

Lenten Greetings,

The events of the past five+ weeks have been a blur with the trip to Liberia and the death of my father. It has been hard to process everything, but I have found perspective as I have gone back to read some of the reflections I recorded en route to Liberia and during my time there. I will be sharing in this month's newsletter and in the months ahead some of those reflections. More than learning something about my perspectives on faith in life and in Liberia, I hope it will nudge you a bit to take yet another step in your own faith journey.

Journal of Reflections – Liberia Trip - Saturday, February 10, 2007

In less than 9 hours of flight time and almost as many getting to and waiting in airports, I was thousands of miles from the familiar. The distance from Bobbie—wife, friend, soul mate—from our two adult children and from two precious grandkids, and from my Dad was more than it had ever been. And today was only the first day of traveling that would take me further away to Liberia.

Yet in the time of flight—with the seat getting harder and harder, and my sitting still tested to its limit—my reading of Gregg Clapper's book, "Living Your Heart's Desire", while listening to the songs of Michael W. Smith and Robin Mark, moved me to another awareness. I felt an overwhelming sense of gratitude for God's grace extended to me in my life and ministry—in the face of all my feeble efforts and mistakes in judgment on occasion. Alongside it was the realization that who I am and what I am seeking to become in my journey toward God has not been synonymous with my service as a United Methodist clergy. The positions of pastor, and now superintendent, have only been arenas in which I have worked through my call. The work done in seeking to draw others to Christ (in faith and discipleship) and in church building (structural and metaphorical) was not the primary work in which I was engaged. That work really had as much to do with how God was calling me to live as it did with what I was being called to do...or what I will ever be called to do.

How I live each day of this life is to honor God. (Period)

How I use my gifts in ministry is to honor God. (Period)

How I am able to become like Jesus will always honor God! (Exclamation Point)

That is my call...my life's work.

As Robin Mark stated in one of his songs:

“When its all been said and done.
There is just one thing that matters:
did I do my best to live for truth,
did I live my life for you...”

Amazing the perspective I found at 35,000+ feet...away from all the doing.

Keith

APRIL

- 1 6:30 pm Los Amigos Del Norte Lent Service at Trinity
- 6 7:00 pm Los Amigos Del Norte Lent Service at Wesley
- 10-12 Cabinet
- 15 District Celebration at Normal Calvary
- 17 9:00 am Los Amigos Del Norte at Trinity
- 23 10:00 am Clergy area leaders at District Office
- 24-26 Cabinet
- 29 12:00-2:00 pm The Great Ingathering at Dwight



Oren Banks	04-02	Roberta Kerr	04-16
Julie Alderman	04-07	Steve Anderson	04-18
David Boggs	04-08	Oliver Zivney	04-24

- APRIL NEWS -

DISTRICT CELEBRATION

As a part of an annual celebration of ministry held by the VRD, this year we welcome Christian singer/songwriter Ken Medema in concert at the Calvary UMC in Normal on April 15. Celebration 2007, *Spreading the Fire*, will begin at 1:00 p.m. with a ministry fair highlighting the UM ministries located everywhere in the district from local churches, to camping, to an automobile racing ministry, and more. In addition to displays featuring these, Cokesbury will offer a store complete with books, curriculum, music, worship resources, and supplies for carrying out effective and vital ministry.

Rounding out this celebration, Ken Medema will perform in concert at 2:30 p.m. Blind since birth, Medema has a stirring and unusual view of the world that he shares in his songs as they apply to the Christian life. The program will include his performance of many of his own well-known songs – old and new – along with a children’s choir made up from young people from the Bloomington and Normal UM Churches. For a special part of the program, Ken will invite all the children in the audience to help him perform a song to two! Also, all who come will be treated to his storytelling and incredible improvisational skill as he “writes” exceptionally inspirational songs on-the-spot using words suggested by the audience. Ken’s gifts and his sharing of them are not to be missed! You can hear and learn more about Ken Medema at www.kenmedema.com.

This free concert will be open to the public and will be underwritten by a love offering to be received during the intermission. Lunch will be available for \$5.50 to those who call Sandy at the District Office by April 9th. We hope to see many there to share in our desire to spread the fire of the Holy Spirit in the VRD and around the IGRC.

*Rev. Brian Caughlan
District Leadership Team*

THE GREAT INGATHERING 2007

God’s Blessings! We are preparing for the Great Ingathering scheduled for April 29th from 12:00 – 2:00 pm at the Dwight UMC. A packet has been sent out to every church in the district with the details needed to make this mission a success. Please get this packet into the hands of your representative of UMM as soon as possible. If you do not have an active UMM’s group, please get this to your Lay Leader and ask them to spearhead this district wide mission.

Last year we filled 5 large straight trucks with boxes of donations. This year we hope to do as well or better. So let’s all take advantage of this project to clean out closets of clothes that we no longer need. Make sure everyone

understands that the goods are to be boxed not bagged. Boxed items pack much better in the large trucks. Good furniture is wanted. Good and wearable clothes and shoes are needed. Please, no refrigerators, air conditioners or stoves.

The key to a successful Great Ingathering is publicity. Please get the word out through your local paper. Making announcements in your church service and newsletters will also be helpful. Reading through the pamphlet is the best way to understand what the Great Ingathering involves.

Also, from 12:00 – 2:00 pm, there is a Great Ingathering meal available hosted by our youth, so come hungry and enjoy a great meal after you drop off your donations. Thank you.

VRD UMM
Verlin Karstens

- FOR YOUR INFORMATION -

GEARING UP FOR 2007 SEASON

The UM Motorsports Ministry is preparing for a season of reaching out to people with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

During the winter months, the ministry team has been hard at work planning the racing and appearance schedules, gathering material to pass out at the events, and working on the two race cars. The ministry is also looking at adding a third car that could be run on the local dirt tracks within the Conference. The modified stockcar is ready to race. Pastors Mark Canada and Mark Amenda will be traveling to Aster, Ohio this month to pick up a new power plant from engine builder, Larry Lalonde. Larry has come onboard this year to provide an engine that will produce over 800 horsepower for the Outlaw Sprint Car. Larry has been very helpful in giving of his knowledge, labor and racing parts.

The group is seeking support from individuals, churches, and companies to take this dynamic, fast paced, evangelistic ministry to a higher level. The ministry is now offering a “Racing Partners in Ministry” program for those who would like to come onboard to reach millions of people for Christ. Last year the UM Motorsports Ministry reached out to over 7.8 million people by personal appearances and television. This year the goal is over 16 million people being exposed to the saving grace of our Savior, Jesus Christ, inviting all to the Lord’s Table and to attend their local UMC. If anyone is interested in joining, please contact us.

The UM Motorsports Ministry will kick-off the season at the VRD Rally and Celebration on April 15. See you there!

“Racing to Reach People for Christ”

Rev. Mark Amenda, 1607 Lucy St., Streator, IL 61364, Phone: 815-672-8932, email: amenda@udnet.net

Racing and appearances tentative schedule:

- April 15 VRD Rally and Celebration – Normal, IL
(sprint car)
- 27 Grundy Co. Speedway-Morris, IL (stock car)
- May 4 Grundy Co. Speedway-Morris, IL (stock car)
- 11 Grundy Co. Speedway- Morris, IL (stock car)
- 18 Grundy Co. Speedway-Morris, IL (stock car)
- June 6-9 IGR – Annual Conference (sprint car)
- 16 Grundy Co. Speedway-Morris, IL(sprint car)
- 29-30 Grundy Co. Speedway-Morris, IL (stock car
and sprint car)
- July 6 Route 66 Raceway (World of Outlaws
national televised event on ESPN2) Joliet, IL
(sprint car)
- 13 Grundy Co.Speedway-Morris, IL (stock car)
- 14 Grundy Co. Speedway-Morris, IL(sprint car)
- 28 Rockford Speedway-Rockford, IL (stock car)
- Aug. 4 Grundy Co. Speedway-Morris, IL (sprint car)
- 17 Grundy Co. Speedway-Morris, IL (stock car)
- 18-19 Ridge Farm UMC-Ridge Farm, IL (sprint car)
- Sept. 1 Grundy Co, Speedway-Morris, IL (sprint car)

SCHOOL OFFERING



Back row: Phyllis Bellot, Para-professional; Donna Folwell, Kindergarten teacher; Gina Weber, Second grade teacher; Diane Kerber, Fourth grade teacher; Tami Schroen, Para-professional
Front row: Chatsworth Elementary students: Jaylyn Brauman, Brianna Koerner, Olivia Weber, Autumn McCure, Sam Wever and Alex McCure

The Chatsworth UMC has set goals for 2007 to help with the education of children in our community and in the country of Liberia. In February we took an offering of supply items identified by teachers at Chatsworth Elementary as things that would improve their ability to teach and care for the children in their classrooms. Boxes filled with pencils, scissors, staplers, tape dispensers, garbage bags, storage bags, notebook paper, construction paper, disinfecting cleaning wipes, crayons, markers and CD players were then dedicated and presented to Chatsworth Elementary teachers and para-professionals at the March 4 worship service. Plans are now underway for a fundraiser meal in May to raise more funds to be split between Chatsworth Elementary and scholarships for elementary and secondary students in Liberia.

Rev. Ann Champion

LET'S GET FRIENDLY!

Last July, the Congregational Development Team of the IGRC decided to explore the feasibility of a new church start in southeast Bloomington, IL. Now, after months of research, development, prayer and learning, Jamani UM Ministries is beginning to take shape. Jamani (pronounced *jah-mon-ee*) is one of several Swahili words that can be translated *friends*. Jamani UM Ministries (JUMM) is all about making new friends.

It is no secret that mainline churches continue to age and shrink. And as we do, our worldview becomes smaller and more disconnected with the very people we would love to see in our pews. Neither is it any secret that reaching youthful parishioners is becoming an increasingly difficult task. Dan Kimball, Senior Pastor of Vintage Faith Church, Santa Cruz, CA and author of *They Love Jesus, But Not the Church* aptly states, "We must recognize the Christian bubble and sub-culture that we have created and how that warps our view of reality and of non-Christians." Kimball contends that not only is the organized church out-of-touch with contemporary culture, but that the very people the church hopes to reach (the 35 and under crowd) actually view the church with at least a great deal of suspicion or worse, as an enemy. The day and age of church being the central part of American life and the home to which all people eventually return is over. It a whole new ballgame.

In order for the UMC to have any chance at all of reaching these present or succeeding generations, we have to be willing to rethink and retool. And it is going to take a lot more than adding contemporary music and a few candles. We have to find new ways to make new friends. Realizing this, the directors of Jamani UM Ministries have developed an entirely new and fun way to meet literally thousands of new people every year and make hundreds of new friends every week.

Sound exciting? Watch next month's newsletter for more about Jamani UM Ministries and how you can be a part of this great new UM movement that is all about getting friendly.

Rev. Charles Anthony
Ellsworth UMC

Be ye fishers of men - you catch them & He'll clean them.

NEW CHRISTIAN EDUCATION ADDITION DEDICATED AT COAL CITY UMC



Communion being served by Dr. Keith Zimmerman, Bishop Christopher and Dr. Thomas Logsdon

On Sunday, March 11 Bishop Sharon A. Brown Christopher led the worship service at Coal City UMC and dedicated their new Christian Education addition. Along with the dedication, Bishop Christopher also served Holy Communion with Dr. Thomas Logsdon, Pastor of Coal City UMC, District Superintendent, Dr. Keith Zimmerman, and District Lay Leader, Ken P. Miller. A crowd of over 200 people attended the special service. Prior to the service, from 9:00 am-10:15 am, tours were given of the new education addition and a cake reception was held in the fellowship hall.

Ann Thompson

IGRC SCHOLARSHIPS

IGRC Merit Awards Scholarship is from the UM Student Day Special Offering. Scholarships will be awarded to students attending a UM-related school, college, university or theological school recognized by the University Senate. One or more \$500 merit awards will be awarded.

Illinois Great Rivers Scholars is for the 2007-2008 academic year. The IGRC Benevolence Budget included funds to support the IGR Scholars Program. Up to three (3) \$1,000 and eight (8) \$750 scholarships will be awarded to students attending any institution of higher learning or seminary recognized by the University Senate. It is not required that the institutions be within the bounds of the annual conference. Awards are for "merit," but it should be understood that merit can be in terms of academic scholarship, church involvement, financial need, special vocational preparation for ministry or other service, or a combination of these factors as may be determined by the annual conference HECM Scholarship Team.

Both opportunities use the same application form, available on-line (<http://www.igrc.org/ministries/highered/schlarships/html>), or by contacting the Conference Office, 217-529-2040 (ask for Christy Blickensderfer).

Due date: Applications must be postmarked no later than April 1, 2007.

IGRC- NEWS