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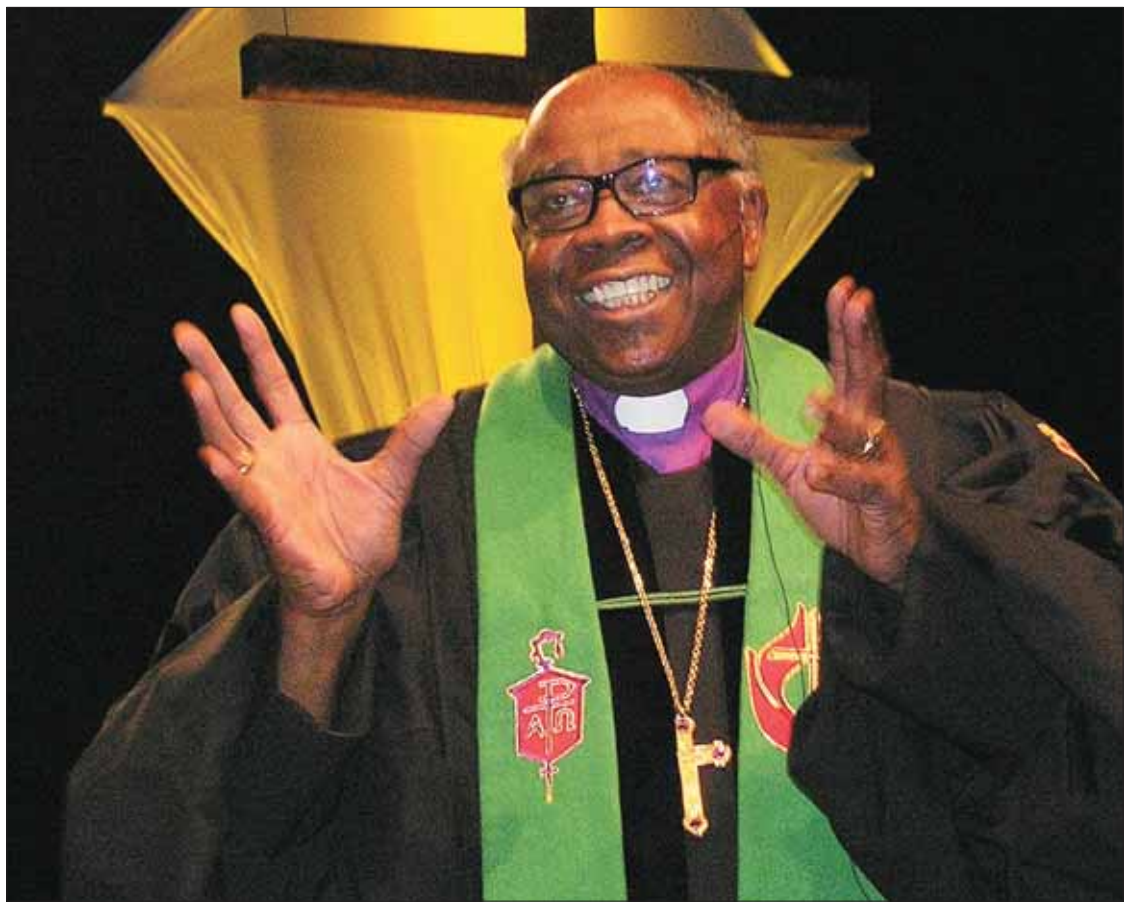
July 31, 2009

Man in the mirror

Focus on relationships, men told at UM gathering

By J. Richard Peck
Special Contributor

NASHVILLE, Tenn.— United Methodist Men's shift to Music City USA for their quadriennial gathering gave their 2009 assembly a little Tennessee flavor.



PHOTOS BY RICH PECK

Bishop William Morris tells attendees at the 10th National Gathering of United Methodist Men to "be all that they can be."

Vince Gill, a member of the Country Music Hall of Fame, and Nashville recording artist Steve Hornbeak were among those who encouraged more than 1,200 attendees at the national event, held July 10-12 at Belmont University.

Country music star Vince Gill performs for the men's gathering in Nashville.

Since 1953, the United Methodist Men's gatherings had been held every four years at Purdue University in Indiana. But the group chose to move the 2009 gathering to a more central location in the U.S. The Nashville event was the 10th such men's gathering since the formation of the United Methodist Church.

With a theme of "Focus on the Cross," attendees participated in worship, seminars and workshops centered on men's relationships with God, other men and younger men they need to be mentoring.

Retired United Methodist Bishop William Morris, a former Nashville Area episcopal leader, borrowed phrases from a Michael Jackson song and an Army advertisement, telling the men that if they want to "make the world a better place" they need to begin with the "man in the mirror" and "be all that you can be."

The bishop, a former interim general secretary of the Commission on United Methodist Men, also encouraged the men to make their United Methodist churches more hospitable. He told of a congregation that visited men in prison, but their actions made it clear that the same men were not welcome in their worship services after their release from prison.

He also described an experiment a local church conducted to see how they would greet a poor person. A member of the congregation dressed as if he were homeless and found that he was now not welcome in his own Christian community.

Often, he said, when a pastor invites parishioners to greet others, most turn to their friends and people they already know well instead of reaching out to visitors.

Bishop Hee-Soo Jung of the Chicago area, said that a troubled

■ See UM Men,' page 2A

Recalling the Apollo milestone

By Mary Jacobs
Staff Writer

Members of Seabrook United Methodist Church in Seabrook, Texas, offered special prayers on July 19 for the astronauts aboard the space shuttle Endeavour. And many remembered the day, almost exactly 40 years earlier, when the congregation offered prayers for the astronauts aboard Apollo 11.

The day that man first walked on the moon, July 20, 1969, is a date that many at Seabrook will never forget. Located about 4 miles from NASA's Johnson Space Center, the church counts many NASA employees among its roll of current and former members. Astronauts Ed White, Joe Engle, Tom Stafford, Donn Eisele, Gordon Cooper and others were once members, earning Seabrook the nickname "Church of the Astronauts."

Dozens of NASA scientists, engineers and other employees are members of Seabrook today, with many of the veterans sharing fond memories of the heady days leading up to the moon landing.

Chuck Wheelwright, 83, worked on

PHOTO COURTESY OF NASA

Astronaut Buzz Aldrin poses beside the deployed U.S. flag on the lunar surface during the Apollo 11 mission.

■ See 'Apollo,' page 8A

FAITH WATCH

Episcopalians lift ban on gay bishops

The U.S. Episcopal Church voted July 14 to lift a three-year moratorium on consecrating gay and lesbian bishops, despite warnings that the ban was needed to preserve unity in the Anglican Communion. Delegates to the Episcopal General Convention in Anaheim, Calif., also passed a resolution allowing bishops to bless same-sex unions and assigned a task force to draft an official prayer for the ceremonies. The convention did not mandate, however, that dioceses must consider gay and lesbian bishops, according to Religion News Service.

University Senate votes on Hiwassee

The University Senate of the United Methodist Church voted June 25 to remove Hiwassee College from the list of educational institutions affiliated with the denomination. In a news release Marianne Inman, the senate's president, cited the school's lack of "proper academic accreditation" as the reason for their decision. Hiwassee, a two-year college in Madisonville, Tenn., lost accreditation in 2007 over financial concerns. The school asked the senate to reconsider the vote during their next meeting in January; it will remain listed until then.

UM 'ex-gay' group merges with Exodus

Transforming Congregations, an unofficial movement within the United Methodist Church, has merged with Exodus International (EI), a ecumenical nonprofit that promotes "freedom from homosexuality through the power of Jesus Christ." One by One, led by some clergy and lay members of the Presbyterian Church (USA), also joined the merger during EI's 2009 conference, July 14-18 at Wheaton College in Wheaton, Ill. Members of the Chicago-based Gay Liberation Network (GLN) protested the conference.

—Compiled by Bill Fentum

■ UM MEN

Continued from page 1A

economy has resulted in a "miasma of discontent and misdirection" in which young people choose "suicide over living, pessimism over faith in God, and temporary enjoyment over the eternal life in Jesus Christ."

As a result, he added, millions of unchurched Americans are open to a set of spiritual truths "that will free them from the burdens of materialism and the shackles of worldliness."

Citing the account in the Book of Revelation about "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and people and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb," Bishop Jung reminded the men that some Christian individuals today have not been documented by the nation in which they live.

"It appears that God has failed to recognize the borders we have so carefully drawn," he said. A native of Korea, the bishop said that in 1900 Korea had no Protestant church, and today it is 35 percent Christian with over 7,000 churches in Seoul.

He highlighted the growth of Christianity in China, with an estimated 60 million Christians; in Africa, where the percentage of Christians has grown from three percent in 1900 to 45 percent in 2000; in Indonesia, which boasts some 10 million Christians; and the former Soviet Union, with over 100 million.

"God is working in every nation," Bishop Jung said. "Ours is a global church."

Man in mirror

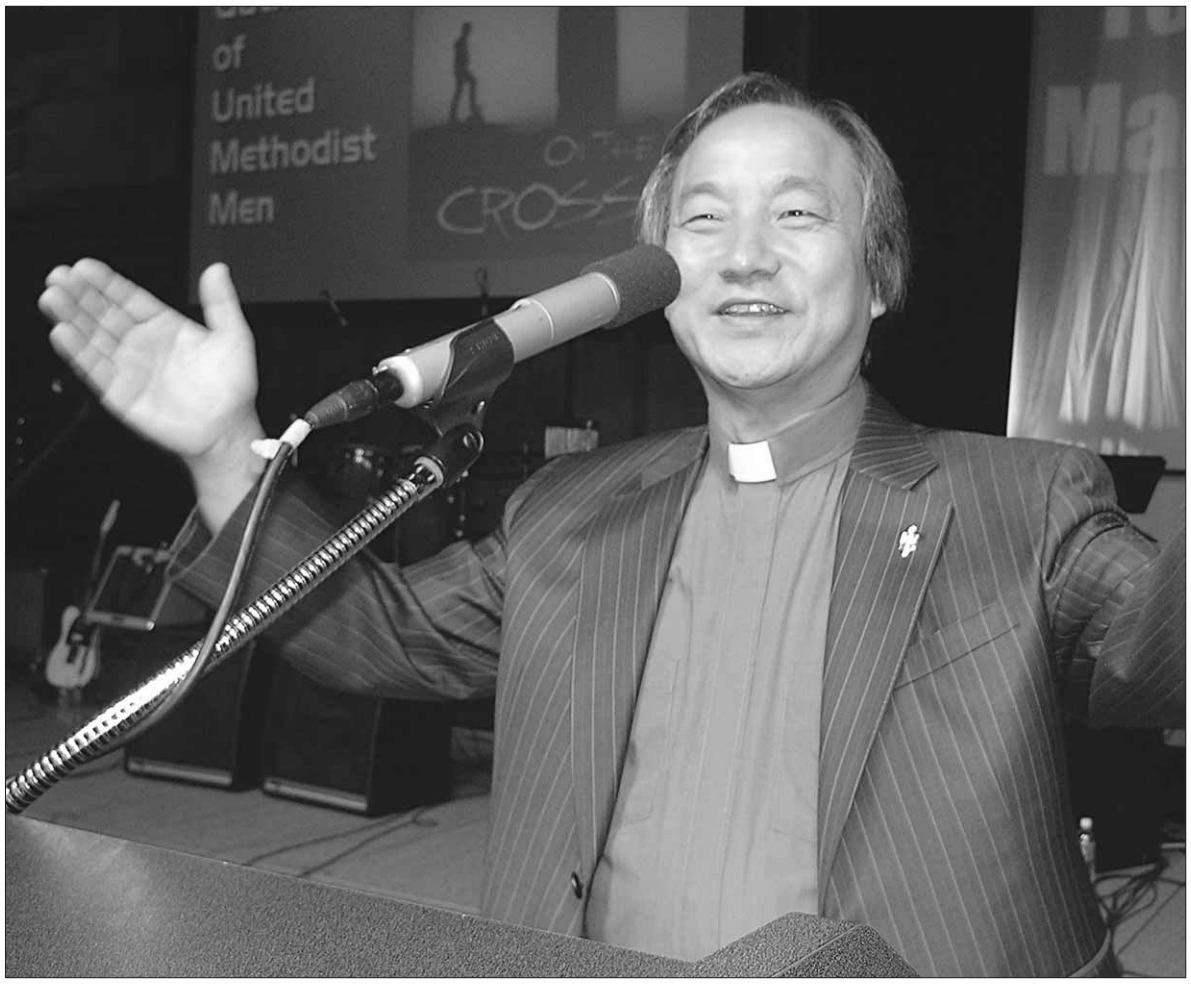
Nashville recording artist Paul Saik led the singing, and comedian Brad Stine was emcee. Speakers included Patrick Morley, founder of Man in the Mirror ministries and the Rev. Kevass Harding, pastor of Dellrose United Methodist Church in Wichita, Kan.

Dr. Morley has worked over the last two years with the Commission on United Methodist Men to create men's ministry specialists, men who introduce neighboring churches to new ways to reach men for Christ.

In cooperation with the Orlando, Fla.-based Man in the Mirror ministries and the United Methodist General Board of Discipleship, the commission has also established an advanced lay speaking course for leaders of men's ministry.

The Nashville gathering also offered 26 workshops with topics such as mentoring strategies, spiritual maturity and equipping scouting ministry specialists.

Sheltered Reality, a group of choreographed drummers based in West Branch, Iowa, included youngsters from 61st Ave. United Methodist Church, a west Nashville congregation that sponsors an after-school tutoring program and a ministry to the homeless. Some assembly participants spent an afternoon painting and repairing the home of an elderly woman in that inner-city neighborhood.



PHOTOS BY RICH PECK

Chicago Bishop Hee-Soo Jung tells United Methodist Men to avoid materialism and help unchurched individuals to find spiritual truth.

Power outage

When a late-night July 11 lightning strike destroyed a city transformer, leaving the men with no air conditioning and only emergency lighting for Saturday morning sessions, the gathering continued nonetheless.

David Adams, top staff executive of the Commission on United Methodist Men, said men might have been impacted by the loss of a transformer, but their lives had been "transformed" by the gathering.

The Rev. Peck is the director of communications for the General Commission on United Methodist Men and former editor of *Newscope* and *Circuit Rider*.

The Rev. Kevass Harding, a United Methodist pastor in Wichita, Kan., challenges men to mentor fatherless boys.

THE UNITED METHODIST REPORTER

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UM CONNECTIONS

Mission Society adds to board

The Mission Society announced the appointment of three new members to its board of directors: William O'Brien, co-director of BellMitra Associates, Frisco, Texas; the Rev. Robert Sturdy, rector of Trinity Church, Myrtle Beach, S.C.; and the Rev. Robert Kwasi Aboagye-Mensah, presiding bishop of the Methodist Church-Ghana, Accra, Ghana. Founded in 1984 in the Wesleyan tradition, the Mission Society recruits, trains and sends Christian missionaries to minister around the world. At present, the Mission Society has more than 200 missionaries in 32 countries.

Cokesbury expands its fall curriculum

Starting this fall, Cokesbury will offer an expanded variety of Sunday school and small-group curriculum choices from other Christian publishers, announced president and publisher Neil Alexander. The children's curriculum offering will include "Hands-On Bible Curriculum" from Group Publishing, "HeartShaper" from Standard Publishing and David C. Cook's "Bible-in-Life" curriculum. Cokesbury's adult line-up will include "Living the Good News" from Church Publishing and the Kerygma series, among other offerings. The new resources will be available through all Cokesbury outlets, including www.Cokesbury.com.

Perkins names Visiting professor

Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, has announced Dr. Ada María Isasi-Díaz as visiting professor for fall 2009. Her visit comes under the auspices of the school's Center for the Study of Latino/a Christianity and Religions, and is made possible through a grant from the Luce Foundation. Dr. Isasi-Díaz has been professor of Christian social ethics and theology since 1991 at the Theological School of Drew University.

—Compiled by Mary Jacobs

Faith leaders urge health care reform

BY JOHN COLEMAN
United Methodist News Service

WASHINGTON—United Methodists have joined with leaders of other faith groups in appealing to U.S. lawmakers to make health care affordable to millions of uninsured Americans.

Nearly 30 top leaders of Christian, Jewish and Islamic organizations gathered July 7 in the U.S. Capitol for a day of dialogue and planning on health care reform. They also heard from congressional leaders, including House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

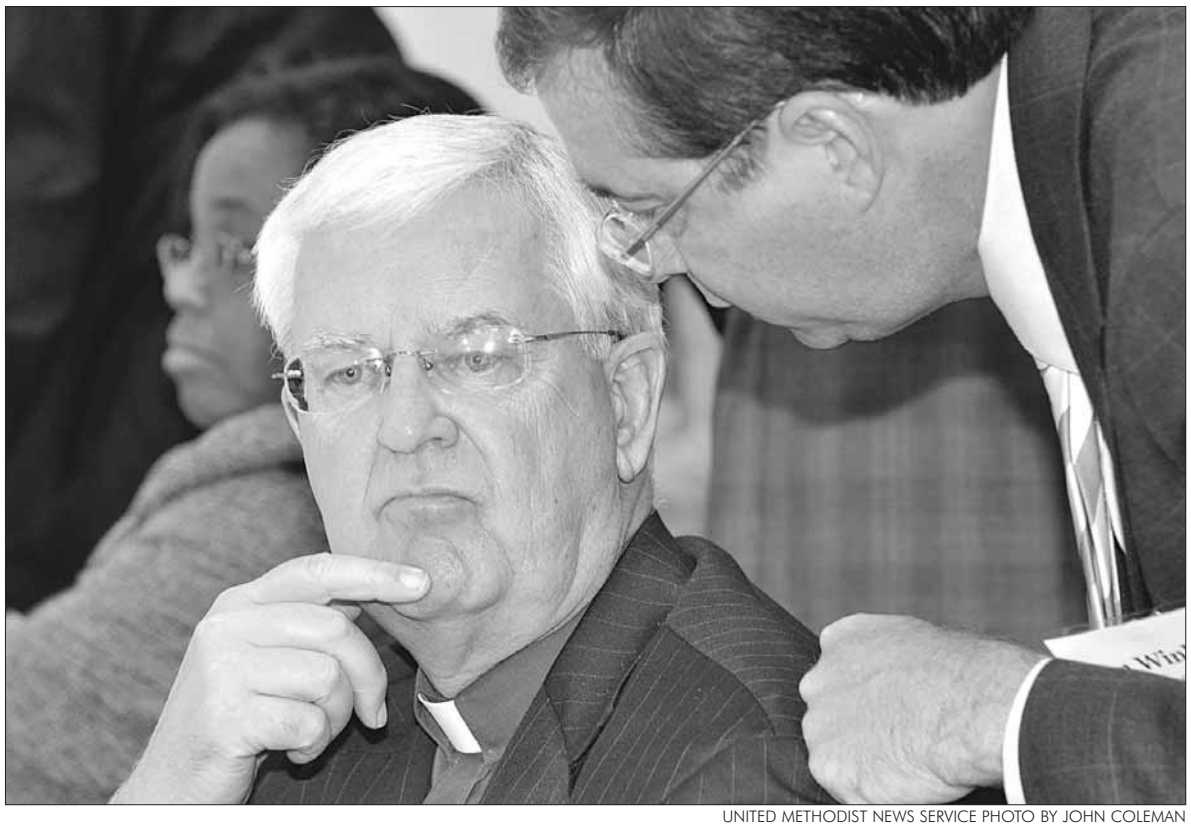
"We must speak on behalf of the poor and marginalized here in the halls of power," said Jim Winkler, top executive of the United Methodist General Board of Church and Society (GBCS). The board co-sponsored the Faith Leaders Summit on Health Care with the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, in collaboration with Families USA and the National Coalition on Health Care.

Mr. Winkler cited reports that the health care industry—including insurance companies, hospitals, medical associations and pharmaceutical firms—is spending $1.4 million daily to influence legislators who will shape, debate and vote on comprehensive health care bills this summer.

"We may not be able to muster those kinds of resources," Mr. Winkler told the gathering, "but we can testify to the damage done to our people by a broken health care system, and today is our opportunity."

Also attending the meeting were Bishop James Dorff of the San Antonio Area, representing the Council of Bishops, and the Rev. Cynthia Abrams, who works on health care concerns for the GBCS.

"There was a real demonstration of unity in our opinions and historical perspectives on this issue," Bishop Dorff said. "These denominations and faith groups share traditions of providing health care to people. We're working together on this, out of that experience, and we're not going away."



UNITED METHODIST NEWS SERVICE PHOTO BY JOHN COLEMAN

Jim Winkler, right, of the General Board of Church and Society speaks with Bishop James Dorff of San Antonio while meeting with faith leaders in Washington to discuss health care reform.

At a press conference, five faith leaders voiced common goals of ensuring that quality health care becomes available and affordable to all Americans.

They also emphasized the religious and moral imperative of health care as a human right, the importance of informed advocacy and the need for broad-based united advocacy.

"This is an important moment in the nation's history, and we will work to build energy behind these efforts to pass meaningful reform," said the Rev. Michael Kinnamon, head of the National Council of Churches. "Health care for us is not simply another good cause. . . . We must care for what God has created. Access is not a privilege but a right to all."

The faith leaders as a group did not support or oppose any particular health care reform plan among the several that are being considered in Congress, but several leaders said their denominations were supporting the government-funded insurance.

"There are good ideas and policies being recommended; the question is how do we pay for them?" asked the Rev. Jim Wallis, head of Sojourners. "We're not getting into the weeds of policies. We're looking for what's in the right bill that will meet the needs of people."

Mr. Wallis said faith groups need to help get accurate information out to people and challenge any attempts at misinformation about health care costs and reform.

"I firmly believe what the polls tell us: that most people in this country are in favor of comprehensive health care reform," he said.

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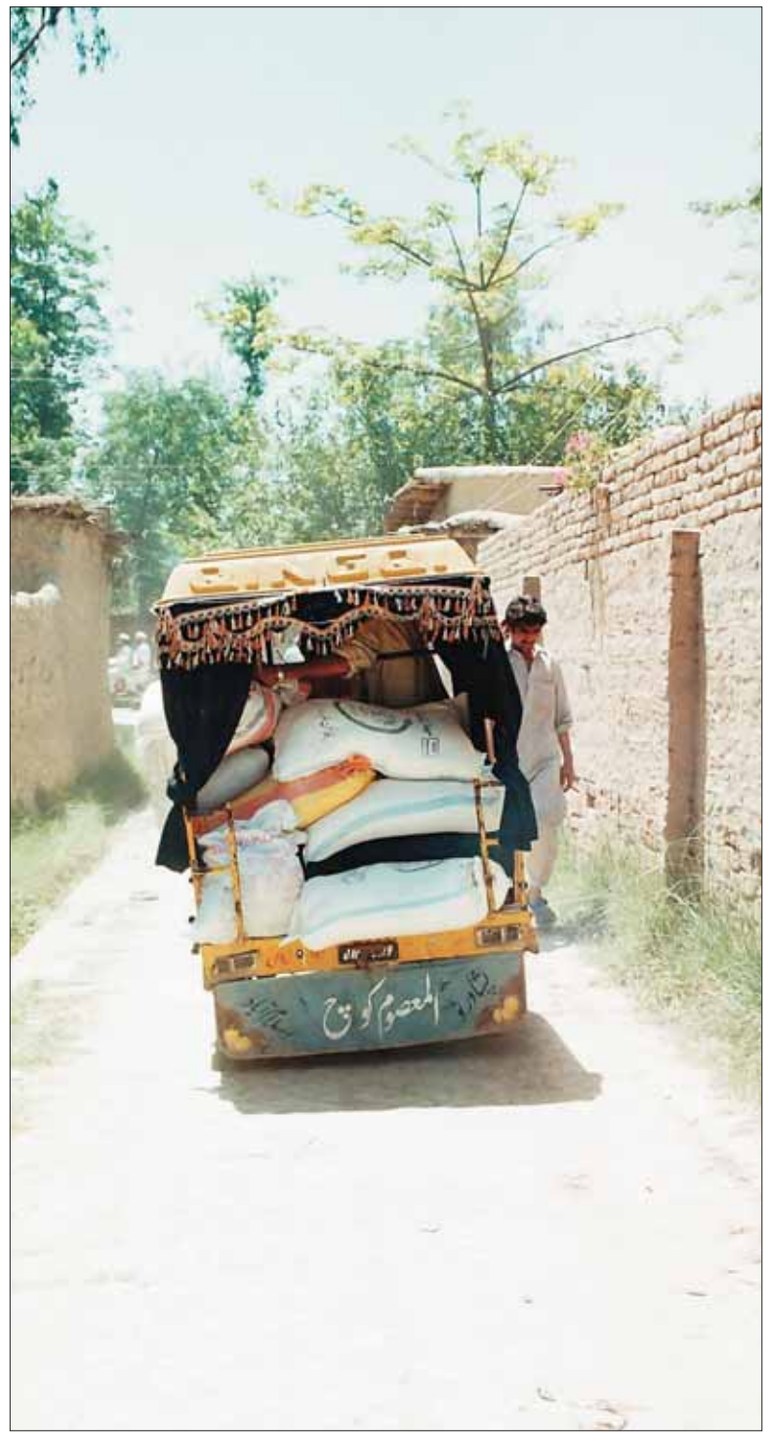
Rising concerns

Displaced Pakistanis face still more safety challenges



PHOTOS BY GHULAM RASOOL/CWS-ACT INTERNATIONAL

All loaded and on its way, the food package will soon reach a waiting family.

By Linda Bloom
United Methodist News Service

PAKISTAN—They want to go home.

But Pakistanis who fled the Swat Valley this spring during fighting there between government forces and the Taliban still have safety concerns.

"They literally ran for their lives," said Matt Hackworth, a communications officer with Church World Service (CWS), who visited Pakistan in late June. "They don't want to go back and place themselves in that kind of danger again."

With few resources of their own, the internally displaced persons who sought refuge in the North West Frontier Province continue to rely upon international aid agencies and Pakistan's government for the necessities of life.

The upcoming monsoon season makes assistance to the 2 million displaced persons in the region even more urgent, according to the United Nations.

Field reports to CWS's Pakistan-Afghanistan office indicate an additional influx of trapped people, mostly from the Swat Valley, into Mardan and Swabi during the past two weeks.

Food aid, to both the displaced and the host communities, is especially important. "While the government is doing what they can, by and large the help is coming from NGOs [non-governmental organizations] and public donations," Mr. Hackworth said in a July 9 interview.

The United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) has contributed $50,000 to CWS's work among the displaced from Swat Valley, along with another $60,000 to Muslim Aid. David Sadoo, an UMCOR executive, said the agency also provided a $10,000 grant to the Church of Pakistan for its own assistance to displaced families.

Safety assurances

On July 8, during a four-day visit to Pakistan, U.N. Undersecretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs John Holmes met with some of the displaced in Mardan and Swabi, who told him they are willing to return home if they can be assured they will be safe and that basic services will be available.

Mr. Hackworth said he did not think such a possibility was imminent. One village elder told Mr. Hackworth he wouldn't allow those taking refuge in his area to go home unless he received a guarantee from the Pakistani government "promising they were safe."

Those living in camps "are taking things day by day and even hour by hour," Mr. Hackworth said. But there are signs that life goes on. The day he visited Sheik Yasin Camp, on the outskirts of Mardan, for example, a wedding was taking place.

About 9,000 people were living in the camp then, with new registrations occurring on a daily basis. Mardan is the last city north of Islamabad that remains in Pakistan Army control. Women and children make up most of the camp's population, as many men have stayed behind in the Swat Valley to keep watch over property.

Camps account for only a portion of those who have taken refuge in the province. The United Nations reports that some 260,000 internally displaced are in 21 camps, but most are living with host families or in makeshift settlements.

"It's a testament to the hospitality of Pakistani people that they are willing to open their doors . . . to anybody in need who is displaced by this violence," Mr. Hackworth said. "I spoke to one man who had 35 people living in the four rooms of his house."

As of late June, CWS had distributed 129 tents, 961 blankets and 600 food packages. CWS is procuring another 13,500 food packages that the agency expects to distribute in the coming days.

UMCOR's other partner in the region, Muslim Aid, has provided 280 tents, food packets and other basic necessities at the Aman camp in the Swabi district, which has more than 2,000 residents. Muslim Aid also is coordinating with UNICEF on water, sanitation and hygiene facilities, and water taps near the tents are used for drinking, cooking and personal needs.

Looking toward the start of the school year, Muslim Aid is making plans for both formal and informal educational programs in camps throughout the province.

Monsoon season

The World Health Organization also has warned that the monsoon season could provoke outbreaks of water-borne diseases, such as diarrhea and malaria, among the internally displaced.

A July 8 report from CWS's Pakistan-Afghanistan office confirmed concerns about the displaced living through the monsoon season at a time when even food and shelter can be an uncertainty. "Particularly for those living in tents, the heavy rains will make life more difficult," the report stated.

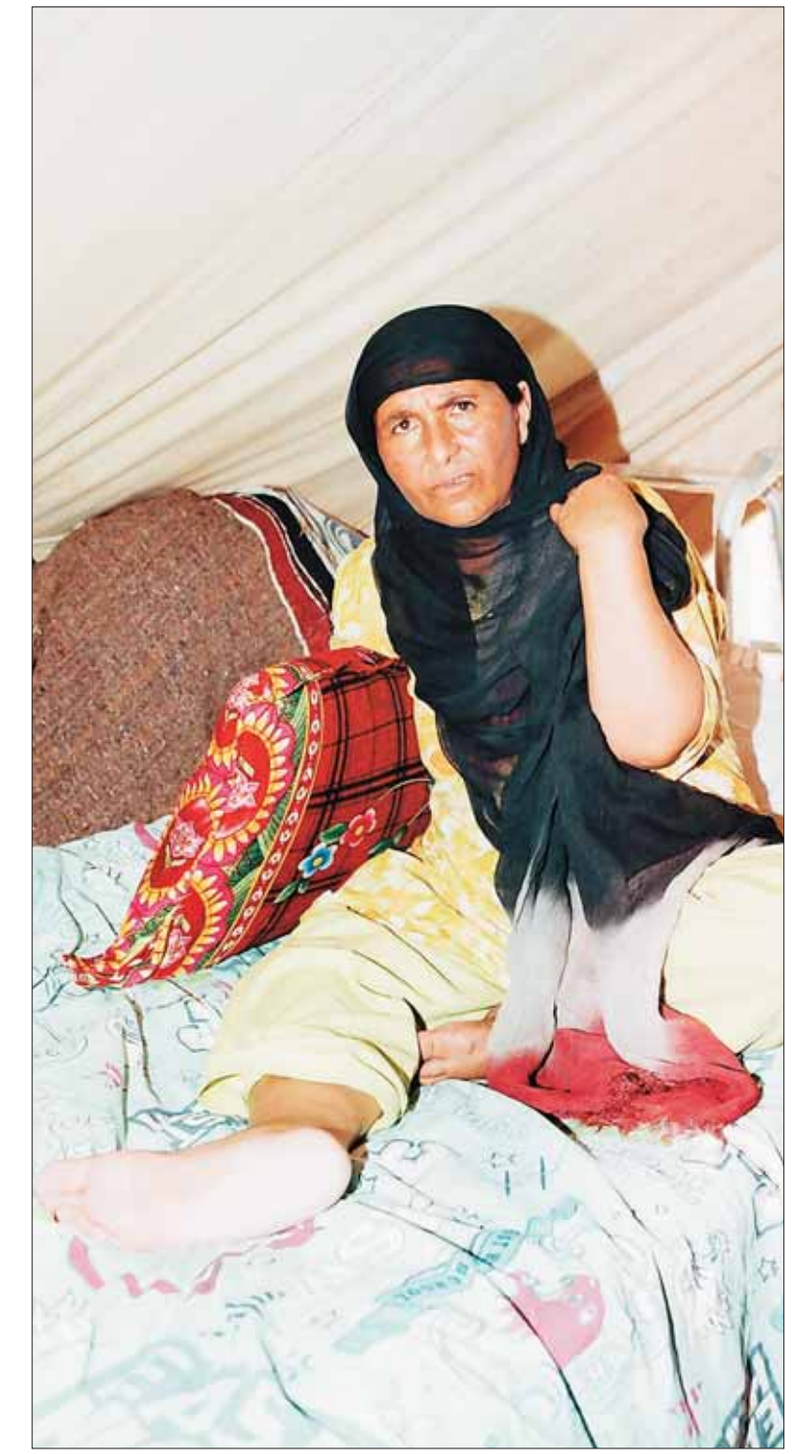
A recent announcement from the World Health Organization that essential medicines in the region could be depleted "within the next couple of weeks" could signal an increase in deaths from water-borne disease.

"The most vulnerable are women and children because a severe shortage of female doctors continues to plague the IDP population," the report stated. "Women remain in tents and host homes unwilling to be treated by male doctors."

Mental health also will be an issue as heavy rains force a people already depressed by their plight to remain crowded inside tents and small living quarters.

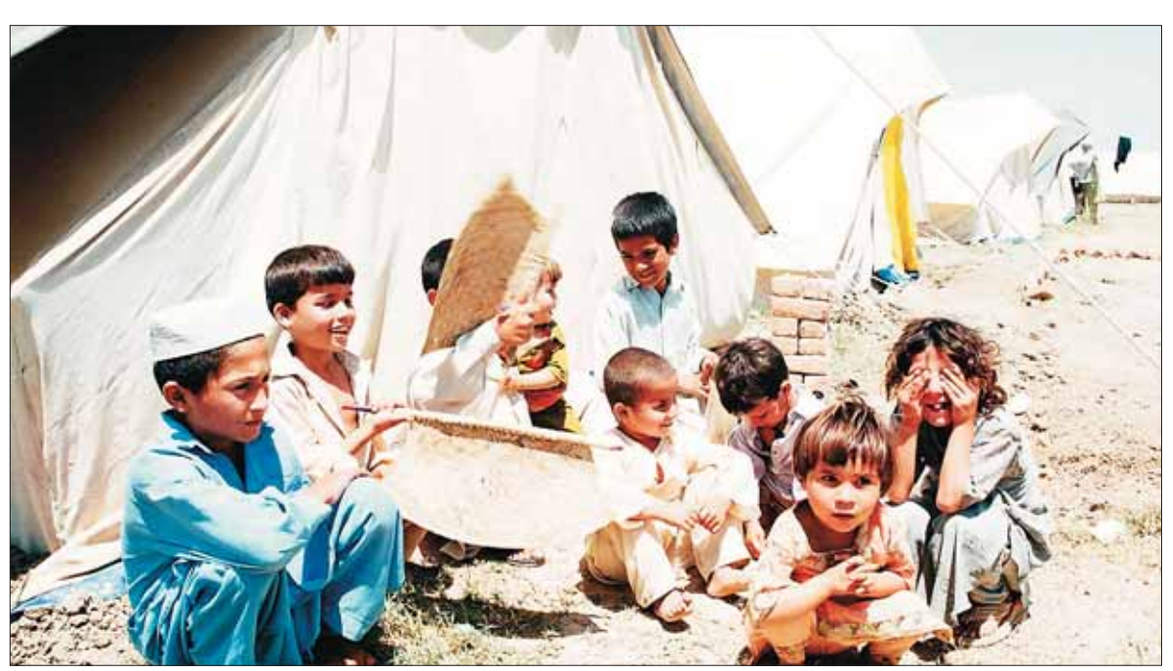
As long as resources are available, CWS will continue to provide health services through its mobile health unit. So far, the team treated 1,285 patients for various diseases and provided free medication. A female doctor is regularly available to treat women and children.

How to help: The United Methodist relief agency is continuing to accept donations to assist the displaced in Pakistan. Checks can be marked for "UMCOR Advance #982450, Pakistan" and placed in church offering plates or sent to UMCOR, P.O. Box 9068, New York, N.Y. 10087-9068. Credit card donations can be made by phone at (800) 554-8583 or online at http://secure.gbgm-umc.org/donations/advance.



PHOTOS BY GHULAM RASOOL/CWS-ACT INTERNATIONAL

A woman from Swat tells of mobilizing females in her community.



A group of children laugh and play despite the heat in Pakistan.

UMNS PHOTO BY MATT HACKWORTH/CHURCH WORLD SERVICE

A girl peeks out of a tent provided by Church World Service and ACT International at Sheik Yasin Camp on the outskirts of Mardan, Pakistan.

A young girl washes dishes outside her family's tent in Mardan.

GEN-X RISING

Fresh perspective on youth ministry

BY ANDREW C. THOMPSON
UMR Columnist

Youth ministry is more prone than most other forms of ministry to mimicking pop cultural trends. Its mission is to reach teenagers, after all. But considering the market-driven superficiality of most pop culture, that's a problem.

Youth ministry needs a fresh perspective. And a summer program on the campus of Duke Divinity School (a United Methodist seminary in Durham, N.C.) may have found a path to do just that.

The Duke Youth Academy for Christian Formation (DYA) approaches youth ministry in all the ways pop culture suggests that it shouldn't. DYA brings several dozen high school youth to Duke's campus for two weeks every summer so that they can explore living deeply the Christian life.

Instead of whitewater rafting or ski trips, DYA offers days that begin and end with worship and are punctuated throughout with study, work, common meals and rest.

Andrew Thompson

It's a strange rhythm for today's youth: They hear lectures from seminary professors and work with artists as they learn to integrate art and Christian faith. They engage in local service projects and they spend time intentionally doing nothing.

In short, for two weeks they live something like a monastic life. And get this: they love it.

Recent statistics show that the United Methodist Church is a "graying church." While we could be lowering our median age through strong youth-ministry programs that form teenagers into mature followers of Jesus, too many youth ministries have bought into a ministry model that entertains as much as it forms.

And even solid programs have the bad habit of teaching kids that their Christian identities are defined over and against everything and everyone else: We know who we are because we "get it," unlike parents, pastors and teachers. With these attitudes, the church shouldn't be surprised that the church commitment of young adults in their 20s plummets, and for many, never recovers.

United Methodist pastor and seminary professor Fred Edie had the vision to develop the Duke Youth Academy. Youth ministry, he believes, can be theologically grounded and fully integrated in the life of the larger church. He sees youth ministry through the lens of baptism, which is the means by which we all receive our true identity in Christ and the way we can learn our vocation into Christian service.

Dr. Edie wants to orient youth ministry around an "ordo," or ordered life, consisting of the four components of book, bath, table and time. The "book" is the Bible, the "bath" is baptism, the "table" is Holy Communion and "time" is the patterning of life around worship and discipleship.

Full disclosure: DYA's summer session just finished and I was on staff. But my connection has convinced me of the contribution that DYA can make to our understanding of Christian formation for youth.

Typical scenes at DYA would seem extraordinary to most people familiar with conventional youth ministry. Morning might see 50 youth and their adult mentors listening intently to a seminary teacher help them understand the Crucifixion by sharing stories of the church's work with the poor in Latin America. The same group in the afternoon would be working in clay making or sacred dance as a way to better understand the embodied nature of God's creation.

Another afternoon they might visit a local community garden to learn about sustainable agriculture in economically depressed areas. And each night would bring the opportunity to rock out to the sounds of guitars and Djembe drums after hearing a stirring sermon and celebrating the Lord's Supper.

For too long we have assumed that the church has to mimic the culture in order to attract young people. DYA proves that mentality to be wrong.

Youth are as hungry as the rest of us for something more substantial than pop culture's sugary fare. DYA is offering just that.

The Rev. Thompson maintains a blog at www.genxrising.com. e-mail: andrew@mandatum.org.

Three months on Twitter

BY ASHLEY ALLEY
Special Contributor

COURTESY PHOTO

Ashlee Alley says she bought into Twitter as a way to communicate during United Methodist conference events.

"Been almost 3 mos on Twitter. Enjoying the connection w others w similar interests & levity thruout the day. Resisting addiction! :)"

The abbreviated sentences above represent how I would share the next several paragraphs in Twitter-speak. Just shy of 140 characters, I've learned brevity in my first 100 days with Twitter, the social networking site that allows people to update their status all day long by answering the simple question: "What are you doing?"

I signed up in late March for an account on Twitter. I had begun noticing @ signs in status updates on Facebook and decided they must have some relevance.

I've never exactly been an early adopter of new technology, but I like to stay somewhere near the front of the pack, so I began to investigate. I discovered that the @ signs had to do with Twitter.

My first real exposure came at a meeting in Nashville of 10 young United Methodist clergy and a "live-blog" conversation. Several others in the room had Twitter accounts, and I saw people joining in from all over the United States simply because they had been invited via Twitter or Facebook.

Several weeks later, some from this group had a live-blog Bible study, where we used our Twitter accounts to sign in. This finally provided the motivation I needed to sign up.

I signed up to "follow" a couple of the United Methodist young clergy and they started introducing me to their followers. I found a couple of folks connected to circles I was interested in and started following some of the people they followed—and suddenly, I had dozens of followers and I was following dozens of people.

Initially, I tried to figure out how Twitter "works" by watching what others did.

I went on a mission trip in May and daily gave an update on Twitter (which also updates my Facebook status). My students ridiculed me for not being able to step away from Twitter, even during our trip. I didn't see it that way.

I did it on the off chance that someone might care the first day, and then got a few quick notes from folks who told us they were praying, they enjoyed our updates and they were with us in spirit, all of which motivated me to keep tweeting. I've run into lots of folks from Twitter or Facebook who have asked about our trip, and it's been a great chance to share about the good work that we did.

Perhaps it was a shallow or vain connection, but it doesn't feel that way. I know that some believe that Twitter is almost too transparent. After all, who really cares what my friend ate for breakfast?

But my stance has been that I only share what I want to share. If someone wants to read my more "substantial" tweets, they can (which usually includes a tinyurl link). If someone wants to read my short movie review, then great!

I can see, however, how Twitter could become addictive. Occasionally I find myself checking Twitter a mere 15 minutes from when I checked it the last time. As with anything, boundaries are important. And while Twitter can be addicting, it is not inherently a time-drainer.

Twitter became a whole new ballgame for me in May, when several whom I follow were tweeting during Annual Conference. Given the responsibilities that I had during conference, I was not able to use my computer to follow the "hashtag" #kswumc, but I followed along on my phone when I could.

I was amazed when I realized that people from other annual conferences were following along the "transcript" being provided from about 10 people present at Annual Conference.

Since we were one of the earliest Annual Conferences, people on Twitter began to generate interest in their own events. The most interesting thing to me was the transparency that was a result because of the multiple eyewitnesses who were giving their perspective of conference. People often showed their allegiances by offering commentary on items of debate. Clergy and lay delegates on the floor have now had their words "heard 'round the world."

I'm a fan of this type of accountability. Sure, things can be taken out of context (and that can happen regardless of whether a running transcript is happening). But Twitter provides communication that until now has been delayed by either time or the lack of awareness of the information.

After my experience with Annual Conference, Twitter became a place where action "happened," rather than a place where what happened was being reported.

Twitter has become a diary of sorts—as such, it is filled with both the important and the mundane. There are times when my important things can be of interest to another fellow journaler. And there are times when I just take solace in knowing that my friend sometimes gets stuck in the slowest grocery line, too!

The humanity revealed by Twitter has been a comfort to me. I've seen a bit of personality behind a name that I might have known only from the articles or books that they write. I've been clued in to subjects of interest from a link that is provided. I've even seen a picture of my friend's toddler as he grows up far away.

Twitter has become a medium to help us connect. Some have argued that it is a shallower connection. Perhaps that's true. But the 140-character notations have allowed for a sense of camaraderie, a place for education and, dare I say, even inspiration, as people are given a new way to connect.

And connecting is a good thing.

The Rev. Alley is director of campus ministry at Southwestern College in Winfield, Kan. Reprinted from her blog at ashleealley.blogspot.com.

Counting the blessings of hablar Español

By Eliezér Valentín-Castañón
Special Contributor

At a church potluck supper one day I was conversing with a member who happened to be from mi patria (my native land) of Puerto Rico. We were speaking in the language we were most comfortable using, Spanish.

Suddenly, another member walking by slowed down and admonished us: "Talk in English. People might think you're talking about them."

At the time I thought the sister was just joking, so I smiled at her and continued my conversation. But the friend I was talking to said in Spanish, "We'd better use English because folks here will feel offended by us talking in Spanish."

Eliezer Valentin-Castanon

I was surprised and could not believe she was serious.

This encounter occurred in 1988. That church is still there, and the congregation that worships in the sanctuary is made up primarily of those same Spanish-speaking people whose cherished language was devalued decades earlier. They worship God freely and fervently in the power and passion of their native tongue.

Why speak Spanish?

Many of you might ask, "Why do Spanish-speaking people speak to one another in their own language when there are non-Spanish speakers present?" You might think it rude, divisive and inhospitable, because other folks might want to join in the conversation but cannot if they don't understand the language.

For people who live in the margins of society, to use the language they know best with others who can speak that language is a way of feeling empowered, connected and affirmed. When people speak Spanish with one another it is not with a desire to create barriers; rather it is a way to communicate with levels of meaning and emotion that a language foreign to them cannot provide.

Speaking English, even for those who speak it well, may not convey the many nuances of sense and sensibility that are endemic to one's native tongue.

Language gives meaning to our communal life, and has great value for the human family, whether it is spoken in Spanish, French, English or any other tongue. Like our five senses—touch, smell, sight, taste, hearing—language helps us connect with our memories, especially those aroused by the sound and cadence of our speech.

> 'Like a legacy, language links people both to their heritage and to future generations.'

Like a legacy, language links people both to their heritage and to future generations. Consequently, when people speak their language, it affirms their identity. That is why I speak mostly Spanish to my U.S.-born children and require the same from them.

Assimilation

When people ask speakers of Spanish or any other language to stop using their first tongue and use instead the dominant language, it is not out of a desire for true integration, which by definition brings a mix of diverse people into equal relationships with one another, as one body of many members.

Instead, such a request calls for assimilation, which demands unyielding uniformity. It is like building a monolingual tower of Babel rather than welcoming the multicultural, multilingual Spirit of Pentecost.

Those who wish to welcome immigrants into their churches and communities—especially if the goal is that they become full-fledged members—should not demand English-only, but encourage English-plus.

Those who speak Spanish, for example, must not let go of their language to accommodate the dominant culture and thus devalue their own culture. Instead, they can enrich the dominant culture, as we have already proven with our language and other generous gifts to Northern Americana.

Some people might have a heartfelt desire to promote inclusiveness by encouraging assimilation, but the effect is the exclusion of "the other's" essential self.

I have heard people say, "Well, if they want to find better jobs and be successful in the United States they need to speak English." I certainly agree: People who come to the United States should learn to speak English, and in fact, given the opportunity, most people do. But we should not expect them to abandon their native tongues in order to be accepted in our communities.

For bilingual people, suppressing the use of their first language can be difficult. One might switch languages to accentuate key points or because one is more comfortable explaining certain things in one language over the other. Sometimes switching languages is done unconsciously. People may know enough English to get by in their jobs, but to talk about family and personal matters or other topics, their primary language offers them a much richer vocabulary and provides deeper meaning and emotion.

Already bilingual

Today, a fifth of the U.S. population speaks something other than English as their primary language. In some areas, it is closer to two-fifths.

Spanish is the second-most common language spoken in our country, and is especially prevalent in some 43 states and the District of Columbia. The U.S. has the world's fifth largest Spanish-speaking population after Mexico, Colombia, Spain and Argentina.

We are already a bilingual nation; if not by decision, then by default.

The suggestion that we Spanish-speakers should learn to speak only English whenever English speakers are present, so that they do not feel left-out or offended, ignores the value that our own language has for us. It also ignores the need and opportunity for English-only speakers to broaden their communication horizons by learning to speak at least some words and phrases in Spanish.

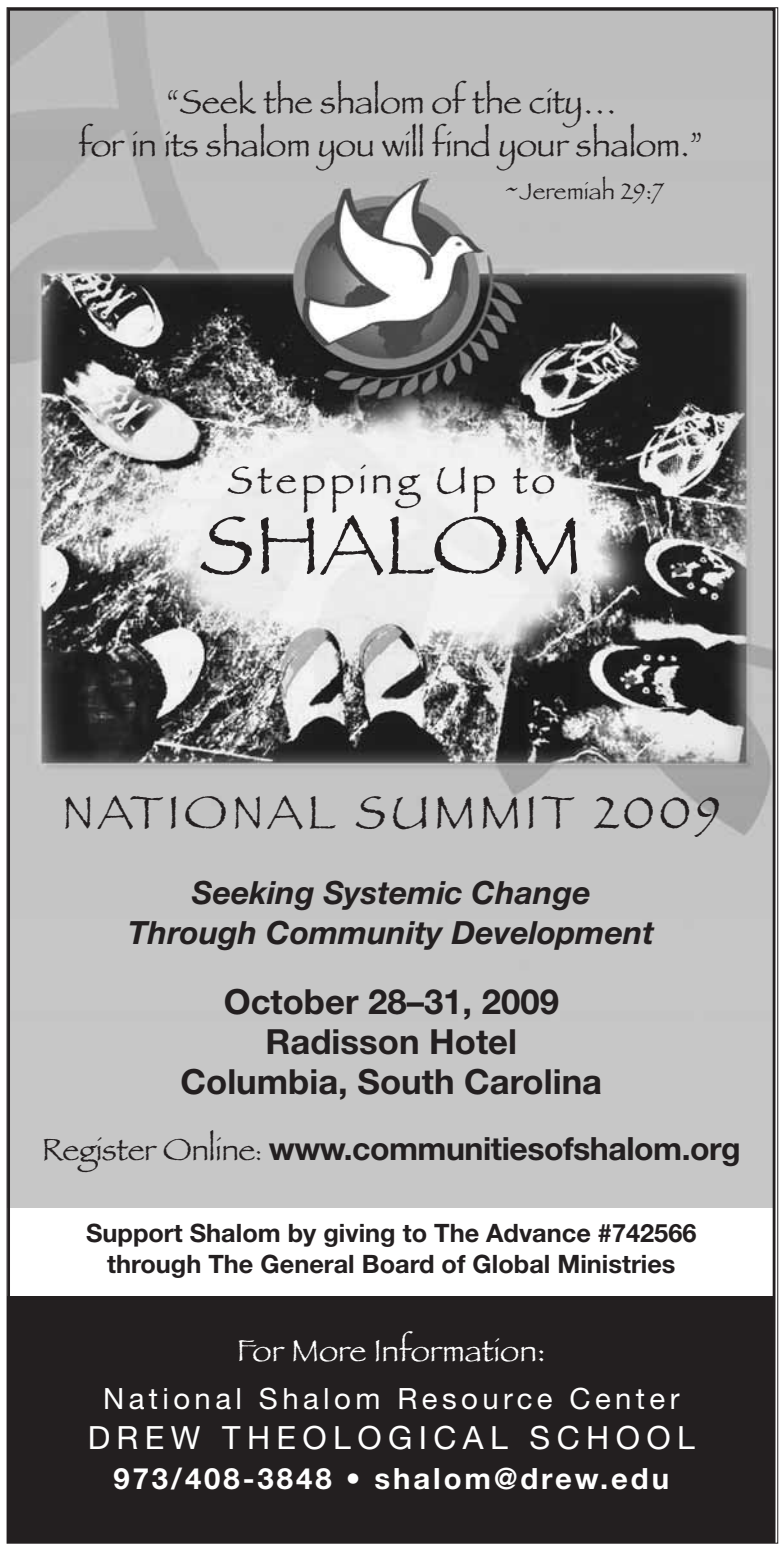
The use of the Spanish language in the United States is one of the blessings that Latinos bring to the church and the nation. Regrettably, when my sister at the potluck supper asked my friend and me to stop speaking Spanish, she was not aware that such a request could hinder God's work and the witness of God's people.

Nonetheless, we continued our conversation en Español.

God is helping and challenging us to appreciate what God is doing in our midst, so that with a thousand tongues and in many languages we may sing and speak our Great Redeemer's praise.

¿Nos puedes escuchar? Can you hear us?

The Rev. Eliezér Valentín-Castañón is associate general secretary of the General Commission on Religion and Race.



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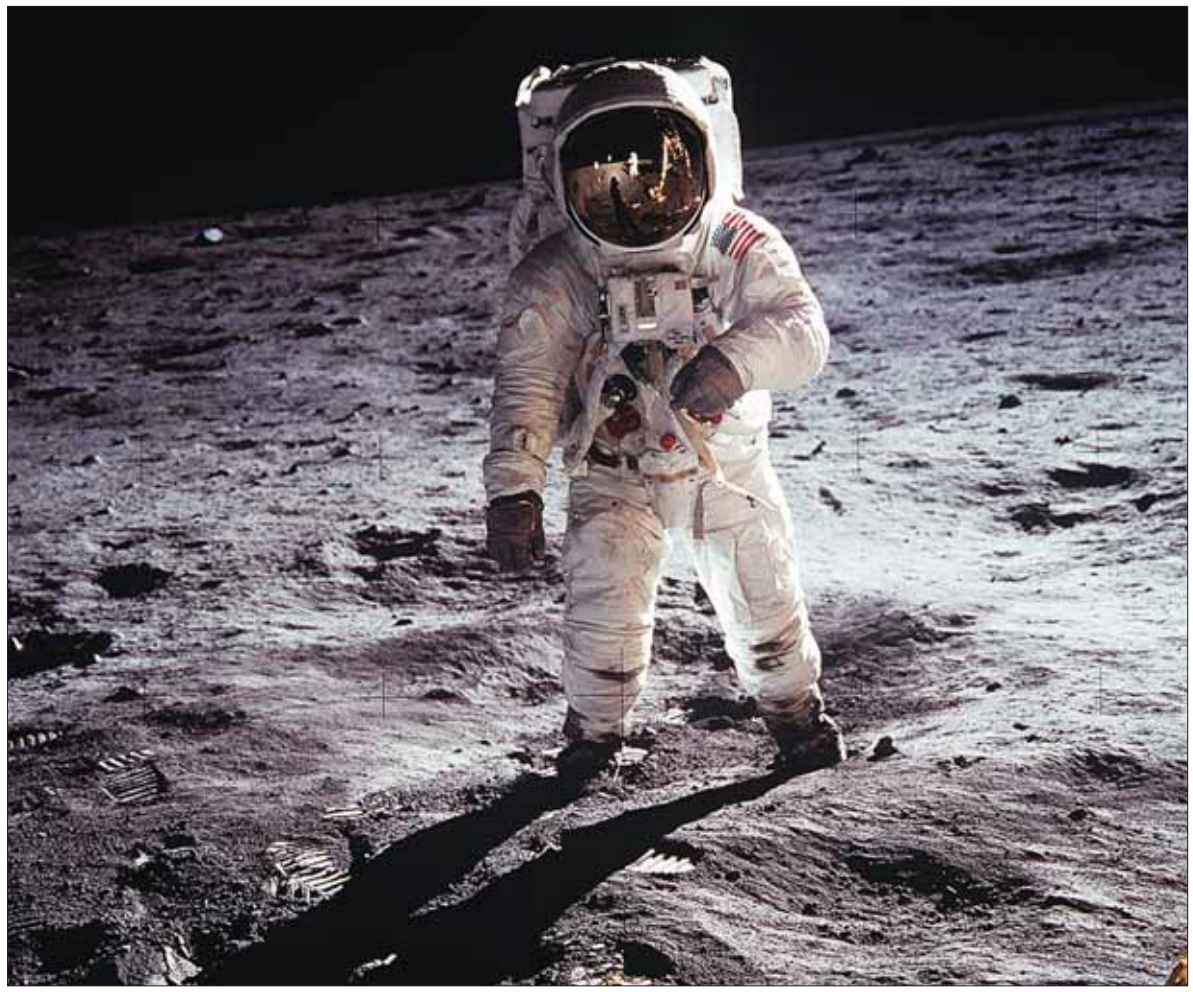
■ **APOLLO** *Continued from page 1A*

PHOTOS COURTESY OF NASA

NASA and Manned Spacecraft Center (MSC) officials join the flight controllers in celebrating the conclusion of the Apollo 11 mission.



Astronaut Buzz Aldrin walks on the surface of the moon near the leg of the Lunar Module (LM) "Eagle" during the Apollo 11 extravehicular activity (EVA). Astronaut Neil A. Armstrong, commander, took this photograph with a 70mm lunar surface camera.

the lighting system for Apollo 11's command module and lunar module.

"It was quite exciting," he said. "We were breaking new ground."

Mr. Wheelwright often teamed with Nick Nelms, 73, on photography projects, including designing and testing systems to photograph and document the Apollo 11 mission.

Mr. Nelms, a former Seabrook member who now attends First UMC in Brenham, Texas, helped with the photo shoot that captured a portrait of the three Apollo 11 astronauts. After the mission, he had a chance to meet and talk with the crew.

"It was a great time, a lot of fun, a lot of hard work," he said. "The hours were long, but the work was interesting."

Member Carlisle Campbell, 79, worked on the Apollo 11 project as an engineer, helping design the parachutes used in the recovery phase of the mission.

"Working on the Apollo 11 . . . that was the golden era," Mr. Campbell reminisced. "It was total freedom, excitement, pride. You didn't mind working long hours. We believed and had faith, and we knew we could do it. We knew we could do something big."

Mr. Campbell is still an employee at NASA, where he says his job continues to feel like a hobby.

"Why retire when I enjoy what I'm doing?" he said.

The Rev. Bob Parrott, Seabrook's pastor in 1969, wrote a book *Earth, Moon and Beyond* (Word, 1969) that chronicled some of his experiences and reflections as pastor to many NASA employees.

Now retired, Mr. Parrott says NASA folks and their families chose Seabrook because of its proximity and because it was the "leading church" in the area at the time. Scientists and astronauts may have also found a kinship with Mr. Parrott, who is an instrument-rated pilot and an avid follower of the space program.

Wilmot Hess, then a church member and head of NASA's science applications division, wrote the introduction to *Earth, Moon and Beyond*.

"Bob has ridden the simulators with the astronauts, has visited the Lunar Receiving Laboratory, and has watched an Apollo launch from Cape Kennedy," Dr. Hess wrote. "His expanding view of the earth and moon brings him to a realization of an expanding view of God."

Seabrook's members take pride in NASA's achievements, but also have remained mindful of the risks of space travel.

When Mr. Parrott was pastor, the congregation sang the "Air Force Hymn" every Sunday when NASA astronauts were in the air: "Lord, guard and guide the men who fly/Through the great spaces of the sky;/Be with them traversing the air/In darkening storms or sunshine fair."

The church hosted a 2003 memorial service in honor of the seven fallen astronauts aboard the space shuttle Columbia. And the congregation grieved in 1967 the loss of member and astronaut Ed White, who was killed along with Virgil Grissom and Roger Chaffee in an Apollo spacecraft flash fire during a launch-pad test.

White had been the first American astronaut to make a space walk—from the Gemini 4 in 1965. During his lifetime, White had spoken of his desire to help the nation's youth. In 1971, Seabrook dedicated the Ed White Memorial Youth Center in the astronaut-member's memory.

Money for the facility was raised in part through a special event at the Astrodome, hosted by Bob Hope. The youth center included a Space Memorial Room with a display of artifacts and photos commemorating 50 years of space travel.

Unfortunately, the church and the youth center were both destroyed last year in Hurricane Ike. (Members say that items from the museum were taken to safety before the hurricane tore through the church.) The congregation broke ground Jan. 25 on a new facility.

And when will they worship at the new church campus? The church's Web site informs visitors in a manner befitting a "church of the astronauts." There's a countdown, ticking off the number of days, hours, minutes and seconds till the blessed event.

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Portrait of the prime crew of the Apollo 11 lunar landing mission shows (from left): Commander Neil A. Armstrong, Command Module Pilot Michael Collins and Lunar Module Pilot Edwin E. Aldrin Jr. United Methodist Nick Nelms assisted photographer John Holland when he took this photo of the Apollo 11 crew at NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston.