

The Call

March 2008

HOLSTON CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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this first:

Holston signs covenant with Sudan: \$125,000 offering in May

On Feb. 23, Bishop James Swanson signed a covenant with Bishop Daniel Wandabula of the East Africa Conference, formally establishing Holston as the first United Methodist body to be in mission in south Sudan. The partnership will provide a school, clinic and other facilities in Yei, Sudan. On May 18 or an alternate date, Holston's 910 churches will take an Annual Conference offering with the goal of raising \$125,000 for Sudan.

For the complete story, see page 6-7. ■

Hands-on missions project: Focus on Liberia, Zimbabwe

This spring, Holston churches will again collect supplies for missions in one of two African countries. Each district will have a different assignment. For example, Chattanooga and Cleveland will collect food buckets (cornmeal, tea bags, canned ham) for Zimbabwe. Tazewell and Wytheville will collect school supply kits (notebooks, rulers, crayons) for Liberia. Churches will be asked to deliver supplies to a central place within their district by June 6.

For a "2008 Hands-On Missions Brochure" detailing your district's assignment, call your district office or visit <http://missions.holston.org>. ■

Special called session of the Annual Conference: June 1 in Knoxville

The Appointment Cabinet has approved a special session of the 2008 Annual Conference, to be held at Central United Methodist Church in Knoxville, Tenn., on Sunday, June 1. The purpose is to conduct clergy business and the Ordination Service. The Clergy Session begins at 4 p.m. The Ordination Service begins at 5:30 p.m. Laity are invited to join the clergy for the Ordination Service.

The Commissioning Service will be held during the regularly scheduled session of the Annual Conference at Lake Junaluska, N.C., June 8-11. Information: Call the Conference Secretary's office toll-free at (866) 690-4080. ■

About the Photo: The three crosses at the top of this page are located on the lawn at Hiltons Memorial UMC in Hiltons, Va. The Big Stone Gap District church joins Christians worldwide in celebrating Easter Sunday on March 23. Photo by Dennis Loy for *The Call*

Ben Scharfstein, The Inviting Guy

By Annette Spence

Ben is bubbly. He's full of stories and smiles and warm affirmation that will immediately put you at ease. "OK, darlin'!" he says, when informed that his noon appointment is running a few minutes late.

"Don't you worry about it," he says, when the appointment turns out to be later still.

With coffee cup in one hand and oxygen tank in the other, he waits in the entry hall at Munsey Memorial United Methodist Church – just like he waits for the people he invites to worship. He *promises* them he'll be there, to greet them and sit with them and make them feel *darn glad* they came.

Ben Scharfstein is the "inviting guy" at this Johnson City church, because it wasn't long ago when he didn't attend church at all. Ben Scharfstein is so glad to be alive and back in this church, he wants to share his joy with others.

"This is a mission God has laid on my heart," he says. "I finally found out where I'm supposed to be."

Dianna Cantler, Munsey director of connection ministries, says that Sunday school classes have asked Scharfstein to talk to them about his inviting philosophy and tactics.

"I believe he has given many people the courage to speak up and invite," Cantler said. "His outlook is, 'What do I have to lose?'"

In the last few years, Scharfstein has almost lost his life. Although he never smoked, he was diagnosed with lung cancer in 1998.



Ben Scharfstein invites people to church, then waits to welcome them in the entry hall at Munsey Memorial UMC.

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