

CONNECTION

Getting your priorities straight

By Bishop W. Earl Bledsoe
North Texas Conference

The quadrennial leadership training held by the General Church was outstanding this year. The theme,



Bishop Bledsoe

“Living the United Methodist Way” featured concrete examples and ministries modeling the four areas of focus. In case one may have forgotten, we are focusing our efforts as a denomina-

tion on four foci:

- (1) Clergy and lay leadership development
- (2) Starting new congregations and transforming existing ones
- (3) Ministries with the poor to help eliminate poverty
- (4) Improving global health

In one plenary session, our very own Oak Cliff UMC, Dallas, was highlighted as a viable model involving transformation of an existing congregation.

I was proud of Rev. Diane Presley, pastor at Oak Cliff, and Rev. Edgar Bazan, who coordinates the church’s Hispanic outreach, as they demonstrated how an older congregation can reinvent itself to meet the needs of a growing and changing population in its community.

Also, our very own Rev. Fred Durham, Assistant to the Bishop and Director of Connectional Ministries for the NTC, facilitated a meeting of our Conference’s dialogue on how well we are doing in aligning our Conference programs and efforts around the four foci.

My hope and prayer is that during the coming months and years, we will begin to refocus and rethink what church can become to the millions of people in our communities.

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Lay Leaders challenged

By Katy Kiser
Dallas-Denton District Lay Leader

“Seek God’s Vision” and remember “Christ is the Rock.” These are just a few of the words that Bishop W. Earl Bledsoe had for over 130 lay leaders, gathered for a historic NTC Lay Leader event Feb. 7 at First UMC, McKinney.

Inspiring, informative, incredibly useful, were just a few of the adjectives used to describe “A Day with the Bishop.” This was exactly what Conference Lay Leader Richard Hearne, who was home convalescing after surgery, and the other district lay leaders had hoped for this unprecedented event in the North Texas Conference. It was indeed a unique opportunity combining inspired worship, radical hospitality, training, networking, and time with the bishop.

After a rousing time of praise and worship led by the praise band of First UMC, McKinney, lay leaders heard from Rev. Jim Ozier, NTC Director of New Church Development and Transformation, and Fiona Macleod Butts, Director of Talent Development for Southwest Airlines. She is also an NTC clergy spouse, wife of Rev. Wally Butts, Cornerstone UMC, Garland.

Dr. Ozier challenged the lay leaders to help their churches practice biblical hospitality. Focusing on “The Power of the Introduction,” he modeled skills that make reaching out to guests easy and enjoyable. He explained how knowing how to make a simple introduction is often the forerunner of introducing someone to Christ; that making a new convert can be as simple as offering radical hospitality.

Southwest Airlines is noted for its emphasis on hospitality, and Talent Development Director Butts extended the idea suggesting churches should operate as families where members are highly valued, nurtured, loved, and looked after. She advocated leadership that is peppered with grace and a loving heart—in other words the kind of servant leadership Christ himself modeled to his disciples. She stressed that NTC churches can create a powerful culture that draws people



NTC Bishop W. Earl Bledsoe and Lay Leaders at the Feb. 7 event.

to the love of Christ.

District Lay Leaders Linda Parks, Wichita Falls, and Ben Bennett, Paris-Sulphur Springs, spoke about the duties of the lay leader and his, or her, role to sit on most church committees. They also admonished lay leaders to be aware of the spiritual pulse of their congregations, remembering to pray for their church as well as pinpointing ministry needs from the lay perspective.

Bishop Bledsoe told the gathering that it is God’s vision the NTC must seek. He believes this is accomplished by trusting God, taking risks, and knowing that God will do what God has always done – reveal Himself and His call for us. Bishop Bledsoe reminded the laity that Christ is the vine and we are the branches if we abide in Him; if we separate from Christ, we cannot live. He said United Methodists should not be afraid of “truth telling” and holding each other accountable to our mission to make disciples. During the question and answer time, he tackled big issues such as the lack of evangelism, how to keep young people in the church, apportionments and separation of church and state.

He admonished the laity to love one another, demand integrity, and work together, always remembering not to hide behind false considerations or be ashamed of the gospel. It was clear to the lay leaders present that Bishop Bledsoe is deeply committed to working with clergy and laity alike.

In his words, “The North Texas Conference is a strong conference, which can be great.”

INFORMAtion:

The Bishop ...

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◆ **Rev. Jim Ozier** was guest speaker for the **Suncreek UMC, Allen**, "2009 Palmer Studies in the Faith Lecture Series," Feb. 22-23. **Dr. Ozier's** theme was "The Big Differences Little Differences Make."

◆ **NTC Disability Ministry** held a symposium on "Disability Concerns," on Feb. 21 at **Custer Road UMC, Plano**. Keynote speaker was **Leslie Bledsoe**, spouse of **Bishop W. Earl Bledsoe**.

◆ **NTC Annual Men's Summit** will be held March 28 at **Christ UMC, Plano**, beginning at 8:15 a.m. with featured speaker, **Dr. William "Billy" Abraham, Perkins School of Theology, SMU**. For more information, please call 972-596-6073..

◆ The **UM Committee of Ministries with Deaf, Late-Deafened, Hard of Hearing and Deaf Blind People**, met Feb. 13-14 at **Lovers Lane UMC, Dallas**. **Rev. Tom Hudspeth**, has chaired the committee for the past eight years.

◆ **Janet Lahr Lewis, UMC General Board of Global Ministries**, missionary from Israel and Palestine made presentations at selected locations in **NTC**, March 4 and 5. She discussed the background and history of the conflict. Lewis spoke at **First UMC, DeSoto; The Center for Spiritual Living, Dallas; Perkins School of Theology, SMU; First UMC, Frisco; and First UMC, Denton**.

◆ **Rev. Sheron Patterson, Highland Hills UMC, Dallas**, is recruiting breast cancer survivors, their families and friends, to help build a **Habitat for Humanity** house, March thru May. Please visit website: **www.drsheron.com..**

◆ **St. Luke "Community" UMC, Dallas**, featured **Dr. Walker L. Kimbrough** as its guest lecturer at the "Dr. Zan W. Holmes, Jr. African Heritage Lecture Series" on Feb. 15 to 17.

◆ Thirty-two volunteers from **Grace UMC, Sherman**, completed **UMCOR Early Response Team** training and are ready to help in the face of disaster at home and elsewhere..

◆ The **NTC** fourth annual **Mission Forum** will draw hundreds of mission-minded **UM** to **Northaven UMC, Dallas**, on March 7. The Forum is a joint project of **UMVIM** and **NTC Global Ministries Task Force**.

◆ **First UMC, Coppell**, presents "The Wizard of Oz," a musical by the area youth in grades 6-8, March 26 thru 28 at 7:30 p.m. and 29 at 2:30 p.m. Tickets are \$5 to \$20. Please call Nathan Frank, 972-462-0471, ext. 216.

◆ **Dr. Zan W. Holmes, Jr.**, will be the guest preacher at the March 8, 10:00 a.m. worship services, at the **Community UMC, Dallas**, the new combined congregations of **Lambuth UMC**, and **Crest-Moore-King UMC**. The church is located at 4501 S. Marsalis Avenue in Dallas. **Rev. Jacqueline Waiters-Lee** is the pastor.

I just finished reading again Adam Hamilton's book entitled, *Leading Beyond The Walls – Developing Congregations with a Heart for the Unchurched* [Abingdon press 2002]. In this book Rev. Hamilton raises four important questions that every congregation needs to ask itself if it is going to be effective in reaching the church's mission:

- (1) Why do people need Jesus Christ?
- (2) Why do people need the church?
- (3) Why do people need your church?
- (4) To whom does the church belong?

The answer to the fourth question is Jesus Christ. Christ is the head of the church. Jesus' divine vocation for the whole of the Gospel is on seeking and saving the lost (see Luke 19:10). Our efforts should always reflect an outward focus to reach others for the sake of Christ. I look forward to our work together.

Annual Conference Mission Project

The **NTC Annual Conference Mission Project** gifts will assist in what is becoming known as "the re-building miracle in Sabine Pass."

Participate in this effort to rebuild Sabine Pass UMC and the community by supporting this effort to rebuild the area now rebounding from Hurricane Ike.

Please send financial gifts to: **NTC Ministry Center, P.O. Box 866128, Plano, TX 75086-6128**. Make checks payable to "NTC Treasurer" and marked "Advance 916" on the memo line.

For more information, please call **Rev. Marji Bishir, Associate Director of Connectional Ministries, 972-526-500, 800-969-8201, or e-mail: bishir@ntcumc.org**.

Not Your Parents' Offering Plate

A New Vision for Financial Stewardship

J. CLIF CHRISTOPHER
FOREWORD BY BILL EASUM

An NTC Connectional Ministries Seminar in the Five Practices of Fruitful Congregational Series

Trietsch Memorial UMC, Flower Mound

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First UMC, McKinney

March 15 • 2 pm - 6 pm
\$15 per person • Register:
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For more information call **Rev. Liz Moen, 972-526-5000, ext. 216**
e-mail: moen@ntcumc.org

Dr. Clif Christopher is an elder in the UMC. He founded the Horizons Stewardship Company in 1992. As a pastor, Clif led six major building and eight capital campaigns in churches ranging from 350-2,000 members. He has been awarded the National Circuit Rider Award for outstanding leadership in developing vital congregations



Dr. Christopher