

# CONNECTION

## Bishop W. Earl Bledsoe assigned to lead NTC

By Dr. Joan LaBarr  
Editor

The 2008 South Central Jurisdictional Conference (SCJ) ended in celebration for the North Texas Conference NTC) with newly elected Bishops W. Earl Bledsoe assigned to the North Texas Annual Conference and the NTC's own James (Jim) Dorff assigned to the Southwest Texas/Rio Grande Annual Conferences.

The 297 SCJ delegates met July 16-19 at the Hilton Anatole Hotel in Dallas. First UMC, Dallas, hosted the opening Wednesday evening Holy Communion and Memorial Service and closing Service of Consecration for the three new bishops in its historic sanctuary.

Bishop Bledsoe of the Texas Conference was elected Thursday morning on the third ballot, the first election of the 2008 conference. Bishop Dorff of the North Texas Conference was the final election late Friday night.

The second new bishop elected, John Michael (Mike) Lowry of the Southwest Texas Conference will serve the Central Texas Conference. All of the bishop assignments for the new quadrennium (four year term) will begin in September.

Bishop Alfred L. Norris, who came out of retirement to serve the unexpired term of the late Bishop Rhymes H. Moncure, Jr., continues to lead the conference through August. He plans to return to the Atlanta area, where he and his spouse, Dr. Mackie Norris, have their home.

In addition to Bishops Bledsoe and Dorff, Bishop Lowry also has ties to the NTC. Bishop Lowry served as an associate at Plymouth Park UMC, Irving, early in his ministry in the late 1970s.

When elected Bishop Bledsoe was serving as superintendent of the Texas Conferences' Bryan/West District, which includes 88 congregations spread across a large area of south central Texas. Sixty percent of the congregations are rural and 29 have a predominantly African-American membership.

Bishop Bledsoe has spent a lifetime as part of a Methodist pastoral family.

His father, Rev. Wilbart Bledsoe, received the call to ministry in 1950, the year Bishop Bledsoe was born. His father, who is now in a nursing home with failing short-term memory, has been exceedingly proud of his pastor son and would frequently ask: "Are you a bishop yet?"

When Bishop Bledsoe called home to say that he is indeed a bishop, his father shouted in joy.

The seeds of excellence and hard work were planted years ago by his parents, who challenged their five children to strive for the best.

His education includes the Bachelor of Arts degree from West Texas State University, Canyon, with an English Major and Spanish minor; Master of Divinity degree from Perkins School of Theology, SMU, where he was the Benjamin E. Mays Scholar in Hebrew and excelled in Greek; the Doctor of Ministry degree from Drew University, Madison, NJ, where his focus was "Equipping Christian Educators to Respond to the Needs of At-Risk Inner City Teenagers."

Prior to being appointed as a superintendent in 2002, Bishop Bledsoe served Spring Woods UMC, Houston, where membership and worship attendance held steady, despite a devastating fire that destroyed the sanctuary and turmoil that came after a previous pastor surrendered credentials under complaint. Under Bishop Bledsoe's leadership, the church built a \$1.5 million sanctuary, including a state of the art multi-media center, maintained an operating budget of \$1.2 million, and paid 100 percent of apportionments for the two years he served there.

His other appointments include:

• **1993-2000** Pastor of Cypress UMC, Cypress, where church membership increased from 1,400 to more than 2,000.

• **1990-1993** Director of Teaching Ministries, Texas Conference, where he



Bishops Alfred L. Norris, left, and Janice R. Huie, right, escort Bishop W. Earl Bledsoe to the stage after the election. (Photo by Jill Krone)

established the first conference-wide Disciple Bible Training and assisted congregations to develop "Book Table" ministries.

• **1986-1990** Senior associate pastor of Bear Creek UMC, Houston, in charge of program and program staff, helping grow the membership from 2,300 to more than 3,300.

• **1981-1985** Student pastor at St. Andrews UMC, Fort Worth, while attending seminary at Perkins School of Theology, SMU, Dallas.

• **1974-1981** Part-time local pastor of Wyatt Memorial UMC, Amarillo, and Anahuac Circuit, Anahuac, which he served bi-vocationally while still working as a YMCA director.

Bishop Bledsoe has been chair of the Texas Conference Board of Ordained Ministry, president of the Council on Finance and Administration, chair of the Houston Board of Missions Revitalization Committee, chair of the Texas Methodist Foundation Board, and chair of the Gulfside (Waveland, MS) Long Range Planning Team, which built the new Norris Hall.

Bishop Bledsoe and his wife, Leslie, are the parents of six adult children. She is a licensed social worker who has also been credentialed as a local pastor in the UMC. Several years ago Mrs. Bledsoe lost her eyesight after severe illness. She continues to pursue her own ministry interests with commitment and an inspiring faith, spirit and resolve.

# INFORMAtion:

Members of the **SCJ Commission on Religion and Race** met together for the first time in six years, June 16-18 at **Mount Sequoyah Conference Center**, representing conferences in Arkansas, Texas, Louisiana and Oklahoma.

**Jerri and Bill Savuto**, NTC missionaries to Maua Methodist Hospital, Kenya, have announced a project of constructing 16 apartments in a four-story building for medical personnel at a cost of \$80,000 per story. Donate by sending a check to the NTC Treasurer, with "Advance 316" on the memo line, and mail to "Staff Flats," NTC UMC, P.O. Box 866128, Plano, TX 75086.

**First UMC, Richardson**, hosted **Project Transformation's 10th anniversary** invitational celebration banquet Aug. 1. Invited guests were the hundreds of PT's volunteers, as well as the 2008 record-largest class of 100-plus interns. A new video produced for PT was premiered as part of the program, and co-founder **Sarah Wilke** spoke.

Nine NTC Lay Speakers attended the fourth annual **SCJ Lay Speaking Ministries Conference** July 11-13 at **Mount Sequoyah Retreat Center**, featuring **Dr. James B. Scott** and **Dr. Molly Davis Scott**, who spoke on restoring Wesleyan practices, especially class meetings and Communion, in the UMC.

Some 18 Dallas inner city youth participated in "**Operation Uplift**," a summer business camp that teaches entrepreneurship skills. The camp was housed at the **UNT-Dallas** campus and included "**Lunch with a CEO**" in which five CEOs of area businesses ate lunch and shared their success strategies with the young people. **Highland Hills UMC, Dallas**, and **First UMC, Coppell**, co-sponsored the camp.

**Sherman 2008 Great Days of Service** special twist was the June 26 "**Sherman Night Out**" family fun events held simultaneously at two city parks that drew large crowds of people of all ages.

Aided by a \$65,000 grant from the **Hillcrest Foundation, Oak Lawn UMC, Dallas**, through its new **Community Outreach Center**, provides financial and clothing aid for "those too rich for assistance, too poor to live," in addition to the outreach ministry to the homeless poor the church started in January 2003.

**The Texas Methodist Foundation** recently announced the addition of **Rev. Richard Caperton** to its staff as the Foundation's representative for the **North Texas Annual Conference**.

An 83 year-old cornerstone at **First UMC, Burkburnett**, was removed on June 1 as **Rev. Don Pellikan**, welcomed and led the group in prayer. The time capsule artifacts included a Burkburnett Lodge No. 1027 A.F. & A.M Proclamation dated July 21, 1925, a letter from the First National Bank, dated July 24, 1925, verifying receipt of one dollar as the first donation made toward the building fund, given by Mrs. M. L. Hamilton, wife of the pastor, and July 1925 editions of the **Burkburnett Star and the Wichita Daily Times** containing stories of the special event, celebrating, "*A magnificent structure costing about fifty thousand dollars.*"

**Mary Brooke Casad**, executive director of **The Connectional Table of the UMC**, addressed the **70th Annual Meeting of the NTC Ministers' Spouses** on June 9 at **First UMC, Richardson**. The theme was "Our Hope is Built." At least 75 NTC clergy spouses gathered for the luncheon event.

More than 40 children from **Dallas Bethlehem Center** and **St. Luke "Community" UMC, Dallas**, experienced "**Imagine God!**" - a Children's Musical Exploring and Expressing Images of God, on June 26 and 27; volunteers from several NTC churches participated as children and youth explored God through music, dance and art.

On June 15, **Lovers Lane UMC, Dallas**, celebrated two long-awaited ceremonies: retiring the debt and breaking ground for the **Tom Shipp Memorial Chapel**.

## UMCOR needs Flood Buckets

United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) Sager Brown Depot in Baldwin, LA, has nearly depleted its supply of flood buckets after shipping thousands of buckets in response to recent floods.

Churches with completed flood buckets or health kits ready for pickup are requested to call Marvin Smith, Howe UMC, 903-532-6718.

Donations may be made to NTC Treasurer for UMCOR Material Resources. Please note "Advance No. 270" on check.

For information to prepare a Flood Bucket, please visit the NTC website [www.ntcumc.org/umcor](http://www.ntcumc.org/umcor) and select "Flood Bucket Instructions."

## Back to School/ Back to Church

Once again the NTC is offering complimentary postcards for local churches to use in various creative ways. Because the state legislature mandated that Texas schools must now wait until Aug. 25 to open this year, there will be more uniformity in school opening dates. This is a plus in making plans to support the local church efforts with broader scope marketing campaigns.

NTC churches are eligible to order complimentary oversized postcards through The Crouch Group, the NTC advertising agency of record. An array of designs can be viewed on the [www.thecrouchgroup.com](http://www.thecrouchgroup.com) website. Click on the "Back to School/Back to Church" link on the home page. Each church is eligible to receive cards equal to 1½ times its average church attendance, as recorded in the 2008 Journal.

There will be no postage charge for cards delivered to district offices. Deadline for district office delivery was Aug. 4, which was also the deadline for customized orders. Deadline for ordering for delivery to church addresses is Aug. 11. All cards are ordered through The Crouch Group, either through the website, by calling toll-free 888-211-0273, or e-mailing Tim Crouch, [tim@thecrouchgroup.com](mailto:tim@thecrouchgroup.com), or Ron Ray, [ron@thecrouchgroup.com](mailto:ron@thecrouchgroup.com).