

# The Call

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HOLSTON CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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## When prison term is over,

### Stanley UMC steps up

By Annette Bender

CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. – Harold Bryson used to pass the Silverdale Correctional Center as he drove to and from work. He always noticed the newly released former inmates walking along the road, so he took to picking them up and giving them rides to where ever they needed to go.

Bryson's kindness has developed into a ministry that is the first of its kind in Holston Conference: a "penal after care" program that helps "ex-offenders" with transportation and referrals for jobs and other assistance. The ministry has been in the making since 1997, when leaders of Bryson's church, Stanley United Methodist Church, had a vision and pursued it until it came to be.

Church and community leaders gathered at Stanley to dedicate the W.S. Hight Community Outreach Penal After Care Empowerment center on Feb. 29. In a small house on the church's property, ex-inmates have a clean, newly furnished and renovated place where they can make telephone calls to locate family members, child care or housing.

The ministry concentrates on helping parents, Bryson said, "because we feel society is down on families. So we're trying to build a strong – what we call – 'kinship family bond.'"

Since the W.S. Hight facility opened in August 2003, 72 individuals have been assisted. All but 11 were women and all but one had children. Bryson's statistics show that most clients received help with counseling, getting their records expunged, creating resumes and filling out job applications.

Conference leaders are excited about Stanley's program because they want to expand Holston's involvement in prison ministries. Although a few Holston churches minister to local prisoners and at least two prison chaplains are conference members, no other known "after care" ministries exist in Holston.

"We need to recognize that prison ministry is not just for people in the prisons, but we have to continue to minister to those people," said Anne Travis,



So new that it still has plastic on the chair, one of several work centers in the facility awaits an "ex-offender."



Photos by Annette Bender, The Call

Church and community leaders gather to celebrate a new prison ministry at Stanley United Methodist Church on Feb. 29. The W.S. Hight Community Outreach Penal After Care Empowerment ministry helps ex-inmates get connected with families and re-established in society.

director of connectional ministries. "Stanley is unique and a model for the conference."

"When prisoners are released, they lose their support and their support groups. It just ends. It's almost like we're letting them down," said the Rev. Paul Griffith, chaplain at Keen Mountain Correctional Center in Tazewell District. "I'm glad that other Holston churches are taking that step of faith and providing

something that's been much needed for many years."

The ministry was many years in coming, however. Stanley leaders conceived the idea when they began to consider how to use a house on the property that had been transformed into a little-used youth center followed by a library.

"We tried everything," said Izzetta Thurmond, whose father is

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## Questions about new drug program?

Persons who wish to learn more about DestinationRX drug savings program – recently announced by the media to be available to all United Methodist church members – should call the firm directly at 1-800-379-9040.

Persons who call should indicate they received the offer from the United Methodist Association and provide the following group number: UMA999.

"This is not an insurance program but could be of great benefit to persons who have no or only minimal prescription drug coverage," said the Rev. Gordon Ridenour, executive assistant to the bishop.

Additional information, provided by United Methodist News Service, is available at [www.holston.org/thecall](http://www.holston.org/thecall). Click on "National & World News." ■