



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 2, Issue 8 - August 2011

Planting 'seeds of love'

AU Task Force seeks to raise \$1 million

By Beth DiCocco
Advocate Writer

The Upper New York Annual Conference's campaign to raise \$1 million for scholarships to Africa University clearly is about education.

But it's not just about making college affordable for young people in Africa.



BYERS

It's also about educating people about the university, the students it serves, and The United Methodist Church's role in founding

and supporting the Zimbabwe school.

That will be a large part of the work of the newly formed Africa University Task Force, which will lead the campaign.

"(We need to) get people interested in the fact that there's a whole great big world out there, helping people help themselves," said Shirley Byers, task force chairperson. "This has been a dream of mine for a few years. We've got to think beyond our own walls, our own communities, and about what does it mean to be the Church, and this is a good way to do that."



Photo by Matthew Williams

Members of the Africa University Choir perform during the Second Session of the Upper New York Annual Conference June 9 in Rochester. During the session, a resolution to support a \$1 million endowment was adopted by the conference. At the current cost of \$5,400, it would endow eight Africa University scholarships each year.

Eighteen people attended the task force's first meeting on July 9, just a month and a day after the Annual Conference approved a resolution to undertake the three-year fundraising campaign.

The resolution called for the campaign to begin immediately upon passage of the resolution, and \$13,097 was collected during the Annual Conference Session; cash donations so far total \$41,803. The administrative costs of the campaign are funded through the Annual Conference's budget, so that the money raised will go to fund the endowment.

Christine Doran, executive assistant to Area Resident Bishop Marcus Matthews, offered a reading from *Conversations of the Heart* by Woodie W. White. From a section titled "On planting for a faithful harvest" she read:

"What we can control is our own sense of stewardship and faithfulness in doing a job well, being faithful to God, life, and relationships, and planting seeds for crops or seeds of love. This is what we can do."

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Trustee president steps down to manage UNYUMC properties

By Beth DiCocco
Advocate Writer

The Rev. Thomas Clemow, who most recently served as president of the Upper New York Annual Conference Board of Trustees, has stepped down to accept a paid position managing the conference's properties, particularly those that are abandoned or discontinued. He also will be creating a searchable database of every conference property.

Clemow, whose title is property management consultant to the conference Board of Trustees, will serve as an independent contractor

employed exclusively by the 12-member board. He has signed a two-year contract that is renewable annually at the end of that period.



CLEMOW

Trustee Deborah Byers, board vice president, has taken over as president.

"Shortly before the trustees-elect took office

it became apparent that the property-related issues for

which the board had oversight was enormous," Clemow said.

The Annual Conference has 937 churches in addition to six camp and retreat centers along with other properties. The conference covers an area of 48,000 square miles.

The union of the four former conferences exacerbated the problem of coping with unused properties; when the conferences were smaller, the property issues were "numerically smaller and geographically tinier" as well, Clemow said.

"A couple of trustees could go out and look at the

properties," he said. "That's not going to happen on the scale of this Annual Conference."

The transfer of property – which involves both state and Church law – is complex. In the case of a church in Eagle Creek, a 19th-century reversionary clause meant the church (no longer standing) came back to the conference after being sold some 14 times over 200 years.

Being based on "a 19th-century church model that doesn't serve us well in the 21st century," contributes to the problem, which Clemow says, is going to increase over

the next several years.

"When the board met last month, (we talked about how) maybe we can come to a point of sustaining faith communities, but take the burden of structures off their back ... (by) being a church in a new way rather than closing churches."

Meanwhile, as of July 1, five districts, nearly half of the conference's 12, had newly appointed superintendents. Clemow, a former district superintendent, sees that as another factor complicating property management:

"How long is it going to

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STORY IDEAS?

The Advocate is always looking for news and story ideas.

If your church is doing something you would like to share with Advocate readers, send us an e-mail and let us know about it.

If you have a story idea for the Advocate, e-mail bethdicocco@unyumc.org and tell us about your idea. Please include a phone number so that we can follow up.

You also can call (315) 424-7878 ext. 319.

To submit photos, e-mail them to the same address. Photos should be at least 300 dpi at full size.

Meet the director of communications ...

By Beth DiCocco
Advocate writer

Maidstone Mulenga is the first person in his family to become a minister.

The first Zambian to be an editor at a U.S. newspaper.

The first foreign-born staffer at the Upper New York Annual Conference.

"My goodness, there are a lot of firsts," said Mulenga, who serves as the new conference's first director of communications.

Among his duties is to assist the conference in effective use of information technology and communications resources, which entails, he says, "striking a balance" between the new and traditional in order to provide information to people "the way they want it."

Mulenga and his family – wife, Chanda, and daughters Lukonde, 16 and Mukuka, 13 – try to visit his home nation

of Zambia every other year; he grew up in Kitwe, the country's second largest city. His mother is a retired teacher; his father died in 2005.

The land-locked country in southern Africa is home to Victoria Falls – or as it was known before Dr. David Livingstone presumed to rename it: Mosi-oa-Tunya (the Smoke that Thunders).

So how did all these firsts come about?

They started with a plaque on the wall of the mayor of Kitwe's office proclaiming Detroit as its sister city.

Mulenga, who was covering Kitwe for the *Zambia Daily Mail*, the national newspaper, asked if anybody from Kitwe had visited Detroit or vice versa. The mayor told him it was "just for show," but he could try to get there if he wanted. Mulenga contacted Detroit city officials who agreed to host him for two weeks, if he

paid for his flight.

Among his hosts on that 1989 visit were the *Detroit News* and *Detroit Free Press*.

"I saw that journalism in the U.S. was more than just telling people what happened," he said. "(It was telling people) what they could do about it and this is what it means in their life."

"I thought maybe I could do that kind of journalism in Zambia."

Seeing him off at the airport, a professor from Wayne State encouraged him to apply to the journalism program.

He was awarded a full-tuition scholarship, and started there in 1991. After earning his second bachelor's degree from Wayne State, he took a job at the newspapers that had hosted him years before.

Ultimately he earned two master's degrees: in communications and divinity.

Eventually, his news career brought him to the *Rochester Democrat & Chronicle*.

In Rochester, he joined the West Avenue UMC where he held "every (lay) position in the church." When it lost

its pastor in 2002, Mulenga was called on to give several sermons.

"People started talking about me becoming a minister, saying I may have a thing for this thing," he said.

But, he said, he struggled two or three years with the call, asking "God, is this really what you want me to do?"

He formally answered the call in 2006, and was commissioned as a provisional elder in 2009 – by Bishop Marcus Matthews, in his first ordination for the Western New York Annual Conference.

Mulenga thought he was on the path to being a full-time minister, and told the newspaper he planned to resign at the end of June 2010. Meanwhile, in November 2009, he applied for his current position. When he was offered the job the following February, he realized that it was a perfect fit.

"(It was) two of my passions put together," he said. "I still have great passion for journalism; now I am using talents and gifts for God. It was not such a tough decision to accept the job."



UPPER NEW YORK UNITED METHODIST

ADVOCATE

RESIDENT BISHOP Marcus Matthews

EDITOR/PUBLISHER Maidstone Mulenga.

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Task force urges AC members to become 'global neighbors'

Continued from cover

"... So plant again, continue to love, preach and witness untiringly, forgive and embrace – for in the doing of them is faithfulness. Faithfulness has its own reward and its own harvest that the world cannot give or take away."

The task force named its officers at the July 9 meeting; in addition to naming Byers chairperson, Rev. Ann Blair will serve as finance chairperson, Rev. Robert B. Kolvick-Campbell was named as program chairperson, Rev. Nan Pullen as corresponding secretary, Rev. Charles Forbes as recording secretary and Rev. Warren Covell and Rev. Billy Bond as publicity co-chairs.

Other task force members are: Julius Archibald and Connie Varcasia, who attended the meeting, and Rev. Ted Anderson, Deborah Byers, Rev. Robert Long, Rev. Judith Johnson-Seibold, and Rebecca Parry, who were absent.

Task force members talked about their personal experiences with and enthusiasm for AU, as did Bishop Matthews.

"I was at the 1988 General Conference when they adopted Africa University. They did a video scanning the delegates. I was one of the ones that

shot up real fast. I didn't realize how excited I was; I just jumped up," he said, pointing to the many objects in his office that came from AU and other travels in Africa.

"I get emotional when I really start thinking about 1988 to this period," he said.

AU was established in 1992, and has a full-time enrollment of about



Above, one of the many African objects that decorate Area Resident Bishop Marcus Matthews' office.



Photo by Beth DiCocco

Members of the Africa University Task Force met for the first time July 9. The group elected officers and began laying plans for a three-year fundraising campaign. The goal is to raise \$1 million to fund an endowment for scholarships to the university, which is located in Mutare, Zimbabwe.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Give faithfully. Give Hope. Be a Global Neighbor.

Mail donations to the \$1 million Africa University Scholarship Fund to:

Upper New York Annual Conference
324 University Ave., Syracuse, NY 13210
Attn: Africa University Scholarship

Checks can be made payable to the Upper New York Annual Conference. Please write "AU Scholarship Fund" on the memo line.

1,200 students a year. Tuition is \$2,500, and the university estimates the total cost to attend for a year is \$5,400. At that rate, the \$1 million would fund approximately eight scholarships in perpetuity, according to Byers.

Referring to the \$5,400 figure, Pullen, who serves the Fonda-Fultonville and Salem UMCs, said, "My grandchildren can't go for a semester for that amount of money. But for AU that is a realistic figure."

Audrey Smith, of Voorhesville, said she sees this campaign as an "opportunity to empower people," and said "(I've been) looking at the economic conditions of the countries Africa University serves. The annual income in these countries ... I checked with people who had been to Africa, and said, 'Have I written the right thing?' It takes my breath away even now. How can they get better if we don't help with education?"

As its next step to help, the group was charged with proposing names of people who could be called on to serve as leaders of the task force's district-level cells – one in each of the conference's 12 districts.

The taskforce is scheduled to meet again at 11 a.m. Sept. 20.

Bishop Matthews closed the meeting talking about its significance to the conference.

"You are setting history. This is the first mission emphasis for the Upper New York Annual Conference," he said, thanking members for joining the task force.

"I am encouraged we can meet our goal (of creating) a new understanding of Africa University," Bishop Matthews said.

If you are interested in working on the \$1 million AU Scholarship Campaign, contact Christine Doran by phone at (315) 422-5027 or via e-mail at christinedoran@unyumc.org.

Area churches will remember Sept. 11, 2001

Churches around the Upper New York Annual Conference will mark the 10th anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks with special services and events. For details about the events, contact the host churches. **For the most complete, up-to-date list, visit the conference website at www.unyumc.org.**

The **Living Waters Parish** will participate in a special worship at 10 a.m. on Sunday, Sept. 11, at the town park in Oriskany Falls. All four of the churches – Oriskany Falls, Bouckville, Deansboro and Madison United Methodist churches – will be worshipping together that day.

Other churches in the communities are being invited as well.

Penfield UMC is combining the celebration of Sept. 11 with a Crop Walk. This ecumenical, community-wide event will commemorate the day, but also do something that will make a difference in people's lives. The church is located at 1795 Baird Road, Penfield. The community event is being organized by PEAC, the Penfield Ecumenical Association of Clergy.

First United Methodist Church of Northville, 303 South Main St., will host a community service of remembrance at 7 p.m. on Sept. 11. Churches in the community will participate.

In **Natural Bridge**, plans are under way to have a community-wide heroes appreciation event on Sept. 11. The two churches in town, the Natural Bridge UMC and the SDAC, will co-host a parade down Route 3 and dinner for the town fire department, ambulance corps, police, snowplow crews, and Fort Drum soldiers/families; all of whom will receive small tokens of the deep appreciation for their service to the country and the community.

Local artist Dorothy Woodworth, who is active in the Natural Bridge UMC, has been commissioned to paint a banner in thankful tribute the local heroes, and it will be dedicated that day, and thereafter hang in the community center.

The **E.J. Thomas Cluster** will be doing a worship service for its churches at 7 p.m. Sept. 11 at Hannibal UMC. The service will honor the EMTs, firefighters and police of its communities, and gift certificates will be given.

Rev. Stephen G. Maddox, pastor of **Camden and Cleveland United Methodist churches**, and Father Paul Mathis, pastor of St. Mary's and St. Bernadette's Roman Catholic churches in Cleveland and Constantia, are planning a joint worship service on Sept. 11 at St. Mary's, which is across the street from the Cleveland UMC. Following the worship service there will be a community memorial service.

At **First United Methodist Church of Oneonta**, 66 Chestnut St., both morning worship services (8:30 and 11 a.m.) will be Services of Remembrance and Hope.

At 4 p.m., First UMC will host a community event, "The Celtic Mass for Peace." This musical liturgy was composed by Sam Guarnaccia and J. Philip Newell (link: <http://www.samguarnaccia.com/>). A professor from Hartwick College will direct the Mass and the band director from the high school will arrange the instrumentation. Local artists are being asked to contribute artwork about peace for an art show in the church; a reception is planned for 7 p.m. Friday, Sept. 9.

Sept. 11 services at **Ogdensburg and Morristown United Methodist churches** will honor first responders and remember the anniversary of 9-11.

Services are 9 a.m. at Morristown UMC and at 11 a.m. at Ogdensburg First UMC. All first responders are invited, including local fire departments, ambulance squads, local police, Sheriff's Department, State Troopers and Border Patrol.

Cover photo: A cross made of steel beams from the wreckage of the World Trade Center at Ground Zero in New York City (2006 UMNS).

Mark your calendar: 2012 Annual Conference Session

It's just a month after the Second Session of the Upper New York Annual Conference, but planning is already well under way for 2012.

Area Resident Bishop Marcus Matthews and the conference senior executive staff listened to the concerns of session attendees, and have made some changes designed to make the schedule more accommodating for lay members.

The 2012 Annual Conference Session will be shorter – Thursday to Saturday, May 31 to June 2, in Syracuse. The session will officially begin at 6 p.m. on May 31, and will include one full day of holy conferencing on June 1. The service for those being commissioned

and ordained will be Saturday afternoon.

Thursday's events include the extension ministry luncheon and the ordination rehearsal.

Some key dates:

December-January

Registration opens

May 18, 2012

Retirement luncheon – 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

May 19

Pre-Conference Briefing – 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Laity Session – 12:30 to 5 p.m.

Clergy Session – 12:30 to 5 p.m.

May 31 – June 2

Annual Conference Session, Syracuse



HANDS4NY: Teaming up to fight hunger

By Sharon Bassett*

The 32nd Annual United Methodist Night at the Ballpark on June 30 was a night to see old friends, make new friends, share a meal – and to raise a

hand to fight hunger.

More than 300 United Methodists came out for the United Methodist Men's tailgate party at Alliance Stadium, home of the Syracuse Chiefs.

For the first time, a food drive was added to the tailgate party; 70 pounds of canned food was collected for the Food Bank of Central New York.

This contribution will help

us to reach the conference-wide Hands4NY goal of feeding 1 million people in one year.

This was a night for the Syracuse Chiefs fans to experience more than a ballgame. Christine Doran, executive assistant to Area Resident Bishop Marcus Matthews, threw an amazing first pitch to start the game.

But that wasn't all. Doran swiftly changed hats to lead a United Meth-

odist choir in singing the National Anthem.

Each year, more and more United Methodist families attend the Syracuse Chiefs game on this special night. Even if you aren't a baseball fan, it's a great time to spend with family and friends.

If you missed this year's game, make a plan to attend next year.

*Sharon Bassett is the HANDS4NY conference coordinator.



This year's United Methodist Night at the Ballpark took place June 30. Above is Karen Love from Cicero UMC; at right, Christine Doran, executive assistant to the bishop, leads the choir. On the cover: Dave Greer (left) and Dennis Plucinik, both from Baldwinsville UMC, are at the barbecue; along with Buddy Heit from Rose UMC and Pastor Carolyn Simmons from St. Paul's UMC in Syracuse.

Photos by Sharon Bassett



Participate in the Oct. 15 event

Can you help feed 1 million people in one year? Yes, and here's how you can be part of your district's impact event on Oct. 15:

- Contact your district coordinator on how you can support area projects.
- Promote the event in your congregation.
- Invite your neighbors!
- Register to volunteer at www.Hands4NY.org

For more information, contact your district coordinator or e-mail Sharon Bassett, Hands4NY conference coordinator, at hands4ny@unyumc.org.

Dealing with conference's unused properties is a 'big job'

Continued from cover

take them to get up to speed on the job, as well as old issues, and find their way around their new district?" Clemow asked. "Who will give attention to these kinds of matters during the months this takes?"

Clemow, who retired as pastor of Oneonta First UMC in 2008, had been working on the property issues as a volunteer. He also worked for Community Action in Oneonta.

"I was working 12 hours a day, then coming home and working three to five hours trying to handle these properties at a distance," he said. "(They were properties I'd never seen and knew very little about.)"

"I was dealing with Realtors, (with) angry town officials asking, 'What are the United Methodists going to do with this derelict property?'"

So Clemow made a proposal for creating a new, paid position to Area Resident Bishop Marcus Matthews.

"I said, that night, 'I can even tell you how to pay for it.' That's kind of a good way to get someone to pay attention," Clemow said with a laugh.

Clemow proposed using

Unused properties

Rev. Tom Clemow, property management consultant to the conference Board of Trustees, gave a brief explanation of what it means for a property to be declared abandoned or discontinued:

A property that is in the hands of a local congregation that is no longer viable comes to the trustees when one of two things happens:

It is abandoned: If a property is declared abandoned by the Cabinet and no one in the district takes responsibility, the trustees take possession.

unencumbered funds from the sale of a property and an unexpected insurance payout on the Brainard United Methodist Church, in the former Troy District, which was destroyed by fire in December 2010.

"I put my package on the table ... (and the trustees came back and said) 'we want you to do it,'" Clemow said.

The real question may be why did Clemow want to do it?

"The fact that I knew it needed to be done," he said. "I was attempting to do it anyway as volunteer. The 12 trustees couldn't handle this (on their own). I know church law. I know what the Discipline requires. I don't have to

be trained in the importance of the trust clause."

The trustees did consider creating a conference staff position to, as Clemow described, "be riding herd on the paper trail from a desk in Syracuse."

But, he said, "right now there are so many loose ends;" he did not discount the idea of having a clerk position to handle these matters once things are better under control. Right now, "there's a lot that just needs to be backtracked on and cared for," he said.

"So now I'm climbing this mountain of property stuff, and beginning to analyze where we are, and work on

It is discontinued: When a property is discontinued a Charge Conference is convened to create a resolution of discontinuance, the congregation votes on that; the Annual Conference, in session, has to affirm that, then it goes to the Board of Trustees.

In any case, he explained, the assets of a congregation are property of the Annual Conference.

For example, a congregation that's giving up its life can't decide to pass its property to the local library.

"In our connectional system, it's never theirs, it's ours," he said.

the properties that are most critical to be resolved."

Part of that climb is creating policy for handling property matters both day-to-day and in the long term. The trustees have adopted a modified property and administrative manual based on one that was developed by the old North Central New York Conference, which Clemow called "a pretty good document."

He will also be ensuring the Cabinet and the new district superintendents are trained to assume a greater role in the "pre-work on property that comes into hands of trustees," and train the Cabinet and district com-

mittees to understand the implications of their property decisions.

Clemow also sees his role as one that provides some pastoral care to congregations that are seeing their churches close.

"There's always a grief process," he said. "It's a tragedy when these (congregations) have to admit defeat. You're losing something precious, vital, that was loved by somebody. ... Somewhere there needs to be someone who understands how much this hurts. I hope I can be a little of that ..."

Another big part of the job is driving – a lot of driving.

Talking about why his job is more than just paperwork, Clemow said: "It's one thing to download and e-mail and put a signature on it, it's another to drive 900 miles round trip – as I did recently – to visit camps and a host of property issues in the Buffalo area."

In another instance, Clemow said, he and his wife "had a 300-mile day" to find three abandoned properties.

But he's not daunted. "I'm enjoying it," Clemow said. "I get to see some pretty geography, which we have in abundance in New York."

Conference Council on Youth Ministry news

'God is Here'

When CCYM held its annual training camp June 26-30 at Cazenovia College they spent considerable time and effort choosing a theme and Scripture for the events scheduled in the year ahead.

Fall Gatherings will be Nov. 11-12 in Albany and Nov. 18-19 in Rochester (see below).

UP!WORD will be held in Syracuse April 20-22.

Our theme is: God is here. Love matters here. Peace begins here. Joy abounds here. Hope lives here.

During the training, youth engaged in Bible study on Scriptures that expand on the theme, contemplated poster and T-shirt designs, and each wrote his or her own reflection on what the theme means (see below).

CCYM also filled out the slate of officers for the coming year, learned and practiced leadership skills, played games, studied the Bible, and worked in many ways to build the CCYM community for the year ahead.



Photo provided

Among the young people who attended this year's Annual Conference Session in Rochester were, from left, back row: Margot Rankins-Burd, Erynn Motak, Paul Sweet, and Alex Howland; front row: Jonathan Standhart, Daniel Sweet, Sarah Cook and Maureen Gilbert.

Youth reflect on Annual Conference Session

Some of the young people who were in Rochester in June offer their reflections on the Second Session of the Upper New York Annual Conference:

Paul Sweet: I had a rather interesting experience at Annual Conference this year ... I wound up being elected as the eighth laity to attend General Conference. I don't believe that this was solely responsible for the sheer amount of people that came up to talk to me, but it certainly contributed. ... Conference is the only place I have ever found that everybody is interested, everybody wants to talk to you, and where everybody is willing to listen.

Conference has been a special part of my faith journey ever since I was a newly confirmed member of the United Methodist Church back in seventh grade. I am one of the "odd" people who enjoy the community aspect of conference, but who also is humbled by the opportunity to have a say in the business of the conference. It is a great responsibility that also turns out to be a little bit of fun as well, spending time with the youth helps with that part.

... Although nerve wracking and busy, I would not have rather been anywhere else. Conference is unique, conference is special and conference helps me remember what it is that we are here to do as a global church in this world. It was a truly marvelous experience.

P.S. Mark Miller was great.

Kelly Walter: This was my first experience going to a large-scale Methodist (political) event. I found that I prefer to not be involved in events like this one because everyone would try to (voice) their opinion, which slowed down the voting process, a lot. I found it annoying when everyone would critique a point that we, as a group, weren't even voting on. I felt that the process allowed people (laity and clergy) who wished to climb the Methodist ladder took over ... and spent way too long quoting the Bible for their own purposes ...

Another issue I had was with the gay rights within the Church ... I've always been taught that God loves you no matter who you are or what you do, and that the UMC is Open Minds. Open Hearts. Open Doors.

I enjoyed Mark Miller and his amazing songs, as well as the sermons and verses that we got to hear. I loved meeting new people from far away districts and reacquainting myself with old friends. I am so happy to have been able to vote and participate in a difficult and deciding conference. ...

Jonathan Standhart: At Annual Conference we had to vote on budgets, petition plans, health care, and other things that would affect the whole Upper New York Conference. Most of the things about the budget could've taken a lot less time if everyone didn't have to tell their own stories that sounded

exactly like other people's stories. Even though it took a long time and it was really boring, it was a great experience knowing that you were voting on stuff that was going to affect such a large amount of people. I would definitely recommend going to Annual Conference to anyone who has never gone before.

Margot Rankins-Burd: Annual Conference was an amazing experience for me. I'd never really been before. ... For me, it was amazing to be standing in a room of more than 2,000 people singing hymns that I know and love from my church. It is, however, far more effective when 2,000 people sing the hymns than when 20 people sing them. Hearing the Africa University Choir sing was also amazing. Hearing them sing in so many different languages and seem to really enjoy what they were doing was a great way to see how different singing can be from a group of high schoolers who want an easy grade. ... It was interesting to hear them talk about what languages they speak, their addictions to Facebook, and their love of music.

... The youth also had the opportunity to present what the CCYM has accomplished over the last year. Because we also got to stand on the stage and report on our year, it made me feel like we were included. We weren't just some rowdy bunch of kids that shouldn't be there. We are a part of the conference, and I want to thank everyone who accepted us in that way.

Here are two of the reflections:

"Here"

By Anita Towndrow
Brown Memorial UMC

How do we get to where God is –

We pray ... we read the Bible ... we go to church ... we go to retreats.

How do we get to where love matters –

We go to a place (church) where we know someone cares for us ... that we matter to someone for that is what keeps us going.

How do we get to where hope lives –

We set a goal and work toward it.

How do we get to where

joy abounds –

Recognizing that God is always here and that means something good is always happening; and to see this we only have to look at the Church – the Bible – other people – our pastor – and there we see Good News, which is joy.

How do we get to where peace begins –

We move away from violence. We go where we are aware of the presence of God.

How do we get to where God is –

The church sign says God is here! Christians by their lifestyle – presence – should be saying God is here.

There is hope waiting for me in His eyes.

With this hope I will live, And now my life begins again.

Seeing His hope and love, I am here.

Giving His hope and love, He is here.

Untitled

By Abigail VanVleck

For if His love is an ocean, Never ending and ever there,

I am but a speck of sand, Sitting in awe of it there.

Through this love I will realize

Fall Gatherings

ALBANY
(location TBA)
Nov. 11-12

The \$35 cost includes floor space at the church and all programming. All meals are on your own.

Registrations must be post-marked on or before Nov. 1

ROCHESTER
Radisson Riverside
Nov. 18-19

Accommodations, including programming: \$140, single; \$110 each, double or triple, and \$80 each quad or quint. All meals are on your own.

Registrations must be post-marked on or before Nov. 8.

Printable registration forms can be found at the conference website, www.unyumc.org.

Send all registration forms, including payment, to:

Judy Hipes
91 Park St.
Binghamton, NY 13905

Make checks payable to: Upper New York Annual Conference

For registration questions, contact Hipes at:

tandj3905@hotmail.com or at (607)624-2145.

Please complete the ALL information on the registration form for ALL individuals attending.

Support Youth Service Fund: Money to support youth raised by youth

By Jefferson Detrick and Dylan Stow

For Youth By Youth is the motto of the Conference Council on Youth Ministry. Evidence that we are living out this model can be seen in many places, especially in the administration of the Youth Service Fund (YSF).

The YSF, is money raised and distributed for youth by youth. These grants assist youth groups or organizations that participate in mission with and for youth. YSF is also a major supporter of conference-wide missions, including the Africa University Scholarship Fund and Hands4NY.

YSF will support the African University Scholar-

ship Fund through a \$1,000 donation. YSF will also support the conference mission Hands4NY through food drives at each of our three events in the coming year.

Recently, YSF approved \$500 for a youth group's mission trip to Jamaica and \$300 for a youth group participating in an Appalachian Service Project this summer.

Over the past two years, YSF has given over \$6,300 to youth going on mission trips, the NEJ Mission of Peace and other youth ministry projects.

The YSF can only give away as much as it raises. This year, we have challenged every youth and

adult on the CCYM team to each raise \$100. We are committed to raising money for youth to be in mission and are holding each other accountable and helping each other to meet this challenge.

The YSF team has also challenged all the CCYM members to go out and speak to their local churches about YSF.

We also would like to ask our conference churches to join us in raising money for YSF.

If the 937 churches of our conference gave as little as \$25, the Youth Service Fund would raise \$23,425!

Just imagine what our youth could do with that!

Opinions

GUEST REFLECTIONS: The Church's stand on homosexuality

If we cannot be united, be respectful

By Rev. James Bailey*

Ever since I became a United Methodist 40 years ago, and I suspect for some time before that, we have been debating the issue of homosexuality. Whatever we or General Conference do, I do not expect this to change. The lines are too clearly drawn, too deeply held.

At Friday's (June 10) session of Annual Conference, I heard a lot of understandably emotional anecdotal evidence relating to those who feel alienated, discriminated against, victimized by the Church's position on homosexuality.

Anyone who has been touched in a personal way by this matter has many such stories, no matter on which side of the aisle we stand. Such evidence, however, is not helpful for a legislative discussion, except for stoking the naturally emotional nature of the topic.

Even this way of speaking is troublesome. How dare we speak of human tragedy merely as a "topic?" The danger of our conversation is in the – intended or unintended, implicit and explicit – labeling of positions legitimately held. My calling into question your faith in and faithfulness to the Gospel, and you pigeon-holing me as homophobic or arrogant or judgmental or "morally bankrupt" (all of which I have heard here at this Annual Conference Session) because of beliefs sincerely held is not helpful to Christian community.

This issue at its foundation is

really a theological one. The issue is not merely the authority of Scripture, but our interpretation of it; the weight we give to the stories we bring to it; where we draw the line between that which is merely illustrative of the human condition and that which is essential to it; how we treat the specific texts and the overall message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

It boils down to what constitutes sin, which for a Christian is first of all, a theological, and then a personal and social issue. If the practice of homosexuality really is a sin, then we have no recourse but to reject it. If not, then we have no recourse but to allow "self-avowed, practicing homosexuals" full participation in the life of the Church.

Let me repeat: If the practice of homosexuality really is a sin, then we have no recourse but to reject it. If not, then we have no recourse but to allow full participation in the life of the Church.

This is where the battle line has been drawn, and make no mistake: it is a battle line. Here all is either won or lost. This point is not negotiable, nor debatable on either side. How we get to it may be, but it is over this issue that we draw swords – and blood.

There is another issue at stake: what evidence is "admissible in court." The basic presupposition of those advocating for full participation in the life of the Church is that homosexuality is merely a variation

of the human condition – an expression of the wonderful diversity of God's creation. I contend that when the Bible speaks of the matters we are considering, it speaks to human behavior. The human condition with which the Bible deals is called sin, which transcends and involves both homosexual and heterosexual behavior. It is from this condition that Christ died to free us, both heterosexual and homosexual people.

We may, and do, disagree on these issues; such disagreement is legitimate. I ask but one consideration: If I hold my position with integrity and conviction, and am willing to sit down and talk, please meet me without rancor.

You may believe I am misinformed, mistaken, woefully out of step, all of which may be true in many areas of life. But I do hold my beliefs with informed integrity, even as I believe you do. Please honor me for that. I will try to do the same for you.

Whether we can walk forever together down this road remains to be seen. The Scriptures we both claim pose that very question, "Can two walk together unless they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3) The grammatical implication of the text is that they cannot. I would like to believe otherwise, but over this issue we presently are not, and I fail to see how we can be, UNITED Methodists.

*The Rev. James Bailey is pastor of Park United Methodist Church in Sinclairville.

I knew I was at Annual Conference ...

By Erma Mae Perkins*

I knew I was at the Upper New York Annual Conference because ...

The Vision "To live the gospel of Jesus Christ and to be God's love with our neighbors in all places" was illustrated throughout.

Music was led by Mark Miller and his talented musicians. He wrote the song "Imagine the People of God" for this conference. I hope he records it so we can share it at Rush UMC.

The Bible Study from Acts 1 and 2 led by Bishop (J. Lawrence) McCleskey of South Carolina was challenging and engaging. He provides significant volunteer support to Africa University and interspersed his preaching with songs by the Africa University Choir singing in Swahili, Lingala, Xhosa and English illustrating the varieties of languages spoken by God's people.

"Holy Conferencing" took up most of the afternoon Wednesday-Friday. ... My favorite words were, "I call the question" during these sessions, despite Bishop Matthews' able presiding over the proceedings.

The Mission Celebration highlighted the work being done in our "Jerusalems," inner-city Buffalo; our "Samaritans," the Emmaus Church of Albany's work with immigrants.

The spirited music of the Africa University Choir kept the denomination's outreach to the "uttermost parts of the world," before us. ... Educating these gifted young people may well be the most effective way of dealing with the needs of this continent.

Miller's anthem "Draw the Circle Wide" expressed the over-arching emphasis on the inclusiveness of The United Methodist Church.

I am grateful for this opportunity ... and encourage you to consider attending future conference activities to learn about our purpose: Growing in our relationship with God, being the body of Christ within the world, and 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 yet united by our love for Christ; and
- Building relationships with our neighbors, particularly with those who have been disenfranchised by mainstream society.

*Erma Mae Perkins, lay delegate, is a member of Rush UMC. She lives in Rush.

Letters to the editor

The Advocate is accepting letters to the editor. You can discuss specific content in the Advocate or any issues within the conference or Church.

Letters should be kept to 250 words (longer letters may be published when space allows). The publisher reserves the right to reject or edit letters. The deadline is the fifth of the month for the following month's newsletter.

To submit a letter, e-mail: news@unyumc.org. (Please put "letter to the editor" in the subject line).

Or send your letter to:
UNY Annual Conference
324 University Ave., 3rd Floor
Syracuse, NY 13210
Attn: Letters to the Editor

It's time to change the Discipline

By Mary Jane Russell*

My epiphany came late in 2005 when I learned that language in the Discipline had been cited by a pastor in Virginia to deny transfer of membership to a young man solely because he was in a committed, loving relationship with another man – a relationship so dear to him that he would not comply with the pastor's demand to sever that relationship in order to gain membership status.

Nothing in the reporting suggested that this young man was otherwise unfit for membership. He had been involved and active in the church, even sang in the choir. No other reason was given. In fact, both the bishop and the associate pastor advocated for granting him membership.

I had been aware of the prohibition against ordination of homosexuals, but this was my first exposure to its application to laity – and it felt wrong.

As an educator, I worked with several closeted homosexuals and a few who were "out." I never felt that they were in any way inferior to my "straight" colleagues. In fact, in several instances, they excelled.

I also saw the bullying and harassment that students who were gay, or even perceived to be gay, suffered at the hands of their classmates. I became convinced that the language in the Discipline (and similar language in the foundation documents of other churches) is, in large part, responsible for our culture's negative attitudes toward homosexuals.

Further, I realized that thousands of the children who had been loved, baptized, nurtured and confirmed by our congregations have found it necessary to relocate in order to find employment. Statistically, some 10 percent of them might be denied a transfer of membership to another United Methodist church solely because they happen to be gay.

I began to research human sexuality. I learned that current scientific and psychological research indicates that sexual orientation is not a choice, any more than eye color or hand dominance (right-handed/left-handed). It is determined at birth by a combination of genetic and hormonal factors.

If we are all created in God's image, how then can we say that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) persons are somehow defective or inferior to heterosexuals? My answer: They are not; they are just different. They are flamboyant; they are reserved; they are short; they are tall; they are faithful; they are fickle – in short, homosexuals have all the gifts, graces, and shortcomings that are enjoyed by heterosexuals. As a group, they are neither better nor worse than their straight counterparts.

Homosexuals have been quietly serving our churches in many capacities for decades. They sing in our choirs; they play our keyboards and guitars; they write our hymns; they fill our pulpits; they serve on our boards; they teach in our Sunday Schools. AND, they live in constant

fear of being "outed," and of losing the love and support of their church family. Rather than live closeted, some have opted to leave the United Methodist Church for more affirming and accepting denominations. Our loss.

The long strand of human history carries an equally long thread of clannishness, tribalism and ethnocentrism. We have made progress as a species whenever we have risen above our penchant to give preference to those like ourselves; whenever we have been able to expand our concept of God and the breadth of God's love to include those who are not like "us."

Paul tells us in Galatians 3:28, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." I firmly believe that, if he were writing today, he would add, "there is no longer gay and straight."

The Bible tells me to love God and to love others as I want to be loved. I want to be loved for who I am, not for whom I love. That's also what I want for my LGBT neighbors. I am convinced that the statement that "the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching" is biased and discriminatory and NOT reflective of God's inclusive love.

It's time to change the Discipline!

*Mary Jane Russell is a member of the United Methodist Church of Orchard Park.

Lay leaders come together to share and learn

By Rebecca Lo Kohler
Advocate Writer

More than 70 lay leaders from all across the conference came to University United Methodist Church in Syracuse July 16 for the Laity Ministry Convocation.

Led by the Conference Lay Leader Scott Johnson, the group came together to worship, discuss the newly published Lay Ministry Handbook, and attend workshops.

One of the sessions focused on ministry opportunities, and included displays and presentations by several – including HANDS4NY, Heifer International, and UMM.

During the opening worship, Johnson called on the lay members to “look around ... ask yourselves has this person been given opportunity to use their gifts? Has this person been given opportunity to tap into their potential?”

“We are a mosaic of human history. All the beautiful souls that have been, and all the beautiful souls yet to come ... God made each shape unique. And that shape is you. That piece is needed in the mosaic, that piece will be missed, every piece is needed.”

“You are a blessing,” said Area Resident Bishop Marcus Matthews. “You, the laity, have come to learn, hear, and teach for the body of Christ.”

The bishop went on to talk about some of those opportunities for learning: Paul Nixon, author of “I Refuse to Pastor a Dying Church,” “will be coming to all the districts to discuss vital congregations. Also, with its goal to foster Christian-principled leaders, the conference is working on offering online and satellite courses, through a seminary, to both clergy and laity. Six sites will be available for the satellite courses.

Laity Ministry Kit

The first question for any lay leader, Johnson said, is “What are you supposed to do?” The goal of the tool kit and of the convocation, he said, is to give lay leaders things to pray about, think about, and to help restart/jump start ministry within your church.

“You will leave with at least a couple of good ideas to take back to your church,” he said.

Johnson took the group through small-group exercises on recognizing a good leader and defining “fostering awareness” about ministry as lay leaders.

“The challenge for discernment starts with ourselves,” Johnson explained. “Spiritual traits are not add-ons. Discerning God’s will for us needs spiritual maturity – it has to be intentional and it has to be on-purpose. We cannot afford to be a beautifully run organization devoid of spirit.”

Johnson encouraged the lay leaders to “ask God to make sure you are on the right path.”

“The more you believe God put you here in this ministry, the more you can be certain God will help you succeed,” he said.

Workshops

Spiritual Leadership & Discernment Session, led by Johnson and Joel Stauring, Mountain View District lay leader.

After a discussion of “the time when we discerned God’s will ... and found out we were wrong,” the group came back with the following thoughts: 1. every story is different – God doesn’t speak to everyone inside a burning bush; 2. Get out of God’s way – we are his sheep dogs, he’s the shepherd; 3. Pray! always start here; 4. Be in the right and proper attitude – we are asking for guidance not delivering a list of demands; 5. Listen carefully – sometimes the message is through someone else.

The workshop on “Creating Meaningful Lay-Clergy Ministry Partnerships” was facilitated Louise Mathews, Northern Flow District lay leader and Cindy Smith.

Mathews emphasized that lay leaders have opportunities that clergy do not have:

“As laity we have so much more opportunity to outreach than any clergy does – in the workplace, in casual gatherings,” she said. “We can work much more deeply if we understand the goals of our clergy. ...”



Photos by Rebecca Lo Kohler
Above, Conference Lay Leader Scott Johnson (in rocker) and presenter Joel Stauring, Mountain View District lay leader, discuss spiritual leadership and discernment. At right, Steven Hallagan (left) and Della Ludwig talk during the small-group portion of the day.



Above, opening worship at the Laity Convocation on July 16 at University UMC in Syracuse. The day-long event was designed to offer lay leaders practical advice and encouragement in their roles as leaders in their churches. At left, mission opportunities were highlighted through displays at the event.

Leadership team opts not to act on petitions/resolutions

By Beth DiCocco
Advocate Writer

The Conference Leadership Team has opted not to take any action on the two conference resolutions and two petitions to General Conference that did not reach the floor during the Second Session of the Annual Conference in June.

Those petitions are Aligning UMC Investments with Resolutions on Israel/Palestine and to Permit Reorganization and Restructuring of Annual Conferences (P-2011.15 and P-2011.16 respectively). The resolutions are

(R-2011.1, R-2011.2), which pertain to the hydraulic fracturing process for mining oil and natural gas.

The Conference Leadership Team is authorized to act on behalf of the Annual Conference between sessions, but has decided to neither adopt nor decline the referred petitions and resolutions.

In explaining the team’s decision Bill Gottschalk-Fielding, conference director of connectional ministries, wrote: “Petitions and resolutions were originally submitted to provide conference members an opportunity to discuss,

debate and speak as a body on the matters addressed. Without the benefit of this wider debate and discussion, the Conference Leadership Team did not feel it appropriate or practical to adopt or decline these motions.”

The petitioners have the option of submitting their petitions directly to General Conference. The resolutions may be re-submitted to a future session of Annual Conference for consideration.

Members of the Conference Leadership Team are Rev. Sara Baron, Rev. John

McNeill, Rev. Adrienne Phillips, Rev. Elizabeth Quick, Jan Rothfuss, Nathan Trost, Eric Yetter, Scott Johnson, conference lay leader; Gottschalk-Fielding, convener, and Area Resident Bishop Marcus Matthews.

The pre-conference materials included 16 petitions to General Conference and five resolutions for conference adoptions.

Of these, one resolution (R-2011.4, on Africa University) and five petitions (P-2011.1, P-2011.2, P-2011.3, P-2011.4, P-2011.5, P-2011.6, all on matters of human sexuality) were adopted by confer-

ence members.

Three petitions (P-2011.7, P-2011.9, P-2011.13) and one resolution (R-2011.5) – all of which pertained to issues of human sexuality and the Church – were withdrawn by the petitioners during the conference session.

Four other petitions and one resolution on human sexuality (P-2011.8, P-2011.10, P-2011.12, P-2011.14 and R-2011.3) were tabled by Annual Conference. These will remain tabled unless a future session of Annual Conference moves to take them up for consideration.

Fredonia UMC's 'army' remodels its sanctuary

By Shirley Erbsmehl*

First United Methodist Church of Fredonia welcomes one and all to see its updated and revitalized sanctuary.

The impetus for this massive project came from the Jubilee Committee in late summer 2010. It was decided that a remodeled altar area, which would be more adaptable to a variety of worship experiences and group presentations, should precede new carpeting, which was badly needed. The old (orange) carpeting had been in place since the early 1970s and was well-worn and tattered in many areas making it unsafe. In fact, some places were covered with duct tape.

A carpet fund had been established by an anonymous donor; that and a very successful cookbook sale, organized by Sandi Askin and Barb Faxlanger in fall 2010, financed the project. The Mission Team funded the cost of wood and other building supplies and all the labor was done by volunteers.

Tom Lafferty made scale wooden models of two possible renovations. The congregation was given an opportunity to look over the models and make suggestions. People

who use the altar area on a weekly basis, namely Pastor Stephen Wiggers and the choir, were asked their opinions as well.

Under the direction of Lafferty, Nick Green and Joe Carapella, work began at 8 a.m. April 25 (the day after Easter).

It was so heart-warming to see 20 men and women of all ages appear in their work clothes, armed with hammers, pry bars and lots of energy!

In just two hours, all the old carpeting and padding were gone.

The fact that no one was injured during this project was a blessing indeed. All in all, the project went well.

That old saying "many hands, make light work" holds true. And although the work wasn't "light," it was done in a much shorter time because so many people came forward to share in it.

I am ever so grateful for the army of God's people that answered the call to beautify the place we worship Him each Sunday. I truly felt God's presence as the whole project came together.

*Shirley Erbsmehl is the Jubilee Committee chairperson.

A Clothes Clubhouse 'for the least of these'

By Christian Vischi
Advocate Writer

On June 24, Carol

Barnes and a crew from the Tioga Center United Methodist Church in the Binghamton District began sorting through a range of clothing – from infant attire to fashions for fourth graders.

Their new undertaking – Clothes Clubhouse – is one of the first projects to be funded with an Upper New York Annual Conference Ministry Fund Micro-grant.

The micro-grants (<http://www.unyumc.org/pages/detail/1579>) were created to "empower our sisters and brothers in Christ to live their love for God by responding to God's calls to service," according to the application.

Barnes, Clothes Clubhouse project coordinator, along with sponsoring clergyman Rev. Donna Martin, Tioga Center pastor, received a \$4,700 "Reaching our Neighbors" micro-grant.

In their application, Barnes wrote that the scriptural rationale for their new ministry comes from Isaiah 58:6-7 and Matthew 25:34-40. "I needed clothes and you clothed me ... The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'"

Grand opening

When: 2:30 to 6 p.m.
Aug. 25

Where: Tioga Center UMC, 3022 Route 17C.

Hours: Second and fourth Thursdays from 2:30 to 6 p.m.

Learn more: Call Carol Barnes at (607) 687-4793 or the church at (607) 687-4882.

The area around the Tioga Center UMC is disadvantaged, Barnes noted, and in order to carry out that mission of serving "the least of these," the church needed a way of meeting the very real and growing need of clothing assistance.

This is the first time that a complete clothes program has been undertaken. It serves children in the Tioga Central School District.

Barnes said, "We have no doubts that this is a calling from God for our church."

Due to limited space, they are not looking for clothing donations from outside their community, but Barnes said, "if other churches ... have 'tips' to share with us that would be great; if other churches like our idea and want more information, they can also contact me."

Camps to be featured in online series



Photo by Christian Vischi

A six-part series by Christian Vischi on the Camp & Retreat Centers of the Upper New York Annual Conference will be published on the conference's website (www.unyumc.org) in mid-August. This series will focus on what makes each camp unique, why the staff and volunteers return each year, and what's in store for the future. ABOVE: campers at Findley Lake Camp & Retreat Center in Clymer, N.Y., enjoy the water on July 13 riding an inflatable shark.

Camp & Retreat Ministries news

Len Sweet coming to Casowasco

Those who are (or are about to become) Len Sweet fans, may want to mark their calendars for Oct. 17-19 and plan to come to Casowasco Camp & Retreat Center where Sweet will be giving a "first peek" at his upcoming book *I Am A Follower*, which Thomas Nelson is publishing early in 2012.

In this book, Sweet explores "The Way, Truth and Life of Following Jesus" and shows that a better description of a Christian is "first follower" rather than "leader." Jesus is our Leader. We are his followers, he says.

This retreat (Sweet prefers to call it an "advance") will be a time of reflection, renewal, recreation and learning intended to equip, prepare and challenge us to become more committed followers of Jesus and to better "follow the Leader."

Sweet's been called one of the church's most important and

provocative thinkers – one who "sees things the rest of us do not see, and dreams possibilities that are beyond most of our imagining."

His messages are uplifting, hopeful and relevant. For two years in a row, he was selected as one of the "50 Most Influential Christians in America" by *The Church Report* magazine (2006 and 2007), and in 2010 was selected by the largest Christian non-English Internet site as one of the "Top 10 Most Influential Christians in the World."

He has authored more than 200 articles, over 1,200 published sermons, and almost 50 books. Audiences flock to hear him speak; you could say he has a following.

Make your reservation now by logging on to www.casowasco.org. Register online or download a registration form.

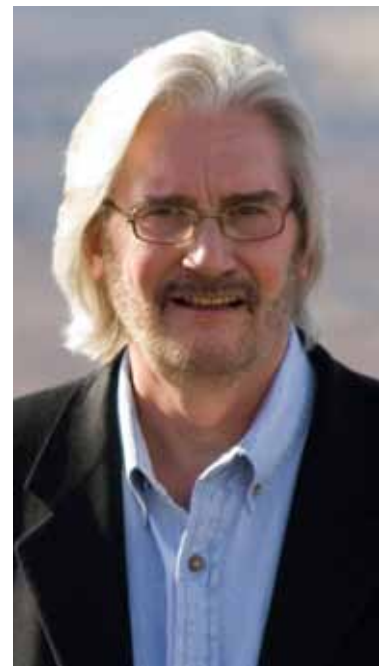


Photo provided

Len Sweet will discuss his new book *I Am A Follower* on Oct. 17-19.

