

## Making Connections As the Beloved Community

With words that have become his enthusiastic hallmark – “I love New York and Connecticut!” – Bishop Jeremiah Park began his episcopal address during Wednesday night’s worship service. “My sense of excitement for being in the right place for ministry has not diminished, it has only increased. This is the best annual conference I can ask for!”

Before his address, Park welcomed those gathered, gaveled the meeting to order and offered the opening prayer. Park thanked the departing members of the cabinet, Rev. George Engelhardt and Rev. Gunshik Shim. He also welcomed the two new members, Rev. Kenny Yi and Rev. Ken Kieffer.

Park echoed the theme of this year’s conference – “For Such a Time as This: We Are a Beloved Community of Hope” – in his remarks. The difficult financial times are calling the church to make decisions and to take action. “The severe economic situation has created a pain that is acute and deep,” said Park. And while the pain may be great in this country, the picture in many places around the world is bleak, he added. Many people are starving not only from hunger, but also moral poverty.

The bishop exhorted the members of conference not to give in to evil because God’s ways are not the ways of the world. His statement that, “This Bishop is against torture of any kind, in any circumstance,” was affirmed by applause.

He invited the gathering to join with him in the journey to become a beloved community of hope. Despite great brokenness, we have the opportunity to do good, to share the hope of Christ with the world.

He suggested that hope can be made manifest in our lives if we follow the three

simple rules inspired by John Wesley: do no harm, do all the good you can and stay in love with God. “I’m



an optimist for the beloved community of hope, because I believe in love.”

Bishop Park cited the many signs of hope throughout the conference including:

**Bishop’s Partners in Mission** has received nearly \$600, 000 since it began in 2005.

**Volunteers in Mission:** The 100<sup>th</sup> team will be sent to the Gulf Coast. Since last year, 315 people from 29 churches have volunteered.

**Apportionments:** For the 5<sup>th</sup> year in a row, the conference has honored its covenant by paying 100 percent of its shared ministry apportionments;

**Natural Church Development** is helping more than 100 churches get healthier;

**Rethink Church:** More than 160 volunteers helped launch campaign to reach new generation with gospel of Jesus Christ.

**New Day UMC**, a multi-ethnic congregation that was started in a Bronx funeral home, has been meeting for weekly worship since March.

**A new Chinese congregation** in Brooklyn will be chartered this week.

In order to be a church that is growing in witness, Bishop Park said we must “take bold steps to be a connecting church, a turnaround church.” On Saturday he will charge the lay speakers to get more involved with making disciples for our church.

And as he continues on his mission to fill the arena with United Methodists, the Bishop announced a special invitation for 2010: all those members who have joined our churches since he became bishop will be asked to attend the Saturday session next year. “Next year we are going to fill this place with 5,000 people, 5,000 witnesses for Christ,” Park said.



# Inseparable Partners: Discipleship and Evangelism

After Wednesday's workshop with the Rev. Dr. Kwasi Kena, the lay members in attendance won't soon forget the biblical story about the blind beggar Bartimaeus. With an engaging mix of teaching, biblical storytelling and singing, Kena offered up an advanced course in evangelism during the afternoon laity session.

Kena, director of Evangelism Ministries for the General Board of Discipleship, told the gathering that evangelizing involves exploring and engaging the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit empowers both the internal and external work of the church. Kena said that Christians must understand that evangelism and discipleship "go hand in glove. They are inseparable."

But he admitted that negative connotations and fears about evangelism keep many from taking the first step. Churches too often focus just on Christian education. There must be a balance between "coming and going," he added.

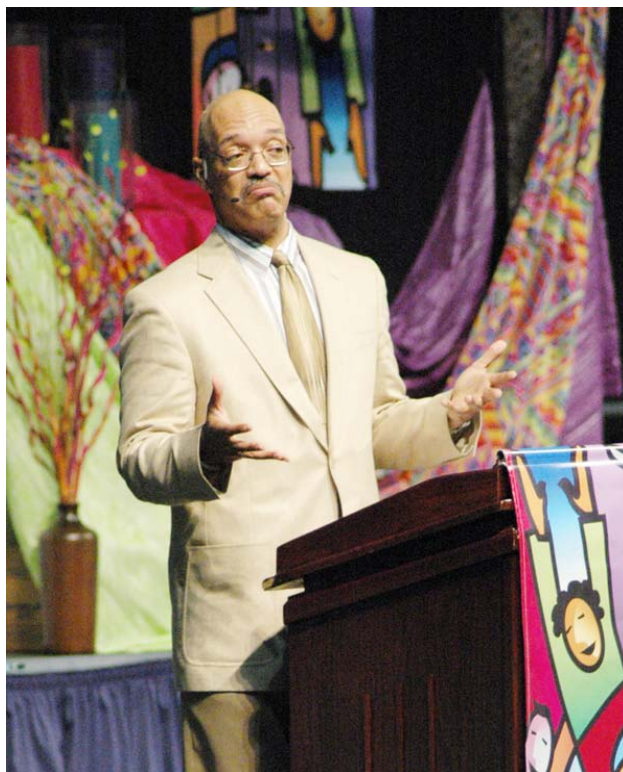
Kena relied on the translation of three Greek words to describe the essential work of an evangelist; they are to tell the good news, bear witness and to proclaim. He suggested that the most powerful message we have to share may be our own faith stories. Those stories are believable when offered in an atmosphere of trust. "There is no rebuttal to all the good that God has done in your life," Kena said.

To emphasize the need for an oral culture, Kena branched into biblical storytelling with the tale of Bartimaeus, who is healed by Jesus in the Gospel of Mark. After telling the story in his own words, Kena challenged the audience to do the same and used a bit of humorous choreography to engage the story further.

Knowing the stories of the Bible, and being able to relate them by heart, is an important tool for being better evangelists.

"You can't expect your pastor to do most of the evangelism. We all have a role to play in Christian ministry," said Kena.

And while the mission is difficult "it is possible, but the church must do some radical things." Those radical actions mean reaching out more intentionally to the "de-churched and un-churched" and challenging the systems of injustice.



Rev. Dr. Kwasi Kena addresses the laity session Wednesday afternoon.

Below: Choir sings during worship; registration tables were a busy place midday yesterday.

