

December 18, 2006

Electronic
Newsletter



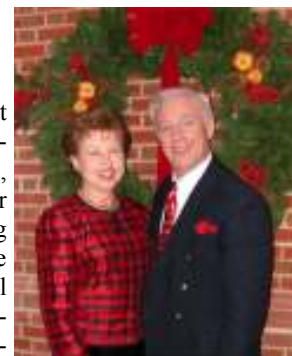
Charlotte District



E-Connections

Merry Christmas

Despite the reality of impossible schedules, excessive obligations, last minute shopping, and unanswered e-mails; I take delight in this Advent-Christmas season. I was a pastor in Boone when my friend, the Catholic priest, informed me that the Vatican had decided that Advent was becoming too somber in tone. He observed that, in his tradition, worship during the month preceding Christmas needed a bit of spice. The mother church decided that year to change the paraments' color to a bright, festive blue rather than the traditional penitential purple. Well, the issue was never really about color, but content and the evangelical fervor of the church during this season of yearning and anticipation. Advent is that period of four advancing Sundays in which excitement magnifies with each passing day. Something ceremonial, but serious, occurs during this special time. Yes, the season cannot discard its sentimental and nostalgic mood; but Advent is much more than a time to contemplate the mysteries of the incarnation. G. K. Chesterton articulated my thoughts on the matter nearly a century ago when he wrote, "If you do not like what is sentimental and ceremonial, do not celebrate Christmas at all...I cannot understand why anyone should bother about a ceremonial except ceremonially. If a thing only exists in order to be graceful, do it gracefully or do not do it."



The first year I was in this office this season was very difficult for me. Since childhood I had entered into the life-flow of a singular parish, participating in "lessons and carols," Christmas-Eve Candle-light, Sunday school class dinners, and caroling with youth groups. Suddenly I was a vagabond superintendent, slipping into the back pew in order to overhear the liturgy or become a slightly-engaged listener. I felt like a disciple in exile. Now I have received a graceful redemption from this slide toward the sin of self-pity and detachment.

During Advent, 2006, I have been inspired by a smorgasbord of qualitative spiritual experiences. I have attended marvelous worship services, continuing my visits to pastors newly appointed. The Clergy District Christmas Banquet at Assurance was indeed a time for sharing our affection for our fellow colleagues in ministry. Pat and I are truly grateful for the lovely cross with the engraving and the gift made to Africa University in our honor. That night was filled with a quality of warmth and cheer that only Christmas can provide.

When Henri Nouwen carved out seven months in his busy life to spend in the Abbey of the Genesee in upstate New York, he concluded his time of retreat and introspection on Christmas Day. He wrote this in his diary: "This day is the day in which I will experience not only the beauty of the night with songs of peace but also the wide ocean stretching out between two continents. This day the smallness and vulnerability of the child and the vastness of our earth will both enter my soul. I know that without the child, I have no reason to live but also that without a growing awareness of the suffering of humanity, I will not fulfill the call that the child has given me."

This is precisely the Christ-centered missional consciousness by which we shall begin our pilgrimage into the calendar year, 2007. The fact that we have prepared for the arrival of the Child in our hearts once again this Advent-Christmastide time provides for us the grace to embrace seasonal sentiment and ceremony; for, through the rituals of worship during this sacred season, we shall reach out to the suffering of this world with a word of hope, a touch of compassion, and the power of redemption.

We wish for you, and all who are near and dear to you, a very Merry Christmas and a fulfilling New Year.

Grace and peace,

George & Pat Thompson

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Ubuntu Explorers to Cambodia

We journeyed...

The first women's journey to Cambodia sponsored by the Women's Division of the General Board of Global Ministry (GBGM) was held September 9-20, 2006. Twenty-one United Methodist Women known as *Ubuntu Explorers*, from ten different states and multi-cultural backgrounds (Korean-Americans, Cambodian-Americans, Filipino-American) shared with the newly formed Cambodian Methodist Women. During a three-day seminar--"Women Journeying in Mission", held in Phnom Penh--they prayed, sang, danced, studied, worshipped, laughed, and cried with their Cambodian sisters as they shared culture and faith stories. Six United Methodist Women from Charlotte joined the mission trip: Christy Bishop, Tara Ebner, and Sandi McGarrah (journey coordinator) from Providence UMC and Lang Heng, Sareom Sam, and Jackie White from the Cambodian Mission Church at First UMC.



Kyung Za Yim, National President of the United Methodist Women and Women's Division, was part of this Ubuntu Journey to Cambodia. In her keynote address based on Isaiah 43:19, she stated, ***"Ubuntu is the new mission project given to us by God as a way to help one another. Ubuntu is an African word meaning respect for humanity. It is an understanding that one is because others are. We American sisters have come to get to know you, to learn from each other, to share the journey of faith, and to build a partnering relationship for God's mission.... I have already felt that I am a part of your family.... We have found out that we have much in common, the most important of which is that we are all God's precious children.... This Ubuntu journey has special meaning for all of us. We are making history. Ubuntu is a mission, God's mission. We are in God's mission and mission is Love in Action... getting involved in a relationship of mutuality...."***

We integrated...

We visited the bright and dark sides of Cambodia: the Royal Palace, the Killing Fields, the dumpsite, the orphanage, the countryside, the churches; and the many projects of the Methodist Women in Cambodia supported by United Methodist Women--pig and cow raising, fish farming, auto repair, beauty and barbering schools, and several special schools. We planted rice along with our Cambodian sisters, ate food caught and prepared on a farm in a northern province, spent the night in one of the villages, and worshipped with the people in the countryside.

We were blessed...

As team leader I learned many lessons before and during our journey, the most important of all being this: ***"You must let go and let God lead. We could see God in the group of amazing UMW women who were called to the mission, in the ways we as strangers worked together to show His love to our Cambodian sisters, in the energy He gave us to perform our daily tasks, in the humor He gave us to eat another usual meal, in sleeping at another unusual place, and (most of all) being 'out of our comfort zone'. I praise God for the blessing of this incredible journey."***

Lang Heng, from the Cambodian Mission Church at First UMC Charlotte, helped with translation. She escaped with her family to the US in 1979 during the Khmer Rouge Regime. After 27 years, she was so happy to have the opportunity to see Cambodia and her people once again and to have a time for healing. Our own Tara Ebner confessed this: ***"I have been moved by the people of Cambodia for their love of the Lord. I have learned what it means to be humble and giving."*** Christy Bishop, a young adult from Providence UMC, was the youngest member of our journey. She received the most beautiful gift of any of us while there. As we walked the dumpsite in Phnom Penh, a six-year old boy she played and held hands with took off his prized possession--a colorful bead bracelet--and placed it around her wrist as a gift. What a gift of unconditional love! Helena Kim from CA said what we all felt as we left Cambodia to travel home: ***"I now have a renewed sense of purpose in doing my part as God's hands and feet."***

The second Cambodian Ubuntu Journey mission trip is scheduled for June 13-28, 2007. If you are interested in information about this wonderful mission opportunity, or if you would like to schedule a program for your church group, please contact me (Sandi McGarrah) at 704-847-3407 or e-mail me at: sandramc@windstream.net.

Sandi is a member of Providence UMC. She is a Diaconal Minister in the Charlotte District and serves as an environmental educator.

2007 Lay Speaker's Training



Lay Speaking Ministry

Charlotte District
2007 Lay Speaker's Training

The Charlotte District is excited to announce its 2007 Lay Speaking training courses.

The training is open to all. You will have the opportunity to gain valuable experience, knowledge, and confidence that will serve you in your ministry. Lay Speaking courses are offered in basic and advanced classes. The goal is to provide effective leadership in our churches through the laity. Whether you teach Sunday school or lead a Bible study you will gain valuable insights into how to become an effective leader in your chosen ministry. The basic (new certification) curriculum focuses on the many ways lay speakers are called to be in ministry. Our advanced (renewal certification) curriculum this year is "Faithful Leadership".

Visit www.gbod.org/laity/lay_speaking/ to obtain the Lay Speaking brochure.

In His Service,

Bruce Carlton

Bruce Carlton

District Director of Lay Speaking

Mary Lou Roller

Mary Lou Roller

District Lay Leader

2007 Basic/Advanced Lay Speaker Training

Dates: Monday nights in February (Feb. 5, 12, 19, and 26)

Time: 6:30 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

Locations: *Select the most convenient location.*

Trinity UMC, 6230 Beatties Ford Rd. Charlotte, NC 28216

Providence UMC, 2810 Providence Rd. Charlotte, NC 28213

Cost: \$25.00 (Includes all course materials)



Registration Form for Lay Speaker's Training – Charlotte District

February 5, 12, 19, and 26, 2007

Please indicate your location choice: Providence UMC *or* Trinity UMC

Name: _____ Church: _____

Street Address: _____ City, State, Zip: _____

Home Phone: _____ Office Phone: _____

Basic (New Certification) *or* Advanced (Renewal Certification)

\$25 cost per person = Total Amount Enclosed \$ _____

Pastor's Signature: _____

Make check payable to Charlotte District UMC Office and mark for LSCS and mail by January 26th to:

Charlotte District Office, The United Methodist Church
4108 Park Road, Suite 101 - Charlotte, NC 28209-2259

Upcoming Events/Activities

**We cordially invite you, District clergy, and friends to join us for our monthly
Communion Service**

St. Mark's UMC, 917 Clanton Road, Charlotte, NC 28217 (Tel: 704-523-7483)

Tuesday, January 2nd • Monthly Communion Service at 8:00 a.m.

Thursday, January 4th • District Clergy Fellowship

9:30 a.m. Educational Experience followed by Lunch

Bethlehem Center

2705 Baltimore Avenue

Charlotte, NC 28203

Please RSVP to the District Office (704-525-3395) no later than January 2nd.

WNCC 2007 Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration

Friday, January 12th • Youth Night

Saturday, January 13th • Annual Service & Celebration

Wesley Memorial UMC • 1225 Chestnut Drive, High Point, NC

Get more details at www.wnccumc.org/eth/mlkcelebration.htm

Charlotte District March 2007 Spring Seminar

“Explore and Practice the Spiritual Dimensions of Stewardship”

Kennon Callahan, Facilitator

Please place on your church's calendar the dates, **March 1-2 for all the churches. On Saturday morning, **March 3**, we shall have an additional session designed for the needs of the small church.**

All sessions will be conducted at Myers Park UMC's Jubilee Hall.

Apportionments

Pastors and local church treasurers, the end of the year is here. Take time now to review your apportionment payment records, and make plans for completing your church's apportionments before year's end. Our connectional ministries are counting on your faithful support.

Year-End Report

The Year-End Statistical Report was mailed to pastors in our District on Wednesday, November 29th. The reports are due in the District Office no later than January 18th.

Upcoming (continued)

Dates Announced for Christian Education Seminars

Dates for the second series of Christian education seminars sponsored by the WNCC Offices of Nurture/Christian Education and Ethnic/Justice Ministries are set for January 25-27 and March 29-31. CEU's are available for participants who attend all of the sessions. For details and the application, see

<http://www.wnccumc.org/eth/christianevent.htm>

The latest issue of *AU Today* provides the broad view of the support of The United Methodist Church to Africa University and some results! See <http://www.wnccumc.org/vsn/au2.htm>

Grants Encourage Building Team Participation

Want to go on a building team project, but think you can't afford it? Grants and scholarships are available to qualifying ethnic minorities and those from rural churches that qualify for Duke Endowment funds. They are awarded for first-time building team participation in 2007. Another grant, by the Fellows Committee, is based on need. Learn about these funds at http://www.wnccumc.org/bgt/additional_support.htm



*May the peace that Christ brings be the heart of your Christmas.
Merry Christmas from the office staff of the Charlotte District.*

**The District Office will be closed in observance of the holiday
during the week of December 24th, re-opening on January 2, 2007.**

George E. Thompson, District Superintendent
DeEtta Rivens, Administrative Assistant
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