

THE RELAY

UNITED METHODISTS
OF GREATER NEW JERSEY

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Cultivating Justice in Westfield

“The God we worship dwells among us as a gardener who holds the soil of our lives in his hands, showers it with rain and blesses it with fruit that gladdens our hearts and satisfies our stomachs... A caring, faithful, and worshipping humanity is one of the garden’s most important crops.”

—NORMAN WIRZBA, PROFESSOR, AUTHOR AND SPEAKER

By Heather Mistretta
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WESTFIELD, NJ

Right down the road from the YMCA in downtown Westfield sits a beautiful landscape of about a dozen different gardens that offer sustenance, a learning opportunity and a place to gather for conversation and reflection. As you walk past each one, you are greeted by vegetables, flowers or herbs that embody a larger message of equity, justice and a reminder that we are all stewards of God’s creation.

First UMC (FUMC) Westfield cultivates these gardens where they grow healthy food for local families in need like those who are part of Family Promise, a Westfield food pantry and a Presbyterian church in town.

Called the “Justice Gardens,” each plot highlights humanitarian and environmental issues and ways that people can do good for others. Retired ordained elder in GNJ, Rev. Dr. Dan Bottorff who has been a member of the church since the early-1980s leads the effort of tending to these gardens, a role that he embraces as a labor of love as well as a new learning experience.

“There’s a community in the church who has an investment in the garden,” said Bottorff, who added that one family recently joined FUMC after noticing the rainbow pots in the gardens and the message that they shared. Bottorff, who was quick to say that tending to the garden is a team effort, provided pas-



Rev. Dr. Dan Bottorff, the gardens’ caretaker, tends to the vegetables that survived the winter under a “hoop house.”

toral care for GNJ for 14 years in addition to being a licensed psychotherapy and marriage counselor.

He mentioned that one of those helpers is the newly appointed Rev. Alison Vanbuskirk-Philip who he said, one afternoon potted

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Strengthening Connections Across Cultures

“After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.”

—REVELATION 7:9

By Heather Mistretta
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While speaking to a group in the King Chapel at Cornell College in the small town of Mount Vernon, IA, on Oct. 15, 1962, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr said, “I am convinced that men hate each other because they fear each other. They fear each other because they don’t know each other, and they don’t know each other because they don’t communicate with each other, and they don’t communicate with each other because they are separated from each other.”

With these prophetic words heard nearly 59 years ago on the minds of some along with a dedication to embrace diversity and foster inclusion, more than 50 people turned out for GNJ’s Cross-Racial and Cross-Cultural (CRCC) Workshop in July for those pastors and churches who received a cross-racial and/or cross-cultural appointment starting on July 1, 2021.

The intent of the gathering was to provide pastors and laity with the awareness of barriers, challenges and blessings of cross-racial and cross-cultural appointments, as well as to build new skillsets and learn how to welcome and embrace a new pastor.

“There was really great info shared. It brought to light what we need to be intentional about,” said Laura Jaskot, lay representative and worship committee chair at Broad Street UMC where she has been a member over 30 years.

In 2017, GNJ approved a 10-year intercultural competency plan at the Annual Conference with the intention of developing laity and clergy so that we continue to strengthen and grow diversity, inclusion and collaboration in our local churches, communities and GNJ. A Journey of Hope plan approved at the 2020 Annual

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Connecting to a Journey of Hope

By Rev. Enger Muteteke
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Welcome to the first edition of a new series from *The Relay* delving into the Journey of Hope plan. Each month, we will feature a story that dives deeper into the plan and helps guide you on your journey.

Racism hurts all of us. Not just black people. Not just Hispanic and Latinx people. Not just Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. Not just Native American people. And yes, racism hurts white people too. Racism harms us all because at the core, of this pervasive, resilient, systemic evil, lies its root—SIN. Sin is within us, every system we navigate, every place we go, every person we encounter, and it affects how we see God and one another. Sin mars the ‘imago Dei’—the image of God as St. Thomas Aquinas first coined the phrase—in each of us. Racism, to be specific, stops us from seeing ourselves and each other as fully human. It forces us to see the ‘other’ as less than so we can see ourselves as greater than, better than.

The Journey of Hope plan was presented in October 2020 to GNJ in the wake of George Floyd’s murder—demonstrating the effects of the pandemic of 1619, racism. The plan was approved with the goal being that “GNJ will dismantle systems and structures within the church that perpetuate racism” (JOH plan, p. 2). This is a colossal undertaking! After last



The Journey of Hope plan takes GNJ’s commitment to ending the sin of racism one large step forward.

fall’s vote and approval of the plan, I thought, “Okay. Now, how are we going to do this?” Many of us have asked this question. The reality, though, lies ahead of this question: it took 500 years for racism to be baked into the systems and DNA of our nation; it will not take 30 minutes, three months or even two years for us to dismantle racism. The Journey of Hope plan is just that—a written plan. Imagine a pile of bones—much like the valley of dry bones in Ezekiel 37. Some of the pieces of the Journey of Hope plan—“bones” or tasks—are already underway: apportioning shared

ministries and billables to congregations in low-income communities, permanently forbearing collecting on billable debt, examining ways to strengthen ethnic congregations, and annual review of all reports and legislation ahead of annual conference for implicit bias review.

However, just as the presence of the bones in Ezekiel 37 did not immediately create a human being with new life, executing the work and tasks of the Journey of Hope plan will not immediately dismantle racism. Sin is resilient. Evil is prevalent.

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A MESSAGE FROM OUR BISHOP

God's Grace Guides Us

Bishop John Schol



My heart is glad, and my tongue rejoices, my soul rests in hope.

—PSALM 16:9

Recently I listened to a podcast on Radio Lab. Like many podcasts these days, it was about the virus. I found this one particularly fascinating. It described a study that was done in England on patients who gave permission for their body to be studied about how COVID-19 reacted in their body.

The study found that when medical teams sought to eliminate the virus with medication and other treatments, when they defeated one variant of the virus, another variant of the virus would become stronger than the one that had just been eliminated. They found the virus to be resilient and hard to defeat.

“OPTIMISM AND HOPE ARE NOT THE SAME THING. IT IS EASY TO BE OPTIMISTIC WHEN WE DO NOT FULLY UNDERSTAND THE SITUATION OR ARE NOT READY TO FACE THE HARD FACTS AND REALITIES.”

—Bishop John Schol

And these words caught my curiosity. The researcher said, after a year and a half of working on the virus, “researchers and the medical profession are at their lowest ebb, and we are beginning to have hope.”

Wow! Researchers and the medical profession are at their lowest ebb. They recognize just how resilient the virus is and how hard it is to defeat, and yet they are beginning to hope.

For me and like many who are not in medical research, we were most optimistic when a vaccine was announced that would protect us from serious COVID illness. That optimism was in

January/February 2021. I do not think I was alone in this. Beverly and I received our second shot in April, and within two weeks we were on a plane headed to see our family in California. Our hearts were glad, and we were rejoicing. Only weeks later the Delta variant began to spread, and our optimism turned into concern and even fear of what this would mean for people.

Optimism and hope are not the same thing. It is easy to be optimistic when we do not fully understand the situation or are not ready to face the hard facts and realities. COVID is not going to easily go away.

It is said that during the Viet Nam War, there were two types of prisoners. Those who were optimistic and those who faced the hard realities and were hopeful. Those who were optimistic said things like we will be saved in a couple of weeks, or we will be home by Christmas, more often died while in the camp. Those who lived said I am not sure when we will go home, but I know this will be a very difficult time and there are people who are working toward our release. The optimist had goals and behaviors that actually worked against their survival. The others looked at daily goals of survival and set their sights on the long-term. Hope is like that, it faces the hard realities, sets goals and behaviors that recognize reality.

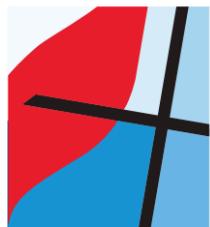
Our hope is built on God's amazing grace that we experience through Jesus Christ. It is hope that does not rest on optimism or wishful thinking but taking responsible actions like distancing, masking, vaccinations and ensuring our behaviors do not put others at risk. Our heart rejoices, and we are glad because we have been given another day to serve God and others.

During this season of COVID, I invite you to face the hard reality that COVID is very resilient and will continue to mutate; that there are very smart people working on our behalf to stamp out the virus; and as John Wesley said, best of all God is with us.

I also encourage you to reset expectations for yourself and others. We are in the midst of a pandemic. Take joy in the small accomplishments, overcoming the small challenges and living to help others and yourself to move through each day, each week and this season. Whether we are willing to admit it or not, maybe we, certainly others are at a low ebb, but we hope because God is with us, and others are working on our behalf. Therefore, my heart is glad, and I rejoice, my soul rests in hope! 🇺🇸

“OUR HOPE IS BUILT ON GOD'S AMAZING GRACE THAT WE EXPERIENCE THROUGH JESUS CHRIST. IT IS HOPE THAT DOES NOT REST ON OPTIMISM OR WISHFUL THINKING BUT TAKING RESPONSIBLE ACTIONS LIKE DISTANCING, MASKING, VACCINATIONS AND ENSURING OUR BEHAVIORS DO NOT PUT OTHERS AT RISK.”

—Bishop John Schol



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Eastern PA Welcomes Bishop John Schol *in* Hope-Filled Celebration

By John W. Coleman

Reprinted from the Eastern PA Conference website on Sept. 21, 2021.

The Eastern PA Conference officially welcomed Bishop John Schol as its new episcopal leader Sept. 18 in an August worship service at the UM Church of West Chester. But what climaxed the Saturday morning service was the bishop's sermon that shared his three primary hopes for the conference's laity, clergy and congregations.

He first expressed a hope for laity. "Today, my hope for laity...is that every one of you hear the calling of God....God's got a calling for every lay person in the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference. And it's my hope that all of our pastors will continue to preach about everybody's calling, and nurture people into ministry."

He then encouraged clergy with his desire for them to "be yourself, not what somebody else is trying to make you, not what you're trying to make yourself into, but the person God has called you to be to lead in congregations and ministry, all across Eastern Pennsylvania and around the world."

And finally, the bishop, who now serves United Methodists in Eastern PA, along with leading those in Greater New Jersey since 2012, voiced his key hope for congregations.

"My hope for every congregation is that you would get to know the people in your communities and offer them the grace of God," he said. "Not on our terms, but on their terms; not in our language, but in the language that connects with them. Not in the ways we want them to conform, but in the ways that God wants us to become Christ."

Bishop Schol recalled the beginnings of his own faith journey at St. James UMC in the Olney community of Philadelphia. That is where he gave his life to Christ and was confirmed as a youth, and where he later married Beverly Schol 43 years ago. Among other memories, he



Rev. Mark Salvacion, pastor of Historic St. George's UMC and executive director of Justice for Our Neighbors of the Delaware Valley, presenting a Bible to Bishop Schol as a symbol of the episcopacy, encouraging him to "proclaim fearlessly the prophetic Word in the cause of justice and peace for all people."

recalled learning to just be himself as a new bishop in the Baltimore-Washington Conference in 2004 and not strive to imitate his venerable predecessors in that role.

Discovering Calling and Connection

Sharing compelling stories from his life as a pastor, the bishop recalled a longtime local church treasurer who reluctantly surrendered that role but discovered his true calling by serving meals among the poor at a Salvation Army. And he recounted a long-ago subway ride encounter with a fellow passenger who interrupted his solitude to coarsely but candidly share his poignant life-story.



Bishop Schol displays artwork by Native American Paige McNutt, which represents the plight of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

Both stories exemplified Schol's hopes that the people and churches called Methodist might have similar experiences of discovering both callings and connections in their communities.

The multicultural service began with a "Blessing of the Four Directions" by Committee on Native American Ministries co-chairwoman Sandra Cianciulli, who is Oglala and Lakota, followed by the singing of "We Are Marching in the Light of God" in three languages. It ended with "Marching to Zion" for the recessional.

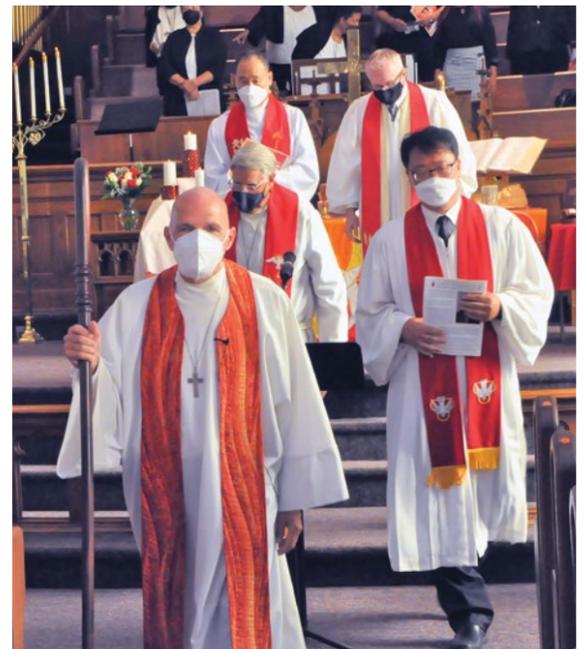
In-between there were warm, hospitable greetings to Bishop Schol shared from the pulpit and by video livestream viewers in the on-line chat section. Nearly 300 viewed it via West Chester UMC's livestream video, as the recent surge in cases of the COVID-19 pandemic limited onsite attendance. (A recording of the livestreamed video can be viewed on the Eastern PA Conference YouTube page and downloaded via Dropbox to share with congregations. See below.)

"We welcome you home to the state of the best sports teams and to the historic roots of both Methodism and our rich EUB tradition," said the Rev. Dawn Taylor-Storm in her greetings to the bishop, his family and other guests. "Today also marks a moment of new partnership for Eastern PA, as we celebrate the gifts that Greater New Jersey (GNJ) and Eastern PA share."

Taylor-Storm, who is Eastern PA's Director of Connectional Ministries, remarked that the newly linked conferences "are both committed to vital congregations, raising up new disciples and working intentionally towards racial equity and a church that reflects the beauty of God's beloved community."

'We Now Share the Same Bishop'

The Rev. Sang-Won Doh, Dean of the GNJ Cabinet, also brought greetings from his conference, while offering a glimpse of its strengths, including its "510 church-



Bishop Schol and Rev. Sang Won Doh, who also shared his greetings that day, ended the service with "Marching to Zion" during the recessional.

es, 490 active clergy and 81,492 members. I'm more than excited that we become sister conferences, as we now share the same bishop."

Describing our shared bishop as "an exceptionally gifted leader," the district superintendent also extolled GNJ's many remarkable successes, including helping churches and communities recover from 2012's devastating Hurricane Sandy and increasing its vital congregations, new faith communities, anti-racism efforts and giving to mission.

A diversity of faces and voices highlighted the service, including various liturgists, Cabinet members, persons who presented the traditional "Signs of Episcopal Ministry" to the conference's new bishop, and music by the popular Philadelphia United Methodist Mass Choir and a Korean American choir, among other performers.

In addition to his sermon, Bishop Schol celebrated Holy Communion, assisted by two deacons, before offering a dismissal with blessing. An offering was received to support the EPAUMC's Dismantling Racism efforts waged by several conference ministry committees and leaders.

The full event recording can be found at www.youtube.com/watch?v=1cavL_QPbLA. #

Journey of Hope

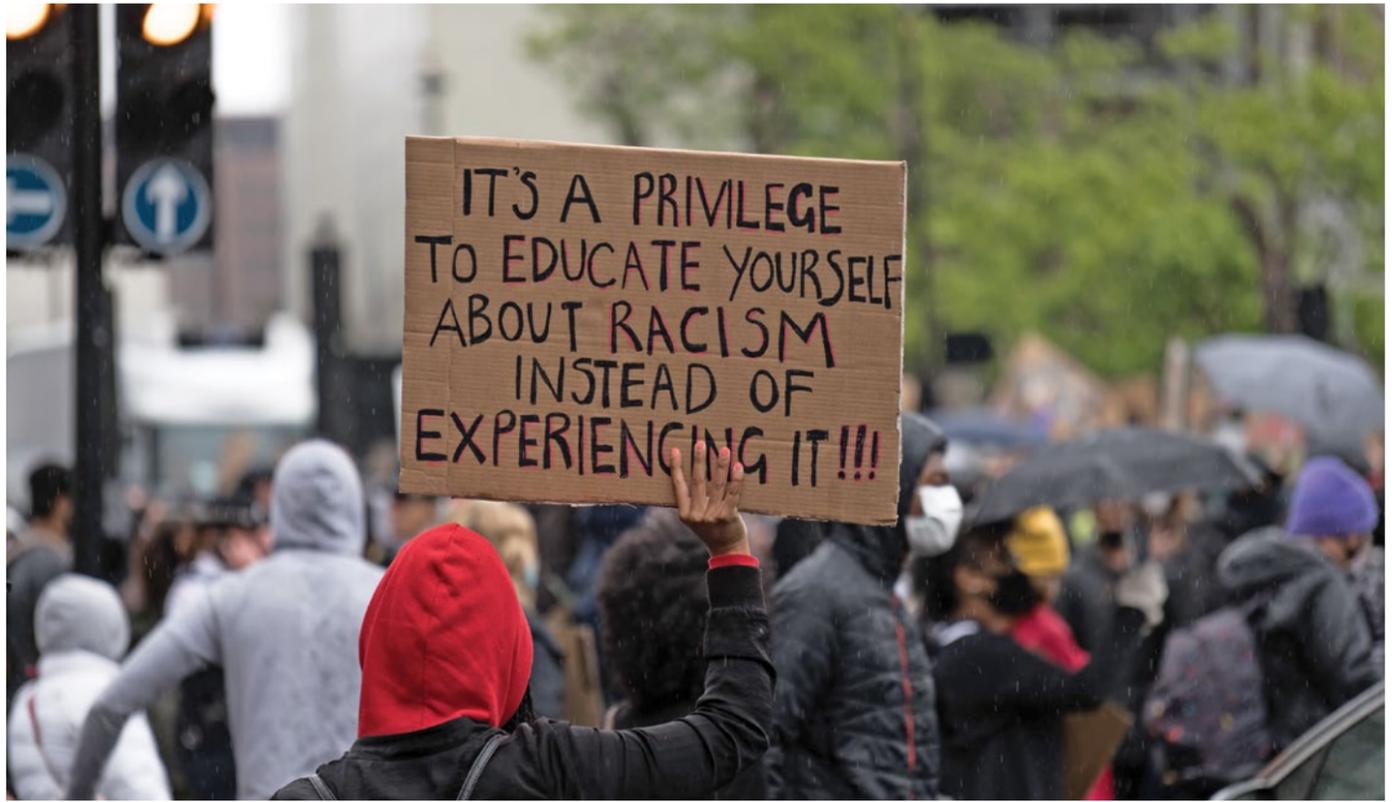
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We engage this work remembering our baptismal identity and vow: “We renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of sin. We accept the power and freedom God gives us to resist evil, injustice and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves. We confess Jesus Christ as our Savior, put our whole trust in God’s grace, and promise to serve God as our Lord, in union with the Church, which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations, and races. Another “bone” of the Journey of Hope plan is for congregations to create their own Journey of Hope plans to dismantle racism—in their respective ministry contexts and communities—starting where they are, starting with whom they are, and remembering Whose they are. Trainers and facilitators will be recruited and trained by consultant, Fearless Dialogues to assist and support local congregations in creating their own Journey of Hope plans. Trainers and facilitators will be supported and coached by identified Journey of Hope coaches.

I hear you asking: *How will all this work? Where is the “flesh” and “breath” of these “bones”?*

The “Flesh”: Fearless Dialogues

Last year, the Journey of Hope team, integral in crafting the Journey of Hope legislation, came together to engage the work of locating a consultant to guide and assist GNJ in living into our commitment to anti-racism work. GNJ underwent a nationwide search with the Journey of



Fearless Dialogues in working with the Journey of Hope team encourages leaders to see and hear “the other.”

tion to help us do the work of Journey of Hope engaging its intersectionality—a term coined by Dr. Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989 to address how identities of race, class and gender intersect with one another. Fearless Dialogues is an organization comprised of faith-filled, gifted, brilliant leaders who have committed to helping many groups and denominations undo racism through seeing the ‘other,’ hearing the ‘other,’ and changing how we approach and engage the ‘other.’ The organization was founded by Rev. Dr. Greg Ellison II who, along with

leaders. Embodying and a desire and call to live into Great Commandment (“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and your neighbor as yourself.”), Fearless Dialogues strives to “create unique spaces for hard, heartfelt conversations” (www.fearlessdialogues.com) with participants—who may begin as “unlikely partners”—leave trainings and dialogue spaces having seen one another fully and heard one another fully committed to changing ways of thinking, being and doing in themselves to fully see and hear God in another.

I hear you asking another question: How are Journey of Hope and Fearless Dialogues connected?

The Connection: Journey Of Hope & Fearless Dialogues

God tells the prophet, Ezekiel (chapter 37), once tendons, flesh and skin had appeared on the skeleton in the Valley of Dry Bones, to “prophesy to the breath.” In other words, God tells Ezekiel to speak life into the lifeless, dry being. Fearless Dialogues, who is partnering with GNJ for two years, will provide us with the language, training, and knowledge to speak Spirit language and life into our ways of being, processes, policies, and systems that have become dry due to racism...that have robbed us of seeing and hearing the image of God in one another, that have equipped us to do harm, do good for a select few, and fall out of love with God. GNJ officially began its inaugural work with Fearless Dialogues on September 20, 2021, with 13 executive conference staff beginning training as Journey of Hope coaches. Training will continue in tandem with people being trained as Journey of Hope trainers and facilitators to assist and guide congregations in developing their own Journey of Hope plans toward anti-racism work in context in their communities. Trained Journey of Hope coaches will be available to support and coach trainers and facilitators as they guide anti-racism work in local congregations and communities. It is the incarnational reality of anti-racism work that makes us all nervous though—if we are honest with ourselves and one another. Plans on paper are neat and tidy. Likewise, trainings and workshops to apply new knowledge and processes are neat and tidy. It is when plans and trainings intersect that messiness happens and questions come. *How is doing a particular task in the Journey of Hope harming us or doing us good? When do we engage a particular task ahead of Fearless Dialogues training? What staff and conference processes and policies do*

we need to change to see and hear all people in our system? How will developing a Journey of Hope plan look for our congregation and community? Why do we need to do anti-racism work at all as people of God?

The Work Of Discipleship: Opening Graves

When three of my four daughters were baptized eight years ago in Maryland, much of our village of people showed up to witness it—about 70 people. These people were not just part of our village but, along with the congregation I served at the time as associate pastor, part of the church who vowed to help us guide our daughters “in the way that leads to eternal life” until they could claim the Christian faith for themselves. At their baptism, while remembering our own, we renounced sin, rejected wickedness, accepted the freedom and power God gives to reject evil, injustice and oppression in whatever forms they presented themselves on our daughters’ behalf until they could do so themselves. We vowed to nurture them in Christ’s holy church and God’s grace by living out Jesus’ teaching and example in our own lives. The work of undoing sin in ourselves, in others and in our world is grave-opening work that first begins with us remembering who we are: children of God. Since racism is sin, the work of anti-racism is tied to our baptismal covenant, which God calls us to live into every day. God tells Ezekiel that he is not alone saying, “I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them, my people and lead you into the land of Israel” (EZEKIEL 37:12). Living into the Journey of Hope plan will not be a perfect endeavor. Partnering with Fearless Dialogues will not be a perfect endeavor. But, praise God! God did not call the Church to be perfect but to be faithful to our call as disciples giving glory to God and nurturing others in Christ’s holy Church. Committing to anti-racism work—rejecting evil, injustice and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves—is grave opening work! Being a disciple is grave opening work! Making disciples is grave opening work! Each day we wake up as we engage the Journey of Hope, let us remember it is the God of Eternal Hope who goes with us, carries us, has freed us, empowers us, and brings us up from our graves.

For more information on attending Fearless Dialogues training to become a Journey of Hope trainer/facilitator, please contact Rev. Enger Muteteke at emuteteke@gnjumc.org. 🇺🇸

FEARLESS DIALOGUES

Hope team discerning which organizations were best equipped to help us do our work. Fifteen organizations were selected, and from this gifted and skilled group, Fearless Dialogues rose to the top. One amendment to the Journey of Hope legislation named the fact that this work is intersectional in nature. Fearless Dialogues was found to be the organiza-

tion, is passionate about seeing the image of God redeemed in the self, the other, and whole communities to the glory of God. Rev. Dr. Ellison, in his book, *Fearless Dialogues: A New Movement for Justice*, talks about how the vision and mission of the organization and its praxis originated from Ellison’s own upbringing, lessons learned, and the wisdom of el-

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TOP ROW (L-R): **Aaron Boylan, Andre Morales, Brittany Boetticher, Ebenezer Shim, Emmanuel Shim, and Grace Kim.**

BOTTOM ROW (L-R): **Kate Sallee, Kori Isaac, Luke Horton, Melissa Johnson, and Noa Park.**

Students Shine with New Scholarships

By Heather Mistretta
hmistretta@gnjumc.org

What would it look like if we could help students graduate from college without the burden of overwhelming debt? Well, this picture is made more vibrant thanks to the General Board of Higher Education and Campus Ministry (GBHEM) and the generous donations they receive. This year GNJ's BHEM awarded 11 scholarships to students who are not only faithful servants but are boldly plotting out their futures.

The recipients are Kate Sallee of Aldersgate UMC, Ebenezer Shim and Emmanuel Shim of Wall UMC, Noa Park of Monmouth Grace UMC, Kori Isaac and Andre Morales of St. Mark's UMC, Brittany Boetticher of UMC of Lake Hopatcong, Luke Horton of First UMC, Grace Kim of Christ First UMC, Melissa Johnson of Bishop Janes UMC and Aaron Boylan of St. John's UMC.

"Kate has been a strong role model of faith for so many of our youngest disciples over these years," said Rev. Erica Munoz who has worked with Kate at Aldersgate UMC for the past seven years and seen how she faithfully contributes to outreach ministries, fundraisers, mission opportunities and music ministry. "She has helped lead our Sunday School children's choir, given music lessons to some of our children and is always willing to do 'whatever needs to get done' in order for Sunday mornings to be filled with the joy and the spirit of Christ."

But when the pandemic shut the doors of churches, Munoz said Kate stepped up to travel 45 minutes to the church to help with the virtual worship service every Sunday. "She shared her gifts, she brightened our dark and empty worship space with the light of Christ's love every week, and for this I will always be grateful and forever blessed as will her community of faith at Aldersgate UMC."

Kate began her studies at Gettysburg College this fall.

Luke Horton is a sophomore at Brown University, studying international and public affairs psychology.

"Luke [Horton] is very bright, but not just in a 'book smart' way. He is not afraid to push the envelope when it comes to his faith and the role the church has in his life," said Rev. Tom Korkuch.

"What especially impresses me about Luke is his willingness to ask questions and not just blindly accept aspects of his Christian faith. He is particularly interested in putting 'love into action' by engaging in outreach, particularly to those on the margin."



Emmanuel and Ebenezer Shim in July 2004 when their dad was finishing his master's program at Boston College.

Aaron Boylan is a student at Rowan University.

"While Aaron has been involved in St. John's since childhood, he has grown and developed as a disciple and leader," said Rev. Michael Bill.

"The past several months have been hard for all, and especially for our high school juniors and seniors. However, it was during these months that I saw Aaron's walk with Christ flourish. He now is a key member of praise band, invests his life in other students, and strives to engage his faith in all aspects of life. We are very proud of him and blessed to have him as a part of our church!"

Grace Kim, a junior at Vanderbilt University, is a budding music educator who loves to play the flute. She is dedicated and committed to teach, encourage and inspire students, possibly abroad. She is pursuing a Bachelor of Music in

Integrated Studies/Teacher Education and Flute Performance, with a continued track for a Master of Education through the Blair School of Music to Peabody College five-year program and a minor in Special Education.

"Grace has worked hard in her academics and her passions while attending campus in person through the pandemic," said Rev. Hyoik Kim, who is also her proud father. "She is blessed to have been awarded this scholarship and will continue to strive in her undergraduate career."

Melissa is a junior at Messiah University where she is majoring in Early Childhood/Special Education and minoring in Speech-Language Pathology.

"Her efforts during the Covid shutdown to maintain a meaningful children's ministry at our church while also being a full-time student were amazing," said Mathew J. Enzler, senior pastor, Bishop Janes UMC.

"She recruited several of her classmates to make weekly video lessons that were absolutely amazing; they contained bible stories acted out in various forms, from finger puppets to little skits; she included two activities, one was a craft, the other was a game or interactive thing to do with family; and they always ended with a memory verse.

Melissa has truly been a blessing to our church for years, but considering she is away at college, we are so wonderfully blessed to have her continued engagement with our congregation while she studies."

Ebenezer Shim, who is studying environmental geoscience at Boston College, will graduate this spring. She is also an intern for the institution's Mother Earth podcast.

Her brother, Emmanuel Shim, is studying finance also at Boston College. He is scheduled to graduate in 2025.

"For Ebenezer and Emmanuel Shim, the United Methodist Church has been a huge part throughout their lives. Having their mom (Rev. Sunny Shim) and dad (Rev. Hyun-Bo Shim), as the clergies at GNJ, they always have participated in the church e.g. worship, Sunday School, VBS, missions, and volunteer projects," said Rev. Sunny Shim.

"They are exceptionally compassionate towards God's people and passionate about the causes of building up God's Kingdom! As a senior (Ebbie) and a freshman (Emmi), they are heavily involved with helping other students and community works (representing the Methodists of GNJAC well)."

Noa Park of Monmouth Grace UMC is a student at Stony Brook University; Kori Isaac is a student at Seton Hall University; and both Andre Morales of St. Mark's UMC and Brittany Boetticher of UMC of Lake Hopatcong are students at Drew University.

On November 28, United Methodist Student Day, we have the opportunity to help students again to achieve their dreams. On the last Sunday in November, your gifts through this offering benefit students as they pursue opportunities in higher education. Your contribution will be joined with those of millions of other United Methodists to provide scholarships to deserving recipients. This offering has raised more than \$400,000 and helps more than 300 students a year.

Student Day was first celebrated in 1940 when a college education could be attained for \$450 annually.

More info and resources can be found at www.umc.org/en/content/united-methodist-student-day-sunday-ministry-article. 🇺🇸

Distinguished Alumna Transforms Lives Behind Bars

*“When I was in prison,
you visited me.”*

—MATTHEW 25:36

By Heather Mistretta
hmistretta@gnjumc.org

Rev. Heidi Kugler, a GNJ elder and national Chaplaincy Administrator at the Federal Bureau of Prisons in Washington DC was named among the Distinguished Alumni Class of 2021 at Boston University School of Theology.

“It was a little overwhelming,” said the 1997 graduate. “They created a beautiful ceremony. This seminary is close to my heart, as it has continued to nurture and provide a well-rounded seminary experience.”

Kugler, who earned a M.Div. with a specialization in Biblical Studies, is also a certified correctional chaplain with the American Correctional Chaplains Association and serves on the advisory board of the Chaplaincy Innovation Lab, a professional chaplaincy think tank.

“She has the courage and energy to do creative things and survive. She is such a gift to this conference,” said Rev. Patricia Barrett, retired elder of GNJ and former UMC Chaplaincy Endorser of the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry.



Distinguished Alumna, Rev. Heidi Kugler (second from left).

Kugler has been providing executive oversight to the chaplaincy departments in all 122 federal prisons nationwide since 2015. Along with her Central Office Chaplaincy team, she seeks to guide religious accommodations across faith lines, policy development, national training, branch hiring, and faith-based reentry for the agency.

“We are all locked up in one way or another,” said Kugler. “I enjoy connecting God’s grace where the needs are to bring about justice and hope. I feel blessed to be part of that.”

Prior to entering the agency, Kugler served as a parish pastor at the UMC in Morristown, as well as a chaplain at

the Morris County Correctional Facility. Her previous Bureau of Prisons duty stations included FDC Honolulu as the supervisory chaplain and FCI Fort Dix as the staff chaplain.

But an internship at a state women’s prison in 1996 while studying for her master’s degree in Boston was a pivotal moment in her ministry, Kugler recalled.

“It opened my eyes to prison ministry. It was then when I realized that is where my calling was,” she said. “It’s a tremendous gift to help people transform their lives.” She added that, throughout her career, she has seen some people return to their faith, while others discover it for the first time.

From helping at-risk youth and homeless persons, to sharing God’s love behind bars, Kugler is always impartial in the way that she ministers.

Her focus has remained constant to, “help people claim their God given potential so they don’t have to return to prison.” Working toward reducing recidivism has been one of her main objectives throughout her career in prison ministry.

But the past year and a half has been a challenging one, particularly in the prison system. “The agency has modified its operations to accommodate the changes brought on by the pandemic,” said Kugler. She went on to add, “We had to develop new ways to do worship and programming that were both transformative and safe. Much like we saw our churches do, we took ideas from religious groups across faith lines. By continuing to partner with community organizations, we were able to still foster hope and healing.”

Kugler added that in her branch’s quest to meet the needs of the inmates and staff, she and her team also strengthened their care for caregivers through pastoral calls, workshops, and virtual retreats to keep them connected.

Through it all, Kugler follows the teachings of Jesus with humility, compassion, and vigilance, a journey that has shaped her into the distinguished alumna that she is. 🇺🇸

Cross Cultural

Continued from page 1

Conference serves to deepen and integrate this intercultural competency work.

Jaskot added that the small group breakouts in which people were able to meet new people, read a passage from Genesis and exchange ideas were beneficial to her group.

“They just help people do better, keep us accountable,” the longtime lay leader added.

This past July, Broad Street UMC welcomed Pastor Teaira Parker, who is not only a Black pastor but is also the church’s first female pastor and the youngest pastor in the past 30 years.

During the workshop, participants discussed Eric H. F. Law’s book, *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb* and delved

its Community Bible Study format by All Saints Lutheran Church in Davenport, IA.

The workshop also featured Public Narrative work by Dr. Marshall Ganz in which he discusses the story of self, story of us and story of now, as well as the Breakthrough team’s *I See You* series.

GNJ has more than 100 cross racial-cross cultural appointments, which is roughly 23% of its churches. These appointments occurred in each region of GNJ and included pastors from various backgrounds.

Rev. Dr. Tiffany Murphy, pastor at Zion UMC in Clarksboro; Rev. Dr. Stephen Yun, pastor at Succasunna UMC and Rev. Enger Muteteke, GNJ resourcing director all shared personal testimonials as CRCC pastors during the workshop.

Rev. William M. Williams III, who is now the district superintendent for Gateway

North District, recently recalled his CRCC appointment in 2018 when he said, “I had the opportunity to experience the CRCC training when serving at the First UMC of Westfield.”

“It was such a pleasure to work with a team of laity who were committed to both learning and implementing the learnings. For us, the

CRCC training wasn’t a one-day event, but developed into a myriad of small groups and book studies and a deep relational building outside between me and the congregation as well as the congregation with each other.”

Three years later, Williams is implementing what he learned that day as he interacts with people of many cultures and works to mend bridges that may have been weak or broken. When Hurricane Ida plowed through the Northeast, Williams stepped in to connect and help heal.

Back in 2015 when GNJ committed to a 10-year plan to address cultural competency and eradicate racism before passing the 10-year intercultural competency plan two years later, keynote speaker and anti-racist expert, Dr. Robin DiAngelo said, “White people are necessarily limited on their perception of race,” and that sometimes when talking about racism, they may respond from a defensive position because society teaches that racism is “bad.” She said, “We believe that to be



GNJ’s Cross-Racial and Cross-Cultural Workshop reinforced a 10-year intercultural competency plan passed four years ago.

complicit with racism and to be a good person is mutually exclusive,” and that the fear of confronting racial injustice “colludes with someone else’s oppression. Your silence is maintaining white solidarity.”

**“(THE CRCC WORKSHOP)
BROUGHT TO LIGHT WHAT WE NEED
TO BE INTENTIONAL ABOUT.”**

—Laura Jaskot, lay representative
and worship committee chair
at Broad Street UMC

In spite of the barriers and negative feelings of shame and defensiveness that threaten to stall a move forward, DiAngelo encouraged people to build bridges, respond from a place of humility and gratitude. “When we begin to reflect, listen, and engage, we get stronger, recognizing that we didn’t choose it, but we are responsible for it.”

Six years later, and those words still resonate in the minds of many. 🇺🇸

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Rev. Hector Burgos delivering the leadership address.

On a Journey to Finding Value, Purpose and Hope

Photo by Shari DeAngelo

By Denise Herschel

Rev. Hector A. Burgos, district superintendent for the Capital District and southern part of the Northern Shore Districts, calls his story to becoming a pastor “a long journey of self-discovery.” Born in Bayamon, Puerto Rico, he was introduced to Methodism from birth through his mother, who came to faith in their adult years. From an early age, Burgos was pointed to as “a leader,” but ordained ministry was never “on my radar.”

But in 2002, he began to feel the Spirit during a missionary trip that he and his wife were doing in North Carolina with a team from Puerto Rico to help launch a Hispanic ministry sponsored by a local UM congregation.

“That was when I first started to feel the Spirit ‘wooing me.’ The night before returning to PR, the pastor shared in tears with our team the following words, ‘if any of you ever feel called to ministry and missionary work, think of the U.S. Our land needs to be re-evangelized for Christ.’ His words haunted me, in a good way, for months,” he said.

Later that year, an opportunity for relocating to New Jersey through his job became available, and in a separate event,

someone who did not know about his journey, shared that “God was sending us to a strange land to meet our life calling.”

“So while we moved to New Jersey looking for better professional opportunities, in the back of my head, I knew there was more; I just did not know who, what or when. Once I engaged in New Jersey as a lay person in a UM congregation, I began to gain awareness of how God had been equipping me for leadership in the church,” he said. “It felt very natural. I served as evangelism coordinator, then as administrative council chair. But it was during a time where our pastor and mentor, Rev. Lucy Martinez, felt ill, and I had to step up to cover the pulpit in my local congregation, that I felt that pastoral leadership was something that God was calling me into. I also realized that as a bi-cultural, bi-lingual person, I had a unique perspective to share about life, faith and ministry.”

And from that point, Burgos said it has been like “a roller coaster” filled with new adventures, growth, and opportunities to serve and lead in the church and in the community. God was calling him “to share by grace” what he had received.

Burgos, who as district superintendent serves as an extension of the office of the

bishop, oversees the ministry of 94 congregations and their clergy, serves as the chief missional strategist for his district, and alongside the bishop and other superintendents, provide oversight of the spiritual and temporal affairs of the conference.

“I am starting my third year as DS. Prior to this role, I served for five years as director of connectional ministries where I oversaw the ministry life of GNJ, including

my mom and grandmother. There are two very strong influences in my life as a spiritual leader. From my dad, a visionary and savvy businessperson, I learned to find opportunities in places others only see problems. Rev. Cotto was instrumental in guiding me through the candidacy process, and I am like a sponge, always trying to absorb the best of the leaders around me,” he continued. The reality of undocumented migrants in the

“THE REALITY OF UNDOCUMENTED MIGRANTS IN THE COUNTRY TRIGGERS MY PASSION FOR JUSTICE AND EQUITY IN THE CHURCH AND IN SOCIETY.”

—Rev. Hector A. Burgos, district superintendent for the Capital District and southern part of the Northern Shore Districts

congregational and leadership development, and local, regional, and global missional partnerships,” he added.

Burgos’ educational background includes a Bachelor of Arts degree in Business Administration with a concentration on strategic leadership and marketing from the University of Puerto Rico. He also has a MDiv. from Drew University. Currently, Burgos leads in MARCHA, the national Hispanic/Latino caucus in the Methodist Church as part of the executive team and Director of communications. And although Burgos, a certified ICA professional coach, reflecting on his approach to leadership, said “I have embraced a coach approach to my leadership, so rather than always being directive, I coach clergy and congregational leaders into self-discovery so they can address their challenges and/or opportunities in ministry,” he added.

“However, I have embraced a coach approach to my leadership so rather than be directive, I coach clergy and congregational leaders into self-discovery and address their challenges and/or opportunities,” he added.

Burgos has had several mentors throughout his life including his parents, his grandmother and Rev. Irving Cotto.

I feel blessed, like Timothy in the Bible, that the faith that lives in me, first lived in

country triggers my passion for justice and equity in the church and in society.”

Burgos is married to Jazelis Adorno, and they have four children – Fabian, age 23, Joel, age 21, Marcos, age 16 and Valeria, age 12. His wife is a licensed local pastor currently serving in the Crosswicks UMC. She has also served as Hispanic coordinator for the UMW of GNJ and the coordinator for the Hispanic Ministries Plan on GNJ.

“I also have a twin cousin, Ruben Jimenez, who serves as a pastor in PR. We call ourselves twin cousins as we were born on the same day, only 20 minutes apart, ushered by the same doctor, and we are both pastors and musicians,” he added.

Burgos continued that nothing brings him more joy in ministry than a person transformed by the healing love and power of Jesus Christ.

“In life and ministry, I find purpose in connecting with people and introducing them to a relationship with Christ that gives value, purpose and hope and that equips them for transformational discipleship in their daily life,” he said. “This purpose has carried me through the different roles I have served in the church. These are extremely challenging times and at the same time I am excited to see the new thing that God is doing and am humbled to be a part of it.”



Rev. Burgos with his wife, Jazelis Adorno and their four children – Fabian (23), Joel (21), Marcos (16) and Valeria (12).



GO TELL IT ON THE MOUNTAIN

The Relay encourages clergy and laity alike to share their experiences in their own words of adapting ministries and how that adaptability shines the light on others in the new section, "Go Tell it on the Mountain." Do you have Good News to tell? Contact Heather Mistretta at hmistretta@gnjumc.org.

Asbury UMC Banks a Nice Shot

By Rev. Stafford Miller

ATLANTIC CITY, NJ

Asbury UMC in Atlantic City, NJ was honored to host on September 11, Minister Steve Lillis and his Gospel Trick Shot Ministries, Inc.

Gospel Trick Shot Ministries, Inc. (GTS) is the creative use of amazing billiard/pool trick shots called Gospel Trick Shots. It was first designed to entertain and encourage young people at local churches. In the fall of 1996, GTS began to minister at colleges working with campus ministries. In 2000, GTS started working in the billiard industry at both pro and amateur events before going international the following year working with billiard federations and international mission teams.

The ministry continues to work in all venues having pool tables and those that do not have a pool table as GTS now has a portable pool table. The goal of the ministry is to encourage people to consider the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Trick Shot ministry was set up in front of Asbury UMC, right on Pacific Avenue. Passersby's and local residents as well as tourists were able to experience the joy of Lord up front and close, who might not have been able to do so before.

Brother Allen Maddox, a volunteer shares, "We at Asbury UMC were blessed to have them minister here with us at our "Touch Ministry Feeding Program," which we offer every Saturday throughout the entire year."



Minister Steve Lillis brought a new kind of ministry to Asbury UMC.



Gospel Trick Shot Ministries brings a portable pool table to every mission trip.



The congregation and the community was welcome to take part in the fun.

Fun Had By All at Mt. Zion Wesley UMC

WENONAH, NJ

Inspired by Sister Geraldine Smith, chairperson of the Finance Committee and Wandette Sanders, the children's coordinator, Mt. Zion Wesley UMC hosted a Fun Day for children on its five acres of land in August.

"The fun day was serving its purpose, helping children with their socializing skills and cognition skills," said Sanders. "It gave them an opportunity to be cooperative and share their fun with each other. They enjoyed structured and instructed joy!"

The day began with an Hour of Prayer, followed by a session by Youth Council leader Angela while the children and youth sat under parking lot tents. She

provided a short message on what it means to reevaluate, restructure and rebuild, referencing Nehemiah 2:11-20.

Afterwards Pastor Randall shared the story about the importance of following instruction. Then, the Children in youth engaged in various outdoors activities. Most of the people were vaccinated, and social distance was followed.

"The day was sorely needed," said Pastor Randall. "Our children have not been able to have in-person connection for over a year. They seemed to enjoy their fun day. The virus has taken its toll on the church family, and it was time to enjoy the outdoors as much as possible."

Others there that day also shared their thoughts:

Gail Allen, an usher of the church and cook of the day indicated, "Beautiful day, nice turn out. Over 25 children and youth showed up."

Brenda Craig, the Evangelist chairperson, noted, "Very Spiritual Day. This a day of extension of Mt. Zion Wesley United Methodist church Family."

Sister Rebecca Tribbett said, "The Fun day was a tribute to watch the children having fun. Their excitement was contagious."

Pat Hickman, a trustee, said, "It has been a long time before we had something like this at our church, even before COVID-19. The children were blessed with instructions first and leadership from the teens followed with helping the young children."

As the children were enjoying the day, Brother James Craig provided music. The music had a blend of gospel, youth songs and R&B soul classic.

Angel Johnson, a visitor who came to the church with her finance and child, Brandon, said "I loved it. It was awesome. I love what is going on. This is nice that the church put together a function like this--to allow families to gather with safe distancing and fun.

Second grader Donald Harris said, "I thought it was going to be boring, but it really a fun day."

A youth named Desire echoed his thoughts when she said, "It was fun a great day."

Jevon, a young adult, said, "Good day, a day with spiritual educational activities and fun at the same time."



OCTOBER BOOKSHELF

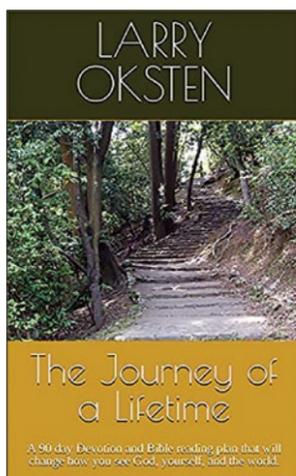
This month we are celebrating and nurturing our students of all ages! Once again, this can mean different things for everyone. Are you the student, the teacher or both? Discover the varied selection of books below, including one from GNJ's own Rev. Larry Oksten.

The Journey of a Lifetime: A 90-day Devotion and Bible reading plan that will change how you see God, yourself, and the world

(2021) By Larry Oksten

The Journey of a Lifetime explores 90 days that will change how you see God, yourself, and the world. The journey through the Bible will uncover an image of God that will encourage, embolden, and excite you. Each day's reading will come with a devotion that will help you experience the Bible in practical ways. From Genesis to Revelation, you will see God active in not only the world around you but your life as well. This is the book that will teach you what it means to not simply know about God but to truly know God.

Larry Oksten, an ordained elder, is the senior pastor at Kemble UMC in Ocean City. He has been married for over 25 years to Ginny, and they have two sons. Larry has a passion for telling the story of Jesus Christ in practical ways. He believes that God is always knocking down barriers in our lives. He is also known by his nickname, Pastor Bluejeans, which was given to him early in ministry. He is working on his second book.



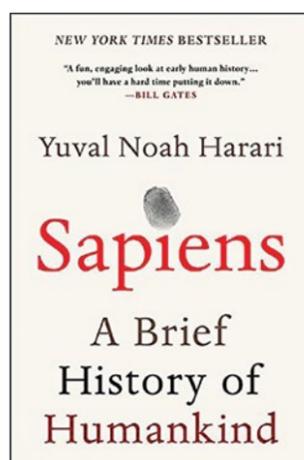
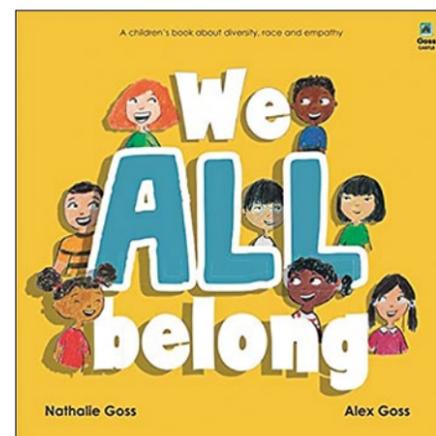
We All Belong: A Children's Book About Diversity, Race and Empathy

(2020) By Nathalie Goss and Alex Goss

We All Belong is a children's book that embraces our differences and recognizes and celebrates the diversity in a caring group of children. It includes a wonderfully flowing, rhyming poem about inclusion, with excellent representation of different cultures.

Nathalie Goss, an illustrator for NB Literary Magazine, began exhibiting and selling her artwork in November 2018. She lives in Bath with her family and two cats.

Alex Goss is a huge football fan, a father, an author and a digital contractor. He works on the world's most popular children's phonics game.



Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind

(2015) By Yuval Noah Harari

Sapiens is a narrative of humanity's creation and evolution that explores the ways in which biology and history have defined us and enhanced our understanding of what it means to be "human." One hundred thousand years ago, at least six different species of humans inhabited Earth. Yet today there is only one—homo sapiens. Learn about what the earth looked like 70,000 years ago with the appearance of modern cognition. From examining the role evolving humans have played in the global ecosystem to charting the rise of empires, *Sapiens* integrates history and science to reconsider accepted narratives, connect past developments with contemporary concerns, and examine specific events

within the context of larger ideas. It features 27 photographs, six maps and 25 illustrations/diagrams.

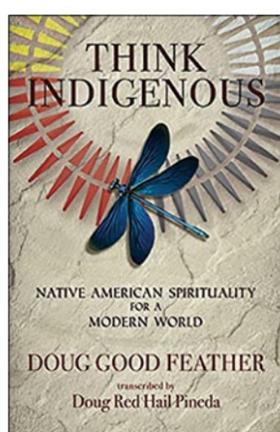
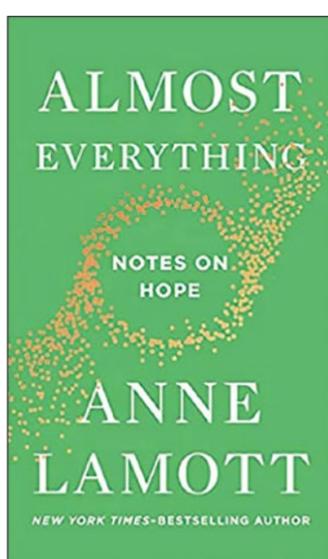
Prof. Yuval Noah Harari has a Ph.D. in History from the University of Oxford and lectures at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, specializing in world history. His books have been translated into 65 languages, with over 35 million copies sold worldwide. His others also looked deep into our past, *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* (2016) considered far-future scenarios, and *21 Lessons for the 21st Century* (2018) zoomed in on the biggest questions of the present moment.

Almost Everything: Notes on Hope

(2018, Riverhead Books) By Anne Lamott

Almost Everything shares the message that in spite of despair and uncertainty, there is hope. "The seeds of rejuvenation are at hand," Lamott writes. This profound and funny book calls for each of us to rediscover the nuggets of hope and wisdom that are buried within us that can make life sweeter than we ever imagined. Divided into short chapters that explore life's essential truths, *Almost Everything* pinpoints these moments of insight as it shines an encouraging light forward.

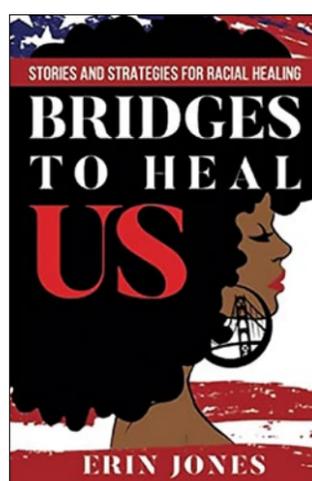
Anne Lamott is the author of the *New York Times* bestsellers *Hallelujah Anyway*; *Help, Thanks, Wow*; *Small Victories*; *Stitches*; *Some Assembly Required*; *Grace (Eventually)*; *Plan B*; *Traveling Mercies*; *Bird by Bird*; and *Operating Instructions*. She is also the author of seven novels, including *Imperfect Birds* and *Rosie*. A past recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship and an inductee to the California Hall of Fame, she lives in Northern California.



Think Indigenous: Native American Spirituality for a Modern World

(2021, Hay House Inc.) By Doug Good Feather and Doug Red Hail Pineda

Think Indigenous is a guide to integrating indigenous thinking into modern life for a more interconnected and spiritual relationship with our fellow beings, Mother Earth, and the natural ways of the universe. This book's intention is not to teach you to "be Native American," but instead to use the indigenous culture to help you connect with your own indigenous roots and help you remember your ancestral knowing that all beings are divinely connected.



Bridges to Heal US: Stories and Strategies for Racial Healing

(2021) By Erin Jones

Bridges to Heal US is for those who want to be part of the healing of our nation but just don't know if you as an individual can make a difference. Do you wonder if you need a title or need to run for office to make the kinds of changes needed? In *Bridges to Heal US*, you will learn from author and 30-year, locally- and nationally-award-winning educator, Erin Jones, about strategies to help you move your community towards racial justice.

Erin Jones is an education and systems consultant who is regularly featured as a TED Talk speaker. She previously worked in educational system before becoming a consultant, and she serves on the boards of

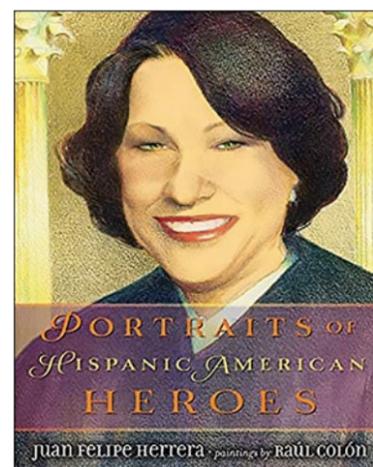
three nonprofits. In this book, she shares her own personal stories to serve as a call to action.

Portraits of Hispanic American Heroes

(2014, Dial Books) By Juan Felipe Herrera

Portraits of Hispanic American Heroes is a visually stunning book that showcases 20 Hispanic and Latino American men and women who have made outstanding contributions to the arts, politics, science, humanitarianism and athletics. Portraits complement biographies of heroes like Cesar Chavez, Sonia Sotomayor, Ellen Ochoa and Roberto Clemente. Complete with timelines and famous quotes, this tome is a magnificent homage to those who have shaped our nation.

Juan Felipe Herrera was initiated into the Word by the fire-speakers of the early Chicano Movimiento and by heavy exposure to various poetry, jazz and blues performance streams. He is the Tomás Rivera Endowed Chair in the Department of Creative Writing at the University of California - Riverside. His published works include *Border-Crosser with a Lamborghini Dream*, *Mayan Drifter: Chicano Poet in the Lowlands of the Americas*, and *Thunderweavers/Tejedoras de Rayos*.



What's That in Your Hand?: God and Pool—The Gospel Trick Shot Story

(2019) By Steve Lillis

What's That in Your Hand chronicles the story of professional pool player, Steve Lillis and his friends and partners in their efforts to share the love of Jesus to many people around the world while using their billiard cue sticks. Gospel Trick Shot Ministries, Inc. became the ministry tool that God used as an umbrella organization to facilitate evangelism and discipleship. As president and founder, Steve with the help of many famous and important people in the billiard industry along with a network of churches and ministry organizations partnered together for the sake of the Gospel. There are also three appendices in the back of the book containing Gospel Trick Shot archival information plus 14 shots complete with historical background and how to set up with pool table diagram illustrations included.

Steve Lillis is a professional pool player, college professor and missionary evangelist. He has been ranked among the top pool players in the world at various times during his billiard career, and he is an adjunct professor of English holding two undergraduate degrees, a master's degree and a Bible diploma. 🇺🇸

Justice Gardens

Continued from page 1
seven plants.

"It's a ministry of hospitality. It's a ministry of open arms for those who come, and it's a reaching out of our arms to those in need," said Vanbuskirk-Philip, who added that the gardens have been a wonderful place to congregate safely during the pandemic.

"They are spaces for the community to eat, walk, reflect and pray," she added. Although FUMC used to host families from Family Promise, the pandemic has put that on hold.

The project began in 2019 when FUMC was one of 42 garden projects in 14 municipalities awarded a \$1,200 grant through the Union County Means Green Community Garden Grants program. With the grant money, a student from Drew University brought the idea to fruition, with the help of local Scouts as part of their Eagle Scout project.

Two growing seasons have passed, and the bounty of crops are still helping feed Family Promise families as well as others



Pastor Alison Vanbuskirk Philip and her husband, Sajjan and daughter, Eve take part in "Adopt a Tender Succulent" for the winter.

like the Westfield Food Pantry and the community that Westfield Presbyterian Church serves.

The gardens fall into three main categories of display, contemplation and production, and are associated with the broad themes of ecological, environmental and social justice. From the vegetable garden that speaks to food insecurity to the succulent garden that teaches visitors about clean water to the FUMC Memorial Garden with ashes buried from more than 100 people that inspires reflection and healing from loss, each garden features a purpose and an artistic element.

"They're all different sizes and different needs," said Bottorff. "There's a sign at each garden that links it with social justice

"We try to thin out perennials in the beginning every spring and then put them in pots to sell. We usually made about \$1,000," he said, adding that the church receives free seeds and discounts from a local garden center and recyclable pots from the recycling center.

Each garden features a plaque with the garden description, a justice meditation, an art piece, rotating children's artwork on the theme and suggestions for personal action. A printed guide explains each station.

Some of the other gardens are:

- *Garden by the front steps*—rainbow design in flowers (symbolizing hope for the marginalized)
- *Pollinator garden*—host and nectar plants for butterflies, bees and hummingbirds (combating loss of pollinators and their habitat)
- *Garden by the front masonry sign*—church announcements surrounded by flowers and/or vegetables (focusing on the crisis of climate change)
- *Ferris Place Garden*—Daylilies with volunteer tomatoes contemplating land and ocean pollution
- *Shade garden*—a cool, quiet space with bird houses and shade plants (centering on the serious effects of deforestation)



"Wesley Hall Garden" Loss of Species Diversity (Memorial Space dedicated to Stephanie Miller, a Wesley Hall Nursery School student who died tragically following a tonsillectomy in 1997.)

- *Tomato garden*—heirloom tomatoes donated to the Westfield Food Pantry (representing the importance of pure food)
- *Basil garden*—10 varieties of basil for members and friends of the church (considering the contribution of plants to maintaining clean air)
- *Herb garden*—common herbs for members and friends of the church (meditating on the importance of clean energy)
- *Rainbow garden*—a universe garden with its own sun and moon where visitors can also watch the stars at night.

"The herb garden is located right by our front door, so everyone can take what they like," said Bottorff. "The shade garden has chairs to encourage conversation."

The gardens also serve as a wonderful opportunity for the community to participate in self-guided tours and provide educational seminars on gardening to encourage individuals and other churches and local businesses to plant their own justice gardens.

Bottorff regularly finds ways to connect to his community. He recently led a talk for the garden club in town via Zoom, and last spring a local kinder-

garten class planted peas. In 2020, he welcomed a church member who is a chef to plan a hot pepper garden. This was followed by a party online where members exchanged recipes and made hot pepper honey.

Visitors and bystanders often wonder how FUMC's Justice Gardens grow so well, but its mission says it all: "seeking to love God and love everyone...to follow Jesus in word and action...to care for community and congregation by sowing seeds of grace, love, and joy."

That mission of inclusion has seeped out into everything FUMC does. At a church, where nothing was done online before the pandemic, virtual services at the beach are now offered so people can watch anytime. They have welcomed new members and hosted baptisms online.

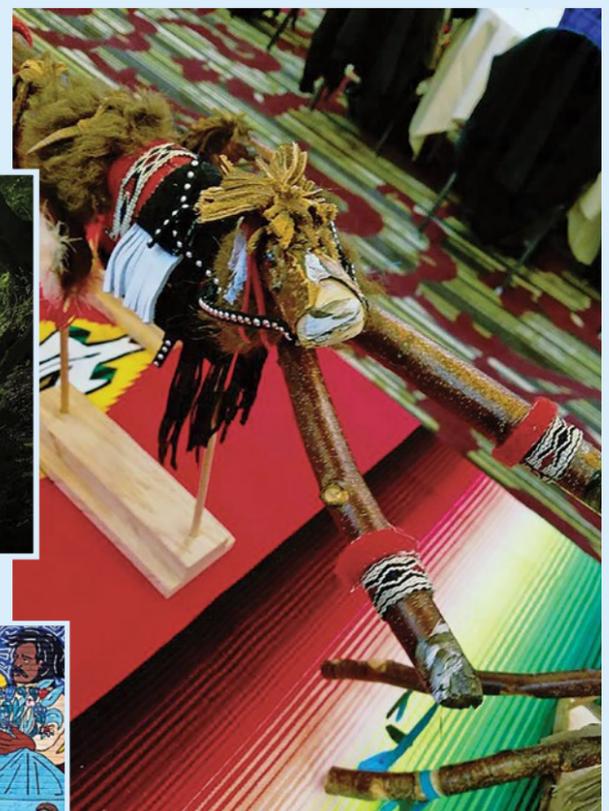
With Bottorff as a faithful steward and cultivator of not only plants but also community engagement, promoting justice and compassion for others, the church will be able to reinforce that mission of inclusion every day.

More information can be found at www.fumcwestfield.org.

TIME TO CELEBRATE!

There is much to be thankful for this month and celebrate the gifts we are given!

- On Oct. 3 we celebrate World Communion Sunday, a day when giving provides scholarships for U.S. racial- and ethnic-minority students and international students, on both undergraduate and graduate levels.
- On Oct. 11, in addition to Columbus Day, we remember Indigenous Peoples Day, a holiday that celebrates and honors Native American peoples and commemorates their histories and cultures. Its newest predecessor on Oct. 6 is A Day of Remembrance for our Native American children, a new day when we remember and honor the memory of those children who were brought to boarding schools throughout North America.
- On Oct. 17 we celebrate Laity Sunday when we embrace the ministry of all Christians to love God and all people. On this day, we lift up the vocation of all (lay and clergy) to follow Jesus Christ and foster leaders.
- This year a team from GNJ's board of laity created the Laity Sunday resource, "A New Path: Laity Sunday." The team developed a sermon outline and worship resources to use on this Sunday (written by laity, for laity!). More details are here: www.gnjumc.org/laity-sunday/
- Also this month, we continue to celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month and the gifts that our Hispanic brothers and sisters bring us every day! We embrace the rich history they bring, recognize the struggles they have faced and still face and stand tall as advocates for a brighter future.
- We also celebrate Pastor Appreciation Sunday! Celebrated typically on the second Sunday in October, this important day is a reminder to say thank you for all that our clergy do to bring solace, build bridges and foster discipleship and a deeper faith.



UPCOMING EVENTS

Oct. 11	Columbus Day and Indigenous Peoples Day
Oct. 12	Next Gen Team's weekly Zoom call at 12:00 p.m. Open to all youth workers: pastors, youth directors, volunteer youth leaders and parents
Oct. 14	Adjourned Session of Annual Conference
Oct. 16	GNJ UMW's Fall Meeting
Oct. 17	Laity Sunday
Oct. 21	One-day Leadership Academy workshop on Advent Breakthrough Series
Nov. 2, 9, 16	Leadership Academy's "Local Church & Community: Building Missional Relationships"
Nov. 3, 10, 17	Leadership Academy's "Be a Leader, Lead a Leader—Small Group Hybrid Training"
June 18-25, 2022	Joshua Generation Civil Rights Pilgrimage

OBITUARIES

Rev. Richard J. Bridge, retired full elder, died on Sept. 23. A memorial service will be held Oct. 9, at 11:00 a.m. at Sailor's Bethel UMC, 7752 Main Street, Bethel, DE 19931. Memorial donations can be made to your favorite charity. Expressions of sympathy can be sent to JoAnn Bridge (spouse) at 30938 Al Jan Drive, Laurel, DE 19956.

Darla Jean Edwards, spouse of retired elder, John T. Edwards, died on Aug. 19. A memorial service was held on Sept. 11 at the Village View Community Church in Florida. Memorial donations can be sent to Village View Christian Academy at 8585 SE 147th Place, Summerfield, FL 34491. Expressions of sympathy can be sent to Rev. John T. Edwards (spouse) at 16975 SE 91 St., Shubrick Court, The Villages, FL 32162-2800.

PHOTO OF THE MONTH



This month we feature Rev. Peter Mantell of Frenchtown and Kingwood UMCs and their creative way to present the new Living Faith series from the Breakthrough team. "Do we have Tuna Noodle Casserole faith (a little wide, a little long, and about an inch deep)? Or does our faith go deeper by the way we offer ourselves to our community?" he asked.

Each month we will highlight one photo sent in from our congregations that really exemplifies the wonderful ministries they are doing. If you would like to submit a photo, please email Heather Mistretta at hmistretta@gnjumc.org.

NEW JOB POSTINGS AT GNJ

Music Leader – First UMC of Blairstown (P/T)

Music leader and musician who loves Jesus, is passionate about the ministry of the Church, and seeks to draw people deeper into their faith through engaging and spirit filled contemporary and traditional Christian music. The ideal candidate will plan and implement the musical components of the worship services with our worship team, in coordination with the pastor.

Interested candidates should submit a cover letter, resume, and references to Tina Taylor, Staff Parish Relations Chairperson at info@firstumcblairstown.com or 10 Stillwater Road, Blairstown, NJ 07825.

Director of Youth Ministry – Sicklerville UMC

Seeking a highly motivated and energetic committed Christian to fill an immediate vacancy for a part time (average ~20 hours a week) Director of Youth Ministry. The individual for this position will be responsible for developing and implementing the youth ministry for grades 7 – 12. This will include overseeing a youth Sunday School, a weekly Sunday evening youth group program, Wednesday night Bible study, retreats, and mission trips. The ministry will be evangelistic and discipleship-oriented and implemented by reaching to church youth, the unchurched community and the committed Christian youth.

Interested individuals please send resume to: Sicklerville UMC, C/O Staff Parish Relations Committee, 406 Church Road, Sicklerville, NJ 08081; or email at sumcnj@sumcnj.com.

P/T Administrative Assistant – Washington UMC

Part-time Administrative Assistant position for 15 hours a week and computer and website experience preferred.

Please call the church office (908-689-0105), if interested.

Director of Children, Youth, and Family Ministry – Marlton UMC (F/T)

Details can be found on the church's website at Director CYF Opportunity — Marlton United Methodist Church (marltonumc.com)

Resumes and Cover Letters should be sent to mumcspc@marltonumc.com.

ONGOING JOB POSTINGS AT GNJ

Regional Administrative Assistant

Provides administrative support to the regional administrator/project coordinator to support the district superintendents and directors of resourcing of the assigned region. Also provides administrative work related to the superintending team and the director of human resources.

For more detailed information on all current GNJ job opportunities please, visit: <https://www.gnjumc.org/job-opportunities>




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An aerial photograph of a park with a large body of water. A white van is stuck in the water, and a blue SUV is on a path in the foreground. In the background, there are trees and a tall brick building.

NEIGHBORS HELPING NEIGHBORS

A Future With Hope's Ida Relief Fund was created to give churches the assurance that support will be there for the duration.

For more details and to contribute to this fund where 100% of donations will go toward the effort, go to www.gnjumc.org/afwh/ida-relief-effort/



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