

Digest

This is a mini print version of our email publication, 'The Call.' Sign up for a free e-mail subscription at thecalltwo.holston.org.

The Call *Digest*

Back page

Council of Bishops says we should work to end racism and welcome the stranger.

May 15, 2015

www.holston.org

Feeding hungry children in Maryville: Church provides weekend food bags

MARYVILLE, Tenn. -- Carpenters Campground United Methodist Church has a special relationship with the elementary school that's less than two miles away.

Every Tuesday morning during the school year, volunteers from the church gather at Carpenters Elementary School. Their mission is to pack about 70 plastic bags with raisins, sunflower seeds, peanut butter crackers, cereal, juice, pudding, and canned beans.

On Friday, teachers will give the bags to about 70 kids, who will tuck the food into their backpacks. The food bags are ammunition for students to fight hunger over the weekend.

"No child should be hungry," says Lori Sorg, explaining why she and her congregation have decided to reach out to children in poverty.

The Maryville church's partnership with Carpenters Elementary is the sort of ministry Bishop Dindy Taylor hopes every Holston church will pursue.

"We don't have to look to Africa to find situations of poverty and great need," Taylor said recently. "Children in our own communities go to bed hungry, live in homes affected by addiction, struggle to have the supplies they need for their education, and they long for a caring adult to nurture them along the way."

This year's Annual Conference missions offering will focus on those children living in poverty near Holston's 887 congregations, Taylor said. The goal is for every local church to give at least \$10 and 10 hours of service for every person in their congregation. Conference leaders hope to raise at least \$180,000 to provide grants for ministries serving poor children in each of Holston's 12 districts.

"Each congregation is especially encouraged to seek out the local school in your community for the purpose of developing a partnership," said the Rev. Michael Sluder, Holston director of missions. (For more information, visit ACoffering.Holston.org or call Connectional Ministries at 865-690-4080.)

"These are the folks we need to be ministering to, and this is one way of doing it," said Rev. Ken Tucker, Carpenters Campground pastor. About 20-25 church members take turns at volunteering for the weekly service project.

Carpenters Campground members recognized the high poverty rate in their community and seized upon a way to



(Left to right) Lori Sorg, Barbara Bakelarr, and Rev. Ken Tucker pack weekend food bags for students at Carpenters Elementary.

help, Tucker said. The church raises about \$3,500 annually -- through donations and United Methodist Women's fundraisers -- to buy the food for the weekend bags.

The receiving children are typically identified by their teachers, according to Nancy Schliesman, school guidance counselor. Of 600 students in the school, about 30 percent are from low-income families.

"As you can tell by the number of students receiving weekly bags and the number actually below the poverty level, we are barely scratching the surface in the actual number of needy children at our school," she said.

As summer vacation nears, the school sends flyers home to the children's parents or guardians, inviting them to participate in a summer feeding program through Carpenters Campground. Last summer, church volunteers delivered food to about 32 consenting families.

Carpenters Campground has about 80 people in average worship attendance. ■

Bishops: Work to end racism and welcome the stranger

BERLIN (UMNS) – United Methodist bishops are committing to work for toward a church “that is anti-racist and pro-humanity.”

In a unanimously adopted pastoral letter that was completed on May 7, the Council of Bishops affirmed that “all lives are sacred and that a world free of racism and xenophobia is not only conceivable, but worthy of our pursuit.”

The active bishops approved the letter on the last day of the council’s weeklong spring meeting in Berlin, which happened to coincide with the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II and the Holocaust of Jews and others in Europe.

The bishops met in a city that also has special significance for many African United Methodists. It was the site of the 1884-85 Berlin Conference, where European imperial powers formally divided the continent of Africa, exploiting its resources and leaving a legacy of strife that still exists in some countries today. No Africans were present at that conference.

“The people of our world are hurting, as injustice, violence and racism abound,” the bishops’ letter said. “Our witness to the dignity of all human life and the reign of God is needed now more than ever.”

The letter came after San Francisco Area Bishop Warner H. Brown Jr., the council’s president and a Baltimore native, gave an emotional address about the racial tumult in his hometown.

Parts of Baltimore, including Brown’s childhood neighborhood, erupted in looting and violence after Freddie Gray died from injuries sustained in police custody. Gray’s death followed other multiple cases where unarmed African-Americans and other young men of color have died at the hands of police and others.

As Brown’s noted in his address, the United States is not the only place stained by racial strife and fear of the stranger.

“After the rich discussion and prayerful reflection in this meeting, I hope we will take home a serious commitment to join the work of breaking down the walls that divide our communities and move to build relationships,” Brown told United Methodist News Service.

He joined the letter’s call “to work against racism and abuses of privileges in all our contexts.”

The far-reaching statement draws attention to problems of racial and ethnic animosity in various regions of the world:

- Migrant people being attacked and burned in the streets of South Africa.

- Jews who are fleeing Europe after spikes in anti-Semitic violence.

- The plight of Mediterranean refugees who are fleeing war and poverty.

- Racially charged protests and riots in cities across the United States “that remind us that systems are broken and racism continues.”

Retired Bishop Linda Lee, who helped draft the bishops’ earlier 2010 pastoral letter on racism, said she felt “God had really moved” when bishops asked her to convene the team who wrote the current letter.

“I’d like to commend us for taking this step of publicly speaking out on the violence that has resulted from racism, xenophobia, tribalism and other abuses,” she said. “I am also grateful because often silence is understood to mean consent.”

She pointed out the Bible was a main resource in developing the letter. Specifically, the letter cites 1 John 4: 21: “This commandment we have from him: Those who claim to love God ought to love their brother and sister also.”

Ohio West Area Bishop Gregory V. Palmer made the motion for the bishops to speak out as a group on racism. He said he was pleased with the statement and the conversations it had already provoked among the bishops. He added that he hoped bishops would invite people to engage further.

Charlotte (N.C.) Area Bishop Larry M. Goodpaster challenged his fellow bishops to “do more than simply publish the letter and walk away.” He suggested bishops could model for the church how to hold the difficult conversations around issues of racism.

Mozambique Area Bishop Joaquina Filipe Nhanala urged the bishops to report on the results of their commitment.

“What we are dealing with is something that is deep-rooted and longstanding and often not visible to people who are not people of color,” Lee said. “It’s not a quick fix.”

But the words of the Bible offer hope for the journey ahead.

“Scriptures tell us not to grow weary with well-doing,” she said citing Galatians 6:9. “Because if we continue, in due season, we will reap.”■