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NEW Spirit!

UNITED METHODISTS OF EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA
& GREATER NEW JERSEY

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LEADERSHIP ACADEMY
PREACHING INSTITUTE

FIFTY FELLOWS, ONE MISSION:

Elevating the Craft of Preaching

An inside look at the LAPI Preaching Summit

By Sarah Borgstrom Lee

A sense of anticipation filled the air as the first cohort of 50 preaching fellows began to file in for the Leadership Academy Preaching Institute (LAPI). They gathered in Jarrettown UMC's warm and inviting lobby space. Some grabbed a snack, while others stood in groups and chatted with friends, both old and new.

The weekend had been years in the making. "The cabinet and leadership discerned that if we could move forward on only one thing, the thing we needed to move the needle on is preaching," shared the Rev. Dawn Taylor-Storm, Director of Connectional Ministries for EPA & GNJ.

Rev. Dr. Juel Nelson, Director of Leadership Development & Associate Superintendent for the Metro Highlands Region of GNJ, was grateful to watch the weekend come together. "The culture of learning that has been built enabled us to receive more applications than we had spots open. This opportunity was well-positioned to be effective and well-received."

The fellows brought that passion for learning with them into the room. "I'm excited to be here," shared Charlene Williams Gungil, CLM at Rutherford UMC. "I want to be able to take it all in and then push it out."

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Emmanuel Camba Jr., Usher, helps Acolyte, Kemisola Aiyegbo, carry the light of Christ into worship. Photo by Ginger Haithcox

Celebrating Five Years of Daily Dinner Ministry at New Brunswick

By James Lee

NEW BRUNSWICK, N J

The doors of the United Methodist Church at New Brunswick open each night, just as they have for five years. Inside, the scent of warm food fills the air, and volunteers line up, ready to serve. For those who come seeking a meal, it is also an offering of dignity, community, and grace.

The Dinner Ministry, a nightly meal service for those experiencing homelessness and food insecurity, has become a defining ministry of the congregation. When it first began, it was known simply as the "Welcome Table," a name that captured its mission: to provide a place where everyone—regardless of their circumstances—would be met with hospitality. Over the years, it has grown into a thriving community effort, serving more than 100 meals every evening.

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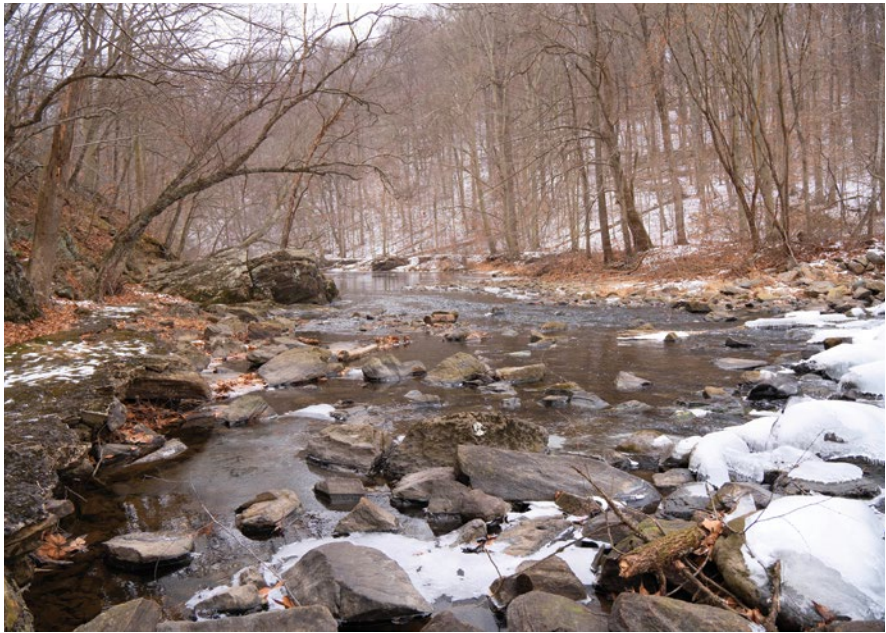
Historic Conservation Easement Signed AT INNABAH CAMP & RETREAT CENTER

By Sarah Borgstrom Lee

While gentle snow fell to the ground, leaders from the EPA and the French & Pickering Creeks Conservation Trust gathered around the table to sign an agreement that had been more than four years in the making. This moment marked the official protection of Camp Innabah's land, ensuring that this sacred space will be preserved for generations to come.

For nearly a century, it has been a place where generations of campers have come to build friendships, challenge themselves, and grow in faith. This conservation easement ensures that Innabah's natural beauty and history will be protected from

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A scenic spot is part of now protected land at Camp Innabah.

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A MESSAGE FROM OUR BISHOP

We Praise God

Bishop Cynthia Moore-Koikoi



“Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved, for you are my praise.”
—JEREMIAH 17:14

I greet you in the name and with the love of Jesus Christ. Hallelujah. Glory to God. I give God thanks and highest praise.

As an annual conference we have been on quite a journey over the past several months. We have named our wounds, prayed over them, participated in communal liturgical acts of cleansing, and covered the wounds in prayer seeking healing. Hundreds of you attended the healing sessions across both annual conferences. Hundreds of you also participated daily in our Lenten Journey of Healing. Together we have done some hard work. Now we are ready for a season of praise.

As we praise, we recognize that we are still healing. There is still work to be done. We also recognize that in our neighborhoods, churches, nation, and world we continue to do harm to one another. Yet, in the midst of our continued pain, and in anticipation of the healing yet to come, we praise God! We praise God because we have felt and seen the presence of God among us while on this journey. We praise God for the strongholds that have been torn down. We praise God for the apologies that have yet to be offered and the apologies that have yet to be accepted. We praise God for our call to the ministry of reconciliation and for the gifts God has provided for the fulfillment of this ministry. We praise God for the witness, mission and ministry that will continue to emerge from our healing.

There are so many more reasons for our praise than those that I have named above. So, when we gather at annual conference we will praise God in response to God’s grace and blessings, but also because the Psalmist says, “I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth” (Psalm 34:1).

And just in case you were wondering, we have paid our security deposit for the Wildwood Convention Center. So, it will be okay if we blow the roof off with our praise! 🌈

Peace and blessings,
Bishop Cynthia Moore-Koikoi



NEWSpirit!

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Rev. Catherine Jordan Latham and Rev. Heather Valosin sing joyfully at the 2024 Annual Conference.

Annual Conference 2025
Get Ready to Praise!

By Sarah Borgstrom Lee

Annual Conference is just around the corner, and it will be one for the books! It’s our first with Bishop Cynthia Moore-Koikoi and we’ll be discussing and voting on four constitutional amendments. Here’s a sneak peak of what to expect as you are packing your bags for AC2025.

Celebration of Ministry

The ordination service is expanding to a celebration of all kinds of ministry. The Service of Passage, where retired elders pass the mantle to newly licensed, commissioned, and ordained clergy will now be part of this worship service.

Annual Conference Mission Project

We’re swapping out afternoon workshops on the first full day of Annual Conference and replacing them with an opportunity to bless the Wildwood community with our hands and hearts. Every person attending Annual Conference should bring two new pairs of socks with them. They’ll be packaged and distributed to seniors throughout Cape May County, one of the lowest income counties in the state of New Jersey. EPA will have the opportunity to bring socks for seniors and to bring plastic grocery bags to plarn sleeping mats for unhoused persons.

In addition to the work we’ll do with our hands, we’ll also have work to do with our hearts. Annual Conference participants can write notes of encouragement to seniors in Cape May County as well as cards of persons in prison. Come prepared to offer yourself in love and in service to others.

Celebrating retiring, commissioned, and ordained clergy

The celebration dinner for retiring clergy and newly commissioned and ordained elders and deacons will happen during Annual Conference on Monday for GNJ, and Wednesday for EPA. We’ll also have

the opportunity to receive video messages of wisdom and blessing from retiring clergy throughout Annual Conference.

Joint Communion Service in the space between conferences

In the space between where Greater New Jersey’s Annual Conference ends and Eastern Pennsylvania’s Annual Conference begins there will be a joint service of Holy Communion in the East Hall at 12:30pm. This means GNJ will end their annual conference session with a closing worship and communion in the West Hall and then exit and turn left to gather in the East Hall. Folks arriving for EPA’s annual conference session may arrive early for the joint communion service at 12:30pm. Registration for EPA’s annual conference session will open at 1pm.

Ratifying Constitutional Amendments

At the annual conference we’ll have the opportunity to discuss and then

PRAISE!



vote whether to ratify the four constitutional amendments passed at General Conference 2020/2024. Here’s a breakdown on the four amendments.

Ballot # 1: Worldwide Regionalization

This amendment will allow United Methodists across the globe the ability to adapt parts of the Book of Discipline to their contexts, so that we might be more effective in making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

What Will Change

The legislation on regionalization gives clear authority to each region to change or adapt the following according to their missional context:

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LAPI Preaching Summit

Continued from page 1

Rev. Joseph Jeung, currently serving Pennington UMC, shared, “I’m looking for inspiration... Iron sharpening iron. I’m hoping for the sparks to rise as we are in the room together.”

Robyn Clark, a local pastor from First UMC of Mays Landing, came looking to grow. “I’m just diving in. I’m hoping to become a better preacher and meet new people.”

Sue Kiefner, CLM, serving Springfield UMC, shared, “I’m always looking to learn. Being so new at preaching, I want to learn more. I want to get better at sharing my message.”

The summit began with a powerful worship service. Rev. William D. Carter III lifted both hearts and spirits as he played and led praise and worship for the opening convocation. Rev. Ronell Howard, District Superintendent for the Central District in GNJ, brought the message, selecting Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16 as her text and titling her sermon “Dial 91:1.”

She opened with a story about the time she accidentally started a small fire in her parsonage’s kitchen. The rising flames left her in a panic. She stood there frozen until a friend on the phone shouted, “Ronell, hang up, and dial 911.” She invited people to ponder the ways they might also get stuck, musing, “Don’t we do that in life? We sit immobile because we find ourselves with problems, and we don’t know what to do. Psalm 91:1 is our spiritual emergency number.”

She named some of the challenges that might lead us to call 91:1: “The ‘20s opened with losing 1 million to COVID, disinformation, war in Ukraine and Gaza, mass deportation, budgets that rob food from needy families... I don’t know about you, but I want to experience precedented times.” After carefully identifying the challenges of our present situation, she turned our attention back to God’s steadfast love and grace, inviting us to consider how we have experienced for ourselves the gift of God’s protection and how we might respond to that grace. “God’s protection is promised,” she proclaimed. “When we embrace God’s promises, we embrace the responsibility to extend His presence to others.”

Her striking message hit home. While the preaching fellows left for dinner and



TOP LEFT: The Rev. Dr. Leah Schade explains the importance of using the body in intentional ways while preaching.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Rev. Jennifer Lovallo shares feedback from her cohort group.

BOTTOM LEFT: Pastor Bob Garvey leans in as he ponders the presentation.

Photo credit: Corbin Payne



their first gathering in their cohort groups, D.S. Howard sat down with conference videographer Corbin Payne to unpack how she crafted the sermon so that others might learn from her example.

Saturday morning’s session opened with a greeting from Bishop Moore-Koikoi. “The storehouse of God’s resources opened up so that this could happen. This is a miracle. I hope that you know that. I hope that you feel that. I’m grateful to all the clergy who said yes. All the clergy who said there’s a little more that I could learn so that even more people could be reached. I’m so grateful that you have said that God is not through with me yet.”

After Bishop Moore-Koikoi’s greeting, Rev. Dr. Leah Schade, the plenary speaker, stood to give her presentation. She reflected on the state of the church, which she had gleaned from a series of congregational surveys.

She shared that 80% of congregations are experiencing moderate to high stress, and clergy are stressed and experiencing burnout. When divisiveness and stress are high, it’s tempting to avoid preaching on social issues. However, what Dr. Schade discovered in her surveys was that 78% of people in the pews want their pastor to bring Biblical insight to pressing political issues. Cultivating effective sermon feedback



learned. They formed listener feedback groups of their own and provided sermon feedback to the brave pastor who offered to go first.

While cohorts offered sermon feedback, Rev. Dr. Darryl Stephens, Director of the Preaching Institute, paused to celebrate. Rev. Stephens shared, “This has exceeded my expectations. People are hungry for the opportunity for peer support, growth, and challenge. People need the tools—listener feedback groups—we heard this morning how divided we are. People want the tools to have the conversation in a constructive way.”

When they came back in the afternoon, the cohorts shared their experiences, and together fellows received tools that would help them level up their preaching.

One preaching fellow shared that she was surprised by the amount of positive feedback she received. The critique she received from her cohort focused on the way she moved during her

sermon. “Movement matters,” Dr. Schade reflected to the group. “Think about how your body is a highlighter and underliner for your oral presentation.”

Another fellow shared that her experience showed her that she’s not alone. “Most of our group is struggling with cross-cultural ministry. The process of our feedback was very helpful. The feedback we gave to our preacher, I am going to use for myself.”

Another fellow shared, “I found myself looking at many holes and gaps that I didn’t even realize I had. It’s very difficult to do self-examination. I am learning from my group.”

A fourth fellow shared that he found the feedback group exhilarating. “I found it exhilarating. I feel like I’m in a safe spot. I trust them. They want the best for me. All of the feedback was right on.”

Another fellow honestly shared that their group found the format of the questions challenging, and suggested rearranging the questions for better flow. Dr. Schade acknowledged that we are still learning how best to give and receive feedback on sermons. The process requires experimentation and practice. The Leadership Academy Preaching Institute is on the leading edge of developing this practice.

The summit ended the same way it began—with worship. Dr. Schade literally practiced what she preached as she offered the closing sermon. Preaching fellows were able to witness her embodying the same best practices she taught throughout the day as she unpacked the scripture.

After a moving closing communion service, the fellows departed for all the places to which God has sent them, equipped with new insights and a few new tools to help them bring the word of God alive in their context, which is no easy feat.

In her greeting to the fellows, Bishop Moore-Koikoi stated, “The art of preaching is changing. It is shifting in our culture. The techniques we used to know that could reach people’s hearts and motivate them—those techniques don’t work anymore. We’ve got to learn a new way of oratory. A new way of helping to deliver the message.”

The landscape of preaching is ever-changing. We all need new ways to help deliver the message of God’s grace. If you feel called to stretch and grow alongside your colleagues in ministry, the next round of Leadership Academy Preaching Institute applications opens May 1.

Learn more and apply at <https://www.epaumc.org/lapi/> and <http://gnjumc.org/lapi>.



TOP LEFT: Dr. Charlene Williams Gungil lifts her voice in praise.

TOP RIGHT: Pastor Lorraine Foster listens attentively to D.S. Howard’s sermon.

BOTTOM RIGHT: The Rev. Dr. William D Carter III leads praise and worship.

Photos by Corbin Payne



Innovation and Inclusive Ministry in God's Brainforest

IGNITE Youth Leader Day 2025

By: Sarah Borgstrom Lee

The sound of warm conversation filled the room as youth leaders gathered to connect and learn during IGNITE Youth Leader Days, held at Aldersgate UMC in Greater New Jersey and Hopewell UMC in Eastern Pennsylvania in late January and early February.

Each attendee wore a name tag and a colored button — green, yellow, or red — as part of a thoughtful accessibility tool designed to help participants communicate their comfort levels with social interaction. A chart at the registration table explained the buttons' meanings:

- **Green:** "I'm ready to talk, please come talk to me."
- **Yellow:** "I'm willing to engage, but I need some time to warm up."
- **Red:** "I'm not really in a talking mood. Please give me some space."

These small but powerful tools set the tone for a day focused on inclusion, empathy, and innovation in youth ministry.

Exploring Neurodiversity in Ministry Spaces

The first session of the day delved into ways churches can create ministry environments that are inclusive and accessible to neurodivergent individuals and their families.

Dr. Michael Paul Cartledge II, a post-doctoral research scholar at Princeton Theological Seminary, led the session. His research centers on neurodiversity, mental health, and youth ministry. He began with foundational definitions and introduced a theological framework that grounded the conversation:

"Neurodiversity is best understood as a biological fact... Just like biodiversity, neurodiversity is part of God's good design... The question, then, is how do we create spaces for everyone to participate in ways that feel meaningful and relevant to them?"

To deepen understanding, Dr. Cartledge shared audio clips from interviews



Dr. Michael Cartledge II urges leaders to actively listen to the needs of neurodivergent youth and their families.



Eric Drew, Director of Next Gen ministries joins youth leaders in praise and worship.



Rev. Dawn Taylor-Storm, Director of Connectional Ministries, reminds youth leaders that Jesus left the ninety-nine to go after the one—because one matters.

with neurodivergent youth. One young woman, who has Tourette's Syndrome, described how standing during worship is not only physically difficult but also emotionally taxing. It draws attention to her tics and demands her constant focus, ultimately distracting her from meaningful engagement in worship.

This example illustrated what Dr. Cartledge called the "double empathy problem" — the idea that neurotypical and neurodivergent individuals struggle to understand each other's lived experiences. This disconnect often results in exclusion, even if unintentional.

He emphasized that accessibility isn't a one-time fix, but rather an ongoing commitment. Often, church leaders are unaware of the silent struggles of neurodivergent individuals and their families. Dr. Cartledge encouraged leaders to adopt a posture of "priestly listening" — a prayerful, empathetic approach to understanding others' stories and experiences.

Joyful Noise: A Model for Inclusive Worship

Dr. Cartledge shared the story of *Joyful Noise*, a monthly worship service at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Princeton Junction. Held after the regular service, it follows a shortened, interactive version of the Lutheran liturgy and emphasizes participation and sensory inclusion.

Worshippers make music together, share communion, and use sensory items — including a prayer rope held by everyone during the Lord's Prayer. The rope provides a tactile sense of connection without requiring physical touch, meeting the needs of worshippers who may be uncomfortable with direct contact.

At the end of the session, youth leaders reflected on their own ministry contexts, discussing what they could celebrate and what they might change to better serve neurodivergent youth. The room buzzed with thoughtful and vulnerable conversation.

the room shifted. Many found comfort in naming and acknowledging the larger systemic issues at play in ministry today. One veteran youth leader with over 20 years of experience stood to share:

"It's hard for me to grasp that kids are different now than they used to be. I had their parents, and now I have their kids. But what they're going to get from me is that I love them, God loves them, and their church loves them — no matter what."

Leaving Inspired and Equipped

As the day wrapped up, Eric Drew reflected on the event's success:

"What I loved about today is that it was full of connections. Some leaders have been coming to Youth Leader Days for years; others are brand new. We were intentional about making space for community, where people could hear from one another and share what they're learning."

Many participants left feeling encouraged and empowered to take their learnings back to their ministry settings. Jennifer Appleton, a youth ministry volunteer from First UMC Moorestown, NJ, shared:

"I want to remember the double empathy problem — to try to understand where someone else is coming from instead of just trying to get them to understand me. I really loved that part about Joyful Noise. I want to go and incorporate something from it."

Aisha Witherspoon from Sayers Memorial UMC also resonated with the practical ideas:

"I know some kids in my church are on the spectrum and could benefit from that prayer rope. Physical touch is not easy for them. But more than that, this helped me think about how our environment shapes participation."

Dr. Cartledge said something of note: *"Youth ministry always has a zip code."* Good ministry is always deeply rooted in a particular time and place. Building faith communities where all God's children can worship, connect, learn, and grow begins with listening.

May we listen—to the needs of those in our communities, those in our pews, and to our own needs as leaders—so that we might be truly innovative and create spaces where beloved community can take root and flourish. 🌱



Youth Leaders are refreshed and renewed during worship at Youth Leader Day.



Leaders discuss ways they can grow in their accessibility.

Innovation in Ministry: Addressing the Iceberg

After a break for coffee and connection, the second session, *"The Iceberg of Innovation,"* took a deep dive into the challenges and opportunities church leaders face when trying to innovate.

Dr. Cartledge introduced Stanford's Design Thinking Process and used the metaphor of an iceberg — layering it with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. His key message: leaders can't innovate if their basic needs (financial support, institutional backing, emotional and relational support) aren't met.

"Burnout is not just a personal issue, but a systemic issue," he said.

As leaders realized they weren't alone in their struggles, the atmosphere in

Two Conferences: Two Generations: One Powerful Word

By Sarah Borgstrom Lee

On Saturday, February 16, 2025, United Methodists from across EPA & GNJ gathered at Franklin-St. John’s UMC for an impactful Black History Month service. The Rev. Dr. William D. Carter III, Zachary Holder, and Rev. Elijah Brown were the visionaries behind the event, which served as a celebration of Black resiliency sustained by the sufficiency of Christ.

Rev. Dr. Carter was the maestro of the event. He composed it and led the people through their paces—never missing a beat. His leadership began with the welcome and a powerful Call to Worship, that concluded

“Despite how the year has begun, we still believe the word God has spoken concerning our destiny, that eye hath not seen and ears have not heard what God will release in the days, weeks, and months to come.”

After the people raised their voices and sang “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” the reading of Scripture, and affirmation of faith, Zachary Holder shared the origin story of this service, pointing people toward the purpose of the event: “May we find purpose, find rest, find where God is trusting us to be, and move forward in faith, knowing that there is hope in Christ.”



The Rev. Dr. William D. Carter III, led the Call to Worship

Rev. Elijah Brown echoed that theme of trust in Christ as he led the assembly in prayer: “The God who was with us through the Middle Passage, with us through Jim Crow, you have never left us or forsaken us. The same liberating spirit with the Emancipation Proclamation, with the Civil Rights Act of 1965, be with us now. May your spirit bring more freedom here. No weapon formed against us, no supremacy, no administration that is formed against us, would prosper.”

The Sanctuary Choir of Franklin-St. John’s UMC blessed everything with a powerful musical selection, and then Althea Myles came forward to read a poem by an unknown author.

*“We were forged in fire—
yet we did not burn.
We echo the rhythm of
freedom’s heartbeat.
Red lines can’t hold us—
nor prisons contain.
We are the dream Dr. King
tried to translate.
...
We stand in the fire,
but we don’t expire.
Because no matter who writes
the laws down below,
The King of kings is still
running the show.”*



Rev. Audrey Blackwell-Washington, of Sayers Memorial UMC

Then the preachers took to the pulpit, each one preaching on a portion of Isaiah 58:6-7:

1st Word—Injustice by Rev. Audrey Blackwell-Washington, of Sayers Memorial UMC

Rev. Blackwell-Washington rose to preach on Isaiah 58:6a, “Is this not the fast I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the straps of the yoke?” She spoke the word of truth into the present crisis: “In America today, systemic inequality and entrenched structural racism continue to obstruct democracy. What do you do when lawmakers stop protecting discrimination policies? These laws apply to employment, housing, transportation, and other areas. They help the poor, the marginalized, and the stigmatized.

It’s our place to bridge the gap between the haves and the have-nots. This is placing an unbearable yoke on the shoulders of people of color. But God has a better idea. He wants to loose the bonds of wickedness and break the bonds of oppression. There are some sacrifices that have to be made in order to experience spiritual renewal in the lives of the oppressed—a God-anointed fast. The fast involves actively working for justice through tangible acts of compassion and social change. We have come to a season where we have to be doers of the Word, everyday community workers.”

2nd Word—Betrayal by Pastor Rodney Weaver, Jr.

Pastor Rodney Weaver, Jr. rose to preach on Isaiah 58:6b, “to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke.” He reminded those gathered that Peter denied Jesus, not one time, not two times, but three times. Betrayal is a touchstone throughout the Bible, but when we find ourselves in a place of betrayal, it does not mean the hand of God is far from us. “Sometimes God will put us in a situation of betrayal to wake us up—and ask us if we can smell what God is cooking.”



Pastor Rodney Weaver, Jr. reminds the congregation to be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power.

We are called to open our eyes, to be reminded of the truth that Dr. King proclaimed: “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” It’s time to loosen up the bounds that have been closing our mouths and the chains that have been holding us down.

Pastor Weaver called the congregation to:

- Open up our eyes—both our actual eyes and the eyes of our hearts (Eph. 1:17)—to see what is really going on in our community.
- Open up our ears—to listen to the marginalized voices and allow the voices of those who have been oppressed to reign.
- Open our mouths—to declare God’s praises, but also to advocate for justice by using our voices and actions.

He invited those present to put on the full armor of God and be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His power (Eph. 6:10) as they go about the work of dismantling injustice.

Freedom Songs Frame the Story

Jared McClain, Psalmist for the occasion, came to the pulpit—to sing but also to preach—through music and song: “Freedom songs were the anthems of the marches. Lyrics simple and masterfully written. When we fight for justice and what is right, and we do it together, we can accomplish much.”

He told the story of the freedom songs that sustained the marches, and also the boycott. The bus boycott, he said, was “380 days of consistent refusal to mistreatment.” The past is prologue, and the call is clear: Are we able to do the same, to sacrifice again, to pressure the system to refuse mistreatment?



Pastor Rutendo Felistas Mahachi holds a winnowing basket, which in her grandmother’s hands was a symbol of compassion and connection.

3rd Word—Compassion by Pastor Rutendo Felistas Mahachi

Pastor Mahachi rose to preach on Isaiah 58:7, “Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house?” She brought with her a winnowing basket, similar to the one her grandmother would use to separate corn from chaff. “In my grandmother’s hands, it wasn’t just a symbol of separation, but a symbol of compassion.” She told the story of how her grandmother would bake bread, spread it with margarine and jam, and then invite anyone who happened to pass through their compound to come in and eat. “There was always room at my grandmother’s. There was always warm water for tea.”

Around this basket were conversations. People would sit down, listen to stories, share laughs, and share tears around this basket. Compassion, she proclaimed, “isn’t just about giving to those who need, but sharing our lives. True worship involves caring for the most vulnerable.”

She explained that in Africa, they have a word: Ubuntu—“I am because you are,” explaining, “Compassion is not optional; therefore, it is essential.” She concluded with a challenge: “I challenge you today—find your own basket. Go back home. Sit down and think about it. What is my basket? How best can I use my basket? What’s in it?”



The Rev. Dr. Dennis Blackwell exhorts the congregation to stand firm and remain connected to their people and their neighborhoods.

4th Word—Unity by the Rev. Dr. Dennis Blackwell

Rev. Blackwell rose to offer the final word. He preached on unity from the perspective of Isaiah 58:7, “turn not away from your own flesh and your own blood.” He referenced Joy DeGruy Leary’s profound work, Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America’s Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing, and described the condition of post-traumatic slave syndrome as a condition that exists when a population has experienced multigenerational trauma. He described how the dominant culture teaches people to value whiteness, and how that system “vacates our esteem... We have internalized our oppression, internalized our age, our despair. This leads us to be captive to a system of belief that leads us to be blind to our own beauty... We have been marginalized and imprisoned in our own minds.”

He continued, “That’s why the text that was read in your hearing is important. We are called to self-denial that calls us from something to something. We are called from independence to radical obedience and dependence on a just God.”

“We should never forget about our people, our neighborhoods, our sisters and our brothers. Let us not conform to the patterns of our culture, but let us be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Tell our story of how God has provided for us. As we tell our story, let us not be conformed by the culture. Let’s understand our past so we can have a bigger and brighter future. Let us learn to love ourselves so we will not be victimized by others. Because winning is only good when we do it together.”

The Rev. Dr. William D. Carter III rose to give the benediction, and folks streamed out of the sanctuary to their own places with a renewed sense of power and purpose.

As the congregation departed, the words and music lingered in their hearts, a reminder that Black history is not just a moment in time, but an ongoing journey of faith, resilience, and transformation. The service was a powerful call to action—challenging each person to examine their own role in dismantling injustice, embodying compassion, and striving for unity in the face of adversity. United in purpose and spirit, they left with renewed strength, empowered by the hope that, through Christ, freedom and justice can and will prevail. 🌈

Students from West Virginia University Learn About The Loss of Turtle Island

By Verna Colliver

The Committee on Native American Ministries for The United Methodists of Eastern PA (CoNAM) presented “The Loss of Turtle Island” in collaboration with Circle Legacy Center (CLC) for their 2nd Friday Program on March 14, 2025, in Lancaster PA. They welcomed a group of students from West Virginia University as their special guests.

“The Loss of Turtle Island” evening began as people carried in dishes for a potluck dinner, and CoNAM members brought in their blankets and scrolls for the interactive exercise to follow the shared meal. The West Virginia University students were traveling with their professor, Bonnie Brown, who organized the trip to Carlisle PA for an immersive experience in Native American studies that included a tour of the old Carlisle Indian School campus site, the Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center at Dickinson College, and a presentation at the Cumberland County Historical Society.

Before the group was invited to help themselves to the food, a young student, Kiana Luevano of Apache ancestry, was given permission by CLC elders to carry



Students from WVU process the experience with Circle Legacy Center and CoNAM volunteers.

the floor to represent North America as the homeland of Indigenous People for thousands of years prior to European contact and colonization.

As the 500-year history of “discovery” and colonization unfolded through the PowerPoint presentation, the participants read scrolls, stepped off the blankets, and removed jewelry to demonstrate the broken treaties, forced removal, loss of culture, assimilation and termination. The interactive exercise ended with a few blankets left and a tiny remnant of people standing on a diminished Turtle Island.

At one point in the exercise, the students were asked to give up jewelry showing how the Native children were forced to give up their traditional clothing when sent to boarding schools. The students even removed the lanyards bearing their names, thus symbolically pointing to the children losing their Native names and being given European ones when they were sent to the school at Carlisle.

Sharing circles were formed after the exercise, with the participants speaking in turn to express their feelings and the impact of the experience on them personally. Brown and her students “found it to be very meaningful.”

CLC members were unanimous in praise of the experience. President MaryAnn Robins, reflecting on her emotional response, said “It opens the eyes of those who are blind” to “the boarding school experience and the loss of land.” For Vicki Valentine, the “presentation was powerful, educational and effective in creating an emotional bond between the community and Native American people.” The exercise is “important to give a voice to that which has been silenced and disregarded for ... centuries,” said Wendy Flanders-Hall, who went on to express “hope as the truths are spoken and a voice is given for the doors of change to open; for healing, for reconciliation.”

Sandi Cianciulli, CoNAM Co-chair and CLC board member, said, “It is always inspiring to present the Loss of Turtle Island program to people of every age who not only visualize the consequence of colonization but momentarily experience the emotional trauma of greed-driven cruelty.”

CoNAM member Paula reflected that learning about the boarding school experience was great for the WVU students and that the Loss of Turtle Island program helped them “even more, to see that not all people in our country have had the same experiences nor equal treatment under the law.” She added, “As these students go out into their professions, I hope that something, or many things they experienced in the program will stay with them.”

Boe Harris, a cultural educator, musician, poet and traditional dancer of Turtle Mountain Chippewa and Spirit Lake Dakota Oyate heritage, after thoughtful reflection had this to say, “The Loss of Turtle Island experience is a powerful awareness of specific times in history that impacted and affected the Indigenous people of this land and altered their lives forever. This experience condenses [the] historical timeline enlightening how governmental decisions were dedicated to eradicate the original peoples of this land thus solving the so-called ‘Indian problem.’” As an educator she sees that “this presentation could be adopted [by] our educational system” and wherever “decisions are being made that affect the [Indigenous] peoples of this land.”



Participant reads information from a scroll.

The collaboration between CoNAM and CLC is ongoing, and the partnership has been of mutual benefit for achieving the goal of educating students at high school and college levels. Learning the history of the devastating impact colonization had on the Indigenous People is crucial to creating awareness of issues today and understanding the importance of continued advocacy for voting rights, truth and healing for boarding school survivors, tribal sovereignty, and treaty obligations.

The Native American Studies Program at West Virginia University led by Bonnie Brown is a key element in this work. The program includes an array of courses, seminars, lectures, and, notably, a work-



Students reflect on their experience in talking circles.

out the tradition of the spirit plate. Many tribes believe in filling a plate with a sample of each dish, praying over it with a blessing for all who will enjoy the meal and then placing it outdoors as an offering for all creatures.

CoNAM members, Mike and Paula Shifflet, Verna Colliver, and Sandi Cianciulli, who also serves on the CLC Board, facilitated the Loss of Turtle Island exercise. After the university students and other guests enjoyed their meal, the room was symbolically turned into “Turtle Island” with blankets spread on



Blankets spread out to represent Turtle Island.

shop for educators and librarians centered on the Carlisle Indian Boarding School. For the WVU students, this experience of The Loss of Turtle Island and their visit to Carlisle Indian School is of inestimable value in combating the erasure of Indigenous history and its consequences for those who still struggle to thrive today. 🇺🇸

EPA CoNAM:
<https://www.epaumc.org/connectional-ministries/advocacy/racial-ethnic/native-american/>

Circle Legacy Center:
<http://circlelegacycenter.com/>

The Coalition to Dismantle the Doctrine of Discovery:
<https://dismantlediscovery.org/>

Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center at Dickinson College:
<https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/index.php/images>

West Virginia University:
<https://nas.wvu.edu>



Students squeeze onto fewer blankets. The loss of blankets symbolically represents the loss of land. Photos by: Wendy Flanders-Hall, CLC Board Member



Journey of Healing

40 DAYS OF HEALING PRAYER

Over the past few months United Methodists from EPA & GNJ have been on a “Journey of Healing.” In January we began by naming our wounds, then in February prayer warriors covered those wounds with their prayers. In February and March United Methodists gathered for healing services that were hosted in every district. Throughout Lent, we prayed together using the devotional, *Forty Days of Healing Prayer*, written by faith leaders in EPA & GNJ.

As we look forward to the Annual Conference coming later this May, we pause to reflect on and offer thanks for the journey. While this time of intentional communal healing is drawing to a close, it is never too late to take the first step on a personal journey of healing. If you’d like a resource to guide your way, you can find the *Forty Days of Healing Prayer Devotional* at epagnjhealing.com.



Get Ready to Praise!

Continued from page 1

- Publish their own hymnal, their own book of worship, and liturgical resources.
- Set standards of character and membership and determine how to respond when lay members do not fulfill them.
- Set standards and qualifications for ordained and licensed clergy.
- Set standards for lay ministries.
- Set standards for the organization and operation of annual conferences, district conferences, and charge conferences.
- Set up a regional judicial court to rule on parts of the Discipline that the region has adopted.
- Develop funeral and marriage rites, and specify how marriage and funeral rites are conducted.
- Make changes to chargeable offenses under church law.
- Work with annual conferences to ensure that the policies and practices adapted at the regional level align with the laws for each conference.

What Won't Change

All United Methodists across the globe will share the following:

- Constitution
- Doctrinal Standards and Our Theological Task
- The Ministry of All Christians
- Social Principles
- Some parts of the Book of Discipline*

*The Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters is working to bring a report to General Conference 2028 about which additional parts of the Book of Discipline must stay the same for all United Methodists. General Conference will retain full legislative power over “all matters distinctively connectional” and will decide with a 60% majority the parts of the Discipline which regional conferences are allowed to adapt.

Ballot # 2: Article IV: Protecting Membership for all

The 2020/2025 General Conference passed an important amendment to The United Methodist Constitution. The amended paragraph would read:

Inclusiveness of the Church — The United Methodist Church is a part of the church universal, which is one Body in Christ. The United Methodist Church acknowledges that all persons are of sacred worth. All persons without regard to race, gender, ability, color, national origin, status or economic condition, shall be eligible to



EPA & GNJ delegations at the 2020/2024 General Conference.

attend its worship services, participate in its programs, receive the sacraments, upon baptism be admitted as baptized members, and upon taking vows declaring the Christian faith, become professing members in any local church in the connection. In The United Methodist Church, no conference or other organizational unit of the Church shall be structured so as to exclude any member or any constituent body of the Church because of race, color, national origin, status or economic condition.

The amended portion of the Constitution adds ability and gender to existing social categories that clergy in The United Methodist Church cannot use to discriminate against a potential member. This amendment makes it clear that a person cannot be denied membership to the local church because of their gender or their ability.

Ballot # 3: Article V: Racial Justice

The third proposed constitutional amendment concerns Article V: Racial Justice. It was submitted to the General Conference by the General Commission on Religion and Race. It strengthens the language and clarifies the antiracism work that all United Methodists are called to embody.

Article V was last amended by the General Conference in 2000. In the intervening years, we’ve learned much about the way racism’s tendrils have woven their way into the fabric of society. New

understanding requires new language that helps us see, name, and confront the sin of racism. The updated amendment, written in full below, includes language that specifically addresses the concerns United Methodists must confront to truly dismantle racism in all its forms.



Pastors bless one another during the Service of Passage.

“The United Methodist Church proclaims that, from God’s goodness and love, God created all persons as God’s unique and beloved children. Racism opposes God’s law, goodness, and love and diminishes the image of God in each person. Fueled by white privilege, white supremacy, and colonialism, the sin of racism has been a destructive scourge on global society and throughout the history of The United Methodist Church. It continues to destroy our communities, harm individuals, obstruct unity, and undermine God’s work in this world. Racism must be eradicated. Therefore, The United Methodist Church commits to confronting and eliminating all forms of racism, racial inequity, colonialism, white privilege, and white supremacy in every facet of its life and in society at large.”

The amendment specifically names white privilege, white supremacy, and colonialism as forms of racism that continue to harm people and destroy communities, focusing attention on the systems that need to be dismantled within our own hearts and in our shared life together.

Rev. Giovanni Arroyo, General Secretary for GCORR, is excited about how Article V shifts our attention to dismantling racism in

our present spaces. that this amendment is future-focused: “Article V does more than reflect on the past; it challenges us to shift how we live out our faith today and into the future. This commitment urges us to dismantle systemic racism, build equity, and develop intercultural competence within our church at every level.”

Ballot # 4: Educational Requirements for Clergy

Every four years, United Methodists vote on who will represent them at General, Jurisdictional and Central Conferences. Half of the delegation is comprised of laity, that is elected by annual conference lay delegates, half of the delegation is comprised of clergy that are elected by clergy at annual conference.

This amendment, submitted by the United Methodist Board of Higher Education and Ministry, specifies the educational requirements for licensed local pastors to participate in clergy delegate elections.

This amendment clarifies that local pastors who have completed the contextual equivalent to course of study or a Master of Divinity degree may participate in the election of clergy delegates. The amendment reads “local pastors who have completed course of study or a Master of Divinity degree from a University Senate-approved theological school or its equivalent as recognized in a central conference and have served a minimum of two consecutive years under appointment immediately preceding the election.”

Global Ratification

Each Annual Conference has the authority to decide how best to take a ballot. EPA & GNJ will use electronic voting devices, as we have done in the past. Each constitutional amendment may be debated on the floor but may not be amended. After a time of conversation, delegates can cast their vote.

Unlike other Annual Conference items up for a vote, constitutional amendments require a two-thirds majority of every individual vote cast across the globe. Each vote contributes to the overall outcome because they are part of an aggregate vote count, meaning the votes will not stay at the Annual Conference level. Each vote will be tallied by the Council of Bishops.

The results of the ballots will not be shared, so the decisions of one Annual Conference may not influence the decision of another Annual Conference. The results will be shared in mid-November, after every Annual Conference has had the opportunity to vote.

This is an exciting time in The United Methodist Church! Let’s be in prayer for one another as we get ready to praise! 🌈



Rev. Bruny Martinez and others sing joyfully at Annual Conference 2024.

Innabah Easement

Continued from page 1

development, allowing future generations to experience the same sense of peace and connection that so many have found here.

For four and a half years, the French & Pickering Creeks Conservation Trust worked with members of the Board of Camping and Retreat Ministry, conference trustees, and camping staff to secure over \$1,613,000 in funding. This included \$861,000 from the Chester County Preservation Partnership Program, \$500,000 from the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and Bureau of Recreation and Conservation through the Keystone Recreation, Park and Conservation Fund, and \$252,000 from the East Vincent Township Supervisors.

Rev. Julian J. Milewski signs the easement on behalf of EPA’s Board of Trustees.

This effort was made possible by the dedication of many individuals and organizations working together. The funding for this conservation easement was provided to the EPAUMC Conference and placed into a fund managed by the Camping and Retreat Ministry Board, which oversees Innabah, Gretna Glen, Pocono Plateau, and Carson Simpson Farm. These funds will be invested for the long-term sustainability of Camp & Retreat Ministry, ensuring they continue to thrive for generations to come.



Rev. Julian J. Milewski signs the easement on behalf of EPA’s Board of Trustees.



From left to right: Matthew Morley, Conference Chancellor, Rev. Julian Rev. Milewski, Conference Trustee, Carl Russek, Conservation Director for French & Pickering, Rev. Dawn Taylor Storm, DCM for EPA & GNJ, Hosea Latshaw, Rev. Jared Stoltzfus, Jen Trachtman, President of the Board of Directors for French & Pickering, and Michael Hyde, Camp Director of Innabah, gather for a celebratory photo.

The conservation easement, approved at the 2024 Annual Conference, represents more than just a signed document. It is the result of years of hard work, dedication, and a shared vision for preserving Camp Innabah’s land and mission. This agreement ensures that its natural beauty and rich history will remain protected for future generations to enjoy.

This milestone was made possible by the vision and leadership of many dedicated lay leaders, especially Hosea Latshaw, a member of the Camp and Retreat Ministry. Latshaw, a retired environmental engineer, brought both education and experience to the project. “Hosea Latshaw was the visionary behind the project,”

shared Dawn Taylor Storm, Director of Connectional Ministries for EPA & GNJ. “Even when we were denied, this was our second application, Hosea didn’t lose faith or hope in the possibility.”

Latshaw was thrilled to see the years

and biology for fish. They’ll be wonderful partners in caring for this tract of land.”

Indeed, the easement is just the next step in the ongoing partnership between Camp Innabah and French & Pickering. The goal is not just to preserve the

“THIS CONSERVATION EASEMENT REPRESENTS MORE THAN JUST PROTECTING THE LAND; IT SECURES THE HEART OF WHAT MAKES INNABAH SO SPECIAL.”

—Karl Russek, Conservation Director of French & Pickering

of work come to fruition. “It’s a really good thing for the camp. The land will be restricted from development, and that’s really good for such a special place. French & Pickering have good local interest. They’ve been at this since 1967. They will bring technical assistance and guidance on how to improve the habitat

land, but to actively enhance its habitat, ensuring that the local ecosystem thrives. “French Creek is very highly regarded. The aim is not just to protect what’s here but to enhance it, which is an educational opportunity for campers as well,” said French & Pickering’s Conservation Director, Karl Russek.

This achievement aligns with the heart of Innabah’s mission. Camp Director Michael Hyde reflected on what this means for the future of the camp. “This conservation easement represents more than just protecting the land; it secures the heart of what makes Innabah so special. As Innabah approaches 100 years of serving in Christian Ministry, we are grateful for all of the campers and guests who have explored these woods, hiked these trails, and gathered in these spaces to form friendships and grow in faith. Now, we can be certain that future generations will have the same opportunities to experience the beauty, adventure, and peace that Innabah has always offered.”

Conserving Innabah’s land is more than a legal agreement, it is a commitment to the future. It is a reflection of the passion, dedication, and faith of all who made this possible. This milestone reminds us of what can be accomplished when people come together with a shared vision, ensuring that Innabah remains a place of ministry, adventure, and natural beauty for generations to come. 🌲



Mirth breaks forth as leaders prepare to sign the conservation easement that will preserve the beauty of Innabah for generations to come.

EPA and GNJ Lead Denomination as First Conferences to Undergo RMN Inclusion Training

by James Lee

Rain-soaked roads stretched across Eastern Pennsylvania and Greater New Jersey on a Thursday morning in April. Yet more than 90 people—cabinet members, Connectional Table leaders, Board of Ordained Ministry members, and staff—showed up at the Mission and Resource Center in Neptune, NJ for what many described as a historic and holy moment.

It was the first time an annual conference group officially participated in a full-day, in-person training led by the **Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN): Welcome! Building Beloved Community: Affirming LGBTQ+ Inclusion.**

"This is the first conference group in the denomination to take part in this training," said Rev. Emily Bagwell, RMN's Director of Resource Management & Development, as she began the first session of the day.

It was a long-awaited moment—years in the making—and one shaped by hope, courage, and the recognition that true change takes both policy and practice.



Rev. Emily Bagwell, Director of Resource Management & Development of Reconciling Ministries Network, giving a presentation. Corbin Payne photo

A Historic First

The day opened with a welcome from Bishop Cynthia Moore-Koikoi, who grounded the gathering in spirit:

"I've always said, if our Book of Discipline changes, that would be the easy work. The hard work would be to open hearts and minds to be truly inclusive."

"It's not about an issue," Rev. Bagwell told participants. "It's about beloved



Rev. Dr. Andrew Foster III shares on behalf of his table. Corbin Payne photo

community. It's about becoming a church where everyone can be their whole selves."

Covenanted Space

Rev. Dr. Juel Nelson, EPA&GNJ's Director of Leadership Development, set covenantal ground rules for conversation on the acronym: "RESPECT." Borrowed from the General Commission on Religion and Race, these guidelines weren't just procedural—they set the tone for a space that valued empathy, curiosity, and courage.

Participants were asked: What comes naturally to you? What takes effort? What are you willing to try?

From there, the group was invited into deeper waters—led by RMN's Rev. Dr. Israel "Izzy" Alvaran, who guided Session 1 on recognizing micro- and macro-aggressions.

"We all carry a web of identity, privilege, and potential for oppression," Rev. Alvaran said. "Our growth comes from acknowledging that and choosing differently."

Language, was examined not as abstract theory but as a pastoral reality. "A single phrase can signal whether someone is safe," Bagwell explained in Session 2. "We are called to use language that heals, not harms."

Tables were given time to reflect: *Where in your conference, church, or process could a shift in language bring life?*

Stories That Heal

In the afternoon, the conversation shifted from concepts to lived experience. A panel of leaders from both conferences—Deaconess Darlene DiDomineck, Rev. Jess Winderweedle, and Rev. Kaleigh Corbett Rasmussen—shared their stories as queer leaders navigating call, trauma, and courage.

"The fortitude, wisdom, and resilience of queer clergy is an untapped resource for the church," said Rev. Winderweedle, whose dissertation explores queer clergy experiences across mainline denominations.

Rev. Corbett Rasmussen added, "We need brave spaces where stories are heard—not just told."

DiDomineck reminded the room, "Queer folks aren't just in clergy roles or reconciling congregations. We are laypeople too, born into every part of our churches."

Their words stirred the room, and sparked discussions around tangible next steps at the conference level.

Alyssa Ruch, Director of Pathways Bridges, described the conversations as powerful reminders of the spiritual practice of community-building.

"It reinforced the importance of cultivating a culture of storytelling, curiosity, and learning in the work of building beloved community," she said. "That's central to what we're doing in EPA & GNJ through Pathways Bridges—yet another small, intentional step."

Small, Faithful Steps

The final sessions emphasized the importance of structure and spirit. Participants reflected on how to support LGBTQ+ candidates in ordination and considered RMN's framework for understanding stages of inclusion.

"We cannot legislate grace," Rev. Alvaran said. "We cannot legislate relationships. That's the work of the Holy Spirit."

Rather than prescribe a one-size-fits-all model, the facilitators encouraged small, faithful steps: foster courageous conversations, build trust, celebrate stories, and—above all—move at the pace of grace.

Rev. Noé Gabriel López, Associate Superintendent of Eastern

Pennsylvania, reflected on how the training deepened his awareness of identity and intersectionality.

"What stood out to me was the reminder to be cognizant of the intersections of our identities—how some grant privilege while others lead to marginalization," he shared. "As a cisgender male and U.S. citizen, I hold certain privileges, yet as a first-generation Guatemalan raised in North Philadelphia, I also navigate complexities that shape my experience and have, many times, marginalized me."

For Rev. Lopez, the training reinforced the necessity of building a church that remains open and inclusive—not only in its policies but in how it honors the fullness of each person's story.

Hope for the Future

After the training concluded, Rev. Emily Bagwell shared watching conference leadership actively engage with foundational tools for building a more inclusive and affirming church reaffirmed her belief in the transformative power of such efforts.

"This engagement fuels my hope for the future of the United Methodist Church," she said. "We have an abundance of gifts to offer the world, and by embracing greater sensitivity and



Panelist Rev. Dr. Jess Winderweedle pauses to laugh while sharing her story. Corbin Payne photo

awareness, we will be able to bless countless individuals and make a lasting impact."

RMN leaders plan to take insights from this training and use them to shape future sessions with other conferences and agencies across the denomination.

Looking Ahead

This will not be the last training of its kind in Eastern Pennsylvania and Greater New Jersey. Conference leaders are already planning future sessions to expand the circle, deepen understanding, and continue the work of building a truly inclusive church.

Rev. Dawn Taylor-Storm, EPA&GNJ Director of Connectional Ministries, summed it up: "It's one thing to write policy. It's another to live out our faith. And that's what today was about."

As the day came to a close, leaders packed up handouts and unfinished conversations, but many lingered in the hallways, sharing reflections and next steps. The rain had stopped.

And something new had begun. 🌈



Rev. Dr. Israel "Izzy" Alvaran, Director of United Methodist Connections of Reconciling Ministries Network. Corbin Payne photo

Daily Dinner Ministry

Continued from page 1

On March 2nd, the church celebrated the ministry’s fifth anniversary, marking a milestone in a journey that has been as challenging as it has been transformative. “Every Day?!”

Rev. Myungsun Han still remembers the moment he first learned about the Dinner Ministry. “I practically shouted, ‘Every day?!’” he recalled. It had been just a month since his appointment to the church when he saw the live security camera feed—volunteers distributing meals on Liberty Street.

What he quickly discovered was that he wasn’t alone. “This ministry isn’t carried by just one person—it’s held up by an incredible team of leaders and volunteers,” he said. “They organize, they improvise, they make things happen.” On nights when food runs short, volunteers scramble to order pizza, raid the freezer, and create meals out of whatever is available. It is a labor of love, sustained by dedication, faith, and a deep understanding of what it means to serve.



Christian Orlando-Price races to quickly pack meal containers.



Children gather for the children’s message.

A Ministry of Presence

After five years of serving daily meals, the congregation gathered to celebrate and praise God for the steadfast faithfulness that had sustained them through the ups and downs. The anniversary service was filled with moments of gratitude and reflection. Volunteers shared testimonies of what the ministry has meant to them. Some had been serving since the beginning; others were newer, drawn in by the simple but profound act of feeding others.

“This ministry is a powerful testament to what can be achieved when people come together in service to others,” said Rev. Han. “We are deeply grateful for the volunteers, churches, and organizations that have made this possible, and we invite more people to join us in this mission of compassion and care.”

The evening also included a video message from the ministry’s founder, Rev. Joseph Jueng, who reflected on its humble beginnings. He reminded those gathered that the work of feeding the hungry is deeply rooted in the Gospel.

the humanity in each person who comes through our doors.”

Every evening, the volunteers offer a listening ear, a warm smile, and a reminder that no one is invisible. Over time, those who come for meals begin to see the church as something more than a distribution point—they see it as a place of belonging.

And the ministry is not just sustained by the church alone. Local organizations and businesses contribute resources, and a network of faith communities comes together to make sure the meals never stop. Trustees, cleaning crews, church committees, and community members—each play a role in keeping the table open.

Musical performances from Diane Booyoung Seo and Dustin Ciano filled the sanctuary with sounds of both celebration and reflection, underscoring the sacredness of the moment.

Beyond the Table

The Dinner Ministry has never been just about food. “It’s about presence,” Han emphasized. “It’s about recognizing

“Until the Day Homelessness is Only in the Dictionary”

As the church looks ahead, there is no sign of slowing down. “My prayer is that God fills our hearts with renewed energy so that we may continue serving—until the day homelessness is found only in the dictionary,” Han said.

For those who have never volunteered, he offered a simple invitation: “Come. Serve. Witness the grace of God in action.”

And for those who wonder whether small acts of kindness truly make a difference, the answer is found at the dinner table, in the laughter of volunteers, in the eyes of those who receive a meal with gratitude.

To those who have supported the ministry—whether by volunteering, donating, or simply offering encouragement—the church extends its thanks. “To God



A packed house gathers to celebrate the ministry and praise God for God’s faithfulness. Photos by Ginger Haithcox

be the glory for the great things God has done through our Dinner Ministry!” Han proclaimed.

The work continues, one meal at a time. 🇺🇸

Learn more at umcnb.org.

From Fellowship Fund to Gift of Care Circle

we’re grateful for decades of partnership from GNJ congregations in championing compassionate care for NJ’s seniors!

Join us aboard the River Queen on May 29th as we celebrate 40 years of supporting the United Methodist Communities’ ministry of abundant life for seniors.

For details and ticket info, visit SupportUMCF.org



Anchored  in Generosity

40th Anniversary Celebration Cruise



Join Us for Unforgettable SUMMER CAMP EXPERIENCES!

Four Sites—One Camp Family

Carson Simpson

- Willow Grove, PA
- csf.org

Gretna Glen

- Lebanon, PA
- gretnaglen.org

Innabah

- Spring City, PA
- innabah.org

Pocono Plateau

- Cresco, PA
- poconoplateau.org



God's Place Apart. Transforming Lives.