

# Holston celebrates mission and ministry, delights in visit from Bishop Dindy Taylor

Holston took a first step toward discerning God's vision for the conference, celebrated several ministries, and focused on money matters during the second day of the Annual Conference on June 13.

The conference also welcomed Bishop Mary Virginia "Dindy" Taylor back on her home turf, took a special offering for Latvia, and sent off two truckloads of goods to Africa.

After attending their respective Clergy and Laity Sessions, the Annual Conference gathered in Stuart Auditorium for morning business and visioning work.

Bishop Michael Watson spoke of Acts 2:42 and the early church's values that led them to God's vision. He told several stories that kept participants laughing while explaining that enthusiasm, prayer, sharing, and other values were central to visioning.

Following Watson, Anne Travis defined "spiritual visioning" for participants. "This is not strategic planning," she said. "In strategic planning, we ask, 'What do we want to do for God?' In spiritual visioning, we ask, 'What is God calling us to be and do?'"

Travis, director of connectional ministries, also said that one of the benefits of spiritual vision is a "known destination."

"We do believe our best days are in the future, and we expect to see a new vitality in our conference as we work through this visioning process," she said.

Acknowledging that God could speak through any one at any time, Travis' workshop included opportunities for participants to indicate their own core values. The Annual Conference will receive some feedback from those surveys during today's session.

As the rain stopped and the heat poured on in Stuart Auditorium, these were other highlights at yesterday's session:

- Bishop Taylor, elected to the episcopacy last year and assigned to the South Carolina Conference, was welcomed back to the Holston stage by Bishop James Swanson. "I want you to know how good you look," said an emotional Taylor, before adding humorously, "But I also want you to know that nothing

could be finer than to be in Carolina."

- The conference applauded as two truckloads of goods, collected by churches during the past few weeks, were sent off to Africa. Each district far surpassed their goals, gathering as many as 1,252 food buckets for Zimbabwe and 1,721 school supply kits for Liberia.

- After congregations brought their offering for Latvia, the total received was \$82,287 as of 7:15 p.m. last night. Participants who still have offerings should take them to Harrell Center, room 202, between 8 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. today.

- Young people woke up the Annual Conference by standing individually and shouting, "I am a young adult!" during the Young Adult Ministries Team presentation. The Conference Council on Youth Ministries asked all those who had ever worked in youth ministry to stand, before offering a collective blessing.

- The Rev. Bob Bostick encouraged members to promote and participate in Jubilation, the conference's senior adult retreat to be held March 26-28, 2006, in Gatlinburg. "The number-one comment we get from people who have attended Jubilation is, 'We never get this material from our pastor,'" said Bostick, coordinator of older adult ministries.

- Leading the conference in a stewardship pop quiz, the Rev. Bill Kilday noted that six percent of pastors across North America feel uncomfortable talking about money. "Money is important, so don't tell your preacher to preach from the Bible, but don't talk about money," said Kilday, director of stewardship. "What we give away is what blesses us."

- The Rev. Andy Ferguson, Council on Finance and Administration president, presented a \$15.3 million budget, reflecting a 2.9 percent increase over last year's budget. He noted concern that 170 churches have not paid any of their Fair Share apportionments this year, and introduced the Rev. Gary Grogg, who presented a recommendation to make the Fair Share apportionment "more fair."

- According to Grogg and the report on page 47 of the "Book of Reports," the Council on Finance and Administration is recommending a new Fair Share formula that eliminates both member-



The Annual Conference stands and applauds as Bishop James Swanson (above, left) invites an emotional Bishop Mary Virginia "Dindy" Taylor back to the Holston stage.

ship and apportionments paid in previous years. Members will have time to ask questions before voting on these recommendations on Wednesday morning.

- The Board of Pensions recommended a past service retirement rate of \$440 per year of approved pre-1982 ministerial service. Stating that the conference's insurance fund is "losing money" due to increasing drug costs and medical costs, Chair Paul Stanton announced that premiums will rise 15 percent effective July 1. Co-pay costs will increase from \$15 to \$25. Health plan participants will receive letters this week, explaining these changes and others, Stanton said.

- The Denman Evangelism Award was

presented to Kim Koesters, lay member at Vermont UMC, Kingsport District, and to the Rev. Larry Linkous, pastor at Greendale-Brumley Gap-Rich Valley UMC, Abingdon District.

- The conference accepted a report of the Committee on Rules and Order, changing the name of the Wesley Institute to the "Wesley Leadership Institute," and the Board of Laity to the "Board of Lay Ministry."

- Bishop Swanson commended members for their Sunday attendance despite the rain. "You have dispelled the rumor that we Methodists are afraid of too much water," he said to laughter. ■



The Rev. Amy Holmes, pastor at Trinity UMC, Abingdon District, fills out a visioning worksheet on core values.



The Rev. Paul Marchbanks, retired pastor from Knoxville District, preaches and sings at last night's memorial worship service.



The Conference Council on Youth Ministries says a blessing for members of the Annual Conference who have worked in youth ministry as pastors, counselors, or volunteers.



The Allelujah Kids, representing Maryville District Hispanic ministries, delight the audience with their songs and smiles.