

At Lunch With

Lurone Jennings: Inner-city minister

“Just like hitting people.” Lurone Jennings says that made football the perfect sport for him as a youngster. “Sports were my outlet. God used that to help me deal with the frustration and pain of my dysfunctional family and the dysfunctional lifestyle of the community.”

Growing up in the Alton Park community of Chattanooga, Jennings witnessed a lot of drugs, crime and violence. “That’s the kind of culture I was exposed to,” he continues, “and participated in to a large extent.”

Thanks to the insistence of a grandmother who lived in the Spencer McCallie housing project, directly across from Bethlehem Center, Jennings became involved in the center when he was six.

As a youth, Jennings knew he would someday be a teacher and coach. An ambition to play professional football was squelched when Jennings injured his knee shortly before he was scheduled to try out for the New York Giants.

In 1977, after graduating from Fisk University, he came back to Chattanooga and began a career in teaching and coaching. At Howard School, where he attended as a teenager, Jennings was assistant football and basketball coach, as well as head track coach.

“I spent 18 years teaching and coaching,” remembers Jennings. “I gave my life to Jesus Christ on May 24, 1983.” Years later, he learned that May 24 is celebrated as “Aldersgate Day” in the United Methodist Church, a date which



Lurone Jennings leans against a fence post at Famous Dave’s barbecue restaurant in Chattanooga.

commemorates the “heartwarming experience” of John Wesley.

Eventually, Jennings landed at Brainerd High School as head football coach in 1989. “Through the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, I took 26 of our football players to an E.V. Hill crusade in Chattanooga. Eighteen of the players committed their lives to Christ that night. Later, several of these young men were baptized together.”

In the years that followed, Jennings was promoted through the ranks to principle at Howard School, in the same neighborhood where he spent his childhood. Finally, at the age of 38, he was elevated to an administrator in the school system. Later, Bethlehem board president Becky Hall came to Jennings to talk with him about the executive director’s position. “There was a huge gap in terms of salary,” Jennings remembers. “But the Lord challenged me to

trust him. I had to learn not to be dependent on financial resources.”

Jennings serves as executive director of Bethlehem Center and pastor of Bethlehem Community Church, a United Methodist congregation that began at the center. While appointed as a pastor from another denomination, Jennings said he began to see the United Methodist Church as having the “greatest opportunity to bring revival to the world because of its connection.” He is now in the process of becoming a licensed United Methodist minister. ■

Peace Conference: April 24

Clergy and laypersons are invited to attend a day-long dialogue, “What’s a Person of Faith To Do? Issues of War and Peace,” April 24 at First Morristown UMC. Sponsored by the Wesley Institute, Outreach /Advocacy Ministry Team, and Peace With Justice Committee, the gathering will be held 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Featured speaker will be Bishop Peter Storey. Bishop Ray Chamberlain will serve as communion celebrant. Other Holston clergy and laypersons will lead discussion groups and provide resources for local churches. Cost is \$20 (including lunch), and 1/2 CEU will be offered. Register by calling the Wesley Institute at (423) 928-2156 or kimgoddard@holston.org.

Native American Day: May 4

One of six Special Sundays in the denomination, Native American Ministries Sunday on May 4 celebrates contributions of native people to the church and American societies. For assistance in observing Native American Ministries Sunday, contact Vicki Collins, chair, at (865) 435-0100. To support Holston’s Native American ministries, make checks to your local church or to Holston Conference, designating “Native American Awareness” on the memo line. Drop checks in your church’s offering plate or mail to Holston Conference, P.O. Box 2506, Johnson City, TN 37605. ■

Exchange

CHATTANOOGA, Tenn.— St. John UMC seeks a **part-time children’s ministry director** with five years minimum experience. Send resume with references to St. John UMC, 3921 Murray Hills Drive, Chattanooga, TN 37416, Attn: Staff-Parish Committee. ■

KINGSPORT, Tenn.— Cassidy UMC is taking applications for **full-time music director**. Applicants should have a bachelor’s degree in music or equivalent. Contact the church office at (423) 323-8142. ■

JASPER, Tenn. — McKendree UMC seeks a **part-time director of youth** (20 hours/week). Person would be responsible for recruiting youth from the community and developing an active, purpose-driven program. Contact Rev. Terry Goodman at (423) 942-3888 or e-mail pastor@mckendree-umc.com. ■



I applaud your article about Chaplain David Knight [“Military chapel from Holston,” March 28 issue]. He is very deserving of our support and prayers. I am writing to inform you that he is not the only military chaplain from Holston Conference. My son, Lt. H. Robert McClellan Jr., U.S. Navy chaplain, is also a former pastor from Holston. He is presently assigned to Mayport Naval Station, Jacksonville, Fla. I am very proud of his service to God and our country, and I feel that his name (as well as any others who may be serving) is worthy of mention in your publication.

Norma McClellan
East Pine Grove Park UMC
Johnson City District

I have just been reading the article about the assistance you intend to give the people of Kenya and the children of Liberia [“Spring mission project targets Kenya,” March 14 issue]. I can’t stop thanking God for the generous congregations of the Holston Conference. I do not doubt that the reward of your actions is above in the heavens. Don’t stop being good stewards!

I remember two years ago, similar offerings and gifts were sent to Liberia for the J.J. Roberts United Methodist School. Today, the students of the school are happy for the buildings erected as a result of the offerings. Accept my personal commendation as a staff person working for the school because I am very proud of the work you are doing.

J. Armah Massaquoi
Business Manager
J.J. Roberts School
Monrovia, Liberia

For more C-Mail – including messages from our readers about war coverage in The Call – go to www.holstonconference.com/thecall/ and click on “C-Mail.”