

Charlotte District E-Connections

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Revitalization: One Church at a Time



*D. S. George
Thompson*

During the occasion upon which I have made pilgrimage to the lands of the Bible, I have particularly been drawn to the excavation site at Capernaum in upper Galilee where Jesus began his public ministry. The evangelist Mark reposts, "They went to Capernaum; and when the Sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught." (Mark 1:21 NRSV) The archeological remains of that synagogue punctuate this placid setting near the Galilean shore, and a considerable portion of the ancient building that our Lord entered has been restored. A couple of decades ago archaeologists uncovered buried fragments of a church that was obviously constructed over the Capernaum site of the home of Peter's mother-in-law. Within that insolas (extended family dwelling) Jesus gathered with his disciples and villagers of Capernaum. Here he taught them. Here became the geographical epicenter for his ministry throughout the region. Here, in effect, Jesus established an academy of discipleship for all followers of the Way.

The late Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives from Boston, Tip O'Neill, was fond of saying, "All politics is local." I would like to be remembered for insisting that "all Church is local." The apostle Paul spent approximately four years in Rome's eastern outpost city of Ephesus. Today this location in modern Turkey has become the most extensive, and perhaps the most expensive, archaeological project in the world. This "dig" will likely continue for another one hundred years! But, when I traveled there with parishioners for Christ UMC of Greensboro, I especially felt the spiritual presence of Paul at that location. Paul knew intimately new converts in this growing metropolis; and the whole city knew Paul whose teachings disrupted the local economy and created a riot. When Paul wrote his first letter to Christians in the Grecian city of Thessalonica (perhaps the very first book of the New Testament), he concluded affectionately, "Greet all the brothers and sisters with a holy kiss." Paul knew these people. He loved them, argued with them, wept over them, suffered along side of them, visited in their homes, presided over their church meetings, instructed them in doctrine, and kissed their faces. He was their friend, their brother, their pastor, and their presiding elder.

Perhaps the most precious, sacred moment at each Annual Conference occurs at that final service of worship on Sunday at Lake Junaluska. The printed listing of the pastoral appointments is circulated by the ushers, and the bishop sends forth each pastor to a community where a church or charge resides. That tradition is as fresh as June of 2011 and as ancient as Wesley and Asbury. But it began when Jesus issued the Great Commission recorded in Matthew's gospel. The Risen Christ announced "the appointments" from a specific mountain where he commanded the disciples to "go therefore and make disciples of all nations..." concluding with these words of assurance, "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:20 NRSV)

Conferences throughout United Methodism have adopted a mission statement comparable to WNC's: namely, "we shall follow Jesus, make disciples, and transform the world." But how will this take place? What is our plan? Are these just empty words to place on a local church bulletin?

Bishop Larry Goodpaster and the Cabinet have a very precise plan: we shall faithfully do these things by the grace of God ONE CHURCH AT A TIME. The task of every pastor is to join in tandem with lay leadership teams in each local church in an effort to revitalize the congregation to which they are sent to serve. Our plan is as simple as that. (continued on page 2)

Revitalization: One Church at a Time (continued from cover)

What if the members of the church to which a pastor is sent do not want to be revived or do not think they need a new and right spirit? What if relationships within the appointed church are toxic? It is an act of candor and Christian realism for us to begin each Annual Conference by singing this stanza of Charles Wesley's hymn, "And Are We Yet Alive?"

"What troubles have we seen,
What mighty conflicts past,
Fightings without, and fears within,
Since we assembled last!"

I have rarely encountered a congregation so conflicted and evil-spirited that it is devoid of a remnant of the few with which revitalization can begin. Two or three gathered together in His name within a small discipleship group can begin that process of transformation. As with Wesley's class meetings and bands, we can foster the environment for nurture, accountability, spiritual growth, sanctification through disciplines of grace, and a community of loving relationships.

Each year our Charlotte District Committee on Congregational Development, with the leadership of Rev. Ken Lyon, will partner with a few churches that are chosen as candidates for participation in this endeavor. Churches have numerous program options including Natural Church Development, administering Bishop Schnase's *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*, partnership with another congregation or congregations, cooperative mission parish, Ken Callahan's *Twelve Vital Keys*, and other such choices. Fundamentally, we can learn from each other, and especially from the guidance of Charlotte District churches that have already experienced renewal and sustainable growth. We cannot all be large churches; but all our churches can become healthy ones. All can be Christ-centered, biblically-based, and mission-driven.

Duke Divinity School's alumni publication recently carried a few stories about some of its graduates in a series entitled, "Leading Lives of Consequence." One of those described was Rev. Cynthia Hale, an African-American woman who launched a new church start back in 1986 with a small Bible study group in her living room. That group became Ray of Hope (Disciples of Christ) in Decatur, Georgia, where Cynthia now conducts two worship services each Sunday attended by over 1,500 per service.

We live in a time when people everywhere are hungry for a ray of hope. Planet earth seems to be spinning out of control with a tsunami in Japan, revolutions in North Africa and the Middle East, and a faltering recovery from the Great Recession. Our collective United Methodist witness in the Charlotte District is indeed a ray of hope amidst a culture of fear and despair. May we, consequently, join hand and heart by becoming the redeemed people of God—followers of the Risen Christ and recipients of His abundant grace, renewed and transformed, ONE CHURCH AT A TIME.

Grace and peace,

George

George E. Thompson
Charlotte District Superintendent

Ghana Mission's Outreach

We at Ghana Mission United Methodist Church, Charlotte would like to give praise and honor to our Lord and King, Jesus Christ for His manifold blessings. The idea of writing this article is to share with you what the Lord has been doing in the West Charlotte area of town, near Charlotte/Douglas International Airport.

Ghana Mission United Methodist Church is committed to connecting people to God's message of love and hope through faith in the saving grace of Jesus Christ. The Church was formed out of two Bible Study groups about 7 years ago. The ministry has grown from 18 professing members in 2005 to 253 at the close of the year 2010.

Over the years, Ghana Mission has thrived in this obscured community with the Gospel of Christ. Every member upon joining the Church makes *intentional* faith promise to obey Christ and to be loyal to the Church in its *intentional* outreach programs (such as Community Keep Fit, Health Screening, Picnic and charitable giving to Charlotte Men's and Women's Shelter and Crisis Assistance Ministry). Not long ago the Church donated an 18 passenger bus to Trinity Theological Seminary in Ghana, West-Africa. The bus is being used to transport pastors to the remote parts of the country to train and share the gospel with the least and the left behind.

We also offer opportunities for friendship to develop through small groups such as practical contemporary Bible Study, prayer groups, music groups, electrified and inspired worship Services.

One thing that will always remain the same at Ghana Mission is our deep passion and focus on God's Word and Community. This is what we do; this is what we live for! May God's name be praised and honored forever- Amen!



Community Keep Fit



Community Health Screening



Sorting clothes at Crisis Assistance Ministry.



Community picnic.

St. Andrew's Shares their Preschool Program

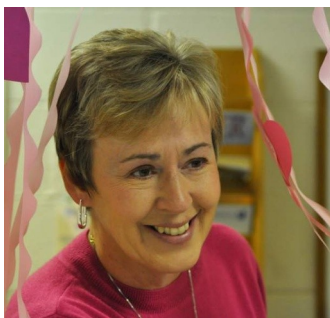
Jesus loves the little children; all the children of the world. Red and yellow, black and white: they are precious in his sight. Jesus loves the little children of the world.

Never is the truth of this song more evident than at the St. Andrew's United Methodist Church Preschool. Among the 69 children and their parents enrolled, eight nationalities outside of the USA are represented: India, France, Mexico, Lithuania, Vietnam, South Africa, Brazil, and Peru. It is so wonderful to learn about one another's native countries and celebrate each others' special days, all the while experiencing the richness of our diversity in the human family. Preschool Director Amanda Newhouse and her staff of eleven do an amazing job of teaching the stories of our Christian faith as they live out daily Jesus' teaching to love our neighbor, helping the children grow in their social, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual development.

God has located St. Andrew's Church in a south Charlotte neighborhood where we truly can be a "light to the nations" and we can be a source of God's holy light to each other through the Preschool. Frequent and ongoing interaction takes place between church members and Preschool families. Preschool children and families regularly participate and serve in Vacation Bible School, our free Wednesday Night Community Meals during the Summer, as well as the Wednesday Night Supper and choirs during the school year. Support for parents is offered through the Mom's Prayer Group and a play group that meets after school and is open to other families in the neighborhood.

While the Preschool is a place of learning and fun, the children and their families enthusiastically and generously support many mission projects throughout the year. These include providing food for families during the Christmas holidays and regularly collecting canned goods for Loaves and Fishes; joining with other families in the church in providing gifts and clothes for children referred by Bethlehem Center through St. Andrew's Church's "Angel Tree" ministry during Advent; collecting money and items for the Humane Society; as well as money and books for the church's partner school across the street: Montclair Elementary School.

In a world filled with so much fear and mistrust of one another, the St. Andrew's Preschool provides the opportunity for us all to see and interact with one another differently and in a way that allows us to glimpse and experience the Kingdom of God present here on earth. What a blessing!



Amanda Newhouse, Director of the St. Andrew's Preschool.



The richness of diversity at St. Andrew's Preschool.



Staff provide nurturing care to the children.

First Hmong Co-sponsors A Family

On October 2, 2010, First Hmong held its annual church revival. The theme for the revival was, "The New Step." First Hmong knew it was time for its congregation to step up, step out and step forward.

In mid November 2010, I received a phone call from a church member. She shared that she was serving as an interpreter through Catholic Social Services for a Hmong family. A gentleman from the agency would make contact with me regarding this Hmong family from Thailand.

The next day, I received a phone call from the Refugee Resettlement Office Case Coordinator and scheduled an appointment to meet with him. During the meeting I learned that a Hmong church was needed to co-sponsor a Hmong family of eight from Thailand. The co-sponsorship would require the following assistance: language interpretation, family needs, and transition into a new life in Charlotte, North Carolina.

I was excited about this opportunity for the church. However, at the same time I was concerned because I did not know if our congregation was ready to take on such an enormous task. If First Hmong was unable to assist the family they would be referred to another state or country for sponsorship.

Our congregation's revival theme echoed the opportunity for "The New Step." This opportunity to reach out to a family who was in the same desperate need that the Hmong people experienced back in the late 1970's when our people became refugees of the Vietnam War. Where would we be today if the American people refused to sponsor us, the Hmong people, to come to the United States of America and start a new life in the new world. The opportunity was accepted to co-sponsor the Hmong refugee family from Thailand.

The Lor family is still following the old religion, Animism and has not accepted the Christian religion yet. They have three daughters (ages 16, 10, 8) and three sons (ages 14, 11, 6). The Catholic Housing Program will assist them financially for six months. If all goes well the Lor family would then become self-sustaining. We rejoice, give thanks, and God bless Kilgo UMC who has kindly helped financially too. (Kilgo also shares its church facility with the First Hmong congregation.) Many of the family's furnishings were donated by the Catholic Church Program and members of our congregation, loving Christians, friends and family from all around.

Several of First Hmong's members have showed the family how to use various home appliances and new meal preparation. However, they still prefer to eat plain and simple homeland style cooking. The family has settled down and received all the necessary assistance they need. They are now trying to adjust to the new atmosphere and surroundings. It will take time but it will be done. The husband is studying to get his drivers license so he can go and find a job to support his family. The children have all been enrolled in Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools.

This is by far a "new step" and the biggest outreach project our congregation has done this year. We solicit prayers from all our brothers and sisters in Christ. Our hope is that this family will see God's love, glory, grace and come to know and accept him as their Christ and Savior so that one day they can re-settle in the eternal home with our Father, God in Heaven.

*Rev. Tou-Chao Her, Pastor
First Hmong UMC, Charlotte*



The Lor Family is co-sponsored by First Hmong UMC.

Sanctuary Partners with WISH Program

Sanctuary Charlotte is making history through mission and outreach! Our members are excited about serving God and helping others. At present more than 60% of the congregation is involved with mission/outreach. Through our Partnership with the Wish Program, Sanctuary hosted the first *Bridges Out of Poverty* training and formed the first African-American Hope Team in the Western North Carolina Conference. Simply incredible! Even though this historical fact is absolutely amazing it is relevant to mention that a fair share of our members devoted a deeper understanding to poverty by completing the training sessions and a select few are now Hope Team Members.

Throughout the *Bridges Out of Poverty* workshops facilitated by Rev. Stephanie Hand, Lisa Howell and Wanda Anderson, most participants were able to identify new opportunities to experience God in their Outreach/Mission work at Sanctuary. It was interesting to examine the stereotypes of poverty but more refreshing to demolish those barriers that prohibited us from forming a genuine relationship with people in poverty. Several participants reported that any preconceived notions of poverty were diminished immediately following the training.

It is only the first quarter of 2011 and our mission initiatives are underway. We are connected as a church, focused and growing closer to God as we serve those that are less fortunate. At Sanctuary we look forward to continuing the year filled with God's grace, joy and love for the least, last and the lost.

Visit <http://wishprogram.org/index.php> to learn more about *Bridges Out of Poverty* WISH Program.



Wanda Anderson (left) and Lisa Howell (right) share information during the workshop.



Bridges Out of Poverty training at Sanctuary UMC.

Pacific Emergency



**Please give generously to
Pacific Emergency,
UMCOR Advance #3021317**

Houses are swept by water following a tsunami and earthquake in Natori City in northeastern Japan, March 11, 2011. Photo: Reuters/Kyodo/Japan

A massive 8.9 magnitude earthquake rumbled through northeast Japan on Friday, March 11 triggering a 33-foot tsunami wave. The earthquake is the strongest to hit Japan in 140 years, and it is the fifth strongest in the world. The disaster caused widespread death and destruction including loss of homes and livelihoods. The crisis is intensified with the threat of nuclear radiation.

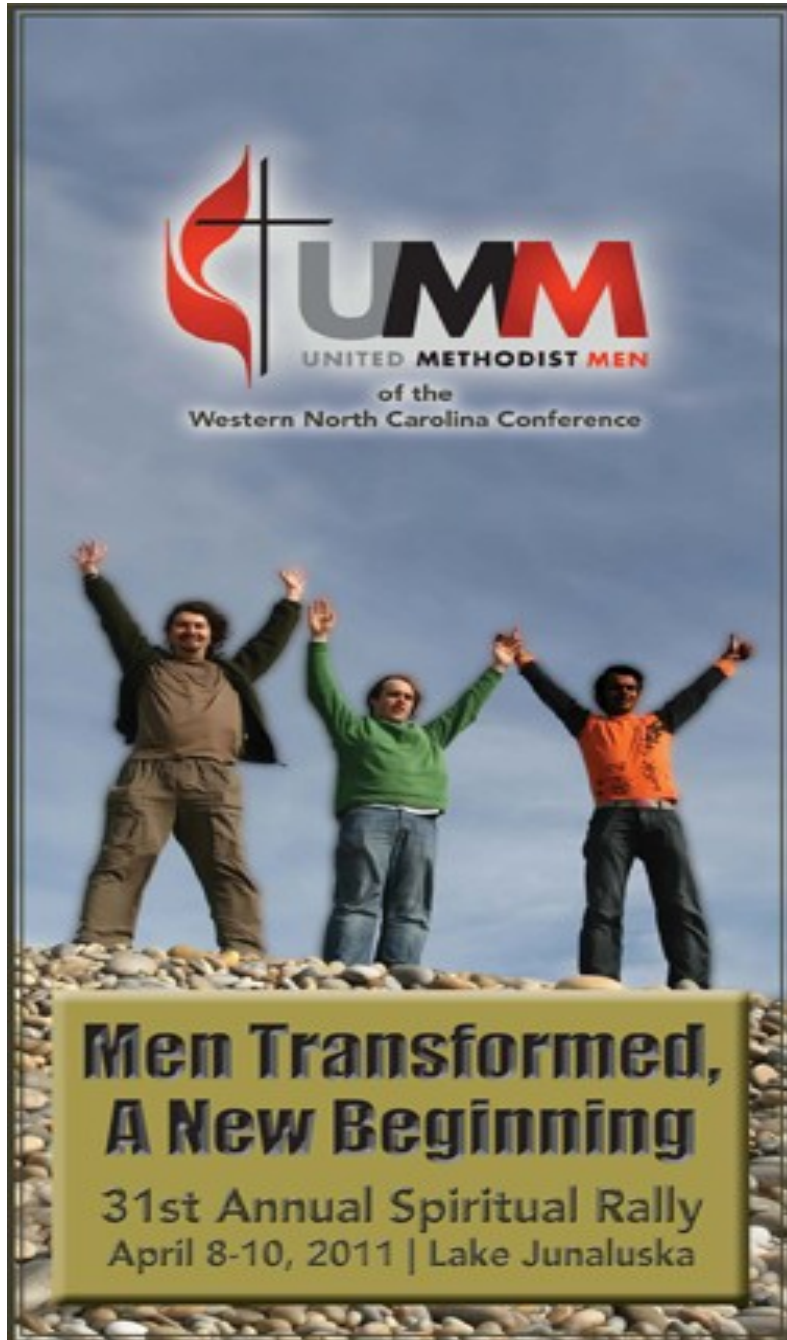
In response to the Earthquake on March 10, 2011 that struck Japan, The United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) will be working with local communities to rebuild. UMCOR is now better able to help when earthquakes and tsunamis or other disasters hit the area. UMCOR works in shelter and infrastructure reconstruction, water and sanitation, income generation, health and nutrition, education and community development.

United Methodists and friends are urged to pray for the people of Japan during this crucial hour and support this emergency effort through giving. Please write the project name (Pacific Emergency) and Advance # 3021317 on the memo line of your check.

How to Give:

- Online at www.givetomission.org
- By Offering: For local church and Annual Conference credit, put your gift in the offering plate on Sunday.
- By Check: Make your check to UMCOR and mail to: UMCOR, PO Box 9068, New York, NY 10087.
- By Credit Card: Call toll-free (800) 554-8583





31st Annual UMM Men Spiritual Rally at Lake Junaluska

**"Men Transformed,
A New Beginning"**

FEATURING

Gil Hanke, UMM General Secretary

Rev. Dr. Percy Reeves, UM Minister

**Jerry Moore, Football Coach
Appalachian State**

The UMM annual rally offers inspiration and direction to United Methodist Men's Fellowships and individual participants as they seek God's will for their common and individual lives to respond to that call in obedience. It is hoped the experience of this rally will encourage participants to work faithfully to make United Methodist Men an even stronger influence in United Methodism.

Golf Tournament | Prayer Line
Fellowship | Scouting | Auction

Flyer and event registration available at:
<http://wnccumc.org/umm/pdf/2011RallyWeb.pdf>

Golf Tournament information available at:
[http://wnccumc.org/benefits The Children's Home](http://wnccumc.org/benefits/TheChildrensHome). Details at
<http://wnccumc.org/umm/pdf/2011RallyGolfWeb.pdf>

Article excerpts
from <http://wnccumc.org/umm/umm-events.htm>

Charlotte District

Western NC Conference
4108 Park Road, Suite 101
Charlotte, NC 28209-2259
www.chardist.org

Phone: 704-525-3395
Fax: 704-525-4238
Email: charlottedistofc@wnccumc.org

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

*Do all the good you can,
By all the means you can,
In all the ways you can,
In all the places you can,
At all the times you can,
To all the people you can,
As long as ever you can.*

John Wesley (1703 - 1791)

Calendar

MARCH 2011

- 26 Bishops' Confirmation Celebration, Pfeiffer University*
- 28-31 Cabinet Meeting
- 31 Application deadline: Jane and Royce Reynolds Fund
<http://www.umfwnc.org/>

APRIL 2011

- 1 Cabinet Meeting
- 6-10 PAUMCS Secretaries Conference, Knoxville TN
<http://www.gbqm-umc.org/paumcs/2011Brochureforweb.pdf>
- 8-10 UM Men Annual Rally (page 8)
- 8-10 Kaleidoscope (middle-school youth)*
- 22-25 District Office Closed
Observance Good Friday/Easter Monday
- 26-28 Cabinet

MAY 2011

- 1 Public Announcement of 2011 Clergy Appointments
- 5 Clergy Farewell Event, Kilgo UMC, 6 pm
- 15 Charlotte District Pre-Conference Briefing,
Memorial UMC-Charlotte, 4 pm (more details to come)
- 23-25 Cabinet

JUNE 2011

- 8-12 Western NC Annual Conference, Lake Junaluska
- 22-26 Harambee! spiritual retreat for youth and their coun-
selors, sponsored by the SEJ BMCR, Paine College*
- 28 Moving Day for clergy

JULY 2011

- 1 Official start day of moving clergy
- 3 Transition Sunday for moving clergy
- 10 First Sunday in pulpit at new appointment

* Event details at <http://www.wnccumc.org/yth/yth-events.htm>