

## Shake it off, *continued from page 1*



**Steve Hodges**

succeeded last year in its ministries with and for

Hispanics, domestic violence, and creation care.

However, Hodges said the conference could have done more to respond to God's call to combat racism and poverty. As a result, that is one of his

wishes for the church in 2008.

"We should face more squarely our call to address poverty and promote genuine community, despite our differences in race and culture," said Hodges, executive director of Jubilee Project in Morristown District.

He would also like to see the conference in 2008 break down barriers between evangelism and justice.

"Our ultimate call is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world," he said. "As we focus on offering them Christ, we need to make sure it is the Christ who calls us to minister to the whole person. And this means giving up all we have to respond to this call."



**Sharon Bowers**

The Rev. Sharon Bowers, who serves at Woodlawn UMC in Morristown District and at Holston Home for Children, thought the conference was not spiritually ignited during 2007 in the area of worship. "We were kind of dull," she said.

She would also like to see the conference become better connected. Rather than focus on the work of the clergy or the work of the laity, she said that Holston should involve all people at all levels at the same time to spread the gospel and do God's work. She also thinks that the conference should not be afraid to take risks.

Jay Garrison, conference chancellor, feels that 2007 was a year of many successes, based on what he saw highlighted in *The Call*. "Some were truly magnificent, such as Resurrection, and many others were just as important, where members of Holston Conference looked outward to serve those in need."

He also saw a few disappointments, such as



**Jay Garrison**

the continued problems with churches not paying conference apportionments. Among the pressing issues for the conference in 2008 will be membership growth, Garrison said.

"The church and the Holston Conference need to emphasize moving out into our community and going to

the people who are in need, as John Wesley did," he said. "We will be at our best when we offer ourselves to others."

Garrison would also like to see the conference practice more civil discourse at the 2008 Annual Conference.

"We do not all agree on all issues, but we need to hold each other accountable when we are judgmental, question the motives of each other, and use inflammatory language," he said. "We should set a new tone at Annual Conference in the Wesleyan tradition that we may not all be of one mind, but rather we will be of one heart."



**Mattea Sanders**

As the president of the Conference Council on Youth Ministries, Mattea Sanders said the youth had a successful past year. The Youth Service Fund raised nearly \$44,000 for various youth ministries, and a new Cross Bearers weekend retreat was held in April at Camp Wesley Woods.

"The people I know who went were amazed by the intense guidance they received about their walk with God," said Sanders, a Bearden High School student and member of Bearden UMC in Knoxville District. "They also loved Bishop [James] Swanson speaking."

She thinks the most pressing issues for Holston youth this year will be the SEJ Convocation for Young People at Lake Junaluska in July, and the continued ministry of the F.U.E.L Youth Ministry Institute, which helps train youth mentors and workers.

Sanders also wants to see her group's focus and ministry become more passionate in 2008.

"I would like to see our ministry be more committed day to day, meeting to meeting," she said. "Sometimes things get put on the back burner because youth are busier than they used to be. But our ministry calls us to always do all we can do for the youth of Holston."



**Will Shelton**

The Rev. Will Shelton, pastor of the Ceres Circuit in Tazewell District, thinks the most pressing issue facing the conference in 2008 will be in showing Jesus Christ in the midst of today's complex culture.

"Following him here, now, and today still represents eternal life and always will," he said.

"We must continue to give our ears and our efforts to the voices of need around us, throughout Holston and throughout the world – this will always be a pressing issue in any year."

Now serving five small Holston congregations after having served as youth minister at a large church, Shelton also sees a need for more connection and unity in the coming year.

"Oftentimes it's easy for those in an individual church, especially a smaller congregation, to feel alone in the fight, and that it's all up to us to carry it forward," he said. "But our connectivity can be a real strength. Our district was there when high winds blew the roof off of one of the churches on this charge, our district was there when one of the parishioners had her well run dry, and in a thousand other ways we are here for each other."

And in this coming year when General Conference and presidential elections can be divisive issues, Shelton hopes members of Holston will remember their focus as Christians.

"We have to remember that we are together in this and not allow things to pull us farther apart but use our shared unity and our shared Christ to make us one," he said. ■

*John Shearer is a member of Church Street United Methodist Church in Knoxville District, where his wife, the Rev. Laura Shearer, is associate pastor.*

## Remembering, grieving, *continued from page 1*

gifts and assistance, according to the Rev. Braxton Cotton, First Madisonville pastor.

While the church still burned and Cotton watched helplessly, leaders of the neighboring Baptist church handed him a \$5,000 check. Cokesbury UMC (Knoxville District) replaced Cotton's black robe and stoles, while Fairview UMC (Maryville District) provided new altar ware. A telephone crisis center that was closing due to lack of funds donated its office equipment and supplies. (For info on how your church can help, write [roxanne@firstumcmadisonville.org](mailto:roxanne@firstumcmadisonville.org).)

Plans are already underway to re-build, according to church leaders, although for a decade before the fire, plans to re-build the sanctuary were never finalized.

"Maybe God was giving us a little nudge," said Joe Penland, who lives near the church and has documented the fire and its aftermath with his camera. "This may turn out to be a blessing."

"We have the opportunity before us to take a bold

step forward," Cotton said. "Hopefully it's going to be something that will create an exciting new presence here in Madisonville."

The trustees are meeting weekly and have accepted an invitation from John Templeton, architect for Foxhollow Goodson, to participate in a two-day visioning process that will also examine the community's needs, Cotton said.

On Dec. 19, Bishop James Swanson joined the congregation for a potluck dinner followed by music from the children's handbell choir. Except for minor smoke damage, the bells survived the fire. Choir Director Sue Hamilton says it's a miracle:

"I told the firemen, 'If you can save anything, please save the bells. It took us forever to get them.'"

While acknowledging the congregation's grief, Bishop Swanson encouraged the congregation to look forward and to rejoice in the connectional system.

"I know this is a real loss you are feeling ... but it



*Photo by Annette Spence, The Call*  
**Bishop James Swanson (far right) visits with the children's handbell choir at First Madisonville UMC on Dec. 19.**

allows you the opportunity to know the real strength of your church ... You have always been there for the rest of the church, and now it's time for the rest of the church to be there for you." ■