



Wildfire emergency ... 5A



Salvation - Compassion ... 5A



2011 AC Offering ... 8A

Texas wildfire devastation is doubled for one pastor

BY CAROLYN STEPHENS
CONFERENCE DIRECTOR OF
COMMUNICATIONS

For Rev. James W. Senkel, pastor of the Cedar Springs United Methodist Church west of Mineral Wells near Strawn, the wildfires that have claimed thousands of acres in north and west Texas are all too familiar.

He was pastor at Cross Plains United Methodist Church on Dec. 27, 2005, when similarly destructive wildfires swept through the West Texas countryside, leaving only the front brick facade of the Cross Plains church and also consuming the parsonage.

Today, only the stone pillars give any suggestion that the Cedar Springs church once served a close-knit congregation that has persevered in this sparsely populated countryside for more than 100 years.

“The two experiences are completely different,” says Rev. Senkel. “With the Cross Plains church, the fire moved swiftly through the community. The damage was great,” he said, “but the fire was gone and we were able to move on with damage assessment and plans for rebuilding.”

On the following Sunday, in fact, the Cross Plains congregation was able to hold their New Year’s Day worship service on the grounds with folding chairs in the parking lot under the shadow of the one remaining wall. It was to have been their 120th anniversary celebration.

“With Cedar Springs, the fires just won’t stop. We’re a small congregation — averaging about 15 in Sunday worship — and we’re spread out across the countryside. The ongoing fires make it impossible for us to regroup and plan our future like we did at Cross Plains. For now,” he said, “we’re still trying to figure out the next hour and which way the



Above, Bishop Mike Lowry stands between the stone pillars which are all that remain of the Cedar Springs United Methodist Church. At right, volunteers assemble before all that remain of the Cross Plains United Methodist Church on Dec. 27, 2005.

fire is moving.”

He said the church is insured, but probably short of its full value. “We have some decisions to make, and we need to find a place to hold our Easter worship service that normally expands to 100.”

As of press time for this newspaper, the wildfires continue to rage throughout the area claiming homes and businesses in the Palo Pinto and Possum Kingdom areas where several of the “weekenders” who worship at Cedar Springs have homes.

Rev. Senkel spoke of his concern for longtime member Laura Thomson who has been trying to protect the family home from the encroaching wildfires. Her Hart Ranch, with an official historical

| Continued on page 4



Wesley Foundation students at Weatherford College respond

Tuesday, April 19, was a busy evening at the Wesley!

First Rev. Chuck Graff came by with \$1,000 worth of supplies from First United Methodist Church in Fort Worth and the Conference Relief Fund.

For The Way, the Weatherford College Wesley Foundation students opened with worship and then packed 150 care bags for firefighters. The care bags contained sandwich meat, bread, Gatorade packages,

candy, granola bars, and chips.

In the course of three hours, Judy Jackson, former Weatherford District administrative assistant, made dinner for the Wesley students and took two carloads of supplies to those fighting the fire. She said the care bags went out almost immediately to keep the workers supplied overnight.



Wildfire emergency ... 6A



Salvation - Compassion ... 6A



2011 AC Offering ... 7A

Texas wildfire devastation is doubled for one pastor

BY CAROLYN STEPHENS
CONFERENCE DIRECTOR OF
COMMUNICATIONS

For Rev. James W. Senkel, pastor of the Cedar Springs United Methodist Church west of Mineral Wells near Strawn, the wildfires that have claimed thousands of acres in north and west Texas are all too familiar.

He was pastor at Cross Plains United Methodist Church on Dec. 27, 2005, when similarly destructive wildfires swept through the West Texas countryside, leaving only the front brick facade of the Cross Plains church and also consuming the parsonage.

Today, only the stone pillars give any suggestion that the Cedar Springs church once served a close-knit congregation that has persevered in this sparsely populated countryside for more than 100 years.

“The two experiences are completely different,” says Rev. Senkel. “With the Cross Plains church, the fire moved swiftly through the community. The damage was great,” he said, “but the fire was gone and we were able to move on with damage assessment and plans for rebuilding.”

On the following Sunday, in fact, the Cross Plains congregation was able to hold their New Year’s Day worship service on the grounds with folding chairs in the parking lot under the shadow of the one remaining wall. It was to have been their 120th anniversary celebration.

“With Cedar Springs, the fires just won’t stop. We’re a small congregation — averaging about 15 in Sunday worship — and we’re spread out across the countryside. The ongoing fires make it impossible for us to regroup and plan our future like we did at Cross Plains. For now,” he said, “we’re still trying to figure out the next hour and which way the



Above, Bishop Mike Lowry stands between the stone pillars which are all that remain of the Cedar Springs United Methodist Church. At right, volunteers assemble before all that remain of the Cross Plains United Methodist Church on Dec. 27, 2005.

fire is moving.”

He said the church is insured, but probably short of its full value. “We have some decisions to make, and we need to find a place to hold our Easter worship service that normally expands to 100.”

As of press time for this newspaper, the wildfires continue to rage throughout the area claiming homes and businesses in the Palo Pinto and Possum Kingdom areas where several of the “weekenders” who worship at Cedar Springs have homes.

Rev. Senkel spoke of his concern for longtime member Laura Thomson who has been trying to protect the family home from the encroaching wildfires. Her Hart Ranch, with an official historical

| Continued on page 3



Wesley Foundation students at Weatherford College respond

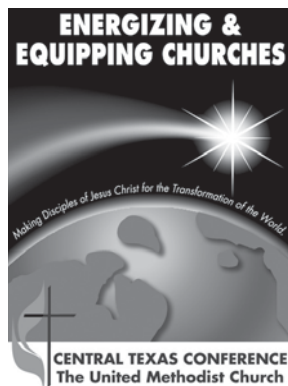
Tuesday, April 19, was a busy evening at the Wesley!

First Rev. Chuck Graff came by with \$1,000 worth of supplies from First United Methodist Church in Fort Worth and the Conference Relief Fund.

For The Way, the Weatherford College Wesley Foundation students opened with worship and then packed 150 care bags for firefighters. The care bags contained sandwich meat, bread, Gatorade packages,

candy, granola bars, and chips.

In the course of three hours, Judy Jackson, former Weatherford District administrative assistant, made dinner for the Wesley students and took two carloads of supplies to those fighting the fire. She said the care bags went out almost immediately to keep the workers supplied overnight.



the
Central Link

Central Texas Conference News

Editor

Carolyn E. Stephens,
Associate Director for Mission Ministries
& Director of Communications
carolyn@ctcumc.org

Bishop

Bishop Michael Lowry
bishop@ctcumc.org

Mission Ministries

Dr. Georgia Adamson,
Assistant to Bishop/Executive Director
georgia@ctcumc.org

Circulation/Subscriptions

Susan Briles
susan@ctcumc.org

Production/Publishing

UMR Communications Inc.,
Dallas, Texas



The Wilderness Way

BY BISHOP MICHAEL LOWRY

56.

I confess to a love of the Book of Acts of the Apostles (that is the actual full name of what we commonly refer to simply as “Acts”). The great New Testament scholar Willi Marxsen goes so far as to label Acts “the gospel of the Holy Spirit.” It is the witness of God present in power and purpose moving in our world.

Among the many things that strike me so forcefully in Acts is the witnessing that takes place. Consider the Apostle Paul. It seems like every time he gets in trouble he stops to give witness or testify (offer testimony as in a court of law) to the presence and activity of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in his life.

It is intriguing that he doesn’t have five steps or the seven rules or any other doctrinal formula. Rather, Paul simply starts talking about how God in Christ through the Holy Spirit has been and is active in his life. The close of the 21st and first part of the 22nd chapters is illustrative. Beaten for bringing Greeks into the Temple and sharing Jesus as the Messiah, he is rescued by a Roman tribune. As he is about to be dragged into the safety of the barracks, Paul stops and asks to speak. He doesn’t share a set of doctrines, rule or law. He tells the story of how the Lord is active in his life. The power is in the story. Indeed, the story is the witness.

As we seek to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, we need to recover witnessing and especially the biblical notion of witnessing as a form of telling our story of how God in Christ through the Holy Spirit is active in our lives. “If I have achieved anything in my life,” said Dorothy Day, “it has been because I have not been embarrassed to talk about God.”

United Methodist campus ministry and seminary professor Kenda Creasy Dean devotes an entire chapter of *Almost Christian: What the Faith of our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (Chapter 7) to recovering a sense of witness or testimony. Interestingly she entitles it “Going Viral for Jesus.”

We tend to think of witnessing as something we do with an unknown stranger. In making disciples it is often the opposite. Our sharing (witness or testimony, telling our story) takes place with family, friends and especially our children. Dean writes: “Christian spirituality requires conversation to both claim and confess our religious identities for ourselves and others ... [it] requires a particular *kind* of conversation that reinforces the church’s unique understanding of who God is in Jesus Christ. To state it bluntly: conversational Christianity requires Jesus-talk, not just God-talk” (Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian*, p. 139).

In places like Sunday school and youth groups, adults sharing how Christ is active in their lives exercises a powerful spiritual influence not only on children and youth, but on other adults as well. Confirmation

mentors or guides have a crucial role in passing on the faith once received. In sharing the story of our relationship with God in Christ through our relationships with each other disciples are made; the story becomes real because a real person cares enough to share.

I urge congregations to rediscover storytelling or witnessing worship. Here is a simple, practical way to do so. First, pray for God to lead you to someone’s story or to witness that need to be heard. (Don’t, absolutely don’t, ask for volunteers! This requires leading from the Holy Spirit, not someone who has something to vent.) Second, once a month or once a quarter, the pastor may invite a person to share their witness in common language. Third, hold to some rigid requirements in sharing (especially as pastors):

1. It is to be a personal story of God’s activity in someone’s life – not bible studies or theological lectures; just tell us how God in Christ through the Holy Spirit has been active in your life;
2. Only 3 to 5 minutes! This is not a substitute for the sermon. A short, tight length of time forces it to be prayed through, thought through, and written out (this last part is important because writing forces clarity of thought);
3. It must be practiced before being given. This includes appropriate sound quality and coaching for clear public speaking;
4. The pastor must approve the content. This protects the doctrinal integrity of the pulpit.

Another clear and spiritually profound step is for adults to occasionally come and share their personal story of life with Christ to the students in the youth group. Some of the ground rules listed above apply. Youth leaders should ensure that it is prayed, thought through, vetted for orthodoxy and practiced. After the sharing, be open to the questions and probing of the youth. The witness or testimony will bless everyone even – especially – when someone is honest enough to admit that they don’t have all the answers.

Putting our faith into words and sharing with each other is a foundational way we make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. The stories, our stories, of God in action through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit have converting power for us and for our listeners. I can still remember well the electricity of a small church I visited in which the pastor invited people to share “God-sightings” of the past week. The Holy Spirit was present in a palpable way.



Wildfire devastation | Continued from page 2A

marker on the property, was possibly in the changing path of the wildfires. Two church members have lost their homes, and two of the regular visitors from the Possum Kingdom Lake area have also.

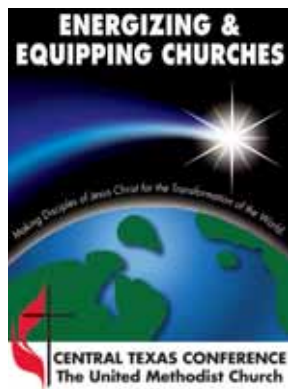
“The locals are country folks with a common bond — they’re strong and resourceful,” Senkel

said with obvious admiration. He holds out hope for the strength of the United Methodist connection. “Volunteers came to help us in Cross Plains, and we can pray they will come again in Cedar Springs.”

The original deed for the Cedar Springs church dates back to 1892 for the property. The church

building was constructed a few years later in 1898. More recently, the congregation doubled the building size with the addition of a Fellowship Hall, a classroom and rest room.

Fortunately for the Senkels, the parsonage is about 43 miles away from the church, outside the current path of the fire.



the
Central Link

An edition of
The United Methodist Reporter
April 29, 2011
Volume 157 | Number 52

Central Link, an edition of *The United Methodist Reporter*, is the official publication of the Central Texas Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Opinions are those of the writers and do not necessarily reflect official United Methodist positions. The Central Texas Conference does not endorse any product or service advertised.

Editor

Carolyn E. Stephens,
Associate Director for Mission Ministries & Director of Communications
carolyn@ctcumc.org

Bishop

Bishop Michael Lowry
bishop@ctcumc.org

Mission Ministries

Dr. Georgia Adamson,
Assistant to Bishop/Executive Director
georgia@ctcumc.org

Circulation/Subscriptions

Susan Briles
susan@ctcumc.org

Production/Publishing

UMR Communications Inc.,
Dallas, Texas

The mission of *Central Link* edition of *The United Methodist Reporter* is to inform, enlighten, inspire and equip leaders for mission and ministry in our connectional church.

For circulation and/or advertising policy, contact Susan Briles 817. 877. 5222, 800.460.8622 or susan@ctcumc.org. Subscriptions: \$20/year.

Central Texas Conference
464 Bailey Avenue
Fort Worth, TX 76107-2153
817.877.5222, 800.460.8622
Conference Website:
www.ctcumc.org

The *Central Link* edition is published every other week and is the official publication of the Central Texas Conference of The United Methodist Church, 464 Bailey Ave., Fort Worth, TX 76107-2153.



The Wilderness Way

BY BISHOP MICHAEL LOWRY

56.

I confess to a love of the Book of Acts of the Apostles (that is the actual full name of what we commonly refer to simply as “Acts”). The great New Testament scholar Willi Marxsen goes so far as to label Acts “the gospel of the Holy Spirit.” It is the witness of God present in power and purpose moving in our world.

Among the many things that strike me so forcefully in Acts is the witnessing that takes place. Consider the Apostle Paul. It seems like every time he gets in trouble he stops to give witness or testify (offer testimony as in a court of law) to the presence and activity of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in his life.

It is intriguing that he doesn’t have five steps or the seven rules or any other doctrinal formula. Rather, Paul simply starts talking about how God in Christ through the Holy Spirit has been and is active in his life. The close of the 21st and first part of the 22nd chapters is illustrative. Beaten for bringing Greeks into the Temple and sharing Jesus as the Messiah, he is rescued by a Roman tribune. As he is about to be dragged into the safety of the barracks, Paul stops and asks to speak. He doesn’t share a set of doctrines, rule or law. He tells the story of how the Lord is active in his life. The power is in the story. Indeed, the story is the witness.

As we seek to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, we need to recover witnessing and especially the biblical notion of witnessing as a form of telling our story of how God in Christ through the Holy Spirit is active in our lives. “If I have achieved anything in my life,” said Dorothy Day, “it has been because I have not been embarrassed to talk about God.”

United Methodist campus ministry and seminary professor Kenda Creasy Dean devotes an entire chapter of *Almost Christian: What the Faith of our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (Chapter 7) to recovering a sense of witness or testimony. Interestingly she entitles it “Going Viral for Jesus.”

We tend to think of witnessing as something we do with an unknown stranger. In making disciples it is often the opposite. Our sharing (witness or testimony, telling our story) takes place with family, friends and especially our children. Dean writes: “Christian spirituality requires conversation to both claim and confess our religious identities for ourselves and others ... [it] requires a particular *kind* of conversation that reinforces the church’s unique understanding of who God is in Jesus Christ. To state it bluntly: conversational Christianity requires Jesus-talk, not just God-talk” (Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian*, p. 139).

In places like Sunday school and youth groups, adults sharing how Christ is active in their lives exercises a powerful spiritual influence not only on children and youth, but on other adults as well. Confirmation

mentors or guides have a crucial role in passing on the faith once received. In sharing the story of our relationship with God in Christ through our relationships with each other disciples are made; the story becomes real because a real person cares enough to share.

I urge congregations to rediscover storytelling or witnessing worship. Here is a simple, practical way to do so. First, pray for God to lead you to someone’s story or to witness that need to be heard. (Don’t, absolutely don’t, ask for volunteers! This requires leading from the Holy Spirit, not someone who has something to vent.) Second, once a month or once a quarter, the pastor may invite a person to share their witness in common language. Third, hold to some rigid requirements in sharing (especially as pastors):

1. It is to be a personal story of God’s activity in someone’s life – not bible studies or theological lectures; just tell us how God in Christ through the Holy Spirit has been active in your life;
2. Only 3 to 5 minutes! This is not a substitute for the sermon. A short, tight length of time forces it to be prayed through, thought through, and written out (this last part is important because writing forces clarity of thought);
3. It must be practiced before being given. This includes appropriate sound quality and coaching for clear public speaking;
4. The pastor must approve the content. This protects the doctrinal integrity of the pulpit.

Another clear and spiritually profound step is for adults to occasionally come and share their personal story of life with Christ to the students in the youth group. Some of the ground rules listed above apply. Youth leaders should ensure that it is prayed, thought through, vetted for orthodoxy and practiced. After the sharing, be open to the questions and probing of the youth. The witness or testimony will bless everyone even – especially – when someone is honest enough to admit that they don’t have all the answers.

Putting our faith into words and sharing with each other is a foundational way we make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. The stories, our stories, of God in action through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit have converting power for us and for our listeners. I can still remember well the electricity of a small church I visited in which the pastor invited people to share “God-sightings” of the past week. The Holy Spirit was present in a palpable way.



Wildfire devastation | Continued from page 1A

marker on the property, was possibly in the changing path of the wildfires. Two church members have lost their homes, and two of the regular visitors from the Possum Kingdom Lake area have also.

“The locals are country folks with a common bond — they’re strong and resourceful,” Senkel

said with obvious admiration. He holds out hope for the strength of the United Methodist connection. “Volunteers came to help us in Cross Plains, and we can pray they will come again in Cedar Springs.”

The original deed for the Cedar Springs church dates back to 1892 for the property. The church

building was constructed a few years later in 1898. More recently, the congregation doubled the building size with the addition of a Fellowship Hall, a classroom and rest room.

Fortunately for the Senkels, the parsonage is about 43 miles away from the church, outside the current path of the fire.

Transforming Experiences

Cup of Salvation — Cup of Compassion

BY REV. CHAUNCEY S. NEALY
PASTOR, CHRIST UNITED METHODIST
CHURCH, FORT WORTH

I call the artwork “Pain & Promise.” The artist, Rev. Patti Waser, calls it “Redemption.”

It figures.

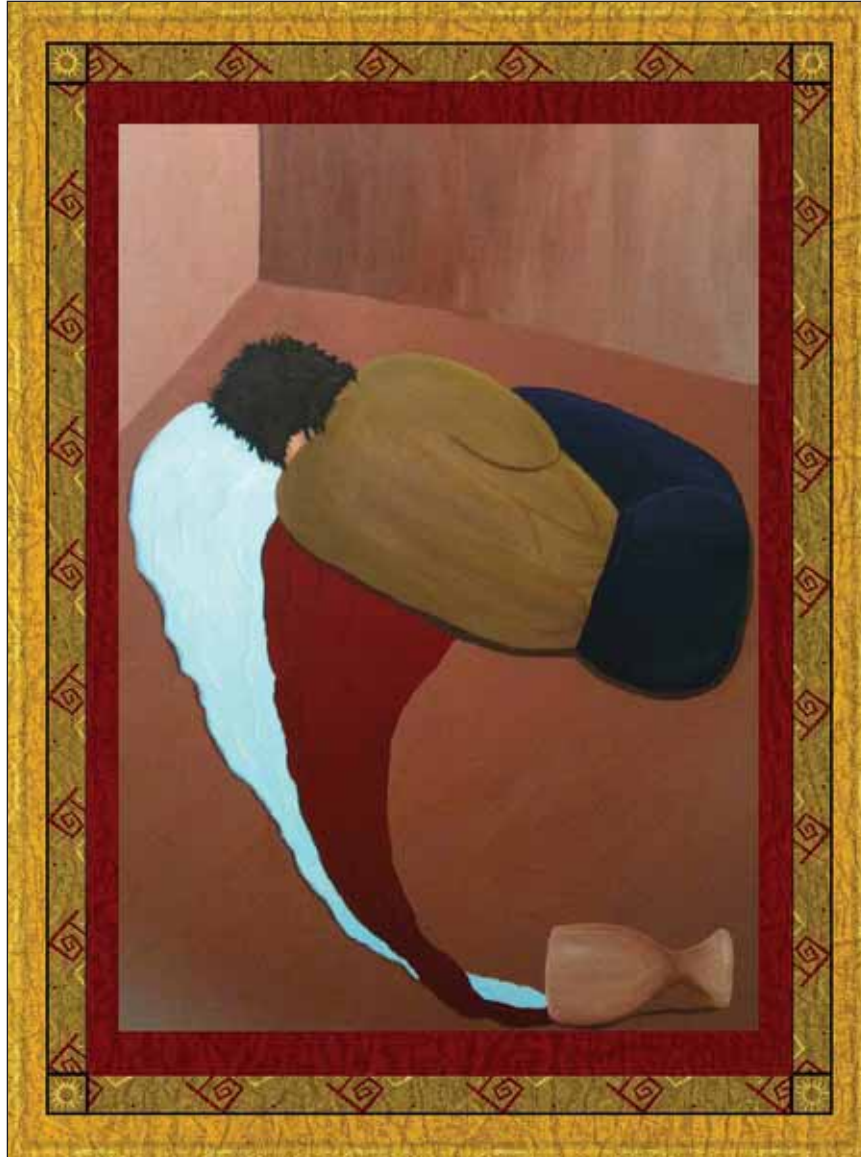
From the day she first shared her spiritual paintings with me at Glen Lake Camp & Retreat center, Patti and I had an ongoing, friendly dispute about interpretation of her work. I told her what I saw in the picture and justified my view. And then she gave the “correct” interpretation.

“The main thing,” I said, “is to celebrate the grace of God coming down to us through the cup. The chalice is foremost. The contents are poured out for us, refreshing my life and yours; and for this we thankfully call on the name of the Lord.”

But Patti had another idea. And our artistic differences about this work led me to reflect on the significance of the cup we lift up in celebration of Holy Communion. Here I share with you the blessing Patti gave me by revealing her innermost feelings, and faith, through her artwork.

I saw the person at the top of the picture in a fetal position and accepted this as an image of human agony; but the object that caught my attention was the cup. I immediately identified it as a chalice — one in which ministers like Patti and I lift up the blood of Jesus.

I thought, “What a powerful image — what a wonderful message! The renewing, reviving, saving blood of Jesus (Matthew 26:28) flows from the chalice to the one who desperately needs it.



“And along with it comes that ‘living water’ Jesus promised (John 4:10), and the refreshment heals the hurting one thoroughly and completely. The fluids running together represented the blood and water which flow from Jesus’ wounded side (John 19:34). Here they flow to the one in need, providing all that is necessary to enable that person to rise again and thrive.”

It was a brilliant interpretation!

And I was proud of myself for being so insightful. I *got* it! Then Patti told me what she — the artist — intended.

“Cauncey,” she said, “I started with only the person in the fetal position — cornered, crying, bleeding, dying. That was me. The pool of water was my tears in a puddle on the floor; and my lifeblood was dripping away to be washed down a drain somewhere.

“At this difficult time in my

life and ministry, I was dying. I painted the picture to cope with my pain. I shared it with my art instructor, and he said something was needed in the foreground to give the picture balance. Only then did I paint the cup.”

I started my interpretation preaching about the cup — God’s promise of salvation. Patti started with her own agonizing pain. Oops! I missed something in my hasty interpretation. A friend shared her suffering, and I rushed to offer a solution, without fully understanding the situation.

But Patti was not hurt. She quickly forgave my insensitivity and gave me permission to see her work through my own eyes. And her patience helped me see.

Effective preaching appreciates pain. People’s agony needs to be seen and even felt by those who truly care. Then, with empathy established, the healing Word of and understanding, caring God may be heard. Isn’t that what Jesus did?

The Messiah saw human affliction and identified with it, taking human sadness and sin upon himself. “Jesus wept” (John 11:35) is a short lesson in empathy. And the teaching, “Bear one another’s burdens” (Galatians 6:2), instructs Christians to follow the example.

“I will lift up the cup of salvation” (Psalm 116:13) has new meaning for me. It is also a cup of compassion, reminding me to truly engage sisters and brothers in crisis. Now when I lift up the cup and call on the name of the Lord I will be striving to really connect with those the Lord calls me to love.

there are some longer-term needs like household items.

“Lots of people will have lives and homes to rebuild,” states Dr. Bassford. “Some have insurance, some do not.” Please watch the conference website at www.ctcumc.org for the latest information about needed supplies. Direct questions to the Weatherford District office at 1-888-423-5378.

Donated supplies are transferred immediately to the front lines for firefighters and to displaced victims of the wildfires.



Wildfire emergency needs

As of press time for this issue, Weatherford District Superintendent Ginger Bassford reports that approximately 147,000 areas have burned, 60+ houses are destroyed, and firefighters are still struggling to get ahead of the fire.

Almost all of Possum Kingdom is either on fire or in danger of fire.

United Methodists are answering the call for assistance. While congregations have been swift in responding to the immediate and intermediate needs of firefighters and displaced victims of the wildfires,



Conference Calendar

- April:**
30: Conference Student Leadership Team meeting
- May:**
5: Weatherford District Conference
10: Cabinet meeting
14: Retirement Party for Rev. Harvey Ozmer at St. Luke’s UMC, Fort Worth
17: Waco District Conference
17: Central Texas Methodist Foundation Board meeting at Conference Center
19: Mid-Cities District Conference
22: Waxahachie District Conference
23: Fort Worth District Conference
23: Brownwood District Conference
- June**
5-8: Central Texas Annual Conference at Waco Convention Center and First UMC, Waco as host church
7: Annual United Methodist Women Luncheon at Waco Convention Center, Waco
12-18: Central Texas Conference Youth in Mission Jr./Sr. High Combination mission trip
12-18: Central Texas Conference Youth in Mission Senior High mission trip
20-25: Bishops’ Week at Mount Sequoyah, Fayetteville, Ark.
23-26: WGRS of Christian Mission at McMurry University, Abilene

For the latest updates on the conference and youth calendars, visit regularly www.ctcumc.org

Transforming Experiences

Cup of Salvation — Cup of Compassion

BY REV. CHAUNCEY S. NEALY
PASTOR, CHRIST UNITED METHODIST
CHURCH, FORT WORTH

I call the artwork “Pain & Promise.” The artist, Rev. Patti Waser, calls it “Redemption.”

It figures.

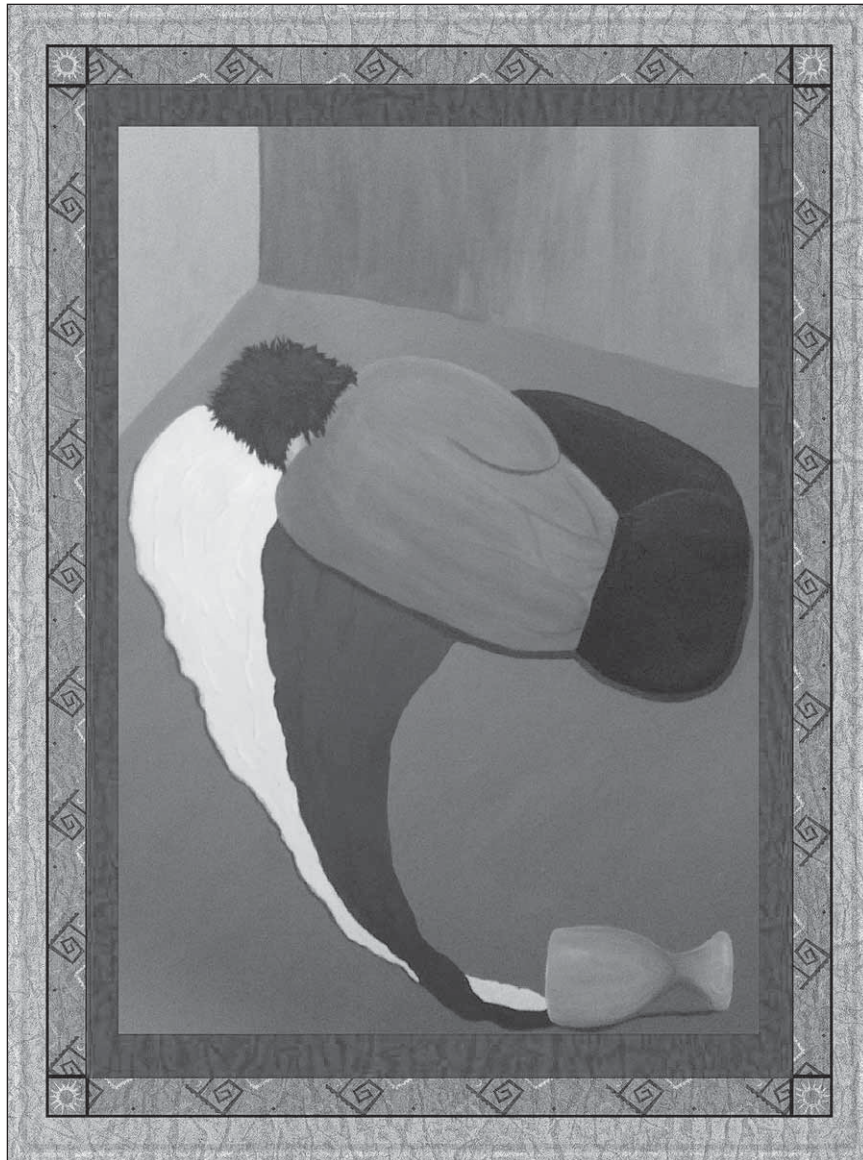
From the day she first shared her spiritual paintings with me at Glen Lake Camp & Retreat center, Patti and I had an ongoing, friendly dispute about interpretation of her work. I told her what I saw in the picture and justified my view. And then she gave the “correct” interpretation.

“The main thing,” I said, “is to celebrate the grace of God coming down to us through the cup. The chalice is foremost. The contents are poured out for us, refreshing my life and yours; and for this we thankfully call on the name of the Lord.”

But Patti had another idea. And our artistic differences about this work led me to reflect on the significance of the cup we lift up in celebration of Holy Communion. Here I share with you the blessing Patti gave me by revealing her innermost feelings, and faith, through her artwork.

I saw the person at the top of the picture in a fetal position and accepted this as an image of human agony; but the object that caught my attention was the cup. I immediately identified it as a chalice — one in which ministers like Patti and I lift up the blood of Jesus.

I thought, “What a powerful image — what a wonderful message! The renewing, reviving, saving blood of Jesus (Matthew 26:28) flows from the chalice to the one who desperately needs it.



“And along with it comes that ‘living water’ Jesus promised (John 4:10), and the refreshment heals the hurting one thoroughly and completely. The fluids running together represented the blood and water which flow from Jesus’ wounded side (John 19:34). Here they flow to the one in need, providing all that is necessary to enable that person to rise again and thrive.”

It was a brilliant interpretation!

And I was proud of myself for being so insightful. I *got* it! Then Patti told me what she — the artist — intended.

“Cauncey,” she said, “I started with only the person in the fetal position — cornered, crying, bleeding, dying. That was me. The pool of water was my tears in a puddle on the floor; and my lifeblood was dripping away to be washed down a drain somewhere.

“At this difficult time in my

life and ministry, I was dying. I painted the picture to cope with my pain. I shared it with my art instructor, and he said something was needed in the foreground to give the picture balance. Only then did I paint the cup.”

I started my interpretation preaching about the cup — God’s promise of salvation. Patti started with her own agonizing pain. Oops! I missed something in my hasty interpretation. A friend shared her suffering, and I rushed to offer a solution, without fully understanding the situation.

But Patti was not hurt. She quickly forgave my insensitivity and gave me permission to see her work through my own eyes. And her patience helped me see.

Effective preaching appreciates pain. People’s agony needs to be seen and even felt by those who truly care. Then, with empathy established, the healing Word of and understanding, caring God may be heard. Isn’t that what Jesus did?

The Messiah saw human affliction and identified with it, taking human sadness and sin upon himself. “Jesus wept” (John 11:35) is a short lesson in empathy. And the teaching, “Bear one another’s burdens” (Galatians 6:2), instructs Christians to follow the example.

“I will lift up the cup of salvation” (Psalm 116:13) has new meaning for me. It is also a cup of compassion, reminding me to truly engage sisters and brothers in crisis. Now when I lift up the cup and call on the name of the Lord I will be striving to really connect with those the Lord calls me to love.

there are some longer-term needs like household items.

“Lots of people will have lives and homes to rebuild,” states Dr. Bassford. “Some have insurance, some do not.” Please watch the conference website at www.ctcumc.org for the latest information about needed supplies. Direct questions to the Weatherford District office at 1-888-423-5378.

Donated supplies are transferred immediately to the front lines for firefighters and to displaced victims of the wildfires.



Wildfire emergency needs

As of press time for this issue, Weatherford District Superintendent Ginger Bassford reports that approximately 147,000 areas have burned, 60+ houses are destroyed, and firefighters are still struggling to get ahead of the fire.

Almost all of Possum Kingdom is either on fire or in danger of fire.

United Methodists are answering the call for assistance. While congregations have been swift in responding to the immediate and intermediate needs of firefighters and displaced victims of the wildfires,



Conference Calendar

April:

30: Conference Student Leadership Team meeting

May:

5: Weatherford District Conference

10: Cabinet meeting

14: Retirement Party for Rev. Harvey Ozmer at St. Luke’s UMC, Fort Worth

17: Waco District Conference

17: Central Texas Methodist Foundation Board meeting at Conference Center

19: Mid-Cities District Conference

22: Waxahachie District Conference

23: Fort Worth District Conference

23: Brownwood District Conference

June

5-8: Central Texas Annual Conference at Waco Convention Center and First UMC, Waco as host church

7: Annual United Methodist Women Luncheon at Waco Convention Center, Waco

12-18: Central Texas Conference Youth in Mission Jr./Sr. High Combination mission trip

12-18: Central Texas Conference Youth in Mission Senior High mission trip

20-25: Bishops’ Week at Mount Sequoyah, Fayetteville, Ark.

23-26: WGRS of Christian Mission at McMurry University, Abilene

For the latest updates on the conference and youth calendars, visit regularly www.ctcumc.org

Were You There?

Reflections on the Final 24 Hours of Jesus' Life

BY REV. ADAM HAMILTON
PASTOR, UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
OF THE RESURRECTION

When we think of the final day of Jesus' life, it is easy to imagine his suffering. Mel Gibson and a host of others have helped us visualize it in ways the Gospel writers only hint at.

What is harder for some is to see themselves in the story. When I wrote *24 Hours That Changed the World*, my aim was to see myself in each scene, and to help readers see themselves in each scene as well.

All of us can find ourselves in the story if we'll look closely. Join me for a quick journey through those 24 hours, and try imagining yourself in each scene.

At the Last Supper, 12 disciples enter a room to eat supper with Jesus. Each passes by a basin of water near the door, left there by the owner of the home so Jesus and his guests could wash their feet.

Why do they ignore it? Is it possible each is afraid that if he stops to wash his own feet, he'll be expected to wash the feet of the others? Non of them wants to be put in the position of a servant washing a fellow disciple's feet. In fact, that night, what is foremost on the minds of some disciples is which of them is the "greatest" (Luke 22:24).

How I identify with those disciples as their egos get the best of them! And how easy it is to imagine their shame when Jesus gets up from the table, lifts the basin, and begins to wash their feet.

Before the evening is through,

Rev. Adam Hamilton, founding pastor of United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kan., will be present a series of training sessions on leadership at the 2011 Annual Conference Sunday and Monday, June 5-6, in Waco. Visitor seating will be available for those who wish to benefit from his dynamic leadership insights. View the Annual Conference agenda at www.ctcumc.org and click on "Annual Conference."

Judas has gone to betray Jesus for 30 pieces of silver, a month's wages. It isn't only greed that motivates Judas. Perhaps his feelings had been hurt when Jesus publicly chastised him. Perhaps his expectations of what Jesus would do have not been met.

In a moment of weakness, and for a month's wages, Judas is willing to betray Jesus. I've been Judas, and so has nearly everyone I know. For some, it's money that lures them away. For others, it's sex. Sometimes, it's a desire for freedom. And sometimes, disappointment with an unmet expectation of God makes it easier to walk away. Yes, I've been Judas.

Jesus is arrested late that night in the garden. He is taken for trial before the religious leaders. These are the priests, biblical scholars, and great teachers of their day. All claim to love God, but they don't love this man. He has challenged their theology, blurred the lines between sinner and saint, and said things they consider blasphemous.

How do religious people respond when someone challenges their convictions? We often question,

judge, and then seek to silence the challengers. We call them names such as "fundamentalist" or "socialist" or "heretic" or "apostate." We sentence them to damnation of one sort or another. Yes, I see myself in the religious leaders who, threatened by this man whose teachings challenge their fundamental convictions, condemn him. Can you see yourself there?

As Jesus stands trial before the Sanhedrin, Peter waits in the courtyard of the high priest, surrounded by people who aided in Jesus' arrest. Three times Peter is asked whether he is a follower of Jesus. Three times he denies it.

He's afraid of what might happen to him if, in this hostile environment, he admits he is a follower of Jesus. How many times have I remained silent when others acted unjustly, too afraid to speak out for fear of how many would leave the church or no longer like me? I've been Simon Peter at his worst.

At dawn, Jesus is taken to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor charged with administering justice. Pilate finds him not guilty of a capital offense. Yet the crowd of merchants,



priests, and rabble repeatedly calls for his death.

Pilate, "wishing to satisfy the crowd," washes his hands of an innocent man's blood and sends Jesus to be abused and then crucified. How often have we, like Pilate, done what we knew was wrong because we wished to "satisfy the crowd"? Yes, I see myself in Pontius Pilate.

Jesus is taken to be abused at the hands of a Roman cohort of soldiers — 300 to 600 men. They strip him, mock him, crown him with thorns, and strike him repeatedly.

Somehow the hate begets hate. Surely some in the crowd know this is wrong. But no one speaks out. I have a difficult time seeing myself among these abusers, though at moments I've felt hatred for those I saw as enemies. I feel more akin to those soldiers who stand by, knowing that what they are doing is wrong but too afraid to speak out.

As Jesus is crucified, those passing by deride him. The religious leaders mock him. Even the thieves being crucified on either side taunt him. Jesus hangs from the cross bleeding, naked, and dying, yet there is no

compassion — only the cruelty of words meant to break his spirit.

Despite it all, Jesus prays, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." Before long one of the thieves stops his curses and says, "Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom."

Jesus turns to the thief and replies, "Today you will be with me in paradise." I want to be that thief, when I've finally seen Jesus' mercy and love, I want to put my hope in him.

Where do you find yourself in the story? Do you identify more closely with the actions of the disciples, the religious leaders, the Roman authorities, the soldiers, the crowd, or those passing by?

The last 24 hours of Jesus' life make a compelling case study in the human condition. In that one day, we see greed, betrayal, fear, self-preservation, abandonment, denial, pride, jealousy, anger, rage, mockery, and cruelty.

The Sanhedrin think they are putting Jesus on trial, but is it not humanity that is on trial here? The righteous, the powerful, even the disciples are all found wanting. On the cross, humanity is shown to be guilty, but the Son of Man, before whom all humanity one day will stand, suffers in our place.

The judge of the "quick and the dead" gives himself for the human race. There, on the cross, he holds up a mirror to our souls; and then, lowering the mirror, he shows us the depth of God's mercy and love.

This is the most compelling, disturbing, redemptive, and hopeful story ever told. It demonstrates to us the truth about humanity and, even more importantly, the truth about God.

It points to what is broken in us, and to God's work to save, redeem, and deliver us. But, when Jesus' body is taken down from the cross and placed in the tomb, they story is not finished ...



Giving Back and Giving Forward ...

Glen Lake Camp & Retreat Center has been named recipient of the 2011 Central Texas Annual Conference Offering.

More than 18,000 children, youth and adults come to the camp site each year for meetings, retreats and as part of the summer and mid-year camping and retreat programs.

Besides the Annual Conference Offering, which will be received during the June 5-8 meeting in Waco, the folks at Glen Lake Camp will be asking individuals and local churches for a variety of other gifts.

Over an eight-week period, GLC will be asking YOU to become a member of the Glen Lake Gift of the Week Club.

GLC wants to hear your stories — great memories of a recent or distant past experience at Glen Lake; how you have given your time, talents, money, etc. in support of Glen Lake; and how you are encouraging young families in your congregation to participate in Glen Lake's summer programs for kids and families.

Contact GLC Executive Director Rev. Kay Hawkins at kay@glenlake.

org with your memories — playful, poignant or profound. If you don't "write," call the camp at 254-897-2247 and ask for Curtis or Seth. They will arrange to come visit you and record your story.

"Your story is very important to us," states Rev. Hawkins. "Don't miss this opportunity to share your story." Check the conference website at www.ctcumc.org for details on how you can participate over and above the Annual Conference Offering through the Glen Lake's Gift of the Week Club.

Were You There?

Reflections on the Final 24 Hours of Jesus' Life

BY REV. ADAM HAMILTON
PASTOR, UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
OF THE RESURRECTION

When we think of the final day of Jesus' life, it is easy to imagine his suffering. Mel Gibson and a host of others have helped us visualize it in ways the Gospel writers only hint at.

What is harder for some is to see themselves in the story. When I wrote *24 Hours That Changed the World*, my aim was to see myself in each scene, and to help readers see themselves in each scene as well.

All of us can find ourselves in the story if we'll look closely. Join me for a quick journey through those 24 hours, and try imagining yourself in each scene.

At the Last Supper, 12 disciples enter a room to eat supper with Jesus. Each passes by a basin of water near the door, left there by the owner of the home so Jesus and his guests could wash their feet.

Why do they ignore it? Is it possible each is afraid that if he stops to wash his own feet, he'll be expected to wash the feet of the others? Non of them wants to be put in the position of a servant washing a fellow disciple's feet. In fact, that night, what is foremost on the minds of some disciples is which of them is the "greatest" (Luke 22:24).

How I identify with those disciples as their egos get the best of them! And how easy it is to imagine their shame when Jesus gets up from the table, lifts the basin, and begins to wash their feet.

Before the evening is through,

Rev. Adam Hamilton, founding pastor of United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kan., will be present a series of training sessions on leadership at the 2011 Annual Conference Sunday and Monday, June 5-6, in Waco. Visitor seating will be available for those who wish to benefit from his dynamic leadership insights. View the Annual Conference agenda at www.ctcumc.org and click on "Annual Conference."

Judas has gone to betray Jesus for 30 pieces of silver, a month's wages. It isn't only greed that motivates Judas. Perhaps his feelings had been hurt when Jesus publicly chastised him. Perhaps his expectations of what Jesus would do have not been met.

In a moment of weakness, and for a month's wages, Judas is willing to betray Jesus. I've been Judas, and so has nearly everyone I know. For some, it's money that lures them away. For others, it's sex. Sometimes, it's a desire for freedom. And sometimes, disappointment with an unmet expectation of God makes it easier to walk away. Yes, I've been Judas.

Jesus is arrested late that night in the garden. He is taken for trial before the religious leaders. These are the priests, biblical scholars, and great teachers of their day. All claim to love God, but they don't love this man. He has challenged their theology, blurred the lines between sinner and saint, and said things they consider blasphemous.

How do religious people respond when someone challenges their convictions? We often question,

judge, and then seek to silence the challengers. We call them names such as "fundamentalist" or "socialist" or "heretic" or "apostate." We sentence them to damnation of one sort or another. Yes, I see myself in the religious leaders who, threatened by this man whose teachings challenge their fundamental convictions, condemn him. Can you see yourself there?

As Jesus stands trial before the Sanhedrin, Peter waits in the courtyard of the high priest, surrounded by people who aided in Jesus' arrest. Three times Peter is asked whether he is a follower of Jesus. Three times he denies it.

He's afraid of what might happen to him if, in this hostile environment, he admits he is a follower of Jesus. How many times have I remained silent when others acted unjustly, too afraid to speak out for fear of how many would leave the church or no longer like me? I've been Simon Peter at his worst.

At dawn, Jesus is taken to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor charged with administering justice. Pilate finds him not guilty of a capital offense. Yet the crowd of merchants,



priests, and rabble repeatedly calls for his death.

Pilate, "wishing to satisfy the crowd," washes his hands of an innocent man's blood and sends Jesus to be abused and then crucified. How often have we, like Pilate, done what we knew was wrong because we wished to "satisfy the crowd"? Yes, I see myself in Pontius Pilate.

Jesus is taken to be abused at the hands of a Roman cohort of soldiers — 300 to 600 men. They strip him, mock him, crown him with thorns, and strike him repeatedly.

Somehow the hate begets hate. Surely some in the crowd know this is wrong. But no one speaks out. I have a difficult time seeing myself among these abusers, though at moments I've felt hatred for those I saw as enemies. I feel more akin to those soldiers who stand by, knowing that what they are doing is wrong but too afraid to speak out.

As Jesus is crucified, those passing by deride him. The religious leaders mock him. Even the thieves being crucified on either side taunt him. Jesus hangs from the cross bleeding, naked, and dying, yet there is no

compassion — only the cruelty of words meant to break his spirit.

Despite it all, Jesus prays, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." Before long one of the thieves stops his curses and says, "Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom."

Jesus turns to the thief and replies, "Today you will be with me in paradise." I want to be that thief, when I've finally seen Jesus' mercy and love, I want to put my hope in him.

Where do you find yourself in the story? Do you identify more closely with the actions of the disciples, the religious leaders, the Roman authorities, the soldiers, the crowd, or those passing by?

The last 24 hours of Jesus' life make a compelling case study in the human condition. In that one day, we see greed, betrayal, fear, self-preservation, abandonment, denial, pride, jealousy, anger, rage, mockery, and cruelty.

The Sanhedrin think they are putting Jesus on trial, but is it not humanity that is on trial here? The righteous, the powerful, even the disciples are all found wanting. On the cross, humanity is shown to be guilty, but the Son of Man, before whom all humanity one day will stand, suffers in our place.

The judge of the "quick and the dead" gives himself for the human race. There, on the cross, he holds up a mirror to our souls; and then, lowering the mirror, he shows us the depth of God's mercy and love.

This is the most compelling, disturbing, redemptive, and hopeful story ever told. It demonstrates to us the truth about humanity and, even more importantly, the truth about God.

It points to what is broken in us, and to God's work to save, redeem, and deliver us. But, when Jesus' body is taken down from the cross and placed in the tomb, they story is not finished ...

Giving Back and Giving Forward ...

Glen Lake Camp & Retreat Center has been named recipient of the 2011 Central Texas Annual Conference Offering.

More than 18,000 children, youth and adults come to the camp site each year for meetings, retreats and as part of the summer and mid-year camping and retreat programs.

Besides the Annual Conference Offering, which will be received during the June 5-8 meeting in Waco, the folks at Glen Lake Camp will be asking individuals and local churches for a variety of other gifts.

Over an eight-week period, GLC will be asking YOU to become a member of the Glen Lake Gift of the Week Club.

GLC wants to hear your stories — great memories of a recent or distant past experience at Glen Lake; how you have given your time, talents, money, etc. in support of Glen Lake; and how you are encouraging young families in your congregation to participate in Glen Lake's summer programs for kids and families.

Contact GLC Executive Director Rev. Kay Hawkins at kay@glenlake.

org with your memories — playful, poignant or profound. If you don't "write," call the camp at 254-897-2247 and ask for Curtis or Seth. They will arrange to come visit you and record your story.

"Your story is very important to us," states Rev. Hawkins. "Don't miss this opportunity to share your story." Check the conference website at www.ctcumc.org for details on how you can participate over and above the Annual Conference Offering through the Glen Lake's Gift of the Week Club.

