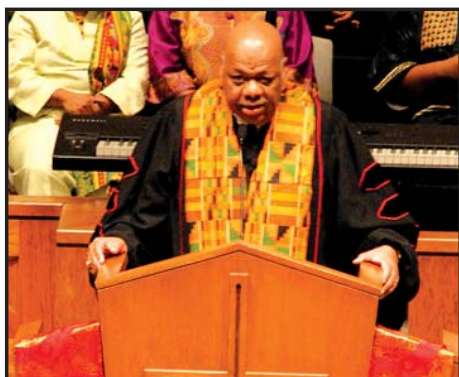


CONNECTION

'The Dream is Alive!'

By John A. Lovelace
Special Correspondent

The drums boomed, the dancers swooped and swirled and the voices rang out, none more fervently than that of Bishop Alfred L. Norris.



Bishop Norris addresses the Africa Night Celebration.

This was the North Texas Conference on a colorful, Africa-themed Monday night, June 9, at Hamilton Park UMC, Dallas, celebrating ties with United Methodism's Africa University half a world away in Zimbabwe.

This was a grateful university accepting North Texans' check for \$500,000 and promising to use it to start construction this month on a new health science center.

And, finally, this was a university pledging to create a plaque to hang permanently in that new structure recognizing the North Texas Conference's generosity, honoring Bishop Norris and his wife, Dr. Mackie Norris, for their leadership in the Bishop's Initiative on Africa University and in memory of the late Bishop Rhymes H. Moncure, Jr. and his wife, Jewell.

The total raised so far toward the \$1 million goal was announced at \$800,000. The evening's offering of nearly \$5,000 added to the march toward meeting the pledge.

Bishop Norris took his sermon text from Isaiah 35:1-2. Under the title "Blooming in the Desert," he spoke not only of the need for water over one-third of the earth's surface but also

the need for spiritual irrigation and nourishment. He described the recent Lenten study on Africa University as "bringing hope and healing to our brothers and sisters in Africa."

He said the university's attitude toward students is "deserts can bloom and we think you can, too. We'll give you a chance."

He swept the congregation right along with him as he referred to "this young man who grew up in a carpenter's shop. Son of an unwed mother. At age 12 impressing the lawyers. Came to the desert at age 30. Bloomed in the desert and on the third day he said, 'I'm doing this for you.' Nobody, NOBODY can stop God's people!"

"Your life might be dry tonight," he concluded, "but God can stir up good gifts in you. You can bloom!"

Preceding the sermon, five costumed dancers accompanied by drums portrayed the story (Acts 8:26-39) of the encounter between Philip and the eunuch who had read the scriptures and

asked to be baptized. "When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing." (NRSV).

Africa University vice president James Salley received the check on behalf of the university. He acknowledged Zimbabwe's current "time of confusion" in political uncertainty but said the school has received "no interference." He noted the university founders' wisdom in starting with a School of Agriculture so the students could benefit from its farm. "It's God's business," he added.

He said AU has 1,300 students from 26 countries, 13 modern buildings, a balanced budget and no debt. After sharing all that data he was resoundingly applauded.

Pastor Rev. Harold Dangerfield welcomed conference members and guests to Hamilton Park UMC, and the church hosted a reception for Bishop and Mrs. Norris following the service.

Statistician report reflects increasing concerns

Conference Statistician Rev. Marvin Guier and Bishop Alfred L. Norris both responded strongly to 2007 data showing decreases in all three primary units of measure for the North Texas Conference:

- Total membership
- Average worship attendance
- Average Sunday School attendance.

Dr. Guier told the conference's opening business session on June 9 that the results are "simply not acceptable." Bishop Norris said, "I hate that this happens on my watch. God knows I hate it. . . Every member is an evangelist. No excuses. Nothing can convince me or God that you can't do it."

Total conference membership at the close of 2007 was 158,712, a decrease of 778 persons from 2006, the third year of decline in a row.

Average worship attendance decreased by 270 persons to 61,626. The ratio between worship attendance and

membership remained at 38.8 percent.

Average Sunday School attendance decreased for the third year in a row and the eighth time in the past decade to 32,537 or 409 fewer than in 2006.

The number of new members received decreased from 9,788 in 2006 to 8,916 in 2007. This was the lowest number in a decade.

Professions of Faith

"Nonetheless," said Dr. Guier's statistician report, "we give thanks for the 3,253 persons who came to know Christ and joined our churches by profession of faith in 2007, although that, too, represented the lowest number in a decade."

The only "up" statistic was the final one in the statistician's report. Grand total paid to all causes increased in 2007 by 3.6 percent to \$141,536,935. Dr. Guier said, "We continue to be thankful for the faithful generosity of United Methodists in North Texas."

INFORMAtion:

White roses placed one by one in a vase symbolized the NTC's June 10 remembrance of 14 ordained clergy and five clergy spouses who have died within the past year. **Wichita Falls District Superintendent Rev. John Rosenburg** delivered the Memorial Service sermon. Family, friends and conference members who felt special closeness to these beloved ones stood as the following names were called:

Ordained Clergy - Martha Louise Gilmore, John W. McGee, William T. Stephenson, Benjamin R. Oliphint, Charles William Cook, William D. Swift, Gene Cloise Welborn, Charles H. Standifer, Myrtis Nanette Davis, Philip del Rosario, Hansel V. Caraway, John M. Shuler, William C. Crouch, and Marshall Hodge.

Spouses - Joan McPherson, Clotilda Elizabeth Shelley, Patty Bell and Joyce Crelia Nelson.

One day workshops on **Developing DNA for Fruitfulness: Casting Vision and Creating Culture**, by **Dr. Jim Ozier** are scheduled for July 10 at **First UMC, Irving**, July 23 at the **NTC Ministry Center** and Aug. 14 at **Grace UMC, Sherman**. For more information, please call 972-526-5000.

Rev. David Adams, General Secretary for the United Methodist Men, reported to the NTC annual conference the need to extend grace to more men. He presented a plaque to NTC UMMen outgoing president **Todd Bristow** recognizing him as **Fellow** in the **Society of John Wesley**.

Youth leaders received the NTC's standing ovation for their reports at annual conference. Outgoing **Youth Council** president **Brian Tan**, **Faith UMC, Richardson**, welcomed new president **Chidi Anyadike**, **Trinity UMC, Duncanville**, who stated "You can count on us to carry on the Wesleyan tradition."

New church planters from 1968 to 2008 gathered for a reunion at the **NTC Ministry Center** on June 3. Church starts in 40-year span represent 14 percent of the NTC UM churches.

Lovers Lane UMC, Dallas, celebrated a June 15 debt retirement and groundbreaking ceremony for the **Tom Shipp Memorial Chapel, Hospitality Corridor and the John and Mary Watson Hall**.

First UMC, Denton captured the **Texas United Methodist Historical Society's Kate Warnick Award for Local Church History** among churches in seven Texas conferences with its book, "**Open Hearts: the First 150 Years.**"

An unexpected **trust-fund gift of \$2.6 million for clergy pensions**, will help lower **North Texas Church** apportionments 7.7 percent in 2009. Total budget for 2009 will be \$11,545,486. The gift from **The Pierce M. Williamson and Jeanette G. Williamson Trust** is in memory of Mrs. Williamson's mother, Regina K. Nadolny. Mr. and Mrs. Williamson were members of **Highland Park UMC, Dallas**, who years ago planned a gift from their estate to help fund the conference's pension liability.

NTC **annual conference** endorsed **Rev. Jim Dorff** as a candidate for bishop during their **SCJ** conference in Dallas July 16-19.

NTC **Lay Leader Billy Ratcliff** completed his four-year term at the annual conference and welcomed new **Lay Leader Richard Hearne** and **Lay Leader-elect Linda Parks** during the June 9 Lay Leader's address.

An **Order of Saint Luke** gathering is planned for the northern sector of the Dallas Metroplex July 7. For more information, please call **Rev. Rebecca Grogan**, 972-625-1281.

Members at the 2008 annual conference helped the **Christ's Foundry Fellowship's 1000 Bells Campaign** by purchasing bells to help build the first building. A total of 830 bells have been sold. For more information, please call **Rev. Owen Ross**, 214-497-9552.

Conference honors retiring clergy

The 2008 NTC Annual Conference honored eleven clergy who are retiring in 2008. Retirees were invited to address the June 10 session of annual conference. They were also recognized at the annual luncheon and participated in the services of commissioning and ordination. Those retiring with their years of service are:

Members in Full Connection

Charles Edward Cox - 33
Daniel Frank Dalton - 14
Dan Leppin Hoke - 36
Richard Arden Kuhlbars - 28
Edgar B. Millican - 19
Thomas Q. Robbins - 34
Jerry Matthews Simmons - 31
Linn Caraway Zink - 27

Full Deacon/Diaconals

Joyce Leslie Stephens - 8
Rita M. Yoes - 23

Local Pastor

Ouidga Meyers - 13

Commissioning and Ordination

2008 Probationary Membership Commissioned on Elder Track

Jay Cousino
Annelda Joy Crawford
Wendy Gale Currran
Dyan Marie Dietz
Christopher John Everson
Aleze Michelle Fulbright
Holly Hatch Gotelli
Davis Morgan Lessner
Stacey Lynn Plyakhun

Commissioned on Deacon Track

Shawn Stephanie Bakker
Stacy Lee Pell

Probationary Membership toward Recognition of Orders

Jerico J. Pagdilao

Full Connection Ordained Elder

Brian Graham Bosworth
Leroy (Lee) Elder
Beatriz Estela Pacheco
Elizabeth Kay Turner Talbert
Mary Christine (Christy) Thomas
Ann Carol Girlinghouse Willet

Full Connection Ordained Deacon

Lydia Laurel Pellikan

ADVANCE 271 Domestic Disaster Response - Midwest

Please send contributions to:
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