

WHBC to celebrate its bicentennial Sept. 20

A banquet address by Rev. Dr. A. Roy Medley, general secretary of the American Baptist Churches USA, will highlight the bicentennial celebration of West Henrietta Baptist Church on Sunday, Sept. 20. The day will begin with worship in the town's oldest church building, the classic Greek Revival structure at the corner of West Henrietta and Erie Station roads. The interim pastor, Rev. Dr. Jill Bradway, will preach on "A Legacy to Live By" with Dr. Medley, Rev. Alan Newton, executive minister of the ABC Rochester/Genesee Region, and Rev. Dr. Dick Myers, a former WHBC pastor, participating in the service. Following an open house at the church, the banquet will be held at the nearby RIT Inn and Conference Center. Current and former members, descendants of pioneer founders, friends, family, and officials have been invited for a unique gathering of church and community, past and present, ready to seek God's future.

The banquet culminates a yearlong celebration launched in October 2014, one month after the arrival of the interim pastor and just seven months after the death of Rev. Dr. C. David Hess, the church's longtime pastor. Emily Keyes, who represented the last of the church's longest participating family, attended the initial history presentation in October and died a week later. David's deathbed emails and Emily's poems and letters written during her 40 years as a missionary in Africa, were compiled and printed for memorials. They will be available again at the banquet. A new church history published in David's memory will also be available and is currently searchable on nyheritage.org in the Town of Henrietta collection.

As David's and Emily's writings comforted and inspired the congregation during the year, new and renewed ties with neighboring churches also brought strength. WHBC hosted the Rush-Henrietta Interfaith League Thanksgiving service for the first time and invited other churches to a caroling party, a choral celebration, and an ice cream social.

In seeking who and what it should be, the congregation explored who and what it had been. It resumed reading the covenant on communion Sundays. Members revived the old-fashioned roll call meeting, a time of testimony and singing, the day before the annual meeting. They held an Ash Wednesday service despite a snowstorm and rediscovered their ancestors' childhood games at the church picnic. Believing in a future congregation, they grappled to explain themselves as Christians in the church's 200th year as they placed memories in a time capsule to be opened in God's time by his children.

All are welcome to the 10 a.m. worship service. Anyone wishing to attend the banquet please contact Sharon Scurlock at scurlocks@gmail.com for a reservation. Anyone unable to attend the banquet but interested in the year's publications, should contact Bonnie Healy at bonniehealy@yahoo.com.