

# REPORTER

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## Church leadership

Experts give tips on effective traits | 2A



## To boldly go ...

What can we learn from Star Trek? | 6A



## Pet peeves

Things that grate about the UMC | 7A

Two Sections  
Section A  
066000  
Vol. 156 No. 11  
July 17, 2009

# Invisible struggles

## Churches learning to help individuals with mental illness

BY BILL FENTUM | Staff Writer

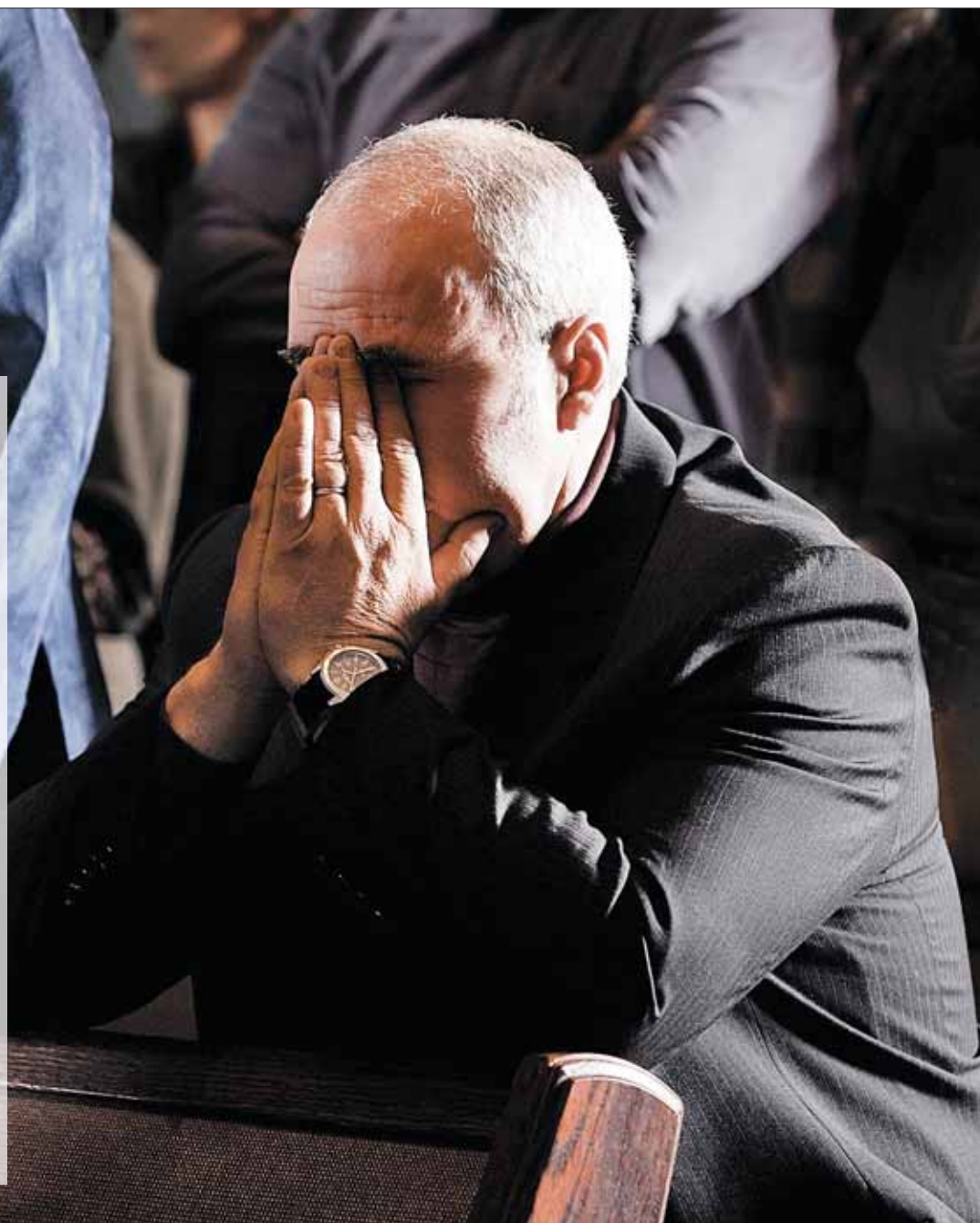
At one United Methodist Church in central Kentucky, members always turned up with cards, visits and gifts of food whenever a church family faced a crisis. But when someone in Angie O'Malley's family was diagnosed with a mental illness in the 1990s, that didn't happen.

"I realized then that mental illness is a no-casserole disease," Ms. O'Malley says. "Our friends didn't know how to help, so they did nothing at all."

The scars of neglect can run deep, driving many people to leave the church entirely. The O'Malleys took a better approach: They moved to a more responsive congregation and began a faith-based support group.

Brain disorders afflict one-fourth of the U.S. population at some time in their lives, according to a 2005 study by the Harvard Medical School. But too many faith commu-

■ See 'Mental illness,' page 8A



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## Q&A: How spiritual practices affect our brain

Many Christians have experienced "the peace that passeth understanding" in their hearts and minds. Neuroscientist Andrew Newberg believes he's observed it in brain-scan studies.

He argues in *How God Changes Your Brain* (Ballantine, March 2009) that God—however understood—is an important part of mental, physical and spiritual health. Based on new evidence from brain-scan studies on

memory patients and meditators, he and co-author Mark Robert Waldman conclude that spiritual practices permanently strengthen functioning in specific parts of the brain.

Dr. Newberg, of the University of Pennsylvania's Center for Spirituality and the Mind, spoke recently with staff writer **Mary Jacobs**.

Is your research showing that belief in God affects the brain, or are

we talking about spiritual practices, like meditation and contemplation?

It's a little about both. We're looking at a variety of ways in which religion, spirituality and belief in God affects us as human beings. With brain imaging, we look at the effects of the brain of different practices, like meditation and prayer. We look at the effects while somebody's actually praying, but the new and excit-

ing research is showing us the long-term effects of that practice.

Our research also showed that while it's important to do a variety of practices like prayer and meditation, it is also important to consider what the ultimate focus is. If you wrap your mind around a negative, angry, hateful God or religious perspective, that stimulates part of the brain involved in anxiety and stress. It dam-

■ See 'Q&A,' page 8A



Andrew Newberg

## FAITH WATCH

**White House denies church-home report**

The White House has denied a report that President Obama decided to make the Camp David presidential retreat his church home. White House aides had told *Time* magazine that Mr. Obama opted for Evergreen Chapel, a non-denominational church at Camp David, so that the First Family could worship more privately than in Washington, D.C. "They have enjoyed worshipping at Camp David and several other congregations over the months, and will choose a church at the time that is best for their family," a White House spokesman said in a June 29 statement.

**Anglican dissidents start denomination**

Conservative Anglicans disenchanted with the liberal drift in their U.S. and Canadian churches have launched a new denomination they hope will one day gain a seat in the worldwide Anglican Communion. The Anglican Church in North America (ACNA) was organized June 22-25 at St. Vincent's Cathedral in Bedford, Texas. Delegates representing an estimated 69,000 Anglicans ratified their church constitution and nine canons, or laws. They also installed former Pittsburgh Episcopal Bishop Robert Duncan as the ACNA's first archbishop.

**Evangelical group names new lobbyist**

Galen Carey, an expert on refugee settlement and humanitarian aid, was named June 24 as the top Washington lobbyist for the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE). Mr. Carey, 53, has worked for more than 25 years with World Relief, the NAE's relief agency. As director of government affairs, he succeeds the Rev. Richard Cizik, who resigned under pressure last December after angering some evangelicals by indicating his support for same-sex civil unions. Mr. Carey starts the post on Aug. 1.

—Compiled by Bill Fentum

# Educators learn power of connection

BY BILL FENTUM  
Staff Writer

ARLINGTON, Texas—Phyllis Bernard started college in the early 1970s, when black militancy was in full swing on many U.S. campuses. She felt sure guerrilla warfare would be the next stage in the country's racial conflict.

She's glad, of course, that she was wrong. As her studies continued, she learned the power of education to create a more peaceful world. Now a law professor, she leads the Center for Alternative Dispute Resolution at Oklahoma City University.

"How do you fight stereotypes that kill? You fight them with education," Ms. Bernard told educators in June, opening a three-day conference sponsored by the United Methodist General Board of Higher Education and Ministry. The 2009 Institute of Higher Education drew 62 faculty and presidents from universities and colleges affiliated with the denomination. They held panel discussions and met in small groups on the theme, "Pedagogy for Peace: Educating Moral Leaders in a Violent World."

"Education that values both intellect and human dignity can reshape communities," said Ms. Bernard. She often travels to countries in Africa, training mediators to settle intertribal conflicts and build relationships that lead people beyond an "us vs. them" mentality.

"When 'we' remove humanity from 'them,' and 'we' are the only humans left, it makes it easier to hate or even to kill," she said. Dehumanization, she noted, led to the 1994 genocide of 800,000 Tutsis in Rwanda—not to mention the lynching of thousands of African Americans in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Ms. Bernard said she was disturbed by an April 7 Homeland Security report warning that white-supremacist militias are on the rise in the U.S. "Some call it passion," she



Phyllis Bernard

said, "but the language of propaganda is designed to create pain and incite violence."

College students mature when they develop both individuality and a love for those who aren't like them, Lutheran theologian Martin Marty said in a keynote speech.

"People are always defining the other instead of getting to know them," said Dr. Marty, a professor emeritus at the University of Chicago Divinity School. "When I see good in higher education today, it's usually because people work toward what [French philosopher] Gabriel-Honore Marcel called 'counter-intolerance.' We call it hospitality."

To embrace hospitality, Dr. Marty noted, students first need a strong sense of themselves. "It's fun to see when it dawns on a student," he said, "that they're not just being transmitted to—that he or she is God's creature, called to their own vocation."

That helps them to feel secure, and ready for respectful dialogue with others from different cultural or theological backgrounds. And teachers are the only people who can make it all happen, Dr. Marty added.

"The task of a teacher," he said, "is to create a climate in which students can lose some inhibitions, feel secure in themselves and become open to the possibility of learning from others."

One way it's being done by David Ahearn, a professor of religion and philosophy at LaGrange College in Georgia, is by leading students in Reacting to the Past games. Developed at Barnard College in New York, the game allows players to debate each side of a historical conflict, from the American Revolution to the struggle against South African apartheid.

"They come to understand the con-



Martin Marty

flicts of interest involved," Dr. Ahearn said in a panel discussion. "They also see that when peace does come, it's hard-won and something of a miracle."

The teacher lets the game unfold as it will and helps students "unpack" the experience when it's all over. "If a student spends three months in the role of a racist, they can actually begin to sympathize," Dr. Ahearn said. "That's a danger, but also an opportunity for people to get out of their skin and into the skin of another."

Ms. Bernard at Oklahoma City University agreed that seeing the world through another person's eyes is often risky, and sometimes even painful.

"But isn't it wonderful to know," she said, "that people make decisions about what to believe based on the people they connect with?"

"Focus on the connections we and our students can make, to bring an ever-widening sense of humanity to the world. Violence doesn't have to have the last word."

The Rev. David Rowe, president of UM-related Centenary College in Shreveport, La., said that he recently launched the Methodist Global Ethics Initiative to help network more than 700 Methodist schools in promoting peace, social justice and environmental sustainability.

"We can be stronger together than we are alone," Dr. Rowe said. "We've got to stop replicating the same programs, at institutions that are only 150 miles away from each other."

Faculty at six schools in Brazil, Japan and the U.S. joined the network in March, taking a three-week online course on global challenges that was developed by Dr. Rowe, using research from the *New York Times* and the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), a bi-partisan think tank in Washington, D.C.

Small groups at the conference discussed ways to involve more colleges and universities in the network. Possibilities include student-exchange programs and online, international chats about war, poverty, the global economy or climate change.

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## UM CONNECTIONS

**Lake Junaluska director named**

Lake Junaluska Conference and Retreat Center will welcome Rev. Carolyn Poling this fall as Director of Ministries with Young People following the departure of Marty Cauley for a local church appointment in the North Carolina Conference. Ms. Poling, a deacon in the North Georgia Conference, will develop ministry events for youth and young adults and will supervise Lake Junaluska Ministries with Children and Families. For information about the center's programs for youth and young adults, visit [mvp.lakejunaluska.com](http://mvp.lakejunaluska.com).

**Commale exceeds \$100K goal for Nets**

The Eastern Pennsylvania Conference in June put 8-year-old Katherine Commale over the top of her goal to raise \$100,000 for Nothing But Nets. Two "mosquitoes," played by Jamil Harper and Jamar Campbell from Grace Community UMC in Chester, Pa., "bugged" the nearly 1,000 attendees to donate. They collected \$4,614, which Bishop Peggy Johnson presented to Katherine. The young member of Hopewell UMC in Downingtown, Pa., started raising funds for Nothing But Nets when she was 5-1/2.

**Shalom summit slated for October**

The seventh national "summit" of Communities of Shalom, a movement promoting faith-inspired community development, will take place Oct. 28-31 in Columbia, S.C. Speakers will include retired Bishop Joseph Sprague, who initiated the Shalom movement in Columbus, Ohio, and the current chair of the National Shalom Committee, Bishop John Schol of the Baltimore-Washington Conference. For information and registration, visit [www.communitiesofshalom.org/summit.html](http://www.communitiesofshalom.org/summit.html) or call 888-201-1718.

—Compiled by Mary Jacobs

# Economy forces missionary-pension cuts

BY LINDA BLOOM  
*United Methodist News Service*

NEW YORK—For decades, United Methodist missionaries were rewarded for their years of faithful service—usually at a minimal salary—with the assurance that they would be fully cared for during their retirement years.

But during this period of global economic decline, when employers from organizations ranging from AARP to Xerox have eliminated or reduced contributions to retirement accounts, what missionaries receive in retirement is changing.

Last year, the Collins Pension and Health Plans for retired United Methodist missionaries, administered by the denomination's General Board of Global Ministries, lost \$33.3 million. In response, the church agency's board of directors approved changes to the plans at the end of April.



**Roland Fernandes**

The result: more out-of-pocket expenses for supplemental health care, starting July 1, a reduction of benefits for early retirement for those with less than 25 years of service and a pension rate determined by a purchasing power index and country of citizenship.

The Rev. James Dwyer, 63, and Helen Dwyer, 64, veterans of service in Germany and Austria and current board employees, reached the 25-year mark in 2009.

When they retire, the Dwyers will be exempt from some of the changes

in the pension plan, but will feel the impact of the reduction in supplemental health benefits. "It's a matter of feeling a bit less cared for, anticipating that," Mr. Dwyer said.

"I think the issue for missionaries in general is we have operated under a system in which we've always been underpaid" compared to pastors and agency staff, Mr. Dwyer said. The hopes were that by the time of retirement, "there would be a very sufficient retirement program in place."

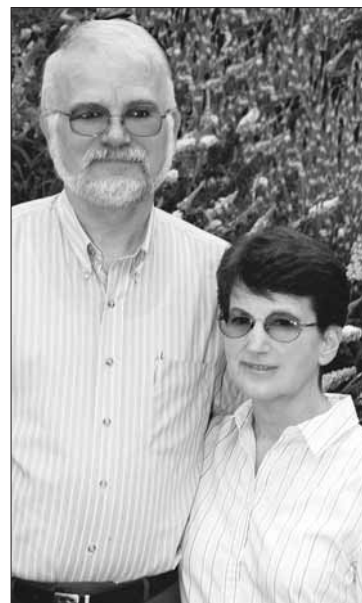
Roland Fernandes, the mission agency's staff treasurer, said the program is still sufficient. He said that the decline in investments, coupled with recent pension legislation, prompted the changes.

As board directors were reminded in April, the new legislation requires the agency, as sponsor of the plans, to put unfunded liabilities—the difference between the value of assets and the estimated amount of what is to be paid to retirees—on its books. In the past, such liabilities could be charged over a long period of time.

Booking costs of \$41.4 million for the plans in 2008, far higher than any other year, "totally wiped out our reserves," Mr. Fernandes said.

As of Jan. 1, the pension plan had \$20.2 million in unfunded liabilities and \$80 million in assets. The ratio was much higher for the health plan, which had \$10.9 million in unfunded liabilities and assets of less than \$22 million.

Mr. Fernandes also noted that income from the Collins Forest, which funds the plans, had dropped due to the decline in the housing market from almost \$8 million annually over the past five years to \$2.2 million in 2008 and could go as low as \$1 million this year.



UMNS PHOTO COURTESY OF THE DWYERS

**The Rev. James Dwyer, 63, and his wife, Helen, 64.**

The United Methodist Missionary Association understands the economic crisis, but had hoped for reconsideration of some of the changes and a longer period of notice before the revised health benefits took effect.

"The people who are going to be affected more are the people in mid-stream, who haven't got to the time of being vested in retirement," said the Rev. Jim Gulley, a former missionary who serves as the association's chairperson, adding that the 1 percent penalty for early retirement "is an incentive for people to stay on until 65."

Mr. Gulley and his wife, Nancy, served two terms of service in Nigeria. Both turned 62 last year, and she took early retirement. She now receives \$316.25 per month, before taxes, for her eight years of service.

Mr. Gulley, who currently is a consultant for the United Methodist Committee on Relief, would now face a 1 percent penalty if he retired early.

Two missionaries—Richard Vreeland and the Rev. Bruce Griffith—were part of the committee considering the pension changes. Mr. Vreeland said he felt that their presence added some balance, even though he had no formal vote.

The association remains concerned that the new pension rate will be linked to the missionary's country of citizenship at the time of first employment.

With some 40 percent of United Methodist missionaries now coming from outside the United States, the association fears the new plan is not equitable. "It gives the appearance that people who are from developing countries are going to bear the burden of the change," Mr. Gulley said.

Mr. Fernandes does not think the new system will be inequitable. "I do not believe it creates two levels of missionaries," he said. "It's citizenship, period. It's not U.S. and non-U.S."

Under the old plan, missionaries received a fixed amount based on each year of service. This year's amount, a \$25 increase over 2008, is \$495. The new plan, effective in 2010, is based on the Gross Domestic Product Purchasing Power Parity index, which is pegged to the same standard of living across all countries. "If the index goes up, as it will each year, the pension will go up," he said.

In the future, the number of missionaries using the pension plan and the amounts they receive will decline. "The lengths of service generally are shorter today than they once were," Mr. Griffith pointed out.

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# Youth sanctuary

## Congregation offers kids a safe place in “Sin City”

By BARRY SIMMONS  
United Methodist News Service

**F**RESNO, Calif.—The Rev. Vickie Healy appreciates the irony of leading a church located along the outer limits of a neighborhood known around town as Sin City.

“I remember when I first took the job,” she said. “I came and drove through this neighborhood and thought, ‘Oh, my gosh, what have I got myself into?’” One of the poorest neighborhoods in Fresno, El Dorado Park—as it is

known officially—is a six-block stretch of low-rent apartments that house gangs, drug dealers and prostitutes.

Several years ago, Ms. Healy’s church, Wesley United Methodist—a mostly middle-class congregation—considered relocating to a more prosperous part of town. Instead, the church increased its efforts to revitalize the neighborhood.

Every Thursday night, the church invites neighborhood children to a family-style dinner where they are encouraged to interact with adults from the church.

“Often times in their homes, their parents aren’t having those kinds of conversations with them,” said Meme Bieks, a church volunteer. “Here, they’re learning how to visit, they’re getting along and the adults are interested in them, which builds that confidence.”

Ms. Healy encourages children to bring their parents. Thomas Mansson has been coming with his son Anthony for several years.

“The way the economy is, it sure does help a lot,” he said. “Groceries are so expensive. This probably saves us \$20 to \$30.”

### Radical hospitality

Ms. Healy calls this approach to neighborhood renewal “radical hospitality.”

“It means we open our doors to people; we welcome people as they are,” she said. “We have to step out of our comfort zones.”

Sometimes that requires leaving church property and entering the secular world of local politics.

Since joining the church in 2007, Ms. Healy has led an effort to partner with other agencies to attract new housing and development into the neighborhood. She also led a drive to develop a community revitalization plan, bringing together government and neighborhood leaders.

And last year, after the Fresno school board put El Dorado’s neigh-

**The Rev. Vickie Healy welcomes community residents.**



UNITED METHODIST NEWS SERVICE PHOTOS BY BARRY SIMMONS

**Church member Josie Vasquez hands out cupcakes.**

hood school—Wolters Elementary—on a list of schools to be closed, she and others from Wesley organized a parent-led protest.

The board, surprised by the reaction, took the school off the list.

“We just felt that Wolters had done too much for the kids in our neighborhood to close it,” said Ms. Healy.

Ms. Healy said her church has become a refuge for children, most of whom don’t attend Sunday services. Children typically meet after school at the church courtyard and transform it into a playground.

Church volunteers often invite them inside to play. Several women in the church, after learning of an interest among neighborhood girls to knit, started an afternoon class to teach them.

“The folks at Wesley for a long time have just wanted to provide safety and food,” said Ms. Healy, “and to let kids know that there are adults who care about them—and that this doesn’t have to be the place they end up.”

### Neighborhood changes

El Dorado Park was originally built to attract students at Fresno State, lo-



**Children and their families enjoy a free meal at Wesley United Methodist Church in Fresno, Calif.**

earned the neighborhood its nickname Sin City.

Over the years, as college students were replaced by lower-income and longer-term residents, the name stuck.

Today, El Dorado Park has some of the city’s worst living conditions. But Ms. Healy said she is beginning to see changes in the community. Besides noting an improvement in behavior among the children, she has

noticed a drop in church vandalism.

As she surveyed the church property—pleased that flowers are still planted and walls are no longer full of graffiti—she said it’s because children don’t feel the need to “tag” the church as their turf anymore.

She hopes it’s because they know they’re already welcome.

**Mr. Simmons is a freelance writer in Nashville, Tenn.**



**ABOVE:** Church volunteers help children with arts and crafts projects.

**LEFT:** Children from the poorest neighborhood in Fresno, Calif., get plenty of adult attention at Wesley UMC.

## Power of a Looming Threat

BY ANDREW C. THOMPSON  
UMR Columnist

There is always a Looming Threat somewhere on the horizon. When I was a kid in the 1980s, it was killer bees in Texas, poised to invade the rest of the United States.

Back in 1999, it was the Y2K bug. We were sure it was going to shut down everyone's computers and cause passenger jets to fall from the sky when the clock struck midnight on December 31st.



Andrew Thompson

Today the Looming Threat is the H1N1 virus. But to get the scary effect, you have to call it by its more common name: *swine flu*.

Our innate tendency to fear disease only increases when the disease is spread from animals to us. Think of how you felt when you first heard about *mad cow disease*. (For the record, bovine spongiform encephalopathy. But who can pronounce a name like that, let alone be scared by it?)

So take a disease with a name like swine flu and notify the public that it's spreading around the country, and you've got a recipe for mass panic.

### Facts first

First, the facts. As of July 2, the Centers for Disease Control reported 170 deaths in the U.S. from the current swine flu outbreak. That number is sure to rise. But it's nowhere close to the 36,000 Americans who die every year from the plain ol' seasonal flu. And despite its "pandemic" status, the CDC also tells us that swine flu is no more deadly than the flu virus that we contend with each and every winter.

Then again, facts don't comfort once something has reached Looming Threat status.

A church member recently asked me if we were going to stop having the Lord's Supper until the swine flu threat had passed. And she wasn't the only one in the congregation who was willing to cease celebrating the sacrament.

There are over 37,000 deaths per

year in the U.S. from auto accidents. But I've never had anyone suggest we should stop coming to church until the "traffic threat" has passed.

So what's the difference?

It has to do with control. Getting behind the wheel of a car doesn't scare us the way getting on an airplane does, even though flying is much safer than driving. We're convinced we control our own destiny when we drive, so we're fine with barreling down the highway at 75 mph.

But at least with airplanes, we can control whether we get on them in the first place.

### The promise

Even scarier are those things we don't control at all. They are the Looming Threats. And that's why the swine flu is scary in the same way those swarms of killer bees were back in the '80s. We have no control over the Looming Threats. All we can do is wring our hands and hope they don't come to our neighborhood.

I think we could use some perspective on this situation.

Before we start barricading ourselves in our homes and waiting for the swine flu apocalypse, we need to connect what we say we believe with what is going on around us.

And we need to realize that all of our panic at the latest Looming Threat is really a symptom of our fear over the greatest Looming Threat of all: death.

"It is appointed for man to die once," Hebrews 9:27 says. There's no getting around that. Until Christ returns, every generation that is born will die. And if that were the final word, we'd have every reason to head for the hills.

But we have been baptized! And our baptism is a baptism into Jesus' death. Being buried with him through baptism, we are given the promise of resurrection with him as well (Romans 6:3-4). And the same love that led Jesus to the cross for us is the kind that casts out all fear (1 John 4:18).

So wash your hands thoroughly. And use hand sanitizer if you want. But don't panic. The Looming Threats come and go, but we have a promise that remains steadfast.

The Rev. Thompson maintains a blog at [www.genxrising.com](http://www.genxrising.com).  
e-mail: [andrew@mandatum.org](mailto:andrew@mandatum.org).



PARAMOUNT PICTURES PHOTO

Among the things that Methodists can learn from *Star Trek*, says Josh Hale, is that passion and youth have a great deal to contribute.

## What Star Trek can teach us

BY JOSH HALE  
Special Contributor

I admit it. I'm a nerd. I've loved *Star Trek* since before the "cool" reboot this summer. It's in my blood: My father was hooked as a star-gazing teenager.

I thoroughly enjoyed the summer 2009 movie version, and I began thinking about what made it an excellent movie, and what promises it made for revitalizing the franchise. (Caution: spoilers ahead!)

Here are a few things I believe the church can learn from *Star Trek*:

**Re-connecting at a deep level with people.** Take the opening scene, with James T. Kirk's parents aboard the ill-fated USS Kelvin. The buildup of interest, engagement and emotional connection to everything that was about to happen was kicked off with a vengeance in the first few minutes.

George and Winona Kirk are heart-breakingly real. They are separated just as Winona gives birth. George spends the last two minutes of his life listening to his newborn son's cries, picking a name and saying a final "I love you" to his wife, defending her and the rest of the escaping crew to his own death. As you watch the Kelvin annihilated in a self-sacrificial burst of light, with the Kirk family life continuing on through the new baby, you cannot help but be drawn into the narrative.



Josh Hale

We rarely narrate our own "origin story" with the same emotive content. Our preaching is either irrelevant to

the gospel and/or people's lives, or it gives no reason to actually touch the lives of the hearers. It's the same with Bible study and evangelism efforts. Recapturing the emotive heart of faith and coupling it with a robust re-telling of the Story of God from the Bible and Christian history must be at the center of any church renewal efforts.

**Fresh faces.** What a great cast! While there are a few seasoned veterans like Karl Urban (*Bones*) and Bruce Greenwood (*Pike*)—and of course Leonard Nimoy's extended cameo as Spock Prime—there are also a number of new faces from TV or obscurity. And they acted superbly. No wooden Anakin Skywalker-like portrayals in this universe. If you were a huge fan and could remember Kirk and Co. as depicted by William Shatner and the original cast, you could really believe that these folks were just their younger version. If you're new, then the acting stacked up favorably against other new releases in May and June.

**Passion and youth have a great deal to contribute.** Things may not be done in the same way, but the intensity, homage to tradition and skill brought to bear by the new actors of *Star Trek 2009* cannot be denied. Young Christians and young clergy would do well to bring the same balance of respect, excellence and freshness to the faith today. And many of them are doing so: check out UMC YoungClergy.com as a great example!

**Culture-making.** The *Star Trek* that burst onto the scene in 1966 was a rabid counter-cultural force, in some ways not unlike the early church as recorded in the book of Acts. The crew was building a loyal community centered on a different vision. The original TV series created an

out-of-the-mainstream cultural phenomenon that has lasted more than 40 years and has been a significant influence upon American society, the vision of space exploration and peaceful international relationships. It is now poised with the promise to reach new people, tell engaging and timely stories (that are really about who we are), and spark the imaginations of 21<sup>st</sup>-century Terrans.

**The church has the same promise.** We may have made many mistakes over the past few years, but we have an even bigger potential. We aren't in the business of creating consumers for tie-in products or fans to line up for Trekkie conventions. Our mission is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. True inspiration comes from the movement of the Holy Spirit, and it is my hope that we will watch for the "reboot" opportunities afforded us in the church.

Can we harness our passionate youth, our traditional elders, our emotions and our stories, and our counter-cultural power so that the Spirit will truly "renew the face of the earth"? It's a challenge worth spending your life for, much as Kirk discovers when he takes up the offer to make something of himself in Starfleet.

I don't want to stretch the analogy to its breaking point, but if you haven't seen the movie, go while it's still in the theaters! It's the most fun I've had in a long time.

I wonder: Can those who encounter Christians and the church say the same thing about us?

Mr. Hale is the campus minister for the Wesley Student Center at Lamar University in Beaumont, Texas. Reprinted from his blog at [expatriateminister.blogspot.com](http://expatriateminister.blogspot.com).

# Seven things I hate about U(MC)

BY TED A. CAMPBELL  
Special Contributor

I promise not to complain about things like Cowboy Church when there are no real cowboys. That's their business, not something our church requires.

And I am not going to criticize clergy who do not keep their promises to preach our doctrines or maintain our liturgy and discipline. At least not right now.



Ted Campbell

Let me complain about some stuff that our church actually does, like the following.

**Too many words.** Add up the *Book of Discipline*, the *United Methodist Hymnal*,

the *Book of Worship*, and the ever-expanding *Book of Resolutions*, and I'd guess that we have more text than the Bible itself.

Add annual conference journals and minutes and committee reports, and we can demonstrate our success in grinding out lots and lots and lots of words with little real consensus.

Trust me: No one needs to read all that stuff. Go read the Bible and say your prayers and then try to help somebody instead.

The early Methodist disciplines included the ritual, and even so, they were slim volumes on which there was strong consensus. Today's endless volumes of words with very little consensus hurts us, because it's hard to see the important words for all the unimportant ones.

What if we print only stuff that 85 percent of United Methodists agree on? Better yet, stuff that 85 percent of United Methodists agree on consistently over a period of 36 years. That would be pretty slim and trim—and maybe even fit.

The good thing about cutting out stuff is that it leaves many decisions to local bodies.

**The procedure for organizing a new congregation.** Read this section of the *Discipline* carefully and then see if you could design a more efficient means of stifling creativity and entre-

preneurship and evangelism in the church. This centralized, bureaucratic, Big-Brother-Knows-What's-Best-For-You approach was invented in 1956, and is perfectly designed to protect dying congregations from the horrendous threat that someone might start a new and thriving congregation on their doorstep.

Take a Valium, place your right hand on the trust clause and just let people—clergy and laity alike—go out and start new congregations, as Methodists did very regularly prior to 1956. No, they can't take your precious property with them.

And if the UMC doesn't like any of these new congregations, they can join my new denomination that I will organize as soon as I finish writing this, but don't hold your breath.

**The anti-Catholic material in the Articles of Religion.** I have made a solemn public pledge to "preach and maintain" the doctrines of my church. Yes, I know we renew a doctrinal resolution every eight years that says we don't really mean what we say in the anti-Catholic articles—or more technically, that what the anti-Catholic articles say is directed against late medieval Catholic teachings and practices that probably have little relevance to what Catholics teach and practice today.

But to renew such a resolution for decades on end means basically that we know this stuff is wrong. Especially after we have signed the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification. Let's be honest and cut it out.

**The Welch Rubric.** What would you think about a denomination that solemnly requires all its members to eat styrofoam in place of bread in the Lord's Supper? How about styrofoam that has been painted to look like bread? Or styrofoam painted to look like bread with chocolate flavoring injected in it? I mean bread is just so old-fashioned.

Think about it: What could be more plainly unscriptural than the requirement that "the pure, unfermented juice of the grape shall be used" in the Lord's Supper, instead of what Jesus Christ explicitly asked us to use? The Welch Rubric is very, very wrong. We can provide that grape juice has to be available as an alternative, but please don't forbid United Methodists from literal obedience to the words of Jesus Christ. Stop it. Now.

**Half-way authorizing half-way laypersons to celebrate the Lord's Supper.** Sure, if a strategically placed terrorist bomb wiped out all the ordained elders on the face of the earth, the remaining laity would have good reason to designate some persons to celebrate the Lord's Supper, and they might as well call them elders.

All of the predecessor denominations of the UMC and almost every Methodist church worldwide ordains those authorized to celebrate the Lord's Supper as elders or presbyters. In 1996, we hastily abandoned this principle and placed "commissioned ministers" in the awkward position of being asked to celebrate without the authorization that ordination confers.

We need to give the ones who celebrate the Lord's Supper the full recognition that they are elders in the church.

**Annual Conferences.** If we're not really going to confer about anything, there's no point in holding a conference. We can approve committee reports by e-mail. And no, I do not intend to read them: see "Too Many Words" above.

What's the cost/benefit ratio for holding these conferences every year, especially where people must sleep in hotels, eat meals in restaurants and drive 150 miles each way? Is this helping us? Would the life of local congregations come to a grinding halt if we didn't hold the annual conference every year? What are we accomplishing?

**The capital letter "T" in "The United Methodist Church."** In the first place, it looks like a mistake, except of course when it comes at the beginning of a sentence where "T" would be capitalized anyway. You can be creative with style, like the name of my heavy metal group, DëthBlød, but it helps if this creative use of style is a little more obvious.

In the second place, it's just arrogant. We are not any old United Methodist church, we want you to know; we are "The United Methodist Church." How about "THE United Methodist Church"—equally stylistically incorrect but it would hype the arrogance just a bit.

Actually, there was a denomination called the United Methodist Church in Britain in the early 20th century, so we're not even the only United Methodist Church that ever was. Let's make it simpler.

Come to think of it, let's make the whole church simpler.

Dr. Campbell is an elder of the Texas Conference and an associate professor of church history at Perkins School of Theology, SMU.

# Let's boycott vacations!

BY SHANNON VOWELL  
Special Contributor

"Vacation" is an all-American word. I learned that young, when my Dad was in the Air Force and we were stationed overseas.

During the summer, only we Americans "took vacations." Our European counterparts on the NATO base "went on holiday."

Granted, in practice, the different words described the same process. My parents taking us to the beach for vacation looked identical to my British friends' parents taking them to the beach on holiday.

But I think the words themselves, removed from the context of beaches or American vs. European lexicon, say something distinct and important about the way we choose to live into our opportunities for leisure and recreation.

"Vacation" vs. "holiday." It's actually a theological issue.

Notice that the word "vacation" doesn't appear a single time in the Bible, yet "holiday" appears frequently. Why is this?

Basic etymology assists here.



Shannon Vowell

"Vacation" ultimately derives from the verb "vacate," as in "to leave empty." But "holiday" originates from "holy day," and means "festival" or "celebration."

Since the Bible describes and provides instruction for any number of holy days, festivals and celebrations, "holiday" is a natural fit in biblical vocab.

But "vacations" is another matter altogether. In fact, the Bible seems to be concerned with the opposites of "vacating" and "leaving empty." Scripture provides instead a lengthy and varied account of the presence and fullness of God in, among and through God's people.

Perhaps I make too much of a fetish about how we use words, but this "vacation" vs. "holiday" thing really bothers me. There are simply too many sub-textual implications to using a word like "vacation" for describing our most-anticipated mini-seasons in life.

For example, if "vacation" is our stated goal, then "emptying ourselves" becomes almost a self-evident good. Doesn't "doing nothing" rank at the top of most "vacation" goals? It's not exactly something that Jesus ever modeled or advised, yet "vacation" seems to bless the

idea of absence, emptiness, nothingness—and the pursuit thereof.

Don't misunderstand. I am not trying to call people back from the beach into a whirl of guilt-ridden busy-ness. While Jesus never sanctioned "vacations," Jesus certainly preached and practiced Sabbath, rest and withdrawal from chaos for communing with God.

'Until we re-make our vacations into true holidays . . . we will return from them even emptier than when we set out.'

I don't think the solution is to stop taking vacations. But I do think that until we re-make our vacations into true holidays—times of holy refreshment and renewal and joy—we will return from them even emptier than when we set out.

In a sense, as Christians, our vacations must be holy days if they are to truly leave us rested; for apart from Christ, where is our rest? And if we are to be replenished by our escapes from routine, then we have to be getting to God, not just getting away.

Jesus' example seems to indicate that if we are going to claim the blessings of discipleship, we need to spend our time doing something that has purpose, meaning and significance; something that draws us closer to God, whether we are in repose or going full tilt.

The intentionality and focus of our lives, the orientation of our hearts and minds matters, regardless of where we are or what we are doing.

"Going on holiday" describes a journey as much as a destination. It's an apt metaphor for a faith walk. We Christians are called to continually ask, "Where are we going? Where is God leading?" And time away on holiday provides unique and wonderful opportunities to listen for God's response.

Jesus invites us: "Come to me, all you who are weary . . . and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). So, this summer, please don't take a vacation. Go on holiday!

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'Today's endless volumes of words with very little consensus hurts us.'

## ■ MENTAL ILLNESS *Continued from page 1A*

nities fail to reach out.

"Medicine treats the symptoms, but relationships cure the soul—and that's what churches can provide," said the Rev. Susan Gregg-Schroeder, a United Methodist elder who has created a series of DVDs on the role of spirituality in recovery.

Ms. Gregg-Schroeder was diagnosed with clinical depression in 1991, while serving as an associate pastor. She took a leave and checked into a hospital, but kept her illness a secret for years, fearing that she would lose her job.

Her silence ended when she led a workshop at the same church, helped by a parish nurse and a licensed professional counselor. Then she launched MHM (MentalHealthMinistries.net), a nonprofit media company housed at San Carlos UMC in San Diego, Calif.

"In mental illness, it's partly the spirit that struggles, so to lift up that God is involved in the healing process is vital," said the Rev. Sue Farley, senior pastor at San Carlos, who also fought depression after the death of a close friend.

Since then Ms. Farley has preached about the experience, and recently invited the National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI) to the church, to teach a free 12-week course on caregiving for the those with mental illness.

"We try to create a safe place," she said, "for people to talk about the real issues of life. I've also told my staff to plan that the need for pastoral care will increase, with the economic stresses that touch all of us these days."

Hard times, of course, have also forced budget cuts across the denomination. The Virginia Interfaith Committee on Mental Illness Ministries (VICOMIM), an ecumenical group started by the Virginia Conference in 1995, won't receive any conference funds this year; so it's up to donors to keep the ministry alive.

"Faith communities rely on us for mental-health education," said Margaret Ann Holt, VICOMIM's coordinator of resources. The group sponsors workshops in the region, training local churches and synagogues on how to help—and not hurt—those in need.

It's not uncommon, Ms. Holt said, for believers to tell friends they wouldn't suffer from depression if their faith were stronger.

"That really puts the fire in the belly for me," she said, "to be sure people understand these are biologically-based illnesses. To lay that extra burden of guilt on someone is just inexcusable."

FACES (Family Advocacy Creating Education and Services), a nonprofit mental-health center, is located in an annex building at St. Mark's UMC near Richmond, Va. Church member Pat

Myers founded the center after her son, Justin, committed suicide at age 20.

"He was hospitalized five times with bipolar disorder," Ms. Myers said. "As is typical for that illness, especially with young people, he resisted taking his medications."

Shortly before Justin's death, Ms. Myers had visited a NAMI support class, and planned to start group meetings at St. Mark's. At the funeral, the pastor—who had tried to help Justin—came to her and said, "Whatever you need, we will provide."

"I could never say enough about how they stepped up," Ms. Myers said, "and the church tells me they're so thankful to have FACES there, so they can refer anyone who needs help."

The denomination's General Board of Church and Society honors some local congregations as Caring Communities, a name adopted by the 1996 General Conference for churches that support persons with mental illness and their families. Clinton UMC, a Caring Community in southern Maryland, hosts seminars on issues ranging from depression to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

"The church has become home and family to us," said Claudette Oghogho, a Clinton member whose husband Emmanuel was diagnosed with PTSD in the 1990s after serving tours of duty in the Persian Gulf, Somalia and Bosnia. Now on permanent disability, he goes through frequent dissociative episodes, or "flashbacks."

"Everything about us looks nice and normal to people until the episodes come," Ms. Oghogho said. "Then we all suffer, and he's not able to be a husband or father." But the church is always there, she added, to hold them in prayer or care for their young sons when she can't leave Emmanuel's side.

Some situations, though, can get a little too scary.

The Rev. Paula Werner, pastor at St. Matthias UMC in Fredericksburg, Va., struggled for months to help a man who attended the church, but was full of anger and refused counseling.

"I tried my best," Ms. Werner said, "but he wanted nothing from a woman; he saw me more in a mothering role. I got him into a men's group, but they had a hard time with him, too. To me, that's my lost soul."

But the victories outweigh the losses, according to VICOMIM's Ms. Holt, a member at St. Matthias.

"Paula has a wonderful compassion and she makes the concern for mental health as routine a part of our congregational life as any other concern," Ms. Holt said.

"It's become inclusive, no different than praying for someone who has heart disease or diabetes. And that's the kind of thing I've always hoped."

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## ■ Q&A *Continued from page 1A*

ages you and it damages your body. If you focus on a loving, forgiving God, you activate the parts of the brain involved in compassion and love, and that ultimately lowers stress.

**In the 1970s and 1980s, Herbert Benson wrote about the "relaxation effect": how meditation or prayer can affect blood pressure and heart rate and thus contribute to heart health. How have you added to that body of work?**

Our research goes well with his work. What we're doing is to expand it to say it's not just the heart. Spiritual practices affect almost all parts of you: your emotions, your memory, your cognitive powers, your psychological and your spiritual life.

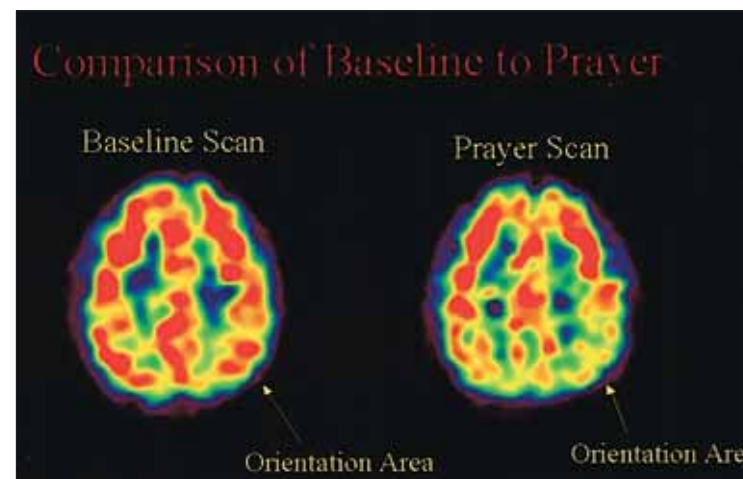
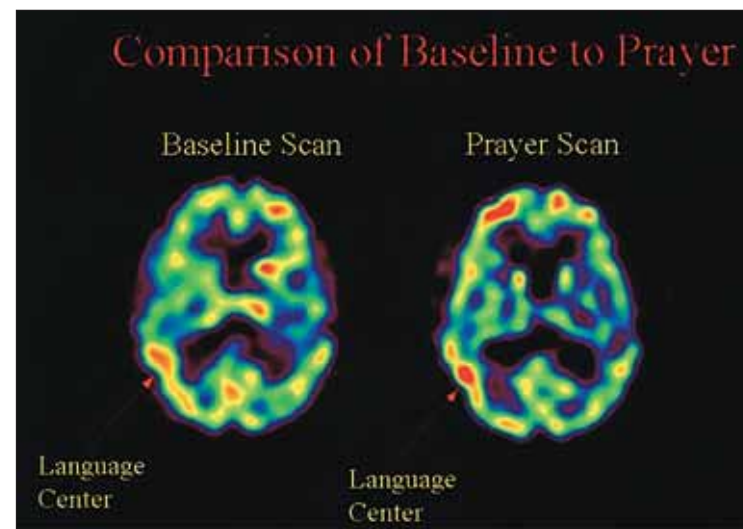
Benson's focus was on the basic physiological effect of relaxation exercise. What we're talking about can be adapted to a variety of religious and spiritual traditions, and can achieve the relaxation response but also enhance your memory, lower depression and anxiety, and potentially bring you closer to your own spiritual goals and spiritual beliefs.

**I think you're looking at what the Bible refers to as the "heart." Like the verse in Proverbs, which says, "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life."**

Yes, you're absolutely right. It's an appeal to people to try to focus their minds on the positive and compassionate sides of themselves. People can utilize these ideas in a religious or non-religious way. If you do a simple breathing practice and you focus on a prayer from the Bible or on God's love, it will have an extremely beneficial effect. You can still do the practice even if you are not a believer. They won't have that spiritual uplift but they will benefit you, whether you're focused on faith or simply on positive emotions and feelings of compassion.

**I tried Zen meditation for a while and I felt it shifted something in me. Looking at my experience through your scientific paradigm, what do you think happened?**

When people are engaged in different meditative practices, the



COURTESY PHOTOS

**TOP:** Brain-imaging technology called single photon emission computed tomography (SPECT) measures levels of brain activity. Images of the brains of nuns show the results from a baseline scan at rest (left) and during a "peak" of meditation and prayer (right).

**BOTTOM:** The nuns also decreased the activity in the orientation area (superior parietal lobes) during prayer.

areas of the brain that you use change not only in the moment, but longer-term effects may persist. You may actually change the fundamental functioning of the brain, and that may be the shift that you perceived.

Studies show that long-term practitioners of meditation have a thicker part of the frontal part of the brain. Even when the person is at rest, you see increased activity in the frontal lobes.

So yes, it shifts something within the person that may have far-reaching effects on memory, on regulating our emotions, on our feelings of compassion.

What you're describing sounds a

little like physical exercise. If you exercise vigorously, your metabolism is raised for hours afterward, and if you exercise regularly, you see long-term changes in your body.

Exercise is a good analogy, because prayer and meditation is like exercising your brain. And the more you engage all the different parts of the brain, the better off you are. If you just exercise your left arm, it's not going to help the rest of you.

Religious and spiritual ideas really have a much more global effect on people, and I think that is part of why religious practices do have such a profound influence on people. It's not like doing a crossword puzzle, which just improves your ability to do crossword puzzles. It's changing your perspective on the world, the way you think about yourself and your moral perspectives on the world. You really change many different aspects of who you are.

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