



**The United Methodist Rural Fellowship**  
**(Soon to be U. M. R. Advocates)**  
**Bulletin**

Strong Rural Churches Build Strong Rural Communities!

Volume LXIII

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Tampa, Florida

Thursday, May 3, 2012



Hospitality Suite volunteers (l-r) Hubert and Sara Clinard, Carl and Geri Litchfield, and Sue Grace arrange three meals daily with snacks in between for UMRF volunteers.

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## What Kind of Relationships?

by Ed Kail, senior correspondent

“It’s all about relationships!”

If you gather a group of people who are praying and working for the revitalization of the church in the mission of Jesus Christ, it won’t be long before someone will say it. We’ve got to build relationships! It’s not enough to reach out to others and invite them into our church buildings – we need to form relationships! Even our theology as Trinitarian Christians moves us in that direction: God is a dynamic community of “Persons”, and faith is all about relationships!

But, what kind of relationships?

Back in the 1800’s, German sociologist Ferdinand Toennies studied the differences between rural and urban communities. He described characteristics of cohesive “community” and of fragmented “society”. One of the chief differences was in the nature of human relationships.

In cohesive communities, relationships could be  
(continued on reverse)

## “Hidden” Rules of Poverty

Dr. Ruby Payne, author of A Framework for Understanding Poverty, speaks of the “hidden rules of poverty.” The rules are “hidden” because they are not stated. Rather, the rules are “mind-sets” and perspectives about how different classes of people approach/view various subjects.

For example, on the subject of a nice dinner, people in poverty ask “How much food was there? Did everyone get enough to eat?” People in the middle class ask, “What did they serve? How did it taste?” Wealthy individuals want to know “How was the food presented? Did the table look nice?”

Different economic classes also view time differently. People in poverty are concerned only about today, the present moment. Middle class individuals think about the future, planning for tomorrow. Wealthy persons (because their financial future is secure) remember the past.

Again, in the area of personal relationships people in poverty are centered on family and friends. Those in the middle class are concerned about how a person might help them in their interests and goals. The wealthy build personal relationships based on the people with whom they want to be seen.

Until people appreciate where others are “coming from”/viewing things, it is difficult to relate to or understand their viewpoint.

## POVERTY SIMULATION

Places in the Poverty Simulation experience Thursday-Friday, May 3-4, at 9 am in Ballroom D are available by registering outside the ballroom or by getting tickets from UMRF members. Space is limited to 120 each day, but entry may be

called intrinsic. That is, relationships are valued for their own sake. The reward, or “payoff” for relating is in the pleasure and fulfillment of being together, sharing experiences of life, working and playing together, growing in intimacy and in wisdom within a shared environment. The joy is in belonging, in knowing and being known.

In fragmented societies, however, relationships tend to be instrumental. People relate to each other through roles in order to gain or accomplish something for themselves. The value of the relationship is in the results; the “payoff” is in the advancing of my agenda, the meeting of my needs or preferences. I don’t need to know you in order for you to serve me. If I relate to you, it will be because of our common interests or mutual goals, and then our relationship will be limited to only what the task or goal requires. Our intimacy or knowledge or belonging will be limited to a defined context.

It can be argued that the social history of the U.S. can be described as increasing fragmentation of once cohesive communities. Sometimes I have called it the “suburbanization” of rural America. But whatever you call it, there is a strong tendency for our social relationships to become more and more instrumental. I know that I have seen it at work in the congregations with whom I have worked in rural Iowa: their outreach to people around them tends to be motivated by “what they could do for us,” as workers, or as givers. We’re good at “giving people jobs,” or placing them on committees. Can they sing?—ask them to join, or lead, the choir. Are they a teacher? – give them a Sunday School class.

Another problem: intrinsic relationships don’t show up very well in most schemes of “metrics”. We don’t have a category for “Number of people who hung out with and enjoyed each other.” It’s a challenge for number-crunchers. And yet, growing intimate relationships have real impact on life in congregation and community. You might call it vitality!

Is our mission of “making disciples of Jesus Christ” inherently instrumental because we approach relationships with an agenda? Or can this, too be approached intrinsically, “for the transformation of the world”? It may indeed be “all about relationships” – but what kind of relationships?



**Peggy Paige, co-leader of the GC Legislative Task Force, and Kennedy Mukwindidza, advocate to the Conferences Committee.**

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### **Hospitality Center**

Contact Info: 740-707-2901

Hours: 7 AM to 7 PM

(fellowship, light meals, snacks)

**Office**

Hours: 7 AM to 7 PM

(copies, computers)

Sheraton Riverwalk Hotel

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