

## First-day expectations at AC: 'I hope that we'll be filled by the Holy Spirit'

The traffic didn't seem to be the bummer that many expected. Instead, members arriving at the 2006 Holston Annual Conference on Sunday talked about the detours they took to avoid the traffic, new grandbabies, new appointments, and the preaching and music to come.

From 912 churches in east Tennessee, southwest Virginia, and north Georgia, they came. They came to register, to sit in rocking chairs at Harrell Center, to hug old friends, and to worship.

Like many, Loreen Atkins took a different route yesterday to avoid a 24-hour road closure on Interstate 40. Yet her trip was a half-hour shorter than usual. "And the scenery was beautiful," said Atkins. Attending her eighth Annual Conference, she is a lay member at Stanley United Methodist Church, Chattanooga District.

Ronnie Collins wasn't delayed by traffic, but by thunderstorms, highway accidents – and his first grandchild, born at 11:28 a.m. yesterday. Collins made a

quick trip to see the baby before heading to North Carolina.

"I got to hold him first, even before my son did," said the associate pastor at First Hillville UMC, Wytheville District. Christopher Gray Collins weighed 8 pounds and four ounces and was 21 inches long.

On the porch at Harrell Center, the Rev. Sandra Johnson and Phyllis Herron rocked alongside each other as if they were old friends. Later, Herron revealed that she had recognized Johnson from the "Book of Reports" cover art.

"We don't know each other, but we're about to," said Herron, laughing. She is a lay member at Colonial Heights UMC, Kingsport District.

Johnson, pastor at Hurst UMC in Chattanooga District, said she looked forward to evening worship, when clergywomen would be recognized and Bishop Mary Virginia Taylor would preach.

"Dindy Taylor was my supervising elder when I did my candidacy," Johnson said with a smile.



Bishop Mary Virginia Taylor receives a standing ovation at last night's worship service.

At an afternoon orientation for first-time appointees, Diana Cornett threw her arms around Janet Geitner when she learned Geitner had been projected for appointment at McDonald UMC in Cleveland District.

"At licensing school, she didn't have an appointment. I've been praying for her," explained Cornett, who is projected for her first appointment at New Market Circuit, Morristown District.

Wayne Cook is also projected for his first appointment – at Lookout Mountain UMC, Chattanooga District. A former vice president of operations for Coldwell Banker, Cook spoke of how he had been "running away" from his call to ministry for 30 years.

"I thought I could satisfy that calling with lay speaking, but I finally had to say, 'Here I am.'"

Attending his first Annual Conference,

Cook said, "I'm excited about the whole idea of being here. I really believe the Holy Spirit is moving in Holston Conference, and I hope that we'll be filled by it this week."

Following last night's call to order by Bishop James Swanson and opening activities of the Annual Conference, members weathered a thunderburst to participate in worship at 8 p.m. They stood to welcome Bishop Mary Virginia Taylor with applause during a service celebrating the 50th anniversary of full clergy rights for women.

"I'm overwhelmed with emotion," said Bishop Taylor. "As I look out and see your faces, I just want to say thank you ... You are my family."

Later, in her passionate sermon, she asked, "What's gotten into you, Holston Conference?" before answering, "The spirit of God." ■



LEFT: Diana Cornett (facing camera) hugs Janet Geitner at the orientation for first-time appointees. "I've been praying for you," she said.

RIGHT: As more members arrive, the Rev. Arturo Reyna (far right) visits with the Rev. Kenneth Sawyer. Reyna is projected for appointment at Morristown District's Hispanic Ministry. Sawyer is pastor at West Market UMC, Johnson City District.



Pictured from left to right are the Rev. Sandra Johnson (Hurst UMC, Chattanooga District), Phyllis Herron (Colonial Heights UMC, Kingsport District), Maria McAfee (Mt. Hebron UMC, Morristown District), Marie Harmon (River Hill UMC, Morristown District), and Anne Cassell (Bethany UMC, Tazewell District).



Jana Martin, wife of the Oak Ridge District's Rev. Steve Martin, attempts to buy soda from an uncooperative vending machine. The thirsty Martin children are, from left to right, Elisabeth, Richard, Christopher, and Matthew.



LEFT: In Stuart Auditorium, the Rev. Sarah Martin irons special communion tableclothes for the evening's worship service.



RIGHT: Bishop James Swanson chats with Troy Forrester, projected for his first appointment as associate at First Oak Ridge UMC.