

By Ray W. Chamberlain Jr.

# Parting words: Don't let God down



Photo by Annette Bender, *The Call*

**T**his is it. This is my last "Bishop's Perspective" to you of the Holston Conference. You kindly permitted me to come into your homes, offices, and lives with my writings nearly 200 times over these eight years.

As I take my leave of you, I go with thanksgiving for the privilege of serving among you. You have endured me, but even more so, have embraced me.

I will miss you. I will miss the glorious beauty of this conference. I will grieve the loss of being among the most earthly and authentic people I have ever known. And I'm a little bit scared to think of trying to make it without your prayer support.

Our witness to God's redeeming, transforming, and sustaining grace during the last Annual Conference will nourish me for a long while. What a celebration it was! Your generous words to Martha and me (and the gift of \$15,000, a tremendous blessing and help in our transition) will forever be cherished.

The future of Christianity is pregnant with promise. I am inspired by the words of poet Mattie Stepanek, who died in June at age 13. Most of you have likely seen him on TV. Confined to a wheelchair, he suffered with dysautonomic mitochondrial myopathy, a genetic disorder and rare form of muscular dystrophy. Everywhere he went, he was on full life support including a ventilator, oxygen tank, monitors, and a tracheotomy tube inserted in his throat. Everyday he underwent countless medical treatments.

The astonishing thing about Mattie, who struggled with every breath, was his incredible faith. He lived by prayer and by faith in God. Though every day was difficult, he wrote, "I want people to know that in everyone's life there are storms – but we must play after the storm and to celebrate the gift of life as we have it, or else life becomes a task rather than a gift."

My prayer for you as I go my way is to remember faith in God is not an inverted, personal piety. It is a life lived with gratitude and joy. It includes play and poetry. It is celebrating grace that magnificently attends us every day. It gives us hope. And this is the message we are to share with the human family. God yearns for us to embrace life and to relish every moment. This means we open wide our hearts in love and justice for all, rather than closing out others with condemnation. We are motivated by God's dream for humanity and shouldn't have time for nor interest in witch hunts.

Mattie wrote of a new hope:

**"... A hope that reaches for the stars, and  
That does not end in violence or war.  
A hope that makes peace on earth, and  
That does not create evil in the world ...  
A hope that inspires me to live, and  
To make all these things happen.  
So that the whole world can have  
A new hope, too."**

Shortly before he died, Mattie wrote, "I won't let God down because he hasn't let me down."

People of Holston, God will not let you down. My prayer is that you will never let God down! God is depending on you to get the word out about grace and hope.

Martha joins me in bidding you a fond, love-filled farewell. We go with tears of joy. ■

*Grace & peace,*  
*Ray*

Bishop Ray and Martha Chamberlain join hands during a tribute to retiring bishops at Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference on July 15.

## Chamberlain announces next role

From the episcopal office

**B**ishop Ray Chamberlain assumes the role of bishop-in-residence at Shenandoah University and Wesley Theological Seminary on Sept. 1.

His responsibilities will be many and varied at both institutions. In addition to guest lectureships, he will seek to develop a significant international culture on both campuses. He also looks forward to personal interaction with pre-ministerial students at Shenandoah University and with ministerial students at Wesley.

The Chamberlains will reside in Winchester, Va., near Shenandoah University, and commute to Wesley Seminary in Washington D.C., about 70 miles away. ■

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● The communications staff is accepting orders now for the 2005 Holston Conference calendar, featuring photos of Holston people. Cost is \$7.50, plus \$2 if you want the calendar to be mailed to you. Calendars will be available in October. Order forms are being mailed to pastors along with monthly Fair Share apportionment statements, or call Millie Meese at (865) 690-4080. ■



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