

Annual Conference Quadrennial theme announced

At the Sept. 29 gathering of the Sessions Committee, Bishop Mark J. Webb shared the work that had been done around discerning a theme for the next four Annual Conferences.

“It’s time for our posturing to change,” Bishop Webb said. “For too long, we have stood face-to-face with those who have differing points of view from us, trying to convince them that we are right. I believe it is time for us to kneel side-by-side and deeply engage in the discipline of prayer, asking God to move us forward together, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit.”



Bishop Webb went on to share that the theme for the next four years will be Together in Prayer. “We will continue to stand firm in our desire to ‘make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world’ and build upon the work we have done together over the last four years, specifically in our primary task of increasing the capacity of Christ following leaders. This is work that cannot be accomplished without a clear commitment to prayer and a desire for the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.”

- Annual Conference 2017: Together in Prayer – Trusting that God is Enough
- Annual Conference 2018: Together in Prayer – Boldly Living our Call
- Annual Conference 2019: Together in Prayer – Moving Beyond Our Comfort Zones
- Annual Conference 2020: Together in Prayer – Courageously Sharing God’s Story

While there will be individual Bible verses chosen each year, the quadrennial theme is rooted in a single verse:

“If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their lands.” – 2 Chronicles 7.14

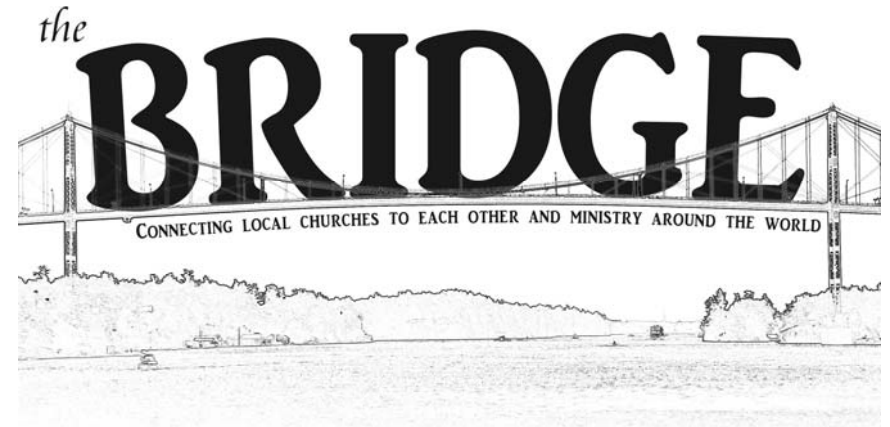
The Sessions committee overwhelmingly supported the theme, and busily began the work of bringing the theme to life for Annual Conference.

The 2017 session of the Upper New York Annual Conference will be held June 1 – June 3 at the OnCenter in Syracuse. A list of other important dates will be coming out through Conference communications channels in a matter of weeks.

*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.*

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How Ministry Shares support young people, the example of the teen camps

By Tasha Gottschalk-Fielding

On a typical summer day at one of the six Camp and Retreat Centers across the Upper New York Conference, Ministry Share funds are helping hundreds of youth deepen their relationship with God in ways which will impact them for the rest of their lives.

While the Camp and Retreat Ministry of the Upper New York Conference reaches out to multiple age groups throughout the year, Executive Director Mike Huber describes the camp portion of the ministry as largely focused on youth. Even though the staff members are now adults, many, including Mike, had their first contact with the ministry when they were youth.

Each summer, many of the camps are specifically targeted to youth, focusing on relevant themes for their age group such as music and sports. Some of this year's most popular teen camps included Beach Bums, Music Camp, and The ReMix. Mike describes these camps' comfortable, informal atmospheres as crucial to their effectiveness in reaching younger generations, providing youth with an "environment where individuals feel safe to find themselves, define themselves, and just be themselves."

For Alisha Gottschalk-Fielding, an 11th grader from the Crossroads District, her time this summer in Casowasco's ReCreate camp, which revolved around crafts and music, provided a warm, welcoming environment that allowed her to bond

with people her age who share her beliefs.

Alisha said, "Every morning my group did bible study on the Galilee porch. We took turns reading bible passages that had to do with the daily themes - like change and forgiveness - and then shared stories about our personal experiences with those topics. I got to really know the girls in my group and by the end of the week it felt like we were one big family."

While Alisha's story demonstrates how powerful teen camps can be at igniting fellowship and building relationships with other Christian teens, the effect that youth camps have on teens can last a lifetime. "Some youth that participate in our programs hear a call to become clergy," Mike explained, "some to mission work, some to other advocacy and social services roles, and many simply come to know that there is a God, that God loves them, and God wants a relationship with them."

Camp and Retreat Ministries require substantial funding and resources in order to continue the breadth of their mission work. This is where the use of Ministry Shares at the Annual-Conference level have an important impact. In 2016, despite the shortfall in expected ministry shares, the UNY Conference allocated 50 percent of its Conference Connectional Ministries Spending Plan to the Camp and Retreat Ministry, giving a total of \$840,000 for the operation of the six camps.

"The funding from the Annual Conference is critical" Mike Huber noted, explaining that this funding is essential to "providing the experienced, professional leadership at each site as well as the property insurance and marketing resources."

In other words, Ministry Shares allow all the camps across Upper New York to maintain the consistent level of quality that enables them to effectively reach out and encourage the faith of teens like Alisha Gottschalk-Fielding. This connectional giving at the Annual-Conference level has the potential to transform the lives of the youth and those they will come in contact with in the future for the rest of their lives.

Editor's Note: The next issue of the *Advocate* will highlight the importance of the United Methodist Connection and the impact Ministry Shares can have on local church ministries, Confer-

ence-level ministries, and global ministries. The UNY Camp and Retreat Ministry area is one way that Ministry Shares have had a positive impact on many UNY United Methodists.

