

Welcome to Our Sacred Space

Greetings,

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in a manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child and all who heard it was amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. Luke 2:16-19



Rev. Elaine B. Ayres

I've always wondered what Mary was thinking about during all this excitement happening around her, Joseph, and this precious baby boy. Wow! Things were finally looking up. It's almost too good to be true. Until now her life with Joseph had been filled with unexpected surprises. Their life together had been like a roller coaster. Here she was chosen by God to bring forth God's own son and Joseph chosen to care for him. "They named him Jesus because 'he' will save his people from their sins." (Matt.1:21) Wow! What a blessing this child would be to the world.

After taking care of community gossip and a few shaking of heads, they were off to Bethlehem. Traveling in her condition on a donkey couldn't have been too pleasant for her or Joseph. "while she was there, the time came for the child to be born, and she gave birth to her first born, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn." (Luke 2:6-7). By now I'm sure Mary and Joseph were as happy as most new parents after having a healthy child, getting ready to relax for a while before starting this new family in spite of a rocky beginning. But the unexpected happened again. Shepherds came to visit Mary and Joseph from the fields excited about angels singing and telling them about the birth of a Savior in lying in a manger. How did Mary react to all this? "She treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart." Yes, Mary pondered. Ponder!!! I know it's not a word we use too often because it's not a word to take too lightly. The dictionary describes ponder as to weigh mentally; consider carefully; meditate; deliberate; and reflect.

By the time we get to the fourth

Sunday of Advent we could or should be pondering too. This is a special time in the life of the church and yet with all the time we spend rushing to get gifts, fix meals, mail cards, and plan social events, we often ponder or at least wonder if we've forgotten the reason for this special season. Often we forget that this time isn't always as pleasant for the hungry, homeless, bereaved, sick, lonely, etc.

Therefore, we might learn from Mary as she places all things in her heart to gain some perspective from past events that will give her insight and strength for the future. God has kept his promise, and God will take care of all her future concerns. This child Jesus is special for the angels came to proclaim Him. He will bless the last, the lost, and the least. He will save His people from their sins. He will reign forever!

Wow, maybe we could learn the importance of pondering during the Advent Season, preparing for Christmas and during the New Year. Maybe we can learn what pondering means for the Church and continues to mean in our lives as a community of faith. Maybe if we could learn how to ponder through unexpected challenges, disappointments, and hardships while filtering them through God's amazing love through the life, passion, death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ; the message of joy and peace from the angels; a child-like faith; the sharing of the good news through word and deed, perhaps we might realize the assurance of Emmanuel, God with us. Maybe we'll accept the guidance of the Comforter.

Well, this is just a thought to ponder on! May you and your loved ones have a Blessed Christmas and a God-filled New Year.

Shalom,
Elaine

By Tamara Ward

Bishop Woodie White began the morning presentation at the Advent Day Apart by asking everyone "How are you?" of which most replied, 'fine.' He then said "no you're not!!"

How many times have you been asked politely, "How are you?" How many times have you been hesitant about how to respond or just automatically respond with 'fine' or 'ok?' Did you really mean it? Bishop White told us that when he was asked this question by someone and he answered 'fine,' the person responded, "No you are not!" More times than not we respond with a one word answer but don't really mean it. He realized that his response of 'fine' or 'ok' was not really accurate. That is when he started answering the question by saying "I'm blessed." When he answered in this way he knew that he was always 100% accurate.

Bishop White retired in 2004 and is currently serving as the Bishop-in-Residence at Candler School of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. From this writers' viewpoint, he was truly a gift to the clergy during this time where they can come together for fellowship and where he talked about Covenant, Connectionalism and Community as pastors in the United Methodist Church.

He read from II Corinthians 6 where Paul speaks to the people of Corinth as companions working together with God. He told us that "God's work gets validated in the details" and that "people are watching us as we stay on our posts." As is written in this chapter, those persons that work diligently for God and our churches (our pastors), also need the love and support of their colleagues as they continuously give to their congregations.

Bishop White then reflected on his calling to "preach" (the language of the day). He said it 'happened on the way to law school' when someone first introduced this concept to him. He told her that he hadn't heard God calling, but, she said, "I have." After this he began to listen and late one cold February night, at the age of 18, he went into a church, knelt at the altar and, in his words, "had it out with God." He wanted to know what God wanted, and, as he got up from that altar, he knew — he was being called to be a preacher.

When the church talks about 'the Connection,' this isn't a new concept. John Wesley used this term as he brought pastors that were 'on fire' for God together. He used the word (and spelling)

'I'm Blessed'



Bishops Marcus Matthews and Woodie White

Connexion. They were connected by their calling. God connected with an individual and they, in turn, connected with each other through Him.

Bishop White then gave us six questions that John Wesley would ask persons (pre-Board of Ordained Ministry days) before he considered them as pastors and sent them out to spread the word of God.

- 1) Do you know God as a pardoning God?
- 2) Do you have the love of God abiding in you?
- 3) Do you have gifts as well as evidence of God's grace for the world?
- 4) Do you speak justly, readily, and clearly? (i.e. can those that you speak to believe that what you are saying is what you truly believe?)
- 5) Do you have the fruit (i.e. what evidence do you have that is convincing that you are on fire for God?)
- 6) Are believers edified by your preaching? (i.e. are you making a difference in people's lives?)

Those persons that answered in the affirmative were truly called by God and Wesley then called them together as Community.

Bishop White said that he "liked being around United Methodist pastors" because of the connection. He commented on the fact that we, as people and United Methodists, we are 99% the same, and our differences are but 1%. He stressed that, in order to have Community, you have to forget about that 1% difference and focus on the 99%.

As pastors, he said that "you made a Covenant with God, a Covenant with the United Methodist Church, and a Covenant with each other to support each other." Bishop White shared with us that it is really important to keep these covenants because the powers of evil are right at our heels wanting us to fail. The Covenant (commitment) to hold

each other up and tell each other the truth is what will keep evil away. He also said we should talk 'to' each other and not 'about' each other. "People trust with their souls, and when you violate that trust, you break all three "C's." (Covenant, Connectionalism, and Community). It isn't just what we 'are' but what we 'live.'

Bishop White led us in singing the hymn, "Help Us Accept Each Other." The second verse reads "Teach us, O Lord, your lessons, as in our daily life we struggle to be human and search for hope and faith. Teach us to care for people, for all, not just for some, to love them as we find them, or as they may become." And the third verse "Let your acceptance change us, so that we may be moved in living situations to do the truth in love; to practice your acceptance, until we know by heart the table of forgiveness and laughter's healing art." What powerful words to sing after such a moving time with Bishop White.

He wrapped up the morning by saying that the 3 C's become our home and that we are people of five books. 1) Scripture, 2) Discipline (our connection), 3) Hymnal (the way we sing our Faith), 4) Resolutions (how we live our Faith in society), and 5) Worship.

"The Covenant, Connectionalism and Community is for life" — it never ends, not even with retirement. As long as you are called pastor, you have the responsibility of keeping, in tact, your covenant, the connectionalism and the community. Bishop White shared one of his favorite Psalms that he reads often, Psalm 139. Concluding, his hope was that as we enter Advent, we take the time to examine ourselves anew.

May God bless each and every one of our pastors as they prepare us for the birth of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

So, "how are you???" I hope you answer with, "I'm blessed."

Notice To Treasurers — Financial Secretaries

Year End Deadline for Remittances

Financial year 2006 ends December 31, 2006. Final 2006 remittances must be received by the Business Office no later than **Wednesday, January 3, 2007**, in order to receive credit in 2006. **DO NOT** use the postal service for 2006 remittances after December 28, 2006. The Bishop Felton Edwin May Resource Center will be closed on December 29, 2006 and January 1, 2007; however, there is a mail drop in the front door of the building if you wish to hand deliver your final remittance. If you have any questions, please call the Business Office at 302.674.2626. Thank you for your cooperation.

Camping And Retreat

Ministry



Capital Campaign Strategy

How does one execute a successful capital campaign? There are certainly many ways, but the primary thing The Goehner Group brings is a proven strategy. This particular approach can be divided into three distinct and sequential phases:

- Leadership Phase
- Public Phase
- Furnishings Phase

Leadership Phase

The Leadership Phase is often called the “major gifts” phase of the campaign. For our purposes, a major gift is considered a commitment of \$10,000 or more over a four-year period. This initial phase of the **Tradition & Transformation** campaign will focus on working directly with individuals to secure major gifts commitments.

The goal for the Leadership Phase is \$1,000,000, which represents nearly half of our \$2,200,000 campaign goal. This is also one milestone for groundbreaking in the resolution passed by Annual Conference in October 2005 authorizing the project. The Major Gifts Committee will continue to secure these leadership commitments beyond this milestone. However, once \$1,000,000 in pledges is reached, the campaign will move into the Public Phase.

Public Phase

The Public Phase of the campaign will be comprised of four regional campaign events, one on each district. Each event will be a celebration of retreat ministry and the progress made to date in the campaign. It will create the Pecometh River Retreat atmosphere in a hotel ballroom setting to help attendees get a sense for what is possible. The events will be underwritten by corporate sponsors to ensure that every dollar raised goes directly toward the campaign goal.

Each event will be designed to reach several hundred guests, each with the potential to give \$1000 to \$3000 or more over a three-year period. It is intended to be a “Premiere” night in which guests are invited to join the “team” and help move the campaign

from \$1 million to \$2 million. These Public Phase events will create a sense of momentum that the campaign goal is all but achieved. The goal for the Public Phase is \$700,000.

Furnishings Phase

With the goal in sight, the campaign will move into its final phase. In the Furnishings Phase, individual churches are invited to furnish a particular space in the Pecometh River Retreat. The range of gifts includes a single bedroom, multiple bedrooms, meeting rooms, the dining room, lobby, kitchen and offices.

These commitments, combined with the final six months of intense major gifts activity are designed to push the campaign to, and even beyond, its goal. Because these are invitations, and not a mandate, to Conference churches, no church will be forced to participate in the campaign.

Is the campaign goal possible? Yes. While there is a tremendous amount of work involved, this strategy has been successful in over 25 camps & conference centers assisted by The Goehner Group, some who had no donor base at the beginning of the campaign. It will be God, using the passion of all those who know the value of camp and retreat ministry, that will make this goal, and the Pecometh River Retreat, a reality.

Zoning Update

Two recent zoning decisions in Queen Anne’s County all but assure that the Pecometh River Retreat will be located within 300 feet of the Chester River, promising spectacular views and a short walk to the water. These decisions gave the Board of Stewards (BOS) confidence that the county would not require the project be moved to a location far from the river.

The critical path remains Maryland Department of the Environment approval of the wastewater treatment and disposal system. This is a lengthy, but necessary, process to ensure that we protect the Chesapeake Bay watershed. It likely means that groundbreaking will not occur before early 2008.

Substantiation of Contributions

Remember to provide statements for donor substantiation for 2006. The rules affect single contributions totaling \$250 or more. A written acknowledgement of the contribution must be provided by the church. The donors canceled check will no longer be sufficient to substantiate a contribution of this size.

The acknowledgement must include:

1. The donor’s name.
2. A listing of each individual contribution of \$250 or more.
3. A description of any non-cash property contributed.

4. A statement that no goods or services were provided to the donor in exchange for the contribution. It is suggested that all church statements reflecting money contributions, such as quarterly giving reports, contain the following disclaimer:

- 5, “Pursuant to Internal Revenue Code requirements for substantiation of charitable contributions, United Methodist Church provided no goods or services in return for these contributions.”
6. The written acknowledgement

must be provided to the donor **prior** to the date on which the donor’s tax return is filed or **prior** to the due date for filing, **whichever is earlier.**

Also note that beginning in 2007 ALL cash contributions must be supported by a written acknowledgement of the gift from the receiving organization in order to qualify as a charitable deduction. Unidentified loose plate giving will no longer allow the donors to claim a charitable deduction for the amounts contributed in this manner.

Interfaith Resource Center

2007 Vacation Bible School Workshops Planned

The Interfaith Resource Center has scheduled three Vacation Bible School Workshops for the last two weekends in January. Choose the event that is most convenient for you: Saturday, January 20 from 9:30-12:00 p.m. at Wesley United Methodist Church in Dover; on Sunday, January 21 from 1:30-4:00 p.m. at Union United Methodist Church in Federalsburg, MD; and on Saturday, January 27 from 9:30 - 12:00 p.m. at the Interfaith Resource Center (St. Alban’s Episcopal Church, Wilmington). Madeline Beall of Cokesbury will present **Lift Off! Soaring to New Heights with God** (Cokesbury VBS kit) and offer Value Days discounts on Cokesbury and much more. Paula Hartzell will present other VBS programs including Augsburg Fortress, Cook, Concordia, Gospel Light, Group and Standard. This will be a good opportunity for planners to review the materials in preparation for making purchases. On January 27, the Interfaith Resource Center will remain open after the workshop to accommodate those who would like to do additional planning. The cost for the workshops is \$5 per person or \$10 for 3 persons from the same church. Registration is requested. If you are interested in participating, please call the Interfaith Resource Center (IRC) at 302.477.0910 or toll-free at 1.800.336.6152, or e-mail your reservation to resource.ctr@dol.net.

New Resources

Confronting the Controversies by Adam Hamilton is a six-part study exploring some of the most controversial and divisive issues of our time by showing how to look at them from a biblical perspective, in order to arrive at a faithful Christian response. By seeking to understand the positions different sides hold and to present them in a fair way, he also provides a model for how to dialogue about issues while maintaining respect for persons on both sides of the debate.



Paula Hartzell

Topics include the separation of Church and state; creation and evolution in the public schools; the death penalty; euthanasia; prayer in public schools; abortion; and homosexuality. Pastor Hamilton, a noted United Methodist Pastor, gives respectful treatment of the United Methodist position on these difficult issues.

We cannot and should not ignore it. Child abuse within the confines of the church should not happen again. **Safe Sanctuaries**, a 3-segment DVD, produced by Discipleship Resources, is a program that I recommend for every United Methodist church. The Reverend Joy Thornburg Melton, a United Methodist pastor and lawyer, discusses what every church needs to know to protect children under its care. Stories of abuse are handled tastefully and confidentially, yet they help to illustrate the many ways that the church can be caught unaware. The IRC also maintains a collection of VHS resources from FaithTrust Institute, a publisher of materials on all aspects of child and domestic abuse. Each of these videos combines dramatizations of actual stories with information on the behavior of enabling persons who help to protect the abuser.

Creative Worship: A Video Workshop for Worship Leaders and Teams offers excerpts from a worship conference, with presentations by Leonard Sweet, Tex Sample, and Robert Webber, among others. If you are looking for a jolt of vitality in your worship services, this program can provide the inspiration. Four approximately 20-25 minute segments provide the rationale for looking at our worship in new ways meant to inspire the faithful.

Conference Calendar of Events

December 2006

22,25

26,29 Merry Christmas – BFEM Resource Center-Closed

January 2007

- 1 Happy New Year, BFEM Resource Center: Closed
- 5-7 20th Annual Youth Rally, Ocean City, MD, Roland E. Powell Convention Center
- 8 Board of Ordained Ministry-Full Board, Centreville, UMC, Centreville, MD, 9:30 a.m.
- 9 Black United Methodist Preachers Meeting, BFEM Resource Center, 10:00 a.m.