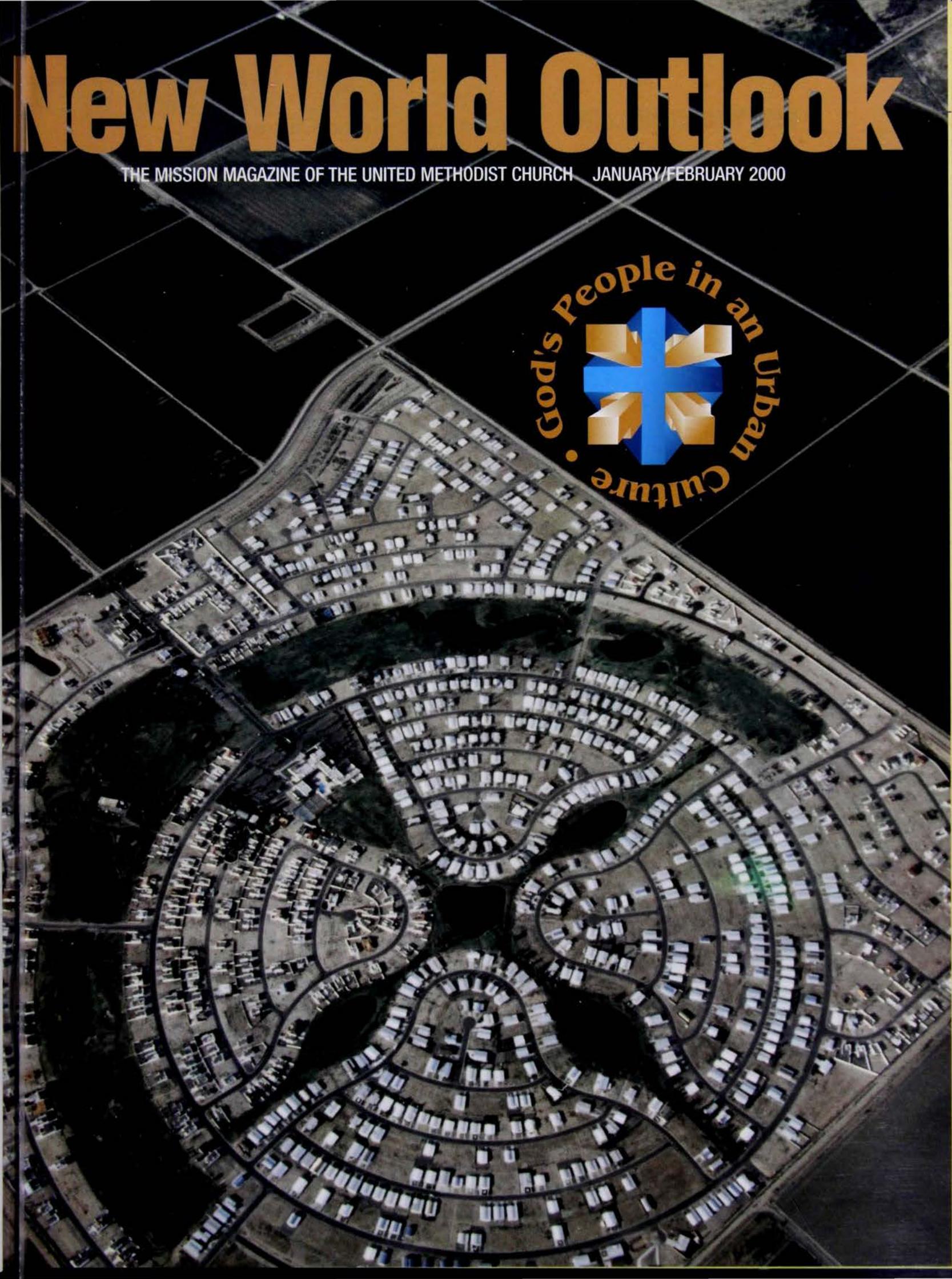
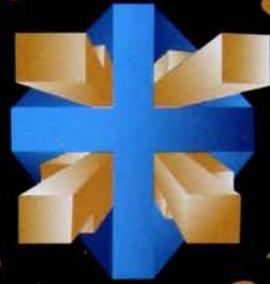


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God's People in an Urban Culture



NEW WORLD OUTLOOK

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Cover Photo: Georg Gerster/Photo Researchers, Inc. A mobile-home community impinges upon farmland near Phoenix, Arizona.

A Century of Urban Culture

The twentieth century saw the ascendancy of urban culture in the United States. The mass movement to cities began in the nineteenth century's Industrial Revolution, which moved workers from farm to factory, from work at home to jobs in centralized locations. But the growth of cities and decline of family farms is just one of the more obvious aspects of urbanization. Urban culture is also the culture of the suburbs, and its incursions into the countryside have brought profound changes to rural life.

As one who has spent 41 of her 63 years in New York City, I cherish and celebrate the city's rich cultural life: the world-class universities, the museums, the opera, the concerts, the Broadway stage. All my support groups are here: in my co-op apartment building (a vertical village), at church, in the neighborhood, among colleagues at work. Above all, I appreciate the multiracial, multiethnic, multicultural character of my home, my office, my Morningside Heights community, and the city as a whole.

But there are also negative aspects of our fast-paced urban life. In the city, one person's privacy is another's isolation. There is constant noise from too-loud sirens and from sanitation trucks, pneumatic drills, car alarms, and backup beeps. There is unremitting stress, not only from noise but from overcrowded streets, subways, and buses—and from a new ethic which decrees that, in a globalized economy, work never stops. The Sabbath rarely comes—for the society and, often, for individuals and families. The great twentieth-century strides in limiting workers' hours—the 40-hour workweek, the concept of the weekend—have disappeared for many. Not only do the urban poor hold two or more low-paying jobs to survive, better paid workers with one job are also laboring day and night, week and weekend, to the detriment of health and family life.

The twentieth century saw the triumph of technology—especially in transportation and communication. Technology brought us automobiles, airplanes, space shuttles, televisions, computers, beepers and cordless phones, the Internet, E-mail, and a host of labor-saving devices. But increased mobility has contributed to uprootedness, and improved communications have impinged on personal privacy and free time. Beyond this, global agribusiness has resulted in worldwide migrations of unskilled farm workers to cities in which well-paying factory jobs have largely disappeared. And, in the meanwhile, television advertising has tended to make both rich and poor more materialistic, even as the economic gap between them has widened to a chasm.

What is the church's role in humanizing this technological, materialistic, largely secular urban culture—while at the same time celebrating its rich diversity, challenging pace, many assets, and endless possibilities? How can we bring the sense of being in "God's country" to our stone and steel cityscapes? How can God's people in the twenty-first century strive to create the City of God on Earth? These are some of the questions and challenges that drive this mission study.

A thousand thanks to Elliott Wright, my Consulting Editor for this issue, who made major contributions to the planning, writing, and editing of what you are about to read.

—Alma Graham

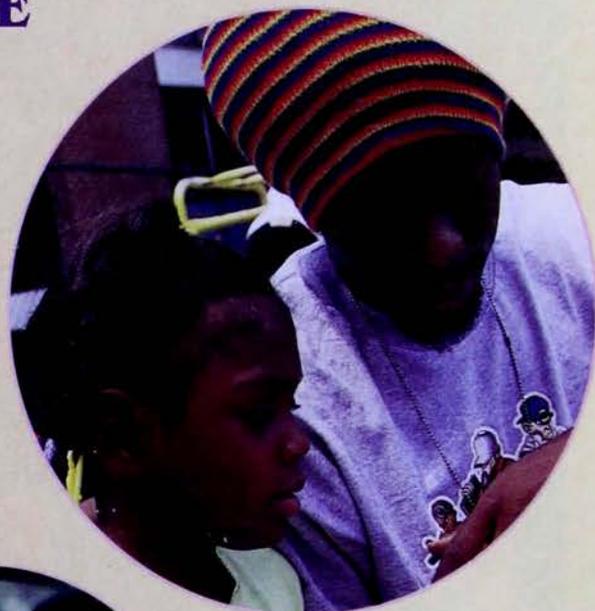
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Introduction

BY ELLIOTT WRIGHT



The contents of this issue of *New World Outlook* and of the April issue of *Response* constitute the primary resource material for the 2000-2001 mission study: "God's People in an Urban Culture." A study guide links and focuses study themes, and a video presents these themes in action.

God's People

The idea of the church as God's people comes from the New Testament. It is a Christian adaptation of the Old Testament concept of God's chosen people, Israel. Picking up on this Old Testament heritage, I Peter 2: 9-10 tells the

early Christians: "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people..." This image permeates Christian literature, liturgy, and language.

But the term "people of God" is not always restricted to the church. It is also used in an expanded sense as a synonym for all humankind. For example, I Peter 1:17 speaks of the God of the church as the impartial judge of "all people." In John 10:16, Jesus says: "I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold." John 3:16 tells us that "God so loved the world..."—not that God so loved the church—"that he gave his only Son." So while "God's

people" refers to the church, the term can also mean the human race, and both uses are scriptural.

Urban Culture

Urban culture is culture characteristic of the city or of city life. *Culture* itself is a complex term with multiple meanings. As defined in this study, *urban culture* consists of the beliefs, values, arts, institutions, and ways of living associated with city life.

The whole society today in the United States and in most other countries is influenced by ideas, trends, and assumptions that come from an urban context. This context



is not restricted to "the city" proper but includes entire metropolitan areas: large cities and their surrounding suburbs and towns. In the United States, economic and social power in the year 2000 is concentrated in suburbs more than in older central cities. Thus the subject of this study is not the city in general, the inner city in particular, or even urban ministry itself. Instead, this mission study strives to explore the ways in which God's people live and act and have their being in a culture where urban/suburban ways of thinking and acting prevail.

Changing Images

A century ago, rural images were far more common in the United States and in Methodism. Where today the greater part of the US population lives in or around cities, then the population was more spread out and agriculture played a larger role in the economy. In 1900, almost 50 percent of the population lived on farms, whereas today, only one in every 100 people is a farmer.¹

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the strength of the Methodist Church in the United States was in rural areas and small towns. Many rural Protestants of that era tended to view large cities with suspicion, seeing them as alien places whose populations included many new immigrants with strange-sounding names and different religious beliefs. Today, city life still brings together many racial, religious, and social groups with varieties of beliefs and behaviors,

attitudes and values. But in contrast to the negative image of cities that The United Methodist Church inherited is the new conviction that the rich human diversity and creative dynamic of city life is something to celebrate. Looking at assets and potentials is also more positive and productive than focusing only on problems and needs. So this study stresses the creative interaction in church and society of diverse ethnic identities, languages, and artistic expressions. It looks at how various racial and ethnic groups are engaged in ministry in urban contexts and how people are affected by urban reality. It also explores positive ways in which urban and rural cultures can relate.

Transforming Urban Culture

From the Christian perspective, all cultures deserve transformation. Transformation, not condemnation, is the Christlike attitude toward anything that can be improved. Urban culture—like all cultures—is in need of transformation.

The Bible contains two interacting views of the city. One view sees the city as a place of corruption, injustice, and rebellion against God's will. The first urban story in Genesis, the account of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9), pits human willfulness against the purposes of God. Narrative and prophetic literature in the Old Testament reinforces this perception. Amos, Hosea, Jeremiah, and most of the other prophets had harsh words for Jerusalem—which in the Bible is the quintessential city. In the New Testament, Jesus also laments over Jerusalem as a place of violence and sin (Matthew 23:37).

Yet throughout the Bible is the hope—the expectation—of the city redeemed and restored. The hope is for a New Jerusalem. This is a dominant theme in the Revelation of St. John and is also beautifully

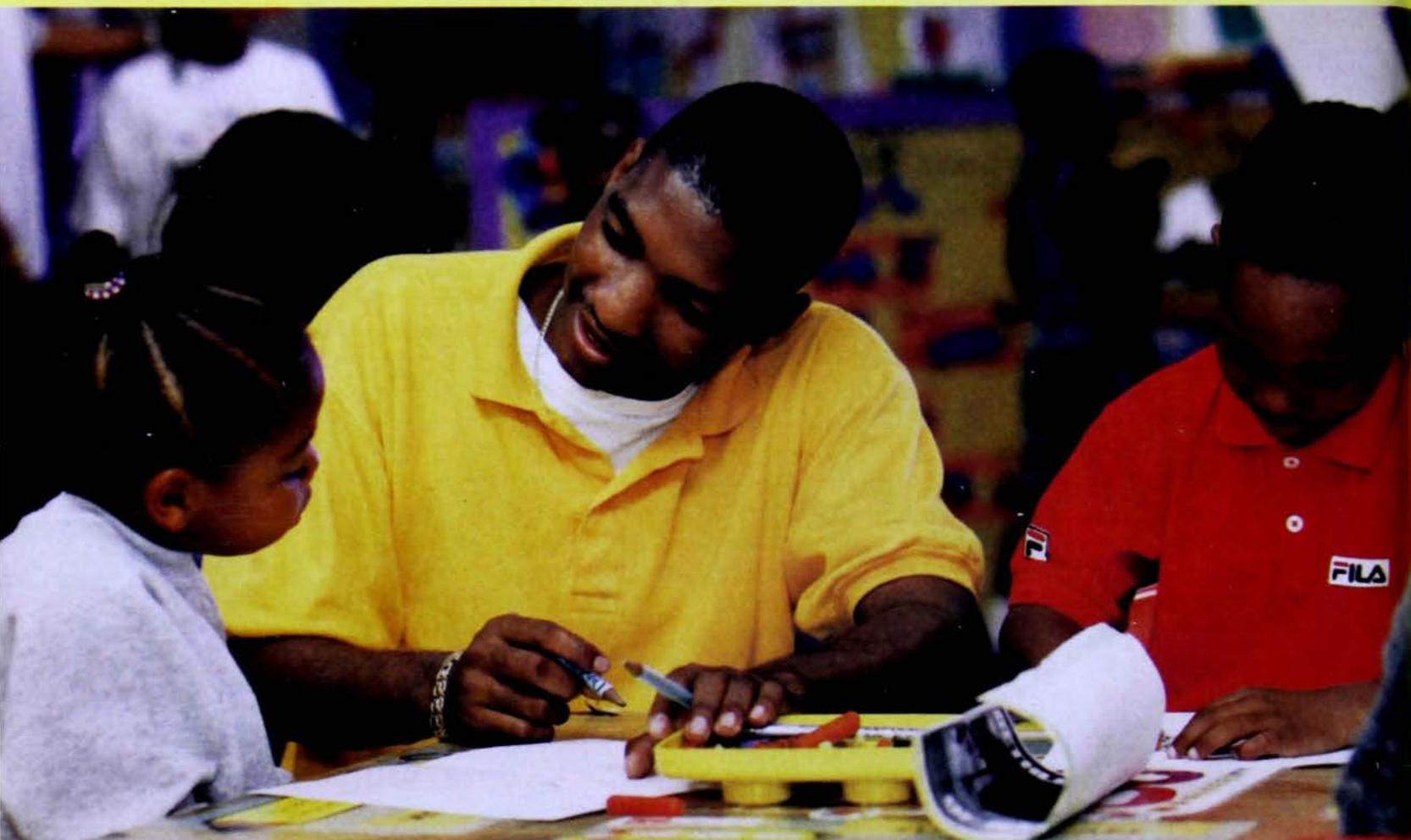
expressed in Isaiah 65, which projects a city of prosperity, justice, and peace. The prophet wrote:

They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity; for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord—and their descendants as well. Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent—its food shall be dust! They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord. (Isaiah 65: 21-25)

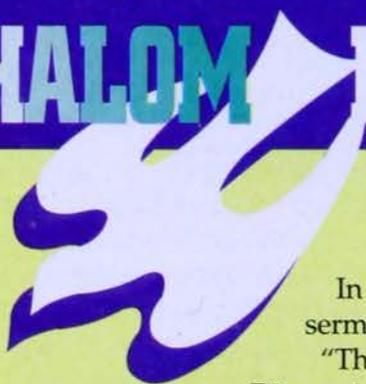
The church itself is and has a culture: the culture of faith, hope, and love. The culture of people who define themselves in relation to God is one of joy, hard work, justice, mercy, and the expectation of holy transformation. This transformation comes about through the power and grace of God. In Revelation 21, it is God who brings about a new heaven, a new earth, and a new Jerusalem. The pledge of God to be with God's people provides both the incentive and the ability of the church to work for the improvement and transformation of cities and urban culture. □

1. Dirk Johnson, "Leaving the Farm for the Other Real World," *New York Times*, 11/7/99, Section 4, p. 3.

Elliott Wright is an author and educator who focuses on the church in urban, rural, and community settings.



THE VISION OF SHALOM FOR THE CITY



The late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s last book was prophetic. In *Where Do We Go From Here? Community or Chaos*,¹ he makes clear that humankind has reached a critical juncture. Will we move toward community or chaos?

Creating the kind of community we seek calls for the best disciplines of community organizing and economic development; but, beyond this, it demands a priority role for the faith community. Only the faith community can supply that "something more" that is required if we are to enjoy community life in all its dimensions.

In his sermon, "Three Dimensions of a Complete Life,"² Dr. King envisions ideal community life in terms of a text from Revelation 21:16—a text that describes the holy city of Jerusalem: "The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width;...its length and width and height are equal." Using the dimensions of the heavenly city as his metaphor, Dr. King applies these dimensions to human life. "Any complete life has the three dimensions suggested in our text," he

by Kinmoth W. Jefferson

says, "length, breadth, and height. The *length* of life is the *inward* concern for one's own welfare and achievements. The *breadth* of life is the *outward* concern for the welfare of others. The *height* of life is the *upward* reach for God. Life at its best is a coherent triangle. At one angle is the individual person. At [another] angle are other persons. At the tiptop is the Infinite Person, God. Without the due development of each part of the triangle, no life can be complete."

What Dr. King was emphasizing as the measure of an individual is also the measure of a community.

What United Methodists now call "Communities of Shalom" are communities that meet the tests of length, breadth, and height.

It is the prophetic power inherent in this comprehensive understanding of community that accounts for the tremendous response that The United Methodist Church is giving to the Communities of Shalom Initiative. This initiative grew out of a resolution introduced by the Rev. (now Bishop) Joseph Sprague at the church's 1992 General Conference, which began within a week of the uprisings in Los Angeles that followed the acquittal of White police officers who had been videotaped beating a Black motorist, Rodney King. In an attempt to heal divisions, repair destruction, and provide the opportunities and services "needed for life, liberty, and the pursuit of meaning," Sprague called for the creation of a "shalom zone" in Los Angeles. Related actions at or after the 1992 General Conference have provided organizational form, content, and resources to translate the shalom vision into practical reality.

Sprague's compelling vision of shalom was drawn from Jeremiah 29:7. This text is the biblical foundation of the shalom concept. It sets forth the prophetic vision that gives the shalom movement its power to transform churches and communities. It also explains the explosive growth that has spread this movement across the United States and is now resulting in global expressions of shalom. As of September 1999, there were 331 Communities of Shalom in the United States and 12 community teams trained in Africa.

Text and Context

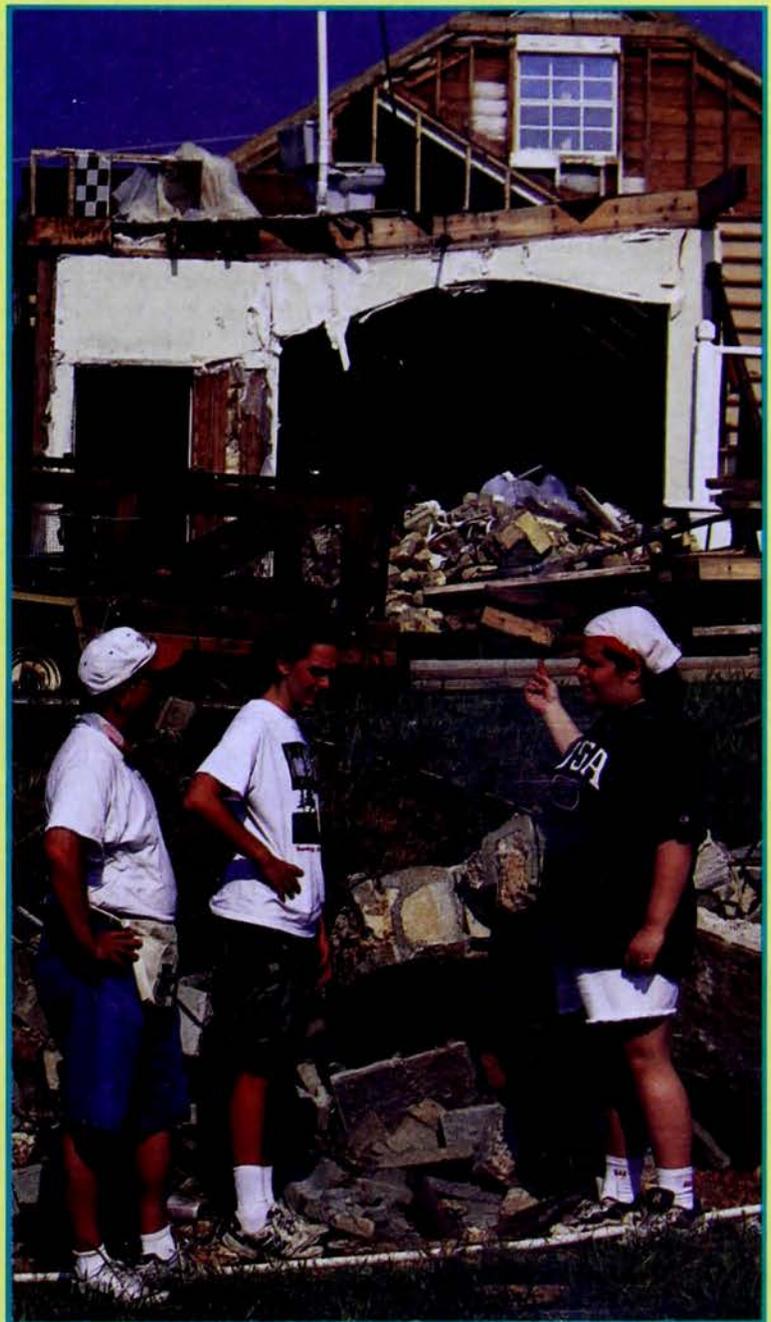
To examine this biblical vision, let's begin by considering the full text

found in Jeremiah 29: 4-7: "Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the [shalom] of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its [shalom] you will find your [shalom]."

The *New Revised Standard Version* of the Bible, which is quoted here, uses the word *welfare* to translate the concept. I have substituted the richer, more comprehensive word *shalom*, as many other scholars do. *Shalom* can connote peace and justice, spiritual health and wholeness, overall well-being.

Let's look briefly at the historical context in which our text was written. Jeremiah had prophesied that God was going to "give King Zedekiah of Judah...and the people in [Jerusalem] ...into the hands of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon...." (Jer. 21:3-7) This prophecy was realized, and in Jeremiah 29, the prophet is writing a letter

"from Jerusalem to the remaining elders among the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon." (Jer. 29:2) He addresses his words to Israelites now in captivity in Babylon. They are feeling isolated and in despair, as



Opposite, p. 6: Richard Abrams (center) with Kimberly King (left) and Jeremy Mosley at the Bethlehem Centers of Nashville. Above: Volunteers In Mission help families "build houses and live in them" in Little Rock.

expressed in the psalmist's lament in Psalm 137. They are inclined to retreat into a ghetto existence, trying to shield their enclave from the corruption of the larger community.

Some exiles are being influenced by those among them whom Jeremiah calls false prophets. These false prophets would stir the Israelites to rebel against their Babylonian oppressors. They contend that only by returning to Israel and to temple worship at Jerusalem can Israelites be a godly community.

Jeremiah offers a different and radically new understanding: that it is not necessary to be in Israel and to worship at the temple, because God has written on the heart a new covenant. (Jer. 31:31-34; 32:37-41.)

In a 1948 seminary paper, "The Significant Contributions of Jeremiah to Religious Thought,"³ the young Martin Luther King, Jr., wrote the following analysis: "Jeremiah realized that the covenant made at Mount Sinai had failed to accomplish its purpose. He saw that Israel had become apostate....This rebellion against the old covenant [see Jer. 11] came to its climax and crown when, in his later activities, the prophet brought forth the noblest of all spiritual conceptions: the new covenant. The shortcomings of the old covenant would be removed in the new....Principles would take the place of external ordinances. Such principles as truth, and justice, and purity, love to God and love [of neighbor] would be enshrined in [human] hearts. This, would lead to an ideal state, in which the sins of the people would be forgiven."

With a revolutionary prophetic understanding of God's new covenant, Jeremiah offers this counsel to the Israelite community in exile.

- Make the most of where God had led you.
- Know that God is there with you and will hear your prayers.

- Settle down. Build families and engage in productive work.
- Above all, seek the shalom of the larger community, the city of Babylon, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in Babylon's shalom, you—the Israelite community in exile from Jerusalem—will find your shalom.

Counseling the Exiles

These must have been shocking—perhaps even infuriating—words to the exiles at first. Consider what Jeremiah appears to be contending:

- *Seek the shalom of the city* (Jer. 29:7a): Do not seek first the shalom of your Israelite community but that of the larger community of which you are now part—this Babylonian city where you are held in captivity. Get your priorities straight. Put the *shalom*—the welfare, well-being, peace and justice, health and wholeness—of this city ahead of your Israelite community's individual welfare.

- *Pray to the Lord on its behalf* (Jer. 29:7b): Pray for the city's physical, economic, political, social, and cultural well-being. But above all, pray for its spiritual well-being. Pray that its citizens and its leaders will be led to right relationships with God, with neighbor, and with self. Understand that the process of building the shalom community is, a spiritual responsibility and task.

- *Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce.* (Jer. 29: 5-6): Understand that you, the Israelite faith community, have the responsibility to stay in the city and to encourage community development—even where your community is threatened by corruption, oppression, and destruction.

- *For in the shalom of the city, you will find your shalom* (Jer. 29:7c): You, Israel in exile, must live out the basic connectionalism of your faith community and the larger secular community. You must become a



Children in the Summer Academy of Atlantic Street Center in Seattle, Washington, plant gardens in the city and eat their produce. (See Jeremiah 29:4-7.)



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movement for the transformation of both communities.

The Message for Mission

This counsel has some obvious implications for the church as it prepares for mission in the twenty-first century. First, Jeremiah makes plain that involvement in the larger community, with the aim of creating communities of shalom, is a primary responsibility of the church. This is true even as the church struggles with the modern equivalent of the Babylonian captivity: captivity in a secularized society. In contemporary terms, the shalom community may be a city, suburban area, town, or even rural village, but the church's responsibility is the same. Sectarian separatism and a focus on protecting and maintaining the religious institution in isolation must be avoided at all costs.

Secondly, the prophet makes clear that this involvement with the wider community will include prayer as well as social action. Intercessory prayer is needed for the welfare even of those who are the oppressors. Prayer alone, however, is not enough. It must be accompanied by action. Creating the shalom of the city today requires engagement in community organizing, community economic development, provision of direct services, and public advocacy for justice and peace.

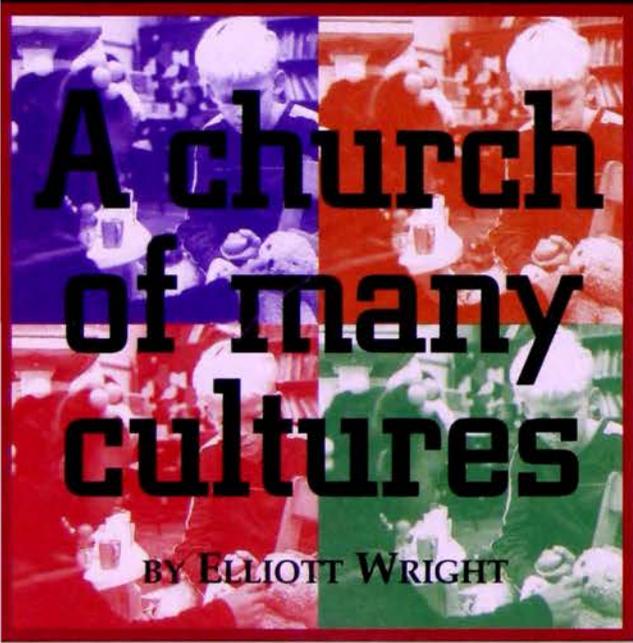
Thirdly, the point is made that seeking the shalom of the larger community is a prerequisite for experiencing shalom in one's own gathered community of faith, the church. If the church would experience congregational transformation, it must become a movement for community transformation. As *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* affirms (see Paragraph 202): "The church of Jesus Christ exists in and for the world."

Finally, God gives the Israelite people a promise: "For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope." (Jer. 29:11)

Here, in Jeremiah's counsel and its implications for the twenty-first-century church, are the spiritual dimensions of the shalom community that should guide the church in its mission. Here is the *length*—the inward drive, the legitimacy of care for the church's own welfare, but within an appropriate subordinate emphasis. Here is the *breadth*—the outward concern, the strong emphasis on seeking the shalom of the larger community that includes all our neighbors. And here is the *height*—the upward reach, our need to turn to God in prayer for the larger community's transformation and our willingness to act out of God's grace and forgiveness and transformative power. Together, these are the only ways that will transform both the community and the church. □

1. King, M. L., Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here?*, Harper & Row, 1967.
2. King, M. L., Jr., in *Strength To Love*, Harper & Row, 1963, p. 69.
3. King, M. L., Jr., in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr., Vol. I*, U. of California Press, 1992, pp. 184-185.

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A church of many cultures

BY ELLIOTT WRIGHT

From its beginning, the Christian church was influenced by the cultures in which it took root. Christianity never had a single indigenous culture. It grew out of Judaism and quickly moved into the diverse Roman world—going east, west, north, and south, where it encountered and absorbed characteristics of many nationalities, ethnicities, races, and artistic expressions. Even in Jerusalem, according to Acts 2:9, the very first Christian congregation—that of

Pentecost—contained people of a dozen lands located in southwest Asia, southern Europe, and northern Africa. Their understandings of Pentecost were no doubt tempered by their cultural outlooks and their maritime, agricultural, nomadic, or urban environments.

Culture as Living Story
Culture is a term with many meanings. In this article, it is understood to be a people's living story or narrative, defined by language and other means of communication and by uniting symbols and goals. Ethnicity, race, and religion can be key components of culture but do not exhaust the term's meaning. For example, the story, means of communication, and symbols that define teenage "grunge" culture today can unite youth across racial and ethnic divisions while excluding most adults.

Christianity often shaped or reshaped the cultures into which it was transplanted. But though it gave believers a context of commonality, it never made them culturally identical. Paul stressed the equality of Greeks and Jews within the household of faith (Romans 10:12) but he never said they ceased to be Greek or Jewish. The most ancient churches of Greece, Egypt, Ethiopia, Carthage, Armenia, Rome, and southern India developed distinctive cultural forms. Each church was strongly influenced by preexisting realities—

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such as language, tribe, and race—and sometimes also by factors such as local economies, geography, or politics. The Roman Catholic Church used Latin as the language of worship and theology for centuries in an effort to transcend cultural differences. This *catholic* (meaning “universal”) church went a long way toward establishing uniformity in administration and formal doctrine, but it never overcame cultural diversity. The Protestant Reformation and the missionary movements that followed further advanced the cultural mix within the church.

Cultural Tensions

Cultural diversity within the church may be ancient but it is not always welcomed. Tensions and conflicts within the same religious family are well attested in the Bible. While sharing many similarities, God’s chosen people, the Jews, were not culturally monolithic. There were differences among the twelve tribes of Israel in terms of worship styles and geographic loyalties. The Old Testament contains numerous accounts of cultural clashes between rural and urban Jews. Their views of the world, and therefore their stories, differed. People from northern Palestine—from Galilee, where Jesus grew up in Nazareth—were considered spiritually and ethnically inferior to the Judeans. “Surely the Messiah does not come from Galilee, does he?” people ask in John 7:41.

One result of the cultural mix under the early Christian umbrella was the formation of separate churches along national, linguistic, or cultural lines—either because the people wanted their own church or because they were excluded from those of others. In theory, the church encompassed diversity; in reality, the differences often led to partisanship and, tragically, to

bloodshed. One outcome of the Reformation was the formation of many European churches that were nationalistically or culturally defined. Those divisions later made their way into the United States.

United Methodism and Diversity

The United Methodist Church of today is an amalgam of geographic, ethnic, national, and theological traditions. The road to the goal of becoming “united” has not always been smooth—nor has it been traveled to its end. Cultures defined by sectionalism and racial policies

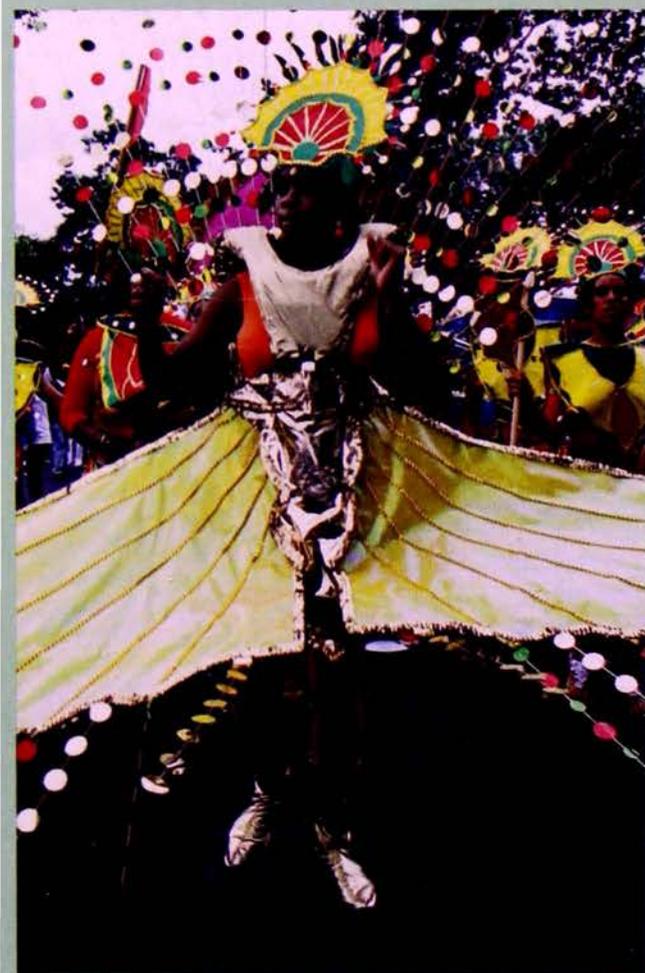
divided the original Methodist Episcopal Church from the 1850s until 1939, when The Methodist Church was formed. Still, a separate nongeographical “jurisdiction” for many African American congregations continued until the Methodists united with the Evangelical United Brethren (EUB) in 1968. Even today, most United Methodist congregations are culturally constituted, and the divide is not always along racial or ethnic lines but may also be economic.

Ethnically and racially, The United Methodist Church on the global level is quite diverse. Most of the 8.4 million members in the United States are of European ancestry. An attempt is made to keep membership statistics on four racial/ethnic groupings. Such figures probably do not count people in multicultural churches. With this caveat, the 1997 figures include 342,245 African Americans; 53,731 Asian Americans; 39,031 Hispanic Americans; and 8,995 Native



Opposite, p. 10: Children at the Neighborhood Center of the Central Pennsylvania Conference, Harrisburg. Left: A police officer and (below) a Muslim procession reflect the diversity of New York City.





A celebration of Caribbean culture in a Brooklyn, New York, parade.

Americans. The Asian membership falls into 10 subgroups. Hispanics come from many different backgrounds. And Native Americans come from tribes, or nations, with different languages and cultures.

Head counting, however, is not the point. Far more important is the fact that these diverse populations are striving to create and be part of a "United Methodist story." This story is a common narrative of faith and service enriched by many contributing stories of the peoples of God in an increasingly diverse country: the United States.

The City as Cultural Mix

Cities are good stages for seeing the cultural diversity of the society as a whole and of the church. Many US cities today are international cultural centers, with varieties of artistic productions and many different ethnic celebrations.

The degree of diversity within the US population varies regionally. Because of immigration, the East and West coasts tend to have the most people of different nationalities and religions. The states with the greatest diversity are California, New York, Texas, Florida, Illinois, and Pennsylvania.

A 1997 study by the Project on Religion in Urban Culture in Marion County, Indiana, found that the Indianapolis metropolitan area had not yet experienced the growth of Islam, Hinduism, and other world religions that had occurred in such nearby places as Chicago and Detroit. While the religious demographics in Indianapolis shifted from the 1920s to the 1990s, the major changes came in the growth of Roman Catholic and Black Baptist groups and the decline in mainline Protestant denominations.

When it comes to urban religious diversity, "Indianapolis is not a microcosm of the United States," concluded the report, prepared by the Polis Center of Indiana University/Perdue University at Indianapolis.¹ Furthermore, the area is below the national average in the percentage of people who are members of or regular participants in religious congregations. However, The United Methodist Church does continue to be the largest single Protestant denomination in Marion County, with 29,445 members and 37,027 adherents.

In marked contrast is Queens, a county that forms a borough of the City of New York—particularly the neighborhood of Flushing, and most especially a 20-block strip along Bowne Street. Beginning with a Quaker Meeting House on Northern Boulevard and running south to the Iglesia Presbiteriana near Rose Avenue, this area is home to at least 15 major houses of worship and religious centers. They include the Muslim Center of New

York, several Hindu and Buddhist temples, a synagogue, a Jewish community center, a Chinese mission, a 3500-member Korean American Presbyterian Church, and a community church used by several ethnic groups. There is no United Methodist congregation in the Bowne Street corridor, but the Macedonia African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, once a stop on the Underground Railroad, is found there.²

Queens and Los Angeles counties are often cited as the most racially, ethnically, and religiously diverse—thus the most culturally variegated—areas of the country. Many other urban areas are tending in that direction, as immigration from every region of the world increases. Even small towns and the open countryside are experiencing a growth of Hispanic, Eastern European, Southeast Asian, and African populations. "Born Again in Every Place: The National Comprehensive Plan for Town and Country Ministry," recently adopted by the directors of the General Board of Global Ministries, notes the interest of rural congregations in reaching these new populations.

The Challenge of Diversity

Learning to be in ministry among and with new populations and cultures is not easy, whether the location is rural or urban. Increased diversity and population shifts can be major challenges to established patterns of worship and church life. This is especially true where large numbers of poor people and new immigrants live in urban areas not out of choice but out of economic necessity. Poverty itself becomes a culture that generates some of the worst urban features: crime, abuse, and fear.

Within the church, cultural differences in close proximity can enrich but can also result in conflict,

competition, and perplexing transitions conditioned by ethnic, racial, or linguistic factors. The United Methodist Church is no stranger to such conditions. The account of the Mt. Auburn United Methodist Church of Cincinnati, Ohio (see p. 29) is typical in cities where populations and cultures have changed and congregations find themselves out of step with their neighborhoods or discover that they have no future without dramatic changes. Mt. Auburn's story has a happy outcome. That is not always the case.

Faced with an aging membership with a building it could no longer fill, a Black church in an East Coast city stopped trying to attract new residents, most of whom were Hispanic, to its own services and events. The few who came did not return because of cultural differences. Rather, the pastor identified leaders in the emerging community and said to them: "Look, we have this big church building. We can't use all the space. If you want some of it, it's yours. Start a church where you will feel comfortable."

The neighborhood people did just that. Women with no college degrees organized a Sunday school and taught it themselves. They invited visiting preachers, sang songs they knew and loved, and soon had an attendance larger than the "official" congregation. The two groups began to get together for fellowship and to hold joint worship on special occasions. Most likely, the new congregation will eventually replace the old in an orderly transition from one culture to another and with a sense of unity in the church.

The Future

The future of the church as the people of God belongs to

A Navaho interpretation of the familiar United Methodist symbol of the Cross and Flame.

no one cultural narrative—no single story. This fact was repeatedly stressed in July 1999 at a United Methodist consultation, sponsored by the General Board of Global Ministries, on global evangelization in the new millennium. Dr. Randolph Nugent, General Secretary of the GBGM, told the consultants from around the world that, in the future, diversity within The United Methodist Church would not be limited to the current pattern: a White majority relating to four minorities. The church of tomorrow, he said, will include peoples and cultures now only recently encountered, as changing political conditions allow the Gospel to permeate regions—Eastern Europe, parts of Asia and Africa—not before reached by United Methodists.

In the United States, international realities will affect the diversity of cultural stories. Evangelism and social outreach in Russia has led to ministry with Russian immigrants in the United States. Such international interaction can be expected in the future with regard to other nationalities, since the United States, though no longer a melting pot, is the world's great cultural salad bowl.

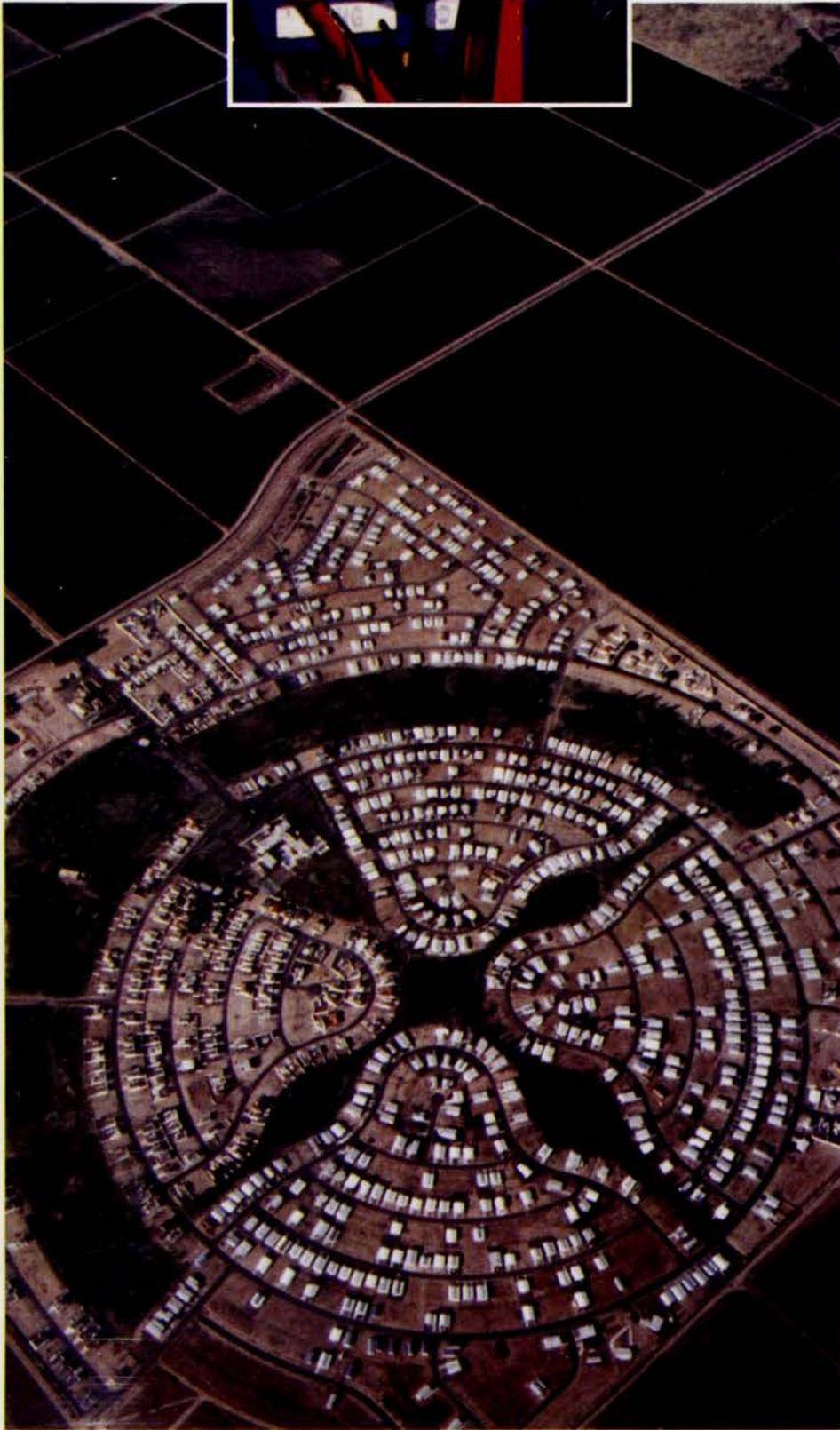
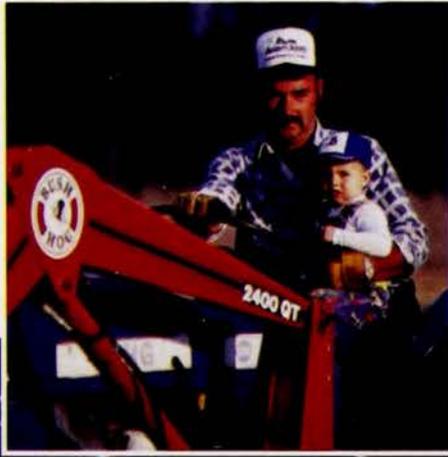
The United Methodist Church in the United States has an unprecedented opportunity to carry out God's intention that Christians adhere around Christ—the center of their story—while respecting and celebrating the cultural variety of God's people in their living narratives. The ability to accomplish this goal depends upon whether United Methodists believe God's promise in Revelation 21:5: "See, I am making all things new." □

1. Arthur Farnsley II, "The Religious Landscape of Indianapolis," Research Notes, February 1997: Polis Center, Indiana University/Perdue University at Indianapolis.

2. Sonini Sengupta, "A Snapshot of World Faiths," New York Times, 11/7/99, pp. 37, 39.

Elliott Wright is an author and educator who focuses on the church in urban, rural, and community settings.





THE IMPACT of Urban Culture ON RURAL Communities

by Ed Kail

Many rural people feel deeply threatened by the spread of urban culture, especially as traditional agriculture is replaced by agribusiness and as "urban sprawl" invades the once open countryside. The impact of urban culture on rural areas and small towns is of great importance to The United Methodist Church. Twenty-five thousand of its congregations are in town and country settings. Now increasing numbers of urban people are moving into sparsely settled rural areas, bringing their culture with them and raising questions about how to organize ministries that are effective for both old and new populations.

The Rev. Ed Kail, who occupies the Chair of Town and Country Ministries at Saint Paul School of Theology in Kansas City, Missouri, is the only full-time professor of rural ministry in a United Methodist seminary. In the article that follows, he meditates on the interplay of urban and rural cultures. An accompanying proposal for rural-urban collaboration around the important issue of food comes from "Born Again in Every Place: The National Comprehensive Plan for Town and Country Ministry of The United Methodist Church," mandated by the General Conference of 1996 and prepared by a Task Force of which Kail was a member. —The Editors.

Two primary factors have shaped the reality of traditional rural communities in the United States: the natural environment and social stability as contrasted with social change.

To be culturally rural is to have a sense of one's place in the natural world. Whether the primary enterprise is farming, ranching, lumbering, mining, fishing, or recreation, the environment is nature: natural forces, natural processes, and living things. Natural factors, such as the type of soil, the lay of the land, and the prevailing weather patterns, determine which economic enterprises will develop and be sustained. The forces, cycles, rhythms, and vicissitudes of nature are unavoidable.

The rural community is ruled by nature's sense of time. There is a time to sow and a time to reap, and doing them at the right time is a matter of survival. Time is measured in gestation periods and growing seasons, not in days and weeks. When the fish are spawning, or the herd is calving, or the cows need milking—then is the time to act. Weather is also a determinant of rural life, and what causes weather to be judged good or bad depends on the season.

Traditionally, rural life has also been associated with small, stable, and cohesive social communities. Longtime rural residents, coming from families with roots in the same community over several generations, are likelier than urban residents to have a deep sense of kinship with the past and a longstanding respect for local traditions.

Rural Views of Urban Culture

While urban life is characterized more by mobility and change than by stable, longstanding traditions, urban culture also has its interdependent social communities. However, to rural eyes, urban and

suburban culture does not look cohesive. Many rural people see suburbanites as people encountering one another less as neighbors than as individuals who perform certain roles or pursue particular interests. They see suburban life—perhaps the epitome of urban culture—as fragmented, with family members going in many different directions, even at mealtimes, and neighbors encountering one another only when they pass in their cars.

Technology, the social environment of urban culture, also creates an image of fragmentation in rural eyes. Technology, by its very definition, seeks to control nature. Indoor "climate control" makes weather a mere inconvenience. Communication technologies connect people who never come face to face. Cars, air conditioners, and television sets may have made life convenient and comfortable but they also make it easier for people to become isolated from their neighbors.

The Changing Rural Scene

Socially stable rural communities have fragmented under the impact of technology-driven urban cultures so that now there is less and less difference between the lives of suburban and rural residents. Urban industrial models, methods, and mentality have been applied to farming, lumbering, and ranching without appreciation for the particularities of place.

Absentee landowners and investors in large farming operations treat agriculture like a business, not as a way of life. Farmers become operators, animals become products, and soil becomes a growing medium rather than a living thing. Industrial efficiency does not value soil-conservation measures that result in a slower plowing process or in the leaving of some pasture ungrazed. Nor does the welfare of the community of wild animals and birds have any bearing on how modern farming is done.



Opposite, p. 14: The sprawling spread of suburban housing impinges on and replaces farmland. Here, a mobile-home community borders fields near Phoenix, Arizona. Inset: Agribusiness has largely replaced the family farmer. Above: The United Methodist Church of New Fairfield, Connecticut, has a yard in which children can play.

The bottom line in modern farming is maximum production and profit. Under the credo "bigger is better," wealth and power have flowed out of the rural areas, becoming concentrated in the hands of a few transnational corporations. When the (patented) genes that give life to a meat animal, the grain it is fed, the packing plant that processes it, the distributor that packages and markets it, and the transportation system that gets the meat to the supermarket are all owned or controlled by the same outfit, there is little competition in the system. The consumer—faced with a variety of brand names in the store—does not realize that only three or four companies control the stream of food production.

The impact of technology on rural communities is not all negative. Workers can do more, in a cleaner and safer environment, and their labors are amplified by the use of machines. But there is no place for small or mid-sized family farms in modern agriculture. One option for a farm family that wants to stay in business is to get bigger. In this process, neighbors can become competitors for land and resources, with the losers displaced to urban areas. Another option is for farmers to become laborers or low-level managers for big systems. Many once independent farmers now contract their facilities and their labor to transnational corporations. The third option is to abandon agriculture while still living on a farm, getting other jobs to pay the taxes.

More and more, the lives of rural families resemble those of urban and suburban workers. Often, today's agricultural communities more closely resemble the European feudal society of the Middle Ages or the collective farms of the former Soviet Union than the American rural society enshrined in many people's memories.

Rural people who have remained in their communities have experienced the loss of neighbors, the loss of businesses, the loss of community services and institutions, and the loss of successive generations. There is a consequent loss of confidence in the future.

Urban Sprawl

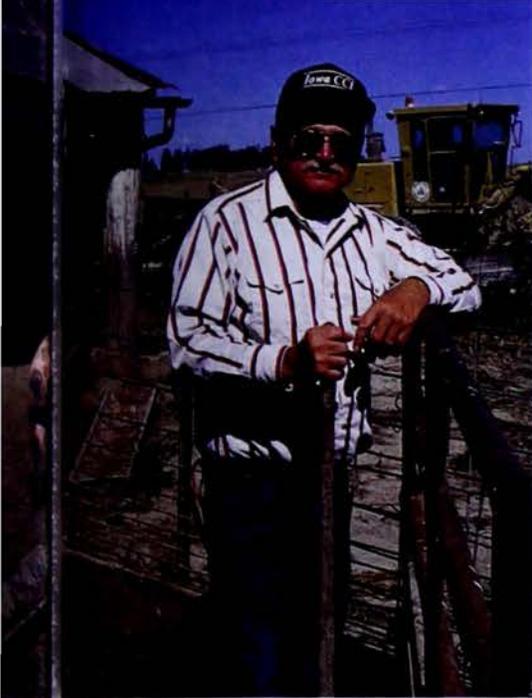
Of equal impact with the displacement of rural people is the movement of urban-cultured people to rural communities. Some folks will live as far from urban areas as they



Top: In Marshall City, Iowa, a farmer tends pigs on his own farm. Above: Mass production of pork at a huge hog "factory" in Ellsworth, Iowa.

can afford in order to enjoy the benefits of "country living" or "small-town life." Such urban sprawl—much discussed in the press and in state legislatures—results in the loss of productive agricultural land to pavement or suburban-style housing.

Urban culture comes along with the territorial sprawl, causing rural communities to change dramatically. Agrarian villages become bedroom communities, and small towns with 60 years of decline suddenly find they are now facing problems of growth.



One new phenomenon is the presence of culturally urban telecommuters in rural communities. Sometimes these newcomers are able to commit more time to community involvement than longtime residents who may be working several jobs to survive. This is also true of relatively affluent urban retirees who relocate to rural areas. The newcomers may be either welcomed or resented by the longtime residents whom they may replace.

Perhaps the biggest challenge occurs in cases where the newcomers, whoever they may be, show no respect for the existing culture and its social arrangements. When newcomers want to change things to fit their ideas of how life should be in the country, rural people may feel that they have been "taken over."

Today a kind of cultural hegemony prevails when rural and urban people mix. Generally, the characteristics of a place-specific, traditional rural culture are supplanted by a mainstream popular culture linked to urban society. Gone is the sense of stability, security, and belonging that people in rural communities once could take for granted.

Healthful Places for Life

The crucial question people in rural communities share with their urban

and suburban counterparts is this: What kinds of communities will be fostered as healthful places for human life? Is it possible to draw upon the cultural heritage of rural life to renew human communities in every place? Can a traditional sense of community be nurtured in a technological context? Can any

local cultures be honored and nurtured in the midst of mainstream popular culture? Can we develop social and economic systems that protect the natural environment while also producing food and fiber for global economies?

Rural culture has wisdom to offer in answer to these questions. □

Questions About Our Daily Bread

The following excerpt is taken from "Born Again in Every Place: The National Comprehensive Plan for Town and Country Ministry of The United Methodist Church."

Food is an excellent example of an issue that clearly connects rural and urban congregations and peoples at the start of the twenty-first century. "Give us this day our daily bread," Christians pray. The church gathers around a sacramental meal of bread and wine, around Christian fellowship suppers, and likewise is united in a desire for a safe, abundant, and affordable food supply available on a daily basis to all of God's children. Many mission activities and funding programs, both local and worldwide, involve providing food—or the means to produce it—for the poor, the landless, and the oppressed.

How does the church react to the consolidation of power to control all "daily bread" in the hands of a half-dozen clusters of biotech, livestock, grain, and food-processing firms that not only control the grain but also the global production of oilseeds and livestock? This is not only a rural issue, although it continues to have a devastating impact upon family farms and rural communities.

The patenting (i.e. the private ownership) of genetic stocks of seeds and livestock raises profound ethical, moral, social, and theological questions, as well as economic and political ones. As resistance to the encroachment of this monopolistic system increases around the world, farmers and consumers, scientists and politicians, and congregations of many faiths in rural and urban settings are voicing their concerns about the injustices it is creating, its unsustainable nature, and the anti-democratic character of a system that allows so few to have so much power over the health and well-being of every human being.

What roles should the church play in fostering alternative food systems such as farmers' markets, food circles, or subscription agriculture, typically creating direct relationships between rural producers and urban consumers? Might such alternatives result in deeper knowledge and greater understanding among people of different social and cultural realities? Might they also engage and challenge monopolistic forces that harm rural communities and limit the nutritional choices of urban and suburban consumers?

Taking strong stands on some of these issues can create dissension and conflict in the church. How can a "reborn" congregation—and the denomination as a whole—nurture unity and harmony in the church and provide ministry to all its membership when it includes not only family farmers and farm workers but also the owners, managers, and stockholders of companies that are major players in the global industrial food system?

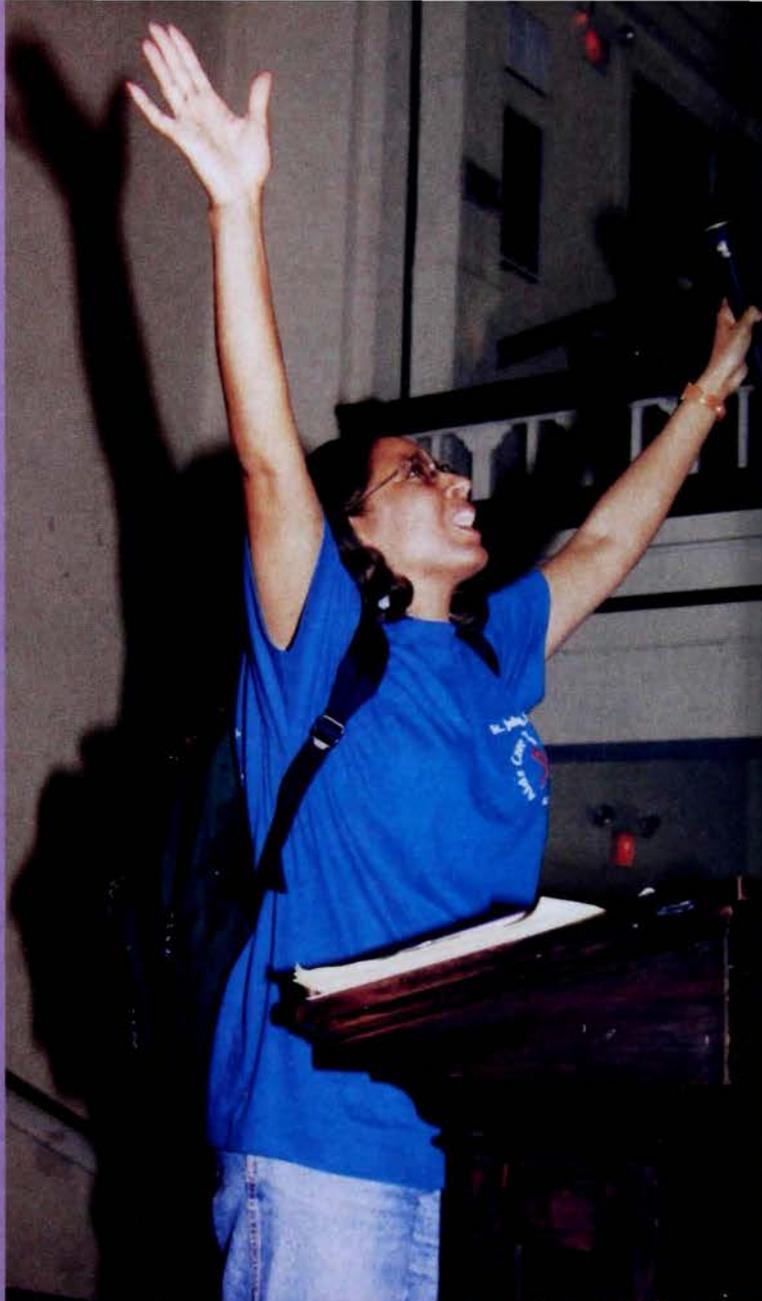
GOD'S *Spirit in the City:*

Church **RENEWAL** in Houston

by Randy Cypret



Clockwise From Top: Pastor Juanita Rasmus preaches a sermon at St. John's United Methodist Church in Houston, Texas. She wears casual attire as part of an effort to demystify the church and make it accessible. St. John's members respond to a sermon. Nurse Connie Swanson checks the chest of a homeless man at St. John's Daybreak Community Health Center.



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Stan Phills had been homeless for two years and was sleeping beneath the Pierce Elevated, the raised section of Interstate 45 that passes above Houston's old central business district.

"I was at the lowest point of my life with drugs and alcohol, living under the bridge," Phills said. A friend told him a church nearby was providing meals. He went to get a meal and to find out more about the church—St. John's United Methodist. There, he met pastors Rudy and Juanita Rasmus and got some direct experience with the "Bread of Life Homeless Project," St. John's nonprofit organization that provides outreach services.

"Pastor Rudy hugged me and made me feel comfortable," Phills said. After attending a Cocaine Anonymous 12-step meeting, Phills had a meal. Over the next few weeks, he met others struggling with problems like his. He was ready to change his life, he said.

"I thank God for St. John's," Phills says today. "I am a product of the Bread of Life. They loved me until I learned to love myself."

Continuing, Phills recalled his first encounter with St. John's: "I was dirty. My hygiene wasn't the best. I knew I was in bad shape. But they hugged me as I was. They genuinely loved me. They saw something in me I didn't even see. The greatest thing I remember was unconditional love. When people believe in you, it does something for you. It's a good feeling."

St. John's arranged for Phills to enter a drug-treatment program. He has now been sober for six years. He spent 55 days in treatment and then went to a halfway house. Later, with the encouragement of the St. John's staff, Phills earned his General Equivalency Diploma (GED), took college-level courses for certification as a substance-abuse and HIV counselor, and started work on an associate's degree in Christian counseling.

At the time Phills received his counseling certification, St. John's was starting a program to minister to the HIV-positive homeless population near the church. So Phills went to work for St. John's, setting up an HIV pre- and post-testing site. He also handled case management, AIDS education, and outreach. Today, Phills is independent and serves as executive director of "A Caring Safe Place," a 10-bed transitional living facility, funded by foundation grants and by the City of Houston, for people who are HIV-positive and who are dealing with drug addiction. Phills is working to establish a second location, explaining that, thanks to St. John's, he wants to make a difference in the lives of others.

Church Growth and Outreach

Phills is a St. John's success story, but such stories are common among what Phills calls St. John's "therapeutic community." Where the 100-year-old church had only five active congregation members

in 1992, it has grown to a membership of 3700, adding 750 new members in 1998 and expecting to add 1100 more in 1999. Those members come from more than 140 ZIP code areas to attend what can best be described as nontraditional services in a decaying structure a block from the freeway on the fringe of Houston's downtown. A third of the members are homeless and economically disadvantaged. Another third are marginally employed people either in recovery or making life transitions. Only the remaining third are well established and are relatively prosperous.

The church's growing membership has enabled St. John's to expand its outreach services and facilities. In 1999, Bread of Life served 75,000 meals, hosted 11,000 hygiene visits for laundry or shower service, conducted 1200 HIV tests and AIDS counseling sessions, helped 240 people find jobs, and referred 400 people for substance-abuse treatment. Hundreds of others have been referred to a variety of social-service programs, depending on their needs. The church also operates a school, St. John's Academy, which has 67 students, including HIV-positive children and others who have been affected by substance abuse.

The congregation recently celebrated the opening of its \$2 million Center for Hope—which also houses the school—and the \$600,000 Daybreak Community Health Center. Future projects include a \$700,000 sanctuary renovation and the construction of a \$1.4 million Center for Youth. The church has a staff of 21 and the Bread of Life programs employ 22 people.

Originally, Kirbyjon Caldwell was the senior pastor. In 1992, the Rev. Caldwell was given a dual charge: the responsibility to oversee both the Windsor Village United Methodist Church and St. John's.



Since 1982, Kirbyjon Caldwell has taken the Windsor Village UMC from 25 members to a membership of 11,000 today. Windsor Village has more than 120 ministries. Church projects include development of the Power Center, a 104,000-square-foot multiuse complex to serve southwest Houston. Church projects include development of the Power Center, a 104,000-square-foot multiuse complex to serve southwest Houston. This facility houses the Imani School, the Chase Bank of Texas, the Business Technology Center of Houston Community College, a University of Texas-Hermann Hospital Clinic, the WAM AIDS outreach program, 27 business suites, commercial lease space, WIC support services, and Houston's third largest banquet facility.

The Windsor Village Kingdom Builders' Prayer Institute and the Pyramid Community Residential Corporation have broken ground for the 234-acre Corinthian Pointe, a master-planned community featuring 440 homes plus a commercial center, park, retirement community, and wellness center.

Ministering to the Need

After Caldwell received his dual charge, he assigned pastoral couple Rudy and Juanita Rasmus to St. John's. The Rasmuses had worked with him for 12 years as members of Windsor Village UMC. They had just answered a call to ministry when Caldwell received his dual charge. Before this, Rudy had been involved in real estate and other business ventures, while Juanita worked with financial products such as insurance and securities. "The transition had much more to do with God's timing than with



St. John's youth pastor, Yvette Tarrant, visits with students at St. John's Academy.

preparation on our part," Rudy explained. Since then, he has earned 20 hours of credits toward a divinity degree, squeezing courses into what has become a very busy schedule.

"We started the ministry at St. John's on a credit card," Rudy Rasmus said—and it wasn't his card. An early supporter offered his credit card to pay for the meal program and repairs to the church. He was paid back when funds became available. "We always ministered to the need," Rudy added, "whether we had the funds or not." Today, St. John's Church and its Bread of Life project have annual budgets of \$1.2 million each.

When the Rasmuses first arrived at St. John's, the congregation had nine members, five of whom were active. These older people of European ancestry warmly welcomed the African American clergy team. "We got here and just went to work," Rudy recalled. "The ministry evolved naturally. We did not push or pull. Things just happened."

Services started in September 1992, with Caldwell in the pulpit. In early October, he had a scheduling conflict, and the Rasmuses conducted their very first service. "Leading a congregation was new to us, but we were quick studies," Juanita said. The two now have St. John's as their own charge.

"We had to step over the homeless to get in," Juanita continued. "We are entrepreneurs at heart. To be successful, you have to find a need and fill it." St. John's, they

found, was surrounded by need.

"We asked: 'How do we intentionally and compassionately meet this need?'" Rudy added, "and people started to join." The new church members who had resources saw that their efforts to help people had an immediate impact. "People began to feel a redemption and empowerment in their lives," Juanita said.

During the couple's first 16 months at St. John's, 150 people joined the church. Though the Rasmuses have two daughters, they took no pay during their first two years. To stay afloat financially, they sold personal investment property each year.

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Demystifying the Church

Meals were—and still are—served in a room off the church sanctuary. Participants eat their meals in the pews. The process is part of a strategy to demystify the church and make it accessible. Rudy typically moves about the complex and conducts services dressed in jeans, a T-shirt, and a baseball cap.

This lack of formality has been important. Though Phills said that he had little church experience when he first arrived at St. John's, "they presented the Scripture in a practical way that I could apply to my life and could understand," he noted. "And I didn't have to have a suit to go to church. People could push a grocery cart up to church or drive up in a Lexus to praise God. For all, it was 'come as you are.'"

The practical application of Scripture and the presentation of relevant messages have become a mainstay of Sunday services at St. John's. Many congregation members bring notebooks to take notes. Rudy and Juanita Rasmus fill the pulpit on alternate Sundays, and lay leaders regularly participate in the services.

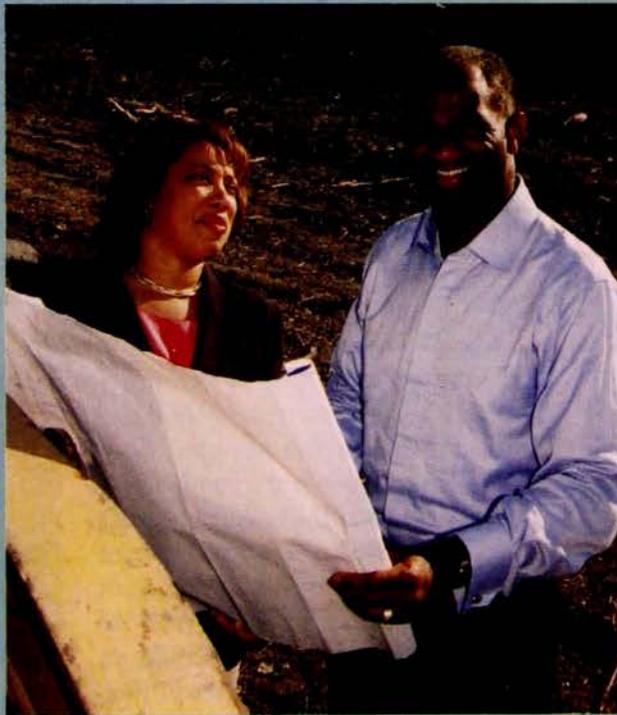
One section of the balcony is reserved for people recovering from alcohol and drug addiction. The church acknowledges its members' sobriety dates and achievements. An area on the other side of the sanctuary is reserved for a different kind of youth "gang"—God's Anointed New Generation.

"Real people have real issues and they want relevant messages," Juanita said. "At St. John's, people know that, if they show up, they will receive basic instruction on how to live effectively in a way pleasing to God." The pastors are supporters of "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective

Believers" and the KISS principle: "Keep It Simple and Sincere." Their goal is to provide messages that speak to people's pain and that help them heal emotionally, physically, and financially, while restoring their relationships. The health center is working on medical empowerment.

Although construction projects have been funded through loans, those loans and future capital campaigns include pledges from church members. "We want people who are part of this community of faith to have a tangible investment in its future," Rudy said.

St. John's is committed to economic development and to the creation of jobs through small businesses. Future plans include developing businesses that can offer employment and job training for positions that pay more than the minimum wage.



Tina Moore, director of administration for Windsor Village UMC and executive director of the Pyramid Community Residential Corporation, and the Rev. Kirbyjon Caldwell of Windsor Village UMC inspect plans at the site of the 234-acre Corinthian Pointe, a master-planned community.

Love, Acceptance, and Prayer

While the pastors are pleased with the church's growth, it was not something they planned. "We never ministered to the original five members as though another 3695 would show up," Rudy said. "We ministered to the five as though they were the whole church. We have ministered to everyone who has shown up as though they are all that matters."

The pastors gave their opinions on why they think the St. John's ministry has been successful. "If there is a formula," Rudy said, "it is unconditional love and acceptance. Whoever shows up, for whatever reason, you give them all you've got. When you love folks, they will tell others. Word gets out, and people come."

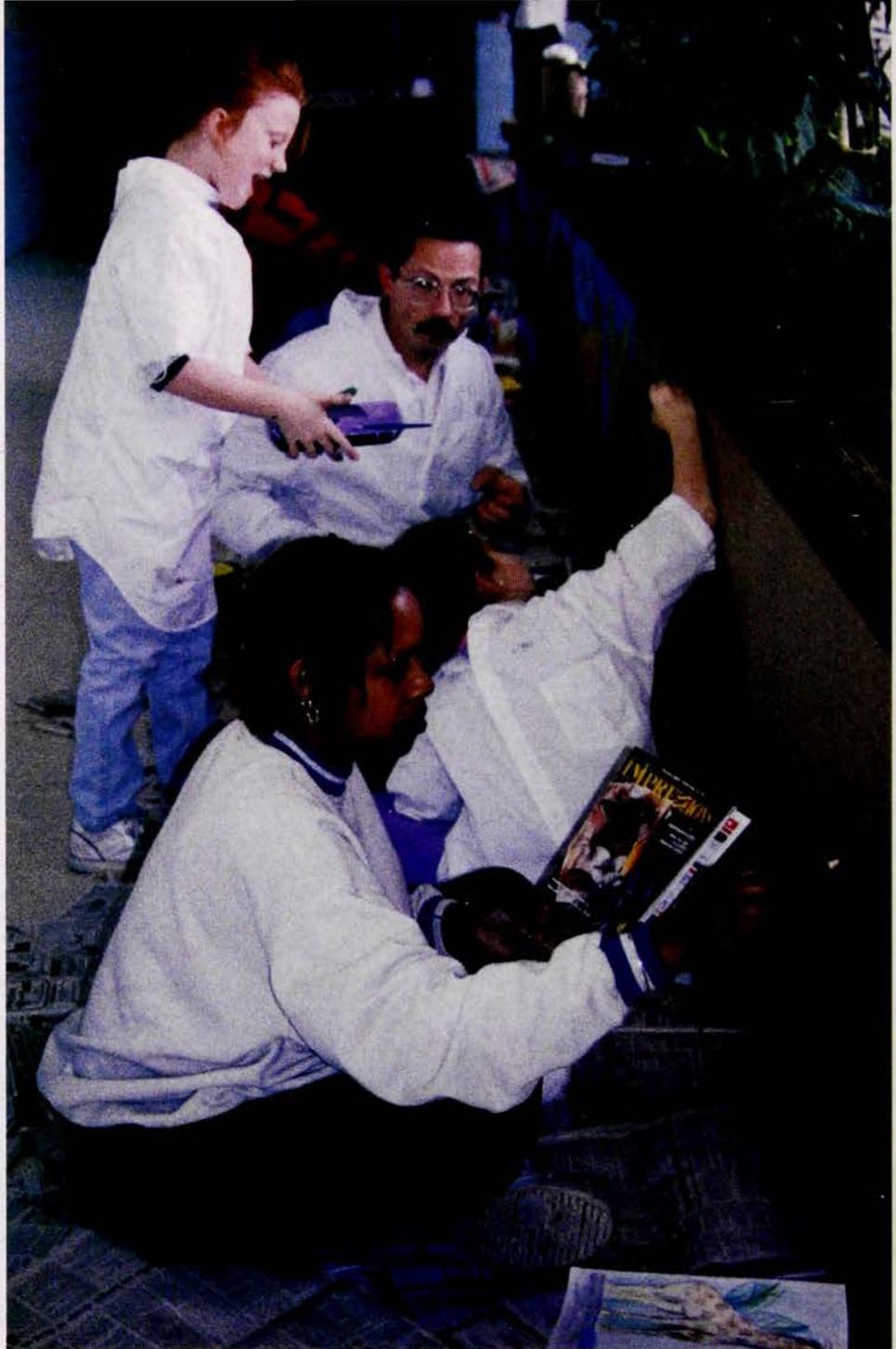
Juanita believes that the reason for the ministry's success is prayer. "I believe prayer has been the basis of everything that has happened," she said. "You have to get God's vision for what He wants and be willing to do whatever He puts before you as a task."

"We tell other churches not to try to duplicate our story but to see how they can find the need in their own communities," Juanita said.

"Our success is due to one beggar's telling another beggar where to find the bread," Rudy added. "When people see their needs being met, they'll tell other people. Any church that isn't run as a Jesus-based, customer-service organization is going to be an empty church." □

Randy Cypret is an award-winning journalist with more than 20 years experience as a writer and editor on daily and community newspapers. He is a contributor to the Texas Conference publication "Cross Connections."

SHALOM IN ACTION



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The Goals of Shalom

by Lynda Byrd

Communities of Shalom grew out of a passionate plea at the 1992 General Conference. United Methodists were called to respond to the devastation and destruction in Los Angeles following the acquittal of White police officers who had been videotaped beating an African American motorist, Rodney King.

The Shalom Initiative today far exceeds anything that could have been imagined at its genesis in 1992. Bishop Felton E. May, Jr., who served as the first chairperson of the National Shalom Committee, coined a prophetic phrase: "Shalom Is on the Loose!"

The United Methodist Church has met its objective of organizing 300 Shalom sites throughout the world by 2000. Early on, it became evident that the Shalom Initiative

could not be confined to urban communities. The concerns reflected in the initiative's four goals—*economic development, strengthened multicultural relationships, spiritual growth, and health and healing*—touch every city, town, and hamlet.

The Shalom Initiative informs, trains, and assists local churches and communities as they strive to bring about positive change in their neighborhoods, moving people forward toward self-sufficiency.

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Shalom in Philadelphia

The Rev. Robin Hynicka, pastor of the Central United Methodist Church in Philadelphia, is executive director of the Frankford Group Shalom Ministry there. The Frankford plan, which has involved more than 40 churches, emphasizes the goal of *economic development*. One of the first accomplishments of the Frankford Group Shalom community was the building of 24 townhouses for first-time homeowners. This achievement resulted from community support, property acquisition, financial backing, and loan assistance for new buyers.

Also critical to the goal of economic development is the need for new businesses and jobs to help stabilize the community. Recently, a new strip mall was opened in the Frankford Shalom community, with businesses owned and run by local residents. A bookstore in the mall is operated by Muslim entrepreneurs, who have helped improve the community's quality of life. In fact, the goal of *strengthening multicultural*

relationships has been vital to the Frankford Group's success.

The Frankford community has also experienced a spiritual awakening that has spread across its different faith-based groups. This accords with the Shalom Initiative's goal of *spiritual growth*, broadening the religious community's collective presence and impact.

Healing in South Carolina

Mentoring and after-school programs for children and youth are the principal emphases for the Bennettsville-Cheraw Community of Shalom. In February 1999, this community was struck by tragedy when six of the children in the after-school program were killed in a traffic accident. Local pastor Carolyn Little, a member of the Shalom team, coordinated the many activities following the accident. Calls of support came from all across the worldwide United Methodist connection. The presence of the church and the continuation of the after-school program fulfilled another of the Shalom Initiative's goals, *health and healing*, as children and Shalom workers comforted one another.

Jesus' New Commandment

The Shalom Initiative seeks to empower people to be responsible for their own lives. Today, Shalom is in action in ways that could not have been foreseen when The United Methodist Church renewed its commitment to Jesus' new commandment, as stated in John 13: 34-35 and 15:12: "that you love one another as I have loved you." □

Lynda Byrd is Assistant General Secretary for Community Ministries at the General Board of Global Ministries. Earlier, she served the GBGM as Director—Communities of Shalom, and she continues to have oversight of the Shalom Initiative.

Building Communities of Shalom

by Tracy Early

Victoria Adams has worked in the Shalom ministry in Petersburg, Virginia, from its beginning. She says that "things are happening."

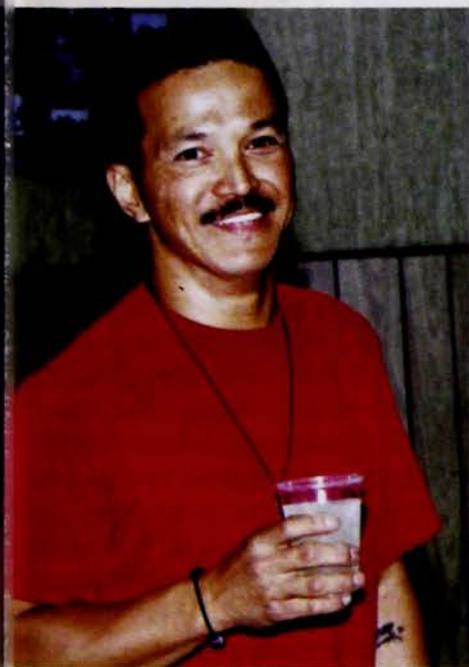
"We are not wielding any magic, but our community is being transformed," she says. "The centerpiece for me is the freedom school for children in the summer, which we then carry on two Saturdays a month throughout the year." Youth are also enlisted in an after-school program of cultural enrichment. They have brightened up the community by painting murals at a number of buildings.

Community gardens have also been set up as part of the Shalom Initiative's work in Petersburg, an urban area in a largely rural region of southern Virginia. These gardens have let urban children learn in action how food is grown and what it is like to eat things you have produced yourself, Adams says. For some children, the gardens provide a means of strengthening their diet with fresh vegetables their families could not afford to buy.

In other projects, Adams reports, the Petersburg Shalom community is rehabilitating housing in a target area and providing a parish nursing service, with classes in "nutrition for body and soul."

Tapping Assets in Petersburg

Victoria Adams—formerly a lay campus minister at Virginia State University—serves on the board of Petersburg Urban Ministries, the vehicle for the local Shalom community. She belongs to Memorial United Methodist Church, where Petersburg's Shalom director, the Rev. Dwala Ferrell, formerly served as the pastor.



Opposite, p. 22: Mural painting, Petersburg Urban Ministries, Petersburg, VA. **Above:** Edward Poblete, custodian at Central UMC, Spokane, Washington.

Appointed in 1995 to lead the Virginia Annual Conference in building Communities of Shalom, Ferrell chairs the conference Shalom committee. The greatest amount of activity in the state has occurred in the Petersburg program, where she is on the scene as director. Even there, she remembers what it meant to start from scratch. "There was nothing in place," she says. But she organized community meetings and put together an advisory council. By the time Shalom training was provided in 1997, she could see "a fairly good grassroots organization."

Now, there is a non-profit corporation, known as Petersburg Urban Ministries, with a \$300,000 annual budget and a mission statement committing it "to create authentic community through relationship building."

Ferrell, a minister from Tennessee of European ancestry, is herself building relationships with a community that is predominantly African American. In fact, the shalom ministry in Petersburg enjoys both ecumenical support and multicultural involvement. Recognizing a connection in the fact that *shalom* is the Hebrew word for peace, a Jewish organization contributes and the local rabbi chairs the board. An African American imam has also worked in the summer program for children.

Adaptability in Spokane

In the downtown area of Spokane, Washington, the assets that Central United Methodist Church could offer for building a Community of



Above: Youth Group of Pearl United Methodist Church, Omaha, Nebraska. *Opposite, p. 25:* Guests participate in "Dining with Dignity" in Spokane, Washington.

Shalom included space. So the church made space available to "Dining with Dignity," a program offering free dinners each evening for homeless men in the area.

One of the men who started coming in was Edward Poblete, a native of the Philippines. Poblete was brought to Los Angeles at the age of 10, started using drugs and alcohol at 12, and eventually found himself on the streets of Spokane.

"My wife and I lost our kids because of our addictions," he said, "and we had lost our relationship with each other.

"Then I was at a detox [detoxification] center run by the government across the street from the church. At the detox center I heard about those dinners the church was having for homeless people."

"I just felt in my heart—what a church to do this for people!"

The Shalom ministry in Spokane is directed by the Rev. Richard Lang, whose salary as a co-pastor of Central Church is partly subsidized by the Pacific Northwest Conference. Poblete and his wife got in touch with Lang. "We asked him to pray for us," Poblete recalls. From that initial contact, all has changed. Now the Pobletes are together again and their children have been returned to them from foster care. Both are employed; Edward Poblete works as custodian at the church.

"We're just not the same people anymore," he says. "This program saved our lives." He still goes to the church dinners sometimes. The friends from his days on the street,

he says, "can't believe the transformation."

Poblete also helps with another part of Spokane's Shalom outreach: the "Living Peace Family Club" on Tuesday nights. That club, as Lang describes it, is a program for Grades 1-6 that includes a gym time where the children "run, romp, and have fun," a time to "focus on how the week has gone," and a time for "learning how to pray."

"I want to help the kids," Poblete says. "I know what trouble they can get into."

in a single year—have become known in the community. Students from a local Jesuit university, Gonzaga, have come in as volunteer helpers, and a university student group made a large financial contribution last year.

The Shalom community in Spokane has targeted four square blocks as its zone of concentrated effort. "An outsider might not be able to see a difference," Lang admits, but to him the impact is visible. Graffiti gives him one direct message about results. A youth gang has put its distinctive markings on every other building around, he observes, but has left the church alone—recognizing the church's effort to do something for young people and for the community as a whole.

A Safe Place in Omaha

Carol Schmidt might also say that an outsider would not see any visible changes in the Shalom zone established in Omaha, Nebraska. But, she says, the program has served to keep people aware that Pearl United Methodist Church remains a support and advocate for its community.

Schmidt herself lives just outside the targeted Shalom zone. But she has been a leader in the church and took the Shalom training offered in 1997. "The training helped to refocus our purpose," she says. "We are there to be a part of this community."

Located in northeast Omaha, the Shalom zone is an area that has been "in transition for 20 or 30 years, racially and economically," Schmidt reports. But, like others, she was impressed by the Shalom training that urged people to focus on a community's assets rather than its problems. The training taught participants how to use local assets and aspirations to advance the community's welfare.

Church members learned that many people in the Shalom community wanted to make their neighborhood "a safe place for children to play and grow up," Schmidt recalls. So one focus of their Shalom ministry has been after-school sessions to improve children's math, literacy, and computer skills.

The pastor of Pearl Church is the Rev. Jamie Norwich McLennan, who also serves another church, Asbury. Those two churches have joined with a third, Trinity United Methodist, to sponsor the Shalom community. In support of the Shalom Initiative's goal of spiritual growth, the leaders in Omaha brought in the Rev. Emanuel Cleaver—then mayor of Kansas City, Missouri—for a successful revival.

Along with its focus on children and spiritual growth, Shalom in Omaha has emphasized affordable housing. An agency called Housing and Neighborhood Development (HAND) buys houses that need renovation, puts them into livable condition, and sells them. The overall goal, McLennan says, is to "develop northeast Omaha as a good place to live and raise your family."

Through its Shalom Initiative, The United Methodist Church is developing many good places to live and raise families, answering God's call in Jeremiah 29: 5-7 to "build houses and live in them, plant gardens and eat what they produce....seek the shalom of the city...and pray to the Lord on its behalf...." In so doing, God's people in the church are working to transform communities for all God's people. □

Tracy Early is a freelance journalist based in New York City who often contributes to religious publications, including New World Outlook.



Spokane's Shalom Ministries is a nonprofit corporation organized separately from the church but operating in partnership and having a board composed predominantly of Central UMC members. The program has brought benefits not only to the community but also to a church which, Lang admits, "had lost its way." Now, after five years' experience, he says, the church knows what it is called to do. Its worship attendance has increased, largely through bringing in the youth.

Central Church's efforts—including 25,000 free meals served

HOLY B

New

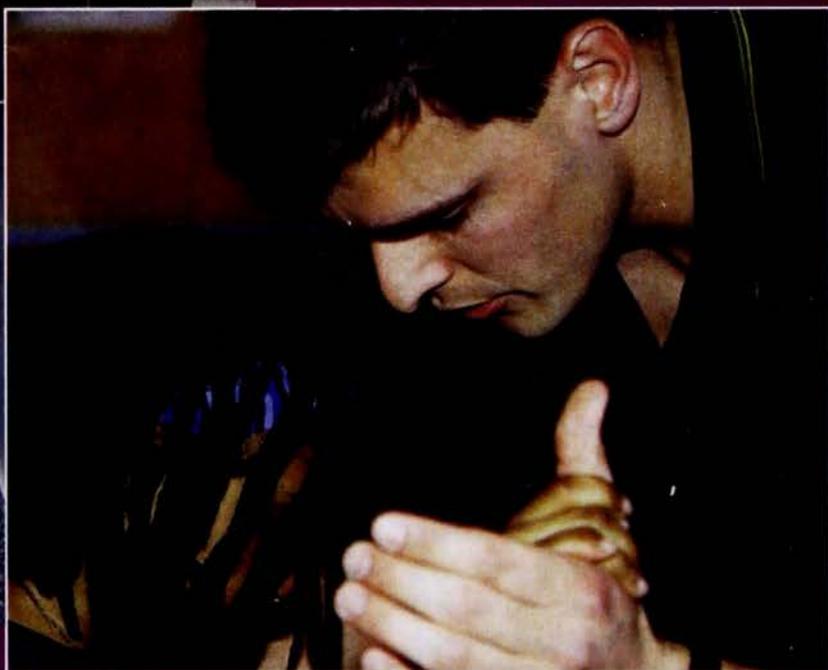
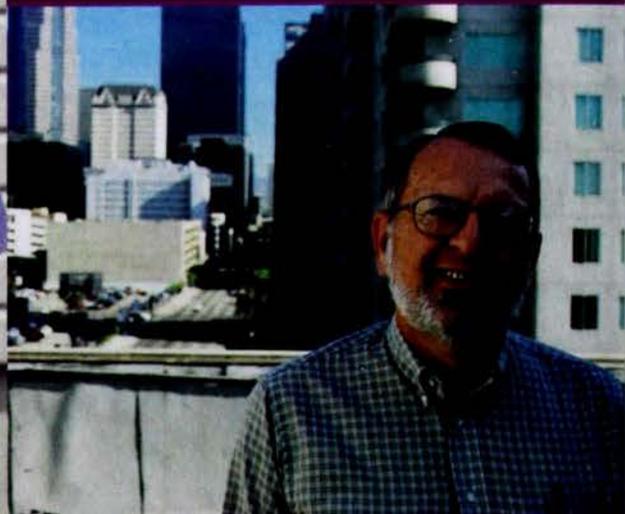
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Clockwise From Top: Lee Fleming, Dela Spears, and Datroina Spears with Lola the dog at the Hughes Memorial United Methodist Church, part of the Holy Boldness network in Portland, Oregon. The Rev. DarEll T. Weist of the First UMC in Los Angeles, California. Lance Marr teaches Danatria Spears the fox-trot at Hughes Memorial UMC. The Rev. Francisco Canas is an associate pastor at First UMC in Los Angeles.

BOLDNESS

New Visions of Urban Ministry

In an urban culture, ministry must both respond to and help to shape urban conditions. Urban ministries in the church today must be vigorous and innovative in order to have an impact. So it is not surprising that the urban ministry plan of The United Methodist Church should be called Holy Boldness. This plan emphasizes urban theology, evangelism and congregational development, the eradication of racism, economic and leadership development, and health and wholeness.

A new generation of clergy and laity has captured and been captured by a sense of this "holy boldness" in city life and worship. Here, we profile three approaches to urban ministry that are bold in concept and dedicated to holy witness and service. —The Editors

Old First Church as a Sign of Hope

by DarEll T. Weist

How does a 145-year-old downtown church forge a new mission as a 150-member neighborhood congregation? First United Methodist Church of Los Angeles grappled with that question for 15 years and is on the way to an answer.

The history of First Church is illustrious. Four bishops have come from its ranks. Seventy years ago, it was one of the world's largest Methodist congregations, with 5000 members. It even gave birth to a whole new denomination, the Church of the Nazarene. First Church stayed downtown when all the other Protestant congregations left. "Downtown for Good" its

board declared. That decision has led to tough challenges and great creativity. In the year 2000, First Church is at the very heart of a neighborhood renewal.

Five Ministry Challenges

Five ministry challenges faced the church, and it has used its assets to address them. The first challenge was exactly that of assets. First Church had an old, user-unfriendly building with a strategic commercial location. It sold the building, bought a five-story office building not too far away, and put \$2 million into the Los Angeles United Methodist Urban Foundation. The purpose of the foundation is "to initiate and support signs of hope in the city." This asset, which has generated \$2.9 million for distribution in 15 years, helps to address other ministry issues, but the funds are not for First Church alone.

The second challenge was that of forming a network focused on the welfare and operation of the urban church. Congregations do not exist in isolation. A chair in urban ministries was set up at the Claremont School of Theology to develop leadership. The foundation got involved with other local philanthropies concerned with urban life and became the only faith-based organization in the consortium of Los Angeles urban funders. It targeted three communities and, with the help of the California Wellness Foundation, has increased the capacity of 10 United Methodist congregations to interact with their neighborhoods. In collaboration with other foundations, with the

California-Pacific Conference, and with the General Board of Global Ministries, it is funding a project to salvage unused recreational facilities and refurbish unused church space for neighborhood children and youth.

Third among the challenges was that of shaping a strategy for extending community ministries beyond a feeding program, a day-care center, and a senior citizens' club. First Church's office-style building provided part of the answer. Office space is offered at cost to nonprofit agencies engaged in social-justice work. Groups using the facility over the years represent issues such as immigrants' rights, access to health care, shelter for the homeless, multicultural leadership development, Asian legal advocacy, tenants' rights, urban-church research, and farmers' markets. Five common rooms host 1300 meetings each year: press conferences, training sessions, community planning, and networking.

Fourth was a challenge related to urban housing. The residential population around First Church was small. Was there a way to increase the stock of affordable housing downtown and also help to build a vital community? A partner appeared in the form of the Los Angeles Community Development Agency. First Church set up the 1010 Development Corporation (the church is at 1010 Flower Street) and set out on the long, sometimes slow-moving ministry of housing. A coalition of public and private funders was put together, and in late 1998, Villa Flores, including 75

units of senior housing, was opened. The new facility, next door to the church, has a part-time case-worker and recreational director.

The prospects look good for a real community around the church. In the fall of 1999, the development corporation broke ground for 67 units of one- to four-bedroom family housing. The 80-child daycare center will be housed in the same complex, along with a neighborhood center offering a parish-nurse program, legal and psychological counseling, and after-school tutoring and recreation. There are now 182 units of affordable housing on the block. In 2001, 175 units of market-value housing will be completed across the street. First Church understands that it is responsible for helping the residents living in this new housing to become a genuine community. That is God's agenda for "Old" First Church.

The fifth challenge, still to be met, is to provide an attractive house of worship for the church and its community. Plans call for the construction of a modest 200-seat chapel and an urban meditation garden. The office building will be torn down and the justice agencies moved to space nearby.

God has taught First Church that urban ministry requires more than just one congregation. It calls for collaboration with other churches and with foundations, community developers, nonprofit agencies, government, banks, private funders, and individual people of good will. The First United Methodist Church of Los Angeles in the year 2000 is not one of the largest congregations in the connection, but it is trying to be one of the most faithful and to be a vehicle God can use to renew the City of Angels. □

The Rev. Dr. Darrell T. Weist is Executive Pastor of First United Methodist Church, Los Angeles.

Road Maps for Urban Ministry

by Brian W. Jackson

What is God's vision for the church? What is God's vision for God's people? What would a "new Jerusalem" look like? What—and who—are the stumbling blocks to achieving God's vision?

These were some of the hard questions asked as hundreds of United Methodists from the Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference met in weekly sessions for three months in 1997. These sessions, initiated by Bishop Felton Edwin May, produced new road maps for urban ministry—for Holy Boldness—in the Baltimore and Washington metropolitan areas.

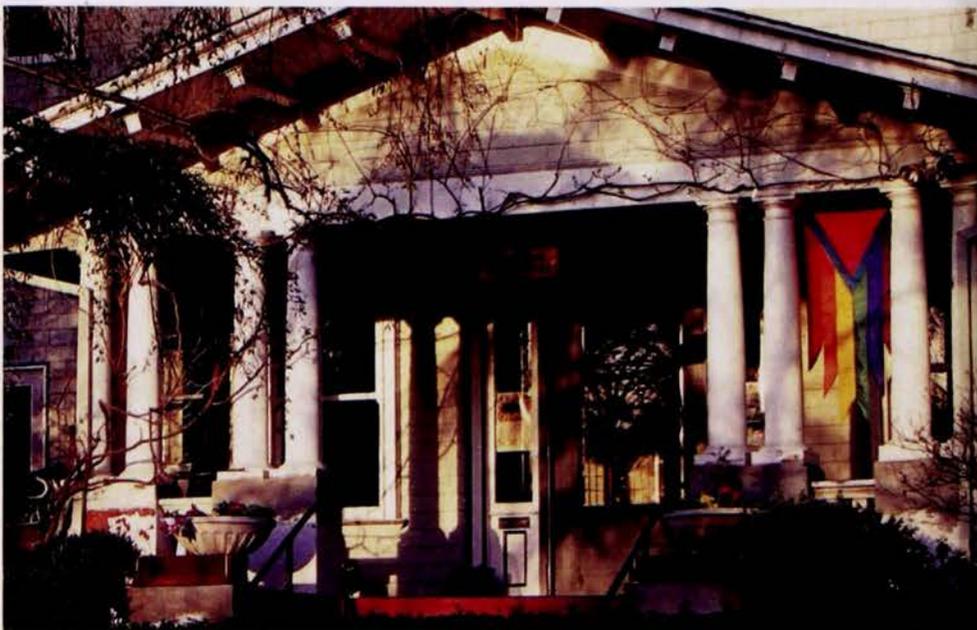
The three districts in and around Baltimore now share a strategic plan that includes a Regional Holy Boldness Center (housed in the historic Lovely Lane Church) where clergy and lay leaders come together to learn together how to accomplish their goals. Detailed information gathered on every congregation and ministry in

the city—showing who is involved, how money is being spent and invested, and what work is already underway—enables the leaders to get a clearer perception of the assets already on hand.

Cooperation and collaboration are hallmarks of the new approach. A few examples will show how assets are being matched with needs. The Susanna Wesley House, a community center, already provided accommodations for homeless women with two children or less. Now, center staff work with pastors and congregations to help them understand the conditions that *cause* homelessness and to recognize and refer crises requiring specialized services.

The Mt. Winans Church is in an area with a 94 percent unemployment rate. This has motivated a citywide empowerment program for families that operates out of a former school building.

St. Mark's Church launched a clinic and fitness center, headed by a physician in the congregation, as a Saving Station. Ames Church in West Baltimore, surrounded by a drug-infested neighborhood, now



The Metanoia Peace Community UMC in Portland, Oregon, is a unique urban ministry involving service and communal living.



Dave is a drop-in guest at the Sunnyside UMC "Hard Times Supper," an outreach of the Metanoia Peace Community UMC in Portland, Oregon.

operates SAVE (Society Against Violence through Education) as part of its Shalom ministry. And St. Paul Community Center, which occupies a former church building in East Baltimore, provides vital services to a youth population.

Holy Boldness is really nothing new. It is as old as the ministry of Jesus Christ. It is a powerful reminder that only a focus on Jesus can equip United Methodists to proclaim "the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). □

The Rev. Brian Jackson is Coordinator of the Baltimore Area Holy Boldness Initiative.

A Church Is Born Again

by E. Cary Simonton

Debbie Bell and her daughter Shunda, both recovering drug addicts, play key roles in the new life of the Mt. Auburn United Methodist Church of Cincinnati, Ohio. Debbie, a blues singer, has revamped the worship to make it

more culturally appealing to an increasingly African American neighborhood. She also runs the social-service outreach since she has great credibility in the community—being an "Oprah Winfrey of Mt. Auburn," as one person put it. Shunda, a mother of five, is the superintendent of a reborn Sunday school and director of a children's gospel choir. She will also be the chef in "God's Kitchen," a church-sponsored catering company.

Debbie and Shunda came to the congregation at a point of crisis. Mt. Auburn UMC's membership had declined from 600 in the 1960s to 15 in 1996—most of whom were elderly White women and none of whom lived in the community. Ties to the neighborhood consisted of handing out \$5 grocery-store coupons once a month. Could the church stay open? Could Mt. Auburn learn to love its neighborhood? I, the pastor at the time, hit the streets to find out. I found Debbie.

Debbie, Shunda, and I enrolled as a team in the first Holy Boldness Academy, which was sponsored jointly by the East and West Ohio annual conferences in 1997 and 1998. The academy—a component of Holy Boldness, the denomination's National Urban Ministry Plan—met three times each year for three-day or two-day sessions. The academy experience helped Mt. Auburn become a welcoming neighborhood church, helping people discover and develop their God-given assets.

By mid-1999, the worshipping congregation numbered some 50 people, 75 percent of them African American. Folks who came from the streets are now in the pews, and they are becoming the new church leaders. Most of the 20 children in the church today also came from the streets, responding to invitations to join a choir or a kid's club.

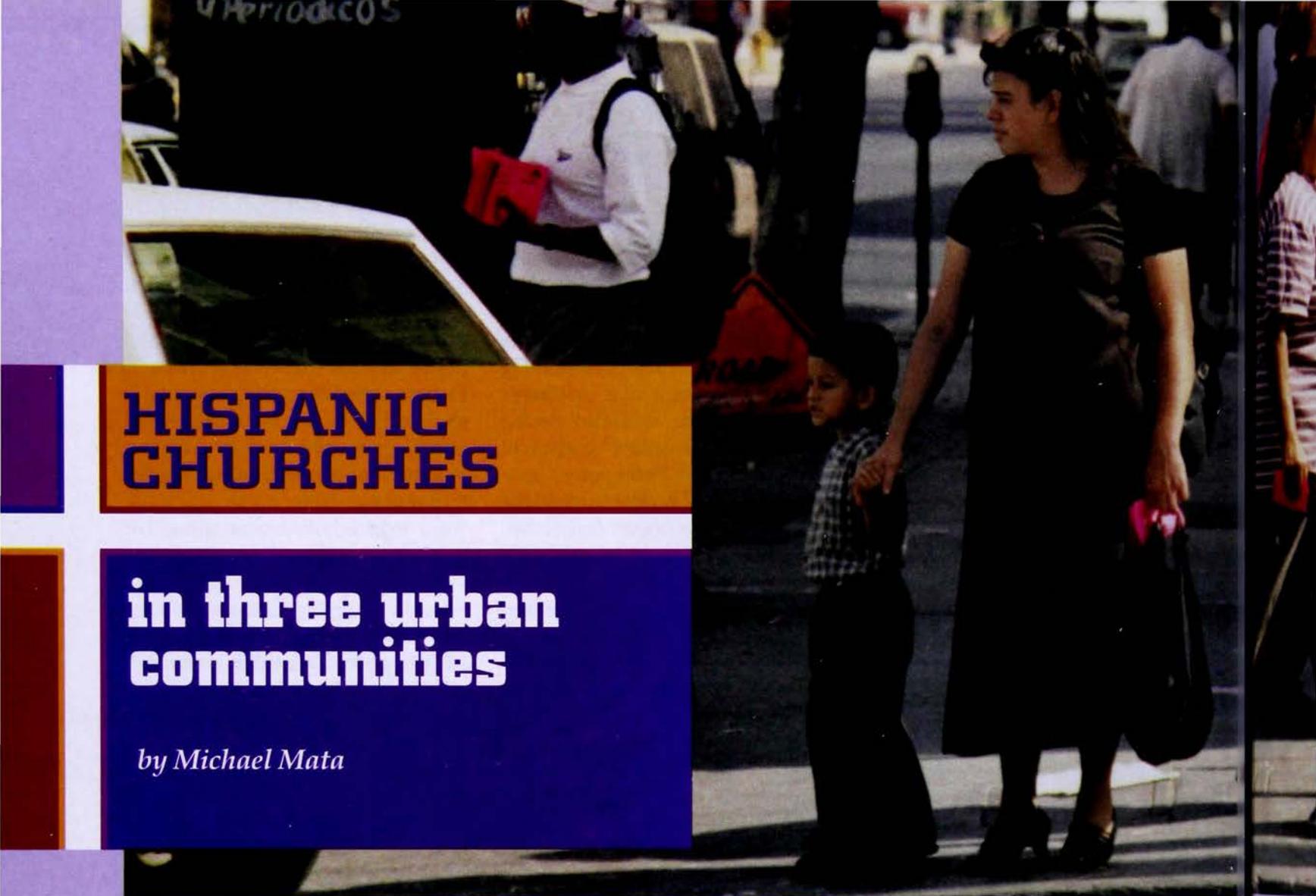
"Jenny" also came from the streets early one Sunday morning, "dressed up" for church and clutching a small, worn Bible. She came to my office and I could tell she had been crying and was worn out. Jenny needed to pay \$250 in rent by Monday or face eviction. I invited her to stay for church and speak to Debbie, who knew more about how to handle such crises. No, said Jenny, she would have to move on to other churches in her quest for rent money.

I figured she was gone for good, but halfway through the service she slipped into the sanctuary.

After worship, Debbie and I listened to Jenny's story. She was an addict, a prostitute who received a small disability check—her only legitimate income—each month. She was exhausted mentally and physically. But Jenny had a powerful asset. She could sing—really sing. An impromptu audition was held. She passed and was hired as a soloist in the gospel choir, with an advance to cover her rent and a promise of help in quitting the drug habit. Jenny agreed. Now she is singing and her struggles with life take place in a supportive environment. The church saw in her a *gift* instead of a *need*, and everyone was blessed.

All miracles do not happen overnight, and Holy Boldness and its academies do not always mean exponential church growth. A Holy Boldness approach does not mean that people solve all their problems and live happily ever after. It *does* mean "being there" with people when no one else wants to be or can be. The Mt. Auburn congregation itself is the visible sign of Christ's presence with people. □

The Rev. E. Cary Simonton is Director of Urban Ministry for the Cincinnati District of the West Ohio Conference.



HISPANIC CHURCHES

in three urban communities

by Michael Mata

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, Latinos will probably become the largest ethnic minority in the United States. From 1990 to 1997, owing to an unprecedented surge in Hispanic migration, the US Hispanic population swelled from 22 million to 30.5 million—33.5 million if estimates of undocumented immigrants are added in.

This rapid growth can be attributed to social and economic crises in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as to the robust US job market. Growth has occurred not only in urban areas but also in less urbanized states such as North Carolina, Georgia, Washington, Nebraska, Iowa, and Arkansas.

In a report to the United Methodist General Conference of

2000, the denomination's National Plan for Hispanic Ministry looks at the impact such demographic shifts may have on Hispanic congregational development. Projecting Hispanic population growth over a 20-year period, the report's writers anticipate Hispanic populations numbering well over 100,000 in at least 55 of the 66 US annual conferences. Indeed, Hispanic congregations of all creeds and confessions are cropping up in such unlikely places as Anchorage, Alaska; Bentonville, Arkansas; Carrollton, Georgia; Hernando, Mississippi; and Sioux Center, Iowa.¹

Not only is the Latino population growing but the population's religious diversity is increasing as well. This fact is reflected in the

increasing number of Hispanic congregational initiatives. According to the 1991 National Survey of Religious Identification, while two out of three Latinos (65.8 percent) say they are Roman Catholics, one out of every four is a Protestant (24.6 percent).² The remaining 9.6 percent say they follow other traditions or are not religious. The Protestant category itself represents a variety of denominations, ranging from Pentecostal to Episcopalian. Judaism has always been present in the Hispanic community. Now Islam is beginning to make inroads.

Three Hispanic Communities

The demographic and religious diversity found in Hispanic communities is further enhanced by

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Maywood is a transitional community of bilingual first-generation Mexican Americans.

generational and socioeconomic differences. To gauge the impact of this diversity on Hispanic ministry, the Pew Charitable Trusts recently funded a study of 32 congregations in three predominantly Hispanic communities in the Los Angeles metropolitan area. These congregations—representing various mainline, Evangelical, Pentecostal, and nonorthodox Protestant denominations—were surveyed regarding their community ministries.

The three communities selected for study represent the ethnic and socioeconomic diversity in the Latino population. Pico Heights (also called Pico Union) is an immigrant neighborhood of Los Angeles, primarily composed of recently arrived Spanish-dominant Central

Americans and having a poverty rate of 52 percent. By contrast, the City of Maywood is a *transitional community* with a poverty rate of 34 percent and a population of bilingual first-generation Mexican Americans. Finally, the City of Pico Rivera is an *established community* with a poverty rate of 20 percent and a population of English-dominant second- and third-generation Mexican-Americans. In all, 134 individuals—including, pastors, laity, and community representatives—were surveyed.³

Evangelism Through Service

Virtually all of the congregations studied are engaged in community-oriented programs. But whatever the congregation's religious affiliation, the motivation for community service is evangelism. While both clergy and laity recognize the material and social needs of the Latino community, they perceive the root cause of these problems in spiritual and moral terms.

Evangelism is also seen as being integral to church growth. Community programs—such as drama and concerts, youth ministries, and women's support groups—are intended to recruit new church members. Although many of the surveyed church leaders acknowledge the need to address problems such as poverty and unemployment, they see bringing people into the church as the solution to society's ills. Thus their approach to leadership development is to equip lay leaders with the appropriate skills to evangelize.

Nonetheless, Hispanic congregations are perceived by the larger community as providing an important element of community service and support. Representatives from community organizations observed that churches strengthen the moral fabric of the community and act as a stabilizing force within it. They

view Hispanic churches as conduits of information and providers of supplemental services, such as educational and recreational programs for children and youth. This observation is supported by the fact that most surveyed activities of the churches reach many people who are not church members. Whereas the total membership of the surveyed churches is 5734, their number of weekly contacts is 8112.

Self-funded Programs

Another theme revealed in the study is that the church-based, community-oriented programs are almost entirely self-funded, either by the local congregation alone or with support from a governing denominational body. Whether it be through tithes and offerings or by renting out space in the church facility, financial support for programs and staff is achieved generally without outside aid, even in the poorest Latino neighborhoods. One enterprising congregation meets in a storefront facility of a building it owns; the additional revenue from rentals in the building funds the church's community activities. All together, the 32 surveyed congregations generate \$4 million annually.

Kinds of Services

The socioeconomic condition of a given community, not the congregation's religious or theological affiliation, is the determining factor in the kinds of services a church provides. Community-oriented programs in the immigrant neighborhood—such as English as a Second Language (ESL) courses; citizenship classes; health education; emergency food, clothing, and rent assistance; and medical referrals—address the concerns of a highly mobile foreign-born population. These kinds of activities differ greatly from those sponsored in an established community with a



The United Methodist Shalom Ministry of Pico Union, an immigrant neighborhood of Los Angeles.

strong residential population of homeowners. In the more stable community, churches are likelier to be involved with baseball clinics for children and youth, holiday events, parent organizations, and substance-abuse support groups.

Congregations in a transitional community generally have two population groups to attend to: the aging long-term community residents who are not Latino and the growing Hispanic population, which generally includes the working poor. Often in transition themselves, these congregations offer activities for non-Hispanic seniors as well as after-school programs in English for Latino children and youth. Health information, job referrals, and crisis-intervention programs in Spanish are common.

Stability and Networking

Whatever the type of community, in many instances the local congregation networks with other organizations or appropriate agencies to access crucial information. The level of collaboration, however, is often shaped by the stability of the local congregation and the availability and openness of the pastor to developing viable partnerships.

Hispanic congregations in stable communities with full-time pastors and well-established ministries seem more likely to be involved in cooperative efforts with other organizations. Recently established Hispanic congregations, as in an immigrant community, generally

have fewer human and financial resources. Their pastors often have two vocations and most of their members work or are looking for work. So the priority is building up the congregation rather than investing time and energy in forming relationships with other groups. Congregations in transitional communities may have long-standing affiliations with selected networks. But generally the links are weak, as the focus is on attempting to stabilize and sustain the congregation through the demographic changes in the community and church.

For the most part, Evangelical and Pentecostal Hispanic congregations tend to act autonomously, creating their own programs without outside assistance. In contrast, mainline churches are more comfortable working with public agencies and institutions. Denominations or religious groups outside mainstream Protestantism tend to prefer aligning themselves only with other congregations within their denomination or tradition.

Drawing Conclusions

The leaders of the Protestant Hispanic congregations in Pico Heights, Maywood, and Pico Rivera are aware of and deeply concerned about community problems, even when their solutions to those problems are essentially spiritual. As a whole, the Protestant Hispanic community exhibits remarkable vitality and seems to be thriving. More than in the sheer number of programs and activities these churches support, their strength lies in their ability to respond to a diversity of needs in a manner reflecting the cultural diversity of their Latino communities.

Depending on a community's demographics and socioeconomic profile, individual Hispanic congregations may operate by different cultural values, serve different

functions, possess different sources of revenue, and have different kinds of responsibility. Whatever these differences, the churches in the study are integral to the Hispanic community's well-being. They are part of the network of relationships and connections that make social life possible.

However, the study does raise some fundamental questions about Hispanic ministry in general. How can congregations be developed and sustained in the emerging Hispanic landscape? And how can the energy and resources of the Hispanic Protestant community be integrated into the larger urban context? The issue is not a question of programs or strategies so much as it is an appreciation for the multicultural nature of Hispanic ministry and the Hispanic congregation's capacity for leadership within a community. Appreciating the role and building on the resources of the Hispanic religious community will enhance the role of Hispanic Protestant congregations in serving their communities. □

1. Rudolpho Carrasco, "Reaching Out to Latinos," *Christianity Today*: 9/6/99.

2. Barry A. Kosmin and Seymour P. Lachman, *One Nation Under God*, New York: Harmony Books, 1993.

3. Michael A. Mata and Karen Tarbell, *Protestant Hispanics Serving the Community*, *The Pew Charitable Trusts*: 1999.

The Rev. Michael A. Mata is Director of the Urban Leadership Institute, a program of the Claremont School of Theology, where he is the Mildred M. Hutchinson Assistant Professor of Urban Ministry.

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Churches and the WTO

"People live and die based on the rules nations and multilateral institutions set for trade and investment in such products and services as weapons and military technology, pharmaceuticals, food, and toxic chemicals," said a joint statement issued by the General Board of Global Ministries, its Women's Division, and the General Board of Church and Society in conjunction with the recent meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Seattle, Washington. "Trade and investment policies are among the most critical moral questions of our day," the statement observed. "We believe people of faith have a moral imperative to speak out on these issues and to participate in shaping the policies that affect them....Current multilateral trade and investment agreements promote profits over the well-being of people and the planet."

An estimated 30,000 people participated in a peaceful march on November 29, 1999, after a rally held at First United Methodist Church in downtown Seattle. The march was organized by the Jubilee 2000 organization to call on the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and wealthy creditor governments to cancel debts owed to them by the world's poorest countries. The marchers later formed a human chain around the exhibit hall where WTO delegates were having a reception.

In the evenings that followed, those who violated a 7:00 P.M. curfew imposed by the mayor, including ordinary residents and visitors, were tear-gassed, pepper-sprayed, and shot with rubber bullets by police. Pamela Sparr, an executive with the Women's Division who attended the events, feared that the few incidents of violence and the overwhelming police response would receive more press attention than the WTO policies and procedures being protested.

\$11 Million Asked for Mission Ministries

The General Council on Finance and Administration will recommend to the delegates of General Conference a total of \$16.3 million for innovative and emerging ministries during the 2001-2004 Quadrennium. The General Board of Global Ministries seeks \$10.9 million of this total for six initiatives: Advancing United Methodist Ministries among Korean Americans, \$3.2 million; National Plan for Hispanic Ministries, \$3.2 million; Native American Comprehensive Plan, \$1.2 million; Shalom Initiative, \$1.2 million; Asian American

Language Ministry Study, \$1.8 million; and Strengthening the Connection with the Greater Deaf Community, \$330,000.

UMCOR Needs Around the World

There is an urgent need for volunteers in Oklahoma, where many homes were destroyed by devastating tornadoes, and in North Carolina and Virginia in the aftermath of Hurricane Floyd. It is not too late to give to the Churchwide Appeal for Major Storm Devastation '99, Advance #982460-1. Recovery and reconstruction continue long after the storms have passed.

Seventy-five medicine boxes are urgently needed for Mozambique, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nicaragua, Haiti, Cuba, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. Call 212-870-3683 for more information. To order a Medicine Box information packet from the Service Center, call 800-554-8583.

Missionary Heads Mission to Nepal

Norma Kehrberg, former Associate General Secretary of UMCOR, has been appointed Interim Director of the United Mission to Nepal—a 45-year-old ecumenical group that represents 39 mission groups from 17 countries. Kehrberg has served with the General Board of Global Ministries as a United Methodist missionary in Nepal for the past seven years.

DEATHS **Nathalie T. Means**, retired missionary with 12 years of service in Malaysia, died August 12, 1999...**Eva Douglas**, retired missionary with 32 years of service in Singapore, died August 24, 1999...**Harold J. Elliott**, retired missionary with 13 years of service in Nigeria, died September 2, 1999...**Edward K. Knetter**, retired missionary with almost 20 years of service in China, died October 23, 1999...**Felix Morales**, retired missionary with five years of service in Uruguay, died November 5, 1999...**Pattie Townsley**, retired missionary with 24 years of service in Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo), died November 9, 1999...**Alva Irwin Cox, Jr.**, independent filmmaker and longtime consultant to Mission Communications at the GBGM and to the National Council of Churches, died November 19, 1999...**Lewistine Martin McCoy**, retired missionary who served 16 years in China and Brazil and was also a former GBGM staff member, died November 28, 1999. □

Values in an Urban Culture

Winnie James, a Chickasaw, was 17 in the mid-1950s when she left her reservation and came to Los Angeles as part of the Relocation Services Program of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). Starting in 1952, the BIA, a US agency in the Department of the Interior, gave American Indians one month's living expenses and some bus tokens to encourage them to move to one of five urban locations. Within the month, the person had to find a job and a place to live.

"Without the Bureau's help, I found a job as a file clerk at an aeronautics company," Winnie recalls. She advanced to administrative assistant, was married to a Native American man, and raised a family. Though her move from reservation to city was successful, many American Indians experienced the Relocation Program as an attempt to isolate them from their culture.

"Some people were churchgoers and that helped them survive," explains Pam James, Winnie's daughter. "But others found success in the city only by being assimilated into the dominant culture."

Unlike the typical pattern in which new immigrants from the same ethnic group band together in urban neighborhoods, American Indians who relocated to cities to find work were scattered and were isolated from one another. In the alien urban culture, adaptation and survival took precedence over adherence to Native American ways.

Circles of Life in L.A.

In Los Angeles during the 1960s, a small group of Native Americans began to dream about having their

own church. In 1975, the Rev. Oliver B. Neal was appointed to engage in a Ministry of Presence with them in the greater Los Angeles area. Soon a small church was formed. In 1978, when ill health forced Neal to resign, the Rev. Marvin Abrams—a Seneca who is a United Methodist pastor from the Western New York Conference—was called to the little congregation with a big vision.

"In those days, physical needs took precedence over spiritual needs," Abrams recalls. "When you are on the street, eating a meal and finding a place to sleep come first. I often felt more like a social worker than a pastor when I first arrived."

In 1978, congregation members decided to address the physical needs of their sisters and brothers by opening a crisis center—now known as the Native American Caring Center. Hot meals, clothing, food distribution, referrals to other social agencies, some transportation, and always a listening ear are the Caring Center's hallmarks.

From the start of his ministry, Abrams developed a way to meet the needs of his geographically scattered members for fellowship and spiritual growth. Following the Wesleyan class system, he organized small groups of Native Americans who lived near one another. They met for worship, food, companionship, and outreach once or twice a month. At first, these groups were called *clusters*, then *gatherings*. Now they are known as

The Children's and Elders' Prayer Lodge of All Nations Indian Church in Minneapolis.

Sacred Circles of Life, each Circle with a trained leader, or Gatherer.

Today the Native American United Methodist Church of Southern California has a church building in Anaheim, the result of a merger with Trinity UMC of that city. Although the congregation is mostly Native American, it is not exclusively so. Some of the Trinity members remain. There are also Circles of Life in Los Angeles, San Diego, and Ventura. Abrams visits each Circle once a month to serve a communion of Native American fry-bread. "No one is outside the Circle of Life," he says.

A Library in Florida

Mabel Haught, director of the United Methodist Seminole Ministry of Florida, works on the Seminole Reservation in Okeechobee. When her parents became



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Christians, they were told to give up their traditional Seminole ways. So Haught grew up on the reservation in one of the two local Baptist churches. There was no Methodist church on the reservation, but there was a United Methodist diaconal minister, Naomi Orprut. Haught was a student when Orprut recruited her to help with church work.

More than 20 years ago, the Seminoles told Orprut of their need for a library. Building a library united the Native Americans who followed traditional beliefs with those who were church people. When the building was completed in 1973, the community named it the Billy Oseola Memorial Library, in honor of their first Baptist pastor. Today, overflowing with stacks of books, the learning center has outgrown its original home.

When Tom Griner became the United Methodist Volunteers In Mission Coordinator for the Florida Conference, he undertook the building of an addition that would double the size of the library. Griner has brought in many VIM teams and the addition is nearly finished.

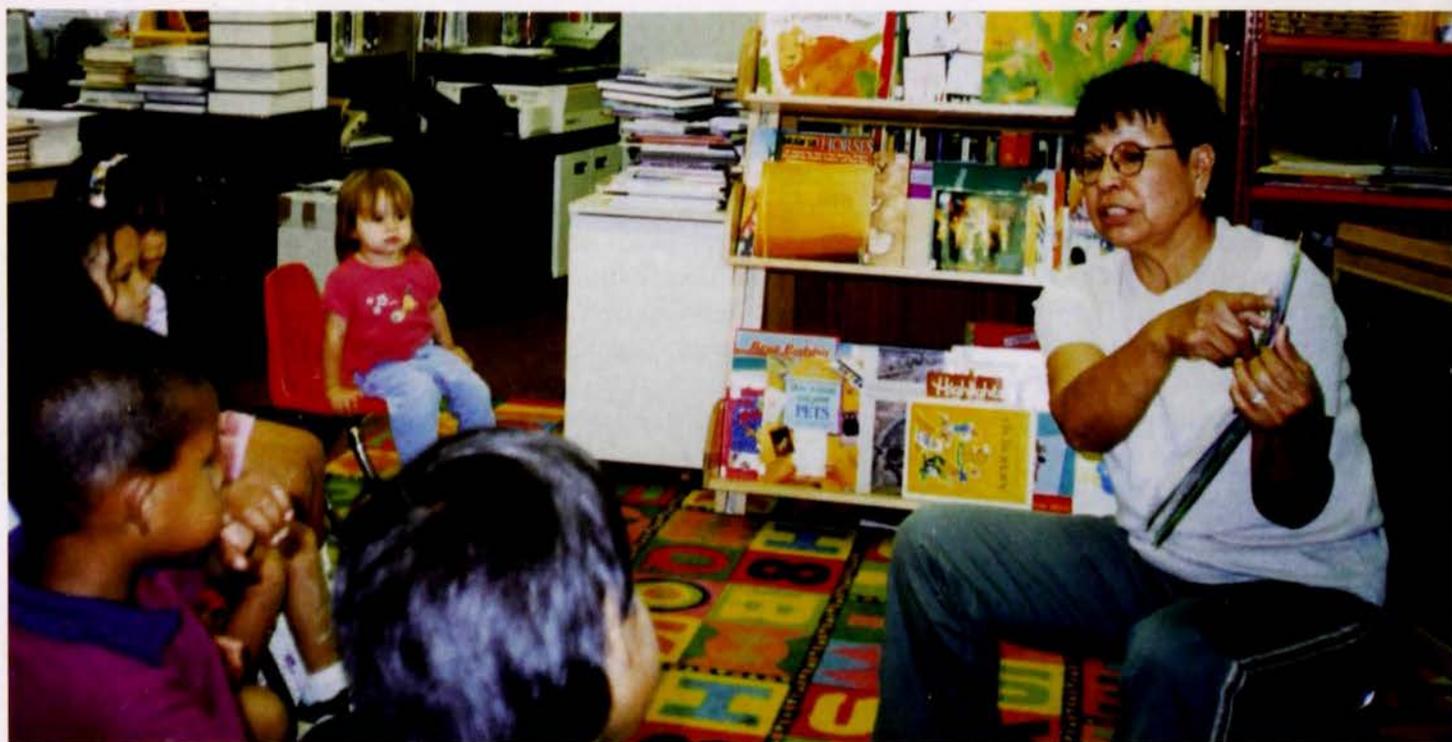
Haught has a busy, varied ministry on the reservation. She works with Head Start, the health clinic, and senior citizens. But she is most enthusiastic about her work in the library with preschoolers. "I teach them Bible stories," she says, "and songs like 'Jesus Loves Me.' When the kids see me on the street, they sing 'Jesus Loves Me' back at me. Then they go home and tell their parents. Pretty soon, Mom wants to know who Jesus is."

Outreach in Oklahoma

One of the fastest-growing cities in Oklahoma is Norman, home of the University of Oklahoma. Not only is it a center for jobs but it is an educational mecca for American Indians because of its strong Native American studies program. Among US colleges and universities, Oklahoma University has the third largest population of Native American students.

In an urban setting, temptations abound for students who find themselves outside their home circles of support for the first time. For Native American students, it is easy to be pulled into the dominant culture of shopping malls and movie theaters, where the focus is on how you dress and what you drive. To keep their bearings, many drive back and forth across the state on





Mabel Haught, director of the United Methodist Seminole Ministry of Florida, teaches children in the Billy Oseola Memorial Library.

weekends to be with family in the home church. The Rev. David Wilson of the Choctaw Nation knows this from first-hand experience. When he was a student, he made a 5-hour round trip on weekends—sometimes just on Sundays for church. So he was not surprised when OU students began to ask for “a church of our own.”

Wilson—now an ordained United Methodist minister and the promotion-interpretation specialist for the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference—is also pastor of the Norman First American United Methodist Church. “The people of the church chose that name,” he says, “because that’s who they are: the first Americans.”

The church was chartered in 1996. It has a young congregation and a pastor (Wilson) in his mid-30s. “The average age is 42 to 44,” Wilson reports, “with a lot of young families. There are about 20 children in the congregation, and a significant number of college students come. The average Sunday attendance is

about 60. Until recently, though, we had no elders; the oldest man was only 55. In our Native communities, elders are important people—the ones who give us guidance, who teach us how to treat each other and to grow as Christians. Recently, two women in their 70s started attending services. There is real excitement when they come.”

The fact that First American is a new urban church gives it a freedom to experiment that older, more established Native churches lack. “When you’re in an urban environment, away from your tribal community,” Wilson says, “there’s a tremendous possibility of losing touch with your culture.” To prevent this, the Norman church is pioneering new services and outreach. For example, when the college students returned for a new academic year, Wilson invited another United Methodist minister—the Rev. Bill Stoneroad, who is Pawnee-Otoe and Cheyenne—to perform a cedar-sage ceremony. “You burn the cedar or sage,” Wilson explains,

“and it provides a fragrant smoke like incense. It’s a cleansing, a purification.” In this Christian service, the students were blessed and prayers were lifted up to God for all aspects of their lives.

Different forms of outreach to youth and young adults take place at the church several nights a week. In another effort to support Native American students, Wilson created a Monday night ministry. “College students miss sharing home-cooked meals with family,” he observes. “So four of our members make a home-cooked meal on Monday nights and become a kind of surrogate family for the students. Of the 20 students who attend, two are United Methodist and some are from families who observe age-old Native religions. The Monday night gatherings not only provide food and fellowship but present the only opportunity for getting some of these students to a church for spiritual guidance.”

For its big Veterans’ Day service, First American brings in a drum

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Left: Mr. B.
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group—a practice many older Indian churches disapprove. “The missionaries taught our grandparents that traditional practices were not allowed in the church,” Wilson explains. “Now, in a new situation, we can do different things. We’re finally able to say: ‘It’s OK to affirm our culture.’”

All Nations in Minneapolis

Another thriving scene of church growth is found in Minneapolis, Minnesota—home to the All Nations Indian Church. This United Church of Christ congregation is located in Phillips, a neighborhood that is unique in being an urban Indian enclave. Almost 4000 Native Americans live there.

“I’m an ecumenist from way back,” says the Rev. Marlene Whiterabbit Helgamo. She is a minister of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America on a special call to the UCC congregation. “This congregation started in the early 1980s,” she explains. “Because we

worked so well intertribally, we became interdenominational.”

Indeed the church has both intertribal and ecumenical roots. Prior to her call, Helgamo recalls, “a Catholic woman, Bea Swanson, wanted a church for the Indian community in the city. She didn’t see a denomination; she saw ‘church’ as *church*.” Helgamo reports that there was a great need to work with children. Through Swanson’s endeavors, using United Methodist and Presbyterian resources, All Nations Indian Church was able to establish a children’s ministry. “Then when I came in 1992,” Helgamo says, “the natural parts of the partnership fell into place to build the ministry.”

The children’s ministry is now called the Children’s and Elders’ Prayer Lodge. It brings both age groups together on Saturday mornings to share storytelling, prayer time, a meal, and arts and crafts. In 1999, about 40 kids and 10 elders took part. Although the key group

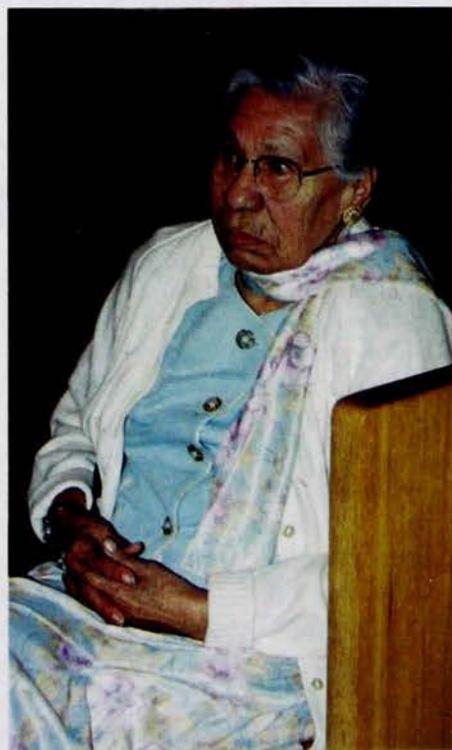
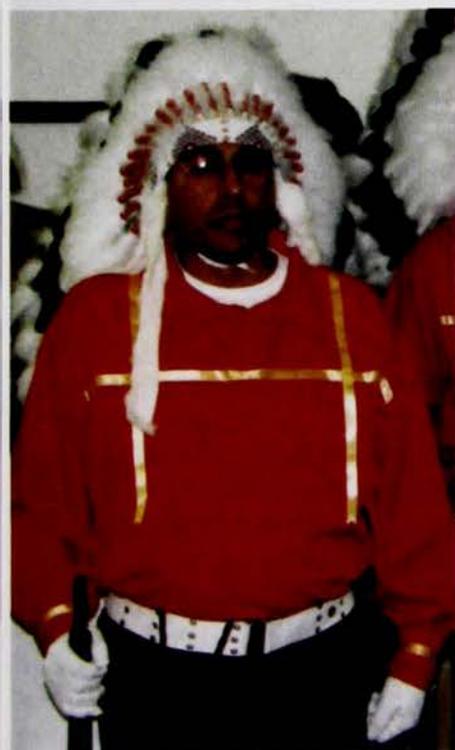
of volunteers is from All Nations, members of other churches come from 10 to 30 miles around to help. The program coordinator, Carol McBrady, draws on her extensive network of young people in the neighborhood to involve some junior high kids in food preparation and cleanup. She also comes in weeknights for tutoring and helps with a drum group for boys and young men.

“Several years ago,” Helgamo recalls, “four young people between the ages of 12 and 18 were killed through gang violence. I performed the funerals for three of them because they were members of the Indian community. It was a horrible wake-up call. The Indian Youth Consortium was formed to combat the gangs. Our Children’s and Elders’ Prayer Lodge is now strong enough to be recognized by the Indian Youth Consortium. This means additional funding.”

As with other Native American churches, the affirmation of traditional culture attracts new members. “In our programs, we don’t proselytize or say ‘You must join the church,’” Helgamo explains. “But we are teaching traditional values. Families and young people see what we’re doing and want to join the church.” In the Phillips neighborhood, most social services are located within an eight-block radius. “So,” concludes Helgamo, “the church doesn’t have to do everything.”

That leaves the church free to do what it does best—transform lives. By affirming time-honored values in the midst of urban culture, the Native American churches are gathering their people into circles of abundant life. □

Elizabeth Haak, a freelance writer and past contributor to New World Outlook, is a member of Christ Church United Methodist in New York City.



Left: Mr. Blas Flores, of Norman First American Church in Oklahoma, is a member of the Buddy Bond Color Guard Troop. **Right:** An elder of the Native American United Methodist Church of Southern California in Anaheim.

PARTNERSHIPS: The School-Church Connection

by Vickie Sigmon

Members of The United Methodist Church seek to share their gifts with people who live in poverty or struggle with social problems. However, churches are sometimes uncertain about how best to allocate mission dollars, and church members may lack the incentive or confidence to get directly involved in front-line ministry.

The Winston-Salem District of the Western North Carolina Annual Conference has developed a mission focus to meet these concerns—the School Church Connection. Inspired by the Bishops' Initiative on Children and Poverty, this program directs energy and resources to impoverished children.

Through the School-Church Connection, a United Methodist district has been the official "sponsor" of the Social Work Department of a public school system since 1998. Under the guidance of the social workers of the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Public School System, individual churches are partnered with specific schools, where they respond to the needs of students and their families.

The needs of children within public schools is long-standing. Most United Methodists who are parents have volunteered time or shared other resources with the schools their children attend. But under the banner of the School-Church Connection, the gap between the needs of underprivileged school children and the resources of United Methodists has been bridged in remarkable ways.



Vickie Sigmon with children of the Open Arms Community, an inner-city ministry in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

A special effort has been made to find partner churches for schools with large numbers of poor children. This effort is especially important in Winston-Salem/Forsyth County, which has a "neighborhood" school system. Most parents choose to send their children to the school that is closest to their home. Since socioeconomic status largely determines where people live, neighborhood schools often have a disproportionate number of children who are either well-off or poor.

This economic imbalance is reflected in the resources that are available to individual schools. For example, a school's PTSA (Parent-Teacher-Student Association) provides various types of support, including a pool of volunteers and funds for extracurricular activities. Schools with a preponderance of poor children do not have many parent donations for sports, band, or playground equipment. The have-not schools also have fewer parent volunteers to serve as tutors or teachers' helpers. In fact, the very schools with a high concentration of students whose learning at school is

adversely affected by problems at home have fewer extra resources to help the children overcome those handicaps.

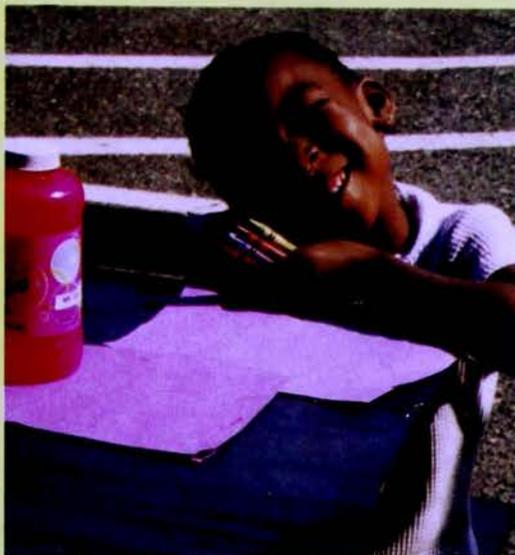
Through the School-Church Connection, the human and material resources that are prevalent in prosperous neighborhoods are shared to help address the needs of children who attend schools in poorer areas. For example, a large United Methodist church with a multimillion-dollar budget is partnered with an elementary school that sits on the edge of a public-housing complex. More than 50 church members are involved as front-line volunteers at the school, and the church has provided funds for a playground to be built on the school grounds.

The United Methodist Women of another large church in Winston-Salem organized a pool of volunteers to serve as grade-mothers at an elementary school with a high proportion of immigrant students. The UMW grade-mothers serve as teachers' assistants and provide special activities for the children. Thanks to the example set by UMW members, mothers of students at the school gained the confidence to become volunteers themselves.

The great variety of needs at each school allows large and small churches to respond on different levels, determined by available resources and the talents and interests of church members. Some United Methodists go directly to their partner school to tutor children or to serve as volunteers. Others offer support by providing school supplies and personal-care items such as soap and toothpaste. When informed by the school social worker, churches also respond to such emergencies as a death in a student's family or a household's need for a basic appliance such as a refrigerator.

Few United Methodists could envision a household without a clock, but school social workers name clocks as a much needed donation. Though many parents feel the financial pinch each fall when they have to buy their children's school supplies, few could imagine a family that could not even afford to purchase a pencil.

The success of the partnerships forged through the School-Church Connection can be attributed to several factors. The 20 social workers employed by the school system educate school and church representatives about the partnership and direct church resources to the schools and children with the greatest needs. Training



This child now has school supplies, thanks to the School-Church Connection in the Winston-Salem District of the Western North Carolina Conference.

for various volunteer positions is provided through each school.

During the early planning stages of the School-Church Connection, questions arose about the legality of a church partnership with the public schools. Would the schools want or accept church involvement? Would issues arise concerning the separation of church and state? In discussions involving school and church officials, the role of the church as a school sponsor was clarified and limited. Church involvement is strictly based on deeds performed and does not involve proselytizing.

Some people consider the School-Church Connection a mere salve to the conscience of Christians who know that the

imbalance of resources and needs in the schools reflects the growing gap between rich and poor in society. But the children who benefit know differently.

Glimpses of Sharing

In 1999, the night before school started, 11-year-old Albert couldn't sleep—not because he was excited but because he was filled with dread. Unlike most of his classmates, he did not have a bookbag filled with new school supplies. He did not even have a pack of notebook paper. But before the end of the first day of school, he had everything he needed. Across town, the parents of another 11-year-old had bought extra school items when they learned of Albert's needs through the school-church partnership.

On that first day of school, 8-year-old Shay was wearing clean socks, new underwear, and a great pair of jeans, thanks to a group of United Methodist Women and United Methodist Youth. And 6-year-old Carolena, who didn't speak a word of English, was greeted by a United Methodist volunteer who told her in her native tongue that she was the smartest girl in the first grade.

These glimpses of sharing show the power and potential of church and civic partnerships to transform a materialistic society into a caring, supportive culture in which the needs of all children are met. □

Vickie Sigmon is a commissioned missionary of the General Board of Global Ministries. She serves as a Church and Community Worker assigned to the Open Arms Community, an inner-city ministry.

Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.

—Isaiah 58:12

Applying Isaiah's words to Christian mission at the close of the twentieth century, we do not have far to search for literal repairers of the breach and restorers of neighborhoods. Across the United States and around the globe, United Methodist Volunteers In Mission have labored with hammer and nails, bricks and mortar, to rebuild communities ravaged by storms and wars or by time and neglect.

But not all repairers of the breach are engaged in physical rebuilding. To "raise up the foundations of many generations," it is necessary to undertake the task of spiritual restoration. This calls for a repairing of the fissures that divide people and bar access to growth, opportunity, and abundant life.

Nowhere is the need for spiritual restoration more apparent than in the secular urban culture of our cities. And no group is in greater need of volunteer intervention than our children and youth. They are our future generations, and their foundations need to be made firm so that their lives can be raised up.

A Challenge for Volunteers

Nearly every social movement in the United States has been nurtured by voluntary efforts. Causes such as the abolition of slavery, voting rights for women, the civil rights movement, public schools and libraries, environmental protection



Young adult volunteers tutor readers at Hoover United Methodist Church in Little Rock, Arkansas (above) and at the Summer Academy of Atlantic Street Center in Seattle, Washington (opposite, p. 41).

—all have been driven by voluntary action. Independent Sector, an action group, reported that adult volunteer time totaled 20.3 billion hours in 1995, with a value of \$202 billion, and that teens volunteered 2.4 billion hours in 1996 worth \$7.7 billion. The true value of volunteer time, however, must be measured in the impact on human lives.

In April 1997, US President Bill Clinton held a "Summit for America's Future," which was attended by 2000 delegates from the volunteer sector. They were challenged to recruit an "army" of volunteers to provide young people with five essential resources:

- an ongoing relationship with a caring adult
- safe places and structured activities for after-school learning
- good health habits acquired through instruction and practice
- a marketable skill acquired through effective education
- an opportunity to give service back to their communities.

In a national study of 254,000 public school students in grades 6 through 12, Search Institute of Minneapolis found that, as developmental assets increase in a young person's life, there is a decrease in health-compromising behaviors

VOLUNTEERS

Repairers of the Breach

by Robert E. Walton



problems as disrespect for authority, tardiness, absenteeism, and peer conflicts. Many students whom the counselors meet in school are filtered into one of EECM's after-school programs.

"At 4:30 p.m., during a visit to an elementary school in east Pittsburgh," wrote former EPRUS staffer Jan Schrock, "I entered the 'Cafetorium' to see about 75 students busy with their homework at the cafeteria tables, working like bees making honey. Most of their tutors were junior high and high school students, who earn \$5 an hour. The after-school tutoring keeps elementary students off the streets in a violent neighborhood during a vulnerable time."

Through EPRUS, the East End Cooperative Ministry has been able to expand its programs for children and youth into eight schools and four church-based after-school programs. The program is staffed by 366 volunteers, including 19 full-time and eight part-time AmeriCorps members. "Imagine what could happen," Schrock observed, "if every at-risk student could receive after-school tutoring in a neighborhood church or school."

Working in another notable program of EECM, eight high school students put on a three-day arts and music festival last July. Over a nine-month period, the teen planners of "E-Fest" learned how to fundraise, to develop a business plan, and to market the event and promote it locally. The response was overwhelming, with 5000 people filling the streets each day to enjoy the festivities and share a renewed sense of community.

Healing in Houston

Shalom Zone Ministries in Houston, Texas, has partnered with the EPRUS/AmeriCorps Program to provide 1081 students with in-

and an increase in school success and optimism for the future.

To increase developmental assets for urban youth and meet their needs for safer, healthier communities, United Methodists have joined with other denominations to establish EPRUS, the Ecumenical Program for Urban Service. Through approvals of its proposals, EPRUS has qualified for the services of more than 100 AmeriCorps members. These are volunteers in a U.S. government-funded program who give up to 1700 hours of service per year, for which they receive a living allowance of \$8000 and an educational voucher for \$4750. Full-

time AmeriCorps volunteers help recruit hundreds of other volunteers to work in community programs.

Intervention in Pittsburgh

Fifty congregations belong to the East End Cooperative Ministry (EECM), located in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, which has established several programs for children and youth. The "In-School Intervention Program" teaches problem-solving skills, provides mediation in conflict resolution, and helps students build positive relationships. Volunteers work with struggling students in a school lunchroom, helping them with such

school and after-school programs emphasizing reading, math, and science. Operating from three United Methodist church sites—Park Place, St. John's, and Trinity East—eight full-time and eight part-time AmeriCorps members work with 455 other community volunteers. They have also held weekly sessions for at-risk teens, addressing juvenile delinquency, gang violence, educational goal setting, and life-skills management.

EPRUS/AmeriCorps volunteers in Houston report a great sense of fulfillment in bringing wholeness and healing to the children. "Our site has children with many emotional needs," said Michelle, a full-time volunteer in her second year. "Chris is learning the difference between good and bad choices. Jose is beginning to make decisions without asking his sister. Steve is finding that he can

do things alone and doesn't have to be perfect. And Amy is discovering that hugs don't always hurt."

Mastering Skills in Miami

In Miami, the EPRUS partner is Shalom Interfaith Outreach Network (SION). Six full-time and 12 part-time AmeriCorps members have worked with 108 other local volunteers to provide enrichment programs for youngsters referred by local schools. In 1999, at the beginning of summer, the volunteers at the Grace Shalom Zone site in Little Haiti found that, out of 16 children, only one had any experience with swimming. By the end of the summer, all 16 could swim with ease. Learning to swim gave them great confidence—not only in the water but in their discovery that they could easily acquire new skills.

Another program of SION is the Miami District Community Music School. Christina, one of 25 volunteer instructors, found that "for the students I had, it made a difference to have someone who cared about what they did. They came to music school because they wanted to learn. These kids could have given up long ago. If they won't quit, then neither will I."

'Sound Youth' in Seattle

The Church Council of Greater Seattle is another partner of EPRUS/AmeriCorps. Working in a program called "Sound Youth" (healthy youth in the Puget Sound area), 16 full-time AmeriCorps volunteers and 487 other community volunteers are building

A youth volunteer at First UMC of Vancouver, WA, prepares sandwiches for "Teen Feed," a program for homeless and runaway teens.

relationships and enriching young lives. Some volunteers work in school-day tutoring programs, either assisting in a class or pulling low-performing students out of class for individual help. Others provide out-of-school tutoring, working one-on-one with students. Mixed-age tutoring is offered at Highland Park and Skyway United Methodist churches and at three public housing communities.

Young people need mentors who can teach them how to flourish in an urban culture, raising up foundations for the future.

Sound Youth also works with a drop-in center for homeless youth. Seattle has become a destination for many troubled teen runaways. The center is fully staffed by volunteers who provide the youth not only with a warm, safe shelter and with meals, clean clothing, and referrals but also with adult attention and encouragement.

A major project of Sound Youth is the teaching of nonviolent conflict resolution. Several volunteers serve at Students Against Violence Everywhere (SAVE). They promote peaceful nonviolence in their communities through noncompetitive games, role plays, and service projects. One of SAVE's major tenets is that service to one's community fosters cooperative relationships, reducing the threat of violence.

Reflecting on her experience as a full-time EPRUS/AmeriCorps volunteer with Sound Youth, Tauyrn Thatcher affirmed that "in our work with youth, we need to build on what they have instead of concentrating on what needs fixing. We must continue to work toward a world that can be caring, just, and



respectful of all peoples. That new vision leads us forward daily, as it expands our hearts."

Summer Companies in Indiana

Another significant ministry involving work with children and youth originated with the United Methodist Campus Ministries of Indiana. This program, called "Summer Companies," was begun six years ago by the Rev. Rick Pickering, campus minister at the Wesley Foundation at Ball State University. It provides an opportunity for college students to be engaged in ministry while receiving a small stipend.

Potential company members are sought out, interviewed, and selected by campus ministers. Those chosen for the program are trained to use music, storytelling, drama, and outdoor recreation in their work with youth. They learn to sharpen their awareness of children's social, mental, physical, and faith development.

Between May and August 1999, eight four-member Summer Companies teams were in place in seven different urban locations, including two United Methodist churches in Indianapolis. At North Church, the team supported the "Peace Kids" program, seeking to teach youth to be at peace with themselves, with God, and with the environment. At the East Tenth Street Church, the team facilitated the "Summer Days for Youth" program, which provides daytime programming to neighborhood children five days a week.

In Kokomo, Indiana, team members worked to establish a better community-church relationship with a weekly "Community Night" that was open to neighborhood children. In Lafayette, they served at the Lafayette Urban Ministries during the day as site supervisors for a program offering nutritious

lunches to school-age children. At night, the team staffed the homeless shelter, and in the morning, they did advocacy work there.

One Summer Companies team served in a unique program that operates four days a week at Grace United Methodist Church in Gary, Indiana. The program, called "Kidtown," creates a mini-economy in a town managed by kids. The youth run businesses such as a store, a restaurant, and a bank. They learn how to act appropriately in given settings while earning "Kidtown bucks." They use some of their earnings to buy lunch in the restaurant each day, and they save some in the bank to purchase school supplies from the store. Summer Companies team members served as mentors in Kidtown, "owning" businesses and overseeing the production and distribution of the weekly *Kidtown Tribune*.

"Many children we see in inner-city settings have a worldview that is limited to a few city blocks," observed Brent Porterfield, a campus minister. "Some of our college students have never dreamed of the challenges these children face in trying to survive by 'street smarts.' What these young people learn about one another is transforming."

"We feel deeply committed to our ongoing work with Summer Companies," said the Rev. Darren Cushman-Wood, pastor of the East Tenth Street United Methodist Church in Indianapolis. "Our congregation members share their wisdom and commitment to mission, and the Summer Companies team members share their enthusiasm and vision. This gives us a way to pass on our congregation's tradition of servanthood to a new generation of United Methodists."

Raising Up Foundations

The urban areas of our nation and world offer many gifts, including a



Summer Companies volunteers in Indiana sharpen their awareness of children's physical, mental, and faith development.

stimulating diversity and a rich educational and cultural life. But cities are also places where social problems are compounded—where youth face isolation, fear violence, are tempted by harmful drugs, and often receive little guidance in their underfunded public schools. These young people need mentors who can teach them how to grow and flourish in this urban culture, raising up foundations for the future. And God's people—the dedicated volunteers, the repairers of the breach, the restorers of healthy communities—are hard at work making this happen. □

Robert E. Walton is Assistant General Secretary for Mission Volunteers at the General Board of Global Ministries.

CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY in Urban Contexts

*Resources that Inspire and Teach
Reviewed by Elliott Wright*

Ten years ago, the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in the Ensley area of Birmingham, Alabama, faced a choice that comes to many urban congregations: Should it close, move to the suburbs, or stay and try to spark a transformation in its run-down, crime-infested neighborhood? Bethel stayed. Today it is at the heart of a spiritual and physical renewal that reverberates throughout what was once a mill town for U.S. Steel.

Bethel's story is told in a small and valuable book, *Reweaving the Fabric* (Black Belt Press, 1999), written by its pastor, the Rev. Ronald Nored. The author is also a visionary who dared to believe that God could use a struggling congregation for a new beginning. Well-trained in community organizing, Nored recruited ecumenical, private, and public partners in an effort that at first looked impossible. Sandy Bottom—the name of the area around Bethel Church—was about as bad off as a place can be, with houses falling down, stores boarded up, and streets full of holes. The whole Ensley area had gone from bad to worse after the steel mill closed in 1970. Despair and crime were the orders of the day.

The expanding partnership coalesced around Bethel-Ensley Action Task (B.E.A.T), a combination community action-community development agency, set up in a way that permitted it to receive public funds. Nored's subtitle is "How Congregations and Communities Can Come Together to Build Their Neighborhoods." Collaboration has resulted in a renovated six-square-block area with new housing, a community center, a revived church, and a stake in a larger Ensley redevelopment plan. Partners have also come from outside the immediate area, including numerous United Methodist churches and the local construction industry.

Nored discusses both the why and the how of B.E.A.T.'s success—a big part of which involved real listening to the people of the community. A helpful appendix contains the community survey instrument and other primary "here's how" documents on the hard but joyful work of doing what God would have Christians do.

Profiles of 28 urban churches engaged in community-based ministries—ranging in membership from 125 to 15,000—can be found in *Urban Churches, Vital Signs: Beyond Charity Toward Justice* (Eerdmans, 1999), edited by Nile Harper. These congregations (one is an ecumenical organization) are in 15 cities across the United States. All have significant ministries beyond the sanctuary walls, and almost all have housing or community economic development affiliates set up as separate corporations.

Some of the 28 are well-known "mega churches," such as Allen AME Church or the West Angeles Church of God in Christ in Los Angeles. Others are small operations, such as the (Episcopal) Church of the Messiah in Detroit and Grace United Church, a Presbyterian-United Methodist congregation in Kansas City. (Other United Methodist Churches profiled are the large Windsor Village Church and St. John's Church (see pp. 18-21), both in Houston.)

Based on the information gathered from the 28 churches, the editor delineates 15 "vital signs" of urban congregations. First on the list is "vigorous and creative worship." Also cited are "community building," intergenerational congregations, stress on social justice, a spirit of partnership with other organizations, racial and ethnic diversity (in some cases), nontraditional financial sources, and community economic development initiatives. □

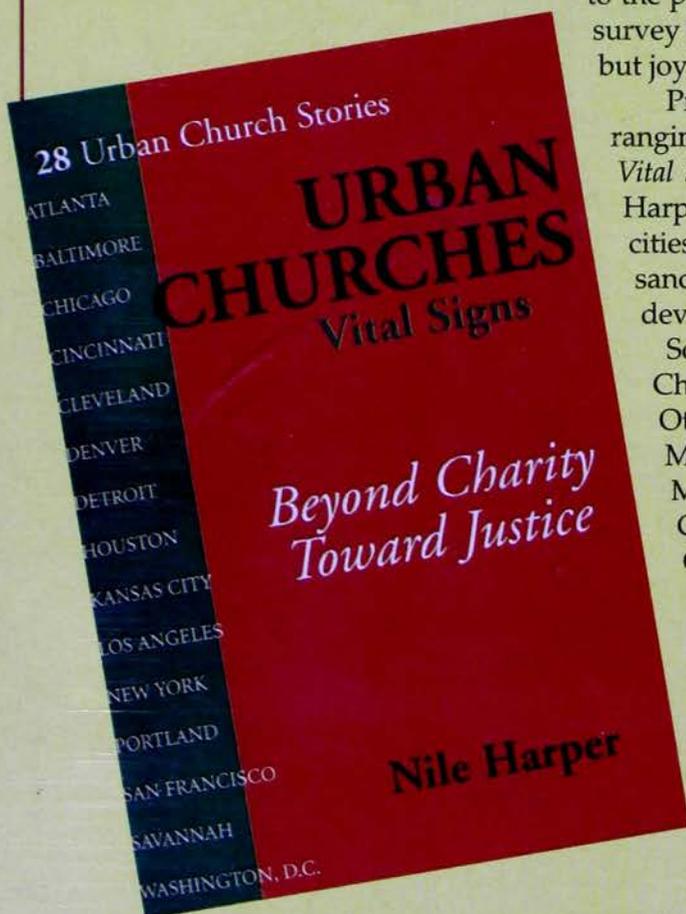
REWEAVING THE FABRIC

How Congregations and Communities Can
Come Together To Build Their Neighborhoods

**RON
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FOREWORD BY
ANDREW YOUNG

Faced with decay
and crime, the
people of Bethel
AME Church
decided to rebuild
rather than to
run. Their story is
a model that can
help save our
cities.



Conclusion:

GREAT JOY IN THE CITY



The articles in this issue show a Christian presence throughout the vast complex that is modern urban culture. There are strong congregations struggling in ministry among all sorts of people, individuals devoting time and talents through personal commitment or institutional

programs, and The United Methodist Church as a whole seeking the peace and prosperity of cities. The study material looks at the urban realities of technology, popular media, poverty, affluence, education, and human diversity. It also raises issues of social justice.

How will the church and its members understand and shape ministry within urban culture as the twenty-first century unfolds? Study participants and other readers may want to ask questions about their relationships, attitudes, and future plans regarding cities. How does urban culture directly and indirectly affect their congregations? What kinds of ministry responses are being shaped to meet the many urban challenges and opportunities?

Christian life and ministry in an urban culture can be enriched and focused by a short passage in the Acts of the Apostles—that first report in the Christian journey toward global mission. Many of the earliest Christian congregations were urban—partly because the early evangelists (messengers) were drawn to population centers. Acts 8:1-8 gives a telling glimpse of urban challenges and opportunities and can instruct the church today.

The congregation in Jerusalem was having a hard time. Opponents of the small, new Christian movement were on a rampage. Stephen, a leader of the Christian fellowship, had been stoned to death. Saul of Tarsus was leading a brigade in storming Christian houses and throwing believers into prison. The followers of Jesus, no doubt apprehensive, scattered into surrounding areas. Philip, one of the original twelve disciples, went to Samaria, north of Jerusalem.

Proper people from Jerusalem and Judea avoided the old city of Samaria. They would walk miles out of the way to avoid setting foot on Samaritan territory. Why? Because the people were not “pure” blooded, and their worship practices were suspect.

But Philip boldly went to Samaria and there preached the good news of how life could be transformed in God’s love through Jesus Christ. He was welcomed. People accepted the Gospel. Philip also expelled evil spirits and healed the weak and lame. As a result, “there was great joy in that city.” (Acts 8:8)

How much joy does the church and do its members bring to American cities today? That question stands as a biblical measure of effective ministry in urban culture. Joy is not a sometimes feeling. It is a constant condition of mind and heart, a theological state. “Joyful, joyful we adore thee,” Christians sing in praise of God.

Philip did two things in bringing joy to Samaria. He preached the Word. He told people about God and Jesus. The Word prepared the way, and then Philip acted. He expelled evil spirits, which made great noise as they were forced to give up control of people’s lives.

How effective is the church in expelling the evil spirits that today cause racism and other forms of bias, drug abuse, domestic violence, child neglect, bad schools, homelessness, and human loneliness? Are Christians equipped to withstand the resistance that evil spirits emit when confronted?

How effective is the church in tending and restoring the urban weak and lame? Palsy, mentioned in Acts, causes the hands to wither and lose their ability to grip. Palsy and lameness can be spiritual as well as physical. When put into action, the Christian message strengthens and restores those who lose their grip and find it hard to move through life.

Think of any urban center, large or small. Think of the church—the people of God—in that place or nearby. Does the presence of the church—of Christian witness and service—lead to the affirmation: “And there is great joy in that city”? It should. □

—Elliott Wright

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The Rev. Kathlyn James, Lake Washington United Methodist Church, Kirkland, WA

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New World Outlook looks ahead!

- March/April:** *GBGM Mission Initiatives*
- May/June:** *Children of Africa Mission Study*
- July/August:** *Focus on Youth*
- September/October:** *Church Growth and Development*
- November/December:** *Mission Service; Global Praise*

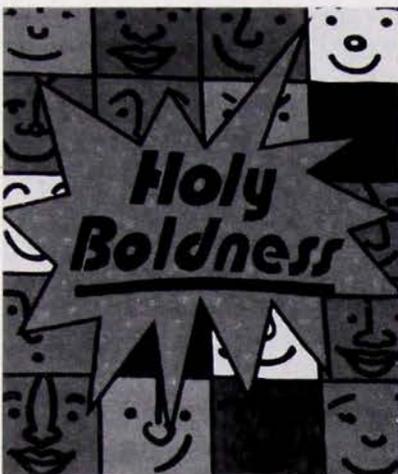
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Corrections: In our Nov.-Dec. 1999 issue, the photo of Bruce Robbins on p. 5 was taken in Honduras, not Puerto Rico. The photographer of the Global Justice Volunteers on p. 7 was Mel Wright. And Wilson Boots' article, "Caught Within the Explosion of the Gospel," was inadvertently dropped from the Table of Contents. Apologies to all. —Ed.

You may use the next four pages as bulletin inserts about mission. Remove this page; duplicate it freely, printing front and back; fold it in the middle, along the black line; and slip the copies into your Sunday bulletins.

Holy and Bold Transformations in Toledo

by E. Cary Simonton, Director of Urban Ministry,
Cincinnati District, Cincinnati, Ohio



Monroe Street United Methodist Church—a typical “old first church” about three miles from downtown Toledo, Ohio—had 3000 members 30 years ago, before members of the middle class began to follow new highways out to the suburbs. By the mid-1990s, Monroe Street’s membership had fallen to 500, with only around 200 people attending worship. The neighborhood around the church had undergone racial and ethnic changes in the 1970s and 1980s and had experienced economic decline. Though the church had

begun an extensive neighborhood ministry around 1990, this ministry had not transformed the Sunday morning appearance of the people in the pews.

Because of its commitment to continue a ministry in the city, the church enrolled three laypeople and two staff members in the Holy Boldness Academy in January 1997. The church’s Holy Boldness training, worship, and workshop experiences since then have led to broader partnerships with other community groups. The church now has a ministry partnership with a YMCA daycare program and a Head Start program, both of which rent space at the church and serve the neighborhood. Neighborhood children and youth are being integrated into the congregation’s music and Christian education programs. And more low-income residents of the neighborhood are now attending worship and joining the church.

Academy participants’ lives have also been changed. One layperson wrote: “Before Holy Boldness, I had never liked the word *evangelism* because I felt inadequate to evangelize. The Holy Boldness Academy gave me a new definition. If I am filled with God’s grace, I’ll be gracious to others and allow others the space to be themselves and to feel God’s grace on their own.”

The United Methodist Church in Mission

Keeping Veterans’ Day at Norman First American United Methodist Church

An interview with the Rev. David Wilson and Mr. Harold Barse
by Elizabeth Haak

Honoring veterans is very important to the congregation of Norman First American United Methodist Church, which is located in a rapidly growing university town 30 miles from Oklahoma City. Many people in the Native American community have served in wars, and they “are always ready to go when called to be of service to this country,” says David Wilson, a member of the Choctaw Nation and the pastor of First American. So every Veterans’ Day, First American has a “huge service,” Wilson reports. “It’s a special occasion to recognize the veterans in our community,” he explains.

Harold Barse of the Sioux Nation, a member of First American UMC, notes that the Native American culture reveres veterans as warriors. “There are no hymns in the United Methodist hymnal to honor veterans,” he observes, “but we have songs to honor them. In this special service, we have an All-Indian color guard and a veteran speaker gives a testimony.”

While the purpose of the special ceremony at First American is to celebrate those who serve, the service is also a means of uniting and affirming the Native American community in the city of Norman.



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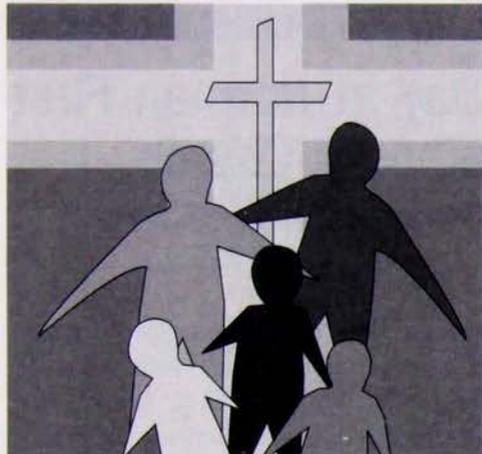
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The Church as an Instrument of Healing

An interview with Kevin Montry of All Nations Indian Church
by Elizabeth Haak



What the All Nations Indian Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota, does best is transform lives, says its pastor, Marlene Helgamo. Kevin Montry can testify to that.

Montry is of the Lakota, Cheyenne, White Earth, and Chippewa nations. Born in Texas, he grew up, he says, "all over the place" in a dysfunctional alcoholic family that eventually settled in northeast Minneapolis. Montry started

drinking in the third grade and dropped out of school in the tenth. He kept on drinking until he was 22. Then, after eight years of sobriety, "I hit a spiritual bottom," he says. "I went for help to the liaison for Native American students at Metro State University, who told me: 'Go to All Nations Indian Church. Check that out and then come back and see me.'"

At All Nations, Montry found a church building shaped like a longhouse where worshippers sit in a circle. As Montry puts it, he "came into the circle. I started to be part of Alcoholics Anonymous too," he says. "It was not until I started to help other people that things happened for me. I began praying for people in my family. Now all my brothers and sisters have come into the circle. My dad comes. Last of all was my mom. I was praying and praying. Then, one day, she just showed up."

One closing prayer stands out in Montry's memory. "We always stand up and hold hands," he says. "One Sunday, Rev. Helgamo brought my whole family into the center of the circle. Then everyone laid their hands on us and prayed for us. It was very powerful."

Today Montry leads a transformed life. He has earned a General Equivalency Diploma, has his own business, and soon will start attending college. "The church was an instrument of healing," he affirms. "It gave me dignity."

Shalom Partnerships in Africa

by Lynda Byrd, Assistant General Secretary, Community Ministries,
General Board of Global Ministries

The primary purpose of the Shalom Initiative of The United Methodist Church is to empower people to take responsibility for their own lives.

First in January and then in June 1999, a delegation drawn from the clergy and laity of the Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference traveled to Zimbabwe to develop Communities of Shalom. The training for pastors there involved more than 200 participants representing the nine United Methodist districts in Zimbabwe. Since the training was given, a school has been started in the Sakubva Township, and the extraction of oil from sunflower seeds is now a new revenue source.

Another US training team—including members of the national Shalom staff and a representative from the Texas Conference's Shalom Zone Ministries—trained six new Shalom teams in Ghana. Among these teams was a group of clergy and laity from the town of Obuasi. The Obuasi team members focused their ministry on sanitation and health care. Following the training, this team put into place the infrastructure needed to open a clinic in the remote village of Watreso. Surrounding Watreso are 48 other communities that have had no access to health care. Less than two weeks after the Ghanaian Shalom team was trained, the Watreso clinic was a reality. The team collaborated with officials of the Ashanti gold mine in Obuasi to secure an abandoned facility in which to house the clinic. It also identified part of the staff to operate the clinic and acquired some furnishings and



enough hospital beds to enable the clinic to begin serving the 48 surrounding communities. Now dialogue is underway to find partnering opportunities through which Shalom communities in the United States can share medical knowledge and resources with this new Shalom community in Ghana.

Children in Ghana

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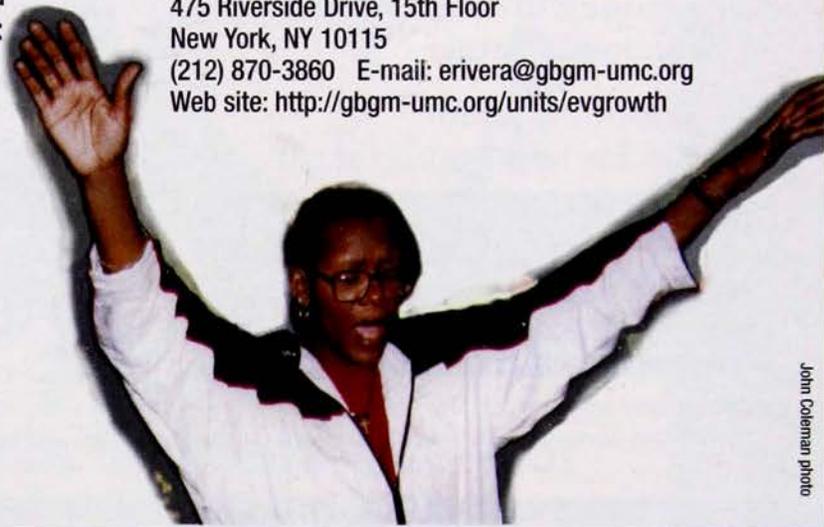
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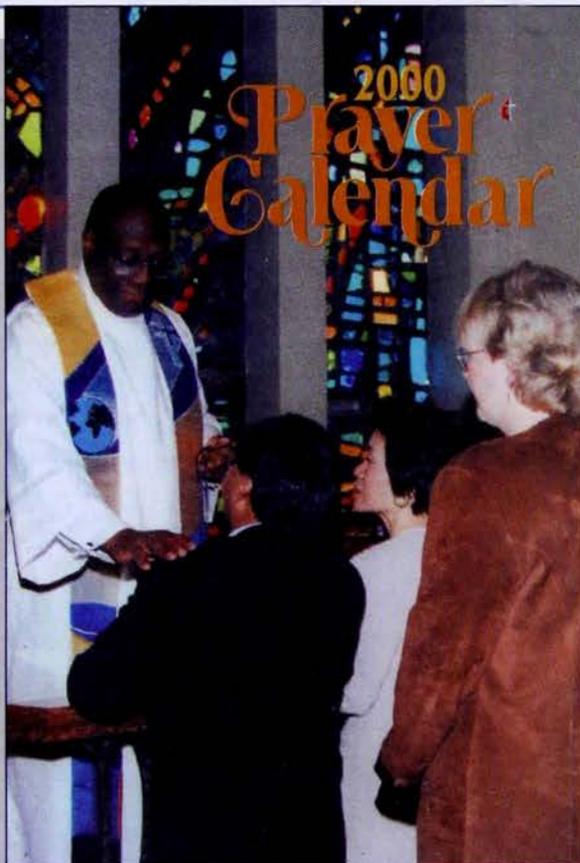
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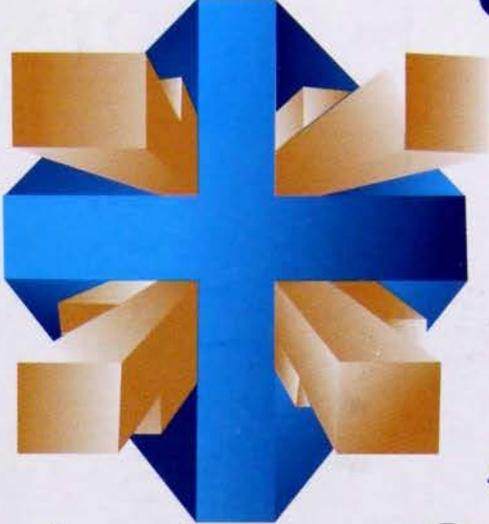
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