



At Lunch With

Izetta Thurmond: Chattanooga laywoman

By Clint Cooper



Photo by Clint Cooper

At 84 years old, Izetta Thurmond has neither run the race nor finished the work.

Just in the past year, the Chattanooga laywoman, 18 years past her retirement as a schoolteacher, has helped found a post-prison ministry and revived vacation Bible school at her historically black Stanley United Methodist Church.

She is also the church's director of Christian education, an adult Sunday school class teacher and a member of its board of trustees and United Methodist Women.

More broadly, she has been a district United Methodist Women member, a delegate to Annual Conference and a member of the Holston Conference historical society.

The fifth child of the Rev. W. S. Hight, a minister in the all-black East Tennessee Conference, she was born in Chattanooga but raised in Virginia and West Virginia.

Already married, a mother and a widow at a young age, she moved back to Chattanooga in 1954 to a segregated city the likes of which she had never known. Where she had taken her choice of seats on the bus in Virginia and West Virginia and had good relations with whites, she was faced with separate "seating" on buses, white and "colored" drinking fountains and a general lack of equality.

"My son just couldn't understand it," Thurmond said. "Told we couldn't sit down on the bus, he said, 'Why can't we?' He has been biased against Chattanooga ever since."

Although she followed the rules then, she doesn't understand the lack of equality she said still exists today.

"We've never been equal," she said, no bitterness in her voice. "We're not equal today. We're all going to die, and we're all going to the same place. If people accepted people as humans, not races ... We're all made in the image of God. It just doesn't make sense."

The United Methodist Church also has a long way to go, Thurmond said, although she added that "we've come a long way in Holston."

Open itinerancy, the process of appointing ministers to churches regardless of prescribed need, she said, would go a long way toward binding racial wounds in the denomination. It also would help attract the young black ministers who she said are not currently being attracted to Holston Conference.

Members, Thurmond said, also need to stop "playing church" and

return to filling congregational offices and functioning in them. Likewise, she said, parents need to remember that all extracurricular activities available on Sundays won't get their children to Christ, but the church can.

It was with similar foresight that she helped begin the soon-to-be-dedicated W.S. Hight Community Outreach Penal After Care Empowerment ministry and revived a weeklong Bible school that this summer attracted 93 children and adults. "It was a great success," she said. ■

Clint Cooper is faith editor of the Chattanooga Times Free Press and a member of First-Centenary UMC.

Conference Briefs

No Redwine grants in 2003

For the second year in a row, the Redwine Committee will not award grants to emerging ministries due to a lack of available funds, the committee's chair recently announced.

"We have an interest in the long-term health of the fund," said the Rev. James Bennington. "The Redwine Fund is a market-bearing fund which means the availability of funds depends on the activity of the stock market. This year, the committee finds itself in the same situation of not having enough monies to make grant awards."

The committee hopes that grants can be made to local churches in 2004, Bennington added.

Older Adult Mission Trip scheduled

The conference's second Older Adult Mission Trip is scheduled for Oct. 20-24 at Camp Lookout in Rising Fawn, Ga. Work projects will focus on Lookout Lodge and include activities such as replacing wood siding, replacing sheetrock, and painting. For more information, contact the Connectional Ministries Office at connectionalministries@holston.org or (865) 690-4080.

Young adults invited to explore

Holston Conference youth and young adults considering a future in ministry have been invited to participate in an Exploration 2003 event with the Western North Carolina and North Carolina Conferences in Asheboro, N.C., Oct. 17-19. For more information, contact Youth Coordinator Dan Gray at dangray@holston.org or (423) 928-2156.

Camp plans two fundraisers

Church members are encouraged to participate in fundraisers sponsored by Camp Wesley Woods this fall. On Sept. 20, the camp will hold its 2nd Annual Bass Tournament at Douglas Dam. The contest begins at 7 a.m. Entry fee is \$50 per boat. First prize is \$500. To register, call (865) 448-2246.

On Oct. 26, Wesley Woods is sponsoring a Putt-Putt Tournament at Celebration Station in Knoxville. The contest happens 2-5 p.m. Entry fee is \$10 per two-player team. Contact Randy Allen at (865) 983-4228 or Charlie Wimmer at (865) 982-4235 for registration and pledge sheets. ■

This morning my heart is heavy. As I listened to the morning news I learned the Episcopal Church had indeed ordained an openly gay man as bishop of their church. While I understand what the Episcopal Church does is its own business, I am concerned the United Methodist Church could take its lead from them. The image that keeps coming to my mind is that of the elders of Israel going to the prophet Samuel and saying to him, "... appoint for us, then, a king to govern us, like other nations (*1 Samuel 8:6*)." God using Samuel, goes on to warn the people that a king will only lead to slavery.

My concern is with our own General Conference coming up next year, there are those within our own denomination who will want us to be like the Episcopal Church, and use their action as justification for our own. I pray that does not happen.

Rev. Mickey W. Rainwater

Tyner UMC
Chattanooga District

Just yesterday, a practicing homosexual was approved as bishop in a mainline church. We must look for the truth of this matter. The answer is found in both the Old and New Testaments. Look up all the references in a NIV Bible and you will find descriptive words relating to the acts of a homosexual person. Here are a few: sexually immoral, detestable, indecent act, unnatural act, perversion, and sexually impure. This act was abhorred by God and such people were described as having exchanged the truth of God for a lie. Do you think God would approve of such a person to leadership positions?

Charles Oakes

Allen Memorial UMC
Cleveland District

For complete versions of these letters, go to www.holstonconference.com/thecall and click on "C-Mail." To send a letter to the editor, write thecall@holston.org or C-Mail, The Call, P.O. Box 32939, Knoxville, TN 37930. ■

