

church development:



New congregation to be launched in January

Reaching new population groups who respond differently to the gospel than you and I – or who are not now being reached by the church – is a goal of the conference Witness Ministry Team.

The team's vision will direct a new church start in Jonesborough, Tenn., in January 2002. A pastor will be appointed and ministry will begin in January; the first public worship service is planned for September 2002.

The Jonesborough UMC voted Sept. 16 to be the parent church. The Holston Cabinet endorsed the new church start on Nov. 14 and will announce an appointment this month.

■ Why Jonesborough?

Jonesborough is the home of the National Storytelling Festival, now in its thirtieth year. East Tennessee State University offers a degree in storytelling, bluegrass, and other regional arts. While Jonesborough is not the geographic center of the Tri-Cities in upper East Tennessee, it has the potential for being a setting for people who enjoy the arts and may be ready to take a second look at the Christian faith.

There may be a need for a new community of faith in your county or city to reach people not already being reached by the neighborhood United Methodist Church. Look around. Study your "ballpark." Make outreach a matter of prayer priority. God may be calling your church to do a new thing.

One of the best ways to do that is for your church (or a group of churches) to start a congregation. West Galax UMC in the Wytheville District did that in its own building. Cokesbury UMC's approach was to move back into the central city of Knoxville. Brainerd, St. Andrews, and other churches and individuals have become partners in a new ministry to the Hispanic population in Chattanooga.

Remember in your prayers the Bishop's Conference on Starting New Congregations on Jan. 24 and 25. Log on to www.holston.org and click on "Builders Club" (on the drop-down menu at the top) to register for this important event.

The Rev. John Ripley is the conference's director of new church development. ■



By John Ripley

opportunities:

Home-repair project offered next summer

EMORY, Va.—Emory Service Project, a week-long home repair mission project in Washington and Smyth Counties, is now accepting applications for summer 2002. Teams of youth and adults are invited to share in study, work, and worship from Sunday, June 30, to Saturday, July 5. House and meals will be provided at Emory & Henry College.

Cost is \$120 per person for room and board plus \$400 per three- to six-person work team as a share of building material costs. Youth must have completed the ninth grade.

Emory Service Project is an outreach of Emory UMC. For information or applications, write: Claire Rasor, Coordinator, P.O. Box CC, Emory, VA 24327, phone (276) 944-3410.

New bulletin insert: Free & online

Did you know a bulletin insert with conference news is available weekly to Holston congregations?

Each Wednesday morning, the latest issue of *The Sunday Call* goes online at www.holston.org. This publication is free for any Holston church to download, print and place in its Sunday bulletin. Two versions of *The Sunday Call* are available: a PDF file and a Microsoft Word file. Both versions contain the same text. The PDF version contains more photos and graphic elements.

For more information, contact Webmaster Donna Hankins at (865) 690-4080 or DonnaHankins@holston.org.

commentary:

By Bruce P.

Ministry among the Muslims Is the Lord calling you to come and help?

A press conference by the two American aid workers recently set free in Afghanistan was the first time Emilie and I had seen folks like ourselves on TV! We have been blessed to work in a peaceful Muslim country in Central Asia, and we have never been in danger of death in prison while bombs fell all around us. But the cheerful witness of these two Christian women gave us confidence that the Lord will sustain our faith through any trial.

The Sept. 11 attack on America was terrible, but this is also a time of new hope. Through tragedy the world's attention has been turned toward Muslims, who often feel the West is ignoring them. What is more, Muslims who are turned off by violence and confrontation are accepting the loving embrace of *Isa al-Masih* (Jesus Christ) in greater numbers than ever before.

Here in this Muslim region, new churches are multiplying. A few days ago I bought tires for a preacher's old car, knowing he would not be able to get around to visit new churches on the bald ones he had. Several of these new house churches are led by Muslim women who believe in *Isa* as Savior and Lord. In the province where we live there are now 27 churches or cell-groups of Muslim-background believers. Ten years ago there were none.

Is the Lord calling you to come over and help? Even now mission teams are being formed to do relief work, teach school, and start new businesses in Afghanistan. In other parts of the Muslim world the work is also chronically understaffed. Apostolic workers in Muslim cities are usually laypersons (occasionally clergy) who practice secular vocations to help people and then share words of faith and love as opportunity arises. Although the two American women on TV were arrested by the Taliban for giving a Muslim family a Christian book and film on request, in many Muslim countries our witness can be fairly open.

Are you willing to commit five or 10 years of your life to this kind of work? It requires a good education and professional qualifications. It means studying a new language in the field. It means physical hardship and living below the standard of living to which you are accustomed. But most of all it means sharing your faith. Religious discussion is part of the fabric of daily life for Muslims (much more than it is in America); so they will want to know who you are and why you believe what you do. Are you ready to make yourself vulnerable for the sake of Christ who died for you and raised you up to live a new and productive life? If you are, the joy of the Lord will soon overtake you.

God's people know that the world's problem is bigger than one dangerous figure like Osama. The problem is hatred fed by fear fed by misunderstanding, and the answer is loving, cross-cultural relationships where deep friendship produces receptive hearts that the Spirit of God can work with. Muslims respond to this kind of ministry where nobody is forcing anything on the other and God's truth is freely discussed.

Let United Methodists never forget Wesley's clarion call that the Gospel is for all. For Muslims also the grace of Our Lord *Isa al-Masih* is very good news indeed. ■

► "Bruce P." is a clergy member of the Holston Conference and has been appointed to serve in Central Asia since 1991. He and his wife, Emilie, make their U.S. home in Knoxville. Contributions for their work may be made to the Holston Conference Treasurer as Conference Advance Specials. Geographical details are withheld for security reasons, but Bruce and Emy may be contacted at this secure address: Bruce.P@ccmail.lfa.com.

