By Bishop Linda Lee

I have been asked...why go to the Holy Land? The answer is too complex and vast to describe in a sentence. Allow me to reflect with you about our journey this past January. There were 19 of us in our tour group, with 8 coming from Wisconsin. Our Wisconsin traveling partners included Mary Council-Austin, Susan Leih, Gail Slaughter, Earl Smith, Sarah Smith, Elizabeth Stower, Forrest Welis and me.

Our study pilgrimage traced the route of Moses and the people of Israel when they escaped their slavery in Egypt. We crossed the Sinai Desert and journeyed to the Promised Land, now known as Israel and Jordan. We were exposed to the geographical and cultural settings of the Bible. We were introduced to our Christian origins in Egypt. Experiencing the spirituality of the desert and the nature of Christianity in Egypt and the Holy Land of yesterday and today was soul stirring and transformative. This was true even though this was my third trip to that part of the world.

High Points

Many of the “high points” of the trip were literally quite high. We were able to see the extraordinary pyramids during our version of the journey that the Holy Family took to Jerusalem. I climbed part way up Mount Sinai; some made it to the top. The scenery is hard to put into words—but majestic, incredible, inspiring, breathtaking, immense—come to mind. I could see why the people of the land could believe in God’s presence and power. I felt closer to God myself as we traveled the land.

Lasting Impressions

There were several people who made a lasting impact on me, including our entire group of travel companions. Sharing such a spiritually inspirational journey with our group of 19 united us in a way that will last a lifetime. We were also able to see many other pilgrims that had made the journey. It was an encouragement to see such a mixture of cultures and races and expressions of our faith—all in one place. We met Palestinians, Christians and Muslims who are all working very hard to bring peace and reconciliation to the region so that people can learn again to live together as one.

We also had a conversation with a fourth generation refugee and his wife, who was not a refugee. Hearing their story of struggles and oppression, yet deep devotion to one another was truly moving. And, I will never forget a young Bedouin boy who boldly approached me, and said that he was hungry. It struck me that he didn’t ask for any money as so many others had, only food. So I got permission from his father to share the only food I had with me and gave him my bag of raisins. I wished I had more to give him.

Spiritual Impact

Some of what I walked away with are simple stories, but the accumulation of them over a 10-day tour was dramatic. I was able to see the huge contrasts between a higher living standard in Israel and the extreme poverty in Palestine. It opened my eyes to the material abundance many of us in the United States enjoy, while others live under the worst conditions, without enough food or water.

Jesus talks to us about caring for and feeding and clothing the poor. Yet we witnessed many still in need on the holiest of grounds. These grounds that include barren terrain and sweltering heat as well as majestic mountains and beautiful oases. One can’t help but know that there is a God who created this magnificence...who is always present even in the midst of such contrasts and conflict.

More Revelations

As I reflect back on our inspiring journey, I now know the true significance of it. We were there to demonstrate a “ministry of presence”…to let the people know that we are aware of what’s going on, that we care, that we will tell their story and that the world is praying for them. It is very important that we pray for peace in Israel/Palestine. And may all our prayers bear the fruit of peace and the revelation of God to all.
Mission volunteers begin project in Haiti

**GOOD WORKS**

**Society commissions 24 new missionaries**

The Mission Society commissioned 24 new missionaries in a May 11 service at Simpsonwood United Methodist Church in Norcross, Ga. The Rev. Ira Gallaway, a Mission Society founder and retired United Methodist Church elder, was keynote speaker for the event, which sent the missionaries from six states to their ministry assignments. This class of missionaries represents one of the largest groups of new Mission Society workers since its 1984 founding. The new cross-cultural witnesses will minister in Namibia, the Philippines, Peru, Kenya, North Africa and Thailand with the Global Resource Team, and to restricted-access locations. Founded in the Wesleyan tradition, The Mission Society recruits, trains and sends Christian missionaries to minister around the world. At present, The Mission Society has more than 210 missionaries in 39 countries.

**UM band hits $100K for UMCOR, Nets**

Connections, a rock-n-roll band consisting of United Methodist ministers and friends, recently played for an audience of 1,000 in a city park in Allen, Texas, gathering $6,500 for Haiti earthquake relief. That night’s “take” brought the band’s total to over $100,000 raised for the United Methodist Committee on Relief and Nothing But Nets.

**Michigan church celebrates milestone**

The First United Methodist Church in Dearborn, Mich., is celebrating its bicentennial in 2010. Methodism was first brought to the Dearborn area in the early 1800s by a circuit rider named Daniel Freeman. The church’s roots date back to 1809, when the Rev. William Case from Massachusetts came to Michigan and helped start the state’s first Methodist Society. Within a year, membership had grown to around 30.

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**Mission volunteers begin project in Haiti**

**By Elliott Wright**

United Methodist News Service

United Methodist mission volunteer service in post-earthquake Haiti will focus on housing, health, education and pastoral services through a six-month pilot project expected to get under way soon.

The pilot program, which could be extended, will involve both Haitians and volunteers from outside the country. It is the outcome of consultations among the representatives of the Methodist Church in Haiti, the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR), United Methodist Volunteers in Mission and the volunteers office of the United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM).

The program is open to qualified volunteers from the U.S. and from Methodist churches in the Caribbean, Latin America and other parts of the world. UMCOR directors approved on April 13 a $565,000 grant, which the GBGM affirmed.

**Volunteer registration**

Since a Jan. 12 earthquake devastated Port-au-Prince and surrounding areas, more than 3,000 people have registered on a website maintained by UMCOR to express their interest in going to Haiti as mission volunteers.

Family housing will be one of the initial priorities, said Melissa Crutchfield, UMCOR’s international disaster coordinator. While earthquake-resistant housing will be the long-term goal, she said an immediate need is for transitional housing. Other priorities include facilities for schools and health services.

The project also will include training for Haitian pastors to become better equipped to deal with earthquake-related stress.

Infrastructure challenges—such as transportation for people and materials, and housing for visitors—have slowed the use of mission volunteers in post-earthquake Haiti, according to UMCOR staff.

In the pilot stage, volunteer teams will work on projects selected as priorities by the Methodist Church in Haiti. Each team will comprise eight to 12 members with skills appropriate to particular projects. U.S. teams will be coordinated through United Methodist Volunteers In Mission, a grassroots movement that operates on an annual conference and jurisdictional levels.

Each team of volunteers will provide from $3,000 to $5,000 per qualifying project, amounts that will be matched by funds from the UMCOR grant. Team contributions will go through The Advance, the designated mission-giving channel of the church. Priority sites should be identified by mid-June.

Teams will be scheduled through a central U.S.-based office to ensure that paperwork covering insurance, finances and travel is appropriately handled. An office in Haiti will provide links to the churches there and coordinate logistics and materials on the ground for teams.

Susan J. Meister of Belleville, Ill., has been chosen as the volunteer scheduling consultant. She is a member of Signal Hill United Methodist Church in the Illinois Great Rivers Conference and has experience in mission, relief and church communications.

The Rev. Mike Willis of Vestal, N.Y., a fluent in conversational Creole, the language of Haiti, will be based in Port-au-Prince. He and his wife, the Rev. Mary Ricketts, are pastors of the Vestal United Methodist Church. He has been involved in Haiti mission work since 1995 and has visited there some 20 times, leading work teams in construction, micro-credit and clean-water projects.

Haitians will be involved in each undertaking. The project hopes to hire “substantial numbers of Haitians” at a 2-to-1 ratio of Haitians to Americans.

The first step for volunteers is to register online at http://secure.gbgm- umc.org/HaitiVolunteer/. In the U.S., these names will go to the jurisdictional and conference coordinators, who will assist in assembling teams and coordinating with the calendar office.

Teams from Latin America and the Caribbean will be organized with the help of Global Ministries, the Methodist Church in the Caribbean and Americas, and the Council of Evangelical United Methodist Churches in Latin America.

The United Methodist Church has been sending Volunteer In Mission teams to Haiti for more than 30 years, and has strong links to congregations and institutions there. Before the January earthquake, the network was placing about 100 teams in Haiti each year.
Radio show offers faith, Southern satire

BY BOB SMEITANA  
Religion News Service  

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—They don’t see Powdermilk Biscuits in the Bible, but Merri Collins and Barry McAlister perform during a recent episode of Tokens, a Nashville-based radio show that deals with social and theological issues in the style of A Prairie Home Companion.

Dr. Camp was also inspired by Mr. Keillor. The theology professor had listened to A Prairie Home Companion for years, and wondered if he could use a similar approach to talk about theology.

First, Dr. Camp approached his friend Randy Goodman, chairman of the County Music Association, about starting the program. Dr. Camp says he expected Mr. Goodman to reject the idea. Instead, Mr. Goodman gave him thumbs up.

Dr. Camp admits that anxiety about failing, more than anything, had been holding him back. “If you can overcome the fear of failure, it’s amazing to see what can happen,” he said.

The first cast member to sign up was Jeff Taylor, who now serves as the show’s musical director. Mr. Taylor helped recruit A-list Nashville session players. He also helped get musical guests like Amy Grant, Ashley Cleveland, Vince Gill and Buddy Greene to appear on the show, which premiered in February 2008.

Ms. Cleveland, a Grammy award winner who appeared on the show last year, said she had heard about the show from friends, and jumped at the chance to play on Tokens. “Faith should never be reduced to a to-do list,” she said. “It should always start with a celebration.”

During a recent show, Ms. Grant sang Joni Mitchell’s pro-environmental song “Big Yellow Taxi,” with its trademark line, “They paved paradise and put up a parking lot.” She also sang the Merle Travis “Dark as a Dungeon,” which laments the fate of coal miners. That’s not a typical song for the Christian pop star.

“I try to have people sing things they wouldn’t normally sing,” said Dr. Camp.

The show’s radio troupe is a mixture of professional and amateur actors, including Greg Lee, an actor from Ohio, who plays Brother Preacher—a pitch-perfect imitation of a Baptist preacher who has nothing to say but doesn’t let that get in his way. His three-minute monologues are alone worth the price of admission. There’s also Merri Collins, a pediatrician and church friend of Dr. Camp’s, along with fellow Lipscomb theologian David Fleer, who said he signed up because of Dr. Camp’s approach to theology.

“We have a very conservative audience,” Dr. Fleer said. “And Lee is presenting some not so conservative ideas. I look out at the audience and not only are they listening, but they are also hearing what Lee’s trying to say. And that’s rare.”

That doesn’t mean that Tokens is simply a Christian imitation of A Prairie Home Companion. While they deal with theology, Dr. Camp and the cast are after something bigger—glimpses of God’s action in the world, or tokens of grace.

Despite the serious topics in the show, Dr. Camp said he’s mainly motivated by the sheer joy of performing. “Christians don’t do many things simply for the delight of doing them,” he said. “That’s something we are trying to do—it’s an exercise in delight.”

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Wisconsin United Methodists Mobilize for Immigration Reform

Donna Veatch, Gwen Gibson and Deborah Thompson led a Wisconsin Annual Conference delegation to the March 21st historic March for America: Change Takes Courage and Faith in Washington, DC, demonstrating the faith community’s strong commitment to passing just, humane, practical immigration reform that keeps families together. More than 200,000 people from across the country participated in the march. Delegating also met with legislative staff from the state’s House Congressional offices and Senators Kohl and Feingold to urge passage of immigration reform this year. The visits were part of an extensive push from the religious community—hundreds of religious leaders from 41 states visited 238 members of Congress on Monday, March 22nd, and a group of nationally prominent faith leaders met with senator White House officials that morning to urge action on immigration reform.

Following the introduction of bipartisan immigration reform legislation by Senators Schumer and Graham, the faith community is pressing reform that includes policies that keep families together. “The brokenness of the immigration system is felt most heavily by immigrant families,” said United Methodist Bishop Minerva Carcaño. “Any legislation that does not reunite families is not only ineffective at repairing the immigration system, it is immoral. It is time that we as a country live up to the ideals of family values and make reuniting families the cornerstone of reform legislation.”

The faith community’s mobilization around the March builds on Together, Not Torn: Families Can’t Wait for Immigration Reform—a nationwide initiative including the delivery of hundreds of thousands of pro-reform postcards to members of Congress and more than 100 events in communities across the country.

Members of the Wisconsin Conference United Methodist Women participated in public actions across the state on May 1st to coincide with an immigrant rights rally of approximately 10,000 UM Women at Assembly in St. Louis on that day. Members of the Wisconsin Conference Immigration Task Force will be planning other educational and advocacy events in the coming months.

Harbor House Crisis Shelter: A Haven to Those in Need

A person who is homeless is not simply one who does not have shelter from the elements; they lack one of the most important things that a person can have—a home. A home is a place that provides security, community, and emotional safety, but above all, home is a place where you belong. A person who does not have a home is like a ship without a harbor.

That is no longer the case in Superior, Wisconsin since the Harbor House Crisis Shelter opened its doors January 12, 2001. Harbor House, a ministry connected with Faith United Methodist Church, provides the shelter and support that so many people need in these tough economic times. One of the thirteen Wisconsin Conference Health and Welfare Ministries, Harbor House is partially supported by your apportionment dollars.

Reverend Barbara Certa-Werner, the executive director of Harbor House, remembers one particular case in which a woman came to Harbor House pregnant with her first child. She was scared, alone, and didn’t know what to do.

Four years later, it is a very different story. The woman has a job with Harbor House as the House Manager, had a second child, and she and her family are active members of the church.

According to Certa-Werner, “From the person I met who was in tears and didn’t know what to do, to the woman I know now...[it is evident that] God has worked in her life through Harbor House. I saw her last week and she was...happy. For the first time. This has helped her confidence, self-esteem, and it has helped her to know that she’s not alone; that whatever comes along, she can face it, because she knows she has support.”

Harbor House provides services for many people who, like this woman, find themselves with no where to turn. Through renovations, the shelter has expanded to a capacity of 20 people. It offers case-management programs—which include budgeting, credit score checks, coaching, community referrals, and supplies—as well as children’s programs, and a transitional living program that provides homeless people with an apartment for around 24 months depending on need.

Harbor House does not accept federal assistance for the transitional living program, which eliminates what would be an 18-month cap in service. According to Certa-Werner, “[Residents] can stay as long as they need. For instance, we had our first college graduate; she got her Bachelor’s in Psychology. She would have had to leave with other programs, but we were able to offer her time to look for a job, save up money, et cetera.”

In a month, Harbor House supports an average of 20–25 people, and in a year, 380–400 people. They have seven bedrooms available, though they often have to turn people away due to a lack of space.

“Last year, we served 370 people and turned 170 people away because there was not enough room,” said Certa-Werner.

“There is no reason we need to have so many homeless women and children.”

Although they would love to expand to meet this need, she said the overall goal is something quite different.

“[My goal for the future is] to be out of business. This might sound weird, but the main vision is to get to a place where we don’t have to exist anymore. There is no reason we need to have so many homeless women and children.”

Certa-Werner and the rest of the volunteers at Harbor House continue to strive for that goal, taking it one step at a time. Not only do they provide shelter, training, and resources, but they provide the people they serve with what they need most—a home.

Harbor House has three locations in Superior, WI. For more information, visit www.harbourohouses.org, call 715-394-9608 or 715-392-4157, or e-mail reflections@wiscumc.org.

Reflections is an official publication of the Wisconsin Conference of The United Methodist Church. Annual subscriptions cost $10. Send checks payable to Wisconsin Conference UMC, along with the recipient name and address to Reflections Editor, Wisconsin Conference UMC, 750 Windsor St., Sun Prairie, WI 53590.
A Generous Vision

By Dan Dick, Director of Connectional Ministries

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also…” This passage from Matthew offers a powerful reminder that what we value most in our lives occupies a significant position in our heart, mind, and spirit. It would be a mistake to equate “treasure” with money—a mistake we often make when we hear this scripture quoted—because the concept of treasure is something much greater and more meaningful than mere money. Treasure—in its biblical metaphorical sense—is all of the value that a person possesses. It includes a person’s talents and passions, knowledge and abilities, experiences and possessions. It includes the full value of all that a person is, does, and has. And treasure exists for a purpose—to create something.

Treasure is a means to an end, not an end in itself. Simply amassing wealth and property is not enough. The point of having treasure is to “generate” something. The root of the words “genius,” “generate,” and “generosity” is the same—“genus”—which means “to birth, beget, or create.” This is an important distinction: When we speak of money and treasure, we often do so as a way of talking about giving. But the act of giving is significantly different than the concept of generosity. A person can give a gift and not truly be generous, but a person who cultivates a truly generous spirit will give a wide variety of gifts wholeheartedly. The church doesn’t need more givers—the church needs to cultivate true generosity.

A person who cultivates a truly generous spirit will give a wide variety of gifts wholeheartedly!

Another difference is in what can be accomplished. If a group of people give money to a project or special need, a lot of good can be done. But if a group of people combine their generosity, amazing things can happen. The combination of gifts, skills, resources, knowledge, and passion are synergistic—the outcome is greater than the sum of the parts. It is through true generosity that God works miracles in God’s people. What is impossible to any one of us alone becomes more than just possible through the power of God’s Holy Spirit.

Generosity is not just about “making do.” It isn’t bound by the limited and limiting definition of stewardship as “management.” More than mere management, we become co-creators with God when we are generous. We bring into being that which was not possible before. True generosity saves lives. True generosity builds shelters and produces food and provides clothing. True generosity makes room for the stranger and takes time for the lonely. True generosity praises God, celebrates all our many blessings, and banks in the warmth of true fellowship. Generosity reminds us that we are so much more together than we are alone.

Perhaps the greatest gift—treasure—God has given us is each other. Where we value true community and build the strong and enduring friendships and relationships that define us as the body of Christ, we cultivate a culture of generosity that has immense power—power to make disciples of Jesus Christ, power to transform the world.
Film explores mysteries, beauty in world’s oceans

BY BILL FENTUM
Associate Editor

Oceans
Rated G

The earth’s five oceans cover nearly three-quarters of its surface. But according to scientists, humans have seen at most only five percent of the wonders that lie beneath.

Filmmakers Jacques Perrin and Jacques Cluzet give us a glimpse of what we’ve missed in Oceans, DisneyNature’s follow-up to the hit 2009 documentary Earth. Mr. Perrin has described their achievement as a “wildlife opera . . . a hymn to the sea and the species concealed within it.”

Indeed, the tone is reverential. Whether we’re watching dolphins off the coast of Australia, humpback whales near the Polynesian islands, penguins and seals in the Antarctic or walruses at the North Pole, a sense of peaceful awe remains throughout the film.

Early on, a marine iguana dives into tropical waters to eat seaweed, and we track it in tight close-up. The camera wanders along coral reefs, past sea turtles and schools of jellyfish, while narrator Pierce Brosnan dwells less on scientific facts than the natural beauty of the undersea world.

There is danger, too. Baby turtles hatch from their nest on a beach begin crawling toward the sea; before they can reach the water many of them are picked off by swooping birds of prey. Enough survive, Mr. Brosnan says, to ensure the species will continue.

In another scene dolphins round up thousands of sardines for a meal, casting “nets” of bubbles from their blowholes to herd the fish. Then birds dive-bomb and copper sharks appear up thousands of sardines for a meal, in shots that took seven months to capture.

Other rare sights include the Asian sheephead wrasse, a giant fish with a swollen forehead and chin that grow more prominent with age. The Spanish dancer, a colorful sea slug, propels itself across the ocean floor, looking as graceful as its namesake.

In the most arresting moment, a diver swims shoulder-to-fini with a great white shark; we’re assured the stunt isn’t always dangerous, but surely it’s nothing for a non-professional to try.

Many nature documentaries (March of the Penguins, Arctic Tale) draw parallels between wildlife and human behavior to help us identify with the animals, often stretching credibility for the sake of a good story. In all but one or two scenes, Oceans escapes that pitfall, taking a poetic, meditative approach that skips some explanations and leaves more room for the mysteries of creation.

In the original French version, re-leased last year in Europe, Mr. Perrin reportedly talks to his grandson about the fragility of nature and human responsibility for the planet as they wander through a museum exhibit on extinct sea mammals. Here the boy only appears in the first and final shots, and all of their conversation is cut from the film.

Perhaps Disney execs are mindful of children who might have trouble following subtitled dialogue. Or they may have felt a bit skittish about the explicitly environmental message.

Either way, Oceans hasn’t suffered in the transition. The elements at its core—the joy of exploration and a passion for sustaining all of life on Earth—are still intact.

A cameraman captures close-up footage of a humpback whale in Oceans, the new documentary from DisneyNature. A cameraman captures close-up footage of a humpback whale in Oceans, the new documentary from DisneyNature.

An Australian Giant Cuttlefish searches for food.

O&A: An evangelical approach to earth care

In April the Rev. Joel Hunter’s megachurch in Orlando, Fla., held what organizers billed as the largest- ever faith-based gathering to celebrate Earth Day. The simulcast from Northland Church drew together thousands of congregations in partnership with Blessed Earth, a nonprofit organization dedicated to spreading environmentalism among churches.

Dr. Hunter, 61, is part of a new vanguard of influential leaders pushing evangelicalism beyond traditional hot-button social issues. The former United Methodist pastor prayed with President Obama on Inauguration Day and served on the White House’s Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships. He is on the board of the National Association of Evangelicals and has lobbied Congress on climate change. He spoke recently with Amy Green of Religion News Service.

Tell me about the Earth Day event. How did Northland get involved?

Through my involvement in what we call creation care, I met Matthew and Nancy Sleeth (of Blessed Earth). We formed a friendship, and when this brainchild of his came up, he knew we were a church of remarkable technology. He came to us, and I said we’d be glad to do it because this is what we do.

Are we seeing a new religious environmental movement—people who see environmental protection as not only a scientific issue, but a moral one as well?

Yes. There is a growth from simply an anthropocentric theology to a Christo-centric theology. That means the story of evangelical theology is not so much getting someone saved and getting them to heaven, but it is Christ re-deeming not only the individual person but all creation as well. You’re seeing a transformation of, or a matu-ray of, interpreting Scripture to do with God’s broader agenda of redemption to things, beyond just the personal, individual salvation.

The environmental movement has pitted science against religion and Christians against Christians. You’ve written that there is “money to be made and self-righteousness to be reinforced by living in disparate worlds.” Do you see these groups beginning to find common ground?

Yes. Of course there will always be people who profit from polariza- tion, and there will always be the fearful and parochial extremist voices. However, there is a growing cooperation and mutual respect and appreciation.

You pushed for that. You pushed evangelicals to embrace issues beyond gay marriage and abortion. Why is this important to you?

First of all, I see this as a pro-life issue. I see all of these issues as necessary for extending and enhancing life. It’s important for Christians to cooperate with people who they may have traditionally thought of as adversaries because, frankly, the problems in this world are too big for any one group to solve.

Christians have to mature in their theology and in their practice of their faith to the point that they are practical and not just ideological.

Do you think climate change is real?

Yes. I think the overwhelming evidence says that climate change, though nonlinear and unpredictable, is very real and that we need to address the pollu- lants in order to reduce the consequences.

Did you see Avatar? What did you think?

We don’t agree with the theology of Avatar. Nonetheless, we embrace the overall message that we don’t exploit, we don’t take advantage, and we prize the creation.

And by the way, the thing that was not mischaracterized in the film is that part of the reason for preserving biodiversity is the healing properties hidden in nature. That’s not theologi- cal; that’s scientific. If we destroy the biodiversity of the world, we are de-stroying many of the remedies that God has hidden or embedded in much of the natural world.

bfentum@umr.org
Special Contributor
BY MIKE LOWRY
Special Contributor

Going back to future of small group model

BY BISHOP MIKE LOWRY
Special Contributor

In the 1985 movie Back to the Future, teenager Marty McFly (Michael J. Fox) accidentally goes back in time to 1955. By taking the right actions in the past, he saves the future for his family.

This is an apt analogy for the challenge faced by Sunday schools—and the discipling movement—in Methodism today.

The early Methodist movement focused its discipling in small groups (classes and bands) who gathered for prayer, Bible study, spiritual discernment and mission work based on both evangelical and deeds of love, justice and mercy.

Despite its decline, Sunday school will be with us long into the future, especially as a means of teaching the Christian faith to children. But it will not be the primary instrument of discipleship development for most youth and younger adults.

Rediscovering roots

A brief historical recap sets the context for our trip back to the future.

Sunday school began in the 1780s as a method of reaching the poor with the gospel through teaching and social reform on the one free day of the week. In time, the classes grew to include all ages and not only taught discipling but also met fellowship and support needs or resources. The early Methodist movement fostered its discipling in small groups, including the sacraments; prayer; including the sacraments; prayer; and merce.

Consider the implications for the United Methodist Church. Our mission is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. The intent is that people move on to perfection—to the full holiness of heart and life. Despite the best intentions, however, few churches have a coherent understanding of the path to genuine discipleship.

Re-embracing some version of the old Methodist class meeting... offers a future of faithfulness and fruitfulness.

We were called Methodist because of our “method” for discipling (put differently: serious Christianity). The means of grace were understood to involve at a minimum regular worship including the sacraments; prayer; small-group training and accountability; service in love, justice and mercy; and evangelistic witness to those who do not have an active relationship with the living Lord; and care for each other in Christian love.

Last summer I read Jim Collins’ newest book How the Mighty Fall. Mr. Collins talks about the “Hedgehog Concept,” an operating model for making good decisions based on three intersecting circles: what you do best in the world, what you care most passionately about and your economic means or resources.

“Hedgehog Concept”

I am mindful that churches are different from businesses. Our mission is defined biblically and theologically. The power and presence of the Holy Spirit cannot be overestimated. But business models are helpful tools for guiding us in our mission and specifically in making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

What is the Hedgehog Concept in Methodism?

First, we are best at intentional Christian discipleship development. This involves being methodical about discipling growth and development.

Second, our passion is to transform people and the world.

Third, we find our resources in the local church. This means more than just where the money comes from; it drives our best development and transformational efforts.

The choice is clear. We can die as Christians different from businesses, or we can again become a movement for advancing the kingdom of God.

So do that, we must go back to the future. We must move beyond Sunday school as we know it. We must again embrace clarity in discipling and rediscover our small-group roots in making disciples.

Bishop Lowry leads the Fort Worth Episcopal Area.

Students ride in style to church tutoring program

BY JOAN G. LABARR
Special Contributor

DALLAS, Texas—In a scene reminiscent of the Richie Rich comic books of the 1960s, when the school bell rings at Clara Oliver Elementary School, a shiny black limousine pulls up and the driver walks out to open the back door.

One by one a group of children walk up to the limo and climb in to perch on the leather seats. With their classmates looking on in wonder, the children are whisked off to their destination: the L’Arts Academy, an after-school tutoring program at Community United Methodist Church in southern Dallas.

Three days a week, volunteers at the church offer intensive one-on-one tutoring. The program began in January and has already gained the respect and support of leaders at the school. One family at Community UMC is so impressed, the parents turn turns driving their son 20 miles from Mesquite, Texas, for tutoring in math.

Where does the limo come in? The answer reflects close links in the primarily African-American congregation and their commitment to make a difference in the lives of the children.

In 2008 the Rev. Jackye Walters-Lee, pastor at Community UMC, and Linda Mitchell, CEO at Black & Clark Funeral Home, got the idea for a high-quality afterschool program. They talked to administrators at Clara Oliver School, but learned the problem would be transportation for the children.

“When I did that” Ms. Mitchell asked. And so the idea was born to drive the children to the church in a limo, as an outreach of Black & Clark.

“By providing a limo ride, we offer excitement, touch the lives of the participants and let them know they are winners,” Ms. Mitchell later said in an interview. “We can catch them [the children] while they are young, and let them know that people care about them. It’s an incentive to do right and finish school.”

Once the children were signed up, others got involved including Black & Clark funeral director Emanuel Pruitt, who often drives the limo.

“Mr. Pruitt tells the pastor if the children cut up in the limo, and his pastor stands at the door and waits for them—and it isn’t pretty,” said Ms. Walters-Lee, laughing.

The reality is that the children spill out of the limo excited about what will follow.

First they enjoy a snack, and then it’s time to work. Community UMC members who volunteer know each child’s needs and focus on helping them grasp their lessons.

Member Sam Ferrerle leads a favoricie activity after the academics. It’s a military-like drill in which the children march and do calisthenics.

After a full afternoon, the driver arrives at 5 p.m. to take some of the children back to the school; others are picked up by a parent.

The Rev. Milton Gutierrez, the Dallas South district superintendent, is one of L’Arts Academy’s biggest fans.

“The Community UMC seeks to live into its name by being a church for the whole community,” Mr. Gutierrez said during a visit to the church.

“This shows the commitment of the church to get involved in the community by linking school and business with the church so the children can receive much-needed care in their educational lives.”

Dr. LaBarr is the communications director for the North Texas Conference.
A Dry Basement, a Happy Home, Finally

By Catherine Idzerda

Since January 2008, Rich and Kay Deeney have been running a sump pump 24 hours a day, seven days a week in their Putnam Street home. They didn’t have a choice: Unprecedented flooding in 2008 had raised the ground water so high that they couldn’t keep it out of their basement.

Kay spent a lot of time cleaning the walls and floors with bleach to keep the mold in check. Because they didn’t have actual floodwater in their basement, however, they didn’t qualify for help from the city or FEMA. They worried they would lose their home.

Earlier this year, the Wisconsin Conference of the United Methodist Church stepped in. The church, with help from a variety of local organizations, has made the Deeneys’ home habitable again. “It’s unbelievable,” Kay Deeney said. “I thought, ‘I’ll believe it when I see it,’ and now I see it.”

Here’s how it happened: The Wisconsin Department of Health Services picked the Wisconsin Conference to oversee the 2008 Flood Recovery Program, which is funded by a federal social services block grant. The conference was working in partnership with Wisconsin Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters.

Kirstine Moser, a caseworker from the conference, came and assessed the situation at the Deeneys’ little home. Water had damaged the furnace and water heater for the second time. The Deeneys were on their fourth—or was it their fifth?—sump pump. The utility bills were killing them. And they certainly couldn’t afford the $32,000 it would cost to fix the basement: Kay is on disability due to a recurrence of cancer, and Rich works at the John Deere warehouse.

Moser helped the Deeneys work through the process. She helped them get the federal money to fix the water problem.

Chile Earthquake: An Unforgettable Moment for Wisconsin Volunteers in Mission

Our lives are a series of events. Many become hazy over time, graying and collecting dust somewhere in the back of our minds. Then, there are those events that are flash-bulbed into our memories; moments that years later we can recall just as vividly as if we were looking at a snapshot.

For a team of Volunteers in Mission to Chile, the February 27th earthquake was one such moment. “It was one of those experiences that you will remember where you were for the rest of your life,” said team leader Don Heeringa.

The team—Heeringa, Cortina Wynia and Caleb Heeringa (two of Heeringa’s grandchildren), Pastor Susan Safford-Gaul, George and Mary Rather, Karen Sandstrom, Rod Schilse, and Heinz Melzl—were staying in Nueva Imperial, which is about five and a half hours away from Concepción. They were working with the Methodist ministry and the Mapuche Indians, a large tribe in the south of Chile, repairing and doing construction on local school buildings.

When the earthquake struck at 3:44 a.m., “several of us made a quick exit out of our buildings; others stood in doorways until the earth settled down, and then checked for damage,” said Heeringa. Several glass objects were broken, but fortunately, none of the team members or their host families were injured.

The story was quite different in other parts of the country. Some 500 people were reported dead, with hundreds more missing. Several cities were affected by the 8.8 magnitude earthquake, including Concepción, Talca, Pelluhue, and Chile’s capital Santiago.

In the days following the earthquake, the VIM team members were without power, Internet, television, water, and fuel for vehicles. Although they were shaken, the team members consider themselves lucky. “I don’t have any dramatic stories to tell. We were inconvenienced,” said Heeringa. They are also grateful for the connection they experienced. “…I appreciate Bishop Lee and Deborah Thompson in our Conference for tracking us down and offering assistance. I feel it comforting knowing there are Methodists in nearly every part of the world who are caring people. I can’t say enough good about our hosts in Chile, who saw to our every need,” said Heeringa.

Heeringa is currently organizing three additional trips to Chile that will take place in November, January, and February. At this time, he expects that those trips will be dedicated to rebuilding the Second Methodist Church in Temuco. For more information, e-mail don-heeringa@yahoo.com.

To date, Wisconsin UMC congregations have donated $10,165 for Chile relief. If you wish to donate, you can send a check to the Wisconsin Conference Treasurer and reference fund number 6015.

A church in Chile was one of hundreds of buildings damaged by the quake.

Wisconsin United Methodist Churches Continue to Help Haiti

With a wonderful outpouring of generosity, Wisconsin United Methodists continue to make a difference for survivors of the devastation in Haiti. Across the state, individuals and church groups are donating their time, talents, and resources.

Volunteers are coming up with creative ways to help. Watertown Christ United Methodist Church and First United Congregational Church held a health kit challenge, and together donated 239 kits. Brooklyn United Methodist Church partnered with Brooklyn Elementary School and Hillcrest Bible Church to assemble 240 health kits. At St. Croix Falls and Wolf Creek United Methodist churches, one member who works with the Forensics team at the local high school rallied her students and the congregations to put together 80 health kits. The Sun Prairie UMC Confirmation Class picked up 182 health kits and thousands of donated items from area religious and youth organizations and delivered them to the Midwest Mission Distribution Center in IL.

The youth group also packed another 509 health kits while at MMDC. Ron Schobert from Sun Prairie UMC has made multiple trips from the Conference Center to MMDC, delivering the kits as they come in. And there are many other stories of giving to tell.

To date, Wisconsin United Methodists have donated more than 3,000 health kits and quilts, and given $413,300 for Haiti Relief.

Bishop Linda Lee from the Wisconsin Conference UMC said, “Although volunteers in Haiti and here in the U.S. have a lot of work ahead of them, the contributions of Wisconsin United Methodists really are making a difference. Through prayers, donations, and resources, you are showing the people of Haiti that though they may be far away, they are certainly not forgotten.”

To give to the Haiti relief efforts, send your donation to the WI Conference Treasurer and reference Fund #6010 or visit www.umcor.org. Please bring any future donated kits to the Annual Conference session in La Crosse, June 13–16.