

# At Lunch With Mai Bell Hurley: Finance chair



Photo by Clint Cooper

Mai Bell Hurley (dining at Chattanooga's Southside Grill) downplays last year's direct billing controversy: "I didn't ever feel personally attacked or that it was a personal issue."

## By Clint Cooper

Though she wasn't a mathematics major at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Mai Bell Hurley has been working with figures since her first job out of college in the 1950s, when she determined the butterfat content of milk from cows on a farm in Sale Creek, Tenn.

Now with Annual Conference 2004 approaching in June, the Chattanooga native is concluding a four-year term as chair of the Conference Council on Finance and Administration and eight years on the board.

"[Incoming president] Andy Ferguson said I would be in charge until the minute Annual Conference was over," Hurley said recently over a salad lunch at Chattanooga's Southside Grill.

While Hurley's term has included some trying times for the conference and the country, such as the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks and an economic downturn, she is optimistic about the conference's financial outlook.

"There have been some watershed events," she said.

This year, Hurley said, the conference reserve funds are growing following several years of stock market instability, and apportionments from conference churches are up.

Also during her tenure, the pension obligations for ministers appointed prior to 1982 (when the pension rules were changed) were retired thanks to a campaign she credits to the skills of Bishop Ray Chamberlain and the conference leadership.

In addition, Hurley cited the 2003 hiring of Clyde McDonald as conference treasurer as a helpful step forward.

Because of the tough economic climate, she said, the conference budget has remained "absolutely flat" with the exception of some mandated benefit items. At Annual Conference in June, Hurley is expected to present a \$14.88 million budget for 2005, reflecting a 2.9 percent increase over the previous year's budget.

On another issue, Hurley said the council struggled to change but ultimately backed away from the way in

which pastors' benefits are paid. At the 2003 Annual Conference, the council proposed "direct billing" of pensions and health insurance to local churches – rather than placing these costs in the conference budget to be paid for through apportionments, as they are now.

"It was a very divisive issue," Hurley said.

Because of some strong opposition – and a desire that Bishop Chamberlain be spared such a rancorous issue in his last year – the council scrapped the proposal for direct billing, a plan used by most conferences in the Southeastern Jurisdiction.

"It was probably our willingness to listen, step back and withdraw the proposal that has resulted in an increased portion in [apportionment] payments this year," Hurley said.

Though she took some heat over direct billing in the discussion among local church representatives, she said years of church, nonprofit and civic work have kept her from being crushed by criticism.

"I didn't ever feel personally attacked or that it was a personal issue," Hurley said. "I do think it represents good listening skills. We just decided it was not the appropriate thing to do."

Though the Chattanooga native will leave the council in June, she still has other obligations. A past Chattanooga city councilwoman (1990-2001) and board chairwoman of its largest social service agency (the Partnership for Families, Children and Adults), among a host of accomplishments, she is the current board president of the United Way of Greater Chattanooga.

"I do what I do because of what I believe," she said.

Though not born a Methodist, she said she appreciates the denomination's collaborations and commitment to community needs. She is a member at First-Centenary United Methodist Church.

"I think the 'connectiveness' is a great thing," said Hurley, who is married to a United Methodist preacher's son (Bern) and is the mother of two and grandmother of two, "(but it also allows) people to worship and believe in a variety of ways." ■

Clint Cooper is the faith editor of the Chattanooga Times Free Press and a member of First-Centenary UMC.

## Five star churches Kingsport blasts other districts

### By Annette Bender

Ten fewer Holston churches received Five Star Church certificates for 2003 than in the previous year, according to recent statistics from the conference treasurer's office. Meanwhile, Kingsport District again far and away leads the conference with the highest percentage of congregations receiving certificates.

Churches qualify for Five Star certificates by paying their Fair Share apportionments in full and giving to missions funds.

Last year, 388 congregations qualified for the honor, compared with 398 in 2002. The Oak Ridge District alone had nine fewer Five Star congregations in 2003 than in 2002, while Chattanooga District dropped by eight. The

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## E-mail Changes



The conference office announces the following district e-mail changes effective immediately:

### ● Abingdon

Secretary: [abdists@holston.org](mailto:abdists@holston.org)

District superintendent:

[kingoddard@holston.org](mailto:kingoddard@holston.org)

### ● Big Stone Gap

Secretary: [bsgdists@holston.org](mailto:bsgdists@holston.org)

District superintendent:

[danieltaylor@holston.org](mailto:danieltaylor@holston.org)

### ● Chattanooga

Secretary: [chatdists@holston.org](mailto:chatdists@holston.org)

District superintendent:

[albowles@holston.org](mailto:albowles@holston.org)

### ● Cleveland

Secretary: [cldists@holston.org](mailto:cldists@holston.org)

District superintendent:

[dindyntaylor@holston.org](mailto:dindyntaylor@holston.org)

### ● Johnson City

Secretary: [jcdists@holston.org](mailto:jcdists@holston.org)

District superintendent:

[mahanarcher@holston.org](mailto:mahanarcher@holston.org)

### ● Kingsport

Secretary: [kptdists@holston.org](mailto:kptdists@holston.org)

District superintendent:

[gradywinegar@holston.org](mailto:gradywinegar@holston.org)

### ● Maryville

Secretary: [madists@holston.org](mailto:madists@holston.org)

District superintendent:

[ronmatthews@holston.org](mailto:ronmatthews@holston.org)

### ● Morristown

Secretary: [modists@holston.org](mailto:modists@holston.org)

District superintendent:

[richardpatterson@holston.org](mailto:richardpatterson@holston.org)

### ● Oak Ridge

Secretary: [ordists@holston.org](mailto:ordists@holston.org)

District superintendent:

[kenhenderlight@holston.org](mailto:kenhenderlight@holston.org)

### ● Wytheville

Secretary: [wydists@holston.org](mailto:wydists@holston.org)

District superintendent:

[charlesstarks@holston.org](mailto:charlesstarks@holston.org)

Tazewell and Knoxville District e-mail addresses will not change.