



# Reach for the Summit with Upward Bound!

**June 24 - June 28**  
**8:45AM - noon**  
**Children 4yrs. Old - Grade 5**  
**(must be 4 by June 22)**  
**EP Church of Annapolis**  
**710 Ridgely Ave.**  
**410-266-8090**  
**online registration**  
**www.epannapolis.org**

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# EPistle

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## The Answer to Suffering

by Pastor Bruce O'Neil

A human truth is that all humans suffer. Bad stuff happens irrespective of age, race, social position, wealth, poverty, religion or politics. It does not matter where you live or work. Suffering is a universal problem for all mankind. Shayne Wheeler in his book *The Briarpatch Gospel* says, "Suffering is everywhere, and we know instinctively that it is evil and we are repulsed by its presence in our world. It isn't supposed to happen."

You don't need to be one of the parents who lost their child to a senseless massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, to know suffering. People suffer right here in our community, we suffer. Almost every day some mother and father, wife or husband has been told that their son or daughter, husband or wife, father or mother was taken from them by war, by a drunken driver or by cancer. Almost every day a husband or wife walks into the living room and tells the person to whom they made vows to love and honor till death do us part, "I don't love you anymore."

Let me tell you, it is natural to ask the question we are afraid to speak, "Why does God allow suffering?" In the face of suffering we should expect this question. And to be perfectly honest with you, I don't know why. The truth is, nobody knows, except God and he has not told us why.

Some try to explain suffering and evil by adopting a worldview that says there are two opposing forces in this world, good and bad; and these forces are at war with each other. Human suffering is just the collateral damage in this war for supremacy. Some have even made this worldview personal by making these forces into gods, gods at war.

Others reject this view because outside of a complete and utter victory, suffering goes on forever. Many have rejected the existence of God altogether and have resigned themselves to the fact that suffering and evil just happens, it is just part of the way things are. In other words, there is no answer to suffering. The problem with this view is that if you get rid of God it doesn't make the problem of evil and suffering any easier. In fact, it robs us of any answer or explanation. Without a good God we have no basis to call anything good or bad. And without an all-powerful God there is no hope to end the suffering we experience.

If the answer is not what Shayne Wheeler calls "gods gone wild" or "God has left the building," then what is the answer? Again, I don't know. But even if Christianity does not have all the answers it doesn't mean that we, Christians, have nothing to say about suffering.

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## Winter Relief

by Laurie Nelson

During the last week of January and again in March, Annapolis EP participated in Winter Relief in partnership with Arundel House of Hope and the Lighthouse Shelter. Through an all volunteer effort, Winter Relief has operated as a Seasonal Temporary Shelter for the homeless since 1992. Hosted by various Anne Arundel County churches each week from mid-November through mid-March, the shelter is a safe and comfortable refuge for those experiencing homelessness throughout the coldest months of the year. During these two weeks we had over 150 volunteers put in over 1,000 hours of service cooking meals, washing laundry, teaching Bible studies and simply fellowshiping with our new friends. This was an incredibly unique opportunity for us to link arms with the



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Love defines the essence of who God is. It is the Bible that tells us that God is love. Therefore, it can't be true that God does not care about human suffering and your suffering in particular as His child. Not only is God loving, but He is all-powerful. The truth is God created the whole world out of nothing. He doesn't get tired or distracted. Evil is real and suffering is real, but they are not gods and they are certainly not more powerful than God Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

But that only raises a bigger question: if God is loving and all-powerful, why does he allow human suffering? Another way to ask this question is, "If there is no stopping God and God wants suffering to end, what's stopping God from ending suffering right now?" The truth is, there is no satisfactory answer to that question. I choose to trust God based on what I know about him and that His purpose is ultimately good and redemptive, even if it is painful and confusing.

Even if I don't know specifically why a good and powerful God does not stop the suffering right now, I can trust that He can and will stop it someday because He is good and redemptive. The English writer G. K. Chesterton once said, "Fairy tales are more than true; not because they tell us that dragons exist, but because they tell us that dragons can be beaten." Chesterton is telling us that whether dragons are real or not is not what fairy tales are about, they are about evil being defeated and suffering stopped. I don't need to know why God allows human suffering to trust that a good and loving God will stop suffering.

This truth empowers me to face the suffering. I no longer have to paint a happy face on a grieving soul and live with the incongruity. It is dishonest and destructive. The truth is, there is no good way to go through suffering because humans are not built for it. Suffering is not just the way things are. Suffering is a grotesque and painful cancer on the human soul, and, really, upon this whole world. And God will not allow His beautiful creation to remain forever wounded by suffering. He is doing something about it.

What is God doing about the suffering? First, 2000 years ago God sent His Son to deal with the cause of human suffering, sin. He sent him here to start the ending of all suffering. How did Jesus start the end of all suffering

2000 years ago? He suffered. He died. God is ending suffering by experiencing suffering personally Himself.

God began 2000 years ago to reverse the curse. Jesus did not remain in the grave. God raised him from the dead. He has become the prototype for all creation. Everything will be made new. In the book, *The Lord of the Rings*, after Gandalf is reunited with the Hobbits, Sam Gamgee, who thought Gandalf was dead, said, "I thought you were dead, I thought I was dead. Is everything sad going to come untrue?" Yes! Glorious yes!

Suffering stinks and God thinks it stinks too. Jesus didn't die just so you can go to heaven someday; he died to end all the suffering like cancer, war, hunger, addiction and abuse. Though I want to know why God has not stopped all the suffering, I don't have to know why. I do know that God is good and He loves you and me and this world. And I trust that He will end all the suffering and make all things new. This allows my broken and wounded heart that sees and weeps at the suffering I do see and I do experience, to rejoice before my God who will end all the suffering.

### Angel Ministry Update

by Dee Chafant

How time seems to be flying by. It seems like yesterday that the Angel Tree was set up for Christmas and now we are preparing to send some of our Angels to Camp Wabanna. So far there are openings for four regular Angel campers - one Angel who has gone to camp since we began in 2006. My goal in sending the same Angels to camp each year is to prepare them for leadership. There is a fifth Angel who has been going to Camp Wabanna and is now in the process of filling out his application for the Leadership Training Program! How excited I am to see the fruit of God's work in this young man. In order to qualify for Leadership Training the young adult must be 17 years old, among many other qualifications. Please pray for him to be accepted into the LTP program and for all of the other children we hope to send to camp, whether with Woodside Gardens, Iglesia de Dios, or Angel Tree.

Blessings!

## Thank You Lord for our Women's Retreat

by Jenny Woodruff

In the opening of the book of Revelation John says "Blessed is the one who reads aloud the word of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near." (Revelation 1:3) Who doesn't want a blessing? Nancy Guthrie asked us. Those the Lord brought on our retreat were blessed to hear His word opened up for us both in the worship by Laura Story and the teaching by Nancy Guthrie. Over 550 thirsty women came together to retreat to the words of our Lord: "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment." (Revelation 21:5-6) Thank you to those who came, to those who served and most of all to our Lord who poured His grace and care into our thirsty hearts.

## Hit the Trail for VBS 2013!

by Linda Cate

During the week of June 24-28 there will be quite a buzz around here as hundreds of children participate in the ultimate Vacation Bible School expedition! It's time again for Upward Bound VBS. We choose this particular program because it's all about Jesus. It challenges both the church and unchurched kids to follow Jesus step by step to the summit. Its adventure's theme calls "backpackers" to follow Christ's rugged and radical trail to the summit of God's Kingdom, heaven. The content is Biblical, God-centered and has an impact for the whole family as parents help their children with homework each night. Pastor Bruce says *Upward Bound is all about introducing the children to Jesus Christ. They can't wait to get to VBS and then they don't want to leave!* Join the team today by signing up to volunteer online, [epannapolis.org](http://epannapolis.org). Contact our Director of Staff, Amy Marshall, at [amy-marshall@comcast.net](mailto:amy-marshall@comcast.net) for more information. Camper's online registration will open May 1.



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broader church in Annapolis and allowed many of us to serve in various capacities that afforded us the opportunity to minister to those who had fallen on hard times. Not only were we able to meet their immediate physical needs but we were also able to impact them spiritually with many opportunities to share the Gospel.

I want to again thank everyone that made it possible and gave of their time during those two weeks. We are in the process of developing a year round ministry team that will minister to people in our community that find themselves homeless. If you are interested, please contact Laurie at [lnelson@epannapolis.org](mailto:lnelson@epannapolis.org).

## EPHEM

by Nancy Deibert

Evangelical Presbyterian Home Education Ministry (EPHEM), a ministry of Annapolis EP Church, will be accepting registrations from new families for the 2013-2014 school year during the month of June. We serve as a home-school umbrella group for members of any of the local PCA churches. If interested in registering, you may download the info packet and forms from our website, [www.epannapolis.org](http://www.epannapolis.org). You will find information about EPHEM under "Ministries" or you may contact Nancy Deibert at [nancy.deibert@gmail.com](mailto:nancy.deibert@gmail.com) or 410-798-8781.

