My Reflections on 2010

By Bishop Linda Lee

This past year was one of many challenges and celebrations. It’s interesting to note that Facebook’s “top trending topics in 2010” included such things as a new phrase “HMU” (hit me up, which means let’s meet or go out), the World Cup, Haiti, iPad and iPhone 4, miners (the miners in Chile) and others. We laughed, we cried, we prayed, we cheered, we hoped and we helped.

Highlights from the Wisconsin Conference

In our Conference, we continued to be faithful to mission support. For example, our Wisconsin VIM teams were right there in Chile during the earthquake and provided immediate assistance. Our congregations have continued to support Chile, as well as other disasters and worthy causes through shared giving and service. Our Conference also administered the 2008 Flood Recovery Program, helping more than 500 families in Wisconsin receive the financial support that they desperately needed.

At our Annual Conference session in June, we launched our Catalyst Team with song and dance, a true highlight of the session. We celebrated the many ways we are in ministry through our Health and Welfare Agencies. We talked respectfully about the very sensitive topic of homosexuality. We celebrated ordination, commissioning and the new ways our lay and clergy leadership are partnering through Circuits. We voted to create a better way to align our efforts across the Conference through our new Discipleship Leadership Team. Additionally, we remained faithful to our commitment to pay 100% of our shared offerings.

Implementing the Call to Action

We received the report of the Call to Action Team from the Connectional Table and will be aligning our plans to support their recommendations. The Call to Action directs United Methodists to:

- Use the drivers of Vital Congregations as a basis for building effective practices in local churches.
- Reform clergy development, deployment, evaluation and accountability systems.
- Assess effectiveness of attendance, growth and engagement in Conferences and congregations.
- Reform the Council of Bishops regarding responsibility and public accountability for attendance, giving, age of participants in local church life, and more.
- Consolidate program and administrative agencies and align their work and resources.

Change is Important

The times we live in require that we do some things differently as a denomination. The Connectional Table, the World-Wide Nature of the Church, and the Ministry Study reports are steps in the process of re-creating the United Methodist Movement. And they are all part of our preparations for the 2012 General Conference and beyond.

In this new year, now is a good time for us to begin to consider where we need to go from here. Through Catalyst, we are addressing our Conference priority of developing both leaders and healthy congregational environments. Through regional visits, spiritual retreats and town hall meetings, we continue to listen, share and grow in gratitude for all that God is doing in us and through us. Our Annual Conference staff is helping clergy and laity to equip others. Our Discipleship Leadership Team will assist us to work together as laity and clergy—as we fulfill our mission to make and be disciples of Jesus Christ who transform the world. In 2011, we will continue our focus, which was highlighted at Annual Conference this past year, on developing a spirit of generosity.

United Methodists Can Be the Example

I pray that Wisconsin United Methodists will become known, not only for our generosity in helping the homeless and the hungry, but in being models of Christ in the ways we treat one another. I see us being the people to whom others look to in our current secular culture of violence and lack of regard for human life, as an example of a Christ-like way to act. I see us loving and respecting one another, even when we disagree.

I see us sharing our love for God with each other and with those who need to know there is a God and that God loves them; those like the street children living around some of our congregations; those like the incarcerated who really need treatment and not prison; those like domestic partners and children whose lives are at risk because of violence in their homes; those in our pews who suffer silently with disease, including addiction, isolation, hunger or fear.

Hope for the Future

As we learn how to communicate with and treat one another with the love, respect and compassion of Christ, others will see him through us and find new hope—hope that we will be transformed by the renewing of our minds, hearts and souls. I believe we can. I believe we will. Because God’s plans for us are for good, and not for harm, he has given us a future with hope.
UM church battles racism with films
How do you fight racism? At St. Francis in the Foothills United Methodist Church in Tucson, Ariz., you watch movies. The church’s popular “Unlearning Racism” film series has been drawing crowds for years. The monthly gathering begins with a potluck dinner, followed by a showing of a thought-provoking film and a typically spirited discussion. The 2011 schedule includes Temple Grandin as well as lesser-known documentaries such as Cover Girl Culture: Awakening the Media Generation, an expose of the fashion industry and consumer culture.

Church’s latchkey program marks 25th
For 25 years, volunteers have been nurturing and loving children through the after-school Latchkey program at Floral Heights United Methodist in Wichita Falls, Texas. The church recently celebrated the anniversary with an open house to share stories and memories in recognition for volunteers and students. Kids from preschool age through sixth grade attend Mondays through Fridays from 3:30 p.m. until 6 p.m. Director Bridget Alvorado thinks she knows why the program has been in business so long. “It’s like a family,” she said. “You know you’re doing a good job when the kids don’t want to leave.”

How to help: Paint my barns
When the Rev. Sondra Snodre visited parishioner Mark Shealy in the hospital, she asked how the church could help. Mr. Shealy, a carpenter, was recovering from an injury that prevented him from working for months. He jokingly replied, “You can paint my barns.” So members of Mount Zion United Methodist Church in Bucyrus, Ohio, did just that. A women’s Bible study group raised the funds to purchase paint and gathered a group of 20 volunteers, who washed and painted Mr. Shealy’s barns.

Missouri church launches K–12 school
By Fred Koenig
Special Contributor

BROOKFIELD, Mo.—Church schools are not uncommon in Missouri. Catholic schools are prevalent across the state, and Christian institutions of Protestant denominations are found in most towns of a significant size.

But where can you find a United Methodist primary school? Look no further than Trinity United Methodist Church in Brookfield. The church is in its second year of offering Jesus Is Lord Academy, a K–12 program certified by Accelerated Christian Education (ACE).

When the Rev. Michael White, senior pastor at Trinity UMC, brought the idea before the church a few years ago, he said they couldn’t really get started exploring the idea without money. The next day someone from the congregation came forward and donated enough to seed the initial efforts.

While Brookfield has a great public school system, Mr. White said it had lacked a Christian institution. Some people expressed concern that the church school would take away from the public school, but he doesn’t believe that’s been the case.

“Most of our students would be home schooled if they weren’t coming here,” Mr. White said. “Some are coming 45 miles to attend school here. Some that were in public schools weren’t doing well before they came here.

The ACE program and curriculum that the school uses is based on individual instruction. The school is Christian, but not specifically Methodist; therefore it doesn’t teach denominational beliefs.

High standards are maintained in academic instruction and mastery is required, but each student’s instruction and progress are individualized. This means both gifted students and ones with learning disabilities find the setting more comfortable than traditional classrooms, where teaching moves at a pre-determined pace to match the abilities of the average student.

Denise Tounzen, a teacher at Jesus is Lord Academy, has taught in public schools and home-schools. She’s been very impressed with the ACE program.

The high school classroom is laid out like an open office with cubicles. At first Ms. Tounzen didn’t like the look of it, but she’s found it to be a very effective layout. “It enables the students to block out everything and focus on their work,” she said.

The education method is called “mastery based.” Students work on assignments at their own pace, then go to a station to do self-scoring. They must reach a 90 percent score on each quiz to take a pace test and must score 80 percent on a pace test to pass. They are encouraged to personalize their own work stations, where they have charts to track their progress.

Teacher Jean Ham uses ACE computer software to manage information relating to the school, including secure student files, academic progress, Scripture studies, progress projections, congratulation slips and financial accounting.

“I spent a lot of time learning what this program can do, and it really does take care of everything that we need,” she said.

The teachers and Mr. White have participated in a national training for ACE schools that was conducted in Kansas.

“I was skeptical of the training for administrators before I experienced it,” Mr. White said. “I’ve heard a lot of good speakers, but these were the best. There were academic professionals with PhDs telling us what kind of instruction will be most effective.”

Tyler Ham, the school’s only senior, has been attending the academy for about a year. He had been home-schooled for nine years.

Tyler finds the course work challenging and he enjoys the pace. He finds the individual learning areas to be a very low-stress environment. And he enjoys the opportunities that the school offers. “I like being able to practice music during breaks,” he said.

Every morning the students make a pledge to the American flag, the Christian flag and the Bible. They volunteer at the church’s food bank and sing songs at a local nursing home.

Michelle Dickinson, the school’s administrator, said there has rarely been a behavior issue for her to handle. “We live by Matthew 25:40,” she said. “We treat everyone and serve them as if they were Jesus. This instills respect among the students.”

The program has a school board made up of members of Trinity UMC, and most of the board members have backgrounds in education, including three teachers and a superintendent. A certified public accountant helps with the business end of things.

“This is a ministry for us, but if you put it in ‘business venture’ terms, you can expect it to take a while to catch on,” Mr. White said.

Students pay $245 per month for tuition. There are currently 19 students enrolled; it will take 24 for the school to be operating at a break-even level. There are five people on church staff associated with the school.

“We have several students who are currently considering coming here, and if they do, the school will have enough students to begin to be self-sustainable,” Mr. White said. “Our goal is to provide a quality Christian education, but an underlying goal is to do that in a way that is self-sustainable.”

For information, visit www.brookfieldumc.org.

Mr. Koenig is editor of publications for the Missouri Conference.
Book Review

Book offers strong witness to U.S. civil rights journey

By Robin Russell
Managing Editor

Civil rights pioneer and United Methodist minister the Rev. Joseph Lowery has penned a “panoramic view” of his life as president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and as a pastor.

Singing the Lord’s Song in a Strange Land, to be released in February, is a compilation of sermons and speeches Dr. Lowery gave in churches, rallies and on the streets, along with some present-day reflections on significant milestones. Taken together, they represent his role in helping to keep “the voice of moral force and ethical power to a decibel level that it was heard in the corridors of power.”

The title refers to the children of Israel being asked to sing while held in captivity in Babylon. Dr. Lowery, now 99, has said that the faith of African Americans “carried them through that strange land of inequality” here in the U.S.

“There was a fire in our bellies that slave masters couldn’t drive out; dogs couldn’t bite out; fire hoses couldn’t wash out; silly clubs couldn’t beat out; cattle prodders couldn’t poke out; bombs couldn’t blast out; guns couldn’t shoot out; jails couldn’t lock out; and money couldn’t buy out.”

It was his own faith that compelled him to seek social, economic and political justice. Dr. Lowery’s life as an activist began in college when he joined the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

He describes meeting with Martin Luther King Jr. and Fred Shuttlesworth in the mid-1950s to coordinate nonviolent strategies for social change, including voter registration drives, bus boycotts and lunch-counter sit-ins. Their monthly meetings became the genesis of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC).

He writes stirringly of the self-determination that rose to the surface when Rosa Parks refused to give up her bus seat to a white man, saying 50,000 blacks in Alabama were of one sentiment: “Everyone who ever rode the bus had felt the sting of abuse and denigration… [T]hey all shared in this common denominator, this racial discriminator, this dehumanizer.”

Black pastors, Dr. Lowery writes, “were no longer content to just preach about making heaven our home, but felt called to make our homes here heavenly.”

After he served as president of the SCLC from 1978-1998, the NAACP named Dr. Lowery the “dean” of the civil rights movement. He is the recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom. He gave the sermon at Coretta Scott King’s funeral and offered the historic benediction at the inauguration of President Obama. Both are included here in their entirety.

Reading through the speeches Dr. Lowery gave over the years reveals his simple yet eloquent imagery, and his powerfully direct commentary.

Citing statistics about how most inmates who are executed are poor, black and in the South, Dr. Lowery says in a speech at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta in the early 1990s, “The death penalty is a matter of place and race and inequity and injurious. He explains affirmative action in his address at the SCLC annual convention in 1995 in New Orleans: “It is not reverse discrimination. It is not preferential treatment. It is including those who have been traditionally excluded.”

And talking about the economic power of the vote, he says: “Don’t let anybody fool you. It is important. It is significant. It is essential. And if you do not vote, you are not a good Christian. I am serious about that. I think folks who don’t vote are flitting with hell. Because what you’re doing is not using that which people fought, bled and died for and what God gave us.”

This book captures Dr. Lowery’s most enduring speeches from the past 50 years. As such, it serves as a good reminder for those who worked for civil rights over the years as well as a solid introduction for young people to significant events in the movement.

By Kyle Miller
Special Contributor

Could it be that Charles Wesley was more focused on marrying a woman than on publishing quality literature? In the mind of John Wesley, probably so. In the mind of Charles, his carelessness was worth all of John’s frustration if it meant that he could marry Sarah Gwynne.

“Lord, help me to hold onto the hand of Sarah. I say that in all seriousness, yet it is not funny.”

To hold it in the midst of Sarah’s fondness of Charles and his brother’s obsessive desire to perfect Charles’ writing, this hymn would certainly not have such a rousing history.

“I Want a Principle Within” has had a longstanding presence in Methodism. It was included in Methodist hymnals as early as 1788 and can be traced to its current form in John Wesley’s A Collection of Hymns for the Use of People Called Methodists (1780). The hymn was first published in five stanzas in Charles’ own collection, Hymns and Sacred Poems (1748), titled “For a Tender Conscience.”

The publication of Hymns and Sacred Poems came about because Charles had to prove to Sarah’s mother that he could financially support Sarah as his wife; his salary as a theologian was quite unimpressive.

Realizing the potential of Charles’ musical gifts, Mrs. Gwynne finally approved the marriage.

Charles then went about publishing the first collection of his poems, much to the irritation of John, who had no hand in editing his brother’s own volumes. John’s desire to do justice to a few of Charles’ hymns led to his 1780 collection, which perhaps made his name famous among Methodists under its current title.

The evolution of this hymn came at a period in Charles Wesley’s life when he was traveling extensively throughout England and Ireland. During these years he suffered both a severe sprain in his leg (1745) and a severe toothache (1748) that added to the strain of his traveling.

Although no sources pinpoint exactly when “I Want a Principle Within” was written, there could be a connection between Charles’ trials and the transformations he asks of God through this hymn. Wesley scholar John Tyson also explains that around the time Hymns and Sacred Poems was published, Charles was “at the mid-point of the development of his doctrine of sanctification,” in which he insisted that Christian perfection could be attained during one’s lifetime.

Taken as a whole, the hymn leads us on a journey from recognizing the darkness of sin to the freeing and uplifting feeling found in the forgiveness of Christ. The tune, by way of its gentle, lilting feel, contrasts with the staid heaviness of the text.

The tune GERALD is attributed to Ludwig “Louis” Spohr (1784-1859), a famous German-born violinist and conductor. It was adapted by James Stimpson (1820-1886), a British-born organist well known for his choral anthems.

The original name of the tune was SPOHR. However, because another tune was known by this name, it was changed to GERALD, named in honor of both Fitzgerald Sale Parker (1863-1936), a member of the 1905 and 1935 Methodist hymnal committees, and Geraldine Reid Serrill, secretary to the editor of the 1935 hymnal.

Since then, the hymn has been adapted and edited by the United Methodist hymnal committee from the version published by John Wesley in 1780.

The reckless nature of Charles’ writing (at least, from John’s perspective) kept John in business as his editor, while Charles’ original version of the hymn solidified his marriage. In the end, both versions were successful endeavors, even if John was a bit frustrated with his brother.

Mr. Miller is a student of C. Michael Hawn and a candidate for the master of sacred music degree at Perkins School of Theology.

History of Hymns

Battle between Wesleys surrounds birth of hymn

“I Want a Principle Within”
Charles Wesley
UM Hymnal, No. 410

I want a principle within Of watchful godly fear, A sensibility of sin, A pain to feel God near.

I want the first approach to feel Of pride or wrong desire, To catch the wandering of my will, And quench the kindling fire.
During the youth service at the 2010 Wisconsin Annual Conference in La Crosse, Bishop Linda Lee gave a passionate sermon, declaring that “God is in the neighborhood!” She spoke about the lavish love that God has for us, and how love can unite different people—even those who disagree. In no place is this truer than Milwaukie, where the staff at Northcott Neighborhood House continue to assert God’s presence in the community they serve.

A Myriad of Services

Northcott is a multipurpose community center that was established in 1961 by the United Methodist Women, the Wisconsin Conference UMC, and the General Board of Global Ministries. It serves approximately 10,000 community residents every year through a myriad of services. These services include senior and youth programs, adult education/GED resources, after-school education and recreation programs, employment and training, and community development. Northcott also has one of the oldest Head Start programs in the state, established in 1965. However, for the people of Northcott, the most important ‘service’ they receive is the feeling of having a loving neighbor. Many people see Northcott as a second home and the people there as a surrogate family. Like any good neighborhood, Northcott is a place where they belong.

It’s Like a Family

“It’s like being at home—a home away from home.”—said Bettye Coleman, a woman involved in the senior program and whose great-grandson participates in Northcott’s after-school programs. Rochelle Cunningham agreed. Cunningham was an only child who started coming to Northcott to make friends. Now a young woman, Cunningham has returned to Northcott.

“I grew up here as a child, but there were some paths that I had to go down to be who I am today,” she said. “Northcott gave me the stability that I needed, but there were some things that I chose to do on my own… yet when I came back, they were still here for me with open arms, which makes me feel good; it’s like a family.”

Many Return as Volunteers or Staff

Many like Cunningham want to help others feel that same sense of belonging, and return as volunteers or staff. “What keeps me coming back is just to not forget, like where I’ve come from,” she said. Cunningham is currently applying to be an employee with the Milwaukee Builds program. Ruben Walker, who participated in Northcott’s after-school programs growing up, is now a staff member at Northcott and works with youth. He is also a basketball and football coach. Walker said, “I feel that I’m doing good and I can help somebody the way I was helped.” Peggy Roberts started as the parent of a child in Northcott’s Head Start program, and eventually obtained a job there. Today, Roberts has been a Head Start employee for 23 years.

The stories of people like Cunningham, Walker, and Roberts are testimonies to the ways in which Northcott has changed people’s lives.

Pastor Brian Baldwin is involved with the Milwaukee Builds program, which partners with the Fresh Start program to teach new skills and trades to people who have lost their jobs, help those people earn their GEDs and certification to further their careers, and provide housing for low-to-moderate-income families. He said, “We don’t just teach them a skill set, we teach them how to change their lives, their behavior, their attitude, how they look at themselves in relation to the next person, and their general outlook on life; we help them in all these areas, and I tell my crew it’s a one stop shop—we deal with the whole person and not just the unemployment side of you.”

Celebrating 50 Years

In May, Northcott will celebrate its 50th anniversary. McArthur Weddle, the executive director of Northcott, said that “in 1961, Wilma Hampel [Northcott’s founder] planted a seed, and this seed has just sprouted and grown, and now we’re reaching out all over the city and making a difference in the lives of people, and we’re just blessed.” Weddle and the staff at Northcott acknowledge that this is due to the generosity of churches in the Wisconsin Conference.

“We want to really thank all of the United Methodist Churches for supporting us, because without your support, we wouldn’t be able to do the things that we’re doing,” he said. “A lot of times when I’m speaking at the churches, I tell them, you give your money, you give your time, you give art supplies, you give educational supplies…and you really don’t see the difference that you’re making, but you really do make a difference.” We wouldn’t be able to touch the lives of 10,000 people wholeheartedly if it wasn’t for the support from the various United Methodist Churches throughout the state.”

Northcott Neighborhood House is a Home Away from Home for Many

In 2010, over 94% of middle and high school summer campers claimed to have learned more about the Bible, and over 98% had a good/very good experience at camp. Spending time outdoors in God’s creation helps people feel part of God’s plan. Vital congregations send people of all ages to camp to encourage spiritual and leadership development. We know by their comments that children, youth, and adults all love to come to camp! See the camping insert included in this issue. Sign up now at www.WTUMCamps.org.

Camping Helps Kids and Adults Find God in the Everyday

A group of 863 high school-aged youth attended the 2010 Senior High Convo, which took place November 12th–14th at the Chula Vista Resort in Wisconsin Dells. The event was a chance for youth to gather together for education, fellowship, and fun. They participated in general sessions, small group discussions, a worship service, and recreational activities at the Wisconsin Dells Center and Chula Vista water park.

This year’s theme, Peace, Love, Happiness, was inspired by three separate Bible passages (Hebrews 12:14, 1 Corinthians 13:7, and Psalms 30:11). Bishop Linda Lee drew from the theme in a special video greeting to the youth, saying, “One of my prayers is that you discover new ways to receive and to give God’s love, peace and happiness at Convo this year. By sharing the love of Christ with one another, you can strengthen your relationship with Christ, and you can endure whatever life may bring your way and remain hopeful.”

The efforts of many helped to make this year’s Convo possible, especially Pastor J.D. McCarty of Waupun UMC, who led the Youth Tech Team, and the Design Team of lay representatives who organized the event.

The Convo band, The Sidewalk Prophets, was a highlight of this year’s Convo. This popular Christian rock band has a loyal fan base, and is best known for their song, The Words I Would Say. Learn more about the band by visiting http://www.sidewalkprophets.com/.

Deborah Thompson, Mission Coordinator for the Wisconsin Conference UMC, said, “It was really inspiring to see the talent and promise of those who could become the future leaders of our Conference. Spending time with so many outstanding young people gave us hope for the future.”

This year’s Junior High Convo will take place May 13th–15th and Senior High Convo is set for November 11th–13th, both at Chula Vista in Wisconsin Dells.
Hmong Churches Embrace Multicultural Ministry

By Victoria Rebeck*

Lake Thao knew Sherman Avenue United Methodist Church in Madison, Wis. was serious about sharing ministry with his Hmong congregation.

“Sherman Avenue welcomes all people,” said Thao, lay coordinator of Hmong ministry at the church. “They’ve never referred to us as ‘you people’—that would have shown that they didn’t really accept us.”

The movement to multicultural ministry is being embraced and encouraged in Hmong congregations throughout the United States as second generations growing up in the United States are used to experiencing many cultures in their schools and communities.

Their growing sense of the need for a broader community to address these issues was evident in a recent meeting in St. Paul of some 100 members of the Association of Hmong United Methodist Churches. The group agreed to hire a part-time executive director to promote local church ministry, empower lay-led ministry and encourage member churches to support the association physically and financially.

Hmong—a people who have their roots in China, Laos, Thailand, and northern Vietnam—started arriving in the United States in 1975. Hmong have been important allies to the United States, fighting alongside American forces during the Vietnam War. This relationship earned them the opportunity to immigrate to the United States on refugee status.

Today, most Hmong United Methodist congregations are in Wisconsin, Minnesota, California and North Carolina. Many Hmong churches in the United States conduct worship and ministry primarily in the Hmong language. However, as their children grow up, the challenge has become to embrace the multicultural reality in their new country as they nurture spiritual growth.

New Models of Ministry

Sherman Avenue United Methodist Church in Madison is stepping up to this opportunity. The church’s plan is to blend the Hmong Faith Church ministry and the English-speaking congregation, who share a building. Faith Church would continue to offer a worship service in the Hmong language, Thao said, but the two congregations would collaborate in leadership and ministry.

Thao started the Hmong ministry at that church in 2007, he said. The ministry has grown from the first six or seven families he initially recruited to 13 families today. His wife, Kazoua Moua, visits Hmong women in the community and started a literacy class that included a meal and childcare. Thao and Moua are optimistic about the plan for a multicultural congregation. “That we will be in fellowship together will show others that we are truly God’s people,” Moua said. “Actions demonstrate this more than words.”

Working with Youth

To appeal to the younger generation, the Hmong American Community United Methodist Church in Wausau, Wis., decided to blend traditional and contemporary elements into its worship service, Pastor Pha Her said. They also share their building with an English-speaking congregation, and are working toward more collaborative ministry, especially with youth. This year, they hope to have two small groups, and are now working on developing leaders for those groups.

Christ Way Church in Milwaukee aims to be more mission-minded and reach more people, said Pastor Thomas Thao. The congregation removed the word “Hmong” from their church name to enhance their outreach and invited missionaries to speak at a conference the church hosted.

Worshippers also developed a praise band that leads music at Christ Way and other churches. Their worship attendance is about 150—approximately 60 of those are children. The church recently hired a director of youth ministry.

Youth ministry is a central concern across the association of Hmong churches. This year, the Hmong United Methodist youth camp, Casab, will observe its 25th anniversary, reported Mai Shoua Xiong. It will observe its 25th anniversary, reported Mai Moua, vice president of Hmong United Methodist Youth fellowship and a member of Hmong Community United Methodist Church in St. Paul. Urging Hmong youth to discern where God is calling them into leadership is the focus of their 2011 retreat.

The association provides connections to Hmong United Methodists in the United States and Asia, encourages youth and women’s ministries, and supports local and international missions.

Newly elected officers are: Thao of Christ Way United Methodist Church in Milwaukee, president; Mai See Yang Herr of Hmong Faith Church in Wausau, Wis., secretary; Tou Ya Khang of Hmong Faith ministry at Sherman Avenue United Methodist Church, Madison, Wis., treasurer; Kao Zer Khang of Christ Way youth director; and Phoua K. Yang of Christ Way, president of the Hmong United Methodist Women’s Association.

*Rebeck is director of communication for the Minnesota Annual Conference. This article is reprinted with permission from United Methodist News Service.

A New Day Dawning for Youth, Young Adults in the Wisconsin Conference UMC

By Dan Dick

Over two hundred youth, young adults, and adults who work with youth and young adults participated in listening sessions across the Conference to discuss the future direction of youth and young adult ministries. Following the voter recommendation to make youth ministries a priority and to address Conference youth leadership by January 1, 2011, laity and clergy leadership of all ages shared a vision for our future.

First, the top priority, by far, is to strengthen youth ministry at the local church and circuit level. The appeal for resources and training delivered to youth and youth leaders in their home congregational settings was the number one request by a 3-to-1 margin. Local church leaders and youth need help from the Conference to do excellent youth ministry.

Second, build networks where youth, young adults, and adults who work with youth and young adults can share their knowledge, their experience, and their stories. We don’t need to hire experts or youth leaders to do youth ministry for us; we need to be learning from one another and supporting a growing community of active youth engaged in ministry.

Third, redesign the Conference Council on Youth Ministries (CCYM) to involve the whole Conference, drawing active participants from all eight districts. Align the work of the CCYM with the priorities listed in The Book of Discipline, and let the youth elect a volunteer youth coordinator for the Conference.

Fourth, continue to host the Senior High and Junior High Convos, but don’t rely on single, once-a-year events to provide ministry experiences for the whole Conference. Hold Convos in more regions, especially in the Milwaukee, Green Bay, and northwestern part of the state.

Fifth, offer academies and training for adults who work with youth on an annual basis. Make sure it is very practical and down-to-earth. Cover the basics on a regular basis.

Sixth, help youth, young adults, and adults who work with youth and young adults maximize the potential of modern digital technology. Use technology to communicate with youth ministry in the local church, but also offer training to local congregations on how to use technology as a tool for ministry.

Continued on page 8A

Conference Calendar

February 18th–19th
Rethink Church, UMC Workshops
Yorkville UMC, Union Grove (18th)
Christ UMC, Racine (19th)

March 28th
Bishop’s Town Hall Meeting
Elm Grove Community Church

March 29th
Bishop’s Town Hall Meeting
St. James UMC, Appleton

April 1st
Bishop’s Town Hall Meeting
Chapel Heights UMC, Eau Claire

April 1st–2nd
Bishop’s Retreat for Clergy and Laity
Lake Street UMC, Eau Claire

April 3rd
One Great Hour of Sharing (offering)

April 12th
Bishop’s Town Hall Meeting
Dodgeville UMC

May 1st
Northcott 50th Anniversary
Northcott Neighborhood House, Milwaukee

May 8th
Native American Ministries Sunday (offering)

May 13th–15th
Junior High Convo
Chula Vista, Wisconsin Dells

May 21st–22nd
UM Volunteers in Mission Reunion and 25th Anniversary
Pine Lake Camp

June 12th–15th
Annual Conference
Chula Vista, Wisconsin Dells

June 19th
Peace with Justice Sunday (offering)

October 21st–22nd
United Methodist Women Annual Gathering
Black River Falls

October 23rd–26th
Mission Week
Chippewa-Heartland, Chapel Heights UMC, Eau Claire (23rd)
Nicolet-Winnebago, St. James UMC, Appleton (24th)
Metro, Community UMC, Elm Grove (25th)
Capital-Coulee, Asbury UMC, Madison (26th)

For a more comprehensive list of events and training opportunities, visit our website www.wisconsinumc.org
King’s Speech brings to life unusual, historic friendship

By Bill Fentum
Associate Editor

The King’s Speech
Rated R for some language

As The King’s Speech opens, a man nervously approaches a microphone and faces an arena crowded with thousands of listeners. He tries to start his address, stammering through a few simple words. Then the scene ends, leaving the rest of his painful ordeal to our imaginations.

A severe stutter is difficult enough to overcome without such intense public exposure. But in this case it’s unavoidable, because the speaker isn’t just anyone; he’s Prince Albert Frederick Arthur George (Colin Firth), who would one day rule England as King George VI. Bertie, as his family called him, is second heir to the throne of England in the years before World War II.

In 1934, tired of doctors’ attempts to cure the disorder, his wife, Elizabeth (Helena Bonham Carter), visits therapist Lionel Logue (Geoffrey Rush) whose methods are reportedly unorthodox but effective. Logue, clearly not intimidated by the couple’s royal status, agrees to help the prince only if it’s done on his turf—a dusty studio in central London—and according to his rules. That means both patient and therapist will first need to trust each other as friends, on a first-name basis.

For a while, the prince bristles at this, especially when Logue insists on calling him by his nickname, Bertie. Once or twice he shows prejudice against Logue as an Australian, and an untrained Shakespearean actor.

But during the next two years they find common ground, as men who are devoted to their families and admire each other’s personal integrity. One day Bertie confesses, “You’re the first ordinary man I’ve ever spoken to,” admitting that up to then he’s spent his life in terrible isolation.

The sessions reveal childhood traumas that may, at least in part, be the roots of Bertie’s problem. His father, King George V, shows no patience with his stammer, and his older brother, Prince Edward, occasionally mocks him for it. He gains a new boldness, however, as he makes progress through daily elocution lessons, tongue twisters and breathing exercises.

There’s no time to lose.

When coronation day arrives, Lionel is there, coaching him through the rehearsals. By late 1939, war has begun and the two face another challenge together: preparing to broadcast a Christmas Day speech that must stir England’s spirit for the trials ahead. It’s a good finale, as the king’s fight for unhesitating words of courage evokes the same suspense we more often associate with the best sports stories. Joining him silently before the microphone, Logue fulfills his call to help someone in need “have faith in their voice, and know that a friend is listening.”

The church takes a bit of drudging here, with the Archbishop of Canterbury (Derek Jacobi) depicted as a manipulative force at times. And some viewers may wince through two scenes in which Bertie unleashes a decidedly unregal string of profanity.

People almost never stutter when they sing or swear, Logue says, advising him to try both as loosening exercises. “These forbidden words have become momentary tools to get a guy to break out of extreme repression,” Mr. Firth commented in a recent interview with Canada’s National Post. “Then he immediately gets rather sheepish and apologetic. There couldn’t be a more harmless context.”

Harmless or not, it doesn’t spoil the proceedings. The King’s Speech is grand historical pageantry and rich personal drama, merged into one. If there’s any justice, recognition will follow on Oscar night, Feb. 27.

The King’s Speech stars Colin Firth and Helena Bonham Carter as England’s royal couple in the mid-20th century.

Peace across Europe is threatened by aggression from the ruling Nazi party in Germany. Neville Chamberlain, Britain’s prime minister, acts only to appease Hitler despite warnings from Winston Churchill, then first admiral of the British Navy.

Meanwhile, the king’s health fails rapidly, and upon his death Edward (Guy Pearce) ascends to his place. But the new king also ignores the signs of impending war, seems resentful of his duties and is unwilling to end a scandalous relationship with Wallis Simpson (Eve Best), a twice-divorced American socialite.

In December 1936, Edward abdicates, leaving Bertie with no choice but to assume the throne. Privately, he longs to remain in the shadows, but world events dictate otherwise; a reluctant monarch will now lead the British Empire.

CONWAY, S.C. — A South Carolina pastor is using his musical talents to help the kingdom—and hopes he’ll persuade others to do the same.

The Rev. Scott Johnson of Union United Methodist Church in Conway has released a CD of contemporary Christian songs, Love Still Wins. Spanning the acoustic rock, roots and blues, and contemporary Christian genres, the album is billed as a personal diary of honest music with an honest message.

“It’s about my personal experience of being a Jesus-follower and the struggles of trying to follow Jesus and lead a congregation,” Mr. Johnson said. “Some songs are a reaction to what’s going on in my life, some are my prayer journals and some I’ve written in the midst of writing a sermon because I couldn’t get in prose what I wanted to say. So I stopped, wrote the song and then I was able to write the sermon.”

All the vocals are his, as are the piano and acoustic guitar, plus some bass and electric guitar. Various other musicians are also featured.

Mr. Johnson sees the CD—featuring songs like “Our First Love,” “Anthem of a Weary Heart,” “Portrait of Grace,” “Our Lovely King” and “How Long”—as a way to use his God-given gifts to share the gospel with others.

“God holds us responsible to use the gifts he’s given us, whether or not we think they’re useful,” he said. “To be self-critical is good, to have self-knowledge is a key to wisdom, but it also can hinder you from actually following through. If God puts something in your heart, you should use it. People are afraid of using it, but you only get one shot at living this life, and I’ll take failure over failing to act any day.”

After all, he added, God might one day ask why we didn’t use our gifts. “You could say, ‘I didn’t feel comfortable.’ But God would say, ‘I didn’t give you to be comfortable. I gave it to you to use it.’”

Half of the proceeds from the CD will support Union UMC’s mission to construct wells and latrines in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in partnership with the United Methodist Committee on Relief.

‘Universal language’

Music has always been a part of Mr. Johnson’s life, and the recurring theme of his personal walk with Jesus. “It kept me grounded, got me through various things, and I just think music is at the core of my ministry,” he said. “It’s how I connect with God.”

That’s the beauty of music, for Mr. Johnson—it transcends language. “It’s a universal language, and that’s why music points to God and is from God, because transcends words,” he said.

His congregation is musically inclined, as well, and they try to capitalize on what Mr. Johnson calls “homegrown talent.” A choir performs every other week, and in between they have different musical offerings.

“Our goal is to help our congregation be producers of worship instead of just consumers, to pull people from the congregation and have them be a part of the worship,” he said. “Excellent music points to God and is from God.”

And that’s just what he hopes others will do—not only in their own worship services but in using their gifts to help the kingdom financially, spiritually and physically of his ministers.

Whatever you’ve got, leverage it for the kingdom,” he said. “Whether music or art, do whatever you can do to contribute outside of your typical income.”

Mr. Johnson believes creativity could be a key to restoring the United Methodist Church, as well. Many people lose interest in the church, he said, because they’re afraid to express their creative ideas within a church setting.

“You put your stuff to work and trust God with the outcomes,” he said. For information, visit www.liveloveandlilikjesus.com.

Ms. Connor is editor of the South Carolina United Methodist Advocate.
Retiree serves village in Tanzania, builds orphanage

BY AMY FORBUS
Special Contributor

HOT SPRINGS VILLAGE, Ark. — Kay Oursler lives in two very different villages.

One is Hot Springs Village, the community where she, like many of the town’s residents, relocated after retirement. There, she’s a member of Christ of the Hills United Methodist Church.

Her other village is Uhekule, in the Southern Highlands region of Tanzania, where she spends about 10 months of every year and is now preparing to open Sunrise Children’s Home, a sorely needed orphanage.

“When my husband left in January 2003, I thought my life was over,” Ms. Oursler said. “The word ‘divorce’ was not in my vocabulary. And now I see how it was meant to be—it was not the end of my life, but the beginning of my life.”

Ms. Oursler says she and her ex-husband, who were married for 46 years, are now “best of friends.” And her life has changed in more ways than she could have imagined.

Looking for a new start and interested in serving others, Ms. Oursler applied to the Peace Corps. She proceeded with her move from Cottage Grove, Minn., to Hot Springs Village, and soon received a Peace Corps invitation to serve in Tanzania.

‘Over there, I feel his presence every day. For some reason, God gives me so much strength over there to continue.’

—Kay Oursler

After training with other Peace Corps volunteers, most of whom were in their 70s, Ms. Oursler was assigned to the village of Uhekule. She found she had one distinct advantage over the average volunteer: Her age brought her respect among the villagers. They began calling her “Bibi Kay”—a title used for older women or grandparents.

Bibi Kay focused much of her Peace Corps work on education and health issues, particularly on helping those affected by HIV/AIDS, which has left the region in crisis. Ms. Oursler worked on education and health issues, particularly on helping those affected by HIV/AIDS, which has left the region in crisis.

One of her most significant projects was the construction of the Sunrise Children’s Home in Uhekule, a small village in the Southern Highlands region of Tanzania, where she now lives as a member of the United Methodist Church.

Ms. Oursler admits to moments of discouragement. “Ms. Oursler began planning. It would be the villagers’ orphanage, not hers, so they had to decide how to form a non-governmental organization (NGO). Their options included working with a nearby government district, with one of the four churches in the village (Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Assembly of God and Seventh-Day Adventist) or on their own as a stand-alone NGO.

The leadership of Uhekule decided on the third option, and about 400 villagers signed up for the project. Ms. Oursler helped them find ways to support the construction.

“Their first goal was to raise the wall and insulation in the building. ‘It’s just so much work, and I think sometimes I can’t do it, and I’ll go to bed, and the next morning I am so re- vived, I know it’s the Lord working in my life,’ she said. ‘He wants this orphanage up and running so bad, and so do I.’

God’s presence

Construction in Uhekule holds more struggles than it does in Hot Springs Village. It’s more difficult to locate supplies and arrange for their transportation to the work site. Then there’s the matter of haggling over pricing. Ms. Oursler admits to moments of discouragement.

“Knowing how she could live here and give to the people, she thought, ‘Hey, Kay. Build an orphanage.’ At that very moment, ‘she said. ‘These kids have been pretty well neglected, as most kids are over there, nutrition-wise and caring-wise. They haven’t had any love. We’re gonna have problems, OK?’

Ms. Oursler knows she can rely on leaders in the village, including Fredy, the foreman who does far more than construction manager and coordinat ing volunteer labor for installing dry-wall and insulation in the building. ‘See how the Lord works in my life?’

With limited time in the U.S., Ms. Oursler’s involvement with Christ of the Hills consists primarily of providing updates on her work in Uhekule. She spends part of her time in the U.S. making presentations to church groups on behalf of her ministry.

Her pastors in Hot Springs Village praise the work she does.

‘Many in the faith community are familiar with such missionaries as David Livingstone and Dr. Albert Schweitzer,’ said the Rev. Walter “Bubba” Smith. “I would place this humble member of our church on the same platform with them.”

‘Knowing how she could live here with so many amenities, yet choosing to live in Tanzania . . . is an inspiration,’ says the Rev. David Wilson. ‘She gives flesh to the words ‘selfless’ and ‘commitment’ are related to the mission of Christ.’

Christ of the Hills supports Ms. Oursler by providing money through their mission budget, and in other ways, too. One seemingly small but significant act of support: They ship a care package monthly containing protein-rich foods such as tuna and beef jerky. Ms. Oursler struggles with protein deficiency in a village where meat is on the menu only for special occasions.

‘Christmas over there is this: There’s no decorations and no gifts. There’s church and singing and praise, and then there’s a meal with meat, she says. ‘[Meat] is something they don’t have.’

‘All these 27 kids who are being sponsored for secondary school by myself and my friends here in America, they’ll be hanging out at my house, so I will have food for all of them. I’ll probably butcher a couple of my chickens.’

Not only has living in Uhekule helped her learn about Tanzanian culture, but it also has exposed her to the generosity of those in the U.S.

“The American people are the most generous people in the whole world,” she says, “because they come to your aid when you really, really need it—like that food. I’m just amazed, and so happy to be living in two villages.”

Ms. Forbus is editor of the Arkansas United Methodist.
Giving—It’s What We Do

By Dan Dick

Approximately 600 participants from the Wisconsin Annual Conference, including 150 pastors and 450 lay people, responded to a giving survey developed by the Generosity Task Force. The Generosity Task Force was formed at the invitation of Bishop Linda Lee to support and promote the theme of Extravagant Generosity, and to explore ways that local congregations might be better resourced and served in the area of financial stewardship.

To summarize the results of the survey in a single sentence: “It is extremely important that Christians give generously as an expression of gratitude and joy for all we have received from God.” Giving is not an option; it isn’t simply something we do, it is an expression of who we are.

Two primary forces motivate the giving of Wisconsin United Methodists: joy and duty. Forty-six percent of the respondents identified “responsibility, discipline, or obligation” as the primary reason for their giving, while forty-four percent named “joy, generosity, or desire to share with others” as their top reasons.

For those responding to the survey, supporting the ministry of their local church and sharing responsibility for the church’s ministry were the most important motivations to making a financial commitment to the church. A majority of people identified “hearing sound preaching and teaching on giving in their church” as important (37.5%) or extremely important (28.6%), though a number of people lament that money and giving is not talked about much in their local congregation.

Seventy-four percent of those responding say that giving is important or extremely important as a means of growing in the Christian faith. It is evident that people believe that faith and giving are in a dynamic relationship—some people give more as they grow in their faith, while others learn to grow through giving more.

Illness can strike anybody, at any time, in any part of the world. It can cripple the strong and weaken the spirited. It can tear even close-knit families apart. Illness does not know money or class, and yet, the hospitals, pharmacies and insurance companies that combat it often do. For people who live in poverty, this can mean that they are unable to receive the care that they need or help loved ones who are suffering.

No One is Turned Away

Ganta United Methodist Hospital in Liberia is working to meet the needs of such people. The not-for-profit hospital, which was established in 1926 by American United Methodist Missionary Doctor George Way Harley, is a saving grace for people in Liberia, Guinea, Côte d’Ivoire, and other surrounding areas. The hospital staff, along with a large pool of volunteers, offer comprehensive healthcare to all who come to them with needs, charge only minimum fees, and never turn a patient away due to inability to pay.

The hospital provides in-patient, out-patient, and community-based services, and has programs for malaria, water and sanitation, maternity and newborn care, dental care, immunization, eye care, and orthopedic care. The hospital also has programs to address the serious conditions of fistula and HIV/AIDS.

Ganta Needs a New Facility

However, Ganta United Methodist Hospital is in need of resources to continue providing these services. Hospital Administrator Victor Doolah Taryor noted that, “The patient population continues to increase, and the current facility cannot address all of the medical needs.”

Fourteen years of civil war in Liberia have severely damaged the hospital. In 2003, the staff and community members were forced to flee the war and abandon the hospital. The building was then looted and marred as a result of fighting and rocket fire. The current hospital building is weak and fraught with structural damage. With much of the country’s population living in extreme poverty and in need of assistance, the current facility cannot support the growing patient population (Ganta United Methodist Hospital currently serves 55–60,000 out-patient clients per year and 5,000 in-patient clients annually). The staff of Ganta United Methodist Hospital is looking to build a new facility to enhance the existing healthcare program.

Their Vision and Drive

Although raising enough to meet the $4.8 million cost of building a new facility is daunting, the staff at Ganta United Methodist Hospital already has a driving vision for the new building and a course of action mapped out. Construction would take place over a five-year period, and would happen in stages. As Taryor said, “The General Conference made a decision in 2008 that the global United Methodist Church was going to focus on healthcare to help people across the world—especially in the developing countries. We are in a better position to deliver that mandate, but we need help. We already have the infrastructure; we have the land to build the hospital; and the location is ideal, because we are between Liberia, Guinea, and Côte d’Ivoire. We also have the history of training middle-level health technicians…with that kind of history of medical training and medical care, we are just the kind of institution that will hopefully attract investors who want to impact the lives of many people.”

A new hospital would allow Ganta United Methodist Hospital to continue helping people like Labala, a woman from the remote village of Gbapa who suffered untreated blindness for two years before undergoing transformative cataract operations at the hospital. According to Labala, “This operation has changed my life. The hope that was shattered two years ago has been restored by this gesture of love.” (Read Labala’s full story by visiting http://new.gsbm-umc.org/umcor/work/health/hospitals/ganta/stories/.)

Ganta Provides Hope

Illness can strike anybody, regardless of money or class, and the staff at Ganta United Methodist Hospital believes that all people—rich or poor—deserve to be cared for when it does. This important ministry continues to change the lives of people in Africa, and provide hope for all who suffer illness.

Asbury UMC in Madison as well as other Wisconsin congregations currently offer support to Ganta United Methodist Hospital. If you or your church are interested in joining the effort by helping them build a new facility, please send a check to the Wisconsin Conference UMC Treasurer for Ganta United Methodist Hospital, Advance number 158080, and specify “New Hospital Construction” on the memo line. One hundred percent of your contribution will go to Ganta United Methodist Hospital.

A New Day Dawning for Youth, Young Adults

Continued from page 5A

Seventh, split the focus of youth and young adults. Young adult ministry never receives the same attention and support as youth ministry, and programs for young adults should not simply treat them as “older youth.” Youth ministry and young adult ministry should be treated as separate, but equal ministries in the Wisconsin Annual Conference.

The Ministry and Outreach Team of the Wisconsin Annual Conference is going to be working on organizing and implementing these suggestions into a plan for ministry in the coming months. As of January 1, 2011, Nancy Deear became staff liaison for youth ministries and Dan Dick accepted the role as staff liaison for young adults and campus ministries for the Conference. We will be working with youth, young adult, and adult volunteers from across the entire Conference to redesign and bolster the work of the CYM, to strengthen and support the Senior High and Junior High Convos design teams, to re-launch the Youth Ministries Institute training program for the Conference, to provide a Conference-wide Safe Sanctuaries support team, and to develop and launch an ongoing ministry with and for young adults.

Our Ministry of Christian Education in Wisconsin

By Sarah D. Beauregard

A new year brings new challenges, and the Ministry of Christian Education in Wisconsin Annual Conference will be doing its best to face each of these head on.

As the Ministry of Christian Education in Wisconsin Annual Conference, we strive to provide quality, resourceful, and innovative programs and resources to...,
Recalling what made UMC thrive years ago

By Mallory McCall
Staff Writer

In the 1950s and ’60s, women wore pillbox hats and white gloves to church, and men met for coffee in the church parlor after the Sunday worship service.

Today church attire and behavior is much more casual, and congregants worship with coffee cups in hand. Over the last 50 years, the Methodist Church has certainly changed—both at the local level and national level. Many of the changes are due to demographic changes: America’s deteriorating family systems, a more diverse population with varied faith traditions, other activities that compete with a family’s time and a younger generation that is less likely to offer institutional support.

Still, many longtime Methodists say a lot can be learned from the way things were “back in the day.” “Our culture has absolutely changed, and I think the church has been pulled more into the culture than we have pulled the culture into the church,” said retired Bishop Robert Spain, chaplain at the United Methodist Publishing House in Nashville, Tenn.

Bishop Spain, now 85, grew up in a small, rural Methodist church in Tennessee, at a time when the church played a prominent role in society. “The church had a place in the community,” he said. “The pastor had a respected place in the community, even before he or she arrived.

See related commentary, 7B

Q&A: Leading the way in civil dialogue

Recent shootings in Tucson, Ariz., sparked heated debate over whether vitriolic political rhetoric may have inspired shooter Jared Lee Loughner. Don’t be too quick to assign blame, says James Calvin Davis, an associate professor of religion at Middlebury College in Vermont, yet he adds that our civic dialogue must become more civil, and people of faith can lead the way.


Many linked the shootings to vicious political rhetoric, particularly from the right wing. Your response?

I would not want to blame what happened in Arizona directly on the rhetoric or the symbolism of Sarah Palin or other GOP leaders. That’s an easy accusation but it’s inaccurate and should be offensive to most people. I do think the incivility in our political culture lays the groundwork for triggering someone’s derangement. As a theologian, I believe there’s a viciousness that is pervasive, and it sets us up for this kind of event.

You write, “Religion can participate—perhaps even lead—in the rejuvenation of healthier public conversation.” How?

For a lot of people, religion is the problem, not the solution. Religion is a source of incivility. As I see it, there are two ways religion can help. A lot of
Tucson services call all to be ‘agents of hope’

Former student pleas guilty in archive theft

William J. Scott, a 19-year-old former freshman at Drew University in Madison, N.J., pleaded guilty Jan. 11 to one count of theft from the United Methodist Archives Center on campus. Mr. Scott, who had worked six months at the center, was arrested last March after a rare books dealer in England told Drew officials the student had offered to sell 10 letters from John and Charles Wesley. An FBI search of his dorm room turned up other letters from the archives.

Two church arsonists receive life sentences

Two men who pleaded guilty to a series of East Texas church arsons were both sentenced to life in prison Jan. 10 in Smith County, where fires damaged or destroyed five churches in early 2010. Jason Bourque, 21, and Daniel McAllister, 23, also face two arson counts in Van Zandt County and three counts in Henderson County, where they were indicted by a grand jury on Jan. 18.

UM bishop to retire, cites health concerns

United Methodist Bishop Richard J. Wills, who has led the denomination’s Nashville area since 2004, will retire effective Sept. 1. In a letter to the Tennessee and Memphis Conferences, Bishop Wills, 68, cited pain he has suffered since back surgery in 2009. “Knowing that complete healing would only happen if I retired early and focused on getting well, made this painful decision possible,” he said in the letter.

War memorial cross ruled unconstitutional

Jan. 4 a veteran’s memorial featuring a 43-foot cross in La Jolla, Calif., is unconstitutional. “The use of such a distinctive Christian symbol to honor all veterans sends a strong message of endorsement and exclusion,” wrote Judge Margaret McKeown.

“The use of such a distinctively Christian symbol to honor all veterans sends a strong message of endorsement and exclusion,” wrote Judge Margaret McKeown.

The Jan. 11 vigil in Tucson was among many interfaith gatherings held in response to the shooting rampage three days earlier, which left six dead and more than a dozen wounded. President Barack Obama also sounded a note of hope in the face of violence when he addressed an overflow crowd during an emotional memorial service Jan. 12 at the University of Arizona.


“She was there at that tragic moment because she had been elected to serve on the student council of her school,” the bishop said. “Her neighbor thought she would find it interesting to meet Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords. We mourn Christina-Taylor’s death, but at the same time, we give God thanks for her witness of hope. At a tender age, she had already come forth to serve.”

The Rev. Ed Bonneau, senior pastor at Catalina United Methodist Church, said about 300 people attended the vigil. Catalina was one of several sites across the region for eucumenical services ‘of mourning, healing and hope” that evening.

People from United Methodist, Catholic, Episcopal, Lutheran, Jewish and other traditions attended, he added, and “it truly was a citywide event.”

The Pima County Interfaith Council was instrumental in helping to plan the service, which included three speakers: Bishop Carcaño, leader of the United Methodist Desert Southwest Conference; Roman Catholic Bishop Gerald Kicanas; and Rabbi Stephanie Aaron from Temple Chaverim. Temple Chaverim is Ms. Giffords’ synagogue.

Some 125 miles north of Tucson, people of all faiths gathered at Temple Solel in Paradise Valley to pray.

The service was a collaborative effort among Rabbi John Linder of Temple Solel; Jan Flaaten, executive director of the Arizona Ecumenical Council; Bishop Carcaño; and Joe Rubio of the Valley Interfaith Project.

The Rev. Robert Burns, superintendent of the United Methodist Central East District, read a description of each of the lives lost, including Green, Dorothy Morris, U.S. District Court Judge John Roll, Phyllis Schnect, Dorwan Stoddard and Gabe Zimmerman. As Mr. Burns read each name, the diverse congregation responded, “They will not be forgotten.”

“If nothing else, we are a community of teka—and of hope,” Mr. Linder said. “So tonight, with our communities together in mourning, healing and hope, come together as one.”

At a nationally televised evening service Jan. 12, Mr. Obama called on Americans to be more empathetic toward each other and not use this tragedy to become further divided.

“At a time when our discourse has become so sharply polarized, at a time when we are far too eager to lay the blame for all that ails the world at the feet of those who think differently than we do,” he said, “it’s important for us to pause for a moment and make sure that we are talking with each other in a way that heals, not a way that wounds.”

Back in Tucson, Bishop Carcaño urged continued prayers “for those most affected by this tragedy—and for each other, without exception.”

While the family of the young man arrested for the shootings—Jared Lee Loughner—was not known to be active in a church, Mr. Bonneau said, “One of the specific prayers was for [them], for they, too, are hurting.”

Outside Ms. Giffords’ office, the bishop said, children have covered the sidewalk in colorful drawings.

“Colored chalk is the medium, love is the heart, hope is the message,” Bishop Carcaño said.

Resident of Tucson, Ariz., offered makeshift memorials in response to the Jan. 8 shooting that left six dead and more than a dozen wounded.

She recalled walking with a clergy colleague to the congresswoman’s office when a boy of about 10 stopped in front of the two. The boy declared that his picture on the sidewalk had been ruined but he would make it better. “With a confident smile, and chalk in his hand, we saw him walk with great determination toward the sidewalk of hope,” Bishop Carcaño said. “In that moment, that boy made us part of his family, speaking to us as if we had always known each other, and letting us know that things could be made better. It was a word of hope, great hope.”

Ms. Dunlap-Berg is internal content editor for United Methodist Communications. Ms. Faust is a writer/editor for the Desert Southwest Conference.
our religious communities bring great traditions for getting through disagreements civilly. My own Calvinist tradition, for example, lays weight to Roger Williams, who is a great historical model for thinking about disagreement without killing one another. Martin Luther King Jr. comes to mind as a member of the Christian tradition who is a great model for civility. Religious groups can help by becoming places where people can talk about these issues and disagree with one another and do so in a way that is healthy. I think we could become patterns of the kinds of conversation that we would like the larger culture to emulate.

Can you give me an example of the kind of “resources” that religious communities offer?

I define civility as including having a sense of mutual respect for people, even if we disagree with them, and having a sense of humility about the things we know and don’t know. For Christians, both ideas are deeply rooted in our tradition. Mutual respect comes from seeing other people, even our ideological opponents, as being made in the image of God. That’s really important in a political environment where it’s too easy to see my opponent as the enemy.

Also, the notion of humility has deep roots in the Christian tradition in the sense that God knows all but human beings are fallible and there is a limit to our wisdom. That kind of theological reminder, to be open to what we might learn from someone else, may seem obvious to someone of us in the church but not so obviously demonstrated in the political culture.

How can we unite America on issues like homosexuality or abortion, for example, when we as Methodists can’t even agree about these issues?

Presbyterians have also been talking about homosexuality ad nauseam. At the same time, I think there is something noteworthy in the fact that we have been able to talk about this over and over again and resist the temptation to split. We’ve had some churches that have left, but we have as a denomination committed to having these conversations but remaining together. I think that’s something.

Civility doesn’t require that we eventually and quickly come to an agreement. To be able to live with our disagreements peacefully and with respect is in itself a significant accomplishment. And some of our mainline denominations, even as we are burdened with these debates annually, we’re nonetheless demonstrating that we talk together about what it’s like to live in disagreement with each other.

One of your chapters is titled, “Isn’t religion a conversation stopper?” Explain.

The title is stolen from a philosopher who wrote an article, “Religion as a conversation stopper,” and basically argued that as a secular mind, he can’t have a conversation with a religious person, because as soon as that religious person says, “I believe X because God wills it,” there’s nothing to say in response. I would agree, not because it’s a religious argument, but because it’s a bad argument. And religion doesn’t have a corner on bad arguments. When argued well, I think religious ideas can be not only comprehensible to a larger culture, but actually quite useful in capturing ideas that many people have across religions and cultures. So the responsibility of the religious person is to make those religious arguments understandable. If I explain it well, you can know what I mean by “seeing others in the image of God,” even if you don’t believe in God.

How do you counter arguments that say that religion needs to be separate from the state?

On the secular side, there’s the idea that separation of church and state, this great American doctrine, means religion has no place in public life. I don’t think it means that; I don’t think it’s ever meant that. It’s about institutional separation and that still allows a whole lot of space for religious people to participate in the obligations of being citizens as religious people. On the other side, there’s the misconception that the U.S. is a Christian nation and so one particular religious perspective should have priority. A careful reading of history indicates that that has never been true. Our founders were never of one mind, that the U.S. should be a Christian nation, and certainly not one that adheres to the convictions of contemporary conservative evangelicals. So conservatives should understand that it’s appropriate for all kinds of religious and non-religious perspectives to be at the proverbial table.

So what’s the middle ground?

Public moral conversation requires all of us to contribute to it. We all have worldviews that give us our moral convictions. Some of those are religious, and all of those, religious and not, should be invited to the table of public debate. And none of them should have a bigger seat than the other.
Haiti marks slow but measurable progress

By Linda Bloom
United Methodist News Service

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti—A year after a massive earthquake shattered Haiti’s infrastructure and the lives of its citizens, the commitment to rebuilding the Caribbean nation remains.

However, even in the best of times, improving the lives of Haitians can be a daunting task. November’s deadly cholera outbreak and brush with Hurricane Tomas, December’s tension-filled presidential election and the upcoming runoff election—now postponed until February or later—have helped slow earthquake recovery efforts.

“The last couple of months have been pretty difficult for people,” said Melissa Crutchfield, who coordinates international relief for the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR). “I think it’s stagnated the progress.”

Andre Prospery Raymond, a Haitian who has worked for UK-based Christian Aid for eight years, believes the coming year could be a difficult one for his country. “I was expecting the [recovery] situation to speed up at the end of 2010, but with this election crisis it is very difficult to predict,” he said.

Progress has been particularly slow for those still living under tents, according to the Rev. Gesner Paul, president of the Methodist Church of Haiti, and many believe the government has not done enough to remedy that situation.

Despite the obstacles, Mr. Paul added, “Haiti will be rebuilt. It is for us as Haitians to work to rebuild Haiti.”

Not insurmountable

While the challenges of Haiti’s recovery can be overwhelming at times, they are not insurmountable, says the Rev. John McCullough, a United Methodist pastor and top executive of Church World Service.

His agency’s partnerships in Haiti—where it has worked for more than 50 years—remain strong, bonded by enthusiasm and a conviction that the efforts are making a difference.

“At the same time, we have to be realistic about what is reasonably possible,” Mr. McCullough said. “The destruction here was massive. It is going to take a long time.”

Some of the progress is measured in small steps. As Church World Service studied the affected populations, it realized that people with disabilities “were often times having to do without,” he said.

By focusing on that demographic, the agency was able “to create centers where people could gather and not have to compete with those who are more physically able to get some of the basics.”

Christian Aid, a Church World Service partner, decided it could have a stronger impact by assisting Haitians living in the countryside, and it is working to improve livelihoods there. Mr. Raymond, the Haiti country manager, believes the initial earthquake response went well, despite the slowdown in the last few months.

Housing, however, remains an immediate concern. “We do have thousands of people living in tents,” he said. “The situation is not good.”

In December, the United Nations reported that 1 million people are still living in homeless camps, though that number represents a decrease from a 1.5 million peak in July.

As Church World Service studied the affected communities, “we actually were able to divert some of our health kits to the cholera-affected communities,” she said.

That type of flexibility also is evident in new partnership arrangements. On the nongovernmental level, that includes the ACT Alliance and the United Nations. On a denominational level, the British Methodist Church is addressing post-earthquake school rehabilitation and other relief needs through a collaborative relationship with Haitian Methodists, the United Methodist Church

more quickly,” she said.

Because the Methodist Church of Haiti has been asked for documentation regarding its Port-au-Prince buildings, it knows city planners there are making progress. “They’re trying to figure out what buildings will stay, what buildings will go,” she said.

While the displaced Haitians wait, UMCOR has assisted in making the tent cities into livable communities by setting up schools and helping with water and sanitation needs. The relief agency’s long-term plan with its partners includes shelter, livelihood, agriculture and microenterprise programs.

UMCOR also has a supply chain in place, and larger shipments of school kits and health kits “are finally starting to come in with regularity,” Ms. Crutchfield said. A distribution plan—developed with the Haitian church, the UMCOR non-governmental organization field office and other Haitian partners—can be adjusted to meet newly defined needs. “We actually were able to divert some of our health kits to the cholera-affected communities,” she said.

A daunting TASK

Construction workers erect homes at Camp Corail, outside Port-au-Prince. Housing, both temporary and permanent, remains a key issue as Haiti rebuilds.

Children pump water in front of the rubble of the Mellier Methodist School near Petit-Goâve.
Grassroots level

Grants from United Methodist Women helped the Lambi Fund of Haiti allocate emergency assistance to grassroots groups dealing with the influx of earthquake survivors in the Haitian countryside. All but one organization “was able to expand and double their crops,” reported Karen Ashmore, executive director, and now recipients are ready to resume their traditional projects for sustainable development.

But if people in the countryside are ready for recovery, the situation is different in heavily damaged Port-au-Prince, where the fund extended its work to answer a cry for help from women in the tent cities.

Personal safety remains a concern for women in the capital. “As long as they’re living in tents and can’t lock doors, that’s always going to be a security issue,” Ms. Ashmore said. Rape awareness (techniques) and peer support help.

The Lambi Fund also distributed small grants to 350 women in two women’s groups to help them start small businesses and pay school fees for their children. The majority of the women are selling goods in the market, she said, “which in Port-au-Prince is one of the easiest ways to start a small business.”

The larger recovery has been much more complicated, and Mr. Quenet of the British Methodist Church sympathizes with the frustrations that Haitians must feel even as they admire their resilience and patience. “As an outsider, stepping in immediately, I can see the differences,” he said. “But for somebody living in Haiti, where the changes are so slow, it must be very, very frustrating and very difficult.”

No one can dispute that progress has been made, says Rick Santos of the Maryland-based IMA World Health. “Ultimately, the question is how much progress, and can more be done?”

Before the earthquake, IMA World Health was working in Haiti with other partners as part of a national plan under the Ministry of Health to address the threat of neglected tropical diseases, such as lymphatic filariasis and soil-transmitted helminthes, through mass drug treatments. Despite the earthquake, hurricane, and cholera outbreak, the agency has treated 1.7 million people in the past year.

As one of the earthquake survivors plucked from the rubble of the Hotel Montana, Mr. Santos himself has “a sense of real solidarity” with the Haitian people, and he envisions ways to help stabilize the country’s strained health-care system and perhaps find a way to use the more than 17,000 Haitian volunteers trained for drug treatment programs.

Jump-starting the real recovery may require more policy-level conversations between Haitian leaders and donor governments, he said.

Economic engine

That especially includes Haiti’s powerful neighbor to the north. “The Haiti earthquake really awakened a lot of people to the long-term development needs that exist, even within our own hemisphere,” Mr. McCullough said. But even with the outpouring of compassion and volunteer and financial support, Haiti’s status as “the poorest country in our hemisphere” has not changed, he said.

Haiti’s partners need to take a look at what it will take to “ignite the economic engine of Haiti,” Mr. McCullough said, to allow for real growth and development. That means holding the U.S. government and other pledging governments accountable for their promises, he added.

During a visit to Port-au-Prince on the eve of the anniversary, former U.S. President Bill Clinton, a United Nations envoy to Haiti, told the BBC he was frustrated by the slow progress but thought the speed of the recovery was picking up. For UMCOR and its partners, the emphasis is definitely shifting toward recovery, said Ms. Crutchfield, who is hoping first anniversary observances will create “fresh enthusiasm” for rebuilding.

“I feel like this first year has been a necessary learning process for everyone,” she said. “We have really made great strides in learning how to work together.”

Sanitary conditions in much of Port-au-Prince, Haiti, remain poor, one year after the January 2010 earthquake.
Strengthening clergy and lay leadership

BY Bishop Hee-Soo Jung

To be leaders in the church today, we must first identify our call to Christian discipleship. No one is able to develop a disciple without first engaging in the process of becoming a disciple himself or herself.

The Apostle Paul was committed to being a follower of Jesus and embodying himself as Christlike in his journey. Only as he worked to be Christlike was he able to invite others to join in the discipleship of Jesus. Calling is key to the integrity and success of our leadership. Calling is not done in isolation. We confirm our call through the perceptions and affirmations of community.

Wesley’s model

The United Methodist Church traces its roots to the leadership of our founder, John Wesley, a visionary leader who risked moving beyond the accepted structures of his day. The early Methodist movement was not a system of hierarchy and polity but a response to those hungry for faith, suffering through oppressive systems, and looking for nurture and support of community.

Wesley was effective as he shared his vision, empowered others to live out their beliefs and created structures of accountability for those who labored with him. As we think about developing leaders for the 21st century, we can learn much from his example.

As we pursue the pathway of strengthening leadership, we cannot jump to the latest leadership theories without first strengthening our own prayer life, biblical study and trust in the presence of the Holy Spirit to work through us. Beginning from centeredness in the faith will for us.

Following God’s call

Visionary leaders need to be open to God’s call to leadership. Where we are in prayer and group study of the Bible are essential. Visionary leaders need to be in constant dialogue with one another through biblical study and reflection; with the church and community to know the needs of the place, with God’s rich, deep, and evocative guidance for every decision. Leadership vision extends the call of God from one’s own heart and life to the ministry field. During the early Methodist movement, the ministry fields could be found on the streets of England and in the colonies of the New World. Early circuit riders were tenacious, brave, visionary leaders who literally gave their lives to bring Christ’s love to those settling on the frontier.

The ministry field has shifted over the centuries. My home country of Korea became a mission field at the turn of the 20th century. My conversion to Christ from a Buddhist home was the result of visionary leadership who were willing to forgo comfort and certain success in their own land for the sake of bringing the gospel to a place where Christ had not yet been revealed. It was not an easy mission. Reaching to centuries of invasion, occupation and deeply rooted beliefs in Buddhism, Confucianism and Shamanism, the Korean nation did not welcome Christian missionaries with open arms. My own family disapproved of my conversion. Centuries of ancestor worship and enshrined beliefs clashed with this new vision.

This same message of salvation is sorely missing in our own communities today. Our neighborhoods must be re-captured as our ministry field. For too long we have waited for those seeking faith to come through our doors, to seek their own answers, to take the initiative in their quest for wholeness. We have forgotten that the church is a vehicle from which to offer Christ’s love; it is a tool in our mission, not the end product of our work.

Equipping our leaders

Pastors have three major tasks: to lead the congregation in perceiving the particular mission and ministries to which it is called; to develop leadership that is able to help others respond to their call; and to work with lay leadership to equip every member in carrying out particular ministries.

Many congregations have expectations that conflict with the pastoral call to leadership. They expect the pastor to be the one doing the congregation’s ministry rather than leading a congregation to be in ministry. We must continue to proclaim the primary role of the pastor in equipping.

Reaching outside

Leadership is nurtured, refined and directed through the community. John Wesley learned that faith formation is strengthened through small groups. Covenant groups hold us in tension with the draw of the world and the call of our faith. Through reflection with others, we learn where we are being drawn to give witness to our faith. Principled Christian leaders are called to reach beyond our own walls. We realize that the church no longer draws people into our institutions just by being available. We must be more intentional in learning the language of faith-sharing. Equipping faith and clergy to move beyond the silent witness will help rekindle the Methodist movement of social and spiritual holiness. Leaders must set the tone for our “faith talk” and witness to their beliefs in public ways.

Leading the way in this outward-looking faith is new faith community development. The world has changed so significantly that many of our existing congregations are not designed to be responsive to the current generation of theunchurched. Principled Christian leadership seeks to partner with those planting churches so we can live out our call to make disciples for Jesus Christ, not just to boost our membership rolls.

Renewing visions

The Christian movement is shifting. Our faith has been built in a time of self-preservation. But we can learn much from the global South, where faith is life-sustaining. If you are poor, you go to Jesus. If you are hungry, you go to Jesus. If you are sick, you go to Jesus. Jesus is the source of life; there is no alternative.

Leaders in the church today are called to help us shed our façade and dive deeply into the Spirit so that we might glorify God’s ministry. That new vision includes a cross-cultural and cross-racial mentality. Our churches will be enriched, our faith lives deepened and our understanding of God’s bountiful creativity broadened when we learn to speak one another’s languages, appreciate one another’s cultures and join into one body worshipping our Lord and Savior.

John Wesley was thought to be radical as he led his community and the financial support of the state to become a street preacher and to shake up the social norms of his day. Wesley’s crazy actions and ridiculous ideas gave way to a movement that is only in part represented in the United Methodist Church today.

Maybe principled lay and clergy leaders of the United Methodist Church today need to have a bit of that deranged boldness in their ideas and actions—if we can open ourselves to a God-sized vision of Pentecostal proportions of relying on the Holy Spirit and being open to the narrative of faith that grounds us in mystery and majestic examples of discipleship.

With God’s blessing we might stir up our congregations, rekindle the flames of social holiness and reflect our faith in new, bold ways.

Bishop Jung leads the Northern Illinois Conference. This is an adapted excerpt from the book The Future of the United Methodist Church: 7 Vision Pathways (Abingdon).

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Reliving the past doesn’t work

By Dan Dick
Special Contributor

On the heels of the tragic Jan. 8 shootings in Tucson, Ariz., that left six dead and more than a dozen—including U.S. Rep. Gabrielle Giffords—wounded, politicians everywhere are calling for an end to incivility in politics.

The question is: Can they do it? Can we as a culture change in how we debate our differences? I don’t think it is ingrained in our political discourse. It’s no longer enough to simply disagree. In our political campaigns, and in our capitals, the polarization of our political process has often turned opponents into evil demons. This evolution from disagreement to hate has infected the political spectrum, contaminating Democrats and Republicans, and conservatives and liberals.

Within minutes of the shooting, journalists and politicians began the blame game. First it was Sarah Palin and other right-wingers. And then it was Keith Olbermann and left-wingers. The truth is, no one yet really knows what caused the tragedy in Tucson. It may simply turn out that Jared Lee Loughner is another of those insane persons who goes after a public official.

No matter what the shooter’s reasons end up being, these events can serve as a watershed moment in American political life. Our discourse—on both the right and the left—has gotten way out of hand in recent years. Civility has become a relic, when it should be one of our key values.

In many places, even being seen having a casual conversation with an opponent is seen as disloyal, say nothing of sharing a meal with your political opposite. It happens in Washington, D.C. It happens in county courthouses across the commonwealth as well.

Come election time, political consultants of every philosophical stripe tell candidates to divide their opponents. It’s a fact that extremely negative campaigning does work. We all can recall those grainy, dramatically voiced television commercials that make opponents appear to be bad people. Simply an opponent, but a truly bad person deserving of scorn and hate, and maybe by extension, deserving of a bullet to the brain.

Demonizing your opponent is no longer confined to campaigns. We see and hear it on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate. We see and hear it on the news every day.

The problem is clear. The tough part is fixing it.

Fixing this problem will require a lot of people stepping forward: One, to take responsibility for their words and actions of the past. Two, to learn and practice better. It is a vital way to begin the important issues of the day. Three, to hold one another accountable for the language we use. And four, to begin teaching our children to model this new behavior. Remember that children mimic adults. That’s not a comforting thought in today’s environment.

This is a problem of the heart and soul. We do not need more laws, especially laws regulating speech.

As our nation examines its heart and soul in the wake of this senseless violence, I pray that a change in how we deal with differences will begin to emerge. I pray that our leaders will begin to talk with one another, not simply yell at each other. I pray that our leaders will learn the power of building relationships across the political and philosophical divide.

Disagreement is a part of our democratic process. Let’s learn how to disagree in a healthy, non-destructive way.

Mr. Drachler is executive director of United Methodist Advocacy in Pennsylvania and former executive director of public information at United Methodist Communications in Nashville, Tenn.
community listened to the church and expected the church to help set the standard for behavior. The Methodist Church was booming in America in the 1950s, a time when many Americans took pride in being a nation “under God” and clung to the church as a means of distinguishing their way of life from “godless” Communists. The Methodist Church and other mainline denominations were nearly synonymous with mainstream America.

Reports show that the 1950s was the decade with the largest church attendance in U.S. history. In 1950, about half of adult Americans claimed membership or affiliation. By 1960, a record 69 percent said they were connected to a church or synagogue, according to William H. Young’s 1950s American Pop Culture Through History (Greenwood).

By 1968, the Methodist Church had merged with the Evangelical United Brethren Church to form the United Methodist Church, tallying over 10.7 million members. Since then, however, church membership numbers have seen a steady decline, and according to the Yearbook of American Churches, the denomination had 24 percent fewer members in 2002 than in 1960.

“The church today has to fight for its place,” notes Bishop Spain. “It’s not a given anymore.”

While Wednesday nights used to be a dedicated time for church meetings and Sundays were a day of worship and rest, families today are just as likely to be heading out to a sporting event during those times.

Bishop Spain recalls the first Sunday morning he saw a little league baseball team lining up for a game.

“That was a shock,” he said. “Sixty years ago, that would have been unthinkable.”

People today view church affiliation differently than did previous generations, says Robert Wuthnow, chair of the sociology department at Princeton University.

“Faith is no longer something people inherit but something for which they strive,” Dr. Wuthnow writes in his book After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s (University of California Press). “It provides security not by protecting them within high walls but by giving them resources, by plugging them into the right networks and by instilling the confidence to bargain for what they need.”

Church life
Not only has the church’s role in society changed, but life within the church has shifted too.

“There’s not the formality that used to be in the church,” said Mary Lou Danheim, wife of a retired United Methodist minister in Mount Enter-

Church options
Not all change is bad, however, say church leaders and historians.

“We’ve made great strides in making sure everyone’s voice in the church is heard,” said the Rev. Robert Williams, the general secretary of the denomination’s General Commission on Archives and History, who made his ministerial debut in the church as young adult in the early 1970s.

“We’ve eliminated the legislation of the [racially segregated] central jurisdiction, and women are much more in leadership today than they were,” he said. “When I went to seminary there were virtually no women in training for pastoral ministry.”

But while his job today is preserving the history of the denomination, Dr. Williams will be the first to tell you that nostalgia can be unhelpful, and even dangerous. United Methodists who believe church decline can be turned around by going back to the 1950s or 1960s way of “doing church” are not taking into account changes in generational values and priorities.

He quotes Methodist theologian Albert Outler: “Heritage is claiming the past for the sake of the future. Nostalgia is mortgaging the future for the sake of the past.”

And sometimes United Methodists get caught up, Dr. Williams said, in dragging their heels over change that is “really quite superficial: ‘It shouldn’t matter, for instance, if songs are posted on a screen or sung out of a hymnal. ‘We’re still singing music that speaks to our soul, teaches us something about the faith and inspires us,” he said.

Experts agree that at least one thing has not changed in half a century or more: a need for connection. Even young people who communicate on Facebook or Twitter are still showing a desire for community and interaction, Dr. Williams said. And while many young people are not as inclined toward institutional structures, they still value the relational connections that a faith community provides.

“The desire and need we all have to connect with someone else is consistent over time,” he said. “Sometimes I think at the very core of our being, not as much has changed as we think.”