

Sunday: Long lines, good friends, and a jump-start service

Church members scurried into Lake Junaluska yesterday for the 2009 session of the Holston Annual Conference – only to wait in long registration lines at Bethea Welcome Center.

They made the best of the situation by re-connecting with old friends, introducing themselves to new ones, and sharing their expectations of the June 14-17 meeting of leaders representing 903 churches.

Virginia Oliver came with her pastor, the Rev. Mary Minnick of Hunt Memorial UMC, Abingdon District. She heard Bishop James Swanson preach last year and said she looked forward to hearing him again at the Sending Forth Service. "He is a very, very, very spiritual person," Oliver said.

Several members said they were concerned about the outcome of votes on 32 constitutional amendments and a direct invoicing proposal.

"We still don't know if our apportionments will go down proportionately," said the Rev. Amy Bartee, referring to direct invoicing. She is pastor at Wallace/Wyndale UMC, Abingdon District.

Bill Daugherty rushed into Bethea and was immediately greeted by the Rev. Samuel Dzobo, pastor at Woodlawn UMC, Morristown District. Daugherty explained that Dzobo is the former pastor of Hilltop UMC in Zimbabwe, where Holston has sent supplies for many years through its Hands-On Mission Project for Ishe Anesu.

The Hands-on Project was completed last week. The total collection of supplies destined for Zimbabwe and Liberia will be announced Monday morning. "It was the most we've ever had," Daugherty said.

The Rev. John Ripley and his wife, Mary Jane Ripley, said they were excited to be staying with five other couples in a condominium this week. The Ripleys attend Church Steet UMC in Knoxville District and heaped praises on the clergy staff.

Another retired clergy member, the Rev. Nelson Woody, celebrated his 58th consecutive Annual Conference. He and his wife, Ruth Woody, recalled how clergy of yesteryear came to Annual Conference not knowing if they would be re-appointed or not.

"There were a lot of tears in those days," said Ruth Woody.

Between Harrell Center and Stuart Auditorium, the Rev. Jeannie Higgins and other members of the Sudan Action Team prepared a special display where art and T-shirts will be sold to raise \$40,000 for a Toyota Landrover. The vehicle will enhance the ministry of the Rev. Boo Hankins and the Rev. Phyllis Hankins, who depart this month for a two-year assignment in Yei, Sudan.

Last night in Stuart Auditorium, members worshipped in air conditioning for the Service of Remembrance. The Rev. Tyrone Gordon challenged members to find new ways to carry out the Great Commission: to be a "go to" church instead of a "come to" church.

"Jesus never expected people to come to him," Gordon said. "He was hanging around with people that good church folk don't want to be around ...

"A 'go to' church doesn't pick and choose who they want to reach out to. A 'go to' church throws out a lifeline to the hurting, the sinking, and the despondent." ■



The Rev. Nelson Woody (right) is attending his 58th consecutive Annual Conference. He and his wife, Ruth (pictured at Bethea Welcome Center) attend State Street UMC in Abingdon District.



Bill Daugherty, conference missions coordinator, is greeted by the Rev. Samuel Dzobo, pastor at Woodlawn UMC in Morristown District.



John Wesley the dog makes friends with Sarah, 14-month-old daughter of the Rev. Brandon Berg. John Wesley is the pet of Johnson City Administrative Assistant Betty Barton.



The Rev. Tyrone Gordon, preacher at last night's Service of Remembrance, holds up a record album to encourage members not to use old methods to reach new listeners.



Isaac Collins solos at last night's Service of Remembrance.

It was a great year!

Yesterday we asked these Annual Conference members, "What was the best thing that happened at your church this past year?"



Rev. Al Shaver
Mountain View UMC
Maryville District

• "Our membership increased by 8 percent and we paid 100 percent of our district and conference apportionments."



Rev. Mary Minnick
Hunt Memorial UMC
Abingdon District

• "We're celebrating the first anniversary of a Monday night ministry for the children in a 500-unit housing project that is only two blocks from our church."



Rev. Brandon Berg
Limestone/Greenwood UMC
Johnson City District

• "Our congregation really came together to send me to Sudan with the October clergy team."



Julia McCain
Rockwood UMC
Oak Ridge District

• "Our United Methodist Women challenged and then matched our congregation in a food drive for the Rockwood Ministerial Association."



Rev. Rochelle Maxwell
Pruitt Hill/Tate Chapel UMC
Morristown District

• "A fire at Tate Chapel seemed to really bring back a lot of lost sheep for both churches."



John Garland
First Broad Street UMC
Kingsport District

• "We built a new children's wing that gives our kids a lot more room to learn and enjoy."



James Bowen
New Salem UMC
Chattanooga District

• "The church as a whole gives 100 percent to just about anything. We have a food bank and we just started a clothes closet for infants through age 14."



Rev. Donald Swift
John Wesley/
Charles Wesley UMC
Abingdon District

• "Our two choirs joined together to sing for a Martin Luther King prayer breakfast and also for last year's Annual Conference."