

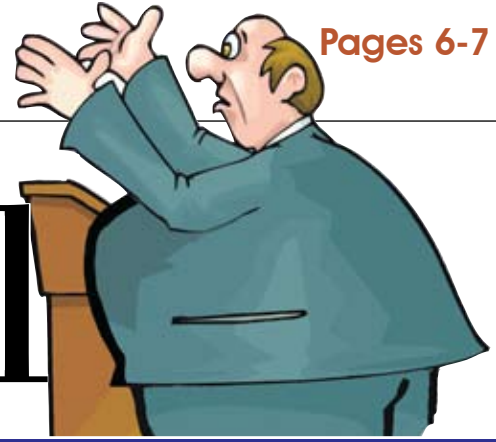
Three churches – Anderson Street in Bristol, Hillcrest in Knoxville, and First Morristown – show the love of Christ through free community fun days.

Our young people need to know that education is still a possibility, even in tough economic times. **Share this letter** with your congregation.

Before you pile on the pumpkin pie and cornbread stuffing, let's talk about the state of overweight in Holston Conference.



The Call



November 2008 **HOLSTON CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH** www.holston.org

Bishop James Swanson, resident bishop of Holston Conference, will not be intimidated by the news.

While the country's economic outlook has many people running scared, this United Methodist leader is stepping up. He's rallying the troops of his 906 Holston churches to seize the opportunity before them.

"This is a great time to be the church," he said on a recent weekday morning in his Alcoa office. "Yes, it is a tough time, but your confidence shouldn't have been in the economy anyway.

"Maybe this is a gift from God to help us get our priorities straight and to help us understand: We have a responsibility to give back to God, because God has been so good to us."

In a candid interview for *The Call*, Bishop Swanson spoke of how Christians should be the body of Christ for their suffering communities. They should not respond with panic and fear as others will do, but "speak a word of hope and confidence."

The bishop said he wanted to reach out to Holston members with this message: "Our hope is not in money. Our hope is in God."

"The church has got to understand that we're not a business. We're a movement," he said. "We are the hands, feet, arms, smiles, hugs, heart, and brain

of God in this world. And if we don't act like the church, especially when they really need us, then what will become of this world?"

"This is not the time to go fishing," Bishop Swanson said, referring to John 21 and also to his sermon from "Clergy Gathering."

During the Oct. 21 meeting, Swanson told clergy, "This is not the time for us to go fishing. This is not the time to retreat from God's vision, to retreat from the work that God has put in front of us."

Giving back to God

While talking in his office, Swanson referred to the conference "Offer Them Christ" directive. "This is exactly what this is," he said. "This is our opportunity to offer them Christ."

He also cited statistics showing that giving in Holston Conference is already low for the year, and United Methodists in general do not give close to the Biblical standard of 10 percent of their incomes to the church.

As of Sept. 30, apportionment giving for the conference budget was \$200,000 shorter than it was for the same period in 2007, according to the treasurer's office.

A 2007 General Council on Finance and Administration report also showed that United Methodists collectively give between 1 and 2 percent of their total incomes. These percentages are among the lowest in U.S. denominations, according to the report.



THE ELECTION IS OVER. NOW WHAT? Ron Matthews' commentary, page 3.

"For us to quit giving to God when times are tough indicates that we were only giving out of surplus rather than out of regular, faithful giving," Swanson said. "To put God on the backburner – when he has never put us on the backburner – is the height of ingratitude."

Church treasurers expect that a large portion of the church's annual giving will be received in December. The indication is that many members either neglect to give throughout the year, or they're basing gifts on end-of-year tax deductions, Swanson said.

"Now I appreciate that in this country, you get a tax deduction for giving to the church," he said. "But that's not how you ought to be giving to God. I challenge our members to see giving as part of the total response to God in their relationships with God."

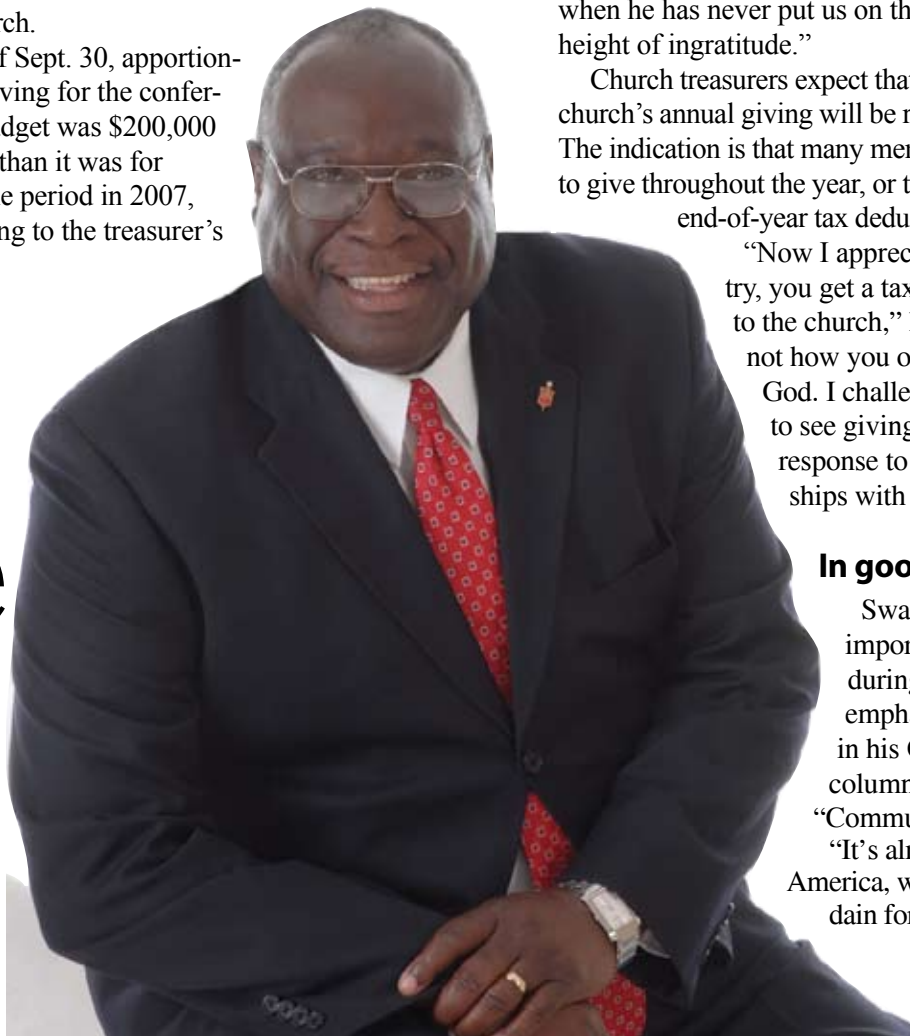
In good company

Swanson spoke of the importance of community during tough times (an emphasis he also made in his October newspaper column simply titled, "Community").

"It's almost as if, in America, we have a disdain for needing each

'This is a great time to be THE CHURCH'

An interview with Bishop Swanson



See **Great time**, page 5

CMYK