Memphis churches provide ‘radical hospitality’ while hosting mobile unit of Guatemalan Consulate

Story and photos by Lane Gardner Camp, Director of Communications, Memphis Conference

More than 800 immigrants and strangers were served by the Southeast Memphis Cooperative Parish of The United Methodist Church over two days when it hosted a mobile unit of the Guatemalan Consulate in December.

The parish includes three congregations in the Metro McKendree District: Aldersgate, Asbury and El Redentor.

Guatemala is a democratic republic located on the Pacific Ocean in Central America. It shares borders with Belize, El Salvador, Honduras and Mexico.

Logistics

The mobile consulate event took place Saturday and Sunday, Dec. 5-6, on the campus of Asbury and El Redentor UMCs on S. Mendenhall in Memphis.

Guatemalan people now living in the U.S. were able to travel to one place at one time to get photo IDs and passports made, as well as conduct other consulate business such as recording births, marriages and deaths.

Demand for the mobile consulate’s services was so high over the weekend that people started lining up Friday night, according to Rev. Dr. Virginia Jones Finzel, lead pastor, who serves the three-church parish with associate pastors Rev. Luz Campos and Rev. Goyo De La Cruz.

Campos was first contacted about the parish hosting the mobile unit because Guatemalan Consulate representatives said the United Methodist Church is known for helping people, explained Finzel.

Once it was determined the Asbury-El Redentor campus had suitable space and parking, as well as sufficient Internet capacity, plans were underway to host the mobile unit—a process that took about five months.

Finzel observed that the church’s parking lot stayed full over the two days with vehicles from throughout West Tennessee, as well as other southeastern states, especially Mississippi.

Consulate employees arrived the Friday night before Saturday morning’s opening, bringing and setting up all their own equipment.

Radical hospitality

“Dealing with the unknown” is what Finzel said was the hardest part of hosting the event for the parish. “We just didn’t know what to expect—how to accommodate the anticipated numbers of people and have enough volunteers.”

Finzel praised George Whitworth of Memphis, who serves as the volunteer consul of Guatemala in Memphis, for his help. Because he has been Guatemala’s local consul for 48 years, Finzel said he has a lot of knowledge and experience and provided helpful advice about how to get organized and be ready.

Finzel said Whitworth reminded her repeatedly that what the area United Methodists were doing was “very Christian.”

She agreed, saying, “We are reaching out, welcoming strangers and showing hospitality.”

Moving around and checking on activities Saturday, Rev. Dr. Cynthia Davis, Metro McKendree District superintendent, said, “Radical hospitality and abundant grace—that is what is happening here.”

Davis noted that without a “one-stop shop” like the mobile unit, Guatemalan people living in the U.S. might remain “in the shadows.” Documentation is a complex process that requires a lot of time and travel to be done correctly, she said.

Continued on page 3

With Sunglasses Sunday on Feb. 7, Memphis Conference marks 25 years of Project 20/20

By Grace Bonner, Project 20/20 Coordinator

The impact of Project 20/20, a mission of the Memphis Conference of The United Methodist Church, continued to grow in 2015.

This all-volunteer operation based at Emmanuel UMC in Memphis, Tenn., has provided glasses for international mission teams for 25 years. All of the volunteers are looking forward to many more years of service and fun as they process the donations and send them around the world. You can help by sending in your donations for Sunglasses Sunday on Feb. 7.

This year Project 20/20 asks for a focus on sunglasses, including children’s sunglasses. Orders for sunglasses are expected to exceed the inventory again in 2016.

Continued on page 3

In 2015, almost 9,500 pairs of glasses and sunglasses were
Youth at CrossRoads UMC in Collierville raised money and awareness for ending malaria

Youth at CrossRoads UMC in Collierville, Tenn., raised $536 for Imagine No Malaria (INM) in October.
INM is a United Methodist Church initiative that strives to eradicate malaria through education, communication and treatment.
CrossRoads Youth Director Matt Barrick said the youth group began its INM fundraiser as a way to participate in a health fair hosted by the church, but then decided to raise money for an entire month.
For four weeks in October, youth raised awareness about their campaign by communicating via Facebook and distributing literature. They also talked personally with church and community members.
“We at CrossRoads UMC are proud of the youth, and … we were happy to join the fight against malaria around the world,” said Barrick.

Attendees learn about cake decorating and dental care at ‘United Methodist Women’ senior brunch

More than 22 women (some pictured in photo at right) learned about cake decorating and dental care at the quarterly Senior Brunch organized by the United Methodist Women of Hughlett, Lighthouse, and Ross United Methodist Churches in the Mississippi River District.
The brunch took place at Ross UMC in Dyersburg, Tenn., on Wednesday, Dec. 9.
Sabrina Fowler was the cake decorating techniques instructor. Dr. Ronald Reed gave a presentation and demonstrated dental care for older adults.
The next Senior Brunch will be at Ross UMC on Wednesday, March 9.

Jacob’s Well UMC in Memphis shares stories about creating a refuge for the hurting

Jacob’s Well UMC in Memphis, Tenn., has dedicated itself to bringing people of various cultures, backgrounds and races together to address racism, addiction and poverty.
According to the church’s website, its mission and ministries strive to create a refuge for the hurting.
Visit www.jacobswellmemphis.org to read:
• Drew’s story about HOPE
• Jackie’s story about PEACE
• Alan and Emily’s story about LOVE
• Genevieve’s story about JOY
Guatemalan consulate continued from page 1

Janice Barnes, chair of the trustees for Asbury UMC, said the church never hesitated when it was asked back in July about hosting the mobile unit.

Volunteers and donations

Due to the high number of guests and level of activity, Finzel said the success of the event would not have been possible without valuable contributions of supplies and volunteers from other Metro Asbury and McKendree District congregations: Faith UMC in Frayser (Memphis), St. Paul UMC in Lakeland, Covenant UMC in Cordova and Peace Tree UMC in Collierville.

Additional contributors and supporters were nearby Fox Meadows Elementary School, Asbury UMC’s adopted school; Workers Interfaith Network; and Memphis Conference Director of Connectional Ministries Dr. Joe Geary.

Among the supplies donated for the weekend’s activities were snacks, water, paper goods and hand sanitizing liquid.

Volunteers contributed their time by directing and managing waiting lines, distributing tickets that determined the order in which people were seen by consistory employees, entertaining children and staffing a copy room.

“Peace Tree UMC was especially generous and helpful,” said Finzel. “I don’t know how we could have done it without (them).” Youth and adults from Peace Tree, along with student volunteers from Briarcrest Christian School in Eads, Tenn., were easy to spot with their matching green t-shirts.

Engaging in sports and crafts with children were among their contributions.

Diana Bedwell, a member of Aldersgate UMC, helped organize all the volunteers for the event and thanked the many groups and individuals who collectively were “so instrumental.”

El Redentor UMC prepared food on the church grounds as a fundraiser for their congregation that allowed Guatemalan families to eat while they waited to conduct their consistory business.

Victor Ramirez, Guatemala’s Consulate General based in Atlanta, Ga., was in attendance and working. He expressed appreciation to the United Methodist Church for helping his team serve people in the Memphis area.

More information

Ramirez said there are approximately 200,000 Guatemalans currently living in the U.S. for employment and education opportunities.

To learn more about this ministry project, contact Rev. Dr. Virginia Jones Finzel at the office of Asbury UMC at (901) 363-1135 or office@asburyumc.org.

Scouts learn about Civil War

Parents and members of Scout Troop 380, chartered at Ross UMC in Dyersburg, Tenn., visited Fort Pillow State Park on Nov. 28.

The scouts had participated in a Civil War seminar and watched a movie on the Battle of Fort Pillow.

Park rangers also led the scouts on a four-mile hike through the park, located on the western edge of Tennessee on steep bluffs overlooking the Mississippi River. The park is approximately 40 miles north of Memphis.

Fort Pillow was a strategic location during the Civil War. It was originally built by Confederate troops in 1861 and named after General Gideon J. Pillow of Maury County. It was abandoned in 1862 due to the Union Navy’s advancement along the Mississippi River.

The area became a Tennessee state park in 1971.

Sunglasses Sunday continued from page 1

given to mission teams traveling to other countries to help them provide vision services to those in need. In addition, reading glasses are now being provided to homeless people through the Room In The Inn program of Emmanuel UMC.

All of this is possible due to the great support provided by the churches of the Memphis Conference. Thousands of pairs of glasses and sunglasses are donated by the members of those churches, gathered in by the work of many hands along the way. Some congregations also send money to help cover the expenses of the operations of Project 20/20.

The donated glasses from the Memphis Conference join others that come from other churches, local and distant, optometry and ophthalmology offices and individuals around the country. Tens of thousands of pairs are sorted, cleaned and examined by the volunteers of Project 20/20. In 2015, almost 6,000 pairs of reading or prescription glasses were added to the inventory and used for orders from mission teams. In addition, more than 2,000 pairs of sunglasses were cleaned and bagged for use by the teams. The new reading glasses that are donated are separated and used for the Room In The Inn program or for mission teams that need them.

Project 20/20 volunteers are committed to serving God’s children by helping the needy protect or improve their vision. They also are committed to preserving God’s many gifts by recycling as much as possible.

The primary mission reuses thousands of pairs of glasses every year, but a secondary mission is to recycle those glasses that can’t be used due to condition or type. Every year, several tons of those unusable glasses are shipped to California for recycling of the materials. Plus paper, cardboard and plastic materials that can’t be reused are recycled locally.

For the past 25 years, Project 20/20 has grown and evolved as the volunteers changed and the needs of mission teams changed. The generosity of the churches of the Memphis Conference is reason Project 20/20 has survived and will continue to grow and serve more people. Please remember Project 20/20 on Sunglasses Sunday.

For more information about Project 20/20 or Sunglasses Sunday, email Grace Bonner, Project 20/20 Coordinator, at grace.bonner@comcast.net.
Volunteers work with Grace Place UMC to assemble and deliver 320 gift bags to women prisoners

By Lane Gardner Camp, Director of Communications, Memphis Conference  [First published on website 12/15/2015]

Volunteers converged at Highland Heights UMC in Memphis, Tenn., on Monday, Dec. 14, to assemble 320 gift bags for women prisoners at Mark H. Luttrell Correctional Center in Memphis.

After assembly, the bags were transported and distributed with the help of Grace Place UMC, the Memphis Conference United Methodist congregation located inside the Tennessee Department of Corrections prison.

Grace Place UMC was chartered as a mission congregation of the Memphis Conference in 2013. Rev. Diane Harrison is the church’s appointed pastor.

Each gift bag contained shampoo, conditioner, lotion, deodorant, toothpaste, toothbrush, toothbrush holder, bar of soap, soap box, pair of socks, tissue, pencils, pens, pencil sharpener, journal and a bag of chocolate candy.

The 17 volunteers who helped assemble the gift bags were from the following West Tennessee churches: Bolivar First UMC in Bolivar; Covenant UMC in Cordova; Covington First UMC in Covington; Christ, Colonial Park and Faith UMCs in Memphis; Balmoral and Hope Presbyterian Churches in Memphis; and St. Elisabeth’s Episcopal Church in Memphis.

After the bags were assembled, Harrison said they were loaded in vehicles and taken to the prison where they were unloaded, carried inside, run through the checkpoint security scanner, loaded onto carts and taken to the prison chapel for distribution.

Harrison called it “a long, grueling day,” but said it is “incredibly heartwarming” because the women are so appreciative of such simple gifts. She said the women appreciate the faces, hugs and words of thanks from the women “make it all worth it.”

One prisoner, Harrison reported, took the time to give Harrison a handwritten thank you note.

“This is all many of (these) women will get for Christmas,” said Harrison. “We are very thankful for everyone who donated funds and items that made these gifts possible.

Harrison said the women of Grace Place UMC “count it a profound privilege to have the honor of delivering (the) humble gifts.”

Ross UMC’s community garden serves community

[First published on website 11/10/2015]

When the members of Ross United Methodist Church in Dyersburg, Tenn., wanted to fight obesity, they began a community garden.

The church’s pastor, Rev. James Luvene, says the congregation has been planting now for three years, and members have added more vegetables, in addition to a fall garden.

“The people in our community have adopted our garden as a community asset and take great pride in the garden,” he says.

In its first year, the project fed more than 50 families and has since continued to grow, serving 10 to 15 families per day during harvest time.

Luvene says some of the church’s other ministries, such as Mothers of Preschoolers and Boy Scout Troop 380, have become involved, as well. Members of those groups work weekly in the garden and help distribute produce to the community’s homebound.

This year, Luvene says, the Tennessee Department of Agriculture recognized Ross UMC’s community garden as part of its Healthier Tennessee initiative.

Children at Newbern First UMC pause with the toys they collected and packed for delivery to Reelfoot Rural Ministries. (Submitted photo)

Children at Newbern First UMC collected toys for Reelfoot Rural Ministries’ Christmas Toy Store

[First published on website 12/15/2015]

The children’s ministry at Newbern First UMC in Newbern, Tenn., helped give underprivileged kids toys for Christmas 2015.

ACTS (Actions for Christ Through Service) involves children from pre-kindergarten through high school. Coordinator Amy Davis said the program facilitates various community service projects. In the past, they have collected school supplies and canned food donations, sung Christmas carols at nursing homes, sent Valentine’s Day cards to shut-ins and more.

This year, ACTS collected toys for for the Christmas Toy Store at Reelfoot Rural Ministries (RRM) in Obion, Tenn. This year’s toy store took place Dec. 7-10.

By the end of the drive, Davis said, the children filled numerous plastic containers with toys for RRM.
United Methodist Neighborhood Centers of Memphis, Inc. (UMNC) recently thanked everyone who donated to its 2015 Thanksgiving food drive that collected more than 268 "baskets" of food.

"To our friends and United Methodist family, we are truly grateful for your outpouring of abundant gifts this Thanksgiving," the staff said in a Nov. 29 ‘thank you’ email.

UMNC’s support organization, The Key Women, organizes the event every year by encouraging United Methodists to fill baskets and other containers with items for traditional Thanksgiving meals. It partners with five church food pantries to deliver the food to persons in need and gives some to staff members who work for the UMNC’s Miriam Child Development Center.

This year, with 268 “baskets” collected, the Key Women surpassed their goal of 225 “baskets.”

“The families served by UMNC were truly thankful as they received what we were able to provide as a result of your faithful sacrificial giving,” the ‘thank you’ email stated.

Bread of Life Food Pantry serves record number of families, including many at Thanksgiving

By Rev. Grace Phelps, Covington First UMC, Covington, TN

Bread of Life Community Outreach Ministry serves needy people in Tipton County, Tenn., by providing food and emergency aid in the form of rent, utilities and temporary housing. Food is offered four Saturdays each month – the first and third Saturdays at Covington First UMC in Covington, Tenn., and second and fourth Saturdays at Munford First UMC in Munford, Tenn.

Families who come for food receive frozen meats, canned vegetables, fruits and soups, rice and pasta plus fresh baked goods and produce and dairy products. Bread of Life is a member agency of the Mid-South Food Bank. Bread of Life has offered this ministry since April 2010 and is funded by freewill giving from churches and individuals throughout the county. Through November 2015, Bread of Life has distributed 87.5 tons of food this year. Typically, 25-30 volunteers work on food distribution days offering hospitality and qualifying, bagging and taking food bags out for patrons. On this Saturday, a large group of young people and their parents showed up to help out and their work was much appreciated. A time of worship is held each Saturday before the food distribution begins and over 140 persons sang and prayed and praised God together that morning.

God’s abundant provision was on full display that morning – through the gifts and service of so many people throughout the community. No one was turned away. Everyone who came left with food for their family. Many were able to find a warm coat for themselves and family members in our coat closet. This ministry has been sustained by the grace of God and through the generous and compassionate hearts of so many in Tipton County. Thanks be to God!

For more information on Bread of Life, visit www.covingtonfumc.com and click on Outreach.
Two McKenzie churches of different races worship together as ‘Brothers & Sisters Connected in Christ’

By Rev. Jason W. Jones, McKenzie First UMC, McKenzie, TN

[First published on website 12/14/2015]

In the fall of 2015, one of the Memphis Conference’s predominantly Caucasian churches worshiped with a predominantly African-American congregation in a gesture of peace and unity.

In mid-September, Hays Brummitt, a member of my congregation, McKenzie First UMC in McKenzie, Tenn., approached me and shared a memory about a particular worship gathering that had meant a lot to him. Many years ago, he said, McKenzie First UMC worshiped with Johnson Temple Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, also in McKenzie. It was, Brummitt said, a powerful experience people appreciated—and he wondered if, given the tense racial climate of our nation, the time had come for the two churches to gather together again. I agreed and planning began.

Through prayerful conversation, pastors and laity from both churches scheduled two worship services, jointly promoted as “Brothers & Sisters Connected in Christ.” The first service took place on Oct. 25 at Johnson Temple. Members there welcomed the McKenzie First UMC congregation with extraordinary warmth and hospitality. The sanctuary was filled with voices from both churches as members sang well-loved hymns. I delivered a sermon on Job’s restoration, focusing on how the character learned to see himself as God’s own. At the conclusion of worship, everyone shared a fellowship meal prepared by Johnson Temple.

The following Sunday, Nov. 1, McKenzie First UMC hosted worship and welcomed Johnson Temple and its pastor, Rev. Dr. Wilma Pearson. Her sermon reminded attendees that where there’s vision, there’s hope. The congregations celebrated Holy Communion. The past year’s decedents from both congregations were honored with chimes and flowers in observance of All Saints Day. Worship closed with a song petitioning for peace on earth. And again, members from both churches enjoyed a fellowship meal—one prepared and served by McKenzie First UMC.

These services were overdue. They reminded me of the unity Christians share in Christ and of the beautiful diversity of God’s kingdom. Pearson agreed, adding that she hopes these gatherings are “just the beginning” of something wonderful.

Veterans are recognized and honored at Nov. 8 event at Northside UMC in Jackson, Tenn.

[First published on website 12/14/2015]

The United Methodist Men (UMM) of Northside UMC in Jackson, Tenn., along with Boy Scout Troop 203, honored veterans on Nov. 8 during the church’s fourth annual veterans’ recognition event.

Bob Sharp, a Northside UMM member, said Maj. James Dusenberry served as the celebration’s keynote speaker, and members of the Boy Scout troop presented the colors. U.S. Navy veteran Tommy Buntin read the poem, “I Am Your Flag,” by Master Sgt. Percy Webb.

During the event, organizers gave out special recognition patches designed for west Tennessee veterans, and additionally, Vietnam veterans received patches that commemorated their service and the war’s 50th anniversary.

The celebration also included refreshments, which attendees enjoyed while a slideshow presented photographs of various church veterans in uniform during their service.

Arlington UMC scouts build ramp for cancer patient

[First published on website 1/27/2016]

In November, Boy Scout leaders and Eagle Scouts ministered to a child dying of cancer by building a wheelchair ramp.

Teresa Rector, Scouting Ministries Coordinator for Arlington UMC in Arlington, Tenn., said the adult volunteers belonged to the United Methodist Men (UMM) of Northside UMC in Jackson, Tenn., along with Boy Scout Troop 203, which is chartered at Arlington UMC. Eagle Scouts Simon Knauss and Carson Knauss, youth members of Boy Scout Troop 452 who earned scouting’s highest rank of Eagle, joined the project, as well.

Rachel Bolick, a social worker at Methodist Alliance Hospice in Memphis, requested the ramp for a cancer patient who needed to enter and exit his or her home safely while spending time with family.

Bolick reached out to several organizations, asking for help with the ramp. But, all of them denied her request because of limited funding or because they only help the elderly. So, Rector said, the two Eagle Scouts joined Troop 452 leaders and took on the project, using treated wood donated by a local home improvement store. Boy Scout Troop 452 covered the rest of the ramp’s costs with funds raised through various fundraisers the boys participate in during the year to have funds for service projects (see pics on page 7).

Troop 452 also donated toward Thanksgiving and Christmas celebrations for three families with children be treated for cancer.
Charge conferences typically take place in church sanctuaries and fellowship halls, but Metro Ashbury District Superintendent Rev. Tim Carpenter presided over one inside a prison on Nov. 4.

Grace Place UMC in Memphis is located inside the Mark H. Luttrell Correctional Center, one of three female prisons run by the Tennessee Department of Corrections.

The charge conference is the basic unit in The United Methodist Church’s connectional system.

Grace Place’s pastor, Rev. Diane Harrison, said this was the church’s first charge conference held inside the prison since the church was chartered as a mission congregation in February 2013.

With Harrison and Carpenter in attendance were “Outside Council” member Mary Nelle Cook, Grace Place’s delegate to Annual Conference, and eight members of the church’s “Inside Council” – Council Chair Tonjala Woodears, Tanya Christian, Vernita Freeman, Kristi Kimbro, Sarah Richardson, Daniela Ramirez, Pam Smith and Janalee Wilson.

Commenting on the experience, Carpenter said, “I constantly find that Christ is already present wherever we are called to go. At the charge conference, I had the privilege of being with a community of faith that Christ has built through the work of Grace Place. I was touched by their testimony of Christ’s transforming power in their lives, and I was challenged by their commitment to the faith.”

Remembering highlights of the charge conference, Harrison said, “When we had communion, Pam served with Tim. He had her reading the liturgy. When she got to the Great Thanksgiving – we sing the responses usually -- she looked at me and said ‘This is Pastor Diane’s part’ and then looked at me. I gave her a nod of encouragement and she sang out, ‘The Lord be with you!’ We continued in our usual fashion, singing the responses. I was so proud of her.”

Harrison talked about showing Carpenter the congregation’s cross on the altar which she explained was “made with cardboard scraps retrieved from the chop hall trash, a little paint and (decoupage glue) by one of our women who also made a cheap plastic goblet look like a wooden chalice for communion.”

The charge conference included reports on some of the ministries Grace Place UMC has supported this year. “Thus far, they have given over $2,885 to missions,” said Harrison, “especially (ministries) that help children.”

The women of Grace Place “earn” money to pay apportionments and engage in ministry by making goods that are sold outside the prison.

“The outreach and mission of Grace Place is evidence that God’s kingdom and grace is being praised and practiced,” noted Carpenter. “Not only is God blessing the community of Grace Place in their worship, study and fellowship, but God is blessing the community of Memphis and the world in their care and concern for others. My sincere gratitude is given to Rev. Diane Harrison, the leaders of the church and the many volunteers that make Grace Place possible.”

Learn more about Grace Place UMC at www.graceplacemethodist.com.
‘Donation Station’ is way for churches to begin outreach

A Donation Station is one way a church can begin missional outreach.

Elyse Bell, lay resource leader for the Tennessee River District, encourages churches in her district to create a Donation Station or something similar if they don’t already have a system for receiving donations.

The first Donation Station Bell saw was at Baton Rouge First UMC in Baton Rouge, LA. A large banner on the wall, she explained, drew attention to a make-shift train where each railroad car was a container labeled with a specific item to be donated.

That Donation Station train for missional outreach included five cars labeled “Food Items” for a community food bank, “Hygiene Items” for a women’s domestic abuse shelter, “School Supplies” for local schools, “Blankets for Newborns” for a local hospital and “Bibles” for evangelistic outreach.

Collecting items, however, is only the first of three steps for a successful Donation Station ministry, according to Bell.

There is “no risk involved” in collecting items, she said.

The more risky second step is to pack and deliver the collected items and “see people in need.”

And the third step is to “personally share” the donated items with people who are “hungry, homeless, abused or living in poverty on the margins.”

Bell pointed out that it is only with the third step that the first two steps find purpose and meaning - to help “move congregations slowly and incrementally out of their comfort zones and engage in risk-taking mission” in their neighborhoods and communities.

Trinity UMC in Paducah, Ky., has a Donation Station to receive donations for missional outreach. The train was built by member Jerry Schaefers, right, standing with his wife, Cindy. (Photos by Pastor Sue Engle)

Bible study group at Shiloh UMC in Somerville made blankets to send with food distributions

In December, 2015, families in need near Somerville, Tenn., experienced some extra warmth, thanks to efforts from the Women’s Bible Study group at Shiloh United Methodist Church (UMC) in Somerville.

Barbara Garnett, Shiloh UMC member, said the group helps out with holiday food distributions from Helping Hands, a ministry formed by Shiloh UMC; Dancyville UMC in Dancyville, Tenn.; Stanton UMC in Stanton, Tenn.; Spring Hill UMC in Stanton, Tenn.; and Mt. Carmel Cumberland Presbyterian Church in Somerville, Tenn.

The ministry serves up to 55 families each month. Garnett said ministry organizers pick up fresh fruits and vegetables on the second Friday of each month and divide them evenly among families. Then, under the nonprofit organization Fayette Cares, they pair that food with non-perishables contributed by churches and the Fayette County community.

The Shiloh UMC Women’s Bible Study group usually tries to include something special in the holiday food packages. “Sometimes it’s just a handmade Easter card; other times, it might be a ham for a Christmas meal, etc,” Garnett said.

For the Christmas 2015 distribution, the women made blankets to help keep families warm. They bought fleece fabric in bulk, cut it into blanket-sized pieces and knotted the ends for fringe.

“They will be wrapped with love in clear bags, tied with pretty ribbons, and delivered with a Christmas card and many prayers, along with ingredients for a Christmas meal,” Garnett said.

She also emphasized that this meal and gift will come in addition to a family’s normal food package.

The Women’s Bible Study group at Shiloh UMC in Somerville, Tenn., is making fleece blankets to accompany 2015 holiday food distributions. (Submitted photo)

Memphis Conference of the United Methodist Church
West Tennessee and Western Kentucky

2016 Campaign
Dates are
Feb. 10-March 27

www.memphis-umc.net/lentenhungeroffering
Calvary Longview UMC in Memphis hosts ‘Harvest Day’ and ‘Pink Sunday’ in October

[First published on website 11/10/2015]

Calvary Longview UMC was busy the last full weekend in October. The church, located in Memphis, Tenn., hosted a Harvest Day on Saturday, Oct. 24, and then followed that up with Pink Sunday on Oct. 25.

Pastor Rev. Ademola Sodeinde said the church hosted Harvest Day to “encourage family time of fun together and draw people to the church.” More than 200 people attended, some from another church, and they enjoyed games, talent show performances, food, drinks and entertainment, as well as a health fair.

“The event [was] aimed at investing in the young people and opening our church up to the community [as an] opportunity for mission and evangelism,” Sodeinde said.

The pastor also said several church members wore pink to the worship service the next day for the annual Pink Sunday, a special event honoring cancer survivors and highlighting the importance of proactive health care. Kelley Sodeinde, led a group of laywomen that organized Pink Sunday. She gave a short speech about cancer, as well, and donated a cake for the event.

Cancer survivors received gift bags that day, and Sodeinde said Rev. Brad Thomas, a navigator from a local Methodist Healthcare hospital, provided informative material about cancer.

Wesley Class at Emmanuel UMC in Memphis brightens Christmas for senior housing residents

[First published on website 1/6/2016]

The Wesley Class at Emmanuel UMC in Memphis, Tenn., helped brighten the Christmas 2015 season for residents of Wesley Senior Housing facilities.

In December, the class gave residents 100 stuffed stockings, roughly 100 bingo bags and 41 Christmas tree door hangers. Kristi Henson Owens, executive director of the Golden Cross Senior Residents Fund, said the gifts were a hit.

“Residents (of Good Samaritan Village in Camden, Tenn,) picked out which colorful door hanger they wanted for their door, and before we left the community, the door hangers were proudly displayed on nearly every door,” she said.

Owens said the stockings went to residents of Union Avenue Baptist Towers and St. Peter Manor in Memphis. Union Avenue’s manager told her the residents were so grateful; they felt overcome with emotion when receiving their gifts.

“They felt loved, knowing that someone was thinking of them during the holidays,” Owens said.

The Wesley Class has given these gifts for many years to Wesley Senior Housing residents in Jonesboro, Ark., and Murray, Ky., and the Tennessee cities of Camden, Dyersburg, Memphis, Milan, Paris and Tiptonville.

Gadsden UMC delivers cleaning buckets to its district office to help with area flood relief

[First published on website 1/26/2016]

Gadsden UMC in Gadsden, Tenn., responded to recent flooding in its area by preparing 18 cleaning buckets as suggested by its Mississippi River District Disaster Relief Committee, according to church member Kyle Holyfield. The buckets, pictured at right with the church’s “Youth Connect” group, were delivered to the district office in Alamo, Tenn., on Jan. 13. (Submitted photo)
Our small group of United Methodist Men (UMM) delivered ten flood relief cleaning buckets to our Purchase Area District Office on Tuesday morning, January 5, 2016. In the big scheme of things, that number of buckets is barely even a dent in the number that will probably be needed. But considering the flooding close to our area, we wanted to at least do something and do it in a timely manner. What preceded our action? I am President of our small rural church’s UMM. Our monthly meetings normally have five or six men present. If we have a significant project with some extra lead time, we often turn out 15 or more. Average age of our group is about 55 plus.

My regular work is as an air-ambulance pilot on 12 to 14 hour shifts, either day or night. Late on Wednesday night while I was at work I opened an email on my phone that our Pastor, Robert Baker, had forwarded from our District Superintendent, Sky McCracken. It indicated that there was a need for some flood relief assistance in our area as a result of the recent very heavy rains.

One of the things suggested was cleaning buckets, comprised of 16 items, with an approximate cost of $65.00 per bucket. My work schedule slowed me down a bit. But, by Saturday morning, after doing some phone calls and coordination with my core group of men, we had set a goal of filling and delivering ten buckets by the following Tuesday. On Sunday, during church announcement time, I made an appeal to our congregation for help with funding. In all we took in a bit over $800.

On Sunday afternoon and evening, I went to five different stores in Murray, KY and got 90% of the materials needed for the buckets, filling the back end of my Subaru. Overall, gathering these items was the hardest part. A fellow member met me at the church about 8pm and we unloaded all the stuff onto a couple of tables in our fellowship hall. We did not sort any of it that night, but another member and his wife came in Monday morning and sorted it into the 15 groups of items that were to go into the buckets; a big help.

On Monday, I was off duty from my regular job, so after doing some household work and errands, I went back to Murray and acquired the remaining 10% of items. I also printed up some content labels and some business card labels with a picture, a greeting, and the name of our church on them to place on the buckets.

Late Monday afternoon, two of us started filling the buckets. Before we got too far along, four others joined us and we got them all filled, sealed, and labeled in pretty short order. We took a few pictures, patted ourselves on the back, and thanked one another for each one’s help. As we were preparing to leave, our Pastor showed up to help too, but alas he had missed the real action. We teased him a bit, but we thanked him for coming with good intentions.

About mid-morning on Tuesday, two of us drove to our District Office to deliver the buckets. Two wonderful ladies that work there, Penny and Kim, helped us unload them into the designated area. They also expressed their appreciation and that of the DS for our good work to benefit others. All in all, it was a very satisfying and rewarding project for our small group of United Methodist Men.

‘Rebirth’ of United Methodist Neighborhood Centers of Memphis is progressing with capital campaign

The Memphis Conference’s oldest “home mission” arm is progressing through a special capital campaign seeking $125,000.

Begun in 1907 as Wesley House, United Methodist Neighborhood Centers (UMNCC) of Memphis, Tenn., plans to renovate two of its primary facilities while intensifying support for children and youth ministries.

We are already nearing the halfway point toward our goal, and the aims are very clear – much needed repair of the Smith Center and Scott Center, plus support for our vital Miriam Center for Early Childhood Education and our new Journey: Junior Leadership program for teens.

Named for the distinguished former president of Rust College in Holly Springs, Miss., the Earnest A. Smith Center in north Memphis houses two unique United Methodist congregations: Holy Community UMC and Jacob’s Well UMC. Holy Community reaches the poorest of the poor and has made an exciting new partnership with Germantown UMC in Germantown, Tenn. Rev. Jerome Scales Jr. recently succeeded Rev. Fred Moore as Holy Community’s pastor. And, Jacob’s Well shares a large, exciting recovery ministry led by Pastor Jamey Lee.

Under Director Iletha Washington’s guidance, the Miriam Center at the Jane H. Scott Center in the Binghampton neighborhood of Memphis, serves more than 80 preschool-aged children. The Miriam Center was among the very first schools in Memphis to serve children younger than three and recently added a pre-kindergarten classroom in conjunction with Shelby County Schools. The new Journey ministry is reaching middle and high school students and grew out of Christian concern to maximize students’ academics and lead them away from teen gangs. This campaign will also enable the third floor of the Scott Center, which has been dormant for many years, to be used for missions.

The sub-goals for the $125,000 financial campaign are:

- Smith Center: $40,000
- Children and Youth: $25,000
- Scott Center: $60,000

Donations are being accepted at: UMNCC, Box 111348, Memphis, TN 38111.
Decorated bears complete circle of ministry; seniors in need give to children in need

[First published on website 1/26/2016]

Children served by United Methodist Neighborhood Centers of Memphis (UMNC) were the recipients of the finished products in the second annual “Bear Your Heart for Art” contest at Wesley Senior Living Communities.

Nearly 2,200 Wesley Senior Living residents decorated 140 bears for the event in November. Groups at 27 Wesley independent and assisted living communities in West Tennessee, Southwest Kentucky and Jonesboro, Ark., worked together to decorate copies of a smooth, white teddy bear named “Art.”

“Senior residents decorated their bears with military themes, flowers and hearts, pirates and animals,” Kristi Henson Owens, executive director of the Golden Cross Senior Residents Fund, said. Golden Cross supports Wesley Living Communities and sponsored the contest.

Owens said each community chose one of its decorated bears to enter into the contest. Judging took place on Dec. 17, and the bear submitted by St. Matthew Manor in Humboldt, Tenn., was declared the winner.

The honorable mention bears were entered by St. Mary Manor in Jackson, Tenn.; Oakhaven Village in Adamsville, Tenn.; and Wesley Pine Ridge/Wesley Pine Meadows in Paris, Tenn.

After the contest, Golden Cross gave all 140 stuffed animals to children served by UMNC. Rev. Mark Matheny, UMNC missioner, picked up the bears and made the delivery in time for Christmas.

“This was a creative and heartfelt way for seniors who have received assistance from generous donors who give to Golden Cross Senior Residents Fund to give back,” said Owens.

Clockwise from top left: 1. Rev. Emily Matheny, executive director of congregational care and associate pastor at Christ UMC in Memphis, admires the winning bear in the “Bear Your Heart for Art” contest. 2. Approximately 140 bears were decorated by residents of Wesley Senior Living Communities. 3. The winning bear and three honorable mention bears are seated with Kristi Henson Owens and David Kabakoff, executive director and president, respectively, of the Golden Cross Senior Residents Fund. 4. Rev. Mark Matheny, missioner with United Methodist Neighborhood Centers in Memphis, picks up the bears for delivery to children with help from K.C. Bass, administrative assistant with Golden Cross.

Electronic bulletin board is Alford’s Girl Scout ‘Gold Award’ project that is helping Colonial Park UMC improve communications

By Madison Alford, Girl Scout, Colonial Park UMC

[First published on website 1/21/2016]

I attend Colonial Park United Methodist Church in Memphis, Tenn. I want to tell you something exciting that is going on at my church.

I wanted to find a way to improve communication about ways our church can help in the community. I chose to do my Girl Scout Gold Award project in my church. For those who don’t know what that is, the Gold Award is the highest award a Girl Scout can achieve and is the equivalent to the Boy Scouts’ Eagle Scout award.

For my project, I helped install an electronic bulletin board in the main lobby. With the contributions I have received, I bought a wall mount and a 48-inch monitor. I had help from various church members and groups.

Each week, I create a slide show with information about what is going on in the church. I also add some opportunities for the church to go out into the community. Some slides that I put on my electronic bulletin board are: suicide and abuse hotlines, Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous meetings, communion offering for the month, which canned foods should be brought in for that month, and various events the church is having within the coming few weeks.

Looking at the amount of canned food brought in before the electronic bulletin board was put up and after it was put up, I can see that the amount has increased from last year.
Bishop McAlilly joined Mason’s Chapel UMC consecration service after devastating fire

Bishop Bill McAlilly joined the Nov. 21 consecration service at Mason’s Chapel UMC in Hazel, Ky. He celebrated the repair of the church’s building after arsonists set fire to it in Dec. 2014.

The church sustained severe damage, including an eight-foot wide hole in the sanctuary floor. The damage was repaired, and the church’s pastor, Rev. April Arnold, spoke to the congregation at the consecration service, offering grace to the arsonists.

“May we now move forward in total forgiveness and with a fresh focus on mission and ministry together,” she said in prayer. Along with the bishop, Mason’s Chapel also welcomed Rev. Dr. Joseph Geary to the service. Geary is the conference’s current director of Connectional Ministries and the Paris District superintendent at the time of the fire. Purchase District Superintendent Sky McCracken attended, as well.

The event included several hymns and a time of reflection led by Geary. McCracken gave the building’s declaration of purpose and dedication. McAlilly led the scripture reading, homily and prayer. He gave the benediction and conducted the actual building consecration.

In her opening prayer, Arnold asked the congregation to continue to show God’s love to the community and focus on ministry.

“Lord I pray a hundred-fold blessing upon all those who have been Your hands and feet through this time of re-building. And Lord, I pray, in and through each one of us, you have been and ever more will be glorified!” said Arnold.

Clergy participants for Nov. 21 consecration service at Mason’s Chapel UMC in Hazel, Ky., were, from left, Rev. Dr. Joe Geary, Rev. Sky McCracken, Rev. April Arnold and Bishop Bill McAlilly. (Submitted photo)