



Cross Connection

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*Vibrant, growing
congregations
changing lives and
reshaping futures
for Jesus Christ*

Rethink Church

Campaign calls Methodists to ministry outside the church walls

Eight years ago, the United Methodist Church introduced the "Open hearts" welcoming and advertising campaign. The result: increased awareness of the denomination and the foundation for churches to welcome newcomers.

Now, the campaign is moving to the next level, by redefining the church experience beyond the church doors and inviting people to become engaged in the world. "Rethink Church" aims to show those who seek spiritual meaning that they may find hope in the United Methodist mission of world transformation.

The campaign seeks to highlight the church's action in the world around us – easing human suffering, feeding the physically and spiritually hungry and spreading hope – as evidence that the denomination is a vibrant Christian

Ministry through media

Beginning April 20, 18-to-35-year-olds and other spiritual seekers will encounter United Methodist Church messages in the media and over the Internet urging them to "Rethink Church." When they do, they may look to your congregation for evidence of how "rethinking church" looks.

Will they find you active in your local community, doing tangible things to better the human condition as the United Methodist means of spreading the gospel? Will they see your church, not as a place to come to and be within; but rather, as a base of operation to move out into your community and spread faith?

"Rethink Church is yet another way to live out our annual conference's vision of vibrant, growing congregations, transforming lives and reshaping futures for Jesus

"In Texas, we've been rethinking church for several years, through our focus on the Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations and transformation."

Bishop Janice Riggle Huie

movement in which seekers may discover spiritual meaning.

"In Texas, we've been rethinking church for several years, through our focus on the Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations and transformation," said Bishop Janice Riggle Huie. "'Rethink Church' is another reminder that the work of the church is infinitely larger than the structures that we call the church."

Christ," Huie said. "Before we transform the world, we must rethink the church."

For the church to be relevant to future generations, young adults must find people of faith doing more than sitting in our pews for worship. They must find people of faith energized to go into neighborhoods, highways and byways as a powerful, Wesleyan way of spreading the gospel of

Continued on page 2



Delegate meetings have been scheduled in each district to help educate and equip those who will participate in the 2009 Texas Annual Conference.

Among the discussion items, are the 32 amendments from the 2008 General Conference on which Methodists throughout the connection must vote.

"These amendments will have a significant impact on the way the church will work in the future – both outside the U.S. and inside," said Rev. Rick Goodrich, assistant to the bishop.

All delegates to the Annual Conference are invited to participate in these important pre-conference discussions.

DATE And TIME	LOCATION
April 18 10 a.m.	Central North District Spring-Faith UMC
May 2 10 a.m.	Central South District Houston-St. Paul's UMC
May 3 3 p.m.	Southeast District Lumberton-Woodcrest UMC
	Southwest District Missouri City-First UMC
May 4 7 p.m.	Northwest District Tyler-Lane's Chapel UMC
May 10 3 p.m.	South District Pasadena-First UMC
May 16 3 p.m.	North District Daingerfield-First UMC
May 17 2 p.m.	East District Lufkin-First UMC
May 20 7 p.m.	West District Navasota-First UMC



The mission of the Texas Annual Conference is to equip congregations to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world to the glory of God.

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Connecting laity

Survey helps refine tools for lay ministry and leadership

By Leah Taylor
Conference Lay Leader

One of the unique and powerful things about the United Methodist Church is our connection. We see it with our clergy who all seem to know each other. We see it with our youth as they participate in things like District camp and other youth events that draw from throughout the Conference, like UM ARMY.

How do we connect adults who are active in their local churches but may not know what else is going on in our Conference or the larger connection? One way to start addressing this question is by

better, more frequent and focused communication.

The Conference Communications office is working with Conference Lay Leader, Leah Taylor, to develop a set of electronic communications tools.

Earlier this year, a Laity Blog was added to the TAC website. It is updated weekly and will have details about Laity events at Annual Conference within the next few weeks.

To highlight Laity communications, work is underway to develop a logo and tagline just for those communications. These will be used on all Laity communications under the

heading “The Laity of the Texas Annual Conference.” A survey has been set up online to allow participation by both laity and clergy to choose a tagline to go with the logo and heading.

Please go to www.txcumc.org/laitysurvey to participate in choosing the tagline. It will take you just a minute to respond and you can either identify yourself or remain completely anonymous.

If you are unable to get online, drop a postcard in the mail to: Brant Mills, Web Content Manager, Texas Annual Conference, 5215 Main Street, Houston, Texas, 77002.

On the back of your post-

card tell us which tagline you prefer:

1. Opening Hearts, Minds and Doors
2. Living our Faith, Sharing our Hope
3. Being the Church wherever we go

The survey will remain available online until early May. Results and the logo will be announced at the Lay Member Assembly of Annual Conference on Monday, May 25. Please share your thoughts!

Visit www.txcumc.org/laityblog.

Rethink Church

Campaign redefines ‘Open hearts...open doors’ and calls Methodists to ministry outside the church walls

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Jesus Christ.

Igniting Ministry research shows that 100 million young adults identify themselves as “spiritual” but see no role for church in their lives. They believe churches are indifferent or oblivious to the needs of the community.

New Web site offers resources

A new Web site, www.rethinkchurch.org, offers resources to help churches reclaim their Wesleyan DNA, get out of their comfort zones and go into their communities to make good things happen as an expression of love for Christ.

“We hope Rethink Church will cause people inside the church to reassess what it means to be people of faith,” said the Rev. Larry Hollon, chief executive of United Methodist Communications. “This campaign is an invitation to a revolutionary conversation about

what it means to be people in mission. It’s more than rethinking. It’s a radical return to understanding what the Gospel is for us in our day.”

National advertising will begin on April 20, though the campaign’s official launch date is May 6.

The Web site offers both annual conferences and congregations resources for getting

“‘Rethink Church’ is another reminder that the work of the church is infinitely larger than the structures that we call the church.”

In addition, the site offers downloadable tools, such as videos and graphics. A lectionary resource provides thematic ideas, along with related Scripture verses. Ideas also include how to illustrate themes with worship visuals, décor, video clips, and activities.

Also accessible through rethinkchurch.org is United

people to become engaged in the world as an expression of faithful discipleship as a follower of Jesus,” said Hollon. “The church is a base of operation for expressing faith. Rethink Church extends an invitation for all of us to consider moving out of the doors and into the world and being a part of the co-creation with God who is transforming the world.”

Rethink Church products are also available at www.umcom.org/store, including free Rethink Church brochures and DVDs. Red Rethink Church T-shirts are available for \$10 in sizes small to 2x. Rethink Church buttons are available in quantities of 20 for \$10.

Bishop Janice Riggle Huie

Methodist Communications’ Igniting Ministry Team, which, in addition to coordinating advertising content and training, continues to manage the matching media grant program.

“Many churches are already outward focused and inviting



Hope for healthcare

Event equips African bishops to improve health of those they serve through global partnerships

By M. Isaac Broune
Conference Communicator
Côte d'Ivoire Annual
Conference

Bishop Janice Huie recently moderated a consultation between the Global Health Initiative and African Bishops of the United Methodist Church. The consultation was designed to help bishops strengthen their health board for their hospital development process and be better able to receive funds to improve their healthcare systems.

"The partnership between Cote d'Ivoire and Texas is a pilot project of the health ministry that can be done by all the annual Conferences in Africa," said Bishop Huie.

By what was done through the November Nothing But Nets campaign, Côte d'Ivoire Annual Conference set an example of collaboration between the Texas Annual Conference, the Global Fund, United Nations Foundation, Global Health Initiative and the Ivorian Ministry of Public Health to fight malaria. "All the Annual Conferences need to be engaged in the same process to eliminate malaria as it was begun in Côte d'Ivoire," she urged the participants.

The venue of the meeting was Jubile - Cocody United Methodist Church in Abidjan. From March 10-12, the participants heard from experts on ways to access money for each of their annual conferences in order to help their people improve their health.

The experts were representatives from United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR); Global Health

Initiative – United Methodist Communications (UMCom); United Nations Foundation (UNF); Global Fund; Cote d'Ivoire Malaria Control Program (PNLP); Population Service International (PSI); CARE International; Country Coordinating Mechanism focal

people, "the small cloud will be transformed in a heavy rain for a future of hope in the African continent."

In order to achieve that goal, Sam Dixon, top executive of UMCOR, suggested a simple methodology: "we need to understand where we are, start

recipients or sub-recipients of these funds.

Michael Pajonk from the United Nations Foundation described his agency as supporting partnerships and funding of organizations to do good works.

He also recalled success stories of the partnership with the UMC in the campaign for fund-raising to fight malaria. "UNF is pleased to be a partner with UMC to help fight malaria," he said.

Participants also learned from experienced people about what is done in Cote d'Ivoire concerning the Country Coordinating Mechanism (CCM) perspectives from the Ivorian Ministry of Health, Prime Recipient perspective from CARE International and Sub Recipient Perspective from PSI (Population Service International).

After the consultation the participants were prepared to implement what was required to improve health in the Annual Conference. Building effective health boards; strategic planning and partnerships were

among the priorities.

For Bishop John Innis of the Liberia Annual Conference "the consultation was an excellent educational opportunity." That is why he called all his counterparts to do their best in improving people's health through transparency, leadership and good governance. He acknowledged the fact that the goal is not just to access the money but use it responsibly to meet people's needs.

By doing that, "community's health teams will have financial independence that is self sustainable so that resources will be allocated to other areas," he said. The Liberia Annual Conference has one hospital, two clinics and community based programs in nutrition, HIV and maternal health.

"UMCOR will follow up with each Conference to build health system and to manage programs that will fight malaria and other diseases and save lives," promised Shannon Trilli, Executive Secretary, Program Implementation and Evaluation, UMCOR Health.

"The partnership between Cote d'Ivoire and Texas is a pilot project of the health ministry that can be done by all the annual conferences in Africa . . . All the annual conferences need to be engaged in the same process to eliminate malaria as it was begun in Côte d'Ivoire."

Bishop Janice Riggle Huie Texas Annual Conference

point, Texas Annual Conference and Duke University.

Participants came from annual conferences in North Katanga Congo, Central Congo, South Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Mozambique, Liberia, Angola and the East Africa Area.

'Heavy rain of hope'

In the opening worship, Bishop Benjamin Boni of the Cote d'Ivoire Annual Conference recognized that the "needs of the church in Africa are so numerous that one can have the impression that nothing is done to improve people's life."

That is why, quoting from 1 Kings 18: 42-46, he challenged the participants to be like that "cloud, as small as a man's hand, rising from the sea" that caused a heavy rain. Compared to the need of the world, "the work accomplished by the United Methodist Church resembles a drop of water in the sea of the needs of humanity." However, if the people called United Methodist have faith in God who called them to bring healing to other

from where we are, and step up to where other donors exist, meet their expectations and keep people from dying from diseases of poverty."

Gary Henderson, executive director of GHI, briefed attendees about the UMC's four areas of focus and the core works of GHI to create better health for people around the world. Henderson also shared an overview of the forthcoming "Imagine Campaign" to build malaria awareness.

He ended by asking every participant to appropriate this quote from U.S. President Barack Obama on global poverty: "We choose HOPE rather than fear."

Power in partnerships

Patrick Silborn, senior partnerships officer at the Global Fund, who works with partners such as faith based organizations offered an overview of the Global Fund, its history and the grant process. He urged Bishops and Annual Conferences to work on how to become prime



Melissa Crutchfield, of UMCOR discusses the fight against diseases of poverty. The Global Health Initiative event was held in Cote d'Ivoire.



Organist for two UMCs shares her musical talent with others

By Libby Stapleton
Coordinator of Student
Publications

Rosemary Swetland is the organist at the Burke UMC and

pianist at First UMC in Diboll, Texas. She is also a part-time music instructor at Angelina College and owner of a private music studio. Swetland recently

presented Jeremy Powell, music student at the college with a copy of her compact disc titled "He Restoreth My Soul" for his church, Trinity Baptist Church

in Lufkin, to use for sanctuary prayer time.

Swetland said: "I have shared my CDs with local funeral homes, hospitals, care facilities and with those going through crisis; however, this is the first time I have shared with a church congregation. My hope is that the listeners will rest and listen to the still small voice of God speaking to their hearts."

The CD, which was Swetland's first, took four years to create, record and produce because "it came during a dark valley in my life," according to the musician. Based on Psalms 23:3, the musical creation contains some very old hymns, favorites that she has played for more than 53 years.

Swetland's second musical creation, "The Gift," took one year to create, is based on John 3:16 and contains old traditional Christmas carols in a quiet mood.

Her latest CD, "Piano Meditations by the Sea," expanded her musical vision to include not only her Baldwin grand piano but also the elec-

tronic sounds of the ocean behind traditional sacred, folk and classical favorites. Based on Psalms 46:10, which instructs the reader to be still and know that God is present, the CD "truly allows that listener to rest as if sitting by the sea," according to Swetland.

Swetland's next musical project will be to create a digital video disc of images of God's world with added scriptures and her music in the background.

"I know my purpose in life is to share my music," Swetland said, "with those who would be still and rest and listen to that still small voice in a loud and stressful world."

Her CDs are available at Christian Words and Works and Music World in Lufkin and at Poulard's in Diboll as well as through her Web site www.rtswetlandmusicstudio.com/.

Beginning in November, she will serve the Eastern Star organization for a three-year term as Worthy Grand Organist of the world.



Rosemary Swetland, who plays the piano and organ for two United Methodist churches in East Texas, donates one of her music CDs to Jermei Powell, her music student for use in his church, Trinity Baptist Church in Lufkin, Texas.

The power of prayer to change things

New neighborhood ministry at Mission Bend UMC

By Nancy Hupp
The Lighthouse Ministry

Mission Bend United Methodist Church has launched a new ministry that has far reaching influence in local neighborhoods.

This national ecumenical endeavor, known as the *Lighthouse Ministries*, is part of an evangelistic movement promoted by Mission America in cooperation with other well known ministries such as *Promise Keepers*, *Campus Crusade for Christ*, *The Jesus Video Project*, *Harvest Ministries* and *H.O.P.E. Ministries* that now includes more than 71 denominations and 300 servant congregations.

What began as concern for local happenings in an individual west side neighborhood during a 2008 Lenten Bible study series has now grown to include more than 65 member households throughout the greater Houston area.

According to Rev. R. Jeremiah Booker, senior pastor of Mission Bend UMC, there is a large, diverse, multi-ethnic congregation from many different neighborhoods (particularly from the far west, northwest and south-

west sides of the Houston area) who are united in prayer seek-



ing to make the areas where they live and work safer.

Team co-leaders Eston and

Nancy Hupp placed a large Houston metropolitan map in the hallway and solicited prayers from each neighborhood then highlighted that specific area with a large pin. To look at the map today one can clearly see the many areas that are being prayed over on a regular and consistent basis. Team members received a 'lighthouse' key ring with scriptures reminding them to be a light of God's love in their neighborhoods.

To quote the Hupps, "What could be simpler than to pray for your neighborhood as you drive, walk or ride through that neighborhood on the way to work, school or the

store? Of course, we could always pray generically for these areas, but now it becomes more powerful when each member is praying in their own 'corner of the world' where they are more aware of that neighborhood's specific needs."

When the congregation becomes aware of specific neighborhood concerns, they band together with others to drive, walk and pray through this neighborhood. This ministry has been so successful since its inception at Mission Bend that the members even have their youth and neighbors joining them in this prayer effort.



The New Church Leadership Institute - “Discernment on the Mountain”

**By Rev. Don Smith
Church Planting Strategist**

In 2004, Dr. Bob Crossman (Minister of New Church Starts and Congregational Advancement for the Arkansas Annual Conference) had a dream of creating an experience where prospective church planters could come together to discern a potential call to start a new church. Modeled after a similar discernment academy in the North Georgia Conference, the New Church Leadership Institute (NCLI) was born.

At first, it was just for the Arkansas Conference with 20 pastors participating. Then, in 2005, the Texas and Memphis Conferences were invited to join in and more than 40 attended several retreats throughout the calendar year. In 2006, the NCLI became a jurisdictional academy with multiple conferences participating.

Now, in 2009, more than 150 are enrolled as participants from 20 annual conferences as far away as the Pacific Northwest. Over the past five

years, 500 people (prospective planters, church developers, spouses, laypersons, and superintendents) have completed the New Church Leadership Institute.

“After 13 years of attending church development conferences offered by some of the most effective churches in the country, I found NCLI to be the most practical, informative, and helpful training event I’ve ever attended - by far! Every day in my work as a church planter I encounter issues that were specifically addressed in NCLI, and for which NCLI gave me workable solutions.”

Crossman marvels at what has happened since the NCLI’s creation, “It’s been exciting to watch the new church start movement develop across our jurisdiction. We’re not only starting more new churches but we’re starting stronger churches and witnessing more professions of faith through our new

church starts.”

There is one main reason that the New Church Leadership Institute moved from being an Arkansas experience to a jurisdiction-wide

academy. In 2006, Bishop Janice Huie, as President of the Council of Bishops, led a process of identifying the elements critical to the renewal of the United Methodist Church. Of these seven stated “pathways,” starting new churches became a primary focus and the national “Path One” emphasis

was born.

Today, directed by Rev. Tom Butcher, Path One (now a part of the General Board of Discipleship) has a goal to facilitate starting 650 new

United Methodist churches in the United States and 400 churches around the world in the next 48 months. It is a bold vision, but the New Church Leadership Institute is helping to prepare prospective church planters to staff this vision. Part of this experience is to address realistically the “fantasy” that many people envision for starting a new church.

“The NCLI opened my eyes to the tough reality of church planting,” states church planter Rev. John Whitehurst of Grace Crossing UMC in Longview, “...and the great joy of the possibilities.”

The Texas Conference has done its part by committing to start new churches each year. Under the direction of Bishop Huie, the Cabinet and Dr. Karen Dorris of the Center for Congregational Excellence, 23 new faith communities have been created since 2004. The church planter for each of these projects has been trained at the New Church Leadership Institute, which holds two different five day retreats (one in the winter and one in the fall) at Mount Sequoyah, the jurisdictional retreat center in Fayetteville, Arkansas.

One of those planters is Rev. Robert Johnson, Planting Pastor

of New World UMC in Houston. Johnson testifies to the benefit of the NCLI, “After 13 years of attending church development conferences offered by some of the most effective churches in the country, I found NCLI to be the most practical, informative, and helpful training event I’ve ever attended - by far! Every day in my work as a church planter I encounter issues that were specifically addressed in NCLI, and for which NCLI gave me workable solutions.”

Of course, not everyone who attends the NCLI will sense a call from God to start a new church. Rev. Don Smith, who has, since 2006, served as the Church Planting Strategist for the Texas Conference in working closely with the Center for Congregational Excellence, states that most people who complete the Institute will never be appointed to start a new church.

“Once the nine month NCLI is complete, participants are asked to write a reflective essay regarding what they have discerned,” Smith states, “and more than half, after hearing ten days of presentations on church planting theory, leadership behaviors for new church pastors and many testimonials from pastors who have started new churches, discern that serving as the founding pastor of a new church is not for them.”

Of the 54 Texas Conference “graduates” from the NCLI, 23 have actually started a new church. Many of the 54, by virtue of their reflective essay, have removed themselves from consideration for starting a new church. The rest will remain in a growing “pool” of prospective planters.

Several participants in the NCLI have even discerned that serving as the pastor who follows the founding pastor is the role they see themselves fulfilling. The bottom line: EVERYONE who has participated in



The Texas Conference Class of 2009 for the New Church Leadership. Back Row: Preston Greenwaldt, Robyn Bishop, Gary White, Jim Love, Brad Morgan and Don Smith (Church Planting Strategist). Front Row: Deborah Vaughn, Hazeline Jackson, Heather Sims, Daniel Irving and Patrick Evans.

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Hispanic Ministries focus on connectivity for the future

By Brant Mills
Web Content Manager
Texas Annual Conference

The Texas Annual Conference committee on Hispanic Ministries is taking steps to connect with others throughout the Conference and wants to share ideas and resources with others currently working in or looking to start similar ministries.

Committee chair, Rev. Joe Cortinas says they've been looking for more ways to get information out to churches to increase awareness of their ministries and find out what others in similar ministries are doing.

"It can be difficult to connect because many different things fall under the umbrella of Hispanic Ministries."



until you get to Conroe," Cortinas said.

After trying mail-outs that generate little response, they are looking for other ways to connect. The committee wants to work with others to share Spanish language resources and want to train existing congregations to make things happen.

nect similar ministries together so they can better communicate what is available to help those in surrounding communities as well as direct those from out of town looking for Spanish language services and ministries. "We want to tell them this is what's going on and what's available," Cortinas said, adding: "We want to get something started and bring lay people in... There is strength in numbers."

If you are currently working with any kind of Hispanic ministry anywhere in the conference, or are interested in learning more, the committee wants to hear from you. You can contact anyone in the committee and can connect through the conference web site.

There is an area for information specifically for Hispanic ministries. For more information, go to: <http://www.txcumc.org/hispanicministries>.

If you are interested in learning more about Hispanic ministries and events or want to learn how you can get connected and help out, go to the Spanish Language Resources page at <http://www.txcumc.org/spanish> or contact Rev. Joe Cortinas at pastorjoe57@sbcglobal.net

*Census information from: <http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/population/012496.html> and <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/48000.html>.

Cortinas added that "it's not about putting stuff in Spanish, but giving information to those who can use it... We want this as a network."

According to 2007 census data from www.census.gov, the Hispanic population was 36% of the population of Texas and continues to grow.*

Nationwide, census data estimates say that the "Hispanic population is projected to nearly triple, from 46.7 million to 132.8 million during the 2008-2050 period. Its share of the nation's total population is projected to double, from 15 percent to 30 percent. Thus, nearly one in three U.S. residents would be Hispanic."*

Because of the needs of this growing population, the committee wants to be able to con-

According to 2007 census data from www.census.gov, the Hispanic population was 36% of the population of Texas and continues to grow.

Information taken from www.census.gov

These can include anything from primarily Hispanic congregations to mission churches, Spanish language services or outreach programs like food pantries or ESL classes based at Anglo churches.

Cortinas says the committee knows of about 35 Hispanic ministries throughout the conference and that, he adds, "is probably a high number. We want to get information out to others. There's a lot going on. We are disconnected... and we need to be more united."

"In the Central South district, we have 11 or 12 mostly Spanish speaking churches... Our plan is to open more Spanish speaking churches. On the East side and from the ship channel north, there's nothing

The new church leadership institute - "Discernment on the Mountain"

Continued from page 5

the Institute has benefited greatly from the experience and many of the principles that are shared during the NCLI are immediately transferable to the participants' present places of ministry.

Rev. Taylor Fuerst of St. Luke's UMC in Houston affirms this truth, "I didn't need to be appointed to a new church start in order to begin using all that I learned at NCLI; what I learned in those two weeks gave me a new focus on those who have no church home and it helped me to explore ways to use my unique gifts to reach out into the mission field where I currently serve."

Ten persons from the Texas Conference are presently enrolled in the 2009 class

of the New Church Leadership Institute. Preston Greenwaldt, Heather Sims, Jim Love, Patrick Evans, Deborah Vaughn, Gary White, Hazeline Jackson, Daniel Irving, Brad Morgan and Robyn Bishop have completed the February session and will return in October for the second.

"Starting 650 United Methodist Churches in the United States from now until 2011 is a bold vision," Smith reflects. "Through the NCLI and the Texas Conference's participation in the experience, we will continue to raise up leaders to create new communities that will reach new people for the sake of Jesus Christ."

National BMCR focus on the need for church starts

The National BMCR conference placed special emphasis on strategies for church growth. The meeting's focus then shifted to exploring current challenges and strategies for creating ministries representative of its theme, "A New Church for a New Day." Lay and clergy panelists presented their models of new church starts, community outreach and evangelism ministries, leadership development, and successful church mergers.

Panelist Rev. Jacqui King, pastor of NuFaith Community United Methodist Church in

Houston, preached her first sermons and offered Bible studies over the Internet and A.M. radio. A 20-year marketing executive and community organizer with an MBA, she obtained donated PCs, helped three elderly members return to college to learn computer skills, and launched

a colorful church, www.NuFaith.org.

"Using technology is not an option any longer," she proclaimed while using PowerPoint slides to share



Rev. Jacqui King shares strategies used to develop NuFaith Church, at the National BMCR meeting.

statistics on popular uses of the Internet. Those stats included millions of users searching for love and sex and many thousands seeking help for emotional needs, but only some turning to religious Web sites for that help.



Friending a Tweeter Being the Church in a World of Social Media

By Brant Mills
TAC Web Content Manager

Social media has been in the news a lot lately. Facebook this... Twitter that... Are you friending and tweeting? On the surface it sounds like the same marketing buzz with manufactured language that drives everything else that is currently plastic and fake in our world; and who has time to set up and manage another account? It sounds like a massive waste of time.

Before writing them off as worthless (which they do have the potential to be if you don't learn to use them or look beyond their obvious trivial uses) you should look at how they are actually being used and what they have enabled organizations and individuals to accomplish already.

There are many tools available which will be covered in greater depth in future articles, but there are two key differences that separate tools like Twitter and Facebook from the rest of the social media out there which give them more credibility, as they help connect people, groups and organizations in ways that have never been possible before now.

Connectional Community

The users are the driving force behind the promotion of

these tools and they have become evangelists for a reason. Sure, the companies behind them are going to profit from it eventually – and they are happy that their products have taken off and so they are out there talking about it, but the phenomenon of

We have the greatest story ever told and now have unlimited means and platforms through which to deliver it—through video, audio, text and graphic imagery.

social media has become big and fast primarily because it works for those using it.

According to recent data from Nielsen-Online, by the end of 2008 social networking services had overtaken e-mail in terms of world-wide reach. The study says “Member Communities,” (including social networks and blogs) are now visited by over two-thirds (67 percent) of the global online population. This has become the fourth most popular online category – ahead of personal email.”

These platforms have opened a new communications paradigm for not only finding and connecting users with people from their pasts, but have delivered new

ways to connect with others whether they share similar interests or work in the same industries or are involved in the same organizations locally and globally. The user community works to keep each other informed and connected.

From an institutional level to the individual level, the ability to connect this way is working for the benefit of everyone who takes the time to grow their community – which takes less effort than before. They begin by connecting in new ways with those they already have relationships with. The side effect is that others can easily find them and connect as well. For free.

Real World Usefulness

Second, these tools offer real value to users and enable community based conversations to take place instantly from anywhere. Just looking at the growth of their networks proves that people are finding value in them.

According to the Pew Internet & American Life Project's December 2008 tracking survey, “adult internet users who have a profile on an online social network site has more than quadrupled in the past four years going from 8% in 2005 to 35%. Younger online adults are much more likely than their older counterparts to use social networks, with 75% of adults 18-24 using these networks, compared to just 7% of adults 65 and older.

While media coverage and policy attention focus heavily on how children and young adults use social network sites, adults still make up the bulk of the users of these websites. Adults make up a larger portion of the US population than teens, which is why the 35% number represents a larger number of users than the 65% of online teens who also use online social networks.”

A second Pew Internet study looks specifically at microblogging services such as Twitter. “As of December 2008, 11% of online American adults said they used a service like Twitter or another service that allowed them to share updates about themselves or to see the updates of others. Twitter and similar services have been most avidly embraced by young adults. Nearly one in five (19%) online adults ages 18 and 24 have ever

used Twitter as have 20% of online adults 25 to 34.” Chances are several people in your congregation are using some form of social media. Why not have your own space to connect them with others in your community?

By connecting these groups of people and organizations with resources and information that they are personally passionate about directly, walls are removed and lines are blurred between the institutions and the people who are a part of them. This has helped others find real help whether it is a resource they are looking for, a donation from individuals, or emotional support from friends.

We have the greatest story ever told and now have unlimited means and platforms through which to deliver it - through video, audio, text and graphic imagery. The systems for delivering our message are now available and very often are free and designed for non-technical people to use. Searching Google and YouTube yields countless tutorials on how to do it as well as best practices to improve the quality of our media and presentations. Much of this will be covered soon, but the resources are currently available all over the internet if you look for them. We can use the tools that are available to live out that call.



Spotlight on Local Church Ministries

Fellowship Opportunities

Fellowship of Older Adult Ministries Luncheon

Jeanette Clift George will be the featured speaker at the F.O.A.M. luncheon at Annual Conference, Monday, May 25 at 11:30 in Aldersgate Hall. She is the founder and the artistic director of the A.D. Players.

Reservations are limited and need to be in by April 30. Tickets are \$16 per person. Luncheon tickets are available from Dorothy Fontana, St. Luke's UMC at 713-402-5031, or email at dfontana@stlukes-hou.org. Checks should be made out to Fellowship of Older Adult Ministries (FOAM).

A&M UMC Youth Host Concert

The youth group at A&M UMC in College Station is hosting Jimmy Needham and Gatlin Elms in concert on Friday, May 1. The concert will benefit the, Nothing But Nets Initiative of the conference.

Tickets are \$10 and every ticket sold will buy one net for Nothing But Nets. Tickets are available at the door, but to guarantee a seat, go to www.am-umc.org/jimmy to purchase tickets or get more information.

Learning Opportunities

Developing a Healthy Relationship with Food

St. Paul's School is providing a parent education workshop with Dr. Sarah Pollack and Dr. Merle Holland about how to help young children develop a healthy relationship with food.

In a world bombarding us with messages about food and body image, it is hard to separate what is really best for our children and what is hyped from the media and advertising.

This talk will address what children need and how you can create a home environment where food and mealtimes nurture children's and parents' physical, social, and emotional growth.

The speakers are both in private practice at the Houston Family Institute.

The free workshop will be from 9:45 to 11:15 a.m. Wednesday, April 22, in the church's Jones Building. To RSVP for the workshop and childcare, please call 713-528-5779 or email: spschool@stpaulshouston.org.

For more information, contact Debra Fischer, Director, St. Paul's School, at dfischer@stpaulshouston.org or 713-528-6779.

Host Churches Needed for DISCIPLE Bible Study Mini-Training Events

The *DISCIPLE Bible Studies* (DBS) Task force of the Texas Annual Conference (a part of the Faith Forming Relationships and Spiritual Formation Ministry Team) is looking for churches interested in hosting a mini training event in their respective districts.

Because of the recent downturn in the economy, the Texas Annual Conference DBS Taskforce has elected to offer these events locally.

Attendees will have the opportunity to learn and explore various ways in which DISCIPLE studies might be offered, scheduled and funded, and discuss advertising and registration details that might benefit their particular group.

Now is the time to schedule a training event at your church. Contact Jill Krone, TAC DBS Taskforce coordinator at 903-473-3755 or jill.krone@gmail.com, for

details and scheduling information. The Disciple Taskforce is waiting to assist and support you with any questions you might have as you offer these transforming studies to your congregation. What a great time this is to share DISCIPLE studies with your church or community!

The Woodlands UMC to host author, Sybil MacBeth In Prayer Workshop

Sybil MacBeth, author of *Praying in Color: Drawing a New Path to God*, will present her fun, interactive workshop Thursday, May 21, 9:30-11 a.m. and 7-8:30 p.m. at The Woodlands UMC, capping off a three-week series designed to bring prayer into your daily life in fun and unusual ways.

Other sessions will include: *Praying with your Body*, offered Thursday, May 7. This informal session will explore the use of meditative movement and song as a way to worship and pray.

Praying with Open Eyes, offered Thursday, May 14. Participants will see how this can play out in our lives through a self-guided tour of eight prayer stations.

The cost for the May 21 workshop is \$10/per person, however, there is no cost for the first two sessions. For more information and to register for any of the three programs, visit www.twumc.org/shorttakeson-prayer or contact Lisa Blanchard at 281-297-5979.

Griefshare Ministry Offered At Clear Lake UMC

GriefShare, Sunday nights, 6-8 p.m., room 425 at Clear Lake UMC, 16335 El Camino Real, Houston, Texas 77062. GriefShare is a special weekly seminar and support group for people who are grieving the death of someone close to them. It's a place to be around people

who understand what you are feeling.

At GriefShare, you'll learn valuable information about recovering from your grief and renewing your hope for the future. Child care is available for those who need it. For more information contact Linda Bracey at 713-731-0581, or visit our website at www.clear-lakemethodist.org.

TAC Preachers' Children Survey

The Texas Conference Committee on Archives and History would like to put together a booklet of experiences from preachers' children and would love to hear from you. Their survey is available online at <http://www.txcumc.org/pksurvey>.

Jones Memorial UMC To Host A Young Adult Retreat

Image, Christian Perfection and The Young Adult is the theme for the April 18 retreat sponsored by the Young Adult Ministry (YAMS).

Keynote speakers will be Dr. Cedric Bridgeforth, District Superintendent of the Los Angeles District; Rev. Olu Brown, Senior Pastor of Impact Church in Atlanta, Georgia; Rev. Jacqui Thomas King, Pastor of Nu Faith Community Church in Houston, Texas and Rev. Joyce James, Pastor of Total Man Christian Center in Houston, Texas.

The event will be held at Jones Memorial UMC, 2504 Alameda Genoa Road, Houston, Texas, starting at 7:30 a.m. and ending at 4:30 p.m. The \$25 fee for the retreat includes breakfast, lunch and snacks.

To register or, for more information, contact Rev. Ricky Georgetown at 832-248-6884 or Ms. Lesley Ayers at 832-722-

6652.

First UMC Bullard Offers Marriage Seminar

April 24-25, 2009 is the date for, *Improving Communication in your marriage seminar*.

The workshop will focus on strengthening your relationship with practical insights. Discover how to gain intimacy in your relationship and overcome the barriers to communication. The cost is \$40 per person (lunch is provided). For more information, contact the church at 903-894-6762.

Outreach and Mission

Prayer Shawl Ministry

The Prayer Shawl Ministry at St. Luke's UMC has made over 250 shawls which have been given to others as tangible expressions of the love and concern of a community of faith. The ministry meets on the second and fourth Tuesday of the month.

On April 18, St. Luke's and Chapelwood's prayer shawl ministries will meet with others throughout the city for a retreat lead by Janet Bristow and Victoria Cole-Galo, co-founders of the international Prayer Shawl ministry and authors of, *Prayer Shawl Companion*. For more information, visit www.stlukesmethodist.org/prayer.

Do you have information about your church or ministry you would like to share with others? Contact Thelma Jones at 713-521-9383, ext. 335 or thelmaj@methodists.net