

The Call

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TRADING SPACES

Oak Ridge District church transforms old school into new community center

By Annette Bender

CLINTON, Tenn. - Pay attention because this is kind of complicated.

In 1996, Heiskell United Methodist Church traded spaces with Heiskell Volunteer Fire Department.

The two groups literally swapped properties without monetary exchange. The fire department needed the choice corner lot occupied by the church. Meanwhile, the church's tiny building was deteriorating and the congregation had a dream to begin a community center.

So Heiskell UMC moved into the fire department. Which used to be a school.

Soon, the fire department took the old church building, tore it down, and built a brand-spanking new fire department on the lot.

Which still left the church with an old school.

But the story has a happy ending, as you might have guessed. For eight years, members at the little church spent every Saturday transforming the old school building (which used to be a fire department) into a spacious, sparkling new community center. With only 30 in worship attendance, Heiskell UMC saw a need for "The Heiskell Gathering Place" in a rural area where parks and recreation centers were nonexistent.

Today, the congregation coexists in a renovated building with the community center they created. Exercise



Photo by Annette Bender, The Call



Above, from left to right: The Rev. Pat Bishop, Ron Milligan and Doug Davis make plans for the ongoing transformation of the old school and firehouse into Heiskell Community Center and Heiskell UMC.

classes meet there on Tuesday and Thursday nights. Bluegrass jam sessions happen on Monday night. A new walking track – built with \$11,400 from an anonymous donor, a former student of the old school – was completed this month.

How did the little Oak Ridge District church come so far?

"I think God's blessing is on this place," says the Rev. Pat Bishop, Heiskell's pastor. "These people love each other, and they had a vision for this."

It was "traumatic" for the congregation, established in 1912, to give up their old church building

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UMNS Analysis

United Methodists run on both sides of presidential race

By Amy Green

President Bush is proud of his United Methodist faith and speaks of it often. But he is not the only United Methodist candidate in this presidential election.

Vice President Dick Cheney and U.S. Sen. John Edwards also are United Methodists, putting the denomination in a unique position at a time when Protestantism is declining and outcry is mounting over the

political weight of the religious right.

The United Methodist Church is the nation's second-largest Protestant denomination, with a diverse 8.3 million U.S. members that resemble the nation's electorate. Its conservative and progressive factions have chafed for years on issues such as homosexuality.

The church's up-front role in this election comes as its congregations – like those of most Protestant

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George Bush



John Kerry

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Inside



Thanks, Holston

Supplies are dispatched to hurricane victims in North Carolina and Florida.

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Tacos Tonight?

Before you bite down on a Mt. Olive pickle or a Taco Bell burrito, there's something you should know.

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Apples & Pizza

Continuing the food theme ... Read how a Big Stone Gap District youth group served St. Andrews and a Chattanooga District children's served Holston Home.

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