FORUM

A Good Pastor is Hard to Find



Ernie Pitt This & That

St. Paul United Methodist Church, of which I am a member, is losing its pastor of 13 vears. Pastor Donald Jenkins has been named the District Superintendent of a newly created United Methodist District in the Lake Norman area. Sounds great on the surface. It constitutes a serious promotion for him but it is devastating to the members, nearly 98 percent of whom -including the pastor himself - do not want him to

I thought long and hard, even prayed about whether I should write about this tragedy. It is a tragedy because the UMC, in reappointing our pastor, has violated its own protocol for such a serious action as this. I wouldn't be saying a word about it except that the whole situation has been

> Iris Venable

Guest

Columnist

"Sunshine," I called him as a

boy. He's in heaven now. But, he left a message here on

Although God has given me

peace since my son's death

just this year, I represent the face of the pain, the mothers

and the loved ones left behind

by the scourge of HIV/AIDS

my son, Tony, then only about

looking for him and I found

him in a crack house. At that

time he seemed more con-

cerned about his music albums

than himself. He asked me to

take them to safety. I took his

albums, knowing how much

they meant to him. But I also

invifed him to come to live

with me. He came with a fam-

ily - a girlfriend and two chil-

dren who also needed a home.

him a shroud of secrecy. His

girlfriend was ill much of the

time. She was back and forth

in the hospital with ailments

like pneumonia. Unable to

turn away my grandchildren, I

helped the family the best I

I asked him repeatedly,

'Are you sure that girl is

alright?' He'd say yes. But

then I'd see her with these big

bottles of medicine. She said it

was nothing and that she was

of guessed it because I'd got-

ten a letter at my house saying

my son needed to be checked

Finally, over time, I kind

could.

just anemic.

But, he also brought with

It was six years ago when

in our community.

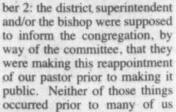
My name is Iris Venable.

on the UMC's website. In fact, ber 2: the district superintendent they put the reappointment on the Web site before members of our congregation knew anything about it themselves. Therein lies the egregious and insensitive

I must admit that when I

joined the church, I had no depth of knowledge regarding the United Methodist Church. I joined because of the way the pastor taught the Word, lived the Word and trusted in the UMC. We have in our sect, a guide book called "The United Methodist

Book of Disciplines." It outlines rules and procedures for governing the body. Well, to my great surprise, I found two items that the district superintendent and the bishop were supposed to do before making this reappointment. Number 1: they were supposed to have had some consultation with a duly appointed and specific committee in the church charged with this function; num-



finding out that our pastor was being reappointed on the UMC's Web site.

You can imagine the sinking feeling in many of our guts upon seeing on a Web site that our beloved pastor had been reappointed. For many of us, it is not so much what was done, but

the manner in which it was done. Given the fact that membership in the UMC all over the country has been steadily declining, we felt that since our membership was steadily increasing, the DS and the bishop would at least treat us with a little more respect and sensitivity, and respond to our many letters of inquiry instead of treating us like slaves. Many of us believed Pastor

Mama, They Need to Know'

recting the decline, and that the bishop and the DS would use St. Paul as a model for bringing souls to Christ. Instead, both violated the very rules created and outlined in the Book of Discipline and ignored the wishes of 98 percent of the congregants. To me, this is absurd. How can you be more concerned with staffing issues than bringing souls to Christ and increasing the membership?

Jenkins had the formula for cor-

I have to apologize because I, like so many others, am grieving over this most insincere and callous disregard for spiritual righteousness. I was also quite surprised to learn that part of the problem related to declining membership was a history of racism in the UMC. Now, I didn't say it. It is on their Web site, but they don't know how to fix it. I do know that you can't fix anything by running from it. God bless you. Amen? Amen!

Ernie Pitt is the publisher of The Chronicle, Reach him at erpitt@wschronicle.com.



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24, lost his apartment. I went Iris Venable's "Sunshine," Antonio Terry Jr. for HIV. Medical personnel also constantly called, asking him to be checked.

So, I pled with him too. But, he just kept saying, "No, Mom I'm fine." I would say, "You're in denial."

It took him at least two years before he got checked and the doctors finally confirmed it. He confessed that he thought it would just go away if he ignored it. They got him started on his medications and for a while he was happy even relieved.

But, then the side effects of the medicines seemed to have a worse effect on him than the disease itself. The constant diarrhea and nausea were unbearable. The medicines also gave him mood-swings. Then, he started having seizures.

I watched as my son slowly deteriorated, his legs weakening, sometimes unable to

As he neared the age of 30, I would often recall him in his prime. He had a gift. The gift

was that people hung on to his every word. They didn't have to know him and they still hung on to his every word. There were people on my front steps all the time. I would say, "Tony, why are those people on my front steps?" He would say, "I have no idea. I asked them to go home. But, they're waiting for me to come back

Even when he attended church, those who ministered to him the prayer of salvation now chuckle that he did more talking than they did.

The last seizure that he had was in August last year. That is when he also began to hallucinate from the medication. He never came back home from that one. The doctors diagnosed PML (progressive multifocal leukoencephalopathy), which they described as a condition in which the HIV had attacked the brain, causing it to shrink. Ever since then, he lived between hospitals and nursing homes.

On Feb. 12, the Lord took

Tony home. He would be turning 31 this year had he lived 'til Mother's Day. I would often talk heart to

heart with Tony when the medications were not causing him to be delirious. I can hear now the essence of the message that he desired to bring to other young men and women. I hope they will hear it too: He'd say, "Mama, they

need to know, if you have to have sex - even safe sex don't just jump anything. Don't take sex causally because you don't want to be where I am. You don't want to know when your last day is. You don't want to take these medications for the rest of your life. You don't want people looking at you funny. You can't get a shot for this. You don't want this. You don't want any parts of it."

Iris Venable is one of millions of mothers who have personally been touched by HIV/AIDS.

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