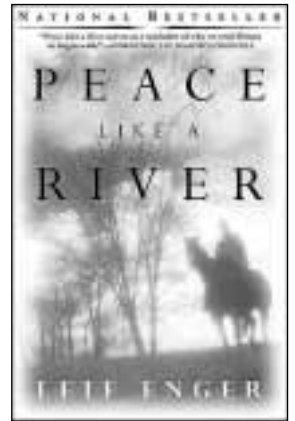
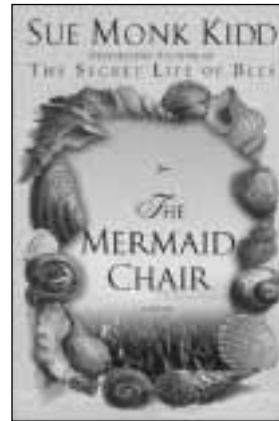
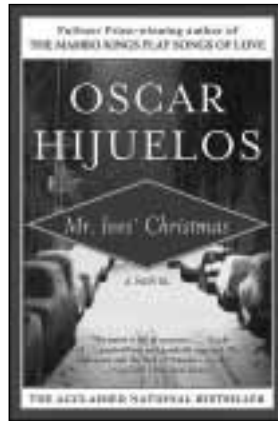
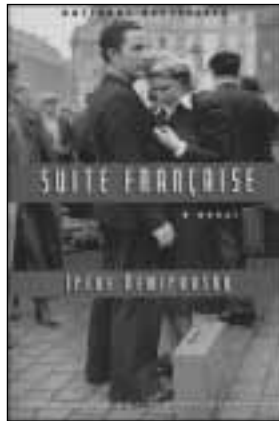
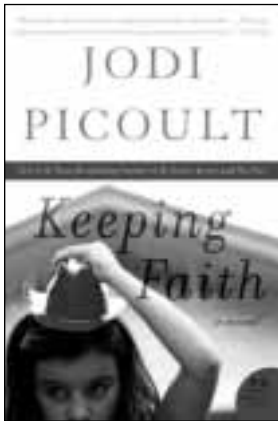


# Have a *Very* Novel Summer



**F**iction is often rich in exploration of theological questions, engaging important issues of faith indirectly but with the power to profoundly shape our ideas. *CIRCUIT RIDER* invited a number of people to suggest titles they think are both “good reads” and also enriching in their theological engagement of important issues. All of the titles mentioned are available at [cokesbury.com](http://cokesbury.com), through a Cokesbury Bookstore, or by calling 1-800-672-1789. Have a good summer, enjoy a good novel!

My recommendation is *Suite Française* by Irene Nemirovsky. This is actually two books, taken from the incomplete manuscript of a Russian Jew, who was living in Paris at the time of the German occupation; she was arrested and died at Auschwitz. These are compelling stories of occupied France, and very telling of the human condition in the bizarre situations caused by war. Such an incredible irony that the author herself becomes a victim of persecution and intolerance....one can't help but wonder what the rest of this story would have been had she lived.

**Mary Brooke Casad**  
Executive Secretary,  
The Connectional Table

*Crime and Punishment* by Fyodor Dostoyevsky. A classically important treatment of issues of sin, forgiveness, and repentance, with profound implications for understanding the gospels.

*Beloved* by Toni Morrison. A challenging novel to read, but profoundly important issues about the haunting of memory, and the legacies of sin and racism that continue to be a “hidden wound” in American culture. Note the epigraph from Romans, which includes a citation from Hosea, and you begin to understand the location of the novel in the larger drama of God's salvation and its complexities.

*Gilead* by Marilynne Robinson A beautiful, poignant portrait of a pastor's life in small-town Iowa. In addition to a lovely evocation of a well-lived pastoral life, it also addresses such issues as beauty and forgiveness quite impressively.

*Mr. Ives' Christmas* by Oscar Hijuelos. It is a story rich in themes of forgiveness and Christmas, and is really beautiful.

**Greg Jones**  
Duke Divinity School

*Run* by Anne Patchett. The award-winning author of *Bel Canto* tells a captivating tale of privilege, poverty, profound

parental love, and providence that works through human hearts and hands.

*Empire Falls* by Richard Russo. This Pulitzer Prize-winning novel by the master storyteller of blue-collar, small-town America explores with gritty honesty and hilarity the dreams, the yearnings, the disappointments, the hopes and foibles of ordinary folk and families who struggle to survive and somehow find a measure of grace and dignity and love.

*The Solace of Leaving Early* by Haven Kimmel. (See review in *CR Reviews*.)

**Jack Keller**  
Publishing Consultant, Project  
Director, *The New Interpreter's Bible*

The first novel that came to mind is *Broken for You* by Stephanie Kallos. Although the main two characters are women, I think both women and men will enjoy reading this book. It is a story about two women (an older woman who just found out she has a brain tumor and a young girl who has been dumped by her boyfriend) whose lives are both broken and who desperately need to experience healing and forgiveness. The story is rich in metaphor about brokenness, the need for human connection and grace that can occur through compassion and understanding.

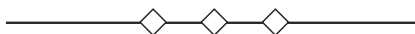
Another novel I enjoyed was *My Sister's Keeper* by Jodi Picoult. In this book,

Picoult deals with the ethical, moral, personal and theological questions that come into play when dealing with the life and death of a terminally ill loved one. The story examines what it means to be a good parent and a good sister and how far you should go to save the life of one child while infringing on the rights of another. There are lots of theological implications in this book and in many of Picoult's other books including *Keeping Faith*, *Salem Falls* and *The Pact*. In all of these books Picoult deals with lots of difficult issues.

A series I am using at my church with a book study group is *Listening for God: Contemporary Literature and the Life of Faith* published by Augsburg. There are at least 4 volumes. In each book there are 10 or so short stories by contemporary authors. It is a great series that encourages readers to listen for the presence of God in the most unlikely places and to see how faith issues arise in all aspects of life. Volume 1 includes such authors as Flannery O'Connor, Frederick Buechner, Alice Walker and Annie Dillard. Volume 2 includes John Updike, Anne Tyler, Gail Godwin and others.

### Jennie Weeks

Minister of Adult Discipleship,  
Christ Church United Methodist, Louisville, KY

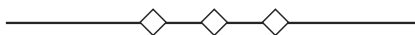


*I Am Charlotte Simmons* by Tom Wolfe. Campus life is depicted as a raunchy, racy, soulless affair as students and faculty have nothing to live for other than sex. Here is the generation our church has mostly lost. It's a satire but one which tells much truth that we need to hear.

*The Magic Mountain* by Thomas Mann. When the church becomes infatuated with physical illness, and ministry too easily degenerates into running errands for those who are experiencing physical degeneration, Mann's novel that takes place entirely in a hospital tells the truth. Our therapeutic church is really challenged in this classic.

### William Willimon

Bishop of the Birmingham Area



If I have to choose just one, I'd suggest *The River Why* by David James Duncan. Among the top three novels I have reread the most times, it is the story of a young fisherman named Gus (short for Augustine) Orvison, who discovered (as did his namesake) that the search for self is always a search for God, and in the end it is God who finds us, not the other way around. It includes some scenes of side-splitting humor, including his reflection on whether it was the disciples or Jesus himself who interrupted their Resurrection morning conversation to count (as per John ch. 21) the one-hundred fifty three fish that the disciples had just caught.

### Robert Ratcliff

Senior Editor, Books, Bibles, and Media; Abingdon Press

— Continued on p. 30.

## Recommended Novels

- The Abstinence Teacher* by Tom Perrotta
- Beloved* by Toni Morrison
- Broken for You* by Stephanie Kallos
- The Brothers K* by David James Duncan
- Crime and Punishment* by Fyodor Dostoyevski
- The Crossing* by Cormac McCarthy
- Death Comes for the Archbishop* by Willa Cather
- Disgrace* by J.M Coetzee
- Empire Falls* by Richard Russo
- Every Last Cuckoo* by Kate Maloy
- Gilead* by Marilynne Robinson
- How To Be Good* by Nick Hornby
- I Am Charlotte Simmons* by Tom Wolfe
- Keeping Faith* by Jodi Picoult
- Last Night at the Lobster* by Stewart O'Nan
- Listening for God: Contemporary Literature and the Life of Faith*
- The Magic Mountain* by Thomas Mann
- Maise Dobbs* by Jacqueline Winspear
- Men and Angels* by Mary Gordon (**Out of Print**)
- The Mermaid Chair* by Sue Monk Kidd
- Mr. Ives' Christmas* by Oscar Hijuelos
- My Sister's Keeper* by Jodi Picoult
- The Name of the Rose* by Umberto Eco
- Night Train to Lisbon* by Pascal Mercier
- The Pact* by Jodi Picoult
- Peace Like a River* by Leif Enger
- Pearl* by Mary Gordon
- The River Why* by David James Duncan
- The Road* by Cormac McCarthy
- Run* by Ann Patchett
- Saint Maybe* by Anne Tyler
- Salem Falls* by Jodi Picoult
- The Solace of Leaving Early* by Haven Kimmel
- Soul Catcher* by Michael White
- Suite Francaise* by Irene Nemirovsky
- Thirteen Moons* by Charles Frazier

**All titles in print are available at  
Cokesbury.com/ 1-800-672-1789**

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*The Brothers K* by James David Duncan

**Tex Sample**

Author of *Earthy Mysticism*

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I love Leif Enger's *Peace Like a River* for an exploration of miracles that never becomes trite.

**Jason Byassee**

Assistant Editor, Christian Century

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I recommend novels by Mary Gordon. Her most recent is *Pearl* but my favorite is *Men and Angels* (1985.) "Men and Angels" is a phrase from St. Paul: "though I speak with the tongues of men and angels, and have not love..." It is a tough read but powerful.

**Tom Trotter**

Former General Secretary of GBHEM

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*The Abstinence Teacher* by Tom Perotta.

*Saint Maybe* by Anne Tyler (all of her stuff actually.)

*Soul Catcher* by Michael White, a novel set during the Civil War.

I also thought that *How To Be Good* by Nick Hornby was interesting.

**Daniel Harrell**

Author of *Nature's Witness* (forthcoming from Abingdon Press)

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*Death Comes for the Archbishop* by Willa Cather. It seems to convey the mundane and also extraordinary patterns of life that occur in pastoral ministry.

In a different way, *Gilead* by Marilynne Robinson covers similar terrain.

**Ken Carter**

Pastor, Providence UMC, Charlotte, NC  
Author of *A Way of Life in the World*

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I've just discovered the *Maisie Dobbs* series by Jacqueline Winspear. In the first of five novels set in post-World War I Britain, Maisie opens a business in which she is known as Psychologist and Investigator. Mysteries are solved by Maisie, but more interesting are Maisie's insights into human nature and her understanding that our interactions with people change the outcome of attitudes and events.

*Every Last Cuckoo* by Kate Maloy. Enjoyable and touching novel about growing old and being a part of community.

*The Road* by Cormac McCarthy. Recommended to me by my mother, a longtime librarian and English teacher, this book is dark and unsettling. It's a post-apocalyptic story of a father and his son. The book deals with questions of survival and what makes us human.

*Disgrace* by J.M. Coetzee. Also recommended by my mother. David Lurie is a white English professor in South Africa, who resigns his teaching post under charges of sexual impropriety. He goes to live on his daughter Lucy's farm and begins a painful quest for renewal. The book deals with prejudice in modern day South Africa.

**Sally Langford**

District Superintendent  
North Carolina

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*The Crossing* by Cormac McCarthy. With exquisite regard, this story raises a gate-lamp to the world of Mexican folk theology and spirituality.

*The Mermaid Chair* by Sue Monk Kidd. A novel with a monastic/theological sub-text that traces a woman's personal struggle to come to terms with a covenant relationship rent asunder and subsequently rejoined; a circuitous sonnet to married love.

*Thirteen Moons* by Charles Frazier. Picturesque and plaintive, this story holds a lens—or perhaps a mirror—to the soul and soullessness of the American frontier and the frontier American.

**Paul Escamilla,**

Pastor, Spring Valley UMC, Dallas  
Author of *Longing for Enough in a Culture of More*

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*The Name of the Rose* by Umberto Eco

**Tony Jones**

National Coordinator of Emergent Village

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*Last Night at the Lobster* by Stewart O'Nan. This short novel explores the lives of those who are most vulnerable to economic recession. A Red Lobster restaurant is being closed by corporate headquarters for "not meeting expectations." Through the diminished personal expectations of the handful of employees who stick around for one last shift and one final paycheck, we are offered an empathetic, yet unsentimental, glimpse of what it takes to just "get by" in twenty-first century America.

*Night Train to Lisbon* by Pascal Mercier. This novel has sold more than 2 million copies in Europe, but it is not your typical best-seller. Written by a professor of philosophy, *Night Train* follows a high school teacher who abruptly leaves behind his stable, predictable life in Switzerland for a quixotic quest in Portugal. Somehow, Mercier's lengthy novel manages to be both a suspenseful "page-turner" and a leisurely meditation on the paradoxes of self-discovery.

**Mark Rawls**

Senior Pastor, First UMC, Rochester, New York

Are you thinking, "Why didn't they ask me?" Well, we're asking now! Send one or two titles you would add to the list, with brief annotations, to [jkelly@umpublishing.org](mailto:jkelly@umpublishing.org). We would love to enrich the list and will include your additions in future issues of *CR*.