



Wings

By Bishop James Edward Swanson Sr.

Look at the poverty of others, then give thanks

The year 2004 has been a year filled with excitement and new challenges for me. It appears to me that from January until now, God has blessed me in a unique and wonderful way. The love and support of my family, the renewal of an old friendship that had gone sour, being part of a ministry that ushers God's kingdom into the lives of many, my election and consecration to the office of bishop, the assignment to Holston Conference – quite frankly, things have gone so well that sometimes I want to pinch myself to see if I am dreaming!

Now as the season of Thanksgiving approaches, I am keenly aware of the goodness of God showered upon my family and me. So, my mouth is filled with choruses of praise and thanksgiving to God. I am sure that many of you will also have no trouble finding reasons to give thanks for God's bountiful blessings. Family and friends that love and support us, an understanding that we are forgiven by a loving and benevolent God, good health, more food in our homes than we can eat, reliable transportation, the benefits of a good education, decent roofs over our heads – the list goes on, as we contemplate and count our blessings. God has been and is blessing us.

But, even as I write this, I realize that some will find it difficult to be thankful. When these people look at their own lives, there is little evidence to convince them that God is on their side.

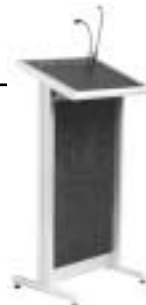
We don't all experience life the same way. When you aren't blessed with a parent who prepares your breakfast every morning, when you can't trust anyone to be your friend, when it appears that life is stacked against you, when you live every moment in physical pain, when your best hope for food depends on the generosity of others, when you walk everywhere because you don't have a car, when you can't read or write or you have to sleep out-

doors – yes, it might be hard to find something for which to be thankful. Perhaps these are some of the reasons why people become so discouraged by life, they just quit trying to give thanks and praise to God. Sometimes life is so filled with trials, challenges, bad experiences and hateful messages, the victims grow bitter, cynical, and angry. It is sad, but sometimes even churches become bitter, cynical, and angry.

If, during this Thanksgiving season, we could look at the poverty of others around us, maybe our complaints and grumbling about what we do not have will turn to shouts of "Thank you, Jesus!"

Or perhaps if we embrace the words of Helen Keller – *There is no lovelier way to thank God for your sight than by giving a helping hand to someone in the dark* – then maybe Thanksgiving would take on an atmosphere of true thanks giving.

God bless and have a happy Thanksgiving. ■



Bishop's speaking schedule

☛ **Nov. 20:** "Conversations about Racism: Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors. Really?" 10 a.m.-1 p.m., Gray United Methodist Church, Johnson City District

☛ **Nov. 21:** First Sweetwater UMC, 11 a.m.; Maryville District reception, 2:30 p.m. at First Maryville UMC

☛ **Nov. 28:** Munsey Memorial UMC, 8:45 a.m.; Wesley Memorial UMC, 11 a.m.; Boones Creek recommitment service, 4:30 p.m. (all within Johnson City District)

☛ **Nov. 20:**

Conference racism forum
GRAY, Tenn. – Holston clergy and laity are encouraged to attend a conference-wide forum on racism, "Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors. Really?" The forum will be held at Gray UMC in Johnson City District, Saturday, Nov. 20, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Bishop James Swanson will serve as guest speaker. The event is sponsored by the Religion and Race Committee, Outreach Advocacy Team, and Wesley Institute. For more information, visit www.holston.org or call (865) 690-4080.

☛ **Nov. 28:**

UM Student Day

On Sunday, Nov. 28, Holston congregations will join others by observing United Methodist Student Day. One of six Special Sundays in the United Methodist Church, Student Day is commemorated with an offering that funds scholarships and grants for Holston students as well as others in the denomination.

For bulletin inserts or worship resources, visit www.umcsgiving.org/ss. For information on scholarships and loans, call (615) 340-7344 (scholarships) or (615) 340-7346 (loans), or visit www.gbghem.org.

☛ **Dec. 10:**

Divine Rhythm deadline

For the first time, organizers of Divine Rhythm have set a registration deadline. The popular spiritual event for young adults will be held Jan. 21-23 at Country Tonite Theatre in Pigeon Forge, Tenn. Speaker is Rob Fuquay. Music and worship will be led by Wayne Kerr. Registration deadline is Dec. 10. The program fee is \$35 per person. A children's program is offered at \$15 per child. For more information, visit www.divinerhythm.com, or call the connectional ministries office at (865) 690-4080.

☛ **Jan. 9-11, 2005:**

J. Ellsworth Kalas workshop

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. – The Knoxville District Ministry Leadership Team presents J. Ellsworth Kalas in a three-day worship and workshop entitled "Sharing the Gospel Story: Preaching From the Soul." The event begins with worship at Faith and Kodak United Methodist Churches on Sunday, Jan. 9, and continues through Tuesday, Jan. 11.

Kalas is the author of several books and professor of preaching at Asbury Theological Seminary. Cost is \$25 per person. Pre-registration is required by Jan. 4. For more information, call (865) 470-7005. ■

SNEEDVILLE, Tenn. – Jubilee Project seeks a college student who can serve as a summer intern for work camps. Some construction experience preferred. A stipend will be provided, with all meals and partial housing arrangements. Contact Randy Hildebrant at (423) 733-4195 or jubileecenter@hotmail.com.

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. – The Rev. Ashley Calhoun is seeking one or more Annual Conference backdrops that have not been returned. If your church has the 1989 "Hands of God" backdrop, call (865) 577-4244. ■



The Call

www.holston.org

Serving 925 churches in east Tennessee, southwest Virginia, and north Georgia

USPS 020-295

Published Biweekly by

Holston Conference

of the United Methodist Church
9915 Kingston Pike, Suite C, Knoxville, TN 37922
Telephone (865) 690-4080 Fax (865) 690-3162

Periodical Postage Paid At
Knoxville, Tennessee

Postmaster: Send address changes to:
The Call, P.O. Box 32939
Knoxville, TN 37930-2939

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The Call uses the following symbols to identify articles about small, medium or large churches:

S Churches with average 85 or fewer in principle weekly worship service(s)

M Average 86 to 225 in worship service(s)

L Average 226 or more in worship service(s)

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