

Holston shows 'fiscal witness' for planet

By Annette Spence

Most of the time, the Holston Conference staff seeks to cut operating costs in an effort to show good stewardship. Beginning this month, the conference will spend an extra \$100 per month to show good stewardship.

Responding to a request by the Creation Care Action Team, the conference center in Alcoa, Tenn., is purchasing "green power" through a Tennessee Valley Authority program, Green Power Switch.

The program invites residential and commercial customers to invest in electricity generated from renewable resources – solar, wind, and methane gas – which is then added to TVA's power mix.

Holston Conference has committed to buying 25 blocks of green power per month, resulting in a \$100 charge added to the typical \$2,500 bill for electricity at the three-story building on 217 South Rankin Road, according to Treasurer John Tate. The 25-block purchase represents about 10 percent of the conference building's average kilowatt-hours usage for 12 months.

Bishop James Swanson's executive team explored and then endorsed the green power commitment after a suggestion from Holston's environmental ministry group, according to the Rev. Ron Matthews.

"It's a gesture of our understanding of the importance of doing all we can as a church to promote environmental concerns and conservation," Matthews said. "It's a fiscal witness to what we believe in."

Matthews is executive assistant to Bishop Swanson and a member of the Creation Care Action Team.

As the public becomes increasingly aware that traditional energy sources like coal, natural gas, oil, and nuclear power are harmful to the environment, Holston's Creation Care Action Team wanted to respond, Matthews said. Although no source of energy is impact-free, renewable resources are believed to create less waste and pollution.

Renewable energy costs more because "the technology used to capture the energy they produce is still more expensive than traditional power generation methods," according to TVA's Web site. "However, increased demand may lead to expanded power production capacity and eventually to lower costs."

TVA built the first commercial wind-powered turbines in the southeastern U.S. on Buffalo Mountain in Anderson County, Tenn., according to TVA. Solar-generation sites are located in the service areas of participating public power companies. Methane gas is providing power at Allen Fossil Plant in Memphis, where a methane waste byproduct from the city's wastewater treatment plant is used for co-firing, according to TVA.

"Every dollar from every block of green power you buy goes directly back into Green Power Switch," said Allison Slater, marketing representative for the City of Alcoa, which distributes electricity for the Holston Conference Center building.

Some Holston churches are already participating in Green Power Switch, including Sinking Springs and Concord of Oak Ridge District and Church Street of Knoxville District.

Other local groups making the Green Power Switch commitment include the City of Sevierville, Mayfield Dairy Tourist Center of Athens, and Dixie Barbeque of Johnson City.

Virginia power

TVA provides power to most distributors in east Tennessee, such as Newport Utilities and the City of Elizabethton Electric Board. In Holston's southwest Virginia area, most churches and residences are served by Appalachian Power, which is part of American Electric Power.

Appalachian Power doesn't have a program comparable to Green Power Switch, according to John Shepelwich, manager of state corporate communications based in Roanoke, Va.

"We're in the process of contracting for wind energy that will be part of the grid," he said, "but our customers will not have to pay a premium cost for alternative energy sources."

Seventy-five to 80 percent of his company's energy is generated from coal,

Shepelwich said, while 5 percent of Virginia's power comes from hydroelectric sources. "Some people consider hydroelectric to be alternative energy, and some do not," he said.

"We do urge all our customers – businesses, churches, residences, whatever – to be wise consumers and look for ways to save energy," he added.

The Rev. David St. Clair, chair of the Creation Care Action Team and pastor in Chilhowie, Va., said that he commends churches and other groups participating in Green Power Switch.

"If it costs us a little bit more, all we have to do is lay that at the foot of the cross and ask ourselves if we have done as much as He has done for us," St. Clair said.

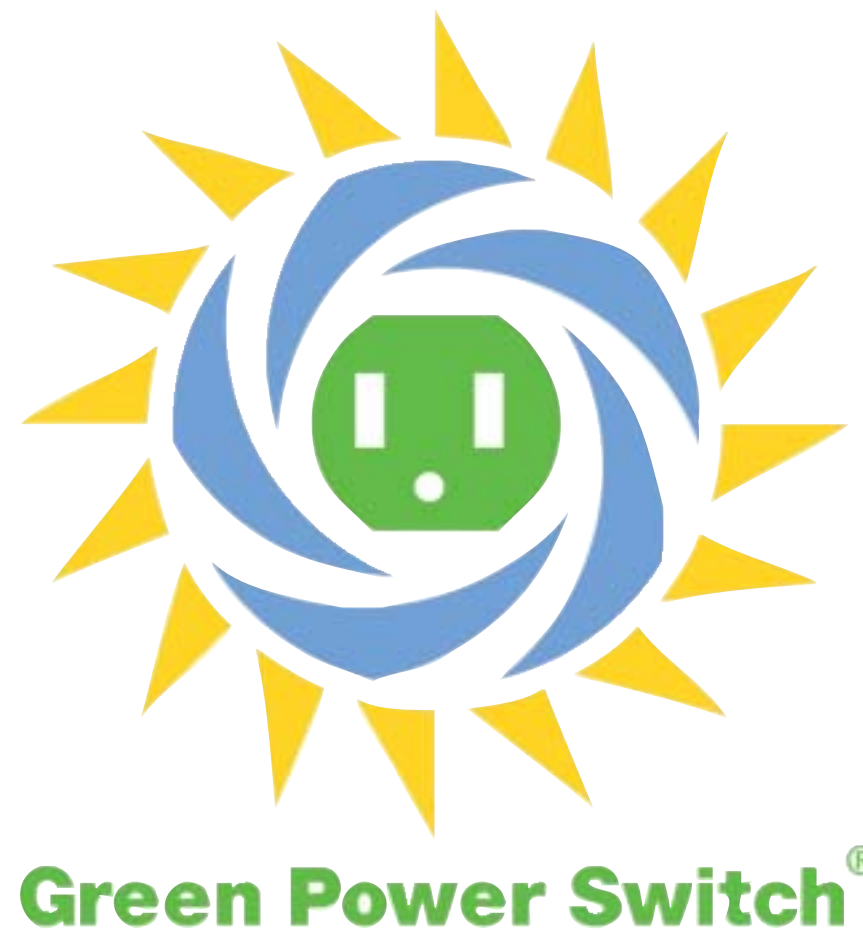
For churches or individuals who don't have access to Green Power Switch or who would prefer other conservation means, St. Clair suggests the challenge of reducing energy use by 10 percent in 2008.

"In my mind, the global climate crisis is every bit a moral crisis as the era of the civil rights movement in the mid-20th century," he said.

For information on Green Power Switch, visit tva.com/greenpowerswitch. For information on Appalachian Power, visit appalachianpower.com.

Resources for eco-congregations

- **U.S. Environmental Protection Agency:** Go to energystar.gov, then search for "Congregations." Find the "Energy Star for Congregations" page.
- **Interfaith Power and Light:** A ministry devoted to deepening the connection between ecology and faith. National site: theregenerationproject.org. Tennessee program: tm-ipl.org. Virginia program: vpl.org. Georgia program: gpl.org.
- **National Council of Churches:** The Eco-Justice Program offers sermons, a green building toolkit, advocacy news, and other resources at ncccojustice.org.
- **Holston Conference:** The Creation Care Action Team reports on advocacy action and provides local and national information at environment.holston.org. ■



First Gatlinburg congregation rejoices in National Register of Historic Places listing

First Gatlinburg United Methodist Church recently joined a handful of other Holston churches listed among 80,000 in the National Register of Historic Places.

A crowd of about 150 celebrated the honor on Sunday evening, Oct. 7, with special music and a message from Maryville District Superintendent Carol Wilson. The church was officially added to the register in July 2007.

The historic listing will help the church remain in its prime location, just off the thoroughfare in a congested and popular tourist town, according to the Rev. Jane Taylor, First Gatlinburg pastor.

"Gatlinburg is a desirable place to be because of the tourism industry," she said. "This listing guarantees that the church can stay where it is. We have a viable ministry in downtown Gatlinburg for the people who reside in Gatlinburg as well as the tourists."

Church members Peggy and Newman Smith led the application process to acquire national historic status, Taylor said.

"This is a celebration of all the work and faith that went into this building," Peggy Smith said. "It's a

time to celebrate the dreams of people that became a realization. They weren't wealthy people; they were just people who wanted to provide a place to worship."

Smith said she believes a historical account written by the Rev. Robert Hilten, a retired Holston pastor now living in Maryville, was key in helping the church gain National Register recognition. Hilten authored the book, "The Pillar of Fire: Drama of Holston United Methodism in a Changing World," published in 1994.

First Gatlinburg was organized in 1938. Bishop Paul Kern dreamed of a place where one could "find the heart of God in the heart of the mountains." When the rock work began, Kern conducted a service with the rock masons. According to church history, Kern told them, "You are building a little Cathedral in the Smokies which will be visited by people from all over the world. Let each stone be a song and each strip of mortar a prayer."



On behalf of history-writer Robert Hilten, the Rev. Jane Taylor presents a book about Holston Conference to Peggy Smith (above, left), immediately following the Oct. 7 service at First Gatlinburg UMC.

Other Holston buildings on the National Register include Asbury and Central of Knoxville District; Sulphur Springs Camp Shed of Johnson City District; Bethlehem-Wiley and McKendree in Chattanooga District; and Acuff Chapel in Kingsport District. ■

Know a retiree? Prescription deadline is Dec. 31

By John Shearer

Attention all retired Holston Conference pastors and/or spouses – as well as those who know retired pastors or spouses: The deadline to sign up for the new health insurance prescription plan is Dec. 31, 2007.

Those who do not sign up by Dec. 31 will have to pay the full price for prescriptions, according to the Board of Pensions.

In March 2007, the Board of Pensions voted for a new health insurance plan for the roughly 560 Holston retired ministers. According to Conference Treasurer John Tate, the move came about after the board realized that the current retirees' health insurance plan was not sustainable due to spiraling long-term cost projections.

As a result, the board recommended converting the retirees to a Medicare Supplement program, BlueCross65, and to have the retirees individually enroll in a Medicare Part D prescription plan that best suits their needs and can provide the best savings.

The retirees and spouses will be enrolled automatically in BlueCross65, but they must sign up themselves for the prescription program.

Patty Muse, chair of the Board of Pensions'



Muse

Hudson

Blair

Retirees Health Insurance Task Force, said informational meetings were organized in mid-November throughout the conference to help people learn how to enroll and make educated decisions.

"We had between 150 to 200 at the meetings," she said. "But we have 500 or so retirees."

As a result, Muse has written letters to the retired pastors or spouses she knows at her home church, Munsey Memorial United Methodist Church, reminding them of the Dec. 31 deadline. She is also encouraging others who know retired pastors or spouses to contact them about the deadline.

"The Board of Pensions is committed to doing everything it can to ensure that each retiree signs up for a Medicare Part D prescription drug plan," Muse said. "But there may still be retirees who

have not taken action. It would be helpful if each of us, as brothers and sisters in Christ, would contact the Holston retirees we know and ask if they have signed up for a plan.

"Come Jan. 1, if they have not signed up, it is too late," Muse said.

The Rev. Bob Hudson of the Johnson City District has already signed up for a prescription plan. Although he admitted that switching to Medicare Part D was scary at first, he thinks it will be a good idea for the conference in the long term.

"Each one of us has our own unique needs, and having the availability to find the plan that fits our individual needs is a positive," he said.

A fellow retiree, the Rev. Ann Blair of Wytheville District, said the November meetings helped her decide what she needed.

"I am not very astute when it comes to insurance," she said with a laugh. "My husband usually takes care of that. So I depended entirely on what they said."

No additional meetings will be held, but retired pastors or spouses who still need guidance in enrolling in a prescription plan are encouraged to contact their pharmacist or insurance agent, Muse said. Or contact Holston Treasurer John Tate at (865) 293-4125 or johnntate@holston.org. ■