



Jacob's Ladder



A NEWSLETTER OF OXFORD FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Rev. Roger Wilson, Pastor

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With Bishop S. Lewis

by Rev. Mattie Gipson



Our newly elected bishop for the Mississippi Annual Conference, Bishop Sharma Lewis, hails from Statesboro, GA. She has been an Ordained Clergy Woman for over 25 years and has been in several positions including

being the first ever African American female clergy leader of the Georgia UMC Conference elected to serve on the General and Jurisdictional Conference Delegation, served on various boards and agencies of the

UMC and was elected as a Bishop at the 2016 Jurisdictional Conference. She was assigned to the Virginia Conference where she served for the past seven years. She was assigned to the Mississippi Conference effective January 1, 2023.

She has embarked on a journey to get to know the clergy and laity of our conference personally. Therefore she is going to the Districts and engaging in conversation with lay and clergy persons throughout the state.

She met with people from the New Albany and Tupelo Districts at Tupelo First UMC- the clergy met in the morning and the Laity in the afternoon on Saturday, March 4th. Between the two sessions, she led A Service of Worship and Communion followed by a Fellowship meal that was open to both Lay and Clergy.

She began the sessions by giving a few background facts about herself but her major focus was having a question and answer session, stating that no questions were off limits. She addressed the “elephant in the room” question first. What about the disaffiliation process? She responded that

she’d rather we not divide and/or secede from the UMC as we know it, but realizing that is not our current reality, wish those well who decide to leave. There is a disciplinary process for those who wish to leave. The sundown date of the process is December 31, 2024. However, if there are churches that want to leave after that date, the door will still be open.

Bishop Lewis is firm in her belief that the Human Sexuality issue is NOT THE ONLY REASON some churches are disaffiliating. Some have wanted out for years and are using this issue as an out. She emphasized the fact that NO AFRICAN-AMERICAN CHURCHES in Mississippi have disaffiliated.

When asked about the dwindling membership due to the disaffiliations, she said “WE MUST TAKE JESUS/THE CHURCH TO THE STREETS!” We bless those going out but the harvest is plentiful for us to bring in new members. We’ve got to keep the main thing the main thing and that is MAKING DISCIPLES OF JESUS CHRIST FOR THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE WORLD!!!



Amber Mister was recently named Teacher’s Assistant of the Year at Lafayette County Lower Elementary School for 2022-2023.

Congratulations Amber. Keep up the good work.

Smiths Honored By UM Black Faculty and Staff Organization



Dr. Erskine Smith and Mrs. Evelyn Smith were both honored on Sunday, March 4, 2023 for their contributions to the University of Mississippi (UM). Representing the University's Black Faculty & Staff Organization (BFSO), Drs. Phillis George and Elle Moore made a special presentation to Dr. and Mrs. Smith in honor and recognition of their valued service as Black faculty at UM. This year marks the 60th anniversary of the University's integration, and the celebration is ongoing. As part of the year-long celebration, the University has honored individuals who have committed a meaningful "first" in support of the University's mission of excellence in teaching, research, outreach, and service.

As the first African American departmental chair at UM, Dr. Erskine Smith is one such individual. He served from 1994 to 2004 as Chair of the Department of Family & Consumer Science within the School of Applied Sciences at UM. He later served as Chair of the Department of Dietetics, Fashion Merchandising, and Hospitality at Western Illinois University. Most recently and prior to retiring, he served as Dean of the College of Education and Human Services at Western Illinois University. During this time, Mrs. Evelyn Smith served as one of the few African American faculty members within UM's School of Education and later as a school administrator within the Oxford School District. Dr. and Mrs. Smith are both distinguished, career educators and members

of Oxford First United Methodist Church (OFUMC)! Coincidentally, Drs. Phillis George and Elle Moore are also members of OFUMC and current UM faculty. Dr. George is an Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Higher Education within UM's School of Education and the outgoing President & Executive Liaison of BFSO. As a Lecturer of Public Speaking and Director of UM's Speaking Center, Dr. Moore is also a BFSO member.

BFSO is an organization that serves UM's Black faculty, staff, and students, and as BFSO President, Dr. Phillis George felt it was important to recognize the great

contributions of Dr. Erskine Smith and Mrs. Evelyn Smith. They both helped integrate the faculty and administrative ranks at UM, thus paving the way for other African American faculty members. In recognition of their service to UM, Dr. Smith and Mrs. Smith received a plaque and roses, respectively, from UM's BFSO.

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