

UMs planning special events to attract visitors

Church leaders in San Antonio and Corpus Christi say they are being more “intentional” about welcoming visitors during United Methodist Open House Month in September.

Many congregations participate each year in Open House Month, one of three annual Southwest Texas Conference efforts tied to the denominationwide Igniting Ministry hospitality and image campaign.

Organizers in at least three congregations say they have brainstormed creative ways to make their welcoming efforts more effective this year.

“We wanted to focus on evangelism and reaching out to the community,” said the Rev. Sharon Stewart, associate pastor at Coker UMC, San Antonio. The 2,862-member congregation is planning a four-day “Ignite the Flame” revival in mid September with the Rev. Johnny Hobbs, a revival preacher who visited the church in 2002.

“We’re really trying to generate excitement, not just outside our church community, but within us,” Stewart said. “We want to get excited about offering Christ to all. Sometimes we just need to be revived a little in that area.”

Bishop Joel N. Martinez has proclaimed each September through 2008 a time for Southwest Texas congrega-



tions to plan special events that might attract visitors. United Methodist leaders are encouraged to use promotional tools to build awareness of their congregations, Open House Month events and ongoing ministries.

The Coker revival is to happen Sept. 16-19, with the rest of September Sundays taking different themes, such as United Methodist Women Sunday and Music Ministry Sunday.

St. Luke’s UMC, Corpus Christi, was to kick off Open House Month with a luncheon for civil servants Aug. 26. The mayor of Corpus Christi was to come with a proclamation thanking civil servants, said Jeanie Brink, who leads the event planning.

Leaders hope that the mayor’s ap-

pearance would generate news coverage and a platform to publicize other events during the month, she added.

For Labor Day Sept. 2, Brink said St. Luke’s leaders are encouraging members to invite someone to worship who has “labored” for them—their lawn man, the woman who sold them a Whataburger, a teacher—and then take them out to lunch as a personal thank you.

The Sept. 16 service is to honor the military. A luncheon is to follow worship. Sept. 23 is to be youth Sunday. For Sept. 30, St. Luke’s leaders are to send out hundreds of mailers inviting people in the community to worship.

Trinity UMC, San Antonio, is to begin its Open House Month with an ice cream social Sept. 8, said Mary Hale, co-chair of the month’s events.

Trinity leaders have scheduled a book fair Sept. 16. Selling books is a “different” event, Hale said, that organizers hope will draw more people.

Music Sunday is to be Sept. 23. The church will provide special music.

Sept. 30 is to be Children’s Sunday. It is to feature a children’s open house with refreshments at the children’s building. Parents can tour the building, an effort Hale said the church is hoping will bring in more families.

4 more churches join certified welcoming congregation list

Four more Southwest Texas Conference churches have joined the list of certified welcoming congregations.

In addition, one other congregation—First UMC, Sonora, in the San Angelo District—renewed its certification July 19. Welcoming certification must be renewed annually.



New welcoming congregations are:

■ Smiley UMC, Corpus Christi District, certified July 19.

■ First UMC, Uvalde, Kerrville Dis-

trict, certified July 20.

■ Zapata UMC, McAllen District, certified July 23.

■ First UMC, Kingsville, McAllen District, certified July 23.

The Southwest Texas Conference now has 136 certified welcoming congregations. That total is the most of any conference in the United States.

The count of welcoming congregations by district now stands at Austin, 28; Corpus Christi, 27; Kerrville, 18; McAllen, 28; San Angelo, 7; San Antonio, 17; and Victoria, 11.

Granted by the General Commission on Communication, certification means a congregation has systemati-

cally evaluated its hospitality and intentionally embraced a lifestyle of welcoming newcomers.

The certification program is part of the denominationwide Igniting Ministry hospitality and image campaign. The goal is to help congregations do a better job of relating to visitors and encouraging them to return.

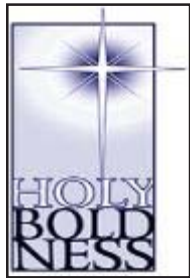
Certified congregations earn a plaque and a special designation in the “Find a church” database at www.unitedmethodist.org.

To earn certification, congregations must qualify for at least 100 points on a yearly checklist of welcoming activities.

Urban ministry academy helps UMs reach cities

Urban congregations across Southwest Texas can learn new ways to transform their community outreach during a two-year training program starting in September.

The Office of New Church Development and Transformation is sponsoring the six-session Holy Boldness Urban Ministry Academy in San Antonio.



First-year classes for teams from urban congregations are scheduled for Sept. 28-30, Jan. 18-20 and March 28-30 at Travis Park UMC, San Antonio. Three more events are planned for late 2008 and early 2009.

Each session is designed to help clergy and laity leaders develop strategies for transforming congregational life. Each schedule includes presentations by a guest speaker and workshops on key aspects of urban ministry.

The Rev. Robert C. Linthicum, president of Partners in Urban Transformation, is featured speaker for the September gathering. The former Presbyterian pastor has led more than 120 urban ministry consultations since 1986. He served congregations in Chicago, Detroit, Milwaukee and Rockford, Ill., from 1959 to 1985.

Workshop topics include:

- Technology in worship for the small church.
- Increasing your church's visibility in the community.
- Turning around the urban church.
- Prayer as an evangelism activity.

Featured strategist for the January meeting is to be the Rev. Tex Sample, coordinator of the Network for the Study of U.S. Lifestyles and former professor of church and society at UM-related St. Paul School of Theology, Kansas City, Mo.

While the Holy Boldness academy is designed for urban congregations,

any church can participate, organizers say.

Pastors are encouraged to bring teams of laypeople from their congregations. Because of the multiple tracks being offered, training isn't designed for a single representative from a congregation. The academy is packaged as a total experience, not six separate events.

Cost per person for Year 1 is \$90 (\$30 per session). Congregations may send four or more participants for \$300 (\$100 per session).

The Rio Grande Conference Office of Connectional Ministries, Black Methodists for Church Renewal and General Board of Global Ministries are joining the Office of New Church Development and Transformation in sponsoring the academy.

For more information about Holy Boldness, visit www.umcswtxprograms.org/holyboldness, or contact the Office of New Church Development and Transformation at (210) 408-4500 or toll free (888) 349-4191.

Southwest Texas UMs continue helping victims of flooding

Southwest Texas United Methodists continued helping victims of recent flooding last month.

Barbara Tripp, a volunteer disaster-response specialist from the United Methodist Committee on Relief, conducted caseworker training Aug. 7 at Grace UMC, Granite Shoals, and Aug. 8 at First UMC, Victoria.

Nearly 50 volunteers learned how to assess flood victims' needs and connect them with public and private recovery resources.

More than 1,000 people from 11 counties in the Southwest Texas Conference area had registered with the Federal Emergency Management Agency for flood relief. President Bush had declared those 11 counties federal disaster areas for individual assistance as of July 31.

June and July rains across Southwest Texas reportedly destroyed more than 40 houses and 20 mobile homes. Nearly 200 other homes are reportedly

Send contributions to help with flood relief to the conference treasurer earmarked for Advance 2050 (Disaster Response).

uninhabitable.

Susan Hellums, conference Volunteers in Mission coordinator, visited Rio Grande City and Roma Aug. 6 with FEMA representatives. The goal was to assess long-term recovery needs. Those Starr County communities are in one of the disaster areas.

The Rev. Jason Fry, senior pastor of First UMC, Victoria, met with the Victoria County Interfaith Long-Term Recovery group in early August to make plans for cleanup across the county, another one of the disaster areas.

Congregations are still assembling flood buckets to help with flood cleanup. Collection sites are in San

Antonio and McAllen, Hellums said. For instructions check www.umcswtx.org.

Grace UMC, Corpus Christi, prepared 100 flood buckets July 30—just in time to help neighbors in Nueces County. Church World Service, relief arm of the National Council of Churches and a partner of the United Methodist relief agency, reported July 31 several areas near the Nueces River needing cleanup supplies.

Blanco UMC delivered 10 flood buckets to the collection site in San Antonio Aug. 6.

Hellums said the conference still needs money for disaster response.

"What's important for people to know is that it's hard to wait for a specific disaster," she said. "That's what gives us the most money, but it's not immediately available. The undesignated domestic disaster fund is important for immediate response."