



The Connection

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The volunteers and staff from Skye Farm are busy preparing for the Summer Season. A total of 50 separate programs will be offered for children as young as 3 years old to adults. A complete list of camps can be found on the Skye Farm website at www.skyefarmcamp.org. Brochures can also be obtained by calling Judy Palmer at the Conference Office at (518) 584-8214, extension 14. Read more about camping on pages 10 and 11.

South Royalton church ministry is a F.I.S.H. story

By: Cynthia A. Lovely

Fish.
They were popular creatures throughout the gospels. Since fishing was a common occupation, people immediately understood and related to a... fish story.

Jesus used several examples in scripture including the feeding of the 5,000, fishermen sorting their catch, fishing all night long and catching nothing and a coin found in a fish's mouth to pay a tax.

There is a common belief that early Christians used the sign of a fish as a secret symbol to mark meeting places and as a code to distinguish friends from foes.

This sign is still recognized today as a Christian religious symbol. It is fitting that the United Church

F.I.S.H. story continued page 4

On Becoming New

Stories from the New Area Conference Team and

The Vermont-New England Transitional Team

Pages 7 through 9

Vermont-New England Team to determine district boundaries

By Rev. Rebecca Clark

Coming out of the recent meeting of the Vermont-New England Transition Team, there is progress in one of the transition's most pressing questions: What are we going to do about districts?

The Transition Team approved a plan to determine where the boundaries for districts will be for Vermont and surrounding areas. Representatives from the districts in Vermont, members of the superintendency committees, and members of both cabinets are meeting as a steering committee to organize listening sessions in Vermont. With input from Vermonters, and the insight of conference officials and finance officers, this committee will draw up a proposal

for new districts to be presented at this year's annual conference sessions. Approval or any new districts can only be finalized by the New England Conference in 2010.

The discussion of district boundaries is more than a matter of geography, finances, and number of churches under the charge of one district superintendent. District boundaries can change the way we do ministry in many ways. Several groups, like United Methodist Women, Lay Speaking Ministries, and Youth Fellowship, function more intently at a district level. Additionally, in a conference as large as we are about to become, organizing for ministries, resources, and local missional contexts can be more ef-

Redistrict continued page 7

Working vision to shape work of New ACT affirmed

By Marilyn J. Kasperek

The New Area Conference Team (New ACT) continued their visioning process for the new Conference of the Upper New York Area and affirmed a working Vision and Purpose Statement at its February meeting.

This is a first word, not the last: Expectations are that the statement will continue to develop and the new conference will continue to shape the future vision. (Not be bound by it.)

Those reading the statement should keep in mind that it is for missionary planners, not potential converts and it is to help us prepare for the future, not define the future.

A full text of the statement follows and appears in the graphic with this article.

"Our **vision** (*desired outcome*) is:

To **live the gospel** of Jesus Christ and to be **God's love** with our **neighbors** in all places.

Our **purpose** (*what we do*) is:

Growing in our relationship with God,

Being the body of Christ within

the world,

Living in accordance with the example of Jesus Christ by:

Engaging, equipping, and empowering local churches to be in ministry with and to our Global Neighborhood;

Encouraging and developing leadership within the laity and clergy that is diverse and engaged with the vision of Christ and:

Building relationships with our neighbors, particularly with those who have been disenfranchised by mainstream society."

According to the joint resolution approved by North Central New York, Troy, Western New York, and Wyoming conferences during their respective annual sessions in 2008, the role and work of New ACT is to engage in discussions necessary to form:

❖ A vision for this new area/conference that will lead forth into the coming decade.

❖ A plan of union for the new conference in 2010.

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Steps on the journey to being green Page 12

I wonder as I wander ...

Encounters on the road to Jerusalem and beyond

In my previous column, I pondered about our journeys as Christians, and invited us (including me) to reflect on where we have seen evidence of Christ's presence on the journey, or places where we have witnessed Christ's invitation to join in this discipleship journey towards Jerusalem. One of the lectionary gospel lessons for Lent has been the focus of some of my prayer and reflection on this theme.

In Mark's gospel it's a pivotal point between Jesus' early ministry and his movement towards Jerusalem and the cross. Just prior to this text Peter had responded to Jesus' question, "Who do you say that I am?" with the amazing insight: "You are the Christ, the Messiah." But very shortly after announcing that declaration, Peter protested Jesus' follow-up comment that he would face suffering and torture and be killed, before being raised up alive. Then Jesus called the crowd to join his disciples as Jesus said these somewhat disturbing words (in the Message paraphrase):



Bishop Hassinger

Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You're not in the driver's seat; I am. Don't run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I'll show you how. Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to saving yourself,

your true self. (Mark 8:34-35)

Over this past month or so, I've been privileged to encounter persons and congregations that have allowed Jesus on this journey of discipleship. Jesus has taken them to places they have never anticipated.

Some of these evidences of faithfulness to the mission of Jesus have come as the cabinets of the two conferences have taken time to go within our Episcopal area to see some of the ministries that have been happening. As part of some of our meetings we have witnessed places where pastors and people have gone beyond their comfort zones to share Christ's love and compassion. In some of these settings, it is as though, as that passage from Mark suggests, they have embraced suffering, and sacrificed so that others might hear the good news.

Let me share with you some brief vignettes.

Consider Emmanuel Faith Community, a predominately Latino ministry in the Great Albany Area. They are currently worshipping in Rensselaer in the facility of First Church, which has embraced their presence.

One of the hallmarks of the ministry is an after-school program, which reaches out to a wide area and helps children to have a safe space in the afternoon before they can go home. During that time, among other things, they receive help with homework. Volunteers from other congregations come to assist with the program. The afternoon concludes with a hot meal for the children and youth before they go home. On the day we were there, one of the children offered the prayer of thanksgiving for the meal when asked, on the spur of the moment, by Pastor Mariana Rodrigues. It was a moving expression of gratitude to God, as well as prayers for others.

On another occasion we visited "The Dream Center" housed in the Sarah Jane Johnson Memorial United Methodist Church in Johnson City, near Binghamton, N.Y. We were there during the daytime, and so did not see the at-risk children and youth who participate in very creative programs that help them to deal with the violence in their lives and the world, give them assistance with life skills and provide computers for them to use for learning.

The night before we were there, youth had been gathered to restart a basketball league that would use the gym that is part of this vast building. Before we left, we went to a room just off the sanctuary which has been set up as the "Maine Street Café," where there are small tables and a very hospitable atmosphere.

"The Dream Center" emerged out of a God-given vision sensed by Patty Cardin, who had a passion for reaching out to the children and youth of the neighborhood. The church has literally given up parts of its facilities, losing their former life as it were, for the sake of following Jesus.

Often we hear about congregations that have sought to keep their doors open primarily so that they can provide a place for those aging members who have gone there all of their lives, even if they church is not connecting with the new neighbors in the surrounding community. Sometimes it seems as though they are waiting to die.

Two congregations have made a different choice: they have chosen to die so that a new congregation might be born. While the cabinets have not visited this setting, the district superintendent has kept us informed about what has been happening.

In the city of Wilkes-Barre, Pa., First Church and Abbott Church decided last spring that they would unite, that both of their buildings would be sold, and that a new congregation for new people would be formed in another type of setting, one where a traditional church building would not be the model. A new pastor, one who speaks both English and Spanish fluently, has been appointed and is already beginning to work on the beginning steps of this first "new church start" in the Wyoming Conference in many decades.



The congregation of Emmanuel Faith Community, a predominately Latino ministry in the Greater Albany Area, offer an after-school program, providing a much needed ministry to the community.

Another example of a congregation that has been giving itself away came as I received a request for supporting of a program growing out of the Hedding United Methodist Church in Barre, Vt. This formerly robust town, at the heart of the granite industry, has fallen on some difficult times. The church has provided a variety of programs and ministries to the neighborhood. Their vision of how to connect with those who would normally be skeptical of the church keeps growing and involving new people in the non-traditional outreach into the community.

In each of these settings, pastors and people have joined together to follow Jesus' leading in unconventional ways. Even when what they are doing may look like suffering, they have embraced the possibilities. They express joy at the ways that God is providing the resources they need in unexpected ways.

While this may seem to be a Lenten message, one of sacrifice and sometimes suffering, I hope that you see that such difficult journeys often lead to new life, new possibilities, resurrection on the other side.

Where is God inviting you to follow Jesus for the sake of the world? What Lenten journey are you being asked to take with the promise of resurrection and new life on the other side?

Read Lenten messages by Bishop Marcus Matthews of the New York West Area and Bishop Peter D. Weaver of the Boston Episcopal Area on-line at www.newconferences.info.



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What would Jesus eat?

“The created world itself can hardly wait for what’s coming next...”

Romans 8:19, The Message

By Henry Frueh

Each food item in a typical U.S. meal travels an average of 1,500 miles, exacting a huge toll in food quality, land degradation, energy consumption, health and community life. We can do better than that

I once visited acquaintances who, at the time, owned and operated Caretaker Farm in Williamstown, Mass., one of the oldest organic farms in the country. They used their 35 acres “to the max:” seven acres produce vegetables; 16 acres of pasture support sheep and assorted cows, pigs and chickens; and one-quarter acre supports apple, pear and plum trees. The rest of the land is woods, wetlands, ponds and a stream.

Their farming methods model efficiency, sustainability and quality of product. One third of the vegetable land lies fallow each year to recover its usefulness. A solar-powered water pump distributes spring water to livestock at several rotating grazing areas. A movable chicken coop (two people pick it up and drag it) allows chickens to graze on fresh meadow each day, producing chicken of significantly higher quality than mass-produced grain-fed poultry, while also fertilizing the soil. A large root cellar stores and provides hardy produce into February. The farm also offers farm-baked bread, honey, eggs, maple syrup, berries, farm-raised meats and pick-your-own flowers and herbs. And, naturally, no pesticides are used.

Caretaker Farm is one of over 2,200 Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms in the U.S. Some 200 households pay up-front shares to financially back this farm’s operations. In return, every week from June to February each household receives a large canvas bag to be filled with the available produce of their choice. Benefits include the availability of pesticide-free produce of extraordinary quality, soil and farm land that is continually enriched rather than depleted, and a personal relationship between consumers and farmer/producers. (Find your nearest CSA at localharvest.org)

Why bring this up? Because God’s people have an interest in responsible care of creation, in feeding the world’s people, and in nurturing community. My acquaintances managed their land as an expression of their deep Christian faith and their love for this world and its people.

In his book, *Deep Economy*, Troy Conference United Methodist lay person Bill McKibben calls us away from our “hyper-individualized” world and toward a renewed appreciation of localized interdependence, including local food production. The extended cabinets of both Troy and Wyoming conferences are studying this book together for insights into how local churches might lead the world in its search for meaningful local community.

Speaking of books, sell all that you own and buy Barbara Kingsolver’s *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*. This extraordinary account of her family’s experience of eating locally-produced food for one year may well revolutionize your eating and community life.

The success of an enterprise like Caretaker Farm has both local and worldwide implications. It shows us a new way (which is really the old way!). It calls us backward to our roots and forward to a world without walls or exploitation. Sounds suspiciously like what a church ought to be.

Easter is upon us. All of creation – human and non-human – groans with the birth pangs of “what’s coming next.” The scriptures connect our resurrection with that of the earth (Romans 8). A locally-based food economy restores the earth and creates community. The next time you reach for that Chilean-grown bunch of asparagus in February, you might want to first ask, “What would Jesus eat?”

Frueh is the Adirondack District Superintendent

No one is leaving ...

By Rev. Rebecca Clark

“Are you staying with Troy Conference, or are you going to New England?”

My clergy sisters and brothers, this is a question I have heard far too many times, and each one is like a kick in the gut. Yes, we are being asked to choose to be affiliated with either the new upstate New York conference or the New England Conference, and the dividing line can sometimes feel like the River Jordan cutting us off from the Promised Land—although we all know how God dealt with that particular boundary). Yes, we are deeply concerned about which of our colleagues will remain in the same Conference as us.



Clark

But staying with Troy Conference is not one of our choices, no matter how much we wish it was.

The new conference being formed in New York State is not Troy Conference 2.0, and does not have a larger share of the personality and identity of Troy Conference. Yes, it may have a larger share of the people, but numbers can’t measure heart and soul. The churches and clergy in Vermont—and Vermonters in the New York mission field—who will join with New England Conference are not leaving Troy Conference behind.

Troy Conference is dying to new life, and we are at least a little familiar with professing that dying to new life is not dying at all. Still, none of us get to stay with Troy. All of us are becoming part of something new and exciting that God is doing. Newness and change come with pain, but we do not need to compound that sadness with the suggestion that some of us are remaining in connection and others are walking away. Connection and connectionalism are bigger than where we live and work and are in ministry. You can take the pastor out of Troy Annual Conference, but—well, I think you know the rest.

Listen, and I’ll tell you a secret, if not exactly a mystery. God doesn’t care where we draw our conference lines. God is not contained by geo-political boundaries or even by which baseball team you think should win the American League Championship Series. The connection, the collegial respect, the love as brothers and sisters in Christ that we all share—laity and clergy alike—is a God thing, and like God, is no respecter of silly arbitrary lines on a map.

So Troy stays with all of us, as we all go to new life and hope and friendship. You may be going into a new conference body in New York. And in case you wanted to ask, yes, I am going to be part of New England Annual Conference.

But I’m staying with you.

Clark is a member of the Vermont-New England Team and pastor at Grace United Methodist Church in Plainfield, Vt., and Trinity United Methodist Church in Montpelier, Vt. Her e-mail address is pastorbeccaclark@gmail.com.

4WORD '09

**When the World says “this way”,
We say “Yaweh”**

WHAT? The fifth Annual event for the youth in Grades 7-12 of North Central NY, Troy, Western NY, and Wyoming Conferences! Bring your youth group to praise God And form new friendships!

WHERE? Holiday Inn, Liverpool, NY (Syracuse)

WHEN? April 24-26, 2009

SPEAKERS: Youth . . . from each conference

Cost is \$100 per person

WORKSHOPS: Everything from faith issues to fun times
Youth Service Fund, Bible Trivia, Volleyball, New Games, Mission of Peace, Adult Leader Workshops, and Open Mic! And MORE!



Registration Deadline Postmarked: April 9, 2009
We cannot guarantee room reservations at the Conference Hotel for any registrations postmarked after April 9, 2009

Send registration and payment (registration must include payment) to:
RoseMarie Schlock, Wyoming Annual Conference, P O Box 58, Endicott, NY 13760
Make checks payable to: Wyoming Annual Conference

Registration questions contact—Tony & Judy Hipes at tandj3905@hotmail.com
Event questions contact—Ted Anderson at geneseevalleyumc@crdc.us.edu

SEE YOU THERE !

South Royalton church's ministry is a F.I.S.H. story

of South Royalton, Vt., would choose this name and symbol for an outreach ministry of their congregation.

F.I.S.H.—Families and Individuals Seeking Hope.—was founded in 2007 with the purpose of helping families struggling with economic instability and financial hardship. The concept for the program began with a united desire of the congregation to establish a local Christian outreach.

The idea was formed after a simple sermon that Rev. Jim Proctor preached one Sunday morning. He talked about worldwide mission efforts and mentioned the poverty existing in their own community.

The topic spoke directly to Dick Ellis, an established church member, local businessman and life-long resident of South Royalton. In his position as town health officer he visited homes and trailers and was surprised at the level of poverty he found there.

After this particular sermon Ellis said, "I felt like God had tapped me on the shoulder and said, 'Hey Dick, are you listening?'"

Obviously he was because shortly after, the F.I.S.H. team became a reality.

Ellis and his wife, Polly, came forward with the idea of helping local families in need.

They had "dreamed of this for some time, had no idea how to accomplish it and wondered if this was the ministry the church was searching for," Ellis said.

When the idea was first presented to the church it received an enthusiastic and affirmative response. Proctor completely supported the idea. He said, "The church was in the right place and time to receive it and act upon it. It was the Spirit of Christ using the whole body of Christ 'when the time had fully come.'"

In the planning stages, a team was formed to create guidelines for the program. The team was comprised of seven members who were compassionate and willing to work hard.

In accordance with the fishy theme, a favorite motto of Ellis became the foundation of the ministry. "Give someone a fish and they will eat for a day. Teach someone to fish and they will eat for a lifetime."

An excellent concept, but the team realized that in order for the program to be successful, they had to face some hard facts.

Financial struggles are a common denominator among many families. Money doesn't seem to stretch as far. Job opportunities are diminishing. For families already on the edge, it becomes a hopeless cycle. Job interviews and employment possibilities are cancelled out due to lack of transportation. Education may improve job potential but it is not affordable. Child care is too expensive. Lost in this cycle of negatives the stress builds up and threatens to fracture families.



Inspired by the gospels and the adage "teach someone to fish and they will fish for a lifetime," the congregation of the United Church of South Royalton, Vt., have launched an outreach ministry that helps people in need by teaching them the skills to get back on—and stay on—their feet.

Realistically facing these problems, the team set up an effective outline for meeting the actual needs.

First, potential participants are identified. Referrals come from a variety of places including word-of-mouth, doctors, a school nurse or local government officials. Participants are interviewed by two team members, then the request and information is brought before the whole team. They determine the need and decide if the family has the potential to become self-sufficient. The participants must have a serious level of commitment for the program to succeed.

When a participant is accepted into the program, they are scheduled to meet weekly with two trained mentors. In those meetings, the family or individual will receive guidance in recognizing their strengths and weaknesses, listing their assets and identifying the obstacles. They are encouraged to establish goals and to create a plan to reach those goals.

Practical assistance is offered to them with transportation (including a car that is loaned out), debt relief, budgeting, education, counseling, child care, home weatherization, and referrals to other service agencies.

The F.I.S.H. program is funded primarily by a \$25,000 yearly donation from the Ellis family. This donation supplies available funds to the participants, under the direction of the team and as needed, to reach their goals. The hope is that once an individual or family has established a life of financial stability and self-sufficiency, they will in turn help others.

One of the success stories of the program involves a single mother. Faced with school loans, the responsibilities of two small children, and no home or transportation, she presented the perfect candidate for the ministry.

The F.I.S.H. team tackled each

lives and express appreciation for the long-term support that the F.I.S.H. team provided to them.

Ellis said, "Participants of the program who are now supporting their own families have a tremendous change in their attitude. They are thrilled



problem and helped her find her way towards a more stable environment. The team assisted her in finding a job and locating an apartment. They helped her learn about budget planning, including a savings plan and paying off debt. She was able to use the loan of a car for almost a year before purchasing her own vehicle.

She is hoping to pursue a college degree in the future.

"The assistance I received from F.I.S.H. was invaluable," she said. "There is no way I would be where I am today without their help. I know the path I am on now and I am committed to following it through."

Other families have graduated the program and are recommending the ministry to their friends. They are proud of the positive changes in their

knowing that they have the skills and ability to care for the needs of their families."

Proctor is pleased with the success of the program.

"Our participants know that their children have a much better chance for a financially secure future," he said. "The parents not only provide well for the children, but also teach them fruitful, financial practices. That is the real payoff and our greatest joy—breaking the cycle of generational poverty."

"The children of successful F.I.S.H. graduates will not need a F.I.S.H. team when they grow up," he said. "Their parents will lead the way."

"We are privileged to serve in this ministry of loving your neighbor," Proctor said. "It seems like something Jesus would do."

Proposed amendments would move denomination from a U.S. centered church to a global church

By Sandra Brands

Members at this year's annual conference sessions will be asked to consider the definition of inclusivity, voting rights for local pastors and restructuring the world-wide United Methodist Church.

Thirty-two amendments were passed at the denomination's General Conference, held in Fort Worth, Texas, April 23 through May 2, 2008. The amendments will now be presented for vote by annual conference session members throughout the connection, and must receive two-thirds of the total votes cast to become part of church law.

Of the 32 amendments, 23 do little more than change the language of the existing Constitution by substituting the word "regional" for "central" in Articles referencing conference structure.

However, this apparently small change in language, if approved, will make it possible to move the church from a United States-centered denomination to a global one.

That means that legislation would be determined by the regional church, with the Constitution remaining under the auspices of the General Conference.

"Right now there is no equity between regions in the world, and in many ways the world-wide United Methodist Church gives preferential opportunities to the church structure and people who live in the United States," said the Rev. Nina Nichols, pastor at Christ United Methodist Church in Troy, N.Y.

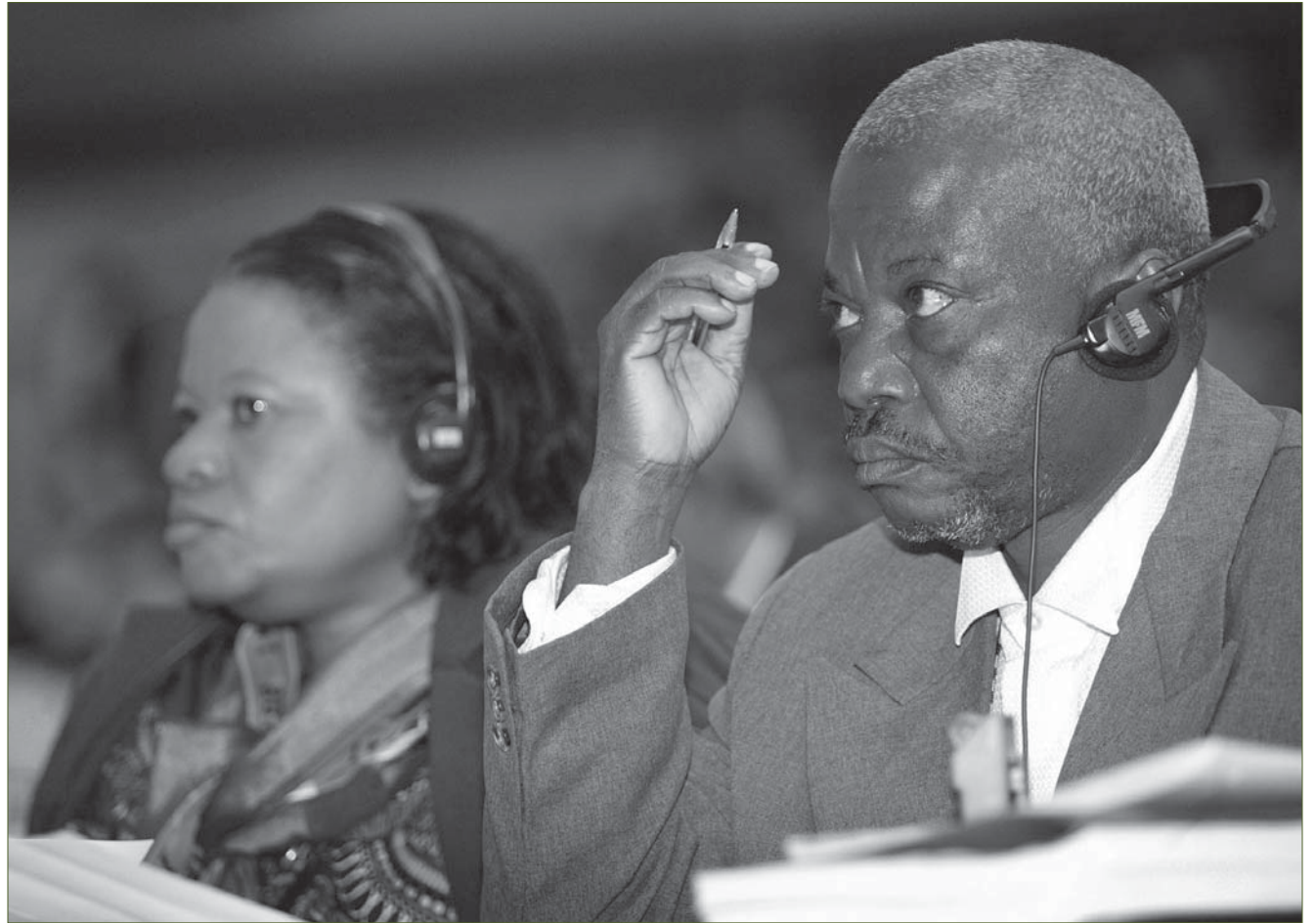
Nichols attended General Conference as a monitor for the Methodist Federation for Social Action (MFSA) and sat in on legislation discussion groups on the 23 proposed amendments.

"Right now, all the [United Methodist] boards and agencies are located here [in the U.S.], and most of the meetings happen here," she said. "Those are examples of preferential opportunities."

The global church

According to the report from the Council of Bishops and the Connectional Table to General Conference, (available on-line at <http://worldwideumc.org>) the proposed changes will not affect Jurisdictional Conferences and the election and deployment of bishops, nor does it change the General Agencies, General Conference, the way the Social Principles are decided upon or amended, or how money is apportioned.

What the proposed amendments do is change terminology and remove the phrase "outside the United States" from the definition of the Central Conferences. These changes will make it possible for a future General Conference to make the United States a regional conference, or conferences like the rest of the connection.



Delegates Musumb Kapemb (left) and Isolo Kapumba of the South West Katanga delegation listen to a translation of the proceedings of The United Methodist Church's 2004 General Conference in Pittsburgh. A UMNS file photo by Mike DuBose.

As the United Methodist Church is structured currently, Central Conferences, which exist outside the United States and include Africa, the Philippines and Europe, are only required to follow the Articles of Faith and the Constitution of The United Methodist Church. Because there are significant cultural and political differences between many of the Central Conferences and the United States, Central Conferences can amend or adopt other parts of the United Methodist Book of Discipline, a document produced every four years after General Conference that contains the law and doctrine of the denomination.

"Central Conferences can now take the Discipline and go home and say, 'this doesn't work for us,' so they can alter the Discipline," said the Rev. Michelle Bogue-Trost, pastor at Newtonville N.Y. United Methodist Church in New York, and a General Conference delegate. "In the U.S., we can't.

"One reason is that General Conference is U.S.-dominated, so the document [The Discipline] we're preparing is U.S.-centric," she said. "The Central Conferences go home and do what they need to make [the Discipline] work for them.

"Central conferences are allowed to make decisions based on their cultural understandings and situation," said the Rev. Steve Clunn, pastor at First United Methodist Church in Schenectady, N.Y., and a clergy delegate to Jurisdictional Conference. "We have pretty strong statements against capital punishment or the use of force, which, for countries living under the regime

of a fairly brutal dictator [may not be realistic].

Conference Lay Leader and General Conference Delegate Ilah Sisson Walser said. "Africa, which has a different point of view both theological and socially than the United States, would be able to self-govern within the scope of the church.

For some, many of the proposed amendments are a way to minimize the influence of the more conservative African church on the social issues the U.S. church has debated for years, such as human sexuality.

"Ultimately, [these amendments are] an attempt to acknowledge that what we create every quadrennium is a document that is by in large U.S.-centric," said Bogue-Trost. "Some of the controversial issues the church has been arguing for years will no longer have to be argued at the global level [General Conference] where these controversies may not be culturally relevant."

In fact, the amendments shift the Book of Discipline toward a global understanding of the connection.

"Right now, people come from all over the world to General Conference that is always held in the United States and vote on thousands of resolutions that have only things to do with the United States," said Clunn.

"We're a world-wide denomination and have a system set up that favors the United States because we are the ones setting the legislation and the agenda for the General Church," he said. "We do that as a country, whether we like to admit it or not. We hold the major amount of the seats on the General

Boards and Agencies right now.

"The structure breathes colonialism," he said.

"Given the emerging world-wide nature of The United Methodist Church, it was the opinion of the General Conference that these Constitutional amendments would structure the church in such a way that it would allow an even playing field for all parts of the church, not just the United States portion," said Walser. "It opens the door, so in the future the United States, if directed by General Conference, could become a regional conference.

The Constitution

The Constitution spells out the organization of the General, Jurisdictional, Central and Annual Conferences and defines the role of bishops and the Judicial Constitution. It also establishes requirements for membership in the church.

Like the U.S. Constitution, the United Methodist Church's Constitution forms the foundation of legislative rulings.

"Whenever there is a judicial council decision, the basis of its decision comes back to the Constitution," said the Rev. Henry Frueh, Adirondack District Superintendent and chair of the General Conference delegation. "Each one of these amendments has a potentially far-reaching affect on as yet undetermined and future issues that may impact the church. The Judicial Council makes decisions based on the specific wording and its understanding of those amendments. That means they

Amendments continued page 18

God is Still Creating (Us)

The 178th Session of
Troy Annual Conference
June 10 through 13, 2009
Saratoga Springs, N.Y.



Call for stories about God's presence in the ministries of Troy Conference

The theme for this year's Annual Conference Session, June 10 through 13 in Saratoga Springs, N.Y., is "God is still Creating (Us)."

Stories of how people have seen or experienced God at work creating in the shared ministries of Troy Conference will be told at Conference Session.

Share the stories of how God has used ministries such as United Methodist Women, Conference Lay Speakers, Skye Farm and Covenant Hills, Emmaus/Chrysalis, spiritual development, Volunteers-in-Missions and ministries engaged in by local churches.

These stories and others will be compiled in a booklet, which will be

distributed at session.

Those interested in sharing their stories are invited to answer the question: "When or where have you seen God creating in Troy Conference—in you, in community, or in ministry?"

Guidelines for submissions are listed below. Submission deadline is April 1. For more information contact Meredith Vanderminden at meredith@vanderminden.com. All are invited to witness to God at work creating among us.

A Creating God Essay Submission Guidelines

1. Essay submission deadline is April 8. You will receive confirmation

of your submission within two days of its receipt.

2. Please answer the question "When or where have you seen God creating in Troy Conference—in you, in community, or in ministry?" clearly and concisely in your essay.

3. Please limit your essay to 350-500 words, or about three minutes when read aloud at your natural speaking pace.

4. All essays should include your name, church, and contact information, including e-mail address and telephone number, when available. Please place this information at the top of your essay for easy reference.

5. Submissions should be sent electronically to meredith@vanderminden.com. If this is not possible, submissions may be mailed to Rev. Meredith Vanderminden, 8 Jacqueline Dr., Queensbury, N.Y. 12804.

6. All essays will be reviewed and prepared for publication in book format. Some essays will be selected for use at Annual Conference 2009. If your essay is selected, you will be contacted no later than May 1 and asked to video tape the reading of your essay for Annual Conference. If you wish to submit an essay for the book but do not want it presented at Annual Conference, please indicate that on the top of your essay.

District Conferences May 16

Registration opens at 9:30 a.m.

Adirondack District

Plattsburgh United Methodist Church
127 Beekman St., Plattsburgh, N.Y. 12901

Albany District

McKownville United Methodist Church
1565 Western Ave., Albany, N.Y. 12203

Embury District

Shaftsbury United Methodist Church
127 Church St., Shaftsbury, Vt. 05262

Green Mountain District

Grace United Methodist Church
130 Maple St., Essex Junction, Vt. 05452

Members of Annual Conference Session are encouraged to attend District Conferences to study, discuss and learn more about the Constitutional amendments, legislation and business of the upcoming session.

For more information, contact your district superintendent's office or visit www.troyac.org>Event Calendars.

CORR-ageous leaders to monitor Troy Conference Session

The Conference Commission on Religion and Race (CCORR), also referred to as "CORR-ageous Leaders" requests the assistance of all trained monitors to monitor Troy Annual Conference Session, June 10 through 13, in Saratoga Springs, N.Y.

Monitoring is an invaluable tool to ensure there is diversity and inclusiveness in all proceedings. It creates an

awareness of when the Annual Conference is being inclusive and where it needs improvement.

Those interested in monitoring all or any portion of Conference Session, should contact Mildred S. Mason at (518) 374-2185 or masonschen@aol.com or Barbara Heise at (518) 355-7654 or barbdkr@verizon.net prior to June 10.

High school students invited to be pages

High school students in grades 10, 11 and 12 are invited to serve as pages at the Troy Annual Conference Session, June 10 through 13, in Saratoga Springs, N.Y.

Pages greet and assist those arriving for conference, assist with various activities throughout the conference,

help put together and distribute materials to members, take messages to and from the bishop, help with technical equipment, assist with meal check-in and have fun and fellowship with other pages.

Download an application form at www.troyac.org>Resources>Forms.

Singers, musicians sought for Session worship

Clergy, laity, youth and special guests are invited to join the Annual Conference Session Choir. The Rev. Jill C. Robinson will direct the choir at the Ordination Worship Service on Saturday, June 13.

Rehearsals are tentatively scheduled for Thursday, June 11 at 12:30 p.m.; Friday, June 12 at 6 p.m.; and Saturday, June 13 at 8 a.m., if needed.

Rehearsal reminders and changes

will be posted with announcements at conference. Let Robinson know by May 15 if you will sing with the choir by replying to revjill@myfairpoint.net or (802) 388-2510.

Robinson also seeks gifted and experienced musicians who would like to be considered for the conference music ensemble that will play during worship. Contact Robinson at revjill@myfairpoint.net or (802) 388-2510.

Next step: To equip planning teams

By Rev. Bill Gottschalk-Fielding

The New Area Conference Team (New ACT) has been pretty busy since my last column. We adopted a "Vision and Purpose" statement at our February meeting to inform, inspire and instruct United Methodists in Upper New York as we develop our new conference together. I like the whole statement, but I'm especially drawn to the vision section: our vision (desired outcome) is to live the gospel of Jesus Christ and to be God's love with our neighbors in all places. See the entire statement on page 9.

New ACT's second big focus has been formulating guidelines to equip the dozens of planning teams needed to develop new conference directions, ministries, teams and structures. At our meeting in March we identified seven principles by which all planning teams are to conduct their work:

- ❖ Innovative: teams will seek innovative approaches to address new conference needs.
- ❖ Spiritually Centered: teams will maintain a strong spiritual focus and conduct work using a process of spiritual discernment.
- ❖ Vision and Purpose Driven: teams will intentionally link their work with the New ACT vision and purpose statement.
- ❖ Diverse and Inclusive: teams will have membership which is as diverse as possible in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, generations, and geography and will include a balanced mix of both old and new voices.
- ❖ Focused: teams will have clear tasks, deadlines and outcome expectations.



Gottschalk-Fielding

Planning teams will be crucial in creation of new conference

Planning teams will be crucial to help build a new conference in upper New York area that is faithful to the conference's vision and purpose statement.

Already working on strategies, data collection, and recommendations for New ACT are the Joint Distributing Committee convened by Robyn Hayes with Steve Deckard acting as linking person to New ACT; Communications Task Force convened by Maidstone Mulenga with Holly Nye acting as linking person to New ACT; Assets Allocation convened by Rene Wilbur with Larry Lundgren acting as linking person to New ACT; and Interim Sessions Committee convened and linked to New ACT by Christine Doran.

At its March 7 meeting, the New Area Conference Team (New ACT) added an Interim Personnel Committee, Interim Leadership Development Committee and an Ordained Ministry team. Sherri Rood will be the New ACT linking person on Ordained Ministry; other linking persons are yet

to be determined.

The Interim Personnel Committee is responsible for developing job descriptions and presenting three qualified candidates by January 31, 2010 to Bishop Marcus Matthews for each of the positions that must be in place on July 1, 2010—Treasurer, Director of Connectional Ministries, Director of Administration, and Director of Communications.

Nominations for this team will be made from the Episcopal offices with assistance from the Diversity Team, a sub team within New ACT, and will be presented at New ACT's April 25 meeting.

The Interim Leadership Development Committee is responsible for recruiting persons to serve on the committees which must be in place for the new conference in the Upper New York Area by July 1, 2010: Conference Finance and Administration, Sessions, Connectional Table (Conference Council), Board of Pensions, Nomi-

Conversations on redistricting planned from page 1

fective and more personally connected through the district. All Vermonters and members of surrounding districts in New Hampshire and Massachusetts are invited to get involved in conversations about how a newly-structured district might help local churches and programs be more effective in ministry.

Another much-discussed transitional issue centered around ministries in Vermont that have been supported by the Troy Annual Conference. These include Covenant Hills Camp and Green Mountain College. In each case, Troy Conference has provided a great deal of the support for each program, and is committed to continuing these important ministries. Jim McPhee, New England Conference Assistant to the Bishop, recently visited Cov-

enant Hills Camp and will continue to connect appropriate people from New England Conference with those working on the ongoing support of the camping program, Green Mountain College, and other United Methodist ministry programs in Vermont.

Additional conversation at the Feb. 17 Transition Team meeting included discussion of overall progress for all six conferences undergoing boundaries changes, and ways to stay informed about what is happening. Visit www.newconferences.info for more information and updates.

Communications in all six conferences and in Vermont and New England will be focusing on ways to inspire people with the vision of what is happening, keep people informed about the tran-

On Becoming New

Stories from the New Area Conference Team (New ACT) and

The Vermont-New England Transitional Team

- ❖ Resourced: teams will be adequately resourced (delegated authority, money for meetings, information, etc).
- ❖ Supervised and Connected: teams will be supervised and linked to New ACT.

Several planning teams are already at work: Communications, Pensions, and Finance and Administration. A planning team focused on the Board of Ordained Ministry has also officially taken up its work. I am also aware of many other informal conversations which will soon be translated, one way or another, into the work of a planning team.

To care for the immediate needs of the first sessions of our new conference, we have also created several "interim committees:" an interim sessions committee to plan and prepare for the Uniting Conference session on June 19, 2010, and the adjourned session on Sept. 11, 2010; an interim personnel committee to develop initial staffing options for the new conference; and a Lay Leadership Development (Nominations) committee to draft the slate of candidates for new conference leadership.

As you can see, New ACT has been busy. If you would like to learn more, visit my blog at <http://convenerscorner.blogspot.com/> or contact me directly at pastor32@twcnv.nyrr.com or (607) 533-4070. Your input and prayers are essential.

Gottschalk-Fielding is the Convener of New ACT.

nations, Rules, Personnel, Episcopacy, Statistician, Board of Ordained Ministry, and a Transition Team.

This Interim Leadership Development Committee will need to determine what gifts will be needed from individuals serving on a particular committee. The team will need a pool of diverse individuals from which to make recommendations. The Diversity team of New ACT will develop and share possible names with the bishops.

The Leadership Development committee needs to be in place by Sept. 1 and appointments by the bishops to this committee are scheduled to be on the New ACT agenda on Aug. 8.

The slate of persons to serve on the critical committees is needed by March 15, 2010, for election in June 2010.

The Transition Team, which will be authorized to act for the new conference between sessions, will be elected at the next year's Uniting Conference.

Members of New ACT reviewed a number of models for how Conference

Planning teams will do their work: Margin to Center, Center to Margin and Further Margins to Center and Back Again. Some groups are already operating under one of these models and others will be guided to a particular model by New ACT in light of the work they are asked to complete.

New Act will establish a policy statement as to what it is resourcing, such as how many official meetings may be resourced to achieve the goal, per diems for meals, lodging and mileage. Each Conference is currently responsible for their share of meeting expenses.

A Critical Question Task Force will create a set of critical questions in light of the New ACT vision and purpose. They will also determine how to identify, recruit and enlist people to work on those questions.

New ACT meets again on April 25.

Information on the creation of the new Conference is updated regularly at uppernewyork.org

sitional work going on, and invite one another and those outside the church into the new thing God is doing.

The team also broke into smaller groups to discuss the areas of harmonizing administrative and structural questions, addressing issues of finances and assets, building relationships, and supporting ministries and programs. In all cases, boards and teams are beginning to share ideas and communication, and many boards and teams have begun to invite members from both conferences to meetings and planning sessions.

Priorities in programming, in addition to camping and Green Mountain College, include Anti-Racism training, Certified Lay Ministry, Vermont-based staff, and Troy Conference Spiritual Directors trainings.

In terms of building and honoring relationships, the sub-team insists that relationships are not official things and cannot be formed or divided along official boundary lines. Priorities moving forward include making contacts between youth in the two conferences, communicating profiles and ministry goals between churches and individuals, sharing prayer concerns, and encouraging congregations to adopt 'sister' churches across conference boundaries.

Structural systems in the two conferences will be compared in the months ahead, and the top financial priority is determining the division of the financial year ahead. From there, questions of budget integration, mission shares/apportionments, benevolence giving, and critical issues funding can be addressed.

New ACT authorizes Planning Teams to begin gathering data

By Sandra Brands

Last month, the New Area Conference Team (New ACT) released the working vision and purpose statement for the new conference that will emerge in upstate New York next year: “to live the gospel of Jesus Christ and to be God’s love with our neighbors in all places.”

Everything will be tuned to help United Methodists in the new conference area care for their neighbors as God asks. Planning Teams are now being organized to work on making recommendations on legal and administrative details and staffing needs. While there are some things that are under the auspices of *The United Methodist Book of Discipline*, such as issues around property, ordination and structure, everything will be developed in order to help United Methodists in upstate New York reach out to their neighbors in love and service.

That does not mean everything will be in place by the first of July, 2010, the start date for the new conference.

“Our primary focus is to have a basic [conference] structure ready for the Uniting Conference [June 19, 2010] to act on,” said the Rev. Bill Gottschalk-Fielding, convener of New ACT. “Much will be left for us to develop in the months and years following the conference union. The basic structure—and we’re still developing that list—will be in place, but not every team, not every committee, not every ministry will be formally organized by the time of the Uniting Conference.”

Gottschalk-Fielding is quick to add that even if a ministry, team, staff position or program isn’t part of the initial structure, it doesn’t mean that it won’t be part of the new conference.

“We’re learning a lot from our sisters and brothers in the Indiana Conference, and they had a lot left to be formally organized after the united conference,” he said. “New ACT seeks to limit its work to the bare essentials so that as the new conference gains experiences it has room to adapt and innovate.”

At its conference in July last year, the North Central Jurisdiction approved the merger of Northern and Southern Indiana. The two conferences were part of the same Episcopal area.

Being one Episcopal area made it simpler for the two Indiana conferences to merge, said Bishop Marcus Matthews of the New York West Episcopal Area and future bishop of the Upper New York Conference.

“The unique piece in this [the upper New York Area] is that there are two bishops with presidential authority,” he said. That, said Bishop Matthews, made the Indiana merger somewhat simpler. “We can’t be a carbon copy of the Indiana model because that was a merger. In the Albany Area, we’re sending folks to different conferences. That’s radically different.”

“That’s made it an interesting jour-

ney,” he said.

Over the next 18 months, Bishop Matthews will continue to get to know the people of the New York West area and will begin getting to know the people of the Albany Episcopal Area. Bishop Susan W. Hassinger of the Albany Episcopal Area brought the extended cabinets of the four conferences together shortly after Bishop Matthews was assigned to the New York West Area.

“That was a nice beginning point,” said Bishop Matthews. More such gatherings are being planned.

In the summer, the 17 district superintendents, four directors of connective ministries, the executive assistant to the bishop, and four treasurers will meet with the bishops over a four-day period.

“The purpose is to build community and for me to get to know cabinet level ministers and for them to get to know each other,” he said. “It is my hope that this will be an important gathering, because this is where we will talk about our shared values and ministries.”

In October, Bishop Matthews will visit districts in the Troy and Wyoming Conference. “I will be meeting with clergy and laity and will visit some of the United Methodist institutions in the area. We have put that on the calendar as a way to introduce me to the laity and clergy in the Albany Area.”

Bishop Matthews will also be present at the Albany Area appointment retreat next January.

“Bishop Hassinger will be giving leadership, but I will be there to observe and hear conversations about the churches and pastoral leadership,” he said. “It’s an opportunity for me to get a sense and feel for the area.”

Bishops of the United Methodist Church, in consultation with the district superintendents, make clergy appointments in a conference.

The structure and organization of each of the conferences beyond the cabinet and what is required by *the United Methodist Book of Discipline* does differ. Ministries, teams and programs all reflect the differences in how the conference members interpret the denomination’s mission to make disciples for Jesus Christ. The new conference vision and purpose statement will give the four conferences a unified interpretation of that mission.

First things first

New ACT has begun forming interim planning teams, most populated by people from the four conferences. Some groups have been meeting since last fall; others are just being formed.

Representatives from New England and Central Pennsylvania will sit on three of the four teams created first: Asset Allocations, Joint Distributing and Communications.

The fourth of the initial teams created is the Board of Ordained Ministry.

The work one will need to meet the

requirements of the *Book of Discipline* as well as the needs of the new conference configurations. It is a task that could easily overwhelm.

For some, the apparent lack of attention being paid to the administrative and legal issues was frustrating and raised anxieties about the rapidly approaching date of union, but the vision and purpose statement provides the framework upon which the interim planning teams and future conference teams will begin to shape the policies and programs of the new conference.

“The vision statement now sets us free to let the two [Episcopal] areas know where we are headed,” said Bishop Matthews. “It sets [the teams] free to do their work while holding the vision before them.”

“For me, it’s an exciting time because people have been asking about our vision and purpose and where we’re headed,” he said. “Now, New ACT is clear on that.”

For example, keeping the vision in the forefront of planning could affect how the new conference will recruit, equip and support clergy, according to Gottschalk-Fielding.

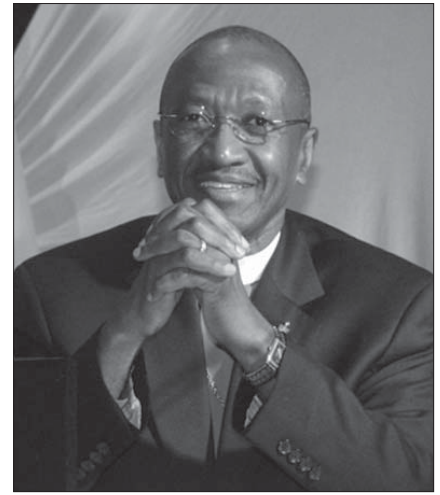
“In my annual conference [North Central New York], we currently require commissioned persons to have one unit of clinical-pastoral education (CPE) before they’re eligible for ordination,” he said. “If reaching our neighbors is our primary focus, wouldn’t it be interesting if we required candidates for ordination to be competent in one language beyond English spoken in our region? Certainly, Spanish would be one such language, but I can also imagine someone seeking proficiency in Mohawk or Korean.”

“That would be one way that the vision and purpose statement could shape a new direction for a particular area of ministry,” he said.

At the March New ACT meeting, three more interim committees were affirmed: Personnel, Sessions and Leadership Development or Nominations. In accordance with the 2008 *Book of Discipline* ¶1509, the members of the Joint Distributing Planning Team will need to be elected at the Central Pennsylvania, New England, North Central New York, Troy, Western New York and Wyoming annual conference sessions in May and June. A slate of names will be presented to the annual conferences for approval, and nominations will be accepted from the floor.

Timeline established

New ACT, working with Bishop Matthews and Bishop Hassinger, has established a timeline of action. Each annual conference will hold a one-day final session and one final clergy session (see timeline.) There, members, including those members from Vermont and Central Pennsylvania churches, will vote upon legislation to complete old conference business before the existing conferences can close. The new business



Bishop Matthews

of the upstate New York conference and new Central Pennsylvania conference, tentatively known as the Susquehanna Conference, will be dealt with at their respective Uniting Conferences.

On June 11, the Pennsylvania churches of Wyoming Conference and Central Pennsylvania Conference will unite, with a worship celebration scheduled a month later on July 11.

The Vermont-New England Team is currently working on the details for 2010.

“We anticipate that June 2010 conference will be a welcoming and celebration time with our new brothers and sisters from Vermont,” said the Rev. Jim McPhee, Assistant to Bishop Peter Weaver of the Boston Episcopal Area.

The new upstate New York Conference will gather at a Uniting Conference on June 19, 2010, in Syracuse. The new conference will convene again in Albany on Sept. 11 for a worship celebration. There will be time to conduct necessary action items.

Sensitive to speculation

The decision to hold the worship celebrations in Albany recognizes that the new conference covers a broad geographical area and is not an expansion of any existing New York conference. Care has also been taken to make sure the teams created “really reflect the four conferences,” Bishop Matthews said. “That’s intentional. We want people to know that the new conference represents the entire area and not just one section.”

However, for practical reasons, in 2008 a decision was made to move the New York West area bishop’s office to Syracuse from its current location in Rochester. That will happen by the end of 2009.

The Episcopal residence has already been relocated to Syracuse.

Bishop Matthews is quick to point out that despite the geographic size of the new conference, investment in technology will connect members throughout upper New York. “Geography won’t be a block. Technology will allow us to do ministry in new and creative ways.”

Planning continued page 9

Planning Teams *from page 8*

The location of the conference office or offices has yet to be determined, said Bishop Matthews. Input on those recommendations as well as staffing and programming, will come from the planning teams.

Bishop Matthews expects to announce the core staff that will “be taking us into the future” at the Uniting Conference. He said the positions he will announce at the June 2010 Uniting Conference will include the conference treasurer, communications director, a director of administration [pension officer] and the director of connectional ministries.

“There may be others added as a result of the interim personnel committee’s work, but these are the positions that New ACT has identified,” he said.

No other staffing changes are expected to be made in the next 18-months, he said, adding that staffing will be determined by the new annual conference.

“In the size conference we’re creating, we’re going to need a good-sized staff,” Bishop Matthews said. “But those are conversations that the interim personnel committee will have, and that will be an enormous task.”

In response to the uncertainties and fears of the current employees, both Bishop Hassinger and Bishop Matthews have met with the staff of all four conferences to answer questions, listen to concerns and check on spiritual and emotional care.

At the Uniting Conference, members of the new conference will elect the Council on Finance and Administration, Trustees, Sessions, Connectional Table, Board of Pensions, Leadership Development, Rules, Human Resources and Episcopacy Committees. A Conference Statistician and Conference Secretary will be named, and members of a Transitional Team, which

will take over from New ACT, will be elected.

In accordance with the *Book of Discipline*, Bishop Hassinger and Bishop Matthews will name the Board of Ordained Ministry in consultation with the existing Boards of Ordained Ministry.

In the meantime, the interim planning teams will gather information and make recommendations appropriate to their areas to New ACT.

“New ACT will need to make decisions as to what pieces we will want to enact at our uniting conferences, and what will be enacted later,” said Gottschalk-Fielding.

Like New ACT, none of the named or future interim planning teams can make decisions for the new conference. Clergy and lay members of annual conference will vote on recommendations brought to them at either the final annual conference sessions or the Uniting Conference.

New ground broken

In envisioning a new conference, especially one that deals with such complicated components as merging two Episcopal areas into one, separating two existing conferences along state lines, and creating three annual conferences from six, can be overwhelming. There’s no known precedent in the United Methodist Church for this magnitude of change.

This is new ground for the denomination, and the General Boards and Agencies have been quick to offer consulting help as the new conferences take shape. Representatives from United Methodist Communications have already met with the Communications Planning Team, representatives from the General Council on Finance and Administration, and the General Board of Pensions and Health Benefits



*The name Susquehanna must be approved at the Uniting Conference on June 11
 **The new conference in upstate New York has yet to be named
 Time line does not include the New England Conference Session schedule, which is unknown at this time

have been working with the Assets Allocation Planning Team and the Joint Distributing Planning Team. The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry and the General Board of Global Ministries will also provide consultants for transitional work.

“They have really been more than eager and willing to do whatever it takes to help us,” said Bishop Matthews. “That shows us the value of the connectional church.”

Gottschalk-Fielding agrees. “The denomination is offering encouragement and guidance,” he said. “We’re not out there alone. We’re part of a bigger movement.”

“That’s something I challenge people to be open to,” he said. “We can be cynical about structural changes, but what if all of this is really a movement of the Spirit? God continues to work through clumsy human organizations and practices. God works through the stuff of human culture and personalities. Why couldn’t God be working through all of this?”

Read more about the specific organization of the planning teams and their work on-line at www.new-conferences.info and www.upperNewYork.org.

Working Vision and Purpose Statement
for the New Conference of the Upper New York Area

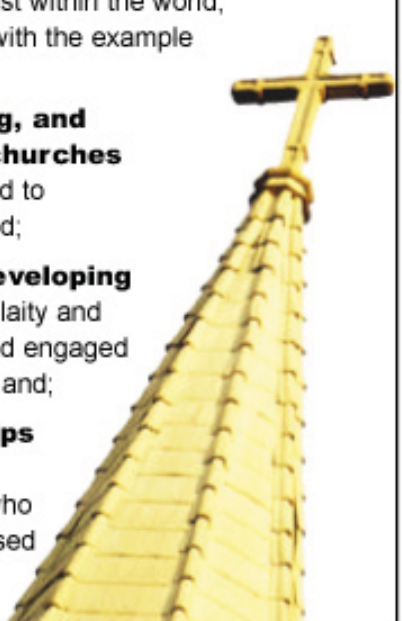
Our **vision** (*desired outcome*) is:

- To **live the gospel** of Jesus Christ and to be **God’s love** with our **neighbors** in all places.

Our **purpose** (*what we do*) is:

Growing in our relationship with God,
Being the body of Christ within the world,
Living in accordance with the example of Jesus Christ by:

- **Engaging, equipping, and empowering local churches** to be in ministry with and to our Global Neighborhood;
- **Encouraging and developing leadership** within the laity and clergy that is diverse and engaged with the vision of Christ and;
- **Building relationships with our neighbors** particularly with those who have been disenfranchised by mainstream society.



Design to support vision *from page 1*

❖ A proposed design to facilitate the initial union of conferences, and a process to develop the necessary structure which will support the vision and mission of the new area/conference.

With a vision and purpose in place, New ACT has a framework for their work.

A number of New ACT subgroups and Task Forces are—or will soon begin—working on specific tasks needed to move forward a plan of union and proposed design. Guidelines for the Task Forces—diversity, reporting, task assignment—are under development

and teams ready to begin include Board of Ordained Ministry, Interim Sessions Committee, Local Church Assets Task Force and Ministry Contexts Task Force.

New ACT met on March 7 and will meet again on April 25.

The Uniting Conference is planned for June 19, 2010, in the Syracuse area, with the Uniting Worship Celebration and adjourned session set for Sept. 11, 2010 in the Albany area.



Come and explore camp at
Camp Open Houses
Covenant Hills, Cabot, Vt.
Saturday, June 20, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.
Skye Farm, Warrensburg, N.Y.
Saturday, June 27 from 1 to 3 p.m.



Above, clockwise, acting up at drama camp, learning carpentry skills, gathering around a campfire, building sand castles or tubing down a mountain river are just some of the activities youth and children can enjoy while deepening their faith at Troy Conference's Skye Farm Camp in New York and Covenant Hills in Vermont.

Troy Conference Summer Camps

Faith

The 2009 Summer Camp Bulletin is available at your local church. Pick up a copy today.

Fun



Check out these new offerings:

Dodge This! a camp dedicated to games for youth grades 7 through 9, July 5 through 11, Skye Farm Camp.

Ring with Joy teaches youth in grades 7 through 12 to play hand bells, July 5 through 11, Skye Farm Camp.

Abacadabra—The Magic Backback teaches youth grades 3 to 5 the secrets of magic, June 28 through July 4, Covenant Hills Camp.

Medieval Quest, a week long tournament of jousting, jesting and making merry for youth grades 4 through 5, July 12 through 18, Covenant Hills Camp.



At the Rev. Harold Shippey's retirement dinner in February, it was announced that the new lodge at Skye Farm Camp, below, would be named for the former Executive Director of Skye Farm Camp and Executive Director of Camping and Retreat Ministries. Above, the women of Calvary United Methodist Church in Latham, N.Y., recently held a retreat at Skye Farm and were the first to officially use Shippey Lodge.



Shippey Lodge at Skye Farm Camp

Join the celebration when Shippey Lodge is dedicated

Bishop Susan W. Hassinger of the Albany Episcopal Area will dedicate the new lodge at Skye Farm Camp in Warrensburg, N.Y., on June 27.

Recently named Shippey Lodge in honor of recently retired Rev. Harold Shippey, the new handicapped accessible retreat lodge is open for business and complements Ogden Lodge quite well.

With the addition of this new building, retreats can be held year round—including summer, while camp is in session. Retreats can be booked by contacting Nancy Wyant at (518) 494-7170 or by e-mailing the camp at skycamped@logical.net.



Commissioned song honoring Shippey available on-line

Debuted at the Rev. Harold Shippey's retirement party, the song "Well My Dear, It's Time to Go" is available on the album *Bits & Pieces 3* and can heard on-line at the Berggren Folk Friends web site, <http://www.berggrenfolk.com/albums.cfm>.

Written and performed by Dan Berggren, the song was commissioned by the friends of Skye Farm Camp to honor Shippey.

The recording contains portions of the live performance at the event.

Friendship

Skye Farm continue to seek 18-year-old (or older) counselors and volunteers for the 2009 Summer season. Interested parties should contact the camp at skycamped@logical.net



Volunteers needed for summer camps

Volunteers and camp staff can make a difference in a child's life. Moms, dads, Sunday school teachers, Christian educators, former staff and clergy are needed to volunteer for a week at camp.

Volunteer counselors are especially needed to help out in youth cabins.

"We'll train you, we'll support you and we'll welcome you to our ministry," said Dave Johnston, Executive Director of Skye Farm Camp. "You'll love it."

For an application, contact either Skye Farm Camp Office at (518) 494-7170 or by e-mailing the camp at skycamped@logical.net or Covenant Hills Camp near Cabot, Vt., at (802) 848-9932 or vt_marlow@hotmail.com.

Make a difference in a child's life

Training gives foundation in youth ministry

Some of the best training for youth ministry is offered for staff and volunteers at Skye Farm. Training sessions are open to all those interested from the Troy Conference.

Training will be held on Saturday, May 2, from 8:15 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Shenendehowa United Methodist Church in Clifton Park, N.Y.

At 10:30 a.m., Skye Farm Executive Director David Johnston, will offer a child protection training session based on the book *Safe Sanctuaries*, by Joy Thornburg Melton. People can register for any portion of the training. To register, call Judy Palmer at the conference office, (518) 584-8214.

We'll even invite you to stay for lunch.

Congregations in Troy Conference begin journey to go green

By Sandra Brands

Congregations throughout the world are being asked to ring church bells 350 times on Oct. 24.

Initiated by 350.org, a movement founded by author and environmentalist Bill McKibben, the bell ringing is part of a campaign to draw attention to what science has said is the upper edge of the safe limit of carbon dioxide parts per million in the atmosphere.

"Any number above this is incompatible with the planet on which civilization developed and to which life on earth has adapted," said McKibben, a member of RWJohnsburg United Methodist Church, N.Y., currently attending Middlebury United Methodist Church in Vermont.

Right now, according to 350.org, the amount of carbon dioxide in the upper atmosphere is 387 parts per million.

McKibben says the tolling of church bells 350 times throughout the world is just one of the ways 350.org is asking people to stand together and call for a fair global climate treaty. For more information, see www.350.org.

"People all over the world will be doing amazing things to bring that number home," he said. "Demonstrations on Easter Island, climbers in the Himalayas, divers on the reef... and we hope to have thousands and thousands of churches ringing bells 350 times.

"That's what the bells are there for,"

he said. "If there's a big fire, one of the things you do is ring the church bells so everyone knows there is a big fire. We also ring bells to remind people what we're called to do.

"I hope someone will step forward to coordinate it in Troy Conference," he said. "If half the churches in Troy Conference don't ring bells [or act in some way], I'll be extremely disappointed."

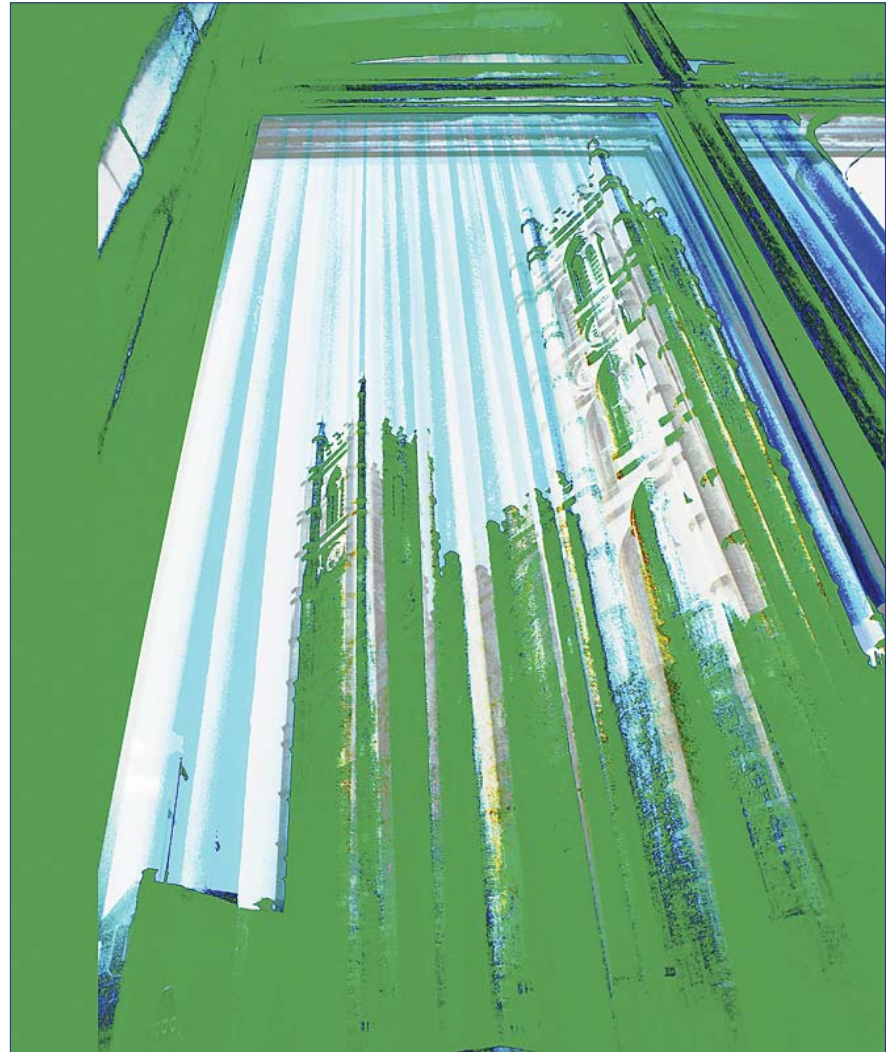
Raising awareness

Taking steps to raise awareness about the dangers of global warming is one action congregations can take in the journey to going green. In addition to advocacy, congregations can educate themselves and others on environmental justice issues.

For example, there are Bible studies and resources available for small study groups that look at the inter-connectedness of faith, care for Creation and care for the least, lost and left out.

Recently, the congregation of Jonesville United Methodist Church in Clifton Park, N.Y., engaged in the video study *Curing Affluenza* by Tony Campolo. The six-part video study examines the epidemic of shopping, overwork, debt and the pursuit of money rife in U.S. society, and shows how the Bible calls people to simplify their lives in order to live fully.

The video also brings to light the concern: Can one small part of the



population live affluently at the expense of the larger population? What impact is "affluenza" having on the poor in the world?

"If the rest of the world were like the U.S. [in its consumption], the planet would be destroyed," said Ed Bennett, a member of Jonesville United Methodist Church and president of New York Interfaith Power and Light. "A lot of our greening goes well beyond being much more efficient; it gets to the consumptive issues and attitudes of the people in this country."

In 2003, the church underwent an energy audit, and members have been incorporating what they learned from the audit into a way of living, Bennett said. They made the recommended changes, installing LED exit signs, a new furnace and energy efficient air conditioner, replacing incandescent lights with compact fluorescent lights (CFL), installing programmable thermostats and insulating the walls of the 153-year-old church.

Recently, the congregation received the Energy Star Congregation Award, recognition by the joint program of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Energy that recognizes excellence in energy efficiency and financial and environmental stewardship.

Though pleased by the award, Bennett is quick to point out that the work is ongoing.

"We're only part of the way there—winning an award doesn't make us green, but it is moving us along and I think people are taking it home with them," he said. "It's a slow process and you need to persist."

Jonesville United Methodist Church

continues to take steps to reduce its carbon footprint. They have made long-needed structural upgrades, including upgrading insulation and replacing windows and doors, to the fellowship hall and office. A recycling bin for clothing has been installed in the parking lot, and proceeds are being used to support the congregation's Helping Hands Food Pantry.

The congregation is working on creating a "Green Team," Bennett said, and is considering planting a community garden, strengthening recycling efforts and taking further energy conservation measures.

It takes more community

Advocacy and education are part of the work being done by the Justice and Social Concerns Ministry Team of First United Methodist Church in Burlington, Vt.

Dr. Sue Deppe, a member of the congregation, has been active on the ministry team since 2007. In 2008, the team invited Wes Sanders of Vermont Interfaith Power and Light to talk about what they could do to reduce energy consumption.

That resulted in seven households from the congregation going on a low energy diet. The team also created a poster listing things people could do to conserve energy. The poster was placed outside the sanctuary and people were invited to put gold stars on the things they were doing at home, Deppe said.

The total commitment people made added up to the elimination 116,000 pounds of carbon use, she said. "That's equivalent to two households or more

An Environmental To Do List

Become a member of the Vermont (www.vtipl.org) or New York Interfaith Power and Light (www.nyipl.org)

Buy green energy

Use conservation techniques in landscaping

Drive less, consume less, survive on less

Eliminate the use of Styrofoam

Have an energy audit—and act on it

Change light bulbs in the church and at home

Recycle

Lift up the issues in the community

Take part in Earth Day events

Switch from a paper to electronic newsletter

Install solar panels on the church roof

Give up meat one day a week

Support and lift up Community Supported Agriculture programs

Care continued page 20

Celebrating 50 years

AUMS was the first of its kind in Troy Conference

By Karen Staulters, Conference Archivist

The Albany Methodist Society (AUMS) is celebrating their 50 years in ministry this year. At the time of when the society was formed, this project was the first of its kind in Troy Conference.

On Dec. 27, 1959, 20 Methodist lay persons and four Albany pastors met with then District Superintendent C. Walter Kessler to officially form the AUMS Board. In May of 1960, the Troy Annual Conference supported the project and Stephen Negby served as the summer evangelist. This 'street' ministry was located south of State Street and east of Swan Street.

A few months later, in September, Bishop Newell appointed the Rev. Angelo Mongiore associate Minister of the First Methodist Church and Director of the Inner City Ministry. A Methodist Counseling Center was set up at 126 Hamilton Street, and on Jan. 3, 1961, the first worship service was held in the "Storefront Chapel."

Initially a pilot Inner City ministry project funded by the Board of Missions, the project became permanent at Annual Conference Session in May 1961. The conference also voted to fund a co-director position for the new ministry.

A month later, representatives of the 14 Albany Methodist Churches met and voted to organize The Albany Methodist Society, electing officers and adopting a constitution. Dr. Oliver Bu-

chanan was elected to be the first president of the Board. In September 1961, Bishop Wicke appointed the Reverends Mongiore and Ralph Nugent to serve as Co-Directors.

The Summer Day Camp program opened in 1961, a joint effort of AUMS and the congregations of the First Methodist Church and the Walls Temple A.M.E. Zion Churches. Also the parsonage at 13 Phillips St. was donated and renovated to provide office space for the "missionaries".

By 1962, there was a Girls Scout Troop, a Boy Scout Explorer Post, a Primary Interest Group, a Girls' Homemaking Class and a remedial Reading Class. The Summer Day Camp added a "Resident Camping Program," and its first student intern was Donald Kline from Drew University.

In February 1964, the Society moved its offices and meeting rooms to a larger location at 38 Catherine Street. That summer 14 college students provided the staff for a full 10-week summer camp which included both day and residential programs.

In 1965, negotiations were begun with the Urban Department of the National Board of Missions of the Methodist Church and the World Service and Finance Commission of the Troy Conference to increase funds for the society's programming.

They were successful and added another full-time position.

In the summer of 1965, the Trinity

Methodist Church and the Society sponsored the first Head Start program in Albany.

The summer of 1966 the Society, the summer program was expanded and in September Lula Garrett was hired as the first Social Worker at AUMS.

Early in 1967, a Teen Club was formed and they met at 29 Elizabeth Street.

That summer, the resident camp for youth 9 to 16 was held at Enosburg Falls, Vt.

The year of 1967 was a critical year for the Society. By mid-year they terminated regular worship services. Staff was being replaced by volunteers. This evaluation and re-organization process continued throughout 1968. The shifting of emphasis continued into the 1970's.

In 1974, Martin Cornman was the first lay person to serve as Executive Director of the Society. The Society also moved from the South End of Albany and to St. Luke's United Methodist Church and education building at 423 Clinton Avenue. In 1987, this property was sold.

In 1987, Rev. David LaRoe was instrumental in getting more churches and volunteers involved in the participation and decision making of the Society. He served until August 1993.

The Executive Directors of the Society over the past 50 years have been as follows: Rev. Angelo Moniore, Rev. Randy Nugent, Rev. Fred Heleine, Mr. Martin Cornman, Rev. Wallace Taylor,

Rev. David LaRoe, Rev. Dr. H. Ward Greer, Rev. Richard Welkley, Rev. Malinda Trotti, and Mr. Peter Fish.

Their current location is at 340 First St., Albany, in the Catholic Charities building. They currently serve residents of the West Hill area.

The ministries and missions AUMS offers are:

Food Pantry: Troy Annual Conference volunteers and donations serve 350 families—approximately 950 people—a month.

AUMS Summer Camp is a program for youth ages 6 through 13 in the West Hill area.

AUMS After School Program, a community-based program focused on literacy tutoring.

FOCUS Churches/Capital Area Council of Churches has allowed AUMS to expand its reach into the community. The consortium offers funding for community projects that identify and develop a currently un-addressed service in Albany that the partnership can sustain

They have recently started a Seniors Group and will be opening a Clothing Room soon.

The Rev. Nugent, former Executive Director of AUMS will be the keynote speaker at a celebration and fundraiser honoring the Society's 50

Th anniversary on Friday, April 3, beginning at 6 p.m. For reservations and tickets, call (518) 432-0818. Tickets are \$35.

AUMS

(Albany United Methodist Society)

50th Anniversary Celebration & Fundraiser

Friday, April 3, 6 p.m.

First Presbyterian Church,
362 State St., Albany, N.Y.

Keynote Speaker:

REV. RANDY NUGENT

former Executive Director of AUMS

Reservations: (518) 432-0818

Tickets: \$35

NCNY Conference offers foundational course on coaching

Coaching, both individual and team, is rapidly becoming the preferred method to ensure adaptability and success in the rapidly changing global world, and is beneficial for church leadership working with congregations.

The North Central New York Conference is hosting a two-day retreat, "Coaching Foundations I," on May 18 and 19 at the North Central New York Conference Center in Cicero, N.Y. The event is open to congregations from the North Central New York, Troy, Western New York and Wyoming annual conferences.

Face to face group training will cover key coaching skills and coaching instruments will be introduced and practiced.

Presented by the Vision and Mission Resource Ministry Team of the NCNY Annual Conference with guest presenters Suzanne Goebel, PMP, PCC and George G. Howard, ACC, this training can be used as a first step toward certification as a coach through the Bishop Rueben Job Center for Leadership Development and the International Coach Federation. The course provides training on the basic principles and practices of coaching,

including "hands-on" practice. It is the first step in a series of trainings that can lead to certification as a coach. Training hours can also be used towards certification with the International Coach Federation.

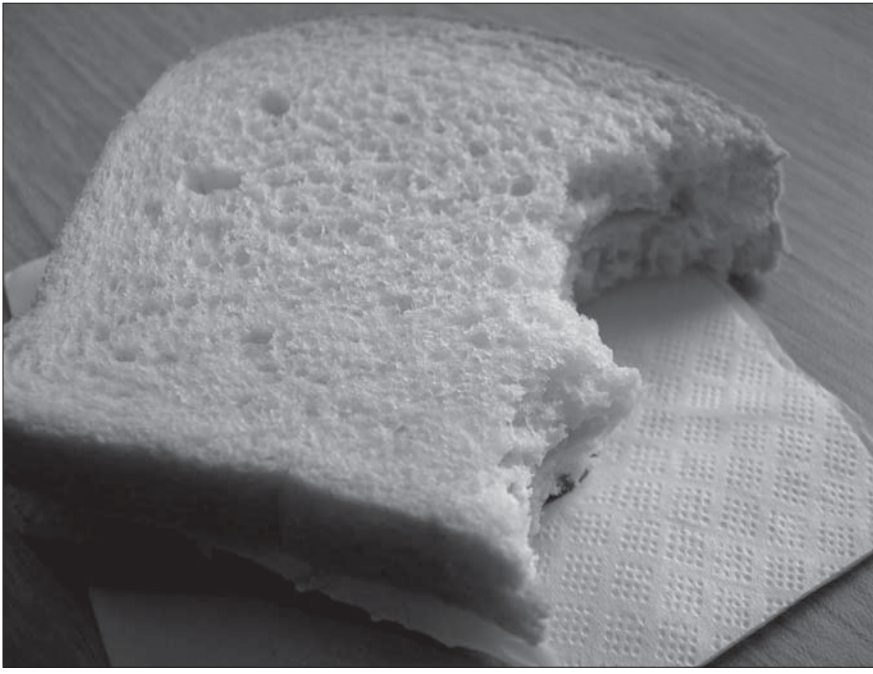
The cost for the course is \$200 per person; fee includes registration, lunch each day, refreshments and materials. Attendees are responsible for their own lodging and dinner.

Special room rate available at the Maplewood Inn, 400 7th North Street, Liverpool, N.Y. (315) 451-1511.

For more information about the event, or to register, visit the North Central New York Conference web site at www.ncnyumc.org.

Classifieds

For job listings and items available, check the Classifieds at the Troy Conference web site, www.troyac.org>Resources>Classifieds.



Spiritual Formation

By Evie Doyon

A bologna sandwich

“By your Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one with the world until Christ comes in final victory and we feast at that heavenly banquet table.”

In “Opening Ourselves to Grace,” Steven Manskar wrote “faith is how we live in and with the God who comes to us in Jesus Christ.”

He goes on: “faith in this God is a living and active faith that is shown by how we live and love in the world.”

I’d like to share a story told by Marjorie Thompson at Soulefeast last summer. Thompson is known for her spiritual writings, is the creative force behind the Companions in Christ series. She is on the staff of the Upper Room.

Imagine you’ve been busy at work all day, get home late, and realize that today is the day of the church picnic. You open the refrigerator in hopes of finding something to take. All you can find is the last piece of bologna, and it is old and a little dry on the edges. You have two slices of bread including the heel. You get mustard on your knuckles as you scrape the jar to get the last remnants out. Well, there it is, a bologna sandwich—you put it in a paper bag and off you go to the picnic.

At the picnic, you sit down, and soon a family carrying a large picnic basket joins you. They take out a tablecloth and start placing their food on it. There are all kinds of homemade goodies: fried chicken, potato salad, rolls, apple pie. You consider hiding your sandwich. Then they ask, “What did you bring?” Embarrassed, you apologetically answer, “Uh, just a bologna sandwich.”

“Oh, we just love bologna sandwiches! Tell you what, why don’t you take your bologna sandwich, we’ll take what we brought, and let’s just put it all together and share everything.”

That, dear friends, is grace!

Thompson told this story as the prelude to a talk focused on “by your Spirit make us one with Christ,” familiar words used in the Eucharist celebration. She went on to explain that spiritual practices are the means of grace whereby we learn to be at home with Christ. They unite us more fully, more consistently with the life of Jesus. Through baptism and Holy Communion, Christ already dwells or is at home with us. Spiritual practices help us to dwell in Christ, or be at home with Him.*

The work of Faith Development is to help us develop our lives in and with the God who is known to us in Jesus Christ. It is about helping us become open to God’s grace: helping us offer our bologna sandwiches to the One who has a picnic basket that overflows with goodness. It’s about asking forgiveness for the dry edges and receiving the grace of “let’s just share everything.” It’s about accepting the goodness and inviting others to the picnic.

How is your faith developing? Do you have companions who are practicing the disciplines with you? Thompson points out that it is a lot easier to know about something than to live it. It’s easy to learn what the spiritual disciplines are, but it is harder to live them. This is one good reason for having accountability groups and companions.

As your Faith Development Coordinator, I hope you will get in touch with me if your congregation would like some help with being intentional about spiritual practices. In the meantime, don’t forget the picnic!

* Available on the General Board of Discipleship website. Go to <http://www.gbod.org> and look for a link under “Know These First” for “Practices of Wesleyan Discipleship” or do a search for “Opening to Grace”

Doyon is the Troy Conference Faith Development Coordinator. She can be contacted at eviedo@gmail.com or (802) 485-7144.



UM student loan fund established in memory of Syracuse University student

By Vicki Brown

A \$10,000 loan fund has been established in memory of Shannon Davis, one of 35 Syracuse University students who died in the explosion of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, on Dec. 21, 1988.

“Years ago, Shannon was the recipient of a student loan from the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry. I knew what a gift it was for the loan to be forgiven after Shannon’s death. That always just stayed in my heart,” said Jane Ware Davis, who donated \$10,000 in her daughter’s memory.

Davis, who now lives in New York City, said that after the explosion, she developed close relationships with many of the parents of the Syracuse students who were among the 270 people who died when the plane was destroyed by a terrorist bomb.

“So many of them had to keep writing a check each month to pay off student loans, and I saw the emotional toll that paying that loan took on them every month,” Davis said.

The students had spent the semester studying abroad in London and Florence, Italy. The plane exploded in the skies over Lockerbie, Scotland, at 7:03 p.m. local time (2:03 p.m. Syracuse time), killing all 259 passengers and crew and 11 Lockerbie residents on the ground.

Angella Current-Felder, executive director of the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry’s Office of Loans and Scholarships, said it is Board policy that if a student dies their loan is forgiven.

“So after the tragic explosion, we wrote Mrs. Davis to express our sympathy and prayers and to tell her that the loan had been forgiven,” Current-Felder said. “After we received the donation, we decided to establish an endowed loan fund in Shannon Davis’s memory.”

The earnings from this fund will provide loans for United Methodist students at Syracuse University and other colleges and universities.

At the time of Shannon’s death,

she and her family were members of Nichols United Methodist Church in Trumbull, Conn., where Shannon had been baptized. Shannon was survived



Shannon Davis was one of 35 Syracuse University students who died in the explosion of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988

by her mother, her brother, Jim, and her sister, Whitney, a 1989 SU graduate. She was predeceased by her father, who died earlier in 1988 in an accident in Saudi Arabia.

“She was a wonderful young woman,” said Davis, who added that Feb. 19 would have been her daughter’s 40th birthday. “It’s hard for us to realize that she has been gone longer than she was with us.”

Davis, a native of Shelton, Conn., was a junior in Syracuse University’s College for Human Development (now part of the College of Human Ecology). Shannon’s dream was to operate a day-care center for young children when she graduated. As a fourth grader, she and her sister had a baby-sitting service, “Mother’s Day Out.” In London, Shannon studied child development and worked at toy libraries.

“When I think of Shannon, I see her beautiful hands as well as her sparkling smile. In her young life, she happily and busily went about leaving her mark of daffodils on much she touched,” Davis said.

Visit the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry web site www.gbhem.org, for more information about available scholarships.

TAC Board is accepting scholarship applications

The Troy Conference Board of Higher Education and Campus Ministry is accepting applications for scholarships from college-bound high school seniors and those already in college, graduate school or seminary.

Four types of scholarships are available:

- ❖ the Merit Scholarship (funded through the Student Day special offerings) which goes to students attending United Methodist related institutions

- ❖ Ethnic Minority Scholarships

- ❖ Lottie Brown Scholarships (for those who are going on to some form of Christian service)

- ❖ Homer Titus Grants (for seminarians who have completed their first year of seminary)

Students must fill out the application, submit a letter of recommendation from their pastor or a leader in the local church using a recommendation letter form available from the Rev. Megan Stowe at Shenendehowa United Methodist Church, Clifton Park, N.Y., and have the school send a transcript of grades by May 15.

For more information, scholarship application instructions and required forms, contact the Rev. Megan Stowe at pastormegan@shenmeth.org or (518) 371-7964.

Lay Leaders come 'from all over' to Sacramento



Association of Annual Conference Leaders President Scott Johnson of Western New York opened the annual meeting of lay leaders held in Sacramento, Calif. Photo by Paul Hampson, courtesy of the California-Nevada Annual Conference

Story courtesy the California-Nevada Annual Conference

Western New York Annual Conference Lay Leader Scott Johnson, who is president of the Association of Annual Conference Lay Leaders (AACLL) opened the organization's 2009 annual meeting held in Sacramento in late

February by acknowledging the "need for fellowship and connection" and for examination of "what it means to share in this role."

While admitting, "There are no magic bullets," he reminded delegates that "our God is big, infinite, and diverse," and said he hoped those attend-

ing would get something they could take home with them and use.

Joining Johnson from the upper New York area conferences and New England were Ilah Sisson Walser, Troy Conference Lay Leader, Bill Hinderliter and Marie DeWispelaere, co-Lay Leaders for the North Central New York Conference, Blenda Smith, Lay Leader of Wyoming Conference, and Oscar Harrell, Lay Leader of the New England Conference.

Under the banner, "Disciples Transforming the World," some 52 lay leaders—coming from as far as Zimbabwe—gathered at the United Methodist Center in West Sacramento, Ca., to resource each other, exploring such topics as Spiritual and Servant Leadership, Extended Cabinet/Episcopal Relationships, Finances and Budgets, and Alternative Administrative Structures.

General Board of Discipleship Liaison Sandy Jackson spoke later Thursday morning, and Cal-Nevada Resident Bishop Warner H. Brown, Jr. delivered the sermon, "Being Real," and led the Service of Communion at Opening Worship that evening.

Keynote presenters Drs. James and Molly Davis Scott, authors of *Restoring the Wesleyan Class-Meeting*, led the Friday sessions, with James Scott

cautioning, "We must always renew the Wesleyan class-meeting, because it is the heart and the life of Methodism, and without it we shall perish."

Reading from a 1600s journal and reflecting on her own memories of being the daughter of a class leader, Molly Davis Scott asked conferees, "Who do you want to be ... as a person and ... as a Christian? When you are dead and gone, as we each will be, what do you want your children to say about you? What do you want your grandchildren to remember about you?"

The early Methodists, she reminded, paid for and built orphanages, hospitals, the first pharmacies, and universities, and—"They stopped slavery in the British Empire; they ground it to a halt!"

"Now these are people that changed the world. These are the people that took an upside-down world that was every bit as chaotic, and fearful, and desperate, as what you and I are living through in 2009—and they turned the world right side-up.

"These Methodist people bettered the world for everyone. And they're gone now. Who will take their place?" she challenged.

The Scotts are pastors, missionaries, adjunct seminary professors, and Elders in the Arkansas Annual Conference.

United Methodists join forces to 'Turn Worlds Upside Down'

By United Methodist News Service

What happens when nearly 14 million United Methodists around the world focus on a single idea with four "themes"?

Denominational leaders pray that in the next four years some amazing transformations will take place—around the corner and around the world.

The four areas of focus adopted by the 2008 General Conference, the denomination's top legislative body, were rolled out in earnest at the quadrennial training event for annual conference leaders Jan. 29 through Feb. 1 in Jacksonville, Fla.

More than 1,200 leaders gathered for the "Living the United Methodist Way: Turning Worlds Upside Down" event to learn how their respective places of ministry can connect with others to transform themselves and the world.

"Turning the Worlds Upside Down" was an event filled with stories, training, worship, workshops, music, making and renewing acquaintances," said Ilah Sisson Walser, Lay Leader of the Troy Annual Conference. "Statistical information made real by actual people and stories. The Four Focus Areas of the United Methodist Church were presented giving the attendees ways to witness in those areas in their local churches, as well as the wide church.

"I came away from the training with hope for the denomination if we can really study, work, and do the four areas

of focus," she said. "It will in many ways mean some radical changes in our life styles and church styles.

"I hope that we are ready to accomplish that," she said.

Millie Mason, chair of the Troy Conference Commission on Religion and Race, agreed. "The most memorable part [of the training] was the feeling of being in accord with the people from various parts of the country on the four areas of focus—developing principled Christian leaders for the church and the world, developing new places for new people and renewing existing congregations, engaging in ministry with the poor and stamping out killer diseases of poverty by improving health globally—in order to ensure that the United Methodist Church lives on and [that] we do what Christians should do for others."

Representatives from the six conferences in the Northeastern Jurisdiction working to create three new conferences had an opportunity to meet during the training on Friday afternoon during a scheduled period for annual conferences, and met again, later, for dinner.

The two gatherings provided opportunities for people of Central Pennsylvania, New England, North Central, Troy, Western New York and Wyoming annual conferences to develop relationships, something Walser found promising.

"Each time we have an opportunity like this I see more and more interac-



More than 1,200 United Methodist annual conference leaders attended the denomination's quadrennial training event in Jacksonville, Fla. A UMNS photo by Erik Alsgaard

tion between individuals from different areas, greeting one another as old friends and partners in ministry," she said. "Again, I came away with a sense of hope for our work in creating new conferences in the Northeast. We are doing good work.

"What's also memorable is what happened after I got home," she said. "On Facebook, an on-line social networking site, I was contacted by more than a couple of folks from beyond the Troy Conference lines, to be 'friends.'"

Mason also appreciated the opportunity to meet with neighboring conferences, though the gatherings also reinforced her thoughts that there

is still "a lot of work that will need to be done by all the conferences in order to make the [creation of the three new conferences] a success. "Though July 1, 2010, is the date given, I feel the transition will actually take longer."

For conference leaders in what will become the new conference in upstate New York, the emphasis of the training and the general church on the four areas of focus deepened a sense of understanding that the work being done is an opportunity to birth a conference that is primarily directed at reaching out to others while providing nurture and support to church members engaged in reaching neighbors.