

inside: hope in sudan

A conference missions team returns from Yei, Sudan, where they find hope and laughter.

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22 acres purchased

Holston takes a bold step to build a new faith community.

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jubilation!

Older adults find fun, food, friends at MeadowView in Kingport.

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The Call



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EASTER HOSPITALITY

Two Churches Share Their Welcoming Ways

For many congregations, Easter is a golden opportunity to welcome guests they might not see any other time of the year.

The goal is to make newcomers feel so good about coming to church on Easter, they'll want to come back again and again.

For Ooltewah and First-Centenary United Methodist Churches, hospitality is important on Easter Sunday, but it's just as important every other Sunday of the year.

"A lot of what we're doing on Easter, we do all the time," says the Rev. David Graves, senior pastor at Ooltewah UMC in Cleveland District. "Our worship team works on hospitality a lot, because we want it to be the best it possibly can be."

The process begins in the parking lot, where worshippers are greeted on one of two golf carts. On Easter, three golf carts will be available, helping people navigate the large parking lot and the crowds expected on April 8.

"Our campus is more rectangular than square," Graves explains. "The golf carts just give them a quick, easy ride to where they want to go."

Greeters are posted both inside and outside the church. Both greeters and ushers are trained to "pick up on" people who might be guests, to sense when they need directions or other assistance. They're also careful not to embarrass or



Photo courtesy of Ooltewah UMC

Greeters at Ooltewah UMC use golf carts to taxi worshippers to the entrance – not just at Easter, but year-round.

overwhelm people who don't want too much attention, Graves said.

For example, on Easter, Ooltewah will provide gift-wrapped devotional books to first-time visitors. People who prefer not to identify themselves as first-timers during worship can discreetly visit a special display to pick up their gifts. Visitors who provide their names and addresses will promptly be invited to come again.

Regular attenders are instructed not to dominate the back pews or end seats, Graves said. Guests usually want to sit in the back, or they find it embarrassing to climb over the laps of others for a seat in the middle of the row.

Ooltewah's average worship attendance is 550, but since the church broke attendance records with more than 1,000 on

Christmas Eve, they expect more than 1,000 on Easter.

Give them coffee

When newcomers have to meet and mingle with people they don't know, they need to do something with their hands, says Nell Mohney. "So you hand them a cup of coffee."

That's how newcomers are welcomed into the Downtown Singles Sunday school group at First-Centenary UMC in Chattanooga District. The class has a big breakfast each Palm

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But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her ...

