

THE VISION

Friday Update
June 6, 2014



The Prophetic Church
Pray about it.
Talk about it.
Be about it.

18 Retirees, Their Families Celebrated

By Rev. Joanne S. Utley

“We are gathered to say the most important thing anyone can say to another: Thank you!” said Rev. Robert Walker as he opened the celebration of retirement Thursday night. The gratitude was well deserved for the 18 retiring clergypersons who have devoted a total of 489 years to ministry. He also invited the families to stand to receive the gathering’s gratitude.

Walker noted that the idea of retirement has changed drastically from what once was a time of idle pursuits like gardening, fishing, and sitting on the porch.

“Retirees are working as hard as they used to . . . it’s a time of rediscovery . . . of being reborn,” he said.

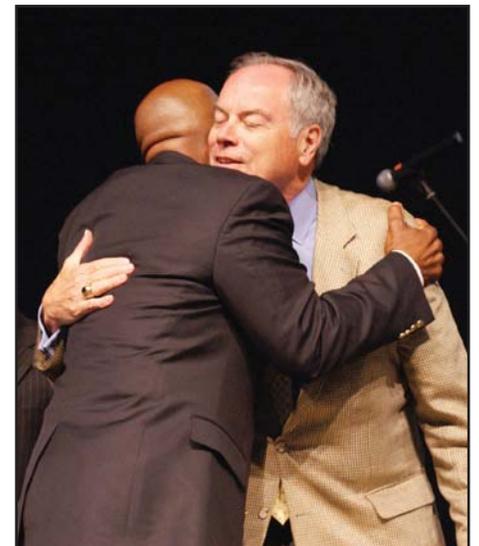
“So tonight, we celebrate the rebirth of 18 retirees, and what they will do and be in the years to come.”

Those pastors retiring are: Harold A. Andrews, Richard E. Allen, John Christian Best, Duane D. Buddle, Ronald B. Cox, Lorraine A. DeArmitt, Jin Hyoung Kim, Jong Sung Kim, Richard R. Lenz, Lee B. Madinger, Ralph A. Merante, Delroy D. Murdock, Ann A. Pearson, James E. Rush, Thomas H. Theilmann, John William Thomas, Ronald D. Tompkins, Westley R. Villazon.

Retiree Richard E. Allen may have best summed up the ministry journey for the entire class. Despite the ups and downs, he said in his video, “best of all God was with us!”



Delroy Murdock and his wife stand for applause, clockwise from above; Richard gets a hug from Bishop Johnson; Ann Pearson stands to be recognized behind Jim Kim and his wife; Robert Walker congratulates Lorraine DeArmitt and her husband during the Thursday night recognition service.



General Conference Delegates Elected

After a number of ballots for both clergy and laity the following were selected:

Clergy: William Shillady, Tim Riss, Noel Chin and Denise Smartt Sears.

Laity: Fred Brewington, Dorothee Benz, Dorlimar Lebron Malave, and Carolyn Hardin Engelhardt

Voting will continue today for jurisdictional delegates.

Looking for Signs of Vitality in Your Church

With the early church described in Acts 2:42-47 as his theme, Rev. Charles Ferrara offered a list of 10 indicators against which churches can measure their own vitality.

“We go to the doctor and have the doctor check out our health and vitality,” he said. “The church is an organism, too, and needs to be examined for its vitality.”

1. Ministry must be grounded in the Word of God. “The Word of God is never boring . . .” Ferrara said. We must go deep, and not just wide in our exploration of the scriptures.
2. Offer a loving fellowship. Paul created koininia for the early believers, a community of intimacy, trust and care.
3. Intentional prayer is a priority for healthy churches. Does your church have prayer ministry?
4. Expect miracles: We have been given the authority to heal the sick through power of Christ.
5. Unity, we are one in Christ Jesus. “And all who believed



Rev. Charles Ferrara

were together and had all things in common . . .” Work out our differences. Blessed are the peacemakers.

6. Be generous. “Give to mission . . . don’t have just one person in charge of all the money.
7. A healthy church offers excellence in worship.

8. Small groups provide fellowship and a sense of belonging. Small groups need not always be lead by the pastor; lay servants are called to lead these groups.
9. Reach outside the church. Healthy church seeks ways to impact community positively. Laity intentionally share the joy and ministries of their church.
10. Knows how to welcome new people into the fellowship, to make them feel recognized, loved, and needed. Ferrara quoted a recent Barna study that indicated that 50 percent of people who join churches drop out in first year.

In wrapping up, Ferrara suggested that despite all the books written by theologians and pastors about church vitality, “there’s no better example than the Book of Acts to model our churches after . . . We need to all be working, and walking together to build up the body of Christ.

BY THE NUMBERS

4,554
Health Kits

\$5,920.49
MEF Offering

\$5,008.41
Black College Offering



JOINING NYAC STAFF: Dr. Claude Gooding, left, and Rev. Derrick-Lewis Noble will assume their duties on July 1 as the director of connectional ministries, and director of church development and revitalization, respectively.

Rural Churches Go ‘Cooperative’ To Meet Changing Needs

By Tom Coddington

Rev. James Moore, superintendent of the Catskill Hudson District, is no stranger to charges with multiple churches. His first parish in the conference was based in Callicoon, and included three other Sullivan County churches – “all on minimum salary.” Over the years, he has served several other multiple-point churches.

Rev. Timothy Riss, who also began his career in a cluster of seven churches with three pastors, introduced Moore at the Town and Country breakfast. Moore said that he has seen many changes in the make-up of rural churches.

“In many cases, the numbers are just not there. There are communities with a lot of second homeowners, who don’t come to any church. Church-going is voluntary,” he noted. He also said that in some parishes, there is a lack of clarity when someone asks, “Who is my pastor?”

“In our district,” he said, we have a five-church parish with one full-time pastor, one half-time pastor, one retired pastor and 13 lay servants. This past year, two new multiple church parishes were created, each of which has one full-time and one part-time pastor.

“A cooperative parish is made up of teams, and it is not a solo operation. You have to have one strong church, where things are working, to be a leader, and churches that are not motivated by self-interest, so they can work together to survive and thrive,” Moore said.

Pointing out that in one of the new parishes, the churches are only about 15 miles apart from one end to the other, he said, “The geography can help what parishes can do. One of those churches is now having services on Monday nights.”

He also said that there is a need for capable pastoral leaders, with a diversity of



Rev. Jim Moore speaks to the Town and Country breakfast.

gifts in such a situation.

“Having common calendars and linked web sites also helps,” he added.

MFSA Honors Ogletree, Tweedy

By Tom Coddington

Two members of the conference who have stood out in the area of social justice were honored by the Methodist Foundation for Social Action (MFSA) at their Thursday night dinner.

The recipients of the Gwen and C. Dale White awards for 2014 are Rev. Dr. Thomas Ogletree and Sara Thompson Tweedy. Ogletree was unable to attend so his counsel, Rev. Paul Fleck, received the award for him.

“Everything I have learned about civil disobedience I learned from Tom Ogletree,” Fleck said. “I have learned to face wrong situations and deal with them; I have learned constructive positions in dialogue.

“He also taught me everything I know about being a good pastor and a good father,” Fleck added.

Rev. George McClain, who introduced Tweedy, shared that he was reading Martin Luther King’s ‘Letter from a Birmingham Jail,’ when he learned that Tweedy was facing a complaint. McClain, the national executive director emeritus of MFSA, said, “She actually took the complaint as a gift. “She wants to be who she is, just moving ahead,” he added.

Tweedy, an NYAC elder, faced a complaint made in 2013 accusing her of being a “self-avowed practicing” lesbian. The complaint was dismissed this spring.



Rev. McClain honors Rev. Sara Thompson Tweedy, who stands with her family.

Calling Tweedy a prophet, McClain said, “She is a face of the movement for helping people see who they really are.”

After receiving the award, Tweedy introduced her wife and their two sons. She also expressed surprise at the honor.

“How grateful I am to be receiving this award considering the others who have received it have been giants,” Tweedy said. She also gave special credit to McClain, Dorothee Benz and Scott Summerville for

their assistance and their support.

In sharing a bit of her personal journey, Tweedy acknowledged, “I couldn’t tell my mother, knowing that she would think the worst. It took her a long time to adjust.

“I will not apologize for being gay, and I want to stand up for someone else someday,” she said. “I know that there are many students in the seminaries who are openly gay, and I will support them in their dreams of being ordained.”



Blackjack Ryan of the Harlem Wizards provides a preview of what is to come at the July 19 "Jump, Shoot, Score" fundraiser. The mosquito seems mesmerized!

Shoot It Out To Fight Malaria!

The New York Annual Conference has been in the fight against malaria for awhile, and will continue to support the Imagine No Malaria campaign of the UMC, said Lynda Gomi, assistant to the director of connectional ministries, at a Thursday night presentation.

The battle moves next to the basketball court at Hofstra University for the July 19, "Shoot, Jump and Score" fundraising event with the Harlem Wizards.

Gomi was joined by a stage full of friends who have committed to help in the fight by joining the UMC "Skeeter Defeaters" to play against the Wizards, or by selling large blocks of tickets. "Blackjack" Ryan from the Wizards dazzled the crowd with his ball-handling skills.

The July event will include a pre-game basketball clinic for kids in grades one through six run by Hofstra Chris Eldredge.



Bishop Alfred Johnson takes a spin backstage.

Tickets are available here at annual conference on Saturday in the arena lobby or online from the conference web site.

The conference Board of Pensions and Health Benefits also announced that in an effort to improve clergy health and contribute to the INM campaign, they will donate \$1 for every pound lost by clergy or spouses in the next six months (up to \$10,000).

Signs of Hope: God's Doing A New Thing

*Oh, I know that I can make it
I know that I can stand*

*No matter what may come my way
My life is in your hands.*

– "My Life Is In Your Hands,"
by Kirk Franklin

The words of this song were lifted by Rev. Adrienne Brewington as a mantra of hope for all that God is doing in the conference. In her cabinet report on Thursday afternoon, Brewington explained that the song exemplified the scriptures bracketing her address: Jeremiah's "I know the plans I have for you;" and Isaiah's "do not dwell on the path . . . I am doing a new thing."

"The NYAC has been living into this bracketed space of hope," she said. "We're confident that the future has been prepared. No matter where you look there is hope."

The reporting of vital signs indicates that the NYAC is trending in positive ways. The number of vital congregations increased from 29 percent to 41 percent from 2012 to 2013, she noted.

"Vital Congregations is God's way of working out God's plan for us," Brewington said. "We are living out hope in a bracketed space, living out hope in diverse ways."

Some of the ways vitality is showing itself across the conference:

- Increase in lay servant classes, especially for youth
- Creation of cooperative parishes with pastoral teams serving multiple churches
- Use of deacons and certified lay ministers to pastor some congregations.
- Establishment of five new mission congregations – one Haitian, Korean, Brazilian, Hispanic, and Pakistani.
- Small churches choosing to merge and sell properties in order to use the proceeds for ministry
- Clergy Sabbath days with worship, basketball and massages
- Experimenting with alternative days and times for worship; including meals with worship
- Recruitment of pastors outside our borders

"The cabinet is trying hard to meet the challenges before us," she said. "We're trying by degrees to get to the place where we belong."

Legacy of Hispanic Ministries Celebrated

The Chrisman Archives honored two conference churches for serving the Hispanic residents of their communities for more than 90 years.

Honored were:

- Immanuel and First Spanish UMC, Brooklyn, led by Pastors Mendis Brown and Elisa Vicioso.
- First Spanish UMC, Manhattan: Pastor Luisa Martinez Buck.

The awards were presented by Leslie Reyman, former chair of the archives committee, and archivist Beth Patkus.