

Continued from page 8

church had gained 100 new members within three years, for a total 800 members. Average worship attendance was 600 and 90 percent white.

“You couldn’t find a seat or a parking place,” he said. “The church was growing.”

When the pastor/parish relations committee at First Broad Street presented a leadership possibility to the South Carolina pastor, he says his focus was on God’s calling.

“It wouldn’t be the ego that drove me to this big church,” he said. “I had to humble myself before God. Humility isn’t a sign of weakness; it’s a sign of strength. I wanted to be obedient to God, and I felt God had called me to this special place.”

The church’s zeal for missions still seems to awe him. First Broad Street, says Jenkins, is a “signature congregation.” “It’s a signature congregation because they’re open to mission and ministry.”

On this day, for example, Jenkins is readying for an afternoon meeting that will culminate in his church’s commitment to finance a new building for a small sister church. Nearby Community United Methodist Church is reaching out to neighboring low-income children, but they need help. An anonymous giver at First Broad Street has stepped up.

The pastor cites other missions for which the Kingsport congregation is known. They collect and restore furniture and appliances in a warehouse, delivering them to needy families on request. Each fall, a group travels to Cherokee, N.C., to cut and deliver firewood for Native American communities. The church has home-repair ministries, food ministries, and clothing ministries.

Jenkins says that he and Mayor Dennis Phillips are “in conversation” about using the church’s Carpenter’s Helpers – a group of dedicated retired men who give up personal time to participate in a highly organized home-repair ministry -- to aid in the overall revitalization plan for Kingsport.

On Feb. 22-24, the Kingsport church will host its annual Missions Celebration, which this year features Bishop Daniel Wandabula from the East Africa Conference and Bishop Felton May, interim general secretary of the General Board of Global Ministries.

The fact that First Broad Street is 99 percent white – and he is African-American – has not been an issue, Jenkins said. He personally came from a “black church experience,” until he was appointed Spartanburg District superintendent in South Carolina.

“This fear of cross-racial appointments – we need to get on with it. Blood is red. From day one, these have been the most gracious people I have ever encountered,” he said, referring to the Kingsport congregation.

In addition to his varied experience in black and white congregations, poor and affluent, Jenkins served South Carolina as a General Conference delegate for two terms, a Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference delegate for four terms. He has served on the denomination’s General Board of Church and Society for the past four years.

– Annette Spence



Photo by Joe Penland

Firefighters watch as the last flames are doused at First Madisonville UMC.

Jan. 16 After devastating fires, churches experience outpouring of love

What was initially disguised as misfortune has since evolved into an outpouring of Christian love for two Holston Conference churches hit with recent devastating fires.

Both the Rev. Cathy Fowler of Baileyton United Methodist Church and the Rev. Braxton Cotton of First Madisonville United Methodist Church admit to being overwhelmed with sympathy and aid. Not only have other churches and members of the two communities wanted to help in various ways, but the tragedies have also brought the church members themselves closer together.

“It has been very touching for the community,” said Fowler, whose Morristown District church was destroyed on Nov. 24. “And the church has always been a closely knit church family, but it has brought them all closer. It is uncanny how our members have come closer together.”

Added Cotton, whose Maryville District church burned on Dec. 10, “Many churches have been active in doing what they can. We have even had churches call up and say that we are part of their prayer service.”

While the emotional support and love have been quick to arrive, help from insurance companies has been a little slower due to bureaucratic procedure. Both pastors say they are waiting for the insurance companies to finish their work before finalizing reconstruction plans.

“We are making plans, but they are a little on hold,” said Fowler, whose church has been holding services in the auditorium of Baileyton Elementary School. “We will probably continue to do that for a good while.”

The current plans for Baileyton are to rebuild on the same site where the landmark 102-year-old building burned.

“When we rebuild, we want to make it large enough to accommodate our members,” she said. “We want to build a larger fellowship hall with Sunday school classes.”

She said that Anne Travis, director of connectational ministries for Holston Conference, is to meet with them to guide them through a visioning process.

Currently, the church has been able to use a donated organ and is expecting a piano. Trinity UMC of Greeneville also awarded the Baileyton church a \$5,000 grant to cover the loss of items lost in the children’s Sunday school classes. The grant was awarded from the Buel D. and Mildred Brooks Trust of the Holston Conference Foundation.

An unlikely source -- a cookbook -- is expected to provide some financial help. According to church member Myra Moore, a cookbook had been planned initially to fund a new roof on the church. After the fire, the church members realized the cookbook could help instead with the overall rebuilding and refurbishing costs.

Through various media reports, the church received numerous calls from people far and near. Some had recipes, while others wanted to buy a cookbook or help sell them.

“Now we have almost 1,300 recipes,” said Moore, who initially hoped for 600. “The community has really rallied for us.”

Regarding the reconstruction plans for First Madisonville UMC, Cotton said the 338 church members are considering whether they should rebuild on the current site, where some of the church’s physical plant remains, or possibly elsewhere. “Is this really where we should build or is there another place?” asked Cotton. “Are we in the right place to promote the service God is asking us to do in this neighborhood?”

The church has been holding services in the nearby Cora Veal Senior Center, he said, and now has an office in a home across the street from the church grounds. They even have phone service, Cotton said.

That might help with the numerous calls the church has received from people wanting to help. Fairview UMC in Maryville District purchased some adornments for the altar, while First UMC in Knoxville donated some old hymnals. A number of other United Methodist churches and churches from other denominations have helped as well, he said.

Shortly after the fire, the Rev. Laura Shearer from Holston Conference’s Pastoral Conference Center talked to the members about dealing with loss and grief.

Cotton added that the fire has taught him and his congregants some valuable lessons.

“You realize these things are not of God, but God gives us an opportunity to accept his peace and guidance as we go through them,” he said. “We need that refreshment of faith sometimes.”

– John Shearer

Additional stories are available online. Visit www.holston.org and click on “See Past Issues” for these stories and others: “District Roundup” (Jan. 9), two teen-written Resurrection stories (Jan. 23), a Divine Rhythm report (Feb. 6), and a faith story from Wytheville District, “Her Name is Britne” (Feb. 6).