



Upper New York ADVOCATE

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Being God's love with our neighbors in all places

A PUBLICATION OF THE UPPER NEW YORK ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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Join AU Lenten Bible study online

The Upper New York Annual Conference is coming together during Lent to celebrate Africa University and reflect on our commitment to raise \$1 million to endow a scholarship fund. Area members are urged to participate in an online Bible study, *Planting the Seeds of Hope*, that offers a daily devotional as well as a contribution challenge. Each day features a personal reflection about Africa University written by United Methodist clergy and laity. The Bible study guide is available on our website www.unyumc.org.

New year, new look!

The *Advocate* has a new look, but it still contains the news, information and features you can use in your ministry. A new year also means it's time to renew your subscription. See page 12.

Church faces time of great change

Restructuring UMC, budget cuts, clergy jobs on agenda

By Maidstone Mulenga
Advocate editor

How will The United Methodist Church look this time next year?

That is the question the denomination faces as its top legislative body, the General Conference, meets this spring to consider a proposed restructuring.

What shape will the general agencies and boards take?

Will clergy lose guaranteed appointment?

Will the Church accept gay and lesbian clergy?

When the nearly 1,000 delegates from all over the world meet from April 24 to May 4 in Tampa, Fla., their decisions are likely to drastically affect the future of the denomination.

The General Conference has final say on whether the structural changes come to pass. The legislative body also can adjust the recommended budget. A total of 988 delegates from around the globe, including 114 from the Northeastern Jurisdiction, will have a vote at General Conference.

Atop the General Conference agenda is the Call to Action proposal that would restructure the denomination, including consolidating nine of the Church's 13 general agencies under a 15-member board. It would also change how the denomination's budget is managed.

"We see a new church. It is a renewed church that is clear about its mission and confident about its future, a church that is always reaching out, inviting, alive, agile and resilient," the Council of Bishops wrote last year in its statement endorsing the restructuring proposal.

Several Annual Conference delegations – including Iowa and North Texas have – have unanimously endorsed the basic recommendations of the proposal. At press time, the Upper New York An-



Photo by Maidstone Mulenga

Illinois Area Bishop Gregory Palmer is one of the architects of the proposal that recommends significant restructuring of the General Church. That plan is one of the biggest issues facing delegates to the General Conference this spring.

nual Conference delegation had not yet made its decision.

Illinois Area Bishop Gregory Palmer, one of the architects of the proposal, is urging delegates to be open-minded as they consider the legislation, which aims to stop decades of decline in the denomination's U.S. membership and increase congregational vitality.

The proposal was devised by the Interim Operations Team, a group of eight laity and clergy working with

denominational leadership to implement the Call to Action recommendations. Bishop Palmer is convener of the Interim Operations Team.

While The United Methodist Church is growing worldwide, particularly in Africa and the Philippines, U.S. membership has declined by 29 percent since 1968, from 10.7 million to fewer than 8 million members.

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Register now for the 2012 AC Session

Registration is under way for the Upper New York Annual Conference's 2012 Session.

The session will take place from May 31 to June 2 at the Oncenter in Syracuse. The theme for this year's session is *Planting God's Future in Hearts and Neighbors: Called to Till*.

Please note that everyone planning to attend – even those who are exempt from fees such as retired clergy members and equalization members – must register for the 2012 Annual Conference Session.

A registration form is included in this issue. There is also an online registration option.

More information and registration guidelines can be found online at www.unyumc.org.

More on AC inside

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Register online or with the form on
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2012 guest preacher
The Rev. Dr. Marvin McMickle
Bible study leader
The Rev. Dr. Tiffany Steinwert

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REMINDER: ITEMS SUBMITTED FOR PUBLICATION ARE DUE ON THE 5TH OF EACH MONTH FOR THE FOLLOWING MONTH'S ISSUE.