From Rev. Stephen Bryant

Bartimeaus, a blind beggar, was stuck on the side of the road in Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples passed by on the way to Jerusalem, Bartimeaus cried out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” (Mk. 10:47). In other words, “Don't pass me by,” “Give me access to abundant life,” “allow me to participate.” And, by the end of the story, Jesus does give him access; Bartimeaus follow him on the way to participation in the divine life.

As we move among clergy and laity in Africa, Asia and Europe, we hear similar cries, what I call the five cries of Central Conferences.

Cry for connection. The United Methodist connection is a lively channel of grace that overcomes the sense of deathly isolation in some conferences and churches in remote parts of the world. Connection allows communication, provides advocacy, and results in sharing. That’s why the publishing teams in two remote areas, North Mozambique and East Angola, linked up for the first time ever to exchange a quarterly Sunday School journal, Revista Da Escola Dominical Para Jovens E Edultosa. Connected in Christ, we can be more together than alone. That’s why, when all publishing team leaders—from Africa and Asia—met together for the first time at LittWorld, all were overjoyed, enthused to meet again, and overflowed with ideas for building up what we’ve begun.

Cry for resources. The church in the majority world often acts like a man dying of thirst while standing knee deep in water. In truth, “we stand in grace,” rich in the resources God grows in us through suffering, perseverance, character and hope (Rm. 5:2-4). The challenge is learning...
to draw from our own wells, to develop our inner and outer resources, and to share them with the community of disciples. That’s why we lead writing workshops, and why our 14 publishing teams around the world are hard at work helping their conferences and churches develop contextual resources. That’s why our team in the Philippines is developing Philippine-authored textbooks on Christian values for the church schools. It’s why we publish the Africa Ministry Series—African authors writing for the church in Africa. “As scripture has said, ‘Out of the heart of those who believe shall flow rivers of living water.’” (John 7:38)

Cry for good leaders. Church and society are starved for good shepherds. Too many people clamor to be in charge; too few take up the yoke of principled leadership. Principled leaders—like the Good Shepherd—choose to live spiritually, ethically, and sacrificially for the common good. The purpose of our seminaries is to produce pastoral leaders—through good spiritual formation and theological education. That’s why, between now and 2016, we are bringing e-reader libraries for theological education to our 21 seminaries in Africa and the Philippines where library resources are scarce. Check it out at www.UMCereader.org.

That’s why we joined with the Central and East Congo Areas and with Tanzania to offer seminars for leaders—on the United Methodist way of making disciples, the UM way of worship, and the UM way of being in connection (polity).

Cry for hope. Discouragement is epidemic in our world today; fear runs through us like a grassfire. Isaiah, drawing on wisdom of 40 years in Exile, reminds us, “Those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength. They shall mount up on wings as eagles. They shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint...” The plural “those” and “they” remind us what we also learn through the
witness of our West African brothers and sisters in Christ—how to “wait on the Lord” together. Standing together in the midst of disease, they’ve find hope borne of God’s undying love. We have shared in the hope that springs from Christian solidarity as we worked with the Liberia Publishing Team on the Ebola Disease Facts booklet for churches and households.

*Cry for God.* “How long, O Lord?” (Ps. 13). In the face of disease, civil strife, and grinding poverty, we cry out to God. We need God, all of God—Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. That’s why we lead devotional writing workshops—because it helps everyone, writer and reader alike, pay attention to God’s call and open hands to God’s help. That’s why we always want you to write your stories of God’s presence and call, so in *The Upper Room* people everywhere can hear the voice of God’s love speaking to them through the witness of Africans, Filipinos, and Europeans, as well as Americans.

In response to the cries of Bartimeaus, Jesus gave him what he most needed to be a true disciple and follow him on the way. Regardless of circumstances, Jesus gives us the same and, in fact, is already doing so through the good work we are doing together.

**WRITING THE VISION**

by Jenny Youngman

In June of 2014, the members of the African Association of United Methodist Theological Institutions (AAUMTI) met for a writer’s workshop on the campus of Africa University in Zimbabwe. The DRI team led sessions on discovering a call to write, writing for the local church, devotional and academic writing, as well as sessions on editing and publishing. Throughout our week together, these prolific professors of theology and pastoral training were challenged to become the voices of theological scholarship in Africa. Taking a cue from Habbakuk, they began to “write their visions” and “make them plain.”

Each member was invited to spend some time praying and reflecting upon what God has called them to write. Afterward, they were invited to share their visions with the larger group. As they stood up, one by one, to read their reflections, some common themes popped up—preserving the history of the church in Africa, organizing for change, church membership and discipleship, Christian stewardship. Each of the DRI team members felt a leap in our spirits at the display of the Holy Spirit inspiring these voices to step into the role of theological writer for their continent and the United Methodist Church.
Throughout the week, participants shared stories of trial, perseverance, broken hearts, restoration, encouragement, and hope, always hope! Their stories bear witness to the need for good writing—for sharing those stories with a broad audience so that others might not feel alone or discouraged. Each conversation proved that there are stories to be told and strength to be shared through the written word, experiences and wisdom that can bless the church and its leaders.

**PUBLISHING TEAM HIGHLIGHT:**

**NORTH MOZAMBIQUE**

by Eurico Gustavo, Publishing Team Coordinator

Our vision is to make the publication team in the North Mozambique Annual Conference strong and powerful so that it can stand on its own in the coming years. We are working hard to produce resources with a good quality at a reasonable price and to sell them at a price that is affordable for the people.

As Christians we were commanded by our savior Jesus Christ to go and spread the good news throughout the world. So we see ourselves being called to spread this good news through the articles we have been producing for they all merge to the same point “calling people to be disciple of Christ Jesus”.

Among all, the main benefits we have seen from in the conference from the resources we have produced is that the poor people “those who were not able to buy or to get the articles of the church”, are now able to do so. The members have something to read after church service and it makes them to be more closer to God.

The big challenge we are facing is our ability to meet with the team when we call for meeting due to the occupation of some team members. Consequently, we do not afford to produce the articles at the expected time. Sometimes two or three members of the team do the works on behalf of others so that we can accomplish with the year plan. Well folks can pray for us at any time as long as they let us know the time and the date that they are going to pray for us. I do have Skype in the office, so sometimes we can do it together. However, it’s not all who have such technology and the time zone can also be a barrier for us. Any way folks can pray for us at anytime—just let us know so that we can prepare ourselves too.