

“Rebuilding a Future with Hope Together”

As waves from Superstorm Sandy crashed onto the shore in Seabright, NJ, George Finnegan kept watch through the night. At 5 a.m. he jotted down “worst” on a piece of paper, describing his experience of the storm. Years as a prison warden never prepared Finnegan, a United Methodist layperson, for the hollowing night and the devastation he would see in his community the next morning.

The second worst storm in US history, Superstorm Sandy, knocked out power for 2.7 million people in New Jersey alone and caused damage to the homes of more than 250,000 NJ households. Within the United Methodist connection in New Jersey 106 church properties were damaged, five churches and seven parsonages were uninhabitable. Yet, in the face of such destruction, hope springs eternal.

“When nature’s stiff winds blow disruption, United Methodist Spirit winds blow hope, healing and relief,” said Bishop John Schol, Resident Bishop of the Greater New Jersey Conference in the wake of the storm. “Laity and clergy from around the Greater New Jersey Conference and around the nation have led the way in the relief efforts across Greater New Jersey,” Schol added.

Relief

To date, the United Methodist relief efforts in Greater New Jersey have provided:

- More than 66,000 meals
- Day and/or night shelter for more than 5,000 people
- More than 10,000 flood buckets and 2,000 first aid kits
- Mucked out (clean out debris, mud, sheet rock, insulation and wet materials) more than 1,000 homes
- Provided comfort and spiritual support to thousands of people

According to Bobbie Ridgely, the newly hired Director for the GNJ Con-



During Superstorm Sandy, flood waters damaged homes and rose as high as SUVs like this one parked in Belmar, NJ.

Photo by Ellen and Gene Chamberlin

ference Relief and Recovery efforts, “relief ministry after a storm this size usually lasts 3-4 months.” “The relief ministry provided by GNJ has been the amazing result of local church pastors, volunteer laity and trained NJ and out of state Early Response Teams who saw a need, mobilized and immediately began helping those in their communities.” Now the remaining long term recovery ministries of repairing, rebuilding and renewal will require an additional intense effort over a 3-5 year period.

Recovery

As we move into the next phase of our recovery work, Greater New Jersey Conference has been preparing and organizing for the long term efforts needed.

The GNJ long term recovery minis-

try will include:

- Repairing 300-500 homes
- Orienting, housing, feeding, and managing 15,000 to 20,000 volunteers
- Providing case management for 500 families
- Renewing 500 lives through counseling and spiritual support,
- Rebuilding three communities for the future, implementing Communities of Shalom strategies.

“Our long term recovery and repair ministry will start at the beginning of April,” said Lou Strugala, construction director for the GNJ recovery ministry. “We will begin repairing four homes using volunteers and will grow to at

least 10 homes at the same time with a goal of repairing 100 to 150 homes a year,” Strugala added.

While the many volunteers throughout our connection have expressed interest and enthusiasm for beginning the repairing efforts before now, “there are several reasons it takes five months to begin the repair ministry” said Ridgely. “First we have to ensure homes are completely dried out and that local townships have clearly identified any new building requirements. In addition, we have to hire oversight staff, raise funds to repair homes, identify space to house out of town volunteers, secure supplies, and coordinate with Long Term Recovery Groups and partners around the state.”

The GNJ Sandy Relief and Recovery ministry to date has identified 12 potential churches and other locations for host sites to house and feed volunteers. They have also identified nearly 100 in and out-of-state volunteer construction teams who will help in our recovery, as well as secured a warehouse and planned material purchases and logistics for repairing homes.

Long-term efforts

Long term recovery from a disaster this size requires staff, volunteers and a sufficient budget. Many have inquired about how many staff the United Methodist Committee On Relief (UMCOR) will provide. Currently UMCOR has three staff and several consultants to resource the entire United States for disaster response and provides consultation to annual conferences to organize their own relief and long term recovery ministry.

Presently, the GNJ Sandy Relief Ministry has hired four full time and two

Continued on page 6

Generation Restoration – A wave of young adults for Sandy relief

The Greater New Jersey Conference (GNJ) is preparing for a wave of young adults from throughout New Jersey and across the nation to help lead the way in the repairing, renewing and rebuilding of homes, lives and communities. “We are preparing for as many as 5,000 young adults over the next several years from colleges and churches across New Jersey and the nation,” said Andrew Ryoo, the new GNJ Coordinator for generation restoration and electronic communication.

“This will be an opportunity to connect and engage young adults with mission and the church,” said Bishop John Schol, Resident Bishop of the GNJ conference. “Young adults are passionate about purpose, service and

helping others, and *Generation Restoration* will connect young adults with some of the most important ministry in GNJ,” Schol added.

In a time when more and more young adults are not choosing a religious preference (according to the Pew Forum’s recent report “None’s on the Rise”) GNJ will take bold steps to connect, call and engage young people through service and connecting faith and action.

GNJ is also exploring a partnership with the General Board of Discipleship to resource other hard hit conferences by Superstorm Sandy, as well as, create young adult houses/communities where young adults will form Christian community and work on Sandy long term recovery.

GNJ Sandy Relief Fund pushes past \$1 million mark

Special thanks are in order to the Northeastern Jurisdiction Annual Conferences, who helped push the GNJ Sandy Relief Fund past the \$1 million mark. Bishops across the jurisdiction invited their churches in addition to receiving offerings for UMCOR Sandy Relief Advance to receive a special offering at Christmas for GNJ. The conferences raised \$428,344.80 for the GNJ Sandy Relief ministry. Each conference supported this effort, including New York and Peninsula Delaware who also have ongoing relief ministries for Sandy. The conferences and their bishops include: Baltimore-Washington, Bishop Marcus Matthews; Eastern Pennsylvania, Bishop Peggy Johnson; New England, Bishop Suda Devadhar; Peninsula-Delaware, Bishop Peggy Johnson; Susquehanna, Bishop Jeremiah Park; Upper New York, Bishop Mark Webb; West Virginia, Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball; and Western Pennsylvania, Bishop Thomas Bickerton.

We’re Coming Back to GNJ



After nearly a decade of annual conference being held outside the bounds of the conference, the 2013 Session of Annual Conference will be held at the Wildwood, NJ Convention Center.

“After thorough research and prayerful discernment, the Session’s Committee was unanimous in its decision,” said Reggie Albert, chairperson of the Session’s Committee. “The committee selected the Wildwood Convention Center and hotels not only because

they would better serve our needs, but the move to this location saves money for individual registration fees and the conference mission budget,” Albert added.

The sessions committee has planned the May 30 - June 1, 2013 conference using the input from the last several annual conference evaluations. The committee has planned an agenda which will further our mission, inspire

Continued on page 3

A Message from the Bishop



Lost in Our Principles

Abraham Lincoln, the 16th President of the United States was a tall, lanky and not a very good looking man. He also had the uncanny ability to hold fast to principles in the one hand and compromise in the other. It is said that someone said to him, *Mr. President, you are two faced.* To which Lincoln replied, *do you think if I had two faces I would be wearing this one?*

Lincoln was self deprecating so that important issues became the center of attention rather than him. He told stories that led to change and focused on getting the right things done rather than being right.

Recently Beverly and I watched the movie *Lincoln*, which portrays these qualities. I came away from the movie pondering and wondering. The movie for me raised more questions than it provided answers. Are all principles of equal value? Are there times that our highest principles are compromised so that the highest ideals are achieved?

There are not neat or easy answers to the questions. For instance, the movie portrays Lincoln as giving away jobs to gain votes to end slavery and he prolongs the Civil War so that congress will act on a vote to end slavery. It left me questioning how principles and ideals work in concert. Is it ever appropriate to relax some principles, not give them up, but relax them so that what is a greater ideal is achieved?

I do not have an answer.

Jesus lived his life in the shadow of principles and ideals. Jesus was a very peace loving and welcoming person. For instance Jesus said, *blessed are the peace makers for they shall be called children of God.* (Matthew 5:9) Yet Jesus did not seek to make peace with the money changers in the temple but drove them out of the temple with whips. In another instance Jesus said, *if you want to be perfect, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven.* (Matthew 19:21) Yet on another occasion when a woman washing Jesus' feet with expensive oils and perfumes is confronted by a disciple to sell the perfume and give the money to the poor, Jesus rebukes the disciple and encourages the woman to continue to lavish him with the expensive perfume.

In each of these situations, one principle rose above another principle that Jesus valued.

In our nation, some elected leaders and people on both sides of an issue cannot see people for their principles. In other words, a principle has become so important that they cannot see how their politics is tearing our nation apart and they miss the needs of people and the Nation. Our Nation is gridlocked on important issues and the people are losing.

It also is occurring in our beloved church. We are so high minded with our principles of how to worship, how to interpret scripture, how to maintain order, that we lose sight of God who is the object of our worship, we lose focus on the words that we miss the heart of the scriptures, and we have order without unity. Worship, scripture and order are keys to the faith and for our church but they should never become a single focused principle or lens that loses sight of people or loses sight of God's grace for people. This past General Conference we experienced the gridlock of our General Conference and God is losing.

It seems to me that Jesus and Lincoln applied these tests to a principle that directed their actions:

- Will people be lost in the principle
- Will a tight hold on a principle maintain an individual or group's power or will it unleash God's power
- Will a greater good come by allowing a particular principle rise above another principle
- Will our principle only maintain our values or will it value the greater good

Like Lincoln, this thinking will invite people to call you two faced. Like Jesus, this way of living will invite ridicule, sacrifice and persecution. The polarization and grid lock within the Nation and the Church is not working. Paul said it this way, *If I can move mountains, but have no love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal... Faith, hope and love remain, but the greatest of these is love.* (1 Corinthians 13)

Today the Church and the Nation need principled leaders who never forget the people and principled leaders who never forget that the ultimate goal of their leadership is to serve.

Keep the faith!
John Schol

EDITORIAL

Keep Your Eye on the Ball

It may not be found in the canonical 66 books of the Bible – at least we've never found it there – but there is a phrase, a familiar adage, which may strike a resonant note in this sports-obsessed society, with Super Bowl fever rivaling the flu, basketball and hockey seasons rising to fever pitch, and pitchers and catchers warming up in Florida in anticipation of spring training.

It is the prudent admonition: "Keep your eye on the ball." It is a warning to stay focused on the task at hand. It is an expression suitable not only for sports fans but for United Methodists as well, especially when there are so many issues and concerns claiming our interest and challenging our multi-tasking skills.

The "Ball" in question is one that was tossed to us a quadrennium or two ago by the General Conference when it defined our mission that of "making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world." Alas, it is a phrase more honored by its frequent repetition than by its implementation.

Caught as we are in what is being called a "post-Christian age," we tend to be pulled in one of two directions, trying to do too much or too little. On one hand, seized by a maintenance mentality, we hang on for dear life to old ways, once tried-and-true, but now tired and outworn. We tighten our budgets and trim our programs.

On the other hand, seeking some new panacea, we go in faddish pursuit of whatever may be the hot idea or issue of the moment, in a scattershot approach that leaves us drained of energy and will.

Either of these two strategies is likely to be counterproductive.

To avoid such seduction we do well to turn to the Scriptures for some guidance. The wise writer of the book of Proverbs shows us the way. "Let your eyes look directly forward, and your gaze be straight before you. Keep straight the path of your feet and all your ways will be sure. Do not swerve to the right or the left..." (Pro. 4:25 – 27) In other words *keep your eye on the ball.*

Perhaps it is time for us to return to this direct, straightforward way; time to listen again to the marching orders delivered in the last recorded words of the risen Christ; words that establish both the premise and the power for ministry, then and now.

"Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. And teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'" (Matt. 28:18-20)

It may seem too simplistic, but could it be that Jesus' prescription for ministry offers today's struggling church all the guideline it needs for a winning strategy in today's world? Is it possible that a refocusing on the evangelistic task might awaken and re-energize our denomination?

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Serving the Greater New Jersey Annual Conference

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ALL NEWS ARTICLES, photos, letters and viewpoints should be sent to the Editorial Staff member serving your district or agency, at the listed address.

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The UNITED METHODIST RELAY is published monthly except January and August by the Greater New Jersey Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. Office of Publication: Office of the Bishop, 1001 Wickapecko Dr., Ocean, NJ 07712-4733. Periodical Postage Paid at Ocean, NJ and additional entry offices. Mailed free to selected Charge Conference members and clergy of each church. Others may subscribe at the rate of \$9.50 per year. Back issues may be obtained as available at \$1.50 for first copy and 50 cents for each additional copy sent in the same wrapper. POSTMASTER: Send Address changes to UNITED METHODIST RELAY, 1001 Wickapecko Dr., Ocean, NJ 07712-4733.

2013 All Clergy Pre-Lenten Gathering Brings Lillian Daniel to the GNJAC

The 2013 All Clergy Pre-Lenten Gathering will be held on Tuesday, February 12, 2013 at 8:30am at St. John's United Methodist Church in Hazlet, NJ. Lunch will be provided at Noon with an anointing service ending the gathering. A \$10 donation is asked to cover the cost of lunch. Clergy are asked to register with their District Offices in advance of the gathering.



This year's guest speaker will be Lillian Daniel, the Senior Minister of the First Congregational Church of Glen Ellyn, IL since 2004. Before that she spent fourteen years in Connecticut, growing up, going to grad school, raising a family and leading two churches,

most recently the Church of the Redeemer in New Haven from 1996-2004.

She is the author of several books, including *Tell It Like It Is: Reclaiming the Practice of Testimony*, which is the story of one church's attempt to get main-line Protestants to talk to each other about God, and *This Odd and Wondrous Calling: The Public and Private Lives of Two Ministers*, co-authored by Martin B. Copenhaver, which takes a humorous and honest look at the ministry. Her newest book, *When 'Spiritual But Not Religious' Is Not Enough: Seeing God in Surprising Places, Even the Church* will be published in January, 2013.

Lillian also hosts the Chicago-based public television program, "30 Good Minutes," which airs on Sundays at 5:00pm on WTTW Channel 11. Additionally, Lillian was recently featured on the PBS program, "Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly."

An editor at large for the *Christian Century Magazine* and a contributing editor at *Leadership*, her work has also appeared in *The Huffington Post*, *Christianity Today*, *Leadership Journal*, *Books and Culture*, *The Journal for Preachers* and in the *daily email devotionals*, with over 20,000 subscribers. She has taught preaching at Yale Divinity School, Chicago Theological

Seminary and the University of Chicago Divinity School.

She serves on the Board of Trustees of Chicago Theological Seminary and the Board of Advisors at Yale Divinity School. In October 2010 she received the distinguished alumni award from Yale Divinity School for "Distinction in Congregational Ministry."

A frequent speaker around the country, Lillian has preached at the National Cathedral, *Duke Chapel*, the Festival of

Homiletics and has delivered preaching lectures to clergy at King's College, London and Queen's College, Ontario.

Lillian is married to Lou Weeks, a labor union organizer who chose not to take her name when they got married back in 1991. She is the mother of two teenagers, Calvin and Abigail Weeks, and therefore in need of constant prayer. In her spare time, Lillian enjoys the following hobbies...

Wait, there is no spare time.

EDITORIAL

A Reader's Response

A Final Word on UMNS Article Concerning East Africa

As a member of GCFA's Audit and Review Committee for the last quadrennium, I am thoroughly familiar with the issues presented to GBGM and GCFA by Bishop Wandabula. The problem is the lack of documentation that funds received by the Bishop were spent for the designated purposes. The Bishop was very active in independent fund raising in the United States for a variety of causes as well as a recipient of GBGM program funds.

Over a period of several years there have been numerous interventions by a variety of Bishops, numerous attempts by auditors to get the documents, and several promises by the Bishop to provide the documents which were nevertheless not provided. It was with great sadness that GBGM found it necessary to suspend any further fund transfers to The East Africa Annual Conference and Bishop Wandabula until the needed documents are provided, and GCFA after its own independent evaluation decided to support GBGM's position. It is my understanding that all the main General Agencies have followed suit.

If the General Church is to be actively raising funds in the United States through General Church apportionments and devoting a portion of those funds to world-wide causes and if Central Conference Bishops (non-US Bishops) are to come to the US and solicit funds directly, United Methodist donors must have confidence that the funds will be used as intended and not diverted to non-approved recipients. GBGM provides that assurance through its auditing program. GBGM is currently holding funds that would ordinarily have gone to the East Africa Annual Conference and it stands ready to release those funds upon receipt of the needed documentation.

I am sure that the lack of funding is adversely affecting people in the East Africa Conference area, and pray that this matter can be soon resolved so that the flow of funding can resume.

John W. Bishop, member
General Commission on Finance and Administration

We're Coming Back to GNJ

Continued from page 1

us in worship, accomplish the important business of the Conference and provide time for community building and connecting with colleagues and friends. Fellowship time will be built into the schedule and Bible studies will be during the session. Families are encouraged to attend and there will be special hotel rates for families and individuals who want to arrive early or stay later. Also, no hotel will be more than a mile from the convention center.

"The convention center is located on the boardwalk and is an ideal setting for holy conferencing, community building and being one with God's creation and those impacted by Sandy," Albert said.

The Bible study teacher will be Dr. Karoline M. Lewis, the Alvin N. Rogness Chair of Homiletics,

Luther Seminary at St. Paul, MN. The preachers for annual conference will be Dr. Joy Moore, an outstanding preacher and writer, associate dean for African American Church Studies and assistant professor of Preaching at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, CA and Bishop John Schol. Bishop Schol, a gifted preacher and story teller, will preach during the Ordination/Commissioning Service.

Registration for annual conference will open on March 6, 2013 via the gnjumc.org website. Resolutions and reports are to be turned in by email to glosh@gnjumc.org by March 1, 2013.

The agenda for the conference will be as follows:

The Greater New Jersey Conference of The United Methodist Church
We Make Disciples of Jesus Christ for the Transformation of the World

Greater New Jersey Annual Conference Session
Building a Future with Hope

May 30 - June 1, 2013
Wildwood, NJ

Thursday, May 30

11:00 a.m. Opening Worship
12:30 p.m. Clergy Lunch and Executive Session
12:30 p.m. Laity Lunch and Session
2:30 p.m. Praise and Worship
2:45 p.m. Organizing the Conference
3:00 p.m. Episcopal/State of the Church Address
3:45 p.m. Nominations Report, Conference Center Report, Legislation
6:30 p.m. Adjourn for the day, dinner on your own (group dinners can be arranged for a meal at the convention center)

Friday, May 31

7:00 a.m. Breakfast on your own; Group prearranged breakfasts (groups are to sign up by April 15)
7:45 a.m. Communion on the Beach
8:30 a.m. Praise and Worship
8:45 a.m. Bible Study
9:30 a.m. Leadership Report
10:10 a.m. Holy Conferencing - sharing hopes, challenges and feedback, strategic ministry plan legislation
11:00 a.m. Service of Remembrance
Noon Celebration Lunch - Honor Discipleship Fruitfulness
Noon Bishop's Luncheon with memorial service families
1:45 p.m. Praise and Worship
2:00 p.m. Legislation - Budget, Legislation
3:15 p.m. Adjourn - Fellowship and Sabbath - Dinner on your own (group dinners can be arranged for a meal at the convention center)
7:00 p.m. Ordination and Commissioning Service
8:45 p.m. Reception

Saturday, June 1

7:00 a.m. Breakfast on your own; Group prearranged breakfasts (groups are to sign up by April 15)
7:45 a.m. Communion on the Beach
8:30 a.m. Praise and Worship
8:45 a.m. Bible Study
9:30 a.m. Service of Passage and Reading of the Appointments
10:15 a.m. Legislation
1:00 p.m. Adjournment

2012 Credit for Small Employer Health Insurance Premiums

Help for "Credit for Small Employer Health Insurance Premiums" Application Process

The Federal Government is continuing the "Credit for Small Employer Health Insurance Premiums" rebate to employers, **including churches**, who provided health care insurance for employees (and pastors) in 2012. Although a number of churches applied for and received these credits last year, the Conference Council on Finance and Administration (CF&A) feels that many churches that would have been eligible for the credit did not take advantage of the opportunity. **The credit can be substantial, ranging into the thousands of dollars for eligible churches. Churches that had no withholdings or payments for Medicare or Federal withholding Income Tax are not eligible for the credit.**

CF&A has asked the Conference office staff to assist local churches in the application process for the 2012 credit by making the required calculations for each church and supplying completed IRS Forms 8941 and 990-T to the church. All the local church needs to do is complete a simple questionnaire that will assist the staff in making the calculations for the church and determining eligibility. The link to the online questionnaire will be published in the GNJ Digest and the Conference website in early February.

The Conference office will begin sending back the completed Forms 8941 and 990-T to churches by the third week in April so that the forms may be signed and returned to the IRS before the May 15, 2013 filing deadline. **Churches that submit the questionnaire by April 1st will receive their completed forms well in advance of the filing deadline.**

Six Month Extension Available - request must be made by April 23, 2013!

If you are unable to gather the required data for the questionnaire before April 1st, please let the Conference Treasurer know and the staff will file a request for an automatic six-month extension for your church with the IRS. **The request for an extension must be made to the Conference staff before April 23, 2013.**

October 1, 2013 is the last day the Conference staff can accept the online questionnaire data from churches with **approved extensions** for the final submission date of November 15, 2013.

Please call John Cardillo, Conference Treasurer, 732-359-1030, or our accountant, Mary Ellen Suarez, 732-359-1031, with any questions you may have.

Bishop's Convocation Provides Building Blocks for Building a Future with Hope

Hundreds of clergy and their families gathered together in Lancaster, PA for the 2013 Bishop's Convocation on January 14-16. With a theme of Building a Future of Hope, the convocation focused on giving clergy new tools to help move into the future, as well as time to fellowship and be in community with one another.

The Convocation was filled with energetic and spirit-filled worship, including the participation of children throughout several of the services. On Tuesday, attendees had the opportunity to take a step back into their childhood while building "the church of the future," using a cup of randomly selected Lego building blocks. The building time was followed by a time of Baptismal Remembrance in which each person was invited to take a building block from a cup of water being offered by the children participating in the service. Photos of the Lego creations can be found on the Conference website, www.gnjumc.org.

This year's speakers were a husband and wife team of Jack Levison and Priscilla Pope-Levison. Both Jack and Priscilla are highly respected and



From left to right: Jack Levison, Priscilla Pope-Levison and Bishop Schol participating in the opening worship of the Bishop's Convocation 2013.

accomplished authors, as well as professors at Seattle Pacific University in Washington. For the convocation, Jack and Priscilla chose to focus on four main words to set the themes for

each of the plenary sessions: contemplate, innovate, debate, and generate.

Priscilla started the sessions with explaining the importance of contemplation and offering the clergy an opportunity to experience "Lectio Divina" for a group setting. Lectio Divina is a form of contemplation where biblical text is read multiple times followed by increasing minutes of silence and a different point of focus for each reading. The exercise started with Priscilla asking the clergy to listen for one word that jumped out to them as the text was read, followed by one minute of silence. The next round involved two minutes of silence with the expectation of listening for what part of the text emotionally moved the participant. The final reading was followed by three minutes of silence while participants listened for the invitation of the text.

On the second day of the convocation, Jack took on most of the plenary sessions focusing on innovate and debate. He spoke of how these words were chosen carefully because with most innovation comes debate. Jack's sessions both gave the clergy opportunities to think about and compare their own churches to the scenarios

given in his presentations, specifically in relation to the church of Antioch, as mentioned in the Book of Acts.

The final day of plenary sessions took on the theme of generate with Priscilla and Jack working together to talk about Philip, Barnabas, Priscilla, Aquila and what great hospitality can do for a church. This focused on identifying those individuals in churches who are ready to take those next steps of responsibility or starting new ministries and mentoring them. Referencing more texts in the Book of Acts, they brought together all of the three days by asking the clergy to reflect on what their future looks like in their own churches.

Throughout the three days there were many great moments shared including: time spent talking with the Bishop about the future of the Conference and Sandy Relief efforts; the showcasing of the many talents of the clergy and families during the Talent Show; the engaging worship sessions; and the time spent in fellowship with one another. The Convocation lived up to its theme, providing a great spring board for building future with hope throughout the GNJAC!



Bishop Schol takes a building block held by one of the children participating in the Remembrance of Baptism service at the 2013 Bishop's Convocation.

Hope and Johnsonburg Churches Celebrate Christmas Eve in a Barn

A Christmas Eve service not in a church, but in a barn, not because there was no room in the church but because a 'God-inspired' question inspired pastor Carla Costantino, to think outside the box. Costantino, who pastors both St. John's UMC in Hope and Johnsonburg UMC credits the Rev. Steve Bechtold's question to St. John's in 2011, "Is this the church that does Christmas Eve in a barn?" She said the answer was "No, but we could be". Costantino made a mental note that at least three people in the room had barns and the seed was planted.

The service was promoted locally and the response was enthusiastic.

For the eighty people who attended, Costantino said the experience was moving. "Hearing the Christmas story in a place similar to where Christ was born gave a deeper perspective and meaning to his birth," said Costantino. "In a place such as this, our Lord was born, the King of Kings and Prince of Peace." She said several youth enacted a live nativity throughout the service, and no other decorations were needed to inspire the story in the way this cold, drafty barn did. "Two cows even peeked inside by the end of the service!" said Costantino. She said that one member of the congregation, who helped with parking, remarked that the



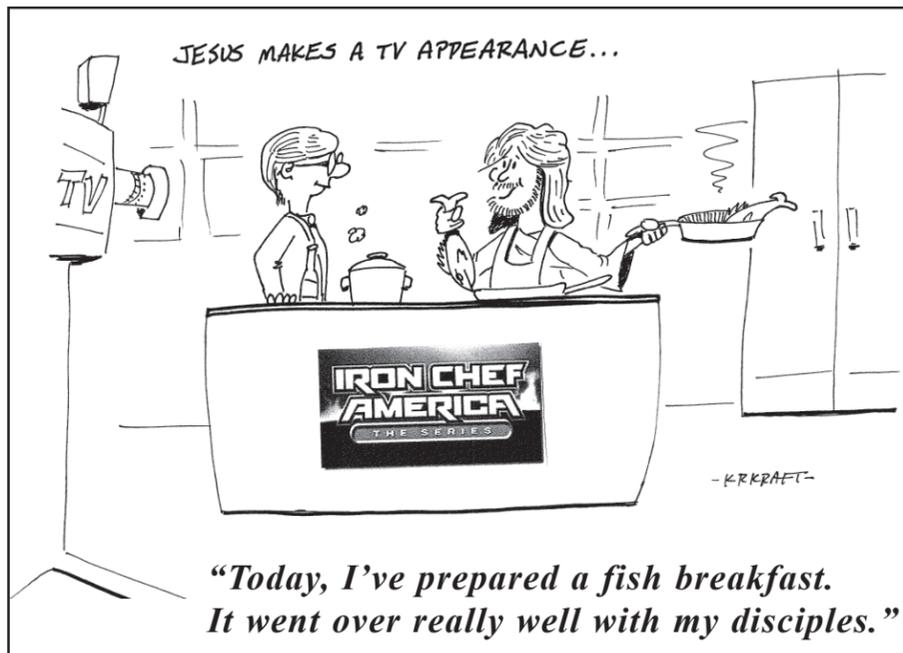
Reverend Carla Constantino leads worship on Christmas Eve as the congregations of the Hope and Johnsonburg churches gather in a local barn.

singing from inside the barn sounded like a choir of angels had come down and joined the celebration. Adding to the ambiance, God even had snow start falling as people arrived.

Costantino's meditation focused on 'What makes this night so special?' The answers included; it was a place such as this that the prophets foretold; it was an ordinary place such as this

that God chose to come to us to meet us in the ordinary routine of our lives; and that it was on this night so long ago, in a place such as this, God finally figured out a way to get humanity to look at him with love so we may live.

For the folks in Hope and Johnsonburg a tradition was born on this Christmas Eve.



Log on to: www.UMRelay.org for Current Relay Online, Relay Archives & Relay Reflections.

Bishop Schol Celebrates Epiphany with the Hispanic/Latino Ministries of the GNJAC

On Sunday, January 6th, churches around the world celebrated the Sunday of Epiphany. In many cultures the Epiphany celebration is also known as "Three Kings Day" or "Dia de los Reyes," meaning "Day of the Kings." It is a day to celebrate the arrival of the three Magi.

For this special night, Bishop John Schol joined COMILA and the Conference Committee of the National Plan for Hispanic and Latino Ministries in celebrating at Christ United Methodist Church in Lakewood, New Jersey. Close to 300 people from around the Conference gathered together for the special service, which was rich in Hispanic/Latino culture and traditions. The majority of the service was spoken in Spanish with English translation provided by Rev. Dr. Doug Ruffle and translation devices. The Bishop spoke in English with Rev. Héctor Burgos translating his message into Spanish.

The evening was a joyous celebration of the arrival of the Magi after Jesus' birth. The service began with energetic music and a joy-filled interpretive dance that set the mood for the evening. Throughout the night, people were dancing, clapping, and praising God. At any point in the service, one could hear "Gloria a Dios" being shouted, which means "Glory to God." Special moments included songs sung by Freddie Rubiera and a children's choir from Camden, as well as a special prayer for a sick child in attendance. It was a moving moment to watch the entire sanctuary reach out their hands in prayer for the young child.

Since it was a celebration of the three kings, they were also an active



Rev. Hector Burgos interprets Bishop Schol's message into Spanish during the celebration of Epiphany hosted by the Hispanic/Latino Ministries of the GNJAC.

part of the service. They began by welcoming guests as they arrived to the sanctuary and then gave the children a gift of a candy cane as each child brought his or her offering to the kings during the service.

During Bishop Schol's message, he compared what happened to the Magi after meeting Jesus to what happens today when a person finds Jesus - life is never the same. Just like the Magi who knew they had to leave by a different way from which they came, so it is with people when they accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. They can't go back to life as they knew it. He also went on to ask, just like the Magi presented gifts to Jesus, "What gifts can we give to our churches, our communities and the Greater New Jersey Conference?"

Schol went on to affirm three spe-

cial gifts that the Hispanic/Latino people bring to their communities and the GNJAC: mystery, passion, and connection. He spoke of how the Hispanic/

Latino people are "people who appreciate the mysteries of God." He went on to explain, "There are some things that we'll never understand until we meet God in the next life. There are answers we can't Google and get the answer to." Referring to the gift of passion, Schol gave examples of the energy in Hispanic/Latino music, preaching and worship. The last gift mentioned was the gift of connection. The Bishop pointed out how connected the Hispanic/Latino communities are with one another, as well as "the people who are most vulnerable in our society."

The Bishop's message and words of encouragement added to the contagious energy present throughout the sanctuary Sunday evening. The Holy Spirit was certainly alive and well in this special "Domingo De Epifanía" or "Sunday of Epiphany" service! Shortly after joining together for the celebration of Communion, the evening came to a close just as it had started - with music and dancing.



Bishop Schol poses for a photo with some of the children attending the celebration of Epiphany in January 2013.

Good Shepherd's Hub lives out its promise... Here We Are Lord



When in mid-October Good Shepherd Church's Mission Central Hub Director Howard Minnichbach passed away, his Good Shepherd church family vowed to continue his mission work to aid in disasters. Little did they know that their promise would be put to the test when Hurricane Sandy hit the Jersey shore. Since the storm, Good Shepherd has received, repackaged and distributed countless tractor trailer loads of supplies to aid those affected by the hurricane, but it has also started a sort of ground swell. Good Shepherd is not large by any means, so when goods started arriving truck load after truck load from as far south as Alabama and as far west as Indiana, they asked for assistance from their fellow United Methodist Churches in the Cape Atlantic District. All of the churches involved have learned in new ways what it is to be a connectional church. Each is doing their part to aid those in need; whether it is housing and distributing a particular supply, like UMCOR approved cleaning and health kits, packaged food, and clothing or helping Good Shepherd unload tractor trailer loads when they arrived. Good Shepherd Hub volunteers are eternally grateful for their support. If your church would like to help; gather supplies for UMCOR kits, you can contact the Good Shepherd Hub and set up a day to volunteer, or if you have a connection through a business that could help them with storage or warehouse space just contact them at 609-641-3219 or rose@goodshepherdumc.com. The next time God asks whom shall I send? Let us raise our collective voices "Here We Are Lord" we are ready to answer your call.

Yes, You ARE BEING DIGESTED!

By now, you have probably discovered the thrice-weekly GNJ Digest, your conference's electronic newsletter full of Announcements, Events, Celebrations, National News and Conference Calendar Updates. There are also special letters from the Bishop and notifications of deaths among members of the Annual Conference.

If you are not currently on our e-mail list and would like to be, please send your request to become a part of our "digested community" to communications@gnjumc.org.

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Global Relay

Brief Reports from around the world
via United Methodist News
Service and Newscope

UMTV: Vets helping vets

CLARKSVILLE, Tenn. (UMNS) — Troops returning from active duty can face many challenges including injuries, post-traumatic stress disorder or having a spouse still deployed. The SAFE Network, Soldiers and Families Embraced, operates at a Wesley Foundation near the Fort Campbell, Ky., Army base. For some of the vets involved, ministering to other soldiers has proven to be the best medicine.

Pastor writes guide for ministry with Iraq reservists

ORANGEBURG, S. C. (UMNS) — The Rev. Kenneth J. Walden, an elder in the California-Pacific Annual (regional) Conference and chaplain and professor at Claflin University, is the author of the newly published "Challenges Faced by Iraq War Reservists and Their Families." In a review of the book, Bishop Will Willimon noted, "Ken Walden, from firsthand experience with these veterans, gives solid help to pastors and congregations seeking to minister to those in pain in the aftermath of Iraq."

Swift reaction to bishop's gay marriage stand

CHICAGO (UMNS) — Since announcing her support for same-sex marriage, Chicago Area Bishop Sally Dyck said she has received numerous emails from United Methodists across the United States who agree and disagree with her stance.

Wesley to offer doctorate track in chaplaincy

WASHINGTON (UMNS) — United Methodist-related Wesley Theological Seminary is offering a Doctor of Ministry track in military chaplaincy designed to enhance the ability of chaplains to satisfy both the operational needs of military leaders and the religious needs of soldiers and their families.

Young adults invited to apply for mission program

NEW YORK (UMNS) — Young adults may now apply for the 2013 class of Mission Interns and US-2s. Feb. 15 is the deadline to submit application materials for these long-term mission assignments through the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries. Organizations interested in being a placement site are encouraged to apply before March 24.

United Methodist takes National Cathedral post

WASHINGTON (UMNS) — The Rev. Gina Campbell, a United Methodist elder, is the first worship director at the National Cathedral who is not an Episcopal priest, and she believes that was intentional. "I think they knew this would be a departure from what people expect. And from a missional point of view, the cathedral is a house of prayer for all people," said Campbell.

Hamilton preaches at Inaugural Prayer Service

WASHINGTON (UMNS) — The Rev. Adam Hamilton, pastor of the United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kan., delivered the sermon for the interfaith Inaugural Prayer Service at the National Cathedral. President Obama, Michelle Obama, Vice President Joe Biden and Jill Biden were among those who attended the Jan. 22 service.

Society of St. Andrews Lenten devotional

BIG ISLAND, Va. (UMNS) — The Society of St. Andrew's Lenten 2013 devotion booklet is entitled "How Beautiful" based on Romans 10:15b, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring Good News!" The food rescue and distribution ministry group is offering an online starter kit to congregations.

2013: Evolution in the modern world

OLYMPIA, Wash. (UMNS) — The theme for the eighth annual Evolution Weekend Feb. 8-10 is evolution in the modern world. Evolution Weekend was organized as a part of the Clergy Letter Project to provide an opportunity for discussion and reflection on the relationship between religion and science.

W. Michael Campbell, AIA
ARCHITECT

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The March Issue Deadline
is February 5, 2013

"Rebuilding a Future with Hope Together"

Continued from page 1

part time staff and has over 15 volunteers overseeing the long term recovery ministry. The volunteers are helping in the office, engaging in Long Term Recovery Groups across the state and developing orientation materials for our volunteer host sites.



GNJ SANDY RELIEF FUND

With the support of UMCOR, GNJ has created two additional resources to assist in the long term recovery ministry. The first is the creation of a special fund called the GNJ Sandy Relief Fund. This fund was created so that gifts from Greater New Jersey can be used directly in Greater New Jersey relief and recovery ministry. Funds sent to UMCOR for Sandy Relief will be divided among several annual conferences along the east coast, Haiti and Puerto Rico.

As of January 18, 2013, \$4.9 million has been raised through the UMCOR Advance Program. As of the same date, the GNJ Sandy Relief Fund surpassed 1 million dollars. The UMCOR Sandy Relief Advance will not raise all of the funds GNJ needs and has restrictions on use of the funds for church property. Our GNJ Sandy Relief Fund will help us to raise funds for our long term recovery and repair church property.

A Future with HOPE

The People of the United Methodist Church

A second resource for the GNJ long term recovery effort is a new nonprofit organization, *A Future with Hope*. Other conferences who have experienced disasters have also organized a nonprofit corporation for two reasons, 1) to provide a legal buffer for the annual conference as conferences engage in essential repair ministry and 2) to assist in raising funds from founda-

tions, corporations and government sources for this ministry. *A Future with Hope* will solicit contributions for our ministry and provide oversight for our long term recovery ministry.

In the hard hit community of Belmar, Ellen Chamberlin said, "What I have really learned is the meaning of give us this day our daily bread, because beyond this day I cannot even focus." Ellen and Gene Chamberlin's pastoral family of the Belmar and Bradley Beach congregations were left homeless following the storm. As Sandy was making its way toward NJ, the Chamberlin house was readied for their son TJ's birthday party. The party was postponed because in addition to their own housing needs, the Chamberlin's began organizing a feeding program at Bradley Beach UMC and assisted people in the community.

Ellen Chamberlin stated, "It is hard to walk into the sanctuary and see the destruction, but when I see the cross I am reminded of everything Jesus did for us and all he sacrificed." TJ later celebrated his birthday with his friends and family, but instead of presents he asked his friends and family to bring donations for Imagine No Malaria because he wanted to help children who were suffering somewhere else.

"We have important days ahead," said Bishop Schol. "Days filled with daring and courage, with relief and hope. Together we will build a future with hope."

Contributions for the Sandy Relief Fund may be given online at gnjumc.org, or sent to 1001 Wickapecko Drive, Ocean, NJ 07712-4733. Contributions for Imagine No Malaria can be sent to the same address.

Please visit www.afuturewithhope.org for further information from this story, including a case statement for recovery efforts, a list of the board of Directors for A Future with Hope Inc., giving information and video resources for A Future with Hope campaign.

VIEWPOINT

Once again we have experienced a national tragedy caused by a person whose madness led him to murder twenty children, six educators and his own mother. We as the church have grieved in this moment in time, offering prayers, candle light vigils, and acts of empathy and compassion to unknown neighbors in the town of Newtown, Connecticut. We have grieved with those whose loss is beyond words, we have affirmed the words of our Lord, "Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted", by comforting in countless ways those who do mourn.

But this moment too can give once more a time to pause and discern what we can do to stop such madness in our culture. There are at least three issues to be addressed out of our Christian faith.

First, violence permeates our society. We live in a culture saturated and addicted to violence. Video games are the most recent form of violent behavior leading us to wonder about its formative and lasting impact upon our children. Violent behavior, be it bullying, hate crimes, domestic abuse, human trafficking, or anti-Semitism are all issues that we as congregations need to address.

The second issue is that of mental health. Who knows what preventive measures of mental health assistance may have prevented a mass murderer from killing twenty children. Clearly one answer lies in more resources to support mental health professionals and communities that seek to address the issues. Yet the irony is that mental health resources are being cut at both state and national levels, affecting limited services to those in need. We as clergy have often been there for those who need help for themselves or their family members to turn to, but our professional training and knowledge is limited and we rely on mental health services found within our community.

Finally the issue of gun violence. No doubt my writing this article is in some way motivated by my engagement through my ministry over several years in addressing gun violence. Many of you have been supportive of such a witness, support which has led to New Jersey being a state with strong gun regulations.

Yet as persons of faith there is so much more we can do to address a gun madness that will not infringe on 2nd amendment rights. It is time to move from our expressions of compassion to advocacy. We can join with Faiths United to Prevent Gun Violence in their efforts in working with policy makers, both National and State to enact effective gun violence prevention legislation in 2013. United Methodists, through our Board of Church and Society and United Methodist Women have been an integral part of this national effort to mobilize the faith community to support policies to fight gun violence. Faith communities can be a powerful force to support policies to fight gun violence, and Faiths United to Prevent Gun Violence will work with your local congregation. For more information on how your congregation may be involved, contact Faiths United to Prevent Gun Violence at www.FaithUnitedtoPreventGunViolence.org

Join others at this moment in time in making God's world a place of Peace.

Rev. Jack Johnson
interfaithpartne@aol.com

Stewardship Stories

By Rich Hendrickson
Coordinator of Stewardship Education
and Development, GNJAC



How to move from Success to Significance

"The real interesting thing about it is that a changed heart is a generous heart. The old way is to desire to have good flow toward us. The new way is to want the good to flow out of us."
—S. Truett Cathy, Founder of Chick-Fil-A

This quote from S. Truett Cathy appears in Ken Blanchard's book, *The Generosity Factor: Discover the Joy of Giving Your Time, Talent, and Treasure*, Zondervan, 2002. In Chapter 16, entitled *Putting It All Together*, Cathy describes the difference between living a life bent on success versus living a life with significance as the goal. A "successful" lifestyle is marked by the desire for wealth, achievement, and status. A person striving for "significance" in their life is recognized by their generosity, service, and healthy relationships.

When you measure yourself in terms of wealth, achievement, and status it is easy to fall into the "enough is never enough" trap. The more you get the more you want and the less chance you ever have of being content and satisfied. When you focus on living a spiritually significant life you begin from a place where you already know you're loved and accepted—which are the most important gifts you can receive. When you're striving for wealth, achievement, and status the most important question is, "What do I need to possess next?" To the spiritually significant person the most important question is, "What is God asking of me?"

When asked, "How will I know when I have truly attained significance?" S. Truett Cathy responded with these simple, yet profound words: "You will know by the sincerity of your generosity, by the joy you find in service, and by the selfless nature of your relationships. You will know by the depth of your changed heart."

GNJ Annual Conference: Representatives at "Day on the Hill"

On December 2-4, 2012 Rosa Williams, Donna Hough and Bethany Amey drove to Washington DC to participate in the "Days on the Hill" hosted by The General Board of Church & Society (GBCS) and the United Methodist "Imagine No Malaria" campaign. They joined 119 other Methodist folks in a lobbying effort as "Imagine No Malaria" advocates, including United Methodist members from 29 states, 40 annual conferences and five participants from Africa. They met with members of congress on December 3rd and 4th during the "Days on the Hill" gathering to urge continued global health funding.

The budget for global health is less than one percent of the budget, but losing even this money would have a devastating effect on global health. "The future of congressional funding to global health, including fighting malaria, is in jeopardy," said Bishop Thomas Bickerton, who chairs the United Methodist Global Health Initiative. "The U.S. has been the world leader in global health aid, inspiring other countries to step up their support. To cut this critical funding would mean unnecessary suffering and loss of life from this preventable disease." This event was held at the same time the "Imagine No Malaria" celebration of more than 1.2 million nets, delivered well ahead of the goal of one million by year's end. More than 9,000 nets were delivered in Angola in October, and 22,000 distributed in Zimbabwe. The gathering opened Monday morning with worship led by Bishop Bickerton; and activities included an overview of the "Imagine No Malaria" advocacy initiative, a presentation on effective messaging by Mike McCurry, former press secretary for President Bill Clinton, and a presentation about the current state of global health funding from Peter Yeo of the United Nations Founda-

tion. We also heard from several people from Africa who had experienced this disease first hand as children. The Rev. Clayton Childers who directs advocacy at GBCS states that congress is feeling great pressure to cut global health aid, including funds to fight malaria, and we need to work to make sure that this does not happen.

The United Methodist Church plans to continue to combat malaria in Africa by using both its own health infrastructure and partnerships with other organizations. To achieve this goal, the denomination will release funds by the end of this year from its "Imagine No Malaria" initiative to the Geneva-based Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis & Malaria. Last week, funds were authorized for release to the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) to help with implementing the campaign in Africa. UMCOR funding will be used to train African Health Boards, providing local delivery systems for malaria prevention, education and treatment. This first step toward an integrated health infrastructure has happened "about two years earlier than we anticipated," said the Rev. Larry Hollon, top executive of United Methodist Communications. The Global Fund will receive the first installment of a \$28-million pledge from The United Methodist Church. "We're able to move forward due to the generosity of the people of The United Methodist Church in response to "Imagine No Malaria," Hollon added. The denomination also is a key partner in a national distribution of mosquito bed nets in Sierra Leone.

The United Methodist Church is the first faith-based partner of the fund. Kemper said he believes the independent organization offers a united approach to the elimination of malaria "which we have not seen before."

VITAL CONGREGATIONS

A Big Thank You

By Douglas Ruffle
Coordinator of Congregational Development, GNJAC



It has been nearly ten years since I began this ministry as Coordinator of Congregational Development for the Greater New Jersey Annual Conference. What a wonderful journey it has been for me! I want to thank the pastors and laity with whom I have worked over these years. I am grateful for what you have taught me and how together we have worked toward making our churches as vital and alive as they can be.

Over the years we have launched new initiatives to help our churches gain a greater measure of health. More than 125 churches of our conference have engaged the "Natural Church Development" process to improve overall health in the congregation. Many churches have followed the "step-by-step" process outlined in my book, *Roadmap to Renewal*, to come up with a "Ministry Action Plan" and gain greater clarity about the church's vision and mission. Churches continue to use the demographic resources available at Mission Insite. We have seen successful new church starts reach more people and younger people.

I have been blessed to work with a great team of people at the conference office and with the most dedicated and talented group of District Superintendents I have ever known. I thank the Bishops with whom I have served: Bishop Alfred Johnson, Bishop Sudarshana Devadhar and Bishop John Schol. We all have been blessed by their leadership and will continue to be blessed under the leadership of Bishop Schol in the years to come.

Beginning later this month I will move to a new ministry position at the General Board of Discipleship in Nashville, Tennessee. I will be the Associate Executive Director for Path 1, the New Church Starts Division of the General Board of Discipleship. I will be a supporter of continued new church start efforts of the Greater New Jersey Annual Conference in my new position and will look forward to working with friends as we meet the challenges of ministry in the 21st century.

Over the years I have written many "Vital Congregations" columns for THE RELAY. I thank the RELAY and for their support and encouragement. A selection of those articles as well as other writings can be found on my website: www.dougruffle.com.

I want to express my heartfelt thanks to all of you for your love and support over the past ten years. May God richly bless you and your ministries.

In Africa, 40% of the health-care infrastructure is operated by religious organizations; the church has the people and the mechanisms to join in that approach. "It's impossible to really do anything without involving the churches," Kemper said. The Rev. Clayton Childers, director of Annual Conference Relations for the General Board of Church & Society (GBCS), has been assigned to work with The United Methodist Church's "Imagine No Malaria" campaign for the next 10 months. His new title with the campaign will be "Annual Conference Liaison."

Childers has been to a number of countries in sub-Saharan Africa in his work for GBCS. "Everywhere I went I saw the devastating effects of malaria on people's lives in Nigeria, Liberia, Uganda, Zimbabwe, and the Democratic Republic of Congo," he said. "We have a chance to rally the church to literally save lives. People simply cannot afford to get treatment. They can't afford to buy bed nets or other preventive measures. We have a chance to change that."

The United Methodist Church, with its clinics and churches and unique capacities, can make a profound difference according to Childers. "I am excited to join

the Imagine No Malaria team and look forward to working with United Methodists across the connection to make malaria deaths a thing of the past." The \$75 million the denomination has committed to raise is important to this effort.

On Tuesday, teams including all 119 delegates visited their respective Senators' and US Representatives' offices. They were armed with a simple message to ask Congress; to continue to fully support global health aid, including critical funding for the fight against malaria. They also had an opportunity to discuss the progress that has been made and to urge their congressional representatives to help continue this work. The group met with assistance from Chris Smith, Robert Menendez and Frank Lautenberg' offices, but actually had an opportunity to sit and talk to Congressman Jon Runyan about the global health budget. They were all in support, but were clear that they had no idea as to what would happen with the budget and cuts that would occur in the final outcome. The delegates all returned to discuss their "invasion on the hill" that afternoon as a group. They believe that we were effective and our message was delivered in the spirit of John Wesley.

OBITUARIES

LOIS WATTERS BRASHER, widow of retired elder Julius Logan Brasher died Jan. 9 after a short illness. She was residing in Brasher Springs, Gallant, Alabama.

In 1941, she married The Rev. Julius Logan Brasher, a graduate of Drew Theological Seminary, then pastor of the Congregational Church in Chester, N.J., subsequently pastor of six United Methodist Churches in northern New Jersey, and in retirement in Alabama, pastor at Walnut Grove United Methodist Church and associate pastor at First United Methodist Church of Gadsden. He predeceased her in May 2012. Throughout their remarkable 70 years of marriage, they formed a beautiful duo with his solo baritone voice and her piano accompaniment. Lois was always a vital part of Julius's ministry with his congregations, sometimes also serving as organist and choir director.

Memorial gifts may be sent to the music fund at First United Methodist Church of Gadsden, AL, or Brasher Springs Camp Meeting, 77 Brasher Road, Gallant, AL 35972. Condolences to 1261 Greensboro Road, Birmingham, AL 35208.

BEVERLY SWANSON, Wife of the Reverend Roger K. Swanson, Retired Elder of the Greater New Jersey Conference, died on Thursday, January 17, 2013 in Newton, Iowa. The funeral service was held on Saturday, January 26, 2013, 11 a.m., at the First United Methodist Church, 210 N. 2nd Ave. E., Newton, IA 50208.

Messages of condolence may be sent to Rev. Swanson, 500 1st St. N., Apt. 218, Newton, IA 50208-3178. In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be sent to the First United Methodist Church in Newton, Iowa.



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GNJ Sandy Relief Fund

“A Future With Hope”

~Jeremiah 29:11

In the aftermath of Superstorm Sandy our relief efforts focus on four areas:

RELIEF – We strive to meet immediate human needs by focusing on shelter, food, and clothing.

Immediately following Storm Sandy we have been providing day and overnight shelters, including feeding programs and clothing for several thousand people.

REPAIR – We begin work with community residents, non-profit organizations, churches, and local, state and federal agencies to assess damage and work to repair homes, particularly for the elderly and poor whose insurance and other agency support does not cover all of the damages. We will utilize thousands of trained volunteers under the supervision of professionals to repair homes and people's lives.

REBUILD – Bringing a sense of normalcy involves more than hammers and nails. It is community building. We will provide case management and community building strategies that develop community leaders and strengthen community organizations.

RENEW – One of the harshest results of Storm Sandy will be the emotional and spiritual toll it will have on people's lives. We will provide counseling for several years to help children, parents and adults renew their hope and faith for the future.

**DISASTER
RESPONSE**

Here's how you can help:

- **The Greater NJ Annual Conference has established a special GNJ Sandy Relief Fund in response to the hurricane.**
- **100% of the monies donated will go directly to relief work in the Greater NJ Annual Conference.**
- **You can make your check payable to GNJ Sandy Relief or to your church with “GNJ Sandy Relief” in the memo. (mark the remittance as “GNJ Sandy Relief” - no remittance code number is necessary).**

**Church Treasurers should send the funds to:
GNJ United Methodist Treasurer,
1001 Wickapecko Drive, Ocean, NJ 07712**

