

An Oak Ridge District boy raises pumpkins to benefit the Heifer Project.

Holston members bring home tales of their relief work in hurricane-affected areas.

Teams of laypersons serve small Cleveland District churches in a new pilot program.



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A United Methodist clergywoman among Baptists?

"It's true that few Southern Baptist congregations would have a female pastor ... Our church happens to be one that's open to women in the ministry."

— **The Rev. Kerry Layne Bond,**
Senior pastor, Rutledge Baptist Church

By **Annette Bender**

The Rev. Betty Shirley uses the word "ironic" to explain how she came to be associate pastor of a small-town Baptist church. This past spring, the local pastor was projected for an appointment at a Holston Conference charge. But the projected appointment didn't work out. Since all the other appointments had been made, Shirley found herself without a church.

When the senior pastor of Rutledge Baptist Church asked the local pastor if she would consider joining the staff, eyebrows surely lifted. The significance was heightened when the Baptist congregation voted unanimously to extend a call to Shirley, and Bishop James Swanson appointed her to the church under the "extension ministries" category.

A United Methodist clergywoman appointed to a Baptist church?

"It's rare," says the Rev. Robert Kohler, assistant general secretary in the General Board of Higher Education's Division of Ordained Ministry, in Nashville, Tenn. Although the United Methodist Church has a long



Photos by Annette Bender, *The Call*

The Rev. Betty Shirley, associate pastor at Rutledge Baptist Church: "You won't catch me preaching doctrine. I'm here to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ."

history of appointing ministers to ecumenical, shared ministries, Kohler says he is unaware of any other United Methodist clergywomen serving as pastors in Baptist churches. "This may not be the only occurrence, but it's fairly unique," he said.

Shirley's appointment wouldn't have even been possible before the 2004 General Conference, which permitted appointment of local pastors to extension ministries for the first time. "Prior to that, you had to be an elder to be appointed to an extension ministry," said Bishop James Swanson, Holston Conference's resident bishop. Swanson said he made the historical appointment because

the Baptist congregation asked, and because "I know [Shirley] wants to serve the church as best she can.

"Not only is this an affirmation of Betty Shirley, but an affirmation of the quality of clergy that we give birth to in the United Methodist Church," Swanson said. "The barriers to progress in other denominations are not as formidable as you might think. We can work together across other denominations."

Hometown girl

The Rev. Betty Shirley greets worshippers as they arrive at the 11 a.m. service. She prays during worship and visits parishioners on Tuesdays. At a covered dish lunch on a recent Sunday, Shirley laughed and chatted with parishioners, helping the children with dessert and fetching drinks for the older adults.

She's clearly at home in Rutledge Baptist Church, because as she says, "I'm a hometown girl."

"These are friends of mine," says Shirley, explaining that she has lived in Rutledge since 1965, when she married

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"These are friends of mine," says the Rev. Betty Shirley (above, right), greeting a parishioner during a recent covered dish lunch.



Be there. Be filled. Be active. Be still. In this issue of *The Call*, the conference connectional ministries staff presents a new supplement, *Be!* Check out the first

biannual issue (inside) and let the staff know what you think. E-mail connectionalministries@holston.org. ■