



NEW Spirit!

UNITED METHODISTS OF EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA
& GREATER NEW JERSEY

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Eastern Pennsylvania
Annual Conference: May 18-20

Greater New Jersey
Annual Conference: May 21-23

Two Annual Conferences Look Forward to a Future with *Possibility*

EASTERN PA ANNUAL SESSION

"...With God all things are possible."

—MATTHEW 19:26

OAKS, PA

The United Methodists of Eastern Pennsylvania may hear Jesus Christ's words of blessed assurance spoken often during their 2023 Annual Conference May 18-20, as they convene onsite rather than online for the first time since 2019. With the Covid pandemic behind them, they will look forward, focused on the theme *Possibility*, as they meet at the Greater Philadelphia Expo Center in Oaks, Pa.

The annual gathering begins on Thursday, May 18, at 2:30 p.m., following opening worship and separate Clergy

and Laity sessions in the morning. It will end Saturday, May 20, at noon before a celebration reception. Online registration, which is strongly recommended, ends May 8; but onsite registration is available May 18, at 8:00 a.m. The registration fee is \$290 per person (includes 3 meals), and \$75 for clergy retirees.

The conference agenda, registration and Pre-Conference Workbook are available on the Eastern PA website's Annual Conference page. Members should receive printed copies of the workbook by mail in the first two weeks of May. To prepare for the conference, members should review legislation and ask questions in advance, primarily at one of two Pre-Conference Sessions offered May 9, at 3 p.m., and May 10 at 7 p.m. via Zoom. Those sessions will provide Q&As with presenters of legislation.

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GREATER NEW JERSEY ANNUAL SESSION

WILDWOOD, NJ

The United Methodists of Greater New Jersey 2023 Annual Conference theme is *Possibility*, drawn from Jesus' faith-affirming words of blessed assurance found in Matthew 19:26: "... With God all things are possible."

The annual session, meeting onsite rather than online for the first time since 2019, will convene on Sunday, May 21, at 1:00 p.m., following morning Clergy and Laity sessions, and extend through Tuesday, May 23, at 1:00 p.m. at the Wildwoods Convention Center. The registration period ended May 1. The \$100 cost includes two meals.

The conference agenda, registration and Pre-Conference Workbook are available on the GNJ website via the Annual Conference page. Members' printed copies of the



Bishop Cynthia Moore-Koikoi will preach at GNJ's Service of Remembrance and provide a teaching moment on *Possibility*. Photo provided.

workbook will arrive by mail in the first two weeks of May. To participate fully in the conference, members should review legislation and ask questions in advance.

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EPA&GNJ Weaves Network of Mutual Ministry Through Affiliation

By John W. Coleman

The United Methodists of Eastern Pennsylvania and Greater New Jersey are living into their EPA&GNJ connectional affiliation by collaborating in key administrative and program operations. Together, they are focused on jointly cultivating leadership and resourcing vital mission congregations, while viewing affiliation as a call to greater discipleship and stewardship.

The two Cabinets meet and make pastoral appointments jointly. Some pastors are voluntarily crossing conference lines, which benefits particularly Eastern PA with its shortage of available fulltime pastors for its pulpits.

EPA&GNJ is preparing to extend GNJ's Mosaic Ministries outreach beyond Princeton and Drew theological schools, and Palmer Theological Seminary to include two additional seminaries that are preparing students for ministry in EPA: Lancaster and Moravian. Mosaic recruits seminarians to serve churches and participate in a learning cohort together that grows their excellence in leadership and pastoral ministry. Participants have called it a win-win opportunity for both them and the churches.

While the program is rebounding from a Covid-related decline, it has "doubled the number of churches and



The Rev. Manfredo Martinez, (left) EPA's Latino Commission co-chair, serves Communion to the Rev. Jana Purkis-Brash, a GNJ district superintendent, at a monthly joint staff worship service hosted on first Mondays by the EPA Conference Office.

Corbin Payne photo

students participating in the new appointment year," said Rev. Kate Monahan, Mosaic resourcing director. Going a step further, she added, Mosaic will also create and support

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A MESSAGE FROM OUR BISHOP

Possibility Leaders

Bishop John Schol



A person once asked, "If you have the choice of receiving \$10 million dollars today, but won't wake up tomorrow, would you take the \$10 million today?" Everyone answered no. What if at the beginning of every day, we said today is better than \$10 million?

Every day is filled with possibility. This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it. (Psalm 118:24) Every day is filled with rich possibilities, a gift from God.

One of the greatest attributes of successful leaders is hopefulness, positivity, seeing possibility when everyone else sees only the problem. All of us lead at some time in our life. Perhaps you are a parent or grandparent, a team leader at work. Or you serve on a committee, teach, pastor a church, or you organize activities in your family or community. All these roles and so many others place each of us in a leadership role.

The best leaders not only see possibility but mobilize people for the possibilities that are waiting to unfold. Here are five things excellent leaders do:

- Possibility leaders do not deny the problem but frame it in the light of possibility. Possibility leaders think this way about leaky roofs. Possibility leaders will say something like, "The roof is old and leaks when it rains. This is damaging the ceiling rafters and walls. There is no better and more important time for us to put on a new roof than now. We need three people to help kick off the campaign with gifts of \$1,000 to \$5,000. Will you be one of the first to help us replace the roof. Together we can do this and be a vital witness to our future in our community." Possibility leaders see the opportunities that are before us.
- Possibility leaders engage the team. There are leaders who think everything rests on their shoulders. These leaders believe they have to have the answers, move the project over the goal line, take charge "because no one else will." In the church we call this type of leadership a leader with a savior complex. "I have to be the one to save the situation," these leaders think to themselves.

Instead, God surrounds leaders with other leaders and servants who are filled with possibility. Possibility leaders engage teams by asking good questions, not always providing answers, by calling forth the wisdom, faith, hope and possibility in others. They ask questions like, "What do you think God is calling us to do? How would you handle this? Have you ever been in a situation like this before? What did you learn? Who else should we be talking with about this opportunity/challenge? What do you think we should do?" Personally, I have found God more often speaks through others to me, than through me telling others what God is thinking.

- Possibility leaders are adaptable; they embrace flexibility and openness. Let's face it: most leaders hate to be challenged when they have an idea or a vision of what could be. I have learned over time that the questions of others, even when they may seem judgmental, can offer something for us to learn. A leader's weakness is defensiveness. A leader's strength is remaining open and flexible to change and able to adapt. The leaders who were most effective during the pandemic were those who could adapt to the changing environment.

- Possibility leaders look for joy. If you are like me, it has been hard to find the joy in leading over the last few years. It's not just been the financial challenges, the pandemic, disaffiliation, illness and deaths, but also the heightened anxiousness in the culture. People are ready to criticize, organize against each other and challenge leadership.

At times we who lead have taken on others' anxiety and internalized it. We have become defensive and even combative for self-preservation. We have had difficulty self-differentiating from someone else's anxiety and fears and have lost the joy in leading. I have found myself reflecting on why I was called to lead. I have asked myself, where do I find joy in leading.

But I have returned to my joy, seeing God's possibility in every person and situation, and coming alongside others to help them to discover and to lead. That is what brings me joy. Where did I find it? In the people around me: superintendents, bishop's assistants, finance leaders, program and administrative staff, the communications team, Hurricane Ida relief staff, elected leaders and pastors and congregational leaders. God's joy is all around me, and I am thankful that God has blessed me with such leaders, such joy. Thanks be to God.

- Possibility leaders focus on what went well. They ask themselves "WWW: What went well." Why is it that we are presupposed to focus on what hasn't gone well. I encourage you to start every day by asking yourself, "What went well yesterday?" At the beginning of a meeting or conversation ask, what went well for you this past week. It is an attitude-changer. It opens the day, the relationship, the meeting to possibility. There is so much that is going well for leaders; it is just that we allow challenges to crowd out all that God is doing and wants to do.

Possibility leaders are successful because recognizing possibility offers hope. They are adaptable. They look for the joy, believe in others and focus on what is going well.

This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in the possibility.

Bishop John Schol
The United Methodists of
Greater New Jersey & Eastern Pennsylvania

NEWSpirit: A New Newspaper to Serve Readers Across EPA&GNJ

"And Jabez called on the God of Israel saying, 'Oh, that You would bless me indeed, and enlarge my territory, that Your hand would be with me...'"

—1 CHRONICLES 4:10

The United Methodists of Eastern Pennsylvania and Greater New Jersey have a new newspaper that encompasses both conferences in its reporting of news and information, its sharing of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and its promotion of mission and ministries throughout our region.

NEWSpirit. It's an old name for some, but it represents a new mission and an increase in territory. Indeed, our mailing list of nearly 10,000 subscribers is sure to grow.

Members of EPA may recall the former NEWSpirit newspaper published in print from 2005 to 2019 and then solely online until publication was suspended in 2022. Meanwhile, GNJ members have long cherished their beloved conference newspaper *The Relay*, which ceased publication with its final issue in February 2023.

Both newspapers covered the news and journaled the lives, ministries and concerns of people and churches across their conferences. Seeing pages and stories pinned to church bulletin boards and overhearing people talk about recent stories they had read has always been heartwarming for us. We rejoice in seeing how our published media can connect people and help bring us together through the unifying power of storytelling.

Well now, we are broadening that connection by enlarging our territory, by the grace of God, to span both our conferences in this season of affiliation, of mutuality in ministry. While saying goodbye to an old friend may be painful, saying hello to new friends can be joyful and revitalizing. As you read news and feature stories and view photographs of people and churches, ministries and events across our affiliated EPA&GNJ, we hope you will become informed, inspired and eager to meet and say hello to new friends.

Explore Other Means of Sharing Our Stories

As we look to the future, we acknowledge that times are changing. God is doing something new around us and no doubt among us. A thorough review of our communications budget and the financial realities of our conference and churches tells us that designing and publishing one quarterly newspaper is the best stewardship use of our limited human and financial resources.

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 reporting, short videos, social media and other effective modern methods. Such changes will bring about new opportunities for growth and innovation, as we seek to help our church tell its story and spread the gospel message.

As God enlarges our territory, we are excited about the mutual possibilities inherent in our two conferences' affiliation. We have seen benefits already working together as a joint communications team. We want to thank you for your readership and support, both over the years and continuing in the years to come, as we share this ministry journey with one another.



Rev. James Lee
Director of Communications



Rev. John W. Coleman
Editorial Manager



NEWSpirit!

John R. Schol, Bishop

United Methodists of Greater New Jersey
205 Jumping Brook Road, Neptune, NJ 07753

James Lee, Director of Communications
732.359.1044 | jlee@gnjumc.org

Joshua Watkins, Communications Administrator
732.359.1063 | jwatkins@gnjumc.org

John Coleman, Editorial Manager
jcoleman@epaumc.church

Lindsey Cotman, Graphic Designer
lcotman@epaumc.church

David Beverly, IT and Web Specialist
dbeverly@gnjumc.org

Corbin Payne, Video Producer
cpayne@gnjumc.org

Christopher G. Coleman, NEWSpirit Designer
chris@cgc Coleman.com

New Subscriptions, renewals, address changes, and corrections should be addressed to Communications Department at info@gnjumc.org or by mail to: NEWSpirit | 205 Jumping Brook Road, Neptune NJ 07753

FOR ADVERTISING RATES, INFORMATION & PLACEMENT

Contact: info@gnjumc.org

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EPA Annual Session

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Resident Bishop John Schol will offer his Episcopal Address to begin the conference session, recalling strides made in the past conference year and highlighting plans and possibilities for the path forward. And he will preach at the Service of Ordination and Commissioning of clergy.

“As we gather, God’s possibilities continue to bless us,” the bishop writes in his Pre-Conference Workbook greeting. “We celebrate the work of Project Restoration, as we work to restore our communities following Hurricane Ida. We give thanks for the relaunch of our Camp and Retreat Ministries and the IGNITE conference.



The Eastern Pennsylvania Annual Conference will be held at the Greater Philadelphia EXPO Center in Philadelphia, PA.

“OUR WORK TO END THE SIN OF RACISM CONTINUES THROUGH THE BUILDING OF THE JOURNEY OF HOPE INTO THE POLICIES, PROCEDURES AND SYSTEMS OF EPA.”

—BISHOP JOHN SCHOL

“Our work to end the sin of racism continues through the building of the Journey of Hope into the policies, procedures and systems of EPA. We are excited about affiliation with Greater New Jersey, which helps us further our mission and be good stewards of our resources. A new Strategic Direction will lead us into God’s next possibilities.”



Rev. James Lee

The Rev. James Lee, Director of Communications for the United Methodists of Eastern Pennsylvania and Greater New Jersey, will preach at the opening worship service. Lee leads the affiliated EPA&GNJ communications team serving both conferences, and he will supervise the

conference’s media operations. A passionate and creative communicator, he has been a pastor in GNJ and previously managed the conference’s audio-video productions.

The Rev. Enger Muteteke, Senior Director of Programs and Education at the UMC’s General Commission on Religion and Race, will lead the conference’s traditional Teaching Session Friday morning, May 19. An Elder and former Deacon in the UMC’s Baltimore Washington Conference, she previously served the Greater New Jersey Conference on loan for four years as a pastor, Director of Resourcing and project leader for the Journey of Hope anti-racism work. She also facilitated cohorts of leaders in cross racial/cross cultural ministry.



Rev. Enger Muteteke

Muteteke has served nearly all her pastoral ministry in cross racial/cross cultural appointments, which is a significant anti-racism initiative in EPA, led by its Commission on Religion and Race. She feels deeply called to this work having seen the Spirit of God work in small and mighty ways in local churches and communities.

The conference will be grounded in praise and worship from beginning to end, including the traditional Service of Ordination and Commissioning and Service of Remembrance to honor the saints we have lost in the past year. A Service of Passage with Anointing will celebrate both those clergy who are retiring and

those who are fully entering the vocation of ministry. Special offerings will be received for Youth and Young Adults Ministries and for higher education and seminary scholarships.

The Rev. Eunice Vega-Perez, Superintendent of Greater New Jersey’s Skylands District, will preach at the Memorial Service Friday. The Puerto Rico native, longtime professional nurse and second-career clergywoman, has served in four cross-cultural/cross-racial appointments and is passionate about social justice and missions. Multiple mission trips have taken her to Kentucky, Mexico, Haiti, Costa Rica and twice to Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria in 2017. She has been a leader of MARCHA (Methodists Associated to Represent the Cause of Hispanic Americans) and the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women.



Rev. Eunice Vega-Perez



Rev. Alice Cook

And the Rev. Alice Cook, pastor of Paoli UMC, will give the charge in the Service of Passage with Anointing for retirees and ordinands, as she herself retires from active pastoral ministry after 39 years.

The traditional awards celebrating exemplary lives and local churches committed to ministry will continue, although

their presentation will again be shown on recorded video.

Harry Denman Awards, from the Foundation for Evangelism, recognize leaders who eagerly invite others to know and follow Jesus Christ. The 2023 awardees are: Alison Laxton of Effort UMC and Deaconess Darlene Didomineck of Arch Street UMC (both laypersons) and the Rev. Samuel Kofi Ashley, pastor of East Stroudsburg UMC (clergy).

The One Matters Award is presented by the UMC’s Discipleship Ministries agency to recognize churches that have grown by at least one new profession-of-faith member. The 2023 award goes to Fallsington UMC for its membership growth due to creative community engagement ministries.

The Herbert E. Palmer Urban Ministry Awards for each district is presented to Philadelphia: Midtown Parish UMC (East); Philadelphia: Sayers Memorial UMC (South); Conyngham UMC (North); and Lebanon: Bethany UMC (West).

Finally, conference members and guests can engage in an onsite mission project together during breaks by assembling disaster response supplies to be sent to the UMCOR (United Methodist Committee on Relief) Sager Brown Depot in Baldwin, La.

Prior to the session, individuals, groups and churches are asked to purchase online from Amazon much-needed cleaning kits, general hygiene kits and feminine hygiene kits to be delivered to the Conference Office. These items are needed more than ever throughout the world in places where disasters continue to impact God’s people. Volunteers will assemble the kits during breaks in the conference session. 🇺🇸

GNJ Annual Session

Continued from page 1

During our time of holy conferencing, we will join in praise and worship, including sharing in Holy Communion on scenic Wildwood Beach to welcome



GNJ Annual Session convenes at Wildwood Convention Center in Wildwood, NJ.

each new day and its many life-enriching possibilities.

There will be a Service of Ordination and Commissioning of clergy, a Service of Remembrance to honor the saints we have lost in the past year, and a Service of Passage with Anointing to

celebrate both those clergy who are retiring and those who are entering the vocation of ministry.

Bishop Cynthia Moore-Koikoi, episcopal leader of the Pittsburgh Area (Western Pennsylvania Conference) since 2016, will preach at our Service of Remembrance and provide an informative and inspirational teaching on the conference theme.

She provides episcopal leadership also to the Harrisburg Area, which includes the Susquehanna Conference, in partnership with Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball of West Virginia. Bishop Moore-Koikoi is president of the denomination’s General Commission on Religion and Race and may likely commend the conference for its commitment to ending the sin of racism.

Resident Bishop John Schol will offer his Episcopal Address to begin the formal legislative session on Monday morning. We will then hear a leadership ministries report and act on more than a dozen ministry reports, proposals and legislative resolutions during Holy Conferencing.

Life-saving mission will be at the heart of the conference on Monday, May 22, when an offering is received to support Hurricane Ida Recovery and attendees who signed up for the onsite mission project will assemble packages of nutritious, imperishable foods to be shipped to Rise Against Hunger.

“As we gather, God’s possibilities continue to bless us,” writes Bishop Schol in a greeting to conference members. He names recent efforts and achievements, including the conference’s relaunch of the IGNITE Youth Conference in person last October, efforts to end the sin of racism through the holistic Journey of Hope, and continuing work on congregational vitality and sustainability through Pathways, the Leadership Academy, the Breakthrough worship series and other initiatives.

The bishop urges us to “prepare for our time together” through prayer, to read and share information in the Pre-Annual Conference Workbook, and to “engage with your congregation the legislation that will be before us.” 🇺🇸

EPA Looks to Possibility Future, Despite Loss of Some Churches

By John W. Coleman

The Eastern PA Annual Conference in May will consider resolutions that point the way to a future of Possibility, the apt theme for its 2023 session. Members will consider a major, new Strategic Direction for EPA's operations and ministries, proposed by the Cabinet and the Connectional Table.

Preparatory steps in that new direction are already being taken through EPA's affiliation with the Greater New Jersey Conference in some programs, staffing and administrative areas.

One ambitious main goal is to increase the percentage of vital congregations in EPA from 25% to 35%, by helping churches focus on five markers of vitality: worship, small groups, mission, stewardship and making new disciples. That goal requires cultivating passionate disciples, vital congregations and transformational leaders.

The resolution reports progress in some of these markers and among other specific priorities, like "ending the sin of racism and responding to mission opportunities. That progress includes increases in:

- Church members' participation in small groups and hands-on mission;
- Percentages of people of color (racial-ethnic) attending churches;
- Conference board and agency chairpersons who are people of color;
- Cross-racial/cross-cultural pastoral appointments;
- Facilitators trained to work with leaders on cross-racial/cross-cultural ministry through the Journey of Hope (formerly EPA's Path Toward Wholeness)
- Hurricane Ida-damaged homes renovated and rebuilt by Project Restoration; and
- Participants attending EPA's four camp & retreat centers.

Additional Strategic Direction objectives—each with quantitative measures—call for the conference to:

- Create a culture of call to pastoral ministry, leading to more clergy for appointments.



EPA assisting elders received "coach approach" training in 2022, which prepared them to help pastors lead Pathways congregations into greater health and vitality.

- Grow participation in a new curriculum of EPA&GNJ Leadership Academy courses.
- Train facilitators to help congregations end the sin of racism.
- Equip leaders to engage their congregations in interpersonal community outreach.
- Equip leaders to lead their congregations to financial health by fostering generosity and sustainability in managing church resources.
- Develop more, diverse young leaders through camping, retreats, IGNITE youth conferences and leadership training experiences.
- Use EPA's new regional structure to help superintending teams support clergy and congregational leaders in pursuing congregational health, vitality and achievement of goals.

Members to Vote on Leadership, Bid Farewell to Churches

Just as the conference endeavors to recruit, create and equip more leaders for congregations, EPA's Committee on Leadership wants to recruit more elected leaders conferencewide for administrative and program committees and councils. The Committee on Leadership will nominate to the conference a full roster of administrative and Connectional Ministries committees and chairpersons for the coming year.

Members will also vote on Equitable Compensation levels for pastors, eight

Advance Special projects recommended for local church support, and updates to the Clergy Retirement Security Program and the Rental/Housing Allowance for Retired or Disabled Clergy. New Safe Sanctuaries policies will be presented to further ensure the safety of children, youth and now vulnerable adults in church facilities and activities.

Meanwhile, the conference will bid farewell to congregations that have played a significant role in its overall mission and ministry. Members will approve the closure of five churches: Pomeroy UMC; Evangelical UMC Pottsville; Frankford Memorial UMC Philadelphia; Green Hill UMC Conestoga; and St. James UMC Philadelphia.

They also are expected to approve the requests of five churches to disaffiliate from the denomination. Those churches have undergone the required discernment and voting process and accepted the terms and conditions set by the Conference Trustees. They are:

- Iglesia Metodista Unida Nuevo Nacimiento (New Birth UMC), in Lebanon;
- Limeville UMC, in Gap;
- New Hanover UMC, in Gilbertsville;
- Wind Gap UMC; and
- Davis Chapel UMC, in Zion Grove

The conference's Council on Finance & Administration also proposes plans for properly allocating the various funds received from departing churches as part of their disaffiliation agreements.

More resolutions presented

A resolution by three conference members requests a revision to the process and terms for congregations that still want to disaffiliate. The Rev. Joan Trout and lay members Doug O'Connell and

Jeffery Pijanowski are asking EPA's Board of Trustees to consider revising current standards and conditions for disaffiliation under Par. 2553. The deadline to declare an intent to disaffiliate passed September 30, 2022. But they are asking for an extension to July 31, 2023, and that "no additional trainings, information sessions, or conference guided church discussions shall be required for local churches seeking to disaffiliate."

The three members request a call for a Special Session of the Annual Conference to vote on new pending requests for disaffiliation in November before the denomination's mandated December 31 disaffiliation deadline. Because the conference cannot compel the Trustees to make any changes in the process or timeline, the resolution is considered "aspirational."

In other resolutions the Rev. Roger Thomas of EPA's Fight for Floyd and Beyond Policy Committee submitted one relating to "Jury Justice." It asks the conference to support the Juror Compensation Bill in the Pennsylvania state legislature, advocating for an increase in the daily pay for jurors—now only \$9/hour—to match the state's new minimum wage of \$17/hour.

Thomas and the Fight for Floyd and Beyond Committee, a racial justice education and advocacy initiative formed after George Floyd's 2020 murder by Minneapolis police, also propose that the conference call for a legislative study and improvements in Pennsylvania's Human Trafficking Act.

Another resolution, presented by the Rev. Robin Hynicka on behalf of Arch Street UMC Philadelphia, asks the conference to support proposals for the creation of Regional Conferences in the U.S., Africa, Europe, the Philippines, by the delayed General Conference when it gathers in 2024 in Charlotte, NC.

The resolution supports the Christmas Covenant, devised by UMC Central Conference leaders, in addition to a similar regionalization vision proposed by the UMC's Connectional Table. Their common goal is to foster bring equity to the denomination's global legislative assembly, which has always been dominated by the U.S. church's affairs and influence. 🇺🇸

GNJ Resolutions Include Farewells to Departing Churches

By John W. Coleman

The GNJ Annual Conference is expected to bid farewell to some valued churches and institutions when it votes on several key resolutions during its annual session May 21-23.

One resolution would approve eight congregations' disaffiliation from The United Methodist Church, based on ¶12553 of the *Book of Discipline*, that allows churches to leave by December 31, 2023, with the property they hold in trust "for reasons of conscience regarding the actions or inactions of The United Methodist Church around human sexuality."

Those congregations have "met the timelines and explored and discerned disaffiliation through the process outlined in the Greater New Jersey Conference and have voted by a two-thirds majority to disaffiliate," according to the resolution.

The churches are: Bethany UMC of Wayne; Cornerstone Church of Englewood; Grace-Bethel UMC of Leonia; KCC of



Englewood; First Korean UMC of Cherry Hill; St John's UMC of Turnersville; Sicklerville UMC; and Elmer UMC.

"United Methodist connectionalism is one of our core values," states the resolution. "We grieve the loss of these congregations, and all the ways that they have mattered to our fellowship and mission."

The Conference will also approve the closure of six churches, while giving thanks for "all the blessings made possible by the clergy and laity who have contributed to their ministry and mission." They are: Bethel UMC and New

Continued on next page



Honor the humanity, racial identity, uniqueness and sacred worth of everyone as we live out our baptismal vow.

Learn more about the Journey of Hope to End the Sin of Racism.

FOR MORE DETAILS
www.gnjumc.org/journeyofhope

GNJ Resolutions

Continued from previous page

Beginnings UMC, both of Camden; First UMC of Bradley Beach; St. Matthew's UMC of Newark; Stratford UMC; and Trinity UMC of Stony Point.

The Conference will also formally dissolve its covenant agreement with The Bergen Point Community Church, which became a federated church in 1971 that included the former Bayonne UMC.

And finally, Conference members are expected to approve the sale of The Pinelands Center at Mt. Misery because maintenance and other costs have made the property financially unsustainable. Now owned by GNJ's Next Generation Ministries, revenue from the sale will support Next Gen's mission as outlined in its 10-year strategic plan.

The Pinelands Center was purchased in 1947 by the Southern New Jersey Annual Conference for youth camping and retreat ministries. "We recognize and honor the service, call and ministry of countless campers, leaders, and clergy over the course of 75 years," reads the resolution.

In other legislation, the Conference will likely endorse a list of 11 Advanced Special projects for local church support through second-mile giving. And members should approve required Equitable Compensation for pastors, church parsonage standards, arrearage policies, pension and health benefits recommendations, and revised Safe Sanctuary policies and practices to help ensure the safety of children, youth and vulnerable adults in all church facilities and activities.

A proposed new 2023-2026 Strategic Direction will be presented by the Extended Cabinet and Connectional Table for consideration and approval. While furthering GNJ's current affiliation with the Eastern PA Conference, its goals include increasing GNJ's vital congregations from 48% to 60%, an ambitious goal fueled by the "five ministries/markers of vitality: worship, small groups, mission, stewardship and making new disciples."

The plan offers key strategic ministry initiatives to generate "passionate disciples, vital congregations and transformational leaders."

The 2024 Budget Legislation, before proposing fiscal policies and projected income and expenses, first links them to the quantitative mission goals. That includes recruiting pastors; training and equipping ministry leaders and facilitators; and helping congregations participate in generous giving, community engagement and the goal to end the sin of racism.

Fiscal proposals include a combined rate of 15.3% for conference and general church apportionments but a reduced rate for congregations in low-income communities under the Journey of Hope Plan. That anti-racism plan also calls for GNJ to give up to 100% to two general apportionment funds, Black College and Africa University, from any year-end budget surplus.

The Conference will also hear and act on non-GNJ resolutions, including endorsement of The Christmas Covenant, a set of legislation and constitutional amendments that the UMC's delayed General Conference in 2024 will consider with the goal of "establishing regional equity in the structures of the (global) church for missional effectiveness while sustaining connectional unity."

Two final resolutions concern the ongoing, destructive problem of sexual abuse. "A Safer GNJ" calls for steps to address the trauma of sexual abuse survivors and to provide training and resources that can help prevent future abuse. "Reclaiming the Narrative" asks the body to censure Bishop John Schol for his handling of a sexual abuse case and calls for sexual ethics training and policies. 🇺🇸

Consolidated EPA Budget, New Fiscal Policies Proposed for 2024

By John W. Coleman

Eastern PA Conference members will see a restructuring—and perhaps a clarifying—of fiscal policies and assets in the proposed new 2024 conference budget at the annual session May 18-20. But they can get a preview and participate in a Q&A session at the Pre-Annual Conference sessions offered May 9 and 10.

With the aim of managing and investing funds responsibly for "the preservation of capital" and "maximizing funds available for mission," conference leaders are proposing changes to better align the EPA budget to "advance its strategic direction, mission, goals and strategies... of growing vital mission congregations." That goal includes allocating designated and restricted funds* according to their various, defined purposes and using a consolidated budget to account for all funds held in the conference's central treasury.

Congregations' billings will reflect a consolidated budget that clearly identifies line items for program ministry and mission, clergy support, administration, property, and both conference and general church apportionments. They would be responsible for a 7.2% EPA shared (connectional) ministry apportionment and a 2.6% general church apportionment. Historically, total local church giving to general church funds has averaged 82-85%.

But congregations in low-income communities, which are primarily racial-ethnic, would pay reduced amounts under the Journey of Hope equity legislation (formerly the Path Toward Wholeness Plan) approved in 2022. That anti-racism plan also calls for EPA to pay up to 100% of its apportionment to the Black College and Africa University general church funds, if it has a year-end budget surplus.

Healthcare billings over the next four years will move to a single blended rate to provide adequate billing and payment for the cost of clergy and lay employee health care, except for Journey of Hope equity congregations who will receive a lower billing rate because they are in low-income communities. In fact, those congregations will receive discounts for all billed funds, not just healthcare.

Proposed Budget Responds to Challenges

The proposed budget is not without its challenges: EPA must pay a \$580,000 share of a \$30,000,000 United Methodist settlement with survivors of sexual abuse

in the BSA (Boy Scouts of America). To avoid taking the funds directly from Trustee reserves, the proposed budget assesses one-third of the \$580,000 as part of its Shared (aka Connectional) Ministry Fund apportionment to churches over the next three years. Thus, the normal assessment formula of 7% has been increased by .2% to accommodate this cost. On the other hand, General Church apportionments have decreased from 2.9% to 2.6% since last year.

But the Treasurer's Office will also assess modest administrative support fees for shared services provided to restricted and designated funds and trusts. Those shared services include administrative, legal and operational support. Additionally, an 8% uncollectable funds fee is added to billed funds to account for our historical 92% collection rate in those funds.

Committees to Invest, Monitor Designated, Restricted Funds

Moreover, EPA's Board of Trustees and Council on Finance & Administration (CFA) will form an investment committee to "ensure funds are invested in accordance with the social principles of the UMC and prudently to maximize gains so that balances keep pace with present AND future ministry needs. Further, the funds are overseen so that funds are only used for the designated or restricted purpose."

CFA will also establish an EPA Fund Committee to monitor careful management of designated and restricted funds. And six agencies—CFA, Board of Trustees, Board of Benefits, Camp and Retreat Ministries Board, Connectional Table and Cabinet, along with any EPA mission partners who have funds invested—will meet jointly with institutions managing their funds to analyze investment performance and projections, including the socially responsible impact of those funds.

The CFA investment committee will make investment decisions for each fund, to be executed by EPA's Chief Financial Officer (CFO). Each designated fund's purpose will be clearly identified and adhered to and can only be changed by vote of the Annual Conference. Funds will be assigned monitors to ensure that governing policies are followed and that the desired purpose and impact is being achieved. That includes funds from the sale of urban property that are designated to support urban congregations and ministry, according to *The Book of Discipline*.

The new policies also provide strict rules for disbursements, emergency uses and borrowing from designated funds.

Budget Describes 26 Designated, Restricted Funds

The detailed budget proposal lists and describes 26 designated and restricted funds, including their end-of-2022 balances, fund goals and identified monitors. The list categorizes them as Congregational Development, Strategic Disciple Making, Leadership Development, Mission, Benefits, and Property and Operations.

During a detailed budget presentation to Connectional Table members April 18, given by CFO Jo Fielding and CFA Chair Irene Dickinson, Bishop John Schol emphasized the determined efforts of staff to search for often elusive financial records for some older funds. Thus, CFA and conference Trustees will review and act on any valid documents presented that may alter any funds or their amounts.

"The new consolidated budget allows our members to see our ministry in its totality," said Fielding. "We are not just a \$3.4 million organization; we are a \$20 million organization with a larger capacity for ministry than we might realize. Our goal is to be transparent in all our finances.

"By putting policies and procedures into place for shared ministry funds, billings, and the use and investment of designated funds," she explained, "we can ensure that the ministry of this conference has a long future. It also means we are investing in and running our conference in a way that is consistent with our mission, goals and strategies to end the sin of racism, to encourage growth and vitality in our churches—especially those in urban areas—and to raise up transformational leaders." 🇺🇸

*Two types of Funds:

Donor Restricted funds are contributions from an individual or group with a restricted purpose that can only be changed by the individual(s) or their estate. EPA must use restricted funds for the purpose designated by the donor. Only the donor may restrict funds, not EPA. All restricted funds will be managed and dispersed according to the donor's restriction.

EPA Designated funds are designated by the annual conference and are overseen by a designated body. The annual conference session may vote to change the designated purpose as needed.

Conference Sessions to Engage Members in Hands-On Mission

By John W. Coleman

The Eastern PA and Greater New Jersey Annual Conferences in May will each offer lively, hands-on mission engagement opportunities for attendees.

EPA's mission project is already engaging generous donors in online purchasing of much-needed items—specifically, cleaning, hygiene and feminine hygiene kits—to be shipped to the Conference Office for disaster response. During the conference session, volunteers will assemble and pack the collected items for shipping to UMCOR's main depot in Louisiana.

GNJ's mission project will gather hundreds of conference attendees for another fun but lifesaving assembly effort, as one of its five workshops scheduled for Monday, May 22, 4:30 to 5:30 p.m. They will carefully pack nutritious food items into bags and boxes to ship to Rise Against Hunger, which engages churches and other groups in helping to fight hunger worldwide.

More information is on EPA's and GNJ's Annual Conference web pages. 🇺🇸



EPA 2023 Awardees Honored for Evangelism, Urban Ministries

By John W. Coleman

FAIRLESS HILLS, PA

About 30 people gathered April 22 for the 2023 Eastern PA Annual Conference awards ceremony at Christ United Methodist Church in Fairless Hills—a 30-minute, video-recorded ceremony where plaques and framed certificates were given out and brief remarks were shared. A video from the award presentations will be shown at EPA's Annual Conference in May.

They came together on a Saturday morning for a small program to celebrate great things accomplished in service to Jesus Christ. Or if not great things, then at least “small things with great love,” as Mother Teresa would describe them.

Just 30 people assembled to honor ministries that have touched and likely transformed hundreds of lives—maybe more. Just 30 minutes to honor people and congregations who have served communities for weeks, months, years, maybe lifetimes.

And yet, the humble, grateful awardees came with their colleagues and family members—several of them driving for up to two hours—to a half-hour ceremony, not just to receive their honors but to share them with the colleagues

give thanks for each of you and your congregations, who saw possibility.”

Taylor-Storm joined three district superintendents and co-chairpersons of EPA's Congregational Development Team (CDT) and Urban Commission in giving thanks for individual and congregational champions of evangelism and urban ministry who looked beyond their inadequate resources in the midst and wake of a pandemic and found possibilities to serve needs and serve people in their communities.

One Matters Award

The Rev. Andrew Foster, East District Superintendent, presented the One Matters Award to the **Rev. Joseph Martin and Fallsington UMC**. The plaque and \$1,000 donation, sponsored by UMC's Discipleship Ministries agency, celebrates congregations that have increased membership by at least one new baptism or profession of faith in the previous year.

However, congregations that receive this award have typically exceeded that mark because of their creative ministries of evangelism, discipleship and outreach. Fallsington grew by 10 members in 2022, adding four baptisms. That followed seven baptisms in 2021, including one shared by a father and his son. Such growth is due largely to Martin's personal outreach into



(Rear from left) The Rev. Andrew Foster III, East District Superintendent, joins the Rev. Joseph Martin, pastor of Fallsington UMC, with Certified Lay Minister Don Cesaretti and other church members— (front, from left) Debbie Hammond, Susan Adamczyk and Donna Manion—after they receive the One Matters Award.

“Because of their resiliency and creativity, Fallsington church is reaching people through (Karaoke) microphones but also through GriefShare ministries to counsel and support people,” said Foster. “They believe that all persons matter...(and) all ministry matters, from the cradle to the grave.”

Denman Evangelism Awards

The Rev. Lloyd Speer, who co-chairs CDT with Suzette

James, presented the annual Harry Denman Evangelism Awards to two lay adults and a pastor. (There were no youth nominated this year.)

“Alison loves Jesus and has a living relationship with him and wants more than anything to have young people come into a relationship with Jesus as their Savior and Lord.” That's how Speer introduced lay Denman awardee Alison Laxton of Effort UMC. “Feeling a call from God to start Effort's youth group back up at after Covid, she set out to make sure the youth of the church had a strong biblical foundation of faith in Jesus Christ and the support of the church as they lived out their Christian Faith in their everyday lives.

“For Alison, the Bible comes alive in how it speaks to her own life. So, she



Denman Evangelism Awards were presented to (from left) Alison Laxton, Deaconess Darlene DiDomineck and the Rev. Samuel Kofi Ashley

wants the youth to realize how God's Word can speak into their own lives as well.” Meeting on second and fourth Sundays, the youths are engaged in mission projects that will take them this summer to Erie, Pa., to serve people there who need home repairs.

Deaconess Darlene DiDomineck, of Arch Street UMC in Philadelphia, “makes Jesus Christ known to everyone she meets,” read Speer from another lay awardee's nomination form, “while alleviating suffering, eradicating causes of injustice, facilitating the development of full human potential and building the global community of faith.”

The first Deaconess to receive EPA's Denman Award, DiDomineck exemplifies the religious order she is a proud member of, through in her work for

“WE WORSHIP A GOD OF *POSSIBILITY*...WHO SAW NOTHINGNESS AND BROUGHT FORTH LIGHT AND CREATION... WHO SAW PEOPLE WITH FAULTS AND FOIBLES BUT SAW DISCIPLES (IN THEM). WE GIVE THANKS FOR EACH OF YOU AND YOUR CONGREGATIONS, WHO SAW *POSSIBILITY*.”

—REV. DAWN TAYLOR-STORM

who labor alongside them to do small things with great love. They will no doubt display those trophies in places where their co-laborers and constituents can see and appreciate them.

“I dwell in possibility,” proclaimed the Rev. Dawn Taylor-Storm in her welcome, quoting beloved poet Emily Dickinson and reminding all of the 2023 Annual Conference theme, *Possibility*. “We worship a God of possibility...who saw nothingness and brought forth light and creation...who saw people with faults and foibles but saw disciples (in them). We

the community—where he is well-known as Rev. Joe in diners, bars and other public spaces—and due to popular creative ministries he leads with his members.

Two of those ministries have drawn neighbors to not only visit but return and even join the church. The 13-week GriefShare groups offer much-needed compassion and friendship to those grieving loss of loved ones. And the lively, communal Karaoke Night worship gatherings, held on two Thursdays a month since last summer, draw dozens of enthusiastic attendees to the church—even on cold, rainy nights.

The Rev. Jana Purkis-Brash

Helenor Alter Davisson Awardee

2023 Greater New Jersey Annual Conference Affiliation



Rev. Jana Purkis-Brash

The Rev. Jana Purkis-Brash is an outstanding clergywoman who has made a difference locally, nationally and globally through her ministry and service to Christ. She has worked for over 40 years in GNJ, serving on the Board of Ordained Ministry, the Super Storm Sandy Emergency Task Force, Order of Elders, Regional Strategic Planning Team, worship planning teams and helping to lead conference events.

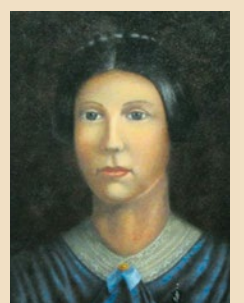
One of Jana's greatest gifts is raising up strong leaders who find their voice, their calling and their passion to serve. Her ability to help women find their calling and vocation has been a gift throughout her life and ministry. She has done this as an United Methodist Elder and pastor, as a Board of

Ordained Ministry member, Chair of the Order of Elders, Circuit Elder and District Superintendent, and also as an Adjunct Professor at Palmer Theological Seminary, and a member of various interfaith coalitions throughout her ministry.

Jana has been a resource both locally and nationally for survivors of abuse within the church, providing one-on-one support and presenting at conferences related to sexual misconduct. Jana advocates for full rights for all women to serve in all levels of pastoral ministry. Many women have found their calling and persevered through incredible challenges because of Jana's support, wisdom, guidance and advocacy.

Helenor M. Davisson

Helenor Davisson is credited with being the first woman ordained in American Methodism. In 1866 she was ordained a deacon in the North Indiana Annual Conference.



Helenor Davisson



The Rev. Graham Truscott (left) displays Palmer Urban Ministries award that the Rev. Hun Ju Lee presented to Conyngham UMC.



The Rev. Audrey Blackwell-Washington holds the Palmer Urban Ministries award presented to Sayers Memorial UMC Philadelphia by (top, from left) the Revs. David Eckert, Urban Ministries co-chairperson, and Evelyn Kent Clark, South District Superintendent. Joining her are church members (from top right, clockwise) Mary Washington, Debra Henry, Yvonne Morgan and Gilda Clayburne.



The Rev. Andres Torres thanks God and members of Bethany UMC Lebanon for their fruitful ministry and the Palmer Urban Ministry Award, as (from left) the Revs. David Eckert, Urban Ministries co-chairperson, and District Superintendents Hun Ju Lee, Evelyn Kent Clark and Andrew Foster III listen.



The Rev. Terry Bridges, pastor of Midtown Parish UMC Philadelphia, which received a Palmer Urban Ministry Award.

justice and compassion as director of Arch Street’s nonprofit partner agency The Center. She shares Christ’s love in leading its various offerings to help unhoused/unsheltered neighbors, including showers, laundry, clothing, case management, wellness aid, a drop-in space and homemade meals.

The Rev. Samuel Kofi Ashley has positively impacted his congregation through his “limitless energy, his kindness, his ever-present smile, and his openness to all,” according to those who nominated the pastor of East Stroudsburg UMC for “his evangelistic zeal.” In the past two years, he has recruited 31 new members. “All areas of his ministry are geared toward bringing others into the fold.”

Herbert E. Palmer Urban Ministry Awards

The Rev. David Eckert, who co-chairs EPA’s Urban Commission along with the Rev. Myra Maxwell, presented five annual Herbert E. Palmer Urban Ministry Awards to pastors of urban churches in all four districts. Each of them credited their church members for the efforts and accomplishments that warranted their recognition.

Midtown Parish UMC in North Philadelphia (East District), led by the Rev. Terry Bridges, uses its facilities and energetic ministries to serve youth and families, including space for gaming, computer stations, arts and crafts, fellowship, and Christian mentoring, as well as travel outside the neighborhood. Several creative community events have increased inter-generational interaction and relationships between youth and adults.

Awarded an **EPA Hope (formerly Wholeness) Center** grant, the lively

church tries to be a community hub to strengthen families by offering information about jobs and careers, civic events and social gatherings, workshops, coaching, outreach efforts and small group ministries.

Sayers Memorial UMC in South Philadelphia (South District), under the leadership of Rev. Audrey Blackwell Washington, has grown in membership, finances and spiritual presence while emerging from the pandemic. In

Church members can be heard on local radio programs promoting their active evangelism events, including community barbecues, Vacation Bible School and giveaways of backpacks with school supplies, hats and gloves, toiletries, diapers and cleaning supplies. Over a hundred youth attended Sayres’ Community Unity Day, which launched a monthly Youth4Change ministry. The church, which celebrated its 139th anniversary last fall with a three-day revival, partners

with other community and civic leadership, has participated in a walk against gun violence, and hosted the traveling “Memorial to the Lost” t-shirt display.

Conyngham UMC (North District), led by the Rev. William Graham Truscott, has significantly increased involvement in its community by serving and supporting individuals and families who are facing poverty and marginalization. In addition to providing food for homeless neighbors through its church pantry and hosting community meal events, the church has also organized movie nights and pool nights as opportunities for fellowship and fun. These initiatives

in addition to in-person worship, their online prayer ministries are reaching people who are homebound and living out of the state.

demonstrate the church’s commitment to building relationships and serving the needs of its community.

Bethany UMC Lebanon (West District) is a growing urban congregation serving both Anglo and Latino members and neighbors. The Rev. Andrés Torres was first appointed as an associate pastor to start outreach to the Latino community, which included a food ministry and sports ministries for local children and youth of all races. When the senior pastor retired, Torres continued as pastor serving both congregations and the community. The church recently began “English for Everyone” classes with the help of an Urban Commission Initiative grant.

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Mutual Ministry

Continued from page 1



Rev. Kate Monahan

leadership opportunities for students of all ages to serve in local churches, camps and other ministries of the annual conferences.

Leaders from both conferences' boards of Ordained Ministry have met together to discuss if there are ways they can collaborate in sponsoring Local Pastor Schools, Orientation to Ministry events, Residency in Ministry and Sexual Ethics trainings, and other facets of clergy preparation for ministry.



Resourcing Pastors, Churches Across Conference Lines

EPA&GNJ's Leadership Team is working to upgrade and expand GNJ's Leadership Academy to offer broader, more flexible leadership education to clergy and laity in both conferences. The newly affiliated Leadership Academy will use its new *Teachable* Learning Platform to pair convenient asynchronous learning models with synchronous learning.



Individuals and teams will be able to access training at home using online, asynchronous platforms that allow learners to gain recorded instruction anytime, anywhere, at their convenience. In addition, synchronous platforms will allow for live, onsite or videoconference learning experiences with training facilitators. The Academy will also offer tracks for learning concentrations and certificates. And courses will be action-oriented, with opportunities for applied and hands-on learning that are essential to help students retain and make use of new knowledge.

Ministry resourcing is also being upgraded with four regional resourcing teams, along with regional administrators now serving in both EPA & GNJ and connecting across conference lines. GNJ's regions are Metro Highlands and Coastal Plains. EPA's regions are SouthEast and NorthWest. Each region comprises two or more districts working together with their regional resourcing teams and supported by their regional administrators and district superintendents.

Resourcing pastors and congregations in both conferences is also happening in the Pathways congregational health and vitality initiative. Over 100



With EPA's and GNJ's websites displayed side-by-side on a laptop screen, digital media consultant Kenny Jahng helps staff begin planning for a new affiliated EPA&GNJ website. John Coleman photo

congregations in EPA&GNJ are currently engaged in Pathways, which is undergoing design changes, as EPA and GNJ Pathways resourcing staff work together. In addition, EPA&GNJ is launching Engage, a supportive initiative to connect every pastor at least quarterly with a District Superintendent, Assisting Elder or conference staff member to engage in reflective conversation and prayer to offer encouragement.

And GNJ's *Breakthrough* creative worship resource is being expanded to EPA to recruit content writers and attract more users there. The popular resource annually offers pastors and worship leaders about a half-dozen series of thematic Bible studies, sermon starters, worship graphics and more—all resources they can easily adapt and utilize. EPA writers are helping now to prepare themed sermon material for several *Breakthrough* series in the fall.



Working Together to End the Sin of Racism

Together, EPA & GNJ are committed to dismantling racism through the Journey of Hope initiative and Cross-Racial/Cross-Cultural (CR/CC) ministries, including CR/CC pastoral appointments. The two conferences are evaluating metrics to track their performance in various areas, including: investing financially in developing and strengthening racial-ethnic churches and leadership; ensuring that people of color have more leadership roles on conference boards and committees; and reviewing conference policies and procedures for signs of bias and discrimination.

Leaders of EPA's Commission on Religion & Race and GNJ's Journey of Hope initiative met at EPA's Carson Simpson Farm Camp & Retreat Center in late April to develop plans for affiliation in their anti-racism work. EPA's annual training for churches with CR/CC pastoral appointments on June 3 will be an affiliated training, giving pastors and church leaders from both conferences an opportunity to learn and grow in partnership as they explore CR/CC ministry together.

EPA&GNJ began affiliating its cross-conference Communications work in December 2022, with a unified communications team that serves the many needs of both conferences. That includes production of emailed newsletters and episcopal correspondence, videos, graphic design, websites, requested media resources and the new affiliated newspaper *NEWSpirit*, which replaces GNJ's *The Relay*. The next big thing being developed is an affiliated

EPA&GNJ website that will serve both conferences with individual and joint content.

"Our commitment to youth and young adults will include the launch of a year-round discipleship calendar offering opportunities for youth from EPA&GNJ to experience EPA's camp & retreat offerings and GNJ's IGNITE, a transformational experience for youth and youth ministry leaders" said the Rev. Dawn Taylor-Storm, who leads the EPA&GNJ Leadership Team. "Our goal is to send 100 GNJ youth to experience EPA's summer camps and 200 EPA youth to experience IGNITE in the fall."

'Affiliation Builds Upon Gifts of Both Conferences'

"Affiliation builds upon the gifts of both conferences and offers possibilities for mutual collaboration and grows our ability to further our mission," said Taylor-Storm, who is EPA's Director of Connectional Ministries and Assistant to Bishop John Schol. Indeed, Jay Kim, who directs GNJ's Human Resources and Regional Support Team, is now doing the same work for EPA. And EPA&GNJ's joint Data & Strategic Analysis Team is collaborating in the development of improved, streamlined church information forms and the collection and analysis of statistical reports. This team, like the Communications team, is working from both conference offices.

"I have enjoyed getting to know staff across the EPA&GNJ and seeing teams work together," said Eric Drew, GNJ's Director of Connectional Ministries. "When they gather together, the Cabinet and other teams are full of outstanding leaders who are working well together and finding joy in collaboration."

Drew preached for a joint EPA&GNJ staff worship service at the EPA Conference Office April 3. EPA now hosts staff worship services and lunches on first Mondays, when the joint Cabinet meets there. And GNJ continues to host worship services weekly on the other Mondays, often with guests from EPA. The services, which include music, liturgy, preaching and Holy Communion, can also be enjoyed by all staff via Zoom.

Drew works with several EPA ministry groups in affiliation, including the Latino/Hispanic Commission and the Prison Ministries & Restorative Justice Team. "I'm excited that the Healing Communities Training, led by EPA's Prison Ministry and Restorative Justice Team, will be offered to both conferences for the first time through the Leadership Academy," he said. "And EPA's Latino Ministry Commission has invited Latino ministry leaders in GNJ to a conversation about collaborative work across both conferences. That's exciting."

EPA and GNJ each have a Committee on Native American Ministries (CONAM); and both groups have shared a relationship since they celebrated Native American Heritage Month together in 2017 (See "Celebrating Native American Heritage Month.") That relationship, and their acknowledgment that we live on what was once Lenne Lenapi tribal land, will be featured in the affiliated video that begins both EPA's and GNJ's annual conferences this year. 🇺🇸

Project Restoration Moving Disaster Recovery Work to Philly

By John W. Coleman

PHILADELPHIA, PA

The Eastern PA Conference's Project Restoration is about to enlarge its territory of endeavor as it moves its Hurricane Ida disaster recovery work from suburban counties into Philadelphia. Doing so will require all that the project's management team has learned about teamwork, discernment, patience and other necessary virtues.

The team began its work a year ago in April 2022, funded by a \$417,000 grant from UMCOR (the United Methodist Committee on Relief) and generous donations from EPA churches and individuals. UMCOR added another \$255,646 in December for a total grant of \$673,383 to fund another year of doing good, important—and still underfunded—work. Their goal is to repair or renovate 55 homes with volunteer labor and also provide case management services.

Project Director Denise Shelton has focused on managing operations, promoting and stewarding much-needed resources, including volunteers and donations, and building relationships with the public sector and faith-based partners in the Southeastern PA Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD).

The Rev. Allen Keller, a Deacon, has used every bit of his chaplaincy people-skills in doing tireless, detailed, disaster case management work, mostly in Chester and Delaware counties.

And construction project manager Daniel Jeffers has supervised volunteer teams—while teaching more than a few neophytes—to do repairs and renovation of homes and also flood-damaged Otterbein UMC in Mont Clare, Montgomery County.

What a first year it's been for this dedicated trio. But now the real fun begins.

"When we received information with lists of survivors from FEMA, we

divided up and began working heavily in Chester County, while another (VOAD) group worked in Delaware County," said Shelton. "We just kind of parceled out those areas. But we always knew we were going to go into Philadelphia together because of the numbers, the sheer volume of needs there."

She values VOAD dearly. "It's been one of the biggest blessings to be able to work with these partner organizations because you know their hearts are focused on the work, which they truly understand. They know the many challenges we're facing, and they are going through this process with us and supporting us. We can lean on each other."

But now they move from just communicating to collaborating on Philadelphia worksites. "We've always kept each other informed of what was happening and the work we were doing," said Shelton, "but now we're doing that work together, side by side. And we're trying to figure out how the pieces all fit together."

Keller focused on clients in Chester County initially, getting lists of people to call who requested help and then following up. "But there are changes I'm dealing with as I've moved more into Delaware County. We're there not so much to repair homes, but to support residents in working with their landlords, or FEMA, or county services, or getting legal aid." Or finding alternatives when fixing problems like flood-damaged laundry machines are tenants' responsibility. "We try to get them the help they need."

He's learned to use onsite visits less and online visits more for some of his casework, including telephone and texting, email, scanners, and SharePoint document management software when he has a capable, cooperative client. "We've got a lot of documentation to do. How could you do this without technology? I've learned the importance of wisely using resources like time; and to

be honest, I did not get that at first. But I appreciate it now.

"We have to gather all kinds of demographic information. How many kids are living in the home? Any disabilities or military veterans that might lead to benefits?" One important, common concern is helping people avoid receiving "duplication of benefits," which they may have to return later.

"My chaplain skills help me really listen to what people tell me and not judge or jump to conclusions." It's one way he feels he can really represent Christ in his work.

Only about 20 percent of Keller's case management work leads to the next stage of needing Project Restoration's volunteer home repair and construction services. But that percentage will rise as the bulk of their work shifts to Philadelphia.

In some communities like Downingtown or Coatesville many residents were able to get repairs done early, thanks to a lot of donations from local organizations, churches and neighbors, as well as FEMA and insurance funds, said Shelton. "Fewer of them actually needed home repairs. We worked with many individuals who just needed help in negotiating their own recovery with the monies they received."

"But as we transition into Philadelphia, because of the sheer number of survivors affected by the storm and the lack of local resources, we are targeting homeowners who still are identifying unmet needs. Many of those cases will end up needing home repair."

The team has identified a single zip code where they will begin their efforts: 19132. "It's one of the hardest hit areas, based on the heat maps we received from FEMA, and there's a high concentration of dwellings in

harm's way in that area," said Shelton. "The response so far has been overwhelming—to the point that we're identifying ways to bring in additional case managers to handle the load."

They will focus on homeowners there who seem to have the least ability to recover financially on their own. One big problem, Shelton said, is that many residents received initial funds from FEMA to obtain work estimate quotes but thought that was all they could get from the agency. They didn't realize they could request more funds to get the work done. They didn't come back to FEMA, and the window for making appeals closed March 10.

"FEMA's process can be very difficult to navigate," she said. "And to do that



Project Restoration team (from left) Daniel Jeffers, Denise Shelton and the Rev. Allen Keller.

on your own when you're also working and managing other life demands can be challenging."

Jeffers will need to determine if repair needs are due to Hurricane Ida or pre-existing problems and deferred maintenance. "Daniel's reasonability is a heavy load to bear," said his boss. "He went to some of these properties and identified some deferred maintenance, as opposed to storm damage."

"There will be a (screening) process to get to people who really need disaster response repairs done. But it's a real challenge because we're a year and a half behind at this point." 🇺🇸

GNJ Ida Recovery Team Expands Its Efforts to Find and Offer Help

The Greater New Jersey Conference Hurricane Ida Recovery Team is expanding its work, known as A Future with Hope, beyond the three counties where it has been working to help more survivors of extensive flood damage restore their homes and access needed services through case management.

Staff are participating in community outreach events to seek input and learn about needs among impacted households and to recruit more volunteers to do the work. Collaboration with other disaster recovery agency partners plus two new videos produced by EPA&GNJ Communications are helping to get the word out.

As GNJ's Volunteers in Mission coordinator for about the past six months, Cricket Denton is learning the ropes of that new responsibility. She has spent much time trying to recruit volunteers, both new and seasoned ones. While numbers have tapered off a year-and-a-half after Ida's destructive storms hit, "I do have people lined up who are interested," she said. "I've got some ready to go, who are texting me to ask so what are we doing? They're excited to help out wherever they can."

About 30 people attended Early Response Team training before the Covid pandemic, but that was long ago, said Denton. There should be two each year. "But I think this disaster has forced us



GNJ Ida Recovery Team: The Rev. Cricket Denton, Andrea Wren-Hardin, Erica Martinezsantos, Virginia Franco, Andy Chan, Bianca Shumanov, Raul Nombera-Bueno and Jean Tam. Corbin Payne photo

really to get on top of things. It may be preparing us for the next big thing that may impact our state. We're hopeful that whatever the next natural disaster is, we'll be able to hit the ground running instead of starting 10 steps behind."

GNJ Disaster Recovery Coordinator Andrea Wren-Hardin's team works closely with New Jersey Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster (NJVOAD). "They've been a very strong partner." She is a member of that essential group, and GNJ's case managers participate in their meetings to learn about available resources they can share. Another partner for community outreach events is the Latino Advisory Council.

In New Jersey we have 12 major disaster-declared counties," she said. "So, when we wrote to our primary funder for our program, we indicated that we were in three counties, Somerset, Middlesex and Union. But we've received referrals from outside of those counties, and our managers have done an incredible job of screening homeowners' database information there, too."

Case managers are much appreciated by the homeowners they help, said Andy Chan. "When we come to visit them for screening, to help them not as a government agency but as the church, they do appreciate it, and some seem to trust us more."

GNJ received a generous \$1.8 million grant from UMCOR (United Methodist Committee on Relief) in May 2022 for its response to Ida efforts, and then it had to hire and train staff before beginning. The grant period ends in May 2024. GNJ hired a required grant monitor in January to research and verify how grant funds are managed and spent.

"A Future With Hope has a dynamic team of disaster case managers who are fielding a high volume of calls from households seeking help with their recovery." Wren-Hardin explained. "We have expanded our reach into other impacted counties and have opened cases that are being vetted for home repairs. We have not yet found a construction coordinator to work with volunteers, so we are hiring contractors to do that work. We are grateful to be of service to those forgotten and offer hope as we walk with them through their recovery."

Anyone interested in attending or hosting outreach events at local churches should sign up for available dates and times. For more information, visit the project's web page or contact Disaster Recovery Coordinator Andrea Wren-Hardin at awrenhardin@gnjumc.org or 732-598-8872. View the two A Future with Hope videos promoting their ongoing recovery efforts and the need for more volunteers. 🇺🇸

EPA, GNJ CoNAMs Share Friendship Beyond Borders

By John W. Coleman

Both the Eastern PA and Greater New Jersey annual conferences in May will begin with a traditional ceremony acknowledging the land we occupy as once owned by Native American people, particularly the Lenni-Lenape nation who inhabited land in what is now Eastern Pennsylvania and New Jersey. There were no state borders then, an interesting precedent for this current season of EPA&GNJ affiliation.

Indeed, the Committees on Native American Ministries (CoNAM) in our two conferences are also not constrained by state or conference borders in their support for one another. That has certainly been the case since a few EPA CoNAM members first visited GNJ's St. John UMC in Bridgeton in 2017 to start a friendship—or one might say, an affiliation.

"Since Pennsylvania has no federally or state-recognized tribes, we were looking for a Native American organization to support that was close to us geographically," recalled Sherry Wack, a former co-chairperson of EPA's CoNAM. She now lives in upstate New York but is still an active member who participates in meetings online and yes, beyond borders.

"I believe it was Bob Hinderliter who brought to our attention St. John UMC in Bridgeton," said Wack. Home to many members of the Nanticoke Lenni-Lenape Tribal Nation, St. John UMC is the fifth oldest Native American Methodist Church in the U.S. "St. John celebrates a Native American service on every fifth Sunday. So, Bob and I traveled to New Jersey to help celebrate their 146th anniversary on October 29, 2017."

There they met Cynthia Mosley, then chairperson of GNJ's CoNAM. "That was the beginning of a symbiotic relationship between our two CoNAMs" said Wack. Since then, EPA has supported their GNJ siblings financially, especially when St. John's church was vandalized recently in a vicious hate-crime.

"Their CoNAM lent us their MMIW (Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women) awareness banner and poster to display at several events; and we have purchased T-shirts (in bulk) together." Both CoNAMs are actively engaged in advocacy for justice and mercy around this important concern and others affecting Native people.

On April 23, Cynthia Mosley, who is Delaware Nanticoke Lenape, came across the Delaware River to speak at Native American Sunday services at First UMC



Cynthia Mosley, GNJ CoNAM, St. John UMC, Bridgeton, NJ

of Germantown. She has done so several times to speak at FUMCOG, Evansburg UMC, which is Wack's former church, and other EPA churches. She also participated in the Land Acknowledgement ceremony for the 2022 EPA Annual Conference.

"More than anything, I think getting to know one another, encouraging one another, lifting each other in prayer and sharing information has been the biggest blessing," said Wack. "We are indeed relatives, and we treasure that bond."

Cynthia Mosely also shared some reflections also on the bond, the affiliation her church and CoNAM shares with EPA's CoNAM:

"I shared the Native American Ministries Sunday message with FUMCOG. We have

partnered with them at least four times on this (United Methodist) Special Sunday. FUMCOG members have volunteered with our Vacation Bible School and attended our Native American Ministries Sundays on occasion. Same with Evansburg UMC.

We partnered with West Chester UMC virtually (on Zoom) last year to participate in EPA's Annual Conference. We also work together as part of the NEJ (Northeastern Jurisdiction) Native American Ministries Committee as a vehicle for partnering.

We have worked on MMIW educational materials, some of which we modified for large events. We loan those materials to EPA when they need them. EPA and GNJ have attended community events together, such as book signings and marches to address social issues.

A few members from Prospect Park UMC collect food and deliver it to our (St. John) church for our bimonthly food giveaways. They have done that at least twice a year for the past six or seven years. The First UMC in Kennett Square supported our winter gear giveaway one year. They brought us lots of coats, hats, gloves of all sizes and for all ages. And we have a very important partnership with Verna Colliver and Lansdale UMC. They have supported our VBS financially every year for the last six years. That is a huge blessing for us." 🌈

Latino Commission's Convocation Celebrates Prayer, Unity, Ministries

From all regions of the Eastern PA Conference, members of its Latino/Hispanic Commission came together to strengthen their unity in the Holy Spirit at their annual Holy Convocation on Saturday, April 15, at Casa del Rey UMC in Allentown, PA.

"We had an amazing spiritual party, as the Holy Spirit led us to a time of prayer" said the Rev. Lisa DePaz, Coordinator of EPA's Hispanic/Latino Ministries and pastor of Haws Avenue UMC in Norristown.

"We took time to lift in prayer our congregations, our EPA and GNJ conferences, our bishop and the Cabinet," she recalled, "and each one of those who offer their

• Several Lay Missionaries are engaging in ministries to serve their churches and communities. They include an immigration project in conjunction with Justice for Our Neighbors (JFON), offering ESL classes and basic computer classes to youth and adults, and launching a food pantry and clothing ministry.

• A Lay Missionary couple at Casa del Rey UMC in Allentown is helping their pastor, the Rev. Manfredo Martinez Luna as he plants a new community of faith in Reading.

• The unique Semana Latina (Hispanic week) Summer Camp at Gretna Glen in July drew 60 campers and nine adult counselors, as they celebrated 43 years of Latino Camp there.

• A young Latinos leadership retreat in September attracted dozens of youth and young adults from various churches to learn leadership and organizing skills.

"Although times have changed and it seems as if the younger generation is drifting further and further away from God," said young adult leader Bryan Serrano, "there are still youth who have a desire and a will to rise above and emerge as leaders."

In 2023, the commission helped offer two workshops in Spanish at the South-East Region Tools for Ministry event, which 30 people attended.

As for the Holy Convocation, Martinez, who co-chairs the commission, described it as "an annual event where we convene as a Methodist people in a Latino/Hispanic context to worship together, recognizing our cultural diversity, and to be enriched by the gift of the other. We celebrate the renewing grace of God present in our congregations and ministries." 🌈



time and talent serving God and working on the extension of the Kingdom of God in our regions."

Her husband, the Rev. Cesar DePaz, pastor of Iglesia Metodista Unida Espiritu Santo (Holy Spirit UMC) in Philadelphia, called on members to "keep the fire of the Holy Spirit burning in our lives and congregations for the healing and restoring of our communities."

Commission leaders had much to celebrate, as reflected in their ministry report to the 2023 Annual Conference. Highlights for 2022 include:

• Eleven new Lay Missionaries from all four districts who took classes and received certificates at last year's Holy Convocation in June.

GNJ Leaders Celebrate NEJ Korean American Mission's Renewal

The Greater New Jersey Conference Korean Caucus, with about 150 members, comprises pastors and church leaders of Korean-heritage, including those serving in cross-racial/cross-cultural congregations. The caucus conducts meetings and events, sponsors several committees and works with other representative Korean ministry groups in GNJ, across the denomination and in the Northeastern Jurisdiction (NEJ).

GNJ members are excited that the NEJ Korean American Mission (NEJKAM), after being inactive for some time, was revitalized last fall, according to the Rev. Sang Won Doh, Dean of the GNJ Cabinet. Its efforts fueled the development of Korean United Methodists in the jurisdiction.

Retired Bishop Jeremiah Park serves the mission now as resident bishop. And the Rev. Timothy Ahn is its new part-time Mission Superintendent. He serves Arcola Korean UMC in Paramus, NJ, but is set to retire in June after 25 years there.

In 2008, Ahn established and nurtured an English-speaking ministry for young Korean Americans, which became a self-sustaining congregation. He has held several leadership positions within the UMC, including President of the Korean National Caucus in 2012-2013.

The Northeastern Jurisdiction (NEJ) has the strongest presence among Korean-American United Methodists in the U.S., with 74 congregations and 292 clergy. The Northeast is one of the major regions where large numbers of Korean immigrants have settled, and the metropolitan New York/New Jersey area has one of the largest concentrations of Korean Americans.

Several Korean congregations are among the largest churches in the Greater New Jersey and New York conferences in terms of worship attendance and budget. The largest church in both conferences is Korean.

The NEJKAM was active for decades planting new Korean mission churches until Korean immigration slowed for about decades. "As some NEJ Korean churches are disaffiliating from the UMC, said Doh, there is a growing need to restructure the remaining Korean UM churches to advance their mission in a changing environment, while preserving their cultural DNA and faith traditions."

The NEJKAM's newly redefined vision and mission gives him hope, especially its endorsement by the NEJ College of Bishops and Northeast Jurisdictional Conference delegates last November. The bishops wrote a letter to Korean United Methodists across the jurisdiction in December.

"We believe that the NEJKAM, with its recommenced role and task, will help bring vitality, stability, and a promising future to our Korean community," the letter stated. "We also believe that NEJKAM is an effective vehicle to build a stronger partnership among the Korean community and various bodies of our church, including the College of Bishops." 🌈



Introducing a New Streamlined Reporting Process for Church Leaders

By James Lee

For many pastors and church leaders, reporting and form-filling is akin to the dreaded task of sorting through a mountain of laundry on a weekend afternoon—necessary, yet decidedly not exciting. However, things are about to change for the better.

THE NEW FORMS ARE INTENDED TO HELP PASTORS FOCUS ON THEIR COMMON MISSION TO “MAKE DISCIPLES OF JESUS CHRIST FOR THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE WORLD.”

The Greater New Jersey and Eastern Pennsylvania conferences announce an improvement in their church information reporting process with the launch of new auto-populated forms starting April 25. Led by the newly affiliated Data & Strategic Analysis Team, the new forms have been designed to simplify and streamline the reporting process for pastors and church leaders.

Committee reports such as Nominations, Trustees, Finance Committee, Staff-Parish Relations and more will auto-populate into the Charge Conference report—minimizing



EPA&GNJ Mission Data Analyst Ryan Clements introduces EPA staff to the Arena data management system, as EPA CFO/Treasurer Jo Fielding listens. *John Coleman photo*

the repetition required from pastors and committee chairpersons each year. Thus, leaders will only need to fill in information that hasn't been previously submitted.

The new forms are intended to help pastors focus on their common mission to “Make Disciples of Jesus Christ for the Transformation of the World.” Moreover, the reporting deadlines have been spaced out to make the process more manageable for pastors, allowing them to focus on their ministry and lead their congregations forward.

“Every effort to simplify our annual process is appreciated,” said the Rev. Janice Sutton-Lynn of Morrow Memorial UMC in Maplewood, NJ. “If the forms auto-populate from other forms, that will be amazing.”

The launch of the new auto-populated forms is a significant step forward for United Methodists of Greater New Jersey and Eastern Pennsylvania. It represents a commitment to continuous improvement and a willingness to adapt to the changing needs of pastors and church leaders. The affiliated Data & Strategic Analysis Team, led by EPA&GNJ's Jo Fielding and Ryan Clements, has worked tirelessly to bring all of this together for the end-user.

While we are excited about this change, there may be some anxiety around it.

“We want to reassure pastors and church leaders that we are committed to making this transition as smooth as possible for everyone involved,” said Mission Data Analyst Ryan Clements, “We acknowledge that there may be some bumps along the

way, such as a learning curve with the new forms, bugs, and some fields that may not auto-populate 100% accurately during the first round. However, we are dedicated to addressing any issues that arise promptly and efficiently.”

An FAQ page on both the EPA and GNJ webpages will be provided, and EPA&GNJ will provide support and answer any questions pastors may have. The team encourages pastors and church leaders to reach out to their regional administrators with any additional questions or concerns.

So, pastors, get ready to experience a streamlined and simplified reporting process. The new auto-populated forms are here to make your life easier, as you focus on leading the church forward in mission. 🌱

Breakthrough's New Website is Here to Help Revitalize Worship

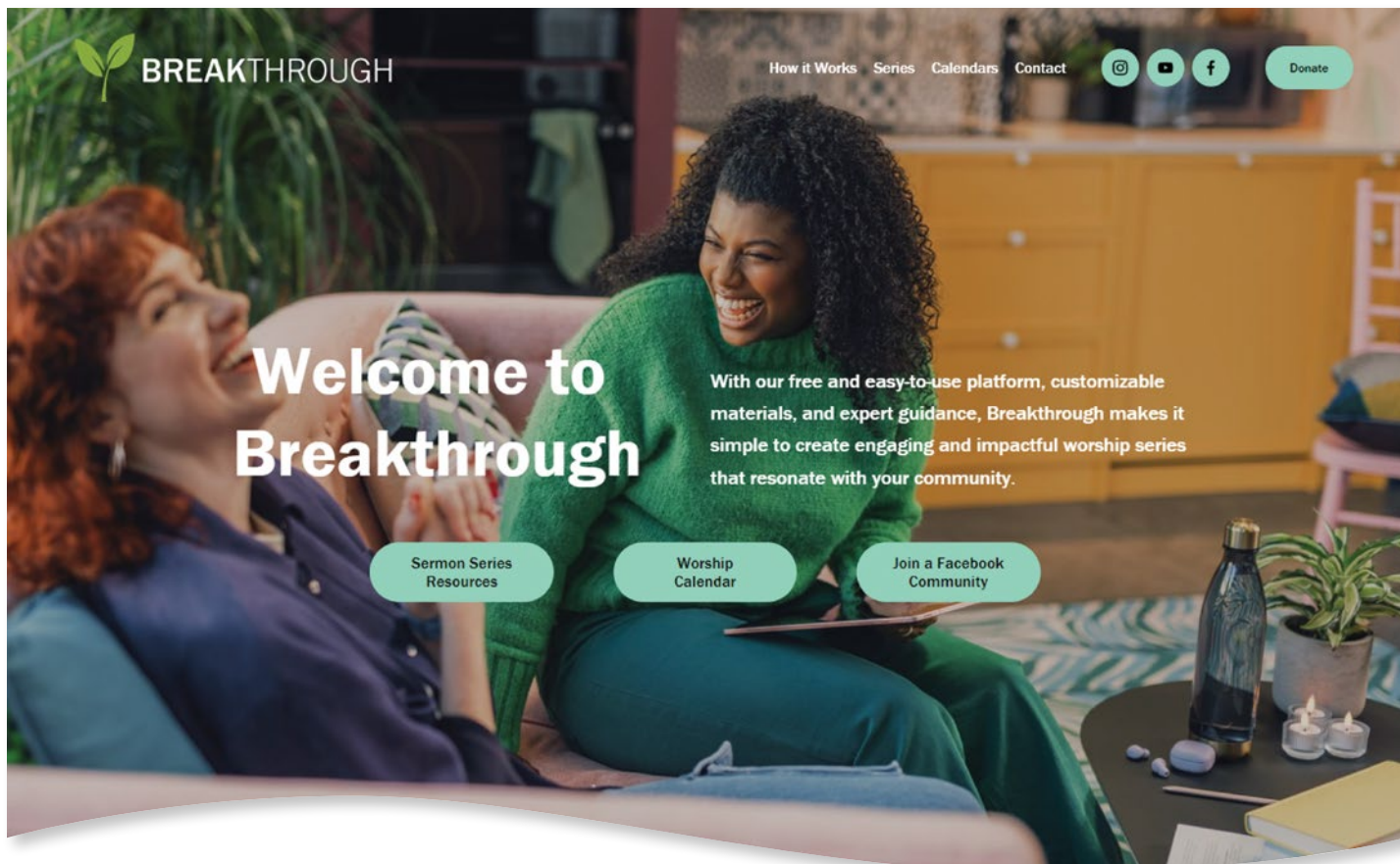
It's here! We've just launched the new colorful, easy-to-use website for our Breakthrough worship resource for United Methodists of Eastern PA and Greater NJ. Check it out at Breakthrough Worship Resources (breakthroughseries.org).

The new site provides easy access to Breakthrough's free, time-saving, creative resources and best practices to help congregations break through ordinary patterns and revitalize their worship to be more insightful and inspiring to hearts and minds.

With each Breakthrough themed worship series, you will spend less time immersed in details and focus on what really matters: preaching the gospel to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Use the Breakthrough Journal for easy access to worship series offering liturgies, creative graphics and videos, song and hymn suggestions, sermon starter materials and more. They're all free and adaptable. The goal is to save pastors planning time and effort, while helping church leaders to learn, grow and serve.

Ready to take your church's sermon series to the next level? Start using Breakthrough today and experience the difference for yourself. Join our Breakthrough Facebook group. Contact Emily Wilton, Breakthrough Coordinator, for more information. 🌱



The New Breakthrough website provides easy access to Breakthrough's free, time-saving, creative resources and best practices to help congregations break through ordinary patterns and revitalize their worship to be more insightful and inspiring to hearts and minds.



Program Seeks Young Black Interns to Explore Pastoral Ministry

Black Methodists for Church Renewal (BMCR) and Strengthening the Black Church for the 21st Century (SBC-21) in the Greater New Jersey Conference have a new pre-ministerial recruitment and orientation program to help youth and young adults of African descent “discern and clarify their call to ministry.”

The Home-Grown Recruitment Internship’s goal is to cultivate within chosen young participants the skillsets they need to one day offer ministry leadership with excellence.

The program seeks recommendations from current leaders to help identify youth and/or young adult prospects, ages 16 to 25, who manifest possible gifts for ministry, as demonstrated by their current work in local churches. The internship will begin July 1, 2023, and end June 30, 2024.

Applicants will undergo a selection process before acceptance into the program. Those accepted will be expected to work

in a predominantly Black church for 20 hours a week, including Sundays, for a weekly stipend.

Interested, eligible persons will need a recommendation from their pastor and written approval from their church’s Staff-Parish Relations Committee (SPRC). Completed applications and recommendations should be emailed to Rosa Williams at rosamw@optonline.net by the deadline is May 30 application deadline.

This is a pilot program; so only two persons will be selected to participate for the first year, starting July 1. All prospective candidates will be interviewed; and interns and pastors of participating churches will receive an orientation to the program. Interns may not be assigned to the church that recommends them.

For more information contact Rosa Williams of the Internship Program Committee at rosamw@optonline.net or 201-833-0352. 🇺🇸



LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

“If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”
-African Proverb

EPA&GNJ leaders are making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. And we offer laity and clergy a wealth of learning opportunities to help make that possible. Register for a course today; and share these valuable opportunities with others. Take your leadership potential to the next level. And take someone else with you.

Leadership Academy courses coming in June:

Building Your Stewardship Team & Pre-work to Launching a Financial Stewardship Campaign—June 1, 7– 8:30 p.m.

Is your congregation struggling to grow stewardship and member giving? Do you want to move toward proportional giving and hold a dynamic, effective stewardship campaign in the fall? This single-session course focuses on building a stewardship & generosity team in your local church.

Healing Communities: Understanding & Developing Criminal Justice Ministries—June 6, 8, 13, 15, 7– 9 p.m. via Zoom.

A national model for leaders to offer restoration and healing for those affected by the criminal justice system and shares how a congregation can be a station of hope. This course is offered in four sessions over a two-week period, with unique learning shared in each session. The maximum class size is 20 participants; so please register early. Registration deadline: May 26.

Learn more about these and other courses at:

[GNJUMC.ORG/LEADERSHIP-ACADEMY](https://gnjumc.org/leadership-academy)



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