

UMs join in local Thanksgiving observances

Many Southwest Texas United Methodist congregations, as part of local ministerial alliances, participated in community Thanksgiving services last month.

"The Thanksgiving service is an opportunity for the community to come together to give thanks for all of our blessings," said the Rev. James Schendel, pastor of Jourdanton UMC. "With the events in our country this year—the hurricanes—we give thanks not only that we've been spared a lot of misery but that we could help others. That's what churches do. We help where we're needed. And that's what we give thanks for."

The Thanksgiving celebration, which involved churches across Atascosa County Nov. 20, is "a tradition that's been going on for 10 to 15 years," Schendel said.

Christmas wreaths are part of the tradition. The wreaths are exchanged and displayed in the churches during Advent.

"Each church is asked to bring a

wreath," Schendel said. "It's a reminder that we're all in this together—that we all work for the same company."

Atascosa County churches take turns playing host to the annual Thanksgiving celebration, which attracts 70 to 90 people, Schendel said. First Baptist Church, Pleasanton, was host for this year's gathering.

A Thanksgiving celebration that included New Fountain UMC, Hondo, dates back more than 50 years. Two historical churches, the 148-year-old United Methodist congregation and 150-year-old Quihi Lutheran Church, marked Thanksgiving together Nov. 20 at the Lutheran church.

The Rev. Charles Parker, New Fountain UMC pastor, said the event draws about 180 people.

The Stockdale Ministerial Alliance comprises six churches, including Christ UMC. The Rev. Carolyn McGuire, pastor, said the alliance's Thanksgiving service accomplishes a number of things, not the least of

which is raising funds for emergency relief.

Stockdale is located where Texas 123 intersects with U.S. 87.

"We get a lot of people coming through here," McGuire said. "Some need gas, food and lodging, and the funds provide those things."

The Nov. 20 Stockdale celebration was at St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church. Some 200 people were expected to attend.

Building a traveler emergency fund was a goal of the Schulenburg Ministerial Alliance's annual Thanksgiving worship as well. Schulenburg is at the crossroads of Interstate 10 and U.S. 77.

At Thanksgiving and on Ash Wednesday, churches in the community join in worship and take up a special collection for the travelers fund, which is administered through a local bank, said the Rev. Mark G. Adams, pastor of First UMC, Schulenburg.

About 100 people were expected to attend a community Thanksgiving service Nov. 20 at First UMC.

3 more Southwest Texas churches earn certification as welcoming congregations

Three more Southwest Texas churches have joined the list of certified welcoming congregations.

Floresville UMC became the first congregation in the San Antonio District Oct. 28 to earn the welcoming-church designation.

Ozona UMC became the first congregation in the San Angelo District Oct. 5 to make the list.

In late August San Juan UMC became the 15th congregation in the McAllen District to be certified.

Southwest Texas now has 23 certified welcoming congregations, the most of any conference in the eight-state South Central Jurisdiction. Five of the other welcoming congregations are in the Victoria District. One is in the Kerrville District.

Granted by the General Commission on Communication, certification

means each congregation has systematically evaluated its hospitality and intentionally embraced a lifestyle of welcoming newcomers. Congregations need to renew their certification annually.

The certification program is part of the denominationwide Igniting Ministry hospitality and image campaign. Certified congregations earn a special designation in the "Find a church" database at www.unitedmethodist.org.

To earn certification, congregations must qualify for at least 100 points on a yearly checklist of welcoming activities. Those include designating a welcoming coordinator, training church members in welcoming techniques and doing various things around the church to make it more inviting to visitors.

Checklists are available at ignitingministry.org or umcswtx.org.

113 congregations pay apportionments in full as of Oct. 31

One-hundred-thirteen of the 350 Southwest Texas congregations had paid their 2005 apportionments in full as of Oct. 31.

The count of "100 percent" congregations by district was Austin, 18; Corpus Christi, 14; Kerrville, 24; McAllen, 8; San Angelo, 18; San Antonio, 7; and Victoria, 24.

Contributions to apportioned funds totaled \$6.4 million as of Oct. 31. That's \$129,000 more than was given during the first 10 months of 2004.

Apportioned amounts represent a congregation's share of expenses for ministries across the state, nation and world.

Offering helps 30 Southwest Texas students

Thirty Southwest Texas college students are receiving more than \$35,000 in financial aid this school year from The United Methodist Church.

The money—\$22,500 in loans and \$12,683 in scholarships—comes from denominational sources supported by the annual United Methodist Student Day special offering.

Nov. 27 was the officially designated Sunday for this year's offering, one of six denominationwide special collections on The United Methodist Church calendar every year. Congregations may still accept money for student loans and scholarships on any Sunday before Dec. 31.

Southwest Texas United Methodists gave \$8,627 to the Student Day offering in 2004. That was up from \$6,829 in 2003 and \$6,098 in 2002.

Last year 34 Southwest Texas students received financial aid from the denomination.

Money from the Student Day offering goes to the Office of Loans and Scholarships at the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry in Nashville, Tenn.

The office issued more than \$6 million in scholarships and loans to 4,091 students during 2004. That compares to nearly \$6 million in aid to 4,028 stu-

dents in 2003, \$7 million in aid to 4,984 students in 2002 and \$8.4 million in aid to 5,561 students in 2001.

Declining revenue from the Student Day and World Communion special offerings has reduced available financial aid, said Angella Current-Felder, executive director of the financial aid office.

"At the end of June, after our scholarship committees had reviewed and distributed all the available scholarship dollars for the 2005-06 academic year," Current-Felder said, "there remained 331 student applicants for which we had no scholarship funds. Seventy-five of these applicants were seminarians, many first-career ministerial students pursuing their master of divinity degrees."

The Nashville-based higher education board allocated money from non-scholarship sources to provide aid for those 75 students, she said.

"Despite not having sufficient funds to award all the applicants, we celebrate that as of the end of July, the office awarded approximately \$3.6 million to 2,543 undergraduates and graduate students," Current-Felder said.

"By the end of the year, our office should have awarded a total of \$4.6 million in scholarships to more than

3,500 students, of which approximately 550 are seminarians enrolled at United Methodist or non-United Methodist theological schools and seminaries."

The Office of Loans and Scholarships receives money from investments, the World Communion Sunday special offering and other sources in addition to the Student Day offering.

The Nashville office rebates 10 percent of Student Day receipts from Southwest Texas—\$863 for last year—to the conference Board of Higher Education and Campus Ministry for local merit scholarships. Those awards are announced each year at the annual conference session.

Christopher James Elford, St. John's UMC, Corpus Christi, and Sarah Ruth Fry of First UMC, Kingsville, received the 2004 awards. Elford attends UM-related Southwestern University in Georgetown. Fry attends UM-related McMurry University in Abilene.

United Methodist scholarships and loans are available to students attending accredited institutions. Some scholarships are limited to United Methodist-related schools.

Scholarship and loan applications for the 2006-2007 academic year are to be available in January.

Wesley UMC, Austin, presents \$5,000 to Huston-Tillotson University president

Wesley UMC, Austin, and Huston-Tillotson University celebrated University Day Oct. 9.

As part of the festivities, the Rev. Sylvester Chase, pastor of the 321-member congregation, and other Wesley leaders presented a \$5,000 check to school President Larry L. Earvin.

The 130-year-old historically black school in Austin was housed at Wesley in 1878.

That was after Methodist-related Samuel Huston College, founded 1876, moved from Dallas to the state capital.

Samuel Huston merged with Tillotson College, Oct. 24, 1952, to form Huston-Tillotson College.

Tillotson College had been founded in 1876 in Austin by the American Missionary Society of what is today the United Church of Christ.

The school changed its name to Huston-Tillotson University Feb. 28. Enrollment on the east Austin campus now stands at 650.

The university remains affiliated with both The United Methodist Church and United Church of Christ.

Blanco UMC extends Open House by day

Blanco UMC extended Open House Month by one day and welcomed 115 people Oct. 1.

They attended the first event in the Hill Country Praise series.

Inspired by the Rev. Kenneth Greene and his wife, the series is an evangelism effort to foster community fellowship.

The next event is scheduled for April 1.

At the inaugural event, Blanco UMs presented music, shared faith stories and served sloppy joes.