From Rev. Stephen Bryant

"How Many Loaves Have You?"
A Lesson on the Vocation of Writing

Mark 6 marks a shift in emphasis from a focus on what Jesus can do to what the disciples can do by faith with him. Jesus continued to circulate among the villages teaching and healing as before, but in Mark 6 something new happens: “calling the Twelve to him, he sent them out two by two” to do the works he had been doing (Mark 6:7-13). Jesus is empowering and discipling his disciples!

We see Jesus doing likewise in Mark 6:30-44. Jesus and the Twelve found themselves surrounded by a multitude of hungry people who had followed Jesus into the hills to listen to his teaching. When it grew late, instead of sending the people into nearby villages to find food for themselves, Jesus instructed his disciples, “You give them something to eat.” When they protested, Jesus proceeded to show them, not merely what God could do through him but what God could do through them with what God had already given them, as meager as that seemed to them at first. Moreover, Jesus demonstrated how the gifts of God, often hidden in plain sight, abound and multiply when shared in community.
The lesson of the loaves is pertinent for those of us God calls to write and develop resources for Christ and his church. We are often tempted to believe the resources for which our churches hunger will only be found elsewhere in countries and villages other than our own. But we demean ourselves when we believe such faithless rhetoric. Jesus knows better. That’s why he asks, “How many loaves do you have?” He invites us to stop looking elsewhere for long enough to check out the gifts God has already given us for ministry to the people we serve.

In our June writing conference for African faculty of theology in Mutare, Zimbabwe, I was struck by the contribution of one participant-writer to our understanding of holiness and incarnational living. He began by exploring the lives of the ordinary saints of his upbringing. He wrote from his appreciation of the holiness that shone through their humanness in the context of everyday village life. Inspiration for his writing was close at hand, unique to his life experience. These were people who had contributed to his formation in faith.

A support group of young women, all HIV positive, called the Mascapas Women once participated in a writing workshop we led in South Africa, all widows and mothers. Not only did they feel they had little to offer; their futures seemed to have been stolen from them and their children. And yet, when they took time to write and then to share their stories while reflecting with Bible stories on God’s presence, promise, and call in the midst of their broken lives, their witnesses touched everyone, even they themselves. Even participants from other countries, listening to the readings through translators, exclaimed, “These stories must be shared everywhere!” They had so little to offer, and yet in that gathering it became evident that God was doing something remarkable in and through them that fed everyone there and more.

As 1 John 1:1-2 reminds us, good Christian writing starts with noticing, reflecting upon, and sharing “what we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched…concerning the Word of life” (NIV).

So don’t go searching all over the world for the written resources your church needs until you’ve faithfully pondered Jesus’ question, “How many loaves have you?” You may find you have more to offer than you first thought, not only five loaves but two fish as well!
PUBLISHING TEAM HIGHLIGHT:
TANZANIA AREA
by Rev. Levi Nyasinde

The Tanzania Publishing Team started with the help of Dr. Steve Bryant of Discipleship Ministries (formerly GBOD) and DRI. Dr. Steve and Rev. Mutwale wa Mshindi, the presiding Bishop, signed the partnership agreement between Tanzania Annual Conference of UMC and Discipleship Ministries. Both launched the project in order to provide more resources to help the life and ministry of the church, its growth and God's knowledge and God's will.

Across the nine districts of the Tanzania Annual Conference, our project is on going and bearing fruits. Worship books are printed, the price of bibles are being sold at subsidized prices, catechism and prayer books are on software and will be presented soon. Even though we are facing challenges of book distribution and collection of fees, books are being sold. The Tanzania Publishing Team presses on and will not give up until we reach our goals.

We want to thank Almighty God for through writing workshops that continue to sustain the Tanzania Publishing Team. These workshops are the light and salt of our resources, that allow for social action as well as being the instruments of changes, turning love into action. We thankfully acknowledge Kara Lassen Oliver and Jenny Youngman for running the last seminar on writing in Mwanza, Tanzania. They mobilized and motivated their audience training them in the writing process.

The resources produced by the Tanzania Publishing Team are actively helping the church to grow. Parishioners can afford resources at reasonable prices, so that people have complete materials in order to serving God, as well as serve others. The project consists to equip and empower clergy any lay members in their respective churches.

Because of these resources our lives are not the same.
CALL FOR AUTHORS

Dear DRI Writers:

Discipleship Resources International is partnering with The Upper Room to provide a new book of devotionals, “Stories of Hope and Healing”. Inspired by the recent ebola epidemic in West Africa, DRI and The Upper Room would like to publish a book of devotionals that will encourage persons facing illness themselves, provide comfort to family and friends caring for loved ones who are sick, and strengthen the faith of persons who have suffered the tragic death of loved ones.

We are inviting submission of 200 word devotions based on a specific scripture that testifies to hope in the midst of despair, the power of God to heal and new life after death.

This devotional booklet will include 20 - 30 devotions written by African authors and will be published in English, French and Portuguese. Local areas, through DRI publishing teams will have the freedom to translate into local languages for further distribution.

Please submit your devotion by 15 July 2015, to Kara Lassen Oliver (kollower@umcdiscipleship.org) including:

• Scripture verse
• 200 word devotional focused on hope and healing
• 1 - 3 sentence prayer
• Name, address, email

Please write in the language that is most comfortable for you (English, French or Portuguese) and the editorial team will have them translated for consideration.

An editorial committee comprised of representatives from DRI, The Upper Room and Africa Central Conferences will receive submissions and choose the devotions for publication. Decisions will be made by 15 August 2015.
AAUMTI WRITER RETREAT

The African Association of United Methodist Theological Institutions (AAUMTI) has been meeting and strengthening secondary education across the continent. And Discipleship Resources International (Discipleship Ministries) was privileged to partner with the Anglophone members of AAUMTI in 2014 to train the theology faculty in writing, editing, and the process of publishing. The group chose to meet again in 2015.

Dr. Maaraidzo Mutambara, on the Faculty of Theology at Africa University, expressed well the motivation for the second writing seminar, “In our contexts, finding uninterrupted time to write what is in us, what we feel called to write, is nearly impossible. This time apart for reflecting and writing has been immeasurably valuable. I feel I have really made progress.”

Mutambara expressed what many of the association members longed for, dedicated time to write, edit and finish their manuscripts. Rev. Rhoda Manzo, from Nigeria, used the intervening months between the two events to complete her dissertation for her Doctor of Ministry at Wesley Seminary in Washington, D.C. and it was selected by the DRI staff as the next title in the Africa Ministry Series. By the time of this year’s writing retreat, she had begun her second book. The gathered group at Africa University celebrated her accomplishment with song and prayers as she signed her author agreement with Rev. Steve Bryant.

During the writing seminar, from June 17 – 19, Bryant and DRI staff member, Kara Lassen Oliver, provided additional teaching and training on “writing as calling”, “writing as ministry” and “writing as work”. But the bulk of the time was given to one-on-one consultations with each author on their specific manuscripts in various stages of completion, and to disciplined times for individual writing and editing. Although each author is an academic who teaches in a theological institution, the topic and approach to each manuscript reflects a heart for the development and vitality of the local church.

Rev. Samson Okello, a district superintendent in Kenya with the East Africa Conference, said, “This is the finest and most affirming experience of continuing education I have ever had.”

The hope is that the authors complete these resources within the year, increasing the offerings for United Methodist clergy and lay people in Africa, as well as in the United States. Selected titles will be translated into French and Portuguese and included in the E-Reader Libraries for Theological Education that DRI is establishing with each of our African seminaries on behalf of AAUMTI, Discipleship Ministries and Higher Education and Ministry.

Rev. Nday Bondo expressed well all of the partners hopes for the writing seminar but also for future resources, “I am discovering that I can write. It’s not only something other people do, people from other places; it is something I can do and God is calling me to do. The church in Africa needs to hear from Africans.”