



OKLAHOMA UNITED METHODIST RURAL FELLOWSHIP

QUARTERLY BULLETIN
NOVEMBER 2011

Clergy Holy Land Tour with Bishop Robert Hayes

Rev. Marsha Purtell, Mangum

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What an experience of a life time. Many of us new preachers are still in awe.

Our group toured and studied in the Holy Land with Bishop Hayes this last summer. We read scriptures, sang hymns, gave and heard devotions, prayed together, and shared as disciples the teaching of Jesus in the places Jesus taught.

New meaning was given to the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. We experienced actually walking, and seeing, and touching, and smelling, and experiencing from Masada to north of Galilee. It was an experience of a life time that I, as a soon to be Ordained Clergy committed to small and rural United Methodist Churches in Oklahoma, might never have experienced otherwise. I pray I will continue to grow in grace and knowledge through this experience.

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National UMRF General Conference Petitions and Resolutions

(Condensed)

United Methodist Rural Fellowship began in 1940 at Atlantic City General Conference. There was a need for town and rural people and churches to work together to achieve common goals through an intentional process of preparing petitions and resolutions for General Conference.

The following petitions and resolutions were crafted during several meetings of the national UMRF executive committee and board the past couple of years:

A. Amend Constitution ¶50 to limit tenure of bishops elected after 2016 to two quadrenniums.

B. Amend Discipline ¶212.1 to change the word neighborhood to Community.

C. Amend Discipline ¶212.2 to “**including ministry with the poor.**”

D. Amend Discipline ¶213 on the Process for Assessment of Local Church Potential to: “Alternatively, the district superintendent may appoint such a task force when the future viability of the existing congregation is in question, **when he/she determines that the existing congregation is no longer acting to transform its community,** or whenever he/she deems it necessary for other reasons.

(3.b) ~~In urban churches where the reported average worship attendance for the previous two conference years is below 25 or is unknown,~~ **for any church that has been through this process, the District Superintendent may convene a special session of the conference...**

E. Amend Discipline ¶324.6d. Local pastors may fulfill the requirements for provisional membership and commissioning when they have: a)...b)...c)completed the five year Course of Study for ordained ministry; ...and d) **begun** an Advanced Course of Study consisting of 32 semester hours of graduate theological study or its equivalent as determined by the General Board of Higher Education.

F. Amend Discipline ¶ 1327.3(1) include in the responsibilities of Health and Welfare Ministries... **all immigrant populations**

G. Amend Discipline ¶ 1504.1 To operate, manage and administer the mandatory benefit funds, plans and programs established by the General Conference **so that the distribution of funds is both equitable and sustainable...**

H. Discipline new ¶ 2548 by adding a new .8 as follows: **Upon the discontinuance or abandonment of a local church, the gift of said property may be made to an organization that is non-profit and has values consistent with the United Methodist Church’s values and consistent with our Wesleyan heritage, theology and United Methodist polity that will begin, enhance or continue the work and vision of ministry with the poor in that community.**

I. Discipline new ¶ 2702.03 by adding a new 3 and renumbering the rest:

3. A bishop may be tried when charged (subject to the statute of limitations ¶ 2702.5) with one or more of the following offenses:

a) the bishop appoints a pastor whose past service while appointed has been documented to be harmful and detrimental to the local church; and/or

b) the bishop directs the acceptance by a District Superintendent of a pastor who he/she knows will be detrimental to the life of a congregation based on past service performance while appointed.

J. Resolution 3395 to replace #3395 Affirmation of Rural Chaplains and #3396 Ministries of rural Chaplains. (For more about the UMRF Petitions, contact Claudéan Harrison clharrison@aol.com)

Island Ministry in a Land Locked Oklahoma....

Rev. Mike Mahaffey-Fairview/Catesby

It is such a blessing to serve in rural ministry. To me the rural church has an appeal and a challenge like no other ministry setting. The appeal is simple. The rural church is where God meets the ground. Those who make a living off the land have a unique relationship with the One who created it. They raise their families by scratching the dirt from which they came and to which they shall return. They have a working relationship with God that is gritty and sweaty. I consider it an honor to share the journey with the faithful folks of the rural church.



The challenge with rural ministry is the isolation. When the nearest neighbor is four or five miles away and when cows outnumber humans thousands to one, you know what it means to be isolated. However, being isolated does produce a beautiful characteristic in rural folks. They are some of the friendliest people I have ever met. I find rural folks truly enjoy being in community with others and they take full advantage of each encounter.

The development of the English word isolated leads us to an interesting source: *isolated* c.1750s, *isole*, also *isole'd*, from Fr. *isolé* "isolated" (17c.), from It. *isolato*, from L. *insulatus* "made into an island," from L. *insula* "island." In view of this, I propose that we in the rural church are really doing island ministry.

No two islands are alike; each has its own unique shape. Using a map to connect the dots representing the outlying homes of those who attend your church defines the shape for your rural island. While the core shape of most islands is fairly stable, its edges are constantly shifting and changing. This is also true for our rural islands. Daily tides slowly alter the shape of an island, just as the addition of a new family or the passing of a long time saint will slowly change the shape of each rural island. Storms alter the shape of an island more quickly, just as sudden economic disruptions or dislocations can dramatically change the rural island's shape.

Working toward a successful rural ministry, the primary focus of each rural church is to know and invite everyone that lives on their island. However, unlike our ocean counterparts, rural islands overlap each other. We share territory with islands of other denominations and/or faith communities. Unless you are into sheep stealing, this reality assures that few rural churches can ever hope to get all or even most of its island population in attendance. Therefore, if a rural church desires to grow, it must constantly work to expand the size and shape of its island. In a rural setting this is not as hard as it sounds.

I presently serve a truly rural setting where people must drive significant distances for the necessities of life. Many of the folks on our island make a thirty to fifty mile round-trip to buy groceries and other staples. Many must make a ninety to a hundred-twenty mile round-trip to the nearest shopping center or for employment. If your rural church provides exciting and relevant worship with genuine and caring fellowship, then people will drive that far and farther to be a part of your church. I pray each pastor and parishioner in the rural church expands their vision, expands their island and finds true blessing in doing island ministry.

Giving My Best Daily.....Rev Lyle Shipley-Coalgate/Clarita

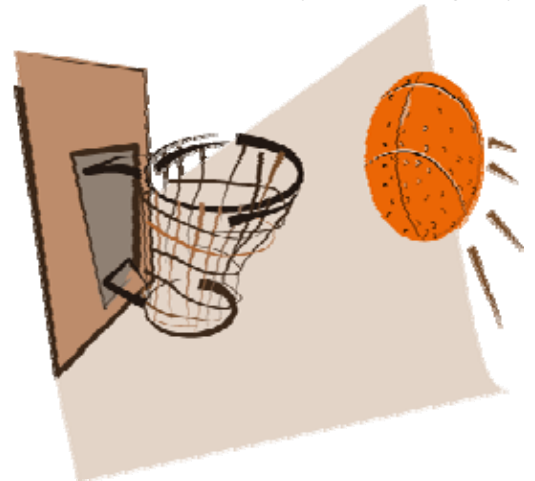
I attended the first basketball game of the season recently. It began early with the 3rd-4th grade girls followed by the 3rd-4th grade boys. The teams for the 5th-6th grade girls and boys then played with the 7th-8th grade girls and boys finishing for the evening. It was entertaining and somewhat amusing to watch the younger children play in their first organized game. They did not follow all the rules. (It must be really hard to referee these games!) But most of the children seemed to understand that the purpose of the game was to put the ball through the hoop.

Not many points were scored in the early game with the youngest children playing; however, it was encouraging to see their intensity of playing a game. As each age group took their turn on the court, it was easy to see the maturity taking place. The older kids knew the rules of the game better and started to add components to the game, like running a set play to take the ball out of bounds and guarding a position on defense. The games with the older kids went a little smoother but the intensity for playing the game did not subside.

As I reflect over my life as a Christian, I wonder if I have the same intensity for living my life for Christ as I did when I first gave my life to him; if I am just going through the motions now that I know the “rules” a little better. The busy-ness of life has a way of changing our priorities and where we are willing to put forth our best effort.

How about you? How about your church? Are you serving the Lord with your “all” or have you lost your steam and find yourself just going through the motions? Regardless of our age, our love for the Lord should be growing daily, and our willingness to give Him our best should be seen each and every day.

The size and location of the church should have no bearing on our desire to faithfully serve Him with all the intensity we had when we first came to know Jesus. I would like to encourage you to actively participate in your church in your service to our Lord and not be a spectator watching others being the hands and feet of Jesus.



God of mercy and grace, we come to you today as we are. Some are joyful and happily anticipating tomorrow. Some are anxious for health, family or occupational reasons. Some are grieving losses which leave big, gaping holes in their lives. And we come to you in thanksgiving, knowing that you receive us as we are. You dance with those who dance; you weep with those who weep. You sit with us at bedside and in the unemployment line. You hold the newborn and the elder. Give us grace on this day both to seek you and to share you with those who are in need. Let us be the instruments of your grace and peace in the world. Hold us close in your love, that we may share it with othersPeggy Jeffries

GOD AT WORK IN SMALL & RURAL CHURCHES!

OKLAHOMA UNITED RURAL FELLOWSHIP

AWARD RECIPIENTS 2011.....Rev. Gary Moody-UMRF Past President

Galatians 6:2 “Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ”...9 “Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. 10 So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.”

These verses in Galatians 6 very clearly tell us about the rural & small churches at their best. People serving God together so that they can help each other to serve Christ in their family, homes, work and community. This was the first thing I learned about being a minister in rural Oklahoma. People need to work together to live life at its very best so that they can not only be joyful and give God glory but also so that we will be able also to give glory to Him when times are tough.

Those who attended the United Methodist Rural Fellowship banquet at Annual conference this year heard first hand from the Outstanding Town and Rural Churches who told us their stories. These were stories about programs that worked well from rural people like you and me. They heard God’s call to serve and worked together to share His love with their family, neighbors and fellow worshippers of God in Christ. These are a few of the things they accomplished:

The Pastor of the Lexington UMC led the leadership of the church to make a defined commitment to ministry in their community. They developed a Food Bank that serves the needs of many people in their community. Their Youth Group has become very strong and draws many to their church. They are proving the value of seeking spiritual growth “on purpose” as a way of sharing Jesus throughout their community as well as their own congregation.

Wesley UMC in Muskogee took a look at themselves and began to ask God for ideas and help for their ministry in their community. God taught them to “live out being the church in their community.” People began to respond and became a part of God’s work together.

These are a few of their developing ministries: 1) A bus ministry to pick up children, 2) “Wesley Reader” in the Elementary School next door, 3) Being friends with Blue Sky Behavioral Health Clubhouse, 4) Involvement in local, district and national VIM(Volunteers in Mission), 5) Work with Ark of Faith, Muskogee Cooperative Ministries and Blue Star Mothers, “Wesley on Wheels” or WOW, where they are in worship with homebound in “home church” services once a month.

Mt. Zion UMC in El Reno, Oklahoma, experienced the power of God through the Walk to Emmaus as well as Bible Study and worship together as they sought Him for leadership. They “desire to allow God to work more fully through them in becoming God’s hands and feet to those placed in their lives..”

As a result their whole congregation-- youth, adult and over 50-- all work together with the youth in missions. Some of their active ministries are: 1) Prayer walks...walking through

neighborhoods to pray over households and leaving a note to say that they have prayed for them as well as to invite them to worship. 2) Bottled water ministry during harvest at the Coops during hot weather. 3) Youth help students at a nearby Community College to move into rooms. 4) Provide a luncheon for the teachers as they prepare for the school term to start.

Tulsa Southern Hills UMC tells us that “Our spiritual growth has come from serving others in need. We have discovered that the more we reach out and give in grace and love, the more spirit and financial giving we receive.”

1) This year was the fifth year as a Project Transformation site. There were seventy children this year.

2) They also provide “Angel Food” baskets at Thanksgiving for thirty families as well as a family Christmas Party.

3) There are various community based programs such as, “Laundry Love”... help one Saturday a month at local Laundromat with quarters etc., a Parish Nursing ministry - assisting with transportation, food and other needs...Monday morning Prayer Team and Prayer Shawl ministry...and local involvement in “Meals on Wheels.”

I must tell you that I was excited to hear these stories and more at the UMRF Awards ceremony this year. We are involved in the lives of our communities and led by the Holy Spirit to care for those with whom we live. My prayer for all of the churches in our Annual conference is that we will allow God to lead us into this kind of loving ministry by our love for Him. I am looking forward to next year and hearing even more of these wonderful “Good News” stories of faith in action in the Oklahoma small and rural churches.

A Rose by any Name...

National United Methodist Rural Fellowship will vote to change its name to United Methodist Rural Advocate during General Conference next spring in Florida. There have been discussions about this change at the national executive committee meetings and at the recent Oklahoma UMRF meeting.

Rural and Town and Country Church advocacy is the main goal of the UMRF thus the rationale for the name change. One concern voiced at the Oklahoma meeting was that UMRF focuses on town and country churches as well as rural churches. One name to reflect this emphasis might be United Methodist Town and Country Advocate or United Methodist Small Church Advocate.

Your thoughts and comments are appreciated. Oklahoma UMRF will vote on the name change during Annual Conference 2012 at the Awards luncheon at Boston Avenue Methodist Church in Tulsa. Hope to see you there!

Claudean Harrison – UMRF President

“Thinkful” about Being Thankful “

Claudean Harrison , President



What gets your heart to beating fast when it comes to doing things for the Lord? Praying out loud affects me like that. You want to open up the highway between you and the Lord; you want to be real and genuinely spiritual. Yet you don't want your intimate talk with the Lord to be a speech or dramatic reading either. Praying out loud in a crowd is difficult and heart stopping for many of us.

Our Bishop Bob Hayes, in his *Strength for the Journey* Devotional Guide, tells us of a young man who was asked to give a short, one-sentence prayer at a college service. The young man bowed his head, “Lord, make us more thankful for all our blessings. Amen.” Before he sat down, he knew he had blown it. He meant to say, “Lord, make us more thankful for our blessings.”

After the service the pastor put his arm around the young man and said, “You prayed a wonderful prayer this morning. If we could be more ‘thankful’ about the blessings that God provides, then maybe we could be more thankful as well.”

During the Thanksgiving Season, we are often asked for what we are thankful, to the point that our answers become rhetorical. “I am thankful for: my country.. Jesus and his gift.. freedom.. parents.. good health.. children.. church.. clothes to wear.. food to eat.. cars to drive..” ..all those great and traditional answers.

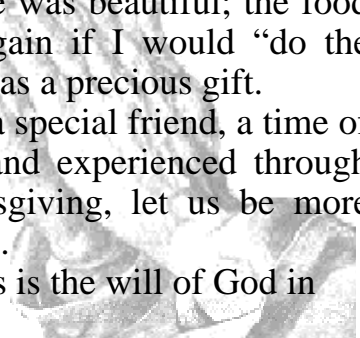
Yet today, I want us to also be “thankful” about being thankful. What people or what events have enabled us to be the kind of people we are today? Who are you, way down deep inside where nobody goes but you and God? How did you get to be that person?

Let us express our thankfulness as we think about how we got to be? I am so thankful that I was raised in a Christian home. As a result of this spiritual foundation, I am a born-again Christian, a growing, struggling, questioning, don't always get it right Christian. My earliest memories are of my dad telling me how special I was; I was a gift from God. Talk about self esteem; I came directly from God, just for him! My parents enabled me to be a spiritual person, as we read the Bible, went to church every time the doors opened and witnessed that God was truly a part of our family. I am so thankful that I can listen, really listen to people. It's one of my greatest strengths; I am a good listener for my sons, my husband, extended family and my friends. Where did I get this skill? Growing up in southwestern Oklahoma with mostly elderly people as playmates, I learned early how to listen and be still, how to be quiet. They were totally focused on me as a child/person, no advice; no judgment; nothing negative. What a gift!

I am thankful for the love and memories of Leola and E. W. Beck in Duke, Oklahoma, who invited me to Thanksgiving dinner when I was a little girl. Their table was beautiful; the food was special. Mr. Beck remembered 40 years later to invite me again if I would “do the dishes”...again. Love and appreciation from outside the family circle was a precious gift.

Who helped you get to this spiritual place and time--your folks, a special friend, a time of adversity, a season of calm and the presence of the Lord as seen and experienced through friends and times? As we get closer to the official day of Thanksgiving, let us be more “thankful” about our blessings, our strengths and the source of strengths.

2 Thessalonians 5:18...”Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit.”



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THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS

Rev. Gene Van Alstyne - Inola

God asked the prophet, “Who despises the day of small things?” (Zechariah 4:10) Apparently the construction of the temple was beginning during the return from captivity. Some people who remembered the old temple that Solomon built, even if they had only heard about it, were disappointed by the plans. The new temple would be only a poor imitation of the “real thing”.

It was easy for them to neglect to remember that before the temple, there was only a tent. But regardless whether it was a tabernacle made of animal skins or a grand temple with aromatic cedar inlaid with gold and silver and imported stone, or a more crude building constructed by less gifted craftsman, it still represented the presence of God among His people.

Someone once said, “God must love small churches, He made so many of them.” There would be something wrong if we did not want the church to grow. But many of our small membership churches may not have the potential for great numerical increases. The reasons may be external or internal, it does not matter. What does matter is that every number represents a soul, and every soul is vital to the kingdom of God.

As we “open (our) eyes and look at the field,” (John 4:10) let us not neglect the ground on which we stand. As the Commission on Small Membership Churches, and the United Methodist Rural Fellowship, it is not our motive to help churches remain smug when they could be more vital. It is our purpose, though, to not despise the day of small things: to recognize and encourage the ministry these churches have to their members, and the richness they add to the tapestry of the whole conference. Good things still sometimes come in small packages.

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