



Connection

California-Nevada Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church

Annual Conference will reverberate with the music of Charles Wesley



Compiled by Chuck Myer

Connection *editor*

Charles Wesley won't physically be present at this year's Annual Conference Session. After all, the famed Methodist hymn composer and theologian in his own right would be 300 years old.

But his memory will certainly be a part of the festivities. A special guest at the 2007 Annual Conference Session, S.T. Kimbrough Jr., General Board of Global Ministries' Associate General Secretary for Mission Evangelism, is an expert on the hymnology of Charles Wesley.

Kimrough and the Global Praise Team will help us celebrate the 300th anniversary of Charles Wesley's birth, and will also bring a wide international

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Walking in the Spirit

Bishop Beverly J.
Shamana

Bishop's Itinerary

Ministry Staff and
Cabinet
UM Center
May 29-June 1

Ministry Staff and
Cabinet
UM Center
June 5-8

Rocky Mountain
Annual Conference
(Preaching Visit)
Denver, CO
June 13

California-Nevada
Annual Conference
Sacramento, CA
June 19-24

Cabinet
UM Center
June 26-27

Reno, First UMC
(Preaching Visit)
July 8

Milpitas,
Sunnyhills UMC –
50th Anniversary
(Preaching Visit)
July 14

W. Jurisdiction
College of Bishops
Mexico Itineration
July 22-28

Come dance with the Spirit.... in Italy!

DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST:

Have you signed up for the Italy Adventure yet? There's still time to join the growing group of excited travelers who want to embrace early Christian sites, world class creativity, friendship, art and architecture.

The Spirit of Italy is more than a group study tour. This is an immersion into God's creativity and ours as co-creators. I firmly believe that each of us is endowed with an overflowing abundance of God's creative nature...and every now and then we let it loose – we let it flow. But what if God is calling it forth, every moment, in every situation, giving us divine permission to birth new creative forms, new patterns, symbols, and relationships for building a new society?

Your imagination will be inspired in Italy. Your spirit will be empowered in Italy. Your juices will be flavored in Italy. You will be touched in the deep places of your soul.

I am enthused by the many ways our Conference is creatively crossing old boundaries to build new connections among us. Old labels are falling away as we discover the common ground that unites us. In this season of Pentecost, give yourself permission to be touched by the Holy Spirit in new ways.

I invite you to share the common ground of Christian travel, shared experiences, and ignited connections as we walk the places where Paul and other biblical giants walked before us.

Call your District Office; put together a group from your church and other friends for a divinely creative adventure in Italy October 2-12, 2007.

And God said...*Let There Be Italy!*

YOUR SISTER IN CHRIST,

Bishop Beverly J. Shamana

Annual Conference

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variety of musical styles to our Annual Conference. Kimbrough's long musical tenure with the General Board has yielded many original compositions, and he has edited liturgies used worldwide.

Kimbrough will sing in a cantata built on the poetry and biblical interpretation of Charles Wesley titled, "The Good Samaritan: Through the Eyes of the Victim," commissioned by Mary K. Jackson for the 110th anniversary of Wesley Methodist Church in Singapore in 1995. It was performed at Victoria Concert Hall and Wesley Methodist Church. According to Bishop Shamana, ours may be the first performance in the United States since the work's completion.

"The Good Samaritan" is a 25-minute cantata for SATB choir and soloists based on a collection of unpublished poetry of Charles Wesley, edited by Kimbrough and Oliver A. Beckerlegge, and composed by Jackson. The poems were among over 800 based on the four gospels and the book of Acts that were not published during Wesley's lifetime.

The poems tell the story from a unique perspective, namely, that of the man who is attacked and left for dead by the side of the road. As was so often the case in his biblical interpretation, Charles Wesley internalizes the experience of the biblical characters and thus their emotions and thoughts become his own. The poems have been slightly reconfigured in the setting of the cantata so that sections in the third person form a chorus of observers who see the story unfold before them, as told by the evangelist.

This is in keeping with Charles Wesley's own style of citing the gospel narrative and responding to it with poetical interpretation.

As editor of the cantata, Kimbrough's introductory notes speak to our contemporary culture and the plight of victims who are still left by the side of the road today with no one to hear their story.

"Wesley's telling of the story remains timely," Kimbrough writes, "for he reminds us that victims of violence in every age deserve our care, love, and justice. Only in this way can violence be overcome."

Bishop Shamana has invited Cal-Nevada United Methodist singers to join the combined choir that will present the cantata at the 9:30 worship service on Sunday morning, June 24th at the Sacramento Convention Center. It will be conducted by Derrick Spiva, Jr., who is completing his last year of graduate school at Walt Disney's California Institute of the Arts.

Rehearsals will be held on June 2 and 16, 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., in Room C at the Annual Conference office, 1276 Halyard Drive, West Sacramento. Lunch will be served. There will be an additional rehearsal on the day of the performance at 7:30 a.m. Sheet music, MP3 files and CDs are available by contacting Dina Stenwick, (916) 374-1525. The entire musical score is also available by emailing globalpraise@gbgm-umc.org. Questions regarding the cantata or rehearsals can be directed to Derrick Spiva Sr. (559) 322-0530 or (559) 367-4903.

Upcoming issue of *Connection*

Coming in the next issue: A report by Cal-Nevada pastor and Africa Regional Director for CitiHope International, Michael J. Christensen, on his mission to save 1,000 AIDS orphans and widows in Africa.

Editor's Note: **The July/August issue of the *Connection* will be the last in this format.** As the Conference website (cnumc.org) continues to become the dominant force in disseminating news of the Conference, the Communications Commission plans to unveil a new, more resource-based quarterly print publication in the months ahead. Stay tuned for details on "focus groups" that will help design the new publication.

Bishops' president calls for new church movement

Article and photo by Linda Green, UMNS

The president of the bishops of The United Methodist Church is calling on the denomination to reclaim its heritage as a Christian movement.

Bishop Janice Riggle Huie told her colleagues on the Council of Bishops that the church “must be led more by



a clear vision and mission than by rules and regulations” in order to make disciples for the transformation of the world.

In her April 30 address, Huie said John and Charles Wesley’s Methodist movement began by ministering to people with no economic, religious or political power and helping them become what God intended. “They made Christian faith simple and practical,” she said.

The denomination’s membership is growing throughout the world but shrinking in the United States at a time when 50 percent of the U.S. population has no ongoing relationship with a faith community. There are almost 14 million members in 50 countries, including almost 8 million in the United States. Much of the growth has been in Africa.

Huie reflected on the energy and excitement she has witnessed in the people of Africa and other parts of the world [who are] working to make disciples of Jesus Christ.

“There is a movement of God’s spirit that is transforming the world and we are witnesses to it, and you and I are blessed by it in this community of faith called The United Methodist Church,” she said.

Huie’s vision of the church in the 21st century is one “that is guided by more movement than by institution” and offers a holistic vision of salvation: body, mind and spirit.

Noting that movements are not easy but are “down-right chaotic and messy,” she said they often begin with a few people on the margins of culture rather than from the centers of power and authority. The message of a move-

ment is to change the way that things are in the dominant culture, Huie said.

“The United Methodist movement invites belief in Jesus Christ over the cultural gods, the practice of forgiveness over hate, peace over violence, a better life over poverty, health over sickness.”

The invitation or vision for a United Methodist movement begins with a few people who – through prayer, study, worship, holy conversation, justice and mercy – reach out to others and make connections so that, “finally, the body of Christ starts to move, together.”

Historically, Methodists were known for their ability to move and empower ordinary people to express their faith and were called “the church which moved with the spirit.”

Referring to a description by Methodism historian Nathan Hatch, Huie said early Methodists were “nimble.” While the church had four ministers and 300 lay people early in American Methodism, nearly one in five Americans were associated with Methodism by 1850, making Methodists the most extensive national institution other than the federal government.

By the 1960s, the church was identified by its institutions and agencies, rather than the prompting of the Holy Spirit as its founders were. The institutions “brought permanence and stability” to a world that had engaged in two wars in a half century, she said.

“Functioning like mighty, well-oiled machines, they were created to endure, to order the church and to offer Christ’s ministry forever,” she said, noting that agencies remain today that benefit the church and world because of their emphasis on health, education, mission and ministry to the poor.

Ordained as a UM deacon 37 years ago, Huie said she rarely has “experienced” a United Methodist church or seen the denomination in the United States with a sense of mission and vision that galvanized people into a movement. “I have never been a part of a church in the U.S. which was making more new United Methodist disciples of Jesus Christ than it lost in the previous year,” she said.

Huie said the platforms that helped launch the church’s movement in the 19th and 20th centuries should be used as the foundations for today’s new initiatives.

“I don’t know about you, but I’m ready to loosen up a little. I’m ready to move. I’m ready to follow Jesus. I am ready for The United Methodist Church to rise up and dance before the Lord. I’m ready for The United Methodist Church to step forward into God’s reign on earth as it is in heaven. I believe this Council of Bishops is ready to lead that movement.”

Bishop brings 'freedom' to death row inmate

By Kathy L. Gilbert

UMNS

Andre Burton, 44, has spent all of his adult life in a small steel cell. He has been on death row since he was 19.

But when United Methodist Bishop Beverly J. Shamana went to visit him in San Quentin State Prison in California, Burton told her she brought freedom.

Shamana, president of the General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church and episcopal leader of the San Francisco area, shared her experience at the opening plenary of the board's spring meeting, April 26-29.

"He seemed genuinely pleased and thankful, grateful that I was there," she said. "I just kept asking myself over and over again – what do you say to yourself day after day, week after week, when this is your life?"

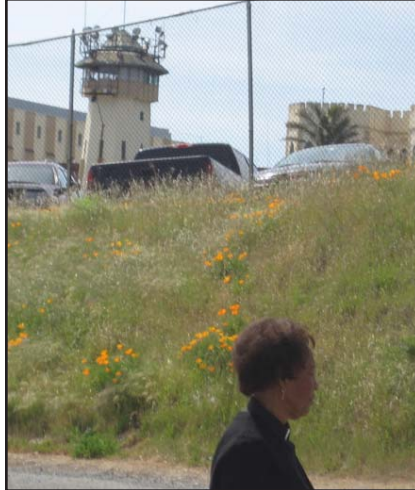
The United Methodist Church marked 50 years of opposition to capital punishment in 2006, and the Council of Bishops asked each active bishop to visit an inmate on death row. It took a year to gain permission, but Shamana fulfilled that goal when she saw Burton in March.

Her role, she said, was to bring him the unconditional love of God, "and to be able say that I come from a church that does not believe you should get capital punishment ... no matter what you did."

Burton was convicted and sentenced to death for fatally shooting Gulshakar Khwaja of Long Beach, California, as she ran to help her son, whom police said was shot in the eye by Burton during a 1983 robbery in front of his mother's house. Burton has maintained his innocence and denied that he confessed to police.

In 1997 the California Supreme Court heard his case, including an order challenging the attorney general's office to show cause as to why his murder conviction and death sentence should not be overturned. The grounds for the order were that he "was denied the right to present a defense at the guilt phase of the trial."

"Andre and his lawyers await the court's decision," she said. "Two of the five justices agreed with his appeal. Andre has not lost hope."



"I'm still processing what happened," Shamana said of her prison visit.

When she returned to the car, her husband asked her how it went. "I couldn't even speak, I could not speak, I had no words to describe," she recalled. "I could not form a thought that I could say. It was just such a powerful experience at such a deep level."

The bishop said visiting Burton made the United Methodist Social Principles come alive for her. "It made it so much more real to me when you talk about restorative justice because death row prisoners cannot take part in any of the education or seminars or anything that are offered to others," she said.

Shamana realized early in the visit that Burton needed conversation and to connect with another person.

"I didn't feel like a bishop when I was in there," she said. "I don't know how I was supposed to feel or expected to feel. I felt like a person who loves God, who knows Jesus, talking to another person."

Shamana expects to visit Burton again and plans to send him the church's position on capital punishment found in paragraph 164G of the 2004 Book of Discipline.

At the close of their visit, Burton asked Shamana for the church's prayers.

"I bring you his request," she told the board.

Annual Conference will present many opportunities to affirm our care and intervention for justice and mercy through reports from the Philippines Fact-Finding Team on the Extra-Judicial Killings; Volunteers in Mission, West Angola Partnership; Global Mission Outreach; Religion and Race; United Methodist Women; youth; children; and other ministries that unite us.

Rock chords enhance church experience at Burlingame

By Jennifer Livesey

Special to the San Mateo Times

It's Friday evening, and for the Morgenstern family that means coming together to worship the Lord during a night of singing and celebration.

"There was a desire in this church for something like this for a long time," Kevin Morgenstern said. "Associate Pastor Laurie McHugh wanted to start a band and through word-of-mouth, either by my wife or my daughter, she heard I was a guitarist and asked me to get involved, to which I agreed."

Every Friday night and Sunday morning, the Morgensterns rock out with their Christian rock band, Healing Stream, at the Burlingame United Methodist Church.

Churchgoer Lynn Stanaway said this church has changed a lot since the band came along three years ago. She said the music is lively and really puts people in a good place.

"This place is really welcoming and warm," Stanaway said. "And it doesn't hurt that the music is good."

Morgenstern, who is the lead guitarist and performs lead vocals, said the band has traveled a long road to get to where it is today.

"No one was here that could really put a band like this together," said the 54-year-old musician. "When I came along, there was a lot of work to be done, like planning practices, gathering talented people and just coming up with the money. Laurie and [I] worked together and we've been able to create a really talented group of people." His wife, Ursula, first became involved in the band singing backup.

"My wife had her hands on this project before I did," said Morgenstern of Ursula, who sings backup vocals and plays the tambourine. "In fact, I wasn't really involved in church anymore because I didn't like the direction the church was going. But when I was asked by my wife to join the band, I was really intrigued and decided to give it a shot."

Another player in the musical family is son, Matt, who started out playing the bass guitar and moved on to the electric guitar.

"When my dad first approached me about being in the band, I wasn't thrilled or excited to jump right in," said Matt Morgenstern, 24. "But he told me just to give it a chance and I said OK."

Matt said playing with his dad has taught him a lot about himself as well as his father.

"I learned a lot about how to put music together, which I never really knew the process," Matt Morgenstern said. "That really has stemmed from my dad; he'll come in with



Healing Stream "rocks out" at Burlingame UMC on Friday nights and Sunday mornings.

some music that maybe isn't quite complete and we work together as a band to finish the music. It's been a really great experience."

Rounding out the musical family is daughter Hailey, 15, who sings backup and, on occasion, lead.

"It's really a great experience working with my family on a weekly basis," Matt Morgenstern said. "It gives me a reason to see my family more often because we're all committed to this project."

In watching the family there is no doubt that they enjoy what they are doing and being together.

After greeting the other band members with hugs, kisses and friendly joking and catching up, Morgenstern takes the lead in starting the Friday night service; inspiring the congregation that has gathered to join in the celebration. At some points, clapping to the beat is almost mandatory.

A self-made musician, Morgenstern always had an interest in music. His first love was drumming on anything he could, but he said his parents bought him a guitar instead of the drums he wanted.

He said he's glad the traditional church ceremonies have changed in the past three years since the band started.

"I think that people think that church is irrelevant or old and boring," Morgenstern said. "My hope for having this band is for people to have a real experience. I think that church should be a place where you can enjoy the music and the people and to where it's not the usual corny stuff people expect."

According to Matt the objective isn't to play music, but to be able to worship in a new modern way.

"I mean we all love playing together, but our main goal is to worship God."

Healing Stream performs at every Friday night's "Evenings at the River," with dinner at 6:30 p.m. beforehand, and in "Mornings at the Well" at 9 a.m. on Sundays.

Judicial Council hears about violence in Philippines

By Neill Caldwell

UMNS

MANILA, Philippines – Human rights violations and violence against both Filipinos and Westerners remain key problems facing the Philippines, a United Methodist bishop told members of the denomination’s “supreme court.”

“We need justice in the Philippines,” said Bishop Solito K. Toquero, who leads The United Methodist Church’s Manila Area. “Those who speak out against the government and who work for the poor are being killed.”

Toquero spoke to eight members of the Judicial Council who were attending the court’s April 25-28 meeting, its first outside American soil.

Using Micah 6:8 as his devotional text, Toquero said leaders of The United Methodist Church and other churches in the Philippines are seeking to do God’s will by advocating for justice, calling attention to injustice, poverty and violence, and visiting with prisoners – “even political detainees, rebels and Muslim detainees, to minister to them.”

Toquero also mentioned the recent death of Peace Corps volunteer and freelance journalist Julia Campbell of Fairfax, Virginia, who was killed while visiting the country’s famous rice terraces, a popular tourist destination.

“This is what is happening in the Philippines right now,” Bishop Toquero said. “There are places where we must tell Westerners not to go.

“We have met with a group of generals to share our concerns and we hope that our president (Gloria Macapagal Arroyo) will do something about the growing militarization. We also hope that the United States will add its pressure on the (Arroyo) government.”

On a recent trip to Washington, D.C., Bishop Toquero and other Filipino clergy met with the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs, chaired by Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., to share concerns.

Filipino church leaders also met with the United Nations Human Rights Council in March, seeking an investigation into “extra-judicial killings, enforced disappearances, torture and other forms of violations of human rights in the Philippines.” Seven cases of killings of church people, including a United Methodist pastor, are among the violations of human rights documented in “Let the Stones Cry Out,” an 85-page report prepared by the National Council of Churches in the Philippines. The report documents 836 politically motivated killings since 2001 when Arroyo became president. Among the victims are teachers, students, journalists, clergy and other religious leaders.

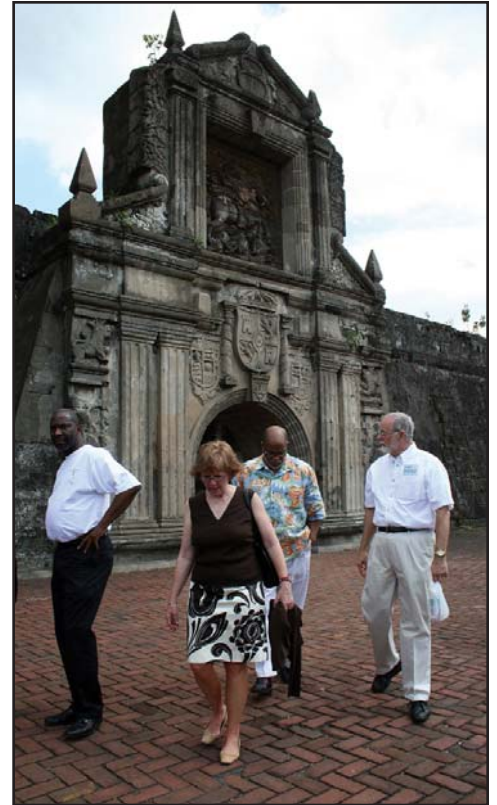
In February, United Methodist Bishop Beverly Shamana and concerned laity and clergy from the church’s California-Nevada Conference made a fact-finding trip to the Philippines, a nation of 85 million people spread over 7,100 islands, speaking more than 80 languages or dialects.

Filipino clergy fear that the government’s new “Human Security Act” will be used to escalate human rights violations in the name of counterterrorism.

National Supreme Court Chief Justice Reynato S. Puno, a lay member of Puno United Methodist Church in Quezon City who has spoken out against human rights violations in the Philippines, opened the Judicial Council’s historic meeting with a devotion on the topic of Christ’s love.

“We are becoming a world more prone to violence,” Puno told the council members, “both physical and spiritual violence. There is only one antidote to hatred and violence, and that is love. Jesus was a victim of violence, but not once did he nurture hatred in his heart or use violence to change the status quo. His commandment was love.

“Love is still the greatest and most meaningful force in the world today,” Puno added. “If love has left our hearts, can this be the reason for mankind’s drift?”



Members of the UMC Judicial Council tour Fort Santiago in Old Manila following the council’s historic meeting in the Philippines.

General Conference size reduction proposed

FORT WORTH, Texas (UMNS) – Future gatherings of The United Methodist Church’s top legislative assembly could be smaller than the 1,000-delegate conferences of recent decades.

The Commission on General Conference, which plans the assemblies, will propose to the church limiting the number of delegates to between 500 and 600. The petition was one of several considered April 17-19 as the commission looked at ways to improve the assembly’s operation.

The commission also adopted petitions aimed at refining the process for submitting petitions to General Conference and enabling annual conferences – the denomination’s regional units – to set term limits for delegates if they choose. All of the commission’s petitions will be sent to the 2008 General Conference for consideration. If approved, they would take effect for the 2012 assembly.

The three petitions “are expressly for the purpose of creating a gathering at which real Christian conferencing is possible, as opposed to what someone once called ... ‘an exercise in the management of petitions,’” said the Rev. Gail Murphy-Geiss, commission chairperson from Centennial, Colorado.

General Conference, which meets every four years, will gather April 23-May 2 next year at the Fort Worth Convention Center. The assembly typically brings together about 1,000 delegates from around the world to worship, celebrate ministry, approve a budget and set policy and direction for the church.

While the proposal to limit General Conference’s size has financial benefits, it also is being driven by the need for “creating better conversation among fewer people as opposed to a cast of thousands,” Murphy-Geiss said at the meeting.

She elaborated on that point in a follow-up note to United Methodist News Service.

“I’ve often said that the General Conference, as currently constituted, is not a good value for the people of the denomination, and even more so, for those to and with whom we minister,” she said. “A thousand (more like 1,100 when you include all the affiliated autonomous delegates, and even more if you include bishops, staff, etc.) people gathered for two weeks, staying in first-class hotels, eating in nice restaurants ... is not what Jesus had in mind.

“I honestly think we could run our institution while also providing better ‘services’ to the world if we work at cutting the time and cost of what we do for ourselves and shift it to the needs of others,” she said. “... Fewer delegates with fewer petitions could meet in a shorter time, in cheaper places, with cheaper arrangements overall, and engage in richer, more spiritually meaningful conversation.

That’s what our church needs!”

During its meeting, the commission considered two other models for the size of the assembly: a Senate model, with two delegates from each annual conference, and a double Senate model, with four from each conference.

Currently, the church has a combination House of Representatives-Senate model, said the Rev. Vin Walkup of Brentwood, Tennessee. The denomination’s Book of Discipline provides for at least two delegates from each annual conference. The church adds members to the various delegations based on the membership in the annual conferences. The denomination has 129 annual conferences – 63 in the United States, 24 in Africa and 21 each in Europe and the Philippines.

In the discussion about term limits for General Conference delegates, commission members tried to find a balance between fostering more diversity among the delegations and capitalizing on the experience that comes with multiple terms.

Joel Huffman of Gilbert, Arizona expressed concern about erasing valuable corporate memory from General Conference, and noted that it wasn’t until his second or third term as a delegate that he felt very effective in legislative committees. “That’s one of my concerns about limiting (terms) to two instead of three or four,” he said.

Pat Stroman, a commissioner from Waco, Texas said the proposal for restricting terms would limit the annual conferences’ basic right to choose who represents them at General Conference.

Noting that two terms “is a little short,” commission member Mollie Stewart of Valhermosa Springs, Alabama suggested the solution lies at the annual conference level. People who keep getting elected over and over again have to say “enough is enough” and let others serve, she said.

In addressing the petitions process, the commissioners were concerned that anyone can



Rev. Alan Morrison, General Conference business manager, chats with consultant Stephen Drachler (left) and Rev. Eliezer Valentín-Castañón under a Texas star made of hats at the Fort Worth Convention Center.

Conference News Briefs

Don't miss Bishop Shamana's trip to Italy!

Do our pastors know that they can earn Bishop Shamana's trip to Italy by signing up church members to go with them? Pastors can earn the basic costs of the trip by recruiting seven people to go with them. With seven more (total of 14 persons or seven couples) the clergy spouse can earn the trip, also.

Just let the people in your congregations know what a great opportunity this is to get to know the Bishop personally, as well as to see the wonders of Italy in person.

What can one expect by going on this tour?

- Opportunities to visit with the Bishop and other colleagues in a leisurely manner
- To see some of the great Christian art in Italy: i.e. the Statue of David in Florence, paintings and mosaics in Rome
- The original balcony and courtyard of "Romeo & Juliet" in Verona
- The wondrous canals in Venice
- A trip into the catacombs where the early Christians worshipped

An optional extension of the tour includes a cruise to the Isle of Capri as well as visits to Sorrento, Vesuvius, Pompeii, and Castel Gandolfo.

And there is much more! But time is getting short: the deadline for signing up for the October tour is July 1. Don't miss this opportunity!

—Bill Marx, Coordinator for the Bishop's Tour to Italy

Shasta Camp still has space

There are still spaces available for family campers at Shasta Family Conference Camp, July 28-August 3. The camp is rustic and open to tent and RV (no hookups) camping. There are limited spaces in the lodge with dormitory-style rooms. The camp is in a beautiful setting near Mt. Shasta, California. It offers crafts, music, workshops for all ages, worship, campfires, good food and afternoons free to swim, fish, boat or explore the highlights of the area. The theme this year is "Miracles." The community of family campers will explore biblical miracles and miracles in our lives today. There will be a 1/2 day hike to Heart Lake, where the view of Mt. Shasta and Black Butte is awesome, and the glacial lake's waters call for a polar bear swim. Shasta is indeed the place to be for a week this summer! Costs are very moderate – \$160 per family campsite for the week, \$100 for singles, and \$30 per person a week for food (children, \$15).

For more info and registration forms contact Carol at: cskmusic@hughes.net, (530) 742-1450; or Jerry at drjerryw@jwrenn.com, (510) 581-9751.

Exciting youth opportunity

Cal-Nevada Annual Conference Camping Ministries is teaming up with Sierra Service Project to provide an exciting mission opportunity for youth this summer. A group of youth from various

churches is being assembled to form a special Urban Plunge Team to serve for a week at SSP!

Pastors and youth workers from any church not already participating in SSP this summer are invited to look for and encourage a youth from their church to join the team, to consist of senior high youth (entering grades 9-12 in the fall). The team will be led by Rev. Cindy Eucalyptus and Rev. Jim Luther.

Still looking for a youth mission project this summer? Sierra Service Project has some week-long service projects available at five different sites for youth groups. Service work consists of various types of home repair projects including roofing, building wheelchair ramps, stairs and porches, and painting. Churches that have never been to SSP get a 10% discount on each registration fee.

Spend a week at SSP where kids are safe to grow in their faith, learn new social skills, embrace cultural diversity and build self esteem – while giving people in need a hand up!

SSP representatives are always happy to talk to a church about the possibility of sending its youth group this summer, or the possibility of pairing with another group to plan a trip. One or two youth and an adult are a great way to get started with an SSP tradition.

For more information contact Christy at Christy@Sierraserviceproject.org or (916) 488-6441, or see the SSP website, www.sierraserviceproject.org and the California-Nevada Camping website, www.cnumccamp.org.

Connection is published monthly by the Office of Communications of the California-Nevada Annual Conference.

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e-mail news@calnevumc.org. Deadline is the 10th day of the month for the next month's issue.

Connection accepts articles and letters to the editor. We will publish items on a space-available basis and may edit submissions for length, content and clarity. We may quote from letters or e-mails in preparing articles. Submissions must include the writer's name, city of residence, e-mail address if available, phone, UM church affiliation, and title.

CONTACT INFORMATION will be published at the discretion of the editor. Please include relevant e-mail and website addresses.

CHECK THE CONFERENCE WEBSITE www.cnumc.org for a downloadable version of **Connection**.

SEND CIRCULATION AND SUBSCRIPTION INQUIRIES to **Connection Circulation Manager**, P.O. Box 980250, West Sacramento, CA 95798-0250; phone (916) 374-1529, fax (916) 372-5544.

A
Missionary's
Notebook
 Rev. Linda Kelly

Linda Kelly directs the Side-by-Side Spiritual Companions program as Conference Missionary to Loaves & Fishes. Her work is supported in part through Conference Board of Missions and donations (Advance Special #811). Phone: (916) 443-4362; revlinda@sbcglobal.net.

Prayers on a park bench

When I say I work in a park with the homeless community, you might picture a city park with green grass, a playground, parents and children feeding ducks in a pond, laughter and picnics. We have some of that, but Friendship Park is a private park in Sacramento enclosed within a cyclone fence. You will find few children in this park, mostly men and some women who long for a secure place to call home. It was built by Loaves & Fishes across the way from their dining room specifically to serve their homeless guests. It is a place of hospitality and services for 500-800 people a day; a refuge until it closes at 2:45 in the afternoon.



This is where the Side-By-Side Spiritual Companions program was born and thrives after six years. This is my parish and a mission site for United Methodists in our Conference.

Side-By-Side does not serve a hot lunch like the Loaves & Fishes dining room. We offer something as nourishing, maybe more so. We offer spiritual food. We do not evangelize, preach, convert or judge. We are simply with the people in the spirit of Christ. We listen to their stories, help carry the pain, remind the person of God's love and faithfulness just by our presence, especially when it feels like God has abandoned them. We cry with them, laugh with them, pray with them. It is a ministry of presence.

One half hour after Friendship Park opens its gates at 7:00 a.m. to hundreds of waiting guests with shopping carts and bicycles, Side-By-Side holds a prayer circle. In a corner of the park near the memorial wall and fountain, a holy place, we gather on four white wooden benches under an awning. Holding our hot mugs of Friendship Park coffee, we begin in silence amidst the noise and chaos of the crowd nearby. We introduce ourselves and read a portion of a Psalm to center ourselves and reflect upon. We share our lives.

The other day, the beginning of the month when our numbers were low, there were only three of us gathered at 7:30 a.m.: Alex, a guest who lives in his vehicle; Chester, a Side-By-Side volunteer; and me. As we read the Psalm of the day aloud, others slowly trickled in until we numbered 11 in all. Shaun arrived dressed in gleaming white shirt and tie, ready to witness with his faith community; Brenda came to voice her prayers for her children, who were removed from her care years ago. Alex asked for prayers regarding his multiple sclerosis; Ben, developmentally delayed and small in stature, burst in and stood in the center of the circle as he read over the Psalm; Lauren, a Friendship Park staff person, arrived with Phillip.

Aaron, who has shared openly about his ongoing struggle with drugs, let grateful tears flow as he shared he was entering a residential treatment program. Over the last year, in spite of his up and down life, he completed reading the entire Bible and comes faithfully to the prayer circle in addition to Bible study at the Salvation Army across the way. His joy and gratitude to God for another chance was great.

Across from him sat Phillip. Phillip's very visible tattoos tell his story of a difficult life. Yet there is a new softness in his voice, an innocence in his manner. Close to tears as well, he shared his growing closeness to God and his desire to do God's will. I was struck by his sincerity and growing faith, so simple and so pure.

As we ended our time and enjoyed our day-old pastries provided by the Park, Robert and Lee appeared. They had just been released from prison. We had not seen Robert in over a year. The first thing he did was bring his friend to prayer where he had found support and strength before. We stopped our munching, paused and offered prayers for them in their new freedom and new life.

A group of homeless folk gathers daily for prayer whenever Friendship Park is open. Some continue to come even after they find housing, traveling by light rail and bus to arrive by 7:30 a.m. In our sanctuary without walls, Christ is present. God draws people there and we are well-fed by the Spirit. Side by side we pray, listen, hope and receive the food we need for our journey. *(Some names have been changed for this story. Permission is granted to reprint this article for church use if proper credit is given.)*

Other Voices

South African Easter: A lesson in prayer

[Editor's Note: Barbara (Bobbi) Mallace, the co-director of Golden Gate District lay speakers for the northern three counties, toured South Africa during Lent with her husband, Fred. It led to a glorious Easter, but not as they would expect. Is that what Lent and Easter are? These are excerpts from her sermon – "Be Careful What You Ask For" – at Willits UMC on April 15.]

By Bobbi Mallace

In Johannesburg, we wanted to learn about apartheid and how it had affected the people. Our driver seemed to know all the right places to take us. We visited an area called "the ghetto," where people live who can't find work. The houses are made of boards and tin roofs. The people bathe by getting their water from a central tank, and putting it in a dish pan. They get hot water and TV with the use of a car battery. Some offered crafts to sell. Even the man who showed us around explained that he has no money except what people like us will give him. This was a humbling experience...partly seeing that these people were not unhappy, because their basic needs were taken care of, and they had a roof over their heads...

We visited the Apartheid Museum and the Hector Pieterse Museum. Hector Pieterse was a 13-year-old boy who became the first victim of the uprising of June 1976, when the blacks refused to comply with the rules laid out for them by the white minority. I had always wondered why apartheid happened, but I believe that God was trying to get people to look beyond their greed and realize that we are all His children. Thank God that state-imposed apartheid is now behind...

We then drove around Soweto, the township where all the black people and colored people were made to live during apartheid. [In South Africa, non-white people are classified according to the following terminology: "blacks," "coloreds," and people of mixed racial background.] Today, it is still considered a township, not a city – 4,000,000 people...



One baboon took an instant liking to Bobbi Mallace during her Lenten South Africa trip.

Sometimes we would get stopped in the road by an elephant or a rhinoceros, and basically had to wait until the animal decided to leave. A group of rhinos ["crash" of rhinos is the collective term] was crossing the road, and suddenly, one decided to come over and sniff our vehicle. The rhino was blind and just had to find out what was there. This was a bit of a tense moment for us, but our ranger was not concerned...

I was so grateful that God had allowed me to observe His creatures in their natural settings. I did learn this, though: Be careful what you pray for. Expect an answer and accept it, even if it's not exactly what you expect.

One day our driver was in a hurry. I saw a family of warthogs, but we were going too fast to snap a photo. I kept asking to take a photo. I did get my chance. But my warthog was in a leopard's

mouth, having just been killed. I guess I need to be more specific when I pray...

We found a guide who would take us to see baboons – once in danger of extinction from poaching. Unfortunately, that day the baboons were at the top of a mountain. We had not worn our hiking boots, but I had prayed about this and this was my answer. We started up the very steep slope — sand and rocks under our feet. We tired quickly, but our guide kept saying, "We're almost there." About the fifth time he said this, we realized he was just keeping us going. An hour and a half later, we got to the top of the mountain.

I plopped down on a large rock to rest. Baboons were all around us. Our guide told us not to be upset because the baboons might brush by us, just checking us out. No sooner had I sat down than a young baboon sat on my lap, looked me in the eye, and proceeded to groom my hair. This went on for a while, partly because I was too tired to move. My baboon took my hand and gave me a hug, all of which the guide said is quite unusual.

On Easter Sunday, we went to a Methodist Church in Plumstead, a suburb of Cape Town. I had found this site on the internet, and it looked like it would be much like our UM church in the U.S. The service was wonderful. The pastor said, "I think we'll start by saying a prayer for our cricket team." I knew we would feel at home. They did a beautiful Easter cantata... I had prayed for a good church to go to for Easter, and it was very special, indeed.

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NEW RESOURCES FOR LIVING FULLY, DYING WELL

For Workers With Children

A Place Prepared: Helping Children Understand Death and Heaven (VCG-513) is divided into four segments: (1) Being Honest With Ourselves, as adults, about death (2) Understanding Death and Children's Emotional Response to it (3) Talking With Children About Funerals (4) Talking With Children About Heaven.

For Adults

In **Life Stories: Aging and the Human Spirit (DVG-514)**, two university professors bring together a group of senior citizens to form a writing group. Many of the participants are new to the notion of writing about their lives, and the experience proves unexpectedly rewarding. There are some tense moments in some of the sessions as the participants open old wounds. The result is that they become a "beloved community."

In **Grow Old Along With Me (DVG-515)**, Artists Frederick and Claske Franck, opera singer Shirley Verrett, 90-year-

old photographer Leni Sonnenfeld, and Buddhist nun Pema Chodron see aging as a creative process that carries with it an opportunity for giving birth in later years to one's full humanity. With spirit and insight, they show how to adapt to the changes taking place in our bodies, in our relationships, and in the circumstances of our lives.

For Adult Study

Living Fully, Dying Well (DVG-809) is designed to assist us in making careful, wise, and prayerful preparation for meeting life's most important moments. In this program, participants will learn how to face openly and unafraid the benefits and limitations of aging and end-of-life decisions. The kit includes a leader's guide, a participant's book, three booklets for congregational use, and a DVD to use for opening each of the eight class sessions.

General Conference

continued from page 8

submit a petition directly to General Conference without screening for possibly frivolous or offensive content.

Moreover, no process exists for determining whether someone submitting a petition is even a United Methodist, noted the Rev. Fitzgerald Reist, General Conference secretary.

The commission adopted a petition that it will send to the 2008 General Conference requiring that petitions go through specific church entities: the Connectional Table or any local charge

conference; general church council, board, commission or agency; General Conference study committee; jurisdictional conference or council; central conference; provisional central conference; annual conference; provisional annual conference; missionary conference; mission of the denomination; or affiliated group or caucus as listed in The United Methodist Directory published by Cokesbury.

Changing the process would raise the quality of petitions that go before the

General Conference, said the Rev. Alan Morrison, business manager of the assembly.

Legislative committees at General Conference have little time to discuss, refine and vote on petitions, Murphy-Geiss said. This proposal would better facilitate that, she said.

"It just means you need to get a broader conversation before it comes to the body," she added.

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