



Bishop: Time for Change, Return to Joy

BY JOANNE S. UTLEY

With the question, "Are you ready?" Bishop Jeremiah Park opened the 211th gathering of the New York Annual Conference last night at Hofstra University Arena.

After a welcome by Rev. Vicky Fleming, conference coordinator, the bishop thanked her for her years of service. Fleming will be turning the reins over to Rosemarie Walker.

A video collage of Charles Wesley's hymn, "And Are We Yet Alive," opened the worship service. The video showcased voices singing in English and Spanish, and liturgical dancers. The voices included our own singing bishop, the NYAC staff, choirs from Asbury UMC of Crestwood, the Hispanic Council, UMC of Westport and Weston, the praise band of New Day UMC, and a steelpan band from Crawford UMC.

Rev. Joyce Wilkerson, singing, "Come, Now is the Time to Worship," was followed down the aisle by liturgical dancer Martha Chapman waving brightly colored flags. With a thump of the crosier on the stage floor, Bishop Park exclaimed, "Let the whole world proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord!" Rev. Evy McDonald then led a procession of dancers – Tisha Jermin, Sheila Beckford and Marcia White-Smith – onto the stage to "O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing." She carried a large Book of the Gospels that was placed on the altar. The scriptures were read in Creole by Guerda Sanon, in Spanish by Isabel Malavet and in Korean by David Anmoo Rim.

Episcopal Address

In his sermon, the bishop struck a prophetic tone by insisting that what the church needs is "urgent, trusting and radical change." The church needs to drastically change the way it operates in order to stem



Bishop Albert Johnson and Lisa Park look on during Bishop Park's episcopal address on Wednesday night.

the declining membership of the last 40 years. Hard choices will need to be made. We can't keep doing the same things in our attempts to make disciples for Christ. "Change is coming, change is evitable," Park said. The Council of Bishops has issued a call to action focused on re-ordering the life of the church. He noted the recent conversations about eliminating

guaranteed appointments for clergy

The bishop also stated that the difficult financial times of the past two years, have resulted in the loss of fulltime pastorates in some of the NYAC's churches. Some churches have even chosen to cut back on mission and ministry in order to keep the doors open. Churches that are

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depending solely on endowments or rentals to stay alive need to re-examine their priorities for ministry.

Fruit. Abide. Love.

Park looked to the scripture reading from John 15 for words that he said can inspire the change that needs to come in the church.

Fruit is the desired product of all our ministry. The church that produces disciples is bearing fruit. "Jesus was relentless about bearing fruit," he said, yet in our denomination in the last year, one half of the churches did not receive any members by profession of faith.

We also need to "rebuild our connection with Christ" by choosing to abide in him. When we abide in Christ, God can use our changed hearts to bring about systemic changes in the church.

Our life as Christians is all about Jesus Christ and his love. "We've been chosen by Jesus Christ to go and bear fruit," Park said. "It is a privilege and joy, not a burden." We must revive love and joy in our churches, otherwise "what's the point?"

The bishop and wife, Lisa, blow out a candle on a birthday cake. Both will turn 60 soon – the bishop on July 4.



The number of new members by profession of faith has increased in the last year, as has the average attendance at Sunday worship, the bishop reported. More churches were able to pay their full apportionments, and for the sixth year in a row, the conference has fulfilled its financial obligations to the denomination. The conference will also start six new congregations in the next year.

The bishop also announced the conference has donated more than \$498,500 to UMCOR for Haiti earthquake relief. Over the next 10 months, the conference will be sending one mission team a month to the Caribbean nation. The first one leaves next week.

And on Saturday, more than 5,000 new members and their families from around the conference will join in the "Momentum in Ministry" festival outside the arena.

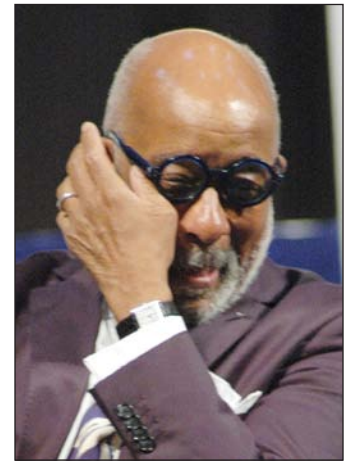
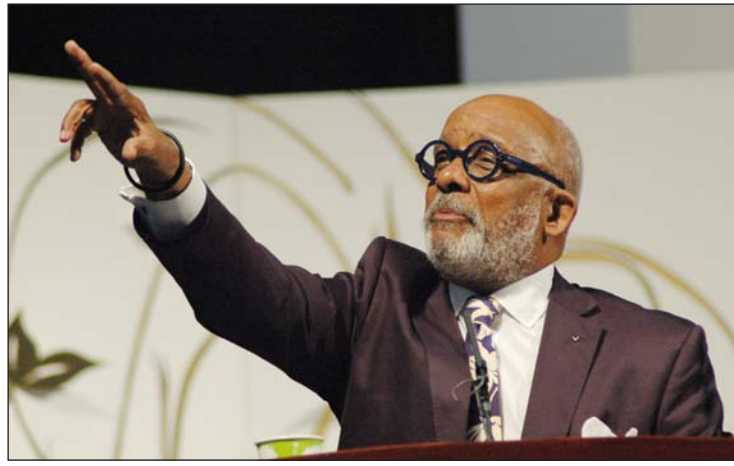
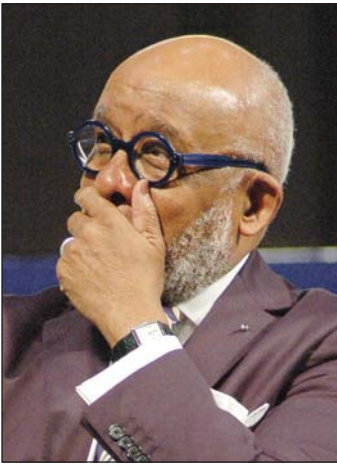
"We are destined to be a growing church again," Park said in closing. And referring to Isaiah 43, he asked, "Are we ready to do God's new thing?"



Martha Chapman, of the Church of the Village, dances during the opening worship service. Plainview UMC Youth and Children's Orchestra, below, also performed.



Members of the chancel choir at Salem UMC sing during the celebration for Ernest Swiggett.



You Have Served Us Well, Good & Faithful Servant

BY JOANNE S. UTLEY

In what was billed as a celebration of a life of service, outgoing Conference Treasurer Ernest Swiggett was honored by a lineup of more than a dozen people, both in person and on video. Swiggett, who is also the director of administrative services and conference statistician, will retire on September 1.

After Rev. Adrienne Brewington, Long Island East district superintendent, offered the song, "Some Day," as a prelude, Director of Connectional Ministries, Rev. Ann Pearson, kicked off the endearing testimonials that praised Swiggett for his "inspiring witness," as well as his "sartorial splendor." As Swiggett sat center stage, he laughed, he cried and, at times, seemed a bit embarrassed by all the praise. Each speaker was greeted with a hug from Swiggett.

He seemed a little puzzled when Bill Shillady, president of the UM City Society, suggested that he had "brought a fruit bowl to every meeting." Shillady explained that those fruits were the ones of which Paul wrote as he thanked Swiggett for his wisdom and generosity.

The honoree was also applauded for his work with the Black Methodists for Church Renewal and Strengthening the Black Church for the 21st Century. Few people can say this, but "Ernest's chosen career has been a true ministry of witness," said Rev. Leo Curry.

Evelyn Brunson, administrative assistant to Bishop Jeremiah Park, spoke representing Salem UMC, Swiggett's home church for the past

30 years. "Ernest is the go-to person at the church, the big brother. He has been an inspiring witness among us," she said. The Chancel Choir from Salem had been scheduled to perform, but were delayed by the weather.

In a video appearance, Bishop Jane Allen Middleton of Central Pennsylvania, thanked Swiggett for his friendship and his extraordinary leadership on the jurisdictional level. "Ernest is a grace-filled man of God," Middleton said.

Noel Chin, dean of the Cabinet, applauded Swiggett as an excellent teacher and administrator. "You are a model of patience and spirituality. We have been inspired by your preaching around the cabinet table."

A presentation of gifts was then made by Rev. Ginny Carle and Rev. Tim Riss. Carle, vice president of the conference Board of Trustees, came to the microphone to remind us of the "importance of being Ernest." Carle applauded the honoree's sense of humor and then showed a little of her own by saying that his "gift had arrived just in time – not like some of our apportionments." Representing the Council of Finance and Administration, Riss continued the tribute by describing Swiggett as the conference's "fiscal junction box."

Bishop Jeremiah Park began his tribute by quoting Philippians 1: "I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy . . . because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now."

Park thanked Swiggett for not only for serving the people so well,

but also for caring for him personally. "The Cabinet is my church, and Ernest is my pastor there," Park said. "If he was a pastor in one of our churches, I'd want to be a member there!"

And then it was time for Swiggett's response. "This has been the most amazing 23 and a half years of my life," he said. "I never ever imagined or dreamed growing up in Chester, Penn., that I'd become the treasurer and statistician of this great annual conference."

Swiggett exhorted the crowd to keep Jesus Christ as the guiding center of their lives. "People say all the time, God is good, but no, God is great all the time!" He thanked those who have played a part in his journey, especially the Salem UMC. "They are my spiritual bedrock."

"I love you from the foundation of my soul. Thank you, New York Annual Conference," he concluded. Bishop Park then invited the body to stand and raise their hands over Swiggett as he offered a prayer of thanksgiving for his life.

Just after Park finished, the Chancel Choir from Salem UMC, arrived. They came to the stage and ended the tribute fittingly with two numbers, "Blessed Assurance" and a medley of "How Great is Our God" and "How Great Thou Art."

Swiggett became the NYAC business administrator and treasurer on March 1, 1987, following several years as church administrator of Salem UMC. He will also be honored during a party June 19 at the Crowne Plaza hotel, White Plains, N.Y.

Newest Appointments

Pastor Michael Barry
Grace UMC,
Newburgh / NYCT

Pastor Carol Bloom
Associate pastor
Centerport / LIE

Pastor Paul Fleck
New Milford / CT

Rev. Richard Hayes
Metropolitan
Community / MET

Rev. David Johnson
Olivebridge &
Samsonville / CH

Rev. Lucy Jones
AEIM / The Grail

Rev. Dale Ellen Krazmien
East Avenue, Norwalk / NYCT

Rev. Victoria Luna
Freeport Hispanic / LIE
*(Continuing to serve
Hempstead Hispanic)*

Pastor Jennifer Nunno
Van Cortlandville
Community / NYCT

Pastor Matthew Schaeffer
Bethel UMC,
Staten Island / MET

Rev. Seungho Shim
Associate pastor
Mid-Hudson Korean / NYCT

Rev. Joanne Utley
AEIM / The NYAC Vision
*(Continuing to serve
Bridgehampton / LIE)*

Ross Tells Laity: Share Your God-Given Gifts

BY TOM CODDINGTON

We all have gifts to share, and we all must use them.

Following up on the reading of 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 at the laity session, Rev. Vance Ross, deputy general secretary of the General Board of Discipleship, stressed that point to those in attendance Wednesday afternoon.

In that scripture, Paul tells the Corinthians that everyone is good at one thing or another, a God-given gift. "All of these gifts are needed, and all of them are necessary. Every soul is important," Ross stated.

"The church needs called and gifted people in all areas of ministry," he continued. He noted that sometimes those in administrative positions in their respective churches are not necessarily called and gifted for these positions.

Ross called upon all those gathered to share their faith in as many ways as possible, including testifying how God has changed their lives, or how they came to have a personal relationship with the Lord. "Be intentional, be inspired and be inspired by God!" he exclaimed. "We've got to want it to happen and work to make it happen!"

He also told the group, "We need to listen and learn from each other. We are all teachers and we are all learners. We don't exist just to keep the structure going, we exist to make a difference."

Ross also urged the laity members to determine if their churches were



Rev. Vance Ross stressed the importance of being intentional about sharing our faith stories.

really living out the goals expressed in their vision and mission statements. "We need to study and search our scriptures, and we need to have more Christian conversations. We need to do things that get everyone involved," he concluded.

Don't forget to fast from midnight tonight for the ProCheck health screening, tomorrow from 7 to 10 a.m. in the Student Center. It's free to all HealthFlex participants.