



# Cross Connection

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

## Youth to explore faith and future at summer academy

**By Eleanor L. Colvin  
TAC Director of  
Communications**

Pray. Play. Study.  
Worship. Create. Serve.  
Reflect.

Those concepts are the foundation for the upcoming Youth Academy for Christian Formation. The Texas Annual Conference will host the inaugural academy July 5-18 at Southwestern University.

**"Pastors speak appreciatively of how participation in the academy has impacted participants and the life of their congregations."**

in their academy over a 9-year period," Huie said. "Pastors speak appreciatively of how participation in the academy has impacted participants and the life of their congregations."

Dorris added that the academy has spiritually influenced the life paths of participants.

"The graduates of the Duke program are going to seminary at Duke, Perkins,

**Bishop Janice Riggle Huie**

The two-week program is designed for high school sophomores and juniors with a desire to explore their faith and future. These youth probably already exhibit promise for future clergy and lay leadership, Dr. Karen Dorris, director of the Center for Congregational Excellence, which is coordinating the program. She encourages pastors and youth leaders to "choose a youth for whom you see real potential for ministry and, possibly, a call to ministry."

The Texas Conference Youth Academy for Christian Formation is modeled after a similar program held at Duke Divinity School for nearly 10 years.

In a recent letter to pastors and youth leaders, Bishop Janice Riggle Huie spoke of the measurable success of Duke's program: "You may be interested to know that Duke has tracked participants

Candler and all over," Dorris said. "And, they're going back to their churches and they're asking significant questions."

### Sacred work and play

Mornings will be spent in lecture discussions with seminary professors that aim to teach students how to ask questions about God and what it means to live as a baptized Christian. Bishop Will Willimon will present the first lecture.

Afternoons will be spent serving in outreach ministries with at-risk children and the homeless in addition to other opportunities. The afternoons will also offer an art village that explores faith through art. The art village will feature visual artist Mimi Nimitz; videographer and photographer Chris Newlin; storyteller Gary Smith and a potter, who all are lay workers in the annual conference.

Another key component of the academy is worship. The first week of worship will be planned by the design team, and students will take the lead in designing the second week of worship. All of which will follow a lectionary that was customized for the two-week event.

And, while there will be time for personal reflection, academy participants will often process their worship, study and service experiences in a group setting.

"The real heart and soul of this program are the mentor groups," Dorris said. Each group will have two mentors –

one with theological training and the other with youth training.

Approximately 50 youth will be selected from throughout the annual conference.

Participants will receive full tuition scholarships. Room and board for the two weeks is \$750. Churches are encouraged to sponsor promising youth or assist students in raising funds.

To apply, download an application from [www.txcumc.org/yacademy09](http://www.txcumc.org/yacademy09) or call 713-521-9383.

Applications are due March 31. Decision letters will be mailed April 30.

## "IKE Relief Concert"



**Singer and songwriter Wayne Kerr will be the guest performer at a concert hosted by the Youth Ministry of Friendswood UMC.**

**See story on page 2.**



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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## U.M. ARMY looking for an army of golfers for inaugural Golf Classic on March 28



The Texas Annual Conference focused on “Risk-Taking Missions” in 2008, and the U.M. ARMY ministry provided ample opportunities for youth and adult volunteers to do just that, as 4,000 youth and adult volunteers spent a week repairing the homes of low-income, elderly and disabled residents throughout the country. Now they are asking you to help expand the ministry, both in the Texas Conference as well as nationally.

In addition to signing up for camps, U.M. ARMY is also asking for your support by promoting, or signing up to participate in the *U.M. ARMY Golf Classic*, scheduled for March 28 at West Fork Golf Club in Conroe. The registration deadline is March 9.

Participants can direct the proceeds from their registration to benefit any of the existing U.M. ARMY chapters or

growth regions or to fund national growth. All proceeds will be used to strengthen and expand the U.M. ARMY ministry, adhering to the mission of providing, “Christ-centered quality youth work camps that serve people in need and promote spiritual growth and leadership development in youth.”

### A view of 2008

2008 was an exciting year for the U.M. ARMY ministry in the Texas Conference and nationally. Staff and volunteers are looking forward to an even brighter 2009. In the Texas Conference chapter, the place where U.M. ARMY began 30 years ago, 3,200 volunteers participated in 39 camps.

“Our 2008 camp season was exceptional, adding to our high school summer camps a Christmas Break camp, a College camp, and several weekend SLAM camps

throughout the conference,” said David Sabom, Executive Director of the Texas Conference Chapter. “At every work camp the Spirit blew with a mighty wind transforming the lives of not only the participants and clients, but also the communities that experienced our witness of God’s love. The 2009 theme is ‘First Love,’ and camps are filling up fast. We are eager to see what God will do this year at U.M. ARMY.”

In addition to the Texas Conference chapter, what started here has now expanded to serve communities in five states, with participants in seven. Through the work of U.M. ARMY National, a Southwest Texas Chapter was created in 2003, and in 2005, the Northeastern Jurisdiction Chapter was created to serve communities and youth in the Northeast.

Fundraisers such as the Golf Classic are important, as growth is on the horizon for U.M. ARMY.

Brian Smith, U.M. ARMY National Executive Director, said, “U.M. ARMY is hosting four growth camps in 2009; two in North Texas and two in Northwest Texas, and we are beginning to explore leads about growing into the Southeastern Jurisdiction with interest in places like Georgia and Tennessee. The U.M. ARMY ministry has been impacting communities and youth for 30 years, and we are working hard to spread this life-changing ministry nationwide.”

For more information on the Golf Classic, contact National Fund Development Manager Scott Atnip at 281-728-4593 or scottatnip@umarmy.org.

## Friendswood youth to raise \$10,000 for Hurricane Ike relief

**By Diane Taylor**  
Communications Director  
Friendswood UMC

The youth of Friendswood UMC have a heart for mission. It is evident in the participation numbers at U.M. ARMY; it is evident by those involved with Angel Food; it is evident each Christmas as youth gather to help host the Annual Christmas Mission Party.

Also, it is evident in the latest program sponsored by the Youth Ministry - the March 1st IKE Relief Concert. The youth have set a goal of \$10,000 to help fund Hurricane Ike Relief. At just \$10 per concert ticket, this means the youth hope to



**KSBJ radio personality, Kent Matthews set to participate.**

fill every sanctuary seat the evening of the concert.

Headlining the concert is Christian singer and songwriter, Wayne Kerr. If you have never seen Wayne share his music and faith, you owe it to yourself to attend.

Lauren James and KSBJ’s Kent Matthews will also be featured. It will be an evening of great music and uplifting Christian witness.

How can you help? Simple, buy a ticket (or two, or three) for the concert. Invite your friends and family to join you March 1 at 6 p.m. for the IKE Relief Concert.

Friendswood UMC, 110 N. Friendswood Drive is located in Friendswood just

south of Houston. For more information about the concert, contact Cindy Dalmolin at 281-482-7535, ext. 108.



**Christian artist Lauren James will open the show.**



# Do you hear what I hear?

## Free help for children and adults with hearing loss

By Sally Penning  
St. Luke's UMC

With the increasing popularity of MP3 players, power tools, guns and motorcycles, hearing loss is not just an "old folks" issue any longer. A recent John Hopkins study reports loud noise accounts for 63% of hearing loss – a problem that is largely preventable.

Additionally, pediatric experts estimate 5.2 million under age 20 in America alone have hearing loss due to extensive ear-phone use.

With more than 51 million (1 in 6) adults in America suffering the nation's most common and least visible disability, there is an increasing need to support those with hearing challenges. St. Luke's UMC is responding to this growing need by hosting a free one-day, "Do you hear what I hear" conference on Saturday, March 7 from 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. Workshops will offer real-time captioning, professional continuing education units, and a vendor showcase featuring new devices and resources.

### Keynote Speaker and Guests

Mayor Bill White will provide the opening comments at the conference, which also includes free screenings, a variety of sessions geared to adults of all ages, and a panel of parents addressing family dynamics and solutions. Keynote speaker, actress and author Gael Hannan, will provide a humorous and insightful view of "bluffing" and other coping mechanisms for all who live with hearing loss.

Named a 2007 Consumer Advocacy Award winner in Canada, Hannan has received several awards for her one-woman play called Unheard Voices.



Mayor Bill White



Gael Hannan

"Since hearing loss impacts speech development, socialization, employment – and ultimately, self esteem, offering assistance is one way St. Luke's United Methodist Church can make a difference in the local community," says Senior Pastor Tom Pace.

The "Do you hear what I hear" conference, free with registration, is appropriate for professionals and consumers. A copy of the brochure and registration form are available at [stlukesmethodist.org/hearing](http://stlukesmethodist.org/hearing). For additional information: Karen Smith 713-402-5086.

St. Luke's United Methodist Church is located at 3471 Westheimer at the corner of Edloe.

# Commission names TAC minister sexual ethics coordinator

A UMNS Report  
By Linda Bloom\*



Rev. Darryl Stephens

In the eyes of the United Methodist agency charged with promoting its female membership, institutional sexism and sexual misconduct are not just "women's issues."

That is one reason why the United Methodist Commission on the Status and Role of Women has hired a clergyman to coordinate efforts on sexual ethics. The position is a new one, both for the commission and the denomination, according to M. Garlinda Burton, the

commission's chief executive.

The Rev. Darryl Stephens, currently a visiting assistant professor of Christian social ethics and Methodist studies at United Methodist-related Candler School of Theology, will begin working part time in March for the commission and start on a full-time basis on April 27. He is an ordained deacon in the denomination's Texas Annual Conference.

The plan, Burton explained, is to create a "strategic, coordinated and theologically solid program" for sexual ethics, focusing on prevention, intervention and education.

Stephens' duties will include the creation of training resources specific to The United Methodist Church and

its clergy and lay leadership; development and evaluation of policies and procedures within annual conferences and church-related entities regarding sexual misconduct complaints; and coordination of intra-agency resources on the prevention and just resolution of such complaints.

Burton believes Stephens will bring "a fresh perspective" on how to understand, prevent and address sexual misconduct by church leaders. "His grounding in Christian ethics and gender issues brings a needed dimension to our notion of what it means to honor all people as sacred and reduce the exploitation of the vulnerable," she said.

*Continued on page 7*

# Be there. Be hope.

## Life-changing ministry – response to God's love

You and your congregation can join United Methodists worldwide by making a special offering through One Great Hour of Sharing to support humanitarian aid through UMCOR. You can be assured that when catastrophes cause suffering, your church, compelled by Jesus' love and compassion will be in the lead to ease the pain.

The 2009 offering date is March 22. Gifts to this offering underwrite UMCOR's

storms or war, disaster or disease.

"The One Great Hour of Sharing offering on March 22, 2009, provides for those basic needs that make the rest of UMCOR's work possible," says the Rev. Sam W. Dixon, Deputy General Secretary of UMCOR. "Without this offering so much of what UMCOR does to bring hope and healing to the world could not happen."



"For you have been a refuge to the poor, a refuge to the needy in their distress, a shelter from the rainstorm and a shade from the heat."

*Isaiah 25:4 NRSV*

"costs of doing business."

That helps us keep our promise that 100 percent of every gift you make to a specific UMCOR project can be spent on that project-not on home office costs.

UMCOR is a good steward of God's gifts. Offering gifts over and above those used to cover administrative costs are channeled where they're most needed. UMCOR's specialized ministries-responding in disaster, fighting hunger, alleviating poverty, providing relief supplies around the world, and offering hospitality to immigrants and refugees — all assist the most vulnerable people whose need is greatest.

### No world service funds come to UMCOR

UMCOR receives no World Service funds or any other apportionments. Your gifts mean we're right there with hardworking families, people who are affected by

### Your gifts work three ways

#### Keep the Lights On

Most gifts coming to UMCOR have been designated for specific programs-and those programs receive 100 percent of those gifts. So part of the One Great Hour of Sharing offering plus a small percentage of other general donations support UMCOR's cost of doing business.

#### Fill-in Fundraising

Donations to the One Great Hour of Sharing offering also assist UMCOR programs that have not been fully funded through designated Advance gifts.

#### Answering Jesus' Call

United Methodists' donations often become the springboard for additional funding.

The compassion of Jesus makes all things new. As Christians we're called to do the same: to offer the hands, the heart and the hope of the church wherever people are suffering.



# Clean-up is underway at



**By Betty Backstrom  
Director of Communications  
Louisiana Conference**

Mount Sequoyah Conference and Retreat Center in Fayetteville, Arkansas is slowly recovering from a destructive ice storm that slammed a four state area on January 27.

Close to two inches of ice accumulated on every branch and limb of the nearly 2,000 trees growing on the 32 acre campus, which serves as a conference and retreat center for the South Central Jurisdiction of The United Methodist Church.

“On our first damage inspection, we noted that almost every tree was toppled, split, or has lost limbs,” said John Altland, who serves with his wife Sheri as part of Mount Sequoyah’s executive team.

“Five power lines were downed and four transformers exploded during the icy storm. Fortunately, all but one auxiliary line is restored and power is restored after five days of being without electricity,” said Sheri Altland.

The property of Mount Sequoyah houses 43 buildings, 15 of which have damage,

with four suffering major damage.

“Basically, these heavy limbs coated with two inches of ice came crashing through roofs, causing the worst of it,” said John. Those structures hardest hit were Miller Lodge (the Center’s youth retreat building), Cate Administration Building, Oaks Cottage and Galloway Cottage.

Six buildings have significant exterior damage and 10 other buildings have roof damage and ceiling leaks, including the Louisiana Cottage.

Rev. Jeff Stull of Daingerfield First UMC in the North District of the Texas Annual Conference and Danny McCain, a member of his congregation, recently returned from helping clean up debris at Mount Sequoyah. Stull and McCain arrived to help and were met the following day by a team from Pittsburgh First UMC, also from the Texas Annual Conference.

To date, six chain saw teams from three different states have rushed to assist the staff of Mt. Sequoyah as they work to restore full operations. “It will take months to finish the job. We need more teams to clean up. And we will need

teams and donations to repair the damage done by the storm,” said John Altland, who was optimistic about the progress being made so far.

“We are expecting 150 clergy next week at the New Church Leadership Institute. We have cleared roads and problem areas and have housing to receive them.”

## **You and your congregation can help**

If you have a work team or want to help out, you can contact Sheri Altland in Arkansas at 479-601-4223 or Don White with the Texas Annual Conference at 832-794-8162.

Mount Sequoyah is a 501c3 organization and donations can be sent directly to them at 150 Skyline Drive, Fayetteville, Arkansas, 72701. You can also designate giving to the Mount Sequoyah Disaster Fund through your local conference office treasurer or through the local conference foundation.

For more information about Mount Sequoyah, go to [www.mountsequoyah.org](http://www.mountsequoyah.org).

*Brant Mills, Web Content Manager for the Texas Annual Conference contributed to this article.*





# Mount Sequoyah



Mount Sequoyah Retreat Center in Arkansas was hard hit by an ice storm in late January. The storm damaged 15 of the 45 buildings at the Center. Work teams from the Texas Annual Conference and other conferences have arrived at Mount Sequoyah to move the debris left by the storm.

These photos show some of the damage the storm caused.



## TAC minister to consult on new United Methodist hymnal

By Tina Pugel  
Asbury Theological Seminary

Asbury Theological Seminary is proud to announce that faculty member Dr. Lester Ruth will serve as one of two

Committee.

Ruth, who is appointed to Asbury as an extension minister through the North District of the Texas Annual Conference, was raised in Trinity UMC in Beaumont and maintains his

the sacraments, and contemporary worship. Among the churches he served in the TAC are Lake



**"Dr. Lester Ruth will bring to the Hymnal Revision Committee his vast knowledge and experience with not only Wesleyan hymns, practice, and theology, but also his research and insight into contemporary worship music and praise songs that are becoming increasingly important in the United Methodist churches,"**

Dr. Dean McIntyre

General Board of Discipleship and Co-editor of Hymnal Revision Project

consultants to the United Methodist Hymnal Revision



Dr. Lester Ruth

charge conference membership at First UMC Henderson. He will consult with the committee charged with preparing and presenting to the 2012 General Conference a hymn and worship resource for adoption as the official hymnal for congregational use in the United States. This will be the first revision of the United Methodist hymnal since 1989.

As the Lily May Jarvis Professor of Christian Worship at Asbury Seminary, Ruth's specialties include the history of worship (particularly early Methodist); creativity with

Rayburn UMC, First UMC Teague, Donie Memorial UMC and First UMC Overton.

Ruth claims the Wesley Foundation at Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, as "my sentimental home in the annual conference...where my commitment to Christ was deepened and stabilized in the late 1970s."

The General Board of Discipleship's Dr. Dean McIntyre, co-editor of the hymnal revision project, said the committee is fortunate to have the Texas pastor as a consultant.

"Dr. Lester Ruth will bring to the Hymnal Revision Committee his vast knowledge

The United Methodist Hymnal was last revised in 1989.

and experience with not only Wesleyan hymns, practice, and theology, but also his research and insight into contemporary worship music and praise songs that are becoming increasingly important in the United Methodist churches," said McIntyre.

"(Ruth's) additional experience with United Methodist Campus Ministry worship, with black gospel music and the fact that he has been a practicing conga player in his church since 2001 brings valuable firsthand experience with diverse contemporary church music styles."

Ruth said he was humbled

when he was approached last fall about serving as a consultant, along with C. Michael Hawn, music professor at Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University.

"I am excited about participating with this project because it gives me a personal opportunity to give back to the denomination," Ruth said.

"Academically, I feel good about being a consultant, since as a worship historian, I'll be able to address the question that always drives me: How might the history of worship help enliven and inform the worship of churches today?"

## What's the news?

The *Cross Connection* mailing list was updated in January. As a result, we've received inquiries from members of the Texas Annual Conference who have missed receiving their papers.

Help us help those who want to be aware of conference news, by referring them to our office for a \$20 annual subscription.

"But, I used to receive the

paper for free," leaders are saying.

Local churches are asked to designate which laity should receive free copies of the *Cross Connection* newspaper and *Interpreter* magazine. This is done via Charge Conference packets, and the district administrative assistants submit this data.

Each church receives 7 complimentary copies of the

paper per 500 members.

In some cases, previous designees continued receiving complimentary papers although they no longer served in the role that merited this courtesy. For example, a church names a new lay leader or SPPR chairperson and requests that they receive the *Cross Connection*; while, the former leader is still on the mailing list.

Purging the mailing list of

those who are no longer designated by their local church will happen annually and/or quadrennially, since these are the typical times of leadership transition.

"But, I still want to know what's happening." And, the annual conference wants you to be informed.

Subscribe to *Cross Connection* by contacting the editor, Thelma Jones, at [thel-](mailto:thel-)

[maj@methodists.net](mailto:maj@methodists.net) or 713-521-9383.

Or, read the paper online at [www.txcumc.org](http://www.txcumc.org) and click on the News tab. And, this summer, an e-mail version of the newspaper will be available – this will mean an unlimited number of e-subscriptions available and make sharing the news even easier.



## Annual Conference 2009

Below is the **final** list of available hotels in The Woodlands area during Annual Conference 2009. This year, only the Marriott Waterway Hotel will have bus transportation to The Woodlands UMC.

NAME OF HOTEL	ADDRESS	PHONE	NO. OF ROOMS AVAILABLE	ROOM RATE
Best Western	17081 I-45, The Woodlands, Texas	936-271-2378	35 Regular; 2 Handicapped	\$85/Night
Comfort Suites	18456 I-45 North, Shenandoah, Texas	936-273-1500	40 Regular; 6 Handicapped	\$89/Night
Courtyard By Marriott	1020 Lake Front Circle, The Woodlands, Texas	281-292-3262	Will not negotiate a block of rooms	No group rates
Drury Inn	28099 I-45 North, The Woodlands, Texas	281-362-7222	45 King Suites; 2 Handicapped 40 Regular Double; 3 Handicapped	\$109/Night \$99/Night
Fairfield Inn	16850 I-45 South, The Woodlands, Texas	936-271-0110	20 Double Rooms 10 King Suites	\$95/Night \$120/Night
Hampton Inn	18484 I-45, The Woodlands, Texas	936-273-3400	35 Regular Rooms/5 Handicapped	\$95/Night
Hilton Garden	9301 Six Pines Road, The Woodlands, Texas	281-364-9300	15 Double Rooms 10 King Rooms	\$156/Night \$156/Night
Holiday Inn	24888 I-45, The Woodlands, Texas	281-681-8088	10 Double Rooms; 10 King Rooms	\$99/Night
Homewood Suites	29813 I-45, The Woodlands, Texas	281-681-9199	10 Queen Rooms; 10 King Rooms	\$149/Night
LaQuinta Inn	24868 I-45, The Woodlands, Texas	281-681-9188	25 Studios 25 1 Bedrooms	\$99/Night \$109/Night
LaQuinta Inn	28673 I-45, The Woodlands, Texas	281-367-7722	48 Double Rooms 31 King Rooms	\$89/Night \$96/Night
Marriott Waterway (Host Hoel)	1601 Lake Robbins Drive, The Woodlands, Texas	281-367-9797	282 Regular Rooms	\$109/Night
Residence Inn	9333 Six Pines Road, The Woodlands, Texas	281-419-1542	5 Studios 10 One Bedrooms	\$124.99/Night \$124.99/Night
Residence Inn	1040 Lake Front Road, The Woodlands, Texas	281-292-3252	25 Sutfdios/One Bedrooms	\$124.99/Night

## Commission names sexual ethics coordinator

*Continued from page 3*

In an interview with United Methodist News Service, Stephens explained that Christian ethics can be compartmentalized into personal, professional or social ethics and sexual ethics crosses into all

social issue. Our society is constructed with gender roles," he said.

He pointed to the "Safe Sanctuaries" program for children and youth as a positive step the church has taken to address

added.

"What we are lacking... is an equivalent degree of awareness and recognition of appropriate sexual boundaries and rules for adult relationships involving clergy," Stephens said. "At the heart of this is the essential power and balance between a professional and someone seeking that professional's help."

**Rev. Darryl Stephens**

The role of the clergyper-

son is to recognize the degree of trust involved in that relationship. "When sex enters a pastoral relationship, it's a violation of trust, it's a violation of power and bound-

aries," he noted. "It's not an issue of two consenting adults."

Stephens, 40, grew up in Atlanta and lived in Texas for 15 years, where he earned a bachelor's degree at Rice University, taught physics and chemistry, and graduated with a master of divinity degree from United Methodist-related Perkins School of Theology in 2001. He returned to the Atlanta area that year to teach and study at Candler School of Theology, where he received his doctorate in 2006.

His wife, Myka Kennedy Stephens, is a deaconess candidate with the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries and will be commissioned in April. They have two children, Deke, 3, and Cecily, 11 months old,

Stephens, who calls himself a "committed" ethicist, has devoted considerable time to the examination of the denomination's Social Principles and co-founded a Wesleyan/Methodist Ethics Group in 2008 through the Society of Christian Ethics. His doctoral dissertation was entitled "A Witness of Words: The United Methodist Social Principles as Moral Discourse and Institutional Practice."

He believes his new position with the commission will allow him "to continue much of that work in a way that will make a huge difference in the lives of people in the pews and in the pulpit."

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

**"What we are lacking . . . is an equivalent degree of awareness and recognition of appropriate sexual boundaries and rules for adult relationships involving clergy."**

three of those areas. "Sexual ethics is deeply personal; is, of course, very relevant to professional boundaries and behavior...and sexual ethics is also a

sexual ethics concerns. The program establishes appropriate boundaries and protocols "that will really help ensure the safety of children and youth," he



## Spotlight on Local Church Ministries

### Fellowship Opportunities

#### United Methodist Women To Sponsor 2009 Lenten Study

Women, men, and families are invited to the 2009 Lenten Study, "Come to the Cross" by John Indermark and presented by Bible Study, University and Seminarian Instructor, Liz Vondy at the First UMC, Houston Westchase Campus.

The introductory session begins Wednesday, February 18 and the following sessions March 4, 11, 18, 25 and concluding April 1. The registration fee is \$8. Contact persons are Charlotte Newton, at 281-980-1918, Celainenew@aol.com or Jane Thompson, at 832-264-9001 at Bob.jane.3214@comcast.net

#### Ken Medema in Concert, February 22, 2009

Strawbridge UMC will host a free, Ken Medema concert, February 22, 2009 at 7 p.m.

Blind from birth, Medema's concerts are incredible experiences that bring people of all ages to their feet - singing, dancing and enjoying life. Ken has a way of touching hearts, and showing people a glimpse of the world, humanity, and God through his eyes.

For more information, contact Debbie Norris at [debbie.norris@strawbridge-umc.org](mailto:debbie.norris@strawbridge-umc.org).

#### Drama Presentation at Jones Memorial UMC

February 26-27, the church will present, *The Underground Railroad*, an interactive event which celebrates an important period of American history.

There will be two school presentations at the church on Thursday and Friday from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. A presentation will also be presented Friday evening at 7 p.m.

For more information, contact the church at 713-733-4630 or

Brenda Conway at 713-413-9149 or <http://jonesmum-church.org>.

#### Trinity UMC Celebrates Founder's Day 2009

"Trinity, 144 Years: Inspired To Dream and United To Serve," is the theme for the Founders Day celebration of Trinity UMC in Houston, Texas.

There will be a Black History Gala Dinner and silent auction on Saturday, February 28, at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, 1700 Smith Street. The cost is \$35 per person. Sunday, March 1, Dr. Walter H. McKelvey, President of Gammon Theological Seminary will be the guest speaker at the 10 a.m. worship service.

For more information, contact Georgia Nolan at 713-738-2130.

#### Women's Lenten Retreat at St. Paul's UMC

Add peace, well-being, and understanding of the Lenten season by participating in an overnight Lenten retreat in the sanctuary of St. Paul's UMC. The retreat will include time for prayer and meditation with the Labyrinth.

The fee is \$50/person and includes breakfast and lunch. To register, call 713-528-0527 or e-mail [info@stpaulshouston.org](mailto:info@stpaulshouston.org), noting if you have special dietary requirements.

#### Texas Annual Conference To Host 'Astros Baseball Night'

The last two years have been such a success that the Texas Annual Conference decided to do it again!

There will be 1,000 Field Box seats available on a first come, first serve basis. Each ticket is \$21.50; there will be no special seating selection, however, districts will have the option to be seated together if all tickets are purchased at the same time.

Contact your district office for tickets. Deadline is March 15.

#### Annual Conference Accommodations at the Cramer Center

The Cramer United Methodist Retreat Center has rooms available for those attending Texas Annual Conference 2009.

Guests must register before May 10 using the on-line registration form found on the web site: [www.CramerCenter.org](http://www.CramerCenter.org). Contact Nanette Radke, Property Manager at 281-350-1355 or [NERadke@CramerCenter.org](mailto:NERadke@CramerCenter.org) for details.

#### Learning Opportunities

##### A New Church for a New Day 42nd Annual Meeting for BMCR - March 25-27

The meeting will focus on congregational development. The program will focus on new church development, congregational transformation and revitalization, and sharing ministry models that reach new people for Jesus Christ.

Through plenary sessions and learning labs, the fact that there are different challenges for different churches will be examined and the reality that historical Black congregations are being closed and/or merging with other churches. Many existing congregations lack the human and financial resources to develop and maintain effective ministries in the communities. For additional information, go to [www.bmcumc.org](http://www.bmcumc.org).

#### South District Leadership Training and Conference

The South District will offer local church training opportunities Saturday, February 28, 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at First UMC in Pearland, Texas.

Workshops will cover the following topics: planning outreach in the local church,

apportionments, measuring fruitfulness in the local church, SPRC, effective evangelism, leadership in the local church, campus ministry and lay leader training and discussion. Participants can select two workshops. Cokesbury will be on site with leadership materials available for purchase. The election of District officers will also take place.

#### St. Peter's UMC To Host Program on Israel and Palestine

Janet Lahr Lewis, a missionary with the Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church, serves as a liaison between ecumenical groups and Israel and Palestine. She will present a program on Monday, March 2, 2009, 7 p.m. at St. Peter's UMC, 20775 Kingsland Blvd, Katy, Texas talking about her missionary experiences and the reality of the situation in this war-torn land.

In light of the current situation there, this will be a good opportunity for people in the United States to learn more about the history of the Palestine/Israeli conflict and the occupation of the Palestinian territories.

Janet says, "Christ calls us all to be ministers of justice. Through my work with the Palestinian community, I will be able to answer this call by working for a just and lasting peace for Israelis and Palestinians, so that reconciliation and healing can occur."

#### Pet Therapy Workshop

Paws 4 Love/hphp (Delta Society Pet Partners) is hosting a pet therapy workshop March 7 in the Liberty, Texas area.

The workshop entitled, "Pet Therapy 101" is designed to introduce handlers to Delta Society Pet Partner program and to the programs offered by Paws 4 Love/hphp, a Delta

Society affiliate.

The workshop begins at 9 a.m. and ends at 1 p.m. The \$50 registration fee includes the Delta Society Student Home Study manual and shipping. For those who are ready to be evaluated with their pet, team evaluations will be held that afternoon. Evaluation fee is \$25 pass or fail.

For more information and registration, visit the website at [www.paws4lovehphp.com](http://www.paws4lovehphp.com).

#### Mt. Sequoyah Offers Three Conferences in 2009

Coming early in 2009, Mt. Sequoyah will host the following events:

Addiction Ministry Responders Conference, February 23-25 - A conference for all church leadership to help shape the church's response to substance abuse problems within their communities and congregations.

Small Church Leadership Institute, March 9-13 - A conference to equip laity and clergy with the knowledge and skills for leading their small attendance church into the future.

Caring for Creation Conference, March 27-29 - A conference designed to educate, network and inspire faith communities to initiate, develop and sustain stewardship programs that will protect and celebrate God's creation.

Do you have information about your church or ministry you would like to share with others?

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