

THE RELAY

The United Methodist Church of Greater New Jersey

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Communities of Hope Teams Prepare to Step out in Faith

By Josh Kinney
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Congregations who participated in the second Communities of Hope training all shared similar hopes and fears as they sat together around tables discussing aspirations and hesitations.

Communities of Hope, the strategic planning, asset-based community development program developed by the United Methodist Church of Greater New Jersey, equips leaders to identify assets in their community and build toward positive transformation through alliance building and action plan development. Its second commissioning ceremony was held on Dec. 10 at the Mission and Resource Center in Neptune.

Congregation teams from Trinity UMC in Roebing, Fieldsboro UMC and a cooperative parish of several collaborative churches in the North Hudson area gathered to celebrate the completion of their six-month intensive training and pray over their community development initiatives.

"The commissioning provides an opportunity to celebrate the work of these teams, mark the end of their training and the beginning of their implementation process moving forward," said Nicole Caldwell-Gross, Director of Missions, who led the program and met with each team throughout their training period to assist in the development of their individual community asset-based plans.

"We're raising up ambassadors of hope to these communities," she said.

Bobbie Ridgely, Executive Director of A Future With Hope, addressed the trainees.

"United Methodists really live out that vision of being the hands and feet of Jesus," she said. "There's something to be said about being out in the community to make a difference."

A Future With Hope, which was launched in the aftermath of Superstorm Sandy to aid in long term recovery, is shepherding its resources to move into community development; becoming the mission arm of GNJ and the umbrella for Communities of Hope and Hope Centers.

"People are integral," Ridgely said. "When you think about the work you might embark on in the future, there's often fear and hope and hope and fear." She added, "Your hopes and your fears are all real but they're what help you to move forward."

The room bustled with murmurs of anxious excitement as the trainees wrote down those hopes and fears on post-it notes and placed them on a board.

Through their training, the groups learned specific ways in which they could benefit their communities by identifying needs, setting priorities and working in partnerships. The program teaches how collaboration with different faiths, residents, local organizations, schools, government and business broadens the scope of what can be accomplished and yields results with lasting impact greater than one group or congregation can establish alone. The idea is to generate new models of development, testing programs which can be replicated in other communities.

"A Community of Hope involves transformation, and it is the movement from charity to economic justice," said Ridgely. "It's rooted in self-determination, and it



A commissioning ceremony for Communities of Hope teams was held last month at the Mission and Resource Center. Photo by Josh Kinney

assures community participation in all decision-making."

A Future With Hope Case Manager Andrea Wren-Harden helped facilitate the commissioning and shared that prayer, networking and trusting in God are all important aspects of moving forward with community development projects.

"Part of Communities of Hope training is to encourage congregations in changing mission fields that are income generated to pour back into the community," said Caldwell-Gross.

In June, Rutgers University Assistant Professor Dr. Jeffery Robinson of The Center for Urban Entrepreneurship and

Economic Development led a day-long summit at the Mission and Resource Center as part of the Communities of Hope program.

"Jesus was a risk-taker, and in His narrative preaching engaged all the major industries of His day including shepherding, fishing, winemaking and even investing," said Caldwell-Gross, who praised the new social entrepreneurship aspect of the program.

Bishop Schol addressed the commissioning ceremony via video message, congratulating the three sites for their out-of-the-box thinking and discernment as to what's happening in each of their

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Clergy Bless Badges of First Responders



Dobbins UMC partnered with My Father's House Ministries in Delanco for a 'Blessing of the Badges' service for their communities first responders.

Photo by Carl Kosola of The Burlington County Times

By Josh Kinney
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Rev. Chuck Mitchell of Dobbins UMC in Delanco Township felt a debt of gratitude to the first responders in his community. Knowing that the men and women of the police, fire, and EMT squad dedicate their lives to the service of protecting others, he decided to dedicate a ceremony to honor them.

Delanco Township clergy blessed their community's police officers, firefighters and EMS workers at a "Blessing of the Badges" ceremony on Dec. 13 at Dobbins

Memorial UMC.

Mitchell partnered with Rev. Donshae Joyner of the Delanco grassroots ministry 'My Father's House' in facilitating the service which included prayers for first responders and remarks from clergy and Delanco Mayor Kate Fitzpatrick.

"The vision here was to provide an opportunity as a church to show the community that we care and want to provide a safe place for first responders to be present," said Mitchell. "We wanted to pray for them, that God would continue to be with them and give them patience, strength, compassion, and grace whenever they

encounter difficult aspects of their jobs."

Joyner, an African-American pastor, joined Mitchell in sending a message of peace and unity. Dobbins UMC youth leader Dave Gannon assisted by anointing the foreheads and badges of the first responders and praying with them. He also serves as Chaplain of Hope Hose Station 122 in Beverly where he has volunteered since age 17.

"For me, the blessing held a special place in my heart because I was blessing the badges of those who I consider to be brothers and sisters," said Gannon. "With everything that is going on in the world today, I thank God that He has given me this opportunity."

In the midst of recent political turmoil and negative police stories in the national news, the ceremony was intended to display trust and appreciation for the work of the first responders.

"We as a community should come together and 'Bless the Badges' to let them [First Responders] know that we stand behind them, value their service and pray for their safety," Fitzpatrick said.

Mitchell was inspired by a similar event organized by a colleague in Moorestown last September. Although the ceremony is spreading nationally, he was unaware of another community in New Jersey other than Moorestown that had participated and decided to start with Delanco.

"We want everyone to connect with each other, and my goal is that every community will start to do this," said Mitchell. "Our goal and vision is always to help the hurting and the lost, but we

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Regional Stewardship Meetings Garner Church Support

By Josh Kinney
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Last fall, representatives from Wespath held three informational group meetings in GNJ for prospective clients. A broad representation of churches attended the gatherings at Haddonfield UMC, Chatham UMC and at the Mission and Resource Center to hear more about Wespath, The United Methodist Stewardship Foundation of GNJ's investment management company.



One of the perspective clients was The First UMC in Freehold. The church's Endowment Committee Chairman Ray Ritchie noted that the Book of Discipline encourages churches to give consideration to placement of their endowment funds with their conference foundation, if such a framework exists.

"In our case, GNJ did not have an acceptable investment opportunity when we established our endowment fund a number of years ago," said Ritchie. "But now that our conference does have such a fund, we felt we should give it serious consideration."

That review led the church to move its

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A Message from the Bishop



We have a future - Part 2

I see a 20 to 50-year view of GNJ, and I am encouraged.

Dorothy smiled a lot. She was joyful and in the midst of challenges she was calm. She laughed and prayed a lot and she had a bright hopeful spirit. She sang in the choir, taught Sunday school and Vacation Bible School, and everyone enjoyed working with

her. Dorothy was also courageous. She did not have an easy life, her husband died and she raised the children, she did not make a lot of money, and she lived in a neighborhood that had high crime and drug dealers. Dorothy was a believer, a passionate disciple with a deep faith. People wanted to work with Dorothy and they enjoyed being in her company. They felt closer to God when they were with her.

I find myself asking where did Dorothy's passionate faith come from. Life and circumstances could have made her bitter, afraid, anxious. She rose above her circumstances and was sustained by her faith.

This is the second in a five-part series on building and growing a regenerative church conference that is constantly generating:

- Passionate faith
- Transformative Leaders
- Vital missional congregations
- Money, and lots of it for mission

God wants us to have passionate faith. John in the Book of Revelation prophesied what Jesus was saying to the church. To the church of Laodicea, Jesus said, you are neither hot nor cold but lukewarm so I will spit you out of my mouth. (Revelation 3:14-16) Think of a lukewarm glass of milk. Lukewarm churches and disciples are not appealing to Jesus.

I have more questions than answers about where passionate faith comes from but I believe the answers are in GNJ. Today I want to talk with you about regenerative passionate faith. Passionate faith is key to our future. Faith in God's grace experienced through Jesus Christ is why we exist as a church. The more passionate our faith, the more we see the church we want to become.

Today there are a lot of people concerned about the future of the church. I am not. But I am concerned about the future of the mission and how the church will adapt and change today to be serving a robust mission in 20-50 years. It begins with a passionate faith like Dorothy's.

Passionate faith is not a particular theology although theology is important. I have encountered passionate liberals and conservatives as well as passionate disciples with a more centrist theology. I have also encountered churches and people with different theologies that are not passionate. It is not the type of theology they have but more about how they practice their faith.

Passionate faith is not an ideology. There have been many passionate Christians who have led us astray. For example, the KKK was started by a Methodist, the Holocaust was perpetuated by Christians. Balanced theology and the corrective Christian community is essential for healthy passionate faith.

Passionate faith is not a set of beliefs. What people believe is a reflection of their values and experiences. Creeds like the Apostles Creed and Nicene Creed were written at particular times in the church's history to clarify what the church valued as important and critical to faith.

Passionate faith walks with people through their most difficult crises. When people are concerned about churches closing or denominations dying or splitting, those with passionate faith are more concerned about mission and sharing faith with children and youth. When others are talking doom and gloom, people with passionate faith are talking hope. Not Pollyannaish syrupy faith and hope, but the hope that says I can be a difference in someone's life, and the church can be the difference in the community regardless of its size or where it is or the condition it is in.

Passionate faith is not determined by the external conditions in which the church or an individual finds themselves, rather it is the inner conviction that God will see us through and the inner determination that I am important to God's deep desires for the world. Healthy passionate faith is bounded by a community that values difference, principles, inclusion, authenticity, transparency and integrity. This is what I witnessed in Dorothy and her church community.

But where does this kind of faith come from and how is it passed on? How do we build a GNJ that ignites passion and deep faith?

I think it has to do with life changing experiences, experiential learning, permission-giving leaders, and sharing stories of people who have the faith we want to see.

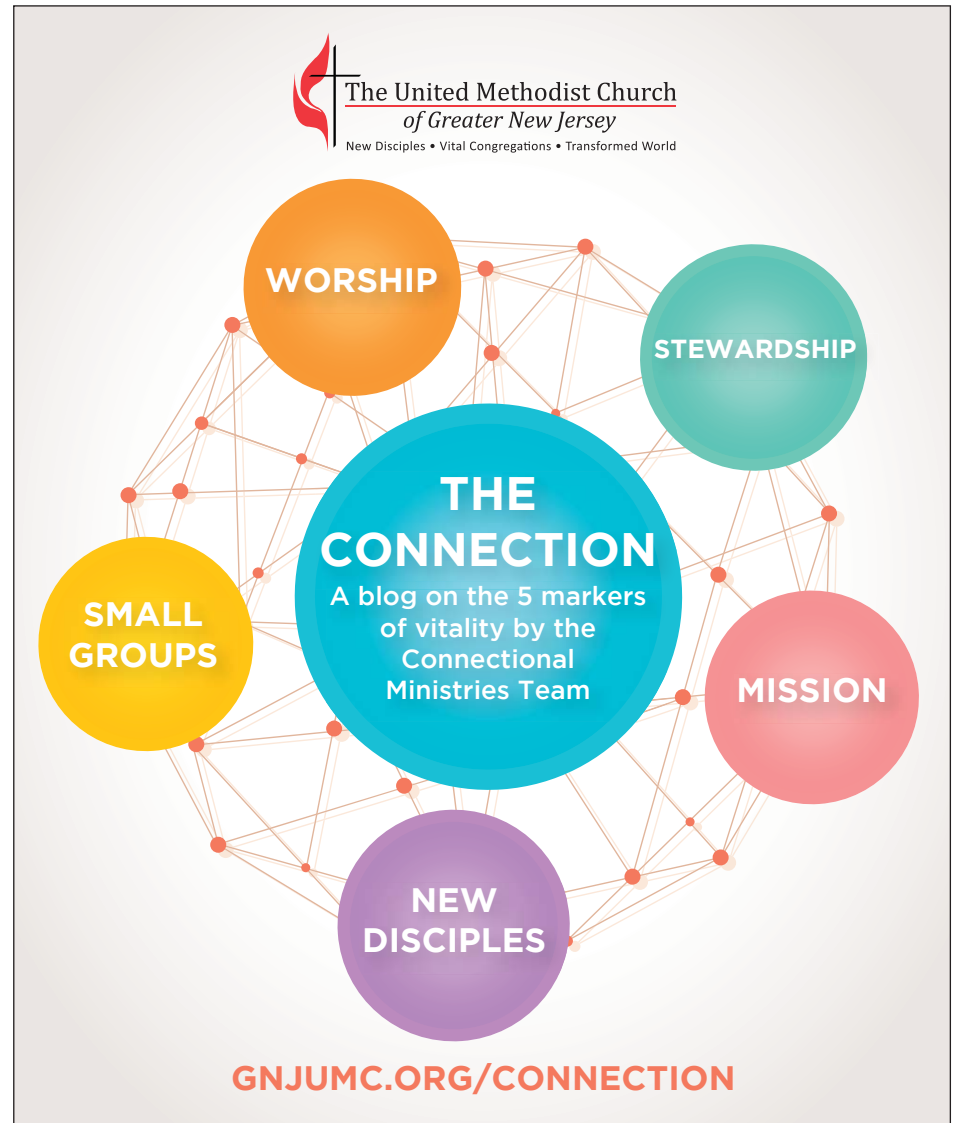
I am encouraged by what I see in GNJ's future. I see and experience passionate faith in our leaders and disciples. This encourages me

and it is what will support and engage an important mission 20 to 50 years from now. This is why I am focused on creating the desire, support and processes to continue to regenerate passionate faith.

What increases your passion for learning about God, following Jesus Christ, sharing your faith with others and engaging in community mission? Send your responses to me at BishopJohnSchol@gnjumc.org. I will use what I learn from you with our GNJ leaders to create a regenerative faith throughout GNJ. Together we will regenerate passionate faith.

Keep the faith!

John



**The February 2017
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is January 23, 2017**

THE RELAY

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PREPARE FOR A YEAR OF WORSHIP AND PREACHING.

Advanced planning can help pastors and worship planners be intentional in balancing the many messages that God has for our churches and community.

Consider the calendar below:

JANUARY

ATTRACTIVE

Publicize this series during Advent or Christmas Eve. New Year's resolutions and goals can reach those who aren't regular churchgoers.

FEBRUARY

MARRIAGE AND RELATIONSHIPS

With Valentine's Day in the middle of the month, this is a great time to address relationships in family and in romance and connect it to life and faith.

LENT

DISCIPLESHIP

Grab the attention of those who don't usually attend church with a series investigating provocative questions of faith. Promote it to visitors during Easter and Palm Sunday.

AFTER LENT

ATTRACTIVE

Grab the attention of those who don't regularly attend church. Promote the series on Palm Sunday and Easter. Some of those visitors will come back for a series they can relate to.

LATE SPRING

DISCIPLESHIP

Celebrate graduations and those who serve in your church. Challenge the congregation to stay engaged with their faith through the summer months.

SUMMER

DEPTH AND FUN

Faithful, regular attenders will appreciate a deep study of scripture. Balance with something fun. Consider a series about "Summer Blockbusters" and explore theology in popular movies.

BACK TO SCHOOL

ATTRACTIVE

As families focus on going back to school, include a coming "back to church" series as part of their routines.

FALL

DISCIPLESHIP

Average church attendance has increased from summer and churches bring in new people. Seek spiritual growth and focus on commitments like baptism and good stewardship.

ADVENT

MISSIONAL

Worship and preaching should always lead to mission and service. Counter the cultural messages of consumerism by challenging people to give and serve; putting faith into action.

*Idea and suggestions adapted from Adam Hamilton's book "Unleashing the Word."

Rev. Al Sharpton Pays Visit to Parkside UMC

By Josh Kinney
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The Rev. Al Sharpton took to the pulpit at Parkside United Methodist Church in Camden on Sunday, Dec. 11, 2016, encouraging the congregation to overcome personal adversities.

Sharpton, 62, a Brooklyn native and iconic outspoken civil rights activist best known for boisterous preaching, addressed approximately 400 at the 102-year-old church on Kaighns Ave on the third Sunday of Advent. A special performance by the "Vessels for Christ" dance ministry preceded the message.

Joined on the altar by Parkside UMC's Senior Pastor, Rev. Keith D. Dickens, and Gateway South District Superintendent, Rev. Myrna Bethke, Sharpton pivoted the message off of politics and on to spirituality.

"Before you get to the politics of the matter, you've got to deal with your spiritual depth," Sharpton declared. He added, "We battle not flesh and blood, not Democrats or Republicans, not Clinton or Trump. We battle wickedness."



Rev. Al Sharpton delivered a moving sermon at Parkside UMC in Camden on Dec. 11, 2016. Sharpton is pictured above at the pulpit next to Gateway South District Superintendent Rev. Myrna Bethke. Photo by Josh Kinney

election night he watched the results with several people who were setting themselves up for White House positions in what they hoped would be Hillary Clinton's administration.

"They were all talking about what they were going to do for themselves, not what they were going to do for others," he said, describing a moment of moving revelation.

Sharpton repeatedly invoked Psalm 37, which according to The Message translation says in verses 5-6 to "open up before God, keep nothing back, He'll do whatever needs to be done." He challenged the congregation, asking them what they were going to do to defend those who are righteous.

"If you do what God has told you to do, He will bless you," said Sharpton. "Whatever mistakes you made in life has made you stronger." He went on to say that Christians ought to get back up after they stumble.

"There's never been anyone in the Bible God didn't test," he said. "The higher the test, the higher the grade. Can't pass from elementary school to secondary school on an elementary school test."

The sermon centered on overcoming hardships and God making "a way" out of "no way."

At age four, Sharpton began proclaiming the gospel. He went on to become a Baptist minister, a nationally renowned



A lively crowd of approximately 400 gathered inside the 102-year-old Parkside UMC in Camden to listen to Rev. Al Sharpton's sermon. Photo by Josh Kinney

social justice leader, and host of MSNBC's PoliticsNation. At Parkside, he promoted his "We Shall Not Be Moved" march for civil rights, scheduled for Jan. 14, 2017, in Washington, D.C., two days before the late Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday.

Months prior, Dickens emailed Sharpton inviting him to preach at Parkside. To his surprise, Sharpton replied and accepted the offer.

"The Bible is all about triumphs and tragedies; victories and defeats," Sharpton preached, mentioning how on

"When trials come, I think God must be getting ready to promote me," Sharpton said. "Don't fret. Through it all, I've learned to trust in Jesus and trust in God. I've learned to depend on His word. He'll make a way. Fret not, 'cause He'll make a way."

After the sermon, Sharpton sold and signed copies of his book "The Rejected Stone."

Bethke said she found Sharpton's sermon "deeply moving at many levels." "He had us laughing, standing in support of his word, all the while challenging us to action," she said. "His statement that we have created a culture of cross bearers, when what we need are cross bearers has echoed in my spirit. I know that the congregation at Parkside UMC will continue to be shaped and challenged by his words."

One churchgoer, Paula Bryant of Sicklerville praised Sharpton's sermon, calling it "uplifting."



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All laity and clergy from GNJ are invited into a deeper conversation to develop our hopes and aspirations for the future of The United Methodist Church and send them to the Commission on the Way Forward. We have the opportunity to model graceful controversy. We will hold a gathering for GNJ members to identify how best we would like to see the church move forward and all church members and clergy are welcome to participate.

RSVP by February 10, 2017

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND RESOURCES, GO TO:

www.gnjumc.org/gracefulcontroversies



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Regional Stewardship Meetings Garner Church Support

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endowment to the Stewardship Foundation.

“The GNJ Stewardship Foundation offered us an opportunity for lowering our management fees from about 1.45% per annum to 1% per annum,” Ritchie said. “Since The Stewardship Foundation uses Wespath to manage most of its funds, we felt we would benefit from an investment diversity and security standpoint, as Wespath manages about \$21 billion in assets and uses dozens of independent fund management firms as contractors in handling portions of its portfolio.”

In 2015, Wespath Investment Management emerged as the best option aligned with the strategic plan goals of GNJ from an investment return and administrative support perspective and was chosen by The Stewardship Foundation to help it become best in class, keeping the commitment to grow GNJ church assets for ministry.

“We resonated with the intent of Wespath and the GNJ Stewardship Foundation to manage our assets in accordance with the social principles of the United Methodist Church,” said Ritchie. He added, “By investing in our own conference Foundation, we will have more access to expert help in setting up programs for our church in such areas as planned giving.”

As the investment management division of the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits of The United Methodist Church, now officially known as Wespath

Benefits and Investments, and the largest faith-based investor in the U.S., Wespath invests solely using United Methodist social principles in compliance with the Book of Discipline. That means the organization withholds investing in companies that produce alcohol and tobacco, operate sweat shops or give executives large bonuses while employees are laid off. Their aim is to avoid ethical exclusions, engage policy makers and corporations, proxy voting, management of excessive sustainability risk and invest in positive social purpose lending and low-carbon energy solutions.

Additionally, Wespath values transparency and provides access to a full record of the company’s holdings and proxy voting, their investment philosophy, shareholder investment stories and a comprehensive list of ethical exclusions that’s frequently maintained and can be downloaded.

“Wespath prides itself on socially responsible investing that’s not just a ‘thou shalt not’” said Sue Goodman, Interim Executive Director of The United Methodist Stewardship Foundation of GNJ. “Their engagement differentiates them from other foundations. They seek to be an agent for change.”



Wespath Benefits and Investments corporate office building in Glenview, IL. Photo provided

Some of that change includes becoming the only faith-based bounding signatory to the United Nations Principles for Responsible Investment (UNPRI), which Wespath helped co-author. Additionally, Wespath makes market-based loans for low-income housing and social needs, promoting affordable housing and community development for disadvantaged communities, and microfinancing in developing countries. The company has specifically invested in New Jersey through loans to the North Star Academy charter school in Newark and an affordable housing project in Merchantville.

In addition to the three informational gatherings Wespath held last fall, six other one on one meetings were had with current and prospective churches as well as The Centenary Fund and Preachers’ Aid Society which has moved their investments to Wespath. The Stewardship Foundation currently serves more than 55 churches with their long-term investments including Mount Pleasant UMC in Millville, Denville Community Church, and Island Heights UMC. One of

the latest churches to consider Wespath is North Wildwood UMC which is in the process of merging with First UMC in Wildwood Crest.

“The foundation doesn’t just offer the investment management side of things, we want to work with member churches on stewardship education, managing existing resources well, and being good stewards of what we already have,” said Goodman. “We want to work with churches on financial management education as well as financial literacy education for their community members.”

The larger the foundation grows, the better for GNJ which, according to Goodman, begs the question to churches: “Who are you supporting and are you ethically aligned?”

For more information about how your congregation can invest through the United Methodist Stewardship Foundation of Greater New Jersey, strengthen your congregation’s stewardship, or hear more about the Wespath story, contact Sue Goodman at sgoodman@gnjumc.org

WHAT FOOTPRINTS DO YOU WANT TO LEAVE?



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Grant Boosts A Future With Hope Collaboration

By Josh Kinney
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The Robin Hood Foundation has reaffirmed their support for Sandy recovery and the work of A Future With Hope by allocating a new grant to A Future With Hope and its partners. The new grant of \$1.45 million from Robin Hood is set to be split among A Future With Hope, the Episcopal Diocese of New Jersey (EDNJ), SBP (formerly St. Bernard Project) and the Affordable Housing Alliance (AHA). This money is in addition to the \$750,000 in grant monies the organization has previously granted to A Future With Hope and the United Methodist Church.

Robin Hood is New York's largest poverty-fighting organization, and since 1988 it has focused on finding, funding and creating programs and schools that generate meaningful results for the families of the region's poorest neighborhoods. Following Superstorm Sandy in October of 2012, Robin Hood organized a relief fund to help meet the challenges left in the storm's wake.

"While we were new to funding in New Jersey, we could not have found a better partner than A Future With Hope," said Stephanie Phillips, a Senior Management Consultant at Robin Hood. "We have found the organization to be well-managed and effective. A Future With Hope provided best-in-class support to Sandy-affected families and expertly navigated getting these families back into their homes."

Robin Hood has received more than \$74.7 million in contributions which have been granted to hundreds of organizations in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut. Since its founding, the organization has raised more than \$2.5 billion in dollars, goods and services to provide hundreds of the most effective soup kitchens, homeless shelters, schools, job-training programs and other vital services that give struggling citizens the tools they need to build better lives.

Regarding Sandy recovery, Robin Hood's website states: "We were humbled by the outpouring of support from people all around the world, and we work



Pictured above: A Future With Hope volunteers help with the rebuilding process of Nan Unley's home in Tuckerton.

Photo by Josh Kinney

to ensure that every dollar we receive goes back into the communities that need help."

Many of those communities are where A Future With Hope continues to rebuild and bring families home. With an estimated 4,000 families yet to complete their recovery in New Jersey, A Future With Hope's steadfast commitment to seeing the recovery work through to completion has helped bring hundreds of families home over the last four years. In 2016, the organization rebuilt its 250th home.

"A Future With Hope has been a blessing for us to be this close to going home," said Nan Unley, whose Tuckerton house was ravaged by Sandy and in February 2016 garnered support from A Future With Hope. "Without them and all the volunteers, it would not have happened!"

A Future With Hope worked with SBP, EDNJ and AHA on applying for a col-

laborative grant through Robin Hood to drive partnerships between the organizations and finish the job of getting Sandy survivors home.

"We want this funding to help get those families most in need over the finish line," said A Future With Hope Executive Director Bobbie Ridgely. "We've come this far, and we can't back down now."

Through 2016, more than 11,000 volunteers have helped move families over that finish line by working with A Future With Hope. Volunteers are needed through 2017 as work continues.

In addition to the grant, generous support from UMCOR and the GNJ Mission Fund has contributed in paving a way forward for A Future With Hope in 2017.

"We knew that recovery from a disaster of this size takes years. When we set a goal of rebuilding 300 homes,

we knew we would be on the ground helping people for five years or more," said Bishop John Schol. "It's what United Methodists do. When people hurt, United Methodists help."

The organization continues living into its role as the mission arm of GNJ. In addition to the Sandy recovery ministry A Future With Hope has begun training churches to engage in community development through Communities of Hope training. Over the next 15 years, a goal of launching 100 Hope Centers will move the mission arm toward sustainability beyond disaster relief and recovery and into community renewal throughout New Jersey.

If interested in volunteering with A Future With Hope, please contact Lisa Park at lisapark@afuturewithhope.org or call (732)359-1066.

Clergy Bless Badges of First Responders

Continued from page 1

should also be acknowledging the partnerships with those who are serving to protect us as well." He added, "Throughout the United States, a lot of our police officers are not getting the appropriate support. I wanted to paint the picture that they matter to us. That all the people in our community matter to us."

According to Mitchell, the service was less about religion and more about showing gratitude and support for the first responders. He noted that unlike veterans, first responders do not have a formal day of acknowledgment.

"I started feeling the tension in our country and felt that we needed to remember those who are really doing their best to serve our communities," said Mitchell. "We wanted to lift them up specifically, showing our support. They're walking into dangerous moments, and we want them to know that we love and care for them and that we're here for them."

Delanco Chief of Police Jesse Desanto felt "truly appreciative" of the service and praised Mitchell and Joyner for their joint-effort.

"They made it so easy for us," Desanto said. "We just had to get everyone there and show up, and they took it from there."

Desanto thought the program, audio, visual, music and timing of the ceremony was "absolutely excellent."

"It was really nice that something like this was organized for us," said Desanto. "It meant a lot that the community came out to support us."

Delanco Fire Department Chief Robert Hubler Jr. and Matt Bartlett of the Emergency Squad were also in at-

tendance and spoke about how much they value their community. The fire department and the EMS squad, both made up of trained volunteers, organize fundraisers that serve as the primary source of income for their operations outside of responding to emergencies and continuing their training.

The ceremony featured a theme exploring the origins of badges and how they came to be. For first responders who were unable to attend, their badges were anointed. Police, fire and EMS retirees, church members from the small, tight-knit community, as well as clergy and laity, made up the gathering of about 100.

"I want to express my biggest gratitude to the United Methodist Church for taking the time to recognize us in this way," said Desanto, who left the ceremony feeling inspired. "I just can't say enough. I am so impressed and so pleased."

Desanto noted that he and the 12 members of the Delanco Township Police would usually feel uncomfortable in the limelight, but felt a sincere appreciation for what was done for them.

"It was well worth our time," he said.

Mitchell's aim was to focus the service on blessing the officers with the patience and courage needed to perform their jobs.

"With everything that's going on in our culture right now, with the mistrust and skepticism in police and others, I felt like this was something we could all do to support our first responders in our community," said Mitchell. "Without having a political climate, we're saying we love you and support you."



Rev. Chuck Mitchell and youth leader Dave Gannon of Dobbins UMC in Delanco partnered with My Father's House Ministries Rev. Donshae Joyner to bless the badges of community first responders and pray for their safety and courage.

Photo by Carl Kosola of The Burlington County Times

First UMC Bridgeton 2016 Christmas Celebration



Children received a free meal from the South Jersey community at the 2016 Christmas celebration held at First UMC in Bridgeton. The program was joined by Bridgeton Mayor Kelly, Pastor Diane Arthur, Pastor John Randall, Director, staff, parents and community volunteers. Through the program, a third year of academic and spiritual support for cross-cultural communities of the greater Bridgeton area churches was provided. Meals are supplied along with tutorial, Biblical studies, computer training activities and nutritional workshops for children three days a week. *Photos provided*

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Communities of Hope Teams Prepare to Step out in Faith

Continued from page 1

communities. He challenged the trainees to inspire others to work with them and imagine possibilities.

"You have great plans, but now it's time to inspire people," said Schol. "They won't be inspired by just your ideas but your enthusiasm and your stories."

Schol encouraged the congregations to tell their stories and take their action plans step by step; starting small and building out.

"God wants to raise up hope, and you can make it happen," he beamed.

Through 2016, 20 communities and more than 200 people underwent Community of Hope training and have begun transforming their communities. In Highlands, a congregation and residents partnered with the Borough Council and the Department of Public Works to clean up and bring properties up to code for low-income, disabled and elderly residents. To date, they have refurbished eight properties and engaged close to 100 community members in their work.

"We were worried about committing to such a big project," said Suzanne



Communities of Hope teams joined together in prayer to conclude their commissioning ceremony, encouraging one another as they prepare to step out in faith with their action plans. Photo by Josh Kinney



A commissioning ceremony was held on Dec. 10 at the Mission and Resource Center for the newest Communities of Hope trainees. Photo by Josh Kinney

Thomas, the leader of the Atlantic Highlands UMC Community of Hope team. "Once you go to training you realize the connection of the larger United Method-

ist Church. It makes a difference. The community that we created with the other teams was important to the process. I looked forward to brainstorming and

learning with them."

Additionally, three congregations in Atlantic City are working together to explore affordable housing options for residents with a vision of purchasing blighted property to transform into opportunities for home ownership.

As Sandy recovery ministry winds down, GNJ is gearing up to train churches to engage in community ministry with a goal of launching 100 Communities of Hope or 'Hope Centers' over the next 15 years.

"When you look at it all together it feels overwhelming," said Schol. "But God brought you to this place for a future with hope."

Gateway North District Superintendent Rev. Manuel Sardinas addressed the financial fears of the congregation's action plans at the commissioning ceremony. "Money is an issue, but we need to walk by faith," he said.

Sardinas has already started working with a group of churches in Jersey City gearing up for the next training. Although

located in different neighborhoods, the churches are connected by one of the main arteries of the city, JFK Boulevard. Their community outreach and engagement includes food banks, feeding programs, after school care, homeless outreach and help for undocumented persons. Five pastors serve these churches, and they are connected to and engaged with the other faith communities and clergy associations of the city.

Schol concluded his message by reminding the trainees that God was in their midst.

"People see God in your hope and actions," he said.

Sardinas gathered the group in a large circle where they linked arms and prayed together, repeating the phrase, "Yes we can."

Interested in finding out more or becoming a part of Communities of Hope training? Contact Director of Missions, Nicole Caldwell-Gross at ncaldwellgross@gnjumc.org or call (732)359-1050.

Award Nominations Set For Annual Conference

Each year, individuals and congregations in GNJ are recognized at Annual Conference for their discipleship and achievements. Nominations for these awards are being accepted through Feb. 1. Award requirements and submission details are listed below.

Christian Unity Award

The Commission on Christian Unity and Interfaith Relationships is pleased to announce two Conference Award opportunities. The commission is seeking nominations for an individual and a congregation that work in the areas of Christian Unity and Interfaith Relationships. More information is included on the nomination forms and questions may be directed to Rev. Dr. Vijaya Kumar at vkumar51@gmail.com or by calling (267) 357-9384.

Harry Denman Evangelism Award

The Harry Denman Evangelism Award recognizes a person whose life and ministry exemplifies the teaching of Christ and the Great Commission. Nominations for lay, clergy, and youth are being sought. One lay, one clergy, and one youth award will be presented. Questions? Please contact Rev. Kee Young Yang at 732-892-5926 or email him at pastorkee@stpaulsbayhead.org. Please mail completed nomination packet to: Attn: Rev. Kee Young Yang, GNJAC Board of Discipleship Chair, St. Paul's United Methodist Church, 423 W. Lake Ave. P.O. Box 105, Bay Head, NJ 08742

Harry A. Seese Memorial Scholarship

The United Methodist Church of Greater New Jersey pastors are invited to apply for the Harry A. Seese Memorial Scholarship for continuing education. Each year this award is given to a pastor whose plans for continuing education will lead to strengthening his/her ministry in the local church. Guided by Rose Seese of Gibbsboro, his widow, and supported by ongoing gifts, the scholarship honors her late husband, the Rev. Harry A. Seese, who died while serving the Medford Church. Application procedures and eligibility requirements can be obtained by contacting Ginny Kaiser at the GNJ Connectional Ministries Team, gkaiser@gnjumc.org or (732) 359-1043, or (877) 677-2594, ext. 1043.

Helenor Alter Davisson Award

The Commission on the Status and Role of Women is seeking nominations for the Helenor Alter Davisson Award for outstanding women leadership and influence in GNJ. Please send completed application and supporting documents to Rev. Michelle Ryoo, 60 Cedar St., Ridgefield Park, NJ 07660 or email her at MichelleMRyoo@yahoo.com

For more information about awards and to download award forms, please visit gnjumc.org/2017-annual-conference/award-information

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Left to right - Rene Pak, Loraine Priestley-Smith, Sunghee Park, and Diane Gilbert. Photo provided

PaCE Group Formed on Healing, Health and Wholeness

Diane Gilbert of Kynett UMC in Beach Haven, Rene Pak, Faith Community UMC in Bayville, Sunghee Park of Belford UMC and First UMC in Keansburg, and facilitator, Loraine Priestley-Smith of First UMC in Freehold made up a PaCE group designed around healing, health and wholeness for body, mind and spirit for personal and professional growth in 2016. PaCE, which stands for Pursuing Clergy Excellence is peer learning re-sourcing offered by GNJ to help pastors be better pastors with other pastors. This group studied Parker Palmer's book, A Hidden Wholeness and Joyce Rupp's book The Cup of Our Life. The

highlight of the year was the four-day retreat made possible by grant money from GNJ to allow pastors to pursue their learning goals. Spiritual health, healing, and wholeness was the theme of the retreat which allowed for spiritual direction, and opportunities to play with a variety of spiritual disciplines including walking the labyrinth, coloring mandalas, choosing doors, praying to the sounds of music, journaling questions, reading poetry, sharing together and learning about mudras (praying with life energy). To find out more about PaCE, go to www.gnjumc.org/pace

Scouting Ministries: A Mission Field Ripe for Harvest



By Rev. Kyle Cuperwich
Rev.cuperwich@gmail.com

Unchurched youth are literally at the front doors of GNJ churches, however church leaders never get to see them. Why?

Because they are hidden behind scouting programs. Hundreds of scouting programs use church facilities in GNJ each year. According to the United Methodist Men, approximately 50% of young people that participate in scouting in local churches do not have a church home. Yet those young people go to church each week to attend their scouting meetings.

The Greater New Jersey Board of Discipleship has decided to address this disconnect by bringing attention and focus to scouting.

Through scouting programs for boys and girls shape character and foster community involvement in ways that allow God's grace to work. Though scouting, the next generation of servant leaders in the community and church develop.

Churches should do more than sponsor scouting programs, they should interact and become involved with them. One does not need to be a pastor to be a "missionary" to a scouting program. Laity can be the spiritual presence within a troop; fostering intergenerational relationships to make disciples. Anyone can be a scouting leader, such as a chaplain or a merit badge counselor, who works to transform lives.

The Board of Discipleship is looking to collect information on churches that sponsor and outreach to scouting programs.

What activities does the church engage in to foster interaction?

How does the church support their scout sponsored program or another program in the community?

Please send a response to these questions and other ideas and insights to rev.cuperwich@gmail.com. The insights received will be used to develop resources and tools to help churches and scouts connect.

GNJ'S FIRST MINISTRY PODCAST!



The Uncovered Dish is a bi-weekly 30 minute podcast on Christian leadership. We share, discuss, and journey with listeners on what churches are doing in GNJ. Be sure to like, subscribe, download and comment!

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Episode 2: Making New Disciples | Featuring: Director of New Disciples, Trey Wince

Episode 3: Church Planters Stories | Featuring: Rev. Mike Bill and Yoon Kim

Episode 4: Why Pastors Shouldn't be Small Group Leaders | Featuring: Director of Small Groups, Rev. Beth Caulfield

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United Methodist Communities at Collingswood Listed on U.S. News and World Report's Best Nursing Homes Multiple Measures Guide Consumer Choice

COLLINGSWOOD, N.J. — The United States has 15,600 nursing homes with 1.7 million beds. Among the vast considerations, how do families select places for themselves or their loved ones? With public service at the core, U.S. News and World Report began the Best Nursing Homes list in 2009 to help people identify the best nursing homes.



United Methodist Communities at Collingswood made the 2016 list, assuring and guiding consumers in finding quality care. Located in Collingswood, New Jersey, with approximately 163 residents of all faith backgrounds, it offers Assisted Living, Long Term Care, Rehabilitation, Respite, and Hospice. Overall, it received 4.9 stars, a compilation of ratings in three unique areas: Health Inspections, Nurse Staffing, and Medical Care Quality Measures.

Of note, the senior retirement community garnered 4.7 stars in Nurse Staffing, which includes not only registered nurses, but also, licensed practical nurses, licensed vocational nurses and certified nurse aides and assistants. This important rating considers the amount of time per day patients receive from the nursing staff and the number of hours they worked (excluding temporary staff and physical therapists).

Collingswood earned 4.6 stars in Medical Care Quality Measures. This is based on 16 indicators for long-stay and 9 for short-stay Medicare and Medicaid

residents. Considered the most valid and reliable data from three calendar quarters, they include health conditions, fall prevention measures, pain management, vaccinations, bedsores, and mobility.

James Clancy, executive director reflected, "I am very proud of the work done every day by our amazing Collingswood healthcare team. Results like this are a product of hard work and a sincere caring for the work that they do for all of our residents."

Regarding methodology, the U.S. News overall star rating is an average of a series of monthly overall ratings by the federal Nursing Home Compare program. U.S. News' ratings of health inspection findings, nursing staffing and medical quality measures are similarly averaged from federal data released in October 2016. Because U.S. News evaluates nursing homes over a longer period than the federal program and makes certain modifications, ratings by U.S. News and Nursing Home Compare may differ.

The data behind Best Nursing Homes comes from the federal Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, which sets and enforces standards for nursing homes enrolled in Medicare or Medicaid, as almost all are. U.S. News reports that they have, "collected meaningful data and ratings on nearly every nursing home in the country and built a search tool designed to highlight the facilities that both match up with a family's priorities and carry good ratings besides."

With guidance from the U.S. News and World Report Best Nursing Homes list, you and your loved ones can benefit by making the best possible decision.



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The United Methodist Church of Greater New Jersey

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Are you interested in writing for The Relay or serving as a Staff Photographer? GNJ seeks freelance contributors to be a part of the newspaper in 2017. This is a unique opportunity for young adults, college students, or just writers who want to explore what's happening in GNJ and get their work published.

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If you have questions or need help, please call your Regional Administrative Assistant or Accounting Supervisor, Danielle Andrews at the Mission Resource Center. 732-359-1000

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CONFERENCE HAPPENINGS

Friends Day at Pinelands Center

The Pinelands Center at Mount Misery is celebrating its 70th Anniversary; one of many activities during the year. A Spaghetti Dinner will be hosted Saturday, February 11, 2017 from 5:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m. at the camp: 801 Mt. Misery Road, Browns Mills, NJ 08015. The cost is \$8 per adult and \$5.00 for seniors and children under 12.

Quest Diagnostics Data Breach – HealthFlex Response

HealthFlex participants may have heard about a recent data breach at Quest Diagnostics, the third-party vendor that administers our Blueprint for Wellness biometric screenings. Center for Health is in close communication with Quest Diagnostics, and has been assured that HealthFlex participants who participated in Blueprint for Wellness were not impacted by this breach.



Play at Trinity UMC in Hackettstown Commemorates 200th Anniversary of Silent Night

To commemorate the 200th anniversary of when the lyrics of Silent Night were written, Trinity United Methodist Church in Hackettstown performed an original Christmas play, "All is Calm, All is Bright." Written exclusively for Trinity Church by member Bill Nutt, the play told the fascinating story of how the Christmas classic hymn, Silent Night by Franz Gruber and Joseph Mohr, was created. Set against the backdrop of World War I, when a truce on Christmas Eve in 1914 brought British and German soldiers together for an evening of song, sweets and a soccer match. Directed by Nancy De Rienzo, this production featured an outstanding cast of Trinity Church members such as Matthew Bippart, Brian Blanford, Jen Caldwell, Toni Chadwick, David, Dingley, Teri Mooney, Tom Mooney, Gretchen Sundstrom-Smith, John Torkos, John Torkos Jr., and others. Several Trinity Church musicians, including Associate Pastor, Jenny Smith Walz on flute, also lent their talents to the production. In addition, original World War I uniforms were featured, thanks to John Torkos Sr., and period costumes and furniture were featured to depict the battlefield as well as the Austrian church where the beautiful 'Stille Nacht' was first performed.



Malaga UMC Youth Bring Thanksgiving to Homeless

The Malaga UMC youth group raised donations, cooked, and provided 50 turkey meals for the homeless in Vineland. A happy group is pictured left, working to serve their local community and make an impact for Christ.



OBITUARIES

Jean White, Spouse of Retired Elder Rev. W. James White, died on Dec. 15, 2016. A celebration of life took place on Jan. 7, 2017 at Morristown UMC in Morristown.

Memorial donations (in lieu of flowers) may be sent to Craven County Literacy Council, 2507 – A Neuse Blvd., New Bern, NC 28562 or the Morris County Habitat for Humanity, 274 South Salem St., Suite 100, Randolph, NJ 07869.

Expressions of sympathy may be sent to Rev. Dr. James White, 343 Five Springs Rd., Stroudsburg, PA 18360.

Dorothy E. Worth, Surviving Spouse of Rev. Philip E. Worth, died on Dec. 21, 2016. A celebration of life will take place on April 25, 2017 at Grace Baptist Church in Lancaster, PA.

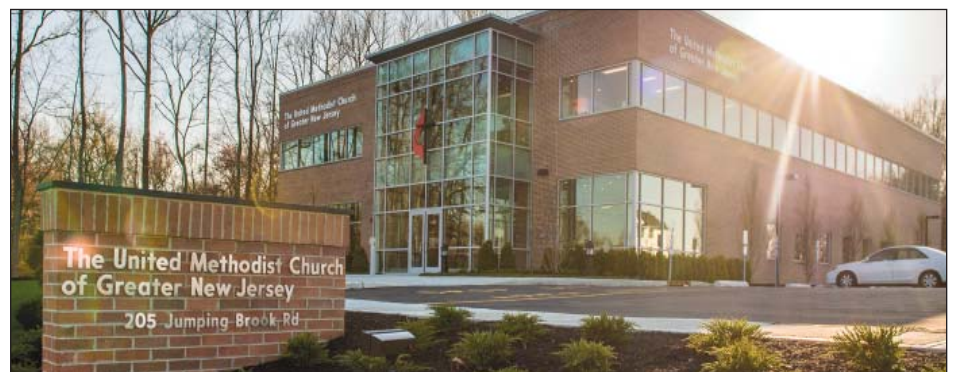
Memorial donations (in lieu of flowers) may be sent to Ranch Hope, P.O. Box 325, Alloway, NJ 08001 or America's Keswick, 601 Route 530, Whiting, NJ 08759.

Expressions of sympathy may be sent to Rev. Fred and Rev. Lanie Price, 245 Pleasant View Dr., Starsburg, PA 17579.

Rev. Robert Godleski died on Dec. 23, 2016. A graveside service was held on Dec. 30 at Mountainview Cemetery in Lebanon, NJ. A celebration of life will take place on Jan. 14, 2017 at Cornwall Manor in Cornwall, PA.

Memorial donations (in lieu of flowers) may be sent to Cornwall Manor, Benevolent Care, 1 Boyd Street, Cornwall, PA 17016.

Expressions of sympathy may be sent to Mrs. Constance Godleski, P.O. Box 125, Cornwall, PA 17016.



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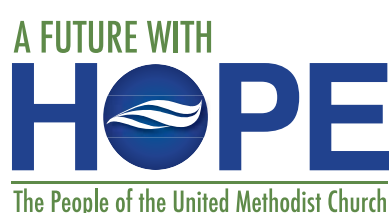
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