

exchange:

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. – Fountain City UMC seeks a **Director of Children and Family Ministries**. The qualified applicant will have a B.S. or B.A. in children's ministry, education, human development, or related area, with at least three years experience in a mature children's program. Submit resume to: Fountain City UMC, Attn: Melissa Smith, 212 Hotel Avenue, Knoxville, TN 37918, phone (865) 689-5175. A detailed job description is available upon request. ❶

► **Holston Methodist Federal Credit Union** is now open to members of United Methodist churches in the Holston Conference. HMFUCU is a full-service financial institution, offering a variety of services with the newest being Bill Pay and Bill Presentment. For more information call (800) 782-9257 or visit www.hmfuc.org. ■

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. – First UMC seeks a **part-time Children's Director**. Candidate should have experience and commitment to Christian faith and the United Methodist Church. Send email or fax resume to: Search Committee, First UMC, 3316 Kingston Pike Knoxville TN 37919, helen@knoxvillefumc.org, fax (865) 525-5264. ❶

What's Your Size?

The Call uses the following symbols to identify articles about small, medium or large churches:

- ❸ Churches with average 85 or fewer in principle weekly worship service(s)
- ❷ Average 86 to 225 in worship service(s)
- ❶ Average 226 or more in worship service(s)



(USPS P000-014)
Published biweekly by
THE HOLSTON CONFERENCE
of the United Methodist Church
9915 Kingston Pike, Suite C
Knoxville, TN 37922

Telephone (865) 690-4080 Fax (865) 690-3162
www.holston.org

Application to mail at
Periodicals Postage Rates is pending at
Knoxville, Tennessee

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Call,
P.O. Box 32939, Knoxville, TN 37930-2939.

Ray W. Chamberlain, Jr. Bishop
Kevin Slimp Director of Communications
Annette Bender Editor
Rita Broderick Circulation Manager
Dion Dykes Layout Artist

bishop's perspective:

by **Ray W. Chamberlain Jr.**

Resident Bishop

FOLLOWING JESUS

Frankly, I hesitate even to write about "following Jesus." Like so much of our church jargon, the phrase can be dismissed as a boring cliché. I am so weary of our superficial slogans and pietistic language. We keep swapping our churchly platitudes with one another as though to impress ourselves with our spirituality. But following Jesus is radical – and profoundly affects who we are and how we live.

In the last congregation I served, I asked every one of the 2,000 members I received, "Is it your intention to follow after Jesus Christ?" That question was far more crucial than asking if they would be "loyal to the United Methodist Church." Loyalty to a denomination pales into insignificance when contrasted with following Jesus.

A Christian missionary was captured and imprisoned by the Taliban. He reports being treated respectfully and kindly. His guards obsessively talked religion. They were intrigued by Jesus' teachings. But what perplexed them was how Christians seem to live differently than the scriptures they profess to follow.

The Taliban's confusion, caught in a time warp, is that they judge us by scriptures rather than by the Jesus of scripture. We are partly to blame for this misunderstanding. We piously claim to follow all the Bible's teachings and condemn those who do not, when in truth none of us fulfills the scriptural teachings.

The religious people of Jesus' day who followed the same God of the Old Testament would agree with the Taliban today, that we don't believe, act or look like followers of God.

We don't justify slaughtering infidels as Moses instructed God's people to do. We don't stone children who disobey their parents as called for in Leviticus. We don't expect women to keep their mouths shut in worship services. We do not permit polygamy (at least in the western church) as practiced by King Solomon, the wise man who built the temple.

We do not punish the man who allows his sperm to be spilled to avoid possible procreation. We don't follow some of Paul's or Peter's writings which prohibit women cutting their hair and wearing jewelry. None of us follow the Bible very literally. Thank God we don't! If we did, we would look and act much more like the Taliban than like followers of Jesus.

We Christians need to learn that we distort God's dream for the human family when we reduce our faith to a rigid belief system claiming to take Christian scripture literally. We don't. We shouldn't. And we need to be honest about it.

This approach requires us to pay close attention to what Jesus taught, how he lived, and how he interpreted scripture. Aside from Jesus, Judeo-Christian teaching is primarily about behavior codes, ethics and rules to govern the life of a society. But Jesus opened up a whole new understanding of how we relate to God and one another. He helped us to center on a spirituality of being that is other-centered, love-centered and humility-centered.

A distinguishing characteristic of a follower of Jesus Christ is radical humility. It's like becoming a little child again. (Remember Jesus telling Nicodemus he needed to be born again, start all over again, young enough not to know all the answers, dependent enough to learn.)

So the question I asked members joining the church is as fundamental as it gets. "Is it your intention to follow after Jesus Christ?" To attempt this honestly is as profound as any choice we make. To do so requires a lifetime of interior and exterior examination of our lives. It means we never achieve perfection but that we keep growing into Christ-likeness. In acknowledging our own flawed humanity, we will forever be humble, withholding judgment of others' spirituality. ■

**opportunities:****Employment law seminars offered**

Holston pastors and staff/pastor parish chairpersons are encouraged to attend one of three employment law seminars offered free of charge during February.

Cherie Adams, member of Crossroads UMC and shareholder in the Wilson, Worley & Gamble law firm of Kingsport, Tenn., will lead the seminars. Topics will include the Fair Labor Standards Act, sexual harassment and misconduct, independent contractor agreements, hiring practices, developing job descriptions, and conducting background checks.

The seminars will be held on Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at First Maryville UMC (Feb. 2); Ooltewah UMC (Feb. 9), and First Bristol UMC (Feb. 16). The Wesley Institute is offering 0.4 CEU for the training event. Please call to register at (865) 690-4080. Or visit www.holston.org; go to the drop-down menu at the top of the page; go to "Wesley Institute"; and click on "Upcoming Events."

Website directory updated on Jan. 31

As the conference website continues to improve, Holston members are encouraged to visit www.holston.org to update or add information to a new email/contact directory. The current email directory will be replaced with a new version at the end of January.

"The old format invites spammers to collect email addresses and is difficult to keep up-to-date," says Webmaster Donna Hankins. "The new directory will allow you to search for people by name, email, address, phone number or title."

Members will find a link to the directory at the <http://www.holston.org> home page. Please follow the detailed instructions carefully. ■

