

bishop's speaking schedule



Aug. 28: Hixson UMC, 10:45 a.m.; Randolph UMC's 113th Anniversary Celebration, 2 p.m. (CST); Chattanooga District conference, 7-9 p.m.

Sept. 4: Hiltons Memorial UMC Homecoming (Big Stone Gap District), 10:30 a.m.

Sept. 7: Trinity Greeneville UMC (Morristown District), 6:30 p.m. ■



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James Edward Swanson Sr. Bishop
Gordon Ridenour Executive Assistant
Annette Spence Bender Editor
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S Churches with average 85 or fewer in principle weekly worship service(s)

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wings

By Bishop James Edward Swanson Sr.



These are difficult times, but remember the outcome

I was introduced to Henri J.M. Nouwen and his writings while I attended seminary. His writings blessed me then and continue to bless me to this day. I was rereading a chapter out of a devotional and was reminded of his powerful way of calling us to deepen our relationship with the Lord.

Here is the quote that called me back; it is from Nouwen's book, "With Open Hands":

If you are praying, you can't help but have critical questions about the great problems the world is grappling with, and you can't get rid of the idea that a conversion is not only necessary for yourself and your neighbor, but for the entire human community. This conversion of the world means a "turning-around," a revolution, which can lead to renewal.

Nouwen speaks to the sense of helplessness that we often feel when facing problems, challenges, and opportunities. These situations can overwhelm us and make us feel defeated before we even begin.

I have felt that way and will probably feel that way many times before the Lord calls me home. In this office of Bishop, I see so many situations that help me to realize how much I need the strength and power of other Christians and – most of all – the power of the Holy Spirit to undergird me with an unrelenting faith. I believe the words of John Carmody are so appropriate in those moments: "If there is one task that life sets (before) us, one charge we must fulfill before we end our days, it is to love the whole world and labor for the whole world's prospering, despite the finitude, evil, and death afflicting each of the world's parts."

It is difficult to love a world that causes you much anger. It is difficult to love people who curse you as well as your efforts to reach out to them. It is difficult to be truly concerned about others who sometimes act in ways that show they don't care about themselves. It is difficult to pray for people who wish you nothing but bitterness and despair.

It is extremely difficult to do all

these things in today's world, because we are so divided into camps now. Even within the church we have allowed ourselves to be separated into opposition forces. In fact, the prevailing climate tells us that to be concerned about the community is to be weak and without convictions. It takes convictions to speak the truth in love and to not allow the hatred of others to make you hate them. I know this a challenge. Yet, I hear, "If you love only those who love you, what reward have you?" The gospel trio Phillips, Craig & Dean tells us in one of their songs to build a bridge of love. I love that message. We must build this bridge one stone at a time.

We must never lose sight of who is in charge of this world. I am reminded of the words of the Korean Methodist Church's Affirmation of Faith, "We believe in the final triumph of righteousness..."

You may not be an Atlanta Braves fan, but who can forget the excitement of the moment in 1995, when the Braves were down by a run in the ninth inning. A runner was on third base and old gimpy leg Sid Bream was on second base when Francisco Cabrera laced a single. The runner from third scored and old Sid headed home. The play at the plate was close – but the umpire signaled that Sid was safe. I remember hearing Skip Caray shout, "Braves win! Braves win! Braves win!" Do you remember that?

Well, every now and then I have to remind myself of what will be the final outcome of "the great problems the world is grappling with." At that time, according to Revelation 21:4, "(God) will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away."

And then someone said, "Amen!" ■



reading list:

We asked these participants at Junior High Assembly (held in July at Hiwassee College), "What book is lying on your nightstand?"

▼ Kayla Anderson

First Morristown UMC
Morristown District
Seventeen Magazine



▼ Katherine Forester

Trinity UMC
Knoxville District
Two for the Dough, by Janet Evanovich



▼ Anthony Jones

Reynolds Memorial UMC,
Abingdon District
Cruel and Unusual, by Patricia Cornwell



▼ Sarah Taylor

Sulphur Springs UMC
Johnson City District
The Alice series, by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor



Is the Secret Visitor coming to your church?

September is Open House Month in the United Methodist Church. And for the fifth consecutive year, *The Call* will send a "secret visitor" to an unsuspecting congregation to check out their welcoming skills. Will it be your church this year? Look for Clint Cooper's assessment in a September issue. ■

