

news briefs:

United Methodists give big in response to September 11

(UMNS) United Methodists have given more than \$10 million to the church's special offering in response to the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

More than \$6.4 million was raised in November alone for the special fund. By the end of November, gifts to the "Love in the Midst of Tragedy" fund totaled \$10.4 million.

The church's response to the attacks is being channeled through the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR), the denomination's relief and development agency. UMCOR has provided relief at local, national and international levels. UMCOR officials have committed to developing a three- to five-year comprehensive response plan by January.

As of Dec. 20, 2001, Holston Conference giving to the "Tragedy" fund totaled \$204,634. Send donations, made to "Holston Conference" and designated for "Advance No. 901125-3," to: Holston Conference, P.O. Box 2506, Johnson City, TN 37605. ■

Anglicans, British Methodists take steps toward unity

LONDON (UMNS) – British Methodists and Anglicans have announced a proposed covenant for greater unity between their two communions that church officials liken to an "engagement to be married."

The proposed agreement is part of a December report resulting from formal conversations between the two traditions since 1998. For the first time ever, Anglicans and Methodists have agreed to the "mutual affirmation of the life and ministry of each other's churches." Both churches will vote on whether to accept the covenant at denominational meetings next July.

The "Anglican-Methodist Covenant" as it is known, includes a series of affirmations, including the statement that both communions belong to the "One Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ" and affirm each other's "authentic ministry of Word and Sacrament."

Topics on which there is still no formal agreement include the mutual recognition of each other's ordained clergy, the role of women in church leadership, some matters of order and practice in communion, and concerns about "establishment" or the status of the Church of England as Britain's official state church. ■

Millions become available in grants for care-giving programs

(UMNS) A national foundation is giving million of dollars to churches and other religious groups to start programs of volunteer care-giving for people who are frail, elderly, disabled or chronically ill.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation of Princeton, N.J., has decided to add \$100 million to its Faith in Action program. Of that amount, \$70 million will fund an additional 2,000 grants to new programs that provide help with everyday activities. The foundation, devoted to health and health care, said it hopes awarding \$35,000 start-up grants will encourage churches and other faith groups to organize coalitions that will coordinate volunteers in providing such services.

United Methodist churches provided leadership for two recipient coalitions in the most recent round of grants, awarded in October.

The next deadline for grant applications is Feb. 1. For more information, contact the national program office toll free at (877) 324-8411, or visit www.FIAVolunteers.org. ■

Presbyterian leaders pray over homosexuality issues

(RNS) Leaders of the Presbyterian Church (USA) are asking other church members to pray for the denomination as divisions over homosexuality seem to become deeper and more personal.

Fourteen church leaders, including the top three elected officials, issued a joint statement and pledged to work for unity so that the church can be a place "where our children and grandchildren can hear and respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ."

A move to remove a ban on non-celibate gay clergy has left the nation's largest Presbyterian body deeply battered and bruised. Although the measure was approved by last summer's annual meeting, it must be ratified by a majority of the church's 173 regional presbyteries. Currently, the vote is running five to one against the measure. ■

NCC's Friendship Press offers book on Islam

(UMNS) A second edition of "God is One: The Way of Islam" will be available this month through the National Council of Churches' Friendship Press.

A basic reference book on Islam for Christians, "God is One" explains the Islamic faith and highlights such points of agreement for Christians and Muslims as the devotion to one God. It presents who Muslims are, what they believe and how their faith not only unites them but also shapes every aspect of their lives.

The paperback book (about 170 pages, \$9.95) can be ordered by calling Friendship Press at (800) 889-5733. ■

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Shoes for Afghans, continued from page 3

initial appeal had come one day later, I don't think we could have gotten it done."

The project originated with Bishop Chamberlain and Stop Hunger Now, a hunger relief ministry, said the Rev. Ray Buchanan, a United Methodist and executive director of the Raleigh, N.C.,-based agency. Buchanan contacted the bishop after working with the North Carolina Annual Conference to start collecting blankets for the refugees.

The North Carolina Conference, led by Bishop Marion Edwards, collected between 40,000 and 50,000 blankets, Buchanan said.

Working with a State Department contract agency, Stop Hunger Now will ship the shoes to Tajikistan, he said. There, partner agencies will distribute the shoes to refugees in Tajikistan and northern Afghanistan, he said.

The shoes and blankets will fill 10 ocean freight containers, Buchanan said. He estimated that the shipment has a value of about \$1.5 million. Money that was raised by the churches will be used to pay for shipping and storage within the United States, he said. Funds that are left over will be used for hunger relief. The amount of money raised is not known yet. The overseas shipping will be handled by the contract agency – a value of \$100,000, Buchanan said. ■

► Tim Tanton, with United Methodist News Service, contributed to this report.



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Knoxville, Tennessee: Youth from George Street UMC help load shoes for a conference mission benefiting Afghanistan. An estimated 80 percent of Holston churches participated in the project.