College students flock to church in Schuylkill Haven

by Suzy Keenan

First United Methodist Church of Schuylkill Haven, PA, may not have known it, but they were poised to do something new, and new is what they got: an inter-generational and inter-racial outreach program.

Pastor Albert Mosley has been at First UMC since July of 2003. He saw immediately that the church had a lot of energy and enthusiasm, but needed direction. The church had just completed a strategic plan, and expressed desire to get involved with the Penn State/Schuylkill Campus.

First UMC is a predominantly white congregation in a community in Schuylkill Haven that is 99% white. For Pastor Mosley, 32 years old and African-American, this is a cross-racial appointment.

Their outreach to the campus started in an informal way by inviting Voices of Schuylkill, a campus gospel group, and Praise in Motion, a liturgical dance ministry to participate in worship. A member of the church, Dr. DeEdre Lewis-Johnson, is director of minority student affairs at first campus, and she initiated this interaction. It developed into an adopt-a-family program, where students can choose to interact with a family from the church.

Mosley's experience included that, he taught at Millsaps College, a United Methodist college in Jackson, MS as adjunct professor of religious studies. “I sort of always had one foot on campus and one foot in the church,” Mosley said of his experience.

“This was a new and different thing for the church - gospel music and African-American students,” Mosley explained.

Mosley’s first assignment as pastor was in western North Carolina in the Appalachian Mountains. “The kids in church wanted to touch my skin to see what would happen - they had never seen a black person before. In that area the inhabitants generally do not encounter people of color at all. My educational background made them more comfortable with me and with who I was as a person of color.” Mosley is a graduate of Millsaps, Duke and Yale. “I believe my calling is to serve people of color.”

UMCOR rushes to tsunami aid, takes supplies, medicine to victims

Adopt-A-Family students from the Penn State-Schuylkill campus enjoy a great meal and fellowship at First UMC in Schuylkill Haven

Ralph E. Blanks appointed to Bishop’s Cabinet

By Suzy Keenan

The Reverend Ralph E. Blanks has been appointed by Bishop Marcus Matthews to the superintendency of the Central District. He will begin his new appointment on July 1.

Blanks’ motto is to bloom where he is planted - wherever he may be appointed to serve God’s people. Born to a deeply religious family in Little Rock, Arkansas, Blanks said that his family prayed like the family of Samuel for a child who would be dedicated to the Lord.

At age twelve, Blanks first acknowledged his call to ministry. He was ordained a deacon at fourteen and an elder at seventeen in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. He served as youth pastor in his home church, Bethel A.M.E.

With the encouragement of his home pastor, family, and godparents, he enrolled in Hendrix College to pursue a B.A. in Religion and Philosophy. The Academic Dean of Hendrix College suggested that he attend Drew University School of Theology to pursue a Masters of Divinity Degree. Following graduation from Drew, one of his classmates shared his name with a United Methodist district superintendent. Blanks was appointed to serve a two-point Charge in Burlington, New Jersey: Saint Mary’s Street, an African-American congregation and Union, a white congregation.

In 1980, Pastor Blanks transferred to the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference to

Pastor’s postcard hobby becomes ministry for disaster relief

A Philadelphia Area pastor is turning his passion for postcards into a way to help the survivors of the tsunami disaster in South Asia.

The Rev. Charlene Gaspar, pastor of Gladwyne United Methodist Church in a suburb of Philadelphia, has been collecting postcards since she was 11 years old. For the past three years, she has been auctioning postcards from her extensive collection, numbering in the tens of thousands, with the proceeds going toward the ministry of her church.

Often she has raised $250 per month through eBay auctions, with recent sales as high as $700 in one month.

Gaspar saw the tsunami disaster as a “horrific situation, producing a desperate need,” and has been moved to direct the proceeds from her auctions to the United Methodist Committee on Relief.

“UMCOR has been working hard for disaster relief. My congregation has always been a congregation that has wholeheartedly given its 100 percent share of connectional giving and has gone the extra mile for special offerings,” she said. “My congregation gives from the heart, and they will celebrate
**BISHOP’S LENTEN DAY APART**

February 8, 2005, 8:30 - 12:30.

Aldersgate UMC, Concord Pike, Wilmington, DE. Guest speaker Charles Yingyen, Jr., General Secretary of the General Commission on Archives and History, will discuss “W holiness and the New Birth: And Can It Be That I Should Gain?” All clergy should register by contacting Mary H. Clark at 302-374-6222 or via e-mail to maryhclark@epalca.org.

**MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT**

February 11-13, 2005.

Rhehoboth Beach, DE - If squeezing the toothpaste from the middle has doused the romance in your marriage, a UM Worldwide Marriage Encounter weekend may just be the spark needed to rekindle the fire of your romantic justic. Here’s a 44-hour makeover away from job, kids, chores and phones. You will focus only on each other. If you’re hankering for greater depth, growth, and enrichment in your marriage, contact Rudy and Jan Iamacone at (609) 259-2527 for details. Or visit the website at: www.marriageenc.org.

**GIRLS ON THE GO**

February 12-13

“From caterpillar to butterfly” - For teens united for mission in the 21st Century. Sponsored by EPA UMC. The camp will be held at 420 Saylor Ln., Shickshinny Haven P.O. Box 155, Shickshinny, PA 17879. Cost is $40. Registration fee is $40. To register, contact Lucille Schaeffer at 610-287-5000 or Ethel Malone at 610-388-2722 for details. Or visit the website at: www.epaumc.org.

**FESTIVAL OF CHOIRS**

February 26-27, 2005

The First Annual Festival of Choirs sponsored by First UMC Shickshinny Haven will be held at 420 Saylor Ln., Shickshinny Haven P.O. Box 155, Shickshinny, PA 17879. The festival will begin from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Registration begins at 8:30 a.m., with lunch provided by the church. Concert performances will begin at 7:00 p.m., and will be conducted by Mrs. Linda Moriarty. Registration fee is $40. Registration deadline is January 28, 2005. For more details on the festival, please contact Lyne O’Connell at 610-388-3941 or via e-mail to lyne@webnet.net.

**PRINCIPLES FORUMS**

March 19, 2005.

The Church and Society Work Team will be sponsoring the second in a series of six forums surrounding The Social Principles. This second forum will address The Economic Community and our role as Christians in fostering economic justice for all. A panel discussion will be held at 7:00 p.m. at the First United Methodist Church in Pottstown, PA. For further information, call 610-388-3941 or 610-294-9191.

**LEADERSHIP WORKSHOP**

April 9, 2005

Development of leadership in small membership churches training workshop. Tony Pappas of The Alban Institute will speak/train on why small churches are central to God’s plan, Four current definitions of what a “small church” and why three are inadequate, Eight ways small-church culture differs from U.S. society and what to do about it, An affirming, challenging model for understanding the nature of a church, Five attitudes that will help small-church leaders increase their leadership “batting average” while having more fun, Six measures to small-church growth, Six plans to turn the “headaches” and “heartaches” of small-church ministry into an agenda for health and growth, and practical strategies to introduce change into your small church.

**NEWSPRINT**

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Pastor composes anthem to help with tsunami relief efforts

By Suzy Keenan

When the Ken Morrison heard the news of the devastation of the tsunami in South Asia, he could do little but sit down. Morrison, a composer and United Methodist pastor who resides in the Philadelphia area, sat down at the piano, feeling a melody stir in his heart.

Out of a heart for the victims of the tsunami and their suffering, he also wrote and set a prayer to the melody. His composition became “Tsunami Prayer,” a new choral anthem. Morrison has made it available for free printing and performance by church and school choirs who want to encourage prayer and support for the victims of the Dec. 26, 2004 tsunami.

Morrison (a member of the Desert Southwest Annual Conference) formerly served as interim pastor of Sanctuary United Methodist Church in North Wales, PA and now volunteers as part of music ministry team there, while working as fulltime songwriter and also teaching conflict resolution at Eastern School of Christian Ministry (undergraduate) as well as theology and practice of worship at Eastern Seminary.

“This is a story of human need,” said Morrison. “Our missions agencies will invite teams to raise funds to help with relief efforts. I hope that this anthem will be helpful to congregations as they gather teams together to pray for the victims and support relief efforts. The anthem was accompanied by projected scenes of survivors and relief efforts.

Jim Carver, Senior Pastor of Sanctuary United Methodist Church said that he “was so captivated by the rhythms of the anthem, almost haunting as it is being sung, befitting the incredible devastation of that region, yet filled with hope. The song captured the hope we have in God, and it acknowledged the miracles that are unfolding even in the midst of this great tragedy.” Sharon Meyer, organist and children’s youth choir director at Friendship United Methodist Church in Cincinnati, OH, called the piece “very beautiful, a well written piece,” while requesting permission to use it in worship. The composition is written for soprano, alto, tenor, and bass voices with male and female soloists and has accompaniment for piano and strings.

“I have been writing songs for worship my whole career,” Morrison said. His education includes a B. S. in Music from Millisaps College, a Master of Divinity from Asbury Theological Seminary, and a Doctor of Ministry from Candler School of Theology at Emory University.

For the last year and a half he had been composing choral music and praise and worship music fulltime, and received an award from Broadjam (a web community) for his composition, “That’s What He Did” based on a family story, being a theological reflection on losses of people in the military.

Composer Ken Morrison sits at the piano where he composed the choral anthem, “Tsunami Prayer.”

TSUNAMI PRAYER

Words and Music by Kenneth L. Morrison

Lamb of God, hear us in our sorrow; catch the tears from waves that washed away tomorrows. Once you crossed a raging sea; stand with those whose pain we see. Jesus, Jesus.

Lamb of God, give our bread to others; heal the sick, let them drink pure water. Send the miracles they need; help us love in word and deed.

Bind the broken hearted with cords of human care; show a world who doubts you the truth, you are there. Give ev’ry child loving arms, healing hands. Give ev’ry parent the strength to go on. Jesus, Jesus.

Lamb of God, open wide the heavens; save the weak, fill their souls with leaven; send them miracles they need, help us love in word and deed.

Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy. (REPEATED) Lamb of God, have mercy upon us we pray; take all our sins away. (REPEATED) Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy, Lamb of God, hear us as we pray.

(Written January 5, 2005 to encourage prayer and support for the victims of the tsunami on December 26, 2004. First performed at Sanctuary United Methodist Church in North Wales, PA on January 16, 2005.)

Copyright 2005 by Kenneth L. Morrison

All Rights Reserved

Use my songs in worship: www.sing4free.com

There is also an mp3 file of a demo recording generated by the composer’s Sibelius software. “Tsunami Prayer” is also available on www.gbod.org.

For more information, contact Ken Morrison at email dkenmorrison@yahoo.com.

UPCOMING CCN SEMINARS

TRANSFORMING CHILDREN INTO SPIRITUAL CHAMPIONS

Thursday, February 10 11:30a - 2:00p - Becoming a church that transforms children into spiritual champions. Recent research indicates that the critical years for developing world view happens before a child is 14 years old and once set, that world view does not radically change. If that’s true, then there is no more important people group for the church to invest in than children! Join George Barna and ministry experts as they teach you how to build an effective ministry to children and families that can actually transform children into spiritual champions!

OVERCOMING OVERLOAD

Thursday, February 17 11:30a - 2:00p - Pastors are more overloaded than ever - information overload, expectation overload, meeting overload, sermon overload, and more! With Pastors leaving the field at an alarming rate, Dr. Richard Swenson and Kevin Miller are ready to provide hope and help for over loaded Pastors. Discover how to make the load manageable with practical tools and insights from these experts. Dr. Richard Swenson, Kevin Miller

GOOD SENSE BUDGET COURSE

Saturday, February 26 11:30a - 5:30p - For regular seminar pre-register by Feb. 6. Help the people in your church discover tools and develop skills that enable them to control their finances rather than allowing their finances to control them. Invite your whole congregation to take their first steps toward financial freedom! (Note: Workbook $8.50 each) Dick Towner

YOUTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE


The theme for YAC 2005 is “Youth Under Construction” (Phil. 1:6) There will be speakers and music groups from our own Eastern PA Conference, games, workshops, small group Bible study, dancing and lots of fun! We are trying to keep costs at a minimum to maximize participation. Registration will be available on-line in February. Watch for a postcard and more information at the conference web site in the coming weeks. If you have a recommendation for a speaker or music or drama group from the Eastern PA Conference please e-mail the suggestion to Georgette Hall-Peterson at ghpeterson@comcast.net.

OLDER ADULT CONFERENCE

October 21-22, 2005

Sponsored by the Nurturing Disciples Resource Team Older Adult Task Force. Days Inn Conference Center - Allentown, PA. Featuring Dr. Richard Ganzler, Director of the Center on Aging and Older Adult Ministries of the General Board of Discipleship. For further information or to receive “The Elder Sage” Newsletter contact: Dorothea Burnett, Older Adult Coordinator, 116 South 53rd Street, Philadelphia, PA 19139; 215-476-5504 or other9@netzero.com
Giving to UMCOR tsunami relief exceeds $6 million

By Elliott Wright

NEW YORK — Contributions to the United Methodist Committee on Relief for Asian tsunami relief passed the $4 million mark during the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday weekend and passed the $6 million mark by Jan. 31st.

“We are still opening checks,” said Roland Fernandes, treasurer of the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries, the parent organization of UMCOR.

The death toll from the tidal waves that swept the Indian Ocean the day after Christmas reached 220,000 on Jan. 19.

“The outpouring of love and concern in the form of dollars is deeply touching,” said the Rev. R. Randy Day, chief executive of the mission board. Two days earlier, he had returned from Indonesia, the hardest hit of the 12 countries swept by the gigantic waves.

Contributions included in the $4 million figure are primarily from telephone and online credit-card donations and checks sent directly to UMCOR.

Fernandes said this included some but no means all of the money given through local church collections and forwarded through denominational channels. He noted a significant slowdown in online contributions in recent days. “This is quite natural as we move away from the immediate emotional impact of the tragedy,” he said.

Day and a delegation of United Methodist mission and communications leaders visited the island of Sumatra, near the epicenter of the earthquake that caused the tsunami, on Jan. 11-16. The group took more than 100,000 doses of medicine for tsunami survivors.

Dr. Charles Yeh from the Chinese Christian Relief Association in Taiwan and Indonesian Methodist doctors will use medications presented by a delegation of leaders from the United Methodist Church to aid tsunami victims in Bireuen, Indonesia.

UMCOR is engaged in both immediate and long-term relief and rehabilitation in the affected area. Its work is coordinated with that of other Methodist and humanitarian agencies, and it puts a high priority on collaboration with local efforts and personnel.

Donations to UMCOR’s “South Asia Emergency” relief efforts can be placed in local church offering plates or sent directly to UMCOR, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10115. Designate checks for UMCOR Advance #274305 and “South Asia Emergency.” Online donations can be made at www.methodistrelief.org. Those making credit-card donations can call (800) 554-6583.

Wright is the information officer of the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries.

The Ministry of UMCOR around the world is made possible when your church pays 100% of its Connectional Ministry Asking.

• OKLAHOMA

Weekday ministries thrive at downtown churches

OKLAHOMA CITY - Not long ago, many Americans lived, worked, worshipped and shopped downtown.

While that has changed as people have moved to suburbia, downtown Methodist churches remain a vital part of many families. Members have overcome such obstacles as declining residential populations, parking headaches and even - in the case of Oklahoma City - terrorist activity, to continue serving their ever-changing neighborhoods. In doing so, the churches themselves have changed the way they do ministry and worship. Like the corporate world, these downtown churches are open for business all week.

• TEXAS

Jobs program helps fill gaps for youth with disabilities

LONGBEAM - Preparing a resume, tracking down leads and getting ready for interviews can make searching for a job a challenge for anyone. The process can be even more challenging for the 3.5 million Americans with disabilities. “They’re falling through cracks when they graduate from high school,” says Debby Puckette, who saw that firsthand with her own family. She founded Real Jobs for Youth, providing training and encouragement for young people with disabilities and becoming an advocate for employers to hire them. Puckette relies on her faith as a United Methodist to start the nonprofit organization two years ago, trying to fill a gap left by other agencies. She works with students and former students ages 14 to 29.

• NEW YORK

Take precautions when giving online, UMCOR executive says

NEW YORK - During the first two weeks after the Indian Ocean tsunami, more than a fourth of the $2 million given to the United Methodist Committee on Relief came from online credit-card gifts. While online giving is safe, “there are a few ways in which scam artists can mess up an occupational transaction,” says Glenda Survance, with the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries, UMCOR’s parent organization. Survance has developed a short list of precautions that donors to UMCOR should follow. Donors should use only Web sites they know are reliable and avoid charitable links sent by email, she says.

• WASHINGTON D.C.

United Methodist pastor gives benediction at inauguration

United Methodist Pastor Kirbyjon Caldwell asked for God’s blessing on George W. Bush’s family and administration during the president’s Jan. 20 inauguration ceremony in Washington. As he did in Bush’s first inaugural ceremony in 2001, Caldwell gave the benediction after the president’s address. In his prayer, which closed Bush’s official swearing-in, Caldwell focused on thanksgiving, rallying Americans together and providing “equal opportunity for all, including the least, the last and the lost.” After the prayer, Bush, also a United Methodist, embraced Caldwell. The pastor leads Windsor Village United Methodist Church in Houston.

• GEORGIA

CNN features UM pastor on ‘get-fit’ program

ATLANTA - The Rev. Leigh Ann Raynor, senior pastor of Thomasville First UMC, is used to being in the limelight within her congregation, but now she is taking center stage on a much larger platform - the worldwide cable network of CNN. Raynor is one of five people selected to participate in the “New You Revolution,” a CNN project to help people get fit and manage their health.

Raynor, 49, is working with a personal trainer, attending cardiac rehab and learning from a nutritionist - all at no cost to her. Her progress will be charted and updated each week on CNN’s “American Morning.”

“Off” switch may be best shield against indecency in media

The answer to the national debate over decency in the media might be simple: Control the remote, lest the remote control you. Is media decency a faith issue? “Everything is a faith issue,” says Phillip Patterson, author of The Electronic Millstone: Christian Parenting in a Media Age. “Scripture tells us to ‘test everything.’ I think that applies to the media I watch,” he says. Teresa Tomeo, a Christian radio talk-show host in Denver, encourages visitors at www.teresatomeo.com to pray for change in media, join letter-writing campaigns to network officials, and boycott programs and advertisers’ products when appropriate.
UMCOR stays course in 'mega-disaster' relief

By Linda Beher

NEW YORK — How well do relief operations follow through with rehabilitation after “mega-disasters” such as the earthquake and tsunami that swept the Indian Ocean Dec. 26?

The New York Times posed that question in a front-page story Jan. 11, using as examples the 1998 Hurricane Mitch in Honduras, the 2004 floods in Mozambique and the 2003 earthquake in Iran. The story described unfinished housing dotting the Honduran landscape and uncompleted projects in Bam, Iran. “We are abandoned,” a resident of Tegucigalpa, Honduras, said.

“In big, complex recoveries from mega-disasters, we plan to be in place for a long time — for years,” said the Rev. Kristin Sachen of the United Methodist Committee on Relief.

“I do not doubt that more rebuilding is needed in Honduras, Mozambique and Iran. Though a number of organizations have left those three countries, UMCOR is still at work,” she said, “just as we will be in the Indian Ocean region long after the media and disasters fade.”

“Four volunteers are still rebuilding houses in the Honduran towns of Tegucigalpa, Sabrina and La Ceiba,” said the Rev. Paul Dirdak, UMCOR’s chief executive. “We sent 45 teams to Honduras in 2004 and have even more scheduled for 2005. In Iran, through grants to our partner, the International Blue Crescent, UMCOR continues to minister to children in Bam.”

UMCOR has also built housing units in Cuba with funds donated for Hurricane Mitch recovery. In 2004, 20 families in a small fishing town at the west edge of Havana moved into new apartments and another 100 received upgraded water service as a result of UMCOR work there — six years after the hurricane struck.

United Methodist donations are still at work in Mozambique, another country mentioned in the Times. Floods in 2000 devastated whole villages. UMCOR helped build houses in the new village of Manganzoina for 70 families that lost both their homes and land. A second project begun later in Bantu involves building 138 mudresistant brick homes using a brick-making machine purchased by UMCOR. Landmine removal and school construction are ongoing projects across the country.

“United Methodists are extremely generous in responding to disasters,” Sachen said. “This means we can stay with people as long as it takes to build them back on their feet. It’s the way United Methodists do things — having the patience to stay with the most vulnerable, however long it takes. We don’t quit.”

Cash gifts will help UMCOR continue to support local relief efforts in the South Asia disaster area as well as other regions. Checks can be mailed to UMCOR, 475 Riverside Dr., Room 330, New York, NY 10015. One hundred percent of every donation to any appeal, including “South Asia Emergency.” UMCOR Advance #274305, goes to support recovery efforts in the disaster-stricken regions.

Donors using a credit card may call toll free (800) 554-8583 or give online at MethodistRelief.org. The Internal Revenue Service will allow donors to decide whether to apply tsunami relief contributions to the 2004 or 2005 tax years, as long as the gift designated for 2004 is made by Jan. 31.

Beher is communications director for the United Methodist Committee on Relief, a unit of the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries.

• INDONESIA

New UMC.org feature offers full coverage of delegation visit to Asia

UMC.org, the official Web site of the United Methodist Church, has launched a new online travel package offering immediate reports from a delegation of mission and communication leaders who visited Indonesia in January. A cross-section of UMC.org’s editorial team, including the Rev. Larry Hollon, head of UMCom, also shares his personal accounts of the trip through his Weblog on the site.

• INDONESIA

Upper Room plans long-term spiritual tsunami assistance

The Upper Room, a United Methodist ministry that provides spiritual resources to people around the world, is focusing on the emotional needs of the victims of the Dec. 26 tsunami. The Upper Room, located at the United Methodist Board of Discipleship in Nashville, TN, is a global ministry that meets the spiritual needs of people through devotional magazines, books and printed resources. Its devotional guide, The Upper Room, has editions and partners serving people in nearly all of the Indian Ocean areas affected by the tsunami, including Indonesia, India and Sri Lanka, as well as in Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong and elsewhere. The guide is localized and printed and distributed in each of these areas.

• SRI LANKA

Sri Lankans work across religious lines to help with recovery

BATTICALO — Abdul Mahid stands looking at what is left of his house. Unlike his neighbors, he is not searching through the rubble — all that remains of his home. “More than 50 of my neighbors died,” he says. He is still dazed at having escaped the fate of the waves with his life. Abdul Mahid lived and owned a store in Kattanduddy in Batticalo, on the east coast of Sri Lanka. Whole areas of his town and villages nearby were obliterated by the tsunami that crashed into the coastline Dec. 26. In this part of town, the Muslim Quarter, 1,000 residents have been confirmed dead, says the Rev. Nadarajah Arulnathan, who is coordinating area relief efforts for the National Christian Council of Sri Lanka — a member of the global alliance Action by Churches Together International. The National Christian Council of Sri Lanka is heading coordination of medical assistance to 10 camps in the Batticalo area, where about 5,000 were killed. “It is a big challenge to feed them,” Arulnathan says.

• ENGLAND

Methodists across Europe respond to tsunami

LONDON — Horrified by what they saw and heard of the destruction wrought by deadly tsunamis in South Asia, Methodists across Europe have lined up to help in whatever way they can. A congregation in the north of England is filling and shipping plastic crates called “aquaboxes” that contain water purification and filter equipment. An elderly Irish Methodist couple donated their government winter fuel subsidy to those they believe have more need of the money. Lithuanian United Methodists collected a special offering that will go to the United Methodist Committee on Relief’s tsunami response. Slovakian United Methodists are collecting donations for the entire month of January; and in the Czech Republic, where United Methodists remember the devastating effects of recent floods in their own country, congregations have organized a national appeal. The story is similar in Switzerland, Germany and other parts of Europe.

• URUGUAY

Methodist sees hope in new Uruguay ruler

QUITO — The year 2004 was notable for the emerging of left-wing governments in Latin America, and a Protestant leader believes that in Uruguay, this could lead to a change in the oligarchically fragmented left, as it “acted together,” he said.

November for European Exploration 2004, a weekend event modeled after the biennial U.S. Exploration events that the denomination’s Board of Higher Education and Ministry has sponsored for the past 12 years. The European gathering, sponsored by the denomination’s central (regional) conferences in Europe, offered the participants an opportunity to look at using faith in daily life, no matter what profession they choose.

• Germany

European youth discern God’s call for their lives

BRAUNFELS — Young United Methodist youth from Central Europe gathered in late 2004 to discern God’s call for their lives. The 45 Methodist participants, ages 16 to 26, gathered in the street in Banda Aceh, Indonesia, following a Dec. 26 tsunami killed thousands in the region. A delegation of mission and communication leaders of the United Methodist Church visited areas of Sumatra, Indonesia, near the epicenter of the earthquake that triggered the waves. A UMS photo by Mike DuBose.

A fishing boat rests
College students flock to church in Schuylkill Haven

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is to bridge those divides of the white and black communities. He grow up in the delta region, the poorest region of Mississippi, which Mosley characterizes as twenty years behind rest of Mississippi, which is twenty years behind the South. He was making enough to be healthy. Join Al Malone as he provides facts on ways to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the churches and how those attributes play a vital role in the vitality of the church.

Technology and the Local Church - This workshop led by members of the conference technical staff will teach the awesome power of Technology in the church. The face of worship is changing and you won’t want to miss this opportunity to learn and ask questions on “Worshiping with Technology”.

The Ministry of Finance - Building the Local Church Budget - Steve Morton will share valuable information on the local church budget and how it impacts the total church mission, ministry, and programs. Pastors and members of the Finance and Stewardship teams will benefit from this workshop.

Writing Successful Proposals and Grants - Lenora Thompson for an overview of how teams will benefit from this workshop.

Annual Conference schedule set

The June Session of Annual Conference will be held in the mid-day Wednesday, July 15th, including evening business sessions, and adjourn with the Ordination Service Friday evening. The local church will be provided on Wednesday.

The June session (except for the Clergy Session) will be held at the Loews Hotel (the recently renovated former PSFS Building) at 12th and Market Streets in Philadelphia. Because of a recent Judicial Council ruling which now allows Clergy Sessions to be held at a separate place and time, EPA’s 2005 Clergy Session will be held at Hempfield United Methodist Church on Monday, June 13th, and at 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. The Church is located at 3505 Marietta Avenue, Lancaster, PA 17603. For directions, go to: www.hempfieldchurch.org

The Laity Session will be held at the Loews Hotel on Wednesday, July 15th, from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. There will also be an additional Laity meeting Thursday, June 16th, for those who cannot attend the Wednesday Laity Session.

The rates will include 2 nights stay (Wednesday & Thursday), parking and food for two and half days (2 breakfasts, 3 lunches and 3 dinners). Complete details, including rates, will be available in the registration materials, which will be mailed in February.

MBA

Members and churches of The Eastern Pennsylvania Conference contributed a total of $14,803.64 toward the Peter D. Weaver Service Fund and the Bethlehem Haven Ministry in Pittsburgh, PA.

HEALING THE WOUNDS OF RACISM WORKSHOPS

SOUTHEAST: Jan. 28-30, Sept. 22-24
Southwest: Feb. 24-26
East: March 14-16
Northeast: April 20-21
Northwest: May 19-21, Oct. 21-23
Central: Aug. 26-28, Aug. 22-24
General Area: Nov. 7-9

For more information or to register, go to: www.epaumc.org/NewDetails.asp?pageID=655

www.epaumc.org
Bishop Matthews Ralph E. Blanks appointed to Cabinet

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serve the Harry Hosier United Methodist Church (UMC), a new church start in the Logan Community of Philadelphia. Blanks stated, “I have had a fun-filled, challenging, rewarding, holistic ministry. Not only was it a new congregation, but the community was new in that it was changing - African-Americans, Asian-Americans, Indian-Americans were moving in and whites were moving away. We shared our building with three fledgling congregations: one Asian and two Indians. In the cutting edge, we looked at how best we could live together and do what we needed to do to help each other - which included English classes as a second language in the Harry Hosier Church.”

Bishop F. Herbert Skeete appointed Rev. Blanks to Mother African Zoar UMC in 1995. At Mother African Zoar, he led the congregation in a year long Bicentennial celebration in 1994 and a $300,000 historic building renovation program. Working with the West Poplar Neighborhood Advisory Community Development Corporation, a $9 million Nehemiah Housing Grant was secured to do more than 180 affordable Townhouses for first-time homeowners. This housing project brought a long awaited renaissance to the West Poplar Community. It also proved to the mayor and city leaders that if you build in North Philadelphia, people will return and invest their resources.

Bishop Peter D. Weaver appointed Rev. Blanks to Janes Memorial UMC in 2001. Playing a strong role in the community, he serves as chair, Resource Development Committee of African American Inter-Denominational Ministries; vice-chair, North Philadelphia Health Systems; chair, Patient Services and Planning Committee St. Joseph’s Hospital; chair, City of Philadelphia Fair Housing Commission; and member of Black Jewish Coalition, First Hospital Foundation, Greater Philadelphia Health Action, and Korean Community Development Service Center. He is the only United Methodist pastor to have served as president of Black Clergy of Philadelphia and Vicinity and the second United Methodist pastor to serve on the Schoolboard of the City of Philadelphia (the late Rev. Dr. Henry H. Nichols, longest-tenured pastor of Janes UMC who was thefirst). Rev. Blanks’ service to Eastern Pennsylvania Conference and the General Church includes the following: delegate andalternate to the Jurisdictional, Episcopalian, and District Conferences; delegate to the General Conference; representative to the General Board of Global Ministries; member of the Board and Committee of Ordained Ministry; and District Coordinator for the Church. He is a direct superintendent.

Blanks envisions his role to be one of walking with pastors and congregations, getting to know them, as well as working, supporting, encouraging and living with them in the midst of day to day ministry. “These are exciting and challenging times, times that need the strength of God’s ambassadors. The stronger the local church, the greater the impact in transforming lives and communities; thus, a more visible witness as Christians in the United Methodist Church. After a 30 year journey of pastoral/community ministry, I come as a pastor to work with clergy and laity for the advancement of the Kingdom of God.”

Blanks is husband to Judith, father of Jason, Noelle and Averie, and grandfather of LaTise and Jasmine. He credits a good diet, a regular exercise program and a strong devotional life as supplying the power and stamina needed for the challenge of ministry.

Pastor’s postcard hobby becomes ministry for disaster relief

Continued from Pg 1

Known as “postcard pastor” on eBay, Gaspar has sold postcards to customers all over the world. While giving the name of her church on each auction, she also sees her auctions as reaching out in the name of Christ. People from different continents have e-mailed her with such questions as, “Are you really a pastor?” and “I didn’t know women could be pastors.”

Several customers and even non-customers have sent donations, sometimes including an additional amount above their postcard purchase as a donation. “People have sent money for the church, sending me $10 on a sale of $3.50, and ask me to put the rest in the plate,” she said. “Ebay is a global market, and so it’s amazing what people will buy. I have sold postcards to people from Israel, all over Europe, in the mid-east, South America, Thailand and Hong Kong.”

Gaspar has received more than 8,000 positive feedbacks to her postcards (indicating customer satisfaction) from more than 4,251 customers since March 1999. She sells just about anything in terms of postcards, new or old, even if in ragged condition, for $4 each, usually with a $5 shipping charge. “They are making a difference in some of the poorest countries in the world,” she said.

While in nursing school in her early 20’s, she had wanted to be a missionary in the United States, but changed those plans when she met her future husband, Ruben, while both were attending Arch Street United Methodist Church in Philadelphia. As a registered nurse for 28 years, Gaspar took care of people who are now members of her church, viewing this as having nurtured their bodies and their souls. Now, with her own walking disability, she finds members at Gladwyne United Methodist Church nurturing her.

In order to accommodate Gaspar’s walking disability, Gladwyne converted its downstairs room into a multipurpose room and sanctuary, to make it accessible.

The upstairs, formerly the sanctuary, houses a home schooling project for children from kindergarten to grade 12, of Christian, Jewish and Muslim faiths. On Sundays, the church building also hosts a new church start, a non-denominational Pilipino congregation.

Gladwyne is a small, struggling congregation in a tiny village that used to be a mill town, and is now surrounded by multimillion-dollar mansions inhabited by some of Philadelphia’s richest and most famous celebrities. “Rather than feel ‘helpless’ in light of these tsunami events, this is one way we can come together and provide extra dollars for the rebuilding of everything affected in South Asia,” Gaspar said of her postcard ministry.

She welcomes donations of postcards or any kind, in any condition. They can be returned to her at 317 Iven Ave., St. Davids, PA 19087. She can be contacted by email at charlenegaspar@comcast.net. A hundred percent of all donations to UMCOR go to emergency relief around the world. As of January 10, contributions to UMCOR for tsunami relief reached $2 million, a figure that incorporates online giving and telephone credit card donations but only part of the boxes of checks received so far.

The Internal Revenue Service will allow donors to decide whether to apply their tsunami relief contributions to the 2004 or 2005 tax years, as long as the gift designated for 2004 is made before Jan. 31. UMCOR is exempt from tax under the Internal Revenue Code and qualifies for the maximum charitable contribution deduction by donors. Now, as need for the boxes of checks received so far.

More information about UMCOR’s ministries is available at www.gbm-umc.org/umcor. Donations can be placed in local church offering plates or sent to UMCOR, 475 Riversides Dr., Room 330, New York, NY 10115. Donations by credit card can be made at (800) 554-8583 or by going online to www.MethodistRelief.org.

Contributions specifically for tsunami disaster relief should be designated for UMCOR Advance #274305, “South Asia Emergency.”

A UMTV report is available at umns.umc.org.

Keenan is director of communications for the Eastern Pennsylvania Annual (regional) Conference of the United Methodist Church.
Summer camps gear up for faith and fun in the sun

It’s cold outside! Want to feel “strangely warm”? How about starting to think about Summer Camp 2005? Many camps and retreat centers near Ft. Myers and Lake Asbury have grown to a point where they can be connected directly to any of our camp catalog was mailed to the churches and summer camp families of the sites individual web sites: www.csfarm.org, www.gretnaglen.org, www.innabah.org, and www.poconoplateau.org. You can call our toll free number 1-877-UMC-CAMP to order a summer camp catalog or to be connected directly to any of our camp and retreat centers. The printed version of the summer camp catalog was mailed to the churches and summer camp families on Monday, January 24, and individual site brochures were mailed to summer camp families earlier in January. Online registration is available as well as mail-in and fax registration. Credit cards are accepted.

Scholarships are available from various sources for those campers and families that are facing economic hardship. No camper is to be refused an opportunity to attend due to financial reasons. The application for the EPA Conference Campership is included on the registration form. Camper families are encouraged to seek scholarship help from their local church first, then the camp/retreat center at which the event is taking place.

What a great opportunity it is to serve as a summer camp volunteer! Program directors, counselors, nurses, chaplains, registrars, maintenance and food service volunteers are needed. Training is provided. Most volunteers have such a great experience that they come back year after year! Scholarships are available for adult volunteers to send their children to camp during the week that they serve. Pastors are encouraged to take a non-vacation week to join us in this vital ministry. Take a look at the catalog and choose a week to help make a difference in a child’s life this summer!

The Volunteer Program Director Training Day is set for Tuesday, March 1st at Innabah for all four sites. As in past years, there will be identical sessions from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. (including lunch) and from 3:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. (including dinner). This will be our final opportunity to share in the ministry of the Rev. David Berkey who is leaving Eastern PA to become Executive Director of Camps and Retreat Ministry in the Florida Conference. Please register through the camp/retreat center at which your event will take place this summer. Volunteer counselors are also welcome to attend. The snow date is March 8th.

The EPA Conference and the Office of Congregational Transformation at 610-666-9090, ext. 230, have the Regional Resource Committee of the EPA Conference.

EPA Camping program and leadership to undergo changes

The Camping Board and Conference staff received word on January 14 that the Rev. David Berkey has accepted the position of Executive Director for Camps and Retreat Ministry of the Florida Conference of the United Methodist Church, effective in March. Rev. Berkey has been the Director of Camp and Retreat Ministry of the EPA Conference since May 1995, during which time there have been significant growth in the program, revenue and facilities. Overall revenues reach nearly 75% and summer campers have risen to over 5400 registrations during the ten-year period. The conference-wide capital campaign from 1998-2002 yielded $1.5 million and has resulted in the construction of a new recreation center at Innabah, dining hall at Pocono Plateau, retreat lodge at Gretna Glen, and the planning for a new multi-purpose building at Carson-Simpson Farm.

In his new position in Florida, Rev. Berkey will oversee a statewide United Methodist camp and retreat ministry based in Leesburg that includes a 400-bed adult retreat and conference center with a youth/children’s camp across the road, all on Lake Griffin. There is also a South Florida Camp near Ft. Myers and Lake Asbury Retreat Center near Jacksonville. The new position will begin in March with a job-sharing transition to take place during the month of February.

“I’m leaving with a mixture of excitement and sadness,” says Rev. Berkey. “It is a wonderful opportunity and challenge with the Florida Conference as they are seeking to do a new thing with camp and retreat ministry in forming a new board and developing new programs and fund-raising. I am confident that the situation with the camp and retreat centers in Eastern PA is on solid ground. We have a great

UM Foundation prepares for 2005-2006 scholarships

By Stacy Martin

December continued to present more “firsts” for me as I learn more about my ministry in my new position as Director of the Foundation. The Rev. Dr. Dorothy Watson Tatem, my co-chair, and I met with the Scholarship Team to make awards for the spring semester. Three awards were made to individuals pursuing degrees in area seminaries with the intent of doing full-time ministry within the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference upon graduation: Tracy L. Bass, Kenneth Eugene DeWalt, and Samuel Derick Kofie Ashley.

The ability to grant scholarships for seminary students within the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference is made possible by the generosity of funds set up by two people: George Garret and Hilda Longenecker. Many years ago these two individuals established funds, in 1939 and 1988 respectively, specifically to provide scholarships to seminary students. Through the benefit of good investment management, the assets have grown to a point where they can provide significant assistance to students. Both individuals saw the importance of helping future pastors with their seminary expenses. The fear of taking on such seminary expenses, especially for those setting a second career in ministry, prevents some individuals from pursuing a career toward which God may be calling them.

In addition to awarding scholarships to students preparing for full-time ministry, the Scholarship Team also awards scholarships to undergraduates and graduate students studying in other areas. These awards are made in the spring for the upcoming academic year. If you, or someone you know, are interested in applying for scholarships for the 2005-2006 academic year (Sept.-May), applications and a list of scholarships are available on our website www.epaumc.org, under the Business and Finance section, or, by calling
This week’s “Quality Counts” report, issued by the D.C.-based Education Week, highlights the urgent need for Pennsylvania to come to terms with providing a school finance system that guarantees every child access to a quality public education. This annual report, which assesses each state’s progress in improving public education, compares states across a broad array of indicators, including how states pay for education, how they distribute money to school districts, and whether they track expenditures.

Equity

According to the report, Pennsylvania remains in the bottom of the pack among states when it comes to the fairness of its system for funding public schools, ranking 43rd and earning an overall grade of C. Trail- ing Pennsylvania were North Dakota, Virginia, Illinois, Massachusetts, Montana, Idaho, New Hampshire, Vermont and District of Columbia. Avid readers of past “Quality Counts” reports may recall that last year Pennsylvania ranked 48th. According to Education Week researcher Ronald Skinner, the change is less a result of anything Pennsylvania did than a change in the methodology used by Education Week. This year’s analysis excluded the state equalization effort, a measure that reflects both the percentage of funding for education provided by the state and the extent to which those funds are targeted to property-poor districts. While the measure can be an important indicator of state efforts to equalize funding across the state, Skinner said, it is “sometimes subject to vagaries in the classification of financial data across the states, and may not capture the multiple measures states use to equalize funding.”

 Adequacy

In another departure, this year’s report also dropped its grading of states on adequacy because “there is no agreed-upon measure of adequate spending on education.” More problematic to Good Schools Pennsylvania is that our historic high ranking on adequacy has always masked the disparities among districts. And this year’s report shows just how “gross” those disparities are. Consider this: Pennsylvania’s average per pupil expenditure is $8,328. However, only 33% of Pennsylvania’s students are in districts that spend at or above the national median of $6,208. In contrast, every neighboring state – including West Virginia, Virginia, Illinois, Massachusetts, and District of Columbia – has at least 10 percent of students in districts spending at or above the national median.

Per cent of students in districts with per-pupil expenditures at or above national median of $6,208:
* Maryland: 100%
* New Jersey: 100%
* New York: 100%
* Ohio: 90.7%
* Pennsylvania: 13.6%
* West Virginia: 99.1%

These statistics should dispel any myth that Pennsylvania is in a high-spending state. Rather, Pennsylvania starts to look a lot like a third world state compared to our neighbors.

Other indicators show plenty of room for improvement as well: Pennsylvania gets a B- in standards and accountability, a C in efforts to improve teacher quality, and a C in school climate.

Meanwhile, in the 2003 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as the “Nation on Their Report Card”, Pennsylvania students scored as follows:
* 36% of 4th graders at or above proficient in math
* 35% of 4th graders at or above proficient in reading
* 32% of 8th graders at or above proficient in reading
* 27% of 8th graders at or above proficient in math

Despite the changes made to school funding this year, lawmakers continue to balk at asking the really important questions: What will it actually cost to enable all students to meet high standards, and how are we going to pay for it so we can ensure that students from low-income communities have equal opportunities? Without asking those questions, our approach to school funding is like throwing darts at a target while blindfolded, and hoping to get it right.

Fourteen states are involved in costing out studies to answer such questions. Sixteen states are tied up in litigation challenging the school finance systems they now have in place, according to the “Quality Counts” report, while over the past five years, lawsuits in 20 other states have been decided or settled, often in the plaintiff’s favor.

UM Foundation prepares for 2005-2006 scholarships

Continued from Pg 8

Carol von Minden at 800-828-9093. The due date for applications this spring has been extended (for this spring only) to April 1, 2005. Also included on the list are scholarships available through many of the General Boards and Agencies of the United Methodist Church. You can find more information on those scholarships by going to www.gbhem.org. In preparing for the Scholarship Committee meeting, I learned that the total amount of financial aid extended by the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, Office of Student Loans and Scholarships in 2003 was $68,660 to students in the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference!

UM Student Day offering gives United Methodists an opportunity to support the United Methodist Church. In 2003, EPA members gave $6,360 to this offering. Inasmuch as 10% of the Student Day offering will come back directly to the EPA for local scholarships, our students will receive an additional $636. Students in our Conference and around the world really benefit from our UM Student Day offering.

Equity

If you are interested in helping to support our students with a direct gift, either for seminary students or undergraduate students, please call me at the Foundation at 800-828-9093 ext. 247. While we have some funds available, every dollar makes a difference in the life of a student or possible future pastor!

IN MEMORIAM

The Rev. James T. Myers, retired elder


He is survived by his wife, Emily, 3 sons, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Services were held Thursday, December 30, 2004 at Good Shepherd UMC, Security, Colorado. Condolences may be sent to Mrs. Emily S. Myers, 325 Everett Drive, Colorado Springs, CO 80901. Memorials may be made to Pikes Peak Hospice, 825 E. Pikes Peak Avenue, Suite 600, Colorado Springs, CO 80903.

The Rev. William C. Strother, Jr., retired elder


Services were held on Friday, December 31, 2004, at Sayers Memorial United Methodist Church. The Rev. Strother is survived by a daughter, Priscilla Anne Ramsey. Condolences may be sent to Shirley Tyree, 6135 Ellsworth Street, Philadelphia, PA 19143. In lieu of flowers, contributions may be sent to the William Strother Memorial Scholarship, c/o Sayers Memorial United Methodist Church, 6101 Catherine Street, Philadelphia, PA 19143.

Rhea Flurer, widow of Rev. Frances G. Flurer


Mrs. Flurer was the surviving spouse of Rev. Francis G. Flurer. Surviving Mrs. Flurer are two children, Lon David Flurer and Lois Ann Snyder. Condolences may be sent to Mr. Lon Flurer, PMB, 30, Ozark, AL 36061.

Bishop Marcus Matthews announces the appointment of the Reverend Ralph Blanks from J anes UMC to superintendent of the Central District, effective July 1, 2005.

DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP IN SMALL MEMBERSHIP CHURCHES

April 9, 2004, 9:00 - 4:00 Myerstown: Zion UMC, 22 E. Main Ave., Myerstown, PA

Speaker/Trainer: Tony Papass, The Alban Institute

Contact Northwest District Office to register.

FEBRUARY 2005
United Methodists forge ties with Indonesian church for recovery work

By Linda Bloom

MEDAN, Indonesia — A United Methodist team’s visit to the island of Sumatra following the Dec. 26 tsunami has laid the foundation for a future partnership with the Gereja Methodist Indonesia (Methodist Church of Indonesia).

United Methodist Bishop Joel Martinez of San Antonio said he found Indonesian church leaders “genuinely pleased and appreciative” about the Jan. 12-16 visit. Martinez, who is president of the denomination’s Board of Global Ministries, co-led the delegation with the Rev. R. Randy Day, the board’s communications executive.

“We tried to listen to the church and get their perspective, and then we also were able to witness and observe for ourselves,” Martinez explained.

Part of that observation included a tour of the devastated city of Banda Aceh and impromptu visits to camps for internally displaced persons. Even three weeks after the tsunami struck, the bishop believes “the full dimensions of the tragedy are not fully known” and expects the price tag of the disaster to exceed initial estimates just as the death toll did.

Although the tsunami swept over other Indonesian Ocean nations — including Sri Lanka, Thailand and India — the delegation chose Indonesia as the place to make a pastoral call, to let Indonesian Methodists know that the greater Methodist family was grieving with them, according to Day. Sumatra suffered 115,000 of the more than 120,000 deaths caused by the tsunami and the earthquake that triggered the giant waves.

While we mourn the people who died in the tsunami, we’re also taking immediate action to care for the survivors, so the death toll doesn’t go higher,” Martinez said. That action included delivery of medicines that the Indonesian church can use in its relief efforts in 11 camps for displaced people.

The Rev. David Wu, a board staff executive and native of Indonesia, said he was impressed that the small church had immediately set up an emergency relief committee on its own, without asking for help.

Perhaps bringing our church and their church together would create a greater energy, a greater hope,” he noted.

Kyung Za Yim, president of the Women’s Division, Board of Global Ministries, said she found the survey of tsunami damage to be a “shocking and painful experience.”

After meeting with several church women in the region, she said she hoped to help them coordinate efforts to participate in tsunami relief efforts, perhaps through the assistance of the Women’s Division’s regional coordinator based in the Philippines.

“Once they set up a system, they can empower local women to join them,” she said.

And said he is thankful for the initial generous response of United Methodists to tsunami relief efforts through the United Methodist Committee on Relief and Board of Global Ministries. Besides Indonesia, funds have been directed to Sri Lanka and India, and future work is expected in Thailand.

Coordinating with Asian leaders and the Indonesian church, he would like to see new gifts directed to the care of internally displaced people living in camps, especially children. That care could include housing, medical and education needs. “We want to do our part in rebuilding those communities,” he said.

As in other countries, the rebuilding of communities by UMCOR covers people of all faiths, according to the Rev. Paul Dirdak, the relief agency’s chief executive. In communities divided by religion or ethnicity, “our projects are often opportunities for modeling coexistence,” he said.

One such possibility he added, would be in the town of Meulaboh, which was severely damaged by the tsunami. An equal number of homes could be constructed for Methodists and Muslims there.

Day noted that Indonesia has a long history of religious tolerance, even though it is overwhelmingly Muslim. That foundation of tolerance “gives a basis for cooperation as we do humanitarian work together.”

“We would see it as an honor to work with Muslims in the largest Muslim country in the world,” he added.

Delegation members acknowledged the need for psychological as well as physical care in Indonesia. Diridak pointed out that Methodists there — in addition to being “shocked and exhausted” from the first three weeks following the disaster — carry the everyday strain of being part of a small minority and sometimes suffering from discrimination.

Raji Dirdak, an Indonesian church member and pastors are in a “survival mode,” Wu said. “But deeper than that, it’s a question of theological understanding. Where is God in this disaster?”

If pastors don’t have the chance to process or cope with this question, there will be a disconnect between what they preach and what they feel.

Since many churches are not equipped to take this step, Wu said he hopes to organize a retreat for Indonesian pastors to help unravel theological issues raised by the crisis.

Another concern is possible discrimination against some tsunami victims by the Indonesian government. The Rev. Henry Leono, an Indonesian native and pastor of St. Paul United Methodist Church in Willingboro, N.J., said a number of ethnic Chinese that he met during the trip expressed fear that the aid would not reach them.

For Leono himself, the destruction of the area where he spent his childhood was painful to see. “I feel so overwhelmed by the magnitude of the need,” he said.

He hopes the church can do small relief projects going “to keep their hope alive.”

The Rev. Larry Hollon, chief executive of United Methodist Communications, said his agency would help present the reality of the tsunami disaster, in Indonesia and elsewhere, to the denomination as a whole. “My hope is that we can help interpret the need, which is obviously for the long term,” he said.

He believes the immediate worldwide response after the tsunami demonstrates a rejection of hostility and conflict in the face of human need.

“A spirit of compassion lives around the world, and people want to bridge these divisions,” Hollon declared.

Donations to UMCOR’s “South Asia Emergency” relief efforts can be placed in local church offering plates or sent directly to UMCOR, 475 Riverside Drive, Room 330, New York, NY 10115. Designate checks for “South Asia Emergency” relief efforts can be made at www.methodistrelief.org. Those making credit-card donations can call (800) 554-8583. One hundred percent of the money donated to “South Asia Emergency” goes to the relief effort.

Bloom is a United Methodist News Service news writer based in New York. She is traveling with the United Methodist delegation to Indonesia.

A Muslim Mosque stands relatively unscathed amongst a sea of debris and destruction in Banda Aceh. However, the mosque did sustain extensive water damage inside (UMNS photo)

www.epaumc.org

The Rev. R. Randy Day noted that Indonesia has a long history of religious tolerance, even though it is overwhelmingly Muslim. That foundation of tolerance “gives a basis for cooperation as we do humanitarian work together.” (UMNS photo)
Christmas, in the eyes of the children in Kensington

Jude 1:22
And of some have compassion, making a difference.  
(King James Version)

The congregations of the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference and their members really helped make a difference for the children this Christmas! The gifts delivered to Methodist Services for Children and Families were distributed to more than 3,000 children. Such a beautiful demonstration of faithful love for others!

The following recounts the experience of one Methodist Services staff member and her visit to the Christmas party at the Kensington office. The young teens who received the gifts you delivered struggle daily to focus on their school work while living in one of the most violent and dangerous neighborhoods in Philadelphia. They knew that gifts they received at the party would be the only gifts they would receive. When the children opened the gifts at the party, they were rather sad, knowing that their parents could not provide them with a gift chosen just for them. 

"I want to go home and hug my sons and tell them how much I love them," said one, the program director, worked especially hard to find a special gift for each of the teens in her program and—thankfully this year we had plenty of gifts so she could make good choices. As each young person received their gift from under the tree, they were reluctant to open them. They wanted to save them for Christmas morning. Even after the gifts were opened, some young teens rewrapped their gifts to bring home so they could open them again. The atmosphere was subdued, which was sad. This party was very different than what occurs in many homes and at other Christmas parties—the smiles and the joy are not long lasting. The children's eyes were so sad; they knew that they are separated from other children their age by the simple fact that they are so impoverished. One other issue is that often these children have been mistrusted and neglected, so when they do get a nice gift from us, they don't think they are worthy to receive it. After that party, I just wanted to go home and hug my sons and tell them how much I love them and how wonderful they are."

Methodist Services for Children and Families is an authorized child welfare agency of the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference providing vital intervention, counseling and educational programs in Philadelphia and rural northeastern Pennsylvania. The generous support of individuals and their congregations allows crucial programs to continue.

Angele Marie Parker, president and CEO of Methodist Home for Children, extends thanks to all of the Churches in the Conference, the United Methodist Men and United Methodist Women's groups and parishioners for the overwhelmingly generous outpouring of gifts for Christmas. Parker said, "You enabled more than 3,000 children to have a joyful Christmas! Your gifts brought wide smiles and some tears of happiness to children of all ages. What a joy to bring Christmas gifts to every single child we serve! Your generosity made the mothers in our Bridge House for Women Transitional Housing Program proud to be able to give a toy to each of their children or grandchildren."

Without your support the Methodist Home for Children would not be able to serve all the children that they do, which gives them hope for their future. To find out more about the programs, please call 215-877-1925.

Family celebration shares Latino traditions of Christmas holiday

Jose "Ricky" Ayala
C.A.L.M. Missionary

Columbia Area Latino Ministry (CALM), with the partnership of Columbia UMC held an event on January 8 entitled "Star of Bethlehem." Children and their families learned about a Latino tradition that celebrates "Three Kings Day" on January 6th.

More than 100 people enjoyed hot dogs, chips and refreshments prepared by the volunteer kitchen committee from Columbia UMC. A special play, based on scriptures reading from Matthew 2:1-11 and Luke 2:1-20, involved seventeen children acting in the roles of Mary and Joseph, shepherds' animals, and three wise men bringing gifts to baby Jesus. Afterwards the children received gifts donated by sponsors who filled the wishes of the children from their wish lists.

Since the event was family oriented, there were gifts for parents as well. It was a joy to see people of different backgrounds in one location enjoying themselves, laughing together and spending time with their children (a big plus!).

CALM would like to thank the following churches for their continued support: Ruhls UMC (Manheim), Covenant UMC (Lancaster), Milton Grove UMC and Columbia UMC. Through their generous donations, the children of this community are reached and through the children, the parents get involved also.
A request has been made for an update or correction to the information provided in an article or photograph submitted to the NEWSpirit using e-mail. The article or photograph should be submitted either as a Word document (extension .doc), Rich Text format (extension .rtf), or a plain text file (extension .txt). If you are sending us photos, please send them as actual stock photos. If you must send them electronically, please send them either as .tif or .jpg. We do not accept pictures less than 800 pixels wide. If you are sending logos or other graphic art, please send them in either .wmf or .eps format. Please do not send articles or graphics in e-mails as attachments. This will prevent us from having to extract the file from the email. If you have previously sent us a submission and wish to update or correct it, please indicate that it is an update or correction. If you have any questions about how to send material, please call 215-878-8054.

GREEN BOOK COMING MID-APRIL 2004

“SEE HOW JESUS HANDLED REJECTION”
Published by WinePress Publishing
(with Interactive Study Guide) - $9.95
by GERALD H. IHLE

FOREWORD By Bishop Neil L. Irons, Ph.D.
Resident Bishop, Harrisburg, PA Area, UMC

Bishop Irons: “Here is a kind of realism that remains optimistic in a world of people that does not always welcome gospel.”

NEWSPHIT at Eastern Pennsylvania Conference
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