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# THE RELAY

UNITED METHODISTS  
OF GREATER NEW JERSEY

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



*May the birth and wonder of Jesus inspire new life for you this Christmas. Wishing you a blessed and peaceful holiday from GNJ.*

## CONVOCATION 2020

### Storytelling with The Moth

By Heather Mistretta  
[hmistretta@gnjumc.org](mailto:hmistretta@gnjumc.org)

LONG BRANCH, NJ

**S**tories are powerful extensions of who we are. They engage a community in a powerful, humanistic way. Stories enliven sermons, move people to action and make presentations interesting. We each have our own unique story to be unraveled, and by sharing them with others we help shape communities, strengthen others and provide a valuable roadmap for others to follow. The best story of all is the one that Jesus has told, and this January at the 2020 Bishop's Clergy Convocation, pastors will be able to develop into better storytellers, learn how to use stories with the congregation and help others learn how to tell their story. It will be fun, engaging and you will leave with a set of skills to enrich your ministry.



**The Moth, masters of storytelling with a presence in more than 30 cities, will present at this year's Convocation.**

Credit: The Moth

The 2020 Convocation will feature storytelling professionals from The Moth, producers of the Moth Radio Hour on NPR. The Moth's storytellers will work with clergy in small group sessions and one on one to shape stories to make

them powerful testimonies to faith and transformation.

"I could not be more excited about our clergy convocation. The Moth has been one of the most creative organizations at helping people tell stories and move hearts and minds," said Bishop John Schol.

Since its launch in 1997, The Moth has presented thousands of stories told live and without notes. The Moth is renowned for the great range of human experience, and storytellers explore themes in often unexpected ways. Bishop's Clergy Convocation will provide the opportunity for each pastor to develop his or her own story under the guidance of a Moth facilitator, culminating in a showcase of the best stories shared on the Convocation stage.

The Moth has been honoring and celebrating the diversity and commonality of human experience by creating a space for people to share their stories — all 35,000 stories to date, in 30 cities worldwide. It

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### Moorestown Answers Team Rubicon's Call for Help

By Heather Mistretta  
[hmistretta@gnjumc.org](mailto:hmistretta@gnjumc.org)

**W**hen Max Fisher learned that volunteers from Team Rubicon needed a place to house volunteers serving the flooding in New Jersey last June, he knew just what to do. Fisher is the Capital District Emergency Response Coordinator and a member of First UMC in Moorestown.



Susan Rapp (in white shirt with triangle) along with fellow church member, Doug Hamilton (in black shirt) shown with the rest of the Team Rubicon.

"They needed a place to stay, a home base," said Fisher. "So, my pastor immediately asked me to contact Team Rubicon to say we could help."

Team Rubicon was started by eight veterans led by two Marines in response to the January 12, 2010, powerful earthquake that shook Port-au-Prince, Haiti, destroying homes, schools and countless lives. Without hesitation they rushed to help those who were suffering in the small Caribbean

nation. Since that time, Team Rubicon has become an unstoppable network that now has about 100,000 members who provide disaster relief all over the world, often in places that are overlooked or underserved by traditional aid organizations.

Nine years later, in June 2019, Team Rubicon came to the aid in New Jersey when heavy rains caused flooding and a state of emergency declaration from Governor Phil Murphy in three counties. The Mid-Atlantic branch of Team Rubicon called on Burlington County Community Organizations Active in Disaster (BUCO-AD) to help. It was there they met Fischer who serves on BUCO-AD.

"We talked on June 27, and by the next day we had cots in the fellowship hall and had them moving in," said Fisher who added that the first step was to put together a multi-agency resource center (MARC) to discuss strategy. From there they were able to get a team of about 50 people together that included several members of the church in Burlington County.

Fisher, a former Moorestown fire chief and now fire commissioner for the past 18 years, added that he immediately

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### Oasis Receives \$25,000 Grant

By Heather Mistretta  
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PLEASANTVILLE, NJ

**O**asis is defined as a pleasant or peaceful area or period in the midst of a difficult, troubled or hectic place or situation. A refuge. A safe haven. A shelter. Oasis UMC on Martin Luther King Boulevard in Pleasantville, NJ, is rightly named. In the face of the many challenges that an urban city with higher-than-average unemployment, violence and language barriers has, Oasis UMC does not stop moving forward and instituting transformational change.

So, it comes as no surprise that in November the church with a congregation of about 100 received a \$25,000 Social Justice Center Grant from the National Plan for Hispanic/Latino Ministry, which is part of the General Board of Global Ministries.

"We are a small church with a lot of possibilities," said Rev. Lyssette Perez who has been the pastor since July. "It's like the sun with many rays. There is always hope. That's our vision."

Like the sun, the leadership at Oasis has come full circle. Thirty years ago, it was Perez's mother, Neomi who founded the church, only four years after she and her family emigrated from Puerto Rico.



Rev. Perez with members of the English Disciple Class.

This grant was a perfect example of how when people work together, great things can happen.

"Thanks for the grant goes to Pastor Lyssette Perez, [Capital District Superintendent] Hector Burgos and those that are part of the GNJ team that developed our Annual Conference Hispanic Plan, which was part of the application process," said Cape Atlantic District Superintendent Brian Roberts. The Plan's overall strategy for 2023 is to develop vital Hispanic/Latino ministries.

The mission of the new "Oasis of Hope Center" is to offer an oasis of hope to the Hispanic/Latino community providing knowledge, leadership skills and opportunities, as they advocate against systems of oppression that marginalize individuals and groups based on social identities.

With this grant, Oasis will move forward by providing hope to marginalized groups including the poor and unemployed; children and youth at risk, senior adults, immigrants and refugees, the LGBTQ+ community, prisoners and

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## A MESSAGE FROM OUR BISHOP



## Shrinking the Darkness

Bishop John Schol

Isn't light the enemy of light and not darkness? When you shine a flashlight during a bright sunny day, it loses its ability to shine a light on things. Lighting a candle in the darkness is always more powerful than lighting it during the day.

And isn't it the church whose light, its witness, is diminished when our congregations focus most of their activity and gatherings in our churches rather than in the world.

I am using light and darkness as a metaphor much like the Bible has used it. I find sometimes there is more light in the world than in our churches. Sometimes there are more people doing the ministry of Jesus found in Matthew 25:31-46 in the world than through our churches.

I want to share with you several churches whose light is shining bright by being in the world.

The St. Andrew congregation in Toms River, NJ, who when they discovered that their zip code had one of the highest populations of autistic children in GNJ asked, what can we do to make our ministries autistic friendly. They trained Sunday school teachers and leaders and created space for autistic students and their families. After a recent program that invited community families with autistic students to a cookie making and cake decorating event, one family member said this is a place where my child feels loved and accepted. The light of Christ shrinking the darkness!

The Maker's Place in Trenton does not have a building. Its congregation is the people of Trenton, particularly underserved children and their families. They have used diapers, yes diapers as a way of organizing people and resources to gather and connect with people in the community to focus on infant health and mortality. Diapers have helped them to expand to food, food for the body and food for the soul. The light of Christ is shrinking the darkness!

**"OUR DEEPEST FEAR IS NOT THAT WE ARE INADEQUATE.  
OUR DEEPEST FEAR IS THAT WE ARE POWERFUL BEYOND MEASURE.  
IT IS OUR LIGHT, NOT OUR DARKNESS THAT MOST FRIGHTENS US.  
WE ASK OURSELVES, 'WHO AM I TO BE BRILLIANT, GORGEOUS,  
TALENTED, FABULOUS?' ACTUALLY, WHO ARE YOU NOT TO BE?  
YOU ARE A CHILD OF GOD. YOUR PLAYING SMALL DOES  
NOT SERVE THE WORLD."**

— Marianne Williamson, Author of *Reflections or Miracles*

The Asbury UMC congregation has taken to the streets to meet the homeless where they are. They have found older women living in their car in a Walmart parking lot. They have connected not by only providing housing and services but by being in relationship. The light of Christ is shrinking the darkness!

The Island Heights UMC congregation organizes people and a box of care for immigrants and those seeking asylum through its new program, "Hope & Hospitality." The congregation is broadening its outreach by focusing on those impacted in New Jersey. The light of Christ is shrinking the darkness!

Dinner churches and messy churches are popping up everywhere. These fresh expressions of being a church focus on smaller gatherings; although some are now attracting 50 or more people, which is a blend of church people and people from the community around tables experiencing a new expression of Jesus Christ and the church through a meal together. These new expressions are being led by clergy and laity. The light of Christ is shrinking the darkness!

Marianne Williamson in her "Reflections on Miracles" wrote:

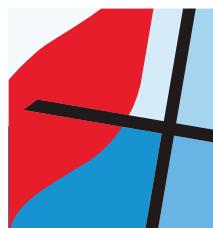
"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, 'Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?' Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world." Or God.

Former President Nelson Mandela found this so profound that he quoted it during his inaugural address to the South African people.

What does it look like for us to stop playing small church? You may worship with a small congregation, but you can think large. It's about attitude. Thinking large does not require more people, but faith. What does it look like for your congregation to be the light in the world rather than hanging with the light in our church buildings? What would it look like for your congregation to look out into your community and see who is there that is often made to feel unwelcome not just in the church but in most places they go? What would it look like to train

your people, change your worship and create ministries that are welcoming them rather than welcoming only those who are already in the light and already made to feel welcome?

Advent is a season of shorter days and longer nights, waiting for the light of Christ to unfold. What would it look like for you to shrink the darkness, to be bold with the light that is already in you? It is happening in churches and people all around us. Embrace it! ☺



# THE RELAY

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OF GREATER NEW JERSEY

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# BREAKTHROUGH

A GNJ guide to best practices for worship

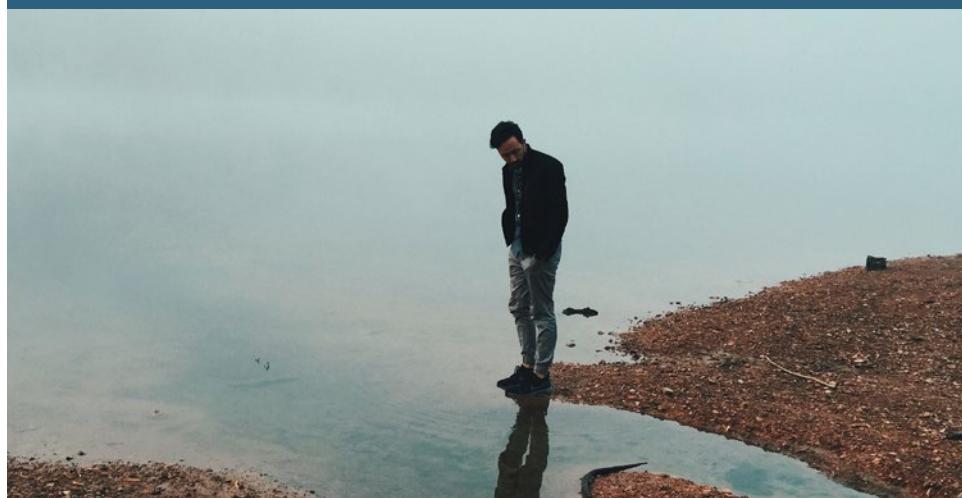
Join us for Breakthrough 2020 as we journey in faithful living through sharing our stories, wrestling with sin, inviting all to the table and struggling through the times when we're tossing and turning or simply don't know what to do. This series will be a deep look into many of the things that we face as individuals and communities.



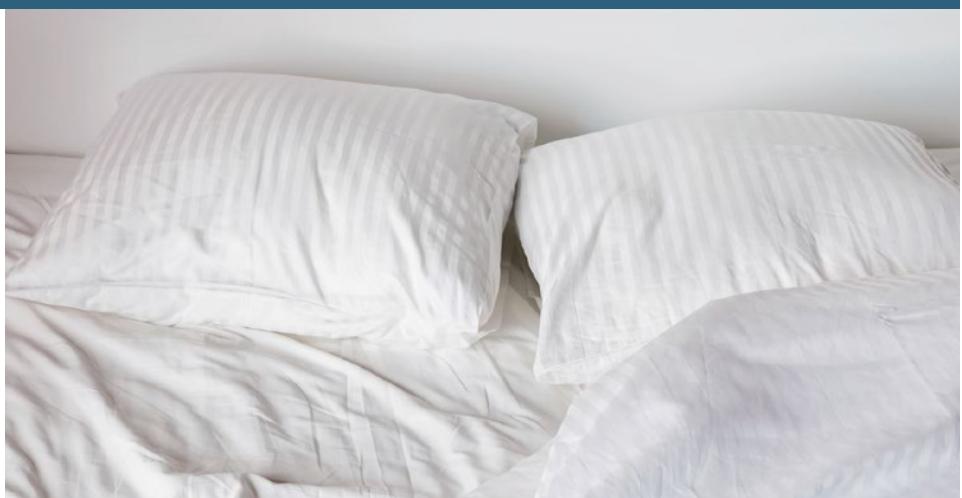
January 2020 | Telling Your Story



After Easter 2020 | Move Mountains



Summer 2020 | What to do...



Fall 2020 | Tossing and Turning



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Looking for more information? Contact:

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## Oasis

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victims of human trafficking and the sick and those with terminal illness.

Members of the group plan to achieve the following goals:

- Work with 80 low income families to provide food, clothing, job opportunities and other basic needs.
- Identify and equip 40 church and community leaders to run the different programs – 30 in Disciple Bible Study (six to eight Certified Lay Ministers and/or Lay Missionaries) and 10 community volunteers.

**"WE HAVE TO BE OUT IN THE COMMUNITY WITH A STRATEGIC MISSION."**

— Pastor Lyssette Perez,  
Oasis UMC in Pleasantville, NJ

- Reach out to 50 children and youth to be involved in children and youth programs.
- Provide 12 social justice workshops (once a month) in collaboration with the Stockton University Center for Community Engagement and other community organizations.
- Create and develop 13 weekly and monthly small support groups to reach out people in the community:

"Fifteen people just finished our disciple class, so we're on our way. It's extremely important to train them and find out the why. We have to be out in the community with a strategic mission," said Perez who brings to the church 25



A group of church members collaborating with Rev. Perez for the local food pantry.

years of experience in ministry. She is also president of MARCHA, the Hispanic/Latino/a caucus of The UMC.

The collaboration that led to securing this grant will continue, Perez said, noting that the "Oasis of Hope Center" will work with GNJ, community outreach groups, social services, Stockton University Center of Community Engage-

ment, United Methodist Communities and key church leaders.

"There is really good energy in this church," Perez said. "I'm excited about what we are going to achieve."

Throughout her 25 years in ministry, Perez has served in diverse settings including ethnic, multicultural, reconciling, suburban and urban churches at the

UMC of the Rockaways, Asbury UMC in Camden, Christ UMC in Lakewood and Lafayette UMC in Jersey City. She served for three years in leadership at the Greater New Jersey Annual Conference and served for six years on the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM), in the Latin American and the Caribbean office and Manager of the Honduras Mission. 🇭🇳

*Thinking about your year-end generosity?  
Wanting to make a greater charitable impact?  
Hoping to maximize your tax refund?*



## INTRODUCING DONOR ADVISED FUNDS

A donor advised fund (DAF) is a charitable giving tool that allows you to reap immediate tax benefits, while creating a lifetime method for supporting your church, 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
- Receive immediate income tax deduction for this year, with a 5-year carry-forward for unused deductions
- Recommend your choice of charitable contributions and grants each year
- Avoid the taxes and regulations of traditional private foundations
- Enjoy complete convenience as The Stewardship Foundation handles all administration and paperwork



Attendees at the 2018 Convocation went deeper to engage in peacemaking by applying concepts from the Arbinger Institute and their work, *Anatomy of Peace*.

## Convocation 2020

*Continued from page 1*

produces approximately 600 live shows each year. It also runs storytelling workshops for high school students, teachers, adults and advocates from around the world through its *Education, Community and Global Programs*.

*The Moth Podcast* is downloaded over 72 million times a year, and each week, the Peabody Award-winning *The Moth Radio Hour*, produced by Jay Allison at Atlantic Public Media and presented by PRX, The Public Radio Exchange, is heard on 500 radio stations. The Moth has published three critically acclaimed books — international bestseller *The Moth: 50 True Stories* (2013), *All These Wonders: True Stories about Facing the Unknown* (2017) and *The New York Times Best Seller, Occasional Magic: True Stories About Defying the Impossible* (2019).

Moths are often associated with transformation and personal growth, given the metamorphosis they take during their lives and the sheer determination to reach the light. Like a moth, Bishop's

Convocation is a forum for transformation, a time when clergy get the opportunity to learn and grow. Following the last convocation, one attendee said, "I took away things that will change how I will live and pursue my life and ministry differently."

Bishop's Clergy Convocation is held each year to provide GNJ clergy a chance to retool, reconnect and refresh themselves for ministry. Each year, Bishop John Schol invites innovative teachers and leaders to expand the way clergy think about their ministry. In addition to the teachings, Convocation offers time for clergy to connect with their peers and enjoy time away. Spouses and families are encouraged to attend as well.

Clergy are invited to attend the 2020 Convocation January 13-15 at the Ocean Place Spa and Resort in Long Branch. Congregational leaders are encouraged to support their pastors by gifting the cost of Convocation as a part of their love gift at Christmas or offsetting the cost out of the church budget.

More about Convocation at: [www.gnjumc.org/bishopsconvocation20](http://www.gnjumc.org/bishopsconvocation20) 🌟



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STEWARDSHIP FOUNDATION  
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# In Her Own Words

*Founded in 1946, the Ecumenical Institute is the international center of the World Council of Churches that brings together people from diverse churches, cultures and backgrounds for ecumenical learning, academic study and personal exchange.*

*Alumni consistently applaud how Bossey shaped their formation, consciousness and awareness of the world around them as they engage in globally unique studies. The Institute draws students and researchers from around the world. Among the 32 students who started the 2019-2020 academic year in September, 19 countries are represented. These include China, Cuba, Georgia, India, Indonesia, Italy, Kenya, Korea, Madagascar, Nigeria, Romania, Serbia, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, Ukraine and the United States.*

*Rachel Callender, MDiv, Princeton Theological Seminary, is one of those students. She has been studying for the past two months in Switzerland with the World Council of Churches as part of a Council of Bishops (COB) scholarship she received earlier this year.*

**G**reetings from the beautiful countryside of Bogis-Bossey, Switzerland!

I am past the halfway point of my studies here at the Bossey Ecumenical Institute at the Château de Bossey of the World Council of Churches (WCC). I was fortunate enough to have been chosen by the UMC Council of Bishops to represent our denomination this year for the Complimentary Certificate in Ecumenical Studies program. There are 32 of us (17 men, 15 women) who live under one roof with a professor and our two outdoor cats whose names seem to change depending on who you ask — I have a preference for Gandalf and Hermione. We eat all our meals together, help each other when someone is sick and engage in off-campus parish visits.

It is not easy engaging in intercultural and interdenominational dialogue; there is no sugar coating that. In fact, it is honestly exhausting. People's feelings have been hurt, I have had to choose when to speak up and when to bite my opinionated tongue, and I have learned far more about my context in the USA by being on another continent.

As an ordination candidate, studying ecumenism is ideal for continuing forward into dialogue in the UMC. We can disagree, yet still listen openly to how someone got to a different perspective than you. We can still find ways that God is working through and with people who have different ideals. I can debate, even argue, with a colleague over theology or a doctrine, yet still can sit next to them at lunch, pour water into their glass and feel cared for when they ask about my father's health.

Much of the application for this program and the daily conversation here is centered around what to do with everything we learn here once we get back home. How do I, as someone studying unity, apply this into my future leadership in a divided denomination?

A good example of this is when I was asked to be the guest speaker for the theology module. They were assigned to read "This Holy Mystery," the Methodist understanding of communion that was adopted in 2004. The students from other denominations and faith traditions disagreed wildly on what



**Rachel Callender was a guest speaker for the theology module, which focused on "This Holy Mystery."** Credit: Rachel Callender

Methodists believe. What was supposed to be 20 minutes of just clearing up some confusion, turned into an hour and a half session questioning United Methodist theology and practice. Some students were struggling to understand the "mysterious" part of Christ's presence being in the communal sharing of the elements for spiritual nourishment, not in any physical change of the bread and juice. Others struggled with inviting all to the table, even the unbaptized. When each of the students had read "This Holy Mystery," they read it with their own lenses and focused on the parts that felt familiar. Everyone thought that Methodists believed just as they did, whether Orthodox or Catholic or Baptist or Lutheran. Assumptions about other beliefs happen often and is one of the difficulties of dialogue amongst diverse groups.

Although my ecumenical colleagues didn't agree theologically with some of my clarifications about Methodism, they can still appreciate the theology of Methodism. I learned that unity does not mean agreement — it does not mean we need the same name or the same roof. In fact, the class ended by looking at a typical Methodist Word and Table service, and everyone was re-energized by how much of their own traditions they found, despite different theologies.

I have much to look forward to in the upcoming weeks, including being hosted by a Reformed Church in Zurich, spending a weekend with the Monks in Taizé, and, this is not a joke, going to the Vatican to meet Pope Francis. God has been unusually loud in my life over these past three months, and I have a feeling that the next two months will not be any different. 

*Applicants for this scholarship must be active UMC members, between the ages of 22 and 30, preparing through an approved seminary for vocational ministry in The UMC and be accepted by Bossey into this program. Visit*

[www.unitedmethodistbishops.org/ecumenical-grants-scholarships](http://www.unitedmethodistbishops.org/ecumenical-grants-scholarships) for details on this scholarship and others

offered by COB. Any questions should be directed to Rev. Dr. Jean Hawhurst at [jhawhurst@umc-cob.org](mailto:jhawhurst@umc-cob.org).



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- Kathy Vestal



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# Vitality at the Right Time and at the Right Place

By Heather Mistretta  
hmistretta@gnjumc.org

## NETCONG, NJ

**T**eam Vital has long been a great resource for congregations to learn from each other and model new ministries that bring vitality into churches. This January participants will have the opportunity to take what they've learned from Team Vital one step further with GNJ's Vitality 2. They will be able to dive even deeper into discipleship, stewardship and assessing community assets. Through new ideas in worship planning and innovative approaches to ministry and stewardship, Vitality 2 will help churches grow and transform communities.

An important part of Team Vital is how churches model for each other by sharing stories of new ministry that multiply. Pastor Lynn Zaremba, who serves Stanhope UMC in Netcong, has learned first-hand how Team Vital can be transformational and in turn, has a story that not only involves her church but also her own personal challenges and circuitous route through God.

Stanhope UMC, also known as the "Church in the Glen," has had a food pantry for several years, thanks to the efforts of 99-year-old Marion Rush, who was the first baby baptized in the church. The pantry helped about 5-6 families, but in 2018, Zaremba and others believed that they could do more.

"We thought we could help more families of ALL ages," she said, adding that at first they stumbled.

"By the time God got us into the [Team Vital] program, we were ready," she said.

Through Team Vital, Zaremba said, she along with church members Linda White, Cathy Rinko and others were able to determine that they were not addressing the right population, that the Latino population was larger than they had thought. It wasn't until they completed a demographic study and tapped into financial resources like grants and local businesses that they began to grow.

"We started working for the future, not the past," said Zaremba.

Funding to grow their food pantry came from a grant from Norwescap, a nonprofit organization that serves the low-income population in northwest New Jersey and joined A Future With Hope as a Hope Center in 2017. [See [www.norwescap.org](http://www.norwescap.org) and [www.afuturewithhope.org](http://www.afuturewithhope.org)].

Zaremba said that with the money they received from the grant they will be purchasing a full refrigerator and full freezer. If there is extra, it will go towards some electrical work for dedicated circuits for these items.

Supplementing that grant was fundraising through Shop Rite and donations from local restaurants, bakeries, Sussex Food Pantry, Tropicana and Panera Bread among many others.

Today, the pantry serves about 38 families on the first and third Thursday each month in Stanhope, Netcong, Byram and surrounding communities, providing not only canned items but also fresh fruits and vegetables, soups and baked goods as well as about 25 baskets every Thanksgiving.



Stanhope UMC's Team Vital team, which includes Linda White, team leader; Lynn Gremmo, Carol Scheese, Walt Scheese, Bob Denner, Kristin Ransiear, Cathy Rinko and Lynn Zaremba, held a baby shower for Birth Haven of Newton, NJ.



Volunteers of all ages help foster growth at the Stanhope UMC's food pantry.

"It has been such a blessing for our church," said Zaremba, who added that the pantry now has about 20 people running it. "We were so grateful for the knowledge that was shared with us," said Zaremba who first answered her call after her 50th birthday.

cared for her son, Anthony, whose mental capacity was stunted by a rare chromosome abnormality. He died in 2011 at the age of 26.

"Throughout those years I learned so much. Anthony taught me about life, and Amy taught me about how to

**"IT TURNED OUT THAT SEVERAL YEARS AGO THIS MAN USED TO EAT AT THE PANTRY WHEN HE WAS HOMELESS. NOW, WITH A HOUSE AND A FAMILY, HE ATTRIBUTED HIS RECOVERY TO THE PEOPLE AT THE PANTRY WHO HELPED HIM GET BACK ON HIS FEET."**

—Pastor Lynn Zaremba, Stanhope UMC, Netcong, NJ

Her call came when she was a child, but for nearly three decades Zaremba's main focus was being a parent to her two children. In addition to her daughter, Amy, who is now studying to be a dietitian, Zaremba

like life," she said.

She recalled while working on the church's renovation just how help can come from the most unexpected places. Stanhope UMC had hired a mason who agreed to do all the work for free. His generosity was a huge support for the church, but when asked to recommend someone who could do the much-needed plastering work, the mason recommended another man.

Zaremba said she was amazed when this man also agreed to offer his time for free. She wondered why.

"It turned out that several years ago this man used to eat at the pantry when he was homeless. Now, with a house and a family, he attributed his recovery to the people at the pantry who helped him get back on his feet."

Now a little over a year since diving into Team Vital, Zaremba looks ahead to celebrating her church's 100th anniversary on October 24 and continuing to help others. In February, she and the congregation plan to have their second annual baby shower for the homeless, pregnant women and girls at Birth Haven in Newton, NJ. This past February there were more than 80 people from the church involved and hundreds of presents donated.

With Zaremba and Stanhope UMC nearing the end of Team Vital, the next step may be Vitality 2 as they work toward broadening their outreach and continue to grow more vitality.

GNJ's first Vitality 2 of the 2020 season will be February 29. For more information about Team Vital, Vitality 2 and to register, visit [www.gnjumc.org/team-vital/](http://www.gnjumc.org/team-vital/).

# Food For Thought Stirs Up New Ideas

By Pastor Ayn Masker & Lay Delegate  
Barbra Barrar

## HADDON HEIGHTS, NJ

**F**ood For Thought is an engaging new series at Fellowship UMC in Haddon Heights, NJ, that features guest speakers presenting contemporary topics, how they affect others and the things that can be done.

### "DID JESUS FOLLOW A FORMULA? OUR ANSWER WAS A UNANIMOUS YES!"

— Pastor Ayn Masker

In organizational discussions for developing a Food For Thought, Fellowship UMC focused on Christ's unending message of love and grace. Secondly, they tried to be unwavering in following Christ in word and action: Did Jesus follow a formula? Our answer was a unanimous yes!

Jesus loved all the people, ate with the marginalized, listened to the unbelievers, fed the hungry, listened to the point of exhaustion and kept loving...everyone. Gatherings at the church begin with a bountiful feast for all who walk through the doors. They gather around a table of grace with strangers and engage with dynamic guest speakers who present challenging



(FROM LEFT TO RIGHT) **Abdul Nasir**, president of Ahmadiyya Muslim Community Central Jersey, **Rev. Shellie Pinner**, **Rev. Sandra Campbell**, **Mohsin Mahmood Mohammed**, secretary of Outreach for the community Hammad Amja, **Imam Muhammad Saeed**, **Imam of Ahmadiyya Muslim Community Central Jersey**. Credit: Barbra Barrar.

topics. Their constant prayer is that they keep following the "Jesus' formula."

On November 9 Mohsin Mahmood Mohammed from the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in Central Jersey was the speaker. He invited guests to "Meet a Muslim: Ask Me Anything."

Islam is the world's second largest religion, but it is still the most

misunderstood faith in America. This is in part due to the vast amount of misinformation that circulates unchecked, combined with the fact that over 60% of Americans do not know a Muslim.

Fellowship UMC was honored to gather with the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, giving thanks for a delicious vegetarian

(and halal) meal with a Mediterranean flair prepared by the dedicated Food For Thought team.

"It was a wonderful evening, and we all learned kingdom building begins with love for all and hatred for none," said Lay Delegate Barbra Barrar.

For more information, please visit [www.fellowshipumc.net](http://www.fellowshipumc.net).

## Women Growing in Faith through Spiritual Retreats in Hackettstown

### HACKETTSTOWN, NJ

**F**or Susan Manhire, bringing women together has always been a natural inclination. A lay leader at Trinity UMC in Hackettstown, Manhire has made it her mission to offer the women in Trinity's congregation a spiritual retreat for the past 15 years.



Retired New Jersey Pastor Deborah Steelman Kauffman sets the table for closing and communion.

"We like to make women feel important and safe," said Manhire. Joanne Stiehl is her co-leader who creates and leads all the praise and worship music. "Each year we share our faith, grow our friendships and spirituality and study God's word together."

The ministry group, "Women Growing in Faith," in October gathered at Star Lake in Bloomingdale, NJ, for its annual retreat that averages 30-40 women in attendance.

"We discover much during our time together, and each retreat allows for personal reflection time as well as our closing of communion together," said Manhire who also runs an optical business along with her husband when she's not serving her church.

For the past six years, Lauren Mount has been a regular participant in "Women Growing in Faith."

"Job and children and family commitments always seemed to be in the way of making a commitment for time for myself with other women reaching for a connection with God. To be connected with other women as we share life's challenges, feelings of doubt and need, praise for our Lord and reaching to Him to continue to join us together when we leave and go on with our daily lives is more meaningful than my words can explain," said Mount.

"Knowing that our leaders and presenters are showing us the Way with God to proceed through our days and find community with others after the retreat if only with a nod, a few brief words, a hug is what I have found, realized and now share with others."

Mount added, "We talk, we listen, we cry, we laugh, we rejoice and pray."

**Do you have a women's ministry?**  
**The Relay would like to know in time for Women's History Month in March.**  
**Please email Heather Mistretta at hmistretta@gnjumc.org.**

## STARTS IN FEBRUARY!

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

- Saturday, February 29, 2020
- Saturday, April 25, 2020
- Saturday, September 19, 2020

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 February 29!

### FIND OUT MORE AT:

[www.gnjumc.org/team-vital](http://www.gnjumc.org/team-vital)

Deadline to register is January 25, 2020



TO FIND OUT MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

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



TEAM VITAL

UNITED METHODISTS OF GREATER NEW JERSEY

# GNJ Board of Discipleship Highlights Evangelism with Denman Award

By Heather Mistretta  
hmistretta@gnjumc.org

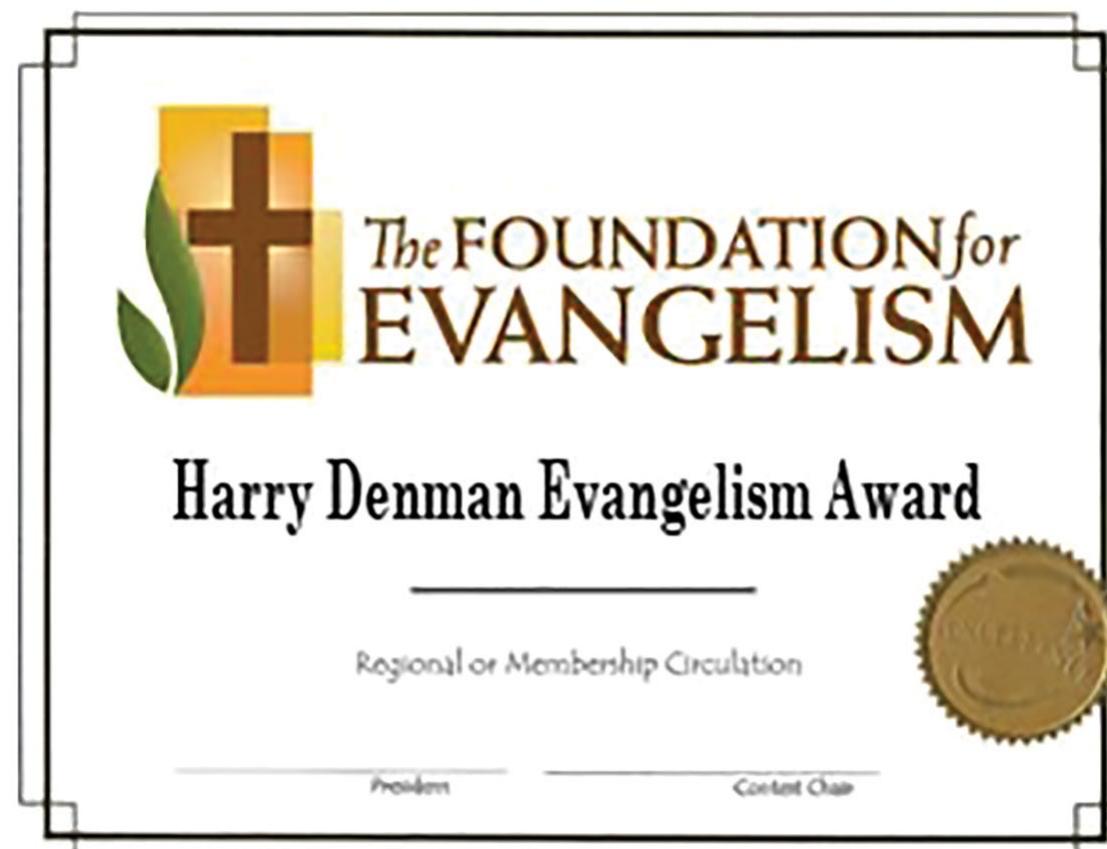
*"Today the only way one can see [Christ's] love is to see it wrapped up in a person. This is true of faith. The only way we can see Christ is to see him wrapped in a person. Evangelism can only be seen in a person. We need to become a package of love, a package of faith, a package of Christ. Then we will be a package of evangelism."*—Harry Denman (1893-1976)

**J**ohn Wesley didn't wait until people came through the church doors before he nurtured disciples. Neither did Harry Denman. That's why the GNJ Board of Discipleship honors evangelism each year with the Harry Denman Evangelism Award.

The Board of Discipleship recognizes clergy, congregations and youth for excellence with the Harry Denman Evangelism Award through the Foundation for Evangelism. For 40 years this award has honored United Methodists for their exceptional ministry of evangelism that brings people into a life-transforming relationship with Jesus Christ.

This recipient consistently introduces those they serve to the Good News of Jesus Christ. Their ministry is outstanding for the number of new Christ followers who credit encounters with this person as critical in helping to start or reignite their faith journey.

The award is named for a man who for many years was a friend to taxi drivers, missionaries, housewives, students, pastors, world leaders and the United



Credit: Foundation for Evangelism

Methodist Church. He was a noted lay evangelist and leader in the Methodist Church in the 1950s, believing that each person must live their call to make disciples of Jesus Christ through relationship, mission and preaching. Since the award's inception, more than 2,500 individuals have been honored.

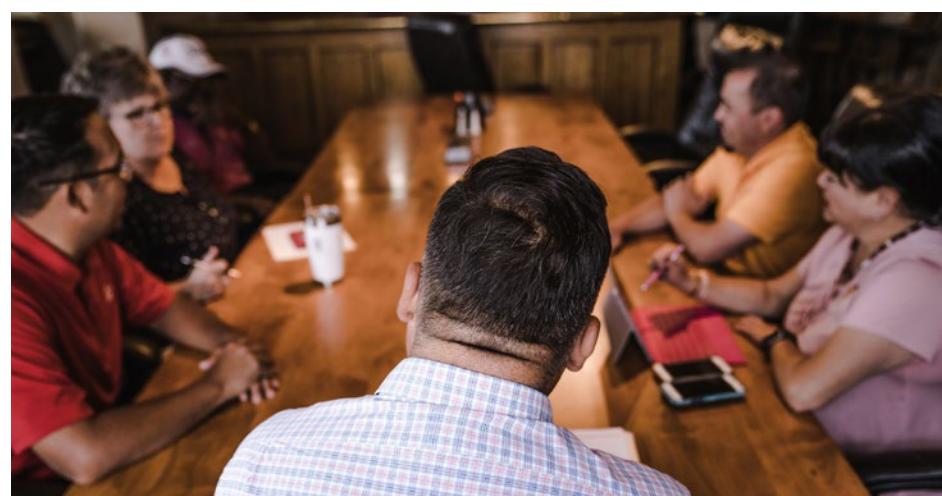
Throughout the years, there have been many notable recipients of this prestigious award—people who continue to serve and make disciples. John Doll is one of those people. The 2006 recipient, who leads Asbury UMC in Cinnaminson said, "It was very touching to receive the Harry Denman Evangelism Award. It was an honor to be recognized for being the pastor of a "turnaround church" — that is, being blessed and used by God to bring Asbury UMC from very low attendance to needing a building program to accommodate the growth."

Thirteen years later, Pastor Doll remains tireless in his efforts to grow more vitality and sustainability in his church

as they become the current role models for evangelism. The Denman award is an important way of doing this."

Information about the Board of Discipleship and the Harry Denman Evangelism Award can be found at [www.gnjumc.org/board-of-discipleship/](http://www.gnjumc.org/board-of-discipleship/) and at the Foundation for Evangelism at [www.foundationforevangelism.com](http://www.foundationforevangelism.com). Nominations are due by February 14.

In addition to the Denman Award, the BOD also recognizes churches with its One Church Matters Award. This award, which includes \$1,000 and a One Matters Discipleship Award plaque, is given to churches who have gone from zero professions of faith to a significant



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**"IT WAS AN HONOR TO BE RECOGNIZED FOR BEING THE PASTOR OF A "TURNAROUND CHURCH" – THAT IS, BEING BLESSED AND USED BY GOD TO BRING ASBURY UMC FROM VERY LOW ATTENDANCE TO NEEDING A BUILDING PROGRAM TO ACCOMMODATE THE GROWTH."**

—Rev. John Doll, pastor at Asbury UMC

and inspire others to give and serve. Just last month, he announced that his church was able to pay off both the parsonage and church building mortgages in five and seven years, respectively!

Echoing his sentiment was Dr. Frank Fowler III, the pastor of Trinity Church who won the award in 1994. "This award is a deep honor, and it is important because we always need role models in ministry—people to whom we can aspire to follow because of their unique effectiveness."

Fowler added, "Harry Denman was indeed effective as he humbly lived his life, consistently telling people about Jesus Christ. He once described Christianity as "give, give, give" and that counsel is needed in our increasingly narcissistic culture. We need to continue lifting up people who are giving significant leadership in telling the world about Christ,

increase in a year as they renew their focus on discipleship.

One of the goals of the award is to encourage more annual baptisms and professions of faith that sometimes get forgotten.

The GNJ Board of Discipleship provides leadership and resources to bolster a congregation's ability to make disciples of Jesus Christ. It is at the heart of a United Methodist's spiritual growth. This group of dedicated United Methodists provides spiritual food for every stage of the Christian journey.

Deb DeVos, associate pastor at Trinity UMC Hackettstown, became chair of the board this year after serving as a member on the board for the past five years. She said, "There's a true purpose to this team, and I am committed to following it and showing people how we can help them." ■



**FOR INFORMATION, CONTACT:**  
Gina Yeske, Director of Small Groups  
[gyeske@gnjumc.org](mailto:gyeske@gnjumc.org) | 732.359.1042



PURSUING CLERGY EXCELLENCE  
UNITED METHODISTS  
OF GREATER NEW JERSEY

# GNJers Explore a Calling in Orlando

By Heather Mistretta  
hmistretta@gnjumc.org

**J**ust down the road from Mickey Mouse, MGM Studios and the EPCOT globe, the other part of Orlando was brewing with enthusiasm in the first weekend of November with young adults who were discerning what next step to take in their calling to be disciples of Jesus Christ.

Ranging in age from 18 to 26, people from around the world took part in Exploration, a three-day event sponsored by the United Methodist Church's General Board of Higher Education & Ministry meant to provide a sacred space for those considering what path to take on their spiritual journey.

Two of the participants that weekend were Zachary Holder and David Geller, who were sent to the conference by GNJ's Next Generation Ministries because of their proven commitment to following the teachings

of Jesus. Both were active members of the IGNITE Squad and have actively contributed to the Annual Conference.

"I had people invest in me, and they were all formative things," said Bethany Amey-Sutton, who is chair of the General Conference Delegation. "I wanted to pay it forward, and these two young men are amazing."

One of those two men who Amey-Sutton suggested was David Geller, who interns at St. Andrew UMC in Toms River through Next Generation's Cultivate program, a summer internship program led by Next Generation Ministries that allows high school students to work together with clergy. Calling the experience "awesome," he said, "It allowed me to explore the call that God has given me and be around young people who have the same passion and vigor that I have."

Twenty-one-year-old Zachary Holder, who is a certified lay servant at Covenant UMC in Plainfield, echoed his sentiments, saying that he benefitted from the different cultures and diversities he saw at Exploration.

"It allowed us to understand things better," said Holder who added that one of the highlights was the variety of workshops including "Journaling through Dis-

cernment," which provided them with some reflective time through poetry and scripture.

This workshop was just one of 11 that weekend that challenged the young adults to expand their minds and perspectives.

Amey-Sutton, who has been part of GNJ her entire life as the daughter, granddaughter and niece of clergy persons, was on a team that led the first-ever workshop on lay ministry.

"I was honored to help run the workshop. Some of them didn't realize that they were already doing lay ministry working in the food pantry or collecting coats for a drive. We talked about the differences between lay and ordained ministry," said Amey-Sutton who since September has been the interim office manager at Arch Street UMC in Philadelphia. She is also a laity delegate from Trinity UMC, the church her father served until his retirement, as well as the adult worker that was elected in 2016 to serve as the Northeast Rep on the Division on Ministries with Young People, which is part of Discipleship Ministries.

The "Extension Ministry: Serving Beyond the Local Church" workshop enabled participants to see how deacons and elders can serve outside the church like being a chaplain in the military or a hospital. Other workshops included "Diversity in Ministry: Embracing

**"IT ALLOWED ME TO EXPLORE THE CALL THAT GOD HAS GIVEN ME AND BE AROUND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE THE SAME PASSION AND VIGOR THAT I HAVE."**

—David Geller

**"IT ALLOWED US TO UNDERSTAND THINGS BETTER...ONE OF THE HIGHLIGHTS WAS THE VARIETY OF WORKSHOPS INCLUDING 'JOURNALING THROUGH DISCERNMENT.'"**

—Zachary Holder

**"I HAD PEOPLE INVEST IN ME, AND THEY WERE ALL FORMATIVE THINGS. I WANTED TO PAY IT FORWARD, AND THESE TWO YOUNG MEN ARE AMAZING."**

—Bethany Amey-Sutton

Holistic, Inclusive Community" and "Mission and Justice" as well practical workshops that addressed financial concerns and a seminary road map.

Holder, who also sits on the GNJ Way Forward Team and spoke at the 2018 Annual Conference, has had a circuitous route toward his calling. Since immigrating from Barbados at 14-years-old with his family, Holder has made it his mission to serve God and help others. He recalled getting his calling during an ordination altar call at an annual conference.

"There was no doubt where I wanted my life to go," said Holder whose other mission is to care for his mother who became blind following an illness. Allison Holder is now learning Braille as she learns to adapt to her new life.

Geller, who is a junior studying social work at Stockton University, is a New Jersey native and relished the opportunity to learn alongside people from all walks of life.

"There were people from Chile and Germany in my small groups," said the 22-year-old. "Although we have differences, we realized we want to be together, that we're called together in love and service." He added that he is still in active conversation with seven people throughout the United States.

"I came out of Exploration with seven new friends!" said Geller. "We continue to lift each other up."

In addition to workshops, the conference provided participants with time for fellowship, leader training and introspective time alone. 



Credit: Zachary Holder

## Team Rubicon

*Continued from page 1*

connected the Team Rubicon team with the local fire house and all its facilities.

The regional Team Rubicon spent the next 10 days in Moorestown helping more than 50 residents recover from the storms by mucking out homes and removing debris including wet drywall.

"The church did a fantastic job. In fact, it was one of the best operations I have been involved with," said Thomas Scheuerman, who led this operation and for the past two years has been Team Rubicon's city coordinator for Philadelphia.

Scheuerman, who served in the Pennsylvania National Guard for six years, added that the church members even arranged for he and his team to march in the town's July 4 parade. He also said that following the operation, the church hosted a community dinner, and there were many who signed up to be new Team Rubicon members.

Church member Susan Rapp, who is also an UMCOR ERT, rolled up her sleeves and offered her help. She said that she has done many operations throughout the country, including in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in January 2006, but this one gave her the opportunity to help locally.

"It was a leap of faith then, and sometimes it still is. I count on the Lord to guide me," said Rapp who added that she always keeps one week per year open to serve on disaster relief teams.

Rapp recalled helping a younger mom who didn't have any resources living with her child in an old home. "Not sure what would have happened to her had Team Rubicon not been there to help."

Team Rubicon members are able to provide aid to many by applying medical and leadership skills honed by years of service in the military. Team Rubicon



Team Rubicon leader, Zach Falcon thanks one of the volunteers.

serves communities by mobilizing veterans to continue their service, leveraging their skills and experience to help people prepare, respond and recover from disasters and humanitarian crises.

"Through continued service, Team Rubicon seeks to provide veterans with three things they lose after leaving the military: a purpose, gained through disaster relief; community, built by serving with others; and identity, from recognizing the impact one individual can make. Coupled with leadership development and other opportunities, Team Rubicon looks to help veterans transition from military to civilian life."

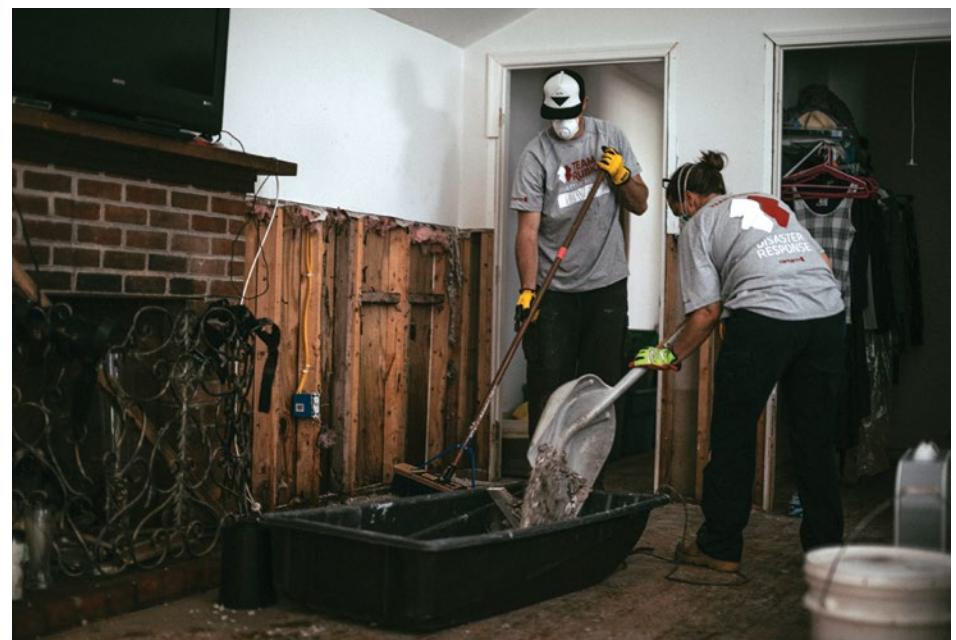
When asked what the best part of the operation was, Fisher said, "It's always

about the people. It feels good helping people get back their lives." He added that among other things involving both adults and children from First United's congregation, they are planning to participate in a mission trip next July in Vermont with Habitat for Humanity.

Serving others is a foundation of the United Methodist faith. While First United was working alongside Team Rubicon, other United Methodists were also coming to the aid of those impacted by

the disaster in Burlington, Camden and Gloucester Counties, including Good Shepherd UMC in Northfield, who is host of GNJ's Southern Region UMCOR kit hub. A team from the church in Atlantic County brought 100 cleaning kit buckets to the Burlington County Office of Emergency Management.

For more details on Team Rubicon, visit [teamrubiconusa.org](http://teamrubiconusa.org). To check out what else FUMC is doing, visit [www.meetwithgod.com](http://www.meetwithgod.com).



Volunteers help with muck-out of home in Capital District.

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**Help make a change  
this Christmas season**



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Size 4+ diapers especially appreciated  
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**Collect diapers for children and families during the four weeks of Advent.**

**Drop off your donations at the Maker's Place By Dec. 22nd.**

**For more info and free promotional resources visit [www.makersplace.org/donate](http://www.makersplace.org/donate)**

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UNITED METHODISTS OF GREATER NEW JERSEY

(609) 836-1403  
[michaelreed@makersplace.org](mailto:michaelreed@makersplace.org)  
[www.makersplace.org](http://www.makersplace.org)

# SAVE the DATE

(Please note change of date.)

## TEAM VITAL CELEBRATION

for all who have participated since its inception

**FEBRUARY 29, 2020 AT MRC**  
**10 A.M.-12:30 P.M.**

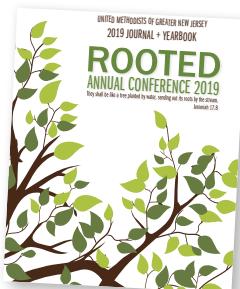
**TEAM VITAL**  
UNITED METHODISTS OF GREATER NEW JERSEY

## CONFERENCE HAPPENINGS

### Journals Are On Their Way

The 2019 Annual Conference Journal, chock full of information and resources to carry you through the year, is now available online and will be delivered to your mailboxes this month.

To access the online journal, visit [www.gnjumc.org/2019-annual-conference/2019-digital-journal/](http://www.gnjumc.org/2019-annual-conference/2019-digital-journal/).



### Making Christmas Brighter for Less Fortunate Children

The Sunday School at the United Methodist Church of Matamoras packed 46 shoeboxes during National Collection Week, November 18-25, for the international relief organization, Samaritans Purse Operation Christmas Child.

"We prayed for the shoebox contents and for the children who will receive these gifts," said Pastor Diane Sommers. "It is very exciting to know that we are helping to share God's love around the world."

For more information about Samaritans Purse, visit [www.samaritanspurse.org](http://www.samaritanspurse.org).



Youth at UMC of Matamoras reveal shoeboxes they made for less fortunate children.

### Searching For Christian Maturity this January

An annual retreat known as Search for Christian Maturity that originally began as a Catholic retreat 30 years ago, will take place Jan. 3-5, 2020 at Pinelands Center at Mt. Misery in Browns Mills, NJ.



letters" to embrace unconditional love.

For details and to register, visit [searchretreat.org](http://searchretreat.org).

There will be 11 talks throughout that weekend, said Tim Booth, who along with Rev. Dianna Stone and Rev. Todd Lattig leads this retreat for high school students.

He added that there will also be small groups, worship and "Agape let-

### Register by January 15 to Bolster Your Ministry

The registration deadline for both the Local Pastor Licensing School and the Certified Lay Minister (CLM) Course is Wednesday, January 15.

The Local Pastor Licensing School is a foundational learning experience for those candidates preparing to become an appointed local pastor in GNJ. One must be recommended by their District Committee on Ordained Ministry or District Superintendent to register. Visit [www.gnjumc.org/ordained-ministry-2/local-pastor-licensing-school/](http://www.gnjumc.org/ordained-ministry-2/local-pastor-licensing-school/).

A Certified Lay Minister (CLM) is a qualified United Methodist lay servant called to congregational leadership as part of a ministry team under supervision of a clergy person, but who often serves the church in many different ways. To register for this course, visit [www.gnjumc.org/lay-servant-ministries/certified-lay-ministries/2020-certified-lay-minister-classes/](http://www.gnjumc.org/lay-servant-ministries/certified-lay-ministries/2020-certified-lay-minister-classes/).

### IGNITE Youth Leaders Day is now the Next Generation Ministries Summit

At the Next Generation Ministries Summit volunteers, pastors and more will come together for a day of learning, inspiration and community. For more than three years the IGNITE Youth Leaders Day created a fantastic community of youth leaders; and now it is growing.

The Next Generation Ministries Summit on February 8, 2020, from 9 a.m.-3 p.m. at Aldersgate UMC in East Brunswick, NJ, will have workshops and learning tracks for Youth Ministry, Children's Ministry, Young Adult Ministry and Camping and Retreat Ministry.

The theme, "Growing Young" will help leaders and churches of all sizes to engage the next generation of disciples and "Grow Young." Keynote speaker Mike Park, from Hope West Side Church, will share practices for any church to begin or grow in their ministries with children, youth and young adults.

Practical, specific workshops will also allow all participants to focus their learnings around what is best for their church and community. Cost (includes lunch): \$20/person. Groups of 4+ only pay \$80.



**On November 21 United Methodist Communities HomeWorks hosted a Grand Opening and Open House at their Haddonfield location. Vice President of Housing and Community Initiatives, Cindy Jacques (right), reviews the program with Senior Pastor of the Haddonfield United Methodist Church, Rev. Chris Heckert. He offered a blessing for the staff, clients, and families touched by HomeWorks' personal care, case management, and companion services.**

### 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?

Please contact Director of Mission Ashley Wilson at [awilson@gnjumc.org](mailto:awilson@gnjumc.org) with questions or sign up on our website.

### Tackling the Opioid Crisis with Compassion

The statistics tell a disturbing story: 70,237 overdose deaths in the U.S. in 2017 — 47,600 of them opioid-related. In 2018 The United Methodist Church's pension agency at Wespath stood up and realized that they needed to address the growing epidemic.

So, Wespath's Sustainable Investment Services division joined Investors for Opioid Accountability (IOA), a coalition of more than 50 institutional investors with a combined \$3.5 trillion in assets under management that calls for pharmaceutical companies to adopt or strengthen their practices to mitigate risks related to opioids.

Wespath now engages with companies throughout the supply chain to reduce the harm done by opioids, having shares in nearly 5,000 companies.

Wespath supports the IOA's resolutions with its votes. For example, in 2018, Wespath voted for a resolution requiring RiteAid to provide a risk report related to the opioid epidemic.

"Will it fix the crisis overnight? No," said Wespath. "But it forces part of the opioid supply chain to acknowledge the role it has played. It also chips away at the industry's moral license to continue business as usual."

For more information, visit [nwumf.org/news/2019/10/2/investors-for-opioid-accountability](http://nwumf.org/news/2019/10/2/investors-for-opioid-accountability).

To read how a church in GNJ is doing their part to help those plagued by addiction, please see the story, "Lacey UMC Heals and Comforts a Community in Recovery" in the September Relay.

## OBITUARIES

**Janet E. Brown**, Spouse of Jay Brown, Former Lay member to Annual Conference, died November 3, 2019. A viewing was held November 15, and a memorial service was held November 16 in Williamstown, NJ. Memorial donations (in lieu of flowers) may be sent to Hope School or a charity of your choice in memory of Janet.

**Nancy T. Sturdivant**, Retired Full Elder, died October 25, 2019. A memorial service was held November 16 at Amity UMC in Chapel Hill, NC. Memorial donations (in lieu of flowers) may be sent to TABLE- feeding local kids in Carrboro, NC. Expressions of sympathy may be sent to James Sturdivant (son) at 567 Barrett Ave., Haverford, PA 19041.

# Miracles Everywhere

Children sought out the teachings of Jesus...

*And you gave them scholarships to IGNITE and Pinelands Summer Camp.*

The crowds had only a few loaves and fish...

*And you fed thousands through Hope Center soup kitchens and food pantries.*

A family in Puerto Rico needed shelter...

*And you helped rebuild their home, their school and their church.*

People in Africa asked for help in building disciples...

*And you sent mission teams that trained pastors in Tanzania.*

**Thank You, for serving and blessing God's most vulnerable people across GNJ and around the world.**



In 2019, over 225 local churches made an investment in Miracles Everywhere.  
*Join the campaign to be Christ's hands and feet in the world today.*

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**For information about Miracles Everywhere:**

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