

CME churches hold annual conference

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More than 800 members of the Carolina Annual Conference gathered at Adam's Mark Hotel this week to be enlightened about the work of God that is taking place in Christian Methodist Episcopal churches in North Carolina and South Carolina. Presiding Bishop Charles L. Helton; host pastor Rev. Bobby R. Best, pastor of Saint John CME Church; Rev. James E. Russell Sr., host presiding elder, Winston-Salem/Greenville District; Rev. Louvenia R. Coleman, presiding elder, Durham District; and Rev. Jimmy E. Gilbert, presiding elder, Charleston-Columbia District, served as the leadership team for the annual conference, being held July 22-26.

Ministers and their spouses; elders; missionaries; lay ministers; conference ushers; conference trustees; church workers in publication services, Christian education, evangelism and missions; the historical society; the music committee; conference officers; elders and other leaders participated in conference plenary sessions, lectures, luncheons, dinners, Bible studies, church business seminars, and various committee meetings throughout the week. Also throughout the week, vendors of spiritual wares were accessible. Some of them sold neckties, hats, figurines, T-shirts with positive family values, and other items.

Each morning Host Pastor Bobby Best led conference attendants in the Power Pool beginning at 6 o'clock. On Tuesday morning, 60 people were present for this Bible study session. They focused on the book of Acts chapters 1 and 2 as well as 1 Corinthians chapters 12 and 14 during the week.

"We are focusing on the



Rev. J.J. Jackson (Israel Metropolitan CME, Greenville, S.C.) buys a hat for his wife from vendor Karen Black.

Helton cautioned the leaders against berating the televangelists.

"Some of the ministers may envy the packed houses of the television ministers like T.D. Jakes. Do you not know that some of that same thing can be happening in our churches? We should not speak against our churches, but lift them up," Helton said. "When our members leave, they take money and support that we need. What is happening to us?...The time has come to think about catching on spiritual fire, pastors and lay people working together."

Rev. Dr. Beverly G. Rose, director of the Annual Conference Board of Christian Education, led the activities for the youths and children at the Carolina Annual Conference. The children involved ranged in age from 6 to 17. The children have Bible study each morning. They also have experienced such local speakers as Willard Tanner, university counselor at Winston-Salem State University; Benjamin Muhammad from the local Public Health Department; and John Raye, a

said. Davis said, "I followed the conferences around until I had an illness, but now that I am better, I am back on the road again. I love the stimulation that I gain from the different services and meetings. I am always learning something."

Brown said, "I am always pleased to be in the conference. I like to know about the church and how it operates. I started early in this program because I married a minister (Robert L. Brown), who is now deceased."

Laws was eager to make her way to the pastoral reports business session.

"My pastor is Rev. Lloyd



Members of the bishops cabinet gather to pose with Bishop Charles Helton.

Watkins Sr., and he will be giving a report in this session. We have to be supportive of our pastor," Laws said.

Pastor Isaiah Green of Guilford Chapel in Middlesex, N.C., and Pastor Johnny Ware of Cross Roads CME in Anderson County, S.C., walked toward the pastoral reports session together. Green has been a pastor for 18 years and Ware has pastored for 32 years. They attend the conference each year.

"This is where we get our pastoral appointments to be assigned to a church. We are assigned on a one-year basis," Green said. "It is required by church law that we

appear before the annual conference to discuss church business and get reassignments for the following year."

Ware said, "We are licensed to preach in the United States, Africa, Haiti and Jamaica, and we can be assigned anywhere. When you see those with the red pastor tags, they have been through a six-year process. We begin as a minister on trial, a local preacher, get deacon orders, get elders' orders and we go through an ordination service. When you see the red tag, that means full connection. We are qualified to fulfill all obligations."

Rev. Joniece Carroll, pastor of Beebe Chapel in Washington,

N.C., has pastored for three years. She enjoys attending the conference because, "It is very spiritual and we receive updates and news that affects our conference as a whole."

Rev. Michelle V. Williams, pastor of Larry Temple CME Church in Charleston, S.C., has been a pastor for only nine months.

"This is my first conference as a pastor. I will be able to find out what other pastors are doing, and I can take some ideas back to my church," Williams said. "The teaching and preaching helps build you up spiritually. It gives you something to go on."



More than 800 people attended this year's event.

theme of 'Catching on Spiritual Fire.' This special time of prayer sets the tone for the rest of the day," Best said. "This is an annual accounting and stewardship conference. We are all accountable for what we have done for the year. We are evaluated and taught about what should happen in our churches. We have come to get our tools sharpened to prepare for the next year."

Bishop Helton expounded on the quadrennial theme, "Refocusing From Survival to Revival and Renewal of the Church." Helton exhorted the ministers to fulfill their calling with love and patience.

"Somebody had better catch on fire, or I will be in trouble trying to find pastors for our churches. Pastors, you cannot continue to go to the church and then leave. We must be active and productive," Helton said. "We cannot be satisfied with mediocre ministry. We've got to catch on fire and do some things differently."

Helton encouraged the ministers to value the members in their various church bodies.

"We have to stop this business of fussing with people at 11 on Sunday morning. This is not the time to fuss or tell somebody off. People are ready to hear the word of God," Helton said. "Some of them are hurt, sick, brokenhearted, down and almost out. This is not the time to fuss with them. Please do not be guilty of this."

motivational speaker and author.

In addition, the youths participated in rap sessions on topics such as anger, attitude, thankfulness, loneliness, self-image, sexual temptation, stress and worry, developing Christian character, and racism, prejudice, and favoritism. The discussion leaders from St. John CME included Alease Gilliam, Angela Brown-Shouse, JoAnn Griffin, Diamond Cotton, Donna Andrews, Pamela Alexander and Shirley Mayfield from Holsey CME Church. The young people also participated in outings to CiCi's Pizza, Chuck E. Cheese, Hanes Mall, Northside Bowling Lanes, and a cookout with games at Walkertown Park. Sallie Ledbetter, director of Christian education at St. John CME Church, assisted on the planning committee.

Many of the delegates and conference attendees have participated for several years because they consider the conference important and viable for their spirituality.

Zilla Brown and Annie L. Williams of St. John CME met Rachel L. Davis and Corrine Laws of Russell Memorial CME in Durham at the conference. They all had their reasons for continuing to support the conference.

"We go anywhere they go. We track them down all around because I enjoy meeting the people I see from one year to the next. I enjoy the fellowship," Williams



Host pastor Bobby Best (St. John CME Church) greets Bishop Charles Helton, presiding bishop.

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