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Instant Connection

California-Nevada Annual Conference



December 11, 2009



Church Retains Mission Focus Despite Hard Times

**A UMNS Report
By Linda Bloom***

When the stock market takes a hit, so do church collection plates.

Global economic woes had an impact on all levels of The United

Methodist Church in 2009 and the results were budget cuts, staff layoffs, canceled meetings, and postponed projects. Even the denomination's bishops voted to take a pay cut.

But the denomination continued to pursue its four areas of focus - improving global health, engaging in ministry with the poor, encouraging church growth, and developing principled Christian leaders for the church and the world.

The recession that began in the fall of 2008 translated into lean times for church bodies the following year. In January, the United Methodist Publishing House reported its greatest sales decline in 20 years. A planned revision of The United Methodist Hymnal was put on hold.

The next month, the church's largest agency, the Board of Global Ministries, decided to reduce its 2009 operating budget by \$3.9 million, or 7 percent.

In May, the denomination's bishops voted to roll back their salaries in 2010 to 2008 levels, dropping from \$125,658 to \$120,942, effective Jan. 1.

By June, the Board of Global Ministries was sending letters offering retirement or "voluntary separation" packages to all employees. The agency eliminated 45 positions by the end of July and another 20 open positions were not filled. The Board of Discipleship cut 30 positions during the first half of the year and United Methodist Communications eliminated seven staff positions at the beginning of August.

Staff members of the Commission on the Status and Role of Women took voluntary pay reductions and the Commission on Religion and Race decided in October to reorganize itself, cutting some positions and adding others but at lower salaries.

"The reality across the connection is that budgets have been realigned, expenses curtailed or eliminated, and lives impacted because of the decrease in monies received and a projection of a recovery," said A. Moses Rathan Kumar, treasurer of The United Methodist Church and head of the General Council on Finance and Administration.

Reaching out with assistance

Despite their own decline in finances, United Methodists reached out to others hurt by the economic crisis, joining rallies for victims of foreclosure, helping job seekers with resume preparation and networking opportunities, and keeping food pantry programs stocked for an expanding client list.

In Elkhart, Indiana, the 850-member Trinity United Methodist Church is doing what it can to minister to the community.

Trinity filled gallon-sized plastic bags, called "bags of grace," with snack-sized food for distribution to community soup kitchens and homeless agencies. Each bag contained four meals. The Matthew 25 program also sent gift cards anonymously to families suffering from job losses.

The economic crisis affected church programs around the world. In September, Africa University in Zimbabwe opened the 2009-10 school year with its lowest enrollment in more than a decade - 865 students instead of the expected 1,200 students.

More than 300 students were unable to register. "I have had mothers come to my office with their children trying to find a way to help their children continue their education," said Africa University Vice Chancellor Fanuel Tagwira. "They break down crying."

For about 60 of those students, however, there was a "saving grace." Grace Muradzikwa, a successful executive in Zimbabwe, raised \$100,000 for scholarships from the business community there.

Attracting young adults

As it continues to assess its economic situation, The United Methodist Church is going forward with a plan to do a systemwide study. The Connectional Table at its Nov. 6-8 meeting agreed to fund a proposal approved by the Council of Bishops to consider changes in the church's structure, from annual conferences to General Conference, from national agencies to the bishops' council.

Part of the point of the study is to figure out how to attract young people to the denomination - both in the pews and the pulpit.

"It is critical to the survival of the denomination to lower the age of United Methodist Christians by a decade in a decade," Bishop Larry Goodpaster said about a Council of Bishops' plan to emphasize mission work and leadership development among young people. The average age of United Methodists in the pews is 57, he said.

The need to recruit younger clergy is critical, research shows. The number of people younger than 35 ordained or on the track to be ordained dropped from 3,210 in 1985 to 910 in 2008, according to a study by the Lewis Center for Church Leadership at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington. The average age of elders is 52; for ordained deacons it is 51.

Young clergy have established their own website, www.umcyoungclergy.com, and have created campaigns such as "40 Days of Prayer" and "6 Questions for The United Methodist Church."

A part of civil society

United Methodists were both observers of and participants in the Jan. 20 inauguration of Barack Obama as the first African-American U.S. president.

The Rev. Joseph E. Lowery, 87, a dean of the Civil Rights movement, gave the benediction. Dorothy Height, 96, was among the special guests on the inaugural platform. Both had worked alongside the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., whose birthday was celebrated a day earlier.

In August, Lowery, who co-founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference with King, was one of 16 people who received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest honor for a civilian, from President Obama. [Editor's Note: Rev. Lowery preached the 11 a.m. sermon at Glide Memorial UMC in San Francisco on Nov. 8. See [story](#) in the November 13 edition of the *Instant Connection*.]

During the inaugural festivities, 40 United Methodist churches in the Washington area opened their doors to people from across the United States, offering food, fellowship and a place to sleep.

Michelle Gilstrap, 17, came to Washington with a group from Cascade United Methodist Church, Atlanta. She told her mother that she wanted to attend the inauguration because "Barack Obama is the George Washington of our generation."

In communion with others

On Aug. 20, the largest Lutheran body in the United States entered into full communion with The United Methodist Church, which had approved the agreement in 2008.

After the vote, Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America hugged Bishop Gregory Palmer, president of the United Methodist Council of Bishops, and thanked all who had labored in dialogue between the religious traditions founded by towering figures in Christian history - Martin Luther and John Wesley.

"You have taken up centuries of differences and found centuries of commonalities," Hanson declared.

[Members of the California-Nevada Annual Conference of The UMC and Sierra Pacific Synod of the ELCA celebrated the full communion agreement at a service titled "Together We Serve," Nov. 15 at First UMC in Sacramento.]

The two denominations also joined with Catholics at a spirit-filled Oct. 1 service in Chicago to celebrate an historic agreement on justification by faith - how individuals are forgiven and brought into a right relationship with God. The three groups vowed to move toward greater unity.

Immigration

United Methodist Bishop Minerva Carcaño of Phoenix helped launch a national interfaith campaign for humane immigration reform, declaring at a Feb. 11 press conference in Washington that people of faith "cannot and will not stand by in silence while young people die, families are separated, individual freedoms are ignored, and the immigrant community in the U.S. is treated unjustly and inhumanely."

Prayer vigils on immigration reform followed across the country during the Feb. 13-22 Congressional recess. Later that month, Carcaño and other United Methodists joined in a solidarity march against alleged abuses of power by Sheriff Joe Arpaio of Phoenix, related to the detention of immigrants.

In November and December, houses of worship in Arkansas, Iowa, Ohio, and Texas were holding special prayer services to press Congress to pass immigration reform that keeps families together - part of a larger campaign sponsored by the Interfaith Immigration Coalition.

Health care

United Methodists were among the nearly 30 top leaders of Christian, Jewish, and Islamic organizations who gathered July 7 at the U.S. Capitol for a day of dialogue and planning on health care reform. "We must speak on behalf of the poor and marginalized here in the halls of power," said Jim Winkler, top executive of the United Methodist Board of Church and Society, one of the event's sponsors.

Three United Methodist pastors participated in an Aug. 19 live Webcast call-in forum on health care reform aimed at the faith community. The call, which featured President Obama and drew

more than 140,000 listeners, launched a "40 Days for Health Reform" more than 140,000 listeners, launched a "40 Days for Health Reform" campaign to ask people of faith to press Congress to finish work on a health plan.

The denomination is embarking on a new campaign to fight malaria, "Imagine No Malaria," with a public launch set for the next World Malaria Day - April 25, 2010. The fundraising goal of \$75 million will expand grassroots programs such as Nothing But Nets and develop more comprehensive efforts to promote prevention and education activities, strengthen health delivery systems, and train health care workers to more effectively treat the disease.

Dealing with disaster

In Africa, United Methodists continued to respond to the political, economic, and humanitarian crisis in Zimbabwe, keeping church-related hospitals and clinics open. The United Methodist Committee on Relief coordinated emergency relief efforts through The United Methodist Church in Zimbabwe and other groups.

In the United States, the swollen Red River left residents in the Dakotas and Minnesota scrambling to stop floodwaters in late March.

The Rev. Rich Zeck, pastor of First United Methodist Church in Fargo, N.D., was exhausted after spending 10 days bagging sand for the emergency dikes. "We are tired, but the saying here is 'God is good and so is Advil,'" he said when reached by telephone. "Everyone is tired, but I am amazed that whenever a call is put out for volunteers, we have more than we need and we keep responding."

UMCOR worked with Church World Service and Muslim Aid over the spring and summer to assist the 2 million Pakistanis who fled the Swat Valley during fighting there between government forces and the Taliban.

Those celebrating the July 24 grand opening of UMCOR's new office and resource warehouse in the Philippines, based on the campus of Union Theological Seminary in Cavite, did not know the office soon would be assisting Filipinos as they dealt with the consequences of multiple typhoons over the fall.

The United Methodist Council of Bishops issued a Churchwide Appeal for Philippines Disasters on Nov.19 in response to the multiple typhoons that have struck the country. UMCOR was distributing emergency supplies to more than 11,000 displaced families.

Court rulings

The United Methodist Church's top court ruled in April that Southern Methodist University could lease campus property for the George W. Bush Presidential library, museum, and public policy institute, saying the agreement does not violate church law. Critics opposed to many

policies of the Bush administration, including the war in Iraq, argued that placing the institute on university property would be inconsistent with church teaching.

At its October meeting, the Judicial Council ruled that the Baltimore-Washington Annual (regional) Conference went too far in adopting its own sexuality statement, which declared "a more authentic and truthful representation of The United Methodist Church" is that "we disagree" on gay and lesbian issues.

The court said that while such statements can be "aspirational in nature," an annual conference "may not negate, ignore, or violate" the *Book of Discipline*, "even when the disagreements are based upon conscientious objections."

In the company of bishops

A new bishop - the Rev. Christian Alsted, 48, a pastor from Copenhagen, Denmark - was elected in February to succeed retiring Bishop Øystein Ølsen in the Nordic and Baltic Area.

Three retired bishops died in 2009: Bishop Melvin E. Wheatley, Jr., 93, of Laguna Woods, California, on March 1; Bishop Ole Edvard Borgen, 83, of Norway, on March 24; and Bishop Eugene M. Frank, 101, of Kansas City, on Oct. 13.

Bishop Larry M. Goodpaster of Western North Carolina was elected in November as the next president of the United Methodist Council of Bishops and Bishop Rosemarie Wenner of Germany was designated as president-elect.

*Bloom is a United Methodist News Service news writer based in New York.

GCFA Board Recommends Special General Session

The board of the General Council on Finance and Administration for The United Methodist Church has passed two resolutions "addressing the financial hardships facing local churches and annual conferences," particularly "the difficulties they face in maintaining their congregational giving at the annual conference and general Church levels."

One of the resolutions calls for the Council of Bishops to authorize a special (interim) General Session to address two items: the recommendations from the Call to Action Task Force, and pension plans for clergy in the United States.

The board also directs GCFA to work with the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits "to obtain an independent actuarial review of the need for additional funding for the clergy pension plan" and to develop recommendations for easing the burden annual conferences face in funding it.

Read [GCFA news release](#) (in PDF format) here.

Year-End Reports Are Ready!

The Year-End Church Reports (Table I, Table II, and Table III) for the California-Nevada Annual Conference have been uploaded to the [GCFA Statistical Website](#). **Churches are asked to complete these year-end reports on line by January 22.**

Within the next few days, the Conference Treasurer's Office will be mailing churches their user name and password, along with worksheets to help them input the data directly into the website. The worksheets include the churches' 2008 numbers.

Please be on the lookout for this information. If your church does not receive its packet by the end of the month (December 31), please email clarep@calnevumc.org.

No data will be accepted after February 28.

The GCFA Statistical Website (where the forms are housed, and where data is to be entered) is located at: <http://eagle.gcfa.org>.

'2010 Annual Conference Session' Page Now Active, Items Available to Download

As we turn the corner from 2009 to 2010, we begin to set our sights on Annual Conference Session. The "[2010 Annual Conference Session](#)" page is active now on the Conference website at cnumc.org - and Conference Secretary Kristin Sachen has posted three important items there for you to download.

The 2010 Annual Conference Session page is where all items related to ACS will be posted, as they are made available.

Now available to download are:

- Conference Secretary's letter
- Instructions for Reports
- Instructions for Recommendations

Navigate to the 2010 Annual Conference Session page by clicking on "[Annual Conference](#)" on the green navigation bar near the top of the Home Page.

Bishop's Confirmation Retreat Dates Are Set

The 2010 Bishop's Confirmation Retreat has been scheduled for **March 5-6 at Monte Toyon**, and **April 9-10 at Lodestar**.

The theme is "B1: One Being, Being One." It is an opportunity for confirmation candidates to engage in a high energy, hands-on event through worship, workshops, and fellowship with Bishop Warner H. Brown, Jr. (resident bishop of the California-Nevada Annual Conference),

workshop leaders, and other United Methodist youth. This can be a faith-deepening experience before, during, or after Confirmation classes.

Space is limited and the camps do fill up, so register early!

Visit www.calnevumc.org/youthministries and scroll down to "Bishop's Confirmation" for more information.

Hmong Ministry 'Kingdom Conference' for Youth, Young Adults Is Dec. 19

The California-Nevada Annual Conference Committee on Hmong Ministry and Hmong Caucus will host the first Kingdom Conference for youth and young adults on Saturday, December 19, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., at Trinity United Methodist Church in Sacramento.

Two motivational workshops in the morning session will be followed, in the afternoon session, by two inspiring speakers: the Rev. Denice Dluabci Leslie (pastor of Memorial UMC, Clovis), and Mrs. Melody M. Yang, who will be the first Hmong female Certified Lay Minister in the United Methodist Church.

All youth and young adults are invited to attend.

For more information contact Paul Joseph T. Khamdy Yang, Chair of the Conference Committee on Hmong Ministry, at 707.245.5399 or KhamD2Yang@juno.com.

Trinity UMC is located at 2245 Highridge Drive, Sacramento, CA 95825.

Peace with Justice Grants, up to \$1500, Available in January; Applications Due by Jan. 1

This September the California-Nevada Annual Conference Church and Society Committee, in conjunction with the Conference Peace with Justice Committee, presented Walnut Creek United Methodist Church \$1,000 to support its Bus Stop After School Program, which is enriching the lives of immigrant children. The committees sent \$500 to the JustFaith weekly class, which will be held at Campbell UMC. The Buena Vista UMC Sister Village Project with Wadi Foquin received \$1,500. Davis UMC, for its "Three Cups of Tea" project, received \$500 and Trinity UMC, \$750 for its "Singing Chaplain Ministries." (For more information about these ministries contact Mary Liebke, Conference Peace with Justice Coordinator.)

These grants are funded by the Peace with Justice Special Sundays, in which California-Nevada UM congregations donate money to be dispersed among peace with justice programs, here and around the world. What a great opportunity for mission! The programs funded this year are working with the homeless and with immigrant families, on behalf of economic justice for Palestinian people, and for awareness of the educational needs of young girls in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The JustFaith program speaks to not just being a good neighbor but to being a more compassionate and caring Christian.

What are the outreach programs in which your congregation is involved? Can some PwJ funding support those programs at your church? Grants of up to \$1,500 are available in January!

To apply, download:

[PwJ Grant Application](#) (**Interactive form** - in PDF format)

[PwJ Grant guidelines](#) (in PDF format)

Both are **due January 1**.

Send your completed application to Mary Liebke at mliebke@yahoo.com or 14983 Los Ninos Place, Grass Valley, CA 95945. She welcomes your calls for assistance or additional information, to 530.273.3678.

An Advent Letter From Janet Lahr Lewis

Dear Friends,

It is the Advent season, and here in Bethlehem people have hung the lights and put up the Christmas trees, despite the concern that Christians will be denied permits again this year [and thus will not be allowed to] get together with family members who live in Jerusalem or inside Israel.

Every month a group of people like me who work for different denominations in the U.S. get together to discuss new resources, advocacy ideas, and to share information so as to best utilize our time and collective energy. This group is known as the Ecumenical Advisory Group and is intended to be a contact in the land called "Holy" for our different denominations who may want more information, advice on advocacy initiatives, or just a general resource for more information on the situation or for assistance in hosting groups to the region.

Each year we put together a letter at Advent and Lent with the hope that the different churches will share the letter with their congregations – not only as a reminder that we are all one in the body of Christ, but with hope that people will remember the Christians of the land of Jesus who have been faithful witnesses for thousands of years, and be moved to ease their suffering.

Please take a moment to [read the letter](#), pass it on to friends, read it to your congregations, and pray for all those around the world and in Bethlehem who are unable to enjoy the season, but still manage to find hope and solace in the knowledge of Christ's birth.

May the blessings of the season be with you all!

Janet Lahr Lewis
United Methodist Liaison in Israel and Palestine

Christmas Eve Broadcast Is First Planned for UMC Radio in Côte d'Ivoire

United Methodist Church radio in Côte d'Ivoire, West Africa will broadcast for the first time on Christmas Eve 2009 - amplifying hope in a country still healing from a recent civil war.

Through December 11, you may leave an inspirational quote, Scripture, testimony of God's grace, or another positive message for playback on air. Visit AmplifyHope.org for information on how to leave your message of hope and to learn more about the radio initiative.

Mission Leaders Deplore Massacre in Philippines

NEW YORK (UMNS) - Two United Methodist bishops have added their voices to those deploring the massacre of 57 people on their way to register a political candidate on the island of Mindanao in the Philippines.

Bishop Bruce R. Ough of West Ohio, president of the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries, and Bishop Joel N. Martinez, interim general secretary of the agency, have commended Filipino Bishop Leo A. Soriano of the Episcopal Area of Davao for his courage in condemning the atrocities, and in insisting that the government be held accountable for justice.

The Ough-Martinez statement expressed concern and offered prayers for "the families of those killed as well as with the churches and other advocates of peace with justice in the Philippines, and also with those in political power who are called up to adjudicate civil justice."

The global ministries statement, as well as a pastoral letter from Soriano, can be found on the [GBGM website](#).

Jimmy Cabillo, a member of the First United Methodist Church of Koronadal City and a radio reporter, was among 27 journalists killed.

Churches Celebrate Bible Translation

BAGUIO CITY, Philippines (ENI) - Cooperation between Protestants, Evangelicals, and Roman Catholics is growing strong a century after the Bible was translated into Ilokano, a local language in the Philippines, say Christian leaders.

"We now come and celebrate together for this great gift of God through which His word, through translation, has become alive in us since 100 years ago," said Evangelical Methodist Bishop Nathanael Lazaro, president of the Philippine Bible Society, during December 2 centennial celebrations of the translation.

Hmong UM Academy Translation Work Underway This Week

Hmong United Methodist Academy 2009 participants are gathering this week to finalize previous translations and to arrange for new materials to be translated from English into the Hmong language.

The Rev. Paul Joseph T. Khamdy Yang, Chair of the Conference Committee on Hmong Ministry, asks that you pray for them as they undertake this important work - and extends Advent blessings to all of you.

At the 2009 Annual Conference Session, the Committee on Hmong Ministry presented the Annual Conference with a translation of the Local Church section of the *Book of Discipline*, for use by Hmong congregations.

UMVIM Teams Poster Is Back

The UMVIM Teams poster - showing the list of all California-Nevada Annual Conference United Methodist Volunteers in Mission (UMVIM) teams currently planned - is now available! It will be mailed to any church on request, while supplies last.

"I see these posters displayed at nearly every church I go to, and have standing requests for the next update," says Phil Bandy, UMVIM Interim Director.

Posters will ship in time for display before Christmas. In addition, downloadable versions of the poster (in both 11"x17" and legal size) will be available on Thursday, December 17 from the Conference website at: <http://www.calnevumc.org/page.asp?PKValue=1475>.

To request that a full size poster be mailed to your church, contact Eddie Frutchey at: UMVIM Office, P.O. Box 980250, West Sacramento, CA 95798-0250; phone 916.374.1584; fax 916.372;5544; email eddief@calnevumc.org or umvim@calnevumc.org.

Frutchey has been collecting trip plans from all over the Conference for the last month, and reports, "There are teams planned for local projects in nearly every District, and going off to faraway places such as Cambodia, Mexico, and Fiji."

Regular updates will be posted to the master project list on the Conference website periodically, but this is the only printing of the poster which will be done this season.

For information about Cal-NeV UMVIM Projects visit: <http://www.cnumc.org/page.asp?PKValue=1412>.

To download the Cal-NeV Conference UMVIM Projects list visit: <http://www.cnumc.org/page.asp?PKValue=1113>.

Cal-NeV UMVIM Team to 'UMCOR West' Is Accepting Applicants

Phil Bandy, Interim Director of the California-Nevada United Methodist Volunteers in Mission (UMVIM) Office, will lead a Conference-wide UMVIM team to the new "UMCOR West" Supply Depot in Salt Lake City, Utah after the first of the year. (See "[UMCOR West Depot Created to Respond to Western States Threats](#)" in the November 17, 2009 edition of the Instant Connection.)

The team will serve at the depot January 25 through January 29. If you've thought about taking a team from your church to the new supply depot, this is an excellent opportunity for you to "check out the place" in preparation for leading your own team there in the future.

The Conference-wide team will travel by car and will be very willing to take along any donated kits as long as space permits. Churches wanting to send kits will need to contact the Conference UMVIM Office by January 10 with the approximate number to be donated, and will need to deliver those kits to the Conference UMVIM Office by January 20.

The team will appreciate any contributions towards travel expenses (gasoline).

- For more information about this trip visit:
<http://www.calnevumc.org/page.asp?PKValue=1476>.
- For information about how to make kits to donate visit:
<http://new.gbqm-umc.org/umcor/getconnected/supplies/>.
- For more information about UMCOR West visit:
<http://new.gbqm-umc.org/umcor/work/umcorwest/> or
<http://www.umvimwj.blogspot.com/>.

Or contact Phil Bandy at philb@calnevumc.org, 916.374.1582 (office), or 925.808.8138 (mobile).

- For a list of all Cal-Nev Conference UMVIM Teams and Projects visit:
<http://www.calnevumc.org/page.asp?PKValue=1113>.

UMCOR West Director Available to Speak to Cal-Nevada Churches

The Rev. Brian Diggs, director of the new "UMCOR West" Office and Depot in Salt Lake City, Utah, is available to speak to churches in the California-Nevada Annual Conference. UMCOR West is the newest United Methodist Committee on Relief depot and it was strategically placed to provide a worldwide mission opportunity for those of us in the Western Jurisdiction. (See "[UMCOR West Depot Created to Respond to Western States Threats](#)" in the November 17, 2009 edition of the Instant Connection.)

Last year Diggs was asked to speak to congregations in the Rocky Mountain, Pacific Northwest, and Yellowstone annual conferences, and he would welcome an opportunity to outline this new and exciting ministry for churches in Cal-Nevada. He is willing to tailor his presentation (in terms of time) to the needs of your church.

To arrange for a visit, contact Rev. Brian Diggs, Director, at UMCOR West Office and Depot, 1479S 700W, Salt Lake City, Utah 84104, westdepot@umcor.org, phone 801.973.7250, fax 801.973.7916.

Emory President Named to Bioethics Commission

ATLANTA (UMNS) - President Barack Obama has named Emory University President James W. Wagner vice chair for a new commission on bioethics.

The Presidential Commission for the Study of Bioethical Issues will advise Obama on issues that may emerge from advances in biomedicine and related areas of science and technology. The commission's goal is to ensure scientific research, health care delivery and technological innovation are conducted in an ethically responsible manner.

Wagner has championed the role of ethics at the United Methodist-related university by enhancing the prominence of Emory's Center for Ethics and including ethical engagement as one of the six pillars of the university's strategic vision. Amy Gutmann, president of the University of Pennsylvania, will serve as chair of the bioethics commission.

Documentary Explores Faith of Disabled

By Kathy L. Gilbert and Suzy Keenan*

PHILADELPHIA (UMNS)

Gifts of humanity go beyond color, gender, ability.

Houses of worship, to be true to their mission, must make places for persons with disabilities, United Methodist Bishop Peggy Johnson of the Philadelphia Area says in a television documentary.

Johnson is one of several faith leaders featured in "A Place for All: Faith and Community for Persons with Disabilities." The show, produced by the Interfaith Broadcasting Commission as part of ABC's 2009 Vision and Values series, began airing Dec. 6 and will continue for eight weeks on ABC affiliates.

The bishop, who has served the deaf for more than three decades, said she "considers it a privilege to be part of the Protestant voice in this multi-faceted study."

The sentiment is mutual.

"What Bishop Johnson had to say was made particularly meaningful considering her own story," said Debra Gonsler Vinik, the show's producer.

Priesthood of all believers

Johnson, who was born with sight in only one eye, felt a deep calling early in her vocation to minister with deaf persons and persons with disabilities. She was pastor of Christ United Methodist Church of the Deaf in Baltimore prior to her election as a bishop.

The bishop said she has been inspired by several ordained United Methodist pastors with disabilities whose "power was made perfect in weakness" and are an inclusive and compassionate witness.

"I had the privilege of being supervisor to first deaf ordained pastor since 1908-- he was ordained in 1997 in Baltimore-Washington - the Rev. Kirk VanGilder. I learned so much from working with him. I was his supervisor, but he really taught me so much about the giftedness

of the community and how important the empowerment piece is for lifting people up in the church as leaders."

Today, Johnson advocates for the inclusion of persons with disabilities, "not just to receive, but to be co-ministers with us in the priesthood of all believers."

Barriers and isolation

One out of every five Americans has a disability and a key issue is social isolation, faith leaders say.

Johnson said she attends a different church in her conference every Sunday. "I can count on one hand the churches that really have people with disabilities. So where are they if they are not in our churches?"

"We can get ramps, elevators ... much easier than we can change hearts. Sometimes ignorance is born of a lack of exposure and fear," she said.

The church needs to do a lot of work to educate congregations on welcoming and empowering disabled people, she said.

Johnson remembers many times taking her deaf choir to sing in churches. After the performance, the church would invite them to cookies and coffee, but no one would talk to them.

"I don't think they really meant to be rude, but it was awkward. They just didn't know how to ... walk across the floor to that side of the room where the deaf people were sitting to make small talk because there was no way to talk," she said. "They couldn't understand them and they couldn't sign themselves so they just avoided us."

Treating people with respect

The bishop was interviewed for the documentary as she directed a weeklong camp for deaf developmentally disabled young adults at Innabah Camp and Retreat Center, Spring City, one of four Eastern Pennsylvania Annual (regional) Conference camps.

The documentary talks about how "the precious text" of all faith communities – Bible, Quran, Torah - teaches how important it is to treat all people equally.

But, Johnson said, all faith groups fall short putting the principle into practice.

"There's a little delivery problem," she said.

"It [the documentary] ends on the note that all people are really the same, we are all searching for the meaning of life, the meaning of God. That is something we all can share, abled and disabled alike. It sort of comes down to we are in this together, folks," Johnson said.

"I always tell people to challenge themselves, step out in faith, reach a community that you are not comfortable with and you can grow personally. The doors of opportunity keep opening when you take that first step of faith."

[A Place for All: Faith and Community for Persons with Disabilities](#) airs in California on KGO TV07 (ABC) in San Francisco, Friday, December 11 at 4 a.m.; and on KABC TV07 (ABC) in Glendale, Saturday, December 12 at 2 a.m. Its only scheduled showing in Nevada will be on KTNV TV13 (ABC) in Las Vegas, Saturday, January 2 at 5 p.m. *A promo can be seen [here](#).* (The documentary aired on December 6 in Bakersfield, Fresno, Monterey, Redding, Reno, and Sacramento, along with Palm Desert, Santa Barbara, and San Diego.)

[Larry Hollon Reflects on Nothing But Nets in 'Church, Culture, Media' Blog](#)

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (UMNS) - The Rev. Larry Hollon, top executive of United Methodist Communications, celebrates a recent partners' meeting of Nothing But Nets, the movement to provide bed nets to prevent malaria, in his most recent blog.

"It was an inspiring meeting, almost like a religious experience. Progress is being made in the battle against this disease that kills a child every 30 seconds. We're at a hinge point in history. It is possible that these deaths could be significantly reduced, if not eradicated in the next five years," he writes in his "Church, Culture and Media" blog.

Read [complete commentary](#).

['Responding to Job Loss,' in Dec. 11 Reporter](#)

With unemployment higher than it's been in decades, how are people reacting to being jobless or to having their friends looking for work? For the [cover story](#) in the Dec. 11 edition of the [United Methodist Reporter](#), Mary Jacobs talked with several people who provide perspective on the situation, and has tips for the best free gifts a person can give an unemployed friend.

Also in the Dec. 11 edition: a [Q&A with Jesse Rice](#), author of *The Church of Facebook*, about what people often are really looking for on social networking sites.

And as the Christmas season approaches, the news staff reflected on [movies](#) that nudge us into the proper mood. Some of their choices may surprise you!

Under "UMR Headlines," in the upper left quadrant of the Home Page:

- "Aging Well" - the importance of the family dining table
- Influences that have negatively impacted Wesleyan theology (Donald Haynes column)
- Making your Christmas more "green" this year (guest commentary from Bishop Sally Dyck)
- A report on Bridges to Circles, a program that helps break the cycle of generational poverty
- A faith-based witness on climate change.

[District Newsletters Now Available On Line](#)

The December 2009 issue of the San Jose District Newsletter *The District Spirit* and the December 2009/January 2010 issue of the Delta District *Current* are now available on the confer-

ence website at cnumc.org.

District newsletters can be found by clicking on "District News," located under "**News,**" found on the green navigation bar near the top of the home page.

(Under "District News," click on "San Jose District," then "December 2009" to open the December issue of *The District Spirit*, or click on "Delta District," then "December 2009/January 2010" to open the December/January issue of the *Current*, in PDF format.)

Christmas CD Recorded in Estonian Church

TALLINN, Estonia (UMNS) - A symphonic collection of a dozen classic Christmas songs, titled "What If Mozart Wrote White Christmas," was recorded in the Tallinn United Methodist church in Estonia. The church is part of the Baltic Mission Center, which opened in 2000.

The holiday soundtrack was recorded by the Northern Lights Orchestra, composed of members of the Tallinn Philharmonic Society. Co-producer Warren Schatz called the church - with an angled ceiling some 60-to-80 feet high providing natural acoustics - a "studio like no other."

The collection is available on Amazon.com.

Celebrate the Season in the California-Nevada Annual Conference

Special Activities Planned for the Season of Advent

Friday, December 11

Los Gatos United Methodist Church, 111 Church Street, Los Gatos, CA 95030. Telephone: (408) 354-4730.

Enjoy an evening of Yuletide favorites from Ireland, Scotland, and Wales at Los Gatos UMC's Woodhaven Golden Bough Celtic Christmas Concert on Friday, December 11 at 7:30 p.m. Admission, \$15 for adults, \$12 for youth and seniors (60+), and \$5 for children (under 12), includes refreshments at intermission. Tickets will be available at the door or in advance through the church office, or call (408) 370-3037 for phone reservations.

Saturday, December 12

Carson City, First United Methodist Church, 400 W. King Street, Carson City, NV 89703. Telephone: (775) 882-1436.

Carson City, First UMC presents its 7th Annual Living Drive-Through Nativity, December 12-13, **6:30-8 p.m.**

Watsonville, First United Methodist Church, 229 Stanford Street, Watsonville, CA 95076. Telephone: (831) 724-4434.

"Holiday Heaven" on December 12, **10 a.m. to 3 p.m.**, is just that for "Holiday Heaven" on December 12, **10 a.m. to 3 p.m.**, is just that for busy parents and their children! While the youngsters enjoy crafts, games, lunch, and stories at the United Presbyterian Church, 112 E. Beach Street, Watsonville, CA 95076, you'll be free to shop, rest, etc. "Holiday Heaven" is sponsored by Watsonville FUMC, Lutheran Community Church, and Watsonville United Presbyterian Church.

Sunday, December 13

Bakersfield, Wesley United Methodist Church, 1314 Oswell Street, Bakersfield, CA 93306. Telephone: (661) 871-3030.

The Sunday school children will present the Christmas Musical "*Sleepover at the Stable*" during the **10:30 a.m.** worship.

At **4 p.m.**, carolers will visit all the Wesley homebound. Afterward, the carolers will gather for refreshments and an old-fashioned Christmas carol songfest. All are welcome to participate.

Carson City, First United Methodist Church, 400 W. King Street, Carson City, NV 89703. Telephone: (775) 882-1436. The Children's Christmas Pageant "*The First Christmas*" is scheduled for December 13 at the **9:30** and **11 a.m.** services.

Carson City, First UMC presents its 7th Annual Living Drive-Through Nativity, December 12-13, **6:30-8 p.m.**

Dixon United Methodist Church, 209 North Jefferson Street, Dixon, CA 95620. Telephone: (707) 678-2191.

On Sunday, December 13 at the **11 a.m.** service, the Children's Christmas Pageant "*Starry Night, Noisy Night*" will retell the story of the birth of Jesus from the viewpoint of the animals: cows annoyed by the bright starlight; sheep spending so much time watching the activity outside the stable that they nearly miss the miracle unfolding within; and the chickens, too busy pecking out IMs to receive the message conveyed by the birth of Christ. For more information contact Judy Franceschi, (530) 795-1073, or Daniel Paulson, (916) 247-4324.

Los Gatos United Methodist Church, 111 Church Street, Los Gatos, CA 95030. Telephone: (408) 354-4730.

At **4 p.m.**, a performance of the Children's Christmas Musical "*A Christmas County Spelling Bee*," followed by a Youth Spaghetti Fundraiser at **5 p.m.** and Christmas carols and cookies at **6 p.m.**

Napa, First United Methodist Church, 625 Randolph Street, Napa, CA 94559. Telephone: (707) 253-1411.

The Napa Valley Chorale will feature "Lux Aeterna" by Morten Lauridsen and "Christmas Oratorio" by Camille Saint-Saens at the holiday concert "*Spirit of Light*" at **3:30** and **7 p.m.** at Napa, First UMC. Tickets are \$25 each and are available at (707) 261-6165 or www.napavalleychorale.org.

Sacramento, First United Methodist Church, 2100 J Street, Sacramento, CA 95816. Telephone: (916) 446-5025.

On Sunday, December 13, **5-7 p.m.**, travel with Joseph and Mary from Nazareth to Bethlehem and experience the birth of Jesus, at Sacramento, First UMC's "*28th Annual Journey to Bethlehem*." There will be crafts, activities, and a traditional Jewish meal, followed by caroling and the witnessing of Christ's presence. All are welcome and everyone is encouraged to dress in period costume.

San Jose, Almaden Hills United Methodist Church, 1200 Blossom Hill Road, San Jose, CA 95118. Telephone: (408) 269-2345.

Children will tell the story of the "*Midnight Miracle*" (The Legend of the Christmas Animals) in words and song on December 13 at the **10:30 a.m.** worship service. The legend refers to an age-old custom called *Wigillia* (the vigil), a feast honoring the birth of the God Child, which is celebrated on Christmas Eve by people in Poland. It is believed that on this night, children, and those pure of heart, can talk with the animals.

Stockton, Grace United Methodist Church, 1625 North Lincoln Street, Stockton, CA 95204. Telephone: (209) 464-6121.

The Priscilla Circle invites you to its annual Christmas Breakfast, December 13 at **9 a.m.** at Grace UMC. A freewill offering of \$5 will be taken for the Women's Center and Haven of Peace.

Watsonville, First United Methodist Church, 229 Stanford Street, Watsonville, CA 95076. Telephone: (831) 724-4434.

Don't miss out on Watsonville, First UMC's wonderful Christmas tradition "*Annual Aebleskiver Brunch*," December 13, in the fellowship hall following **10 a.m.** worship. The aebleskiver is a homemade round Danish pancake. All are welcome. Donations will be gratefully accepted.

Tuesday, December 15

San Leandro, First United Methodist Church, 1600 Bancroft Way, San Leandro, CA 94577. Telephone: (510) 483-0606.

Everyone is invited to share a Christmas memory (a special place, person, or gift received) and sing Christmas carols at the Super Seniors Christmas Tea in Hale Hall on Tuesday, December 15, **2-3:30 p.m.**

Wednesday, December 16

Watsonville, First United Methodist Church, 229 Stanford Street, Watsonville, CA 95076. Telephone: (831) 724-4434.

Join the Rev. Robin Mathews-Johnson of the Watsonville, First UMC in a *Posada Celebration* on Wednesday, December 16 at **5:30 p.m.** at the Watsonville Lutheran Community Church. La Posada, a traditional Christmas celebration, re-enacts the pilgrimage of Mary and Joseph toward Bethlehem and their search for shelter. The Lutheran Community Church is located at 95 Alta Vista, Watsonville, CA.

Thursday, December 17

Napa, First United Methodist Church, 625 Randolph Street, Napa, CA 94559. Telephone: (707) 253-1411.

Sing along with the Napa Valley Chorale in its "*Candy Cane and Carol Sing*" on Thursday, December 17 at **7 p.m.** Refreshments will be available. Concert is free of charge but donations will be gratefully accepted.

Sonoma United Methodist Church, 109 Patten Street, Sonoma, CA 95476. Telephone: (707) 996-2151.

Family and friends are invited to a "*Carol Sing*" on the grass in front of the Sanctuary on December 17, **5:30-6:30 p.m.** Hear the Christmas story, sing carols, and enjoy hot chocolate.

Friday, December 18

Los Gatos United Methodist Church, 111 Church Street, Los Gatos, CA 95030. Telephone: (408) 354-4730.

Celebrate the music of George Frederic Handel's *The Messiah*, with Daniel Hughes and the Los Gatos UMC Chancel Choir, on Friday, December 18 at **7 p.m.** The San Jose Youth Symphony will accompany the performance.

Stockton, St. Mark's United Methodist Church, 306 E. Clay Street, Stockton, CA 95206. Telephone: (209) 463-7071.

Join Las Posadas, a procession that will go home to home (and businesses) asking if there is

room at the inn, on December 18, **7-8:30 p.m.** Las Posadas, which originated in Latin America, commemorates the search for a room by Joseph and Mary. The procession will find its way to the church, where they are able to find a room. Las Posadas will conclude with a short worship service and refreshments.

Saturday, December 19

Stockton, St. Mark's United Methodist Church, 306 E. Clay Street, Stockton, CA 95206. Telephone: (209) 463-7071.

Join Las Posadas, a procession that will go home to home (and businesses) asking if there is room at the inn, on December 19, **7-8:30 p.m.** Las Posadas, which originated in Latin America, commemorates the search for a room by Joseph and Mary. The procession will find its way to the church, where they are able to find a room. Las Posadas will conclude with a short worship service and refreshments.

Turlock, First United Methodist Church, 1600 Arbor Way, Turlock, CA 95380. Telephone: (209) 668-3000.

A musical service by the Chancel Choir will feature Dr. John Hillebrandt on piano, Saturday, December 19 at **6 p.m.** Free childcare is available but you must contact Turlock, First UMC **by December 11** to reserve a space in the childcare program. There will be a freewill offering at the program, to support the missions of Turlock, First UMC.

Sunday, December 20

Carson City, First United Methodist Church, 400 W. King Street, Carson City, NV 89703. Telephone: (775) 882-1436.

The Chancel Choir and Hosanna Handbells will share the Christmas story through poetry, Scripture, and music with "*Candles, Carols and Handbells*" at all three services, Sunday, December 20. Services are at **8, 9:30, and 11 a.m.**

Dixon United Methodist Church, 209 North Jefferson Street, Dixon, CA 95620. Telephone: (707) 678-2191.

Through narration and song, the Dixon United Methodist Adult Choir and Chamber Ensemble will present "*Lord of Glory*," a Christmas cantata that blends historic carols with newer compositions, at the **11 a.m.** service and at an evening encore performance (at **7 p.m.**).

Lake Isabella, Highland United Methodist Church, 5301 Lake Isabella Road, Lake Isabella, CA 93240. Telephone: (760) 379-2120 or hcumc76@dslextreme.com

The *Christmas Story* will be performed in the Highland Chapel Sanctuary at **2 p.m.**, by the youth of Highland Chapel UMC.

Sonoma United Methodist Church, 109 Patten Street, Sonoma, CA 95476. Telephone: (707) 996-2151.

The Children's Pageant will perform "*The Friendly Beasts*" at the **10:30 a.m.** worship service.

Watsonville, First United Methodist Church, 229 Stanford Street, Watsonville, CA 95076. Telephone: (831) 724-4434.

Enjoy a Christmas Musical, "*One Small Child*," during worship, December 20, **10 a.m.**

Christmas Eve, December 24

Bakersfield, Wesley United Methodist Church, 1314 Oswell St., Bakersfield, CA 93306. Telephone: (661) 871-3030.

The Christmas Eve Service at **5 p.m.** will include beautiful music performed by the Choir and Bells, Christmas carols, special moments for the children, Holy Communion, and Silent Night by candlelight.

Dixon United Methodist Church, 209 North Jefferson Street, Dixon, CA 95620. Telephone: (707) 678-2191.

There will be three Christmas Eve services:

The **5 p.m.** and **7 p.m.** services will include traditional Scripture readings and carols. For those who prefer a late service, the **11 p.m.** service will be a quiet, reflective service with Holy Communion. All three services will include candlelight. Nursery care is available at the 5 p.m. and 7 p.m. services.

Fresno, Grace United Methodist Church, 3362 E. Balch Avenue, Fresno, CA 93702. Telephone: (559)233-4565

Christmas Eve Candlelight Service at **7 p.m.**

Los Gatos United Methodist Church, 111 Church Street, Los Gatos, CA 95030. Telephone: (408) 354-4730.

There will be three Christmas Eve Candlelight Services: at **5, 7:30, and 10 p.m.**

Newcastle United Methodist Church, 410 Buena Vista Avenue, Newcastle, Ca 95658. Telephone: (916) 663-2250.

Two Christmas Eve Candlelight Services: **7 p.m. and 11 p.m.**

Sacramento, First United Methodist Church, 2100 J Street, Sacramento, CA 95816. Telephone: (916) 446-5025.

There will be a special Christmas Eve Family Service with the retelling of the familiar story at **5 p.m.** Children of all ages will be part of the Christmas pageant (costumes will be provided). All are invited.

San Jose, Almaden Hills United Methodist Church, 1200 Blossom Hill Road, San Jose, CA 95118. Telephone: (408) 269-2345.

At **7 p.m.** a special Family Christmas Eve Service, "*All Through the Night*," will tell the story of the special night when animals talked and welcomed the Christ Child. The service will close with a flameless candlelight procession.

And at **11 p.m.** there will be a Candlelight Christmas Eve Service.

San Leandro, First United Methodist Church, 1600 Bancroft Way, San Leandro, CA 94577. Telephone: (510) 483-0606.

Christmas Eve Service in the Sanctuary at **7 p.m.**

Sonoma United Methodist Church, 109 Patten Street, Sonoma, CA 95476. Telephone: (707) 996-2151.

At **6 p.m.**, the Christmas Eve Service will include the choir, carols, bells, candlelight, and the Christmas Story.

Stockton, Grace United Methodist Church, 1625 North Lincoln Street, Stockton, CA 95204. Telephone: (209) 464-6121.

Christmas Eve Service, **6-7:30 p.m.**

Stockton, St. Mark's United Methodist Church, 306 E. Clay Street, Stockton, CA 95206.
Telephone: (209) 463-7071.

Christmas Eve Candlelight Service at **6:30 p.m.** will retell the Christmas story as told in the gospel of Luke. Cultural offerings, singing by the choir, and candlelight gospel of Luke. Cultural offerings, singing by the choir, and candlelight will make this a memorable Holy Night. The service will be conducted in two languages. Following worship, a light meal of Juk (Shinese Soup), Pozole (Latin Soup), Filipino desserts, and Api (Bolivian hot drink) will be available in the fellowship hall.

Watsonville, First United Methodist Church, 229 Stanford Street, Watsonville, CA 95076.
Telephone: (831) 724-4434.

Enjoy a service of candles and carols at the Christmas Eve Candlelight Service, December 24, **5 p.m.**

Willits United Methodist Church, 286 School Street, Willits, CA 95490. Telephone: (707) 459-2855.

Christmas Eve Service, **7 p.m.**

Yuba City, First United Methodist Church, 3101 Colusa Highway, Yuba City, CA 95993.
Telephone: (530) 673-5858.

Two Christmas Eve Candlelight Services, at **7 and 11 p.m.**

Christmas Day, December 25

Stockton, Grace United Methodist Church, 1625 North Lincoln Street, Stockton, CA 95204.
Telephone: (209) 464-6121.

Christmas Day Service, **9:30 a.m.**

Stockton, St. Mark's United Methodist Church, 306 E. Clay Street, Stockton, CA 95206.
Telephone: (209) 463-7071.

Celebrate Christmas Day with a short, bi-lingual worship service at **11 a.m.**, followed by Christmas dinner prepared and served by and for those without family with whom to spend the day. Dinner will be served at **12:30 p.m.** Participants are asked to bring a favorite holiday dish to share.

Wednesday, January 6

Willits United Methodist Church, 286 School Street, Willits, CA 95490. Telephone: (707) 459-2855.

There will be a 12th Night Celebration, with a potluck dinner (ham and roast beef provided), January 6 at **6:30 p.m.** Participants are asked to prepare a dish to pass, poems to read, stories to share, songs to sing, and games to play.

Visit our [Facebook page](#) and add your church's seasonal events it we missed you.

Resources for Advent and Beyond

From the General Board of Discipleship's [Worship website](#):

Download "[A Christmas Lament](#)." This song, set to the tune of "O Little Town of Bethlehem," is a reminder to pastors, church musicians, Sunday School teachers, committee members, choir singers, parents - in fact, to all of us who get so busy during Advent and Christmas that we

risk missing the coming of Jesus at Christmas. (Remember to use copyright notation.)

Download [A Candlelight Service for Christmas Eve](#): Scripture, Carols, Communion.

EcuFilm 2010 Annual Catalog Is Now Online

To aid church staff members in small-group planning for 2010, EcuFilm announces that its [new annual catalog](#) now is available online. Free shipping for Internet orders is available through January 31, 2010. (See front cover of the catalog for the free shipping code.) To request a print copy of the catalog, call toll free 1.888.346.3862, or e-mail ecufilm_info@umcom.org.

Resources Encourage Congregations to Rethink Church at Advent

On Tuesday, December 1, CNN Headline News began airing "[Rethink Church this Christmas](#)" - a 30-second spot encouraging viewers to help those who are searching for hope, acceptance and love. This and [other resources](#) are available online from United Methodist Communications, for use in worship and in reaching out to those who are without a church home this Christmas.

On January 2, UCom will release Lenten worship resources to help congregations Rethink Church as we move toward the cross and beyond with Christ.

For more information, contact Rethink Church at 1.877.281.6535 or email rethink-church@umcom.org.

The Instant Connection is published each week by Jane Horstman on behalf of Cate Monaghan, Interim Director of Communications for the California-Nevada Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church.

The physical address for this eNewsletter is 1276 Halyard Drive,
West Sacramento, CA 95691.