



New UMW chartered ... 5A



Hoffman talks to press ... 8A



JFON solves problems ... 8A

One pastor shares her response to hate mail

BY REV. ANN HITT
PASTOR, FIRST UNITED
METHODIST CHURCH OF WEST

I open all the mail that comes to the church — and there's a LOT to it. Catalogs, sales brochures, conference and district information, gifts from people who can't worship with us (and whom I miss, very much) and — every once in a while — mail that can only be called ... disturbing.

On All Saints Day I received one of that last variety.

I noticed at once that it looked a little "strange." The address had been cut from an Internet listing of local churches. It had the physical address instead of the post office box. I also noticed that it did not have a return address, but was mailed from "Waco, TX 767..." on Oct. 22.

Inside were two pages filled with small type, 8 point; for comparison, this [article] is printed in 10 point. The lines were single-spaced, and the page had narrow margins. The writer obviously wanted to get a lot of "information" in as few pages as

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Tearing down fences that divide us

Newer residents of rural Ovilla, once an agricultural community that is now part of the urban sprawl from south Dallas, didn't know about the tiny South Section cemetery behind the Ovilla United Methodist Church Cemetery.

It was easy not to know. Beyond an aging wire and post fence, the cemetery and its grave markers were almost obscured by tall grass, untrimmed trees and overgrown

brush. Ovilla UMC's Cemetery Association did not have oversight of the South Section; they just knew a third-generation caretaker was in charge. The cemetery was part of the Ovilla community history that somehow got lost in the hustle and bustle of the contemporary lifestyle.

Then one day, about a year ago, a family that had its history in the old black cemetery wanted a resting place for their loved one. Rightly so, they were concerned about its

condition.

That's when members of Ovilla UMC's Cemetery Association and the community became involved. The committee asked Harvey Gillum, the caretaker, to become part of the Cemetery Association and to help in honoring their shared roots and caring for their present facilities. Gillum's family had maintained the South Section of the cemetery for about a century, but as earlier generations of family members died the responsibility

was overwhelming for the sole surviving caretaker.

Accuracy of ownership for the black cemetery, which pre-dates the white one, has been lost over the course of time, but there's the story of a farmer by the name of Mr. Billingsley who donated the land for a cemetery for his black workers. An historic marker provides more information

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The South (black) Section Cemetery before restoration began.



The North(white) Section Cemetery.

Conference treasurer Harvey Ozmer shares gratitude, hope

As conference treasurer, I want to express a word of great thanks to all the congregations and clergy of our Central Texas Conference. What a remarkably generous and committed people you are!

In the first 10 month of 2008, you have given \$571,745 to Advance Special mission ministries. Of that amount, we have received to date for:

Hurricane Ike	\$31,028
UMCOR Hurricane Relief	\$15,935
UMCOR undesignated	\$32,000

Nothing But Nets \$49,500

Given the state of the economy, I am often asked, "How are our apportionments doing?" I am pleased to share with you that as of October our percentage receipts is 66.4%, which is the highest in the past 12 years.

We have two months remaining and \$3.7 million to go. This is a lesser amount than last year and we made it then. I am confident we will make it again. Thank you again for your generous spirit.



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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. Doyle R. Allen, Director
doyle@ctcumc.org

Circulation/Subscriptions

Susan Briles
susan@ctcumc.org

Production/Publishing

UMR Communications Inc.,
Dallas, Texas

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For circulation and/or advertising policy, contact Susan Briles at 817.877.5222, 800.460.8622 or susan@ctcumc.org.

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

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The Wilderness Way

BY BISHOP MICHAEL LOWRY

3. If we ever needed evidence that we are in the wilderness, just consider the current financial crisis that the world is going through. Stock markets are mimicking yo-yos. Job security is questionable for many. Churches are wondering what the future portends. Usually December is the big catch up month. This year that may not be so. Nobody knows! And yet, it is here that we are most called on to be a people of faith.

Currently, our giving is ahead of last year! Furthermore, in recessions church giving usually goes up (not down as one might suppose). The Wilderness Way leads us into unknown territory. Franklin D. Roosevelt's famous statement, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself," has applicability. What does our faith tell us about the wilderness way on which we are traveling? What are biblical lessons that might inform us?

God leads us into the wilderness to teach us to trust the Lord's leading and not take council to our own fears and foibles. The story of the initial reconnaissance into Canaan is instructive. Under the Lord's director, Moses sends men to spy out the land. They return with a disquieting report. "The land that we have gone through as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people that we saw in it are of great size."¹ (I love the old King James translation: "There are giants in the land!")

Once again the people complain that it would have been better if they'd been left in Egypt to die. They even go so far as to suggest choosing a captain to lead them back to Egypt!² Only Joshua and Caleb were open to act in great trust and faith. "The land that we went through as spies is an exceedingly good land. If the Lord is pleased with us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey. Only, do not rebel against the Lord; and do not fear the people of the land, for they are no more than bread for us; their protection is removed from them and the Lord is with us; do not fear them."³

Unfortunately, the report of Joshua and Caleb was ignored leaving them another lengthy period of wandering in the wilderness. Our wilderness way calls for us to learn again the need to radically trust and rely upon God even while we bend forward with our most arduous effort to build up the church.

Much like the people on the wilderness journey, the modern church suffers from a failure of nerve, faith and radical trust. We look at much of the secular landscape before us in the same manner as the other spies gazed at Canaan. There are giants in the land. They come wrapped in the clothes of intellectual despisers. They come shod in the garment of hedonism and make up of prosperity. Our dwindling numbers and timid faith call us to pull back. God is leading the old mainline into the wilderness once again precisely so our character may be shaped and honed like the people Israel before we once again enter the Promised Land. The wilderness is where God does a great work among us, through us and in us.

In our wilderness time we would do well to remember that after Jesus' baptism at the Jordan (including the epic pronouncement "You are my Son,, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."⁴) Jesus is led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness. "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for 40 days he was tempted by the devil."⁵ The wilderness is a place where God does a great creative work.

Egypt belonged to the Pharaoh. It was his land to rule and to control. The Promised Land was the land God gave to the Israelites. It was their territory to rule and control in faithfulness to God. The wilderness, the land in between the old slavery in Egypt and the hope of the Promised Land belonged to God. Today's church lives in the wilderness. The wilderness is God's land; the land where the Lord is in control and rules.

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|-------------------|----------------|
| 1. Numbers 13:32 | 4. Luke 3:22 |
| 2. Numbers 14:4 | 5. Luke 4:1-2a |
| 3. Numbers 14:7-9 | |



One pastor's response to hate mail | Continued from page 1A

possible. I say "information," but that's not really the correct word; a better one would be "manifesto."

The communication was filled with the most vile, xenophobic, homophobic, racist, sexist, bigoted opinions I have ever seen expressed — anywhere. After about the fourth line I was so disgusted I tore the pages into four pieces and threw them into the trash. Truth be told, I was also a little frightened ... the writer identified himself as a Christian.

Even touching the letter made me feel "dirty" somehow, but as I tried to get my work done I couldn't stop thinking about it. I've received letters

such as this before and I treat them exactly as I did this one — I destroy them and put them out of my mind.

But for some reason, I was unable to do that this time. I fished the despicable words out of the trash, taped them back together and read them from start to finish.

By the time I reached the ending, my revulsion for the writer had turned to pity. How could someone who claims to love God be filled with so much hate? The depths of this person's anger and rage are beyond my understanding, but I knew exactly what to do: I prayed for him.

In Leviticus 19:2 God instructs

Moses to tell the people of God that they shall be holy, for the Lord God is holy. In turn, this is followed by specific instructions on how to live together in community. And God sums up all these instructions by saying, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord" (Leviticus 19:18). We should love our neighbor, not only because it helps us live together, but because loving one's neighbor is the essence of holiness.

If I believe in John Wesley's understanding of grace (and I do), then I believe that I am "going on to perfection." I am becoming more Christ-like, more holy. At my

ordination the bishop asked, "Do you expect to be made perfect in this life?" And I answered, "I do — with God's help."

It was God who made me read the sad words of that letter. It was God who told me to pray for that person. And it was God who made it possible for me to do so.

Good Samaritans shine at Fort Worth church

El Buen Samaritano means the Good Samaritan. It references the biblical story found in the Gospel of Luke. The story is a parable, told by Jesus, about a Samaritan man who crosses cultural lines to meet the needs of another.

The story is an illustration of what it means to be a good neighbor. In it, we see how God wants us to be like the Samaritan. God wants us to transcend the cultural and societal barriers that would keep us at a distance from one another. God wants us to go beyond boundaries that would keep us from reaching out to one another in love.

At El Buen Samaritano United Methodist Church in Fort Worth, neighborly love transcends culture. Worship services are geared at a community that is largely Hispanic. Many of its members are Mexican immigrants. Others are second and third generation, or more. Still others represent other ethnicities.

As an intern in the Central Texas Conference Office of Hispanic Ministries, I had heard great things about this dynamic church, its praise band and its pastor, the Rev. David Martinez. I decided to attend worship there a few weeks ago. Services begin at 10 a.m. and I arrived early. I was greeted by Karla Rodriguez, a member of the Conference Committee on Hispanic Ministries. Karla has attended El Buen Samaritano for about 15 years. She introduced me to members of the church, helped me find the nursery for my son and then sat by me during worship.

She explained a few things about the worship style. First, she said it would be a good opportunity for me to practice my Spanish. She then said that I should be aware that worship services the church are longer than those in the typical Anglo church. She said Anglo visitors to El Buen Samaritano usually seem impatient with the length of worship, which typically last about two-and-one-half hours.

Rev. Martinez also had some insight for visitors. As the congregation gathered, he explained from



the pulpit that visitors could expect spirit-filled worship. His sermon focused on the importance of worship born of a heart grateful for the amazing fit of salvation through Christ Jesus.

El Buen Samaritano meets in an old church in an older part of Fort Worth. The building was home to an Anglo congregation for many years until the shifting demographics of the area caused its membership to dwindle. Worship was revived in the setting when the Hispanic congregation took over services.

This congregation formed

from an English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) class offered at another United Methodist church. Members of that class were invited by the church to worship services. They then began meeting regularly for Bible study, increased in numbers and grew into the El Buen Samaritano congregation of today.

The sanctuary at the church is simple with one dominant feature — a single stained glass window featuring a descending dove — located high on the wall behind the pulpit. The symbol of the dove is associated with the Holy Spirit. When Jesus was baptized, the Holy Spirit descended on him like a dove (Luke 3:22).

This imagery is in line with the theology Rev. Martinez expressed — that of a “spirit-filled worship.” Also, Spanish-speaking services are reminiscent of the Day of Pentecost, the day the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples. That day, the people who gathered together heard the gospel proclaimed in their own language.

This passage of scripture is often cited in reference to the universality of the Christian faith. On the Day of Pentecost, Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Mesopotamians and others heard the gospel proclaimed in their own tongues. At El Buen Samaritano, those who speak Spanish can hear the gospel proclaimed in their language each week.

— by Sunny Farley
Office of Hispanic Ministries

UMW Unit chartered at El Buen Samaritano

El Buen Samaritano United Methodist Church recently became the only Hispanic church in the Central Texas Conference with a chartered unit of United Methodist Women, only the second in conference history following Mi Casa Su Casa which closed last year.

“We’ve all worked very hard in order to make this happen,” said conference UMW President Myrtis Parker calling it an exciting day for the church and UMW.

The process for establishing the unit began four years ago when a group of women at the church began meeting. “They decided it was time to get together as a group and talk about issues in their communities and how to get closer to God,” said church member Karla Rodriguez.

In 2006, Rodriguez was named by the conference UMW and the Women’s Division to be the Spanish language coordinator for the conference. “I started to build a bridge between the Anglo UMW to the Hispanic UMW. The women from El Buen started to get involved in the conference activities, and in September ... decided to become an official unit,” Rodriguez said.

The chartering portion of the service was in Spanish with the following officers installed: Elvira Andrade, president; Elena Rodriguez, vice president; Amparo Escamilla, secretary; Ulda Gutierrez, treasurer; Frances Martinez, spiritual growth; and Karla Rodriguez, resources.

Cabin No1 will become a museum honoring Glen Lake Camp’s past as a valued ministry

Glen Lake Camp & Retreat Center Executive Director Rev. Steve Nance and the staff recently discovered an old brochure (circa 1940s) that describes the vision of Glen Lake’s founders.

The brochure talked about the infrastructure, the buildings and cabins, the dream of a beautiful chapel and a paid staff in the summer to minister to the visiting campers.

What an amazing feeling the current staff had as they read through the three-fold publication and realized their vision had been realized!

Time does not stand still. Today, Glen Lake is in the process of remodeling old Cabin No. 1 into a museum that commemorates and

celebrates the people and organizations that have been a part of this incredible ministry.

In doing so, Glen Lake needs your help. If you have memorabilia, old photos or anything else that might enhance the Glen Lake Camp Museum, and you are willing to share those items, please send them to:

Glen Lake Camp & Retreat Center
C/O GLC Museum
P.O. Box 928
Glen Rose, TX 76043

For larger items that are being shipped, please send to:
Glen Lake Camp & Retreat Center
C/O GLC Museum
1102 N.E. Barnard St.
Glen Rose, TX 76043



Conference Calendar

November

27-28: Conference Center closed in observance of Thanksgiving

30: United Methodist Student Day Offering (only participating churches are eligible for their students to apply for United Methodist Merit Scholarships)

December

4: Waco District ministers meeting at Methodist Children’s Home

6: Brownwood District clergy Christmas brunch at Early UMC

6: Mid-Cities District clergy Christmas brunch at First UMC Colleyville

6: Waxahachie District clergy Christmas brunch at the District Parsonage

8: Higher Education Task Force meeting at Conference Center

13: Student Leadership Team Christmas party, location TBA

13: Weatherford District clergy Christmas party at Glen Lake Camp & Retreat Center, Glen Rose

15: Posadas at Grace UMC, 4028 Calmont Ave., Fort Worth (A Mexican tradition for Christmas is this celebration of the birthday of Jesus. Gather at 5:30 p.m. at Grace UMC and then process to Arlington Heights UMC for a celebration through drama & festivities.)

19: Last day to mail apportionments

24-26: Christmas observance, Conference Center closed

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

Tearing down fences | Continued from page 1A

about the white side. About four acres was donated to the Ovilla Methodist Episcopal Church South by the McFarlin family in 1886 for a church building and cemetery. Among the 440 buried there are veterans of the Civil War through the Vietnam conflict.

"Harvey, who does not want to bear the cost and responsibility as sole caretaker, is comfortable with the new negotiated arrangement," according to Rev. Cal Hoffman, pastor at Ovilla UMC for the past five years. Families that were a part of the South Section agreement for free burials are on a list the Cemetery Association will honor through mid-2009. After that, family members will be asked to cover half the usual cost of a burial plot.

The earliest grave site on the white side is a death in 1884, but folks are pretty certain research will reveal even earlier gravesites on the black side. The Cemetery Association plans to use a sonar device to help in mapping out the South Section where many of the grave stones have worn down or been moved by storms. In earlier times, people enjoyed the brush arbor along the nearby creek bed for worship, but raging storms some-times caused the creek to overrun its bounds.

Over the course of several months, volunteers had begun mowing the

tall grass and clearing the underbrush. That's when 17-year-old Connor Bynum, a member of Boy Scout Troop 524 that meets at Ovilla UMC, adopted removing the fence and clearing the remaining underbrush as his Eagle Scout community service project. Also helping were their scout leader, Cemetery Association President Ray Hartsock and member Bundy Hogue who donated the use of his heavy clearing and mulching equipment from ACE Tree Service.

Connor's Boy Scout troop and others in the community joined the workday on Nov. 8 as scouts tore down the fences that divided the black and white communities for over a century. At the same time, the church and community are building stronger relationships, something Gillum and other members of the Cemetery Associations will continue to nurture.

"It's important in this size community with its cultures and history that the breaking down of barriers has been a cooperative effort," Rev. Hoffman told television reporters covering the work day. "There are things that have separated us in the past that are now being replaced in a loving Christian manner," he added.

At right, Boy School Troop 524 is ready for a hard day of community service at the historic Ovilla Cemetery.



Boy Scouts get the help of a few members of Ovilla United Methodist Church and community volunteers.



Rev. Cal Hoffman, pastor at Ovilla UMC, answers media questions. Below, Connor Bynum checks with his scout leader on his Eagle Scout project.



World Methodist Evangelism director calls for prayers for peace as Advent begins

Dr. H. Eddie Fox, director of the World Methodist Evangelism Council, is calling on all Methodist congregations in 138 countries to "Pray for Peace" on the first Sunday of Advent, Nov. 30. His message to every congregation follows:

In our world today we are overwhelmed daily with great suffering, agony, pain and death. Our world desperately needs to hear again the message announced by the Angelic Choir more than 2000 years ago:

I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people:

To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior,

Who is the Messiah, the Lord.

(Luke 2:10-11)

In the midst of troubled time, uncertainty and the unknown, we need an anchor of hope on which we can depend. Recently we were with our Methodist people in Bulgaria, and we experience anew what it means to place fully our

trust in Christ Jesus and know that "great is the faithfulness" of the Lord.

During the communist era of 40 years (1950-1990), our people in Bulgaria suffered very much for their faith an witness. I remember our first visit with them in the early 90s. I heard it so often that I wrote in my Bible, "Bulgarian Psalm." Recently a new Methodist church was dedicated in Veliko Turnovo on the first land that the Methodists ever owned in Bulgaria in 1850. And yes, I heard Psalm 124 read to open the celebration. The call to worship was climaxed with the strong voice of all the people saying the closing words of Psalm 124:

Our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth.

Pastor Ivan of Veliko Turnovo expressed great praise to the Lord and thanksgiving for the Methodists connecting with them through World Methodist Evangelism

enabling their dream of a new church to be fulfilled in the year of the Lord 2008.

World Methodist Evangelism is passionately committed to proclaiming the good news of the gospel so that everyone can know and experience that "our help is in the name of the Lord." God has raised up this movement not for our sake but for salvation and healing in the world. We are deeply grateful to you for your prayers and support.

During this time when persons are looking for the "anchor of hope" a wide door is opened to us. At this particular moment, we need your prayers and financial support; your Christmas gift and your generous love offering is greatly needed. I ask that you pray for us and stand with us.

Again, I am reminding you that all Methodist congregations in 138 countries are called upon to "Pray for Peace" on the first Sunday in

Advent, Nov. 30. Please encourage your congregation to join in this worldwide prayer and learn more about [our mission and resources] at www.WorldMethodist.org. Let us be of one mind and heart and fervently "pray for peace in every tongue in the Name of the Prince of Peace."

In times like these we need a savior

and an anchor of hope. Let us join together in our heart's desire to see the Kingdom come. May you experience the living help in Christ Jesus and celebrate a wonderful and blessed Christmas filled with the presence, joy and peace of our Lord. Hallelujah our help is in the name of the Lord!

Year-end opportunity to help JFON

As the end of 2008 draws near, you have the opportunity to help your congregation meet its Fair Share goal this year. This second-mile giving supports the ministry of Justice for Our Neighbors (JFON), an UMCOR-related ministry that welcomes immigrants into our churches and communities by providing free, high-quality immigration legal services, education and advocacy.

JFON provides legal assistance for such needs as family petitions, religious worker visas, self-petition under the Violence Against Women Act and T-visas for victims of human trafficking to name a few. The needs are so great that the Central Texas Conference immigration clinic has a six-month waiting list.

You are invited to give generously through your church to help make this important ministry possible. For more information about JFON, please visit the Refugee & Immigration Ministries page on the conference Web site at www.ctcumc.org.