

*"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 2015

## Bishop: A New Year to Explore God's Yearnings

Dear Beloved Sisters and Brothers,

Greetings in the name and hope of Jesus Christ!

Happy New Year! We Christians experience many opportunities for new beginnings. As we enter into 2015, this temporal, secular new year is one of those occasions. We can use this launch of a new year to reflect on the year that has ended and to make resolutions and intentions for the next 12 months. It is a time to prayerfully ask the question, "What is God's yearning for me, for us in the year to come?"

There are other times of new beginnings as well. Each year I experience Eastertide as a time of celebration of the resurrection of Christ and the possibilities of being open to resurrection and renewal in all of life. The powerful message of the cross is that indeed nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus and that even unspeakably challenging circumstances can be transformed.

For United Methodists, July 1 brings yet



**Bishop Jane Allen Middleton**

another new beginning. At this traditional pastoral appointment beginning time, we are reminded that indeed a new year begins. Whether it is a continuing appointment or a new appointment, this date provides the occasion for pastor and congregation to recommit to serving Christ together.

And another new year happens at the beginning of the school year when churches often celebrate "homecoming" with the return of church school, youth groups, Disciple Bible study and other small groups as well as full church programming. This secular time offers to the church yet another new beginning.

And perhaps the most authentic new year for the church is Advent, the new beginning of the Christian year during which we begin a year-long remembrance in our liturgy of the gospel story and the mission of the church.

As you contemplate the "new beginnings" in your own life and in the life of the church, there may be no better way to be reminded of what it means to be a faithful servant of God than John Wesley's Covenant Prayer:

*I am no longer my own, but yours.*

*Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will;*

*put me to doing, put me to suffering;*

*let me be employed for you, or laid aside for you,*

*exalted for you, or brought low for you;*

*let me be full, let me be empty,*

*let me have all things, let me have nothing:*

*I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things to your pleasure and disposal.*

**Continued on page 5**

## 5 YEARS LATER HAITI & MISSION VOLUNTEERS Boots on the Ground

**BY LAURA WISE\***

*This article is the first in a series of special coverage commemorating the 5-year anniversary of the earthquake in Haiti. Stay tuned for the full series.*

Iowa, the Great Flood of 1993. North Carolina, Hurricane Floyd, 1999. New York City, September 11, 2001. In the aftermath of each of these disasters, Rev. Tom and Rev. Wendy Vencuss of the New York Annual Conference were there, helping communities to recovery and get back on their feet. Even this long and committed

experience, though, would not prepare them for the events of January 12, 2010.

In Haiti for partnership meetings between the Methodist Church of Haiti (EMH) and Methodists from around the world, Tom and Wendy can recall their exact location—at the Methodist Guesthouse in Port-au-Prince—on that quiet afternoon when a magnitude 7.3 earthquake struck the small Caribbean country. When it was over, one thing was clear; Haiti needed help. "Boots on the

**Continued on page 6**



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE HARTFORD COURANT

**Tom and Wendy Vencuss, left, with Claudia and Jude Exantus and the couple's two children safely back in Connecticut following the Haiti earthquake in January 2010. Jude Exantus, who has worked with the Mountains of Hope ministry, and his family were evacuated with the Vencusses.**



### Jan–March 2015 LIW Lay Servant Classes

The Long Island West District is offering youth, beginner, and advanced courses at multiple locations in early 2015. Classes will meet from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. on January 24 and 31, February 7 and 28, and March 14. A mandatory orientation session will be held January 10. Locations include the UMC of Floral Park, St. Mark's UMC in Brooklyn, and Primera Iglesia Metodista Unida de Corona (Spanish language). A beginner's class in Akan will be offered at St. Mark's. A closing worship celebration and fellowship is planned for March 28. Registration fees, which include all texts and printed materials, are \$15 for youth, and \$25 for beginners, certified and advanced courses. Register by December 19 at [www.nyac.com/eventdetail/480606](http://www.nyac.com/eventdetail/480606).

### Feb 7 & Mar 7 Sandy Recovery Work

Though the winter may slow down the recovery work, two "Done In A Day" dates have been scheduled and await your team or individual volunteers. The DIAD concept remains a simple one: start early and end late—done in a day! Simple projects will be completed in one day; more complicated projects can be done in one-day segments. To volunteer, contact Peggy Racine at 516-795-1322, or [LI-SandyRecovery@NYAC-UMC.com](mailto:LI-SandyRecovery@NYAC-UMC.com).

### 2/21&28 NY/CT Basic Lay Servant Course

This foundational course will be offered on both Saturdays from 8:30 a.m.–2:30 p.m. at the Grace UMC, 337 Peekskill Hollow Road, Putnam Valley, N.Y. Cost is \$15, plus \$11 for the book. Participants should read the first three chapters of Lay Servant Ministries (Jackson & Jackson), before the first class. Snacks, coffee, tea, and water will be provided; please bring your own lunch. Registrations forms are available at [www.nyac.com/eventdetail/490636](http://www.nyac.com/eventdetail/490636). Contact Steve Allen at [sjallen@optonline.net](mailto:sjallen@optonline.net) with any questions.

### FEB/MAR Lenten School of Discipleship

The New York-Connecticut District has planned a five-week school from February 22 to March 22 Sunday at Grace United Methodist Church in Newburgh, N.Y. The Basic Lay Servant class will be offered in addition to four advanced ones:

- From Your Heart to Theirs: Delivering an Effective Sermon
- Leading in Prayer
- Devotional Life in the Wesleyan Tradition
- Leading Worship

The cost for the sessions that will run from 4–7 p.m. is \$20 in advance,

\$25 at the door. A light supper will be served. Contact Steve Allen at [sjallen@optonline.net](mailto:sjallen@optonline.net) with any questions. Registrations forms are available at [www.nyac.com/eventdetail/664428](http://www.nyac.com/eventdetail/664428).

### 2/28 Volunteers in Mission Training

Workshop for mission volunteers at the Conference Center, 20 Soundview Ave, White Plains, N.Y. **Please bring \$10 payment for your background check.** To register, go to Urge <https://ny-reg.brtaapp.com/2015VIMTraining>

### 3/19 Pre-retirement Seminar

This session for clergy who are retiring or considering it will be held from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Contact Sally Truglia at 914-615-2220, or [struglia@nyac.com](mailto:struglia@nyac.com).

### 3/21 United Methodist Women's Retreat

This conference retreat is scheduled for 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. at the Church Center for United Nations, 777 United Nations Plaza, Manhattan. Contact Susan S. Kim, UMW conference president at [nycumwpresident@gmail.com](mailto:nycumwpresident@gmail.com), or 914-997-1081.

### 4/13–17 Clergy and Spouse Clinic

Twice a year, New York Methodist Hospital in Brooklyn opens its doors to 12 clergy and/or spouses for a four-day clinic in which major diagnostic tests and consultations are made available. To apply for the next clinic, download a brochure and registration form at [www.nyac.com/eventdetail/198565](http://www.nyac.com/eventdetail/198565), or contact Rev. Elizabeth Braddon at [elizabeth.braddon@gmail.com](mailto:elizabeth.braddon@gmail.com), indicating your interest. Registration is very limited, so do not delay.

### 4/11&18 Metropolitan Lay Servant School

Christ Church UMC will host the annual lay servant school on two Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. The basic course will be offered in English; advanced courses in English, Korean and Spanish. The \$40 fee includes the required text, and breakfast and lunch both days. Christ Church is at 524 Park Avenue in Manhattan. Registration deadline is February 28; details can be found at: [www.nyac.com/eventdetail/561619](http://www.nyac.com/eventdetail/561619).

### 4/29 Boundaries & Sexual Ethics Training

Long Island East District Superintendent Adrienne Brewington will lead this training, which is mandatory for all clergy, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. in the NYAC Learning Center, 20 Soundview Avenue, White Plains, N.Y. Contact Brewington at [RevyBrew@aol.com](mailto:RevyBrew@aol.com) for additional details.

 <p>The News of the New York Conference of the United Methodist Church</p>
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# Bishop Speaks to Appointment Consultations

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

With great joy and anticipation I greet you in the name and the hope of Jesus Christ!

I thank God for the ministry of Bishop Martin McLee who in a short time has left a powerful legacy to the New York Annual Conference. During the past few months, the ministries of Bishop Neil Irons and Bishop Ernest Lyght have been a gift to the conference. And now it is my honor and privilege to serve as your interim bishop for the next 20 months. I consider this conference to be my spiritual and ecclesiastical home. I am grateful to God and to those who made the decision to send me home to be your episcopal leader and I pledge to you my intention to serve you with zeal and faithfulness.

I will be living in White Plains and have every aim of being as present as possible. I understand that my personal calling is to empower pastors for excellence, to assist our churches to be vital communities of faith and to advocate for risk-taking outreach ministries of justice and mercy. As the song describes, "We must draw the circle wide."

My husband, Jack, will join me as much as possible. We celebrated 53 years of marriage this past year and he is truly my partner in ministry. God has blessed us with two daughters and four grandchildren. Our daughters live with their husbands and children, one in Florida and one in Seattle. We have experienced many mission journeys together to Bolivia and enjoy travel to many places, especially to be with our grandchildren!

I want to respond to the action of the 2014 session of the Annual Conference requesting a statement from the bishop about consultation during the appointment process. I was not involved in the process for which this request was made, so I think it is only fair that I speak to you of my intentions as your bishop for the next two years of appointment making.

Perhaps the most fundamental, challenging, spirit-filled, fruitful, and sometimes disappointing distinction of The United Methodist Church is our appointment system.

*"Clergy shall be appointed by the bishop, who is empowered to make and fix all appointments*

*in the Episcopal area of which the annual conference is a part. Appointments are to be made with consideration of the gifts and evidence of God's grace of those appointed, to the needs, characteristics, and opportunities of congregations and institutions, and with faithfulness to the commitment to an open itineracy," The Book of Discipline ¶425.1*

When this process is bathed in prayer and in openness to the movement of the Holy Spirit, possibilities emerge for the pastoral leader and the congregation to experience a grace-filled life together.

In my years as a superintendent and then as a bishop of the church, I have found the appointment process to be one of the most

***'Perhaps the most fundamental, challenging, spirit-filled, fruitful, and sometimes disappointing distinction of The United Methodist Church is our appointment system.'***

demanding and most rewarding experiences—one in which the only way to proceed is to listen carefully to all those involved: the congregation, the pastor, the cabinet and above all, the yearning of God.

*The Book of Discipline* states very clearly, "The process of consultation shall be mandatory in every annual conference." ¶426.1. Consultation involves communication and dialogue with the pastor and the committee on pastor-parish relations and I am committed to insuring that this will happen, understanding that the authority of the bishop to appoint is clear.

As I serve as your bishop for the next two appointment seasons, it is my intent that every step will be faith-filled and fair. From the first moment that an appointment change is possible, careful consideration will be given both to the needs of the congregation and to the gifts and the manifestation of God's grace in the life of the pastor. Be mindful of two important facts: 1) that pastors make a commitment to go where

needed upon ordination, and 2) that United Methodist Churches deserve the most effective pastor possible. Therefore, extraordinary efforts will be made to discern the ways that these needs can be met in the most optimal way. The intent is to achieve an enthusiastic, deeply felt match for the pastor and for the congregation.

I am committed to consultation at every step. When a pastoral change is anticipated, the superintendent will consult with the staff-parish relations committee to understand as well as possible the potential for vitality in ministry as well as the challenges faced by the congregation and its community. When the cabinet designates a pastor to a particular church/charge, the superintendent will consult with the pastor to provide information regarding the appointment and to allow the pastor to engage in discernment.

I plead with all the laity and clergy of the conference to hold all of those who are involved in this process in prayer, whether or not you are in a position to anticipate a change as a church or as a pastor. Only by faithfulness to God's yearning can we hope to claim the New York Conference for God!

This is a time of enormous challenges in our families, our communities, our country and in the world. As disparities increase and tensions rise, as the reality of rampant disease and poverty threatens to overwhelm, as animosities and warfare rage we must be those who continue to proclaim the message of the Prince of Peace and to bring hope through our words and actions.

Ultimately, as we live together as bishop, laity, and pastors of the New York Annual Conference, it is my expectation that we have one goal and one goal only: to be faithful to God and to the mission of The United Methodist Church: "To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world." It is my prayer that all that we do will indeed carry out this high calling.

Again, let me say, how excited I am to be in ministry once again in the wonderfully diverse and gifted New York Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church.

In Christ's love,  
*Jane Allen Middleton*

# Complaint against Bishop Talbert Resolved

UMNS—The complaint against retired United Methodist Bishop Melvin G. Talbert—who blessed the union of two men in violation of church law—has ended in what the denomination calls a just resolution.

The resolution, agreed to by all parties in this complaint, means that Talbert will not face a church trial or possible loss of his clergy credentials.

Instead, the joint resolution agreement calls on all parties to follow the *Book of Discipline*, The United Methodist Church's law book, and urges the Council of Bishops to do more work related to the denomination's longtime debate around human sexuality. The resolution also expresses regret "over harm to gay and lesbian sisters and brothers, and all those involved, through the complaint process."

Mountain Sky Area Bishop Elaine J.W. Stanovsky, president of the Western Jurisdiction College of Bishops, announced the complaint's conclusion on January 5. Before his retirement, Talbert served in the Western Jurisdiction, which encompasses the eight westernmost conferences in the United States. Church law requires that complaints against bishops be heard in the jurisdiction where the bishop is a member.

The resolution comes at a time when the church's debate on human sexuality has intensified with some United Methodists warning it could split the denomination.

"The Just Resolution Agreement achieved by the complainants and Bishop Talbert is a reminder that United Methodists don't have to be divided by their differences," Stanovsky said in a statement. "The conflicted parties came together, prayerfully listened to one another, challenged one another, and searched for God's guidance for themselves and for the church."

## How the complaint began

The United Methodist Council of Bishops on Nov. 15, 2013, requested the complaint be filed against Talbert, after he officiated at the union of two United Methodist men—Joe Openshaw and Bobby Prince—on Oct. 25, 2013, in Alabama.

The *Book of Discipline*, the church's law book, has stated since 1972 that all people are of sacred worth, but "the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching." Church law bans United Methodist clergy from performing and churches from hosting "ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions."

Before the ceremony, both Birmingham Area Bishop Debra Wallace-Padgett and the Executive Committee of the Council of Bishops asked Talbert not to officiate.

The Council of Bishops requested that Germany Area Bishop Rosemarie Wenner, then the council's president, and Wallace-Padgett, who leads the North Alabama Conference, submit the complaint. They did so in March last year.

The Council of Bishops directed that the complaint accuse Talbert of "undermining the ministry of a colleague (Paragraph 2702.1f) and conducting a ceremony to celebrate the marriage of a same gender couple (Paragraph 2702.1b) within the bounds of the North Alabama Conference."

## The resulting resolution

The resulting agreement, Stanovsky said, "acknowledges their differences, allows each their distinctive voice, and creates a framework for staying in relationship."

Specifically, those involved in the agreement:

- Affirm the work of the Council of Bishops Task Force on Accountability and Task Force on Human Sexuality, Race and Gender in a Worldwide Perspective to define "living in covenant," community and accountability. The council formed the task force at the same time it requested the complaint against Talbert.
- Encourage the Council of Bishops "to actively pursue sustained theological conversation especially around human sexuality, race and gender in a worldwide church."
- Request that the Council of Bishops and all individual bishops "make use of the teaching role of the bishop through preaching, teaching, writing and theological conversation to continue to address our differences and to work for unity in diversity."
- Request that the Council of Bishops consider options in addition to the complaint process to address differences that "reflect our Wesleyan heritage, and acknowledge that ways of resolving disagreements within a community of faith should be distinct from those of a civil judicial process."

Talbert, a veteran of the U.S. civil rights



**Bishop Melvin G. Talbert**

movement, also has long campaigned to change the church's stance on homosexuality and has been an outspoken advocate for clergy officiating at same-gender unions. He comes from a jurisdiction where many United Methodists share his views.

Delegates to the Western Jurisdiction's meeting in 2012 asked Talbert to oversee a Western Jurisdiction grassroots movement to act as if the stance against homosexuality in the *Book of Discipline*—Paragraph 161F—"does not exist." Talbert calls the movement "biblical obedience."

After the resolution was announced, Talbert praised God and expressed his gratitude to Wenner, Wallace-Padgett and others involved "for their openness, honesty and fairness in the process."

However, he added, "our primary mission of 'making disciples . . .' is still before us. At some point our church must choose its best preferred future."

"Out of the depth of my heart, I believe embracing biblical obedience offers the best way forward for maximizing its potential for growth and full inclusion," he said. "I pray that we will remain open to the leading of the Holy Spirit, as we continue the struggle to be faithful followers of Jesus Christ."

Wallace-Padgett noted that the hoped-for outcome of any complaint in The United Methodist Church is a just resolution.

"Over the course of the past year Bishop Talbert, Bishop Wenner and I, along with support persons each of us invited to the table, have worked diligently to find such a resolution," she said. "My hope and prayer is that our reaching this resolution will be helpful to the church at large."

# Helping the Aging Find God in Between Us

BY JIM STINSON

Director of Spiritual Life, UM Homes

There is a wonderful children's book called "God in Between," by Sandy Eisenberg Sasso. It is one of the few books I kept when downsizing and moving to a condo. As with most children's books, adults would do well to read it, too.

It is the story of a windowless, roadless, overgrown town, and its people who sense something missing in their lives. People are cut off from one another, cannot watch or see anything beyond their own four walls. They sense that if they can find God (whose existence is not certain to them) they might find what they are missing. Much to their surprise they are led to discover that God (the meaning for their lives) is not missing. He, She, It, has always been present, but unseen because they are not connected to each other. They discover that God is found "In the between. In between us."

What draws me to this story is how deeply spiritual it is, transcending religious boundaries



and restrictions. It was published by Jewish Lights Publishing in 1998 and is "for people of all faiths, all backgrounds." It speaks to the universal need of being connected to others, of the need to know we are not alone.

For Christians it is the Christmas message of Emmanuel (God with us), for Jews, it is the conviction that Yahweh (God) has led them in the past and will continue to do so in the present and the future. All major religions emphasize the community, the togetherness in which God, the Other, the Divine, the Sacred One, is found.

As we age we lose loved ones, and leave familiar communities, we change our living arrangements to adapt to new physical and mental realities, our friends die or move further away, and as a result of all these things we sometimes seem lost. We can find ourselves again when we adapt to new situations, make new friends, and find new ways of being involved. In short, we discover the God who gives meaning to our lives when we find community, and when we forge new and meaningful relationships.

From where I sit, this is often the most

difficult task that aging people are called to take on. But I believe that they do so successfully and more gracefully when those who care for them and care about them understand the enormity of this task and offer support.

A word of encouragement, rather than a word of criticism is one way to help. Rather than, "Mom, you know it isn't good for you to just sit around all day," how about, "Mom, there's this great group downtown for people your age, would you go once or twice and try it out? I'd be glad to take you and pick you up." Or rather than, "Dad, you need to move out of here," how about, "My friend's father moved a while ago to a senior living community and surprisingly loves it. He said his Dad would love to show you around his new home. Would you go for lunch someday with me and his son?"

As care givers and people who care about someone who is aging we can make a great difference in helping them discover "God in between—in between us." And that difference begins when we understand what they are facing and face it with them as partners.

## 2014 Journals Available for Purchase

Production of the 2014 conference journal presented many challenges, but it is now available for ordering.

### CD Version

The conference will send, without charge, one 2014 journal and directory on CD to each church, retiree, and clergy member serving an extension ministry.

Additional copies are available for \$5. All CD orders will need to be placed and paid for by January 15 by either by PayPal or check. Checks should be drawn to "NYAC" with a notation, "2014 CD" and mailed to: NYAC, Attn: Fran Collins, 20 Soundview Ave., White Plains, NY 10606-3302.

If you are not a member of the New York Annual Conference or one of its churches, you will need special permission to order the directory. Please email Conference Secretary Fredric Jackson at [confsecy@nyac.com](mailto:confsecy@nyac.com) to be considered.

### Online Version

Remember, the 2014 Journal will be available online along with the 2007-2013 editions. They are accessed on the conference web site at [www.nyac.com/journal](http://www.nyac.com/journal).

### Print Version

Printed journals will be available for purchase online via CreateSpace, an Amazon company. This "on-demand" printing option will allow you to place your journal order directly from a link at [www.nyac.com/journal](http://www.nyac.com/journal) and receive the printed copy within days. The estimated price for the 2014 journal is \$11 plus shipping, with several shipping options available.

## Staff Change Announced

Dear Beloved Sisters and Brothers,

Greetings in the name and hope of Jesus Christ!

I want to share some news about our New York Annual Conference staff. As of yesterday, January 6th, Claude Gooding is no longer employed and serving in the role of Director of Connectional Ministries. I will be convening a search committee to identify a replacement shortly.

In the interim, if you have questions that relate to Connectional Ministries, please contact Lynda Gomi, Assistant to the Director of Connectional Ministries, at either [lgomi@nyac.com](mailto:lgomi@nyac.com) or 914-615-2228.

Questions that pertain to church development and revitalization should be directed to Derrick-Lewis Noble at [dnoble@nyac.com](mailto:dnoble@nyac.com) or 914-615-2219.

In Christ's love,  
Jane Allen Middleton

## Exploring God's Yearnings

Continued from page 1

*And now, glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, you are mine and I am yours. So be it.*

*And the covenant now made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven.*

*Amen.*

God calls us to be partners with the Holy Spirit in being Christ's presence to serve a troubled world. As we address such issues of poverty, integrity, disease, justice, inclusiveness and care for creation, may this powerful prayer guide your life in this and in every period of new beginnings.

In Christ's love,  
Jane Allen Middleton

# Boots on the Ground in Haiti Recovery

Continued from page 1

ground,” Tom dubbed it, speaking of the role of volunteers in relief efforts.

Tom was a natural fit to serve as a coordinator for the United Methodist Volunteers in Mission (UMVIM) program in Haiti. He and Wendy had been coming to Haiti for years, spending months at a time there. In November 2010, they moved in and remained in Haiti through August 2013. While Tom coordinated the work of volunteers, Wendy, an emotional and spiritual care consultant with the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR), took on the role of accompaniment, working with local communities through the spiritual challenges of recovery.

## Established Relationship, New Responsibilities

Tom and Wendy’s journey with the Haitian people began in 2002, when they founded Mountains of Hope—a ministry of the New York Annual Conference—in the small, rural community of Furcy. For many years, they worked tirelessly with the residents of this resource-poor community to build their capacity to thrive. The Vencuss’ focus on sustainable community development positioned them well to partner with UMCOR after the earthquake. Tom mobilized volunteers to repair damaged structures, provide business training to local communities, and support a hot lunch program for school children.

Shortly after the quake, the Haiti Response Plan (HRP), a three-year partnership among Haiti Methodist Church, UMCOR and VIM to coordinate recovery efforts, was formed. Una Jones, associate general secretary of Mission Volunteers, spoke of the importance of timing.

“VIM teams have been going to Haiti for more than 50 years,” she said. “We had to hold off [sending them] in the beginning, in order to plan a strategic process.”

This response plan consisted of three key components, she said.

“First, it allowed the Haiti church to define their priorities. Second, the partnership between VIM and UMCOR was designed to provide matching grants for the money raised by each volunteer team. Third, the plan required a ratio of two hired Haitian workers to every one foreign volunteer.”

Jones highlighted how pivotal the response plan was.

“It was the first of its kind,” she said. It helped all partners to think strategically and take ownership for this shared ministry.”



**Rev. Tom Vencuss, left, visits with Jean Claude Degazon, center, in his rebuilt home in Haiti in March 2013. Juliet Degazon (right) and Nana, 2, are among 15 family members who live in the home.**

The program, which organized United Methodists to give their time and talents in short-term mission, allowed the church to mobilize volunteers in a new way. Between 2010 and 2013 UMVIM Haiti equipped more than 4,000 volunteers to work in Haiti before it transitioned to local leadership, lead today by Carine Odilus, the EMH VIM team coordinator.

“The VIM program started as a grassroots movement,” Tom said. “While we [the church] had national and international organizations, they didn’t really engage volunteers. The UMVIM program changed that.”

## The In’s and Out’s

Not only did the mission program assist in rebuilding through volunteers; it also provided a vehicle for sustainable development efforts. “And, like what typically happens with the VIM program, there was an immediate response—literally thousands of people waiting to come in-country to do work,” Tom said.

Tom also shared some of the critical elements of volunteer management he faced in his role.

“We took a hit when books like ‘Toxic Charity’ and ‘When Helping Hurts’ came out. We had teams come in and, during the

orientation, their first question would be, ‘I just read “Toxic Charity”. How are we not destroying something here?’ When you work with the local communities and you listen to them and begin to develop a relationship and true partnership, you can avoid those pitfalls.

“Having an established program like UMVIM allows you to work through a system,” he continued. “It provides continuity, a certain structure, a certain set of guidelines. Unfortunately, the image of volunteers is that they drive down the road throwing money out of their cars. By having programs like this in place, we can make sure a lot of these problems don’t exist, or reduce the probability that these things will happen.”

Tom is no longer the Haiti volunteer coordinator; he and Wendy are both working with the New York Annual Conference on its Hurricane Sandy recovery program.

The Haiti response plan contemplated the successful transition of the volunteer program to the Methodist Church there. All volunteers who sign up to work in Haiti now work directly with EMH for resourcing, logistics, assignments and so forth.

Continued on page 8

## Nearly 400,000 Relief Kits Shipped

In 2014, the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) delivered 364,184 relief-supply kits into the hands of people in need, leaving relief-supply warehouses throughout the United Methodist network in need of replenishment. The kits shipped this year—health, school, layette, blanket, birthing, sewing kits, and cleanup buckets—were valued at \$4,871,215.

Kits that are now in most critical need are health kits and school kits. To learn how to be a part of this vital ministry, go [www.umcor.org/UMCOR/Relief-Supplies](http://www.umcor.org/UMCOR/Relief-Supplies). Donations can also be made to UMCOR Material Resources, Advance #901440, every penny of which will be used to purchase supplies for the kits.

# Other Side of Christmas: Death of the Innocents

**BY JACOB S. DHARMARAJ, Ph.D.**  
President, National Federation of Asian American United Methodists

Christmas is over! The stable back at Bethlehem's Inn is empty now. The shepherds and the magi have returned home. The light, glow and warmth of the stable have been replaced by frigid temperatures and cold wind. The miracle of the first Christmas has vanished. Everything appears ordinary and commonplace. It's time for customary routines and mundane activities, and to get ready for a brand New Year.

It's also time to remember the slaughter of the innocents. The children ordered to be killed by King Herod.

My family has a tradition of calling friends overseas on Christmas Day to greet and cheer them. When we made such calls a couple of days ago, some of them lamented about the changed religious landscape in Asia. One of them said, "These are dark days for Christians in India."

Sharing the sentiment of many Christians in other lands, Pope Francis spoke eloquently on behalf of all persecuted minorities on Christmas Eve.

In his "Urbi et Orbi," the pope said, "Truly there are so many tears this Christmas," and "brutal persecution" had descended upon Christians in Iraq and Syria. After urging those persecuted Christians not to be afraid or ashamed of their faith, he prayed, "May the power of Christ, which brings freedom and service, be felt in so many hearts afflicted by war, persecution and slavery."

Religious sectarian tensions have deepened around the world in recent years. More than 80 percent of those persecuted for religious beliefs are Christians. They practice their faith in Christ under severe circumstances. Egypt's Coptic Christians are worshipping in charred churches. Pakistani Christians worship in the midst of blasphemy laws and persistent anti-Christian sentiment. Syria's mostly Orthodox Christians are caught in the middle of the civil war. Churches are regularly targeted and demolished by Hindu extremists in India. Christians in Sudan and Nigeria are systematically targeted and brutalized. The long list is endless.

I am aware that Christians are not the only ones in the world suffering from bigotry and violence. What's important to bear in mind is that the communities under attack in the Middle East now stand on the verge of extinction. In less than a decade, for instance, Mosul's Christian population has dwindled from 135,000 to some 3,000 a year ago. After ISIS' invasion, according to a recent news report, "there is no one left."

Many in the National Federation of Asian



PHOTO COURTESY AFP/GETTY IMAGES

**Pakistani Christians protest against the suicide bombing in All Saints church in Peshawar in September 2013.**

## COMMENTARY

American United Methodists wonder why this atrocity does not arouse the same horror and intense public interest as the notable atrocities that unfolded at Abu Ghraib or Guantanamo Bay. Why hasn't there been the same flood of investigations, media exposes, demonstrations, and other forms of expressions of this blatant human rights violation? If the defense of human rights and the shield of religious freedom is to mean anything, its cutting edge has to be shaped by strong concern for the fate of these Christians also.

Perhaps the separation of distance shields us from full responsibilities of advocacy efforts and missional response. Or we simply say to ourselves, "The problem is too complex, I cannot do much about it."

Fouad Twal, the Catholic patriarch of Jerusalem, in addressing the crisis facing Arab Christians, bluntly asked at a London conference, "Does anybody hear our cry? How many atrocities must we endure before somebody, somewhere, come to our aid?"

We cannot escape our responsibilities.

The Asian Federation is extremely grateful to the general secretaries of the World Council of Churches and General Board of Global Ministries of the UMC for their bold statement and resounding denunciations in condemning the atrocities perpetrated against religious

minorities. We wish more of our denominational leaders had responded to the discrimination so that the hapless plight of our sisters and brothers in other parts of the world might be conveyed from the pulpit to the pew across the denomination, while assuring the protection of religious minorities in our midst.

Although we have been slow to recognize the scope and scale of anti-Christian violence, we cannot remain the same for too long. Today the United States is a vast Home Depot of "do-it-yourself religion." A Christian born here is a stranger in a strange land no less than the people who adhere to other religions and have arrived from other parts of the world. We do not know where our society is going and what our culture has in store for our children.

Cardinal Francis George of Chicago memorably expressed where he believes Western society is heading, when he said in 2010, "I expect to die in bed, my successor will die in prison, and his successor will die a martyr in the public square . . . His successor will pick up the shards of a ruined society and slowly help rebuild civilization, as the church has done so often in human history."

If our common membership in the mystical body of Christ is to mean anything, then their suffering must be ours as well. We need to incorporate the forced migration of religiously persecuted minorities as a missional issue. We cannot continue to use the old gothic ecclesial design as the wineskin for our new missional

**Continued on page 8**

## Apply for “Glocal” Mission Awards

Nominations are being accepted for the NYAC Mission “Glocal” Awards that will be presented during the annual gathering in June. Churches may apply for one of three levels: gold, silver, and bronze for their mission responses in 2014. The requirements are:

### Bronze

- Paid in full the 2014 shared ministry apportionment.
- Supported at least one local mission project.
- Received 50 percent of Special Sunday offerings.

### Silver

- Paid in full the 2014 shared ministry apportionment.
- Supported at least one local mission project.
- Received 75 percent of Special Sunday offerings.
- Fulfilled a covenant relationship with a missionary and/or Advance project.

### Gold

- Paid in full the 2014 shared ministry apportionment.

- Supported at least one local mission project.
- Received 100 percent of Special Sunday offerings.
- Fulfilled a covenant relationship with a missionary and/or Advance project.
- Participated in Volunteers in Mission, Early Response Team, or Disaster Recovery

Send the following information to:  
Rev. Joseph Ewoodzie, Conference Mission Coordinator, 20 Soundview Ave., White Plains, NY 10606; or email, [jewoodzie@nyac.com](mailto:jewoodzie@nyac.com).  
Deadline is May 8.

1. Your local church name, address, phone number.
2. Contact person for the application, including name, email address, and phone number.
3. Category of Glocal Award for which you are applying: gold, silver, bronze
4. For each mission project, event, or relationship provide the project or missionary name, a brief description, dates or frequency of participation, and your financial contributions.
5. Send a copy of your application to your district mission coordinator.

## Free Download to Connect Church, Community

To help congregations reach beyond their walls with worship, community events, ministries, and service, the Lewis Center for Church Leadership had made available a free download, 50 Ways to Take Church to the Community. The resource offers practical tips congregations can use to meet community members where they are and move them toward discipleship.

The download, which is available at [www.churchleadership.com/50ways](http://www.churchleadership.com/50ways),

provides information on these topics:

- Embrace an expansive concept of community
- Prepare spiritually
- Get to know the community surrounding your church
- Listen and learn
- Build authentic relationships
- Turn your existing ministries outward



- Reach out through community events
- Extend your congregation's spiritual presence beyond church walls
- Connect spiritual outreach to community service

Additional downloads on the Lewis web site include 50 Ways to Take Church to the Community, 50 Ways to Welcome New People, and 50 Ways to Increase Worship Attendance.

## Death of the Innocents

### Continued from page 7

challenge. It will leak. A faith with something like 170 million adherents in the United States, a faith that for centuries seeped into every nook and cranny of our society, must play a different role.

I would like to share a story that was shared with me by a Syrian Orthodox priest:

A Roman provincial governor, deciding that his capital should have a coliseum like that in Rome, employed a Greek architect to design and supervise the construction of such a building.

When the building was completed, the governor decided to dedicate it with a great celebration. He planned to climax the celebration by unleashing wild animals on a band of Christians. When the architect realized what was about to happen, he left his prominent seat and leaped into the arena.

“Come back,” shouted the governor.

“I belong here,” replied the architect, “for I am a Christian, too.”

“But I don’t want you to be killed,” shouted the governor. “You are my friend!”

“You are indeed my friend,” was the architect’s response. “But these are my brothers. If they die, I die with them.”

“As you will!” replied the governor grimly as he signaled for the animals to be released.

Thus the architect joined the long line of martyrs from the Apostles’ day to ours . . . men and women who have chosen to obey God rather than humanity. May we stand in solidarity with our persecuted brothers and sisters on this day when we remember the slaughter of the innocent!

## Boots on the Ground in Haiti Recovery

### Continued from page 6

“One thing that isn’t always recognized is the incredible wealth of skill and experience that volunteers bring. Medical and dental work, amazing educational work, teaching and care ministries—like what Wendy provides—vacation Bible schools; they help fundraise, they help resource; many just need direction,” said Tom. Volunteers have undoubtedly been an integral part of the rebuilding process in Haiti.

Tom and Wendy, the entire UMCOR staff and EMH are extremely grateful for the outpouring of volunteer support over the last five years. The work of volunteers in Haiti is an outstanding example of the power of our connection as a global church.

Tom and Wendy leave us with a challenge: “As a mission community, let’s see how we can begin to train and best use the resources of volunteers moving forward. And to all who gave their time and talents to help rebuild Haiti, thank you.”

*\*Laura K. Wise is an intern serving as a mission communicator with the GBGM in New York City*



### CONFERENCE SCENES OF CHRISTMAS



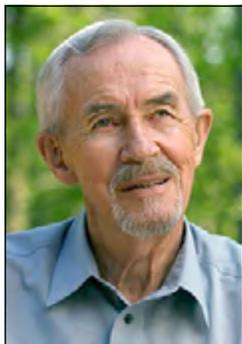
Clockwise from above: Cheshire UMC (Conn.) created a picture perfect living nativity, the wise women brought gifts at the Clinton UMC (Conn.) pageant as the shepherds awaited their cue; carols were sung from the steps of Colchester Community UMC in Downsville, N.Y.; and a barn in Grand Gorge, N.Y., offered shelter for the living nativity brought to life by the youth of Harpersfield UMC; Advent candles at the United Church of Roscoe.



## OBITUARIES

### Bishop Job, who Helped People Deal with Death, Dead at 86

UMNS—"I have no anxiety about my own death. . . . I don't know what that's going to be like, but I have some idea that it will be good because this life is good," said retired Bishop Rueben P. Job after the publication of his book, "Living Fully, Dying Well," in 2006. Job died at his Tennessee home Jan. 3 at 86 after a long struggle with heart disease.



**Bishop Rueben Job**

He was a bishop, pastor, author and friend who was not afraid of death and wanted the church to be better prepared to help people deal with the experience of dying.

In talking about his book, Job offered the best words of comfort about his own death.

"I have no fears at all about death. I think everyone has some apprehension about pain, and in the past, perhaps we did not treat pain well. I think now that's not true anymore. And even when we did not, I think the body itself begins to close off the functions so that the pain itself is lessened."

The bishop had been under hospice care and died peacefully at his Brentwood home, surrounded by his family. He is survived by wife, Beverly Ellerbeck Job; children, Debbie, Philip and David Job, and Ann Job Fullerton, and seven grandchildren.

Job leaves behind a legacy of more than 20 books including, "Three Simple Rules: A Wesleyan Way of Living" published in 2007 that has sold more than 300,000 copies worldwide.

"Thousands of churches and hundreds of thousands of individuals reclaimed the general rules of "do no harm, do good and stay in love with God" through the little brown book. He put the most foundational and profound into 10 words that we could understand and then spent a lifetime trying to achieve," said Susan Salley, associate publisher of ministry resources at the United Methodist Publishing House.

Job's commitment to spiritually was recognized by Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois, in 2010. The Rueben P. Job Endowed Chair in Spiritual Formation was one of the first chairs in spiritual formation among Protestant seminaries. Garrett

Evangelical is one of 13 United Methodist schools of theology.

Job was elected to the episcopacy and assigned to the Iowa Area in 1984. He was world editor of *The Upper Room* devotional magazine and a staff member of the United Methodist Board of Discipleship. He served as president of United Methodist Communications Commission in 1988.

### Rev. Kermit B. Morrison

The Reverend Kermit B. Morrison, died January 2 at age 86 at the Mary Wade Home in New Haven, Conn. Morrison served The United Methodist Church for more than half a century with the majority of his service in the New York Conference.

Morrison was born on Jan 17, 1928, in St. Johnsbury, Vt. He attended DePauw University in Greencastle, Ind., where he majored in philosophy, lettered in football and was a member of Beta Theta Pi fraternity. When he graduated in 1951, Morrison was awarded the Walker Cup, presented annually to the senior who had contributed the most to the university community during his or her four years on campus.

He then attended Yale University Divinity School, earning his bachelor's of divinity in 1955; he returned to Yale and earned his master's of sacred theology in 1970.

During his career as a pastor, Morrison served churches in New England and beyond, including the American Protestant Church in Brussels, Belgium; the North Thetford and Post Mills churches in Vermont; Hicksville, N.Y., UMC; Great Hill/Oxford in Seymour, Conn.; First-St. Paul's in Hartford, Conn.; Faith in North Haven; and, after his retirement in 1998, he served at St. Andrews in New Haven until 2007. While serving at Great Hill/Oxford, he was also an instructor, and later an assistant professor, at Post Junior College in Waterbury, Conn.

Morrison was an active leader and his ministry extended beyond the church, leading groups on bicycle and skiing trips, cruises, and excursions to the Passion Play in Oberammergau, Germany. He directed plays, coached sports teams and led choirs, and summer church camps.

A longtime supporter of the Mary Wade Home in New Haven, Morrison served the facility as chaplain and on the board of managers. Morrison and his wife, Mary Ellen (Susi), moved into an apartment owned by Mary Wade; following Susi's death in 2011, he moved to Mary Wade's skilled nursing unit,

where he died.

During Morrison's first marriage, to Marilyn Payne, they adopted two children, Michael (who died in 2005) and Marci. He married Susi in 1964, and helped to raise her four children, Thomas, Robert, Ellen and James.

He is survived by five children; six grandchildren; a sister, Barbara Ann Streater; a brother-in-law, Sheldon Stokes; and many nieces and nephews.

A celebration of Morrison's life will be held at 2 p.m. January 24 at The Mary Wade Home, 118 Clinton Ave, New Haven, Conn. For more information, contact Peggy Nelson at 203-888-5625, and confirm your attendance by January 15. In lieu of flowers, the family requests that memorial donations be made to The Mary Wade Home.

### Sarah Wilson Ohms

Sarah Wilson Ohms, 94, died on December 21. The widow of Rev. Frederick John Ohms, she was employed for many years by the National Council of Churches and then by the United Presbyterian Church, USA. The Ohms were married in September 1943.

Rev. Ohms entered the ordained ministry through the Atlantic Conference of The Evangelical Church. This denomination joined the United Brethren in Christ to become the Evangelical United Brethren Church, which eventually merged with The Methodist Church to form The United Methodist Church.

As an EUB pastor he served Saint Paul's in Philadelphia, St. Paul's in Forest Hills, N.Y., and Calvary in Queens Village. In 1964, Rev. Ohms became a member of the New York Conference and was appointed as assistant pastor at Hanson Place Central Church in Brooklyn. Two years later he became the pastor of Bethelship Norwegian Church in Brooklyn that became a two-point charge with Fisherman's Church in Brooklyn. Rev. Ohms died in 1985, Sarah Ohms moved to Albuquerque, N.M., where she lived until she died.

The daughter of a pastor, Mrs. Ohms was an accomplished musician playing both the piano and organ. She was also a talented quilt maker, painter and ceramicist. She enjoyed traveling, especially in Europe, India and Hawaii.

She is survived by a brother, David Wilson, along with sons David and Edward, and two granddaughters.

A memorial service is planned for January 17 at Sandia Presbyterian Church. Donations may be made in her name to Sandia Presbyterian Church, 10704 Paseo del Norte NE, Albuquerque, NM 87122.