

One of the national workshops to be held in Indianapolis

## United Methodists invited to see if God is calling

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – The United Methodist General Board of Discipleship, based in Nashville, Tenn., is sponsoring “Turn Aside and See: Is God Calling?” March 8, from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., in **Indianapolis**; Tempe, Ariz.; Philadelphia, Pa.; Brentwood, Tenn. and Dallas, Texas.

The agency is harnessing the power of the Exodus story of Moses and the burning bush to help churches discern God’s call and strive to make disciples of Jesus Christ.

“The church is in such a time of change. We need space and

opportunity for reflection and discernment around God’s call to us – who we are as disciples and what are we called to do in this place,” said Carol Krau, GBOD team leader, Congregational Leaders Team.

“Turn Aside and See” ([www.gbod.org/turnaside](http://www.gbod.org/turnaside)) invites participants to hear God’s call through a free one-day study and discussion of Exodus 3 and 4. Moses’ encounter with the “Burning Bush” is the inspiration for the event’s theme and title of the core curriculum for Discipleship University, GBOD’s

groundbreaking new initiative that addresses the denomination’s leadership needs.

Pastors, laity, church staff, individuals or teams from churches may attend the event being offered simultaneously in the following locations.

- ◆ North Central USA: St. Luke’s United Methodist Church, Indianapolis,
- ◆ Western USA: First United Methodist Church, Tempe, Ariz.,
- ◆ Northeastern USA: Tindley Temple United Methodist Church, Philadelphia, Penn.,

- ◆ Southeastern USA: Brentwood United Methodist Church, Brentwood, Tenn., and

- ◆ South Central USA: St. Luke’s Community United Methodist Church, Dallas, Texas.

“This event is a preview of the Discipleship University Core Curriculum. It will assist local churches in becoming places of disciple making through focusing on discipleship systems,” said the Rev. Vance P. Ross, executive for GBOD’s Leadership Ministries.

In addition to a deep Scripture study and reflection, participants will receive help in discovering

God’s call, naming excuses that prevent congregations from answering God’s call and identifying ways to answer God’s call despite the current reality.

Attendees also will receive resource materials to lead a study in their own congregation and an introduction to other opportunities for training local church leaders.

A copy of the Bible study and lunch will be provided. Travel and lodging will be at the expense of participants. For more information, contact Mary McDonald, [mmcdonald@gbod.org](mailto:mmcdonald@gbod.org), or call toll-free 877-899-2780, ext. 1760.

## Seminary dean gives good advice to transitional churches in new book *Keep the Call: Leading the Congregation...*

By Daniel R. Gangler

Congregational leadership in a transition church can be a difficult task, however Jill Y. Crainshaw’s, recent book *Keep the Call: Leading the Congregation Without Losing Your Soul*, gives useful advice to both newly ordained or seasoned ministers and is well worth the read. The book is one of the Bishop’s Bundle of Books recommendations by Bishop Mike Coyner. Crainshaw serves as associate dean for vocational formation at Wake Forest’ Divinity School in Winston-Salem, N.C.

From the beginning after reading the title, I was not drawn to the book. I think it’s mis-named. A better title comes as a kicker on the back cover – “Keep Faith with your call to ministry while becoming an engaged and effective congregational leader.”

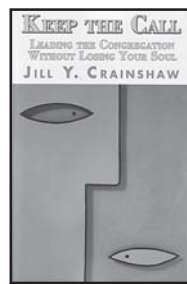
Crainshaw **doesn’t give answers** in how to keep one’s faith while strengthening a faltering congregation in a transitional neighborhood, but **gives readers a process** to follow to revitalize waning congregations in socially-transitional areas. First and foremost, she believes each established congregation and neighborhood has its own personality and

culture that needs to be understood.

For her, there are no easy answers for transforming congregations. If a pastor, no matter how smart or experienced, applies changes to strengthen a congregation without listening to the congregation and the community, he or she will probably fail. Crainshaw believes a different approach is needed and spends 116 pages outlining a process used in two transitional inner-city congregations.

With a conventional three-point sermon style, she outlines what she sees as three aspects of congregational ministry: Ministry as proclamation, ministry as formation and ministry as transformation. She begins where unsuccessful newly appointed pastors don’t begin – by listening, which she describes as “hearing God’s voice.” At one point, she literally instructs readers to walk their neighborhood and listen to the sounds. She writes, “Theological reflection is central to the process.”

This is uniquely important to United Methodist pastors who are appointed not only to a congregation, but to a community. What does the community sound like? Are the sounds of the congregation in tune with the sounds of the



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community?

If not, how does a congregation tune itself to the community? Without this tuning together, there will be no growth and the congregation will probably die as the members no longer can keep up with the financial challenges of a dwindling congregation.

Crainshaw sees a congregation tuning itself to the community through a sharing of the stories of faith. She says the role of pastors is two-fold in this process – “They must listen theologically and pastorally to congregations, biblical traditions, and broader cultural soundscape. At the same time, they must seek the authenticity of their own voices (p.17).”

Having set the foundation for her process to strengthen transitional congregations, she unfolds a process with questions and exercises for congregations to do to

seek their potential in ministries that lead to transformation. In this process, she does not accept that declining congregations necessarily mean a declining income to keep the parish alive and vital.

According to Crainshaw, once a pastor and congregation hear their neighborhood, their community, the process of formation can begin. Members and pastors need to ask themselves, who are we, and what are we to do as people of God? She says when those two are in sync, congregations flourish. She believes that formation happens when people of faith share their personal stories, which lead to communal stories as a congregation in transition begins sharing its stories with the community coupling stories with biblical stories. She believes congregations that are in transition, spend too much time sharing the stories of what the

congregation used to do, rather than telling new stories about what the congregation is doing now.

Formation, finally leads to transformation. She instructs her readers to watch for four threads that lead to vitality – transformation, just values, responsibility and possibility, and imaginative questions. These four threads will lead the congregation beyond its walls to the community and world.

She ends with the claim that transformation only becomes reality with short-term and long-term goals. To a great extent, congregations determine their own destinies even if they are in the midst of transitional communities.

*Keep the Call* is worth the read even if a congregation is already vital in a growing neighborhood or community. The process the author outlines and the questions she asks are questions every congregation can consider for its own well-being. *Keep the Call* is about making a difference in the lives of people, words very familiar to us as Hoosier United Methodists.

For online conversations about *Keep the Call*, log on to [www.keepthecall.blogspot.com](http://www.keepthecall.blogspot.com).

## United Methodist CTS student receives LIFE Scholarship

INDIANAPOLIS – Lauren Hacker, a Master of Divinity student at Christian Theological Seminary, was recently named the 2007 recipient of the LIFE (Lacy Institute For Ecumenism) Scholarship.

Hacker, a United Methodist and native of Indiana, currently serves as the youth director at the University Heights United Methodist Church, across the street from the University of Indianapolis. She also has previous experience as an Impact Camp counselor for the North UMC of India-

napolis.

She graduated in 2005 from the University of Indianapolis with a B.A. degree in Pre-Theology and Youth Ministry.

The Lacy Institute for Ecumenism is directed by the Rev. Donald Lacy of Muncie, Ind. Gifts to the LIFE Scholarship Fund can be made to Christian Theological Seminary and sent to Charles H. Webb, Jr., director of Alumni Relations, Christian Theological Seminary, 1000 W. 42nd Street, Indianapolis, IN 46208.

## Together freelancer called to write for Mississippi newspaper

Sharon Dunten, a United Methodist freelance writer for *Together* and the Disaster News Network, plans to move from Indianapolis to Hattiesburg, Miss. She has accepted a reporter position with the *Hattiesburg American* newspaper.

She told *Together*, “I have felt a calling to the Gulf Coast for some time, but I did not know exactly what I was supposed to do or where to go. Well, God informed me today where I am supposed to serve Him.”

Dunten served both as a volunteer in mission and disaster

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news reporter/photographer to the Gulf Coast since November 2006 and has made several trips south since then.

She writes, “I am sad to leave Indiana, but I am excited on what lies ahead in Mississippi. Looking back, it is amazing to see God’s hand in all of this. I just had to ask, keep my eyes open, and it

was revealed to me. I realize it is not always that easy. Even the journey is unknown, I do not walk alone. I have felt embraced by the people of the Gulf Coast and supported by my family and friends in Indiana.”

*Together* wishes her God’s speed as she packs and leaves in a couple of weeks.