

Fall Summit focuses on the five fundamental practices that revitalize, reenergize and recommit local churches

Bishop Robert Schnase will lead the Central Texas Conference's 2009 Fall Summit Nov. 14 at First United Methodist Church, Mansfield, in exploring five fundamental practices that revitalize, reenergize and recommit churches to dynamic congregational life and ministry.

During three plenary sessions, from 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Bishop Schnase will guide committed CTC clergy and laity through the basic building blocks of effective church life based on his book, *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*. During lunch, CTC local church leaders will facilitate dialogues on each of the practices and share the experiences of local churches in our own conference who have been engaged in the *Five Practices* study.

The conference is grateful for the partnership of the Texas Methodist Foundation (TMF) in hosting this event. Because of their support, the conference is offering our CTC churches the following incentives for attendance and early registration:

- Ten free copies of Bishop Schnase's book, *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*, to the first churches to register at least 10 people before Oct. 1.

- Fifteen Leadership Manual & Media Kits, including materials that help engage the church in a congregationwide focus on the practices, to be given away to local churches on the day of the event.

- Up to 150 scholarships, including registration fee and books (if registered before Oct. 1). Awards will be made to the first 15 qualified (small membership and/or ethnic) churches who register at least 10 people.

More information about the 2009 Fall Summit is available on the conference Web site, www.ctcumc.org, along with a brochure and registration form. If you have questions about the Summit, registration or scholarships, please contact Karen Granderson at 817-877-5222, 800-460-8622 or karen@ctcumc.org.



Members of Brock United Methodist Church, just west of Weatherford, hosted about 50 Iraqi and Burmese refugees as a part of America's our Fourth of July observance and another step in the refugees' cultural exposure to their new nation home.

Sharing our independence with those who just recently found their freedom

By TRACI MCGRATH
MEMBER, CONFERENCE REFUGEE & IMMIGRATION MINISTRIES TASK FORCE

Each year members at Brock United Methodist Church celebrate July 4th with a cookout and unique pot luck fireworks show. It was especially meaningful this year when they shared the celebration with 50 Iraqi and Burmese refugees who came to the event with Refugee Services of Texas (RST).

Cultural field trips are one of the many services RST offers to new refugee families — trips that help connect them with unfamiliar American holidays and neighbors.

Initially Brock UMC expected 20 refugees for the fireworks show — a product of fireworks contributions from each family in the congregation with a few brave volunteers to fire them in the church parking lot at dusk — so the congregation was thrilled when over 50 wanted to come.

Church members volunteered to drive refugee families in their own cars and vans, while nearby Coups United Methodist Church in Weatherford graciously lent their vans so that all could be involved.

Welcoming the refugees became a churchwide effort when 20 youth created welcome bags to give to the guests. Abbey Drillette, a ninth

grader, shared, "We came together as a group and we put gift bags together with cookies and little things about American culture. We also researched information about refugees in Iraq and Burma, so that everyone could have an idea of what is going on in those parts of the world."

The youth also discussed the many scriptures where God calls followers to remember the refugee. "God doesn't come to earth to do all these things by himself," Drillette said. "God has us go do things that represent Him throughout the world."

Susie Hull, one of the volunteer

SAVE THE DATE
Fall Leadership Summit
Saturday, Nov. 14
First UMC, Mansfield
"The Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations" and more
with Bishop Robert Schnase

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The Wilderness Way

By BISHOP MICHAEL LOWRY

18. We have a problem with our theology. Stay with me; it is not the typical problem most people think of. It is not because we are too far left or too far right. Our issue is far more basic than the trivial choosing of theological camps to pitch our tent in.

It is deeper than the tired old battle of whether one understands the Bible in literal or demythologizing terms. (That old debate has been going on since at least the beginnings of the second century. Don't take my word for it, go read Origen for yourself. Dive into the invigorating arguments and discussions between the Alexandrian and Antioch schools of theology. But I digress.) Our problem is not that we are too Wesleyan (in fact, we aren't Wesleyan enough!). The theological problem we wrestle with as a church is deeper and more basic. We have lost our sense of Christ as Lord and Savior.

Allow me to share a few stories. A young friend went to visit a Unitarian church. When I asked her about it she commented, "I missed Jesus." Another young friend somewhat heatedly asked me, "What is it with you preachers? Do you forget about Christ when you learn the secret handshake from the bishop at your ordination?"

I replied that (a) I didn't know the secret handshake, and that (b) I certainly hope not. For a number of years now, my son has insisted that the typical Methodist sermon consists of three points: "(1) God loves you; (2) love each other; (3) Come on, you all try hard to love each other!"

I could go on with additional stories, but hopefully you are making the connection as you read this. Somehow we have gone thin on the vital connection of Christ as the center of the Christian faith. Our

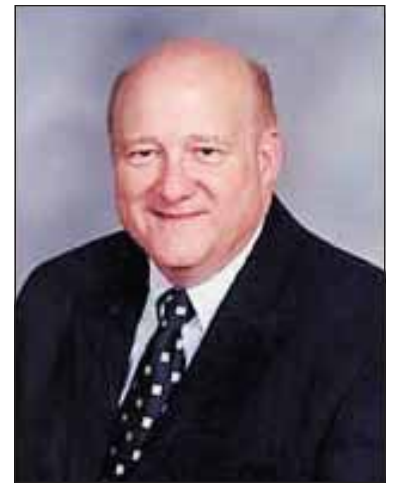
Christology is often poorly thought through and poorly articulated.

A pastor in the Central Texas Conference reported to me a recent experience interviewing a possible staff addition in education and/or youth ministry. "I asked each of them the following question to get a sense of their Christology," the pastor said.

"If a youth came to you and said, 'I believe in God, but who is this Jesus Christ and why is he so important?' What would be your response?"

"The newly commissioned Perkins graduate gave a very nebulous response that emphasized something about 'community.' A Lutheran lay person's response was equally weak and basically went in circles. The applicant we ended up hiring (a United Methodist lay person) gave the best response, but still needs coaching in how to be simple and clear."

The Apostle Paul wrote, "We proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." (I Corinthians 1:23-24) Albert Cook Outler, the great Wesleyan scholar, noted that this was one of the most widely preached passages (along with Ephesians 2:1-10) by John Wesley. We need to reclaim a robust Christology at the center of our Christian witness and faith sharing — both for ourselves and others.



Companions in Ministry offers unique growth opportunity for young (20s-40s) pastors

Thanks to a grant from the Lilly Endowment, Upper Room Ministries is offering a unique program for pastors in their 20s, 30s and 40s called *Companions in Ministry Two* or CiM2.

The goal of the CiM2 program is to provide two years of guidance and support through readings, a five-day residential session in Nashville Oct. 26-31 and "companion guides" who will serve as mentors/coaches/spiritual directors.

Rev. Jerry Haas, director of the Academy for Spiritual Formation, is project director for CiM2. Speakers for the October 2009 program include Rev. Marjorie Thompson, a Presbyterian minister well-known for her work in spiritual formation, and Rev. Trevor Hudson, a Methodist pastor from South Africa,

whose writings include *The Way of Transforming Discipleship*, published by The Upper Room.

A previous grant from Lilly funded the first CiM, which proved successful but not financially sustainable. CiM2 will help pastors develop the support systems they need "back home," after input at the five-day gathering in Nashville.

Participants will be expected to do some reading and contribute to a "virtual community" through the Web. The cost for the two-year program, which ends with a three-day conference in Nashville in 2011, is minimal thanks to the grant.

Approximately 50 pastors will be selected to participate. For more information and the application form, visit www.upperroom.org/CiM2 or contact Donna Bryant at 877-899-2781 (ext. 7233) or dbryant@gbod.org.

Texas Interfaith challenges pastors with sermon contest

Texas Impact is conducting a statewide sermon contest for 2009 on the topic of health justice.

If interested, submit a 10-minute video of your sermon/homily/other pulpit presentation by Aug. 14 for a chance to win cash, have your entry showcased on YouTube and to be a part of the national interfaith conversation about health care in America.

For more details about the contest and how to enter, please visit www.texasimpact.org/sermoncontest.

Palmer UMC's P.U.M.P. teaches faith sharing

By REV. ANN HITT
PASTOR, PALMER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Do you know how to make a miracle? The people at Palmer United Methodist Church do. All it takes are 97 youth and 65 adults representing 10 churches, 12 families in dire need, and an endless supply of popsicles.

Oh, and God, of course!

Those were some of the ingredients of the fourth annual P.U.M.P., the Palmer United Mission Project, that was held the weekend of June 25-28.

Some people might think it impossible for a small church with an average attendance of 55 to do such extraordinary work, but they haven't met the people of Palmer United Methodist Church.

For a very reasonable cost of \$75, they invited youth in grades four through 12, from all over Central Texas, to come to Palmer, work in the hot Texas sun, worship God every evening — and change people's lives. I saw it with my own eyes, and I was humbled and amazed.

During the closing worship on Sunday morning, one of our senior youth told of building a deck and steps outside a lady's trailer home. When the work crew arrived, all the windows were open and box fans blew a small breeze into the house. There was no shade.

After a short while, the crew began to feel a breeze. And as they lifted their faces to thank God, they noticed that all the box fans had been turned outward.

That's not a bad metaphor for a Christian life and for the P.U.M.P. experience: we've got the only breeze in a hot, hot world — and we need to turn it OUTWARD.

At Palmer First United Methodist Church, we're doing just that!



Conference Calendar

August

- 7-8: Mid-Cities District Live Out LOUD Youth Event at First Euless
- 12-14: Cabinet meeting
- 14-15: CTC United Methodist Women Executive Team meeting at Glen Lake Camp & Retreat Center
- 15: Early Response Team Training at Saginaw UMC
- 16: Recertification for Disaster Response ERT at Woodway, Waco
- 17: Weatherford District Pastors Meeting at First Weatherford
- 18: Central Texas Methodist Foundation board meeting at Conference Center
- 22: Student Leadership Team at UCF, Hill College, Hillsboro

September

- 6: Christian Education Sunday
- 7: Labor Day
- 9: Board of Ordained Ministry dCOM training at Central, Waco
- 9: Candidacy Mentor Training at Central UMC, Waco
- 10: Board of Ordained Ministry dCOM training at Arborlawn UMC, Fort Worth
- 10: Candidacy Mentor Training at Arborlawn UMC, Fort Worth
- 10: Evangelism Task Force at First Hillsboro
- 10: Council on Finance & Administration at Conference Center
- 12: UM College & University Preview Day for high school juniors/seniors at Methodist Children's Home, Waco

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

Sept. 1 is deadline for listing of church fall fundraisers

Local churches are in the planning phase for their annual fall fundraisers, and once again the *Central Link* and conference Web site will carry a one-time listing of all the church and ministry fundraisers in mid-September.

Please get your church's information to Carolyn Stephens at carolyn@ctcumc.org by Sept. 1. This is a hard deadline, so please don't miss it!

Provide your church name and event location, name of the event, date/time, and any activities that make your event unique or special.

This is an opportunity for folks to share in the delight of their own church's event as well as those of neighboring communities.

Methodist Children's Home program for grandparents receives national attention

According to the latest census figures, 6.7 million children in the U.S. are being raised by grandparents and other relatives. And in Texas, there are over 257,000 grandparents raising their grandchildren in their homes.

For Methodist Children's Home, a ministry of the Central Texas Conference located in Waco, these statistics serve as a call to action.

The Home began the Grandparents as Parents Program (GAPP) in 2006, hoping to relieve the financial, social and physical burdens that face many Central Texas grandparents. Rehan McNeil, the coordinator for GAPP, has been instrumental in the exponential growth and success of the program over the last few years, even garnering respect from a national perspective.

McNeil represented GAPP recently at a national conference (July 27-Aug. 1) in Washington, DC. Her presentation, entitled "How Old Is Too Old to Parent

a Grandchild?: A Social Paradigm for Ageism or Moral Obligation," was featured during the 15th Annual Generations United International Conference.

McNeil is proud of the service and support that MCH offers to grandparent-led families. "Without the Home providing services through GAPP, many grandparents would not be able to provide the basic necessities for their families," McNeil said.

"In addition to meeting the most basic needs, GAPP strives to provide occasions for emotional and intellectual growth for people of all ages," she added.



Rehan McNeil

Thank you, thank you, thank you to the many contributors to a new ice machine at Glen Lake Camp! Because of your generosity, GLC was able to purchase an ice maker and holding bin.



Photos by Traci McGrath

Independence and freedom | Continued from page 1A

drivers, picked up a young Iraqi couple and their two-year-old boy in Fort Worth. "It was very eye-opening," Hull said, "as the husband told me he had always wanted to be able to take his family to church and worship God freely, but they could have been kidnapped or killed for that in his neighborhood at home."

"His family waited in Turkey over a year for clearance to come here. They are now starting over with no transportation, no jobs and they are far from relatives they may never see again. It was that important

to him to find a place where his family could worship freely. His story sent chills down my spine," Hull said.

Excitement grew as the vans started arriving in the church parking lot that evening. Children ran out to greet Iraqi and Burmese families with welcome bags in hand. Church members and their guest refugee families spent the evening talking and learning together about cultures and places that seem so far removed from their own experience.

"We got to meet some of the refugees and hear their stories,

and realize that America is like a promised land for them," Drillette said.

"Celebrating our own independence takes on new meaning when done alongside those who have recently found their freedom," Pastor Alan McGrath said of the evening. The celebration reminded everyone that, in God, we have brothers and sisters far beyond our man-made borders.

For more information on Refugee Services of Texas, or how your church may host groups for an



Toddlers Pax, son of Rev. Alan and Traci McGrath, and Mustafa from Iraq readily form a connection and enjoy their playtime together.

event, contact RST Director Laila Amara at rstfw@sbcglobal.net or 817-457-8110.

Sunday school classes, individuals or congregations may hold housing supply drives, help set up apartments, sponsor a family or teach English-as-a-Second-Language classes.

RST is the Church World Service affiliate that Central Texas Conference churches work with to assist refugees permanently resettling in our area. You can learn more about RST and other opportunities with the CTC Refugee & Immigration Ministries program at www.ctcumc.org.

Hope of Africa Children's Choir returns to Central Texas for 3 performances

The people of the Central Texas Conference are invited to join the Hope for Africa Children's Choir in their ministry of music.

These children are from the East Africa Annual Conference. They attend the Humble United Methodist School in Uganda but are currently touring through the United States with their beautiful music.

The Central Texas Conference is blessed to host them for the second year in row during mid-August. The first time was during the 2009 General Conference held in Fort Worth in late April through early May when they delighted so many in our conference and the larger gathering at the worldwide conference.

Please mark you calendars to see the children during their one evening performance and two worship services in our area:

- Wednesday, Aug. 12, 7 p.m. at St. Barnabas UMC (5011 W. Pleasant Ridge, Arlington 76016)
- Sunday, Aug. 16, 9:30 a.m. at Silver Creek UMC (2200 Church Road, Azle 76020)
- Sunday, Aug. 16, 11 a.m. at Aledo UMC (100 Pecan St., Aledo 76008)



United Methodist Association, PS Card join to cut prescription costs for millions

VANDALIA, Ohio — Consumers hit hard by the recession can cut their prescription costs by using the PS Card, a free prescription discount card available from The United Methodist Association of Health & Welfare Ministries.

Millions of the cards are now available through the association's members and United Methodist churches across the United States, said the Rev. Dr. Mearle Griffith, chief executive of the association.

"Partnering with PS Card to help America's uninsured is in line with our Christian mission," Griffith said in announcing the cooperative arrangement with Santa Barbara-based PS Card. The association serves nearly 400 United Methodist-related health

and human service agencies across the United States. Together, they serve more than 32 million people annually.

"With the United Methodist Association, we have found a great partner in our efforts to reach Americans needing help paying the high cost of prescription drugs," said James Robbins, co-founder and chief executive officer of PS Card. "The United Methodist Church reaches into virtually every community across the United States."

Robbins estimates PS Cards are already saving consumers \$10 million a year. PS Card is able to offer discounts on FDA-approved drugs through its bulk purchasing agreements with pharmaceutical companies. Consumers may also obtain items such as diabetic

supplies at a discount with the card.

PS Card allows individuals with no prescription drug insurance to enjoy pricing discounts usually available only to persons with a prescription drug insurance benefit. The discounted drugs are available at 56,000 pharmacies across the U.S. There is no co-pay or fee involved.

The free PS Cards are available through the United Methodist Association at www.umassociation.org, or from PS Card online at www.pscard.com/refs/uma. Personalized plastic cards are also available. Persons without Internet access can obtain the cards by calling 1-877-716-4457.

**College Preview Day helps high school juniors/seniors plan ahead
10 a.m.-2 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 12,
at Methodist Children's Home, Waco**