

Hector Burgos elected Bishop

By Maidstone Mulenga, DCA Editor



The Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference has elected Rev. Hector A. Burgos, 48, as a bishop of The United Methodist Church. He is the first Hispanic elected bishop in the jurisdiction and the first Puerto Rican elected in the denomination.

Bishop Burgos was elected on the third ballot and the conference erupted into cheers when Bishop Sudarshana Devadhar announced the results.

Before he was elected, Burgos was serving as district superintendent in the Greater New Jersey Annual Conference. He was nominated by MARCHA, the national Hispanic Caucus. He has previously served director of Connectional Ministries.

In his vision statement, Burgos noted that his priorities as an episcopal leader would be to lead the church to continually grow in knowledge, experience and outward expressions of the love of Christ.

"I also envision strategically organizing, overseeing, and evaluating the overall ministry of the church to ensure the church is recruiting and deploying a new generation of effective clergy and laity leaders, equipping leaders and congregations for transformational ministry, being a good steward of the resources entrusted to us by God to fulfill the mission; and promoting unity that embodies the radical and all-inclusive grace of Christ," he said.

Bishop Burgos, who is married to Jazelis and has four children, will be consecrated on Friday.

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CORRECTIONS

Please email corrections in the Daily Christian Advocate to DCA Editor Maidstone Mulenga (mmulenga@umc-cob.org).

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DAILY CHRISTIAN ADVOCATE STAFF

PUBLISHER

- Northeastern Jurisdiction of The United Methodist Church

- Tom Salsgiver, Secretary Elder – Susquehanna Conference

EDITOR

- Maidstone Mulenga
Director of Communications -Council of Bishops
Elder - Baltimore-Washington Conference

DESIGN

- Liz Lennox – Western PA/Susquehanna Conferences

GRAPHICS

- Beth DiCocco – New England Conference
- Alison Burdett – Baltimore-Washington Conference

Burgos becomes first Hispanic bishop in NEJ

By Erik Alsgaard, Baltimore-Washington Conference



History was made in the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference Nov. 2 when the Rev. Hector Burgos, superintendent of the Central District in the Greater New Jersey Conference, was elected as bishop in The United Methodist Church's Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference. With his election, he became the first Latino bishop elected by the Jurisdiction and the first Puerto Rican in the denomination.

Burgos was the first bishop elected at the Nov. 2-4 meeting after Delegates elected Burgos on the third ballot. He received 94 votes out of 150 valid ballots cast. He needed 90 to be elected.

"Dios es bueno," the bishop-elect said in his first remarks to the delegates, guests, and other bishops. "Todo el tiempo. God is good, all the time, and all the time, God is good."

Standing at the podium with his wife, Jazelis, Burgos thanked her for being his support and strength during his time in ministry and during this episcopal journey.

"Friends, some of you heard me say that I'm coming to this with my eyes wide open," he said. "Open your eyes ... look for the

blessings and opportunities God has for us. Friends, the world needs us ... all of us. Let's go and reform the world, In Christ's name."

Burgos was elected by the Northeastern Jurisdiction's 184 total delegates and reserves, an equal number of United Methodist clergy and laity, from the 13 states and the District of Columbia forming



Bishop Burgos bows his head moments after being elected. He describes that moment. "I heard the voice of my mom, reminding me to open my eyes. I heard the voice of my grandmother, who 23 years ago, when I moved to NJ from Puerto Rico and things started to go horribly wrong, said, 'you stay there until God's will is fulfilled in your life'. And I heard God saying 'this is the time'. And those 3 voices that came, I found that moment of peace."

the Northeastern Jurisdiction. The assignments of bishops in the Northeastern Jurisdiction for the next two years will be announced later in the week.

His two-year term of service begins Jan. 1. In the United States, bishops are elected to serve for life.

Burgos was the endorsed candidate of MARCHA, the Hispanic/Latino Caucus of The United Methodist Church.

"At this pivotal time in the history of our denomination," he said in an email interview prior to his election. "I am called by God to offer myself to lead in the office of bishop in the footsteps of the prophet Nehemiah, whom God called to lead the people to rebuild and renew the community during challenging and uncertain times. I humbly can say that I am a leader with strong faith; with a pastoral heart that values, affirms, and cares for all people – especially the most vulnerable."

Burgos has served as Superintendent of the Central District in the Greater New Jersey Conference since 2019. Prior to that, he served as their Director of Connectional Ministries from 2015 to 2019.

He also has served as Interim Executive Director, NextGen Ministries, in the Greater New Jersey Conference; Director of Worship and Urban Ministries in Greater New Jersey; lead pastor at Oasis UMC in Pleasantville, New Jersey, from 2009 to 2014, and as Associate Pastor, First UMC in Tuckerton and Assistant Pastor at West Creek UMC.

In The United Methodist Church, bishops are ordained elders who are called to "lead and oversee the spiritual and temporal affairs of The United Methodist Church." Bishops, in consultation with district superintendents, are responsible for appointing clergy. They also preside at annual conferences, jurisdictional conferences and General Conference, the denomination's top law-making assembly.

He and other new bishops are coming aboard as the denomination deals with the continuing fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic and rising congregational disaffiliations amid a denominational splintering.

Delegates approve election of 2 bishops; certify retirements

By Beth DiCocco, Director of Communications, New England Annual Conference



The 21st Session of the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference plenary session began with Bishop Mark J. Webb presiding in a “team model” with Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball and Bishop Jeremiah Park.

Bishop Webb welcomed everyone saying he appreciated the ability to meet virtually amid the pandemic, but “those little boxes just don’t capture the full essence.”

Host Bishop LaTrelle Miller Easterling brought greetings from the Peninsula-Delaware and Baltimore-Washington Conferences and the long list of significant places in Methodist history that can be found here. Welcome to:

- The great state of Maryland
- University of Maryland
- The land of the Piscataway people
- The first meeting place of Methodists in the new world beginning in 1759 – the Strawbridge Shrine
- Home of Lovely Lane Meeting House, the mother church of American Methodism, where in 1784 the Christmas Conference was held, and Methodist Episcopal Church was born

- Mother church of African American Methodism, Sharp Street Memorial, founded in 1787

- Seat of justice where the General Board of Church & Society and the General Commission on Religion and Race are centered ...

“It is apropos that we assemble here today framing our holy conferencing as “One in Ministry to All the World,” she said.

On Wednesday, there were 152 delegates seated and voting, along with six youth delegates. Youth cannot vote but are welcome to make motions and ask questions.

Conference Secretary Tom Salsgiver noted that the jurisdiction has 20 youth delegates, but due to school and other commitments all were not able to attend. He also noted that the NEJ is the only U.S. jurisdiction that ensures that there are youth representatives.

After a refresher on how to use their voting devices and the approval of some of the organizing motions, NEJ delegates began their first official day by approving the Committee on Episcopacy’s motion to elect two bishops.

The Committee's original motion to elect one bishop was amended at the Oct. 15 special session.

Sam Smith, delegate from Upper NY, made a motion to increase the number of elections to three, asking:

"Are we a jurisdiction that worships scarcity or abundance? ... GCFA's projections regarding the Episcopal Fund and other information presented to delegates, Smith said, present "a dim and hopeless future" for The UMC, but he asked, "What if we succeed? What if we grow?"



If so, he said, "I like to have adequate episcopal leadership who can lead us to transform the world."

Baltimore-Washington Delegate Sarah Schlieckert spoke against the amendment saying electing fewer bishops is a question of priorities.

"When I think about the sort of ministry that supports the making of disciples ... I know that being able to resource our local churches, being able to allow more funds to stay in our local churches, that is how the United Methodist Church will grow ... that's where we need to invest.

The delegates heard other speeches in favor and against the amendment as well as got additional clarification from GCFA about the financial projections, which are based different election scenarios across the denomination, before ultimately approving the election of two bishops.

During the morning plenary, delegates also approved the certification of the retirements of Bishop Webb and Bishop Sudarshana Devadhar. Bishop Devadhar, who was due to retire in 2020 stayed on amid the postponement of General Conference. Bishop Webb announced his intention to retire earlier this year. Both will complete active service on Dec. 31.

OTHER ORGANIZING MOTIONS APPROVED:

Approved: Adopting the rules as amended. The amendment to Rule 10 was made by Eastern PA Delegate Robin Hynicka to expand the voting area of the Conference.

"The voting area of the conference shall include the lactation room or area and shall be so equipped as to provide for the full participation of the delegate or delegates in the lactation area."

Once it was approved, the Conference Secretary said the necessary changes to the area would be made as quickly as possible.

Approved: Adopting the agenda with the flexibility of adjusting items as necessary.

Approved: Permission to those non-delegates to speak/make motions as needed

OTHER PRESENTATIONS

Rev. Sherri Rood, Upper NY Conference, presented the Finance Report for consideration in advance of delegates taking up the report and budget on Thursday.

The Boundaries Committee presented its report and Rev. Becca Girrell, New England Conference, offered the following motion on behalf of the committee.

The NEJ authorize the Committee on Episcopacy and the Boundaries Committee to contract an outside facilitator to organize, convene and facilitate a joint task force that would include the above and the College of Bishops charged with "envisioning and recommending the strategic direction and alignment of the jurisdiction in light of the emerging circumstances" including the potential reduction or realignment of episcopal areas, declining attendance and membership.

Since the motion has financial implications, it is automatically referred to the Finance Committee and will come back to the floor later in the Conference.

The resolution entitled "Queer Delegates' Call to Center Justive and Empowerment for LGBTQIA+ People in the UMC" was approved in the afternoon plenary session.



NEJ remembers bishops, spouses, and other saints

By Beth DiCocco, Director of Communications, New England Annual Conference



On Wednesday, the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference remembered bishops, spouses, and other prominent leaders in the NEJ who have died since the last conference in 2016.

Bishop Sudarshana Devadhar, who leads the New England Conference, preached.

"We are gathered here to make some crucial decisions," he said. "As you fondly remember

these saints and others who left a legacy that shifted their corner of the world for good, can you envision what their advice would be to you today as you interview episcopal candidates and decide which leaders the church needs to truly be the church?"

Too often, the bishop said, the church "has fought the wrong battles at wrong times."

Using an analogy from Rev. Wayne Lavender's book, "Counting Ants While the Elephants March By: Thoughts on Church and State, Poverty and Terrorism, War and Peace," Bishop Devadhar said we are "attempting to kill the ants while the elephants are rampaging through the land."

"Many a time I wonder and lament: are we simply a private social club or are we truly the Church of Jesus Christ?" Bishop Devadhar asked. "When did we stop being the global church who cares about God's children everywhere and the stewardship of God's creation? As we come

"... Paul is concerned about them maintaining unity and keeping the new believers centered in Christ. For Paul, that unity cannot be achieved without humility."

- Bishop Devadhar

to the Lord's Supper, we say through our lips that Christ's table is an open table, yet we don't demonstrate that all means all."

The title for his sermon, "Whose Interest?" used Philippians 2:1-11. His words focused particularly on the fourth verse: "Let each of you look not to your own interests but to the interests of others."

"Friends, as we celebrate these saints who changed, molded, and influenced us, do you notice a similar quality in their legacies? All of them served with humility and grace and in the interest of others," the bishop said. "The question now is what have we done with these teachings they left us? What are we doing or what can we do to put the interest of others and the interest of God and the Church above our own interests?"

"As you discern," said the bishop, addressing the delegates, "ask yourselves in whose interest your decisions lie. It must not be in yours or even in that of the saints, but in God's interest that your discernment is based."

Quoting Bishop James K. Mathews at the 1996 NEJ Conference, Bishop

Devadhar said: "We are on the edge – where God is at work. Therefore, we must work with God where we are or some things will not be done. This is our identity."

New England Conference Delegate Amanda Bonnette-Kim served as liturgist. Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball and Bishop Mark J. Webb served as celebrants. At one point, Bishop Steiner Ball held up the wampum beads that were presented to the NEJ Conference in 2012.

"The alternating white and black wampum beads symbolize that both non-Indian and Indian peoples are equal and can live together in harmony with one another if they speak honestly and respectfully to one another," Bishop Steiner Ball said.

There is a red tassel on each end of the string; the color that often signifies the sacred. It was

the request of the Committee on Native American Ministries (CONAM) that every time the NEJ Conference or the College of Bishops meets that "this sacred string would be present."

"To remind us," Bishop Steiner Ball said, "of the process and the work still yet to be done on reconciliation. And I have carried the wampum to each and every one of the gatherings of the College of Bishops."

Delegates took an offering for Seeds of Security, an entity of the Baltimore-Washington Conference, committed to educating, advocating, resourcing, and providing safe haven for survivors of domestic violence/intimate partner violence.

During his sermon, Bishop Devadhar remembered each of those being memorialized:

- **Eunice Mathews** claimed, "I do not want to be identified as the daughter of Evangelist E. Stanley Jones, nor do I have to be identified as the wife of my husband (Bishop James K. Mathews), but I do have permission to be myself." Having been raised in a male-dominated society with the people of India, her statement gave courage and a voice to the voiceless, the bishop said.
- **Bishop Felton E. May** always knew what was most important and then acted on it, Bishop Devadhar said. He had the courage to say to the Council of Bishops, "Allow me to leave my office as bishop at least for the time being so that I may help others to rescue the life of innocent victims from the drug culture." He told me personally, Bishop Devadhar said, "that though the Council of Bishops supported him, not all the agencies of the church did; yet he kept on going because of his love for innocent victims." In addition to his work on the enormous damage of illegal drugs, he was instrumental in developing the Salt 'n Light Ministry to young people, first in Central Pennsylvania and then far beyond the borders of that annual conference. It is still a vital and growing ministry leading young people to follow Christ.





• **Bishop C. Dale White**, in his own style of servant leadership, changed others through his passion for justice and equality, not just for all of God's children, but for all creation, Bishop Devadhar said. "A prophet who raised questions without fearing anyone, changed society." Among these transformational changes is the lives of hundreds of youths in this jurisdiction since 1986 when his vision for Mission of Peace became a reality. "Perhaps no one has articulated it as well as Beth Capen, Esq. who said 'He modeled the fact that our work and our mission is not about us, it is about those who we are serving in the name of God.' Committed to world peace, in December 1979, Bishop White and six other Protestant clergy unofficially traveled to Iran to meet with Ayatollah Khomeini regarding the Iran Crisis, leaving behind his family during Christmas time."

• **Gwen Ruth White** fully supported her husband and encouraged him throughout his ministry, traveling with him around the world studying world hunger and peace and justice issues, the bishop said. "Gwen was a gifted musician and a true spiritual giant and mentor whose eyes could read you before you even shared what was on your heart. She enabled many people to also become spiritual mentors."

• **Rev. Sherrie Dobbs Johnson**, with great humility and a beautiful smile, touched our hearts and minds with sincere questions and statements. "Before my election," the bishop said, "we discussed my discernment regarding the episcopacy. She told me to do what was

best for me and the church. She said something like, 'Be yourself!' In her own quiet style, Sherrie empowered others with her thoughtful suggestions and guidance."

• **Bishop F. Herbert Skeete**, according to a colleague in the NEJ College of Bishops, made it one of his practices to be very intentional about appointments to missional contexts and inclusiveness in the staff/cabinet. "Though he received vocational scars for it when all people did not see the wisdom of his ways," Bishop Devadhar said, "the New England Conference is better today because of his courageous leadership in bringing the Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and Southern New England Conferences together."

This action was not to get a feather on his cap, the bishop said, but to create one conference with better opportunities for pastors, congregations, and mission. "A passionate supporter of local mission, Bishop Skeete envisioned a strong United Methodist Foundation in New England that was birthed during the challenging times of that merger. He was also a strong advocate for Africa University. Wherever he served, his prophetic mind and courageous leadership led him to speak the truth even at the cost of losing popularity."



• **Bishop Joseph Yeakel's** understanding of the Book of Discipline and its interpretation was second to none, Bishop Devadhar said. "He knew his people by name, often wrote personal

notes to clergy and laity, and deeply cared for both clergy and laity. A respectable layperson in our denomination commented that during Bishop Yeakel's episcopacy, he noted the gifts and graces of laity, nurtured them, and brought them to the table. As one of my mentors, he advised me to let the clergy make the decisions when presiding at clergy session and not to forget to use the privilege of executive session where there can be honest discussion with transparency and within the covenant."

- **Tom Price**, a jurisdictional delegate from Baltimore-Washington Conference, loved serving God, loved his beloved wife Becki, music, and helping youth explore their faith. "Tom directed choirs from the age of 17," the bishop said. "He founded Joyful Noise! Youth Choir, which sang at The White House, The Crystal Cathedral, EPCOT and The US Air Force Academy Chapel and with Becki led ROCK!, the BWC youth worship for over 30 years."



- **Jack Middleton's** love for all the people of God was much broader than his well-known love for cars. "He would talk to everyone irrespective of color and creed," the bishop said. "Needless to say, without Jack even realizing it, he changed others by discovering their interests through respectful and open conversations and engaging them. He not only loved being an episcopal spouse, but truly cared and supported his beloved spouse, Bishop Jane Middleton. Whenever Jack was in the room, his presence brought out the light in others."

- **Dight Crain** had a deep love for the church and was a true financial steward for the jurisdiction. "All his decisions as a dedicated NEJ treasurer were made in the best interest of the entire jurisdiction. A member of the New England Conference, Dight was a quiet but faithful friend, often humbly helping others outside the public view."

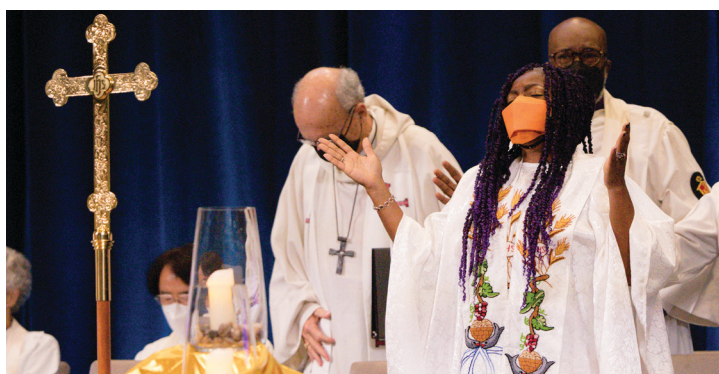
- **Rev. Dr. Shirlyn Henry Brown** was a faithful servant leader in the Peninsula-Delaware Conference. She led several congregations, served as Director of Connectional Ministries and a district superintendent. "She has a passion for kingdom building and kingdom living," Bishop Devadhar said, "as well as incorporating theatre and the arts into her ministry. She served on the Programs and Arrangements Committee of Jurisdictional Conference up until the time of her death."

- **Warren A. Heil, Jr.'s** love for Jesus was one of the first things you noticed when interacting with him, the bishop said. "He was faithful to the end, committed to being a delegate despite facing serious health challenges. His dedication was all based on his unwavering love for Christ and the Church in all circumstances."

- **Faith Weston Geer** was a faithful, gifted, and humble leader in the Western Pennsylvania Conference. "Her administrative skills were a true blessing to her local church," the bishop said, "and the annual conference. Her compassion and love for the church was contagious, and her ability to work with all people complemented her passion for full inclusion and social justice."

- **Former Bishop Hae Jong Kim** and his wife, Wha-Sei, brought the NEJ a new glimpse of what it means to be a global church by giving us an understanding of Korean culture, Bishop Devadhar said. "In addition to being a gifted hymn writer and author, Bishop Kim was responsible for birthing Korean churches in the Northeast. Wha-Sei modeled the essence of Christian love as a spouse and the best of Korean culture."

Prayer and celebration at NEJ



Photos by Deborah Coble (West Virginia Conference); Beth DiCocco (New England Conference); and Alison Burdett (Baltimore-Washington Conference)

Wednesday evening ended with a celebration of the four retiring bishops: Bishop Sudarshana Devadhar, Bishop Peggy A. Johnson, Bishop Jeremiah Park, and Bishop Mark J. Webb.

Bishop LaTrelle Easterling called the four leaders who have “moved many, many mountains” and who have “never tired of being agents of change.”

Colleagues of each retiree shared witness and gratitude – and some amusing stories and inspiring stories of the bishop’s time in ministry. Each bishop shared a favorite hymn and Bible verse and was given time to share their thoughts and gratitude to those who have helped them fulfil their role as bishop.

After each bishop spoke, the body was invited to shout out a word that defined that bishop for them: leader, courageous, bold, kind, brave, loving were heard more than once.



In a move reminiscent of an Upper New York Annual Conference session when he auctioned off a coffee cup to raise funds for the Imagine No Malaria campaign, Bishop Webb’s coffee cup this night raised money for Seeds of Security, which serves victims of domestic violence. The cup went for \$1,500 to the Rev. Jen Williams, pastor at Aldersgate UMC in Mechanicsburg, PA. Bishop Webb agreed to preach at Aldersgate’s Christmas Eve and Easter services.



Bishop Schol delivers State of the NEJ address

"Nobody knows the trouble I've seen, nobody knows but Jesus." — African American spiritual

The State of the NEJ Episcopal Address began with that musical refrain and with the words: Trouble, Trouble.

Bishop John Schol, who serves the Greater New Jersey and Eastern Pennsylvania conferences, delivered the address on behalf of the College of Bishops.

"There are United Methodists among us today and in our congregations who feel harmed, unheard, and unseen," the bishop said.

There those who feel seen, he said, but because of their race, income, sexual orientation, gender, ableness, theology or nation of origin have been relegated as "second-class citizens" or have "no status at all."

Amid all this, Bishop Schol said, there's pandemic exhaustion and anxiety as well as

the dissention and uncertainty within the denomination.

"We are turning on each other rather than turning to each other and turning to God in ministry to all the world," he said.

But while acknowledging these laments, the bishop also highlighted some of the vital ministries going on across the jurisdiction where "God is doing a new thing in ministry as we work together," he said. "Don't you see it springing up all around us?"

The bishop also named four areas of challenge for the NEJ:

- Navigating the pandemic
- Ending the sin of racism
- Living into future
- Engaging with the people in our communities

Read full remarks on next page:

As the Northeastern Jurisdiction, we gather together to be in ministry with the world. Yet there are those who are troubled among us.

There are United Methodists among us today and in our congregations who feel harmed, unheard and unseen. They feel the United Methodist system oppresses and devalues their gifts, their calling and their service.

There are United Methodists among us today and in our congregations who are seen and yet feel their income, race, sexual orientation, gender, ableness, theology, nation of origin, have relegated them to second class status or even no status.

There are United Methodists among us today and in our congregations who are pandemic-exhausted, anxious, burned out, fearful of whether or not their congregations will come back.

There are United Methodists among us who are tired of the fight, of the continual push and pull, of rulemaking, rule bending and rule breaking, who would rather disaffiliate or feel the church is trying to push them out. We are turning on each other, rather than turning to each other and turning together toward God in ministry to all the world.

Let us be honest: the state of the church, of ministry, of our people is beaten down. We are weary, anxious, frustrated and some are angry.

Having the mind of Christ is a hard thing to do when you are not seen, not heard, when you have been wrestling with a pandemic and racism and feel the denomination does not embrace you for who you are or because your theology and beliefs are not valued.

But every time God has been ready to do a new thing, trouble was at its height, trials were all around, hope was at its lowest ebb. For a tormented people enslaved in Egypt, or a wandering people on a dusty trail in the wilderness, or a brave boy facing a fearsome giant on the battlefield, or a huddled group of disciples in an upper room, God was working a new thing. Can't you see it? God's new thing is springing up all around us even today. (Isaiah 43:19 and 65:16-17). You, the Northeastern Jurisdiction are

examples of God springing up and doing a new thing.

- In West Virginia, a mobile children's ministry goes to where the kids are to share God's love.
- Asbury Church in Western Pennsylvania partnered with the Fijian Community to open a Fijian Store to offer food and other commodities from the Fijian culture.
- In New England, a Sex/Gender-Based Crisis Response Team has been organized to respond to instances of sexism and discrimination based on gender, as well as to provide training to prevent harm across the New England Conference.
- In Greater New Jersey, a young pastor shaved his beard except for the mustache to give him a Ted Lasso look for his worship series using Ted Lasso video clips.
- Linglestown Life Church in Susquehanna has two campuses and a community center called Ray's Place. Ray's Place is a converted garage which houses a bicycle and reading program and a community garden. It is a gathering place for the community.
- In Baltimore Washington, their Catalyst Initiative works with congregations to meet with the community to understand what the church can do to partner with the community. New community ministries are springing up all of the time.
- Pastor Joan Brooks of the Peninsula Delaware Conference has led her congregation into the community and beyond. As a bi-vocational parttime local pastor she and the congregations have formed relationships with the chief of police and other community leaders. As a result, their ministry feeds thousands of people in the community. The congregation also held a water drive for the people of Jackson, MS during their water crises. When the WM F Stewart Trucking company heard about it, they transported two truckloads of water to Jackson, MS. In 2022 the congregation received more than 25 new members through baptism and profession of faith, and they burned their mortgage.

(Continued next page)

Troubles may be all around, but God is ready and is doing a new thing when we are in ministry together with the community. Don't you see it springing up?

In each instance where a new thing is springing up, the mind of Christ is pervasive and persuasive. Just as is stated in Philippians 2, where we find the theme for our Jurisdictional Conference.

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a servant,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of
death—
even death on a cross.

In humility, regard others better than yourself. Look to the interests of others (Philippians 2).

There are a number of important missional challenges, spiritual faith challenges, affecting the state of the church, and today I would like to talk about four of them: 1) navigating the pandemic, 2) ending the sin of racism, 3) living into the future, and 4) connecting with the people in our communities.

Navigating the Pandemic

More than 6.5 million people so far have died because of Covid. The effects of Covid and a worldwide pandemic are not fully understood yet. Its impact on the church has affected every congregation, and we are grateful for our lay

and clergy leaders who are leading us through this time. Our pastors especially have done an amazing job providing pastoral care, imagining new ways of being in ministry, and moving thousands of congregations from in-person to virtual worship in a matter of weeks. They also refereed the struggles of masks versus no masks, onsite or online worship and the politics of any decision.

They literally saved the church and we are indebted to their courage and spirit of determination and ingenuity. But it came at a cost. Frustration, anxiety, depression and burnout are higher among the clergy than at any other time in our memory. They sacrificed their time, relationships and well-being for the mission and ministry of the church. They demonstrated the mind of Christ and we are indebted to them. Today, the bishops and the leaders of the Jurisdiction thank our pastors.

What are we learning from the pandemic?

- The importance of community, and that community, including the worshiping community, is being formed and shaped in new ways. Online worship and online gatherings are here to stay; and virtual communities will be an important means for connecting people in addition to physically gathering in the same space. We need to continue experimenting, innovating and improving how we gather virtually.
- We are also learning we can change more quickly than we ever believed. When there is an urgent need that is clearly felt, people are willing to act together in ministry, making the necessary changes to adapt and serve.

Eastern Pennsylvania camping and retreat ministry navigated the pandemic. In 2021, EPA reopened their four camps and 11,000 guests engaged in camping and retreats. Evidence that people respond to a compelling ministry that meets their needs and is done well.

The pandemic has created troubling times; but learning and working together strengthens our serving in the world together.

Ending the Sin of Racism

Every conference within the Northeastern Jurisdiction has a plan and is engaged in ending racism through learning, changing unjust systems, recognizing implicit bias and ensuring inclusion and equity. This is a crucial step toward ending the sin of racism within the Jurisdiction.

These plans are taking action across the Jurisdiction.

- The New York Conference has been active in its communities, raising awareness and action about the killing of African Americans and civil rights violations.
- Rodney Hudson of the Baltimore-Washington Conference, after racial violence in his Baltimore community, led his congregation into the community, launching the Resurrection Sandtown Project to address systemic racism and poverty. A business donated a \$2.2 million property for mental health services and to help community entrepreneurs start their own businesses
- Recently the Susquehanna Conference Cabinet, along with clergy and laity there, participated in a Civil Rights Journey. In preparation for this experience, participants read books and met online monthly in order to discuss the readings and begin to prepare for the experience of the Civil Rights Journey. The Civil Rights Journey was immersive and included readings, videos, museums, and visits with firsthand participants and witnesses to Civil Rights.
- The Eastern Pennsylvania and Greater New Jersey Conferences created a more equitable apportionment and billing system, and Greater New Jersey approved giving back the land of closed churches in two counties to Native Americans. The conference set aside 1.3

million dollars for the land transfers and to sustain the St. John's Native American United Methodist Church property.

- The Upper New York annual conference has taken a multigenerational approach and trained coaches to work with groups to Imagine No Racism which is helping people move from contemplation to action.

Racism is a pervasive sin, sewn into the fabric of the values, culture, systems, policies and procedures of the church and society. It is insidious. Most white people do not even recognize racism and their own privileges that are often hiding in plain sight sometimes. Racism advantages white people and disadvantages people of color. It is a sin against the Creator and the created order.

Equality is not the answer. Allow me to illustrate why. I am aware of a church that has 41 worshipers and a church that has 108 worshipers. The church with 41 worshipers has a full-time pastor while the church with 108 worshipers has a parttime pastor. Why? The congregation with 41 worshipers is in an affluent white suburban community, and the congregation with 108 worshipers is in a low-income African American community. Not only is there an injustice in appointments, but in apportionments as well. Both congregations are apportioned an equal percentage share of the full apportionments. We call this equality, but it is not equity.

Let me illustrate further. The white, suburban congregation has reduced billings by the conference because it is a small congregation; but the African American church in a low-income community receives the full billing rate from the conference because it is a larger congregation. Rewarding smallness is not equity. At times, it is racism hiding in plain sight. Equity creates an apportionment and billing system that takes into consideration the community's average income and most of the time because of racism, is much lower in communities of color, particularly in African American communities. Might it be

good for all the conferences in the Northeastern Jurisdiction to evaluate their appointment, apportionment and billing systems, and create systems not built on equality but on equity and root out any implicit bias.

Racism has a way of repeating itself because White people choose to either flee or ignore what is in plain sight. Again, let me illustrate. The overwhelming majority of churches disaffiliating are white congregations, often with some means. African Americans are once more staying with The United Methodist Church to make it a better church, as they have done before. The United Methodist Church owes a great debt that must be paid by ridding the church of the sin of racism and making ours a church that chooses equity rather than only equality. We are called to change our systems so that we will be diverse, inclusive, equitable and free of racism. This is a debt we have incurred, and we have not yet repaired the harm of the past nor rid the church of our present racism.

Trouble! These are troubling times that call for us to be in ministry together to rid the church of racism and to serve the whole community.

Living into the Future

We are saddened and pained that there are churches who are disaffiliating from The United Methodist Church. Our differences about ministry with and by LGBTQ persons has led congregations to engage in a process of disaffiliation. For many, their hearts and our hearts are broken. Most of the congregations have been United Methodist for more than 100 years. They have faithfully participated in the mission and ministry of The United Methodist Church; and like in any separation, we are all losing something whether we are staying to continue the United Methodist mission or leaving.

During this divisive time, we have a choice about how we will engage. A monk teaching students under a tree was stung by a scorpion several times, until his students asked him, "Why don't you kill the scorpion?" The monk said,

"Just because it is in the nature of the scorpion to sting, it does not have to change my nature." Friends, let us, in our nature, speak the truth in love and have the mind of Christ, in whom we live and move and have our being. (Acts 17:28)

As congregations disaffiliate, those who continue the United Methodist mission will have differences among us. The faithful will always encounter trouble. On the last night of his life, Jesus gathered with his disciples in a room. During the evening, there were differences between the disciples and heated debate. One disciple would later turn Jesus in to the authorities. Another would deny he even knew Jesus. At least one was still carrying a sword and by the end of the evening, not one would be left standing with Jesus. But in the midst of their differences, Jesus would continue to stand with them and by them demonstrating what he taught, the law for love of God and love for others rises above every other law. The mind of Christ does not sting when stung.

The majority of congregations in The United Methodist Church, particularly in the Northeastern Jurisdiction, including both traditional and progressive congregations, are choosing to continue the United Methodist mission in the midst of their differences. One matter is not going to divide them. Like the disciples, there will be differences among us; but we have a mission and ministry that unites us as we together serve our communities and the world.

Our present United Methodist controversy is about people, not issues. That is what Jesus realized. He saw his disciples as people, not objects, not as an issue, not as those who were with him or against him, but as people. When we objectify or "issuefy" people, it is a sin against the Creator and creation. The state of the church will continue to be weary, anxious, frustrated and some angry if people feel harmed, unheard and unseen.

In the midst of our differences, let us follow Jesus, who recognized difference among the disciples, but who said the ultimate law is to love

God and to love our neighbor. We are called to include all people regardless of race, gender or sexual orientation in ministry and leadership. While living with differences, we must stop the harm against those God has gifted and called for ministry, particularly in the LGBTQ community.

It is time for the LGBTQ community to no longer be unseen, unheard and harmed. It is time for the full inclusion of queer children of God. While there will be congregations and conferences in United Methodism that may not choose this path, hindering other congregations and conferences that recognize the calling and giftedness of the LGBTQ community is only driving a deeper wedge among us and hindering the mission. God is ready to do a new thing among us, can't you see it. We can achieve true unity, equity and inclusion if we have the mindset of Christ, if in humility, we regard others better than ourselves and look to the interests of others (Philippians 2) and keeping the mission first.

Engaging with the People in Our Communities

There are important justice and mercy ministries throughout the Northeastern Jurisdiction. We have the mindset of Christ Jesus when we serve together in and with our communities and the world. A deeper challenge for us is connecting with the people in our communities with a compelling relevant message that captures the hearts and imaginations of people, especially younger and more diverse young people, inviting them into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Let us look at some numbers that represent how we are reaching the people in our communities.

- 33,449 to 11,840: The number of new disciples in the Northeastern Jurisdiction made in 2019 and today.
- 263,060 to 126,535: The number of youth and children in the Northeastern Jurisdiction in 2019 and today.
- 11% to 5%: The percent of clergy elders under 35 in the Northeastern Jurisdiction in 1990 and today.

- 30% to 62%: The percent of clergy elders over 55 in the Northeastern Jurisdiction in 1990 and today.
- 1990 – 90%; 2020 – 67% ; 2050 – 47% : The declining percentages of self-described Christians in the United States in 1990, 2020 and projected by the Pew Research Center by 2050.

These numbers do not represent church attendance, but people who call themselves Christians. Without a relevant and compelling message that captures the hearts and minds of the people in the community, participation in the church will decline rapidly which impacts our serving together in the world.

New and younger generations of disciples are looking for churches that exemplify the life of Jesus, that inspire them, that accepts them and their friends as they are, that demonstrate signs and wonders, that helps them experience meaning and purpose in their lives, and that offers inspiring worship and teaching and ministry that connects with their everyday lives.

We are in trouble unless we look for the signs of new life rather than depending on what worked in the past. The signs are springing up! Can't you see them? It is Rodney Hudson, Joan Park and Ray's Place, and the thousands of leaders who have inspired their congregations to break through their complacency and lead people into their communities to connect with their neighbors and to be in ministry together.

Today, more than anything else, we will be served well by recruiting and developing transformational leaders who understand the congregation is our primary place of mission in our communities. They will grow vital mission congregations to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. As a Jurisdiction, as conferences, we do not make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. But we do recruit and develop leaders who lead their congregations and ministries into the community to meet and connect with the people...and yes, to transform the world. The

challenge of leadership is further compounded by the fact that we are still trying to emerge from the pandemic, and we continue to suffer the wounds of serving during the pandemic. Leaders of our Northeastern Jurisdictional conferences will need to be especially compassionate in this season, while developing our clergy and lay leadership to be transformational.

Leadership development is not just about having workshops. If it only took workshops, The United Methodist Church would be the largest church in the world. Workshops are a small component of development. Most of us here today did not become a better leader because of a workshop. Most of us developed as leaders by being confronted with a deep challenge and supported by someone who worked with us to help us grow and develop. How will we free our bishops, superintendents, connectional ministry directors and other senior staff from the minutia and administration of keeping the denomination running and be freed so that they can connect with and support the development of our clergy and lay leadership. Our clergy and congregational leaders have the highest calling of the church, to lead congregations into the community and they need the church to support them in deepening their calling and growing their ability to lead the church into the community to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

The challenges of the pandemic, racism, difference and inclusion, and growing leadership to lead us into the world can seem daunting, yet there are signs that God is doing a new thing, it is springing up around us.

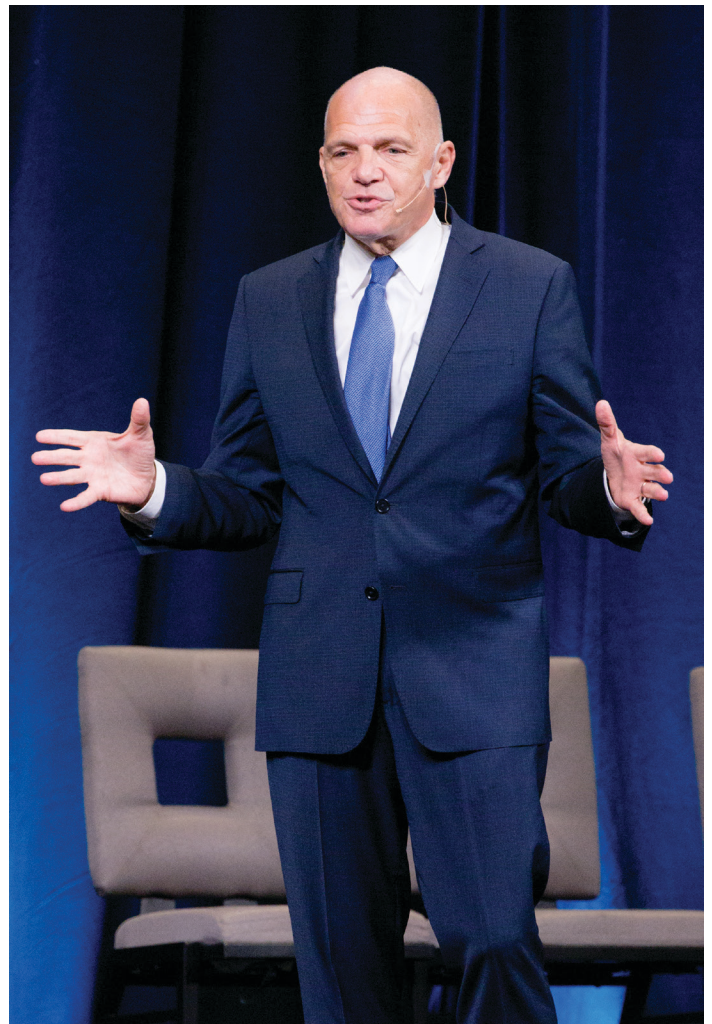
Maybe a gift during this season, is for all of us to become more curious. It has been said to choose curiosity over judgement.

Right now, our church is filled with people with answers. But Jesus approached people with curiosity. Right now, our church is filled with single solutions, or hierarchical decisions and policies, rather than asking, "What can we do to more effectively raise up transformational

leader and support and release congregations for ministry in their communities?" Having only answers leads to judgement. What would it look like for us to become more curious?

Emerging from a pandemic, ending the sin of racism, living with differences and raising up and developing leaders is hard work, deep work. Deep work, hard work can lead to making judgements, or it can lead us to be more curious and seek to discover the signs all around us that God is ready to do a new thing. It will take the mind of Christ Jesus and humble hearts to see others as better than ourselves and to move into our communities together...to truly be in ministry with all the world together. Yes, together. Let it begin with us?

In the name of the Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, amen.



Agenda: Thursday, November 3, 2022

- 6:30 - 8:00 a.m. Breakfast
- 8:15 - 8:45 a.m. Worship
- 8:45 - 10:00 a.m. **Plenary**
 - Daily Report: Sessions Committee /
 - (Journal, Credentials, Courtesies)
 - Report: Treasurer
 - Resolutions
- 10:00 - 10:15 a.m. Recess
- 10:15 - 11:55 a.m. **Plenary**
 - Call to Action
 - Adoption of NEJ Budget
 - Resolutions
- 12:00 - 1:30 p.m. Lunch
- 1:30 - 1:45 p.m. Gathering Music
- 1:45 - 4:10 p.m. **Plenary**
 - Report: Disciplinary Committees
 - Resolutions
- 4:15 - 5:00 p.m. Organization Discipline mandated committees
- 5:00 - 6:30 p.m. Dinner
- 6:45 - 7:00 p.m. Gathering Music
- 7:00 - 10:00 p.m. **Plenary**
 - Continued business
 - Announcement of Jurisdictional Conference 2024
 - Report: Monitors
 - GCOSROW – Mike Conner
 - GCORR – Enger Muteteke

Thursday Menu

BREAKFAST

- Freshly Squeezed Orange Juice
- Seasonal Fruit, Berries & Bananas
- Whipped Butter and Assorted Fruit Preserves
- Irish Oatmeal with Brown Sugar, Wildflower Honey, Agave Nectar, Selection of Dried Fruits
- Cage Free Scrambled Eggs
- Skillet Fried Breakfast Potatoes
- Chicken & Apple Sausage
- Freshly Brewed Regular and Decaffeinated Coffees & Assorted Hot Teas

LUNCH

- Artisanal Rolls Whipped Butter
- Baked Potato Soup
- Traditional Caesar Salad, Crisp Hearts of Romaine, Fire Roasted Red Peppers, Shaved Parmesan, Garlic Croutons, Caesar Dressing
- Herb Roasted Chicken & Broccoli Penne Alfredo Sauce
- Garlic Bread
- Chocolate Ganache Cake
- Soft Drinks & Water
- Freshly Brewed Regular & Decaffeinated Coffees & Assorted Hot Teas

DINNER

- Artisan Rolls and Whipped Butter
- Baby Spinach Salad, with Goat Cheese, Candied Walnuts, Roasted Pear w/Dijon Vinaigrette
- Chicken Piccata, Roasted Rosemary Potatoes
- Sauteed Green Beans
- Lemon Tart
- Freshly Brewed Regular and Decaffeinated Coffees & Assorted Hot Teas



TRANSPORTATION TO THE CONSECRATION SERVICE:

Transportation will be provided from The Hotel to the Consecration Service on Friday November 4, 2022.

The first group to be boarded beginning at 10:20. The last trip leaving The Hotel for the chapel will depart at 11:15am. Transportation from the consecration service back to The Hotel will also be provided with the last trip leaving the chapel at 1:45pm.



Daily Christian Advocate

The Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference
of The United Methodist Church

