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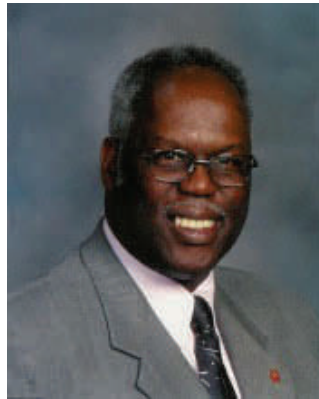
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Instant Connection

California-Nevada Annual Conference



January Message From Bishop Brown Posted to Website

In his January article, Bishop Warner H. Brown, Jr. urges churches to participate in Special Sunday giving for Human Relations Day this Sunday, January 17.

The article was written before tragedy struck in Haiti.

Now, some churches are revising their plans to take two special offerings this Sunday - the Human Relations Day offering and a Haiti offering - while others are postponing the Special Sunday offering until later in the month in favor of taking a special offering for Haiti only, this Sunday.

Please remember that although the day before the Martin Luther King birthday observance is the *suggested* day for the Human Relations Day offering to be taken, it can be taken at another time - and the importance of this offering is undiminished by the greatness of the need in Haiti.

Please give generously to Haiti relief *and* to the Special Sunday offering, whenever it is scheduled at your church.

The Bishop's January article follows.

Putting a Human Face on Human Relations Day

This Sunday, January 17, we celebrate Human Relations Day - the first of six Special Sundays in The United Methodist Church, when special offerings are taken for specific purposes.

Human Relations Day was established by the 1972 General Conference to promote support for the Community Developers, United Methodist Voluntary Service, and Police-Community Relations programs. Traditionally observed on the Sunday before the observance of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday (though a local church may choose to observe it on another date), it has a historical relationship to the American Civil Rights Movement by virtue of its support for community development, with its justice and human rights implications. Established four years after Dr. King's death, this Special Sunday provides a method for positive expression by congregations, a means for them to show their support for the values Dr. King exemplified.

[Today, although the offering continues to go to Community Developers and Voluntary Service, the Youth Offender Rehabilitation Program has replaced the Police-Community Relations Program – a change made in 1989, in response to the growing population of youth offenders and their need for creative redirection.]

This offering is the sole source of support for the Community Developers Program.

You may not know much about these programs – or may be unaware of the impact this special offering has had in our own Conference. That's why I've asked our communications office to put a human face on Human Relations Day in Cal-Nevada – and, in fact, on all the Special Sundays this year.

Before each Special Sunday, you'll be able to read in the *Instant Connection*, the "News" section of our Conference website, about someone right here at home who has benefited in some way from the designated offering.

This week, you'll read that the "face" of Human Relations Day belongs to:

- A Japanese-American former Buddhist saxophonist who plays blues in a United Methodist church – thanks to basketball;
- A young person devoted to helping others, after the suicide of a friend; and
- West Bank villagers given a better chance at life because of bees.

I encourage you to read their stories in the [Instant Connection](#) (along with other stories at www.umcgiving.org) – and then to give generously to the Human Relations Day offering on January 17.

Your brother in Christ,

Warner H. Brown, Jr.

UM Response to Earthquake in Haiti

United Methodist Communications is working to provide timely and relevant information about how The United Methodist Church is responding to the tragic earthquake in Haiti and how United Methodists can support these efforts. United Methodists have had a long-standing relationship with Haiti through the Methodist Church of Haiti.

The [United Methodist News Service](#) posted a story soon after the tragedy and will have ongoing coverage about United Methodist mission teams who are in Haiti, response efforts by the United Methodist Committee on Relief, and what local churches are doing to provide aid. Tune to <http://www.umc.org/haiti> for more information.

Support for relief efforts can be made to Haiti Emergency, [UMCOR Advance #418325](#). 100% of gifts to UMCOR through the Advance support the designated project.

Bishop Asks Prayer for UMs Unaccounted for in Haiti

Bishop Warner H. Brown, Jr. is asking members of the California-Nevada Annual Conference to hold in prayer United Methodists unaccounted for since a massive earthquake struck Haiti yesterday afternoon.

Sam Dixon, Clint Rabb and Jim Gulley, United Methodist Committee on Relief staff members, were in Haiti as part of an UMCOR team visit with the Church in Haiti when the quake struck, and reportedly were in one of the buildings which collapsed. They have not been heard from since.

In addition, Volunteers in Mission teams from Texas and New Jersey - two of five conferences that had teams in Haiti at the time - also are unaccounted for.

The UMVIM teams from Michigan, Western North Carolina, and the Dakotas conferences all have reported in and say that they are fine, however.

The massive earthquake, worst to strike the region in more than 200 years, hit shortly before 5 p.m. yesterday, about 10 miles southwest of Port-au-Prince. It "left the country in a shambles," according to a U.S. Geological Survey seismologist.

Bishop Brown asks prayer for those unaccounted for and their families; for United Methodists who have relatives in Haiti; for the Church in Haiti and all the people of that nation affected by the earthquake; and for UMCOR staff tasked with coordinating relief efforts, as well as those on the ground in Haiti.

At this time, however, congregations are asked not to organize relief teams.

"Additional people without appropriate coordination will not have a positive impact on the situation," states Bishop Joel Martinez, Interim General Secretary of the General Board of Global Ministries. He encourages congregations looking to assist to contribute to [UMCOR Advance #418325](#), and to UMCOR's [supply kits project](#).

"I am confident that the full resources of UMCOR and The General Board of Global Ministries will save lives and restore communities with the prayerful support of our United Methodist connection," he concludes.

[Editor's Note: Please be patient if an UMCOR site you are trying to access is slow to load due to the increased volume of traffic on UMCOR's website.]

UPDATE: UMs Missing in Haiti

New information places three United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) executives inside a building destroyed by the January 12 earthquake in Haiti.

Initially there were conflicting reports as to whether the men were inside or en route to the hotel at the time.

The Rev. Sam Dixon, UMCOR's top executive, the Rev. Clinton Rabb, head of Mission Volunteers, and consultant Jim Gulley have not been heard from. Their driver now has confirmed that he dropped them off at the Hotel Montana approximately five minutes before the massive 7.0 earthquake struck the Caribbean nation.

The hotel, on the outskirts of the Haitian capital of Port au Prince, was destroyed. However, rescue operations are continuing and some people reportedly have been rescued from the hotel.

Indiana UMVIM teams still unaccounted for

Members of a Dallas mission team working at an eye-care clinic were injured in the Jan. 12 Haiti earthquake, and two Indiana churches are still waiting for news about their members.

A group of 12 mission volunteers from [Highland Park United Methodist Church](#) in Dallas was working in the village of Petit Goave when the clinic building collapsed. Volunteers had to dig out people buried in the rubble, the church said on its website.

Some mission members were injured.

"Some may be serious," the church said.

Meanwhile, church members at Milroy (Indiana) United Methodist Church and St. Luke's United Methodist Church in Indianapolis are concerned they have not heard from mission teams in Haiti.

Four members from each church were working at a Catholic school and orphanage in Fondwa - four hours south of Port-au-Prince, the epicenter of the quake. They traveled to Haiti under the auspices of the Family Health Ministries, a faith-based non-profit organization based in Durham, North Carolina.

Members of a New Jersey mission team that also had been unaccounted for were found to be safe.

Read UMNS stories:

[Missing Mission Execs](#)

[Mission Volunteers Missing, Injured in Haiti](#)

[New Jersey Church Rejoices](#)

Haiti Connections in the California-Nevada Annual Conference

A pastor in the California-Nevada Annual Conference today is experiencing relief that family members in Haiti are safe, while grieving the widespread loss of life and devastation in her homeland.

The Rev. Myrna Bernadel-Huey, pastor of First UMC in San Leandro, California, in the Bay View District, has aunts, uncles, and cousins in Haiti. She has been able to communicate with her family and all are safe, she reports. Although for some hours after the earthquake an uncle and a cousin were unaccounted for, this afternoon Bernadel-Huey received word that they had been located unharmed.

"I appreciate your prayers for Haiti, all her people, and our world that *can* respond, to lend the aid that's needed to help with this herculean relief effort, as well as the rebuilding that must follow," she says. "I pray we will open our hearts and respond to this calamity with an un-weary, Christ-like spirit."

"I am so grateful for the global response of compassion thus far, [and] praying it will continue ... but in all things, God is our sure and certain strength," she states. As for personal support of relief efforts, Bernadel-Huey says it makes sense, to her, to donate to organizations that are already 'on the ground' in Haiti, such as the United Methodist Committee on Relief.

"No words can describe the complexity of how things work in Haiti. Therefore, if an organization has already been at work in Haiti, they'll be the most experienced and, most likely, more effective than anyone 'new' to the scene," she says.

And she notes that 100 percent of UMCOR donations go directly to providing relief; not one penny of giving to an [Advance number](#) is spent on administrative costs.

Novato UMC rents space to two Haitian congregations (7th Day Adventist and Southern Baptist) and Novato UMC pastor, the Rev. Rebecca Irelan, reports that "a couple of Haitians attend our worship services."

"Many of these local folks will have lost family members," she says, adding, "We will buy flowers for their services and send some prayer shawls. If any other church has a prayer shawl ministry and would like to send shawls to us, we will get them distributed to the members of these two congregations."

Haiti Earthquake Volunteers and Responders

The California-Nevada Annual Conference UMVIM (United Methodist Volunteers in Mission) Office is maintaining a list of persons interested in volunteering to work in Haiti or in local support projects in the near future. [Tom Hazelwood](#) of UMCOR reports, "UMCOR will be sending a team to Haiti just as quickly as we can get confirmation from the Methodist Church of Haiti that it is safe and the Government will allow us in."

Phil Bandy, Cal-Nevada's UMVIM coordinator, says, "We will contact everyone on the list with more information as it becomes available, and once teams can enter we can start scheduling."

Online registration will be available soon. In the meantime, please send the following information to the [CA-NV UMVIM Office](#) and you will be contacted with any updated information that becomes available:

- Name
- Email
- Phone
- City/State
- Conference
- Want to work in Haiti?
- Prefer to provide local support?
- Skills

The registration is open to all people within the Western Jurisdiction.

The Face of Human Relations Day: A Japanese Saxophonist Who Plays John Coltrane in a United Methodist Church (Thanks to Basketball)

"Anyone can count the seeds in an apple, but only God can count the number of apples in a seed." - Robert H. Schuller

Human Relations Day on January 17, a Special Sunday in The United Methodist Church, is the sole source of funding for the Community Developer Program. Some 15 years ago, the special offering provided seed money to Buena Vista UMC in Alameda – and no one could have predicted what the fruit of that gift would be.

The church had been getting involved in the issue of Asian representation in the local school district, and realized it needed a designated staff person to direct its efforts. Buena Vista's pastor, the Rev. Michael Yoshii, had heard about the Community Developer Program, so the church applied, was approved, and was able to hire a community developer. People from the community were recruited for a committee, which became an organization, and eventually that group spun off and became its own non-profit organization. (The person at the center of the original controversy eventually became a member of the church, and was elected to the school board.)

Wanting to develop a more multi-cultural advocacy, the church formed another committee, which eventually became another self-sustaining non-profit group. From the schools issue, Buena Vista plunged into work on behalf of fair housing practices. Another non-profit organization resulted.

Today the church has a three-pronged priority approach, focusing its efforts on:

- Local – a partnership with an urban organic farm for a transitional housing collaborative
- National – partnerships in New Orleans
- International – a partnership with the West Bank Palestinian village of Wadi Foquin

The one who staffs those efforts, serving as Buena Vista's current community developer, is Kaz Takahashi – a Japanese American who grew up in a Buddhist household and who is, by profession, a criminologist and educator specializing in community-based violence prevention. He came to the position at the church by means of a route only God could have designed: through a basketball court.

Buena Vista is known for its youth basketball program, "Our Children." A couple of years ago, Takahashi's sons, Schungo and Kengo, now ages 8 and 11, wanted to participate. He took them, and afterward, they attended a social event. There was a band, and Takahashi, a saxophonist, was impressed by the talent of one of the musicians in particular. He asked who the band member was, and was told that he was Ben Luis, the music director at Buena Vista.

"The next thing I knew I had a saxophone with me and I was going to church," Takahashi says.

A friend, Kristin Furuichi Fong, had invited his family, and had said that he should take his instrument with him.

When the time came to recognize visitors that morning, Rev. Yoshii noticed the saxophone Takahashi had with him, and asked if he wanted to step in and play with the band. He did, and has been playing ever since.

He and his family also have become members of the church.

"Since I was a child I was very curious about religion and faith," Takahashi says. "My wife and I met in a Bible study. We have attended several churches, but couldn't find the right fit when I came to Buena Vista and I heard Michael Yoshii's sermon, I immediately realized this is a church for me."

They asked for pre-baptism education and a few months later were baptized and joined the church. "Every Sunday, we attend," Takahashi says. They are involved in other ways, as well: Anny Hsu-Takahashi coordinates the hospitality luncheon, held every first Sunday of the month, and the boys are still playing basketball.

When Buena Vista advertised for a new community developer, Takahashi read the job description and saw similarities between the position and what he does. He approached Yoshii and they agreed that he would volunteer in the program for a couple of months to determine if he and it were a good match. He did, they were, and he's been on the job for 14 months now.

Takahashi says the thing he likes best about the position is that, "When I work on projects I can see an immediate difference in people's lives. In the classroom, of course you see a difference ... but more happens in five years or 10 years, then you can see it. [With this] I talk to people, organize events, and see an immediate difference."

An example of that is relationships developed through the Growing Youth Project Partnership, a partnership with the Alameda Cooperative in which members of the church work alongside transitional housing residents, to grow crops at an organic farm – a community garden. Despite cultural differences, Takahashi has struck up friendships. He tells of one youth in particular.

"He doesn't come to church but I asked him if he would be interested in taking part in an inter-faith program. I was anxious that it was too far from his comfort level, but he said 'OK, I'll come,' with no hesitation. It is a big commitment for a teenager to attend a four- Saturdays program. It is called The Season of Non-Violence, studying Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and other faith leaders. [The program is led by Jessica Woo, program and development assistant for Buena Vista Community Institute.]

"He has not grown up in a faith tradition, maybe he has some Christian background but the family is not active – but he was very open, he's coming to the program, and I'm very excited about that."

Takahashi also oversees Buena Vista's partnership with the Louisiana Relief Agency and relationship with the Vietnamese community in New Orleans, as well as the church's partnership, forged in August, with the West Bank village of Wadi Foquin as a part of the ministry of the Church and Society Committee, chaired by Jose Arcellana. Through a "Bee Hive Project," the church is raising funds to enable the village to cultivate honey as a means of economic survival.

"People say my dish is very full," Takahashi says. "It is, but I feel very blessed to work for this community, our village called Buena Vista."

"I appreciate that church is a safe place for people to express their lament," he says. "But the pastor helps transform it into hope. Not false hope – real hope."

"I am amazed at what a big difference a small church can make."

[Editor's Note: Watch for other Human Relations Day stories to be posted to the [Instant Connection](#) on the

Conference website at www.cnumc.org later this week.]

The Instant Connection is published each week by Jane Horstman on behalf of Cate Monaghan, Interim Director of Communications for the California-Nevada Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church.

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