NEJ to reveal area names, assign bishops

By Rev. Dr. Maidstone Mulenga, DCA editor

The 2024 Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference comes to a close today, July 12, with the revealing of the new six reconfigured areas and the assigning of bishops to supervise those areas.

On Wednesday, the conference voted to reduce the number of its episcopal areas from nine to six. The new episcopal areas will be named today just before the bishops’ assignments are announced.

The new six new episcopal areas comprise:

- Baltimore-Washington and Peninsula-Delaware
- Eastern Pennsylvania and Greater New Jersey
- New York and New England
- Susquehanna and Upper New York
- Western Pennsylvania
- West Virginia

The six bishops to be assigned in alphabetical order are:

- Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton, who currently serves New York Conference;
- Bishop Héctor Burgos Núñez who currently serves Upper New York Conference;
- Bishop LaTrelle Miller Easterling, who currently serves Baltimore-Washington and Peninsula-Delaware Conferences;
- Bishop Cynthia Moore-Koikoi, who currently serves Western Pennsylvania Conference and co-supervises Susquehanna Conference with Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball;
- Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball, who currently serves West Virginia Conference, and co-supervises Susquehanna Conference with Bishop Cynthia Moore-Koikoi;
- Bishop Debra Wallace-Padgett, who will be shared with Southeastern Jurisdiction.

(Continued on page 3)
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Friday Morning
Episcopal Area Gatherings

• UNY & SUS: Monongahela (17th Level)
• BW & PEN-DEL: Three Rivers (WP Level)
• NE and NY: Riverboat (WP Level)
• WPA: Sternwheeler (WP Level)
• WV: Oliver (ME Level)

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Bishop welcomed 3
Agenda 4
Morning sermon 5
Memorial service 8
Delegates celebrate youth 6
Youth share experiences 8
Delegates raise thousands 9
NEJ passes budget 10
GCORR monitoring 12
Directions for worship 14
Yinzer Prayer 15

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

DCA copy deadline for each day is 5 p.m. Please submit the information electronically.

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Bishop Wallace-Padgett welcomed to NEJ

(Continued from page 1)

Bishop Wallace-Padgett was welcomed last night by her colleagues when she arrived at the site of the NEJ Conference and will be introduced to the delegates this morning when the assignments are announced.

The NEJ Committee on Episcopacy will present recommendations for the names of the new six areas for the delegates to approve before the episcopal assignments are announced. Delegates will then go meet with their bishops.
Bishop Alfred Johnson, who proved that he is retired in name only, delivered a powerful morning message on hope yesterday as the NEJ began its day with worship.

Preaching from Romans 5:1-5, Bishop Johnson – who retired 20 years ago but has continued to serve in local church settings since then – took up the theme of the Jurisdictional meeting by preaching on how the waters of baptism initiate us into a revolution, and that leads to hope.

“I had no idea that those words spoken at my baptism inducted me into a revolution,” he said. “It was prevenient grace. When those waters hit my head, I didn’t know I was in a revolution.”

That’s because, as part of the baptism, we all become one in Christ, the bishop said. That’s different than how the world operates, he offered, and that’s revolutionary.

“Hope overflowing comes out of the revolution. I can have hope because of the revolution,” he proclaimed.

Hope is also subversive, he said.

“Abraham hoped against hope,” he said. “Romans talks about affliction… Hope flies above suffering, circumstance, disappointment, and has the power to turn disappointment in to seasons of dance and joy in spite of itself.”

And because our hope is rooted in Christ, not ourselves, God can make a way out of no way; hope will rise above anything and then try to get to overflowing, he said.

Hope, he said, “is defined in the dictionary as ‘a desire or wish to make something happen … an expectation that something that might happen.’ But from the biblical view, hope is built on Jesus’ blood and righteousness. It is something that goes down deep that you can’t you get under it, so high that you can’t get over it.”

Preaching in the service set aside for a retired bishop to preach, Bishop Johnson not only thanked his colleagues for the honor of preaching, but also stating that just because a bishop is retired doesn’t mean they are sitting around in rocking chairs.

(Continued on next page)
Bishop Johnson then quoted from several retired bishops without naming them, each one sharing how they continued to offer hope in new ministry settings. “I’m in my 20th year of retirement,” he said, “and I ain’t tired yet. We’re still serving.”

The bishop closed by noting how Eugene Peterson does Romans 5 in “The Message,” saying that hope does not disappoint because the love of God has been poured into us and there’s no containers big enough to hold it all.

“Quite the contrary, we can’t round up enough containers,” he said. “We need to be those containers. Don’t be stuck at the door of grace, but go in to the room. Sometimes we want to stay at the door. Get inside the room and you find out there are other people in the room. Our cup runneth over all over the place.”

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Bishop Johnson is a child of Tindley Temple United Methodist Church in Philadelphia, and said that he can’t far away from those old Charles Tindley hymns.

“Charles Tindley reminds us,” he said, “that we will understand it by and by because we have hope. Some of you do not know that the storm is passing over … let us journey on through the night.

Borrowing from a poem by Amanda Gordon, Bishop Johnson said that The United Methodist church isn’t broken, “it’s just unfinished.”

In response to the sermon, the NEJ rose as one and sang, “Hope Will Not Fail,” from Mark Miller.

The service ended with a renewal of baptism lead by the bishop. People came forward to dip their fingers in bowls of water while singing, “Let’s go down to the river to pray,” and “Wade in the Water.”

Worship closed with singing of “I am a Child of God,” also by Mark Miller.
NEJ delegates celebrate youth, approve resolutions

By Beth DiCocco DCA staff

Delegates approved Resolution #3: “A Resolution Calling on the Annual Conferences of the NEJ to [Require] Consider the use of United Methodist Resources When Readmitting Disaffiliated Churches Into The United Methodist Church” (pages 12-13 of the July 8 DCA) with two amendments.

In the title of the resolution, the word “require” was changed to “consider” to reflect what the maker of the motion, Ian Urriola of the Upper New York Conference, called “aspirational” legislation.

Urriola also offered an amendment to add Discipleship Ministries to the list of general agencies that could provide educational and other resources to annual conferences and the churches seeking to reaffiliate.

Episcopal Areas Meet

Following lunch on Thursday, delegates in each of the six episcopal areas that now make up the Northeastern Jurisdiction had the chance to meet. For conferences that will now be part of one area, it was a chance to get to know each other and talk about the future.

In The UMC, each bishop is assigned to an episcopal area over which they preside. An area can comprise more than one annual conference. Forming one episcopal area is not the same as a merger of conferences.

Youth Presentation

When delegates came back together for the afternoon session, they heard from the youth of the NEJ who were offered time to speak to the body about what they had been doing in Pittsburgh before the session began.

Bishop Hector Burgos, who was presiding at the afternoon session, introduced the youth saying, “We are blessed by the joy-filled spirits and contributions of our youth representatives. We celebrate who they are today and all they offer to the body … there is a total consensus they are a key piece, and, in many ways, they will lead us into this new future God is inviting us into, amen?”

The NEJ is the only jurisdiction to have youth representatives; they have voice but no vote at the conference. There are 19 present this year, and that does not include the youth who serve as voting delegates.

NEJ Council on Youth Ministries (NEJ CYM) Lourdes Dom, youth representative from the New York Conference and co-chair of the NEJ CYM, along with Baltimore-Washington youth representative Cassidy Carpenter, who is NEJ CYM secretary, shared some of what the youth have been doing.

On July 6, the youth did some mission work at Warren United Methodist Church in Pittsburgh.

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Welcomed by Senior Pastor Rev. Raphael K. Koikoi, the youth helped around the church with power washing, rose bushes and other plants, and by repainting an accessibility ramp.

Along with youth-led worship and sharing music, they attended a Pittsburgh Pirates baseball game.

They thanked the adults who have been shepherding the youth during this conference Tony Hipes of Upper NY and Amanda Mitchell from Western PA.

Mission of Peace (MOP) participants Grace Stierheim of Upper New York and Calvin Fisher of New England, shared information about 2024 MOP to Puerto Rico and announced that the 2025 MOP will be to Hawaii. Learn more and apply for the 2025 MOP here: https://nejyoungpeople.weebly.com/mission-of-peace-2025.html

Of the MOP to Puerto Rico, Fisher said the opportunity to interact with youth and to participate in prayer services were very impactful for him.

“It was probably one of the greatest ministry things I have ever participated in. ...[MOP] has shaped my life and made me the person I am now,” Fisher said as he thanked all those who make MOP possible.

At the request of a delegate, Bishop Burgos agreed to schedule an offering for MOP for later in the Conference.

Committees and agencies

As per NEJ rules, once the nominations slate is approved, those serving on jurisdictional committees and agencies for the next quadrennium meet to elect officers and otherwise prepare for their future work. Those committees are: Appeals, Episcopacy, Admin review, Program and arrangements, Boundaries, Finance and admin, Vision table, Rules, Investigation.
On Thursday morning, before the Northeastern Jurisdiction began its work, Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton, serving as chair of the meeting, spoke to the NEJ’s youth. There are 19 youth observers as well as some youth delegates at this year’s NEJ. This is the only jurisdiction to have youth representatives.

Singling them out, the bishop spoke about his own experience at a Jurisdictional Conference more than 40 years ago, and how that turned an 18-year-old wanna-be optometrist into an ordained clergyperson.

“In 1976, at the NEJ in Bridgeport, Connecticut, I found my way into the ministry,” the bishop said. “I thought I was going to be an optometrist.”

The bishop paused.

“Youth – God is knocking on your door, too. It may not be ordained ministry, but God has a purpose for you. Thank you for being here.”

For most of the youth here at the NEJ, this is their first time at a Jurisdictional Conference, and the experience has been both eye-opening and wonderful.

Ryan Taylor is observing from the Baltimore-Washington Conference and is here for the first time. “I’m having a great time and I’ve met a lot of amazing people,” she said.

Ariana White, from the Susquehanna Conference, is also here for the first time, and she is finding lots of joy. “Being around this many youth, I haven’t been used to,” she said, “but this group has been very welcoming to me and I feel very welcomed.”

For Naomi Waybright, learning about the legislative process has been new for her. Also from the Susquehanna Conference, she has enjoyed connecting with other youth. “We’ve only known each other for four days, and its crazy about how close we all are.”

Galen Schad, from the New England Conference, is attending his second NEJ. “The difference this time is that last time, we were trying to elect two bishops, and this time, we are not electing one and possibly sharing one. It’s just a whole new thing each time, just like Annual Conference, just with larger boundaries.”

Evan Washabaugh, from the Western Pennsylvania Conference, is an elected delegate serving at his first NEJ. He said that he actually got elected as the “youth observer” last August, and then elected this past June as a delegate.

“It’s a lot more serious than I thought,” he said. “I thought it would be more conferencing and fellowship rather than all the business that we have to deal with. I’m talking with my friends every night so that it all settles down by the end of the night.”

Samuel Gilligan also serves as an elected youth delegate, also from Western Pennsylvania.

(Continued on next page)
Delegates raise thousands for youth programs

By Beth DiCocco, DCA staff

When Bishop Hector Burgos announced that the offering received for Kidcelerate, a child enrichment program in Pittsburgh (https://kidcelerate.org/), had raised $3,000, his colleagues on the College of Bishops rose to announce that they would match amount with an additional $3,000.

Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton then stood to ask, “Can we offer a challenge for even more?”

The answer was a resounding yes with conferences, churches, individuals and a foundation responding. A delegate reminded the body about the request for an offering to support Mission of Peace and donations were made too.

It was announced that in just during the time of the challenge the evening $22,800 was raised for Kidcelerate and $3,500 was raised for MOP.

Motion approved

Delegates approved an aspirational motion brought by Ryan Fox, youth representative from the Western PA Conference, that would encourage the annual conferences of the Northeastern Jurisdiction to set aside two seats on their delegations for voting youth.

Grace Stierheim, youth representative from Upper NY, spoke in favor saying, “We [youth] are the now as much as we are the future. Give the youth a chance to speak and have a vote.”

Motion referred

Lydia Munoz, delegate from Eastern PA, brought a motion to give the responsibility for naming the new episcopal areas to the Committee on Native American Ministries. Bishop Burgos referred the motion to the Committee on Episcopacy, saying naming the areas is the purview of the COE so the committee would make that decision.

2028 NEJ Conference

Delegates accepted the invitation offered by Rev. Bill Mudge and Carmen Vianese to hold the 2028 NEJ Conference in the Upper NY Conference.

“We can’t wait to welcome you with open arms and warm hearts,” Vianese said.

In their video presentation, however, the delegates from Upstate NY would not promise there wouldn’t be snow even in July.
In its business session Thursday morning, the NEJ again witnessed history being made as a Latino bishop presided for the first time. Bishop Hector Burgos, who now serves the Upper New York Annual Conference, was elected in 2022 as the NEJ’s first Latino bishop. The bishop made only brief reference to that fact as business got under way.

During his time in the chair, Bishop Burgos presided over the Nominations Committee report, presented by Bishop Peter Weaver. After delegates instructed the Nominations Committee to return to its work and perfect the document, Bishop Weaver said that the committee was bringing forth new people in new spots by a unanimous vote.

“This is another step in trying to have our actions match our words,” he said.

NEJ delegates also approved the 2025-2028 budget by an overwhelming margin, 136 to 3. The budget, along with a brief background of it, can be found beginning on page 43 of the ADCA. It calls for an expense of $1.28 million. This is a 15 percent cut, across the board, except for line items such as salaries, benefits, and other fixed costs.

After the vote, Bonnie Marden offered a motion that the NEJ finance committee be encouraged to invest the money with United Methodist investment institutions, such as foundations or Wespath.

“I think it’s time to invest in our own investment resources,” she said. “It also ensures a socially responsible investment.”

The motion passed, 135 to 7.

Rev. David Simpson, who is concluding his time as NEJ treasurer at this session after 20+ years of service, then presented the apportionments for the next quadrennium. After carefully walking through the numbers, delegates approved $968,135 for 2025-2028. Each annual conference shares the responsibility of this, Simpson said. He noted earlier that for the 2020-2024 quadrennium, every annual conference had paid 100 percent of its apportionments.

The apportionments were approved, 134 to 5.

Bishop Bickerton thanked Simpson for his years of dedicated service.

In a moment of personal privilege, Simpson grew emotional as he thanked those who helped him in his work, especially his wife, Sylvia.

(Continued on next page)
Yesterday, he said, Bishop Bickerton reminded us of the important work of dismantling racism in every area of our lives and the church.

“The journey toward racial justice is long and fraught with both progress and setbacks,” he said. “We have a racist history that has caused harm and, sometimes, we have replaced harm with another harm.”

Arroyo said that the NEJ’s 2016 “Call to Action” resolution was a signature milestone, urging the Jurisdiction to confront and dismantle systemic racism and calling each of us to be agents of change. This work has continued at different levels in every annual conference.

Arroyo highlighted the upcoming work of the NEJ Anti-Racism Working Group, which will be accountable to the Vision Table. The working group will engage the NEJ College of Bishops and annual conferences in at least five areas:

1) Leadership commitment;
2) Fostering conversations on racism, power, and privilege – to facilitate dialogue, encourage conferences and local congregations to host regular opportunities to talk about racism and share personal stories;
3) Continuing work of training – assisting in identifying resources and training, workshops, etc.;
4) Jurisdictional Audit – a comprehensive audit of racial equity in the NEJ, for example, in which churches have closed and the candidacy process among other areas; and
5) Partnering with racial and ethnic plans throughout the church.

“I am confident that together, by God’s grace, we can build a church that honors the dignity and worth of every individual,” Arroyo said. “The work is not just about implementing policies and fulfilling obligations. This is not about checking a box. It is about embodying the love and justice of Christ. It’s about transforming our church.”

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At the end of his report, delegate Lauren Godwin made a motion that the NEJ have a cross-cultural trip to West Virginia, to be done by the 2028 Jurisdictional Conference, with two people from each annual conference in attendance.

“It is an invitation to come and know our story,” Godwin said. “It is a plea ... we have communities at home that do not have drinkable water. I don’t mean for a day or a week or a month, I mean all the time. Because the mines poisoned the water and no one has come to fix it. Our Annual Conference has invested funds to bring sustainable drinking water. We need help ... help us advocate for these people. This is an injustice. Everyone has a right to water.”

The motion, approved by a show of hands, was later amended to ensure youth were included in that trip. It was also amended to ask the NEJ College of Bishops to lead in a public witness to the West Virginia state government regarding defunding school lunches and other matters.

GCORR Monitoring Report: July 11, 2024


“The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives.”

These words were first written by the Combahee River Collective – a group of Black feminists – in their statement 50 years ago in 1974. It was their statement that laid the groundwork for the term ‘intersectionality’ later coined by Dr. Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. Yesterday evening, in the monitoring report, we explored moving from institutional equality to how to begin building institutional equity. As we will remember, equity requires a both/and mindset rather than an either/or mindset. Equity requires that we do no harm to the most marginalized among us and do good examining the root causes that perpetuate systemic racism and internalized oppression.

Intersectionality challenges us to contextualize the work of equity by examining where and how the major systems of domination, discrimination, and oppression prevent us from recognizing the imago Dei in one another and treating each other justly. The work of intersectionality on the journey of institutional equity forces us to lean in, recognizing all the wondrous ways that God has made each of us and honor our varied identities and backgrounds as children of the Most High God.

Let us celebrate the ways in which our Northeastern Jurisdiction was intersectional in its work today:

• Bishop Alfred Johnson reminded us that we have been baptized into Jesus’ revolution covenanting with God to resist evil, injustice and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves.

• Rev. Dr. Giovanni Arroyo, General Secretary of the General Commission on Religion and Race, laying out the partnership work between the agency, the Vision Table and the NE Jurisdiction challenging us to begin building Beloved Community with a focus on five areas: Leadership Commitment; Fostering Conversations on Racism, Power and Privilege; Training and Education; Conducting a Jurisdictional Audit; and Partnering with Racial/Ethnic Plans and other Self-Determining Groups.

(Continued on next page)
• West Virginia delegate Lauren Godwin making a motion to the jurisdiction for each conference to attend a cultural immersion trip to West Virginia conference to confront their realities of poverty and economic injustice

• New England delegate Effie McAvoy’s speech in favor of delegate Godwin’s motion naming intersectionality as the impetus for her words

• Eastern Pennsylvania delegate Lydia Munoz’s speech in favor of the motion calling on the College of Bishops to lead the jurisdiction in a public witness to hold the governor of West Virginia accountable for the grave economic conditions of some of its residents.

• Delegate Katie Reimer reminding the jurisdiction of the Thursdays in Black and the Church’s ongoing commitment to those who have been victims of rape and sexual violence

• NEJ Young People addressing the body today regarding their experiences at conference, the mission they engaged, and their upcoming Mission of Peace work in Hawaii in February 2025.

• Nominations returning to the body with a revised report and amended slate of names after having met together late last night to ensure the slate of names in each area had more gender and racial equity.

Let’s celebrate how the Spirit of God has moved and how we have been attentive to the Spirit movement and adjusted accordingly. And yet Church, the work of intersectional equity does not stop! Much like each of our journeys toward being made complete in Christ’s love each day, we must remain open to the work of perfecting Christ’s Church. We must remain diligent in listening to where the equity gaps and have the courage to lean in, accept what is being shared, and work together to create equitable outcomes that honor one another — no matter who we are or what level in the Church we serve. Here are three items for our consideration tonight as we continue doing our good work:

• How are we sharing power across this jurisdiction in ways that consider all the intersections of our lived experiences as we build institutional equity?

• Where do we hinder voices and perspectives different from ours in decision-making processes for the sake of achieving equity our way?

• Where do we allow voices and perspectives like ours in decision-making processes for the sake of achieving equity our way?

Tonight’s monitoring report was difficult to write because, in the past when I have monitored officially (with GCORR) and unofficially (for years from the confines of my pastor study or home office), the continual rancor, divisive rhetoric, and malcontented voices made it easy to parse out equity and inequity. It was easy because the ugliness of humanity was on full display and our sin-sick souls are, sadly, not accustomed to recognizing the imago Dei in one another. We all need God’s grace to recognize the image of God in each other. When we do, it is then that we can even begin to consider where and how we can do no harm and do good and do so in contextually whole ways that truly honor the whole person.

There is a modern quote from a wise, familiar source – TikTok – which goes like this: “My therapist told me this and it changed my life – You’re not healing to be able to handle trauma, pain, anxiety, and depression. You’re used to those. You’re healing to handle joy, acceptance, and happiness back in your life.” Church, I offer the same words to us this evening yet with a slightly different twist: “The Spirit of God is not healing us to be able to handle trauma, pain, hurt, and division. We are used to these states of being and have allowed them to be present in and rule Christ’s church for far too long. The Spirit of God is healing us to spread divine joy, hope, and love to all so that others – not yet in God’s kin-dom – join Christ’s revolution of love and justice.
Request for a declaratory decision approved

Under the provisions of ¶2610, the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference requests a Declaratory Decision on the constitutionality, meaning, application, and effect of ¶48 or any other constitutional or disciplinary paragraph on the decision of the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference to assign an individual Bishop to two annual conferences across two Jurisdictions. Specifically, is it permissible for a Bishop to be assigned to two annual conferences across two Jurisdictions and hold membership in two Colleges simultaneously? Is it permissible for a Bishop to be assigned to two annual conferences across two Jurisdictions and hold membership in only one College?

Two petitions approved

Resolution from The Northeastern Jurisdiction Commission on Archives and History to Encourage Conference Boards of Trustees and Commissions on Archives & History to Work Cooperatively

A Resolution Calling on the Annual Conferences of the NEJ to Consider the Use of United Methodist Resources When Readmitting Disaffiliated Churches Into The United Methodist Church

(The resolutions appeared in the July 8 DCA.)

Directions for worship at Trinity Episcopal Cathedral

Today’s service of Anointing and Sending Forth will take place at Trinity Episcopal Cathedral, 328 6th Avenue, Pittsburgh. The Cathedral is approximately two blocks from the Omni William Penn Hotel.

Time: The service will begin promptly at 11:15 am. The business of the NEJ will conclude at 10:45 am in order to allow for travel to the Cathedral.

WPA host committee volunteers will be present in red vests to guide those walking to both entrances to the Cathedral.

Directions:

→ For Accessible Entrance with Elevator to Sanctuary: Turn left out the front door of the Omni, and proceed to Oliver Street. Turn right; the entrance will be on the right hand side of the street.

→ For the Main Entrance: Turn left out the front door of the Omni, and proceed to Oliver Street. Proceed to Smithfield Avenue, and turn left onto Sixth Avenue. The entrance will be on the left.

Some sidewalk access is detoured or closed due to construction. These are the most direct walking directions due to those closures.

The service will last approximately one hour. Check out from the hotel will need to take place prior to the service.

We’ll see you at the Cathedral!
A Yinzer Prayer

Are Father up ‘er in heaven,
Holy is yinz name.
Yinz kingdom should come,
Yinz rules should be done dahn here
like it is up ‘er.
Don’t forget the tahntalk bread
for all the samiches.
Please forgive those who are nebby
And forgive me for bein’ nebby to others.
Please don’t lead me dahn no evil places
For Yinz is the kingdom, the pour, and da glory.
For ever and ever. Amen en ‘at.

-Paraphrase written by Rev. Greg Cox, WPA
2015, used with permission