

Continued from page 8

I want to celebrate this increase, and I trust it is a harbinger of growth for years to come. Looking back over our records, I noticed that from 1956 to 1969 we only experienced two years of lost members. I believe we can continue our growth if we cooperate with the Holy Spirit to "Offer Them Christ."

I realize that some of you are asking, "Who are the 'them' of which we speak?"

The "them" are all persons inside and outside the church in need of the grace of God. Some are in need of heeding the pull of "prevenient grace." Then there are those in need of "justifying grace." Last but not least, those of us who have confessed Christ as our Savior are in need of "sanctifying grace."

I long to hear more people sing, "It's me, it's me, O Lord, standing in the need of prayer." I want to hear more persons sing, "He touched me, and oh, the joy that floods my soul! Something happened, and now I know, he touched me and made me whole."

And oh, I want to hear our churches filled with a thunderous singing of "take my life and let it be consecrated Lord to thee." We have demonstrated that we can do it, so let us be about the joyous ministry of offering them Christ. I choose to believe that is a turnaround. Hallelujah!

— Bishop James Swanson

July 24 District superintendents react to Holston's membership increase

Seven of 12 districts experienced membership increases in 2007, breaking Holston out of a spiraling decline for only the second time in 40 years.

Holston leaders celebrated immediately after Annual Conference, when they learned that the recently tabulated numbers showed a 172-member increase conference-wide. The 2007 total membership for Holston's 900-plus churches was 166,987.

Knoxville District showed the largest membership increase, with 213 more members in 2007 than in 2006. Other districts showing increases are Maryville (137), Morristown (105), Oak Ridge (72), Cleveland (37), Johnson City (37), and Wytheville (6).

Districts showing decreases are Abingdon (148), Kingsport (105), Tazewell (70), Big Stone Gap (62), and Chattanooga (50).

Knoxville is the largest-membership district, with 23,822 members. Chattanooga is second, with 22,158 members. Smallest are Tazewell (7,715) and Big Stone Gap (6,216).

The Rev. Doug Fairbanks, Knoxville District superintendent, attributed his district's increase to leadership and the congregations themselves.

"We have some vibrant larger churches in Knoxville, and those are Cokesbury, Christ, Powell, Fountain City, and of course, Church Street," Fairbanks



said. "They have the leadership and congregations who are in sync with reaching out and creating an atmosphere that attracts new members. They want to do it, and they're doing it. It's no accident. We also have some smaller churches, like Trentville, that have that mindset."

The Rev. Chuck Starks, Wytheville District superintendent, said that although some districts experienced decreases, the entire conference should "dance a little jig and enjoy a little hope."

"To not do so is sort of like saying we can't celebrate a new birth in the family because someone else in the family has not yet conceived," Starks said.

"In the Wytheville District, I've been celebrating the fact that we had a net gain of six. That's a small number but it's six souls that we get to have the privilege and responsibility of disciplining ... This should be a conference-wide joy," he said.

United Methodist News Service recently reported that of 50 annual conferences submitting reports, Holston is one of eight (as of July 14) with membership increases.

— Annette Spence

July 24 Youth ministry news

DON'T FAKE IT! Nine districts and 52 churches were represented at Junior High and Senior High Assembly, held July 7-11 at Hiwassee College in Madisonville, Tenn. The gathering was attended by 51 junior high students, 109 senior high students, and 47 staff members, for a total attendance of 207.

The theme was "Don't Fake It!" based on Romans 12:1-13. Directors were the Rev. Larry Dial and Carol Long for junior high, Jane Currin and Laura Lambert for senior high. For an online photo gallery, visit <http://holstonconference.org/youth/assemblygallery08/index.htm>

OFFICERS ELECTED: The Conference Council on Youth Ministries (CCYM) recently elected its Servant Leadership Team for the August 2008-July 2009 term. They are: President, Cody Quillen (Big Stone Gap District); vice president, Megan Lange (Oak Ridge District), Youth Service Fund chair, William Ballard (Wytheville District); corresponding secretary, Katie Burke (Big Stone Gap District); recording secretary, Palmer Cantler (Johnson City District); chaplain, Grady Milligan (Knoxville District).

NEW STAFF: Laura Lambert has been selected to serve as associate director of director of connectional ministries for youth and college, effective July 28. Lambert is a graduate of Emory & Henry College and is currently serving as youth ministry director at Keith Memorial UMC in Athens, Tenn. She is a Cleveland District youth coordinator, a member of the Resurrection and Divine Rhythm design teams, and a former CCYM member.

Lambert follows the Rev. Dan Gray in a position that has been revised to include college ministries. She will relate to the five Wesley Foundations and campus ministries at three conference colleges. Lambert's office will be located in the conference center in Alcoa, Tenn. ■