



West Hills

United Methodist Church Newsletter

Volume 2, Issue 1

Summer, 2006

A Message from Spencer Segalla.....

The New York Annual Conference, 2006—a report by Spencer Segalla

In June I had the honor of serving as the West Hills UMC delegate to the 2006 New York Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. It was held in the Hofstra athletic complex, and there were representatives of all the Methodist churches, over a thousand people, from Long Island, New York City, upstate almost to Albany, and even part of Connecticut, even though we call it the “New York Annual Conference.”

It was inspiring to see all these people coming together to worship and praise the Lord and take communion—filling the whole stadium at Hofstra. The motto or theme of the conference was “**In Such a Time as This, We are the Church Together.**” With everybody singing and praying together, the feeling of togetherness was palpable

A wide variety of issues were discussed and voted upon. The conference voted to adopt a new “**Vision Statement**”:

“The New York Annual Conference, through the grace of God, embodies a beloved community of hope, building up a healthy Body of Christ, with heart-warmed United Methodists in mission for the transformation of the world.”

There was also a discussion of legal issues, and particularly **liability**. Among other issues, the Conference is currently in the midst of a misconduct lawsuit regarding an event that occurred thirty-three years ago, in 1973. There is, apparently, a legal principle called “ascending liability.” This means that if an individual church gets sued, and doesn’t have adequate liability insurance, the Conference as a whole is liable; if the Conference has to pay damages, then it will have to raise the amount every little church has to pay in, in apportionments, to keep the conference from going bankrupt.

This means everything must be amply insured, including insurance against misconduct. This is not too much of an issue for West Hills, because we get our insurance through the conference. However, it means we have must take great care to screen everybody and everything for safety: employees, volunteers, facilities, etc. This is part of our responsibility toward our fellow Christians, and our fellow human beings, since money paid out to lawsuits is money that could be spent feeding the hungry and sheltering the needy.

Other fiscal issues were also discussed. Speakers at the conference stressed the importance of each church making their healthcare and pension contributions promptly and in full—otherwise, ALL church employees' coverage is put in jeopardy.

However, Bishop Park urged us to think of the Annual Conference as a provider of ministries, not as a sort of tax collector. This year's budget includes \$2 million for "World Service Conference Benevolences." At the conference meeting itself, over \$6000 were collected for the Black College fund from the delegates at the conference. 2,200 health kits were collected for hurricane survivors in Louisiana and Mississippi.

Another thing that the annual conference does is discuss and vote on resolutions about issues of social justice and ministry. Sometimes these issues are controversial.

One rather controversial resolution passed, in calling upon the U.S. House of Representatives to impeach President Bush. This was one of the closest votes at the whole meeting. I had some misgivings about this. Although I am very frightened by Bush administration statements claiming unlimited executive power in times of war, even undeclared war, it's not clear to me that the President has actually defied Congress or the Supreme Court, so I don't see that impeachment is in order, at this point. But that's just my opinion, and most of the delegates didn't see it that way.

This resolution passed by the whole assembly by about a 2/3 majority, so there was disagreement on this point, but I don't think there's anything to worry about: people are used to disagreeing about politics and elected officials; it's just part of living in a democracy.

Other points of disagreement are more troubling, I think, and are making some people worried about the divisions in the church. The Conference rejected two petitions supporting government laws defining marriage as heterosexual only. The Conference also rejected a petition calling for the church to end its support for the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, a group that promotes allowing women access to birth control and abortion.

These three petitions were all rejected by about 70-75% of the voters. But these issues are potentially divisive, because the other 25-30% of people feel very strongly about these issues, and indeed see them as the very foundation of society, morality, and even Christianity. One very angry person spoke at the microphone and yelled that abortion was murder and homosexuals should be stoned.

Some delegates expressed concern that these divisions in the church are not necessarily coming from inside the church. Indeed, there are divisions like this breaking out in all the mainline churches. It was pointed out that some of these divisive resolutions were cut and pasted right off of the website of a national political activist organization which is seeking to promote a less tolerant vision of Christianity in America.

Bishop Park, in his opening address, spoke about the deep divisions in Church over issues of homosexuality. Bishop Park stressed the importance of not becoming a "one issue church." I don't know what I think about this. How can you expect people to stay in a church if they think it acts in ways that are fundamentally wrong? So we have to keep wrestling with this and with each other. But on the other hand, while we are debating this, we can't let it

consume all our energy so that the other good work we do goes undone.

In the meantime, the Conference voted overwhelmingly for a resolution prohibiting “discrimination in receiving members into United Methodist Congregations,” and resolving that “all pastors of the New York Annual Conference are strongly encouraged to minister enthusiastically to all persons regarding race, class, ability, gender or sexual orientation.”

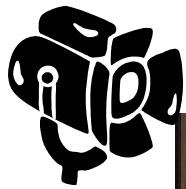
Most of the resolutions passed were less controversial. Resolutions were accepted encouraging the United States start supporting democracy in Latin America; encouraging churches to “sponsor a worship service on the AIDS crisis and to collect an offering which would go to World Day of Prayer USA”; encouraging churches and parishioners to urge their political leaders to act to prevent global climate change by limiting greenhouse gas emissions; and urging congregations to use “fair trade” coffee and chocolate

There were also several resolutions about the Middle East, and that always seems to bring out heated disagreements. One resolution which passed was the “**Act for Peace in the Middle East,**” calling for the United Methodist pensions board to selectively and gradually divest its investments from “any multinational corporations profiting from illegal demolition of Palestinian homes, destruction of the Palestinian economy and confiscation of Palestinian land....” There was a counter-proposal to this, which did not pass. The counter-proposal argued that it was unfair to single out Israel for its wrongdoings, when other governments and groups in the Middle East do bad things too, including some groups of Palestinians or groups like Hizbollah who identify with the Palestinians.

Thus two sides of this issue were argued. On the one hand, its true that when Europeans took over the Middle East in 1918, they took power away from the people who were native to the area, including the Palestinians; its true that in 1948, the new Israel, dominated by Europeans, took Palestinian homes and lands and orchards, and drove Palestinians out of their homes to live as refugees; it is true that in 1967, Israel took over more Palestinian land and drove more people out of their homes, and has, ever since, refused to give up the land they took, except for little token bits of it here and there, and has refused to let people return to their homes and farms. This refusal of justice is what has prevented peace in the region ever since, and has led to the failure of every moderate and peaceful group that has sought compromise, on both sides. This is how we ended up with the people who are now in power.

On the other hand, it is also true that a wide range of governments and groups have done equally bad things, and worse; and that in terms of human rights, and treatments of minorities, and oppressive rule, and use of force, there are other governments that one could criticize just as much, or more.

Regarding this argument, I would say two things. First, we have more responsibility for the things we do ourselves, and the things we can control, and the things we pay for, than for the things done by others and the things we cannot control. The American government and the American taxpayer do not fund the bad things done by Syria, or Hizbollah or Iran, but we do fund the activities of Israel, including its ongoing illegal occupation of Palestinian lands. We have a responsibility to pay attention to how our own money is being used. Second, we have a responsibility to protect the weak from the strong; and in this day and age there is no question that Israel is the strongest



Spotlight on Church Members



On June 11th Judy delivered the message "Pieces Of Our Lives."

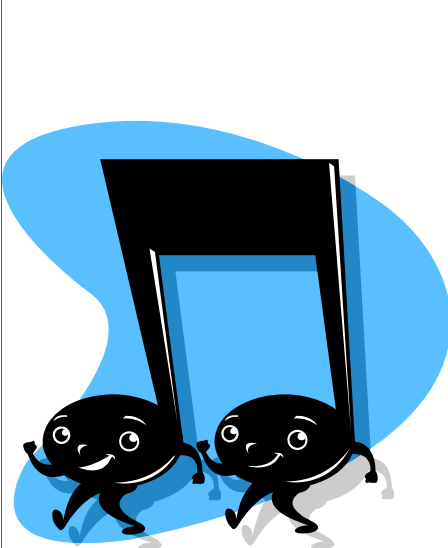
On April 30th Eddy provided special music.

May 21st Kent and Paula played "Down To The River To Pray" from the movie *O Brother, Where Art Thou*.



Nightsong

On June 18th *Nightsong* performed an inspirational service while the pastor was away.



Nightsong Music Ministry provides a number of services to the community of faith. Whether it be a concert, Sunday morning worship service, coffeehouse, or as praise and worship leaders. Whatever the setting: a college campus, an outdoor festival, a homeless shelter, prison chapel, synagogue or church, Bill and Bette connect, inviting us all to become participants in the journey of faith.

For more information, log on to:
<http://cooperkron.com/home.html>

CHURCH RENOVATIONS

In July, the Nursery School Board and the Board of Trustees agreed to renovate the current church library/meeting room in order to create a larger nursery school room. This new nursery school room will be used by the West Hills Nursery School during the week and will be used as an additional Sunday School room on Sundays. The decision was made based on the limited usage of the library, as well as the possibility of attracting new families to the West Hills Nursery School. The new



nursery room is 30% larger (stats courtesy of Dave Knorr)

than the current nursery room, which will allow for a more spacious playroom. A new, larger, state-of-the-art room will help the nursery school program remain competitive with surrounding programs, continuing the tradition started by Miss Marion over three decades ago. The room is being prepared by volunteers, including the current Nursery School staff, led by Deborah Friedell.



The Library/Meeting Room will occupy the space vacated by the nursery school. The library will retain important historical archives as well as spiritually relevant materials. The meeting room table will maintain center stage in the room, allowing it to be used not only as a meeting center, but also as an additional Sunday School room. Surplus library materials (videos, CDs and novels) will be made available during the “Back to Church Brunch” for a \$1.00 donation per item.



SAVE THE DATE!

August 6 4:00pm—Video Pizza Dinner: “What Bleep Do We Know Anyway!”

For more info, log in at <http://www.whatthebleep.com/whatthebleep>

September 10: 10:45 am service returns

September 10: Sunday School Begins



the

power in the Middle East. Since the 1970s Israel has been able to inflict and has inflicted far more bloodshed and suffering on its enemies than it has suffered in return, although one might not realize this from watching the television news. Considering these issues, although I had some reservations about the divestment resolution, I think its okay that the Methodist Church has said that we don't want our pension money and investments to be profiting from the occupation of the Palestinian territories. We already know, of course, that we aren't getting rich off of what Hamas or Hizbollah are doing, but it takes a little extra effort to avoid profiting from Israel's actions against Palestinians, since so many multinational companies are involved.

On another topic pertaining to the Middle East, the Conference passed a resolution concerning **Iraq**. This resolution urged the U.S. government to come up with a "comprehensive plan" for peace in Iraq, including the eventual withdrawal of U.S. troops, the closure of U.S. bases in Iraq, support for a peace process, & support for the transition after the troops have left. The resolution stated that this should be done so that the "hundreds of billions of dollars to be spent for the war" could instead be spent to "meet human needs at home and abroad." In addition, to this, the conference passed a resolution urging churches to read a statement that was issued by several bishops, including Bishop Park, last November. The conference voted that this letter should be read in every church and studied in Sunday school classes. I read it to the congregation during our July 23 worship service, and I can provide copies upon request. The overall message of the letter was an expression of contrition and repentance by the bishops for their failure to speak out sufficiently against the invasion of Iraq.

In Conclusion, I would like to repeat the conference motto: "We are the Church Together." Dealing with these disagreements and controversies is just one of those difficult things, like the phone bills or the budget, that comes with being a church community.



The Latest Arrival!

Isabella Grace Vozzo was born on June 13th 2006 at 8:45am. She was 9 pounds 4 ounces and 21.5 inches long.

She was born to "Proud Parents" Vic and Tara, and "Big Sister" Katie.

The Christening is scheduled for September 10th

Word Search: Summer Thyme

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BASIL BEANS BLUEBERRY CARROTS CUCUMBER EGGPLANT

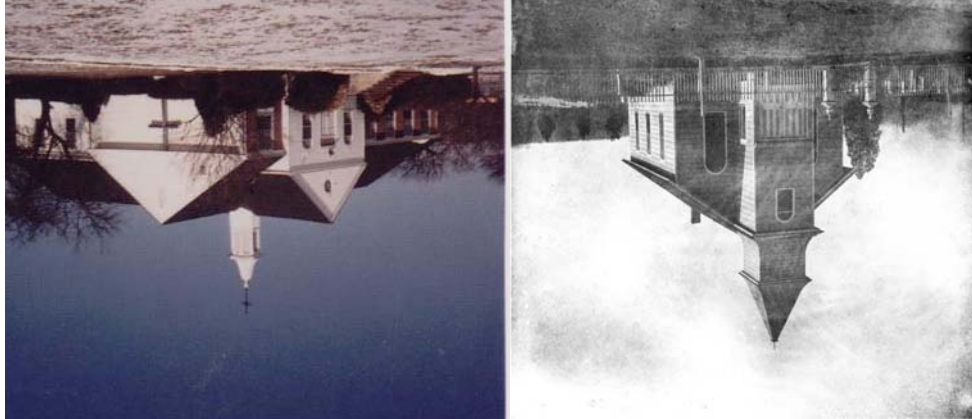
LETTUCE ONION PARSLEY PEPPER PUMPKIN RADISHES

RASPBERRY ROSEMARY SAGE SQUASH STRAWBERRY THYME

TOMATO WATERMELON

The purpose of the West Hills United Methodist Church is to be a living church, where we can learn about our Lord, love Him, worship Him, and serve Him. We want our church to emphasize fellowship with a sense of sharing one another's concerns and joys. We want our church to reach out to the needs of our youth, and encourage them to participate in our programs. We want our church to be actively involved in the world community, with outreach programs to help the needy and less fortunate, and to attract others in our community who are not currently attending worship service.

PURPOSE STATEMENT



Visit us On-line at www.westhillsumc.com



West Hills United Methodist Church

Newsletter



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SUMMER 2006

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