



The Connection

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Rev. Nina Nichols points out some of the comments written on Christ United Methodist Church's graffiti wall. The church, located in downtown Troy, N.Y., is known throughout the community as 'the church with the red doors that supports recovery.' See story on page 9.

It's not your parents charge conference

By Sandra Brands

This year, church charge conferences in the Adirondack and Embury districts have been different from the normal business as usual gathering.

Congregations have been asked to invite community leaders—school nurses, high school counselors, DARE officers, volunteer fire department personnel, senior citizen service providers, government officials—to attend the first part of the church's annual charge conference to talk about what they do and what they need to help the people who come for assistance.

It's a change from the typical annual church conference of recent years.

"The primary responsibility of the charge conference is to review and evaluate the mission and ministry of the church," said the Rev. Henry Frueh, Adirondack District Superintendent. "Over time, charge conferences have become largely administrative, business meetings and transactions.

"Originally, they were conceived as a way to do holy conferencing, to

Community continued page 5

Pastor awarded Lilly grant to study Celtic spirituality

By Sandra Brands

Chittenden's Church of the Wildwood in Vermont was awarded nearly \$45,000 by the Lilly Endowment that will enable its pastor, The Rev. Shirley Oskamp, to travel to Ireland and Scotland to study Celtic Spirituality.

Oskamp said the Lilly grant applicants were asked to write about 'what would make their heart sing.'

For Oskamp, the answer was simple. Spending time on a family vacation at Prince Edward Island, attending her twin daughters' college graduation, and exploring the connection between the sacredness of earth, environmentalism, making church and ministry relevant again, and Celtic spirituality.

First introduced to Celtic spirituality through the early Christian monk Pelagius while in seminary, Oskamp was excited by his view of Christianity, one that recognized free will and a person's ability to grow spiritually.

"This Christianity made sense to me," she said. "Then I went to class the next day and was told Pelagius was a heretic."

According to Oskamp, Pelagius, thought to have been from the British Isles, was in direct conflict with the teachings of the Roman Christian church and the teachings of St. Augustine, which separated the body and material world, considering it sinful, from the spiritual. The Roman church became the dominant force in Western culture, overshadowing Pelagius' teachings, except in Ireland and Scotland.

Oskamp teaches a class called "The Sacred Earth" at Green Mountain College in Poultney, Vt., which studies the earth-based traditions and spiritual practices. It connects spiritual practices with living and being environmentally "green."

"It seems to me that Celtic Christianity has been able to pull together the natural world and physical body with spirituality and Christianity," she said. "There is a disconnect in Christianity between men and women, between earth and heaven, between the natural world and heaven," she said.

"The Celtic tradition has managed to keep Christ alive in a more holistic way than we have in the Roman



Pilgrimage continued page 12 Christ Enthroned from the Book of Kells.

Inside ...

'God's renewed creation'...a pastoral letter

Page 2

Marlow to resign at Covenant Hills Camp

Page 5

Poultney congregation hosts team from Ohio

Page 10-11

I wonder as I wander ...

Advent 2009: Anticipating 'God's Renewed Creation'

At the recent Council of Bishops meeting, this semi-annual global gathering of United Methodist Bishops, active and retired, adopted unanimously a pastoral letter which we are asking every congregation to hear during the season of Advent. The theme of the pastoral letter is "God's Renewed Creation: Call to Hope and Action," and is the result of more than four years of study and listening to many persons and groups around the world. More than 20 years ago, The Council offered another Pastoral Letter and study document, "In Defense of Creation: The Nuclear Crisis and A Just Peace." That letter reminded us that the whole earth belongs to God, and that we have responsibility for its future as stewards of God's creation.



Bishop Hassinger

This new letter deals with three interrelated threats that currently confront God's creation: "pandemic poverty and disease; environmental degradation and climate change, and a world awash with weapons and violence." For many people in our time, these critical issues create fear and hopelessness. The Pastoral Letter acknowledges the difficulty of these serious matters, but remains rooted in our biblical hope for God's renewed creation. The Pastoral Letter invites each of us to pledge to God and to each other steps to participate in this renewing of God's creation.

Why do we ask that you read this letter in every congregation? And why during Advent?

Advent is a time of "new beginnings," the start of the new year in the Christian cycle of remembering who we are and whose we are. It's a time when we remember that God gives us another chance, another opportunity of beginning again. It's another occasion for us to recall God's wonderful grace that invites us to return to God's ways, and to seek anew to follow those ways.

Advent is a time when the prophetic words from Isaiah and Jeremiah, from Malachi and Micah remind us of God's longing to restore God's people and God's creation to the wholeness in which God created all things. Advent is a time when the songs of Zechariah and Mary, and of the birth-accompanying angels remind us of God's turning upside-down the normal expectations of power ruling and poor suffering become God "filling the hungry with good things, and sending the rich away with empty hands." (Luke 1:33).

Advent is a time for us to take inventory of ourselves, our commitments, our response to God's grace, and to engage in confession, repentance, and looking at new ways of being and living. Advent is a time to put our individual and corporate



lives in order in preparation for celebrating the birth of Emmanuel, "God with us," the Word-become-flesh.

The very purpose of Advent is a "call to action and hope" so that God's desire for renewed creation, God's renewing work in creation, may be realized in its fullness. The very purpose of Advent is to recognize that we do that, not on our own strength and initiative, but only by and through God's amazing grace.

I urge you not just to read the letter, but to use the liturgical format, which involves the congregation in prayer. And I urge you, early in the new year, to use some of the resources that are being made available for reading, studying, and discussing the "Foundation Document" that accompanies the pastoral letter. Engage with the United Methodist Church around the world in this important conversation about the intersection of our faith with critical issues in our world.

The pastoral letter is printed below. It, along with a liturgical version of the letter, is also available on-line at www.hopeandaction.org.

The United Nations' Climate Change Summit will be held in Copenhagen, Denmark, Dec. 7 through 18. Please pray for the Summit as an important step in care for the poor and in hope for God's Renewed Creation.

A Pastoral Letter from the Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church¹

God's Renewed Creation: Call to Hope and Action

The 2004 General Conference of The United Methodist Church called for the Council of Bishops to publish new documents and a study guide similar to the Council's landmark call in 1986, In Defense of Creation: The Nuclear Crisis and a Just Peace. This is the Council's response to the General Conference action (The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church 2004: "Replace In Defense of Creation with new Document and Study Guide").

God's creation is in crisis. We, the Bishops of The United Methodist Church, cannot remain silent while God's people and God's planet suffer. This beautiful natural world is a loving gift from God, the Creator of all things seen and unseen. God has entrusted its care to all of us, but we have turned our backs on God and on our responsibilities. Our neglect, selfishness, and pride have fostered:

- pandemic poverty and disease;
- environmental degradation, and
- the proliferation of weapons and violence.¹

Despite these interconnected threats to life and hope, God's creative work continues. Despite the ways we all contribute to these problems, God still invites each one of us to participate in



the work of renewal. We must begin the work of renewing creation by being renewed in our own hearts and minds. We cannot help the world until we change our way of being in it.

We all feel saddened by the state of the world, overwhelmed by the scope of these problems, and anxious about the future, but God calls us and equips us to respond. No matter how bad things are, God's creative work continues. Christ's resurrection assures us that death and destruction do not have the last word. Paul taught that through Jesus Christ, God offers redemption to all of creation

and reconciles all things, "whether on earth or in heaven." (Col 1:20²) God's Spirit is always and everywhere at work in the world fighting poverty, restoring health, renewing creation, and reconciling peoples.

Aware of God's vision for creation, we no longer see a list of isolated problems affecting disconnected people, plants, and animals. Rather, we see one interconnected system that "groans in travail." (Romans 8:22) The threats to peace, people, and planet earth are related to one another, and God's vision encompasses complete well-being. We,

your bishops, join with many global religious leaders to call for a comprehensive response to these interrelated issues. We urge all United Methodists and people of goodwill to offer themselves as instruments of God's renewing Spirit in the world.

First, let us orient our lives toward God's holy vision. This vision of the future calls us to hope and to action. "For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope." (Jer 29:11) Christ's resurrection assures us that this vision is indeed a promise of renewal and reconciliation. As disciples of Christ, we take God's promise as the purpose for our lives. Let us, then, rededicate ourselves to God's holy vision, living each day with awareness of the future God extends to us and of the Spirit that leads us onward.

Second, let us practice social and environmental holiness. We believe personal holiness and social holiness must never be separated. John Wesley preached: "The gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social. No holiness but social holiness."³ Through social

Creation *continued page 17*



The glories of the season

I love this time of year when the trees shout out the glory of God in brilliant colors and then as if that brilliance is too much to be contained in the leaves, they slowly fall and we are left with a barren wilderness that makes me want to join the noisy geese in their chevrons and fly somewhere.

I love the late fall when the air grows crisp and the warmth of the late morning sun seems such a gift.

This year, as a new district superintendent, I have discovered new glories in this season. When I served a local church, this season was a time of new beginnings as families and children returned to church after summers away. Programs started up, new faces appeared and the church, which had rested a bit over the summer, once more became a bustling, busy place, especially on Sunday mornings.

That is not the season that I have been experiencing as a district superintendent.

No, this is the season of the annual Church Conferences.

This is the time when the district superintendent visits the churches and hears their reports about the past year and their hopes and dreams for the future. In these moments of sharing the grace and glory of God has surely been seen.

I came upon one little church on a dirt road in the hills that is led by a lay woman. They were reveling in their worship, outreach and ministry in their little hamlet, delighting in the summer Sundays when the local music school fills the church with gifted musicians to praise God and give thanks for the gifts they have received. They were glad to share in the abundance that they felt with those in need, especially those in need of spiritual care. They have an active prayer life and are practicing many ways in which they make their church hospitable to visitors, like a small library/prayer room that is always open.

Surely God was at work in this neighborhood.

I spoke with some youth at one church who wanted to let me know about the fun they have and privilege they feel when someone from church calls and asks for their help whether that be at a church supper, food drive, cleaning up the mountain climbing paths or raking a neighbor's lawn. "That's what church is all about, they told me, "Helping your neighbor is doing God's work." Youth are excited about all the service they do in the church.

I asked one congregation why they worked as hard as they did to stay open. They immediately came back with an answer, "The community needs us not only as a spiritual center, but as a place where they can meet, as a place where things can be collected when there is a fire in town, a place where other community organizations like the scouts, and global campus for the disabled can have classes." Their worship was very community oriented, too. They were very welcoming, hospitable and taking joy in all that God has given to them.

Several churches were also working on ways to help the families of many National Guard soldiers who are about to be deployed. They were planning community building events, offering childcare and support for those left behind, knitting prayer shawls to send with those being deployed and making prayer quilts for the children who will be without a parent or two for over a year. They had already sent more than 100 prayer books to those going to Afghanistan.

The glories of this season, my first charge conference season as a district superintendent, have been abundant. I have visited churches forming all sorts of communities where they can share the love of God with others and looking for ways to be in ministry with those who are in the neighborhood, not just in the churches. These churches all have financial struggles of their own but they aren't dwelling on those because they are celebrating God's abundant grace, love and compassion and trying to live out of this abundance, sharing with others where they see a need.

May my journeys this fall continue to be full of these blessings.

Farrell is the Green Mountain District Superintendent.



Brigid Farrell

Vermont experiences charge conferences New England-style

By Rebecca Clark

Though it may not be common now, changes in the way charge conferences are held may mean that the annual meetings will become a highlight for congregations, clergy and district superintendents.

According to the *Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, a church charge "shall be the connecting link between the local church and the general Church and shall have general oversight of the church council." A charge conference is required to be held annually, and is for reviewing and evaluating the missions and ministry of the church, adopting objectives and goals, receiving reports and modifying organizations, and addressing the other administrative concerns of the church.

As Vermont churches look toward becoming part of the New England Annual Conference, it has been important to examine the way church charge conferences are handled in New England.

Over the past few years, the New England leadership has begun to implement a new model of church conference that is a change for congregations accustomed to meetings that are largely about struggling to approve a budget and listening to lengthy reports.

The Rev. John Blackadar, District Superintendent of the New Hampshire District, explained that long ago, United Methodist churches held four quarterly Church Conferences a year.

At the first-quarter meeting, the congregation would develop and strategize toward a vision for the year. The intervening conferences would deal with the implementation of programs and celebration of progress toward goals. The fourth-quarter conference focused on year-end reporting and adopting budgets for the year ahead.

"Unfortunately, as we moved toward having only one church or charge conference a year, we tended to adopt the model of that final-quarter conference," Blackadar lamented.

"As a Superintendent, I'm much more interested in hearing about a congregation's vision and what they are planning to do, rather than a report on what has already been done," he said.

Blackadar said that the push in New England Annual Conference has been to move back to the first-quarter model for church conferences, regardless of the time of year in which they are held. He explained that there are only five pieces of business that must be addressed at a church conference session, presided over by the District Superintendent: setting the pastoral compensation, certification of Lay Speakers from the congregation, voting on candidates for ordained ministry, removal of inactive members from the church rolls, and acceptance of bequests.

All other business, such as hearing reports by committees and teams, can

Vermont *continued page 8*



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Retirees will be honored on eve of closing Troy Conference Session

Though only a one day conference session, the Troy Conference Session will mirror a regular conference session with worship, recognition of awards' recipients, and business sessions.

Members of Troy Conference will gather one final time next year at Christ United Methodist Church in Glens Falls, N.Y., for its final Annual Conference Session, May 22.

As of July 1, the conference, which was organized in 1832, will separate along state lines. Vermont churches will become part of the New England Annual Conference and New York churches will become part of the new conference in Upper New York.

Though only a one-day conference session, the Troy Conference Session will mirror a regular conference session with worship, recognition of awards' recipients, and business sessions. Retirees will be celebrated on Friday evening, May 21, following the clergy session held earlier in the day at the church. Communion and worship will conclude the final Troy Conference Session.

District meetings will be held on May 8 in all four districts. More information on the district meetings will be available in the near future.

"We've abbreviated much of what we've always done during session," said the Rev. Michelle Bogue-Trost, chair of the Sessions Planning Team. "People will be able to nominate people for the Denman Evangelism Award, and the Conference Commission on Religion and Race, Camping, Peace with Justice, Website and Small Church awards will be presented."

The business session will deal with those legal issues that must be resolved before the conference is closed and limited to that which is essential or required for the transition to the new conferences.

"We'll work through whatever steps are needed to close the conference and move forward," Bogue-Trost said.

Vermont clergy and laity are required to attend the 2010 New England Annual Conference, to be held at Gordon College in Wenham, Mass., June 17 through 19. The Rev. Dr. Zan

Holmes will be the preacher and presenter. Clergy Session is scheduled for June 16, also at Gordon College.

New York clergy and laity will take part in a uniting conference on June 19 in Syracuse, N.Y., to bring together the New York churches of the North Central New York, Troy, Western New York and Wyoming conferences. Bishop Marcus Matthews will become the first Episcopal leader of the new conference of more than 180,000 United Methodists.

According to Conference Minister Holly Nye, a member of both the New Area Conference Team in New York and the New England-Vermont Transition Team, part of the work of the uniting conference in June will be to put into place the basic structure and budget for the Upper New York Conference for the remainder of 2010, including basic staffing configurations. Ordination for candidates serving in the Upper New York Area will be held that afternoon.

Vermont candidates will be ordained at the New England Session.

On Sept. 11, clergy and laity will gather once more to celebrate the birth of the new conference at the Empire State Convention Center, located near The Egg in Albany, N.Y. In addition to worship, which is being planned by a team of people from all four conferences, members will act upon the steps needed to put into place the structure and funding for 2011.

A pre-conference Journal for the 2010 Troy Annual Conference Session will be published on-line. Deadline for submitting materials to the Conference Secretary is Feb. 1.

Members needing to stay overnight in the Glens Falls area for the May 21 and 22 events will need to make their own arrangements for lodging. A link to information about nearby hotels will be made available on-line at www.troyac.org in January.



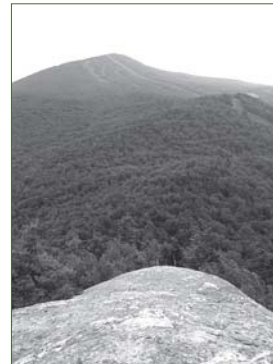
The Rev. Brigid Farrell, left, and Bishop Susan W. Hassinger enjoy a laugh during Farrell's installation service. Farrell was installed as the Green Mountain District Superintendent at a special worship service on Oct. 4, held at the Hedding United Methodist Church in Barre, Vt. Farrell was appointed District Superintendent beginning July 1.

NEJCAH to come to Vermont

The Northeastern Jurisdiction of the Commission on Archives and History (NEJCAH) will meet in Barre, Vt., May 11 through 13. The event will be sponsored by the Troy Annual Conference, which will divide along state lines in July, with the New York churches becoming part of a new conference in Upper New York and the Vermont churches joining New England Annual Conference.

According to the NEJCAH newsletter, from the mid-1800s to the mid-1900s, Vermont east of the Green Mountains was its own annual conference, which has inspired the theme: "Beyond the Green Mountains—A Journey Through the Old Vermont Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church."

The program will review the history of the old Vermont Conference and visit a number of churches which played a significant part in the history of the conference. During the meeting, trips will be taken to Wolcott United Methodist Church, gathered and built by the Rev. George S. Brown, the first African American pastor in both the Troy and Vermont Conferences. Brown re-enactor Clifford Oliver will be on hand to share the story of Brown's



ministry along the Green Mountains and Adirondacks.

The meeting will also spotlight the stories of a number of Vermont women who played a significant role in the development of the Women's Foreign Missionary Society in Boston, Mass., in 1869, and "listen" to some individuals who were involved in the North Barre Italian Mission, which ministered to the Italian granite cutters who emigrated to Vermont to work in the Rock of Ages quarry in Barre.

More information on the annual meeting will be available later.

Pre-Retirement Seminars

Learn more about the United Methodist Church's Pension Programs
Find out more about the implications for pensions due to the change in conference boundaries

Monday, Dec. 7, 10 a.m. to noon
Saratoga Springs United Methodist Church
175 Fifth Avenue, Saratoga Springs, N.Y.

Tuesday, Dec. 8, 10 a.m. to noon
Shelburne United Methodist Church
Route 7, Shelburne, Vt.

The Facilitator will be Bill Lasher, Pension Officer

Helpful Preparation:

Review your Third Quarter Statement from the General Board of Pensions and/or use the "pension calculator" on the General Board web site at www.gbophp.org. Both may help you formulate questions for the seminar.

Note: The General Board of Pensions requires 120 days notice before the date of retirement. If you plan to retire June 30, 2010, the deadline is March 1, 2010. However, your District Superintendent will want to know your intent by January 1st if possible. Send a written request to retire to the Bishop, with copies to your DS, the Board of Ordained Ministry (ch: Mark Demers) and to Bill Lasher, who will notify the GBOPHB of your intent to retire.