

**TENNESSEE WESLEYAN COLLEGE'S**

# NEW GUY<sub>ON</sub> CAMPUS



*Photo by Annette Bender, The Call*

Stephen Condon in Tennessee Wesleyan's courtyard: "I have never felt, in all these institutions I've worked, a more powerful source than Methodism when it comes to love and caring for our fellow man ... It's the blessing that we have by being a Methodist college."

**STEPHEN CONDON – native of Massachusetts, former altar boy – is Tennessee Wesleyan College's 20th president. A few weeks after his arrival in Athens and with classes beginning on Aug. 24, the college's new leader talks about the path that led him here – and the path he's pursuing. Part one of a two-part series.**

By ANNETTE BENDER

Stephen Condon is being watched. He says so himself.

"I see them looking at me out of the corner of their eyes," he says. "I see them wondering, 'What's he really like? He's got a lot of energy. He talks a lot. But can he do it?'"

Condon, 52, really does talk a lot, and he seems to have a lot of energy. He answers questions by relaying long conversations between himself and others: his dad, his wife, the head of

the search committee that hired him, the Tennessee Wesleyan student who helped him move from Georgia. The conversations aren't boring: Condon is a good storyteller, and he always has a point. He knows that people are watching him, and it's going to take a lot of work to get their trust.

"I've been curious about the word 'trust,'" says the 20th president of Tennessee Wesleyan College, whose first day on the job was July 1. "It's so difficult to put your finger on what trust is, until it's not there and then you can point right to it. What I'm trying to do is to get that trust back."

Condon, a native of Newton, Mass., has years of experience in small, southern, United Methodist colleges. With five degrees of his own – including a post doctorate from Harvard University – he most recently served as vice president for enrollment management and student affairs at United Methodist-related Reinhardt College in Waleska, Ga. He has also held posts at Lambuth University in Jackson, Tenn., and Huntingdon College in Montgomery, Ala., among other schools.

Through his years at Reinhardt, he became friends with Floyd Falany, a former Reinhardt

president who's just completed his second term as TWC's interim president, following the resignation of Thomas Armstrong in summer 2004.

Armstrong comes up a lot in Condon's conversations, because people "still feel the pain" generated by the former president's controversial reign and resignation. It's the pain and mistrust left behind that Condon says he's tackling, along with TWC's other challenges.

The community's emotions were evident even during his selection process, he says. At one point he told the search committee, out of frustration, "You either trust me and believe I can get the job done, or don't waste my time." He got the job.

Condon's wife, Becky, figured largely in Condon's decision to pursue the leadership at Tennessee Wesleyan, his first presidency. After successfully battling breast cancer, she was diagnosed in summer 2004 with Paget's disease. Although her husband was in the midst of a job search and had been offered the vice chancellor position at the University of Indiana ("I wanted that job," he says), Becky Condon wanted to stay close to her physicians as she recovered. Athens is only a 90-minute drive from Waleska, and Becky "had a feeling" that they were the perfect match for Tennessee Wesleyan.

"She just felt like this was where God intended us to be," Condon says softly.

After extensive surgery this spring, Becky Condon has been given a clean bill of health and is currently working as librarian at Vonore Elementary School. While the Condons' children remain in Georgia (daughter Alexis, 19, is a sophomore at Reinhardt; son Curtis, 24, is a computer analyst in Norcross), Becky has since decided to continue her care through University of Tennessee physicians.

Yet she remains convinced – and has convinced her husband – that Athens was the right place to come.

"Becky and I are small-town folks, raised in small-town environments, who have worked in United Methodist institutions," he says. "If you come here all fancied up in your suit, and you think you're better than other people because you make more money and you have a fancy education – then I think you came to the wrong place. Becky knew right away that with our type of energy and work ethic, we would fit right in here.

"We fit nicely here." ■

**COMING IN THE NEXT ISSUE:**  
**Condon's move from Catholicism to United Methodism, his search for a church home in Athens, and his goals for Tennessee Wesleyan.**