

CONNECTION

Getting your priorities straight

By Bishop W. Earl Bledsoe
North Texas Conference

What's up with this accountability stuff?" That was the question a local pastor asked me a few weeks ago. From the tone



Bishop Bledsoe

of his voice I knew he was not comfortable with the word. "Accountability" stems from the Latin word *acomptare*, which means "to give an account for something." In essence, as Christians we all are accountable to God for the things of God. The scriptures are full of stories about accountability. The parable of the talents, or better yet, the story of the three servants in Matthew 25:14-30 is just one example of many that Jesus offers to suggest that accountability is the root of faith relationships. We all are ultimately accountable to God. Accountability helps us to get our priorities, and it helps us to focus on doing justice and mercy.

"But what about being accountable to one another?" he asked. I believe this is the crux of the matter. It's noble to say we are all accountable to God, but to live out that accountability as Christians we must be willing to hold one another accountable as well. Several years ago, I found myself going here and there, all over the place, struggling with priorities and being stretched to the limit. I needed some balance in my life. My calendar was 24/7; fun, personal, and family time came after work. With work being 24/7, there was no time for fun, family or rest. I remember praying about it, and a long-time friend by the name of John Drew came to mind. John was a member of my congregation and a banker. He always wanted to know the bottom line. After much prayer and trepidation, I finally asked John to be my "accountability partner." He was stunned and asked me what that meant. I stated: "I'm giving you permission to ask me about my soul

New Advent/Christmas designs

The North Texas Conference *Home for Christmas/Watch Night* campaign will offer two new designs for local church 2008 Advent/Christmas inviting and welcoming campaigns. "The Wonder of Christmas" features three young children whose faces communicate anticipation and expectation of the season. "Hope for the World" puts the emphasis on the Christ Child, in a photograph of a strikingly evocative Nativity Scene from Mexico.

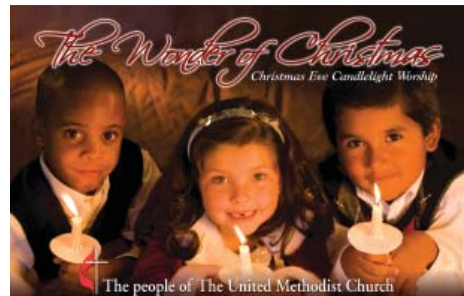
Both designs will be available in the array of complimentary oversize postcards offered to NTC churches to customize for their particular uses through NTC *Igniting Ministry*. Any other *Home for Christmas or Watch Night* design will also be available for churches to select. All are available for viewing on the www.thecrouchgroup.com website.

The paper maché nativity scene in "Hope for the World" was handcrafted in Mexico, likely in a coastal area, as indicated by the seashell gifts of the Magi. The collection was on loan from Bethlehem in Denton County, a private collection of over 2,600 depictions of the birth of Jesus. Owner Judy Klein is organist and a 42-year member of Blue Mound UMC, Denton.

The media campaign components of *Home for Christmas/Watch Night* will once again include advertising of Christmas Eve Candlelight and other special Christmas week and Watch Night New Year's Eve services in area newspapers, including the zoned editions of the Dallas Morning News. District Offices are being provided forms for churches to indicate their service times. Dec. 1 is deadline for submitting this information to District Offices.

Local churches are encouraged to use their creativity in shaping the up-

and how I am balancing my church life with my personal life." From that point up until now he has held me accountable. When we meet, he looks me in the eye and asks the first question: "How is it with your soul?" The second is right behind the first: "Are you spending time with Leslie?" And then the final one: "What are you doing for fun?"



coming inviting and welcoming efforts. This includes using tried and true resources like the venerable Bring a Friend program in new, fresh ways.

Deadline for ordering the oversize postcards, allocated to churches at one and one half times their average worship attendance as recorded in the 2008 Journal, is Nov. 21 for orders shipped to District Offices. Churches may opt to have cards shipped to their address to have them customized at their own expense. The Crouch Group indicates that imprint orders may be accepted as late as Nov. 21, but it is highly advisable to have these orders in as early as possible.

In addition to the complimentary cards, churches may purchase other promotional items at special rates, including customized yard signs (deadline Nov. 15). Custom banners and non-customized yard signs may be ordered as late as Dec. 10.

For more information or consultation on *Home for Christmas/Watch Night* materials and campaign ideas, contact Tim Crouch or Ron Ray at 888-211-0273 or e-mail: tim@thecrouchgroup.com or ron@thecrouchgroup.com.

For information on the NTC *Home for Christmas/Watch Night* emphasis, contact Dr. Joan LaBarr at 972-526-5036, 800-969-8201, or e-mail: labarr@ntcumc.org.

My hope and prayer is that over the next several years in your midst we will come to terms with the word "accountability" and give it a chance to help balance our church lives with our personal lives. If you don't have someone or a group that will hold you accountable, take the first step. It will make a difference!

INFORMAtion:

◆ A luncheon conversation with **Dr. Leonard Sweet**, author and professor at **Drew University, NJ**, will be held at **First UMC, Richardson** at 11:30 a.m. on Nov. 17. Lunch cost is \$10. Visit web site: www.fumcr.com.

◆ **Christ UMC, Plano**, broke ground on a new 60,000 sq. ft. sanctuary and connecting space to the existing building on Aug. 24 and is expected have the first **Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED)** certified sanctuary in the state of **Texas**.

◆ **Rev. Lisa Greenwood**, pastor of **First UMC, Commerce**, led the celebration on Aug. 24 for the **consecration** of its **New Ministries Building**, a 6,900 sq. ft. multi-function facility.

◆ **UMCOR Early Response Team Training**, 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Nov. 1 at **Stonebridge UMC, McKinney**, and Nov. 8 at **University Park UMC, Dallas**. For more information see www.ntcumc.org.

◆ **Rev. James Minor**, led the **Casa Linda UMC, Dallas**, to host a **community open house** for over 70 visitors on Sept. 20.

◆ **NTC Equipping Disciples Team** presents **Confirmation Celebration**, Feb 15, 2:00 to 5:00 p.m. at **First UMC, Denton**. To register, call Janet Thompson, 972-526-5000, ext. 245, or e-mail: thompson@ntcumc.org.

◆ **Rick Reilly** presents "Nothing But Nets," Nov. 3 at **Highland Park UMC, Dallas**. Admission is the purchase of one bed net (\$10). For more info, call Allison Aars, 214-523-2256.

◆ **NTC Connectional Ministries** offers a luncheon presentation, **ZOE Ministry's Giving Hope Program**, Nov. 21, 12:00 p.m. at **NTC Ministry Center, Plano**. For more information, call 972-526-5000.

◆ **First UMC, Whitesboro**, observed the **50th Anniversary** of its sanctuary on Sept. 14 with former pastors and more than 285 persons participating in a Sunday worship and celebration. A luncheon and video presentation of the church's history followed.

◆ Members of **Mulberry UMC**, led by pastor **Rev. Dee Morton**, provided refreshments, rest facilities and a shady place to catch their breath for several hundred cyclists who took on the 64-mile challenge for the 22nd annual **Autumn in Bonham Bike Rally** on Sept. 27.

◆ **The VA North Texas Healthcare System Chaplain's Service** will offer a free workshop, "**Helpful Homecomings for America's heroes: A Clergy/Community Leader Training Event**" on Nov. 10, from 8:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at **Holy Family of Nazareth Catholic Church**, 2323 Cheyenne St., Irving, Tx. To register, please call 214-857-1070.

◆ "**Five Alive, Encountering the Bible with all Five Senses**," workshop will be led by **Perkins School of Theology** professor and NTC clergy member, **Dr. Alyce M. McKenzie**, Friday and Saturday, Nov. 7-8, at **Hamilton Park UMC, Dallas**. For more information, please call **John Bartham**, 972-564-2157, or visit www.ntcumc.org.

New position created to align Ministries

Bishop W. Earl Bledsoe has announced the appointment of Rev. Fred Durham as Assistant to the Bishop/Director of Connectional Ministries. The position combines the Disciplinary responsibilities of the Connectional Ministries director with a new set of responsibilities designed to more closely align NTC program ministries with the functions of the episcopal office.



Rev. Durham

Bishop Bledsoe explains that the new position was created to better coordinate and implement the vision and mission of the annual conference. In explaining why he chose Rev. Durham for the position, he said: "I chose Fred because of his knowledge and experience in the NTC and his 'servant's heart,' which I believe will be ideal for the work of assisting the bishop."

Prior to being appointed to the Connectional Ministries position in October 2007, Rev. Durham was superintendent of the Sherman-McKinney District. He has served numerous churches in both urban and rural areas during his 37-year ministry.

Spanish Immersion Course For Beginners

Focus: Conversation-based immersion into Spanish Language and local culture for pastors and church workers

Feb. 9-12 and 16-19
April 20-23 and 27-30
Monday thru Thursday (4 days, 3 nights) for two weeks

C2K facilities in Bennett Hall
Tyler Street UMC, Dallas

For more information, please call
Rev. Diane Presley 214-943-4328 or
e-mail: presley@ntcumc.org

Annual conference schedule change

The Annual Conference Planning Committee has announced a change in the schedule for the 2009 session. After serious consideration, the committee, with the support and encouragement of Bishop W. Earl Bledsoe, voted in its Sept. 30 session to meet June 7-9, ending on Tuesday evening rather than midday Wednesday.

The goal is to change the tenor and tone of annual conference, particularly in regard to making the agenda covered and time required more accommodating to younger laity. Details of the new schedule will be announced as soon as the committee and staff make adjustments.

The plan is also to make appropriate adjustments in District Conferences to allow for fuller consideration of issues and opportunities for holy conferencing in these smaller settings.