

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

THE VISION

May 2017



Abundant Health

Taking a zumba lesson and learning how to make fun and healthy snacks were just two of the many activities at the "Abundant Health" Expo, sponsored by the Metropolitan District at the New Rochelle UMC on May 6. [Abundant Health](#) is a new initiative of the denomination.



UMC Believes In Welcoming, Not Exiting

When I was a boy my eyes would always light up when my Mom let me buy a "connect the dots" book from the store. The books would usually start off with easy puzzles, ones where you could almost see the final product before you ever got started. But with each passing page, the dots would get more in number and the pictures didn't reveal themselves until the very end. With every number identified and every line drawn, the picture would get clearer and more recognizable. I really enjoyed "connecting the dots."

The fact is, I still do. I have come to believe that the role of leadership is to cast a vision, a picture of what is connected to what can be. I believe that leadership is all about taking a jumbled series of dots and connecting the lines between them in just the right way so that a picture emerges. The real beauty comes when you are able to "connect the dots" between God and us. We call those connections theology.

Theology is defined as "the study of God and of God's relation to the world." Given that definition, it's pretty important that we do some good "theology" today. The events of the world, both outside and inside the church, are really not making a lot of sense these days. Fears and angers are rising. Civility and mutual respect are declining. Simple questions like, "Why is this happening?" and "Where is God in all of this?" are becoming harder and harder

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For a full lineup of events, go to: www.nyac.com/conferencecalendar.

5/20 Missional Community Engagement Forum

Rev. Dr. F. Douglas Powe, Jr., author of “Transforming Community,” will facilitate this 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. training event at the Doral Arrowwood Conference Center, 975 Anderson Hill Rd., Rye Brook, N.Y. This is considered as a follow-up to the Laity Convocation, but all laity and clergy are also invited to participate. David Gilmore, director of congregational development and revitalization, is the facilitator; please direct questions to [Carol Merante](mailto:Carol.Merante@nyac-umc.com) in the conference office. The fee per person is \$50 and includes materials, lunch and snacks; [register](http://www.nyac.com/conferencecalendar) online.

5/20 UMM Annual Lunch

Rev. Steve Knutsen of the UMC of Seaford is the featured speaker for this event from noon to 4 p.m. Spaghetti and meatballs at noon at the Huntington-Cold Spring Harbor UMC, 180 West Neck Rd., Huntington. Cost is \$35. To reserve, call Wayne at 516-551-8966, or Ben at 917-715-9872.

6/7–10 2017 Annual Conference

Online [registration](http://www.nyac.com/conferencecalendar) closes on May 24. The theme for the 218th session is “Pathways & Possibilities: The Journey of Disciple Making.” A related story can be found on Page 3.

6/16–17: Anti-Racism Training

The NYAC Commission on Religion and Race is sponsoring a session of “Effective Christian Leadership in a Multicultural World” training. This training is mandatory for all clergy, and members of district committees on ministry and the Board of Ordained Ministry. The sessions, which run from 8:30 a.m. on the first day until 4 p.m. on the second day, will be held at St. Thomas Seminary in Bloomfield, Conn. [Register](http://www.nyac.com/conferencecalendar) on the conference web site at least one week beforehand. Contact Rev. Sheila Beckford at Sheila.Beckford@nyac-umc.com with any questions.

7/7–8 UMM National Gathering

Registration is open for the United Methodist Men’s 12th National Gathering, “Discipleship: The Contact Sport,” at St. Luke’s UMC in Indianapolis. Speakers include Bishops James Swanson Sr. and Jonathan Holston, as well as the Rev. Kevin Watson, Candler School of Theology professor, and Shan Foster, national director of MEND, the YWCA program combatting domestic violence. To register, go to the [UMM web site](http://www.nyac.com/conferencecalendar).

7/14–16 Mission “u”

This year’s event will be held at the Stamford Hilton, 1 First Stamford Place, Stamford, Conn. Watch the conference [calendar](http://www.nyac.com/conferencecalendar) as additional details become available.

9/9 Safe Sanctuaries Training

This workshop from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. is for the person responsible for training volunteers and staff in your church’s Safe Sanctuaries policy. You will leave with tools to help you facilitate training at your church. Topics covered will include reviewing and editing policies, cyber safety, vulnerable adults and more. Register by September 6. Contact Cassandra Negri at childrensministry@nyac-umc.com with any questions or to register.

9/28 Anchor House Banquet

On Thursday September 28th, 2017 @ 6:00pm we will be hosting our annual Graduation Banquet. Anchor House invites you to join us, as we celebrate our clients that have successfully completed treatment. We will be celebrating them in style at the Grand Prospect Hall with an evening filled with hope, fun and fellowship. We hope to see you there!

Vision Deadlines for 2017

The Vision is a monthly online publication of the New York Conference. Deadlines are always the first Friday of the month, with posting to the web site about 10 days later. Deadlines for 2017 are: May 5, June 2, July 7, August 4, September 1, October 6, November 3, and December 1. Please send any stories, photos, ideas, or questions directly to vision@nyac.com.

 <p>The Vision</p>
<p>The News of the New York Conference of the United Methodist Church</p>
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Celebrations and Amendment Votes on Tap

It's just a few short weeks before laity and clergy from across the New York Conference will gather at Hofstra University for the 218th annual session.

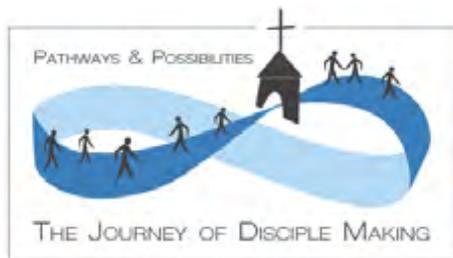
The final day to [register online](#) for the June 7–10 event is May 24; there is no on-site registration. Any clergy person or elected lay members unable to attend annual conference must send a letter or an [email](#) to Conference Secretary Margaret Howe asking to be excused.

Wednesday, June 7: Check in at the Mack Arena begins at 10 a.m., with opening worship at 1 p.m. Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton will preach and preside over Holy Communion. The separate clergy and laity sessions are scheduled to follow at 3 p.m. Rev. Susan Henry-Crowe, general secretary of the General Board of Church and Society, will lead the laity session. After a picnic dinner, the 218th session will be officially called to order. A healing service will conclude the day's events.

Thursday, June 8: The agenda includes the bishop's "State of the Church" address, a memorial service remembering those who have passed away since the last annual conference, a celebration of the 2017 retirement class, workshops, and legislative section meetings.

Rev. Gerald "Jay" Williams, currently the lead pastor of Union UMC in Boston's South End, will preach during the memorial service. He replaces Father Greg Boyle, S.J., who had to bow out due to illness. Williams, a former member of the NYAC, will become the pastor of Glide Memorial UMC in San Francisco on July 1.

Friday, June 9: The day will include reports



from the legislative sections, and an evening service of commissioning, sending and licensing for provisional elders and deacons, local pastors and missionaries. Quest Jamila-Hadaye Tillery Hunter, who grew up in Vanderveer Park UMC in Brooklyn, will be commissioned as a General Board of Global Ministries church and community worker.

Rev. Williams will preach at the commissioning service.

Saturday, June 10: The final day of conference will feature the ordination of elders and deacons in full connection, along with a service of Holy Communion. Bishop Bickerton will preach at the ordination service.

Constitutional Amendments

This year, in addition to the petitions put forth for each legislative section, the annual conference will consider five amendments to the UMC constitution. To be ratified, a constitutional amendment first requires at least a two-thirds vote at General Conference, which happened in May 2016. Then, it must win at least a two-thirds majority of the total voters at annual conferences around the world.

In the coming months, the voters will [consider changes](#) that address matters of gender equality, inclusiveness in membership, delegate and bishop elections, as well as bishop accountability. The voting started at the Liberia Conference in February, and will continue through potentially early next year, depending on when annual conferences hold their meetings. The Council of Bishops will certify the results at its next meeting after the voting concludes.

Here is an overview of the amendments in the order submitted to annual conference voters:

#1: Gender equality

This amendment declares, "men and women are of equal value in the eyes of God." It goes on to say that maleness and femaleness are characteristics of human bodies, not the divine. It also asserts that The United Methodist Church will "seek to eliminate discrimination against

women and girls, whether in organizations or in individuals, in every facet of its life and in society at large."

The amendment, if ratified, would become the new Paragraph 6 in the Book of Discipline, the denomination's governing document. Subsequent constitutional paragraphs would be renumbered. General Conference approved the measure by a vote of 746 to 56.

Carol Napier, a Sunday school teacher for 17 years at Glenn Memorial United Methodist Church in the North Georgia Conference, submitted the amendment.

"I hope that this amendment will help churches remember that girls and women are of equal worth to boys and men because everyone is made in the image of God," she said. "I believe that when churches remember and live out of this truth in all of their ministries, then villages, cities and even nations will be transformed to reflect Jesus' perfect love for all of us."

#2 Inclusion in membership

If adopted, this amendment would add gender, ability, age and marital status to the list of characteristics that do not bar people from membership in the church. Specifically, the amended Paragraph 4 would say that no member shall be "denied access to an equal place in the life, worship and governance of the Church because of race, color, gender, national origin, ability, age, marital status or economic condition."

The vote at General Conference was 509 to 242.

The United Methodist Commission on the Status and Role of Women submitted the amendment and put together a site seeking to [answer frequently asked questions](#) about the changes. For example, the agency notes that gender refers simply to men and women. The amendment also has the support of United Methodist Women, Discipleship Ministries and the DisAbility Ministries Committee.

"Paragraph IV, Article 4 protects people in The United Methodist Church against discrimination in membership based on age, gender, marital status and ability, while still protecting exclusivity in groups like United Methodist Women, youth groups and singles ministries, to name a few," said Dawn Wiggins Hare, top executive of the Status and Role of Women agency. "We are enthusiastically supporting the ratification of this amendment for the betterment of The United Methodist Church."



Rev. Susan Henry-Crowe



Rev. Jay Williams



Missionary Quest Hunter

High Hopes for Living Out Our Witness

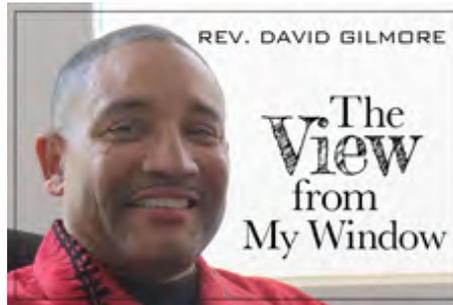
“So I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”

(Mark 11:24)

Approaching my one-year anniversary in our conference, I pause to reflect on how a perceived reality may or may not be an actual reality. Prior to my arrival into the New York Conference, I was cautioned to not get my hopes up too high, because the “Christians in the northeast are different from other parts of the U.S.” Someone even offered the humorous insight, “David, you’re not in Kansas anymore” (note to that “someone” . . . I never was in Kansas).

Thus far, I have participated in the Metropolitan, Catskill Hudson and Long Island West district training days, and what have I discovered—what is most preponderant is this: the desire for something real and filling is just as prevalent here as in any other place I have been.

There is a hunger for something offering



purpose and direction that is hope and not hype-filled—among clergy and laity.

There is a hunger for promise-filled meaning that provides a lasting and not temporary anchor during the storms of life in every community beyond the walls of our local church houses.

And, yes, there is a hunger for a holistic healing rather than something(s) placebic, half-baked and empty that addresses the whole

person physically, emotionally and spiritually!

Where does that leave us?

Hopefully, at a place where we begin the process of filling the void(s) in our lives and the lives of our communities, and it starts with “drinking the Kool-Aid.” If we do not believe and embody the Good News of Jesus Christ, how can we hope for our neighborhoods and churches to believe and embody?

If we “believers” begin to live like we believe, then others will witness our belief being lived out right in front of their eyes, and who knows—maybe THEY will begin to believe, too. We cannot expect others to drink what we’re serving if we have not taken a sip ourselves. In other words, we cannot effect change if we have not been changed. “Drink the Kool-Aid!”

My most fervent prayer is that we “believers” take in what we are supposed to be pouring out, and then watch how God works!

Stepping away from my window now . . .

Celebrations and Amendment Votes on Tap

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#3: Delegate elections

This amendment to Paragraph 34 specifies that elections of delegates to General Conference as well as jurisdictional and central conference meetings will include open nominations from the floor at annual conference sessions. The measure also calls for the election of delegates “by a minimum of a simple majority of the ballots cast.”

General Conference supported the amendment by a vote of 767 to 22.

Paul Clinton Law of the Democratic Republic of the Congo submitted the amendment. The current provision in Paragraph 13 states that delegates “shall be elected in a fair and open process by the annual conferences.” Law said that is “unduly vague in some cultures without a democratic tradition.”

#4: Bishop elections

This amendment to Paragraph 46 states that central conferences are to elect bishops at a regular, not an extra session of the central conference “except where an unexpected vacancy must be filled.” General Conference voted for the change by 621 to 15.

Lonnie D. Brooks, a member of the Alaska Conference, said the amendment aims to treat bishop elections in the central conferences—church regions in Africa, Asia and Europe—in

much the same way they are treated in U.S. jurisdictions.

When bishops are elected in a special session, he said, “some of the delegates who would be present at the regular session will either not be present at a special session or will be placed in a hardship condition by the call of a session for the purpose of electing bishops.”

#5: Bishop accountability

Under this amendment to Paragraph 50, General Conference can adopt provisions for the Council of Bishops to hold individual bishops accountable. General Conference approved the amendment by 715 to 79.

The Western Pennsylvania Conference submitted the legislation to address [a ruling by the denomination’s top court](#), the Judicial Council. That ruling holds that it is unconstitutional for the Council of Bishops to hold its members accountable. Currently, any complaints against bishops are to be handled in the jurisdictions or central conferences where they are elected.

The Rev. Robert Zilhaver, who wrote the legislation, said the goal is to keep primary responsibility for a bishops’ accountability where they are elected, while also creating a mechanism for the Council of Bishops to step in for global accountability if needed. Zilhaver is the senior pastor of DuBois Lakeside United

Methodist Church in Pennsylvania.

“It moves us to a position, where in our church we might hold ourselves accountable for a sin that rises to global expressions,” he said, pointing [to the example of a bishop holding slaves](#), which led to the denomination’s split in 1844. At the same time, he said, he wants to protect “cultural expressions from being labeled a sin and being prosecuted.”

Recent Appointments

It is the intention of Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton to make the following appointments effective July 1, 2017:

Cecile (Sandy) Koppmann to First, Amityville (LIE)

Dale Ashby to Greenville-Norton Hill (CH)

Melvin Boone to Kings Highway, Brooklyn (LIW)

Martha Vink to NOW Larger Cooperative Parish (NY/CT)

Young Hoon Kim to Bethel, Bronx (MET)

For information on the pastors and their new churches, go to the [appointment page](#) on the NYAC web site.

DISASTER RESPONSE MINISTRY

We Can be Anxious or We Can be Prepared

BY TOM VENCUSS

At a recent meeting in New York City between voluntary disaster response organizations, representatives from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the Office of Emergency Management, and other city and local agencies, we took part in a table-top exercise—coordinating how we would respond and interact if a category 3 hurricane were barreling in on the greater New York area.

The thing is, this was not just a theoretical exercise—in recent years we have had Lee, Irene, and Sandy, and narrowly avoided Hermine, Joaquin, and Matthew. As well, there have been a number of more localized events throughout the New York Conference boundaries.

In the past six months, the NYAC disaster response ministry office has been focusing on preparedness. Particularly, developing a district-based structure and plan that would allow us to respond more quickly and effectively in our local communities. We have had trainings for early response teams, disaster emotional and spiritual care, and Connecting Neighbors. The long-term goal is to have every church establish its own disaster response plan—for both its own preparedness and for community response.

One of the major points that came out of the meeting in N.Y.C. was that local municipalities, and other federal, state and local agencies rely on the volunteer sector—particularly the faith community—to be there in times of need.



A first dental checkup—a lot to smile about.

Are we ready? Are you ready? Please see the disaster response table at annual conference for information and resources, or contact Tom Vencuss (tvencuss@nyac.com) to discuss or schedule training events.

Mountains of Hope for Haiti

In recent months Mountains of Hope for Haiti (MHH) has sent two teams to Haiti as part of its on-going work and ministry in the greater Furcy area.

The first was a combined team from Hyde Park and Mary Taylor UM churches in February. The team assisted in constructing a playground at the primary school, provided a community meal, participated in worship, led an activity

involving liturgical dance and “zumba,” and did a VBS-game day program.

The team also had a dentist, Dr. Tina Gage, who provided care to more than 60 persons—most of whom had never seen a dentist before. In addition, there was a first-aid/cardiopulmonary resuscitation class (CPR) offered by several nurses who also led a “Days for Girls” program—distributing more than 90 kits to local women and girls. On the last day, a general discussion about oral hygiene and tooth care was conducted for the community. Funds for the dental clinic were provided by the NYAC Millennial Mission Focus Fund. It is our hope to send another dental team in the fall and we are looking for interested dentists and hygienists.

The second team was from Newtown and Ardsley UM churches. The primary focus here was the distribution of water filters. This was a unique project—coordinated by Jack Agnew of Newtown, who organized the effort as his Eagle Scout project. He raised funds to provide 200 filters. Local technicians from the Haiti Clean Water Project held sessions on understanding bacteria and germs, and the use and maintenance of the filters.

In July, a team of more than 20 youth and adults from Wethersfield UMC will be going back to Furcy.

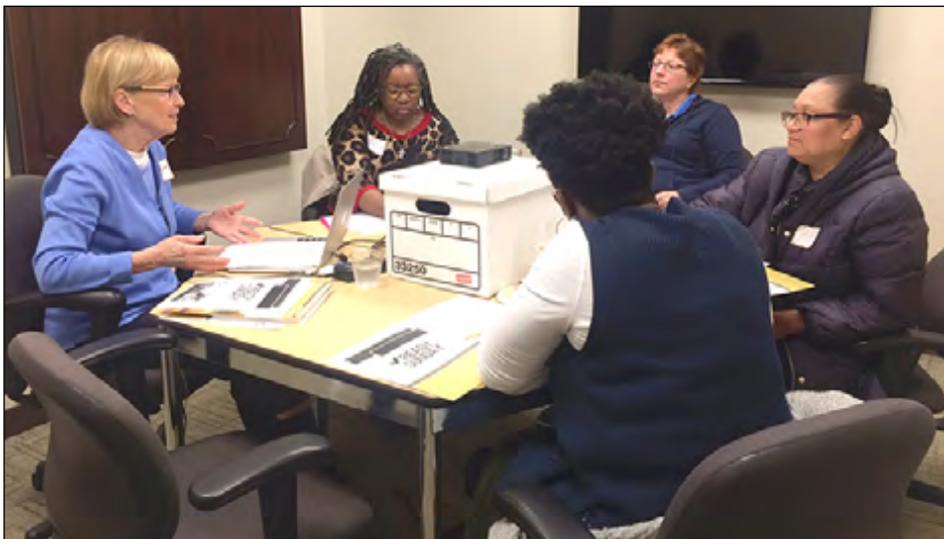
For more information about Mountains of Hope for Haiti, please contact Wendy Vencuss (wvencuss@gmail.com).

Preparing for Recovery: Physical & Spiritual

BY GINA GRUBBS

What does it mean to be prepared for disaster? Are you and your family prepared for a disaster? Is your church prepared? These questions were posed to participants from across the conference who attended the NYAC's Disaster Response Forum on April 22 at the White Plains conference center.

Tom Vencuss, New York Conference disaster response coordinator, led a group of presenters providing information on what qualifies as a disaster, and the roles that churches and individuals may play when disaster strikes. Special guest, Greg Forrester, president of the National Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD), joined the group by Skype to discuss current happenings on disaster preparation in our communities, the region, and the nation. He also addressed some recent



Wendy Vencuss, left, leads a training session on providing spiritual care during a disaster at an April 22 forum at the conference center.

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Consecration of Gay Bishop Against Church Law

BY LINDA BLOOM

UMNS | The consecration of a gay bishop violates church law, the top court of The United Methodist Church ruled in a decision announced April 28.

However, the bishop “remains in good standing,” the Judicial Council said in Decision 1341, until an administrative or judicial process is completed.

“Under the long-standing principle of legality, no individual member or entity may violate, ignore or negate church law,” said the decision, made public April 28. “It is not lawful for the college of bishops of any jurisdictional or central conference to consecrate a self-avowed practicing homosexual bishop.”

Officials in the U.S. Western Jurisdiction [consecrated the Rev. Karen Oliveto as a bishop](#) on July 16, 2016. Based in the Denver area, she is the episcopal leader of the Mountain Sky Area, which encompasses Colorado, Montana, Utah, Wyoming and one church in Idaho.

A petition from the South Central Jurisdiction to the Judicial Council raised four questions about the legality of that election. Judicial Council claimed jurisdiction to review its petition “only with respect to the consecration of an openly homosexual bishop” and said the rest of the petition, related to nomination, election and assignment, “is improper.”

The vote on the decision was 6-3. Judicial Council members N. Oswald Tweh and Deanell Reece Tacha filed a joint dissenting opinion that the council had no

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PHOTO BY MIKE DUBOSE, UMNS

Bishop Karen Oliveto (left) leans over to speak with her wife, Robin Ridenour (behind Oliveto) prior to a meeting of the United Methodist Judicial Council in Newark, N.J. The denomination’s top court ruled on April 28 that the consecration of a gay bishop violates church law. At right is Bishop Elaine Stanovsky.

UMC Believes in Welcoming, Not Exiting

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to answer. Leaders who are able to connect the dots between the events of the world and God’s relation to the world become persons who transmit hope and possibility in the midst of brokenness and confusion.

But it doesn’t stop there. It’s one thing to say what you believe and interpret how God is involved in the world. It’s another to live life with actions that demonstrate our belief. It’s one thing to *believe* in theology. It’s another to *do* theology by backing up what you say you believe.

The other day I read a statement from a group who is currently professing to be concerned about preserving the integrity of our denomination. In that statement this group said, “We further call upon those who feel they cannot in good conscience abide by the doctrines and discipline of the church to seek an honorable exit from our denomination.”

My first reaction to this sentence was a resounding, “*What?*” I read the sentence over and over again looking for a connecting dot between God and the world or a connecting dot between what we say we believe and what we do to demonstrate that belief. The connection between that statement and my understanding of God grew less and less each time I read the sentence. The dots were not lining up and the picture became less and less clear.

This church work “thing” has been something that I have done all my life. The “theology” attached to my church is the main thing that brought clarity when I was confused,

joy when I was sad, and peace when I felt out of control. The more I studied the basic tenets of what it meant to be a Methodist, the more I came to understand that I could not be a Methodist if I did not embrace key words like grace, joy, peace, justice, and love. When I encountered this “God talk,” on the surface it said to me, “Do no harm. Do Good. Stay in Love with God.” When I dug deeper into what we believe it spoke to me words about unconditional love, a grace that existed before I even recognized it, a claim on my life from a God who would not let me go, and an open table that welcomed members, friends, guests, and even enemies to the table of the Lord.

When I looked around and saw other United Methodist’s living out their faith, I began to understand about things like ministry to the poor, spreading the gospel to everyone with no exception, advocating for those who have suffered injustices, and setting no boundaries on how far God might go to welcome someone into heart of God’s love.

Nowhere in my connecting the dots between us and this loving God we serve did I find anything that talked about seeking an honorable exit. Every time I look at this messed up world and connect it with this amazing grace of God, I find words like come, enter, and you are welcome. When I bring scripture into the conversation, I read stories about Jesus welcoming the children, inviting a tax collector to join him for lunch, talking with church leaders in the middle of the night about being

born anew, and forgiving companions who had betrayed him. None of it talks about exiting. All of it talks about welcoming.

I know how hard it is to understand and appreciate the viewpoints of others when those opinions are different from our own. But I believe that we serve a God who loves and welcomes us all no matter our theological viewpoint. I believe in a God that wants to welcome us all into the heart of God and loves us enough to forgive us over and over and over again when can’t just seem to get it right. Nowhere does it talk about exiting. Everywhere it describes a love that just will not let us go.

I believe in a God that allows us to say with confidence and joy, “If you don’t believe as I do, let’s build a relationship together so that we might understand one another more deeply and appreciate the vastness of our God more completely.”

I believe in a God that allows us to say with no hesitation, “There may be days when I don’t agree with you but there is never a day that I do not love you.”

In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus said, “*Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.*” (Matthew 11:28) The last time I checked, I think *all* meant *all*.

That’s connecting the dots. That’s theology. That’s the God we serve.

The Journey Continues, . . .

Thomas J. Bickerton
Resident Bishop

Consecration of Gay Bishop Against Church Law

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jurisdiction over the petition. First lay alternate W. Warren Plowden Jr., who was sitting for council member Beth Capen, and council member Ruben T. Reyes each filed a concurring and dissenting opinion.

The court rejected the argument made during [the April 25 oral hearing](#) by Richard Marsh, Western Jurisdiction counsel, that Oliveto's same-sex marriage to Robin Ridenour in 2014 was not a public statement about her sexual practices.

"A same-sex marriage license issued by competent civil authorities together with the clergy person's status in a same-sex relationship is a public declaration that the person is a self-avowed practicing homosexual" for purposes of the prohibitive language in the United Methodist *Book of Discipline*, Paragraphs 304.3 and 2702.1(b), the council ruled.

Church law requires all clergy persons to dedicate themselves to "the highest ideals of Christian life," the decision said, including "their commitment to abide by and uphold the church's definition of marriage and stance on homosexuality. An openly homosexual and partnered bishop is in violation of those minimum standards."

The decision further found that an openly homosexual and partnered bishop may be charged with disobedience to church law, along with other bishops and clergy persons who actively participate in the consecration of a bishop who has been found to be a self-avowed practicing homosexual

through a judicial or administrative process.

"Self-avowal does not nullify the consecration and cause removal from episcopal office but is a sufficient declaration to subject the bishop's ministerial office to review," the decision said.

Judicial Council spelled out the process required by The Discipline for such a review, which begins with the filing of a complaint against the bishop. If action is not initiated by the jurisdictional or central conference, the president or secretary of that body's college of bishops must take action.

Pending the supervisory response process to review episcopal membership and office, the college of bishops, in consultation with the committee on episcopacy, "may suspend the bishop from all episcopal responsibilities for a period not to exceed 60 days."

The process allows for a bishop to be placed in the retired relationship "regardless of age" if it is "found to be in the best interests of the bishop and/or the church."

If there is no resolution, "the president or secretary of the college of bishops may refer the matter as an administrative or judicial complaint," the ruling concluded.

Oliveto grew up in the Babylon UMC on Long Island, N.Y. She was ordained as an elder in the New York Conference in 1985, and served in Bloomville, N.Y., and in campus ministry at SUNY-Delhi before transferring to the California-Nevada Conference in 1997.

Bishop Responds to Judicial Council Ruling

I, like many of you, read with prayerful concern yesterday the decisions of the United Methodist Judicial Council regarding the status of Bishop Karen Oliveto ([Decision 1341](#)) as well as the Bishop's Decision of Law in the New York Annual Conference ([Decision 1343](#)).

The Judicial Council ruled that Bishop Oliveto remains a bishop in good standing although her consecration violated church law. In making this decision, the Judicial Council ruled that they did not have the power under church law to do anything other than direct the church to use the administrative or judicial process that currently exists within our *Book of Discipline*.

The ruling related to the New York Annual Conference states that the Board of Ordained Ministry is required to examine all persons coming before them as to their fitness for ministry and make full inquiry as to the fitness of the candidate based on the paragraphs of the discipline that are "relevant to election of pastoral ministry." Further, the decision states that "candidates for licensed or ordained ministry in the United Methodist Church should be treated fairly and denial of entry must be based upon the evidence received from the results of the full examination."

During the few short months that I have been in this Annual Conference I have come to believe that our current Board of Ordained Ministry is filled with highly competent and committed servants of Christ who bring integrity and

clear vision to their work of "assuming primary responsibility for the enlistment and recruitment of ordained clergy" (§635.2a, 2012 *United Methodist Book of Discipline*). I trust that their examination of candidates is thorough and comprehensive in nature. I believe that our Board of Ordained Ministry will properly review this Judicial Council decision and continue to act with integrity in the manner by which they do their work. I invite you to join me in prayers of thanksgiving and petition for those persons who have accepted the assignment to serve in this capacity. May God's blessings continue to guide and direct them in the ongoing work that is theirs.

In addition, these past several months I have found myself overwhelmed and extremely blessed by the giftedness of our licensed, commissioned, and ordained clergy. We are blessed in this Annual Conference to have a team of committed servants who have been confirmed by their colleagues as called and gifted for ministry in the present age. I count it a privilege to walk alongside them as we continue our work of revitalizing our churches, renewing the souls of our people, and offering grace and love to a broken world. I also affirm the members of our LGBQTQI community as they work with calling and purpose for the full inclusion rights of all of God's children. As we continue to work diligently in our efforts to welcome and affirm all of God's children as a part of the body of Christ, we pray that God will not only bless us with the gifts and

courage necessary to dismantle the "isms" and "phobias" that separate us from one another, but also with the discernment and insight necessary to replace judgment with grace and condemnation with affirmation as we reach out in ministry to all people everywhere.

It is my hope that we will continue to find significant ways to respect one another in the midst of our ongoing conversations concerning the future of our church and demonstrate to ourselves and the world that our love for one another is genuine and sincere. It is my further hope that we will create the space necessary so that ministry can unfold in the midst of our varied contexts and theologies so that God may be glorified in all things.

I encourage each of you to continue the discipline of remaining focused on the mission of making and nurturing disciples on the journey. I also urge you to be actively praying for Bishop Oliveto, the Board of Ordained Ministry, all persons affected by these decisions, the work of the "Commission on the Way Forward," and the recently announced [special session](#) of the General Conference in 2019.

May God's richest blessings fall upon us as we move forward in ministry together.

The Journey Continues, . . .

Thomas J. Bickerton
Resident Bishop

Read the [statement](#) on Decision 1341 from Bishop Bruce Ough, president of the Council of Bishops.

Review All Clergy Qualifications, Court Says

BY LINDA BLOOM

UMNS | United Methodist boards of ordained ministry must look at all qualifications to determine whether a ministerial candidate is a fitting applicant—including adherence to the church's position on homosexuality.

That is the ruling of the Judicial Council, the denomination's top court, [in petitions related to the New York and Northern Illinois conferences](#), where those boards had publicly declared they would not consider issues of sexuality when evaluating a candidate.

In total, the nine-member Judicial Council deliberated on seven docket items during its April 25–28 spring session, including a petition [challenging last year's election of a lesbian bishop](#), Bishop Karen Oliveto, that drew attention from church members worldwide. About 200 people [attended an April 25 oral hearing](#) on the matter.

In that case, the court ruled that the consecration of a gay bishop violates church law, but said the bishop “remains in good standing” until an administrative or judicial process is completed.

One of the qualifications for candidacy and ordained ministry in The United Methodist Church—as stated in church law—is “fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness.”

“The board of ordained ministry is mandated by the *Book of Discipline* 2012 to examine all applicants as to their fitness for the ordained ministry...,” the council declared in both Decision

1343 regarding a New York Conference bishop's decision of law, and Decision 1344, related to a bishop's decision of law in Northern Illinois.

This “full inquiry” of candidates in the categories of local pastor, associate membership, provisional membership and full conference membership should include all provisions relevant to pastoral ministry, including issues of sexuality, the decisions said.

“Candidates for licensed and ordained ministry seeking election into The United Methodist Church should be treated fairly and denial of entry must be based upon the evidence received from the results of the full examination,” the decisions said.

The New York decision is the continuation of a petition on a bishop's decision of law that was on the council's October 2016 docket. Decision 1343 modifies the ruling the court received from Bishop Jane Allen Middleton, now retired, on two questions raised during annual conference in June.

Paragraph 304.3 in the *Book of Discipline*, which prohibits self-avowed practicing homosexuals from being “certified as candidates, ordained as ministers or appointed to serve in the Methodist Church,” prevents a board of ordained ministry “from ignoring statements of self-disclosure,” the decision said.

The Northern Illinois decision, which modified a decision of law by Bishop Sally Dyck, stressed the duty of the board of ordained minis-

try “to conduct a careful and thorough examination and investigation, not only in terms of depth but also breadth of scope.”

Only after a thorough examination can a person who has met “the disciplinary standards for fitness” be recommended to a conference's clergy session as a candidate for the ministry, Judicial Council said.

In other rulings on the spring docket, Judicial Council affirmed a bishop's decision of law from the 2016 Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

A “Stop the Trials” resolution—calling for the jurisdiction's college of bishops to stop church trials—[was debated, amended and “untitled” before being approved by delegates](#) on July 14.

The court agreed with Bishop Mark J. Webb, who ruled the resolution to be “null, void and of no effect.”

“Jurisdictional conferences are free to adopt resolutions that are aspirational in nature, and to express their ideals and opinions as long as they do not attempt to negate, ignore or contradict the Discipline,” Judicial Council said in Decision 1340.

“They may not pass resolutions that encourage a violation of church law or discourage the enforcement of church law.”

The council found the “untitled resolution” adopted by the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference to be “contrary to the Constitution and The Discipline, and, therefore, null and void.”

Reactions from NYAC Clergy Members

BY JOANNE UTLEY

Editor, *The Vision*

Rev. Alex da Silva Souto, pastor of the New Milford UMC, said he was not necessarily surprised, but “still the Judicial Council decisions knocked the wind out of me. Somehow, I had been nurturing the fragile bud of hope that they would at least defer such detrimental decisions to the Commission on the Way Forward.” Souto, who came out as gay shortly before his [ordination](#) in 2016, was part of the newly formed United Methodist Queer Clergy Caucus and their allies who prayed and held vigil throughout the Newark, N.J., proceedings April 25–28.

Despite “feeling mangled up in mind, body, and spirit, and deeply concerned for our LGBTQI clergy persons and laity,” Souto said that he has been heartened by the diverse body of people across the connection willing to risk it all for the sake of God's justice.

“Together we are peacefully and lovingly

resisting all forms of legalisms and forces that insist on depriving God's children of dignity, humanity and sacred worth, Souto wrote in an email.”

Souto and Rev. Elyse Ambrose, who is an associate pastor at The Church of Village, both expressed gratitude for Bishop Bickerton's [response](#) to the rulings.

Ambrose said in an email that while her congregation was heartbroken by the decisions, they have also been “impassioned—seeking ways to be active and support queer clergy all the more.”

Rev. Bruce Lamb, who describes himself as a proud out LGBT clergy, lamented in an email that the Judicial Council is “expanding ways to keep LGBTQI people out.” But he finds hope in “seeing people getting to experience God's love and knowing that we are all on a journey and that change is possible. God is able to do exceedingly and abundantly more than we ever imagine.” Lamb pastors the Ardsley UMC and

St. Paul's UMC in Hartsdale.

Lydia Lebrón-Rivera, chair of the NYAC Board of Ordained Ministry (BOOM) was unavailable for comment for this story.

A statement from the Wesley Fellowship applauded ruling 1343, and further said, “In order to heal the schism and conflict wrought by willful disobedience, we now call the BOOM to faithfully change its current process and commit itself, in its own policy and practice, as well as the District Committees of Ministry, to follow the direction of the Judicial Council and the Book of Discipline.”

The Wesley Fellowship is an orthodox group of laity and clergy within the New York Conference. They called upon Bishop Bickerton, “in his episcopal and presidential leadership of the New York Conference, to ensure that the ruling of the Judicial Council is the practice of the BOOM at this year's Conference sessions” or they will ask that candidates be deferred for one year until “properly questioned by the BOOM.”

Pastoral Transitions: Etiquette Tips for Parsons

BY THOMAS W. GOODHUE

At the Long Island Council of Churches and in several churches where I served, I was blessed by predecessors who were helpful and supportive. A few, however, were not quite so helpful. . . .

In my first appointment, a deeply-divisive previous pastor kept meeting with the chair of the Pastor-Parish Relations Committee, making it hard for either him or the congregation to heal. My predecessor in my next assignment, by contrast, never created a single problem.

The New York Conference provides some guidance for pastoral transitions on its web site:

“The outgoing pastor and the Committee on Pastor-Parish Relations have the responsibility to inform the congregation of ethical considerations about the transition: the former pastor can no longer be their pastor; that friendships may be continued but discussion about church life is not appropriate. Events that cause the most misunderstanding are funerals and weddings. Church members need to be told that former pastors return for funerals and weddings and other functions only at the invitation of the current pastor who must be consulted first. When former pastors are invited to participate in such events, they do so in an assisting role. Not least, it is expected that parishioners will not follow the former pastor for counseling or other pastoral functions.”

[Frequently Asked Questions for Pastor/Staff-Parish Relations Committees](#)

Long Island East District Superintendent Julia Yh Yim offers additional advice:

- It is wise to avoid contact with your former flock for at least a year.
- Trust God and let your successor provide pastoral ministry—no matter how much you have come to love the congregation you are leaving.
- As you say goodbye, urge your parishioners to trust God to continue the good work you have done.

Departing pastors and P/SPRCs can use the church newsletter to remind everyone about the limits our annual conference suggests. But problems arise, I find, regardless of how clear

the rules are, whenever retirement or a new appointment threatens a clergy person’s self-esteem. Clergy often “need to be needed” and face unique challenges in moving on. Clergy would do well to search for ways to serve wherever we find ourselves, happily or not, and the wider church would be wise to encourage us to use our gifts and graces beyond the local church.

Clergy also need to cultivate avocations apart from our vocation, interests that are pursued when they are not working. These avenues help us thrive in retirement or in unhappy appointments. Perhaps appointment request forms could ask not only if we are ready to retire but also what we want to do next.

Reasonably healthy people can navigate

murky situations. As Rev. Bill Wolf was leaving one church and I was arriving, a member of the church died suddenly. I had scarcely met the grieving family, so it made sense to share the services. He led the wake, where I spoke; I led the funeral, where he preached. It gave the family and the congregation another chance to say goodbye to Bill, and it gave him an occasion to affirm my gifts. It turned out to be a wonderful pastorate.

Tom Goodhue is a retired member of the NYAC. He is completing a biography of the Hawaiian queen Kaahumanu and another about being a good neighbor in a multi-faith, multi-cultural world.

Rallies With the Bishop



Confirmands from across the conference had the opportunity to worship together, assemble health kits, and meet with Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton at two different locations. The group at Grace UMC in Valley Stream poses on the front steps with the bishop; confirmands ask the bishop questions in the gathering at Poughkeepsie UMC.



Some of the resources available from the New York Conference include the video of a 2015 [seminar](#), “Starting Well: A Workshop for New Appointments,” and the article [“Protocols Relating To Transitions in Clergy Leadership.”](#)

Lobbying Brings Progress on HALT Bill

"N-o-o Mo-ore (pause) solitary confi-i-i-ment.

The voice of freedom ain't qui-i-i-i-et.

Cuomo, (clap, clap) Hear us now!"

The 444 steps and grandiose stone carvings of the fabled "Million Dollar Staircase" in the capitol building in Albany were ringing with this chant on May 2 as about 25 members of the NYAC joined with a coalition of justice groups (including our Conference Board of Church and Society) to lobby for the passage of the HALT Solitary Confinement Act (A. 3080/S. 4784).

Currently, more than 4,500 people—disproportionately black, young, and/or mentally ill—are held in solitary in New York on any given day, more than double the national average. Humane Alternatives to Long Term (HALT) Solitary is legislation which will move New York State away from a punishment that the United Nations defines as torture—holding people in isolated confinement for more than 15 days—as well as providing much needed training for prison staff.

Organized by the NY Campaign for Alternatives to Isolated Confinement (CAIC), the Lobby Day began with presentations about the dangers of solitary confinement, followed by the 300 or so participants visiting legislators in teams for the next three hours. Each team was

well versed in the provisions of the bill, the key facts about the harm inflicted by solitary, and the particular legislator's history of comments on the legislation.

In mid-afternoon, after more than 75 lobbying visits, the participants gathered under banners on the Great Western Staircase (aka the "Million Dollar Staircase") to hear heart-rending stories from survivors of solitary and relatives of those who did not. They also sang, chanted and marched with the banners to end the day.

A well-deserved slice of pizza was waiting for all on the way out of the capitol concourse to board the bus back to New Paltz and White Plains. While debriefing on the way home, many expressed feeling tired after the long day, but also shared a sense of exhilaration about what had occurred. One participant said, "Thank you for running this bus. This was my first experience of lobbying and it really made me feel like a citizen!"



A coalition of justice groups, including members of the NYAC, gather on the Great Western Staircase in the Albany Capitol building to lobby for an end to solitary confinement.

The next day there was some immediate gratification when 12 more legislators agreed to sign on to sponsor the bill, with six others strongly considering it and five pledging to vote for it, even if they don't sponsor. In the words of another chant that the group rallied around:

*"Our family is suffering
And we can't wait
We gotta halt solitary
In New York State!"*

JFON Working to Cover Increased Demand

BY JOANNE UTLEY
Editor, *The Vision*

Each year, attorneys across the country working for the Justice For Our Neighbors (JFON) program assist thousands of immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers. According to their web site, they do this one client at a time, slogging through the miles of paperwork, filings, and court appearances for each case.

And these services are needed now more than ever in light of the actions and policies of the Trump administration.

Recently, Rob Rutland-Brown, director of National JFON, reported that the need for services has "skyrocketed." In 2016, JFON served 35 percent more clients than in the previous year, hitting the 10,000 mark in terms of cases undertaken, according to Rutland-Brown. The organization also opened a site near the US-Mexico border last month in Imperial Valley, California.

Steven Lee, executive director of the NYAC program, agreed about the rising need.

"We are seeing an increased demand for our legal services at our clinics, as well as increased demands for educational workshops," Lee said.

In terms of numbers, JFON has hosted 10 "Know Your Rights" workshops or other education events in the first three months of 2017—the same number that they might normally hold in more than a year.

These workshops are in addition to JFON's regular schedule of legal clinics in four locations in the conference:

- Chinatown, Manhattan: Chinese UMC, founded in 1999
- Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn: John Wesley UMC, founded in 1999
- Flushing, Queens: La Promesa Mission, founded in 2000
- Long Island: Hicksville UMC, founded in 2014

The increased demand for appointments has resulted in a backup of several months, according to managing attorney TJ Mills. His greatest hope is to hire another attorney and find additional office space so "we could see more clients."

JFON-NY is supported as a line item in the NYAC budget each year. For 2017, that amount is \$60,000; their request for 2018 is \$85,000, according to Ross Williams, chief financial officer

for the conference. Discretionary lines in the budget, like JFON, are dependent upon the payment of apportionments for full funding. Since the conference never collects 100 percent of apportionments from its churches, JFON receives roughly 90 percent of its request.

The project is also currently looking for "highly knowledgeable, experienced, and professional members" of individual churches to serve on New York JFON's board of directors. According to Lee, current board chair, Rev. Marjorie Nunes of the Hicksville UMC, has started to bring about a much-needed change in the project's governance culture and more work needs to be done. Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton has also asked Rev. Bill Shillady to serve as the cabinet's representative to the board.

How you can help:

- More information about [NY-JFON](#) and instructions on making financial contributions can be found on their web site. [Steven Lee](#) and [Rev. Marjorie Nunes](#) can each be reached by email.
- NYAC [Task Force](#) on Immigration: Updates on training and action events.

Inspire, Equip Lives for Justice-Making

BY JANE WAKEMAN

Camping and Retreat Ministries

The summer schedule of camping ministries is almost upon us. Our beautiful camps are registering campers, finalizing staffing, preparing the grounds and buildings, all for the joyous beginning of the summer season.

There will be campers returning just as they have for decades to our family camping programs, as well as campers of all ages who are eagerly, and perhaps nervously, anticipating their first experience away from home.

People of all ages and from all walks of life will be looking for adventure, new skills, friendships and community. They may also find something that they did not anticipate – a new and deeper experience of the holy, the eternal and the love of Christ. There is something so compelling about being in a true community where the ways of love and fairness, kindness and peace are taught and lived, that can inspire a lifetime of faith and a deep appreciation of what a just world might look like.

The [seventh of the foundations](#) ascribed to by the United Methodist Camping and Retreat Ministries (UMCRM) is to “inspire and equip lives for love and justice.” UMCRM believes that it is important to intentionally welcome and serve those outside the United Methodist Church through our camping and retreat ministries. Like our local churches, the camping programs seek to touch as many lives as we can. That means inviting everyone into the circle. And to think of our camp guests and retreat groups as income-generating entities or rental groups is to miss the point. It overlooks and trivializes our



Sharing community around the campfire at Kingswood Campsite in Hancock, N.Y.

true purpose, as well as their worth. We provide camping experiences to those who are not likely to be able to afford such beautiful places in which to grow.

“When we inspire the leaders of these groups and families for love, justice and healing, it is one of the very important, unheralded ways that the United Methodist Church actively supports the transformation of world.”

It can be easy to overlook the impact that our camps have on staff members. Counselors, program directors, and volunteers are also recipients of the community and care of camp life. When justice, love and healing take place for

our campers, our staff also bears witness to what Christian community looks like. Our counselors and program directors come from many places. It is a powerful image indeed—people from all over coming together to live in community and live into love and justice, returning home with a new perspective, like ripples in a pond, or a lake or an ocean!

Both Quinipet and Kingswood are still hiring for some staff positions. For more information about those, to register for camp or for more general information, please visit our [web site](#). For more information about how UMCRM works, please visit their [web site](#).

Volunteers Needed for Nicaragua VIM

BY DARYL FITZGIBBONS

Over the past few years, a number of us have been blessed to be part of a mission team to Nicaragua. Once again this year, the New York Conference is organizing a VIM trip to Nicaragua to work with Acción Médica Cristiana, a mission agency that is supported in part by the United Methodist Church. The dates of the trip are August 4–13.

Last summer, our VIM team helped lay the foundation for a bridge that will enable the AMC model farm community of Nueva Jerusalén to safely cross their river. This year our project with AMC will again be in the Matagalpa region, and the field staff there is considering which projects will best meet the community needs. Our goal is to raise \$4,000 toward whatever project they

determine is most necessary and helpful.

Requirements for the trip are:

1. A passport that does not expire within six months of the trip. (Some web sites say three months, some say six. To be safe, have at least six months remaining.)

2. A Volunteer In Mission training course within the last three years.

Immunizations and malaria prophylactic medication are not required, but team members should always visit a travel clinic and visit the [State Department web site](#) for recommendations about travel to Nicaragua.

First timers and people of high school age and up, are welcome to join us! No prior experience is necessary, nor is the ability to speak Spanish. The conditions can be hot and

physically demanding so be sure to have medical clearance and be ready for the challenge.

These things are also necessary: a willingness to try new things, flexibility, desire to work hard and follow instructions (even if we think we know better), getting dirty and hot, making new friends, laughing a lot, worshiping and praising God in many ways, learning about Nicaragua, and sharing faith and life in a different culture and country.

The approximate cost is \$2,100 per person, which covers international airfare and travel fees, and all in-country costs for meals, lodging, transportation, translation/guides, orientation and tourist activities, trip set-up prior to arrival, and personal insurance from the Volunteers in

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LETTER FROM UKRAINE

Coming Together to Celebrate Risen Christ

April 17, 2017 | Kyiv, Ukraine

Dear friends in Christ,

I wish you and your loved ones a Happy Easter. May the joy of the Resurrection fill your hearts and minds with a spirit of thanksgiving and praise, as together we glorify God for Christ's victory over sin and death. As our Christian friends here in Ukraine say, "Христос воскрес! Во истину воскрес!" *Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!*

Unlike most years, in 2017 the observance of Easter in the Orthodox and Western church traditions falls on the same day. So on Sunday, all across Ukraine, believers of all denominations—Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant—celebrated the holy day of Christ's resurrection.

Here in Kyiv, our United Methodist community celebrated these most holy days of the Christian year with two special worship services. On Maundy Thursday, members of our English-language student group joined with the Russian-speaking United Methodist congregation for a very solemn service of worship. As one body, we sang hymns of praise, listened to the reading of Scripture, and reflected upon Jesus' sacrifice for us as we celebrated the sacrament of Holy Communion.

And then on Easter Sunday, the entire United Methodist community—Ukrainian families, international students from Africa, and other guests and visitors—joined as one for a festive celebration to welcome the risen Christ. Following worship, the community gathered around a трапеза ("trapeza"), or long table, to share a meal and enjoy fellowship. The ritual of the Easter "trapeza" comes from monastic times, when holy brothers would emerge from their solitude to break bread with fellow Christians.

In addition to these sacred celebrations, the people of Ukraine also embrace the more secular traditions of this Easter season. One beloved tradition, also marked in other societies around the world, is the painting and displaying of Easter eggs, or pysanky ("pysanki"). Here in Kyiv, in St. Sophia's Square, the very heart of the historic district, hundreds of large painted wooden eggs have been placed in metal stands. Decorated by a cross-section of city residents—from renowned artists to ordinary school

children—these pysanki serve as a reminder of this season of new birth in a joyful and whimsical spirit.

The people of Ukraine take courage and hope in this season of resurrection. It is a much-needed balm, as war continues in the east of the country, and political and economic turmoil create havoc and uncertainty in the daily lives of citizens across Ukraine. I ask you to continue to keep the people of Ukraine in your prayers, that the conflict would end and that all those many lives broken by war and suffering would find healing.

And I also ask you to pray for our growing ministry with international students here in Kyiv. Each Sunday, we gather together for a time of Bible study and fellowship, before joining the Ukrainian United Methodist congregation for worship. On the first Sunday of every month, I lead a service of Holy Communion in English, where students and young adults gather to worship God, offer prayers, and sing songs of praise in their native language. And throughout the week, I provide pastoral care and counseling to the student community, and make home and hospital



Some of the large painted wooden eggs—pysanki—on display in St. Sophia's Square, Kyiv, Ukraine.

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Encourage Elders to Be Politically Active

BY JIM STINSON

Consultant on Older Adult Ministries

Some years ago, I was privileged to be present when a resident at United Methodist Homes in Shelton, Conn., received a call from the White House to wish her well on her 100th birthday.

She received the call graciously and thanked the president and then spoke with the first lady. They chatted for a few moments when the resident said, "I always admired you, but I need to tell you, I don't agree with a lot of what your husband says and does."

Since the phone was on the speaker, we heard the first lady respond, "Neither do I, and I will be sure to tell him what you said." A good chuckle followed and a lesson was reinforced. It's never too late to have a say in how the world and nation is going.

Blessings on the elderly gentleman who, in a casual conversation about the state of the world and our nation's role in it, asked, "When is the last time anyone here wrote or phoned an elected representative locally or



nationally saying, 'Your views do not speak for me.'" Again a lesson was reinforced. It is never too late to have a say in our collective affairs.

The church and our congregations would do well to heed that message. Large portions of our congregations are elderly. What a waste of our power and influence if we neglect engaging them in our common concern for peace with justice. Elected officials are vulnerable and are often moved by phone calls and letters from the people in their districts. Why not provide every member, (especially older adults who often feel like they are not needed and devalued) with names, addresses, and phone numbers of their elected officials? They can share their concerns and how they would want the elected officials to act and vote.

Such an effort can be a powerful statement on different levels. It can have a leavening effect on all members. It can be a way to teach that civic responsibility doesn't come with an expiration date. And it is a means of teaching a Christ-like way of speaking truth to power. Supplying such information does not have to convey a specific stance of the congregation. It simply encourages people to speak out of their faith. Surely in and of itself that is a vital part of the church's ongoing role in Christian formation.

Church & Pub Compete to Help Food Pantry

For the third year in a row, Diamond Hill United Methodist Church and the Little Pub have sponsored a “PB & J Challenge” to benefit Neighbor to Neighbor, a local food pantry and aid agency. The church and the pub, neighbors on East Putnam Avenue in Cos Cob, Conn., brainstormed about ways they could work together to make a difference in their community.

This friendly competition was the result.

Throughout the month of April, the church collected jars of peanut butter and the Little Pub collected jars of jelly. The competition has caught the interest of the community and the eye of the local newspapers. The pub had T-shirts made for their staff in a grape jelly color and the church wore “peanut butter” colored shirts.

“It was not unusual for us to find jars of peanut on the front steps of the church or waiting at the side door when we arrived in the morning. So this year we set out collection bins at both doors,” said Rev. Carol Bloom, the church’s pastor.

Bill Taylor, general manager of Little Pub, added, “We also gave our patrons the option of adding the cost of a jar of jelly to their check, and then we purchase the jelly on their behalf.”

The results were tallied on May 1 with Diamond Hill UMC winning the challenge for the third time.

“We’re looking forward to having Little Pub provide the food for one of our events under the terms of the challenge,” said Sandy McMurray, a member of Diamond Hill.

Even though Cos Cob, part of the larger town of Greenwich, is viewed as an affluent community, approximately 5 percent of its residents live in poverty. Another 12 percent of individuals qualify as “asset limited, income constrained, but employed.” More than 1,000 people receive groceries from



Diamond Hill UMC came out ahead again in its PB&J Challenge with the Little Pub. Counting up the jars are Sandra McMurray (front row), Pastor Carol Bloom and Rob Seavey from the church; and Katie Capalbo and Daneen Grabe (in back) from the restaurant.

the food pantry each month; approximately 300 children receive summer lunches through the program.

The church and the pub also collaborate over the summer to collect backpacks and school supplies.

OBITUARIES

Rev. Henry Elias Johnson

The Reverend Henry Elias Johnson of Humble, Texas, died on April 15, 2017. He was 80 years old.

Johnson was born January 8, 1937, in Hernando, Miss., and was called to preach when he was only seven years old. As a child he lived with his maternal grandmother, Mariah Williams, a devoutly religious lady. He was a very studious child, which earned him the nickname “professor.”

In 1962, he graduated from Jackson State University, where he majored in industrial arts and minored in art. Five years later, he graduated from Drake University Divinity School, where he majored in Old Testament studies and Semitic languages and literature. Two days after graduation, Johnson was ordained in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). He later completed additional studies at Boston University, Harvard University and the Foundation for Biblical Research.

Johnson served United Methodist churches in the Detroit, East Ohio and Troy Conferences before joining the New York Conference in 1990. In New York, he served Trinity UMC in White Plains for four years and St. Matthew’s UMC in Ossining for 14 years. He retired in 2007. Upon retirement Johnson and his wife, Helen, relocated to Texas.

In addition to his wife, Helen, he is survived by a daughter, Cassandra C. Johnson of West Des Moines, Iowa; two sons, Ahmad S. Johnson of Des Moines, and Chaucer O. Johnson of San Francisco; grandchildren, Bailey, D’Angelo, Bella, and Brielle of Des Moines; a brother, Laurence Johnson of Memphis; a sister, Geraldine Patton of Hernando, Miss., and a host of nieces, nephews, and cousins. Rev Johnson was preceded in death by a sister, Juanita Marie Johnson.

A memorial service was held April 22 at Atascocita UMC in Atascocita, Texas. Interment will take place at Rosewood Memorial Park in Humble. Condolences may be left for the family at www.rosewood.cc.

Rev. George Edward Harris

The Reverend George Edward Harris of Jensen Beach, Fla., died April 8, 2017, at the Cleveland Clinic in Weston, Fla. He was born October 9, 1938.

After service in the U.S. Army in Germany, Harris completed his undergraduate work at West Virginia Wesleyan College and his graduate work at Yale University. He joined the Army Reserve in Connecticut, where he was a chaplain. Harris later completed a master’s degree in social work at the University of Connecticut.

Rev. Harris served the New York Conference for 31 years, leading congregations at Millerton, N.Y.; Derby, Conn.; Ridges UMC in Stamford; and Bloomfield, Conn. He was appointed in extension ministry from 1979 until his retirement in 2004.

After retiring, Harris and his wife, Linda, moved to Jensen Beach. They enjoyed traveling, especially by cruise ship.

In addition to his wife, Harris is survived by a daughter, Karin (Roger) Elizabeth Kristiansen, and a son, George (Janel) Nelson Harris; four granddaughters, Elizabeth, Cathrine, Krista (Michael), and Kimberly, as well as two great-grandchildren, Isabella and Evelina.

Services will be held at Arlington National Cemetery with Army Honors for Lieutenant Colonel George Edward Harris; date and time are pending. Expressions of sympathy may be made at www.fredhunters.com.

Volunteers Needed for Nicaragua VIM

Continued from page 11

Mission. Because the airfare is a “guesstimate,” the total amount is subject to change. In addition, team members are asked to raise funds to contribute toward the project; that amount will be determined by the number of trip participants.

The budget may be a challenge for some to meet. Experience has shown us that there are many ways to raise support and that many people are willing to help if given the

opportunity. Fundraising ideas include: asking local church mission groups and United Methodist Women for support, selling “shares” for trip with a promise to do a presentation upon return (or some other form of thanks), car washes, bake sales, pancake breakfasts or spaghetti dinners, online fundraisers, bottle drives, letters to friends and family. What suggestions do you have?

What we have found on previous trips is that we are blessed beyond our imaginations by the

experience and the welcome of the Nicaraguan people. We go to learn about Nicaraguan history and culture, and share in their faith and life. We go to work beside them—not to “do for them,” but with them. It can be hot, humid and challenging, but also an opportunity that will change your life.

For more information or for an application, please contact team leader, Daryl Fitzgibbons, at darylfitz@yahoo.com or 203-314-8632. Application deadline is May 15.

Preparing for Recovery: Physical & Spiritual

Continued from page 5

disasters and what volunteer organizations are doing to prepare for future. Forrester formerly led the U.S. disaster response unit of the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR).

In 2016 alone, 36,000 disasters required state or federal resources. Another 12,000 undeclared disasters relied on local resources. When a disaster goes undeclared on the state or federal level, the responsibility for response and recovery falls on the community, which in most cases relies on the church. Each community is responsible for their own disasters.

Following Forrester’s presentation, the participants broke into three groups for specialized training in leadership training, disaster emotional spiritual care, and recertification as early response team (ERT) members.

The leadership training, led by Tom Vencuss, focused on the responsibilities of team leaders, and the role they play in disaster response and recovery. Leaders may be asked to facilitate Volunteers in Mission teams, ERT teams, or disaster recovery teams.

JOB OPENINGS

Organist/Choir Director

The Poughquag UMC is seeking an organist/choir director to lead congregational singing, direct and accompany the church choir, and support the worship service with appropriate musical offerings. This is a part-time position that includes a 9 a.m. worship service on Sunday mornings, and other special services as needed. The choir currently rehearses before and/or after the service.

Please send resume and professional references to: Poughquag UMC, 21 Church St., Poughquag, NY 12570, Attn: Rev. Joanne S. Utley. For questions, please call the church office at 845-724-3912.

Welcome Nancy!

Nancy Fogg, a member of Setauket United Methodist Church since 1969, is the new administrative assistant for Long Island East District Superintendent Julia **Yeon-Hee** Yim. She succeeds long-time office manager, Barbara Atchison, who has retired.

Fogg currently serves on the board of trustees and fundraising committee at the Setauket church. Previously, she has both served as an air traffic controller and trained others in the vocation for the Federal Aviation Administration.

Ross Porter, a member of Mount Kisco UMC, reviewed the requirements of ERTs and the necessary steps to take when called into action. The NYAC is looking to reboot and re-engage our current ERT roster and are always looking for new volunteers to become [certified team members](#).

United Methodists are known for providing the presence of Jesus Christ in times of disaster. Through the disaster emotional and spiritual care (DESC) training, led by Pastor Wendy Vencuss, participants reviewed the importance of care teams and how church care teams can help in times of both crisis and quiet. She also discussed the importance of knowing what to say and what not to say when helping those in need. The NYAC web site has information on upcoming [DESC training](#).

The NYAC Disaster Response Ministries goal, through Connecting Neighbors, disaster emotional and spiritual care (DESC), and early response teams (ERT), is to assist our families, congregations, church districts and communities prepare.

“Disaster response is an effective ministry through which we become instruments of God’s healing and hope. By becoming the hands and feet of Christ, we share in a commitment to the spiritual, emotional, and physical needs of people in a time of crisis.”

Coming Together to Celebrate Risen Christ

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visits to those in need.

I give thanks to God for our developing ministry in Kyiv, and for the opportunity to represent you in this ministry, as a missionary of the United Methodist Church.

May God bless you in this season of Easter!

Yours in Christ,
John

To support my mission service in Ukraine, [make a donation](#) through the secure Global Ministries web site. All 100 percent of your donation goes in support of mission service. Thank you for your prayerful and generous support.

Rev. John Calhoun
Coordinator of International Ministries, Kyiv, Ukraine
Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church
jcalhoun@umcmmission.org