

Missions agency expresses support for Russians after tragedy

By United Methodist News Service

United Methodist missions leaders say they are “sick to our souls” for the people of Russia, following terrorist attacks that killed more than 450 people.

The Board of Global Ministries extended sympathy and support for Russia in a Sept. 7 statement, “A Message to Russian United Methodists and Their Neighbors in a Time of Trial.” Bishop Joel N. Martinez of San Antonio, board president, and the Rev. R. Randy Day, top staff executive, signed the statement.

‘We are sick to our souls in the loss of lives at the school in Beslan.’

“The directors and staff of the General Board of Global Ministries join hands in faith with United Methodists and their neighbors in Russia in this time of suicide and terrorist attacks that bring fear and uncertainty to your nation and daily life,” Martinez and Day wrote.

“We are sick to our souls in the loss of lives at the school in Beslan,” they said. “Ministry to children and youth is among our mission priorities. The killing and wounding of children, youth and their teachers brings tears to our eyes and pain to our hearts. We are praying for the families of the victims, and we stand with the Russian people in this time of national mourning. Our entire staff is

joining today in prayers of remembrance for the victims.”

The United Methodist Committee on Relief, a unit of the General Board of Global Ministries, will send school kits and health kits to the Beslan area, said Linda Beher, the relief agency’s communications director. Assembling the kits is a good project for a congregation or church school class, she said. Instructions can be found by going to www.umcor.org and clicking on the “Kits” link.

More than 350 people – at least half of them children – were killed Sept. 3 in the tragic climax to a three-day hostage crisis at a school in Beslan. A group of militants had seized the school in southern Russia and reportedly demanded independence for the republic of Chechnya, where separatist rebels and Russian troops have been locked in conflict for several years. The hostage crisis ended with a gun battle between the 30 or so militants and Russian security forces. Most of the hostages died in the gunfire or as a result of explosions caused by the militants.

The Board of Global Ministries said it also remembered the victims and families of people who died in other incidents leading up to the hostage crisis – two airplane crashes on Aug. 24 that killed 90 people and an Aug. 31 suicide bombing on a subway that killed 10. All of the incidents are believed linked to the war in Chechnya.

Martinez and Day said the agency is praying for the United Methodist Church’s leaders in Russia, including Bishop Ruediger Minor, based in Moscow.

“We also send our sympathy and loving greetings to the Russian Orthodox Church, which is our ecumenical partner through the World Council of Churches,” they said. ■

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Disaster relief,

continued from page 1

Church members wishing to make financial gifts to help hurricane victims may make checks to their local churches, designating “UMCOR/hurricane relief” on the memo line. The tax-deductible gifts may be placed in offering plates. To make credit-card donations, call UMCOR directly at 1-800-554-8583.

When submitting checks for hurricane relief, church officers may designate “Project 507” under “UMCOR” on their 2004 remittance forms.

For general information on how your group can help hurricane or flood victims – or to report your own church’s efforts – contact the connectional ministries office at (865) 690-4080. ■

Secret visitor,

continued from page 1

steps to become visitor-friendly.

When this visitor scouted out the church the night before – assisted by the familiar blue United Methodist sign on the main highway two blocks away – the sign in front of the church read: **8:30 & 1 M.**

Obviously, several numbers were missing. So, did that mean the worship service began at 10:30 a.m.? 10:45? 11 a.m.? Similarly, the sign wasn’t very clear on the start time for Sunday school: It read **9:5 A.**

Confused, I ended up arriving early on Sunday morning, to allow for all possibilities.

Several handicapped parking spaces were located directly in front of the church, yet the church steps were not handicap accessible. Another door may have provided better accommodations.

I saw no parking spaces designated for visitors, although spaces overall were limited since the middle-size church is in the middle of a residential neighborhood.

During the service, there was no time at which individual visitors were recognized. While many visitors prefer to remain anonymous, some congregations take this as an opportunity to provide visitors with information on the church.

There also was no member/visitor register. Had I been an in-town visitor, there was no way to indicate I might want a call from this friendly church unless I passed someone a note.

At the service’s conclusion, the pastor stood at the foot of the steps in front of the church. As I approached, he said, “I don’t think I know you,” which led to a pleasant exchange about hometowns and his former pastoral service near my home.

The church without a doubt is friendly to visitors, but it still could take action to live up to its sign and be more visitor-friendly. ■

Clint Cooper is faith editor of the Chattanooga Times Free Press and a member of First-Centenary United Methodist Church.

Calendar

Sept. 25: Bishop Swanson service

JOHNSON CITY, Tenn. – Holston members are invited to a “Service Celebrating the Assignment of Bishop James Edward Swanson Sr.” at Munsey Memorial UMC in Johnson City, Tenn. The service begins at 2 p.m. on Saturday, Sept. 25.

Sept. 30: Redwine applications

The Redwine Committee gives grants to church groups starting new ministries. Grants for program ministries (not “brick and mortar”) are expected to be awarded in April 2005 in amounts of \$2,500. Applications are due Sept. 30. Forms are available in district offices or through Committee Chair John Grimm at (540) 639-5369.

Oct. 3: World Communion Sunday

One of six Special Sundays in the United Methodist Church, World Communion Sunday, is Oct. 3. There still may be time to order free leaflets to place in church bulletins or newsletters. Call United Methodist Communications at (888) 346-3862.

Oct. 19 & 21: Clergy conferences

Clergy are urged to attend one of two regional clergy conferences, set for Tuesday, Oct. 19, at State Street UMC in Bristol, Va., and Thursday, Oct. 21, at Cokesbury UMC in Knoxville, Tenn.

The Rev. Gayle Felton will be the keynote speaker on the theme, “Water Washed, Bread Fed, Spirit Led: The Sacraments as a Basis of Our

Unity.” Bishop James Swanson will be the liturgist and preacher. Cost is \$10, including lunch.

For more information, contact the Rev. Carol Wilson at (423) 282-6722 or the Rev. Doug Smith at (865) 690-4080. A brochure is available for download at www.holstonconference.com/upcoming.html.

Oct. 19: Safe Sanctuaries

ABINGDON, Va. – Due to high demand of “Safe Sanctuaries” workshops, a new seminar has been added to workshops already scheduled. The newly scheduled child-abuse prevention workshop will be held Sunday, Oct. 17, 2-5 p.m., at Pleasant View UMC, Abingdon District. To register, call Anita Henderlight at (865) 690-4080 or e-mail bonniecox@holston.org. ■