

# THE RELAY

UNITED METHODISTS  
OF GREATER NEW JERSEY

OCTOBER 2019  
Vol. LXIII/No. 10

gnjumc.org

## Superintendent Installations Inspire

By Carolyn Conover  
cconover@gnjumc.org

**T**he weekend of September 14-15 was one of celebration as Greater New Jersey installed three new district superintendents to lead in the central and northern regions.

“Breaking Down Walls” was the theme of Rev. Dr. Eunice Vega Perez’s installation as the Skylands District Superintendent, which was hosted by Trinity UMC in Hackettstown on Saturday. The service featured clergy and lay leaders from Skylands who shared their wisdom and vision for Vega Perez’s leadership. Her family celebrated this moment by participating in the service. Her daughter, Elisabet performed a liturgical dance; her daughter, Kiana sang and her daughter, Keila expressed her sentiments through video. At the end of the service, each worshiper was handed a piece of brick to represent the walls coming down.

Rev. Sang-Won Doh used Romans 11:2-6 to anchor his message and cast his vision for Raritan Valley at his installation as the superintendent on Sunday at Calvary Korean UMC in East Brunswick. He looked out into the congregation and called Raritan Valley leaders to be the



The painting, “God’s Vision,” done by Rev. Richard Romero at Rev. Burgos’ installation.

remnants chosen by grace. The service was hosted at the church where he served for nine years and was celebrated by the congregation and Bishop Young Jin Cho, who was appointed to the church earlier this year. Music was lifted in Korean and English by the Calvary Korean UMC Young Adult Praise Team, the Calvary Korean UMC Choir and the Calvary Yebit Women’s Choir.

As the installation service of Rev. Hector A. Burgos at Trinity UMC in Ewing began later on Sunday, the Rev. Richard Romero of Trinity UMC in Bordentown quietly set up an easel, canvas and drop cloth directly in front of the altar. While the service unfolded, Romero painted. In his sermon, Burgos set out a vision for the church, challenging leaders to listen to

*Continued on page 4*

## Coalitions Call for Ruling in NJ School Segregation Case

**T**he Coalition for Diverse and Inclusive Schools, which includes GNJ, the NAACP, the Latino Action Network and others, who are plaintiffs in a lawsuit against the state to drive out segregation in education formally asked the Superior Court of Mercer County in September to rule based on undisputed facts that the level of school segregation in the state’s schools violates the law.

The coalition of civil rights groups, led by Retired Supreme Court Justice Gary S. Stein who is president of the NJ Coalition for Diverse and Inclusive Schools, has argued that persistent segregation has violated the constitutional rights of hundreds of thousands of New Jersey students.

“A ruling in the Plaintiffs’ favor would eliminate the need for a trial on the issue of liability and would focus the balance of



Retired Supreme Court Justice Gary S. Stein is leading the cause.

the litigation on the issue of how to undo the high levels of racial segregation and fulfill the New Jersey Constitution’s requirements to maintain non-segregated schools,” said Stein.

They have added that the unbalanced access to a “thorough and efficient education” greatly limits opportunities for Black and Latino students, but the lack of diversity also harms other students because of the homogenous learning and social environments and the ensuing racial stereotyping, stigma, fear and other negative effects.

A Center on Diversity and Equality in Education study recently found almost 25 percent of New Jersey schools are “desperately segregated,” with student enrollment more than 90 percent white or more than 90 percent non-white.

The lawsuit stated that about 66 percent of New Jersey’s African American students and 62 percent of its Latino students attend schools that are more than 75 percent non-white.

While the total of black and Latino students is nearly equal to the white total statewide, most black and Latino students attend schools that are largely nonwhite, the suit says, and a growing number of students attend schools that are 99 percent nonwhite.

Unlike many other states, New Jersey explicitly bans racial segregation in its constitution. That provision is part of the basis of the suit.

For more information on this issue and GNJ’s participation in the lawsuit, visit [www.gnjumc.org/segregation-in-new-jersey-schools/](http://www.gnjumc.org/segregation-in-new-jersey-schools/).

## The GNJ Way Forward Team Report to Annual Conference

*In preparation for the Special Session of the Greater New Jersey Annual Conference Session called for October 26, The GNJ Way Forward Team reported the following to the conference.*

NEPTUNE, NJ

**T**he GNJ Way Forward Team and Connectional Table just completed two days of work on our way forward.

The team was created to identify how GNJ clergy and congregations could be in ministry with the LGBTQ-IA+ community, particularly in light of recent changes to *The Book of Discipline* that adopted key pieces of the Traditional Plan, which addresses ministry with gay and lesbian persons.

Our time together was productive, and you were instrumental in helping us to move forward. We thank everyone who took time to participate in the listening sessions, focus groups and online survey. We learned that most people in GNJ:

- want to remain united
- want people to be able to live their convictions
- want to continue our mission, ministry and services together
- have questions about why we would move into pilots or a different expression
- want support and an outside facilitator to assist with conversations about human sexuality within their congregation.

Our work together was difficult, even painful at times. As we reassessed, we dove deeper into specifics and experienced firsthand how language that personalizes does real harm. We are thankful for our spiritual director, Rev. Shawn Callender Hogan who centered us with the story of Hannah and Eli from 1 Samuel and the change that happens when we truly listen to each other.



We honor the trust you have placed in us and so based on your input we have changed some of our original direction.

Fundamentally, our principles and mission have not changed:

### GNJ Way Forward Principles

- Bless and love one another in the things that unite us.
- Grow spiritually as we connect with one another and with the people in our communities.

### GNJ Way Forward Team Goals

- To work with our congregations to identify objectives, opportunities, challenges and structures that support their efforts to thrive.
- To create new and renewed connections with one another through ministry and mission.

Our action steps forward, however, are being refined based on your input. We have significantly more work to do in the coming weeks before we are ready to share our next steps.

We understand that waiting for information may create mistrust, but we also understand that our work is so important that providing information that is inaccurate or not fully complete will create confusion and widen the gulf of mistrust. Our objective is to be thorough, thoughtful, responsive, inclusive and clear.

We will be preparing a pre-conference journal which will outline our work together, the framework for moving forward and our affirmation as a team. You will receive the pre-conference journal by October 16 for the special session of annual conference scheduled for October 26. A separate call letter will be sent with an agenda.

Thank you for your prayers, support and participation. We feel God’s presence in all that we do. 🇺🇸

## A MESSAGE FROM OUR BISHOP

## Looking Ahead... and Forward to Special Session and Beyond

Bishop John Schol



In a few weeks, the GNJ annual conference will gather to receive a report from our GNJ Way Forward Team. The team was empowered by a March annual conference to find a way for GNJ to move forward in ministry with the LGBTQ+ community.

This has been a profound experience for me. I watched GNJ leaders who have diverse ethnicities, theologies and experiences work together on a matter that divides many people. They respected and honored one another. They worked hard and deep. They remained spiritually-centered and Jesus-committed. The team also understood that they would not all agree but recognized that they would agree to actions because at this time and moment it was the best to help GNJ congregations thrive to make disciples of Jesus Christ and grow vital congregations to transform the world.

I invite you to prepare for the special session of annual conference by doing the following:

1. Pray for our pastors who are leading during challenging times. I am grateful for their leadership and commitment to serve during this time.
2. Pray for one another. We are one in Christ.
3. Embrace those you love and those you are called to love. Jesus said the most important thing you can do is to love God and to love your neighbor.
4. Recommit your life to Christ and your baptismal vows.
5. Accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves
6. Confess Jesus Christ as your Savior, put your whole trust in his grace and promise to serve him as your Lord, in union with the Church, which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations and races.

God will; God is seeing us through.

I have witnessed GNJ come together to help thousands to recover from Superstorm Sandy. I have seen you join to desegregate NJ schools and packed hundreds of thousands of meals to feed people around the world. You are one of the most diverse conferences in all of Methodism. You are called for this time to lead a way forward. In the midst of the storm, with God's help you stepped into the storm bringing hope and relief. You are the church in all that is best for the world. Thank you. I look forward to seeing you on October 26.

Keep the faith!  
Bishop John Schol



**THE RELAY**  
UNITED METHODISTS  
OF GREATER NEW JERSEY

**John R. Schol, Bishop**

United Methodists of Greater New Jersey  
205 Jumping Brook Road, Neptune, NJ 07753

**Heather Mistretta**, Editorial Manager  
732.359.1047 | hmistretta@gnjumc.org

**Carolyn Conover**, Director of Communications  
732.359.1016 | cconover@gnjumc.org

**Laura Canzonier**, Communications Administrative Assistant  
732.359.1063 | lcanzonier@gnjumc.org

**Brittney Reilly**, Online and Digital Communications Manager  
732.359.1040 | breilly@gnjumc.org

**Christopher G. Coleman**, The Relay Designer  
chris@cgcoleman.com

New Subscriptions, renewals, address changes, and corrections should be addressed to Beverly Karlovich, bkarlovich@gnjumc.org or by mail to: United Methodist Relay | 205 Jumping Brook Road, Neptune NJ 07753

**FOR ADVERTISING RATES, INFORMATION & PLACEMENT**  
Contact: communications@gnjumc.org

The United Methodist Relay (USPS 343-360) is published monthly by the United Methodists of Greater New Jersey. Office of Publication: Office of the Bishop, 205 Jumping Brook Road, Neptune NJ 07753. Periodical Postage Paid at Red Bank, 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 THE RELAY, 205 Jumping Brook Road, Neptune NJ 07753.

### Corrections (in the September issue of The Relay):

1. On page 1, the photo of the man cutting the ribbon is not Bill Applegate but is former Mayor of Lacey Township, Nicholas Juliano, who supported the project.
2. In the Lacey UMC story on page 4, it should have said "20-25 families per month," not per week.
3. On page 10, the pull quote should have been attributed to Rev. Heather Mandala of Hope Church in Voorhees, not Rev. Denise Tiedemann. We regret the errors.



**ROOTED**  
SPECIAL SESSION  
UNITED METHODISTS OF GREATER NEW JERSEY

## SPECIAL SESSION OF GREATER NEW JERSEY'S ANNUAL CONFERENCE

**SATURDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2019**  
9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

**Robert J. Collins Arena**  
Brookdale Community College  
Lincroft, NJ

**All are invited.**  
**Registration is required.**

Registration closes October 18.

[www.gnjumc.org](http://www.gnjumc.org)



**UNITED METHODISTS**  
OF GREATER NEW JERSEY

# 'TIS THE SEASON TO BE GIVING

Here are 8 ways you and your church can engage in mission this holiday season!



- **Create and distribute care packages** for those without a home. Contents can include snacks, socks, a scarf and beanie, baby wipes, travel size toiletries, lip balm. Even better, check with a local homeless shelter to see what items are most needed in your area.
- **Collect items** for a local food bank/pantry and have a group volunteer as well!
- **Write and send letters** thanking people who have made a positive impact in your life or community.
- **Learn what items families in the community make for the holidays.** Sponsor a local family by purchasing the food items and delivering to them.
- **Giving tree.** Give local children Christmas gifts. You can identify families you know that may want to participate or can contact a local organization to identify interested families.
- **Make Christmas cards** and deliver them to those who are homebound and persons in the hospital and nursing homes.
- **Schedule and begin planning** a short-term mission trip for next summer.
- **Support missions** financially by collecting a special offering for a local organization, advance specials, a United Methodist missionary through the advance or through the Miracles Everywhere Campaign.



FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT MISSION, CONTACT:

Ashley Wilson, *Director of Mission*  
awilson@gnjumc.org | 732.359.1043



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## Installations

Continued from page 1

God's call, trust in the message and dare to do what is needed. Burgos' daughter, Valeria charmed the celebration with a liturgical dance; his son, Fabian played drums in the praise band and his sister, Nilda read scripture. At the end of the service, the painting that Romero called "God's Vision" was gifted to Burgos.

The services each reflected the ministry of the superintendents and their commit-

ments to lead. Several GNJ leaders were able to attend all three and came away moved by the strength and courage of each of the messages.

"This weekend will sit with me for a long time. I am grateful for the leadership, wisdom and vision of our three newest district superintendents and what they bring to our existing awesome cabinet. I am excited where God is taking GNJ and how my leadership will be impacted," said Rev. Catherine Jordan-Latham, pastor of Simply Grace UMC. 🇺🇸



Rev. Dr. Eunice Vega Perez as the Skylands District Superintendent was hosted by Trinity UMC in Hackettstown, NJ.



Rev. Hector A. Burgos at Trinity UMC in Lawrenceville, NJ.



Rev. Sang-Won Doh at Calvary Korean UMC in East Brunswick, NJ.

## Spirituality, Friendship & Growth at This Year's Laity Event

By Heather Mistretta  
hmistretta@gnjumc.org

Every congregation in GNJ is rooted in the strength of laity leadership. Great ministry happens because leaders in our congregations partner with clergy to create churches with inspiring worship, dynamic small groups, enthusi-

astic evangelism, radical generosity and engaged community mission.

The Laity Leadership Academy, sponsored by the GNJ Board of Laity, is designed to equip congregational leaders to continue moving their ministry forward.

The Academy, held on September 28 at the Mission and Resource Center, inspired lay leaders to reach higher

and make their congregations stronger. From the new and fresh look on youth ministry to the power of storytelling and spiritual vitality, participants were resourced and equipped with tools to lead their congregations well.

New this year was "Innovation in Youth Ministry," led by Next Generation Ministries staff Kerwin Webb, Youth Program Coordinator and Davidson Sutherland, Youth and Campus Program Coordinator. The workshop was especially designed for youth volunteers and focused on new ways to engage young people.

hopes that God has planted in them with others."

Track 3, "Generosity: Moving from Scarcity to Celebration," was led by Rev. Jana Purkis-Brash, executive director, The United Methodist Stewardship Foundation of Greater New Jersey.

"We spent the day reframing our approach to stewardship in the local church. Participants left with a workable action plan to grow in generosity," said Purkis-Brash.

Betty Quackenboss, Rev. Erica Munoz and a team from Aldersgate UMC in East Brunswick led the last track called "A



### FALL INTO BREAKTHROUGH

Halloween is one of the most popular holidays in the United States; it is hard to escape its influence on our culture. Rather than avoid Halloween, during this season we remember that Christ is the light in the darkness, and God tells us: do not be afraid.

DOWNLOAD SERMON SERIES  
AND RESOURCES:

[www.gnjumc.org/ghost-stories](http://www.gnjumc.org/ghost-stories)

 **BREAKTHROUGH**  
A GNJ guide to best practices for worship

 **UNITED METHODISTS**  
OF GREATER NEW JERSEY



Bishop Schol encouraged laity to be rooted in Christ as each lead in their congregations.

Rev. Gina Yeske, GNJ's Director of Small Groups delved into "Storytelling through Small Groups," offering ways in which congregations can infuse vitality into their small groups through the power of language.

"Our day of storytelling was fun! We bonded as we shared stories about ourselves and our churches," said Yeske. "We 'geeked out' on new ways to digitally share and learned video storytelling basics. The world is in need of stories of hope and grace. This group has taken the first step in preparing to share their life, passions, dreams and

Closer Walk: A Path to Spiritual Transformation" where participants were encouraged to go deeper in their faith.

Using the small group model, the interactive workshop explored ways to infuse prayer, scripture exposure and faith-inspired stories into existing church activities.

Laity who attended the event were encouraged to complete an action plan and apply for grant money to complete their plan. Seed grants up to \$500 are available for congregations to begin a new ministry that demonstrates readiness to grow vital congregations and develop lay leadership. 🇺🇸

# Embracing the Importance of Caring in Newark: Making it a Mission to Care

By Heather Mistretta  
hmistretta@gnjumc.org

NEWARK, NJ

The United Methodist Women (UMW) chapter from St. Paul Centenary UMC in Newark has made it their mission to be good stewards, to care—care for others and themselves. The group went together to Mission u, an annual educational retreat co-sponsored by GNJ and the GNJ United Methodist Women and left with tools and plans to enrich their caring covenant.

Rev. Rolando Santiago Fuentes and his congregation embraced a workshop called “Embracing Wholeness: An Earth Perspective for Covenantal Living.”

“It was very profound because the topic of discussion was having a covenant with nature and respecting creation,” said Pastor Rolando who has been the pastor of the small Newark church since 2012.

The mission event allowed participants to learn how to live a life of stewardship with creation, on how to understand the importance and sacredness of keeping the Sabbath and a time for rest, among other themes.

The weekend included plenary sessions, singing, presentations and time of worship. Workshops included “Children’s Story: A Journey with Jesus,” “UMW in Mission: 150 Years and Beyond” and “Youth Study: Who Do You Say That I Am.”

“It strengthened our commitment to be in covenant with God’s creation and with our community,” said Pastor Rolando who came to New Jersey in 2000 “looking for the Puerto Rican dream.” Born in Hawaii and raised in Puerto Rico, he emphasized the importance of the Sabbath and taking care of ourselves.



Pastor Rolando and members of St. Paul Centenary UMC enjoy a day of learning in Lakewood.

“Each woman came out of the workshop with a plan on what to do during Sabbath time,” he added.

Perhaps it is the strength they build in themselves that in part allows them to do good for others. Through the church’s “Bread & Love” ministry, they give away bread every Saturday and serve a meal once a month in their community of Salem.

They are a mighty group. The congregation of about 50 who are predominantly Hispanic are also active on a global scale. They are working on one ministry in Honduras where the handful of congregants now meet under a tree to worship but are

working on partnering with a local Methodist church so that they will be able to worship inside.

Fuentes said the women’s ministry has designed a program that is similar to its local “Bread & Love” program whereby bread is sent to the developing nation along with backpacks, devotionals, books and Bible studies curriculum.

Similar to their mission work in Honduras, St. Paul is also sending donations of backpacks, school supplies and clothes to Santo Domingo, capital of the Dominican Republic.

By embracing stewardship of mind, body and spirit, Mission u empowered St. Paul to make a difference both in their backyard and over three thousand miles away.

For more information on Mission u, visit [www.gnjumc.org/mission-u-2019/](http://www.gnjumc.org/mission-u-2019/).



## 2020 Mission u

“Finding Peace”  
*Save the Date*  
**July 10-12**

A 3-day event with a 1-day Saturday opportunity at Georgian Court University, Lakewood



## TEAM VITAL

UNITED METHODISTS OF GREATER NEW JERSEY

Increase Your Impact with Vitality 2 this January!

Team Vital worked with you to develop a strategic ministry plan. Now’s your chance to be inspired again with Vitality 2!

Dig deeper into the areas of Stewardship, New Disciples and Community Assets mapping.

Team Vital is once again gearing up to help your congregation grow with new ideas and opportunities.

JOIN US IN JANUARY

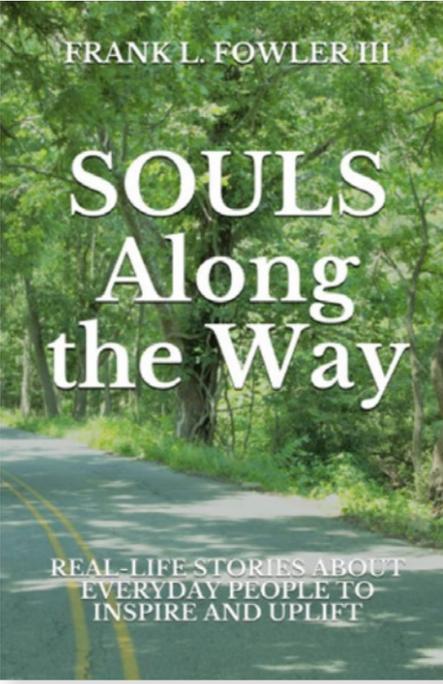
**Saturday, Jan. 25 | 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.**

Mission & Resource Center in Neptune  
Stay tuned! Registration will open soon!

NEW BOOK PUBLISHED

## SOULS Along the Way

*by Frank Fowler*



A compilation of true-life stories from everyday pastoral experience. These stories will inspire and uplift people of all ages.

Available on Amazon.com

Cost is \$12.99

TO FIND OUT MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:



Gina Yeske, Director of Small Groups  
gyeske@gnjumc.org | 732.359.1042



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[www.ignitenj.org](http://www.ignitenj.org)**



**NEXT GENERATION**  
UNITED METHODISTS  
OF GREATER NEW JERSEY

# Relief, Repair, Rebuild, Renew...Repeat

By Heather Mistretta  
hmistretta@gnjumc.org

A thousand miles away from the islands in the Caribbean that have been devastated by hurricanes, residents in New Jersey know all too well what it means to face adversity at the hands of Mother Nature. In October 2012 when Superstorm Sandy wreaked havoc on the Jersey Shore, many were caught unaware as floodwaters raged through their homes and churches and washed away their hopes for the future.

GNJ stepped in and created A Future with Hope (AFWH) to help people rebuild. And help, they did. In fact, as of the last quarter of 2018 the total number of homes rebuilt reached 273, and more than 12 thousand volunteers made this transformation happen. During the early days of the relief stage, GNJ was instrumental in providing more than 50,000 meals, day and night shelter for more than 5,000 people and the distribution of more than 11,000 cleaning buckets, more than 3,000 health kits, tons of clothing



Food distributed after Sandy devastated Jersey Shore.

and other material supplies such as non-perishable food, heaters, blankets, etc. The people of the United Methodist Church also rallied to clean out nearly 2,000 homes affected by the storm.

Sandy is not the only disaster affecting communities throughout New Jersey. Flooding, tornadoes, high winds and fires have led to an inordinate need for recovery efforts. With climate change dramatically affecting weather patterns and populations rising, the need is real.



**A FUTURE WITH HOPE**  
UNITED METHODISTS  
OF GREATER NEW JERSEY

So far this year, there have been nine “triggering events” in NJ—five weather, three man-made and one transportation related.

Recovery is complex and costly. Every dollar *and* minute counts.

Today, as the airwaves flash images of destruction from storms like Dorian and recent flooding in Houston, reminders of Sandy come to the surface. A Future With Hope who was founded on the four pillars of relief, repair, rebuild and renew, is looking to develop a cohesive structure that includes specific roles for district disaster response coordinators, county roads and United Methodist Volunteers in Mission (UMVIM).

“New Jersey has a strong disaster readiness structure, and we want to be sure that our membership is a functioning part of it,” said Hope Center Developer Tara Maffei. “We want to bring everyone around the

table to make sure we are all working toward the next time when our communities need help. We want them to be prepared by making sure we have someone to lead the way and work in partnership with our statewide advocates in every neighborhood.”

The goal of AFWH’s proposed Disaster Relief & Recovery Program is to promote disaster recovery within the GNJ region by establishing an effective

network linking state and county emergency management systems with local churches and Hope Centers.

Tom Lank, GNJ clergy person and Northeastern Jurisdiction Volunteer in Mission Coordinator, said, “Currently we have very limited capacity to train ERT’s (Emergency Response Teams) and UMVIM teams and no clear way to deploy teams. While A Future With Hope may be able to organize a response in the event of another disaster in GNJ, we are



Early Response Trainers assist homeowners in Highlands, NJ, after Sandy.

very limited in our ability to send teams out of conference to assist elsewhere.”

The proposed upgrade of its current system to a more cohesive one will build upon the ability to scale up for larger response and recovery. One of the keys is working within the county VOAD System. VOAD, which stands for Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster, is comprised of local groups, interfaith partners of all denominations, nonprofit organizations and local businesses that provide coordinated relief and recovery for designated events when activated by the state or county EOC.

During Sandy recovery, A Future With Hope was an active VOAD member in all affected counties. Since then, the people of Greater New Jersey are called to participate regularly as was the case when flooding hit Brick last year.

“More needs to be done. We need to be better prepared, and towns need to be more self-sufficient,” said Maffei, who is calling on churches in the GNJ conference to be proactive in forming a more structured plan of action. She added that training is available to train volunteers from local congregations to be disaster responders.

Helping to bridge that communication is Tom O’Hearn, who is the Disaster Response Coordinator for Greater New Jersey. In his role, he activates disaster responders by district and helps coordinate training, which happens throughout the year. O’Hearn was responsible for securing the UMCOR grant to help repair homes flooded in Brick in 2018.

“We also do a lot of other things for our churches other than disaster response ministry,” said O’Hearn, who added that this past spring when rain-induced flooding affected a few dozen families in Burlington County, a group was mobilized to step in and help.

Partnership opportunities to strengthen relief and recovery efforts include grants to cover the cost of emergency generators for shelter sites as well as security assessments and cameras for faith-based partners; conferences and trainings, including active shooter, continuity of operations and first responder; and preparedness exercises and messaging. Information about these opportunities are regularly announced in the GNJDigest.

For more information or to get involved, contact Tara Maffei at [tmaffei@gnjumc.org](mailto:tmaffei@gnjumc.org).

## GNJ Mitigates \$1.4 Million in Claims from Sensor Program

By Heather Mistretta  
hmistretta@gnjumc.org

Every year buildings across the Greater New Jersey Conference face the possibility of damage and disruption from water-related incidents like frozen pipes. Unexpected temperature dips during the winter months or faulty heating operations can leave some churches vulnerable to these unplanned burdens to their budgets.

But in recent years this problem has diminished significantly thanks to the introduction of Church Mutual’s CM Sensor 24/7 temperature and water alert system for our more than 400 churches.

The CM Sensor Program, which was first rolled out to our churches in 2017, provides free 24/7 protection against the threat of property damage by sending alerts directly to a mobile phone for elevated water levels, freezing conditions and other issues that may affect a church’s water system.

“GNJ has the highest success rate out of all the churches we serve,” said Tiffany Lupo, a senior account manager



at Sovereign Insurance Company, which is the broker agent for Church Mutual.

Lupo added since its start in 2017 that sensors have been installed in 415 of the 420 eligible churches in GNJ. Each sensor equates to a savings of about \$20-30 thousand when more costly repairs associated with flooding or other disasters are averted.

The Christ UMC in Jersey City knows all too well how the sensors have prevented that. Since being installed in June 2017, the sensors at the church have saved nearly \$30 thousand two different instances.

Reverend Cliff Still Chair of the Conference Board of Trustees said, “GNJ churches have proven to be good stewards by installing these sensors. The conference mitigated approximately \$1.4

million in property claims, which assists in helping manage property insurance premiums so more resources stay at the local level.”

Lupo echoed the sentiment. “It’s a great risk-management tool, and we’re happy that GNJ has been so proactive about this. We really value this partnership,” said Lupo. “They are our shining example that these sensors hold up.”

This service, which is provided to clients free of charge, is valued at \$200-300 per unit and \$30 per month for monitoring. However, Lupo added that they have no intention of ever passing this cost onto their clients.

Each organization is reviewed for the best type and number of sensors to be installed. The number is based on the potential freeze or pipe burst areas in

the building. Two or three sensors are normally installed.

Partnering with Hartford Steam Boiler (HSB), this state-of-the-art technology is not only saving thousands of dollars for churches throughout GNJ, it also giving them the piece of mind they need so they can concentrate on ministry and bringing more vitality into their churches.

Kevin Nugent, senior risk control consultant at Church Mutual, said, “This not only saves churches money, but sometimes catastrophes related to water damage can keep congregations out of their sanctuaries for a year. This helps prevent that.”

He added that the sensor saves in GNJ over the past two years have added up to \$457 thousand.

In 2017, Church Mutual Insurance Co. was recognized for its Sensor Technology program with the “Award in Innovation” by the National Association of Mutual Insurance Companies and by Celent with a “Model Insurer Award for Innovation and Emerging Technologies.”

For more information, see [www.churchmutual.com/sensors/assets/Sensor\\_Booklet.pdf](http://www.churchmutual.com/sensors/assets/Sensor_Booklet.pdf).

# Making the Marginalized Feel Like They Matter

By Heather Mistretta  
hmistretta@gnjumc.org

DOVER, NJ

**R**ev. Charles Perez, senior pastor at First United Methodist Church in Dover, stands for the marginalized. For the past three and a half years, the Newark native has been instrumental in bringing more awareness to homelessness by helping families in his community of Dover, a town whose Hispanic population has risen to about 70 percent in recent years. In turn, he has inspired others to do the same.

“On January 6, 2016, I found myself under a bridge with homeless people living in inhumane conditions. I remember praying for a miracle because it hurt for me to see so many individuals living under those circumstances in the town that I was appointed to be the pastor,” Perez, a first-generation American said.

“When I look at homeless people, I see my dad’s face,” said Perez, who recalled the stories of how his father, Benildo Perez faced homelessness after emigrating from Cuba when he was 22. “After having to eat from garbage cans and overcome alcohol issues, he transformed from atheist to Christian. It’s amazing how God works.”

Perez worked with other community members like Rev. Rod Perez-Vega from the nearby St. John’s Episcopal Church and other United Methodist churches like the Wharton United Community Church, Rockaway UMC, Teabo UMC, Grace UMC, Lower Berkshire Valley UMC, Hurdstown UMC and UMC of Lake Hopatcong, who he likes to call “small but mighty.”



Rev. Charles Perez assists with communion at Lake Hopatcong UMC.

“It takes 12 to change the world,” Perez said as he inferred that the size of the congregation at Lake Hopatcong was no coincidence. “I want to give a special thanks and honor to UMC of Lake Hopat-

cong for their unshakeable continuous participation.”

On September 1, a service was held at Lake Hopatcong UMC to celebrate the homeless ministry’s fourth year. A special offering was taken to help the homeless people, many of whom are immigrants.

As word spread of the program’s effectiveness, community members of Dover started to take notice and get involved. A business owner donated food from her restaurant; people from the Wind of the Spirit immigrant resource center in Morristown volunteered their time and

The group, which continues to grow, supports its local community by providing food, clothing, Communion services and whatever else they need to help them thrive.

“Most of all we offer them friendship and a place where people listen,” said Perez.

The group has also partnered with Morris County and St. John’s Episcopal Church to make sure that during the harsh cold weather on what are known as “Code Blue Nights,” the homeless people have a place to stay.

**“IT TRULY TAKES THE WHOLE COMMUNITY TO ALLOW SOCIAL HOLINESS TO OCCUR IN THE LIVES OF ALL PEOPLE AND ESPECIALLY THOSE ON THE MARGINS.”**

—Rev. Charles Perez, senior pastor at First United Methodist Church

resources; the Holy Hoops basketball ministry adopted the homeless ministry and Mayor James Dodd, Police Chief Anthony Smith, area clergy and many other people stepped in to see how they could help.

A fire in October 2018 displaced about 100 people in town. With the support of the former Skylands District Superintendent Steve Bechtold, the UMC churches responded by raising six thousand dollars to help the families impacted. This allowed the homeless ministry to place five families out of homelessness and into a future with hope for better days.

“Ten years ago, the conversation on homeless people and people on poverty was treated as taboo,” said Perez. Today, this homeless ministry has changed the conversation in how we can help as a community and as a connectional UMC.”

“It truly takes the whole community to allow social holiness to occur in the lives of all people and especially those on the margins,” said Perez.

Perez said he is planning to celebrate his birthday a little differently this year by hosting a community barbecue three days later on November 9 with the intention of not only celebrating the lives of all community members but also bringing more awareness to the issue of homelessness.

When asked if there was one person who stood out over the past three years, Perez without hesitation said, Eric Hidalgo. “If it wasn’t for him, we wouldn’t be here today. He was a homeless person living in Newark who helped other homeless people. He’s the catalyst for what we have done.”

For more information or to get involved, contact Rev. Perez at [charlesprz777@gmail.com](mailto:charlesprz777@gmail.com). #

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Help make a change this Christmas!  
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# GNJ Churches' Continuing Commitment to Immigrants and Refugees

By Joshua Kraft Gribbin

Last year, church leaders and community members gathered together outside the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Contract Detention Facility in Elizabeth, NJ, for a prayer vigil to protest and pray for those being held after trying to seek asylum in the United States. The rally was sponsored by the GNJ Board of Church and Society, the Immigration Task Force, Hispanic Committee, United Methodist Women and Black Methodists for Church Renewal and was attended by ecumenical partners, students at Drew University and community members.

Many GNJ congregations have long histories of mission and advocacy for immigrants and refugees.

In August of this year the topic surrounding immigration was a focus of the annual MARCHA Conference held this year in Philadelphia. GNJ clergy and laity have been strong supporters and leaders of MARCHA which is the Hispanic/Latino national caucus within the United Methodist Church. Rev. Lysette Perez, who serves Oasis in Pleasantville serves as the chairperson and Capital Superintendent Hector A. Burgos serves as the communications chair. In Philadelphia conference attendees clad themselves in aluminum blankets reminiscent of those seen worn recently by immigrants at U.S. immigration detention centers and called recent actions inhuman, immoral, unfair, insensitive and racist.

Many GNJ congregations echo this call to action in their ministry.

Rev. Emad Gerges of Wesley UMC in Bayonne, (also known as the Rivers of Life Church) faithfully serves Arabic-speaking immigrant persons through deeply personal relationship building and programing.

They operate the largest online Arabic Christian bookstore in the United States and Canada. Additionally, Gerges hosts a daily video devotion, spoken in Arabic, out of a production space in the church. The daily devotion is viewed online by an average of 500 people each day.

Gerges shared that 70% of the people he serves in Bayonne are Egyptian and the other 20% are from other countries located in the Middle East.



Rev. Gerges of Wesley UMC in Bayonne offers Arabic-speaking immigrants hope.

Members of Wesley UMC go to the airport and leave information for people coming to United States. "Now people reach out to us. We are often the first place people come to when they get to America," said Gerges.

Church members also connect with people in their communities through worship services held in the park. "People have come to know that we will care for you. We will listen to you. Any immigrant no matter color, gender, religion, status in U.S. We listen to you and try to get you help."

Gerges shared that most of the people he serves work in service jobs. "They work at gas stations, drive-thru restaurants and other places where no one can see them. They get jobs through our networking here at our church."

"A pastor is often the only help and person they can trust. I have come to know this, and I am humbled to be that person in their life."

"We have the hope to make our church a center for all immigrants. A place to learn English, get drivers licenses and a Social Security card, job training and how to get a home."

Also championing driving licenses for immigrants is Rev. Sammy Arroyo First UMC of Hightstown.

"Drivers licenses are crucial for people. If people get or have a job they need to drive themselves. People need to take

home. They hear about the U.S. from American missionaries and decide to come to the country. Or sometimes because there is better education for their children here. Everyone comes here seeking something specific."

In addition Arroyo has humbly led First United Methodist Church of Hightstown to partner with ARISE to host ESL classes at the church. The coordinators and teachers are college-level professors with ESL training. Eighty people attended the ESL course last year.

"What drives me is 1 John 4: love for my neighbor. God is becoming visible in lives of all of us through this work."

Lunch time in Palisades Park has become a sacred time. Pastor Michelle Ryoo and members of First UMC in Ridgefield Park have opened a second church location with the aim to care for undocumented persons and those struggling to find work.

Tuesday lunchtime services involve free lunch, a worship service and resources to help people network for employment and housing.

"We are learning every day," shared Ryoo. "We are all coming from different places. We must keep asking: What are the needs of people? How can we help? How can we do our best to love all people?"

"Every day is a challenge. It is challenging to connect with people because they do not know if they can trust us. They choose to sleep outside of the legal system because they are afraid of being betrayed," said Ryoo.

"Once they get a job and have money, they live in an apartment room with 15 other people. It is incredibly humbling to hear their stories."

An increasing trend in stories shared are of people crossing the border with debt they are expected to pay to the groups that helped them. If they cannot pay, it has been shared that their families are at risk.

"I ask God every day, 'What should I do? I need your wisdom.' We have blanket drives, clothes drives and keep asking those we serve how can we do better."

"We contact people using WhatsApp, going up to people waiting for work along the street and showing that we are a safe space," said Ryoo who added that they have partnered with other churches and pastors to help provide lunches, worship services, networking assistance and job training opportunities.

Morristown UMC is also working on building trust and safe space with immigrant communities. They have organized small groups centered on the needs and experiences of immigrant people.

"In the small groups people are educated on their state and federal rights," said Brian Lozano who serves as a wor-

ship leader and small group facilitator. "Our small group discussions lead to lobbying and actively advocating for policy changes to ensure fair, welcoming, and safe communities."

"Validating people's experience by listening to people in the safety of small group space is essential. We respect people through interactive style small groups, no lecture because people know their experiences with ICE and they need to share their stories with people who are willing to listen and support them."

"We organize our small groups and workshops with the approach of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. People need basic level needs first: food, water, safety. When there are resources that meet the basic needs, it becomes the quickest way to provide trust. It's difficult but it's possible."

"We serve people who are in constant fear. People are afraid to go to health clinics because they do not know if they will be turned in to ICE when they ask for help. People are being threatened at every level of our legal system," said Brian.

Congregations seeking resources for ministry with immigrants and refugees can visit the websites for the General Board of Church and Society, United Methodist Women or General Board of Global Ministries. Information is also available at First Friends of New York and New Jersey, which is a GNJ Advanced Special and Hope Center.

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Pastor Charles Perez echoed Brian's words, "We advertise by establishing real connections with people over the years. Everyone is suspect to immigrants. It's a cynical mindset, but it keeps people safe because you don't know who to trust. Church become the safe places, especially when they link up and support each other's outreach and programing."

"We serve people who operate in constant fear. People are afraid to go to health clinics because they do not know if they will be turned into ICE when they ask for help. People are being threatened at every level of our legal system," said Brian.

"Therefore, we have to build relationships and a reputation of having a genuine heart, lots of patience, showing that the church is in it for the long haul," shared Pastor Charles, "People will come to believe you care for them by your actions."

For more information, visit [morristownumc.org](http://morristownumc.org). Do you have your own story? Please share with us so that we can share with others. 🇺🇸



Networking for employment and housing at the First UMC in Ridgefield Park.

"I can relate to people who I serve because I came to America too," Gerges said. "I understand the pain because I know the pain myself. I came here having very little. I had no family here, no friends, no money. I kept asking myself how can I stay here with no protection? I know this about myself and the people who come to me."

their kids to school events and doctors," said Arroyo.

"The population I am working with are central American immigrants and the homeless. People come to the U.S. for many reasons. The hospitals are better here to treat their children. They may be working here to supporting families back

# Cultivating Faith for the Next Generation

**C**ultivating connections and relationships is fundamental to the United Methodist Church so it's appropriate that Next Generation Ministries chose the name Cultivate for the internship program it created in 2019.

This summer, high school students from 11 churches participated in an eight-week program that exposed them to a different side of ministry.



**NEXT GENERATION**  
UNITED METHODISTS  
OF GREATER NEW JERSEY

"It has been a tremendous blessing to the church," said Avalon UMC's Rev. David Montanye who looks forward to participating in future years as well.

It was a mutual learning experience as clergy members shared with the students on what it means to be a pastor. The exchange allowed students to glean valuable advice from clergy and allowed clergy members to reflect on their own missions and see potential growth in their roles.

In between the sessions, there were two check-ins via Zoom to provide the students and clergy members with the cohesion they needed to grow a little more each time.

Rev. James Lee from Wesley United Methodist Church in South Plainfield said, "Seeing young folks in the pulpit and at the lectern has been a blessing to the church. Having to explain why I do what I do was helpful for me as a leader because I had to really examine why I was doing what I was doing. The Cultivate Internship was a big win and should keep going."



**Braedon Dobrynio ended his Cultivate internship from Next Gen Ministries with a powerful sermon at Wesley UMC in South Plainfield.**

Students planned and led worship, organized and taught Vacation Bible School, hosted community events, visited members and even preached sermons.

Cultivate HS Intern, Emma Voorhees from the UMC in Madison said that she

She added, "We should encourage all students to do some type of speech or speaking presentation at the end."

Another intern who grabbed hold of the lessons learned from Cultivate and shared them with the congregation

**"SEEING YOUNG FOLKS IN THE PULPIT AND AT THE LECTERN HAS BEEN A BLESSING TO THE CHURCH."**

—Rev. James Lee, Wesley UMC in South Plainfield

saw engaging with the people who run the church as intergenerational ministry. She added, "People can grow from the internships. I would encourage as many students to take part in the internship as possible."

at Wesley UMC is high school senior Braedon Dobrynio. On August 18 he preached a powerful sermon on ageism, adultcentrism and the Christian duty to lift up the next generation of leaders in our churches.

All the interns left feeling excited about achieving their new-found goals — from planning events for Back to School and coordinating fundraisers and mission events to visiting homebound members of their churches and leading worship. Learning the "why" in what pastors do has helped them understand and motivated them to move forward.

But the learning did not stop when the students left the classroom on the last day of the internship. Students who have goals that extend beyond the expiration of the internship have agreed to continue to work on the projects to see them through to completion.

The supervisors also said that having interns demonstrated the value of having youth representation in their worship services on Sunday and also in the planning process.

"The supervisors want a way to keep connected after the internship was done," said Youth Program Coordinator Kerwin Webb who facilitated the program.

He added, "I intend to facilitate monthly zoom meetings with the interns as they begin their school year so that they can continue to build on their foundation of friendship and support. I also intend to build in more collaborative time for the interns and supervisors in the coming year."

Webb said that the Cultivate program was a wonderful way to impart in these students the importance of planning, organization, collaboration, communication and the execution required to successfully operate church ministries. A college version of Cultivate was started this fall and plans are already underway to renew the high school program for next year. 🇺🇸



## INTRODUCING DONOR ADVISED FUNDS

A donor advised fund, or DAF, is a charitable giving tool that allows you to reap immediate tax benefits, while creating a lifetime method for supporting your favorite churches, UMC missions and public charities. The Stewardship Foundation of Greater New Jersey is now accepting applications to open DAFs from individuals and families who want to simplify their generosity.

- Establish a DAF with cash, stock, or appreciated assets of \$7,500 or more
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Find out more | [www.gnjumc.org/umsf](http://www.gnjumc.org/umsf)



**Jana Purkis-Brash**  
Director of the United Methodist Stewardship Foundation of Greater New Jersey  
[jpurkisbrash@gnjumc.org](mailto:jpurkisbrash@gnjumc.org)  
or call 732.359.1057



**Michaela Murray-Nolan**  
Director of Development, the United Methodist Stewardship Foundation of Greater New Jersey  
[mmurraynolan@gnjumc.org](mailto:mmurraynolan@gnjumc.org)  
or call 732.359.1045

## St. John UMC in Fordville Among Recipients of 2020 Council of Bishops Grants

### COUNCIL OF BISHOPS

In September, three groups, including one church in GNJ received grants from the Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church to strengthen ecumenical and interreligious ministries in the denomination.

St. John United Methodist Church Fordville and Trinity African Methodist Episcopal Church in Bridgeton received one of the grants for \$1,000. The two neighboring churches that serve the Bridgeton area split from each other 175 years ago. St. John has a Native American congregation, and Trinity has an African American congregation. According to Cynthia Wilkes-Mosley from St. John's, the two churches have several ministry projects planned to help pull the congregations back together.

"The two churches are coming together through shared food drives, youth groups and educational programs, and they have added another neighborhood church to make their efforts even stronger and more sustainable," said GNJ Bishop John Schol. "This grant will greatly help them further these efforts and allow them to make a significant impact on the youth in their community."

The other projects that received Council of Bishops grants are Columbia Wesley Foundation Methodist Student Network in South Carolina who is working with the Hillel Foundation and the

Muslim Student Association and the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, which is working together with the National Association of Schools and Colleges of The United Methodist Church (NASUMC) to bring together university presidents in order to teach the value of interfaith leadership formation on their campuses.

**"THE TWO CHURCHES ARE COMING TOGETHER THROUGH SHARED FOOD DRIVES, YOUTH GROUPS AND EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS, AND THEY HAVE ADDED ANOTHER NEIGHBORHOOD CHURCH TO MAKE THEIR EFFORTS EVEN STRONGER AND MORE SUSTAINABLE."**

— Bishop John Schol

Earlier in 2019, another GNJ United Methodist, Rachel Callender, received the Bossey Scholarship from the Council of Bishops' Ecumenical Grant and Scholarship Program.

For more information about the Council of Bishops ecumenical grants and scholarships, go to their website: [www.unitedmethodistbishops.org/ecumenical-grants-scholarships](http://www.unitedmethodistbishops.org/ecumenical-grants-scholarships). 🇺🇸

## CONFERENCE HAPPENINGS

### Open Enrollment for Health and Dental Starts this Month

The Health and Dental Plans of Greater New Jersey will offer open enrollment for their Active and Retiree Health Plans and Dental Plans from Oct. 30-Nov. 14.

A Notice of Open Enrollment is being mailed to all churches. This is a legal notice, and Federal Law requires that the opportunity to enroll be offered to every eligible employee, including church-controlled nursery school employees.

For eligible lay employees working 30 hours or more and clergy serving a full-time appointment (HealthFlex Plan), this is the time to enroll or waive coverage for yourself; add or remove an eligible child or spouse; or waive coverage for eligible dependents from your HealthFlex plan for coverage beginning January 1, 2020.

To be eligible for dental coverage (Guardian), participants must work at least 20 hours/week.

Please note that they do not offer FSA through HealthFlex, and FSA plans are available only through the local employer (church or agency) if offered — not all employers (churches) offer an FSA plan. For more information, contact Veronika Varga at [vvarga@gnjumc.org](mailto:vvarga@gnjumc.org) or Alexa Taylor at [ataylor@gnjumc.org](mailto:ataylor@gnjumc.org).

### Calling All Clergy to Get Inspired

All active clergy are invited to Myrtle Beach, SC, from November 11-13 to learn about the many benefit issues that affect clergy life and ministry. Once there at the Hilton Myrtle Beach Resort, clergy will have the opportunity to also earn continuing education units for attending.

The GNJ Board of Pension will reimburse the registration fee for clergy. Early-bird registration fee: \$149 by Oct 11.

For more information, visit [www.wespath.org/events/cba-2019-myrtle-beach/](http://www.wespath.org/events/cba-2019-myrtle-beach/).

### Helping Young Clergy Grow Financially — RevitUp!

Because the GNJ Board of Pension and Health Benefits believes in this program and wants to help young clergy grow, they will be covering the \$169 registration fee for RevitUp!, an energizing educational event in Baltimore, MD, October 28-30 for clergy under 40 to strengthen personal financial leadership skills for a productive and healthy lifetime in ministry.

In addition to this benefit, the UMC Clergy Financial Well-Being Initiative offers a limited number of scholarships for first-time attendees.

Keynote speaker will be Karen McCracken, a Christian inspirational speaker, comedienne and published author who has over 20 years of experience speaking and preaching at conferences, retreats and training events throughout the United States.

As an added treat, the conference will feature Chuck Bell, an avid musician since the age of five when he began studying piano.

Once you've registered for the conference, email Michaela Murray-Nolan at [mmurraynolan@gnjumc.org](mailto:mmurraynolan@gnjumc.org) to RSVP for the GNJ Stewardship dinner on Tuesday, October 29.

For more information about all this as well as the free childcare available, visit [www.wespath.org/events/revitup/](http://www.wespath.org/events/revitup/).

### GNJ is Hiring!

GNJ is looking to make the team even stronger.

Next Gen and the Stewardship Foundation are looking for administrative support to ensure their projects are completed with excellence. All people with experience in project management and event support who have superior Microsoft Office skills and are committed to excellence are encouraged to apply. See the full job description and apply [www.gnjumc.org/job-opportunities](http://www.gnjumc.org/job-opportunities).

The communications team is looking for freelance photography at events and AV support at the MRC. For more information and to apply, please contact David Beverly at [dbeverly@gnjumc.org](mailto:dbeverly@gnjumc.org).

Additional information can be found on our website at [gnjumc.org](http://gnjumc.org).

# SAVE *the* DATE

**TEAM VITAL CELEBRATION**  
*for all who have participated since its inception*

**MARCH 21, 2020 AT MRC**  
**10 A.M. – 12:30 P.M.**



## BISHOP'S CLERGY CONVOCATION

**SAVE THE DATE**  
**JANUARY 13-15, 2020**

Ocean Place Resort & Spa  
Long Branch, NJ

More information coming soon  
in the GNJ Digest this fall.



### United Methodist Women Fall Meeting is Oct. 19

GNJ's United Methodist Women will feature A Future With Hope's Andrea Wren-Hardin on October 19 as part of its fall meeting at the Mission Resource Center.

The meeting, "Making Mission Happen in Your District," will include workshops like "How-to and Create-a-Toolkit: Interrupting the School-to-Prison Pipeline, Restorative Justice, Hope Centers, Housing: A Basic Need and Maternal & Child Health.

Canned goods and non-perishables will be collected. Reservations will be accepted until Oct. 13. For more information, visit [www.gnjumc.org/events/united-methodist-women-annual-meeting/](http://www.gnjumc.org/events/united-methodist-women-annual-meeting/).



### Look for a CROP Walk Near You in October

CROP Hunger Walks have been raising millions of dollars to help end hunger and poverty for 50 years. Many of our churches, including Whiting, Belvedere and Vincent UMCs, participate in walks scheduled in Greater New Jersey on October 20.

If your church is participating, please send us your information and photos. For more information on CROP, visit its website at [www.crophungerwalk.org](http://www.crophungerwalk.org).

## OBITUARIES

**Rev. Dr. Eldrich Campbell**, Retired Elder, died September 5. A memorial service was held September 15 at Centenary UMC, Weatherly, PA 18255. Memorial donations (in lieu of flowers) may be sent to: UMCOR. Expressions of sympathy may be sent to: Glenn Campbell (son) at 1761 Buck Mountain Rd., Weatherly, PA 18255.

**Lester W. Guilfoyle Jr.**, Retired Local Pastor, died September 22. A visitation and memorial service was held September 30 at the UMC of the Rockaways. Memorial donations (in lieu of flowers) may be sent to: UMC of the Rockaways, 1 Hoagland Ave., Rockaway, NJ 07866. Expressions of sympathy may be sent to: Whitham-Kanapaux Funeral Home, 20 Keller Ave., Rockaway, NJ 07866.

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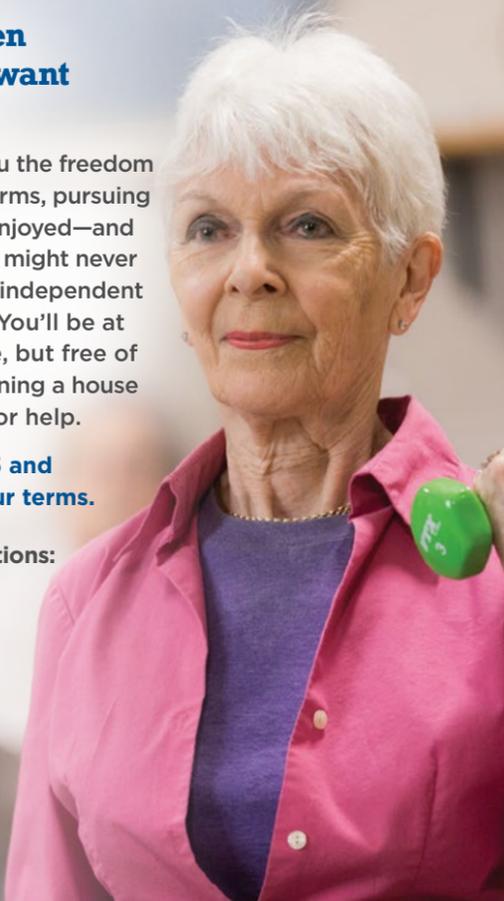
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# Miracles Everywhere

## Be part of reaching our 2019 Miracles Everywhere Goal!

**Has your church committed to joining the campaign?  
Have you submitted your pledge tally to be counted?**

*So far:*

34 churches have completed congregational campaigns

159 churches have made offerings

60 congregations have committed to running the campaign this fall



**We are close! Call to join, commit, or report your pledges TODAY.**



**Michaela Murray-Nolan | Director of Development**

O: 732.359.1045 | E: [mmurraynolan@gnjumc.org](mailto:mmurraynolan@gnjumc.org)

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