

Hebbronville, San Benito men receive Exemplar Awards

McAllen District United Methodists honored laymen from Hebbronville and San Benito in February for faithful service to their congregations.

Charles Schroeder, First UMC, Hebbronville, received the 2007 Bishop's Exemplar Award for the northern portion of McAllen Feb. 24 in Alice.

Allen Bills, First UMC, San Benito, was given the Exemplar Award for the southern portion of the district Feb. 25 in McAllen.

In addition, 57 individuals and three groups from 32 of the district's 35 congregations were recognized at the two events as laypeople of the year.

More than 100 people attended the Feb. 24 "McNorth" gathering at First UMC, Alice. Another 270 came to the "McSouth" event Feb. 25 at St. Mark UMC, McAllen.

Bishop Joel N. Martinez gives the Exemplar Award annually to laypeople chosen by each district board of laity for "witness, commitment and service after the example of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Pastor Leo Carrasco of First UMC, Hebbronville, said Schroeder is "the perfect example of what a servant of God should be." He does everything with "pure agape love" and "is totally

humble and unassuming and prefers to stay in the background."

For 13 years, Schroeder has picked up youths from their homes and prepared breakfast tacos for them when they arrive at the church. After the service, he takes the young people home.

He has for many years prepared unleavened bread for Holy Communion. He's been church treasurer and a member of the administrative board.

Once a month, Schroeder drives a trailer from Hebbronville to Edinburg to pick up the Angel Food order distributed to the Hebbronville community.

Bills was recognized for his leadership in the Master's Builders Program.

For 11 years he has managed the organization, which works in conjunction with the Texas Department of Aging and Disability Services to help people make repairs and add handicap-accessibility renovations on their homes.

Bills was cited for his "great knowledge and knowhow in basic home repairs" and his "huge, tender and loving heart."

The Master's Builders Program has helped about 60 families in the San Benito area, replacing roofs, building handicap-accessible bathrooms and repairing damaged floors.

29 laypeople seek election to conferences

Twenty-nine people submitted "Questionnaires for Prospective Lay Delegates to General Conference" by a Feb. 1 deadline.

Secretary David Seilheimer is to compile those questionnaires into a voting guide for distribution to elected laity members of the June 6-9 Southwest Texas Annual Conference session.

During the June meeting, representatives of the region's 345 congregations are to elect delegates to the 2008 General Conference and 2008 South Central Jurisdictional Conference.

Southwest Texas is expected to pick 12 General Conference delegates—six laity, six clergy—and 12 more jurisdictional conference delegates.

The conference is also expected to elect eight reserve jurisdictional conference delegates—four laity, four clergy.

The exact number of delegates is still unknown, however, pending a Judicial Council decision in April on how many votes the new Ivory Coast Conference will get.

San Antonio pastor named to Kerrville District

Kerrville District United Methodists are to welcome a San Antonio pastor as their new superintendent in June.

The Rev. Robert M. Allen, 56, senior pastor of Coker UMC, San Antonio, is to succeed the Rev. Fred E. Martin as superintendent of the 16,616-member Kerrville District.

Martin, 62, who has led the Kerrville District since 2000, is awaiting another appointment.

Bishop Joel N. Martinez announced his intention Feb. 23 to appoint Allen to the Kerrville District. The appointment is to become effective after the June 6-9

Southwest Texas Annual Conference session in Corpus Christi.

As a superintendent, Allen is to be an extension of the bishop's office and advise Martinez on pastoral appointments.

Allen is to provide spiritual and administrative leadership to the pastors and members of the 51 congregations in the Kerrville District and represent The United Methodist Church hierarchy to them.

Allen, a San Antonio native, has been senior pastor of the 2,862-member Coker congregation since 1998.

Before that he served congregations in Brady, Corpus Christi, Cuero, Gonzales, Rabke, Seguin, Westhoff and Windcrest.

Allen began his ministry in Louisiana in 1975. He came to the Southwest Texas Conference in 1979.

Allen earned a bachelor of arts degree from United Methodist-related Southwestern University in Georgetown in 1973 and a master of theology degree from Southern Methodist University in Dallas in 1977. He was ordained a deacon in 1975 and an elder in 1978.

Early count shows end to 3-year member slide

Total church membership in the Southwest Texas Conference appears to have reversed a three-year decline during 2006.

A preliminary membership report issued Feb. 15 showed 100 more United Methodists on the conference rolls Dec. 31 than at the end of 2005. The total was 119,777. That's a 0.08 percent increase from 2005.

Average weekly worship attendance, however, appears to have gone down for the fifth year in a row during 2006—from 50,202 to 49,983. That's a 0.04 percent decrease.

The 2006 figures are all preliminary, said the Rev. David A. Seilheimer, conference statistician. He said he would ask congregations to confirm their statistics before issuing a final report for the June 6-9 annual conference session.

Four of the seven districts—Austin, Kerrville, McAllen and San Angelo—

registered net membership gains in the 2006 preliminary report. Three districts—Kerrville, San Angelo and San Antonio—showed gains in average weekly worship attendance.

The Southwest Texas Conference recorded its all-time high membership in 2002—120,915. The total slipped slightly each year from 2003 through 2005.

Average weekly worship attendance climbed steadily from 1993 to 2001—from 44,972 to 52,344. Attendance began edging downward in 2002.

Of the 347 congregations in the preliminary report, 167—or 48 percent—showed net membership gains. For average worship attendance, 150—or 43 percent—showed increases.

The number of congregations reporting net membership gains was up from 158 in 2005 and reversed a steady decline that began in 2001.

University UMC, San Antonio, posted

the biggest net membership gain in 2006—246. Its membership climbed to 5,730, largest in the conference.

The San Antonio congregation also had the conference's highest average weekly worship attendance at 2,682. That was up by 172 from 2005.

Three other congregations recorded net membership gains of more than 100 during 2006:

■ North Shore UMC, Canyon Lake—194, up from 0 (a new congregation).

■ Northern Hills UMC, San Antonio—1,343, up 111.

■ Coker UMC, San Antonio—2,862, up 104.

Besides University UMC, two congregations reported changes in average weekly worship attendance of more than 100: First UMC, Kerrville, 1,041, up 119, and North Shore UMC, Canyon Lake, 110, up from 0.

Curero woman honored for helping neighbors

Brush Country United Methodists recognized a Cuero woman Feb. 14 for always being ready to lend a hand to church members, friends and strangers.

Darlene Welborn, First UMC, Cuero, received the 2007 Bishop's Exemplar Award for the northern "Brush Country" portion of the Corpus Christi District.

Forty-three other individuals took home certificates for distinguished discipleship following the 11th annual Brush Country Awards Celebration. The list included eight youth discipleship awards.

Sharon Metting and Betty Mann, First UMC, Yorktown, were given the District Superintendent's Award for work with children's ministry in their community.

Some 250 people from United Methodist congregations between Corpus Christi and San Antonio witnessed the awards presentations at First UMC, Beeville.

"It's too much," Welborn said to the Rev. Barbara J. Ruth, Corpus Christi District superintendent, after accepting the Exemplar Award. Ruth

presented the award for Bishop Joel N. Martinez, who couldn't attend.

Martinez gives the Exemplar Award annually to laypeople selected by each district board of laity "for witness, commitment and service after the example of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Welborn—wife of Pastor Ron Welborn of First UMC, Cuero, and mother of the Rev. Teresa Welborn, pastor of Lakehills UMC—was cited for service in both Cuero and at Ingleside UMC.

In Cuero Welborn leads a prayer group, conducts Bible studies, teaches a Sunday school class, sings in the choir and plays hand bells. She provides transportation to worship services and participates in food or clothing drives for needy young people.

"You will find her as a greeter at services, cleaning the oil candles, checking the pew books and seeing that the 'pew bears' are in place," the award nomination said.

During the week Welborn visits nursing home residents, hospital patients and homebound neighbors. She

launched "Puppy Love," a ministry that brings her dog, Bridgett, into nursing homes to provide companionship for residents.

Before moving to Cuero, Welborn was similarly active in the Ingleside congregation.

A certified lay speaker, Welborn helped establish the Corpus Christi District lay speaking training program. She was an instructor for the first advanced lay speaking course offered in the district.

Ruth cited Metting and Mann for working as a team to bring Godly Play, a new form of children's ministry, to Yorktown. To do that the pair had to persuade the congregation to invest in training for leaders, buy special equipment and dedicate space within the church for this specific ministry.

Metting and Mann also work with the church's Kids Club, a ministry with youngsters in the community. About 25 children attend the monthly gatherings. Only half are associated with the United Methodist congregation, Ruth said.