

Reading List

We asked these Commission on Communications members, "What book is lying on your nightstand?"

Jim Crook
Church Street UMC
Knoxville District
A Cold Mountain Companion,
by Paul Ashdown

Rev. Jason Gattis
Keith Memorial UMC
Cleveland District
Hearts in Atlantis, by Stephen King

Rev. Larry Trotter
Concord UMC
Oak Ridge District
The Bible Jesus Read,
by Philip Yancey

Teresa Williams
Church Street UMC
Knoxville District
Simple Abundance:
A Daybook of Comfort and Joy,
by Sarah Ban Breathnach ■

Book art courtesy of Cokesbury Bookstore



Numbers

- Total funds contributed by Holston churches to 2004 UMCOR hurricane relief: **\$90,374**
- District that contributed the largest total amount: Morristown, with **\$16,188**
- District that contributed the 2nd-largest amount: Kingsport, with **\$11,145**
- Church that contributed the largest amount: First Broad Street, with **\$3,860**
- Church that contributed the 2nd-largest amount: Lebanon Memorial, with **\$2,638**

Source: Holston treasurer's office

Cycles & Seasons

By Jane Curran



Cemeteries speak to us of lives and love

My vocation often takes me to cemeteries. I've conducted funerals and memorial services in dozens of cemeteries – some on rolling land in towns and some high on mountains where we parked below and walked up steep slopes to the graves.

A few months ago I visited an old, old cemetery in Sewanee, Tenn., outside of Chattanooga. Ancient trees grow in this cemetery. Hemlock, cypress, oak in profusion. The stones on the graves tell stories of teachers, pastors, families – some long-lived, some a day old. Every grave was unique. Some were outlined by stones broken off from Sewanee Mountain. Some were raised above



ground level. Some had become flowerbeds, lovingly tended by relatives. Some had flowering shrubs. One grave, belonging to a woman who had died in her 30s, was covered with glittering beads, little statues of angels, flowers, and a doll. Some graves were overgrown, weedy, and remote.

As I walked through the cemetery, a woman came with a trowel and potting soil to cultivate flowers on a sunken grave. Perhaps an ancestor. Or a teacher. Or just for love.

I could almost hear those old plots of earth telling vast and fascinating stories of times past and beliefs in times to come. People have told me that they remember their mothers and grandmothers taking them to family cemeteries to clear the graves in preparation for special days of remembrance, while telling stories of ancestors. Who did what when. Remembering and retelling histories of a world now gone, except for a statue of a little lamb on a baby's grave. Or an azalea bush planted to remember a father's love of growing things.

I think the reason I loved that old cemetery in Sewanee is because there, the very earth reflects the individual quality of how each of us lives. Like us, the graves wear and are shaped by the loving hands of families and friends who do honor in each of our lives. In old family cemeteries, some of the headstones lean or fall over or become smooth from centuries of blowing rains. I'm reminded that as we all walk our spiritual journeys, live our spiritual lives, and become our full spiritual selves, we all weather at different rates and arrive at the end in different shapes and conditions. Human existence – no matter what cultural pressures for conformity seem to require – is no cookie-cutter proposition. We are created like snowflakes, falling together yet each a remarkable crystalline structure.

That old cemetery – filled with splendid tall trees and laced with stones, azaleas, and beauty – speaks to how special each of us is. How we weather like stone, some-

times more worn, sometimes maintaining sharp edges. How our hearts sometimes grow lovely flowers and sometimes a patch of weeds. And how all attempts at uniformity ultimately fail because each of us walks an individual path, seeking our own truth and hoping for our own healing. ■

The Rev. Curran is a member of the Western North Carolina Conference.

Mission Update

Team serves in India, supplies arrive in Africa

Fourteen volunteers representing 10 churches and five districts departed for India on Nov. 4 and were expected to return on Nov. 16. The conference mission team's trip to Hyderabad is the culmination of this summer's Annual Conference missions project, according to Conference Lay Leader and team member Bob Lockaby.

Since June, churches have contributed \$127,000 for Hope for Today ministries in India. According to Holston Missions Coordinator Bill Daugherty, the offering will be used primarily to fund a 12-acre center allowing ministry for preschoolers through senior citizens.

"The goal is to nurture the poorest of the poor, with a focus on education and medical care," he said.

Last spring, Holston churches also participated in hands-on projects – collecting food, school, health and medical supplies – for missions in Liberia and Zimbabwe.

According to Daugherty, the supplies have arrived and been distributed in Liberia. The supplies destined for Zimbabwe are still waiting to clear customs. "When you are dealing with a third-world country, you're at their mercy," Daugherty said. ■



Photo by Steve Bender

ALCOA, Tenn. – The conference mission team leaves for India from McGhee Tyson Airport on Nov. 4.