

A Word of Witness from Upper New York Annual Conference

By Jan Marsi, vice-convenor of the New ACT

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I wish Mike Bealla was here. Because he is so good at this kind of thing, and because he was there when this all began.

Come to think of it, he is here.

When all this began, when the first conversations began, I never really expected we'd get here. At first, it was a conversation, embedded in scripture, about why things had to be different --(for many reasons). And then it morphed (--also embedded in scripture) into the wildest, most amazing and colorful and energizing dreams; dreams of what our community, --our communities, -- *could be*.

And I never really expected we'd get here.

Where was God in the process?

There were so many questions and such urgency, and we had to keep stopping, and embed ourselves in scripture again. We had to stop and keep saying, "We can't answer that question now. We can ground ourselves in this particular way, but we can't answer that question now."

There were so many technical questions and pieces that for the new conference in Upper New York, we still don't have, and won't for some time.

Because the task we embraced wasn't ever really about supplying answers to all those technical questions. The task was about re-forming ourselves into a body that could *engage* with the questions. (Actually, it was about allowing God to re-form us. And getting out of God's way, so God could do that.)

Where did I experience God in this?

Really, it was more like *When wasn't God there?*

Although there were a lot of times when we moved away:

Out of anxiousness;

Or the urgency to make a decision on a tight time line;

Or wanting to supply an answer for someone to ease their anxiety.

There's an image that will stay with me.

In those earliest days of the conversation, Ted Anderson (who was serving then near Chatauqua in Western New York) would bring these baskets of tennis balls, and try to teach the 20 or so of us who had gathered to juggle.

And it was a mess! It was crazy and clumsy and messy.
Tennis balls all over the place;
Inept people bumping into each other;
Trying, fumbling...mostly not attaining anything resembling
accomplishment or mastery.

The trick, Ted said, is you have to let go of one ball, and get it launched into the air, while you simultaneously have the other hand ready to receive the other ball. There's this tendency to hold on to the ball in your other hand, and just try to kind of quickly transfer it to the other hand so as not to drop it. And that doesn't work. It doesn't work.

And there we were.
And here we are: lurching our way, bumping into each other, tennis balls flying all over the place.

And we learned how to loosen our hold and let go.
And we learned how to keep the receiving hand open, and how to live with the ball in the air, not in the hand.
And we learned that the answers don't come easily or quickly. But they do emerge when, --and only when, --we ask the right questions.
And we learned who we were in that room, bumping into each other; and who we are in God's story about us.

And it was good. And sweet. And rich with possibility.