Memphis Conference Delegation
2016 General and Jurisdictional Conferences

Lay Delegates to General Conference
David R. Reed, Martin First UMC, Martin, TN
  first lay delegate and head of delegation
Elyse Bell, Paris First UMC, Paris, TN
  second lay delegate

Clergy Delegates to General Conference
Sky McCracken, Purchase District superintendent
  and dean of the Memphis Conference cabinet
    first clergy delegate
Eddie Bromley, Milan First UMC, Milan, TN
    second clergy delegate

Lay Delegates to Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference
Sandra Burnett, Lone Oak UMC, Paducah, KY
  first lay delegate and first lay alternate to General Conference
Isabelle Dillard, St. John’s UMC, Memphis, TN
  second lay delegate and second lay alternate to General Conference
Delores Smith, Milan First UMC, Milan, TN
  alternate lay delegate
Deborah Watlington, Lambuth Memorial UMC, Jackson, TN
  alternate lay delegate

Clergy Delegates to Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference
Autura Eason-Williams, Capleville UMC, Memphis, TN
  first clergy delegate and first clergy alternate to General Conference
Jonathan L. Jeffords, St. John’s UMC, Memphis TN
  second clergy delegate and 2nd clergy alternate to General Conference
Cynthia D. Davis, Metro McKendree District superintendent
  alternate clergy delegate
Steven Louis Douglas, East Trinity - Beech Bluff
  Mt. Pleasant Parish, Jackson, TN
  alternate clergy delegate
Concert fundraiser raised more than $2,700 for local preschool

[First published on website 3/23/2016]

More than $2,700 was raised for Jackson, Tenn.’s Hands Up! Preschool at a concert fundraiser hosted by the United Methodist Men of Northside UMC in Jackson, according to the UMM’s Bob Sharp.

The Finchers and Vonda Peet performed Jan. 29 at the church. (Submitted photo)

MISSION

» This quarterly publication is distributed electronically to print and email in any quantity at user’s cost. No permissions are needed to redistribute in any form. This revised publication now includes only articles about mission, ministry and transformation inside the Memphis Conference of The United Methodist Church which includes West Tennessee and Western Kentucky. Hard news and upcoming events are communicated via the Memphis Conference website at www.memphis-umc.org, the conference’s free weekly eNews and social media.

» MISSION of the Memphis Conference is to discover, equip, connect and send lay and clergy leaders who shape congregations that offer Jesus Christ to a hurting world, equip, connect and send lay and clergy leaders who shape congregations that offer Jesus Christ to a hurting world, to make the world hunger-free.

» VALUES include unrelenting love for all people, integrity, excellence, faithfulness & fruitfulness, innovation.

Editor: Lane Gardner Camp, Director of Communications
Layout: Lisa (Ogle) Smithey
Contributing Writers this issue: Lane Gardner Camp, Amanda Crice, Joe Geary, Kathy Hunter, Kim Morrison, Kristi Henson Owens, Mary Beth Richardson, Kim Rose, Casey Northcutt Watson
To submit news or ask questions about content: Email communications@memphis-umc.org
Call 731-664-8480 Fax 731-660-5712
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125 from across Memphis Conference participated in ‘30-Hour Famine’ & raised $6,000+ for ‘World Vision’

By Amanda Crice, member of 30-Hour Famine leadership team

[First published on website 4/4/2016]

It’s not everyday that a group of people chooses to go without food for 30 hours, but that’s just what happened at the 30-Hour Famine retreat at Lakeshore Camp and Retreat Center in Eva, Tenn., Feb. 26-28.

Lakeshore is the camp and retreat ministry of the Memphis Conference of The United Methodist Church.

To experience empathy, awareness and God’s presence, 125 youth and adults representing churches from around the Memphis Conference began their fast together at 1 p.m. on Friday. For the next 30 hours, participants came together in small groups, worshiped together, learned together, prayed together and prayed together until they broke their fast at 6:30 p.m. on Saturday with Holy Communion.

Even before the weekend began, youth groups participated in various fundraising projects to raise money for World Vision and its hunger relief ministry. The fundraising efforts, along with other service projects, were celebrated Saturday night at a camp-wide talent show. Funds raised for World Vision totaled at $6,056.64!

The theme for the Famine was “Hungry Free” and the weekend was shaped around the idea of making room for everyone around the potluck table. At a potluck, everyone brings what they have to the table and everyone leaves with something new. Over the course of the weekend, we explored how this potluck table was similar to the Kingdom of God and our efforts to help make the world hunger-free.

Together the camp worked through sessions titled “We Hope,” “We Trust,” “God Does” and “We Praise” to help us discern the ways God is calling us to participate in His work of making room for everyone at God’s table.

On Saturday afternoon youth groups participated in mission training activities that helped them understand what it means to serve with empathy. Then they spent time brainstorming about ways this will change the way they serve back home.

The weekend wrapped up with time to praise God for what He has done and will do in our lives and in the world and the reminder that the way we praise God is to love and serve others. As those at the retreat went their different ways, they went with the hope and trust that God’s table will be a little bit bigger through the work God will do through them.

Below are some of the participants’ comments about the experience:

» “I had the chance to get away from the distractions and setbacks in my life and see the bigger picture that God has planned for me and other believers.” – Landon Roberson

» “30-Hour Famine is more than not eating for 30 hours. It’s feeling how people half way across the world feel every day and knowing how much we really take for granted.” – Emma Cody

» “It was a joy to see the young people of our conference not only dream about their hopes for a better future for our world but, also trust that God does amazing things through believers like them who praise God with their everyday lives and actions.” – Amanda Hartmann Westmoreland

30-Hour Famine for Memphis Conference youth took place Feb. 26-28 at Lakeshore Camp and Retreat Center. (Submitted photos)
Bishop McAlilly opened SEJ Disaster Academy with message: ‘A storm is a terrible thing to waste’

By Lane Gardner Camp, Memphis Conference Director of Communications

“A storm is a terrible thing to waste” was the message from Bishop William T. (Bill) McAlilly during opening worship of the 2016 Southeastern Jurisdiction (of The United Methodist Church) Disaster Academy in Franklin, Tenn., Feb. 28-March 1.

Held at Franklin First United Methodist Church in McAlilly’s episcopal area, laity and clergy watched him open the academy by putting on what he called his “ugly lime green t-shirt,” a reference to his UMCOR (United Methodist Committee on Relief) attire and saying that people involved in disaster assistance are about “greater things.”

McAlilly told attendees, “Something great becomes possible because you said ‘yes’ (to this ministry). … God is at work in your life when you go to serve where there is the greatest need.”

Before McAlilly was elected bishop in 2012 and assigned to the Nashville Episcopal Area that includes the Memphis and Tennessee Conferences, he served in the Mississippi Conference.

In 2006, after Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast, he was appointed District Superintendent of the Mississippi Conference’s Seashore District, which required him to work closely with UMCOR and others involved in disaster response ministry in southern Mississippi.

Having learned first-hand about immediate and long-term suffering caused by a deadly and costly Category 5 hurricane like Katrina, McAlilly praised all who serve in disaster response ministry – from first responders to long-term recovery volunteers – for understanding that “those who can take care of those who can’t.”

McAlilly continued, “At the end of the day, people don’t ask about your theology; they are just thankful you showed up and loved.”

He listed four reasons United Methodist Christians do disaster response ministry: It’s scriptural, spiritual, sacrificial and sacramental.

Other attendees from Memphis conference

At least five individuals from the Memphis Conference joined McAlilly at the Academy; Dr. Joe Geary, director of Connectional Ministries; Elyse Bell, chair of the Memphis Conference Disaster Relief Committee (also lay resource leader for the Tennessee River District); Rev. Robert Craig, Memphis Conference Disaster Relief coordinator (also executive director of Reelfoot Rural Ministries); Christy Smith, UMCOR disaster consultant (also member of Brownsville First UMC in Brownsville, Tenn.); and Lane Gardner Camp, Memphis Conference director of communications.

In addition to networking and receiving training, Craig and Smith also served as trainers at the academy.

Smith taught a “Foundations for Disaster Ministry” class and two modules of the “Connecting Neighbors” curriculum while Craig taught a pilot “Cultural Considerations” class. Some of the other classes offered during the academy were about cleaning out flooded homes, spiritual and emotional care, site assessment, leadership development and long-term recovery.

The “Foundations for Disaster Ministry” class that Smith taught, she explained, “provides the ground upon which we build disaster ministry.” Topics covered were:

• phases of disaster and the “players”
• how UMCOR supports conferences, districts and local churches as they plan for and respond to disaster
• work of UMCOR – “the humanitarian and relief response mechanism all over the world”
• values that undergird UMCOR’s work

The “Connecting Neighbors” curriculum, Smith continued, “is intended for broad use by dedicated local church volunteers to provide training or presentations to assist local churches that want to understand how to better protect people and property–home, church and community— from natural disasters and emergencies and how to engage with the community in ministry following disaster.”

Craig’s class on “Cultural Considerations” was a first-time offering for which he wrote the pilot curriculum. In addition to delivering content and providing time for participants to contribute, he shared numerous resources to assist attendees in their ongoing disaster response ministry.

“It’s not about us,” said Craig. “It’s about ways to show God’s love.”

Disaster response volunteers, he said, often find themselves in unfamiliar cultural situations that require them to “know their own biases” to be able to “overcome barriers” to be able to be in “relationship” with those affected by disasters.

He reminded his class that “Jesus was relational” and said that “disaster forces us to be ‘we,’ not ‘me/you’ or ‘us/them.’”

“Exemplify the love of God” so you can “lead others into relationship with God,” he advised. “Be like Jesus,” he continued, which means meeting people where they are and being aware of one’s own personal preferences and cultural history.

“When people know they are loved, barriers come down. If we don’t know them, we can’t love them. If we don’t love them, we can’t know them,” said Craig.

More information

• Director of Memphis Conference Connectional Ministries - Rev. Dr. Joe Geary jgeary@memphis-umc.org
• Chair of Memphis Conference Disaster Relief Committee - Elyse Bell ebell@memphis-umc.org
• Memphis Conference Disaster Relief Coordinator - Rev. Robert Craig executive@reelfootruralministries.org
• UMCOR Consultant – Christy Smith christysmith5@me.com

2016 Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference

The United Methodist Church

July 13-15, 2016

Lake Junaluska, NC • www.sejumc.org

Episcopal elections occur during this conference.
Rev. Sky McCracken of the Memphis Conference has been endorsed as a candidate for bishop by the Memphis and Tennessee Conferences. Learn more at www.skymccracken.org.
13 UM churches of Marshall County United for prayer vigil on March 4

By Kim Morrison, Purchase District Lay Resource Leader
[First published on website 4/4/2016]

“Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” Gal. 6:2

We, as disciples of Jesus Christ, have a responsibility to offer up prayer on behalf of others -- not only those in our own churches and community, those throughout our nation and abroad who are suffering oppression, exploitation and persecution.

The 13 United Methodist Churches of Marshall County, Ky., in the Purchase District of the Memphis Conference, united on Friday, March 4, for World Day of Prayer and held a 13-hour prayer vigil. Each church hosted one hour with the vigil beginning at 7 a.m. and ending at 8 p.m.

Some of the churches held a service and others were set up so that anybody could come at any time during the hour and pray as long as they would like. We had a prayer guide that they could use that would unite us all together as we prayed for:

• Christians in all places of our world...
• the persecuted, oppressed and exploited...
• all world leaders, that their hearts would be turned to God...
• Christians, citizens and leaders in Cuba... (focus of this year’s World Day of Prayer)
• our nation and its leadership...
• The United Methodist Church and 2016 General and Jurisdictional Conferences...
• The Memphis Conference, its churches, laity and clergy...
• the Purchase District, its churches, laity and clergy...
• churches, laity and clergy in Marshall County: Olive, Calvert City, Oak Level, Briensburg, Pleasant Grove, Benton First, Mt. Carmel, Oakland, Palma, Church Grove, Maple Spring, Union Ridge, and Dexter-Hardin United Methodist Churches...
• all of the churches, people, leaders, and those in need in Marshall County.

Sometimes we think that we must do some mighty labor that produces a “visible” work that all will see to do any good in this world, but many times it’s a quiet voice lifted up in love to a mighty God that does the most powerful work that this world needs.

Our resources came from the World Day of Prayer website. Many thanks to Jennifer Rodriguez for listening to God and prompting us to do this and thanks to our Marshall County Cluster Leadership team that made this possible.

Faith UMC in Henning got multi-use field for community AND had its parking lot re-lined, thanks to Brandon England’s Eagle Scout service project

[First published on website 3/24/2016]

Faith UMC in Henning, Tenn., received a blessing recently from an Eagle Scout. Brandon England, a church member and a freshman at Ripley High School in Ripley, Tenn., recruited volunteers to help him clean and re-line Faith UMC’s parking lot and install a multi-use field for the church and community.

England is the son of Scott and Angela England and a member of Troop 63, chartered by Ripley First UMC in Ripley, Tenn. His service project helped him earn the rank of Eagle Scout, the ceremony for which took place at Faith UMC on Feb. 28. Eagle Scout Phillip Glenn led the ceremony, and Eagle Scouts Kevin Helwig, David Snell, John Brazier, Tanner Ream and Matthew Chalk participated.

England also earned the 2015 Glenn A. and Melinda W. Adams West Tennessee District Eagle Scout Service Project of the Year award.

Brandon England’s Eagle Scout service project included re-lining Faith UMC’s parking lot and installing a multi-use ball field for the church and community.
(Submitted photo)

Germantown United Methodist Preschool (GUMP) to begin class in Fall for children with special needs

[First published on website 2/5/2016]

Germantown United Methodist Preschool (GUMP) will open a class for children with special needs in the Fall of 2016.

Located at Germantown UMC in Germantown, Tenn., the preschool has announced a new program called GUMP Recognizes All Can Excel (GRACE).

According to a recent Germantown UMC newsletter, GRACE will work with LeBonheur Children’s Hospital’s Early Intervention and Development program to serve children ages 2 to 5 who have various disabilities, including developmental delay.

“GUMP believes that the parents are their child’s first teachers. Therefore GUMP teachers and staff will work closely with parents through daily collaboration and communication to ensure the most success for their child,” the newsletter says.

Therapists paid by parents may also work with children during GRACE classes, and teachers can integrate suggestions therapists have into their daily lessons.

In addition to special education, GRACE students may also participate in outdoor recreation, music, gym and chapel. Families may choose from two-, three- and five-day commitments from August through May. Classes start in the fall of 2016. Parents may call the preschool at 901-753-3109 to ask about tuition fees and to schedule a tour and interview. Space is limited.

For more information, visit www.germantownumc.org/ministries/preschool/ OR contact Sarah Sutton, Director of Germantown United Methodist Preschool, at preschool@germantownumc.org OR (901) 753-3109.
Some members of Concord UMC in Paducah, Ky., chose to forgo new Easter attire this year and wore t-shirts instead, according to the church’s electronic newsletter.

Church member Damara Bolton said she ordered 22 shirts for Concord UMC attendees from the Forget the Frock campaign, a movement that encourages people to buy and wear t-shirts instead of new Easter dresses and suits. The shirts, ordered through www.forgetthefrock.org, benefit different charities.

Bolton donated Concord’s t-shirt money to Feeding the Orphans, an organization that provides basic necessities to orphans in West Africa.

UMW groups at Halls First UMC and Murray First UMC opened umbrellas to fight human trafficking

United Methodist Women (UMW) associated with at least two Memphis Conference churches recently participated in a movement to raise awareness about and stop human trafficking.

Before the Super Bowl on Feb. 7 this year, UMW members at Murray First UMC in Murray, Ky., and Halls First UMC in Halls, Tenn., photographed themselves with open umbrellas as a part of the national “Intercept the Traffickers” campaign.

According to the UMW website, the annual Super Bowl contributes to an increase in human trafficking opportunities. The campaign serves as the UMW’s response to this injustice.

“Many United Methodist Women will travel to the San Francisco Bay Area and will carry open umbrellas as a sign of support and to encourage survivors to hold on a little longer,” the site said. This year’s Super Bowl was held in Santa Clara, Calif.

The Halls First UMC and Murray First UMC groups sent their umbrella photos to the national UMW headquarters so the organization could display them during its Super Bowl demonstration.

The “Intercept the Traffickers” campaign was inspired by “The Umbrella Defense,” a football play created by New York Giants coach Steve Owen. The UMW website said the strategy helped the Giants shut out the Cleveland Browns in a game.

The UMW hopes to do the same with trafficking.

Umbrellas were opened by the United Methodist Women (UMW) of Halls First UMC in Halls, Tenn., (top photo) and Murray First UMC in Murray, Ky. (bottom photo) as part of a UMW movement to raise awareness about and stop human trafficking. (Submitted photos)
Bethel University sanctioned Wesley Fellowship

By Casey Northcutt Watson
[First published on website 3/23/2016]

Bethel University in McKenzie, Tenn., granted official recognition to the Bethel Wesley Fellowship in January. According to Josh Shaw, Fellowship president (and director of youth ministries at Alamo First UMC in Alamo, Tenn.), the organization held its first meeting in spring 2014. Nearby United Methodist churches (including McKenzie First, Carter’s Chapel, Trinity, Bruceton First, Paris First and New Hope) sponsored or supported the group, along with Lakeshore Camp and Retreat Center and the former Paris District Office.

As the Fellowship grew, Shaw said, leaders felt the need to gain official university recognition. They filled out the necessary paperwork. Shaw and Vice President Cody Greene presented a case for recognition to Bethel’s Student Government Association. They explained how the organization adds to campus life by providing volunteer service for organizations like Meals on Wheels and various food pantries. The group hopes to eventually establish a Wesley House near campus. “This facility will be a place of worship, fellowship, recreational activities, quiet place for studying, and ultimately a safe place for college students to come and be themselves,” Shaw said.

Now that the university has sanctioned Bethel Wesley Fellowship, members can promote it and hold events on campus.

The group will next seek recognition from the Memphis Conference at its 2016 Annual Conference in June in Jackson, Tenn., Shaw said.

“Being recognized on the conference level could change the outlook of the ministry,” Shaw said.

Exercise program at El Redentor UMC targets women of Hispanic community it serves in Memphis

[First published on website 4/12/2016]

El Redentor UMC in Memphis, Tennessee, is now offering its congregation worship opportunities, fellowship -- and workout routines.

The church, one of three that make up the Southeast Memphis Cooperative parish in the Metro McKendree District, began sponsoring an exercise program after several female members wanted to help women of the Hispanic community stay fit and healthy.

El Redentor Pastor Rev. Luz Campos said Biridiana Duran and Rafael Miranda from Methodist Hospital in Memphis lead the exercise and nutrition program called “Get Set.”

“Get Set was created to prevent chronic diseases such as obesity, diabetes and mental illnesses caused by stress and anxiety,” Campos explained. Duran and Miranda began the exercise regimen on March 28 in the Asbury UMC parking lot. (El Redentor meets at Asbury UMC.) The health workers planned to meet with participants two hours per day five days per week for 10 weeks. Campos said other medical professionals from Methodist Hospital volunteer and support the program, as well.

Dr. Cynthia Davis, Metro McKendree District superintendent, dropped by the church recently to check out the program. She said she saw 60 people exercising in the parking lot.

“It is the butterfly effect of how lives are being changed because one person (Rafael) decided to do something to positively affect the community, and it has taken off,” said Davis. “Now families and their children are trying to live healthier lives.”

Churches responded with donations to senior residents

[First published on website 3/23/2016]

Churches in Shelby County, Tenn., recently blessed senior residents of Wesley Living Communities by donating household items.

Wesley Communities serve the elderly in west Tennessee, Jonesboro, Ark., and Murray, Ky., and they receive support from the Golden Cross Senior Residents Fund, based in Cordova, Tenn.

Kristi Henson Owens, executive director of Golden Cross, said she contacted the Golden Cross Key Women, a support organization, and asked them to collect donations for residents. Within a week and a half, she said, the Key Women “flooded” her office with household supplies collected from area United Methodist churches.

“There was a wall of Kleenex, rows of laundry soap, mountains of toilet paper and a mound of paper towels,” Owens said. “We had boxes of soap, shelves of cleaning supplies, a rack of new clothes and coats and art supplies. The outpouring of generosity was simply amazing and heartwarming.”

Owens distributed the items to representatives from all 29 Wesley Living Communities when they met at the Wesley Senior Ministries Foundation corporate office for training in February. She wanted every representative to leave with a carload of donations.

The gifts were important, she said, because Wesley Community residents often struggle to afford food and medicine, as well as household items. Gifts like toilet paper and laundry detergent relieve some of that burden.

“When Wesley Living Service coordinators opened the foundation office doors and saw all of the donations, many were moved with immense emotion of the pure loving nature of people who give so freely to those who they may not know,” Owens said.

United Methodists who want to donate to Wesley Senior Communities may do so on Golden Cross Sunday. Learn more at www.goldencrossseniorresidentsfund.org.

Please add this address to the distribution list of your church news:
communications@memphis-umc.org
24 Corporate Blvd., Jackson, TN 38305

Household supplies were donated to residents of Wesley Living Communities.
Book by Rev. Randy Cooper of Martin First UMC was basis for Lenten study by imprisoned women of Grace Place UMC

By Lane Gardner Camp, Director of Communications, Memphis Conference
[First published on website 3/23/2016]

The United Methodist connection has been at work this Spring as the women of Grace Place UMC in Memphis, Tenn., did a Lenten study based on a book by Rev. Randy Cooper of Martin First UMC in Martin, Tenn.

The beginning
In the Fall of 2013, Cooper did a sermon series at his church on The Lord’s Prayer. “It’s not uncommon for me to step away from the Lectionary a little bit in the fall and winter,” he explained.

Originally, Cooper said, he thought the series would include six to eight sermons, but it ended up being 12 sermons. A member of Cooper’s congregation (who prefers to remain anonymous) heard the series and asked Cooper for copies of the sermons.

Next thing Cooper knew, the member said he wanted to underwrite publication of the sermons in book form and make printed copies available to Martin First UMC, as well as send copies to a friend who runs a jail ministry in South Carolina.

Grace place
Discussion of the South Carolina jail ministry led Cooper to mention the Memphis Conference’s “mission congregation,” Grace Place UMC, presently located at Mark H. Luttrell Correctional Center in Memphis, which is part of the Tennessee Department of Correction.

After learning about Grace Place, the anonymous member of Martin First UMC also sent copies of the published book to Grace Place where approximately 20 women read and studied it for Lent. The study was led by Amanda Hartmann Westmoreland, Outside Council member and volunteer, and Vernita “Free” Freeman, the church’s lay leader and Inside Council member.

“Free has enjoyed and spiritually grown from reading the sermons and contemplating what the Lord’s Prayer is really saying about how we should live our lives,” reported Westmoreland, who enjoys mentoring Free and helping her follow her call to ministry and teaching.

“It has been a joy to watch Free grow as a spiritual leader and teacher as she shares her own experiences and insights with the (Lenten) study group,” said Westmoreland.

Free has remarked to Westmoreland that the Lord’s Prayer helps with daily life and is not just something to recite. As well, Free has told Westmoreland that leading the Lenten study has taught her “leadership qualities like how to listen, share and learn.”

The book
When You Pray: Sermons on the Lord’s Prayer was published in September 2015.

Reflecting back, Cooper said that when he preached the series at Martin First UMC, he had “no notion” the sermons would see publication, much less become study material for prison ministries.

Highly appreciative of the member of his congregation who made publication possible, Cooper said, “(The sermons) took on an additional life through his interest and generosity... If this is something that helps build faith, I am thrilled.”

When You Pray: Sermons on the Lord’s Prayer may be purchased in paperback, hardcover and Kindle formats at amazon.com.

Two Memphis churches to offer 'summer camps' in partnership with UofM School of Public Health
[First published on website 2/4/2016]

Asbury and St. Matthew United Methodist Churches in Memphis, Tenn., are hosting summer camp events this July in partnership with the School of Public Health, Social and Behavioral Sciences at the University of Memphis, according to an announcement from Metro McKendree District Superintendent Dr. Cynthia Davis.

The events are called Living Healthy Summer Camps. According to a promotional flier, the free camps will teach children and adults about maintaining healthy eating habits and living healthy lives. As a University of Memphis research study, the program offers four sessions for adults and one week of camp for children. Participants will also receive assessments of diet, physical activity, height, weight and hip circumference.

The week-long children’s camps will be offered July 18-22 at Asbury UMC and July 25-29 at St. Matthew UMC. Camp days will begin at 8:30 a.m. and end at 5:30 p.m. Boys and girls ages 9 to 14 may sign up. Child participation is limited to 30, and one parent or guardian must sign up to participate with each child.

To learn more, contact Brook Harmon at 901-678-1687 or bharon1@memphis.edu.

Pastor expresses herself through her art
By Casey Northcutt Watson
[First published on website 3/21/2016]

Rev. Lindsey Byard is a woman of many talents. The pastor of Longstreet UMC in Memphis, Tenn., displayed her art at Memphis Theological Seminary earlier this year. Sixteen of her pieces hung in the school’s halls for public viewing from Jan. 4 to Feb. 5.

“Art is part of my very core, the core that makes me who I am,” Byard wrote in a brochure for the show. “As an artist, art helps me breathe while, at the same moment, is breathtaking. Art is a love language that every individual is able to relate to.”

The pastor said about 50 people attended her art show reception on Jan. 14. Attendees saw a collection consisting of mixed media works that conveyed messages of love and action.

“Each piece is sprinkled with hearts, challenging the viewer to love well,” the brochure said. “Think about what you are doing to make a difference. What are you doing to solve the problem? What are you doing to love well? What are you going to do about it?”

Byard used keys, yarn, colored pencils, paint and other unique materials to create pieces that talk about radical hospitality, the speeches of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the need to speak boldly about important issues and more.

“Art allows me to make a bold statement,” she said. “Art is my freedom forum, my voice and my communication. Art is colors, images, symbolisms, trinkets and treasures. Art is my creativity, my individuality and my source of revealing my inner self to the outside world.”

To learn more about Byard’s art, contact her at lindseybyard@yahoo.com.
Donating eyeglasses and sunglasses to Project 20/20 is year-round opportunity to help persons around the world with vision problems

[First published on website 3/21/2016]

By Mary Beth Richardson, Mullins UMC, Memphis, TN
[First published on website 3/21/2016]

Mullins UMC in Memphis, Tenn., observed “Sunglasses Sunday” on Feb. 7, joining other congregations in the Memphis Conference in celebrating the 25th anniversary of Project 20/20.

Mullins UMC members donated new sunglasses and recycled prescription glasses to be distributed locally through Room in the Inn Memphis and globally through support of mission teams. Special receptacles for the donations were placed at three entrances to the sanctuary, in addition to the familiar Project 20/20 cardboard collection box in a main hallway.

Adding to the spirit of the occasion, Rev. Ken Stewart, senior pastor, greeted worshippers wearing glasses, and the Mullins Chancel Choir, under the direction of Tom Machen, surprised the congregation by donning sunglasses during the offering, when soloist Ed Bowen began to sing “God is My Redeemer.”

In a significant way, Project 20/20’s dual ministry at home and abroad coincides with Mullins UMC’s goals to serve as the hands and feet of Jesus in local and global communities.

Locally, for example, under the direction of Joe Wyrick, a lay member, Mullins UMC is assembling “blessing bags” for members to keep in their cars to offer people in the community who appear to need practical help, as well as prayer and encouragement. Other lay members prepare and serve meals regularly at St. John’s UMC’s soup kitchen and Highland Heights UMC food ministry, both in Memphis. Youth volunteer regularly at local Manna House for the homeless and at a neighborhood public school.

Globally, Mullins UMC supports United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) and Imagine No Malaria. Youth, under the direction of associate pastor Rev. Camille Bradley, are busy this year raising funds for a hands-on mission trip to Costa Rica this summer. In recent months, Stewart was part of a United Methodist Volunteers in Mission team that went to Cuba. For well over a decade, Mullins UMC has built relationships with villagers in Sechebeya, Zambia, providing financial aid for construction projects and sending mission teams with school supplies and sporting equipment.

It is through small steps – a drink of water, a soccer ball, a pair of glasses – that the life of faith in Jesus Christ our Lord is lived out to its fullest.
Taking one for the Team: Encourage a culture of ‘the call’ in your family and faith family

A reflection, including questions, by Dr. Joe Geary, Director of Connectional Ministries, Memphis Conference (West Tennessee and Western Kentucky), The United Methodist Church [First published on website 2/23/2016]

Reelfoot Rural Ministries received $25,000 grant from Walmart Foundation’s State Giving Program

[First published on website 2/1/2016]
‘Differing Abilities’ was focus of worship at Aldersgate UMC in Jackson on Sunday, Feb. 21

By Kathy Hunter, Aldersgate UMC, Jackson, TN
[First published on website 2/16/2016]

On Sunday, Feb. 21, the Aldersgate UMC congregation in Jackson, Tenn., celebrated “Differing Abilities Sunday,” formerly known as “Disabilities Awareness Sunday.” Not only did the morning worship service highlight the many contributions of members of the Rainbow Class and Friendship Group, it marked a major milestone in the life of Aldersgate UMC.

Twenty five years ago, the Rainbow Class met for the first time, and a rich history of ministry for persons with special needs was born at the corner of North Parkway and Campbell. At that time, the concept of enriching the spiritual lives of Christians who live with special needs, disabilities, handicapping conditions, or differing abilities was a trailblazing idea.

The labels may have changed. The education and learning methods may have changed. Expectations and the roles that our members with differing abilities play in our congregation may have changed, but one thing has remained constant: Aldersgate UMC’s heart for ministry for ALL of its members, regardless of IQ, physical agility, or social behaviors has never wavered.

During worship they remembered the gifts they received as a result of supporting the special needs ministry in our church. While they acknowledged the obvious blessings that have been given to the Rainbow Class and Friendship Group, the less obvious, but perhaps more profound, blessings have been those showered on the many who have volunteered their time and talents to make Aldersgate UMC an inclusive church through this ministry of love.

Members of the Friendship Group helped lead the morning worship service, and the guest speaker was Stephanie Rogers, director of the West Tennessee Regional Office of Omni Visions, Inc.

Aldersgate UMC is located at 1050 North Parkway in Jackson.
When community manager Mary Russell gave cameras to 11 senior residents at Wesley Millington Towers and asked them to take pictures, she was curious to see what captured their eyes. Residents were excited to get out of their apartments and drive around. They were curious to look for things that they don’t always see and maybe have never paid attention to before.

Sharon Horton has lived at Millington Towers in Millington, Tenn., for seven months. She was visiting a friend’s house in Millington when she noticed a tree that had fallen on the property. There had not recently been a storm and she thought it was interesting to see this large mature tree on the ground. She snapped a picture of it and was curious to why it had fallen.

A resident at Millington Towers for the past two years, Terry Winters visited Navy Lake with her camera. There were fishermen out on the lake that day and she was intrigued by the beauty of the water. Winters loves the water and taking pictures, so this was a great opportunity to bring together two things she loves.

Barbara Rainwater has called Millington Towers home for the past 16 years. Her pet cat Bojangles has been with her for 15 years. She got him when he was a year old and when he was healthy she would take him for walks on a leash. Bojangles is older now and diabetic, but still very much a part of Rainwater’s life. She took several pictures of her pet, sitting on the couch and standing by the door. He is a delight for the entire community.

For nine years, Mary Wroblewski has called Millington Towers home. This past fall the large pecan tree on the community’s grounds produced a tremendous quantity of pecans. Residents were able to pick the pecans at their leisure and there was plenty to go around. One resident picked so many, they packaged them and have them for sale at the community’s Friends Boutique. Wroblewski said that the pecan tree blooms every four years and everyone was excited watching it this year. She took a picture of the glorious tree because she loves the way the branches look.

Helen Sartain has been blessed by the flag outside her community at Millington Towers for the past 15 years. The flag symbolizes freedom for her. She snapped a picture of the beautiful flag that flies high about her community home.

Dot Morgan visited Wolfchase Mall in Memphis and took a picture of the carousel. A resident at Millington Towers for five years, Morgan took a lot of pictures around the Christmas holidays. She loves how the carousel lights up and the beautiful colors in the photo.

“Children and adults love to ride the carousel,” Morgan noted. She has ridden carousels in the past, but not the one at the mall, yet.

Millington Towers was full of holiday spirit in December 2015. Walking past the front sitting room, Donna Marshall was fascinated by the creatively-decorated tree by the window. She loved the colors and the different ornaments. Marshall, a six-year resident, thought “My, that is beautiful!” Not knowing where the tree came from, she took a picture of it, finding out later that Terry Winters had handmade the tree with happy meal toys she had saved over the years from when her children were small.

During the holiday season, the Millington Towers nativity scene always graces the community property. This year the nativity scene was captured in a picture by Pauline Bielen, a resident of Millington Towers for the past six years. Bielen also took pictures of Christmas trees and residents’ decorated doors. She thought everything for the season was so beautiful. The nativity scene was extra special this year because the stable was a new addition and was handmade by Don Spaulding, Millington Towers’ maintenance employee.

For six months, Pat Clark has lived in her new home. Excited to be a part of this activity, she got right to work taking pictures of residents’ doors who decorated for the festive holiday season. Waking through the community, looking at the creatively-decorated doors, Ms. Mona’s door caught Clark’s eye. With childlike reindeer and a sign that read “Do not feed the reindeer” delicately handmade on the door, Clark took a picture of the door and thought to herself, “Who would dare try and feed a reindeer?”

Sadie Barbee who has been a resident since 2008 took a picture of her great grandson Alanzo Jr. who is six-years-old and lives in Brighton, Tenn. She loves when her family comes to visit her at Millington Towers. Showing off her picture with a giant smile on her face, Barbee says “I earned him right here; he’s my baby. He is quite the handful and a conversationalist.”

A resident at Millington Towers for a year, Nancy Stavely loves to look at the community garden full of flowers and vegetables. She took a picture of a beautiful cabbage. She likes to be outside in the garden. A picture from every resident who participated was framed and will hang in the hallway leading to the community room. The winning picture was taken by Aileen Marbry who has lived at the community since 2012. One of Marbry’s favorite places at Millington Towers is the Friends Boutique. She visits the boutique every Friday, even if she doesn’t purchase anything. “It is a fun place to laugh and hang out with neighbors.” Marbry snapped a picture of Dot, Donna and Lucy in their Christmas sweaters outside the boutique. She likes the picture because everyone is smiling and happy.

What a fantastic way to capture a moment in time. Whether it is a picture of friends and family or beautiful scenery, the things that draw our attention are often the things we value the most; like our freedom, our community and our home. This activity will become an annual event for the senior residents of Wesley Millington Towers. They hope to do the next one in the spring.
‘Downton Abbey’ was theme of ‘Wednesday Night Fellowship’ at Aldersgate UMC in Jackson, Tenn.

Aldersgate UMC in Jackson, Tennessee, brought a British flair to its March 9 Wednesday Night Fellowship (WNF) event using a “Downton Abbey” theme.

The church established its monthly Wednesday Night Fellowship (WNF) program in 1998, according to Aldersgate Communications Coordinator Brittany Crockett. It is a way for congregation members to connect through catered meals, conversation and fun.

The program developed into a platform for entertainment and enlightenment. In the past, WNF events have featured a performance by the Casey Jones Barbershop Quartet and presentations on a trip to the Holy Land and a mission trip to Honduras. One WNF in 2014 featured a successful “Frozen Carnival” for children.

The “Downton Abbey” WNF event, which took its theme from a popular British television show, gave church members an opportunity to dress in early 1900s costumes. Participants enjoyed themed versions of games like Bingo and Name That Tune, and the Aldersgate UMC tap group, Taps of Glory, danced the “Turkey Trot.”

Crockett said Becky Buckley, adult ministries team leader, organized this programming and other WNF events and thought they played an important role in the church.

“I firmly believe that Jesus knew when to be with others and when to be alone, and our Wednesday Night Fellowship is one way for us to be together when the time is right,” she told Crockett. “Our Wednesday Night Fellowship program helps us fulfill a need as Christians to be together to pray, talk, learn, laugh, and be uplifted.”

For more information about Aldersgate UMC, visit www.aldersgatejackson.com

The Wednesday Night Fellowship at Aldersgate UMC (Jackson, Tennessee) on March 9 had a “Downton Abbey” theme. (Submitted photo)

‘Nature of God’ was theme for first session of 2016 ‘Generative Leadership Academy,’ Feb. 26-27

The third annual Generative Leadership Academy (GLA) is underway with the first quarterly session having taken place in February with 61 in attendance.

GLA is an annual series of four quarterly workshops designed to empower laity and clergy and develop spiritual leadership. The first 2016 GLA session took place Feb. 26-27 at Kenlake Resort in Hardin, Kentucky.

Kim Morrison, Purchase District lay resource leader, said the GLA meeting carried the theme, “Nature of God,” and included messages and testimonies from several Memphis Conference laity and clergy. Topics upon which they spoke included how God reveals Himself in nature, how understanding of the Trinity can affect human relationships and how to draw others into fellowship.

Speakers were Rev. Sky McCracken, Purchase District superintendent; Rev. Dr. Eddie Bromley, pastor Milan First UMC in Milan, Tennessee; and Rev. Joe Hansen, pastor of Trinity and Mayfield First UMCs in Paducah (Graves County) and Mayfield, Kentucky, respectively.

Rev. Samuel Chambers, pastor of Brooks Chapel and Bethel UMCs in Cottage Grove, Tennessee; Cyndi Stephens, member of Lone Oak UMC in Paducah, Kentucky, and Rev. Latricia Trull, pastor of Puryear and Buchanan UMCs in Paris, Tennessee, gave personal testimonies and shared God stories.

“Rev. Latricia Trull led our ‘Personal Piece’ and shared her own personal experiences of searching for God and how often He was right there all along and shared scripture of how God loves those who seek him because they will find him,” Morrison remembered. “We were challenged to find God revealing himself in different times and through different people of our lives and to discover if our church is in a season of searching.”

She also said organizers built crosses out of LEGO bricks and set them on each table. The crosses reminded participants that Christ is the foundation for spiritual leadership.

After small group discussions, worship, fellowship and Holy Communion, Morrison said participants left GLA challenged to return to their churches and bring more people into fellowship and community.

Clockwise from top left: A LEGO cross; Rev. Joe Hansen; and a room full of laity and clergy in attendance at the first session of the 2016 Generative Leadership Academy. (Photos by Rev. Sky McCracken)

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