

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

# THE VISION

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

January 21, 2011

## Documenting Cash Gifts To Churches

**BY LARRY  
MCGAUGHEY**  
Conference  
Chancellor

Church donors are primarily responsible for complying with the Internal Revenue Service rules for the substantiation of their gifts to charities. However, should the IRS disallow the deduction of a gift to a church because the church did not follow the IRS' rules, it may be the last time that donor gives to that church.

### **Date of Delivery Rules**

When yearend donations are made by check, and a receipt is required, the "mailbox rule" states that the date of delivery to the church is deemed to be the date of mailing. This effectively means the date on the postmark.

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UMNS PHOTO

**Students were able to return to their classrooms at the Methodist Church's Freres School in Port-au-Prince, some nine months after the earthquake.**

## *Haiti: One Year After the Quake*

# Shaken, But Not Broken

**BY KATHY L.  
GILBERT AND  
LINDA BLOOM**  
UM News Service

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti—On weekday mornings, hundreds of boys and girls—neatly dressed in "Methodist-yellow" uniforms—run and play on the Freres School campus.

The smallest, still in life's daredevil stage, delight in leaps from the top of concrete steps to the dirt courtyard, bouncing back up the steps to do it over again. Teenagers, older and more sophisticated, stroll in tight groups or stand in clusters, talking and laughing.

Except for some roped-off stairwells, everything seems normal at the school.

But on Jan. 12, 2010, those stairwells nearly crumbled when an earthquake devastated Haiti, leveling most of Port-au-Prince and killing 300,000.

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# SAVE THE DATE

## Ignite Weekend for Teens

**January 21–23:** Register at [www.umyouth.com](http://www.umyouth.com) for the “Ignite” youth weekend for all teenagers in the NYAC. Cost is \$199 per person, at the Taconic Retreat Center, Poughkeepsie. John-Thomas Crockett, youth minister at Westchester UMC, will be the featured speaker.

## Clergy & Spouse Tax Seminars

A series of seminars will be offered from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the following locations. Register by contacting Lynda Gomi, at [learningcenter@nyac.com](mailto:learningcenter@nyac.com), or 914-615-2219.

**January 18:** Walden UMC, Walden, N.Y.

**January 19:** Red Hook UMC, Red Hook, N.Y.

**January 21:** First UMC, Jamaica, Queens

## Safe Sanctuary Workshops

Register by contacting Lynda Gomi at [learningcenter@nyac.com](mailto:learningcenter@nyac.com), or 914-615-2219.

**January 22:** Lucien UMC, Kings Park, N.Y. Check-in at 9 a.m.; workshop from 9:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m.

**February 5:** North Canton Community UMC (CT). Check-in at noon; workshop 12:30 p.m.–3:30 p.m.

**February 12:** Summerfield UMC (CT). Check-in 9 a.m.; workshop 9:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m.

**February 26:** White Plains Trinity UMC (MET). Check-in 9 a.m.; workshop 9:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m.

**March 12:** Windham UMC (CH). Check-in at noon; workshop 12:30 p.m.–3:30 p.m.

## Fruitful Living at Convocation

**January 25–27:** The 61st Annual Bishop’s Convocation will focus on “Five Characteristics of Fruitful Living,” with Bishop and author Robert Schnase. Begins with 1 p.m. registration Tuesday; concludes after lunch Thursday. Includes gatherings for clergy spouses and under-40 clergy; musicians’ jam session; and workshops on media, PowerPoint and Photoshop. Location: Hudson Valley Resort & Spa, Kerhonkson, N.Y.; cost is \$605 double / \$385

single. Children sharing room with parent are \$75, age 12 and under; \$115, age 13–17. Commuters are \$135, including lunch. Continuing education unit of .5 offered for full participation. For other details and registration form, go to <http://www.nyac.com/events/detail/2975>.

## ERT Training for Haiti Missions


**February 5:** Applicants should go to <http://www.nyac.com/pages/detail/1740>, for more details. Training is from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Mamaroneck UMC, 546 E. Boston Post Rd., Mamaroneck, N.Y., with Rev. Joseph Ewoodzie, conference mission coordinator. See related story on Page 6.

## Engage Conflict Well—Case Studies for Clergy,

**February 8–9; and 22–23:** Rev. Scott Summerville will conduct two-day seminars for interested clergy. Each seminar at Asbury–Crestwood UMC, 167 Scarsdale Rd., Tuckahoe, NY 10707, is limited to four persons. Call or email Summerville at 914-779-3722, or [sumvil@aol.com](mailto:sumvil@aol.com). Cost of \$250 includes seminar, materials, and food; housing is extra.

## NE Jurisdiction Clergywomen’s Gathering

**February 27–March 2:** Join other clergywomen in the region to refresh and re-power . . . through worship, learning, prayer, networking, and laughter at the “Bodacious and Bold” consultation at the Lancaster Host & Conference Center in Lancaster, Penn. For more information and to register, go to: <http://www.epaumc.org/nejclergywomen>.


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

# Is It Time to Take the Steps to Retire?

Dear Clergy Colleagues,

A few of you have asked my opinion as President of the NYAC Board of Pensions and Health Benefits, whether this is a good year to retire. I will not venture to answer that unless you have reached the mandatory age of 72, then you must retire.

Every year a number of clergy wonder, "How do I to retire?"

So here is my response to that question.

Have you checked your United Methodist retirement accounts lately? You can do so online through the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits web site: [www.gbophb.org](http://www.gbophb.org). If you have looked at your personal accounts through OASIS, you will notice that your account with the Ministerial Pension Plan and United Methodist Personal Investment Plan is probably close to the August 2008 value—before the financial markets took their tumble.

Is now the time to retire?

There are a number of factors to consider and the General Board has a great number of resources available. The most important one is a booklet entitled, "Are You on Track to Retire?" This resource helps you consider all the complicated factors that go into this decision. Please contact the General Board at 1-800-851-2201 to get this booklet. Through your pension account on the web site, there are calculators to assist you in knowing what income you will receive in pension benefits. You can call the above number and request a PIN to access your account.

One significant benefit is that your pension is eligible as a housing allowance based on the resolution that your Board of PHB submits to the NYAC each year, although there are certain limits that apply. The portion of such pension distributions may be excluded from taxes to the smallest of the following amounts:

1. The amount spent for your housing (mortgage principal and interest, utilities, taxes, insurance, furnishings, maintenance, etc.), or

## Retirement Seminar

A seminar about retirement is planned for February 25, from 9 a.m.–2:30 p.m., at the Conference Center. To reserve a space, call Pat Perruccio at 914-997-1570, ext 229, or email, [pperruccio@nyac.com](mailto:pperruccio@nyac.com).

2. The current fair rental value of your home, including furnishings, plus the current-year cost of your utilities (whether you own or rent your home).

In addition to the many resources available, including a free retirement analysis from an Ernst and Young financial planner, we are having a seminar about retirement on February 25, from 9 a.m.–2:30 p.m., at the Conference Center. Representatives from the General Board of Pensions and Health Benefits will help you understand the benefits, opportunities, and risks associated with retiring. Those who reserve a place at the seminar before February 14 will receive a personal statement and may consult individually with Mark Connor and Bill Neuert, both from the General Board. A representative of the Social Security administration will also be part of the day's program. We are limited to 50 participants, including spouses.

According to the Book of Discipline, clergy with 40 years of service who are 65 are eligible for normal retirement. Those with 30 years of service, or are age 62, are eligible for early retirement. Those who retire early may begin receiving reduced benefits. Those who retire under the 20-year rule must wait until age 62 to begin receiving retirement benefits.

The other complicating factor in retirement is the cost of Medicare supplemental insurance, or insurance coverage, if you or your spouse does not qualify for Medicare. Please read the policies that were adopted by the Annual Conference concerning the cost of the Medi-gap insurance. (NYAC BOPHB

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# Is It Time to Take the Steps to Retire?

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report beginning on page 198 of the Conference Journal. Available through the NYAC web site, at [http://www.nyac.com/console/files/oFiles\\_Library\\_XZXLCZ/2010NYACJournalSection6A-5\\_NKHJAJKY.pdf](http://www.nyac.com/console/files/oFiles_Library_XZXLCZ/2010NYACJournalSection6A-5_NKHJAJKY.pdf).

One must have 15 or more years of service, plus the last five years in the plan, to qualify for paying only 25 percent of the premium. Those with 11 to 14 years will pay 50 percent of the premium, six to 10 years 75 percent, and 5 or less years pays the entire premium.

For 2011, this means that someone with 15 or more years of service, who was in the active plan for the last 5 years of their ministry will pay 25 percent of \$3,216 for themselves, and the same amount for their spouse. This is \$804 annually, or \$67 per month. Anyone with 11 to 14 years will pay \$1,608 per participant (\$134 per month); six to 10 years \$2,412 or \$201; 5 years or less, \$3,216. In reality, persons in this last situation may find a more financially viable plan through an HMO or organizations such as the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP).

A spouse under the age of 65 can remain in the Healthflex plan at a cost of \$525 per month for 2011, while the retired clergy is on the Medicare supplemental plan.

Those who have credit in the pre-1982 pension plan will receive \$545 for each service year. From 1982 to 2006, the MPP plan projections are available from the General Board, and the post 2007 CRSP/ Defined Benefit and Defined contribution funds are calculated by the General Board.

All this is to say, that you may be able to afford to retire without knowing it. Or you may not be able to retire. Perhaps the bigger question is—are you spiritually and emotionally ready to retire? Where will you live? What will you do? For each of us, this is a very personal choice. Either way, your Board of

Pensions and Health Benefits hopes you will take advantage of all the information and resources available.

If you decide to retire as of July 1, you must send a letter stating your intention to: Bishop Jeremiah Park, 20 Soundview Ave., White Plains, NY 10606, with copies sent to your own district superintendent, the Board of Ordained Ministry through the chairperson of Conference Relations, Rev. Robert Walker, 9 McCrea Lane, Darien, CT 06820; and a copy to me, Rev. Bill Shillady, President of the BOPHB, c/o United Methodist City Society, Room 1922, 475 Riverside Dr., NY, NY 10115.

This notification is required 120 days before July 1, or by February 28. However, the cabinet can make exceptions to this date, which is the norm for this Annual Conference.

Once you decide to retire, and the letter is received, the conference retiree registrar, Pastor Oscar Destruge, will notify the General Board, and you will be sent an official retirement kit. The General Board staff can provide one-on-one service for those embarking on their retirement journey.

Of course, you must decide based on emotional, spiritual and financial issues whether the time is right for you to retire. But I would be happy to answer any general or technical questions you may have.

And, whether retired or not, we still are active in sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ, every day of our lives.

God be with you in your discernment about this significant transition in your life.

With appreciation for all your years of service,

*Rev. Dr. William S. Shillady*  
President of the NYAC,  
Board of Pensions and Health Benefits  
[bshillady@umcitysociety.org](mailto:bshillady@umcitysociety.org)  
212-870-3094

# Haiti: Shaken, But Not Broken

## Continued from front page

The campus was quickly filled with shell-shocked survivors who were seeking any fragment of refuge they could find.

What had been a place for play and laughter became a place for clinging to life and hope. Families slept on thin blankets or sheets on the ground. Blue tents covered the basketball court.

In those first, frightening days after the earthquake, members of Eglise Methodiste d' Freres came to offer hope and, as darkness fell, to lead the newly homeless in the singing of hymns. A year later, happy children sing their school anthem before classes begin.

And, almost every day since the earthquake, United Methodists arrive in the country to prop up the spiritually wounded and help the Methodist Church of Haiti comfort thousands still grieving over loss of families, friends, homes and hope.

## Volunteering love

United Methodist Volunteers in Mission, offering aid in Haiti for 30 years, has a larger focus and task.

The rebuild is not just about the physical structures, but also about emotional support.

For example, one New Jersey volunteer team that was in Haiti the week of Nov. 6 painted the home of "Sister Paulette" Holly. The 82-year-old Methodist deaconess had been living outside in a tent since the earthquake. It was time for her to go home.

Kathy Ahmad, United Methodist Volunteers in Mission coordinator for the Greater New Jersey Annual Conference, also spent time coloring with some of the children.

"We have to remember it's about more than the work, it's about relationships," she said, gazing at her small friends in the yard of the orphanage, operated by the Eglise Methodiste de Haiti.

More than 80 UMVIM teams traveled to Haiti from April to October last year, four of them from the NY Annual Conference. Nearly 180 are scheduled to go this year, including 9 from the NYAC. Already, 20 teams have committed to 2012.)



UMNS PHOTO

**Volunteer Kathy Ahmad visits with Franckenson Renevil during a break from renovating the Methodist Children's Home orphanage in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Ahmad is the VIM coordinator for the Greater New Jersey Annual Conference.**

Each team raises \$3,500 in project funds, matched dollar-for-dollar through a grant from the United Methodist Committee for Relief.

It's part of an ongoing pattern of providing aid and comfort in this human emergency. United Methodists have contributed more than \$40 million for earthquake relief in Haiti.

UMCOR re-established its office in this land, and embarked on a three-year, \$10.4 million earthquake relief and recovery program.

A successful six-month pilot UMVIM project led to the approval of a three-year, \$3 million grant to continue to place volunteer teams at selected work projects. Nearly 70 percent of the grant will support the hiring of Haitian workers for the projects.

## Witnesses to tragedy and hope

The denomination is hardly new to Haiti. Helping the people as well as the Methodist Church of Haiti have been longtime commitments, with dozens of teams dispatched each year.

For many teams, the routine mission work took on urgency at 4:53 p.m. Jan. 12, 2010, when the 7.0 magnitude quake—the strongest to hit Haiti in two

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# Haiti: Shaken, But Not Broken

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centuries—struck, its epicenter 10 miles west of Port-au-Prince and its 2 million inhabitants.

Pastors Tom and Wendy Vencuss from Wethersfield UMC in Conn. were standing outside the Methodist Guest House, part of the Freres complex, when the quake hit. They were unharmed, and immediately went to work caring for the injured. Tom has since taken a leave of absence from Wethersfield to serve as UMCOR's volunteer management coordinator based in Haiti.

The waiting was the hardest part for Haitians in the United States, where word of the fates of relatives and friends and their homeland in general was eagerly sought.

Included in the earthquake's death toll were two executives from the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries—the Rev. Sam Dixon, who led the United Methodist Committee on Relief, and the Rev. Clinton Rabb, head of Mission Volunteers.

Along with the Rev. James Gulley, UMCOR consultant, the men had arrived in the Hotel Montana lobby for a dinner meeting with Rick Santos, Sarla Chand and Ann Varghese of IMA World Health minutes before the hotel collapsed.

The group was trapped for 55 hours before French rescuers found them. Dixon and Rabb died from their injuries.

Another casualty was Jean Arnwine, part of a volunteer team from Highland Park United Methodist Church in Dallas. She was working in Petit Goave. Injured when a village clinic building collapsed, she died in Guadeloupe from medical complications.

## Hope for future of Haiti

Those first desperate days and hours are long past, the questions of who lived and who died answered, but the nightmarish memories and the devastation are constant reminders.

A year later, much work remains, but the spirit of the Haitians is stronger than ever.

Before leaving Sister Holly's house, the New Jersey

team threw a party for the children next door in the orphanage. Naturally, they thought of ice cream and cake, but Molly O'Brien, 23, the youngest member of the UMCOR team, suggested asking the children what treat they would like.

Mission coordinator Ahmad said the message was clear: "They said chicken. I gave the headmaster the money and he cooked a beautiful chicken-and-rice dish. Each child was given a plate heaped up almost to the sky and went back for seconds."

Bellies filled with chicken and rice, the children then enjoyed the cake and ice cream and sang, in appreciation, for their guests.

And those songs—that spirit among the orphans—proved again O'Brien's feeling that an overpowering faith guides the people of Haiti.

"What always surprises me is you describe how little they have but at the same time they have the strongest faith in God.

"That is never a struggle for them, which I always find remarkable. I always try to describe the conditions but at the same time, their faith is so strong. That's something you don't always find in the States."

Ahmad puts it simply: "It was the hope that made me feel.



**MOUNTAINS OF HOPE FOR HAITI**  
A Mission of the NYAC of the United Methodist Church

## NYAC Seeking Haiti Volunteers

The New York Annual Conference has trips planned to Haiti on the following dates: March 8–15, April 5–12, May 6–13, June 17–24, July 18–25, August 19–26, September 16–23, and October 21–28. Applicants should go to <http://www.nyac.com/pages/detail/1740>, for more details.

# Documenting Cash Gifts To Churches

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The date of mailing does not apply if the envelope has a postage meter postmark, or if private couriers, such as Federal Express, are used in which case the date of receipt applies.

The envelope must be received within the usual time period for mail delivery. Some charities adopt a rule of January 15 to “close the books” on yearend donations and provide receipts to donors for checks that are received up to that date that were mailed in December—unless the donor clearly indicates that credit should be applied to the subsequent year. If the date of delivery is important to the donor, he or she should use registered or certified mail. Also note that a postdated check is not deemed delivered until the check is deposited by the church. In most other cases, the date of delivery is when the donated property is actually received by the church.

When a receipt is required, the law provides a deadline by which a donor must receive the receipt. The deadline is the earlier of the actual filing date of the return, or the return due date, whichever occurs first. A speedy filer may lose the deduction if the church has not sent the receipt before he or she files. This is called the “receipt-in-hand rule”: the taxpayer must have the receipt in hand before filing the return (if filed before the due date) or by the due date—usually April 15, or the extended due date if an extension of filing is obtained.

## When a Receipt is Required

Cash gifts up to \$250, whether in the form of cash, check or other forms of transfer (such as gift of a gift card, electronic funds transfer or online payment) require that the donor can substantiate the gift with either (1) a bank record or (2) a written communication from the church (see below). A bank record includes a statement from a financial institution, an electronic fund transfer receipt, a canceled check, a scanned image of both sides of a canceled check (such as is obtained from a bank web site), or a credit card statement. Written communication includes



emails and other forms of electronic correspondence.

Whenever bank records are not available, the church must provide a written receipt for all cash gifts of \$250 or more. The receipt should state that no goods or services were given back to the donee in exchange for the gift. If the total contribution was more than \$75 and goods or services were given, there must be written disclosure (such as written on a receipt) by the church that describes the goods or services provided and makes a good faith estimate of their value as given.

No Social Security number needs to be on the receipt. Generally, separate payments are considered separate contributions for purposes of the \$250-or-more threshold unless the payments are made on the same day. These records must be kept by the donor and produced in the event of an IRS audit.

There are many other kinds of charitable contributions and numerous rules, but this article deals only with cash contributions. Note that gifts of vehicles, art, securities, office equipment and household items, all entail special requirements, which must be complied with in order for the gift to be deductible. Special rules also apply to gifts to charitable remainder trusts and a pooled income fund, and transfers to gift annuities and the like. Answers to these and other questions may be found in IRS Publication 557—Tax Exempt Status for Your Organization, available on line at: [www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p557.pdf](http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p557.pdf).

# It's All About Dying, Isn't It?

**BY REV. JIM STINSON**

Consultant on Older Adult Ministry

Recently a Wesley Village resident asked me that question. She asked because we have experienced more deaths than usual on our campus in recent weeks and she knew my position led me to be involved in one way or another with each of those deaths. The question startled me! I am not naïve. As we age, death looms closer, sickness and frailty often preceding it. I am aware of the frequency with which death makes its appearance in our community.

But I am also aware that life always involves dying at some point and that our population is one of largely older people. But, even after nearly nine years as the Director of Spiritual Life for the United Methodist Homes, I do not believe it's all about dying. In fact, I believe just the opposite. "It's all about living."

While we have breath, we have life! It is a precious gift, too precious to be wasted fretting about the things we cannot change, too precious to be wasted bemoaning all the "things I used to be able to do." Far better—is it not—to do all the things I can still do, all the things I never had the time to do before,



GOD'S GIFT OF LONG LIFE

but for which I now have time. Regardless of our age, physical condition, or medical diagnosis, if we busy our selves, our hearts, our minds, with the business of living, each day offers new possibilities.

Far too often, "It's all about dying" becomes the lie that governs our lives as we age. I have had the privilege of observing people who adopted the truth ("It's all about living") as the governing principle of their lives as they aged. To a person, they were happy and contented, sharing themselves in whatever way they were able with those around them. They were a joy to know and to be with. Many of them were housebound, but made phone calls to their equally housebound friends, many wrote notes to faraway family and friends, some adopted new hobbies, and the list goes on. All of them accepted the reality of their physical abilities with grace and nonetheless remained vital until the very end.

Ministering with, and to, older adults is largely about encouraging and enabling this attitude, an attitude by the way that bears witness to the message of Jesus: I have come so that you might have life! We do our older adults a disservice not to challenge them to see "it is all about living."

## Spring Break Mission Trip to Help Hungry

The Society of St. Andrew is sponsoring a unique hunger relief effort for college students and staff during spring break in Orlando, Fla. From March 6–13, campus groups, as well as individuals, are invited to participate in the "Harvest of Hope" to glean and harvest fresh fruits and vegetables. The food that is saved will be donated to local food banks and feeding agencies in the central Florida area.

During spring break 2010, college students saved and distributed 18,000 pounds of fresh produce. They also boxed and shipped 34,000 pounds of canned goods.

COST: \$150 per person (travel not included)

The Society of St. Andrew is a national nonprofit hunger-relief ministry that rescues about 25 million pounds of fresh, excess produce each year that would otherwise go to waste for various reasons. The food is then distributed to feeding agencies across the country at no cost to them, or to the hungry people they serve.

For more information about participating in the spring break mission, go to SOSA's web site at [www.endhunger.org/harvest\\_2011\\_asb.htm](http://www.endhunger.org/harvest_2011_asb.htm), or contact the society by phone, 800-333-4597, and email, [sosahoh@endhunger.org](mailto:sosahoh@endhunger.org). The cost per person of the "Harvest of Hope" mission is \$150, not including travel.

# Searching For The Hidden Treasure Within



*The Children's Home was the lucky recipient of a tree that was being removed from a piece of property due to its interference with power lines. Our Spiritual Life Director, Rev. Bill Townsend, was inspired to write this story.*

My life started as a seedling growing along a little-traveled road in the country. In the spring and summer, I would spend my days basking in the warm sunshine, being caressed by the gentle breezes that blew across the open farmland. As fall approached, I would always feel a little jealous as all the other trees around me changed color, transforming the landscape from a solid green to hues of orange and red and yellow. The other trees looked so beautiful and I felt so drab. Why couldn't I be like them? But then, as their colors faded to brown and their leaves began to fall to the ground, my envy turned to pride. Now,



I alone stood out against the shadowy hills. Clothed from head to toe in nicely-scented needles, my branches were well prepared to face the chilling winds and the frigid snow of winter.

As winters turned to springs and springs turned to summers, I continued to grow. With each passing year my branches reached out farther and farther from my thickening body. A sense of pride filled every branch and every needle as I stood there straight and tall. Over the years I had watched as other trees my size were cut down and thrown into the back of pickup trucks or strapped to the top of cars and driven away. I had heard that these trees were actually taken into peoples' homes and strung with lights and garland as a sort of celebration. Winters continued to turn to springs, and springs continued to turn to summers, until finally I was the tallest tree along the road. And, as trees do,

I continued to grow higher and higher and wider and wider.

It was the growing higher and higher that caused a new problem. The electric wires that ran overhead were coming closer and closer. When I was a seedling, they seemed to be miles up in the sky. Now suddenly they were perilously close to the tip of my head. What would happen, I wondered, if I grew so tall that my branches would touch the wires? Would I feel some kind of shock? Would I burst into flames? Each year I grew taller and taller, and the wires came closer and closer and closer.

Then one day, when my head was just inches from the wires, something awful happened. One late November day, I heard a loud buzzing noise and felt a strange sensation in my trunk. I looked down to see a man in a tin hat waving his loud chainsaw at me. I could feel myself beginning to fall and finally, down I went. Crashing

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# Searching For The Hidden Treasure Within

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to the ground I laid there in confusion. What would happen to me now?

Suddenly, as the man with the tin hat was about to cut me limb from limb, I heard a woman's voice. I sensed a tone of anger mixed with a bit of compassion. I couldn't hear the whole conversation, but I heard a few words—"don't," "waste," "Christmas," "Children's Home." Next thing I knew the man with the tin hat shut off his saw and stomped away in a huff. Suddenly I was all alone. I knew that I couldn't survive lying on the ground, separated from my roots and all. What a sad end to my life—left to rot away beside the road I had guarded for so long. Resigned to my fate, I breathed a sigh and gave up.

I had no way of knowing that someone had another plan for me. The next day a big truck came and lifted me gently onto its long bed. When I was securely strapped down, the engine roared and the truck began to move. After a time, we stopped in front of a large red brick building. A sign on the building read, "Children's Home of Wyoming Conference." Those were some of the words I had heard the woman say as I was lying on the ground back at my home. I guessed I was in the right place, but why was I here?

Just about the time I was getting used to my new surrounding, I could feel myself being picked up again. It was a little scary as I swayed back and forth above a small hole that someone had dug in the cold earth. Eventually the swaying stopped and I was looking straight down into the hole. Slowly and

carefully I was lowered into the hole until once again I could stand on my own. Standing there straight and tall once more, I looked around. There were happy faces all around. Some people were taking my picture. Someone else was stringing beautiful lights over my branches. Another person decorated my limbs with yellow ribbons. When it was all over, I was quite a sight. After all this time, I was a Christmas tree—the first one ever to grace the front lawn of the Children's Home. I swelled with pride as one by one the children walked by and smiled. Then, as a light flurry of snow swirled around someone started to sing: "O Christmas tree, O Christmas tree, how beautiful your branches." And I was beautiful—and I was home.

To the kind woman and the folks at the Children's Home, I was a hidden treasure. All I needed was someone to prop me up, to take the time to add some finishing touches, and I was given a new life and a new purpose. And you know, people are a lot like that. We all need at least one person who will stand by our side and prop us up when we fall. We need someone who can see the hidden potential and take the time to help us make some changes and improvements. And we need someone who will celebrate the new life and new purpose we receive.

*For more information on the Children's Home, call toll free 800-772-6904, ext. 131, or visit the web site at [www.chowc.org](http://www.chowc.org). Please feel free to send donations directly, or use the New York Conference advance number, 60-0588.*

## GBGM Seeks Input on Web Site

The General Board of Global Ministries is working on a new look for their website, and wants to know who visits their website at <http://new.gb-gm-umc.org> and what they are looking for when they visit. The online survey is available in Spanish, Portuguese, Korean and English and only takes five to ten minutes to complete. All responses are vital as we move forward with this project.

Click on one of the links below to participate in the

survey:

Take our survey! <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/BS3VD2X>

¡Por favor, participe en nuestra encuesta! <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/ZXJBQNL>

Responda ao nosso inquérito! <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/ZR3HNZ9>

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# Event to Explore Cross-Racial Ministry

The General Commission on Religion and Race, and the General Board of Higher Education & Ministry are sponsoring an event to address the increasing number of racial ethnic persons pursuing ordained ministry in the United Methodist Church. “Facing the Future: Cross-Racial/Cross-Cultural Appointments in a Global Church,” is planned for May 16–18 at the Westin Los Angeles Airport Hotel in California.

The event includes pre-events on May 15 that provide an eight-hour seminar on cross-cultural competency and a Teaching Church Site Experience.

“The reality that global migration is presenting us with new opportunities and challenges for reaching out to new communities, makes this event a necessity for any church leader seriously committed

to growing The United Methodist Church in the 21st century,” said GCORR General Secretary Erin M. Hawkins.

Key presenter and co-author of *Many Faces One Church: A Manual for Cross-Racial and Cross-Cultural Ministry*, Bishop Ernest S. Lyght anticipates that “participants in the event will come with the necessary energy and interest to cause them to have an open mind, an open heart, so that they can become instruments of opening new doors.” Lyght, the resident bishop of the West Virginia area, served the NYAC from 1996 to 2004.

The event is designed to help church leaders, both clergy and laity, to obtain the new skills, insights, ideas and commitments that will prepare The United

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## Fruitcake Wanted—Really!

*The following is excerpted from the Long Island Council of Churches newsletter, but is applicable to the needs throughout the conference.*

There are probably as many jokes about fruitcake as there fruitcakes. Unless, of course, there is that one tin that is re-gifted each year.

Some of us actually like fruitcake and look forward to receiving it in December, but others—perhaps the vast majority of Americans—would rather use these gifts as doorstops or hockey pucks. Rev. Thomas W. Goodhue, executive director of the Long Island Council of Churches, said, “If you belong to the latter group, why not give them to your local food pantry?”

Do you have fruitcake in your cupboard, either received in recent weeks or placed there by the Ghost of Christmas Past? There is actually a fair amount of nutrition in these desserts, and food donations are slow after the holidays, leaving community pantries scrambling to feed the hungry in January and

February. In the current recession, even more of our neighbors than usual are at risk of going hungry. The Long Island Council of Churches fed 10 percent more people in 2010 than the previous year, and 2009 was itself a record year.

Do you have anything else that needs to be cleaned out of your cupboard? Fancy jellies and jams? Flavored coffee that is not your cup of tea? Most of us have food in our homes we will never eat—food that our neighbors need,” Goodhue adds. “This is a great time to go through the canned goods and give away anything that you are not going to use that is not dented, many years old, or otherwise inedible.” Donations of baby food, infant formula, toiletries, personal care items, and shopping bags also are welcome.

Did you receive a gift of clothing that does not suit you? The LICC also welcomes donations of hats, scarves, gloves, mittens, and other warm clothing at all of its locations.



# Steps to Revive A Prayer Ministry

## UM NEWS SERVICE

One can follow many different paths to reviving congregational prayer ministries. The key is to make prayer a priority and to begin.

Rev. Michael Henderson of Cayce (S.C.) United Methodist Church says, "There has never been a revival or a reformation or re-anything that was not firmly bound in prayer."

Here are some things your congregation can do to revive prayer:

### **Set aside the lectionary for a period to preach specifically on prayer.**

Dedicate several weeks to speaking and listening to God. During these weeks, pray for your community and world, in addition to congregants and their needs. Include religious and political leaders serving locally and globally. Invite the community to participate by posting prayers on your church marquee.

### **Connect willing participants with a prayer partner.**

Prayer partners can meet in person or talk on the phone to pray. This encourages partners to become good friends and accountability partners. Prayer partners could also arrive before Sunday services, pray for the presence of the Holy Spirit and continue to pray throughout worship.

## Event to Explore Cross-Racial Ministry

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Methodist Church to face this future boldly.

"We have the ability as The United Methodist Church to do wonderful work in cross-racial/cross-cultural appointments if we choose to do so," said Randy Cross, assistant general secretary for clergy supervision and accountability, GBHEM.

The event will feature special learning tracks designed for bishops and cabinets, boards of Ordained Ministries, clergy and laity, and will bring together experts at all levels of the cross-racial/



### **Create an altar ministry.**

During worship, invite people to come forward for prayer. The Rev. Jeff Kersey has used this method to re-energize his congregation at Mount Horeb United Methodist Church in Lexington, S.C. The church has grown from 250 to 2,600 members since becoming intentional about prayer.

### **Create prayer spaces and rituals.**

The altar may feature a Bible, cross, candle or other sacred object. Children's altars should be safe—no candles, glass or sharp objects.

People who are artistic and energetic may enjoy spaces that allow for movement, such as talking, singing or dancing. Others may prefer quiet activities, such as walking, writing or memorizing Bible verses.

cross-cultural appointment process.

"This is about creating the holy space to allow new language and new ways of engaging our clergy and laity around the appointment process as it relates to race, gender and cultural issues," says GCORR General Secretary Hawkins.

Early registration, at a cost of \$250, ends February 28. Regular registration from March 1 to April 15 carries a fee of \$300. For basic information about the schedule, event presenters, and pre-event activities, go to [www.gcorr.org/crccevent](http://www.gcorr.org/crccevent).

# Letter from Bishop on Vision Bearer Project

*“I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.”*

—Isaiah 43:19

January 7, 2011

Dear United Methodists:

Greetings to you in the name and love of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, who sends us out into the world to make disciples for the transformation of the world!

I am thrilled to write this introduction to the boldest initiative of the New York Conference in many years. At last year’s annual conference we unveiled our Vision Bearer Project, a strategic ministry to help God do a new thing among us. Specifically, the Vision Bearers will seek to establish new worshipping communities to relate to people whom the United Methodist Church has not been reaching. We are taking two approaches: planting new faith communities and revitalizing existing ones.

Our Vision Bearer Task Force has already begun to recruit, select, and train lay Vision Bearers who will be deployed within our conference to plant new faith communities with the support and sponsorship of existing ones. We are excited about these new ministries, and we will continue to expand the number of Vision Bearers. We also recognize that many of our existing churches are not effectively ministering to the people in their neighborhoods. Accordingly, a second initiative is directed to the revitalization of such churches primarily by adding a new worship service.

We are dedicating significant resources to this effort of “creating new places for new people and renewing existing congregations,” one of United Methodism’s areas of focus for the present quadrennium. Training, mentoring, and stipends will be given to lay Vision Bearers, and matching funds and support are available for churches that wish to start another worship service.

I encourage you to read more about the Vision Bearers project on the New York Annual Conference web site at <http://nyac.com/pages/detail/1762>. I also ask everyone who reads these words to stop and pray for the success of God’s “new thing” among us, and to pray unceasingly that we might continue to grow in faithfulness and fruitfulness in being used by God to “make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert” by reaching out with the loving, saving gospel of Jesus Christ—for such a time as this.

In Christ,  
*Bishop Jeremiah J. Park*



## Santa Visits NY Methodist Hospital

**Santa Claus made a pre-Christmas visit to pediatric patients at New York Methodist Hospital via a cherry picker provided by Ladder Co. 105 of the New York City Fire Department. Santa—retired MTA employee Tom Franze—handed out gifts to the children after being lifted three flights to the pediatrics unit. Several “elves” from Engine Co. 220 and Ladder Co. 122 joined Franze in the visit, which delighted the children, their families and NYM staff members.**

# Church Social Media: Engaging or spam?

## UM COMMUNICATIONS

Are you using social media to strengthen relationships within the church or are you just creating more noise? A recent national study of church members reports that most churches are using social media to supplement e-mail. In other words, social media is just another tool to push out messages—or more noise. As a result, many churches do not realize the full potential of social media to engage their congregations.

The 2010 study, published by Buzzplant, a Tennessee-based social-media marketing company, involved more than 400 church members across the country. The study reports that although 61 percent of those surveyed said their church uses some form of social media, typically Facebook, only 18 percent of respondents indicated that their church seeks or solicits their feedback through social media. Their churches employ these emerging tools, not as a method to engage, but as another way to push out notices about events, 47 percent; youth activities, 34 percent; and volunteer needs, 20 percent. Only about one-third of respondents were involved in small groups where they used social media to discuss their studies.

For such a “hot” technology, normal church practices have rendered Facebook, Twitter and similar services as relatively ineffective. This performance did not reflect a lack of interest in social media among church members. Two out of three indicated they would follow church leaders on social media if they knew how to connect with them. Instead, churches must establish communications strategies that acknowledge and embrace the “connectional” nature of these technologies.

It is not enough to get someone to “follow” the church or church leaders. The focus must become to create conversations. The true power of social media comes from exchanging ideas and opinions. Churches must be intentional in encouraging members to engage in this exchange.



To make your social media efforts more effective, you may want to review past MyCom articles. In the past few months, the newsletter has recommended that churches:

- Set up a group page where you can post news, a church calendar and event invitations.
- Create polls to gather information and opinions.
- Set up discussion pages and post questions.
- Encourage groups to create pages for their resource discussions.
- Tie Facebook to your podcasts, photos and blogs.
- Engage in reciprocal links with members.
- Promote your Facebook group page in bulletins, newsletters and other communications materials.

Your congregation may want to designate someone outside the church staff to manage its Facebook presence and to be responsible for efforts to engage the congregation. Managing a Facebook presence is not hard, but it takes time. Your church staff may not have the time or the Facebook orientation to make your group page a success. In particular, this might be a way to inspire one of your younger-adult members to be more involved in your church. Taking an intentional approach to social media can create dividends that lead to more participation and engagement.

## Summit on Children's Ministry

**March 25–26:** NYAC presents this first-ever event, "And a Child Shall Lead Us," featuring two nationally recognized leaders in children's ministry, Melanie Gordon from GBOD, and Leanne Hadley, founder of First Steps Spirituality Center. Begins at 6 p.m. Friday; ends at 3:30 p.m. Saturday at Renaissance Hotel, West Harrison, N.Y. Pastors, Christian educators, and parents are encouraged to attend; children in grades 2–5, who can sit through the seminars are also welcomed. Cost is \$65 for adults, \$25 for children, not including housing. Register online at [www.nyac.com](http://www.nyac.com); questions to Lynda Gomi, 914-615-2219.



## Sharing the Love of Christmas

Children in the Cambine orphanage in Mozambique received Christmas gifts, thanks to the NYAC, and the Platte Woods UMC in Kansas City, Mo. Jerry and Kay Jones from New Milford UMC in Connecticut, sent presents for each of the kids in green and red bags with their pictures attached via iron-on patches. The Mozambique Orphanage Fund paid for a holiday feast and gave each member of the staff a monetary gift.



## Permaculture Design Course

**February–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 February, March, April and May. If interested, please contact Joan Ewing, Green Phoenix Permaculture, at [mamajoane@yahoo.com](mailto:mamajoane@yahoo.com), or 845-687-7646.