

Digest?

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The Call

Digest

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Maryville District pastors walk, bike for Imagine No Malaria awareness.

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Couple leads fast-growing Hispanic church

SEVIERVILLE, Tenn. --Three years ago, Susana Lopez was a translator in a furniture factory. Wilmer Lopez made a living out of laying tile and carpet.

Today, the couple is co-pastoring what might be the largest Hispanic congregation in east Tennessee, and one of the fastest-growing Hispanic churches in the United Methodist denomination.

El Ministerio del Espiritu Santo, or "Ministry of the Holy Spirit," is located in Sevier County, a congregation of First United Methodist Church of Sevierville. The Spanish-speaking congregation worships every Wednesday, Saturday, and Sunday night with an average attendance of 100 or more each night. Few of the worshippers attend all three services; most attend the night that fits their work schedules.

"It's a noisy, wonderful time," says the Rev. Charles Maynard, superintendent of Holston Conference's Maryville District. He's describing the standing-room-only services held in the chapel across the street from First United Methodist's main building, yards away from the Great Smoky Mountain tourist traffic that streams through Sevierville each day.

When *El Ministerio* had its first United Methodist service in August 2010, just 18 people attended.

"Within eight months, we started to grow fast," says the Rev. Susana Lopez, age 33. It wasn't long before church leaders yearned for more space to accommodate their enthusiastic crowd, chock-full of children.

With three children of their own, Lopez and her 36-year-old husband are pastoring a church for the first time. They're also introducing United Methodism to a community more familiar with Catholicism. A recent Gallup poll showed that while the majority of U.S. Hispanics are Catholic, younger Hispanics are increasingly shifting toward Protestant churches.

"At first, the people were afraid of what it means to be United Methodist," Lopez says of her congregation. They believed worship services would have to be subdued, that music would have to come from a hymn book.

"We tried to show them that we could worship in our own way, while teaching what it means to be Methodist in the Wesleyan tradition," Lopez said.

The style is typical of other nine other Hispanic worship services in Holston Conference, including the tendency to surpass the standard one-hour time frame by an hour or two.



Pastors Wilmer and Susana Lopez serve Holy Communion for a young Hispanic congregation at First Sevierville United Methodist Church.

Children freely whirl around the sanctuary during worship, joining in as they please. Inviting children to participate in communion was a United Methodist tenet the congregation accepted "quite well," Susana Lopez said.

However, placing a woman in a pastoral role was more of a challenge for congregants with conservative cultural and religious backgrounds.

"The church is growing, so there will always be newcomers," said the Rev. Arturo Reyna, Holston Conference Hispanic ministry coordinator. "But if we train our people in scripture, they will speak up about what we believe. Susana doesn't have to defend herself. The others will."

Aiding the success of the Lopezes' leadership is the fact that they are a husband-wife team with different heritage, Maynard said. Susana was born in Dallas, Texas, to a Mexican family. Wilmer was born in Atlantida, Honduras. *El Ministerio* is a congregation comprised of people from Mexico, Honduras, and Guatemala, with a few from Puerto Rico and Venezuela.

Last year, *El Ministerio* helped spin off a second congregation at First United Methodist Church in Gatlinburg, *Iglesia Metodista Unida de Gatlinburg*, about 13 miles away. Soon, church leaders will have to address the problem of needing more space for the Sevierville congregation. ■

Pastors walk, bike for no-malaria campaign

By Clayton Hensley

Inspiration comes from many places, and during the week of April 21, two men in East Tennessee undertook respective journeys to inspire others to imagine a world without malaria.

The Rev. Charles Maynard is superintendent of the Maryville District in the Holston Conference. The Rev. Randy Pasqua is director of Holston Conference Camp and Retreat Ministries. Together, they criss-crossed the Maryville District (Maynard on foot, Pasqua on bicycle) to motivate people to save lives through Imagine No Malaria.

“The people in Africa need to be free of the threat of malaria,” Maynard said. “The Next Mile is to encourage the good people of the Maryville District to go the next mile in giving in order to give children in Africa a next mile of life.”

The two pastors traveled more than 100 miles each, joined by friends and family for segments of their journeys and visiting churches and camps along the way.

A district-wide walk and rally finale was planned, but on Sunday, April 28, the rain was relentless. Plans had to be altered a bit, but spirits still ran high. Broadway United Methodist Church hosted

games and a pie-throwing event where Maynard even got an extra taste of whipped cream.

The mile or so between Broadway UMC and First Maryville United Methodist Church had purposely gone un-walked during the 100-mile event. So on Sunday, in the pouring rain, Maynard and dozens of Broadway members filled the gap by walking “the next mile.”

About 80 people turned out for the rally and worship service where Maynard reminded everyone that even though there were times when no person was walking with him along the route, he never walked alone. Jesus was always beside him and he is always beside us to make sure we are ready to go “the next mile.” ■



The Rev. Charles Maynard, right, is joined by Oakland UMC Pastor Stephen Yeaney for part of his trek.

As of April 15, Holston Conference had collected more than half of its \$1 million goal for Imagine No Malaria (INM). All Holston churches will be taking their traditional Annual Conference missions offering for INM by the first day of the Holston Annual Conference, which begins June 9.

To learn more about the United Methodist mission to eradicate malaria by the end of 2015, visit NoMalaria.Holston.org or call the Connectional Ministries Office at (865) 690-4080. To give, write a check to your local church with “Imagine No Malaria #684” on the memo line or give online at ImagineNoMalaria.org.

HOLSTON BRIEFS

Buffalo Mountain Camp announced April 30 the cancellation of its summer season as a result of low registration numbers. Located in Jonesborough, Tenn., the camp suffered serious damage during an August 2012 flood. A modified summer camp schedule was created with ongoing renovations and repairs, but low attendance forced the cancellation, camp leaders said. “If you have a camper registered, a camp representative will call you to either refund your 2013 camp fees or register your camper at one of our other conference camps,” Buffalo Mountain leaders announced. For more information, visit www.buffalomountaincamp.org or call (423) 753-9060.

Emory & Henry College has selected Jake B. Schrum to serve as president of the institution. Schrum, who retires as president of Southwestern

University in Texas on June 30, will begin work at Emory & Henry on Aug. 1. Schrum replaces Dr. Rosalind Reichard, who announced last fall her plans to retire as president of the college located in Emory, Va.

Holston Annual Conference will be held June 9-12 in Lake Junaluska, N.C. The theme is “Imagine” and presiding for the first time will be Bishop Mary Virginia Taylor. For planning information, visit AC.Holston.org or call the Connectional Ministries staff at (865) 690-4080.

In memoriam: Rev. Robert Lynn Irwin died April 24 in Knoxville, Tenn. He was a retired Holston clergy member who had served as chaplain at Tennessee Wesleyan College and pastor at several Holston churches including Ketron Memorial, St. John-Chattanooga, First Newport, and Central Radford. ■

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 ● [@TheCall_Holston](https://twitter.com/TheCall_Holston) ● Free e-news: thecalltwo.holston.org