

## National Guardsman helps Iraqis walk again

MONROE, La. (UMNS) – Capt. Steve Lindsley, a member of the Mississippi Army National Guard's 112th Military Police Battalion, was certain his days would be full, arranging logistics for a military police battalion and dodging mortar fire, rockets and snipers while deployed to Iraq. He made the most of the 14 months he spent away from his home and family by helping children and a legless Iraqi veteran walk again. With the help of his employer, Methodist Rehabilitation Center in Jackson, Miss., Lindsley volunteered his time and skills to open a prosthetics clinic in Baghdad. "(I) saw a lot of ... folks walking around ... on crutches or rolling in a wheelchair because they didn't have an artificial limb," said Lindsley, who makes and fits artificial limbs at a Methodist Rehabilitation clinic in Monroe.

## United Methodist giving grows, membership drops

EVANSTON, Ill. (UMNS) – United Methodists increased their giving by nearly 4 percent to the denomination's churchwide ministry during 2004, despite the loss of more than 69,000 members. The increase of \$4.4 million to the United Methodist Church's seven apportioned funds marks a reversal from slight decreases in the two preceding years, noted Sandra Lackore, treasurer and head of the denomination's financial agency.

Membership declined by 69,141 to a total of less than 8.2 million U.S. members, including clergy. This figure is based on congregational statistics collected for 2003 and reported through the annual (regional) conferences after their sessions in spring 2004. These numbers reflect a continuing decline in U.S. membership that has been ongoing for at least three decades.



**Sandra Lackore**

**United Methodists increased their giving by nearly 4 percent to the denomination's churchwide ministry during 2004, despite the loss of more than 69,000 members.**



Photo courtesy of Mississippi Armory National Guard

**Capt. Steve Lindsley fits 14-year-old Ali with an artificial leg.**

## Judicial Council's spring docket includes new pension plan

ARLINGTON, Va. (UMNS) – The United Methodist Church's highest court will hear 12 cases during its April 27-29 meeting with topics as diverse as clergy benefits, Girl Scouts and handicapped accessibility in local churches. The court will hear again an item related to a new clergy plan developed by the United Methodist Board of Pension and Health Benefits. The item is a request from the 2004 General Conference for a decision on the constitutionality of Petition 40325 as adopted, "in light of the broad new powers that it appears to grant to the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits." The Judicial Council heard oral arguments in October before deferring a decision until the spring.

## Relief agency offers bulletin insert on Iraq, updated facts on hunger

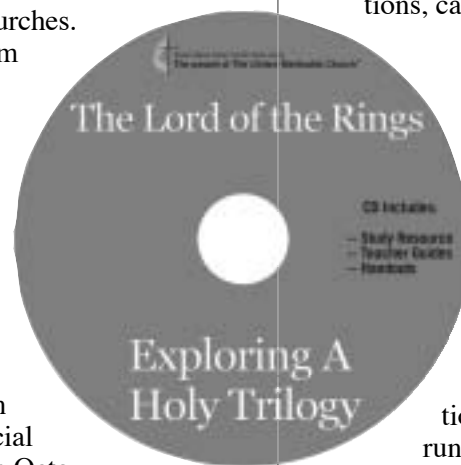
NEW YORK (UMNS) – Several hundred Baghdad children have new help in managing their sometimes frightening world, in which gunfire threatens such ordinary tasks as walking to school. The United Methodist Committee on Relief and Save the Children offer role-playing projects in which youth and schoolchildren can work through their fears and

gain confidence. A new worship bulletin insert is available online at <http://gbgm-umc.org/umcor/print/bulletininserts/iraq.cfm> that describes this ministry of compassion, made possible through donations to UMCOR Advance #623225, "Iraq Emergency."

UMCOR also has produced a new brochure, "Ten Facts About World Hunger and Poverty," to heighten awareness about those global concerns. It can be downloaded at <http://gbgm-umc.org/umcor/print/10facts/>.

## UMCOR plans earthquake response in Iran

NEW YORK (UMNS) – A powerful earthquake razed villages in Iran overnight Feb. 22. Iran's interior minister, Abdolvahed Moussavi Lari, told The New York Times that 50 villages were badly damaged and around 8,000 houses destroyed. He estimated that the death toll would reach 500. Poor weather conditions have hampered rescue efforts. The mountainous region in southeast Iran is only 160 miles from Bam, devastated a year ago by an earthquake that killed 31,000 people. Temporary shelter will be critical in the wintry rain. UMCOR will send emergency relief supplies and other aid. Gifts may be placed in the offering plate of any United Methodist church or sent to UMCOR at 475 Riverside Drive, Room 330, New York, NY 10115. Designate the contribution for UMCOR Advance #624315, Iran Earthquake. For credit-card donations, call (800) 554-8583.



## Study guide looks at Christian themes in 'The Lord of the Rings'

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (UMNS) – A new six-week study guide from United Methodist Communications explores the biblical themes running through J.R.R. Tolkien's epic, *The Lord of the Rings*, and Peter

Jackson's award-winning films of the books. The study guide examines the themes and characters of the complex trilogy and relates them to the Christian tradition. *The Lord of the Rings: Exploring a Holy Trilogy* study includes a printable leader's guide, student guide and participant handouts. The CD is \$29.95. The study also can be purchased in a package bundle with public performance licensing for \$169.95; the license alone is \$150. The license permits groups to view *The Lord of the Rings* DVDs and use them in public presentations, as long as admission is not charged. For details, contact EcuFilm, (888) 346-3862 or go to [www.umd.org](http://www.umd.org). ■