

Cross Connection March 24, 2016

Countdown to Conference: Celebrating Bishop Huie and Conference Priorities Past, Present and Future

Three prominent keynote speakers, special events and a nationally-known worship leader will inspire delegates and guests attending the Annual Conference in Houston this May. Register soon to safeguard your spot.

This year's historic annual conference will be a special celebration with longtime Bishop Janice Riggle Huie as attendees and guests focus on successes and goals related to *Planting and Harvesting Seeds of Faith*. Hear from keynote speakers including:

- Bishop Cynthia Fierro Harvey on the topic of Leadership
- Rev. Ruben Saenz on Vibrant Churches
- Rev. Tom Berlin on Investing in the Young

Bishop Harvey received a call to ministry while attending **Foundry UMC** in Houston. With a degree in Journalism from the University of Texas, Cynthia believes her curiosity serves her well as a leader and her creativity spurs a personal commitment to innovate and inspire others to see what is possible. She was ordained Deacon in the Texas Annual Conference in 1999 and ordained as Elder in 2001. She served as Director of Missional Excellence in the TAC 2008 - 2010. She was assigned as Bishop of the Louisiana Conference in September, 2012 where she continues to serve.

Rev. Dr. Ruben Saenz has a Master of Divinity and a Doctor of Ministry degree from SMU Perkins School of Theology and was awarded the Perkins Faculty Award for the student who best exemplified the goals and mission of Perkins. He served at La Trinidad UMC and El Divino Redentor UMC in El Paso where he increased worship attendance by 200 percent over four years. He later pastored El Buen UMC -- known as the largest Hispanic-American United Methodist Church in the country with over 900 members. As Executive Director of the Mission Vitality Center in the Rio Texas Conference, he continues unification work by overseeing the strategic direction and outcome delivery of the conference's missional objectives.

Rev. Tom Berlin is a graduate of Virginia Tech and the Candler School of Theology. He has served churches of all sizes and currently serves as the Lead Pastor of Floris United Methodist Church in Virginia, a church committed to reaching out to the local community and the world. Through international outreach, the church has established the Child Rescue Centre for war-displaced children and Mercy Hospital in partnership with the Sierra Leone Annual Conference. Tom has co-authored three books with Lovett Weems, *Bearing Fruit: Ministry with Real Results*, *Overflow: Increase Worship Attendance and Bear More Fruit*, and the soon to be released *High Yield: Seven Disciplines of the Fruitful Leader*, all published by Abingdon Press. He is also the author of several small group studies: *6 Decisions That Will Change Your Life*, *6 Things We Should Know About God*, and *6 Ways We Encounter God*.

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Worship

According to Rev. B.T. Williamson, Assistant to the Bishop, nationally known worship designer Marcia McFee will team up with Lindsay Smith (**Kingwood UMC**) and Michael Vaughn (**Wildwood UMC**) to facilitate a special worship experience for attendees. Marcia, who followed her call to ministry two decades ago, incorporates her love for God, the arts, dance and meaning by creating unique worship inspirations.

Special Event and 2016 Keepsake

On Monday evening of conference, there will be a dinner honoring Bishop Huie that will include video remembrances from some of her close friends. Also, during this historic conference, delegates will receive a commemorative book outlining the accomplishments of the conference during Bishop Huie's tenure.

Important Details for Delegates

- Rooms are going fast. Reserve one at the Hotel Americas Houston, 713-739-8000, \$130 per room.
- Meal and Meeting lists are available at: <http://www.txcumc.org/2016tac>
- Contact your district office for registration information

Last Year to Print Pre-Conference Journals

Following a stewardship decision by the Core Leadership Team, 2016 will be the last year for pre-conference journals to be printed and mailed. "Future journals will be available digitally, at a savings of \$32,000 per year," notes Rev. B.T. Williamson.

Simultaneous Pre-conference Meetings

This spring, Reverends B.T. Williamson, Gail Ford Smith and Jesse Brannen will be holding a meeting in three districts as follows. See your district website for details on time and place.

Rev. Jesse Brannen:

April 24	NW
April 25	N
April 26	E

Rev. Gail Ford Smith:

April 24	W
April 25	CN
April 26	SW

Rev. B.T. Williamson:

April 24	SE
April 25	S
April 26	CS

Up Close Series: Meet Your General Conference Delegates

This ongoing series provides insight from two of the delegates representing the Texas Conference at the mid-May General Conference. In the video and article to follow, meet Dr. Janice Gilbert, pastor of St. James UMC in Beaumont in the South East District. This article also spotlights Marquice Hobbs, 23, a member of Jones Memorial UMC in Houston, who attends Candler School of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta.

Marquice Hobbs

Why did you want to participate in General Conference?

A few reasons why I wanted to participate in General Conference are: to represent the youth and young adults of The United Methodist church especially within the jurisdiction of the Texas Annual Conference, to understand better the political and bureaucratic side of the United Methodist Church, to aid in moving the church forward and setting the standard of our legislation and governing principles upon Biblical doctrines, and to just have fun and meet new people. I understand with this role comes a lot of responsibility and esteem. Thus, I do not take it lightly, for I want to represent my conference, especially the young adults and youth, as best as I can. This is my first time attending General Conference, and from the advice of my mentors, I'm ready for a long ride.

Why do you think General Conference is important?

I believe General Conference is important because it is a time where those of us under the United Methodist denomination can meet and fellowship with others. We are all unique in our culture, our stations in life, our spirituality, our political views, favorite genre of music and books, employment, and even in our hobbies. We are a large community of brothers and sisters, so just to be able to appreciate the differences amongst us in the spirit of community, holy conferencing, and fellowship is highly important. In addition, General Conference is the stage where a lot of big tickets items are dealt with such as how will we respond to global crisis, the concepts of human sexuality, the candidacy process and the most effective method for producing quality pastors through various means, and how best to indoctrinate the Holy Scriptures of God. General Conference is the place to direct the vision and agenda of the United Methodist Church, but it is also a time to meet and greet our many brothers and sisters whom represent their respective conferences from across the World.

What is your greatest hope for General Conference?

My greatest hope for General Conference is to be led by the Spirit of God, for if we are led by any other spirit we would fail. Moreover, I hope that all legislative committees can be heard and present their legislation before the body because it is highly important to deliberate and focus on all aspects and offices/ministries of the United Methodist Church throughout its hierarchical stages. I also hope that we can handle the topic of human sexuality and its place within the church and church leadership, along with other hot topic debates, with much integrity, diligence, and care. Lastly, I hope that somebody might be saved amongst our midst and that we might imprint upon the city of Portland

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the true faith of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior through our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, and most importantly, our witness to Jesus Christ.

What is your greatest hope for the UMC?

My greatest hope of the United Methodist Church is that we might continue to shine bright the light of Christ into this dark world. The UMC should be hope for the hopeless, freedom for the oppressed, relief for the distressed, comfort for the afflicted, love for those engrossed with pain, and a mural of Jesus Christ, for the UMC stretches its arms through the world and is able, under its auspices, to touch any region therein. To many times the people of a community are separated by the walls of a church, so I hope that the UMC might break down its walls and have church in the streets, festivals with the homeless, revivals in the prisons, and choir rehearsal within the schools in order to transform the lives of people in the name of Jesus of Christ.

What are some of the most exciting ministries that the UMC is doing globally or locally?

One of the exciting things the United Methodist Church is doing globally, ministry wise, is UMCOR whose work reaches at least eighty countries. Through this ministry of the UMC, so many prayers are answered, so many people's needs are met, and so many lives restored. They help people receive health provisions and are active participants in the sanitation of water for countries where the need is dire, amongst many other things they do. I have so much respect for this ministry, its accomplishments, and its many members. Locally, however, I feel it only best to speak to what I know which is the Texas Annual Conference. Within my personal conference, I love the summer College Pastoral Internship Program. This has been in effect for over five years now, and it gives young adults a glimpse of what being a pastor is all about. Interns are able to serve in a local church through the areas of teaching, preaching, administration, and so on and so forth. Young adults are required to live with a member of the church in order to be fully immersed within the life of that church. I remember the two years that I got to do it, and let me tell you, both years shaped my life. During my first year, I was able to stay with the Associate Pastor of The Foundry UMC in Cypress, Texas, Ray Hughes. It was a new church start for their second location where he was the pastor, and I got to experience the life of a pastor through all dimensions of social and personal interactions. He is a great man, his family is wonderful, and oh my goodness their church is a staple of Christian Discipleship, and I think nothing is more evident than their construction of Cy-Hope. My second year was just as amazing under the leadership of Robert Besser and his team at Wesley UMC in Beaumont, Texas. We did door to door ministry, and had a blast in the office. His leadership style was one I took to heart, and from both pastors, their pastoral team, church, and ministries I definitely was mentored, supported, and loved on. In addition, through the culmination of both experiences it made me even more excited for my first day in office at a local church.

How is being a delegate in General Conference part of your calling?

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Being a delegate is a part of my calling because God has called me to be a leader. I am a very humble person, but when you are confident in the work of God you are able to speak boldly. General Conference is the Mecca of church leaders who decide the future of the UMC and who network in order to create and renovate potential partnerships between persons, ministries, conferences and businesses. I believe God wants me to be an active participant on this stage of the UMC, and my hope and will is that I can do the ground work to be as effective as God so desires.

Author Mike Bonem: Five Practices of Great and Godly Leadership

Consultant Mike Bonem recently taught over 100 leaders how relationships, planning, mental models, and change can be leveraged to produce Godly leadership and church vitality.

While the Bible provides the core foundation for daily life, it does not say much about how to stretch the church budget, whether or not to change the worship service schedule or how to have an effective welcome center. Therefore, consultant and author Mike Bonem looks to best practices in the business world to supplement biblical wisdom in developing dynamic leaders within the church. Addressing over 100 Texas conference lay and clergy leaders in early March, Mike said, "I don't believe that secular leadership principles are inherently evil or contrary to Scripture, and if we are unwilling to use solid business principles in our leadership style then we may be limiting the church's potential—and shame on us!" He also acknowledges the other extreme from no business insight to an over-reliance on business practices...so business oriented that God is left completely out of the equation.

As the author of *Leading from the Second Chair* and *In Pursuit of Godly Leadership*, Mike believes Christians have a tremendous stewardship responsibility as leaders. "Wherever they are serving, leaders have the potential to help others grow in their faith and the potential to reach those who do not know God," he adds.

The Challenge of Change

Although people inherently seek stability and predictability, and perceive change as chaos, Mike knows that organizations that do not evolve at all often die a slow death. "Just the mention of the word "change" can threaten someone's sense of comfort and power," he adds, "and it sometimes implies that we've done something wrong, but we can't lead without change!" The challenge with change in churches is amplified since churches are volunteer-dependent (no power of the paycheck), tradition-rich, may have an assortment of confusing governance structures and not be accustomed to seeking feedback. "Mental models – the images and assumptions we use to interpret our world -- cloud our progress because we all have our own mental models and may not realize the models others are acting from," he says. He suggests that the most important reminder for church leaders is to constantly clarify the mental models to seek agreement on WHO we are here for – members or the rest of the world? "Churches are odd organizations in that they don't exist solely for the personal preference of members but for the benefit of nonmembers who seek truth.

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Five Practices of Godly Leadership

"The past is always present," Mike shared, which can make it hard on churches to move on after a crisis or employment issue.

1. **Spiritual/Relational Vitality**

The secret to vitality is a deep relationship with God, according to Mike. "We are all equal at the cross," he adds.

2. **Strategic Discernment**

Godly leaders try to keep everyone on the same page, often by narrowing down the focus to just a few initiatives that will make a bigger difference. "Leaders often have to build the bridge at the same time they are walking on it," he adds. He reminds leaders that data is important, but does not trump God's timing.

3. **Supportive Systems**

"Imagine the leader that is pushing a boulder up the mountain over and over versus one that establishes steps, patterns and processes for recurring responsibilities." Mike suggests that metrics play a role here in that people do pay attention to the things they measure, whether that be church attendance or how engaged members are in ministries.

4. **Coalition of Leaders**

Mike believes, "There is enormous untapped leadership potential in the pews." This is a community of encouragers that help the pastor feel support. Many members give their leadership gifts away to big organizations that recognize their abilities, so my advice is to get to know what is important to them as high level leaders and how to help them make a difference in their local congregation. Some of these leaders will help overcome resistance. "Getting others' opinions can be messy but it is very valuable," he adds, "and necessary to implement systemic change."

5. **Courage**

He urges leaders to be courageous but not reckless. Most importantly, leaders with a strong spiritual foundation will have the courage to pursue their Godly vision with deep spiritual conviction.

Rev. Vickie Simon, **Somerville UMC** was inspired by the leadership event. "Best of all I loved that he tied so many principles together in a compelling package," she shares. "As a second career pastor who came from a corporate background, I agree with Mike in his core convictions that, 'secular business principles are not inherently contrary to Scripture.' Artfully applied, they can be very useful tools for a pastor in a leadership role."

She believes that "good planning is good stewardship, because you are being proactive about time and investments." Adds Vickie, "I believe that without a vision the church *does* die. I also agree with his reference from Reggie McNeal's concept *that success comes when we strive for God's will for the church and not come forth with our own vision and then ask God to bless it.*"

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For churches to go forward, she notes, “there needs to be an understanding and a tolerance, from both the conference hierarchy and the congregation, that risk and failure are present in the life of a church as well as a corporation. Risking a new launch of a new ministry or a new church start may not always work the first time; however, if lessons are learned and new insights are gained all is not lost.”

Vickie also champions the idea that a group of people truly committed to a common vision is an awesome entity. “Instead of having individual ministries in their own orbits, having them all in alignment, unified with a clear vision of God's intention and will for the body of Christ, is the most exciting approach to ministry I can think of! In fact, that prospect is the reason my church will now be exploring VCI!”

Dr. Mike Deaton, pastor of **Columbia UMC**, says, “I thought Mike Bonem offered some real insight on leadership roles and it started with the title, *Pursuing Great and Godly Leadership*. When we, as pastors and coaches are faced with the choice between deep change or slow death, particularly during the Vibrant Church Initiative process, we have to remember *who we are serving* and it is most certainly not the status quo.”

“Because of the many positive responses to Mike’s presentation we have asked to continue to serve as a resource to the Texas Annual Conference in Congregational Excellence in the area of leadership development,” adds Rev. Mike Tyson. “We are in the process of planning additional leadership development activities that will include additional experts in the field.”

“Revolution Youth” Ministry Exemplifies the Live+Serve+Share Vision

Not only will you find the word LOVE in Lake Houston UMC’s dynamic youth ministry logo, you will find it in dozens of ministry adventures involving everything from skits to sandwiches.

“Ways not to use your Bible” is among the skit titles performed by the energetic and multi-talented “Revolution” youth group of **Lake Houston UMC**. Several dozen strong, this group also includes an active praise band that will be part of the student-led Sunrise Service for Easter this weekend.

The group, known by its red, black and white logo t-shirts, has made it into the newspapers twice this month; The *Cherokeean Herald* announced their youth-led service during their recent mission trip to **Dialville UMC**, and the *Observer* featured a story on the youth group’s sandwich-making milestone for the Huffman Food Pantry, as the group topped 1,000 ham and cheese sandwich donations just in the last few months. On the March mission trip to Rusk, students helped with cleaning, led worship, shared messages through drama and still had time to go hiking and hang out together.

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“These students and parent volunteers are remarkable,” says Rev. Frank Coats. “The skits are a wonderful way to do a type of street ministry that reaches people with a nonthreatening style of evangelism.” These accomplishments could not be possible without a cadre of supportive parent volunteers. “The volunteer that handles most of our A/V tasks, has been nicknamed the *press agent for the Lord*.”

Youth ministry leader Lee Frasier believes the key to a thriving youth group begins with the pastor consistently expressing a vision and passion for the youth. “By sharing that passion, parents and youth quickly see the need and want to help,” notes Lee. “That shared vision is unifying. We give options for parents and students to choose what they will enjoy, but the expectation is *if you come, you serve, not sit*.” Lee’s previous involvement in New Life Drama Company has inspired the skit ministry. Some of the skits are purchased from the organization and the students write some of them and perform at UM Army, youth camps, out in the park and in churches.

Video and Facebook are essential communication tools of the youth ministry. The Revolution Youth [Facebook page](#) features many students announcing upcoming events on camera and inviting others to join in.

Ministry leaders understand the importance of spreading the good news about youth activities so that others might be inspired to join in. They make the effort to get in the newspaper. For events and special occasions the church typically sends out press releases with photos to local papers or invites them to the event to do their own story.

Here are links to several of the student skits:

Skit - The Gas Station (catcher skit to get people’s attention) - <https://www.facebook.com/254806711222756/videos/987391247964295/> - Street Ministry, Durango, CO
Skit – What if - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5KcUB4DPQS0> LHUMC Youth Sunday
Skit – The Church <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vhcOgXeZIHg> LHUMC Youth Sunday
Skit – Get To Know Me <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HI0GpMwfSK8> First UMC Pasadena
Skit – Everything <https://www.facebook.com/Revolution-Youth-Ministries-254806711222756/videos> LHUMC Sunrise Service

Another notable outreach activity sponsored by these generous teens is the recycling of plastic bags into mats for the homeless. “The students have shortened a 10-20 hour process into a one-hour method of weaving mats that are given to homeless shelters for use by visitors. The youth are turning something worthless --

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that would remain in some landfill until Jesus comes – into something useful and it’s just fantastic,” Frank adds.

Fun-draisers

The youth-sponsored Valentine Dance themed “Prom Night Through the Ages” was a sell out and, thanks to a festively-dressed dinner and dance crowd with outfits ranging from mock-tuxedo t-shirts to old prom dresses. The event, featuring handmade tissue “mums” for the ladies, raised money for camp and other upcoming youth activities. And, to everyone’s delight a prom king and queen were crown

At-Risk Teens Flourish in Experimental Poetry Program

ProjectCURATE’s Iconoclast program, sponsored in part by the Texas Annual Conference and St. Paul’s UMC, Houston, is turning troubled teens into published and performing poets who feel heard and affirmed in unique ways.

When it comes to *Investing in the Young*, Matthew H. Russell Ph.D. Executive Director of *ProjectCURATE* (Center for Urban Reconciliation and Theological Education) calls Sharpstown High School English teacher Faris Jabbar “a force of nature with the kids we are working with.” As one of Houston’s most notably disadvantaged schools, the successes are even more remarkable. *CURATE’s* Iconoclast Program sends renowned author, poet, speaker and activist Marlon Lizama into schools such as Sharpstown High, and youth lockdown facilities, to hold workshops on writing. He inspires students to express their stories through this medium – with life-changing impact.

Adds Farris, “Since we started our collaboration with Matt and Marlon, our students have been exposed to a myriad of powerful opportunities and experiences. They’ve primarily benefited from small group writing workshops with Marlon where they discuss a range of topics, including but not limited to: current events, philosophy, community issues, emotions, and perspective. These workshops have developed their critical thinking and writing skills and inspired some excellent compositions.”

Although they were aware that some of their compositions would end up in an anthology, these students don’t write with the intention of becoming famous, he explains, they write for the sake of art and expression. “They feel as though their voices are valued when Marlon comes and listens to their poetry and thoughts. To me, this is the heart of the program in addition to the improbable friendships and connections they’ve made through meeting with their peers from other schools and members of the community who show up to support their art,” shares Feris. “The extras of being published authors, receiving scholarships, and performing in front of hundreds at venues such as the Houston Museum of Fine Arts are simply icing on the cake. We’re extremely fortunate to have made this connection with Matt and Marlon and our kids have been transformed in ways that can be seen through their poetry and performances, their outlook on the world, and their confidence in and out of the classroom.”

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These students share their powerful stories on video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A6-rL-kDS04>

Ripple Effect Extends Beyond Houston

A doctor with one of the Iconoclast student poetry anthologies recently shared this story with Matt, illustrating the far-reaching impact of this unique ministry. The email states that one of his Multiple Sclerosis patients in Cincinnati developed a life-threatening case of pneumonia and ended up on a ventilator. While 99.9% of patients on ventilators are sedated for comfort purposes until their lungs recover, this particular patient was comfortable with very little sedation and wanted to be awake enough to text and write messages with his family who were at the bedside. The doctor shares, “I brought a book in, explained a bit of the background of how the anthology titled *They Say* and Iconoclast came together, and gave them a copy. When I returned, they had just read Lissette’s poem on page 41. The patient’s family was in awe and the patient, still with a breathing tube secured in his windpipe, put his hands up in a prayer position and wrote me a message saying, ‘This is amazing.’”

Adds the doctor, “Summary: You have your first intubated fan on a ventilator.”

Lessons from a “Community Partnership Pro”

Faithbridge UMC member Jerrie Amos has developed a system for finding divine connections in the community and she is contagiously passionate about empowering others to do the same.

In her position as Community Liaison for Care Net Pregnancy Center in Houston, **Faithbridge UMC** member Jerrie Amos has mastered a system for finding and developing strong community partners. “When we find other organizations that mirror our mission to share Christ while providing assistance of some sort, we consider that to be a divine connection. We have learned the benefits of partnering with existing groups rather than always *starting* new ministries. It seems exponentially more effective to have one big targeted effort rather than lots of little scattered efforts meeting the same need,” she shares.

For example, she consistently hears about groups that want to start a nonprofit and file a 501c3 to help young teen moms. “I ask them if they have met with other ministries that are already doing this and how would they offer *something different*,” she says, “and I am surprised by the lack of research people have done before they begin investing time, money, energy and valuable volunteers. I work to connect them with other groups with the same vision and then help them to put all their multiple resources together to form a strong, collaborative working ministry.”

A Process for Finding Ideal Mission Partners

When vetting potential community partners, Jerrie uses the Bridge Gap form (<http://www.txcumc.org/files/fileslibrary/bridgegapform.doc>) to begin the conversation. “When I vet a resource or community partner,” she adds, “I ask specific questions about their funding, who they are serving and insight about their mission, which are questions on my form. Those questions open the door for additional discussion and discernment. The key to impactful partnerships is doing research and having connections with people who do what they do with excellence.” Additionally, Jerrie monitors her particular area of ministry by using Google Alerts to follow what is being said or done in her field of interest.

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She's quick to tell you that God prepared her for this Community Liaison position long before she took it on. "I was in women's ministry for many years before God showed me His hand on the ministry of Care Net when I began as a volunteer almost a decade ago," she shares. "I joined the staff and immediately saw that my professional background gave me the foundation for my distinct calling here at the Care Net Pregnancy Center." Serving as an account/client relationship manager in the corporate world equipped Jerrie with specific research skills to create databases and systems to put a new partner and referral process into place. Care Net now carefully researches prospective partners in search of those that mirror the Care NET values. Staff and volunteers now use an excel database which is able to be "up to the minute current" throughout a system with multiple users. She is sharing her Excel database template (<http://www.txcumc.org/files/fileslibrary/housingandshelter.xls>) for congregations that would like to be more intentional about finding missional partners ideal for building long-term relationships.

When someone comes to the Center for help, the last thing Jerrie wants to do is to send them to a nonprofit resource that has either relocated, closed or that places no value on sharing Christ. After a few mishaps when she first began helping the Care Net Center, Jerrie realized her business skills were needed. By replacing the Care Center's binder of outdated information -- on other nonprofits in the city -- she developed a much more relationship-driven system. "Nowadays, we meet and get to know our prospective partners much like a new mother researches adoptive parents. We want to avoid partnering with groups that might lead to a bad reputation, but more importantly we want to be careful that all partners present the love of Christ."

Bridging to the Community: Externally Focused

In addition to mentoring young women on a regular basis in her career, Jerrie is a part of the **Faithbridge** discipleship team for women, a member of a Grow Group, and she serves on a prayer team twice monthly as an Elementary Shepherd. There are about a dozen members of **Faithbridge** that are regular volunteers and supporters of Care Net. Care Net is also one of the Bridging Ministries under the leadership of Pastor Dan Slagle and Peggy Burdon that help the congregation to extend the message of the church.

Care Net has 1200 pregnancy centers and partners enthusiastically with churches across the nation to facilitate young mothers growing in Christ and their children as well. "Carefully chosen community partnerships can increase the mission and vision of your church," she adds. "As believers, we want to truly help others rather than just complete a task. We want to provide something tangible that they need while also pointing them to the cross -- adding value to their lives." She champions the idea of serving with excellence. "When hearts are changed, lives are changed and God is exalted."

Communication Power: 2016 Best Idea Contest to Generate Shareable Ideas

From a revamped website to a newly discovered shortcut or app, churches that share their "Best Idea" in the upcoming weeks might receive a prize and recognition at Annual Conference -- but more importantly, they can help other congregations leverage the power of effective Kingdom communication.

Scrambling to get their messages heard, churches are launching complex web sites, printing brochures, expanding their bulletin, using video, social media and face-to-face communication to reach their audiences. The church is having to face an information-crazed culture. Leaders are realizing they need a few "smart systems" to cut through the clutter.

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People need to be *reachable* before they are *teachable*, yet most feel they are overloaded with communication. How can they be reached? Great communication strategies help churches make a connection to the community and invite people into a place where they can experience changed hearts and lives.

How is your church communicating in a way that facilitates better communication? How are you getting members to take an active role? How is your church attracting visitors or engaging laity or the youth? What are you doing, offering, or saying that encourages life transformation, meets a need or raises awareness of an issue that impacts many?

What is Working for You?

The Communications Committee of the Texas Annual Conference is seeking to highlight “best practices” in congregations of all sizes across our region. In last year’s inaugural contest, one church submitted a movie/Bible study that attracted dozens of guests from the community. Another told about a pastor’s video blog (vlog) that allowed members and residents to learn spiritual truth in an authentic way. One of the entries featured a special video, and there were others that highlighted a special anniversary that yielded news coverage, and another that gave the insider view of a highly successful stewardship program.

“We know that the Texas Annual Conference is known for its leadership on many fronts,” notes Communication Director Paula Arnold. “We also know that there are pockets of communication greatness in our congregations and we want to celebrate those and share them with others to foster new ideas and creativity in the local church.”

How Can You Enter?

Before **April 15**, send an email to April Canik at acanik@txcumc.org, or package with your sample newsletter or project to the Conference Communications/attention April Canik, 5215 Main, Houston Tx 77002. Winners will be notified prior to Annual Conference at the end of May.

Description of your Communication Project (be as specific as you can):

(How was this idea developed? What did you set out to do and why? Was it well received?)

Entrant’s Name/Role in the Church:

Email/ Cell phone contact info:

Church Name/Average worship attendance:

Urgent need for flood buckets and volunteers

Over 1000 flood buckets have been delivered so far to accommodate victims of extensive flooding in the Southeast District and North District, and more are urgently needed. “Churches across Texas are stepping up in big ways but we are in desperate need for churches to make more flood buckets to replenish our supply,” shares Rev. Scott Moore. As shown in this television newscast, Rev. Sharon Sabom immediately opened a shelter at **FUMC Mauriceville** for displaced persons and relief workers, as well as a distribution center for flood buckets. Additionally, the

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Texas Conference has deployed Early Response Teams and volunteers in several regions but additional volunteer work teams are needed.

What can you do?

- Rev. Roger Garbs (903-938-6622) is leading the flood bucket effort out of FUMC Marshall;
- Volunteers available to work in Newton or Orange Counties along the Sabine River should contact Rev. Amy Walker at earthangel!1231@yahoo.com or 409-291-2237;
- Others that want to help with flood buckets or serve on a work team in Kilgore, Marshall, Caddo Lake area can contact Scott Moore at smoore@txcumc.org, understanding that cell and internet coverage might be somewhat intermittent.

A full story on the flood aftermath and response will be featured in the April 14 Cross Connection, so send information and pictures to acanik@txcumc.org.