

Cross Connection

a Texas Annual Conference publication
an edition of The United Methodist Reporter

Label Area

Two Sections, Section A

076000 Volume 156

Number 04

June 5, 2009

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Vibrant, growing congregations changing lives and reshaping futures for Jesus Christ

'Glimpses of heaven on earth'

2009 Episcopal address reviews year's hardships and blessings

The people of the Texas Annual Conference have persevered and are hopeful, said Bishop Janice Riggle Huie in the 2009 Episcopal Address, which challenged area Methodists to help bring heaven on earth.

"At this annual conference, we rejoice that God is gracious and good," Huie said, as she recounted the year's challenges ranging from Hurricane Ike to the economic recession. "If you are feeling a little anxious or weary, it would be understandable. If you are feeling discouraged or downright frustrated, most of us would be sympathetic.

"Nevertheless, in the words of the Apostle Paul paraphrased by Eugene Peterson, 'We've been surrounded and battered by troubles, but we're not demoralized. We're not sure what to do, but we know that God knows what to do. God hasn't left our side. We are not giving up and we are

not keeping quiet.'"

Agents of transformation

Quoting religious scholar N.T. Wright, Huie asserted that Christians are "agents of transformation" who are responsible for "colonizing earth with the life of heaven."

"The Texas Annual Conference continues to take bold, imaginative action to fulfill God's dream that God's kingdom will come on earth as it is in heaven," she added. "By the power of [Jesus'] resurrection, his disciples become new creation people, birthing the life of heaven on earth.

"Therefore, United Methodist disciples help people re-build their lives and homes after the storm — whether that storm is a natural disaster or an economic one. United Methodist disciples help people re-claim their lives from whatever demon

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The Houston Children's Chorus provides a glimpse of heaven through music during the opening celebration of Annual Conference.

The duct tape parable



Friends of the Groom drama ministry blessed the Texas Annual Conference with a "new parable" and a new view of worship.

See story on page 4.



The mission of the Texas Annual Conference is *to equip congregations to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world to the glory of God.*

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The Cross Connection is the official publication of the Texas Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church.



Cote d'Ivoire partnerships advances

By Eleanor L. Colvin
Texas Annual Conference
Director of Communications

In one of its final actions during the Wednesday morning business session, the 2009 Texas Annual Conference voted to name the Methodist Schools of Cote d'Ivoire the Advance Special of the year. All funds given to the 2009-2010 Advance Special will support students in the country's 49

covered by such a gift.

As is the custom in the Texas Conference, spontaneous extravagant generosity was witnessed.

"Someone was moved to passion, and handed me a check for \$1,200," said Conference Treasurer Dr. Elijah Stansell, as he reported total conference offerings about an hour after Dennison's presentation. "If anyone else is moved to passion, I'll be outside waiting."

"This is personal for me, . . . this is the first time I've heard of this type of partnership with United States and African annual conferences ... Thank you for my brothers and sisters. Thank you for what you are doing for the United Methodist Church."

Methodist secondary schools.

Rev. Noel Dennison, chair of the conference's Sending Ministries, shared that a donation of \$600 would sponsor one student for the entire school year. The cost of uniforms, books and meals would all be

Three more conference attendees were so moved – each giving Stansell a check for \$1,200 and bringing the total gifts to \$4,800 before the adjourning of conference.

Welcoming new partners

Rev. Lacey Warner, who is

Dean of Academic Affairs at Duke University and a member of the Texas Annual Conference, announced yet another groundbreaking partnership. Warner said she was pleased to accept the Bishop's invitation for Duke to help strengthen the Ivorian seminary – ISHTA.

The partnership will take place at "the intersection of health care and education," Warner said, adding that "these

conference.

"Thank you," Koffi said as he began to recall the November 2008 net distribution. "I looked in my colleagues' eyes and saw tears – tears not of sorrow, but of hope...they came out transformed and touched by the experience with their brothers and sisters in Cote d'Ivoire."

It is the prayer of both annual conferences that the 2008 trip was the first of many. Teams are needed to visit communities to ensure the nets have been hung properly and to do construction work at Dabou Hospital.

"This is personal for me," said Rev. Kalamba Kilumba who was a part of the distribution team and will lead mission projects at Dabou Methodist Hospital. "You know I'm a native of Africa, and this is the first time I've heard of this type of partnership with United States and African annual conference ... Thank you for my brothers and sisters. Thank you for what you are doing for the United Methodist Church."

Rev. Kalamba Kilumba
Texas Annual Conference

two annual conferences are among the most vital in the connection."

On hand to represent the Cote d'Ivoire Annual Conference were Conference Lay Leader Emmanuel Auguste Ackah; Valentine Amoukou, director of Methodist Schools; Dominique Edoukoun Miezán and Sam Koffi, assistant to Bishop Benjamin Boni of Cote d'Ivoire. Koffi extended greetings on behalf of his bishop and

For more information about Partners In Mission trips to Dabou Hospital, contact Rev. Kilumba at 281-682-5693 or kkilumba@aol.com or contact the PIM office at 713-521-9383.

For more information about net hang-up teams, contact Rev. Cynthia Harvey at 713-521-9383 or charvey@txcumc.org.



The Cote d'Ivoire Annual Conference Lay Leader Emmanuel Auguste Ackah greets members of the Texas Annual Conference.



Rev. Lacey Warner, Duke University Dean of Academic Affairs, announces that the college will partner with the Texas Annual Conference and the Ivorian seminary.



Retirees honored for witness and walk

The Texas Annual Conference celebrated the life and ministry of 26 pastors who retired in 2009.

“One More Step” was the theme of the Tuesday morning service that focused on the faithful steps of these leaders in their mission fields, which ranged from the local church to Christian counseling to Lakeview Methodist Conference

Center.

Each retiree was presented a hand-made walking stick crafted from the wood of a tree that was toppled by Hurricane Ike.

Bishop Huie explained the biblical symbolism of the walking stick, by pointing to the verse “thy rod and thy staff they comfort me” from Psalm 23. She noted that walking sticks were used by shepherds to pro-

tect and guide the flock.

She expressed gratitude to the retirees who had dedicated their lives to protecting and guiding their respective flocks through their upright walk and witness.

Visit

www.txcumc.org/tac09videos to hear the retirees’ stories in their words.

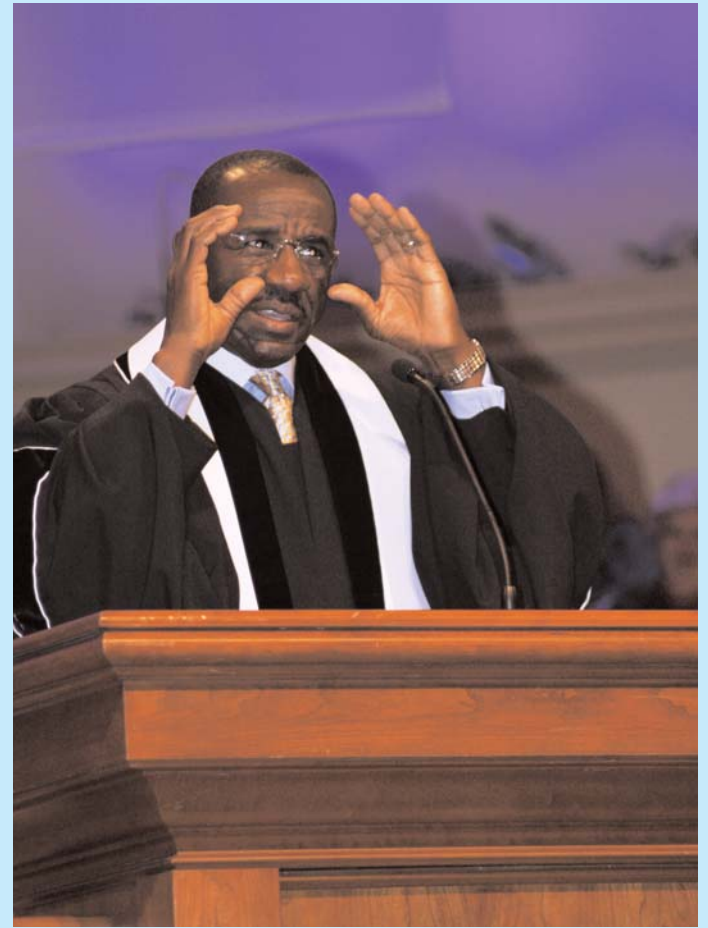


Top Photo: Bishop Janice Riggle Huie enjoys a laugh during the Texas Annual Conference Retirement service, as she demonstrates how walking sticks were used for protection.

Bottom Photo: *Walking tall.* The 2009 Retirees pose for a photo with Bishop Huie and their walking sticks.



Remember the journey, remember to witness



By Eleanor L. Colvin
Texas Annual Conference
Director of Communications

Remember. The journey.
Our journey. Your journey.
Their journey.

Remember their journeys
down small country roads and
busy city streets.

Remember their journey of
care for the hungry, naked,
sick, and imprisoned.

Remember their journeys of
love and compassion.

We remember and give thanks.

With a call to worship that focused on the Christian journey, the 2009 session of the Texas Annual Conference was called to order during the Sunday evening Memorial Service.

“They spent their journey laboring in the vineyard...loving the church with all their heart, mind and strength,” said Conference Treasurer Dr. Stansell, who noted that majority of the 30 families represented had personally touched his life.

Stansell’s sermon celebrated the witness of clergy and clergy spouses who died in the

2008-2009 year, while challenging others to consider their witness. “This message is for those who yet have to journey – who are doing their best to do the will of God,” he said.

Conference attendees were reminded that the 2008 General Conference voted to add “witness” to the membership vows taken when people join the United Methodist Church. The message lifted up witnessing as a vitally important practice of clergy and laity.

“You may never know the [effect] of your witness ... until you reach eternal heaven, and there stands someone to whom you have witnessed,” he said, “and they have witnessed to someone else about someone who can save anyone.”

‘Let your light so shine’

The service also included communion, which Bishop Huie officiated at an altar adorned with lanterns to represent the

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‘The Kingdom of God is like duct tape...’

Drama entertains, enlightens and expands concepts of worship



Top Left: Friends of the Groom actors, Rebecca Prewitt (right) and Jocelyn Sluka explore faith in one’s divine travel agent while flying “Celestial Airlines.”



Top Right: A member of the Texas Annual Conference participates in the candlelight prayer during the drama.

Bottom Left: Friends of the Groom actor and playwright, Tom Long plays the role of King Xerxes crowning a nervous Queen Esther.

Aspects of the spiritual journey — from embarking with excitement to getting lost and losing faith in one’s divine “travel agent” — were explored in the Monday night worship service featuring the Friends of the Groom drama ministry. Based in Ohio, the group was commissioned to write and perform this play especially for the Texas Annual Conference.

Music punctuated each vignette throughout the night. DeAndre Johnson of St. Luke’s UMC Bryan and Faith Ayers of St. Luke’s UMC Houston were the featured vocalists, while Taylor Davis of First UMC Fulshear, Sam Ramsey of St. Luke’s UMC Bryan and Shawn Welling served as musicians.

The first vignette showed two travelers flying Celestial Airlines. The first traveler was weary — after having traveled for a while, losing companions along the way and beginning to lose faith that he’d ever reach the destination. “There are lay-

overs, indirect flights and not to mention time spent just sitting on the runway,” he said. “Look at the people at all the other gates — going wherever they want. Why does it always have to be the narrow gate?”

The second traveler, although unsure about where her travels on Celestial Airlines would take her, was sure about one thing: “I know who sent me the ticket,” she said. “In the end, you just have to trust your travel agent.”

The second vignette focused on Esther chapters 1-10. “Because of Esther’s bravery, God’s people triumphed. By faith, who knows what could happen...Maybe God has place you where you are for just such a time as this.”

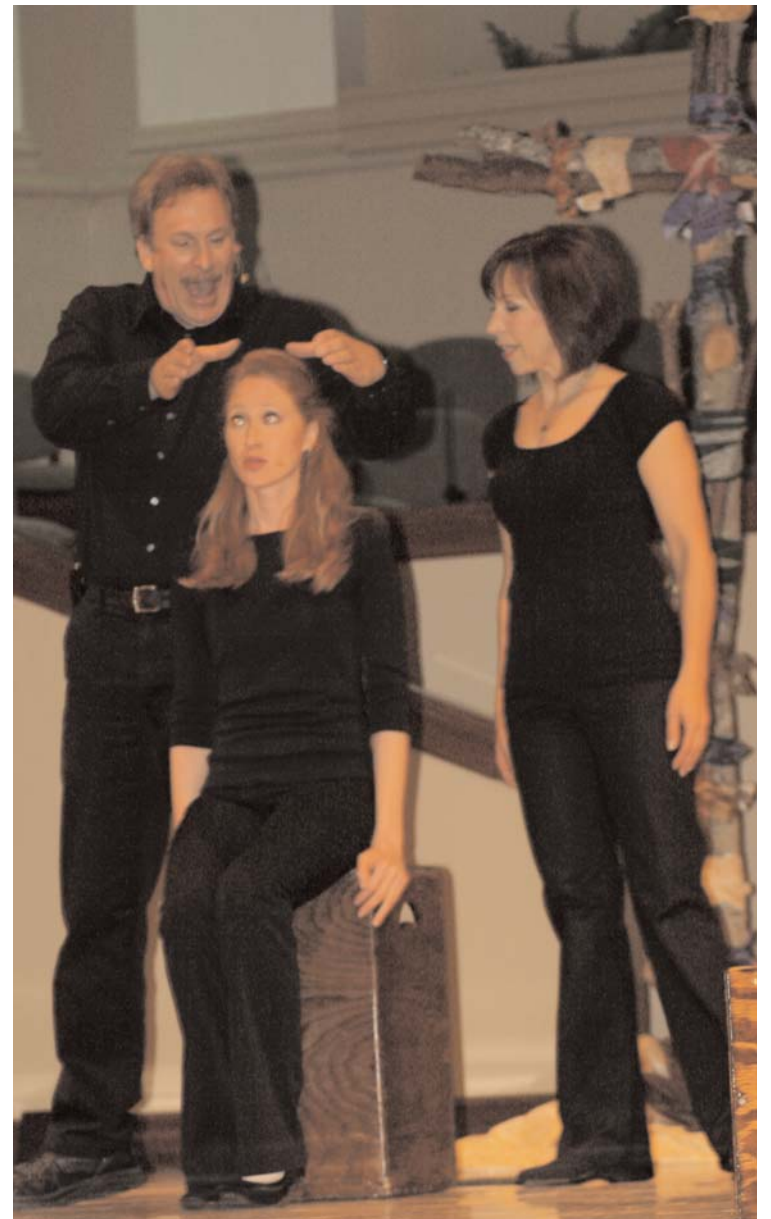
The last vignette was set in an auto repair shop, where a customer met Jesus and learned that “the Kingdom of God is like duct tape.” The comical scene included a heinous day to which most people can relate —

unexpected auto repairs, an important meeting at work, and a money-stealing vending machine when desperate for a Diet Coke.

In the scene, “Jesus” makes initial contact by supplying the customers need — Diet Coke. They begin to talk, and Jesus is able to reveal the woman’s heart to her through conversation. Through conversation and a photo album of her life, the Lord illuminated her fears, joys, secrets, and unspoken needs. And, most importantly, Jesus communicated the desire to connect with her by any means necessary.

“The Kingdom of God is like duct tape,” Jesus said. “If I can hook on to you in just one area — your passions, your finances, one area...I can get your heart to follow.”

The Friends of the Groom company members are: Tom Long, Director and Playwright, Jocelyn Sluka and Rebecca Prewitt.





“Together!”

Unity, love and self transformation are keys to changing the conference and world

By Eleanor L. Colvin
Texas Annual Conference
Director of Communications

Delegates to the Texas Annual Conference received their marching orders to spiritually unite in spite of divided thoughts and beliefs, to love unconditionally and to be personally transformed during Wednesday's Sending Forth Service. Rev. Christi Conway of Noonday/Flint UMC, Tyler, Texas powerfully preached her personal testimony, which abounded with universal lessons.

“You have to be a transformed agent to facilitate transformation,” she said. “We ourselves can't facilitate transformation if we are not being transformed.”

Dedicating the sermon to her mother-in-law who died less than one week prior to the Annual Conference gathering, Conway confessed that when she accepted the Bishop's invitation to preach two months ago, she had no idea what was coming her way. A sudden, terminal diagnosis within her family and countless other joy zappers were all headed her way.

“I wanted to push the pause button,” Conway said, acknowledging that the pause button is one of her favorite inventions,

“You have to be a transformed agent to facilitate transformation. We ourselves can't facilitate transformation if we are not being transformed.”

since it enables you to stop, go do whatever you'd like, and come back without missing a thing. “You can't hit the pause button on being transformed. You can choose not to be transformed, but that's never what God intended.”

Choosing love

Loving sincerely was also among the instructions Conway shared from Romans 12. Love is both a responsibility and choice.

“As United Methodists we believe in free will – that we have the right to choose things,” Conway said. “We have the obligation to choose what is right and good – to choose to love at all times.”

It's easy to love the people who think you're awesome and those who take you to lunch, Conway warned: “But when evil truly comes upon you...it's hard to love. There are times my flesh wants to do things I can't say in front of the Bishop. It's in those times that I have to pray and rely on that faith formed together,” she said, lifting up the Annual Conference theme.

“Rely on Bible study, rely on covenant groups, rely on the

Sunday school class, or whatever I'm involved in. If I was a part of the group that went to Africa, then rely on them and ask them to hold me up.”

Holding one another up is an expression of “being devoted to one another in brotherly

love,” which the sermon's text, read by Rev. Derrick Noble of Impact UMC in Port Arthur,

Texas, also called for. Other instructions included: Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn (Romans 12:14-15).

“When you weep with peo-

ple, you are the presence of Jesus Christ with them,” Conway said, undoubtedly in gratitude to all those who've wept and mourned with her family in the past weeks.

By myself or together?

Conway's teachings on unity required crowd participation. She first referenced a video illustration that preceded the sermon, which noted that together people can make a difference, because the things that unite are stronger than the differences that divide.

Employing this notion, Conway asked everyone to say the words “by myself” and “together.” She then explored the congregation's possible reactions based on whether one considers themselves a “thinker” or a “feeler.”

Both groups likely felt or thought about the frustrations associated with doing things alone. Yet, frustrations and challenges often drive people into deeper isolation, feeling as if it would be easier to accomplish the will of God on their own.

“God and I can do it by ourselves – I don't need anyone. I don't need the church,” she said. “Sometimes we do that as pastors; sometimes we do that as lay people. All we find out is we can't.”

“When we come together as a full body in this conference, we are a force to be reckoned with...Together nets can be distributed, lives can be saved, people can feel the love of God.”



Rev. Christi Conway, pastor of Noonday and Flint UMC in Tyler, Texas gives an exciting and powerful message during the “Sending Forth” worship service. Using her personal testimony as a point of reference, she encouraged delegates and clergy to unite spiritually, love unconditionally and be transformed.



'Hammer in the pitons'

Bishop shares tools for ministry climb at ordination

By Eleanor L. Colvin
Texas Annual Conference
Director of Communications

In a service that commissioned 14 and ordained 21 for ministry as deacons and elders, Bishop Janice Riggle Huie filled their ministry tool box with words of wisdom. She likened ministry to rock climbing and noted that they have common success indicators: one's equipment and one's team.

"Climbers who fail to anchor themselves to the rock have very short climbing careers," Huie said. "Climbers who work alone have a high fatality rate."

She added that the vows each pastor took Tuesday night – to pray, study scripture, commit to discipleship and more – anchor them to Jesus Christ. "When you're strung out on a vertical cliff of ministry – and you will be – practicing these vows will secure you," she said. "Those vows anchor us to the solid rock of Jesus Christ...hold us securely to the ministry to which God has called us."

Before a rock climber takes

a step, they hammer in pitons to secure their connection to the rock and to ensure their next move is safe. Similarly, a pastor's spiritual discipline secures their connection to the Rock and ensures their every ministry move. Creativity, balance and learning to adapt to situations also are tools of the successful climber and minister.

"An excellent pastor is a beautiful thing to behold," Huie said, echoing an earlier sentiment regarding excellent climbers. "We do not proclaim ourselves – stumbling, slipping, sliding, weary as we are – we proclaim Jesus Christ."

Climbing essentials III - equipped to climb Underused equipment

Huie shared a personal testimony that in the "busyness" of her early ministry year's she sometimes neglected personal scripture study and her prayer life.

"I thought I was going to be the first preacher since John Wesley to get it right," she said with transparency that seemed to resonate with all. "I was climbing up and down that ver-

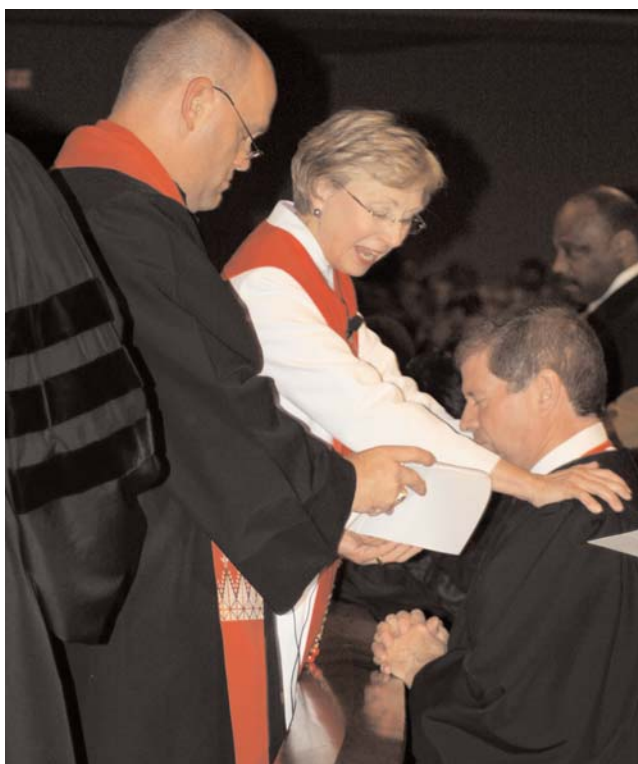
tical precipice [of ministry] without hammering in the pitons that anchor me to the rock. It is so easy to get caught up in our professional roles that we lose our own souls."

Another fatal mistake of ministers: "sometimes we let go of the rope that holds us to our sisters and brothers," the bishop said. That rope of wisdom, support, prayer and accountability can hold one steady even when the ground gives way beneath them.

She warned that newly ordained and commissioned pastors that – like climbing – ministry has unparalleled risks and unparalleled joys.

"You're embarking on an awesome expedition – awesome!" she said. "Dangers abound, but so do blessings. The sights will be glorious – glimpses of heaven and transformation on earth, so it looks like heaven.

"May the sights you see and experiences you embody fill you with a joy so real and a love of life so authentic that people can't help but see your witness and want to follow this God to whom you've given your life."



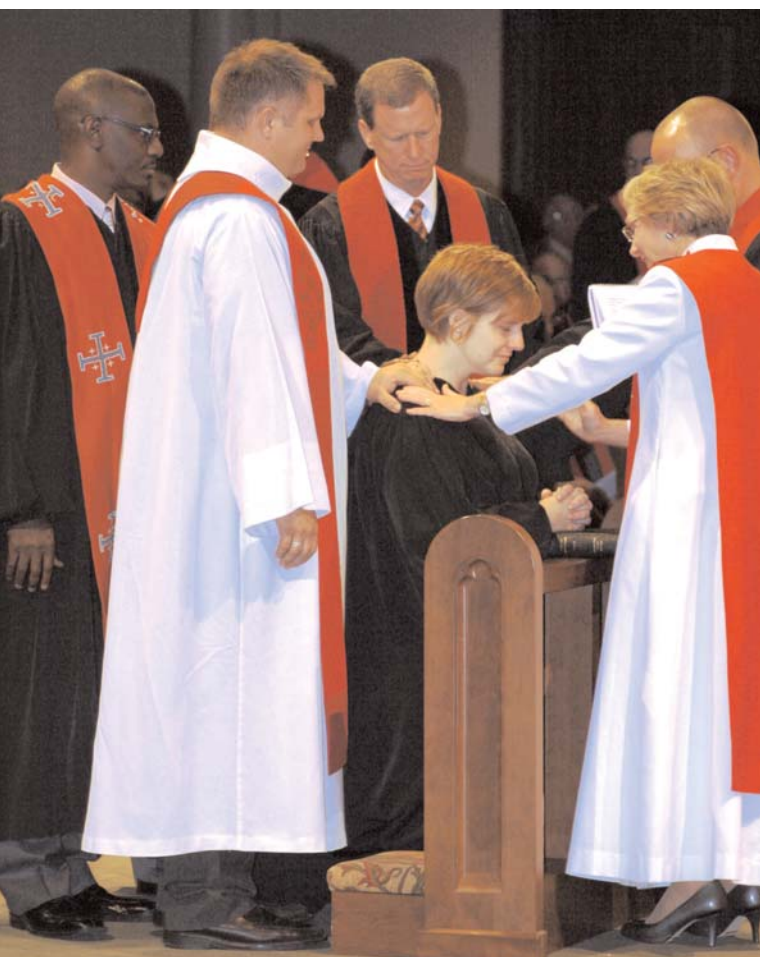
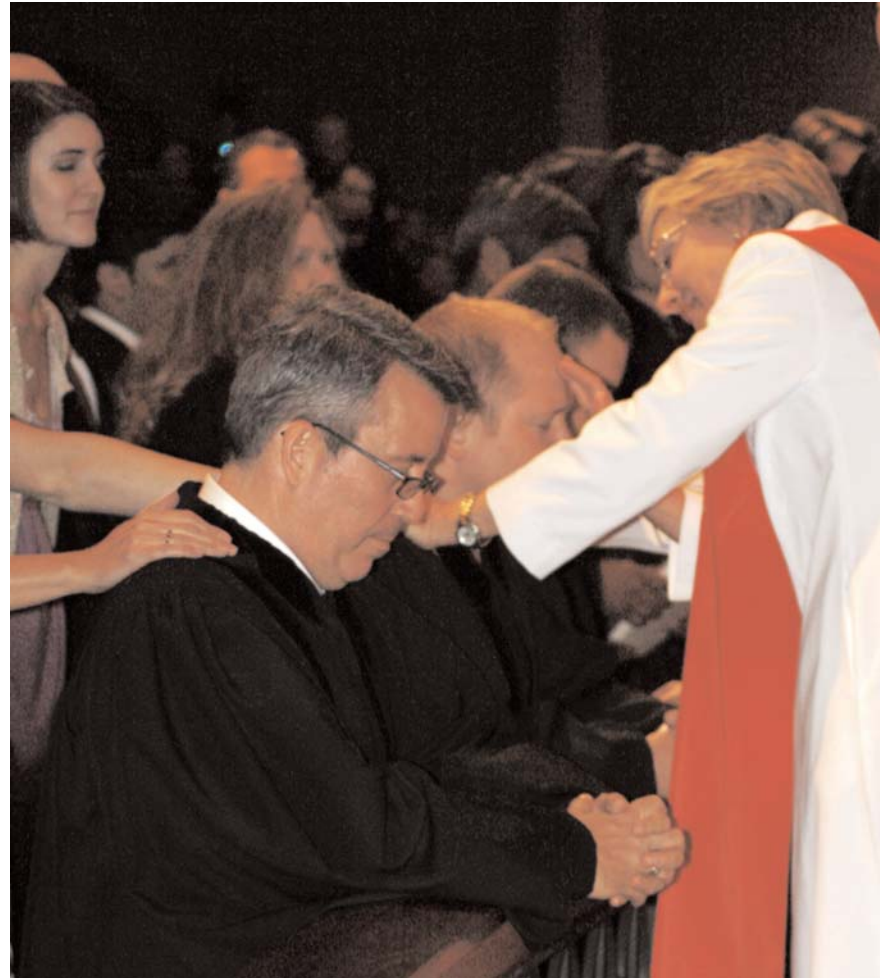
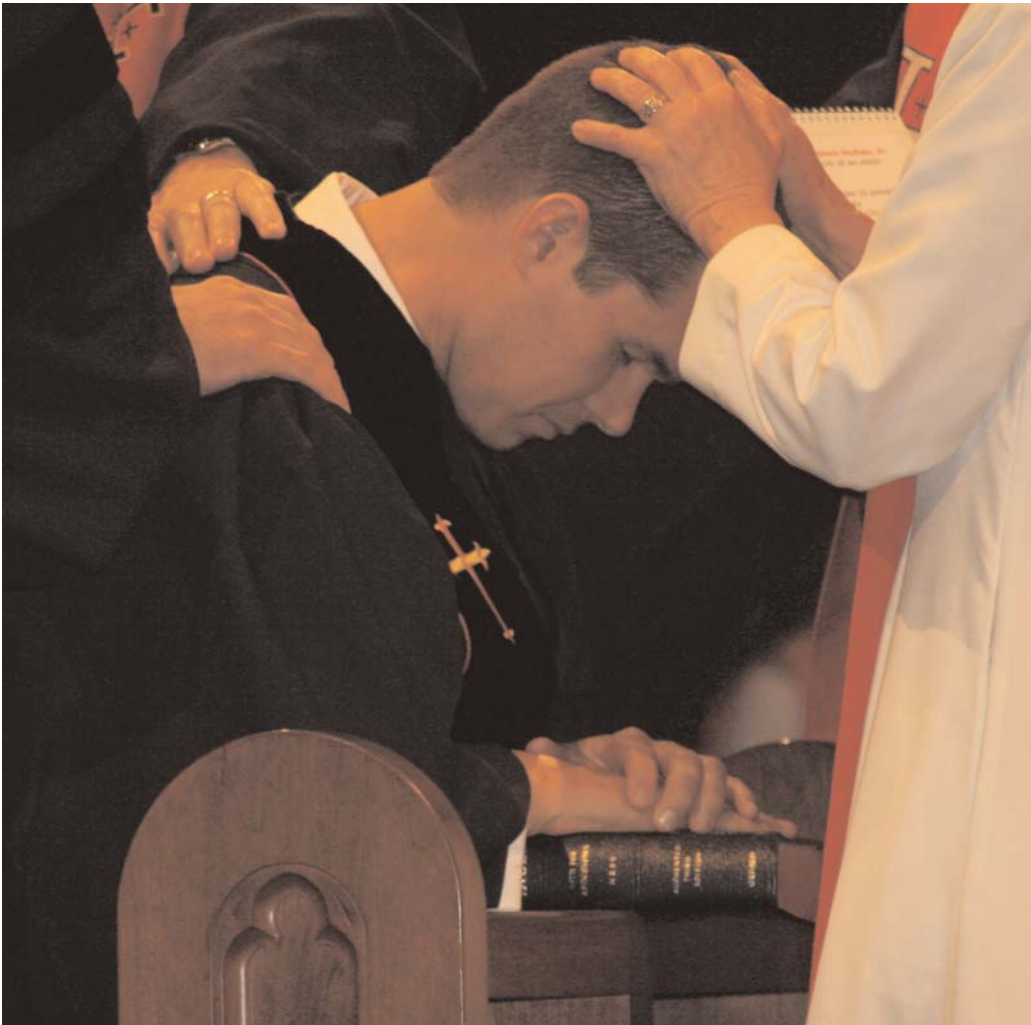
Top Right: Rev. Jin-Jon Lee and all ordinands were reminded to take authority as an elder to preach the word of God; administer the sacraments and order the life of the church.

Bottom Right: Bishop Janice Riggle Huie prays that the Holy Spirit be poured upon Rev. Elnora Nummally for the office and work of an elder.

Bottom Left: Rev. Jon Stouffer, Board of Ordained Ministry registrar, assists the bishop in commissioning Rev. Edward Blackstone and 13 additional pastors.



Ordination and commissioning service



Top Left: Rev. Ray Hughes bows humbly as he is ordained.

Top Right: Rev. Jon Thornbury prays while the bishop commissions Rev. Collin Taylor.

Bottom Left: Rev. Taylor Meador Fuerst is ordained as an elder in cull connection.

Bottom Right: Wiley College Chaplain Rev. Michelle Hall is ordained a new elder in the Texas Annual Conference.



'Glimpses of heaven on earth'

Continued from page 1



Bishop Janice Riggle Huie reviews the conference year and shares a hope-filled vision for the church.

holds them fast: drugs, greed, scars of abuse, or depression so deep that life seems not worth living...United Methodist disciples seek justice. They resist temptation. They ensure God's children have adequate food, clothing, shelter, health care."

How are we doing?

"The primary place through which this annual conference fulfills God's dream of bringing heaven to earth is in and through our congregations," Huie said. "So how are we doing?"

In spite of the fact that membership dropped by about 2,000 people (down from nearly 107,000 last year) and eight less churches reported having even one profession of faith, the Bishop found cause to cele-

brate.

New church starts are one source of celebration – with more than 2,200 people worshipping in these fruitful faith communities each week.

"During this last year I've had the opportunity to visit some of these new faith communities," she said. "Young families. Senior adults. Middle-aged folks. Usually kids everywhere. Poor people. Wealthy people. Everybody in between...Ex-offenders. Corporate boardroom folks. Unemployed. Blue collar. Management. Persons in the recovery community. Congregations where lives are being changed and futures re-shaped for Jesus Christ. It is a glimpse of heaven on earth every time."

Additionally, the conference's extravagant generosity remains a reason to praise God.

"That \$1 million you raised has now triggered an additional \$33 million in giving, mostly for Cote d'Ivoire," Huie said, adding that 8 million more nets have been provided for the country with these funds to ensure that each household will have a net. "No doubt, that this is the work of God – an extraordinary manifestation of the Holy Spirit."

The upcoming Youth Academy for Spiritual Formation and a \$2 million grant from the Lilly Foundation to fund the Advancing Pastoral Leadership Program also speak to God's desire to do a new thing in the TAC. "Bringing heaven on earth is always difficult work," Huie said. "It takes longer than expected...God will surprise us with resurrection when we least expect it and in a form we can't imagine."

The Episcopal Address concluded with the understanding that the Texas Annual Conference has been blessed this year to see numerous glimpses of heaven on earth.

"By the grace of God and through sacrifice and service, we have witnessed lives changed and futures re-shaped for Jesus Christ," Huie said. "We have participated in the resurrection itself: resurrection turned into prayer, turned into forgiveness, turned into families saved, turned into hope restored, turned into children who have a brighter future, turned into lives redeemed. Thanks be to God for giving us these glimpses of heaven on earth."

To view the Episcopal Address online visit www.txcumc.org/tac09videos.

Thanks for your extravagant generosity

The 2009 Annual Conference offerings totaled \$17,302.06. Sunday's receipts are applied toward meeting expenses and totaled \$6,029.16. Monday's offering of \$5,700.54 will benefit the Methodist schools of Cote d'Ivoire. Lon Morris College will receive Tuesday night's offering of \$5,572.36.

Location of Video Links

Visit www.txcumc.org/tac09videos to view all DVD presentations shared at the 2009 Annual Conference.

Remember the journey, remember to witness

Continued from page 3

light and life of each clergy or clergy spouse who died this year. Although dim, the lanterns washed the sanctuary in a golden glow, similar to the light of a life-well-lived although their time on earth has faded.

The cycle of life and ever-changing seasons of the journey permeated the service, as

worship team members opened with the song "Seasons of Love" from the Broadway musical *Rent*. The song asks how one measures a year. The answer: seasons of love. Stansell's sermon tackled the question of how one measures a life. The answer: one's invaluable, un-substitutable witness.



Let your light shine. The altar in the sanctuary is decorated with lanterns that symbolize the light and life of each individual who died this year.