

"Write the vision clearly on the tablets, that one may read it on the run." – Habakkuk

THE VISION

The Newspaper
of the New York
Annual Conference
of The United
Methodist Church

February 17, 2014

Team Work Scores For Sandy Homeowners

The field was set. The teams were ready. There was a kickoff, play-action passes, interceptions and definitely some touchdowns. Saturday, February 1 kicked off our first "Done in a Day" Sandy recovery effort.

The call to action was answered. With homes as far west as Island Park and as far east as Babylon, there was much work to be done and many ways to spread hope. Volunteer teams from the New York Annual Conference, the Presbytery of Long Island, Unitarian Universalists, and Elon University shared their time and talents with homeowners. God's light was shining, both indoors and out as the weather was a mild 50 degrees. Approximately 50 volunteers worked on seven homes.

"I have met so many great volunteers and homeowners," said one volunteer. "It's one of the reasons I keep coming back . . . that and learning new skills. It truly is an inspiring experience." This was a common theme as I walked through the home sites, witnessing the

bonding over buckets of paint and laughter through demolition. It brought a smile to my face and joy to the homeowners' hearts.

And, just to make their volunteer experience even better, the team of students from Elon

University was able to take the train to New York City and participate in the festivities along "Super Bowl Boulevard."

When asked what was most surprising about the current recovery situation, a first-time volunteer said, "It's surprising that the homes look nice on the outside, but when you walk in the front door it is complete devastation. There are no walls or floor or heat. It's crazy and

it's unacceptable." Which brings the most important point home: It is unacceptable. The "Done in a Day" program is trying to help and it looks like we are off to a good start.

So while the nation was contemplating who would win the big game, there was big game going on in Long Island, the volunteer

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Two volunteers tear down sheetrock during the first "Done In A Day" project on February 1.

Ogletree Case Referred Back for "Just Resolution"



Rev. Thomas Ogletree

BY HEATHER HAHN and KATHY GILBERT
UM News Service

United Methodist theologian Rev. Thomas Ogletree, who had been scheduled to face a church trial in a month for officiating at the same-sex wedding of his son, is now awaiting a new trial date. Ogletree is a retired elder in the New York Conference.

The trial of Ogletree was

initially scheduled for March 10 at First United Methodist Church in Stamford, Conn. Retired Bishop S. Clifton Ives, the presiding officer or the equivalent of a judge, postponed the trial date Feb. 10. No new date has been given.

Ives' decision followed a joint motion by the counsel for the church, the Rev. Timothy Riss, and the counsel for Ogletree, the Rev. W. Scott Campbell. In a

previous pre-trial meeting, Ives—after consultation with Riss and Campbell—referred the charge to a process seeking just resolution, a move that puts the matter back before NYAC Bishop Martin D. McLee. More time is needed for this process, said a news release.

Ogletree, a retired seminary dean noted for his work on Christian ethics, presided over the

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3/8 Black College Fund Luncheon

Kevin Jones will be the guest speaker for this annual luncheon to benefit 11 Black colleges, held at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in White Plains. Lunch begins at 1 p.m.; tickets are \$100. For details or purchase a ticket, go to www.nyac.com/eventdetail/90079.

3/9–4/13 NY-CT District Lenten School

Basic and advanced Lay Servant Ministry courses will be offered each Sunday from 4 to 7 p.m. at Grace UMC in Newburgh, N.Y. Courses include Go Preach, The Sermon as Story, Lord, teach us to pray: Connecting to God through Prayer, and Radical Hospitality. The fee for each course is \$15; participants also need to purchase required texts. Checks for fees and on-site book purchases should be made out to New York/Connecticut Lay Servant Committee. Soup and sandwiches will be available along with fellowship each week from 4 to 4:30 p.m. For details and to register, go to: www.nyac.com/eventdetail/92618.

3/15 & 22 Living Our Methodist Beliefs

This is an advanced lay servant ministry class certified by the General Board of Discipleship as one of the required classes towards lay speaker designation. Jerry Eyster will lead the class from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Fellowship and sign-in begin at 8:30 a.m. at the UMC of Westport and Weston, 49 Weston Road, Westport, Conn. Cost is \$15. For details and registration info, go to: <http://www.nyac.com/eventdetail/76820>.

3/22 Volunteers in Mission Training

All those interested in leading or participating in local, national and international mission projects are encouraged to attend this training session from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Mamaroneck UMC, 546 E Boston Post Rd., Mamaroneck, N.Y. Registration fee is \$10 per person and includes lunch. You will receive an official NYAC-UMVIM photo identification after this training. A safe sanctuary background check is required for the photo ID and costs \$10 per person. Register online at www.nyac.com/vim-training or call Pat Hylton at, 914-615-2226. !!!!

3/27 Clergy Pre-Retirement Seminar Rescheduled

The seminar meets from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at New York Annual Conference Center, Learning Center, 20 Soundview Avenue, White Plains, N.Y. Contact Sally Truglia, at 914-615-2220 or struglia@nyac.com, for more information.

3/28–30 IGNITE Weekend for Youth

“SWAG: Standing With the Armor of God” is the theme for this annual gathering of conference youth (ages 11–18) for worship, games, a DJ dance party, and workshops. The HYPE praise band will be back, too! Cost for the weekend at Quinipet Retreat Center, 99 Shore Rd., Shelter Island Heights, N.Y., is early bird \$159; after February 28: \$179. To register your group, go to: www.nyac.com/eventdetail/87841. Optional bus service *may* be available for \$50 per person if enough groups are interested. Please contact Greg Nissen at Camp Quinipet at 631-749-0430, as soon as possible if you are interested in the bus.

3/29 Putting the Joy in Worship

A joyous day of Christian worship experiences, plus training and tools for contemporary services through seminars of video, drama, music, preaching, singing and Media Shout. Peter Neumann, a worship pastor from California, will be the featured speaker at the 9:30 a.m.–9:30 p.m. conference at Jesse Lee Memorial UMC in Ridgefield, Conn. More details at, www.nyac.com/eventdetail/88661.

4/5 Team Vital Evangelism Seminar

The conference’s Team Vital training continues with featured guest Rev. Jorge Acevedo focusing on “Vital: Churches Changing Communities and the World.” Acevedo is the lead pastor at Grace Church, a multi-site, United Methodist congregation in Southwest Florida. His greatest delight is connecting people to Jesus and the Church. A light breakfast and registration begin at 8 a.m. at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Southbury, Conn. The workshop runs from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., and lunch will be provided. Registration is \$75 per church. To register, go to: <http://www.nyac.com/eventdetail/55799>.

5/22–26 Community Nursing Training

Having a qualified nurse on a parish’s staff can enhance the church’s efforts to integrate whole person health. The parish nurse/faith community nurse is prepared to evaluate, and advocate on behalf of the congregation and the community concerns especially in whole person health and wellness. Sponsored by: the New York Conference, Parish Nurse Ministries of New York, and Trocaire College of Buffalo. The event is planned for the Edna Macy Conference Center in Briarcliff Manor, N.Y. Questions? Contact either: Claris Skerritt at, Claris.Skerritt@nyac-umc.com, or 718-324-8386; or Ann Marie Mac Isaac at, ammacisac@aol.com, or 716-655-1163.

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<small>The News of the New York Conference of the United Methodist Church</small>	
Bishop: Martin D. McLee Director of Connectional Ministries: Ann A. Pearson Editor: Joanne Utley New York Conference of The United Methodist Church 20 Soundview Avenue, White Plains, NY 10606 Phone (888) 696-6922 Fax (914) 615-2244; Website: www.nyac.com Vision e-mail: thevision@nyac.com	

Archives Offers Grants To Preserve Records

Do you know where your church's historical records are stored? What condition are they in? Are they in need of preservation? The NYAC Commission on Archives and History and the C. Wesley Christian Archives can help.

The CAH is offering a grant program to assist local churches with the preservation of historical records. A total of \$1,000 will be made available to distribute through several smaller grants, with a minimum of \$300.

The application deadline is February 28. An informational flyer, detailed guidelines, and an application form for the program can be found at <http://www.nyac.com/localchurchgrantprogram>, or contact Archivist Beth Patkus at archives@nyac.com, or 914-997-1570, ext. 128, for more information.

Call for Denman Award Nominations

For more than 30 years, the Foundation for Evangelism has worked with annual conferences to celebrate the outstanding personal evangelism ministry of UMC clergy, laity and youth by sponsoring the Harry Denman Evangelism Award. One person in each category will be selected by the NYAC.

Since inception, more than 2,500 individuals have been honored for their efforts to help people experience God's transforming love through Jesus Christ.

Denman's personal dedication forced him to follow Christ totally, and he sought to lead others to have what he had: total commitment to a life of faith.

Nomination forms are available at <http://foundationforevangelism.org/>, and should be returned to Rev. Ann Pearson at apearson@nyac.com by April 30. The awards are presented during annual conference in June each year.

Team Work Scores For Sandy Homeowners

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game. Yes there was a kickoff and some play action. There was passing (of paint brushes and crow bars). There were interceptions (of homeowners' despair) and of course there were the touchdowns (bringing hope, love and help to those who need it most). Everybody came out a winner!

Call to Action: "Done in a Day" is moving forward. Please consider volunteering for our next date, March 1. To work in Brooklyn, call Gillian Prince at 718-594-7972; for Staten Island, call Samantha Christian at 347-252-7979; and on Long Island, call Peggy Racine at 516-795-1322.

Follow me on twitter @gina_nyac NYAC Sandy Recovery for updates on "Done in a Day" and volunteer opportunities!

Be the blessing!

Gina Grubbs
Project Coordinator,
NYAC Sandy Recovery



Teams worked from top, above, to bottom on seven homes for the "Done In A Day" program on February 1. MIDDLE, Stephania Petit and Gus Sagredo, from left, check in with one of the teams working on Long Island.



The sacrament of communion brings the gathering around the table as one body to celebrate “this holy mystery,” as Bishop Martin McLee and Dr. Marcia McFee preside.

“Engaging Worship” in NYAC Gets the McFee Spin

BY JOANNE S. UTLEY
Editor, *The Vision*

“What is a moment from worship that you will never forget?”

That question, and many others, were pondered by the clergy, spouses, and certified lay ministers gathered for the Bishop’s Convocation in mid-January.

“Worship is powerful, an opportunity to soar . . . it is an invitation to just be, and rest in the arms of God,” guest speaker, Dr. Marcia McFee told the group. McFee spent the three days teaching about and leading the kind of engaging worship that is one of Bishop Martin D. McLee’s priorities for the coming year in the New York Conference.

In introducing McFee, the bishop called her one of the United Methodist Church’s worship geniuses who truly understands authentically multicultural worship.

“She is a scholar who has spirit,” said McLee, who has known McFee for many, many years.

In addition to sensory-rich worship and inspired music, the January 14–16 event at the Villa Roma Resort in the Catskills provided time for games, sports, and relaxation for the 154 participants, under the theme, “A Glimpse of God: Worship & Fellowship.”

McFee said that one of the most important tasks of those planning worship is something she calls “metaphorizing,” the creative means



Rev. Karen Eiler and Rev. Alex Souto, above, take advantage of the jazz offered by the Nat Dixon Quartet. Dr. Marcia McFee, right, provides a rhythm for worship with her djembe.



of engaging some symbol in the worship design process—or foraging for metaphors. To prove her point that God is in all things, she pulled out a bottle of sinus spray and described the clarity it provides for the user. It is that kind of clarity that is the hope of the church, she added. Then she charged the group to try the same exercise

with something from their purse or pocket.

“God takes ordinary things and people . . . and invites us to extraordinary feats of love, justice, and peace,” McFee said. “What we do in worship matters, even to those outside our doors.”

McFee’s three sessions were filled with advice

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**Know anyone who would pay
to see you jump out of a plane?**

**Take a flying leap
to defeat malaria!**



Join the NYAC Skydiving Team and District Superintendent Adrienne Brewington on Friday, April 25—World Malaria Day—to raise funds for the Imagine No Malaria initiative. Collect sponsors and pledges before taking your tandem jump; those who raise more than \$5,000 will jump free! For more information, contact Lynda Gomi, at lgomi@nyac.com, or 914-615-2228. The United Methodist Church is committed to transforming the world through the Imagine No Malaria Initiative. Put your faith into action today!

Getting Healthy at Clinic for Pastors, Spouses

BY REV ELIZABETH BRADDON
Coordinator of Pastors' and Spouses' Clinics

Are you a clergy member, or the spouse of an active clergy member, of the NYAC? If you are and you have not attended the Pastors' and Spouses' Health Clinic at New York Methodist Hospital, then this article is for you.

There is a treasure in our midst. New York Methodist Hospital, the "Mother Hospital of Methodism," was chartered in 1881. Today New York Methodist is a modern, 651-bed acute care teaching hospital serving a constituency that includes Brooklyn and far beyond.

It is one of the finest health institutions in metropolitan New York and its facilities are available to you for an "executive health checkup" that could cost you thousands of dollars elsewhere. The cost to you is \$50.

Twice a year—March and October in 2014—the hospital opens its doors to 12 clergy and/or spouses for a four-day clinic in which major diagnostic tests and consultations are made available. Every appointed clergyperson and/or spouse is eligible to attend. Preference is given to those who have not attended in the last six years.

During the four days, each participant will

receive a thorough physical examination and any follow-up tests that may be indicated. There will also be time to tour the hospital and participate in seminars on recent developments in health care. Participants will get a penetrating view of your mission hospital at work. In addition, you will be performing a unique function for the hospital as your presence will remind the hospital family of their ties to the "people called Methodist," which go back over 130 years.

We clergy, are notoriously remiss at taking the time for self-care. Through Healthflex and Virgin Health Miles, there have been major strides made to educate us about healthy lifestyles and this has made significant differences in many lives. The blood workup done at annual conference is a snapshot of the state of our health. A yearly physical is crucial. But none of these programs offer what New York Methodist Hospital is offering us. If you were to have all these tests through your local

physicians, it could take weeks of appointments. By carving out the time to attend the clinic, you can get several issues addressed at once.

Before retirement, I participated in the clinics on three different occasions. In every clinic, at least one participant discovered, for the first time, a major health issue that needed to be addressed immediately. One notable year, a colleague was about to have a heart attack and it was discovered in time: He remained in the hospital to be treated. Personally, because of contacts made with a speech therapist at one of the clinics, I had the immediate resources to address a serious vocal dysfunction that occurred three years later.



Rev. Martha Vink took this selfie before beginning a sleep study at the pastors' clinic in October 2013.

To apply for the March 10–14 clinic, download a brochure and registration form at, www.nyac.com/eventdetail/94505, or contact Rev. Elizabeth Braddon at elizabeth.braddon@gmail.com, indicating your interest. Registration is very limited, so do not delay.

Calling All Laity Nominees for Delegations

Laity of the New York Conference are invited to consider placing themselves in nomination for election as delegates to the 2016 General and Jurisdictional conferences. Both of these conferences, which take place every four years, are critical in the life of our denomination.

A change to the *Book of Discipline* that was passed at the 2012 General Conference allows annual conferences to elect delegates up to two years in advance of the General Conference.

At General Conference, the *Book of Discipline* and the *Book of Resolutions* are revised, and the budget and churchwide plans are approved. Bishops are elected at Jurisdictional Conferences. The next General Conference will be held in Portland, Oregon, May 10–20, 2016. The Northeast Jurisdictional Conference will be held in Lancaster, Penn., July 11–15, 2016.

“To be eligible for election, prospective lay delegates shall have been a member of The United Methodist Church for at least two years preceding their election, and shall have been active participants in The United Methodist Church for at least four years prior to their election. In addition, lay members must be members of a church within the annual conference electing them at the time that the General and Jurisdictional Conferences to which they have been elected are held. (Conference Rules, Section K, Elections of General and Jurisdictional Conference Delegates, ¶87, page 372)

During this year’s annual conference from June 4–7 at Hofstra University, lay members will elect four lay delegates to General Conference. Clergy will elect four clergy delegates as well. These eight, along with others to be elected, will serve as delegates to the Jurisdictional Conference.

The following voting process will be used to elect lay delegates for 2016:

- An eligible layperson shall declare her/his candidacy to be a delegate, by submitting a nomination statement upon which s/he has affixed her/his signature. The nomination statement is to be on one side of an 8½" x 11" sheet of paper, and submitted to the conference secretary by April 1. Each nomination statement shall be accompanied by a biographical sketch, not to exceed one side of an 8½" x 11" sheet of paper. A photograph may be included. In addition, each nomination of



a person who is not a lay member of annual conference shall be accompanied by a certification from the nominee’s administrative board chairperson or church council chairperson, verifying that the nominee meets the membership and activity requirements set out in ¶87 of the Conference Rules. The annual conference shall copy the biographical sketches and collate them into packets. The conference secretary shall ensure that

there is a packet available at the laity session of the annual conference for each lay member of conference.

- The names of the laypersons placed in nomination according to the above procedure shall be read aloud in the laity session. At the option of the nominee, s/he may take the stage as her/his name is read. The reading shall be limited to the name of the nominee and the name of the church and district from which the nominee comes. Additional nominations may be made from the floor of the laity session at annual conference. Those who are nominated may provide sufficient copies of their biographies.
- For electronic voting, numbers will be assigned to all lay nominees. A list of all nominees and their assigned numbers will be provided to all lay members with the first ballot. Nothing herein shall preclude the right of lay members to write in the names of eligible lay members throughout the entire election process. If these members receive more than 5 votes, their names shall be added to subsequent ballots. (Conference Rules, Section K, Elections of General and Jurisdictional Conference Delegates, ¶88–89, pages 372–373)

Delegates should be prepared to attend all preconference meetings, and to thoroughly read the preconference material relating to proposed legislation. Jurisdictional delegates will prepare to interview prospective candidates for the episcopacy. Delegates should be prepared to attend and participate in approximately three weeks of general and jurisdictional conference meetings. The annual conference will assist with the cost, but that amount will not cover all the expenses that a delegate will incur. While it is a privilege to serve in this capacity, the delegate should weigh the cost in terms of time, dedication and financial obligation before making the commitment.

If you have any questions about becoming a lay delegate, you may contact me at, renata10553@yahoo.com.

Wesley Pilgrimage For Clergy & Laity

United Methodist clergy and lay leaders will have the opportunity to immerse themselves in the Christ-centered leadership of John and Charles Wesley this summer during a 10-day Wesley Pilgrimage to England. The pilgrimage, sponsored by the United Methodist Board of Discipleship and the Board of Higher Education and Ministry, will begin July 14.

Participants will explore: Epworth, the Wesley’s birthplace; Oxford, where John and Charles Wesley led the Holy Club; Bristol, the home of the Methodist societies and class meeting; London, where both Wesley brothers experienced assurance of salvation and John Wesley built the center of British Methodism; and Salisbury, home to a vital Methodist congregation once served by Francis Asbury. This pilgrimage qualifies for 3 continuing education units. For information, go to: www.gbod.org/live-the-um-way/.

Advocacy Secretary Sought by UMW

The United Methodist Women are seeking a candidate for executive secretary for children, youth and family advocacy in the Christian Social Action section of the organization.

The position is responsible for training, educating and serving as a resource for United Methodist Women in the analysis of children, youth and family needs, such as their health and welfare, and on specific actions of advocacy. This person also serves as liaison to coalition partners whose focus is children

Qualifications include a bachelor’s degree and at least three years’ experience conducting advocacy work in a nonprofit organization or religious institution. Membership in the United Methodist Church is desirable but not required. The ability to speak a language other than English is a plus. The position is located at the United Nations Plaza in New York, N.Y.

For more information and to apply online, go to: <http://www.umcmmission.org/Test-Pages/hr>.

Dealing With Loss While Continuing to Live

BY JIM STINSON

Consultant on Older Adult Ministries

In response to a professor who was fond of saying that “life is about learning to deal with loss,” Frank Bruni, a columnist for *The New York Times*, wrote recently that the professor was only half right.

In a column reflecting on maturity, Bruni agrees that loss is an inherent part of life for which skills of coping must be learned. However, he observes, “Life is about learning to look past what’s lost to what’s found in the process.” At least, he notes, maturity is about that kind of learning.

Unwittingly, perhaps, Bruni’s column led me back to “The Wounded Healer,” in which author Henri Nouwen wrote that it is the losses and wounds of life that enable empathetic responses to people in distress of any kind. Those observations are worth remembering as we minister to and with older adults. Older adults have usually faced many losses and have usually learned to look past them and discovered new life. They have often learned lessons in acceptance and patience. And they have wisdom to share regarding coping skills. There is so much we can learn from them about living if we are open to what they have to say.

It was serendipitous that I read Bruni’s article after an eventful day at United Wicke Health Center of United Methodist Homes. As I had been preparing to leave for the weekend, a woman approached and asked if I had time to meet with she and her sister about their mother. The staff knows the mother very well because of several previous stays at Wicke; currently she is quite weak and perhaps terminal.

Complicating the sisters’ dilemma was the fact that their father was at home with a terminal illness, and their brother had died a week earlier in a house fire.



“Mom doesn’t know these things yet and we don’t think we should tell her,” she said. “We’re afraid the news would kill her. Do you think we’re correct in not telling her?”

Certainly a question that raises more questions. When, if ever, is it right to withhold information from someone?

Is there a risk in sharing bad news with someone who is already compromised? Are those risks greater than the person finding out by accident and being angry and mistrustful of the one(s) withholding information? I did not envy those two sisters, nor did I suggest an answer, other than saying it had to be their choice and they needed to be prepared to live with the consequences. I am not inherently more capable of making such choices than anyone else.

That same evening my bias toward always telling the truth (which I carefully had kept to myself) proved itself when called back to Wicke to see another resident. The woman’s niece, by marriage, to whom she had become a second mother had died unexpectedly. This 94-year-old resident is also in precarious health, and has had many losses in her life. Her daughter had decided to tell her the news, which is when I was called in.

With the wisdom born of experience she shared her tears and pain and then said calmly and faithfully, “She’s with God now. I’ll do what I’ve learned to do. I’ll trust it to Him and I’ll get on with my life.”

The “wounded healer” was healing those around her (the nurse who had sent for me, the daughter who gave her the news, and myself who had wondered what to say to her), even as she was allowing herself to begin the healing process. The wisdom of experience had taught her she could deal with whatever came to her, and she was teaching others as well. We were witnessing maturity in action.

California Donor Gives \$1.1M to Imagine No Malaria

Imagine No Malaria will get a million-dollar-plus boost, thanks to a generous gift from a lifelong United Methodist who just wants to give back—the largest gift to date from an individual donor.

“I think it’s important that we all give back in some small way

to make this world a better place for folks to live,” said Barbara Ferguson, a laywoman from Los Altos United Methodist Church who

is donating \$1.1 million towards the California-Nevada Conference’s efforts in the denomination’s Imagine No Malaria campaign. “My heart was tugging and I believed that I needed to do it (give to Imagine No Malaria),” said Ferguson.

Ferguson decided to make the gift after hearing a presentation by Bishop Warner H. Brown, Jr. of the San Francisco Episcopal Area, upon his return from a trip to Angola. Ferguson is a member of Los Altos United Methodist Church since 1985 and one of the leaders for the church’s Stephen Ministry who has worked as a volunteer in the finance office for 17 years.



Celebrating New Year

Barbara Abel, a resident at Bethel Nursing and Rehabilitation Center and formerly of Thornwood, N.Y., holds a lantern she made for a recent celebration of the Chinese New Year. The Bethel residents and staff welcomed the New Year by creating lanterns and preparing traditional food—egg rolls and rice.

Fellowship Laments Clergy Doing Same-Sex Marriages

The disobedience of 13 New York Annual Conference clergy who have performed same-sex ceremonies as reported on the Methodists In New Directions (MIND) web site has deeply saddened us. (see www.mindny.org/category/we-did/) The *Book of Discipline* of the United Methodist Church forbids these ceremonies that are also a chargeable offense under our rules. Pastors who perform these ceremonies may lose their credentials and license within the United Methodist Church.

Moreover, we have been concerned that attempts have been made in various resolutions to the Annual Conference to undermine our church's position on homosexuality. Indeed, some have attempted even to restrict the placement of complaints against pastors who perform same-sex weddings. These actions, however, run counter to the *Discipline* as every pastor in our church is accountable for his or her behavior. We ask: "Do pastors have the right to pick and choose which disciplinary rules they will accept or reject?" We believe that defiantly breaking the *Discipline* of our church will lead to increasing brokenness and, eventually, open division within our church.

Furthermore, the General Conference alone speaks for and to the church on matters of doctrine and practice. By increasing margins, the United Methodist Church has affirmed heterosexual marriage and has

long stated that the church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching while affirming, at the same time, that God's grace is available to all.

Finally, two other things deeply concern us: the considerable expense that each church trial will cost and the negative, divisive effect these potential trials will have on all the churches of the New York Annual Conference.

The actions of these errant clergy who have conducted same-sex weddings have confused and deeply troubled many persons within our conference. We cannot and will not remain silent in the face of these acts of disobedience. Wesley Fellowship is committed to following the *Discipline* and will hold those who have performed these same-sex weddings accountable for their actions. Moreover, we encourage any lay and clergy persons to place a formal complaint against any of the clergy who have performed these ceremonies. Letters of complaint can be sent to Bishop Martin D. McLee.

In conclusion, we applaud the fact that the United Methodist Church is open to all people; we are all sinners standing in the need of God's grace in Jesus Christ. Yet, we cannot celebrate and bless what the Scriptures and the tradition of the Church have forbidden.

—Submitted by Rev. Philip Hardt, for the Wesley Fellowship

New Group Seeks Way to 'Live in Divided Church'

BY UM News Service

A new United Methodist group in the United States is forming with the aim to advance "the Kingdom of Christ," despite the denomination's growing divisions over same-sex unions and gay ordination.

In practice, founders of the new Wesleyan Covenant Network say, they are committed to mutual accountability, evangelism and upholding the United Methodist doctrine, especially the primacy of Scripture in faith and practice.

The group first met Jan. 13–14 in Atlanta and drew 125 United Methodists, mostly clergy, from 15 states. Participants came from three United Methodist jurisdictions in the United States, including southeast, south central and north central areas.

The Rev. Maxie Dunnam, a longtime United Methodist leader, is one of the group's founders.

"We're really working on how to live in a divided church and be productive and kingdom-minded," he told United Methodist News Service. "We're just exploring ways to encourage and equip and support people in doing that."

Dunnam is a retired president of Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Ky. and retired senior pastor of Christ UMC in Memphis. He also was one of the founders of the Confessing Movement within The United Methodist Church, an evangelical renewal group. Among other things, the Confessing Movement advocates for maintaining the denomination's definition of marriage as between a man and woman and its ban on "self-avowed practicing"



Rev. Maxie Dunnam addresses the first gathering of the Wesleyan Covenant Network in Atlanta.

gay clergy.

Dunnam said some of the clergy at the Atlanta gathering discussed whether they were being faithful to the gospel if they remained in a church where pastors and a retired bishop have been officiating in same-sex unions. "I am not sure leaders of the church know how serious what's going on is," Dunnam said. "This is what I'm committed to trying to prevent. I don't want that kind of hemorrhage."

However, the Wesleyan Covenant Network will not be a political action or lobbying group, Dunnam and other group organizers emphasized. Group members said they plan in some ways to act in parallel to traditional church structures, such as starting new churches where the denomination is not.

Rev. Thomas E. Frank, a historian of Methodism and professor at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, N.C., sees the new group as part of the growing proliferation of interest

groups in the denomination promoting differing theological perspectives.

That's in contrast to much of the 20th century, he said, when there was a long-term trend toward church unity that saw the formation of the Methodist Church in 1939 and The United Methodist Church in 1968.

The Wesleyan Covenant Network's charter describes homosexuality as "the presenting divisive issue," but adds that the group sees the division as deeper. "Fundamentally, the issue is the authority of Scripture and the exclusive claims of the Gospel in tensions with the ideological commitments of multiple groups within the life of the church," the charter said.

"Now The United Methodist Church looks like a story of fragmentation with interests groups, and the groups are all using the name Wesley to leverage their theological point of view," said Frank, who is also the author of the frequently used textbook, "Polity, Practice, and the Mission of The United Methodist Church."

"My question as a historian is what happened to the mainstream that sought unity and institution building."

The Wesleyan Covenant Network's charter describes homosexuality as "the presenting divisive issue," but adds that the group sees the division as deeper. "Fundamentally, the issue is the authority of Scripture and the exclusive claims of the Gospel in tensions with the ideological commitments of multiple groups within the life of the church," the charter said.

To see video from the gathering, go to: <http://vimeo.com/84641273>.

Ogletree Case Referred Back for “Just Resolution”

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wedding of his son, Thomas Rimbey Ogletree, to Nicholas Haddad on Oct. 20, 2012. The service took place at the Yale Club in New York City.

Ogletree, 80, is a Yale Divinity School professor emeritus, veteran of the U.S. civil rights movement and lifelong member of the Methodist tradition. He has served as dean at Yale Divinity School in New Haven, Conn., and the Theological School at Drew University in Madison, N.J. Ogletree is declining interview requests at this time.

But, in May, he told United Methodist News Service that as a professor, he rarely has been asked to perform weddings. When his son asked him to officiate, he said he felt “deeply moved.”

He said in a statement released Jan. 17 that, “I could not with any integrity as a Christian refuse my son’s request to preside at his wedding.”

“It is a shame that the church is choosing to prosecute me for this act of love, which is entirely in keeping with my ordination vows to ‘seek peace, justice, and freedom for all people’ and with Methodism’s historic commitment to inclusive ministry embodied in its slogan ‘open hearts, open minds, open doors.’”

The Book of Discipline, the denomination’s law book, since 1972 has stated that all people are of sacred worth but “the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching.”

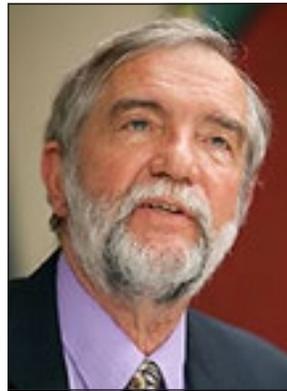
Church law says that marriage is to be between a man and a woman and bans United Methodist clergy from performing and churches from hosting “ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions.”

If found guilty, Ogletree could face a variety of penalties. The *Book of Discipline* gives a trial court of 13 clergy—the church equivalent of a jury—a range of choices up to revoking Ogletree’s credentials as United Methodist clergy. However, a trial court also can opt for a lesser penalty.

Voters in the New York Conference repeatedly have approved petitions seeking to change church law on homosexuality, most recently in 2011. In 2013, the conference approved a resolution by Methodists in New Directions (MIND) that commended United Methodist individuals and congregations “whose bold actions and courageous statements help to provide for the pastoral needs of same-sex couples within The United Methodist Church.”

Complaint process

Rev. Randall C. Paige, pastor of Christ



Presiding officer, retired Bishop S. Clifton Ives, above left, postponed the trial date following a joint motion by the counsel for Ogletree, Rev. W. Scott Campbell, center, and the counsel for the church, Rev. Tim Riss.

Church in Port Jefferson Station, N.Y., and Rev. Roy E. Jacobsen, a retired pastor, were the NYAC clergy who filed a complaint against Ogletree after his son’s wedding announcement appeared in the *New York Times*.

Paige is the president of the Wesley Fellowship, an unofficial evangelical renewal group in the New York Conference. Jacobsen is a board member of the group.

“As we who brought the complaint expressed to Bishop McLee, we take no joy in bringing this complaint,” Paige said. “We do it in obedience to Christ and the laws of our Church. His honor, along with the integrity of the entire United Methodist Church is the motive driving this action.”

Ogletree and Paige met face to face in late January 2013 to try to find a just resolution to the dispute and avoid a trial. Paige asked Ogletree to promise never to officiate at such a union again. Ogletree declined.

NYAC Bishop Martin D. McLee informed Ogletree in March 2013 that he had referred the case to a church counsel—the equivalent of a prosecutor. The church counsel then determined that there was enough evidence to proceed to trial.

The *Book of Discipline* states, “church trials are to be regarded as an expedient of last resort.”

McLee said in a statement released late Jan. 17 that he still prayed that the complainants and Ogletree could negotiate a just resolution and avoid a trial.

“During this most difficult time in the life of the church, I invite you to be in prayer for the Reverend Dr. Ogletree, the complainants and all who have a vested interest in this matter,” his statement said. “God is still God and that is where our trust and hope lies.”

Ives’ referral of the case for the just

resolution process puts the matter before McLee again. Under the *Book of Discipline*, the process is confidential. McLee may use a trained, third-party mediator to help. If a resolution is achieved, a written agreement will be presented to Ives. If no agreement is reached, the matter will be returned to Ives for further action.

Trial preparations

The United Methodist News Service confirmed Feb. 10 that McLee had asked Ives to serve as the trial’s presiding officer and Riss, pastor of Poughkeepsie UMC, to serve as the counsel for the church. McLee was not immediately available for comment Feb. 10.

Ives was among 36 retired bishops who signed a 2011 statement urging General Conference, the denomination’s top lawmaking body, to end the United Methodist ban on “self-avowed practicing” gay clergy. Riss is the treasurer of the Methodist Federation for Social Action, an unofficial progressive United Methodist group that has advocated for greater inclusion of gays and lesbians.

Rev. Thomas Lambrecht, the vice president and general manager of the unofficial United Methodist evangelical renewal group Good News, will serve as an advocate for the clergy who filed the complaint against Ogletree.

“The complainants registered their concerns about the appointment of Rev. Timothy Riss as counsel for the church with Bishop McLee,” Lambrecht said on Feb. 10.

“Bishop McLee assured them that Rev. Riss would carry out the responsibilities of the office of counsel with objectivity and integrity, and he refused to reconsider the appointment. We are hopeful that Rev. Riss will indeed vigorously pursue the goal of accountability with grace, which has been the intention of

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Ogletree Case Referred Back for “Just Resolution”

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the complainants all along. The complainants desire to maintain the covenant unity and polity of The United Methodist Church in a context of deep division.”

After the trial’s postponement, Lambrecht did not yet know whether he and the complainants would be part of the discussions with Riss and Ogletree’s counsel about a potential just resolution.

In an earlier interview, Lambrecht said his hope is that a trial “will accomplish the goal of holding the Rev. Ogletree accountable to the vows he made as an ordained elder in The United Methodist Church.

Lambrecht served as counsel in the church case against the Rev. Amy DeLong, who was found guilty of officiating in a same-sex union at a public church trial in June 2011. He also helped Paige and Jacobsen file the complaint against Ogletree.

“We filed this complaint in the spirit of Matthew 18 following Christ’s direction when a brother/sister sins. We are to go to him asking him to listen. The goal is restoration; the implicit requirement is repentance,” Paige said.

Methodists in New Directions, an unofficial New York Conference group that advocates for greater inclusion of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender individuals in the life of the church, has championed Ogletree’s case and first announced the trial date.

Dorothee Benz, chair of MIND, said after the trial’s postponement, “Tom (Ogletree) has had an official complaint hanging over his head now for 16 months and the phrase ‘justice delayed is justice denied’ certainly comes to mind.”

“But let us hope that justice may yet be

won,” she added, “And let us remember that whatever happens in this case, the problem here is not the church trials but the unjust church laws that put pastors on trial for ministering to LGBTQ people.”

Campbell, pastor of Harvard-Epworth United Methodist Church in Cambridge, Mass., serves as Ogletree’s counsel. He previously represented DeLong in her 2011 trial.

“I will try to help the jury of 13 people understand the difference between what is legal and what is right,” he said in a statement on his church’s website. “I will attempt to empower them to make a decision that reflects the true nature of the covenant of the ordained, a covenant that is not held hostage every four years to the whims and prejudices of the General Conference.”

Ogletree told UMNS in May that as retired clergy, it won’t make much difference if he loses his credentials. Both federal law and provisions of United Methodist retirement plans prohibit depriving clergy members of the pension benefits they already have earned.

Lambrecht said that the goal of those filing the complaint is not necessarily to affect Ogletree’s financial standing.

“Our goal is to have a public declaration of accountability, and if Rev. Ogletree were to lose his credentials, it would be a very public statement that his actions were outside of the agreed-upon covenant of United Methodist clergy.”

Widening dispute

Ogletree’s case comes at a time when the church’s debate regarding human sexuality has intensified and more clergy have been willing to

defy publicly church law.

He was among more than 1,000 active and retired United Methodist clergy across the United States, who in 2011, signed pledges announcing their willingness to defy the denomination’s ban on officiating at same-gender unions. The New York Conference alone has 218 clergy signers, supported by 1,000 lay signers.

Bishops promised in a letter released Nov. 11, 2011, to uphold church law banning same-gender unions.

Since then, the dispute has become only more public.

Frank Schaefer in the East Pennsylvania Conference was told in December to surrender his credentials after he was found guilty in a church trial of officiating at the 2007 nuptials of his son to another man. After a 30-day suspension, Schaefer said he could not abide by the *Book of Discipline* “in its entirety because of its discriminatory laws.” He also announced plans to appeal the ruling. The trial and its aftermath made headlines nationwide.

Retired Bishop Melvin G. Talbert officiated on Oct. 26, 2013, at the same-sex union of Joe Openshaw and Bobby Prince, members of Discovery United Methodist Church in Hoover, Ala. The Council of Bishops has called for a complaint to be filed against Talbert.

A complaint against the Rev. Stephen Heiss, a pastor in the Upper New York Conference, has been referred to church counsel. Heiss has said he officiated at the same-sex ceremony of his daughter in 2002 and more such unions since New York legalized same-sex marriage in 2011. Two cases in the Pacific Northwest Conference also have been referred to counsel.

“Engaging Worship” in NYAC Gets the McFee Spin

Continued from page 4

and demonstrations on how to creatively design and deftly lead worship. What appears so effortless on her part is a product of her process of brainstorming, visualizing, choreographing and even rehearsing the worship experience.

“The only way you’re going to get them to clamor for worship each week is if it’s deep and meaningful,” McFee said. “How do we shape worship that fills us even before Sunday?”

McFee stated that every church—no matter how big or small—is capable of taking their worship to the next level by rethinking their practices and searching for the “m-m-good moment”—the meaning and memorable moment. Some of her best practices include:

- After the announcements, begin worship

with a “threshold moment” that sets up the theme, prepares the congregation for what’s ahead, and takes people to a different time and place.

- Worship should flow from moment to moment rather than being a series of disconnected parts. Some moments will be high energy and loud, others will be quiet and contemplative. Plan the transitions carefully, even to the point of rehearsing them.
- Walk through the worship service with musicians and readers so that they know what to do, and how to do it. Train readers to embody the Scriptures rather than just read them.

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Rev. Ann Pearson preaches about “waking the sleeping giant” in our churches and communities.

“Engaging Worship” in NYAC Gets the McFee Spin

Continued from page 10

- It's not possible to please everyone every week in worship. People have different ways of learning and connecting to God. McFee suggests writing an article for the church newsletter about the different ways people learn—be it verbally, visually, viscerally and etc. “Building trust may be the most difficult thing when trying something new,” McFee said. People may feel uncomfortable at first, but soon they'll discover that their best way of learning will find a place in worship, too.
- By the layering of words, music, prayers and movement that reference one another, a sensory-rich worship experience can be achieved. “Cells that fire together, wire together,” McFee said, with a chuckle.
- Embody the words that are being said, and the emotions that are being felt. Give people permission to move in ways that they feel lead. Encourage people to dance, clap, or raise their arms in praise. Invite the congregation into a gesture of openness (whatever that may look like) before prayer.
- Celebrate what trust in the presence of God can do. Celebrate a sure sense of God's abundance. Play into what the Holy Spirit is doing in the time and space.
- Think like a filmmaker by giving a segment or the whole service a soundtrack. Use canonical language in ways that reference where people are here and now.
- Change up a favorite hymn/song in a new way: sing it as a round rather than in unison, use a refrain as a responsive thread that repeats throughout the service, or throughout the season, or sing familiar words to a new tune.
- When creating a new service or ministry, give it a great name, and do it for a short time, maybe a season. Try beginning a contemplative alternative to your regular service during Lent or Advent.

During the closing Communion service Thursday, McFee demonstrated one more way to bring deeper meaning into worship by centering the table in the middle of the space and inviting everyone to circle around it. As people gathered, it was a more intimate experience as they came face-to-face, embraced, or stood hand-in-hand listening to the words and prayers of the liturgy.

The theme of creating more meaningful worship and ministry was continued on Wednesday afternoon in a sermon by Rev. Ann Pearson, director of Connectional Ministries. Pearson drew on the Gospel of Mark talk about how fear can keep us from achieving the vitality in our churches that God so desires. She suggested that those fears often stand in the way



Rev. Enrique Lebron, left, stands in with Rev. Nat Dixon, right, and members of his quartet for a few songs.

of excellent leadership in our churches—both from the pastors and the laity.

Pearson noted that instead of waking the “sleeping giant” on the front steps of the church, we build a path to the back door and enter the church that way. We find ways to work around our fears, and not confront the sleeping giants in the church.

“We want to think we're doing the best we can given our appointment,” she said. “But are we teaching people to deal with crisis and problems, or just trying to move them to a happy ending?”

Pearson pointed out that Jesus gave the disciples ways to deal with faith everyday; Jesus taught the disciples how to struggle in culture.

She urged the pastors to stir things up, and challenge the issues and problems vital to our congregations and community. “You really need to want to be excited disciples,” she said. “You need to model excitement.

“Clear the slate of everything you thought you couldn't do,” Pearson added. “Leave it here. Go home with something new.”

Later that evening, during a time of fellowship, Rev. Nat Dixon led his quartet through a set of inspired jazz in the hotel lounge. Dixon, who pastors St. Stephen's UMC in the Bronx, was a professional sax player before entering the ministry. Their performance provided an opportunity to praise God and engage people in worship with a musical style well beyond traditional hymns or praise music. The music even brought some members of the group to their feet to dance.

The gathering spent time in conversation on Thursday morning with Bishop McLee, who outlined two priorities, in addition to engaging worship, for the coming year:

- Learning to be the beloved community, living

together without hurting one another.

- Dealing with a time of transition as the conference hires a congregational developer, and chooses a successor for Director of Connectional Ministries Ann Pearson, who will be retiring in June.

When asked by a clergywoman about how to deal with questions on the denomination's divisive stance on homosexuality, Bishop McLee urged that the group to continue to pray for one another and for our church. He said that he had called Rev. Frank Schaeffer after the trial decision in the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference to defrock him for presiding over the wedding of his son to another man. McLee told the group that he apologized to Schaeffer, and prayed with him.

The denomination would still have problems if the language in the *Book of Discipline* on homosexuality were changed tomorrow, McLee added.

“The United Methodist Church is struggling with lots of issues,” he said, and homosexuality is just one of them. He noted the need to continue the fight for immigration reform, noting that a member of one of the NYAC's congregations had recently been deported, leaving four young children without their mother.

Music for worship and McFee's presentations was provided by a three-piece band from Vanderveer Park UMC, comprised of Raymond Trapp on piano, Joseph Roberts on keyboard and Jerome Roberts on drums.

McFee, who had led a NYAC-sponsored workshop on Long Island in September 2013, offers teaching and coaching in a regular schedule of retreats, and through membership in her online Worship Design Studio, www.worshipdesignstudio.com.

Integrating the “Third Spaces” in Our Midst

BY JACOB DHARMARAJ

Shrub Oak UMC

A few days ago I sought the help of a broker to get a loan for a major purchase. The broker insisted that I should check my credit score for a favorable interest rate negotiation. So she proceeded to ask my full name, social security, number of years I had lived in the current address etc., When she came to the question, “Do you own or rent a house,?” I said, “Neither.”

There was a pregnant pause on the other end of the line. Then with a subdued tone, the broker asked, “Are you living with your parents?” I said, “I live in my Father’s house.” “What kind of business is he in?” she continued. “Well, he used to be a carpenter . . . but now he owns everything.”

“What do you mean by ‘he owns everything?’” After a few moments of friendly razzing, I told her that I am a United Methodist clergy person, and I live in a church-provided house. We had a few moments of belly laughter.

Our culture has conditioned us to think and act often in terms of binary divisions such as male/female, black/white, native/foreign, and culture/nature.

A tourist shared with a group about an experience he and his fellow tourists had had when they were visiting Lourdes, France. While touring the historic buildings of an abbey, they saw some signs posted outside the restrooms which baffled them. The first sign on the door of the restroom was marked “Women,” and the next one “Men,” and then the third one said, “Clergy” (I will leave the inference to the imagination of the readers.) It was the third sign that seemed misplaced!

We have been conditioned to think and act on dual categories. But in today’s globalized, de-territorialized world, the traditional dualistic categories do not function effectively anymore. We need new categories as the navigational system that we have used has become obsolete because the vehicles of transportation and the terrain in which we live have radically changed.

A compass works fine with earthly reference, but if we want to leave the earth and travel in the stratosphere, we need a completely new reference point. The scientists call for a new guidance system called “inertial guidance system,” in order to fly and soar. In Christian

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mission, we need a new reference system for our culturally pluralistic, religiously diverse, and linguistically polyphonic society. Both the periphery and the center have to be engaged in order to experience a joyful dance.

Immigration and globalization have made local communities to live alongside global communities, but rarely do they seem to connect. The previously close connections between urban space and cultural identity have been broken and irreversibly altered. Today there is a fusion of identity and practice between old and new, native-born and foreign-born; fusions of gender, sexuality, and different degrees of mobility as well as race, culture, and ethnic identity. Even those communities



that are stable and wealthy enough not to have to uproot themselves in search of work or from fear of persecution or exploitation are being changed radically by the forces of globalized immigration, and feel the “uprooting, disjuncture and metamorphosis” of their own cultural context.

In this context sociologists and anthropologists propose that the old binary divisions must go, and a new category called “third space” must be created. The “third space” that they put forward is both literal and metaphorical where traditional assumptions based on either/or definitions or top-down methodologies collapse under the need to engage with a multiplicity of influences that now compete with each other on equal terms.

This “third space” is a globalized locality in which diversity and cultural creativity emerge alongside traditional and conventional lifestyle.

It is the place where binary certainties are overwhelmed by the unsettling and persistent presence of “the other.” It is also the place where we recognize a renewed sense of an interdependent global community.

This “third space,” nonetheless, is a contested space where the tension between welcoming the stranger and the fear of the stranger, the self and the other, will exist. Hence it calls for a reformulation of traditional notions of mission and ministry within the postmodern world we now live in. It calls for a commitment to engaging hopefully with the future and the present—not returning to the past but using the past as a critical tool of analysis.

Christian mission by necessity must be “glocal”—multi-directional, multi-cultural, interdisciplinary, contextual and pluralistic. And if social media such as Facebook and Twitter should they fail in these areas, they

may become virtual altars. Decisions and popularity of all our engagements cannot be limited to “thumbs up” or “thumbs down” buttons with no commitment. What we need today is a third space button for everyone.

I am not saying that the “third space” is the definitive answer for our cultural malaise. There must be multiple spaces. But what we need to do first is to acknowledge that, “solitary icebergs we are,” as Virginia Wolff would say, and then act as Paul would have us do: “We are

the body of Christ.”

The recent 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches was passionately engaged in this kind of ministry, inviting all to engage in mission from the margins. I believe it is vital to engage those who are in the “third space,” by creating a new Christology that emerges from the periphery that emphasizes a Trinitarian understanding of mission; a pentecostal theology that stresses the importance of diversity as a sign of the Kingdom and reminds the church to be constantly reborn into new and challenging contexts; a new catholicity that stresses the need to reach all believers while our cultural and missional cornerstones steadily erode and wane.

May we move from our accustomed home of either/or, and embark on a pilgrimage to identify, welcome, and integrate the “third spaces” in our midst in our ministry.

Worth Hearing: Springsteen's 'High Hopes'

BY TOM GOODHUE

Bruce Springsteen's "High Hopes" is a good album, if not a great one, but is still one that is worth hearing again and again. Though not in the same league as "The Rising" and "Wrecking Ball"—and almost nothing is—preachers and all people of faith can find comfort and inspiration here.

Released in January, "High Hopes" is unlike any record "The Boss" has ever done before: a studio album that consists entirely of older songs covered or recast by Springsteen and the E Street Band—including Clarence Clemons and Danny Federici, who both now play in the heavenly chorus. The rousing title track is not one of The Boss' own, but rather one composed by Tim Scott McConnell that Springsteen gives his signature spin with lyrics about hard times set to upbeat music. In much the same way, he makes a sad song about lost love achingly beautiful in "Down in the Hole."

Listening to "American Skin (41 Shots)" today,—written after the shooting of Amadou Diallo and performed often after the shooting of Trayvon Martin—it is hard to imagine why this song was ever controversial. Can anyone doubt that African-American mothers have to tell their sons to remain polite if they are stopped by an officer, and "keep your hands in sight?" Perhaps the police want us to know how hard it is to make split-second, life-or-death decisions when approaching a suspect, but it is equally true that "you can get killed just for living in your American Skin."

A Christian who has said that his politics owe more to his Catholic education than to ideology, Springsteen draws deeply on biblical imagery in songs such as, "Heaven's Wall," which refers to the woman at the well, Gideon, Saul, Abraham, and Jonah.

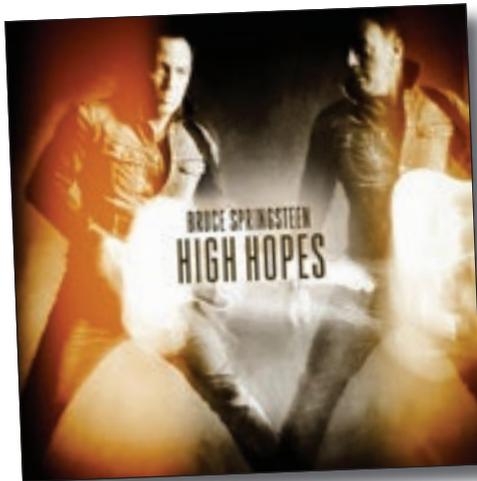
"This Is Your Sword" expresses Paul's metaphor of putting on the whole armor of God better than any hymn I know. Other cuts create entirely new religious imagery: if you seek "a kingdom of love waiting to be reclaimed," he suggests, you might think of yourself as "the hunter of invisible game."

And the Christ-figure imagery of John Steinbeck's "Grapes of Wrath" are expressed even more clearly and forcefully in his often-performed, often-covered, "The Ghost of Tom Joad." Jesus, like old Tom Joad, is "Wherever somebody's fightin' for a place to stand/Or a decent job of a helpin' hand."

Theologically, this is a fine album indeed.

Rev. Tom Goodhue is executive director of the Long Island Council of Churches. You can reach him at 516-565-0290, ext. 206, or tomgoodhue@optonline.net.

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5/18 City Society Annual Meeting

Scheduled speaker is Jennifer Jones Austin, chief executive of the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies, and co-chair of NYC Mayor Bill de Blasio's transition team. The event at the Church of Saint Paul & St. Andrew UM, 263 West 86th Street, will begin at 3:30 p.m.

6/4-7 Annual Conference Gathering

The annual meeting of NYAC clergy and lay members runs from Wednesday to Saturday at Hofstra University, Hempstead, N.Y. In addition to the business sessions and times of celebration, this year's agenda includes the election of clergy and lay delegates to jurisdictional and general conferences. The call to conference packets will be mailed out around March 1 and online registration will then be available.

7/24-26 Mission "u" Returns

Studies for the 2014 session in Danbury, Conn., will include the church and people with disabilities, the Roma of Europe and "how is it with your soul." The one-day Saturday Sampler will again be offered on July 26.

OBITUARY

Rev. Dr. Gayle C. Felton

The Rev. Dr. Gayle C. Felton, 71, a clergy member of the North Carolina Conference known for her published works on baptism and the sacraments, died Jan. 25. She was the primary author of the 2004 denominational statement on Holy Communion, "This Holy Mystery."

Felton received her master of divinity and doctorate from Duke University, where she taught in the School of Divinity for more than a decade, guiding and influencing a generation of pastors and others serving the United Methodist Church. Felton's scholarship largely focused on the history of Methodism with special emphasis on the sacraments.

Among her published works are "This Gift of Water," "By Water and the Spirit," "This Holy Mystery," "United Methodists and the Sacraments," and "The Coming of Jesus." She was a frequent participant in United Methodist General Conferences and was appointed for many years to the General Board of Discipleship.

Felton had a deep commitment to social justice, working to integrate the public schools in North Carolina and as a pioneer in building the Reconciling Movement, a group advocating for the full inclusion of LGBT persons in the United Methodist Church.