Two district superintendents elevated to the episcopal office

By Maidstone Mulenga
DCA Editor

Two district superintendents changed their titles to bishop on Thursday morning.


McLee was elected on the 21st ballot while Webb was elected on the 35th ballot, a record for the NEJ Conference.

McLee broke into the song when he was introduced to the delegates.

“I told Jesus it would be alright if he changed my name, and on the 21st ballot, he changed my name,” he sang from Nina Simone’s If He changed My Name.

Upon his election, Webb said: “Thank you for your grace,” Webb said. “I appreciate your love prayerful spirit and desire to do what God wants. We are a great Church, and God isn’t finished with us yet.”

McLee and Webb join Sandra Steiner Ball as the newest bishops in the NEJ. Steiner Ball was elected as bishop on Wednesday on the fifth ballot.

The three will be consecrated today at St. Marks UMC.
Today’s Agenda: Friday, July 20

6:30 a.m.  Personal Centering/Devotions
7:00 a.m.  Breakfast – 3rd Floor Pavilion at hotel
8:30 a.m.  Conference Session – Ballroom
           Daily Reports of Sessions Committees
8:45 a.m.  Praise/Worship
           Assignment of Conferences to Episcopal Areas
           Assignment of Bishops to Episcopal Areas
9:30 a.m.  Closing
9:45 a.m.  Area Delegation meetings with assigned Bishops

11:15 a.m. Service of Consecration for Bishops at St. Marks UMC
1:00 p.m.  Adjournment

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Vision Table Report outlines need for vital congregations

By Christian Vischi*

Washington Episcopal Area Resident Bishop John R. Schol shared the grades of the annual conferences related to congregational vitality.

In terms global ranking, there were leaders of the class and four cellar-dwellers.

“A vital congregation is a congregation that is engaged in its community,” explained Bishop Schol. “And gives generously to mission… and is involving more of its members in ministry.”

“They are growing over time.”

In the U.S., the Northeastern Jurisdiction is the most challenged in growing and sustaining highly vital congregations, said Bishop Schol.

Giving the rankings of growing, highly vital congregations, Bishop Schol said one annual conference is in the top third globally, “two of our conferences are in the middle third, seven are in the bottom third… and four are the bottom four.”

Bishop Schol, chair of the Vision Table, said the delegates are gathered to cast a vision for the NEJ.

“This is a time to risk everything,” said Bishop Schol. “This a time for us to meet the challenges before us with faith, daring and courage.”

His Vision Table report was unanimously approved.

During the report, he also congratulated and lifted up annual conferences on their apportionment payments.

Western Pennsylvania paid 100 percent of their apportionment to General Conference, the first time in 17 years, said Bishop Schol. Also paying 100 percent were the Peninsula-Delaware, New York, Greater New Jersey and Baltimore-Washington annual conferences.

The West Virginia Annual Conference went above and beyond that standard, paying 103 percent of their apportionment. “There are some who think this is the first tome West Virginia has paid 100 percent,” said Bishop Schol.

“In the Northeastern Jurisdiction we have more conferences than any other jurisdictions that pay 100 percent.”

*Christian Vischi is the communications associate for the Upper New York Annual Conference.
Future pastors urged to consider VIM experience

By Beth DiCocco

The annual conferences’ boards of ordained ministry are asked to consider requiring all candidates to participate in a VIM experience prior to ordination or licensure.

That is the heart of a resolution proposed by Greg Forrester, Upper New York Annual Conference’s disaster recovery coordinator, who was speaking in his capacity as the Volunteer in Mission (VIM) coordinator for the Northeastern Jurisdiction.

The resolution, which also urges that clergy candidates be required to raise the funds for their mission trips themselves, was adopted by delegates Thursday.

In the discussion before the vote, a delegate raised a concern that the resolution’s requirement that the clergy pay for or raise the funds for their VIM experiences themselves would be prohibitive for low-income candidates.

Another voiced concern that it would not be possible for candidates who have a disability to meet a VIM requirement.

In response, the Rev. Evelyn R. McDonald, delegate from the New York Annual Conference, who “wears a long-leg brace” said:

“I take exception (to the suggestion) that those with disabilities cannot participate in mission,” she said. “I totally support the requirement … it’s important clergy understand our connection as global church and understand what it’s like to be in mission with others.”

“If you have not gone on a mission, I don’t think you should be sitting in here as a delegate,” Rev. McDonald said, earning a round of applause.

Following the approval, Forrester said: “It begins the discussion.”

Forrester said that more than half of the churches in the jurisdiction are now served by licensed local pastors, and while those attending seminary often have to complete a VIM requirement, the licensed local pastors do not.

The rationale as stated with the resolution reads, in part: “We are placing clergy into churches with the expectation that they will lead their United Methodist into outreach ministry. Unfortunately – most clergy do not know how to connect with our UM resources to facilitate connectional mission experiences.”

In presenting VIM report and resolution, Forrester, who has been the jurisdiction’s VIM coordinator for 12 years, said he wanted to “celebrate this area of growth” which he termed “phenomenal.”
Native American Ministries name change approved

WHEREAS, one of the goals of the Task Force was to help organize Committee on Native American Ministries (CoNAM’s) in each conference and at which time, seven (7) of the ten (10) CoNAM’s are organized, and

WHEREAS, The Task Force has been in existence since 1999 and within that time has become very involved in the areas of Native ministries, organizations, communities and peoples at the Conference, Jurisdictional and National levels, and

WHEREAS, the Task Force continues to have a working relationship with the Multi-Ethnic Center which enables the Task Force to be involved with other ethnic groups in the Jurisdiction, and

WHEREAS, the Task Force has diligently worked to obtain operational funds through the support of conference CoNAM’s and other entities,

WHEREAS, this entity must continue to work and advocate for Native people and issues in the Jurisdiction,

BE IT RESOLVED that there be a Northeastern Jurisdiction Native American Ministries Committee.

A traditional welcome at the NEJ Conference

By Richard Vance*

The 2012 Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference began their session on Wednesday with a centering prayer to the four directions and a traditional indigenous Native American welcome from Ellesa High a Native American member of the West Virginia Committee on Native American Ministries (CONAM).

In a traditional gifting ceremony, wampum was given to Bishop Thomas Bickerton of the Pittsburgh Area. Bishop Bickerton was asked to take this gift with him to the Council of Bishops. During this welcome, the bishop and jurisdictional delegates were reminded that the indigenous people of the land were not just here in the past but are still walking with us. The Spirit of Creator God fills these lands and the Creative God’s spirit is dwelling in flowing rivers, the tall standing ones, the trees, the two-legged and four-legged in West Virginia.

As music was being played from a traditional Native American Flute, those gathered were reminded to live in respect for all of creation, living peaceably with each other and asked to walk humbly side by side in harmony with all of God’s creation.

On Thursday morning, Cynthia Ann Kent, Chairperson of the Northeast Jurisdiction Native American Task Force presented a resolution to the delegates to change the status and name of the task force. The resolution to form a Northeastern Jurisdiction Native American Ministries Committee was passed by the conference.

*Vance is a pastor and communicator in the Peninsula-Delaware Annual Conference.
NEJ approves $1,052,925 budget

Delegates to the 2012 Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference on Thursday voted to approve the 2013-2016 budget of $1,052,925.

The 2013-2016 budget is a decrease of $247,265 or 19.1 percent from the 2009-2012 budget. The largest portion of that decrease comes from the elimination of the need for Area Realignment Funds. Other reductions in the budget include a 6 percent reduction in the sessions portion due to another anticipated reduction in the number of delegates for the 2016 Jurisdictional Conference, and a 7.48 percent reduction in the administrative section – due in part to the elimination of the three sub-tables under the Vision Table.

NEJ Treasurer Dight Crain said one concern is that “we do not feel we can under-apportion for the next quadrennium.”

Crain also noted that the Finance Committee met during the morning break and accepted the audit from 2011 from auditors.

Meanwhile, Crain reported that the offering from Wednesday’s Memorial Service totaled $3,860.08.

The offering will be used to further the work of the United Methodist Appalachian Ministry Network.

The network partners with general agencies, annual conferences, districts, and local churches to develop and support leaders within The United Methodist Church in Appalachia.

The network seeks to provide education and training for local church leaders, lay and clergy, in an Appalachian context; advocacy on issues that impact Appalachia, support ministry that addresses systemic causes of poverty in Appalachia and provide a communication strategy to link people across Appalachia.

Learn more about the network and its efforts at www.appalachia-umc.org.

Honor urban ministry, annual conferences told

The 2012 Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference on Thursday approved a resolution by the NEJ Urban Steering Network to promote the urban ministry in the jurisdiction. Here is the text of the following resolution:

Whereas, the primary work and focus of the NEJ Urban Steering Network is to support, affirm and encourage, effective, cutting edge and transformational Ministry in urban and metropolitan areas in this Jurisdiction and;

Whereas, one of the pioneers of the Urban Ministry movement in the United Methodist Church locally and Globally was The Rev. Kim Jefferson and;

Whereas, over a decade ago the NEJ Urban Steering Network began to offer the “Kim Jefferson Award for Effective Urban Ministry” (The Kim Jefferson Award) to Annual Conferences in this Jurisdiction and;

Whereas, several Conferences have annually honored urban ministries with this award,

Be it resolved:

1. That each Annual Conference, by processes already in place for other awards, annually honor an effective, transformative, and cutting edge urban ministry within the bounds of the Conference.

2. That this award be presented during the session of the respective Annual Conference.

Be it further resolved that at each subsequent Jurisdictional Conference, all recipients honored in the previous four years in each respective Annual Conference be appropriately lifted up and honored at the Jurisdictional Conference Session.
## NORTHEASTERN JURISDICTION BUDGET 2013-2016

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<td>B. Multi-ethnic Center for Ministry</td>
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<td>B. 2013-2016 Funding</td>
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* Program Ministries Funded for Years 2013 & 2014. In 2014 Vision Table will evaluate how these ministries are meeting the goals and objectives of the Vision Table and the goals and objectives submitted by the Program Ministries in their budget submissions for the 2013-16 quadrennium and then determine the amount of funding to be allocated the agency for 2015 & 2016 from the total amount in line item 3J.

** To be expended by the College of Bishops.
**NEJ Conference Young People’s report**

By Rev. Hannah A. Bonner*
and Rev. Jordan G. Shaw*

Many times over the past couple years I have heard, from the more cynical amongst us, the phrase “Connectionalism is dead.”

This week, we can see instead that Connectionalism is alive and well. When we look at our young people it is not hard to see why.

This rising generation is the most connected, globally minded, technologically savvy generation that the world has yet seen. It is easy for those of us who are youth and young adults to see that Connectionalism is neither dead nor irrelevant; it is one of our greatest strengths in the current context.

It is not something that we can afford to lose; instead we must continually remind ourselves what it truly is - not a competition, in which different teams come together to do battle - but a Body where each part, each Conference, offers its gifts to the whole.

It is true that the Church is graying at a rapid rate, and that youth and young adult voices are wildly out numbered. And yet, in the midst of all that, they still choose to be here. Let us celebrate them!

Let us celebrate the courage of these young leaders, both clergy and laity, who choose to remain in an institution that often alienates their peers; where, as Bishop Jane Allen Middleton preached Wednesday, many people their age see the Church as the place that hates people who are gay and lesbian.

In the midst of that, these young leaders stay; they offer their time; they offer their gifts; they offer their voices and their leadership. Let us rejoice in their answering Christ’s call on their lives by taking them up on the offer.

Despite their small numbers in local churches, young people are represented in a powerful way, this week, in several of the delegations. These young leaders are engaged in local-church ministry that seeks to do the work of Christ unabashedly.

Gathering for fellowship with young adults late at night, after all the meetings have ended, it is inspiring to hear the struggles and joys of these young delegates and guests.

Around one table, you will find:

The Rev. Stephanie Gottschalk (Western Pennsylvania Annual Conference) who works in ministries of justice and compassion in Pittsburgh, Pa., and who was engaged in vocal leadership among young delegates at General Conference.

Demetrio Beach (Peninsula-Delaware Annual Conference), who, at 24, is the youngest Conference Lay Leader in our denomination.

The Rev. Erica Munoz (Greater New Jersey Annual Conference) who was elected by the Youth Convocation last week to serve in partnership with Ashley Dubois (New England Annual Conference) as the co-coordinators of our NEJ-CYM.

In addition, we have many more young people, like Jordan Harris (Eastern Pennsylvania Annual Conference), Michael Parker (Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference), Rashid Warner (New York Annual Conference), Paul Sweet (Upper New York Annual Conference) and Evan-Michael Drexler (Susquehanna Annual Conference), that are serving as delegates, youth observers, monitors, site hosts, and reporters.

We have intentionally been creating spaces for young people to gather to talk with one another about their hopes and fears for the Church, to blow off steam after a long day, and to connect with young people from other annual conferences.

We gather for morning prayer in Salon E, and every evening at the Whitewater Grille at the Marriott (search for “UMC Northeast Jurisdiction - Young People” on Facebook for updates).

* Rev. Hannah A. Bonner works for Division of Ministries with Young People for the Northeast Jurisdiction.

* The Rev. Jordan G. Shaw is younger clergy coordinator of the New England Annual Conference.
## EPISCOPACY COMMITTEE 2013-2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conference</th>
<th>Clergy</th>
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<td>Terri Rae Chattin</td>
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<td>James Todd</td>
<td>Mary White</td>
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<td>Drew Dyson</td>
<td>Evelynn S. Caterson</td>
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<td>Sandra Steiner Ball*</td>
<td>Demetrio Beach</td>
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<td>New England</td>
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<td>Bonnie Marden</td>
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<td>New York</td>
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<td>Carolyn Engelhardt</td>
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<td>Susquehanna</td>
<td>Mark Webb*</td>
<td>Zedna Haverstock</td>
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<td>Stephanie Deckard</td>
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<td>Western Pennsylvania</td>
<td>Joel Garrett</td>
<td>Sharon Gregory</td>
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*Elected bishop and will be replaced

## EPISCOPACY COMMITTEE 2009-2012

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<td>Joel Garrett, Patricia A. Morris</td>
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NEJ affirms statement of grace, full inclusion

By Alexx Wood

Rev. Scott Campbell, clergy delegate of the New England Conference submitted to the Northeastern Jurisdiction a resolution stating in part that “the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference affirms its commitment to the civil and ecclesiastical rights and privileges of all persons, including lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) persons, and declares its passionate opposition to continued distinctions of church law that restrict the rights and privileges of LGBT people in the UMC.”

Specifically, the language of the resolution declares that our “clergy, lay persons and congregations may feel bound by conscience to offer the ministries and sacraments of the church to all persons on an equal basis to all,” and that even though bound to the Book of Discipline, we are also “bound by Jesus’s commandment to stand with the marginalized and the oppressed in our midst.”

Campbell offered the resolution acknowledging the deep pain around questions of full inclusion in our Church. More than 50 delegates and alternates had signed the petition prior to its presentation at the Conference.

The Rev. Larry Baird, national chair of the Renewal Movement, opposed the motion.

“It seems to be, after having been at General Conference and gone through that battle,” Rev. Baird said, “and listening to the episcopal candidates who all tried to dampen down the argument on this point, (the statement) simply escalates the battle and tension. I urge people to vote no.”

Shirley Readdean, a lay delegate from the Upper New York Annual Conference, spoke in favor of the statement, calling it an issue of justice.

The Jurisdictional delegates affirmed the resolution with 61 percent of the vote.

A Statement of Principle

Be it Resolved, that the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference affirms its commitment to the civil and ecclesiastical rights and privileges of all persons, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) persons, and declares its passionate opposition to continued distinctions of church law that restrict the rights and privileges of LGBT people in The United Methodist Church; and be it further

Resolved, that the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference, acknowledging the grave pastoral crisis facing the church at all levels with regard to the pastoral care of LGBT people, acknowledge that clergy, lay persons and congregations encountering institutional discrimination that inhibits equal access to the means of grace for all persons may feel bound by conscience to offer the ministries and sacraments of the church to all persons on an equal basis. Those who so act according to conscience do so in a way that is consistent with the principles of this jurisdictional conference; and be it further

Resolved, that the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference acknowledge that leaders of the conferences that comprise our jurisdiction, including cabinet members, bishops and members of boards and agencies of the annual conference, while bound to the Book of Discipline, are also bound to exercise their consciences and are bound by Jesus’s commandment to stand with the marginalized and the oppressed in our midst when called upon to enforce unjust laws, policies and procedures to the detriment of gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender individuals wishing to participate fully in the life of The United Methodist Church and those who minister faithfully to them; and be it further

Resolved, that the jurisdictional conference recognize that individuals who take punitive actions against others for offering the sacraments and rituals of the church on an equal basis do so contrary to the highest ideals of the United Methodist Church at the risk of causing grave harm to LGBT persons, their loved ones, their sisters and brothers in Christ, faithful clergy and the United Methodist Church itself.

Images of worship services

Left: Candace Carter and her granddaughter, Taylor Hamilton, serve Holy Communion during Wednesday worship service.
Right: Bishop William Morris preaches during the Thursday morning worship service.
Below: Youths stage a dramatic reading of the scripture. Photos by Maidstone Mulenga
Newest bishop in the NEJ: Rev. Dr. Martin McLee

The Rev. Martin D. McLee sings as he celebrates his election to the episcopal office Thursday at the 2012 Northeastern Jurisdiction Conference in Charleston, W.Va.

By Alexx Wood*

The Rev. Martin D. McLee, 56, was elected on the 21st ballot as a bishop of The United Methodist Church. McLee is the district superintendent of the Metro Boston Hope District in New England conference.

Bishop Peter D. Weaver of the Boston Episcopal area introduced the newest bishop with joy, saying he was truly “one who knows Jesus.”

Before any words would come, McLee broke into song with “I told Jesus it would be alright, if He changed my name,” adding at the end, “and on the 21st ballot – He changed my name.” Addressing the body, McLee remarked “I give honor to God, in whom I live and have my being.”

Active in the denomination and the communities he serves, McLee is currently a member of the Adjunct faculty at Simmons College in the Graduate School of Social Work, serves on the Massachusetts Commission on Health Care Disparities. He has served as delegate for the 2008 and 2012 General Conference of The United Methodist Church. He is the former Senior Pastor of the historic Union United Methodist Church in Boston’s South End and served as an Associate Pastor at Dallas’ Hamilton Park United Methodist Church.

McLee has preached and lectured widely. Originally from New York City, he received a BA with Honors from Hunter College in NY. He has graduate degrees in Education and Theology from Fordham University and Southern Methodist University respectively, and a Doctor of Jurisprudence from the Thurgood Marshall School of Law at Texas Southern University.

*Alexx Wood is the communications director for the New England Annual Conference.
Newest bishop in the NEJ: Rev. Mark Webb

By DCA Staff

On the 35th ballot, a record for the NEJ Conference, delegates elected the Rev. Mark Webb bishop of the United Methodist Church.

In introducing Bishop-elect Webb, Presiding Bishop Jane Allen Middleton said:

“You are receiving a gift to the Church. This is a man who loves God deeply and lives that every day of his life. He is a man of marvelous conviction and great gifts; the gift to not only to create a vision, but enroll others in that vision.”

Thank you for your grace,” he said. “I appreciate your love prayerful spirit and desire to do what God wants. We are a great Church, and God isn’t finished with us yet.”

The bishop-elect did express some apprehension:

“I’m a little nervous because all these bishops sing,” he said. “Please do not ask me to sing. It’s for your benefit.”

Bishop-elect Webb currently serves as superintendent of the York District in the Susquehanna Annual Conference.

Webb, 47, is a native of York, Pa., and is married to Joy Dianne Webb and the two have two sons. He holds a M. Div from Asbury Theological Seminary and a bachelor’s from Shippensburg University. Before being named superintendent in 2007, Webb served pastor at Aldersgate United Methodist Church, Mechanicsburg, Pa. He earlier served St. Paul’s United Methodist Church, Wormleysburg, Pa.

He has been a delegate to General Conference for three straight conferences since 2004.
Delegates pledge to support ‘Imagine No Malaria’

By Christian Vischi

On July 11, the U.S. Senate agreed to a new resolution supporting the goals and ideals of World Malaria Day, including the target of ending malaria deaths by 2015.

Just over one week later, the delegates at the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference unanimously approved supporting the $75 million campaign by Imagine No Malaria to help eradicate the disease from the world.

Bishop Thomas Bickerton of the Pittsburgh Episcopal Area gave an impassioned presentation, requesting annual conferences to support the campaign.

“We are just a few years away from a vaccine,” said Bishop Bickerton. “A mosquito is a relentless bug and if we don’t continue to squelch the spread of mosquitos they will rise again. … That is why you sense urgency whenever you talk to any of us. Frankly I don’t want to talk about this for the rest of my ministry.

“I ask you to consider coming onboard the Imagine No Malaria campaign.”

He taught the delegates a song that he heard while at the Pacific Northwest Annual Conference.

Bishop Bickerton said the NEJ College of Bishops and three annual conferences are already on board: Western Pennsylvania, Baltimore-Washington and New York annual conferences.

“But we need the rest of you to come on board if we every stand a chance of raising $75 million,” he said.

Minutes later, the delegates unanimously voted to support the campaign after delegate Craig French moved a motion calling for the support.

Bishops Lyght, Matthews, Skeete hailed for supporting Africa University

Kevin G. Goodwin, a member of the Africa University Advisory Development Committee and a lay delegate of the Peninsula-Delaware Annual Conference, offered appreciation to Bishop Ernest S. Lyght, Bishop Marcus Matthews and Bishop F. Herbert Skeete for their support of and dedication to Africa University. “I am standing in the midst of the only jurisdiction that has paid 100 percent of their apportionments for the past two years,” said Goodwin. “I also want to honor the friends in the Upper New York Annual Conference as they are in the midst of a $1 million campaign to raise scholarships for Africa University.”
NEJ agrees to study episcopal election process

By Beth DiCocco*

During the Thursday morning plenary session, delegates to the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference approved a motion to study the processes by which annual conferences nominate and endorse candidates for bishop with a possibility of creating a unified process across conferences.

The motion was proposed by We Hyun Chang, delegate from the New England Annual Conference, who asked that the NEJ Episcopacy and Rules committees undertake a study the annual conferences’ processes in an effort to “ensure a process we can all trust,” he said, citing that delegates get to know the episcopal candidates through a 25-minute interview and their printed biographical information.

Re-tasking the committees to look into this, Chang said, would allow delegates to “have sense of trust and integrity that all candidates endorsed and nominated with a similar process.”

A rule change made Wednesday that allows for “Christian conversation” reads as follows:

“Candidates may engage in Christian conversation with individuals and groups, including communication by electronic means. Web sites, mass-produced advocacy materials, campaign buttons, and fundraising for the purpose of campaigning or supporting a candidate for the episcopal are prohibited.

“Endorsements by annual Conferences, recognized caucuses, and other organizations related to The United Methodist Church are permitted. They may be publicized through the conference and other organizations regular communications channels.

“This shall not preclude annual conference delegations from meeting with and endorsing eligible clergy, inside or outside the membership of the annual conference. Neither shall this rule preclude delegations from gathering prior to Jurisdictional conference for the purpose of sharing information and discussing candidates, provided that such meetings may not include campaigning.”

*DiCocco is writer/editor for the Upper New York Annual Conference.
It’s a New Day!

NEJ Episcopal Address
By Bishop Jane Allen Middleton
Harrisburg Area

It’s a new day! It is a new day because we are people called by Jesus Christ. We have opportunities to deepen our walk with God and to transform the world.

These are extraordinary times to be the church. We are being challenged as never before. Yet, with these times of challenge come extraordinary opportunities to: Rise up! Encounter God! Engage the world!

· We are indeed called to rise up—to speak up, to live up, to join up, to rise up.
· We are called to encounter God, to go deeper than ever before, to be serious about being not just an active church person, but to be a disciple. This is a time to do whatever it takes to grow closer to God, to allow Jesus to live and grow within, to encounter and be encountered by God!
· And we are called to engage the world, to be relevant, to make a difference, to dare to change the world.on behalf of Jesus Christ. And, by the power of Jesus Christ, we are challenged to transform the world. Rise up! Encounter God! Engage the world!

We are called to be resurrection people!

What a time to be alive!

This is the day the Lord has made, Let us rejoice and . . . [be glad in it!]

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ, your bishops are proclaiming that it is a new day! We are living in a time of the refiner’s fire, a time when the church is being called to be the church in risk taking ways. Those churches which dare to take this challenge and to go where God leads, no matter the cost, will bear fruit. Those churches which do not will die.

We do indeed face significant challenges today!

We know that in the United Methodist Church as in other mainline churches, we continue to lose members. In fact the last year that the United Methodist Church grew was in 1962. But we aren’t alone in this drop in participation. For the past 10 years, many of the mega churches and Conservative Christian churches have stopped growing as well.

In a survey taken 52 years ago in 1960, 97 percent of respondents were emphatic about the existence of God. When the same survey was done in 2009 the percentage of Americans who claimed strong be-
belief in God was 71 percent. That is a drop of 26 percent in the number of people who were certain about the existence of God. The category of religious belief and practice that is growing rapidly is the none. That is “n-o-n-e-s”. We know that some 50 percent of the people in our communities have no faith home. The more alarming statistic is that only 25 to 30 percent of adults under 30 claim any religious affiliation.

For too long my friends we, as the church, have been separated from the context in which we do ministry. Our churches have become insular clubs, more focused on institutional survival than on our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. We can no longer live in an ecclesiastical ivory tower, apart from the cares and woes of the world.

So I ask you, are we up to it? Can we truly be resurrection people! Or is our temptation to simply mimic the values of our American society filled with hubris, pride. A recent article in The New Yorker spoke of American children as Hedonistic stating, “contemporary American kids may represent the most indulged young people in the history of the world. It’s not just that they’ve been given unprecedented amounts of stuff—clothes, toys, cameras, skis, computers, televisions, cell phones, PlayStations, iPods. (The market for Burberry Baby and other forms of kiddie ‘couture’ has reportedly been growing by ten per cent a year.) They’ve also been granted unprecedented authority. ‘Parents want their kids’ approval, a reversal of the past ideal of children striving for their parents’ approval,’ [Jean Twenge and W. Keith Campbell, both professors of psychology, have written]. In many middle-class families, children have one, two, sometimes three adults at their beck and call.” This is what the article said and most of us would agree. But we know that it is not only the children who are hedonistic. These children reflect the values of a society which measures worth by possessions. We live in a nation that even in hard times consumes far more than we need for subsistence.

There is increasing disparity between the rich and the poor in our country and throughout the world. And some people have no problem with that! Three fourths of Americans believe that the Bible teaches that “God helps those who help themselves.” Think of it: three out of four Americans believe that this super American idea, a notion at the core of our current individualist politics and culture actually appears in Holy Scripture. In fact, it was Ben Franklin who said, “God helps those who help themselves”. The thing is, not only is Franklin’s wisdom not biblical; it’s counter-biblical. Few ideas could be further from the gospel message. The message of Jesus is a radical summons to love our neighbor.

There is a clear preference for the poor in all of scripture. There are some 3000 references in the Bible proclaiming the need to alleviate poverty.

God’s preference for the poor is repeated over and over in many different ways. And the corollary is also true: God doesn’t seem to have much sympathy for those of us who have plenty and don’t share with the poor. In fact, one of the most uncomfortable passages in the scripture is the story of the rich man, who lives a life of extreme luxury and ignores Lazarus, starving and covered in sores at his gate. When they both die the rich man goes straight to hell and sees Lazarus in heaven. He wants just a drop of water from Lazarus but he doesn’t get it. Then he wants to warn his brothers and begs for the right to do so but that is refused. I find myself thinking about that story as I see evidence of people in Somalia, the Sudan and elsewhere who are watching their children die of starvation. And we know that it is happening in this country as well. And then I wonder, how am I different from that selfish, despicable rich man?

Bill McKibben warns in an article, [The Christian Paradox, Harper’s Magazine, 7-27-2005] “Since the days of Constantine, emperors and rich men have sought to co-opt the teachings of Jesus. As in so many areas of our increasingly market-tested lives, the co-opters - the TV [commentators], the politicians, the Christian ‘interest groups’ - have found a way to make each of us complicit in that travesty, too. They have invited us to subvert the church of Jesus even as we celebrate it. With their help we have made golden calves of ourselves - become a nation of terrified, self-obsessed idols. It works, and it may well keep working for a long time to come. When Americans hunger for selfless love and are fed only love of self, they will remain hungry, and too often hungry people just come back for more of the same.”

I’ve often wonder if the proliferation of reality TV is the modern day version of the gladiators, the Roman means of entertaining the masses while the
country was being destroyed by greed, false idols and corruption. There is today an alarming and rising level of vitriolic discourse in the public arena which spills over into other human interactions, even the church! Perhaps even in our “holy conferencing”. Didn’t we see moments of that at General Conference and didn’t our hearts break? An increasingly polarized society leads to turning sister against sister, brother against brother, factions against factions and results in stalemates which paralyze our democracy and undermines our ability to trust one another. Never has there been a greater need for the church to offer a prophetic healing voice.

Killer diseases still plague millions of people throughout the world. Thank God for the Imagine No Malaria campaign. Because of the work of the United Methodist Church and the efforts of other partners, the death rate has been cut in half. No longer does one person die every 30 seconds but now it is every minute. A victory, but we have a long way to go and the United Methodist church has promised to raise $75 million for that effort. Some of our conferences are already doing this and soon hopefully we all will do our part.

When we consider the principalities and powers which prevail in our word, a domination system that strips away too many of fundamental needs, we know that Jesus calls us to a third way. The Jesus way is the way which God puts before us, the narrow path, the path through the eye of a needle, the path that requires sacrifice, even sacrifice of our very lives, the way of the cross.

The issues we face are daunting but here are signs of hope, there are signs of resurrection! This IS the day the Lord has made!

There is a deep and growing spiritual hunger in our society today. In 1962 pollsters found that only 22 percent of Americans claimed to have had a “mystical experience” of God. Remember, that was about the same time that 97 percent proclaimed a strong belief in God! In 1976 the number of people who had a “mystical experience” of God had risen to 31 percent. By 2009 48 percent of Americans, almost half, claimed a mystical encounter with the divine.

Just as we are experiencing a drop in outward expressions of faith – that is, the church and other faith communities, there is a powerful and growing trend of evidence of an increase in the inner experience of God.

Diana Butler Bass in her book Christianity after Religion points out that people are hungering for meaning in their lives. We are the ones, we are the people, we United Methodists have the potential and indeed the capacity to speak to that deep hunger which is growing and expanding. This is our opportunity to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ in such a way that people come to understand that the deep spiritual hunger they are feeling will be fed by a relationship with Christ.

Robert Bellah said in an address to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America in 1996, “At the beginning of the [20th] century, American Protestants looked forward to our Christian nation leading an effort to convert the rest of
the world. As the 20th century closes, we see that it is we Americans who, at every level, are lost in sin. If the Church is, as I believe the evidence indicates, virtually the only effective functioning institution in our civil society, then we may indeed look to the Church for a saving initiative in the grace of God.”

Bellah makes a most remarkable statement here: “the church is virtually the only effective functioning institution in our civil society”. If we are to be that we need to step up! Or to put it another way, we need to Rise Up! Encounter God! and Engage the World!

George Barna has said that no mainline denomination is better poised for growth than we are as United Methodists. Why? First, because of our theology: the Wesleyan concept of personal holiness and scriptural holiness speaks to the heart of faith and the yearning of those who are searching for meaning. Our commitment as United Methodists is to seeking deeper relationship with God. And we insist on faith bearing fruit, our mandate is to allow that faith to manifest itself in acts of justice and mercy which gives purpose to our lives. Personal/scriptural holiness and social holiness are two sides of a whole.

And second, he points to the power of our being a connectional church. We do not have hundreds of unconnected congregations, rather we are knit together, we support and uphold each other. We are in a position to dramatically shift our system.

We’re seeing signs of new life, of the creation of a firm foundation: small groups are growing throughout the jurisdiction. From Wesleyan class meetings to prayer groups to every possible connection, our history is that disciples are grown when people share scripture and faith in intimate small groups and they are growing. The fertile ground of small groups has been tilled with 30 years of disciple bible study. This remarkable program which has reached almost two million people is yielding a biblically literate laity and clergy. How many here have taken part in at least one disciple bible study course? We are making disciples as people grow deeper in faith.

And we’re seeing congregations moving beyond their walls to impact their communities and beyond. Our jurisdiction in 2010 collectively served 3.6 million people through our community outreach ministries. That number for 2011 increased dramatically because the Upper New York Conference alone served food to over 1.8 million people! We’re getting it my friends. We’re committed in real ways to being partners with God in transforming the world.

Our Council of Bishops has challenged us with the Call to Action. We have a mandate to spread the good news of Jesus Christ. We are being challenged to be accountable as never before in proven measures of church vitality. Those five fundamental measures are: number of people in worship; number of professions of faith; participation in small groups; numbers of people in mission; and money given to mission. Our reality is this: disciples are not made at the district level or at the conference level or at the jurisdictional level or at the general church level. Disciples are made in the local church. Disciples are made when a neighbor offers to bring a neighbor to church; when a nurse shares with another nurse the transformation she’s experienced through her local church; when a truck driver tells his customer how it is that his life has been changed by Jesus; when a youth brings a lonely friend to youth group.

The promise is that in this journey to revitalize our church, God is with us. (Isaiah 43:1b-3a)

“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you. . . For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.”

How must we configure ourselves as the Northeastern Jurisdiction to provide appropriate Episcopal areas? Four years ago we approved a plan to realign six annual conferences in order to reposition ourselves for a bold new venture as United Methodists. In September of 2008, these annual conferences enthusiastically approved a plan to form new conferences. It truly seemed that God had called the right episcopal, lay and clergy leadership, had tilled the soil of the hearts of God’s people and had prepared the way for the creation of new ways of being conference.

During this past quadrennium what had been a powerful vision became a reality. It was not without tears that final sessions were held in 2010 of the Troy Conference, the Western New York Conference, the Central New York
Conference, the Central Pennsylvania Conference, and the Wyoming Conference. Within days of shedding those tears there was great celebration and rejoicing as the Upper New York Annual Conference and the Susquehanna Annual Conference were formed. And an expanded New England Conference welcomed Vermonters from the Troy Conference. We rejoiced that God was doing a new thing in our midst!

These conferences modeled what we are asking our churches to do: we must be bold and courageous in order to follow where God is leading, whatever the cost! All of these conferences have experienced this as a wonderful unfrozen moment to rediscover God’s activity and God’s yearning for us.

So where are we now as a jurisdiction? In anticipation of a possible further reduction in 2016 of the number of bishops assigned to the Northeastern jurisdiction, a task force was established by action of the 2008 NEJ to explore our options. We subsequently learned that unless a change was made in the Book of Discipline at the 2012 General Conference, we would not lose another bishop. Proposed changes were not approved. Now barring an unforeseen development, we can anticipate that at least through 2020 we will continue to have nine Episcopal areas in the Northeastern Jurisdiction.

The task force will be recommending to you that no change be made in Episcopal areas.

If we put all of our energies into growing our churches we do not need to face a possible loss of another bishop.

What does the future hold for ministry in the Northeastern Jurisdiction?

The news we must pay attention to is that from 2005 to 2010 we had a drop in membership of 9% in our jurisdiction and a drop in attendance of 10%. Perhaps more alarming is that in those five years we had a drop in professions of faith of 21% and a drop in baptisms of 25%. There are hundreds of growing, vital congregations in the NEJ but as a jurisdiction we have losses.

But there is also good news. We have had a 53% increase in the number of multi ethnic congregations in the Northeastern jurisdiction which is the highest percentage of increase of multi ethnic congregations of all of the jurisdictions. These are defined by the way as a congregation which has no more than 70 percent of any ethnic group. We are very slowly looking like the whole people of God!

We had the greatest percentage increase in the number of local pastors of any jurisdiction. I believe this is actually cause for celebration. We are returning to our roots of more of a tent maker ministry in which persons who are on fire for the Lord are finding a way to serve! Through increased use of Certified Lay Ministers we are finding creative ways to provide pastoral care for our congregations.

In some of our NEJ conferences there was a significant increase in the number of constituents, an increase great enough that it more than offset the loss of membership. Could this be the precursor of a new kind of church, a church that is truly more nimble? Are we perhaps moving slowly but surely to a church which is fulfilling our mission, a church in which people are deeply and seriously engaged in becoming disciples and a church which is passionate about being partners with God in transforming the world.

In a presentation this past January to the NEJ College of Bishops and the Episcopacy Committee Dana Roberts, professor of missiology at Boston University School of Theology said this, “Nobody ever accused a bishop of being too holy. We laypeople expect bishops to stare down the principalities and powers. We expect our bishops to carry the sanctity of their office, and to exhibit the personal charisma of holiness. The good news is that God will help them do this, because sanctity comes through Christ.”

As we gather during these days of holy conferencing our principal task of the Northeastern Jurisdiction Quadrennial Conference 2012 is to elect bishops of the church. This is a daunting and holy calling for you who are delegates. I suggest that you be informed by the words of Professor Roberts which I just quoted and by these further words from her, “In today’s global church, the office of the bishop continues to evolve. As we face a post Christian or non Christian world, we must recapture the identification of the bishop as the chief missionary of the church. This means electing bishops who are vocationally called by God to be boundary crossers, who exhibit incarnational humility on behalf of the people; who promote evangeli-
On Friday when we consecrate three new bishops, by God’s grace those we consecrate will be such persons: the chief missionaries of the church, who are vocationally called by God to be boundary crossers, who exhibit incarnational humility on behalf of the people; who promote evangelization combined with holistic formation of people into [United] Methodist beliefs and structures; and who walk in the paths of holiness and represent the unity of the people before God, and represent our church to the world.”

On Friday when we consecrate nine bishops will be assigned an area. And then early the bishop and every bishop will have been made. Every area will have a a.m. or so on Friday decisions will be made. When elections have been accomplished, the Committee on the Episcopacy will begin its discernment process and at the end of the weeks. When elections have been accomplished, the Committee on Episcopacy will begin its discernment process and at the end of the evening or, if history repeats itself, at some point hopefully before 6 a.m. or so on Friday decisions will be made. Every area will have a bishop and every bishop will have an assigned area. And then early Friday morning nine bishops will be informed as to which area they will be assigned. No negotiation, no windshield tour of the area, no time to decide yes or no. They will be assigned. Sent.

Several years ago I received a gift from the Wellsboro District, the northern tier of the then Central Pennsylvania Conference – they like to describe themselves “as miles above the rest”. As you can see, this stole has most unusual liturgical colors. We have the liturgical camouflage and on the other side the liturgical blaze orange. This stole has some symbols on it: on each side there is a deer head – we’re not talking Bambi here! We’re talking trophy. We know that because on each side there is also this symbol, crossed rifles. I guess you could call this the hunter’s liturgical stole! I’m not a hunter. I don’t even eat creatures who walked on four legs! But this came from my people; people whom I love; people whom I serve. And most important of all are the symbols at the top of this stole, on both sides! Do you see the Chi Rho? We will never agree on every single aspect of being the church. But we are one in Jesus Christ, we are one in the Spirit of Christ --- Jesus calls us to a third way, to the Jesus way. And so I wear this stole.

In Ephesians we read, (4) “As a prisoner of the Lord, I beg you to live in a way that is worthy of the people God has chosen to be his own. Always be humble and gentle. Patiently put up with each other and love each other. Try your best to let God’s Spirit keep your hearts united. Do this by living at peace. All of you are part of the same body. There is only one Spirit of God, just as you were given one hope when you were chosen to be God’s people. We have only one Lord, one faith, and one baptism. There is one God who is the Father of all people. Not only is God above all others, but he works by using all of us, and he lives in all of us.”

In all that we do we must focus on one question and only one question, “What is God’s yearning for us as God’s faithful people?” This must be the center of our focus. We can make grand plans, develop strategies, set a vision but at the heart of who we are and what we do must be this passion to respond to God’s deepest yearning for us. We will rarely hear God speaking to us in a clear loud voice, but if we are faithful in asking the question, we will come to know the way, God’s way, the way of the cross. As with Elijah, it may well be the “still small voice.” And so we must listen very, very carefully.

We are united by far more than we are divided. We are a people who are connected, united in one Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

On Friday when we leave this place and in the ensuing years before us, it is my prayer and I hope it is your prayer that we leave with a renewed spirit to truly Rise up! To rise up in union with God’s deepest yearning for us: to rise up as partners with Jesus Christ to truly “change the world!”

It’s time to tell a new story – a story of Jesus and his love. A story of hope and possibility. It’s time to rise up; encounter God; and engage the world! It’s time to truly be resurrection people! And by God’s grace we will!
Who is missing at the table?

What would it be like if you walked into the 2012 Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference and you were the only person who spoke your language? Karen Miller, president of the Northeastern Jurisdictional United Methodist Congress of the Deaf found herself in that situation. As the only Deaf person at the gathering, Karen utilizes the services of Carol Stevens as an interpreter of the events and conversations of this conference.

Karen is attending this Jurisdictional Conference as president and an ambassador for the United Methodist Congress of the Deaf to seek help from Annual Conferences and delegates from the jurisdiction in getting information about Deaf ministries that are occurring in the jurisdiction. The UM Congress of the Deaf was founded in 1976 with a mission to promote Deaf people who use sign language, late-deafened, hard of hearing and deaf-blind ministries.

Based on available information there are less than 20 United Methodist Churches in the NEJ involved in Deaf ministry, yet at the same time only 1% of the Deaf communities say they are associated with a church. One of the reasons for this statistic is that there is little chance that a Deaf person can be fully involved in the church since there is usually no interpretation in the church except on Sunday mornings.

The NEJ Congress of the Deaf is asking for help to change these statistics. Real support of Deaf ministries and communication about where Deaf ministries are occurring will begin the process of changing this current reality.

Next year there will be a mission trip to Kenya just prior to the 3rd International Methodist Deaf Missions Conference.

If you would like more information about this mission trip or you can share information about Deaf ministry in your annual conference, please contact Karen Miller at Watunya@verizon.net or Carol Stevens at carolstevens100@hotmail.com.

NEJ Conference Lay Leaders report

The membership of the group is composed of the most Conference Lay Leader, co and Associate of the ten annual conferences. By the Discipline, they are charged with the responsibility of fostering awareness of the role of laity both within the congregation and through their ministries in the home, workplace, community and world in achieving the mission of the church. Additionally, they are to enable and support lay participation in the planning and decision making processes of the annual conference, district and local church in cooperation with the bishop, district superintendent and pastors. This group is the most diverse association of lay leaders out of the five jurisdictions.

Since 2009-2012, they have been extremely busy in providing leadership training for their conferences and three major leadership conferences for district lay leaders, local church lay leaders and lay speaking ministers in Philadelphia and Boston.

They initiated and participated in a meeting at the United Methodist Convocation of Extended Cabinets in Lake Junaluska, North Carolina with the Council of Bishops to discuss and support the Certified Lay Ministry program.

The newly elected president of the Northeastern Jurisdictional Lay Leaders, Betty Gooch, passed away June 12. Her leadership and spiritual gifts will be greatly missed by the conference and all United Methodists. My last communication will be a training session of lay leaders that will be in October 2012 in the Western Pennsylvania Conference.

Submitted by Oscar W. Harrell, II, Ph.D.
President
Northeastern Jurisdictional Lay Leaders
God’s infinite love inspires mountain painting

By Laura Allen*

Julie Conley remembers her kindergarten art gracing the front of her parents’ refrigerator. It was the beginning of a lifelong passion. “I remember looking at art history books from an early age,” she said. “I was very drawn to the impressionists, especially Monet and Cezanne.”

Conley’s impressionist-themed monoprint “Yonder”, was the cover art for the opening worship bulletin on July 18.

The painting depicts the mountains of West Virginia in green-blue layers. A gray-white blue sky completes the piece. Foggy mountain vistas are a regular sight for West Virginians, and it’s a sight Conley has always loved.

“The hills always amaze me, especially the long views of the mountain ranges. I am fascinated by the misty hills, the variations in values as they stretch out beyond us,” she said.

To create the painting, Conley used oil paints on a piece of plexiglass, which she then pressed onto paper. The resulting image is one of a kind. “It’s tough to get it just right,” she said. When she began working on the piece last year, Conley had no inkling that her art would be used this week at the Northeast Jurisdictional Conference. The piece was originally intended as a gift. “I feel that God often gives me with an idea, an image, that I feel I need to communicate in art,” she said.

This time, God surprised her. The painting wound up working well with the NEJ tagline: “Rise up, encounter God, engage the world.” For Conley, though, there’s a deeper meaning. “God’s love is infinite; it goes on and on like the distant mountain ranges,” she said. “Even in the obstacles, God will make a way.”

*Allen is director of communications for the West Virginia Annual Conference.
Farewell and welcome

ABOVE: Retiring bishops, Bishop Ernest Lyght, Bishop Jane Allen Middleton and Bishop Peter Weaver, give the benediction at the close of the service honoring them and their life of ministry.

RIGHT: The Northeastern Jurisdiction’s bishops-elect Mark Webb, Martin D. McLee and Sandra Steiner Ball are presented together for the first time.

Photos by Christian Vischi and Maidstone Mulenga