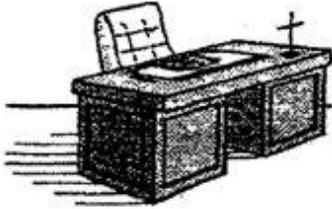




The Messenger
Grace United Methodist Church
16 Hillcrest Drive
Ravena, NY 12143-1409

Rev. Judith Johnson-Siebold, Ph.D.
Pastor



**FROM THE
PASTOR'S
DESK**

August 2014

Dear Friends,

The account of Annual Conference that appears below gives you a wonderful sense of what it felt like to be there. Enjoy!

Pastor Judi

A TASTE OF ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2014

Ralph A. Marino

(Reprinted with permission from the Valley Falls UMC Newsletter, The Bell Tower, Summer 2014)

If someone had to capture the spirit of Upper New York Annual Conference in four words, they probably would say, "I can't do it!" There were too many people, points of enthusiasm, signs of the Holy Spirit in action, and good natured laughs to permit such a compressed sense of what went on at the Syracuse OnCenter May 29-31. So with that excuse for using more than four words, I offer the following observations.

Worship: Worship is always an important part of conference. The David Crowder Band, a Christian rock group whose music was familiar to many in the crowd, led most of our music. Bishop Webb's opening message set the stage with his reminder that "we have somehow forgotten that we are called by God for connection to one another," but the good news is that "through Jesus Christ, we can seek a unity that is deeper than our differences."

Snapshot: When the conference budget (\$10,340,438) passed with nearly unanimous consent, the youth tossed half a dozen beach balls into the crowd to help celebrate our enthusiasm and mutual good feeling. The band played "Nothing is Impossible" with a throbbing beat. It took the bishop a while to return us to the agenda after that.

Bible Study: Bishop Michael Lowry from the Fort Worth Episcopal Area pointed us to the founding of the church in Acts. He recalled the words of Mother Theresa when she visited the United States: "I've never seen people so starved." Like Peter then, we today need to feed spiritually hungry people with the message of Christ. Lowry's message to us was to put Christ at the center, change our hearts and lives, and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit so we build not to meet our preferences but to fulfill God's purposes.

CONAM: It may sound like the name of some ancient warrior, but it's the acronym for the Committee on Native American Ministries. The history of interaction between Europeans and Native Americans is ugly in general and embarrassing in several particulars to United Methodists. The last General Conference moved to have all annual conferences and all individual churches participate in a Service of Repentance & Healing Relationships with Indigenous Persons. The goal is to better understand where the church has failed to be the church and put us back on track together. The service is especially relevant to us because there are nine different Native American nations living in the area of the UNY Annual Conference.

Snapshot: At the Friday evening Celebration of Ministry Night we recognized the retirement of thirty-eight clergy. Between them they had served a total of 1068 years.

Technology: Forgot your worship booklet or can't find your reading glasses when the hymn begins? No problem. Nearly everything of importance was displayed on five large overhead screens. A team of skilled typists translated everything that was said into closed captions so everyone could follow the action. The typists were off-site somewhere and

they didn't necessarily know if someone was saying, "Skin act tiddy," or "Schenectady," but their efforts were a real plus.

Sad Snapshot: During the course of conference we voted to close ten churches. It was not a happy event; however, to put it in perspective, through the years we've closed nineteen churches in Albany and another half dozen within a twenty-minute drive of the village of Valley Falls.

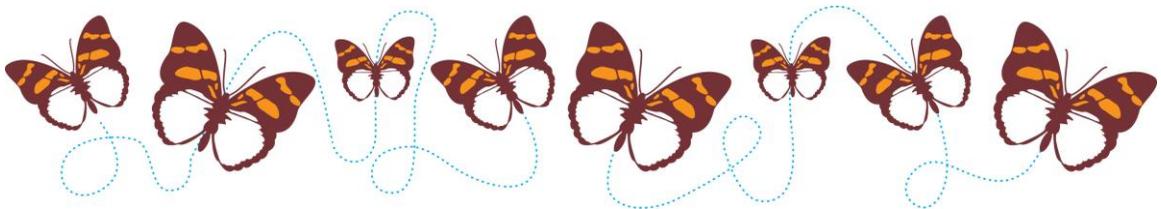
Human Sexuality: The General Church and the annual conferences have struggled with changing perceptions of homosexuality for decades now. Last year's conference action called for a Human Sexuality Task Force made up of people representing a wide range of opinions on the issue. They met throughout the year and essentially agreed that they needed to continue to talk-not to argue, convince, or attack, but to understand divergent points of view.

Environmental Concerns: Noting that our meals were served on plastic dishes with plastic utensils, all of which were discarded after one use, we added a person to the Sessions Committee who will look after environmental issues in the future. Also, while hydro-fracking is not currently allowed in New York state, that could change. We formed a committee to prepare a recommendation on fracking on conference-owned land (think, for instance of church camps and closed churches) for the next session of conference.

Good News Snapshot: In a story told by one presenter, a church had the opportunity to move forward in ministry by giving up its present building and moving to a new one. One old-timer said, "We can't go. My grandfather set this post in place. My father kept it plumb. I've painted and maintained it. We can't go." After a pause, another old-timer responded, "Give the man his post and let's move on." UNYAC is working to move on. Last year saw a 9% increase in professions of faith, 615 mission teams ministered to over 460,000 persons, and we gave over \$4,000,000 to mission work beyond our mission shares. We celebrated the potential for the Mission of Peace to touch the lives of young people with an offering of \$7,800. Twenty-two new faith communities provide United Methodist outreach to new people, with an additional 15 more in various stages of development. Of direct importance to us, three of these new faith communities are in Albany.

Summing Up: Annual Conference offered inspiration, hope for the future, and a chance to see again our dynamic, forward-looking bishop in action. Everyone was regularly reminded that our role as members of local UM churches today is not just to survive but also to thrive!

Final Snapshot: Meals were served quickly and comfortably. We had chicken salad Thursday noon, chicken with potato Thursday night, and chicken with rice on Friday night. For lunch Friday and Saturday we had turkey sandwiches. So please forgive Pastor Morris if he seemed to come home in a fowl mood.





EVANGELISM COMMITTEE

A recent Gallup survey of churchgoers reveals that 58% of those who go to church regularly first began going when they were invited by someone they knew. Of those who do not go to church, 63% report that none of their friends or acquaintances has ever invited them.

With this in mind, the Evangelism Committee has designated two Sunday's in September for the purpose of inviting a friend to come to church with you.

Pre-FRIENDSHIP SUNDAY on **September 21st** will give us an opportunity to invite folks from the Fall Fair to come back the next day and be our guest for a time of worship and fellowship.

FRIENDSHIP SUNDAY on **September 28th** will feature a special coffee hour and music by Sharon Phillips.

Our Committee will have a special gift for every guest on both Sundays. The gift comes with no attachments or requirements...simply a gift of appreciation for being a part of our friendship event.

During the remaining days of Summer, we encourage everyone to start thinking about who you'd like to invite and for the perfect opportunity to do so. To assist you, we'll have special index cards available on the name tag table.

Each card will have welcoming and inviting tips from the Igniting Ministries Handbook published by the United Methodist Communications. On the other side of the card, please write the name of the person you wish to invite. Then, pray and expect God's best!

EXPECT GOD'S BEST

Isaiah 40:31

Those who wait for the Lord, who expect, look for, and hope in Him, shall renew their strength

What are you expecting in life – good things? Bad things? Big things? Little things? Anything at all? God wants you to get your hopes up! The Bible says, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for." One definition of hope is confident expectancy. Did you know you can't even have faith if you don't first have hope?

Your expectations set the limits for your life. If you never expect anything good, you're never going to receive anything good. If you don't expect things to get better, then nothing will get better. God promises to meet you at

your level of expectancy. That's why Jesus said in Matthew 9:29, "According to your faith be it done unto you." Another translation simply says, "Have what your faith expects."

Start expecting to overcome every challenge you face and for God to meet all of your needs! Live every day of your life filled with anticipation that God is going to bless you abundantly above and beyond all that we ask or think (Eph. 3:20) beyond our wildest dreams!

PRAYER:

DEAR FATHER,
TODAY I PURPOSE IN MY HEART
TO RAISE MY LEVEL OF
EXPECTANCY AND HOPE IN YOU.
THANK YOU FOR PUTTING YOUR
DESIRES IN MY HEART AND
BRINGING THEM TO PASS
THROUGH FAITH AND TRUST.

AMEN

(from "30 Thoughts for Victorious Living:" by Joel Osteen)

BARGAIN SHED HAPPENINGS

Beginning Saturday, **August 2nd**, the Bargain Shed will be having a \$3.00-bag sale on all summer clothes (men's, women's and children's), including shoes, handbags and accessories. The

sale will continue through Saturday, August 16th.

Then, beginning Monday, **August 18th through Thursday, August 21st** we will be changing over our inventory for the Fall/Winter season. If you would like to help with this changeover, please see Edna Rominger for the work hours. There is plenty to do and many hands make the job so much easier.

We thank you all for your continued donations and patronage.

Latest sales for the Bargain Shed totaled **\$3,121!**

BOOK NOOK NEEDS YOU!

It's time again for the Annual HUGE BOOK SALE. This year is our 11th Annual Sale. **August 21, 22 and 23** are the sale dates. (Food will be available on the 22nd & 23rd.) With an estimated 30-35,000 books, we NEED HELP "desperately"! (Consider this begging, pleading or even groveling.) The areas in need of help include:

- carrying up from the basement
- sorting
- organizing

A sign-up sheet will be posted but feel free to just show up. The set-up days are:

Mon (**Aug 18**) & Tue (**Aug 19**) – 9am-3pm & 6-8pm
Wed (**Aug 20**) – 9am-3pm (Hopefully)
Our goal is \$2,000.

Sales for the Book Nook YTD have reached **\$5,800!**

SUNDAY SCHOOL UPDATE

The Sunday school will be having a little mid summer get together at the Robertson's house on Thursday, **July 31st at 7pm**. All Sunday school students and their parents are invited. Dessert will be served! Our address is: 126 Bushendorf Road. Please RSVP to 756-2388 or rarksr@gmail.com.



Mark your calendars! On Thursday, **August 28th** the Sunday school will be hosting a back-to-school party to bless our student's backpacks. More detailed information will be coming soon, but in the meantime, please consider picking up extra supplies when you're out shopping as we will be donating school supplies to students in need.



We are still in need of mason jars of any size, so please donate any extra jars you may have sitting around your house. These jars will be used for a craft project in September.



Congratulations to everyone celebrating a birthday or anniversary in August:

- 4 Jim Youmans
- 9 Ken Bliss
- 9 Elizabeth Robertson
- 9 Brian Phillips
- 10 Audry & George June
- 10 Brian & Sharon Phillips
- 11 Marlene McTigue
- 12 Barb Bullock
- 16 Beth Babcock
- 17 Pastor Judi and Pastor Allen
- 18 John Ginder
- 18 Stacey Youmans
- 21 Jonathan Haslett
- 21 Evangelyn Seymour
- 22 Mark Contreras

23 Ethan Johnson
24 Gabriella Selbe
25 Devin Whitney
25 Ryan Roe

A 90-10 SPLIT



THINK FIRST

British evangelist Alan Redpath suggested these five helpful questions to ask yourself before you speak:

- T** – Is it True?
- H** – Is it Helpful?
- I** – Is it Inspiring?
- N** – Is it Necessary?
- K** – Is it Kind?

LOVE IS TO GIVE

The most famous verse in the Bible [John 3:16] begins “For God so loved the world that he gave...” It’s a generosity verse. I say you can give without loving, but you cannot love without giving. If you want to become a loving person, you have to learn to give. You spell love G-I-V-E.

—Rick Warren

When the weather prediction is for a 10 percent chance of rain, do we sigh and grumble and stay indoors? Or do we go ahead and picnic, golf or hike because the chance of bad weather is so low?

When doctors say our child has a 90 percent chance of full recovery from a deadly illness, don’t we rejoice at the great prognosis? We quickly decide we can live with the slight chance of some impairment.

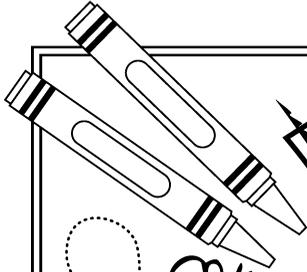
When a really tough exam comes back with a 90 percent grade, aren’t we glad to have done well?

When a politician runs for office, 90 percent of the vote would be considered an overwhelming mandate.

Why then, when God gives us 100 percent of our material blessings, are we so horrified at the thought of giving him 10 percent back?



Answers to Puzzle on Page 9: 1. poor in spirit, 2. mourn, 3. meek, 4. hunger and thirst, 5. merciful, 6. pure in heart, 7. peacemakers, 8. persecuted



PUZZLE



BE HAPPY

In Matthew 5:3-10, Jesus begins his teaching with the Beatitudes. They give us many reasons to be happy. The Greek word for blessed, *makarios*, also means happy!

Directions: Complete the Beatitudes by matching the blanks in each "Happy" phrase on the left with the bold word(s) on the right.

1. "Happy are the **POOR**
I N S P I R I T

hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."

2. "Happy are those who



pure in heart, for they will see God."

3. "Happy are the _____

peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God."

4. "Happy are those who

persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

5. "Happy are the

poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

6. "Happy are the _____



merciful, for they will be shown mercy."

7. "Happy are the

meek, for they will inherit the earth."

8. "Happy are those who are

mourn, for they will be comforted."

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JOIN US ON FACEBOOK

If you are on Facebook, please join the church page by *liking us* at Grace United Methodist Church, Ravena, NY. Find out what's happening each week from Sunday's Service sermon title and hymns to meetings and special events.

OR VISIT US ON THE WEB:

www.graceumcravena.org



Deadline for articles for the **September** issue of *The Messenger* is **August 24th**. Please e-mail or fax articles to Barb Bullock at:

bbullock812@gmail.com

or

fax to: **731-8994**