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THE RELAY

UNITED METHODISTS
OF GREATER NEW JERSEY

gnjumc.org

GNJ's NextGen Meets Modern Day Pilgrimage

By Heather Mistretta
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NEPTUNE, NJ

Next Generation Ministries is committed to supporting GNJ youth into going deeper in their faith. Sometimes that means going deeper in social justice issues and sometimes that means going to the deep south.



The Joshua Generation, a program sponsored by Next Gen and funded by the General Commission on Race and Religion, has been led by Rev. Brenda Ehlers, Associate Pastor for Children, Youth and Educational Ministries at Morrow Church in Maplewood. The group of 14 New Jersey high school students began meeting in 2018 to study social justice and learn about civil rights leaders who have shaped our history.

"We're all about racial justice. There is no shortage of hard work that still needs to be done," said Ehlers who has been sup-



Students listen to moving speech at Birmingham Civil Rights Institute. Photo: Kerwin Webb

porting her church and community toward a stronger sense of stewardship and justice ministries for the past 16 years.

The year-long program began with a list of books including "Between the

World and Me" by Ta-Nehisi Coates and "The Fire This Time: A New Generation Speaks about Race" by Jesmyn Ward and monthly Zoom calls to discuss each one.

Following a training session in May, five chaperones led the high school students in late June on a pilgrimage down south to retrace steps taken by some of their heroes and other lesser-known activists while learning about their faith and their place in this world.

"Everyone should have some type of exposure to this," said Kerwin Webb, who is a recent graduate of Princeton's M.Div. program and the Youth Program Coordinator for Next Generation Ministries. "If you don't know your history, you can easily repeat it. We're hoping to be voices for those who can't speak."

The pilgrimage started in Atlanta where the group visited the childhood home of Martin Luther King Jr and the Ebenezer Baptist Church where Dr. King and his father were associate pastor and pastor, respectively, and where his sister, Christine King Farris is still a member.

Also that weekend the group visited the National Center for Civil & Human Rights where they experienced an interactive simulation of the historic Woolworth's lunch counter from North Carolina where African Americans defied the racism they faced by organizing peaceful sit-ins.

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LEADING BY EXAMPLE:

Leaders Use Laity Academy to Spur \$250,000 Campaign in Hightstown

By Heather Mistretta
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HIGHTSTOWN, NJ

Methodism began as a lay movement, and GNJ laity embrace that history by equipping themselves to support their clergy and congregations to become more vital. That vitality is evident in Hightstown, where a team of laity took full advantage of the tools of last year's Laity Leadership Academy to jump start their capital campaign.

The United Methodists of Greater New Jersey's 2019 Laity Leadership Academy, a day that recognizes that no one is ever alone and that miracles can happen as it empowers others to be church leaders, kicks off on Saturday, September 28.

"IT WAS AN INSPIRATION. I CAN'T SAY ENOUGH ABOUT THE CLASS"

—Judy DiCecco, Hightstown UMC

The Laity Leadership Academy, which is designed to provide tools and skills for leaders facing the challenges of the 21st century, offers four different tracks to help laity and their churches become stronger and more in touch with their missions.

The First United Methodist Church (UMC) of Hightstown, led by Pastor Sammy Arroyo, is one church that has embraced what they learned in the last academy and applied it to their own church in a transformative way.

"It was an inspiration. I can't say enough about the class," said lay member Judy DiCecco who is a lifetime member of the Mercer County church with a congregation of about 200 and a strong advocate of instituting change at her church.

DiCecco, who runs the church's Little Beavers Preschool among many other responsibilities like photography and the weekly bulletins, enrolled in the "Generosity vs Funding" track



Pastor Sammy Arroyo launches balloons for the church's capital campaign, Our Campaign is Bridging Our Future Through Faith-Lift It Up.

with United Methodist Stewardship Foundation's Executive Director Rev. Jana Purkis-Brash in October 2018.

"She walked the entire journey with us," DiCecco said of Purkis-Brash who has more than 35 years of experience in development. "She even paid for the cake at our celebration!"

After reading Henri Nouwen's "The Spirituality of Fundraising" as part of the course and learning that how you frame your ask is vital during a fundraising campaign, DiCecco dove back into the

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Listening Sessions and Surveys for the Way Forward

NEPTUNE, NJ

The GNJ Way Forward Team formed three working committees to focus on communications, framework and assessment in preparation for the launch of pilots at the October 26th Special Session of Annual Conference.

As a part of this work, the team encourages all United Methodists to participate in the process of discerning the next steps. They have scheduled focus groups with laity and clergy representing the diversity of the conference, will open online survey for all United Methodists in GNJ at the end of August and are inviting all members of the GNJ community to two listening sessions at the Mission and Resource Center:

Saturday, August 24
9:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.

Tuesday, August 27
7:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

The thirty-five member team includes laity and clergy representing GNJ's congregational, ethnic and theological diversity and were affirmed at the March Special Session of Greater New Jersey's Annual Conference to find a path that recognizes that GNJ has disciples who embrace the passage of the traditional plan at General Conference and disciples that are hurt and in disagreement with the denomination's plan concerning ministry with the LGBTQIA+ community.

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A MESSAGE FROM OUR BISHOP

Keeping Your Eye on the Ball

Bishop John Schol

Have you ever taken your eye off something and in a moment everything changes? Maybe a toddler is innocently playing and you look away for what seems to be a couple of seconds before noticing she has a valuable vase in her hands. Or when a football receiver begins to look toward the goal line before he catches the football, often resulting in an incomplete pass.

Taking your eye off something, even for a short period of time, can have dramatic consequences.

The United Methodist Church has been focused on several important things but along the way has lost focus on its mission. We focus on declining finances, human sexuality and how we reorganize the denomination, but what about our ultimate mission?

Our mission—to make disciples of Jesus Christ and grow vital congregations to transform the world—involves three things: 1) make disciples, 2) grow vital congregations, and 3) transform the world. Let's see how we are doing.

In 2018 243 of our 537 congregations did not make one new disciple of Jesus Christ (profession of faith). That means that nearly half of our congregations did not inspire someone new to say, "I want to follow Jesus."

Several years ago, we said we wanted to reverse a trend with our congregations by increasing our highly vital congregations to 41% from 14%. We made progress several years ago, rising to 37%, but we have not made progress since and slipped back to 36% in 2018.

Vital congregations are measured by five vitality markers:

1. Gather disciples to worship — growth in worship attendance
2. Organize disciples into small groups — number of worshipers in small groups
3. Develop disciples into witnesses — number of new professions of faith
4. Send disciples to engage in mission — number of disciples in hands-on mission in the community
5. Inspire disciples to give — percent of budget given to mission

In 2018 we declined in each of these areas — a change that presents a serious challenge and a renewed call to grow vital congregations.

The last part of our mission is to transform the world. We continue to excel in this area. Every week I hear about a life changed, a community served, a justice issue addressed. Our work in Tanzania is making a significant difference through its churches and in their community. We have sent multiple mission teams to Kentucky, Latin America, Mongolia and Puerto Rico. Our Next Generation ministry is starting new ministries on college campuses and impacting the lives of young people through camping and IGNITE. We have congregations doing significant ministries with immigrants, and through mission partners and congregations we are doing transformational ministry in urban communities. This is all encouraging mission ministry, but through our congregations in 2018, we had a fewer percent of our worshipers engaged in hands-on mission.

While there are important challenges that need our attention, we cannot take our eye off the ball, off the mission. The mission will lead us through each of our challenges.

I am calling on all our congregations and their leaders to recommit to growing the vitality of their congregations. A 2009 study of 33,000 United Methodists congregations in the United States found that congregations making disciples of Jesus Christ, growing their vitality and transforming the world were congregations that had:

- ***Inviting and inspiring worship***
- ***Engaged disciples in mission and outreach***
- ***Small group ministries, including strong children & youth ministries***
- ***Inspired disciples to make new disciples***
- ***Gifted, equipped and empowered lay leadership***
- ***Gifted, equipped and inspired clergy leadership who cast an exciting vision and call the congregation to achieve challenging goals***

The researchers assured us that congregations who were focused on these six areas with consistency and passion would begin to see their vitality grow as measured by worship attendance growth, new disciples, more people in small groups, more people engaged in mission and more giving to the congregation and its mission budget. It is not sufficient to focus on only some of the six areas of ministry. As mentioned, 36% of our congregations are highly vital, which is up from the 16% 10 years ago. These congregations focus on growing all six essential ministries.

The GNJ staff is ready to work with your congregation to accomplish these goals through coaching, peer learning groups, Team Vital, leadership seminar and lay leadership development. If you would like to grow your congregation's vitality, contact Diana Picurro, Executive Assistant for Connectional Ministries at DPicurro@gnjumc.org. 



THE RELAY

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TEAM VITAL
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Two Trentons: Turning Point UMC Embraces a City's History and Vitality

By Heather Mistretta
hmistretta@gnjumc.org

TRENTON, NJ

It was about 2 a.m. a little over a year ago when gunshots disrupted Trenton's annual 24-hour Art All Night at the Trenton Artworks. Amid a display of enormous talent, relationship-building and healthy conversation, 22 people were injured, and one person died in a shootout.

Now imagine how different that picture looks when you introduce hope, a shift outward and a strong group of creative and courageous people dedicated to working together to uncover the vibrancy and vitality of a city.

"Two Trentons — An American Discussion" is a depiction of this transformation taking place in a city that is steeped in a rich history and poised to change lives one



Pastor Hall speaks outside the Turning Point UMC in Trenton.

day at a time. The film, created by the producer/director team of Joe Hulihan and Brad Mays, chronicles the story of an American city in transition and the forces that are in control.

When the film's executive producer, Yaniko Palis walked into Turning Point United Methodist Church on South Broad Street one day to see if the local church, with a congregation of about 50-60, might consider hosting a viewing of his small film, he never expected the greeting he would receive.

Pastor Rupert Hall, who has been affiliated with the Turning Point UMC for the past 12 years, starting as a lay person and then as its pastor for the past three, said the

decision to say yes was an easy one. When asked about "his church," Hall promptly replied, "It's not my church. I'm just lucky enough to be its steward." He added, "We want the city to know we're here to contribute to its life."

On the warm evening in June, two members of the congregation helped usher guests from both sides of the Delaware River to their seats. Another member, Triniece Robinson-Martin, who also happens to be the church's creative arts director as well as a faculty member at Princeton University, sang Sam Cooke's "A Change is Gonna Come" and composer, John Negus played the saxophone.

"It was a serendipitous connection," said Hulihan, who recalled how the active participation from the church's congregation further enhanced the message that he and his fellow filmmakers were trying to convey.

The filming, which began in 2017 at Art All Night, took an unexpected turn on its last day of filming that summer night in 2018 when the violence ensued. It prompted the organizers to move away from the around-the-clock schedule, but it also provoked the filmmakers into taking a different look at the film's narrative and the impact that it could make on its audience.

"We never expected to be filming for as long as we did," said Hulihan who is also on the board of directors of the nonprofit, Mercer Street Friends. "But a lot of things just came together, and it was an opportunity to show this city in a raw, unbiased way." The last day of filming became the opening scene of the film.

"Two Trentons — An American Discussion" introduces us to many of the people who are shaping the future of this American city like Abdul who owns the Trenton Coffee House and Roland Pott, an entrepreneur and places like the Candlelight jazz club and Champs, which provide refuges and places of inspiration for people who live there. Ultimately, the film offers a hopeful view that a troubled city can reinvent itself.

Helping in a large part to shepherd in that reinvention has been the Turning Point UMC. One of the oldest churches in New Jersey, Turning Point was named in 2007 following the merger of the First United Methodist Episcopal Church, also known as "the Mother Church," and St. Paul's UMC.

"We're dedicated to being a relevant church with a heart for the city. It's all about establishing relationships, doing what Jesus did," said Hall, who is a former commercial banker and lawyer. He said his calling came in 2013 when he was asked to lead a church. He was the pastor at Groveville UMC in Trenton for three years before coming to Turning Point.

Now six years later, Pastor Hall is driving Turning Point UMC toward making a difference in its community by collaborating with local nonprofits through job fairs, seminars and food pantries. From delivering groceries twice a week through the nonprofit, A Better Way, and serving breakfast every Saturday to almost 200 people with the congregation of Urban Grace, to hosting holiday concerts, mayoral debates, health education events and a race relations seminar, Turning Point is now a strong force in its community.

"We don't have a lot of money, but we have assets," said Hall, citing location, space and parking as sustainable solutions to problems plaguing the city. Hall, who is the president-elect on the board of the affordable housing project known as Kingsbury Towers, estimated that approximately 200 people come through the church's doors every week. No one is ever turned away.

When asked how he and his church community deal with violence in their community, the Baltimore native said, "You have to be vigilant. We are rooted in the community. The arts are leading the way, and Turning Point is a part of that."

Since the viewing of "Two Trentons — An American Discussion," the old church with a century-old organ in the center of town has continued to make great strides. Most recently the church collaborated for six weeks this past summer with Freedom School in Trenton to offer a mentoring program for the city's youth.

"They come to us for hope," said Hall. "Our doors swing on open hinges."

For more information on the Turning Point UMC, please visit www.thepointtrenton.org. For more information on "Two Trentons," please visit www.twotrentons.websitemanual.com.

*Director, Co-producer and Editor Brad Mays is an award-winning independent film maker and stage director. His works include the feature films "The Watermelon" and "Road Rage." He is an outstanding documentary film producer/director with many credits including "The Audacity of Democracy", "Aiden's Butterflies" and "SING*ularity." Brad lives and works in southern New Jersey.*

United Methodist Stewardship Foundation of Greater New Jersey Hosts National Association of United Methodist Foundations Event

By Micháela Murray-Nolan

PARSIPPANY, NJ

In May the United Methodist Stewardship Foundation (UMSF), a vital mission partner of GNJ, hosted a three-day conference comprised of the staff and trustees of their counterparts of UMC foundations throughout the Northeastern Jurisdiction.

The UMSF serves the local churches of GNJ, providing investment accounts, planned giving and estate planning workshops, donor advised funds and stewardship resourcing and training.

Fifteen colleagues from Maine to West Virginia joined UMSF's Executive Director Rev. Jana Purkis-Brash, Director of Development Micháela Murray-Nolan and Administrative Assistant Cristel Ramirez in Parsippany to attend the annual business meeting, share creative new approaches and learn about trends in the investment world.



UNITED METHODIST
STEWARSHIP FOUNDATION
OF GREATER NEW JERSEY

The following day, after a rousing devotion by Purkis-Brash, representatives Dave Zellner and Karen Manczko of Wespath Institutional Investments gave a highly informative seminar on the current condition and future trends of the domestic and international investment markets. They covered the implications of China's growth, climate change and automated labor on the economy; and answered logistical questions about how pensions and local church accounts with Wespath may be impacted by fallout over the General Conference vote.

With several Drew University alumni among the conference participants, a campus visit had to be on the agenda. Following the Wespath presentation, everyone made the short trip to Madison for a tour of the United Methodist Archives and History Center, including the infamous relic of George Whitfield's thumb and John Wesley's death mask,

among a treasure trove of rare books, historic paintings and significant Methodist memorabilia.

The conference culminated with worship and a presentation by Rev. Dr. Virginia Samuel Cetuk titled "Uncertainty as a Spiritual Discipline," in which she explored the lessons of the book of Job. The group shared their personal journeys of faith during extended periods of anxiety and reflected on their roles as stable stewards of local churches' finances.

For more information about the services of the United Methodist Stewardship Foundation of GNJ, contact Jana Purkis-Brash at jpurkisbrash@gnjumc.org.



Show off your Miracles Everywhere sunglasses and use the hashtag #MiraclesEverywhere in your summer travel selfies! The Miracles Everywhere Campaign is asking for your photos to show how across GNJ and beyond, United Methodists are making Miracles Everywhere. A hit amongst annual conference fashionistas, these shades will keep you looking cool as summer heats up. Submit your photos, using the hashtag, across social media platforms before Labor Day. Bring your Miracles Everywhere sunglasses to potential photo shoot sites when you're on mission, vacation or at your local church. Miracles Everywhere will feature the photos in the fall, in three categories: most unique location, farthest distance from GNJ and best overall photo. Learn more about the campaign at www.gnjumc.org/miracleseverywhere.

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NEXT GENERATION
UNITED METHODISTS
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Music and Theater and Crafts, Oh My!

From theater and photography to music and arts and crafts, campers reveled in all there was to do this summer at Camp Inspire, the fine arts camp located at Pinelands Center at Mt. Misery. In between activities, the children enjoyed making new friends, partaking in archery and celebrating the gifts of God! They even squeezed in some time for hula hooping and a little goofing off!

The campers, ranging in age from 10 to 16, left feeling energized and empowered to bring these gifts and what they learned with them into their communities and inspire growth and a renewed inspiration.

Nestled in the middle of the historic National Pinelands Reserve, Pinelands Center is surrounded on most sides by cranberry bogs and preserved forestland, including miles of trails in Brendan T. Byrne State Park. Owned by the United Methodist Church for more than 70 years, the town of Mt. Misery was founded in the 1700s by the French Huguenots but more recently brings back childhood memories for the parents of some of our campers!

Next Generation Ministries is committed to providing opportunities for all kids to attend summer camp! You are invited to join their efforts by donating to the scholarship program. www.gnjnextgen.org/2019-summer-camping-programs/



Modern Day Pilgrimage

Continued from page 1

"It was hard to bear, but I was committed to getting through it until the end," said Webb, a Birmingham, AL, native who explained that the simulated lunch counter recreated things like kicking and yelling to allow participants to feel a fraction of what African Americans felt in the 1960s.

The next stop was Birmingham where the group visited Kelly Ingram Park and the 16th Street Baptist Church, a place that served as a central staging ground for many demonstrations in the 1960s and where high school stu-

**"IF YOU DON'T KNOW YOUR HISTORY,
YOU CAN EASILY REPEAT IT.
WE'RE HOPING TO BE VOICES FOR
THOSE WHO CAN'T SPEAK."**

—Kerwin Webb,
Youth Program Coordinator for
Next Generation Ministries

dents held hands to protect each other from attack dogs and fire hoses as ordered by former Commissioner of Public Safety Bull Connor.

The pilgrimage continued onto Jackson, MS. There they met with the chief of staff in the mayor's office and then visited the barn where the iconic 14-year-old Emmitt Till was lynched before traveling to the home of the civil rights activist Medgar Evers.

The killing of Till and the ensuing lies reflected how insidious the problem was, said Ehlers.

"It changed the trajectory of the Civil Rights Movement... It also showed how complicated the silence of evil can be."

The remainder of the trip included a stop at the Fannie Lou Hamers Memorial Garden in Ruleville and Cleveland where segregated high schools still existed until 2017 because of divisive practices administrators used, and then the Southern Poverty Law Center in Montgomery. Also in



Multiple hanging steel sculptures represent the victims of lynching. Photo: Kerwin Webb

the city where Dr. King finished his famous nonviolent walk from Selma that day, the group visited the lynching memorial designed by the Equal Justice Initiative that draws attention to the more than four thousand African Americans lynched from 1877 to 1950.

As the students tried to digest everything they saw and heard, the chaperones led a discussion every night so that they all could share their hearts and listen to the hearts of other students. They spoke about how each experience impacted them, sometimes shedding a tear. They also kept journals along the way to preserve their most personal thoughts.

Ehlers remarked how after every person they interviewed along their journey, how hopeful they were in spite of the adversity or abject racism they faced.

"Everyone saw hope in the conversations that ensued from the violence, racial slurs or discrimination."

Following the end of the journey, each student was encouraged to reflect on the experience and work on securing mini-grants to support their respective communities.

For more information on GNJ's Joshua Generation, please visit www.gnjnextgen.org/joshua-generation-a-civil-rights-pilgrimage-for-high-schoolers/.

\$250,000 Campaign in Hightstown

Continued from page 1

church's fundraising strategy with new knowledge and a renewed spirit.

"The light bulbs went off when we learned that we needed to invite them to be partners instead of just asking for money," said the lay leader who has been entrenched in her church's culture and committed to its growth since retiring from her 42-year career as a teacher in East Windsor.

DiCecco also applied for a \$500 grant. The money helped pay for the mailing of handwritten notes to potential donors.

With the help of Purkis-Brash, who returned in January to offer more advising, Hightstown UMC relaunched its capital campaign to significantly renovate the 121-year-old structure since being condemned in the late-1990s.

By April 7, the day of the church's celebration, nearly all of the \$250,000 goal had been raised.

"It was a wonderful celebration," said DiCecco who added that all the food was donated from local restaurants for the event.

With the raised funds in hand, construction at the church resumed on April 29. With the main level expected to be complete by September, the project also includes adding a new entry-way as well as an elevator.

"It was a simple, eye-opening experience that I will never forget," said DiCecco.



Church member crosses bridge to place her pledge in the balloon's basket. Photo: Judy DiCecco

In the midst of this fundraising to preserve its future, the Hightstown UMC continues to serve its community. From community hot meals served every Thursday from 4-5:30 p.m. in the finished basement as part of a partnership with Rise Community Services and the Trenton Area Soup Kitchen (TASK) to a summer basketball program and the Waves of Grace Women's Retreat this past April, the Hightstown UMC is making a difference in a transformative way.

For more information, please visit www.hightstownmethodist.org, where you might also check out the church's unique and interesting history that dates all the way back to a tavern in 1786.

Find out more and register:
Laity Leadership Academy
September 28, 2019
Mission and Resource Center
www.gnjumc.org/events/2019-laity-leadership-academy

The Way Forward

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Their work includes the following steps:

- Create a statement and framework for pilots/models of new expressions of Methodism
- Outline a communication plan and timeline so that we have feedback from the pilot programs before General Conference 2020
- Schedule and carry out listening sessions and create an assessment tool
- Identify ministries and programs that we currently share to help guide discussions on new and renewed connections
- Launch 75 congregations into one of three pilot programs:
- Congregations that hold a scriptural view that same gender weddings should not be performed in our churches and that LGBTQI+ persons should not be ordained.
- Congregations that hold different scriptural views and can be together recognizing there will be different practices and understanding of the LGBTQI+ community's participation in the church.
- Congregations that hold a scriptural view that Jesus invites everyone to participate fully in the life of the church and that all churches should allow same gender weddings and that all churches should be open to the appointment of an LGBTQI+ clergy person.

The team will continue to keep the conference informed of their work. They meet again in September and will report on the proposed launch of the pilots at the Special Session of the Annual Conference scheduled for October 26.

To participate in the listening sessions or survey, please go to the Way Forward pages of the GNJ website, www.gnjumc.org or look for announcements and links in the GNJ Digest.

Vincentown Inspires Children to Grow in Faith One Project at a Time

By Heather Mistretta
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VINCENTOWN, NJ

Reverend David Ledford, III, pastor at Vincentown United Methodist Church, invites free expression in everything he does. "Christian learning that's fun equals a life transforming," he said in a recent interview.

Ledford and his church tucked in an historic, agrarian village within the Burlington County township of Southampton is committed to fostering a Christian education that is inclusive and makes learning both challenging and fun. Their original sanctuary built in 1853 still stands as does their strong sense of community and investment in learning.

Born out of a confirmation class started in December 2018, a new junior youth group for ages seven through 13 began in July 2019.

"Our students didn't want to lose the connection they built. We like to think of it as a VBS [Vacation Bible School] that never ends," said Ledford who has been the church's pastor for four years.

The New Jersey native originally from Bound Brook likes to instill connection. When the confirmation classes began last December, one of the first things the group did was build a covenant where no one was judged and where everyone felt comfortable expressing themselves.

From December 27 until June 9 the confirmation class met every Thursday night. Each class began with 30 minutes of worship in which the eight confirmation students (and many of their parents



Pastor Dave blesses the students in his confirmation class. Photo Courtesy: David Ledford, III

who wanted to stay and learn as well) were taught about what each ingredient of a worship service is all about.

"We discussed many worship topics; traditional worship, contemporary worship, special worship services for holidays and UMC Special Sundays and the Sacraments," said Ledford.

After each lesson the children had the opportunity to act it out themselves. The worship was followed by 30-minute lesson topics ranging from the Old and New Testaments to the church history, United Methodist history, United Methodist doctrine and polity and United Methodist theology and beliefs.

By the end of the confirmation class, the students were required to complete a ministry project that reflected their own talents as well as the needs of the church, the community and the world around them.

One student who was clearly paying attention was 11-year-old Kathrine, who has recently expressed an interest in becoming a pastor. Following the classes, Kathrine preached the Pentecost sermon on Confirmation Sunday.

helping to bolster the church's social media presence by creating and maintaining a new Instagram page; and Lawrence has created a new mailbox and is contributing to the new Junior Youth Group.

"I am so proud of these eight students who have found how God made them unique and special and then used those things to improve the ministries of this church."

"I am extremely proud of how diverse these projects are: missional, reaching out to the world while also caring for those who come here, connectional, artistic, compassionate, hopeful and bold. All of this when put together taught our young disciples of Christ that church membership is more than church attendance. It requires action, it is social



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FOR INFORMATION, CONTACT:
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PURSUING CLERGY EXCELLENCE
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"I AM SO PROUD OF THESE EIGHT STUDENTS WHO HAVE FOUND HOW GOD MADE THEM UNIQUE AND SPECIAL AND THEN USED THOSE THINGS TO IMPROVE THE MINISTRIES OF THIS CHURCH."

— Rev. David Ledford, III, pastor at Vincentown United Methodist Church

"She did an awesome job. Her bedroom is now her church office," said Ledford, who encourages flexibility and autonomy with the hopes of instilling confidence, courage and authority.

The other students also latched onto his passion to be good disciples as well. Jenny helps him lead sessions in Vacation Bible School; Hunter has used her artistic skills to create bookmarks for the pew Bibles; Ava is channeling her love of animals to start a food pantry for pets; Mark is collecting necessary personal items for the homeless; Emma is embracing the church's rich history by creating a "Pastor Wall" that will display the pictures of all of the pastors who have served this church; Angelica is

justice, and it is a commitment that should not be taken lightly."

Vincentown UMC also offers several bible studies programs, women's circles, a choir, men's group and a food pantry on the first Saturday of every month.

Ledford's passion for teaching inspired him to pursue and earn an associate degree in Teaching (Raritan Valley Community College, 2008), a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education (Kean University, 2010) and a Master of Divinity from Drew Theological School (2014). Prior to coming to Vincentown, he served churches in Berkeley Heights, Warren and Phillipsburg.

For more information, please visit www.vincentownumc.org.



September 28, 2019

LAITY LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

The Laity Leadership Academy is a premier event for laity to engage and deepen their ministry. Join us for a one day training that can change your ministry.

Bring a team, complete an action plan and apply for a grant to make an impact in your congregation and community.

Register now for one of four tracks:

- Innovation in Youth Ministry
- Storytelling through Small Groups
- Generosity: Moving from Scarcity to Celebration
- A Closer Walk: A Path to Spiritual Transformation

Registration:

Deadline to register is: Sept 7, 2019

Find out more by visiting:

www.gnjumc.org



UNITED METHODISTS
OF GREATER NEW JERSEY

GNJ Ushers in a New Group of Lay Servants

By Heather Mistretta
hmistretta@gnjumc.org

NEPTUNE, NJ

The sweet sounds of "For the Beauty of Earth" kicked off this year's Lay Servant Graduation on June 1 when nearly 200 lay servants from nine different districts graduated at the Mission and Resource Center in Neptune amid a friendly crowd of laity board members, lay servant directors and district leaders.

Delaware Bay District Director Creed Pogue led the call to worship, drawing attention to the power of one drop of water in creating a ripple effect throughout our congregations.

"When dropped in a pool, the ripples move out into infinity," said Pogue.

Following welcome addresses by GNJ Lay Leader Rosa Williams and GNJ Director of Lay Servant Ministries George Lagos and a scripture reading from the *Book of Acts* by Raritan Valley District Director Alice Bennett, Rev. Juel Nelson, who is Director of Leadership Development, shared a recent story of hope and compassion much like the one of Philip and an Ethiopian official in the Acts passage.

"AS A LAY SERVANT YOU ARE AGREEING TO BE LED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT. YOU ARE EQUIPPED TO SERVE THE CHURCH BUT ALSO TO BE THE CHURCH FOR THE PEOPLE WHO YOU COME ACROSS ON A DAILY BASIS."

—Rev. Juel Nelson, Director of Leadership Development

Nelson stressed the importance of caring, communicating and leading and how powerful a small gesture can be in redirecting someone's path. These three traits are leadership qualities that all lay servants are called to live out both

who you come across on a daily basis."

Now with the new message in hand, she urged the new graduates "to draw close to another with a caring heart, and with words and action welcome each other into the body of Christ."

Lay servant graduates proudly show their new certificates. Photo: Zachary Holder

in their church and their daily lives.

Addressing the new graduates, she said, "As a lay servant you are agreeing to be led by the Holy Spirit. You are equipped to serve the church but also to BE the church for the people

Williams went on to congratulate both the Basic Lay Servants and Certified Lay Services, recognizing their dedication in answering a call to serve the Church and complete the requirements of *The Book of Discipline*.

Addressing the graduates, Williams said, "A lay servant is a member of a local church who is ready and desirous to serve the Church; who is well informed on the Scriptures and on the doctrine, heritage, organization and life of The United Methodist Church; and who has received specific training to develop skills in witnessing to the Christian faith through spoken communication, church and community leadership, and caregiving ministries."

Following communion and a lively rendition of "God is on the Move," Palisades District Director Daniel Jimenez closed out the uplifting day with a benediction urging the audience to "go out in the world and love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and love others as you love yourself."



GNJ Lay Leader Rosa Williams shares with audience ways to be a transformative lay leader. Photo: Zachary Holder

Basic and Advanced Lay Servant classes for this fall begin in October. For details, please visit the Laity Leadership pages of GNJ's website: www.gnjumc.org.

Don't Panic: the Improv Squad Will Be at IGNITE

By Heather Mistretta
hmistretta@gnjumc.org

WILDWOOD, NJ

Entertaining the crowd of teenagers at IGNITE in October, will be the Panic Squad, a group born out of an idea one day in college over 20 years ago. The now-eight-person improvisation comedy troupe started at Trinity Western University in Langley in the Canadian province of British Columbia in the 1990s.

"Improv fits us. We've never performed the same scene more than once," said founding member Andrew Bright who like the others in his group encourages spontaneous participation from the audience.

Turns out the group's name was also an improvised decision. The eight original founders flipped through magazines, each randomly pointing to two words with the understanding that two words would be picked from the hat. Finding it hard to pick just two, the group's first name was Friday Night Panic Squad, but like the once-Silver Beatles, they too shortened their name, making it the Panic Squad.



Dann, Andrew and Elijah of the Panic Squad. Photo courtesy: Panic Squad

Panic Squad's first public gig was in the spring of 1996 when a local coffee shop agreed to pay them \$100 and then two dollars for each attendee. A whopping total of 12 people showed up. Ten of them were family members.

"That was a turning point for us," said Bright. "We made a decision that be-

commanded an audience of 35,000. Their backgrounds range from an actor and teacher to an author and pest control technician.

"It's all because we said yes that day," said Bright who lives in Linden, WA, and grew up acting out Bible stories for his siblings as he looked for ways to channel his sharp wit and high energy.

"I was a funny, wiggly kid," said Bright. "I never dreamed it would be my career. God has definitely guided me."

Going full time in 2001, the group added performers from well-known enterprises like The Second City, historically the first ongoing improvisational theater troupe continually based in Chicago, and The Groundlings in Los Angeles.

The Panic Squad has performed across the United States and Canada for hundreds of churches, businesses, national conferences and top Fortune 500 corporations. They have appeared on CBC, CTV, 100 Huntley Street, The Miracle Channel, JCTV, CBS and more.

But their core values are still intact. "Excellence and honoring God have always been our foundation, and that will never change."

For more information, please visit www.panicsquad.com.

cause God has given us this talent to use, that we would never let the size of the audience dictate the quality of the show."

Four months later the group packed the coffee house with more than 500 people.

Since then, the group who offers a "Show Me the Funny Guarantee," has

CONFERENCE HAPPENINGS



Photo courtesy Rev. Juel Nelson

Criss-Crossing Cultures Like Jesus Did

GNJ's third annual Cross-Racial & Cross-Cultural Workshop was held on July 20. The resourcing and learning experience is intended to provide pastors and laity with the awareness, barriers, challenges and blessings of cross-racial and cross-cultural appointments, as well as building new skill sets and learning to welcome and embrace new pastors. "We have to learn to embrace others from different cultures as Jesus did," said Rev. Dr. Grace Pak, the Director of Cross Racial/Cross Cultural Leadership at the General Commission on Religion and Race who led the program in GNJ.

Wall UMC's Cookies for Soldiers

Using social media, the Wall UMC in Spring Lake Heights worked with the small community to bake over 3,500 chocolate chip cookies, for the National Guard, Infantry 1-114 stationed overseas. The recipients are soldiers who are under direction of Captain Hyun-Bo Shim, who is Pastor Sunny Shim's husband. He is also the chaplain for this infantry division.

Move Your Congregation Forward with Team Vital

Customize a strategic plan that helps you grow more vitality in your church. Sign up your congregation to assess strengths, explore God's purpose and look at your context for ministry. Registration deadline is August 31. Learn more at www.gnjumc.org/team-vital.



UMAC Leaders Connect in Neptune

Greater New Jersey recently hosted the United Methodist Association of Communicators annual leadership meeting. Carolyn Conover, GNJ's Director of Communication was elected to the leadership board earlier this year and serves with other communicators from Michigan, Great Plains, Mississippi, West Virginia, Kentucky, East Ohio, South Carolina, Africa University, UMCOM and United Methodist Women.

REVITUP! Resources for Young Clergy

Join the GNJ Stewardship Team at a conference for clergy under 39 to learn financial planning for a lifetime in ministry. To learn more, visit www.wespath.org/events/revitup.

GNJ Receives Guard and Reserve Award

United Methodists of Greater New Jersey received an Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve award for its work with those serving in the military. GNJ has active duty, reservist and former military personnel working on GNJ staff and as pastors. "We are grateful for those who serve and protect our nation," said Bishop John Schol. "We are also grateful that the church can ensure smooth transitions for those going to serve and returning to ministry."



2019 Annual Conference Journal

The 2019 Annual Conference Journal will be available online to all this fall. All retired clergy are eligible to receive a free bound, printed copy, but they must order in advance. Hard copies of the Journal are also available for lay and clergy for \$20. The deadline to order a hard copy of the Journal is August 15. Order your Journal at www.gnjumc.org/2019-annual-conference.

Basic and Advanced Lay Servant Classes for this Fall

Registration for Fall Lay Servant Classes are now open. Classes are scheduled by district, but laity may enroll in a course schedule that best suits their needs. For more information, visit www.gnjumc.org/lay-servant-ministries.

Foundation Earns 2019 Bronze Seal

United Methodist Stewardship Foundation, affiliated with GNJ, earned a 2019 Bronze Seal! Now our community can see our commitment to transparency and easily contact us for more information. Check out our updated GuideStar #NonprofitProfile: www.guidestar.org/Profile/7082083



OBITUARIES

Rev. David C. Pierson, Retired Full Elder, died July 20, 2019. A memorial service was held Saturday, July 27, 2019, at 9:30 a.m. at UMC of Little Falls in Little Falls, NJ. Expressions of sympathy may be sent to Mrs. Johnnie M. Moore-Pierson at jmoorepierson@gmail.com.

Thomas A. Murphy Jr., spouse of Sandra Lee Murphy, Retired Full Elder, died July 18, 2019. A memorial service will be held on August 17, 2019 at 11:00 a.m. at Asbury UMC in Woodstown, NJ. Expressions of sympathy may be sent to Sandra Lee Murphy, 36 Independence Ct., Swedesboro, NJ 08085-3151.

Rev. Eugene W. Hamilton, Retired Full Elder, died July 10, 2019. Details for the memorial service will be announced at a later date. Expressions of sympathy may be sent to Leslie Ortenzi, 36 Hudson Avenue, Apt. 2, Edgewater, NJ 07020.



Abundant Choices For Seniors

United Methodist Communities brings compassionate care to New Jersey's seniors with our full suite of living and care options. This includes affordable senior housing; home care with HomeWorks; and assisted living, memory care, long-term care, rehabilitation, and hospice and palliative care in our full service communities. We offer independent living for active seniors in our continuing care retirement community.

Reach out to us for all of your senior living or care needs.

Call 732-922-9800 for additional information or visit our website, UMCommunities.org.



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The goals of the Miracles Everywhere Campaign are audacious, passionate, God-sized goals. Goals that speak to the gifts and graces of this conference. Goals inspired by the vast potential of our members' faith. Goals that will create disciples.

Goals that can transform the world.



Already, the campaign's miracles that YOU and your fellow members have created include:

100 scholarship recipients, 3 clergy appointed to campus ministry and the 150th camper registered this year

20 Hope Centers serving thousands of God's people around greater NJ

11 mission teams to Puerto Rico, with 2 more scheduled, who have helped rebuild the island

2 pastor schools in Tanzania

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Michaela Murray-Nolan | Director of Development
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For information about Miracles Everywhere:
www.gnjumc.org/miracleseverywhere



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