

Selected stories from

NetConnect

The Monthly Newsletter of the Kentucky Annual Conference

March 2011

What's New with NetNews?

By Beth Dixon

NetNews Online is now *NetConnect*. This monthly web-only publication will still bring you Conference news, local church stories, features, and information about events and other opportunities for Kentucky United Methodists.

Why the name change? With the move to all electronic publications, we needed a new way to differentiate between our monthly newsletter and quarterly publication. The quarterly will still be called *NetNews* and will contain the same kinds of stories you came to expect from the print version. It will be available online and will include a print-friendly version for people who want to print their own copy or print a copy to share with friends who don't have Internet access. You can look forward to the next issue of *NetNews* later this year.

The name *NetConnect* reflects the mission of the monthly newsletter: to connect readers with what's happening in The United Methodist Church locally and globally. *NetConnect* will connect you with inspiring stories of ministries; ideas for growing your church's ministries and growing as disciples; stories of the Church in mission; announcements about training, grants, and other opportunities; and reminders of upcoming conference events. As always, we welcome your submissions and story suggestions (email to bdixon@kyumc.org).

We will also email a weekly update. *NetNotes* will be a concise report of breaking news, timely announcements and reminders, and stories of interest to people throughout our Conference, with links to take you to further details.

We also update our web site (www.kyumc.org) and Facebook page (www.facebook.com/kentuckyannualconference) on a regular basis.

Children's Advocacy Day at the Capitol

By Beth Dixon

Kentucky United Methodists were among hundreds who gathered in Frankfort to speak up on issues that impact children. The seventh annual Children's Advocacy Day at the Capitol was February 17, 2011.

A rally outside the Capitol highlighted three areas from the Blueprint for Kentucky's Children, a policy agenda promoted by children's advocates across Kentucky. The emphasis for 2011 was on Fair Deal for Working Parents (payday loans), Safe and Healthy Families (increasing child wellness), and Fair Opportunity for Every Child (increasing high school graduation rates).

In addition to the adult speakers, children and teenagers spoke, sang, cheered, and stepped for the crowd. Participants included the Harlan County High School Choir, North Oldham High School cheerleaders, and the Indian Trail Elementary (Jefferson County) Steppers. Marian McClure Taylor of the Kentucky Council of Churches shared talking points about payday loans. Governor Steve Beshear also addressed the rally.

Kentucky ranks among the bottom ten states in child well-being. It is number one in the nation in the number of child deaths as a result of abuse and neglect.

Melinda Ryles-Smith, Vice President for Development for the Kentucky United Methodist Homes for Children and Youth, says this second statistic is of particular concern to her and the Children's Homes.

Ms. Ryles-Smith has been involved with Children's Advocacy Day since its first year. She coordinates United Methodist participants and updates the United Methodist Women on issues.

Prior to the rally, United Methodist Women (UMW) and representatives from the Kentucky United Methodist Homes for Children & Youth met at St. Paul UMC (Frankfort District) to learn about some of the issues. These include the need to adequately fund child welfare services; House Bill 441, which would create a child fatality panel to look at systemic issues related to child abuse; and House Bill 449, which addresses the need for standards for alternative school programs.

Kentucky Conference UMW is one of many organizations that help sponsor the Children's Advocacy Day. The sponsorship is a good fit because, said Conference UMW Mission Coordinator for Social Action Sarah Williams, "one of our important goals is to improve life for children."

"We feel that we should stand up for the laws and the funding which will positively impact the lives of children and families."

After the rally, a number of people crossed the street to visit with legislators and advocate for the children's issues they supported.

Kentucky Youth Advocates spearheads Children's Advocacy Day. The event began in 2004 when, according to Ms. Ryles-Smith, "several children's advocacy groups realized that the at-risk families and children we serve need people to advocate for them so that their needs become a priority at the legislative level."

For those unable to attend the February 17th event who still want to advocate for Kentucky's children and youth, Ms. Ryles-Smith recommends that they find the names and contact information for the legislators in their district. That information is available at www.lrc.ky.gov. Then, she said, "Call your legislator, introduce yourself, and let them know that you, one of their constituents, want them to make improvements to the social welfare system to improve the well-being of Kentucky children."

Local UMW units throughout the Conference are helping to improve the quality of children's lives. Ms. Williams shared some ideas.

"Some local units are part of a backpack program which provides food for a child to take home, some tutor after school, some work in the schools by listening to children read, some assist families in navigating the legal system, some work with the various United Methodist Community Centers, and some raise money for special after school programs."

Church Plant Update

By Rev. Matt Johnson

The Community is a United Methodist church plant in Boone County (Covington District). Here are excerpts from an update from church planter Rev. Matt Johnson.

Dear Friends,

While January and February might seem to be a slow after the Christmas rush, things have picked for your resident church planter! On January 23rd we met together for the first time as The Community, gathering in the home of one of our members to read and discuss a book called *Jim and Casper Go to Church*. This book, a discussion between an atheist and a pastor, demonstrates the ways that the church can accidentally exclude and make people feel like outsiders, even when we are well meaning. While I thought this was going to be small group, we have 19 people who are attending! Our small group is rapidly growing, thanks to God's grace!

Just a few quick stories-

-In December we were blessed by Carter's Chapel UMC with 25 dozen Christmas cookies. On "Super Saturday" (the Saturday before Christmas and one of the busiest days shopping days of the year) we took cookies and a flier about the new church and went to bars, restaurants and businesses all over the area, giving away the cookies to employees and wishing these frazzled workers "Merry Christmas." People were blown away by this random act of kindness, and we were able to have a variety of conversations with folks about the new church. Beth suggested that we take several plates to Hooters and this stop elicited my favorite reaction from the recipient...As we turned the leave the restaurant we could hear the hostess say to her co-workers "They brought cookies! From a CHURCH! For EVERYBODY!" We continue to pray that God opens doors for us to reach the people that we sometimes forget about or write-off...We remember that God's heart breaks for those people who are missing. This event was the beginning of a monthly outreach called "Love, The Community," where we head out to practice random acts of kindness for people in our community. **If your church would like to help by providing gifts for us to give out, please contact Matt.** Our February event may be held at a laundromat, as we show up with treats and rolls of quarters.

-Last week I was sitting in my upstairs home office when my phone rang. A young man named Anson, whom I had met in September, was calling me for the first time. He was coming to the point in his life where he realized that he needed something more...and he remembered meeting me at a bar at the horsetrack several months before. I invited Anson to our Sunday night meeting, and to my surprise, he accepted! God's grace goes before us as we connect with people...God prepares the way for the Gospel message to be heard. Please pray for Anson and those like him that we continue to meet and connect with, that God may be at work in the lives of those people that need to know God's great love.

-I sat down with my friend Geoff last week for lunch. My new question for people is "What questions do you think that people have about faith?" I asked Geoff and he asked some normal questions...divorce, creation, etc and we had some good conversations. Suddenly he looked at me and said, "Do you think that it's possible to miss your chance? Like, is there a RIGHT time?" I pushed him a little to explain more to me and he shared that he's always felt that he needs to get his life in order before he can come to God...that God won't accept him if he doesn't get things worked out first. I told Geoff that he didn't need to be perfect before he came to God...instead, he could come to God and say, "Lord, I've messed my life up and I need you to take control" and that God would do just that. Geoff told me that he'll be thinking about that...please continue to pray for Geoff, as I'm convinced that God is at work in Geoff's life, bringing him back to a full relationship.

We've got much that's moving from the back burner to the front of my mind! **I'm hopeful that our first monthly worship gathering will be March 5th, and if your church would be willing to help with hospitality, parking, worship, etc., I would appreciate any help!** Please let me know if there is a time when I can come and share with your congregation or your mission committee how God is at work and how we might engage together in God's great mission of redemption.

In the Name of Him that can do through us more than we can dream or imagine,
Matt

The Community's Web Site: <http://www.thecommunityky.org/#>

Rev. Johnson's email: matt@thecommunityky.org

Teaching the Sacraments to a New Generation

By Jim Nichols*

This is the second in a series of articles on worship from the Conference Worship Team.

In her book *The Great Emergence*, author Phyllis Tickle explores what she believes is a global "rummage sale" of ideas occurring within the church. This rummage sale, she says, occurs every 500 or so years as the church reforms, renews, and reengages with a world and culture that is morphing all around them. Tickle is not alone in her premise that the church universal is currently experiencing one of these giant shifts of ideas and thoughts. Theologies and practices that have been held firm for hundreds of years are being redefined and infused with a new sense of purpose and identity, while other past areas of focus are being relegated to the "less important bookshelves" of our theological practice.

As United Methodists we are called to the task of upholding our beliefs with a critical and discerning eye - a "witness that is faithful to the gospel as reflected in our living heritage." We are also called to a "constructive" approach to the ministry in our charge - an approach that pushes us to "appropriate creatively the wisdom of the past and seek God in (our) midst in order to think afresh about God...and other significant theological concerns." With this in mind, how do we as pastors engage a radically different emerging generation that questions our traditional approach to what we hold most dearly - namely our sacraments? How do we critically and constructively approach these seeking hearts and lives with the "means of Grace" as we have been charged to do so?

I consider myself especially blessed because I work with this young and emerging generation. I meet with young adults from 18 through their early 30's each week, and I hear from them both their great hope and their great frustration with the church and the apparent deadness that they see. Many of these young adults claim a faith in Jesus, a faith that we would call orthodox and even evangelical, yet they are unsure about what that faith actually means. Many of these young adults know the "story" of their faith quite well, but are either disinterested or disenchanted with many of the liturgies we uphold. Many would even say that the liturgies or traditions have little or no real meaning.

On the other side of this divide are young adults who know very little about the "story." They haven't grown up with any kind of faith tradition, and as a result many of the practices they see in the church are mysterious, intriguing and confusing. They experience great meaning in them, but they lack an understanding of what is taking place. These young adults want to participate in these great sacraments, but they want to know more about what they are doing and then incorporate that in to their everyday lives.

On a cold January morning, I sat down with Dr. Charles Brockwell to talk about these very questions and to think together what it might look like to teach sacramentally to those in the midst of this "Great Emergence." Dr. Brockwell is a lover of our liturgy and the unique perspective we as United Methodists have on the sacraments. He shared with me that a lot of the teaching on these important elements of our worshiping life is specifically connected to how we as ministers engage the liturgy and the story from which the sacraments come.

He encourages a living out of our liturgy that invades our sermons and our teachings in all we do. This demands a "sensitivity to the Spirit" to guide us in all we do, to be aware when the Spirit is prompting us to explain and teach what we know and love. I shared with Dr. Brockwell that many young adults look at what we do as a "dead liturgy" and he was not surprised. He suggested we talk one-on-one with these sheep who see such deadness in their worship experience and that we also take a long, hard look at our own ministries. The "liturgy will be dead, if it's dead to the minister."

Dr. Brockwell suggested that we as ministers fall in love once again with the story that we are telling. If we love the story of what is happening at both the Table and the Font, then the people gathered in our churches will also find deeper meaning in these acts. "Look at what is happening here, the Spirit is using these elements to metabolize in you the presence and intimacy of the Living God." It is through the liturgy and the elements that we are telling the story of God's first and most often used self-descriptor - steadfastness (beginning in Exodus 34:6). As often as we lead the community through the story of God's reach to humanity, we are once again allowing the Holy Spirit to "make use" of Table and Font.

Teaching these sacraments comes best not through some lecture but through an active living out of our story and a continual Spirit and life-filled telling of that story to all of our congregants young and old. For in teaching this we, too, must find the life of our words, our traditions and these sacraments once again.

Notes on Resources on the Sacraments

Rev. Nichols did a teaching on the Sacraments with the Antioch community that gathers at Christ Church and used both the United Methodist resources as well as resources by Bishop William Willimon ("Remember Who You Are" and "Sunday Dinner") and Dr. Ben Witherington ("Troubled Waters" and "Making a Meal of It").

Dr. Brockwell strongly recommended a re-reading of United Methodist resources like "By Water and Spirit" and "This Holy Mystery."

**Rev. Nichols is the Minister for Young Adults at Christ Church in Louisville. He works with the emerging generation ages 18-30. He also leads the Sunday night alternative worship community, Antioch.*

Annual Conference Mission Offering to Support Church Planters

2011 Kentucky Conference Mission Offering

To Benefit: Church planters in Thailand and Venezuela

Goal: \$120,000

Suggested Mission Offering Sunday: June 5, 2011

The following excerpt from a letter from Bishop Lindsey Davis gives an overview of this year's Mission Offering.

Our mission offering this year will go to plant a new church in Thailand and to support the education and development of new church planters in the country of Venezuela. Both of these nations have young, emerging Methodist churches. Our efforts in Thailand are through Kentucky Conference leaders, Mike and Sherri Morrissey. The work in Venezuela is in cooperation with the United Methodist Church of Venezuela and their Bishop, Juvenal Perez. In Thailand we will be actually providing support for the development of a specific congregation, helping to fund the pastor's salary.

In Venezuela we will be cooperating with the Seminary of the Methodist Church in Venezuela in helping to prepare their young clergy to be church planters. Over the past five years, over fifty new churches have been planted in Venezuela. As you may know from reading about this nation, the Christian witness is strong even in the midst of some difficulty and persecution.

Our cabinet has set a goal of raising \$120,000 for our mission offering this year. It will be divided equally between the efforts in Thailand and Venezuela. I am confident in your generous spirit. Last year we gave a record breaking \$240,000 to support the ministry of Red Bird. I am confident that we can have another wonderful response from our people with your help. Please plan for a special offering at your church on the Sunday prior to Annual Conference or at another time that would be convenient for you. Then bring your church's check with you to conference to give during the Mission and Ministry Celebration on the evening of Friday, June 10. This year we begin a new journey with our brothers and sisters in Thailand and Venezuela.

Lighthouse Names New Director

By Rev. Jim Sutton

Dr. Ophelia T. Scott has been appointed Program Director/Coordinator of the Lighthouse Community Center, effective January 26, 2011.

Dr. Scott received her BS Degree in Elementary Education from the University of Louisville, her Masters of Education in Reading Instruction from University of Louisville, and her PHD in Educational Leadership, also from University of Louisville.

Dr. Scott retired from the Jefferson County Public School System after 30 years. Seventeen of those years were in the classroom. For two years, she was on loan to the Kentucky Department of Education, where she was responsible for administration of the State Even Start Family Literacy Program, and for providing information to State Schools for implementation of KERA for elementary schools. For five years, she served as instructional support, as a teacher coach, and the last six years as a Certified Personnel Specialist responsible for recruiting, training and retaining teachers for elementary and special schools.

After her retirement from the Jefferson County School System, Dr. Scott worked for the University of Louisville and Bellarmine College as a student teacher supervisor/liason for two years. After that, she worked at Ivy Tech Community College as Program Chair, Education, where she was responsible for developing courses of study and teaching students in Elementary Education.

At a recent Board Meeting, Dr. Scott commented, "My first and second weeks here have been very enlightening." Her next few weeks are likely to be even more exciting and enlightening as she is heavily involved in the planning and organizing the moving of Lighthouse operations from our current facility to our new 18,600 sq. ft. building (hopefully in early March).

The entire Lighthouse Board, Staff, and especially the kids, are excited and happy to have Dr. Scott on board.