

Monday: Ministry joys, subdued voting, money concerns

Conference members efficiently tackled 32 constitutional amendments and gave their missions offering for Sudan. They celebrated the conclusion of another successful Hands-on Mission Project with the blast of a truck horn and heard about the accomplishments and goals of the Discipleship Team through a humorous video presentation.

But they also took it on the chin when several reports revealed that weak giving combined with the economic downturn is depleting reserve funds and squeezing ministry dollars.

Bishop James Swanson began the State of the Church Address with a rundown of ministries exemplifying the "Offer Them Christ" theme. He mentioned Holston's mission work in six of seven continents, as well as local-church ministries for the homeless and prisoners.

Swanson then addressed what he called the "stark reality" of Holston's financial state. Apportionment giving for 2009 is projected to drop 10 percent below the historic rate of 90 percent, prompting the conference to cut expenses by 15 percent and limit travel. The Cabinet voluntarily opted not to accept salary raises in 2009, he said.

"Although we are known as a generous conference, I am convinced that we can grow in our giving," Swanson said. He urged members not to "tip God" by giving out of surplus, but to "give 10 percent of everything God has given us."

Of 167,000 Holston members, 47,946 are identified as regular givers, Swanson said. If those persons gave 10 percent of their incomes – even if all their incomes were at poverty level – their total gifts would exceed the current conference budget.

"Even in the midst of the current economic crisis, I still seek to challenge us to be the church," Swanson said. "I want you to go back to your congregations and quit poor mouthing. You serve a God who is extremely able."

Other activities from yesterday's service;

- The conference celebrated a record-breaking collection of 7,647 missions kits – with the traditional honk-honk of trucks that will transport the supplies to the coast for shipping to Liberia and Zimbabwe. Every district surpassed their goals; some districts doubled and even tripled their goals.

- With minimal discussion and emotion, members plowed through voting of 32 amendments in about 30 minutes. Provoking the most discussion was proposed amendment #1, granting membership to all who take vows. The results of Holston's votes are expected to be announced before the close of conference. Holston is one of 134 conferences worldwide whose votes will be counted.

- Three resolutions were considered by the conference. A resolution to base conference finances on tithing was tabled until the conclusion of the direct invoic-

ing vote on Wednesday. A resolution to reduce the number of districts from 12 to six was referred to the appointment cabinet. A resolution to eliminate the pastor's salary as an element in the conference apportionment formula was rejected.

- Bishop Swanson reported that the Congregational Development office will start 15 new churches in the next five years. "And nobody better not ask me how we're going to do it," Swanson said. "I do believe that if you set bold goals, God will come alongside ... It doesn't take a bucketload of money, but a mustard seed of faith."

- Later, the Rev. Richard Edwards announced that an immediate goal is to begin one church in 2009 and three churches in 2010. Among the congregational development projects are Cokesbury UMC's Hardin Valley campus, scheduled to open in September; Fairview UMC's "The Remedy" for young adults, currently meeting in a downtown Maryville theater; and Jordan's Chapel UMC in Pulaski, Va., relocating to a 12-acre site.

- Deb Holly of the Discipleship Team encouraged members to review the United Methodist Church's four areas of focus for the quadrennium through a new web page at quadtraining.holston.org.

- The Discipleship Team announced the development of Leadership Holston, a nine-month training program for 12 clergy and 12 lay members. The Rev. Adam Hamilton's teaching sessions at Annual Conference is a Leadership Holston initiative, Holly said.

- The conference celebrated nine Hispanic communities in Holston, including emerging ministries at Cherokee UMC in Johnson City District, First Broad Street UMC in Kingsport District, and another in Cleveland District.

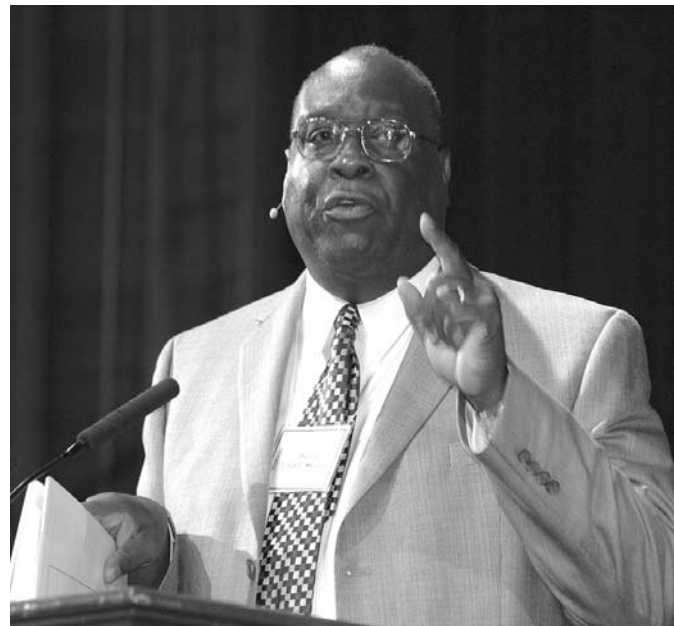
- The Witness Team will offer an evangelism conference in early 2010 and has set a goal to baptize 3,000 on Pentecost Day.

- An African American Ministry Team was formed last year and a Poverty Action Team will soon be formed, according to the Discipleship Team report. A Disciple Bible Study project in Virginia prisons is in development.

- In the 2008 summer season, Holston's four camps hosted 3,241 campers and recognized 1,304 faith decisions.

- The Conference Council on Youth Ministries celebrated the second straight year as the top United Methodist conference in giving to Youth Service Fund.

- The Council on Finance and Administration (CFA) reported that 85 percent of apportionments



"Our church is faced with a crisis," says Bishop James Swanson, referring to the decline in apportionment giving.

were received in 2008, while spending totaled 89 percent. The shortfall was covered with \$743,000 of reserve funds.

- The CFA proposed a 2010 budget of \$15.16 million, which is 4.6 percent below the adopted 2009 budget. Members will vote on the 2010 budget on Wednesday.

- Effective January 2010, the conference has secured a self-insuring program providing workers compensation for pastors and church employees. The program is United Methodist Property & Casualty Trust (PACT), according to Board of Trustees Chair Gene Frazer.

- The Board of Pensions reported that reserve funds were reduced to offset the economic downturn – by \$5.2 million in 2008. The board voted not to include bariatric surgery in the conference health plan, as requested in a 2008 resolution, according to Chairperson Charlie Harr.

- The conference's Emergency Response Team van was parked near the main entrance to Stuart Auditorium. Jim Fetzer and the Rev. Mark Hicks said they were raising awareness as well as recruiting volunteers. "We're looking for a few good people, men or women," Fetzer said.

- The Sudan offering total will be announced Wednesday during the Sending Forth Service. ■



The First Maryville UMC Chancel Choir sings at last night's ordination service, which included 18 ordinands.

Bishop Swanson's Reading List

- *The Poverty and Justice Bible* (CEV)
- *The Wesley Study Bible*
- *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*
- *Enough*, by Adam Hamilton
- *Hope Lives: A Journey of Restoration*, by Amber Van Schooneveld

More information to come

Plenary Monitoring Snapshot (6/15/09)

Female participation – 30%
 Male participation – 70%
 Racial/ethnic participation – 14%
 Lay participation – 59%
 Clergy participation – 41%
 Youth participation – 17%
 Older adult participation – 35%

Provided by COSROW and RRC



A member marks her ballot for 32 amendment votes.