

Digest?

This is a mini print version of our regular news. For a free e-news subscription and more news, visit thecalltwo.holston.org.

The Call

Digest

Back page

Wytheville District church members respond to a deadly 95-car pileup near Galax, Va.

April 15, 2013

www.holston.org

Choir sings Easter cantata in Knox jail

Eighteen choir members, carrying their robes over their arms, went to jail on the Saturday before Easter.

They couldn't bring their cell phones or pocketbooks. They had to hand over their driver's licenses to the guards. They even had to give up the paper clips attached to their songbooks.

However, the choir from Lake City (Tenn.) United Methodist Church went joyfully into the Knox County Detention Center on the morning of March 30. Their mission was to sing an Easter cantata for 48 inmates.

"What this does is let these individuals feel like men again," said Officer Rick Staples, explaining why the inmates were permitted this special visit. "They feel connected to society and that helps their mindset when they go back out into the community."

Staples and the other guards teased the choir members as they passed through the heavy doors, body scanners, and long, austere hallways. "Have you ever been wanted?" one officer asked a grandmotherly singer.

The choir walked deep into the facility, until they reached the "Exodus Project." Inmates call it the "God Pod."

Pete Garza, director of programs, explained that there are 800 to 1,250 total inmates in this east Knoxville prison. The Exodus Project only includes inmates who have successfully applied for the faith-based, life-skills program affiliated with Focus Group Ministries.

The choir was directed into a large room where 18 plastic chairs were arranged in the center. Facing them, on the opposite wall, were two floors of prison cells, impressively tidy. Lined up in plastic chairs outside the cells were the 48 men, dressed in identical gray-and-white-striped uniforms and orange rubber clogs.

The Rev. Dave Henderson, pastor and choir director, walked to the front of his group. It was his idea to bring the church choir to the jail, after a few months of working with a new inmate choir.

Garza introduced the Lake City choir – 18 singers from a congregation with 30 in average attendance – and Henderson lifted his arms. The singers launched into "One Had to Rise," their first public performance after two months of practice.

The men settled in to listen to the resurrection story. Some slouched in their chairs. Some jiggled their knees nervously. But they all watched and listened.

In the back of the room, the officers also listened as they drank



The Lake City United Methodist Choir sings the resurrection story to grateful inmates in the "God Pod." (Photo by Pete Garza)

coffee and chatted. "I saw one of the mothers visiting this morning," Officer Charma Truman whispered. "I asked how she was doing. She said, 'I'm better, now that I got to see my son.'"

When Larry Poole began his solo in "What Wondrous Love is This," the listening became more intense. A few men leaned forward in their chairs. One inmate, wearing a Mohawk, stood and stepped to the handrail, as if to get closer to the message.

Poole sang, "For you my body will be broken. For you my body will be spilled."

Later, the choir would talk about how their hearts started to beat faster, how they felt warm and their voices sounded louder and better than ever. They noticed how a few more men got up from their chairs during the singing. Some clasped their hands as if in prayer.

When the choir finished, their listeners applauded enthusiastically. Then six men with orange clogs came forward to sing two Easter songs that Henderson had taught them, *a cappella*.

The inmate choir called themselves, "39 Stripes." The church choir returned the applause, many with tears.

"A lot of these men have had to scrap all their lives," Garza said when it was time to walk single-file back out of the jail. "You all coming today is the spear point of a positive change in their lives."

Twenty-four hours later and 35 miles away, the choir from Lake City United Methodist Church sang the cantata again for Easter Sunday worship. They were more than ready. ■

Deadly car crash, church members respond

Some Holston Conference church members were responders in the Easter Sunday crash that left three people dead and 25 injured on I-77 near Galax, Va.

All lanes were open the following day, April 1, after fog caused a 95-vehicle pileup on Fancy Gap Mountain, according to the *Charlotte Observer*. However, traffic was stopped for as long as 16 hours on Easter while busloads of stranded holiday travelers were transported to locations such as the Hillsville VFW Hall.

Donna Godwin, pastor at Glenwood United Methodist Church in Galax, was one of several who came to the VFW hall to assist and counsel travelers.

“There was a family with three young boys, all safe,” Godwin said. “The dad was describing the horrific events to us ... I can only imagine there will be many sleepless nights and nightmares, but our God is bigger than that. They were not letting it ruin their vacation, and they were pressing forward with their plans.”

Godwin said she spoke with other families, too. “They were very, very thankful to be alive and well,” she said. “They also expressed great thanksgiving and appreciation for the way the community came together to care for their needs.”

Members of Glenwood church took food to the VFW, Godwin said.

Members of Mount Olivet United Methodist Church in Galax took beverages, snacks, and fruit to the VFW and also drove stranded travelers to hotels for the night.

“That’s what God wants us to do, to go help out when you can,” said Donna Delp. “That’s what we’re here to do, is serve one another.”

Delp and husband Greg were visiting with their daughter and son-in-law, Ashley and Gary Linville, when they heard about the Sunday afternoon pileup near the Virginia-North Carolina state line. The Linvilles are members of Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church in Greensboro, N.C.

Delp called her pastor, the Rev. John Grimm, to ask if church money was available to buy snacks for stranded travelers. More than a hundred uninjured victims were expected to be transported by school bus to the VFW – where the American Red Cross had set up a shelter – but only 24 arrived, according to the *Charlotte Observer*.

The Delps and Linvilles arrived to find that food and volunteers were plentiful, but they helped two groups find hotels for the night. Greg Delp transported a Canadian couple with dogs to a hotel, while Donna Delp assisted three college students from Jacksonville, Fla.

“Their car was tore up and not drivable,” Donna Delp said. On Monday morning, one of the students called to let Delp know they were able to retrieve their belongings from the destroyed car and a family member from Florida had arrived to drive them home.

Members from First United Methodist Church and Out of the Box Worship Center in Hillsville, Va., were first responders at the tragic scene, according to the Rev. Ronnie Collins. ■

HOLSTON BRIEFS

As of April 15, Holston Conference has collected \$500,370 of the Imagine No Malaria goal to raise \$1 million by June 12 (the last day of Holston Annual Conference in Lake Junaluska, N.C.). To learn more about the campaign, visit Holston.org. To give to the United Methodist campaign to eradicate malaria by the end of 2015, write a check to your local church with “Imagine No Malaria #684” on the memo line. You may also give online at ImagineNoMalaria.org.

Need ministry money? The application deadline for four ministry grant opportunities has been extended to April 30. Visit Foundation.Holston.org and click on “Grants” for information about the Loving, Redwine, Henson, and Hamm grants, or call (865) 690-8124 for more information.

The United Methodist Women of Holston Conference will offer their 39th annual “Spiritual Enrichment Experience” April 26-27 in Lake Junaluska, N.C. The theme is “Fruit of the Spirit.” Leaders are Rev. Rosemary Brown and Rhonda Catanzaro. Register at Lake Junaluska Assembly for \$20, not including accommodations. Info: Visit www.holstonconferenceumw.com or call President Georgia Lister at (423) 741-6772.

2013 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, Holston’s new resident bishop. For ongoing planning information, visit AC.Holston.org or call the Connectional Ministries staff at (865) 690-4080. ■

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