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The Call

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The 2014 Annual Conference missions offering will be used to support education in South Sudan.

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21 Hispanic church leaders receive training

MORRISTOWN, Tenn. – Twenty-three Hispanic church leaders were celebrated for completing a six-month theological course during a graduation ceremony held at Trinity United Methodist Church on Dec. 7.

The graduates received certificates for their studies through a program administered by Reinhardt University: *Instituto de Formación para el Ministerio*, or Institute for the Formation of the Ministry (INFORM).

Holston lay members and pastors traveled from as far away as Hillsville, Va., to participate in Saturday classes led by the Rev. Aquiles Martinez, professor of religion at Reinhardt College in Waleska, Ga., and the Rev. Francisco Cañas, executive director of the National Plan for Hispanic/ Latino Ministries, based in New York, N.Y.

Selected church leaders from Holston Conference's 10 Hispanic congregations received culturally sensitive instruction on United Methodist tenets to prepare them for reaching out to their communities, according to Martinez and Cañas.

"The purpose was to help them understand, adopt, and insert into their hearts the doctrine and theology of the United Methodist Church," said Cañas.

The Holston course was the second of its kind, Martinez said. The first was offered in the North Georgia Conference with low completion rates. The Holston class began with 27 students and ended with 23.

"This was a faithful, persistent group that was willing to follow the rules" and attend every class, Martinez said. He praised them for their willingness to embrace teachings and principles that may be different from those of their childhood faith.

Some of the graduates expressed appreciation to the instructors, Holston Conference, and to God for the scripture-based training. They spoke in Spanish while the Rev. Arturo Reyna, Holston's Hispanic ministries coordinator, translated in English.

"I am thankful to the [Holston] Conference for going the extra mile for us, for motivating us to go forward to do more

thinking and studying," said Petrona Vicente from First United Methodist Church of Pulaski, Va.

Also graduating in the class was 13-year-old Vanessa Lopez, daughter of Pastor Wilmer Lopez and Pastor Susana Lopez of El Ministerio del Espiritu Santo (Ministry of the Holy Spirit) congregation at First United Methodist Church of Sevierville, Tenn.

The INFORM class is a first but critical step in reaching more of the growing Hispanic population within Holston Conference boundaries, Cañas said. The United Methodist Church has a "complex task" as it attempts to include more of the 53 million Hispanic Latinos in the United States, comprised of "28 cultures, 22 nations, and many ways to understand the Gospel."

Cañas addressed some of his comments to Holston Cabinet members, challenging them to continue to educate and equip rising Hispanic leaders.

"It's obvious this is the first step toward an amazing, beautiful, powerful ministry in the Holston Conference, but it's an incredible difference," he said. "I'm willing to come back, but I'm not willing to come back without your commitment."

Cabinet members attending the graduation included the Rev. Stella Roberts, director of connectional ministries; the Rev. Tom Ballard, Morristown District superintendent; the Rev. Charles Maynard, Maryville District superintendent; and the Rev. Meg Taylor, Wytheville District superintendent. ■



Leaders from Holston's 10 Hispanic congregations celebrate completion of special theological training.

South Sudan supper: Churches will give 2014 offering for education

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. -- Eighty-two people attended a dinner for Holston Conference's mission work in South Sudan on Friday night, Dec. 7.

When they departed Bearden United Methodist Church into the cold, driving rain two hours later, they had learned at least two new things:

- The mission offering for Annual Conference 2014 will be used to develop education in South Sudan.
- The \$1.2 million donated by Holston members to fight malaria this year is already making an impact in South Sudan.

"Your money is already at work," said the Rev. Fred Dearing, Yei District superintendent in South Sudan.

Home in the U.S. for the holidays, Dearing updated United Methodists from southwest Virginia and east Tennessee on progress made in the East African region where Holston Conference has been sending mission teams since 2006.

He said a \$50,000 grant -- from the Imagine No Malaria campaign -- has been received to purchase medicine and protective bed nets. A second \$50,000 grant is in progress.

Fifteen churches have been developed, and a school that was built and staffed in Yei currently educates 1,000 students, Dearing said. Thirty-two wells have been dug. Thirteen wells have already needed (and received) repair work.

Several covenant relationships have been formed throughout Holston Conference, Dearing said. The Knoxville, Chattanooga, Kingsport and Abingdon Districts -- as well as First United Methodist Church of Maryville -- have made long-term commitments to build churches, train pastors, or support education.

"These covenant relationships are very important," he said. "It gives the people hope and confidence, knowing you are walking alongside them."

Dearing also provided updates on health, economic development, and food security programs developed by Holston in partnership with the East Africa Conference.

His wife, Libby Dearing, updated the audience on Grace Home for Children, the orphanage opened by Holston in September 2013. She showed before-and-after photos of 20 children now living in four houses, cared for by four "mommas."



The opening of Grace Home for Children was a highlight in Holston's past year of mission.

"We wanted you to see these faces, so you can see what a difference you have made in their lives," Libby Dearing said.

When asked how long the children will live in the home, Libby Dearing replied, "Right now I'm planning for their college education. This is my prayer, that this will be their home."

Other speakers included LeRae Collins, Imagine No Malaria coordinator, who said the latest total for the disease-fighting effort is more than \$1,227,800.

The Rev. Tom Hancock, chair of Holston's Missions Ministry Team and pastor at Harrison United Methodist Church, announced that money raised by churches for the Annual Conference missions offering in 2014 will benefit South Sudan education. (The offering will be collected at the Holston Annual Conference, held June 8-11 at Lake Junaluska, N.C.)

"South Sudan has one of the weakest education systems in the world because it's one of the newest nations in the world," Hancock said. "When you invest in education, you really do invest in the future."

Forty-nine percent of South Sudan's population is under age 18, he said. Fifteen percent of the population is younger than 5. ■