



MEMPHIS CONFERENCE

an edition of
The United Methodist Reporter

Two Sections, Section A

Volume 153 Number 35

021000

www.memphis-umc.org

January 5, 2007

Briefly

VIM OPPORTUNITY - OCEAN SPRINGS, MS, JANUARY 21

A VIM work team will go to Ocean Springs, Mississippi January 21, 2007 to help rebuild homes destroyed by last year's hurricanes. Anyone interested in going as part of this team may contact **Rev. Glenn Hill** at Aldersgate UMC (731-427-4887 or 731-616-2345). Cost per person - \$100.

POSITION AVAILABLE

•**Executive Director, Henderson Settlement, Frakes, KY.** Henderson Settlement, a United Methodist Mission Institution in Appalachia, is seeking a United Methodist with mission experience to serve as Executive Director beginning May, 2007. A position description can be found at www.hendersonsettlement.com. Address resumes and inquiries to: Executive Director Search Committee, PO Box 205, Frakes, KY 40940 or employment@hendersonsettlement.info.

POSITION AVAILABLE

•**Part-time Church Secretary/Church Financial Secretary: St. Matthew's UMC, Memphis.** Three days a week, this person will perform the tasks routinely performed by both a church secretary and the church financial secretary. Those interested in the position must have bookkeeping experience and be proficient on computer-based software for bookkeeping and office operations (includes spread sheet). Send resume to: **Rev. John Meeks**, St. Matthew's United Methodist Church, 1362 S. Prescott St., Memphis, TN 38111.

CATHI JOHNSON NEW VP OF ADVANCEMENT AT MTS
Cathi Johnson has been

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Caring for Creation Conference open to West Tennessee faith community

By **CHRISTY SMITH**
and **MARTHA LYLE FORD**

We seem to have forgotten that human beings are part of Creation, the part that has been blessed with reason and therefore has responsibilities that the rest of Creation does not bear.

No matter the direction we turn, the voices we hear, the words we read, we are inundated by the tears of our planet home, this fragile world created by the God we love and serve. What is the responsibility of the Church, of the only creatures with the capacity to save or destroy the world?

Answers to this pivotal question will be the centerpiece of a Memphis Conference "first," a seminar aimed at opening a discussion that has been the property of science to the wider faith community.

The *Caring for Creation Conference* will be February 18-19 at a retreat center in Dancyville, TN, only a three-mile drive south from I-40 Exit 47.

The conference will begin Sunday, Feb. 18, at 3 p.m. and end at 4:40 p.m. Monday (President's



Tropical rain forests used to occupy a space the size of the United States. Now they occupy a space the size of the U.S. east of the Mississippi River. By the middle of this century, it's estimated they will be about 5% of their original size.

Day), Feb. 19. Overnight accommodations at the retreat center are available to the earliest registrants.

Among those who will lead the conversation are speakers from both faith and environmental com-

munities. Topics under discussion will be "The Need for Creation Care," "Children and Nature," "Energy Audits for Churches," "Agriculture and Land Use," and "Measuring your Ecological Footprint."

Participants will learn about the biblical basis for creation care from the Rev. Pat Watkins from the Virginia Conference. Watkins is a former United Methodist missionary to Nigeria who is also a member of the United Methodist Women's Division Green team.

"Energy Audits for Churches" will focus not only on the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and reducing the church's ecological footprint, but also on ways to save money by wise use of resources. The Southern Alliance for Clean Energy will lead the topic.

Dr. Jim Byford of UT Martin will lead a workshop on "Children and Nature" which will highlight the value of nature to our children, their mental and physical health and their academic scores. Dr. Byford will also join in the Sunday evening vesper service with songs he has written about human-nature interaction.

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Weakley County raises \$16,450 to feed needy

We Care Ministries of Martin, Tennessee estimates Weakley County needs 20,000 pounds of meat per year to feed the needy families in the area. If that 20,000 pounds happened to be venison donated through Hunters for the Hungry (a ministry supported by Memphis Conference men) then the total cost of processing the donated deer would be \$16,450.

It was a challenge the United Methodist men of Weakley County

couldn't resist. They set \$16,450 as the goal of their 2006 Fund Drive for Hunters for the Hungry.

By December 11, \$15,441 had been raised. Donations came in from all over the county: United Methodist churches (Martin First-\$563, Mount Pleasant-\$70, Dresden First-\$670, Mount Vernon-\$167); Baptist churches (Liberty-\$110, Sidonia-\$148, Bethlehem-\$15, Mack's Grove-\$133, Gleason Oak Grove-\$250); Missionary Baptist (Dresden Oak

Grove-\$633, Fuller Street-\$87); anonymous Christian churches-\$800; Cumberland Presbyterian-\$100; and Church of God of Prophecy-\$25. The Hunters for the Hungry Game Supper and Auction raised \$3,887. The Gleason Fire Department added \$100, the Frontier Telephone Company, \$40, and various individuals contributed \$3,409. Added to the pot was the \$4,234 carried over from 2005.

"Money is still coming in," said Dr. Jim Byford, chair of Hunters

for the Hungry for the Memphis Conference. "We've now reached our goal of \$16,450, enough to feed meat to all Weakley County needy for a year."

Additionally, Byford reports, "The U.T. Martin Interfraternity Council just chose Hunters for the Hungry as its Greek Week Philanthropy. They've committed \$5,000 more in February."

Byford says the success can be attributed to "Good people, great cause, hard work!" •

Much retired Jim Shaw looking for successor to head Decatur County Shepherd's Fund

By ANGIE SMITH
Decatur County Chronicle
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The teachings of Christ tell us to feed the hungry, clothe the poor, and have compassion for those less fortunate. There are ministries and outreach programs in Decatur County which do just that.

One such program is the Shepherd's Fund, headed by local resident Jim Shaw who is assisted by many volunteers and caring individuals.

Shaw, who told us that "...he's retired about five times," spoke with *The Chronicle* recently about the program, how he got involved, and how, at age 85, though he's still trying to stay active, he's looking for a successor.

The Shepherd's Fund emerged from a Good Samaritan program that operated in Decatur County until around 10 years ago. The Samaritan program was also operated by several volunteers, including Father John True who passed away.

Shaw took over with the help of Betty Blackstock of the Department of Human Services. Blackstock was on the board at that time.

The Shepherd's Fund has grown in the past 10 years from a food pantry to a service that assists with mortgages, rent payments and utility bills. Shaw and several church members and volunteers worked to help the outreach grow. They decided to "make everything legal and get incorporated," so donations are now tax-deductible.

The Decatur County Shepherd's Fund has an annual budget of about \$25,000. Its assistance to the needy doesn't necessarily stop with food and housing: "We sometimes help with just about anything," Shaw explained. "We've paid for car repairs, dental work. We do have a number of transients that we help as well."

There is also a form people can use to apply for Christmas assistance. Shaw says there is a local individual who matches donations to the program, though he declined to say who. "I don't know what we'd do without it," he maintained.

He says the work would be impossible without the help of volunteers such as Sister Janet Delperdang of St. Regina Catholic Church, employee Imogean



At 85, Shepherd's Fund director Jim Shaw is very computer-literate. "I don't know what I'd do without my computer," he maintains. He subscribes to many online newspapers and uses a computer to keep up many of his daily activities, including volunteer work at the Decatur County Shepherd's Fund.



In the food pantry: Sister Janet Delperdang, Jim Shaw, Imogean Kelley and Laura Levingston. The food pantry portion of the Shepherd's Fund was in need of donations for the holiday season.

Kelley, and volunteer Laura Levingston. He called Sister Janet "a true treasure to the organization," and wanted to publicly thank and give appreciation to the other two ladies he mentioned.

Jim says that applicants must fill out forms and prove their need before getting assistance. "We do get some deadbeats," he admitted. "We can pretty much sort those out. Ultimately, before anyone gets any help, I have to be the one who makes the final decision. Sometimes that means getting calls after midnight. That's okay though...I don't mind."

'I thought I was going into pulpit ministry'

Shaw has led a full and productive life. He's originally from Shelby County, and he thought his first calling was to be a minister. "I spent 2 1/2 years in school, thinking I was going into the pulpit ministry, but it just wasn't

working out." Turns out Jim did have a calling, just not to the pulpit. He has dedicated his life to serving others. After ministerial school ended, he graduated from Memphis State in 1966 with a CPA degree. He came to Decatur County some time later and was a comptroller at Kolpak, a local factory, until his "retirement" at age 65. He worked part-time at Kolpak even after his retirement, with a local CPA, and now works in the accounting department part-time at Decatur County General.

"I just couldn't stop working," he explained. Jim enjoys serving on boards. He's on the local Quinco Mental Health board, the United Methodist Church's National Board, is Chairman of the Library Board, and also works with the local Habitat for Humanity chapter.

The Shepherd's Fund outreach is located in the former Parsons Junior High building, which is now

called the Decatur County CARES center.

Although neither Shaw nor any of the other employees or volunteers brought the matter to attention, the CARES building itself is in obvious need of repair and upkeep. There is a persistent moldy smell. The roof leaks. The ceiling tiles are falling in. It could use a professional cleaning job, as well as a coat of fresh paint everywhere. The building has only been vacant of students for about six years, and is already in disrepair. There is no heating or air conditioning in many of the rooms.

A few weeks of several church or civic groups volunteering time and materials could be a major help to the facility. The building houses a few other organizations and is open for public use, but the Shepherd's Fund operation takes up a good deal of the space. As for donations, yes, they're badly needed; money, food, infant formula, toys, nice clothing...anything that could help a family in crisis. The food pantry, which should be filling up with

holiday edibles, is nearly bare. Donations are currently needed and being accepted. They can be dropped off at the building.

Shaw told us he is getting ready to "retire for good this time". He's having trouble getting from place to place, due to severe arthritis. "I'm ready for someone else to take over. This is a good program. I'm 85 and it's getting hard to get around in this big building. I used to fish and golf a lot, but that's pretty much in the past now."

Jim has been married to wife Margaret for 54 years, and they have a daughter who lives in Salt Lake City. Even though he says he's ready to retire, it doesn't mean he's throwing in the towel just yet.

Last weekend, he drove himself to North Carolina for a United Methodist Men's convention. And he will continue to serve the public by his board memberships.

If you or someone you know would like to assume the Shepherd's Fund Director position, Mr. Shaw can be reached by calling 731-847-2519.

Oldest living couple in Methodism?

The riches of a small community in America are always worth celebrating. Kevil, Kentucky is one such community. The Rev. Don Barnett writes, "My family and I moved here in June, 2006. We did not know the wonderful people and their love for the Lord and their pastors. We are proud to count ourselves among the blessed. Barnett believes that Kevil United Methodist Church quite possibly has the oldest living couple in all of American Methodism, Mr. Elmer and Ms. Thelma Jerrell. Mr. and Mrs. Jerrell have been married for 81 years. Mrs. Thelma celebrated her 100th birthday, December 18, 2006. Mr. Elmer, who has reached the wonderful age of 103, is at her side every day. Mr. Elmer still drives from Kevil to LaCenter, KY (about 5 miles) each day to help his dear wife eat her lunch.



196th Field Artillery Brigade thanks Covington First UMC for spiritual support in Afghanistan



Thank you! Major A. Jason Fleming presented to Tim Wallace and Dr. William P. Mullins, Jr. (left to right) a flag that was flown over Qalat, Afghanistan in honor of Covington, Tenn.'s First United Methodist Church. Fleming said he wanted to do something to recognize the church for encouraging him and his unit spiritually while they were serving our country.

By CATHY FARMER

Major A. Jason Fleming says the two things the 11 soldiers in his team looked forward to were mail and those times when they shared the evening meal together. Fleming and his small unit were embedded with the Afghan National Army on July 7, 2005 and tasked with providing training. They spent a full year living in an isolated part of Afghanistan, finally returning home on July 11, 2006.

"It was always especially nice when the mail brought a DVD of the Sunday services from Covington's First United Methodist Church," Fleming said. "Being such a small team... and located in an isolated portion of the country, it was rare that we had the chance to attend formal chapel services. Having the DVD of the church service from FUMC allowed for a corporate worship experience."

Fleming said having the services on DVD allowed him a lot of flexibility. "(I could) enjoy worship whenever there was a

break in my schedule.

"Even though I was isolated geographically, I wasn't isolated spiritually," Fleming continued. "Having my copy of 'Strength for Service' and the weekly services on DVD enabled me to have a daily, personal quiet time and a corporate worship experience."

Fleming decided that he wanted to do something for the church that so faithfully stayed in contact with him. He wanted to show his appreciation.

His wife Sheila Fleming, Covington First UMC secretary, said her husband had a shadow box made to showcase a flag that was flown over Qalat, Afghanistan in honor of the church. Along with the flag, he included a certificate stating when it was flown and who it was dedicated to. The box also has a picture of "The Castle", headquarters of the Brigade while they were in Afghanistan.

"Worshiping with the congregation of FUMC never failed to encourage me spiritually," Fleming said. "The love of God in Christ was made very real to me by the congregation of FUMC!" •

Jackson's 'Music for Esteem' graduate now graces runways as top international model

By HENRY HARRISON AND CATHY FARMER

In the fall of 1991, Francis Hollis enrolled her little girl Wakeema in "Music for Esteem," a program for at-risk children at Jackson, Tenn.'s First United Methodist Church.

As a member of the program's first class, for four years Wakeema studied piano and the musical arts under the direction of Margaret Harrison. In a recent telephone conversation, Wakeema recalled, "I learned to play *Mary Had a Little Lamb* under Ms. Harrison. There were also many other skills I learned as a child, sitting beside her on a chair, when we just talked," she continued.

"I remember Wakeema very well," said Ms. Harrison. "And I remember her mother, Francis, a proud, hard-working, wonderful Christian lady."

Ms. Harrison said Francis Hollis brought her little girl to the church every Thursday afternoon for the hour and a half program.

"She would sit outside the door of the studio, waiting for her. And she insisted that she practice."

After three or four months in the program, people began to notice a change in Wakeema. One of her gym teachers stopped Ms. Harrison to tell her that the child's self esteem was much improved.

"I always found Wakeema to be a lovely girl, inside and out. She had wonderful manners and was very genteel. We never had to wring our hands over Wakeema's behavior," Ms. Harrison said.

"Nor do we take credit for her later success," Ms. Harrison added. "We just hope we sowed the seed, raised her self esteem so she could pursue her studies."

Wakeema started modeling at the age of 16. After working with

her in the theater program at Jackson Central Merry High School, Rebecca Fly, a local drama teacher and actor, introduced Wakeema to the Colors Agency in Memphis, TN.

Colors set up Wakeema's first photo shoot then sent the pictures out to larger agencies in Atlanta and Miami, thus beginning Wakeema's career. She started to work for clients such as Holliday's, Kmart, Coca-Cola and Delia's.

During this period, Wakeema remained a very active honor roll student. She was president of her senior class, president of the drama club and a member of various student and community organizations.

After graduating in 2002, Wakeema (known professionally only as Hollis) decided to fully



Wakeema Hollis, now a top model, was once a student in Music for Esteem.

pursue her career. Over the next five years she worked her way to the top. She's now an international model who lives in New York and frequently travels to Europe to walk the runways of Paris, London, Germany and Italy.

Wakeema has modeled for many famous designers. She has also appeared on nationally televised shows and graced the pages of magazines. She spends most of her time flying throughout the United States working for clients like Abercrombie and Fitch, Kenneth Cole, Target, Kohl's, JC Penny, Sears, Belk, Macy's and Nordstrom. She recently returned

from the Bahamas where she was shooting the cover and 12 pages of Elle Magazine Holland and is currently planning travels to London and South Africa.

At a party in her honor at Jackson First UMC on December 21, Wakeema told the children now enrolled in Music for Esteem that she learned if she kept herself a pure, virtuous, Christian woman, "I could achieve anything I had my heart set on." Harrison said it was a marvelous testimony to the 14-year-old program.

Mayor Jerry Gist and Representative Johnny Shaw presented special awards to Wakeema. •

Briefly

selected to serve as Vice President of Advancement of Memphis Theological Seminary. Johnson, most recently Director of Development and Public Relations at the Baddour Center, has also served as Director of Development at United Methodist Neighborhood Centers of Memphis. Johnson and her husband Paul attend Crossroads UMC.

MEMPHIS FIRST CHURCH AND ACTS OF SERVANT EVANGELISM

Memphis First UMC members spent a recent Sunday afternoon wrapping holiday presents at a midtown Memphis store. As members wrapped presents, grateful customers asked, "How much does it cost?" and "Can I give you a donation?" when told there was no charge for the service. To convince them, a "TOTALLY FREE" sign was placed on the gift wrapping table to assure customers there was no catch to the offer! The gift wrapping event was the third in a series of "servant evangelism" projects started by First Church this past summer. Other projects have included a "Totally Free Car Wash" near the downtown Farmers' Market and offering "Totally Free Cold Bottled Water" to the Shelby County voters waiting in the hot sun to cast their vote. **Senior Pastor Martha Wagley** said, "We just wanted to come out into the community and give back a little of the incredible kindness we have been shown..."

HUNTERS FOR THE HUNGRY TO MEET JAN. 18, U.T. MARTIN

Committee members for Hunters for the Hungry will meet at Brehm Hall, Rm. 258, U.T. Martin, 4:30 pm, Martin, Tenn. Please be present to discuss fund-raising, donations, successes and challenges.

INVITATION TO MUSICIANS, ARTISTS & DANCERS TO PARTICIPATE IN 2008 GC

United Methodist Choirs/Ensembles/Bands, Instrumentalists, Singers, Dancers/Dance Groups, Visual/Video/Textile and Performing Artists are invited to apply to share their gifts in worship with the 2008 General Conference in Fort Worth, TX. Submit a recording (DVD, CD, VHS, cassette tape, mpeg, mp3, jpg), brief bio, and other supporting materials either by postal mail or email by March 30, 2007 to: **Mark A. Miller**, Director of Music, Drew Theological School, 36 Madison Ave. Madison, NJ 07940 or email: mamiller@drew.edu.

Hundreds gather to celebrate life

MEMPHIS, Tenn. More than 450 people recently gathered for a special Celebration of Life service hosted by Methodist Healthcare and Hospice at St. John's United Methodist Church.

"The Celebration of Life service helped me to focus on the person my grandmother was, not the fact that she is gone," said April Smith, whose grandmother passed away within the last year. "During the service we were able to celebrate and honor my grandmother and what an amazing person she was. For that opportunity, I am exceedingly grateful."

The past 12 years Methodist Hospice hosted this holiday memorial for hospice families. This was the first year Methodist Healthcare and Hospice joined together to make the service a community-wide event.

The service provided those who attended with a sense of comfort and hope through song, readings, and reflection. The names of those who had passed away were read



Mary Elizabeth Jones, bereavement supervisor, Methodist Hospice, and April Smith remember April's grandmother with a special ornament she received during the Celebration of Life service hosted by Methodist Healthcare and Hospice.

aloud. As each name was spoken, a candle was lit in their memory. During the service, family members placed a personalized heart-

shaped ornament on a tree. After the service concluded, families took home the ornaments as a special remembrance. •

Rivercrest Elementary donates \$1,000 to church reconstruction

A check for \$1,000 came as a nice surprise for the Rev. Martha Wagley, senior pastor of First United Methodist Church in Memphis. The donation was made by the assistant principals, teachers, staff and PTA of Rivercrest Elementary School in Bartlett, Tenn. The money was given in honor of Rivercrest Principal Marty Redding and designated for First Church's reconstruction.

Redding, a member of First Church, presented the check to

Wagley and explained, "When the school learned about the downtown fires of October 6 destroying our church, the faculty and staff decided to make donations to the church without my knowledge. Their goal was to raise \$500 before Christmas. In order to reach their target, the faculty and staff agreed not to exchange Christmas presents and instead to give the money to First Church. They kept this wonderful secret from me this whole time. The Rivercrest PTA also contributed.

Through everyone's generosity, the goal was exceeded and they collected an amazing \$1,000."

Rivercrest Elementary School focuses on caring and giving to others in the community. Teachers, staff, and students brought food and gifts this holiday season for nursing homes, Toys for Tots, children, and families with special needs.

Mrs. Redding said, "I feel especially blessed this year to be a part of our Rivercrest Elementary School family." •

Superstar Model Wakeema Hollis honored



See story about young girl who joined the Music for Esteem outreach program at Jackson, Tenn.'s First United Methodist Church and then became a superstar model.

Inside page 5A

Caring for Creation Conference, Feb. 18-19

(Continued from page 1A)

Prophets and seers speak a word for the planet throughout the Bible. Especially in the Hebrew text, we see God talking about justice for the world – not just economic justice but land justice. In Leviticus 25:23, God says, "The land belongs to ME." As Biblical scholar John Dominic Crossan points out, what God is saying is, "You're ALL resident aliens." So we must treat what belongs to God gently and reverentially.

Confusion about the Genesis text may be the reason we have viewed our role as masters of the natural world, seeing opportunities to control rather than protect, reading "dominion" as license to exploit. But that word in ancient Hebrew thought means responsibility.

"If a ruler...fails in this righteous rule of dominion, then that person forfeits the right to rule. (Incorrect) theological focus has isolated a good part of the faith community from the care of creation and (from) those themes you find in every major world tradition." (Dean Freudenberger Professor of Social Ethics Emeritus, Claremont School of Theology, in the Los Angeles Times, October 16, 1999.)

What, then, is the role of the church specifically and the role of people of faith generally in the care of God's creation?

We hope you will want to know the ways that God's people can help protect the incredible creation that is our legacy. For more information about *Caring for Creation Conference*, contact Martha Lyle Ford, Memphis Conference Church & Society chair, 731-780-6737, mlford1@bellsouth.net, or Christy Smith, Memphis Conference Program Ministries chair, call 731-780-2037, or email ctsmith923@bellsouth.net.

Registration information is available through the Memphis Conference office, 731-664-8480. •

An award winning newspaper
Cathy Farmer, Editor
Carol Kiddy, Circulation
24 Corporate Blvd.
Jackson, TN 38305-2315
Phone: 731-664-8480
Sub. Rate: \$12.50/52 issues