

Ken's Comments

Can you believe it! By the time you receive this newsletter Thanksgiving will have passed and Christmas will be on the way. In between these two festivals is the season of Advent, which begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas and continues until sunset on Christmas Eve.

The word "advent" means "coming." During Advent the Church celebrates its hopes and expectations in the coming of Jesus, past present and future. We identify with those persons in ancient Israel who looked for the coming of the Messiah. Like them, we look forward to the annual celebration of the birth of Jesus the Christ. We look for the presence of Christ here and now through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. And we look forward to that time in the future when the fullness of God's kingdom will be completed in and through Christ.

One of the oldest of all Christian symbols, and surely one that is second only to the cross, is the flaming candle. Long before Christians began to celebrate Christmas as the day of Christ's birth, the candle was used to signify Christ as "the Light of the world." During Advent, this symbolism is expressed with the lighting of a candle on each of the four Sundays preceding Christmas Day, each candle marking the next step on our spiritual pilgrimage to the celebration of the birth of Jesus. Always these candles serve as a silent witness to that glorious light that shone at Bethlehem on the night of his birth. (Check out St. Luke's version of the story).

The burning candle also represents faithful discipleship. Jesus, who called himself "the Light of the world," also said his disciples were to be "lights" in the world. Christians, then, are the "candles" by which the world is made bright with hope and spiritual confidence. As each of us "glows" with his outreaching love, the darkness of the world is driven back a little farther and the values for which Christ lived and died are expressed in your life and mine -- which means the kingdom of God becomes more of a reality in the world.

When was the last time you thought of yourself as a "light-giver" or a "light-bringer?" When was the last time you thought of yourself as a "point of light" amid the darkness of the world? You are, you know! Jesus himself has given us our assignment for this and every other season: "Let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Mt. 5:16). This year, let us shine brightly as we offer Christ to our congregation, to our community and to the world. What is it the hymn says: "This little light of mine, I'm goin'a let it shine. . . everywhere I go, I'm goin'a let it shine." Shine on, during Advent and every day of the year!

End of Year Report Forms

The 2008 End of Year Reports will be mailed to pastors. Please remember to return the Application for Church of Excellence in Evangelism, even if your church does not qualify for one of the medals.

We must also have a copy of Tables I, II, and III!

Birthdays & Anniversaries

December 2008

4-John & Annette Dunn (A)	23-John Rhoads (B)
6-Kevin & Nancy Cole (A)	24-James Bailes (B)
6-James & Joyce Mullens (A)	24-Ronnie & Patsy Mutter (A)
8-Wayne & Sandra Hedrick (A)	24-E.C. & Joanne Vestal (A)
9-Peyton Rowlett (B)	26-Emily Buchanan (B)
16-Charles Liles (B)	29-John Brewster (B)
19-Pete & Glorial Bradby (A)	29-Rhonda Ketron (B)
20-M.C. Taylor (B)	29-Billy & Karla Kurtz (A)
21-Kenny & Christian Faught (A)	30-Stephanie Blue (B)
21-Walter & Betty Smalley (A)	30-Scott & Rhonda Ketron (A)
22-Gordon & Nancy Ridenour (A)	31-Ken & Anita Henderlight (A)

Wesley Woods Chili Cook-Off Results

Teams

- ▲ Don't Double-dippers – Waibel family From 1st Farragut UMC
- ▲ Pirates of Kingston – Garren Family from Kingston UMC
- ▲ Mom & Pop Chili – Milligan Family from Concord UMC
- ▲ Carico Hot Chili – Carico Family from Kern Memorial UMC

Judges Award

- ▲ 1- Mom & Pop's Chili
- ▲ 2- FUM Moms
- ▲ 3- The Don't Double-dippers

People's Choice Award

- 1- FUM Moms
- 2- Pirates of Kingston
- 3- The Don't Double-dippers

Table Decorations Award

- ▲ 1- Pirates of Kingston
- ▲ 2- The Don't Double-dippers
- ▲ 3- Carico Hot Chili

Total Amount Raised for Camp

Wesley Woods:

\$487.00

Joys and Concerns

Our prayers are offered for:

- ◆ Rev. Richard Timberlake, who was hospitalized.
- ◆ Gayle Crabtree, wife of Rev. John Crabtree who was hospitalized.

Hurricane Clean-up Teams Needed

The Louisiana Annual Conference is now ready to receive UM Volunteers in Mission teams in the Baton Rouge area to help with clean-up efforts from recent hurricane flooding. Specific training on safe removal of debris and flood procedures will be scheduled for all teams that register. Churches interested in sending a team should schedule through Melissa Smith, Holston UMVIM Coordinator. She can be reached at msmith@fountaincityumc.org or at (865) 600-0271. All teams must receive training (even if they have previously responded) in order to be allowed into the affected areas.

Oak Ridge District

Clergy Meeting Schedule

2008

District Wide Clergy Meeting

First UMC, Oak Ridge
10:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon

December: No Meeting

2009

January 9

February
(No Meeting)

March 12

April 16

May 14

June
(No Meeting)

District Ministers Spouses

You are invited to complete a survey between November 1-30, at www.gcsrw.org. Then click under the RESEARCH area, "Clergy Spouse Survey – Learn More" menu button. Only one survey per computer is allowed. A hard copy can be made available by calling the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women (800-523-8390) by November 20.

Save the Date!

Ministers' Wives, mark your calendar for the Holston Ministers' Wives Retreat - March 12-14, 2009 – at the Oak Tree Lodge in Sevierville, TN. This year's retreat is dedicated to the memory of beloved friend, Mary Jane Smith, who passed away in September. If you have not attended the Wives Retreat, give it a try. The theme is *"Creating and Maintaining a Healthy Mind, Body and Spirit."* Watch for further information.

THE CLOSET

By Anita Ayers Henderlight – November 2008

The following reflection is based on a recent experience with a student at NESEI's school in the Yei region of South Sudan, Africa.

Innocently looking up from the storybook we were reading, Neema asked, "What's a closet?" Hmm. Images of closets in the U.S. raced through my mind. I thought about saying, "Well, a closet is a prime piece of real estate in a homeowner's search – 3 bedrooms, 3 baths, open kitchen, minimum 2-car garage, and spacious walk-in closets." For a brief moment, I considered describing the closet I had left at home in America. It was a 4th bedroom in which my husband had added wall-to-wall shelving so that we could get *more layers* of stuff stacked up. Who doesn't need to keep around decades old socks, sweaters, and shoes for every season? Then I thought about telling her that a closet can be metaphorical for people who live in deep, dark places in their minds and it's liberating when they can "come out of the closet."

Really, how do you describe something as frivolous as a closet to a young girl staring up at you who has experienced a lifetime of war and scarcity? Everything Neema owns can fit into one small, oblong silver trunk that she carries on her head. She's never been beyond the borders of Sudan, Africa.

"A closet," I said, "is a small space with walls where people can safely keep clothing, shoes, and other items important to them." It was a short response which satisfied her. She returned to reading aloud as we sat underneath a tree on campus. The rainy season, more like monsoon season, was in full swing. Yet we were enjoying a rare sunny, dry Sunday afternoon.

We were seated in straight-back chairs made from wood that had been locally harvested and crafted from a place down the road which leads to Congo. I was wearing a campy shirt, khaki pants and blue flip-flop Crocs on my feet. While forbidden in many parts of Sudan, pants could safely be worn on our campus. The threat of being arrested in town for wearing trousers lingered in the back of my mind, but I knew that the students, goats and chickens at our school didn't care how my snow white legs were covered. Conversely, Neema was dressed more traditionally in a simple white blouse, black school skirt, white socks, and black shoes. Being Sunday, she did not have to appear in her full school uniform. It just so happens that the skirt, shoes, and socks provided by NESEI donors, had become her staple wardrobe. It constituted a small collection of items worn day in and day out; not because these were items she favored, but they were practically the only articles of clothing she had.

This holiday season, I'm thankful for all the students at the NESEI school who teach me about keeping life in perspective. Is it important to keep a collection of stuff within tall walls? Do I really need that pink pair of faux fur boots? Sadly, no. What Neema unknowingly teaches me is that I *do* want to be reading aloud under a tree, with a friend, recognizing the bounty that comes from being in relationship with humanity. Being connected to another is sufficient. That cannot, and should not, be kept in a closet.

The New Sudan Education Initiative (NESEI) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, and all donations are 100% tax deductible. Donations may be made online at www.nesei.org or www.globalgiving.com or by check made payable to NESEI and mailed to the following address:
NESEI 123 Ethan Allen Ave., Suite 300 Colchester, VT 05446
\$500 helps provide education supplies, food, housing, and health care for students like Neema for one year at a NESEI school in Sudan.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

DECEMBER 2008

JANUARY 2009

Fri 5 - Sat 6 CABINET

Thurs 25 CHRISTMAS DAY
(Conference and District Office's Closed:
Wed (Dec 24) - Mon (Jan 5))

Sun 4 - Mon 5 CABINET

Thurs 8 District Wide Clergy Meeting
(10:00 a.m., First UMC, OR)
Program: "TBA"

Fri 9 2009 Books Close
District and Conference

Sun 11 Discipleship Training
(Brochure enclosed)

Tues 13 End Of Year Report Turn-In
(schedules have been mailed and are on the District web page)

Fri 16 - Sun 18 Resurrection Weekend #1

Mon 19 Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
(District Office Closed)

Fri 23 - Sun 25 Resurrection Weekend #2
Divine Rhythm

Great Turn Out at Festival of Gifts and Talents

I thought you would like to know the info regarding the District Festival of Gifts and Talents. It was a great success this year, with almost 300 in attendance. Here are the OR District churches who were represented: *Concord UMC; Central UMC (LC); Cowan's Chapel UMC; Kingston UMC; Jacksboro UMC; Beaver Ridge UMC; First UMC (OR); Midtown Valley UMC*

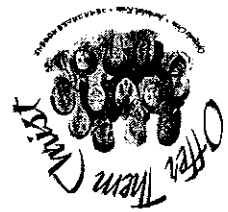
The voting resulted in a tie between Cowan's Chapel UMC and Concord UMC. We did a runoff election between the two, which also resulted in a tie. Luckily, Laura Lambert (Dir. Holston Conference Youth Ministries) was on hand, and she approved having Cowan's Chapel present their talent on the first weekend of Resurrection, while having Concord present theirs on the second weekend.

It was a great night of fellowship and worship! Brad Stapleton (*Oak Ridge District Co-Youth Ministries Coordinator*)

Conference and District Books Close January 9, 2009

This is the LAST day to submit 2008 apportionments and District Askings. Must be received by noon on 1/9/09

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December 2008

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