

NOVEMBER 2019
Vol. LXIII/No. 10

THE RELAY

UNITED METHODISTS
OF GREATER NEW JERSEY

gnjumc.org

GNJ Creates A Path Forward for Ministry with LGBTQ+ People

By Carolyn Conover
cconover@gnjumc.org

LINCROFT, NJ

In an overwhelming vote of affirmation, Greater New Jersey Annual Conference passed a resolution that provides a way forward for congregations who are called to be fully inclusive of the LGBTQ+ community.

The recommendations (see inset) outlined in the plan call on GNJ leadership to support a covenanting process within congregations so that congregations can gain clarity about their ministry with each other and how they will serve within their congregations, communities and the conference.

The Special Session, held Saturday, October 26, was called specifically to receive a report from the GNJ Way Forward Team



Members of the GNJ Way Forward Team address questions posed at Special Session.

From left, Bob Dietz, Chair of CF&A, Rev. Sarah Borgstrom Lee, Diana Stone, Rev. Sang Won Doh, convener of the Way Forward Team, Rev. Kay Dubuisson, Chair of the Connectional Table and Rosa William, GNJ Lay Leader. Photo by Corbin Payne

and consider their recommendations. The Team, which consisted of 36 people representing the diversity of Greater New Jersey, was created to identify how GNJ clergy and congregations could be in ministry with the LGBTQ+ community, particularly in light of recent changes to the *Book of Discipline* that adopted key pieces of the Traditional Plan that addresses ministry with the LGBTQ+ community.

In his episcopal address to the conference, Bishop John Schol took his own step in support of ministry with LGBTQ+ persons by stating that he will not participate in the ongoing harm and division of the church and will not exclude faithful and fruitful United Methodists from serving God.

"Today, as a bishop who humbly claims his first calling as a pastor, I share with you that I will not forward complaints for trial against gays and lesbians who serve the church or those who bless gays and lesbians in marriage," said Bishop Schol.

Bishop Schol's address received a standing ovation, and UMNews reported that the resolution to go forward with the

Continued on page 4



Teens enjoy inspirational music and friendship at IGNITE. Photo by Corbin Payne

The Tapestry of Stories at IGNITE

By Heather Mistretta
hmistretta@gnjumc.org

WILDWOOD, NJ

More than 1,300 young people and their youth leaders gathered in the Wildwoods Convention Center last month to "move mountains" and pack diapers as part of Next Generation Ministries' 2019 IGNITE Conference, an annual event designed to help teens connect with God in a fun and inspiring way.

But amid all the hoopla of music, chatter, dancing, jenga blocks falling, air hockey pucks crashing and colorful woven hearts of inclusion being handed out were stories—stories that had been woven together before that weekend in Wildwood, stories that didn't stop unraveling because of IGNITE and stories that strengthened the connection to others and to God.

At IGNITE, all the workshops, concerts and small groups are rewarding and fulfilling for youth in attendance, but the stories the teens experience and share give all that happens those three days life and makes it all matter.

Some kids were reticent; others were boisterous, and most were somewhere in between. Some were crying. Others were laughing, and some clung to their adult leaders while others ventured out to explore all that IGNITE had to offer them. Most were United Methodist, but for the first time, others were not.

Annabella, Amber and John, friends from Freehold UMC, first said their most favorite part of IGNITE was the music then quickly changed their answer to "all of it." Annabella said she played the piano when she wasn't going to school and attending IGNITE.

Rev. Shelley Smith, a pastor at Ferry Avenue UMC in Camden, beamed with pride as she looked out at the mass of people gathered in the auditorium to bundle diapers for families in Trenton. IGNITE's mission project sponsored by The Maker's Place in Trenton wound up collecting nearly 24,000 diapers that day.

"They wait for this event every year. It's a time of reflection, new meaning," she said, referring to the group of students from her church she regularly escorts to Wildwood.

Three girls from New Mount Calvary Baptist Church in Mays Landing whose

Continued on page 7

Community Looks Rosier and More Sustainable with 21st Hope Center

By Heather Mistretta
hmistretta@gnjumc.org

FAIRFIELD, NJ

What if there were a place where education thrived, all were welcome to engage and learn and lives were made brighter and more fulfilling? Imagine a place where programs supported the elderly, youth, special needs and the entire community to make it stronger and more sustainable. Jesus would be happy.

At the new Community of Hope Center at Fairfield UMC, a place like this is

"HOPE COMES ON THE WINGS OF SPIRIT, BUT HOPE ALSO COMES FROM HANDS."

—Bishop John Schol

coming to fruition. The 21st Hope Center as part of A Future with Hope is a place where seeds are being planted for others to nurture and grow, and on September 12, the leaders of Roseland UMC opened the doors to a modernized facility in a ceremony that included the church, conference and community leaders.

"I am proud to be celebrating because of what God is doing," said Rev. Michael Kim, who has served as Roseland UMC pastor since 2016.



Clarke Mayer, founder and owner of A.cad.e.ME, shows a student what he can expect in his filmmaking class. Photo by John Montalvo

In October 2017, Roseland UMC and Fairfield UMC merged under the guidance of Gateway North District Superintendent Manuel Sardiñas. After the merger, Kim and the congregation were left to consider the future of the Fairfield church buildings which had been run down and dilapidated.

Fast forward two years, and members of the congregation, town officials and project managers gathered in unity to support what promises to be a significant enhancement to Fairfield and the greater area.

"People came together with a vision," said Bishop John Schol as he congratulated the group for their accomplishments

and wished them well. "Hope comes on the wings of spirit, but hope also comes from hands," Bishop John Schol told the audience that day.

The many hands involved in this project have developed classes like computer design, photography, CPR, food prep, music, gardening, job coaching, English-as-a-Second-Language, Spanish, Chinese, filmmaking, summer theater camp and more. Also, the second-floor conference room has been upgraded and is now fully functional for meetings, gatherings and classes.

There's even talk of a greenhouse being added to the property to serve as

Continued on page 9

Special Session

United Methodists of Greater New Jersey

October 26, 2019

Episcopal Address
Bishop John Schol

I care deeply about each of you, and I care deeply about GNJ and the church. Today I come before you as a pastor. In 1982 I was ordained, and the church made me an elder. In 2004, the church consecrated me and made me a bishop. As an elder, I chose to be a pastor. As a bishop, I still choose to be a pastor.

In the last two weeks, I wept with someone who lost their job. I prayed with someone who was diagnosed with cancer. I talked with a clergy spouse whose husband died. I am a pastor.

At the same time, I am a bishop, and I care deeply about the people of The United Methodist Church and the people in our communities. As a bishop, in the last two weeks, I discussed financial challenges, staffing issues and how to evaluate our resourcing with our congregations. In my role as a bishop, I use a pastoral lens.

I choose to be a pastor of all our congregations and of all our people. I am hearing from many people right now who are concerned about our way forward.

A spouse of a clergy person wrote, "I am deeply concerned about what will happen. We have two sons in college and if my husband loses his appointment, I do not know what we will do."

"I have been United Methodist all my life," said one lay member. "It is in my DNA. Why would you even suggest that we divide or move into different expressions. How dare you betray me and the people of my congregation."

A clergy person shared, "I invested my life in the United Methodist Church. My studies were all geared to be a clergy person. I have only served in The United Methodist Church. If the church splits and I lose my appointment, I cannot go and find another job easily. My training and skills do not translate to other professions."

A lay woman said, "If there are changes to the Discipline, my friend Sarah said she will leave the church. She has been a good friend, and I would hate to see her leave."

A young person shared, "My friends and I do not all agree about homosexuality, but we don't understand the church judging LGBTQ+ people. We work and go to school with gays and lesbians; they are our friends and we don't like the church judging them."

"If The United Methodist Church dealt with racism and privilege, we would not be facing this challenge," said a clergy person. "One more time African Americans will be passed over."

A father with two daughters said, "The church will allow the wedding of one of my daughters but not the other daughter because of who she loves. It's just not right."

Others wrote, "Our congregation is barely making it, and these conversations will tear us apart."

"If we make this change, what will be the next change."

"What happened to the church I grew up in. We were welcoming and accepting. Now we are getting harsh and mean spirited."

"How is it that all of a sudden, the church can change what it has believed for more than two thousand years."

"I do not understand homosexuality, but we should not treat gays and lesbians like we are treating them."

And someone wrote to me and asked, "Who do you think you are, God?"

The comments remind me of the work we are doing to turn the church outward and see everyone as a person and that everyone is valuable, a child of God.

There is truth to the assertion that if The United Methodist Church dealt with racism and privilege, today we would not marginalize or oppress others. There is mistrust today because we haven't finished the work of privilege and oppression. We have not eliminated racism, sexism and classism in the church, let alone society. In the shalom community, in the kingdom of God, when one hurts, we all hurt. When one is held back, we are all held back from being fully human, fully a child of God. When one is discriminated against, we are all discriminated against. I pledge today that as we seek a way forward in one area, it will not diminish my leadership and efforts to continue to do the work to end privilege, oppression and discrimination.

As we face into our way forward ministry, there will be no winners today. All of us will lose something. There is nothing easy about our way forward. It keeps me awake at night, it sets me on edge during the day. It keeps me wrestling with my love for Jesus, my love for the church, my love for you and my calling to be a bishop and a pastor.

As the bishop of GNJ, I am a pastor of the LGBTQ+ community. And I am and will continue to be the bishop and pastor of all of GNJ.

Today, there are people among us, me included, that believe all people can have loving caring relationships. I believe

a man and a woman, a man and a man, a woman and a woman can share love and make a home where God is honored.

Today, there are people among us, me included, that believe God calls people to ministry regardless of their ethnicity, gender, class and sexual orientation. I personally have witnessed God using people in congregational leadership and as clergy persons regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, national status and age.

I recognize we all do not share the same beliefs. Good people of faith will disagree. I have never found the people of the United Methodist Church to completely agree with any number of significant beliefs or policies within the church. I welcome and thrive in the midst of difference. I learn from difference and continue to be shaped by other ideas, beliefs and understandings. I also recognize that change is difficult – whether it be change within the community that affects the church or change within the church that affects the community.

Today in the midst of challenge and struggle to find a way forward, I choose to be a pastor as I serve you and the church as a pastoral bishop. Being pastoral is being graceful. Grace is not cheap; it is born through sacrifice.

Church trials concerning homosexuality are not graceful. Trials create division, pain and harm to the mission and witness of the church. Trials use valuable mission resources. Nothing good comes from trials. Trials hurt everyone. Trials of LGBTQ+ people and their supporters divide the church. Trials hurt the witness of Jesus Christ.

No trial ever stopped someone from being gay. No trial ever stopped someone from being Wesleyan. A retired pastor told me that he was "pushed out of the church" because he was gay and so he served in the United Church of Christ. He said, "I felt exiled, a refugee in a different country. Oh, the UCC was good to me," he said, "but I am Wesleyan." He told me that now that he is retired, he is worshiping with a United Methodist congregation, and it feels like home.

Trials push faithful lay and clergy people out of The United Methodist Church. Trials of LGBTQ+ people and their supporters push out United Methodists with valuable gifts that are needed and wanted by congregations — and I believe by God as well.

Today as a bishop who humbly claims his first calling as a pastor, I share with you that I will not forward complaints for trial against LGBTQ+ people who serve the church or those who bless gays and lesbians in marriage. I believe it is the pastoral action to take. The LGBTQ+ community should not live in fear of what the church will do to them because they pursue their calling or because they want to serve people, or because they seek God's blessing because all people are of sacred worth.

I care about the church and believe that the church is in a vulnerable place right now. We face shifts that leave our leaders and disciples struggling to connect with the people in our communities about who is God, who is Jesus and why people need the church. For more than 20 years, we have been experiencing a decline in people and money.

Can the church handle more change?

I have found God works most powerfully through me when I am most vulnerable. I have witnessed that when the church has been most humble and outward, God has used the church for greater glory. I have witnessed that when we are most challenged, God is ready to work through the opportunities the challenges present. I have witnessed that in dying we are saved; we are resurrected.

While individually we may be challenged to live in and through change, the church of Jesus Christ has more often thrived when it has been humble, turned outward and prayerfully ready to see the opportunities God is presenting in the midst of the change. Change is not the issue. Who we will be in the midst of the change is the test of our faith.

Today the GNJ Way Forward Team is asking us for our prayers and space for our congregations to thrive. They ask for sacred space to allow congregations who are ready, to develop a covenant for ministry with LGBTQ+ persons.

At the same time, the Way Forward Team wants to provide room for other congregations to make covenants based on their convictions that will help their congregations thrive. And while each covenant may be different, each will hold sacred their commitment to God, to each other, their community and our connection together. I will support all of our congregations and their covenants.

Although the covenants may be different, some will affirm our present disciplinary standards, others will enter into new ministry with the LGBTQ+ community. I anticipate they will lead to stronger ministry as our congregations thrive in our shared mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

When developing a covenant, we invite you to ask important questions:

- Who is God?
- Who is Jesus?
- Why do people need Jesus?
- Why do people need your congregation?

If these questions lead you only to talk about homosexuality, there's a problem. If the questions lead your congregation to better understand yourself, your community and how God is leading your congregation into the community to be in ministry with people, to see every person in your community as a child of God, then you are on the path. A Wesleyan path. A path I believe we can travel together.

LGBTQ+ United Methodists just want to worship and serve like all disciples of Jesus Christ. They want to be faithful in marital relationships. They want to offer their gifts to the church and the community. Rather than being seen as LGBTQ+ United Methodists, they want to be people like most of us in this room today who are not questioned about our sexuality, who are not somebody's poster child of what a problem or issue looks like. They want to matter just like I matter, just like you matter.

The DNA of our LGBTQ+ family here today is United Methodist. If they wanted to be Calvinists, they would have joined the Presbyterian Church, but they want to be United Methodist. If they wanted to be Episcopalian, they would have joined the Episcopal Church, but they want to be United Methodist. Our sister denominations are worthy of joining, but they are not Wesleyan. Our people want to be Wesleyan and it is time, time to say their gifts, their lives are worthy of service and leadership in The United Methodist Church.

Today I shared with you my commitment to be the pastor and bishop of all of GNJ and how I will be pastoral in my leadership. It is at great risk and may be misunderstood, but it comes after prayer, listening, reading scripture and choosing the harder path.

Friends, we can make this work. We can be faithful to God and rely on God to lead us through this time. We can bless our congregations to thrive in ministry. We can create space for congregations to covenant with God to be in ministry with and by LGBTQ+ persons. We can support congregations who want to have graceful conversations about their calling and convictions. Just as the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15 gave permission to Paul not to require new gentile Christians to follow all the laws, particularly circumcision, so too we can make way for congregations to create covenants that allow ministry with the LGBTQ+ community.

We can do this, because we are United Methodists from GNJ. We have sought to see people, people of sacred worth. Historically, we have been in the forefront of change within the United Methodist Church. WE are leading today, just like we have led in the past.

- Ordained a woman in 1956, among the first in our denomination. Where? Greater New Jersey
- Ended the segregated central jurisdiction in 1966, two years before general conference abolished it. Where? Greater New Jersey
- Created multicultural congregations long before others did. Where? Greater New Jersey
- Started an Arabic congregation, the first in our denomination and started one of the first Korean and Filipino congregations. Where? Greater New Jersey
- Overseen by an African American bishop, Prince Taylor, the first to serve a predominately white conference. Where? Greater New Jersey
- Started the third congregation of our denomination after Lovely Lane in Baltimore and John Street in NY. Where? Greater New Jersey, The Pemberton United Methodist Church

We did all this not because everyone else was doing it, or everyone agreed we should do it, but because some disciples among us believed that time had come for us to be bold and sensitive, to be courageous and humble, to be convicted and searching. Those disciples who came before us knew that God would help us sort it out and God would see us through.

That time has come again for us to be bold and sensitive, to be courageous and humble, to be convicted and searching.

Today, I take my own step, and I invite you to take a step with me. I will not forward complaints concerning homosexuality for trial. I will not participate in the ongoing harm and division of our church. I will not participate in excluding faithful United Methodists, faithful and fruitful LGBTQ+ United Methodists from serving God. I will not prevent caring, loving LGBTQ+ people who in the United Methodist tradition want to enter into a covenant with God and one another.

I will lead to create space and room for all our clergy to be pastoral in their context and for all of our congregations to develop the ministry that will help them thrive in their context. I will lead and invite all of you to serve and lead congregations into the future by doing the following.

- Recruit and develop transformational leaders.
- Make disciples of Jesus Christ to transform the world.
- Grow vital congregations
- Organize 3,000 people to pack a half a million meals on March 21.
- Inspire students to receive Jesus Christ as their savior through IGNITE ministries.
- Start new faith communities to reach younger and more diverse disciples.
- Desegregate New Jersey public schools and address racism, oppression and inclusion.
- Start an additional 20 Hope Centers.
- Support all congregations to grow and thrive.

The Way Forward Team is calling us to take a courageous and humble step. A bold step and a sensitive step. A step of conviction and a step of searching. A step that recognizes differences among us. A step that says we may not all believe alike, but we can love alike and we can serve together. Let the love and service begin with us. 



10

THINGS GNJ IS THANKFUL FOR

1. United Methodists who make disciples who make disciples.
2. The laity who give their time, money and talents to bless God and The United Methodist Church.
3. The clergy who said *here I am* and give their best every day to God, the people of our congregations and the people in our communities.
4. Our district superintendents and GNJ staff who model servant leadership.
5. Hope Centers who reach out to the community providing food, counseling, education and other transformative ministries and missions.
6. Next Gen Ministries who bring young people to Christ at IGNITE, IGNITE Communities, Summer Camps and more.
7. The United Methodist Stewardship Foundation of Greater New Jersey who do socially responsible investing that grows the assets of our congregations to multiply their ministry.
8. The Miracles Everywhere campaign that transforms lives by investing in transformational ministry from Greater New Jersey to Puerto Rico to Tanzania and many places in between.
9. Committee and agency leadership who guide GNJ decisions and engage our churches in ministries and administrative resources.
10. Our connection with each other in our congregations, communities, conference and throughout the denomination that makes our ministry go further than any one church could do alone.

Wishing you and yours a very bountiful Thanksgiving!

Good news is something to be shared, but sometimes that requires stepping outside our comfort zones and really tapping into the minds and hearts of real people and communities.

A Wave of Hope Leads to Majority Saying Yes to Way Forward Plan

By Heather Mistretta
hmistretta@gnjumc.org

LINCROFT, NJ

It was an historic day. The energy, conviction and motivating spirit of the people of Greater New Jersey was alive and contagious at the Special Session of the Annual Conference on October 26. From Barryville, NY, to Cape May and from Pennsville to Long Branch, United Methodists gathered to consider the report and recommendations from the GNJ Way Forward Team, which was convened in March to create a path for GNJ congregations to be in ministry with the LGBTQ+ community.



Rev. William Williams III and Rev. Tom Lank bow in prayer during Special Session of annual Conference on Saturday, Oct. 26. Photo by Corbin Payne

United Methodists from different theological understandings listened with open hearts and open minds—some clad in shirts saying one nation under God and others showing their support of the LGBTQ+ community by wearing colorful stickers on their cheeks—as the hymn, “Glory to Glory to Glory” graced the Robert J. Collins Arena at Brookdale Community College ahead of the GNJ Way Forward Team sharing its report that was several months in the making.

Overwhelmingly, the majority decided to affirm the recommendations that invited congregations to develop covenants for ministry understanding, some of which would include fully inclusive ministry with the LGBTQ+ community.

Setting the tone for the day were the more personal moments of worship—from the uplifting opening hymns of “Glory to Glory to Glory” and “Falling into You” led by Director of Worship Lan Wilson to the confessional prayer and communion. Many said that those introspective moments that allowed them to also outwardly support one another brought them the solace and strength they needed.

A Path Forward

Continued from page 1

Way Forward recommendations passed with 80% of the delegates supporting it.

The recommendations called for congregations to make covenants based on their convictions that will help their congregations thrive. The covenants for each congregation will be different, with some confirming the current *Book of Discipline*, and others entering into new ministries with the LGBTQ+ community.

In preparing their report, the GNJ Way Forward Team learned that while some congregations are ready to move forward and are clear, many others are only starting conversations or have differing views about their ministry.

“When asked, ‘What challenges are your congregations facing?’ most answered that their biggest concerns included mission, worship attendance and finances. Those who responded with concerns over ministry with LGBTQ+ persons were concerned about divides within their own congregation and with their connection to the denomination,” explained Rev. Sang Won Doh, convener of the Way Forward Team.

To assist congregations, GNJ will be providing trained facilitators to help interested congregations develop covenants. Congregations who are not ready or in agreement can request facilitators to start Graceful

GNJ Way Forward Team member Rev. Jessica Winderweedle and Rev. Michelle Ryoo set the tone of the meeting with Holy Conferencing which focused on choosing words that do no harm and having conversations that heal even when there is disagreement. Winderweedle shared a little of her personal story urging others not to label someone using a noun but rather identify someone using the word that specifies his or her orientation.

A panel of GNJ Way Forward Team members shared their process for coming to agreement. Rev. Tom Korkuch replied to questions about the change in direction of the team this summer. “We stopped pilot programs because we heard in our listening sessions that people felt like we were telling them what to do. Instead, covenants empower churches. It’s more from the ground up, and it’s voluntary.”

Another Team member who has been serving as a lay leader for 46 years since the inception of the Korean Community Church of New Jersey in Englewood, Michael Hoon Yang said, “We should remain together as Christian brothers and sisters.”

Bishop John Schol addressed the crowd saying, “I care deeply about each of you, and I care deeply about GNJ and the church” as he shared voices of concern from United Methodists, both young and old, over the past several months.

“I recognize we all do not share the same beliefs. Good people of faith will disagree,” said Bishop Schol. “I welcome and thrive in the midst of difference. I learn from difference and continue to be shaped by other ideas, beliefs and understandings. I also recognize that change is difficult – whether it be change within the community that affects the church or change within the church that affects the community.”

Bishop Schol vowed as the bishop that he would not forward any complaints for trial against LGBTQ+ people who serve the church or those who bless gays and lesbians in marriage, stressing that trials create division.

“Trials push faithful lay and clergy people out of The United Methodist Church. Trials of LGBTQ+ people and their supporters push out United Methodists with valuable gifts that are needed and wanted by congregations — and I believe by God as well.”

Bob Dietz, chair of the Council for Finance and Administration agreed, “There was a need and a hurt that we needed to address and find a way forward to work side by side in ministry.”

Conference members spoke from the floor from diverse perspectives; however, it quickly became evident that the body was unifying. From an 84-year-old lay leader who had served in the Korean War to a pastor from Guyana, people were seeing every person as a person, as a child of God of sacred worth.

“We’re going to come up with a group that can work together,” said the Navy veteran, James Moreno of Mount Horeb UMC in Warren, who worried about the youth members and their reluctance to be engaged in church. “We’re totally an open church; we have differences, but we are like a family,” he said as he nodded in agreement

with his pastor of his church, Rev. George Rodney who emigrated from Guyana 33 years ago.

Sitting right in front of Moreno was another couple from the Wesleyan United Methodist Church in West Berlin, Robert and Lettie-Jane White, who expressed concern for the future of the church but vowed to be vigilant in remaining engaged. The Whites see themselves as traditionalists but acknowledge they worship each week with diverse people, including someone who identifies as transgender.

“We’re going to stick it out,” said Lettie-Jane. “If you leave, you can’t make changes.”

Voicing her support of the action was Skylands District Superintendent Eunice Vega-Perez. “Sometimes we need to break the rules. If we hadn’t, I wouldn’t be standing here today,” said Vega-Perez who emigrated from Puerto Rico. “It used to be that only the man was the head of the house. In my house, we have two heads.”

Many in the conference understood that the issue was complicated. Bret Walker, who leads both the Ebenezer and Hudson United Methodist Churches, said, “When we disobey the *Book of Discipline*, we open it up for more disobedience. My son is transgender, and I love my son. I would move mountains for him, but we need to be careful.”

Echoing that concern were pastors, Rev. David Yun and Rev. Blessings Magomero.

“This conversation is hard for a lot of people. My thoughts don’t come from hate,” said Yun who added that the churches that he and Magomero represent, Central and Salem UMCs were among the first churches to merge black and white congregations.

Amid the day of rising emotions, wrestling of beliefs and expressions of hope clashing with expressions of uncertainty, there was ministry, communion, a beautiful prayer room available for all and a moment of silence.

Bishop Schol also spoke to the many in the crowd who worried that creating a path forward on ministry with the LGBTQ+ community was diminishing a commitment to the mission, addressing the matter directly by indicating that he would stay focused on our mission.

“I pledge today that as we seek a way forward in one area, it will not diminish my leadership and efforts to continue to do the work to end privilege, oppression and discrimination.”

As a show of GNJ’s continuing focus on ministry in spite of the concerns over polity, Lay Leader Rosa Williams and Director of Mission Ashley Wilson announced that GNJ would pack half a million meals for the hungry in a conference wide mission project on March 21.

“For those of you who are ready to move forward, I celebrate the next step with you,” said Bishop Schol who urged those who are uncertain to keep asking questions so that all United Methodists can learn and grow together. “God can see us through if we are open to each other.”

For additional information regarding the GNJ Way Forward including videos, the episcopal address and the legislation that was passed, go to the Way Forward pages of GNJ website: www.gnjumc.org.



The day's worship that included music, prayer and communion, brought people together. Photo by Corbin Payne

Conversations to help provide clarity and build agreement for their ministry within their congregation. Covenants are voluntary.

At the Special Session Rev. Myrna Bethke, dean of the Cabinet, shared a cabinet covenant that outlines its commitment to congregations and clergy in the districts. The cabinet covenant includes guiding congregations to stay focused on the mission and ministry. The members of the cabinet also state that they will “appoint pastors that align with the congregations understanding of themselves and their ministry.”

Some within the conference, particularly Wesleyan Covenant Association members, have concerns over the Way Forward Report, and members filed five questions of law surrounding the recommendations. Bishop Schol will rule on these questions within the next 30 days.

Rev. Dr. Virginia Samuel Cetuk rose at the end of the session to bring a motion to the floor affirming the activities of the day. The motion, which also passed by an overwhelming margin, supports Bishop Schol’s declaration to not forward for trial charges arising out of ministry for or with the LGBTQ+ community as well as the Board of Ordained Ministry decision to disregard sexual orientation as a basis for recommending candidates for ministry.

Once the covenant is developed, it is to be shared with the district superintendent. The superintendent may follow up with congregational leadership with questions or suggestions for further refinement. Ultimately, it is the congregation’s covenant and must be supported by the congregation.

By Saturday afternoon, 64 congregations had signed up to start the covenanting process. GNJ will start training and facilitators in November and start scheduling congregations for covenanting and Graceful Conversations in December. Congregations who start the process in December will be asked to report to Annual Conference in May to share their experience and learnings.

Pack a half million meals in one day? Nothing is impossible with Jesus

By Heather Mistretta
hmistretta@gnjumc.org

There are more than seven billion people in this world. More than 800 million of them, or about one in 10, are hungry. More than half of these people are in countries facing conflict and devastating violence. Amid these startling statistics, children are the most visible victims. More than three million die every year because of undernutrition and the disease that ensues, and many others fail to thrive in school because they're hungry.

Every child deserves an education and the opportunity to flourish — but in order to do this they need enough to eat. In fact, according to the Global Nutrition Report, 3.1 million or 45% of child deaths can be attributed to poor nutrition.

GNJ has been working hard to stem this tide, in part with Rise Against Hunger who since 1998 has envisioned a world without hunger. United Methodist volunteers at 71 events in Greater New Jersey have packed 1.2 million meals for people in 13 countries. Most recently, GNJ packed 30,000 meals at 2019 Annual Conference in May which were delivered to Salesian Missions in Uganda for distribution.

GNJ has made much progress, but more needs to be done. On March 21 GNJ is answering that call by hosting the "Yes, We Can" meal packing event at several different locations across New Jersey with the intention of having three thousand people pack 500,000 meals in one day.

All are invited to join the effort—United Methodists and community members alike. No matter the age, GNJ is looking to make a difference and walk like Jesus did.

Ashley Wilson, Director of Mission, shared the details, "We will have meal packing stations at several locations in every region of GNJ so that it is easy for our congregations to invite their communities to join them in mission."

Rise Against Hunger, founded in 1998 by Ray Buchanan, a United Methodist minister and Vietnam veteran, is aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Goal #2 of Zero Hunger. From the implementation of sustainable community development projects and improving health to addressing gender equalities and facilitating this meal packaging program around the world, the nonprofit is committed to ending hunger by 2030.

Wilson announced the event at Special Session in October by sharing, "Margaret Mead once said, 'Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.' GNJ is looking toward those committed citizens in GNJ to change the world together on Saturday, March 21."

Meal packing locations will be announced by January. Visit www.gnjumc.org/events/yeswecan/ for more information, updates, and to register yourself, your Sunday school class and anyone who is willing to make a difference and walk like Jesus did. ☺



GNJ packed 30,000 meals last year at Annual Conference. On March 21, we will pack 500,000!

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.



Do You Know Someone Who Would Like to Subscribe to The Relay?
The Relay is sent free of charge to all clergy, lay leaders and committee leaders in our congregations. Others can subscribe to The Relay for \$10 a year. More information can be found at www.gnjumc.org/the-relay or by emailing hmistretta@gnjumc.org. We'd also love to hear from you if you have a good story idea. The deadline to send news for the following month's Relay is the 15th of each month.



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 October issue of The Relay):

On page 1 at the top of column 3, it should have said "Rev. Hector A. Burgos at Trinity UMC in Ewing," not Lawrenceville.

We regret the errors.

THE CENTENARY FUND AND
PREACHERS' AID SOCIETY
UNITED METHODISTS
OF GREATER NEW JERSEY

Trying to find the perfect
Christmas gift for the
pastor or clergy mentor
in your life?

Consider making a gift in their honor to
The Centenary Fund and Preacher's Aid Society.

The role of the Centenary Fund and Preachers' Aid Society is to:

- Subsidize all retired GNJ pastors' healthcare costs
- Offer emergency financial assistance to retired pastors and the families of deceased pastors for funeral, medical or family needs
- Provide a stable source of funding to support GNJ's annual budget

To contribute to this cause today!

Go to: www.gnjumc.org/the-centenary-fund



Meeting Jesus at a Drag Race

By Heather Mistretta
hmistretta@gnjumc.org

Jo-Anne and Glenn Winzer from Sussex County relish a chance in their busy lives to strengthen their connection to Jesus and to help others. But sometimes that connection can be made in the most auspicious places.

"There's always a moment for someone to get connected," said Glenn who is the pastor at the Andover United Methodist Church as well as a longtime auto mechanic.

At the IGNITE Conference in early October, they welcomed everyone with bright smiles and extended hands into a room decorated with colorful reflection tents, safe, beautiful havens away from the bustle of activities for IGNITE attendees to pray, reflect and ask for forgiveness, each room customized according to its message.

There was a "Pray" tent where soft pillows and mood lighting made it welcoming for guests to pray in private or with a friend. The "Cleansing" tent invited guests to write the names of people they needed to forgive on their hands and then wash them off with soap

and water. The "Prayer Wall" asked that guests write down a prayer for someone in need and hang it, knowing that their voice would be heard by God. Another allowed guests to create "a family tree" of names who needed prayers.

"Everyone's experience is different," said Jo-Anne, who noted that the pottery decorating each tent was donated by a local potter named John Pier. "We're grateful for all the help we receive to make each experience special for people."

The display shown that weekend in Wildwood was just a representation of what Jo-Anne and Glenn have been doing every week for their congregations for the past several years.

But the impetus for this idea came in 2010 when Glenn and Jo-Anne were following one of their other passions, drag racing, hundreds of miles away.

They were attending a Racers for Christ conference in Cedar Lake, IN. It was here that the couple discovered the need for private prayer and a place to reflect.

The couple said they like to think of race cars as "church magnets," as opening doors to conversations. Early on that



Jo-Anne and Glenn Winzer from Sussex County stand in front of one of the prayer tents that was available at IGNITE.

door they opened allowed Glenn and Jo-Anne to provide solace for those impacted by the sudden death of a young man following a tragic car crash in their community. Those affected were able to bring that rush of emotions they were feeling to the prayer room for serenity.

"All day long I pray. I'm constantly in connection with God, but we realized that others needed the same," he said, adding that the tragic death in their community reinforced this. "In times of adversity as well as in peaceful times, the need for others to have a private place to pray and express themselves was real."

Jo-Anne, a dental assistant for 30 years also owned and operated a sign shop. She is now senior pastor at Delaware Valley UMC in Sandyston as well as lead chaplain at Karen Ann Quinlan Hospice in Newton.

"People hurt sometimes, and it is during these times that they especially need a place to talk to God," said Jo-Anne. "Now they have a nice place to go."

The couple's commitment to IGNITE is a natural extension of their service

throughout GNJ. Jo-Anne has served many times on the spiritual retreats, The Walk to Emmaus, with GNJ's Gina Yeske, Director of Small Groups, who said she connected this year with Glenn at Local Pastor's School. This prompted Yeske to invite the couple to join the GNJ Prayer Team for Annual Conference.

"It has been a wonderful connection," said Yeske. "The prayer tents were

**"ALL DAY LONG I PRAY.
I'M CONSTANTLY IN
CONNECTION WITH GOD,
BUT WE REALIZED THAT OTHERS
NEEDED THE SAME."**

—Glenn Winzer, pastor at Andover United Methodist Church

RING IN THE NEW YEAR WITH VITALITY 2!

Vitality 2 offers you tools to dig deeper into ministry—specifically into Stewardship, New Disciples and Community Assets mapping.

Get new people involved, re-engage congregations and get new insight on children's ministry and worship. Starts January 25!

All programs are located at the Mission & Resource Center in Neptune from 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

- Saturday, January 25, 2020
- Saturday, April 25, 2020
- Saturday, September 19, 2020

FIND OUT MORE AT:

www.gnjumc.org/team-vital
Deadline to register is January 13, 2020



TO FIND OUT MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

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



The prayer tents enabled people to express themselves and connect to God in a personal and quiet way.

Tapestry of Stories

Continued from page 1

work ethic at the diaper bundling party defied all others. They seemed undistracted by the melee happening around them and instead remained focused on the task at hand.

Peyton, a pretty teenager with a bright smile, shared that she has long suffered from depression and anxiety—so much so that she suffered bouts of being suicidal and spent time in an in-patient addiction facility where she also was recovering from an abusive relationship with a boyfriend. Peyton, who is home-schooled, now attends an outpatient facility.

"Places like this help me tremendously. It's a great chance to meet good people," said Peyton as she embraced an adult leader and explained, "Her daughter was having an anxiety attack in the bathroom, and I helped her," she said. The girl wrote Peyton a note on two folded paper hearts that said, "If you were looking for a sign, this is it. There is always hope" and "You are loved by God."

Peyton smiled and offered up her thanks with a hug when she parted to reconnect with her group from southern New Jersey.

Jasmine, who sported knitted hearts dangling from her glasses, emigrated from Kenya a year ago. She attends the Abundant Life Church and went to Next Gen Camp at Pinelands Center in Mt. Misery this summer. She was with Sandy McGarvey who first met Jasmine when her daughter befriended her at camp. McGarvey's father had been a pastor at Moorestown UMC, and she too recalled summering with her sister at Pinelands.

"This event never ceases to amaze me," said Eric Drew, executive director of Next Generation Ministries. "From our talented musicians and hysterical improv guys to our enlightening workshops and diaper bundling party, I'm leaving today with a full heart and a hoarse voice."

The weekend wasn't all loud music and laughs. IGNITE also tapped into the more contemplative sides of the teens who attended. There was a small group time on Saturday morning where adult leaders and their teens were encouraged to have healthy discussions and learn more about each other.

Workshops, which provided teens with good opportunities to step outside their comfort zones, ranged from names like "Here I am, Lord" by the UM Army, "Know Your God-Given Purpose" by ARISE and "Relationships" by Revs. Nicole and Jevon Caldwell-Gross to "What Does Hip-Hop Have to Do with Jesus" by Rev. Kermit Moss, "Songwriting & Rapping the Word" by New City Kids and "Art, Dance, Believe" by Christian Drama School of NJ.

"It's all about empowering our youth to be leaders and to not be afraid to pursue their dreams," said Anne Joseph, the music director at New City Kids who encouraged teens to rap scripture while drumming on a five-gallon bucket.

Rounding out the weekend was a bonfire concert on the beach Saturday night by ARISE, a network ministry for worship leaders, musicians and like-minded people, followed by a group communion service to commemorate World Communion Sunday that morning.

"IGNITE Weekend continues to grow," said Drew, "So much so that we are bringing the experience into each region of Greater New Jersey so even more students can experience it. I can't wait for IGNITE Communities on November 17!"

For more details on IGNITE, IGNITE Communities and all things Next Generation, visit www.ignitenj.org.



PHOTOS FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:
Eric Drew, Zach Holder, Kerwin Webb, Mecan Payne, Wes Ellis, Amirah Kitchen Photo by Edison Lee; **Cape Atlantic Superintendent Brian Roberts** prays with a student Photo by Corbin Payne; **Girl connects with God through prayer** Photo by Corbin Payne; **Peyton embraces adult leader during Diaper Drive** Photo by Heather Mistretta; **Communion was served the last day to commemorate World Communion Sunday** Photo by Edison Lee; **Jasmine sports handmade macramé hearts made to show support for the LGBTQ+ community.** Photo by Heather Mistretta

IGNITE Communities Connects Youth Groups Regionally

On Sunday afternoon on October 6, more than a thousand teenagers shuffled out the door of the IGNITE Conference in Wildwood feeling energized having just spent two amazing days at the IGNITE Youth Conference experiencing their Christian faith in new ways and with new people. Many of them were asking the same questions: *Now what? Why does this have to end? How*

do I live out my discipleship every day at school?

Next Generation Ministries has the answer: IGNITE Communities. IGNITE Communities is a full year of regional programming for youth groups to stay connected to each other and to Christ and to build on the foundation of youth programs in GNJ local churches.

The first IGNITE Community will launch Sunday November 17 from 5-8 p.m. at four locations to accommodate the busy schedules of teens and their adult leaders. Two more IGNITE Communities

are planned, including a winter retreat at Pinelands Center at Mt. Misery in February and another regional event in March.

The new IGNITE Communities, which will each feature a unique blend of fun,



Teens who attended IGNITE are encouraged to join one of the IGNITE Communities and find out how they are "wonderfully made."

"OUR REGIONAL TEAMS HAVE BEEN SUPER EXCITED TO BRING THIS NEW PROGRAMMING FOR OUR YOUTH GROUPS."

— Eric Drew, Director of Next Generation Ministries

IGNITE COMMUNITIES IS ONLY 2 WEEKS AWAY!



FIRST THERE WAS IGNITE, NOW THERE ARE IGNITE COMMUNITIES.

Sign up your teens for an experience that picks up where 2019 IGNITE left off... only this time, in a neighborhood by YOU!



Sunday, November 17, 2019 5-8 p.m. at four locations!

- Trinity UMC, Hackettstown
- Bridgewater UMC
- First UMC, Toms River
- Haddonfield UMC

For more information, visit:
www.ignitenj.org

field UMC. But as participation grows, the team plans to add more.

IGNITE Communities is inspired by GNJ's 2019-2 Strategic Plan, which calls NextGen Ministries to cultivate and mobilize a new generation of enthusiastic disciples of Jesus Christ that connect, engage and lead in their congregation and communities to transform the world. Their vision is to enhance the work that is already going on in GNJ's local churches by providing a year-long calendar of programming that can connect local youth groups with their peers. Each community is locally run to provide context for the region.

"IGNITE Communities is going to be great. Our regional teams have been super excited to bring this new programming for our youth groups," said Eric Drew, Director of Next Generation Ministries.

Posters and flyers are available for download on the IGNITE website, www.ignitenj.com, and a new leaders guide is being developed so that local youth leaders can integrate the curriculum with their existing programs.

For more information and to access a valuable youth leader guide, visit www.ignitenj.org/ignite-communities/.



Teens enjoyed music and fun from several performances at IGNITE. Photo by Corbin Payne

21st Hope Center

Continued from page 1
another learning center for students.

"I can't wait to come back when people start graduating these programs or get jobs as a result of this," added Bishop Schol. He added that he hopes five more programs like this are added in GNJ over the next several years.

optimism and touted the long-term relationships and sustainability that has been achieved, saying, "I'm excited about the future possibilities."

One of the catalysts behind the new Hope Center was Ted Mayer, the lay leader of Roseland UMC whose experience in serving the special needs population led him to present this idea to Kim to help others and save a crumbling church.

"PEOPLE NEED A PLACE WHERE THEY COULD LEARN A SKILL WITHOUT HAVING TO GO TO COLLEGE. THIS MODEL GIVES HOPE TO CHURCHES WHO MAY BE STRUGGLING WITH THEIR IDENTITY AND THEIR FUTURE, CREATING NEW VITALITY."

—Ted Mayer, lay leader of Roseland UMC

The first classes, which are being facilitated by Fairfield-based A·cad·e·ME, began in late September and will continue to be enhanced as the program grows.

A Future With Hope Developer Andrea Wren-Hardin echoed the overriding

"People need a place where they could learn a skill without having to go to college. This model gives hope to churches who may be struggling with their identity and their future, creating new vitality," said Mayer.



Rev. Michael Kim speaks with Bishop Schol and Glen Mayer. Photo by John Montalvo



Church and community members join together to cut the commemorative ribbon.

Photo by John Montalvo

The proceeds of this program are in part returned to the church, so that as the program grows, it becomes at a sustainable solution to financial shortfalls that many churches face. The church in Fairfield employs two missionaries who serve as caretakers of the church grounds and help with some of the renovations in exchange for a place to live and a viable career.

Mayer added that the eight-week classes average six to eight students per class and are designed to nurture and develop. Many of them like the horticulture and soon-to-be hydroponics class have been developed to work together, offering students a progressive education that will give them the skills needed to land a job.

"People can make a difference, and they will not only survive. They will follow the Wesleyan Way," said Mayer.

Mayer said he called on his son, Clarke who had recently embarked on his own filmmaking business after graduating from William Patterson University. His business, called A·cad·e·ME, is focused on providing participants with skills to apply to real world work environments.

The September 12 event exuded promise from church leaders and children alike. Church members Obasi and Phina Obasi, who emigrated to the United States about

10 years ago from Nigeria, were excited about the project and what it would mean to children in the community, including their seven-year-old Nnamdi who was taking advantage of the musical program now offered by the church.

"This center means we can make an impact in the community and set up facilities that can help achieve that goal."

For more information, visit academnj.com.

A Future with Hope believes that there is always more hope. Whether it be a new class, building or just idea, hope centers are designed to heal communities and to develop long-term solutions. Started back in 2012 in the wake of superstorm Sandy, A Future with Hope is a 501(c) 3 designed to work with organizations of all kinds to transform communities.

In 2015 the first six nonprofits completed their grant applications, becoming Hope Centers in January 2016. They were Camp YDP, CUMI (Camden Urban Ministry Initiative), CUMAC, The Neighborhood Center, Christian Outreach Project and Pathways2Prosperity. From the Crisis Room at Aldersgate UMC in East Brunswick to the STEM program at the Asbury UMC in Atlantic City, people throughout GNJ and beyond are still making a difference for many.

DID YOU ATTEND LAITY LEADERSHIP ACADEMY?



Now it's time to plant opportunity at your church with GNJ's 2019 seed grant program!



This grant will enable you to foster more vitality in your congregation and better connect with your community.

FOR DETAILS, VISIT: www.gnjumc.org

Or submit your application to Beverly Karlovich at bkarlovich@gnjumc.org.

Application deadline is Friday, Dec. 6, 2019.



Greater New Jersey Commission on Archives and History seeks church histories for the annual Local Church History Contest.

Church Histories may be submitted under one of three categories:

The Steelman Methodist History Award (*For best local church history*)

The John C. Goodwin Multi-Media Church History Award (*For electronic or PowerPoint history*)

The Morris L. Smith Ethnic Church History Award (*For a GNJC ethnic church history*)

All histories must conform to the guidelines and be received by January 6, 2020.

Submission guidelines may be found at:

www.gnjumc.org/our-history-and-values/archives-history/archives-history-resources

For more information, contact:

Don DeGroat, Vice-chair | dfdegroat4@aol.com or 570-646-9298

Trinity Church Again Feeds 5,000 in One Day

By Rev. Dr. Frank L. Fowler III
ffowler@catchthespirit.org

HACKETTSTOWN, NJ

When Jesus miraculously fed 5,000 people on the shore of the sea of Galilee 2,000 years ago, he set an example that the people of Trinity United Methodist Church in Hackettstown have decided to follow. For the second year in a row, they have held a Caravan of Hope, in which they fed over 5,000 people on one day.

The mission, led by a team of 14 church members, found this month's long project coming to fulfillment on a recent weekend at the church. On a Friday night, over 275 people gathered in the church gym to assemble a generous boxed lunch. The meal included a turkey and cheese sandwich, fruit, raisins, chips and more, along with a bottle of water. The assembly line evening found volunteers slicing over 5,000 rolls, making the sandwiches, filling the boxes with food, loading the boxes into delivery crates and placing them in a refrigerated truck on the church campus. To personalize the meal, every box had a hand-written note of faith and encouragement in it, written by parishioners over the summer. Also included in each boxed meal was a child's note and drawing, as the church school and Vacation Bible School kids drew these in the months leading up to the weekend.

The joyful evening included Trinity parishioners of all ages, as well as many community volunteers, including groups from Hackettstown High School, Centenary University and Hackettstown Medical Center.

Then on Saturday morning the Caravan of Hope began, as 35 driver teams came to pick up their pre-determined number of boxed meals. They then headed out to 52 locations in the Jersey region, including Asbury Park, Newark, Camden, Morristown, Newton, Whiting and Allentown. They delivered the meals to soup kitchens, shelters, food pantries, churches, rescue missions and similar food distribution programs and ministries. In some locations the driver teams assisted in the delivery of the meals, and in others they simply dropped them off to workers in the food programs. Included were about 150 meals distributed to local Hackettstown residents through the church's Lord's Pantry.

Funding for the mission was not budgeted by the church, and so parishioners and community residents were invited to support it. A total of almost \$14,000 was donated, including a \$5,000 grant from a foundation. When the teams had finished their trips, they had delivered 5,460 meals, and not one meal was wasted.

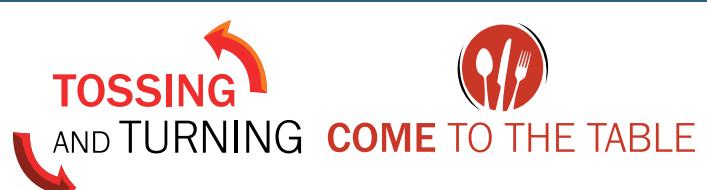
Commenting on the Caravan, Rev. Frank Fowler said, "Once again the people of Trinity caught the spirit of Christ-like caring and service and came together in a powerful event of compassion. Of special joy to me was seeing the people of the community and church join together, as I would estimate that well over 600 people participated in this mission.

Trinity Church is making plans to repeat this mission again next year and would welcome those who would like to be a part of it. The church's website is www.catchthespirit.org.



BREAKING THROUGH IN 2020

with 5 New Worship Series!



SONGS OF THE SEASON

Get a taste of what Breakthrough offers by trying out *Songs of the Season*. Song-inspired sermons will help you bring peace this Advent tradition and then ring in the new year with 5 New Worship Series!

Find out more at:

www.gnjumc.org/breakthrough

CONFERENCE HAPPENINGS

Open Enrollment for Health and Dental Continues through Nov. 14

The Health and Dental Plans of Greater New Jersey will continue to offer open enrollment for their Active and Retiree Health Plans and Dental Plans through Nov. 14.

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 a 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 or Alexa Taylor at ataylor@gnjumc.org.

CROP Walks Raise Millions for the Hungry

On Oct. 20 tens of thousands of people took part in local CROP Hunger Walks that have been raising millions of dollars to help end hunger and poverty for 50 years. In 2018 alone, more than 800 walks gleaned more than \$8 million.

Many of the GNJ churches, including Whiting, Belvedere and Vincent UMCs, participated in these walks.

For more information on CROP, visit www.crophungerwalk.org.

Two Denominations Celebrate World Communion Sunday Together

Mt. Zion UMC of Deptford welcomed members of nearby First Presbyterian Church of Woodbury Heights to its sanctuary on Oct. 6 to celebrate World Communion Sunday together.

Mt. Zion's Rev. Dr. John E. Randall led the service that calls the Church to be universal, inclusive. He welcomed the children to the altar as communion was shared by all.

In the fellowship hall following the service, seniors held conversations and lay leadership shared sacred moments of fellowship.

"Children and youth ate, laughed and moved around with joy," said Rev. Randall.

Statistical Training to Make Year-End Reporting Accurate and Easy

GNJ will hold three Statistical Training sessions on December 10, 11 and 12. All pastors of local churches will need to submit each year, a year-end statistical report by going to www.ezra.gcf.org.

Pastors who do not submit the report by the January 31, 2020, deadline will be contacted by their District Superintendent.

UM Communities Earns an Excellence in Technology Bronze Award

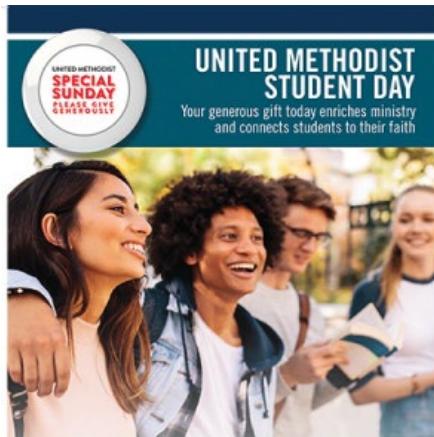
United Methodist Communities won Bronze in McKnight's Excellence in Technology Awards for implementing the Accushield Visitor Management System in all its full-service communities and one affordable housing community (Safety Category, Senior Living Track). The system replaces the paper sign-in logs at entrances and instead, uses a touchscreen sticker-badge printing tablet. The result is the ability to better track and identify visitors.

Due to heightened awareness of unwelcome visitors in public venues including senior living communities, UMC chose Accushield, a user-friendly digital solution that regulates, tracks and identifies visitors and prints date-and-time stamped name sticker-badges. It replaces the former paper sign-in logs at reception desks.

Since implementation in 2018, the system has recorded over 22,000 vendor, 70,000 family/friend and 700 volunteer logins. These groups have successfully learned to use the system and praised its benefits.

Accushield also allows associates system-wide to identify and engage with residents who have not received visitors, especially those with few local friends or family members. They then take steps to increase their social connections, a vital component of wellness.

"Do all the good you can, By all the means you can, In all the ways you can, In all the places you can, At all the times you can, To all the people you can, As long as ever you can."—John Wesley



Transforming Students' Lives on November 24

For the past 147 years on the last Sunday in November United Methodists around the world have celebrated United Methodist Student Day by giving generously to students as they embark on living their lives abundantly.

For some, that journey can be more arduous, so the fact that the full 100% of what is collected goes toward more than 70 scholarships is life-changing for many, giving them the chance to grow into transformative leaders.

TEAM VITAL CELEBRATION

for all who have participated since its inception

MARCH 28, 2020 AT MRC
10 A.M.–12:30 P.M.



**SAVE
the
DATE**

(PLEASE NOTE DATE CHANGE)

Established in 1872 as the Children's Fund, it was the original Special Sunday created by United Methodist Church Sunday Schools who collected offerings to help advance education for their children.

The fund, which is now administered by the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, helps students achieve their dreams through scholarships. In 2017 alone, United Methodists donated more than \$140 million to support various ministries within the denomination.

To access a valuable pastor and leader kit, visit www.umcgiving.org/resource-articles/united-methodist-student-day-pastors-leaders-kit.

Engage with Neighboring Churches in Local Mission

Mission is an opportunity to put our faith into action. In doing so, we become catalysts of mercy, justice and love to transform our communities and the world. By tapping into resources and partnering with organizations around the world, we are able to create greater impact.

Would you like to work with other churches as you engage in mission projects and initiatives to grow more vitality in your church? Are you looking for resources to get you started or to bolster a project you have begun?

Contact Director of Mission Ashley Wilson at awilson@gnjumc.org with questions.

Church Aims to Raise Another \$20,000 at Bazaar

St. Andrew UMC in Toms River, which celebrated its 50th anniversary last year, will host its annual "North Star Holiday Bazaar" on Nov. 16 from 9 a.m.-2 p.m. A silent auction will follow from 2-4 p.m.

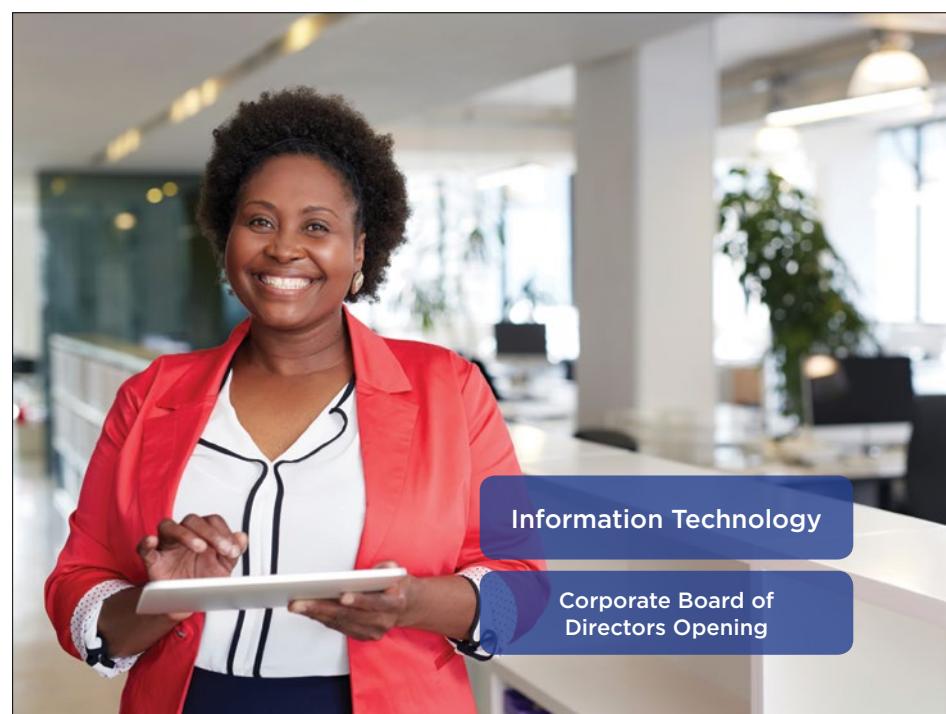
"Last year we raised \$22 to \$23 thousand in mission. This year we're shooting for \$25," said Coordinator Debbie Boucher.

For more details and to check out what other missions St. Andrew is doing, visit www.standrewtr.org.

OBITUARIES

Janice (Potter) Dorchester, Surviving Spouse of Douglas F. Dorchester died October 6. A memorial service was held November 3 at Bourne UMC in Massachusetts. Memorial donations (in lieu of flowers) may be sent to Broad Reach Hospice and Palliative Care, 390 Orleans Road, Chatham, MA 02633 or to the charity of one's choice. Expressions of sympathy may be sent to Dian (Dee) Dorchester Aukamp (daughter) at 25 Nobska Rd., Woods Hole, MA 02543.

Brian Grant Eble, Retired Elder, died October 4. A memorial service was held October 9 at First UMC in Oakhurst. Memorial donations (in lieu of flowers) may be sent to your home church or to your favorite charity in memory of Brian Grant Eble. Expressions of sympathy may be sent to the family O' Brien Funeral Home in Wall Township.



The future of IT presents many challenges and opportunities for corporations.

You've worked hard to develop your level of expertise. Now it's time to apply that knowledge in a way that benefits others.

If you are interested in serving as a member of the United Methodist Communities Board of Directors, email us today at board@umcommunities.org.



UMC Home Office
3311 State Route 33
Neptune, NJ 07753
umcommunities.org

Miracles Everywhere

***“Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving,
and pay your vows to the Most High.” - Psalm 50:14***



To every congregation and every leader who has helped create Miracles Everywhere this year, we extend our thanksgiving on behalf of the many faces of Christ whose lives you have touched.

**TO JOIN THE MIRACLES
EVERWHERE CAMPAIGN,
CONTACT:**



Michaela Murray-Nolan | Director of Development
0: 732.359.1045 | E: mmurraynolan@gnjumc.org

For information about Miracles Everywhere:
www.gnjumc.org/miracleseverywhere