“Offering Christ to a Hurting World” was the theme for the 2015 Memphis Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church that took place May 31-June 3 in Jackson, Tenn., with Bishop William T. “Bill” McAlilly presiding.

Jackson’s Civic Center was the location for most events while Jackson First United Methodist Church hosted the Sunday evening memorial service, Monday evening ordination service, childcare and meal events.

Reminding delegates and guests on the last day about the overall purpose of annual conference, McAlilly said, “I want Christ to use you to change the world.”

175th Anniversary
2015 marked the conference’s 175th anniversary (176th session) and was celebrated with a series of “historical moments” on the agenda. The Memphis Conference, which dates to 1840, covers West Tennessee and Western Kentucky.

Worship Services
Seven worship services took place among the business and teaching sessions.

Youth from across the Memphis Conference ended their May 29-31 “Youth Annual Conference,” also in Jackson, by leading the annual conference’s opening service on Sunday afternoon. “IGNITE!” was the theme of the youth gathering, a message repeated in the opening service with words, music and dance.

Lauren Riley, a member of McKenzie First United Methodist Church in McKenzie, Tenn., and children and youth director of Greenfield United Methodist Church in Greenfield, Tenn., reminded delegates and visitors, “We are to wash feet and not have ours washed.”

Memphis Conference clergy and spouses who died in the previous year and numbered 18 were remembered in a Sunday evening memorial service. Retiring pastor Rev. Larry J. Daniel of Lexington First United Methodist Church in Lexington, Tenn., delivered the sermon, “Why I Believe in Resurrection.”

Pointing out that Christians rejoice at transformation, not extinction, Daniel said, “God is more powerful than death.” A clergy choir sang during this service.

After separate clergy and laity sessions on Monday morning, Bishop McAlilly led the Monday morning service with his “Wake Up to Love” message. He probed the notion that too often “our first love of Jesus” is being replaced with “church stuff” and that “loyalty to the institution” prevents us from tending to our own souls and serving others.

McAlilly reminded those gathered that the world watches closely how Christians love.


Bishop Larry M. Goodpaster, resident bishop of the Western North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church, was the preacher for the Monday evening service of commissioning and ordination of elders with licensing of local pastors.

“How I See” was the title of Goodpaster’s sermon. He asked newly-credentialed clergy, “How will you help people see Jesus?”

“Do not try to do it alone” and “Lose yourself through wonder, love and praise,” he advised.

“Follow Jesus,” Goodpaster said, by serving the poor, eating with sinners, associating with those who are pushed around, sharing the good news of hope.

Continued on page 3
Reidland UMC youth group gave out candy to help raise camp and mission trip funds

[First published on website 5/21/2015]

The youth at Reidland UMC in Paducah, Ky., raised money for summer missions in the “sweetest” way.

On Mother’s Day, May 10, youth group members passed out tubes of Mini M&M candies to everyone who walked through the church’s door for Sunday morning service. In return, they asked the congregation to collect quarters over the subsequent weeks and deposit them into the empty M&M tubes. Then, the group asked people to donate any tubes they filled. One candy container full of quarters might equal $10.

According to the church’s Facebook page, money received will go toward summer youth activities like the Paducah Urban Mission Plunge, a Paducah-based youth camp that emphasizes local missions.

Millington First UMC gifts old choir robes to another UM church choir

[First published on website 4/30/2015]

This spring, members of Millington First UMC in Millington, Tenn., received new choir robes and donated their old robes to another United Methodist church choir.

According to Millington First UMC’s newsletter, choir members began to discuss replacing their old, green robes last summer. Jane Munsell, choir director, said many of the choir’s robes had begun showing signs of wear. And then an anonymous donor volunteered to purchase new robes.

Munsell started working with Lisa Albert of Cokesbury to order new robes and learned from Albert that many church choirs gift used robes to congregations that need new robes, but can’t afford them.

The Millington First UMC old robes were soon repaired, cleaned and delivered to Embury UMC in Millington that had been identified as wanting to receive the old robes.

‘CARE about Crime’ was theme of May 9 men’s breakfast in Jackson

[First published on website 4/20/2015]

Captain Tyreece Miller of the Jackson, Tenn., Police Department was the guest speaker May 9 at a breakfast in recognition of National Law Enforcement Week at Northside UMC. Also speaking was Madison County Chief Deputy John Lewoczko.

Captain Miller, commander of the department’s Criminal Investigation Division, spoke about a new program aimed at helping victims of crime, particularly those who’ve experienced violent crime. The program is called Clergy Assistance Response Effort (CARE).

The breakfast, hosted by Northside UMC’s United Methodist Men, was held in advance of National Law Enforcement Week, which ran May 10-16.

In appreciation of local law enforcement officers and their dedication to the community, 275 copies of “Strength for Service to God and Community,” a daily devotional written for first responders engaged in service to others, were presented to local officers. Funds for these devotionals were donated by members of Northside UMC and Aldersgate UMC, also in Jackson.

“We have about 350 local peace officers who watch over, protect and defend our community day and night. They’ve chosen their professions knowing there will be times when, without personal regard, they will put themselves in harm’s way,” said Bob Sharp, president of the Jackson District United Methodist Men. “Handing out these books during National Peace Officers Week is our way of saying thank you for your service to others.”

Five Jackson Area UM churches collaborated for ‘Breaking Down the Walls’ youth week in July

[Fist published on website 5/11/2015]

Five Jackson, Tenn., area United Methodist churches collaborated to bring junior and senior high school students together to impact the city this summer.

Student ministry from Grace UMC, Northside UMC, Jackson First UMC, Lambuth Memorial UMC and Medina First UMC joined together to “break down walls and get to work!” during a July 22-26 Youth Week.

Students did mission work in the mornings across the city – in churches and in the community. Afternoons and evenings were filled with a variety of worship, teaching, social and recreational activities.
and healing, and creating a culture that mirrors the character and life of Jesus.

• Ordained as elders were David Coleman Stewart, Gregory Scott Shrein Taylor and Derek Wayne White.

• Commissioned as elders were Chris Alan Eaves, Robert Michael Potter, Kristofer Santos Roof and Ademola Okunola Sodinde.

• Commissioned for provisional membership with orders from another tradition was Dennis Vance, Jr.

• Licensed as local pastors were Lindsey Byard, Susan Engle, Robert Ferguson, Tondala Hayward, Jimmy Horn, Jr., Mike Hutcherson, Kim Morrison, Brian Stahl, Janeane Tinsley and Bernardo Zapata.

“An Analysis of Paralysis” was the message from Rev. Dr. Cynthia D. Davis, Metro McKendree District superintendent, during the Tuesday afternoon service. The multi-cultural service reflected different races, languages and musical styles.

While it can be easy to become paralyzed when burdened, she said Jesus speaks to “our circumstances” and “death is not the end.”

The closing service of sending on Wednesday afternoon included the setting of 2015 appointments and a homily by Bishop McAlilly, “By Faith We Travel.”

Among other parting words, McAlilly told clergy and laity, “I send you out as “truth tellers and witnesses” for Jesus Christ.

Teaching Sessions

Teaching sessions conducted by Bishop McAlilly during annual conference dealt with Chapter 4 of the Gospel of John about “the woman at the well.” The themes of the three sessions were “An Unexpected Perspective,” “Well People” and “Why Her? Why Me?”

Print and video materials used in the teaching sessions are being made available to all churches to access and use in the coming year.

Offerings for Imagine No Malaria and The Jerusalem Fund

Offerings during annual conference benefited two initiatives: Imagine No Malaria, a campaign of the global United Methodist Church to end malaria through education, communication and treatment, and The Jerusalem Fund, a confidential ministry that provides assistance to Memphis Conference clergy facing short-term financial hardships.

Attendees celebrated the year-long effort that raised $276,457.34 for Imagine No Malaria by wearing red on the last day of annual conference.

Delegate Elections

Elections took place to choose lay and clergy delegates to represent the Memphis Conference at General (worldwide) Conference and Jurisdictional (Southeastern U.S.) Conference in 2016.

Lay Delegates to General Conference

• David R. Reed, Martin First UMC, Martin, TN – first lay delegate

• Elyse Bell, Paris First UMC, Paris, TN - second lay delegate

Clergy Delegates to General Conference

• Sky McCracken, Purchase District superintendent – 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 (also first lay alternate to General Conference)

• Isabelle Dillard, St. John’s UMC, Memphis, TN - second lay delegate (also 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 (also first clergy alternate to General Conference)

• Jonathan L. Jeffords, St. John’s UMC, Memphis TN - second clergy delegate (also second 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

Episcopal Candidate

Delegates endorsed the candidacy of Rev. Sky McCracken for the episcopacy. He currently serves as dean of the Memphis Conference Board of Laity.

Youth Activities

In addition to the Youth Annual Conference that took place just prior to annual conference, youth were active participants in several worship services.

Elin Bell from Martin First United Methodist Church in Martin, Tenn., delivered the “Young People’s Address,” sponsored by the Memphis Conference Board of Laity. She answered the question, “What do we need to do to offer Christ to a hurting world?”

Black College Fund Ambassador Johnny Benjamin Scott III of Huston-Tillotson University in Austin, TX, delivered a message entitled, “Excellence without Excuses” and thanked the Memphis Conference for its support of the Black College Fund of the United Methodist General Board of Higher Education and Ministry.

Partner Today and Project Transformation

Lynn McAlilly, married to Bishop McAlilly, shared her passion for children, education, literacy and ending poverty – issues that are all intertwined – with a presentation about two initiatives: “Partner Today” that she started in 2014 and “Project Transformation.”

An elementary public school teacher for 20 years, she continues to challenge Memphis Conference churches and small groups to form partnerships with local schools, classrooms and teachers.

“Education and literacy are at the core of the best interest of children,” said Mrs. McAlilly, who reminded churches they must minister to their communities and not just their churches.

Redistricting

McCracken reported on the redistricting of the Memphis Conference that was approved in 2014 – to go from seven to four districts by the beginning of the next quadrennium that begins in 2016.

In April of 2015 the conference reduced to five districts with new names:

• Purchase District: 8 counties in Western Kentucky

• Mississippi River District: 8 counties in Northwest Tennessee

• Tennessee River District: 10 counties just west of the Tennessee River in Western Tennessee

• Metro-Asbury District AND Metro-McKendree District: 3 counties in Southwest Tennessee.

These will continue as two districts until 2016 when they will come together as one district.

The April changes were implemented, McCracken explained, to allow time to ease into the new district structure and begin to address any unintended consequences before June 2016. Read more about redistricting on the Memphis Conference website at www.memphis-umc.org.

Resolutions

The annual conference adopted four Resolutions:

• One about district dialogue on the inclusion of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people in the life of the church

• One about church participation in public school reading programs

• One about production of the Memphis Conference Journal

• One about a review of the conference’s standing rules to simplify, update, organize and align them with the conference’s mission statement, core values and focus areas

Budget

The annual conference approved a budget of $8,655,761 for mission and ministry in 2016.

This is a $269,161 (3.02 percent) decrease from 2015.

Bethany K. Huffman, president
McKenzie First UMC bulletin board helps spread messages of encouragement

Want a new idea for encouraging your congregation? McKenzie First UMC in McKenzie, Tenn., recently created a bulletin board focused on encouragement. Anna Brockman, director of children and youth ministries at the church, saw a similar project on Pinterest and decided to turn one of the church’s information bulletin boards into a space for prayer and positivity during Lent. Brockman covered the boards in colorful construction paper and posted the words “Take what you need” and “Give what you can.” The “Take what you need” side contained Post-It notes with words and phrases like “encouragement” and “understanding.” Church members could peruse the messages and choose messages to take with them as physical reminders that God and the Church recognize their needs. The “Give what you can” side held notes with words and phrases like “a hug” or “a hand-written note.” People could use those as reminders of their own capacities to support others.

Some people, Brockman said, moved notes from the “Give what you can” side to the “Take what you need” side. She guessed the gesture was another way of spreading encouragement. The McKenzie First UMC bulletin board was a physical reminder of the value and importance of “encouragement” in the life of a congregation. Submitted photo

Two United Methodist churches in Carroll County help take ‘Vacation Bible School’ into community

A total of 43 children attended one or more days of Vacation Bible School (VBS), thanks to the efforts of two Carroll County, Tenn., United Methodist churches.

New Hope UMC in Vale, Tenn., and Hebron UMC in Hebron, Tenn., worked together and were assisted by other churches in the county to offer a community VBS for ages three through teens, June 8-12 at the Vale Community Center. The VBS ran 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. each day and used a curriculum called “G-Force.” Children learned about God’s love and enjoyed songs, scripture lessons, Bible verses, crafts, science/nature lessons and food.

“Children from the whole community came,” said Rhonda Crawford. “It was such a great response. We had children from all walks of life.” Crawford is a Sunday School teacher and youth director at New Hope UMC.

“I was overjoyed with the response from the kids,” continued Crawford. “They loved all of the zones. We kept them moving and active.”

Crafts were among the many activities enjoyed by children at a community Vacation Bible School in Vale, Tenn., this summer. Submitted photo

Pickwick UMC creates prayer labyrinth and receives health kit donations for UMCOR

In early May, the congregation of Pickwick UMC in Counce, Tenn., created a prayer labyrinth in its fellowship hall. According to a post on the church’s Facebook page, a host greeted participants and provided them with instructions on the labyrinth’s use and purpose.

A labyrinth is a path that leads to the center of an intricate design and back out again. It is used to facilitate prayer, meditation, spiritual transformation and global unity. Read more: http://www.gotquestions.org/prayer-labyrinth.html#ixzz3fDwlolpL

The church also set up a table to receive health kit donations for United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR).

The post said members kept the fellowship hall in a spirit of prayer for three days.

Lakeshore thanks Archers Chapel UMC for gifts

Archers Chapel UMC in Frog Jump, Tenn., is among many churches and individuals that donated helpful items to Lakeshore Camp and Retreat Center for its 2015 summer camp season.

Lakeshore is the camp and retreat ministry of the Memphis Conference (West Tennessee and Western Kentucky) of The United Methodist Church.

Donated items included board games, office supplies, children’s books, water shoes and craft supplies.

In a recent edition of its electronic newsletter, Lakeshore extended a special thanks to Archers Chapel UMC for its donations of board games, life jackets, art supplies, footballs, basketballs, soccer balls and volleyballs.

“These wonderful items will be used by all of our campers this summer,” the newsletter said.

Gift from Paducah Sub-District of ‘United Methodist Men’ sends 20 kids to summer camp at Lakeshore

A group of 20 elementary school-age campers (photo at right) was recently able to attend a week of summer camp at Lakeshore Camp and Retreat Center in Eva, Tenn., thanks to a gift of over $7,000 from the Paducah Sub-District of the Purchase District United Methodist Men (UMM).

Lakeshore is the camp and retreat ministry of the Memphis Conference (West Tennessee and Western Kentucky) of the United Methodist Church.

“Each year, several UMM groups from the Paducah area, including McCracken and Ballard Counties, raise money to cover the cost of tuition, transportation and in-transit meals for up to 20 campers ages 8 to 11,” reported Joe Burkhead, UMM volunteer.

“Lakeshore is truly one of our (Methodist, Memphis Conference) greatest assets, and here are 20 examples why,” added Burkhead, referring to the 20 children who benefited from the experience.

A group of 20 elementary school-age campers (photo at right) was recently able to attend a week of summer camp at Lakeshore Camp and Retreat Center in Eva, Tenn., thanks to a gift of over $7,000 from the Paducah Sub-District of the Purchase District United Methodist Men (UMM).

Lakeshore is the camp and retreat ministry of the Memphis Conference (West Tennessee and Western Kentucky) of the United Methodist Church.

“Each year, several UMM groups from the Paducah area, including McCracken and Ballard Counties, raise money to cover the cost of tuition, transportation and in-transit meals for up to 20 campers ages 8 to 11,” reported Joe Burkhead, UMM volunteer.

“Lakeshore is truly one of our (Methodist, Memphis Conference) greatest assets, and here are 20 examples why,” added Burkhead, referring to the 20 children who benefited from the experience.

A group of 20 elementary school-age campers (photo at right) was recently able to attend a week of summer camp at Lakeshore Camp and Retreat Center in Eva, Tenn., thanks to a gift of over $7,000 from the Paducah Sub-District of the Purchase District United Methodist Men (UMM).

Lakeshore is the camp and retreat ministry of the Memphis Conference (West Tennessee and Western Kentucky) of the United Methodist Church.

“Each year, several UMM groups from the Paducah area, including McCracken and Ballard Counties, raise money to cover the cost of tuition, transportation and in-transit meals for up to 20 campers ages 8 to 11,” reported Joe Burkhead, UMM volunteer.

“Lakeshore is truly one of our (Methodist, Memphis Conference) greatest assets, and here are 20 examples why,” added Burkhead, referring to the 20 children who benefited from the experience.
Members of two Jackson, Tenn., UMCs (Aldersgate & Jackson First) make medical mission trip to Haiti

By Susan Crocker, Jackson First UMC, Jackson, TN [First published on website 5/11/2015]

Hands were clapping on every side of me, and I could hear hymns rising up in the early morning, warm air.

The sun rising held promise of another hot day in Haiti. The sounds of rhythmic clapping and singing in another language were exciting and spiritual. The wooden benches vibrated as the clapping and singing got louder and louder. Our American team looked around at each other when we recognized the song being sung as “How Great Thou Art.”

I held a severely disabled child, Pierre Richard, on my lap and my hands held his as we clapped together and sang the song in his language and mine. Each of us later recounted that moment in time as a “God moment.” The heat, the sweaty bodies, the clapping and singing of the Haitians with their hands, faces and smiles lifted up in the midst of this impoverished place to sing praises to Jesus was unforgettable.

“Advent” means the arrival of illumination or grace or redemption itself; but even for those Haitians without belief, the country seems to be standing on tiptoe, offering a sense of expectancy and attention. I’ve been one of the few on our planet who’s never known homelessness or hunger or a first-hand view of war; I’ve had all the comfort and ease I could want.

Our April 2015 mission team from two churches in Jackson, Tenn. (Aldersgate UMC and Jackson First UMC) saw how the other half (which is to say, 99.7 percent of our neighbors on the planet) lives and we looked a little beyond our too-comfortable ideas and easy assumptions.

Yet, sitting in the open air, tin-roofed, jam-packed church that morning singing hymns ... it was as if Advent was happening at that moment.

Many things are beyond description... How do you tell someone about the child on the dirty mattress in a cinder block home alone and unable to move? How do you describe inhumanity? The answer: You can’t.

During the course of the April 11-17 week, we all decided there was more than the mind can attempt to wrap itself around. There is a place that is hell on earth. Yet, there is a prevalent sense of passion in every heart you meet. There are cheek kisses, arm strokes and shoulder squeezes. There is a focus of living every day for God. Praises are lifted up for Jesus constantly and when you pray, it is fervently for healing of this child of God. Every one matters - every single one.

Peter, our team dentist, described the moment a tooth broke and Regan prayed it would come out whole. Two seconds later it did. Praises were sung.

Lorie brought a tiny, three-week-old baby around for us to see. She was severely malnourished and dehydrated and her mother was unable to care for her.

Bill and Mickey rubbed scabies cream on heads and toes and offered kind and patient touches.

Courtney spent all day with Peter disinfecting dental instruments and offering a kind smile and making everyone feel comfortable and laugh.

Greg, our team physician, patiently listened to every complaint of headache, stomach ache, etc. He and Deline, a resident, were the front lines of medical care.

Jacob and Barry prayed for each person in the clinic each day.

The patient sees all the doctors. Then, before leaving, hands of prayer are laid on that person for a very personal prayer of healing.

Bob was our front line man. As people arrived, he made sure everyone was in the right line and stayed there. It was no easy task. He weighed, measured, laughed and joked with everyone. He was the first person each day to offer a kind touch and smile.

I was the fortunate one; I worked with severely disabled and at-risk children. The five children I worked with during the week would break your heart. Yet, they would light up as we volunteers played and taught them colors and songs.

Not all of us can go to Haiti, but we can each find a place that is in need. It might be five minutes from your house. It might be a smile at the grocery counter or when you open your door. It might be a smile at a hospital where someone is in pain. If you are reading this in the middle of one of your anxious moments, remember that the Haitians without belief, the place where you live, the children who are malnourished and the children who are undernourished who you meet. There are cheek kisses, arm strokes and shoulder squeezes. There is a focus of living every day for God. Praises are lifted up for Jesus constantly and when you pray, it is fervently for healing of this child of God. Every one matters - every single one.

Reach out, open up and find them. Find the spirit that is its center and it becomes something you bring back into your “regular life.” There is an expectation of Christ coming here in Haiti. Advent (Perhaps that is what Haiti has taught me?) need not be the focus of only one season.

O come, O come, Emmanuel
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appears.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel!
dent of the Memphis Conference Council on Finance and Administration (CFA) said CFA continues to work toward a budget that is aligned with the conference’s mission.

**Language Translation**
For the first time ever, this annual conference provided language translation assistance to Spanish and Korean-speaking delegates with the assistance of equipment from the United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries and volunteer interpreters. Sign language interpretation was provided as it has been for many years.

**Denman Evangelism Awards**
Three individuals were named recipients of the 2015 Memphis Conference Harry Denman Evangelism Awards:
- Clergy: Mark Earheart of Dresden First United Methodist Church in Dresden, Tenn.
- Laity: Sue Engle, Memphis Conference Intentional Discipleship Action Team leader and, since June 2014, pastor of Trinity United Methodist Church in Paducah, Ky.
- Youth: Hailey Gilbert of Collierville United Methodist Church in Collierville, Tenn.

Sponsored by the Foundation for Evangelism, the Denman Award honors those who have made outstanding efforts in Wesleyan evangelism by helping to bring others into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

**Other Awards**
- Cynthia Bond Hopson on staff at the United Methodist Board of Higher Education and Ministry as assistant general secretary for The Black College Fund and ethnic concerns, received the Francis Asbury Award for “outstanding service in supporting, strengthening and promoting the church’s higher education ministries.”
- Kathryn Nation was honored as the recipient of a scholarship from Martin Methodist College in Pulaski, Tenn.

**Prayer**
A room in the Civic Center was transformed into a “prayer room” – a place for delegates and visitors to go who needed a quiet place for prayer. Morning prayer services with communion took place in the prayer room on three mornings.

**Banquets and Luncheons**
Bishop McAlilly and Sue Engle were the speakers for a laity banquet. “1 of the 72 – Is God calling your congregation?” was the subject of their presentation about an initiative begun by Bishop McAlilly in 2014. Learn more at www.72plusyou.com. Retired clergy, clergy spouses and women clergy also had private meal events.

**Exhibits and Displays**
More than 40 organizations with ties to the Memphis Conference and The United Methodist Church had displays and exhibits throughout the Civic Center.

**Streaming and Social Media**
2015 marked the third time the Memphis Annual Conference was streamed, allowing non-attendees to watch live from their homes, churches and offices.

Using hashtag #2015mac, social media provided a way for conference attendees to participate in online discussion before, during and after the event.

**2016 Memphis Annual Conference**
Delegates voted to meet June 19-22 at Northside United Methodist Church in Jackson, Tenn., for the 2016 Memphis Annual Conference.

**Other Business**
Attendees also:
- Welcomed the conference’s new treasurer, Larry Davis, and new director of connectional ministries, Dr. Joe Geary.
- Were introduced to Synolve Croft, new executive director of United Methodist Neighborhood Centers; Michael Ugwuueke, new president and chief operating officer of Methodist Le Bonheur Healthcare; Rev. Marco Antonio Gonzalez Cortes of the Eastern Mexico Conference; and Brittany Martin of Paris First United Methodist Church, global justice volunteer (Philippines) with the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries
- Prayed with and for clergy and laity representatives of four Memphis Conference churches affected by fires in the previous six months: Masons Chapel United Methodist Church in Hazel, KY; Trinity United Methodist Church in Brownsville, Tenn.; Mt. Pleasant United Methodist Church in Dresden, Tenn.; and Trinity United Methodist Church in Paris, Tenn. Three of the four churches were completely destroyed by fire. Two were the result of arson.
- Participated in tours of the Lambuth Heritage Rooms on the University of Memphis Lambuth Campus in Jackson. The rooms celebrate the educational history and religious life of United Methodist-affiliated Lambuth University before it closed in 2011 and became part of the University of Memphis.
- Received reports from many different boards, agencies and affiliated organizations of the conference.

**More Information**
More information, including video and photos, about the 2015 Memphis Annual Conference is available on the Memphis Conference website at www.memphis-umc.org or by emailing communications@memphis-umc.org.

Presiding Bishop William T. McAlilly (top) and ordination service (bottom).

Find more pictures, video, reports and transcriptions at www.memphis-umc.net/2015AC
Clockwise spiral from top left:
» elected delegation to 2016 General and Jurisdictional Conferences;
» Bishop Larry M. Goodpaster at ordination service;
» Memphis Conference youth at opening service;
» Bishop McAlilly and youth speaker Erin Bell;
» award presentation to Cynthia Bond Hopson by Dr. Cynthia Davis;
» Treasurer's office staff Larry Davis and Clare Wilson;
» memorial service speaker, Rev. Larry J. Daniel;
» Bishop McAlilly commissioning elders;
» youth at multi-cultural, multi-language service;
» Rev. Sky McCracken addressing delegates about his episcopal candidacy.

Photos by Lane Gardner Camp
At Colonial Park United Methodist Church in Memphis, TN, the “Takin’ It to the Streets” ministry has been in place for about three years. Every Sunday morning, after The Gathering worship service (the church’s 9:30 a.m. modern-style worship service), a group of people will meet in the kitchen at the back of the gym and assemble 50-60 sack lunches to take out on the street to feed the needy. Each sack lunch consists of a bologna and cheese sandwich, chips, snack crackers, a breakfast bar, Vienna sausage and a chicken or tuna box kit. We always take a large cooler full of water and sometimes coffee to pass out along with the lunches.

Around 11:15 a.m or so, a handful of people will head out to a location where mostly Hispanic day workers wait in hopes of getting some work. These men are not homeless, but are still needy and hungry. We spend maybe 30 minutes passing out lunches and visiting. The language barrier does cause some communication problems, but the men are very pleased to get something to eat.

Next, we head down the street to another location where a group gathers that consists of persons best described as “just down on their luck.” They might be homeless, unemployed or dealing with substance abuse issues. We know most of these men and women by their first names and they know our names. Many times there are small children wanting one of our lunches. There is nothing more humbling than handing these children one of our meager lunch sacks. Many Sundays someone will request that we pray together. We will form a circle in the parking lot, hold hands and pray.

Sometimes, one of the people receiving one of our lunches will lead the prayer. Recently, one of our longtime friends from the streets, known as Dead Eye (David), passed away. Holly, one of the regulars we see, contacted our group and requested we have a time of prayer and remembrance for David. We did just that right there in the parking lot. We had our prayer circle and different people shared how they knew David and how he had influenced their lives. A few balloons were released in David’s memory.

We know that, for the most part, these men and women are content with their lifestyle and make no effort to improve their situation. It is not our place to judge, and we don’t really know how they got in their situations, but one day a week we provide them with something to eat and a little fellowship and we let them know we care about them. Some have attended The Gathering worship with us on Sunday mornings.

We have recently joined with another church on the second and fourth Sundays of each month to serve a hot lunch. We still provide sack lunches so our guests will have something to eat later. We meet around 12:30 p.m. which allows people attending Colonial Park UMC’s 11 a.m. worship service to participate in this ministry.

We “take it to the streets” each and every Sunday, no matter the weather or how many people are available to go out that particular day. This ministry is open to anyone who wants to participate – not just members of Colonial Park UMC.

We invite you to come out with us. 

The second season of Room in the Inn at Trinity UMC was more successful than organizers could have imagined when they started the program two years ago.

Room in the Inn (RITI) provides emergency overnight shelter to individuals experiencing homelessness during the coldest months of the year – Nov. 1 through March 31.

This season Trinity UMC provided a total of 274 beds over 22 sessions and averaged 12 guests per night. An average of 34 volunteers took part in each session, which included those involved in transportation, setup, clothes closet, meal preparation, serving guests, dinner cleanup, fellowship, staying overnight, serving breakfast, morning cleanup and laundry.

In total, 159 volunteers served at least once, however, most served many nights and mornings in regular positions. Most of the regular volunteers came from the Trinity UMC congregation, but others are from the neighborhood, local churches and other area groups. Below are seven groups that were involved this season:

- Binghampton UMC
- Miki Skeen’s Homeschool Service Learners
- Church on the Square
- St. Peter Catholic Church
- Redeemer Presbyterian Church
- Christ UMC Blessing Sunday School Class
- Second Presbyterian Church

The program also had individual volunteers representing Boy Scout Troop 13, Rhodes College Bonner Scholars, St. Mary’s Episcopal Church, St. John Orthodox Church, Saint John’s Episcopal Church, Calvary Episcopal Church and Christ UMC.

One of the things I love most about this program is the way people of different faiths come together to serve God by serving our unsheltered neighbors.

Along with faithful volunteers, Trinity UMC also had many dedicated prayer warriors and donors, who gave much-needed funds, clothes, coats and supplies.

RITI is spiritually transforming our church and the individuals who are involved. The guests experience kindness and respect in a safe, non-judgmental atmosphere. The volunteers quickly learn that our unsheltered neighbors are just like them, but they have faced a crisis or two or three without a safety net.

To learn more about RITI-Memphis at Trinity UMC, email or call me (loislane.young@comcast.net, 870-559-2228) or visit www.trinites.net/room-in-the-inn.html. Other church groups are welcome to cook and serve evening meals or just provide more volunteers for the many tasks that must be completed for each session.

During the 2014-2015, individuals representing 74 congregations volunteered at 16 churches. Learn more about this growing ministry at www.roomintheinn-memphis.org. RITI is all about sharing the love of God with our neighbors in need. Won’t you join us?!
‘Bread of Life’ feeding ministries of Covington First UMC celebrated five-year anniversary by announcing new partnership with Munford First UMC

By. Rev. Grace Phelps, Covington First UMC [First published on website 5/18/2015]

Bread of Life feeding ministries recently celebrated its five-year anniversary of distributing food to people in need in Tipton County, Tenn.

Since April 10, 2010, Bread of Life volunteers have distributed more than 480 tons of food to over 2,700 families. Families can get food once every 30 days if they have a need. Many elderly and disabled persons and families living below the poverty line rely upon the food provided to meet their basic nutritional needs.

Bread of Life is a member agency of the Mid-South Food Bank. The ministry began as an outreach of Covington First UMC in Covington, Tenn., and distributed food first and third Saturdays in Covington and second and fourth Saturdays in Brighton, Tenn.

As of May 2015, Bread of Life has entered into a new partnership with Munford First UMC in Munford, Tenn. The church family at Munford has opened their hearts and made space in their building to provide storage for the food. The first food distribution day at Munford First UMC will be Saturday, May 23, and will continue on the second and fourth Saturdays each month.

Sign-up begins at 8 a.m. and food distribution takes place between 9 and 11 a.m. God has provided faithfully for this ministry and this new partnership is yet another example of his abundant grace.

Bread of Life relies on freewill giving from individuals, churches and other groups throughout the community to purchase the food from the Mid-South Food Bank. There are no government grants or subsidies. The food at Mid-South Food Bank averages about 9-cents per pound, so a $50 gift purchase about 500 pounds of food. Bread of Life also receives weekly food donations from Wal-Mart and Kroger in Covington which include meats, fresh produce, bakery items and miscellaneous dry and canned goods.

Over 200 persons currently volunteer their time to make the food distribution happen each week – picking up food in Memphis, stocking pantry shelves, and distributing food on Saturdays. We are blessed with volunteers from over 20 area churches, plus scout troops, homeschooler groups, honor society members and other youth who serve. Most volunteers work once a month. Bread of Life is grateful for the support of the community in serving those in need.

For more information about receiving food, donating or volunteering your time at Bread of Life, call me at 901-476-9694.

Millington First UMC celebrated ‘Creation Care Weekend’ with seminars and songs

Millington First UMC in Millington, Tenn., celebrated Creation Care Weekend April 25 and 26.

Members of a Creation Care Weekend Committee designed the event to promote environmental awareness in the congregation. It began with a breakfast and seminar from 9 a.m. to noon on Saturday, April 25. The lecture focused on new and environmentally-friendly sources of energy, as well as on the production of energy from solar, bio-fuels and wind generation.

According to the church’s newsletter, James Burkhead, plant manager for Clean Energy Renewable Fuels, spoke, as well, about renewable energy alternatives and paid special attention to Tennessee’s largest solar farm, located by Interstate 40 east of Shelby County. The newsletter also said participants learned about other new projects that directly impact the community.

Nathan Rawls delivered a lesson called “Creating Hell Around Us” during the Sunday School hour on Sunday, April 26, and a reception followed. Church member Kyle Bomar presented the sermon for both services that day. The worship service focused on praise for God’s Creation and on an individual’s responsibility as a stewards of that creation. The adult and children’s choirs and the church’s youth gave special performances.

Memphis Conference is now on Instagram!

The Memphis Conference (West Tennessee and Western Kentucky) of The United Methodist Church is now on Instagram: https://instagram.com/um_memphisconf

The conference communications department has opened up an account on Instagram, a popular social media site for sharing photographs and videos. The department is now using the handle “@um_memphisconf” and plans to post news, videos and updates from United Methodist churches across west Tennessee and western Kentucky.

“Instagram is a great way to capture and share photos and short videos of events happening in your church,” Carla Taylor, chair of the Memphis Conference Communications Team, says. “You can easily then share them on Facebook and Twitter. We hope with our new Memphis Conference Instagram account, our local churches will be able to share what’s happening with our conference and the world.”
Northside UMC in Jackson, Tenn., makes a difference in Tanzania, Africa

By Eric Soard, United Methodist Missionary in Tanzania
[First published on website 5/15/2015]

We enjoyed a blessing this past month when a favorite ministry partner of ours, Northside UMC in Jackson, Tenn., sent a team to visit. This is the third trip church members have made to Tanzania, and they always uplift Christians here, especially because now they have an on-going relationship with Gamasara UMC, our local Tanzanian church.

While Northside’s volunteers were in Tanzania, they helped teach carpentry to youth; they led a women’s seminar on issues of health, violence against women and raising livestock; they helped with the nursery school; they participated in a service to consecrate the Gamasara UMC building; and, as always, they built new relationships and strengthened old ones.

I loved that they hosted simultaneous activities for men and women that week. While the women attended seminars, roughly 12 young men in the village learned about woodworking by making benches for the church. They also talked about the “man of God” concept and the importance of caring for others instead of abusing them.

This dual empowerment was a beautiful picture of what we, as Christians, should work toward. The seminars didn’t try to take power from one group and give it to another, but they conveyed the message that we are stronger together. This is similar to the African concept of Ubuntu, which means, “I am because you are,” or, “a person is a person through other people.”

My wife Liz and I have already seen changes take place in our town simply because a small group of people has invested in this community. Abusive husbands have started taking care of the farm work on Sundays so their families can go to church. Women with no self-confidence now operate small business projects and make their own money. Children are beginning find their voices in front of others.

Transformation is possible through partnership and, more importantly, through the relational strength of God.

Emmanuel UMC embraces idea of ‘offering Christ to a hurting world, one neighborhood at a time’
[First published on website 7/6/2015]

Emmanuel UMC in Memphis, Tenn., strives to live out the Memphis Conference’s mission statement by “offering Christ to a hurting world, one neighborhood at a time.”

This spring, the church let its surrounding community know it cares by hosting or participating in at least six outreach events listed below.

Emmanuel Feeds
Members packaged 20,448 outreach meals during Emmanuel Feeds, an April meal packaging event at Emmanuel UMC.

Project 20/20
The church hosted students from Southern College of Optometry who visited the Project 20/20 lab at Emmanuel UMC. The students observed eyeglass processing for mission teams around the world.

Walking Group
The Walking Group participated in the Church Health Center’s Walking as One event. They raised $170 in support of a happier, healthier city. The funds go toward the Faith Community Nursing Ministry.

Jacob’s Ladder
Youth participated in a Jacob’s Ladder event at the Beltline Community Center on Boston Street in Memphis. They helped plant trees, lay sod, clear lots and perform yard work by working alongside residents.

Joy Prom
Youth volunteered at the Joy Prom, a special needs prom held at Christ UMC in Memphis. They are served as “dates” and “paparazzi.”

Belle Forest Community School
Members tutored students in reading at the Belle Forest Community School.

Follow Bishop McAlilly on his Blog:
www.bishopbillmcalilly.com

Follow us on Twitter
Twitter.com/UM_MemphisConf
In April, a team of young boys, called “BattersBox,” played baseball on the baseball/softball field at CrossRoads UMC in Collierville, Tenn. Honoring Organ Donor Awareness Month, the players wore stickers on their helmets from the Mid-South Transplant Foundation.

The stickers also honored the memory of Ashley Blythe, a 17-year-old girl who died in a 2001 car crash and whose donated organs gave life to others. According to Blythe’s mother, Cathi Johnson, Ashley grew up in the United Methodist Church. As a very young child, she attended Aldersgate UMC in Memphis, Tenn., with Johnson, her father, Ric Blythe, and her younger sister, Erin.

“WE loved it there and Ashley and our younger daughter, Erin, started learning about Jesus there,” Johnson said.

After her parents divorced, Blythe and her sister attended Good Shepherd UMC in Memphis, Underwood UMC in Memphis (now closed), and later, CrossRoads UMC in Collierville, Tenn.

While Blythe grew, Johnson said, she developed a talent for softball, and as a freshman, she started on the varsity team for Germantown High School in Germantown, Tenn. During the summers, she played with a recruited team. She even dreamed about playing in the Olympics. But Blythe never had the chance to realize that dream.

She died during her senior year of high school.

Although the car crash rendered her brain dead, Blythe’s athletic body remained in good shape, and her parents donated her organs. Johnson said her heart went to a sick 14-year-old; her lungs went to a man with cystic fibrosis; and her liver and other tissues went to other people who needed them.

In 2001, Johnson and her husband, Paul, made a donation to Crossroads UMC in memory of Blythe. The church used the money to finish its ball field and install bleachers. A ceremony dedicated the field to Blythe.

Fourteen years later, the BattersBox players now pitch and bat on that field. Johnson said team leader Danny Harrington saw the dedication plaque, and then the coaches and parents looked up Blythe’s story online. Touched, they contacted the Mid-South Transplant Foundation to get stickers for the boys’ helmets, and they even sent a donation to the organization. The team also invited Johnson and her family to the field to thank them for their gifts.

“It’s a beautiful thing to honor Ashley’s legacy this way,” according to CrossRoads UMC’s pastor, Rev. Birgitte French. Quoted on the Mid-South Transplant Foundation’s website, she says, “We are glad that someone wants to use our softball field. We are thrilled how they’re taking care of it. We are so humbled by their gesture. It goes to show that when you give something to someone, you get it back tenfold.”

“Nov. 11, 2001, seems so long ago,” said Johnson. “It has been a wonderful surprise to be able to share her story again. I want Ashley and her gift of life to others to be remembered and I want adults and children to be aware that life can change, can end, in an instant. We should be prepared for the physical aspects of that, but more importantly, the spiritual. Ashley grew up in church and knew Jesus. It’s comforting to know her soul is in the right place.”

Cathi Johnson of CrossRoads UMC in Collierville, Tenn., right, receives gifts of appreciation from baseball team that uses church ball field made possible by donations in memory of Johnson’s daughter, Ashley Blythe, who died in 2001 and whose donated organs gave life to others. Photo compliments of Mid-South Transplant Foundation.

The Mothers of Preschoolers (MOPS) ministry at Ross UMC in Dyersburg, Tenn., recently celebrated its third year with an annual picnic at Okeena Park in Dyersburg.

Ross Pastor Rev. James Luvene said MOPS meets monthly and aims to help mothers become healthier and stronger in their personal and professional lives.

The ministry invites speakers from various professions, including medicine, education, law and food service, to help participating women become better mothers.

“Our MOPS program continues to grow larger each year, and I am especially proud of the diversity of the Ross UMC MOPS ministry,” he said.

At the picnic, MOPS participants and their children enjoyed hotdogs, hamburgers and more as they celebrated the third anniversary of the Mothers of Preschoolers (MOPS) ministry of Ross UMC in Dyersburg, Tenn. Submitted photo.

A picnic was the occasion to celebrate the third anniversary of the Mothers of Preschoolers (MOPS) ministry of Ross UMC in Dyersburg, Tenn. Submitted photo.

Looking for more news? Visit www.memphis-umc.net/news
Closed Bardwell First United Methodist Church finds new life as Carlisle County Museum and Library

By Lane Gardner Camp, Director of Communications, Memphis Conference [First published on website 6/26/2015]

It’s always sad when a United Methodist church closes, but with endings sometimes come new beginnings.

As is the case with Bardwell First United Methodist Church that closed in 2013.

The property in Bardwell, Ky., that still displays the church’s name, is three years later reopening as the Carlisle County Museum and Library.

Closure

Because the active membership and church facilities had declined in 2013 to a point where the congregation could no longer sustain its mission, the church voted that year to discontinue. The church’s last worship service was held on June 30, 2013.

Cash assets of the church were divided equally to the general accounts of Arlington United Methodist Church in Arlington, Ky., and Corinth United Methodist Church in Cunningham, Ky., but the building was deeded to the Carlisle County Museum and Library, as documented in the 2013 Memphis Conference Journal.

Reopening

This summer the museum and library holdings are being moved to the church with a lot of hard work still ahead for a small group of volunteers who make up the Board of Directors, including Kay Presson, editor of the local Carlisle Weekly newspaper.

With limited funds and hope for grants, the board is dedicated to preserving the history and supporting the educational needs of the county, she said.

Library books, historical records, artifacts, shelves and display cases were temporarily stored at another location in town after the museum and library’s previous home was heavily damaged by a 2011 tornado and then torn down. The museum and library was founded in 2008.

“We hope to be open in three to four months,” said Presson, who described the building on Highway 51 South as being in “pretty good condition, except for water leaks.”

The museum and library will be located in rooms on the ground floor of the church, according to Murray Akers, chairman of the board of directors. There are no plans for the upstairs sanctuary at this time.

Church history

Presson said the history and legacy of Bardwell First United Methodist Church are a key component of the building’s new life as a museum and library. Plans are to include historical information about the church and retain existing church signage, though new library and museum signage is now prominently displayed.

Presson said one of the things she remembers most about the church’s life in the town was its “live nativity” that was presented each year at Christmas and dated back to the 1960s.

According to historical records about the closed church from the Memphis Conference Archives in Jackson, Tenn., Methodists in and near Bardwell prior to 1885 worshipped south of town. A white, frame church was erected in Bardwell on donated land after 1885. The present brick building replaced the frame one in 1926. The Memphis Conference Journal first lists the name of Bardwell in the clergy appointments in 1887.

County history

Carlisle County, for which Bardwell is the county seat, was founded in 1886. Presson described it as one of Kentucky’s four river counties in the far western part of the state.

She said Bardwell is on what’s known as the Great River Road, a collection of state and local roads that follow the course of the Mississippi River through ten states, including Kentucky.

In addition to local residents, Presson and other board members hope tourists and travelers who follow the Great River Road will visit their museum.

Current populations of the county and town are “less than 3,000” and “700 to 800,” respectively, Presson said.

Bardwell First United Methodist Church in Bardwell, Ky., closed in 2013 and is now reopening as the Carlisle County Museum and Library. Photos include the exterior of the church, a local school bell that is one of the museum’s artifacts and members of the board of directors of the museum and library (from left, Murray Akers and Leon Todd) at June 18 meeting. Photos by Lane Gardner Camp

Scenic Hills UMC held graduation ceremony for local school; Memphis Mayor Wharton spoke

[First published on website 6/22/2015]

Scenic Hills UMC in Memphis, Tenn., hosted a fifth grade graduation on May 20 for Scenic Hills Elementary School, also in Memphis, and the church invited the city mayor, A C Wharton, Jr., to speak.

According to Administrative Assistant Cindy Burnette, Scenic Hills UMC has “adopted” Scenic Hills Elementary School and partners with the school to better its students’ education. Associate Minister Tony Reeder serves as the liaison between the church and school, and he discovered Scenic Hills Elementary needed a place to hold a ceremony for children advancing from primary to middle school.

Burnette said the church offered the use of its sanctuary, and members decorated their fellowship hall for a reception. They also supplied cake and other snacks and gave gifts to each graduate. More than 250 people attended.

“The ceremony itself was inspiring as the children processed in and then sang a beautiful song,” Burnette said.

The event blessed Scenic Hills UMC members, Burnette said, because they got to share God’s love with their community.

Memphis Mayor A C Wharton, Jr., (standing) spoke to students of Scenic Hills Elementary School at Scenic Hills UMC on May 20. Submitted photo