

# CONNECTION

## Getting your priorities straight

By Bishop W. Earl Bledsoe  
North Texas Conference

Have you ever expected one thing and experienced another? I had that happen a few weeks ago. I was invited to



**Bishop Bledsoe**

preach at St. Luke “Community” UMC in Dallas. I was prepared to preach at the 11:00 worship service, but learned that I was scheduled to preach at the 8:00 a.m. service as well.

Thoughts of traditional and typical early morning worship in a United Methodist congregation ran through my mind. Most, if not all, of the ones I had experienced were much more traditional in worship style, usually with an older, mature age level, and typically low attendance. What I experienced at St. Luke “Community” UMC was something else. I discovered an active, vibrant, and alive worship experience—young and old, contemporary style, and high attendance with a full choir stand and participation of lay and clergy worship leaders.

I confess that my mind was transformed by the experience. The worship service was awesome, engaging, and exciting. I was so well adjusted to the culture of what an early Sunday morning worship service was that I did not expect what I experienced. I was reminded of Paul’s letter to the church at Rome, where he writes, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Romans 12:1-2 NRSV). *The Message* interprets it this way: “Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and

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## NTC leadership group to develop strategic plan

The North Texas Conference Strategic Planning Team (SPT) is hard at work to fulfill the task affirmed by the 2009 Annual Conference—to have a comprehensive strategic plan ready to present to the 2010 Annual Conference for approval and set the Conference on a new course toward the future.

As the team continues its task of discernment, moving toward the development of specific details, Bishop W. Earl Bledsoe has asked Rev. John Fiedler, pastor of First UMC, Dallas, to chair a Leadership Group to help provide coordination and direction. In addition to Dr. Fiedler, other team members include Bishop Bledsoe; Kay Yeager, First UMC, Wichita Falls; Charles Reed, St. Luke “Community” UMC, Dallas; Fiona Macleod Butts, Cornerstone UMC, Garland; Rev. Tyrone Gordon, St. Luke “Community” UMC; Rev. Fred Durham, NTC Assistant to the Bishop/Director of Connectional Ministries; Rev. Marvin Guier, NTC Director of Administration/Treasurer; Rev. Jim Ozier, Director of New Church Development/Transformation; and consultant Christie Latona.

The SPT, which has 35 members representative of the diversity of the conference, went back to work following the summer break by holding a retreat at The Prothro Center. Dr. Fiedler explains that in order to accomplish the goal of creating a proposal, clear methodologies must be defined. To that end, the Four Areas of Focus of the UMC have been selected as the key points around which plans possibly will be developed.

The focus areas include: Developing Leaders, Creating places for new people, Eliminating poverty, and Improving health globally.

As consultant and facilitator, Latona helps team members work through issues and visions to arrive at specific proposals. This task has also included a thorough review of the “hopes and dreams” cards submitted at the 2009 Annual Confer-



**Dr. Fiedler**

ence and feedback from small group discussions there. They also considered the feedback emerging from the [www.holyconferencing.com](http://www.holyconferencing.com) website.

“These wishes were profound, significant and timely,” Dr. Fiedler says. He says that dominant themes included hopes for inclusion, sharing the biblical witness and relevance, noting it is clear that a lot of energy and creativity went into the hopes and dreams process.

As an initial task, the SPT took the cards and sorted them into the focus areas that they most reflected.

Dr. Fiedler explains that as the team goes about its task, the members expect and appreciate that Bishop Bledsoe will bring ideas from his own experiences, and as a process-oriented leader, he has made it clear that he will participate fully and support whatever the team develops.

With such a broad spectrum of feedback, Dr. Fiedler acknowledges that it is inevitable that as work progresses, the team will have to delve into polity-related issues.

Dr. Fiedler says the team works with the understanding that however well-intentioned its efforts may be, they realize that whatever is presented will ultimately be up to the Annual Conference to approve.

Asked what topics seem to generate

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# INFORMAtion:

◆ **Bishop W. Earl Bledsoe's** sermon at the "50th Anniversary service" of **Chapel Hill UMC, Dallas**, on July 12 reflected on the mission of the church to "sow seeds" everywhere.

◆ The annual **Vision Africa** banquet is scheduled Oct. 15 at **Park Cities Baptist Church**, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. **UM Bishop Sunday Onuoha**, founder of **Vision Africa** will speak. Visit [www.visionafrica.org/banquet](http://www.visionafrica.org/banquet) for reservations.

◆ **First UMC, Krum**, consecrated its new home, Sept. 13, a cream-brick 10,000 sq. ft. building. "We've left room for another building or two including a sanctuary, in a few years," explains pastor **Rev. Christy Thomas**.

◆ **NTC Lay Speaking Ministry** conducted a short course "Prepare to Teach," Aug. 15 at the **NTC Ministry Center** for those interested in improving their skills as facilitators of adult learning.

◆ A video of the "Breaking Bread and Barriers," Aug. 11 potluck dinner and testimonials at **Pleasant Mound-Urban Park UMC** is available at [www.ntcumc.org](http://www.ntcumc.org) website under "NTC Video Center."

◆ **Katherine Long**, daughter of **Anya and Rev. Mark Long, First UMC Trenton**, worked tirelessly for 21 days at a "Lemonade Stand" to raise \$1,003 for the church's new playground and children's books for the Church Library. For more information, visit [www.firstumctrenton.org](http://www.firstumctrenton.org).

◆ **Wellspring UMC, McKinney**, volunteers distributed school supplies to children at the **Collin County Samaritan Inn** as hair stylists worked on the children's hair Aug. 23. For entertainment, **Rev. Kevin Strempe** made and flew paper airplanes with the children..

◆ At least 80 people gathered at **Pleasant Mound-Urban Park UMC** for an evening of "Breaking Bread and Barriers" sponsored by **Justice For Our Neighbors (JFON)** a ministry of **UMCOR**.

◆ **Northaven UMC, Dallas**, offers a *weekend spiritual retreat* with **Dr. Jim Finley** Oct. 16-18. For more information, or to register, log on to [www.northaven.umc/finleyretreat2009](http://www.northaven.umc/finleyretreat2009).

◆ **Oak Lawn UMC, Dallas** celebrated its *135th anniversary* Sept. 25-27, beginning with an **Art Show** on Friday, a **Golf Outing** on Saturday and **Worship Service** on Sunday with **Bishop W. Earl Bledsoe** as guest preacher.

◆ **Lovers Lane UMC, Dallas** will hold its "6th Annual Silent Night" Oct. 3 benefitting its **Deaf Ministries**. Keynote speaker will be **Bishop Peggy Johnson**.

◆ **Custer Road UMC Plano**, received certification as a "Welcoming Church" by the **UMC**. When searching the **UMC** website, "Find-a-Church," **Custer Road UMC** is listed in red as a "Welcoming Church" For more information, e-mail **Karen Fordce, [kfordyce@crumc.org](mailto:kfordyce@crumc.org)**.

## Getting your priorities straight...

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quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you." (Romans 12:1-2)

The truth of the matter is that we can all become adjusted to the status quo and miss out on God's transforming power in our very midst. My hope and prayer is that during this next year of our ministry together we will experience God's transforming power and change in our lives.

## NTC leadership group to develop strategy...

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significant energy, Dr. Fiedler points out leadership as a key component. "We must find new ways of recruiting and developing persons for lay and ordained ministry if we are to enhance the covenant," he emphasizes.

The SPT will have an opportunity to engage in continuing dialogue with laity and clergy as representatives brief the upcoming Clergy Retreat, Oct. 19-21, and the Lay Leaders Gathering, Oct. 24. Plans are also in place to hold listening sessions with a gathering of NTC Church Council Chairs (or their equivalent). "It is our intent that the process and proposals that will emerge will be discussed in local churches before Annual Conference. We want churches to offer suggestions, objections, and any other feedback," Dr. Fiedler explains.

As the SPT continues its bimonthly meetings, members incorporate all the feedback as they evaluate and deliberate. Also, every lay and clergy member of the NTC can continue to be in dialogue with the SPT by providing feedback through the Holy Conferencing Website that can be accessed at [www.holyconferencing.com](http://www.holyconferencing.com), [www.holyconferencing.org](http://www.holyconferencing.org), or by logging on through the homepage of the [www.ntcumc.org](http://www.ntcumc.org) website.

## NTC Clergy Retreat 2009 Tanglewood Resort, Pottsboro • Oct 19-21

*Rethink Covenant ...And are we there yet?*

• **Tanglewood Option** (2 nights, meals, leisure activity)

Single room \$379 Double room \$294 - Reservations, call 800-833-6569

• **Prothro Center Option** (Overnights and breakfasts)

Single room \$284 Double room \$254 - Reservations, call 903-786-2141

• **Commuter Option** (Lunch, dinner and leisure activities)

One day \$115 Two days \$158 - Call 800-833-6569

For more information, go to [www.ntcumc.org](http://www.ntcumc.org) and select "Clergy Retreat" link. For scholarship information, contact Billy Echols-Richter at [billy@graceavenue.org](mailto:billy@graceavenue.org). A registration form is available online at [www.ntcumc.org](http://www.ntcumc.org).

**2009 Fall Meeting  
South Central Jurisdiction  
Black Methodists for  
Church Renewal  
Hamilton Park UMC, Dallas,  
Oct. 1-3**