

La Plata United Methodist Church
P.O. Box 2824, 3 Port Tobacco Rd.
La Plata, Maryland 20646-2824

March-April 2011

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The Grapevine

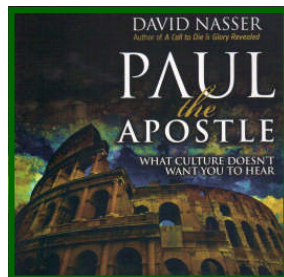
**Intertwining the church
to help it bear fruit on
The Discipleship Adventure**

Ash Wednesday Prayer Vigil & Ashes



Wednesday, March 9 is Ash Wednesday. At La Plata UMC we observe Ash Wednesday with a time of prayer and, if you wish, the imposition of ashes (the placing of a mark of the cross on one's forehead made from the ashes of burnt palm branches). On that day we hold two prayer times or prayer vigils. One will be held in the afternoon from 2 to 3 PM and the other will be from 6:30 to 7:30. During this time we are encouraged to come into the sanctuary and sit in silence to pray and reflect upon season of Lent, to repent of sins and ask God's forgiveness, and to contemplate ways we can demonstrate our contrition. Reverend Jones will be available at both sessions to pray with and/or people and will place the mark of the cross on the forehead or hand for those who ask. This is an important time of reflection and contemplation. Each year nearly 100 people take advantage of this quiet time of prayer, reflection and reading. A guided prayer structure will be provided for those who want one.

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Study of Paul, Now on Wednesday Morning

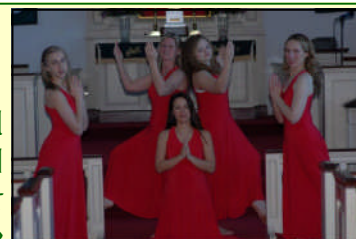
By Marilynne Landweer

Starting March 9th, the Wednesday Morning Bible Study will be studying Paul using the same material that Pastor Bruce used on Monday nights in February. So, if you missed the Monday night class, now is an opportunity for you to participate in the same study on Wednesday mornings. Anyone interested is welcomed to attend - we would love to grow our group! We have a lot of fun and laughter, sometimes we shed a few tears, and we genuinely love one another. We meet Wednesday mornings at 9:30 AM in Conf. Room 2. And, we have coffee and snacks! We would love for you to join us and, if interested, please call Marilynne Landweer (301-374-9333) so she will know how many to plan for. +

Liturgical Dance Ministry

By Pat Brennan & Lisa Stone

Angel Wings, our newly formed liturgical dance ensemble, will be presenting "Child of God" during services on March 6th. After its debut, many in the congregation were moved and excited to see this visual expression of worship developing at La Plata UMC. The team meets after services on Sundays in the sanctuary, as well as many additional hours to choreograph and perfect its interpretive dance presentations. Betty Risley is the talented choreographer who leads the group. The other members of the ensemble include Catie Boggs, Jan Saunders, Danielle Stone, and Michelle Tolbert. The upcoming presentation is a moving experience of life's personal struggles and how our faith in God and His love for us gives us the strength to overcome anything. The group is eager to share its ministry with you and welcomes your thoughts on the performance. So many joyful moments in the Bible were celebrated with tambourines, music, and dance. It is an extension of that spirit that shines through "Angel Wings". +





Congregation Invitation

Worship in March

March 6 – Last Epiphany

Holy Communion
Liturgical Dancers
“A Light from Within”
Bruce Jones, preaching

March 9 – Ash Wednesday

Prayer Vigils (2-3 &
6:30 – 7:30)

March 13 – First Lent

One Great Hour of Sharing
Offering

Daylight Saving Time
“Alpha Sunday”

Cherub Choir sings
Sacrament of Holy Baptism
“Leaving It All Behind”
Bob Kells, preaching

March 20 – Second Lent

Sacrament of Holy Baptism
“Have You Had Your
Second Birthday?”
Bruce Jones, preaching

March 27 – Third Lent

Puppet Ministry Team
Service of Healing
“Does Healing Still
Happen?”
Bruce Jones, preaching



Lenten Dinners

By Betsy Radtke

This year our Lenten dinners will be held each Wednesday beginning March 16 through April 13. We will be taking reservations for the Lenten Dinners on Sunday, March 6 and again on Sunday, March 13. After these dates, additions and changes may be made by contacting Betsy Radtke at church, calling her at her home (301-392-3191), or calling Christa at the church office. Please check your calendars to see when you can attend. If you need to make changes, please call and let us know by Monday before each meal so we can prepare the proper amount of food. This year we are asking for help in cleaning up and taking down tables and chairs. If you can do this please let Betsy know.

The cost again this year is \$5.00 per person over 12 years of age and \$3.00 per child ages 6 -12. There is no charge for children under 6 years of age. There is a maximum family charge of \$15.00 per household. Reservations are required.

This is also a good time to learn the “ins and outs” of our kitchen. If you would like to help prepare any of the meals, let Betsy know.



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March 16 – Lasagna and Salad – The Chancel Choir

March 23 – Ham & Cabbage – The United Methodist Women

March 30 – Fried Chicken Dinner – The United Methodist Men

April 6 – Roast Beef Dinner – The United Methodist Women

April 13 – Stuffed Baked Potatoes and Salad Bar – The Evening Circle of UMW

These dinners have always been a great social time for our church family and they lead us into a Joyful Easter. We hope everyone will plan to attend. +



Youth Serve Pancake Supper on March 8, Shrove Tuesday

Shrove Tuesday is the day before Ash Wednesday. Shrove Tuesday is also known as Mardi Gras (French) “Fat Tuesday”. Our Youth Fellowship teens are continuing their tradition of serving a fantastic Pancake Supper that day. The kitchen will be open from 5 to 7 PM, so stop by the fellowship hall, and fill your plate with all kinds of great breakfast type items. The cost is merely a donation to help the youth as they prepare for their retreat to Camp Manidokan later in March. Please join us for great comfort food and fellowship. +



Ministries That Make A Difference

Caring Ministry is Growing

By Marilynne Landweer, Ministry Team Leader

Have you heard about our Congregational Care Ministry Team? It is a team of 13 caring and compassionate individuals willing to pray for, call and/or visit those who are ill, homebound, hospitalized, etc. We currently have 15 wonderful people on our visitation list. It is a great honor and privilege to be involved in this ministry. What a blessing it has been to visit and get to know such wonderful members of our congregation. They minister to me more than I could ever minister to them! Grace Franklin was one of our church members we visited on a regular basis until she recently passed away. Even though she wasn't always up to talking, she appreciated knowing the church was thinking of her and praying for her. I recently visited another one of our homebound members and she told me she now knows the church hasn't forgotten her. We need your help in identifying individuals who are unable to attend church so they will know that we haven't forgotten them either. If you know of someone who might like a call or visit, please call me, Marilynne Landweer, at 301-374-9333. Or, you can fill out one of the "Caring for People" pew cards and hand it to the pastor on your way out of church on Sunday morning. Please also call me if you would like to become a member of this caring ministry. +



Join the Puppet Ministry



The puppets are really doing a great job and we have a nice mix of teens and adults. If you'd like to see their last performance in church, it is posted on our web site at www.laplataumc.com. The team is now looking for more hands to help out. If you've enjoyed watching the puppets, and now you'd like to "try your hand at it", please contact Bob Kells, our Pastoral Intern, or Karen Surratt at 301-843-1250. They rehearse weekly on Tuesday nights at 7:00 PM in the sanctuary. +

Annual Mission Trip 2011— You can be a part of this Mountain Top Experience.

What: Mississippi Mission Trip

When: October 15 thru 22, 2011.

Where: Gulfport, Mississippi



Over the past five years, dozens (skilled and less skilled, men and women, ages teens into 80's, first time and repeat participants) have journeyed in mission with the 'LHUMC and Friends' ecumenical team to spread hope through rebuilding/repairing homes of those who might think their God and fellow human beings have forgotten them. It is also a time to grow in faith as we support each other and share together spiritually.

You may be a perfect candidate. Even if you think you only know which end of the hammer to hold, you qualify for this amazing teamwork venture if you have a willing heart and Christian compassion for others. Work group leaders and other volunteers provide training and assistance in a Christian 'teamwork' environment.

*Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying,
"Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!" Isaiah 6:8*

Please prayerfully consider making a reservation today by contacting: Rev. Bruce Jones at 301-934-2288 or bajones15@gmail.com for more information. Spaces are assigned on a first come - first served basis. +

Youth Go On Retreat

Our Youth Fellowship Group is heading for the hills on the weekend of March 11-13. They will be traveling to Camp Manidokan in the Maryland mountains overlooking Harper's Ferry, WV. There are still 8 spaces available. Registration closes on Thursday, March 3, so contact Ms. Chery at jazzitshws@comcast.net if you are interested in going. Cost is \$30 per participant if you help out with the Pancake Supper fundraiser or some other fundraiser the youth have had. +





Reaching Around The World

Opportunity to Go to Russia

By Rev. Kenneth S. Jones
(Bruce's father)

I will be leading a group of folks, many from my congregation, Faith United Methodist Church in Rockville, on a 12-day site-seeing tour of Russia, from August 17-28, 2011. This trip is not a work trip, but is a cultural exchange and travel trip. A few spaces are left and it only costs \$2,400. Normally a trip of this duration and itinerary would cost around \$4,000. We will have three Days in St. Petersburg. We will be visiting one of our sister congregations, Aspiration UMC, while we are in St. Petersburg. Then we will travel on and have 4 days in Vladimir, where I have led many trips before, visiting the orphanage where we have done so much work over the years. We will continue on to Suzdal where Christianity was first introduced to the Russians in 14th Century, then finally we will enjoy 3 days in Moscow, staying at the Russian United Methodist Seminary. We will see Red Square and many other key tourist attractions in Moscow before heading home. Please call me (Ken) at 301-216-5210 ASAP if you are interested, or think you might like to go. I can also answer any questions you may have. The cost of the trip is tax deductible for cultural exchange. +

Grapevine Publication Staff

Karen Fowler—Editor

Lisa Stone—Layout Design

A Letter from Suzanne Porter

Submitted by Judy Hall,
Missions Correspondent



Suzanne's letter is an update of what is happening at the Winifred J. Harley College of Health Sciences of the United Methodist University in Ganta, Liberia. She wrote on 12/6 that mid-terms were over and students knew what they needed to do for the rest of the semester so teachers can determine who would be "capped" on December 21st. Once "capped" students are considered to have the knowledge and skills to work on a hospital ward under the supervision of a ward nurse or clinical instructor.

HOMEcoming: The college had its first homecoming since 1999. Because of the war and continued safety concerns the school was displaced to Monrovia so there was no opportunity for a homecoming. Now that there is peace and stability it seemed a good time to resurrect the tradition of a homecoming. There is a strong affiliation between graduates so the old alumni association was able to get connected and organized. The first class graduated in 1979. This year there was a parade, a lot of speeches, fundraising, and food followed by kickball games for the girls and soccer matches between male students and another local college. The festivities ended with a dance at a local club.

DENTAL NURSE PRACTITIONER PROGRAM: The program is starting off small with only three students, but since this is the first time the program has been offered Suzanne is happy with the size. The instructor, Dr. Ashwin Sakharia, is from the Christian Dental College in Ludhiana, India and is "great not only for the teaching program but also for the patient care he is providing the newly established clinic at the Ganta UM Hospital."

DORMITORY RENOVATION PROJECT: Renovations were begun after Suzanne received an Advance number through the General Board of Global Ministries and money was received from many congregations and individuals. An Advance number is needed in order to process donations for a certain project. Adams Hall, a girl's dorm was scheduled for completion by Feb. 6. After Adams Hall is completed, there are two more dorms that need renovations. The "Hostel" is next and so far there is \$13,000 donated towards the \$91,571 that is needed. The Advance number for this dorm is #3021119. Every donation goes to the purchase of supplies for the project.

To visit Suzanne's blog to see pictures of the Homecoming parade, Mr. Gbatu the contractor working on the buildings, and other pictures of the campus go to <http://suehereandthere.blogspot.com> +



Lands' End Logo Apparel



One of the coolest ways to start a conversation with a friend or neighbor about our church is to wear a shirt, blouse or jacket, or maybe even a sweater with our churches logo stitched on it. If you'd like something a little higher quality than screen printing, you can't beat the quality of Lands' End clothing. During the first part of March, a catalog and order form will be available in the entry each Sunday, for you to peruse and pick something you'd like to order. Then we will place a mass order all at once. You don't have to pay for it until you pick it up. This is a great way to show your pride in being part of such a great church. +

The Other Wesley

Almost all of us have heard of John Wesley, the founder of Methodism. Some may know that John had a brother, who was also an ordained Anglican priest: Charles. Charles is the one who wrote so many of our favorite Methodist hymns. In April and May for six weeks, our Pastoral Intern, Bob Kells, will be leading a class on the life and accomplishments of Charles Wesley, called "The Other Wesley: The Life and Theology of Charles Wesley". We have already ordered the text book, and the class is limited to the first 20 who sign up for the class. The dates are on Mondays, (Part of our Pastor's Monday Night Study Series) April 4, 11 & 25 (skipping Spring break and Holy Week), then May 2, 9 & 16. If you'd like to be in this class, write "Wesley Class" on the fellowship folder, or call the church office at 301-934-2288. +

Share Your Faith, Inside & Out

Worship in April

April 3 – Fourth Sunday of Lent

Holy Communion
"Are You Still in the Dark?"

April 10 – Fifth Sunday of Lent

Cherub Choir sings
"Breaking Through to New Life"
Bob Kells, preaching

April 17 – Palm / Passion Sunday

Children's Procession with Palms
Two Part Worship
"Dancing & Waving" and
"Dying & Saving"

April 21 – Maundy Thursday

Joint Service with Indian Head
Charge

April 22 – Good Friday

Ecumenical Progressive Services

April 24 – Easter Sunday

Sunrise Service at Gilbert Run Pk
Easter Breakfast
Easter Egg Roll
"Whom Are You Looking For?"



Women of our church and their friends have an opportunity through the Baltimore-Washington Conference to get tickets for the 2011 Women of Faith Conference at the Verizon Center in Washington, on August 26 & 27. Special musical guests include Sandi Patty, Mary-Mary and Natalie Grant. The main speaker will be Dr. Henry Cloud.

The group ticket price is approximately \$89 which includes a box lunch each day. If you would be interested in attending this wonderfully inspiring and uplifting event, please let Linda Rollins (rollinsl@verizon.net) or Ellen Bowie at (ellen105@verizon.net) know of your interest as soon as possible. The deadline for getting the discounted group rates is coming up soon. +



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Spring Alpha Course

Our team of Alpha Leaders has met and they have planned out our next offering of the Alpha Course. It will begin on Thursday, March 31 at 6:30 PM. The Alpha Course is a powerful 10-week video-based class that lays out in a clear fashion everything you need to know about our Christian faith. It is also a great course to invite friends from outside the church to share in with you. Each evening begins with dinner together. Then after a joke, the video lesson is watched. Then in a small group setting, a chance to discuss the video enables participants to question, to ponder, to challenge, and to grow in one's faith.

To introduce the Alpha Course to people who are unfamiliar with it, there will be an Alpha Celebration Dinner on Sunday evening, March 27 at 6:00 PM in the fellowship hall. There you will hear from people who have taken the course before, and get to watch a sample video given by the course teacher, Nicky Gumbel. The Alpha Course is one of the most important classes we offer, and that's why we have the course so often. Please consider being a part of the spring class. Call the church office to make your reservation for the dinner or to sign up for the course. +



Alpha

Keeping You Informed

Financial Snapshot

By the time you read this we will have finished 1/6 of the year. January and February have been good months for our church despite the cold weather and occasional icy conditions. You continue to bless our church with positive stewardship and generosity.



January ended better than we initially thought. We had income of \$38,911 against a budgeted expectation of \$35,000 and expenses of \$34,406. In February, we received \$41,385 in income. In a four-Sunday month we generally need to collect \$31,769. Mary Norris, our Church Treasurer, reported that expenses in February came to \$39,558. So for the first two months of the year we have taken in \$82,659.23 from all sources including preschool, and had expenses of 75,312.65 enabling us to be at \$7,346.58 to the good right now.

Thank you so much for all your generosity and faithfulness. You are enabling us to do be effective in ministry and to care for the needy around us. Bless you! +

Building Committee Update

The Building Committee has reviewed all the ideas, feedback and responses that came out of the three focus group sessions that were held in January. The process was very helpful, and the committee was pleased with the number of people who attended the work sessions and who participated with good ideas, good questions, and important concerns. The committee has since met, and has identified those elements that were most often raised, and which are most important to our determining our needed space.

They also categorized a second tier of ideas that will be implemented in the final completion stages, but don't impact square footage at this point. With the authorization of both Finance and the Administrative Council the Building Committee will ask our architect, Ronald L. Litten, to develop a feasibility study bringing together our stated needs and wants and relating these to town and county codes for property line setbacks, development, parking, traffic, and utility concerns. This will give us an indication of the limits that will impact how much we can build, if we move forward with a full scale design. +

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Program Council Report

By Bright Thompson, Program Director

The Program Council is currently under reconstruction. When we began planning for 2011 we discovered that:

- *The addition of a number of new programs in recent years had caused the membership of the Program Council to grow from 18 members in 2003 to 29 in 2011.
- *Many of the programs have become more active which may need more planning and coordination than in the past.
- *The "committee reporting" meeting style that has been in place for the last eight years on the Program Council is being revised into a "ministry planning" style.

The new structuring of the Program Council will incorporate the five elements of the Discipleship Adventure: Worship; Fellowship; Discipleship; Ministry and Witness with all of the programs of the church clustered under one of the five headings.

This re-structuring will provide more contact with the program leaders and a more efficient way to receive and convey information to the various committees. This will allow the Program Council to focus more on the overall ministry of the church. Our plan is to have the new Program Council plans completed by the Administrative Council meeting in March. +

Fun Stuff

Take Me Out to the Blue Crabs

By John & Sherri Hastings, Fellowship Ministries Chairs

The crack of the bat, the sound of children laughing, and the smell of roasted peanuts in the air, what a great time of year: SUMMER. With the cold we have endured, let us set our sights on a great summer night with friends and a great American past time, Blue Crabs Baseball.

The Fellowship Ministries Team invites everyone to the 2nd annual La Plata UMC Night at the Park on July 21 at 7:05PM. The Blue Crabs will be playing the Long Island Ducks. We had about 100 people attend the game last year, and we had a great time. Please join us this year and hear our own La Plata UMC adult choir sing prior to the game.

Here are the prices: Field Box Seat: \$10.00; and Kid Zone passes: \$10.00 in addition to the ticket. Contact John or Sherri Hastings at 301-934-5295 or ccs0355@yahoo.com to reserve your tickets, or you can stop by the sign-up table in the foyer after church on June 12, June 19, and June 26. Payment is due at time of reservation and is non-refundable. +



Youth Shopping Spree

On Sunday, March 27 the youth of our church will be going on a Youth Spring Shopping and Luncheon at Pentagon City Mall. We will be leaving right after the 11 AM service via private cars for an afternoon of shopping and a group lunch in the food court. It's "Pay as you go". Please contact Ms. Cheryl if you have any questions or if you are able to assist with the car pooling. +

Faces in the Congregation



We welcome the arrival of **M a s o n L y n d o n M c C o n n e l l**, born Tuesday, Feb. 22 at 10:18 PM to **Lea and Travis McConnell**. He weighed 8 lbs. 2 oz. Mason and mommy are doing well. Congratulations also go to **Shawn and Sherri McConnell**, the first-time grandparents. +



Good News from Judy McAfee!
"My recovery is going so well that neither my surgeons nor my family can believe it. I have been very blessed and I want to thank everyone who offered prayers and sent cards. Ralph and I are so lucky to be a part of such a caring congregation with a loving pastor."

Judy McAfee



Cross Necklaces to be Available

The Youth Fellowship will be selling "Cross Necklaces" after services in the entry area all during April and through Mother's day weekend. You've seen many people around the church wearing these cool looking crosses. The cost is \$10 and they come in a variety of colors. A portion of the proceeds benefits Youth Group Fundraising.

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Movie Nights Under the Stars

By John & Sherri Hastings, Fellowship Ministries Chairs

The La Plata UMC drive-in movie theater will be open again this summer. Come join other church members for a movie under the stars. The movies will be fun and appropriate for the entire family, so bring a chair and enjoy the movie on our "BIG" screen. Snacks will be available. Here are the **Movie Dates and Times**:

1. June 18, 2011, 8:00PM (rain date June 25, 2011, 8:00PM)
2. July 15, 2011, 8:30PM (no rain date)

SMART Goals Set by SPRC

The Staff-Parish Relations Committee and Rev. Jones have worked together to set his goals for 2011. The conference asks the SPRC and Pastor to set what is called "SMART Goals" which are "specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely." Their fulfillment is dependent upon all of us working with him to strengthen our church. Here are Bruce's five SMART Goals for 2011.

1. Bruce will lead the congregation toward continued growth so that statistically, we will have increased worship attendance by 2% or more over 2010. We averaged 279.9 in 2010.

2. Bruce will continue to develop and encourage the spiritual growth and discipleship of the congregation by planning and leading a variety of classes as part of our discipleship program. These would include, but not limited to, teaching ongoing Pastor's Monday Night studies; and classes taught by Bright Thompson and others with a goal of increasing the number of participants by 5% over 2010.

3. Bruce will continue providing the general supervision and mentoring of our Pastoral Intern, Bob Kells. He will also prepare the church for the process of determining our needs for a next Pastoral Assistant.

4. Bruce will guide the congregation through the process of assessing the future needs of our church, and provide periodic updates to help keep everyone informed. This will be done through different means, such as meetings, reports, publications, etc. The SPRC will evaluate his doing this at the end of the year.

5. Bruce will lead the congregation toward the Conference's expectation of our being an "Acts 2 Disciple-Making Congregation", which includes the following description from Conference guidelines:

"Acts 2 or disciple-making congregations carry out the life of Jesus: these congregations ...

- "are filled with the Spirit (Acts 2:1-4, 37-38),
- "engage believers in the complete Discipleship Adventure (celebrate, connect, develop, serve, and share);
- "bear Acts 2 fruit (Acts 2:41-47);
- "focus all activity on Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27);
- "are organized to make and engage disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world (Mathew 28:18-20);
- "call, equip, and release disciples to pursue their passion and use their gifts to glorify God (Ephesians 4:11-13);
- "call, equip, send, and support spiritual leaders to lead disciples in the Adventure (Mark 1:17); and
- "lead disciples to meet the spiritual, social, and physical needs of those in the community and world (John 15:8, 16 and Acts 2:47).



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Anticipated Fruits of Acts 2 Congregations:

- "Congregational Fruits - John 15:1-11 and Luke 13:6-7. The anticipated fruits within the congregation are based on Acts 2:41-47;
- "Acts 2:41-47 - Increase worship attendance by 2% of the worshipping congregation or 2% over the percentage growth of the community where the congregation is located).
- "Acts 2:44-45 - Mission engagement - Address poverty and community development through ministries of mercy, justice and development (the Shalom and Holy Boldness strategies are two potential strategies).
- "Activate 90% of the worshipping congregation in ministry within five years; financially support mission through locally identified community and world mission projects and fulfill 100% of apportionment giving);

"Acts 2:43 - Demonstrate signs of God's power and wonder: Ministry results that are more than human ability and are clearly God's movement through and within the congregation, (examples of signs and wonders in Jesus' ministry were: 1) multiplication - several fish and loaves that feed thousands or, jars of water into gallons and gallons of wine, or twelve followers to a world-wide movement, and 2) kingdom reversal - death to life, blindness to sight, bound by demons to freed for kingdom living." +

A Note from Our Bishop

February 28, 2011

"God loves a joyful and generous heart."



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Vision gives us the courage to act when we might otherwise not take action. In 2010, the churches of the Baltimore-Washington Conference claimed their vision to "make disciples for the transformation of the world," by giving generously through apportionments. With the highest apportionment collection rate in years, the people of the Baltimore-Washington Conference, fed the hungry, gave new life to churches, reached out across the globe in life-saving mission, deployed pastors and missionaries, educated children, and, in a thousand other ways, shared the Word and the love of God.

We celebrate our congregations' faithfulness! In 2010, the apportionment collection rate was 90.51 percent, up from 87 percent three years ago. This generous giving and faithful stewardship of God's resources enabled us to contribute \$1.5 million in other missional giving and complete our Conference Mission Center, which has begun to generate savings that will be used to further our mission and ministry. Your stewardship also resulted in an operating surplus for 2010. As a result of this surplus, we were able to initiate a maintenance reserve to care for future repair and maintenance requirements of our new Conference Mission Center. In addition, we are able to provide initial funding for our recently adopted strategy of starting 20 new churches over the next 10 years. Your faithful giving also enabled our conference to continue a 14-year tradition of paying 100 percent of our General Conference Apportionment.

Another reason to celebrate is the fact that our conference was able to contribute \$500,000 from excess reserves towards the worldwide initiative called "Imagine No Malaria." This initiative is a collaborative effort between many notable organizations, including The United Methodist Church, The United Nations Foundation, The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and 'Nothing But Nets'. The goal is to eliminate malaria deaths in Africa by 2015.

Conference leaders strongly believe that it is their calling and commitment to resource local churches. The most effective ministries are carried out through our laity and clergy in communities all across the conference. Toward this end, even as we celebrate, we are committing to work with the conference to reduce the benevolence factor from 19.5 percent to 16 percent by 2017, while continuing to grow our mission and ministry. This reduction represents nearly 20 percent less that we will be collecting in apportionments. The reduction in the benevolence factor will constitute a remarkable 36 percent reduction in the benevolence factor since 2005.

Our plan for reducing the benevolence factor will be undergirded by our congregations' continuing to give 100 percent of their apportionments. Full payment will also enable us to pursue our goals of starting 20 new churches/faith communities over the next 10 years, growing small, medium and large size churches, strengthening our ministry in Baltimore, making new disciples and working to bring an end to homelessness. All of this is accomplished through God's grace and your generosity as we seek to be a strong witness for generations to come.

This year, the conference is equipping local churches with resources that will put a face on the many reasons we give. This is available at www.bwcumc.org/whywegive. We hope you will use this resource throughout the year to tell the story of how your congregation is making a difference every day.

Thank you for your leadership and partnership, which brought us to this place. Let's continue to work together so that God uses our ministry to accomplish great things around the world. Let's celebrate all that is possible when United Methodists embrace a vision that transforms the world. Keep the faith! +

John R. Schol, Bishop
The United Methodist Church

Charlie Moore, Chairperson
Council on Finance

Paul Eichelberger, Treasurer/CFO
Baltimore-Washington Conference

Robert Slade, Chairperson
Discipleship Council





Sunday School News

By Carrie Summers, Sunday School Coordinator

Spring is in the air, the bees are buzzing, and so is our Sunday School Program! In addition to our regular Christian Education program held each week from 9:45-10:45, we have many extra events that we sponsor each spring. With something for everyone, we hope that you'll join us for one or two!

We've just completed a food drive where we collected a ton of food for our food pantry. It's heartwarming to see the unstoppable generosity of our young people at work. In April, we'll collect Easter items to fill baskets that we'll donate to Lifestyles, Inc. Last year we filled 20 baskets. Maybe this year we can fill more? Next up will be our Annual Easter Family Fun Day. During the Sunday School Hour on Easter Sunday, we'll gather with our families for a carnival-type atmosphere where we all rotate through stations of crafts and games. It's fun for all! And May will bring our flower planting day...watch the church bulletin for the date for that.

As a final note, we are blessed to have the world's best Sunday School staff, but even the best need a day off from time to time. This means we need substitutes! We participate in the Safe Sanctuaries program, which means that we must have two non-related adults in each classroom at all times. If you are willing to fill in for a missing teacher, please let Carrie Summers know. It's not nearly as intimidating as you might think, and you'll have a blast for sure!

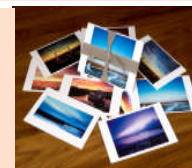
As you can see, the next few months are bursting with activities and we invite you to come and check them out. There is no cost to attend Sunday School, and we have classes for all ages from 2 years through adults. If you have any questions about Sunday School or would like to help coordinate any of these events, please contact Carrie Summers at 301-934-0277 or getscrappin@gmail.com. +



A Postcard from the Discipleship Adventure

By Rev. Bruce A. Jones

A Call to Action



The Council of Bishops and our denomination's program arm, "The Connectional Table" has come together to study and encourage local congregations. They looked at 33,000 local churches and they found that 5,000 were growing and had vitality as measured in five specific areas. The findings spanned every kind of church and in all of the countries where Methodism exists. The five areas they measured are worship attendance, new members who joined on Profession of Faith, people in Bible studies and small groups, people involved in doing missions, and the amount being given to support missions.

These areas of vitality are dependent upon engaged and active lay leadership and lay people, effective pastoral leadership and encouragement, strong church council engagement in the priorities of the church, and a

commitment to reach new people for Christ inviting them to become a part of the church.

I feel so blessed that our church scores highly on many of the things the UMC is proposing to measure. But as in all situations there is more we can do, and more we should be doing.

Following Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, and being fully committed disciples of Jesus means that we live our lives following the example of Christ with the same values, energy and commitment as Jesus shown.

We have talked for a long time about the five pieces of the Discipleship Adventure and how critical it is for all of us to make concerted efforts in all five areas. We need to worship often and regularly, we need to share in

fellowship opportunities and get to know new folks in our church, we need to take classes that deepen our faith and understanding, we are to use the gifts God gave us to touch the lives and needs of others, and we are to share with others outside our church all the good things God has done in our lives, and all the good things our church is doing to serve others.

As The United Methodist Church rolls out this new focus on vitality, I am grateful that our church is already very vital in many areas. But we can always improve. Our hope, our goal is to become a beacon of faith, caring and service to our whole community, so that when people think of our church, they will smile and say, "Now there is a congregation that truly lives as Jesus calls them to live. Thank God for La Plata United Methodist Church."

I know I do every single day.

Did You Know?



Since Egypt has been in the news recently, perhaps it would be helpful to have some understanding of its history, especially related to the Bible.

Egypt as a place, and as a nation, is one of the most frequently mentioned names in the Bible. From the time when Abram went down to Egypt in a famine, to baby Jesus' flight to Egypt, it spans Genesis to the Gospels. It is full of meaning and symbolism, but not always the same symbolism. Egypt became a byword among the Israelites, and its prominent place in Scripture is not easy to ignore.

In the book of Genesis, Egypt is mentioned frequently, and for a number of different purposes and occasions. An early mentioning of Egypt occurred in Genesis 12:10, when Abram was struggling to survive a famine, and he made the journey to Egypt to escape the severest part of the famine. This indicates that Egypt was seen as a place of prosperity, a view corroborated a few verses later in, where Lot and Abram separate, and Lot chooses the best land, "Lot looked up and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan was well watered, like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, toward Zoar." Gen. 13:10. But it isn't all positive, since this same land is destroyed in Sodom and Gomorra's destruction. While Abram was in Egypt, he feared for his life from the Egyptians, thinking they would kill him to take his wife Sarai. This could simply be the beginnings of the traditional Jewish caution in countries where they are 'foreigners,' but it seems more likely that such things were not uncommon in Egypt.

The next time Egypt comes into the Bible in a significant way, is when Joseph, the great-grandson of Abram, is sold into slavery by his brothers. His brothers intended to kill him, but they saw some merchants with camels heading to Egypt with lots of goods, and decided they could avoid having blood on their hands by selling him instead. Egypt was still a place of prosperity, with lots of merchants and trading happening, since these merchants were carrying "spices, balm, and myrrh" and were willing to take on a slave. When they got to Egypt they sold Joseph to Potiphar, a captain of the guard, and official of Pharaoh. The land was such that Joseph was able to do extremely well for Potiphar, in his handling of Potiphar's affairs. Potiphar's wife tried to take advantage of Joseph, and when he refused to cooperate, she had him thrown in jail. While in jail, he met two very important men, the Pharaoh's baker and cupbearer. They had displeased Pharaoh and were thrown into prison, where the warden had put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners.

While these two men were in jail, they each had a dream, and asked Joseph to explain the dreams to them. He did so, explaining that the cupbearer would be pardoned and the baker hanged. When the cupbearer returned to Pharaoh, he forgot all about Joseph, until one day when Pharaoh had a dream, and none of his magicians or wise men could explain it. When Pharaoh told his dreams to Joseph, he says of the seven skinny cows "I had never seen such ugly cows in all the land of Egypt." Apparently Egypt was still a land of prosperity at that time. But the meaning of the dream was that after seven years of prosperity, there would be seven years of famine. Joseph explained what should be done to prepare, and then Pharaoh put him in charge of the process of storing grain and other food for the approaching famine. The stage was set for the people of Israel to grow in Egypt. Joseph was now second to Pharaoh, with great power and authority.

The famine came, and it filled all the land, not just Egypt, and Joseph's father and brothers in Canaan felt its ill effects, and heard that Egypt had warehouses full of grain. So the brothers were sent down to Egypt to buy grain. After a series of interesting interactions between Joseph and the brothers who didn't recognize him, Jacob was sent for, and the whole family moved to Egypt. When the Pharaoh who was indebted to Joseph died, the new Pharaoh forgot all about what the Hebrew people had done for Egypt. Before many generations had passed, the Hebrews were so numerous that the Pharaoh made them into slaves and worked them hard, in the hopes of containing them and keeping them from over running the land. Egypt became a place of captivity for the Israelites. And when the Pharaoh's grew so desperate to curb Hebrew numbers, that he ordered their baby boys to be killed, it was even worse.

At this point, Moses was born. But rather than allow her son to be killed, Moses mother put him in a basket on the river, and Pharaoh's daughter saw him and adopted him. Now a new Israelite was in the corridors of power, but Moses did not nothing to for forty years. When he was forty years old he killed an Egyptian who had been beating a Hebrew, and fled from Egypt and the Pharaoh's anger. When he was eighty, God spoke to him, and sent him back to Egypt, to free the Jews. Of course, Pharaoh was not interested in letting them go, so he had to be convinced. God caused a series of ten plagues, every one of which was an attack on some god of Egypt. The sun god was attacked in the plague of darkness, the sacred Nile was attacked when it was turned to blood, and the godhood of the first born son of the god Pharaoh was killed. And yet, the Israelites couldn't shake off their fear and trepidation



that they had built up in the time of their captivity in Egypt. When Pharaoh responded by making their lives more difficult, the Israelites complained bitterly to Moses. Eventually, after all ten plagues, the Pharaoh agreed to let the Israelites leave. Not only did the Israelites leave, but they were hurried on their way by the Egyptians, giving them gifts of silver, gold, and clothing.

This time of leaving Egypt, and the time afterwards crossing the Red Sea and wandering in the desert became a major part of the Israelites history and culture. As they left Egypt, they headed east. But the Pharaoh changed his mind and brought his army after them to re-enslave them. They were up against the Red Sea, and all of Egypt's military might came against them, and they were terrified. For Egypt had chariots and horsemen galore, and these were merely slaves. Then all of that military might was destroyed when God caused the Red Sea to part for the Israelites, but to fall on the Egyptians, and drown them. Egypt as an invincible country was destroyed once and for all. The Israelites now knew God was more powerful than the Egyptians. But they failed to believe that he was able to take care of them, and throughout their many years wandering in the desert, they frequently grumbled. And in this grumbling, Egypt was a central theme. "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?" (Exodus 17:3) They began to remember Egypt as a land where they had at least had enough to drink and eat. And so they complained. This was not the last time the people of Israel looked back to Egypt when they were in hard times. It was a pattern that continued for many years.



Canopic Coffinette of Tutankhamun

Egypt remained a military power in the region for a long time. God gave the Israelites instructions in the book of Deuteronomy, "The king, moreover, must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself or make the people return to Egypt to get more of them, for the LORD has told you, "You are not to go back that way again." (Deut. 17:16) God had told them not to return to Egypt, and he had made it clear that they were not to rely on military might they gained from Egypt. Later, when they Israelites were threatened by the Assyrians, they signed a treaty with the Egyptians. But when they needed help, the Egyptian army refused to come to their aid. This happened in a number of instances, where the Israelites counted on the Egyptians to save them from some other power, only to be let down in the moment of crisis. In Jeremiah's time, some Israelites returned to Egypt, despite his warning that God would not support them, and Egypt too would be defeated by Babylon.

After the Babylonian captivity, there are few major happenings with Egypt and the Israelites. Many of the prophets prophecy against Egypt, predicting the time when she would fall as she later did. Egypt remained a symbol of military power, God's faithfulness to the Israelites, and the Israelites unfaithfulness to God. But then in the New Testament something interesting happened.

In order that prophecy which said that the Messiah would come out of Egypt might be fulfilled, God told Joseph, the father of Jesus to flee to Egypt with his wife and baby son. For Herod was going to kill all the boys in Bethlehem. This is the final time in the Bible where an Israelite went down into Egypt for safety, whether from famine or fear. But this time God commanded it to be done, so rather than relying on the Egyptians, Joseph and Mary were relying on God. And the symbolism of Christ coming out of Egypt as the people of Israel had been brought out of Egypt when God saved them, foreshadowed the Messiah's mission to save every lost soul.

Egypt was a place of great importance in the Bible, and influenced the Israelites greatly. In the beginning it was simply a place with lots of food, where they could rest in comfort while waiting for God to prepare the promised land for them, but it grew into a place of captivity and oppression. God turned it into a sign of his faithfulness to his people, when he led them out of Egypt, but it remained a stumbling block for them, as they remembered the food and good things of Egypt, and tended to trust in the military might of Egypt's army over the strong arm of God. Finally, with the coming of Christ, the place of Egypt is complete in the Bible. The savior has come out of Egypt, just as all the Israelites did, when God saved them, and he has come to save and seek the lost. +

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