What Does it Mean to Imagine Wisconsin Anew

By Bishop Hee-Soo Jung

For the past several months, I’ve been deeply involved in the formation of the context for how and why we are in ministry as United Methodists in Wisconsin. Wherever I go, I seek to discover what God is doing in and through our congregations and Circuits to fulfill the biblical mandate to reach out to people with God’s love in Jesus’ name. Since returning home to Wisconsin, I have been seeking to Imagine Wisconsin Anew!

What does that mean? It means seeking to see what God is placing before us as possibilities. It means learning what has changed and continues to change in the communities that make up Wisconsin. What new populations or people are living in our communities and how are we going to reach out to them in God’s love? How are we preparing ourselves to offer leadership in the United Methodist congregations in Wisconsin to reach out beyond ourselves and our buildings?

How are we as United Methodists going to prepare the soil of our lives and our faith communities so we are equipped to produce the Fruit of the Spirit? The Cabinet, other Conference leadership, and I have started to find answers to these questions. For one thing, we have created District Strategy Teams. They have been recruited by the District Superintendents to work together with them to learn what has changed in the communities in their Districts in Wisconsin, and help develop plans and a strategy for addressing new people and places, as well as explore together how to invite people into relationships with each other and Jesus Christ through existing congregations. We’ve started the training and equipping of these teams, and will continue throughout the year to meet and to learn together.

The work of the Cabinet and District Strategy Teams has also invited the Conference Board of Congregational Development to imagine itself anew. This Board has decided to go to the Annual Conference asking for a change in their name and direction from Board of Congregational Development to Conference Strategy Team.

Everywhere I go, I have found that we as United Methodists in Wisconsin want and need to pay careful attention to our surroundings and the people of our communities. I have met old friends and new who tell me they want to bear good fruit as followers of Jesus Christ. Together, I believe we will find the tools and opportunities that will allow God to transform our lives and the congregations of Wisconsin.

I give thanks to God for all of you and all you do!

Live the Fruit of the Spirit at Annual Conference 2013!

We are embarking on a new quadrennium, with an updated and exciting emphasis: “Live The Fruit Of The Spirit.” At this year’s Annual Conference, we will focus on “preparing the soil.” We are excited to be gathering at the Marriott Madison West in Middleton June 7–10 and equally excited to be joining Bishop Hee-Soo Jung in celebrating United Methodist connectional ministry within the Wisconsin Conference. May God bring us together in joy and thanksgiving as we celebrate ministry: growing disciples, and through our congregations and Circuits preparing the soil of our lives and our faith communities so we are equipped to produce the Fruit of the Spirit.

At this year’s Annual Conference, we will focus on “preparing the soil.” We are excited to be gathering at the Marriott Madison West in Middleton June 7–10 and equally excited to be joining Bishop Hee-Soo Jung in celebrating United Methodist connectional ministry within the Wisconsin Conference. May God bring us together in joy and thanksgiving as we celebrate ministry: growing disciples, experiencing God’s abundance, and living the fruit of the spirit!

The regular registration fee is $125, which includes Sunday dinner. Scholarships are available. Note that June 10 is a Learning Day for everyone in the Wisconsin Annual Conference and is open to all clergy and laity. Our day together will focus on our vision of every congregation, charge and circuit becoming transformational centers of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. This Learning Day is open to anyone who wishes to attend, and is included with your Annual Conference registration, but those who only wish to attend the free Learning Day, can visit the Annual Conference website at www.tinyurl.com/WACUMC13 for more information and to register.

NOTE: Mailing Address for Conference Office Changes July 1st

Effective July 1st, the Wisconsin Conference UMC Office will be closing its Post Office Box in Sun Prairie. Mail will be received to its street address: 750 Windsor St., Sun Prairie, WI, 53590.

Please update your contact list to reflect this change and contact Amanda Rehrauer at arehrauer@wisconsinumc.org with any questions or concerns.
UMCOR makes grants for Sandy recovery

BY LINDA BLOOM
United Methodist News Service

NEW YORK—United Methodists in New York have been working on the regional shipments of 15,000 flood buckets that they distributed to Hurricane Sandy survivors last fall. But they didn’t expect the more than 11,000 blankets from a faraway source, said Bishop Martin McLee, in the denomination’s New York Conference.

“There was this wonderful call, asking if we would receive blankets from Russia,” Bishop McLee told directors of the United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries on April 11 as he recounted the conference’s relief efforts. The United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) is a part of the mission board.

Both Bishop McLee and Bishop John Schol, leader of the Greater New Jersey Conference, spoke to the mission agency about the challenges and opportunities that have arisen since the hurricane turned “superstorm” made a significant impact on the Northeast coast.

In New Jersey, where 253,000 households sustained damage and tens of thousands of homes were left uninhabitable, Sandy was the most destructive storm in the state’s history. In the New York area, 269,640 applications have been made to FEMA for federal assistance.

To help meet these needs, UMCOR has allocated much of the $8.35 million it had received in Sandy donations by early March.

On April 12, UMCOR directors approved $3 million grants to both the New York and Greater New Jersey conferences, to be delivered in six-month installments. The Peninsula-Delaware Conference received $500,000 for its Sandy recovery work in Somerset County, Md. Another $500,000, not yet approved, has been earmarked for the Methodist Church of Cuba, which is preparing its grant proposal.

In addition, UMCOR allotted $825,759 to New Jersey and $42,000 to Peninsula-Delaware for repairs to church property damage from Sandy. Those grants represent 10 percent of the funds raised for Sandy relief.

In a further gesture of solidarity, the mission agency’s directors took part in a Sandy workday April 13, assisting at two sites in New Jersey and in New York.

Greater New Jersey has established a comprehensive long-term Sandy recovery plan overseen by a nonprofit organization, with a projected budget of $21.8 million. In addition to support from UMCOR, the conference has created its own fundraising appeal.

Repair, rebuild, renew

During the relief phase, the conference distributed food, clothing and basic supplies, including flood buckets, to more than 10,000 people, along with daytime or overnight shelter to some 5,000 affected by Sandy.

The larger task is now beginning, Bishop Schol pointed out. “The long-term recovery is where we really begin to put our efforts,” he said.

Greater New Jersey’s recovery ministry focuses on three goals: to repair, rebuild and renew, in cooperation with churches, community residents and nonprofit groups as well as local, state and federal agencies. State and federal agencies.

The repair of 300 to 500 Sandy-damaged homes, particularly for the elderly, disabled and low-income households, is expected to require assistance from more than 20,000 trained volunteers.

“We are the biggest player [for recovery work] in New Jersey,” the bishop said, noting that Habitat for Humanity has committed to 150 houses. The conference’s Sandy project would not be possible, he added, without the support of UMCOR and the church volunteer-in-mission networks.

Rebuilding will extend beyond homes to community centers and churches. Other direct assistance to the most vulnerable will be provided in the form of materials, donations and services. “Rebuilding the social fabric of a community is essential,” the conference’s grant proposal declared.

Renewal will focus on the emotional and spiritual toll that Sandy took on people’s lives. Greater New Jersey expects to provide case management and counseling for more than 500 families during the next several years.

‘Holy moment’

In the New York Conference, United Methodists and related volunteers—nearly 2,000 of them—already have prepped more than 300 houses for repairs or rebuilding by pumping out water, removing debris and mold and replacing insulation and flooring.

New York’s project goal for the new grant is to help about 500 families, with “a specific target” of 175 households. Five recovery sites—in Massapequa, Freeport and Rockville Center on Long Island, on Staten Island and in Brooklyn—have been established. The conference also wants to set up a site in Connecticut, where more than 13,000 homes were damaged.

New York will use the grant to support its disaster recovery ministries and staff as it provides case management; restores, repairs and rebuilds homes with the help of volunteers—inmission and offers ongoing spiritual care to persons in the affected areas.

“A case manager will engage each survivor and will sit and be like a friend,” said the Rev. Joseph Ewoodzie, New York Conference disaster coordinator.

UMCOR staff and consultants have worked closely with the New York Conference on its Sandy response, the report said, and “see opportunity” for program expansion if the recovery work is successful and more funds become available.

The Peninsula-Delaware Conference will use its grant to help 50 to 100 families in the town of Grisfield and Somerset County, Md., rebuild their homes and their lives. United Methodists there, working through the conference’s volunteer-in-mission coordinator, they hope to support and deploy 175 teams with a total of 3,000 volunteers during a two-year period for the Sandy recovery work in Maryland.
Wesley hymn invites all to ‘the Gospel Feast’

BY BENJAMIN HENSLEY
Special Contributor

Food is a big deal in our society, but even more important are the spiritual “meals” that we share. One often hears phrases such as, “They are hungry for the gospel,” and as Jesus said, “It is written: ‘Man cannot live on bread alone.’” (Matt. 4:4)

We are reminded that truth, as well as sustenance, is found in the gospel. Charles Wesley’s hymn, “Come, Sinners, to the Gospel Feast” is an invitation to that table and a reiteration of that truth.

The younger brother of Methodistism’s founder, John Wesley, Charles (1707-1788) wrote 6,500 hymns, and as an itinerant minister of the Church of England. To put this in perspective, if he wrote hymns from the time he started school up to his death, it averages out to 97 per year, or one hymn every three to four days. Wesley wrote many of the most important Methodist hymns, 41 of which remain in the latest edition of the UM Hymnal (1989).

His hymns were examples of fine poetry married to a rich, biblically based theology. Wesley scholar Ernest Rattenbury once observed that “a skillful man, if the Bible were lost, might extract much of it from Charles Wesley’s hymns.”

Our hymn first appeared in 24 stanzas in Hymns for Those That Seek and Those That Have Redemption in the Blood of Jesus Christ (1747). Nine stanzas were later chosen for the Wesley’s Famous Collection of Hymns for the People Called Methodists (1780). In the 1980s the Wesley Consultation of the Hymnal Revision Committee decided to make two hymns out of the original one; the other hymn is found at No. 616 in the UM Hymnal.

“Come, Sinner, to the Gospel Feast” makes an important theological statement. Our participation in church is more than a weekly obligation or chore. Perhaps we can view church as a family meal where all are welcome. The first stanza bids us to “let every soul be Jesus’ guest,” and adds, “Ye need not one be left behind.” It is this joyful message of welcome that as parishioners we should seek and embrace, and as ministers we should promote and foster in our churches.

The gospel feast is also a feast of salvation: “Come and partake the gospel feast, / be saved from sin, in Jesus rest.” When we participate in the Eucharist, we are reminded of the sacrifice our Savior made for us. The Eucharist should be as inclusive as the gospel demands that the ministers of the church be. Just as we tell others of the good news, we should be eager to share both the food we eat and the truth we cherish.

Another interesting aspect of this hymn is its urgency, as Wesley sounds an eschatological note: “This is the time, no more delay! This is the Lord’s accepted day.”

However, there is another way to see this—perhaps even simultaneously—as a call of eagerness: “Come to the feast, be saved from sin: Why should we not be excited and a little emphatic to share the gospel? There is a sense of urgency and excitement in this hymn that can influence how we live and share the gospel in our lives.

Wesley also likens the gospel feast to a place where one finds relief: “Come, all ye souls by sin oppressed,/ ye restless wanderers after rest.” What catharsis can be found in the joyful sharing of food and conversation with others? We are social creatures who love sharing our lives over a meal with those we care about. We should be able to pass on the gospel to those who are hungry for it, as easily as we pass the sweet potatoes to our neighbor at the table.

Mr. Hensley, a Master of Sacred Music student at Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, studies hymnology with Dr. C. Michael Hawn.

“In the same book, he recalled the range of hymns featured in his book. At age 23, he wrote the song ‘I’d Rather Have Jesus,’ which became another staple of Graham crusades. A few years later, the song’s message inspired him to decline an offer to sing with a secular singing group.

Franklin Graham, who succeeded his father as the president of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, recalled how “unassuming” the musician was.

Even though Bev was 10 years older than my father, he never acted his age,” said Franklin Graham. “He was absolute fun to be with.”

In 2004, when he was sidelined by a heart attack, Shea had to miss Graham’s evangelistic event in Kansas City, Mo. It was the first time in 57 years that he had missed a crusade.

One of his last public appearances with Graham was in 2010, when the ministry celebrated its 60th anniversary. Mr. Ross said. Even in his later years, Shea awed listeners with his continuing ability to sing his signature songs. Dr. Martin heard him sing in Dallas in 2002, when he would have been 93.

“I commented on how remarkable it was,” Dr. Martin recalled, “and he said, ‘I think I sounded better when I was 90.’”

Kevin Eckstrom, editor in chief of Religion News Service, contributed to this report.
**Film Review**

Malick’s concept of love still shrouded in mystery

**By Rebecca Cusey**

Special Contributor

**To the Wonder**

Rated R for some sexuality/nudity

In the New Testament there is a letter from the Apostle Paul to a church he founded in the city of Ephesus in Asia Minor. It contains a passage that is cause for much debate and angst in the church, a passage that compares a husband to Christ and the wife to the church. Paul writes, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will be one flesh. This is a profound mystery, but I am talking about Christ and the church.”

This “profound mystery” lies at the heart of writer-director Terrence Malick’s exposition of love and marriage, *To the Wonder*. Or, at least, I think it does. With Malick films, one feels shy to make outright statements.

Mr. Malick, reportedly a Catholic, poured his faith out in the profound *The Tree of Life*, a movie that moved me so much, it inspired a tattoo on my arm.

**Tale of two marriages**

In *To the Wonder*, he weaves together the story of two marriages that inform each other, both of them flowing from and to the love of God, the ultimate bridegroom. Parisian Marina (Olga Kurylenko) marries American Neil (Ben Affleck) after a weighty and confusing courtship, made more complex by an unresolved love between Neil and Jane (Rachel McAdams). The second marriage is of Marina’s priest, Father Quintana (Javier Bardem), to God.

The two marriages run in roughly the same course. First, there is an unresolvable conflict, a love that changes everything, recasts the universe and reshapes the people on which it falls. Before the love, life was different, life-altering love—a love that changed everything and remains undeniable, even in the past.

And yet, I ended the film wishing there was more. This juxtaposition of marriage and relationship with Christ fascinates me. I want to see, to feel, to know how a film’s theology reflects its ideas of love and marriage. I suspect he may be one of the few filmmakers who actually has something profound to say about it.

Yet, I felt he teed up the ball but didn’t swing. In his other films, you have to dig for truths but they’re waiting to be discovered. I felt like there was less here.

Also less was the cinematographic wonder. Mr. Malick chooses beautiful shots of water, nature, rocks, streams and beaches, and lingers on them. Yet, in *The Tree of Life*, many of his frames had theological implications in themselves. They meant something, the imagery was alive. They were dreamlike, creative, alternate realities that expressed his truth. This film doesn’t have the same level of forethought or theology in the very images. Sometimes a stream is just a stream, I guess.

**Lack of resolution**

Still, you get the sense that love is a real thing, more real than we often believe. And that is, paradoxically in our sex-crazed world, a message the world needs. But you don’t know what that means for love, for life, for a soul, by the end of the movie, because part of the conflict is left unresolved.

And a little unresolved for a Terrence Malick film is, let’s just say, way unresolved for a normal film. The scenes of the priest made me weep at times, for a man who so loved his God as to dedicate his life to Him, but then loses all sense of his lover. It is beautiful, his tired faithfulness, his desperation for the God he knows is there somewhere. Father Quintana knows God is there because of the love that changed everything and remains undeniable, even in the past.

Mr. Malick, reportedly a Catholic, poured his faith out in the profound *The Tree of Life*, a movie that moved me so much, it inspired a tattoo on my arm.

When the reality of love is either believed and held or lost. The two types of love flow from the same source, “the Love that loves us,” as Marina puts it.

Mr. Malick tells his stories in unique ways. He cares much more about the cries of the heart and the whispers of the mind than everyday dialogue. So the prayers and unspoken longings of the characters are told in whispered voiceovers while the details of their lives are hard to know. This makes the movie almost unbearably quiet, still, nearly silent, like a cathedral in the middle of the day, holy but ineffable.

Sometimes this approach works and his style delivers profound truths, but other times it just leaves the viewer feeling quietly lost. It doesn’t help that many of the voiceovers here are in French and Spanish.

Writer-director Terrence Malick (*The Tree of Life*) explores romantic and spiritual love in his new film *To the Wonder*, starring Olga Kurylenko and Ben Affleck.

**PHOTO COURTESY MAGNOLIA PICTURES**

**Commentary**

Jackie Robinson’s faith missing from 42 movie

**By Eric Metaxas**

Religion News Service

A new film about Jackie Robinson, titled 42—the number he wore during his historic career—tells the triumphant story of how the civil rights icon integrated professional baseball by playing for the Brooklyn Dodgers. But there’s a mysterious hole at the center of this otherwise worthy film.

The man who chose Robinson for his role, and masterminded the whole affair, was Dodgers General Manager Branch Rickey played by Harrison Ford. In their initial meeting, the cigar-chomping Rickey makes it clear that whoever will be the first African American in major league baseball will be viciously attacked, verbally and physically. So Rickey famously says he’s looking for a man “with guts enough not to fight back.”

Where did Rickey get that crazy idea and why did Robinson go along with it? The film doesn’t tell us, but the answers to these questions lie in the devout Christian faith of both men.

For starters, Rickey himself was a “Bible-thumping Methodist” who refused to attend games on Sunday. He sincerely believed it was God’s will that he integrate baseball and saw it as an opportunity to intervene in the moral history of the nation.

And Rickey chose Robinson because of the young man’s faith and moral character. There were numerous other Negro Leagues players to consider, but Rickey knew integrating the racist world of professional sports would take more than athletic ability. The attacks would be ugly, and the press would fuel the fire. If the player chosen were goaded into retaliating, the grand experiment would be set back a decade or more.

Rickey knew he must find someone whose behavior on and off the field would be exemplary, and who believed “turning the other cheek” was not just the practical thing to do but the right thing. We know that Robinson’s passionate sense of justice had gotten him into trouble earlier in life. But the patient mentoring of pastor Karl Downs convinced him that Christ’s command to “resist not evil” wasn’t a cowardly way out but a profoundly heroic stance.

When he met Rickey, Robinson was prepared for what lay ahead and agreed. But it was a brutally difficult undertaking. Robinson got down on his knees many nights during those first two years, asking God for the strength to continue resisting the temptation to fight back, or to say something he would regret.

But the filmmakers of 42 were evidently uncomfortable with all this and, to put it in baseball terms, they decided to pitch around it.

Of course, Hollywood has been skittish about faith and religion since at least the late 1960s. Even when it’s almost impossible to avoid, filmmakers find a way. The Johnny Cash biopic *Walk the Line* omitted the central role Christian faith played in how Cash overcame drug addiction. Even in 2007’s *Amazing Grace*, about British abolitionist William Wilberforce, the story of his conversion and the huge role faith played in his political efforts is essentially left out.

And now in 42, Hollywood’s done it again. Omitting the role of faith in this story does a serious disservice to history—and to the memories of Robinson and Rickey. But it’s also fine, really. Foolish. The biggest megasuck of *The Bible* mini-series and the cool $600 million earned by Mel Gibson’s *The Passion of the Christ* in 2004 are just two reasons why. The audience for faith-friendly films is huge and growing.

Which brings us back to another reason Rickey did what he did. He believed bringing African Americans onto the baseball field would bring them into the stands, too, and ticket sales would increase. Which is precisely what happened.

So isn’t it time Hollywood integrated faith into stories where it rightfully belongs? Why should such stories be excluded from the mainstream in a nation that’s filled with people of faith? If filmmakers do the right thing—and break the “God line”—they’ll find there are countless millions who’d cheer stories like that. And who’d pay to see them too?

Mr. Metaxas writes about Jackie Robinson in his new book *Seven Men and the Secret of their Greatness*. This column appeared first in USA Today.
Georgia couple finds calling in Scout leadership

BY KARA WITHEROW
Special Contributor

Sponsored by Whigham United Methodist Church, Whigham’s Cub Scout troop was started by Travis and a group of dedicated parents. But a few years later, Travis was disappointed to learn that the older boys didn’t have a Boy Scout troop to move up to.

That’s when Cathy, an obstetrics nurse, stepped in to lead the Cub Scout pack so Travis could start a new Boy Scout troop in Grady County.

“I started as the Cubmaster with a 5-month-old on my hip,” said Cathy, who completed her bachelor’s and master’s degrees while working full time, leading the Cub Scout pack and raising three boys.

Scouting has given the Shepherd family time together and the opportunity to go places and do things they might not otherwise have gone and done. They camp, hike and serve together, and most of Travis and Cathy’s vacation time is spent travelling with the Scouts.

“Scouting has allowed me to be really close with my boys,” Travis said.

It’s also strengthened their faith and deepened their relationship with Jesus Christ.

Before volunteering to work with the Scouts, the Shepherds weren’t attending church. As a child and teenager, Travis was active in a Baptist church, but had drifted away.

A few months after volunteering to be Cubmaster, though, Travis told Cathy that Whigham UMC was host- ing their annual Scout Sunday the next weekend.

“I said, ‘What are we going to do?’ And she said, ‘Well, I guess we’ll go to church there!’”

That Sunday they attended Whigham UMC for the first time. They were their scout uniforms and sat on the back pew.

“We went to church that Sunday and the next,” Travis said. “From that day forward we have gone. My family and I have been going to church there ever since.

“Scouting brought me back in to where I should have been all along. I was raised in church and knew that my kids needed to be.”

In addition to teaching boys and young men about first aid, fire safety, leadership, responsibility and countless other life skills, scouting goes hand-in-hand with faith, Cathy said.

“This isn’t an organization that skips faith,” she said. “It’s added another dimension to our walk with Christ, and this is just another facet to our Christian walk; it’s that rooted in the values of our faith and the church.”

Not only has the Shepherd family deepened their faith and found a church home through their involvement with Whigham UMC’s scouting ministry, but they have several young men.

One 8-year-old boy calls Whigham UMC “his church” even though he and his family don’t attend worship services there.

“One year we had Scout Sunday coming up, and I was reminding the boys to wear their Scout shirt to their church on Sunday,” Cathy said. “We always invite them to our church, and I asked one boy which church he went to. He looked at me and said, ‘Miss Cathy, this is my church!’ He had never been to church on Sunday—our Cub Scout program was his only exposure to church.”

Even though two of their sons are adults and their youngest will soon graduate from high school, the Shepherds say they have no plans to step away from scouting.

“I keep going even without a kid in Cub Scouts because it’s that important,” Cathy said. “It’s that vital to our church and to our community to have a place for these boys.”

Travis says he can’t just walk away from the 70 or so young men who are a part of their Cub Scout and Boy Scout troops.

“I just can’t walk away from these kids,” he said. “When God wants me to do something else, He’ll make it known.

“A lot of people go through life wondering what God wants them to do. I know that this is exactly what He wants me to do.”

Ms. Witherow is editor of the Advocate, the newspaper of the South Georgia Conference.

Fire destroys church’s building, but not its spirit

BY BARBARA DUNLAP-BERG
United Methodist News Service

Sally Curtis Askew was in Seattle, getting ready for a United Methodist Judicial Council meeting, when she learned about the fire that consumed her beloved church—Ocone Street United Methodist in Athens, Ga.

The fire, detected around 10 p.m. April 15, gutted the 111-year-old structure. The cause has not been determined. The blaze apparently started in the basement of the wood structure, Ms. Askew said.

“I am sitting in a hotel room in Seattle, still crying so hard I have to stop to wipe my eyes often,” the Judicial Council clerk said.

Gathering on the church lawn the evening after the tragedy, the congregation joined for a prayer vigil.

“The building is so visible,” Ms. Askew said, “up on Carr’s Hill. When you come across the river from downtown, you see the lighted cross.”

That cross has beckoned a diverse, “very welcoming” congregation—university professors with Ph.D.s, uneducated people and everyone in between—to worship and to witness.

Ocone Street, Ms. Askew said, is “a perfect example of a church that has ‘reimagined itself’ many years ago and continues to press forward today.”

About 30 years ago, the membership had shrunk to the point that the congregation could no longer support a full-time pastor. So when a new nonprofit, Action Ministries, was getting off the ground, Ocone Street became a partner with the group.

Today, the congregation of 125 is flourishing, and Action Ministries—an independent, faith-based corporation affiliated with the United Methodist Church—furnishes food, legal assistance, educational services and nursing care.

The Our Daily Bread soup kitchen is housed in the former parsonage, adjacent to the historic church.

According to the Athens Patch, Our Daily Bread provides more than 60,000 meals a year and collaborates with more than 70 volunteer groups, both church-related and secular. The program serves breakfast and lunch seven days a week. Because it receives no federal funds, Ms. Askew said, it “serves not only people below the poverty level but also the working poor.”

“She said that since the fire, the outpouring of love and offers of help has been overwhelming.

“Local groups have stepped up to provide breakfasts all week. Another small-membership church—Temple United Methodist, out in the country east of Athens—stepped right up and is bringing breakfast today.”

Ocone Street’s pastor of 13 years, the Rev. Lisa Caine, said the Athens community and the UMC’s North Georgia Conference have reached out to the congregation, donating space for worship and various ministries.

“Although the church building is gone, and some planned projects are on hold for now, the church will rebuild and move forward with the help of God and many humans,” Ms. Askew said.

Young Harris Memorial United Methodist Church in downtown Athens already has opened its facility to its Ocone Street sisters and brothers.

The congregation will worship in the Young Harris gym.

Ms. Caine’s outlook is positive.

“We’ve been so blessed by so many people in so many ways,” she said.

“This isn’t what we had planned, but we are going forward with faith and trust in God.”

PHOTO COURTESY OF OCONEE STREET UMC

The 111-year-old main sanctuary at Ocone Street United Methodist Church in Athens, Ga., lies in ruins following an April 15 fire.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CATHY SHEPHERD

Travis, Thomas and Cathy Shepherd celebrated earlier this year after Thomas, 16, earned his Eagle Scout rank.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CATHY SHEPHERD
Changing the World One Congregation at a Time

When was the last time your congregation moved its ministry outside the confines of your church building? This is what Change the World is all about. Launched by the United Methodist Church three years ago, Change the World is a denomination-wide event that focuses on the ministries of the church beyond the sanctuary during one particular weekend, so that change is palpable and noticeable. Just imagine if every United Methodist church in your surrounding area were outside the walls of their buildings, helping one another and enacting social change. People would take notice.

Be sure to start planning your outreach project now for the weekend of May 17–18, and register it on the Change the World site at www.umcom.org/changetheworld. United Methodist Communications has plenty of free resources available on their website to make your Change the World event a success! The “Change the World. Be. Go. Do.” sermon series will help your congregation think about what it means to Change the World choice by choice. The four-week series also comes with a companion multimedia bundle so you’ll be prepared to invite people to work and worship alongside you on this transformative weekend. Visit www.umcom.org/changetheworld to download the series, view maps of participating churches from previous years, and advice on how to advertise the event to get a great turnout.

Last year, more than 40 Wisconsin churches participated in Change the World. Through clean-up days, food pantry collections, fundraisers for mission abroad, and many other creative projects, they made a significant and positive difference in their communities. For the second consecutive year, Wisconsin Conference UMC staff will join in solidarity with United Methodists in Wisconsin and around the world by participating in its own service project; this year by sorting food and clothing donations for Community Action Coalition for South Central Wisconsin.

It’s up to you and your congregation to decide how you will Change the World with thousands of other United Methodists this year! Be sure to post your event on our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/wisconsinumc and email us at mvirnig@wisconsinumc.org.

Experience a Unique Encounter with God’s Creation

By Nick Coenen
Pine Lake Camp Manager

I have lived my whole life in Wisconsin and during this time I have gathered something almost everyone here realizes eventually. There is something here that has great value, but you can’t buy or sell it. You can’t even get more of it if you try. It only lasts for a few months and we do our best to make the most of every second of it.

Summer. A warm sun, green grass, birds chirping, bugs buzzing, kids playing. Does it really get any better than this? And yet, as a parent, I know how hard it is to manage this moment to its full potential. Kids and families are pulled towards a million different activities and commitments. Most of them can make a case for being worthwhile, with benefits like exercise, building self-confidence or learning a new skill.

But what if I told you that there was a place that takes all of those benefits and adds the greatest gift of all, a closer knowledge of God? What if there was a place where families and kids made great summer memories, and at the same time, had the opportunity to grow deeper in their faith?

Well, as you probably guessed, there is such a place. Every summer at Pine Lake Camp and Lake Lucerne Camp & Retreat Center, we provide outdoor experiences for youth, adults and families that allow a unique encounter with God’s creation. When your child returns home from church camp, they may not be a dramatically improved basketball player or be able to play the clarinet better, but they will likely have a closer relationship with God. As a parent, I know there is nothing I want more for my kids than that everlasting knowledge and assurance.

For more information about registering for camp, you can visit www.wiumcamps.org or call the Conference Camping Office at 877-947-2267. We look forward to sharing these special places with you and your family this summer!
Wisconsin United Methodists Support Immigration Reform

Sergio Martinez, a 24 year old Mexican immigrant, first came to the United States on a visitor visa to Detroit with his parents when he was very young. There, his father was able to support his family until 2005. That’s when everything changed.

When Congress passed the Real ID Act requiring states to issue official identification to those who live and work in the country, his father lost his job and declared bankruptcy, and his mother was deported to Mexico, where she is prohibited from returning to the U.S. Martinez has not seen her since.

Unfortunately, his story is far from uncommon. That’s why Donna Veatch, with nearly 20 other members of the Wisconsin United Methodist Immigration Task Force (ITF), hope to educate as many people as possible about the broken immigration system in our country.

This winter, the ITF hosted a prayer vigil to raise awareness of stories like Martinez’s. Martinez, who attended the vigil with others from the nationwide “Keeping Families Together” bus tour, says he hopes to inspire other undocumented immigrants to take a stand.

“I see people suffer every day, and I see communities and families torn apart,” he said. “There must be a more humane way to handle this. Taking the breadwinner from home only places the burden on the kids. It’s very difficult to see.”

Bishop Jung also expressed his support at the vigil. Citing Leviticus 19:33–34 and personal experience as former Bishop to the Chicago area, he spoke about witnessing one immigrant family lose their father on Christmas morning.

“It was heartbreaking,” he said. “We as a Church need to stand together and show that we are a place of welcoming. Wisconsin is a pioneer for Peace with Justice and friends of immigrants need support in reaching out,” she said.

As the country changes, the Church must change… The reality after reform passes will be: how do we help people? It’s a process and congregations need support in reaching out,” she said.

In the meantime, Veatch, Martinez and the ITF are doing all they can to change perceptions of immigration, in hopes of an easier transition for both immigrants and communities alike.

“No one comes here to be a menace to society,” Martinez said. “Everything about me is American except a piece of paper.”

Making Youth a Priority in Church throughout Wisconsin

By Don R. Dick

If you ever hear someone utter the well-intentioned statement, “Youth are the future of our Church,” I invite you to challenge it immediately. Youth are not the future of our Church, but a vital part of today’s ministry—not just as a “target audience” to provide ministry for, but an essential part of the priesthood of all believers. Young people are some of our most invested and engaged disciples—learning together to be effective spiritual leaders. This process of growing effective young leaders for mission and ministry is a top priority of the Wisconsin Annual Conference.

A survey of youth and adults throughout the Annual Conference provides important feedback to strengthen youth ministry in the years to come. We heard loud and clear a number of opinions about what our churches need for strong, relevant and transformative youth ministry. Here is a small sample of the feedback we have received:

- Help us do effective ministry in our local churches and communities; don’t try to do Conference-level programs for us
- Connect youth and adult leaders working with youth together in social and supportive networks—help us talk to each other about exciting ministry
- Hold district and regional events with a greater frequency so we can attend without having to travel all the way across the state on just one weekend that doesn’t fit our schedules
- Help us be in ministry as young leaders; don’t just do “fun” events
- Include us in the important work of the whole Annual Conference; don’t just ask a few young people from a few churches to design “youth events”
- For the next few years, we will be working together as the Wisconsin Annual Conference to renew, restore and rebuild a strong Conference ministry that supports and trains young leaders as they minister to each other, to the Conference and to the world. We will be forming a Conference Youth Council (formerly the Conference Council on Youth Ministries) to coordinate a strategy for leadership development. One adult representative from each region and two youth (13–17) for each district will work with Karen Rankin, our Youth Resource Team Facilitator, and Nancy Deane, our Conference Staff Liaison to Youth Ministry, to focus on four areas: developing young spiritual leaders, supporting and re-sourcing youth and adult workers with youth in local congregations, developing shared mission projects and opportunities for youth, and supporting regional and district youth teams in hosting events for youth.

This will be a rich time for change and transformation throughout the Conference. We will be engaging more young people to be in ministry and to offer more opportunities in more places for young people to come to know God through the Christian faith. If you have recommendations of young people, ages 13–17, that you feel would offer strong leadership, please let me know (ddick@wisconsinumc.org) or Nancy Deane (ndeane@wisconsinumc.org) know. Our commitment is to do everything in our power to help our churches make young disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world!
Greater Northwest Area Bishop Grant Hagiya earned a third-degree black belt in karate, as well as a master of divinity and a doctorate in organizational leadership. His new book Spiritual Kaizen: How to Become a Better Church Leader (Abingdon Press) draws on this varied background. Bishop Hagiya answered questions by email from managing editor Sam Hodges. Here’s an edited version of the exchange.

Can you sum up, in a sentence each, how your faith, leadership training and martial arts experience are guiding you as you serve the UMC in a difficult time?

My core belief is that God is in charge of all of life, and, like Job, my response is reduced to humbleness in awe.

In leadership training, as Jim Collins reminds us with his “Stockdale Paradox” [concept], we must always confront the brutal facts, but never lose hope.

My martial arts training has been instrumental when a crisis situation arises in slowing down all that swirls around me, and enabling me to focus on the most efficient course.

Explain “spiritual kaizen,” and why you think it’s a key idea for clergy and committed laity.

The Japanese word “kaizen” comes from the root words “kai” meaning “change,” and “zen” translated as “good” or “better.” In business management it is often translated as “continuous improvement.” When you add the description of “spiritual,” it reinforces John Wesley’s personal discipleship movement from prevenient grace to justification and on to sanctification.

As United Methodists, we must recover this lifelong spiritual journey, and enter into a continuous growth in love of God and neighbor. Steady improvement in our leadership skills and abilities is also a lifelong process, as I believe leadership is not an innate quality, but rather learned.

How much trouble is the UMC—all mainline Christianity—in? And of the causes of the trouble, what stands out as most important, in your view?

We are in huge trouble and we have been in trouble for decades, but out of hubris we have believed like some secular organizations that we were “too big to fail.” Now reality is coming home to roost in the form of our secular Western society moving to a “post-religious institutional society,” where one in five Americans have absolutely no religious preference whatsoever. There is a complex set of causes and challenges, but to mention just one: The systems, structures and processes of our United Methodist Church worked well for the American culture 40 years ago, but are out of touch with our contemporary American culture. In order to be relevant, we must adapt and change.

You write that the UM seminaries and UM churches and conferences aren’t serving one another well.

I see both our seminaries and churches have a focus on the exhilarating nature of theory and less about the “messy” middle ground of leadership and life.

Explain Bishop Hagiya’s book, Spiritual Kaizen: How to Become a Better Church Leader.

A book on spirituality and leadership is not only overdue, but also necessary for United Methodists to adapt and change.

Bishop’s book draws on faith, leadership theory, martial arts
Edgar recalled as progressive Christian leader

BY Adelle M. Banks
Religion News Service

The Rev. Bob Edgar, a Democratic congressman and United Methodist minister who went on to lead the National Council of Churches through a painful series of restructurings, died suddenly on April 23 at age 69.

The man religion leaders remembered as a “bridge builder,” suffered a heart attack and had been exercising on a treadmill in his home in Burke, Va., said Mary Boyle, spokeswoman for Common Cause. Edgar became president of the Washington-based nonpartisan advocacy group in 2007 after serving two terms as the general secretary of the NCC.

“He was a man of great capacity who understood the importance of cross-cultural and religious dynamics,” said the Rev. Carroll Baltimore, president of the Progressive National Baptist Convention, who recalled traveling in a Common Cause interfaith delegation Edgar led to Vietnam in 2010 to learn about continuing effects of Agent Orange.

Dr. Baltimore said Edgar brought together Christians, Buddhists, Confucians and political leaders.

“He was able to link all of those pieces together and just remind us that we’re all made from the same cloth,” he said.

Elected to Congress from southeastern Pennsylvania in 1974, Edgar was one of the reform-minded wave of Democratic “Watergate babies” who swept Capitol Hill in the wake of the Watergate scandal. After losing a Senate race in 1986, he was president of Claremont School of Theology for 10 years before he started leading the NCC in 2000.

At the NCC, his tenure began with intense media attention during the Elian Gonzalez case as he helped ferry the boy’s grandparents to and from Cuba.

He soon turned to dealing with the NCC’s growing multimillion-dollar deficit.

“This is the hardest job I’ve ever had,” Edgar told Religion News Service early in his NCC tenure. “About every other day it’s the most fun I’ve ever had, but it’s the hardest job!”

Early on, Edgar sensed that the venerable ecumenical agency was losing its public voice, and was one of the early supporters of Christian Churches Together in the USA, which brought the NCC’s mainline Protestant, Orthodox and black churches together with evangelicals and Catholics for the first time.

The conservative Institute on Religion and Democracy often criticized the NCC and issued a 2006 report that claimed Edgar tried to help save the still-troubled NCC with donations from liberal philanthropists.

IPRD President Mark Tooley said he was saddened to learn of Edgar’s death.

“Although IRLD was frequently critical of the NCC’s policies under his rule, he was always cordial in personal interactions,” Mr. Tooley said. “Edgar did temporarily revive the NCC, but as the NCC has recently further shrunk and still struggles, it appears that revival could not be sustained after Edgar’s departure.”

Former NCC co-workers and colleagues, who remembered Edgar’s fondness for running, noted his sense of humor and penchant for bad puns, his support of the “What Would Jesus Drive?” campaign and his boundless energy.

“I thought that should be every aging person’s goal—to be as physically fit as Bob Edgar,” said Philip Jenks, retired communications officer for the NCC, who was four years younger than his supervisor. “Sometimes God’s sense of humor catches up with us.”

The Rev. Leslie Copeland-Tune, former director of justice and advocacy at the NCC, added: “He just was a true believer and a believer in making sure that people who were the least of these did not suffer because of our selfishness.”

Edgar, who wrote the 2007 book Middle Church: Reclaiming the Moral Values of the Faithful Majority from the Religious Right, was known for activities ranging from protesting the Iraq war to a coordinated arrest inside the U.S. Capitol in 2011 for praying to stop Republican budget cuts.

“That was the strength of the man,” said the Rev. Barbara Williams-Skinner, president of the Skinner Leadership Institute. “He was a bridge builder in the truest, most powerful sense of the word. He took the gospel seriously, the gospel of peace and the gospel of love.”

Edgar became top executive of Common Cause, a national advocacy group with more than 400,000 members and 35 state organizations, in 2007. While there he “oversaw the re-launching of at least seven state chapters, traveled tirelessly to meet with and recruit Common Cause supporters, and raised the organization’s national profile and its critical mission to strengthen our democracy,” Common Cause said in a news release announcing Edgar’s passing.

“We are deeply saddened and shaken today by the passing of Bob Edgar,” said Common Cause board chair Robert Reich. “Bob will be remembered for his decency, kindness, compassion and humor. His deep commitment to social justice and strengthening our democracy is his greatest gift to Common Cause and the nation. Our hearts are with Bob’s family, his wife Merle, and sons Andrew, David and Rob, and their families.”

Jim Winkler, top executive of the United Methodist General Board of Church and Society, was a close friend and colleague.

“Bob Edgar was a close personal friend of mine. I cannot believe we have lost him,” Mr. Winkler said. “He was a great servant of Christ, possessors of a magnanimous and positive personality and a faithful United Methodist. Those of us who knew him have been sharing our sadness and our fond memories of him all day.”

The Rev. Larry Holton, top executive of United Methodist Communications, was another saddened by the news of Edgar’s passing.

“Bob was a valued friend, social progressive and committed Christian leader,” he said. “He brought a wonderful sense of humor to any gathering in which he was present. He was a tireless defender of the poor and an advocate for justice.”

United Methodist News Service contributed.
Council rules on WPA/East Africa dispute

By Neil Caldwell
Special Contributor

SEATTLE—A 10-year financial dispute between the United Methodist Western Pennsylvania Conference and the East Africa Conference that wound up before the denomination’s top court has ended with a split decision that likely will not please everyone.

The Judicial Council agreed with only one of Western Pennsylvania’s three questions—an item concerning $3,000 owed to a pastor in South Sudan, a fraction of the more than $100,000 involved in the overall dispute.

In Decision 1238, the council said that a question about the outcome of an appeal filed by East Africa Bishop Daniel Wandabula still was hypothetical “because there is no evidence in the record that the complaint process has concluded.”

Bishop Wandabula told the council in October that the complaint has been dismissed and promises to provide documentation to prove his contention. But the council said no documentation has been received nor was provided during a second oral hearing April 17. “The Judicial Council, therefore, understands that the complaint process is continuing,” the ruling says.

In the larger question—whether designated funds donated to the East Africa Conference have been used as intended—the decision offered a message of donor beware.

“The projects were not managed through the connectional system in the General Board of Global Ministries or authorized as an ‘Advance of the denomination,’” the decision states. “Members of the Western Pennsylvania Annual Conference raised the funds, transmitted the funds to the East Africa Annual Conference, visited locations in Uganda, and negotiated the terms with church leaders in East Africa…. It is not clear from the record whether any specific officers within the Western Pennsylvania Annual Conference had the authority to adjust expenditure plans in cases where the property had become too expensive or too cumbersome, where construction proved to be too inferior, or where the water well was to be bored.”

The record indicates that the Western Pennsylvania Annual Conference now seeks supervisory action by the General Board of Global Ministries to help remedy errors that the annual conference funds in the management of this mission,” the Judicial Council said.

The ruling did direct that the $3,000 in funds intended as compensation for Pastor Isaac Sebit should be paid to him by Jan. 1, 2014, or returned to the Western Pennsylvania Conference.

An oral hearing on the matter was held April 17, primarily so that Nancy Denardo of the Pittsburgh East District of the Western Pennsylvania Conference could speak to the Judicial Council. Ms. Denardo, who supervised the mission project and filed the original complaint against Bishop Wandabula, was ill during the October meeting and could not attend.

‘Plans never realized’

Ms. Denardo spoke of her shock in going to Uganda expecting to see a new church and seeing only a foundation constructed. “Our plans have never been realized,” she said. “No receipts were ever made available and no explanation given by Bishop Wandabula. … Because of the consistent corruption in Uganda and South Sudan, I felt compelled to write a complaint against the bishop.”

In his own comments, Bishop Wandabula said that it was important to note that his office did not misuse any designated funds offered for particular ministries, nor have I mismanaged any funds given for mission and ministry. Believe it or not, we have many projects both within Western Pennsylvania and without the East Africa Annual Conference praying for accountability with a ‘human face’ balanced with transparency.

“Terrible mistakes are being made in dealing with East Africa,” he added. “Please note that both the Western Pennsylvania Annual Conference and GBGM were told about their mistakes even as the mistakes were being made. It is so engraining that they refused to listen! … GBGM is misguided, and I have been framed for whatever reason.”

The Rev. Robert Zilhaver, a clergy member of the Western Pennsylvania Conference, also spoke at the oral hearing. “This dispute has crippled our work in Uganda and our work fighting malaria,” Mr. Zilhaver said.

Case of former bishop

In another case, the council upheld a 2012 decision of law by Bishop Thomas Bickerton that rejected arguments by the Rev. Hae-Jong Kim that sought to reverse his 2005 resignation as a bishop.

Mr. Kim resigned Sept. 1, 2005, in the midst of a complaint against him. In January 2007, he wrote to the Council of Bishops asking that his resignation be rescinded. The Council of Bishops, citing no provisions in the Book of Discipline to deal with such a situation, decided they had no jurisdiction to consider his request.

Kim then appealed to the Northeastern Jurisdictional Committee on the Episcopacy for help, but the committee did not act on his request.

During the 2012 Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference, a clergy delegation offered a five-point appeal for a decision of law based on whether Mr. Kim had received fair process. Bishop Bickerton was presiding when the request was made. The Judicial Council affirmed Bishop Bickerton’s responses to all five points.

The council said that its ruling was only in regard to the fair process question and would not be drawn into other areas “where the Judicial Council has no disciplinary authority.” That included Mr. Kim’s appeal to the United Methodist General Commission on Religion and Race for an investigation into his treatment, a request that was made 10 weeks after his resignation.

After his resignation, Mr. Kim was returned to status as a retired elder in good standing in his home Greater New Jersey Conference.

“The Judicial Council acknowledges that this matter has caused much pain and suffering among those involved, the community and the entire church,” Decision 1239 read.

An oral hearing on this matter also was held April 17.

Mr. Kim, making a brief comment before the Judicial Council, remembered that he was first ordained 50 years ago this year and asked “that the church I love, and gave my life for, treat me fairly.”

More decisions

In other rulings the Judicial Council:

• Remanded a question of law made during the Western Jurisdictional Conference back to the presiding bishop for a decision after the bishop had rejected the question as moot because it had a typographical error. The Judicial Council has ruled several times in previous decisions that such an error in a question does “not necessarily negate the legitimacy of the questions.”

• Deferred a decision on a question from the Congo Central Conference until it receives the minutes of the relevant session of the election process.

• Refused jurisdiction in an episcopal election dispute between annual conferences in Nigeria because the group submitting the request was without the proper disciplinary standing to do so.

• Said it lacked jurisdiction in a question of an inclusiveness resolution in the Desert Southwest Conference because the request for a bishop’s decision of law was not properly presented during the business session of annual conference.

• Denied a request to reconsider Decision 1230, the decision on reinstating Bishop Earl Bledsoe, along with Memorandums 1213 (Western Jurisdictional Committee on Appeals) and 1217 (North Alabama and the Coalition for Reproductive Choice).

The Judicial Council is next scheduled to meet Oct. 23-26 in Boston.

Mr. Caldwell is the editor of the Virginia United Methodist Advocate and is a correspondent for United Methodist News Service.
In his remarks at the dedication, Mr. Bush said: "President Gerald Turner runs a fantastic university." He added that SMU has "a student body that is awesome," prompting a roar from students gathered for the event.

"Mr. President, for your service, for your courage, for your sense of humor and most of all for your love of country, thank you very much," President Obama said at the dedication.

Mr. Bush's father, former President George H.W. Bush, merely thanked the crowd, but moved many by rising from his wheelchair briefly.

**Strong resource**

George W. Bush's presidency was, as he acknowledged at the dedication, controversial, including his decision to go to war in Iraq after the 9/11 attacks, and his handling of Hurricane Katrina and the economy, which went into a deep recession late in his second term.

Though the Bushes made clear they would return to Dallas after his presidency, SMU had to compete to become home to the Bush Center.

SMU also had to win approval from the UMC's South Central Jurisdiction.

Some within the SMU community and the denomination lamented the school's aggressive bid, particularly since the arrangement required a public policy center that they predicted would reflexively defend Mr. Bush's legacy and promote his philosophy of government.

Critics remain, including the Rev. Bill McElvaney, a retired United Methodist pastor and professor emeritus of SMU's Perkins School of Theology. He joined in an interfaith service of lamentation on April 22 in Dallas, one of a number of protest events timed to the Bush Center dedication.

"My view has not shifted about the war in Iraq," Dr. McElvaney said in a recent interview. "This was an illegal war. It was unnecessary. It was taken on false premises. Our president lived above the law on that."

But Dr. McElvaney volunteered that the Bush Institute, already in operation, has had some worthy initiatives, including building leadership skills among women in the Middle East—a Laura Bush priority.

"Those are things we can be grateful for, as far as we know," said Dr. McElvaney, an SMU alum. "We'll see how this plays out."

United Methodist Bishop Scott Jones, an SMU board member, said it's understandable that there would be opposition to the Bush Center within the UMC, given the size and "big tent" character of the denomination.

But he praised the Center, including the Institute, as a strong new resource for SMU.

"The predictions of great harm and polarized political activity raised by critics in 2007 and 2008 have not come true," Bishop Jones said. "The Institute has conducted itself with academic integrity and been a strong contributor to the university's mission."

The Rev. Stephen Rankin, a UM elder and chaplain of SMU, also called the Bush Center an asset for the school and said the Institute can be a place for rigorous, fair-minded policy debate.

"I'm not suggesting some mushy middle-of-the-road default," he said. "We United Methodists go there almost unthinkingly. I long for honest, pointed discussions with charitable judgments about each other's motives, rather than the political tit-for-tat that happens too often."

**Twisted beam**

The Center opens to the public May 1, and visitors will encounter a 226,000 square foot structure whose exterior complements SMU's Georgian architecture, while including modern touches. The interior walls integrate Texas pecan paneling with Texas limestone.

The solar panel-equipped building
earned LEED Platinum certification from the U.S. Green Building Council, and the 15-acre urban park that surrounds it, which Mrs. Bush consulted on closely, features native, drought-tolerant plants landscaped to maximize water conservation.

Freedom Hall provides the “wow” of the Center, with its elevated ceiling and a 360-degree video screen of amazingly high definition.

The Museum begins with exhibits depicting Mr. Bush’s early policy initiatives, such as tax cuts, the No Child Left Behind education program and faith-based initiatives.

But around the corner, the unexpected events dominate, namely the 9/11 attacks, the Iraq War, Hurricane Katrina and the recession.

“You can see the way our lives changed, and the way the lives of everyone in our country changed,” said Mrs. Bush at a media preview on April 24.

The building also houses the Bush Institute, whose policy areas include economic growth, global health, education reform and human rights. Mrs. Bush noted the Institute’s work on improving treatment for cervical cancer in Africa.

She also praised the Center’s collaboration with SMU.

“There’s even a Rose Garden, albeit it with Texas plants, and a view of the Dallas skyline.

The Bush Library, formally handed over to the National Archives and Records Administration on April 24, offers scholars 70 million pages of paper records, 200 million emails and four million digital photographs.

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“It’s fun to be here,” she said during the media preview. “I went to college here. I’m back on my old campus.”

At the dedication, the former presidents and First Ladies—Michelle Obama, Laura Bush, Hillary Clinton, Barbara Bush and Rosalynn Carter—sat together on the raised platform. Dignitaries in the front rows included former Vice President Dick Cheney.

The strict security measures accompanying the dedication prompted Highland Park UMC to shut down for much of this week.

But Mr. Craig said the church will see visitors and other benefits from the Bush Center. He plans to spend time there in his retirement, which he’s beginning this spring.

“I wouldn’t mind being a docent,” he said.

shodges@umr.org

FACTS AND FIGURES

- The George W. Bush Presidential Center is on 23 acres near the entrance of SMU.
- The 226,000 square foot building houses George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum, George W. Bush Institute, a museum store and Café 43.
- Grounds cover 15 acres, featuring native trees, shrubs and grasses, and a Texas Rose Garden.
- “Green” building features include solar hot water and photovoltaic systems.
- Library/Museum is administered by the National Archives and Records Administration, and holds 70 million pages of paper, 43,000 artifacts, 200 million emails and 4 million digital photos.
- Library/Museum includes exhibits, an Oval Office replica and a piece of steel from World Trade Center. Freedom Hall encases a 20 foot tall, 360-degree high-definition video wall.
- Building designed by Robert A.M. Stern Architects.
- Landscape designed by Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates.
- Total cost: $250 million.
- Opening: May 1.
- Admission: $16 for adults. Discounts for seniors, students, children. Free for SMU students, faculty, staff.
How will United Methodists respond to Gosnell horror?

By Matt O’Reilly
Special Contributor

United Methodists have an impressive record for faithfully responding to tragedy. In the aftermath of the Newtown massacre, Methodist congregations responded with an outpouring of love and intercession. We have preached, prayed and worked to transform the systems that not only allow but sometimes even enable such terrible acts.

The trial of Kermit Gosnell presents us with a new national horror involving the violent deaths of children. Charged with the murder of one woman and seven newborns, his crimes likely far exceed the formal accusations against him. The horror of the allegations has been compounded by the initial hesitancy of mainstream media to cover the story. As details continue to emerge, the question for United Methodists is this: How will we respond to the Gosnell horror?

We must begin by recognizing that this tragic situation follows from the widespread efforts to normalize abortion in the United States. Not all will agree with that conclusion, but a variety of factors suggest its accuracy. Since abortion was declared a constitutional right in the landmark case of Roe v. Wade, the pro-choice movement has worked hard to undermine the full personhood of the preborn. We have been told again and again that the child in the womb is a fetus, not a baby; we are told that abortion is not the ending of a life; it is the termination of a pregnancy. This cold and detached terminology is intended to downplay any emotional reaction to abortion.

The problem is that if a preborn child in the eighth or ninth month of gestation does not have the moral status of a person, why should we think a change of geography from inside the womb to outside the womb suddenly establishes personhood? There is no substantive difference between the preborn and the newly born, if we are desensitized to the death of the former, it will lead us to be marginally sensitive to the latter. The road from Roe to Gosnell is a downhill slope.

This connection can clearly be seen in a variety of recent arguments made by abortion advocates. In 2012, bioethicists Alberto Giubilini and Francesca Minerva argued in the peer-reviewed Journal of Medical Ethics for what they called “post-birth abortion.” They claimed that new borns, like fetuses, do not have the moral status of a person and, therefore, the killing of a newborn should be permissible even when the new

Editor’s Note: The Rev. Matt O’Reilly submitted this commentary. Since it references the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, we asked that group for a response. The Rev. Steve Copley wrote the essay below on behalf of RCRC.

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born has no disability or defect. Upon the 40th anniversary of Roe v. Wade, Mary Elizabeth Williams wrote a piece for Salon.com titled, “So what if abortion ends life?” in which she argued that the child inside the womb is as much a life as the one outside. She did not go as far as Dr. Giubilini and Dr. Minerva by arguing for infanticide, but when you agree that the preborn and the newly born are alive in the same sense, it is a short and logical step from pre-birth abortion to infanticide. More recently, a representative of Planned Parenthood argued to Florida lawmakers that the decision to offer life-saving care to a child born alive after a botched abortion should be left to the mother and her physicians rather than guaranteed by law.

When the principles that gave us abortion-on-demand are being applied to infanticide in such a broad range of arenas, from academic journals to popular websites and congressional hearings, it is difficult to sustain the view that there is no connection between Roe and Gosnell. United Methodists need to recognize that we are where we are because the Roe decision started us on a path of devaluing the sacred worth of human life. That path has led us to the trial of Kermit Gosnell.

In light of the connection between abortion and infanticide, United Methodist leaders should respond to the Gosnell horror in two ways. First, we should break ties with the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC). As many readers already know, our General Board of Church & Society and United Methodist Women are member organizations of RCRC. Readers may not know that in a published volume of worship aids entitled Prairely Pro-Life, RCRC has written that abortion is a “God-given right,” a “sacred choice,” and that human life is not attributed to the preborn. This language goes strongly against our Social Principles which declare that, “Our belief in the sanctity of unborn human life makes us reluctant to approve abortion” (2012 Book of Discipline, ¶161). Claiming abortion as a divinely endowed holy right is hardly consonant with reluc-
tance to approve it. RCRC has worked tirelessly to devalue and destroy pre-born human life, which, as I have argued, has played a significant part in bringing about the current situation in which Kermit Gosnell stands accused of infanticide. United Methodists must respond by holding our denominational agencies accountable for their role in advancing abortion. We must insist they break with RCRC.

Second, we should call upon General Conference to make a stronger statement in our Social Principles in favor of the preborn and newly born human life. Our United Methodist Church must speak against the increasing application of pro-abortion arguments to the practice of infan-
ticide, and we need our Social Principles to guide us. We already state our reluctance to approve abortion. We need a statement that declares our unambiguous and unqualified support for human life at every stage.

United Methodists are supposed to be the people who speak up for those who have no voice, who take up the cause of the preborn and newly born and the abused and the victimized. If we want to be faithful to that heritage today and in the days to come, we must be the voice both of the preborn and the newly born, and so must our denomina-
tional agencies and Social Principles. We should be able to count on them to defend the defenseless and care for the destitute. This is our opportunity to stand for righteousness and against injustice. We must not miss it.

The Rev. O’Reilly is pastor of First UMC of Union Springs, Ala. Connect at www.mattoreilly.net.

Case is a horror, but no reason to leave RCRC

By Steve Copley
Special Contributor

The Kermit Gosnell case is as hor-
rible as you think it is. And it illus-
trates precisely why it should not be used to argue for further restriction of abortion.

Women living in poverty in Philad-
elpia felt that Gosnell was their only option when they needed an abortion, in part because of the current restrictions on Medicaid funding and the dearth of accessible and affordable abortion providers. Using Gosnell as an excuse to further restrict abortion care creates just more unprincipled, back alley charlatans like him who are willing to take advantage of women in desperate circumstances. Gosnell’s case does not show a slippery slope to infanticide; rather, it is a window into a not-too-
distant past where women were per-
manently injured or—too often—died from illegal abortions.

As a pastor in the South Central Jurisdiction, I’m glad our denomina-
tion is involved in the Religious Coali-
tion for Reproductive Choice because the mission and work of RCRC so clearly fits United Methodists’ position on women’s health, and specifically abortion care, as outlined in the Book of Discipline.

Like many of you, I believe that abortion should be legal, safe and rare. One way to accomplish the “rare” part of that belief is comprehensive sex education. The Book of Disci-
pline says (¶161;F) RCRC has done faith-
ful work around sex-ed that is both age and denominationally appropriate so that young women and men aren’t faced with having to make a decision about abortion in the first place. I know of no other organization inside or outside the denomination that has been this successful. It is neither pro-choice nor anti-choice. The Book of Discipline makes several references to concepts such as self-determination, informed Chris-
tian conscience, and thoughtful and prayerful consideration regarding abortion. Those actions are difficult to effect without access to a full range of reproductive health care services. As a coalition, RCRC believes that access to reproductive health care services should be readily available to all people so that we can all experience God’s good gift of sexuality with joy and responsibil-
ity, health and wholeness.

One passage from the Book of Disci-
pline that is particularly meaningful to me is who someone who pastors those living in poverty is also in the section on abortion: “We call all Christians to a searching and prayerful inquiry into the sorts of conditions that may cause them to consider abortion. The Church shall offer ministries to reduce unintended pregnancies. We commit our Church to continue to provide nurturing ministries to those who ter-
minate a pregnancy, to those in the midst of a crisis pregnancy, and to those who give birth.” (¶161;F) For decades, RCRC has been conducting trainings for clergy in helping women deal with these difficult decisions, as well as in times of reproductive loss.

Being “reluctant to approve abor-
tion,” as our Book of Discipline says, is an indication of the careful thought that a woman undertakes when con-
sidering the ending of a pregnancy. But we agree that “…we are equally bound to respect the sacredness of the life and well-being of the mother and the unborn child. We recognize tragic conflicts of life with life that may jus-
tify abortion, and in such cases we support the legal opinion of abortion under proper medical procedures.” (¶161) Indeed, this particular pas-
sage models the behavior of recogniz-
ning the gravity of the situation, and then thoughtfully and prayerfully pro-
cedding in partnership with loved ones, clergy and medical profession-
als. It’s important to note here that Gosnell’s actions were not proper and accepted medical procedures, and he in fact is not certified as an OB/GYN.

As United Methodists, we are not called to the easy answers, but rather called to bring our prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness to our Church specifically, and by extension, to God’s vast and complex world. The reasons a woman would choose an

abortion are rarely simple or easy, and are made in an environment colored by many factors, including poverty, race, education and class, as well as access to reproductive health care. RCRC’s recent expansion into a frame-
work of reproductive justice includes not only the moral agency of people to make their own decisions about their reproductive lives, but also now a commitment to change the environment in which people make those very decisions. Given the UMC’s long his-
tory of social justice and working to help people at the margins, this is a good fit for us—and a good fit to bring our unique voice as a member of the coalition that makes up RCRC.

We’re also called to witness to Christ’s love. We live the gospel best when we do so with action—action that creates an environment where people are able to exercise their con-
science with as few barriers as possi-
ble.

The Rev. Copley is an ordained elder in the Arkansas Conference, and serves as executive director of the Arkansas Interfaith Conference. scopley438@aol.com.
Faith is balm for ‘collective grief’ after tragedy

By Julie Yarbrough
Special Contributor

“We know that trouble produces endurance, endurance produces character, and character produces hope.”
(Romans 5:3-4, CEB)

When an entire community is stunned and shocked by large-scale loss, most recently the explosion in West, Texas, a kind of collective grief touched everyone by the tragedy. Usually this grief is exponentially more intense in small communities where there are far fewer than six degrees of separation between neighbors, friends and family. People know each other personally and intimately, many related by birth and a shared geographic heritage.

It was inspiring to see a news report from West on Sunday, April 21, about members of a large church there worshiping outside together in the bright sunshine of a spring day. There were tears. There was sadness. There was determination. There was hope. “And hope does not disappoint us because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.” (Romans 5:5 NRSV)

Life’s extremes collided in the lives and hearts of those gathered in a field to share their collective and individual grief. And there was joy—to be alive and connected, safe amid the public and private outpouring of love and care that is God’s inspired response of the human heart.

The nature of collective grief is that sometimes it lifts rather quickly, such as when a suspect is apprehended. All of West, indeed the entire country, was relieved and jubilant when the manhunt for those responsible for a senseless act of violent terror ended after four days of searching. Yet in Newtown there will always be a collective grief that lingers in the hearts of those who sustained unimaginable loss and suffer deep heartache. It could not be otherwise. There will always be grief—always—for the children and adults slain that December day. Grief for their tender age, their innocence, their self-sacrifice. Those who survived live daily with circular projections of the mind about a future that will never be—the “what if” and “if only” at the core of the great, unanswered, “Why”?

The rites and rituals of collective grief can bring us, eventually, to a sense of comfort and reassurance. Yet the work of grief that ultimately leads to healing demands that we first acknowledge our pain and loss, and engage with ourselves at a deep spiritual place where we encounter what it is we’re feeling and what it is we believe.

I want to conclude this piece by saying two things. First, the Council is made up of persons of deep commitment to the mission of the United Methodist Church. These persons, as a group, want to lead the Church to be an instrument through which Christ can work. Secondly, there are times when the meetings do need to be closed because of delicate needs and issues that affect the soul of the church. There should be a place and a time to adjourn into closed session but having closed meetings contradicts the spirit of Wesley when he said, “Do all the good you can, by all of the means you can, in all of the ways you can, in all of the places you can, at all of the times you can, to all of the people you can, as long as ever you can.”

Retired UM Bishop Pennel is a professor of the practice of leadership at Vanderbilt Divinity School.

Why the UM bishops should keep their meetings open

By Bishop Joe E. Pennel Jr.
Special Contributor

As one of the retired bishops I join those who are concerned about the active bishops meeting as a closed “forum” in San Diego from May 5-8. The word “forum” is a public word. Its derivation comes from the open space or market place in an ancient Roman city. It is also used by organizations that hold public meetings for reflections and discussions around themes of common interest.

It should be noted that the active bishops are scheduled to meet as a forum in 2013, 2014 and 2015. “Forum” does not mean closed meetings that hold public and private outpouring of love and care that is God’s inspired response of the human heart.

The Rev. Jimmy Sansom led a service at West UMC in West, Texas, on the Sunday after the April 17 explosion devastated much of the town.

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‘We want persons to be fully engaged in the community of faith. The communal nature of Methodism is compromised by not having open minds, open hearts and open doors.’
Briefly, what needs to happen on both ends?

The church and academy are separate institutions with different histories, audiences and systems. One does not serve the other, but rather there should be a synergistic arising out of a shared partnership in mission and purpose. I have a lot of ideas on how the two institutions can work together, but the one that I would suggest immediately is to find a way for the church and academy to talk with each other in a constructive and mutually transforming way. Often, the communication is single, channeled with one institution demanding something from the other. A carefully constructed two-way conversation when both institutions are attempting to understand where the other is coming from and seeking to serve one another would go a long way. Having been on both sides of this fence, there are great strengths in each institution, but instead of working for the best in both, often times we draw out the worst in each.

You did your doctoral study on highly effective UM pastors. How did you define “highly effective”?

As an academic research dissertation, I had to have a carefully defined and quantitative definition of “highly effective clergy.” My dissertation definition was those clergy who were able to increase their average worship attendance over a sustained five-year period or longer throughout their ministerial careers. Conversely, “lower effective clergy” were not able to increase their average worship attendance over the same five-year criterion.

You write about a “culture of entitlement” within UM ministry, including bishops, that sometimes trumps service to God. How does that relate to “security of appointment”—and is security of appointment hurting the UMC?

From a management perspective, I believe that security of appointment is harming the United Methodist Church. I understand its historical roots in the primary protection of women clergy, and I applaud that. However, the church has come a long way in this one area, and although there is still a great deal of sexism in our church, security of appointment is no longer needed in the same historical context from its origin. Personally, I believe that security of appointment fosters a sense of clergy entitlement, and I would include bishops. If security of appointment would someday go away, I believe bishops should also be subject to term limits, and that would push all of us away from mediocrity and into a lifelong sense of growth and improvement.

“Empowerment of laity” is something you stress over and over. Why?

Because of its biblical and theological grounding, and the fact that in our baptism, we have been endowed with all the powers of Jesus to heal and transform a broken world. Our current church culture has fostered a clericalism that is miles away from our biblical heritage, and it is truly harming our denomination. We are in a consumerism church model, where the laity come as passive recipients of a gospel truth that is dispensed by the pastor who is supposed to be a theological expert. The biblical mandate is that we all are ministers of that gospel in our baptism!

The Pacific Northwest is known as the least church part of the country. How tough is it to get people engaged in Christian faith there?

As one in the original “None Zone,” I am always reminding our people of the great adventures we have had in the Pacific Northwest: We have way more people to evangelize and transform! Instead of lamenting the secularization of our part of the country, we should be challenged by it, and work that much harder to be the church of Jesus Christ. It is definitely tougher to get secularized people interested in the gospel message, but nobody, especially Jesus, promised us it would be easy. We are working as hard as we can to turn things around, and I pay special attention to our yearly metrics, especially average worship attendance, professions of faith and baptisms, and mission events and projects.

On page 130 of your book, you lay out the “metrics” you’ve posed to the churches in your area, including a 10 percent net increase in worship attendance. Yet you also stress the “missional” as opposed to “attractive” model of church. What do you say to the pastor who says to you, “In order to boost attendance, I need to focus on programs that bring in individuals and families, more than on mission work”?

As I have mentioned earlier, we are now in a “post-organized religious culture” here in the West and Europe, and people will not necessarily seek out our churches from a felt need. Thus, the “attractive” model that we have worked for previous generations will not work in our contemporary society. We need to move to a “missional” model that engages people where they are. However, as I also previously mentioned, all of our systems, structures and processes are still fixed in the old attractional model. Therefore, I believe we find ourselves in the transitional zone between attractional and missional.

Gill Rendle calls this the “wilderness.” We are sojourners, looking for home. I tell anyone who will listen that God will ultimately lead us by pillar and fire to our final home, and the key is for us to journey in faith. Our home is not in a church building or church property, but our home is the mission itself. To bring more people into the church building, without sending them out in mission to the world, is bankrupt and biblically wrong. Mission is our very reason for existence as the people of God.

How has your work changed and grown, now that you’re leading three conferences? And how much traveling are you doing?

In my opinion, the reduction of one bishop in each jurisdiction at the 2004 General Conference was more motivated by political rather than financial reasons. As such, the church did not realize the unintended consequences, and we are now living through the problems that this decision has produced. In my case, I must now oversee a huge geographical territory that includes Alaska, Idaho, Oregon and Washington. My personal testimony is that if I could focus and concentrate on any one of those areas and annual conferences alone, I could effect change and growth to a greater degree.

You write in Spiritual Kaizen, as an aside, that you can teach most people how to break a board. Do you still practice the martial arts, and what’s the most boards you’ve ever broken at one time?

I do still practice. Board and brick breaking is not an integral part of the art, and the only time we did it was for show . . . to promote our dojo (studio) or art. It was also expensive, as in one power break we would break 5-6 boards at one time. At my age, I don’t have the time or money to waste on such activities!

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Spotlight on Spiritual Formation Resource Team

By Barbara Dick
Facilitator, Spiritual Formation Resource Team

http://www.wisconsinumc.org

"Board Room" at the Marriott in Middleton. We think of a board room as the space in which high-powered decisions are made. Well, we are preparing a welcome for the amazing power of the Holy Spirit in a space of contemplation and Sabbath rest. Come in any time during Conference to reflect, to rest, to pray. Team members will be there, praying for all attendees and ready to pray with you. You will find a prayer guide and a quiet, peaceful atmosphere.

Consider attending our afternoon offering for the Annual Conference Learning Day, June 10. Experience and learn about spiritual practices for small groups that bear "fruit that will last" (John 15:16) through local congregations. We will explore a variety of approaches to prayer and Bible study and provide simple instructions for sharing these practices in your local setting.

And look for information, coming soon, about the REAL Retreat at Pine Lake (July 14-17). The Rest, Eat, And Laugh Retreat invites participants to reflect on their spiritual journeys, share stories, and renew their souls. It is open to all clergy and laity in the Conference, and timed to provide particular value to those who have just experienced transitions in pastoral leadership.

For additional information, contact Barbara Dick at 608-658-4447 or spiritualformation@wisconsinumc.org.

Looking ahead, we plan to offer a 5-Day Academy of Spiritual Formation in the summer of 2014. Begin praying now about participating in this powerful, transformational experience of spiritual exploration and learning (dates and other details to come).

As a team, we hold one another, our leaders, and the Conference in prayer, confident in the ongoing presence and power of the Holy Spirit to transform our lives and build up the body of Christ. Many thanks to the hard work of our Spiritual Formation Resource Team, including Lucinda Alwa, Amy Anderson, Karen Bankes, Vicki Brantmeyer, Steve Brown, Barbara Cook, Kate Crockery-Jones, Laura Ida, Sara Langlois, Thomas Lindahl, Thad Rutter, Kevin J. Tubbs, Wendell Williams, and Connie Ziegler.

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Reflective Formation in the Conference atmosphere.

The Prayer Room at Annual Conference 2013 will be in the theom Indian Missionary, Peninsula-Delaware, Red Bird Missionary, Southwest Texas, Tennessee, Upper New York, West Michigan, West Ohio, West Virginia and Western Pennsylvania.

Wisconsin Conference has maintained a longtime relationship with Africa University: “Our churches,” said Bishop Hee-Soo Jung, “celebrate the level of higher education advancement that Africa University has accomplished.”

According to Lisa King, conference treasurer, five local churches and a couple donated funds above the 2012 appropriated amounts to Africa University. The largest donations came from Bethany United Methodist Church, Madison; First, Whitewater; and Community, Elm Grove.

“Africa University is a wonderful example of what The United Methodist Church can do together connectionally,” said King.

“The entire denomination has established a university that provides critical education for Africans, who will then go back to their various nations and provide leadership through the church and continent. (The school) has amazingly continued in this mission throughout the devastating and crippling economic circumstances in Zimbabwe over the past decade and now appears to be stronger than ever.”

In the Greater New Jersey Conference, the Rev. Robert Costello, superintendent of Gateway South District, said Africa University has been the “favorite” missionary project of the Greater New Jersey Conference since the school opened.

Greater New Jersey Bishop John Schol encouraged support of Africa University. “The development of leadership to serve within Africa,” he said, “is a priority for us as we seek to be faithful in our mission as a global partner.”

The bishop has made seven trips to Africa University. “I have seen and experienced firsthand how the school is making a difference in the lives of students, the church and the region where it’s located,” he says, “Graduates . . . are leaders in business, the church, agriculture, education and economic development and an example of what United Methodists can do when we work and give generously together.”

*Heather Peck Stahl is a freelance journalist living in Nashville, Tenn. Reprinted with permission from United Methodist Communications.

Conferences Exceed 100 Percent Giving to Africa University

By Heather Peck Stahl*

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—“Africa University is an example of how the connectional system can make a difference in the world,” said John Cardillo, treasurer and director of administrative services of the Greater New Jersey Annual Conference. “By supporting the university, we are enabling the growth of well-educated leaders and helping to provide the tools for a better socioeconomic future for communities in Africa.”

Support of Africa University, now celebrating two decades of preparing leaders for Africa and the world, is gaining momentum. In fact, 27 annual conferences paid 100 percent of their 2012 asking for Africa University Fund, with four exceeding their goal. Wisconsin Conference paid a whopping 169.31 percent, followed by Greater New Jersey, 104.69 percent; Iowa, 100.57 percent; and Louisiana, 100.03 percent.

Other conferences paying 100 percent were Alaska United Methodist, Baltimore-Washington, Desert Southwest, East Ohio, Florida, Holston, Illinois Great Rivers, Kansas West, Minnesota, New England, New York, North Carolina, Northern Illinois, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Southwest Texas, Tennessee, Upper New York, West Michigan, West Ohio, West Virginia and Western Pennsylvania.

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