

Digest?

It's the short, print version of our regular e-news. For a free subscription, visit thecalltwo.holston.org.

The Call

Digest

Back page

"Sunday Supper" events support military families. Virginia members invited to Richmond on Feb. 7.

January 7, 2013

www.holston.org

Holston sends first chaplain on Appalachian Trail

For the past 10 springs, three tiny churches offered free home-cooked breakfasts and other friendly services to Appalachian Trail "thru hikers" passing their portion of southwest Virginia.

This year, the ministry moves out on the legendary trail with the introduction of a roving United Methodist chaplain. Josh Lindamood, a 26-year-old preacher's son, is scheduled to take the life-changing hike himself, beginning April 4 at Springer Mountain in Georgia and finishing some six months later at Mount Katahdin in Maine.

The goal is to provide an encouraging spiritual presence to trekkers tendered by nature and physical challenge during the 2,200-mile, spring-to-fall quest, said the Rev. Alan Ashworth, pastor of the three hospitable churches that began Appalachian Trail Outreach Ministry in Bastian, Va.

"I know we've touched lives because of the letters we've received, but the relationship ends right there," Ashworth says of the 1,000 or so hikers who have received a hot breakfast or a ride into town for supplies over the past decade. "The idea behind the chaplain is to put somebody on the trail an amount of time to build real trust."

The chaplaincy venture is backed by Holston Conference, the parent regional body for 897 United Methodist churches. Lindamood, a landscaper from Lynchburg, Va., has already received chaplaincy training and will soon receive "wilderness medical training" before shouldering his backpack through 14 states and a variety of weather conditions.

"I just love nature and the outdoors and the way God speaks to you when you're in it," Lindamood said.

Ashworth believes that Lindamood will be the first chaplain to represent a mainstream denomination while hiking the entire route (as a thru hiker), although he knows of evangelists and religious fundraisers who have done so or who hike part of the trail ("section hikers").

A former camp director, Ashworth's been talking to hikers about their needs since he first convinced his congregations to provide a trash can and picnic table on the trail in 2001.

Later, church members realized that weary travelers could benefit from a hot meal as they passed through. So breakfast

was served at New Hope Union United Methodist Church, located 1½ miles from where the trail crosses state Route 615 in Bastian, Va. Ashworth also pastors Green Valley United Methodist and Pine Grove United Methodist, each with fewer than 20 worshippers on Sunday.

The three congregations worked together to provide a unique ministry, including placing a cooler with drinks, weather reports, and New Testaments on the trail. Over the years their nature-loving pastor began to dream of the next step.

"We started with an idea to intercept hikers and minister to their needs," Ashworth said. "But we had a desire for lasting relationships and long-term contact."

The Rev. Bob Hayes, a retired pastor and avid hiker in Maryville, Tenn., was one of the first people

approached by Ashworth in pursuing the chaplain mission. Like others, Hayes immediately recognized the opportunity for faith-sharing within a life experience well-known for drawing or driving spiritual seekers. However, the AT chaplain is not on a mission to cultivate new church members.

"Josh is not ordained and he doesn't have theological training," Hayes said, "but he has faith in his heart and he's an authentic thru hiker. We wanted somebody who could enter into dialogue with people without having all the answers."

The chaplain's backpack will be marked with a symbol incorporating the recognizable green "AT" logo symbol with the traditional United Methodist "cross and flame." Lindamood also has a Facebook page established as "Appalachian Trail Chaplain."

Holston Conference doesn't have plans to send out a chaplain each year for a 14-state pilgrimage. However, organizers might appoint a chaplain to serve hikers passing through Holston in East Tennessee and southwest Virginia.

Holston also includes Damascus, Va., home of the mid-May "Trail Days" festival that draws the largest single gathering of Appalachian Trail hikers anywhere.

"We have an opportunity to offer something beyond food," says Ashworth. "We can offer encouragement." ■



Josh Lindamood



Sunday Supper events reach out to military

By Barbara Dunlap-Berg

If your congregation is seeking ways to reach out to military families, New Providence United Methodist Church, on the Tennessee-Kentucky border, might inspire you.

Just six miles from the Fort Campbell Army base in Kentucky, New Providence is home to many retired soldiers and their families. They know what it is like to have a spouse or parent absent for a year or more. They know how it is to celebrate birthdays with Mom or Dad deployed thousands of miles from home. They resonate with the frustration of a car that won't budge and the pressure of caring for children 24/7.

They understand because they've been there.

Through the Eagle's Wings ministry, New Providence matches military families with "sponsors" — members of the congregation who act as friends, confidants and, often, surrogate grandparents, aunts and uncles.

This ministry is just one example of how United Methodists reach out to troops and their families. Honoring veterans is the focus of America's Sunday Supper, slated for Jan. 20, 2013. Inspired by the legacy of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., America's Sunday Supper invites people from diverse backgrounds to come together to share a meal, discuss issues that affect their community and highlight the power each one of us has to make a difference.

Army Staff Sgt. Joe Murray holds his 3½-week-old baby at his Fort Campbell, Ky., battalion headquarters. A Web-only photo by Hope Murray. Over the past two years, tens of thousands of soldiers have come home from war ... to heal from wounds both visible and invisible, to face unemployment, a lack of housing and other domestic challenges.

"Now is the time to give back," the Rethink Church website says. "Raise awareness in your community, and do something to address the needs of veterans and military families."

Here are six ways to support military families:

- 1. Celebrate birthdays** of soldiers and their family members. Have a birthday party for a child whose parent is deployed.
- 2. Have a churchwide holiday meal.** It's a great way to build a sense of family, especially for those whose loved ones are miles away and for newly returned soldiers.
- 3. Open church activities** to military families. Bible studies, Sunday school classes and youth groups acquaint newcomers with longtime members and give military families a safe place to share their stories. "Beyond the Yellow Ribbon — Ministering to Returning Combat Veterans," a Bible study available from Cokesbury is a great place to start.
- 4. Provide free babysitting** for children in military families, both during and after deployment. Give a sole caregiver a break or a reunited couple a night out.
- 5. Remember simple things** such as a weekly phone call to ask how things are going and to offer a listening ear.
- 6. Send care packages** to active troops. Letters, drawings and photos from the church family are fun and easy to do. It's a wonderful way to involve children. ■

Dunlap-Berg is internal content editor at United Methodist Communications, Nashville, Tenn.



Army Staff Sgt. Joe Murray holds his 3½-week-old baby at his Fort Campbell, Ky., battalion headquarters.

Virginia members invited to 'UM Day in General Assembly'

The Virginia Conference is inviting Holston members to the 21st annual "United Methodist Day in General Assembly," to be held Thursday, Feb. 7, in Richmond, Va. Sponsored by Virginia's Board

of Church and Society and United Methodist Women, the event gives congregations a vehicle for reaching beyond themselves and introduces them to the Social Principles of The United Methodist Church in a meaningful way. For more information or to register, visit VAUMC.org or contact Rev. Randy Harlow at (434) 941-4092 or crhncboy@aol.com. Four of Holston's 12 districts are located in Virginia: Abingdon, Big Stone Gap, Tazewell, and Wytheville. ■

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