

NORTH GEORGIA ADVOCATE

an edition of the United Methodist Reporter



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Two Sections
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EDITOR'S NOTE

New Advocate: Still Wesleyan, Still Christian

Welcome to the North Georgia Advocate, a new publication steeped in a long and proud tradition.

For 170 years the Wesleyan Christian Advocate provided coverage of news and events across the state of Georgia. In May, the final edition of the WCA rolled off the press. The long-running publication has been replaced by two new papers—the North Georgia Advocate and the South Georgia Advocate—dedicated to covering news in their respective conferences.

But don't let the new name mislead you, we are still Wesleyan and still Christian.

The new Advocate, published twice a month in partnership with the United Methodist Reporter, will include many of the same features you have come to appreciate through the years. We will now be able to focus more fully on news and events in North Georgia.

In addition, through the United Methodist Reporter, you will also receive important church news and developments from across the nation as well as the world.

Let us know what you think about the new North Georgia Advocate. We appreciate your patience. Keep in mind this is simply the first edition of a new newspaper. We will continue to make changes as we see opportunities to better serve you.

We look forward to hearing from you.

**Glenn Hannigan, Editor
North Georgia Advocate**

Ugandan children to sing across conference

STAFF REPORT

Their faces are radiant, voices filled with joy, singing songs of praise.

These children are eager to travel many miles to share a message of hope -- even across continents.

Members of the Hope for Africa Children's Choir, based in Mukono, Uganda, will be singing their way across North Georgia the last two weeks of June. The choir will be performing at the Annual Conference in Athens before visiting churches in various districts.

The children are from the East Africa Annual Conference, which spans five nations and 2.85 million square kilometers, with a population exceeding 116 million. They represent Humble Place United Methodist School, which opened in 2004 and serves many orphans and other vulnerable children. The school's stated mission is to provide quality education enriched with vocational skills, as well as a moral grounding for self-reliance and love of God.



The Hope for Africa Children's Choir performs during the 2008 United Methodist General Conference. A UMNS photo by Paul Jeffrey.

The purpose of the choir is to glorify God through music and to raise money for their mission efforts in Uganda.

Admission is free. A love offering will be taken at each

concert. There are many other opportunities to volunteer and give. People are invited to sponsor a child from the choir.

A sponsorship underwrites the costs of the tour, which

allows other donations to be funneled directly into Ugandan missions.

Donations can be made at www.ngumc.org/hope, where there is also a concert schedule.

Amendments address the makeup of the church

A much-needed restructuring or a complicated fix for something not broken? It all depends on whom you ask. Either way, decision time is near. Delegates to the North Georgia Annual Conference will be voting on 32 constitutional amendments that, to a large degree, address the fundamental makeup of the global church. North Georgia delegates will be meeting at the Athens Classic Center, June 16-18.

While there has been much

debate over the pros and cons of the proposed amendments, the two sides agree on one major point: The decision could have a profound impact on the future of the church. Advocates for the amendments say restructuring is long overdue, and necessary to reflect the new global nature of the church. Opponents say, if passed, the amendments would create greater bureaucracy and could result in a permanent division of the denomination.

Members of the North

Georgia Annual Conference, as well as delegates to the other 61 U.S. annual conferences and the 73 conferences in Africa, Europe and Asia will consider 23 amendments approved by the 2008 United Methodist General Conference, the denomination's top legislative body. The amendments, proposed by the Task Force on the Worldwide Nature of the Church, are for the creation of regional conferences to establish a uniform denominational structure.

The remaining nine amendments involve a number of issues, including church and conference membership and annual and jurisdictional conference composition.

Delegates may debate a proposed amendment but they cannot alter it. They must either vote for it or against it, as is. To become church law, the amendments must be ratified by two thirds of the total voting membership in all annual conferences worldwide.

The North Georgia Advocate Edition of the United Methodist Reporter is a ministry of the Conference Communications Office

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'I truly cannot imagine doing anything else. My sense of call to ministry is very strong.'

Bishop Mike Watson, who is preparing for his first Annual Conference since coming to North Georgia last September, recently took time from his schedule to respond to questions – some ministry-related and some personal – submitted by the North Georgia Advocate.

ADVOCATE: What has been your biggest surprise so far in serving the North Georgia Conference?

BISHOP WATSON: I continue to be amazed by the wonderful and Christ-like spirit of the laity and clergy of this great conference as they respond to God's call upon us to be the church. It is inspiring to see so many people seeking to be, and to make, faithful disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. There is so much going on that it is impossible to keep up with it all. People are serving Christ locally and globally every day. I am thrilled to be on the North Georgia ministry team!

ADVOCATE: How big of an adjustment has it been for you after spending so many years serving in South Georgia?

BISHOP WATSON: The adjustment has been relatively easy because of the gracious welcome that Margaret and I have received everywhere we have been in these first months in North Georgia. You know, South Georgia is a wonderful place, too, and being reassigned to stay in Georgia was a tremendous blessing for us. I am now in my twelfth year in this beautiful state. I was here for three years while in seminary at Emory, was in South Georgia for my first eight years as a bishop, and am

in my first year as bishop here in North Georgia. Margaret and I feel totally at home.

ADVOCATE: What is the biggest challenge facing this Conference?

BISHOP WATSON: There are several major challenges. Among them is the constant need to reach new people with the Good News of Jesus Christ across all racial, ethnic, cultural, economic, and generational lines. Part of the challenge here is the creation of new congregations and ministries, the reinvigoration and renewal of existing congregations and ministries, and reaching populations that are currently under-served by our United Methodist Church. While we rejoice that the United Methodist Church is growing in North Georgia, we are not keeping up with the population growth. We especially need to reach the younger and more diverse culture around us.


Another challenge is one of financial stewardship. Even during difficult economic times, can we even imagine what resources for ministry would be available if United Methodist people tithed?


Fundamentally, we do not have a financial problem, we have a financial stewardship problem. Until we faithfully commit our pocketbooks, we will not be able to do all that God has for us to do in North Georgia. Other issues that challenge us include staying current with technological advances that assist us in communicating the Gospel more effectively, developing leadership that is able to reach people of all ages and life situations, strengthening the ministry partnership of laity and clergy, and vital Christian ministry among the poor and marginalized both locally and globally.

ADVOCATE: What is one fact that few people know about you?

BISHOP WATSON: Our family's home in Birmingham is shown on national television commercials for Hampton Inn featuring neighborhood boys making amazing basketball shots. You can see these on www.sportsfeel-goodstories.com/2009/05/25/the-hampton-inn-basketball-commercials-teenagers-a-basketball-a-video-camera-and-you-tube/.


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Bishop Mike Watson and Margaret Watson say they have received a warm welcome from North Georgians.

Do you have a question you'd like to ask Bishop Watson?
E-mail it to advocate@ngumc.org. We will publish select questions and answers in future editions.

ADVOCATE: Excluding your time as Bishop, what do you consider your most blessed time in ministry?

BISHOP WATSON: God has blessed my life in too many ways to count throughout my 37 years in ministry; however, serving as the founding pastor of a new congregation for 11 years certainly was a rich blessing. We began with no conference money, no building, no land,

and no members. Margaret was the first one to join! Being part of an experience in new church development that has resulted in Covenant United Methodist Church, Dothan, Ala., becoming one of the strongest congregations in the Alabama-West Florida Conference was pure joy.

ADVOCATE: Other than the Bible, what book has most affected your thinking?

BISHOP WATSON: The Bible definitely is the book that has affected my thinking the most. I have a daily Bible reading plan that enables me to read the Bible through each year. I have also been greatly influenced by John Wesley's sermons and journal, by Henri Nouwen's "The Living Reminder," and "The Wounded Healer," and by Eugene H. Peterson's "Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity." I love to read and I read so much that it is difficult to say what one book other than the Bible has affected me the most.

ADVOCATE: How do you make time in your schedule for prayer and Bible study?

BISHOP WATSON: I have made a personal commitment to an hour of quiet time each day, usually in the morning, for prayer, Bible and devotional reading. I also try to do an hour of physical exercise each day. The North Georgia Committee on Episcopacy holds me accountable for these two commitments to spiritual and physical care.

ADVOCATE: What person had the most influence in helping you grow in your faith?

BISHOP WATSON: Without a doubt my parents had the most influence on my faith development. I was blessed to be raised

by wonderful Christian parents who taught me the faith through word and deed. I experienced the living Christ daily in our home.

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RETHINK

North Georgians are making 'church' a verb

By GLENN HANNIGAN

It's time for a little word association exercise.

OK, here we go. Read the following word—then pause for a second:

Church.
What is the first thing that pops into your head? No cheating.

If you are most of us, your initial thought either involves the physical building where you go each Sunday, or something involving the worship service itself.

But what if "church" also meant replacing leaky roofs for those in need? Providing free auto repair? Throwing block parties in neighboring communities? Can such a familiar word take on new meaning?

Early in May, the United Methodist Church launched "Rethink Church" a \$20-million, four-year campaign exploring the question: What if church were a verb? The global initiative is aimed at 19-to-34-year-olds, who research shows are increasingly moving away from mainline denominations.

As explained on UCom.org: "The (Rethink Church) campaign goal is sweeping and ambitious – to invite the church and those unchurched who seek spiritual fulfillment, to become more outwardly focused and engaged in the world. The campaign seeks to offer the church, not as a place to come to and stay within, but as a base of operation for expressing faith by moving out into communities and around the globe to become part of God's plan for world transformation."

Translation: What would happen if we knocked the walls down and carried church into the community? What if we all rolled up our sleeves?

You don't have to search long or hard in the North Georgia Conference to find examples of people turn-

ing church into a verb—and not only at Christmas or Thanksgiving.

An increasing number of Methodist churches are expressing a renewed enthusiasm for hands-on ministry, delivering meals to the elderly or sponsoring days of community service, where members go out and fix broken windows, replace roofs, paint or do general maintenance for those in need.

Some churches have developed ongoing specialty missions. McEachern Memorial UMC, in Powder Springs, has a car care ministry, where volunteers repair vehicles for the elderly and low income residents. The church has also given away dozens of cars that were fixed up after being donated.

Liberty Hill UMC in Canton (disclosure alert: it's my home church), has a mobile ministry truck that it regularly takes to the local family violence center to show movies – complete with popcorn and cold drinks -- for children and their moms.

City on a Hill in Holly Springs came up with an unusual Mother's Day outreach last month. The church arranged with a local gas station to allow volunteers to provide full-service chores for single moms, checking oil, cleaning windshields and paying for gas. By the end of the day the church had given away \$4,000 of fuel.

Fellowship UMC, in Paulding County, has been reaching out in various ways, including hosting neighborhood block parties.

"The service we do is more a blessing for us than for the people we do it for."

Bryan Fowler, Navo Church

"We'll get a call from folks in a subdivision inviting us in," said Pastor Kenny Ott. "We'll bring in a sound system and play music, grill some hot dogs, and set up a moonwalk and other family-friendly activities.

"We just want to get out and be active in the community. We want to be involved with civic groups and other churches."

Of course, before a church starts "rethinking" too much, it might want to first check the supply cabinet for rubber gloves.

Navo Church, in the Oakhurst community of Decatur, might take the prize for creative service. Navo – which in Hebrew means "we will go" – sets aside the second Sunday of every month for service projects.

In May, Pastor Bryan Fowler led his group of volunteers to various shops in the business district, where they walked in and politely asked if they could clean the bathrooms.

"We'd get a little half-smile, then they'd say, 'sure, knock yourself out!'" Fowler recalls. "We tried to be subtle about it. We didn't want to be a distraction or draw attention to ourselves. We simply want to do good things in the community."

The Navo group cleaned bathrooms in a half-dozen businesses, including a coffee shop, sports shoe store, and even a pub.

"The service we do is more a blessing for us than for the people we do it for," Fowler says. "We don't do any recruiting or put any pressure on people to participate. We experience God's love by doing service for others."

Has your church come up with creative ideas for getting out into the community and serving others?

We'd like to hear your story. E-mail us at: advocate@ngumc.org.

Roswell UMC's Kidz Zone gives gifts that keep on giving



Roswell's Kidz Zone raised more than \$2,000 for Heifer International.

Looking for that perfect gift for someone special? Ever thought of giving a water buffalo? How about a heifer?

Some children from Roswell United Methodist Church have done exactly that.

The children, part of Roswell UMC's Kidz Zone, wanted to purchase gifts that keep on giving. They recently raised money to buy a water buffalo, goat, cow (heifer), llama, and chicks for those in need around the world. They raised more than \$2,000 through bake sales, raiding piggy banks, and performing various chores.

Each new recipient of an animal donation made through Heifer International undergoes training in animal management. These living gifts help communities become more self-reliant.

RUMC's Kidz Zone—kindergarten through fifth grade—challenged one another to raise money to purchase the animals. On Sunday, May 10, the children celebrated their contributions to Heifer International. They also learned about this year's Vacation Bible School mission project: raising money for Bible verse translations in Madagascar.



North Georgia Notebook: Happenings in our conference

CCPI: Generous donor challenges others to increase giving

The Central Conference Pension Initiative (CCPI) recently received a \$500,000 gift from a generous donor in Georgia, with the potential for an additional gift later this year if Georgia churches respond with significant participation. The CCPI supports approximately 2,000 retired pastors, lay workers, and surviving spouses in the central conferences outside the United States, including Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe, according to www.ccpi-umc.org.

The donor has challenged the North and South Georgia Conferences to match the gift with a minimum goal of \$500,000. All church gifts and pledges received after May 7 will be counted toward the challenge. The hope is to raise more than \$1.5 million. North Georgia United Methodists have a chance to contribute to CCPI through the Mission Offering for Annual Conference. Get details at www.ngumc.org/ac2009.

For a glimpse into the life of someone who receives help from the initiative, meet Minerva Kekeh, surviving spouse of a Liberian United Methodist pastor, at www.ccpi-umc.org/stories/mkekeh.asp.

NGUMF: Celebrating 25 years of encouraging faithful stewardship

The North Georgia United Methodist Foundation has reached the 25 year mark of helping churches, agencies and individuals in the North Georgia Conference multiply their financial resources for missions and ministry.

The foundation's ministry plays an important role in the North Georgia annual conference because "the foundation models good stewardship and care for the resources with which God has blessed us," said Mike Watson, Resident Bishop of the North Georgia Area of the United Methodist Church. "The foundation encourages faithful stewardship by managing fund entrusted to it; by building endowments for future ministries; by providing investment opportunities for planned giving; and by working

with churches and agencies on loans and capital campaigns."

Foundation president Bob Fletcher expressed his gratitude for the support of North Georgia Methodists and pledged to "continue to identify new ways to enhance and expand our resources to better serve the North Georgia Conference's stewardship needs."

For more information on the foundation, call 770-449-6726 or visit www.ngumf.org, where a copy of the 2008 Annual Report is posted for review.

SNELLVILLE UMC: Learning to share the Good News in a diverse faith community

Gwinnett County, which Census records indicates is one of the most ethnically-diverse counties in Georgia, is home to people of many faith traditions, including

Islam, Hinduism, Mormonism and Jehovah's Witnesses. How well equipped are Christians to respectfully engage in dialogue and share the Good News of Christ? Through the month of June, Snellville UMC is offering a sermon series that examines key tenets of some religions being practiced in the area. The series began May 31, focusing on Islam.

The series continues June 7 - Hinduism; June 14 - Mormonism; June 28 - Jehovah's Witnesses. Each week the church will offer a book table, web resources, and articles to increase your knowledge and understanding of these other faiths.

MOUNT PISGAH UMC: Truett Cathy to speak at June 11 lunch

Truett Cathy, founder and president of Chick-fil-A and one of America's premier CEOs, will speak on "The 5 Secrets of Success" at Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church's WorkLife Pioneer Lunch Series at 11:30 a.m. June 11. Doors open at 11:15 a.m. The \$25 tickets are available online at www.mountpisgah.org through June 10.

Armed with a keen business sense, a work ethic forged during the Depression, and a personal and business philosophy based on biblical principles, Truett Cathy took a tiny Atlanta diner that was originally called the Dwarf Grill

and transformed it into Chick-fil-A, the nation's second largest quick-service chicken restaurant chain with more than \$2.64 billion in sales in 2007 and currently more than 1,380 locations. Chick-fil-A generates more sales in six days than most national chains produce in seven. Closing on Sunday is just one of the "principles before profits" ingredients in founder Truett Cathy's inspiring recipe-for-success.

"The WorkLife Pioneer Series is a quarterly event designed to encourage and inspire believers in living out their faith through their work by introducing them to pioneers who have paved the path before them," said Shawn Murray, director of WorkLife Ministries. Mount Pisgah is located at 2850 Old Alabama Road, Johns Creek, GA 30022.

FAIRVIEW UMC: Family reunion homecoming celebration planned

Fairview United Methodist Church-Ft. Oglethorpe will hold a Family Reunion Homecoming on Sunday, June 14, with a 10:45 a.m. service followed by covered dish lunch at noon. The speaker will be Page Petty Durham, a former member and a Certified Lay Speaker for the Murfreesboro District of the Tennessee Conference.

Special music will be presented by Rev. Ron Ragon, retired pastor of Brainerd Presbyterian Church in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

Fairview United Methodist Church is located at 2112 McFarland Avenue, Rossville, GA 30741. The pastor is Rev. Joe

Buffington. All members, former members and friends are invited.

IMPACT UMC: Church plant now meets at World Congress Center



Impact UMC now meets at Atlanta's World Congress Center in a space that accommodates 1,000 worshippers. The church that promises to "do church differently" has worshipped at Brown Middle School in the West End of Atlanta for two years. Members are excited about the possibilities of adding creativity to the worship experience in the new locale.

Services begin at 10 a.m. and noon in Building C on Level 3 in the Georgia Ballroom. Parking is free in the Red Parking Deck: http://www.gwcc.com/maps/red_deck.html. The Rev. Olu Brown is Impact's pastor. For more information, visit www.impactdoing-churchdifferently.org.

LIGHTHOUSE CHURCH: Registration for VBS

The Lighthouse Church has now opened registration for its summer VBS "Crocodile Dock." VBS will take place at 400 Windgate Road in Peachtree City (Peachtree City UMC's Windgate Campus) on 6-8:30 p.m. June 21 - 25. Register at www.lighthouseumc.net/vbs.



Jasper Russell, president of the Conference United Methodist Men, speaks during the groundbreaking service at Leigh Cottage at the United Methodist Children's Home in Decatur. The UMC Men have volunteered to do much of the rebuilding of the cottage that burned in 2007.

Visit ngumc.org to find and share information



By GLENN HANNIGAN

Build it and they will visit. And the goal is that they will visit very often.

Two months ago, the North Georgia Conference launched its newly fashioned Website—www.ngumc.org—with improved design, expanded content, easier navigation and enhanced search capabilities. Now, the challenge for the conference communications staff is getting the word out to both clergy and lay people.

"The new site is more functional in every way," said Tim McDaniel, Associate Director of Communications for the North Georgia Conference. "It not only has much better content that is updated often, but it is also much more practical and useful."

Among the features of the new site:

- Advanced search feature
- Regularly updated news
- Blogging capabilities
- Enhanced clergy and church locators

- Google Maps attached with church search
- The ability for local churches to add events to calendar
- The conference calendar can sync with Outlook

The calendar offers three different viewing options: Conference, District and Local Church. You can also view upcoming events in a traditional calendar format or as a list.

Three "Posting Boards" allow local churches to find and share information. The "Classifieds" section includes employment opportunities, free items, and listings of evangelists, speakers, worship bands, etc.

Other specialty features such as: "It Worked For Us," are designed to serve as a marketplace of ideas to help churches learn from one another.

"We feel like we made all the big improvements that we wanted to make," McDaniel said. "Now, we just need to encourage people to go to the site and see for themselves."

June 14 Lesson: Moses and Aaron Respond to God

By HERCHEL SHEETS

Lesson Scripture: Exodus 4:10-16, 27-31

Moses made one try after another to escape the call of God upon his life. Listen to his questions and objections, and see if you can identify with any of them: Who am I that I should go? I don't know enough; I don't even know your name, and wouldn't know what to say if they asked me the name of the god who sent me. Suppose they don't believe me or listen to me and say that you didn't really appear to me? I've never been much of a speaker and am not getting any better now that you have spoken to me. And then his final appeal: O Lord, please send someone else.

Was Moses' resistance motivated by fear of the task, by genuine feelings of inadequacy for it? He had left Egypt to escape royal fury and certain death; did he just not want to put his life on the line again? Maybe he had heard that those threatening his

death were out of power now, so he wanted to leave well enough alone and not wake sleeping dogs. Or did he simply not want to get involved? He was comfortable enough where he was. He preferred to stay there and not take on such a gigantic and dangerous job.

Who cannot identify with Moses in that situation? Who has never tried to escape some task or responsibility? What objections, excuses, or rationalizations have you used?

God's Promise of Adequacy

We cannot be sure exactly why Moses wanted to avoid the task to which God was calling him. His reasons may very well have been multiple, as is often the case with us. But notice the consistency of God's responses to Moses' objections: God kept telling him that he would not go alone; God would go with him.

When William Howard Taft was retiring as President on Inauguration Day, he said to his successor, Woodrow Wilson: "I'm glad to be going—this is the

loneliest place in the world."

We would think that about Moses' job as a shepherd in the Sinai Desert, wouldn't we? What place could be lonelier than that? But at least there his responsibility was for sheep and goats, not for a whole mass of people. God did not promise Moses that he would never be lonely if he accepted this call, but in one way after another God emphasized to him that he would not be alone in carrying out his divinely appointed task. He would be adequate for it, because God would be with him and would supply what he needed to do the job.

The Apostle Paul testified to his experience of God's adequacy when he wrote to the Philippians, "I can do all things through him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

When Two Work Together

For a time it seemed that Moses was not willing to trust God to go with him and to empower him for this task. Maybe he would be more accepting of the responsibility if someone

shared the load with him. Finally, in exasperation—actually Exodus says the Lord became angry with Moses—God told Moses that his brother Aaron would work with him. Moses claimed not to be eloquent in speech; so the Lord said that Aaron would do the talking for him. Moses would give God's message to Aaron, and Aaron would give it Pharaoh, to the Israelites, and to everyone else who needed to hear it.

Moses did not think he was the only one who could do the job. Aaron's strength would supplement Moses' weakness.

Here in the very beginning of the story of the formation of a special people, we see an example of how tasks for God are to be accomplished. They are to be accomplished together by people committed to God's purposes and goals. The weaknesses of one are to be overcome by the strengths of another. What is missing in one's knowledge and skill is to be supplied by another committed person. So what should be the attitude and motto of persons who are trying to do

God's work in the world? What about this? Together we'll do it!

Now That We Know God Cares

It is interesting that their fellow Israelites were the first persons Moses and Aaron told about the mission to which God had called them. They "assembled all the elders of the Israelites," and then Aaron told them what Moses had told him. "The people believed; and when they heard that the Lord had given heed to the Israelites and that he had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshipped."

Sometimes it may seem that God is nowhere around and doesn't know about our situation, our problems, our needs. But if a caring person comes on the scene, even without speaking many words, we may get the feeling that God is giving heed, that God has seen and knows. Then even if things don't immediately change to the way we want them to be, we may be moved to "bow down and worship." It makes all the difference in the world if we know God cares.

June 21 Lesson: Pharaoh ignores God's call

By HERCHEL SHEETS

Lesson Scripture: Exodus 5:1-9, 22-6:1

Are you surprised at the first response the Egyptian Pharaoh, possibly Ramses II, made to Moses and Aaron's request to let their people go? They requested permission to go into the wilderness to "celebrate a festival," and of course Pharaoh recognized the request as an alibi for escape.

It is interesting that Pharaoh's first response was similar to Moses' response when God spoke to him out of the burning bush. Moses pleaded ignorance, saying that he did not even know God's name. Pharaoh said, "Who is the Lord, that I should heed him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and I will not let Israel go."

Don't Know, Not Obligated

But Pharaoh had a lot more in mind than Moses did when Moses confessed ignorance about God. Moses felt incapable of representing God because of lack of acquaintance. Pharaoh was denying that he had any commitment or responsibility to the god these

slaves were asking freedom to go outside Egypt to worship. He was saying, in effect, "This god has no claim on me or control over me. I don't owe this god anything."

On the day after his second election as President, Abraham Lincoln said: "I should be the veriest shallow and self-conceited blockhead upon the footstool, if in my discharge of the duties that are put upon me in this place, I should hope to get along without the wisdom that comes from God . . ."

But Pharaoh felt no such need. He needed no help—at least not from the god these slaves were talking about. He could order and command whatever help he needed. Indeed, that was what he was doing. But he had no indebtedness to this Israelite god, and therefore owed nothing to him.

In the Bible, to know someone is to be intimately related to that person. The same is true of knowing God. If you know God, that does not mean that you know everything about God; it means that you are related to God, committed to God, ready to do what you think God wants you to do.

Of course, Pharaoh did not have that kind of relationship with the God Moses and Aaron represented. He was not interested in this God's purposes and goals. So he was ready to say "No" to anything having to do with this God.

You can't know God and then just ignore God's wishes, purposes, and demands. Maybe that is why so many in our day, too, are saying, in effect if not in actual words, "Who is the Lord that I should heed him . . .? I do not know the Lord, and I will not . . ."

Work, Not Worship

If Moses and Aaron expected immediate compliance with their request on the part of the Pharaoh, they were quickly relieved of their delusion. Not only did he vigorously affirm his denial of their request, he also demanded that they get back to work and issued new work requirements for the Israelites. They were to continue making bricks, but without the supply of straw usually provided for them. Instead, they were to collect the straw themselves, and still produce as many bricks as they had

been producing.

Pharaoh's view was that these slaves existed to do the work he wanted them to do. That was to be their priority. Nothing else—not even worship of their god—was to come before that.

At first the Israelites thought they had no choice. Pharaoh ordered them to work, and they thought they had to give first attention to that. It was not what they wanted to do, but it was what they thought they had to do. It was Pharaoh's priority for them, and so had to be their priority, too.

How many of us allow others to determine our priorities? We may say that circumstances sometimes determine our priorities, and there is certainly truth in that. But should anyone or anything cause us to make decisions that crowd God out of the primary place in our hearts and lives? Those slaves could not, at the moment, escape responsibility for doing the work Pharaoh demanded that they do, but did that mean that God could not still be uppermost in their minds and hearts? Work, not worship, is what Pharaoh said, but maybe at least a few of them said, "We'll

worship while we work, we'll focus on God even as we hunt straw and make bricks."

Choice Made the Difference

Moses and Pharaoh made different decisions about responding to the claims and the directives of the Lord. Would anyone say that their respective decisions were unimportant, that they did not matter?

If this Pharaoh was Ramses II, historians say that he had tremendous influence in the world of his day, but who except historians remember much about him today and who could say that their lives have been enriched in any way by his? But Moses' influence is different. He has to be counted as one of the most helpfully influential persons of all times. And the differences in the responses of these two men to the call of God made the difference.

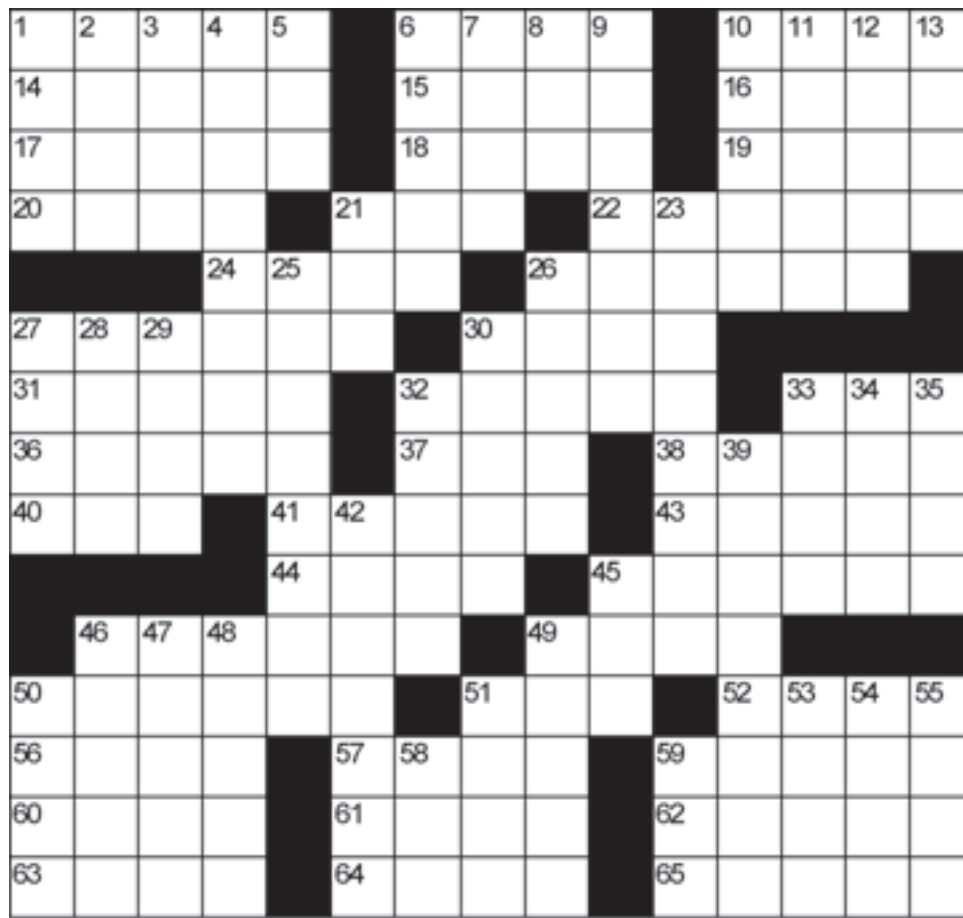
It does matter whether you say "Yes" or "No" to God's call upon your life!

Rev. Herchel Sheets is an author and retired pastor. E-mail him at HHSheets@aol.com

Georgia United Methodist Puzzler

ACROSS

- 1 Capital of Morocco
- 6 Pros
- 10 Invitation abbreviation
- 14 Quickly
- 15 Grating sound
- 16 Winged
- 17 In Telfair County, GA
- 18 In ___ of
- 19 Glen
- 20 Matched set
- 21 Quill
- 22 Indian groups
- 24 Parent groups
- 26 Granite-like rock
- 27 These "burning bush" plants enhance the beauty of Georgia's fall foliage
- 30 Baby's bed
- 31 'Love' (Italian)
- 32 Capital of Bangladesh



- 33 Resort hotel
- 36 Thicket
- 37 Rend
- 38 A Hindu's red dot
- 40 South southeast
- 41 Christian love
- 43 Habituate
- 44 Fades
- 45 Traps
- 46 Soft hat
- 49 Marshes
- 50 In Lamar County, GA
- 51 Cation
- 52 Post
- 56 It's time ___ (2 wds.)
- 57 Unfold
- 59 Stale
- 60 Voiced
- 61 Herr's wife
- 62 Red pigment
- 63 Mother of Jesus
- 64 Ceases
- 65 Herb
- 10 RADIUS
- 11 Thick slices
- 12 You'll find many _____ in North Georgia
- 13 President (abbr.)
- 21 Pops
- 23 Giving back
- 25 Bullfighter
- 26 Bunched fruit
- 27 Western Athletic Conferences
- 28 OT Book
- 29 Anticipate
- 30 Exp. with biblical roots; "Let the ___ fall where they may." (Ecclesiastes 11:3)
- 32 Theater
- 33 Mumble
- 34 Peel
- 35 In Polk County, GA
- 39 Since
- 42 One of the animals on the ark
- 45 Paul considered Timothy to be like a ___
- 46 Regional plant life
- 47 Author Poe
- 48 GA county
- 49 Sphere
- 50 Speck
- 51 Cain's grandson
- 53 Colorless
- 54 Detail
- 55 Greek stringed instrument
- 58 Pot
- 59 Bon ___: witticism

DOWN

- 1 Inclined plane
- 2 Capital of Western Samoa
- 3 Indonesian island
- 4 Condition of fig tree which produced no fruit
- 5 X
- 6 In Sumpter County, GA
- 7 Son of Adam and Eve
- 8 Compass point
- 9 Russian spacecraft

Classifieds

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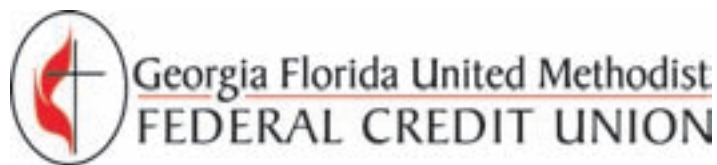
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THE UNITED METHODIST

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Wilke elected

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Spiritual influence

Jordanian mothers are shapers of beliefs | 4B



Why she stays

Feeling at home with Wesley | 6B

Section B

June 5, 2009



UNITED METHODIST NEWS SERVICE FILE PHOTO BY WAYNE RHODES

An anti-torture banner is displayed at the United Methodist Building in Washington. The denomination's social action agency is promoting an independent investigation into allegations of torture by the U.S. government.

Board urges inquiry on torture

BY WAYNE RHODES | *United Methodist News Service*

WASHINGTON—The United Methodist General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) is soliciting signatures to send to President Barack Obama and the U.S. Congress urging an independent commission of inquiry into allegations of torture by the U.S. government.

The petition campaign is in response to President Obama's statement that prosecution of anyone involved in torture may not occur because of "very complicated issues."

The campaign also is taking on urgency in light of a recent Pew Research Center survey that shows more than seven in 10 Americans continue to believe there are circumstances in which the torture of suspected terrorists is justified.

"Shame, shame, shame on any Christian who could imagine there is justification for torture against any

Majority of Americans say some torture justifiable, p. 8B.

human being," said Jim Winkler, top executive of the GBCS. "I cannot conceive in my wildest dreams of Jesus Christ giving any blessing to torture."

GBCS is part of a larger campaign raising the voices of religious communities opposed to torture.

■ See 'Torture,' page 8B

Death-penalty opponent calls others to action

BY BILL FENTUM
Staff Writer

INDIANAPOLIS—Sister Helen Prejean found her life calling in 1982, after she sent a letter of moral support to death-row inmate Patrick Sonnier.

Before long, the Catholic nun had visited Sonnier at the Louisiana State Penitentiary, agreed to be his spiritual advisor and went on to witness his execution in 1984.

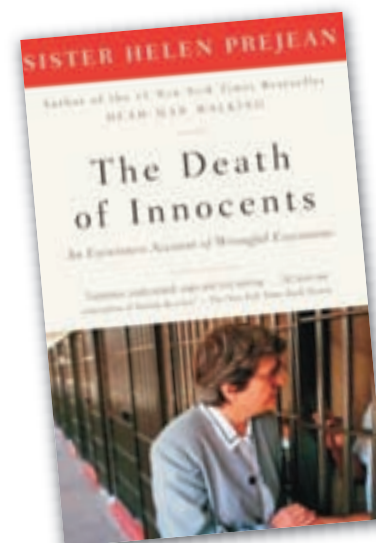
Then she began a personal crusade against the death penalty, and hasn't abandoned it since.

"This isn't a peripheral moral issue, but one that lies at the heart of who we are as a society," she told members of the Associated Church Press (ACP) during their May 6-8 annual convention. The ACP is the nation's oldest interdenominational press organization.

"Since 1976 we have gassed, shot, electrocuted and lethally injected over 1,000 human beings in this country, but it could just as well be in India. We're so separated from the reality that we feel no horror."

Her 1994 book *Dead Man Walking* tells the story of the Sonnier case. It was later adapted into an Oscar-winning film, an opera and a play.

Sonnier and his brother Eddie were convicted for the 1977 murders of teenagers Loretta Bourque and



■ See 'Opponent,' page 2B

FAITH WATCH

Methodists in Fiji warned on protest

The Methodist Church of Fiji has been warned not to call for a return to democracy in the country, where a military regime has ruled since 2006. The 200,000-member church—one quarter of Fiji's population—opposes the rule of Commodore Frank Bainimarama. The warning came after the arrest and release of a Methodist minister, the Rev. Manasa Lasaro, who had called for peaceful protests. A government spokesman said the regime would prevent the denomination's conference in August, if security forces "suspect any motive to cause instability."

Gallup finds most Americans 'pro-life'

Fifty-one percent of Americans described themselves as "pro-life" on the issue of abortion in a Gallup poll conducted May 7-10 among 1,015 adults. Forty-two percent identified as "pro-choice." The findings marked the first pro-life majority since Gallup's annual Beliefs and Values survey began in 1995. The change in pro-life identification occurred across Christian affiliations, Religion News Service reported, with a seven-point increase among Catholics and an eight-point increase among Protestants.

GOP support holds among churchgoers

Another Gallup poll shows that the Republican Party has lost support among all major demographic groups with the exception of regular churchgoers. Americans overall were almost evenly split in 2001, with 44 percent identifying or leaning Republican and 45 percent Democratic. The split is now 39-53, according to a January-April survey of more than 7,000 U.S. adults; however, a 52-percent majority of those who attend church weekly still identify as Republican. Support dropped from 46 to 40 percent among "nearly weekly/monthly" attendees, and from 38 to 29 among those who "seldom/never" attend.

—Compiled by Bill Fentum

■ **OPPONENT** Continued from page 1B

David LeBlanc in New Iberia, La.; Loretta was raped and both were shot in the back of the head. Courts sentenced Eddie to life without parole, while Patrick faced death in the electric chair.

Early on, Sr. Prejean studied the news reports, and wondered if she hadn't been foolish to befriend the Sonniers. But she believed they were still children of God in spite of what they had done, and were worth more than their terrible acts.

"Pat was remorseful," she said. "He asked me to pray for him, but told me that I shouldn't be there for the execution, that it might scar me emotionally."

"I said, 'I don't know what it's going to do to me, but you're not going to die without at least one face there that will show you love.'"

She remained with Sonnier in his last hours, and left the execution chamber dazed and shaken. "The mission was born that night," she said. "I had to share my experience because I knew statistics would never be enough to change people's hearts."

She finished her book in 1993, served two years as chair of the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty and launched a campaign to discourage doctors from assisting in executions.

She also founded Survive, an organization that provides counseling and support for murder victims' families.

"I made a terrible mistake at first," she said, "and kept away from David and Loretta's parents. I felt sure none of them would want to talk to me." It took an encounter at Sonnier's pardon board hearing—one week before the

execution—to prove that wasn't entirely true.

The Bourques walked past her after the hearing, averting their eyes. But David's father Lloyd LeBlanc stopped to introduce himself and his wife, Eula. "Sister," he said, "how can you spend all your time worrying about those two men and not think that maybe we needed you too? You can't believe the pressure we've been under."

Mr. LeBlanc, a Catholic, still struggled with anger and bitterness over the crimes, but had chosen to personally forgive the Sonniers.

"I've been a kind person all my life," he told Sr. Prejean, "and I didn't like the way it made me feel, to want them dead. So I decided no, they killed my son but I'm not gonna let them kill me."

He took Sr. Prejean to the murder site, and they knelt together in a nearby chapel to pray for everyone involved, including Patrick's mother Gladys Sonnier. Mr. LeBlanc later visited Ms. Sonnier before her death in 1991, to comfort her.

"Lloyd taught me what forgiveness means," Sr. Prejean said. "Not that you condone, but that love must not be overcome by hate. He's the hero of *Dead Man Walking*."

Family members of 62 murder victims lobbied the New Jersey Legislature in 2007 to repeal the state's death penalty. The bill passed; similar efforts have helped end the practice in other states.

Sr. Prejean noted that President Obama, in his book *The Audacity of Hope*, supports capital punishment in cases "so heinous . . . that the community is justified in expressing the full measure of its outrage." But she questions the ethnic and racial disparity



UNITED METHODIST REPORTER PHOTO BY BILL FENTUM

Sister Helen Prejean shares the story of her campaign against the death penalty at an Associated Church Press convention in Indianapolis.

among death-row inmates. According to Amnesty International, she said, half of all homicide victims in the U.S. are ethnic minorities, but 81 percent of inmates on death row are there because they killed whites.

"Can it possibly be," she asked, "that we value some of our victims' lives more than others?"

She believes courts pass death rulings based on two assumptions: that some individuals are not fit to live and the legal process can determine who those people are.

"We look at who was killed and who is outraged," she said. "But if a homeless person were murdered tonight on the streets of Indianapolis, can you picture any district attorney saying, 'A valuable person was killed and we're going to pursue the ultimate penalty'? No, because victims need to have some kind of status before the discussion even begins."

When people are convicted falsely, she added, it's almost impossible to later prove their innocence. Her book *The Death of Innocents* (Random House, 2005), profiles two convicts in Louisiana and Virginia, both put to death in the 1990s after numerous appeals.

The U.S. Supreme Court twice rejected the Virginia man's petitions, though Justice Harry Blackmun urged lower federal courts to review his claims and warned of "the gross injustice that would result if an innocent man were sentenced to death." But the Supreme Court decided in another case (*Herrera v. Collins* in 1993), that convicts have no right to submit new evidence if a statutory length of time

has passed since the trial. In Virginia that period is 21 days, which Sr. Prejean calls "outrageously short."

Christians, she said, need to step into the debate: "Who, if not us, should be the blazing fire that gathers people together and opens a dialogue with legislators? This is one of the moral tragedies of our day, the killing of human beings in our name."

Churches can start letter-writing campaigns, she suggested, or stage productions of the *Dead Man Walking* play and invite neighbors to attend. "Do it right in the sanctuary," she said, "and point to a symbol of execution—the cross—to bring it home to the gospel of Jesus."

In the secular world, debates on the death penalty focus mostly on deterrence vs. rehabilitation or pardon vs. punishment. Sr. Prejean, who has witnessed four more executions since 1984, sees it differently.

"The essence of Christ comes through to us in those moments," she said. "I mean, what are you for: Life or death? Compassion or vengeance? Love or hate?"

She urged ACP journalists to study the issue themselves, seek God's wisdom in prayer and then witness through their stories to the rest of the world.

"A mission has been entrusted to us," she said, "to wake people, leading them step-by-step past fear and prejudice, and always through story."

"Story, finally, is the only thing that can hold the truth for transformation in people's lives."

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UM CONNECTIONS

Mission Society elects new president

After a nationwide search, the board of directors of



Dick McClain

the Mission Society elected the Rev. Dick McClain as president, effective Dec. 1. The Rev. Phil Granger, president and CEO since De-

cember 2001, retires at the end of this year. Mr. McClain is an ordained United Methodist minister and the son and grandson of missionaries. The Mission Society was founded in 1984 and has more than 200 missionaries in 32 countries.

Arkansas UMs appear on Oprah

Dr. Dan Bell and his wife, Suzie, members of Eureka Springs UMC in Eureka Springs, Ark., were featured in May on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* in a segment highlighting Eureka Christian Health Outreach clinic. The Bells started the free medical clinic after attending a workshop at their church on how to be better "kingdom people." The clinic has treated more than 1,200 people since opening in November 2005.

Abrahamic faith leaders to gather

The Lake Junaluska Peace Conference, Sept. 20-22, will focus on the common heritage of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, with speakers describing what each faith tradition brings to the search for peace. Speakers include Archbishop Elias Chacour of the Melkite Catholic Church; Rabbi Arthur O. Waskow of the Shalom Center; Dr. Sayyid M. Syeed, of the Islamic Society of North America; and Dr. Lisa Schirch, professor of peace-building at Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, Va. Register online at www.lakejunaluska.com/peace.aspx or call (828) 454-6656.

—Compiled by Mary Jacobs

UMR's Wilke accepts Upper Room post

BY ROBIN RUSSELL
Managing Editor

DALLAS—Sarah E. Wilke, CEO of UMR Communications since May 2004, has been selected to be the world editor and publisher of the United Methodist Church's Upper Room Ministries, a division of the General Board of Discipleship (GBOD).

Ms. Wilke, 46, was elected May 26 by the 58 members of the GBOD, a general agency of the United Methodist Church, to head the Nashville-based ministry. In her capacity, she also will serve as associate general secretary for the Upper Room Division. She is expected to succeed outgoing editor and publisher Stephen Bryant, whose 12-year tenure ends in late July.

"We are sorry to lose Sarah, considering all that she has accomplished at UMR, but we're excited she'll be bringing her energy to such an important global ministry," said Shari Goodwin, board chair for UMR Communications, the parent company of the nationally award-winning *United Methodist Reporter*.

John Greenberger, UMR's chief financial officer since 2006, has been appointed interim CEO of the Dallas-based company.

International staff

In her new capacity, Ms. Wilke will lead an international staff of 81 and offices in Nashville and Johannesburg,

South Africa. The division publishes *The Upper Room*, an ecumenical devotional guide with a circulation of 2.2 million in 40 languages. Africa Upper Room Ministries prints nearly 150,000 copies of the devotional in Portuguese, English and Arabic, and it broadcasts a radio edition in Kiswahili, French and Zulu.

'We're excited she'll be bringing her energy to such an important global ministry.'

—Shari Goodwin, UMR board chair

In addition, 1 million copies of *Prayers for Encouragement*, a devotional for people suffering from HIV/AIDS and other serious illnesses, have been printed and distributed through Africa Upper Room networks.

"We at GBOD are delighted that Sarah Wilke is joining our staff," said the Rev. Karen A. Greenwaldt, the agency's general secretary.

"She brings tremendous enthusiasm and knowledge about religious publishing from the perspective of the *United Methodist Reporter* and UMR Communications. Her commitment to linking spiritual formation daily prac-



Sarah Wilke

tices with the practice of ministry in the church and the world is impressive."

Under Ms. Wilke's leadership, UMR Communications has significantly increased the circulation of the *Reporter* among United Methodist conferences and churches. And the nonprofit ministry has diversified to provide design services and targeted marketing services, as well as books, journals and other print and digital products for United Methodists and other denominations.

Ms. Wilke also spearheaded a collaborative relationship with the Women's Division of the denomination's General Board of Global Ministries to print and distribute its program materials. Other accomplishments during her tenure

include the introduction of variable-data printing and marketing, as well as a customized Web site, the UMPortal, for local churches, United Methodist conferences and general agencies.

"It has been such a joy to be a part of the ministry of the *United Methodist Reporter*, and to lead UMR Communications through change and growth," Ms. Wilke said. "I look forward to leading Upper Room Ministries with the same level of energy and enthusiasm."

Search committee

A search committee for a new CEO will be in place by mid-June, said Ms. Goodwin, the board president. "We're working hard to ensure the vitality of UMR," she said. "We completely believe that God is in this ministry."

Mr. Greenberger said UMR's unique offerings have sustained the company despite the downturn of the economy and the print industry in general.

"UMR offers communication tools and products to United Methodists that no one else does," he said. "We intend to continue our commitment to growth and improvement."

Before coming to UMR, Ms. Wilke served as director of urban strategies for the North Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church and as executive director of Wesley-Rankin

Community Center in Dallas, a United Methodist-affiliated mission. She holds an executive MBA from Southern Methodist University.

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Forming faith

Women in Jordan shape kids' spiritual formation

BY JEANETTE PINKSTON | *Special Contributor*

Editor's note: In 2008, Jeanette Pinkston traveled to Amman, Jordan with a group of 20 U.S. journalists from the Associated Church Press, Evangelical Press Association and the Catholic Press Association. Having just covered an interfaith panel on faith formation during the joint Preaching from the Center and Christian Educators Fellowship conferences in Albuquerque last fall, she was led to explore the role of Jordanian women in the faith formation of their children.

AMMAN, JORDAN—The role of Jordanian women in the faith formation of their children is remarkably similar to that of women in other faith traditions. Across the board, women are typically more influential in shaping the religious practice of children; Jordanian women are no different.

Lorain Rezeq works in the business center of a local hotel in Amman, Jordan. "Women are very influential in shaping the religious life of their children," says Ms. Rezeq. "Because they are so close to their moms, moms influence their children from ages 1 to 10. The children follow their mothers everywhere. They are so close to them. When you hear a mother saying her prayer, you say 'I am going to repeat it.'"



A Muslim woman walks with children in Rihab, site of the oldest Christian church in Jordan.

JUNE 5, 2009 | UNITED METHODIST REPORTER



Jordanian boys play near St. Georgeous Church in Rihab.

PHOTOS BY DOUG NYSTROM

Hasan Abu Nimah, a former ambassador to the United Nations, agrees. Mr. Abu Nimah, director of the Royal Institute for Inter-faith Studies, says a child will normally be more influenced by his mother than by his father because of the physical proximity to the mother.

"If a child is born to a Moslem mother and a Moslem father, the child will be Moslem," Mr. Abu Nimah said. "If the child is born to a Christian mother and Moslem father, (we have a lot of cross marriages here), that depends on the family itself. Sometimes they agree what the children will be when they have children. Sometimes they leave it to chance."

While Muslims are asked to practice their beliefs by performing certain acts of worship, actually doing so is a matter of choice, as in other religions. Some people are very strict in adhering to the religious practices of their faith, while others are not.



Former Ambassador to the United Nations, Hasan Abu Nimah, speaks to journalists.

PHOTO BY JEANETTE PINKSTON

Ihab El-Kady of the Islamic Center and University of New Mexico told a gathering of over 600 Methodist educators, lay and clergy, that women shape the faith of their young and ac-

tually have a bigger hand in faith formation than male members of that faith.

"I think it is safe to say that regardless of one's faith or background,

perhaps the most influential person or one of the two most influential, in the minimum, is the mother," says Dr. El-Kady. "On her shoulders, reality says [rests] the core of faith formation for

Dr. El-Kady says it is important for those who are foreign to Islam or who are not Muslim to separate what is cultural from what is Islamic when viewing people who are practicing

'I think it is safe to say that regardless of one's faith or background, perhaps the most influential person or one of the two most influential, in the minimum, is the mother.'

—Dr. Ihab El-Kady

the offspring—at least in the very first few years or stages of that person's life."

In Muslim and Christian communities throughout Jordan, women have a strong influence in the family, workplace, religion and society in general.

faith from a cultural perspective like those in the Gulf region or in North Africa.

"One needs to ask himself—or ask those who know Islam—what of these practices is actually cultural and what of these practices is



Women in Jordan figure heavily in their children's spiritual formation.

actually Islamic?" said Dr. El-Kady. Young children are trained in the rituals of Islam, Dr. El-Kady says, but Islam is not just the ritual; it is the faithful belief itself.

"Although we teach our children how to pray at the age of 7 and start teaching them how to fast at the age of 10, we don't go through the entire day. We go through segments of the day and a little longer as the child grows older. Then the length of the fasting actually extends until hopefully, when they reach puberty, they can actually fast the entire month of Ramadan.

"But the training for the ritual itself is only the surface. What lies in his heart is completely different. Nobody can tell what lies in your heart but yourself."

Ms. Pinkston is the director of media relations for the United Methodist General Board of Discipleship.



Three Jordanian women stop to chat in Amman.

UNITED METHODIST REPORTER | JUNE 5, 2009

Social etiquette rules: online and otherwise

BY ANDREW C. THOMPSON
UMR Columnist

Mention the word “etiquette” and most people think of Miss Manners or Emily Post. But etiquette is more than a quaint set of rules for how to navigate dinner parties, weddings and thank-you notes.

Etiquette describes the standard of how we treat one another in our most basic interaction. It sets the tone for individual relationships and community life.

As more and more of our interaction takes place online, we’re seeing whole worlds open up that we couldn’t have predicted just a few years ago. What started with e-mail and online chat rooms has evolved into real-time Twittering and sophisticated social networking sites like Facebook.

The online arena is just begging for a new etiquette. But who’s got the time? And who would teach it?

Virtual forms of community are flourishing even while real flesh-and-blood communities seem to be in decline. Coincidence? People are now using digital venues to interact in ways that used to be reserved for face-to-face conversations, telephone chats and letter writing.

Andrew Thompson

But the “old-school” forms of communication came with their own standards. My parents taught me to use “sir” and “ma’am” when addressing grown-ups, to avoid interrupting and to always be polite in conversation.

Mom also taught my siblings and me a very specific greeting when answering our home telephone (rotary-dial, of course): “Hello. This is the Thompsons’ residence. May I help you?” Mom’s required greeting served a dual purpose: It taught us kids basic courtesy through repetition, and it also was supposed to suggest something to the caller about the character of our family.

The proper etiquette for letter writing came in school. I’ll never forget the lessons in elementary school about the difference between a “friendly letter” and a “business

letter.” We got drilled on the use of acceptable greetings and closings, the content of the letter and even how to address the envelope.

But when interactions move from real space to cyberspace, everything gets muddled.

Part of the point of sending an e-mail is that it is both fast and relatively impersonal. You don’t have to go through the trouble of finding the “closing” that matches the intimacy with which you know the person you’re writing, à la letter writing. And you don’t even have to engage in the pleasantries of asking how the person’s day is going, à la the telephone. E-mail is short, sweet and to the point.

But that’s also its problem. E-mail is tone-deaf when it comes to communicating emotional intent. And the tool meant to make life easier can lead to the occasional office fracas, due to a too-hastily composed message.

Facebook’s very sophistication makes it an etiquette obstacle course. If someone writes on your wall, do you have to write back? How bad is it to ignore a “friend request” from a high school classmate? And what about “Facebook activism”—all those worthy causes that your friends want you to support by joining a group. Should I really feel guilty for hitting “ignore, ignore, ignore” every time I get invited?

Twittering is probably the worst of the lot. Not only is it voyeuristic by nature, but the 140-character limit on a tweet encourages bad spelling. Arrgh!

The online world is designed to limit (or even eliminate) etiquette. And for folks in the church, that’s going to be a problem. Bad online etiquette leads to bad face-to-face etiquette.

Our technology shapes us to believe that we have a chronic shortage of time. And when time is short, etiquette has to go out the (desktop) window.

The poverty of online community impoverishes our real communities. What does that mean for a people who believe that loving your neighbor is more than just a way to be polite?

The Rev. Thompson maintains a blog at www.genxrising.com. e-mail: andrew@mandatum.org.

Why I stay in the UMC

BY ASHLEE ALLEY
Special Contributor

Wesleyan theology is the reason that I became United Methodist.

I actually grew up American Baptist. Undercurrent themes of “once saved, always saved,” “right” behavior and God’s omniscience permeated my early faith. Sure, I saw love exhibited, but my developing spirit identified this as conditional on right behavior.

I chose to attend a small United Methodist college with an excellent biology program, as that was my intended major. My mom was all for it! She had grown up Methodist and had actually wanted to attend Southwestern College.

The first Sunday my twin sister and I were away at college, we decided to attend a United Methodist church with some new friends. The second Sunday we were going to go alone to the American Baptist Church (right next door to FUMC) and when we discovered that it had already started, we went instead to the Methodist church’s service.

It was youth Sunday and I was hooked! I saw that the youth had a ministry within the church and were willing to share their faith. Before long, the youth pastor had asked me and several other students to work with the youth group. I have been a regular worshipper at a United Methodist congregation ever since.

Fast forward a few years and you’ll find me in seminary, still worshipping in a United Methodist congregation, but not claiming that I was United Methodist despite the fact that I loved the idea of prevenient grace. It was not until I took a class on Wesleyan theology that I realized that I actually loved the theology of John Wesley!

Every sermon I read was my favorite, until I read the next one! His “heart-warming experience” warmed my heart, too, especially when I realized that he could bring together my own understanding of doctrine, personal piety and love for others, especially the outcast.

In studying United Methodist theology, I realized that I had truly been “home” all along. Sometimes I’m envious of someone who has a long Methodist heritage, but I feel blessed to realize that inasmuch as I feel like the United Methodist Church found me, I feel like I found it. I still make that choice today.

Right after college, I worked for the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA). I was on a plane coming from a training event when my seatmate, who was reading the Bible, started talking to me about my faith. He asked



COURTESY PHOTO

Wesleyan theology and a sense of calling keeps Ashlee Alley in the United Methodist Church.

what church I went to. I told him that while I wasn’t a member, I worshipped at a United Methodist Church.

He then very loudly asked, “You aren’t a lesbian, are you?” Flustered at both his pointedness and his decibel level, I stammered, “Uh, no! Just because I’m Methodist doesn’t mean that I’m gay!”

You see, we had just been in the news once again for our tension over homosexuality in the church. I was disheartened to hear that while there was much that could have been reported that was positive, this man pulled out what is not one of our prouder distinctives—our ongoing struggle about homosexuality in the church.

During that conversation, however, I found myself defending the church because even while we have our struggles, on our best days we are committed to staying in relationship with one another, despite the fact that our diversity causes us pain.

There are a few things about the United Methodist Church that grieve me, but among the worst is when the world to which we are witnessing sees us as fractured, exposed and fighting. It was in this conversation close to 10 years ago that I began to see God calling me to the United Methodist Church. Somehow I felt that the challenges of the church were my challenges, too.

I see great hope in the people called Methodists. However, I am not blind to the fact that our numbers in the U.S. are diminishing, and that we sometimes lose sight of our main

focus: to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

I often think we’re pretty caught up in issues that are not central to making disciples. But I see the stirrings of people all over the church, people who sometimes challenge us by making us confront our failures, and people who, with a theology rooted in grace, remind us that we have much work left to do and can actually make an impact.

We have a wonderful heritage. But our heritage must impel us forward into a trajectory rooted in Scripture and articulated in our Methodist doctrines. It is a faith that is not intended to stay in the church service on Sunday morning, but is sturdy enough to carry us into the streets, schools, boardrooms and even the bars.

There are many who have this hope, and I hope that the many will respond.

There are other reasons why I stay in the church, such as the connection that I’ve experienced locally, nationally and globally, or the concern for the least, the last and the lost that permeates our work in the world.

There are many other “family resemblances” that I could name, but the theology, the call and the hope are what got me here and are what will keep me here.

God is at work in the United Methodist Church, and I’m so glad that I get to be a part of it!

The Rev. Alley is director of campus ministry at Southwestern College in Winfield, Kan.

AGING WELL

Our passion can change things

BY MISSY BUCHANAN
Special Contributor

A well-behaved Chihuahua dressed in an angel costume came to the worship service in a skilled nursing center. He curled up in the lap of an elderly woman who stroked him as she sang familiar hymns.

Just a few steps away, a 2-year-old sat in a stroller while her mother served Communion to a widow whose hands trembled.

Following the benediction, the toddler got out of her stroller and began to entertain eager residents. The dog continued his own unique ministry, moving from lap to lap.

Every month, the scene is repeated in 25 different senior care centers in the Kansas City area, though not always with a dog and a toddler. Twenty worship teams from Silver Link Ministries of the United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kan., bring church to older adults who are unable to attend Sunday services.



Missy Buchanan

For many elderly residents, the worship service is the only connection they have with a church. Some are members of Resurrection or have grown children who are members. Others are disconnected from their own churches or have no church affiliation.

All are invited to come and remember their faith.

Silver Link pastor Karla Woodward says that each service is shaped by the

level of care required by the residents. “Older adults in an independent living facility generally have different needs than those in assisted living or skilled nursing centers,” says Ms. Woodward, a former geriatric nurse. “We adjust the message and format accordingly to fit each group, even those with dementia.”

I think you’d have to be a bump on a log not to get excited about older-adult ministry when talking to Karla. Her passion, rooted in childhood, is unmistakable and contagious.

As a 13-year-old girl, she went with a church group to visit elderly residents in a small-town nursing home. That visit became the spark that would later flame into a multi-faceted ministry for frail older adults in one of the largest United Methodist churches in the U.S.

Even so, Ms. Woodward’s journey to Silver Link Ministries has not been without its challenges. As a staff member in another area of ministry at Resurrection, she had begun to experience burnout. The Rev. Karen Lampe, congregational care pastor, recalls that Ms. Woodward was about to quit. Ms. Lampe alerted senior pastor, the Rev. Adam Hamilton.

“Karla was too valuable to lose,” she says. “We just needed to re-align her position with her gifts and passion.”

Immediately, Mr. Hamilton invited Ms. Woodward to dream about a ministry to, for and with frail older adults. And dream she did.

Not long after, Ms. Woodward stepped into a full-time staff position with Silver Link Ministries.

More recently, the Center for Ministry with the Frail was created, fulfilling another of her dreams. The Center

offers resources to assist others who want to serve the frail. Today Ms. Woodward supervises two seminary interns, one retired pastor and more than 100 laypersons who serve on the Silver Link Ministries team.

Ms. Woodward and her team made over 30,000 contacts with people in 2008. Last year, she became a licensed local pastor, enabling her to administer the sacraments and participate in funerals for older adults she has served.

She is now attending seminary to become a deacon, even as the ministry continues to evolve and grow.

When Ms. Woodward realized that some older adults wanted to worship in a church setting but were uncomfortable with bustling Sunday morning crowds, Silver Link began hosting a Friday worship service in the church’s chapel. Now, area senior care centers bring older adults to the church once a month for the special worship service, where Silver Link volunteers help them in getting off the buses and vans and into their seats.

Ms. Woodward also knew that as people become more frail, they struggle to find purpose. In response, she has found ways for older adults to minister to others.

Each week, the older adults are provided a large-print prayer letter with prayer requests from members of the congregation. If the older adults are unable to read the letter, a member of the Silver Link team will read it to them and lead them in prayer.

Ms. Woodward has also developed a monthly Order of Worship that is available for download at www.cor.org/cmf. There’s a daily devotion which older adults can hear by dialing toll free 866-702-1585.

Smaller congregations may be quick to rebut that Silver Link is successful because Resurrection is a large church with vast resources. But Ms. Woodward disagrees.

“It is not about church size,” she says. “If a good system is in place, churches of any size can do this ministry.”

So why does Ms. Woodward do it? “You have to believe these frail elderly are worth it, that their lives have value,” she says. “In your heart, you have to know that what you are doing matters.”

Ms. Woodward knows that what she’s doing matters a lot. She gets it. As the song goes, it only takes a spark.

Ms. Buchanan, a member of FUMC Rockwall, Texas, is the author of *Living with Purpose in a Worn Out Body* (Upper Room Books).



COURTESY PHOTO

Karla Woodward’s passion for working with the elderly is contagious, says Missy Buchanan.

REFLECTIONS

A reminder to be respectful, especially when we disagree

BY BISHOP WOODIE W. WHITE
UMR Columnist

The phrase “irreconcilable differences” came to my attention years ago in relationship to divorce settlements. It simply was a way of summarizing the reason why two people had determined that their marriage had ended.

Issues in the relationship and marriage had come to a place that living together was no longer a viable option. The couple chose not to make public those issues, however,



Bishop Woodie White

and simply used the phrase “irreconcilable differences.” A few weeks ago, President Barack Obama spoke of that kind of tension when he delivered the commencement address at Notre Dame University, amid much public controversy and protest demonstrations. Some “pro-life” persons thought that the president should not be invited to speak at a Catholic university because of his “pro-choice” position on abortion. And many objected to the university awarding him an honorary degree.

The president devoted a section of his address to the protests—not on the merits of one position over another on abortion, but rather on public discourse. How should Americans engage in public debate on issues with which they fundamentally disagree?

“The fact is that at some level, the views of the two camps are irreconcilable,” he noted.

It is a lifelong challenge to address those issues where there appear to be fundamentally different points of view, whether in a marriage, personal relationship, a congregation or a denomination. How do you address such issues?

Of course, they must first be acknowledged. They must be taken seriously.

Mr. Obama observed that while opposing views would and should be presented with passion and conviction, they could be done “without reducing those with differing views to caricature.”

Then he suggested a model: “Open hearts. Open minds. Fair-minded words.” Sound familiar?

Even in the face of irreconcilable differences, often we can find ways to co-exist—in a marriage, congregation, denomination or nation. Of course, it depends on the issue and the nature of the core value.

Co-existence does not mean relinquishing position or principle, however. What it does mean, in the words of the president, is that there should always be “friendship, civility, hospitality and especially love.”

These words are a good reminder to those who struggle with opposing and contradictory “truth.” These words are certainly instructive in a denomination that has long sought to be a place where people with differing minds—yet who share a like heart—can find room for common ground and unity.

These words may also help those who have committed themselves to a life together, until death, in achieving a lasting relationship.

“Open minds” are not empty ones! Conviction must have intellectual and moral integrity, yet also leaves open the possibility of seeing new truth, revelation and principle. Most of all, it means trying to see what others see and understand, even when you differ.

“Open hearts” means you understand that even those with differing views, convictions and passions are of intrinsic value. Even people you think are wrong can still be loved unconditionally.

“Fair-minded words” suggests that in discourse and argument words are chosen with care. Words should be chosen to persuade, with the hope others may see the “truth” of one’s position, but not to diminish the other person. To this end, there are many words and phrases that have characterized for too long the debate on certain sensitive and controversial issues, and that should be eliminated from discourse. They hinder, not help discourse!

It is always good to be reminded how we should behave as citizens and as persons—and even as United Methodists.

Thank you, Mr. President, for the reminder!

Retired Bishop White is the Endorsing Agent for Chaplain Ministries and bishop-in-residence at Candler School of Theology.

Poll: Majority believe some torture justifiable

BY G. JEFFREY MACDONALD
Religion News Service

While elected officials and cable-news pundits have been debating whether torture of suspected terrorists is effective, legal or constitutional, a moral question has loomed in the background: Is torture ever justified?

Most Americans say yes. A Pew Research Center survey of 742 Americans in April found that 71 percent believe torture of suspected terrorists is justified, at least on rare occasions. Solid majorities of every subgroup, including religious affiliation and worship attendance, said torture could be justified.

Ethicists and other thinkers are weighing the conditions, if any, where torture could be acceptable. What's emerging is a rough outline of what could be termed a "torture doctrine," vaguely reminiscent of Christianity's 1,500-year-old Just War theory.

That theory starts with a number of questions: Is war really necessary? Is it likely to succeed? Are there other alternatives? Here's how similar questions might apply to moral dilemmas surrounding torture:

Is torture ever permissible?

The United Methodist Church's Social Principles state torture for any purpose violates Christian teaching and must be condemned. The church's social action agency is asking United Methodists to sign a petition urging an independent commission of inquiry into allegations of torture by the U.S. government.

The Rev. Richard Killmer agrees. He is executive director of the National Religious Campaign Against Torture, a coalition of more than 250 religious organizations.

Torture "is a violation of the respect and honor that every human being is entitled to," Mr. Killmer said. There are better methods, including appealing to suspects' humanity and the idea that needed information "might be important to saving innocent lives."

Others disagreed. Michael Levin, a philosopher at City University of New York, said he stands by his 1982 essay, "The Case for Torture." In it, he argues: "there are situations where torture is not merely permissible but morally mandatory."

For those with a utilitarian philosophy—the idea that the moral course is the one that accomplishes the greatest good for

the greatest number of people—torture may at times seem justifiable. The conditions, however, can vary. Is the detainee conspiring to commit a heinous crime, such as mass murder?

John Kleinig, director of the Institute for Criminal Justice Ethics at John Jay College in New York City, posed a hypothetical scenario: What if a bomb were sure to go off and kill many unless officials were able, through the use of torture, to obtain information essential to defuse it?

"We are never going to be in position to know what the ticking-bomb argument requires that we know," Dr. Kleinig said in an e-mail. Officials would have to know, for instance, that a real bomb will certainly go off unless defused, but he expects such certainty isn't ever going to transpire in real life.

Would torture yield better information than any other method?

The notion that torture generates useful information is widely contested. President Obama, among others, has rejected the idea on the grounds that the tortured will presumably say almost anything to make the pain stop.

Yet even those who oppose torture on moral grounds say they nonetheless consider the prospects of securing high-quality information in certain cases.

"If I were the mother or grandmother of a child who might have been saved had information been garnered concerning a bomb placed in a school, I would no doubt be very



Jean Bethke Elshtain

angry that harsh things weren't done," said Jean Bethke Elshtain, a University of Chicago political philosopher.

"After all, if one saw a person running into the school with a bomb, he could be shot dead on the spot. Still, there is something in me that says 'no'—a decent, human rights-respecting society cannot go down this path, no matter what the provocation."

Would innocent lives likely be saved as a result of torture?

"If life is so valuable that it must never be taken," Dr. Levin argues, "the lives of the innocents must be saved, even at the price of hurting the one who endangers them." He compares

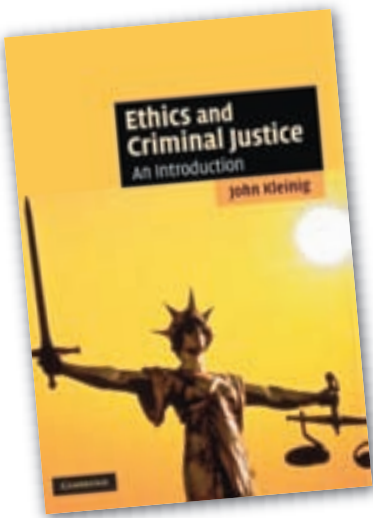
torture to assassination and pre-emptive attack—that is, "an acceptable measure for preventing future evils."

Some worry, though, about an ends-justify-the-means morality that legitimizes something reprehensible on the grounds that it could save innocents. Ronald Hallman, director of the criminal justice program at Roberts Wesleyan College in Rochester, N.Y., offered the example of dropping atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki to end World War II. At the time, it was justified as a way to spare American lives and bring the war to a swift end.

"Can we sit here today and say, 'Well, that was the right thing to do because we saved all those lives? Maybe,'" Mr. Hallman said. "But we're now the only country that's ever used a nuclear weapon. That bothers me a lot. It's hard for me to morally justify actions that torture, injure or potentially kill people except under the most extreme conditions."

Dr. Elshtain noted how Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer plotted to kill Adolf Hitler, even though he knew planning to take a human life—even Hitler's—was morally wrong. But Bonhoeffer suggests in his "Ethics" text that necessity sometimes prevails.

"Harsh necessity may require harsh measures," Dr. Elshtain said. "There are things that one should *not* try to justify—terrible and tragic things . . . one throws oneself on God's mercy and seeks forgiveness, for one is certainly a sinner."



■ TORTURE Continued from page 1B

"It's time for people of faith around the world to stand up and let their voice be heard," said Bill Mefford, director of the agency's human and civil rights work area. "Torture in any form, whether psychological or physical, is dehumanizing to the victim and to the perpetrator."

UMC stance

The United Methodist Social Principles state that torture for any purpose violates Christian teaching and must be condemned. According to "Opposition to Torture" in the 2008 *Book of Resolutions* (No. 6120), United Methodists believe: "Our commitment to human rights is grounded in the conviction that each and every human life is sacred. Therefore the United Methodist Church endorses legislative and judicial remedies for the use of torture and illegal detention . . . such as the appointment of special counsels [and] appropriate investigations." A report from the International

Committee of the Red Cross has documented U.S. activities that it characterizes as torture. The report demands U.S. authorities investigate all allegations of ill treatment and take steps to punish the perpetrators where appropriate.



Jim Winkler

Last month, a Senate Armed Services Committee report said senior officials in the U.S. government solicited information on "aggressive techniques" to use against detainees. It said Justice Department memos attempted to set a legal precedent for torture, where there was none, after the aggressive interrogations had already begun.

Some political figures, including leading Democrats, have argued against a special commission of inquiry because they said it would appear less of a

bipartisan effort to seek the truth than a Democratic effort to seek "retribution" against the former administration.

Much of the national policy debate has centered around which activities constitute torture, and whether there is a moral argument for more aggressive interrogation practices if they can prevent the deaths of innocents.



Bill Mefford

GBCS supports an independent inquiry. "How do we bring reconciliation and healing if we avoid looking for the truth behind how it happened?" asked Dr. Mefford. "We must acknowledge our corporate sins that allowed torture to happen and move forward so the truth will set us free from our tortured past."

Signatures for the petition are being gathered at [\[gbc.org/UMsDoNotTorture\]\(http://gbc.org/UMsDoNotTorture\). The campaign coincides with June's "Torture Awareness Month."](http://www.umc-</p>
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The June observance is a program of the National Religious Campaign Against Torture. In three emphases for the month, the campaign said it will lobby for a commission on inquiry, putting into law key provisions of President Obama's executive order banning torture, and expanding the belief that torture is always wrong.

Truth sets us free

Dr. Mefford said last year's emphasis was to end torture by U.S. authorities. "This year's is to open an inquiry into whether persons should be held accountable for what the previous administration has acknowledged as 'enhanced interrogations,'" he explained.

Most attention on the United States' use of torture has focused on its signing the 1949 Geneva Conventions that protect prisoners from "cruel treatment and torture."

The United States also signed the "U.N. Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, Degrading Treatment or Punishment." That convention specifies each nation shall ensure acts of torture are offenses under its own laws.

The convention also declares "no exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or a threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification of torture."

The petition calls for a commission of inquiry, but also includes a personal pledge to educate, empower and engage others in the signers' communities about the issue of torture and shining a light on past actions.

The campaign's Web page, www.nrcat.org, offers activities congregations can do during Torture Awareness Month.

Mr. Rhodes is director of communications for the GBCS.