

THE RELAY

The United Methodist Church of Greater New Jersey

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In Mercer County, Hunger Knows No Religion

By Josh Kinney
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BORDENTOWN – In the southern shadow of Trenton’s skyline, situated between a sprawl of railways and bus lines, welfare motels, turnpikes, and interstates, a beacon of hope glows inside the warm fellowship hall of Bordentown’s Trinity UMC.

A delicious fragrance marinates the nearby kitchen as Shaesta Chaudhry clangs a tray of simmering potatoes onto the wood countertop. It’s a Tuesday, and outside the weather is frigid, but inside the kitchen is snug and toasty. In just a few short hours volunteers in trucks arrive to spread some of that warmth out into the community with a weekly meal delivery to the struggling families who call the neighboring motels their homes. Simultaneously, the hall starts to throng with people from the area fraught to afford nourishment for themselves and their families.

Since April 4, Trinity UMC has been acting as a satellite campus for the Trenton Area Soup Kitchen (TASK) and serving home-cooked meals prepared by Mercer County Muslims Against Hunger (MMAH). Chaudhry, a volunteer with the Mercer County chapter of MMAH, running programs in Trenton, Hightstown, and Freehold in addition to Bordentown, helped launch the satellite soup kitchen at Trinity along with the church’s hospitality team. The two groups were introduced by TASK after church members reached out to the organization to learn how they could convert their fellowship hall into a place to feed the hungry.

“A community program like ours, involving Christian, Muslim, and secular volunteers, sends a simple yet very clear



Jim Maloney, Jon Lorie, Farzana Jaffery, and Shaesta Chaudhry are pictured hard at work on a Tuesday afternoon inside the kitchen of Trinity UMC in Bordentown, preparing for the evening’s outreach. Photo by Tim Proctor

message: hunger has no religion, and strangers are the friends we haven’t met yet,” said Rev. Thomas Miller, Trinity’s senior pastor.

According to Chaudhry, the meals are made with the same quality food that volunteers would eat at home with their own families.

“We feed people what we like to eat,” she said.

It started with one meeting after church when the laity hospitality group

got together to address one simple question: how can we serve the community around us? Ryan Forbeck was at that meeting. Since October of 2016, he had been attending Trinity and was moved by one of Rev. Miller’s sermons about using talents to serve God and the community. He was drawn to the church’s hospitality team and found himself around a table with church members Elyse Cartey, Diane Maretz and Rev. Miller.

“God’s hand was in this the whole

time,” said Forbeck.

The second Tuesday in operation, the newfound outreach received a \$1,000 donation from the former Bordentown mayor.

“And from there the donations started coming in,” exclaimed Miller. From partnerships with ACME, Wawa, a local deli, and Bordentown Bagels, a momentum began building not only among church volunteers but local businesses, com-

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Hope Center Developer, Andrea Wren-Hardin (center) watches as Gateway North District Superintendent Manuel Sardinias places a pin on a member of the Jersey City “Mission Movers” at a Communities of Hope Commissioning Ceremony on Nov. 4 at Christ UMC in Jersey City. Photo by Edison Lee

Mission Movers Commissioned to Transform Jersey City

By Laura Wise
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JERSEY CITY - On November 4, 2017, six United Methodist communities came together to celebrate their commissioning; a sending forth into the world

and the mission field of their very own community; Jersey City. The service, a culmination of six months of training, affirmed each church community in their choice to do ministry together.

Identifying homelessness as an area where they can make a difference, the

group-- who has affectionately dubbed themselves the Mission Movers-- is committed to creating a more equitable Jersey City. Supporting the concept of ministry together, Gateway North District Superintendent Manuel Sardinias

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All People Conference Unlocks Transformative Potential

By Josh Kinney
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COLUMBUS, OH – Building relationships can lead to building entire neighborhoods, at least that’s what 36 laity and clergy from Greater New Jersey discovered when they stepped off a bus onto Parsons Avenue in the south side of Columbus, Ohio on October 21. Once blighted and in disarray, dozens of new and reconstructed homes stretched for blocks in the gleaming shadow of the city’s Nationwide Children’s Hospital; a vital partner of The United Methodist Church of All People and their nonprofit organization which has helped transform an entire community.

Several years ago, Bishop John Schol was invited to speak at the church’s annual ‘All People Conference’ and agreed under one condition: that he would be able to bring others with him to dream, envision, and learn in the hopes of leaving inspired and equipped to go forth and live out what it means to truly be a church for all people.

Mission

For Rev. John Edgar and the All People Church, it started with acknowledging

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A Message from the Bishop



The church and identity crisis

Did you know that The United Methodist Church doesn't exist? How could that be? We are more than 12 million members worldwide. We have 30,000 congregations right here in the U.S. But, as a denomination, we are not incorporated, we are a series of incorporated bodies. Annual Conferences are incorporated, General Church Agencies are incorporated, and congregations are incorporated, but the denomination as a whole is not. The various organizations make up The United Methodist Church.

As a denomination, and particularly at the General Church level, we are organized and act more like a government than a church. We are modeled after the pattern of the United States government. We have three branches of government: legislative (General Conference oversight of the mission, constitution and laws of the UMC), judicial (Judicial Council decides the constitutionality of laws decided by General Conference and if they are followed by the conferences and other bodies of the church) and the executive branch (Council of Bishops that superintends the church). In fact, I shudder when I show up at a meeting and a layperson has brought their Discipline that is dog-eared, underlined and marked with post its. It's then that I know we will be talking about laws and governing issues rather than people and mission.

Today I begin a series about the identity of The United Methodist Church, reflecting upon whether or not we are:

- A government or a church
- A nuclear family or an extended family
- A set of behaviors or a way of being

I want to think with you about how our identity furthers our mission or inhibits our mission.

John Wesley, our founder, never intended for us to be a Church or denomination, let alone a form of government. He intended the Methodist movement to be a way to supplement and support other denominations and focus on weekday living rather than organizing Sunday worship. His great experiment in England attracted thousands of people and created a movement for living spiritually, mercifully and justly. In the 1700s the movement jumped across the Atlantic to the emerging nation here in the United States. But in the U.S., Methodism morphed from a movement and became a denomination.

Governments, particularly large, complex governments, tend to focus more on the laws to carry out the mission rather than the spirit of and activities for carrying out the mission. Systems, particularly large, complex organizations are designed to produce what they accomplish. For instance, General Conference is designed to review, manage and vote on more than 2,000 pieces of legislation which I estimate takes up more than 70% of the 10-day gathering that meets every four years. This becomes a political exercise for the most part, and it is done very well. But I wonder what kind of church we would be today if we spent 70% of our time on worship and mission discernment and accountability. We will probably never know because the oversight of our denomination at the General Church level is designed to act like a government.

The church is better at focusing on worship, mission discernment and accountability where it is small, clear, and the people's context for ministry is similar. These bodies, annual conferences and congregations are also closer to the mission field which is critical for being a church. For instance, GNJ's three-day annual conference session is designed to spend about six hours in legislative conversation and about 12 hours in worship, study, mission discernment, and accountability. This shift has produced greater focus throughout the year on recruiting and equipping spiritual leaders to make disciples and grow vital congregations for the transformation of the world.

Our healthiest churches have a similar experience when they gather for meetings. They focus their meetings on spirituality, mission discernment, and accountability. The other work, policies, procedures, and administration is essential for the health and vitality of the church, but receive maybe only 30% of the meeting time. If we spend 70% of our time on policies, procedures, and administration, we tend to be more law-focused than mission engaged. Our policies and procedures would be better served if they arose out of worship and mission rather than what not to do. This is what governments do; they focus more on law rather than mission, order rather than the movement of the Spirit.

In our earliest days, the Book of Discipline was a daily guide for how a disciple lives their life. It contained hymns, orders of worship, daily practices and guides for how to live. As we matured, in an effort to protect our values and the health of the denomination, I believe we started to become a government and the governmental process became more layered. Today, our Book of Discipline does not contain hymns, orders of worship or daily practices for living a disciple's life but contains our laws and policies primarily for our organizational life.

What's a church to do that is organized as a government? The answer is found in those closest to the mission field. Church literally means those "called out" from the Greek word ecclesia. The New Testament refers to the church as the body of Christ. In other words, a group of people called out to think, feel and act like Jesus did. In The United Methodist Church, I find this happens most often where the people are called out and living and serving the people in the neighborhoods and communities. The ecclesia that is in the neighborhood is more concerned about feeding souls, minds and bodies. It is more connected with the everyday concerns of the people living in the community and world. Suppose every time a congregation, annual conference, and the General Conference gathered, the prevailing questions were: 'what must we decide today to feed the souls, minds and bodies of people in the community?' 'How will our decisions ensure people in the community see and experience the mercy and justice of Jesus through us?'

If we based all of our decisions on these questions, we might actually transform the world.

Three steps to being a church:

1. Recognize whatever group you are with, God has called you out to be the body of Christ
2. Deepen the ecclesia's faith and understanding so that every day the congregation's disciples are living more like Jesus
3. Ask missional questions, like how will this decision help us feed the souls, minds and bodies of the people in the community

When we take these three steps, we become more like the Church of Jesus Christ than a government or a political body. People will see us differently, and our identity will be forged missionally rather than governmentally. Also, never forget, change will occur at the top when it is already happening in the congregations and annual conferences. Let the change continue with us.

Keep the faith!

John

Bishop John Schol
The United Methodist Church of Greater New Jersey

THE RELAY

The United Methodist Church of Greater New Jersey

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4 IDEAS FOR SMALL GROUPS AND LEADERSHIP QUALITIES

Small groups offer the support, encouragement and accountability to help people reach the goals they set. Different types of small groups work best with leaders who have different leadership qualities. Here's a guide to help match leaders with four types of small groups.

1.



DINNER PARTY

Eat, chat, laugh and pray. Invite visitors!

Leadership Qualities: Influencers who drive accountability, and mentors dedicated to the success of each person.

2.



PAINTING PARTY

Share in an artistic endeavor or common interest as well as spiritual connections through prayer shawl, music, journal and writing groups.

Leadership Qualities: Flexible and creative, allowing time to focus on activity and faith building.

3.



FUNDRAISER

Drive the causes your church is passionate about by forming mission-minded, advocacy groups.

Leadership Qualities: Passionate and motivated, valuing social transformation.

4.



BOOK CLUB

With a desire to learn together, groups can be formed over sermon series discussions, books, devotionals, or interactive Bible studies.

Leadership Qualities: Conversationalist who can lead with good questions, listen intently, and value time to process.



CHALLENGE

What new small group might enliven your church this year?

Why Do Local Church Statistics Matter?

So a church gains or loses a few members from year to year... no big deal, right? But what if that church has doubled (or halved) in membership in the span of 40 years? Church statistics not only help answer the question of "How are we doing right now?" but also, "How are we doing in the long run?" A church's leadership can review this data to interpret underlying meanings and help the congregation assess the story being told.

Apart from a church's internal check-in, statistics provide information about the big picture and help researchers see trends, which in turn aid Church leaders in making decisions. For example, the number of Hispanic/Latino church members has gained more than 20,000 members in the past five years and is increasing at a rate of approximately 3% per year. This sort of information is integral when making a decision about languages used in church materials, for example. On a more local level, many bishops and annual conference cabinets use these statistics to assist in the clergy appointment process. Churches enjoying extraordinary success in a certain aspect of ministry, as well as those struggling in the same, can be identified.

In The United Methodist Church, the statistics are used by the general agencies for a variety of purposes:

- The General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) uses them to help annual conferences, districts, and local churches plan how to more effectively minister within their own communities. Church statistics are combined with demographic data by the office of research to help local churches analyze where there are new opportunities for outreach.
- The United Methodist Publishing House (UMPH) uses them to assist in planning resources and marketing. The statistics help to determine where resources are already being used and where there may be opportunities to provide new resources to local churches.
- The General Commission on the Status and Role of Women (COSROW) and the General Commission on Religion and Race (GCORR) use the information to assist in monitoring and raising consciousness of gender and racial/ethnic inclusiveness in The United Methodist Church. Gender and Racial/Ethnic membership information provides a measure of progress toward the United Methodist Church's commitment toward becoming a fully inclusive denomination.

While it is recognized churches are about more than the number of persons attending worship or how many persons are baptized in a year, those numbers help bring attention to matters warranting concern or celebration. Sharing with each other the objective data numbers provide helps us to keep our connection vital.

Per the Book of Discipline ¶606.7, All pastors of local churches are required to submit a year-end statistical report each year. GCFA has provided a website (ezra.gcfa.org) for annual conferences to use to collect the requested information. The statistical reports are set up in 3 Tables, these tables are updated by GCFA at the change of the quadrennium and 2017 is the beginning of a new quadrennium. Therefore the tables have been updated and some questions have been changed and others added. Find out more at...

2017 Statistical Reports

Website : <http://ezra.gcfa.org>

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Deadline : January 31, 2018

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Judicial Council Rulings, Update on Kwak Complaint Process

Greater New Jersey had three matters before the Judicial Council of the denomination in October with the decision released on October 27, 2017.

Two of the requests were petitioned by Rev. Dr. Jisun Kwak's advocate Rev. Bob Costello in reference to the complaint made against Kwak by the Greater New Jersey Cabinet and the resulting placement of Kwak on involuntary leave of absence by the Executive Committee of the Board of Ordained Ministry following a hearing of the Conference Relations Committee (CRC) and a vote by the Board of Ordained Ministry.

The complaint, which included issues of financial misconduct, disobedience to the order and discipline of the church and other matters, was originally filed in June 2016 as a result of questions concerning a previous just resolution and ongoing related issues that occurred between 2010 and 2016.

During the review process in 2016, it became clear that there was no possibility of a just resolution within the 90 day period as specified by The Book of Discipline. The Cabinet referred the matter to the Conference Relations Committee with a recommendation that Rev. Kwak be placed on involuntary leave.

"The Cabinet has been united in this decision from the start. The nature of the complaint and the information provided to support it required us to take immediate action," said Dean of Cabinet Gina Hendrickson. "The process is being faithfully followed as outlined in The Book of Discipline."

The Book of Discipline requires that between sessions of the annual conference, an involuntary leave of absence may be granted by the executive committee of BOOM. The action is subject to approval of the clergy session of the next annual conference session.

Costello made two requests to Judicial Council at the 2017 Greater New Jersey Annual Conference. Costello's first petition was ruled to be "not the appropriate way to litigate a pending judicial matter."

The Judicial Council memorandum states, "It is improper for the Judicial Council to take up a matter that is currently the object of a judicial process in the Greater New Jersey Annual Conference."

The second petition from Costello involved back compensation. The Judicial Council affirmed Bishop John Schol's ruling that Rev. Kwak was to receive clergy minimum compensation.

The Kwak complaint is currently before the Committee on Investigations who are reviewing more than 1,000 pages of financial records, conducting interviews of relevant witnesses and were required

to await the outcome of the Judicial Council before completing their work. Pending the outcome of the Committee on Investigations, a trial would be scheduled for the matter in early 2018.

Bishop John Schol, who recused himself from the process because the complaint involved a member of his cabinet, said, "Good and healthy process assists better outcomes. The United Methodist Church has good checks and balances."

The third petition before the Judicial Council was brought by Superintendent Gina Hendrickson on behalf of the Cabinet concerning part-time appointments. The Judicial Council ruled that there is no action to take. The Cabinet will move forward with part-time appointments when necessitated for the good of the mission of GNJ.

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Service of Thanksgiving Brings Hope (Esperanza) to Puerto Rico

By Carolyn Conovor
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HIGHTSTOWN - The need in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria is personal for many in GNJ as congregations and surrounding communities have significant numbers of people with strong family ties to the island. From these concerns, GNJ United Methodists created Esperanza (Hope) for Puerto Rico, a grassroots effort to bring relief and resources to those struggling through the storm's devastating aftermath.

Working directly with Bishop Hector Ortiz of the Methodist Church in Puerto Rico and coordinating with UMCOR (United Methodist Committee on Relief), churches raised funds and gathered supplies. In October, Sam Perez, a member of Bishop Jane's UMC in Basking Ridge met Ortiz at the airport in San Juan to deliver a \$50,000 check to provide immediate relief and supplies.

Since then, leaders have organized a food, fund and supply drive as part of a Service of Thanksgiving held on November 19 at First UMC of Hightstown. The service, led by Hector Burgos, Director of Connectional Ministries, was live-streamed in Puerto Rico and featured a greeting of thanks from Ortiz. The fund and supplies drive raised an additional \$50,000 for Puerto Rico and resulted in 27 pallets of food and six pallets of Christmas toys which are being shipped for deployment to the island.

"The beautiful people in GNJ are overflowing with abundance for the people of Puerto Rico and have declared that Puerto Rico will rise again," said Burgos at the service. "We are working with Bishop Ortiz to develop facilities and avenues for mission teams to get to work in Puerto Rico rebuilding homes and renewing hope."

In addition to the funds raised for Esperanza for Puerto Rico, GNJ churches have:

- Donated more than \$350,000 to UMCOR for hurricane relief for



A Food, fund and supply drive was held as a part of a Service of Thanksgiving on Nov. 19 at First UMC of Hightstown. \$50,000 was raised for Hurricane Maria ravaged Puerto Rico, 27 pallets of food, and six pallets of Christmas toys were gathered for shipment to the island. Photo by Rev. Hector Burgos

- Irma, Harvey and Maria.
- Donated time and resources assembling relief kits (flood buckets) and hygiene kits, and designated two depot sites at Good Shepherd UMC (Southern NJ Hub) and Skylands Outreach Depot (Northern NJ hub). Thousands of these kits have been assembled and delivered to UMCOR's mission center for distribution in affected areas.
- Held an early response team training in October which quickly

overbooked, resulting in a second session scheduled for November and more scheduled for 2018. Early response trainings equip team leaders to take volunteers on mission trips in affected areas to muck out homes and buildings and offer relief to those in most need.

- Engaged key staff members with peers in Texas, Florida and Puerto Rico to offer advice on organizing and deployment.

- Deployed Tara Maffei, from A Future With Hope, to Texas to participate in equipping early responders.

Churches around the region are preparing teams to deploy to Texas, Florida and Puerto Rico in 2018 to start the rebuilding process.

Several Early Response Team (ERT) Training sessions will be held in January, March, and April of 2018. Visit www.gnjumc.org/disasterresponse for event details, dates, and further information.



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All People Conference Unlocks Transformative Potential

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what had been freely given them as followers of Christ; God's abundant grace.

In January 1999, the church opened a "Free Store" on Parsons Avenue, a street known as a dividing line between a gentrified community and poverty-stricken neighborhood. Donations were collected to populate the store so area residents could pick up clothes, shoes, books, furniture, and household items free of charge. Those supplying the offerings were challenged to "follow their donations" by volunteering at the store to build relationships with people in the community. What resulted was poor and middle-class people coming together while the store "sold love" to the area and built friendships that would have never existed otherwise.

"The Free Store allowed people to touch grace," said Edgar, recognizing how the relationships expanded to launch a highly diverse church in 2002 and form the 'Church and Community Development for All People' (CCDAP) nonprofit organization. CCDAP grew to open a

enriching programs and initiatives and over \$60 million in affordable housing through their asset-based community development nonprofit.

"Take what you have, no matter how meager it seems to you, and God will use it," said Edgar. He encouraged the conference attendees to consider their assets and to build from resources, hopes, dreams and partnerships.

"The bookends of Bible (Genesis and Revelation) tell us that God created the world in abundance and will restore it to abundance again, and that when we share our resources with each other, we trigger that divine economy of abundance," said Rev. Michael Reed of Pearson Memorial UMC in Hamilton, affirming Edgar's testimonial. "We are finding this with our church's food pantry: that the more we seem to give away, the more seems to come back in through donations and a spirit of generosity."

Movement

'Rise up and Build' was the theme of the conference which was exemplified



'Rise up and Build' was the theme of the 2017 'All People Conference' in Columbus, OH. Participants were given wood blocks to write their hopes, dreams, and ministry ideas to present at the altar. Photo by Josh Kinney



Rev. Michael Reed of Pearson Memorial UMC in Hamilton speaks with Rev. John Edgar beside a mural inside a facility the United Methodist Church of All People use to provide fresh produce to the community and healthy eating and living initiatives. Photo by Josh Kinney

produce market, bike shop, after-school programs, a summer school, mentoring services, senior transportation, music and arts education, and health and wellness initiatives. With the help of a vital partnership with the community's Nationwide Children's Hospital, an affordable housing strategy was birthed and began renewing south Columbus.

"The relationships began building the front porch of the Kingdom of God," said Edgar. "With the Free Store, people simply gave out of abundance, and it began to multiply."

Dr. Katelin Hansen, CCDAP Strategic Initiatives Director and the church's Minister of Music addressed the All People Conference.

"No one said church is supposed to be comfortable," said Hansen, pointing out that the diverse church on Parsons Avenue was packed with people from all different races, stories, walks of life, backgrounds, tastes, preferences and economic situations. "If everyone is always comfortable at their church, that's not integration, that's assimilation. We have to ask ourselves what we are willing to sacrifice as our sacrifice of praise."

For Hansen, the institutional church seemed to send a message of 'do whatever it takes to grow the church' as opposed to being and living the body of Christ. At the Church of All People, she was inspired by the latter.

"God can't be constrained within a church building. And everyone who walks through these doors is poor," she exclaimed from the pulpit, speaking about the condition of the soul. "Some of us are just so poor that all we have is money."

Hansen joined the church because she saw it "doing what the church was meant to do." She purposely chose a life the world considered "downward mobility" for "the sake of her soul" and in doing so learned what it meant to "truly love Jesus."

"Some people come in here with nothing and give like the widow's mite," she said. For the Church of All People, that mite has gone on to produce community

on a Sunday morning session where participants were given wood blocks and a marker. On the top of the block they wrote a dream, idea or ministry, and on each side the names of people who could help achieve the mission. During the worship service, church members and conference attendees made their way to the altar to place their blocks and pray over their hopes.

"When you don't know what to do, pray to see how to assemble it and preach about what you're praying about," said Edgar. "Bring assets together. Every vacant house is an asset, not a liability."

The Church and Community Development for All People recognized that their

city's Nationwide Children's Hospital was anchored in their community and therefore had an interest in their neighborhood. Knowing that the hospital was mission-minded with a desire to build a good image and reputation, the All People team sought out the hospital's goals in order to form a vital partnership and simultaneously achieve their objective to live out the church by serving others.

"It's important to understand your partners' aspirations and help them achieve their goals, too," said Edgar.

Block by block, year after year, the organization transformed blight, received grants, bought up abandoned homes, created affordable housing, senior housing, and a multi-family workforce development consisting of apartments, townhomes, and a career training and support service space. The Greater New Jersey team enjoyed lunch inside the job training space where Hansen shared the building's story.

"This space is close to our partner, the hospital, who needs to hire people and is committed to hiring from this very place," she beamed with outstretched arms. "We're coupling affordable housing and workforce development to get folks into a livable wage."

Moments later, Cherese Evans of Magnolia UMC eagerly raised a hand, bellowing, "I'll take Camden."

Rev. Hector Burgos, Director of Connectional Ministries, turned toward her and smiled.

"That's why you're here," he said. "To dream."

The next day, as Greater New Jersey laity and clergy clamored together on a

street corner inhabited by new affordable housing units, Edgar explained the challenges of accomplishment.

"We don't want to become victims of our own success," he said. Despite the determination to rid the neighborhood of blight in exchange for an attractive, inclusive community, the All People team feared displacing people and the looming threat of gentrification.

"We're working on a strategy for housing that everyone who lives here can still afford to do so in ten years," said Hansen.

For the All People team, that means a plan to rehab and own 15% of the housing in Columbus' south side to "create a plateau" rather than a "tipping point." Presently, their strategy has the support of the city's mayor, local banks and the hospital, which as a vital partner, has become not just a granter of funds, but a leader in what's become a shared initiative.

"It's a reputable model," said Edgar. "This is our chance to preserve this inclusivity."

Momentum

Bishop Schol addressed the conference, sharing his community development experience, wisdom and recommendations. He encouraged the formation of community associations and an "all in this together" mentality.

"We should get rid of the word client and begin to think of people as friends, coworkers, neighbors," he said, suggesting the group flip their perspective from a 'needs-based' to 'challenge-based' thinking.

"It's the mission that is our capital,"

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Road Trip a First for GNJ

By Josh Kinney
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WHEELING, WV – Soomin Lee woke up to the hum of cross-country travel, the late sun on her face, heavy head resting against the charter bus window. Outside, an ocean of trees swooshed by in a blurred landscape as the rolling timpani of the engine and the horn section of murmuring passengers vibrated in a symphony of transportation. It was a soothing reassurance that the bus was one mile closer to Columbus, Ohio.

On October 20, a charter bus departed the Mission and Resource Center in Neptune with 36 GNJ laity and clergy en route to the 'All People Conference' at the United Methodist Church of All People in the south side of Ohio's capital.

Lee, Administrative Assistant to the Episcopal Office, readjusted her position and scrolled through the Instagram feed on her phone. The energized group quieted sometime before the bus reached central Pennsylvania, thumbing through books, responding to emails, settling into naps, and listening to music and podcasts.

Bishop John Schol browsed his notes on his iPad. He would be joining Rev. Junius B. Dotson, General Secretary of Discipleship Ministries and Rev. Olu Brown, the Lead Pastor of Impact Church, as one of the conference's keynotes. Several years ago Schol was asked to speak at the conference by the All People Church's Pastor, Rev. John Edgar. He agreed under the condition that he would be able to bring others with him so they could witness firsthand the

transformative potential of community building and living out what it means to be a church for all people. Edgar agreed, and Schol packed a charter bus in what would become GNJ's first group road trip.

"The town is an island in the middle of the Ohio River," GNJ Editorial Manager Josh Kinney pointed out to Lee as the bus hurried across the Route 70 bridge in the West Virginia town of Wheeling; a small sliver of the state that stretches in-between Ohio and Pennsylvania. Red, yellow, and orange autumn speckled across the Appalachian foothills surrounding the rustic town.

The next rest stop was just ahead.

"For a number of reasons, I was not looking forward to taking a long bus trip," said Rev. Shelley Smith of Ferry Ave UMC in Camden. "I heard there would be camp songs... but Bishop Schol said it was a luxury bus. I brokered a deal with my lay leader in advance - a window seat, in the front half of the bus. What I found as we were on the road for a while, was a chance to relax. There was nothing that had to be done, I could enjoy the scenery, slip in and out of conversations, and nap."

The ride out to Ohio seemed relatively quick. But it would be the spiritually charged conversations on the drive back after a powerful weekend conference that left lasting impacts.

"The learning never stops," said Director of Mission, Nicole Caldwell-Gross. "One of the great powers of this experience was not simply visiting the All People church but making this journey together."

Caldwell-Gross described the discernment and questions discussed over lunch, rest stops and on the bus as "Holy

All People Conference

Continued from page 6

he continued. "Is this going to move innovative ideas forward and grow a vital congregation and build the community? These are the questions we need to ask."

Rev. Brandon Cho of Morristown UMC was encouraged by the Church of All People's three basic principles: Build relationships, build the body of Christ and build the 'Front Porch of the Kingdom of God.'

"I was most inspired by the joy of serving others by Pastor Edgar, the leadership team and every member of the church," said Cho. "It was their love in action that is making a real difference in people's lives."

Cho said he was moved by the church's "brilliant" way of bringing rich and poor together to develop and multiply its mission. His wife, Rev. Jennifer Cho of Bridgewater UMC agreed.

"Community transformation work can start in a small way as the Church of All People did with their Free Store," she said.

Rev. Shelley Smith of Ferry Avenue UMC in Camden concurred with Cho's 'starting small' sentiment. She, along with her lay leader, Michael Brown, left the conference with newfound motivation.

"As one starts small and builds ministries out of opportunities that emerge, partnerships can grow," she said. Smith was mesmerized by the people of the church.

"They don't practice radical hospitality," she said. "They are radical hospitality. Their unapologetic acceptance of everyone is consistent. All were not just welcome to come but were actively involved and participated in the mission in their own way."

Schol told the conference that there was a difference between programs and strategies.

"Strategies link programs to programs. Programs have beginnings and ends. Here we see the Free Store was the start, and it was linked to the next thing and the next thing after that," he said. "That's what strategic thinking is all about."

He concluded by challenging the conference to think like leaders by seeing

everyone else as a leader.

"Give the work back to them," he said. "Keep things moving forward and keep casting vision and putting it out there."

He shared what he considered important enthusiasm for 'what's next.'

"Leaders don't dwell on what they've already done," he said. "They dwell on what's next. We have to fail a whole lot more. That's the only way we'll continue to see things happen; if we're not afraid to fail."

After Schol finished speaking, Rev. Dennis Paschke of Orting UMC in Washington leaned back in his chair, stroking his chin.

"This conference is giving us permission to do what we should have been doing all along," he said. "To be who we say we want to be as followers of Christ."

Director of Mission Nicole Caldwell-Gross weighed in. "Community transformation is hard work," she said. "Yet, we don't do this alone! In addition to the capable and called leaders within each of our communities and congregations, there are staff leaders in GNJ committed to walking alongside our laity and clergy in this work."

GNJ Hope Center Developer Andrea Wren-Hardin expressed earnest gratitude for the experience of the trip and the conference.

"We have to be in relationship with people," she said, admitting that discipleship begins with relationships. "We can't continue to see ourselves as separate or different from others. We're all gifted in ways and lacking in other ways, yet all children of God. By connecting with others, knowing them, we can all build ministry together. Not 'us for others' but 'we for one another.'"

The conference's final evening ended with a raucous dance party, music, laughter and praise.

"It was so amazing," said Wren-Hardin. "It didn't matter where we were from, what we had done, what our lives were like – in that moment we could celebrate that we were alive and together – the walls separating us dropped. That is what I imagine the Kingdom of God to be."



36 laity and clergy from GNJ took a road trip on a charter bus from New Jersey to Ohio to attend the 'All People Conference.' The group stands together on a south Columbus street corner, learning about affordable housing initiatives and the ministries of the All People Church. Photo by Josh Kinney

conversations." She likened the relationships fostered on the bus to GNJ PaCE Groups.

"This kind of experiential and peer-learning is at the heart of PaCE Groups, which are designed to help pastors be better pastors with other pastors."

Sean, the bus driver, became friends with many of his passengers. He remembered names, engaged the group, made specific accommodations, and cracked jokes. He briefly shared his testimony of how he found faith in Christ.

"Sean was a joy," said Smith. "We shared breakfast together one morning and shared our stories and our hopes."

For Rev. Brandon Cho of Morristown UMC, the road trip experience with other GNJ colleagues was enriching.

"We shared our experiences, insights and learning application possibilities," he said.

Rev. Michael Reed of Pearson Memorial UMC in Hamilton said the retreat experience catalyzed conversations and projects that would have otherwise taken months to achieve.

"If they would have happened at all," he said.

Constrained to a bus for ten hours also provided ample time for networking and making connections. Story leads were discovered and bright spots shared as laity and clergy spoke about their ministries, churches, and initiatives. New concepts were sparked and possibilities entertained as conversation topics continued linking and new ideas were birthed.

"There is something special about the road trip alongside others from GNJ," said Rev. Jennifer Cho of Bridgewater UMC. "It was a powerful time of sharing and learning and community building as colleagues and partners in God's work."

In the early hours of Tuesday morning, October 24, the bus rolled into the parking lot of the Mission and Resource Center. The 36 passengers left with new friendships, deeper relationships, a rich, memorable experience, and a vast pallet of possibilities.



All aboard! Northern Shore District Superintendent Gina Hendrickson takes a selfie as a bus carrying GNJ laity and clergy departs for Columbus, Ohio. Selfie by Rev. Gina Hendrickson



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Prayer Shawl Ministry

By Denise Herschel
nj6pack@yahoo.com

HAZLET - As a small group who loves to put their creativity toward a meaningful cause, the St. John's Prayer Shawl Ministry of St. John's UMC in Hazlet is all about providing warmth and comfort to others.

Whether it be a lap throw, baby blanket, or a small shawl, each handcrafted piece is lovingly created by the women of this dedicated group who have been meeting for more than a decade. The jovial, relaxed atmosphere of their monthly meetings in which the women help each other, share ideas and most importantly, have fun, is evident and has allowed them to blossom into the ministry they are today.

"Our first meeting was in December 2006 and our first dedication was in February 2007. I have been involved with this group for the past eleven years," said Joni Parr, who has been a church member for 41 years. "I started this ministry with Joanna Nichols and

we do feel it is a ministry because it is a way for us to spread God's love. The giving of a shawl says, 'We are praying for you!' It is something they can feel; it gives warmth, comfort, strength and healing. I truly believe this can be felt through the fibers of yarn which hold the many prayers that were said during the making of each piece."

In addition to shawls, the group makes blankets, lap throws, and baby blankets - both knitted and crocheted. According to Parr, many of the group's members work from home and some are from out-of-state; sending their work home with family to be a part of the group.

"When shawls are needed, Joan and I just spread the word and within a week beautiful pieces are waiting at the church for us. God has blessed this ministry. We have never run short!" she added.

The ministry's members range from beginners to expert. For those who do not know how to knit or crochet, there is always encouragement to join the group where the women are willing to teach novices.



Ryder Watkins holds his cousin Piper, wrapped in a prayer shawl from St. John's UMC in Hazlet. Photo provided

"All are welcome to join us. We are all women at this time but men can also join. There is no experience needed; we can teach you. We help each other at all levels," she said. "Joan Rhodes helps me with everything we do. She is

an excellent teacher. I couldn't do this without her."

There are numerous places where the women's creations are distributed including hospitals and work camps.

"Many members often bring a prayer shawl or blanket to a loved one who is needing love and prayers. There are many reasons to give and to give to - the sick, elderly, lonely, new mothers, those in mourning and young adults going off to college. All the babies baptized here at St. John's receive a baby blanket," she continued.

Parr said that one of the most rewarding aspects of the Prayer Shawl Ministry has been the many thank you notes received from the recipients.

"To have us hear about the love and the comfort, even the healing, that these shawls give still amaze all of us. It is worth the time. It just warms our hearts!" she said.

The St. John's Prayer Shawl Ministry meets the second Tuesday of each month at 7 p.m. The church is located at 2000 Florence Avenue, Hazlet, New Jersey. For more information contact Joni Parr at 732-872-2246 or Joan Rhodes at 732-264-4545.

Building Relationships through Music and Vegetables

By Rev. Alison V. Philip
pastor@franklinlakesumc.org

FRANKLIN LAKES - As part of its efforts to connect with the surrounding community in new ways, Franklin Lakes UMC has been focusing its energies on two new ministries aimed at relationship-building.

On October 6, the church launched The Old Stone Music and Coffee House, a place for people of all ages to gather for good music, coffee, and conversation. The Old Stone is located in the church's nearly 100-year-old stone sanctuary, a historic landmark that used to be the only church in town. Together members of the congregation have reimagined the space as becoming a center of community again. Creating an ambiance that mixes new and old, they have repainted, fixed up the antique lighting, hung church families' heirloom quilts on the walls, and refurnished with a mix of wood coffee tables, comfortable chairs, and even pews anchored along the walls for extra seating.

On every first Friday of the month, local musicians of various ages and styles share quality music with the community. The walls are decorated with the art of a different local artist each quarter, starting off with that of Amanda Hartwell, a

member of the church who is a senior art major at her college. Locally roasted coffee and loose leaf tea are served along with seasonal treats. The Old Stone planning team was pleased to welcome nearly 70 people through its doors for the first event, where Steve Palmeri offered folk music on five different instruments including an electric upright bass and a mandolin.

Along with this event aimed at welcoming neighbors and meeting new people, FLUMC has partnered with the Borough of Franklin Lakes and its Environmental Commission to build a community garden on town property. For the past six years, the church has faithfully grown over 1,200 pounds of vegetables for CUMAC, a GNJ mission partner food pantry in Paterson, at a garden next to the church. This second garden in town, funded in part by a Peace with Justice grant from the GNJ Board of Church and Society, came out of a desire to meet people in public space, build community, and invite others to join in the mission to feed people in Paterson just a few miles away who often do not get fresh produce. The mayor sees it contributing to his wellness campaign for mental and physical health.

The garden was constructed by a Boy Scout in late July for his Eagle Scout



Franklin Lakes UMC has partnered with the Borough of Franklin Lakes and its Environmental Commission to build a community garden on town property. A garden next to the church has faithfully grown vegetables for the CUMAC food pantry in Paterson for the last six years. Photo provided

project. Rather than miss a whole growing season, leaders from the church and town decided to aim for a fall harvest. By the beginning of October, the garden had produced ten bunches of spinach, five bunches of kale, five bunches of collard greens, and ten turnips. More of those crops along with bush beans, carrots, beets, and broccoli were ready by mid-October. Next spring the garden will start up in full force, maintained by a group of

volunteers from a variety of faith communities, schools, and organizations.

To follow these ministries, visit their Facebook pages:

The Old Stone: <https://www.facebook.com/TheOldStoneMusicandCoffeeHouse/>

Franklin Lakes Community Garden: <https://www.facebook.com/FLCommunityGarden/>

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**The January 2018 Issue Deadline
is December 23, 2017**

In Mercer County, Hunger Knows No Religion

Continued from page 1

munity members, high school students, college students seeking resume experience and leadership skills, and interfaith circles.

"The most exciting part as a pastor is seeing no resistance to opening Trinity up to strangers," said Miller. "The response has made me praise God, and it's been one of the most exciting ministries in my pastoral career."

Since April, over 3,000 meals have been served. Approximately 80% are take-outs to six local motels each Tuesday evening. Forbeck has been pitching in to drive and deliver meals.

"The experience is really hard to put into words," he said. "We knock on the doors, and some of the people want us to come inside and pray with them. Others just quietly thank us for the meals and close their doors. All are extremely grateful, and there are a lot of people who want to talk and connect."

According to Forbeck, the more he volunteers and gets to know the people in the motels, the more his perspective has changed.

"It makes me look at my life differently," he said. "I'm more grateful, and my eyes have been open to how big of a need it is just to feed people. And that's just the beginning."

For Forbeck, the experience has been nothing short of rewarding. He feels volunteering his Tuesday night's with the ministry has made his life complete.

"It's humbled me greatly, and it's shown me not to take things for granted," he said.

The outreach has a core group of leaders but has seen more than 30 people step up to volunteer. Chaudhry's mosque donates the meals for Trinity's distribution, and volunteers sit with visitors while they eat to make them feel welcome.

"It's a beautiful thing to see Christians working alongside Muslims," said Forbeck. "I'm amazed at how successful this has been since April."

Between the church, the mosque, and TASK, each play a vital part in making the Tuesday night outreach possible.

"Without the conjoined teamwork it

wouldn't happen," said Forbeck. "It sends a message to the community that we're all just people; that we're all the same inside."

For Maretz, witnessing that message in action has left her "flabbergasted."

"Seeing all of these different people coming together and earnestly working to help out and seeing their compassion has really opened my eyes," she said. "My opinion of people has changed, I can't even express my feelings. People are not only helping each other, they want to help each other. Their hearts are opening more and more for the people around them. It's just amazing when you see how many people care."

As Trinity's Lay Speaker, Maretz has faithfully involved herself in the church since 1997, but now she's witnessing a hands-on mission revival with the Tuesday night ministry.

Miller described an instance when a woman stepped off the local River Line with three children and entered Trinity on a Tuesday night, seeking escape from a broken home situation.

"Everyone sat and prayed with her, fed the children, and provided them with clothes," said Miller. Needing a place to stay, it only took a few minutes for volunteers to pull together resources to fund a motel room covering several nights.

"It's a mission station around here," said an elated Miller, who defined the ministry as "working like a clock."

Cartey, an Italian who loves to feed people, felt like the ministry fulfilled a new purpose for her.

"I knew something was missing, and all fell into place," she said. "It was definitely spirit led. It's encouraging to those of us involved to see what can be done when people work together. And I think that's the most amazing thing I've seen: people so happy to work together; laughing, teasing each other, and all different people coming together. You can just feel the energy in this place."

Some Tuesday's, Cartey and Chaudhry wonder if they're going to have enough food.

"And yet we always do," said Cartey. "It's loaves and fishes around here. Always more than enough."



Farzana Jaffery and Shaesta Chaudhry of Mercer County Muslims Against Hunger prepare meals inside the kitchen of Trinity UMC in Bordentown for their Tuesday night outreach. Photo by Tim Proctor

Maretz shared a moment when a stranger brought a struggling family to the church after discovering them sifting through an Aldi parking lot.

"They were rushed with love," she said. "I remember leaving that night with such a great feeling that those people were taken care of."

Pastor supported, and laity led, Trinity plans to budget the outreach into the church's mission program as it evolves to become an entity in the local community.

Miller says the experience has been a "thrilling spiritual eye-opener" that's made hands-on help a desire.

"It's easy to be invisible to a community if you're not doing something tangible and relevant," said Miller. "The message here is clear: God loves you, and so do we."

For Trinity, MMAH, and TASK, the sustainability and momentum is an

encouragement as they continue the outreach one week at a time.

"Only God knows its future," said Chaudhry, "And if it expands, the mosque will always be there to help."

Miller sees the movement as an example of a great need for social services, both religious and secular, working together outside of silos.

"It's pleasing that people of two different world religions are working together," he said. "It's a voice of sanity in the midst of insanity, and sends the right message during these troubled times when people are losing hope."

Miller continued, "We tried something new, and the spirit took hold of it. And now I'm just pinching myself thinking, 'did this really happen on my watch?' All of this came out of a meeting where we asked one simple question: How can we do our part to serve our community?"



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From Mendham to Mongolia, Church Funds Feed Students

By Mark Shenise
Shenise5761@gmail.com

MENDHAM - It's called "Hot Lunch Fund" and it's the newest mission project of the Mendham UMC. Partnering with Huree University, a United Methodist supported college in Mongolia, the church is raising funds for student lunches in a country with poor financial resources.

"Recently the Mendham UMC leadership began thinking about an overseas mission project that would be an attractive vehicle to draw interest and participation from the larger Mendham-Chester community," said Mark Shenise, Associate Archivist for General Commission on Archives History. After learning about

Mongolia's United Methodist related Huree University forming a partnership with the General Board of Higher Education to help feed students through the 'Hot Lunch Fund' he knew his church had discovered their sought-after mission project.

A science and technology school, Huree is one of the top ten schools among the country's 66 colleges and universities. All 1,323 students, (961 undergraduates, 42 master candidates, 320 1-12th graders) receive scholarships. Many Huree students are unable to afford meals and typically go without breakfast and lunch. The cost of lunch per individual is \$100 per semester with a \$200 donation feeding and keeping a student healthy for a year.

Dr. Chung Soon Hoon, President of Huree University, writes, "Our wish is that students have access to a hot lunch to help their minds focus through the pressures of becoming science engineers, who not only contribute to developments in science and technology, but also help better the economy and living conditions of their neighbors in Mongolia."

Presently, Mendham UMC and Morristown Korean UMC are the first two churches in the denomination working with the General Board of Higher Education to raise funds for the school. The churches invite their community and Greater New Jersey to take part in their mission project by donating to their Huree "Hot Lunch Fund" which runs until

December 31, and will be taking weekly donations each Sunday.

"We already exceeded our initial fundraising goal and continue to push on with the project until the end of December," said Shenise. "We look forward to becoming an even bigger blessing by feeding more Huree students in the coming year."

If you your church, or organization is interested in supporting the Hot Lunch Fund, donations can be mailed to 10 East Main Street, Mendham, NJ 07945 with "Huree University Offering" written on the check's memo line. All donations are tax deductible to the full extent of the law.. For further information call (973)-543-6376 or email mendhamumc@gamil.com

Mission Movers

Continued from page 1

and Bishop John Schol were also in attendance. Offering a powerful message rooted in hope, Schol cast a vision that "we have all been called to work the lot we've been given" and for this group, that meant starting next door.

Communities of Hope training is a program of A Futures with Hope, the mission arm of GNJ, which helps congregations work with their communities to build on assets, create alliances, and transform the world. Nicole Caldwell-Gross, Director of Mission and Community Development recalls how the Mission Movers got started nearly two years ago.

"It began in conversations with District Superintendent Sardinas," she said. "We learned that two developers had approached Christ Church. We brought in the Bishop who is a very well-versed and experienced community developer to talk about what the possibilities were with the building. We wanted to make sure that we were developing people along with buildings. The Communities of Hope training is for people within a community to decide what they want to do, what their assets are and how they want to develop. Jersey City is a rapidly changing community demographically, culturally and economically. It's a rapidly transitioning mission field. We wanted to get leadership together to start thinking of the city as a joint mission field rather than six individual churches working separately."

And that's exactly what they did.

Starting in June 2017, Hope Center Developer Andrea Wren-Hardin, led the group of churches in a six month training. While these congregations are a part of the United Methodist connection, they didn't really know each other, even though many of their sanctuaries sit merely a few miles apart. Wren-Hardin breaks down the Communities of Hope training that she led in a very simple way, "It's basically looking at asset mapping, social capital, community organizing and strategic planning to develop a vision that you can distill down into an action plan so that you have goals and objectives," she said.

All of the Jersey City churches have decided to work together on a ministry project to counteract homelessness. Between all of the churches, they will act as mobile shelters, working with partner Family Promise, and housing homeless families.

Dr. Donald Sullivan Medley, Pastor of Clair Memorial UMC, Bethany Browne UMC, and founder of Change Ministries, Inc. (A Shalom Initiative) feels extremely fortunate to have been invited to participate in the training.

"Bishop John Schol cast an exciting vision for our entire region in his timely homily at the commissioning, encouraging us to come outside of our church walls to embrace a rapidly changing yet fertile environment of bringing the good news of the Gospel," he said.

As the Director of Mission and Community Development, Caldwell-Gross is well aware that a movement of this magnitude requires hard work and vision, and is thankful for Wren-Hardin's presence in leading this movement within the Jersey City community.

"She worked tirelessly with this team for the past six months, and she will continue that work moving forward," said Caldwell-Gross. "One of the things that I love about Andrea is that she is a lay leader. At times we can often elevate clergy, thinking that you need a degree to do this work. She is a lay person who is lifting our communities up and leading this work in this season."

At the commissioning, each participant received an A Future With Hope pin. As the leadership pinned each participant, they said, "We send you out as ambassadors of hope." The Mission Movers will wear their pins and talk about them so that they see themselves as speakers and sharers of hope.

Caldwell-Gross is hopeful that the training becomes self-sustaining. The program is designed so that leaders continue to check in with their Hope Center Developer. They check in after three months, regroup after six months, and come together again after a year.

"We hope that the continued connection will move this from a moment to a movement," she said. "And we will know it's a movement when it begins to connect with more people outside of the church. Success would look like 50% of Communities of Hope leaders who are not members of the United Methodist Church, but are so engaged in what that community is doing, that they have to be a part of it. That's when we will be successful and can step back and say this is what God was calling us to do. It's bigger than us and it includes more than us."

To learn more about Communities of Hope, please contact Nicole Caldwell-Gross at ncaldwellgross@gnjumc.org.



Bishop John Schol places a celebratory commissioning pin on Rev. Ivan Alberts of Christ UMC in Jersey City at a Nov. 4 ceremony. Photo by Edison Lee



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SUBMISSION DEADLINE

January 18, 2018. Entries received after the deadline will be entered in the following year's contest. Any questions or comments? Contact Don DeGroat at 570.646.9298 or dfdegroat4@aol.com.



"The Mission Movers" - Six United Methodist communities in Jersey City have come together in ministry together to serve their city. Photo by Edison Lee

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CONFERENCE HAPPENINGS

Aldersgate UMC Teen in USA Special Olympics Games

Justin Malfitano of Aldersgate UMC in East Brunswick began his bowling career at age 6. While bowling for Toms River North High School in 2016, he was named the team's MVP leading the group with an average of 210. Malfitano seeks to bring home the gold medal in bowling for Team New Jersey in the 2018 USA Special Olympics.



Year-End Statistical Training Make-Up Day

If you were unable to attend the regional Year-End Statistical Training sessions in December, a make-up date has been scheduled for **Jan. 5, 2018** from 7:00 – 9:00 p.m. at the Mission and Resource Center in Neptune. Learn more about why statistics matter on page 4.

Seeking a 'What's Next?' Visionary

Are you a forward-thinking, big-picture visionary interested in 'what's next' for the church? Next Generation Ministries, GNJ's strategic partnership of youth, camping and campus ministries is seeking an Engagement Specialist who is exactly that. Visiting www.gnjnextgen.org for details.

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2017 Workers' Compensation Payroll Audit Forms

Be on the lookout for the Customized 2017 Workers' Compensation Payroll Audit Forms which were mailed to every church on Dec. 1 by Church Mutual. Completed audits are due **Jan. 15, 2018** and are to be sent directly to Church Mutual. Questions? Call Becky Meyer at the Church Mutual Premium Audit Unit at 800.554.2642, option 4, extension 4697. Questions regarding housing should be directed to Veronika Varga, Administrative Assistant at 732.359.1036 or vvarga@gnjumc.org

2018 U.M. Army Mission Weeks Announced

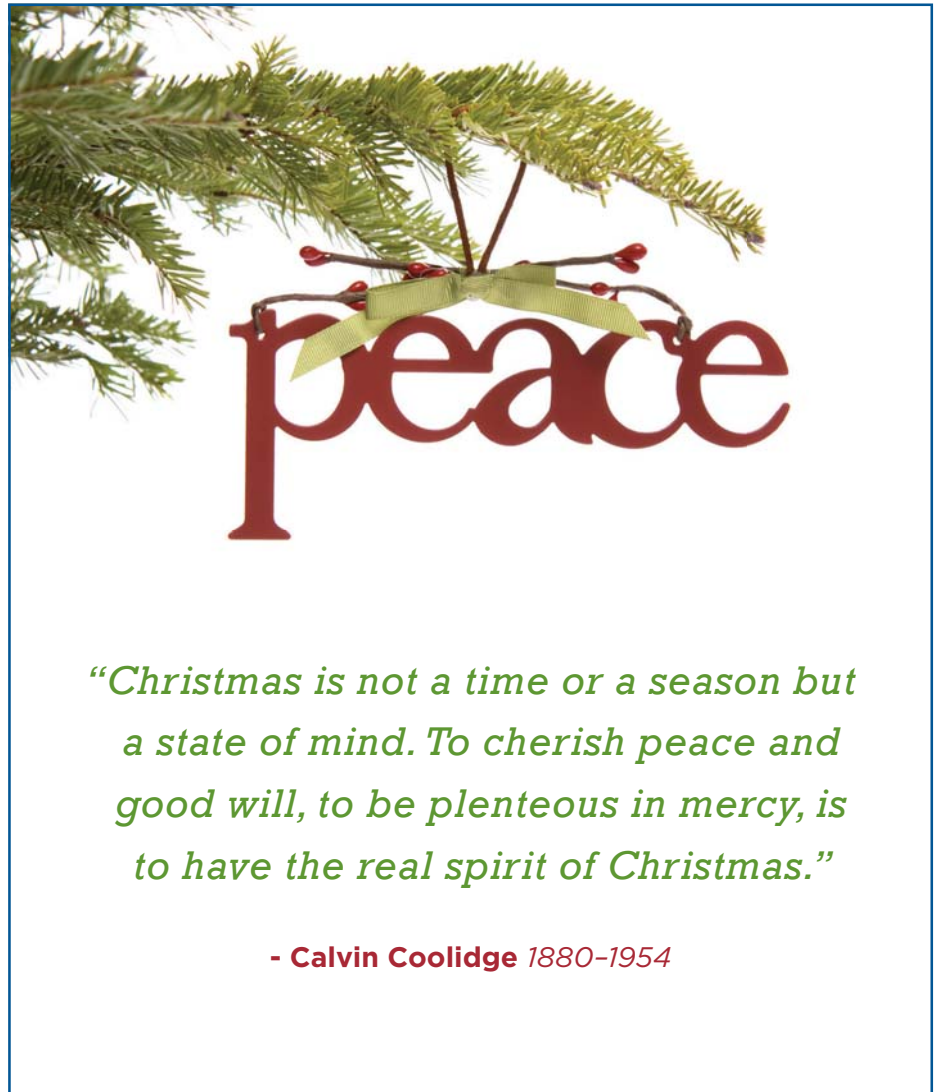
Looking for a local Methodist mission opportunity for your youth group? United Methodist Action Reach-out Mission by Youth (U.M. ARMY) has announced their 2018 lineup for summer missions in June and July. Visit www.umarmy.org to learn more.

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The United Methodist Church of the Resurrection has provided clergy, church staff and volunteers with practical tools to renew the church. With a free account, users can download anything they need. Visit www.sharechurch.com

Let the Mission and Resource Center Serve You

Let the Mission and Resource Center serve you. Visit www.gnjumc.org/meeting to fill out the Conference Meeting Room request form and reserve space for your congregation, agency, or committee



“Christmas is not a time or a season but a state of mind. To cherish peace and good will, to be plenteous in mercy, is to have the real spirit of Christmas.”

- Calvin Coolidge 1880-1954

United Methodist Communities
Abundant Life for Seniors

Home Office
3311 State Route 33 | Neptune, NJ 07753
732-922-9800 | UMCommunities.org

Independent Living | Residential Living | Assisted Living
Memory Support | Respite | Rehabilitation | Long-Term Care
Hospice & Palliative Care | Affordable Senior Living | Home Care

Is Your Congregation Receiving The GNJ Digest?

Do you know someone who doesn't get The GNJ Digest weekly e-newsletter? Make sure your congregation has access to the vital news, information, and resources posted each week. Don't miss out or fall behind! Stay in the loop and sign up at www.gnjumc.org/the-gnj-digest

How to Get in The Relay and The Digest

Do you have vital information that pertains to all of GNJ for The Digest? Email gnjdigest@gnjumc.org. Do you have a good story idea for The Relay? Email Josh Kinney at jkinney@gnjumc.org.

OBITUARIES

Minerva Steelman, Spouse of the late Rev. Merton L. Steelman, II, died on Nov. 7. A Celebration of Life took place on Nov. 13 at Padgett Funeral Home in Bridgeton, NJ. Memorial donations (in lieu of flowers) may be sent to Friendship-Finley UMC, 252 Centerton Rd., Bridgeton, NJ 08302.

Expressions of sympathy may be sent to Rev. Kimberly Wecht, 9 Sleepy Hollow Rd., Stratford, NJ 08084

Zoila Margot Fernandez, Spouse of Retired Elder Jose R. Fernandez, died on Nov. 20. A Celebration of Life was held on Nov. 22 at First Baptist Church of New Brunswick.

Expressions of sympathy may be sent to Jose R. Fernandez, 29 New Rd., Kendall Park, NJ 08824

WHAT FOOTPRINTS DO YOU WANT TO LEAVE?



After a life of service, retirement should be simple, peaceful and fulfilling. For more than 25 years, Clergy Retirement Advisors has worked with ministers to create effective retirement plans. We will review all your retirement options which may include pensions, social security, property and other investments, and create a personalized plan designed to maximize your monthly payments to help provide a secure financial future for you and your family.

For years you have dedicated yourself to the service of others. Now, let Clergy Retirement Advisors help you secure a thorough financial plan, so you can focus on the things you love.

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THANK YOU

FOR BEING A MIRACLE THIS CHRISTMAS



ESPERANZA
FOR PUERTO RICO
UNITED METHODISTS OF GREATER NEW JERSEY

United Methodists of Greater New Jersey have stepped up in response to hurricanes Irma, Harvey and Maria and raised over \$350,000 for UMCOR (United Methodist Committee on Relief).

27 pallets of food and 6 pallets of Christmas toys have been shipped to Puerto Rico along with an additional \$50,000 for relief efforts on the island.

FIND OUT HOW YOU CAN JOIN THE RELIEF EFFORTS.
www.gnjumc.org/disasterresponse