



Photos by Stephanie Parsons

Bishops Alfred Johnson, Martin McLee and Grant Hagiya preside over Holy Communion during Wednesday night worship.

Joy & Remembrance Mark First Day

BY JOANNE S. UTLEY

In what would be both a joyful and poignant evening, Bishop Martin D. McLee officially opened the 214th gathering of the New York Annual Conference last night at the Mack Arena at Hofstra University.

“When I say ‘God is’, you say, ‘good’,” chanted the bishop in a call and response with the gathering. “When I say, ‘All the,’ you say, ‘time’.”

To punctuate the conference theme, “Dismantling Walls: Building the Beloved Community,” McLee then led the singing of “And Are We Yet Alive.”

He invited the gathering to “put your hands together and give God some praise in this place.”

Rev. Jim Moore offered a welcome from the Sessions Committee, Rev. Fred Jackson presented the organizational resolutions, and Rev. Dr. Gennifer Brooks explained the conference rules changes.

As opening worship began, Rev. Tisha Jermin appeared on stage – disheveled and dressed in torn clothing. She walked by a red brick backdrop splashed with graffiti, before lying down and covering herself in a cardboard box. The words on the wall shout conservative, liberal, sexism, homophobia,

rural, urban, racism, and the like.

After images of people and things that separate us from one another flashed on the video screens, Jermin rose and danced as the conference choir sang the words of “Gypsy Woman” – “She’s just like you and me, but she’s homeless.” As the music ended, Jermin took off her tattered jacket and pulled on her clergy robe and stole to lead the body in the call to worship.

Rev. Charles Ryu and Rev. Jessica Anschutz, co-chairs of the conference worship team, offered the prayer of the day and the prayer of confession, respectively.

Bishop McLee introduced Bishop Grant Hagiya by warning that “when a preacher like this preaches, people get up and start running the floor.” Hagiya is resident bishop of the Greater Northwest Area, which includes Alaska, Oregon-Idaho, and Pacific Northwest conferences.

Then McLee told the body, “There can’t be any preaching from this pulpit if there’s no praising in the seats.”

The conference male chorale got the praise rolling with their rendition of “Yes, God is Real.” Hagiya thanked them for that boost of “joy to begin.”

Hagiya said he had come at McLee’s

invitation after getting to know the new bishop at some episcopal meetings.

“I’m only here because of relationships,” he said. Hagiya expressed his excitement at also being greeted by Bishop Alfred Johnson, “one of coolest bishops we’ve ever had.”

He urged the gathering to cherish the relationships that will be started and renewed this week. “Those relationships make our denomination great.”

But he noted that our churches are experiencing a great struggle for unity. In fact, “disunity might be the theme for our denomination,” he said. “The 2012 General Conference was a prime example of this fragmented state.”

One of the current conflicts for the church is over clergy officiating at same-sex marriages. Hagiya admitted that he himself is under complaint for advocating for the same-sex marriage law in Washington state.

“You got to know that you’re not alone,” he said. “There are others standing with you. I’m glad that both sides are continuing to work it out.”

Hagiya added that he is “ready to accept whatever penalties come because I must be

First Day: Remember & Give Thanks

faithful to the prophetic witness as I see it.”

Hagiya shared a story about encountering a fractured sculpture of Jesus in West Berlin. First he was incensed that the sculpture had not been replaced or fixed. But slowly he began to understand the statue in a new way – as a “broken body for a broken world.

“Jesus Christ readily gave himself up to be healing for a broken world,” he said. “None of us can deny brokenness . . . we must give personal witness to this brokenness.”

Families and communities are too often divided by pain and hurt and isolation.

“We are fractured so much that only God through Jesus Christ can repair us . . . Only in Jesus Christ can we find grace to heal our brokenness,” he said. “God still forgives us.”

Referencing John 20:19-29, Hagiya noted the clear dividing line in the scripture. “Doors are shut,” he said. “This story is not about doubt, but about belief. Jesus wants Thomas to move from unbelief to belief.

“Only in woundness and brokenness is Jesus recognized,” Hagiya said. “The disciples only know Jesus by his wounds and pain.”

He spoke of a program at the University of California that brought together both soldiers and the draft evaders from the Vietnam era. A soldier gave witness to coming home branded not as a hero, but as a monster. When he finished his story, the room was silent. But then the professor stood, hugged the soldier and said, “Welcome home.”

The next week a draft dodger told his story of being away from home, and longing for family and friends. He admitted that he came home branded as a traitor. When he finished, the veteran from the week before, stood, hugged the soldier and said, “Welcome home.”

“We go home to be accepted,” he said. “We go home to be loved, to share God’s grace. Annual Conference may be too large to think of as a family, but nothing is too large for God.”

As the sermon came to a close, Bishop McLee extended an invitation for anyone who was feeling wounded, or broken. Worship leaders prayed with the many who came forward at the foot of the stage.

The time of remembering those who have died in the past year was led by Conference Secretary Fred Jackson. In introducing the “Celebration of Life,” Jackson expressed a belief that our society



Rev. Jessica Anschutz, above, places flowers in remembrance of those who died in the last year. John Carlson offers a solo on “For All the Saints.”



needs to reclaim respect for the elderly and honor for those who have gone on before. He applauded how the United Methodist Church has been reclaiming “All Saints Day” in just that way.

As the sound of a single trumpet rang out, “For All the Saints,” Jackson prepared to read the list of laity, clergy, clergy spouses, clergy children, and widows and widowers of clergy. As each name was read, a bell tolled and a single pink carnation was placed in a vase at center stage.

Those honored include:

LAITY

Ralph Eddy, Lucretia Fernandez, Thelma Fortune Little, Rittenella Pyne, Chiquita Smith, and George W. Wright

CHILDREN OF CLERGY

Tim Manchester

WIDOWS / WIDOWERS OF CLERGY

Ruth Lindsay-Hempel, Virginia E. (Koegel) Jones, Edna A. McCracken, Anna Rousch Mirabelli, Kathryn Jean (Paine) Lee, Judith-Ann (Clamser) Grant, Mack Logan, Jr., and Marian Linn Wright

SPOUSES OF CLERGY MEMBERS

Mack Logan Jr., Ella Betsy (Case) Ross, Shirley Merritt Doughty, Charlene (Lenox) Denton, and Nancy Borgese Sargent

CLERGY MEMBERS

George Ellis Gibbs, Alfred C. Thompson, R. Elinor Hare, Sharon D. Miller, Lee Daniel Snyder, Paul B. Mengle Sr., Donald Eugene Goodson, Francis W. Carlson, Seaborn Benjamin Gay, Lyman “Bud” Palmer Taylor, Charles W. Cheeseman, Edna Grace Soltis, Wilbert Taylor Bradley, David P. VerNooy, Gerard B. Pollock, Lucile C. Hill, Frederick D. Savage, William “Bill” Marcus James, Poong Ro Cha, Richard Edward Smeltzer, DuBois T. Smith, and Dolores H. Henderson.

The service ended with the sacrament of Holy Communion, presided over by Bishops Johnson, McLee and Hagiya.

Rules Change GC Elections

Rev. Dr. Gennifer Brooks, chairperson of the Conference Rules Committee, offered information on the change in rules for conducting business.

One involved the election of a person to chair what has been a three-member Sessions Committee, and a second, the need to increase the representation of lay members to conference now that campus ministers were now being included in conference membership totals.

One change that came about with the 2012 Discipline, was the opportunity to elect General and Jurisdictional delegates two years before the date of the next gathering of those bodies. Brooks noted that the rules committee felt compelled to bring the decision before the whole body.

Fred Brewington then brought forth an amendment to select delegates two calendar years before General Conference. He argued that the usual pattern of elections the year before GC did not provide enough time for discernment and education for the delegates. He stated that the extra time would allow the delegation to form a unified voice.

Rev. Bill Shillady, co-leader of the 2012 delegation with Brewington, echoed those sentiments. The extra time will “prepare us to be the kind of delegates you expect,” Shillady said.

Those speaking against the amendment questioned who might be excluded by such an early election and whether the issues that would arise at conference would still be in flux two years out.

In a show of hands, the motion to change the selection from one to two years ahead of GC was adopted. Following that decision, the rules for conducting conference business were approved by the body.

New Email For Pastors

During Wednesday afternoon’s clergy session, it was announced that the conference is providing all pastors with NYAC-specific email addresses. These addresses will replace any personal email addresses currently being used to receive correspondence from the conference, effective July 1, 2013.

Printed information about each pastor’s new email address, password and instructions can be picked up at the registration desk at the Hofstra arena.



The conference choir inspired with their gifts of song.



Bishop McLee offers communion to one of the servers.



Scriptures are proclaimed during laity session by storyteller Marcia Bent.

After Hours Concert Tonight

Relax and spend some time praising God at a special after-sessions concert tonight in the Hofstra USA building. Gracious Vine, a Christian band based on Long Island, has captivated the hearts and ministered to the spirits of many groups with their vision to “encourage, equip and engage.” The concert is sponsored by the Wesley Fellowship, and is open to all for free.



Rev. Dr. Ken Sloane urged a complete change in thinking about stewardship during the laity session. *Photo by Stephanie Parsons*

Sloane Offers ‘Tipping Points’ for Stewardship

BY TOM CODDINGTON

Rev. Dr. Ken Sloane returned to his native New York Annual Conference for the laity session on Wednesday afternoon. “I grew up in the Union Methodist Church in East Northport,” he said at the start of his presentation.

Now serving as director of Stewardship and Connectional Ministries for the General Board of Discipleship, Sloane offered eight “Tipping Points” for stewardship. He indicated that to be fully vital churches, must shift priorities in all eight areas.

Instead of “seasonal” stewardship, his suggestion was “continual” stewardship.

“What if we talked about it all year, not just in the fall?” he asked.

The second shift he brought forward was a change in thinking from scarcity to abundance.

“God has given the church the abundance, and we should talk about what we have, rather than what we don’t have,” he stated.

The third point was turning “got to” to “gratitude.” He said that, like Zaccheus, we should focus more on a response from the heart – an “explosion of gratitude.”



As Sloane’s presentation was coming to a close, an outburst of giving prompted a spontaneous offering that will go to the Imagine No Malaria campaign.

The fourth shift Sloane recommended was from “purse” to “purpose.” He noted that many businesses are getting involved in spending to help those in need.

“We need to find a way to get people with purpose connected to the church,” he said.

For point five, he said that “their” connectional giving to mission matters should be shifted to “our” connectional mission work.

The sixth tipping point is to turn “numbers” into “narratives.”

He said, “We need to know how to give

to help others, and tell stories that move people to make a difference.”

Sloane’s seventh shift is from “mortar” to “mission.” He urged churches to focus not on maintaining the building but, more importantly, to growing in mission.

The eighth point is to shift from being members of a church to being true disciples of Christ.

“We need to raise the bar on membership, and challenge our members to become disciples, so that they might change the world,” Sloane said.