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work in Mexico and she could not feed her children in her hometown of Guerrero. Crisóstomo took refuge in the Chicago church on Jan. 28, her last day for leaving the United States voluntarily under an order by the U.S. Board of Immigration Appeals.

Church-run clinics help families get needed care

ORLANDO, Fla. (UMNS) – Having seizures but no insurance, Melissa Whaley said seeing a doctor was out of the question—until she learned about Shepherd’s Hope Health Center. “There was nobody in the world to help me, but this place helped me,” she said. Whaley received a free doctor’s consultation, free medication and, most importantly, compassionate care. Shepherd’s Hope was organized a decade ago by a local United Methodist church and today includes nine health care centers in the Orlando area run by 2,000 volunteers from 20 churches. Just as the Good Shepherd cared for each of his sheep, the center serves people without access to insurance or medical care. The Rev. William S. Barnes, senior pastor at Orlando’s St. Luke’s United Methodist Church, said the ministry is simply “caring people caring for other people.”



UMNS photo by Tim Griffis

Dr. Jeff Thill examines Geannie Figuereo at a Shepherd’s Hope Health Center in Orlando, Fla. St. Luke’s United Methodist Church helped launch the clinic system to serve residents without access to insurance or medical care.

Peoria gathers for 40 days of prayer against crime

PEORIA, Ill. (UMNS) — Mayor Jim Ardis certainly has the community of Peoria talking. Faced with rising statistics of crime and violence, Ardis called on the community to find its voice through the power of prayer and to engage in 40 days of prayer for the city. Congregations responded with nightly, community-wide prayer services that began on New Year’s Eve and continued through Feb. 8. “This outward testament of our faith will truly be a defining moment in making our city a stronger commu-

nity united in prayer,” said Ardis. “Let this 40 days be the beginning of a new united spirit in Peoria and the surrounding area.” The Rev. Timothy Bias, pastor of the downtown First United Methodist Church and host pastor of the event, quoted from the prophet Jeremiah at the first service: “Israel was dispersed and divided in Jeremiah’s time, but the prophet told the people, ‘Pray to the Lord for peace and prosperity for the city, because if it prospers, so do you.’” First United Methodist and Bradley-Epworth United Methodist are among the 35 congregations providing leadership for the services.

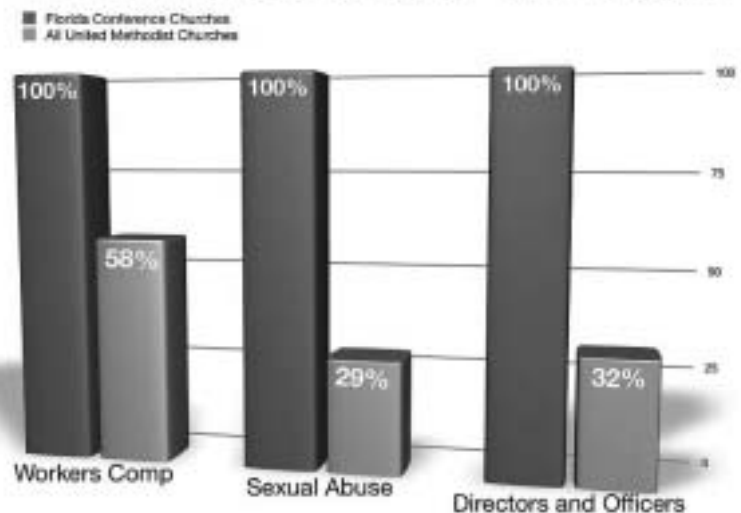
Florida churches enjoy drop in insurance premiums

LAKELAND, Fla. (UMNS) — United Methodist churches in hurricane-prone Florida began 2008 with good news: a 22 percent decrease in the cost of property and casualty insurance premiums. Compared with 2007, the total cost of premiums is expected to decrease by \$4.1 million to about \$15 million for the 750 churches in the Florida Annual (regional) Conference, according to Mickey Wilson, conference treasurer, and Mark Thomas, director of the Florida Conference Ministry Protection department. “The exact percentage will vary from church to church,” Thomas said. “It all depends on variables such as if the church purchased a new fleet of vehicles, increased the value of its buildings or built new facilities—things like that.” The Florida conference experienced record-high premiums in the wake of Hurricanes Charley, Jeanne, Frances and Wilma in 2004-05, but now is enjoying a market correction following several years of moderate weather, Thomas said.

Briefing offers glimpse into assembly changes

FORT WORTH, Texas (UMNS) — When United Methodists convene this spring for their worldwide assembly, they can expect wider international representation, a denominational budget built around four new areas of focus, and carefully choreographed opening sessions aimed at fostering unity through common ministry instead of gridlock over divisive social issues. The 2008 General Conference will meet for 10 days – two fewer than the 2004 gathering in Pittsburgh and with no break

Insurance Coverage Percentages



UMNS graph by Greg Moore

One-hundred percent of United Methodist churches in Florida are insured in three key areas, while most elsewhere in the United States are not. Churches in the Florida Annual (regional) Conference are benefiting from lower insurance rates after years of increasing premiums.

– but still must sort through more than 1,500 petitions, which is about the same amount of business conducted at the previous assembly. In addition to hearing opening addresses from a United Methodist bishop and lay person, delegates will hear the first-ever Young People’s Address – delivered by six teens and young adults who promise a presentation “different from anything that’s ever been presented to General Conference before.”

The new approaches are among a bevy of changes outlined during the United Methodist Pre-General Conference News Briefing, an informational session attended by more than 200 delegation representatives and church journalists. The Jan. 24-26 briefing, sponsored by United Methodist Communications, was held in Fort Worth, where General Conference will open April 23.

Flooded Indiana areas get United Methodist relief

MONTEICELLO, Ind. (UMNS) — United Methodists are joining other faith groups to provide relief for hundreds of northern Indiana flood survivors whose homes were heavily damaged by muddy waters. The three northern Indiana communities of Remington, Monticello and Delphi were hard hit by early-morning flood waters on Jan. 8. United Methodist Bishop Mike Coyner of Indianapolis visited with pastors of each community on Jan. 19 and toured flood-ravaged areas in Jasper, White and Carroll counties. As of mid-January, three United Methodist churches in the area had distributed more than 500 flood buckets, received \$10,000 from the United Methodist Committee on Relief to meet immediate needs of flood survivors, and coordinated help from volunteers across the state. ■