

Bishop's Perspective

Open more churches, serve more people

The Ukrop brothers have the largest market share of the grocery business in Richmond, Va. Food store giants have unsuccessfully tried to topple them.

Yet, Ukrop Super Markets defy conventional wisdom. They close their stores on Sundays and holidays. They refuse to sell alcoholic beverages. Their employees are noted for having high morale. They hire qualified personnel for onsite nurseries, where parents may safely leave their children while they shop. (It was enough incentive for some parents to shop nearly every day!)

Each new Ukrop store was more impressive than the last. But I was truly amazed when they opened a larger, more attractive supermarket close to another new Ukrop store. I figured they made a costly mistake. So while I was shopping one day, I asked one of those Ukrop brothers, "Won't this new store take customers away from your other store?"

Mr. Ukrop, always the innovative risk-taker, answered patiently. "Yes, we will probably lose some customers from one store to the other," he said. "But the number of new customers we'll serve with two stores will be much greater than the number we could serve with one store."

As Methodists, there's a lesson for us here. Every Annual Conference in Methodism that is growing is commit-

ted to establishing new congregations. There is not one single exception to this rule. In Holston, we have experienced a membership increase in only one year (1998) out of the last 40. Nearly every county within our conference has increased in population, while the percentage of United Methodists is shrinking. The primary reason for this loss is that we have begun precious few new congregations.

Remember the story of Jesus and the fishermen? They toiled all night without catching fish. Jesus told them to change the way they were fishing. They did. And in the same waters, those men filled their nets to the breaking point with fish.

If we continue to do things the way we have for 40 years, we'll have the same results. Most of our laity and clergy are not at fault for the conference's collective failure to bring more people to Jesus Christ. It is the conference that must take responsibility for lifting the vision and providing leadership and resources for starting new congregations.

Still, every congregation is encouraged to — and yes, in the name of Jesus Christ *mandated* to — discover its unique calling and "means" by which to witness, serve and reach others. And then, collectively, through the conference, we will witness, serve and reach others by establishing new congrega-



Bishop Ray Chamberlain

tions. We have no alternative except death — slow, painful, and certain.

Through your Fair Share giving, Builders Club contributions, prayers and moral support, you help create a thriving, growing conference rather than a merely surviving conference.

We do this for the sake of a hungry humanity and for the sake of Jesus Christ. Grace and peace,

Ray W. Chamberlain Jr.
Resident Bishop



Richard Edwards and Bernice Kirkland
Farragut church 'clicks' with area funeral home

FARRAGUT, Tenn. — When you first learn that First Farragut UMC is sharing its building with a funeral home, all sorts of questions and bad jokes come to mind. The Rev. Richard Edwards made light of it himself at Annual Conference in June, when he joked about mistaking an urn for a candy dish.

So let's start by laying some of those issues to rest: Click Funeral Home only maintains an office and holds funerals and receptions in First Farragut's building. Other funeral-home functions are performed at Click's two sites in Lenoir City, Tenn.

Yet, Edwards and Associate Pastor Rev. Bernice Kirkland admit: Sharing digs with a funeral home does present some interesting challenges.

"Initially, some people may be scared away from visiting our church, since Click's sign is over ours," Edwards says. Both ministers also spend significant time working around a complex schedule that allows, for example, the church to use the sanctuary on Sunday morning, the funeral home to use it on Sunday afternoon.

Not that Edwards and Kirkland are complaining. With groundbreaking on a new church site scheduled in the near future, First Farragut already has a buyer for the existing facility. When the growing church moves into its new place in early 2003, the current tenant has the "absolute right and option of purchase."

It's a creative agreement that allows Click to "establish a presence" in the area while giving First Farragut a boost toward acquiring a new place.

The existing 17,000-square-foot building is only 14 years old and attractively located on prime real estate in west Knoxville. But the Oak Ridge District church, chartered in 1983 and the first-ever recipient of a Holston Builder's Club grant, has grown too large for its home. With about 470 in average worship attendance, First Farragut recently purchased 17 acres two miles west of its current site. Total relocation package: about \$7 million.

Church members pledged \$1.8 million, while the conference is providing a \$30,000 grant and \$400,000 loan. Phase one, projected to be complete in 2003, will produce a 38,000-square-foot building.

"We hope to add a third worship service at the new site, a contemporary service to meet on Thursday or Friday night," Edwards said. He attributes First Farragut's rapid expansion to a high-growth area and the congregation's "pioneer spirit": "Whatever needs to be done to move to the next level, they've been willing to do."

Even if it means sharing the parking lot with a hearse.

Growing church sees light at end of tunnel

HARRISON, Tenn. — If there's one thing the Rev. Brian Rainwater has learned at his church plant in the Chattanooga District, it's patience.

It's been two years since Rainwater was appointed to Lighthouse UMC, the Holston Conference's most recent church start since three new ones were launched this year. And things are looking up for Lighthouse: One worship service in September packed 185 participants into a sanctuary only meant to hold 140.

But after months of giving out flowers, lollipops and sodas — months of direct mail and inviting people to worship — Rainwater wishes the numbers were higher. He's also disappointed that the north Harrison community where Lighthouse is located hasn't grown as projected.

"When you consider we started out with five people meeting around a table for bible study, we're doing O.K.," he says. "But I guess I'll never be satisfied. The time-delay on some of these things has been amazing."

For example, when Lighthouse members



FLOWER GIRL — The pastor's daughter hands out plants at a supermarket.

tossed out 2,000 lollipops in a Harrison Christmas parade, it was six months before a woman walked into a worship service in response. The woman had seen Lighthouse's name and worship time on a card attached to the candy. "I know that God wants me to be involved in church," she told Rainwater.

Church members also handed out cold sodas and flowers at grocery stores, saying, "We're doing this to show you God's love — no strings attached." To the people who seemed interested, members gave cards with worship information.

"We put the bait out there and let God prompt their hearts," said Rainwater. "In time, we always have a few new people come in."

Lighthouse has been averaging about 110 in worship, but the biggest attendance ever occurred after the congregation invested less than \$2,000 on a direct-mail campaign. They sent out 8,000 Igniting Ministry postcards, offering free Bibles to children who came to worship. They ended up giving out 90 Bibles on the Sunday following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

With the congregation growing beyond the capacity of the Seventh Day Adventist



CROWDED HOUSE — Lighthouse packs in worshippers on a Sunday in September.

church where they currently meet, Lighthouse has begun a search for a new place. Until then, members celebrate the fact that half of their worshippers were previously unchurched. They're also happy about Tennessee legislation that will eventually improve Harrison's access to Interstate 75.

"The people just aren't here yet," Rainwater said. "When they get here, we'll be ready."

Relocating churches in Holston

- Bethel Seymour, Maryville District
- Central Lenoir City, Oak Ridge District
- Fairview, Maryville District
- First Farragut, Oak Ridge District
- Kodak, Knoxville District
- Martel, Oak Ridge District
- First Whitwell, Chattanooga District