

"Write the vision clearly on the tablets, that one may read it on the run." – Habakkuk

THE VISION

The Newspaper
of the New York
Annual Conference
of The United
Methodist Church

January 15, 2010



Photo by Malcolm Bowman

Start 2010 Off On The Right (Or Left) Foot

Now is the time for the clergy of the NYAC to make a covenant with themselves for better health and a bit more exercise.

John Wesley understood that exercise, health, healing and faith are interrelated. In fact, Wesley was well ahead of his time by recognizing the link between health and the theological understanding of a good creation.

Walking for wellness and being physically active in other ways helps us—and by extension those touched through our ministry—to honor God by being good stewards of our bodies.

If you're covered by HealthFlex, and becoming more active through the Virgin HealthMiles program, you are on the path to better health. The HealthMiles program is an initiative developed by the Center for Health—a multifaceted focus on denominational health.

Running With A Mission

The sun breaks through the trees just before the church bell rings to start the 5K Holiday Fun Run at Community UMC in Stony Brook, N.Y., on December 12. A record 130 runners and walkers, including Bishop Jeremiah J. Park, took to the streets on the frigid morning to raise funds to be used for the church's outreach efforts. See story and more photos on Page 7.

Connecting at the Jurisdictional Level

Ximena Varas and Mitch Underwood, (Connecticut), Gerry Rosenberger (Catskill Hudson), Lorraine Leak (Long Island East), and Renata Smith (conference lay leader) represented the NYAC at the Northeast Jurisdiction's Annual Meeting for Lay Leaders. The October meeting was held in Philadelphia under the theme, "Living the Witness."

We enjoyed being in the company of each other as members of the New York delegation, and we learnt so much from being in fellowship

**LAITY
ON THE
MOVE**
Renata Smith



with our counterparts from other conferences. The ultimate goal of our attendance is to put what we have learnt into practice in ways that will fulfill the vision of the NYAC. We will share what impacted us most at the conference and how that will help us fulfill our roles.

Renata: Sandy Jackson from the General Board of Discipleship led the training on the role of lay leaders. David Napoleon, manager of financial services, spoke on financial discipleship. The two trainings came together in a powerful way for me, as I am becoming more aware that many lay leaders need roles clarification. David challenged us to give from transformation, rather than from obligation. Wow! Combining knowledge of roles with serving which includes giving, from a

Continued on page 6

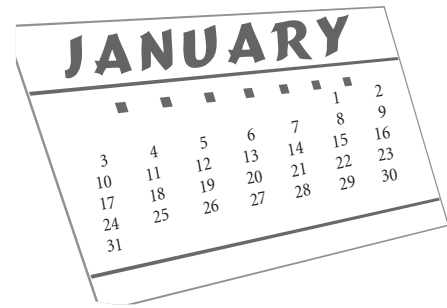
Incentives for Better Health

During 2009, only 332 participants out of a possible 1,000 enrolled in the Virgin Health Miles program. They earned \$35,687 in rebates as they worked to improve their health. Of the 332 participants, 188 have logged walking miles and earned an average of \$93 per member. The other 144 could get in on the cash too if they put on their pedometers and aimed for 7,000 steps per day.

In 2010, improving health will be more rewarding than ever. With the expanded HealthFlex Wellness Incentive Program, all

Continued on page 6

SAVE THE DATE



Lay Speaking Classes

January 2010: Lay speaking classes are beginning in the Long Island West and New York-Connecticut districts for both adults and youth. For the schedule and registration information go to: <http://nyac.com/events/index?area=7>.

Wilke at Bishop's Convocation

January 19–21, 2010: "Connecting Movement: Connecting with God, the Church and the World" with retired Bishop Richard Wilke. Hudson Valley Resort and Spa, Kerhonkson, N.Y. Register by January 4 for the early bird discounts. Download registration information at: <http://nyac.com/events/detail/2364>. Make checks payable to: Bishop's Convocation, and mail to: Ken Coddington, 555 Joslen Blvd., Hudson, NY 12534. For questions, call Ken at 518-828-0226, or email, TrinityUMC@mhonline.net. See story on Page 5.

Ignite 2kX for Youth!

January 29–31: Exciting Worship! Engaging Speakers! Amazing Performances! Relevant Workshops! And some free time to relax and enjoy at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, White Plains, N.Y. The weekend starts at 6 p.m. Friday and runs through 11 a.m. Sunday. Events include open microphone nights and music with Hype praise band. Register by January 14 for the cheapest fees and the best hotel room rates. Find all the details at: www.umyouth.com.

Church Records & Archives Workshop

January 30: Workshop for pastors, administrative assistants, trustees and local church historians will introduce basic archival concepts. The noon–4 p.m. session is sponsored by the Commission on Archives and History, and is limited to 25 participants. Hands-on activities included. Lunch provided at noon; workshop begins at 1 p.m., NYAC Center, White Plains, N.Y. To register, contact Mary Robison at archives@nyac.com; or 888-696-6922.

Boundaries & Sexual Ethics Workshop

February 6: Training for clergy runs from 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m., NYAC Center, White Plains, N.Y.

Souper Bowl of Caring

February 7: For information and helpful resources about this campaign to fight hunger, go to www.souperbowl.org, where you can register your congregation.

Want to Write, Photograph, Or "Tweet"?

At The Vision, we're always looking for news, photos and stories about what's going on in your church and your community. You can submit news events, first-person accounts and photos to thevision@nyac.com. Anything you submit may also be featured separately on the conference web site. And please remember to include The Vision when you're sending out press releases to your local media outlets.

Each month, you'll find the latest edition of The Vision at www.nyac.com, where you can read it online or print out just the pages that you need. There is also a large-print version for those who prefer that option. A translation application on the web site allows you to read anything on the site in one of more than 25 different languages. We ask that churches consider printing out a few copies of The Vision to share with their leadership teams each month.

During annual conference in June, we're also looking for volunteers to write stories about the events and speakers for the Daily Updates. Or if you "tweet," consider becoming part of our Twitter team at Hofstra University. To volunteer, email Vision Editor Joanne Utley.

Genealogy Workshop



March 6: A discussion with Saugerties historian, author and genealogist Audrey Klinkenberg, 1–4 p.m., NYAC Center, White Plains, N.Y. The workshop is sponsored by the Commission on Archives and History, and is limited to 25 participants. To register, contact Mary Robison at archives@nyac.com; or 888-696-6922.

Black College Benefit Luncheon

March 14: UMC Black College Fund Committee Annual Luncheon, 3 p.m., Crowne Plaza Hotel, White Plains, N.Y. Dr. Haywood Strickland, president of Wiley College—home of the great debaters, will be the guest speaker. For tickets and information, contact Caroline Nanton at 718-377-7568, Veronica Darby at 718-455-7784 or Cleolene Jones at 718-739-9046.

NYM Hospital 2010 Pastors' Health Clinics

April 12–16 and November 8–12: Rev. Richard S. Parker, Coordinator of the Methodist Hospital Pastors, Clinics, has announced these dates for the two 2010 New York Conference, All Districts, Pastors' Health Clinics. The respective registration and payment deadlines are March 26 and October 22, 2010. For more information and an online brochure, go to the news section of www.nyac.com.

The News of the New York Conference of the United Methodist Church

Bishop: **Jeremiah J. Park**
 Director of Connectional Ministries: **Ann A. Pearson**
 Editor: **Joanne Utley**
 New York Conference of The United Methodist Church
 20 Soundview Avenue, White Plains, NY 10606
 Phone (914) 997-1570 or (914) 615-2219
 Fax (914) 615-2244; Website: www.nyac.com
 Vision e-mail: thevision@nyac.com

Best Wishes for A Blessed New Year!

The bishop, the extended cabinet and the entire NYAC staff are ready to serve the clergy and congregations throughout the conference in 2010. Seated from left: Rev. James Moore, Rev. Adrienne Brewington, Rev. Jeannette Bassinger-Ishii, Bishop Jeremiah J. Park, Rev. Noel Chin, Rev. Ken Kieffer, and Rev. Kenny Yi. Second row from left: Rev. Ann Pearson, Barbara



Moody, Fran Collins, Barbara Atchison, Chan Gillham, Evelyn Brunson, Pat Perruccio, Lesley Asase, Dorothy Chamberlain, Ernest Swiggett, Robert Miller, Rev. George Engelhardt, Rev. Dennis Winkleblack, and Lynda Gomi. Back row from left: Rev. Jim Stinson, Jean Strong, Kim Cartiglia, Sally Evans, Rev. Keith Muhleman, Sam Rosenfeld, Mary Robison, Joanne Utley, and Rev. Joseph Ewoodzie.

Learning to Nurture a Positive Attitude

BY JIM STINSON

Consultant on Older Adult Ministries

Two separate visits to two new residents at our assisted living facility at the United Methodist Homes on the same morning! They both arrived on the same day and now live a few doors from each other, never having met before. The contrast could not have been more extreme. Two distinctly different responses. Two radically different approaches to change.

One hopeful and expectant. One despairing and resigned to things never being any better.

Both are suggestive of attitudes we bring to aging, whether our own or that of someone we care for and about.

Asked how things were going in their first week in a new setting, he said, "Couldn't be any better! I'm as free as a bird. I have my apartment and laundry cleaned for me, my meals are served and they're delicious. I can pick and choose from a variety of things to do. I go to my office at least once a week and do what I like the best—pursue my life-long career." He is a mere 93 years old.

She said, "I'm in prison! But what did I



expect? Everyone gets old and this is what happens. I'll get used to it, but I'll never like it!" She is barely seventy years old.

Both attitudes—both approaches to aging—are real in the older adult population. Both are real among those who do ministry with older adults. The first, obviously, is the more constructive and life giving. The second is self-destructive and saps the energy out of the person and those around him or her.

The question these attitudes raise for those who care for and about older adults is, "Can I do something to foster the first and diminish the second?" Ultimately there is the frustrating reality that no one can change anyone else's attitude. Every individual is finally in charge of his or her attitude and approach to life.

However there are some things that can help foster the possibility of a healthier attitude. Let me suggest a few:

- Listen, without judgment to the negative comments. Explore the reasons for the negativity. Often there are legitimate reasons for them. Talking about them and dealing with them often is therapeutic and helpful.
- After listening, gently observe some positive things, some concrete actions that might be taken by saying something like, "You used to love to knit, would you please make Mary a scarf? She would love one from you." Or "Josie cannot see to read her own mail, you're a great reader, would you read to her?"
- Gently remind the person of the strength and resilience he/she has already demonstrated, having made it into being an older adult. That strength can still be tapped. Talk about spiritual resources that she might use.
- Expect a different attitude and share with her how much confidence you have that she will choose a different approach.



Never Too Young To Learn to Say Thanks

Did you ever forget to say “thank you”? Do you ever remind your kids, “What do you say?” Children won’t say thanks unless you teach them why it’s important and how to make their appreciation known. Your example is crucial. When your child asks why it’s important, start by saying it’s simply the polite thing to do and make sure they see you thanking others.



- Set a time soon after the holidays to write thank-you notes. If possible, put pen to paper—limit e-mail thank-yous.
- Be sure your children see you write thank-you notes. Read the completed note aloud and ask your kids, “Is there anything we left out?”
- Let the kids pick out the cards. If they’re young, keep an eye out for over-sized, kid-friendly cards. Then make your kids part of preparing the thank-you notes, no matter how small the role.
- Don’t relegate the task to girls—boys need to learn to say thanks, too.
- If the child is too young to write a note, talk to grandparents on the phone or have the child dictate a note. Urge the child to discuss the gift and how it will be used.
- Be sure your child understands how

important it is to others to say thanks because you want it to be more than rote mumbling or a pro forma scribble. Tell the child that others need to know that you appreciate their efforts on your behalf.

- Praise your children for saying thanks and tell them that it means a lot to others.
- If your child is shy or intimidated by crowds, practice saying thanks with the child before a family event. Success builds confidence, so set your child up to succeed.
- If the excitement of a large event carries your child away take a moment in private to remind the child to say thanks. Never have this conversation in public or denigrate the child for forgetting. These things take time and patience. Positive feedback builds positive behavior.
- It’s often said that the best gifts come from the heart—not the store. Build on this folk wisdom and explain to your child that the real meaning of a gift is made clear to giver and recipient by saying thanks.

For more information on the Children’s Home, call 607-772-6904, or toll free 800-772-6904, ext. 131, or visit our website at www.chowc.org. To schedule a presentation about the Children’s Home, contact Rebecca Mebert at the above number. Please feel free to send donations by using the NYAC advance number, 60-0588.

Lenten School Offers Bible, Lay Speaking Classes

For six Sundays, beginning February 21, the Grace UMC in Newburgh, N.Y., will be hosting the 2010 Lenten School. Each weekly meeting will begin at 4 p.m. with soup and sandwiches, followed by a worship service at 4:40, and class from 5 to 7:30 p.m. Pre-registration is highly recommended; there is no charge for the Lenten School courses.

The school will include the following courses:

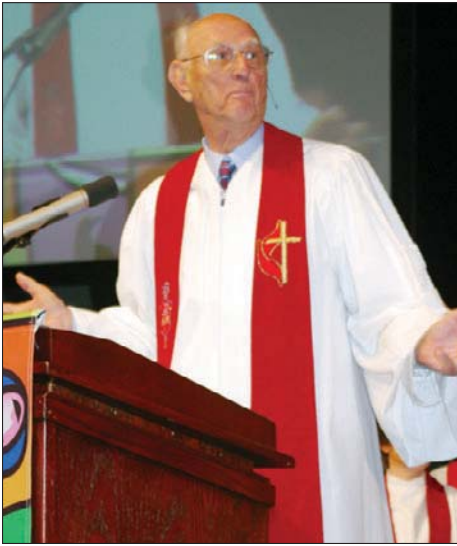
- Six-week Lenten Bible Study
- Six-week devotional study for middle school, junior high and high school students.
- February 21 and 28: “Paths to the Ministry,” information on ministry opportunities in the United Methodist Church.
- March 7: Spiritual disciplines
- March 21 and 28: Funeral ministry
- March 21: “Your Body as a Temple,” workshop on basic nutrition. Followed on March 28 with a session on counting carbohydrates, specifically for those with diabetes, pre-diabetes or high triglyceride levels.
- Three-week study on prayer: Dates to be determined.

There will also be a variety of six-week classes for those interested in becoming a local lay speaker or a certified lay speaker. Each lay speaker, local and certified, must take a course once every three years to maintain status. The Basic Course in Lay Speaking will be offered in addition to the following that can serve as advanced or refresher courses:

- Sermon planning
- Leading worship
- “Technology in the Pulpit” will deal with ways to present the mission of the church beyond traditional preaching including video presentation, blogging, and other social network methodologies.
- “Devotional Life in the Wesleyan tradition”

Each of the lay speaking courses is \$35, with a \$5 discount for those who register before February 1. For more information or to register, contact Tony Mitchell at 914-456-9247 or TonyMitchellPhD@verizon.net. You may also contact Pastor Steve Knutsen at 845-635-3540 or pastorsteveknutsen@verizon.net for information.

Convocation a Time to Relax, Reflect



Bishop Richard Wilke addresses those gathered for the 2009 ordination service at Hofstra University.

Clergy from across the conference will soon be gathering for fellowship and a time of retreat at the 60th annual Bishop's Convocation. Bishop Richard Wilke, who offered an engaging sermon at last year's ordination service, will be the featured speaker at the gathering on January 19–21 at the Hudson Valley Resort and Spa, Kerhonkson, N.Y. The focus of the convocation is "Connecting Movement: Connecting with God, the Church and the World."

Wilke is presently bishop-in-residence at Southwestern College in Linfield, Kansas. He was elected to the episcopacy in 1984 after serving several UM congregations in Kansas. He is known around the world as the co-author with his wife, Julia, of the Disciple Bible study program. Bishop Jeremiah J. Park has called Bishop Wilke an "energizing, inspirational and prophetic presence and preacher."

The convocation begins with registration at 1 p.m. on Tuesday, Jan. 19, and concludes with lunch on Thursday, Jan. 21. Sessions with

Bishop Wilke are scheduled for Wednesday and Thursday mornings, and there will also be meetings with Bishop Park all three days. Wednesday's schedule offers separate lunches for clergy spouses and single clergy, as well as workshops on web site design, and on Adobe Photoshop and Microsoft PowerPoint; a musicians jam session and an under-40 clergy gathering. Evening entertainment will include music from Solomon's Porch and a comedy hour.

Bishop Wilke has asked those attending the convocation to read his latest book, "The Tie That Binds: Connecting With God, the Church and the World."

Registration information can be downloaded at: <http://nyac.com/events/detail/2364>. Checks should be made payable to: Bishop's Convocation, and mail to: Ken Coddington, 555 Joslen Blvd., Hudson, NY 12534. For questions, call Ken at 518-828-0226, or email, TrinityUMC@mhonline.net.



Highland Mills Pastor Darlene Resling is flanked by two of her predecessors, Rev. Kirt Watkins, left, and Rev. Robert Thompson-Gee.

Dinner Caps Highland Mills Celebration

Members of the Highland Mills UMC concluded the yearlong celebration of their 150th anniversary on December 5 with a Christmas dinner. Despite a surprise snowstorm, a large and enthusiastic turnout filled the social hall at the Central Valley UMC where the dinner was held to accommodate the crowd.

Current pastor, Rev. Darlene Resling, welcomed back Rev. Kirt Watkins who served Highland Mills from 2002 to July 2009, and Rev. Robert Thompson-Gee who was pastor from 1993 to 1997. Watkins is now pastor at Sea Cliff UMC and Thompson-Gee serves as senior pastor at Poughkeepsie UMC.

Guests at the dinner also included Rev. Dee Stevens, pastor of Central Valley UMC, and several members of the Central Valley and Mountainville UM churches. The evening concluded with a rousing Christmas carol sing-along.

Church Flocks to Pink Fundraiser

Excerpted from The News-Times

Stealthy United Methodists are targeting their fellow church members and friends in New Milford, Conn., for an unexpected migration of pink flamingos into their front yards.

Under the cloak of darkness, members of the New Milford UMC youth group and their adult chaperones shepherd the flocks to unsuspecting recipients so the people arrive home, or awake, to the sight of the native Floridian birds.

Not to worry, though. The birds are plastic, so other than creating a spectacle for neighbors and friends—and no shortage of laughter—they do not make a mess.

The upside of sharing the flocks is that the money paid to send the birds—and donations made at the end of the day to remove them and send them elsewhere—benefits the church youth ministry, youth missions and Christian education programs. The church web site says the UMYF group "will capture these endangered species from your yard and guide the birds elsewhere. It is a very delicate procedure and should only be accomplished by the trained UMYF."

The delivery of a flock of 12 is \$10; a double flock is \$20. The flamingos arrive with a greeting card that reads, "You've Been Flocked."

The first sighting of the gangly birds was at the Northville home of longtime church member Jean Lord.

"I was very surprised. You don't expect to see that many flamingos in the yard," said Lord, who arrived home from a spaghetti dinner at the church to find birds covering the lawn outside her home.

The Rev. Stefanie Bennett, church pastor, said the only criteria for participation is "good will and good humor."

Bennett said the flocks will continue to make visitations as long as they are wanted, and she would love nothing more than pink flamingos on a snow-covered lawn. If you'd like to see that happen, you can arrange for a flocking by emailing the church office at nmumc@charter.net.

Start 2010 Off On The Right Foot

Continued from page 1

HealthFlex participants and their spouses have the opportunity to earn up to \$300 for improving their health. If you are covered by an active medical plan (not a Medicare Companion Plan), you're eligible to earn up to \$425 this year in incentives! Plus the NYAC will have the opportunity for pro-check blood tests at Annual Conference that will provide an additional \$25 in rebates per covered clergy and spouse. So that totals \$900 per family. This amount would almost pay the clergy share of the HealthFlex premium.

For those who are retired and covered under the Medicare HealthFlex plan, you have the opportunity to earn up to \$300 in incentives this year. If your spouse is also covered by a HealthFlex Medicare Companion Plan, he or she also can earn up to \$300—for a household total of up to \$600.

Incentives provide short-term rewards for improved health. But the real payoff comes later, with a lower risk for heart disease, diabetes, stroke, obesity, some cancers and kidney disease. HealthFlex incentives are awarded throughout 2010 for staying focused on your fitness and wellness. The program has an anniversary date based on when you sign up, not on the calendar year.

Health Is the Bottom Line

HealthFlex, HealthMiles, HealthCash and a healthier you—they're all connected. You accrue HealthMiles for doing things like increasing your physical activity and taking a closer look at your risk factors and health history. As your HealthMiles add up, you can redeem them for HealthCash in the form of gift cards from major retailers' or a check payable to you, your church or a charity of your choice.

Taking good care of you isn't selfish—it's good stewardship. When we are healthy, we are better able to serve others.

To be eligible for the 2010 HealthFlex incentives, you must first enroll in the Virgin HealthMiles program. All HealthMiles are tallied—and all HealthCash is issued—through your personal HealthMiles account. Go to www.gbophb.org, log in to your HealthFlex/WebMD account and click "Join Now!" Your spouse also can enroll in the walking program to earn incentives if he or she is covered by HealthFlex.

For any questions, please contact Bill Shillady, chair of Pensions and Health Benefits at bshillady@umcitysociety.org.

Hmmm... maybe I should trade the horse for a pedometer?



Search Begins For Next NYAC Treasurer

Bishop Jeremiah Park has appointed a committee to guide the search for the next conference treasurer/director of administrative services. This individual will succeed Ernest Swiggett who is retiring on September 1.

The committee consists of seven members representing various entities within our conference. The members are as follows:

Cabinet and Extended Cabinet

Representatives: Rev. Noel Chin (Chairperson), Rev. Ann Pearson

Commission on Finance and Administration (CFA) Representatives: Rev. Steve Phillips, Gillian Prince.

Board of Trustees Representative: Jorge Lockward

Personnel Committee Representative: Rev. Sabrina Johnson Chandler

At-Large Representative: Myung Rae Kim Lee

The committee is finalizing plans for the application process for the position. More information will follow in the coming weeks.

Making Laity Connections

Continued from page 1

point of transformation rather than out of obligation will be a foundational principle as we on the board of laity help lay leaders to understand their roles.

Mitch: For me getting to meet Sandy Jackson from the GBOD and others at the Jurisdictional level gave me additional resources to draw upon when I encounter those unexpected bumps in the road. I found the time of sharing ideas to be most helpful. As you might imagine, I have been a district lay leader for only a few months and being able to hear the experiences of others was very useful. Most of all, I enjoyed the worship and fellowship shared by all. There is a certain energy that comes from being with others who are deeply committed to the support of laity ministry. I remain inspired and motivated by their commitment.

Gerry: Besides the exceptional training mentioned above and the overall great spirit experienced throughout the session, a result is that a training presentation is being promoted for lay leaders of the Catskill Hudson District.

Lorraine: I was impressed that although we come from different geographical areas, cultures economies and church sizes, we are faced with very similar needs and utilize similar efforts grounded in love to make disciples for Jesus Christ.

Ximena: As a newly elected co-lay leader of the Connecticut District, attending the Northeast Jurisdictional Conference for Lay leaders was truly a blessing. I was able to learn about the ministry of the lay leader on the local church, district and conference levels. I was reminded of the importance of giving and the way we model by example. Every speaker gave me food for thought that continues to inspire me. My favorite part was the sharing of all the lay leaders as we prayed and sang together, laughed together and as we shared our joys and struggles. What a beautiful reminder of the importance of Christian community and that when two or three are gathered together in his name, Jesus Himself is present. I know that attending this conference has given me not only the knowledge, but the energy to serve my Savior better in my district.



Photos by Malcolm Bowman

Running side by side so they can cross the finish together are Conor Gruber, Gillian Meyer, Kristen Holl, Lauren Davis, and Connor Brogan.

Stony Brook Race for Mission

The near freezing temperatures on December 12 didn't deter the 130 runners and walkers in the Community UMC's "5K Holiday Fun Run" through Stony Brook, N.Y., village. Bishop Jeremiah Park and Rev. Elizabeth Braddon offered blessings before the race and then took to the course with the other competitors. The participants,

who ranged in age from eight to 73, warmed up with coffee, tea and bagels back at the church. Medals were given to the top female and male runners as well as the first, second, and third place runners in each age category. Approximately \$2,700 was raised, which will benefit the church's outreach efforts including the Bishop's Partners in mission fund.



Bishop Jeremiah Park, above, makes the final turn heading to the finish line. In the right photo, Pastor Elizabeth Braddon, right rear, and her husband, Wally Robinson, walked the 5K course that began and ended at the church.

Training Planned For Disaster Chaplains

A two-day event to train volunteer disaster chaplains is planned for January 26 and 27 in New York City. The training, co-sponsored by the New York Annual Conference and New York Disaster Interfaith Services (NYDIS), is open to religious leaders of all faiths. Those participants who complete certification can volunteer with NYDIS or as disaster spiritual care volunteers in other communities.

The training prepares faith leaders and institutional chaplains to offer care in mass care settings or within their house of worship, religious community or professional institution. Each registrant must be endorsed for this training and/or currently serve as a professional chaplain or credentialed religious leader.

The training will focus on:

- What to expect at disaster sites
- Providing spiritual and psychological first aid
- Making appropriate assessments and referrals to mental health and other services
- Developing and maintaining holistic self-care practices

Attendance is limited to 25 participants; registration deadline is January 15. Tuition is \$195 and includes continental breakfast, lunch and training materials. Training sessions are from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., with registration beginning at 8:15 a.m. at the NDIN offices, 4 West 43rd Street, 2nd Floor, New York, NY 10036. To register, go to the National Disaster Interfaiths Network web site at, <http://www.n-din.org/> and click on the link under the "Training" section. For further information, contact Rev. Joseph Ewoodzie in the NYAC office at jewoodzie@nyac.com, or call 888-696-6922, ext. 233.

Share Your Successes On NYAC Web site

Have you seen two of the newest features on the NYAC website under the "Resources" menu? You can share the events and ministries that have been a success in the new "It Worked For Us" section at <http://nyac.com/itworkedforus>. Or submit photos and descriptions of the altar or seasonal displays used at your church for the Liturgical Arts pages at <http://nyac.com/pages/detail/1701>. Send your stories and photos for these pages to Rev. Ann Pearson, director of Connectional Ministries at, apearson@nyac.com.

What Does God Ask of Us in

2010?

BY ELLIOTT WRIGHT

The Bible is filled with questions, from God's, "Where are you?," asked of Adam and Eve in the garden, to John's inquiry, "Lord, who will not fear and glorify your name?" in Revelation.

Many of the questions are presented as coming from God:

Where is your brother . . . what have you done? asked of Cain (Genesis 4:9–10). *What shall I do with these people?* asked of the Israelites (Exodus 17:4).

Or God's prophets and poets: *Whom shall I serve?* (Isaiah 6:8) *What shall I return to the Lord for all his bounty to me?* (Psalm 116:12)

Or from Jesus, often to disciples: *How many loaves have you?* (Matthew 15:34) *Do you also want to go away?* (John 6:67)

Or by those who encounter Jesus: *What must I do to inherit eternal life?* (Mark 10:17) *What should I do with Jesus?* (Mark 6:24) Christian life, discipleship, and mission confront the biblical questions in every generation and culture. Responses become part of the building material of the household of faith.

Four biblical questions challenge United Methodists in 2010, especially in the terms of our strong commitment to personal and social holiness—our love for God and people experienced in daily life and our society as the church.

With what shall I come before the Lord. . . . What does the Lord require of us? (Micah 6:6,8)

These questions of attitude and ethics from the Prophet Micah remain valid in the 21st century. They touch directly on human interaction with God and on interpersonal relations. The prophet's response is likewise relevant today: To do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. Is not God asking United Methodists to internalize Micah's questions and responses in our emphases on ministry with the poor and global health? In the mission goal calling us to promote justice, peace, and freedom? The questions challenge us to examine how we regard God and God's people.

With what shall we come before the Lord in

2010? What does the Lord require of us in the New Year?

And who is my neighbor? (Luke 10:29)

The lawyer who asked Jesus this question was trying to justify himself after questioning Jesus about the route to eternal life. Jesus asked him what the Jewish law said, and the lawyer answered: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." So, the questioner pointed the dialogue in another direction: "And who is my neighbor?"

Jesus followed with the story of a Jew who falls among thieves on the road to Jericho. The injured person remains unaided until a Samaritan provides transportation and funds for his care. Perhaps contemporary counterparts of the injured traveler are those around the world who have no access to health care and those in the United States who have no health insurance.

Who are our neighbors in 2010?

Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? (Isaiah 6:8)

This summons came to the prophet Isaiah and has served as a clarion call to God's mission over the centuries. Isaiah responds, "Here am I, send me." Sent for what, to whom? Isaiah's mission was to speak to his people about the power and majesty of God.

Christians across the ages have been called to tell the story of God's love to all people, to share the experience of hope and faith with

all people; to include in the church those of all races and languages, all cultures and economic stations, all physical and intellectual conditions.

To whom are we sent in 2010? For what purposes?

For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? (Matthew 16:26)

The Bible frequently questions the value and worth of worldly possession and positions. Those who have profited in material terms are often unhappy with the answers they receive. They

are disappointed when Jesus fails to confirm their wealth. We might ask today about the value of cathedrals without hunger ministries; jeweled crosses without compassion; vacation trips without visits to prisons; savings accounts without saving stations of hope and healing.

Where are our values in 2010?

As we contemplate the questions scripture presents to us, we need the reminder from Micah to walk humbly with God. We have heard questions before. We have made pledges and promises to follow more excellent ways, and we often stumble. Confession is in order as we prepare to respond to God's questions.

Appropriate for the new year is a prayer of confession written by the Rev. Paul Rock of the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York:

"You have taught us to endure and promise to supply our needs, O God. Yet we grow stagnant and demanding with our wants. We seek your will and desire that you guide our steps, but we forget to keep walking. God, we long for comfort, security and stability in our jobs, relationships, schedules and faith. But Lord, you ask us to move. You call us to new perspectives when we grow content with old ones. You led us to far away lands and back again, as new people. You yourself were born in the midst of a journey, O Lord. God, help us to be a people willing to travel with you in this temporary life, so that you might use us to bring light to those in darkness. Amen."

Elliott Wright is the information officer of the General Board of Global Ministries.