



Beloved Community Tackles Tough Topic

The Friday afternoon session may have been a bit of a mystery on the agenda, but it soon became apparent that this time had been set aside for a thoughtful dialogue on the topic of human sexuality. So for 90 minutes, the conference became the beloved community and engaged in a loving conversation about how individuals and the church are affected by the issue of homosexuality.

The dialogue, which was framed throughout by prayer and singing, provided opportunities for both the sharing of personal stories and the sharing of insights. Jonathan Gregory began by offering an “evangelical” point of view that included scriptural references to address the questions of biblical authority, the lordship

of Jesus and commitment to the Great Commandment.

Kevin Nelson, represented the “progressive” point of view, and introduced a group of eight people, all of whom spoke their personal stories. The stories included those from the mother of a lesbian, a gay Baptist minister serving in a UMC church, a UMC pastor who cannot minister fully to members of her congregation, and a woman who met her partner in a church where



their union cannot be blessed.

The process then turned to conversations in gathered groups of four or five on the arena floor and in the bleachers. Bishop Park invited everyone to share their stories with one another, speaking directly to how they have been affected by the issue.

After several minutes, the body was invited to come to the microphones and share insights from the experience. While the differences remained, those who spoke expressed gratitude for the experience and suggested repeating the model at conference or using it in the local church.

One speaker thanked the bishop for his “chutzpah” in bringing the dialogue to the body and creating a sacred space in which it could occur.



Winkler: GBCS Battling on Many Social Fronts

Jim Winkler, who has been general secretary of the General Board of Church and Society for the last eight years, is a man on not just one mission, but many. There are six major social concern priorities in which the board is involved.

He outlined many of the issues in his address at the NYAC's Church and Society dinner Friday. First of all, however, he pointed out that the changes in the Book of Discipline concerning recognition of homosexual persons – which narrowly missed passage at the 2008 General Conference – has a good chance of passing in 2012. “We need to be more proactive, and work with supporters in all conferences,” he stated.

Winkler noted that with the new administration the GBCS has increased access to the White House and Congress. He and other members have found that certain issues now have a better chance of being adopted. “Our voice is important,” he said.

He also said that “hate groups” who commit acts of terror are a

focus of the board, and indicated that much of that has to do with the National Rifle Association's opposition to gun control. “We are trying to partner with other groups to fight this,” Winkler said.

The board's legislative priorities are: Alcohol, other addictions and health care; civil and human rights; economic justice; environmental justice; peace with justice and international affairs; and population concerns.

Winkler advised that regulation of tobacco, one of the items included in their top priorities, has been passed in Congress. He declared, “We were able to overcome the power of the tobacco lobby!”

“We are also working with many other groups in the area of health care reform, he said. “It is a basic human rights matter, that everyone should have health care, and for us, this is a moral and ethical witness.”

The GBCS is also addressing the effects of climate change, especially upon those living in poverty, and pushing for comprehensive immigration reform. “It's something that will protect workers and save families,” he added. – *Tom Coddington*

Constitutional Amendment Results

In the voting on the 32 amendments to the Constitution of the church, a total of 646 votes were cast. Amendment 15 was not approved and amendment 6 did not pass by a two-thirds majority vote.

Amendment 15 reduces from two to one the number of years a lay person must be a church member before being elected a member of an annual conference. It also eliminates a requirement that they be active participants in church.

Amendment 6 addresses an issue that followed the 2004 admission of the Cote d'Ivoire Annual Conference to the denomination. The conference has more than 500,000 members, but had only two delegates to the 2008 General Conference. The amendment states that newly established conferences could be represented on a non-proportional basis for two quadrennia.

All 134 conferences around the world must vote on these amendments before they can be enacted.



Bishop Park listens as wife Lisa and other clergy spouses offer a song and grace before dinner on Friday.



The song “Our Hope Is Built on Nothing Less” brought everyone on the dais to their feet after remarks by Erin Hawkins’ (far left). Hawkins, general secretary for the General Commission on Religion and Race, urged the gathering to reclaim courage to face adversity, and to take on difficult issues in a spirit of hope.



Our Bible Study Leader

Rev. Safiyah Fosua has been waking us up daily with a great Bible study each morning. She focused on the story of Esther and what it means to accept God call to be a voice for change in the world. Fosua is the director of Invitational Preaching at the General Board of Discipleship. You can find some of

the material she writes on the GBOD website. We have been truly blessed by the witness of both she and her husband, Rev. Dr. Kwasi Kena.

Legislative Results

All seven of the legislative sessions were able to finish their work on Thursday. Only three of the resolutions did not make consensus and were brought to the full body for a decision. The resolution concerning the New York State Marriage Equality Law passed on the floor without comment. Support for those who dissent from the Discipline passed on a vote of 295-199. and the amended conference budget of \$9,060,238 was adopted. Of that amount, \$8,484,238 of that amount apportioned to the churches.

Board of Trustees

The corporate session on Friday afternoon dealt with a variety of issues including the

chartering of a Chinese congregation in Brooklyn, Tien Fu UMC, and the discontinuation of two churches – East Pearl Street in New Haven, Conn., and Lexington in Manhattan.

A resolution on with the disposition of funds from the sale of the Platte Clove church was also adopted. The proceeds will be used to establish a Catskill Hudson District Mission Fund.

Larry McGaughey was re-elected as conference chancellor.

New Trustees: The election drew 440 ballots with Rev. Koonae Lee, Rev. Joseph Piccirillo, M. Meyers Mermel, and Susan Wilson Bynum being elected.

Denman Award

The Henry Denman Award for Evangelism was awarded to layperson Eunice Kirpatrick from Butler Memorial and to Rev. Steven Bauman of Christ Church, Manhattan.



Lay Speakers Embrace “Beloved Community”

Lay speakers from throughout the conference answered the bishop’s invitation to Annual Conference and on Friday participated in an evangelism workshop with Rev. Dr. Kwasi Kena in the Hofstra USA Center.

The day concluded with a worship service led by Peter O’Neill, conference director of Lay Speaking Ministries. The Glorification Singers offered a program of praise music and Kena encouraged the gathering with his message to “Try . . . Try Again.”

During the service, the lay speakers were called upon to affirm their commitment to serve God. *“I, through your infinite grace, have become your covenant servant. So be it. Let the covenant I*



have made on earth be ratified in heaven. Amen.”



Offering Amounts

Personal Energy

Transportation: \$4,109

Women’s Advocacy Ministries: \$4,807

Black College Fund: \$3,507