Reflections on Our Town Hall Meetings

By Bishop Linda Lee

This spring, I had the privilege to meet with people from throughout the Wisconsin Conference at the Town Hall Meetings. I was inspired, not only by the number of individuals willing to attend the meetings and be in conversation with me and with the Conference staff, but also by the many gracious, insightful, and honest comments that they shared.

The Town Hall Meetings—which took place in Elm Grove, Appleton, Eau Claire, and Dodgeville—were intended to be an informal way for us to come together and be in conversation about our joys, struggles, ideas, opinions, and concerns. As Dan Dick, Director of Connectional Ministries, said in his opening words, “We want to hear questions; we want you to be able to share stories about challenges and successes; this is a time that is as important for the Conference staff to listen as it is for us to speak.”

People Shared Both Miracles and Pain

We found when we listened to the participants was a wonderful willingness to share from both their experience and from their hearts. There were testimonies about miracles of healing, anger about things some wanted to be different, and some pain about the very real day-to-day struggles in a number of congregations. Yet, the spirit of hope was alive, undergirding the possibility that things can change for the better.

Said one attendee: “If we’re excited about our faith and share our faith, people are drawn to that. We have a world around us that is hungry for something that will give them meaning in life. And we have Christ to offer! But if we’re comfortable just sitting in our pews on Sunday, and we’re not salt and we’re not light…yeah, we’re going to die.”

And another: “People, we are the Church. You have to extend yourself in order to make your church grow. We need to step out of our comfort zones. Get out of that box. Go out and play. A lot of folks are out there to play with; invite them in. You’ll grow.”

And yet another, who spoke about how he had read his church’s archives from 1932, a year in which parishioners were dealing with the effects of the Great Depression, including the failing of two local banks: “I discovered that the church had never been so vital than in that period of time,” he said. “Precisely when people were struggling was our time to shine. Now is the time that we should be at our best. And that’s what I’d like to tell our leaders—call us to be our best. That history is there; it’s in the blood of your own congregation.”

If We Have Faith, God Will Provide

I can share some of these joys and struggles, not only as your bishop, but as one who has served the Church as both laity and pastor. However, the experience that helps me relate most to the current season of our life in the Church is a personal one.

There was a time in my life that was a great challenge, but also gave me a new understanding of God. I was a young, single parent with three teenagers and a new job in a new city. Although I had carefully budgeted, when I got my first check, I realized that it wasn’t enough to pay for our bills and necessities. I couldn’t work additional hours, and on top of all that, my car died. I wasn’t quite sure what to do, so I decided to test my faith in God and start tithing, even though it didn’t make any sense to give up 10 percent of what was already not enough. What I discovered was that every month, somehow or another, there was enough. Even if at times it meant I had to figure out a new way to prepare macaroni and cheese and tuna fish, God was faithful. What I learned was not so much about money, but that God would provide. God was there for us at a time when there was no other way.

Thank You Wisconsin Conference

Although the times are tough in many ways, and we’re struggling as a denomination, we are uniquely positioned to create new ways to continue in mission and ministry with the people and resources that we have right now. And, because of God’s faithfulness to us, United Methodists in Wisconsin continue to give and to serve and to trust in God. As Dan Dick said, regarding the results of a recent stewardship survey of over 600 clergy and lay people, “The people of the Wisconsin Annual Conference are generous people. We want to give. If we’re not giving, it’s not because we don’t want to…a lot of our giving is not just financial…we are a great Church, doing great things, and God is doing great things in us.”
Ambassador praises Sierra Leone hospital

BY PHILEAS JUSU
United Methodist News Service

BO, Sierra Leone—The U.S. ambassador’s enthusiasm for the United Methodist Church’s health care and humanitarian efforts was obvious when he emerged from Mercy Hospital’s research lab.

“The lab is probably one of the best labs in all of Sierra Leone,” said Michael Owen, ambassador to Sierra Leone. Mr. Owen was in the Kaulanda Town Community of Bo to tour the hospital and Child Rescue Center, both of which he praised for helping the country heal in the nine years since a long civil war.

He and his wife, Anna, were joined by a flock of dignitaries as they visited the two facilities. The United Methodist Church, which has three major hospitals and four health centers in the country, is among Sierra Leone’s key health service providers.

The trip to Bo emphasized the important role the church is playing in the healing process. Needy and homeless children, plucked from the streets of Sierra Leone during the depths of an 11-year civil war, were the first to receive hope and help from the Child Rescue Center. Their medical needs have been tended by Mercy Hospital.

Building relationships
Both facilities are supported by Helping Children Worldwide, a foundation formed by nine churches in Virginia. Mercy Hospital also receives funding through the United Methodist Church’s designated-giving program as Advance Special No. 15173A.

Herndon, Va.-based Helping Children Worldwide provides 95 percent of the funds for Mercy Hospital. The foundation’s African Programs division, supported by 12 United Methodist church partners in Texas and Virginia, provides financial planning and oversight as well as strategic planning and program development for the Bo facilities. It also tends to the human resources needs of employees.

Several Helping Children Worldwide board members traveled from the United States to participate in the ambassador’s visit, which was planned as a way of creating a relationship and perhaps partnerships between the facilities, the embassy and America.

Partnerships were on the ambassador’s mind after he emerged from the lab. “We’re going to partner them with labs in America,” he said, citing the high standard of the facilities.

The hospital’s laboratory services include clinical investigation and research technology. The visit went well beyond the labs, as the ambassador’s party toured the 26-bed hospital that offers outpatient and in-patient services.

The hospital’s specialties include a prenatal clinic, which is much needed, as post-war Sierra Leone ranks among the countries with the highest infant and maternal mortality rates, according to the United Nations Human Development Index.

The hospital also offers therapeutic and treatment programs for malaria, HIV and other diseases.

Remote communities
During the tour, Bishop John Yambasu said the church wants to expand aid into remote provinces where health care is virtually non-existent.

“We really want to train our own nurses who are ready to go and work in the remote communities where health needs are greatest,” Bishop Yambasu told the ambassador.

“When you actually go into the interior of our country, people are dying every day in record numbers just because they do not have access to a medical facility,” he said.

The problem is that trained nurses and medical personnel prefer to work in the cities, he said.

This prompted Anna Owen to add that during a visit with health care workers in Makeni, in northern Sierra Leone, she was told they “were not very keen on going into the remote communities where most of the deliveries and maternal deaths take place.”

Ambassador Owen praised the Child Rescue Center, where 23 girls and 17 boys—orphans and street children—receive food, shelter, clothing, education and skills training all the way through their secondary school years.

“I appreciate the Americans who are part of Helping Children Worldwide who are coming here and have really made a sustained effort to support that facility for the last 10 years,” he said.

The children’s facility—which he called “a center of excellence”—has also spurred talk about partnerships in the United States, he said.

‘Transforming lives’
The Rev. Tom Berlin, who has led many work teams to help the facility in the last 10 years, was excited by the tour.

“It’s something very powerful when we come to know and love each other across cultures. We come to see each other as sisters and brothers,” Mr. Berlin said. His friendship with the bishop led to the founding of the center 10 years ago, with Bishop Yambasu serving as the first director.

The success of the Child Rescue Center also drew praise from Liberia Bishop John Innis during a March address to the Sierra Leone Conference.

“This is our pride. It is an excellent setup. It is transforming lives. It is making children to be educated; it is making children to be vision-driven,” he said.

He thanked Mr. Berlin—who has led many groups to the center—and the Virginia Conference “for committing your lives to transforming the lives of our future leaders.”

Mr. Berlin was similarly moved by what he saw during his tour with the ambassador of the facilities in southern Sierra Leone: “The will of God has uniquely brought us together not simply to bless the children, not simply to bless the hospital patients, but to bless us all.”

Mr. Jusu is communications director for the Sierra Leone Conference.
Did faith drive Titanic musicians?

BY JOEY BUTLER
United Methodist News Service

LONDON—April 15 this year marked the 99th anniversary of the sinking of the RMS Titanic, the famous shipwreck that claimed almost 1,500 lives. As the 20th century draws nearer, interest in the event is ramping up.

Of note to United Methodists is the fact that two of the members of the famed Titanic band were Methodists themselves.

A recently released book by music journalist Steve Turner detailing the lives of the band members cites the Methodist heritage of bandleader and violinist Wallace Hartley and cellist John Wesley Woodward, and speculates how their faith influenced their decision to play till the last.

In The Band That Played On (Thomas Nelson), Mr. Turner wrote: “[Hartley’s] moral character and his personal assurance that death was not the end must have stirred his bandmates. Together as a band under Hartley’s leadership, they transcended their personal limitations.”

Wallace Hartley was raised in Colne, England. His father, Albion Hartley, was choirmaster and Sunday school superintendent at Bethel Independent Methodist Chapel. Perhaps a foreshadowing of things to come, it was choirmaster Hartley who introduced the hymn “Nearer, My God, to Thee” to the congregation.

Hartley was one of the most famous bandleaders of the band, although its introduction to the movement wasn’t the first important impression. Several times John Wesley visited the mill town, which had a tough reputation, and was always met with opposition and, in some cases, violence. During one visit, he was met by an angry mob, and one of his helpers was thrown to his death off a bridge.

However, Methodism was eventually embraced in Colne, and almost 10 Methodist chapels sprang up there. Born in 1878, young Wallace studied at Colne’s Methodist day school, sang in Bethel’s choir and learned violin from a congregation member.

Less is known about the band member with the most “Methodist” name—John Wesley Woodward—but the cellist was raised in the Methodist tradition, and his father was an officer at Hill Top Methodist Chapel in West Bromwich, England. The Titanic sailed from Southampton, England, but its band was hired in Liverpool, making them, behind The Beatles, maybe the second-most famous band to emerge from that city.

Hartley was among three of eight Titanic musicians who were engaged to marry in the summer of 1912. Sadly, like many of his band mates, Hartley’s intent was to make this his last sea voyage and return home to concert work instead.

Power of music

Owing to the contract they’d signed with their Liverpool management, the musicians were considered second-class passengers, rather than first-class, and were not under the order of the captain.

When the ship struck the iceberg at 11:40 p.m. on April 14, the band would have already finished playing for the night. Yet, something led them to gather up their instruments and head for the first-class lounge. One survivor later claimed that, as she passed the men, one of them told her they were “just going to give them a tune to cheer things up a bit.”

“No one knows for sure why the band played,” Mr. Turner said. “We do know that Wallace Hartley once told a friend about the power of music to prevent panic. My feeling is that he was a person of great moral authority as well as a born leader, and therefore his advice at that time was passed on to all the men.”

It is thought that only three musicians’ bodies were recovered and identified, and the only one returned to his home. He was given a hero’s welcome as his funeral procession drew a crowd of 40,000—almost twice Colne’s population at the time—and Hartley’s body was crafted in his and the band’s honor.

Urban legend

The two most popular beliefs surrounding the Titanic band are that they played until the ship went down, and their last song was “Nearer, My God, to Thee.”

Because no definitive eyewitness accounts exist to prove either, even those who have studied Titanic history disagree. And survivors had, in some cases, completely contradictory details about whether the band was playing, where they were playing and what song they were playing.

Once the band was playing on the deck (they began their last performance in the first-class lounge), it’s not known how the two pianists would’ve participated, as there weren’t pianos on deck. And once the boat began to list, it would’ve been difficult for the cellists to continue to play seated.

But Phillip Gowen, a United Methodist and Titanic historian, thinks the band did, indeed, play on.

“From all the accounts I’ve either read, or people who were there that I’ve interviewed, I do think the band played till the end,” Mr. Gowen said.

“Most of the survivors that were in an area where they could’ve heard did claim that they heard the band playing.”

Mr. Turner said, “I think they played for as long as they could. There were some reports of them playing while the water began to engulf them and others of them eventually packing their instruments into cases.”

As for the last song the group performed, no one can agree, all survivors are now deceased and no living person will ever know for certain.

If their goal was to keep spirits up, a hymn typically reserved for funerals may not have been the best choice. But once their outcome was certain, who knows?

“It’s more likely that they played a French waltz called Songe d’Automne,’ ” Mr. Gowen said.

“Wallace Hartley once told a friend that if he was on a ship going down, the best thing he could do would be to play a hymn like ‘Nearer, My God, to Thee,’” Mr. Turner said. “One of the most convincing accounts I read, by one of the sailors, was that at the end, there was a lone violinist playing ‘Nearer, My God, to Thee.’ I suspect that was Wallace Hartley.”

Wesley hymn expresses the language of the heart

BY THOMAS WESLEY MOORE
Special Contributor

Charles Wesley (1707-1788) wrote this hymn in the years immediately following his disastrous mission trip to America in 1733, his subsequent illness upon his return, and then the unbridled enthusiasm of his conversion on Whitsunday (Pentecost Sunday), May 21, 1738.

“I’ve interviewed, I do think the band did, indeed, play on.

The hymn, “Make me a Clean Heart, O God,” is a prayer for pureness of heart, a plea for Christian perfection.

“O For a Heart to Praise My God” was introduced in the book Hymns and Sacred Poems in 1742, published by John Wesley, originally with eight stanzas. The scriptural basis was Psalm 51:10, thus the heading to the hymn, “Make me a Clean Heart, O God, and renew a right Spirit within me.” Thirty-eight years later, the eight-stanza hymn was included in a slightly altered form in the monumental Wesley hymnal, A Collection of Hymns: For the Use of the People Called Methodists (1780).

Wesley scholar James I. Warren Jr. describes this hymn as “Seeking Perfection in Love.” In the first stanza, the sinner yearns for her or his heart to be cleansed. Throughout the successive stanzas, the believer then pleads to God to keep her or his heart pure, growing to be more like Christ.

Each stanza explores the nature of the heart. Wesley employs the technique of synergocynode, in which a part—in this case the heart—substitutes for the whole. In the first stanza, the poet yearns for a heart to praise God for God’s redemption and love, and to personally feel God’s presence.

The only stanza that does not mention the heart is the penultimate stanza, where the writer focuses on the Re-deemer’s “ipsis.”

As the Christian’s heart becomes more Christ-like, the Christian is moving toward perfection. The language of stanza one is passionate: “…a heart that always feels thy blood/So freely shed for me.”

In stanza two, Wesley uses the rhetorical devise of tautology—repetition of the same idea in different words. “Resigned, submissive, meek” are all different expressions for the same idea. This was Wesley’s way of emphasizing the sinner’s role in coming to Christ for help.

In the third stanza, Wesley incorporates tautology again with the words “humble,” “lowly” and “contrite,” along with “Believing, true, and clean” to reiterate that the humble sinner who comes to Christ will have her or his heart renewed.

Again, Charles Wesley uses tautology in the last half of stanza four—“perfect and right and pure and good, a copy”—to call attention to Christ’s perfection and how Christians should strive to be like their Savior.

Finally, Wesley penned the following words in the 1742 collection: Thy Nature, dearest LORD, impart, Come quickly from above, Write Thy New Name upon my Heart, Thy New, Best Name of Love. The hymn is the same one now used in the previous stanza, reappears. Wesley employs personification—the believer pleading for “Love” (an image of Christ) to be written on the heart.

“O For a Heart to Praise My God” appears in the UM Hymnal (1898) in the whole stanza, and in the Praise Hymns of the People Called Methodists (1898). The tune, RICHMOND, composed by Thomas Haweis (1734-1820) for a friend named Leigh Richmond, who was a rector at Turvey, Bedfordshire. According to the hymnal’s editor, the Rev. Carlton Young, “RICHMOND entered our hymnals in 1966. The tune along with the text is seldom sung, though many think it easy to sing.”

Charles Wesley’s hymns often not only employ the theme of the heart, but also speak the language of the heart, or as a hymn from the same era says—“the music of the heart” (“Praise the Lord Who Reigns Above,” No. 96, stanza two).

Mr. Moore is a candidate for the master of sacred music degree, Perkins School of Theology, and studies hymnology with Dr. Michael Hawn.
D-C-M, D-L-T, M-O-U-S-E

By Dan Dick

United Methodism is a denomination of acronyms. We have such long names for everything that we constantly shorten them to initials. Staff-Parish Relations Committee becomes S.P.R.C. The Council on Finance and Administration is C.F.& A. Board of Ordained Ministry? BOOM! When asked to define the word “acronym,” one of my friends responded, “A Confusing, Really Obnoxious Name Yielding Meaninglessness!” “Yes, we use them all the time.

However, sometimes even knowing what the initials mean doesn’t clear things up. Take my title for example. I am the D.C.M. of the Wisconsin Annual Conference—Director of Connectional Ministries. Does that clear it up? I get asked all the time what my job is. When I give my title, I am met with blank stares, a pause, and then, “Yes, but, what do you do?”

In the Wisconsin Annual Conference, the Director of Connectional Ministries organizes and directs the program ministries of the Conference that provide service, support, resources and training for local congregations, circuits and districts. It is my job to find out what congregations and circuits need to do effective ministry, then work within the system to “connect” them to solutions. I do a lot of listening and consultation. I do a lot of planning and organizing. I do a lot of training and resource development and identification. I connect dots. I have one main goal and purpose in my work—to create healthy congregations and circuits by equipping leaders to be as effective as possible. The keys to doing my job are relationship building and effective communication.

Part of the work I do is to create yet more acronyms, such as the D.L.T.—the Discipleship Leadership Team. For over a decade, our Conference has not had a Council on Ministries to organize, coordinate, plan and prioritize our work. We have also lacked specific Conference resource teams to focus on training and support in Spiritual Formation, Christian Education, Evangelism, Worship & Preaching, Local Church Missions and Stewardship. Some of these important ministries have been addressed by other groups (our United Methodist Foundation has done excellent stewardship resource work for our Conference), but they have not been connected to, or coordinated with, a larger Conference vision and structure. We are in the process of correcting this problem. To fulfill our mission of “making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world,” we must help develop the most effective clergy and laity leaders possible—thus “Discipleship Leadership Team”—D.L.T.

It can be confusing to be a United Methodist, and we really shouldn’t have to work so hard trying to figure out what to be referring to. Acronyms. Even the term “Annual Conference” is confusing because we use it to describe three different things. Is it the once-a-year meeting where we set policy and direction for Wisconsin United Methodists? Is it the middle-judicatory office in Sun Prairie where staff and administration are housed to do “Conference-level” work for Wisconsin United Methodists? Or is it all of our congregations and charges as a corporate body of United Methodists doing ministry together in all forms? The answer is “YES!” When we say “Annual Conference,” we might mean any of these three things—even in one sentence such as, “The Wisconsin Annual Conference shall convene a meeting at the Annual Conference center for this year’s session of Annual Conference.” Aren’t we clever?

The only way through the muck and mire of all our confusing jargon is communication and collaboration. It is our commitment and goal to improve our communication throughout all levels of our Annual Conference, and to improve the relationships and systems that are essential to good and faithful ministry. All of us together—the Wisconsin Annual Conference—can make this work. But we need to do it F.D.Q., A.S.A.P., and... oh, sorry.

Wisconsin Partners with Other Conferences to Help East Angola

The third-annual East Angola Task Forces Meeting took place in February at the Wisconsin Conference UMC office in Sun Prairie. Representatives from the Yellowstone, California-Nevada, and Wisconsin Conferences, and from the General Board of Global Ministries met to speak about their partnerships with Angola. The three-day meeting provided a means for attendees to share successes and concerns, brainstorm new ideas, and look with hope towards the future; a future that looks a little brighter because of the work they do. They also conducted a Skype meeting with Bishop Gaspar Joao Domingos from West Angola, and Bishop Jose Quipungo and Pastor Andrade Gomez from East Angola.

The task forces help to provide relief for an ailing country. From 1975 to 2002, Angola—located in south-central Africa—experienced a devastating civil war. As a result, buildings and roads were left in ruins, few churches remain, and life expectancy and infant mortality rates are among the worst in the world. Hidden landmines prevent safe access to farm land, and unemployment is rampant. United Methodist Missionaries have been working for more than 50 years to support Angola. The Conference has raised more than $25,000 through fundraising events and other means. To date, we have raised more than $25,000 in cash and equipment. But the need for more resources continues.

The relationship between the task forces and the East Angola Conference is truly a partnership, and not just a one-way charity. Whereas the Angolan people are poor in material resources, they are rich in faith. Morais Quissico, Executive Secretary for the General Board of Global Ministries, said, “We get a lot from the Angolans—more than money or material goods. The enrichment of spirituality of Church is great in Africa; the churches there are growing as opposed to the mainland churches in America, which are shrinking. We look to them to see what we can adapt for America.” For more information, visit the Missions page at www.wisconsinumc.org or contact Deborah Thompson at 888-240-7328 or Lamarr Gibson at 608-873-3273. To donate, send a check to the Wisconsin Conference UMC Treasurer for Fund #7946.

Got Spirit? Come to Camp and Renew!

Around the camp fires, in the prairies, and in chapel, lives are changed and spirits are renewed. Don’t miss the opportunity to Find God in the Everyday at Summer Camp 2011 in Wisconsin. You will grow in your relationship with God, each other, and your community. Sign up now at www.WIUMCamps.org

ABOVE: UMC members need help to rebuild their church; LEFT: Many East Angolan buildings remain in ruins.
Don’t Miss this Important Workshop in October!

Bullies, Victims and Bystanders: A Seminar for Youth and Adults

Sadly, bullying over the internet as well as in schools has resulted in several recent suicide deaths. Even when death is not the end result, bullying can cause lasting psychological problems. Together, we can help stem the tide.

Be sure to attend Bullies, Victims and Bystanders: A Seminar for Youth and Adults. During this one day workshop, you will learn the causes of bullying, the impact on the victim and society, how to be empathetic, and what active steps both youth and adults can take to create a caring community that helps prevent bullying. The cost is $20 per person, including lunch. Youth scholarship help is available for those in need. Clergy will receive 6 CEUs. Participants have the option of attending one of two locations: Wauwatosa Avenue United Methodist Church, Saturday, October 22nd, 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. or St. Paul’s United Methodist Church, Stevens Point, Sunday, October 23rd, 1 p.m. – 8 p.m.

Middle and high school-age youth, pastors, school personnel, youth leaders, and parents of all faiths are invited. The seminar will feature resource leaders David A. Levine and Lee Domann. Levine is a teacher, author, facilitator and musician who has been working with students, teachers and parents since 1984. He is the founder of Teaching Empathy, a training, development and research group devoted to creating Schools of Belonging. According to Levine, “the work on bullying is really a consciousness movement that focuses on the right of all students to feel safe, connected and secure. During this workshop, we will invite students to have real life conversations about their choices and the impact they have on themselves and others.”

Domann is a United Methodist minister under special appointment with the Kansas East UMC Conference, an award-winning songwriter, storyteller and modern-day troubadour. His music has been recorded by a variety of well-known artists and he has recorded seven solo albums. His song, Howard Gray, about a kid nobody liked in school, is widely used as an inspiration for camps and workshops. Domann said, "The first priority in bullying prevention is exactly that—prevention. But for the faith community that’s only the beginning. We seek reconciliation and restoration. The factual story song, Howard Gray, witnesses to that possibility. Fifty years ago, I helped bully a child in grade school. Years later, I asked for forgiveness and Howard gave it. One of my primary roles at the Wisconsin event will be to share this song and the healing power that God graciously continues to give through this story.”

For more information and to register,

Wisconsin Witness at General and Jurisdictional Conference

By Dan Dick

Every four years, each Annual Conference has a unique and valuable opportunity to participate in the shaping of our United Methodist witness and impact on the world. We send “delegates” to General and Jurisdictional Conference to set policy, cast vision, prioritize and plan the mission and ministry of The United Methodist Church. This is a time to actually shape the identity and purpose of the people called United Methodist.

In 2012, Wisconsin will send the smallest delegations in our Conference’s history to both General and Jurisdictional Conference. We will send three clergy and three laity leaders—teams of six—to each. Historically, our Conference strived to balance our delegation across racial and ethnic, gender, age, theological, cultural, and experience-level considerations. With the smaller numbers, we will need to trust one another much more and acknowledge that every group, caucus and interest cannot attend. This offers us a serious and important challenge: how do we create “teams” instead of “delegations”?

The primary focus of the General Conference is to set policy, vision, and direction. The primary focus of Jurisdictional Conference is to elect episcopal leadership (which the North Central Jurisdiction will not be doing in 2012) and to look at structural and procedural issues unique within each jurisdiction.

What we need to be asking ourselves as we prepare to elect our team is “What witness do we want the Wisconsin Annual Conference to make at both Conferences?” Will ours be a witness of unity? One of collaboration? One of focusing on the future? One of building bridges? One of health and vitality? Is there a message or metaphor we want to carry to our global Church? This is a special opportunity for us to model the kind of Church we believe God wants us to be.

As an Annual Conference, we are reflecting on five questions for those considering serving on our General and Jurisdictional teams, as well as those who will be voting to send them. They are:

1. How well can I represent the entire Annual Conference, even those with whom I may disagree on certain issues?
2. How will I build trust with those who will not be “at the table” so that they are confident that their concerns will not be lost or forgotten?
3. What will I do to foster unity and collaborative leadership as part of the General or Jurisdictional team?
4. How will I serve the Wisconsin Annual Conference as an ambassador and a faithful steward of our vision and priorities?
5. What will I do to help our team stay forward focused and committed to moving the Wisconsin Annual Conference into a healthy, holy future?

Though the challenges of sending smaller groups are great, we can work together to elect the very best teams to represent our great Annual Conference. We need prayers, positive attitudes, open communication, and constant encouragement. Together we can make a witness to our whole denomination that Wisconsin Annual Conference is committed to serving Christ, the world, and the Church as faithfully as possible.
Faith-based wedding movie gambles on PG-13 approach

By Mary Jacobs

Jumping the Broom, the latest and pos-
tistic message.

The moves on an older woman; and a
chef who woos a young wedding guest
with a light, almost jokey touch. Sab-
rina (Paula Patton) and her groom Jason
(Jazef James) lead a wedding party in
Jumping the Broom, co-produced by Dallas
megachurch pastor T.D. Jakes.

Newlyweds Jason (Laz Alonso) and Sabrina (Paula Patton) lead a wedding party in Jumping the Broom, co-produced by Dallas megachurch pastor T.D. Jakes.

Faith-based wedding movie gambles on PG-13 approach

By Mary Jacobs

DALLAS—The lovely, obviously un-
married young woman fastens her
bra as she chats with her hunky and
shirtless young man. The two have
shared a “one-night stand,” and it’s
coming to its awkward conclusion.
So goes the opening scene of
Jumping the Broom, the latest and pos-
tistic message.

A key plot element of the film is
the fact that bride Sabrina Watson
(Ms. Patton) and her groom Jason
Taylor (Laz Alonso) have opted to wait
until they’re married to have sex. But
for a faith-based film with an absti-
nence theme, Jumping the Broom is
hopping with sensual scenes. There’s a
hilarious, surprise rendition of the
song “Sexual Healing” by Sabrina’s
aunt Geneva (Tony-nominated actress
Valarie Pettiford) at the wedding re-
hearsal; a sexy young man who makes
the moves on an older woman; and a
chef who woos a young wedding guest
with a rather erotic description of the
oysters he wants her to sample.

How’d all that stuff get in? Among
the film’s writers and producers,
there was constant debate over what
was seen and not seen, said pro-
ducer/writer Glendon Palmy. “The
movie was never scripted to be erotic.
We wanted to respect our faith-based
audience and at the same time also
appeal to a secular audience.”

The absence story line is told
with a light, almost jokey touch. Sab-
rina’s the gal in the one-night stand,
and that sexual foray clearly isn’t her
first. But she vows to God that it’ll be
her last, until she meets the man that’s
truly right for her. Jason proves to be
that man, and he’s so perfect that he
goes to the sexless courtship.

But abstinence seems an after-
thought; what this story is really about
are class differences. The bride’s fam-
ily, the Watsons, is a wealthy and well-
connected African-American dynasty
(“They got white people working for
them” as one character observes) liv-
ing on Martha’s Vineyard, presided
over by the stern and proper Mrs.
Watson (Angela Bassett). The Taylors,
however, are from Brooklyn—Pamela
Taylor (Loretta Devine) is a single
mom with a sassy mouth who works at
the post office. She shows up for the
wedding weekend with three unin-
vited and somewhat motley guests
tagging along.

Faith gets some airtime when the
couple meets with their pastor (played
by T.D. Jakes) to discuss the Bible
verse they’ll read at the wedding. We
see the groom praying, and his
mother reading her Bible. The reli-
gious moments mainly point to mes-
sages of forgiveness, marital and
family fidelity more than a particular
religious faith. Producers used the
term “crossover” to describe the film;
the religious message is sufficiently
generic that the film runs no risk of
coming off as a Sunday school lesson.

The stars say they feel at home with
the faith aspects of the film but
were drawn to a story, they believe,
that works on its own.

“I am a person of faith, absolutely,
but in addition to that, this is a script
that with or without faith, I appreci-
ated,” said Ms. Bassett at the Dallas
premiere of the film on April 23. “It
was a wonderful opportunity to be in-
volved that way because that’s where I
live and breathe.”

Working on a set with a pastor on
duty wasn’t new to Ms. Devine, who
appeared in one of Mr. Jakes’ earlier
films, Woman Thou Art Loosed. She
said that Mr. Jakes shared books and
tapes with the cast to help keep them
on the “right path,” and she didn’t
mind at all.

“I know how important these films
are because they really change the
lives of the people that go and see
them,” she said. “This film has great
messages without being very preachy.”
mjacobs@umr.org

Artist’s fourth album
offers an ode to love

By Mallory McCall

Staff Writer

Loverboy

Brett Dennen

Dualtone

Sound/Style: Funky Rock

Listeners would also like: Neil Young,
Amos Lee, Tracy Chapman

There’s a quirkiness to
songwriter Brett Dennen that
is flat-out intriguing. He’s like that
street-artist you dodge at first but
then purposely make the block again
just to hear another heart-pricking
lyric crawl from his innocent smile.

Chances are you’ll either love him
or hate him; but before you decide,
give his new album, Loverboy, a listen.
This is his fourth album since 2004,
and unlike his previous classic folk,
coffeehouse records, this self-pro-
duced 14-track compilation leans
more toward the gritty, electric rock of
the ’80s.

With long-lined melodies and
clever rhymes, Mr. Dennen tackles
the heavy subjects of love, death and
pain, yet somehow manages to sound
hopeful the whole way through. His
high-pitched voice is sticky sweet and
softly frail—which makes for a weird mix
in the funky rock world. But strangely
enough, it’s that delicate voice that an-
chors the sunny songs in a raw hon-
esty.

And don’t be fooled by the school-
boy album title. Although Loverboy is
clearly an ode to love, it’s not necessar-
ily limited to the cliché summer romance;
it speaks to several kinds of loves—
romantic, friendship, love for your-
self, love for the world, love for music,
love for God.

The opening track, “Surprise, Sur-
pise,” paints a colorful picture of the
harsh reality of the poverty and dis-
parity in the world around us:
Grandma’s gathering aluminum
cans in a rusty shopping cart / Born-
Againer get their lives together / while
the whole world’s falling apart. . . .
Some of them come up hard and
hungry / stopping up to take your turn /
some of them throwing their money in
the fire just to watch it burn
This peace-loving social com-
mentary is more common in Mr. Den-
nen’s earlier work—like the popular
songs “Ain’t No Reason,” “There Is So
Much More” and “I Ask When,” but his
new album embeds a broader human-
itarian message.

“This album is about having fun
and letting go,” he writes in his brief
liner note.

“Dancing at a Funeral” snaps,
crackles and pops much like Pete
Townshend’s “Let My Love Open the
Door.” With echoing shoo-wops, this
ironically lovely song is a call to live
to the fullest: “We are getting older at
the blink of an eye, so don’t let the
moment pass you by.”

The fun-loving spirit continues in
“The Comeback Kid (That’s My Dog),”
which is a cheerful root for the under-
dog—the broken-hearted lover, the
straying friend and the defeated, cry-
ing on the bathroom floor.

Each track unveils another way in
which Mr. Dennen is a loverboy, and
“Sydney (I’ll Come Running)” is no
different. With a handclap-powered
falsetto chorus, the song tells a story
about a friend who got in trouble for
something he didn’t do. Mr. Dennen
was in Sydney, Australia when he got
word that his best friend back in Cali-
ifornia had been framed. Feeling help-
less on the other side of the world, Mr.
Dennen decided to write a song for
his friend about standing up to bullies
and being a good friend.

“Can’t Stop Thinking” has a reggae
vibe and includes a horn section, a
new element to Mr. Dennen’s music.
Drawing inspiration from Van Morri-
son and Marvin Gay, Mr. Dennen
swings from a full voice to somewhat
of a screaming falsetto in songs like
“Must Be Losing My Mind,” which has
an old step-and-sway, deep-base funk
and echoing chorus.

Sift through the 60 minutes of ho-
memongous jams and you’re bound
to find something that tickles your fancy.
Loverboy may not be groundbreaking
in the world of pop, rock, funk or folk,
but it’s definitely a “feel good” album
that celebrates God-given life.

mccall@umr.org
**By LINDA BLOOM**  
**United Methodist News Service**

In April, a month after the earthquake and tsunami that devastated northeastern Japan, the neighborhood around Eiko Church in Ishinomaki remained mired in mud. Still, there were signs of progress in one of the coastal cities hardest hit on March 11 by the tsunami, even as occasional aftershocks shook the ground. Running water had been restored a few days earlier. The church, part of the United Church of Christ in Japan, had just reopened its kindergarten, although some of the 50 children enrolled there had not returned. The church itself still bore watermarks from the floodwaters.

**Church response**

Volunteers sent by the Emmaus Center in Sendai, Japan, have organized relief efforts, were shoveling mud—thickened with pulp from a nearby paper factory—out of homes. One group tried to clear a path to remove an abandoned car stuck between two homes—one of many such cars littering the streets.

The Rev. Minoru Kobuna, pastor of Eiko Church, led a small delegation of Christians from Korea, Hong Kong and Taiwan through the neighborhood. A stench of mud, trash and seawater penetrated the air, and he suggested the visitors might want to wear masks to cover their noses and mouths, as many locals did.

Christians from Japan and Asian neighbors already have sent money, prayers and support for earthquake survivors in the Tohoku region, says the Rev. Claudia Genung-Yamamoto, a Tokyo-based United Methodist missionary who accompanied the group. Churches in Taiwan also sent much-needed bicycles, which allow volunteers to reach areas near the ocean.

**Continuing fears**

The National Police Agency of Japan has confirmed 14,238 deaths from the disaster, mostly by drowning. More than 5,000 were injured, and 12,228 are listed as missing.

But the survivors, including some 150,000 living in evacuation sites across the country, continue to deal with uncertainty. The fear of radiation contamination continues since Japanese authorities raised the crisis level at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant to Level 7, putting it on par with the Chernobyl disaster in 1986. Some people cannot return to their homes. Farming, fishing and other industries have been crippled.

The needs of basic relief assistance—hot meals, sanitation and medical and psychosocial care—“still remain as a big issue,” said Takeshi Kominma, head of emergencies for Church World Service (CWS) Asia Pacific. A CWS team recently returned from another assessment tour of the earthquake region.

Because of the impact of the damage to both the infrastructure and the people, supplemental relief efforts by nongovernmental aid groups remain crucial, he said.

Trauma from the disaster can resurface quickly. “During our team’s interviews, we also came across a survivor who seemed to be really outgoing at the beginning, but suddenly started to weep for the dead, indicating how she could not save them at the time of tsunami,” Mr. Kominma wrote on April 23. “We are facing tens of thousands of such people who need careful attention.”

CWS Asia Pacific has signed a partnership agreement with the National Christian Council in Japan for emergency response, recovery and other humanitarian initiatives, and an office has been established in the council’s compound in Tokyo. The council, along with the United Church of Christ in Japan and Korean Christian Council in Japan, already supports the church-directed relief work that has made the Emmaus Center in Sendai a hub of activity.

Every Thursday night, 70 to 80 representatives of churches in the area gather to pray and discuss activities of the newly formed Sendai Alliance of Churches for Relief Work. “None of us are experts [on relief work], but we have gathered volunteers and have been reaching out to the community,” the Rev. Jeffrey Mensendiek, a United Church of Christ missionary, told the visiting delegation of Asian church partners.

Mr. Mensendiek serves as director of the youth center at Emmaus.

For example, as the cherry blossoms bloomed April 18, the center started its fifth week of hosting and coordinating volunteers from all over Japan. Mr. Mensendiek reported in his regular email update.

**‘Tremendous energy’**

“Each morning we have a meeting before sending the volunteers out on their bicycles heading for Shichigo,” he wrote. “Each day new people join us. There is tremendous energy in the air. Young people are at the center of the planning and organizing.”

For the Emmaus Center—started 60 years ago by missionaries of the Evangelical and Reformed Church and supported for 30 years by the Methodist Church—their participation is a product of the years of commitment to serving young people in Sendai, he added.

“I want our churches in the U.S. to know that the seeds we planted in faith have taken root in so many young people in this country,” Mr. Mensendiek wrote. “God is alive in each of them, whether they know it or not. And we are blessed to be a sign of hope to the world.”

In Ishinomaki, another sign of hope is that worship never stopped at Eiko Church, even though one of the 21 congregants was lost in the tsunami and only three people came to the first Sunday after the disaster. Gradually, people have returned to the neighborhood, cleaning up what is left of their homes.

Ms. Genung-Yamamoto said she felt “an incredible sadness” as she thought about the lives lost in towns such as Ishinomaki.

However, on Easter Sunday, she told her congregation at West Tokyo Union Church that she was inspired by the signs of hope she saw amid the devastation, including a “cross of comfort” erected at the site of a church washed away by the tsunami.

“I saw groups of Christians working together,” she said. “Theological differences are not an issue now as everyone pulls together. It is spring, and new life and new hope come. Out of the mud will come new growth.”

How to help:

Gifts to UMCOR can be left in church offering plates or mailed to UMCOR, PO Box 9068, New York, NY 10087. Please write “Japan Emergency, UMCOR Advance #3021317” on the memo line of your check. Credit card donations are accepted at (800) 554-8583 or online at www.givetomission.org.

Workers clear debris from the damaged port at Rikuzentakata, Japan.
UMVIM Team Brings Hope and Help to Haiti

Deborah Thompson, the Missions Coordinator for the Wisconsin Conference UMC, was struck by the hard-working nature of the people of Haiti after going on a nine-day mission trip in April to the country. She recently shared her experiences upon returning from this troubled island nation that is still reeling from the devastating earthquake of January 2010.

According to Thompson, “Haiti was very poor before the earthquake happened, and it is obvious how much the disaster added to their woes. But you can also see how much has been cleaned up over the past fifteen months. Yes, real progress is being made.”

Thompson traveled to Haiti as part of the United Methodist Volunteers in Mission (UMVIM) Team with other United Methodists from around the country. April 2011 marked the start of the second year of the Haiti Response Plan.

On a Mission to Rebuild, Teach and Play

Thompson first traveled to the capital city Port-au-Prince, where she and other missionaries received training at an orientation session. Volunteers were assigned to small teams, and each team was given a different assignment and/or geographic location to serve. Thompson’s team, composed of eight volunteers from Texas, South Dakota, Washington, Colorado, and Wisconsin, was “sent out in the field” to the municipality of Arcahaie, which is located in the western part of the country.

Her team was assigned to sand and paint the inside of a church, as well as teach local children attending a vacation bible school.” Thompson said that the children were a joy. Her team played games with them, taught them about the bible, and got to know the children quite well.

“The living conditions were certainly what one would expect in a developing nation,” Thompson noted, “We all lived together in a compound. There was no air-conditioning, no running water, and no ice. The heat was unbearable, and the only transportation we had was our own feet. When we drank water, it was room temperature to slightly warm at best.” Thompson said the food provided was very good, and pointed out that the cooks were trained to prepare the food and feed the mission workers in a way that would help prevent illnesses.

Thompson explained that a goal of the United Methodist Church is to maintain a presence in Haitian communities hit hard by the earthquake. This way, critical education can take place as to how best to use the water resources. “Information about the different ways to use and keep water separate for different tasks—whether for animals and crops, for washing and personal hygiene, or for human drinking purposes—is a very critical message that needs to reach Haitian citizens,” Thompson said.

Grace Hospital Thanks United Methodists

A highlight for Thompson on her trip was a visit to Grace Children’s Hospital, founded in 1967. This hospital is the flagship ministry of International Child Care, and is recognized as Haiti’s leading medical facility dedicated to the treatment of children with tuberculosis. Each year, the hospital receives thousands of children who are suffering from this and other diseases.

The staff at Grace Hospital spoke with Thompson and other volunteers, and pointed out how thankful they are to the United Methodists who have done so much good for the organization. The hospital suffered much damage from the earthquakes, and the staff credits the Church for enabling the doctors, nurses, and other staff members to be in a position to continue to provide medical help for the children in the area.

The Missionaries Plan to Return

Serving on this mission is the first of two stages of Haiti travel and work for Thompson. As she has now served on a team, she is qualified to lead a team back to Haiti at some point in the future. As she explained, “I will likely lead a group of young adults, and on this next mission, I will train someone from my group to then serve as the leader the next time he or she comes to the country.” This way of missionaries serving first as a “follower” on a team, and then returning to the country to serve as a leader on a subsequent mission, is part of the UMC’s plan to continue efforts to help Haiti’s long term recovery.

Thompson discussed the other benefits the volunteer program offers Haitian citizens. For each participating missionary, three Haitians were employed to assist with the mission. “We really were able to help Haitians help themselves. We worked alongside the local people, and if we hadn’t been there, our Haitian coworkers would not have had jobs,” she said. The jobs provided to Haitian citizens were funded by mission volunteers’ donations.

Haitian People are Inspiring

Thompson was clearly moved by her trip to Haiti, and noted that although some communities are starting to rebuild, many people throughout the nation are still living in tents. She also said that it is readily apparent that Haitian citizens are actively looking for work and for ways to get involved with recovery efforts. There is a great deal of positive energy in the country.

Thompson explained the role that family plays in the nation of Haiti, “There is a great sense of family—when people were dislocated immediately after the earthquake, family members were there to quickly step in and take care of each other. The importance of family in this country is very, very clear.”

Thompson is optimistic about the future of the country’s recovery efforts, and looks forward to her return visit. For more information about volunteer trips to Haiti, contact Deborah Thompson at dthompson@wisconsinumc.org or 888-240-7328. To donate to Haiti relief efforts, mail your check for Fund #6010 to the Wisconsin Conference UMC Treasurer. To date, Wisconsin has generously given $488,380 to help Haiti.

Northcott Neighborhood House Celebrates 50 Years

On May 1st, the people of Northcott Neighborhood House celebrated the 50th anniversary of the organization with a dinner meeting at the Hyatt Regency in downtown Milwaukee. Northcott—a multipurpose community center that serves approximately 10,000 Milwaukee residents every year—provides programs for seniors and youth, adult education/GED, after-school education and recreation, employment and training, and community development. It also has one of the oldest Head Start programs in the state, established in 1965. For the people who take part in these programs, Northcott is “a home away from home,” and the staff is like a surrogate family.

This “home” came to be through the support of the United Methodist Women, the Wisconsin Conference UMC, and the General Board of Global Ministries. Over the last 50 years, Northcott has grown from humble beginnings to become a strong presence in the community. According to McArthur Weddle, Executive Director of Northcott, “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. We wouldn’t be able to touch the lives of 10,000 people wholeheartedly if we weren’t for the support from the various United Methodist Churches throughout the state.”

Northcott Neighborhood House is located at 2460 North 6th Street, Milwaukee, WI 53212. The staff can be contacted at 414-372-3770. View their inspiring video online at www.youtube.com/WisconsinUMC. Contact Michele Virnig at 888-240-7328 or mvirnig@wisconsinumc.org to request a DVD.
The steeple from the roof of Ford’s Chapel United Methodist Church in Harvest, Ala., was removed by the April 27 tornado and repositioned next to the church parking lot.

Volunteers launch UM relief efforts in Southeast

BY SAM HODGES
Managing Editor
AND MARY JACOBS
Staff Writer

GRiffin, Ga.—The Rev. Sandra Fendley makes daily trips to what’s left of Vaughan United Methodist Church after a tornado blew off its roof and punched holes in its walls, essentially destroying the 107-year-old frame structure.

She’s the church’s pastor, but at age 70, she’s not taking the lead on debris removal. Instead, she’s been cheering on the many volunteers who have arrived un-beknowned to help, learning their names and churches, providing effusive thanks and spontaneous hugs, and noticing with specificity every thing delivered “hurricane.” Ms. Fendley exclaimed on Sunday afternoon, May 1, during a visit after she led worship at the other church she serves as local pastor.

“There was nothing here but big, old oak trees!”

This has been a treacherously busy season for natural disasters across the Southern states, and the toll includes the destruction of a handful of UMC church buildings, with many more damaged. There has also, at scene after scene, been an outpouring of help. That’s certainly been the case at Vaughan UMC.

“Honey, you can’t believe the amount of volunteers,” Ms. Fendley said. “Methodist church teams from all over have been here and cleaned things up.”

A wide swath

The April 27 storm cut a wide swath through seven states—Alabama, Tennessee, Mississippi, Georgia, Kentucky, Arkansas and Virginia—and left a million people without electrical power. Tuscaloosa, Ala., was among the hardest hit.

Federal officials noted the April 27 storm as the biggest on record for a single 24-hour period. Preliminary estimates counted 312 tornadoes, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, well above the previous record of 148 twisters in 1974.

At press time, the death toll was at 340, with more than 200 still missing, making this the second deadliest day due to a twister in U.S. history.

That storm followed on the heels of another system that stampeded through the Southern states, with many more damaged.

United Methodist News Service photo by Kathleen Barry

UMC bishops vote for full-time council president

BY SAM HODGES
Managing Editor

ST. SIMONS ISLAND, Ga.—While taking pains to say they’re not trying to create a pope for the United Methodist Church, the denomination’s bishops voted for making their council presidential a full-time position, one that would likely have enhanced influence and a higher profile.

The Council of Bishops, meeting here May 1-6, overwhelmingly approved recommending a constitutional amendment that would allow as council president a full-time “set aside” bishop who would not have to oversee a conference but could focus on the broad work of the church.

Bishops foresee their president as the chief ecumenical officer, and as a key implementer of the Call to Action plan for reforming the UMC in response to a long slide in membership within the United States.

The bishops also signaled their willingness to shrink the UMC bureaucracy, voting to fold into their council the General Commission for Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns.

Further approval is required for both the full-time council presidency and ending the stand-alone status of the commission.

“These are ideas that will have to be debated,” one bishop said.

See ‘Council’ page 2b

UMC bishops vote for full-time council president
move to the next stage,” said Illinois Area Bishop Gregory V. Palmer. “The church as a whole, through the General Conference, will have their say about them.”

Indeed, the constitutional amendment will require approval by a two-thirds aggregate vote of the annual conferences, assuming the 2012 General Conference—the denomination’s quadrennial legislative body—goes along.

But Western North Carolina Bishop Larry Goodpaster, current president of the Council of Bishops, said the bishops have shown they’re willing to make changes that will result in more vital congregations, leading more people to become disciples of Jesus Christ.

“It’s a commitment on the part of the bishops to fully live into the mission of the church,” he said. “We’re trying to position ourselves to give the leadership needed.”

Not at the table

Currently, the Council of Bishops' presidency is a part-time, two-year position. The debate to move to a full-time council presidency was lengthy, stretching over three years, and included mention that some bishops were privately concerned that a Methodist pope was in the making—or at least the perception of one.

Proponents of the full-time council presidency said the “set aside” bishop would, over the projected four-year term, represent the denomination in high-level ecumenical councils and initiatives, help align disparate parts of the UMC democracy, and play a key role in pushing the Call to Action reforms; but would not have anything like pope-level power or tenure.

“This is not in any way, shape or form that kind of a role,” said Washington, D.C. Area Bishop John Schol.

But some bishops who favored the full-time presidency argued that the UMC does need someone whom outsiders can identify as its leader. Retired Bishop William Oden, of Santa Fe, N.M., noted that President Obama’s faith-based advisory board doesn’t include a United Methodist.

“We’re not at that table the way we should be,” he said.

‘Historic’ downsizing

The bishops moved more quickly to support ending stand-alone status for the General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns.

As an office within the Council of Bishops, it would still have a board, but the number of members would drop from 38 to 15. Scaling down the operation would save $500,000 every four years, mainly in reduced travel costs for meetings, said the commission’s top executive, the Rev. Stephen Sidorak Jr.

During discussion before the vote, bishops applauded Dr. Sidorak and commission board members for recommending the change. Bishop Schol and others described as “historic” the act of a commission’s leadership voting to reduce its size and profile.

Dr. Sidorak said the changes will focus the denomination’s outreach to other religious groups.

“This is a real validation for ecumenical and interreligious work,” he said.

Asbury’s example

Bishop Goodpaster used his opening day presidential address to challenge colleagues to lead by example in renewing the UMC, including making substantive changes in how the episcopacy itself works.

“What would it look like to abandon competing interests and personal agendas in order to become a beloved community where grace abounds and where the community supports and holds one another accountable?” he asked.

Bishop Goodpaster’s speech, titled “Leading into the Future,” largely avoided specific proposals, though he cited the Call to Action blueprint.

Mostly, he sought to inspire, drawing on the example of Francis Asbury, pioneer of Methodism in America. He challenged bishops to follow Asbury’s example in various ways, including the willingness to use popular culture to spread the gospel.

“Think emergent leadership,” Bishop Goodpaster said.

He added that no solution can be found without increased faithfulness.

“We have stumbled along the way,” Bishop Goodpaster said. “We have built shrines and monuments where we try to capture and confine him. We have created councils, committees, boards and study groups. And, while we are trying to figure out how we can survive, Jesus continues to go on ahead.”

Bishop Goodpaster noted that the United Methodist News Service photo by Heath Hahn

The Rev. Stephen J. Sidorak Jr. (left) speaks with retired United Methodist Bishop William B. Oden. Bishop Oden, a member of the Council of Bishops’ ecumenical task force, presented a recommendation to fold Dr. Sidorak’s agency, the General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Affairs, into the council.

Church press group honors Reporter as ‘Best in Class’

STAFF REPORTS

CHICAGO—The United Methodist Reporter earned an award of merit plaque for “Best in Class” from the Associated Church Press’ 2011 “Best of the Christian Press.”

ACP is the oldest interdenominational press organization in the country. Awards for work done in 2010 were presented at an April 29 banquet during the organization’s annual convention, held this year in Chicago.

The Reporter shared the award of merit in the category, “National/International Newspaper, with the Christian Chronicle. The award of excellence went to the Mennonite Weekly Review.

Honorees also included David Briggs, former editor of the Nashville, Tenn.-based United Methodist News Service (UMNS). Mr. Briggs received an award of excellence in feature articles for stories on UM mission workers who were trapped in the rubble of the Haiti earthquake in January 2010.

An award of merit for “Personal Experience/First-Person Account” went to UMNS writer Heather Hahn for “Finding God Amid Fire’s Ashes,” a commentary on lessons she has learned from surviving two house fires.

Photographer Mike DuBose of UMNS received an award of excellence for his contributions to a series of articles on the denomination’s “Imagine No Malaria” campaign.
How do we respond to the death of our enemy?

By Rebekah Miles

On May 1, Vice President Joe Biden and President Barack Obama (at left) received an update on the mission against Osama bin Laden in the Situation Room of the White House. Seated, from center, were Brigadier General Marshall Webb, Deputy National Security Adviser Denis McDonough, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates.

By Rebekah Miles

Special Contributor

In the days immediately following Osama bin Laden’s death, many Christians focused their comments not on the actions of bin Laden, the Navy SEALs who killed him or the U.S. officials who literally called the shots, but on the young people who celebrated in streets and on campuses around the country. I have to admit that riotous celebration in the face of political execution is hardly the stuff of Christian heroism and virtue, but maybe those spontaneous, electrified reactions to bin Laden’s death are not as callous or unchristian as they at first seemed.

Young people, like the rest of us, have a deep, God-given desire for justice. We see the injustices of the world and long for things to be made right. In recent days, many have quoted biblical injunctions against rejoicing at the destruction of an enemy. The most frequently quoted verse on Facebook and Twitter in the hours following bin Laden’s death was Proverbs 24:17, “Do not rejoice when your enemies fall.”

But the Bible is also full of people who do rejoice. Another frequently quoted text on Facebook was Proverbs 11:10, “When the wicked perish, there are shouts of joy.”

The heroes of Scripture are not immune to this impulse. Not halfway through the second book of the Bible, Moses, Miriam, and their company see the corpses of the Egyptian soldiers who had pursued them into the sea, and they respond by singing and dancing. In an ancient Jewish story about this celebration, the angels join in the festivities; God-solid the angels—but not the humans—for rejoicing in the death of his creatures. It is tempting to think that some young people might do the same.

When you see the emotions on the faces of those celebrating, you have to wonder if it goes far deeper than that.

Many Christians have reflected on the appropriate Christian response to bin Laden’s death. My responses have been all over the place—sorrow at the tragedies around the world that led to bin Laden’s death, anger at the celebration, at anger at terrorists, sober satisfaction that justice had been done, and nagging worry that our national sense of justice in this situation may mask our complicity with injustice in other parts of our shared life. And sometimes, like Anna, I think, “I don’t know. I just don’t know.”

Rebekah Miles

I’ve wondered how one person could hold all those conflicting feelings at the same time, but that is precisely what we see in Scripture. When bad things happen to bad people, our forefathers and mothers of Scripture were as mixed in their responses as we are. Maybe all of those conflicting responses are there in Scripture because they are so typical of human life. We could take a lesson from the ancient midrash on Moses and Miriam at the Red Sea where God chastens the angels for rejoicing in the death of the enemy, but leaves the humans to all their wild and conflicting emotions. At least for now, “I don’t know. I just don’t know.”

Dr. Miles, a United Methodist clergywoman from the Arkansas Conference, is associate professor of ethics at Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University.
The United Methodist Church of the Servant doesn’t hold the record of most meals assembled for the charity Stop Hunger Now in a single event. But the Oklahoma City church put together a whopping 144,000 meals on Sunday, April 10. And it did so without calling off worship services.

“We shut down Sunday School, but not church,” said Scott Smith, the church’s director of discipleship.

And Church of the Servant may well have set a minor record, at least for congregational efforts.

“It’s unusual to have more than one packing area, and they had eight,” said Matt Casteel, a Jackson, Miss.-based program manager for Stop Hunger Now. “They managed wonderfully.”

Church of the Servant is one of a fast-growing number of churches and other nonprofits that have collaborated with Stop Hunger Now, which has close ties with United Methodists.

The Raleigh, N.C.-based charity was founded and is still led by the Rev. Ray Buchanan, a UM clergyman and former Marine who was named 2010 “Tar Heel of the Year” by the News & Observer of Raleigh. Two current board members, the Rev. JoElaine Harris and the Rev. Reggie Ponder, also are UM clergy.

The General Commission on United Methodist Men has officially recommended to its members that they work with Stop Hunger Now, and some annual conferences have sponsored packing events.

“We’re inextricably linked to the Methodist church,” Mr. Casteel said.

Since 1998, Stop Hunger Now has packed more than 41 million meals for distribution in 76 countries.

CHURCH OF THE SERVANT

These boxes, containing 216 meals each, were loaded onto a truck and later shipped to Colombia, Brazil, Peru and Haiti.

These boxes, containing 216 meals each, were loaded onto a truck and later shipped to Colombia, Brazil, Peru and Haiti.

Mr. Casteel said that nearly all of the meals ultimately will go to schools and orphanages in Peru, Colombia and Brazil, though some may go to Haiti, where earthquake relief efforts continue.

The Rev. Ray Buchanan, a United Methodist minister and founder of Stop Hunger Now, helped deliver relief supplies in Haiti following the January 2010 earthquake.

The Rev. Ray Buchanan, a United Methodist minister and founder of Stop Hunger Now, helped deliver relief supplies in Haiti following the January 2010 earthquake.

Mission opportunity

The groups then provide volunteers to assemble the meals. The packing events have caught on and even made headlines, such as in 2008, when students from North Carolina colleges and universities came together to pack more than 1 million. (North Carolina students set a new record the next year.)

Mr. Smith learned of Stop Hunger Now when a friend posted a video on Facebook of the college students’ epic effort.

“I thought, ‘What a great opportunity for our church,’” he said. “I’ve always had a desire to figure out how to get more of our people involved in missions.”

Church of the Servant had its first Stop Hunger Now event on March 7, 2010. Some 500 volunteers assembled just over 101,000 meals.

This year, event leaders aimed higher, raising about $35,000 for meals and recruiting more than 1,300 volunteers for packing day. They worked in four shifts, spaced from 7:45 a.m. to 1 p.m.

A job for all

“Each person has a job,” Mr. Smith said. “One person is going to put a vitamin sachet into the sack. Another person is going to put in the vegetables. Another puts in the soy protein, and another the rice. The runners run the completed sacks over to the weighing station.”

Add in those who are packing and moving boxes, and supervisors and coaches for each packing station, and the throng is fully accounted for.

“My role during the event was to walk around the overall church and make sure all of the different production lines were operating smoothly and were adequately stocked,” said Brad Traynor, chairman of the church’s mission council. “If there were any hiccups, we would move to remedy them.”

Meals for warehouse

The hiccups were few, and the church easily met its goal of packing 142,000 meals, enough to fill a 20 ft. shipping container. Volunteers packed about 2,000 extra meals for Stop Hunger Now’s warehouse.

Mr. Casteel said that nearly all of the meals ultimately will go to schools and orphanages in Peru, Colombia and Brazil, though some may go to Haiti, where earthquake relief efforts continue.
Church of the Servant is large, averaging 1,800 to 2,000 for Sunday services. But Mr. Casteel noted that much smaller churches can be a partner with Stop Hunger Now.

“The majority of my events do under 50,000 [meals],” he said.

Church of the Servant has sent teams to Mexico and other countries on short-term mission trips. But the packing events have allowed far more church members—from small children to seniors—to feel a part of foreign mission efforts.

“The one thing we want to have our congregation become is the hands and feet of Christ,” Mr. Traynor said. “This is a great global event that allows that to happen.”

Church of the Servant has already set Sunday, March 4, as the date for next year’s packing event.

shodges@umr.org

More than 1,300 volunteers worked in four shifts during the packing event in Oklahoma City. Volunteers around the funnel table added vitamins, dried vegetables, soy and rice to meal packets. The cost per meal was 25 cents.
Revisiting GracePoint offers lesson for UMC

BY ANDREW C. THOMPSON
UMR Columnist

The names of Bryson Butts and GracePoint were all over the church news circuit in the spring of 2009. After planting GracePoint United Methodist Church as a church start in Wichita, Kan., in 2004, Mr. Butts eventually determined that the denominational structure was too constraining for his congregation. So with the blessing of the church’s lay leadership, he left the UMC and founded a non-denominational church. He took the GracePoint name and most of the church’s 700 members with him. The new congregation was styled as “GracePoint Community Church.” With only 17 members left from the original GracePoint UMC, Bishop Scott Jones was soon forced to close the church.

At the time, opinions among United Methodists were divided. Some saw Bryson Butts as unfairly taking advantage of the resources of the Kansas West Conference, only to leave when he no longer needed the logistical support (and the money) the conference had provided and was unwilling to cooperate with the conference’s mission plan for the Wichita area. Others believed it was just another example of a creaky denominational structure getting in the way of a dynamic pastor with a vision whose ministry was clearly proving itself.

Two years later, the subsequent history of Mr. Butts and GracePoint provides a poignant lesson. And it shows just how much patience and cooperation are needed to sustain any kind of ministry that extends beyond bare congregationalism.

At the beginning of this year, a letter to members of GracePoint from the church’s board of directors announced that Bryson Butts had been fired as pastor. It detailed allegations that Mr. Butts had improperly used staff members’ personal information to set up a “multi-level marketing program, more commonly known as a ‘pyramid scheme.’” The letter also alleged that Mr. Butts improperly used church funds for personal expenses.

An attempt in October 2010 to place Mr. Butts on personal leave had not been met with the board’s satisfaction, which eventually led to his termination. GracePoint Community Church has continued, and the website now lists a new senior pastor.

Significant issues

For United Methodists looking at what might have been, the issues that the GracePoint situation raises are significant.

There’s something of a culture of dissatisfaction within our denomination about how “out of touch” the various levels of the church hierarchy can be with the on-the-ground ministry. Our Book of Discipline states that the church’s mission is to make disciples for Jesus Christ and that the “local church’s mission is to make disciples through which disciple-making occurs.” So when bureaucracy seems to get in the way of what pastors and their congregations are trying to do in mission and evangelism, the tendency is to criticize the bureaucracy as a hindrance to what the church is supposed to be about.

I’ve made such criticisms, including in this column space. And when I read the Call to Action report produced by the CTA Steering Team late last year, I was encouraged. While particular aspects of that report are seen as debatable around the connection, the overarching claim that the hierarchy of the church needs to be more accountable and more in harmony in terms of mission appears to be something on which we can all agree.

But the legacy of Bryson Butts and GracePoint show how not all aspects of our structure deserve the negative label of “bureaucracy.” Bishop Jones and the leadership of the Kansas West Conference were clearly not trying to hamper GracePoint UMC’s attempts to reach people for Jesus Christ in the years prior to Mr. Butts’ departure from the denomination. They were not trying to keep the congregation from reaching out to the Wichita area. And they were not trying to protect pastors and congregations less “dynamic” than Mr. Butts as he sought to expand the reach of his church’s ministry.

What they were doing is simply what church leaders have done throughout Christian history: Organize the church of Jesus Christ in the area of their responsibility so that it could do its work effectively and so the gospel might be made manifest in that place.

At its best, denominational structure provides stability both for doctrine and for ministry. When we fall prey to the modern tendency to reject such institutions for the “easier” path of congregationalism, we lose the safeguards that an episcopal church polity provides.

It takes patience and a certain willingness to admit that the wisdom of the ages is greater than the wisdom of one man (or one congregation) to follow the path that a broader form of organization offers. But if Bryson Butts and GracePoint offer any lesson worth learning, it is that one.

The Rev. Thompson maintains a blog at genxrising.com. Email: andrew@mandatum.org.
The ‘vital balance’ of Methodism’s message

With the current climate of social upheaval and change, the Wesleyan message of grace, love, and transformation becomes more powerful than ever.

By Donald W. Haynes

Lovett Weems continues to be God’s person of the hour for United Methodism. As director of the Lewis Center for Church Leadership, he has his hand on the pulse of the people called Methodists.

Lovett has been sharing wisdom with the connection for a long time, as a pastor from Mississippi who also served in other jurisdictions, as an author, as a seminar president who performed an institutional miracle in the capacity and history of the Israelite tribe of Issachar “understands the times and knows what God wants Israel to do.”

He and Len Sweet speak both to and for our heritage and our mission in these challenging times. This morning I opened my dog-eared copy of one of Lovett Weems’ first books, Pocket Guide to John Wesley for Today. I went on to Richard Heinzen-rater, Rupert Davies, David Hempton, Colin Williams, Albert Outler, Randy Maddox, Bishop Scott Jones, and other Wesley scholars. We cannot “live with Wesley,” but we impoverish our current efforts of reform and recovery unless we visit him often and long.

I have previously called Methodists a “church of the middle way,” as we draw from both our evangelical heritage and our liturgical heritage. Lovett quotes his seminary mentor, Bishop Mack Stokes, who called us the church of “vital balance.” Wesley pointed out the Moravians’ experience of the “peace that passeth understanding down in my heart” that drew Wesley to their counsel in Savannah and their company back in London in the winter and spring of 1738.

In spite of all he owed them, Wesley was unable to continue with the Moravian journey after the summer of 1740. They were children of a pietism that insisted on quietism, or “still-ness.” Drawing from the psalmist’s admonition to “wait on the Lord,” the Moravians rejected Wesley’s Anglican appreciation for social holiness. They called his acts of kindness and deeds of mercy, “works righteousness.”

Count Zinzendorf, the Moravian leader, considered Wesley’s doctrine of perfecting grace delusional while Wesley was convinced that the means of grace provided through the church are just that: “means” by which the Holy Spirit works in a heart to develop “the mind which was in Christ Jesus.” Wesley considered the Moravian insistence on “only faith” to be what Dr. Heitzenrater calls a “challenge to vital Christian living.”

Wesley also could not erase the distinction between the roles of laity and clergy, even as he encouraged the emergence of exhorters and lay preachers. He insisted on the responsibility of the clergy for preserving “Word, Sacrament, and Order.” Of the latter, he meant leadership of the conference and the connection to ensure “only expressing with the word of truth” (II Timothy 2:15). This continues to be a vital role of our bishops, a theological reason to restore some of the role of counsel and direction which we moved to the general boards and agencies in 1939.

New species

While Wesley always remained in debt to the Moravians for Aldersgate, he drew from both the Catholic heritage and his beloved Anglican Church the necessity of human responsibility for spiritual discipline. As British scholar Rupert Davies put it, “Wesley opposed with all his might any disparagement of the ‘means of grace’ and argued his point persistently with the Moravians.” Even with Aldersgate’s being so pivotal in his own spiritual journey, he warned against the excesses of enthusiasm and excessive emotionalism. He wanted a “vital balance” that not only talked the talk, but walked the walk.

David Hempton points out, “At stake was the genetic structure of a new kind of religious species.”

Included in this “new species” with “vital balance” are evangelical Arminianism (not Calvinism, even of the “neo” variety), experiential grace (assurance or witness of the Spirit which Paul elucidates in Romans 8), a quest for perfecting grace as the long journey into perfect love, and the energetic activism which motivated and propelled Methodism in both England and post-Aldersgate.

These constitute an agenda which would create a call to action of unprecedented measure. Though the term is unpopular because of its political roots, there is much truth in the recognition of a “culture war” in America today. We must be more than a national church with a humanitarian heart. We must have a message that enables people to tap the resources of the Holy Spirit in order to empower a vital life change.

For the people

Albert Outler aptly called Methodism a “third alternative” that brought together God’s saving grace with human responsibility for “doing no harm, doing all the good we can, and keeping in touch with God through the means of grace.” Outler documents Wesley’s “triumph of the kinship of the human” that insisted on quietism, or “stillness.”

Like the prophet Ezekiel, he could identify with the last, the least, and the lost, the dispossessed, disenfranchised and disillusioned. In that sermon, he demonstrated his definition of sin as “dis-ease” and his definition of salvation as “taking the cure.”

We are indebted to scholar Randy Maddox of Duke for recovering this Wesleyan language of the clinic.

Wesley cared about people in every stratum of society. Every aspect of Wesley’s doctrine was sociological—that is, it related to salvation.

The mind was never asloof from the heart; the message was not estranged from the existential reality (hurt, pain, guilt, fear, doubt, and “worldly ambitions”) of daily life.

The higher calling

Times have changed but the heart of the human psyche runs more deeply than the potential of any human cure. Only God’s redemptive love can restore our lost humanity. Only the Holy Spirit can empower us to hold our cultural adictions at bay as we “press on toward the higher calling which is ours in Christ Jesus.”

Methodism has a message, a message of vital balance between grace and responsiveness which makes us unique among all denominations. Told to build a house in Dallas, H. L. Luccock tells of shopping for a globe for his grandson. The boy wanted the one with a light in it but the grandfather noted its higher price. The little boy spoke with wisdom of which he was unaware as he said, “But Grandpa, the world always costs more with a light in it.”

Dr. Haynes is a retired member of the Western North Carolina Conference. He is the author of On the Threshold of Grace: Methodist Fundamentals. E-mail: dhaynes111@ri.md.com.
mediate training in early response to disasters and the spiritual and emotional care of those affected.

UMCOR has collected about $100,000 in online donations as of May 2. (Donations by way of local churches have not yet been tallied.)

“Right now, we don’t have enough money to get help beyond these emergency grants, so we’re counting on the money to get help beyond these emergencies,” said James Rollins, UMCOR’s director of marketing and communications. “Church members have always come through in the past and I’m sure they will come through again.”

Methodist-heavy area

The tornadoes cut through an area populated by a large number of United Methodists. The 11 annual conferences affected include more than 2.1 million professing members, about 28 percent of U.S. church membership.

Many United Methodist churches were destroyed or severely damaged. In the North Alabama conference, Bishop Will Willimon estimated that 15 churches had been destroyed, and 15 left unusable for the near future. (All were insured.)

The death toll included a number of United Methodists, including three members of Jackson Chapel United Methodist in Sawyerville, Ala., and three members of Mount Tabor United Methodist near Greeneville, Tenn., but no total figures were available at press time.

In some of the small rural communities affected by the tornadoes, United Methodist churches were virtually the only community buildings. Those that were still standing after the storm—even those without power or partially damaged by the storm—soon became centers of helping, providing meals, shelter and supplies. Some served as staging areas for supplies; others hosted volunteers who traveled into the area to help. One church in North Alabama, Holland Pond UMC, opened its doors to people who wanted to charge their cellphones so that they could contact friends and families.

United Methodists arrived on the scene “before the National Guard got there” in a number of places, according to Bishop Willimon. Church members in the conference were feeding over 10,000 people daily, and had dispersed five55555.

Bishop Willimon, who noted that he’s been a critic of the denomination’s bureaucracy at times, said he was grateful for the denomination’s connectional system. “I’m real thankful we didn’t wait for a storm to get organized,” he said. “How wonderful it is to have a structure in place and a means of responding.”

“Since this is the biggest challenge of my episcopacy, and the most inspiring,” he said, “the worst times are also some of the best, when you really see the gospel.”

Facebook-powered

The Rev. Tom Hazelwood, assistant general secretary for UMCOR’s U.S. disaster response, traveled to Alabama to assist in training volunteers as emergency responders. He watched in fascination as a group of United Methodist men served up hot food in the parking lot of a Wendy’s restaurant in Tuscaloosa. Group members were able to feed thousands, even though they spent only about $700.

“They were using Facebook,” he said. “They’d post a request, and within a half an hour, someone would deliver it.” One request went out for coolers, to allow the group to carry meals to people in the community; within hours, a van pulled into the parking lot with boxes of nylons.

How to help

UMCOR is urgently in need of monetary donations for UMCOR Emergency Advance #3021326. To donate, visit www.umcor.org, call (800) 554-8583, or mail UMCOR, PO. Box 980, New York, NY 10008-9808. Make checks payable to UMCOR and specify “Spring Storms 2011” in the memo line. (With all donations to UMCOR’s Advance, 100 percent of donations go directly to the designated emergency.)

Trained volunteers are needed, but, as always, volunteers should call ahead before they go to a disaster site.

North Alabama’s website has details at www.northalabamumc.org/news/detail/885. There is also a call center for those interested in volunteering: 1-855-862-8657.

Alabama West Florida Conference’s website will post regular updates with needs for volunteers and supplies at www.awfumc.org. The North Georgia conference’s website will post regular updates with needs for volunteers and supplies at www.umcor.org. The United Conference’s website will post regular updates with needs for volunteers and supplies at www.cwumc.org.

The North Georgia Conference established a call center to match cleanup and repair needs with volunteer teams. The number: (678) 533-1443.

Cleaning buckets are in low supply at UMCOR’s Sager Brown and UMCOR West supply depots, and are urgently needed to ship to tornado victims. For details, visit http://nwagbgm-umc.org/umcor/getconnected/supplies/flood-bucket.

Similarly, churches along the Gulf Coast affected by Hurricane Ivan in 2004, and last year by the BP oil spill, began returning the favor of help they’d received by setting up collection sites for donations.

“Those disasters helped prepare us for what was unfolding . . . and we were immediately able to put a plan of action together,” said Mary Catherine Phillips, Alabama-West Florida’s communications director. “We’re getting calls now from people all over the country who want to help.”

Trained volunteers

Having responded to previous disasters in nearby states, several of the affected annual conferences also already had large numbers of people trained. The North Georgia conference has about 800 trained volunteers, for example, and many stepped up to help.

“Thank goodness, we’ve been inundated with trained volunteers in our local area,” said Mike Yoder, the conference’s disaster response coordinator.

Ms. Fendley, pastor of Vaughan UMC, recalls her reaction as she saw the church for the first time after the tornado had left it in tatters. “I came up the hill crying and screaming,” she said.

The recovery will go on for years, given the extent of the damage. But she and the 35 members of Vaughan UMC quickly regrouped, and now see opportunity arising from misfortune. The church was insured. When the settlement comes through, and if it can be combined with help from Methodist sources, the plan is to rebuild nearby—but on property that’s for sale right by the highway and would provide greater visibility.

Ms. Fendley smiled often on May 1 as she moved around the damaged church, thanking volunteers.

“God is good,” she said. “And he’s going to make things better.”

AP PHOTO/GOULAY NEWS COURIER, KIM FINDERS

Ennis McLin Jr., right, and Ennis McLin Sr. look over the wreckage of the Lakeview UMC in Cullman, Ala. The church was destroyed when powerful storms swept through the area April 27.

GRACE UNDER PRESSURE

“Negotiating the Heart of the Methodist Traditions

By Joerg Rieger

“The good news is that the climate is more open now,” Ms. Fendley said, “but the challenge is to get people to understand that this is not a momentary experience.”

Ms. Fendley said her congregation is still searching for an opportunity to rebuild on the same site. “We’re looking at the possibility of a small house on the lot,” she said. “That way, we can start over.”

Ms. Fendley said her congregation is still searching for an opportunity to rebuild on the same site. “We’re looking at the possibility of a small house on the lot,” she said. “That way, we can start over.”

Ms. Fendley said her congregation is still searching for an opportunity to rebuild on the same site. “We’re looking at the possibility of a small house on the lot,” she said. “That way, we can start over.”

Ms. Fendley said her congregation is still searching for an opportunity to rebuild on the same site. “We’re looking at the possibility of a small house on the lot,” she said. “That way, we can start over.”

Ms. Fendley said her congregation is still searching for an opportunity to rebuild on the same site. “We’re looking at the possibility of a small house on the lot,” she said. “That way, we can start over.”

Ms. Fendley said her congregation is still searching for an opportunity to rebuild on the same site. “We’re looking at the possibility of a small house on the lot,” she said. “That way, we can start over.”