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## Reflections From Ron

Hello colleagues and friends,

We're almost through the season of Lent. This was probably a good time for reflection — thinking about those things that we could just as well do without in our lives and living without them during the Lenten season. Soon the Lenten season will be over. What that might mean for some of us is that a rousing shout of Hallelujah will resound and we will celebrate the fact that we can return to indulging ourselves in those appetites that we just six weeks ago turned away from.

It would be easy to take those things which we've turned away from as an act of self-denial and resolutely proclaim that we are not going to deny ourselves any longer (not an unusual mantra for anyone who's been on a diet). But perhaps the important issues are deeper than our denial — perhaps even deeper than our return to those things once denied. Perhaps the bigger, more important question is this:

*"While we were journeying through our small, albeit spiritual world of self-denial, did we encounter Christ?"*

I imagine that is the purpose of Lent. It's not just a turning away from those things that keep us from relationship with God through Jesus Christ, but a turning around in repentance so that we might actually encounter Christ. The real purpose for denying ourselves is so that our emptiness may be filled with more of God's presence. It's so that God and Christ may be more alive, active, visible, and resonating in our lives. Perhaps, one of the ways of avoiding the tragedy of turning back to our former indulgences from our world of self-denial is to remember the words of the Apostle Paul when he said:

*"... and this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God n Christ Jesus."* (Philippians 3:13b-14)

If may be such a small thing as we begin to turn away from self-denial and turn toward the cross and all that happened there. It is, though, a way for us now, more than ever, to cultivate our Christian discipleship.

Agape and shalom,  
Ron



Atop Cape of Good Hope, the southwestern most point of South Africa.

## Hiattville Pastor Visits South Africa

By Andrew Smith as told to Marvé Ralston

Near the end of 2007 I was talking to a church member from Hiattville UMC. She offhandedly mentioned that her student pastor Andrew Smith was getting ready to leave for a trip to Africa. When I saw him in January at our clergy meeting I was anxious for details. He began the story but there was not enough time for me to fully understand the purpose of his trip through our short conversation. I asked him for more information and details so that I could share his experience more fully with you as well. So begins Pastor Andrew's story about his trip to South Africa.

Saint Paul requires all Master of Divinity students to take what is called an Immersion. A student can take an Immersion trip at any point of their academic career before graduation. The idea is to go someplace-inside or outside the country-to witness and experience ministry in a different context.

There were about twelve of us who went, including a professor who was our group leader. We stayed at a town called Fish Hoek, near Cape-town in South Africa. We visited several townships, one an apartheid remnant village known as Masiphumelele, which is Xhosa for "We have succeeded," which among small, self-made houses had a bicycle ministry, bed and breakfast, food stores, and schools providing not only education but shelter for children who were either refugees or had lost their parents to AIDS.

We stayed with a friend of our professor who owns a Bed & Breakfast house in Fish Hoek. They house many American students, particularly from seminaries who are visiting South Africa. The owner is a New Testament scholar and former theological professor who uses his house and resources as a ministry to those visiting the area. He helped us a great deal in terms of places to visit and people to speak with. Because of this help we were able to go to places that were not normally visited, such as a church known as "Tembe Labantu," which means "Hope of the People." This church also had a soup kitchen which operated daily (provided it had food to serve), a preschool, and a hospital for HIV/AIDS patients.

When the pastor took us into the hospital ward, he asked us if we would sing in the hallway, and then each of us go into one of the patient's rooms, lay hands on them, and pray with them. No one said it, of course, but we felt we would not be able to say anything of worth to these patients. How was it going to happen that strangers from America were going to be able to meet with these patients-most of whom were too weak to stand-and offer them any kind of comfort. But we put our trust in God that we would be led into an attitude of prayer, and proceeded to walk down the hall, singing, and after we finished, we each took a room. A few of us were in the same room; the one I visited was occupied by a woman who could barely move in her bed. We each spoke to her, not knowing if she could understand us, laid our hands on her, and we each said a prayer for her. She spoke softly at the end, but I was not able to hear what she said.



The view of-where we stayed in Fish Hoek



A communal holding cell on Robben Island.

Each day led us to visit places such as the church, other townships, Robben Island-where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned, District 6-a community of Africans who were forced out of their homes at the time of apartheid, and have not begun to be able to return as their homes are being rebuilt, and many other areas. We visited SHADE (Sojourners Help Advocacy Development Education), which is a United Methodist church and outreach organization, formed from a compilation of several United Methodist churches in the area's past. Among the staff was a General Board of Global Missions intern from North Carolina who is the Youth Leader.



Masiphumelele, "We have succeeded"

Each day was incredibly powerful, and incredibly draining, physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually; and in contrast with the absolute beauty of the country itself-the ocean, the bays, the mountains-made us wonder, "How can all this beauty exist alongside the horrors that have occurred and are still occurring?"

The best part of this trip was just being there with the people and witnessing the kind of community that exists. To witness how the people of these villages and townships cared for one another was truly miraculous. When one person had means to give, the whole community was invited to partake, and then when another person had the means, they would be the ones to share. They had the strongest connection of community I had ever seen, where nothing was held back, nothing was hidden, and they truly felt blessed by God for where they were and what they had. In reflection as we traveled back home, it did not feel as though we were going continents away, that we are so separated by geography, but that this it truly one world. We are all connected. Situations may be different, but in the end, it is people connecting with people.

*"I don't think I could ever know what the best way to help would be, but I know, at the very least we must do something.. We must get involved."*

*Andrew Smith*

One of the best ways we can help is by acknowledging this, that distance is not a hindrance. We can be a part of this community, and there are so many ways we can become involved in aiding in the ministries that exist there already. It was astonishing to see, in their contexts, the difficulty they had in ways we would take for granted. In the village of Masi-phumelele, a preschool was trying to acquire more land for an orphanage that would cost only \$10,000 in America. Students of all ages-including college bound-could be sponsored for only \$100 per semester. Mothers who are infected with HIV/AIDS can be vaccinated to prevent the disease from passing to their children for only five dollars. \$5

And yet the reality is that a mother in South Africa cannot afford a shot that will save her baby's life from AIDS with the amount we spend on a couple bottles of Coke and never think twice about it.

I don't think I could ever know what the best way to help would be, but I know, at the very least we must do something. We must get involved.

I knew going into this experience that it was *not* going to be life changing in the sense of my being awakened to the reality of poverty and oppression in another country, however I believe that even after our eyes are opened to that reality we must continue to expose ourselves to these realities, whether they are in our own country or outside. What I experienced could be compared, I suppose, to hearing or reading stories about a specific thing-whatever that may be- and then seeing and touching it for oneself. For me this was a continuation of exposing myself not only to the surroundings of God's world, but the formation of relationships with God's people in a way that separated me from my own lifestyle. **Continued on page 6**



**Table Mountain.** A lot of the time it is high enough that clouds rest on the mountain; when the winds and humidity are often right, the clouds descend over the mountain like an ever-flowing table cloth.

# March 2008

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

March 1st Diversity and Advocacy Meeting at Lawrence Central  
 March 4th-5th Appointive Cabinet DS in Wichita  
 March 4th Recertification for Sexual Ethics in Wichita  
 March 6th Recertification for Sexual Ethics in Chanute  
 March 7th World Day of Prayer  
 March 8th A Whole New World: The Gospel of John (Parson's District) Erie, KS  
 A Leadership Summit for Small Membership Church Leaders  
 March 11th District Nominations Committee  
 March 12th-14th Appointive Cabinet DS in Wichita  
 March 14th-15th Boot Camp Leadership Training for Youth at Camp Chippewa  
 March 16th Palm Sunday  
 March 17th Leadership Incubator location to be determined  
 March 18th-19th Appointive Cabinet DS in Wichita  
 March 21st Good Friday  
 March 23rd Easter  
 March 25th District Nominating Committee  
 March 25th-26th Appointive Cabinet DS in Wichita  
 March 27th District Leadership Meeting  
 March 29th District Conference details TBD  
 April 12th Spring UMW District Meeting "Through Jesus Christ"  
 June 4th -7th Annual Conference at Baker University

## Step-by-Step, Journey to Topeka

I would like to share with you and your congregations that starting on April 23, 2008, Lori and I will be walking from Pittsburg west on Highway 400 to Highway 75 and then north to Topeka, a distance of approximately 187 miles in support the “Uninsured” and Underinsured” peoples of Kansas.

During this time the 2008 General Conference of the United Methodist Church will be meeting in Fort Worth, Texas and revisiting the Social Principles of the Church for the 100th Anniversary. The prophetic voice of the United Methodist Church is and has been that the right of access to health care should be open for all people regardless of status.

Please pray for our delegates to General Conference during this time as we will pray with every step toward Topeka. Please also pray for the raising of the political bill to provide health care to all the uninsured, which includes 20,000 children in Kansas which are eligible, but not enrolled. Work toward getting the information to the parents of these children and help them to get the proper forms and documents that allow them to have health insurance.

There is additional information about this and other aspects on our web site [www.journeytopeka.org](http://www.journeytopeka.org). You may contact us through the site and request more specific data. The journey is not; however about two crazy old people walking to Topeka, but the injustice of health care in our nation.

Rev. Ken and Lori Butts



## Clergy Birthdays



Barbara Clinger	March 2nd
Donna VotEAU	March 21st
Beth Hodgson	March 21st
Jim Hopwood	March 23rd
Glen Duderstadt	March 25th
Charles Russell	March 25th
Dale Lewis	March 27th
Jada Hodgson	March 31st

## District Prayer Calendar

Mar. 2	Colony-Kincaid Selma Pastor John Sheehan
Mar. 9	Overbrook Rev. Kathleen Ketchell Ferris
Mar. 16	Wellsville Rev. Richard Fitzgerald
Mar. 23	Ottawa 1st Dr. Felix Burrows
Mar. 30	Gridley-Turkey Creek- LeRoy Rev. Marcia Eaton
	Our missionaries in Haiti Joe and Shirley Edgerton and work teams



## Five Rivers District

The United Methodist Church

809 Seventh, #1

P.O. Box 565

Baldwin City, KS 66006-0565

Phone: 785-594-4804

Fax: 785-594-4820

E-mail: [fiverivers@embarqmail.com](mailto:fiverivers@embarqmail.com)

Ds E-mail: [5riversds@embarqmail.com](mailto:5riversds@embarqmail.com)

Kansas Bishop: Dr. Rev. Scott Jones

District Superintendent: Rev. Ronald King

Administrative Assistant, Newsletter editor

Marvé Ralston

**We're on the web at [www.fiveriversdistrict.com](http://www.fiveriversdistrict.com)**

Andrew Smith's South Africa Continued from pgs 2-3

At the end of each day, as we had seen more and spoken to more people, and learned about what those forced to live in shacks, the children whose parents had died of AIDS, and the programs of outreach who were hanging by threads to stay open, I wondered to myself, "How can I come back home and tell what I have experienced so that it honorably and faithfully relates to others what we all experienced here?"

One day we visited an area known as District 6, which was home to several hundred Africans before the rule of apartheid. Afterwards the people were physically removed from their homes and they were being torn down. With the removal of apartheid, this area has begun rebuilding those homes so that the original inhabitants and their families can once again live there. We were able to meet one of the original inhabitants, who was given back his home during a ceremony officiated by President Mandela, who gave this man the keys back to his house. As he looked around all of us, he said with a huge smile on his face, "What can I say?"

What can I say?

One of the very first things our guide to Masiphumelele (Miss Charlotte) told us as she was explaining how the village populated by so many was all theirs-a village in which they had truly succeeded-was that they were blessed. "We are blessed" were her exact words.

There is nothing that we can say that adequately describes the adversity and suffering, and the miracles and hope that we witnessed occurring in these places. In a place that has survived-and is surviving-some of the greatest challenges human beings can face, lies people who fully embrace the type of community that shares, depends, empowers, cares, and embraces each other the way Jesus Christ teaches us all. We visited a true kingdom of God.