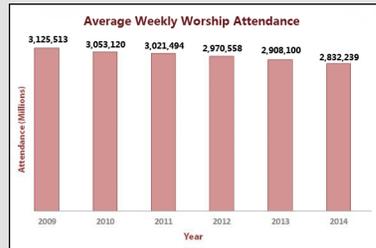


## IN BRIEF

### GC2016: Should the General Church budget go up?

The Upper New York Conference revised its 2016 Ministry Share Plan to take into consideration a trend over the years of Ministry Shares receipts coming in below the approved budget. In 2015, for example, 76.13 percent of the Ministry Shares budget was collected.



A proposed increase to the General Church budget is heading to the 2016 General Conference session, when the lawmaking assembly meets May 10-20 in Portland, Ore. However, a number of United Methodists say that in the wake of continuing declines in United States worship attendance, the General Church needs to tighten its belt. Read more about the General Church's proposed budget at [www.tinyurl.com/GC16BudgetUp](http://www.tinyurl.com/GC16BudgetUp).

### Global Ministries is looking for young adult missionaries

Do you know a young adult (age 20-30 years old) who would like to engage with local communities, connect the Church in mission, and grow in personal and social holiness?

The United Methodist Board of Global Ministries is looking for candidates to serve as young adult missionaries for the 2016-2018 term. Global Mission Fellows work with global organizations that address human trafficking, worker's rights, collegiate ministry, youth and children, and women's rights among many other issues.

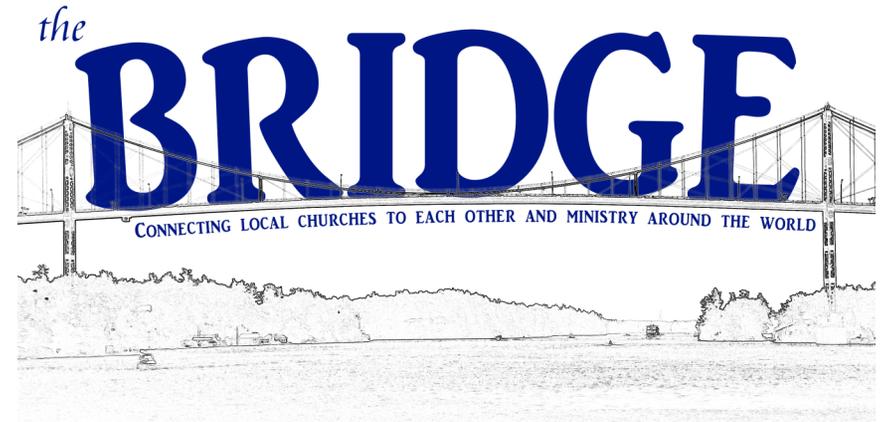
The application deadline for Global Mission Fellows is March 31.

For more information about Global Mission Fellows, visit [www.umcmmission.org/Get-Involved/Generation-Transformation/GMF](http://www.umcmmission.org/Get-Involved/Generation-Transformation/GMF). To apply to be a Global Mission Fellow, visit [www.tinyurl.com/GMFApplication2016](http://www.tinyurl.com/GMFApplication2016).

The *Bridge* is a Conference Communications Ministry tool that delivers to local churches news and stories of ministry from around the Upper New York Conference and the world.

[www.unyumc.org](http://www.unyumc.org)

HAVE A BLESSED EASTER SUNDAY!



The Upper New York Conference's vision is to live the gospel of Jesus Christ and to be God's love with our neighbors in all places.

## A LOOK INSIDE!

Experts discuss human sexuality at Liverpool First UMC	Page 2
Should the General Church budget increase?	Page 4
Global Ministries seeks young adult missionary candidates	Page 4

# Experts discuss human sexuality at Liverpool UMC

By Kathleen Rubino

More than 150 people attended – and more than 300 live-streamed – the Upper New York Conference Human Sexuality Task Force’s forum on “Human Sexuality and Biblical Interpretation” March 5 at the Liverpool First United Methodist Church. The event featured guest speakers the Rev. Dr. Bill T. Arnold, professor at Asbury Theological Seminary in Kentucky, and the Rev. Dr. Althea Spencer-Miller, professor at Drew Theology School in New Jersey.

“I was very pleased with it. I thought everybody was very respectful and listened well, although they were very clear on what they thought ...” said the Rev. Marty Swords-Horrell, pastor at Christ UMC in Troy and a member of the task force.

Upper New York Area Resident Bishop Mark J. Webb greeted the crowd, emphasizing the Conference’s role in walking alongside local churches. He called the forum a “vital conversation.”

“It’s important to have conversations like this one that help us more deeply engage,” Bishop Webb said. “We are in an important time, not just in The United Methodist Church but in the life of the Christian Church.”

The Rev. Bill Gottschalk-Fielding, Conference Director of Connectional Ministries, Executive Assistant to the Bishop, and a member of human sexuality task force, welcomed everyone to the forum and outlined the format: each speaker would have time to present, followed by a time for dialogue between the two, and conversation with the audience.

Rev. Arnold presented first, speaking about everything he wouldn’t touch up-

on in his speech, from hermeneutics to various sections of Scripture. Rev. Arnold addressed some of the “clobber passages” – Bible passages that involve

homosexual behavior – that he feels “are exclusively negative about same-sex practices.” He noted that the institution of Christian marriage came before the introduction of sin to the world, as evidenced in Genesis 2:22b-24. He also touched on Genesis 1:26-27, where God created male and female, and pointed out how the plurality of God is reflected in the plurality of humankind.

Rev. Arnold said he believes that in Matthew 19:4-6, heterosexuality is: God’s design (God created humans as distinct males and females), God’s institution (he instituted marriage to be between a man and a woman), and God’s plan. Based on compelling pieces of Biblical data, Rev. Arnold believes homosexual practices are incompatible with Christian teachings.

“I do not relish talking about these things,” he said. “We are not of one mind on this, but that doesn’t excuse us from drilling down to why we are not of one mind.”

Rev. Spencer-Miller took the podium next, starting her presentation with the



metaphor of the chicken and the pig. The chicken says to the pig, “Let’s have eggs and ham for breakfast.” For one, it is a matter of laying eggs.

For the other, it’s a matter of giving up their life. Having this breakfast impacts the pig more than it does the chicken. Rev. Spencer-Miller outlined the challenges she has faced as a gay, black, ordained, single mother.

“I feel a bit like a pig this afternoon,” she said.

Rev. Spencer-Miller discussed in depth her hermeneutics – the art and methodologies of interpretation, especially as they relate to Biblical literature. She stated that Christians are taught to disdain the homoerotic experience, but believes that increased knowledge and understanding might reshape our theories.

“This polarized conversation needs a new lens,” she said. “If we go deeper into the hermeneutical conversations, we may have new compasses.”

Rev. Spencer-Miller argued that the Bible is tendentious and that it disagrees with itself. For example, the Bible intones about family values, yet Abraham sells his wife into prostitution. She said people can argue over the “clobber

passages,” but this will only result in disdain. Instead, she invited the audience to embrace the complexity of Scriptures, rather than to act like one narrative is the only compelling narrative.

After a short break, Rev. Arnold and Rev. Spencer-Miller engaged in respectful dialogue with each other.

“I was really fed by their ability to interact with each other,” said Dr. Scott Johnson, Conference Lay Leader and a member of the task force. “I thought that made the conversation go to different places than we normally hear. I took a lot away both in terms of substance and also just hearing the engagement; it was really helpful.”

Following the dialogue, members of the Human Sexuality Task Force read aloud questions written by attendees, and each speaker took turns answering.

“I really, really appreciate the opportunity to sit and listen to two people who, coming from different perspectives and presuppositions, are able to articulate their theologies and discuss specific texts in a very amicable way,” said the Rev. Dr. Bill Allen, pastor at the Bemus Point UMC and a member of the task force. “I think maybe one of my hopes for the task force is to always bring respect to people who are differing on issues, and I think today is a good example of respectfulness offered and received for two differing opinions.”

To view or download a video of the human sexuality forum, visit [www.vimeo.com/158023055](http://www.vimeo.com/158023055). If you would like to request a DVD copy of the forum, contact the Communications Ministry Area at [news@unyumc.org](mailto:news@unyumc.org).