

# Jackson encourages churches to 'stay in love'

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It was while serving as a paralegal at East Mississippi Legal Services in Forrest that Embra Jackson accepted his calling into a life of ministry.

His father had also been diagnosed with cancer at this time. Jackson's increasing frustration with how the world responded to the big issues, such as poverty, racism, war, etc., lead him to make a commitment.

In college, Jackson looked at other religions, but struggled in his faith.

"But in this time of humility, I realized that it was through Jesus that I would find an answer for my concerns and for my needs," Jackson said.

As a result, Jackson returned to the faith of his early life—the faith in God that his paternal grandfather, a Baptist pastor, and parents nurtured.

After five and a half years of serving as Administrative Assistant to the Bishop of the Mississippi Conference of the United Methodist Church, Jackson and his family have returned to Starkville to serve as the District Superintendent for the Mississippi Conference. He began the new role in January and is enjoying meeting and working with 111 churches, 64 "charges" and 71 active clergy in the district.

"Being the District Superintendent of the Starkville District is both an honor and a responsibility," Jackson said. "The honor comes from knowing that Bishop Ward had enough confidence in me to select me to be the 'shepherd' of the lay and clergy members of this district."

Jackson is leading the district "to stay in love with neighbor and God" with the mission "to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, beginning in the Starkville District."

"My faith has sustained me throughout my life and particularly as a District Superintendent," Jackson said. "It takes faith in God in order to deal with some of the issues that many of our local churches confront. These range from making decisions as to when to relocate a building, starting new ministries, handling conflict, changing worship styles, welcoming new pastors and their families, deciding how to minister to the persons in the communities surrounding the church, etc."

In his first few months as District Superintendent, Jackson is attempting to emphasize four major areas of focus this year, including evangelism, leadership development, missions/outreach and health/wellness.

Jackson has helped the district secure two part time staff to assist in implementing these focus areas. New staff members are Rev. Sarah Windham and Kathy Butler. Windham's pastor of Christ U.M. Church in West Point. She is serving as the coordinator of the Lay Leadership Academy.

Butler, a recent honors graduate of the University of Mississippi for Women, is the coordinator for health/wellness and missions for the district. Butler is assisting in the coordination of the Health Advocate Training that will be lead by Dr. Richard DeShazo of the University Medical Center in Jackson and the Public Broadcasting Radio program, Home Remedy. The health advocate training will be held September 10 at Griffin UMC.

Jackson is also engaged in disaster recovery work through a special fund collected by churches in the district. The fund was created through the help of a matching grant of \$2,500 from First UMC Columbus. Bishop of the Mississippi Conference of the United Methodist Church Hope Morgan Ward, said Jackson is a gifted, dynamic, visionary leader of God's people.

"He has given particular leadership across Mississippi and the global connection of the United Methodist Church in developing ministries of wellness and in strengthening local congregations for mission in the world," Ward said. "I am delighted that he is the embodiment of the office of the bishop in the Starkville District. Christ promises abundant life to all. My hope is that he will continue his excellent leadership, focusing on ministries in local churches and on ministries of wellness."

Former Starkville District Superintendent, Giles Lindley, current pastor at First United Methodist Church in Starkville, said he is excited about Jackson's leadership of this district.

"He knows the Starkville District well, having served three different churches in this area," Lindley said. "But he has a wealth of other experiences — other churches, an urban ministry, serving in the conference office. His work with new churches and developing healthy churches will carry over well to his work here. Having been a District Superintendent and having worked with him directly, I know that he has the patience and common sense to be able to deal with the different problems and opportunities provided by the 100+ churches of the Starkville District."

Jackson said turning to Starkville was strictly through God's leading. About 15 years ago, the Jacksons lived here while Embra served as the pastor of three churches and taught at Armstrong Middle School and the former Wood Junior College. His wife, Rosia, taught at Emerson Elementary School.

"The decision to return to Starkville hinged on me and my family remembering the vow that I made as a United Methodist pastor to go where I am called," Jackson said. "We relied on God to lead us in choosing to return to this area."

But they had settled in Jackson, where they own a home and have family, including two adult children, his mother and mother-in-law, and many friends. Rosia was teaching at Madison Crossing Elementary School where she had recently been selected as Teacher of the Year. Their two younger children were in school in the Jackson area at Hinds and at Germantown Middle School. Their home church, Anderson United Methodist, is also in Jackson.

Jackson said his work as Administrative Assistant to the Bishop was one of his greatest accomplishments. He served under Bishop Hope Morgan Ward, for five and a half years while living in Jackson.

During that time, he helped create a local church assemsnet instrument know as A-2, they trained people to become church coaches, and they also emphasized health and wellness.

Jackson said the Amazing Pace Walking Ministry earned the Mississippi Conference special recognition from the country's Surgeon General, Dr. Steven K. Galson.

"I preached a revival message at Liberty United Methodist Church (last) Monday," Jackson said. "In the

message I told the congregation that if I had not been able to rely on God through difficult times I do not believe that I would have made it in life. I also contributed all of my earthly success to God and to my family. I have come this far by faith, leaning and depending on God and with the support of my family.” Rosia Jackson is board certified teacher and Jackson describes her as the “love of his life.” She will be working as a second grade teacher at Sudduth Elementary this year. They have four children, Embra III works as a volunteer coordinator at the Veteran’s Administration in Jackson; Ebony is a second grade teacher in the Madison County School System; Emmanuel recently became a member of Amercorp’s Read Mississippi Program at East Oktibbeha Elementary School and Katelyn is entering the eighth grade at Armstrong Middle School in Starkville.

Outside of work, Jackson enjoys football and basketball. He also enjoys watching movies and walking the dog, Tanner. He said he is also fascinated by martial arts such as Tai Chi.

As for what’s next, he said he will rely on the Bishop and the Lord to determine his ministerial appointments.

“However, I know that with faith in God I will be able to help someone along this journey we call life,” Jackson said.

For more information about the Starkville District of the Mississippi Conference of the United Methodist Church, go to <http://www.starkvilledistrictumc.org>.