

" C O N F E R E N C E E C H O E S "

FROM YOUR ROVING REPORTER, CHURCH HISTORIAN

Alice J. Archibald

THEME: "LET'S STRENGTHEN THE FAMILY OF GOD"

A yellow banner stretched across George Street in New Brunswick, New Jersey, signed by Mayor John A. Lynch, announced the 114th Session of the New Jersey Annual Conference which convened at the United Methodist Church, corner of George Street and Livingston Avenue. Yellow signs appeared on the doors of the Sanctuary also indicating that this was where the Sessions were being held. Mt. Zion A.M.E. Church, New Brunswick and North Stelton A.M.E. Church served as Co-Hosts.

Bishop Frank C. Cummings, Presiding Bishop, First Episcopal District was assisted by Presiding Elders John H. Johnson, Jr., Host Presiding Elder of the New Brunswick, District, John W. Johnson, Sr., Camden District, Bynum C. Burton of the Newark District, and Nathaniel L. Burgess of the Atlantic City District. The Bishop's wife was the Episcopal Missionary Supervisor. The Reverends Henry A. Hildebrand and Edward Adams served as Co-Host Pastors.

Sessions were held March 12-16, 1986 with the Conference Theme "Let's Strengthen the Family of God" threading its way throughout all of the Sessions. To our knowledge, this marked the first time that the Annual Conference had convened in this city, so this was quite a unique learning experience for all of us!

Ninety-seven (97) churches with delegates and alternates were represented. Reports were made and they gave an account of their stewardship. There was a great "hustle and bustle" as they arrived at the church by plane, bus, van, car and on foot, anxiously awaiting the business of the week.

My first impression upon my arrival on Tuesday, March 11, when the Women's Missionary Society Conference Board held its Annual Meeting, was looking in on "a sea of white" as one entered the Sanctuary. You have no idea just how beautiful it was--seeing the ladies dressed in white every where you looked! And they were busy

"going about their Master's business!" There was a great deal of spirited competition as delegates were elected for the Quadrennium. The democratic process seemed very slow and tedious. To me, there were too many candidates, and I felt that some might have been eliminated during area meetings that occurred before Conference.

Attractive banners were seen from the "Asbury Park Missionary Society," "Morristown Area," New Jersey Conference Branch, Newark, "Trenton Area" to mention a few. They made one aware of the different sections of our state.

Conference Business Sessions began on Wednesday morning, March, 12, promptly at 8:00 AM. Sessions opened with Devotions led by Conference Evangelists. Marshals and Ushers seated the delegates and friends with a minimum of confusion. There seemed to be a constant dating of persons with papers behind the scene, but business proceeded. There was a Roll Call of all churches and delegates. The New Brunswick District Presiding Elder led the Worship Service. The Processional of Church dignitaries was most regal, as the "standing room only" congregation looked on.

The Mt. Zion Choral provided excellent music. The Annual Sermon was given by Rev. William Smith, Jr. He held the congregation spell-bound with a stirring message. His text was taken from John 5:7-8. He spoke on overcoming a paralysis of hopelessness--let the Lord touch your life. Lots of feeling was expressed, with other ministers giving wonderful encouragement to him, and to others that appeared in future sessions. Some visiting Baptists were overheard saying, "We didn't know Methodists could show so much feeling!" And who could forget the sight of our Stewardesses serving communion to all those worshippers!

Sessions dealt with the Church at Worship, the Church Praising God, an Evangelistic Worship Service with Music provided by the Angelic and North Stelton Choir, plus Mt. Zion's Jubilee Choir; the Church at Work, Laymen's Night, Youth Night, etc. Rev. O'Neal Mack, Pastor of Bethel A.M.E. Church, New York City, gave a sermon that was spiritually rewarding based on a text from Jeremiah 37:17,

leaving us with this challenging thought: "Is there any word from God?" He inspired the congregation by speaking of the living presence of God.

On Thursday and Friday, March 13 and 14, the church held its Business Sessions. Inspirational Reports were given by Pastors of even the smallest charges. A need for better lines of communications was discussed. Also, more churches should be involved in decision-making procedures. There seemed to be much disparity in insurance premiums. Presiding Elders were asked to get together on this problem. Two Black Mayors present, Mayor Kenneth Gibson of Newark, and Mayor UKsry of Atlantic City expressed the need for churches to work together and "make things happen."

Some random samples of church reports showed:

Woodbury reporting	125	Members and raising	\$40,000
Burlington "	194	" "	73,000
Riverton "	125	" "	60,000
Bethel,			
Madison "	176	" "	53,200
Vauxhall "	240	" "	90,083

Our own Mt. Zion A.M.E., New Brunswick, reported 400 members, raising \$168,327. Over \$5,000,000 was raised by all churches. A total of almost a million dollars was reported remaining in the various church treasuries.

The Bishop commented on the lack of coverage of the Conference by the local media. Our Pastor had acquainted the local paper with the information about the Conference. Itinerant Pastors who sought retirement were asked to submit their requests in writing.

Laymen's Night, March 13, was well attended. Representatives were present from the Delaware, Philadelphia, New England conferences as well as from our own Branches. Contributions from local churches, personal contributions, pastor's reports to the Presiding Elders, organized laity, and the general offering at this Session resulted in close to \$15,000 being raised to assist the Ministerial

Training Funding.

Youth Night, March 14, was effectively arranged by the New Brunswick Board of Christian Education directed by Rev. Archie Richmond of Quinn Chapel, Atlantic Highlands. A mass choir of twenty-four youth voices sang. Rev. David Cousin delivered a sermon on the need for a strong Christian foundation--a strong Christian character standing on the promises of God.

The Ordination Service held on Saturday was deeply moving. The Sanctuary was again crowded with delegates, ministers, candidates, families--truly an outstanding example of "Strengthening the family of God."

Sunday's Closing Service took place in the Livingston Gym on the Campus of Rutgers university. Over one thousand, (1,000) heard Bishop Vernon R. Byrd of the Fourteenth Episcopal District preach on "**Forgive Ye One Another.**" Lack of forgiveness breeds hatred. Evil is temporary. Each of us must create conditions by which each of us can be forgiven. Visitors were glimpsed from Bermuda, New York, Delaware, Philadelphia Conferences, Third, Seventh, and Fourteenth Episcopal Districts, and Retired Bishop D. Ward Nichols. And the women in the congregation wearing lovely hats, many of which were purchased in the local Hat Shop located one block from the church! Of course this made the proprietor very, very happy!

After the Reading of Appointments by Bishop Cummings (very few pastors were moved) the Conference closed to re-convene at the 115th Conference to be held in Atlantic City during 1987. St. James A.M.E. Church has already contacted us regarding planning, statistics, etc.,--things one needs to know in order to have a smooth operation.

During all of these Sessions, our Entertainment Committees were functioning in an extraordinary manner. They tackled their "herculean tasks" with an excellent spirit of cooperation from Committee members and non-committee members who "pitched in" whenever a need arose. Over-all Chairpersons William Robinson and

Eugene Hildebrand functioned "like pros."

Our Food Service Team used the services of a Caterer. Three hot meals were served daily. The Catering Service did not provide breakfast. The Committee handled that, and also Service Handlers. Dining Room patrons were served by Waitresses. A Snack Bar was available to serve those who needed "just a bite"; dignitaries were fed at the Parsonage and North Stelton. Some church clubs sold pie, cake, cookies and soda. Ebenezer Baptist Church hosted a delicious Breakfast for the Ministers' Wives as they honored the First Lady in our District--Mrs. Martha C. Cummings.

The Conference Office Committee was efficiently handled by persons answering phone calls, typing reports, etc. A special note of thanks goes to Dolores Gatling who typed last minute reports, maintaining excellent composure. She seemingly took over the responsibilities of Mrs. Mildred Davis who had to go to Buffalo where her daughter had been involved in a very serious automobile accident.

The Parking Crew saw to it that cars were properly parked. Jersey City provided van service to the Airports, with other ministers and delegates handling transportation as needed. Tabernacle Baptist Church furnished their Bus to transport delegates to North Stelton and elsewhere. Our Housing Committee provided housing at the Hyatt Regency, Quality Inn, and Best Western. That more delegates did not stay at the Hyatt was through no fault of our Committee. It was due to late registration on the part of some of the delegates. Security was adequately handled. Our Housekeeping and Maintenance Committee worked so effectively that church officials exclaimed that the church hadn't looked so good in a long time! Music and Choirs were coordinated for the Worship services. And-what can one say about the efficient and courteous manner in which the Ushers and Nurses served? Ushers and Nurses were assisted by other church units--some being on duty as frequently as ours!

CONFERENCE ACTION, RESOLUTIONS, ETC.

1. Conference Branch Missionary Society elected four (4) delegates and alternates to represent the N. J. Branch at the 1987 Quadrennial Convention
2. There is a need to re-examine and re-assess insurance policies (Church).
3. Need to put in writing requests for retirement.
4. Need for some Conference publicity. Be sure of adequate coverage locally.
5. Plan early for a Mass Conference Choir.
6. Ministerial Training Board certified the Election and Ordination of those who fulfilled requirements. Others will be examined when they resume and complete their studies toward ordination.
7. Conference Hosts were congratulated on their outstanding hospitality.
8. Thanks and appreciation to the United Methodist Church, Redshaw School, and Livingston College for the use of their facilities.
9. Appreciation to Area Churches that assisted in any way.
10. Deepest gratitude to the City for allowing us to park nearby--making facilities easily accessible to our conferees.

Rev + Mrs. Vernon Leak

31 cantabury circle

Somerset, N.J. 08873

201-873-5589 home

201-218-3227 office

Under
Patterson Bldg
673-5504
Salvina
523-1048