

to her endorsing delegation, her vote count began to rise. The votes kept rising until Mary Virginia "Dindy" Taylor was elected bishop by the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference on the 34th ballot, receiving 354 of 549 votes cast.

Taylor's election was historic because she is the first female bishop from Holston Conference. The conference, held July 14-17 in Lake Junaluska, N.C., also registered a record-breaking number of ballots, surpassing the previous all-time jurisdictional record of 25.

Taylor, who was assigned to the South Carolina Conference less than 10 hours after her late-night election, said she didn't withdraw from the contest because she felt a call from God to stay. She remained among the bottom of vote-getters throughout most of the election, while a few leading candidates tried to break a deadlock lasting nearly two days.

Taylor's votes began to increase on the 26th ballot, spurring speculation and surprise among the jurisdiction's 556 delegates representing 15 Southeastern conferences. In the end, the Rev. Arnetta Beverly of Western North Carolina Conference, an African-American female candidate whose vote tally never dropped below 125 and at one point reached 221, was beaten by Taylor, whose votes numbered well below 100 for 24 ballots.

"I hoped two women would be elected, and I always said it didn't have to be me," Taylor said on the morning after her election.

"I didn't do anything strategic, and I wasn't trying to block anyone else's election. My piddly little votes didn't hurt anybody. I was just trying to be faithful to what God wanted me to do."

"I think it was wonderful that we never gave up, and that Dindy went on with patience and fortitude," said Mary Frances Tucker, Holston delegate and chair of the Personnel Resources Team.

Taylor is only the third female bishop to be elected in the Southeastern Jurisdiction, and she will be South Carolina Conference's first female bishop. Taylor was one of two women elected bishop at the 2004 Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference, marking the first time the SEJ has elected two women at the same session.

In all, the SEJ elected six episcopal leaders. The first was Hope Morgan Ward of North Carolina Conference, later assigned to the Mississippi Conference. The jurisdiction's first female bishop, Charlene Kammerer, was elected in 1996.

"I have been the 'first' woman in every position I have ever been in," Taylor told the United Methodist News Service. "I have never followed a woman into an office."

Bishop Ray Chamberlain said that Taylor's election was "a remarkable affirmation of her and of Holston Conference."

"She will bring a wonderful sense of joyfulness to her new role and will strive to bring honor to the office," he said. "Holston Conference can rejoice in its embrace and nurture of her over the years. I join many others in celebrating her election and only

regret her loss to this conference."

Taylor, age 54, has served as Cleveland District superintendent for the past five years. She served as chaplain, Tennessee Wesleyan College, Athens, Tenn., 1975-76; associate pastor, Fountain City UMC, Knoxville, Tenn., 1977-78; pastor, Boones Creek UMC, Gray, Tenn., 1979-82; pastor, Elizabeth Chapel UMC, Bluff City, Tenn., 1983-86; pastor, St. Luke UMC, Kingsport, Tenn., 1987-88; co-pastor, Wesley Memorial UMC, Chattanooga, Tenn., 1989-95; and pastor, Beaver Ridge UMC, Knoxville, Tenn., 1996-98.

She has been chair of the conference Board of Ordained Ministry and a delegate to six General Conferences and six Southeastern Jurisdictional Conferences. She served on the conference Council on Ministries and as chair of the conference Council on Finance and Administration. She is also a trustee of Tennessee Wesleyan College in Athens.

Taylor graduated from the University of Georgia in 1972 and received her master of divinity degree from Candler School of Theology in 1975.

She has been married for 31 years to the Rev. Rusty Taylor, senior pastor at First Cleveland UMC. The Taylors' two children, Tiffany, a rising sophomore at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, and Mandy, an interior designer in Greenville, S.C., attended the consecration service on July 17.

"Thirty years ago, we said that we would serve the church in any way and go wherever we needed to go," Rusty Taylor said shortly after his wife's consecration. "And we meant that."

As the last bishop elected at the jurisdictional conference, Taylor told United Methodist News Service that she felt a "keen sense of God's presence throughout this process."

"My dream is that the church will be a vibrant, active community of faith working together. When I picture that church it has all colors, all ages – all sorts of folks working together in the name of Christ, reaching out around the world."

Taylor's assignment to South Carolina is effective Sept. 1. She will reside in Columbia, S.C. The Rev. Charles Lippse, retired clergy member from Chattanooga, will serve as Cleveland District superintendent through June 2005. ■

United Methodist News Service contributed to this report.

Swanson assigned

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"He's a strong leader. He's worked in a diverse population. He's bold," Taylor said. "I firmly believe that this is the man who can pick up where Bishop Chamberlain left off and take us into the 21st century."

Swanson is Holston Conference's second African-American bishop. Bishop Scott Allen served Holston from 1969 to 1976.

Swanson has served as superintendent of the Savannah District of the South Georgia Conference since 2001. Raised in the African Methodist Episcopal Church and ordained in the Church of God, Swanson became pastor of the Statesboro Circuit in the South Georgia Conference of the United Methodist Church in 1981. He served as pastor of St. Mary's Road United Methodist Church, Columbus, Ga., from 1988 to 2001, leading the congregation to grow from 12 members to 950.

"My dream is to see the United Methodist Church turn this declining membership around," Swanson said soon after his election. "I really feel we have a message that the world needs to hear. We believe in personal salvation. We are so committed to social justice."

The church has a mission to make a difference in the world, he said, adding, "I want to see the church having fun doing that, that's my dream."

Swanson was the first African-American chair of the South Georgia Annual Conference Council on Ministries and just completed eight years as a member of the United Methodist Board of Church and Society.

He holds a degree in Christian ministries from Southern Bible College and a master of divinity degree from C.H. Mason Seminary, Interdenominational Theological Center, Atlanta. He is a candidate for a doctorate degree in evangelism from Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University.

Bishop Ray Chamberlain and others in the conference praised Swanson and the vision he could provide for Holston from 2004 to 2008.

"He comes with vision, vigor, immense goodwill and faith," Chamberlain stated in a letter to Holston Conference (see page 5). After serving Holston since 1996, Chamberlain will retire on Sept. 1. "I relinquish with an enormous sigh of relief my responsibilities to him, for my prayer is answered that Holston Conference receive a great spiritual leader."

"This is a new day for Holston," said Steve Hodges, alternate delegate and director of the Jubilee Project.

Swanson is married to Delphine Yvonne Ramsey. They have six children and seven grandchildren. Although Swanson's assignment in Holston does not take effect until Sept. 1, he is expected to arrive at the Knoxville episcopal residence in mid-August to enroll his younger children in school.

Holston members are invited to attend a "Service Celebrating the Assignment of Bishop James Edward Swanson Sr." on Saturday, Sept. 25, at Munsey Memorial United Methodist Church in Johnson City, Tenn. The service begins at 2 p.m. ■

United Methodist News Service contributed to this report. For additional stories about this month's elections in the United Methodist Church, see page 6.

New Appointment

Lippse to lead Cleveland District

The Rev. Charles Lippse will fill the vacancy left by the election of Mary Virginia Taylor to the episcopacy, Bishop Ray Chamberlain announced on July 20. Lippse is a retired clergy member in Chattanooga, Tenn., and will lead the Cleveland District effective Sept. 1 through June 2005.

Taylor has served as Cleveland District superintendent since 1999.

Lippse's prior experience as Chattanooga



Charles Lippse

District superintendent "will be a tremendous asset," Chamberlain said. "He will be a voice of wisdom at the cabinet for the new bishop."

Lippse will work with Taylor during the transition month of August, Chamberlain said. The Rev. Gordon Ridenour, executive assistant to the bishop, will also provide guidance during the transition phase.

The Cleveland District is comprised of 49 charges and 74 churches. ■