

Approved: Building purchase and vision statement

Lots of business, voting, worship, and ice-cream eating at Tuesday's session

The Annual Conference swiftly approved the purchase of a building for the conference headquarters and unanimously accepted a new vision statement during yesterday's business-packed agenda.

The Annual Conference also worked its way through seven of ten resolutions – although not as swiftly on some as they did on others.

During the morning session, members voted to give the Board of Trustees approval to purchase a \$1.8 million office building in Alcoa, Tenn. Gene Frazier, Board of Trustees chair, said the proposal was the result of more than a year of research – an effort to find office space to build conference equity without increasing the conference budget.

"The conference felt we needed to be proactive in finding a place to go," said Frazier, explaining that Holston Conference currently leases space from Cokesbury UMC in Knoxville, Tenn. "Cokesbury is a very vibrant church, and we could see down the road that they would need more space."

Purchasing Ruby Tuesday's former three-story corporate building, Frazier said, would more than double the conference's current office space. The conference will lease the first floor of the Alcoa building, providing \$100,000 of annual income toward the purchase. The remaining funds will be obtained from reserves in a Board of Trustees account. Projected equity built over the next 10 years is \$1 million.

The Board of Trustees also reported the sale of the Johnson City satellite office to First Johnson City UMC for \$135,000. The conference is leasing the top floor from First UMC for its Johnson City staff, Frazier said.

Later in the day, approval of the "bold, passionate, and joyful" vision statement was followed by a worship celebration and the singing of "Be Thou Our Vision."

"Thank you for singing as if the

Lord touched your hearts," Bishop James Swanson said. "And now the work really begins with this vision statement."

Following Annual Conference, Swanson will empower the Connectional Table to develop an action plan for the conference to live out the statement, conference leaders have said.

The final three of 10 resolutions, published on pages 184-191 in the "Book of Reports," will be addressed in this morning's session. Yesterday, the Annual Conference approved resolutions establishing a Youth Sunday, lifting up mental health awareness, supporting health and wholeness ministry, and appointing a task force to preserve historical Acuff Chapel near Blountville, Tenn., and Cox House near Bluff City, Tenn.

The Annual Conference also approved a resolution supporting the United Methodist Church Global AIDS Fund, referring it to the Council on Finance and Administration.

A resolution to establish "limited-service churches" prompted 25 minutes of discussion, including speeches against ("I'm not in the business of making monuments of our church buildings," said the Rev. Rebekah Fetzer of Knoxville District) and speeches for ("There's a hope in there that this church will grow," said the Rev. Rance Edwards of Morristown District). The resolution was approved, with an amendment to call churches opting for this designation, "limited-service chapels."

Also sparking debate was a resolution asking the Annual Conference to reconsider its relationship with the National Council of Churches. Calling the resolution "troubling" and stating the importance of "staying in conversation with caring people," the Rev. Jim Green, representing the Committee on Resolutions, recommended non-concurrence. Joey Hester of the Wytheville District spoke against the non-concurrence, noting that National Council of Churches funds were used to support non-Christian groups.

A majority vote of the Annual Conference supported the Committee on Resolution's non-concurrence – rejecting the resolution.

Other news from Tuesday:

- **The Rev. James Noseworthy**, president of Hiwassee College, received the Francis Asbury Award for higher education. "He has made worship and service to God a high priority for students," said the Rev. Al



ABOVE: The Rev. Gary Grogg (right), representing the Resolutions Committee, looks to the Rev. Mike Travis, representing the Cabinet, to answer a member's question concerning the "limited-service churches" resolution.



RIGHT: The Rev. Allen Shupe of Morristown District is one of many to ask questions or to speak out about the "limited-service churches" resolution.

Bowles of the Board of Higher Education. "He motivates and deeply cares for all the students. He is an active presence in their lives."

- **Twenty-one retirees** were recognized during an afternoon Retirement Celebration. The Rev. Walter Willis spoke of his own retirement in 1994, when a child gave him the gift of hand-picked flowers, inspiring a poem he called "Seeing God." "A place to see God is not in stained-glass windows," he said, "but enclosed in human flesh."

- **At least 150 members** participated in the Walk for Change around the lake. After walking around the lake one time, Sharon Nelson Rush was inspired to organize a walk at her own church – Jonesborough UMC in Johnson City District – to also raise money for children's ministries. "So she walked around the lake one more time to pray about it," said Children's Ministry Coordinator Anita Henderlight. Offering totals for Change for Children will be announced today.

- **Paul Stanton** of the Board of Pensions reported that the conference pension fund reserves now total \$32 million, an 8.8 percent increase in 2005. The Annual Conference approved an increase in insurance premium rates of 3 percent for individuals and 9 percent for family/retirees, effective Jan. 1, 2007. The Conference also approved a pre-1982 past service retirement rate of \$465 for next year, a 3.64 percent increase over the previous year.

- **In the morning** Bible study, Bishop Scott Jones explained how examining "the

general tenure of scripture" shows that 1 Timothy 2:11-12 and 1 Corinthians 11:4-5, forbidding women to pray or preach, were temporary rules for the time. The rules have been kept by other denominations, he said, "because of the culture of sexism we have maintained for 1,900 years."

- **After announcing** that the United Methodist Men wanted to recognize a clergywoman with a special honor, "just to show that we're not all chauvinists," President Jim Ball called the Rev. Caryl Griffin to the stage. "Now you're a lifelong member of the United Methodist Men," he said, presenting her with a pin. Griffin is director of the Wesley Leadership Institute.

- **Three churches** were discontinued in the past year: Cumbo, Big Stone Gap District; Walnut Grove, Maryville District; and Wellspring, Maryville District. In addition, Mt. Tabor of Cleveland District was abandoned. Loy Memorial and Wooten's Chapel of the Morristown District were merged into New Market UMC. Beulah and Trinity of the Lead Mines Circuit, Wytheville District, were also merged in the past year.

- **Last night** at 7 p.m., the total offering received for the mission in Alaska was \$88,857. "This conference continues to amaze me with its missionary zeal," Bishop Swanson said earlier in the day.

- **Bishop Ken Carder** joined Bishop Swanson in participating in last night's Service of Ordination and Commissioning. In his sermon, "From the Jordan to the Wilderness," Bishop Swanson preached, "When you're the toast of the town – or when they want to run you out of town on a rail – know that God is still on your side."

- **For a complete** wrap-up of the 2006 Holston Annual Conference, see the June 30 edition of *The Call*. ■



ABOVE: Holston members line up for Mayfield's ice cream.

RIGHT: Bishop James Swanson (far right) congratulates the Rev. Wayne Rader during the afternoon Retirement Celebration.

