

HOLSTON CONFERENCE LAY LEADER REPORT
Annual Conference 2013

Bishop Taylor, members, guests, and friends of Holston Conference:

The mission of the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Laity: We are called to ministry through our baptism and work alongside our clergy brothers and sisters as partners in ministry. We fulfill that calling by participating in ministries of nurture, outreach, and witness in our local congregations, districts, and conference.

Tonight we consider what the ministry of the laity looks like in Holston Conference as we imagine where we will serve.

At last year's annual conference session, Reverend Drew Dyson asked the question: "What is your missional imagination like? What would it take to make today the best day ever for somebody in a world that so desperately needs to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ?" In the past twelve months, laypersons across Holston have been working in many and varied ways to respond to that challenge, for the glory of God and the upbuilding of His Kingdom.

At North Tazewell United Methodist Church, the Lilies of the Field ministry provides quality, affordable clothing through the work of church members and community volunteers. All proceeds from clothing sales are returned to the community through the projects of the ministry.

In Chattanooga, United Methodist Men worked together with congregations in the district to sponsor 60 youth and adults' attendance at "Take Me Out to the Ballgame Day" last July. They provided tickets, transportation, and spending money for a Chattanooga Lookouts game.

Dunlap United Methodist Men raised \$3,000 to purchase a golf cart for Camp Lookout. Its priority use is for nurses to go the aid of those needing medical care while at camp.

St. Mark United Methodist Church in Knoxville hosted an "Old Fashioned Appalachian Christmas" for the Rocky Hill-Bearden community. Congregation members provided candy, fruit, and other items to fill treat sacks for the children who attended to take home. Mountain story-telling and bluegrass music led up to the sharing of the Christmas story as children gathered around the altar to hear. Residents of eight area assisted living and retirement centers were personally invited to attend and were given special holiday treat bags.

First United Methodist Church, Morristown, has teams who go to the county jail each week to witness, distribute Bibles, and pray with inmates. The church also builds 30-50 wheelchair ramps each year at no charge to the families being served. And the congregation regularly sends mission teams to state-run orphanages in Bulgaria to deliver clothing and to sing, pray, and play with the children.

The Pruitt Hill-Tate Chapel men's prayer team meets for breakfast each month and then delivers meals to shut-in church and community members.

"Feet of Faith" is a group of youth who provide liturgical dance ministry at revivals and worship services.

"Kids' Club for Christ" in Bean Station, Tennessee, works with the local school system as an after school program where leaders share Bible stories, teach music, help with homework, and provide a meal.

Many congregations in the conference provide back packs full of food to children and youth who otherwise might not have anything to eat on weekends and during summer months when schools are not in session.

The Nicklesville United Methodist Church Teen Action Group is a lay-led ministry for teenagers designed to help them strengthen their faith, grow in their knowledge of God, and help others in the community. Participants are 7th to 12th grade students who meet together for fun and Bible study and who have designed and rebuilt a community cross, served hot chocolate at the community Christmas parade, helped the Upward Basketball program, and completed a community beautification landscape project in Nicklesville, Virginia.

Other congregations in the Big Stone Gap District are actively serving their communities: Midway United Methodist Church serves over 140 families each month through its food bank. Nottingham United Methodist Church holds a community gathering in the fall with inflatables, games, contests, and hay rides. Mendota UMC offers a food pantry, weekly soup kitchen, and a community Christmas dinner. The Nicklesville/New Hope/Culberson Chapel circuit provides desserts twice a month to the Meals of Love community ministry that prepares and delivers home-cooked meals each week to shut-ins, senior citizens, and needy families.

East Pine Grove Park United Methodist Church in Johnson City, Tennessee, sponsors a little league baseball team and operates God's Corner thrift ministry.

The Carter County Parish churches (Watauga Point, Slagle, Hunter, and St. Paul) have a laity committee that formed a parish choir, plans joint worship services, leads a parish youth group, and sponsors an annual picnic.

The Shelter Ministry of Middlebrook Pike United Methodist Church in Knoxville assists its members and local community as well as responding to disasters in other areas. The ministry has helped with roof repair following Hurricane Katrina, performed roof and home repair at Project Crossroads in Marion, Virginia, worked with Habitat for Humanity, and responded to recovery and rebuilding efforts after tornadoes in Tennessee.

"God's Girls" is a lay-led Bible study at Wesley Memorial UMC in Johnson City helping to bring about spiritual growth among the women of the congregation.

Also in Johnson City, Cherokee UMC sponsors monthly neighborhood fun nights, youth in the congregations spend Tuesday after school performing community service projects, and a young couple leads Insanity workouts during the winter months.

Since annual conference last year, our conference newspaper has featured stories about the congregation of Luminary UMC in Ten Mile, Tennessee, providing a dream wedding and honeymoon to a couple who could only afford a small ceremony; Miller's Chapel United Methodist Church's first vacation bible school in fifteen years; the "Farmapalooza Festarostock" event in Jonesborough, Tennessee, to benefit the ministries of Buffalo Mountain Camp; the efforts of the First Jefferson City UMC to provide refreshments and Christian hospitality to voters in the November 2012 election; and the first-ever Appalachian Trail chaplain, a United Methodist layperson, who is spending six months this year sharing the message of God's grace and mercy with hikers from Springer Mountain, Georgia, to Mount Katahdin, Maine.

Wow! And that just scratches the surface. From the miraculous story of an over \$200,000 Christmas Eve offering at Christ United Methodist Church in Chattanooga to build an orphanage for the helpless children of South

Sudan, to the stories of Thanksgiving and Christmas food baskets and community dinners in every corner of the Conference, to the incredibly creative ways individuals and congregations have found to raise money this year for the Imagine No Malaria effort, the lay people of Holston Conference have served and ministered in powerful ways.

I barely have time just to mention the fact that lay-led ministries in Holston Conference have also been the subject of hundreds of newspaper articles and television reports in local media during the past year.

So Bishop, I am proud and humbled to report that the state of lay ministry in the Holston Conference is strong. You see before you representatives of passionate lay and clergy partners in ministry who lay claim each day to the promise that we serve a God who is able to do far more than we can ever ask or imagine.

And I know, when we leave this place later this week, we are sending effective ambassadors of the Kingdom of God who will return to their homes and communities inspired anew to live and work in ways that bear witness to the grace of Almighty God, the everlasting love of Jesus Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit. Go ye, therefore, into all the world, and proclaim the gospel message in both word and deed.

Thanks be to God!