Project 20/20 is a mission of the Memphis Conference that has been growing and growing in the last 20 years. It is housed at Emmanuel UMC in Memphis, Tenn., but is connected to the Memphis Conference, the United Methodist Church and the rest of the world through mission teams that distribute eyeglass and sunglasses to people in need.

**Project 20/20 had a great year in 2014.** A group of about 15 volunteers processed at least a ton of donated glasses, finding ones that could be useful to people in need of vision care around the world.

Volunteers sorted, cleaned, checked and bagged 6,400 pairs of prescription glasses and 3,000 pairs of sunglasses. They filled orders from 21 mission teams that took the eyeglasses and sunglasses to 13 countries, reaching over 5000 people.

Donors from all over the country sent in from one to several hundred pairs of glasses and sunglasses. United Methodist churches in the Memphis Conference (West Tennessee and Western Kentucky) provided faithful support, mailing directly or sending in glasses via a kind of “pony express” that moves from church to district office to Memphis Conference office to Project 20/20’s home at Emmanuel UMC.

The work of Project 20/20 is done on a shoestring. The only expenses are supplies for processing and packaging and shipping costs for getting the glasses to mission teams. Money comes from many sources. Two churches in Georgia sent large donations in 2014. Glasses that can’t be used for the missions are recycled and Project 20/20 is paid for that.

So every pair of donated glasses is used in one way or another.

**2015 is already starting out to be a great year.** Five orders of glasses (total of 4,387 pairs) are with mission teams traveling to Haiti, El Salvador, Dominican Republic, Belize and Mexico. There is a large order leaving soon for the local student chapter of the Fellowship of Christian Optometrists to take to Nicaragua in May. These teams will return the prescription glasses they don’t use and they will be available to go out to other mission teams.

If you want to help, you may contact Project 20/20 at info@project2020.org. One current need is for children’s sunglasses. Perhaps your Sunday School classes or your Vacation Bible School could start a mission project to collect them for Project 20/20 to send around the world to help other children protect their eyes.

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**United Methodist churches in the Memphis Conference (West Tennessee and Western Kentucky) support Project 20/20 with gifts of glasses and money. Many churches provide donation boxes at their facilities or at community locations. Donation boxes also are located at district offices and the conference office in Jackson, Tenn.**
The Purchase District’s 2014 Project Christmas House attracted many volunteers.

Kim Morrison, lay resource leader for the Purchase District, said the effort attracted so many people that it only took the group one day to lay the foundation and erect the walls on a new home in Brookport, Ill.

“It was a joy to see so many different people from various churches come together and work united for a cause,” she said.

The Purchase District’s Project Christmas program began in 2003 after a district relief team traveled to Mobile, Ala., during the Advent season to help clear debris after Hurricane Ivan.

Now, district volunteers build one new home every year for those in disaster areas. From Dec. 26 to Jan. 1 volunteers constructed a house for a family who, Morrison said, had lost one home to a fire and watched a tornado damage their second.

The district asked people with specific types of skill, including carpentry and plumbing, to help reconstruct a house for this family. It also asked for anyone, of any skill type or level, who simply felt willing to assist.

Morrison said organizers greatly appreciated the volunteer physical labor, the abundant food, supply and monetary donations and the prayer this project received. According to the latest update, groups continued to work on the home after the Purchase District left, and the family hoped to move in by April.

Purchase District’s 2014 Project Christmas House was built in Brookport, Ill. Submitted photos.
Honoring the Miracle: Grandmother donates bicycle every Christmas in memory of granddaughter

By Casey Northcutt Watson [First published on website 2/13/2015]

In Parsons, Tenn., a few little girls ride around their neighborhoods on brightly painted bicycles – tokens of love for another child who will never ride one herself.

For the past three years, the Carl Perkins Center for the Prevention of Child Abuse in Parsons has given a little girl a bike for Christmas.

The gift comes from Benita White, a member of Parsons First UMC. The congregation donates an abundance of toys to the center each holiday season, but the one annual bike is special. White donates it in memory of her granddaughter, Emma Claire White, because that’s what the girl asked for in September of 2011.

Emma didn’t get to wake up that Christmas and see that shiny, new bike waiting for her under the tree. She died soon after making the request.

Her grandmother says doctors diagnosed the little girl with brain cancer in early 2010, when Emma was 3 years old. Not long after that, she ended up on the operating table at St. Jude Children’s Hospital in Memphis, Tenn.

“Her type of brain cancer was like a sparkler that has little sparks that just branch all out,” White says. “[Her surgeon] was able to get the big tumor, but he was unable to get the little sparks.”

Although it didn’t eliminate the tumors, the surgery gave Emma seven months of quality living, in which her parents and grandparents prayed for a miracle. White said the family – including her parents, Blake and Kelley White – all wanted God’s will to be done, but for themselves, they wanted to keep their Emma. The child’s faith, however, remained strong.

“She was the one that would reassure her momma and reassure her daddy,” White says, adding that Emma would often tell her parents, “Don’t cry. Everything is going to be ok.”

The trial tested the grandmother’s faith, as well, and she began to panic when Emma had a seizure after her initial surgery.

“God’s voice was just as clear in my ear … and He just said, ‘Trust me,’” she says. “From that moment on, I gave it all to Him.”

White also says one time, after suffering a bad seizure, Emma lay in a hospital emergency room. The episode had left her unable to talk, so quietly, she stuck her hand into the air. Both of her grandmothers tried to hold her hand, thinking she was reaching out to them, but Emma shook her head. She just kept holding up her arm.

Then, her mother asked Emma if Jesus was holding her hand. The girl nodded.

“Jesus was holding her hand – there’s not a doubt in my mind – we all felt His presence in that room that day,” White says.

While she struggled against cancer, Emma inspired not only her family but also people from her community. Local teenagers would visit her every day — one of whom is now studying nursing. And all the while, White says they kept expecting good news after every doctor’s visit.

But at the end of August 2011, when Emma went to St. Jude’s for a brain scan, doctors sent her home and didn’t expect her to live until the next day. White says her granddaughter continued to surprise them all. She lived exactly seven more weeks to the day.

By the time Emma died on Sept. 22, 2011, her right side had atrophied, and her arm, leg and face had become twisted. She had lost a portion of her hair, but White still saw her granddaughter as precious at the funeral. She said God showed the family that He had restored their girl, and she looked beautiful in her casket, with a sweet expression on her face.

“When we got to see her, her little hair was beautiful and her little mouth was beautiful,” she says.

Emma Claire was buried in her favorite Cinderella dress.

And that Christmas, White bought the first bicycle for the Carl Perkins center. It was the one that Emma would have received if she had lived. And now, three years later, three other little girls have received bicycles in honor of White’s granddaughter.

“It makes me feel close to my Emma, and it makes me feel blessed that God chose me to be her grandmother,” she says.

White stresses the importance of an anagram from “Emma Claire.” If you rearrange the letters, they form the phrase, “Me, a miracle.” The bicycles pay homage to that miracle.

Almost $3,500 raised for ‘Hands Up! Preschool’ by United Methodist Men of Northside UMC in Jackson

[First published on website 2/9/2015]

A Jan. 9 concert fundraiser by the United Methodist Men (UMM) of Northside UMC in Jackson, Tenn., raised $3,464 for Hands Up! Preschool that serves at-risk children in the Jackson area.

The concert featured “The Finchers” from Archer’s Chapel UMC in Crockett County, Tenn., and the “Mathenia Family” from Northside UMC.

This is the third annual fundraiser for the preschool by the UMM of Northside UMC. Learn more about Hands Up! Preschool at www.handsupjackson.com.

Bob Sharp, a member of the church’s UMM leadership team, thanked everyone who came out and made the event a success.

Hands Up! Preschool in Jackson, Tenn., received almost $3,500, thanks to concert fundraiser by United Methodist Men of Northside UMC. Photo shows some students of the school with friends and family. Photo by Emily Johnson
Scenic Hills and Raleigh UMCs in Memphis host ‘Souper Bowl’ food drive to benefit food pantry

[First published on website 2/11/2015]

Scenic Hills and Raleigh UMCs in Memphis, Tenn., decided to celebrate the Super Bowl this year by helping people in their community. Scenic Hills Administrative Assistant Cindy Burnett said the congregations organized a “Souper Bowl Sunday” event and encouraged their members to bring items for the Raleigh UMC food pantry.

In honor of the food drive, the Scenic Hills morning praise group sang a special rendition of “Dropkick Me Jesus” to help the rest of the congregation get into the Souper Bowl spirit. Burnett said organizers prompted members to make the canned food drive a festive occasion.

“Members were invited to dress in their favorite team gear, which led to some good-natured bantering as the congregation stayed to socialize over delicious homemade soup after the church service,” she said.

Raleigh and Scenic Hills UMCs reported collecting food items that “stretched from end zone to end zone. ♦

Arlington UMC Boy Scouts donate 104 Easter baskets to United Methodist Neighborhood Centers

[First published on website 5/4/2015]

Boy Scout Troop 452, chartered by Arlington UMC in Arlington, Tenn., donated 104 Easter baskets to United Methodist Neighborhood Centers of Memphis (UMNC) this year.

UMNC offers various services, including daycare and food distribution. The Key Women, a UMNC support organization, sponsors an Easter basket drive every year that benefits children enrolled at UMNC’s Miriam Child Development Center.

Key Women Co-President Sharon Cornelius said her group set a goal to collect at least 85 Easter baskets this spring for Miriam’s children and extra baskets would go to the children of Miriam’s staff and to families that frequent UMNC food pantries. The Key Women distributed a list of items to go in the baskets that included plastic Easter eggs, candy, crayons, coloring books, stuffed animals, small books and more.

Teresa Pinkston-Rector, religious coordinator and chartered organization rep for scouting ministries at Arlington UMC, found out about the drive and wanted to help. She got approval from the child development center to use the basket drive as a Boy Scout church and community service project.

Troop 452 used money it collected from recycling projects and from various fundraisers to purchase the requested items. Pinkston-Rector said the group also received donations from members of the National Association of United Methodist Scouters and from local Beta Club families. The scouts’ parents also donated plastic eggs, and the local Kroger grocery store gave the troop a $25 gift card toward candy purchases.

These donations allowed scouts to purchase enough items to fill 104 baskets. ♦

Golden Cross Fund introduces ‘Bountiful Blessing Bags’

By Kristi Henson Owens, Golden Cross Senior Residents Fund

[First published on website 2/10/2015]

It is hard to picture in our minds someone in their later years without the comforts of everyday items we all take for granted. It is hard to wrap our heads and hearts around the elderly without food to nourish them.

We are wrapping our hearts and our arms around this growing issue. The past year, Wesley Living welcomed many new faces into 27 affordable senior living communities throughout West Tennessee and in Jonesboro AR, and Murray KY. Some of those new residents came home to Wesley Living with NOTHING. Through generous and loving donors, the Golden Cross Senior Residents Fund is able to help provide these residents with furniture and Move-In Kits.

But we could not stop there. Golden Cross Senior Residents Fund has introduced “Bountiful Blessing Bags” to give to senior residents who arrive at our communities needing support and nourishment. $150 purchases enough nonperishable food items to sustain an elderly resident for nearly two months (including a $25 gift card for perishable items). Having to worry about where one’s next meal might come from is one less stress we are able to remove.

Creating “Bountiful Blessings Bags” with your United Methodist Women (UMW) or United Methodist Men (UMM) group, Sunday School class, youth group or entire congregation can truly help transform lives one need at a time.

For additional information on “Bountiful Blessings Bags” or Golden Cross Senior Residents Fund, contact us at 901-213-1930 or me at Kristi.owens@wesley-housing.com. ♦

Follow Bishop McAlilly on his Blog: www.bishopbillmcalilly.com
When a young man needed housing, his parents called on the Church.
Memphis, Tenn., resident Matthew Gabriel recently found himself in a bind. The 27-year-old was working on his doctorate in physical therapy at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center in Memphis, and he had planned to work a five-week internship at St. Anthony Hospital in Lakewood, Colo., starting Jan. 5.

On Jan. 1, his housing arrangement fell apart.

“I wasn’t devastated, but I was certainly on panic mode,” he said.

Matthew began to scrounge for places to stay, even arranging to spend nights on strangers’ couches through a website that connects tourists with people willing to host them. He said he planned to wing it until he could find a more permanent place to stay.

Then, his parents had an idea and decided to test the United Methodist motto: Open hearts. Open minds. Open doors.
Bradley Gabriel and Rev. Linda Gabriel are United Methodist pastors appointed to St. Mark’s UMC and Emmanuel UMC, respectively, located in Memphis, Tenn.

Linda Gabriel emailed Rev. Dr. Melanie Rosa, district superintendent of the Mile High/ Pikes Peak District of the Rocky Mountain Conference – the district encompassing Lakewood, Colo. And, she sent a message to Rev. Dr. Betty Bradford, pastor of Lakewood UMC. Bradley Gabriel said his wife described their son as a trustworthy, honorable Eagle Scout in an unfortunate situation, and she asked Rosa and Bradford for help.

Within a short period of time, both women replied with open invitations. Bradford said four families in her congregation would love to host Matthew. And, Rosa offered the use of her own basement.

“We saw a chance to help him, make a new friend, and put some vitality back into our home,” Rosa said.

Matthew, for his part, was grateful and slightly amazed at this outpouring of generosity.

“It was really wonderful suddenly realizing how much love circulates throughout the faith, whether at home in the South or all the way out here in the West,” he said.

Bradley Gabriel said his son accepted Rosa’s offer because it came in first, but the young man has gone to a couple services at Lakewood UMC and thanked the people there. Church members even took him to lunch and showed him around town. The pastor knows his son is in good hands.

“What a delight to send even your adult children off to a strange land and know that there is Church there,” he said.

“There’s community. There are people who are willing to say, “Sure. Come be here.”

And because of those people, Matthew Gabriel never went a day without housing.
Youth from 17 churches raise estimated $20,000 for hunger relief during ‘30-Hour Famine’

More than $20,000 was raised for hunger relief by youth during the Feb. 27-March 1 “30-Hour Famine” at Lakeshore Camp and Retreat Center in Eva, Tenn.

Vickie Lawson, Lakeshore registrar, reported on March 2 that the leadership team only had a rough estimate, but was confident more than $20,000 had been raised for World Vision.

“Make it Your Fight - Go Hungry to Help the Hungry” was the theme for the “30-Hour Famine” that takes place every February at Lakeshore. Youth from all over the Memphis Conference (West Tennessee and Western Kentucky) participate by fasting, learning about world hunger and raising money for hunger relief.

Lawson said 190 youth and adults from 17 churches participated. They began their fast at 1 p.m on Friday and went without food until 6:30 p.m. on Saturday. The fast was broken with a 6:30 p.m. communion service and 7 p.m. meal.

“Organizers used a combination of skits, music and Bible lessons to help everyone begin to understand hunger issues in our world,” explained Lawson. She said the youth and adults also did service projects around Lakeshore and enjoyed play time.

Dyersburg Alternative School adopted by three churches

The United Methodist Women (UMW) and United Methodist Men (UMM) of Hughlett, Lighthouse and Ross UMCs in the Mississippi River District have joined forces with the local chapter of Omega PSI PHI Fraternity to “adopt” the Dyersburg Alternative School in Dyersburg, Tenn.

The official announcement was made during the third annual Charles Connell Scholarship Banquet on Saturday, Feb. 21, at Ross UMC in Dyersburg.

“This partnership will allow professionals from our local community, as well as surrounding communities, to mentor students at the school. The focus will be to serve as positive role models and provide successful life skills that will help students of the school become motivated, high-achieving students,” according to a media release about the school adoption.

Members of mission team from Memphis Conference available to speak about South Sudanese orphanage

Members of a United Methodist Volunteers in Mission (UMVIM) team are available to speak to Memphis Conference churches and small groups about a recent trip to Greenland Children’s Home in South Sudan.

Last October, the team traveled to Kenyi, South Sudan, where they visited and served the orphanage’s children. If invited to speak, the team will give updates on the orphanage and on the children for whom it cares. They also will explain how the project has made the most of Memphis Conference donations and encourage listeners to support Greenland Home for Children.

To schedule a speaker, contact:
• Rev. Michael Blake: 731-588-1130 micwbl@mac.com
• Rev. Richard Dowdy: 731-705-7796 richard.dowdy@marshall.kyschools.us
• Beth Brown: 731-885-7218 sebrown1@bellsouth.net
• Joseph and Jeannine Cauthen: 270-436-5383 tink@wk.net

Children at Johnsons Chapel UMC collect money to make pillowcases for St. Jude Children’s Hospital

Children at Johnsons Chapel UMC in Paris, Tenn., collected $150 to help volunteers make approximately 50 pillowcases for St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital in Memphis, Tenn.

Church member Amanda Pascall said the money collected on Feb. 15 purchased 50 yards of fabric for a program called “Pillowcases of Hope for St. Jude.”

Established in Benton County, Tenn., the program involves about 20 women who sew pillowcases for the hospital throughout the year.

This is the second time Johnson’s Chapel UMC has contributed to the effort. A year ago, the congregation donated enough money to purchase fabric for another 50 pillowcases.
600 families served by Christmas Toy Store

By Rev. Robert Craig, Executive Director, Reelfoot Rural Ministries  [First published on website 2/19/2015]

People shared countless stories at Reelfoot Rural Ministries’ (RRM) annual Christmas Toy Store in 2014 – stories of hopeless despair turned to hope-filled joy, thanks to the donors, volunteers and staff of RRM, an agency of the Memphis Conference of the United Methodist Church. Stories were about lost employment, the struggle to find employment and the strain of meeting daily family needs. While our nation’s economy appears to be strengthening, that does not seem to be the case in northwest Tennessee and southwest Kentucky, RRM’s service area.

The RRM Christmas Toy Store’s goal is to offer opportunities for low-income families to provide Christmas gifts for their children in encouraging and affirming ways. Families apply and are selected according to income requirements and geographic service area. If selected, parents or guardians may shop for each child from an inventory of toys, clothing and bicycles donated to RRM. Families pay small shopping fees – $3 per child or a maximum of $15 per family – to select three items per teenager and five items per younger child.

Parents take great pride in their ability to shop and provide Christmas presents for their children. One family of four included a mother who is finishing a bachelor’s degree and a father who was laid off from work in the fall of 2014. The Christmas stress weighed heavily upon them. When these parents visited RRM to shop, they said, “We are very grateful to everyone who has donated to help us. We don’t know what we would have done without help this year. May God bless y’all. We plan on returning to shop next year. Thanks for all your help, and may God bless you always.”

These stories come from only two of the more than 600 families who were loved and affirmed by people associated with RRM. In addition to staff, volunteers are vitally important in RRM’s work with these families. In return for their service, the RRM staff provides volunteers with lunch, but God provides a much greater blessing.

All families seemed overjoyed by the care they received from the people of RRM.

“The atmosphere was one of love and genuine respect,” shared one toy store volunteer. “My heart was truly moved.”

Another volunteer of several years added, “This was the best Toy Store that I have helped with. Things ran so smoothly! The RRM staff did a great job.”

Many volunteers, like the ones in top photo delivering toys, made the 2014 Toy Store of Reelfoot Rural Ministries possible. Bottom photo shows just a portion of the many toy donations that made it possible for 600 families to shop. Submitted photos

Bolton UMC in Arlington, Tenn., says ‘Yes, we can!’ in response to ‘Imagine no malaria?’

By Rev. Larry Chitwood  [First published on website 4/13/2015]

One recent Sunday, the folks at Bolton UMC in Arlington, Tenn., were challenged to Imagine No Malaria in a unique way.

The Memphis Conference of the United Methodist Church (of which Bolton UMC is a part) and Tennessee Conference are working to raise $1 million for Imagine No Malaria by June 2015.

As the congregation left worship that day, they were greeted by a colorful chalk drawing of a mosquito with the question, “Imagine no malaria?” and the answer, “Yes, we can!”

Outreach Chair Robbie Wylie, along with some of the children in the church, created the large chalk drawing as part of a campaign to raise funds in support of Imagine No Malaria. A different aspect of the work being done by Imagine No Malaria was highlighted each Sunday during Lent.

So far the congregation has raised over $900 toward its goal of $1,500 to support Imagine No Malaria.

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Collierville UMC partnered with other churches to be in mission and ministry during 2014

By Teresa Pinkston-Rector, Collierville UMC

Collierville UMC in Collierville, Tenn., experienced a blessing in 2014 when it participated in ministry with other United Methodist churches, their pastors and missions committees.

Collierville UMC had the opportunity to partner with St. Matthew’s UMC in Memphis while recycling gently used Sunday School literature, Upper Room devotional guides and Pockets magazines. Pockets is an Upper Room publication for kids. Collierville UMC’s Sunday School classes collected Cokesbury literature and other curriculum as they finished them, and they set up a collection bin in the church’s missions room. Metro-McKendree District Superintendent Dr. Cynthia Davis suggested that the recycled resources would be gifts from God for smaller United Methodist congregations.

Then, during the 2014 Thanksgiving and Christmas holiday season, I was blessed to minister alongside Rev. Rich Cook from Highland Heights UMC in Memphis, Tenn., and Rev. Luz Campos, from El Redentor UMC (located at Asbury UMC) in Memphis. We worked together during an annual outreach effort called “Turkey Trotters.” Lenny’s Sub Shop’s corporate office raised funds for the event’s traditional Thanksgiving meals, which consisted of turkey, sweet potato and green bean casserole, pumpkin pie, bread and soft drinks. Rock House Live in Bartlett, Tenn., provided space to prepare and box the meals, and together, several members of the Collierville UMC staff and young adult group – along with leaders from the scouting units at Arlington UMC in Arlington, Tenn., and other community volunteers – delivered 98 Thanksgiving meals to those in need across the poorest parts of Shelby and Fayette counties.

It was a great opportunity for adults to show their kids the importance of volunteering and of serving others in need. Some of our youngest kids have the biggest hearts and passion for service.

Jesus’ Holiday Helpers also has been a program of Collierville UMC since 2003. It screens families mainly in the Collierville area, but it sometimes reaches to the city outskirts. It helps pastors of smaller churches ensure that people in their communities have Christmas for their kids. Families in need are screened by qualified Collierville UMC personnel and by local school counselors, and they are referred to Collierville UMC for help.

We provided coats, gifts, clothes, toys, new bikes, gift cards for adults and teens, essential items and food baskets through the generosity of Collierville UMC’s Sunday School classes, young adult ministry and individuals. Local civic organizations and local companies also contributed. Two companies each sponsored a family in need for Christmas, and two additional companies donated food baskets and some toys to a few families who came to Collierville UMC late in the holiday season seeking assistance when most resources were already invested in other programs.

It was wonderful to have a selection of age-appropriate toys for the children and to have holiday food, as well as some pantry staples, on hand. Thanks to all our church family at Collierville UMC who donated, shopped, wrapped and prayed. We provided Christmas food baskets for 16 families.

Collierville UMC worked with other churches to assist families like these during Christmas 2014. Submitted photos

Jackson First UMC members meet neighbors in Huntersville and offer free smoke detectors

“Operation Inasmuch” was the name of a day of outreach on Feb. 28 by members of Jackson First UMC to the community of Huntersville, Tenn., that lies about eight miles west of the church’s downtown Jackson, Tenn., campus.

Huntersville is the location of Jackson First UMC’s second campus, Andrews Chapel.

Operation Inasmuch is an organization that employs proven models to motivate, train and equip churches to move congregants out of sanctuary seats to serve the neediest in their communities. The name comes from Matthew 25:40 where Jesus says, “Inasmuch as you did it for the least of these, you did it for me.”

Twenty volunteers and three members of the Madison County Fire Department worked together to canvass homes in the neighborhood and offer free smoke detectors funded by a fire department grant.

Door-to-door visits were made to 110 homes within a two-mile radius of the church, located at 3820 Brownsville Rd./Highway 70.

Twelve requests for smoke detectors were received and “Sorry we missed you” cards were left at 65 homes.

In addition to telling neighbors about the free smoke detectors, volunteers invited Huntersville neighbors to Sunday worship and a Palm Sunday “Easter Eggstravaganza” at Andrews Chapel.

Contact information was gathered from the door-to-door visits to be able to invite neighbors to future events at Andrews Chapel.

From left (top photo), Chris and Meredith Nye and, from left (bottom photo), Pete Bryant, Harold Wood and Kathy Abrams were among 20 volunteers from Jackson First UMC who participated in an outreach project to neighbors of the church’s Andrews Chapel campus in Huntersville, Tenn. Submitted photos
**Prison-based Grace Place UMC practiced mission & ministry inside & outside its walls throughout 2014**

Even though Grace Place UMC is located inside a prison and has limited resources, it continues to find ways to be in mission and ministry inside and outside its walls.

The church for women prisoners at Mark H. Luttrell Correctional Center (MLCC) in Memphis (part of the Tennessee Department of Correction) ended 2014 with a long list of Christian service, according to Rev. Diane Harrison, who pastors the church.

“Here (below) is a partial list of donations made by the women (in 2014) from money they earned through the sale of their cookbook and handmade items,” reported Harrison.

- $50 to Imagine No Malaria
- $200 to First Works
- $330 to United Methodist Neighborhood Centers of Memphis
- $100 to the Art Room at Highland Heights UMC
- $120 to Heifer International (purchase of sheep in honor of Grace Place volunteers)
- $160 for two backpacks full of school supplies for Jacob’s Well UMC
- $180 to purchase complete outfits for Easter for two children
- $100 to purchases greeting cards for inmates to mail
- $100 to Prison Congregations of America
- $250 to cover the cost of a lunch at Highland Heights UMC
- $150 to Communion Fund at Highland Heights UMC
- $233 to purchase lip balm for Christmas bags for inmates
- $130 to purchase food gift cards for door prizes at Highland Heights UMC Christmas lunch
- $100 to Manna House

Also in 2014, for the second year in a row, Harrison said the women of Grace Place UMC made 100 sets of hats and scarves for Christmas gift bags at Highland Heights UMC in Memphis, as well as donated 100 tubes of toothpaste and toothbrushes for the gift bags.

The congregation also collected hotel-size hygiene items that it shared with Room in the Inn, Highland Heights UMC and Manna House, said Harrison.

Grace Place UMC is the first prison-based mission congregation in the Southeastern Jurisdiction of the United Methodist Church. It began in 2007 as Grace Place Ministries and in 2012 became a “mission congregation” of the Memphis Conference as defined by the United Methodist Book of Discipline. A “service of organizing” with Bishop Bill McAlilly was held on Feb. 25, 2013.

**Aldersgate UMC in Jackson, Tenn., hosts outdoor Easter communion**

**[First published on website 3/24/2015]**

On Easter Sunday morning, April 5, from 9:20 to 10:20 a.m., Aldersgate UMC in Jackson, Tenn., offered its front lawn at 1050 North Parkway to members of their congregation and all of Jackson for “Communion for the Community.”

“Aldersgate has offered outdoor communion at the Cross on Easter Sunday morning for the past five years,” said Dr. Barry Scott, pastor of Aldersgate UMC.

The church made the experience even more accessible by having an additional communion station located in its parking lot overlooking the Campbell Street and North Parkway exchange. This addition made it possible for individuals with limited mobility to receive communion.

“Aldersgate is focused on reaching outside our church walls,” said Anita Roark, the church’s communications team leader. “‘Communion for the Community’ is one way we can invite those who may not be comfortable stepping inside the physical church building to celebrate Easter. No matter your background, everyone is welcome here.”

Aldersgate UMC invited all of Jackson to attend “Communion for the Community” and stay its Easter morning worship at 10:45 a.m. in the church’s sanctuary.

**Pleasant Hill and Barlow UMCs open food pantry**

**[First published on website 4/16/2015]**

Two Purchase District (Purchase District as of April 23) churches, Pleasant Hill UMC in LaCenter, Ky., and Barlow UMC in Barlow, Ky., together opened a food pantry on Saturday, March 28, at Barlow UMC, located at 198 South 5th Street, according to a district announcement.

For operating hours and more information OR to make food donations, contact Pastor Matthew Thomas at (270) 331-1343.
Beauty for Ashes: a reflection on time since Mason’s Chapel UMC was burned by unknown arsonist(s)

By Rev. April Arnold, Mason’s Chapel UMC, Hazel, Ky [First published on website 3/13/2015]

Isaiah 61: 1-4 (NKJV) says this, “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, Because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn. To console those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord that He may be glorified.” And they shall rebuild the old ruins, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the ruined cities, the desolations of many generations.”

This was the Lectionary Scripture I used to preach from on the third Sunday of Advent Dec. 14, 2014. How could I have known the words of this passage would resonate so deeply and ring in our ears with the events, then before us, of Monday, Dec. 15, 2014? What a witness to God’s presence and love to be before us, behind us, and with us, whatever comes.

Just 10 days before Christmas it was discovered that someone(s) had forced themselves into our church building and left their mark with fire in several places throughout.

We, the people of Mason’s Chapel UMC, our sister churches from around the Paris District, Memphis Conference and the world have asked, “Why?”

Today, I do not have that answer. The people of Mason’s Chapel UMC and I are reconciled that we may never have that answer. What we do know is this: Whoever entered God’s house and did these things, need what we have! So we and so many others offer our prayers for them that God will use this situation in their lives to draw them closer to His side. Because of our trust in God, His will, and His sovereignty, we rest in the peace of forgiveness.

There is plenty I don’t know, but let me tell you about what I do know. Fire can damage and burn, but fire can also fuel a congregation! We are blessed to have a fellowship building that we lovingly call our “pavilion” on our property that was undamaged. This one-room building is currently serving all our ministry and worship needs.

The fire has not stopped ANY ministry; if anything, it has only renewed our resolve, determination, commitment, unity and sense of urgency in being about the Lord’s business. We continued on with our Manna Mondays Children and Youth Ministry the very same evening the fire was discovered. Through this time, we have become more creative and adaptive.

As we seek to bless others, in the true nature of God, WE are the ones who are blessed. Offers of help in many forms have come to us and each one has been so special and so appreciated. Each one has been lifted up in our worship gatherings with thanksgiving and praise to God. Each one has been prayed over, often with tears, as it truly is a humbling experience to have our feet washed when we are accustomed to washing the feet of others.

I can’t express how much every prayer has meant to us. We have and continue to feel the power of your prayers and love that are strengthening us to rise above and be a light any and everywhere we can. Our giving to mission and ministry around the world and here at home has not ceased in a season when it would be easy, and seem understandable, to focus on ourselves. Quite the opposite, we have been taken to a new level propelled forward by a fresh sense of determination to give God glory whatever comes, realizing we have been given a unique opportunity to share in ways that were not attainable to us before Dec. 15, 2014.

I was recently asked the question: “What has brought you joy through this situation?” I am most joyful that the Church has not ceased to be the Church. I am joyful that our foundation is firm and this event has not caused us to crumble, or squabble. I am joyful that God is using this situation, and us, for His good and His glory. The fire has refined and is refining us and we have a sense of knowing that God is doing something far greater than our eyes can see and our minds can fully comprehend.

At the end of each of our Sunday morning worship services, Mason’s Chapel UMC has a custom of singing a verse or so of a closing hymn/chorus after our Hymn of Invitation and Response and before our Benediction and Sending Forth. On Sunday, Dec. 14, the morning before the fire, we sang, “There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole; there is a balm in Gilead to heal the sin sick soul. Sometimes I feel discouraged, and think my work’s in vain, but then the Holy Spirit revives my soul again.” We have been revived by the Holy Spirit, the very Spirit who is symbolically represented by fire!

God does grant beauty for ashes. He does give the oil of joy for mourning. He revives us by the power of the Holy Spirit that we might take off the garment of heaviness and put on the garment of praise. HE rebuilds from the old ruins. My prayer is that we may we be trees of righteousness, a new planting of the Lord, that He would be glorified now and for generations to come in the name of Jesus, AMEN! ❞
March 28 concert raises $10,000+ for Trinity UMC (Brownsville) destroyed by fire in January

More than $10,000 was raised and more than 300 people attended a benefit concert for Trinity UMC on Saturday, March 28, according to Don Ammons, lay leader for the Brownsville District of the Memphis Conference of the United Methodist Church.

The concert took place at Ripley First UMC in Ripley, Tenn. Trinity UMC in the Nutbush community near Brownsville, Tenn., was destroyed by fire (set by still unknown arsonists) on Jan. 7. Read about the fire at www.memphis-umc.org.

“Local artists performed and the main attraction was the Finchers Quartet from Frog Jump (Tenn.) who donated their considerable talents,” reported Ammons.

Additional donations may be made to:
Joan Parks
Trinity UMC Treasurer
10871 Hwy 19 W
Brownsville, TN 38012

OR
Trinity Building Fund
c/o Ripley First UMC
145 S. Main St.,
Ripley, TN 38063

UMCOR received 804 relief supply kits from Memphis Conference in January

In early January, United Methodists in the Memphis Conference sent 804 relief-supply kits to the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR). The kits arrived at the UMCOR depot in Sager Brown, La., and represented more than $16,000 in donations.

A ministry of the United Methodist Church, UMCOR is a nonprofit organization that works in more than 80 countries, providing humanitarian relief to survivors of war, conflict and natural disasters. According to the UMCOR website, the organization collects six different types of relief-supply kits that help people in crisis. These types are bedding, birthing, health, layette (for basic baby needs), school and sewing.

“Each kit is a symbol of hope to someone experiencing a disaster in their lives,” Kathy Kraiza, UMCOR executive director of relief supplies, says. “We know that a cleaning bucket, for instance, will not clean a whole house after a flood. But it is a start, and it tells the survivor they are not alone; they don’t have to face this situation by themselves. That’s hope in the midst of disaster.”

In January, Memphis Conference members (United Methodist Women, Memphis Conference youth and more) donated the following kits:
• 19 bedding kits at $50 each = $950
• 25 birthing kits at $8 each = $200
• 8 cleaning buckets at $65 each = $520
• 132 health kits at $12 each = $1,584
• 248 school kits at $11 each = $2,728
• 372 sewing kits at $28 each = $10,416

Total kit donations represented a value of $16,398.

For more information about UMCOR kits and about how you may assemble and donate kits or donate funds, visit http://www.umcor.org/UMCOR/Relief-Supplies.

St. Paul UMC in Lakeland, Tenn., hosts seventh annual ‘Mission Focus Day’

By Janice McCallen St. Paul UMC

[First published on website 3/9/2015]

Neither rain, nor snow, nor sleet/ice, nor hail could keep the hands and feet of Christ from energetically working as the St. Paul UMC United Methodist Women (UMW) hosted their seventh annual “Mission Focus Day” on Saturday, Feb. 21.

Over 35 women, men, youth and children gathered to work on a variety of mission projects:
• 23 teddy bears were tenderly and carefully crafted and will be donated to Le Bonheur Children’s Hospital.
• 19 desk chair bags were cheerfully stitched by talented seamstresses and donated to Berclair Elementary School.
• 8 fleece baby blankets were stitched with love and donated to Hannah’s Hope.
• 8 sets of crocheted towels and dish cloths were crafted for Methodist Hospital’s gift shop. (Several ladies learned to crochet at this year’s event.)
• 80 ½ dozen cookies were baked for the upcoming Kairos prison ministry weekends. Children and youth got in on the action, as well. Cards and letters numbering 30 were creatively designed and decorated and sent to St. Paul UMC shut-ins. Our “Kids with a Mission” group created “Socks of Love” filled with toothbrushes, toothpaste and toiletry items for Manna House. They also weaved handmade placemats for Meals on Wheels recipients.

Mission Focus Day has become a very successful annual event for the UMW and provides another way for church members to be actively involved in mission and ministry.

Photos by Janice McCallen

Memphis Conference
The United Methodist Church
www.memphis-umc.org

NEWS ~ EVENTS ~ RESOURCES
Every girl is a princess, and the daughter of a king. That’s the message sent recently from Milan, Tenn., to young girls in all parts of the world.

Homemade, reversible dresses for girls were sewn and assembled by women at Milan First UMC in Milan, Tenn., and packed and shipped to destinations in rural Tennessee and Kentucky, Nicaragua, Haiti and Tanzania on the east coast of Africa.

Included with each colorful dress was a card with “The Princess Prayer” and a message: “Created especially for you and sent with love and a prayer.”

“The Princess Project: Dresses for Daughters of the King,” was organized by members of the Lillian Rust Circle, led by Jane Kizer and Karen Freeman. Other church members got involved, and the project grew to include community groups and churches in other towns. People donated fabric, buttons, materials and money.

During the church’s worship service on March 1, over 100 dresses were placed at the altar, and prayers and blessings were said.

The dresses are adorned with numerous designs - flowers, animal prints, checks, stripes, school days décor, butterflies, dinosaurs. They are sized for toddlers through children age six.

“The dresses were done for little girls to make them feel important and feel loved,” said Kizer. “What we wanted to do was let the girls know that somebody they don’t even know from somewhere else would take time to make them feel special. We wanted to let them know the feeling of God’s love. We prayed over the dresses. Anybody who was involved by donating money, or sewing or cutting material prayed over the dresses and these little girls that their lives will be touched in a positive way.”

The idea for the reversible designs and the basic pattern came from Kizer’s daughter, Hope, and granddaughters, Lilly and Hanna. “(Hope) wanted to make a dress for her second daughter, and the dress is easy to make,” said Kizer. “Some ladies will make a dress from start to finish, cutting out the material and sewing on the last button. Others do an assembly line. One lady cuts material; another applies and decorates; another sews; and another puts on buttons. The dresses are washable cotton blends.

Leading seamstresses for the project were Carolyn Cutlip, Kathy Cohan, Becky Hayes, Judy Hardy, Jane Ann Lane and Kizer. The patterns have four main seams that can be sewn quickly, said leaders.

The project began last October. At Christmas 20 dresses were prepared, and a fashion show was held. The first batch of dresses was sent to Reelfoot Rural Ministries, an agency of the Memphis Conference of the United Methodist Church, for its 2014 Christmas store.

“Our goal was to make about 70 dresses, but we had 130 dresses ready to go March 1,” said Freeman.

“My dream was to try to get other Methodist churches to do it, and that’s what happened,” said Cohan. Jackson Northside church, Mt. Pleasant near Whiteville, and Methodist churches in Camden and Halls took up the project. Members of the Milan Senior Center joined in. “It became a community-wide effort,” said Cohan. All total, the Milan church shipped about 150 dresses. T-shirts, white lace socks and tights went with some dresses.

The dresses are going to four areas: Reelfoot Rural Ministries, Jackson Northside Methodist Nicaragua mission, Hope for Haiti, and Tanzania where missionaries Eric and Liz Soard from Medina are in ministry.

“We have faith that they know where the greatest need is,” said Cohan. “I don’t always like to send money, because you’re not sure how it will be used.”

Milan church members hope to continue the project in the future. They welcome donations to pay for dress materials.

Each Princess Project dress carried a card with this message: “You are a daughter of the King of Kings! I pray you will always know how much God adores you! I pray you will see yourself the way He sees you – perfect in His eyes. May you always treat yourself as a precious and irreplaceable child of the Lord, and not settle for anything less than you are worth. I pray you will never let anyone tell you that you are any less than beautiful, and may you always listen to your heavenly Father, who knows the real you and loves you infinitely! May you always shine for Him! In Jesus’ precious name. Amen.”

The cards also contained a Bible scripture 139:14: “I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.”

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Lexington First UMC thanks local grocery store, staff and customers for helping stock its food pantry

During the 2014 Christmas season, the Save-A-Lot grocery store near Lexington First UMC in Lexington, Tenn., sold 329 coupons for the church’s food pantry, according to a Jan. 16 post on the church’s Facebook page.

The coupons represented $5 or $10 bags of food donations for the pantry, which means Save-A-Lot’s efforts stocked the food pantry’s shelves with $1,935 worth of food items.

On Jan. 16, the church thanked the grocery store, its staff and customers on its Facebook page.