

Texas and Cote d'Ivoire conferences announce partnership

By Eleanor L. Colvin
Director of Communications, Texas Conference

Bishop Janice Riggle Huie of the Texas Annual Conference and Bishop Benjamin Boni of the Cote d'Ivoire Annual Conference recently announced a history-making ministry partnership of the two conferences before more than 14,000 worshippers.

The culmination of Cote d'Ivoire's second Annual Conference activities, the three-hour worship celebration was held at the Palais de Sports

- Establishing community radio stations;
- Strengthening the theological institute in Cote d'Ivoire;
- Assisting the Methodist Hospital in Dabou;
- Providing school lunches for Ivorian students.

"As a result of this trip, we are confident that the Holy Spirit will work mighty deeds in Texas and Cote d'Ivoire," Huie said.

"We celebrate that although the UMC is made up of different nations, languages, cultures, styles of worship, ways of dress, we are still one body - the Body of Christ."

Bishop Huie

in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire, on Sunday March 25. Methodists began arriving at 7 a.m., for the 8:30 a.m. event, and many ultimately were turned away from the stadium, when even the stadium's external corridors reached capacity.

"In this Annual Conference today, we are making history," Huie said in her address. "This relationship is the first partner relationship of the Texas Annual Conference with a conference in Africa. It is the first partner relationship of Cote d'Ivoire with a conference in the United States.

"We look forward to praying for one another, learning from one another, helping one another, and joining together to work for a better world."

The partnership, which will also engage the General Board of Global Ministries and international entities such as the United Nations Foundation, initially will focus on the following areas:

- Supporting the Nothing But Nets campaign to prevent Malaria;

Blessed to be a blessing

One aspect of the partnership that was frequently lifted up during the annual conference was that it would be a mutually beneficial relationship, and not one in which one party is taxed to be the primary giver and the other positioned to simply receive.

The Texas-Cote d'Ivoire partnership is designed to capitalize on the strengths of both conferences.

Praising the Ivorians for their excellence in evangelism, Huie noted that there is much to learn from the church in Cote d'Ivoire, as it is outpacing the declining Methodist church in America.

There are more than 642,000 United Methodists in the southern region of Cote d'Ivoire. The Methodist population of the northern region of the country has not been well documented since political unrest split the country in 2002. It is estimated that when including Methodists in the north, the population of Ivorian Methodists would be nearly 1

million.

In spite of war and poverty, the church is growing. Huie said she looks forward to learning strategies from Ivorians regarding evangelism and new church starts that can be implemented in East Texas.

"Bishop Boni has a powerful vision for both evangelization and for improving the lives of all people," she said.

The United Methodist Church of Cote d'Ivoire also has an exceptional body of lay members. There are 720 churches in Cote d'Ivoire, which are served by only 121 pastors and more than 2,000 unpaid lay (local) pastors.

One church

Both Bishops noted that this partnership reflects the connectional strength of the church.

"Our partnership also celebrates that the UMC is a global church," Huie said. "We celebrate that although the UMC is made up of different nations, languages, cultures, styles of worship, ways of dress, we are still one body - the Body of Christ.

"No annual conference or country is alone. We are all connected in Christ."

Bishop Boni also spoke on the global nature of the church at a conference luncheon, held in the seaside city of Grand Bassam, which recognized conference guests and honored the elders of the church in Cote d'Ivoire.

"We are gathered here around the sea - the same sea we have in England, the same sea we have in Ghana, the same sea we have in the United States, the same sea we have in Senegal. This is to mark the uniqueness - the universality of the church," Bishop Boni said. "We are several nations, several continents around Jesus Christ."



More than 14,000 Methodists celebrate at the closing worship service of the second annual Cote d'Ivoire annual conference gathering.



Members of the Honor Guard present the cote d'Ivoire and United Methodist flags.

See more Cote d'Ivoire stories inside this issue of Cross Connection

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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.

The Cross Connection is the official publication of the Texas Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church.

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'Send a net, save a life'

Texans called to cover Cote d'Ivoire with mosquito nets

By Eleanor L. Colvin
Director of Communications, Texas Annual Conference

The Nothing But Nets campaign for Malaria prevention will be a key focus of the new ministry partnership between the Texas and Cote d'Ivoire annual conferences of the United Methodist Church.

It is estimated that 78 percent of African children under the age of 5 become infected with Malaria and that half of those children die. One out of eight African children is predicted to not live to the age of five because of the disease.

In the time it took to read the first two paragraphs of this article, Malaria claimed another African life.

"We pray through our partnership that God will bring about the next generation of healthy children," said Bishop Janice Riggle Huie. "We, too, pray that we will be part of a partnership that acts on Jesus' command to love our neighbors as ourselves. And you are our neighbors."

The deadliest killer

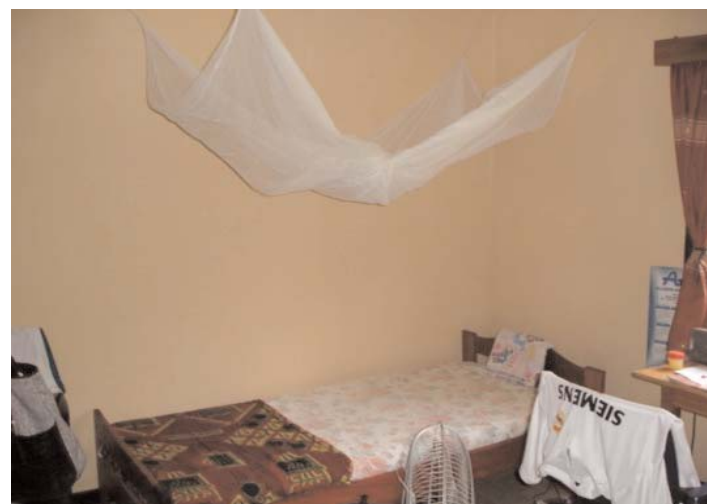
The effects of Malaria are

Elizabeth McKee, director of marketing for the United Nations Foundation. "Malaria costs Africa \$12 billion a year in economic loss – not including treatment."



Cote d'Ivoire journalists interview Bishop Huie and Bishop Boni outside the home of President Laurent Gbagbo.

It is this profound impact on the continent and world that drives Nothing But Nets. McKee said this is the first time world development organizations have come together to work on one issue. The Nothing But Nets partnership unites groups such as the



A mosquito net hangs over a bed at the Cote d'Ivoire training school for pastors and laity.

far reaching and not limited to health matters, hence the reason the disease has caught the attention of diverse entities.

"It's been contributed to being the No. 1 cause of poverty on the continent," said

National Basketball Association, the United Methodist Church, the United Nations Foundation, the Center for Disease Control, philanthropists and various arms of governments.

"We are all coming together to prevent, treat and eventually eradicate this disease," McKee said.

While there can be political and social obstacles to intro-

"People talk a lot about AIDS because AIDS does not have a remedy. People are so scared of AIDS ... people feel doomed. In terms of quantity, in our country, Malaria kills more people than AIDS."

Gbagbo commended and endorsed the partnership.

"We welcome this initiative," the president said. "I'm happy you are talking church to church, conference to conference and I will support this initiative. It is our priority as the state to assist such initiatives."

How does it work?

Insecticide treated bed nets have been identified as the most cost effective way to prevent the spread of Malaria. There are medicines used to treat and prevent the disease, but often they are expensive and not widely available.

Treated bed nets cost \$10. More often than not, entire families sleep under one net. "Even if only half the village is covered," McKee said, "it's depleting the mosquito population of the whole village."

The nets are effective for approximately five years.

And, what happens after five years? McKee said Malaria research is presently being funded, which will hopefully result in a vaccination for the disease.

Methodists in the Texas Conference are invited to make donations through the conference as opposed to other websites, in an effort to keep track of TAC donations and ensure that funds are earmarked for nets for Cote d'Ivoire. Checks may be made payable to the Texas Annual Conference, with Nothing But Nets in the memo line. The campaign is also designated as Advance Special 982015. More information on the campaign is available at www.umc.org.

ducing this type of initiative in developing nations, the political leaders of Cote d'Ivoire were open to learning about the Nothing But Nets campaign that will prevent the spread of Malaria in their country through the distribution of insecticide treated bed nets and disease control educational campaigns.

"This is a gift of God to bring you to Cote d'Ivoire to say let's partner," said former Prime Minister Charles Konan Banny. "Your focus on women and children is important, because educating a woman is educating a nation."

"It's true that HIV is important, and HIV is global. Malaria is tropical. Malaria kills more people here than HIV. You can prevent Malaria, but sometimes the resources don't exist."

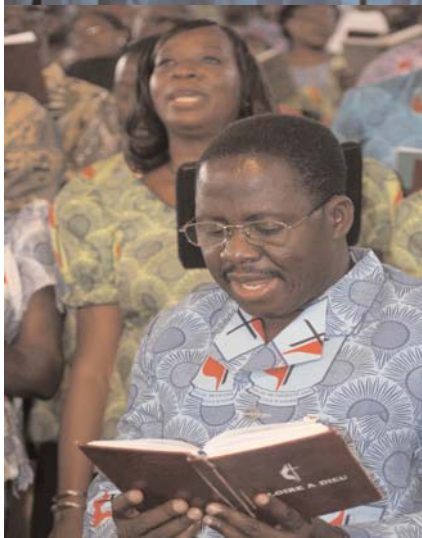
That sentiment was echoed when the delegation visited with the Cote d'Ivoire President Laurent Gbagbo.

"I am very happy to receive you – first because I'm a Christian myself," said President Gbagbo. "You raised a key question – the question of Malaria."

Passionate worship at its best

Passionate worship is the signature of the Methodist church in Cote d'Ivoire. Ivoirian Methodists can be found joyfully praising in small informal gatherings, in impromptu worship celebrations on the street and in spirit explosions that would make any modern mega church envious.

There are more than 24,000 choir members throughout the country. And, on any given occasion, hundreds upon hundreds show up to lift their voices. Praise isn't a matter left only to choristers. The laity sing with passion – rejoicing in every song as if it were their favorite. Worship encompasses their entire being, with little attention paid to the time that has passed or the relentless heat. Again and again, Ivoirians illustrate and define passionate worship!



Methodist boarding school educates, empowers Ivoirian girls



Festive drumming underscores excitement at Methodist Boarding School for Girls.

**By Eleanor L. Colvin
Director of
Communications, Texas
Annual Conference**

We Shall Overcome was among the songs that the talented and beautiful students of the Methodist Boarding School for Girls in Anyama, Cote d'Ivoire, flawlessly rendered in French and English during the visit of the Texas Annual Conference delegation.

There is no question that – even in the face of extreme poverty – the ministry of the United Methodist Church of Cote d'Ivoire is doing more than educating these young ladies. The church is unquestionably sustaining them and assuring them that with education and God, they will overcome.

From the youngest greeter, who likely spent hours reciting and learning her English words of welcome to the senior student,

who served as tour guide – it is obvious that good seeds are being planted at the Methodist Boarding School for Girls. And soon, Cote d'Ivoire will reap a generation of well-educated, spirit-led young women with a heart for serving God and their country.

Although raised Catholic, Kouassi Naurine, who served as guide, is clearly a star Methodist student. Naurine graduates this year and said she plans to be a judge.

School snapshot

The Methodist Boarding School for Girls serves more than 500 students.

Although it is a modern facility, with standard school features such as a library, dining hall, gymnasium, classrooms and play areas – there are many needs. The computer lab, for example, was comprised of approximately a dozen older-model computers, with two students sharing a



Ivoirian students (above) sing Negro spiritual, “We Shall Overcome,” in English and French for the visiting Texas Conference delegation.

At left: three of the tiniest worshippers join in the praise celebration at the Boarding School.



Below: West District Superintendent Earl Bledsoe prays for the Methodist Boarding School for Girls in Anyama, Cote d'Ivoire.

workstation. Additionally, the library is lacking.

“Our library is in desperate need of books,” Naurine said in her greetings.

The students, who read and learn in both French and English, also learn vocational skills, such as cooking, cosmetology and sewing.

In the coming years, there will be numerous opportunities for individuals and congregations to bless and be blessed by the girls of the Methodist Boarding School in Anyama.

The Methodist Boarding School in Anyama naturally will be one of the key areas of focus of the Texas-Cote d'Ivoire partnership. The school has enjoyed a legacy of Methodist involvement,

as the Methodist Women Fellowship Union of Cote d'Ivoire first supported the school in 1927. The campus sits on 4 hectares of land, which is approximately 10 acres, about 6 miles outside of Abidjan.

According to a Cote d'Ivoire publication on women's projects in the country, the objective of the school is to “reinforce and confirm the role and value of the woman in the society.” Therefore, the school's motto is “To be trained to assume oneself.”

Naurine and other stu-

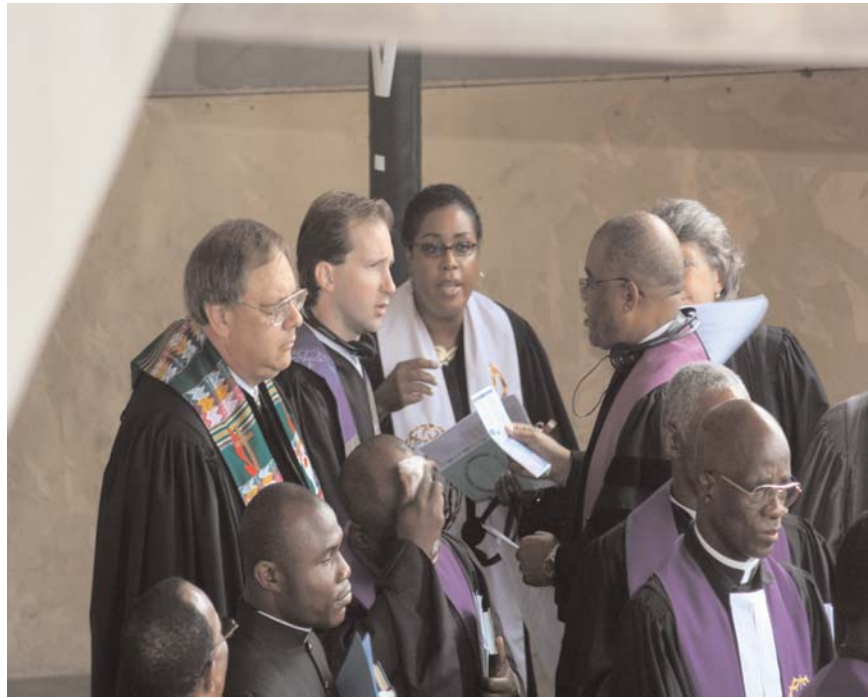


dents are being trained in a Christian environment to do just that.

The students of the Methodist Boarding School for Girls shall overcome.

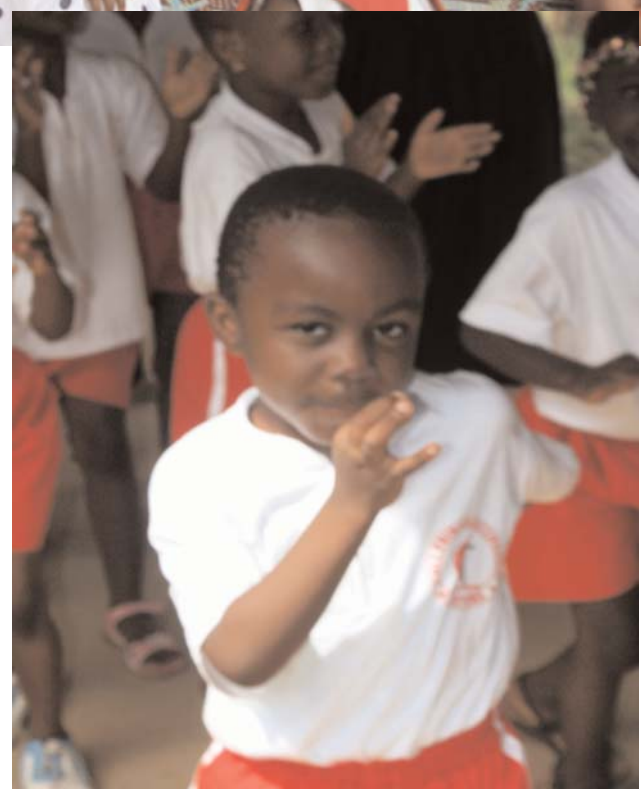
Cote d'Ivoire 2007 Annual Conference

Ivorians welcome Texas Annual Conference delegation



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Perspectives on Cote d'Ivoire



Rev. Todd Jordan
Trinity UMC,
Beaumont Associate Pastor

The most memorable moment for me on our trip to Cote d'Ivoire was the packed stadium of 14,000 worshippers shouting praise and singing to God with the energy one only witnesses at ball games here in the U.S.

It is not uncommon for Americans to shout passionately at a great touchdown catch or last-second three-pointer to win an important Saturday night game; but that fervor quickly dies down to mere whimpers on Sunday morning. While in Cote d'Ivoire, our delegation witnessed worship in a way that forced me to ask, "What is it that I am (or should be) passionate about?"

I am excited about the partnership between our two conferences because of just that: it is a partnership. Working, serving and praying together in order to accomplish the mutual goal of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. That might include anything from sharing the effort to distribute mosquito nets to faculty exchanges to building radio stations to broadcast the Gospel in the tradition of the United Methodist Church.

All of this opens us up to a greater awareness to the power of connection, and there is great joy in knowing we have United Methodist brothers and sisters across the Atlantic just waiting to connect in order to share resources, ideas and opportunities to witness to the love of Christ with those desperate for it.

Ivoirians are dedicated to sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ in our Wesleyan tradition. Their love for Christ and respect for our tradition is unparalleled. They are ready at a moment's notice to sing praise, lift up a prayer or offer a helping hand.

The UM cross and flame

shows up on clothing, in front of schools and hospitals, and, of course, on church signs all throughout the country. They have worked hard to establish a reputation of loving service, so much so that even folks on the street recognize what the church has done, and will know to say, "United Methodist do good." We can be proud of our sister church in the Ivory Coast and I pray our partnership will

continue to bear good fruit.

Rev. Rick Goodrich

Texas Annual Conference Assistant to the Bishop



The music, the people, and the "joy of life."

The EMUCI (Eglise Methodiste Unie of Cote d'Ivoire) has so much to teach our churches about being connective and working together.

The way the choirs came together, the people came together – what 1 million United Methodists can accomplish in the world to share our faith in action.

Ivoirians have great faith in the face of great poverty and great social and political difficulties. They have the ability to rise above the storm and see the Promised Land.

Rev. Velosia Kibe

Windsor Village UMC Associate Pastor



The most memorable thing I saw was the closing worship of

Following their trip to the Cote d'Ivoire, the Texas Annual Conference delegation reflect on the following questions:

1. What is the most memorable thing you heard or saw in Cote d'Ivoire?
2. What excites you most about the partnership between the Cote d'Ivoire and Texas annual conferences?
3. Introduce our Methodist brothers and sisters abroad to those at home. What one thing would you like Texans to know about the Ivoirians you met?

their annual conference. If worship were an art form, the people of Cote d'Ivoire would be among the most gifted.

Their worship of God included their whole being: body, mind and spirit. Praise seemed to come from their pores. Their dancing, singing and exaltation of God was beautiful to watch, and to join in with. Their joy in the Lord was evident. Their excitement was contagious.

The lives of many persons in that country will be saved.

They are a very proud, yet humble people, who are very well organized in their administration of the church.

In a country where so many have so little material things, I witnessed these people of the

United Methodist Church in Cote d'Ivoire who loved the Lord, not for what God gives, but because of who God is.

In an amazing audience with the President of the country, I was delighted to hear him speak with such a strong conviction of faith in God. He declared not only his personal faith in God, but also his intention to allow the "Reign of Christ" to take

precedence in his leadership of the country.

I am happy to know that the

Texas Annual Conference will be in Christian partnership with the great people of Cote d'Ivoire.

Eleanor Colvin

Texas Annual Conference Director of Communications

I saw the definition of Radical Hospitality everyday in Cote

d'Ivoire. A genuine sense of graciousness and care permeated every action of our hosts. Hospitality dwelled among us from the moment we stepped off the plane and were greeted by hundreds of Methodists who had been waiting outside for us to arrive for four hours. Their open hearts, open minds and open doors, let me know that I was at home in Cote d'Ivoire.

This partnership offers limitless possibilities. There are

so many opportunities for individuals and congregations of all sizes to participate in this hands-on ministry. Not everyone will travel to Cote d'Ivoire, but most of us can buy an insecticide treated bed net to prevent the spread of Malaria or a book for the boarding school or seminary.

Additionally, if the Texas Conference is willing to learn from our partners, we stand to be blessed in a mighty as we follow their model of focusing our Passionate Worship on God and not on our individual desires. I am excited about the potential for multi-faceted growth.

Ivoirians have a genuine love of God and their fellow man. Genuine love. They are proud to be Methodists. I am proud we are partners.

Dr. W. Earl Bledsoe

District Superintendent, West District

The love and excitement about being a United



Methodist. The UM logo was proudly displayed on everything. The joy and excitement of worship.

It is a partnership and not a mission project where we give and they receive. We will learn from each other. The partnership has enough diversity of ministry opportunities to develop a rich experience of learning.

They know how to evangelize and celebrate worship. I have made several trips in many different countries. This was the first trip where I sense a genuine love for Christ and His church. Words could not describe seeing and hearing our Bishop preach to a crowd of 15,000 persons.

Across the conference

a cultural mission moment

By Sharma Castillo, Director of Youth and Student Ministries
First United Methodist Church, Beaumont

The Youth at First United Methodist Church in Beaumont Texas experienced an unforgettable mission trip and met wonderful Christian people at 'El Buen Pastor United Methodist Church in Corpus Christi Texas.

As I was preparing for this trip, many things kept getting in my way. Nothing seemed to be going right. I'd gotten a headache suddenly, which lasted for three days, and then my feet began to swell.

I made my list of things to bring, gathered tools to load on the trailer and bought



Dr. Frank Alegria and youth from First UMC, Beaumont clear the grounds of El Buen Pastor church in Corpus Christi, Texas.

snacks for the car ride there. I reminded Pastor Frank Alegria he would be driving the church van because I didn't want to pull the trailer. I decided that the only thing that was going to help me was prayer. So I rallied together prayer partners for the youth, for me and Pastor Frank. Not only was this my youth group's first

mission trip, but it was also Pastor Frank's first trip with the youth group.

Sunday morning came and we began loading the trailer and the van making sure we had everything. The prayer partners gathered around us. We took time to visit with them and reminded each other how important it was to pray for one another. Then off we went to Corpus Christi, Texas.

We arrived at 'El Buen Pastor, which means the *Good Shepherd* and we were greeted by the church historian, the lay

leader, the pastor and other members of the church. It was as if they already knew us; they hugged us and thanked us for coming and bringing our youth. After a good night's

sleep and a wonderful breakfast (and yes,

the girls did talk till 2 a.m.), we got ready to paint two bathrooms at the parsonage. The boys were going to work outside until it started raining. I took a moment to pray and realized my headache was gone and my feet were not swollen anymore. I noticed I was really having a great time.

Prayer does work.

We finished the work at 'El Buen Pastor and celebrated with a communion service. During the service the pastor talked about serving from the heart, and it reminded me of the scripture from first Corinthians about love; how love can be shown in many different ways because it is faithful and not rude and it sees no wrong. Youth of today think of love in a romantic way and here our youth was experiencing love in a Christian way. God is so good. We realize we may not know someone or even speak their language but the language of love is strong in its translation.

The love of Jesus Christ could be seen in the eyes of the Congregation at 'El Buen Pastor UMC, because love offered through Jesus Christ speaks all languages. The youth, Pastor Frank and I experienced something rare in Corpus Christi – God's love for others expressed through the ministry of the Church.

If you have never been on a mission trip, I encourage you to go. If you are a youth director looking for a first mission trip for your group, 'El Buen Pastor UMC is in need of a lot of work, and they have a wonderful congregation that will take care of you. If you would like to help this congregation in Corpus Christi, contact First UMC-Beaumont at 409-832-0295. As Christians, we show our love for God by serving others.

Lon Morris college choir connects with Wesleyan roots in Oxford England

The Lon Morris College Chapel Choir traveled overseas to perform and tour London and Oxford during their spring break March 13 – 20. The group was made up of 18 students and 29 others, including alumnae, family members of the choir, and faculty as well as Lon Morris College President, Dr. Miles McCall, his wife Jana, and their two children.

While in London, they performed at Wesley

ple who speak about 35 different languages and "were friendly and encouraging" according to Director Jack Brooks.

There were leisurely aspects to the trip as well. The group stayed in central London at the Royal National Hotel on Russell Square and went on self-guided tours of Hampton Court Palace and Windsor Castle.

They also had the opportunity to see four different



Lon Morris College choir perform at Wesley Memorial UMC.

Memorial Methodist Church in Oxford to a crowd of about 70. They also took part in the worship service at Wesley's Chapel in London on Mothering Sunday in Britain, where daffodils were handed out to all those in the congregation. "Dr. Leslie Griffiths, the senior pastor, said that he could understand every word we sang, but none of what we said,"

The Wesley Chapel's congregation is made up of peo-

shows, including "Chicago," "The Phantom of the Opera," "Wicked," and the "Blue Man Group."

"We have plans to make this trip every two years, so that while a student in the choir program at LMC is here, he/she will have an opportunity to sing at Wesley's Chapel, London," Brooks noted.

For more information about Lon Morris College or its choir please visit www.lon-morris.edu.

Real change means real change'

Conference shows openness to God's possibilities

By Eleanor L. Colvin - Director of Communications, Texas Annual Conference

"The Core Leadership Team, in its March 30 meeting, explored the dynamics of change as the Texas Annual Conference draws near the one-year mark of implementing its new Model for Ministry.

"This idea of change is actually beginning to sink in," said Jerry Massey, Core Leadership Team member from the North District, who led the devotion. Drawing on 2 Corinthians and the popular children's story, *Alice in Wonderland*, Massey emphasized

the importance of clear, understandable goals, so that everyone knows where they are going and the road needed to get there.

"We really have created a destination," Massey said. "The destination is radical hospitality, passionate worship, faith forming relationships, extravagant generosity, risk-taking mission, connective ministry, fervent prayer and diligent study of scripture.

"The road to that is not going to be the easy road. The road has to be the road less traveled – the harder road."

Even the hard road can become easier to travel when one focuses on the true reason for the journey. Massey recommended that people shift their focus to God.

"It's not about us. This is about nothing but your relationship with God and what he wants us to do," Massey said. "Why should we change? Because God wants us to. Don't change for me or for the Bishop or the Core Leadership Team. Change because God wants you to."

In other business, the Core

Leadership Team reviewed several proposals that will be set before the Annual Conference in the form of resolutions. Resolutions on assessing the model for ministry and for assessing all ministries of the conference will be included in the Pre-Conference Journal and voted on at Annual Conference.

"The purpose of assessment is first to celebrate victories where we find them," said Jack Steele, at-large member of the CLT, "and second, to define a program of improvement where needed."

Rev. Rick Goodrich, assistant

to the Bishop, added that accountability is a positive measure to help everyone discover areas for growth.

"We're talking about making everything effective and excellent," Goodrich said.

Pre-Conference Journals, including these resolutions and other ministry reports, will be delivered to Annual Conference delegates no later than 30 days before Annual Conference.