

GOLF tournament on May 27 will raise money for Sudan wells

Last June, the Holston Annual Conference rejoiced at raising \$170,000 for Sudan – about \$45,000 over the annual missions offering goal.

The Rev. Joe Barber remembers thinking, "Seems like we could do better than that, with 900 churches."

Two months later, Barber heard the Rev. Beth Tipton speak at a district ministers' meeting about the desperate need for clean water in Sudan. When Tipton said that Sudanese children die from illnesses caused by drinking dirty water, Barber was ready to take a swing at doing something about it.

A "Wells for Sudan" fundraising golf tournament on May 27 in Kingsport not only gives golfers a chance to help south Sudan, church groups can also help by sponsoring a hole, providing prizes, or offering other services.

An avid golfer who helped organize fundraising tournaments for Camp Fort Blackmore, Barber is letting his longtime passion for the game drive his new passion to dig wells.

"Last fall, the conference set a goal to dig 19 wells in south Sudan," the pastor says. "Some of those wells have already been funded, but there's

no reason why we can't fund the rest of them through this tournament."

Each well costs \$10,000, according to the Sudan Action Team. The Holston Conference Foundation has promised to match \$1 for every \$2 donated. In March, Holston sent \$50,000 to Sudan for the first five of the 19 new wells. Previously, Holston funded three wells in Yei. The Virginia Conference funded a fourth.

"Don't let the fact that it's a golf event throw you off," Barber says of the May 27 fundraiser. "There's strength in numbers, and lots of other things you can do to help."

Salem UMC and Crossroads UMC are providing lunch for the tournament. A United Methodist who owns the course is providing the course at no charge, Barber said. Prizes have already been donated, and Bishop James Swanson will host the tournament.

"There's no cost for meals, the course, or prizes," Barber said, "so every dollar raised will go for the wells."

The tournament is sponsored by Kingsley UMC and Hermon UMC in Kingsport District, where Barber is pastor. The two churches orga-

nized their own fundraising project: "Jacob's Well." It's named after the Biblical Jacob as well as the 12-year-old boy who made a big impression on his pastor and congregation.

It was shortly after Tipton's presentation, Barber remembers, when he made an appeal to his churches about helping to bring fresh water to south Sudan. "I told them I sensed God wanted us to do something about it."

Twelve-year-old Jacob walked up to his preacher and gave him \$20 of his birthday money to get the effort started.

"I still have that \$20 bill," Barber says. "I plan on keeping it as a reminder that God does do big things."

"Don't worry," he adds. "I replaced the \$20 in the offering."

The two churches have since designated the second Sunday of each month as "Wells Sunday." Between offerings and yard sales, Kingsley and Hermon have already raised \$8,500. Their goal is to fund at least one well.

To learn more about the tournament or to register online, visit WellsforSudan.holston.org. ■



Photo by Dennis Loy for The Call

Lennon-Seney has an active, busy schedule. Here, girls meet for Wednesday Bible study at 5 p.m.

A UMNS Report By John W. Coleman

Once-dormant ministries have come to life. New titheers have helped double the weekly offering. The average number of worshippers has increased from 115 to 175 at Lennon-Seney United Methodist Church in Knoxville, Tenn.

And there's more.

The 135-year-old black church recently had to add portable walls in its fellowship hall to create multiple classrooms for a suddenly burgeoning Sunday school, including a new young-adult class. The congregation hired a new music minister, tripled the size of its chancel choir and started holding prayer meetings in the front yard and doing "prayer walks" around its inner-city neighborhood.

The good news at the 135-year-old black church is in part the result of a partnership with the Strengthening the Black Church for the 21st Century initiative, the denomination's primary African-American church development program.

"Rev. (Fred) Allen and SBC21 lit a fire under our folks, and it's still going," said the Rev. Angela Hardy Cross, who came to Lennon-Seney in June 2009. "Our future goals are no longer far-fetched dreams for us. We're excited about what God is doing in and through our church."

Reaching local churches

The pastor gave her glowing report earlier this month at the SBC21 National Summit in North Charleston, S.C. The gathering drew about 100 local, regional and churchwide leaders concerned with strengthening and developing African-American churches.

The initiative, now in its 14th year, is strengthening its collaboration with annual conferences by engaging them as full partners in planning, holding and promoting training events.

Such events are typically sponsored by a few dozen teaching churches, known as Congregational Resource Centers. Teams from selected partner churches come to these centers to learn lessons in creative worship, stewardship, evangelism, com-

Partnerships strengthen black churches: Lennon-Seney thrives

munity outreach, church administration and other topics.

SBC21 is taking its show on the road by bring-

ing teams of experts to training events hosted by conferences and jurisdictions, especially in areas where there are no Congregational Resource Centers.

These jointly sponsored, local "traveling CRC" events make it affordable for more church teams to benefit from the training offered.

"I'm excited about pursuing a conference partnership with SBC21 to resource African-American congregations here," said the Rev. Lillian C. Smith, Eastern Pennsylvania Conference director of connective ministries. "We don't have a CRC currently. An SBC21 training event in our conference would be more cost effective because more congregational leaders could attend and learn."

Success stories

The efforts are bearing fruit. In January, Allen, SBC21 executive director, came to Lennon-Seney with a professor from Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington to teach members about Christian education and nurturing effective, committed leadership. John Tate, Holston Conference treasurer, also came to teach financial stewardship.

Last October, a team from the church learned to praise God in new ways, led by top musicians and worship lead-



Photo by Dennis Loy for The Call

135-year-old Lennon-Seney UMC is located in downtown Knoxville.

ers from across the nation, at the SBC21-sponsored African American Music and Worship Explo held at Lake Junaluska, N.C.

"We experienced an excellence in worship rarely seen among local churches," said Cross. "We came back inspired to seek excellence in our own worship efforts."

As a result, church members sought and found a new music minister and purchased copies of "Zion Still Sings! For Every Generation," the new United Methodist songbook of diverse African-American music ranging from traditional spirituals to contemporary Christian rap.

Elsewhere, four pastors led workshops at an Effective Leadership for Church Growth training event sponsored in January by the North Alabama Conference. Another joint event, focused on developing effective outreach ministries, is planned for July in the neighboring Alabama-West Florida Conference.

Growing interest

Allen reports that at least three more conferences have requested training events since the summit. Twenty-four of the 26 conferences that sent representatives to the summit have signed partnership covenants with SBC21.

Several attendees said they expect the new emphasis on conference partnerships and joint events will promote the initiative more widely and perhaps lead to recruitment of more SBC21 partner churches.

"I look forward to reintroducing SBC21 to many churches here," said the Rev. Ken Nelson, a congregational specialist in the South Carolina Conference, where 269 of 1,100 churches are African American.

Bishop W. Earl Bledsoe, who chairs SBC21's national coordinating committee, sees more collaboration with annual conferences as essential. He pointed to several reasons, including shrinking funds and the need for SBC21 to get involved in starting new black churches with the help of Path 1, the denomination's emphasis on planting "new churches to reach new people."

"The biggest challenge we face is congregations that want funding to continue doing what they have always done," Bledsoe said. "We will need to make some deep changes in the ways we go about doing church in the future. It will require patience, prayer and conversations with each other to get to the place where God is calling us to go." ■

Coleman is a freelance writer based in Washington.

A family in Yei, Sudan, benefits from a well dug with Holston funds. The goal is to dig 19 more wells.

Photo by Annette Spence, The Call



TWC president Condon resigns



Stephen Condon

For the second time in less than two months, a Holston related college has lost its president.

Tennessee Wesleyan College announced the resignation of President Stephen Condon on April 1. The college released the following statement:

"Tennessee Wesleyan College and President Dr. Steve Condon, announce that Dr. Condon is resigning as President of the College to pursue other opportunities in business and higher education. Dr. Condon has stated that he has very much enjoyed his five year tenure with the College and wishes the faculty, staff and students, as well as the alumni, the best of everything in the future."

Hiwassee College announced the resignation of its president, the Rev. James Noseworthy, in mid-February. Holston is also related to a third college, Emory & Henry, currently led by President Rosalind Reichard.

Visit www.twcnet.edu for more info. ■