

## On Our “Connection”

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LAKE JUNALUSKA, NC – Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are not only the names of celebrated Biblical fiery-furnace survivors. They are also the names of 18<sup>th</sup> century brothers in my wife’s family tree (now there was a mother who knew her old testament). The latter-day trio were contemporaries of Daniel Boone, according to family lore, and accompanied the intrepid explorer on several of his journeys through the Appalachians, including, perhaps, this area of western North Carolina, now home to the southeastern jurisdiction of the United Methodist Church.

Hundreds of United Methodists from the southeast are here this week for the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference, the primary purpose of which is to elect new bishops and assign both new and “old” bishops to leadership of the fourteen annual conferences in our area of the country. Florida’s Rev. Dick Wills was elected to the episcopacy this week and has been assigned to the Nashville area where he will assume leadership of the Tennessee and Memphis Annual Conferences in September. Congratulations Dick!

Lake Junaluska is a beautiful place and it is a part of our United Methodist history. It also represents the “connection” that makes us unique as United Methodists among God’s people. Electing bishops is one of the most visible aspects of our connectional system, but there are many others that deserve our support.

What does it mean to be connected? Here’s just one small example. My wife LeeAnn, who is a pastor in the Florida Conference, received a call from the Rev. Philip Stubbs, a former colleague in the Northern Illinois Conference who is now serving a church in the Bahamas. Phil was concerned about the son of one of his Bahamian parishioners who is now living in south Florida, and asked her to use our system to check-in on the young man, who was having a difficult time in our state. LeeAnn contacted a pastoral colleague in Ft. Lauderdale, who immediately mobilized his church to help the troubled young man from the Bahamas. Our church – our *connected* church – reached out to our brother and became the loving arms of Jesus for him. By the way, that Ft. Lauderdale pastor was the same Bishop-elect Dick Wills.

Our apportionments and other connectional gifts helped make this small story happen. Our gifts touch people, every day and in every place we are present as the church, to transform lives. Thank you.

The Florida United Methodist Foundation, the Florida Annual Conference, and United Methodist Communications are embarking on a project to help local churches of our conference say “thank you” to our members and help them appreciate how their gifts help spread the all-encompassing love of God. For information or to learn how your church can become involved, please call, click or write us at 1-800-282-8011, extension 106; [www.fumf.org](http://www.fumf.org); or PO Box 3767, Lakeland, FL 33802.