

## **July Conference in Johnstown to Highlight Faith's Role in Community Renewal**

The New York State Council of Churches will host a dynamic three-day conference, "The Church as a Catalyst for Community Renewal: An Urban-Rural Dialogue" in Johnstown, July 10-12.

The event will be held at the First Presbyterian Church, 37 S. Market St. Registration and more information can be found at the New York State Council of Churches website: [www.nyscoc.org](http://www.nyscoc.org).

Building on last year's "Bridging the Urban-Rural Divide," this year's program will focus on the role churches can play in the economic revitalization of their communities. About 75 individuals from across the state attended that conference held at Fulton Montgomery Community College, Johnstown.

The gathering is expected to attract a unique mix of leaders from business, labor, government, nonprofits and religious organizations from both rural and urban areas across New York State. Faith communities who have led the way on community revitalization will present their work, reflect on challenges and share successful strategies.

First Presbyterian's Rev. Leonard Sponaugle said, "There are examples of successful economic revitalization all over our state. Too often the learning that has come from the success stays where it happened. We are providing an opportunity for people to learn from each other."

"Faith leaders have a unique opportunity to support economic development that benefits everyone in their communities," said Rev. Peter Cook, executive director of the New York State Council of Churches. "By the end of this conference, participants should be inspired and equipped to become a catalyst for revitalization in their own towns and cities."

Rev. Sponaugle said, "Churches are one of the few places where people of vastly different political and economic views still talk and listen to each other."

The conference begins with a conversation focused on the Johnstown/Gloversville region, including a visit to the former Johnstown YMCA, recently purchased by St. John's Episcopal Church for redevelopment for community use.

Reverend Donna Schaper--author and expert on creative use of church buildings--from Judson Memorial Church in New York City and Reverend Dawrell Rich--an architect, urban planner and leader of the Mount Moriah Church in New London, Connecticut--will discuss their deep involvement with their neighborhoods.