

Methodist Federation for Social Action at Annual Conferences 2009

Annual Conference sessions provide a great venue for MFSA chapter activities and 2009 was no exception. Our chapters held events with inspiring speakers; submitted, spoke to and helped pass legislation; staffed display tables with helpful and challenging information; presented awards to faithful justice workers; and, in one case, even cleansed a meeting space that had housed a gun show the previous week!

Chapter leaders report here on some of the highlights.

IOWA

A highlight of the Iowa Annual Conference was MFSA's Awards Event on Saturday, June 6th attended by over 400 people. Awards were presented to Sol Varisco and Jeff Abbas for their outstanding work with immigrants following the raid at Postville a year ago. In addition two churches, St. Bridget's Catholic Church in Postville and First United Methodist Church in Decorah, were recognized for



Rev. Dr. Jeremiah Wright

their tireless work in the community of Postville. A third award was given to Sharon Malheiro, who was instrumental in the case that ultimately led to the Supreme Court's decision on marriage equality.

The keynote speaker, the Rev. Dr. Jeremiah Wright, was received enthusiastically and delivered a simple but powerful message. To the award recipients and to MFSA he said, in essence, that our work fulfills scripture; it's not in vain and does make a difference, and it's not over. He called the recipients "prophets," and admonished all of us to keep on working.

Other highlights of Conference were the Rainbow Communion Service, attended by over 80 persons, and the celebration of the 10th Anniversary of Justice for Our Neighbors.

Eloise Cranke

WISCONSIN

The Wisconsin Annual Conference MFSA Chapter honored the Perry Saito Award win-

ners, Craig Mybro and Rev. Barbara Certawerner for their work with labor and faith and also the starting of a new homeless ministry in Superior, WI.

The chapter held a program about community organizing and we were blessed with the presence of Stephanie Gyldenvand, organizer for ESTHER, the interfaith social-justice organization in the Fox Valley (Appleton, Wisconsin).

We were energized by the specifics Stephanie and others from ESTHER brought to us. We saw where we could apply some of their techniques and skills to our own situations. A very encouraging time.

The Wisconsin Chapter of MFSA is sponsoring a retreat and workshop at Pine Lake Camp on the theme, "Worshipping God...Just for Us or for Justice," January 22-23, 2010. Our own Phil Carver will be the workshop leader. For more information, contact Steve Zekoff at: szekoff@charter.net.

Wesley White



Craig Myrbo and Rev. Barbara Certawerner, Perry Saito Award Winners for 2009

BALTIMORE-WASHINGTON

Over 100 people gathered at a Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference for a lunch



"God's Foolish One" Rev. Dr. Mary Kraus

co-sponsored by BWARM (Baltimore Washington Reconciling Movement) and MFSA. Our guest speaker was Bishop Melvin G. Talbert and we presented our annual "God's Foolish One Award" award to Rev. Mary Kraus.

Kenneth Hawes

NEW YORK

On the legislative front, the New York MFSA chapter submitted resolutions on the following issues: human trafficking, energy use, torture and use of Fair Trade products within the conference, all of which were passed. Two other resolutions concerning advocacy for the New York State Marriage Equality Law and support for those who dissent from the *Book of Discipline* were also adopted by the body.

MFSA-NY has joined the effort begun by NYAC Board of Church and Society to address immigration issues and helped to shepherd a resolution through Annual Conference that turned the currently ad hoc group on immigration into an official conference taskforce.

The 2009 recipients of the Gwen and C. Dale White award are Rev. Gilbert H. and Grace Caldwell. Gil is one of the founders of the Black Methodists for Church Renewal and

was its second national president. He served the general church as the Associate General Secretary of the Commission on Religion and Race. He was one of the organizers of the United Methodist of Color, committed to the full inclusion of all people in the United Methodist Church. Grace Caldwell's ministry has included teaching school for many years as well as raising two sons. Both Gil and Grace have been blessings to the communities where they have served and to the national UMC.

The NYAC also allotted 90 minutes for the body to dialogue on homosexuality and inclusiveness in a session entitled, "The Beloved Community Speaks." Presentations from both the "evangelical" and "progressive" perspectives were given, interspersed with singing, prayer, and a time to speak both in small groups and on the floor of the conference. MFSA-NY convener Kevin Nelson led the team presenting the progressive witness, which included 8 testimonies demonstrating the struggles of many persons—LGBT and straight, clergy and laity, parents and friends—with the exclusivity of the church on this issue. Feedback from the experience was positive, with some suggesting that this model be used in other conferences and local churches for honest and open dialog amidst division.

One of the new initiatives undertaken by the New York chapter has been to participate in a dialogue with members of racial and ethnic communities of the NYAC around racism and gender equality. This work is still in its beginning stages and has expanded to include gender issues. The dialogue is born out of the concerns for racial justice and gender equality, inspired in part by Rev. Taka Ishii's challenge last year at the MFSA dinner during Annual Conference.

Kevin Nelson and Jennifer Mihok

WEST MICHIGAN



The West Michigan MFSA had a luncheon featuring Fred Keller, a United Methodist area businessman and philanthropist who has

Fred Keller

done amazing work with raising consciousness and taking action on sustainability issues in the workplace. His talk was entitled "Why Christians Should Care About Sustainability."

The chapter also passed out many of the national MFSA suggestion forms for voting on the Constitutional Amendments. We are proud that West Michigan was one of the minority of conferences that passed amendment one by more than 2/3. Our younger delegates rose on several occasions to voice their support for the amendment! We can see the gradual change in attitudes towards our LGTB persons but there is still much work for all of us to do.

Susan Hagans

CALIFORNIA-NEVADA

The Cal-Nevada Chapter co-sponsored a dinner with the conference Board of Church and Society on Thursday evening June 18, 2009, in the Sacramento Convention Center. The speaker was Paul Larudee, PhD, co-founder of the Free Gaza Movement and a neighbor from El Cerrito, California.



Paul Larudee

Doug Sibley

ILLINOIS GREAT RIVER

The Illinois Great River MFSA Chapter co-sponsored a Social Justice Dinner with the Board of Church and Society, and the Commissions on the Status and Role of Women and Religion and Race, with speakers from the Central Illinois Organizing Project (a faith-based community organizing group that started up in 1996) and Farmers Supporting Independent Agriculture. The Cramer-Heuerman Social Justice award was presented to Rev. Howard Daughenbaugh, a retired minister in our conference who has taken a bold stand on many social justice issues, beginning with the civil rights movement while he was still living in the south.

Janet Eggleston



Jacquelin Washington receives the Jesse and Annamary DeWitt Award. With her are her pastor, the Rev. Edwin Rowe (r) and the Rev. David Kidd (l).

DETROIT

Bishop Jesse and Annamary DeWitt participated in the Detroit Conference MFSA Banquet. The DeWitt Peace with Justice Awards were presented to Jacquie Washington in recognition of her witness for the American Civil Liberties Union & Planned Parenthood, and to Rev. Herb Glenn in memoriam for his advocacy for affordable housing and preaching on peace. Rev. Faith Fowler delivered an inspirational message on "Charity and Advocacy."

We held a hopeful celebration for "All Means All" outside the chapel following the opening worship service and two MFSA folk spoke eloquently on amendment one on the Conference floor.

A resolution entitled, "Create a Peace Economy" was passed: "We call upon the President and our U.S. Congressional Representatives to order a thorough review of major weapons systems and other defense spending programs with the objective of bringing about at least a 25% reduction in spending without cuts in salaries and benefits to military personnel & dependents and care for veterans."

Richard Peacock

SOUTHWEST TEXAS

The Southwest Texas Chapter hosted a very busy table at Annual Conference, including a book fair for used religious books. SWT had a catchy display of lighting options for energy efficiency, with LED and CFL options shown for attendees to see and compare. Continuing in the study theme of environmental stewardship, we presented a slide



MFSA display tables at the Southwest Texas Annual Conference

show on the scriptural basis for environmental issues. We distributed MFSA's position papers on the constitutional amendments, and talked to a large number of delegates that came by.

Several Austin-area churches marched the route with us, and crowds were enthusiastic about our participation. ❖

Rowland Curry

On June 6, the chapter sponsored a "float" at Austin's Pride Parade on June 6. Besides balloons and other decorations on the float trailer, we had an "open door" representing our fondest wishes for the denomination.

EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA

The Eastern Pennsylvania chapter held a service to cleanse the meeting space where Annual Conference would be held. The space had housed a gun show the previous week!

