Our Ministry Together in Wisconsin

By Bishop Hee-Soo Jung

Ministry belongs to every believer. Caring for those in need is the responsibility of all of us. As we look to the year ahead, I invite us to examine how we can best carry out this vital ministry as individuals, families and churches.

When a group of believers learns how to minister to a particular need, and when they are willing to commit significant time and emotion to the ministry, then we are able to provide the needed resources. Ministry should not be imposed on a congregation by the leadership. It is most effective when it bubbles up out of the lives of people who are compelled to meet a particular need.

We know ministry is a command of God, yet it is not simply a response to a demand. It arises out of hearts made generous and gracious by an understanding and experience of God’s love and salvation. It is the heart of the congregation that is guided to discover “who and where is my neighbor?”

Ministry begins with each one of us

Motivation for vital ministry begins with individual persons. Any person, either lay or clergy, can begin the process—but individual persons have to do it alone. The scripture asks us to “ponder how to stir up one another to love and good works.” (Heb. 10:24) Together we can become the Church, with a vision of what the Church can be when God is really present. Together we can become galvanized and inspired by a picture of fruitful possibilities of the Church.

My prayer for revival and growth

As your Bishop, I pray for the Church in Wisconsin and beyond. I feel inspired and overwhelmed by the outpouring of the Spirit of God within our churches and people in Wisconsin. I pray for God to reveal “pacesetter” leaders who may become part of my team and my companions in reviving and renewing God’s Church. I pray for those who will join with me, and with humble-boldness become leaders. The pacesetters will begin by taking the lead in praying fervently for revival and growth.

We in Wisconsin need the inspiration of God and the passion for revival and vibrant ministry everywhere. Wherever we are, whoever we are, and in all sizes of congregations, we must envision together what it will take to bring the change necessary to move us into a new place. We need to commit again to seek, to point people to God at every opportunity.

Our prayers and plans will be affirmed when we see signs of vitality in our congregations, including mission engagement, generosity in giving, and other indications of people involved in ministry.

Our prayers will bear fruit

So I invite you to continue to pray with me in the New Year, and join me in creating and implementing plans that will lead to growth and vitality. As we pray together, we will see God working in fruit producing people and congregations.

A Time for Reflection: An Update on Bishop Jung’s Visits to All Churches

By Donald Greer

Bishop Hee-Soo Jung has established a priority to visit every United Methodist Church in Wisconsin and meet with laity and clergy in each circuit. As Coordinator of Circuit Ministries, I have been traveling with him, keeping notes and making a photographic record of the journey. During the last nine weeks of 2012, on nine full days dedicated to these visits, we have traveled to 72 churches in seven circuits in the northwestern and southern central part of the state. We have traveled to circuits 1, 2, 5, 6, 8, 22, and 34. Visits to 48 more circuits and another 400 churches are being scheduled for 2013.

Rev. Cathy Hamblin, pastor at New Richmond UMC and Circuit 6 leader, recently shared her circuit’s impressions of the Bishop’s visit. “They found the Bishop to be exciting and engaging, and they were thankful that he took time to come.”

What’s a typical visit like?

Each day, a group of churches is visited, and a conversation takes place with local members about their ministry and mission. These visits allow Bishop Jung an opportunity to bless each altar, understand each geographic context, and personally celebrate the ministry of each congregation. In meetings, Bishop Jung asks those who have gathered, “What do you want me to celebrate with you? How do people in this community know your church?” Stories about people, events, accomplishments, mission, and congregational life abound. These meetings offer a great way to learn about so many of our congregations, their personalities and cultures.

I try to take good notes on the uniqueness and the important characteristics of each one. Bishop Jung also asks, “What can I pray for you?” This time is an opportunity for the Bishop to listen to the challenges and hopes of each congregation as they grapple with community issues and needs. There is a challenge to look beyond the current reality to future possibilities, and a basic outreach question, “Who else is out there?” The Bishop’s conversation with churches is both comforting and thought-provoking. People clearly appreciate the willingness to visit, listen, and be present in each place where we have a United Methodist congregation.

Our visits to Health and Welfare Ministries

In addition to the local congregations, this visitation schedule provides an opportunity for exposure to our Health and Welfare Ministries. Bishop Jung has seen first-hand the facilities and ministry of Harbor House, located in Superior, and Christian Community Homes, with campuses in Hudson and Osceola.

Sharing Bishop’s vision

In the evening of each day, a dinner and full circuit event provides Bishop Jung an opportunity to share his vision for the Wisconsin Annual Conference, and to discuss themes of abundance, recruitment and the giftedness of all God’s people. It is a conversation that builds bridges and connections to the wider Church while at the same time affirms the essential witness of each congregation in its local context.
Small church offers big health ministries

By Kara Witherow
Special Contributor

Scripture recounts dozens of ways Jesus met people's needs. He fed more than 5,000 men, women and children on the Sea of Galilee's shore. He restored blind Bartimaeus' sight. He healed the invalid at Bethesda. And he ministered to the woman caught in adultery.

Through meeting their physical and emotional needs, Jesus was able to minister to and meet their spiritual needs, too.

Tennille United Methodist Church in Tennille, Ga., is following Jesus' example with their many health ministries. By meeting community members' physical and health needs, church members are communicating the love and grace of Jesus Christ.

“If we can reach out and make a difference, if we can be in some way a healer, I think that opens people's hearts to being a little more receptive to the message of the gospel,” said the Rev. Jeff Cook, pastor of Tennille UMC.

“If you're hurting and in pain, I don't think you're always in a place where you can receive the Good News. But if some of that pain is lifted or alleviated, then you know someone cares, somebody wants to make a difference. Maybe then you'll want to listen to what we have to say and why we do what we do. I think that's when the opportunity becomes available for us to go a little deeper and share the gospel.”

Several church members, many who are retired nurses and educators, are passionate about health care. Mr. Cook said, and were looking for ways to serve and help others.

Margie Johnson was one of them. A retired registered nurse, Ms. Johnson spearheaded and helped develop several of the church's health ministries.

When one of her friends was diagnosed with cancer, Ms. Johnson learned of the need for a community cancer support group. At the time, the closest one, in Milledgeville, was a 30-minute drive from Tennille.

She felt called to do something, and after discussing the need with Mr. Cook and praying about how she and the church could help, the Washington County cancer support group was launched.

Held monthly in Tennille UMC's social hall, the group offers support, encouragement and hope to cancer patients, survivors and caregivers.

“I was asked to do it and couldn’t say no,” Ms. Johnson said. “I was just responding to a friend's need. It was something I needed to do.”

The cancer support group inspired other Tennille UMC members to become involved in health and advocacy ministries.

“Since we started the support group, it [health ministries] has become more of a passion for the whole church,” Mr. Cook said. “They've asked how they can help out and be a part of what's happening.”

The church has been involved in the Washington County Relay for Life for the past three years and will have a team this year, too.

And each October, members host a “Bumps and Bruises” booth at the annual Tennille BBQ Blast barbecue competition. At the booth, nursing students from Georgia College & State University perform free health screenings and first aid for festival-goers, and church members provide entertainment for the kids by giving away balloons and painting faces.

Church members also have a passion for helping those in need of food assistance.

On the second Wednesday of each month they prepare meals for Bread of Life, a community ecumenical food ministry, for more than 100 low-income families and shut-ins in Washington County are fed through this program.

Tennille UMC also partners with Golden Harvest Food Bank to provide food for at-risk children each weekend.

Mr. Cook’s passion for health and his background in health care—he’s a former physical therapist—combined with church members’ passion and their desire to help the community, has created a “perfect storm” and helps make a real difference in Tennille and Washington County.

“We have the same vision and the same desire to reach out and share the love of Christ in tangible ways,” Mr. Cook said. “They’re doing that in tangible ways. I’ve seen the people of the church really gain an energy and passion for missions and going out and serving in the name of Christ, and going out and living their faith that others can see.”

“They’re really letting their light shine.”

Ms. Witherow is editor of the Advocate, the newspaper of the South Georgia Conference, where this article first appeared.
**Gospel song urges Christ to ‘Stand By Me’ during trials**

**By C. Michael Hawn**

UMR Columnist

The Rev. Charles Albert Tindley (1851-1933) was one of the eminent preachers of Methodism at the turn of the 20th century. Emory University hymnologist James Abbington has called Tindley a “pastor, orator, poet, writer, theologian, social activist, father of African American Hymnody, progenitor of African American gospel music and prince of preachers.”

Tindley was born in Worcester County, Md., the son of Charles and Esther Tindley, but his mother died when he was only 2 years old; thus his father raised him.

Dr. Abbington comments that biographies often refer to Tindley’s slave background, but that an autobiographical reference in his Book of Sermons (1932) implies that he was never a slave. However, economic conditions were very difficult after the death of Tindley’s mother, forcing his father to “hire him out.” African American scholar Bernice Johnson Reagon notes, “This practice was not unusual for freed Blacks. Hired-out workers often labored alongside slaves, experiencing much of the reality of the slave plantation. The major differences were that there was some remuneration… and hired-out workers did get the opportunity to go home.”

Tindley moved to Philadelphia as a young person, attending school at night. He said, “I made a rule to learn at least one new thing—a thing I did not know the day before—each day.” He was self-taught, never graduating from college or seminary, yet acquiring and reading more than 8,000 books in his library. He learned Greek through Boston School of Theology and Hebrew through a synagogue in Philadelphia. Tindley was awarded two honorary doctorates of divinity from colleges in North Carolina and Maryland.

From the United Methodist Reporter, January 25, 2013
Combining Tradition with Innovation at Summer Camps

When it comes to camp, there are some things that will never change. The mission of our Wisconsin UMC Camps is to “Provide outdoor settings for Christian education and faith formation in exceptional settings.” We will always rely on amazing volunteers who give freely and cheerfully of their time, talents and finances. We will always have campfires, devotions, hikes, games and excellent worship.

But as one camper this summer put it, “This place isn’t just any old camp. I loved it here. Whenever we had our activities, it was like, ‘Oh yeah this is the best part of my life!’ I hope everybody sees this place not only as a camp and retreat center, but as their new outside home and connection with God. The two years that I have been there have really been an eye opener towards God and I hope someday that I am fortunate to actually call the place ‘home’ and be able to see other kids do the same.”

This camper has the same vision that we do: to continue the tradition of UM camping into the future. And that, of course, requires that we find new ways of sharing an old and ongoing ministry. Our curriculum for the summer of 2013 includes the scripture from Isaiah 43:19 (NIV): “See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.”

God continues to do new things here at our camps. A new year-round Camp Assistant, Danielle Glut, joined us last fall. A new Youth Lodge was built at Lake Lucerne, and Amphlett Dining Hall was remodeled at Pine Lake. Among other improvements, Amphlett had air conditioning added, the bathrooms remodeled, and a propane boiler has replaced the old fuel oil boiler. It has kept the feel and history of the building while creating a more inviting, energy efficient space. The new Youth Lodge at Lucerne was completed in time to be used by Night Owl Camp this past summer and several retreat groups this fall. This “green construction” building has two lodging wings and two meeting spaces to serve our summer campers and retreat groups. These projects have been wonderful blessings to the ministry of our camps.

We are looking forward to what God has next! You can be a part of the new things in 2013. There is something special for you and your family at camp. Visit www.WIUMCamps.org to explore our catalog and discover an adventure of Faith, Fun, Friendship … it just might change your life.

New Living Center Provides Christian Care for the Elderly in Wisconsin

When the town of Osceola was in need of a nursing home, the people looked 30 miles south to the town of Hudson and the town’s United Methodist Church sponsored Christian Community Home (CCH) located there. CCH, one of our Health and Welfare Ministries, agreed to build a second campus in Osceola, combined with the hospital that had moved just several years prior. Doors opened in 2011, and the new facility has been thriving ever since.

“There was a need in the area because [another] nursing home had closed,” Director of Resident Services Marie Gaspardo said. “It was a vital part of the community that was missing.”

After community fundraising campaigns, CCH raised enough money to build the nursing home and assisted living on a 20-acre parcel in November 2011—all attached to the newly built Osceola Medical Center. Gaspardo said the facility was built with the residents’ best interests and independence in mind. The 40 nursing home beds and 20 assisted living rooms are all private rooms, but designed in a neighborhood layout to create privacy yet still encourage socialization. “This is their home, and we treat them with dignity and respect,” she said. “We leave a lot of things up to residents to decide in terms of how they want to live; choice is very important to our residents.”

Fitness and short-term rehabilitation centers are also available on-site, and patients and residents alike benefit from having a hospital that shares services with CCH of Osceola. “It’s nice that the doctors are able to walk right over,” Gaspardo said. “We’re linked together, so the doctors can come over and see the residents. Our medical director is right on site and in our facility every week.”

“The way we provide care is exceptional,” Gaspardo said, and attributes the high quality of living to a wide range of activities, dedicated volunteers, and loving family members who visit frequently and often provide entertainment as well.

Future building plans include an independent senior apartment center within the next two years. For more information, visit www.cchosceola.org. For more information about the Hudson CCH campus, visit www.cchhudson.org.
Spotlight on the Wisconsin Conference Board of Church & Society

By Ellen Rasmussen

The Conference Board of Church & Society (BSC) is about making connections and building relationships. We serve as a connector between the local churches, districts, Conference and the General Board of Church & Society. We help build relationships by providing resources that equip and empower United Methodists to engage in social issues with a faithful response. We are about helping members relate the gospel of Jesus Christ to people, communities and the world in which they live. As a representative of the General Board of Church & Society, our purpose is “to bring the whole of human life, activities, possession, use of resources, and community and world relationships into conformity with the will of God.”

In order to provide the resources that help to equip, empower and engage our members, the Conference BCS is working to improve its ability to resource local congregations. We have developed a Facebook page and are updating our website. Our goal is to provide access to our faithful stance on social issues facing our members and congregations today. Our current focus is on gun violence/gun control, health care, and ministry with rural poverty in Wisconsin. We are growing our collaborative relationships by working with the Wisconsin Council of Churches, and with other boards and agencies, such as the Board of Global Ministries, the Commission on Religion and Race, the Ethnic Church Caucus, Commission on Christian in Urban and Inter Religious Concerns and the United Methodist Women.

Our board is comprised of members from across the state, and we are looking to grow our board membership. One member of the board is the Peace and Justice Coordinator. We give thanks to Mary Lainberger, who most recently served in this position. The General Board has asked to designate an AODA Coordinator and we are still working to fill that position. Our board meets quarterly at the Conference office and we have monthly conference calls. We work to understand the issues that are facing our society and help implement the Social Principles in response to those issues. We are all called to provide “forthright witness and action on human well-being, justice, peace, and the integrity of creation that call Christians to respond as forgiven people for whom Christ died.”

One of our greatest acts of witness can come through our Peace and Justice work that witnesses to God’s demand for a faithful, just, disarmed, and secure world. The funding for this work comes from the Peace and Justice Special Sunday offering that is designated the first Sunday after Pentecost. This year, the offering Sunday is scheduled for May 26, Memorial Day weekend, although each local church can designate a different Sunday. Our hope is that each congregation will consider “implementing the Social Principles for Peace with Justice Sunday. Fifty percent of this funding stays within Wisconsin and provides support for important local ministries. We have been able to support immigration work through collaboration with the Board of Global Ministries, anti-bullying programs, and education efforts on worker justice through Interfaith Worker Justice. We are always open to receiving grant applications for Peace and Justice work. Because our board now has monthly contact, we are able to respond to funding requests more quickly. If you would like more information about the board and its work or you are in need of resources, contact us at churchandsociety@wisconsinumc.org or through our Facebook page at http://www.facebook.com/WIChairAndSociety or at our website via the Conference website at www.wisconsinumc.org. We look forward to hearing from you.

Fruit-Filled Living

By Dan R. Dick

I love the metaphor in John 15 where Jesus explains to his disciples that he is the vine and that they are the branches. The vine draws vital nutrients and fluids from the soil, nourishing the branches and enabling them first to bud, then to blossom, then to bear fruit. The vine is the connection between branches and roots, providing structure and support. Jesus says in verse eight, “My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.” Later, in verse sixteen he continues, “…I appointed you to be witnesses.” So I appointed you to bear much fruit and become a center for love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control?”—then develop an action plan (that either aligns with the current ministry plan or succeeds it) for cultivating fruit-filled living within and beyond the congregation.

The Wisconsin Annual Conference is making a commitment to live the fruit of the Spirit. Our challenge to every congregation is to contemplate the question, “What would it take for our congregation to become known as a center for love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control?”—then develop an action plan (that either aligns with the current ministry plan or succeeds it) for cultivating fruit-filled living within and beyond the congregation.

The resource teams of the Discipleship Leadership Council will be creating resources for use in the local church that help in the cultivation and education process. Worship, education, spiritual formation, evangelism, mission, and stewardship resources will be made available on a regular basis throughout the quadrennium (Metho-speak for “next four years”) for all ages. Workshops and training events will be offered across the whole Conference. Special emphasis will be given to supporting the smaller membership churches.

Bishop Jung and the Cabinet are creating a “Fruit-Producing Strategy” study for congregational leadership teams and small groups. This study lays a Biblical and theological foundation for shifting our focus in three fruit-producing areas: from scarcity to abundance, from retribution to the existing reality in our churches to recruitment for a new and vital reality; and from the deficiencies of our ministries to the giftedness of all God’s people. This study will be available this spring.

Our Annual Conference session in June will be our “official” launch of the Live the Fruit of the Spirit theme. Following the business of the conference, we will offer a day of visioning, workshops, interactive planning, and resource sharing to help congregational leaders introduce the theme and focus when they return to their local churches. We will explore together four aspects of bearing fruit that will last—preparing the soil, planting the seed, nurturing the fruit, and harvesting and sharing the bounty. This is an exciting metaphor and theme, so let your imagination run wild.

Conference Calendar

February 7th
A Day Apart with Bishop Jung
Capital/Coulee Region

February 10th
Scouting Ministries Sunday

February 14th
A Day Apart with Bishop Jung
Nicollet/Winnebago Region

February 21st
A Day Apart with Bishop Jung
Metro Region

February 28th
A Day Apart with Bishop Jung
Chippewa/Heartland Region

March 1st
World Day of Prayer

March 1st – 2nd
Youth Leaders Training Overnight Retreat
Lake Lucerne Camp

March 10th
One Great Hour of Sharing Offering

March 15th – 16th
ERT Recertification Training (3-15)
Basic ERT Certification Training (3-16)
St. James UMC, East Troy

March 31st
Easter Day

April 6th
United Methodist Women Mission Action Day
Tomah UMC

April 14th
Native American Ministries Sunday Offering

April 25th
World Malaria Day

April 26th – 28th
Junior High Convoy
Green Lake Conference Center

For a more comprehensive list of events and training opportunities, visit our website www.wisconsinumc.org.

Reflections

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Reflections is an official publication of the Wisconsin Conference of The United Methodist Church. For a complimentary subscription, send your request along with the recipient name and address to Reflections Editor, Wisconsin Conference UMC, 750 Wisconsin St., Sun Prairie, WI 53590 or email mediacontact@wisconsinumc.org.
Q&A: Don’t rule out a renaissance of religion in North America

Despite a deep drop in the number of Americans who identify with a particular faith, the country could be on the cusp of a religious renaissance, says Frank Newport, editor-in-chief of The Gallup Poll.

Grounded in more than a million Gallup interviews, Dr. Newport’s new book, God is Alive and Well, argues that the aging of the baby boomers, the influx of Hispanic immigrants and the links between religion and health could portend a bright future for faith in America. He spoke recently with Daniel Burke of Religion News Service; the interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Why did you write this book?
I think religion is extremely important in America today. All of our research shows that, and I wanted to get empirical data about religion out there, rather than just speculation.

We here at Gallup have had a tracking project since 2008. We do 350,000 interviews a year, which is a huge and unique dataset that nobody else has. And personally, I grew up in a religious background and always found it interesting.

What’s the most important trend in American religion today?
One trend that I’m asked a lot about is the rise of the “nones,” about which there’s a huge amount of publicity, but which is often misrepresented. When Gallup asked the question about religious identity back in the 1950s, almost zero would say they have “none.” People would say “Baptist” or “Catholic” even if they were not particularly religious. Now, 18 percent of Americans, according to Gallup polls, say they do not have a particular religious identity. That doesn’t mean that 18 percent are atheists—only 5 or 6 percent say they don’t believe in God—but people are changing how they express their religiosity.

Do other trends point to a religious revival?
If you look at age, the baby boomers are approaching 65-85 years old, which we’ve seen as the most religious age group for decades. It’s a reasonable expectation that the huge group of boomers is going to become more religious, and because they are so big, they’ll make the country more religious in the aggregate.

In addition, the country’s increasing Hispanic population tends to be more religious. Religion has been correlated to health, so more people may seek out religion because it’s good for them. And Americans are migrating to states that are more religious, which tends to make [the travelers] more religious.

Gallup uses worship attendance as a key barometer of religiosity. But haven’t studies shown that Americans often overstate how often they attend religious services?
That’s probably true that people overstate how often they go to church. But it’s a generalization. It doesn’t mean that someone attends church 52 weeks a year. But we’ve found that church attendance is a good surrogate for religiosity, People who report to an interviewer that they attend services often are in fact more religious than others, even if they don’t actually attend services as often as they say they do.

You write that mainline Protestants are pretty much doing everything wrong in terms of growing their churches. Why’s that?
For any group to grow, whether it’s a country or a church, you have to have more people coming in than going out. For example, the Catholic Church holds its own in terms of percentage of the American population because of the in-migration of Hispanics. But there is no massive in-migration of Protestants. Secondly, there’s been no evidence that they’ve been able to evangelize effectively. And thirdly, one way you grow is to have high fertility rates. Mormons are doing that well because their theology encourages big families. But Presbyterians, for example, have less children on average (than other Americans).

So, if you look at the way churches could grow, the mainline Protestants haven’t been able to hit the nail on the head with any of them.

Why do you propose that the government and companies promote religion as a means to reduce health-care costs?
That certainly is controversial. We have separation of church and state in this country. But the correlation between religion and well-being has been established by Gallup and many other organizations. The question is causality. Maybe healthier people choose to be more religious. But it’s clear that religious [people] are less of a drain on our mental and physical health systems. So, a company may want to give discounts for employees who attend church four or five times a month, just as many give discounts for employees who go to the gym. If America were to become more religious, and this is controversial, it would become healthier.

"Spending too much time on media" is one of the temptations Americans say they most commonly struggle with, according to a new study by the Barna Group. Another media-related temptation is to express anger or “go off” on someone by text or email, the study showed.

Barna poll: Virtual vices indicate shift in morality

BY DANIEL BURKE

The seven deadly sins have new partners in crime. Lust, gluttony, greed, sloth, wrath, envy and pride still attract a lot of attention. But as the Internet and other media invade American life, our vices have increasingly gone virtual, according to a new study.

Nearly half of Americans say they are tempted to idle the hours away on media, including the Internet, video games and television, according to The Barna Group, a California-based Christian research organization.

And more than one in four American men admit to struggling with Internet pornography or other sexually inappropriate material online. Millennials—Americans born between the early 1980s and 2000s—are most likely to seek forbidden fruits online, according to Barna.

The technological temptations reflect a shift in American morality, said David Kinnaman, Barna’s president.

Vice now “shadows many of the digital domains of contemporary life,” he said. “For faith leaders, this shift underscores the importance of including technology and media as part of a broader discussion of spirituality and stewardship.”

But faith leaders might not find eager ears among young churchgoers. Barna’s research suggests, Young Americans are more likely to admit to being tempted by transgressions. That may mean they’re more willing to open up about their private lives, Mr. Kinnaman said. But it also suggests that young Americans see nothing wrong with breaking a few commandments now and then.

“Millions of Millennials do not see temptation as something to be avoided, but rather a relatively benign feature of modern life,” Mr. Kinnaman said.

Still, as sinners go, Americans are pretty nerdy. Work-related vices top the list of temptations, according to Barna.

The most commonly admitted temptation (by Barna’s definition) is worrying or anxiety, which 66 percent admit to. That’s followed by procrastination (60 percent), eating too much (55 percent) spending too much time on media (44 percent) and being lazy (41 percent).

Relatively few Americans admitted to being envious (24 percent), lying or cheating (12 percent), or engaging in sexually inappropriate behavior (9 percent).

Part of that might be the so-called “halo effect”—Americans’ tendency to present their best selves to pollsters. But it also reflects a distinctly American approach to vice, said Mr. Kinnaman.

“Productivity is not exactly the most biblical pursuit,” he said. “That specific ‘temptation’ is much more reflective of American values than of core biblical themes.”

The Barna survey included 1,021 online interviews conducted among a sample of adults in all 50 states. The sampling is plus or minus 4 percentage points, at the 95 percent confidence level.
Sports help Wounded Warriors on path to healing

BY KATHY L. GILBERT
United Methodist News Service

WASHINGTON—Deep in the heart of the Pentagon, warriors are warming up for several rounds of fierce volleyball competition.

The gym is an assault on the ears: dozens of volleyballs hitting the hardwood floor, deep baritone shouting of teammates pumping up teammates, shrill whistles.

This is the second annual Wounded Warriors seated volleyball tournament, and it includes all branches of the military pitted against each other—and each team is in it to win.

Many of the men and women on the floor today are missing arms or legs or have scars across their heads and bodies.

Everyone competing in this tournament is wounded, ill or injured. Most are young men with shaved heads, but there are a few women competing or on the coaching teams. The Special Operations Forces stand out because many have long hair and beards.

An announcer points out before each round that the rules of the game for seated volleyball are the same as regular volleyball except for three things: The net is lower, size of the court is slightly smaller, and some part of the player’s torso must maintain contact with the floor at all times or a “butt lift” will be called.

Cpl. Dylan Kelley, 22, of the Marine Corps is participating for the first time today.

“It’s very motivating, especially to see double amputees fighting cancer, just coming out here and giving it their all, you know, putting their whole heart and soul into the game;” he said. “You know, just everybody comes away winners, all the time.”

Some injuries are “in-your-face” apparent but for others like Cpl. Kelley, the wounds are not visible.

Invisible wounds are hard to mend and anyone who has gone to war is wounded, says the Rev. Laura Bender, a United Methodist Navy chaplain who serves at the United States Marine Corps Wounded Warriors Regiment in Quantico, Va.

“War changes everyone….Some of us are better able to manage the changes in our lives. But some have physical ways in which they are not able to manage as well.”

Scarred by war

Invisible wounds can include traumatic brain injury, post-traumatic stress disorder or a serious illness such as cancer. Sports competitions like this seated volleyball game are part of the treatment for these service members.

Lt. Cmdr. Bender describes it as a pathway or transition to another stage in their lives and a way to stay connected to other veterans. She is in a three-year assignment as the regimental chaplain for Wounded Warriors, a Marine unit charged with the administrative and non-medical care for all wounded, ill and injured Marines.

She is here today, cheering on two teams of Marines. Lt. Cmdr. Bender spends a lot of time at events like this. She also goes to cowboy challenges; cycling races, wheelchair basketball and ice hockey.

“These games are a chance to build camaraderie, teamwork and to enliven their spirits, she said.

Many times warriors with invisible wounds begin to self-medicate, or they engage in thrill-seeking behavior, or look for an opportunity to return to combat—all ways to keep them from feeling that pain, she said.

“But there comes a point for most people when coping mechanisms that they have been using are not sufficient any longer. And at that point then they need to seek some assistance.”

Soul wounds

“When you talk about wounds that are invisible, I think one of the greatest wounds is the soul wound,” Lt. Cmdr. Bender said.

She gave an example. Recently she was riding bicycles with some of the wounded warriors in an athletic-conditioning program. One man started lagging behind until he was alone with the chaplain.

“He looked over at me and he said, ‘You know chaplain, I… I killed a child.’”

Medication, new prosthetic legs and mental health treatment had given him almost normal movement and helped with his depression, but he still had that issue—he had killed a child, she said.

“Those kinds of issues would make a person come to the door of a church and say, ‘Am I really welcome here? I know these people have called me a hero, but am I really?’”

Those harsh memories make someone ask, “Am I still loved by God?” They wonder if God still hears their prayers.

“I think addressing soul wounds is one of the major areas that the church needs to figure ways to get at, and certainly it is something that I, as a chaplain, spend a good deal of time working with service members about, said Lt. Cmdr. Bender.

Sitting on the front row with Lt. Cmdr. Bender are other staff members of the regiment. She also spends a lot of time caring for them.

“It’s very stressful to hear stories of family pain, individual’s wounds and not be affected by it,” she said. “So I spend a good deal of time actually assisting the staff members so that they are better able to do the jobs that God has called them to do.”

Finding faith again

Jenny Sullivan, program manager for the Warrior Athlete Reconditioning Program for the Marine Corps, helped organize this event as part of Warrior Care Month, which is in November.

She is a lifelong United Methodist and proud to be one. She has a picture of her home church, First United Methodist Church at Isle of Palms, S.C., on her iPhone. She knows the important role chaplains play.

“A lot of the time, especially with the wounded service members, their spirit is down and faith gets questioned,” she said. “They question why something bad happened to them. It takes time for the chaplain to help them find their faith again.”

Ms. Sullivan worked for the Army for six years in the recreation department. She was deployed to Iraq for six months where she was in an accident and had to be flown out. During her own recovery, she realized there was a lot that could be done for wounded service members through recreation.

“To be a Marine you have to want to join the Marine Corps and you are probably a different kind of guy or girl,” she said. “To come back and need to be taken care of….It’s heartbreaking for some of them.”

Events like today give them an opportunity to be competitive, to have people cheering them on, to have something to take their minds off their injuries, she said.

“They probably won’t sleep well tonight. They may ice up some body parts. But they’ll be on an emotional and spiritual high for the next few weeks,” she said.

First line of defense

People of faith—churches—can be instrumental in helping someone heal from soul wounds and traumatic body wounds.

“Everyone out here has been wounded in some way, shape or form. I believe in the power of prayer. And that’s what got me through a lot of things,” said Staff Sgt. Nestor Cruz.

“The church is our first line of defense … at least that’s what I believe.”

Staff Sgt. Cruz has cancer and he said competing in this game was “phenomenal.”

“That support back home is … it’s the biggest thing we all need.”

Lt. Cmdr. Bender, 53, remembers when she heard God’s call to military chaplaincy; It was during the first Gulf War as she was watching CNN and hearing the reports about what was happening.

“I was a civilian pastor and yet I stood there staring at the TV, saying, ‘Who’s providing pastoral care for these people?’ and ‘I bet the ones who are doing the hardest jobs are the youngest, who cares for them?’ I had absolutely no idea that seven or eight years later I would end up in the military.”

She has spent a lot of time working with congregations and many of the United Methodist Church agencies to provide resource material on welcoming home the warrior.

Military members and their families are not projects to be fixed. That is the first thing congregations need to remember, Lt. Cmdr. Bender said.

“Ms. Sullivan added, don’t forget about a wounded warrior.

“They need that support. And it needs to continue ‘cause they’re not gonna grow their limb back and they’re not gonna always recover from an injury 100 percent and so they’re always gonna need the support. I just don’t want people to forget about ’em.”

Retired Chief Warrant Officer Shawna Dunn, competing on a veteran Marines team, was windeled after several tough rounds. He said it is great to see people with all kinds of wounds playing so hard.

He understands what they are going through and how much more they will need on their way to recovery.

“You know you have succeeded when they stop defining themselves by their injuries.”
The year 2012 proved to be a unique year for Wisconsin’s Disaster Response Ministry. On the one hand, floods in the north of the state required assistance, and help was provided. On the other hand, an unusually low number of trained and certified Early Response Team (ERT) members presented unprecedented challenges. “When Sandy hit, we were asked to send people out there to help,” said Tom Rossmiller, Disaster Response Coordinator. “But we presently only have four early responders who have up-to-date training and are properly certified with current background checks in the state. Therefore, we determined that it was not best to go, so we could keep people in Wisconsin in case something happened here.”

ERT members are the first responders

Early Response Teams are the first group of people to aid in disaster response. “They don’t do any repairs,” Rossmiller said, “They just try to provide a Christian presence, stabilize the situation, and help people protect their belongings. We try to help people organize, and have a place where their personal property can be stored and picked up later. At this stage, we are hoping to help start the process of recovering from the disaster.”

Rossmiller said each team only stays for three days before another moves in—but each team works hard to get as much done as they can in the limited timeframe allowed. Since starting at his position in May 2012, Rossmiller said he has been working tirelessly to bring paperwork up-to-date, and bring new volunteers into the program to be able to aid other parts of the country besides just Wisconsin.

Sign up for ERT training in March

“That’s why we’re going to have recertification training for ERT members, to see if we can bring some of those whose certifications and background checks have expired back onto the team,” he said. “After that, we’re going to try to get the new people in for basic ERT certification.” Rossmiller said that training will take place on March 15 and 16 at St. James United Methodist Church in East Troy, WI. Recertification training is on the 15th and Basic ERT Certification is on the 16th—and he stresses that these will be the only ERT training available this year in the state. Rossmiller is also planning a Spiritual and Emotional Care Training event in partnership with UMOR personnel sometime in April.

Our volunteers gave help and hope during the Superior floods

Rossmiller said the Disaster Response Ministry provides assistance in other ways, too. When floods hit the Superior area last summer, Rossmiller and Ron Schobert, in charge of logistics, organized sending flood buckets up to Harbor House, one of our Health and Welfare Ministries. “The flood happened on a Thursday, and on that Friday, we were already working on getting flood buckets in place. We sent 3,600 flood buckets up to Superior and Duluth,” he said.

Rev. Barbara Certa-Werner, Harbor House’s Executive Director, said she remembers how volunteers across the state pitched in during their time of need. “Our community stands in awe of the power of God to provide the flood buckets, volunteers and funds to assist in the flood recovery,” she said. “I will vividly remember the moment—which was filled with anticipation—when the truck with the flood buckets arrived. The sense of belonging filled my heart and it was brimming with pure joy. We were not alone; God, through the United Methodist Church, was there giving us hope. Our community is so grateful for all that we have received.”

Volunteers in Mission begin the rebuilding

After ERT members stabilize the disaster area, Volunteers in Mission, or VIM, arrives on the scene. Chuck Wedemeyer, who has been on many VIM trips across the country, said this is when the actual rebuilding begins. “It’s generally not for six months to a year after a disaster that VIM gets involved with people who don’t have insurance or can’t get aid from the government,” he said. “We go in and provide pre-labor and rebuild whatever has to be rebuilt.”

But Wedemeyer, now a trip leader, also said that much more goes on than rebuilding, no matter the phase. “I remember the first trip I was on,” he recalled. “I was healthy; I wanted to work as hard as I could to get as much work done as possible for these people. Now, as I lead the trips, I stop everybody and say, ‘The first thing I want you to do is sit down and listen. If you don’t work for the first half a day and all you do is listen, you have provided them with therapy and comfort, which is just as important as rebuilding.’”

Wedemeyer added, listening to people while doing God’s work is what truly makes the trips worth it. “People can’t believe we pay to work for them,” he said. “God doesn’t have any hands or feet; guess who has them? If we’re going to go out and do His work, then we need to go out and do it. If you can focus on other people’s needs, the rewards are tenfold.”

To sign up for ERT training, contact Tom Rossmiller at 262-642-3727 or email Tom at tomarossmiller@centurytel.net. Registration for the sessions will close on March 4th. To learn more about VIM or get involved, email Chuck Wedemeyer at jcwede@gmail.com or visit www.wisvim.org.

Mark Your Calendars:

Attend A Day Apart With Bishop Jung

Bishop Jung is planning on spending A Day Apart with the clergy, and a separate session with the laity, in each of the regions in February. Each clergy visit will begin with a registration at 9:30 a.m. and the agenda starts with worship at 10 a.m. It will conclude by 4 p.m. with a lunch included. A special laity session with Bishop Jung is scheduled in each region on the same date in the evening. The dates are as follows:

**Capital/Coulee Region**
- Thursday, February 7, 2013, Dodgeville UMC, 327 N Iowa Street, Dodgeville 53533, with an evening portion for laity, 7 to 8:30 p.m., including refreshments.

**Nicole/Winnebago Region**
- Thursday, February 14, 2013, First UMC, 325 E. Franklin St., Appleton WI 54911, with an evening portion for laity, 6:30 to 8 p.m., including refreshments.

**Metros Region**
- Thursday, February 21, 2013, Central UMC, 639 N 20th St., Milwaukee, WI 53233, with an evening portion for laity at Calvary UMC, 3177 S. 107th St., West Allis, WI 53227, to 8:30 p.m., including refreshments.

**Chippewa/Heartland Region**
- Thursday, February 28, 2013, Holcombe UMC, 27841 Cty Hwy M, Holcombe, WI 54745, with an evening portion for the laity, 7 to 8:30 p.m., including refreshments.

Self Knowledge is the Key to Cultural Competency

By Grace Cajiuat

The word “culture” often invokes a specific set of images about a group of people: perhaps a way of life, but not necessarily a way of thinking. Grace Cajiuat, Coordinator of Multicultural Ministries, knows there’s more to a country of origin than meets the eye.

“Culture goes beyond the tip of the iceberg,” Cajiuat said. “Whereas the tip only indicates what we usually associate with culture, such as dance, food, language, or way of dressing, culture includes what is below the waterline of the iceberg and impacts our lives together the most: the unspoken rules and the unconscious rules we have. Multicultural means that diversity of culture includes sections of our lives that we normally don’t think of as carrying culture: age, economic status, educational background, sexual orientation, work experience, to name a few.”

As the bearer of this newly-created position, one task Cajiuat carries out is presenting workshops to churches and their communities across the state, where participants learn just how diverse their congregation may be—and to celebrate that diversity for the congregation’s advantage. “The realization is that each church has its own culture, depending on where they are and which group of people settled on that land,” Cajiuat said. “The focus of the workshop has been to discover the culture of the clergy and the culture of the church, so that together, both clergy and congregation discover the culture of Christ that is within their faith community that then impacts their ministry in the community and in the world.”

Of course, accepting a multicultural atmosphere never comes without obstacles: Cajiuat cites ethnic churches that struggle with generational cultural conflict as an example. “Elders who migrated to the U.S. are struggling with their children who were born in this country and who have been ‘enculturated’ in the western way of life and vice versa,” she said.

The key to cultural competency, Cajiuat said, is self-knowledge. She cites Matthew 22:39: “Love your neighbor as you love yourself. “We can’t genuinely and authentically love others if we don’t know how to love ourselves. The same goes for cultural awareness: we need to know our own culture and values before we can genuinely open ourselves to other cultures so as not to get lost in the process,” she said. “It is more difficult to be a multicultural church, yet that is our call as disciples of Christ: to have everyone at the table. We do this by celebrating who we are so we can then celebrate others.”

In the end, Cajiuat offered a vision of what she hopes to accomplish in the newly minted position, and said that learning about culture is simply a means to do greater works for God. “The vision for our Conference is for all of our congregations to know who they are with their culture and values, and celebrate that so they can celebrate others; not only opening their hearts, their minds, and their doors, but to go out of the church walls and walk with people, walk with the poor and the marginalized, act justly, love kindly, and walk humbly with God. The vision is to have the image that it isn’t one culture at the center, but that Christ is at the center, and all cultures, all people surround Christ and grow deeply as disciples so that they may disciple others.”
And that influence runs deep. The fellowship program has nurtured some of Methodism’s most high-profile scholars; created a go-to pool of candidates for seminaries looking to hire top United Methodist professors; fostered a network connecting United Methodist faculty from different seminaries around the U.S.; forged links between the academic world and the local church; and hosted a sort of intellectual support group for Wesleyan scholars in seminaries, local churches and the denomination.

“It’s been more wildly successful than [the founders] could have imagined,” said the Rev. Jason Byassee, senior pastor of Boone United Methodist and a John Wesley Fellow. “It’s a model for, if you want to change the world, do something really narrow and deep, instead of trying to do everything.”

Methodist stars

The list of John Wesley Fellows reads like a roll call of United Methodist luminaries: the Rev. Richard B. Hays, current dean of Duke Divinity School; the Rev. L. Gregory Jones, Duke Divinity’s dean from 1997-2010; the Rev. Kenda Creasy Dean, a Princeton Theological Seminary professor and leading authority on youth ministry; the Rev. Doug Strong, dean of Seattle Pacific School of Theology; Bishop Scott Jones of the Great Plains Conference; the Rev. Tom Albin, dean of the Upper Room Chapel; the Rev. Ben Witherington, author and Asbury Seminary professor; the Rev. Steve Rankin, chaplain of Southern Methodist University; the Rev. Ted Campbell, associate professor of church history at SMU’s Perkins School of Theology; and the Rev. Amy Valdez Barker, executive director of the Connectional Table.

There are now 145 John Wesley Fellows; about a third of them serve on the faculties of theological schools such as Duke, Wesley, Asbury, Princeton, Garrett-Evangelical and Perkins.
Christian teaching, it also holds the teaching and a long tradition (albeit a struggle every inch of the way) of civil rights," she wrote. "Marriage equality is a civil rights issue; it provides for all what is afforded to some." Bishop Dyck noted in her statement that she's not able to perform such a ceremony, or allow clergy under her supervision to do so, because of restrictions in the Book of Discipline, or law book.

But just because I can't provide the service of marriage to same-sex couples doesn't mean that I should prevent people from being able to commit their lives to each other in the State of Illinois," she said.

Strong reactions
Among those saluting Bishop Dyck was the Rev. Gilbert Caldwell, a retired UM clergyman and longtime civil rights advocate.

"She and other bishops, pastors and lay persons in the United Methodist Church who today support marriage equality for same-sex couples are to be congratulated rather than condemned," he said. "Why do we in our denomination continue to believe that exclusion of some rather than inclusion of all is an appropriate response to the inclusive love we have seen in Jesus?"

Randall Miller, interim executive director of the Reconciling Ministries Network, an unofficial caucus within the UMC supporting gay rights, also praised Bishop Dyck for what he called a "brave decision to support the rights of same-sex couples."

Good News, which strongly supports the church's current position on homosexuality, quickly issued a statement expressing disappointment with Bishop Dyck.

"We respect Bishop Dyck and have worked well with him in the past in relating to the Unity Task Force of the Council of Bishops which she led," the statement said. "However, we believe that for Bishop Dyck to advocate a minority position that is at odds with the stated position of the church fosters disunity and deepens the sense of disconnect felt by many United Methodist members."

The group added: "We share Bishop Dyck's commitment to ensure the protection of the civil rights of all persons. However, there are other ways to ensure the civil rights of gay and lesbian persons without redefining the bedrock institution of marriage. We see no reason why the church should allow a secular, anthropocentric, hyper-sexualized Western culture to tell us what marriage is, rather than looking to the Scriptures and, with real concern for the rights of all, maintaining what God has revealed."

The Rev. Thomas Lambrecht, vice president of Good News, told United Methodist News Service that he did not see Bishop Dyck's statement as advocating disobedience to the Book of Discipline, but rather expressing opposition to it.

But he also argued that Bishop Dyck and retired Bishop Melvin Talbert—who has gone on record advocating that UM clergy perform same-sex unions, something prohibited by church law—"are engaging activities that tend to undermine the unity of the United Methodist Church."

Bishop Dyck said the church already is clearly divided on the issue, with support for gay rights gaining in the United States. She described what she posted as "a statement of honesty that helps us to be able to be in dialogue in order to move through and figure out how it is to live together."

The UMC has, for four decades, had language in its Book of Discipline declaring that the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching.

Faith Focus
North Korea toughest country for Christians
A report from the non-denominational group called Open Doors estimates that about 100 million Christians faced oppression in 2012. The group, which advocates on such Christians' behalf, listed North Korea, Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan as the most hostile countries for Christian faith.

Kosher food pantry does brisk business
A kosher food pantry called Yad Ezra, outside Detroit, serves 1,400 families a month, up from 250 when the pantry began in 1990, Religion News Service reported.

"For many years, one of our biggest hurdles was convincing Jews and non-Jews that a need existed," said Lea Luger, executive director.

Oxford is U.K.'s least religious city
Among cities in the United Kingdom, Oxford has the highest percentage of residents who claim to have no religion, census figures show.

"The self-described Christian population is 48 percent, down from 60 percent in 2001," Oxford Online reported. "An increasing percentage of Western Europeans have had an experience of Christianity that makes the best news about God seem irrelevant," said Timothy Bateman, president of the Oxford Inter-Collegiate Christian Union.

Groups sue N.H. over scholarships
Civil liberties groups have filed a lawsuit challenging New Hampshire's tax-credit funded program to provide disadvantaged students scholarships to private schools. "Whether it's through a traditional voucher or a tax credit, the result is the same: Taxpayers are subsidizing religious instruction," said Barry Lynn, executive director of American United for Separation of Church and State. The program gives businesses tax credits in exchange for donations to K-12 scholarship organizations, which will pay for tuition at private schools. Plaintiffs argue the schools will be able to use the funds for religious instruction and discrimination.

BISHOP Continued from page 1B

Bishop Sally Dyck (r) joined in talks with gay rights demonstrators who took over the floor during a session of the 2012 General Conference in Tampa, Fla.

Efforts to change the church's position, including at the 2012 General Conference, have all failed. An "agree to disagree" proposal by the Rev. Adam Hamilton and the Rev. Mike Slaughter, UM megachurch pastors, was also defeated, though Bishop Dyck said she believes it enjoyed majority support among U.S. delegates.

Other mainline Protestant denominations have modified, to various degrees, their stances on homosexuality. But in the UMC, delegates from Africa, who have increased in number as the church has grown there, have joined with social conservatives in the United States and elsewhere to uphold the status quo.

Many UM clergy have in the last two years announced their support for same-sex unions, including more than 1,100 who signed pledges saying they would officiate at such ceremonies, despite church law. Others in the church, including Good News members, have urged the bishops to endorse the Book of Discipline against such clergy.

The Northern Illinois Conference has been a stronghold for gay rights, petitioning the General Conference in 2011 to remove all discriminatory language about homosexuality from the Book of Discipline.

But Bishop Dyck's statement drew criticism from the Northern Illinois Conference Evangelical Association, which chair James Blue said consists of about 130 people, both clergy and laity.

"We regret the disunity that Bishop Dyck's statement will inevitably bring to local congregations and we encourage the Illinois General Assembly to find another way to ensure the civil rights of gay couples without redefining marriage which has for millennia been the foundational unit of human society," the society's statement concludes.

'Cultural context'
Bishop Dyck said in the interview that understandings of marriage have changed over time, as evidenced by uncritical accounts of polygamy in the Old Testament.

"There’s no sense that any of that was really wrong, especially with polygamy," she said. "You have to admit that marriage is in a cultural context and a historical context."

She said she wanted with her statement to stress the importance of life-long committed relationships, whether heterosexual or homosexual.

"For the health of individuals and communities, that's what we need to value," she said.

To date, nine U.S. states and the District of Columbia have legalized same-sex marriage, while 30 have added language to their constitutions banning same-sex marriage, according to the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life.

Illinois has, since 2011, been among the states taking a middle ground, allowing civil unions and we encourage the state to provide many legal protections for same-sex couples, but not allowing them to marry.

Advocates for same-sex marriage in Illinois say it's a matter of fairness for same-sex couples, and also will strengthen their legal protections.
Book applies prayer to world problems

By Tim Tanton
United Methodist News Service

God, our protector and source of hope, help us to remember that wealth is often simply the flip side of poverty and exploitation elsewhere in the world. Give us the strength to recognize our lives are inextricably tied with those struggling to find freedom from trafficking. Amen.

With the deadline moving closer for the international community to achieve significant goals to relieve human suffering, the Rev. Liberato Bautista decided to take action.

“When I was looking at the Millennium Development Goals, I said, ‘...’ these goals are not going to be [implemented]. We have to start praying for the implementation because they are too important to be neglected,” he recalls.

The United Nations developed the goals to focus the world’s attention on reducing poverty, protecting the vulnerable, decreasing the numbers of mothers and babies who die in childbirth and achieving other steps by 2015.

Mr. Bautista, the United Methodist General Board of Church and Society’s executive representative to the United Nations, put together a prayer guide with contributions from writers around the world. The result was Meditations and Devotions on the Millennium Development Goals, which debuted in February 2012. It has taken on new significance as another year passes and the 2015 deadline nears.

“This book . . . helps provide a moral constraining through which we see that these eight goals are not just national and governmental goals, but nearer the core of the Christian gospel—the Christian gospel of justice and peace and wholeness and fullness of life,” Mr. Bautista said.

The book is extraordinary because it brings together the voices of people from around the world who are “from the base,” said the Rev. Rex Reyes, general secretary of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines. Most of the contributors are people “from the roots of the grass,” doing what they can for a better world, he said.

The book is “very Methodist,” Mr. Reyes said. It is guided primarily by the United Methodist Church’s social teachings. “It saddens me that the voices of the indigenous people don’t seem to come out,” he said, adding that perhaps they will for a future edition.

“This book is a trailblazing effort of a faith trying to make itself heard,” Mr. Reyes said. It “feeds us spiritually and convicts our social consciousness. “For me, I have the book on my table, a daily source of nurture from now on.”

The book took three years to compile, Mr. Bautista said. He said he first considered doing a 60-day devotional guide, but as he traveled around the world and invited 300 to 400 people to contribute, he ended up with enough material for 117 days. The devotional guide approach was inspired by the Ilocano version of The Upper Room that Mr. Bautista’s mother read when he was growing up in Sanchez-Mira, a rural town in northern Philippines.

Mr. Bautista’s career has reflected his ongoing concern for the poor and marginalized, starting from the days when he and his wife were activists and church youth leaders during the difficult years of the military regime of Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines.

“My wife and I were both student activists and church youth,” he said. “As United Methodist Youth Fellowship officers during the hardest time in the political and national life of the Philippines, he said. “And we struggled with how to deal with the immense poverty of this country, and yet, it has an abundance of resources. Therefore, the unequal distribution of wealth is one that would be glaring in one’s eyes when you deal with issues in the Philippines.”

The Millennium Development Goals are a way to raise the faith community’s awareness to those types of issues, he said. He refers to them in one sense as “minimum development goals” to lift those who are in extreme poverty into regular poverty.

Politics . . . and prayer

governments have shown a lack of political wisdom and courage in working for the goals, he said. At the same time, “political will is welling up from people to better their lives for sustainability, to better their lives for mental health and public [health],” to better their lives with respect to the eradication of hunger and poverty.”

His response, he said, is to lift up the eight goals in the context of prayer, with an emphasis on Micah 6:8. The first three goals relate to seeking justice, the second set relates to loving mercy, and the last two relate to walking humbly with God.

The Board of Church and Society published an initial 4,000 copies of the book. Proceeds from the sales will support the United Methodist Church’s Imagine No Malaria campaign, the denomination’s Global AIDS Fund, and relief and rehabilitation efforts in the Philippines from typhoons that hit the country year-round. The book (ISBN 978-1-4507-9931-7) can be ordered online. For information, visit http://umls.com/urby.

LETTERS

Judicial Council oversteps bounds

I was provoked by a comment by the Rev. William Lawrence, president of the Judicial Council, in a recent United Methodist News Service article. The passage in question, which includes Dr. Lawrence’s quotation at the end, goes like this: Whether secular or ecclesiastical, an independent judiciary has at its root the principle that “the rights of the minority must be taken seriously.”

The primary function of the judicial branch of government, ecclesiastical or secular, is NOT the protection of the rights of minorities, but the dispensation of justice, without regard to whether disputant parties are in the majority, in the minority, active, passive, people of color, white, young adults, older adults, male, female, clergy or lay. It is axiomatic that justice, properly administered, is blind.

The protection of the rights of minorities is the joint function of the legislative and executive branches. That is why in the UMC it takes a two thirds General Conference vote to suspend the rules, close debate and amend the Constitution. These processes are designed to protect the rights of minorities to be heard, but also to ensure that small minorities may not block action and stifle the work of the body. Despite the growing popularity in some UM circles of so-called consensus processes and “holy conferencing,” the best method we’ve found for large groups to make decisions that are fairly made and fully inclusive is the parliamentary one.

After our laws are in place, the administration of those laws is jointly the function of our conferences and our bishops. The bishops, individually and jointly in the Council of Bishops, are called to lead the whole Church toward its vision of unity, which necessarily implies ensuring that the rights of minorities are protected.

Considering the whole sweep of UM history, the phenomenon of empowerment as few as six people on Judicial Council to declare an act of the General Conference to be unconstitutional is a relatively recent thing, as Sally Askew points out in her history of the Judicial Council. I think it’s time we give some serious consideration to returning the power of constitutional decisions to a larger body, such as the Council of Bishops. We surely need a Judicial Council to serve as the ultimate appellate “court” and to rule on decisions of law made by our bishops. But constitutional decisions probably could better be made elsewhere.

Lonnie Brooks
Lay leader
Alaska United Methodist Conference
The Fellowship was one of the places where I would turn when recruiting new faculty,” said Dr. Gregory Jones. “That’s where many of the most talented United Methodist scholars can be found.”

Dr. Jones became the new executive director of A Foundation for Theological Education (AFTE), the non-profit organization that provides the funding for John Wesley Fellows, on Jan. 1, succeeding Paul Erin, who retired after five years.

AFTE is independent of the denomination, with an official mission of strengthening “the classical Christian witness within the United Methodist Church.” The organization has an endowment of $1.6 million, but most of its $350,000 annual budget comes from a few hundred individual donors—many of them John Wesley Fellows. More than $200,000 of that goes to scholarships; the remainder covers the Christmas Conference and occasional gatherings of Fellows at events such as the American Academy of Religion’s annual meeting.

More than $3 million in grants have been awarded since 1977. Each year, AFTE awards up to six Fellowships to United Methodist doctoral students; the grant runs for four years (typically, $12,500 per academic year per student), so about 20 John Wesley Fellows receive stipends each year.

**Reclaiming Wesley**

AFTE was established in 1977 by the late Albert Outler and the late Edmund Robb Jr. The two were a bit of a theological odd couple: Outler was a Perkins professor, an Ivy League educated academic with impeccable credentials and the pre-eminent Wesley scholar of his time; Robb was a fiery traveling Methodist evangelist and a sharp critic for what he perceived as the denomination’s liberal leanings.

Both, however, were convinced of the need for the United Methodist Church to reclaim its Wesleyan heritage as the key to revitalizing the denomination. While the AFTE’s description of core Wesleyan doctrine (see sidebar) might read conservative to some—there’s no mention of social justice, for example—Dr. Gregory Jones says there’s no theological litmus test for selecting Fellows.

“We have some pretty interesting and vigorous theological disagreements [among the Fellows],” he said. “That’s part of the richness of the program.”

Bishop Scott Jones says that the Fellowship has helped re-focus the “Wesleyan center” of the United Methodist faith in seminaries and ultimately in the denomination.

“There is a diversity of theological perspectives [among the Fellows], but there has been a shared, Wesleyan approach to things,” he said. “I think AFTE did bring greater balance and church-relatedness to theological education.”

Dr. Byassee says he initially had reservations about the Fellowship, which helped him earn his Ph.D., at Duke Divinity in 2005.

“I was deeply suspicious, because AFTE used a lot of belligerent language at the time about ‘taking back the seminaries,’” he said. “There was an impression that the Fellowship program was a kind of conservative Trojan horse.”

But AFTE has since toned that down, Dr. Byassee says, and he’s indebted to the program.

“This is a group that has no official United Methodist money or representation, and it’s doing better than [any other group] in forming the United Methodist identity of future scholars,” he said.

**Financial support**

Without the John Wesley Fellowship, Dr. Dean says she wouldn’t have been able to complete her Ph.D. For Dr. Strong, the Fellowship meant that he didn’t have to work long hours in a job while pursuing his Ph.D., at Princeton Theological Seminary. Ms. Valdez Barker says the Fellowship is allowing her to pursue her doctorate at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary without taking on a heavy load of debt.

But all agree the Fellowship’s benefits extend beyond the financial.

“I can say without question that, other than the college where I teach, my closest colleagues in my professional life have been my John Wesley Fellowship friends,” Dr. Strong said. “Whenever there’s an issue I need some counsel on, or I need the name of a good speaker, I call [a John Wesley Fellow] and ask their opinion,” he said. At academic conferences, where anxiety levels are often high, he added that the presence of other John Wesley Fellows has been a source of support.
“You walk in, you see somebody you know, who’s there for you and you’re there for them, it’s very encouraging,” Dr. Strong said.

Those connections not only facilitate academic work, but also filter down to members of local United Methodist churches, Bishop Jones says. He noted that when the Rev. Craig Hill, a John Wesley Fellow, produced a video-based curriculum series for use in churches while a professor at Wesley Theological, he turned to other John Wesley Fellows to enlist presenters and ideas. In 1994, Bishop Jones collaborated with another John Wesley Fellow, the Rev. Michael Cartwright, as part of a larger group that crafted the denominations mission statement, “to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transnational’s mission statement, “to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.”

“AFTE created this network, and then allowed things to bubble up out of this network,” said Bishop Jones. “It’s an informal collaboration, rather than a tight-knit organization.”

Dr. Gregory Jones adds that many Fellows remain connected to local church ministry, something he witnessed on a recent visit to Lovers Lane United Methodist Church in Dallas.

“Ted Campbell was leading an adult Bible study in one side of the hallway, and Steve Rankin was leading one on the other,” he said.

Fellows follow the example of John Wesley, who was both a pastor and an Oxford don, according to Dr. Dean.

“That’s part of the ethos that’s encouraged,” she said. “There’s not a sharp line between the pastoral and scholarly identity.”

Dr. Byassee said, “I think the John Wesley Fellowship is continuing to gather interesting and smart people together for the transformation of the world.”

“I saw a new generation of people prepared to do the hard scholarly work,” he said. “The John Wesley Fellowship is proving that.”

Matthew Sigler, a John Wesley Fellow and music director at the Church of the Cross, an Anglican congregation in Boston, gives others at the Christmas Conference an update on his career.
**Holy habits are good for people—and churches**

**By Laurie Haller**  
Special Contributor

Have you made any New Year’s resolutions? How are they working for you so far?

New Year’s resolutions are nothing more than promises to ourselves to develop new habits. The most popular ones in the U.S. remain remarkably consistent year after year: lose weight, exercise, eat healthy, drink less alcohol, work less, spend more time with family, manage debt, get more education, get a better job, quit smoking, get organized, volunteer more and recycle more.

Unfortunately, old habits die hard, and the majority of our resolutions quickly fall by the wayside because we fail to develop new habits to replace them. In his recent book, *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business*, Charles Duhigg defines habits as “the choices that all of us deliberately make at some point, then stop thinking about but continue doing, often every day.”

It’s estimated that 40 percent of our daily decisions are habits. Good habits make us more efficient because they evoke automatic responses that free us from the energy and time involved in making conscious decisions about our everyday life. Our brain has a way of storing patterns of behavior by “chunking,” which converts behavior into unthinking routines that become repeated actions.

For the same reason, bad habits can be destructive to our body, mind, spirit and relationships. Hence the need for New Year’s resolutions. Try as I might, I have great difficulty changing my bad habits:

- I love chocolate but am very sensitive to caffeine, so I usually only eat chocolate before noon. Unfortunately, I have a habit of mindlessly nibbling on chocolate almost every morning when I sit down at my computer, even if I am not hungry.
- My iPhone is set up to beep when I receive an email, so whenever I hear the sound I habitually check my email, even when it is not appropriate to do so.
- I am a faithful recycler at home and have five mesh bags in my car for grocery shopping, but I am not yet in the habit of remembering to grab the bags when I go into the store.

**Keystone principle**

Each habit, whether good or bad, has a cue, a routine and a reward. The cue for my morning chocolate routine is sitting down at the computer, which triggers a craving and offers the reward of comfort. The key to changing a bad habit is recognizing the cue and substituting another routine to satisfy the craving and achieve the same reward, such as having a cup of tea instead of chocolate.

All 12-step programs are based on habit replacement; that is, inserting new routines as responses to cues that formerly triggered addictive behaviors. Alcoholics Anonymous has also discovered the secret of “keystone habits”: central practices that, when followed completely, cause a transforming ripple effect. For AA, the keystone habit is the higher power. We cannot change habits ourselves. Rather, when we believe in a higher power (God) and learn to believe in ourselves and others, and claim the will to change.

Habits play an important role in our individual and collective spiritual lives as well. A community is an amazing collection of habits, and when churches get their habits right, Holy Spirit routines take off and wholistic growth abounds. In order for healthy and holy habits to form in churches, conscious decisions have to be made: What are our core values? What is our mission, vision and strategy for ministry?

Hebrews 10:25 says, “And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting our meeting together, as is the habit of the ancient Jews.”

**‘Manifold blessings flow from healthy spiritual disciplines.’**

How do we form new habits in churches? By teaching church members to become spiritually mature self-feeders. When church leaders cultivate spiritual disciplines in the lives of congregation members through works of piety and mercy, every person becomes a minister. Furthermore, holy habits such as prayer, tithing, witness, outreach and discernment of spiritual gifts not only become routine but are routinely transmitted to others. Manifold blessings flow from healthy spiritual disciplines.

What do some churches do?

- Have a large percentage of members attending worship?
- Have a large number of families tithing?
- Experience transformative worship week after week?
- Follow a well-defined strategic plan for wholistic growth?
- Make consistently wise and critical decisions in healthy ways?

Continually encourage new and innovative ministries to serve our community and the world?

Have a large cadre of spiritually mature leaders?

The reason is simple. These congregations have developed such good habits and spiritual disciplines that their DNA is second-nature. It is naturally transmitted to any guest who walks in the door or is served outside the door.

What habits can you identify in your church, and what are your keystones? What spiritual disciplines do you need to develop?

Do you believe that you can choose your own personal habits? Do you believe that every church can form its own unique keystones? Do you believe that it’s possible to create new routines to replace ingrained and unhealthy responses to cues and cravings? Do you believe that God gives you the power to develop habits of faith that convert mere followers to spiritual leaders?

Though it’s a slow process, I’m working on changing my bad habits. And I’ve memorized this quote from Aristotle, “We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, therefore, is not an act, but a habit.”

May all of your New Year’s resolutions become holy habits!

Two conversations that helped renew my hope

BY RICHARD HEARNE
Special Contributor

As a member of the North Texas Conference delegation to the last three General Conference sessions and an annual conference lay leader from 2008-2012, I have had the opportunity to attend multiple meetings discussing the decline of the United Methodist Church. The most dramatic talks centered on the prediction of a “death tsunami” in the coming years, as so many United Methodists will pass on to become Saints of the Church.

This constant reminder of our dire circumstances has really become oppressive, and forces one to consider the wisdom of continuing to devote so much time to the UMC. The futility of the 2012 General Conference (where we accomplished little if anything)—coupled with recent rulings of the Judicial Council that would seem to indicate no significant changes are going to be allowed to our denominational functions—makes it appear that we’re in a lose-lose situation. It is very difficult to be committed to making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world when we are not sure our denomination will be relevant or even in existence in just a few short decades.

However, this past week I had two conversations that gave me some hope for our future: one at a local church meeting and the other on a golf course.

At the church meeting, staff and laity were discussing the opportunity to provide more discipleship programs for our congregation. Somehow the focus of the meeting turned a little negative.

One of the young clergy in the room made an almost-defiant statement that he was tired of all the doom and gloom talk in our denomination. He is in the very early years of his ministry and doesn’t want to believe that he is committed to a dying denomination. He believes in our Wesleyan theology and our polity.

My other encounter was with a very good friend—a man who is one of my accountability partners. The weather was warm for a January afternoon, and the golf was not focused, so the conversation between shots turned to concerns about the UMC. We were discussing how many persons are leaving the UMC to go to nondenominational churches. I expressed my disapproval, a feeling that many of those folks are merely following preachers and aren’t committed to a body that has a connection like the UMC.

Then my friend asked me, “Are you more interested in having the gospel of Jesus Christ preached, or in saving an institution?”

What a great question! Am I invested in saving United Methodism... only because I’ve committed so much of my life to the UMC as an institution? If so, and if that is also true for others, could that be the reason so many people tell us they don’t feel God’s spirit in our worship or in how we treat others?

Have we become—as John Wesley feared—a “dead sect” that values our own comfort more than the needs of the poor? Would we rather battle over social issues (which are important) than deal with the critical issue of preaching the living, saving grace message of Jesus Christ?

Do we heed the admonition in Ephesians 4 to conduct ourselves with humility and gentleness, bearing with each other in love as one body and one spirit? I am not sure that those outside our churches would describe our actions in this way. Do we need to refocus on our mission statement?

One conversation restored my confidence in the institution, and another convinced me that we still have the message to preach—we just need to do it.

So how about you? What do you think our future is, and what is your goal for the United Methodist Church?

Mr. Hearne is director of development for the UMC-affiliated Lydia Patterson Institute and former lay leader of the North Texas Conference.

‘Am I invested in saving United Methodism... only because I’ve committed so much of my life to the UMC as an institution?’

Opening worship at General Conference 2012. The UMC must worry less about preserving itself as an institution and find fervor for sharing the gospel, says Richard Hearne.

A ‘changing landscape’: How will we respond?

BY BISHOP WOODIE W. WHITE
UMR Columnist

My colleague and friend Bishop Sudarshana Devadhar, who presides over the Boston Episcopal Area of the United Methodist Church, recently brought to the attention of members of the Council of Bishops an interesting article that caught his attention in a newspaper in India.

The headline reported: “First Hindu U.S. Legislators Make History with Oath on Gita.”

The news account began, “Five and a half years after a Hindu prayer opened a U.S. Senate session, Tulsi Gabbard, the first Hindu to be elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, created history by taking the oath of office on the Bhagavad Gita, the sacred Hindu text.”

Bishop Devadhar, called affectionately by his colleagues, “Suda,” went on to write movingly about how the article impacted his heart.

The religious landscape of America is changing; historically, the nation has been noted for its diverse racial and ethnic population, but the future will bring widespread religious multiplicity, as well. It is already common in communities across the country to see not only churches as places of worship, but also synagogues, mosques and temples. While Christianity has been and is still the predominant religion practiced, more people than ever before claim other faith allegiances. (Also, 20 percent of U.S. adults surveyed in a recent study said they had no religious affiliation at all—an increase of 5 percent in only five years.)

Methodism has a long and rich history of relating to people of different faiths, going back to its founder, John Wesley. United Methodists have often welcomed opportunities to reach out to those who call God by different names, and indeed, the potential for these efforts is even greater as we witness the changing demographics of the nation.

Ecumenical dialogue in America will expand in coming decades to include more interfaith ties, friendships between people of different faiths and, overall, a growing mutual respect—I hope! Of course, religious and racial intolerance will be there, too, but I pray it will be rare among United Methodists.

Each year when the Pew Forum on Religion and Politics reports the religious affiliation of U.S. congressional leaders, I confess that I count the number of United Methodists. I am pleased, however, that our nation has no religious test for elected leaders; the primary criteria should always be how wisely those leaders will govern. And wearing a lapel pin of an American flag or a cross around one’s neck should never be seen as an indicator of either genuine patriotism or faithful Christian discipleship.

As the nation moves toward an age of even greater racial, ethnic and religious diversity, I trust it will enrich our culture and society. In addition, I pray that our politics will become more civil and our policies more just.

By the way, after Rep. Tulsi Gabbard’s swearing-in ceremony this month, she told the press that she chose to take the oath of office with her personal copy of the Bhagavad Gita “because its teachings have inspired me to strive to be a servant-leader, dedicating my life in the service of others and to my country.”

Sound familiar?

Retired Bishop White is bishop-in-residence at Emory University’s Candler School of Theology, in Atlanta.

U.S. Rep. Tulsi Gabbard (D-Hawaii) is the first Hindu to serve in Congress.

PHOTO BY WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

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PHOTO BY WIKIMEDIA COMMONS
By Kathy L. Gilbert
United Methodist News Service

GARDENEALE, Ala.—Though many feel lost in a terrible sea, members of Gardendale-Mt. Vernon United Methodist Church were reminded on Jan. 13 that Jesus Christ is in the boat with them.

Just days after their pastor, the Rev. Terry Greer, was accused of shooting and killing his wife and wounding his daughter, worshippers came through the doors of their church seeking comfort and answers.

Bishop Debra Wallace-Padgett, episopal leader of the North Alabama Conference; the Rev. Bob Alford, superintendent of the conference’s Central District; and the Rev. Jeri Hunt, interim pastor of Gardendale-Mt. Vernon, offered words of healing in all three worship services.

On Jan. 10, according to police reports, Mr. Greer, 53, shot his wife, Lisa, 52, and daughter, Suzanna, 18, while in the church’s parsonage. Lisa Greer died of her wounds later that night. Suzanna Greer reportedly took the gun from her father and ran to a neighbor, who called police. Mr. Greer then took a kitchen knife, went into the bathroom, and repeatedly stabbed himself in the neck and chest.

Suzanna Greer, a college freshman, was released from the hospital and is staying with family friends. Mr. Greer is still in the hospital with war- rants for murder and attempted mur- der against him. As church members and all their friends that are in such pain, “she said.

The bishop said she looked at many Scriptures trying to find the right word for her sermon. She said Mark 4—the story of Jesus calming the Sea of Galilee—seemed most ap- propriate. She said there are parallels between that ancient story and what this church is facing.

“We are in a ferocious storm, and it has left us feeling off balance,” she said, adding that just as Jesus stayed in the boat and calmed the seas, he will do the same for us.

“My heart breaks for the people of this congregation, for the Greer family and all their friends that are in such pain,” she said.

During each of the services, mem- bers of the congregation came to the altar to pray and comfort each other. Many hugged and whispered to each other, “We will get through this; we will be stronger.”

Moving forward
Bishop Wallace-Padgett and the Rev. Sherri Ferguson, executive director of pastoral care and counseling for the conference, met with local

‘My heart breaks for the people of this congregation, for the Greer family and all their friends that are in such pain.’

—Bishop Debra Wallace-Padgett

media in a news conference after the last worship service. She said the con- ference is in the planning stages of finding another pastor for Garden- dale-Mt. Vernon and will announce that soon.

Ms. Hunt said many in the church had been concerned about the family; Lisa and Suzanna had not been at- tending Gardendale-Mt. Vernon dur- ing Mr. Greer’s illness. The family wanted their privacy,” she said.

“This is a community of faith that is in shock,” said Ms. Ferguson. She and other counselors have been on hand since the news of the shooting. Four counselors were in the church’s fellowship hall from 8 a.m. to noon Sunday and more were to be available during the week.

Ms. Ferguson said she was also prepared with resources for parents about how to talk to their children about the pastor and his family.

“We have seen about 75 people, that’s eyeball to eyeball,” Ms. Ferguson said.

“That is just a drop in the bucket.” She is working on the short-term pas- toral care but also is developing a year- long program for the church and staff.

Mr. Greer was appointed to De- catur First United Methodist Church for nine years before being appointed at Gardendale-Mt. Vernon, about 10 miles north of Birmingham. Bishop Wallace-Padgett and Ms. Ferguson said members of that church also have been receiving pastoral care.

“Ferocious storm’
Bishop Wallace-Padgett told wor- shippers on Sunday that there was no place she would rather be than with them. But she also added she hoped they are holding the congregations in prayer.

“This experience is a visible re- minder what power there is in the connection,” she said. “I want to thank the people across Methodism for their love and support.”

A memorial service for Lisa Greer was held Jan. 15 at First UMC in Scottsboro, Ala.

Jay Reeves of the Associated Press contributed to this story.

How to help:
Pastors announced at the end of the service on Jan. 13 that a fund had been set up for the surviving victim, Suzanna Greer. Donations to the Suzanna Greer Fund can be sent to the North Alabama Conference at 898 Arkadelphia Road, Birmingham, AL 35204.

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