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Connection

California-Nevada Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church



Celebrating Our Diversity



and Unity in Christ

ACS '07 set to 'Celebrate Diversity'

By Chuck Myer

Connection editor

This year's Annual Conference Session, which will meet June 19-24, 2007 at the Sacramento Convention Center, will feature joyful celebrations and special worship services, and will include selection of General Conference delegates for 2008.

Unlike the last several years, the conference will once again extend into Sunday morning for closing worship (on June 24). The week's theme will be "Celebrating Our Diversity and Unity in Christ." The theme, taken from the overall vision statement, carries

with it a challenge to us to "move toward a future where every congregation names and celebrates our identity and bears fruits of respect, love, and mutual ministry."

The special guest preacher for ACS 2007 will be Bishop Warner Brown of the Rocky Mountain and Yellowstone Annual Conferences. Before being elected bishop in 2000, **continued on page 3**

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Bishop appoints new Bay View DS

DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST:

One of the deep joys and responsibilities of my office is the selection and appointment of District Superintendents. After prayerful consideration and mutual conversation, I am pleased to announce to the California-Nevada Annual Conference the appointment of Rev. Renae Extrum-Fernandez as the next District Superintendent of the Bay View District beginning July 1, 2007.

After earning her B.S. degree at the University of California at Davis in International Agricultural Development, Renae served as a US-2 Church and Community Outreach worker in Fresno's Latino community. Renae graduated from Boston University School of Theology in 1984, becoming a full member of the California-Nevada Conference in 1986, the first Latina clergywoman raised in our conference to receive ordination and full membership. Churches benefiting from Renae's leadership include Central UMC in San Francisco, First UMC, Palo Alto, and Lake Merritt UMC in Oakland. Renae is currently in her ninth year as lead pastor at First UMC in Walnut Creek.

Renae has given leadership to our conference, including the Conference Nominations Committee, as well as the Board of Ordained Ministry, where she has helped to develop the new Council of Clergy Development. Renae has been elected a delegate to General Conference three times and served in the areas of Religion and Race and Church and Society at the general church level. The Western Jurisdiction has welcomed her involvement in Hispanic ministry and indigenous community development.

Renae is married to Paul Extrum-Fernandez, Vice President for Institutional Advancement at the Pacific School of Religion. They have two daughters, Elana, attending U.C. Santa Barbara and Daniela, a senior at Las Lomas High School.

As your Bishop, I know Renae will bring a wealth of experience and gifts to the Cabinet, and I welcome her to this covenant we share. Renae shares, "I feel at home because I am! The Bay View District is my homeland and I feel privileged to serve its rich diversity of congregations. I hope to lead our District to the fore in the revitalization of our Conference through effective pastoral leadership and congregational witness for our times."

In addition, I want to make known my decision to extend the term of the Rev. Jane E. Schlager into her seventh year. I appreciate the leadership Jane has given to the Golden Gate District and have asked her to continue.

YOUR SISTER IN CHRIST,

Bishop Shamana plans historic trip to Italy

By Rev. Bill Marx

Retired Clergy, CA-NV Annual Conference

Join with our Bishop for a 10 day exciting trip to Italy. Departure date is October 2, 2007. Take this opportunity to personally meet and visit with your Bishop.

We will visit historic ruins in Rome including actually going into the catacombs of St. Sabastino where early Christians worshiped; see the great Art by Michelangelo at

Vatican City; enjoy seeing the city of St. Francis in Assisi; the Statue of David in Florence; ride in the canal streets of Venice; see the Leaning Tower of Pisa; and so much more.

Time is very short, so get in touch with your pastor or District Superintendent for a brochure and registration form. This cost from San Francisco and return is only \$2898, and includes your round trip air fair, breakfast and dinner, first class **continued on page 3**

ACS '07

continued from page 1

Bishop Brown was a clergy member of our Conference, serving as CCOM associate director and director, Golden Gate District superintendent, and pastor at Taylor UMC, Oakland and First UMC, Bakersfield.

This will be the annual conference session in which lay and clergy delegates will be elected for the 2008 General Conference. A good part of the conference agenda will be devoted to this process. The deadline for nominations of lay delegates for General and Jurisdictional Conference is May 10; for clergy delegates it's June 5.

The deadline for reports, legislation and general conference petitions will be the same as last year – April 1. Instructions for submitting recommendations and reports are on the Conference newly-redesigned website, www.cnumc.org.

This Annual Conference session will also prepare for upcoming nominations for the 2008 Episcopal Election with a ballot on the question: "Shall the Annual Conference Secretary distribute forms for the nomination of Episcopal candidates to the lay and clergy members of the next year's (2008) Annual Conference?"

The clergy session begins Tuesday June 19 at 7 p.m. at the Sheraton Hotel. The laity session begins Wednesday morning, June 20 at the Convention Center Ballroom. Other traditional services will include Remembering the Saints (Friday evening, June 22), and Ordination and Consecration (Saturday evening, June 23). A special celebration in Capitol Park, including dinner and conference displays, is planned for the evening of Thursday June 21.



S.T. Kimbrough Jr.

This year's ACS offering will benefit the Angola Partnership and the Conference Philippines Solidarity movement (a 20-member fact-finding team from our Conference went to the Philippines in February to investigate human rights violations under their current administration.)

As a way to visually celebrate our unity and diversity in Christ, ACS members are asked to bring large pieces of fabric or quilts that represent the diverse cultures of our conference. Some of these fabrics will be used to give color and celebration to our worship and plenary spaces. More information about the patchwork celebration will be forthcoming.

Music leadership at ACS will feature the Global Praise team from the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM). The Global Praise program, part of GBGM's Evangelization and Church Growth program area, strengthens the worship and witness of Methodists around the world by publishing hymnals and songbooks, worship and educational resources that strengthen the outreach of indigenous churches.

S.T. Kimbrough Jr., GBGM's Associate General Secretary for Mission Evangelism, will be leading the Global Praise team as they help us to celebrate all that we are as United Methodists. A member of the North Alabama Conference, he holds a doctorate in Old Testament and Semitic languages from Princeton Theological Seminary and is a graduate of Birmingham Southern College and the Divinity School of Duke University. He is an internationally known scholar/pastor/musician who has published more than 30 books and numerous articles on biblical, theological, liturgical, musical, mission, and Wesleyan subjects, and performed and recorded widely throughout Europe and the USA. He was leading baritone of the Bonn Opera Company for a number of years, and served as director of music for the 1996 General Conference. For more info, see <http://new.gbgm-umc.org/about/us/ecg/programs/globalpraise/>.

Bishop plans Italy trip

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hotels, deluxe motor coaches, guided sightseeing, and entrance fees to sites visited.

An extension for those interested is available for any who would like more travel for an additional \$948. You will be going to southern Italy, including Mt. Vesuvius, Pompeii, Castel Gandolfo (the Pope's summer residence), Sorrento, the Amalfi Coast, and so much more, plus a boat ride to the Isle of Capri. Can you get more romantic than that? The deadline for reservations is July 1, 2007.

Shifting gears for stewardship

Stewardship resourcing for your local church is expanding, thanks to a reshaped partnership between the Conference Board of Discipleship and the CA-NV United Methodist Foundation.

Since 2001, the Foundation has “housed” stewardship work with local churches by having Betsy Schwarzentraub as its Director of Stewardship Development. During this period, the Annual Conference has contributed some of your apportionment money to help support the position and her work with congregations throughout the Conference.

But now, thanks to a year of dialogue between the Foundation and Conference leadership, as well as your vote in the 2006 Annual Conference Session, Betsy works halftime as Director of Stewardship for the Board of Discipleship and halftime as Director of Development for the Foundation. And the teams with which she works – Stewardship Associates and Connectional Giving Interpreters – have shifted, as well.

So what difference does it make for your local church? First, this year we will be able to resume recruiting, training and deploying Stewardship Associates to meet with churches, with that team now reporting directly to the Annual Conference. Now with a little help from host churches they assist, we will be able to use these persons’ skills and insights.

And we will recruit more Stewardship Associates to receive training in a dozen specific stewardship workshops! This helps us extend our network of trained resource persons in our Conference.

At the same time, members of the CFA Income Committee are working with Betsy and the current

Connectional Giving Interpreters to design a new way of helping congregations grow their support of our shared Apportionment ministries.

But that’s not all. Through the Foundation, we help churches choose and implement exciting, biblically-based annual stewardship campaigns, drawing from a range of program resources across denominations. Betsy can either travel to you or consult by phone.

Perhaps most exciting of all, the Board of Discipleship and the Foundation together have just launched a new Conference Stewardship Endowment to help churches develop generous, joyful stewards for future generations! Watch for more informa-



tion in future *Connection* issues about this great opportunity.

In addition, Betsy can point you to the Foundation’s exciting range of services to empower your church financially, including establishing, strengthening and promoting local church endowments; growing your assets for stronger ministries; leading capital campaigns; researching benefits for your members of particular individual planned gifts; or helping United Methodists provide major gifts or personal endowments that support their passions for ministry. Many of these services are free to you.

Want to know more? You may call Mark Parsons at (916) 374-1579 for more about the Foundation’s services; and you can reach Betsy on Tuesdays at betsys@calnevumc.org or (916) 374-1515, and on Thursdays at betsysumf@sbcglobal.net or (916) 374-1580.

Paul Dirdak leaves UM Committee on Relief

By Linda Bloom

(UMNS)

The Rev. Paul Dirdak has left his position as chief executive of the United Methodist Committee on Relief.

His departure, effective Jan. 31, was announced by the Rev. R. Randy Day, chief executive of the Board of Global Ministries, UMCOR's parent agency. Dirdak, who has led UMCOR since 1998, also had overseen Mission Volunteers and Health and Welfare Ministries for the board during his tenure there.

Dirdak, a clergy member of our Annual Conference, resigned to pursue new professional opportunities, according to a statement from the Board of Global Ministries. He said he was pleased "to have been a part of the expansion of UMCOR's capacity."

The Rev. Sam Dixon, a staff executive who currently oversees the board's evangelization and church growth unit, will assume Dirdak's duties on an interim basis, according to Day. Dixon previously led UMCOR's nongovernmental organization unit.

Day told United Methodist News Service that he will work closely with Dixon to enhance and expand partnerships with the denomination's annual (regional) conferences and agencies.

"In my heart, I want our denomination to move spiritually and substantially to an ever-deeper level of caring for and advocating for the poorest of the poor, especially the children, as an expression of the Gospel," he said.

A search committee to seek Dirdak's successor is expected to be named when directors of the Board of Global Ministries meet in April.

Before joining the staff of UMCOR, Dirdak was a director of the Board of Global Ministries from 1988 to 1996 and was president of the board's National Division from 1992 to 1996. He also served as chair-

man of the Interagency Task Force on AIDS, created by the United Methodist General Conference, from 1988 to 1996, and was a director of the General Council on Ministries, which was phased out of existence in 2004.

During his tenure at UMCOR, the budget increased from about \$30 million to \$100 million as

the agency not only followed a mandate to provide humanitarian relief and rehabilitation, but also became internationally known for work in Bosnia, Afghanistan, Haiti and Africa.

In the past few years, UMCOR has helped direct tens of millions of dollars from United Methodists – as well as grants from outside agencies – into comprehensive disaster relief programs for those affected by the South Asia tsunami and Hurricanes Katrina and Rita on the U.S. Gulf Coast.

Based on its track record and relationship with the Federal Emergency Management Agency, UMCOR was asked to manage Katrina Aid Today, a coalition of organizations assisting hurricane victims through a \$66 million grant. Dirdak also credited UMCOR's experience overseeing a large, church-funded case management program assisting families and individuals affected by the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.



Rev. Paul Dirdak

Correction

Correction to February's *Connection* cover story on Ministry Staff trip to New Orleans: Amherst College was erroneously "placed" in New Hampshire. Amherst College is in Massachusetts.

It's time to go to camp!

Hundreds of children, youth, and adults are anticipating another exciting summer at one of our conference camps. Some will be found on our climbing wall at Monte Toyon, while others will be taking a cool dip in our pool at Lodestar. Some campers will be making a lanyard, and others will be doing leathercraft. All of these activities are just part of what happens in our conference camp and retreat program.

Each year our conference sponsors many camp and retreat opportunities for children, youth, and adults. The events vary from week-long residential camps, such as Super Kid Camp and Toyon Kids' Camp, to adventure style camps such as Alive Now and the Senior High Backpack Camp. There are also camps for adults and families, such as the Adult and Family Camp at Silver Spur.

Each of these camps and retreats is staffed by well-trained volunteer directors and counselors. Most of these camps are located at one of the four United Methodist camp and retreat centers: Monte Toyon, located in the Santa Cruz Mountains; Lodestar, which is in the foothills of the Sierras just outside of Jackson, California; Camp Kelly, in the high desert of Austin, Nevada; and Shasta Camp, located just outside of Mt. Shasta, California. The two main sites, Monte Toyon and Lodestar, are both



accredited by the American Camping Association, an organization devoted to promoting safety for camps.

The conference camping ministries program will be offering a special service experience this year. Along with the Sierra Service Project (SSP), an agency sponsored by our conference that is devoted to providing youth service opportunities, there will be two weeks of service projects offered. These projects are especially designed for smaller youth groups who would not otherwise attend SSP.

For more information and reservations contact Shari Sandoval, Camping Registrar, at (916) 374-1528, or email sharis@calnevumc.org. You can also obtain information and register online by going to www.cnumccamp.org.

SF Calvary starts breakfast, sleeping bag giveaway

By Bruce Pettit

Conference Communications Commission

Calvary UMC in San Francisco, which has languished in congregational numbers in recent years, appears to be on a rebound, as evidenced from two new major programs to help the homeless.

The Rev. Anthony Jenkins, a student at Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, has been the student supply pastor there since July 1. Under him the average worship attendance has surged from 26 in 2005 to 40 for all of 2006, with a lean more toward 50 at the end of the year. The congregation voted him a raise from quarter-time to half-time four months into the appointment.

Rev. Jenkins started a Sunday morning breakfast program in September, and he emphasizes that it is an all-you-can-eat affair – of bacon, eggs, sausage, French toast, grits, orange juice and coffee. “It’s not just a plate. We feed them until they are full,” he stresses. The largely homeless guests are offered bathroom facilities and clean-up time as well. The breakfast attendance was 5 the first Sunday, but now is 50 to 75 a Sunday.

The attendance grew largely word-of-mouth, Jenkins said, from the homeless network, and with a growing youth population attending that has handed out flyers. The *San Francisco Examiner* lists the Sunday breakfast every second Saturday of the month, according to Judy Sison, the assistant at Calvary. Channel 2 News did a feature on the breakfasts in early January.

The volunteer cook is Markum Knight, a friend of Jenkins and now a Calvary member who came to the church after Jenkins' appointment. Jenkins says he does most of the food shopping on Fridays, but the church also has back-up supplies for any number. He solicits outside donations for the purchases instead of using Calvary money.

On Sunday, January 14, Calvary began a second program for the homeless called “Keeping Warm.” It will be a giveaway of sleeping bags. “I think the Mayor and the City Council have given their best efforts to find shelter for people, but it’s still falling short,” Jenkins said. “Our goal is to give away 100 sleeping bags a Sunday.”

Commission proposals would impact ordination process

(UMNS) - A draft report by the Study of Ministry Commission for the 2008 General Conference proposes eight recommendations about the ordering of ministry, including the creation of three classifications of ordained elders and separation of ordination from full conference membership.

The report, which is framed in the historic form of Methodist conferences as “minutes of several conversations,” is available at www.gbhem.org, along with an online survey for reactions to the report.

“The commission is determined to draw on the collective insight and wisdom of all United Methodists in preparing this important report. And so we offer this initial draft of the report for examination and comment,” said Bishop William H. Willimon, who leads the denomination’s Birmingham Area and chairs the Study of Ministry Commission. “The commission will consider all contributions in preparing the final document.”

The commission is inviting people to read the report and take the online survey by logging onto the Web site and clicking on the Study of Ministry button.

The Rev. Mary Ann Moman, a commission member and staff executive with the United Methodist Board of Higher Education and Ministry’s Division of Ordained Ministry, said the draft reflects the commission’s work in addressing the General Conference request to bring clarity to the ordering of ministry.

“We are pleased with the Wesleyan model of questions and response. It is our expectation that this teaching document will become the catalyst for The United Methodist Church to discuss these important issues,” Moman said.

The commission recommended classifications of itinerant elder, associate elder and local elder. Itinerant elder is essentially the same as the current classification of elder. All three could administer the sacraments, but associate elders and local elders could do so only in the charge to which they are appointed.

The other recommendations include the following: Pastors-in-charge who are not ordained as elders will be licensed lay pastors. This will incorporate certified lay ministers, student local pastors, part-time local pastors and full-time local pastors who have not completed either the denomination’s Course of Study or a master of divinity degree.

Every licensed lay pastor shall be authorized, blessed, and sent out annually for his or her appointment through a liturgy to be conducted at annual or district conference each year.

The United Methodist Church must sustain the traditional Wesleyan understanding that the authority to cele-

brate the sacraments derives from ordination as an elder by the presiding bishop upon election by an annual conference. Therefore, licensed lay pastors shall not administer baptism or Holy Communion in the charges to which they are appointed. Itinerant elders designated as presiding elders shall be assigned by the cabinet to circuits of local churches served by licensed lay pastors to administer the sacraments on a regular, rotating basis. The bishop may grant provisional authority to administer the sacraments to certain licensed lay pastors under exceptional circumstances, in order to advance the mission of the church in a particular place. Deacons are not ordained to administer the sacraments but to assist in their administration and to lead the congregation in extending the table of Holy Communion into the world.

Deacons and itinerant elders will be ordained at the conclusion of educational and examination requirements rather than at the end of a probationary process. This realigns ordination and conference membership, granting sacramental authority to at least an additional 2,000 pastors under appointment in any given year. Under the commission’s proposal, these ordained elders and deacons will have full authority for ministry. Elders will continue on trial to become full members of the Order of Elders, while deacons will also be on probation for a period.

Elders shall be ordained to Word, Sacrament and Order, while deacons are ordained to Word and Service.

All deacons and itinerant elders will be reviewed every five years by a group of peers from within their respective annual conference orders.

The commission will propose that 2008 General Conference authorize a study of the diaconate during the 2009-2012 quadrennium, including a review of how the office is being practiced across the connection and what challenges remain in fulfilling the potential of the office of deacon.

The draft incorporates issues identified by the commission, as well as comments from the focus groups and results from an earlier survey.

The 2004 General Conference established the commission because of questions, concerns and uncertainty regarding the two ordained clergy orders – deacons and elders – and local pastors. Both the 2000 and 2004 General Conferences received a large number of petitions related to certified lay ministers, local pastors, deacons and elders. The Study of Ministry Commission was established to “theologically discuss and clearly define the ordering of our shared life together in The United Methodist Church.”

Prison ministry: A holiday project

By Rev. Bill Sanford

Retired Clergy, CA-NV Annual Conference

“I was in prison and you remembered me with a bag of treats at Christmas.” You can’t find that exact statement in the Gospels, but something pretty close.

Last Fall the Inmate Family Council (IFC) of the Central California Women’s Facility (CCWF) in Chowchilla had an idea which had worked in southern California. Perhaps it could be made to work farther north.

One of the Council members, David Hetland, sits on the IFC, and is also a member of the UMC in Merced. He challenged his local church’s Social Action Team to take the idea and run with it.

The idea was to put a collection of small Christmas treats in a ziploc bag for each prisoner. Permission to do this was secured from the prison administration. The contents of the bags would include:

Toiletries: (sample/travel sizes only) Soap, shampoo, conditioner, hand lotion, tooth paste, tooth brush

Beverages: Tea bags, hot chocolate packets

Greeting cards (unused)

It sounded ‘do-able’ – until someone mentioned a number. CCWF has very close to 4,000 prisoners!

Some committee members worried that that number might be off the reality chart. Chairman Hetland, however, was undaunted and undeterred. He did a masterful job of organizing. Other churches – especially UM churches of the Fresno District – were invited to participate. Other groups, companies, businesses in the community were encouraged to lend a hand. Members of the IFC sent word of the project to points far and wide.

Through the Fall there was an encouraging response. Items for the packets streamed in from many quarters. Individuals and groups gave money, eventually about \$2,500. With this, items could be purchased if they hadn’t been donated in sufficient amounts. The Merced Labor Council contributed boxes to transport the packets from the Merced church to the prison.

Soon after Thanksgiving sorting began. All shampoos were gathered together, all tooth brushes, etc. Then came the work of filling the bags. Various individuals worked 2-3-hour shifts, three youth groups participated, and, according to chairman Hetland’s records, all the packets were assembled and boxed by more than 60 people in 19 ½ hours.

Thirty-one boxes were trucked to the prison on



Members of Girl Scout Troop #2 of Merced help assemble the 4,000 packets. Photo by David Hetland

December 14th. Clearly, that was a considerable investment of human resources. Committee members wondered: was it worth it? Should the project be undertaken again in 2007? The wondering was short-lived. Letters began to arrive which served to answer the questions. Here are excerpts from several:

From five members of the Women’s Advisory Council: “. . . We were all so pleased to receive the many gifts you so kindly gathered for us. With a population here of nearly 4,000, we realize what a huge undertaking this must have been . . . Mainly, however, we thank you for reminding us that we are not forgotten over this holiday season. There are no words to properly express the significance of that feeling. . . .”

An inmate’s mother: “. . . My daughter is there, and she was so pleased. She wrote to tell me about it. And wanted to send you a thank you card . . .”

An elderly woman serving a life sentence: “Since I really have no one on the outside, and since I will be 82 on the 9th of January, it made me feel special. Once again I thank you. If there are any persons in your congregation who would care to write me, I’d be most grateful . . . Happy New Year! . . . W57149.”

The Merced UMC hopes people in the community will begin gathering ziploc bag stuffers right away and throughout the year. It also hopes people in other parts of the country will see this as a worthy project and launch it in their districts and annual conferences.

Bill Sanford is a retired ministerial member of the California-Nevada Annual Conference. His phone number is (209) 357-0701; his address is 146 Madrona Dr., Atwater, CA 95301-2272.

Conference News Briefs

Social Justice Award

The Conference Commission on Religion and Race invites nominations for this year's Bishop Melvin Talbert Social Justice Award. This annual award is given to a person within our Annual Conference who best exemplifies a proactive stance in addressing and works toward dismantling racism in the church and society. Individuals and churches are invited to submit a one-page letter regarding the nominees. Please send the nominations, through regular mail or e-mail, by April 30, 2007 to:

Dr. Jeffrey Kuan
Chair, CORR
Pacific School of Religion
1798 Scenic Avenue
Berkeley, CA 94709
Email: kjkuan@psr.edu

Bringing UMs together around mission

United Methodists from across the denomination will come together in the Chicago area for four days in August to explore what mission can mean for the church in the 21st century.

The "Bridges of Hope" Mission Gathering and Forum will take place August 5-8 at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, Evanston, IL. Participants will pray, sing and worship together while being inspired to share the evangelical message that leads to the transformation of lives and communities.

The gathering will critically analyze the changes in communities impacted by Christian mission, while affirming justice ministries and ministries of presence as legitimate forms of mission.

According to Norma Kehrberg, a retired missionary and former UMCOR head, the conference will bring together people involved with mission at all levels of the church, from deaconesses and home missionaries to short-term volunteers in mission and long-term cross-cultural missionaries as well as UMC professors of mission. "Local church pastors and laity with a heart for mission will also be there as we discuss how mission can be a critical force in healthy, alive local churches," Kehrberg said.

Speakers at the conference include Bishop Roy Sano, Gennifer Brooks, a professor of preaching at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, Steven Ybarrola, a professor of anthropology at Asbury Seminary, and Robert Hunt of Perkins School of Theology. Randy Day, the head of the denomination's mission agency, and Ruth Daugherty, a former UMW president, will also give keynote presentations. Edith Gleaves of the mission agency, David Scott, long-time missionary in India and deaconess Dana Jones will lead the Bible Studies.

Workshops and panels are scheduled on a variety of topics ranging from mission in situations of conflict to medical mission, from the challenges for mission of U.S. foreign policy to the links between evangelism and mission. UVMIM-NCJ leaders include Jane Dunn, Teresa Miller, David Harsh, Lorna Jost, Administrator of the UVMIM-NCJ program, and GBGM missionaries Nan McCurdy and Miguel Mairena.

Registration for the event is \$35. Additional information is available online at www.umma-global.org or by contacting the Gathering's registrar, Richard Vreeland, at rvreeland@sbcglobal.net; or Norma Kehrberg at 808-394-0459 or kehrbergn001@hawaii.rr.com

Interfaith dialogue

New Vision UMC in Millbrae will host one of three San Mateo County interfaith dialogues in conjunction with the Islamic Networks Group in the next few months. New Vision's topic is "Is There Room for Fundamentalism in Religion?" to be held at 7 p.m. on Wed. May 9.

New Vision member Margaret Jones has heightened her leadership in interfaith activities since the terrorist airliner bombings of Sept. 11, 2001.

The first dialogue in the series, at Peninsula Temple Beth El in San Mateo, explored "Is There Value in Faith in our Modern Society?" The second, March 15 at the Yaseen (Muslim) Foundation in Belmont, will examine women's changing roles in religion.

Connie Hunter, chair of the Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns (CCUIC) of the California-Nevada Annual Conference, is

working with local congregations to promote ecumenical events.

Hunter says: "Although many Americans think of the United States as a Christian country, the number of people in our communities who subscribe to other religions is rapidly increasing. We don't have to go far to find a mosque, a Sikh temple, a Buddhist temple, or a Jewish synagogue.

"The change in the religious makeup of our neighborhoods can be scary, especially when we find ourselves in a war with religious overtones. Seeing women wearing scarves covering their heads, and men wearing turbans, we wonder what the reasons are."

The choice, contends the CCUIC, is to believe TV and talk show comments — and perhaps be fearful — or to engage in dialogue with people of other faiths and build bridges.

Spanish Immersion trip

Do you really want to learn Spanish? Language experts agree: the most effective way is to immerse yourself in the culture of a Spanish-speaking country — and fortuitously, United Methodist Volunteers in Mission is offering its fifth Spanish Immersion trip this summer! Soon after ACS the team will leave for Guatemala to study Spanish at the Celas Maya School in Quetzaltenango (Xela). Although the team experience is planned as a three-week stay, you may extend your stay for as long as you like. All instruction is one-on-one. You will be assigned to an instructor for formal course work five days a week, and you will be assigned to a local family for housing. This completely immerses you in the Spanish language and the culture of Guatemala. Weekends and evenings are free for study, side trip excursions, or service opportunities according to your choice.

At approximately \$900 +/-, all inclusive, the cost of this trip is considerably less than that of equivalent studies at a college here in the United States.

For information and/or bulletin inserts contact team leader Rod Brayfindley at rod@umc-joyfulhealer.org — or Eddie Frutchey in the UVMIM office at 916-374-1584, eddief@calnevumc.org.

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.

On the first pew

It was a Sunday morning in a downtown church at their community breakfast. A stranger walked directly through the fellowship hall into the sanctuary. Concerned, I followed him and invited him for pancakes and coffee. He said, "No thanks," and sat down in the front pew. "I need to be here," he said. The cavernous sanctuary was empty except for the choir and organist practicing before worship. The man, a bit unclean and raggedy, wore several layers of clothes, a long straggly beard and smelled slightly of alcohol. He seemed deeply troubled.

He beckoned me to sit with him. I did. He told me his name was Gary*.

He held out his hand with all four fingers curled under and said, "I've lost four friends. One was found in a trash can, one in the river. . ." He paused and could not continue the litany. He wiggled his thumb. "It still works," he grinned in reference to himself. "I'm an alcoholic," he confessed.

He looked upward. "I'm in my Dad's house. I need a quiet place, a place to be."

Gary showed me the scars on his lower arm from a suicide attempt. The choir sang out their anthem to God. "A beautiful chorus," said Gary as he smiled at the music. "I'm here with my big Brother" (Jesus). Gary stared at the cross rising above the choir members' heads. "I can't believe something so beautiful could love me so much."

The shameful way he made money, because he saw no other choice, spilled out in the form of confession. I was surprised at his honesty, yet it felt so appropriate to hear in his Dad's house where he felt at home. I thought of Jesus who welcomed, healed, and forgave without judgment.

"I'm going into rehab tomorrow. I've been on the wait-

ing list six months. I just have to make it until tomorrow."

He knelt alone at the altar rail and prayed silently. Returning to the pew, he prayed aloud for me, thanking Dad for me, his sister.

Sunday worshipers, dressed in their finest, were now filling in the pews behind us.

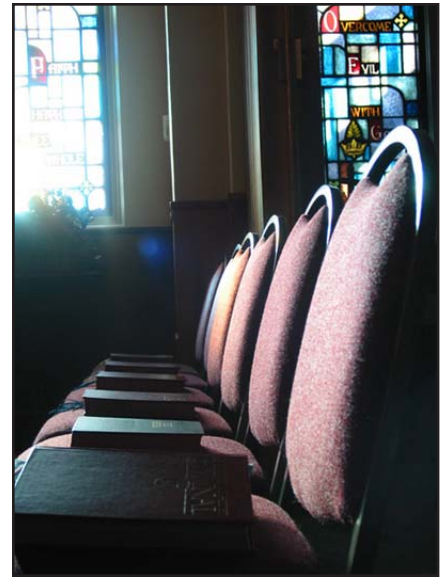
He asked me for money. I said no, I didn't have any, knowing in my wallet were quarters to do the laundry, but that was all. "That's OK," he said. "I'll make it somehow." I worried about the possibility of him going into D.T.'s (alcoholic *delirium tremens* which can be fatal).

"Wait, I do have some change I can give you. How much is the cheapest bottle?" "\$2.60." I counted out the change and decided my laundry could wait until payday. I invited him to stay for worship, but he was already starting to shake from withdrawals.

"I need to go around the corner, down the alley, to my cardboard box."

Before he left we stood and hugged. He thanked me, walked up the aisle and out the front door. The organ prelude began. I prayed I would see him again, someday.

*Name changed.



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Other Voices

The feminization of AIDS: From stigmatization to mobilization

By Kelvin Sauls

Reprinted from UM NeXus

Black History Month is not just another opportunity to look back. Celebrating our heritage also invites us to critically look at present challenges. One such a challenge is the pandemic of HIV/AIDS. To change the course of this pandemic, we will have to do more than sing “Lift Every Voice.”

We will have to do more than wear African attire and romanticize about the “underground railroad.” To change the course of this pandemic, we will have to lift every hand to build a railroad of compassion and acceptance above ground.

And the faith community must lead the way! Churches, temples, synagogues and mosques must walk in love and solidarity with our brothers and sisters who are infected with, and affected by HIV/AIDS.

The time has come for us, as people of faith, to be intentional about demonstrating the kind of faith that is rooted in compassion. In our walking, we can exclaim with the apostle Paul that “nothing can separate us from the love of God” — not even HIV/AIDS.

Too many lives are being lost while too many people are doing too little. The facts and fears are real and overwhelming! There is still no cure or effective vaccine.

There are more than 40,000 new infections per year. AIDS is the Number-One killer of African American males age 15 to 45. Two teen-agers are infected every minute in the United States. Zero people have been cured to date!!!

HIV/AIDS is also one of the top health disparities locally, nationally and globally. Moreover, there are signs of the “feminization” of the disease in the United States and the world.

According to a report titled, “Women and HIV/AIDS: Confronting the Crisis”, African American and Latino women represent fewer than a quarter of all women in the US, yet, together they make up to 80 percent of AIDS cases among women in the US.

Globally there are now 17 million women and 18.8 million men between the ages of 15 and 49 living with HIV/AIDS. However, since 1985, the percentage of women among adults living with HIV/AIDS has risen from 35 percent to 48 percent.

In its 2004 report, the UNAIDS observed: “Nowhere is the epidemic’s ‘feminization’ more apparent than in sub-Saharan Africa, where 57 percent of adults infected are

women and girls”. In the face of this challenge, people of faith, are called upon to walk the talk and display compassion and care for all who are infected with and affected by HIV/AIDS.

To change the course of the epidemic, we must move from stigmatization to mobilization. Its time for us to take our heads out of the sand, and allow our homes and congregations to become places where those who are challenged with HIV/AIDS can experience acceptance, peace and love.

The time for lip service is long gone. With every crisis comes an opportunity. Our opportunity is to practice hope and love through prevention, intervention, and mobilization.

Our prevention can be in the form of blunt, compelling and innovative education forums to stem the tide of ignorance and stigmatization. Hence, our faith education must include preventative health education. Intervention opportunities can include making our congregations available as testing sites for HIV/AIDS, host support groups, collaborate in providing life-sustaining services for people who are infected with HIV/AIDS, and coordinate opportunities for retreat and respite.

We can mobilize our congregations, districts and conferences to influence and direct policy on the local, national and international levels. We must fight to insure that funding and HIV medications are available to all who need them. Accessibility is the key to turning the course of the pandemic.

My brother and sister with HIV/AIDS are still my brother and sister. Now is not the time to be a spectator. Become a participator.

Move from stigmatization to mobilization and make God’s love, care and compassion visible and viable. Remember, “nothing can separate you from the love of God” – not even HIV/AIDS!

May God’s compassion ignite us within so that we can practice a vital faith with opened hearts, opened minds, and opened doors.



Rev. Kelvin Sauls

The Rev. Kelvin Sauls is a native of South Africa and serves as director of congregational development at the General Board of Discipleship in Nashville, Tennessee. He is a clergy member of our Conference.

God is not abusive: Three faiths address domestic violence

By Jennifer Joslyn-Siemiatkoski

Community Educator for STAND!

According to the 2000 report of findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey, 25% of American women and 8% of American men report being physically or sexually assaulted by a current or former partner at some point in their lives. Studies show that domestic violence crosses all lines, including religion, which means that many of those who are abused are members of faith communities, and many will seek help from a clergy person before they will call a hotline, call the police, or turn to another professional for help. But are faith leaders equipped to handle such requests for help? Do they understand enough about the dynamics of domestic violence to respond effectively? Are they aware of the ways their traditions have been misused to justify abuse and violence?

Many in the faith community are recognizing that there is a need for domestic violence education and prevention in their congregations. Religious leaders are asking for the resources and skills to help the members of their faith communities. They want to know how to recognize the signs of abuse and how to respond both to those who are being abused and to those who are abusing others. STAND! Against Domestic Violence and the Faith Community Taskforce to End Domestic Violence are committed to making sure clergy and faith communities have the tools and resources to break the silence surrounding this issue and to respond both faithfully and effectively.

STAND! Against Domestic Violence is a domestic violence agency serving those affected by domestic violence throughout Contra Costa County since 1977. STAND! runs a 24-hour toll-

free crisis line, an emergency shelter, transitional housing, counseling, support groups, batterer intervention groups, and community outreach and prevention services. As part of its prevention efforts, in 1999 STAND! convened the Faith Community Taskforce to End Domestic Violence as a partnership of religious, governmental, civic, and community-based organizations dedicated to ending domestic violence within faith communities.

In 2005, the Taskforce decided to address some of the major barriers they had encountered in their work. They decided that focusing on scripture in the three traditions was a critical unmet need in helping faith communities respond to domestic violence. The result of their work is "God Is Not Abusive: Three Faiths Address Domestic Violence," a 20-page booklet which addresses the Torah, the Christian Bible, and the Qur'an, in order to provide guidance for clergy, lay leaders, and those in their congregations affected by domestic violence. The booklet includes three primary sections – "Healthy Intimate Relationships," "Misinterpretation and Misuse of Sacred Texts," and "Healing Steps" – as well as a section of general domestic violence resources and resources specific to the different traditions. Each section includes specific scriptural texts and doctrinal concepts.

As "God Is Not Abusive" says in conclusion, "This publication marks a beginning step in addressing the significance of religious and spiritual beliefs and practices in situations of domestic violence. We hope readers find that it helps to fill the gap in the ways that faith communities understand, teach about, and respond to domestic violence."

To purchase a \$3 copy of "God Is Not Abusive," contact Jennifer Joslyn-Siemiatkoski, Community Educator for STAND!, at 925-603-0103 or jenniferjs@standagainstdv.org.

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