



Photo by Buzz Trexler, special to The Call

Bishop Mary Virginia Taylor preaches at opening worship, "What's got into you, Holston Conference?" She answered, "The Spirit of Christ."

I just want to say thank you ... You are my family."

Another special guest was Bishop Scott Jones, resident bishop of the Kansas Area, who led Bible studies on female leadership in the church. He concluded that seemingly conflicting verses can be resolved by examining the "general tenor of scripture." Verses forbidding women to pray or preach were temporary rules of the time, he said, kept by other denominations "because of the culture of sexism we have maintained for 1,900 years."

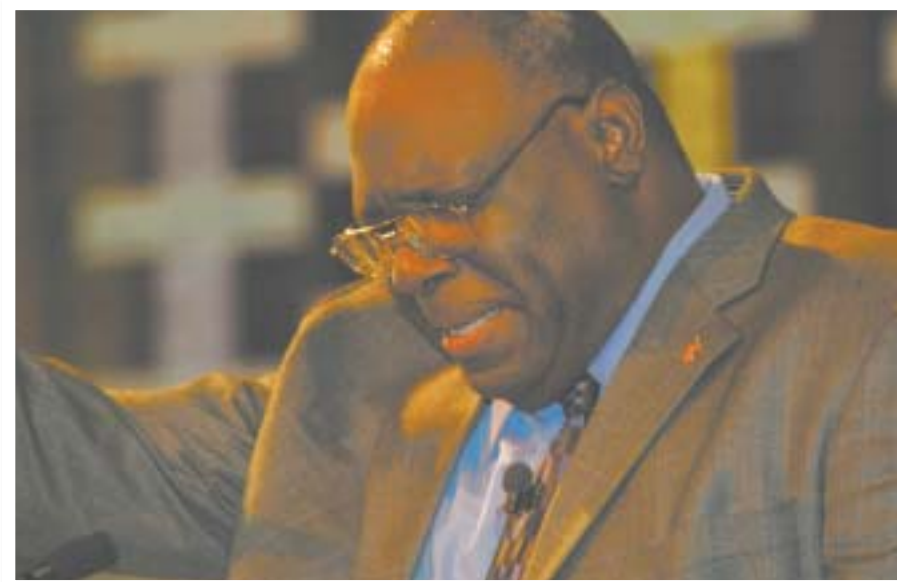
On Tuesday afternoon and Wednesday morning, the conference tackled 10 resolutions, approving some swiftly while debating a few for several heated minutes before voting.

Approved were resolutions creating a "limited-service church" category, establishing an annual Youth Sunday, lifting up mental health awareness, supporting health and wholeness ministry, and appointing a task force to preserve two historical shrines, Acuff Chapel and Cox House.

Also approved – and referred to the Council on Finance and Administration – was a resolution supporting the United Methodist Church Global AIDS Fund.

The conference adopted, with a narrow 421-396 vote, a resolution "affirming laws defending marriage." The resolution states, "... Be it resolved that we continue to affirm the United Methodist stance on marriage and support laws in our state that protect the definition of marriage as the union of one man and one woman."

Rejected were three resolutions: a resolution "reconsidering our relationship with the National Council of Churches," a resolution "urging withdrawal from the Religious Coalition of



In his Sending Forth message, Bishop James Swanson delivers an anguished plea for Holston to "start right here, start right now" to make a difference. "I have fallen in love with Holston Conference and all the people across this conference, because I see you not as you are, but what you could be ... I know you can do it."

Photo by Annette Spence, The Call



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"Praise in Motion," a liturgical dance team from Tyner UMC in Chattanooga District, participates in the Service of Remembrance, recognizing members who died in the past year.

Reproductive Choice," and a "Resolution on Homosexuality." The latter declared that "advocates of unbiblical sexuality, who year after year seek the approval of plain and sinful practices, should cease their striving or separate themselves from the Holston Conference of the United Methodist Church."

As members stood to express conflicting viewpoints on some resolutions, Swanson repeatedly asked members not to applaud. He finally scolded members by saying, "We are people who are bound and wrapped up in the Spirit of Christ. We have the right to disagree, but we do not have the right to do it in a way that antagonizes others."

The applause ceased.

Other actions:

- The Board of Trustees received approval to purchase a \$1.8 million,

three-story building for the conference headquarters. The conference office will relocate from Knoxville to Alcoa, Tenn., in late August.

- The conference approved a \$15.89 million budget for 2007 – a 3.8 percent increase over 2006.

- The conference approved an insurance premium rate increase of 3 percent for individuals and 9 percent for family/retirees, effective Jan. 1, 2007. Also approved: A pre-1982 past service retirement rate of \$465 for next year, a 3.64 percent increase over the previous year.

- Members learned that more than 4,000 Holston volunteers have done hurricane recovery work in Mississippi. In the past year, churches and individuals gave a combined \$1.32 million to UMCOR disaster relief, Change for Children, the Russian Seminary Building Fund, and Special Sundays.



Photo by Annette Spence, The Call

The Rev. Dennie Humphreys (above, left) applauds as the Rev. Will Shewey heads to the stage to accept the Denman Evangelism Award. Shewey is pastor at Hiltons Memorial UMC, Big Stone Gap District. Humphreys is Shewey's former district superintendent.

- Twenty-one retirees, representing a total 531 years of service, were recognized during a Retirement Celebration.

- The Service of Ordination and Commissioning included 17 full-connection deacons, 1 full-connection deacon, 2 deacons in associate membership, 9 commissioned probationary elders, and 1 probationary deacon.



ABOVE: The Rev. Walter Willis, pastor at Magnolia Avenue UMC of Knoxville District, preaches at the Retirement Celebration. "A place to see God is not in stained-glass windows, but enclosed in human flesh."

Photo by Annette Spence, The Call



RIGHT: The New Beginnings Quartet of Hales Chapel, Big Stone Gap District, sings at the Sending Forth service.

Photo by Annette Spence, The Call

- At the Sending Forth Service, 34 new local pastors received licenses.

- The Rev. James Noseworthy, president of Hiwassee College, received the Francis Asbury Award for higher education. (See related story on page 3.)

- The Witness Ministry Team recognized three people with the Denman Evangelism Award: Wayne Scott of Unicoi UMC, Johnson City District; the Rev. Will Shewey of Hiltons Memorial UMC, Big Stone Gap District; and 10-year-old Ashton Taylor Huff of First Hillville UMC, Wytheville District.

- The Peace With Justice Team updated members on accomplishments of the Sudan Action Team, including the "Have a Ball" campaign and an initiative for all church members to read the book, "They Poured Fire on Us From the Sky."

- The Children's Ministries Team reported that \$55,800 was given by Holston churches to Change for Children in the past year. One-half (\$27,900) was awarded to nine groups within the conference. The remaining funds were awarded to three missions benefiting African children.

- As part of a new hospital-

ity mission at Annual Conference, the Conference Council on Youth Ministry (CCYM) lavished attention on less-mobile senior citizens by bringing them fans on hot afternoons and serving them ice cream and beverages during crowded break periods. The CCYM members wore bright blue T-shirts with the message, "Greet each other with a holy kiss ... or how about a hearty handshake?"

- At least 150 members participated in the "Walk for Change." After walking around the lake one time, Sharon Nelson Rush was inspired to organize a walk at her own church – Jonesborough UMC in Johnson City District – to raise money for children's ministries. "So she walked around the lake one more time to pray about it," said Children's Ministry Coordinator Anita Henderlight.

- Three churches were discontinued: Cumbo, Big Stone Gap District; Walnut Grove, Maryville District; and Wellspring, Maryville District. Mt. Tabor of Cleveland District was abandoned. Loy Memorial and Wooten's Chapel of the Morristown District were merged into New Market UMC. Beulah and Trinity of the Lead Mines Circuit,



Photo by Annette Spence, The Call

Bishop Scott Jones of Kansas leads a Bible study on women in the ministry.



Members gather outside Stuart Auditorium for the Ice Cream Social on Tuesday afternoon.

Photo by Annette Spence, The Call

Wytheville District, also merged.

- Members were treated to coffee, soda, water, popcorn, and ice cream during breaks and fellowship time. The sponsors were Holston Conference Foundation, Holston Methodist Federal Credit Union, Asbury Inc., Emory & Henry College, and Holston Home for Children.

- In a powerful Sending Forth message, Bishop Swanson urged members to stop mourning the past and "start right now" to make a difference. "You can carry on about the good old days all you want," he said, "but honey, in the good old days I wouldn't even be your bishop."

- Conference membership stands at 167,340, down 373 from the previous year. Average worship attendance stands at 73,956, down 419. ■



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The Rev. Lynn Hutton leads music during Sunday night's service recognizing clergywomen. Hutton served as Annual Conference music director.