

# CONNECTION

## Getting your priorities straight

By Bishop W. Earl Bledsoe  
North Texas Conference

Words cannot convey our deep appreciation for the outpouring of love and support shown to us as we mourned the



**Bishop Bledsoe**

death of my father. Thank you for the many cards, letters, notes, flowers, e-mails, text messages, and wall-to-wall notes on Facebook to let us know that you were praying for us during this time of loss. Although we have shared words of comfort and encouragement with others, we now know what it means to receive the gift of prayer and love from the body of believers – it is awesome!!!

Many persons traveled to Midland to attend the wake and/or the funeral services. Needless to say, we were humbled and grateful for your presence. There were so many special notes and cards (we read them all). One that especially touched our hearts came from the Rev. Dennis Wilkinson, senior pastor of First UMC, Coppell. Dennis lost his father during the holidays in 1967 and wrote about it in an article entitled, “The Package and The Gift,” based on Isaiah 9:2 – “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.” Dennis reminded our family, and other families who experience tragedy and loss during the holiday season, of this: *“Indeed, God loves you directly and God loves you through other persons. Regardless what packages may come your way in life – large or small, fancy or plain, good or bad – they should never overshadow nor should they be mistaken for the true Gift.”*

One might ask, “Where is God in the midst of loss and hurt?” I have experienced God’s grace and presence in the outpouring of love and support shown by the community of faith. The gift of love and support is a living testimony to the power and presence of God. Thank you for your witness.

See “Getting your priorities...” on Back

## DBC looking toward a new day

The Dallas Bethlehem Center (DBC) has initiated an ongoing capital campaign aimed at generating 100 entities (individuals, UMW groups, Sunday school classes, congregations, organizations and corporations) to give \$100 per month to DBC. The Seekers Class at Spring Valley UMC has been giving \$100 month to the Center for several years. Their generosity was the impetus for this idea. If one hundred individuals or groups will give \$100 a month, they could create a sustainable capital resource of \$120,000 per year. Donations may be mailed to DBC at 4410 Leland Avenue, Dallas, TX 75215 or made on the DBC website: [www.dallasbethlehem-center.org](http://www.dallasbethlehem-center.org) – using credit card. For more information, contact the executive director at 214-428-5171, or e-mail: [pbrooker-dbc@sbcglobal.net](mailto:pbrooker-dbc@sbcglobal.net).



Child Care Director Carolyn Surry-Middleton, left, and Executive Director Petrella Booker share a common vision of Dallas Bethlehem Center’s future. They are standing next to the Christmas tree in DBC’s full-size gym, a great asset to the agency and its outreach to the South Dallas neighborhood it serves.

## Reflections on NTC Strategic Plan

By Rev. Lisa Greenwood  
First UMC, Commerce

John Fiedler and Fiona McLeod Butts met with the clergy at Tanglewood and then with Lay Leaders from local churches across the conference last month offering an update on the process of designing a strategic plan for the North Texas Conference.



**Rev. Greenwood**

The Team our Bishop has assembled shares, along with you, a deep commitment to the mission of the church, an urgency around our church’s decline, and a determination to participate in sustainable transformation. A key question as we have been about our task of crafting a strategic plan for the NTC has been: What is the role of the Annual Conference? This is no small question!

As United Methodists, we firmly believe the local church is the primary means for carrying out the mission of the church. So, naturally, what we ask, “What is the role of the Annual Conference and why does it need a strategic plan?”

In our connection, we do believe

there is a unique role of the Annual Conference, the primary connectional body of the church. What the Annual Conference can do best is to:

1. Recruit, train, nurture, deploy leaders in the church,
2. Start new churches, and
3. Connect local churches in mission so that together we might have more impact than we can have individually.

The strategic planning process seeks excellence in each of these three areas through best practices and accompanying structural changes. The timeline is short as we are charged to present a plan at the 2010 Annual Conference. Here are the milestones for the process:

- Dec. 15, 2009 -Finalize first draft.
- Jan. 2010 - Meet with Council Chairs and Pastors.
- Feb. and March - Revise plan.
- April - Submit final plan in the NTC Conference Workbook.
- May - Discussions at District Conferences.
- June - Annual Conference.

Please log on to the website: [www.holyconferencing.com](http://www.holyconferencing.com) where you can find updates to the Strategic Plan and have an opportunity to enter your own thoughts or questions.

# INFORMAtion:

◆ **First UMC, Dallas**, will be featured in a national *Christmas Eve* broadcast to a potential audience of 26 million viewers. The special program is produced by **First UMC** and has been chosen by the **UM General Commission on Communications** to be part of an ecumenical Christmas presentation. In addition to the pre-recorded service on the ABC Network, **WFAA-TV** will broadcast a live service from **First UMC** at 11:00 p.m. on Christmas Eve.

◆ **NTC Communications** has produced a cable TV spot to support local church inviting and welcoming efforts for *Christmas Eve* services. They direct viewers to **www.christmaseve-worship.com**, a domain owned by the conference and linked to the **www.ntcumc.org** website. The cable TV spot will be aired on *Sudden Link Cable* from Dec. 14 thru 24, and *Verizon/Grande Cable* from Dec. 17 thru 24.

◆ Over 50 people weathered the storm to share in singing, praying and Holy Communion as witnesses to the commandments of God to love God above all else and love your neighbor as yourself at the second *Breaking Bread and Barriers* event on Dec. 1 at the **Pleasant Mound-Urban Park UMC** in southeast Dallas.

◆ On Oct. 25, 225 youth and adults played, laughed, sang, worshiped, and came together to be church in a new way in the **Dallas-Denton District** at the *3DYouth Rally*, hosted by **First UMC, Denton**.

◆ *The 2010 Five Day Academy for Spiritual Formation* will be March 7-12 at **The Prothro Center at Lake Texoma**. For more information, please contact **Rev. Woody Weilage** at 972-492-9393 or e-mail: **pastor.woody@verizon.net**.

## Getting your priorities...

*Continued from Front Page*

As you celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, we pray God's continued blessings upon you for caring and sharing. Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year! We love you, North Texas Conference!!!

*Bishop W. Earl Bledsoe  
Leslie J. Bledsoe  
Letitia Bledsoe*

◆ **Wesley-Rankin Community Center, Dallas**, Executive Director **Kathy Stutesman** calls the Nov 14 benefit, "...a wonderful evening and a successful event, raising over \$130,000 for the ministry and mission of our West Dallas Community." She thanks all who helped by volunteering, attending, providing auction items, bidding for items and other supportive acts.

◆ **Perkins School of Volunteer Youth Ministry** will be offered on Jan. 9 from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. at **Arapaho UMC, Richardson**. This training will cover many facets of youth ministry useful to volunteers, including a theology of volunteerism. Instructors will be **Rev. Walt Marcum, Highland Park UMC, Dallas**, noted author and veteran youth ministry leader; **Georgia Harrison; Rod Hocutt**; and **Joy Allen**. For more information, please call **Dr. Andy Stoker**, 972-526-5000.

◆ **The Harold Simmons Foundation** and **Ginger Murchison Foundation** have pledged to match year-end gifts made to the **Wilkinson Center** in amount of \$120,000. According to Executive Director **Brian Burton**, the gifts are timely and hugely affirming as the Center's donations have declined while needs grow exponentially. Send gifts to: **The Wilkinson Center**, P.O. Box 720248, Dallas, TX 75372, or give online at **www.wilkinsoncenter.org**.

◆ **Rev. Eric Folkerth, Northaven UMC, Dallas**, dedicated the church's new *Celebration Garden* on Nov. 1. A *columbarium wall* with 120 niches for urns and spaces for memorial plaques includes the reconstructed mosaic cross from the Lecture Lounge of the old education building. The garden features a 30-foot labyrinth made of buff and rose paver stones. For more information, please call 214-363-2479 or log on to website: **www.northaven.org**.

◆ **Harless Memorial UMC, Denison**, celebrated its *100th anniversary* Oct. 25. Among the day's activities was dedication of a time capsule to be opened in 25 years. Pastor **Rev. Bill Brown** reports that the day was a wonderful time of celebration that drew members and friends from across North Texas and Arkansas. For more information, please call 903-465-6402.

## Vision Africa challenge grant

*Vision Africa*, a four-pronged mission enterprise based in Nigeria with strong roots in the North Texas Conference and offices in Dallas, has until year's end to match a \$120,000 challenge grant from the **Ginger Murchison Foundation of Athens, TX**.

According to the recent report, supporters have raised \$85,000, but still need \$35,000 more by Dec. 21.

With the deadline quickly approaching, the Board of Directors and wonderful volunteers are doing everything they can to make that happen.

For more information, including two five-minute video slideshows explaining *Vision Africa's* ministries, see **www.visionafrica.org**.

For information on the matching grant, contact Frank Roby at **Frank@conceroglobal.com**.

## 2010 NTC CLERGYWOMEN'S RETREAT

### Cultivating Missional Wisdom

February 7-9

## The Prothro Center at Lake Texoma

**Dr. Elaine  
Heath**

*McClellan Assistant  
Professor of Evangelism  
Perkins School of  
Theology, SMU, Dallas*



**Dr. Heath**

A registration form is available on website: **www.ntcumc.org**. Select "What's New".

The form and a \$35 deposit are required for reservations.

For more information, please e-mail:  
Rev. Rebecca Frank, **rfrank@upumc.org**.