

# THE RELAY

UNITED METHODISTS  
OF GREATER NEW JERSEY

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## 2023 ANNUAL CONFERENCE | MAY 21-23

## The Flame Church Ignites, Spreads Pentecost Spirit

By Krista B. Jefferies

BAYONNE, N.J.

**T**he Rivers of Life Church, an Arabic-speaking congregation that is part of Wesley United Methodist Church in Bayonne, N.J., is now The Flame Church. The symbolic name change evokes Pentecost, embodied by what this group is becoming as it spreads its light around the world.

The Rev. Emad Gerges, founding pastor, has spent the past 20 years ministering in the Bayonne area, especially to the Arabic-speaking community. His mission is to bring people together, spread the word of God, and make members feel “a part of something special.”

“I try to find people from many areas,” he said. “People need to feel safe in a family church, not just worship and leave.”

The Flame represents the Holy Spirit, which arrived suddenly and moved among Jesus’ disciples, inspiring their expressions of faith at Pentecost. A flame divided into seven tongues and lighted upon the disciples, baptizing them with the Holy Spirit. It enabled them to spread Christ’s gospel among people from other parts of the world



The Rev. Emad Gerges, founding pastor of The Flame Church

Michael Dempsey photo for the Jersey Journal

and be understood in other languages.

Pastor Gerges applies this story from the Book of Acts to the congregation he serves. “We went to the church and filled it with the will of God,” he recalled, “and then we went outside the church to reach others and to make the whole nation and the world transform.”

### Offering Arab Christians Familiarity and More

The people he serves in Bayonne are mostly Egyptian-American, like him, and from other Middle Eastern countries. The Flame Church offers a desired familiarity in language and culture to Arab

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## Justice for Our Neighbors Needs Language Interpreters Now!



**J**ustice for Our Neighbors of the Delaware Valley, which provides affordable immigration legal services to low-income clients in our region, urgently needs Spanish-English language interpreters to help busloads of migrants arriving in Philadelphia seeking asylum.

Read story on page 4

## New Videos Remind Us of Hurricane Ida Recovery Needs

**T**wo new GNJ videos, in English and Spanish, are reminding people of Hurricane Ida’s ongoing impact on many lives and communities, where many residents are still unable to live in their homes more than a year after the storm. “You Are Not Alone” assures survivors of our commitment to helping in their recovery. “Rebuild Homes, Rebuild Lives” offers a clarion call for volunteers.



Read story on page 4 **A Future With Hope volunteer welcomes a survivor back to her renovated home.** James Lee photo

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## A MESSAGE FROM OUR BISHOP

# When the Past Just Doesn't Work Anymore

Bishop John Schol



***No one pours new wine into old wineskins.***

—LUKE 5:37

In my role as bishop of EPA&GNJ, I lead or serve on the board of directors of eight nonprofit organizations. These include annual conferences, foundations, universities, social service organizations and church agencies. All facing the same thing: rapidly changing cultures and economic environments. And each are facing structural budget challenges.

I shared in a recent board meeting of one organization that we have a structural budget challenge, and someone asked me during the break, "What is a structural budget challenge?" A structural budget challenge, like many of our churches are facing, is when the typical income streams no longer fully fund necessary expenditures.

For instance, as enrollment declines, colleges and universities, particularly small liberal arts colleges, do not have enough students. They may be doing a good job, but families are having fewer children; and so there are fewer students. Some liberal arts universities are offering professional degrees such as nursing and physical therapy.

Many local churches are facing the same problem, and it started prior to the Covid pandemic and disaffiliation. Covid sped up the changes. Just as there are fewer students, there are fewer Christians in the United States; and that trend will continue. Other religions—Judaism, Hinduism, Islam—remain relatively small, but more people in the U.S. have chosen to not affiliate with any religion.

Presently, most nonprofit organizations, especially churches, are using one or more of three methods to address structural budget challenges: 1) reduce the budget, 2) spend reserves, and/or 3) sell property. These three methods are like pouring new wine into old wineskins. They only lead to increased challenges in the future.

Jesus told this parable to illustrate that when there are shifts in the culture, the former methods are no longer able to sustain the mission. New wine wants to expand; but old wineskins have lost their elasticity and therefore burst when new wine poured into them expands.

How we engage in the present and future is not sustained by how we did things in the past. Structural budget issues may be eased with temporary fixes of budget cuts, selling property and spending reserves. But soon churches run out of budget cuts to make, property to sell and reserves to spend.

Congregations should examine what they are doing to sustain their mission. Here are a few good questions:

1. *Are you considering selling property? How long will the money from the property sale last, and what will you do when it runs out?*
2. *Are you spending more than 5% of your reserves? If so, your reserves will not last. Review how long spending your reserves can last. What will you do when you spend down your reserves?*
3. *The most recent budget cuts to balance a budget will last how long? When will you have to make additional budget cuts, and what will you cut next?*

Jesus' parable was calling the believers and the faith community to change. In essence, he was indicating that God was doing a new thing. Congregations cannot continue to do the same thing and expect different results.

The following are some questions to explore.

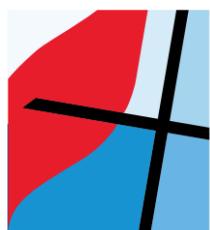
1. *What changes does our congregation need to make to reach and engage younger, more diverse people to make new disciples?*
2. *Does our worship experience match the rhythms and culture of the people in our community?*
3. *Do our worship and ministries excite and inspire people to get involved and live their faith in our community?*
4. *What do we need to stop doing and start doing to reach new people?*

There is hope and possibility. We have congregations that thrived during the pandemic and continue to thrive. We have congregations that are emerging from the pandemic and connecting with new people. Most often, they are becoming new wineskins.

We have opportunities and resources to support your congregation as it recognizes and moves into a new reality. If you would like further information, contact the EPA&GNJ resource manager Megan McKay at [MMckay@gnjumc.org](mailto:MMckay@gnjumc.org). She will work with you to identify how best we can support you as you live into what God has next for you.

Keep the faith!

—John



## THE RELAY

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OF GREATER NEW JERSEY

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## The Relay Passes the Baton to NewSpirit



*"And I will give them one heart,  
and a new spirit I will put within them ..."*

—EZEKIEL 11:19A

Dear readers,

After many years of serving the United Methodists of Greater New Jersey (GNJ) through *The Relay*, it is time for something different. Change is difficult, but we believe that this change will bring about new opportunities for growth, innovation, and impact in furthering our mission as the Church.

Our goal has always been to provide in-depth coverage of news and events happening in GNJ and to share inspiring stories of faith and service from our churches and communities. One of the things that has always warmed our hearts is visiting churches and seeing cutouts of *The Relay* articles on bulletin boards, or overhearing people talking about a recent story they read in the paper. It has been a joy to see how *The Relay* has connected people and brought GNJ together.

But as we look to the future, we must also acknowledge that times are changing, and God is doing something new. After careful consideration and a thorough review of our budget—especially considering the financial realities of our local churches and the subsequent impact to the Conference—we have determined that the cost of printing *The Relay* monthly, at approximately 25% of our annual conference communications budget, is not the best stewardship of our funds.

### Explore Other Means of Sharing Our Stories

The communications team believes it is time to be forward-thinking and explore other means of sharing our stories and furthering our mission together, including podcasting, online news, and other modern methods.

We are excited that the United Methodists of Greater New Jersey (GNJ) are affiliating with the United Methodists of Eastern Pennsylvania (EPA) and the communications teams of the two conferences have already combined and begun working together as one team.

For those who still prefer a printed newspaper, we have you covered. Starting in April, we will move to an affiliated newspaper called *NewSpirit* which will be printed quarterly and feature news from both EPA and GNJ.

This may be the end of an era for *The Relay*, but we are confident that this change will bring about new opportunities for growth, innovation, and impact in spreading the gospel message. We want to thank you for your readership and support over the years. We are grateful for the memories and the relationships that we have built together.

Wishing you all the best,  
Rev. James Lee  
Director of Communications

# District Superintendent's Installation Highlights Joint Cabinet Retreat

By John W. Coleman

The EPA&GNJ Cabinet meets jointly during appointments season, and it began with a three-day retreat at the Mission Resource Center in January for prayer, study, discernment and strategy development.

Judging from Bishop John Schol's Jan. 20 letter to members of the newly affiliated Eastern PA and Greater New Jersey conferences, the retreat generated emotional highs and lows during what was described as "a very challenging season."

Members were saddened by dual tragedies in the death of one's nephew and news of a late-stage cancer diagnosis for one brave GNJ pastor, the Rev. Hoo Sug Lee. But emotions were lifted Jan. 18 in worship at St. Mark United Methodist Church in Hamilton, as the bishop installed GNJ's newest superintendent, the Rev. Ronell Howard, to lead the Central District.

"It was a glorious celebration and worship of God's ministry and presence among us," Schol wrote in his letter.

Indeed, the nearly half-full sanctuary seemed to elevate, brimming with the Holy Spirit, as robed clergy and other guests stood, swayed, clapped and raised their hands and sang along to heartfelt hymns and praise and gospel music led by the Rev. William Carter III.

Bishop Schol introduced Howard and shared her story—from growing up in a Muslim household, to being ordained a Baptist minister, to being received into The United Methodist Church. Along the way, she earned her Master of Divinity degree from Princeton Theological Seminary, where she was awarded for her excellence in speech and homiletics.

Indeed, her homiletical prowess inspired the gathering in a timely sermon aptly titled "Creating Amid Chaos." Howard preached about Genesis, extolling God's creation of order, light and life from chaotic darkness. She called on listeners to do likewise in taking on the dreary, daunting challenges facing our churches, our denomination and our society today.

**'Don't just turn on the light. Be the light!'**

"Don't just turn on the light, be the light," she proclaimed, recalling how God self-illuminated the world three days before God's creation of luminous celestial bodies.

"We have questions hanging in the air, just like the people for whom Genesis was written," said Howard. "God, what will become of our beloved denomination? How can we do ministry with dwindling budgets and small memberships? What do we do about deep denominational and cultural divisions, about young people leaving the church in droves, about crumbling buildings, about lost souls in the world that we can't seem to connect with?"



**Clockwise from top left: The Rev. Ronell Howard preaching.; Bishop John Schol introduces the Rev. Ronell Howard.; Bishop John Schol and Cabinet members pray and lay hands on Howard during her installation ceremony.; Howard receives a symbol of superintendency from the Rev. Rene Yon Pak during her installation ceremony.**

*Corbin Payne photos*

Howard previously was a pastor, a regional resource director for clergy and churches, and a leader of GNJ's Journey of Hope to End the Sin of Racism. In her vision for the Central District, she called on members to "join together in turning on lights that have been dimmed and rolling up our sleeves to bring order where there is chaos, that we might flourish, reach more people for Christ, baptize more babies and watch them grow." 🇺🇸



**The Rev. William Carter III leads the gathering in singing songs of worship and praise.**

*Corbin Payne photo*

## Do You Need a Website?

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# New Videos Remind Us of Hurricane Ida Recovery Needs

With so many disasters occurring since Hurricane Ida battered New Jersey communities in 2021, many may have forgotten about its destruction of 80,000 households in 12 counties and the loss of 30 lives. The survivors of Hurricane Ida aren't receiving nearly the same publicity, resources or help as those who suffered from Superstorm Sandy in 2012.

But the United Methodists of Greater New Jersey have not forgotten. We are reminding people of Ida's ongoing impact on many lives and communities, where many residents are still unable to live in their homes more than a year after the storm.

Two new videos produced by EPA & GNJ's Communications Office offer important reminders of Ida's survivors

and the need for more volunteers to help them. "You Are Not Alone" assures Ida survivors of our commitment to helping in their recovery. "Rebuild Homes, Rebuild Lives" offers a clarion call for volunteers.

GNJ's Ida Response Team, in partnership with A Future with Hope and UMCOR, still seeks volunteers and donations to help in the rebuilding phase. There is still much

work to be done. And all of us can play a role in this continuing recovery.

Please watch these two short videos, produced in English and Spanish, and share them with others. Let's work together to make sure the forgotten are remembered.

You can find the videos on our A Future with Hope web page at [www.gnjumc.org/afwh](http://www.gnjumc.org/afwh).



## Justice for Our Neighbors Needs Language Interpreters Now!

Justice for Our Neighbors of the Delaware Valley (JFON-DV), which provides affordable immigration legal services to low-income clients in our region, urgently needs Spanish-English language interpreters now to help busloads of migrants arriving in Philadelphia seeking asylum.

The small agency, providing free or low-cost legal aid to immigrants and refugees with limited means, is supported by a United Methodist partnership of the Eastern Pennsylvania, Greater New Jersey and Peninsula-Delaware conferences.

A handful of attorneys and legal assistants work and meet with clients at their headquarters at Haws Avenue UMC in Norristown, Pa, and at intake clinics in UM churches around the tri-conference area.

"We are being asked to provide legal orientation sessions and

small-group consultations to the new arrivals," said the Rev. Tom Lank, Interim Executive Director and a Deacon in the GNJ Conference.

"Generally, we get about 24-hours advance notice when a bus will arrive. Then we provide

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orientations the next morning at the welcome center set up in North Philadelphia. But having volunteers who can do Spanish-English translation is a real need."

### Need Spanish-language Interpreters March 12-18

JFON is one of about six organizations sharing in this work. "We will be on call for a week at a time in a five-week rotation," said Lank. Their first week of on-call service was Feb. 5-11. The second week will be March 12-18, and so on.

"We have the legal staff to be able to handle these consultations. But we are lacking in available Spanish-speaking, bilingual interpreters who can be on call for us during the week," Lank explained. "We may call them our Rapid Response Interpretation Team. Please help us, so we can welcome and seek justice for our new neighbors."

If you can help, please contact JFON promptly at (814) 343-3260 or [director@jfondv.org](mailto:director@jfondv.org).



Joshua Watkins

## EPA & GNJ Welcomes New Communications Administrator

We welcome Joshua Watkins ("JW") to the EPA&GNJ Communications Team as our new Communications Administrator. He has served as a temporary worker for us since February 2022, supporting our database and communications efforts. JW has labored reliably behind the scenes working on Arena records, communications projects and the GNJ Journal. He can be reached at [jwatkins@gnjumc.org](mailto:jwatkins@gnjumc.org).

Meanwhile, we bid a fond farewell to Laura Canzonier, Marketing & Communications Specialist, who left Jan. 19 to take on a management role in another organization.

"It has been my pleasure working for GNJ for the past four years," said Canzonier, "and I appreciate all of the opportunities I have been provided to grow and learn within the organization."

The Rev. James Lee, EPA&GNJ Director of Communications, expressed appreciation for "all the amazing work and dedication Laura has shown over the years, especially keeping the communications team afloat amidst significant turmoil and turnover. Her contributions to our organization have been invaluable, and we will truly miss having Laura on the team."

## The Flame Church

*Continued from page 1*

Christians. But it reaches beyond the familiar to embrace and offer connection to the broader family of God.

The English-speaking congregation still gathers for Sunday worship at Wesley UMC, whose namesake, Methodism's founder John Wesley, once claimed the world as his parish. There are two different services—one offered in English, the other in Arabic. But Gerges tries to bring all the worshipers together for one service during Christmas and Easter.

He also hosted a prayer meeting on New Year's Eve at midnight, so the two congregations could welcome in 2023 together. His son, David, a college student who speaks both English and Arabic, helps with translations.

The Arabic-language congregation, which once attracted up to 200 worshipers on Sundays, has declined since the Covid pandemic hit New Jersey hard. Many members moved out of the state.



**Worshippers at The Flame Church.**

*Rev. Alexander Santora photo for the Jersey Journal*

## Spreading The Flame Near and Far

But now attendance is growing again, as more area residents respond to its evangelistic efforts. Meanwhile, Gerges has begun to spread The Flame elsewhere, igniting small-group ministries

### Wesley United Methodist Church, home of The Flame Church, in Bayonne, NJ.

*Michael Dempsey for The Jersey Journal*

alive and growing locally in New Jersey? He focuses on training his members to become capable leaders in his absence. He even created courses to train the church's disciples to lead worship, youth groups and other ministries.

### A Passion for Immigrant People

But Gerges does remain committed to serving his community at home. He is planning strategies to help the church's homeless neighbors, many of whom are recent immigrants, because he has "a passion for immigrant people in all areas."

Meanwhile, the young people of the church have been getting more involved, he reported. "They have been going to the homeless, to senior residents and to hospitals to pray with people," Gerges said, "That is the mission of our church."

This immigrant pastor, once a successful mechanical engineer in Egypt, first became a sought-after lay preacher and then answered God's call to pastoral ministry in the U.S., specifically at Wesley UMC in 2003. He wants to spread more awareness of his church, especially to Arabic-speaking immigrants and refugees who need a community of faith, fellowship and support in the New York, New Jersey and Philadelphia areas.

Gerges welcomes any help he can get, especially much-needed financial resources. And he is grateful for the help Wesley UMC and The Flame do receive from GNJ and other partners, as they spread the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit in their community, around the country and throughout their world parish. 🇺🇸



## "All I Really Needed To Know I Learned In Sunday School"



### Read Rev. Dave Bailey's Latest Book

Rev. Dave Bailey writes, "Since 1998 when I read the book by Robert Foghorn, *Everything I Needed to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*, I have been in a personal pilgrimage- a pilgrimage to write a type of sequel- *Everything I Really Needed to Know I Learned in Sunday School*. I thought for me and many others there was something missing- a dimension of education that has influenced millions of people. It was called church school, parochial school, catechism school or most often Sunday School. Sunday School usually started with what was called primary class in most churches and lasted right through high school, young adult and senior adult classes." That is where eternal education started.

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**THE REV. GERGES IS PLANNING STRATEGIES TO HELP THE CHURCH'S HOMELESS NEIGHBORS, MANY OF WHOM ARE RECENT IMMIGRANTS, BECAUSE HE HAS 'A PASSION FOR IMMIGRANT PEOPLE IN ALL AREAS.'**

in Los Angeles, Houston and San Diego, and in Virginia and other places around the country.

He is trying to also expand the global reach of the church, helping new faith groups start up in Israel and Egypt. He does much of his outreach online, offering video-recorded worship services and hosting a daily video devotion in Arabic that is viewed online by an average of 500 people each day. Soon he will travel to India to spread The Flame and help people gather there as well.

How does Gerges travel the world for the gospel but still keep The Flame



**The Rev. Gerges (left) is ordained by Bishop John Schol.** *Corbin Payne photo*

# Lunch with Jesus: Church's Creativity Inspires Stewardship

By James Lee

METUCHEN, N.J.

**C**entenary United Methodist Church in Metuchen, N.J., has launched a unique, successful stewardship campaign called "Lunch with Jesus." It invites members to pledge an amount per week that they would spend on a lunch with Jesus.

This campaign, led by the Rev. Sooh Na and Stewardship Committee chairperson Linda Woodfield-Stern, began November 20, 2022. The inspiration came from Scriptures and from real life. While brainstorming for stewardship campaign ideas amid global financial difficulties, the church's finance team was reminded of Jesus' resonance to food (John 6:1-15).

Inspired by a \$19 million charity auction bid someone in San Francisco made recently to dine with billionaire Warren Buffett, the team asked themselves, "How much would we spend to dine with Jesus each Sunday?" A new idea was born.

The campaign concept is simple: Members are asked to think about how much they would spend on a lunch with Jesus and then pledge that amount each week. Pledges range from "a coffee with Jesus (\$10 per week)" all the way to "a steak with Jesus (\$50 per week)," providing a fun but meaningful way for members to consider recurring giving to support their church.

## How much would you pay to lunch with Jesus?

During the campaign, Woodfield-Stern asked the congregation, "We want you to consider, as you think about your financial commitment for next year, if you have an opportunity to have lunch with Jesus...how much are you willing to pay?"



The Rev. Sooh Na (above) and Stewardship Committee Chairperson Linda Woodfield-Stern (right) inspire Centenary United Methodist in its creative "Lunch with Jesus" stewardship campaign.



But I also want you to consider, in terms of your spiritual growth, what would you ask him? And what would he say to you?"

In the spirit of sharing, she also reminded the congregation of Jesus' act of multiplying a young boy's lunch to feed five thousand souls, prompting the question, "How much are you willing to spend to nurture others in our church and our community?"

Since its launch, the "Lunch with Jesus" campaign has increased pledges

by 11 percent, demonstrating the effectiveness of the church's creative approach to stewardship.

"The campaign not only provides a unique and fun way for members to support their church, but it also emphasizes the importance of spending time with Jesus," said Pastor Na. "It reminds members that their relationship with Jesus is at the heart of their faith, and they should be willing to invest in it, just as

they would invest in any other important relationship in their lives."

The success of the "Lunch with Jesus" stewardship campaign at Centenary UMC highlights the power of creativity and innovation in church fundraising that can also inspire other churches. By approaching stewardship in such a unique, memorable way, the church has been able to engage its members and increase support for its mission and ministry. 🇺🇸

## BREAKTHROUGH SERIES: Fresh Start and Questions to God

By Emily Wilton

**T**he first of 2023's Breakthrough series is in full swing in many local congregations across EPA, GNJ and beyond. Fresh Start, designed for use at the beginning of a new year, gives a different take on New Year's resolutions. Instead of getting swept up in the tide of personal goal setting, the series asks us to consider what fresh start God is leading us into, and what we may have to give up, change or take on to say "yes" to it.

This versatile series would also be well suited for use after Easter or at the beginning of any season when people and congregations need to hear that God is still calling God's people into something new.

The Rev. Wade Jackson, pastor of Wayside and Cedar Grove United Methodist churches had this to say about Fresh Start:

*2022 was a difficult year for me after losing my father, having two joint replacement surgeries and dealing with a severe staph infection that caused me to spend 18 days in the hospital. For my churches, it was a difficult year, losing several longtime members and friends, and doing without their pastor present because of health issues.*

*We all needed a fresh start, and this series is helping us to discover how and where we can again focus on what God is calling us to. Throughout the Scriptures,*



*there are many who got a fresh start because of their relationship with the Triune God. From Saul, to Zaccheus, to the Prodigal Son, to the woman at the well—all were changed when they encountered God. They got a fresh start, and so can we. I am grateful for this series and all who put this together."*

### Breakthrough Lenten series, Questions to God

This year's Breakthrough series for Lent, Questions to God, is a series that gives people permission to be honest about their doubts, questions and curiosities. Each week examines a different "Frequently Asked Question" about

Christian faith and opens up the Scriptures in search of wisdom to respond to it.

The series by no means offers clearcut, easy answers. Rather, it creates space for the questions and invites people into an ongoing dialogue with Scripture, tradition, reason and their own experience.

One thing I love about this series is that it provides an opening for people to invite their friends, families and neighbors who are less familiar with Christianity to church. It puts the hard questions out on the table so newcomers and longtime members alike can ask their own questions without fear.

I am also encouraged that it will resonate with young people. I received a

request from a pastor to use the series when a high school intern discovered it through an internet search and suggested the church use it for Lent. Of course, all congregations in GNJ, EPA and everywhere, regardless of denomination or location, are more than welcome to use Breakthrough.

Please let us know how you use any of our Breakthrough series and how it helps you and your congregation engage fully in worship, discipleship or other dimensions of Christian life. 🇺🇸

*Emily Wilton is GNJ's Breakthrough Coordinator. Contact her at ewilton@gnjumc.org.*

# IGNITE: A Limitless Impact, a Place to Belong

By Mecan Payne

After a long, lonely two years of pandemic isolation, churches across the Greater New Jersey, Eastern Pennsylvania, Upper New York and New York annual conferences came together for a much-needed weekend of building community at the IGNITE 2022 Youth Conference.

Middle and high school students participated in musical worship, received wisdom from powerful speakers, engaged with one another in interactive workshops, danced and sang during high energy concerts and grew relationships through small groups. The theme of IGNITE 2022 was “Limitless,” and for the year after quarantine, it was a relevant and powerful one.

## ‘This is the best weekend of my life!’

“This is the best weekend of my life!” a middle school student exclaimed to an IGNITE Squad young adult in between workshop sessions. This was his first overnight youth-group trip finally, after waiting in anticipation for years to attend IGNITE. He had heard his older siblings talk about the conference.

Many other expressions of enjoyment, fun, celebration and excitement could be heard throughout the halls of the Wildwood Convention Center last October by students in grades six through twelve. In the months since, youth leaders have shared celebratory testimonies that no doubt were inspired by the Holy Spirit’s movement at the IGNITE Conference.

One of those stories comes from a youth director of middle and high school programs:

“I had a high school freshman who was not a regular attender of youth programs. Their attendance at IGNITE was kind of a



Youth connect and engage with one another while attending IGNITE 2022. Corbin Payne photo



Aqueelah speaks passionately to attendees at IGNITE 2022. Corbin Payne photo

surprise to our leadership team. But we knew that the Lord would move, and we were ready for it. This student really resonated with Aqueelah’s sessions, and we chatted during the entire trip home about Aqueelah’s energy, passion and messages about being limitless when you pursue

Jesus and the family of God.

Flash forward a few weeks after IGNITE, and this student approached me about joining the worship team for our church on Sunday mornings. I can say, with true faith and celebration, that the Holy Spirit has moved deeply in this student’s life. They are now a regular attendee of not only our youth programs but also our Sunday morning worship services. This student has transitioned from a worship team member, to now become the worship team leader for our church.

Our youth leadership team has been humbled and encouraged by the growth that we have seen in this student. I am constantly receiving messages from others in our church community about the impact that this student’s testimony is having on others. Rest assured that our youth group

has already registered for IGNITE 2023; and that we all, including this student, of course, absolutely cannot wait to be together in Wildwood with our IGNITE family again!”

## Impacting the faith and lives of young people

The IGNITE team has continued to hear stories and powerful testimonies from middle school students, high school students, IGNITE Squad young adult volunteers, clergy and youth leaders. They talk about the limitless impact that IGNITE 2022 has had on the faith and lives of young people, the ministries of local churches and the work of ministry leaders across a variety of churches and conferences.

Since IGNITE 2022, we have continually been celebrating the power and movement of the Holy Spirit through a diverse array of musicians, main stage speakers, workshop leaders, small-group conversations and missional initiatives. We have recounted moments of healing, celebration, mourning, joy, processing, worship, prayer, critical thinking and faith exploration.

One lay leader declared on their way out the door, “I came here for a personal worship experience this weekend, but I am leaving with a calling to start a youth ministry at my church.”

Looking back at IGNITE 2022, we are overwhelmed by our limitless God. Our limitless Holy Spirit. Our limitless Jesus Christ. Our limitless worship. Our limitless community. Our limitless diversity. Our limitless mindset of openness and growth. Our limitless family of God.

We are overwhelmed of the limitless impact that continues to come from IGNITE 2022. We cannot wait to come together again to celebrate the limitless potential of this past year and to step into our 2023 theme, “Belong”.

## UMC Scholarships Aid GNJ Students Pursuing Careers of Service

By John W. Coleman

In 2022, 29 United Methodists in Greater New Jersey received \$52,800 in scholarships for higher education from the denomination’s Office of Loans and Scholarships. They are among over 2,000 grateful students who received a total of \$4 million last year.

“These future leaders range from first-year to doctorate-level students,” said Allyson Potts, executive director of the office, which is administered by the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM).

While they are pursuing various careers at various institutions, many are pursuing ministry vocations at different seminaries. Seven recipients are attending Drew University Theological School in Madison.

“It’s been such a blessing to my education to receive scholarships from GBHEM,” said Jack Tironi, a youth pastor with a degree in Sociology, who is earning a Master of Divinity degree. He is president of Drew’s Theological Student Association and hopes to become an ordained minister. “I felt a call to ministry in my senior year of high school,” said the lifelong member of First UMC Blairstown.

### ‘I am grateful to the church for helping students like me.’

“There’s no doubt that college can be very expensive, and all of this could not have been done without such generous gifts,” said Tironi. “I am grateful to the church for helping students like me.”

Roeline Ramirez said her scholarship enables her to enjoy her learning and preparation for ordained ministry at Drew. “The scholarship helps me to continue my studies and have an internship at two churches in



Jack Tironi



Roeline Ramirez



Christabel Zimbeva



Heeyoung Jung

Jersey City (Trinity UMC) and Union City (First UMC), while enjoying the life of being a wife and mom with a clear path to where God is leading me in my pastoral ministry journey.”

Monica Kudakwashe Mafarachisi’s scholarship is helping her earn an MDiv. Degree in social justice advocacy at Drew. “I am very grateful for the opportunity to be part of the Greater New Jersey Conference and to be a recipient of a GBHEM scholarship,” said the aspiring deacon.

Christabel Zimbeva, originally from Zimbabwe, serves as a Mosaic pastor at Community Church of Hoboken. She feels “privileged, honored and blessed” to be selected for her scholarship. “It has assisted me greatly in having a good life while studying, and I am forever grateful,” she said.

Heeyoung Jung is a Ph.D. student at Claremont School of Theology, having earned theological degrees from Drew University and Union Theological Seminary in New York.

“My first connection to the GNJ conference was at Drew, while I was studying for an M.Div degree,” she recalled. “It’s my mother church and conference in the USA, even though I wasn’t involved in the UMC’s ordaining process. UMC scholarships always helped me to study and work together in seminary and the church as a mom, a student and a minister. I always appreciate your help in supporting my continuing studies.”

GBHEM’s Potts also appreciates GNJ churches, especially for their Special Sunday offerings that help many hard-working students pursue dreams of service through ministry and other fields. Those offerings are received in churches on United Methodist Student Day, World Communion Sunday, and Native American Sunday. Other sources of scholarships include gifts, annuities, and endowments GBHEM has invested and administered for decades.

United Methodist students may apply for a Fall 2023 GBHEM scholarship online until March 30, at [www.gbhem.org/scholarshipapplication](http://www.gbhem.org/scholarshipapplication).

# Exploring Racial Equity, Food Justice to Fight Hunger

HACKETTSTOWN, NJ

While so many churches and agencies are striving to help feed their communities in this high-inflation economy, three GNJ churches will take the next step in learning to fight the injustice of hunger. They hope other churches will join them.

Denville Community Church (UMC) will host a Social Principles Initiatives Workshop focused on advocating for “food justice” March 25, from 9:00 AM to 12 noon, in partnership with Sparta UMC and Trinity UMC in Hackettstown.

Leaders of the three churches welcome all to come hear Kayann Foster, Community Engagement Coordinator of the Center of United Methodist Aid to the Community/ Ecumenically Concerned Helping Others. CUMAC/ECHO,

in Paterson, runs Passaic County's largest food pantry and other programs dedicated to alleviating hunger and poverty.

With the theme “Visions of Abundance: Food Justice, Racial Equity and Liberative Mission,” the workshop will be the first in a series of events funded by a GNJ Congregational Development grant. The series will offer research and resources based on “a theology of abundance and a common table.”

### Can we do more than just food pantries?

“Our churches value food accessibility, and many of them host or support growing food pantries with compassion and love,” said organizers. “But hunger and the lack of affordability and availability of good food is a reality for so many. Is there something more we can do together?”

One goal is for churches to learn together about food access and delivery, racial equity and how to pursue food justice for all. The March 25 workshop will address racial injustice and historical policies and practices related to the prevalence of widespread hunger. Participants will learn how to respond more effectively by extending their ministries of mercy to advocacy for justice.



CUMAC ECHO, Paterson, N.J., Food Drive.



Kayann Foster of CUMAC ECHO.

The Congregational Development grant will also fund a related 6-8-week small-group study intended for the fall. Grant information will be available in May for churches to review.

In late November churches and individuals who complete the study and want to learn more about advocating for public policy will be offered a subsidized visit to the United Methodist General Board of Church and Society in Washington DC. There they can learn about laws and policies that they can affect, as they get a chance to speak with their leaders in Congress.

## World Methodist Council Nominations Sought

Bishop John Schol seeks persons—clergy, lay adults and youth—to nominate for membership and leadership on the World Methodist Council, for the remainder of its current

term, 2022-2024, and also for 2024 to 2030.

The Eastern PA and Greater New Jersey conferences each are entitled to two representatives on the council.

Nominations should be sent by March 1, 2023, to GNJ Director of Connectional Ministries Eric Drew.

Nominations should specify the nominee’s name, contact information, a rationale for their nomination and a plan of financial support for their participation in the WMC.

Nominees should have a global understanding of the Methodist-Wesleyan movement and be willing and eager to contribute and advance the purpose and visions of the WMC. Council members serve at their own expense, often with support from their church.

The worldwide council, headquartered in Waynesville, N.C., comprises 500 representatives nominated by their respective Methodist denominations located

in more than 130 countries. Those representatives will meet at the WMC’s next conference August 13-18, 2024, in Gothenburg, Sweden.

The council meets every five years to plan its programs, elect leadership, organize its work, and review progress made in nine key areas: Ecumenical Relations, Education, Evangelism, Family Life, Interreligious Relations, Social and International Affairs, Theological Education, Worship & Liturgy, and Youth & Young Adults. For more information visit the WMC’s website: [www.worldmethodistcouncil.org](http://www.worldmethodistcouncil.org).



To download and use the documents visit our website at <https://www.gnjumc.org/news/world-methodist-council-nominations-sought/>.



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MULTIPLAN\_APAPFL20220526\_M



A World Methodist Council Assembly fellowship.

# Baptism Welcomes a New Year, a New Life in Christ

By the Rev. YoungHak Joseph Lee

*This reflection was shared on Facebook on January 23, 2023. Used by permission.*

Imagine a child comes to you and asks, "What is baptism?"

That happened to me last month when one of our young disciples, Riri, came to me and asked, "Pastor, what is baptism?" After hearing about it, Riri said she wanted to be baptized!

Then, our Sunday School team and I planned a monthlong lesson on baptism in January, and our young disciples learned about how God welcomes us, forgives us and nurtures us through baptism.

Yesterday (Jan. 22), on a Lunar New Year Sunday, we baptized Riri and her grandmother Kim Thomas together.

Kim shared with me after the baptismal service that she felt something deeply touched her heart and made her whole. I told her it was God that made her whole. Kim told me how grateful and blessed she is now to be baptized. She initially thought that baptism was only for babies and not for her.

No one is too young or too old to be baptized in the name of the Triune God

and to experience God's amazing grace. I am so happy for Kim and Riri, grandmother and granddaughter. They fully embraced God's love yesterday.

I love them so much, and I pray that God continues to bless Kim and Riri with God's profound grace so that their lives are filled with joy and love!

*Note: The Rev. YoungHak Lee was appointed to serve as the pastor of Trinity UMC in South Amboy in 2020 as a part of GNJ's Mosaic Ministry. Read a longer version of this account and see photos on the church's Facebook page. Having previously served in campus ministry, Army chaplaincy, and youth and children's ministry, Pastor YoungHak has a passion for spreading the good news of Jesus Christ and embodying the "Kingdom" of God. Born in Seoul, South Korea, he has lived in several countries; and he believes that this world can be a better place with the teachings of Jesus Christ because he has seen how the gospel transforms and saves people's lives. As a United Methodist and a member of GNJ's Commission on Religion and Race, he also believes that no child of God is unqualified to receive God's abundant grace and love. 🇺🇸*



Garey Hope (left) presents a Golden Circle Certificate to George Morris for his fifty years of ministry.

## Clergy Retirees Honored for 50 Years of Ministry

The Rev. George E. Morris receives a Golden Circle Certificate for his 50 years of ministry during the fall 2022 meeting of ARMS (Association of Retired Minister & Spouses). Garey Hope presented the award at St. Peter's UMC in Ocean City. Also entering the Golden Circle were: the Revs. Dennis G. Lippart, Jerry D. Ruff, Donald W. Tabler, Nehemiah Thompson, and Robert W. Tomer.

ARMS is an organized fellowship of clergy and spouses, widows and widowers of pastors who support one another in their advanced mature years. 🇺🇸



Riri with her family and Rev. YoungHak Lee dipping their hands in the baptismal water.



### Taizé Chant and Prayer Circle

by *Visiting Harp*

Each *Taizé Chant and Prayer Circle* will begin with a harp mediation on a classic hymn to calm our soul and focus our mind on the presence of God in our midst. Scripture, Taizé chants, and prayer will then draw the circle closer together and grow the Light of God within and among us.

**Contact for booking:**

609-577-3604

[pastorfkb@GodHG.net](mailto:pastorfkb@GodHG.net)

<http://www.prayersong.net/VisitingHarp.php>

# ANCHOR Program Recipients Can Benefit GNJ Churches

The Rev. Sangwon Doh, Raritan Shore District Superintendent, recently shared with Cabinet members and his district's pastors a stewardship idea to invite generous beneficiaries of New Jersey's new ANCHOR property tax relief program to support their churches.

Enacted by Governor Phil Murphy and the Garden State's legislature in June 2022, the new ANCHOR property tax relief program—which stands for Affordable NJ Communities for Homeowners & Renters—is described as “a game changer

for countless residents.” The program's application deadline is extended to Feb. 28.

Nearly 1.2 million homeowners with incomes of \$150,000 or less can receive a benefit of up to \$1,500, while those with higher incomes can receive up to \$1,000. Over 900,000 renters with incomes of \$150,000 or less can receive a benefit of \$450. Payments will be issued as checks or direct deposits beginning in late Spring 2023.

“I would like to bring to your attention a program offered by the state of New Jersey that can benefit both your

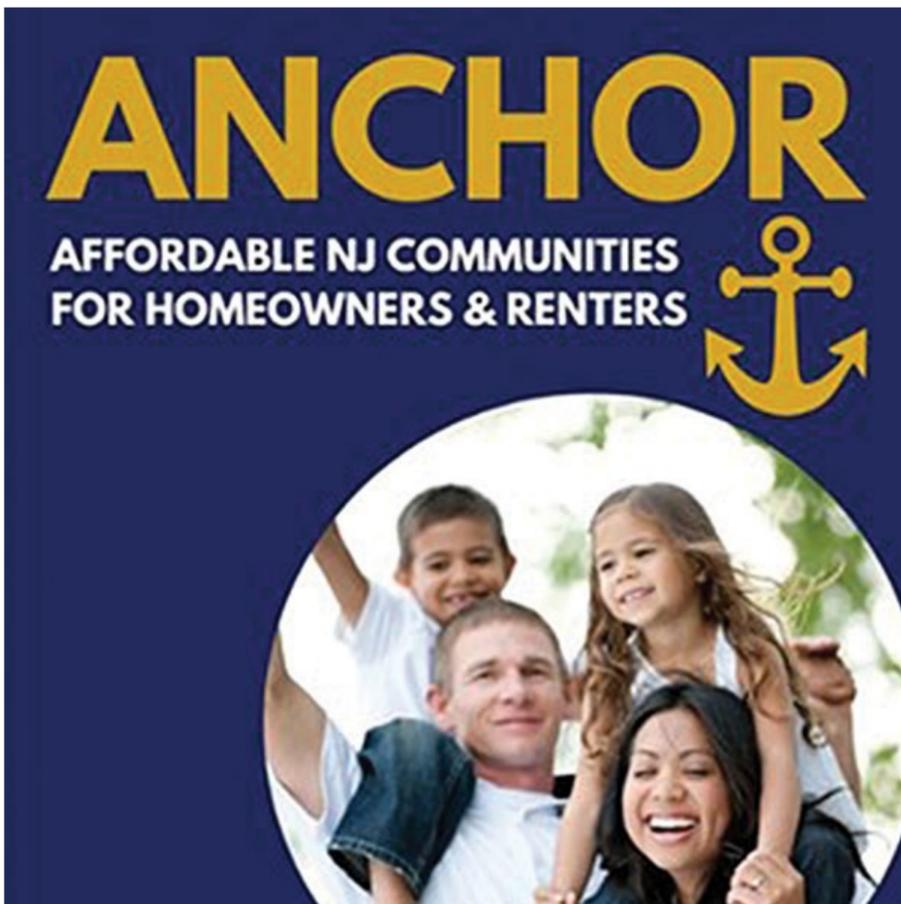
congregants and your church,” wrote Doh, who is GNJ Cabinet Dean. “I encourage you to share this information with your congregants and encourage them to apply for the program if they are eligible.

“Additionally, as your congregants receive their ANCHOR payments, encourage them to consider tithing a portion of that money back to their church. This would be a great opportunity to cultivate generosity and begin the year stronger.”

Applications can be completed online or by phone for homeowners and online for renters by the Feb. 28 deadline. Learn more and visit the FAQ page on the NJ Division of Taxation's website. Or call the ANCHOR Hotline at 1-888-238-1233. 🇺🇸



Rev. Sangwon Doh



## JOB OPPORTUNITIES

### GNJ seeks Ida Recovery Construction Coordinator

The Construction Project Coordinator will work with GNJ disaster recovery efforts to help communities impacted by Hurricane Ida by providing home repairs that will enable homeowners to reestablish normalcy. The Coordinator will collaborate with the Disaster Recovery Case Coordinators and the Volunteer Coordinator. Learn more at [www.gnjumc.org/news/ida-recovery-construction-coordinator/](http://www.gnjumc.org/news/ida-recovery-construction-coordinator/).

### Mission Data Administrator

The Mission Data Administrator works to improve the efficiency, accuracy, and usefulness of data and business systems for all departments and mission partners of EPA & GNJ by compiling and organizing data, vetting collected data for accuracy and completion, and assisting with data collection and reporting processes. This position supports other staff, clergy, and laity in implementing data collection standards. The data administrator is required to work two days a week at the EPA Conference office in Norristown, PA. Send inquiries and resumes to [umjobs@epaumc.org](mailto:umjobs@epaumc.org).

### Church Music Director

Simply Grace United Methodist Church seeks a Music Director (part-time) to help administer, develop and promote the church's music program, including contemporary and traditional music, plus other worship resources. Apply at Simply Grace UMC, Attn: Pastor/Music Director Search Committee, 61 Church St. Bloomsbury, NJ 08804. [church@simplygraceumc.com](mailto:church@simplygraceumc.com).

## Learning for Leadership

*Making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world*

The Greater New Jersey Conference offers a wealth of courses to enhance discipleship and advance leadership for United Methodist laity and clergy. Check out our 2023 Upcoming Events schedule on [page 11](#).

Register for a course today. Share these excellent learning opportunities with others. Take your leadership potential to the next level. And take someone else with you.



### Lay Servant Classes

- Basic Lay Servant Classes
- Certified/Advanced Lay Servant Classes: *Accountable Discipleship* and *Called to Preach*

[GNJUMC.ORG/LEADERSHIP-ACADEMY/LAY-SERVANT-MINISTRIES](http://GNJUMC.ORG/LEADERSHIP-ACADEMY/LAY-SERVANT-MINISTRIES)

### Leadership Academy Courses

- You on Purpose: Exploring Your Calling
- Foundations for Just, Inclusive and Equitable Ministries in the Local Church
- Finance: Alternative Income Streams for Ministry
- Building Your Stewardship Team & Pre-work to Launching a Financial Stewardship Campaign
- Breakthrough for Youth

[GNJUMC.ORG/LEADERSHIP-ACADEMY](http://GNJUMC.ORG/LEADERSHIP-ACADEMY)



*“If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”*

—African Proverb

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### GNJ Black Methodists for Church Renewal

#### Annual Celebration Day

Feb. 25, 11 AM, at Turning Point UMC in Trenton

### Basic Lay Servant Class (Option 2, on Zoom)

Mondays: February 27, and March 6, 13, 20, & 27 from 7pm - 9pm.

### Board of Pension and Health Benefits

#### 2023 Pre-Retirement Seminar

March 2

### Certified/Advanced Lay Servant Class:

#### Accountable Discipleship (Option 1, on Zoom.)

Saturdays—March 4 & 18, 9 am– 2:00 pm.

### Certified/Advanced Lay Servant Class:

#### Accountable Discipleship

#### (Option 2, on Zoom.)

Sundays—April 16, 23 & 30, 2:30 pm – 5:30 pm.

### Certified/Advanced Lay Servant Class: Called to Preach

#### (Option 1, in person.)

Tuesdays—Feb. 28, March 7, 14, 21, & 28; 7:00 pm–9:00 pm.

At Petersburg Wesley UMC.

### Certified/Advanced Lay Servant Class: Called to Preach

#### (Option 2, in person.)

Saturdays—March 18, April 22, & 29; 9:00am–1:00 pm.

At Galilee UMC, Englewood, NJ.

### Leadership Academy Course:

#### You On Purpose: Exploring Your Calling

March 16, 23, 30; 7 pm–8:30 pm, via Zoom

### Leadership Academy Course: Foundations for Just, Inclusive and

#### Equitable Ministries in the Local Church

April 19, 26 and May 3; 7 pm–8:30 pm, via Zoom

### Leadership Academy Course:

#### Finance: Alternative Income Streams for Ministry

April 20 & 27; 7 pm–8:30 pm, via Zoom

### 2023 Annual Conference at Wildwood Convention Center

May 21-23

### Leadership Academy Course:

#### Building Your Stewardship Team & Pre-work

#### to Launching a Financial Stewardship Campaign

June 1; 7 pm – 8:30 pm, via Zoom

### Leadership Academy Course: Breakthrough for Youth

August 8; 7pm – 8:30 pm

## DEATH NOTICES

*Our thoughts and prayers are with these families and friends.*

**Norma M. Hockenjos**, Retired Deacon, passed away on January 24, 2023. Memorial donations may be sent to First UM Church, 1 East Broad Street, Westfield, NJ 07090. Send expressions of sympathy to: Katie Hockenjos and Janet Roberto (daughters), 242 Holcombe Way, Lambertville, NJ 08530.

**Rev. Wilbert S. Hoffman**, Retired Full Elder, passed away on January 22, 2023. Memorial donations may be sent to The Foundation for Evangelism online at: [www.foundationforevangelism.org/giveinmemory](http://www.foundationforevangelism.org/giveinmemory) or by mail to The Foundation for Evangelism, P.O. Box 985, Lake Junaluska, NC 28745. Send expressions of sympathy to Donnabelle Hoffman (spouse) at [wshoffman@aol.com](mailto:wshoffman@aol.com).

**Beatrice Kaine Knowles**, Retired Local Pastor, passed away on January 18, 2023. Memorial donations may be sent in Beatrice Knowles' memory to <https://donate.mytributegift.org/>. to send expressions of sympathy to the family email at [info@greenidgefuneralhomes.com](mailto:info@greenidgefuneralhomes.com).

**John Frances Cardillo**, Treasurer/CFO and Director of Administrative Services of the New England Conference, and Former Treasurer and Director of Administrative Services of Greater New Jersey, passed away on December 30, 2022. Memorial donations may be sent to Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church, 259 Oliver Street, Newark, NJ, 07105 or The Church By The Bay Feeding and Clothing Ministries, 244 East White Horse Pike, Galloway, NJ, 08205. To offer online condolences and tributes, visit [www.UnionFuneralHome.com](http://www.UnionFuneralHome.com).

**Glenn D. Chaplin**, Retired Local Pastor, passed away on December 6, 2022. Memorial donations may be sent to Pitman UMC, 758 N. Broadway, Pitman, NJ 08071 or to St. John's UMC, 149 Ganttown Rd, Turnersville, NJ 08012. Send expressions of sympathy to the family via Kelley Funeral Home, 125 Pitman Avenue, Pitman, NJ 08071.



 **United Methodist Communities**  
Abundant Life for Seniors

## With Gratitude, UMC

As we enter the season of gratitude this November, we would like to thank our associates for their continued efforts in providing high-quality care to our residents, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It is this dedication that allows us to foster the abundant lifestyles that our seniors deserve.

To learn more about the care offerings at United Methodist Communities, visit [UMCommunities.org](http://UMCommunities.org).

Home Office  
3311 State Route 33, Neptune, NJ 07753  
[UMCommunities.org](http://UMCommunities.org)



BRISTOL GLEN | COLLINGSWOOD | PITMAN | THE SHORES

 **United Methodist Communities**  
Abundant Life for Seniors

## Enjoy a Winter Respite

Are you a caregiver seeking a break from responsibilities, desiring a winter vacation, investigating senior living options, or needing other support for your loved one?

United Methodist Communities offers respite care, a short-term stay for your loved one, which in turn gives caregivers beneficial opportunities to rest, manage other demands, take a break, and otherwise balance work and family life.

Visit our website or call to discover the innovative ways we can support your loved one.



**Bristol Glen**  
[BristolGlen.UMCommunities.org](http://BristolGlen.UMCommunities.org)  
Newton | 973-300-5788

**Collingswood**  
[Collingswood.UMCommunities.org](http://Collingswood.UMCommunities.org)  
Collingswood | 856-854-4331

**Pitman**  
[Pitman.UMCommunities.org](http://Pitman.UMCommunities.org)  
Pitman | 856-589-7800

**The Shores**  
[TheShores.UMCommunities.org](http://TheShores.UMCommunities.org)  
Ocean City | 609-399-8505

Home Office  
3311 State Route 33, Neptune, NJ 07753  
[UMCommunities.org](http://UMCommunities.org)



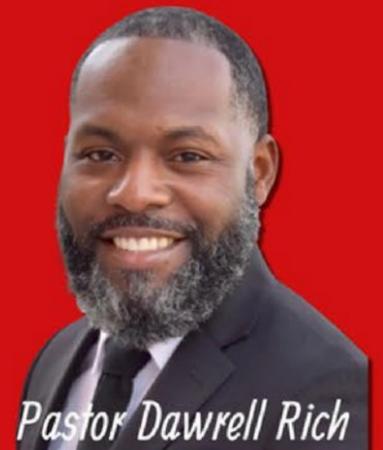
BRISTOL GLEN | COLLINGSWOOD | PITMAN | THE SHORES

# THE FUTURE IS NOW

## BLACK HISTORY MONTH

### FREE EVENTS

679 Communipaw Ave Jersey City, NJ 07304



*Pastor Dawrell Rich*

SATURDAY FEB 4TH | 3PM - 5:30PM

## "Youth and the Journey Toward the Future"

### PANEL DISCUSSION:

Moderator: Pastor Dawrell Rich  
Clair Memorial United  
Methodist Church



**FRANK E. GILMORE**

Ward F  
Councilman



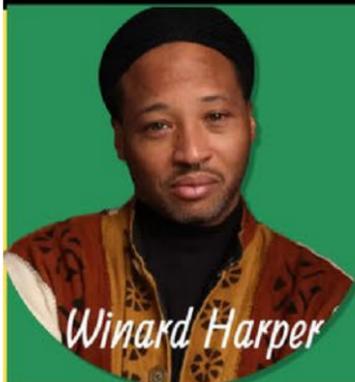
**ROBYN GORMAN**

CEO, Hudson  
Partnership CMO



**CHRIS GADSDEN**

Principal  
Lincoln High School



*Winard Harper*

SATURDAY FEB 11TH | 4PM - 6PM

## Jazz Concert featuring World Renowned **Winard Harper & Company**

SUNDAY FEB 26TH | 4PM - 6PM

Gospel Concert featuring  
**Don Corey Washington  
& Perfected Praise,  
Evangelist Ushika  
Clyburn & Sandra Huff**



Don Corey  
Washington



Sandra Huff



Evangelist  
Ushika  
Clyburn



#CLAIRUMCJC



# BLACK HISTORY