

## Digest

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# The Call *Digest*

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Maryville pastor writes to her congregation: Lament, then healing

July 1, 2015

[www.holston.org](http://www.holston.org)

## Churches give \$205,058 for children's ministries

**LAKE JUNALUSKA, N.C.** -- Leaders of 887 United Methodist churches of the Holston Annual Conference met June 7-11, 2015, at Lake Junaluska Conference and Retreat Center under the theme "Engage." Bishop Mary Virginia "Dindy" Taylor presided over the meeting of 1,971 clergy and lay members from 12 districts in east Tennessee, southwest Virginia, and north Georgia.

During the five-day meeting, members elected their delegation to General Conference and Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference in 2016. They took an offering of \$150,366 for children in poverty within Holston communities and an additional \$54,692 offering for "Change for Children," supporting ministries in both Holston and Africa.

For the 15th year, Holston churches collected food, school, health, sewing, cleaning and other supplies for Africa. Valued at \$225,680, the goods were blessed by Bishop Taylor before being transported to the South Carolina coast and shipped to missions led by Maria Humbane of Zimbabwe's Ishe Anesu and Helen Roberts-Evans for United Methodist schools in Liberia.

Eighty volunteers joined in a Stop Hunger Now event, packaging 10,152 meals for needy communities all over the world. An additional 80 volunteers bagged 13,800 pounds of potatoes through the Society of St. Andrew, providing 40,000 servings for church groups to deliver to hungry families in their own communities.

### In other actions, the conference:

► accepted Bishop Taylor's challenge for each member to give at least \$10 and 10 hours of service in the coming year to support children in poverty within Holston communities. (See [ACoffering.Holston.org](http://ACoffering.Holston.org).)

► commissioned Bert "Wildcat" Emmerson as Holston's third Appalachian Trail chaplain. Emmerson, a member at First United Methodist Church of Maryville, Tenn., departed June 15 for a 2,200-mile ministry journey from Maine to Georgia.

► celebrated a \$75,000 matching grant, received over three years from the National Consultation on Hispanic/Latino Ministry, to be used for leadership development, youth ministry, justice and advocacy.

► recognized 26 retiring clergy and their collective 664.5 years of service.

► recognized 11 ordinand elders, 13 provisional elders, two ordinand deacons, one provisional deacon, three associate members, and 22 local pastors.

► learned about "Defining Moments," a program developed by Emory & Henry College to nurture young people discerning a call to ministry ([DiscernMyCall.com](http://DiscernMyCall.com)).

► approved a \$9.7 million budget for 2016, reflecting a 10 percent cut in the requested budget to offset shortfalls and unrealized income.

► received congratulations for giving \$7.147 million to the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) over the past decade.

► received congratulations from the General Commission on Finance and Administration for paying 100 percent of general church apportionment during 2011-2014.

Membership stands at 164,076, down 405 from the previous year. Worship attendance stands at 65,981, down 466. Church school attendance stands at 30,040, down 1,483. Professions of faith stand at 2,004, down 15. Baptisms stand at 1,636, up 20.

Reaffirmations of faith stand at 106, down 30 from the previous year. Adults in small groups stand at 37,021, down 461. Young adults in small groups stand at 4,895, down 120. Worshippers engaged in mission stand at 39,052, up 9,949. Amount given to mission stands at \$19,453,670, down \$258,123. ■



Rachel Slack joins 80 volunteers in packaging meals during a "Stop Hunger Now" event June 10 at the Holston Annual Conference.

## Pastor to her congregation: Lament, then healing

June 19, 2015

### Dear Church Family,

The Psalms are full of laments; the prophets speak of lament for a nation. Lament is that act of wailing, sighing, or crying out when we first learn of tragedy. There is nothing to be said. There is only that audible reaction that comes from deep within our souls. We have been focusing on healing during the 10:30 services and I am struck how lament can be a part -- maybe a first step -- of healing.

Nine people who were at church Wednesday night in Charleston are now dead. Before we begin yelling at one another about gun laws and community mental health services, before we debate the nuances of words like terror and racism, can we just take time to be sad? I have learned through years of ministry that after someone dies, there are no words; there is lament. There is nothing to say to explain or make it better; there is only the comfort of silence with others who are also grieving.

I had a brief reprise to my sadness as I sat outside Thursday morning at the Pavilion at Asbury Place for the United Methodist Women's picnic. There was actually a breeze! We listened to Kayce Castenir, Hispanic Language Coordinator for Holston Conference talk about the struggles, but also the hopes, of mothers and fathers who have come to our community looking for a better life for their children. We learned about ESL classes (English as a Second Language). Kayce reminded us of how difficult English is. I had to agree. I had tried putting my thoughts on paper yesterday morning after hearing the radio announcer say, "... and now we take you back to Charleston, South Carolina ...". I had no words; only pain in my heart, my soul, my very being.

I felt the need to find sanctuary -- a place to sit, lament, weep. Since our sanctuary is not available and there is no quiet place at 804 Montvale Station right now, I drove to St. Paul AME Zion Church hoping I could find solace in their sanctuary. The office was closed when I went by, so I sat in the parking lot alone. I could see Maryville City Police across the street and offered a prayer for them and the police in Charleston. I offered a prayer for St. Paul's minister who speaks so eloquently about social hurts and racism and how a community needs to address those issues before there is an episode that brings lament.

My next stop was to the Blount County jail to visit a

friend. I prayed for him, "holding hands" as you do at prison visitation, hands pressed against the glass. My intent was to pray for hope and encouragement. Before I spoke a prayer, I prayed for myself that lament would not seep out in my prayer. I had to sit alone in my car a while before heading back to church to say hello to Welcome Table volunteers and neighbors.

Asbury Hall smelled delicious! It was nachos and burritos night at Welcome Table. I asked one little boy if he and his sisters would rather have a peanut butter and jelly sandwich instead of the burrito. He smiled and said he liked the burrito, but then looked at his mother and whispered, "Could I get the sandwich so I can have something for tomorrow?" I went to the kitchen and tried to ask Dorothy and Amelia about making extra peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, but Lament finally overcame my sensibilities and I could hardly talk. That mama took home a bag of extra PB&J sandwiches, fruit cups and juice boxes.

I could write pages of commentary on social justice, gun safety and gun regulations. Welfare reform. Prison reform. I know that a good portion of my sadness has to do with racism that we don't want to talk about. Part of my duty as minister is to talk about it, but right now I am just grieved. I have words I want to share about forgiveness and care for Dylann Roof, but they must come later. Right now, I just hurt for him. My beloved congregation, please, before we draw lines in the sand or move to our corners of for/against, may we simply lament? May we take time to grieve?

Lament is necessary, but it is not in our culture's vocabulary. However, it is in our faith's vocabulary. Lament -- crying out, groaning, wailing. Our hope is, our certainty is, that God hears our laments. We go to God first with our pain and wail and cry and confess and grieve and ask why? God can handle our cries and our bodies bent over in grief. And, I believe God is wailing and weeping also. If we go to God first, perhaps we will not say hurtful things to others later. If we take time to lament, then I believe healing will come. For, it is in our lamentations where we begin to find our words again. Healing words.

I look forward to being with you Sunday. Let healing begin.

### Catherine Nance

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