

# Way to go! Way to give!

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Holston Conference

Congregational Development

**“What if we did something really out of the box?”**

**~ Rev. Ronnie Collins**



It all started in 2008, during a youth retreat to Macon, Ga.

The Rev. Ronnie Collins, then associate pastor at First United Methodist Church of Hillsville, Va., led his group on a weekend trip to an Assemblies of God church that was held in a former sports arena. Ronnie and the group were amazed.

“This church had grown from nothing to 800 in attendance over a short period of time,” Ronnie said of the Macon congregation. The group from Hillsville began to dream and pray about doing a similar thing in their hometown.

“We started to ask ourselves, ‘What if we did something really out of the box?’”

Within three days of returning from Georgia, Ronnie and crew had found a vacant coffee shop on Main Street in Hillsville, about a half mile from the main church building. First United Methodist Church opened “Out of the Box” Youth Ministry in October 2008, and within three months, 40 teenagers were showing up for Bible study on Wednesday nights. On Friday nights, 150 youth came to the post-football-game parties for free pizza and snacks. Many did not have church homes until they found Out of the Box.

As the youth ministry grew, so did worship attendance at First UMC. Yet the enthusiastic youth began to say to Ronnie, “You’ve got to give us something to bring our parents to.”

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Out of the Box's first worship service launched on Christmas Eve 2010 with 118 in attendance. In March 2011, a second worship service was started, bringing total attendance to 170. Today, Out of the Box has three worship services with 250 in attendance.

With the help of congregational development funds from Holston Conference, both Out of the Box and First United Methodist Church of Hillsville have grown and begun new ministries. Ronnie received congregational development coaching, and Out of the Box thrived with its reputation for meeting in an unorthodox location with a lot of young people leading worship and music.

In January 2014, the little youth ministry that dreamed of something bigger became Holston's newest chartered church. Each of the 165,000 members of Holston Conference can join in being proud of what is now Out of the Box United Methodist Church, because it was their tithes and offerings that helped make this success story happen.

Now, Ronnie and Out of the Box are dreaming of expanding their space on Main Street and starting new churches in Carroll County.



The Out of the Box Praise Band sings at Annual Conference.

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Holston Conference offers congregational development coaching to its clergy.

"We could have a mega church. We could have 10 churches with several people. It can be done," Ronnie says. "I'm not going to be happy with 200 people when 1,000 people are hurting."

Thank you, Holston Conference. You'll never know how many lives you've changed.

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