

conference mission:

By Kevin Slimp

Holston Director of Communications

Holston churches collect huge quantity of shoes for Afghans



© 2001 Photo by Anne Travis, Holston Conference

▲ **Assembly Line:** Volunteers at Central UMC form an assembly line to load shoes for Afghan refugees. The shoes are scheduled to arrive in February, according to Stop Hunger Now.

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. (UMNS) – United Methodists in the church's Holston Annual Conference have gathered more than 100,000 pairs of shoes to help Afghan refugees.

"I'll sleep a lot better this Christmas season, knowing we did something tangible for people in such need," said Ray Chamberlain, bishop of the Holston Conference.

Volunteers throughout the conference, working Dec. 14-15, collected shoes as well as financial donations for children and adults living in impoverished conditions in Afghan refugee camps.

The outpouring of shoes and money was "absolutely overwhelming," said Anne Travis, director of Holston's Connectional Ministries. She also was impressed by the way volunteers showed up to pack the shoes and load the trucks on Saturday, Dec. 15. "It's significant that people would come out to help during such a busy time."

Travis, along with Bill Daugherty, Holston's director of missions, led the volunteer work.

The Saturday efforts began early at Pleasant View UMC in Abingdon, Va. The Rev. Larry Carroll, Pleasant View's pastor, worked alongside dozens of volunteers, loading boxes onto a tractor-trailer. It soon became apparent that one trailer would not be enough. The thousands of shoes included dona-

tions from the Wytheville, Tazewell, Big Stone Gap, Abingdon, Kingsport and Johnson City districts.

The Rev. Grady Winegar, superintendent of the Kingsport District, spent Thursday with six volunteers bagging 382 large trash bags full of shoes, which were delivered the next day to Abingdon.

On Saturday afternoon, efforts shifted to Knoxville and Central UMC. With the initial tractor-trailer filled in Abingdon, a second truck had to be found quickly. Jon Bock, a member of Fairview UMC in Maryville, came to the rescue. Bock, owner of Graebel Van Lines, arranged for five employees to provide assistance at Central UMC and for another tractor-trailer to be donated to store and transport the shoes. The abundance of shoes also created a shortage of boxes. Bock came to the rescue again, providing hundreds of boxes for the shoes.

When the need for more help became apparent, Central's pastor, the Rev. Bruce Spangler, called on a nearby homeless shelter. Within minutes, several residents of the Knox Area Rescue Mission arrived to load the truck. "These were homeless people coming out to help others they perceived as being in need," Travis said.

"It's incredible to imagine this all came together in three weeks," said the Rev. Dennie Humphreys, superintendent of the Big Stone Gap District. "If the

Galax Congregation, continued from page 3

The Rev. J.N. Howard, Wytheville District Superintendent, officiated during the event at West Galax UMC. Also participating were the Rev. Ty Harrison, West Galax former pastor, and the Rev. Joe Carrico, current pastor.

With \$38,000 raised by the Door of Heaven congregation and a \$12,000 loan from First Galax UMC, five acres of land have been purchased for the church's future site, Howard announced. Through the conference's Volunteer Labor Program, groundbreaking for a new building is expected to occur in spring 2002. The future site is three miles from West Galax UMC.

"Until today, there were 117 churches in the Wytheville District. But in about 30 minutes, there will be 118," Howard said to applause.

In addition to members of the Hispanic community, many members from the parent church were present for a total attendance of about 130.

"I look out on this congregation, and I see so many people who prayed so faithfully, so ardently, that this day would come," said an emotional Harrison as Reyna interpreted in Spanish. Now serving Kodak UMC in the Knoxville District, Harrison was a leader in developing the new church and is current chair of the conference's Hispanic Ministry Team.

Other highlights during the Sunday night ceremony included special music by singer Felix Medina, drummer Luis Reyna and keyboardist Edgar Mendieta. Medina was among the charter members; Mendieta was baptized shortly before the service. Salvador Gutierrez, Door of Heaven lay leader, read scripture from Isaiah 2:1-4.

While the Door of Heaven Church is the first Hispanic congregation within the conference to gain a charter, worship services in Spanish also exist at First Pulaski UMC, Wytheville District, and Brainerd UMC, Chattanooga District. Other mission projects for Spanish-speakers are ongoing in the Maryville District, Morristown District and Johnson City District.

A Hispanic worship service at West Galax UMC was initiated in 1995 when Harrison noticed the area's growing Hispanic population and began visiting and inviting newcomers to church.

Himself new to the area, Reyna had lived a troubled life as a self-described alcoholic until he came to West Galax as an interpreter and was led to rededicate his life to God. After two years of devoted lay work, Reyna was called to full-time ministry. ■



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Congratulations: The Rev. J.N. Howard, Wytheville District superintendent, congratulates charter members of the Door of Heaven United Methodist Church in Galax, Va.