



UPPER NEW YORK UNITED METHODIST ADVOCATE

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Being God's love with our neighbors in all places

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

Volume 1, Issue 3 - December 2010

Prayers urged as 5 Districts to get new superintendents

By Maidstone Mulenga
United Methodists in Upper New York Annual Conference have been urged to keep Resident Bishop Marcus Matthews in prayer as he discerns his decisions in naming five new district superintendents.

Six people, including five district superintendents, are leaving the Upper New York Annual Conference Cabinet.

Area Resident Bishop Marcus Matthews made the announcement to members of the Extended Cabinet during their meeting November retreat. The six are:

- Director of Transi-



O'Connor-Slater



Frueh



Fenimore



Baird



Hanson



Benham

tional Ministries **Deborah O'Connor-Slater**,

- Adirondack District Superintendent **Henry C. Frueh**,

- Albany District Superintendent **James Fenimore**,

- Cornerstone District Superintendent **Larry Baird**,

- Niagara Frontier District Superintendent **Natalie Hanson**, and

- Northern Flow District-

Superintendent **Beth Benham**.

O'Connor-Slater will leave the Cabinet effective Dec. 31, 2010 while the district superintendents will leave at the end of the appointment year on June 30, 2011. O'Connor-Slater plans to return to local church service in July 2011.

Hanson, Baird and Benham are leaving after completing their years of service

and will be appointed to local churches in July 2011. Frueh and Fenimore are leaving to pursue other ministries.

Bishop Matthews plans to announce the replacements for the five district superintendents early next year and asked United Methodists to keep him in prayer. The Upper New York Area of the United Methodist Church has 12 districts.

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'Love the hell out of each other,' pastors told

By Maidstone Mulenga

More than 500 United Methodist pastors from the Upper New York Annual Conference packed the Hendricks Chapel on Syracuse University on Nov. 17 for the Bishop's Advent Day Apart and organization of the Orders.

The pastors were meeting to elect officer bearers for the Order of Elders, the Order of Deacons and the Fellowship of Local Pastors and Associate Members.

In his sermon to the gathering, Resident Bishop Marcus Matthews dared the pastors to go into neighborhoods to make disciples of Jesus Christ.

"We are called to live the gospel of Jesus Christ and to be God's love with our neighbors in all places. This is our vision as the Upper New York Annual Conference."

Therefore, he said, clergy need to get ready for what is coming as God is doing a new thing in the Conference and "we need to position ourselves spiritually and



Bishop Marcus Matthews brings the message during Clergy Day Apart.
Photo By Carlos Smith

mentally for what is happening."

"We plan to grow spiritually and numerically in Upper New York Conference."

Preaching from the Romans 12:1-2 text, Bishop Matthews urged the clergy to support each other in their ministries, especially during the Advent season.

"My prayer this season will continue to be that the clergy in Upper New York Area will love the hell out of each other," Bishop Matthews said. "Not by just saying the words, but walking the walk and talking the talk."

"Get over what happen yesterday, what someone said, meeting gone bad. This is a season where we should smile more and sing just a bit more cheerfully. And, yes, cry more."

Reminding them that The Upper New York Annual Conference was just 140 days old, Bishop Matthews said he feels the spirit of God moving throughout the conference.

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Deadline

All information for the January 2011 issue of the **ADVOCATE** is due on **Dec. 10, 2010**

Calendar opens spiritual windows during Advent

By Sandra Brands

Advent is about waiting, about preparing, about longing for that which has not come.

For the Rev. Merry Watters and the Rev. Tom Mousin, creating a calendar has become an essential part of their yearly prepa-

rations for Advent. Over the last 21 years, their calendar became anticipated by a growing number of people who make it part of

their spiritual preparations for Christmas.

Watters, pastor at Church of the Covenant in Averill Park in the Albany

District, created the first calendar for the church she served in Essex Center, Vt., in 1988.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

UMW elects Conference leaders

Members of the United Methodist Women of the Upper New York Annual Conference have elected the inaugural office bearers for the new conference.

Meeting for the first time since the creation of the new conference, UMW members gathered Oct. 23 at First United Methodist Church in Geneva and elected the following:

- **President:** Pat Briggs
- **Vice President:** Valerie Clark
- **Secretary:** Tracy Jackson
- **Treasurer:** Leona Peterson
- **Mission Coordinator for Spiritual Growth:** Joni Lincoln
- **Mission Coordinator for Social Action:** Carole Collins
- **Mission Coordinator for Education and Inter-**

- pretation:** Jan Greiner
- **Mission Coordinator for Membership Nurture and Outreach:** Karen Elmen-dorf
- **Secretary of Program Resources:** Jean Nichols
- **Communications Coordinator:** Sue Olmstead
- **Chairperson of the Committee on Nominations:** Helen Johnson
- **Members of the Com-**

mittee on Nominations: Byoung Baek, Ruth Cleveland, Nancy Hirst, Rose Kingsbury, Jean Sherwood

United Methodist Women is the largest denominational faith organization for women with about 800,000 members. Its mission is foster spiritual growth, develop leaders and advocate for justice. UMW members raise

about \$20 million each year for programs and projects related to women, children and youth in the United States and in more than 100 countries around the world.

Membership is open to any woman who indicates her desire to belong and to participate in the global mission of the church through United Methodist Women.

FROM PAGE ONE Advent

"For me, I did it with the idea of making Advent visible and helping people focus on Advent as a journey, not just as 17 more days to Christmas," she said. "I just used a typewriter and my own little art pieces, and Tom came to visit and saw it and got excited about it."

The following year, Watters sent Mousin the scriptural and response pieces she had selected, and he based his illustrations and design on a World Peace Prayer, published in 1989. In 1990, Mousin wrote the poem and the calendar was

distributed free to United Methodist Churches in the former Troy Conference area.

"In those days, [Tom] was printing it in White River Junction, Vt., and he had volunteers come in to do mailings," Watters said. "Someone at the Conference sent us mailing labels and we mailed it out."

Soon, the calendar was reprinted in the Troy Conference newspaper, shared with the General Board of Global Ministries and sent to colleagues throughout the country. In 2005, the

calendar went online and its reach continued to expand.

"We were kind of laughing this year about how far we'd come with technology," said Watters.

This year, the Advent calendar will be published by the Upper New York and New England Annual Conferences of the United Methodist Church, the Vermont and Massachusetts Dioceses of the Episcopal Church and on the Cambridge, Mass., Episcopal Divinity School web site. In addition, pastors from other denominations including the United Church of Christ, the Presbyterian

Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church of America and the Roman Catholic Church reprint the calendar for their congregations.

"It has become very ecumenical," said Mousin, an elder in the United Methodist Church on Honorable Location who will be ordained an Episcopal deacon in early December. "This is one of those endeavors that really feels like a mustard seed that has grown. The first year we did it was for the two congregations we served. It grew to connect all the churches in Troy Conference. It seems each year we do it, it grows a little more."

"When it went online, that really expanded its reach," he said, adding, "It feels like something that keeps growing and we can't see where all the branches have gone."

It was the response of fans of the calendar that helped Mousin and Watters make the decision to continue producing it annually.

"Last year, with the ending of Troy Conference and because we had done 20, I wondered if we might stop," Watters said. "We talked about it, but enough people said, 'I hope you're going to continue doing it.' So we're chugging along."

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How to Reach Us

The Upper New York Conference of The United Methodist Church was created when the New York churches of four existing conferences--North Central New York, Troy, Western New York and Wyoming Conference--united to better serve the ministry needs of the local church and the community. Total membership is more than 184,000.

The staff of the Annual Conference seek to support local churches in their ministry and mission.

Episcopal Office of the Resident Bishop of the Upper New York Area

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There are twelve districts in The Upper New York Area Annual Conference. Their contact information follows:

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UNY members helped shape Call to Action project

By Sandra Brands
As the United Methodist Church considered its future, two members of the Upper New York Annual Conference were invited to be part of a Call to Action project that would look at what steps the denomination must take to meet its missional goals.

Conference Lay Leader Dr. Scott Johnson and the Rev. Darryl Barrow, superintendent of the Crossroads District, were both invited to serve on the Call to Action Steering Team.

The Call To Action Steering Team was created by the Council of Bishops and the Connectional Table to guide the denominational response to the urgent need for further alignment of the mission of the church.

"The Council of Bishops and the Connectional Table of (the?) denomination wanted a group of people to look at ways the denomination can move forward, to interrupt the inertia that has been the trend [in the church] and to make some recommendations to the Council of Bishops and Connectional Table on what we could do differently to 'unfreeze' the denomination from the place where it finds itself," said Johnson.

Barrow said he was very impressed by the fact that the church was willing to take a courageous step to look at itself and to be self-critical and self-reflective.

"The emphasis was to look at local churches as the pivotal piece that holds the [denomination's] connection together. When I responded to the invitation [to be part of the Call to Action Steering Team], I accepted because I believe the church must concentrate its efforts and ministries to be more missional and there was a strong missional renaissance in the invitation," Barrow said.

"I sensed the church knew it was time to recalibrate its efforts, to reshape the landscape of what we think church should be," he said.

Work began last November

The teams began meeting

in November 2009, building on work of the previous Call to Action Committee. In order to assure that recommendations would be fact-based and not opinion-based, the Steering Team commissioned research based on extensive data-mining and objective methods for identifying relevant trends, behaviors, and issues.

An independent system-wide operational assessment of the connectional church was conducted by Apex, which looked at how the denomination is currently using people, money, and processes at the district, annual conference, and general church levels. In addition, comprehensive research on data from various sources was carried out by the international firm Towers Watson to gain information about the factors that lead to congregations being more vital as evidenced by attendance, growth and engagement.

"There was much prayer about the work when we were together and when we



Barrow

were apart," Johnson said. "We always came back to the essential question of what is God doing, what is God telling us to be, telling us to do.

"It wasn't an organizational or efficiency exercise, it's about who is God calling us to be right now," he said.

Both Johnson and Barrow recognized in the work they were doing for the Call to Action project as an echo of what was happening in the Upper New York Area as the new conference was formed.

"We would sit [in the Call to Action meetings] musing that this is what we have been

talking about, this is the direction we want to go in Upper New York," Barrow said. "We must take this call to action seriously and look for places in the document that align with [the Upper New York Conference's] vision and purpose statement."

Barrow said the report is something "Upper New York will benefit from."

Report released

The report, released on Oct. 25, stated the United Methodist Church needs to institute widespread reforms — from consolidating general church agencies to holding bishops and clergy accountable for church growth — to revitalize the denomination. The Call to Action Steering Team's final report, says the status quo of a shrinking and aging U.S. church is "toxic" and unsustainable.

The report was presented and discussed at the Council of Bishops meeting Nov. 2 through 6 in Panama City, Panama.

Even as Barrow was being interviewed for this story, he received word the Council had affirmed the Steering Team's recommendations to meet what Barrow described as "the adaptive challenges" and the five recommendations that would make the denomination more able to quickly meet the needs of the local church.

"With the Council of Bishops affirmation that the church doesn't have to wait until General Conference to respond [to emerging needs and] redirect the energy and flow of resources that will sustain and increase the number of vital congregations in making disciples for Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world," he said.

Currently, agency priorities are approved and launched as a result of action taken at General Conference, which meets every four years. As the top policy-making body of the United Methodist Church, only General Conference has the authority to speak officially for the denomination.

Affirmation of the report means, Barrow said, "we don't have to wait four years

before responding [to needs]. We need to call to faith a new church culture, a culture that is not administratively heavy but more mission-focused."

Barrow was quick to point out that the recommendation of the Steering Team does not usurp the authority of the General Conference. "I see



Johnson

the General Conference as where technical work happens. I see what the Council of Bishops and the Steering Team would do as adaptive work that would unfreeze us. We would not be bogged down by administration and legislation. We would focus on the mission of the church."

Mission happens in local churches

That mission — to make disciples for Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world — happens primarily through the local churches, Johnson said.

"The study of the General Church structure named some issues that have long been great sources of discomfort for some people, but it shows that even at our General Church level, local churches still matter. The work we do through the General Board of Global Ministries, for example, cannot be done without healthy churches providing volunteers, sending in their apportionments and supporting missionaries around the world.

There is a disconnect between the flow of resources from the general church, annual conferences and districts to the local church, Barrow said. "We have to be more intentional that when we speak of resources we are being

innovative and creative, that we're not just resourcing but providing relevant resources that reach the local church."

He also said accountability needs to be a part of the process. "Local churches don't believe that conferences and agencies are accountable in delivering resources.

"If the local church is the place that will drive the vitality of the congregation," he said, "then the general agencies must do their work in a way to ensure that they're lining up with what local churches need. Conferences and the General Church cannot assume they know what the local church needs."

Still a need for connection

Even with the emphasis on the local church, Johnson says there is still a need for United Methodist connectional system. "There are simple things we do together that we cannot do as individual congregations," he said.

That being said, he added, how can the agencies, conferences districts and churches work together more efficiently in that connection.

Johnson hopes Upper New York United Methodist Churches will study the recommendations of the Steering Team and reflect on what the recommendations could mean to their congregation and discern which recommendations call to them.

"As we discern specifically how we [the Upper New York Annual Conference] are being called to be what God wants, we should be listening to our brothers and sisters across the denomination," Johnson said. "There are new ways of thinking, and past mistakes we don't want to recreate."

Like Johnson, Barrow hopes congregations in Upper New York will study the Call to Action Steering Team's recommendation.

"I am asking every United Methodist in the Upper New York area to read and to reflect and to ask the question what does this mean to us as a denomination," he said.

To read the full report and more about the work of the Call to Action Steering Team, visit www.umc.org/calloaction.

Bishops support church reforms, accountability

By Heather Hahn*
(UMNS) United Methodist bishops have unanimously endorsed recommendations for widespread church reforms, including greater accountability for denominational leaders in promoting church growth.

The Council of Bishops' approval of the recommendation in the Call to Action Steering Team Report on Nov. 4 was heralded as a step forward for a church that has suffered decades of membership decline in the United States.

"What this means is that

whatever goes forward, the council is committing itself — and hopefully the Connectional Table will make the same commitment — that yes, we are taking a stand and these are the levers to pull the church in the direction in which we feel the Spirit of God is calling us," said Illinois Area Bishop Gregory V. Palmer, the steering team co-chair. "And that is toward more congregational vitality."

The major recommendations for reform include: Starting in January 2011, make congregational vitality

the church's "true first priority" for at least a decade.

Dramatically reform clergy leadership development, deployment, evaluation and accountability.

Collect statistical information in consistent and uniform ways for the denomination to measure attendance, growth and engagement.

Reform the Council of Bishops, with the active bishops assuming responsibility for promoting congregational vitality and for establishing a new culture of accountability throughout the church.

Consolidate general church agencies and align their work and resources with the priorities of the church and the decade-long commitment to build vital congregations. Also, the agencies should be reconstituted with smaller, competency-based boards.

Some of the recommendations will require the approval of General Conference, the denomination's top lawmaking body. The bishops also supported the creation of an interim operations team, which will be responsible for helping to draft any legislation

that will be required.

Greater accountability

The studies had a U.S. focus, and some bishops questioned whether the drivers of vitality would be as effective outside the United States. Still, many of the bishops from other parts of the world applauded the report's recommendations — particularly the call for greater accountability.

*Hahn is a multimedia news reporter for United Methodist News Service.

UP!WORD'11

The Youth of the Upper New York Conference Registration info • Theme • Schedule



CCYM Chooses New Chairs

(written By Jacki Stow and Margot Rankins-Burd)

As our four conferences become one new conference, we have two new co-chairs to help us along. Jess Lawson and Aaron Millard have stepped up. They both believe that "having the minds and hearts of youth from all over New York State give our new Council great potential to provide great events for the youth".

Jess Lawson will be a senior next year at Williamsville South High School. She is on the YSF (Youth Service Fund) committee. She tries not to watch TV, but makes exceptions for "Glee." "She's the Man" is Jess's favorite movie, and she loves chick flicks. She is a vegetarian. Jess also plays violin, piano, guitar, and she sings. Her favorite book of the Bible is Romans, but she likes Psalm 121. Jess is looking forward to being co-chair because it is a new way to serve God, CCYM, and the youth of the conference.

Aaron Millard will be a senior next year at Carthage High School. He is also on the YSF committee. He plays football and baseball and is a member of National Honor Society and Key Club. He likes reading and hanging out with friends when he has free time. Aaron's favorite movie is "Seven Pounds" and his favorite TV shows are "The Office" and "CSI." He loves Psalm 34 because it speaks about how amazing God's love is. He is excited about being co-chair because it will be an amazing experience and his faith will continue to grow.

As our Conferences merge, so do our CCYMs grow together into one. Jess and Aaron are excited about sharing the leadership of CCYM through this transitional year. Each brings different strengths to the role, and will help set the tone for the new CCYM of the Upper New York Conference.



FALL GATHERING - Youth participating in the Fall Youth Gathering in Rochester had opportunities to experience dynamic worship, deepen their faith, and make new friends. More photos at: www.unyumc.org

Photo by Maidstone Mulenga

Thoughts on a Theme — 'Grace'

The theme means to me that no matter who you are, whether you're the richest person in the world or the poorest, or if you're famous or no one knows you at all, you're still accepted by God equally. God's not going to accept someone more because they have more money or they're famous. He's going to accept everyone as the same whether they're rich, poor, blind, deaf, paralyzed, black, or white. The theme is Grace. Which means no exception to GOD'S acceptance. So it means He doesn't care who you are or what you have done. He still loves everyone equally. God's not going to love someone more

because they go to church every week or because they pray all the time. God loves them just as much as someone who's in jail for murder and doesn't believe in going to church or praying.
-Troy Babcock

To me, the definition of Grace means that everyone is accepted no matter what. Grace makes me think of beauty and the beauty that is all around us. All of God brings us Grace whether it is a thunderstorm or a leaf on a tree. As children of God, I feel like we need to concentrate more on His grace and find no exceptions in accepting everything. Not only accepting

people and things as God's creation, I think we need to embrace the beauty in it all.
-Anonymous

It can be as simple as accepting Jesus as your savior. God gave his only son so that we could live in paradise for eternity.

"I was lost when you found me here, You pulled me close and helped me near, And I'm a fool, but still you love, I'll be a fool for the king of love, You gave me wings so I could fly, And you gave me a song to color the sky, And all I have is all from you And all I want is all from you, His Grace, your Grace,

I'm nothing without you, Your Grace, Your Grace, Shines on me."
-"Grace"
-Michael W. Smith

"Your Grace has found me just as I am, empty handed, but alive in your hands"
-"Majesty"

God's grace accepts us for who we are. With his love we are alive. We are forever grateful because God has given us such an opportunity. Because of God's grace I'm not afraid of what's to come. Jesus is my savior and he will guide me. We are saved by Grace alone.
-Aaron Millard

UP!WORD '11

Holiday Inn at Syracuse/Liverpool
April 8-10, 2011

Registration Deadline

Postmarked March 28, 2011

For registration form go to:

www.unyumc.org/pages/detail/1033

Any questions on the registration, please contact Judy Hipes at tandj3905@hotmail.com or 607-624-2145

Any questions on the event itself please contact:
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UP!WORD '11

Holiday Inn at Syracuse/Liverpool
April 8-10, 2011

Tentative Schedule

Friday, April 8

- 7:00 PM Registration Opens
- 8:45 PM Pre-gathering Time - Convention Center
- 9:30 PM Opening Worship - Convention Center
- 10:30 PM Late Night Options (more details available upon arrival)

Saturday, April 9

- 7-8:30 AM Breakfast (on own) (Restaurant suggestions will be given at registration)
- 8:45 AM Pre-Gathering Time - Convention Center
- 9:30 AM Morning Worship - Convention Center
- 10:45 AM Workshops- Session I (Workshop descriptions available upon arrival)
- 11:45 AM Lunch (on own)
- 1:15 PM Workshops - Session II
- 2:30 PM Workshops - Session III
- 3:45 PM Workshops - Session IV
- 4:45 PM Dinner (on own)
- 7:00 PM Workshops - Session V
- 8:15 PM Pre-Gathering Time - Convention Center
- 9:00 PM Evening Worship - Convention Center
- 10:00 PM Late Nite Options (more details available upon arrival)


Sunday, April 10

- 7-9 AM Breakfast (on own)
- 9:00 AM UP!WORD '11 Sunday Workshops (options will be available upon arrival)
- 10:45 AM Pre-Gathering Time - Convention Center
- 11:00 AM Morning Worship - Convention Center
- 12 Noon Homeward Bound


UP!WORD '11

Holiday Inn at Syracuse/Liverpool

Bishop sends Christmas Greetings



**“Thanks Be to God for
His Indescribable Gift!”**
2 Corinthians 9:15



Christians from around the world will soon be celebrating Christmas. Each year many people change their normal routines to buy gifts, send out greetings cards, decorate their homes, attend candlelight worship services, sing at Christmas gatherings and watch Christmas specials on TV. Others plan to travel long distances to be with families and love ones. The sight and sound of the season fill the air. There are even stores that are dedicated to preparing for and celebrating the holiday. Careers have been built. There are people who will decorate your home inside and out. Prepare your holiday meal and even do your holiday shopping.

Many of you have started your Christmas shopping and you are looking for a gift for that special person. You want to get that perfect gift. That gift that the person can open and say “awesome!!”. But let me ask you, have you ever received a gift that makes you say, “I’m speechless” or “what is this thing?” Or have you received a gift that is indescribable?

What is an indescribable gift?

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16


This is an incredible priceless gift. It is the most expensive gift you’ll ever receive because Jesus paid for it with his life. It will last forever and it’s practical. We can use it every day for all of our lives. Have you ever been given such a wonderful gift?

In order to get such an indescribable gift, we must be open to receive it. Everyone can have it. God doesn’t force it on anyone. We have to accept it as our own. Each of us have to make the decision to receive Jesus Christ into our lives.

Yet some people accepted him and put their faith in him. So he gave them the right to be the children of God. John 1:12

What better way than Christmas to begin a life of fellowship with Jesus Christ, a new life of PEACE, JOY AND LOVE!

May God be with each of us this Christmas as we welcome the Christ child, God’s indescribable gift – JESUS CHRIST!



Bishop Marcus and Barbara Matthews

Bishop’s wife shows passion for service to others

By Sandra Brands

“We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to Faith; ministry in ministering; the teacher, in teaching...”
Romans 12:7

Barbara W. Matthews believes that God gives everyone gifts to be shared with others. “I always felt teaching was my gift or call,” said the wife of Bishop Marcus Matthews of the Upper New York Annual Conference. “And I have a passion for doing it.”



It is those gifts that the Bishop cited in his recent visit to each of the Upper New York Annual Conference districts, where he issued three challenges to all United Methodists in the area:

- Develop and strengthen spiritual discipline through prayer and devotion.
- Bring one soul to Christ by June 2011.
- Add one more mission opportunity to every local church’s ministries.

He used the example of Barbara’s volunteer work as a mentor to children attending Syracuse area schools as an example of a mission opportunity, saying, “You’re being the presence of a Christ-like spirit. It makes a difference because the children begin to see something of Christ in you. They’ll begin to identify you with that church up the street.”

For Barbara, mentoring children is a ministry, though she rarely, if ever, says that aloud. In fact, few people she volunteers with know that her husband is the bishop of one of the largest regional bodies in the United Methodist Church, unless, she said, “They know him or me, or have met us in circumstance where it’s obvious.”

Hers is a ministry of example, her deep faith revealed in “the way you are, the way you talk, the way you present yourself in a Christian way without actually saying the words or speaking them. Children generally know when you’re sincere, that you genuinely care.

And she does care deeply about children, having devoted her adult life to teaching them.

Born in rural southern Virginia, a community very much like the area where she and the Bishop now reside, Barbara Walker received her degree in education and at the age of 19 left home to begin her teaching career.

Teaching was not always in her plan. She wanted to be a nurse. The first day as a teacher found her facing 22 boys and 22 girls eagerly awaiting their brand new teacher. Little did they know how frightened

CONTINUED ON PAGE 9

BMCR honors Bishop Matthews

The Northeastern Jurisdiction of Black Methodists for Church Renewal recently honored Upper New York Resident Bishop Marcus Matthews during the annual meeting in Philadelphia.

Under the theme ‘Preparing Leaders for Today and Tomorrow,’ members of the BMCR gathered Oct. 29 and 30 to ponder ways to encourage lay and clergy leadership in the United Methodist Church.

Bishop Matthews gave the keynote address based on Rev. 21:1, 5, noting that with Jesus Christ, all things are constantly being made new, “even our ability to perceive a future greater than our present or even our most recent past.”

He told the gathering that Christians are constantly being challenged as people of faith, to see things from the perspective of a Savior who makes all things possible.

Tabulating a list of events that were thought to be unattainable several years ago, Bishop Matthews said the vision of Christ, shared by John of a “new heavens and a new earth” indeed, puts within our reach today possibilities and opportunities that would otherwise be unthinkable.

“And the vision of Christ, for all who choose to remain faithful, even during these turbulent times, will put within our scope tomorrow, horizons yet unseen today,” he said.

He saluted local churches

that encourage young people to go into ministry. “I don’t know where I would be if it were not for a local United Methodist church in my life? If it were not for a local church that embraced me and loved me as part of the family of

God.”

He said the value of effective leadership has become crucially important. He pointed that the Church has trained the clergy for a managerial role in a highly outdated

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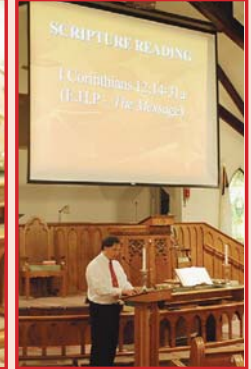


Bishop Matthews gives the keynote address at the BMCR meeting in Philadelphia as Bishop Violet Fisher listens.

Photo by Maidstone Mulenga

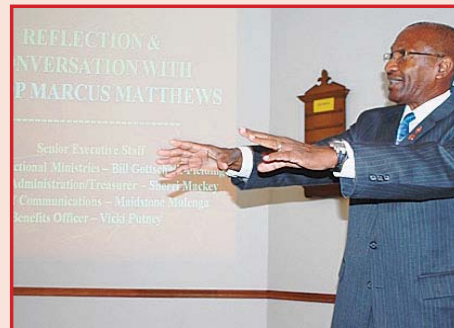
Niagara Frontier District Tour

Mountain View District Tour

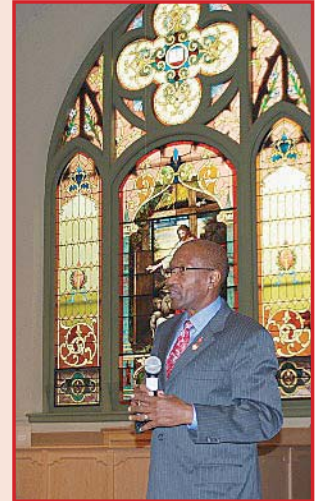


Bishop's Northern Flow District Tour

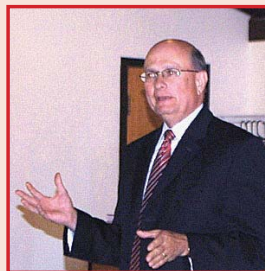
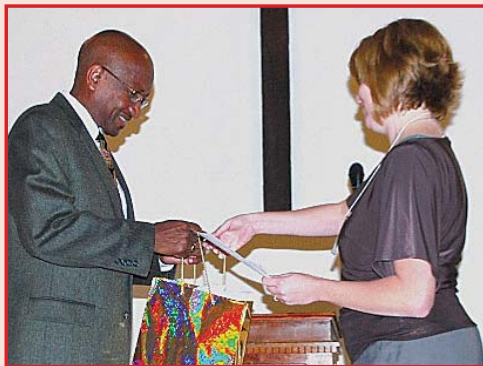
Photos By Maidstone Mulenga
For more photos about the Bishop's Tour, go online at www.unyumc.org



Bishop's Genesee Valley District Tour



Bishop's Crossroads District Tour



Photos By Maidstone Mulenga
For more photos
about the Bishop's Tour,
go online at
www.unyumc.org



Road to Tampa passes through Rochester as Annual Conference Session preparations continue

***By Maidstone Mulenga**

With the secretary's decision to keep the number of delegates for the 2012 General Conference at about 1,000, Upper New York Annual Conference is preparing to send a strong delegation and petitions to the quadrennial meeting of the highest-policy making body of the United Methodist Church.

The secretary of the General Conference, Rev. L. Fitzgerald Reist, announced early last month that the number of delegates for the 2012 General Conference will be near the 1,000-delegate limit. The 2012 meeting will take place April 24-May 4 at the Tampa Convention Center.

"Although a variety of opinions have been expressed, I've heard strong pleas to retain similar numbers as before, and I believe any significant reduction in the number of delegates should occur in concert with a more comprehensive look at the whole process," Reist told the United Methodist News Service. "It's essential that we not undermine the level of trust. With so many substantive changes expected to be considered during the 2012 General Conference, it is important to avoid any perception that a reduction in the number of delegates might somehow be intended to influence outcomes."

Reist said he consulted with many others, made himself available for discussion with the Council of Bishops and the Commission on the General Conference, held conversations with diverse bodies, and spent endless hours in prayer and meditation.

The exact number of delegates will not be available until calculations have been completed, but the secretary of each annual conference will be notified by December 1 how many delegates their conference will have. The number of delegates per annual conference will be calculated based on the requirement for one lay and one clergy delegate for each

annual conference, with additional delegates assigned proportionately according to the total clergy and lay membership per conference.

For the Upper New York Area, the road to Tampa - where the General Conference will be held - starts in Rochester, NY, where the Second Session of the Upper New York Annual Conference will be held June 7 through 11, 2011, at Riverside Convention Center, Rochester. Actual conferencing starts on June 8 but various events have been scheduled for June 7.

The Upper New York Annual Conference Committee on Petitions and Resolutions has begun its work. The Committee Chair Ronald Bretsch said it will deal with all petitions and resolutions submitted to the Annual Conference Session in 2011 for approval, including the petitions and resolutions to be forwarded from the Annual Conference to the General Conference and/or Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference, both in 2012.

At its session in 2011, the Upper New York Annual Conference will consider which petitions it wishes to submit to General Conference 2012 and the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference 2012.

The Committee also is charged with designing and recommending to the Commission on Sessions the processes for the election of the clergy and laity persons from Upper New York to the 2012 General Conference and the 2012 Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference.

"At present, the Committee is learning from our own past histories as four separate annual conferences. Also, it is learning how five other annual conferences currently function: Baltimore-Washington, Central Pennsylvania, East Ohio, Indiana, and Western Pennsylvania--regarding petitions and resolutions, and the elections of General Conference and Jurisdictional Conference members," Bretsch said.



Riverside Convention Center, Rochester, NY

Photo by Maidstone Mulenga

Fees for second Conference Session set

The fees for the 2011 Upper New York Annual Conference Session are as follows:
Room (4 nights, 1/2 of double occupancy room)

\$180 per person

Meal Package (3 breakfasts, 4 lunches, 3 dinners)

\$156 per person

Full Package \$336

per person

Commuter Package

(no room, no breakfasts)

\$125 per person

PLUS Registration Fee

\$75 per person

*Includes reporting by the United Methodist News Service.

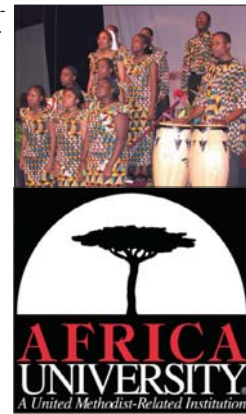
THE AFRICA UNIVERSITY CHOIR IS COMING!

The Africa University Choir will be giving performances throughout the Upper New York Conference, June 3 through June 18.

COME HEAR THEM SING . . .

- Friday June 3 Mohawk Valley UMC, Whitesboro
- Saturday June 4 Covenant UMC, Rochester
- Sunday June 5 Asbury First UMC, Rochester (morning)
- Monday June 6 Kenmore UMC, Buffalo (afternoon/evening)
- Tuesday June 7 East Aurora UMC
- Wednesday June 8 Southern Tier, TBA
- Thursday June 9 Hilton/Greece UMC
- Friday June 10 Annual Conference Session, Rochester
- Saturday June 11 Asbury First UMC, Rochester (morning)
- Sunday June 12 Clifton Springs (afternoon/evening)
- Monday June 13 Norwich Broad Street UMC
- Tuesday June 14 High Street UMC, Binghamton, 10:30 a.m.
- Wednesday June 15 Rotterdam UMC, Schenectady, 7 p.m.
- Thursday June 16 Troy/Albany Area TBA
- Friday June 17 Newcomb/Long Lake UMC
- Saturday June 18 Malone UMC
- Sunday June 19 First UMC, Watertown
- Monday June 20 Christ Community UMC, Syracuse
- Tuesday June 21 Syracuse City Churches

Watch for more information about the choir's tour of Upper New York Conference in future editions of *The Advocate*, the *E-Advocate* and online at www.unyumc.org.



Two DRC students receive Upper New York Conference scholarships to Africa University

Mukalay Loris Banza is the recipient of the Upper New York Endowed Scholarship for 2010-2011, and Kumwimba wa Kasonga Carine is the recipient of the Upper New York Conference Director Scholarship for the 2010-2011 academic year, announced Elaine Jenkins, Director of Planned Giving in the Africa University Development Office.

Both students, who are from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), attend or will attend Africa University in Zimbabwe.

Banza was admitted to Africa University in August 2009, and will complete his education in 2014. Last year, he was the recipient of the

North Central New York Endowed Scholarship, which became the Upper New York Endowed Scholarship on July 1, 2010. As long as Banza remains in good academic standing and meets financial aid requirements, he will remain the recipient of the scholarship until he graduates.

The eldest of six children, Banza was 16 when he and his family moved to a refugee camp in Kigoma, Tanzania because of incessant political disturbances and rebel attacks. Because of the transitory nature of their lives and the displacement that the family experienced, his parents have not been able to make a meaningful living in Tanzania.

Inspired by his experiences in refugee camps, Banza plans to return home to the DRC when he graduates to advocate for access to clean water and proper sanitation in refugee camps in Africa.

He is a member of the United Methodist Church of Mwunga in Kigoma.

Carine is a first-year student enrolled in the Faculty of Theology, and will receive the direct scholarship for the 2010-2011 academic year of \$5,125.71. She is a member of the North Katanga Annual Conference.

The direct scholarship is a one-time gift received from the former Western New York Annual Conference.

FROM PAGE 5 BMCR honors Bishop

bureaucratic system.

"Our leadership across the entire system for both clergy and laity is to have the impulse to control through requirements and regulations that further constrains and inhibits the movement toward change. The result is as a denomination we request leadership only to resist it and reward management which maintains the system."

Bishop Matthews said the church now needs to cultivate leadership that is creative, innovative and adaptive to change that will influence the community to follow the Church's vision and mission.

"We need effective clergy and lay persons who give leadership to inspirational preaching, small groups, and programs for children and youth. We need leaders who have integrity. Practice what we preach. Persons who have

a passion for what they are doing. And have a vision. To have a vision requires prayer, discernment and looking from the balcony."

He decried the fact that the church appears to be losing touch with lives of ordinary people in the working class, young adults and in the mainstream of society. "We have to explore new ways of being and doing church together; develop authentic relations with youth and young adults; engage in dynamic ministries and grapple courageously with contemporary issues of faith and justice."

Do we really care? "According to the Call to Action report if we do nothing as United Methodists in winning souls for Christ, by 2048 we will close the last door on our churches. . . . Do you want your legacy to be you did nothing to stop this?"

Talk about Rethinking Church; this church has no doors

By Sandra Brands

Walking into a church building for the first time can be intimidating.

That's not the case with Grace Adventure United Methodist Church. The congregation doesn't have a building. In fact, strictly speaking, there isn't much of a congregation—yet.

But that's starting to change, said Annette Snedaker, the 29-year-old local pastor, who with lay person Maureen Gilli, felt God was calling them to start something new in the Greater Binghamton area, something "where people could be part of the creation of a new church."

"So many youth and young adults—even people in their 40s—are scared to step inside a church building because [the congregation] already has set traditions and ways of doing things," she said during a recent interview. "We forget when we're already church-goers what it's like to walk into a church."

That's one of the reasons, Snedaker said, they don't have a building—and don't plan to have one. They meet in places where people already congregate: hotel lobbies, bars, coffee shops, and they have been aggressively using social media networking to invite people to participate.

Earlier this summer, Grace Adventure United Methodist Church posted a message on Facebook, inviting anyone interested to join them at a local store front for free bubble tea.

Bubble tea?

A trendy drink out of Asia, bubble tea is a mixture of fruit syrup, black tea and tapioca pearls. "It's a fun way to drink tea," Snedaker said.

The Grace Adventure launch team, which has grown to include 10 people, thought the unexpectedness of offering bubble tea might attract attention. Previously, they had offered to buy people coffee at a local donut shop, but no one came.

"We thought we'd get about 30 [people at the bubble tea]," Snedaker laughed. "That's not what happened."

The invitation went viral, she said. Someone would reply that they would

come to the event, and their acceptance would post on their Facebook page. Friends would see it, and they, too, would accept the invitation.

"That's how you end up with 361 people coming for free bubble tea," she said.

The 361 people who came to the event were mostly young adults. "The line was out the door and down the sidewalk," she said.

True to the reason for the event, Snedaker said the 10 members of the launch team came prepared with flyers about Grace Adventure United Methodist Church and upcoming events. They also decided to celebrate the first anniversary of the congregation and handed out free cupcakes.

"It was a festive, fun event," Snedaker said.

Team members made sure to follow-up after the event, she said, contacting every one of the 361 people who joined them for tea. And while the team is not sure how many people will come out for future events, Snedaker said she is in dialogue with 10 or 15 people from the early July event. One young woman has expressed such a deep interest in the church Snedaker believes she will join the launch team.

"We said if we had 400 people show up [for an event] and we get five consistent people involved, we'll consider it a success," she said.

On Aug. 6, the congregation will hold a flash mob for hunger. Originally, a form of performance art, flash mobs bring people together in a specific location at specific time, often just for the sake of coming together. Grace Adventure United Methodist Church is bringing people together during the 26th Annual Spedie Fest and Balloon Rally held at Otsiningo Park in Binghamton to collect items for the Community Hunger Outreach Warehouse (CHOW), a food pantry in Endicott.

"Some of the people who came to the bubble tea are coming to the Flash Mob," she said. "We'll pull people from Binghamton and beyond. That's possible because of social networking."



To celebrate its first anniversary, members of Grace Adventure handed out free cupcakes to guests of the Bubble Tea Meet Up. Photo By Sandra Brands

Other upcoming events, such as a roller skating party, a bonfire and an upcoming service project in the Catskills are also being promoted through social media networking.

"We find that the social networking sites are today's way of communicating," Snedaker said. "That's because that's where young adults are today. That's how they communicate."

But it isn't just about getting people to an event, Snedaker says. The launch team is building a congregation and because they are a church without walls, they are holding events that let people in the community know who and what they are, giving others an opportunity to see if they want to make Grace Adventure United Methodist Church their church home.

Weaving in mission projects with events, Snedaker said, is a way to give people an opportunity to help others. "Once they are part of something spiritually-based, they realize that this is making them feel really good and more complete, so they'll come back," she said.

"A lot of times you don't know what you're missing until you get a taste of it," she said. "A structured church environment is tough for young adults and youth. They want to know they aren't going to be told what to think, and that they'll have the space and freedom to develop their own theology and own views."

"Grace Adventure wants to get out into the community and say very directly, 'we will not judge you, we want you just the way you are'. We are journeying, we will explore the Bible together and we'll also explore other things together," she said.

That's what the unorthodox church says on their Facebook fan page: "Grace Adventure is a church without a building! We go places. We help people. We have fun together. We keep things simple. We wear jeans. We want to make a difference in the community and offering support to one another. So check out our activities and come meet up with us on one of our adventures!"

"We are way past being out of the box. We are out of the building!" Snedaker and the launch team like being out of a building because it "forces us to be present in our community. If we don't have a building, it means we're meeting in public spaces where people see who we are. It keeps us mission-oriented, to be present and do things in the community."

They also chose not to be burdened with the expenses of supporting a building. "We'd rather put that money into something else," she said.

For more information about Grace Adventure UMC and its mission, contact Snedaker at taekwannet@hotmail.com

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5 Barbara Matthews

and inadequate she felt. All they knew was, "I'm here to learn and you are here to help me."

From day one, she knew she had found her purpose. Barbara has never regretted this change in plans. She has taught in Virginia, Washington, D.C., and Maryland. Throughout her career she has tried to be the kind of teacher she would want her children and grandchildren to have.

It was while living in the District of Columbia that she met a young seminarian from Wesley Theological Seminary, who was an intern at Douglas Memorial United Methodist Church. Barbara's brother-in-law, the late Rev. Dr. Joshua Hutchins II was the pastor at this inner-city church. Her sister, Gloria, thought it might be nice to introduce the teacher to the seminarian, and that something might come of it.

"I told my sister I'm not going to marry a minister," Barbara laughed. "I don't want to live in a fishbowl!"

Barbara and Marcus were married two years later in Asbury United Methodist Church by her brother-in-law, the late Rev. Frank L. Williams and Bishop Woodie White. That was more than 36 years ago.

They have raised two children; son Jaime, who is a police officer and, daughter Marci, who is a registrar at a local university. They have four granddaughters and one grandson.

Barbara taught grades 1-5. Most of her career was as a reading specialist in the District of Columbia and Maryland until she retired.

Bishop Matthews was elected in 2004 and assigned to the Philadelphia Area. During their tenure in Philadelphia, Barbara volunteered at UMC Home for Children,

where she worked with children and in the clothes closet.

The two moved to upstate New York in 2008, when Bishop Matthews was assigned to serve the New York West Area, now part of the Upper New York Area. Knowing the amount of time needed in getting to know the area, meetings and traveling that would be required; Barbara knew she had to rethink how her gifts could be used.

These days, she shares her passion for teaching and learning as a volunteer in the local school district. She finds this just as rewarding as teaching fulltime. Marcus was called to be a minister; I was called to be a teacher."

The children she mentors come from families of diverse backgrounds economical, cultural, racial, single parent, married and divorced. They are having difficulty in school. Some need help with basic skills. Others need a little

one-on-one attention. Some only need positive encouragement. All want to know that someone cares.

"We talk about whatever they want to talk about and whatever we discuss is confidential. I don't push my beliefs on them but try to show what it means to be a Christian."

"If you are aware of the controversy regarding the state of education in our country, you know our children are not getting the education they need and deserve. If our children are not educated well then we have no future. They are the future. I prayed a lot about whether I should volunteer. The answer came as a question. Why aren't you using your knowledge to help?"

With information from friend Lillie Fields, a retired principal in Liverpool, N.Y., about the Baldwinsville Volunteer Center and OASIS, she went through the required screening process was approved and now mentors in that local school district.

"The children and teachers are a joy to work with. I feel I am doing what God intended for me to do, to help others. You don't have to be an educator to mentor. Everyone has something to offer, experiences to share," she said.

"What's important," she adds, "is for each of us to find our passion in the church and outside of the church. Then search resources, talk to friends, ask around. Sometimes, you get a connection. Sometimes you have to try several different things before you find the niche that fits you."

Getting involved, she added is like going to a new church and not knowing anyone or knowing how anything works. "You check it out and get a feel for it. Sometimes, you don't feel welcome; sometimes you're over-welcomed and feel like they just want to get people in the church."

"It's a learning process," she said. "Wherever you go, let God guide you and do the best you can."

From the desk of Bill Gottschalk-Fielding, Director of Connectional Ministries

In just a few weeks, rental sales for the classic film *It's a Wonderful Life* will begin to increase once again. This story of one man's struggle to see his significance takes place on Christmas Eve in the 1940's. Many believe (myself included) that Frank Capra, the film's director, based the setting for this film on our own Seneca Falls, New York.

Truth be told, I love this film and will be one of those watching it this Christmas season. It is simple and sentimental and it grabs my heart every time. Even if you have never seen the film, the storyline is likely known to you: George Bailey, a struggling community-minded small business man, is given the chance to see what the world would be like if he had never been born. It is not a pretty vision. With George out of the picture, his beloved "Bedford Falls" becomes a pretty dreary place. Indeed, in one

particular scene, George's "angel guide" Clarence reveals that without George's initiative and hard work, an entire neighborhood - open and inclusive and affordable - disappears, replaced by dirty tenements and despair.

When I was traveling around our conference with Bishop Matthews earlier this fall to participate in the District Days presentations, a pastor asked what difference our new conference could actually make in Upper New York. In my answer, I referred to this movie. Acknowledging the film's obvious sentimentality, I urged us all the same to hear its central message: we are here to make a difference in our neighborhoods. Indeed, if we do not seek to make that difference, Upper New York will be less vital, just, and beautiful.

Bishop Matthews in the presentation he made at the District Day,

challenged us to "win at least one soul for Christ" in the year ahead. He admitted adding to our membership rolls would be a good thing, but emphasized the true value of this work would be found in a changed life. He also encouraged us to add an additional mission activity to our church's work, such as a tutoring program or food pantry, remind us United Methodist practice two kinds of holiness, both personal and social. We United Methodists believe in feeding people by both opening the Bible and opening the food cupboard.

Thinking about these challenges, I tried to imagine what my life would be like if several "George Baileys" hadn't taken the initiative to introduce me to Christ, especially when I went off to college. Or if carloads of George



Baileys had not showed up in my home town of Elmira after the '72 flood to provide my homeless family with food, clothing and hope. In both cases, United Methodists were among those who touched my life. I am very grateful for their gifts. And I wonder where I would be today if they had not reached out and blessed me.

Frankly, I wonder who I would be today. I believe we are always blessed in order to be a blessing to others. Right now, there are people within our reach God is seeking to bless through our words and actions. The biggest mistake any of us can make is to assume what we do and say makes no difference. Jesus said even a cup of cold water offered to quench someone's thirst is of value. What you do for another in Jesus' name matters. Indeed, it's what matters most.

From the desk of Larry Baird, Cornerstone District Superintendent

Mission and vision statements can be lofty articulation of wishful thinking or even more sadly pronouncements of institutional delusion. This happens when the organization lacks the knowledge, will, or means to achieve the desired objective.

Whether or not our new Upper New York Conference lives out its vision and mission statement remains to be seen. I am hopeful only because I believe that in our DNA we have a theology that can fulfill our stated vision and mission. On the other hand I have no confidence that simply reorganizing ourselves will achieve our objective. Nor do I believe ratcheting up a pluralistic spirituality will do the job.

Without a transforming theology the reorganizing will simply lead us to distraction while we continue to be inclined toward that which is self-destructive and antithetical to God's purposes. That is a recipe for continued decline and disillusionment.

The theology of which I speak is thoroughly Wesleyan and which

leads to the praxis alluded to in our statement: being God's love with our neighbors and living out the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I believe that a return to our Wesleyan theological roots would restore our conference's motivation as well as ability to be in effective ministry. I also believe that when we are so motivated by God's grace we would act on our mission and see our vision become reality. In turn, if that happens we will grow spiritually and numerically, not because increasing numbers is our objective, but because it is a natural byproduct of living and sharing the Gospel.

So I ask: "What if we really believed in prevenient grace?" What if we believed that God was working in every individual desiring to refurbish the divine image in them? What if we cared enough to learn the story of every individual in our neighborhoods to discern with them where God is at work in our lives?

Answer: We would have a multitude of new friends and acquaintances.

And I ask: "What if we believed in justifying grace?"

What if we believed that every person, like ourselves, needs to repent of our brokenness that has brought hurt and distorted God's image in every area of our life both personal and corporate? What if we shared the joy of turning towards God's gracious gift of new and reformed life in Jesus Christ?

Answer: We would be made free from the captivity of social, relational, and personal sin, and would be released into a joyous company of believers which would be contagiously attractive to our neighbors.

I ask: "What if we believed in sanctifying grace?" What if we believed that when put right in our relationship with God that God would be willing to work with us in our new relationship to move us toward total conformity to the image of Jesus Christ? What if in the company of others we



held each other accountable to seek and remain in God's continuing grace, and seek to manifest Christ in all our personal and social relationships?

Answer: We would be a powerful and authentic force in the world.

We would then be God's love with our neighbors as we would embody the gospel of Jesus Christ. This

would be because God would incarnate this vision and mission in us. This is radically different than us attempting it on our own terms by cozying up to the world through identification with culture in the hopes that the world will like us enough to help us preserve our institution.

The result would be that we would be disciples of Jesus Christ and we would make disciples for Jesus Christ.

And so we have a choice to make. One is an exercise in futility. The other has and always will engender a hope that will not be disappointed.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2 ADVENT SPIRIT

An invitation to reflection

The calendar is simple and usually published in black and white.

It begins with the first Sunday of Advent and ends on Christmas Eve. Each day offers a scriptural passage for reflection, an illustration and a suggested activity. For most of the 21 years, the calendar theme reflects a poem written by Mousin.

"Generally I start the process for us both by writing a poem," he said. "I send the poem to Merry to give her some ideas and thoughts about scripture. Sometimes, not always, the poem will particularly reflect something that happened in the last year. In 2001, the poem very much referred to—in an oblique way—to 9/11. The 2005 poem had a focus on finding one's way home after being disrupted and that came after Hurricane Katrina and the Indonesian Tsunami."

"Tom's poems are always a little wistful, [suggest] a little bit of yearning—and I think that's Advent, that there's yearning for what is not yet complete," said Watters.

After receiving Mousin's poem, Watters turns to the lectionary. "All of the Sunday passages come from the lectionary," she said. "I find a kernel in the scripture passage that can translate into something appropriate for our lives today."

For example, she said, the scriptural passage for Dec. 15 is I Corinthians 13:12-13, "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been

fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love."

The suggested activity is to clean a mirror, and while cleaning it, reflect on the scripture.

Watters said she tries to make the scripture come alive. "It's trying to think about what's going on in our daily lives and how the Scripture [relate]."

Like Mousin, Watters said she looks at what's going on in the world, in her life and how the scriptures ground her. Over the 21 years, she and Mousin have created the calendar, "there have been major upheavals in both our lives," she said, "and this is the one consistent project we do."

Each year, Hanukkah, St. Nicolas Day and World AIDS Day are recognized. Theologically, she said, Dec. 24 has always referenced John 1:14, "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth."

Three years ago, they began to incorporate a reference to a mission project for World AIDS Day, Dec. 1, in part because there was a covenant relationship between the congregation Mousin was serving in Brattleboro and the nonprofit organization, Children Affected by HIV/Aids (CHABHA). Last year, it was the El Hogar Project, a Hondurans-based children's project; and this year, it is Soteni International, a Kenya-based nonprofit organization

dedicated to preventing AIDS.

The mission reflection began, Mousin said, because of the calendar's availability on the Internet. "It just occurred to us that this would be an opportunity to expand their vision," he said. "We don't say, 'give to the organization.' We just list it as an invitation to find out more."

For Watters, this year's mission reference has a special connection. Her cousin, Victoria Wells Wulsin, a physician-epidemiologist from Cincinnati, Ohio, helped start the organization, which works with locally elected management to help empower orphans of AIDS to lead the fight against AIDS and to prevent another generation from succumbing to the disease.

Spiritual discipline

Watters and Mousin create the calendar as a gift to others, one that provides theological grounding to lights and wreaths and Christmas carols.

Because the illustrations are black-and-white, people can color in the simple line drawings while reflecting on the scripture and suggested activity.

"My mother has always had it sitting by her place at the breakfast table with a couple of colored pencils," Watters said. She colors each day in, either all at once or a day at a time. One of Watters' colleagues enlarges it and uses it as a place mat during an Advent family potluck. Another keeps it in front of her exercise bike and ponders it all year long.

One of the younger members of



Watters

her congregation, who had received his third grade Bible, saw the calendar and said, "Oh, now I can use my Bible," Watters said. "And he got the family to read the Bible each day [of Advent]."

This year, Mousin's poem is about hospitality and sharing gifts, Watters said. "For the first week of Advent, the passages I used specifically talk about hospitality, that someone's coming, about people entertaining angels unaware, or the guy who gets up in the middle of the night to give his visiting friend a loaf of bread. The suggested activities are intended to be a simple act of spiritual discipline."

"For me, at the simplest level, it's reading the devotions each day and following through on them so that each of the days can be like a traditional Advent calendar," Mousin said. "Each day can be a window into a deeper relationship with God and what God is doing in their lives. If you open the window on this particular day, you may see something you've never seen."

For both Watters and Mousin, the calendar is a form of prayer, a form of worship.

"Merry's devotions are an invitation," Mousin said, "but they're general enough they can be interpreted many ways. On Dec. 23, she suggests 'Give glory.' There are a number of ways you can give glory."

Both Mousin and Watters said they would be very interested in learning how others are using the calendar.

Watters can be contacted at merry.watters@verizon.net and Mousin at tmousin@gmail.com

Community comes together to consecrate new church home

By Marilyn J. Kasperek

A community of faith in Amherst, New York came together September 26 to consecrate a new home for Asbury United Methodist Church and to celebrate the possibilities of their ministry together.

Community was evident throughout the moving service which marked the end of an interesting and, sometimes painfully long, journey for the Asbury congregation led by the Rev. Jackie Ann Rose Kraft. About 300 of the church and community at large filled the new sanctuary, as seats had to be added.

The Rev. Jerry Gillis, Lead Pastor of The Chapel at Crosspoint, which was built in Asbury's previous backyard, brought the consecration message, emphasizing the importance of serving together. He noted that Rev. Kraft came to hearings to support the construction of The Chapel out of love and without being asked. Rev. Gillis expressed his appreciation for her ministry and that of the Asbury congregation.

As a gift for the Asbury congregation's new home, the Chapel gave Asbury enough chairs to fill their sanctuary and welcome area.

Others from the community joined in the service including the Rev. Thomas M. Kraft, Senior Pastor, Pendleton Center and Niagara First

United Methodist churches, the Rev. Dale Meredith pastor, University Baptist church, the Rev. Kevin Wright pastor, Bethel Baptist Church, the Rev. James C. O'Connor, pastor, St. Pius X R.C. Church, and Niagara Frontier District Superintendent the Rev. Natalie Hanson. Greetings came from the Rev. Dr. Marcus Matthews, Resident Bishop of the Upper New York Area, the Rev. Douglas Spencer, the Rev. Fay Cleveland, and Father James Chaplain of the 107th Airlift Wing with whom Chaplain (Maj.) Jackie Kraft serves.

Leaders and members of these congregations came together offering guidance, labor, and furnishings for the new church home. Grants from the Upper New York Conference made a memorial book and refurbishing of candelabra and candle lighter possible. Many other gifts for the new facility were given in memory and honor of members and friends of Asbury UMC.

Asbury traces their beginnings as a congregation to the late 1800's, moving to Amherst as Sweet Home United Methodist Church in the 1960's, to various temporary homes in the 1990's as they came together with the St. Andrews UMC congregation, and then into a pole barn church structure on Millersport Highway in 2003.

As the church began to grow with Pastor Kraft's

leadership at the Millersport location, expansion of their facility became a topic of conversation. As they looked at the possibilities, a local developer approached them with a proposal to find a suitable site, design, and build a new church and once completed, the developer and congregation would exchange properties.

Community was vital to what Kraft envisioned for the new facility – the community known as Asbury UMC and the Amherst community. "You can't just be a church sitting," said Pastor Kraft. "You've got to say 'how can we serve the community?'" An ideal plan developed as Pastor Kraft, members of the congregation, and the architect worked closely to meet the vision and stay within budget.

Included in the design were a beautiful, flexible worship area, several classrooms, a nursery, industrial kitchen and oversized, welcoming lobby.

The local community is already taking advantage of the invitation to use the space. Scrapbookers, as well as those receiving tutoring for the SAT, are already benefiting from members of the community sharing their talents.

Kraft has met with local boys and girls clubs and has reached out to the Amherst Center for Senior Services and hopes to plant a community garden on the church grounds. The offering for the Consecration service went



OPEN FOR MINISTRY - The Rev. Jackie Rose Kraft outside of the new Asbury United Methodist Church building which is already ministering in the community where it sits.

Photo by Ken Kasperek

back to help those in need in the community.

"It's about reaching out and making discoveries," said Lay leader Charles Syms. "We have the opportunity to do things here that we couldn't do elsewhere because we were so small," he added.

Members of the congregation worked together to complete whatever it took to get the many jobs done which brought them home to the Dodge Road, Getzville address. There were plans, and meetings, and hearings, and meetings, and organizing, and meetings, and cleaning and cooking, and meetings... but mostly

there was visioning of sharing the love of Christ with their community in a building that complemented that vision.

Community extends to the Air Base in Niagara Falls as the 107th Airlift Wing featured a story on the consecration in October and included an invitation: "All are welcome, and Pastor Jackie invites all members, their families, and friends to join her Sundays at 10:30 a.m. for worship. 'I look at it as this isn't the church that we built it's the church that God built,'" said Kraft. "Together may we make a difference in people's lives through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Court upholds pastor's right to accept members

By Linda Bloom*

(UMNS) A United Methodist pastor has the right to determine local church membership, even if the decision is based on whether the potential member is gay or lesbian.

Annual (regional) conferences cannot limit that right or ask the church's top court to set policy, the United Methodist Judicial Council ruled during its Oct. 27-30 meeting.

"The General Conference is the only body authorized and able to resolve the issue for the Church," wrote Jon R. Gray in a concurring opinion on one of the October cases. The General Conference is the denomination's top legislative body and meets every four years.

The council declined several requests to revisit a decision allowing a pastor to bar a gay man from joining his congregation. In one case, the denomination's top court ruled that the Northern Illinois Annual (regional) Conference did not have the authority to interpret constitutional language to prohibit pastors from denying membership based on a person's sexual identity.

When the court denied requests for reconsideration at this meeting made by the Northern Illinois and Arkansas conferences, Judicial Council member Ruben T. Reyes noted in a concurrence that the council had previously taken "a second hard look" at the decision in April 2006,

based on 12 briefs and more than 2,000 pieces of communication. "There should be an end to a controversy," he wrote.

But the issue has been an unceasing source of debate within the church for the past five years.

Defining church law

Judicial Council Decision No. 1032, from Oct. 29, 2005, related to the case of the Rev. Ed Johnson, who had been the senior pastor at South Hill (Va.) United Methodist Church until he was placed on an involuntary leave of absence by the Virginia Annual (regional) Conference. Bishop Charlene Kammerer upheld the action.

Johnson had refused to admit a self-avowed, practicing gay man into membership in the church.

Decision 1032, based on Paragraphs 214 and 225 of the denomination's law book, The Book of Discipline, said the paragraphs are "permissive, and do not mandate receipt into membership of all persons regardless of their willingness to affirm membership vows." The ruling meant that the pastor in charge of a local church has authority to determine a layperson's readiness for membership.

The pastor returned to his pulpit after the court's decisions, but the case's impact extended far beyond Virginia. Various annual conferences and other groups have protested the ruling, while others have supported it. General

Conference legislation filed in response to the case did not pass in 2008.

The Northern Illinois, Arkansas and Minnesota annual conferences asked the Judicial Council to reconsider the decision.

What annual conferences cannot do, the court ruled, is define church law, as the Northern Illinois Annual (regional) Conference did when it passed legislation this year on church membership and sexual identity based on its

interpretation of the church's constitution.

During the Judicial Council's Oct. 28 oral hearings, representatives for the Northern Illinois Conference argued that other parts of church law – namely Article IV of the denomination's constitution -- supersede the previous Judicial Council decision when it comes to matters of membership.

Judicial Council decided that the Northern Illinois Conference did not have the

authority to take such actions. "An annual conference is not permitted to devise and define its own policies or rules relating to the conditions, privileges and duties of church membership," the council said. "Such efforts violate the Discipline and are unlawful."

*Bloom is a United Methodist News Service multimedia reporter based in New York. Follow her at <http://twitter.com/umcscribe>.

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Trainings prepare VIM team leaders, members for work

By Sandra Brands
 Missionary and physician Sylvia Reimer has led so many Volunteers-in-Mission (VIM) trips, she's lost count. But she has learned valuable lessons about what it takes to lead a VIM team.

The one-day training helps people become more effective team leaders, she said. "Many people have been team leaders without the training. Many of us learned leadership by the seat of our pants. Training helps people avoid the same mistakes we made."

One of the first lessons Reimer learned was that the team leader cannot always control things. "You have to trust God, but it helps to be prepared. You may not be able to control everything, but the more you know and the more you prepare, the better able you are to handle the situation."

"There's a lot of responsibility—and some frustration—in being a team leader, but there's also a lot of richness that grows out of the experience," said Jay Dunkleberger.

Dunkleberger and his wife, Cathie, are the Interim Coordinators for VIM in The Upper New York Annual Conference.

"You're really taking God's love to other people, wherever they may be," said Jay, "and you're accepting God's love from them, too..."

"And from each other," Cathie said. "The leadership training helps folks understand the bigger picture, the people connection."

For Jack Hill of Valley Falls United Methodist Church and a member of the Conference VIM Interim Steering Committee, it is the people

connection that is the most rewarding.

"A lot of the people we help are people of limited income, have very limited resources," he said. "We don't deal in Main Street as a rule; we work with those who are socially kind of forgotten. When we arrive at the site the people are a little standoffish and nervous; by the end of the week we know everything about what happened to them, what their history has been, the names of the children and grandchildren. That's a big thing. We have some team members whose job is to sit and talk to people. That talking is part of the healing process—and in some cases, especially after a big disaster like Katrina, is the most important part of the project."

Part organizer, part psychologist and part cheerleader, VIM team leaders help select a project, recruit members and assign team responsibilities, oversee raising money to pay for supplies, make travel, lodging, safety and logistical arrangements, drum up support from congregations and remind people of the spiritual basis for all VIM projects.

"We're called to be servants, called to action, but we're also called to do no

harm," said Roger Cullen, another member of the Conference VIM Interim Steering Team. "Leading a team, especially out of the country, is complex. There are so many things to consider—cultural issues, travel problems, team safety—and we don't want to be missing the important steps to take so as to do no harm."

"Obviously if we're called to Christian action, we want

folks we meet appropriately, and understand each person's responsibility.

"This is what the team leader training is supposed to take care of—how to deal with issues that might come up," he said.

Pat Thomas and her husband, Mike, have taken the training a number of times. "The training lets you know what kind of different mission trips there are and what to

expect. You learn about international and national projects, and you learn there's a lot of local mission projects you can work on."

Members of Burnt Hills United Methodist Church, Pat and Mike have led seven teams to Northern Ireland in the last six years in addition to

leading a number of teams on local mission projects. "The training really lets you know that the main focus of VIM is building relationships more than any physical work you do."

In the process of recruiting a team for a return trip to Springfield Road Methodist Church and Forthspring Intercommunity Group in Northern Ireland, May 3 through 12, Pat said she and Mike became team leaders because

"we have good organizational skills, and we feel that's something we give back. We've been so blessed in our lives, and we have skills that can be used to help others. It's something we enjoy doing."

Reimer said the training helps future leaders determine what type of project they might want to consider. "The skills of their team have to match the needs of the project, as do their financial resources."

Experience in leading a team on a project is also a factor, she said. "Taking a team to Redbird Mission is VIM 101 because all you have to do is plan for your people to get there. Red Bird takes it from there. Other places in the United States, the Gulf Coast and so on, are also set up and people there know how to welcome teams."

That's not always the case. International projects require more from a team leader.

Planning for a big mission trip can take six to nine months to organize and fund, said Hill. "My first mission to Mississippi after Katrina, we went with \$40,000 and we spent almost all of it down there. There was such a tremendous need."

While the training is not mandatory for most VIM projects, teams going into Haiti after the earthquake last year were required to be led by a trained VIM leader.

"The training would also benefit those wanting to be a member of a team," said Cullen. "If the team member is aware of all the different issues that might arise around, they'll be better prepared. There's a considerable section in the training that's geared towards team members."

If you go

What: VIM Team Leader Training.

Trainer: Sylvia Reimer, a member of the Upper New York VIM Interim Steering Committee.

When: Saturday, Dec. 11, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Where: Clifton Springs United Methodist Church, 1 East Main St., Clifton Springs, NY 14432

Details: Download the brochure available online at www.unymc.org or contact Cullen at rcullen@rochester.rr.com or (585) 857-3140.

What: Second Team Leader Training.

Trainers: Jay and Cathie Dunkleberger, and Pete and Jan Huston.

When: Saturday, March 12.

Where: Cobleskill United Methodist Church, 107 Chapel St Cobleskill, NY 12043-3865

Details: Contact Jay Dunkleberger at jdunkleb@nycap.rr.com or (518) 371-7071.

For information on current or upcoming VIM projects, visit the [UNY Conference Website at www.unymc.org](http://www.unymc.org) and click on Mission & Ministry > Volunteers in Mission > Upcoming VIM Events.

to be sure we're able to work and witness as Christians and we can do that best if we're prepared," he said.

"When you're leading a team of people who may not have gone on a mission trip before, you need to be able to train them so they are prepared—both mentally, spiritually and culturally. Even if you're traveling to an area nearby, it's still important for the team to be working together and to treat each other and the

FROM PAGE ONE Love the hell out of each other

Speaking from the Hendricks Chapel where he was consecrated as a Bishop in 2004, Matthews praised the vision of the Methodists who had built the chapel during the depression.

"Yet women and men who had a vision also had faith in a God who has never failed. And so today local pastors, Deacons and Elders join together as a connective church to affirm our oneness in Jesus Christ."

Giving leadership to 185,599 United Methodists in 940 mission stations required clergy and leaders to strengthen their faith. "We cannot move forward as a community of believers, unless we are first of all moving forward in our faith."

He said faith involved the persistent and day-to-day practice of constantly being hitched to the Spirit of the living Christ in all actions and decisions. "To be built up in faith means that we practice every day learning how to listen for the voice of God that is the Spirit of Christ pulling us back to the foundations of our belief: that Christ is Lord, and if we yield our will to Christ's will, then Christ will consistently lead us to higher ground in our journey of Christian discipleship."



Bishop Matthews serves Communion during Advent Clergy Day Apart.
 Photo By Carlos Smith

Using football analogy, Bishop Matthews pointed out those teams that make it to the Super Bowl patiently persist, paying the daily dues of disciplined practice on the fundamentals.

"We need in this Annual Conference clergy leaders in our local churches who don't give up in the dead of winter or the heat of summer."

He said Advent demands a response from all local pastors, deacons and elders to offer hope to a broken and hurting world today.


"We are the ones. God is doing something big through

us! Advent offers us courage. It inspires and motivates us. It challenges us even when we are tired. It forces us to remember. To Hope! To Believe!"

Bishop Matthews compelled the clergy to tell the story of Salvation in all of Upstate New York.

"So go tell it! Over the hills and everywhere that Jesus Christ is born.

Tell it in the streets of Syracuse, Endicott, Gouverneur, Rochester, Albany, Amherst, Oneonta— that there is good news, that there is hope!"



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