



LAKE JUNALUSKA, N.C. – Speaking at the Holston Conference Ministers Convocation, the Rev. Stephen Gunter tells participants, “We have to be mindful who we are, who we’re preaching to, and who we’re praying for.” Gunter is professor of evangelism at Candler School of Theology. A reported 241 Holston clergy attended the annual event, held Feb. 17-20 in North Carolina.

Photo by Kevin Slirmp, The Call

News Brief

Complaints against bishop dismissed

(UMNS) United Methodist Bishop Bruce B. Ough, president of the church’s North Central Jurisdiction College of Bishops, has announced that complaints filed against Bishop C. Joseph Sprague of Chicago have been dismissed. A four-person supervisory response team met in January and February to review the complaints and respond to them. In its recommendations, the supervisory response team asked Sprague to release a public statement clarifying and reaffirming his adherence to the doctrinal standards of the United Methodist Church.

A group of 28 United Methodist clergy and laypeople filed the complaint against Sprague on Dec. 30, calling for his removal based on comments that he made about Christ’s divinity at a speech at Iliff Theological Seminary and in his book “Affirmations of a Dissenter.” A pastor in the Mississippi Conference had filed a similar complaint in September. ■

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Ten churches gather

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Photo by Annette Bender, The Call

Pastors of African-American congregations in Chattanooga gather around the pulpit at Wiley Memorial UMC. From left to right: Phynis Hall, Lurone Jennings, Sandra Johnson, Alberta Clark-Johnson, Walter Cross, Donald Swift and Stanley Williams at the pulpit.

believe the Lord will tell us what to do next.”

The pastors were soon inspired to organize a special service involving the gifts of Chattanooga’s African-American congregations. Of 12 districts in Holston, Chattanooga has the highest number of African-American pastors: 10 out of 28 black ministers in the conference. Holston has 930 total clergy members.

The event on Feb. 16 was considered to be so successful that the congregations are gearing up for other gatherings and programs to unite and strengthen African-American United Methodist churches in Chattanooga, according to Hardy. The \$378 offering will provide seed money for future gatherings, she said.

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“There was a lot of excitement. The choir especially said they wanted to get together again,” said Hardy, referring to 20 choir members from different congregations who sang on Feb. 16. “It really sparked a fire.”

The Chattanooga initiative could lead to “mini conferences” for black churches in Holston Conference, Cross said. Non-African-American parishioners are encouraged to participate.

“It is inclusive,” Cross said. “We want to make this a tool for our Caucasian brothers and sisters to come and witness how the African-American culture worships.

“The more we find out about each other, the more we have to love,” he added. “It’s kind of like

our children – the more you find out about them, the more you have to love. I think that is a way we can have racial reconciliation within the body of Christ. We’re not there yet.”

The Feb. 16 service at Wiley Memorial also included an original poem, “The Theme of Dreams,” recited by poet Charlotte Williams, daughter of the Rev. Stanley Williams, pastor at Eastdale Village UMC.

Other participating pastors and churches included the Rev. Alberta Clark-Johnson, Wiley Memorial; the Rev. Aldana Allen, St. Andrews and St. Elmo; the Rev. Mike Ogle, St. Andrews; the Rev. Donald Swift, Stanley; and the Rev. Phynis Hall, Randolph/Wells Chapel. ■