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The Call

Digest

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Kingsporters return from Global Young People's Convocation in Philippines.

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Susannah's House helps moms recovering from drug abuse

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. -- Melissa was addicted to drugs when she gave birth to her children. She still feels the shame of being rejected by people who struggled with their own disease but expected her to walk away from hers.

"They don't accept you," Melissa says, referring to past recovery groups. "My disease was so strong that I didn't have the option to just 'put down.'"

Abby, who has two daughters, was also shunned by people who didn't understand how an expectant mother could keep using. It was like being an "outcast" among outcasts.

"I can't tell you how alone I felt," Abby said during a recent support-group meeting. "We were humiliated for what we had done ... But no one wants to be a drug addict. No one wants to lose their children. We love our children and want good things for them."

Recognizing a ministry niche among mothers trying to recover from substance abuse -- and their babies who are born drug-dependent -- Cokesbury United Methodist Church has sponsored a new faith-based organization to serve the spiritual, physical and emotional needs of this growing population.

"Susannah's House" celebrated its grand opening July 12 with a ribbon-cutting, blessing, and open house. The center is located in inner-city Knoxville, in the building formerly occupied by Wesley House Community Center.

The Rev. Rebekah Fetzer, minister of discipleship at Cokesbury, conceived of the ministry in spring 2013 and is now executive director at Susannah's House.

"You don't just get up and decide to be addicted while you are pregnant," Fetzer said. "It's heartbreaking from every standpoint."

Whenever pregnancy occurs during addiction to narcotics, expectant mothers need medical care to receive substitute narcotics such as methadone. Fetal death could occur if a woman stops taking narcotics suddenly.

Infants exposed to these substitute drugs while the mother is pregnant will be born dependent on them, a condition referred to as Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS).

Tennessee has one of the highest rates of NAS by population of any state, more than tripling in the past eight years into a statewide epidemic, according to the Tennessee Medi-



Susannah's House hopes to serve as many as 25 mothers and their children at one time.

cal Association. Forty-two percent of women who gave birth to drug-dependent babies in Tennessee last year were taking painkillers prescribed by doctors for medical conditions, according to the Tennessee Department of Health.

Susannah's House will provide free non-medical therapy, life-skills training, Bible study, worship, and group support to help mothers stay clean and eventually get out of the court system. The "Susannah's Kids" program will provide child care, pre-school curriculum, and Bible study for their clients' children, ages six weeks to 11 years.

"We want to make sure we are delivering best practices for women and their children," Fetzer said.

Helping recovering mothers and their NAS babies is "the most complicated issue out there," she said. Susannah's House wants to be effective and nurturing in a legal system that sometimes seems to work hardships against these families.

Susannah's House hopes to serve as many as 25 mothers and their children at one time. The staff includes two full-time and two part-time employees.

Countless volunteers have already given their time to get Susannah's House ready and more are needed, as well as donations, Fetzer said.

For more information, call (865) 599.9878 or email rfetzer@cclive.org. ■

Typhoon, debate, unity: Kingsporters return from convocation in Philippines

Maddie Steiner and Paige Trent arrived in Tagaytay, Philippines, at 12:30 a.m. on July 16. It was the beginning of the first day of the Global Young People's Convocation and Legislative Assembly.

Two hours later, the women were awakened and told to pack their things. Typhoon Rammasun had arrived, and their safety in the Center for Community Transformation, where they were staying, was threatened.

Strong winds and rain pounded on the building and eventually blew in the glass windows. Back home in Kingsport, Tenn., Steiner's parents were worried.

"I wasn't," says Steiner. "We were in such good hands, and everyone in the room had such an aura of peace and trust in God."

Steiner, age 18, and Trent, 25, were representatives of the Southeastern Jurisdiction during the United Methodist convocation, which meets every four years. Steiner and Trent are members at First Broad Street United Methodist Church and were selected by Holston's connectional ministries staff.

About 300 United Methodists from 35 countries attended. Organized by the General Board of Discipleship, the convocation brings young people together to worship, share their stories, and contribute their voices to the legislative process.

Trent, an elementary school art teacher, had served as interim youth director at First Broad Street and was already a friend to Steiner before arriving in the Philippines. She also was not overly frightened by the storm, although the group was eventually evacuated to a new venue called Island Cove near Manila.

"We ran into difficulties with power outages and toilets not flushing," Trent said, "but it all helped us to remember we were not there for luxury but to discuss and vote on legislative issues and to be with people from all over the world."

As the group waited out the worst of the storm, sleepless



After the typhoon, participants in the Global Young People's Convocation step outside for fresh air. From left to right: Ellen Beasley and LaDante Elerby from North Carolina Conference; Paige Trent and Maddie Steiner from Holston Conference.

and packed into a central room, they prayed and worshiped, Steiner said:

"Everyone started singing, and I learned songs in the African language, in Spanish, in Japanese, in the Filipino language ... And it was absolutely amazing."

After the story, the July 16-20 gathering allowed participants to present, discuss and vote on legislation. One piece of legislation called for the church to schedule meetings accommodating student schedules, to encourage and bring more young people into the decision-making process.

"When you think about any church committee, it's planned around work schedules," Steiner said. "General Conference always happens around exam

time for college students. Couldn't we push that back a little? We need to have our voices in our conference meetings."

Four legislative pieces involved homosexuality which involved "a lot of heated debate," Trent said. "It was interesting to hear that other countries' views are very different than the U.S."

Both Trent and Steiner said the highlight of the legislative assembly occurred during concluding worship, when participants from different nations who had earlier disagreed on homosexuality legislation came forward with a statement urging leaders of the denomination to "seek solutions that promote our global unity."

"It was neat to see people who had been arguing and clashing get up together during closing worship and say, 'We want to be united and we don't want this one thing to divide us,'" Trent said.

"They were up there saying, 'Unity in the church is more important than any, any, any issue,'" Steiner said. "There's so much more that unites us than divides us."

Legislation approved by the Global Young People's Convocation will be submitted for the 2016 General Conference. ■

The Call is the news source for Holston Conference. • The Holston Conference of the United Methodist Church includes 887 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