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The Call

Digest

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Maria Humbane returns to Zimbabwe, thankful for Holston and the "Hands-on Mission Project."

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18 students attend 'pastor school'

ALCOA, Tenn. -- Patty Muse just gave up her weekend to sit in an office building with 17 other aspiring pastors. So did Greg Ezell, Edna Lopez, and Bill Pendergrass. They are the students of Holston Conference's 2014 Local Pastors School.

Some already work in the church. Muse is lay pastor of small groups and local outreach at Munsey Memorial United Methodist Church in Johnson City, Tenn. Ezell is pastoring the Rural Retreat Circuit in Wythe County, Va.

Other students work in the secular world: Car sales. Physical therapy. Housekeeping. Candy factory. Yet all have heard a call from God to serve as a pastor.

"There is so much power in our stories," said Bill Pendergrass, 34, a physical therapist in Knoxville, Tenn. "We're all so different and we answer the call in so many different ways."

According to the United Methodist *Book of Discipline*, the local pastor is not ordained in the United Methodist Church but is licensed for ministry to perform the duties of a pastor.

In Holston Conference, candidates for Local Pastors School pay \$650 plus \$45 for books for three full weekends of classes in the first weeks of February, March, and April. In years past, training was held at Buffalo Mountain Camp. This year, the school was held at the Holston Conference Center in Alcoa, Tenn.

"Almost everybody who comes to us has been working in some other career. A lot of these folks are giving up vacation days or paychecks to be here," said the Rev. Dale Gilbert, co-dean of Local Pastors School and senior pastor at Central United Methodist Church in Radford, Va.

"My dad was a bi-vocational pastor, and I saw how hard he had to work to get his education. So part of me really appreciates persons who are willing to work while taking on a pastorate," Gilbert said. "I want to help them get off to a good start."

The Local Pastor School students pass through other steps before gathering for their first weekend of classes. They are recommended by their home church and assigned to a mentor to explore their calling.

Once recommended by a district committee for local pastor school, the students attend class from Friday evening through Sunday at noon. The *Book of Discipline* requires 80 hours of study in four areas: worship and preaching, church administration, Christian education, and pastoral care.

Graduates are recognized and receive their licenses at

Annual Conference in June. "They have a reasonable expectation that they will receive an appointment," Gilbert said.

After eight years of teaching, Gilbert, an elder, is now in his second year as dean of Holston's Local Pastor School.

"This is always a time of spiritual renewal for me," he said. "After years of dealing with a call to ministry, many of these people have finally said 'yes.' It's a time of great joy for them."

Pendergrass, a member at Fountain City United Methodist Church, said he only recently realized it was "OK" to hear and answer a bi-vocational or second-career calling. After completing local pastor school this spring, he plans to attend Asbury Theological Seminary in 2015.

"My current path has prepared me for this," he said. "Instead of regret, I feel so much more prepared than if I went straight to seminary."

For the last two years, Edna Lopez has served as a volunteer co-pastor (with husband Marvin Lopez) for the Hispanic congregation at First United Methodist Church of Gatlinburg, Tenn. She helps support her family and her ministry as a housekeeper.

"The Lord has been calling me to proceed with getting my local pastor license," she said. "I would love to be able to accept new members to our congregation and offer the sacraments."

Local pastors are in higher demand today than in recent years, Gilbert said. "A lot of our congregations are no longer able to afford to pay an elder. These individuals are willing to serve for the smaller salaries that churches can pay." ■



Bill Breeding works on a time-management assignment at Local Pastors School.

'Hands-on Project' feeds Zimbabwe children

MARYVILLE, Tenn. -- On her last day in Holston Conference, Maria Humbane was so grateful -- and yet so concerned.

From the moment her plane touched down at McGhee-Tyson Airport on Feb. 13 until her March 27 departure, Humbane visited churches all over Holston and many in Indiana.

Her priority was to express gratitude to Holston Conference for sending food and other supplies to the children of Zimbabwe over the past 14 years.

"I'm coming to thank the churches," said the director of Ishe Anesu, a missionary project that feeds and educates about 75 students in Sakubva, Mutare, Zimbabwe. "Everything we ask for, they send. They do so much for us."

Each May since 2000, Holston churches have collected food, school, and health supplies for children cared for by Humbane as well as children in Liberia. The "Hands-on Mission Project" is blessed at Annual Conference in June before being shipped across the ocean to Africa.

Now, as Holston gears up for another Hands-on Mission Project, Humbane has returned to Zimbabwe with confidence that, at least, the children will continue to be fed. The food and other supplies sent by Holston each summer are carefully rationed and made to last until the following year, when another "Hands-on" shipment arrives in August.

"It helps me to know the churches care and know our needs," Humbane said. "My presence and visits in the churches, to me, was like a revival. They remembered me and called me by name. They welcomed me with open arms."

Because of Holston, the children are healthier, Humbane said. Many are HIV positive yet nutrition and vitamins help keep them well.

What Humbane is unsure of, however, is how long Ishe Anesu can continue to educate the children.

"It's a frustration," the 72-year-old leader said on her last day in the U.S. "I don't see the green light or where we are going. Maybe God wants us to struggle so we appreciate what we get."

Ishe Anesu Project needs \$65,000 a year to educate 45 children in primary school plus an additional 20

in secondary school and college.

In past years, donations and Maria Humbane's own salary as well as her husband's salary helped meet these expenses, Humbane said. Maria Humbane's husband is Bill Humbane, age 82, a teacher at Africa University.

Changes in Zimbabwe's exchange rate, political state, donation levels and salaries are threatening the future of Ishe Anesu, said the Rev. Jerry Russell, senior pastor at Fairview United Methodist Church in Maryville, Tenn.

"They see this mission as God's call on their lives," Russell said, referring to the Humbanes. "They're doing all they can not to let it wither and die."

In addition, an orphanage built by volunteers from Fairview United Methodist Church has sat vacant for three years. Currently, the children of Ishe Anesu receive education and one meal daily, but they do not live on campus.

The orphanage was built to accommodate 12 children left parent-less by HIV. "For \$25,000 a year, 12 children can stay at Ishe Anesu overnight rather than sleep in a doorway," Russell said.

When Humbane visited the Holston Conference Center on March 10, the Connectional Ministries staff was so concerned to hear about the situation at Ishe Anesu, they invited her to apply for a Change for Children grant.

Humbane did apply, and the Children's Ministry Team has since awarded Ishe Anesu a \$22,000 grant. Change for Children is funded by donations

from Holston churches explicitly for children's ministries.

"Maria shared that she had vacancies for younger children as a result of graduations but was unable to fill them because of lack of funds," said Gaye King, associate director of connectional ministries. "Her story spoke to my heart. The Children's Ministry Team wholeheartedly agreed that we should fund this ministry." ■

To give to Ishe Anesu, write a check to your local church with "Ishe Anesu Advance #130710" on the memo line. To participate in the "Hands-on Mission Project," talk to your pastor.



Maria Humbane holds a bucket that church members will fill with food and send to hungry children in Zimbabwe.

The Call is the news source for Holston Conference. ● The Holston Conference of the United Methodist Church includes 897 churches in east Tennessee, southwest Virginia, and north Georgia. ● Our resident bishop is Mary Virginia Taylor. ● Our executive assistant is the Rev. Carol Wilson. ● Our office address is P.O. Box 850, 217 South Rankin Road, Alcoa, TN 37701. ● (865) 690-4080 ● www.Holston.org ● thecall@holston.org or info@holston.org ● Facebook.Holston.org ● Twitter @TheCall_Holston ● Free e-news: thecalltwo.holston.org