

EAST OHIO

joining hands

- informed, inspired and in touch.

A day
in the
life...



*The Vision of the East Ohio Conference
of The United Methodist Church is to
make and mature disciples of Jesus Christ.*

A day in the life ... of the Church

“How ya doing?”

“Hey.”

“What’s going on?”

These are examples of greetings I have used at the grocery store in the past week, usually without stopping to wait for a reply.

How might my life have changed if I had stopped and engaged in actual conversation with the friends I was greeting? How might each of our lives be different if that conversation included sharing my faith and inviting him/her to church with me?

This issue of *Joining Hands* highlights the many ways churches in East Ohio speak of and display our faith stories during the course of a day. You will notice these stories take place on different days of the week and at different times. Church is more than just the time spent in worship on Sunday morning. Of course, we know that God can change our lives at any moment but think about how many people don’t know that. In making disciples of Jesus Christ, we need to make people aware of the life-changing power of God. That’s how we transform the world.

Consider this: There are 163,603 members of East Ohio churches. Each of whom has 1,440 minutes (60 min/hr x 24 hrs) available to them each day. That means as a conference we have 235,588,320 minutes available to us, collectively, each day. Multiply that number by seven and that’s how many opportunities we have to engage others from the time we arrive at church one Sunday until we return the next!

How many lives can we change in that time? Let’s find out.

Rick



**Rick Wolcott is the Director of Communications for the East Ohio Conference of The United Methodist Church.*

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A Win for All

By Rev. Russ Adams*



“CHRISTIANITY IS A VERB ... NOT JUST A NOUN.”

With those eight words, Jeremy Schmidt, 16, of Itasca, Ill., provides an instruction guide for the best way to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. We must put our words to action.

Volunteers, 375 of them, did just that the last week of June by participating in the **Mill Creek Workcamp**. The ecumenical event attracted volunteers from 17 different congregations across 10 states.

“I thank God Almighty that they are here,” Janet Trevathan said as a crew cleaned her yard. “I needed this help.”

The 65 Mill Creek crews each were made up of five youth and one adult from various churches. They provided free repairs and maintenance to 62 homes within the city of Youngstown. The homeowners, most of whom are elderly, disabled or of limited resources, applied for the assistance. Most of the projects revolved around interior and exterior painting, building wheelchair ramps and installing handrails.

The repairs are a tangible result of the week’s work but what the crews really offered was hope.

“The hands-on project shows God’s love,” says Carrie Boyer of **Western Reserve United Methodist Church** (Mahoning Valley District) in Canfield. “It’s a joyful experience knowing you’re helping someone.” She has volunteered on mission trips/projects six times as an adult.

Schmidt, on his third mission trip, said, “This is a spiritual experience helping people who need it.”

The week-long project was co-sponsored by the Western Reserve UMC and the Group Workcamp Foundation of Loveland, Colo. Volunteers each paid \$435 to participate, which covered food and

materials, and they were housed at Youngstown Chaney High School. Costs for the balance of the work were covered by grants.

Volunteers came in the name of Christ, connecting with many in the Mahoning Valley to improve a community that many have forgotten.

“It’s a blessing from God,” said Carolyn Jackson, whose house was painted by one of the crews. “It means a lot to me.”

The goal of the project was to draw everyone involved closer to Jesus. Each camper participated at the work site in devotions that included the resident(s) of the homes being repaired. At night volunteers reconnected with youth from their home church for another devotion. This was followed by a worship service in the school gymnasium involving the entire camp plus community members. The Holy Spirit was truly at work.

The Group Workcamp Foundation reports that 90% of its participants feel closer to God at the end of the camp. For many, lives are forever changed.

This year’s camp was a win-win-win situation. The homeowners won because they received free home repair, while Western Reserve UMC won because we reconnected with our community. Finally, the campers won because they experienced Jesus and made new friends in the process.

This year marked the second time Group Workcamp Foundation co-sponsored Mill Creek Workcamp and plans are already being made for a third pairing of the two organizations.



*Rev. Russ Adams is senior pastor at Western Reserve United Methodist Church.

(Quotes reprinted with permission of *The Vindicator*.)



A day in the life
... of the Church

To market, to market ...

By Rev. Liz Nau*

The trucks start pulling in around noon. The set-up team arrives shortly thereafter to begin placing cones and directional signs followed by the tent, table, chairs and the signature red and yellow five gallon jug of ice water. It's Thursday – Market Day – and the place is beginning to buzz with activity.

Every Thursday from 2-7 pm, beginning in June and running through the first week of October, the front yard of **South Euclid-Hillcrest United Methodist Church** (North Coast District) is transformed into the **Green Road Farmers Market**. Farmers and vendors line the tree-shaded lawn to create a market of locally produced goods, and to provide a community meeting point.

The market is in its third year and continues to grow. It comprises vendors from Northeast Ohio, most of whom grow their own produce or sell locally produced or hand-made goods. Items include Amish cheese, fruits and vegetables, (organic) grain-fed poultry, plus homemade pickles, honey and organic protein bars.

A favorite stand is the Amish bakery. Martha Yoder and her family bring several tables worth of baked goods. Many shoppers head there first, because Yoder often sells out. Because of this year's wet spring, the

first few weeks of the market included vegetable plants and bedding plants along with hanging baskets of beautiful, locally grown flowers.

Homegrown strawberries have just arrived at the market. One farmer said she had just picked them that morning. It doesn't get fresher than that!

The market provides an outlet for farmers to sell their goods, and provides fresh, affordable produce to the community. Local nonprofit organizations also participate, including the recycling club, city garden club and the animal shelter. South Euclid Mayor Georgine Welo sees the market "as a cooperative venture with the city, the church and the farmers as an ongoing community event that undergirds the fiber of the community."

People begin calling the church in early May to be sure when the market is opening for the season. Several hundred people shop weekly and in the height of summer it is difficult to find a parking space. Farmer Jack, who sells at the market, says, "I sell at other markets, but I like this one the best. The location and the trees make a beautiful setting, and the people who shop are the nicest people."

South Euclid-Hillcrest UMC staffs a booth each week, offering free, ice cold water and a chance for conversation. At the

church's table, recipes, information about upcoming church events and details about community programs, such as reduced-cost prescriptions, are dispersed. It's a chance for church members to talk with neighbors and shoppers about their lives and the life of the community, to listen and to pray.

Debbie, one regular shopper, started attending church and is now a member who sings in the choir. She says, "I came to the market and God brought me to this church. This church has been so important to me in surrounding me with love at a very difficult time. I love this church."

The market has become an amazing outreach ministry. By meeting an important need, this congregation has brought new people into relationship with Jesus Christ, and simultaneously become a vital presence in the community.

And it all started with a cup of water.



*Rev. Liz Nau has been pastor at South Euclid-Hillcrest United Methodist Church since January 2009.

Mission in the valley

By Deanna Bottar*

The Urban Mission (Ohio Valley District) lives and breathes, reaches and embraces, feeds and nourishes. But best of all, it loves.

The United Methodist outreach in Steubenville serves area residents with food, shelter and many other services with the help of countless volunteers and broad-reaching support from churches of various denominations.

With rich roots that stretch back to 1959, this Ohio Valley institution has grown and changed to meet the needs of the people it serves, ensuring that neighbors help neighbors and service is paid to those without.

Incoming executive director, the Rev. Ashley Barker Steele, who took the reins July 1, is looking forward to continuing the direction of the mission established and supported by its former director the Rev. Bruce Hitchcock.

"Sharing life with these individuals will allow them to see my heart for the people of this community and my desire to be a part of the wonderful Ohio Valley ministry," Steele said.

During the past nine years, Hitchcock led the mission with the support of its board, employees and volunteers. He said his tasks have been about living God's word in real life.

"I had reached the point in ministry that I felt the need to do what I had been preaching about because I had always preached about our faith being more than what we speak or sing or pray but being how we live," he said.

That meant interacting with families in need, individuals who had lost their jobs, had mental health troubles, drug problems, were burdened with family traumas or financial woes. He worked to unburden the mission from some of its financial debt, upgrade its facilities and encourage its programming.

A financially healthy organization, the mission strives to keep in step with the most effective way of ministering to the poor, primarily through food and shelter, including a homeless shelter program.

Steubenville is a tight-knit community with neighbors caring for neighbors. But it's

also an area of the state hard-hit by the economic downturn and bereft of once plentiful manufacturing jobs. That means to keep the people the mission serves healthy, a focus also needed to be put on health care.

So, in 2006, the **Fourth Street Health Center** was founded as a mission outreach. It served the uninsured, and quickly it saw that 20,000 of the 70,000 area residents were in need of access to these services. Soon, this program became its own stand-alone nonprofit with its own board of directors, funding and staff, Hitchcock said.

Moving forward, Steele said among her priorities will be sharing the story of the Urban Mission wherever she goes. The good news is that "lives are being transformed, needs are being met and people are coming into contact with the living Christ through the work of the mission staff and volunteers," she said.

"In a world that is used to hearing about all that is bad, it is time we focus on stories of positive change and what can be done to bring about good," Steele added.

To her, that means sharing the heart of the mission by helping people to restore a right relationship with God, themselves, others and the rest of creation – the four foundational relationships God planned from the beginning, Steele said.

"At the Urban Mission, we are constantly seeking new ways to help our neighbors' experience this fullness of life," she said. "We believe each person is of great value to God, possesses unique gifts and talents, and has a role to play in bringing shalom, in all its meanings, to the city of Steubenville and beyond."

And the need remains prevalent. Hitchcock pointed out that when he started at the mission in 2002, the mission packed about 500 bags of groceries per month for distribution. Now, that figure has more than doubled to 1,200 bags per month.

"So, the need has gone up, and we're doing that with fewer employees," he said, de-



scribing some belt-tightening that has gone on to ensure the food and homeless shelter programs function at their peak.

For Steele, who grew up in nearby Cadiz, her new role is a homecoming of sorts. After undergraduate studies at Malone College in Canton, she graduated from seminary with a master's degree in divinity in 2007 and earned a second master's degree from American University in nonprofit management.

And she is passionate about the challenges ahead.

"As the new director, it is my desire to continue to create an environment where people are loved, respected and provided with the essentials to live a full life," she said. "But this can only be done in partnership between the mission staff, volunteers, churches and the surrounding community. In the coming months, we, at the Urban Mission, will be working to improve upon these partnerships already established and building new ones with those who have a heart for the poor."

Simply put, the Urban Mission lives the Golden Rule. And at its heart and in often dramatic fashion, the mission also is redefining the word "community" and matching muscle with spirit and compassion to care for neighbors, whether strangers or friends.

"Those who give of their time and resources to the Urban Mission find that they need the people they serve just as much as the people they serve need them," she said.



*Deanna Bottar is a free-lance writer who grew up in Simpson United Methodist Church in Canton.





Photo: © James Steidl / iStockphoto.com

Popcorn and cookies can lead to future members

By Rick Wolcott

Have you ever purchased popcorn from the Boy Scouts or cookies from the Girl Scouts? My guess is the vast majority of you can answer “yes” to this question.

Have you ever attended the Pinewood Derby, either as a participant, leader or observer? There are a lot of you nodding your heads but far fewer than a question ago.

How many have invited a Scout and their family to church? Thankfully there are many of you who have and that decision to risk sharing your faith has made a difference in the lives of the people you invited.

As we live out our mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world we sometimes overlook the people who are already in our buildings.

It may surprise you to learn that The United Methodist Church is the second largest sponsor in the world of the Boy Scouts of America: 371,000 youth meet in 11,300 units (packs, troops, crews) in 6,700 United Methodist churches. The General Commission on United Methodist Men, which provided these statistics, further states that 50% of all youth who meet in Scout units in United Methodist churches come from un-churched families. This is a great opportunity for evangelism and outreach.

“We need to explore new ways to reach the younger generation. Scouting is



Ed Brewer (left) is the Scouting Ministry Specialist for the East Ohio Conference.

one way to do that,” says Ed Brewer of **The United Methodist Church of Berea** (North Coast District). “It is futile to do things the same old way and expect different results.”

Brewer is the first person to volunteer as a scouting ministry specialist in the East Ohio Conference. The United Methodist Scouting Ministries Committee has created the position to help local churches establish and expand scouting ministry opportunities.

“Too frequently, churches treat troops as if they are just renting space instead of being a vital part of their ministry,” says Larry Coppock, national director of scouting ministries.

In addition to Boy Scouts of America and Girl Scouts of the USA, The United Methodist Church is working with Big Brothers Big Sisters, Camp Fire USA and 4-H. These agencies were chosen because of their Christian teachings, long-standing connection with local congregations and their recognition of the God and Country program, an age-appropriate study series

that focuses on discipleship, family and service.

Brewer and his daughters long have been involved in scouting, with their troop meeting at UMC of Berea. He also teaches Sunday school at the church. “Parents brought their child to Sunday school one week,” recalls Brewer. “I didn’t recognize them and asked if they were new to the church. Their answer was, ‘Yes, we are not members but we participated in Scout troops sponsored by this church.’”

“They said as they were now looking at churches, this was one of the first places they thought of visiting. The outreach that we provide through the scouting ministries program plants the seeds of the future members of our churches,” he says.

Brewer, and anyone interested in volunteering as a scouting ministry specialist, will help other churches in the East Ohio Conference understand how youth-serving agencies can minister to the community and reach un-churched families.

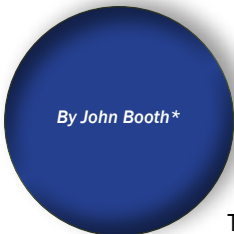
The scouting ministry web site highlights one reason to become a scouting ministry specialist: “Nurturing children, teens, and families through outreach and evangelism and incorporating them into the life of the church may have tremendous, eternal results for the youth, their family and the Church.”

Keep that in mind the next time you eat a cookie or microwave a bag of popcorn.

To learn more about scouting ministries or becoming a specialist, please visit www.umscouting.org or www.gcummm.org.



A day in the life
... of the Church



By John Booth*

Dodgeball for CHRIST

Tom Hartley, sports program coordinator at **Wedgewood United Methodist Church** (Canal District) and husband of pastor Rev. Karen Hartley, can sound a little bit like the voice from the cornfield in Field of Dreams.

Whether it's starting a softball team, a basketball league or an open gym night, Hartley says, "My philosophy is always that if you do it, people will show up."

That explains how you wind up with an unusual ministry like the one that's unfolded at Wedgewood UMC on Saturday nights for the past few years: dodgeball.

Rev. Hartley is in her 19th year as the pastor at Wedgewood UMC, situated in Ellet on Akron's east side. While church membership stands at just over 300, average worship attendance is 250.

"We have been growing for awhile," she said, "and the church is very welcoming to visitors and newcomers."

In 2005, Wedgewood doubled the size of its building in a construction project, which included a Family Life Center that can be used as - among other things - a gymnasium.

For her husband - who Rev. Hartley says "wants to play games all the time," - the addition meant the chance to expand Wedgewood's sports ministries beyond the usual warm-weather church softball leagues.

It wasn't long before Tuesday evenings in the Family Life Center were reserved for church basketball league play and Wednesdays became open gym nights.

And then, a few years ago, this other sport stuck its foot in the door.

David Natko, 23, grew up in nearby

Mogadore and attended high school with the Hartleys' son, during which time they played in their high school's dodgeball tournament. To sharpen their skills, David and his teammates got permission to practice at Wedgewood UMC.

"We'd just play a couple times a week, and eventually ... it got to be a Saturday night thing," Natko recalled. "Through the grapevine, and on Facebook, I started telling people about it. Everybody's always invited. Some weekends we'll have 40 people, and some weekends we'll just have 15. "It's another way for people to be around the church, which is awesome," he says.

And so it happens that from October to April, people - mostly young men - from all parts of the surrounding community come together and play dodgeball. They start at 8 pm and often go well past the stated 11 pm ending time.

"We play until basically you can't walk anymore," Tom Hartley said with a laugh. And despite the competitiveness, "Everybody gets along, and they're pretty respectful, for the most part. They know they're going to come here and be treated well."

Rev. Hartley says, "When you think of all the other things that men in their twenties could be doing on a Saturday night, that they're in a church playing dodgeball is pretty amazing."

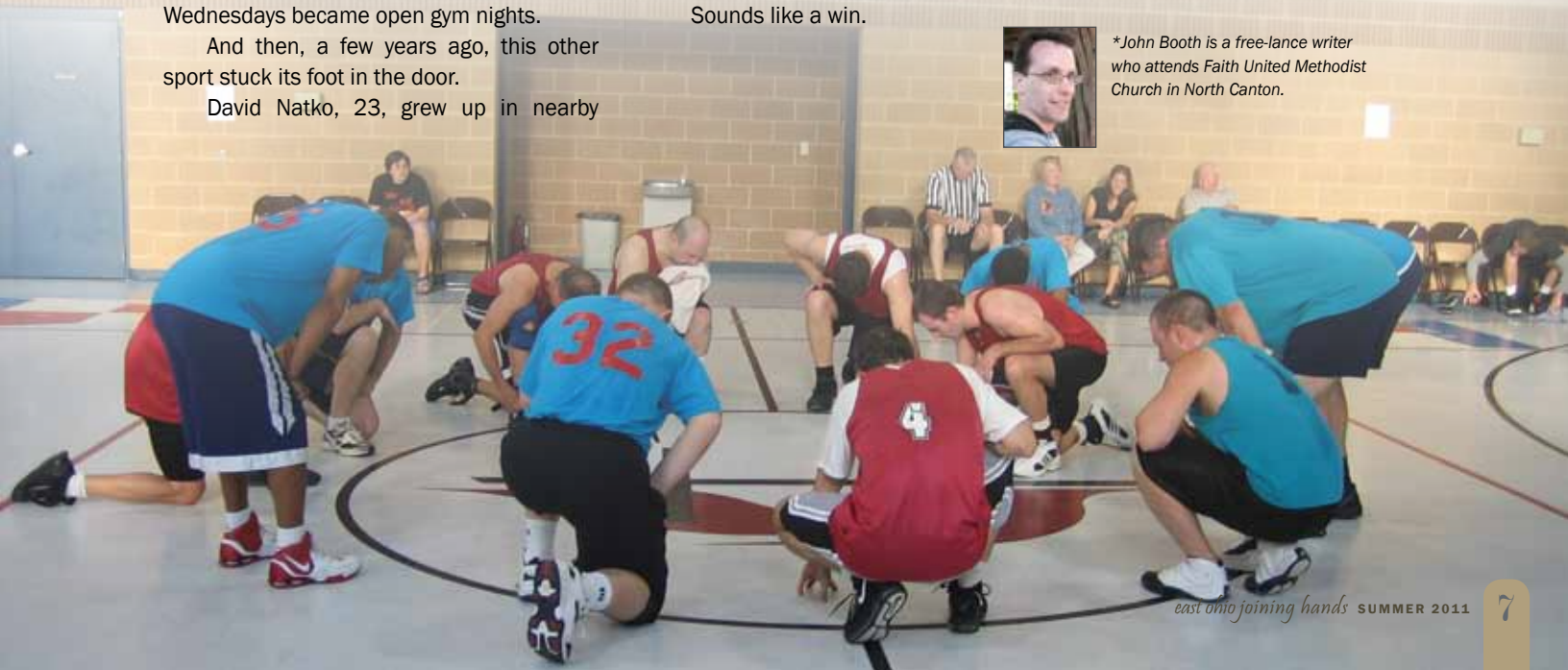
She has also seen first-hand the way the gym programs have opened spiritual doors and changed people's perceptions.

"Most of these people are not people who attend church - and they don't attend at our church regularly, but we do a devotional just to try to introduce to them the seeds of faith. Some of the guys that come and play have told me that they've never been in a church before. Every year, we invite them for Christmas or Easter services, and several times they've asked me, 'Well, what do I wear?' And I tell them, 'Anything you'd wear for basketball is OK for church.'"

Sounds like a win.



*John Booth is a free-lance writer who attends Faith United Methodist Church in North Canton.



“Faithkeepers”

inspires Renee to do a great thing

By Peter Chakerian*

Amazing things can come from a simple Sunday school lesson. That’s the message Renee Skinner of **Otterbein United Methodist Church** (Tuscarawas District) in Navarre wants you to know.

Skinner’s immersion in an April 2011 **“Faithkeepers”** Sunday school study at Otterbein UMC led her to launch an emergency closet mission for the church — one hosted out of the Fairless Elementary school.

The closet offers clothing and grocery items that cannot be purchased with food stamps.

Motivated “to explore the life, faith, and vision of the great 19th century British reformer, William Wilberforce,” Skinner felt this “need on my heart for quite some time,” she says.

Wilberforce believed that he and his circle of friends were called by God to pursue two “great objects”— the abolition of slave trade, and the reformation of society.

Inspired by the more than 65 social reforms Wilberforce initiated (including the first Bible society, first animal welfare society, free education, and laws to protect children and to reform prisons) she decided that the church could put faith and knowledge to work beyond the Faithkeepers’ “Service Day Project.”

Skinner, whom everyone calls “Peaches,” decided that one of the great objects she was passionate about was the constituency of young people in need within her school district.

She decided an emergency closet, filled with critical goods, clothing, wares and sundry items, could really help out the district. She began her work immediately.

“I’m amazed by how it started and how quickly it came together, gaining momentum by word of mouth,” Skinner says.

“I wanted to help people, and I saw a LOT of need. With so many little kids in need of shoes for gym class and school supplies, I saw that there could be vision beyond a closet to grow the mission into a ‘backpack program’ as well,” she adds.

“Compassion and sharing with people really helped spread the word and brought so many together.”

Otterbein UMC, which is located in

Bethlehem Township in Stark County, borders the Fairless, Sandy Valley, Perry and Canton Local school districts. Being a family-oriented church, Skinner’s initial thought was to “adopt the school district.”

She found an immediate need for clothing in the district, and shortly after getting the word out, people within and outside the district began pouring in with support.

“My vision was kind of small to start, so imagine how surprised I was when we ended up with a locker room with 32 lockers to fill and having another parish build us shelving for the project,” she says.

As the momentum increased, the mission quickly outgrew its humble “closet” moniker — collecting everything from toiletries and cleaning supplies, to underwear, socks and laundry detergent.

Skinner and Otterbein UMC have helped quite a few families in need and are taking referrals from other area clergy. “It’s my passion,” she says. “I just couldn’t believe how people pulled together after a Sunday school class brought an idea for a mission.”

And with greater inventories and word-of-mouth spreading, the George & Sandy Smart Family Foundation stepped up with a sizeable endowment.

“They gave us \$2,000 to start with to really get the closet going,” Skinner relates.

“And recently they gave us a challenge that whatever additional funds we raise to help stock the closet they will match, up to \$3,000. When you add that to all of the donations we’ve had — both financially and in goods — I’ve just been overwhelmed with all of the support we’ve received. It’s been truly awesome.”



*Peter Chakerian is a free-lance writer who has focused on arts, entertainment, business, features and religion during his 20-year career as a journalist.





Thursday's Kids

By Jane Slater*

The joyful sounds of children fill the halls of **Wooster United Methodist Church** (Canal District) at 3:45 pm every Thursday during the school year. As they arrive in the building, hugs and happy greetings are exchanged between the 15 to 20 children and 7 to 8 adults. The afterschool tutor/mentor program, **Thursday's Kids**, is about to begin.

Adults walk the children to church from Cornerstone Elementary School. Once at WUMC the eager students wash their hands, put on a name tag, receive a healthy snack, and get to the day's activities. Usually this includes 45 minutes of help with their school work but that is just the beginning. Students mainly receive a big dose of Christian love! Activities this past year included story time, planting spring bulbs, short videos with Christmas and Lenten messages and take home books.

Suzanne Souers, WUMC's director of Children's & Family Education, developed the afterschool program in 2010. She talked with the teachers at the school to clarify homework assistance needs. She also planned the program to dovetail into "Meals Together." The ecumenical, free program available to anyone in need of a hot meal, has been hosted by WUMC every Thursday since 1988.

Volunteers, mostly retired teachers, assist with math and other subjects and each child is asked to read! Younger children read aloud from their "Book Baggie," a teacher - assigned book at the child's reading level. Older students read silently for 10-15 minutes. If a child doesn't have a book from school, one can be selected from a collection in the room. A simple reward, like the ever-popular silly band, is given for accomplishing the reading task. Flashcards and games are also a part of the routine. When homework is complete, the students and volunteers play educational games, assemble puzzles,



build with Legos and color in coloring books, extending valuable mentoring time.

Before dinner children eagerly go to the church gymnasium for some physical activity. Sometimes a kickball game is organized or an activity utilizing a large parachute, while other times each child independently goes about their favorite activity ... shooting a basketball, jumping rope or running.

The program concludes with another round of hand washing, gathering up school bags, coats, etc. and proceeding to dinner in fellowship hall. The children from the Thursday's Kids program have a standing table reservation at "Meals

Together." Lined up and ready for the meal, a volunteer offers a prayer before entering the dining room. As the year progressed, the children became eager to be the one to offer prayer! Reward for the mentors comes in hearing an 8-year-old quietly say, "Thank you God for the sunshine today, our teachers and supper we'll eat. Be with us when we go home, AMEN"

An invitation to participate in Thursday's Kids is sent home with children in kindergarten through sixth grade at the beginning of the school year. Parents enroll their children in the afterschool program. This outreach community connection has provided an opportunity for other groups in the church to assist families at various times. Boxes of food and games were shared during Christmas and Easter.

Church members were able to provide and deliver furniture and other items to a family who lost household items in a recent flood. When one family was without a place to live, the church assisted them in securing temporary housing and helped them settle into a rental home. And, of course, families are prayed for by Sunday school classes and Bible study groups!

Some of the families involved in Thursday's Kids were able to participate in the May 14th Day of Service events sponsored by WUMC as part of **Change the World Day**. Church members volunteered to provide curbside cleanup for local residents and then hosted a block party with free hotdogs, music and games. The after school program has been a true blessing to our church. It has made us more aware of our community's needs and has connected us personally to families in need of God's message.



*Jane Slater is a volunteer for the Thursday's Kids program and member of Wooster United Methodist Church.

If you would like more information about Thursday's Kids, please e-mail Suzanne Souers at ssouers@woosterumc.org.



Teddy bears- not just for kids!

By Peter Chakerian

They're usually smooth, furry and are stuffed with soft, white cotton. Their origins date back to former U.S. president Teddy Roosevelt. They're teddy bears, and they offer their keepers a warm and fuzzy place for comfort, solace and sanctuary when circumstances are daunting and dire.

It stands to reason that such bears would make for an amazing ministry. **Main Street United Methodist Church** (Mid Ohio District) in Mansfield has just that — a “Bear Ministry” led by the church’s own Marlene Marquis. She emerged with the idea after one of her fellow worshippers came back from cold-weather vacationing in Fort Myers, Fla.

“And now I’m the one they call The Bear Lady,” Marquis says with a laugh.

“One of our members was wintering in Florida and there was a similar ministry going on down there,” she adds. “She came back and told me all about it, and the idea just seemed to take off. There’s a lot of heart in the idea, and I figured if we could get it off the ground it would be a wonderful thing.”

The premise was a simple one: ask church members to gather up new and like-new teddy bears from their homes, friends, family and other donation sources, then



bring them to the church and distribute them to those in need of help and support.

“They’ve all been donated. We’ve not had to buy any,” Marquis adds with a smile.

The bears themselves act as you might expect—a fuzzy embrace wrapped up in a physical reminder of the love of the church and its congregation for the bear’s owner.

Since the program’s inception in June 2008, “more than 500 bears have been given by the church to those in need of prayer — and not just within the Main Street UMC parishioner footprint,” says Marquis.

Bears from Main Street UMC currently reside in several U.S. states, including “Arizona, California, Florida and a couple have made their way to the New England area,” she says. A few have also ended up in Canada.

Some of these spirited bears have also spent time on the battlefield in both Iraq and Afghanistan, with the teddy bears’ “owners” receiving prayers from the church as well.

“We have had bears sent to the Middle East,” Marquis says. “To have a reach that extends that far feels truly amazing to all of us involved in the ministry.”

“It’s just been wonderful the way this has turned out, and in many ways, a little overwhelming! We asked for bear donations and most that came in were new or like-new. Things started coming in like crazy! We’ve been overwhelmed! Other than ribbons, we’ve not had to buy anything for the ministry.”

Marquis says that supporting this mission led one of the active participants into a garage sale to look for a few good bears.

She got more than she bargained for,

but atypical to garage sale etiquette, didn’t really bargain at all.

“When she told [the homeowner] why she was buying the bears, the lady went right into her house and came back with eleven bears to donate!” Marquis says.

Of the many wonderful stories that have come from the bears’ comfort, one of the cancer patients who received a bear seems particularly memorable to Marquis.

“The recipient wrote to us with a really wonderful note and said that she had taken the bear to each and every chemo[therapy] session and that she felt good to have so many people behind her and supporting her.”

Marquis says that every third Sunday, cards and letters from recipients are read to the congregation to remind everyone about what the ministry is doing. And to hear Marquis, the catalyst behind Main Street’s hopeful “bear hugs,” this ministry could be one that will be around for a long time.

“This gives people such hope, that as long as I’m alive, I’ll keep at it,” she says.





Word-of-mouth key to growth of “Jesus Seekers”

By Deanna Bottar

In the church world, word-of-mouth is the fuel that drives growth, change and excitement. At **Tod Avenue United Methodist Church** (Mahoning Valley District) in Warren, word-of-mouth drove a new Sunday school class to double in size as one student excitedly told a friend who then told a friend, and so on and so on and so on.

And soon **“The Jesus Seekers”** special needs ministry took root and grew.

After taking note of the enthusiasm of a couple of special needs children in the church’s Sunday school program, Michelle Graham, Christian education director, embarked on creating an entire class designed to meet the learning needs of students with special needs. The class began last September.

“The goal is to make everybody, no matter what their handicap or special need is, know that God loves them,” Graham said. “To give them a Sunday school class where they can express their thoughts and views on their Bible stories and draw closer to God. To help them feel a sense of belonging and acceptance in our church.”

The Rev. Mark Vincent, Tod Avenue UMC pastor, describes the ministry as a living illustration of the church’s passion for making a

In the advertising world, word-of-mouth is highly sought after, strategically coveted and quite frankly, not often achieved.



difference in each person’s unique life situation.

“There is a sense of enthusiasm within TAUMC and ‘The Jesus Seekers’ class,” Vincent said. “This enthusiasm is becoming more contagious as ‘The Jesus Seekers’ are motivated to invite others to join them to learn how God loves them for who they are. The class started out small. However it is growing fast.”

Jackie Carr, whose profession is working daily with people with special needs, leads the class, which has been warmly welcomed into the church family, Vincent said.

“To me, this is a ministry for everyone involved to truly be excited about,” Graham said. “I am very proud to have them be a part of our church.”

So far, the ministry has been advertised very little but has grown from the original two students and multiplied in size a few times over because of word-of-mouth recommendations. Vincent said the ministry will be publicized among the greater Warren community.

“We are anticipating an explosive interest of those who have special needs,” he said, explaining how the development of the ministry is having a magnetic effect. “This enthusiasm is becoming more contagious as ‘The Jesus Seekers’ are motivated to invite others to join them to learn how God loves them for who they are.”





Outside the walls, into the world

By Rev. Shawn C. Bishop*

A pastor, a minister and a rabbi were riding in a truck. It sounds like the beginning of a joke, doesn't it?

But this was real life – military chaplain fellowship. And this night was unique.

Scott, a Pentecostal chaplain, Sarah, a Jewish chaplain, and I had just finished dinner. Sarah and I caught a ride with Scott to head “home” for the evening. First, however, we needed to stop by Scott’s office.

Sarah and I stayed in the truck and talked a bit while Scott went into the building. We noticed the call to prayer being sung in the nearby town. The melody was relaxing and I commented to Sarah about the calming effect of the song.

We were suddenly interrupted by the loud alarm of incoming fire. We bailed out of the truck onto the ground. Special defensive guns used to shoot rockets and mortars out of the sky fired over our heads from about 50 yards away.

Sarah and I stayed on the ground until the all-clear signal allowed us to move safely into Scott’s building. We could hear on a nearby radio that one of my unit’s buildings had been hit and evacuated. Fortunately no one had been injured or killed. While Scott went with some of his unit to respond in other ways, I took Sarah with me to see those who had evacuated. Upon our arrival we spread out among the displaced mass of people and checked in with as many as we could. The next day was spent in visitation to people from that unit. I listened as they recounted their stories. Writing about it now brings up the realization of what could have happened.

This story represents one facet of the

Extension Ministry of our church. United Methodist military chaplains extend the ministry of the church beyond the walls to temporary places where a decidedly small percentage of U.S. citizens deal with issues and struggles that many of us would otherwise not have to (or want to) think about. We extend the ministry of the church... the ministry of East Ohio.

I am stationed in Iraq with Air Force surgeon Dr. Kara Schultz, who is originally from Stow, Ohio. Her brother and I were in scouts together at **Stow United Methodist Church** (Canal District). Though we hadn’t seen each other in over 20 years, we became fast friends.

I have the privilege to visit people injured in combat, to talk with people going through a personal challenge and to periodically remind people that there is a bigger picture beyond our current experience. I get to lead worship for those who desire to thank and praise God together. My experiences are some of the most diverse and interesting encounters I could ever expect to have; and it is my home conference, East Ohio, which has prepared me for this ministry.

When I sensed a call to ministry, while serving as an Air Force officer, I had many people along the way helping me discern my call, mentoring and guiding me. Seminary and my first appointment followed. East Ohio invested in my formation and many (too many to list here) guided me through that process.

The times I’ve been able to get home for conference have been nourishing to my soul and refreshing to my life: seeing friends, the extension ministry lunch, VBS for my kids,

choir for my teenage daughter, and my wife, Claudia, connecting with other spouses.

And then there are my churches: I cut my teeth at **Olivesburg United Methodist Church** (Mid Ohio District). Early patterns of who I am as a clergyperson can be traced to my two short years at the church. I still have meaningful ties and memories there. **Mansfield Trinity United Methodist Church** (Mid Ohio District) was my first full-time appointment out of seminary. I began to grow as a pastor and found a home and perhaps more of myself ... and then 9/11, followed by some searching, and an unanticipated return to the military.

All of this is to say: I was and am formed by our conference, and as a result our conference is in ministry to airmen, soldiers and sailors in Iraq. United Methodist characteristics, theology, spirituality, and openness shape the way I interact with people as a chaplain. It’s not always easy, but it is rewarding.

As you answer God’s call, consider Extension Ministry as a voice of the church to hurting people and to secular entities making decisions that affect people’s lives and character formation. And keep the link when you realize someone has been sent. Your thoughts and prayers mean a lot.



*Rev. Shawn C. Bishop is a chaplain in The United Methodist Church serving in Extension Ministry with the U.S. Air Force.



A day in the life
... of the Church

restoring • the • spirit

“Ministering to ministers in East Ohio and beyond” is the call of **Hope Springs: Ministries for the Journey**. Founded 10 years ago under the auspices of **Gay Street United Methodist Church** (Three Rivers District) in Mount Vernon, Hope Springs offers several types of quiet, contemplative ministry.

Ministers include clergy, clergy families and lay people. We have found that many people, especially pastors and their families, feel alone, without someone to share in significant spiritual conversation, to explore questions and fears, highs and lows, or to share in prayer together. Hope Springs offers spiritual leadership, study, retreats and companionship to assist in bridging that gap.

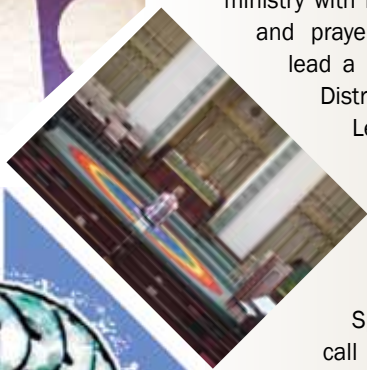
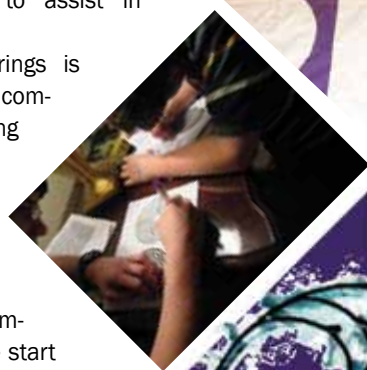
One of our primary offerings is called “spiritual direction”. It is a compassionate ministry of listening offered in a confidential, covenantal relationship. There are three people in a spiritual direction relationship: the individual seeking spiritual companionship, the spiritual companion or director, and God. We start and end with prayer. The spiritual director holds “presence” as the individual shares. It is not psychological counseling, or advice giving. It is a listening ministry, of praying within God’s presence. Sometimes, we pull up an extra chair as a reminder that God is present in this meeting.

Spiritual companionship is for anyone with questions about faith and life and who needs to explore those questions in a confidential and safe relationship. John Wesley emphasized the need for just such “holy conversations” and Christian conferencing as a way of discipleship. Sharing our life and faith experiences together is an important way of nurturing spiritual growth and discipleship.

Another exciting focus of Hope Springs Ministries is the labyrinth walk. Our retreats in the last few years have offered the opportunity for many people to walk the labyrinth for the first time, and experience the transforming power of the path of prayer. It is a beautiful form of walking prayer that has been practiced



By Rev. Carol Topping*



in the church for hundreds of years. Hundreds of people, young and old, have walked our prayer labyrinth and been moved by the depth of the experience.

Initially, Hope Springs Ministries was formed to offer retreats and labyrinth walks for Gay Street UMC and churches in the surrounding area. Soon however, we were invited to share our retreat offerings with churches, pastor and deacon groups, district conferences and pastors’ wives groups. Each retreat is tailored for the needs of those participants and varies from one-day to three-day retreat offerings.

Gay Street UMC continues to support this ministry with ministry space, encouragement and prayer. In August, 2011, we will lead a retreat sponsored by Firelands District for East Ohio Conference Lay Leaders on “The Transforming Path of Prayer”, at the Sawmill Creek Resort & Conference Center.

Over time, we have realized that most of Hope Springs Ministries are what we call ‘quiet’ contemplative ministries – and are done outside the church walls. Long-term work in spiritual direction brings a quiet movement of the spirit, growth of relationship with God, and recognition of where God is active in one’s life. Retreat ministry is a short, exciting burst of creative energy in which participants are offered story, song, prayer, Scripture, questions and spiritual reflection that one seldom experiences in such concentrated time.

The labyrinth walk is a source of amazement and mystery. You wonder how walking on a piece of painted canvas or a plain stone path could be a spiritual experience, until you do it in community with fellow believers ... and find yourself transformed by the Spirit. As God works through and in us, this ministry continues to evolve and grow. Thanks Be to God!

Read more about Hope Springs: Ministries for the Journey on Facebook at Hope Springs Ministries for the Journey or on the web at www.hsprings.org.

**Rev. Carol Topping is a retired East Ohio Conference pastor who is registered as a retreat leader with both East Ohio and West Ohio Conferences.*



East Ohio 2011 Annual Conference Report

By Rick Wolcott, Dir. of Communications

Bishop John L. Hopkins welcomed East Ohio back to Hoover Auditorium as he opened the 42nd session of Annual Conference on Monday, June 13, 2011. "If these walls could talk, we would hear the Holy hum of Hoover," Hopkins told the 1,501 in attendance on a sunny, 75 degree day along the shore of Lake Erie. "We stand on the shoulders of others who have worshipped here."

The Service of Communion and Remembrance offered the opportunity for East Ohio to pay respects to those who dedicated their lives making disciples for Jesus Christ. Lighted candles were processed through Hoover Auditorium and then placed on the altar to honor the 55 saints who joined the church triumphant since last year's annual conference. Among them was Bishop James Samuel Thomas, who shepherded East Ohio for twelve years.

The morning scripture from I Corinthians 12:12-26, Paul's letter to the church at Corinth, reminded us that the church, despite its many parts, is one body. Like a human body, it functions best when each of its parts performs its task properly. The lesson was a perfect way to introduce, "If We Are the Body..." this year's annual conference theme.

The State of the East Ohio Conference report showed a 1.14% decrease in membership to 163,603, and a .9% decrease in average weekly worship attendance to 64,602. There were 2,049 baptisms performed in 2010 and 20,359 professions of faith.

One provisional deacon and five provisional elders were commissioned Monday night. The evening was also a time to honor 27 retiring pastors for their years of faithfully carrying out Christ's work.

Tuesday's featured speaker, the Rev. Jorge Acevedo, shared reasons why and how Grace UMC in Cape Coral, Fla., is heralded as a vital congregation. The key lesson brought by Acevedo is that his church is vital because it is in ministry with the marginalized but it's able to do ministry with the marginalized because it is a vital congregation. The two are not mutually exclusive. Acevedo shared further examples with Bishop Hopkins during the opening of the Episcopal-Cabinet address. The second half of the address highlighted, through personal testimony, video and PowerPoint, vital ministries of East Ohio.

The conference welcomed five elders and one deacon during the Tuesday evening Service of Ordination.

Bishop Julius Trimble of the Iowa Conference led worship Wednesday morning. Trimble received a warm welcome back to East Ohio, where he previously served two churches and was dean of the cabinet. During his sermon Trimble challenged the crowd that we are not doing enough to be the body of Christ. "We don't give a damn about the poor. Period. End of story," Trimble proclaimed. He continued, "maybe we need fewer songs about Jesus and statements about who will get into heaven and who is going to hell."

Thursday morning's sermon, Faces of Grace, was given by the Rev. Dr. Gary George. Continuing to build on the theme of "If We Are the Body..." George lifted up the stories of three individuals whose lives have had an impact on his. The sermon concluded with a cardboard testimony featuring participants from around the conference and liturgical dance.

Dr. George's West Ohio Conference counterpart, the Rev. Joyce Fry, brought greetings on behalf of West Ohio Bishop Bruce Ough, who was out of the state and unable to attend. She thanked East Ohio for bringing her to Christ. Fry was ordained in East Ohio in 1971, one of the first female pastors in the

conference.

Fourteen clergy and 14 lay members were elected as delegates to General and Jurisdictional Conferences and a \$12,168,020 apportioned budget was adopted. The approved budget amount is the same as was approved for 2011.

Five resolutions were proposed and passed during the 2011 Annual Conference:

A Call to Advocate for the Enforcement of the Human Trafficking Laws in Ohio

The resolution asked that the conference contact Ohio governmental agencies encouraging new legislation and upholding legal action against human traffickers. It further asked that the Church and Society committee, in partnership with the East Ohio United Methodist Women and the Commission on the Status of Women of East Ohio Conference, advocate for this cause.

A Call to Support the Ohio Food Banks

The resolution asked the conference to commit to educate and encourage congregations to support local food banks with donations and volunteering. It further advocated for changes in public policy on state and local levels that will decrease hunger.

A Call to Honor Martin Luther King Jr. Day

The resolution asked that each United Methodist Church suspend activities and meetings unless it is to commemorate its observance.

A Call to Advocate for Continued Participation in Political Process and Support of Collective Bargaining

The resolution asked the conference to educate themselves and affirm the historic support of education, rights of workers and right to collective bargaining and to vote their conscience regarding the referendum initiative Ohio Senate Bill 5.

A Call to Ensure Youth a Place on Committees and Councils

The resolution asked that local churches make it a focus that youth be a part of leadership and mission.

Bishop Hopkins closed annual conference by reminding those in attendance to Aid, Advance and Advocate on behalf of Jesus Christ.

The 43rd session of Annual Conference will take place at Lakeside June 18-21, 2012.

2012 East Ohio Delegates

General Conference Delegates

At the 2011 Annual Conference 14 members (7 clergy & 7 lay) were elected to represent the conference at the 2012 General Conference.



Jurisdictional Conference Delegates

The Jurisdictional delegation is comprised of 28 people. It includes the 14 General Conference delegates plus 14 additional members (7 clergy & 7 lay). Ten reserve members (5 clergy & 5 lay) will also accompany the delegation to Jurisdictional Conference in 2012.



Clergy Delegates to General Conference (left to right, front to back) Valerie Stultz, Armando Arellano, Cynthia Patterson, David Baker, Gary George, Dan Bryant (Delegate not pictured: Orlando Chaffee)



Lay Delegates to General Conference (left to right, front to back) Jane Ruggles, Iris Andrews, Maggie Jackson, Allen Laferty, Jerry Rinehart, Andy Call, Jessica Vargo

Clergy Delegates and Reserves to Jurisdictional Conference Top left photo (left to right) Row 1: Elizabeth Schenk, Cara Stultz Costello, Valerie Stultz, Armando Arellano, Cynthia Patterson, Neriah Edwards. Row 2: James Winkler, David Baker, Judith Claycomb, Delaine McGhee, Dan Bryant, Michael Grant. Row 3: Thomas Snyder, Gary George, James Humphrey, Paul White (Delegates not pictured: Orlando Chaffee, Gary Henderson, Chester Harris)



Lay Delegates and Reserves to Jurisdictional Conference Bottom left photo (left to right) Row 1: Carole Burdette, Betty Wilson, Jane Ruggles. Row 2: Paul Capelle, Iris Andrews, Maggie Jackson, Jessica Vargo, Jeanette Kraus. Row 3: Sandra Lutz, Linda Crowell, David Hartong. Row 4: Allen Laferty, Jerry Rinehart, Andy Call, James Ehrman (Delegates not pictured: Kay Panovec, Carl Winters, Harry Askin, Kathy Palmer)

resources

our contributors

Find out more about churches and organizations featured in this issue:

Otterbein United Methodist Church
www.otterbeinconnection.org

Urban Mission in Steubenville
www.urbanmission.org

Mill Creek Workcamp
<http://millcreekworkcamp.org>

Wedgewood United Methodist Church
<http://wedgewoodumc.org>

Wooster United Methodist Church
www.woosterumc.org

South Euclid-Hillcrest United Methodist Church
<http://sehumc.org>

youth in mission



Project 1:8 is a challenge for teens to be in missions locally, regionally and globally for the next year. Jesus' charge to "make disciples of all the earth" is a huge part of our United Methodist heritage ... it's Biblical, taken straight from Acts 1:8. Our youth will be sharing God's love! Visit www.eocumc.com/youth (click on Project 1:8 tab) to find out more about the project and to blog along with youth who are recording their mission work online!

Celebrate 1:8 (November 11-12, 2011) is a mid-year event for East Ohio youth to come together and celebrate the lives changed at mid-point of the Project 1:8 challenge.



Making A Difference: Leading Students In Life-Changing Service (DVD) Help your students discover the value and joy of serving as they seek to follow Jesus' teachings and example. This is not just a Bible study, but an experience of putting faith into action.

Made to Make a Difference (DVD) Deep down, everyone wants to make a difference. But it is difficult for students to get past their own issues, problems, and distractions to see that their lives can count right now. Max Lucado offers Biblical insight into how God has uniquely created students with certain passions, talents, and interests to impact the world for Christ.

mind, body, spirit

Rediscovering the Labyrinth

This documentary tells the stories of real people whose lives have changed by walking the labyrinth. Join Lauren Artress, author of *Walking a Sacred Path*, as she presents this remarkable tool for transformation.



All featured media resources can be found at East Ohio Conference Media Center. Use the convenient online catalog to reserve these and additional resources for your church at www.eocumc.com/media or contact Susan at 800-831-3972 ext. 139.



Prayer Path: A Christ-Centered Labyrinth Experience (VHS) Create your own multi-media labyrinth for a devotional adventure. In the span of one hour, participants can journey through the labyrinth guided by a CD narration.

Sacred Rhythms: Spiritual Practices that Nourish Your Soul and Transform Your Life (DVD) Explore the practices that spiritual seekers and growing disciples have used throughout history to grow closer to God. Ruth Haley Barton provides guidance for you and your group in a way that links the disciplines of the Christian faith to the most compelling desires of the human soul.