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PHOTOS AVAILABLE: High resolution color photos of Bill Wade, Skeeter Ramey, and the Virginia Annual Conference Potato Drop are available from Carol Breitinger at the Society of St. Andrew.

His loss is others' gain

Virginia UM pastor loses weight to feed the hungry and challenges others to do the same

By Carol A. Breitinger, Society of St. Andrew

Big Island, VA – In August 2006 the Reverend Doctor William (Bill) Wade announced to his three-point United Methodist Loudoun Charge congregations in the Winchester District of Virginia that he was embarking on a weight-loss and wellness program. For every pound of weight he lost from then through Christmas, he pledged to donate \$10 to the Society of St. Andrew (SoSA) to feed the hungry.

“My motivation was that my loss (in weight) meant others (the hungry) would gain. By the time I weighed in on Christmas Eve I had lost 50 pounds,” Bill confirmed.

Having asked his small, rural congregations (Upperville UMC, Unison UMC, and Aldie UMC) to encourage and pray for him in his health-and-wellness effort and to consider also pledging a contribution to the Society of St. Andrew for every pound he lost, a total of \$7,500 was raised for the national hunger-relief ministry (Advance Special #801600). Some of the monies were used to pay the shipping cost for the 46,710-pound Potato Drop held June 12th during the Virginia Annual Conference at the Civic Center in Roanoke, VA. The Potato Drop was co-sponsored by the Society of St. Andrew and the Virginia United Methodist Board of Global Ministries. More than 180 delegates to the conference came out in the pre-dawn hours to bag the sweet potatoes for pick-up by local food banks, pantries, soup kitchens, shelters, and other agencies that feed the hungry. Over 140,000 servings of fresh, nourishing food were provided with that one Potato Drop.

The Loudoun Charge also sponsored another Society of St. Andrew Potato Drop held June 30th at Riverton UMC in the Winchester District. Skeeter Ramey, Hunger Relief Advocate to the Virginia Conference United Methodist Men's Cabinet and a long-time friend of Bill Wade and the Society of St. Andrew, helped organize that project. “The Loudoun Charge and Riverton UMC are at opposite ends of the Winchester District,” said Skeeter. “Bill and I and our churches wanted to bring the whole community and District together to help the hungry.”

Bill Wade's concern was not only for his own health and well-being but for that of his congregations and others. “Many of my own church members have health issues including diabetes, and lots of folks in the nation are dealing with weight problems,” Bill explained. “In fact, several

members of my congregations also lost weight during this time, which is much better for their health.

“At one time I served on the Virginia Conference Board of Ordained Ministry, which addressed the issue of health concerns by developing a covenant for pastors to care for their health and well-being. The concerns I’m speaking about are related to those concerns raised by the Board. I see this as a ministry useful to others. It’s a health issue and a spiritual issue that is very much a part of our Wesleyan tradition,” said Bill.

Indeed, many United Methodist conferences have health-and-wellness programs to address the issue of over-weight and related disease and illness. At least two conferences (Mississippi and Oklahoma) held walks or runs during their Annual Conferences this year to call attention to the issue and promote a healthy lifestyle. “If other pastors with weight problems were to be supported by their people as I was mine,” offered Bill, “and if they were to support the Society of St. Andrew, as my charge is doing, we could be feeding a lot of hungry people in Virginia and the rest of the nation, not to mention be much healthier ourselves.”

Bill said he did not use any of the popular diet plans but relied upon his commitment to feeding the hungry and his desire to set a good example for his congregations to keep him on track – “as well as the prayers, support and encouragement of my folks,” he admitted. “Oh, and a little book titled ‘Thin Over 40’ that I picked up at a yard sale for a quarter was also quite helpful.”

Not only did the 6-foot-3 inch pastor lose 50 pounds, taking him down to his high school weight, but his cholesterol dropped more than 60 points, making his point about better health. “One of my parishioners has nick-named me ‘Slim’,” said the now lean and lanky Reverend Doctor Wade with a self-deprecating smile.

During the five months of his diet-and-exercise program, Bill presented a special series on health to his churches. “Food is what we do in the church,” he readily confessed, “and that is not always a good thing since we tend to overeat. I brought in some experts from the health community to teach the folks how to have a healthier lifestyle and they responded in a very positive way.”

Bill is committed to helping others achieve better health. “I’ve been very convicted that this whole thing was good for me and my folks and for our spiritual journey,” he said. “I’m more than happy to talk with anyone about what we did and how it has benefited so many, including all the hungry people we will be feeding.”

Bill Wade’s commitment to feeding the hungry through the Society of St. Andrew, which dates back nearly twenty years, and his recent weight loss spurred a generous contribution that will ultimately provide more than 75 tons of food for the hungry. The end result will be nearly half-a-million servings of nourishing food for Virginia’s hungry families. “I’d call that a good trade-off for 50 pounds,” concluded Bill.

The Reverend Doctor Bill Wade can be reached at 540-554-8164 or bnwade@netzero.net. For more information about the Society of St. Andrew (Advance Special #801600) call 800-333-4597, email sosausa@endhunger.org, or go online to www.endhunger.org.

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