

July 18, 2024



COMMUNICATIONS
New York Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church

The Northeastern Jurisdiction Reconfigures Episcopal Areas

The New York Annual Conference and the New England Annual Conference to Share a Bishop

The 2024 Northeastern Jurisdictional (NEJ) Conference ended last Friday, July 12, with the announcement of six new reconfigured Episcopal Areas and the assigning of bishops to supervise those areas. **The new six new episcopal areas are:**

- Baltimore–Washington and Peninsula–Delaware
- Eastern Pennsylvania and Greater New Jersey
 - New York and New England
- Susquehanna and Upper New York
 - Western Pennsylvania
- West Virginia and Holston (a joint arrangement with the Southeastern Jurisdiction)

These new configurations became necessary following the action of the General Conference to reduce the number of active bishops serving in the United States from 39 to 32. This has resulted in a larger number of Annual Conferences having to share a bishop.

The Northeastern Jurisdiction Episcopal Areas

**Greater New Jersey
Eastern Pennsylvania**
Bishop Cynthia Moore-Kaikoi

**Baltimore-Washington
Peninsula-Delaware**
Bishop LaTrelle Easterling

**New England
New York**
Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton

**Upper New York
Susquehanna**
Bishop Héctor A. Burgos Núñez

Western Pennsylvania
Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball

West Virginia
Bishop Debra Wallace-Podgett

Graphic courtesy of Mary Dalglish, Upper New York Conference

BISHOP BICKERTON RE-ASSIGNED

Bishop Bickerton has been reassigned to the New York Annual Conference for a third quadrennium and assigned to the New England Annual Conference as a part of the newly reconfigured Episcopal Areas. It was decided among the two delegations that we would call ourselves the “New Hope” Episcopal Area.

In a time of introduction and celebration in Pittsburgh, delegates and members of the New York Annual Conference gathered with the delegates and members with the New England Annual Conference to meet, greet, and welcome home our Resident Bishop, Thomas J. Bickerton.

WHAT IS THE NEW HOPE EPISCOPAL AREA?

This newly formed Episcopal Area will encompass the existing New York Annual Conference and the New England Annual Conference (which includes the remainder of Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine). The New England and New York delegations decided that the New Hope Episcopal Area describes a sense of hopeful anticipation for mission and ministry in this region of the Northeast.

Bishop Bickerton’s return to New York is a historic moment because he is poised to become the first bishop in the history of the Annual Conference to be in residency for twelve years. In addition, Bishop Bickerton will follow Bishop Peggy Johnson in New England who served that Annual Conference in an interim capacity since 2022.

WELCOME HOME BISHOP!



HOW WILL THIS NEW ARRANGEMENT WORK?

Bishop Bickerton is clear that while this new arrangement will have a significant impact on his work as an episcopal leader, there will be little to no change in the day-to-day work of mission and ministry in the New York Annual Conference.

This arrangement does signify a new and different day that is emerging within The United Methodist Church. “My time will now be shared with clergy and laity of New England but the ongoing work of our staff, cabinet, and leadership of the New York Annual Conference will largely be unchanged. We are currently discerning a work plan that will enable both Annual Conferences to do their work effectively under the leadership of a common bishop.”

“I am grateful to have the opportunity to continue to build upon the work we have done together here in New York the last eight years. By the same token, I am eager to discover the rhythms and needs that exist among the people I am called to serve in New England. While the way is not yet clear, I know that God has got this, and we will find a way to be faithful to the call God has placed upon us in this region of the world.”

The bishop is clear that this new Episcopal Area will focus on ministry in a multi-cultural, multi-lingual context. Both areas have a history of ministry that involves radical inclusion, empowerment of our LGBTQIA+ siblings, respect and love for all theological perspectives, and active work in dismantling racism and sexism. The work done in establishing Cooperative Parish ministries in urban, suburban, and rural contexts will continue to be a focus as well as equipping lay and clergy leaders for the challenges we face in this modern context.

“I trust that there is much to learn from each other. My prayer is that we will find places of synergy where we will discover ways to benefit from one another’s gifts and talents.”

“Key to it all,” Bishop Bickerton reminds us, “is the ongoing work of clear communication, transparency in leadership, collaboration among everyone, and tirelessly working to build trust among all people. I welcome those ongoing challenges and pledge to make those priorities seen in all aspects of our work.”

Bishop Bickerton also offered a rallying reminder to all in attendance at the episcopal area reception: “We have work to do. I’m not shy about hard work and ask each of us to prepare ourselves for the work that lies ahead.” He added, “Both of us (New England and New York) need to understand that our life together is going to be different. It’s going to be an adjustment and I believe we WILL find our way. There are a great teams in both Annual Conferences and I am so very excited to see what new thing God has in store for us.”



WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

This new alignment will not take place until September 1. Not surprisingly, the Bishop has begun putting an early-stage strategy in place.

Exploratory conversations are being scheduled with the cabinets, staff, and key leadership in both Annual Conferences. As these plans begin to emerge, we will keep you up to date and abreast of what is unfolding.

Keep in mind, however, that mission and ministry will continue as it has been. We must be faithful and earnest in intentional prayer for this transition as it continues to be revealed. As the bishop reminded us in a recent Facebook post, the words of Philippians 3 can and should be our guide:

“I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to think this way about all of you because I hold you in my heart, for all of you are my partners in God’s grace.”

