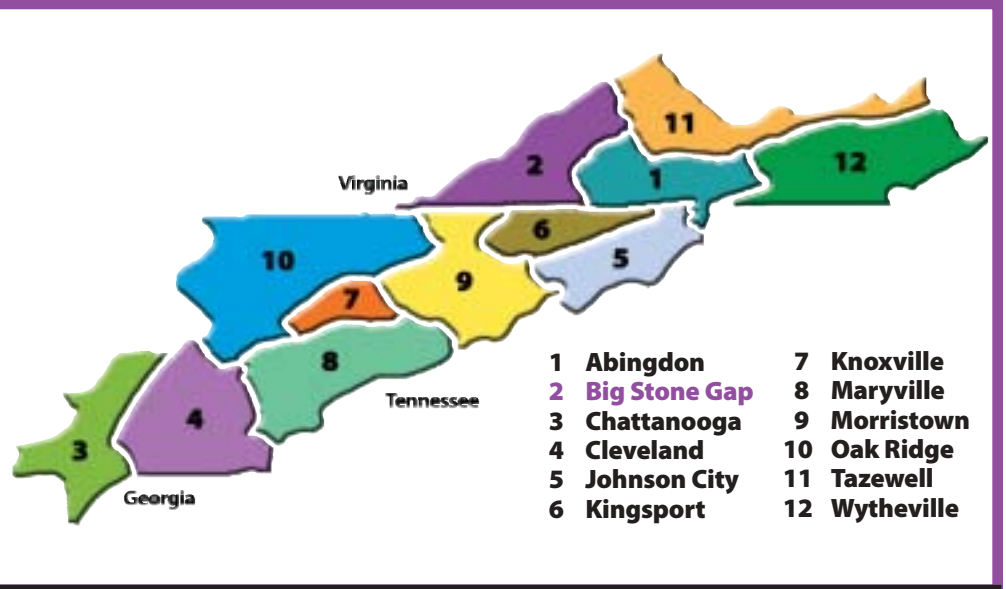


mydistrict

BIG STONE GAP



Nancy Hobbs, age 62, has been a Church and Community Worker for seven years. She is a deacon of the United Methodist Church and has attended First Pennington Gap UMC for 35 years. This is her district.



Coal Miners | Three Bells | Community Meals | Johnny Cash | Fort Blackmore | Small Churches | Mutual Pharmacy | Slant | Powell Valley Overlook | U.V.A. College at Wise

Big Stone Gap District is one of 12 districts in Holston Conference. It includes 39 charges, 61 churches, and one mission outreach. The Virginia-based district includes all of the City of Norton; all of Wise, Lee, Scott, and Dickenson Counties; and a small part of Washington and Russell Counties.

- **Largest membership church:** Gate City, with 469
- **Largest average worship attendance:** Hiltons Memorial, with 220
- **Smallest membership church:** Robinette Memorial and Slant are tied with 9
- **Smallest average worship attendance:** Robinette Memorial with 6
- **Oldest church:** Fort Gibson, founded in 1786
- **Youngest church:** Three Bells, founded in 1981
- **Congregations with largest percentage growth:** McClure (Dickenson County) with 14 percent, Dungannon with 9 percent, and Speak's Chapel with 9 percent

Who's the boss? District superintendent is the Rev. Dan Taylor, an African American from Chattanooga, Tenn., who now lives in an area that is 97 percent white. Administrative assistant is Beverley Crabtree, a Big Stone Gap native and member of Andover UMC. The district office is located at 101 Gilley Avenue East in a 45-year-old house across the street from Trinity UMC. The district office has occupied the house since 1986.

Small is cool: The district is the smallest in Holston, in population and total church members (6,301). The congregations are also comparatively small in numbers – if not in terms of ministry. “While they may be small in size, they get a lot done,” says former District Superintendent Dennie Humphreys (1999-2003).

Proud to be from BSG: Church members are proud of their coal-mining heritage. The building of coal camps in Southwest Virginia began in the 1880s, peaking in the 1920s. Those houses still exist today, although many of the mines have closed. Still, it's common to see customers at Food City with faces blackened by coal dust, says Beverley Crabtree. “It's like stripes on a military uniform. Coal miners still command a lot of respect, and we always say a little prayer for them, remembering those who have lost their lives before.” A statue in Miner's Park, in Big Stone Gap, recognizes the area's history.

Keep on the Sunny Side: A.P. and Sara Carter of country music fame were members of Mt. Vernon UMC and are buried in the cemetery in Hiltons. Today, their granddaughter and great-grandchildren remain

active in the church. Johnny Cash and June Carter Cash bought the old Carter home place about a half mile from the church, sometimes visiting Mt. Vernon before they died. In 1981, the Cashes taped a TV Christmas special at Mt. Vernon.

If you were a tourist you might consider:

- Weekly concerts at the Carter Family Fold in Hiltons
- Powell Valley Overlook in Norton
- “Trail of the Lonesome Pine” outdoor drama in Big Stone Gap
- Southwest Virginia Museum in Big Stone Gap
- Appalachia, considered to be an “intact era town” of the late 1800s

Best-kept ministry secret: Churches are dedicated to Camp Fort Blackmore, which is not supported by the conference but by the district. For two weeks each summer, BSG churches provide a free day camp for the community. As many as 150 children attend.

The district is known for ... its response to high rates of unemployment, suicide, and drug abuse. Numerous ministries are geared to the community's needs, including a district “discretionary fund” for utilities and rent payments; food pantries sponsored by Trinity and Midway Memorial; free Thursday night dinners at First Pennington Gap; and a Thanksgiving dinner at Norton. Church leaders from Norton and Pleasant Hill have also started a suicide-prevention ministry, and the district benefits richly from the ministry of Nancy Hobbs. As a Church and Community Worker, Hobbs serves hundreds by facilitating the collection of garden seeds, school supplies, Christmas gifts, food, and clothing.

Best place to eat after church: In Big Stone Gap, worshippers might choose Little Mexico or the old-timey Mutual Pharmacy. Virginians in Norton and Wise like their meat well-done at Prime Sirloin or Bonanza. Pastor Randy Powers of Mt. Vernon UMC heads for soup beans or fried fish at Pop's, his dad's restaurant across the state line in Kingsport, Tenn.

Remember our connections: The district is home to the Wesley Foundation at University of Virginia College at Wise, and to the historic Jonesville Camp Meeting, held nearly every summer since 1810. ■



What's cool in mydistrict



Jonesville Camp Meeting



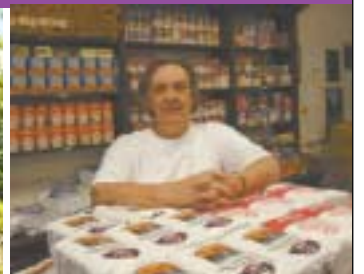
Camp Fort Blackmore



Miners Park



SW Virginia Museum



Food pantries