

travel:

See Greece

Walking
in Paul's
footsteps

By Charles Ensminger

We read in Acts 17:22-25 of Paul boldly addressing the people of Athens. I never appreciated where Paul was and what massive setting Paul was speaking from until I saw it with my own eyes. Looking down from the entrance to the Acropolis, I clearly saw the rocky face of the Areopagus, which was the hill of the Greek god Ares, the god of war (called Mars Hill by the Romans). It was a daring place to proclaim the good news of Christ – from the mountain dedicated to the god of war.

But, as the saying goes, you have to see it to believe it. And I have, thanks to the October trip put together through the Society for Biblical Studies and the Holston Conference. Twenty-seven Holston clergy and lay members ventured to Greece for a 10-day study tour of Paul's travels.

We followed what is commonly called Paul's "second missionary journey" through Greece beginning at Kavala and ending at Corinth. While we traveled many miles and stopped at many non-Biblical sites, this article focuses on our experience in walking the paths of Paul. We followed the beginning of Paul's journey in Greece at the still-bustling port town of Kavala (known as Neopolis in the Book of Acts). We saw a city of trade where port commerce is still very much a part of the daily routine.

From there we traveled to Thessalonica, a massive city where we witnessed (from our American perspectives) how crowded the people are. Of the ancient world of Paul, there was little left to see. But in its stead was a city as alive and active as it has been for hundreds of years.

Following this, we made a stop at the archaeological site of Philippi – a wonder to behold. We sat in the remains of the great theater, a rounded stage surrounded by stone seats which have – despite earthquakes, wars, and time – remained well preserved. From the theater, we walked through ancient archways. Standing on the steps of the ruins of a Christian basilica, we looked into the past. From those steps we journeyed to the forum, the common area where Paul would have stood and addressed the crowds. Walking across the remains of smooth marble streets, history spoke to us of the ancient city's splendor.

Surrounded by the five million inhabitants of modern-day Athens, we stood on the steps of the Acropolis and looked out upon Athens –



The Rev. Charles Ensminger (left) and the Rev. Robert Burlingham stand in the ruins of Pella.

Mars Hill, the Agora, the Parthenon, the ruins of theaters and stadiums – and it was here that the magnitude of the tour hit us. We were in the heart of the land where Paul had boldly proclaimed the gospel of Christ to a world fraught with gods and goddesses. We could almost see and hear the ancient metropolis.

Finally, we headed to Corinth, where the heart of an ancient city stands in the middle of a modern one. Just off to the left of the Temple of Apollo is the gate where Paul would have entered the city. In a dramatic moment, we gathered and sat under a shade tree and had our daily devotion in the heart of Corinth itself. What a blessing!

Some of our experiences contained elements of wonder that cannot be expressed, only felt. I recommend that Holston members grasp any future opportunities to walk in history and experience the wonders of our Christian heritage. ■

The Rev. Ensminger is pastor at Tasso United Methodist Church, Cleveland District.

who said that?

**"The only people who
like big churches are pastors."**

– The Rev. Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Church, which has an average weekly worship attendance of 15,000 in Orange County, Calif.

web update:

What's new at holston.org:

Our new "Church Search" lets you find contact information for every church in the conference. Check it out at <http://holstonconference.com/churchsearch>.

If you're a fan of John Ripley's "Church Development" column, stay tuned to www.holstonconference.com/builders. Ripley's column will be updated frequently there as he moves to his new online format.

Free web hosting available to Holston churches! Find out more at www.circuitride.com or contact Donna Hankins at dhankins@holston.org or (865) 690-4080.

It's not too late to register for Divine Rhythm, the conference's young adult retreat held Jan. 17-19 in Gatlinburg, Tenn. Go to www.divinerhythm.com for info.

If it's Wednesday, it's time to visit www.holston.org. We've got new content every week at "Wednesday on the Web." Be sure to look for our "sneak preview" of the redesigned *Call*, appearing online until mid-January. ■



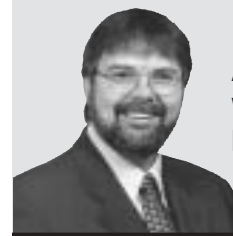
announcement:

Finance office closes 2002 books

The Holston Conference treasurer's office recently announced that 2002 financial books will close on Jan. 10. Only money received in the financial office on Jan. 10 will be accepted for 2002 apportionments or missions; no postmarks will be accepted. For information on wiring funds, call the finance office at (423) 928-2156. ■

preview:

Beginning with the next issue,
The Call introduces a new series of columns!



At Lunch With: Kevin Slimp dines with some of the conference's interesting people in interesting situations. We hope his reports will leave you hungry for more. Beginning Jan. 17.



Connectional Reflections: At the pulse of Holston ministry is Anne Travis, who crisscrosses the conference to keep our connections sound. Look for her updates from the connectional ministries office beginning Jan. 31.



Cycles & Seasons: A regular columnist for the *Asheville Citizen-Times*, Jane Curran is a United Methodist minister who can turn a phrase and touch your heart. The Rev. Curran's columns about life and lifework begin Feb. 8.