

IN BRIEF

Special Request: Photograph your church's Christmas spectacular

Every Christmas, churches of the Upper New York Conference put on elaborate, funny, and poignant Christmas pageants. We want to hear about your budding thespians. Take photos of your production and send them along with a short summary - including who participated, what was the theme/story, and any other unique tidbits - to news@unyumc.org with the subject line "Christmas Pageant." Please remember to get a signed photo release of all children 17 years of age and younger. If you need a photo release template, go to www.tinyurl.com/UNYPhotoReleaseTemplate. We will add these photos to an album on the Conference's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/UpperNewYork). *Photo courtesy the Oriskany Falls United Methodist Church.*



Advent letter asks New York's congregations to 'proclaim the fullness of our faith'

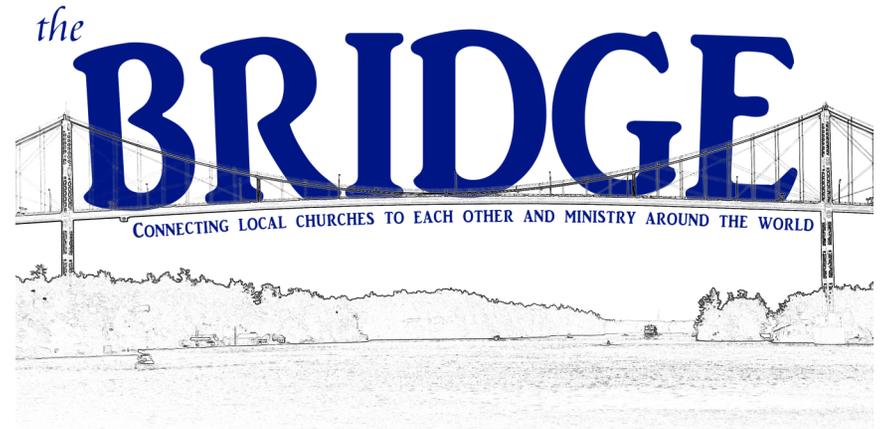
New York Conference Bishop Jane Allen Middleton and Upper New York Conference's Bishop Mark J. Webb have co-authored an open letter to United Methodists in the state, encouraging them to "welcome those seeking refuge, to advocate for systems that will deal with this international crisis, and to offer hope, peace, joy, and love to all, in the name and person of Jesus the Christ." Visit www.tinyurl.com/NYBishops15ADV to read the full Advent letter.



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

www.unyumc.org

WISHING YOU A HAPPY, HEALTHY NEW YEAR IN 2016!



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.

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A message from Upper New York Conference Area Resident Bishop Mark J. Webb:

The days leading up to Christmas have always been my favorite. It is a time of anticipation and expectation. As a child, many things were a part of this season. There were the traditional Christmas programs I never missed, programs like “Santa Claus is Coming to Town,” “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer,” and of course, “A Charlie Brown Christmas.” My dad and I would put up the outdoor Christmas lights. Our family would go together to search for the “perfect” Christmas tree. There were special services and programs we would participate in at our church. We would set up the nativity, the very one that sits in our house today. And, of course, there was the annual visit to see Santa Claus.

I still enjoy many of those things that made this season so magical as a child. But as I continue to “grow up,” I am coming to understand in a deeper way how important the days leading up to Christmas are. I’m attempting to move from getting ready to *celebrate* Christmas to getting ready to *be changed by the promise and truth* of Christmas.

We find ourselves living in a time that many of us have never experienced before. While the world has always been filled with violence, injustice, and despair, the days we experience seem filled with event after event that remind us: We live in a world that needs the promise of Christmas. We live in a time where those who follow Jesus have the potential to share with a hurting humanity the promise of healing and hope – a message of justice and love beyond comprehension.

As we get ready to celebrate Christmas, I wonder how we are getting ready to be changed by the promise of Christmas? Are we boldly sharing that promise with the world? External preparations are fun, but how are our internal preparations of mind, heart, and spirit taking priority? How are we opening our lives in a deeper way, *so that* we might truly live among the world as people changed by the truth of Christmas? How are we preparing for and anticipating God to use us, our actions, and



our words to proclaim to the present reality of the world, that there is another way?

The words of Isaiah must speak into and through our lives:

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore.

The promise of Christmas is Jesus! The truth of Christmas is Jesus!

The hope for the injustice and despair of our world is Jesus!

The hope for the brokenness of the Church is Jesus! The hope for me and for you is Jesus!

In these days leading up to Christmas, let us open our lives to Jesus in a fresh way. Let us be open to the promises of Jesus to give us new life and a new way of living. May we boldly offer Jesus to the world, believing that He will give to the world a new way! Let’s not simply get ready for another celebration of Christmas, let’s get ready to be changed by Jesus in a deeper way and to offer that promise of change to those around us.

Jodi, Tyler, and Ben join with me in wishing you a blessed and holy Christmas! May it be filled with anticipation, expectation, promise, and truth. May it be centered on truly getting ready for the only One who offers lasting hope and change. The one we call Emmanuel. Then one whose name is Jesus!

Merry Christmas!