

NEW Spirit!

UNITED METHODISTS OF EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA
& GREATER NEW JERSEY

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Glaks Diego Vega photo

IGNITE Excites, Engages Youth with Inspiring Music, Messages, Mission

By John W. Coleman

“Everything was awesome, from the band to the concert! Lydia Sohn is the best speaker. Her messages were practical and at the level of our youth. And her chill demeanor was exactly what I needed and what our kids needed.”

That was one of many such “awesome” responses to the aptly named IGNITE youth conference, September 29 to October 1. Indeed, it exploded with pulsating excitement, powerful music and profound messages of faith that reverberated throughout New Jersey’s Wildwoods Convention Center.



John Coleman Photo

Over 800 youth and adults from the Greater New Jersey, Eastern PA, New York, and Upper New York conferences attended a celebration not to be missed. “IGNITE made me feel like a part of something big and important” said one participant.

In fact, some churches combined their youth groups to attend in larger contingents. Eastern PA’s Hopewell (Downingtown), West Lawn (Reading) and Covenant (Springfield) churches brought about 45 youth together, just one of several ways they are doing collaborative ministry.

“Partnering like this is the future of youth ministry for many of us, especially when attending big events together,” said Caasi Grove, Hopewell’s youth ministry leader. “Only 15 of our 25 youth came. But this way we can give them that old feeling of belonging to a larger youth group. And our youth leaders can support one another.”

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Leadership Academy to Create Preaching Institute funded by \$1.25 Million Grant

The Greater New Jersey Conference has received a \$1,249,980 grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. to develop a Preaching Institute as part of the EPA&GNJ Leadership Academy. GNJ and Eastern PA conferences will collaborate in this new effort, which was one of 81 programs, among various Christian denominations, funded through the Lilly Compelling Preaching Initiative.

“It is our hope that through the Leadership Academy Preaching Institute (LAPI), preachers in EPA&GNJ and beyond



can be empowered and emboldened to take up the task of bearing witness to the good news of the gospel in new ways and with renewed zeal,” wrote Bishop John Schol in the grant application cover letter.

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Bridges Cohort Learns Storytelling

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The Rev. Joseph Jueng, pastor of Pennington UMC, joins Bridges Project cohort companions in experiencing the insightful, connective power of storytelling during their September training event. Register your church team by November 30 for the final Bridges cohort in 2024.

Telos.Studio photo



Missionaries from Tanzania Visit EPA

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FROM LEFT: Ngoy and the Rev. Umba Kalangwa, a missionary couple serving in Tanzania, worshiped and spoke with staff during a visit to the Eastern PA Conference office in mid-October. Here they celebrate Holy Communion with their host, Deaconess Barbara Drake.

Corbin Payne photo

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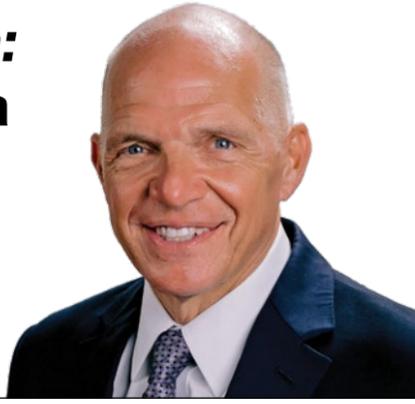
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A MESSAGE FROM OUR BISHOP

The Wesleyan Path: A Guide for Being a United Methodist Disciple of Jesus Christ

Bishop John Schol



Our founder John Wesley had a distinct way of being a Wesleyan Christian which all United Methodists are called to live. It is a path, a route traveled. And the goal of all United Methodists is not only to stay on the right path but to help others join in traveling and staying on that path.

The path is not literally a road to travel, but steps to take in life. One can enter the path at different points, but traveling the entire path over and over is what deepens and enlivens an abundant life. (Jesus said, *I have come that you may have life and have it abundantly.* —JOHN 10:10)

The path is not a duty but a calling, an invitation; and it is compelling. Our calling, our character and values, our means of grace and mission engagement is the DNA of United Methodism.

The Wesleyan Path

Calling, Character, Values, The Means of Grace, and Engagement—United Methodists have a distinctive Wesleyan way of being the church of Jesus Christ.

Calling

The first calling of every United Methodist, lay and clergy, is to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. As disciples, United Methodists are called to be lifelong learners and followers of Jesus Christ who passionately serve God in the church and in the world. Disciples live their baptismal vows, and these vows are the standard for evaluating the calling and engagement of any United Methodist.

Character

Every United Methodist, lay and clergy, is to live by the highest standards of faith, including but not limited to: ethical decision making; care for creation; faithfulness in relationships; ending evil, injustice and oppression; and welcoming and including everyone in our ministries and worship. The ethic of a United Methodist is embodied in faithfulness to the Scriptures, doctrine, teachings and Wesleyan Way of The United Methodist Church.

The character of a United Methodist is encompassed in Wesley's three general rules: *Do no harm, do all the good you can, and stay in love with God. These simple rules are profound and transformative when lived every day.*

Core Values

Grace—God's grace is sufficient for salvation and is offered to all through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Extending God's grace—Grace is extended through the sacraments of communion and baptism to adults, youth, and children, inviting all people into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and by practicing the Wesleyan means of grace.

The Bible—The Bible is the primary authority and revelation for salvation and holy living, and is interpreted through tradition, reason, and experience.

Personal and social holiness—United Methodists grow spiritually and are accountable for witness, service and doing justice in the world.

Connectionalism—United Methodists are connected through a web of congregations and organizations that share a common mission, doctrine, apportioned financial mission support, itineracy and holy conferencing.

Diversity and Inclusion—United Methodists welcome, include and involve all people in the life of the church guided by the scriptures, doctrine and Wesleyan Way of the church.

Itineracy—United Methodist bishops and superintendents teach, support, and practice an open itineracy in making appointments to strengthen the mission of congregations, and taking into consideration differences among congregations in theology, language spoken, leadership needs, and contexts.

The Means of Grace

United Methodists practice the *means of grace*. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, taught that while God's grace is unearned, we are not to be idle waiting to experience grace. Rather, we engage in the *means of grace*. God's mystery works in the hearts and thinking of disciples through the *means of grace*, hastening, strengthening and confirming faith so that God's grace pervades in and through disciples. The *means of grace* are categorized into *works of piety* and *works of mercy*.

Works of Piety

Individual Practices include reading, meditating on and studying the Scriptures, prayer, fasting, regularly attending worship, holistic healthy living and sharing our faith with others.

Communal Practices include regularly sharing in worship, the sacraments, Christian conferencing (accountability to one another in small groups), and Bible study.



Steward Warner photo

Works of Mercy

Individual Practices include doing good works, visiting the sick, visiting those in prison, feeding the hungry, and giving generously to the needs of others.

Communal Practices include advocating for and seeking justice, ending oppression, injustice, and discrimination (for instance, Wesley challenged Methodists to end slavery), and addressing the needs of others, particularly the poor, marginalized, oppressed, children, and elderly vulnerable persons.

Living the Membership Vows

Every United Methodist is called to witness and actively participate in the life of the church as they fulfill their membership vows.

- Renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of the world, and repent of their sin.
- Accept the freedom and power God gives them to resist evil, injustice and oppression in whatever form they present themselves.
- Confess Jesus Christ as Savior, put their whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as their Lord.
- Remain faithful members of Christ's holy church and serve as Christ's representatives in the world.
- Be loyal to Christ through The United Methodist Church and do all in their power to strengthen its ministries.
- Faithfully participate in its ministries by their prayers, their presence, their gifts, their service and their witness.
- Receive and profess the Christian faith as contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

More specifically, this calls all United Methodists to engage in:

- worship, faith sharing and intentional faith formation through small groups, including children and youth ministries;
- engaging in ministries of witness, mercy and justice in the community and the world; and
- giving generously to the mission and ministry of the church.

These practices were initiated by the disciples of the first-century church. (ACTS 2:41-47)

Active engagement in the mission and Wesleyan Way of The United Methodist Church keeps disciples on the path to loving and serving God. All United Methodists are called to daily live *The Wesleyan Path* creating habits that become part of our nature.

United Methodist congregations and organizations are to teach, invite and offer meaningful and relevant opportunities for people to participate in and practice The Wesleyan Path. What does it look like for you to embrace and live and walk more on this path in your life?

Keep the faith!

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



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Members of the current Bridges Project cohort experience the potential of candid storytelling to connect with each other's lives and find commonality amid diversity, during their September training event. Register your church team by November 30 for the final Bridges cohort in 2024. *Telos.Studio photos*

Experience Joyful Gift of Bridges on Journey of Hope

Sign up by Nov. 30 for final cohort in 2024

The Bridges Project offers a key pathway on Greater New Jersey's Journey of Hope to help congregations engage with the diversity of their surrounding communities.

The Bridges experience, offered to church teams gathered in cohorts, can equip church members with the tools and abilities needed to start honest conversations, share in the language of candid storytelling, learn about their surrounding communities and cultivate joyful relationships across lines of difference.

Never have our churches needed this gift, this joy more than now.

GNJ's Bridges Project, funded by a Lilly Endowment grant, takes participating churches through a 12-month process that makes this kind of joy more possible. The third and final cohort in this program is being formed now and will engage in Bridges together in 2024.

Churches on a Journey of Hope that want to benefit from Bridges should email Alyssa Ruch, director, at aruch@gnjumc.org by November 30. The third and final cohort will launch in February 2024.

The cohort gathers together over three weekends to help them explore

and gain tools to use throughout the year to better engage their communities. The three 2024 gatherings for the final cohort will be February 2-4, May 3-5 and August 23-25.

Visit the Bridges section of GNJ's website to view short videos where 2023 cohort participants reflect on their learning experiences with storytelling and how it impacted them. Also, read new articles there in the coming months about how Bridges participants are using and benefiting

from the experience in their churches and communities.

"Our connections matter, and each of us has a story worth sharing and worth hearing," says Ruch. "We help facilitate and provide tools to create a safe space where people are not fearing judgement but can be the authentic persons God created them to be. Every act of love ushers God into the world, and each story has a way of drawing forth the sacred."

Contact Ruch today, at aruch@gnjumc.org, if you want your church to have the joyful gift and experience of Bridges on its Journey of Hope. 🌱



Alyssa Ruch

Leadership Academy

Continued from page 1

Schol cited the growing difficulties preachers face in bearing the good news, especially during bad times for many in their churches and parishes. "As they watch the news and walk through their communities each week, our preachers bear witness to weighty realities like racial inequity, gun violence, political polarization, a widespread mental health crisis and the lingering effects of a global pandemic," he wrote.

"United Methodist preachers also find themselves facing the realities of division within our denomination, oftentimes within their own congregations," he continued. "When they sit to craft their weekly sermon, these sobering realities serve as a lens through which they seek to faithfully interpret scripture with their listening communities. When they ascend pulpits, they do so in the midst of people who ache for a message of hope in scary, uncertain times."

The aim of the new initiative is to foster and support preaching that inspires, encourages and guides people to come to know and love God and to live out their

Christian faith more fully. EPA&GNJ will provide instruction, coaching and support for both preachers and Staff-Parish Relations Committees to help them foster preaching excellence and effectiveness in their pulpits.

The Leadership Academy is a hybrid continuing education program with courses designed to empower disciple-making leaders and grow vital mission congregations, fully engaged in their communities through ministries of witness, mercy and justice.

The institute's 10-month intensive certificate program will cultivate compelling preaching that leads to congregational vitality. Through dynamic online courses, cohorts and coaching



The Rev. Ronell Howard, Superintendent of GNJ's Central District, preaching here at her January installation service, played a key role in writing the Lilly Endowment Compelling Preaching Initiative Grant and will serve on the Leadership Academy project team. *Corbin Payne photo*

for both pastors and congregations, the LAPI will provide diverse, gifted preachers with fresh perspectives, enriching resources, and holy companionship as they engage in their unique ministries of proclamation.

Missionaries from Tanzania Visit EPA Conference, Churches

By John W. Coleman

The Rev. Umba and Ngoy Kalangwa, a missionary couple from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) serving in Tanzania, visited the Eastern PA Conference in mid-October to worship, fellowship and share inspiring information about their mission work. Deaconess Barbara Drake hosted them, as EPA Global Ministries Secretary and Chairwoman of EPA's Global Ministries Team.

The Kalangwas have a covenant partnership with West Grove UMC, where they visited October 15 to worship and speak with the congregation. In addition, they visited the Eastern PA Conference for staff worship October 16, and went to Havertown UMC October 18 to speak and fellowship with the congregation at its Hope Campus Chapel.

The United Methodist presence in Tanzania began in the early 1990s from the mission outreach efforts of the North Katanga Annual Conference in the DRC. Umba Kalangwa was one of six clergy assigned to do evangelism in Tanzania. He is now a District Superintendent, Director of the Morogoro Pastors Training Center, Coordinator of the Reaching Out Ministry in Rural Areas, and Manager of the Wesley Primary School.

Ngoy Kalangwa directs the Susannah Wesley Education for women and the Health Care Center in the Morogoro area, while also assisting her husband in various ministries there.



Rev. Umba and Ngoy Kalangwa

Brenda Binns photo

Sent to Tanzania in 1992

The Rev. Mutwale Mushidi and his wife Kabaka Alphonsine are also missionaries from the DRC serving in Tanzania and are supported by churches of the Eastern PA Conference. Both missionary couples were sent to Tanzania in 1992 and later became UM Global Ministries missionaries about 20 years ago.

Mutwale Mushidi and Umba Kalangwa joined other clergy in Tanzania in welcoming Bishop John Schol and clergy from the Greater New Jersey Conference in late May for their Pastors School. The clergy there expressed gratitude for GNJ's teaching and financial support, including the new *For Tanzania* fundraising campaign to build a church in the capital city of Dar es Salaam and to help pay pastors a living wage for a year.

You can meet Mushidi and Kalangwa when both are featured on Global Ministries' online iteration program #StillInMission, Episode 60, via Zoom, on Thursday, November 2, at 12 PM. You must register to attend this event and choose one of the missionaries for a brief breakout session. Learn more and register at <https://umcmmission.org/stillinmission/>. 🌱



"The Lilly grant will enable EPA&GNJ to build upon our Wesleyan legacy as we focus on homiletical renewal through the development of the Leadership Academy Preaching Institute," said the Rev. Dawn Taylor-Storm, EPA&GNJ Director of Leadership Development, who will oversee the LAPI project. "The institute will include preaching summits, coaching for preachers, cohorts to study and dream creatively together in community, and a fresh embrace of 'open air' preaching through the cultivation of online and hybrid worship experiences and use of digital space."

The program will be designed to benefit preachers of all levels of skill, confidence, experience and educational background, Taylor-Storm explained, "with the understanding that no preacher is ever finished learning and honing their craft. In the Leadership Academy Preaching Institute, all teachers are learners, and all learners are teachers."

"We are grateful for Lilly Endowment's investment in the future of our preachers and congregations," said Bishop John Schol. "We have excellent preachers in EPA&GNJ, and we look forward to working with clergy who want to continue to grow their preaching." 🌱

Ignite 2023

Continued from page 1

Other attendees spoke or wrote of finding “opportunities to strengthen our faith,” seeing youth “relating to one another and making new friends,” and “helping youth see that they are not alone, that their peers also love Jesus, and that they are loved just as they are by God, by their leaders and friends.”

Other comments:

“Our youth seemed comfortable, and even the first-timers were engaged... Worship doesn’t have to be boring to them.”

“This was the first IGNITE for all the kids in our church (my third), and we were talking about IGNITE 2024 the whole ride back. What an amazing experience. God loves you to infinity!”

“As our church had not been since 2019, every kid with us was experiencing their first IGNITE at the same time. I was experiencing my first (as a youth leader) in charge. I have been so incredibly moved by the experience, and I know my youth have been as well, since we all left talking about IGNITE 2024. What a blessing this program is; and I so look forward to the years ahead, as the number of youth who get to hear the Good Word will continue to grow!”

“IGNITE 2023 brought together youth from four conferences for a weekend of powerful worship, reflective messages, hands-on mission, small groups and of course, transformational relationships,” said event coordinator Mecan Payne. “It was a weekend undeniably filled with the Holy Spirit’s presence. The IGNITE Team is honored, once again, to witness God impacting and changing the lives of young people.” 🌟

IGNITE Sets Hundreds of Young Faithful Hearts on Fire

“God sees us and loves us, no matter how unworthy we may think we are!” The Rev. Lydia Sohn’s blessing reverberated like a pulsing heartbeat throughout the IGNITE youth conference, whose excitement filled the Wildwoods New Jersey Convention Center from September 29 to October 1.

The writer, mother and pastor’s gentle wisdom about the divine gifts of faith, forgiveness, freedom and family punctuated a weekend full of ascendant music, bringing together hundreds of Christian youth and their adult leaders.

They came together in front of the stage to feed on generous helpings of soul-searching lyrics and compelling melodies by North Point Worship from Georgia, contrasting with the energetic, percussive and profound performances of Christian rap and spoken word by Ripe Creatives from Philadelphia.

They came together in tender, supportive embraces of one another, in many small-group discussions and in playful games. They came together in the hands-on assembling and packing of 21,168 nutritious meals to help Rise Against Hunger feed children and families around the world.

They came together to receive the gift of Holy Communion and also to give over \$5,400 to the Greater New Jersey’s campaign to build a church and help pay pastors in Tanzania.

While youth were assembling and packing Rise Against Hunger meals, their adult leaders attended breakout sessions on Safer Sanctuaries and Providing Pastoral Care to Youth. And youth and adults engaged daily in intimate, small-group discussions on what they were learning and feeling during the event.

‘Where Young People Encounter Christ’

“IGNITE continues to be a powerful experience where young people encounter Christ, Christian community and the outpouring of God’s grace,” said



Youth and adults assembled and packed 21,168 nutritious meals to help Rise Against Hunger fight food insecurity worldwide. Corbin Payne photo



The Rev. Lydia Sohn



Ripe Creatives Christian rappers Diomer (front) and Aable perform high-energy music with lyrical wordplay for excited young listeners, who also enjoyed meeting the artists at their display table. Corbin Payne photo



Mecan Payne, IGNITE coordinator

Corbin Payne photo



FROM LEFT: The Rev. Lydia Sohn, Bishop John Schol and Bishop Hector Burgos all provided inspiration for the youth and adults at IGNITE.

Glaks Diego Vega photo

Bishop John Schol. He greeted the crowd and served them communion, aided by Bishop Hector Burgos, his former district superintendent and now episcopal leader of the Upper New York Area. The two helped oversee the birth of IGNITE in 2014 and led the IGNITE staff and audience in celebrating eight years, including a resurgence after a two-year hiatus due to the Covid pandemic.

“Over the years I have witnessed IGNITE transform the lives of young people, youth leaders and youth groups,” said Bishop Schol, who also celebrated the generosity of their exemplary giving to the *For Tanzania* campaign. “I am grateful for our youth leaders who continue to help shape the lives of young people during IGNITE and throughout the year.”

The staff and audience applauded, prayed for and presented the hoops-loving Schol with a parting

Popular Christian band North Point Worship, from Georgia, enlivened spirits and touched hearts among their appreciative young audience.

Glaks Diego Vega photo

gift—a signed basketball—to bid him farewell before he retires in August 2024. IGNITE 2024 is scheduled for October 4-6, with the theme “&GO!”

“We are still basking in the glow of the incredible IGNITE Conference,” said lead organizer and NextGen program specialist

Mecan Payne. “This year’s theme, *Belong*, truly resonated with each of us.” 🌟



NEXT GENERATION
UNITED METHODISTS
OF GREATER NEW JERSEY

Upcoming 2024 NextGen Events: Youth Leader Days

January 27 at Hopewell UMC in Downingtown, PA

February 24 at Aldersgate UMC in East Brunswick, NJ

PATHWAYS TO TRANSFORMATION:

Cultivating Wholeness and Fruitfulness

By the Rev. Gina Yeske

The church as a living, dynamic spiritual body is constantly evolving and seeking to adapt to the changing needs of its members and society. Recent upheavals in our world have accelerated changes in our churches that were already underway, thrusting us into a season of transformation and sparking fresh expressions of faith. The success of our congregations through this new season will depend on the deliberate choices and new directions we choose to embrace.



In 2008 it caused quite a stir when religious scholar Phyllis Tickle introduced the concept of the Great Emergence, suggesting that Christianity undergoes significant changes roughly every 500 years. In 2023, for the faithful pastors and members of our churches, it seems like we are indeed living through one of these pivotal, emergent periods.

As we stand at this crossroads, both clergy and laity alike are asking, "What is next for our congregation? How can we honor our spiritual heritage while forging a hopeful future?"

In these transformative times it's essential to have a roadmap for the next steps. Pathways to Congregational Fruitfulness & Health can be that roadmap to help your congregation reach its fullest potential in ministry and mission. Pathways isn't just a program; it's a promise of renewal with the power to reshape not only individual churches but also the very communities they serve.

Over the last year, over 100 churches in both EPA and GNJ have enrolled in Pathways. These are churches of all sizes, in all kinds of settings, with different passions, gifts and desired outcomes. They have engaged in candid, and at times challenging, conversations, delving into what has changed in their congregations and what might be hindering them from taking the next faithful step.

'Finding New Ways to Connect'

Churches participating in Pathways right now are finding new ways to connect with their neighbors, right sizing their budgets and addressing how to work through disagreements. These congregations have become champions of missional living and are imagining new ways to use their buildings.

This dedication to growth and renewal is a reminder to the inner strength and spiritual resilience of our church communities. Through Pathways, these congregations are not just facing change; they are embracing it. And their stories are shaping the future of ministry in EPA and GNJ. Their stories remind us that faith can guide us through change with a profound sense of purpose.

Starting this fall, we're rolling out Pathways as both a guided process and a self-led resource. Regardless of the direction it chooses, your congregation will work as a cohesive team under your pastor's guidance.

Opting for the guided process entails partnering with a Pathways facilitator who will work alongside your pastor to guide the process for your congregation. Or you



can choose to move through the process yourselves, with your pastor guiding the journey through a series of probing questions and subsequent action steps for your church's future.

If you find yourself uncertain about the best fit for your setting, no problem. You can schedule a call with one of our facilitators for a brainstorming session. For further assistance and guidance reach out to our Pathways champions, Steve Morton at smorton@epaumc.church (EPA) or Gina Yeske at gyeske@gnjumc.org (GNJ).

Exploring Pathways

Your Pathways team will begin by evaluating present circumstances and future possibilities, while helping your church assess its strengths and obstacles. Then you will engage in visioning, planning and executing goals. This commitment demands time and dedication.

The planning, strategy-setting, and action-taking phases may extend from three to 18 months with ongoing efforts. As you complete initial goals, you'll be ready to embrace new ones.

Pathways offers six distinct means to guide your congregation's growth, vitality, and mission. These Pathways help you discern God's calling, reverse decline, build on strengths, and align mission, goals, activities, people, and resources to help fulfill God's purpose. Let's take a glimpse into each pathway.

Congregational Vitality: If your congregation is eager to infuse fresh vitality into worship experiences, small groups, mission endeavors, welcoming newcomers, and fostering a culture of generosity, this pathway revitalizes these fundamental aspects of your congregation's identity and purpose.

Sustainability: If your church seeks strategies for long-term sustainability, this pathway equips you with the tools to maintain physical infrastructure, strengthen leadership support, and fulfill ministry budgets, ensuring a solid foundation for your church's future.

Community Engagement: If your goal is to build dynamic partnerships within your community and collaborate actively for a brighter shared future, this

pathway is your ideal choice. It's tailored for congregations committed to community development or aspiring to become a Hope Center.

Next Generation: Are you looking to inspire and nurture the faith of the next generation? This pathway empowers you to invest in youth ministry and cultivate future generations of disciples who not only connect and grow but also assume leadership roles within the church.

Journey of Hope: If your congregation is ready to take meaningful action toward fostering a more just and equitable society, the Journey of Hope pathway is designed for you. It courageously addresses racism as a sin against God and embarks on a transformative journey rooted in personal growth, profound understanding and a proactive dismantling of racial inequities.

Conflict Resolution: In cases where your congregation seeks guidance in resolving conflicts constructively while fostering harmony, the Conflict Resolution pathway is here to provide valuable support and strategies.

As we move into this new era, let us do so with hope and anticipation, united in unwavering commitment to the mission of the Church. The road ahead offers hope, and the opportunity for growth and renewal awaits your congregation. Together, we can create brighter, more connected and more impactful communities for all. Let us step forward with faith, for this is our time, and the pathway toward transformation awaits us. 🌈

Sign up for Pathways and be part of a transformative process that leverages your strengths, fosters collaboration, and empowers you to create meaningful change.

For EPA Registration visit www.epaumc.org/pathways/. For GNJ Registration visit www.gnjumc.org/pathways/.

This isn't just about your church; it's about your community, your mission, and mobilizing your faith in action. We look forward to partnering with you in this exciting endeavor. If you have any questions or need assistance, please don't hesitate to reach out to us. Address all questions to Megan McKay, Resource Manager at mmckay@gnjumc.org.



"Creating a Culture of Call"

"Creating a Culture of Call" was the topic of two recent dialogues of alumni/alumnae, faculty, administrators and students at Palmer Theological Seminary in September and Lancaster Theological Seminary (LTS) in October. Pictured here at LTS are (from left) keynote speaker the Rev. Steve Morton, EPA's Leadership Development Manager, and discussion leaders: the Rev. Carolyn Williams (LTS); the Rev. Jenny Freymoyer, West District Superintendent; Rev. Darryl Stephens (LTS); and the Rev. Kathy Harvey-Nelson (LTS). Not pictured is the Acting Associate Dean Greg Carey (LTS), who also spoke.

Participants both here and at Palmer discussed "advancing theological education to meet the changing needs of faith communities," including new curricula and practices to help more people of faith discern and seek education and opportunities in response to the call to ministry. 🌈

DISASTER CASE MANAGEMENT: *Being a Light in the Darkness, Part 1**

By Krista B. Jefferies

Unfortunately, many have witnessed firsthand the destructive power of Mother Nature. Natural disasters occur everywhere, leaving cities and towns blanketed in ruin. Victims of Hurricane Ida are still trying to recover from nature's wrath from two years ago.

Helping people come back from such devastation is hard work. But when people's lives fall apart, there are important individuals behind the scenes helping to piece things back together. Disaster case managers give of themselves to help disaster survivors get the assistance they need; and they should be recognized for the good work they do.

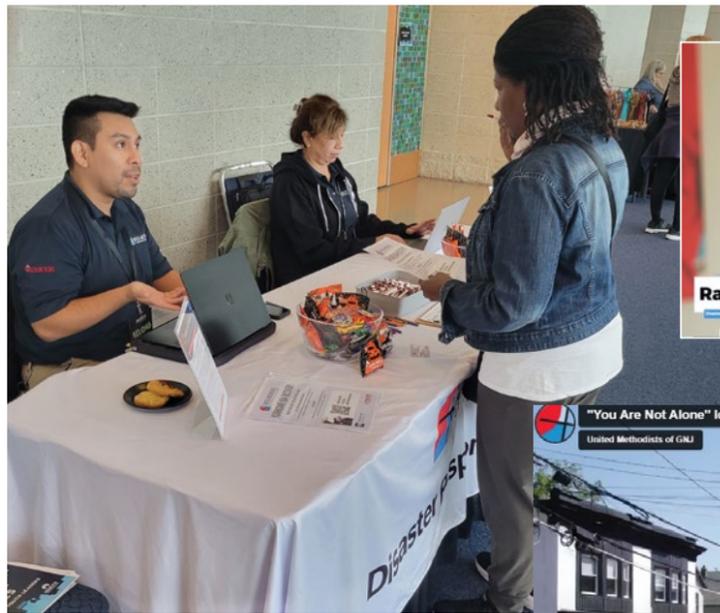
Survivor Maria Castrillo recalls her hurricane ordeal as terrifying. With no warning, her apartment was suddenly under water, trapping her family there all day. Eventually, they had to leave carrying bins of clothes, treading through dirty water, her three children following with backpacks filled with some clothes and essentials. They walked miles to a shelter that was full, and then had to travel by bus to another shelter. They stayed for two weeks and then moved into a hotel for six months.

Everything they left behind was contaminated or destroyed and had to be thrown out. "We had to start from zero," Maria says. FEMA gave them some funds to pay for the hotel, but it wasn't nearly enough. She tried to use her savings, but it still wasn't enough.

A Blessing to Many Survivors

The United Methodist Church of Greater New Jersey has been a blessing to many survivors like Maria, offering them major assistance through Disaster Case Management and often doing more than the government. Case manager Bianca Shumanov directed Maria to resources she didn't know about, and even helped her get TRA (temporary rental assistance) from Social Services. With Bianca's help, Maria received funding from Compass 82 and the Salvation Army to help rebuild her life.

Disaster recovery is both challenging and rewarding. The essential partnership between case managers and clients is built on communication, resourcefulness and a tremendous amount of trust and support. Disaster relief could not take place without financial assistance, which is why case managers are grateful



Raul Nombera-Bueno (left) and Bianca Shumanov shared disaster response volunteer opportunities and other information with IGNITE 2023 attendees at their popular display table.

John Coleman photo

for local partners who have aided their boots-on-the-ground efforts.

New Jersey Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (NJVOAD) is a network of recovery groups that provides a wide range of services to promote resiliency. Compass 82, with funds from the American Red Cross, helps communities navigate difficulties in disaster recovery. The Salvation Army's services go beyond relief to recovery, providing food, shelter, household needs and emotional support. The United Way of New Jersey is also a generous source of funding, resources and volunteers. And the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) joins local churches in providing grants and donations to support people in need.

Disaster Case Management Supervisor Raul Nombera spends most of his time behind the scenes working with generous partners. His job is also to make sure everything runs smoothly and that his own team follows through with goals and submits forms properly.

Meanwhile, Bianca works tirelessly, researching programs and resources and trying to connect clients with helpful partner agencies and grants, especially for Spanish-speaking clients for whom navigating the system is even harder. She goes above and beyond her regular duties to do

whatever it takes to make people's lives whole again. "I have the resources at my fingertips," Bianca says, "and I don't mind doing it."



Raul Nombera-Bueno



Bianca Shumanov



There are many steps to her work, starting with a screening to see if clients are eligible, according to program guidelines. Then comes a face-to-face visit in the home, if the family is not displaced, to get a profile of their situation and their needs.

Next Bianca goes back to her case management team to present her case and advocate for helping the client. Their approval leads to a return visit to verify needed documents and start the process. If rental assistance, furniture or household items are needed, Bianca will work with local partners to make it happen.

Emotional Support for Children

She may also try to procure emotional support services, especially for children traumatized by disaster. Hurricane Ida's flooding struck in the middle of the night while people were asleep. Some had to wait until morning to leave, but those at risk of drowning had to get out immediately, while trying to save their children, elderly relatives and pets. So, it's understandable that trauma would result.

The full extent of the damage, both physical and emotional, is not always evident because people often just adapt to a bad situation if they have no other choice. One thing that often goes unseen is mold. It's a silent killer that many people are still dealing with two years after the hurricane.

A lot of people are still trying to recover physically and mentally. "Even now when it rains," says Maria, "I get so scared because I don't know what's

going to happen." But having Bianca's constant help gives her comfort.

However, constant helpfulness can take a toll on case managers as well. "Many of these survival stories are upsetting," Bianca explains. "And two years later they are still stressed and traumatized." When she feels the emotional toll on herself, she puts her health care training to good use and manages her own emotions. "You can't help people if you're traumatized yourself," she said. "Of course, you have empathy, but you have to push through it to focus on the client's needs and get the job done. Then you can grieve later."

'It Felt Like Someone Had My Back'

Maria appreciates that focus on her needs. "Bianca has been an angel, getting me rental assistance, furniture, new appliances, and making everything so much easier," she said. "I'm grateful for everything she did. It felt like someone had my back and I wasn't alone. She made it easier to overcome and feel normal again."

GNJ's disaster case managers continue to be a light in the darkness for so many in need. People need to know they are there to offer help and hope. Maria went through so much and wanted to give up before she met Bianca. Her advice to anyone in her situation is, "Never give up. You can always come out of the storm."

"We are still here, trying to assist more hurricane survivors," said Raul. "We have made a lot of progress with people's recovery, but we know there is still more work to be done. There are still more people out there who need help. We want our community's help in pushing our name out there to help reach anyone who needs us." 🇺🇸

Read Part 2 of this extended article on GNJ's Disaster Recovery Case Management efforts on the GNJ website in December 2023.

For more information about GNJ's hurricane relief ministry and to donate needed funds, visit our web page "A Future with Hope" (<https://www.gnjumc.org/afwh/>). Watch our video, "You Are Not Alone," available in English and Spanish. Also, visit our Volunteer web page and watch the video, "Rebuild Homes, Rebuild Lives: A Call for Volunteers."

For more information contact Andrea Wren-Hardin, GNJ Disaster Recovery Coordinator at awrenhardin@gnjumc.org.



HURRICANE IDA RECOVERY

GREATER NEW JERSEY UNITED METHODISTS provide:

FREE DISASTER CASE MANAGEMENT SERVICES

To assist households in coordinating necessary services and resources to address complex recovery needs.

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GNJ Disaster Response Case Managers (from left) Andy Chan, Bianca Shumanov and Raul Nombera-Bueno. John Coleman photo



Breakthrough Creative Worship Resources Impact Churches Near and Far

By John W. Coleman

Breakthrough, the increasingly popular worship resource, is breaking through our over-reliance on ordinary worship themes and patterns, as many churches now enjoy its extraordinary approaches to preaching, teaching, learning and celebrating our faith. The easy-to-use, time-saving worship resources include liturgies, sermon ideas, small-group study and activity guides, plus high-quality promotional graphics, videos and templates.

Breakthrough is also breaking through Greater New Jersey's conference borders. Eastern PA churches are using Breakthrough's resources; and Eastern PA writers are participating in creating resources for 2024. Meanwhile, pastors and churches beyond our region are letting Breakthrough coordinator Emily Wilton know how much they are using and appreciating the various series as well. (See some testimonies below.)



The current fall series, *Everybody Tell Somebody* confirms for all that "our faith grows as we share it, and the Bible teaches us how to do that." The series acknowledges that faith-sharing can seem difficult and feel intrusive at first. But it can also feel gratifying and exciting when we embrace Christ's Great Commission—especially his promise to always be with us. We soon learn that a faith worth having is a faith worth sharing. Learn more. Watch and use the video.

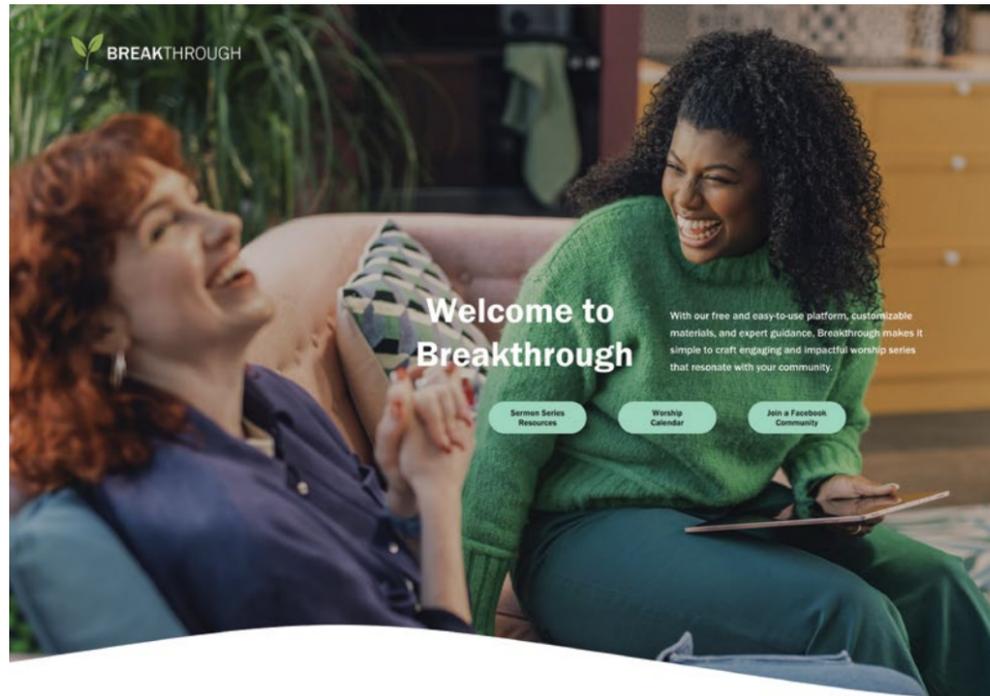


Next up is Prepare, a worship series perfect for Advent and Christmas, useful from December 1 through Christmas. As we make holiday plans and preparations for Christmas, this series bids us to ask, "Who are we really preparing for?" Use these resources to help your congregation hear God's call to prepare for the one who came and will come again.

The weekly themes, inspired by the Gospels, are: "Keep Awake!" "Get Ready!" "Testify!" "Be Courageous!" "Go!" And finally, "Worship and Bless." Hear these imperatives as an invitation to strip away all the fuss and ready your heart and life for the change that is coming when Jesus gets here.

Breakthrough's Non-Seasonal Series Offer More

While Breakthrough's series are typically created and used for Christian and regular calendar seasons—Lent, Easter, Advent, Summer, Fall and so on—we have broken through that pattern, too, by adding two series that focus on special discipleship and mission opportunities for our churches.



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.



The Generous Stewardship & Generosity Campaign Series is ideal anytime, for any church that's planning to launch a stewardship campaign, as many do in the fall. It teaches us to focus less on having the "good life" externally, which can leave one unsatisfied, and focus more on living Christ's good news internally, which teaches us to seek first the Kingdom of God to find true contentment, freedom and joy in abundance. And Jesus shows us the way there, which is through living a generous life. Use this series to help your



church members learn lessons that will last them a lifetime.

The timely *For Tanzania* series can engage churches in worship and small-group studies to enhance their participation in GNJ's ambitious fundraising campaign to support our United Methodist mission partners in Tanzania. The "For Tanzania 2024" campaign, set to run until December 31, 2023, seeks to raise \$100,000, which will aid in constructing a new, much-needed church in the capital city of Dar es Salaam (for \$60,000) and also provide the gift of a year's worth of

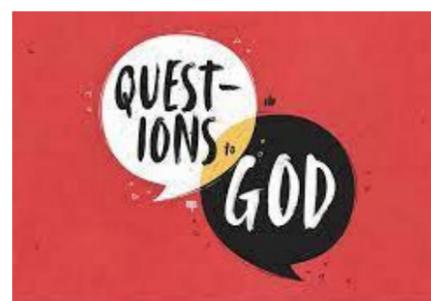
living wages to all Tanzanian pastors (for \$40,000). Our hard-working but low-paid clergy siblings there are building a United Methodist presence that is still new but growing fast.

These creative, comprehensive, well-constructed and adaptable Breakthrough worship series can bless any congregation's worship experience and unburden any pastor's busy schedule. That's why they are so popular among churches near and far. They also offer mission and community outreach ideas to fit many different contexts.

'An Amazing Resource for All of Our Churches'

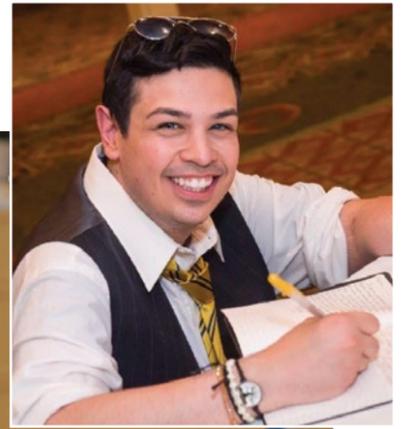
"Breakthrough is such an amazing resource for all of our churches; the small-group resources take minimal prep time, and can easily be led by laity," wrote the Rev. Schuyler Berdan, pastor of Calvary UMC in Dumont, in his Breakthrough testimony. "I'm so grateful to Emily and the entire team for taking on this tremendous task of giving us top-of-the-line resources that help us relate to our people, and that have brought us closer to God than ever!"

For the Rev. Mia Crosthwaite, pastor of Kuna UMC near Boise, Idaho, it felt "God-inspired" when she used the very popular Questions to God series



for Lent. "People who hadn't been coming to church started attending every week because they found the questions so relevant. Online viewers and sermon podcast downloads increased dramatically. Holy week attendance, which is usually about 30 percent of regular worship attendance, increased to above 50 percent."

Rev. Schuyler Berdan



Emily Wilton

Pastor Crosthwaite attributes this increase to the real-world questions that the series focused on. One week, when she had a medical emergency and a last-minute guest preacher deviated from the series, church members reached out to ask when they would be addressing that week's question. "We don't skip questions!" they said.

Crosthwaite uses Breakthrough's series regularly. She says they increase engagement by giving her congregation something to look forward to. She has seen a 17 percent increase in average worship attendance since last year and attributes that, in part, to how Breakthrough is working for her church.

Wilton is receiving more glowing testimonies about the use of Breakthrough from church leaders in Wisconsin, Louisiana, Indiana, Kentucky and elsewhere. "Earlier this year, I even heard from a church in Singapore who wanted to use it!" she reported. "As coordinator, I am excited to see the growing usage of our worship series resources across the United States and the world.

"Since our new website launched in April 2023," she adds, "our resources have become more accessible and easily searchable for those outside of EPA&GNJ." The new Breakthrough website is receiving about 1,500 clicks per series, five times the number of clicks received before its launch; and it's getting more than 2,000 unique visitors per month.

"Churches can use or change as much or as little of a series as they want, or simply use it as inspiration," Wilton explained. "Users have also expressed their appreciation for the Wesleyan perspective from which sermon outlines are written, unlike many other popular sermon resources."

Breakthrough is also gaining traction and helping more churches break through the ordinary because "it is more than a resource," she said, "it is a community. Our Facebook groups have become a place for sharing ideas, collaborating and asking questions, both about Breakthrough and about doing ministry more generally."

Visit the new Breakthrough website at breakthroughseries.org.

A Transformed Church Parsonage Becomes Home to Ukrainian Refugees

By John W. Coleman

EDDYSTONE, PA

This grew from being just a project to becoming a home.” That’s how Eddystone United Methodist Church describes its journey—an inspiring labor of love—that converted its once dilapidated, abandoned parsonage into a comfortable new home for refugees who journeyed there from war-torn Ukraine.

The parsonage might just represent a crossroads of journeys for the church and the two unrelated families who now reside there as friends and neighbors: Oleksii and Maryna Zentsev and Igor and Olha Gluschenko with their 11-year-old daughter Masha.

That crossroads was celebrated in a joyous housewarming party on Sunday, October 15, as Eddystone UMC’s friends and neighbors—including some from other churches—got to tour the renovated home, greet the two families and sample several of their Ukrainian dishes.

The historic church, built in 1891 by the town’s first mayor and nestled in a small community surrounded by industrial complexes, was almost closed three years ago. The tiny, aged congregation’s longtime pastor had retired, they had no vision for their future, and they were no longer gathering for worship, in the midst of the Covid pandemic.

But South District Superintendent Evelyn Kent Clark asked the Rev. John Lafferty, a part-time local pastor, to go there and help the church stay open just a bit longer if he could.

When he attended his first church board of trustees meeting, the members had decided to sell the parsonage, built in 1907, to gain needed revenue. No one had lived there in nearly 18 years, but it was in disrepair, with inadequate plumbing and electricity, and full of donated clothes collected to be given away. Still, the new pastor suggested they explore how to clean out, repair and convert the old, abandoned house for use in mission.

After discarding several unworkable ideas, the Russian invasion of Ukraine in early 2022 and the resulting evacuation of Ukrainian refugees gave them a new idea to provide a new home for refugee families. Thus, their journey began.

From a Liability to an Asset for Mission

“We took something that was a liability, that was becoming dangerous because it was falling apart,” said Lafferty’s wife Jennifer Lafferty, a Certified Lay Minister. “But we turned it into an asset; and we didn’t take a dollar from the church or from the conference. We went out and raised the money.”

“I DIDN’T BELIEVE WE COULD DO ALL THIS AT FIRST, BUT NOW I BELIEVE THIS IS ALL FROM GOD, AND I FEEL GOD IS ON OUR SIDE.”

—BRENDON MAGEE, TRUSTEE CHAIR, EDDYSTONE UMC

Needing thousands of dollars, they formed a special Parsonage Project Board. They applied for grants but were denied. So, relying on the adage that charity begins at home, they sought aid from local neighbors, businesses and associates. Fortunately, both their timing and their cause were ideal because strong sentiments favoring Ukraine and its refugees elicited the support they needed.

The neighboring St. James Catholic High School Alumni Association in Eddystone, Linvilla Orchards in Media, the Monroe Energy Company, the Carpenters Union of Philadelphia and many other local businesses and individual benefactors eagerly and generously responded.



Eddystone UMC held an open house Oct. 15, welcoming guests to meet two Ukrainian refugee families who now live in its restored parsonage. (From left) EPA conference lay leader William Thompson poses in front of the parsonage with: church lay leader Brendan Magee; Oleksii and Maryna Zentsev; the Rev. John and Jennifer Lafferty; and Olha, Igor and Masha Gluschenko. Photo courtesy of William Thompson

We received \$500 here, \$200 or \$300 there—I mean, they were barbershops, hairdressers, bakeries, pizza shops, candy stores all giving to this effort,” said John Lafferty.

“Essentially, we did a lot of begging but for a good cause,” recalled Brendan Magee, trustee chair. “We pounded the pavement going from place to place—all the churches in our area, the West Chester Business Exchange, the Broomall Rotary Club, local unions. We raised about \$70,000. A group of plumbers came in and did major work for just the cost of materials. And every piece of furniture in there was donated from various estates.”

Magee, a young attorney who joined the church three years ago, now serves as an unpaid assistant pastor who recently completed seminary. He and longtime member Bill Balentine joined the Laffertys in doing much of the fundraising and friend-raising, as well as negotiations to secure the ideal refugee families to occupy the home.

‘I Feel God is on Our Side’

“I didn’t believe we could do all this at first,” said Magee. “But now I believe this is all from God, and I feel God is on our side.”

As part of its friend-raising, the church invited local 12-step addiction recovery groups to meet there. Now it hosts groups totaling about a hundred people five nights a week. Some of those groups’ influential members, plus others from MVP Recovery, a residential recovery facility in Media, have donated funds, materials and services, sometimes doing

Continued on page 10



Maryna Zentsev repaired and made artistic use of donated sewing machines. John Coleman photo



Eddystone UMC welcomed friends, neighbors and supporters of its renovation efforts at its open house Oct. 15 to meet two Ukrainian refugee families now residing in its parsonage. John Coleman photo

A Resurrection in the House of God Promises 'Hope and a Future'

By John W. Coleman

C A M D E N , N J

When the tiny congregation of historic Bethel United Methodist Church in Camden, N.J., birthed in 1864, finally closed its doors last year—depleted of members, money and mission—it was the death of yet another urban church. But in a wonder-working faith, where death at times leads to resurrection, some doors don't stay closed for long.

As trustees of the Greater New Jersey Conference began preparing to sell the idle church facility, three visionary ministers did a timely walk-through last fall and said, in effect, "Not so fast. God may be about to do a new thing here."

The Rev. Glenn Conaway, Delaware Bay District Superintendent and Coastal Plains Region Team Leader, led the tour with the Rev. Dennis Blackwell, longtime pastor of Asbury United Methodist Church in nearby Woodlynne, and Timothy Merrill, a leader at Asbury, but more importantly, a neighbor and former youth pastor at Bethel.

The trio saw the neglect and disrepair there—a badly leaking roof and debris strewn in rooms and hallways—all in an abandoned church unfitting of its Hebrew name, which means "House of God." But they also saw "Possibility," ironically, the theme of this year's Greater New Jersey Annual Conference session.



Unity Community dancers and drummers practice in a large, renovated room upstairs at the Imani Community Fellowship Church every Wednesday night. John Coleman photo

Much of that possibility is embodied in Tim Merrill, a Camden native who lives just over a block away and has spent much of his life developing and leading youth ministries in churches and the community. He directed youth ministries at Asbury for five years—founding the Watu Moja (Swahili for "One People") program to reach and teach African American youth by connecting them with their heritage and the global African Diaspora.

Merrill, a father of three, has directed at least seven youth outreach and mentoring programs in Camden and Philadelphia over the last three decades. That includes co-founding and chairing the Community Education Research Network (CERN) and

the Eastside Preparatory School, located at Bethel UMC from 2006 to 2015. He also directed the South Camden Christian Fellowship (also known as The Fellowship House) in the early 1990s.

"My life's work has been to guide and encourage our city's young people," Merrill says of his personal mission. "I specialize in serving the young people who have slipped between society's cracks—those at economic, social and educational disadvantage."

Helping Young People Coming Out of Prison

He has done that for decades, especially among youth involved in the Crips, Bloods, Latin Kings and other gangs and also young people coming out of prison. Merrill has engaged and helped many of them as a community pastor and loving father-figure. And his wife and ministry-partner Renata Merrill has done likewise, even welcoming some of those youth into their home.

Merrill's personal mission led him to Bethel 20 years ago to develop not only a community youth ministry there but also CERN and Eastside Prep, two innovative alternative education programs. He co-created them in partnership with longtime Latino community leader Angel Cordero. Both programs—housed at Bethel and at the now closed Rosedale Baptist Church—were a creative response to student violence plaguing Camden schools that left many

Black and Latino students fearful and unable to achieve in their studies.

Despite meager resources, Eastside Prep enrolled, taught and graduated about 50 students in a safe environment, helping many of them to make good use of their hard-won education. And CERN served over 6,500 students—mostly youth but all ages, including one family of three generations

that graduated together. It became New Jersey's largest African American/Latino community-based program.

The schools eventually lost church and community financial support and had to close, a painful disappointment for Merrill. But recognized for his innovative, energetic dedication to developing young people's gifts, leadership and character, he was recommended to become a Harvard Advanced Leadership Initiative fellow. He chose to focus that 18-month immersion in academic and leadership learning and peer-to-peer collaboration on developing new strategies and enlisting cohort partners to help him help more of Camden's youth.



Pastor Tim Merrill (center) talks with Unity Community dancers and drummers after a class.

John Coleman photo



FROM LEFT: Pastor Tim Merrill and the Rev. Glenn Conaway talk with Helene Bolopue, a volunteer from First UMC Williamstown on the Day of Service July 29. John Coleman photo

Trying to Do God's New Thing

Now, Merrill is trying to do a new thing—prayerfully, God's new thing—in the building where he still fondly remembers and sometimes reencounters the youth he once taught. The former Bethel church is now renamed the Imani Community Fellowship. Imani is Swahili for "faith." And the church doors that closed last year are swinging open again on Sunday mornings for Bible study and on four bustling nights a week for children, youth and young adults who come there to learn and enjoy African drumming and dance, martial arts, and brass instruments.

The lively and loud drumming, dance, music and Karate classes, held upstairs in a large, newly renovated activity room, are

they need. But he also welcomes those who come just to congregate around a wooden picnic table in the front yard situated there to offer a place for conversation.

He plans to have a larger conversation with community members at Imani this fall—inviting them to come share their concerns over dinner and to suggest more activities and services they want to see happen there.

"Tim could be the right person to start a new church here, and that's a godsend," said Conaway. "He has always lived and been a leader here. He has a huge network of people he knows, and that's a great opportunity for us. Meanwhile, so much has been donated to this ministry that the conference trustees didn't have



The Rev. Wil Wilson and other volunteers from First UMC Williamstown on the Day of Service July 29. John Coleman photo

sponsored by Camden's Unity Community Center. When he received the church keys in March, Merrill promptly invited Robert and Wanda Dickerson, revered founders of the four-decade-old academy of youth development and cultural education, to bring their school to Imani. Their own small, cramped, storefront community center had suffered structural damage and was no longer usable.

The school saluted their new relationship in Imani's rarely used sanctuary June 3 with a celebration of music, dance and poetry, amid pews that were filled with people for the first time in many years. Robert Dickerson, esteemed by many in Camden and beyond, died of a long-term illness in early October.

Welcoming Friends and Neighbors

Today, Merrill welcomes—and invites to Bible study—friends and neighbors who come to help fix and upgrade the building, who send or bring donations for the ministry, or who come merely to seek the help

to purchase." That includes skilled labor, building materials and furnishings the fellowship has received.

Imani's friends and neighbors also include generous members of other Delaware District churches—including Williamstown, Mantua and Haddonfield UMCs. More than a dozen volunteers came when invited to Imani's Day of Service July 29 to offer their labors of love—painting, cleaning, carpentry, power washing brick walls and more. Some supporters are former Camden residents and fondly remember the Bethel church's history of educating youth. Another Day of Service may happen this fall.

Imani is a mission of Asbury UMC Woodlynne, its supportive mother church, where Merrill is still a member. And it receives special attention from the Coastal Plains Regional Resourcing Team. But Conaway wants it to also become a new Hope Center of Greater New Jersey's Journey of Hope initiative, which should broaden its visibility and support conference-wide. Hope Centers "collaborate

Continued on page 10

Ukrainian Refugees

Continued from page 8
repairs as community service.

Significant aid also came from churches in the South District and Eastern PA Conference—especially from Lima UMC, where Lafferty, a bivocational pastor and part-time high school teacher, is also that church's finance manager. He applied for and received a generous grant from their endowment committee to replace and upgrade all the antiquated electrical wiring in the house.

But Lima church donated more than just money. Volunteers from its United Methodist Men and United Women of Faith groups did major work on upgrading the kitchen floor, repairing the sidewalk, decorating the entire house and donating furniture and furnishings.

Bountiful Blessings from Everywhere

Now all that remains to be done in the house, Lafferty told visitors at the housewarming party, is the replacement of about a dozen aged, decrepit windows. A recent fundraising effort that netted \$7,000 will pay for the new windows, and two contractors he recently met will install them to fulfill community service.

While the bountiful blessings they've needed seemed to come from everywhere, finding refugee residents for the three-story, six-bedroom home required some effort and much patience. They ran into delays and obstacles with several refugee families, sponsors and resettlement



Eddystone United Methodist Church (left) and Eddystone UMC's parsonage (right), next door to its church.

John Coleman photos



How long the two families will stay there and where their refugee journeys may take them next is uncertain. But Olha and Igor have said they want to be there for at least three years, said Lafferty.

Eddystone UMC's new home away from home for these refugees is a major milestone in its own ministry journey that may lead it to adopt a new vision of growth and vitality through mission and community engagement.

"In the beginning all of this was hard to believe—that we could do all this," said Jennifer. "But miracles started to happen—generous gifts we received here and there. Soon, the whole church started to trust us to make good decisions. And it really bonded our small congregation together through this whole process. We always say we're small but mighty because we've done so much with God's help."

'More Than Anything, it's Been Fun'

"More than anything, it's been fun," said John. "It's been a lot of work, but it's been a lot of fun. Every time we greet one another with hugs, we know that we are getting as much joy and gratitude from this as they are."

"This project has been and continues to be in my prayers; and I praise God for the transformational work being done there," said District Superintendent Clark. "We are called to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world; and Eddystone UMC's pastor, members and community took this mission statement to heart." 🇺🇸

agencies, until they finally received the help they needed from Ukrainian Catholic Services (UCS) in Philadelphia. One problem was that most Ukrainian refugees prefer to live further north among other Ukrainians near Philadelphia and Abingdon, said Lafferty.

The Gluschenko Family from Odessa moved there in April. The Zentsev Family from Kyiv moved there in July.

'We Fell in Love With Them'

"We fell in love with them," said Lafferty. "They regularly attend worship, and their daughter participates by lighting the altar candles for us." They use Google Translate on their cellphones to communicate bilingually; and Jennifer prepares worship bulletins in Russian for both families. Now John, who acquired Russian Bibles from the Gideons, is searching for United Methodist hymnals in Russian.

Oleksii is a physical therapist in Philadelphia. And thanks to John, Olha was hired as a cook at the nearby elementary school that their daughter attends. Igor is a Truck Driver and Mayna is a computer programmer.



Pastor John Lafferty gives house-warming guests a tour of Eddystone UMC's renovated parsonage and a chance to meet the two Ukrainian refugee families now residing there. John Coleman photo

COMUNIDAD CRISTIANA CASA DEL PUEBLO INVITES YOU

YOUTH FORCE

SATURDAY
11TH
NOVEMBER

Worship, games, food,
workshops and more...

Session 1: Youth Leadership (William Jimenez)
Session 2: Being Christian in a Digital World: The Real
Ups and Downs (Cesar Depaz Jr.)




2:00 PM - 8:00 PM

COMUNIDAD CRISTIANA
CASA DEL PUEBLO

2131 Palomino Dr, Warrington, PA 18976



Unity Community's intergenerational drummers make a joyful noise as they teach, learn and play for dancers. John Coleman photo

Imani-Unity Community

Continued from page 9

with communities and build on assets to address various educational, social and economic challenges" like those in Camden.

Meanwhile, the Delaware Bay District Committee on Ministry is helping Merrill complete his training to become a Licensed Local Pastor. As vibrantly connectional as Merrill is in his own community, he and his fledgling community of faith are no less

connectional in the benefits they receive from their mother church, their district, region and conference.

All those connections should give the Imani Community Fellowship "a hope and a future," in the prophet Jeremiah's words (Jeremiah 29:11), so that it can grow from a small resurrection wonder and maybe become a full worshiping congregation. That is the hope of all involved—to offer a new place for new people, while serving Christ and this underserved Camden community. 🇺🇸

Home from School: The Children of Carlisle

EPA CoNAM Offers Free Online Viewing of Documentary

The Eastern PA Conference Committee on Native American Ministries (CoNAM) offers Home from School: The Children of Carlisle, a powerfully moving documentary, for viewing and showing churches on the EPA&GNJ Vimeo streaming platform.

Home from School: The Children of Carlisle is the revealing story of Native children who were taken from their homes to a faraway boarding school in Pennsylvania in the late 1800s. The location is less than one hundred miles from where many of us live. What do you know about the Carlisle Indian School, other than Jim Thorpe, the celebrated athlete?

A Story from a Native Perspective

“Pennsylvania basically hosted the Carlisle Indian School and has never taken any sort of responsibility to represent that story from a Native perspective, maybe not even their own side of the story,” said



Sandi Cianciulli, who co-chairs Eastern PA’s CoNAM. “We have met entirely too many people who claim to be born and raised there and never heard there was an Indian boarding school there, let alone the first off-reservation, military model, U.S. government-run boarding school.”

The documentary tells the story of trauma and loss for the children who left their families and all that was familiar to them to board trains and enter a regimented world of forced assimilation. While many students thrived and learned skills to help them succeed,

some did not survive. The cemetery at the school still bears witness to their lost lives.

In Home from School, a Northern Arapaho delegation travels in 2017 from the Wind River Indian Reservation in Wyoming to Carlisle, Pennsylvania, to retrieve their children buried there a century ago. With the unearthing of the remains, the film journeys through the troubled legacy of Indian boarding schools and follows the brave efforts of these native peoples they seek to heal historic wounds.

The documentary is now available for streaming on Vimeo by church groups and Sunday school classes. A pdf file of a 24-page Discussion & Viewer Guide is also available. Contact CoNAM for the video access password at conam@epaumc.church or vmcolliver@gmail.com.

Learn more about the documentary at <https://itvs.org/films/home-from-school-the-children-of-carlisle>.



Special Session Budget Presenter Group

At the Eastern PA Annual Conference Special Session, Sept. 9, a Council on Finance & Administration team—(from left): the Rev. Jennifer Freymoyer, Cabinet representative; Lawrence Lee, Finance Manager; Jo Fielding, CFO & Treasurer; and Steve Cherry, CFA member—presented a revised, comprehensive 2024 budget and new policies for managing conference funds. The unprecedented resolution received unanimous approval from the 400 members who voted. *Steward Warner photo*

2023 Summer Camp

Eastern PA’s Camp & Retreat Centers are still receiving praise and thanks from families about their children’s enjoyment of recreation, learning, worship, bible discovery, new friendships and God’s amazing creation during Summer Camp 2024. The four busy sites served 1,375 families and 2,541 children, youth, and adults from Pennsylvania, New Jersey and 12 other states and Washington DC.



Caravan of Hope

At Trinity UMC in Hackettstown, NJ, about 400 volunteers—mostly high school and college students—launched the church’s sixth annual ‘Caravan of Hope’ mission event in September to fulfill an ambitious goal: feed more than 5,000 people in a single day. They prepared boxed meals, topped with the church’s logo and a friendly, handwritten note. While many of the meals were distributed locally, most were trucked to 51 locations where hungry people gather in New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania.



James Lee photo

“Everyone who does this comes back with some God moment to share,” said Glenn Ashton, Trinity’s Missions Co-Chair.

“The Caravan of Hope is a practical means to get one meal each to people who need it,” explained the Rev. Deb De Vos, associate pastor. “It’s also a way to raise awareness of the need and... shed light on the work that we still have to do to end food insecurity.”



GOD WILL PROVIDE!
REV. WILLIAM D. CARTER III



FOR TANZANIA CAMPAIGN VIDEO

Watch two inspiring new videos about GNJ’s For Tanzania mission fundraising campaign. The first offers an overview of our prayerful challenge and commitment to raise \$100,000 to build a United Methodist church in Tanzania’s capital and to help support Tanzania’s dedicated UM clergy. The second, newest video, titled “God Will Provide,” offers a moving, personal testimony by the Rev. William D. Carter III, who recently visited and taught in a GNJ-sponsored Pastors School in Tanzania, along with conference staff. Use these two videos to inspire your congregation to donate at least \$500 to this Holy Spirit-led campaign For Tanzania by December 31. Learn more at <https://www.gnjumc.org/fortanzania/>.

Conference Studies Racism's Ongoing Legacy in *The Color of Compromise*

By John W. Coleman

Eastern PA continued its use of conferencewide, monthlong book discussions to help end the sin of racism by focusing on Jemar Tisby's acclaimed book *The Color of Compromise*. Over 60 participants explored each Wednesday in October this timely narrative of "how people of faith have worked against racial justice (and) a call for urgent action by all Christians today in response."



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP-LEFT: Bishop Alfred Johnson, Bishop Ernest Lyght, Bishop Jonathan Keaton, author Jemar Tisby.

"THIS IS A JOURNEY OF UNMASKING THE COMPLICITY WE, AS A CHURCH, SHARE IN THE SIN OF RACISM, AND THE LIBERATION WE CAN EXPERIENCE WHEN WE FACE OUR TRUTHS AND BECOME CATALYTIC AGENTS OF CHANGE AND TRANSFORMATION."

—BISHOP ALFRED JOHNSON

Bishop Alfred Johnson, a retired clergy member of EPA and former bishop of Greater New Jersey, led those discussions, which included supplemental videos featuring Tisby. Johnson now directs the Center for the Study and Practice of Urban Religion at New York Theological Seminary.

"This is a journey of unmasking the complicity we, as a church, share in the sin of racism," he said, "and the liberation we can experience when we face our truths and become catalytic agents of change and transformation."

The goal of the book and study is understanding, not guilt. "But I wouldn't mind if we all experienced a bit of godly grief," says Tisby, quoting the apostle Paul. Indeed, the study inspired among many participants candid expressions of surprise, concern, revelation, pain and cautious hope for the future.

Bishops Ernest Lyght and Jonathan Keaton, Johnson's fellow retired United Methodist bishops, led a session of the study to introduce their new book, *Unmasking Racism: Coloring with Love*

in the Church, Community, Academy. It calls for eliminating racism as a prophetic response to God's call and our commitment to love God and neighbor.

EPA's Congregational Development Team (CDT) and Commission on Religion and Race (CORR) cosponsored the book study, continuing what they started in 2021 with two books: *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*, by Isabel Wilkerson; and *Plantation Jesus: Race, Faith and a New Way Forward*, by Skot Welch and Rick Wilson, with Andi Cumbo-Floyd.

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