



Confirmation students balance a light weight dowl on their fingers and attempt to lower it to the floor. The exercise encourages cooperation and communication skills. The exercise was part of the third overnight retreat of the Albany District Confirmation Class. See story page 7.

Bishop announces shifts in Albany area district supervision

Bishop Susan W. Hassinger, interim bishop of the Albany Episcopal Area issued the following announcement for both Wyoming and Troy Annual Conferences.

Some time ago, the Rev. Jan Marsi, Superintendent of the Oneonta District for the past seven years, had indicated her desire to be appointed as a pastor to a local church. (A district superintendent's appointment is year-to-year, as is the appointment of every elder. A superintendents' term, as per the *United Methodist Book of Discipline* is six years, and may be extended for up to two additional years.)

After prayerful consideration, the Albany Area Cabinet and I have honored that request, and Rev. Marsi's new appointment was announced on Sunday, Feb. 21. That decision required further prayerful discernment regarding superintending responsibility for the Oneonta District of the Wyoming Conference.

At the same time the cabinet and I were engaged in these discussions, it became apparent that the new conference in Upper New York was facing potential financial concerns. Those working on recommending budgets for the second half of 2010 and all of 2011 had made a commitment that a balanced budget would be prepared that would not increase local church ministry shares/apportionments for the second half of 2010.

In a time of deep change any shift in the system becomes an opportunity to ask how we might become more missional. Hence, Rev. Marsi's decision became an opportunity to reconsider how superintendents will lead and supervise in ways that are both more missional and less costly. To that end two things are happening: 1) a task force to explore superintendency; 2) reduction of the number of districts.

In light of that reality, Bishop Matthews and I agreed that we would consider the reduction of one district each within the current Albany Episcopal Area and the New York West Episcopal Area. Such a reduction would not be the last word on district configurations in the new conference, but would be a response to some of the current needs.

A task force for the new Upper New York Conference, convened by Jan Marsi, has been exploring what districts might look like in the new conference, based on how superintendency might best be carried out in order to move towards the vision and mission and

Upper New York Information Sessions

Informational Sessions on the new conference in Upper New York and what it means for Troy Conference clergy and laity in New York will be held in mid-March. There will be three sessions for clergy, and three for laity.

All persons are invited; pastors, lay leaders, lay members, staff/p parish relations chairs, chairs of finance, trustees, church council chairs and church treasurers are particularly encouraged to attend.

Laity sessions:

- Thursday, March 11, 7 to 9 p.m. at McKownville United Methodist Church, 1565 Western Ave., Albany.
- Saturday, March 13, 1 to 3 p.m. at Saratoga Springs United Methodist Church, 175 Fifth Ave.
- Monday, March 15, 7 to 9 p.m., at Plattsburgh United Methodist Church, 127 Beekman St.

Clergy sessions:

- Thursday, March 11, 1:30 to 4 p.m., at McKownville United Methodist Church, 175 Fifth Ave., Albany.
- Saturday, March 13, 8:30 to noon, at Saratoga Springs United Methodist Church, 175 Fifth Ave.
- Monday, March 15, 1:30 to 4 p.m., at Plattsburgh United Methodist Church, 127 Beekman St.

The clergy session will include a question and answer period for retired clergy, and Pension Officer Bill Lasher will be on hand to answer pension-related questions.

For more information about these sessions, contact your district superintendent's office.

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I wonder as I wander ...

Lighting the way to Christ



Bishop Hassinger

In early January, the extended area cabinet, including district superintendents, conference minister and director of connectional ministries, communications staff persons, and the lay leader from one of the conferences, gathered to consider where and how God is leading us in these next months before the current conferences move into the new conferences. We were moving towards Epiphany, the time when we celebrate the Christ child's recognition by the visitors from the East, a time when we give thanks for those Wise Ones who moved out by a different way, carrying with them the hope they had received from the visit with that infant in whom they had recognized God's very presence.

We considered, as we worshiped together and sought God's guidance, where were the bright stars among us that were lighting the way to the Christ, and to the future. We reflected on those pastors and congregations and communities where new moving outward of the gospel message was happening, or where we were seeing the potential for that to happen. As part of that prayerful consideration, we identified characteristics of those "star-bright" situations. Those included:

- Ability (or potential) to think missionally instead of just institutionally
- Ability (or potential) to act adaptively as well as technically
- Have gifts for looking outside of self to the broader mission field
- Have a sense of deep calling to be in mission
- Have energy to pursue that sense of mission
- Strongly supportive of the United Methodist Church
- Have a relationship with God that forms you and helps you see God in others
- Ability to live in uncertainty about the future with flexibility

As you look at those characteristics, how do you, how does your congregation, exemplify them, live them out? Are you Wise Ones carrying the light of Christ into the community in new ways? Are you passionate about how your worship is inviting of others, and overflows with the joy and love of Christ? Is there an eagerness to share that light not only in the community surrounding you, with all sorts and conditions of people?

There are a number of settings that give us hope and joy. For them we give thanks to God, and express appreciation and encouragement for the future. Unfortunately we also heard of those places where congregations are struggling, or have focused more on survival for the sake of those within the current body of believers rather than adapting and reaching out to new people, or have faced challenges with buildings that no longer meet 21st Century needs or communities that have been declining in population.

That time leading to Epiphany also included seeing an interview from "theoosze.tv." Spencer Burke talked with Phyllis Tickle, scholar and author of *The Great Emergence: How the Church Is Changing and Why*. Tickle suggested that mainline denominations have approximately 18-months of "open window" in which to shift the ways in which they function. Part of that shift means welcoming and encouraging "emergent Christianity" alongside the traditional forms. If we cannot encourage the new, even fund the new, while keeping traditional forms for those who desire it, the future is dim. Tickle does not see these shifts as "terrible," but exciting, as part of God's ongoing transforming of the church, a transformation that has been happening across the centuries of Christian history.

I initially wrote this column in the waning days of Epiphany—a season of focusing on mission and outreach. By time you read this in *The Connection*, we are in Lent—a season of focusing on what it means to follow Jesus on the way of discipleship. As part of your Lenten consideration, I ask each congregation to consider:

In what ways does your congregation/your leadership exemplify these characteristics?

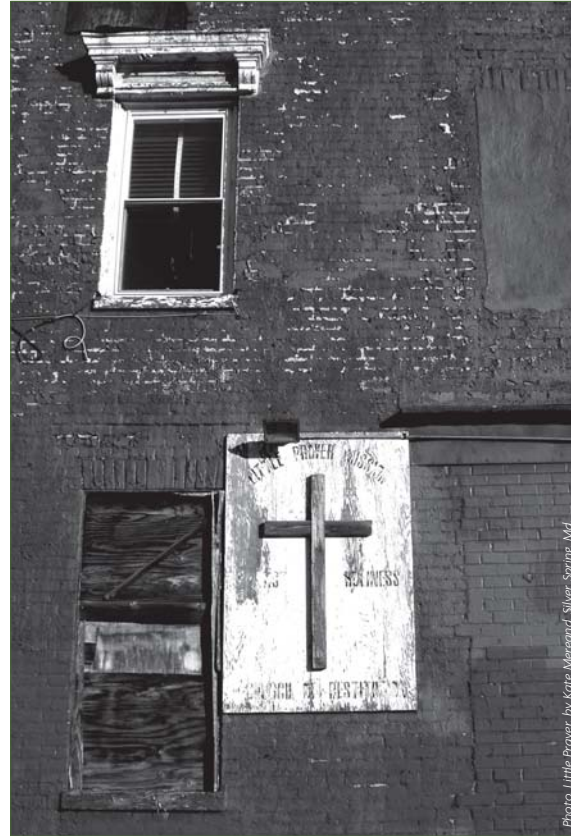
What is God's desire for you in relation to these characteristics, as you look to the future?

What is your desire in response to that?

Take time in your council meetings, or in a forum, to prayerfully consider these questions.

I invite you to respond to this article. You may e-mail your response to me or to your district superintendent. Share your feedback with us. Share your stories of how God is working within and among you.

It is the commitment of the cabinet to encourage and support pastors and congregations that are stepping out, re-imagining their roles and life together, in ways that communicate the gospel of Christ to this generation.



Growing in faith together

By Holly Nye

This Lent, I invite you to reflect on two simple statements.

The first is the vision of the New England Annual Conference:

Transformed by the Holy Spirit,

united in trust,
we will proclaim Christ
boldly to the world.

The second comes from the new conference formation in Upper York:

Our vision (intended outcome): to live in the way of Jesus Christ and to be God's love with our neighbors in all places.

Wherever your church is located, both of these guiding visions have something to offer.

Both remind us of our connection to God in Christ, and our connection to one another—our shared life, which leads us to reach beyond ourselves in ministry.

In your congregation, how are you "united in trust" and growing in faith together? How are you learning to live in Jesus' way? In what ways is your faith community being transformed by the Spirit?

Are you taking time together this Lent, prayerfully seeking God's vision for your congregation? Are you reflecting together on how you are called to proclaim Christ and to embody God's love for your neighbors?

I have appreciated hearing some of the stories of church conferences where neighbors have been invited to share. They remind us of the many ways God yearns to touch the world through our presence with others.

This spring is in some ways a bittersweet time. Even as many of us experience the loss of the connection that has bound us together as Troy Conference, we are called to ministry in this moment and toward a future in which God will speak in new and wondrous ways.

As we gather in districts on May 8, and in conference on May 22—and as we gather in new configurations, such as the New England Mission Fair in April and the Upper New York information sessions in March—may we take time to testify to the ways that God is calling us to a future of hope and promise. We share that promise, wherever the future leads us.

As Paul reminds us in a reading for the second Sunday in Lent:

I've got my eye on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward—to Jesus. I'm off and running, and I'm not turning back. (Philippians 3:14, *The Message*)

Nye is the Troy Conference Minister.



Holly Nye



Spiritual Formation

By Evie Doyon



An Elephant in the Room?

Countdown to conference changes... Teams have been meeting and planning; making some decisions and holding off on others; asking who or what have we forgotten, where does this piece fit, can we resolve this now or will it happen later; being careful to be inclusive and welcoming.

Here's a question: Is there an elephant in the room? Or two or three? Are there some things no one has brought up because they might be controversial or emotionally charged and it seems safer to ignore or avoid them?

Well, I see an elephant. In the conferences that are about to be formed, there are folks all over the spiritual spectrum. Some of the differences may seem "as far as the east is from the west" or, to put it another way, not likely to come together. Is it safer not to talk about this than to bring it up?

I say, let's talk about it. Let's explore the possibility that this is exactly a place where God would like us to do some transition work.

We like to use stereotypes—oh those Troy Conference folks, they walk to the beat of a different drum, rabble-rousers and activists, right? Isn't this an image that we have heard used to describe us? And haven't we used it ourselves? Is it accurate? Well, yes and no. It might describe some of us but certainly not all of us. And certainly, we have stereotyped images for folks in the other conferences, too.

A lot of conflict in the church is due to differences in the ways we express our spirituality or faith. Richard Foster has written a book that was very helpful for me in gaining a better understanding of this. In *Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of Christian Faith*, (Harper San Francisco 1998), Foster describes 6 traditions of Christianity or faith streams.

Even though each of us will tend to identify predominantly with one or two of the streams, each stream is to be honored or celebrated because all of them flow from the source of Jesus Christ. Foster describes Jesus as the fulfillment or embodiment of all 6 streams. Very briefly, these are the streams:

- Contemplative: the prayer-filled life
- Holiness: the virtuous life
- Charismatic: the Spirit-empowered life
- Evangelical: the Word-centered life
- Social Justice: the compassionate life
- Incarnational: the sacramental life

Just as streams in nature flow into greater bodies of water, the streams of Christian faith must flow together into one Body. Damming up or trying to block off any of the streams would be detrimental to the larger body. For example, persons in the contemplative stream in the extreme might be enticed to withdraw from this world and live only in a place of mystery and mysticism. They might try to block off the social justice stream but they need some of its water to keep them engaged in the needs of others.

These streams are in us individually but are also in our congregations and annual conferences. A congregation might have a dominant stream of social justice but it must also provide ways to engage folks in prayer and spiritual disciplines. A conference might have streams that are trying to dam up each other rather than finding ways for the streams to flow together. If you've ever witnessed hotly contested debate at annual conference, you'll recognize this.

If your curiosity has been peaked, please get the book and explore it so that you can find your predominant stream and explore the ones that seem less like you. You might consider doing this in a small group or in your congregation. Your group may gain insight into stress areas or past conflicts. Being able to name these may be an aid in bringing about reconciliation—an important part of our calling as the Body of Christ.

Understanding the streams will also help us to name the elephant in the room and show it the door. As we move into new conferences, it will be important to recognize our faith stream differences and not perceive them as threats to be blocked, but to see them as places where we can learn to flow together as one body as we work toward Christian unity.

Outreach Transformed

Does your church have a Food Shelf or offer a Community Meal? Are you involved in other outreach activities that engage folks with members of the community? Have you discovered that there are some individuals who will readily say, 'sure, I'll help,' and there are others who know they should but hesitate or find an excuse not to?

For some of us, this sort of work comes easily and naturally; for others of us, it takes a strong effort. I would suggest that these differences are not good or bad. We are created differently and respond differently. One person may serve at the food shelf and leave the experience fully energized about having made a difference, another person having worked at the same food shelf may leave discouraged and distraught about what she saw. Two people in the very same place may have very different experiences.



Evie Doyon

When volunteers come to the food shelf, help out, and leave, they have fulfilled a task, done a good deed, and helped another person. They may feel uplifted or discouraged. They may or may not be aware of God in this activity. How can we transform these good deeds from social action or humanitarian efforts to Christian practice?

Do the food shelves in our churches look and operate like community food shelves? Whether serving in a community food shelf or a church's, when a volunteer is recruited to serve, the hands-on task and expectations of the worker are probably reviewed. They'll learn guidelines about how often a person can visit the food shelf and how much food a person or family can have. They'll know to arrive at 2:30 to make sure the pantry is stocked, open the door at 3, close it at 5, clean up, and lock the door when leaving. Often the guidelines are posted visibly in case the worker should forget any of them. What could make a church food shelf different from a community food shelf?

Can the food shelf or outreach team be transformed into a small group?

Here are some suggestions:

Rather than recruit folks to work at the food shelf, invite them to be part of a small group whose service role is to operate the food shelf but whose purpose is to grow in relationship with God and community.

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New England to continue camping covenant with UCC

By Sandra Brands

Twenty years ago, Troy Conference United Methodists and Vermont United Church of Christ members enter into a covenant to provide Christian camping experiences to the people of Northeastern New York and Vermont, eventually establishing Covenant Hills Christian Camp near Cabot, Vt.

As Vermont United Methodists prepare to become part of the New England Conference, a new covenant between United Methodists and United Church of Christ members is being drafted.

"With the dissolution of Troy Annual Conference and the re-alignment of Vermont to the New England Annual Conference, we need to revisit the covenant so it reflects these new realities," said the Rev. David Murphy, former Director of Camping for Troy Conference.

The new covenant between the New England Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church (UMC) and the Vermont Conference of the United Church of Christ (UCC) and will be submitted to both conference sessions for approval.

"This is a successor document [to the original covenant]," said the Rev. Jim McPhee, Director of Connectional Ministries for The New England Annual Conference. "It outlines our mutual understandings of the [covenant]—who is responsible for what and our understanding of how the UCC and UMC folks share in the ministry; the property and the committees."

McPhee said that the shared UMC-UCC camping ministry is a new experience for the New England Conference, one that he has appreciated. "I've gotten more familiar with the Covenant Hills ministry—it's great. For instance, the UCC conference contributes approximately half the summer campers and the staff. It's really a very dynamic ministry with people coming together around the ministry itself. There isn't a lot of reference to the denominational structure beyond what makes sense."

The camp will be owned by the New England Conference as part of the distribution of conference assets when Troy Conference is dissolved. In 1989, when the original covenant came into being, the Vermont Conference of the UCC contributed \$25,000 to the creation of Covenant Hills, and under the terms of the original covenant and its successor, that money would be returned without interest to the Vermont UCC should the camp be dissolved.

But the camp will continue its ministry, a ministry McPhee says is unique outreach primarily to children and youth.

"On a lot of levels, we have people throughout our church who have had their formative faith experiences in camp," he said. "In fact, our bishop, Bishop [Peter] Weaver, testifies to the power of camping experience in his early life in what's now the Western Pennsylvania Conference.

"Being in a residential setting, being in an outdoors setting, coming together with a variety of people in churches—



forging new friendships, having a practical experience of one's faith with other people in a natural environment—is a very rich ministry—often camping ministries are the most significant faith formation ministries," he said.

Murphy said that the covenant came about originally when he determined, as director of camping, that if camping in Vermont was to survive, "we needed a stronger church population base to make it viable. At that time, the UCC had sold their camp and they were struggling to run a camping program without a site."

After talking with the Vermont UCC director of camping, Murphy said they started offering some joint programs at Camp Mississquoi, the UMC camp in Vermont at the time.

The alternative, he said, was to lose

Camp Mississquoi. And Covenant Hills would not have been built without the support and cooperation of the United Church of Christ.

"It's been a great marriage," Murphy said. "Together we are able to provide Christian Education in the out-of-doors that has stunning effects on the young people and adults of both conferences. A week of camp for a camper is equivalent to a full year of Sunday school. We model Christian family and love. We demonstrate how to live a Christian life in the real world. We separate kids from their usual environment of TV, cell phones, video games, peer influences and show them an alternative way to live with the love, forgiveness and guidance of Jesus.

"It is one of the best things that Troy Conference and the UCC have done,"

Camping news

Help plan Senior High Camp at Skye Farm, July 4 to 10

Skye Farm is assembling a group of clergy and laity to plan a Senior High Leadership Development Camp for the week of July 4 through 10. The camp will feature exciting adventure programming, mixed with in depth Bible Study. The model for this camp has been used successfully in both the New England and Western New York Conferences. If you are interested in helping with the planning of this camp, contact Executive Director, David Johnston, at skiefarmed@logical.net.

Summer camping brochures available on-line

The Skye Farm summer brochure is now available on-line at www.skyefarmcamp.org. Printed brochures will be available soon. Skye Farm Director, David Johnston, is now visiting churches to talk about the ministry offered at Skye Farm. This could be done during the sermon portion of the Sunday service or at a special event. To invite David to your church please call (518) 494-7170 or e-mail him at skiefarmed@logical.net.

The Covenant Hills Christian Camp brochure is also available on-line at <http://www.covenanthillsvt.com>.

Campers Donate to Worthy Causes

Skye Farm campers in 2009 donated funds to two non-profit organizations. As a result, a check for \$400 was recently sent to Project Chacocente USA, which helps those in poverty in Latin America and a check for \$1,018.75 to Heifer International, which helps empower the poor to fight poverty and hunger.

2010 staff applications now being accepted

Staff applications for paid and volunteer positions at Skye Farm Camp are being accepted for the 2010 summer season. All staff and volunteers will have reference checks, background checks and training. Applications can be downloaded at www.skyefarmcamp.org.

Shhhh! It's Silent Auction time ...

It is time to get ready for the Youth Service Fund (YSF) Silent Auction hosted by the Conference Council on Youth Ministries at the Troy Annual Conference Session, May 22 at Christ United Methodist Church, 54 Bay St., Glens Falls, N.Y. Youth are seeking donations for the auction, especially handmade items such as baby quilts and afghans; humorous items such as "Wash

Away Your Sins" hand soap; useful items such as books and devotional baskets; artistic items such as photographs or paintings; and novelty items such as collectible Happy Meal toy sets. Help youth raise money for YSF! Donate an item to the Silent Auction by bringing an item to the youth table on May 22.

Questions? Contact Sue Petrosino at suzieym@aol.com.

Classified

Interim Pastor

Seeking Interim Pastor for two small rural churches in central Vermont while pastor is on Spiritual Growth leave. We are seeking a candidate who is excited about doing ministry in creative ways that go beyond the traditional ideas of "church." Responsibilities include pastoral care, worship, visitation, small group leadership, mission projects and fund raising. Terms of employment—approximately May 9, 2010 through September 3, 2010. Honorarium for Preaching & Pastoral Care \$3,000. Housing Allowance \$3,000. Inquiries should be directed to Lucinda Clark at lucindac@myfairpoint.net.

Deputy General Secretary, GBGM

The General Board of Global Ministries has retained the services of The Novak Consulting Group to recruit for the position of Deputy General Secretary. Information regarding the position can be found at <http://thenovakconsulting-group.com/global-ministries>.