

# Not business as usual, but matters of the heart: Members urged to stay focused on the mission

Speakers, preachers, and teachers all hit “grand slams” yesterday at the 2008 session of the Holston Annual Conference. They drove home the “offer them Christ” theme, while providing tools to help churches actually live out the theme.

The Rev. Randy Frye received one of a few standing ovations, after speaking on how members should “work together in the United Methodist way.”



Nance



Laycock



Looney

Standing in for the Rev. Al Bowles, who was scheduled to make the presentation but is ill in Chattanooga, Frye encouraged members to practice holy conferring, learn to disagree in love, commit to true open itinerancy, and stay focused on the mission.

“The call before us is to offer them Christ,” Frye said to applause. “That is the main thing. That is the only thing.”

If members could stay focused on the mission, “the fact that we have different viewpoints, theological stances, ethnic backgrounds, or economic

levels won’t make any difference and do not have to limit what God can accomplish through us,” he said.

Referring to Frye’s earlier explanation that he was a “pinch hitter” for Bowles, Swanson said that Frye had hit a “grand slam.”

Swanson also responded to the report of the Dialogue Task Force, prior to Frye’s presentation.

In the report, Lee Snider and the Rev. Catherine Nance said that a year of study had led the task force to recommend a conference-wide event for church members to learn how to “dialogue” on disagreements. This “facilitated dialogue process” – or “learning to lean in and listen with our hearts” – could be used in disagreements over what color to paint the Sunday school rooms, as well as more complex issues in the general church, Nance said.

“It is obvious to me that we have not learned to deal with conflict,” Swanson said, after the report. “This is a gift the Dialogue Task Force is trying to present to us.”

Evelyn Laycock, long-time Bible teacher and native of Holston, charmed and awed members with her grandmotherly stories and profound scripture lessons.

She told of riding on a motorcycle at age 75 and the female nursing-home resident who blows kisses to her husband. Addressing Ephesians 2 in the afternoon session, she spoke of aliens, Egyptians, and peace.

“If anybody here feels like an alien or a stranger, let it go. Let it go. You belong to Christ. Christ belongs to you. You belong to everyone here.”

“Offer them Christ. That is a love letter to the world,” she said. “Offer them Christ. It’s the hope for world peace.”

In the Retirement and Commissioning Service, Bishop Richard Looney spoke to both retirees and incoming ministers when he said he wished he could start his ministry again.

“When you finally know what to do, you’re too old to do it,” he said to laughter.

But he also issued advice stemming from decades of experience: to be good ministers of Jesus Christ, to stay in training, to live a godly life, to fulfill one’s gifts, and to love the people.

“People don’t need you to harangue them. They need you to love them,” Looney said. “The strange and wonderful thing is that you can love people who don’t like you, or whom you don’t like.”

In the Memorial Worship Service, the Rev. Angela Hardy Cross spoke of the “aroma of memory.” Referring to the Song of Solomon, she used stories of her husband’s gift of Coco Chanel and the Old Spice of beloved relatives to show how lingering aromas are like memories of loved ones.

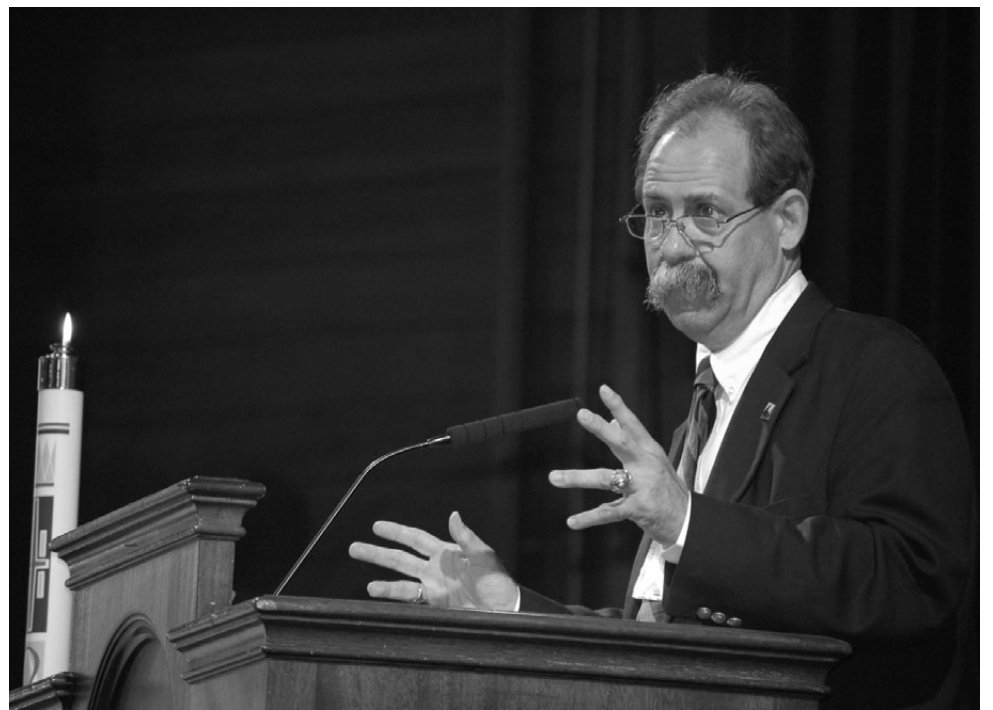
Later in the afternoon, clergy were requested to sit with their church lay members for the final Board of Laity session. For two days, video segments had shown how several Holston churches are offering Christ through prison outreach, schools for unwed teenage parents, soup kitchens, and other ministries. Members were encouraged to discuss ways they could offer Christ in their own communities, perhaps by using examples from the videos in their own churches.

Anne Travis, director of connectional ministries, posed the final question for consideration: “If you could do anything – anything – for the kingdom of God without fear of failure, what would you do?”

Also yesterday, members submitted Change for Children offerings at the “Walk for Change” tent. At 4:30 p.m., the total offering received was \$51,028.

Also at the tent, 19 groups representing 10 districts received Change for Children grants from last year’s offering. A total \$35,000 was awarded to Holston groups, with an equal amount provided for children’s ministry in Sudan.

The 2008 grant winners are: Trinity, Abingdon District; Pound, Big Stone Gap District; St. Elmo/Alton Park Partners, Chattanooga District; West Market Street, Johnson City District; Community, Kingsport District; Inskip, Kodak, Lennon-Seney, and Trentville, all of Knoxville District; JC Evangelistic Ministries, Casa Del Alfarero, First Sweetwater, and Friendsville, all of Maryville District; Christ, Mt. Carmel, Talley’s Chapel, and Trinity, all of Morristown District; Cowan Chapel of Oak Ridge District; Savannah UMC of Wytheville District. ■



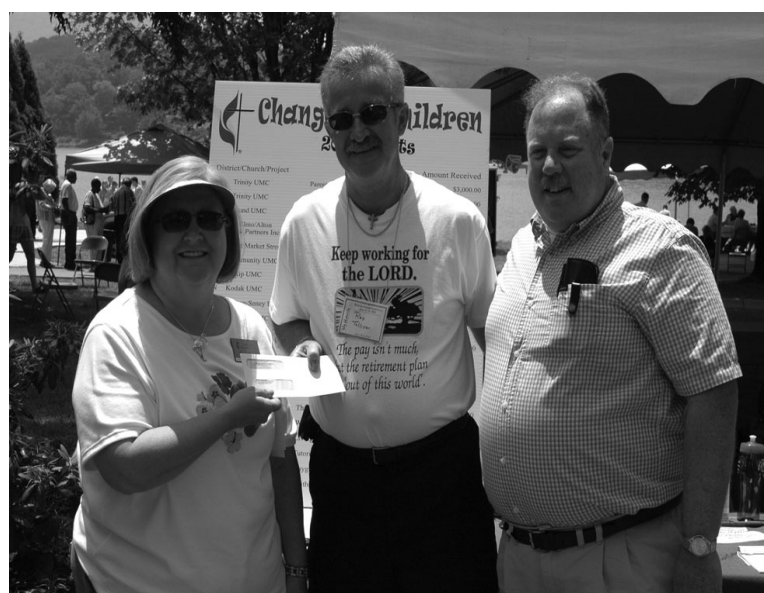
ABOVE: The Rev. Randy Frye, Johnson City District superintendent, says that to work together in the United Methodist way, congregations must commit to a “true open itinerancy,” seeking the best pastor to fill their needs “regardless of gender, color, or ethnicity.”



LEFT: Retiring pastor Rev. Grady Winegar passes the mantle to newly commissioned Rev. Sandra Johnson, as Bishop James Swanson looks on.



RIGHT: The Rev. David Woody and Kristen Burkhardt (standing) brainstorm with lay members of Asbury UMC of Greeneville during the small-group session.



LEFT: Gaye King, associate director of connectional ministries, presents a Change for Children grant to Rex Tolliver (center) and the Rev. Rick Lindamood (far right) of Savannah UMC, Wytheville District.