

THE RELAY

UNITED METHODISTS
OF GREATER NEW JERSEY

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The Value of the Connection

FROM NEW JERSEY TO AFRICA

By Heather Mistretta
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“Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.”

— LUKE 6:21 21

Connectionalism has always been an important part of the United Methodist Church. In part, it is what links the hungry to food and connects the sad and less fortunate to laughter. Ultimately, it’s what connects us to one another and to God. But the unexpected changes caused by the pandemic have amplified the need to connect and not just over a wireless network. In the face of adversity, networks of ministries and missions, both within and outside the United Methodist Church, have become stronger and stretched wider because of these connections.



When Centenary UMC in Metuchen saw how Wesley UMC was able to bolster the wonderful work that New Dover UMC was doing, they too knew they had to be involved. Together on September 11, the group packed a record-breaking 438 sandwiches.

“I really believe in the connectational value of the church. We’re never alone,” said Rev. James Lee who leads Wesley UMC. “One of the things I love about the church is that

there are always people I trust and can reach out to.”

When it came time to consider the use of the money they would have received from the Payroll Protection Program (PPP), the people of Wesley UMC saw their blessings as an opportunity to help others and pay forward the blessings they had received.

“It moved the hearts of the people in our church leadership,” said Lee. “We were lucky to be able to give back.” Wesley UMC was one of 15 GNJ churches who recently donated the value of 10 percent of the funding it received or would have received through the CARES Act back to the COVID-19 Relief Fund for congregations who were denied funding.

At Wesley UMC the tapestry of connection stretches from beyond the churches in GNJ and all the way from South Plainfield, NJ, to Nyagidha, Kenya.

“We think locally and globally,” said Lee who likes to embrace the philosophy that God calls us to say “no” to the very good things, so that we could say “yes” to the best things.

The connection with a small village on the shores of Lake Victoria in western Kenya called Nyagidha began in 2007 when a Wesley UMC member’s mom started attending and sharing

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“An ounce of love is worth a pound of knowledge.”

—JOHN WESLEY

Nine Thousand Acts of Kindness IN VOORHEES

By Heather Mistretta
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If a picture is said to be worth a thousand words, a paraphrase from what the famous 19th century playwright Henrik Ibsen penned, then what are nine thousand random acts of kindness worth? For Pastor Heather Mandala of Hope Church in Voorhees and Mount Laurel, NJ, their worth has exceeded her expectations.

When the #HopeOutside initiative began last June at the Hope Church, Mandala and her congregation were blind to what the future held. But that didn’t stop them from moving forward with their plan to spread hope throughout their community, both individually and as a group, for three

Continued on page 7



When Haley and Elizabeth of Hope Church made lemon bars for a recently widowed neighbor, they had no idea how their little act of kindness would be treasured.

Thank You Rosa & Welcome Judy

By Heather Mistretta
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“Enough light to see the hope of God’s call.”

—EPHESIANS 1:18

For 10 years as GNJ’s Conference Lay Leader, Rosa Williams has been empowering and leading laity to help them serve in partnership with clergy in the local church. She has been instrumental in creating programs that were vehicles for their growth and transformation, all the while with a peaceful, determined nature that she is being guided by God.

“The United Methodist Church has grown to more than 12 million people around the world because of the faithful service and leadership of laity. Rosa Williams has as GNJ’s lay leader for the last 10 years strengthened the mission and ministry of GNJ,” said Bishop John Schol. “She has been a partner in ministry and given sacrificially to GNJ and I am grateful to have served with her.”

“IT HAS REALLY BEEN A JOURNEY. EVERY TIME GOD IS ALWAYS THERE.”

—Rosa Williams



Photo by Shari DeAngelo

For Williams, it’s a journey. “Every time God is always there,” said Williams who is a member of Galilee UMC in Englewood and has passed the torch to Judy Colorado who was elected Conference Lay Leader at Annual Conference in October.

“It was a call that came at such a time as this when I can share my gifts. God has put me in the capacities and has prepared me for this new role,” said Colorado who also serves on the board of GNJ’s Council of Finance & Administration, contributed to the new A Journey of Hope and is chief nursing officer/vice president for patient care services for RWJBarnabas Health-Monmouth Medical Center Southern Campus in New Jersey.



“GOD HAS PUT ME IN THE CAPACITIES AND HAS PREPARED ME FOR THIS NEW ROLE”

—Judy Colorado

Williams has prepared the way for Colorado to take over by laying a strong foundation of laity leadership over the past decade. In 2009 she was instrumental in creating the Laity Leadership Academy to equip laity with tools for ministry, which this year has been transformed into the Leadership Academy to accommodate both laity and clergy.

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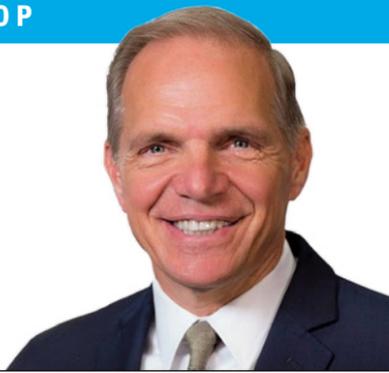


Thank you to the more than 18 million veterans in the United States for your courage, dedication and compassion.

A MESSAGE FROM OUR BISHOP

Election Learnings for the Church

Bishop John Schol



As I write, ballot counting is under way for federal, state and local governmental leaders. There is no winner yet for president. I often find the church's best learnings are found along the way rather than in the results. What can the church learn from this election that shapes our future as a church?

Older People Still Have It

Two people, well into their 70s captured the nation's nomination for president and endured the rigors of a nomination and election process. While jokes have been made about their age, both of the candidates successfully outstumped and outran much younger candidates. Age should not be the determining factor for service and leadership in the church. The values of experience, effectiveness and wisdom are hallmarks of good leaders just as passion, energy and new ways of thinking are hallmarks of leadership.

Outdated Methods Lead to Unsatisfied Results

We have suffered through another season of national pundits and polling, all to find out they were wrong. An old system of polling, contacting people through land lines to ask their opinion misses the mark. Pollsters are using antiquated and biased systems that miss all the people.

Many churches also use antiquated systems, technology and biases to determine and engage in ministry, and therefore we are missing all of the people. For the churches that are progressing in the short term, an antiquated system or methodology may work, but for the long term our vital congregations are continually changing and evolving. Our churches who are thriving during the pandemic are the ones that made changes to their ministry and delivery of the Gospel prior to the pandemic.

"WHILE WE TEND TO CREATE IN THE VERNACULAR OF U.S. POLITICS, "RED" OR "BLUE" CHURCHES, WHAT CAN WE LEARN ABOUT BEING A PURPLE CHURCH, WHICH IS READY TO GIVE THE SHIRTS OFF OUR BACKS, DEFEND OTHERS RIGHT TO LIFE AND ENGAGEMENT IN THE CHURCH REGARDLESS OF OUR DIFFERENCES?"

—Bishop John Schol

The church was created to bring together all people under Jesus Christ for the work of God. While we tend to create in the vernacular of U.S. politics, "red" or "blue" churches, what can we learn about being a purple church, which is ready to give the shirts off our backs, defend others right to life and engagement in the church regardless of our differences?

Politics Paralyze

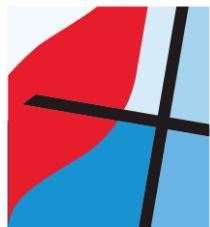
As a church leader, I have been cautious about shining a light or speaking about political decisions and leadership because I find people are quick to state that I am being political. I was wrong. As a faith leader, I

am compelled by God and my role as bishop to shine a light on immorality and injustice that any public leader does as a voice of the church, the voice of God. I believe the church should shine light on both good and evil regardless of the consequences. I also believe we should do it not from moral superiority but humility and reverence for God.

Thank you for being the church of Jesus Christ. God continues to shape us as we learn and understand who God is calling the church to be in and for the world. 🇺🇸

CORRECTION

On page 10 of the October issue of The Relay, under scholarship recipients, Luke Horton attends First UMC Moorestown, not First UMC Cherry Hill. We regret the error.



THE RELAY

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OF GREATER NEW JERSEY

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Save the Dates for:

UPCOMING CLERGY ONLINE GATHERINGS!

All clergy are invited to join Bishop John Schol, the cabinet and clergy colleagues in worship, preparation, celebration and learning.

Advent Worship for Clergy

December 1 at 10:00 a.m.

Bishop's Clergy Convocation

January 11, 2021

LOOK FOR MORE INFORMATION IN THE GNJ DIGEST AND AT:

www.gnjumc.org

Ways to make Disciples while helping others

- Use Jesus' example as a model for discipleship. Care for the most vulnerable and promote justice with peace.
- Read the Bible and pray together. Take it one step further by participating in the "Read the Bible in 90 Days" Challenge. Learn to love scripture by sharing your favorite ones with others.
- Contribute to a food ministry. If you don't feel comfortable on the front line, consider making a donation or helping to prepare the distribution ahead of time through packing, phone calls, research, etc.
- Share your feelings with others and listen to theirs. Matters of the heart matter.
- Organize a small group that discusses a book (see page 9 for suggestions) or film.
- Sign up for a new course that can help you grow and enrich what you give to others. Engaging with others while learning is even more vital now.
- Take care of yourself. Modeling good self-care will make others feel more comfortable doing the same.

*Wishing you and yours a
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 Hometown Hero in Sussex County

By Heather Mistretta
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WANTAGE, NJ

The small, rural town of Wantage in Sussex County, NJ, is known as a “doughnut town” because it surrounds several other towns in both New Jersey and New York. Much like its demographics, the people at Wantage UMC have surrounded their community during the pandemic by stepping up to help those who are hungry.

At the forefront of this effort is Melissa Fortuna, who since May 20 has been leading a free, no-contact dinner once a week for about 75 people. Along with her husband, Edmund, daughter, Amber and son, Tyler, and some church members including Sandy Post, Glen Sumpman and Kenny Reuter, Wantage UMC prepares

person and a lay member to the conference. The church applied for and received support from the NJ Pandemic Relief Fund for their feeding program.

Their hard work did not go unrecognized. In June U.S. Congressman Josh Gottheimer (NJ-5) honored local frontline health care workers and first responders, veterans, students, search and rescuers, life-saving bystanders, volunteers, teachers, community leaders and residents who worked to help the community throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.



In addition to the no-contact dinner, Melissa and her team started to supply families with five-gallon buckets filled with staples like flour and sugar.

ry of the free Christmas Day dinner that she started 10 years ago when she helped serve more than 300 meals. The tradition will continue again this December, but the meals will be distributed with no contact.

Call it a Family Affair or the Brady Bunch, but Fortuna and her husband of 16 years together have six children.

As a family, they help others. Even their three-year-old granddaughter gets involved. In October, in addition to the no-contact dinner, they started to supply families with five-gallon buckets filled with staples like flour and sugar.

“This way they can make other things in addition to what we give them,” said Fortuna who said she has always liked to help people.

One of her biggest inspirations and the person who contributed to her creation of a missions committee at the church, Fortuna said, was Rev. Alfred Jaeger who retired from Wantage UMC in 2015.

“He inspired me to do more. Through his guidance I exploded. He was the reason why I did what I did. He was a perfect mentor.”

Fortuna said she is already thinking about her next idea for a new ministry. Word is it might involve wheels. Meanwhile, her husband, Edmund is studying to be a pastor.

To make a reservation for a no-contact dinner, visit www.wantageumc.org.



Melissa shown here with her son, Tyler, who also does his part to feed the hungry.

“MELISSA, THANK YOU FOR MAKING EVERYONE’S DAYS A LITTLE BRIGHTER. I AM PROUD TO NAME YOU A HOMETOWN HERO.”

—Josh Gottheimer, U.S. Congressman (NJ-5)

homecooked meals like baked chicken, mashed potatoes, gravy, carrots and dessert for those who visit the church.

“A lot of people lost jobs. People are really hurting,” said Fortuna who has been a member of the church for the past 12 years and serves as the church’s mission chair-

Fortuna was among those heroes.

“Melissa, thank you for making everyone’s days a little brighter. I am proud to name you a Hometown Hero,” said Gottheimer at the virtual ceremony.

Fortuna has a habit of being a hero. This December will mark the anniversa-



Volunteer Kenny Reuter travels a couple of times a month to pick up supplies for the church.



For use during Thanksgiving 2020

Share how you may have struggled or are struggling to give thanks this year. (For example, sadness about not being able to be with family, feeling like the bad outweighs the good, grief over what the year has brought). Thanksgiving in COVID looks sadly different.



DOWNLOAD SERMON SERIES
AND RESOURCES:

www.gnjumc.org/breakthrough



Church volunteer Sandy Post packs meals in preparation for the day of distribution.

Poised for Greater Growth in Williamstown

by Heather Mistretta
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WILLIAMSTOWN, NJ

When the pandemic hit in early March, First UMC of Williamstown, like most churches, was caught off guard and unsure what the future held, but through constant prayers and careful discernment the church kept moving forward.

In October the rural church was selected to receive an assortment of promotional items as part of a \$4 thousand relaunch grant sponsored by United Methodist Communications (UMCOM), aimed at fostering more growth in a church that has already shown an exemplary response to adapting to the COVID-19 environment.

"The church we selected had to have a minimum average worship attendance of 100, has accomplished significant success in vitality and has grown steadily in worship attendance over the last 10 years," said GNJ's Director of Congregational Vitality & Sustainability Ed Bowen. "In addition to the minimum criteria, the church we selected also has an outstanding internet presence, a demonstrated highly successful virtual service, portrays emphasis on youth and adults of all ages and is thriving during the present COVID-19 situation."

Rev. Joshua Mularski, who has been the lead pastor at First UMC since 2016 and was among those ordained in October, said, "We hope that what God has been doing in our church can be shared more widely. We hope people can come to meet Christ."

"WE HOPE THAT WHAT GOD HAS BEEN DOING IN OUR CHURCH CAN BE SHARED MORE WIDELY. WE HOPE PEOPLE CAN COME TO MEET CHRIST."

—Rev. Joshua Mularski,
Lead Pastor at First UMC

The church in Gloucester County, NJ, will receive customized banners, hats, shirts, magnets and more so that it can continue to bolster its online presence and other marketing efforts so that its ministries can continue to grow and become more vital.

"This pandemic has everyone operating in a diminished capacity in some way, but we hope for a day when we all can be operating at our full potential," said Craig Catlett, manager of the Local Church Services Team at UMCOM. "This grant may allow a church to come out of the gate more powerfully instead of crawling back to normalcy."

First UMC, with a congregation that tops 100, has shown an 11 percent growth from 2015-19, up from four percent from 2010-15.

FIRST UMC IN WILLIAMSTOWN

The town with a population of about 15,000 was once inhabited by the Lenni-Lenape tribe of Native Americans, from whom the town derived its original name, "Squankum." The name was changed to Williamstown when the town's first post office was established in 1842, due to postal regulations that prohibited two towns from having the same name and there was an older Squankum located 60 miles northeast. The earliest faith to be established in the town was the Methodist denomination. After several moves a church was erected at the present location of the First UMC, and a town clock was placed in its tower.



First UMC of Williamstown will continue to grow in vitality thanks to a recent marketing grant from UMCOM.

"We're grateful for God's provision that enables us to do new ministry," said Mularski who added that although they have had to put their monthly meal on hold, they are still distributing food through the food pantry, planning to provide Christmas gifts for local families in need through its Angel Tree ministry and continuing to offer Small Groups via Zoom. One group of women go for a virtual walk together every week.

Mularski credited much of the success in recent months to church member Heather Fullerton who is a co-coordinator of the Vacation Bible School at the church as well as instrumental in driving the marketing efforts.

"It was a lot of trial and error. All the credit goes to Heather who is really gifted in those areas," he said. Outside of the church, she is a full-time director of communications for a nonprofit.

"We focused on streamlining our website, mobile app and email tools to create clean, clear and easily digestible information," said Fullerton who added that updating their database also helped them be able to send group texts when needed, and the addition of services like Outreach Digital and Shift Worship allowed them to refine Facebook engagement and online worship.

Keeping in mind that not everyone is using digital, Fullerton said, "Good ol' fashioned phone calls by a group of volunteers on a regular schedule to check in on each other has really helped keep us connected. Our next big project is a permanent live streaming solution to replace our current simulated stream that we've been using throughout the pandemic."

Working as a team, First UMC has stayed connected to its congregation

since the onset of the pandemic through two online worship services, Sunday School, Small Groups on Wednesday evening, emails and an informative reopening video.

Also, using Zoom Breakout rooms and adhering to all Safe Sanctuary guidelines, their VBS program in July was divided into households instead of age groups, so

the curriculum was overarching instead of targeted. Supplies were provided to registrants during designated pick-up nights at the church prior to the start of the VBS.

Check out their website at <https://1umcwilliamstown.com/> or the Facebook page to see what they are doing. 🇺🇸

CELEBRATING NATIVE AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH

"For the unending baskets of food, coaxed from Mother Earth by the hands of her Native children"
(from a Native American liturgy)

Find out more about GNJ's
Committee on Native American
Ministries (CoNAM) at:

www.gnjumc.org/global-ministry



CONNECTION

Continued from page 1

stories of her husband's village in Kenya whose children needed help. A successful campaign was hosted to provide water tanks for 20 households and a larger tank to serve the full community.

Over the years the church has contributed to the Nyagidha community's health, education and life with Christ. In 2009 after Rev. Lark McCalman visited the small village to discover the inordinate need for childcare, Wesley UMC's Friends of Nyagidha was formed to work with the village, identifying needs and ways to raise money to help support them. A year later the Child Care and Education Centre for the village was officially opened, which provided a safe place for adults in the community to leave their children while they went to work.

When GNJ's Palisades District Superintendent Rev. Gina Kim became pastor, she organized a trip of about 12 people to travel to Kenya in 2012 to foster the mission.

"Each year we added another school year to the school. We formed relationships with Kenyans, and they formed a support group for those helping them," said Kim who noted that the "Today is my



Wesley UMC recently raised over \$7,000 to support an educational center in Kenya that Rev. Gina Kim and Rev. Lark McCalman visited in 2012.

favorite day" line she often says and uses in her email signature was derived from the village when she heard a group of children singing the song of the same name.

"It has become even more apparent today that the world is indeed my parish," Kim said.

Today, over 300 children from pre-K to eighth grade are educated in the center, but the building's structure made of corrugated iron is in serious disrepair and

makes the interior temperature unbearably hot for teachers and students.

In spite of the limitations caused by the pandemic, in 2020 the congregation at Wesley UMC opened up its "Bricks and Books" campaign with a goal of raising \$3,000 over a three-week period. That goal was eclipsed in September when \$7,251.66 was raised.

"Every penny will go towards the bricks that will build 13 classrooms and the

books that will provide education for the children," said Lee. "It showed that with the right storytelling, people were moved to help." He added that the plan is now to return to the village in 2022.

Closer to home, Wesley UMC is also changing lives. Every Friday a group of volunteers, led by Connie Palmer who is a member of mission, roll up their sleeves, pick up boxes of collected food and travel to nearby New Dover UMC in Edison to support that church's strong food ministry.

This connection between two churches did not go unnoticed. When Centenary UMC in Metuchen saw how Wesley UMC was able to bolster the wonderful work that New Dover UMC was doing, they too knew they had to be involved.

"Now all three of us are working together," said Lee.

On Sept. 11, the trio shattered a previous record as they packed 438 total sandwiches.

Donations can be brought directly to New Dover at 687 New Dover Road in Edison or can be dropped off at 526 Harrison Ave, South Plainfield. To view Wesley UMC's campaign, visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=21kNW2DWI4E>.

This church is among the 15 churches who have tithed a portion of their PPP funding.

Bringing the Power Back TO SMALL VOICES IN JERSEY CITY

By Heather Mistretta
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The origins of vacation bible school can be traced back to Hopedale, IL, when in 1894 a Sunday school and public schoolteacher named D. T. Miles started a daily Bible school to teach children during the summer. Four years later the "Everyday Bible School" was organized by the New York City's Epiphany Baptist Church where Eliza Hawes, the church's youth director, sought to provide religious activities during the summer for the large number of immigrant children living in the East Side tenements. The VBS was held at a rented beer parlor to accommodate those children.

Today, a VBS can be found in many churches in Greater New Jersey, most likely not in a beer parlor but likely still with plenty of crafts, snacks, games and smiles as congregations do their best to keep children connected to their community and God in the summer months. In 2020, VBS took on new meaning as children and churches faced the realities of COVID-19.

"They are brave, but they are afraid of what will happen in the future," said

Trinity UMC in Jersey City hosted a virtual VBS in August with music, stories, poetry and guitar to provide a sense of normalcy to their youth.

Roeline Ramirez, the Christian Education Chairperson of Trinity UMC in Jersey City who hosted a virtual VBS in August with music, stories, poetry and guitar. "We wanted them to know that it will be okay because God will empower you."

The VBS 2020 theme was "Empowered Generation." During the five days in August, the children ranging in age from



one to 13 from Trinity UMC along with First Filipino-American UMC, Ridgefield Park UMC, Ignite UMC and some UMC and non-UMC churches in New York City, Maryland, Philadelphia and in the Philippines, joined together to learn more about God.

"God can empower them into becoming strong believers of Jesus Christ, especially in the midst of the current world pandemic," said Ramirez who is a strong believer of following God's lead and "listening to small voices."

In 2014 Ramirez, who was living in her native country of the Philippines with her husband and two children, listened to the small voice of her daughter, Amara (with the middle name of Job) who had been telling her nursery schoolteacher that she was moving to America. After some extensive research, Ramirez and her husband made the decision to take a trip to the United States. Six years later they are living in New Jersey, and in May Ramirez received a degree from the Unification Theological Seminary in New York City.

The collaborative effort to create the week-long VBS was enhanced by the donation of all the items needed by parents. These items were either delivered or put in the mail prior to the start of the VBS.

Virtual certificates were mailed following the completion of the program. Lay members of Trinity UMC did the opening and closing prayers.

We pray and hope that all children will be empowered by God's Spirit and they will become the "empowered generation" who will continue the faith in Jesus Christ that will be manifested in their life in the family, church, and community."

In addition to VBS, the children who had registered were then treated to free basic poetry making classes and basic guitar classes via Zoom.

"It was challenging and hard for we are not experts in new technology. However, God really works in mysterious ways," said Ramirez.

As the Trinity UMC congregation looks toward 2021, Ramirez said, they will likely do a hybrid program so that they can continue to connect to people throughout the world and include children from different faiths.

For a collection of VBS videos, including those featuring poetry and guitar classes, go to Trinity UMC's FB page at www.facebook.com/watch/tumcjc/.

This church is among the 15 churches who have tithed a portion of their PPP funding.

IGNITE COMMUNITIES WATCH PARTIES

Grow and deepen the faith of your students this fall and winter with IGNITE Community Watch Parties!

Keep an eye out for a new IGNITE video each month along with small group questions to guide you on your new adventure!

READY TO START YOUR OWN WATCH PARTY?
Check out details here: www.gnjnextgen.org

KINDNESS IN VOORHEES

Continued from page 1

months. For the congregation at Hope Church, hope is “a meeting place.”

“It has been super exciting to watch,” said Mandala who added that the purpose of the program was to move outside of themselves and their homes. “By helping others, we are able to do this.”

Summers for youth at Hope Church have always been shaped by the idea of helping others, so #HopeOutside was a way to do so safely and differently than ever before.

The #HopeOutside initiative was divided into two parts: united focus and random acts of kindness. For the united focus part, each week a group was chosen to be blessed in some way. Starting with first responders and continuing with grocery store owners, fire and police officers, bus drivers and crossing guards as well as organizations like Urban Promise, the youth blessed others

by doing things like baking cookies, sewing masks or buying and delivering lunches.

For the second part, individuals were challenged to do random acts of kindness. By late September more than nine thousand acts had been done. Whether it involved leaving a treat on the playground or taking in trash cans, these acts made a difference.

“When Haley and Elizabeth made lemon bars for a recently widowed neighbor, they had no idea how their little act of kindness would be treasured,” said one parent, Sandy Brown, whose daughter and her friend delivered the treat with a note attached to the man in June.

“They received a simple thank you, ‘I like lemon bars,’” Brown said. “In September when their grandma delivered soup to the same gentleman, he said, ‘I kept the card’ that said, ‘Happiness is not by chance. Happiness is by choice.’ He reads it every morning to help face the day as he now lives alone. God works mightily through even small acts done in Love.”

The hope spread by the youth in Voorhees has apparently been contagious, as Hope Church welcomes people from 12 different states as far away as Naples, Italy, each week online.

“We have re-envisioned what the future looks like,” said Mandala who added that they will continue to worship online through the end of the year. “Every other week we have someone new.”

Also continuing at the church is curbside distribution of food from their food pantry in Voorhees, family ministries like “Kids Konnect, online resources for its Tomorrow’s Hope Preschool and virtual small groups.

To learn more about Hope Church, including other ministries like Hope Cares, Alpha and addiction recovery support groups, visit www.meethope.org/.

This church is among the 15 churches who have tithed a portion of their PPP funding.

Rosa & Judy

Continued from page 1

She also created the Lay Ministry Recognition Awards to recognize outstanding ministry. The awards honor creativity and innovation in transforming lives and making disciples of Jesus Christ.

“It’s amazing what people can do and how intentional they can be,” said Williams. “God is pushing them, and when we equip them with the right tools, how many people they can pull with them. We need to keep encouraging them to do great things.”

Williams noted that both her mother and great grandmother were Methodist. She has carried what she learned during those developmental years with her in every step of her journey, looking toward God to give her guidance.

She recalled how each role she had led to the next one from the president of the Palisades District United Methodist Women to the District Lay Leader to Conference Lay Leader.

“I’m waiting for my next assignment from God,” said Williams, who is confident in the future. “Judy is a great leader and will do a great job, I have no doubt.”

Colorado learned how to be a leader as a child while watching her grandmother be a strong civic leader in her community in the Philippines where she grew up.

“She always gave everything she had, and early on I saw that there were people in need,” said Colorado who recalled how prior to the opening of a clinic in her community, her grandmother opened up the family room of her house to patients who needed help.

Colorado emigrated to the United States in 1989, with her first job as a registered nurse at Methodist Hospital in Brooklyn. Her husband, Joseph, who is also a Filipino immigrant, realized after studying in college to be an accountant, his real calling was also to be a nurse. Together, they have three children and a passion to help others.



For 10 years Rosa Williams embraced the vitality and strength of laity as GNJ’s Conference Lay Leader.

She sees both her secular and non-secular roles as intertwined: “It’s no longer a job. It’s my higher calling to help others learn and grow. God has been sustaining me all along.”

She has taken on many roles in the United Methodist Church, including district lay leader for Gateway North, chair of the Committee on Ethnic Local Church Concerns, a member of both the Laity Board and Connectional Team and a board member for the United Methodist Communities, but she said, “Along the way I learned to calm myself to be an empty vessel to be filled.”

Her hard work in creating better work environments and shaping the futures of fellow nurses has not gone unrecognized. She was one of 13 honorees by the New Jersey Institute for Nursing on its 2019 Divas and Dons Awards for her innovative work on redesign of patient care delivery model that achieved organizational turn around on patient and staff engagement and operational efficiencies.

“In the tradition of GNJ, you have elected another outstanding leader, Judy Colorado” said Schol. “Judy brings exemplary leadership and experience.

Also in 2019, Colorado was one of 21 nurses honored by the Nurses with Global

Impact on its third International Nurses Day celebration at The United Nations for her work in community engagement with social impact and mission at work in nursing.

As she enters her new role as Conference Lay Leader, Colorado said she hopes to listen, learn and assimilate for the first six months so that she can best align all efforts and work together. Her lifelong heart for mission and faith in God will be the vehicle on which what she learns will grow and thrive.

“Laity need to be courageous more than ever before. I hope I can bring encouragement and inspiration to them and most of all, let them know they are not alone.”

“Laity are a vital part of any United Methodist Church. They lead people to the love and grace of Jesus Christ and to serve the world. Rosa was that leader, and I’m grateful for her 10 years of service and the transformation she brought GNJ. I’m looking forward to see how Judy will bring her vast talents and passion for mission to this vital role.”

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New Conference Lay Leader Judy Colorado has been a leader since growing up in the Philippines watching and modeling her civic-minded grandmother. Photo by Shari DeAngelo

The Tie That Binds for Five Generations: A Clergy Family from Flanders to Hazlet

By Heather Mistretta
hmistretta@gnjumc.org

The recently installed Gateway North District Superintendent Rev. Williams M. Williams III recently shared his journey to calling, saying that despite his father being a pastor and being strongly influenced by the trustees of his church as a child, his calling came while studying to be a cardiac thoracic surgeon during the day and a professional baseball player at night.

“My dad always said whatever you do, be the best. My parents let it be my journey. I always said it was my dad’s calling, not mine. Then one day after moving back home I heard a voice telling me to follow. It was a surreal experience, one I’ll never forget.”

A calling can come at any time. Some experience a strong calling as a child. Others work an entire career as a cadet in the Navy or finish a pre-med program or raise a family before receiving their calling. But regardless of when, most clergy will say it happened at the right time.

And for those who are clergy legacies, the major influence was a family member, albeit sometimes in retrospect. The following is the first of a series of stories about the strong connection of families in the Greater New Jersey Conference.

For Rachel Callender, who was commissioned in October as a provisional elder, ministry has been a way of life for as long as she can remember. Once ordained, Rachel will become the 13th in her family and the second female, following in the footsteps of her Aunt Shawn Callender-Hogan who serves First UMC in Oakhurst and her father, Rev. Clark L. Callender who leads St. John’s UMC in Hazlet.

Just recently, Rachel discovered that a congregant in her new appointment knew her great, great Aunt Ernestine who had worked in the southern NJ conference before the two conferences joined to become Greater New Jersey. Her great grandfather, Rev. J. Clark Callender served at Union UMC; her grandfather, Clark David Callender is a retired pastor, formerly of Wesley UMC in South Plainfield; and her cousin, Clark Stephen Callender is also a retired pastor living in Vermont.

Moving from Flanders to Bergenfield to Bernardsville to Manahawkin and then Hazlet as her father took on new appointments, Rachel said was difficult at times but mostly a wonderful experience.

“We were all so tight. The four of us were each other’s home,” said Rachel who added that her sister, Samantha is now a professional writer.

“I’m always hearing stories from people saying how wonderful my aunt is, and I’m grateful for that,” said Rachel, speaking of her Aunt Shawn.

“I GREW UP LOVING THE CHURCH BUT NEVER FEELING PRESSURED TO DO WHAT MY FAMILY HAD DONE BEFORE ME.”

—Rev. Rachel Callender,
Associate Pastor at Medford UMC

“Growing up it was always in-depth Methodist theology at the dinner table,” said Rachel who added that these conversations allowed her to immerse herself in the ordination process. Her father, Rev. Clark L. Callender is the senior pastor at St. John UMC in Hazlet, and her mother, Traci died in 2018 following a long illness.

“My mom made things practical. She always wanted to know how does this help people in need,” said Rachel who added that her mother instilled in her the importance of



Rachel will become the 13th in her family and the second female, following in the footsteps of her aunt, Rev. Shawn Callender-Hogan (right) and her father, Rev. Clark L. Callender (left).

food justice. “She was passionate about people having a meal, and because she had breast cancer years earlier, she was hyper-aware of the importance of good healthcare.”

In addition to food justice, Rachel said, she is passionate about the mission of refugee resettlement and listening to people’s needs. She hopes to bring that passion to her ministry. She also hopes to impart a little of what she learned while studying in Switzerland last year with the World Council of Churches after earning a M.Div from Princeton Theological Seminary.

“There I learned that making Christian unity can be messy. I learned not to sugar coat it and just embrace it.”

Rachel shared that unlike her father, her mother did not grow up in ministry. In fact, Traci was first baptized with Rachel’s sister. Traci, who Rachel liked to call “the miracle girl,” embraced service and mission, and together her parents never made her feel obligated to follow a career in ministry, Rachel said.

Rachel recalled. “I grew up loving the church but never feeling pressured to do what my family had done before me.”

In fact, her first love was acting. “I was an actress for 11 years, but then I realized I really wanted to do activism, so I thought what better way to do that than ministry.”

As a fifth-generation Methodist clergy member, Rachel infuses her knowledge gained from her family to enrich what she does. This coupled with inspiration from her mom’s passion to help others through charity compelled Rachel to move away from a career in acting and pursue ministry.

In July, Rachel followed in her family’s footsteps as she was appointed as an associate pastor at Medford UMC where Rev. Joe Monahan leads.

“Joe knows everything,” said Rachel. “I won the jackpot of appointments. This church has gone above and beyond.”



Rachel’s mom, Traci, who imparted a passion to help others, died in 2018.

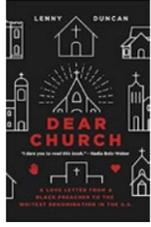
Listening, embracing ministry and striving to help others is exactly what Rachel has been doing since she started her new appointment in July. In October, which is Domestic Violence Awareness Month, she raised money for the Providence House, of Catholic Charities, by supporting a donation stream through a local Italian restaurant set up by UMW at Medford UMC.

Rachel’s mom would be proud, and apparently so is her dad.

“How joyful and proud can a father be? I believe my heart will burst,” said Clark. 🇺🇸

ON THE BOOKSHELF FOR NOVEMBER

Readings that provide solace and guidance as well as educate, catalyze and foster conversation surrounding racial justice. Do you have a book you'd like to recommend? Please email Heather Mistretta at hmistretta@gnjumc.org.



Dear Church: A Love Letter from a Black Preacher to the Whitest Denomination in the US

(Fortress Press, 2019) by Lenny Duncan

Dear Church offers a bold new vision for the future of the mainline Christian community of faith. It rejects the narrative of church decline and calls everyone—leaders and laity alike—to the front lines of the church's renewal through racial equality and justice. It also features a discussion guide at the back—perfect for church groups, book clubs and other group discussion.

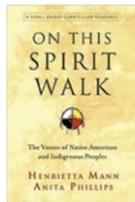
Called “a voice calling in the wilderness,” Lenny Duncan is the Mission Developer Pastor at Messiah Lutheran Church in Vancouver, WA. Formerly incarcerated, formerly homeless and formerly unchurched, Duncan is now a sought-after speaker and writer on topics of racial justice and the role of the church in the 21st century.

On This Spirit Walk

(Abingdon Press, 2012) by Henrietta Mann and Anita Phillips

On This Spirit Walk is a resource for small group study within the local church. Setting this resource apart is the list of Native American United Methodist writers who contributed to this work. This diverse group includes a cross-section of tribes and nations, ages and life experiences. The inclusion of indigenous activist and human rights advocate Rev. Liberato Bautista provides a powerful depth of vision to these voices.

Dr. Mann, one of seven recipients of the State of Montana Governor's Humanities Award in 2001, is a Cheyenne enrolled with the Cheyenne-Arapaho Tribes and is the founding president of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribal College. Dr. Mann was the first individual to occupy the Endowed Chair in Native American Studies at Montana State University, Bozeman, where she is Professor Emeritus and continues to serve as special assistant to the president. Dr. Anita Phillips, with more than 40 years of experience working with children, is a Cherokee from Oklahoma who holds both an MSW and M.Div. She serves as the executive director of the Native American Comprehensive Plan of the UMC.



Get Your Life Back: Everyday Practices for a World Gone Mad

(Thomas Nelson, 2020) by John Eldredge

Get Your Life Back is a practical and simple guide to taking your life back. The author provides practices—or what he calls “graces” like the “One Minute Pause”—you can begin to recover your soul, disentangle from the tragedies of this broken world and discover the restorative power of beauty.

John Eldredge is a bestselling author, a counselor and a teacher. He is also president

of Ransomed Heart, a ministry devoted to helping people discover the heart of God, recover their own hearts in God's love, and learn to live in God's kingdom. John and his wife, Stasi, live near Colorado Springs, CO.



Christianity and the Art of Wheelchair Maintenance: A Dialectical Inquiry at the End of the World

(Cascade Books, 2018) by Stephen Fallner

This book chronicles a GNJ deacon's journey into seminary and ordained ministry by revealing the story of how someone with a lifelong disability, cerebral palsy, might find his way into ministry as a hospital chaplain. While particular in its own right, this story will speak to anyone in college or graduate school studying one of the many disciplines hoping to make the world a better place. Through narrative and dialogue, Fallner engages philosophers and theologians alike. This is an intimate text that seeks to integrate mind, body, and spirit that situates itself more beyond the margins than as marginalized.

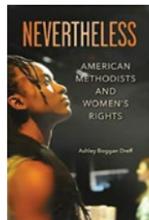
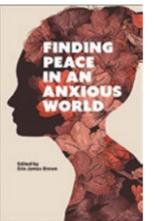
Stephen Fallner is a board-certified chaplain and a clinical pastoral education supervisor as a Diplomate of the College of Pastoral Supervision and Psychotherapy at the Center for Pastoral Care at Capital Health in Hopewell, NJ. He is the author of *Beyond the Matrix* (2004), *Reality TV* (2009), and *The Art of Spiritual Midwifery* (2015). He has a Master of Divinity from Duke Divinity School and a Master of Theology from Princeton Theological Seminary.

Finding Peace in an Anxious World

(United Methodist Women, 2020) by Erin James-Brown

The 2020 Spiritual Growth Study by staff of the Urban Village Church, uses the book of Proverbs and “The Serenity Prayer” as a guide to help Christians find their way through anxiety, worry, and fear and move towards God's peace that surpasses all understanding. Using “The Serenity Prayer” as a scaffold, *Finding Peace in an Anxious World* explores ways to discover peace through scriptural and spiritual disciplines so that we can be rooted in God and energized to live fully as disciples of Christ.

Erin James-Brown is Director of Discipleship at Urban Village Church, a faith community in Chicago that seeks to be bold, inclusive and relevant. It was established in 2013.



Nevertheless: American Methodists and Women's Rights

(GBHEM-Cokesbury, 2020) by Ashley Boggan Dreff

Nevertheless tells the story of American Methodist women's efforts fight for women's rights, beginning with the Women's Christian Temperance Union and ending with the #MeToo movement. Each chapter documents particular Methodist women and provides the reader with a basic historic context of the time or situation at hand as it shows how Methodist women engaged and fought for women's equality or women's rights in American society and American Methodism.

Ashley Boggan Dreff, Ph.D. is director of Women and Gender Studies, assistant professor of religion, High Point University, High Point, NC. She is author of the award-winning book, *Entangled: A History of American Methodism, Politics, and Sexuality*.



UNITED METHODISTS
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For details: www.gnjumc.org/journeyofhope

Making a Place for Families to Live Vibrant Lives

By Heather Mistretta
hmistretta@gnjunc.org

“Keep alert, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love.”

—1 CORINTHIANS 16: 13-14

Since 2018 The Maker's Place of Trenton has been bridging gaps and planting seeds of hope throughout the city by providing families in need with diapers and other supplies to keep their children safe, healthy and dry. As of early November, more than 80,000 diapers had been distributed, averaging about nine thousand each month since the pandemic's inception. When they are not collecting, packing and distributing diapers and other baby supplies to those in need to places like the Trenton Housing Authority, the team at this GNJ Hope Center is distributing blessing bags and care boxes, registering people to vote, cutting hair for free and celebrating children's birthdays.

“Today is all we have to work for a better tomorrow,” said Rev. Michael Reed who leads the effort and is the proud father of a baby in diapers. “God is a maker, and you're made in God's image.”

But the pandemic has forced The Maker's Place to rethink how they do what they do.

“COVID threw our model into a tailspin, but some ingenuity from some amazing people and a little humility has worked out well for us,” said Reed.

Based on a recent survey, 90 percent of their clients have either lost a job or income since the pandemic began, resulting in many families having to meet another need over buying diapers for their families.



One of Rev. Michael Reed's goals is to allow mothers like Camila Vargas (right) to not have to worry about diapers.

“Every baby deserves a first birthday. Diapers bring human dignity,” Reed said. “By alleviating this burden, we're hoping to reduce infant mortality and build an abundant community for all God's children.”

And it's working. Data from the survey showed that half of their clients feel like they are better parents because of the diaper donations.

In addition to hosting five giveaway sites, The Maker's Place “virtual volunteers” help over 150 families each month schedule appointments to pick up diapers at grab-and-go locations across the city.

The business model has needed to be flexible, because no one client is the

same. Rationing diapers or cutting costs in other areas like food or childcare have become a way of life for many as this pandemic weighs heavily on families whose budgets were already tight or opens up new challenges for families who never had to worry.

Camila Vargas has two sets of twins, all in diapers, in part due to medical complications in one set.

“Diaper depot [the name given to the drop-off locations] is a project that really helped me in very hard moments. With four kids in diapers last year, facing a couple evictions, I faced very hard times. I will never forget what they did for me,” said Vargas who during a recent trip to the emergency room for her daughter meant only getting two doses of antibiotics because she couldn't afford more without health insurance.

In spite of the adversity, Vargas exudes courage and hope. She often speaks of a Spanish idiom she strives to live every day, “de los cobardes nunca se ha escrito nada” that roughly translates to “no one writes the history of cowards.”

Vargas embraces all that she is given as she works hard to shape a brighter future for her children. Last week, this 27-year-old mother of five became a U.S. citizen.

Helping in part to make that a reality are the many donations from United Methodist Churches, like the UMC at Milltown, Pearson Memorial UMC and First UMC of Moorestown who each month send diapers, baby wipes and other items. The Maker's Place also accept donations as part of fundraisers organized by local churches like Browns Mills UMC and its Little Lambs Preschool.

“Our goal is to offer radical hospitality,” said Reed. “We need to build bridges that cross race and class, be where our clients are.” Although the pandemic has curtailed their efforts to build a stronger faith community, board member and volunteer Lori Pantaleo said she feels like she's making a better connection with people as the strict social distancing parameters have compelled volunteers to envision new ways to interact.

“We used to create community with areas where people could meet and talk, but that is no longer possible. Now I really get to know their names and their stories,” said Pantaleo who uses her fluency in Spanish and experience as a Spanish

teacher for many years to manage calls from the many Spanish-speaking clients.

“These people are the most resilient, faithful and grateful people,” she said.

One of them is Maria, the mother of a toddler who likes to laugh, eat chips and play outside. Shortly after his first birthday, her son Jose was in two full-leg casts all the way to the hip after fracturing both his legs. Jose has brittle bone disease, so every day is a potential challenge.

“Normally, we only provide one size diapers to families, but in this case, the boy needed one size for the area between his legs, and a larger size to go over the cast that basically came up to his waist,” said Pantaleo. “We were able to accommodate the family and get the diapers to them without putting them on the waiting list.”

Margarita, a mild-mannered Latina woman, is the mother of 14-year-old Oscar whose developmental disabilities require him to wear diapers.

“He is the size of a 14-year-old, and requires adult diapers, which is something we hadn't really focused on,” said Pantaleo, who added that with money donated by supporters, they were able to purchase adult diapers and have them in stock for future situations such as these.

“Diapers are always expensive, but adult diapers can run up to \$25 for a pack of 12. As you can imagine, this is a tremendous financial burden for a low-income family.”



Volunteers at The Maker's Place distribute diapers to families in five different locations throughout Trenton.

Because of the pandemic, Juan from Lawrenceville had to ask for assistance when a sudden job loss drastically changed finances for him and his family. He turned to The Maker's Place for help.

Pantaleo said she packed up her car and delivered him a supply of diapers that day.

The Maker's Place team, which also includes Trenton native, Assistant Director Callie Crowder, and Community Care Coordinator Rev. Susan Victor, imagines a brighter future for its community and the return of valuable services they provided before the pandemic like a clothing swap. They also look forward to expanding their services by offering art, music, crafting and parenting classes.

“Imagination is a synonym for faith,” said Reed. 🇺🇸



JOIN THE MAKER'S PLACE DECEMBER DIAPER DRIVE

Families are struggling to afford diapers and wipes due to COVID-19. Help them make a change this Advent season.

Host a collection drive or donate diapers, wipes, and pullups for the Maker's Place "Diaper Depot" from Nov. 29 to Dec. 20. Virtual options available. More at www.makersplace.org/donate



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CONFERENCE NEWS

Family Fall Days: A Nice Respite in Pinelands

Next Generation Ministries hosted three days over the past month at the Pinelands Center for some good old-fashioned fun for families while social distancing. Parents and their children enjoyed a Sunday afternoon chockful of food, games, crafts, hayrides and more.



“It was a great opportunity for families to just get away, get away from all the stressors they have been feeling over the past several months,” said Next Gen’s Executive Director Eric Drew. “It was also a great way for them to reconnect to each other and God.”

For more Next Gen news, visit www.gnjnextgen.org.



Bishop’s Days for Clergy and Laity Continue Virtually

Clergy and laity are invited to join with Bishop John Schol for a time of worship and sharing. GNJ leadership will share next steps on A Journey with Hope, regional teams for resourcing and leadership development with a time for questions and answers. Details below:

FOR CLERGY:

- Southern Region Clergy: 11/12 at 9:00 a.m. Register
- Northern Region Clergy: 11/19 at 9:00 a.m. Register
- Central Region Clergy: 12/2 at 9:00 a.m. Register

FOR LAITY:

- Bishop’s Day – Laity: 11/19 at 7:00 p.m. Register
- Bishop’s Day – Laity: 12/3 at 9:00 a.m. Register

Childcare Evolves Amid Pandemic

Amid job losses and changes in the way we live, childcare and the centers who provide this resource have been impacted greatly in recent months. New Jersey is stepping up to provide both financial resources for childcare for families and also a potential financial opportunity for local churches.

To discuss GAP Centers, temporary supervised facilities providing care for children receiving remote instructions in NJ public schools, a forum was hosted online on Nov. 4. A recording of the call can be found on the GNJ website.

Also, New Jersey families with incomes up to \$150,000 are now eligible to apply for funding to cover childcare costs through the new COVID-19 school-age tuition assistance program. Families with children in remote schooling can be eligible for up to \$1,900 in full-time childcare assistance during this period. Part-time assistance is also available. Families can apply for this assistance by completing the online application at www.childcarenj.gov/COVID19.

GNJ Churches Are Transforming Lives

Churches throughout GNJ are courageously stepping outside their comfort zones to feed the hungry, clean up communities, meet online for healthy conversation and connection and learn more about racism and how they can end the sin.

Read the Good News at www.gnjumc.org/good-news-from-gnj-churches/ and then share with your congregation! 📢



Turning Point UMC in Trenton.



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- Provide a stable source of funding to support GNJ’s annual budget

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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.

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YEAR OF THE MIRACLES
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Michaela Murray-Nolan | Director of Development
O: 732.359.1045 | E: mmurraynolan@gnjumc.org

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