

THE RELAY

The United Methodist Church of Greater New Jersey

Volume LIX

FEBRUARY 2015

No. 1

Forecast Doesn't Stop Convocation

By Jeff Wolfe

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LONG BRANCH – The weather forecast may have been discouraging, but that didn't stop about 300 clergy and spouses from being encouraged at the Bishop's Convocation.

The annual event took place Jan. 26-28 at Ocean Place Resort and Spa on the beach, a location that was originally targeted to be in the midst of the 2015 blizzard. While some snow fell and the wind blew off the Atlantic, the predicted blizzard never happened.

But GNJ pastors were not deterred by what might happen outside, but were optimistic about what might happen inside their own lives at the Convocation.

"The weather forecast never fazed me in terms of making sure I wanted to get here," said David Edwards, the pastor at Millbrook UMC in Randolph, who made the about 1 hour, 30 minute ride to Long



Photo by Brittney Reilly

The waves crash along the beach outside the Ocean Place Resort and Spa in Long Branch, which was forecast to be in a prime spot for the 2015 blizzard that never happened.

What's Inside...

Haddonfield UMC's Operation Bear Hug makes a difference. **Page 3**

Missions at heart of Nicole Caldwell-Gross' mission. **Page 4**

Rev. Vanessa Wilson goes to the White House. **Page 6**

Basketball ministries take hold in Camden, Dover. **Page 8**

Branch early to beat the supposed storm. "I wanted to get here because this is an important event."

The theme for this year's Convocation was Renew, Relax and Retool and the primary activity was for groups to experience the Coach Approach to ministry. The Coach Approach was led by Rev. Chris Holmes and his team of Rev. Karin Walker, Rev. Chris Owens and Rev. Dr. David Argo.

"Usually we teach others to become coaches," said Holmes, who is a full-time coach and trainer in the United Methodist Church. "Here, we are teaching the Coach Approach to life and ministry. It's a wide scope of coaching and it's very intentional because we have pastors and their spouses with us."

Holmes wanted the Convocation to be more than just a good experience for those who attended.

"We will consider it an absolute failure if people just go away and say that was nice," he said. "We want them to take away a plan for using the Coach Approach in life and ministry and we are going to ask them to write that plan. We want them to make a verbal commitment about how they are going to use this."

Holmes emphasized that there was no one plan that fits all. In fact, he expected some plans to be radically different. "It could be I am going home to have



Photo by Andrew Ryoo

A group of pastors share a moment together during a break between sessions at the Bishop's Convocation on Jan. 26 at Ocean Place Resort and Spa in Long Branch. The event was held despite the weather forecast of a blizzard that never happened.

more coach-like conversations with key leaders of my church," he said. "Or it could be I am going to talk to my teenage son in a way that comes alongside him and asks more questions than presume to have the answers. Or it could be I am going to put together a worship team to help plan our worship service."

For some pastors, the plan will likely include several facets.

"I hope it gives me some really good skills that we can utilize in lay leadership development," said Rev. Luana Cook Scott, who drove about two hours from her church in Milford, Pa. "And for me, I tend to be a micro manager, so hopefully I can get some help in delegation skills."

Edwards was also aware that the coach approach may reveal some areas he needs to work on.

"The coaching approach will give me more insight into areas where I need to

work," he said. "Coaching will help me strengthen my gifts so I can be more effective in my ministry."

"I want to be more pastoral in palliative care and hopefully this will help me be more effective in consoling those who are in hospice."

Rev. Michael Kim of Christ UMC in Fairhaven wants to find ways to help members of his church use their talents.

"I am hoping to engage with lay leaders and help them find their gifts and graces so they can participate in the body of Christ," he said. "Whether it's children's ministry, youth ministry, adult ministry or helping the elderly, I want them to try to define their own God-given mission and work with them very closely."

Convocation is the first step for GNJ pastors to get involved with coaching. More information on coaching can be found on the GNJ website www.gnjumc.org.

Conference Names Burgos As New DCM

By Jeff Wolfe

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The combination of pastoral and business experience has led GNJ to name Rev. Hector Burgos as its next Director of Connectional Ministries.

Burgos was named to the position after a team of conference leaders interviewed several strong candidates.

Burgos has been a part of the connectional team as the Director of Worship since last summer. Before that Burgos had grown churches as a pastor in the conference for the last 11 years.

"Hector comes to this position with a background in ministry and business," Bishop John Schol said. "He worked in public relations and information technology and impressed the interview committee with his leadership skills and his vision."

Burgos will now lead a six-member connectional ministries team. He will be responsible for ensuring the GNJ ministry



Burgos



The Feed Truck was commissioned on Sept. 28 and served its first offerings to Kingston UMC members after the service that day.

Feed Truck Ready To Roll To Campuses

By Jessica Stenstrom

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Imagine a farm-to-fork fresh hand-crafted egg sandwich served with house preserves and fresh brewed coffee as chaplains chat with college students about United Methodist mission and

volunteer opportunities.

Sound unlikely?

It's the primary mission of The Feed Truck, an innovative ministry model dreamed up by Kingston United Methodist Church (KUMC) as members reflected upon how they could best connect with college age students.

"We're in the business of serving up radical hospitality and a taste of hope to the good folks of Central New Jersey," said Jessica Winderweedle, Executive Director of Feed Truck Ministries, Inc.

Winderweedle is a student at Princeton Seminary who was attending KUMC

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Selma Stirs Memories

By Rev. Gilbert H. Caldwell

Seeing the movie "Selma" with my family and an interracial group of viewers at a theater in Harlem brought back my personal memories of the Selma to Montgomery march.

The film offers all faithful United Methodists a chance to reflect on how the denomination of that time — with its structure of segregating African-American churches into the old Central Jurisdiction — dealt with racism. And it raises the question: What can The United Methodist Church of today learn from the film and its own history?

I was one of many clergy and religious leaders who responded to the "call" to come to Selma, Alabama, following "Bloody Sunday," when about 600 marchers were attacked on the Edmund Pettus Bridge with tear gas and billy clubs by state and local law enforcement officials.

One of the clergymen on the plane from Boston was the Rev. James Reeb, the white Unitarian minister who would be beaten and later die of his injuries. In the film, Reeb is identified with a racial slur for participating in the march. I took part in his memorial service at Arlington Street Unitarian Church in Boston.

The march was scheduled to begin the Tuesday after "Bloody Sunday," but arrangements had not been completed for police and state trooper protection, so marchers walked across the Edmund Pettus Bridge, prayed and then returned to Selma on what became known as "Turnaround Tuesday."

I returned to Boston, then rejoined the march on the day before marchers entered Montgomery, presenting money raised in Boston to support the walkers.

Harry Belafonte had invited well-known entertainers from Hollywood and elsewhere to participate in the march and a rally that night. In his autobiography, "My Song: A Memoir of Art, Race and Defiance," Belafonte describes the rain and the mud of that day and evening, and lists the names of celebrities present.

Commentary

He failed to write that Gil Caldwell, a 31-year-old Methodist preacher from Boston with no musical, comedic or acting ability, but with a deep commitment to racial justice, was on the stage with the entertainers. I will never forget it.

Not a documentary

It is important to remember that the film is not a documentary. Thus, whatever squabbles there are about the portrayal of President Lyndon Baines Johnson should fade into insignificance when placed next to the portrayal of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement.

Every American ought see and then discuss this film.

It would be helpful if United Methodists and others view the film with open hearts and without anger, guilt, disbelief, denial, or a wish to revise our own history.

In 1963, just two years before the Selma to Montgomery march, two Methodist bishops were among white clergy who posted a newspaper statement in Birmingham that agreed that social injustices existed but argued that the battle against racial segregation should be fought solely in the courts, not in the streets. In a veiled reference to King, they criticized "outsiders" who were causing trouble in the streets of Birmingham.

King responded with his famed "Letter from a Birmingham Jail."

A discussion of the movie by United Methodists would be enriched by remembering, not denying or revising, the debates in Methodism over slavery and the owning of slaves that resulted in the formation of the Methodist Episcopal Church South in 1844.

Relevant to current events

The movie speaks to current events, too.

The police violence in the film reminds us that many blacks view police violence against blacks through experience or



Rev. Gilbert H. Caldwell (right), now an Asbury Park resident, stands with the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. (left) and Virgil Wood on the roof of a Boston public school in 1965.

awareness of history. Some do not understand why many of us respond to the killings of Michael Brown and Eric Garner as reminders a history of lynchings and violence instead of as isolated events.

Those of us who are black should allow the film to help us imagine what it is to be a white ally or advocate of blacks and the black justice journey — allies such as Reeb and Viola Liuzzo, a white mother who was killed as she drove people home from the march.

We have not spent enough time in prayer, reflection, study and introspection to understand why we do and do not do in response to race. The Apostle Paul's "good, that I do, and do not" might be a helpful text as we discuss "Selma."

Finally, viewing and discussing the movie is about more than race. It is the "much more" that people of faith bring to the table on any issue that makes us unique.

Why and how have people of faith allowed race, which is a social construct, to demean, diminish and divide us in the

United States?

What does this say about our biblical interpretation, theology and Christology?

The film could enable United Methodists as well as others to have an authentic moment of recognizing how our anti-black history and present have contributed to our current frustrations in all of our educational and economic life.

Using the language of the black preacher: "I have come by to tell you today, that 'Selma' is about more than race and Selma. It is about how faith-based and justice-focused human beings can turn the nation upside down so that it will be right side up, not just for some of us, but for all of us!"

Is that not what Luke 4 means when Jesus says, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me"?

Caldwell is a retired elder and member of the Rocky Mountain Conference. A member of the board of the African-American Methodist Heritage Center, he lives in Asbury Park.

New DCM

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plan continues on track and ultimately grows more vital congregations who connect with their communities to make new disciples and engage in life changing mission. The team he will lead is responsible for developing and integrating resources for the five markers of vitality — growing worship, new disciples, small groups, mission engagement and giving.

"It's an honor to be chosen as the leader of such a quality group of people," Burgos said. "They have a great heart and desire for their roles as well as for all of the people in our conference."

The rest of the connectional ministries team includes Director of Stewardship Rev. Rich Hendrickson, Director of Mission Nicole Caldwell-Gross, Director of

Small Groups Ministry Rev. Beth Caulfield and Director of Professions of Faith Rev. Matthew Na.

Schol said the selection process for the new director was a difficult one.

"We had outstanding candidates and the interview process was thorough," he said. "I'm thankful to the candidates who came forward and the team of conference leaders who helped in the decision-making process."

Burgos started in worship ministry at age 15, leading his church in worship when asked by his pastor. After accepting the call to full-time ministry, Burgos pastored at churches in West Creek, Tuckerton and Pleasantville in New Jersey. He also has been a leader in various conference and denominational organizations, most notably MARCHA, the Hispanic-American caucus of the United Methodist Church.

The March Issue Deadline is February 15, 2015

THE RELAY

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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 lay leaders and clergy of each church. Others may subscribe at the rate of \$9.50 per year. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to UNITED METHODIST RELAY, 1001 Wickapecko Dr., Ocean, NJ 07712-4733.

Correction

Glenn Ferguson was on the staff of The Relay for a 14 years, 11-1/2 as associate editor and the last 2-1/2 as Editor in Chief before resigning in October. Robin Van Cleef had been Editor in Chief for 30 years before Ferguson took over. That information was incorrectly reported in the December/January edition of The Relay. We apologize for the error.

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Haddonfield's Bears Bring Christmas Kindness To Sick

By Jessica Stenstrom

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It may seem like a small act of kindness, but it made a big difference for many who could not be home for the Christmas holidays.

Haddonfield United Methodist Church continued its Operation Bear Hug ministry by delivering 850 teddy bears on Christmas Eve to five different hospitals in the South Jersey area. Operation Bear Hug has been a community outreach mission of the church since 1997.

Haddonfield Senior Pastor Rev. Bob Costello said the people who are in the hospital on Christmas Eve are the "sickest of sick" who have no hope of being home for Christmas. The church's two associate pastors, Rev. Tom Lank and Rev. Christina Lelache, oversee the delivery efforts.

"It's the loneliest time to be in the hospital," Lank said. "You wouldn't think receiving a teddy bear would have the impact that it does."

Costello said this year a nurse who had been working when some of the bears were delivered came to a later Christmas Eve service and said what a difference the bears made.

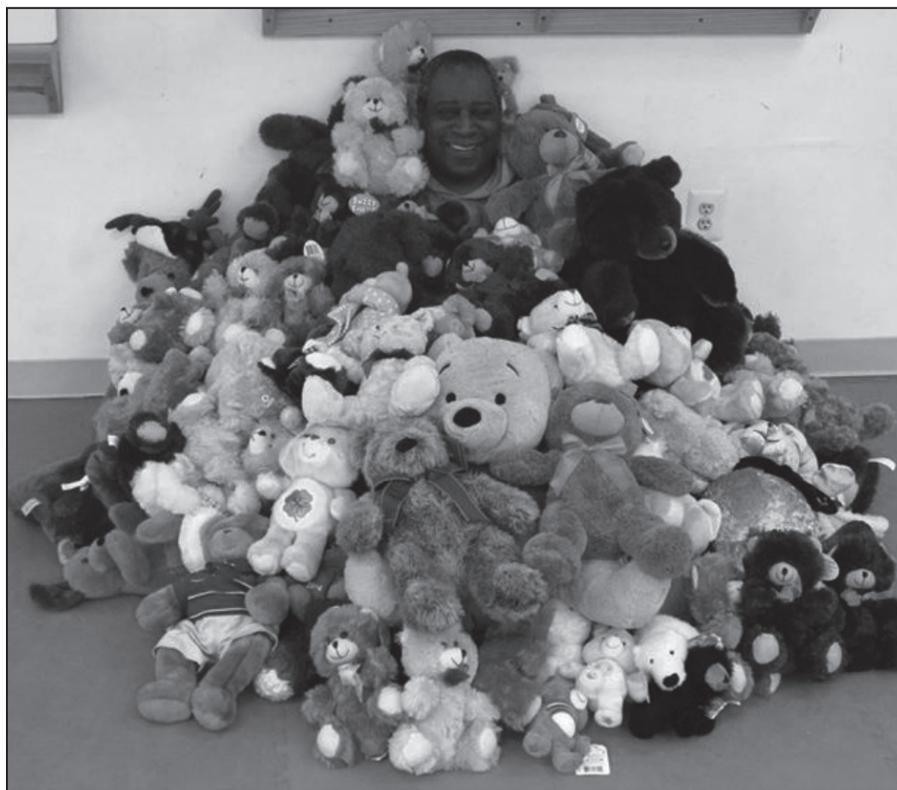
Each bear comes with its own written greeting: "A 'Bear Hug' - The youth of Haddonfield United Methodist Church would like to give you this 'Bear Hug.' We simply want to let you know that someone is thinking of you. We wish you a Merry Christmas and a Joyous New Year."

"Dear Youth Group, My 80-year-old husband was a patient on Christmas Eve and Day. Our whole day was brighter because of you and our great bear hug. Everyone can use a hug - even 80-year olds. Thank you for sharing your faith and may God continue to bless all of you. ...

P.S. We named him Chris and he is happy here!"

Each year the church receives thank you notes from recipients expressing their gratitude. One of the favorites from this year read: "Dear Youth Group, My 80-year-old husband was a patient on Christmas Eve and Day. Our whole day was brighter because of you and our great bear hug. Everyone can use a hug - even 80-year olds. Thank you for sharing your faith and may God continue to bless all of you. . . . P.S. We named him Chris and he is happy here!" Delivery efforts impacted not only those receiving the bears, but also the team of 70 volunteers that distributed them this year. Lank said the team of volunteers is intergenerational with some having participated in Operation Bear Hug since they were a youth in the church.

"You could watch where they went



A karate studio in South Jersey collected this bunch of bears to donate to Haddonfield UMC's Operation Bear Hug, which delivers the bears to hospital patients on Christmas Eve.

from being very nervous at first, delivering in pairs, to being more comfortable," Lank said.

He said they even suited up in the proper gear to bring bears to non-contact

patients knowing it might be the only non-medical interaction the patient had all day.

"It's a pretty amazing experience," Lank said.

Major League Baseball Hits A Home Run In N.J. By Giving \$40,000 Grant

A Future With Hope is the recipient of a \$40,000 grant from the Major League Baseball Player's Trust to continue the work of rebuilding homes that were destroyed or damaged by Superstorm Sandy. The money will be used to pay for construction materials and related costs for families in Greater New Jersey.

The MLB Player's Trust is a charitable foundation through which Major Leaguers contribute their time, money, and celebrity to call attention to important issues affecting the needy and to help encourage others to get involved in their own communities.

"Having such a visible national organization support our efforts helps raise our visibility in the community," says Bobbie Ridgely, Executive Director of AFWH.

Since the Trust's inception in 1996, Major Leaguers have disseminated more than \$19.6 million dollars to over 700 charities around the world. While the Trust supports a variety of organizations including the American Heart Association, neighborhood Boys and Girls Clubs, regional Red Cross chapters and many more, it has also focused on disaster relief.

The Trust has been active in Japan since the devastating 2011 disasters, and has also contributed over \$275,000 for a continuum of care for Sandy survivors

A FUTURE WITH
HOPE

The People of the United Methodist Church

including legal, mental health and rebuilding services. One grant award went to rebuild a boardwalk/raised nature trail in marshlands used to educate students of a Long Island alternative high school.

With this significant contribution to AFWH, the Player's Trust is continuing to support storm survivors as they move into another year of recovery.

Two Minor League Days Set

A Future With Hope is also partnering with local minor league teams the Lakewood BlueClaws, a Philadelphia Phillies Class A team, and the Trenton Thunder, a New York Yankees Class AA team. Both teams will host an 'A Future With Hope' day to promote the non-profit and spread awareness about the continuing needs of Sandy survivors. The Thunder game will be June 9 and the BlueClaws game June 17. Both games promise to be a great day out for all! More details and information on how you can get tickets will be announced at a later date.

Mennonite Group Committed To Continue Recovery in N.J.

By Jeff Wolfe

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If they come, they will build it.

That's been the mission of the Christian Public Service group, which is affiliated with the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite. For nearly two years, that group has been helping A Future With Hope and the United Methodist Church rebuild homes that were destroyed by Hurricane Sandy on Oct. 29, 2012.

While Christian Public Service sends volunteers to help with disaster recovery all around the nation, this particular unit has been housed in Tuckerton since February of 2013.

"Basically what happened here, is that our group saw a long-term project," said Kirby Toews, who with his wife serves as house parents for four Mennonite young men who volunteer to spend six months working at one site. "We come in here, rent a house and then set up a long-term project. It's the same way it has worked with Katrina (in Louisiana) and we can definitely work here for a long time."

That commitment, especially to stay and work during what can be unpleasant winter months, isn't lost on A Future With Hope leaders.

"The fact that we have dedicated partners like the Mennonites who work during these winter months is a significant reason we can continue to make progress," said A Future With Hope Executive Director Bobbie Ridgely.

This particular unit had been in North Carolina doing hurricane rebuilding, and then in Iowa doing flood cleanup and rebuilding before coming to New Jersey. Crew members come from all over North America. Toews, along with his wife Julie and 3-year-old daughter Jenessa, are from Arizona, while the four volunteers between the ages of 19 and 21 have come from Wisconsin, Kansas, Kentucky and Manitoba in Canada.

"They can kind of pick where they want to go," Toews said of the volunteers. "My wife and I, we are here for a year. We take care of the house, and she keeps the groceries bought up and

laundry done and I'm usually out working with the crew."

Toews said volunteers come with varying levels of construction skill.

"Some do and some don't," Toews said when asked if volunteers had construction experience. "Some come here with quite a bit, and some come here with basically none. A lot of them have some learning to do. It's a good opportunity for them to learn. They benefit from it in that way too and they can pick up those skills while they are here."

Learning those skills have helped A Future With Hope volunteers rebuild more than 130 homes. Toews says relocating for a year has been a positive learning experience for him and his family.

"It's very, very enjoyable to learn about a new place and to get to learn about new people," he said. "You see a lot of different things and it is very rewarding to be involved in the work."

Part of the situation for the house parents and volunteers is that if they have regular full-time jobs, they leave them for a year or six months. But it's not always a big risk.

"A lot of us work for other Mennonites, so they are very understanding and willing to suffer a bit to let us go," Toews said. "There are some that will just give up a job and come anyway. When they are 18 or 19 that is not as big of a deal as it is if you are several years older with a wife and children."

Toews said his year will be finished in March, when he and his family will return to Arizona. They will be replaced by another set of house parents.

While Toews will be leaving soon, he says the Christian Public Service group has plans to continue its stay in New Jersey as long as there is work to be done. He said the organization of AFWH Construction Director Lou Strugala and the guidance of foreman Travis Evans also makes the group want to stay.

"As of now, I know we will be here for a while," Toews said. "As long as A Future With Hope keeps us busy, we will be here."



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Missions Always A Way Of Life for Caldwell-Gross

By Jeff Wolfe
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Nicole Caldwell-Gross has been all around the world on mission trips. But the GNJ Director of Mission says a church's most important mission may be in its own area.

"One of my biggest emphasis is shifting people from the perception that missions are only done internationally," said Caldwell-Gross, who was named to her position last spring. "For some, missions are somewhere we send a check to or some place that we pray for and is not something we do in our cities and towns."

Part of Caldwell-Gross' GNJ mission is to help churches work with other organizations within a community so that mission-minded projects can happen.

"This is related to pastors and churches exploring their own communities and seeing them as full of assets," she said. "We want to gather congregations, community members and stakeholders to see where they live and what they can do to help people."

"I want to help connect local pastors



Caldwell-Gross

and congregations who are finding challenges connecting with the community." One place the connection is hap-

pening is in Jersey City, where seven pastors from different denominations have started a group called the Jersey City Mission Movers. Caldwell-Gross has been meeting with that group every month and says good ideas are emerging from pastors and the lay people who attend.

"The pastors brought in some lay people who had ideas about mission projects that can be done together," she said. "The lay people started giving out ideas, like connecting with people at train stations and praying for them. I love that because people who wouldn't typically think of themselves as church leaders came up with that idea. When pastors are able to give them that kind of support that's when our mission is going in the right direction."

Caldwell-Gross' direction toward missions started at a young age. She believes her heritage is part of the reason why.

"My dad is from Cameroon and my mom is American, so I always had an eye outside my own environment," she said. "Just because of my dad's heritage,

it caused me to not just think of myself as Nicole, but as a global citizen."

That thought became a reality when as a teenager she spent a summer on the Caribbean Island of Nevis.

"I worked there in an orphanage for the summer and it really impacted the reality of the living conditions that some people have around the world," she said. "It made me realize how privileged I was and what God was calling us to do."

Caldwell-Gross first accepted the call to ministry at Mount Holyoke College and after graduating enrolled in the Masters of Divinity Program at Princeton Theological Seminary. It was during her time at Princeton where she made mission trips to places such as South Africa and India. She also has served as a youth pastor at two urban churches. The wife of Rev. Jevon Caldwell-Gross, the senior pastor at St. Mark's UMC in Montclair, and mother of two, admits she is hoping to make another mission trip soon.

"It's almost like I get an itch if I haven't been anywhere," she said. "I want my children and the church to constantly have an eye outside of themselves."

Dashboard A Vital Tool That Can Help Churches

By Jeff Wolfe
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Representatives from churches in each district attended a Vital Dashboard Seminar at St. John's UMC in Hazlet in mid-December to learn how to use and the importance of using the Vital Congregation Dashboard. The idea wasn't just to learn about how to input another set of numbers, but to learn the meaning behind those numbers.

"When it comes to counting congregations, the numbers are shorthand for people," said Palisades District Superintendent Rev. Steve Bechtold. "Each number represents a person's life. This is our own shorthand to get us to ask deeper questions. No matter which way the numbers are going, if they are increasing we need to know why we are doing so well in a certain area, and then how can we use that in other areas of ministry."

Those areas include measuring a church's weekly attendance, professions of faith, small groups members, and members involved in missions – the key areas of the conference's strategic plan to grow vital congregations. When a church sees a trend that increases or decreases in an area, it allows church leaders to ask what went right or wrong.

"Every church should be tracking these numbers," said Scott Brewer, the

UMC's Assistant General Secretary who presented the seminar. "It will help church leaders identify weak spots, and if so, what does that mean?"

Bechtold pointed out that it could mean something significant, but a shift in attendance in a certain area is not necessarily because of a bad reason.

"It helps us focus on certain things that we need to, such as participation in the worship life of the church, spiritual growth through small groups and participation in outreach and fulfilling the Christian lifestyle," he said. "It helps us stay focused and see the ongoing trends so we can make appropriate decisions."

The decision to use the Vital Dashboard is actually pretty simple. It requires going to vitalsigns.gcf.org and then following the instructions to create a dashboard for the church.

"Conferences that use this site tend to do better at achieving goals than conferences that do not," he said. "It has been exciting to see from the narratives how many things are happening in different churches of different shapes and sizes and how people have offered up those testimonies."

Rev. Vicki Brendler, the senior pastor at Bridgewater UMC, said it is going to be important for church leaders to have patience with the process.



Scott Brewer, right, and Bishop John Schol share a light moment together after Brewer gave a Vital Dashboard Training Seminar to several church leaders at St. John's UMC in Hazlet in December.

"What's going to take time is making sure everybody reports in and gets into the mindset of measuring," she said. "The hope is that we can take that information and see what we are doing well and what we aren't doing so well."

Brendler said one thing her church did was put a clipboard in each room and asked whichever group was using it to sign in. That was one form of measurement to see which groups were most active.

"Whether it's positive or negative, the

important thing is to ask the 'why' question," she said. "Why are we growing or why aren't we growing?"

Brendler emphasized the size of church is not what matters the most in this process either.

"We are hoping it will help local congregations have a mindset of measuring toward goals, rather than just counting and sending stuff into cyberspace," she said. "As churches set goals toward vitality, they will be more able to see how they are making progress."

Dates Set for Future Annual Conferences

The dates for the next four GNJUMC annual conferences at the Wildwood Convention Center have been set. The 2015 annual conference will be May 28-30, a Thursday through Saturday.

Starting in 2016 the annual conferences will begin on Sunday evenings and last through Tuesday. The dates are May 22-24, 2016; May 21-23, 2017; and May 20-22, 2018.

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GNJ's Higgins Is Enthusiastic For Summer at Pinelands

By Jessica Stenstrom
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The following is a question and answer session with the Director of Camp Ministries Jестie Higgins. After taking a year off, camps are scheduled to return to the Pinelands Center at Mt. Misery this summer. The exact dates and other details will be announced soon.

Q: Why are you passionate about camps?

A: I am passionate about camp for innumerable reasons. When I returned home from my first week as a senior high camper, my mother remarked that I seemed different. Looking back, I can see how camp changed me. I returned to school the following year with more confidence. I had experienced what authentic, non-judgmental friendship could be and aspired to interact with people more genuinely in my everyday life. Camp had lessened my dependence on peer affirmation and heightened my self-esteem as a beloved child of God. It was at camp and because of camp that I felt my call into ministry. I remember being asked what my future plans were and all I could think was, 'I want to run a Methodist camp. I want to make sure that others get the chance to feel the love that I have felt.'

Q: What positive impact does camp have on young people from the conference?

A: My goal as a camp director is to create a safe and positive space where young people can engage in challenging growth opportunities, refocus on building



GNJ Camps Director Jестie Higgins is excited that camps are returning to the conference. Pinelands Camp at Mt. Misery will be in session for three weeks this summer.

healthy peer relationships, participate in open dialogue about their faith, and experience God in new ways. It is our goal to help grow Christian leaders, leaders that will follow Christ's example of love and healing in the world. The beauty of it is that, time and again, campers astound me with their revelations, with stories of acceptance, love, and healing. I am blessed to experience God's presence at camp through those moments, through immersion in creation, and through our campers.

Q: Why is this season going to be different?

A: Coming back with a three-week summer in 2015 will make it possible to concentrate our efforts and energies more fully into those weeks, as opposed to spreading that energy, as well as our enrollment, over six weeks.

Q: Why should churches/parents give the gift of camp?

There are endless research and statistics that prove that camp is good for our kids. But additionally, Christian camping

is one of the few places we have left in our church that is intentionally just for our young people. Imagine how powerful the message behind the gift of camp is, as if to say, 'Camp is good, and healthy, and life-giving, and just for you. I want you to have a life-giving experience.' Camp does not wear out. You can't grow out of being part of the camp family. Camp lasts longer than any toy, game, or material possession. Camp is an experience that will last eternally.

Covenant Small Groups Can Bring Growth Opportunity

By Jeff Wolfe
jwolfe@gnjumc.org

A lot of churches have small groups that fit a wide variety of interests. The idea is to allow people in churches to get to know each other a little better through some type of common interest.

But there is one kind of small group that has the potential to reap significant spiritual rewards for those who give it a try.

It is called a covenant small group and the sole purpose is to help those in the group grow spiritually. One of the leaders in the United Methodist Church to endorse covenant small groups is Steve Mankar, the Director of Wesleyan Leadership for the General Board of Discipleship.

"These groups originated in the early Methodist meetings," Mankar said. "There is no curriculum or no specific study. It's just a group of five to seven

people who want to be more intentional about living a Christian life in the world."

Mankar said these groups are based on the general rule of discipleship, which is "to witness Jesus Christ to the world and follow his teaching through acts of compassion, justice, worship and devotion under the guidance of the Holy Spirit."

Mankar believes these kind of groups are a way for people, no matter where they are in their faith, to advance spiritually.

"With these groups, they can be people who are new Christians, all the way to people who are seasoned disciples," he said. "It's a place where you can learn from each other. You are walking with each other and praying for each other and that's how disciples are made."

Mankar also pointed out that these groups are not intended to be personal accountability groups, where every item of someone's life is known. They are

intended to be strictly about spiritual development.

"In a covenant group, you are not sharing life details, what you are sharing is how you are living in your Christian walk," he said. "You're not going to go in and talk about the struggle you might be having with your kids, or wife or husband. It's not a therapy group. The focus is on discipleship and the discipline that you need to learn."

Mankar added that one key to early success of a covenant group is that a pastor needs to be involved in the initial group a church starts.

"One of the things I tell pastors, is that if they are going to introduce this to a congregation, you need to be in the first group," he said. "It helps them attend to their disciples. But pastors are disciples like everybody else. They need the support and accountability maybe even more. They have the responsibility of preaching the gospel every week and the best people to get ideas from are the lay people."

"The reality of a pastor's life is that they often live in a church bubble. Everybody they come in contact with in any given week are members of their congregation, district staff, other clergy, or going to annual conference meetings. That's just the world that pastors live in.

"When they are in a covenant discipleship group they are with people who work in offices, schools, construction sites, farms or wherever. The pastors are going to hear from them how they are living the Christian life out in the world. It helps make them a better pastor."

Mankar said if and when a church starts a covenant group, it can also be a time of positive change for that church.

"When it really takes hold," Mankar said, "it changes lives and it changes churches."

While that was part of John Wesley's mission about 250 years ago, Mankar says the basic function of covenant groups should still be part of each church's mission today.

"It's part of what I call the method of Methodism," he said. "It is being in small groups, having mutual accountability and support for living the Christian life and equipping people to join Christ in the world. That's what we are called to do and the people who do that the best are lay people."

If you are interested in starting a covenant small group in your church, contact GNJ Director of Small Groups and Spiritual Visioning Beth Caulfield at bcaulfield@gnjumc.org or (732) 359-1000 ext. 104.

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**The March Issue
 Deadline is February 15, 2015**

Rev. Wilson's White House Visit Much More Than A Simple Tour

By Jeff Wolfe
jwolfe@gnjumc.org

It's not every day that a regular citizen gets to visit the White House, but when Rev. Vanessa Wilson made the trip with several others in early December, it had nothing to do with being a tourist.

It had everything to do with trying to save lives.

Wilson, who is the senior pastor at Magnolia Road UMC in Pemberton, was there as an ambassador for the United Methodist organization Healthy Families, Healthy Planet. She was one of 48 representatives from 26 international health organizations, various Christian denominations, and USAID at a meeting that was called Faith Matters: International Family Planning from a Christian Perspective.

Most of their time during the two-day event was spent at the Salvation Army headquarters in Alexandria, Va. The meeting was held with USAID's Advancing Partners and Communities and the United Nations Foundation Universal Access Project to advance a constructive dialogue on family planning from a Christian Perspective. At the end of the second day, about 20 of the representatives went to the White House to the Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships, its Office of Public Engagement, and USAID's Center for Faith-based and Community Initiatives.

They discussed the faith community's strong support for family planning initiatives, both locally and abroad, including healthy timing and spacing of pregnancies through the use of voluntary family planning. Some other organizations represented at the meeting were UMCOR, the Salvation Army and Christian Connections for International Health.

Federal money may be available to an organization if it is doing either family planning, HIV AIDS or maternal health work throughout the world. Representatives from Healthy Family, Healthy Planet said it does not receive any federal funding.

"Historically, they do not give funding to faith-based organizations that do this



Rev. Vanessa Wilson (second row middle), the senior pastor at Magnolia Road UMC in Pemberton, represented the United Methodist organization Healthy Families, Healthy Planet at a White House meeting in December.

type of work," Wilson said. "For them to move in the direction of giving funding to faith-based organizations is really interesting."

The Healthy Families, Healthy Planet project strives for a world in which every woman can plan her children and every family experiences God's promise of abundant life. Wilson says family planning from a Christian view is important.

"It's important to have a Christian perspective that values the lives of women, children and sees sexual intimacy as a gift from God for couples," Wilson said. "Family planning generally evokes a lot of emotion, but we are talking about family planning from a Christian perspective. We talk about healthy options, and it does not involve abortion."

"We just want to bring education to women globally and let them know that there are a lot of options open to women. We want women to be able to go to school and get an education."

While it may be natural to think of Healthy Families, Healthy Planet helping Third World countries, Wilson said the United States could use a lot of help as well.

"The U.S. is not even one of the best countries for maternal health," she said. "What we found was that New Jersey is pretty good with maternal health, but the U.S. is not one of the leading nations for maternal health."

"The resources are not dispersed equally throughout the country."

According to Christian Connections for International Health, more than 222 million women worldwide have an unmet need for family planning.

Another New Jersey pastor involved with Healthy Family, Healthy Planet is Rev. Amanda-Rohrs Dodge at North Hunterdon UMC in Hampton. While Rohrs-Dodge couldn't make the trip to the White House, she has been an official advocate for Healthy Planet, Healthy Families since completing training in 2012. She also has had her church assemble birthing kits for UMCOR during the Lenten season.

Wilson said that is just one way for local churches to have a global impact.

"It's very important to understand the global mission and to get involved," Wilson said. "Just to understand the funding issues and to be proactive is really important, too."



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Special Calling Vital For General Conference Delegates

By Jeff Wolfe
jwolfe@gnjumc.org

It may be rewarding and an honor, but it's certainly no vacation.

That's what past GNJUMC delegates to the General Conference agreed on when asked about what it is like to serve the conference in that role.

The process to elect the four clergy and four laity to the 2016 General Conference has begun with nominations being done at gnjumc.org. While these nominations must all be finished online by Feb. 15, the voting process will take place at the 2015 Annual Conference in Wildwood on May 28-30.

While it's uncertain how many nominations there will be, what is certain is that those elected will be in for a lot of work for the next year. And while traveling to Portland, Oregon for the General Conference on May 10-20, 2016, may sound like fun, the elected delegates shouldn't expect a lot of, if any, tourism time.

"From the moment you are elected, you are receiving material from all kinds of constituencies wanting to influence you one way or the other," said Dr. Rev. Tanya Linn Bennett, who represented the GNJUMC at the 2012 General Conference in Tampa. "For me it was very

important to pay attention to all of this information."

Bennett, who is now the chaplain and a professor at Drew University, said the preparation before the General Conference is just as important as attending the conference itself.

"Once you are there, there is no time for reading up on anything," she said. "Your day is absolutely scheduled from early in the morning pretty much for about 18 hours. The preparation is critical for being able to get there and to be effective."

Much like pastors feel the initial call to ministry, the same is true for being a General Conference delegate.

"I think you need to have a calling to do this," said Rev. Jessica Campbell, who was also at Tampa in 2012. "You need to be specifically interested in this and feel called to do it. Otherwise it can be a very depressing and very frustrating experience. But for me it was an absolute awesome experience and opportunity."

But being a delegate is not 100 percent work. Campbell and Bennett each said there were many other interesting facets to the job.

"One of the best aspects of the experience was seeing how diverse we are as Methodist people and how much we bring

our cultural understanding and values with us to church and the work that we do," said Campbell, who is in her 11th year of ministry, and second year at Franklin Lakes UMC. "As frustrating as it can be to be a Methodist and have everything be so systematic, you learn there is value in having a process in place for how we agree to work with each other. It really worked well."

And in the midst of that work, it's almost inevitable that a delegate will get to meet new people and make new friends.

"One of the reasons I am a United Methodist is because of the power of connection," Campbell said. "I have many friends from around the world now, which is fantastic."

Sometimes those new friends can come about due to a simple seating arrangement.

"One of the interesting things about the way we were seated is that the New Jersey delegates were at three tables, but the tables were half Liberian delegates and half New Jersey delegates," Bennett said. "It was a real opportunity for engagement and a real opportunity for real dialogue and to learn why we hold the perspectives that we had."

"I haven't seen the Liberians since

then, but there are some U.S. delegates I became close to and continue to be friends with."

And part of the reason for that is because they continue to share similar interests, which means having a lot of discussions about church business, which Bennett says she enjoys, especially during General Conference.

"It's something I find somewhat invigorating," she said. "It's interesting to see a group of people who are invested in the future of the church. There is something about that that is energizing to me. A lot of work happens not on the floor, but behind the scenes. A lot of times you are being called into meetings to talk about responses to what has already occurred and there is something energizing about that."

Aside from the business end of things, Campbell says the General Conference worship time (yes, there is time for that) can be energizing as well.

"The schedule is very intense, but we had beautiful flow between worship and the work," she said. "We would go from exhausting legislation to these very powerful and moving experiences. That blend was beautiful for me. A lot of the world doesn't operate that way."

Feed Truck Ready To Roll

Continued from page 1

when she became part of the dreaming process for The Feed Truck. She had thought her 10 years of food/retail management experience prior to attending seminary, were wasted time. But that didn't turn out to be the case. Her prior experience, partnered with a seminary class on missional entrepreneurship, helped fuel the idea.

"My time in the field helped prepare me for this," she said.

KUMC first applied for a grant through the GNJ Board of Higher Education and Ministry for The Feed Truck.

"It felt a little like the TV show 'Shark Tank', but they were nothing but supportive," Winderweedle said of her experience working with the conference board. In addition, they applied for and received funding from the Global Board of Higher Education and Ministry.

With the funding in place, the team began a long process of research and planning, working with many individuals including Ministry Incubators, a consulting firm comprised of Kenda Dean and Mark DeVries, who offered to assist in the planning and launch of KUMC's food truck ministry at no charge. Dean is also the coordinating pastor of KUMC overseeing the pastoral intern partnership between KUMC, Princeton Theological Seminary, and the conference. KUMC is unique in that a majority of its pastoral leadership team is either currently students at Princeton Theological Seminary or recent graduates.

After a lot of planning, organizing and work, The Feed Truck arrived and the permit process began. They opened for business at Kingston UMC's Fall Arts Festival on Oct. 18 and served about 125 people. Since then The Feed Truck has been at a Trunk or Treat event at Trinity Presbyterian Church in East Brunswick, at CRW apartments (seminary housing in West Windsor) and on campus at Butler College at Princeton University and Princeton Theological Seminary.

"Our operational philosophy is built on three organizational pillars: *food, work and neighbor*," Winderweedle said.

Food

The Feed Truck uses as much local, farm-direct, seasonable, consciously sourced food as possible.

"If we can't tell you where it came from, we don't want it on our truck," Winderweedle said.

In addition, 10 percent of the truck's food and beverage sales is donated to

other area non-profits. Winderweedle said that at least half of that goes to organizations dedicated to alleviating food insecurity and/or providing good work opportunities within their area.

Work

The Feed Truck is working to launch an apprenticeship program, this spring. It will provide skill training and career development services at a living wage to emerging adults who do not have the benefit of a strong support system or safety net. Through a partnership with KUMC, apprentices will be provided with community encouragement and relational mentoring.

Winderweedle said the goal is to work with one or two young adults each year during a 6 to 12 month program

"We want to give young people permission to dream and plan what their next steps might be," she said.

To find potential apprentices, The Feed Truck partners with agencies that provide support for young adults, such as Life Ties in Ewing, which provides both housing and social services for young adults in crisis.

The Feed Truck also links diners with volunteer opportunities in the community, partnering with different volunteer organizations to raise awareness, in addition to funds.

"At The Feed Truck, we believe that a person's work – whether it's work done as a paid employee or a volunteer – should be life-giving, not soul-sucking," Winderweedle said. "Through encouraging the folks who visit The Feed Truck to participate in charitable giving and volunteer service within their community, we also urge area students to consider how their investments of time, money and energy can lead to a well-discerned answer to the question, 'Who am I going to be when I grow up?'"

This is done partly through chaplains and interns at KUMC from Princeton Theological Seminary who chat with folks as they wait for their food.

The long-range goal is to partner with a different non-profit each month, raising awareness on behalf of that particular cause, while also fundraising for it through food and beverage sales.

Neighbor

"We believe that there is a need within our community to help young adults in particular to encounter the church positively, perhaps even unexpectedly,"



Kingston UMC's Feed Truck became a reality with a series of grants and the work of several church members, including Feed Truck Executive Director Jessica Winderweedle.

Winderweedle said. "We believe this positive encounter begins and ends with love. The Feed Truck exists as an outreach effort of a local church congregation that cares about and for young people within our community and loves them as neighbors – whether they are students passing through or our own born-and-bred New Jerseyans."

She said that in Mercer County there are 53,000 college students and The Feed Truck would love to be on all the campuses. While The Feed Truck is filling its spring schedule now, a goal is to be on both the Princeton University and Princeton Seminary's campus weekly. Winderweedle said there aren't many food trucks in the Princeton area and when The Feed Truck was on the Princeton campus she kept hearing a lot of disbelief that a church was doing this.

"I kept hearing 'this is weird, but really cool,'" she said.

Winderweedle said she sees The Feed Truck as the "pied piper" communication tool to share the message of the ministry.

"The Feed Truck seeks to bring a little bit of Kingston UMC hospitality to our surrounding area, as well as to extend

an ongoing invitation to our neighbors to take part in what God is already up to in our own backyard," Winderweedle said.

When asked if she had advice for churches who might be thinking of a new and innovative model for ministry, Winderweedle said, "you need to know as much you can, but also not be bogged down with what you don't know."

She said it would have been easy to be discouraged about the idea of starting a food truck. It was both too hard and expensive.

"Churches tend to be overly cautious," she said. "You have to let go of that fear."

Winderweedle said it is equally important to have a team of enthusiastic people working on the ministry model.

"It has to be a huge team effort," she said, "built on enthusiastic faith that grows organically out of the congregation and people in the church."

If you would like more information or are interested in booking The Feed Truck at a local church or community event, read more at feedtruck.org. The Feed Truck is also on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Executive Director Jessica Winderweedle may be reached at thefeedtruck@gmail.com.



RELAY ISSUES ARE AVAILABLE ONLINE

Back issues of the Relay are available at
www.gnjumc.org/news/issue



GLOBAL RELAY

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

United Methodists gather to remember Sand Creek

EADS, Colo. (UMNS) — The 150th anniversary of the Sand Creek Massacre is “not a celebration; it is a commemoration,” the Rev. Michael Dent, pastor of Trinity United Methodist Church in Denver, said during the Prayerful Preparation gathering held Nov. 29 at Eads United Methodist Church.

Tattoo ministry: Expression of Christian commitment

OCALA, Fla. (UMNS) — A tattoo parlor is hardly the likeliest place that Christians would be found on a Saturday morning studying the Bible. But nearly 40 members of Wildwood United Methodist Church met at Fat Kats Artistry and about a dozen members, including the Rev. Michael Beck, got the United Methodist cross and flame inked onto forearms, hands and, in at least one case, a foot.

Bishops to get 3 percent raise in 2015

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (UMNS) — Most United Methodist bishops will see a 3 percent salary boost next year, a higher raise than they’ve seen in five years. The board of the denomination’s finance agency decided on the pay increase based on a bishop compensation study and trends in the secular workforce.

Filipino church members walk for accountability

CABANATUAN CITY, Philippines (UMNS) — Some 500 church members and students from The United Methodist Church in the Philippines, led by Manila Area Bishop Rodolfo A. Juan, gathered Nov. 17 to express their indignation about graft and corruption.

Kassig remembered for humanitarian service

INDIANAPOLIS (UMNS) — During an interfaith memorial service at Butler University, Abdul-Rahman Peter Kassig was remembered for his dedication to serving others. The 26-year-old Indianapolis native lost his life while providing humanitarian aid in Syria.

African women earn money via cellphone subscription

ABIDJAN, Côte d’Ivoire (UMNS) — Cellphone subscriptions are generating income that women of The United Methodist Church in Côte d’Ivoire hope to use to start small businesses. The Côte d’Ivoire United Methodist Women received a check this month for \$1,000 U.S., earnings on a social media network.

Religious groups support EPA rules on carbon pollution

WASHINGTON, D.C. (UMNS) — The United Methodist Board of Church and Society was among the 17 religious organizations whose representatives met Nov. 18 with Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Gina McCarthy to show support of the EPA’s proposed rules to address carbon pollution from power plants.

‘My Carolina Today’ features church’s malaria fight

RALEIGH, N.C. (UMNS) — Bishop Hope Morgan Ward, who leads the North Carolina Conference, shared with a television audience the work the denomination is doing through Imagine No Malaria. The conference also aired 30-second commercials to promote Imagine No Malaria through Dec. 2.

Liberia Partners in mission together

DETROIT (UMNS) — Eighty participants from 14 conferences, including two bishops and three missionaries, gathered to focus on the needs of Liberia beyond Ebola. The Liberia Partners Summit heard from missionaries who have returned to West Africa and stressed that the emphasis now needs to move beyond crisis to focusing on schools, health safety, and other prevention and development issues.

Iowa clergyman faces complaint for same-sex wedding

DES MOINES, Iowa (UMNS) — The Iowa Conference cabinet filed a formal complaint against the Rev. Larry Sonner for officiating at a same-sex wedding. “I invite you to a season of prayer as the supervisory response to Rev. Sonner’s action is directed toward a just resolution,” Bishop Julius Calvin Trimble wrote in a pastoral letter to the conference.

Mozambique women celebrate 50th anniversary

INHAMBANE, Mozambique (UMNS) — More than 750 members of the Women’s Association of the South Mozambique Conference celebrated the group’s 50th anniversary Jubilee at the Chicouque Mission. Representatives from six countries joined Bishop Joaquina Filipe Nhanala, the only woman bishop in Africa, in honoring the group’s work on issues affecting women in the church and in the community.

Exemplary United Methodist laywoman Alice Lee dies

MONROEVILLE, Ala. (UMNS) — Though known to the broader world as the older sister of Harper Lee, author of “To Kill a Mockingbird,” Alice Lee earned recognition and deep respect in United Methodist circles for decades of service at the local church, conference and general church level. Alice Lee, also a female legal pioneer in south Alabama, died Nov. 17 at age 103.

Clergy Family Care Summit offers ways to support families

CHICAGO (UMNS) — The United Methodist Church gathered experts to discuss issues facing clergy and their families and to suggest ways the church can help improve their lives. The 23-member task force made recommendations on how bishops, annual conferences, district superintendents and others can help support clergy families. The summit was convened by the United Methodist Commission on the Status and Role of Women.



Haitian children enjoy playing a game with former Rutgers football star and UMVIM team member Brian Leonard during a mission trip to the island of Gonave last March.

Rutgers Students Join UMVIM Team in Haiti

By Kathy Ahmad
kahmad@comcast.net

Some jobs get started and never get finished.

When the GNJUMC United Methodist Volunteers in Mission went to Haiti last March, one of their goals was to continue a job that started 20 years ago.

The 10-member team, which included six Rutgers University football players, had the goal of completing Zabricot Methodist Church on the island of Gonave, which is off the west coast of Haiti. Construction on the church had started 20 years ago, but due to the lack of funds, work was stopped before the roof was put on, causing most of the work which had been accomplished to be destroyed by weather throughout the last two decades.

The UMVIM team worked side by side with Haitians who were members of the community and the work was directed by a Haitian site boss. With project funds provided by the UMVIM team, construction materials were purchased and Haitian workers were hired. The hiring of the Haitian workers was an important aspect of the mission because unemployment on Gonave is even more severe than for most of Haiti. By the end of the week, significant progress was made on the walls of the church.

However, the week was not all work. Many children do not go to school on Gonave due to the inability of families to pay tuition and buy uniforms, which are required by all schools. This meant a lot

of children were hanging around waiting for team members to take a break so that they could play soccer and jump rope. As soon as school let out, more children joined in the soccer and jump rope activities which continued into the evening.

The final night included a party with all of the children and workers. Local women prepared a meal of chicken and rice with juice and cookies for more than 100 people. The children played with UMVIM team members until late into the evening and everyone was sad to leave the next day for their return trip to the U.S.

Nearly all of the team members were affiliated with Rutgers. Team members included Rutgers football players Ryan Brodie, Quentin Gause, Quanzell Lambert, Bryan Leoni, David Miliewski, and Gary Nova, Brian Leonard, a former Rutgers football player, John Mauer, campus director of Athletics in Action at Rutgers, Tariq Ahmad, Director of Recruiting Operations for Rutgers Football and Kathy Ahmad, the GNJUMC UMVIM coordinator.

Many of the team members said the trip was a life changing experience. The UMVIM philosophy of mission emphasizes building relationships with the members of the community where it serves and showing the community that it is not forgotten by Methodist brothers and sisters in the United States, a purpose that was clearly fulfilled on this trip.

The GNJUMC UMVIM team will be returning to Haiti again on March 14-21.

Construction Continues On New Conference Center



Construction is well underway on the new conference center that received final financing approval at a special Annual Conference session in September. The new building in Neptune, N.J., is expected to be completed by the spring of 2016.

**The February Issue
Deadline is January 15, 2015**

Conference Happenings

Monmouth Grace serves at Jersey Shore Rescue Mission - On the Sunday before Thanksgiving nine members from Monmouth Grace UMC went to the Jersey Shore Rescue Mission in Asbury Park to serve a hot Thanksgiving meal to over 100 people. The Grace UMC members conversed with those who attended the dinner. Rebecca Gould, the daughter of Grace UMC Associated Pastor Blair Gould, wrote a piece for the church's bulletin about the people that were served, "I saw Jesus in every single one of them."

Palisades spring men's gathering set - The Palisades District Men Spring Gathering will take place from 8:30 a.m. to noon on April 11 at Grace UMC in Wyckoff. The theme is from Proverbs 27:17 and the speaker will be Grace UMC pastor Scott Bostwick. For more information contact Sugandh Salvi at sugandhsalvi@yahoo.com or 973-632-8475.



Several members of Monmouth Grace UMC in Eatontown helped serve a Thanksgiving dinner to about 100 people at the Jersey Shore Rescue Mission in Asbury Park.



STEWARDSHIP STORIES

by Rich Hendrickson, Director of Stewardship & Visioning

Where Is The Tithing Box?

While sitting in her office one day, the pastor heard a knock on her door and when she answered was greeted by a young man who wanted to know where he could find the tithing box. "I'm sorry," she said, "What are you looking for?" "Your tithing box," the young man answered.

To which the pastor replied, "We don't have one of those in this church but if you come in and sit down maybe I can help you."

After a short conversation it turned out that the young man didn't attend the church on Sunday for worship but was coming to the church the other six days of the week whenever there was an AA meeting. He told the pastor that he was looking for the tithing box because her church had made such a difference in his life simply by being the place that was willing to open its doors to the community. He was looking for the tithing box because he wanted to say thank you to God and give something back to the church that had impacted his life.

What a powerful witness to a healthy theology of giving! Saying thank you to God and giving back. All giving starts with God and God's extravagant generosity. All giving is in response to God's gift of Jesus Christ and is an expression of our thanks in response to God's giving. May we all approach each and every opportunity to give of ourselves with joy in our hearts and thanksgiving on our lips.

Three IGNITE Rallies Set For Different Sites

There will be three Ignite Regional Rallies on Saturdays in February and March to help continue the momentum that was gained at the first IGNITE Youth Conference in Wildwood this past fall. The 2015 Ignite Youth Conference is already scheduled for Oct. 2-4 at the Wildwood Convention Center.

The regional rallies, with the theme of Stir Up A Hunger, will take place at varied geographical settings around the conference.

The dates and locations are:

Feb. 28, Southern Region, at Sicklerville UMC.

March 7, Central Region, at Calvary UMC, East Brunswick

March 21, Northern Region, at Bethany KUMC, Wayne

Each of the rallies will begin at 6 p.m. with a meet and greet with food, with the regular program going from 7 to 8:40 p.m. It will include a message from featured speaker Preston Centuolo and performances from the Ground Zero Master's Commission.

For more information about the rallies, contact your district office or Matthew Na at mna@gnjumc.org.

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GBHEM Awards Scholarships Around Conference

The following students received scholarships from the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry. They are listed below by name, church affiliation and location, and college/seminary.

Anudeep Alberts, Christ UMC Jersey City, Boston College; **Kyle Biemiller**, Hope UMC Voorhees, Drew University; **Kaitlyn Bleiweiss**, Hedding UMC, Rowan University; **Nick Cavanaugh**, Haddonfield UMC, Centenary College; **Eunice Chang**, Grace Korean UMC Westwood, Rutgers; **Kathleen Chappelle**, Morrow Memorial UMC Maplewood, Green Mountain College; **Sue-Jean Choi**, Arcola Korean UMC Paramus, Boston University; **Tyler Clark**, Asbury UMC Woodlyn, Montclair State; **Dianna Damstra**, Boonton UMC; Drew University; **Melissa DeRemer**, Bridgewater UMC, Centenary College; **Terry Frazier**, Old First UMC West Long Branch, Drew Theological School; **Kia Hill**, Browns Mills UMC, Drew University; **Peggy Holder-Jones**, Roselle UMC, Drew University; **Nadine Ilunga**, Morrow Memorial UMC Maplewood, Drew Theological School; **Ju Hee Jun**, True Light Korean UMC Bayonne, Rutgers-Newark; **Heeyoung Jung**, Omega Mission Korean UMC Ridgefield Park, Drew Theological Seminary; **Hyun Hui Kim**, Monmouth Grace UMC Eatontown, Drew Theological Seminary; **Jieun Kim**, Calvary Korean UMC East Brunswick, Drew Theological School; **Keunsi Lee**, UMC in Madison, Drew Theological Seminary; **Seung Hyun Lee**, Livingston Korean UMC, Drew Theological Seminary; **Sung Woo Lee**, Leonia UMC, Drew Theological Seminary; **Onay Lopez**, Bound Brook UMC, Drew University; **Caly McCarthy**, Waterloo UMC Stanhope, Dickinson College; **Taylor Murphy**, Saint Andrews UMC Toms River, Methodist University; **Claudine Nouvelles**, Church Covenant UMC Jersey City, New Jersey City University; **Noelle Oh**, Bethany UMC Wayne, Drew University; **Eunhye Park**, Korean Community UMC Englewood, Drew University; **Akash Parmar**, Hackettstown Trinity UMC, Rutgers; **Nickolay Petrov**, Port Morris UMC, Landing, Drew Theological Seminary; **Rosemary Rentas**, Asbury UMC Long Branch, Drew University; **Melissa Snow**, Bridgewater UMC, Rutgers; **Brian Tipton**, Summit UMC, Drew Theological Seminary; **William Wilson**, Chews UMC Glendora, Emory University Candler School of Theology; **Ji Sun Yang**, Leonia UMC, Drew Theological Seminary; **June Hee Yoon**, Grace Korean UMC Westwood, Drew; **Jennifer Zaplitny**, Central UMC Linwood, Albright College.

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Battle of the Bells Raises Thousands for CUMAC

A unique tribute to Motown turned into a pretty big fundraiser for CUMAC.

Familiar sounding songs such as "Stop in the Name of Love" and "Higher Ground" were a part of CUMAC's Battle of the Bells that ended up raising \$3,000 for the organization that helps feed those in need. Several Motown hits were played by hand bell choirs from the Pearl River, Butler, Caldwell and Wayne United Methodist Churches. It was the first in a three-part series of events aiming to help fight hunger locally.

"It was fantastic to meet bell ringers from other churches and to hear how they interpreted and presented the music," said Marilyn Creamer, who led the Jubilation Ringers from Wayne. "The Jubilation Ringers are already talking about what the next Battle of the Bells will bring. Despite a lot of hard work, it was a lot of fun and we'd like to see more bell choirs participate."

The choirs played in front of a large crowd at Butler UMC with the goals of putting on a good show, helping those in need and making the unique fundraiser a success.

One of the most moving aspects of the night was seeing bell players, young and old, come together to share their talents. The Jubilation Ringers work with a variety of skill levels, with choir members ranging from ages 9 to 70. A member of Wayne UMC for 55 years, Creamer believes having multiple generations working together has been a huge advantage, especially for children.

"Not only do they start to learn music, but it also helps build inter-generational bonds," she said. "These young people meet and work with adults with whom they might not otherwise interact."

The Battle of the Bells concept started with a performance by the Wayne bell



Members of bell choirs from Wayne, Butler, Pearl River and Caldwell churches participated in a Motown Battle of the Bells at Butler UMC to raise funds for CUMAC. Each of the choirs played arrangements of Motown hits in what was a friendly competition.

choir at CUMAC's Beatles Night. After seeing the performance, members of the Franklin Lakes UMC bell choir were inspired and challenged the group to a "bell off" competition. Unfortunately the Franklin Lakes choir was unable to participate, but the idea for the event was born. For many bell players, it was the first time they had played outside of their own church. Many had never heard another bell choir perform. This only added to the night's excitement.

One of the challenges for the bell choirs was putting together the arrangements for the Motown songs. Most pieces arranged and composed for hand bells are classical. Without any Motown music available, the choirs had to recreate songs on their own before they rehearsed.

"It was tough for us, ringing a style we don't usually get to ring," said Pamela Gunning, Hand Bell Choir Director at

Pearl River. "But once we figured out which song to do, it was fun figuring out the rhythms and timing."

The Butler choir also had to make adjustments.

"I ended up writing the arrangement, but it was pretty complex," said Rich Lovallo, Director of Music Ministries at Butler. "We gave it two weeks and then I had to simplify things. Our group kept asking, 'what if we're not ready?' We didn't know what to expect. It didn't finally click until just before show night."

Some of the other Motown classics played by the choirs included, "I Heard it Through the Grapevine", "I'll Be There" and "Sign, Sealed, Delivered". Every group brought its own style to the competition — with everything from elaborate costumes to back up dancers — leaving judges with some tough decisions to make at the end of the night.

Choirs were scored on three major

categories, but had the chance to gain extra points by collecting donations in their respective bins. Butler was declared the winner, but at the end of the night, the crowd cared much more about its fundraising total than winning or losing.

"It wasn't about who played well," Lovallo said, "it was about supporting each other."

The night was made even more special as the YouChoose Band performed, including the songs "Get Ready" and "Ain't No Mountain High Enough". For Motown fanatics, the band even auctioned off two tickets to Motown the Musical on Broadway.

If you would like to support the next Motown event, see CUMAC's website for more information on a free Tree Tavern Pizza Party & Motown Open Mic Night on March 7 and CUMAC Motown Night on April 18, 2015. Learn more at www.cumacecho.org.

Dirt Moving On Conference Center



Photos by Brittney Reilly

A lot of dirt has been moved as progress continues on the new conference center being built in Neptune. After approval at a special session in September, construction began in October. So far a minimal amount of bad weather days has helped keep the construction on schedule. The new building, which will house the conference office staff and provide space for special conferences and large meetings, is expected to be completed by the spring of 2016.

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These GNJ United Methodists were among those who attended the Anti-Poverty Action Network meeting. The meeting's theme was Changing Attitudes, Changing Laws, Changing Lives.

Anti-Poverty Network Meets, Discusses Ways To End Injustice

Greater New Jersey United Methodists joined 200 people gathered in Monroe in early December for the Anti-Poverty Network (APN) meeting that had the theme of Changing Attitudes, Changing Laws and Changing Lives.

One of the keynote speakers, Professor Kasturi Dasgupta of Georgian Court University in Lakewood, spoke of "Vanquishing Injustice Once and For All."

"Groups and individuals are needed to advocate for long-term policy change," Dasgupta said in her speech. "This would require reaching out to our elected officials and the legislative process by building and nurturing political support, reciprocity, trust, mutually supportive relationships such that advocating for the poor becomes strategic for electoral gain. As advocates we need to do our homework – and recognize that we will have to educate the decision makers and convince them of the urgency of what we propose."

In addition to Dasgupta, other speakers were Shaquana Thompson, a former resident of Covenant House, State Senate Minority Leader Thomas Kean, Jr., and Assemblyman Carmelo Garcia. Each shared their experiences with poverty in New Jersey.

Conference workshops built advocacy skills and helped participants develop advocacy plans for key anti-poverty efforts.

Greater New Jersey was represented by APN Chair Cyndi Kent and APN mem-

bers, Rev. Jonathan Campbell, Helen McCahill, Phyllis Truran, and Grace Rapp. Also attending were Marilyn Powell, Conference UMW President; Sarah Joslin, member of a district poverty task force; Rosa Williams, Conference Lay Leader; Alice Johnson, a UMW district president; Millie Grey, and Rev. Heidi Bak. GNJ's Board of Church and Society filled two tables which provided four "scholarship" seats. Deaconess McCahill's group from the Allen Project in Asbury Park, also had a full table. Four members of Church and Society served on the Planning Committee for the event.

APN is a non-profit that connects faith-based communities, government officials, private businesses and people who have experienced poverty. APN works toward ending poverty in New Jersey through legislative action, education, and advocacy efforts and focuses on hunger, housing and economic empowerment.

Serena Rice, Executive Director of APN, indicated that in 2015, the network will support the Breakfast After the Bell campaign; the United for Homes campaign that seeks funding to provide affordable housing; and continue to influence public policy surrounding issues such as low-wage jobs and paid sick leave for workers.

For updates and further information on this coalition contact Cyndi Kent at njcyndi@live.com



Some youths take a look at the pink flamingos at Bethany St. John's UMC in Pleasantville. The church took the food challenge and collected a ton of food over two months to donate to a local food bank.

Pink Flamingos Signal Food Challenge

It's not every day that a church will find a bunch of plastic pink flamingos standing near its entrance. But there are many people in New Jersey who wake up every day knowing how they are going to eat.

Those two things are coinciding as part of the Food Challenge project started by Rev. Peter Jamieson at Asbury UMC in Egg Harbor Twp. The challenge was originally started to help supply a food bank of a church's choice in the Atlantic City area due to the layoffs caused by recent casino closures. And while some churches in the Cape Atlantic District are participating in what is called flocking, this well could become a conference wide challenge.

The results so far have included Asbury UMC donating about 2,000 pounds of food to the Atlantic County Food Bank,

Bethany St. John's in Pleasantville collecting over a ton of food in two months and Seaville UMC doing a Fill The Sill by putting food items in windows all around the church.

The hope now is to make this a conference-wide initiative.

A church is challenged by the placing of the pink flamingos and having a video of a church's pastor being dunked with stuffed animals and then placing the video and the challenge on the church's or district's Facebook page. Once the challenge is agreed to, the church then organizes its food drive and has the ability to challenge another church to do the same. Each church can donate the food to the food bank or organization of its choice.

OBITUARIES

JANET WALZ, widow of Rev. Norman Walz, full Elder of the Greater New Jersey Conference, died on Jan. 11. A memorial service will be held on Saturday, Feb. 28, at 2 p.m. at Bristol Glen: 200 Bristol Glen Dr., Newton, NJ 07860.

Memorial gifts may be sent to: The Centenary Fund and Preacher's Aid Society, 1001 Wickapecko Dr., Ocean, NJ 07712. Condolence messages may be sent to her son, John Walz, P.O. Box 343, Mt. Tabor, NJ, 07878.

BRIAN A. GRECO, Full Elder of the Greater New Jersey Conference died Dec. 17. A Celebration of Life was held Dec. 21 at Haddonfield United Methodist Church.

Rev. Greco, affectionately known as Pastor Brian, went to Springville Griffith Institute, was a graduate of Rutgers University and received a Master of Divinity Degree from Duke University. He first pursued a career in finance before answering God's call to ministry. He served as the Pastor of Cross Keys United Methodist Church for 18 years before becoming the Senior Pastor of Haddonfield United Methodist Church.

In lieu of flowers the family asks that contributions be made to Haddonfield UMC Mortgage Reduction Fund, 29 Warwick Rd. Haddonfield, NJ, 08033; or Cross Keys UMC Mission Fund, 1644 N. Main St., Williamstown, NJ, 08094; or Respond Inc., 532 State St., Camden, NJ, 08103.

Messages of condolences may be sent to his widow, Lois and the Greco family at 1814 New York Ave., Williamstown, NJ, 08094.

EDWARD S. CARTY, retired Elder of the Greater New Jersey Conference, died Dec. 12. A funeral service was held Dec. 20 at St. Mark's United Methodist Church, Montclair. Rev. Carty served the GNJAC for 16 years before his retirement.

Memorial donations may be sent to St. Mark's United Methodist Church, 51 Elm Street, Montclair, NJ, 07042. Messages of condolence may be sent to his wife, Mrs. Viola Carty, 203 Ashland Avenue, Bloomfield, NJ, 07003.

CAROL SUE PRICE, widow of James Kenneth Price, Elder of the Greater New Jersey Conference, died in Nashville, Tenn., Nov. 24. A Celebration of Life will be held at 1 p.m. on Saturday, March 21 at her daughter's home: 104 Pembroke Ct., Hendersonville, TN, 37075.

Memorial Donations, in lieu of flowers may be sent in Carol's name to: St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, 262 Danny Thomas Place, Memphis, TN, 38105.

Messages of condolence may be sent to her daughter, Shaundra Kohls, 104 Pembroke Ct., Hendersonville, TN, 37075.

HOWARD L. CASSADAY, retired full Elder of the Greater New Jersey Conference, died Jan. 18. A memorial service was held Jan. 24 at Aldine United Methodist Church, Elmer.

Howard received his master of divinity degree from Eastern Baptist Seminary and then began his second career as a United Methodist minister for the South Jersey United Methodist Conference. He also later obtained a master's degree in Christian education from N.Y.U.

Memorial donations, in lieu of flowers, may be sent to: Aldine United Methodist Church, 780 Friesburg-Aldine Road, Elmer, NJ, 08318 or Habitat for Humanity of Salem County, 416 South Pennsville-Auburn Road, Carneys Point, NJ, 08069.

Expressions of sympathy may be sent to his widow, Grace Cassaday, 522 Garrison Road, Elmer, NJ, 08318.

Voorhees Rotary Club Honors Hope UMC



Rev. Jeff Bills, the pastor at Hope UMC in Voorhees, receives the Voorhees Breakfast Rotary Club's annual Business Person of the Year Award in late January. Bills accepted the award on behalf of the church.

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