



Our Missions at Metropolitan

The religion page in last Saturday's Washington Post had two interesting articles that pertained to churches taking Volunteer in Mission trips. The first raised the very valid issues of whether it makes sense to send a planeload of volunteers to a foreign country to paint or repair buildings, when local workers could be hired cheaper to do the work with more benefit to the local economy. The second article was about Ginghamburg United Methodist Church (which worships 4,400 a Sunday!) and their incredibly active Volunteers in Mission program, which sends VIM teams around the U.S. and the world. Already this year, they have sent five teams to help with rebuilding in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina, and they have another six scheduled before the end of the year.



Members of the ASP Team

The first article was helpful in reminding us how important it is to have trips that are well-planned and executed with integrity. VIM trips are not meant to be "feel good vacations." The second newspaper article was an important reminder that there are a variety of important reasons to engage in VIM trips that transcend the specific work being done.

- VIM trips transform the people and churches who engage in them. We learn about ourselves, we learn about the dramatic poverty in which people live around the world, and we learn about how God is moving in those places. We return changed, and our churches become changed.

- VIM trips show people in other parts of the country and the world that we care for them and stand in solidarity with their struggles. "Compassion" literally means to "suffer with," and by placing ourselves among people who are suffering, we convey our compassion in a way that money alone never can. One of the oft-repeated truisms of the VIM program is that "it's not the project, it's the people."

- VIM trips can build long-term relationships that transform communities on both ends of the partnership. The world becomes smaller. We return with a more acute sense of how our actions and political policies really impact those around our country and around the world.



Members of the VIM Nicaragua Team

We are very blessed at MMUMC to have the active VIM program that we have and I am profoundly grateful to the wonderful leaders and participants that shaped the VIM trips to Nicaragua and Mississippi, the ASP trip, and the Heifer trip this year. And I encourage all of you to think about joining one of the trips next year.



Members of the VIM Mississippi Team

Charlie

ASP (Appalachian Service Project)

On June 14, Reverend Faith Lewis led a mission team of ten youth and four adults for a week of home repair ministry in Saylorsville, Kentucky. The team provided vital housing services to low-income families through a group called The Appalachian Service Project, originally founded as a program of the United Methodist Church's General Board of Discipleship. Student team members included Nick Adams, Simon Courtney, Emily House, Ian Lesaar, Katie Mayo, Mariah McGee, Hailey Rector, Justin Settlege, Sarah Whitehead, and Nick Wood. They were joined by their adult leaders Ned Bachman, Mike House, and Kevin Settlege. Below are some reflections from the Team:



Kevin Settlege: "ASP Crew Bolsters Foundation for Young Couple"

In June, two work crews from Metropolitan went into the mountains of Kentucky to repair homes. My crew faced the challenge of rebuilding half of a mobile home that had been ripped apart two years ago by a fallen tree.

This project was not typical for ASP. In fact, it was quite an undertaking and would require all 7 weeks of ASP crews to finish. Our job, as the second-week crew, was to finish laying the floor and start putting up walls.

For me, ASP has always been about meeting the people where they are, accepting them and putting aside all judgments. Our crew of five youth and two adults immediately became hyper-focused on the daunting reconstruction task, and paid less attention to the people—a young man and woman just recently married. Since we did not spend time in the home, we experienced those we were helping more from a distance.

I am big into motivation, so I insisted that our crew grapple with the question: Why are we doing this? We spent time talking about why we were rebuilding a trailer for such young, capable adults. After gathering more data, we learned that the man had a young infant son from a previous marriage. We concluded that in order for his new marriage to succeed, he would need space to raise his son along with other children he may have in the future. Our motivation was to help this young couple set a foundation for raising a family.

By the end of the week, we had successfully rebuilt the floor and prepared two walls to be raised by the crew that would follow us. We had done our part over five 8-hour days of back-breaking hauling, sawing and hammering to give a new kitchen and dining area to this young husband and wife, who had been living in only a bedroom and a bathroom.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to five youth who stuck together and pushed each other to achieve our goals. I also want to thank them for trusting Mike House and me, as we sometimes fumbled and groped our way. Ian Lesaar, a student from Wilson High School, deserves high praise for stepping up, leading when asked, and modeling for our crew the art of collaboration and mutual respect. Crewmembers Hailey Rector and Emily House accepted every challenge with enthusiasm, while Nick Adams learned the thrills of wielding power tools. Mariah McGee earned her stripes as the crew's ambassador to all the puppies, cats, chickens and other animals that lived with the family.

A special thanks to Mike for his driving expertise, calm questioning skills and determination to finish the wall frames before the week ended.



The other crew from Metropolitan, led by Faith Lewis and Ned Bachman, poured their hearts and souls into replacing a trailer's underpinning, as well as interior bathroom and floor repairs. This crew included Sarah Whitehead, Katie Mayo, Simon Courtney, Justin Settlege and Nick Wood.



"As a group, we were able to bond, learn about each other and have fun. It was a great experience for kids who had never met anybody in the youth group. We learned how we can impact someone's life just by working for a week with them. We also learned how we can build relationships with others who live in a different culture by reaching out and helping them." Justin Settlege



"It was...such a big experience and a really big opportunity (not only for meeting new people) but the different types of work we did. What struck me was seeing just how a week of work can make a lot of difference in people's lives. I know the people at our house were really grateful and happy that we came...they were really moved. It was awesome and everyone should go on ASP." Hailey Rector

VIM Nicaragua 2008

In June, Metropolitan Memorial sent a VIM team of 12 to Masaya, Nicaragua, where they worked in partnership with United Methodist missionaries Nan McCurdy and Miguel Mariena. There, the team worked to help renovate a school building and supported several community organizations and Christian communities.

The Nicaragua team included Anne Brown, Bob and Suzanne Browning, Sara Jo Emmerich, Geoff Jacobi, Ray Keene, Ann Michel, Charlie Parker, Clark and Austin Rector, Dick Schleicher, and Pam Settlage. Below are some reflections of their mission trip.



Ann Michel: “How could we help?”

Part of our mission assignment was to partner with The Association of Consumers of Masaya (ACODEMA.) ACODEMA is a grassroots organization that helps poor citizens who are being victimized by predatory lending practices and unjust pricing practices in the distribution of water and electricity. When I learned of this assignment, I wondered: “How could we help?” Not many of us spoke Spanish. And none of us knew much about these complicated situations. Needless to say, we learned a lot. We witnessed groups of citizens coming together to give testimony to what it means to have to go for days without water. Many were being grossly overcharged for electricity; one woman, a mother with five children, was on the verge of losing her home. We were inspired by the dedication of ACODEMA’s leaders, who worked incredibly hard to help citizens file complaints and voice their concerns. I was reminded again and again of Jesus’ parable of the persistent widow who wore down the unjust judge. (Luke 18) We even got to attend a large rally held with the mayor of the city. Part of the money we raised for our mission will go to support this ongoing work. But more than just monetary support, I think our presence made a great deal of difference. One of the most moving experiences of the trip for me was witnessing Dick Schleicher comfort the woman who feared losing her home and seeing Suzanne Browning simply sit in solidarity, holding hands with another of the women. I believe our presence and concern made a tremendous difference in building their resolve.

Dick Schleicher:

“Providing a Great Service”

One of the highlights of the trip for me was working with and learning about the mission and activities of ACODEMA. I was particularly impressed by the dedication and passion exhibited by Roger Alberto Lacayo, a key staffer at ACODEMA, a non-governmental, non-profit organization run by and for the people. A tireless advocate for his people, he participated in a press conference in Managua, chaired a meeting of some 40 local barrio representatives, charismatically spoke at a public meeting with municipal and departmental officials, as well as hosted his daily radio program in Masaya during our stay. Some common themes heard by our team from the clients and barrio representatives were: excessive charges for electricity, interruption of water supply to some barrios (more than 6 days in one case), and problems with micro financing, which can be abusive if not adequately monitored. The expertise developed by ACODEMA over the past nine years is providing a great service to literally thousands of Nicaraguan citizens by: advocacy, teaching them of their rights, and helping them navigate the often complex paths to obtain justice. It is hoped that interchanges of this kind will help to provide an educational basis for closer cooperation and mutually beneficial relations between our two countries.



Dick being interviewed on Nicaraguan radio

Bob and Suzanne Browning:

“We Received More Than We Gave”

The VIM Trip to Nicaragua was an outstanding experience for us. We are very grateful to Metropolitan Memorial UMC for allowing us to join their VIM Team. The people we met in Nicaragua welcomed us, taught us, shared with us and worked with us. This trip was unique to us because of Nan McCurdy’s emphasis on educating the VIM Volunteers about the Nicaraguans, their history (including the US involvement), their culture, their desire for peace, their theology of liberation, and their basic needs today. Their hope is that the mission trip will not end with our week of work and sharing but that we will bring back what we have seen and learned and use that knowledge to make changes in our own lives, in our churches, in our communities and in our country that will in turn help them and other developing countries stand on their own feet. It was a very humbling time for us. As always we received more than we gave. Thanks again for this opportunity to serve God and his people in Nicaragua.

Geoff Jacobi: “Awakening to Nicaragua”

Our first day in Managua, Austin (AKA “Chele”) decided to do the canopy (“zip”) line above the water. He convinced his spiritual advisor and chess mentor, Carlos Parker (name changed to protect the pastor), to lead the way. Carlos went first, and along the way, renewed his commitment to God. Austin showed no fear, daring the water to interrupt his superman flight. This experience had us considering new fund-raising opportunities to be held in our very own high and lengthy sanctuary.

On our last day our host Nan took us to an amazing volcanic lake, Lake Arroyo. For me, the lake and our swim in it symbolized our awakening to Nicaragua. After some serious earthly upheaval, there remains this beautiful, refreshing, and almost secret, lake. Nicaragua itself has been through serious upheaval and violence (most of it thanks to the US government), but we found the Nicaraguan people beautiful, warm and optimistic. To have been through so much, I was amazed that they seem to be a nation of “glass half full” people.

Sara Emmerich: “Meeting Their Family”

During one of our afternoons Nan took us to see some artisans in Masaya. We drove down alleyways in different neighborhoods, stopping at homes where families made everything from wooden bowls to saddles to hand sewn shirts. At the wood maker’s house/shop, we walked through the front room where various family members were gathered, walked through the courtyard where their products as well as a parrot and goat were kept, and saw the workshop in the back of the house where everyone was working. The poverty the families lived in stood in stark contrast to the beauty of the things they created, and when we bought items from the workers themselves we had the experience of meeting their family, seeing how the product was made, and exchanging money with the artisan him or herself. The experience was much more personal and intimate than our usual trip to the mall or Penney’s, where we buy products off the shelf without knowing where they come from, how they were made, or who made them.

VIM Nicaragua 2008 (cont.)

Ray Keene: "The Kingdom of God"

One day I was walking down the street. My companion was a 24-year-old single mom who had been widowed at age 19 with three children. She lives on \$50 a month which she earns by babysitting. An elderly man in rags approached us to beg for some coins. He didn't come to the wealthy American but to the poor Nicaraguan woman. She didn't turn away from him or ignore him as the wealthy often do. Instead she put her hand on his shoulder, looked him in the eyes, and with her face filled with genuine compassion explained that she had no coins to give him. I have no doubt that she would have given anything she had. "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." —Luke 6:20

Anne Brown: "Nothing is Easy"

We are living and working in Masaya. There are two homeless boys sleeping outside the front door of our hotel every night. A member of our team wants to leave money in their hands as they sleep but we worry it will blow away.

We eat lunch at a small local restaurant and then walk back to our hotel to shower. The water pressure is low and the cold water trickles from the pipe but we are thrilled to wash away all the dirt, sweat, and paint of our workday. One day, upon our return to the hotel, we learn there isn't any water pressure and the 12 of us will need to share three large buckets of water. What a gift! Obtaining shelter, water, and food is a daily struggle for many Masayans. Nothing is easy.

Clark Rector: "A Deeper Level of Understanding"

While the ability of Dick to speak Spanish and the services of Gema (our translator) were invaluable, I was struck by the ease of our communication with the people of Nicaragua. The most obvious example was Austin's ability to communicate with the children through the universal language of play. He and Christian (our driver) spent a good deal of time laughing and joking with each other, even though they did not speak the same language. This extended to all members of the team, who through signs and gestures were able to make our thoughts known to the local population.

But there seemed to me to be a deeper level of understanding, as well. It was an unspoken acknowledgement between the team members and the men and women we met that despite the vast differences in our life circumstances we were very much the same. It was a recognition that our hope is not in the government, or work, or social service agencies, but in God's grace. The people of Nicaragua reminded me that what I want is not necessarily what I need, and what I need is not always what I want.



Pam Settlege:

"The Power of God's Grace"
I was prepared to surrender for an entire week, to see what the Holy Spirit would have me do. I had no idea that God had no intention for me to "do" anything; He only wanted me to be. To see, to experience; to understand. To witness the utter

joy and warmth of the people who make up the second poorest nation in the western hemisphere. To participate in a fledgling church service in a humble concrete block room - a tiny

sanctuary full of laughing children and grateful Christians praising God with songs from *the "Hymnario Metodista"* – the United Methodist Hymnal en Español. I did not anticipate the depth of my emotions as I listened to the despairing stories of Nicaragua's poorest citizens - real mothers, fathers, sisters and brothers—as they shared their stories of injustice and suffering.

I did not realize how easily the power of God's Grace would move among a team of 12 would-be disciples who shared one vision, one van, two sinks, 3 zip lines, 7 evening devotions, 18 paint brushes, 24 meals, 78 diet Cokes (Coca Lite!), 2,437 pictures, and countless tears and laughs for an entire week. I was not prepared for the deep love and connections that we shared with each other. I was completely unprepared to board the plane as strangers, and to return as family.

Charlie Parker: "A Powerful Witness"

It was a great joy to return to Nicaragua after 17 years and to see a great deal of healing in that very broken country. Other than the wonderful smiles of the children, the image that I carry away with me is from the days painting the offices of the wonderful ACODEMA organization (a consumer rights NGO, helping low-income residents of Masaya advocate for themselves against water, electric, and banking companies). We had



piled all of their office files and furniture outside, while we cleaned and painted, and rather than stop working, they just perched themselves outside on a couple of rickety chairs and continued to listen to the long line of consumers that came to them for help. Their passion, commitment, and care for those that came for help was a powerful witness to me. It was a gift to be a part of their work for a few days.

Austin Rector: "Growing in Faith"

My trip down to Nicaragua was fun and helped me to grow in my faith. One of the best things that happened to me during this trip is that I was swarmed every day of work by multitudes of little kids who had as much (and in some cases, more) energy than I did. This was a very exciting thing because I know those kids will remember me for a long time (maybe not as Austin, but as Chele, their nickname for me which we were told means "whitey" in English). This was definitely a wonderful trip and I would recommend it to everyone.



UMW Recognition Luncheon

Each year the United Methodist Women of Metropolitan hold a Recognition Luncheon honoring women who have made a significant contribution to the church, the nation, and the world. The Recognition Luncheon will be held on Sunday, December 7 at 12:30 p.m. We are seeking nominations of outstanding women to honor this year. Please submit nominations by contacting Robin Emery at 202.625.9273 or by email, emerymjon@aol.com by September 30. In addition to recognizing these special women, we will also celebrate the babies who have been born this year and remember with gratitude those who died this year.

VIM Mississippi

Our VIM Mississippi Team returned to Pass Christian, Mississippi, for its third consecutive year to work in the area, to honor its commitment to rebuilding along the Gulf Coast. Four team members have participated in all these trips. The group worked with a local non-profit called the Gray Hut which is building new houses for people who lost their homes to Katrina. The team includes four persons from Good Shepherd UMC in Silver Spring, including their pastor, Joye Jones who served at Metropolitan Memorial in 1995 and 1996. Team members include: James Conley, Mia Bloomfield, Lee Crockett, Kevin Fain, Joye Jones, Earle Knapp, Eliza Hamner-Koenig, Jeremy Koenig, Leilani McConnell, Pat McConnell, and Lindsey Scherer. Below are some excerpts from their blog. To read more about their trip view their blog at <http://vimms08.blogspot.com>.



“On Sunday, we worshiped at St. Paul United Methodist Church and those of us who worked on it two years ago got to see how great it looked. Everyone was pleased at how shiny and new everything looked.”

“This was my first trip EVER to that wonderful city (Mia)...I loved being with people that I came here to help.” Mia Bloomfield and Lindsey Scherer.



“For those of us who are returning to the area after previous VIM trips, it has been meaningful to see some of the signs of a more normal life returning to Pass Christian. There are more shops back in business, a nice new park close to the water, and even a few families on the beach. But there is still so much to be done. We all thought about this need as we drove down the highway this morning – passing empty lots one after the other – places that undoubtedly held special memories for so many individuals. It is so much starker to see many of these places that only have a concrete slab foundation remaining – as if there was nothing worthwhile to remain – everything simply washed away. We think about how painful that must feel for those who are living through such loss, particularly now that so much of the country has “moved on” and given the bureaucratic difficulties some have faced in obtaining much needed relief... It just feels right to help.”

Our Community

Catch the Creative Spirit: UMW Craft Day July 19

Looking for a cool activity on a hot summer day? Come join Metropolitan's UMW Saturday, July 19 from 9 a.m. – 1 p.m. to make crafts for the fall bazaar. There will be a variety of projects to work on in the Great Hall. Everyone is welcome – from the novice to the experienced. Drop by for an hour or stay the whole morning. Talented (and patient) crafters in our congregation will lead several activities:

- Sew classic Raggedy Ann dolls
- Bead earrings, bracelets and necklaces
- Make beautiful cards and bookmarks
- Create picture frames and Christmas ornaments, and much more!

There will be plenty of coffee and light snacks available to fuel your creativity. Join in the fun and fellowship all for a good cause!

Requests for Jewelry

UMW Circle 5 once again requests jewelry donations for sale at the November Bazaar. If you have jewelry to donate, you may leave it at the front desk in the Church Office, or, on Sunday, in the Church Library. Remember, all proceeds go to women's and children's charities locally and globally.

The Messenger is Going Electronic!

In our mission to be more green, *The Messenger* will be released in electronic form and available in hardcopy at the Church. *The Messenger* will only be mailed by the post office to those who request it. This will save not only paper, but also frees up funds that can be used in other ministry areas. We are also moving to a monthly newsletter. In doing this, we hope to create a more discussion oriented newsletter that tells stories of our members, our church, and our community. With this in mind, our weekly *Metro Update* will continue to focus on calendar events. We invite you to send in announcements, articles and photos to be included in any of *The Messenger* issues and our *Metro Update* to Jeff Clouser at jclouser@mmumc-dc.org. The deadline for each is noon on the Tuesday before the released issue. Please submit your requests for post office mailing to Jeff Clouser in the church office at 202.363.4900, ext. 22. Also, please make sure we have your e-mail address so we can send you our newsletter and updates! Our next *Messenger* issues will be on August 8, 2008 and September 5, 2008

Guest Speaker, Dr. David Wilkinson

August 5 at 6 p.m.



Dr. David Wilkinson, widely acclaimed author, scientist and educator, will be a guest speaker at Metropolitan Memorial, courtesy of the Science & Religion class. Wilkinson is currently Principal of St. John's College, Durham University (U.K.) and lecturer in the Department of Theology and Religion. His background includes research in theoretical astrophysics; his PhD was in the study of star formation, the chemical evolution of galaxies and terrestrial mass extinctions such as the event which wiped out the dinosaurs. He is a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society and his current work involves the relationship of Christian Theology to contemporary culture, from science to pop culture. He has had a long interest in the dialogue of science and religion, especially as it impacts the physical sciences. His most recent book is “Christian Eschatology and the Physical Universe” and other books include, “God, Time and Stephen Hawking” and “Alone in the Universe: The X-Files, Aliens and God.” Join us for this rare opportunity! For more information contact, Maynard Moore, maynardmoore@onebox.com.

Church Council Minutes June 23, 2008

(Minutes Pending Approval)

The meeting was called to order by Mike Emery and the opening prayer was offered by Charlie Parker. Jimmy Sherrod was welcomed by Church Council members as the new Minister of Youth and New Worship. Jeff Clouser was introduced to the Church Council in his new role as Director of Communications and Outreach. The minutes from the May meeting were approved without any changes.

Update on Visioning Process: Charlie Parker reported that the Visioning Committee had met following the last Church Council meeting, and Joyce Shields would be leading a staff retreat to flesh out the goals. Ann Michel noted that the Critical Success Factors included revisions that had been suggested from the small group meetings at the May Council meeting. Lloyd Leonard raised a question about whether the plan focused sufficiently on service outreach and challenging injustice. Ann responded that the visioning process focused on perceived areas of deficiency and that areas of strength were not necessarily included in the Critical Success Factors. This issue will be brought to the staff retreat that will be reviewing and making recommendations for the future. Ann invited anyone interested in advocacy to attend the next meeting of the Advocacy Team on Sunday, June 29, at 12:30.

Update on Reconciling Process: Ann Michel reported on the June 1 congregational vote on reconciling that was approved by 86 percent, and she noted that there was a minority who did not support it, and we want to remain sensitive to those differences. We have seen people drawn to the church following the decision to become a Reconciling Congregation. Ann thanked members of the Advocacy Team, particularly Anne Brown, for their efforts during this process. Future efforts will focus on three areas: proclamation, advocacy, and welcome. Ann thanked the Church Council for their support during the process, and noted the strong support that we have received from other churches, such as Dumbarton UMC which organized a time of prayer while our church voted. Charlie noted that a number of churches have been watching our process as it unfolded. Mike thanked Ann for all the work that she and her Team brought to the process with their extraordinary, well-attended programs over the last several months.

VIM trip to Nicaragua: Ann Michel, Charlie Parker, and Pam Settlage all reported on their very successful mission trip, which provided a sense of missional connection, great team work, and educational opportunities to learn about the country and its people. There were 12 individuals who participated in this. VIM Nicaragua, VIM Mississippi, and the Appalachian Service Project involved 39 people who participated in these three mission projects this year.

Transition of prior Senior Minister: Mike Emery and Charlie Parker led a follow-up discussion from the discussion at the May Church Council meeting regarding the process and concerns related to the transition of the prior senior minister. Mike noted that there is a continuing need for healing by individuals on both sides of the issue and that resources have been identified both within and outside the church to help those seeking healing. Mike also noted that the learning from our collective review of the process has led to a series of actions to make our processes more transparent, to strengthen communications, to improve our practices, and to encourage more church members to participate on church committees and work areas. (As noted in the Messenger of June 6, 2008, copies of a memo from Dr. Parker to the Church Council on "lessons from the pastoral transition" as well as the report from the consultant, Rev. Peter Steinke, are available in the church office). Mike and Charlie recommended that it is time to

bring the formal process of review to a close while continuing support for those needing healing. A draft statement from Mike and Charlie had been circulated to Church Council members in advance of the meeting and was discussed. The draft will be revised based on input from the Church Council as a letter from Mike and Charlie to the Church Council and included with the minutes of the Church Council meeting in *The Messenger*. Mike further noted that some church members on both sides of this issue have advised him that they sense a certain distance from some other church members as a result of their opposing views regarding the transition. He appealed for sensitivity and inclusion so that we can move forward in unity.

Reports from Committees: Pam Settlage reported from the **Finance Committee** that the audit is entering its final phase. A draft audit report and management report will go to the Finance Committee and then to the Church Council for review and suggestions for how to implement recommendations the audit produced. Pam thanked Dona Collary and Pete Stathis for their efforts to provide the requested information to the audit team. With regard to the Capital Campaign funds, there is a shortfall of \$600,000 pledged and not yet received. If the work is done this fall, all of the pledge income may not have yet been received. There is a line of credit that could be used to bridge if necessary. A letter will be sent to those who have pledged but not yet paid up to date. Pam and Charlie may also invite people with three-year pledges to consider adding a fourth year. Charlie thanked Pam and Finance for the audit – an audit of the church had not been done in 8 years, so it is quite labor intensive process. Pam noted that the 2008 budget is doing well to date.

The **Outreach Committee** report was made by Jeff Clouser on behalf of Sue Wadel and the Outreach Committee. They are moving forward with the electronic format of *The Messenger*; the Website has been updated and technical problems have been addressed; and there was an article in the *Washington Blade* on the church's reconciling decision.

The **Arts Council** report from Marilu Wood included information on panels being developed on Eldbrooke Church – proposals have been solicited. Also, there are many disks of photos from Eldbrooke that need to be identified. The Arts Council has discussed having a youth member on the Arts Council as well as developing a docent program if people have questions about the church's art work. Four programs have been set for next year that include young artists. Charlie thanked Marilu for her wonderful efforts in identifying and cataloging the church's art.

The **Worship Ministry Team** report was made by Phil Potter who highlighted a new worship service beginning on July 3 and on Thursdays throughout the summer at 7:00 pm. Jimmy clarified that the summer Thursdays are different from the new worship services that will begin in the future on Saturday evenings.

The next meeting of the Church Council will be on September 20, with no Council meetings in July or August. The meetings will be scheduled on the 4th Monday of the month in the fall.

The closing prayer was offered by Charlie Parker.

Submitted by Helen Simon

Attendees: Charlie Parker, Sandy Rector, Jimmy Sherrod, Jeff Clouser, Mike Emery, Terry Rusch, Jeff Clouser, Pam Settlage, Bill Roach, Sue Roach, Anita Seline, Marilu Wood, Doug Lewis, Ann Michel, Phil Potter, Mary Beth West, Lloyd Leonard, Phyllis Kokus, and Helen Simon.

Letter to the Church Council

June 2008

To: Church Council Members

From: Charles Parker and Michael Emery

Since last fall the Church Council in conjunction with the Staff Parish Relations Committee and an independent consultant have been evaluating concerns raised regarding the transition of the prior Senior Pastor. (Out of respect for the prior Senior Pastor and for confidentiality we will refer to the position rather than the name to avoid the possibility of "Google searches" on the name when this memorandum is published along with the Minutes on the church web-site.) As we conclude the current program year we thought that it would be helpful to share our reflections on this subject.

The prior Senior Pastor served Metropolitan Memorial UMC from January 2002 until June 2007. During his tenure he had many notable achievements. He provided important spiritual support and guidance to many church members, and many are experiencing a deep loss with his departure. Other notable achievements include inspired preaching, overseeing the development of a thriving Volunteers in Mission program, leading a very successful capital campaign, and touching many lives through his pastoral counseling. There were also, however, areas of concern that the Staff-Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) addressed with him over several years, and he was provided a variety of resources with which to address these concerns. Ultimately, the Senior Pastor and the SPRC were unable to satisfactorily resolve the concerns, and the SPRC requested that the Bishop appoint a new Senior Pastor.

Throughout this process, the SPRC maintained a high degree of confidentiality, which, though appropriate and required by church discipline, did result in many members of the congregation feeling surprised and frustrated by their decision. In order to reflect upon the process and to respond to those members of the congregation who were concerned that the process was not fair and did not follow due process, the Church Council engaged Dr. Peter Steinke, a nationally recognized expert in the resolution of church conflict, to come to MMUMC to help us reflect on what happened, on what might be changed and on how to move ahead in unity with the congregation's mission and ministry.

During the fall of 2007, Dr. Steinke met individually with a number of MMUMC members who desired to share their views of the process. Additionally, Dr. Steinke conducted a workshop on "The Congregation as a Healthy System" which was open to the congregation. Based on the interviews and workshop participation, he prepared a report outlining his findings and observations and discussed this report in person with the Church Council. Dr. Steinke acknowledged that the SPRC decision did take many members of the congregation by surprise; and, the apparent suddenness created distrust of the process, even though a lengthy process had preceded the decision. In addition, those interviewed raised questions about whether the prior Senior Minister had received due process, about the requirements of SPRC confidentiality, and about whether the process was fair.

Dr. Steinke found the conditions for due process were met by the SPRC based on the standards of the United Methodist Discipline as well as standards that he has developed over his career of dealing with church conflict. Dr. Steinke noted that the process was fair and the SPRC used restraint, patience, and good judgment in handling a delicate matter. In moving forward, while much of the work of SPRC must and will continue to be performed within the strict bounds of confidentiality, the SPRC and the broader church structure have made many changes to facilitate greater transparency and openness. Among these changes are:

- publishing the calendar for Church Council and other key meetings;
- continuing the practice of open Church Council meetings;
- publishing the minutes of Church Council meetings in the newsletter;
- publishing the list of Church Council members and committee members twice annually in the newsletter as well as in the annual Charge Conference booklet and also having this information available in the church office;
- publishing when the SPRC undertakes its annual clergy evaluation, and publishing in detail the procedures and schedule for the evaluations, as well as inviting input from the congregation
- committing to finding ways to more broadly invite congregational participation during the annual evaluation of the pastors; and
- continuing to encourage a broader participation of church members on church committees and work areas

These events have been challenging for our congregation, with people of good will on both sides of the decision. We recognize that even members of the Church Council have varied views. Having reflected on this process, learned from this reflection, and implemented changes to enhance openness and due process, we believe it is time to conclude the formal review. However, we recognize that there are people on both sides of the concerns who feel a need for personal healing and we want to facilitate that healing. The following individuals have offered to be available to anyone wishing to talk further about this transition: the church's pastoral staff; Cathy Anderson (PhD, psychology, 301-951-0949); Baldwin Tillman (Licensed Clinical Social Worker, 301-469-8324); Kay Jacobi (Licensed Clinical Social Worker, 202-363-4900); and Rev. Dr. Roderick Miller, who has chaired the Conference's church conflict team (800-492-2525, ex. 429). We hope that all who wish to will talk with these individuals whose training and livelihood is based upon listening, talking and counseling on sensitive and difficult matters.

Let us continue to facilitate healing individually and collectively; to strive for openness and unity; and to seek always to follow the path that the Lord has laid before us.

