

Easter Greetings,

This month I share a second of my reflections recorded in route to Liberia. Next month I move to those I wrote while in Liberia in an effort to share with you what I experienced and learned. I hope these reflections will encourage you in growing and living your faith.

Journal of Reflections
Liberia Trip
Sunday, February 11, 2007

Our touchdown in the rain at Brussels Airport transformed our Illinois and body time of 12:40 am into 7:40 am...*so much for a night normally dedicated to sleep*. In its place were “catnaps” in the airport and during the nine hour flight from Brussels to Monrovia via Freetown, Sierra Leone.

Between the naps my attention was on an autobiographical book, “By the Goodness of God,” written by John G. Innis, Resident Bishop of the Liberia Annual Conference. From his childhood through the bitter civil war, Bishop Innis shared joys and struggles, threats and testimonies of faith experienced all “by the goodness of God.”

One of those testimonies points to a truth that can never be overlooked in our shared ministry as United Methodists and as local churches in our conference. Bishop Innis affirmed,

“The immense contribution and sacrifices of all the dedicated and committed leaders with whom I shared the responsibility at Camphor (mission and school) during the war cannot be overemphasized. We operated with a team spirit that got things done for the best interests of those we had to serve. God blessed and guided us in our working relationship. Cooperation, courage, and prayers became the hallmark of our collective leadership, enabling us to forge ahead positively” (p. 129).

Our time and circumstance is much different, but our dedication and commitment to God in Jesus Christ and to each other is just as crucial as theirs if we are to honor God with the ministry we extend: a ministry marked by “*cooperation, courage and prayers*” that is focused on “*the best interests of those we serve*.”

As Bishop Innis wrote earlier in his book,

“God is a friend of the poor, the oppressed, the marginalized, and the brokenhearted. In Jesus Christ, God is a friend to all—to women, men, children, the elderly, the sick and the well” (p. 101).

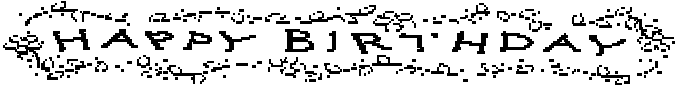
[To] be a disciple of Jesus Christ, one must be bold, stand for justice, defend the defenseless, and be an accountable servant for the people of God” (p. 101).

Another amazing perspective gleaned at 35,000+ feet...calling me...and each of us...back down to earth to our true calling.

Keith

MAY

- 1 9-11 am North Fork Subdistrict at Herscher
- 2 9-11 am Middle Fork Subdistrict at Pontiac
- 3 9-11 am South Fork Subdistrict at Bloomington Park
- 7 10:00 am District Leadership Team at District Office
- 8-10 Cabinet
- 15-17 Cabinet
- 20 3-4:30 pm Liberia River Way Rally at Streator First
- 21 Romeo
- 22-24 Cabinet
- 28 District Office closed



Kevin Boesen	05-06	Edwina Wilber	05-15
Kandi Perry	05-07	Lon Alderman	05-16
Kathy Tymonko	05-07	Dave Estep	05-20
Dennis Brooks	05-13	Kathy George	05-23
Joan Orewiler	05-14	Charles McDonald	05-29

- APPOINTMENT NEWS -

Brent Anderson will be retiring from LeRoy as of June 30 and Mary Louise Haxton has been appointed to LeRoy starting July 1.

- FOR YOUR INFORMATION -

UNITED METHODIST MOTORSPORTS IS EXPANDING!



Rev. Mark Canada and "Racing Partner in Ministry" member Tom Albright (who is also a member of "Soldiers for Jesus" motorcycle ministry) working on the Sprint Car.

The UMMM has been blessed with a second ministry racing team. Rev. Mark Canada will be taking the lead of the UMMM number 4L Dirt Track Stockcar.

The ministry has grown to the point where it needs to divide their efforts to cover more tracks and reach out to more people during this racing season.

With the "Racing Partners in Ministry" in place the United Methodist Motorsports Ministry, Inc. NFP, 501(c)3 registered organization is looking for the following to be donated to the ministry: a ¾ ton pickup truck, van, or 1 ton box type van or truck and a tandem axle car trailer.

Be watching for the New United Methodist Motorsports website coming soon.

Become a part of "Racing to Reach People for Christ" as the UMMM travels the conference inviting all to the Lord's Table and making Disciples for Christ.

For more information, please contact Rev. Mark Amenda, President of UMMM at 815-672-8932 or email at amenda@udnet.net.

LET'S GET FRIENDLY (PART 2)

In my home town of Alpha, Illinois McKee's Diner was unique in that it was one of the only, if not the only, drive-in in the County of Henry. Unfortunately, by the time I was old enough to go to McKee's the drive-in had been closed and only inside dining remained. McKee's Diner was also unique in that it was made out of an old railroad dining car. The main counter area with its rounded ceiling that looked like it belonged in a European cathedral was about 75 feet long and so narrow that it was said the customers could walk in but had to *back* out.

However, McKee's real allure was neither its novelty nor its architecture. The real draw was that Skip McKee (owner and operator) had created a culture that was friendly and inviting to all patrons and passersby. As a secular space, McKee's Diner accomplished what many churches had only dreamed of doing: it initiated and nurtured meaningful relationships, welcomed and gave value to newcomers, and fostered wholesome social networks.

Jamani United Methodist Ministries wants to help local churches do the same thing. Our goal is to open *Jamani Java*[™] coffee shops all across the Illinois Great Rivers Conference – coffee shops in which meaningful relationships are initiated and nurtured, people are welcomed and given value, and wholesome, spiritually charged social networks are developed. **We are all about making new friends: thousands of them.** In fact, we fully expect that because of the contacts made at *Jamani Java* local churches will see noticeable increases in the number of first time visitors.

But that is not all that JUMM has to offer. As a specialty coffee purveyor, *Jamani Java* has direct connections to the major coffee producing nations of the world. Our suppliers have been chosen in part for their commitment to help educate children in Africa and Latin America. At *Jamani Java*, whether you buy a cup of great coffee, a double-shot espresso, caramel latte, French vanilla cappuccino or a bag of our signature whole beans, **you help educate a child!**

And now for those famous words, "*But wait. There's more!*" JUMM will also help our very own East Bay Camp! We are currently working on an agreement with Deb Townsend, East Bay Camp Director, to have the East Bay Camp kitchen supply baked goods for *Jamani Java*. **The proceeds from this exciting partnership will fund camping scholarships for underprivileged children in our conference!**

Are you excited yet? There is no better place to buy a latte and a muffin than from *Jamani Java*!

As a United Methodist 501(c)3 ministry JUMM would like to invite you to help us get going by visiting www.jamanijava.org and ordering your premium quality signature *Jamani Java*[™] coffee beans for your church and your personal use. Our highest quality beans are fresh roasted to order and sent directly to your door. And remember – *at Jamani Java, you will find a great cup of coffee, and you will find a Godly movement, a good education and a great camp.*

Rev. Charles Anthony

2007 VRD LOCAL LAY SPEAKER SCHOOL



Front row: Andrea Keith, Carol Desch, Kim Zajak and Rebecca Pentecost
Back row: Jason Rinker, Don Reed, Keith Blankenship and Robert Steele

Eight new local lay speakers have completed their preparation to serve the Lord in their local churches. The VRD local lay speaker school met at the Fairbury UMC each Sunday from February 11 to March 18 from 1:30-5:00 p.m.

The commissioning service was held on Sunday, March 18. District Superintendent Keith Zimmerman gave a short presentation on the UMC program in Liberia and then conducted the commissioning service. Superintendent Zimmerman, assisted by Pastor Scott Baird, also served communion during the service. The class of eight candidates prepared the regular portion of the service.

The new local lay speakers are Carol Desch and Kim Zajac, Herscher UMC; Keith Blankenship, LeRoy UMC; Andrea Keith, Coal City UMC; Rebecca Pentecost, Lexington UMC; Don Reed, McNabb UMC; Jason Rinker, Wesley UMC, and Robert Steele, Hennepin UMC.

During the course of the class, Rev. Dennis Powers, of the Forrest UMC, presented a session on John Wesley's influence on the church. Vermilion River District Co-Director Deb Honegger conducted the classes.

Don Wills

Lay Speaker Co-Director

IGRC MISSION ACTIVITIES

In 2005, we reported 55 mission work teams and 361 volunteers. In 2006, there were 115 work teams and 1,259 volunteers. This is a wonderful increase in mission work teams. Thank you!

If you are planning a volunteer mission work team in 2007 for adults, youth or an intergenerational group, please send the following information to bwolfe@igrc.org.

- 1) dates of your mission work trip
- 2) location of the work
- 3) cost
- 4) contact information for the team leader
- 5) registration deadline
- 6) how many spaces you have available for others to join your team

This will facilitate a more complete listing of all volunteer mission work teams. Many groups will go from IGRC in 2007, but others may wish to join your work team. Teams are still needed in the Gulf States for hurricane recovery. Let's make 2007 another record breaking year!

Bunny Wolfe

IGRC Missions and Outreach Coordinator

MAUNDY THURSDAY AT ELPASO



The El Paso UMC presented the "Living Lord's Supper" on Maundy Thursday evening. The men practiced very hard and did an awesome job. This is the first year in El Paso for the performance. The hope is that this will become an annual presentation within the community. The cast members were Charles Feeney IV, Charles Feeney Jr., Jim Skolek, Don Mool, Alex Brucker, John Schaffer, Charles Feeney III, Jordan Kilpatrick, Phil Klein, John Meinhold, Jim Taylor, Brent Johnson and David Denney. Open communion was served at the close of the presentation.

Rev. Dave Estep

CELEBRATION 2007



Ken Medema and children

When those gathered at Calvary UMC on Sunday, April 15 to enjoy Ken Medema in concert were told to expect a blessing during Ken's performance, unless they had seen him before, they could not have known what surprises were to come. Part of the Vermilion River District's Celebration 2007, Ken's performance was more than just another program; it was a participatory celebration of song, storytelling dancing, and laughter! In a way that only Ken Medema can, the blind singer/songwriter regaled the participants with his powerful singing and musicianship woven with wonderfully touching and inspirational stories all while challenging them toward being a "radical community of caring." And it was truly a community! People of all ages shared stories of caring, whereupon Ken then performed a song on the spot to tell their story again in song. Young and old alike danced and clapped in the aisle as Ken performed his song, "Dance in the Crossroads". A highlight of the program came about halfway through when twenty or so children from Bloomington Wesley UMC, under the direction of Adria Schumann, performed Ken's witty and thoughtful song, "The Wonder of Why" to perfection. Blessings were abundant!

While one can often never know how these special times and celebrations touch others, we are privileged to know how it touched the lives of two who attended. In an email addressed to the VRD Superintendent, Keith Zimmerman, a woman shared these thoughts, and gave us permission to share them: "What a wonderful afternoon. I had no idea what to expect, but find myself this morning thinking of many of the stories that were told and the messages in the songs. Dancing around the sanctuary was a wonderful thing to do...I haven't danced literally or figuratively since my husband died. I called him the Fred Astaire to my Ginger Rogers and thought of our marriage as the best dance ever. The little boy that I chose to dance with me at the beginning came up to me as I was leaving and said, 'Thank you for dancing with me - I never get chosen for anything.' "

How awesome it was that God used that woman and child to be a radical community of caring for each other! You can never know how God is going to move in our lives! God is so good! It was indeed a moving and powerful time for everyone there.

Pastor Brian Caughlan