

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The 2005 Pennsylvania State Pastors' Conference will be held November 14–16 at the Radisson Penn Harris Hotel and Convention Center, Camp Hill. The theme, "We've Never Done It Like This Before: Lessons from the 'Emergent Church'" is expected to attract nearly 400 clergy, church educators, seminarians, retirees, and spouses.

The conference is designed to offer participants the opportunity to engage grassroots practitioners from the Emergent Church—Doug Pagitt, Holly Rankin Zaher, and Karen M. Ward—in critical reflection on the movement and its relationship to more "traditional" Christian expressions. Scholar Diana Butler Bass will help set the movement in context, and Scott Bader-Saye of the University of Scranton will facilitate discussion and reflection.

"Emergent has attracted a lot of attention recently," said conference planning committee chair the Rev. Gene Jerge. "By giving practitioners who also have a leadership role in the emergent conversation the podium, we hope participants will gather new and challenging insights into 'doing' church."

Doug Pagitt

Plenary presentations will begin Monday afternoon, November 14, with Doug Pagitt speaking on "Emergent 101: Background and Basics on an Emerging Church." Pastor of Solomon's Porch (www.solomonsporch.com) in Minneapolis, he is part of Emergent ("a generative friendship of missional church leaders around the world;" see www.emergentvillage.com) and the Gospel in Our Culture Network. A graduate of Bethel Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, Pagitt has written *Church Re-Imagined*, *Preaching Re-Imagined*, and *BodyPrayer*.

The Web-posted description of Solomon's Porch offers a view into the values, intentions, and style of the "Emergent Church:"

Solomon's Porch is a community seeking to live the dreams and love of God in the way of Jesus. As part of this effort, we maintain a meeting space.... While we use our facility for Sunday evening worship gatherings, Bible studies, meals, internet café, art exhibitions, and events, we are very aware that our community exists wherever the people of Solomon's Porch find themselves. In this way, our Christian lives are not limited to what we officially do in our meeting space, but are expressed through our lives.

We are seeking to be a redemptive, transformative community living as a blessing of God in all the world. The people of our community are from varied backgrounds and perspectives, but find unity and commonality in seeking the

things of God in this world, "as they are in heaven", in the generous Orthodox expressions of Christianity.

Diana Butler Bass

Setting the Emergent conversation and the "Emerging Church" in historical, theological, and cultural context will be Diana Butler Bass, speaking Tuesday morning (November 15) on "Emerging Christianity: The Pilgrimage to a Country with No Maps." Bass is currently Senior Research Fellow and Director of the Project on Congregations of Intentional Practice, a study of mainline Protestant vitality funded by the Lilly Endowment. In addition to research and writing, she teaches religion and politics, church history, and congregational studies at Virginia Theological Seminary in Alexandria.

She is the author of four critically acclaimed books—*The Practicing Congregation: Imagining a New Old Church* (Alban, 2004), *Broken We Kneel: Reflections on Faith and Citizenship* (Jossey-Bass, 2004), *Strength for the Journey: A Pilgrimage of Faith in Community* (Jossey-Bass, 2002), and *Standing Against the Whirlwind: Evangelical Episcopalians in 19th Century America* (Oxford, 1995). (The latter volume won the Frank S. and Elizabeth D. Brewer prize of the American Society of Church History and was her doctoral dissertation at Duke University.) She is currently working on three books—*The Wisdom of Practice: Christianity for the Rest of Us* (Harper, 2006), *From Nomads to Pilgrims: Stories from Practicing Congregations* (with Joseph Steward-Sicking, Alban, 2005), and *Episcopalians in America* (Columbia, 2007).

Holly Rankin Zaher

One of the features of "emergent" churches is their eclectic liturgy, drawing on a broad range of traditions and practices. "Exploring Worship in the Emerging Context: Opting for Contextualization over Technology" will be the topic of the third plenary, with Holly Rankin Zaher as speaker. Until her recent move to South Carolina, Zaher was Online Education Coordinator for Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry in Ambridge, Pennsylvania and facilitated the creative expression group which planned and executed worship gatherings for threenails [NOTE: this is the correct spelling and typography], a congregation of the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh.

Zaher holds a M.Div. from Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry, has worked in youth ministry in a variety of settings, and has published articles in such journals as *Youthworker* and *Relevant Leader*. She also has contributed to *The Post-Evangelical* (Graham Tomlinson, ed., Zondervan, 2003) and written about threenails in *The Relevant Church: A New Vision for Communities of Faith* (Relevant Books, 2004).

Karen M. Ward

The final plenary speaker will be Pastor Karen M. Ward, who will speak on "'The Life Aquatic: Emergence within Denominational Vessels.'" Ward is pastor of the Church of the Apostles (www.apostleschurch.org) in Seattle and a rostered clergyperson of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The Church of the Apostles, known on its Web site as COTA, is a

congregation related to the Northwest Washington Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Episcopal Diocese of Olympia. Ward will explore how Emergent concerns and conversations find space in "mainline" denominational settings.

Scott Bader-Saye

Response panels featuring parish clergy and church body executives, facilitated by Scott Bader-Saye, will assist participants in critical reflection and conversation. Bader-Saye is an associate professor in the Department of Theology/Religious Studies at the University of Scranton and holds a Ph.D. in Theology and Ethics from Duke University and an M.Div. from Yale Divinity School. His teaching and research interests include theological reflection on culture and politics, evangelism and the emerging church, providence and suffering, and Jewish-Christian dialogue.

His book, *Church and Israel After Christendom: The Politics of Election*, explores the politics of the post-Christendom church seen through the lens of Israel's corporate election. He is currently working on a book entitled *Following Jesus in a Culture of Fear*. He has contributed chapters to *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics* and *The Cambridge Companion to the Gospels*, and his articles have been published in journals such as *Modern Theology*, *Studies in Christian Ethics*, *Pro Ecclesia*, *Cross Currents*, and *Christian Century*.

Before entering full-time teaching, Dr. Bader-Saye spent eight years in volunteer and professional ministry to youth and college students through Young Life, Yale Campus Ministry, and numerous church youth groups. He remains very involved in music and teaching ministries in the Episcopal Church, currently serving on the Evangelism Commission for the Diocese of Bethlehem.

Special interest group luncheons

The pastors' conference will include its usual array of special interest group luncheons on Tuesday, November 15. Speaking on "Christian Churches Together: Building a New Ecumenical Future" will be Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, chair of the steering committee of Christian Churches Together in the USA (www.christianchurchestogether.org). Previously director of Church and Society for the World Council of Churches (1988–1994), Granberg-Michaelson is currently general secretary of the Reformed Church in America.

Presenting the "Capitol Hill Update" will be the Rev. Sandra L. Strauss, director of public advocacy for the Pennsylvania Council of Churches. She will review the legislative and gubernatorial highlights and lowlights of the past year and update attendees on current legislation of interest to the Council.

Finally, of particular interest to chaplains working in state-related facilities as well as congregational pastors, Ginny Thornburgh, vice-president and director of the National Organization on Disability's Religion and Disability Program, will speak on "That All May Worship:

A Ramp is Not Enough.” Thornburgh is a recent recipient of the prestigious Hubert H. Humphrey Civil Rights Award, widely seen as the civil rights community’s highest honor.

Opening and closing luncheons

Two relative newcomers to the ranks of Pennsylvania religious leaders will open and close the conference. Speaking at the opening luncheon on November 14 will be the Rev. Alan C. Miller, conference minister of the Penn Northeast Conference of the United Church of Christ. A native of Pennsylvania with a degree in civil engineering from Lehigh University, Miller worked as a structural design engineer before receiving his M.Div. from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary in 1979. Prior to becoming conference minister for the Penn Northeast Conference in 2002, he served United Church of Christ congregations in eastern Pennsylvania and as the Associate Southern Conference Minister for the Western North Carolina Association. The title of his luncheon address will be, “If Only I Didn’t Have to Work with the General Public!”

Closing the conference with an address titled “For Such A Time As This” will be Bishop Jane Allen Middleton, resident bishop in the United Methodist Harrisburg Area. Prior to her election to the office of bishop in 2004, Middleton taught high school English, speech, and journalism, served as a legislative assistant in the Connecticut State Legislature, pastored United Methodist congregations in Connecticut, and served as Spiritual Life Director for the New York Conference of the United Methodist Church. Most recently she served as district superintendent for the Connecticut/New York District. Her B.A. in Education is from Oklahoma State University and her M.Div. is from Yale Divinity School.

The \$90 registration fee includes both Monday and Wednesday luncheons. The special interest luncheons on Tuesday are offered for a modest additional cost. A printable registration form is available on the Council’s Web site at www.pachurches.org, which also offers the opportunity for secure online registration with a MasterCard or Visa credit card. For a brochure with registration form, send a stamped, self-addressed business-size envelope to State Pastors’ Conference, Pennsylvania Council of Churches, 900 S. Arlington Avenue, Suite 100, Harrisburg, PA 17109-5089 or send a request by e-mail, including your address, to pcc@pachurches.org.