



The Bishop Getting our priorities straight

BY BISHOP W. EARL BLEDSOE
North Texas Conference

“Bishop, do you think this economy will get better?” asked my neighbor. I struggled with an answer, because I knew he was a stockbroker and should be advising me as to



Bishop Bledsoe

the economy. But what I think he was asking was how the economy was affecting the church.

I’ve talked with many pastors of large congregations and some of small congregations, and they are doing OK but are anticipating a downturn to occur sometime in the future. A friend of mine who is an economist says that things will get better, but it will take some time; he thinks much longer than any previous recessions in history. I believe most of our churches understand this and are taking measures to make sure they hold down costs and are sensitive to the concerns of those affected by the economic downturn.

Several pastors I’ve spoken to have assured me that they will continue to pay 100 percent of their Conference benevolences. I assure you that we will do all that we can to curtail expenses in the Conference office.

This downturn in the economy does allow us as a church to speak to the issue of money in the church. Many times, because it takes money to operate, we forget that our worth as Christians is defined by God and not by money or the state of the economy. This is the time for us to pull together

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‘Don’t go to church’ puts Faith Into Action

Fellowship UMC, Trophy Club

BY JOHN A. LOVELACE
Special Correspondent

More than 400 obedient members and visitors skipped Sunday School and worship services Sept. 28 at Fellowship UMC, Trophy Club, the high-energy Denton County congregation that risked promoting a “Don’t Go to Church” Sunday.

But the rest of the story, so to speak, is that they met the challenge to “BE the church.” From 8:00 a.m. until noon that day, the only quiet place at the church was the sanctuary, proudly dedicated little more than a year ago.

Sunday School rooms bulged with kids and octogenarians and all ages in between making pillow cases for Cook Children’s Hospital in Fort Worth or assembling care packages for soldiers and the homeless. Outside, moms and kids scrubbed and cleaned plastic toys used by pre-school and Sunday School classes.

As if all that activity were not

impressive enough, seductive aromas wafted from the kitchen as volunteers baked cookies for area police and fire stations.

And that’s just what was happening at the church, whose tall, white steeple is a landmark near six-lane highway Texas Highway 114, linking Dallas/Fort Worth Airport, Texas Motor Speedway and Alliance Airport. As far away as the Ronald McDonald House in Fort Worth, Fellowship UMC, Trophy Club crews cooked and served a meal to resident families. As near as “Highway 114,” another crew gathered and bagged roadside litter. The Senior Center and the Food Pantry in the nearby town of Roanoke got some priceless sprucing-up, indoors and out.

Rev Daniel Humbert, pastor of Fellowship UMC summarized the day this way:

“That evening at 6:30 p.m. we came together for a community meal and multi-sensory celebration of God’s work through this outreach, including a 3 to 5 minute video of the ac-



PHOTOS BY JOHN A. LOVELACE

Daniel and Donna Sizer gathered plastic bags full of Highway 114 litter near their church as part of Faith in Action Sunday at Fellowship UMC in Trophy Club.

tivities. We had over 400 folks participate in mission, affecting over a thousand people’s lives directly and indirectly helping out thousands!”

Rev. Humbert continued, “We had several first-time visitors show up for worship, and two stayed to help with ‘Faith in Action.’ One of them stayed for three hours to help with several of the projects, and one

of them, a former nurse at Cook Children’s Hospital, stayed to sew the pillow cases we were making to give to kids at that very hospital. God works in wonderful ways.”

In this case, those “wonderful ways” included several months of careful preparation. Rev. Humbert first came across

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LLAD offers Deaf youth new opportunity

BY DR. JOAN G. LABARR
Editor

A school for Deaf youth, a unique ministry among churches of all denominations, has started at Lovers Lane UMC, Dallas. The Lovers Lane Academy for the Deaf (LLAD) opened in August with six students as it officially began the 2008-09 academic year.

Executive Director/educational leader Peggy Key and her team of teachers and volunteers bring the highest level of commitment, compassion and skill to their mission of helping Deaf teens realize their life potential. The students study the usual academic subjects at the level that best fits their personal needs, plus they learn communication



Richard Brownalenoir, LLAD School Board president, left, cuts the ribbon to the school’s classroom as Executive Director/educational leader Peggy Key cheers him on. The ribbon cutting was part of the Sept. 8 open house.

and practical living skills to equip them for the future.

All of the academics and

social skills are undergirded with a strong faith foundation as the teens also learn biblical principles and experience devotionals and a weekly service of Holy Communion, worshipping and maturing in spirituality and faith understanding.

The holistic approach is summed up in the LLAD

Mission Statement: “Our mission is to provide, in a Christian environment, a bilingual

American Sign Language (ASL) and English education for Deaf students that will develop their physical, mental and spiritual abilities to live an independent, productive and happy life in a personal relationship with God.”

Rev. Tom Hudspeth, who oversees Lovers Lane UMC’s ministry to the Deaf, is a member of the LLAD Board and steering committee and serves as chaplain for the school.

The school opened Aug. 25 with a capacity of eight students. The staff includes Key, an assistant teacher and a part-time teacher. LLAD’s focus is on Deaf teens who have the potential to learn, but who are being left behind educationally in their current academic settings.

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First UMC, Terrell, has just completed an October giving emphasis entitled, "Heading For Miracle Sunday!"

A budget and cash flow analysis in September concluded that unless things changed radically they were on the verge of having a \$30,000 or 10 percent deficit in the General Budget with the very real probability that it would get much worse before December.

A task force was created to address the situation and the result was "Heading Toward Miracle Sunday!" The emphasis was kicked off in the Sunday school classes on the last Sunday in September and climaxed on Oct. 26. The goal was to raise \$33,333.33 a very holy number—seven threes. It was a number that was big enough to require God's help but also require everyone to participate in order to make it happen.

On the first Sunday, senior pastor Rev. David Rucker used three buckets to explain the church's finances. A five gallon bucket was used to represent money under the control of the Board of Trustees, most of which is invested and designated for specific property issues. A 1½ gallon bucket was used to

represent designated gifts, memorials and contributions to ongoing ministries of the church. A one quart bucket was used to represent the operating budget. In the course of the year it has much more money pass through it than does the middle bucket, but the money doesn't stay very long – it's like bailing out a boat – you fill it up and pour it out over and over again.

Since these last two pails of money are in the same bank account, when the operating budget goes in the red it is actually "borrowing" money from the designated accounts, which should never happen. "This is the problem we were trying to solve," stated the pastor. "Wouldn't you like to be a part of a miracle?" he asked to congregation. "YES!" they responded.

As a part of the collection process, each of the four Sundays, the children were given small metal buckets and they went through the congregation collecting their "noisy offering." Then the children would bring their buckets forward and pour them into a large plastic water jug. The noisy offering totaled \$586.39 in coins and \$188 in cash and checks or almost \$775. Of even bigger value than the

dollars raised was the excitement of the children in being included in the emphasis.

The result was amazing. Regular giving for the end of September and for all of October was up more than expected. While gifts marked for "Miracle Sunday" totaled \$21,137.72 the increase in regular October giving made the total income for the month about double the normal offering. The result is that the operating budget is in the black again, which was the primary goal.

For more information on "Miracle Sunday" and the ministries of First UMC, Terrell, call 972-563-6274 or log on to www.fumcterrell.org.



Senior pastor Rev. David Rucker, left, and Launny Thies of the Methodist Men receive a "noisy" offering as children share in the miracle.

Warren UMC to celebrate 92 years

Rev. Zan W. Holmes, Jr. will be guest preacher for the Warren UMC, Dallas, 92nd anniversary celebration on



Dr. Holmes

Nov. 23. Dr. Holmes will preach for the 10:15 a.m. worship service at this historic church located at 2801 Peabody St., near the corner of Malcom X and Martin Luther King Boulevards.

Warren's storied history includes being a planning site and rally center for Freedom Riders as they planned protests in the city. It was also a meeting site for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference as it made preparations for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s trip to Dallas.

Members have always maintained a strong interest in the civil rights movement and in political and social activism, as well as in education. At one point the church served as an extension campus for then Bishop College. The church also started programs, such as its food pantry, to help the South Dallas community. The weekly feeding program has continued through the years.

Rev. Holmes, who was the first African American district superintendent for the NTC, maintained his office at Warren prior to desegregation.

In 2001 Warren's building was destroyed in a fire. For

the next four years the congregation shared facilities with Oak Cliff UMC. The present church, a striking modern urban design, opened at the original site in 2005.

The present senior pastor, Rev. Jackie Wickware, is the congregation's first woman pastor. The congregation continues to seek ways to fulfill God's call for the church to be transformative in the lives of people within the community and the world.

Guests are invited to join the Warren congregation for this special anniversary celebration. For more information, call Warren UMC at 214-928-7373.

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and help one another through a difficult economic time in our world. It does not help in finding blame or accusing one another as to what caused the downturn. It is here with us; thus, let us continue to pray for our leaders and for a solution

to the crisis.

In the meantime, remember that our primary function as followers of Jesus Christ is to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. Some things do not change over time, no matter the economic season.

Birtheright UMC sweet potatoes benefit Meal-a-Day

Members of Birtheright UMC, Hopkins County, recently gathered (gleaned) two pickup loads of sweet potatoes at a farm in Alba. They cleaned the yams and donated them to the Meal-a-Day program in Sulphur Springs. Couples pictured from left, front to back, are Meal-a-Day volunteer Patsy Shaw and husband, Don; Joyce Goldsmith and husband, Jimmy, and Peggy Gibby and husband, Jerry. Gleaning of the already harvested yam fields in the Alba area continues until a heavy frost damages the potatoes. For more information about Birtheright UMC and its ministries, call 903-885-0195.



Mentors sought for at-risk youth

Bethany Graham, a Perkins School of Theology intern serving with the Central Dallas Ministries Transition Resource Action Center (TRAC), is working to help sign up mentors for at-risk youth ages 14-24 who emancipate from foster care or juvenile services with no system of support.

At any one time, there are an estimated 1,000 youth in the North Texas area in need of transitional living services, such as housing, vocational training and health services. TRAC provides such a safety net, but more is needed. Volunteer mentors can make all the difference in the success or failure of the program.

Mentors work with young people in TRAC, offering friendship and support. Mentors must be 21 or older and agree to a background check and training.

At this time there is a great need for mentors in the Sherman and Decatur areas, as well as in the southern parts of the Metroplex, including DeSoto,

Lancaster, South Fort Worth, Duncanville, Red Oak, Cedar Hill, Arlington, Grand Prairie and Mansfield.

For more information, please call Community Outreach Manager Maury Meeks, 214-370-9300, ext. 27, or e-mail: maury@traconline.org.

Make bowls for NT Food Banks

Senior adults are invited to The Point Center for Arts and Education at C.C. Young to make pottery with the help of high school student volunteers on Nov. 16 and Dec. 14 as a fundraising activity for the North Texas Food Bank. Youth volunteers will join senior partners from 2:00-4:00 p.m. to create bowls, one to keep and the other to donate to raise money for the food bank. For information, contact Felicia Burns at 214-841-2631 or e-mail: fburns@ccyoung.org.



Nicole Key helps clean tables before the students serve lunch to Gustav evacuees.

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According to Key, many Deaf teens never master basic academic skills. Often they graduate from high school with only a third or fourth grade reading level, limiting their ability to interact with an increasingly technologically literate workplace and community.

As the mother of a Deaf teenage daughter, Key has been highly motivated to make sure that this bright, inquisitive young woman receives a quality education. She and her husband, Rin, made it their mission to take courses that would qualify them to teach their daughter. As her skills grew, Key began developing the vision of a school that would benefit other young persons as well.

She shared her dream with Dr. Hudspeth and the idea of the LLAD began to blossom. Just as it began to look as if the school could launch in 2007, Dr. Hudspeth became seriously ill, delaying the process.

During Dr. Hudspeth's convalescence, a set of fortunate circumstances began to develop. In December of 2006,

Dr. Hudspeth had sent a letter to the United Methodist Foundation in Houston, outlining plans for the school and requesting to be considered for a grant.

He heard nothing for months, and it was during that period that he became ill. As he was recovering at home, Dr. Hudspeth received a call with good news from Rev. Stan Copeland, Lovers Lane senior pastor. Dr. Copeland had heard from the Foundation.

Paul Andrew Walkup, a multi-talented individual who did not let being Deaf prevent him from living a rich, fulfilling life, had died at the age of 97, leaving a generous bequest. The call from the Foundation came on Aug. 30, 2007. One year later the school was a reality.

The pioneering students are a diverse group, coming from different backgrounds and family circumstances. It was obvious from the beginning that these young people were special, with the knowledge that they have gifts to share with the world.

Shortly after school began, a call went out for volunteers to help serve meals to evacuees fleeing Hurricane Gustav. Key called to inquire if her students would be eligible to volunteer. The answer was a resounding, "yes," and on the morning of Sept. 3, the class boarded a Lovers Lane bus to drive to the Irving Community Center to serve lunch. The students watched carefully as their teachers interpreted the serving instructions. The young people serving and the evacuees served seemed to connect in a special way, transforming the simple meal into a blessed experience.

A few days later, students and staff had another oppor-

tunity to share their quickly developing commitments to the school and one another at a Sept. 8 open house for community leaders, media, students and prospective students. The event included a ribbon cutting for the school's classroom on the basement level of the Lovers Lane sanctuary.

Another inspiring event was the "Silent Night" fundraising dinner on Sept. 20, featuring an address by Katherine Murch, Miss Deaf Texas, and special guest Dr. Edwin Flores, Dallas Independent School Board Trustee.

With the first semester nearing its end, Key reports that morale is high and progress exceeds expectations, noting: "Our students are working harder than ever before. They are making great progress. One of the mothers reported that her child is so happy to be coming to LLAD that the student is already up and dressed in the mornings before Mom goes in to wake the student up. And the student happily does homework without reminders! Our teachers are doing an awesome job with each student's needs."

Core values

The LLAD continues to build toward a future of serving more students as it embraces the following core values:

- LLAD believes the mind and body are gifts from God and comprise the temple of God. LLAD will emphasize good health – spiritual, mental and physical.
- LLAD will teach biblical literacy and incorporate devotionals in the curriculum in order to promote a vibrant faith in God through Christ.
- LLAD believes a quality



Peggy Key and Dr. Tom Hudspeth, Lovers Lane minister for Deaf and Alpha Ministries and LLAD chaplain, address the Sept. 8 open house gathering.

instructional package that fits Deaf students' needs requires working cooperatively with the student, the family and the school, so all can advocate effectively for the student.

- LLAD believes a partnership between the student, family, school and community will enhance the student's self esteem, growth and development.

- LLAD staff will reflect an intense desire that Deaf students be successful and productive members of society.

- LLAD is committed to eradicating illiteracy to help students set goals for life, work and the pursuit of happiness.

- LLAD will promote citizenship, self-discipline and respect for self and for others.

- LLAD believes in developing the whole student.

- LLAD recognizes that each student has unique interests, needs and abilities.

The school is also committed to the highest ethical standards and follows the Safe Sanctuaries policy recommended for all United Methodist churches and

agencies.

Parents who are interested in discussing enrolling a student in LLAD are invited to contact the school for more information. Those calling should have the following information available: the student's age, grade level at current school, ARD/IEP report, ASL capability, samples of current work, and a health report. Details are available on the website: www.deafacademy.com.

To contact Executive Director Key, call 214-890-0881 or e-mail: peggy.key@deafacademy.com.

To contact Dr. Hudspeth, call 214-706-9522 (voice) office or 214-265-0496 (video phone), or e-mail: thudspeth@llumc.org.

As a ministry of Lovers Lane UMC, LLAD is chartered as a nonprofit organization under IRS tax code section 501(3)(c). Contributions for the school and student scholarships are welcomed with gratitude. For information on how contribute, contact Laurie Watts, Lovers Lane Finance Director, at lwatts@llumc.org.



From left, LLAD students Sandy Romero and Brenda Ramirez and teacher Peggy Key prepare to serve lunch to Hurricane Gustav evacuees, as Mary Kay Hudspeth, right foreground, signs instructions in American Sign Language.

Around the Conference

Lovers Lane UMC, Dallas, announces its "12th Annual Marketplace," Nov 21-22 from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. and Nov. 23 from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Admission is \$3 for the benefit. For more information, please call 214-691-4721.

Denton Wesley Foundation is hosting a lunch and concert of student choirs, "Seraphim" and "Illuminare," and praise band "Chi Rho," Nov. 22 at 12:30 p.m. at 1501 Maple on the UNT campus.

Sorrow

Art Rice, step-father of Rev. Larry Rathburn, Stony UMC, died Oct 25. Memorial services were held Oct. 27 in Austin.

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Don't go to church ... *Faith into Action*



This sign in front of Fellowship UMC on Trophy Club Drive was designed to draw attention. It did.



No, Jim Masters didn't cut all those limbs by himself, but he was part of a clean-up crew from Fellowship UMC working outdoors and indoors at the Roanoke Senior Center.

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“Faith in Action” (FIA) while attending the National Pastors Convention in San Diego in February. He also knew that Argyle UMC, near Trophy Club, had conducted the program last fall with success.

“Our primary goal for conducting FIA,” he says, “was two-fold: 1. Meet the needs of the community and 2. Motivate our congregation to a higher level of servant ministry.”

“Faith in Action” is sponsored by World Vision, a Christian humanitarian organization; Outreach, Inc., a church communication resources provider, and Zondervan, a world leader in Christian communications. Campaign materials provided by the sponsors call for 28 daily devotionals, four weeks of small groups during September, four

sermons/services during September and one canceled worship service replaced by a day of community service – all wrapped up with an evening celebration.

Trophy Club’s lay leader and Church Council chairperson, Tommy Raper, recalls the church’s preparation.

“The pastor brought the idea to the Church Council last spring,” Raper said. “We looked at a video promoting the program and got pretty well behind it right away. We thought this also fit in with the radical risk-taking mission and service that Bishop Robert Schnase recommends in his book on the five practices of fruitful congregations.”

“A few in the congregation were shocked by the idea of not having services on one Sunday,” Raper said. “But we had presentations in Sunday School

and Disciple Bible classes and, as FIA suggested, a sermon series in September. This all helped prepare us in mind and heart about this activity.”

Rev. Humbert said that the Fellowship UMC’s worship during September focused on outreach and mission, with simple themes like:

Detour - allowing ourselves to follow God’s divine detours when we encounter the needs of others during the normal journey of life (like the Good Samaritan);

Lens - seeing others through the lens of Christ’s compassion when we encounter the sufferings of the world (like the healing of Blind Bartimaeus or the blind man from Bethsaida);

Drop - believing that our tiny drop of a contribution to the needs of others can add up to a big ripple when combined with other drops of help (like

the mustard seed).

“All of our weekly small groups in the church have likewise been following a study guide that generates discussion around these same biblical themes,” said Rev. Humbert. “There also have been daily devotional guides that allow other people to take a few minutes each day to focus on how God can use them in mission and ministry in the world.”

Up to a point, workers got to choose which service project they worked on. Chores ranged from skilled use of chain saws to mopping floors and laying down masking tape for painters. Crews, depending on the size, car-pooled or took advantage

of vans and SUVs to hit the road. Custom white T-shirts featured the “Don’t Go to Church” theme on large orange blocks, followed by the “BE the church” reminder.

Crew members came back with new discoveries about what it means to “be the church” in the larger community of which Fellowship UMC is a part.

Donna Sizer and husband, Daniel, were part of the Highway 114 cleanup crew, glad to take a brief interview break and sip some bottled water. Facing the visiting journalist, she said, “Promise me this: Next time you eat at McDonald’s or Whataburger you won’t throw your cup out the window.”



You think these ladies look happy? Think how Trophy Club firefighters and police felt after receiving these cookies baked during Faith in Action Day at Fellowship UMC. From left are Lisa Rodgers, Kayle Langford, Judy Petrazio, Debi Jones and Lucy Singleton.

Hospitality ‘cross training’ ... *From Burkburnett to Bogata*

BY RICHARD B. HEARNE
NTC Board of Laity, Chair

In my last article, I talked about the Clergy Retreat and what I learned about our



Hearne

clergy and promised to discuss the presentations made by NTC New Church Development Officer Rev. Jim Ozier, former senior pastor at Trietsch Memorial UMC, Flower Mound; Fiona Macleod Butts of Southwest Airlines (SWA), and Jorge Luna of Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts.

All the speakers were asked to discuss Radical Hospitality, which is lifted up in Bishop Robert Schnase’s, book *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*. All three spoke of how their organizations employ

methods to create a culture of hospitality for their members/guest/employees, offering clergy valuable “cross training” from the business world.

Jim spoke of practical ways to train a congregation and staff in “The Power of Introduction.” It is a reality that we all do not always know the name of people to whom we are speaking and it becomes very embarrassing when we try to introduce that person to someone else.

Jim also mentioned the importance of bringing people into your conversation as they walk by. As part of the worship service on a regular basis, Jim would call three or four people up from the congregation, totally unrehearsed, and model how to do this. The steps in the process are available from the NTC Office of Communications, e-mail: labarr@ntcumc.org.

Almost all of us have had the opportunity to fly on Southwest Airlines and notice the enjoyment that the employees have

while providing excellent service. This is a result of a culture where the employees are given the freedom to make the customer happy. Team mentality means all are expected to help when needed – for example, no one is above helping clean the airplane. Everybody counts and everybody cares.

Fiona asked several questions in relationship to the church based on her experience at Southwest Airlines.

First, how does it feel to be in your church for a member or a guest? Is everyone welcomed, greeted with a smile and made to feel at home. Do only the clergy and staff greet people, or do the members seek out guests (as Dr. Ozier calls them) to welcome? What are the “take aways” that people have when they walk out of your church?

Second, how do people interact with each other in your church? Does everyone have an assigned role that he/she is expected to fulfill? Are there staff jobs and congregation jobs? Are

the staff and congregation doing all that is possible to create an enjoyable experience for everyone?

Third, what does the culture in your church look like? Is it formal and staid or a warm and welcoming atmosphere? Finally, Fiona asked us, who is the employee and who is the customer of the church?



Fiona Macleod Butts shares insights into the SWA culture.

Jorge reviewed the fantastic growth of Four Seasons based on a philosophy of (1) clarity of vision, identity, (2) translating vision into methodology, (3) give people the tools and knowledge they need to be successful and (4) holding people accountable in a positive way.

The management believes that their people are their greatest asset and key to their success. Like Southwest Airlines, Four Seasons employees believe they are the most successful when they work together cooperatively, respecting each other’s contribution and importance. Their Golden Rule is: “Seek to deal with others as we would have them deal with us.”

While the church is not a business, there are some basic business principles that we can incorporate into our systems that will help us grow. In the coming months, we hope to be able to repeat these presentations so that the laity can learn more about creating Radical Hospitality.