

# THE RELAY

UNITED METHODISTS  
OF GREATER NEW JERSEY

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## Celebrating God, Ministry, Mission & People at the 2021 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

By Heather Mistretta  
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*“In everything, acknowledge God,  
who makes straight our paths.”*

—PROVERBS 3:6

**T**wo hundred and eighty-three years ago, John Wesley had a moment of spiritual revelation, a moment he felt his “heart strangely warmed,” a moment that led to the advent of Methodism and a moment that was the catalyst for who we are today as United Methodists.

On the day we celebrate what is known as Aldersgate Day, GNJ welcomed conference members and guests to day one of a two-day Annual Conference. On this second year of hosting a virtual event, the words of Proverbs 3:6 seemed to pervade the energy found at the Mission Resource Center that sunny day as a small group of clergy and staff gathered in fellowship and trusted in God to lead them forward on their journeys. Much like the “voice” of

Wesley was heard long ago on Aldersgate Street in London, so too were the voices of many at the MRC and online as stories of courage and circuitous routes were told and stoles were wrapped around shoulders of the newly ordained.

“Celebrate!” said Bishop Schol. “Celebration reflects an attitude of gratitude to God and others and gives thanks for what we

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**Skylands District Superintendent  
Rev. Dr. Eunice Vega-Perez  
joins in the revelry of the day.**

*Credit: Shari DeAngelo Photography*



**“CELEBRATION REFLECTS AN  
ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE TO  
GOD AND OTHERS AND GIVES  
THANKS FOR WHAT WE HAVE,  
INSTEAD OF LOOKING TO  
WHAT IS NEXT. CELEBRATION  
ALSO CHANGES THINGS.”**

—Bishop John Schol

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2021 Annual  
Conference photos  
on pages 6-7!**

## Café Brings Compassion and More to Long Beach Island

By Heather Mistretta  
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BEACH HAVEN, NJ

**I**t’s a Tuesday afternoon, and a young woman named Chrissy squeals in delight as she hands change back to someone who just purchased the first cup of coffee she poured. Nearby a man breaks down boxes for recycling and labels packages. Another man stands at the doorway with a smile, a friendly greeting and a genuine enthusiasm for all who cross the threshold of Barry’s Do Me a Flavor in Beach Haven, NJ.

“They are looking for a purpose, not a paycheck,” said Sue Sharkey, a recently retired physical education teacher and



**Employees learn how to prepare and serve the outsourced food items at First UMC of Beach Haven Terrace.**

co-founder of Compassion Café, whose mission is to employ local adolescents and adults with special needs by providing a work environment catered to training and support, so each individual is able to develop appropriate vocational skills in a natural work setting.

“For some, this is their first opportunity to work,” said Sharkey who along with her

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## Singing Out Loud in Sussex County

*“Anchor the eternity of love in your own soul...Lean toward the whispers of your own heart... Release the need to hate, to harbor division and the enticement of revenge...But when it is your time, don’t be afraid to stand up, speak up and speak out against injustice. And if you follow your truth down the road to peace and the affirmation of love, if you shine like a beacon for all to see, then the poetry of all the great dreamers and philosophers is yours to manifest in a nation, a world community, and a Beloved Community that is finally at peace with itself.”*

—JOHN LEWIS



**Boonton UMC’s Director of Music Stephanie Lindley provides a learning experience in racial justice each Friday night.**

me.” As GNJ delves into a new plan to work toward ending the sin of racism, GNJers are boldly singing out loud.

On April 30, Boonton UMC hosted the opening night of its new HOPE Film Festival, a project designed to call attention to GNJ’s *A Journey of Hope* by offering featured films and documentaries about America through the experiences, perspectives and artistry of Black Americans.

“The HOPE Film Series is a step in the much larger fight against racism. We recognize that every step is a crucial step, but we also recognize that racism is a really heavy piece of concrete to kick,” said Boonton UMC’s Director of Music Stephanie Lindley who initiated and is leading this project.

On that opening night, local NJ musician ROSTAFA opened up the event, followed by the movie, “Black Panther.”

*Continued on page 3*

By Heather Mistretta  
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BOONTON, NJ

**R**emember the song that told you to “sing out loud, sing out strong?” Then you were told to “let the world sing along,” “sing of love there could be” and “sing for you and for

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Credit: Shari DeAngelo Photography

## Celebration

### Bishop John Schol

*My colleague, Bishop Sally Dyck recently shared the following story with the council of bishops.*

The late Jonathan Sacks, former chief rabbi in Great Britain, told the story once of a Head Teacher of a school that was floundering and came to see him for advice. They met, and she told him that morale within the school was low among teachers, pupils and parents alike. Parents had been withdrawing their children. The student roll had fallen in half. Examination results were bad: only eight percent of students achieved high grades. It was clear that unless something changed dramatically, the school would be forced to close.

They talked for a while, and then Sacks realized that they were thinking along the wrong lines. The problem she faced was practical, not philosophical. He said: "I want you to live one word: celebrate." She turned to him with a sigh: "You don't understand—we have nothing to celebrate. Everything in the school is going wrong." "In that case," he replied, "find something to celebrate. If a single student has done better this week, than last week, celebrate. If someone has a birthday, celebrate. If it's Tuesday, celebrate." She seemed unconvinced but promised to give the idea a try.

Time passed and years later, she wrote him to tell him what had happened since then. Examination results for high grades had risen from eight percent to 65 percent. The enrollment of pupils had doubled. You get the drift. He explained that he never had any doubt that the strategy would succeed, for we all grow to fill other people's expectations of us. If they are low, we remain small. If they are high, we walk tall. Celebration promotes motivation.

Celebration is a powerful testimony to the faith and conviction people have in God and the goodness of people. Those who find something to celebrate even in the most challenging times are a gift to the church, their families, workplaces, communities and friends. Recently, I experienced this at the celebration of life for Rev. Dr. Frank Fowler III. Frank died tragically in a matter of months from a rare brain disease. He was a faithful and fruitful leader who deepened people's faith, conviction and service in the world. People loved Frank. At his service, there was grief, but the service focused on thanking God and celebrating Frank's life. People left hopeful and with gratitude.

That is the power of celebration, gratitude and hope. People who celebrate life are people filled with gratitude. They are thankful for life and see the opportunity to thank God that it is Tuesday and to thank others for their efforts. Their celebration raises hope, not fear, raises promise, not bewilderment.

Celebration does not negate challenges, issues and even pain, but recognizes that our challenges, issues and pain will define us or our faith. Recently, a congregation that declined and could no longer sustain ministry and mission discontinued. They took the money they had in the bank and gave it to a community organization that was doing good and to a church in the next town that was also doing good. They celebrated others as they closed their church.

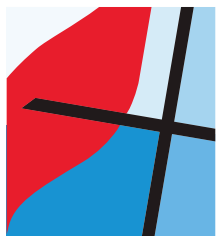
Choosing celebration is not easy. It is easier say it will be another problem filled Tuesday. Choosing to be thankful is an act of will that requires something deeper, trust, belief and faith that in this Tuesday there will be something that is a gift from God.

We all have challenges ahead as individuals and the church. We have a choice, complaining about what is or celebrate what God is doing and claim hope and gratitude is our path forward. The people of GNJ I have found to be a people who choose gratitude and hope as they celebrate *forward*.

Celebrate!

**"CELEBRATION IS A  
POWERFUL TESTIMONY  
TO THE FAITH AND  
CONVICTION PEOPLE  
HAVE IN GOD AND THE  
GOODNESS OF PEOPLE."**

—Bishop John Schol



## THE RELAY

UNITED METHODISTS  
OF GREATER NEW JERSEY

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*A Journey of Hope*

**JUNE  
TEENTH  
FREEDOM DAY  
JUNE 19**

*A Journey of Hope commemorates  
African-American freedom this Juneteenth.*

**FOR MORE DETAILS**  
[www.gnjumc.org/journeyofhope](http://www.gnjumc.org/journeyofhope)

**UNITED METHODISTS  
OF GREATER NEW JERSEY**



## Boonton Theater

Continued from page 1

Lindley said she is hoping that the new film series educates and enlightens, that it attracts people who would not normally go to events like this.

“I hope it makes them think about things a little differently and prompt them to get involved in the movement on their own,” she added.

Although Lindley said she felt lucky to have acted in many plays led by her father in an African American high school in Salem County, Lindley openly admits that her white privileged childhood growing up in southern New Jersey had given her an idealistic view of racial harmony.

But her eyes were opened when she spent 30 years of her adult life in Greensboro, NC where Blacks, which make up about 50 percent of the population, made a powerful impression on her.

Returning to New Jersey to her mother after her father died in 2017, Lindley said she was shocked by what she saw in her childhood home state.

“In the summer of 2017, the Sussex Airport was vandalized with Nazi graffiti. I couldn’t believe it. I was truly horrified.”

Lindley quickly found work doing what she did in North Carolina—musically directing theater, teaching music as an adjunct professor in Paterson and directing music for two different churches. But as existing racial tensions and divisiveness became more apparent in many communities throughout New Jersey and in the nation, Lindley said she realized much more needed to be done.

She wanted to do something that could make a lasting impact on the communities she was immersed in, something that could be used as a model and inspiration for others wanting to do similar work.

It was in the summer of 2020, after a number of horrific incidents Lindley witnessed, that she had a conversation with

Pastor Chris Bruesehoff at her family’s church in Vernon. Pastor Chris pointed to a book on his desk, *Dear Church*. In this book, Lutheran Pastor Lenny Duncan strongly asserts that all 21st century Christians are called to destroy white supremacy. A few days later, she spoke with Rev. Donald Kirschner, pastor of the Boonton UMC who told her about *A Journey of Hope*.

While leading a small Zoom-based book group on Colson Whitehead’s Pulitzer Prize winning book that addresses America’s racist history, *The Underground Railroad*, Lindley presented Kirschner with her idea, which would be a vehicle to promote GNJ’s *A Journey of Hope*.

Lindley has become all too aware of the racism that exists in her communities, a problem that is exacerbated by the distance of minds and hearts that segregation brings.

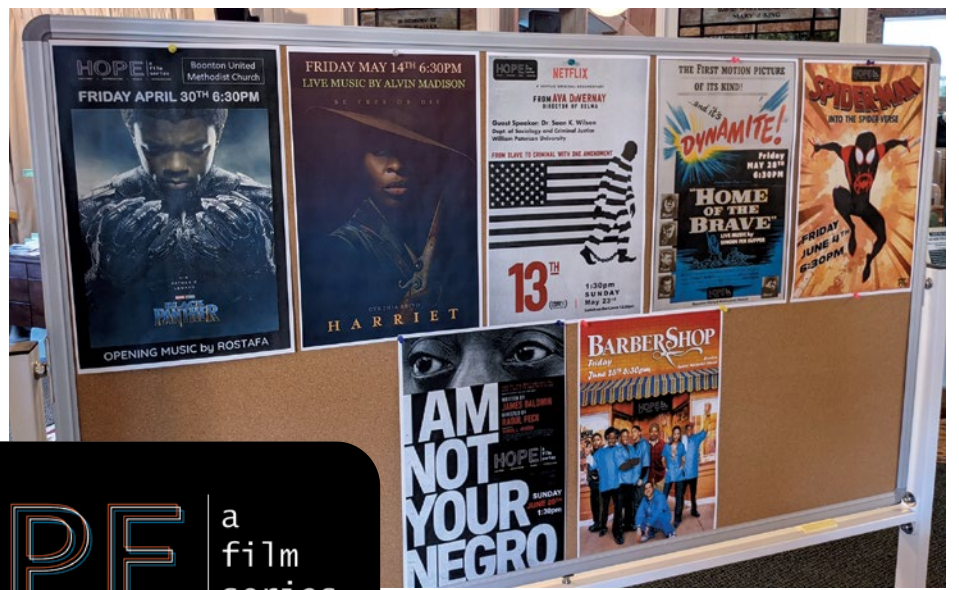
“But there’s art. Art transcends geography, religion and boundaries,” said Lindley.

Along with her son, who is a graduate of University of Connecticut, she began creating a database of films that focus on Black Americans and Black American concerns, history, artistry and joys. They also collected books by W.E.B. DuBois, James Baldwin, Ta-Nehisi Coates, Ibram X. Kendi and others.

The Hope Film Series and Library was born.

With a new movie being shown each Friday, the team is working hard to stock a library at the church and create a special website that will organize, advertise and be a resource related to all this. Study guides are also provided at each showing.

Most recently, “The Underground Railroad” was shown on May 23 with additional performances of the Amazon



“Black Panther” kicked off the theater series on April 30.

series scheduled to be on June 13, June 27 and into July.

When the Boonton UMC was established in 1857, tensions were rising over the issue of slavery. The state had a strong abolitionist community, having long been a primary route on the Underground Railroad for hiding and protecting fugitive slaves who escaped from the South.

In an attempt to strengthen the position of those seeking to keep New Jersey from joining the Southern cause, Lincoln stopped in New Jersey on the way to his inauguration in Washington. He was greeted by a crowd estimated at 25,000 to 75,000 in Newark, along with large turnouts in Jersey City and Elizabeth, followed by a raucous reception by students in Princeton of the College of New Jersey.

Several Morris County history books mention the Underground Railroad that traveled from Boonton to Newfoundland to Stockholm to Canistear. (It should be noted that then Stockholm was located in Passaic County at the intersection of Route

23 and Canistear Road). From there the route traveled to Warwick and to Chester, NY. The Presbyterian Parsonage in Chester served as the safe house. Incidentally, the one pastor involved in the Underground Railroad at that point was Rev. James W. Wood who had served as pastor of the Sussex Presbyterian Church from October 1839-October 1845.

Now more than a century later, there are activists in Sussex County working hard for racial justice and equity.

“I’m working on this every day,” said Lindley who has invited everyone to share their ideas and thoughts about this important and exciting program that will likely continue for the remainder of the year if there is enough interest surrounding these first seven films.

“This is about empathy. This is about community. This is LOVE in action,” she said.

For more details, including a list of the movies, visit [www.boontonumc.com/journey-of-hope/hope-film-series/](http://www.boontonumc.com/journey-of-hope/hope-film-series/).

## Compassion Café

Continued from page 1

team opened the new Compassion Café in May at the restaurant in Beach Haven. As a pop-up organization, Compassion Café borrows the shop’s store four days each week for four hours each day, selling coffee and baked goods like bagels and quiche.

The group of about 30 volunteers, which also includes co-founder and Sue’s niece, Erin Sharkey, who is a Board-Certified Behavior Analyst, and about 40 employees also sell baked goods for dogs, which they prepare at First UMC of Beach Haven Terrace where the employee training, baking and storage are also done.

“We knew we needed to make connections within our community in spite of COVID. It helps us remember that we are part of the community. It goes outside our walls,” said Rev. Scott Bostwick who noted that the partnership with the Compassion Café was the perfect transition from the community dinners the church used to offer.

For two hours each week, the volunteers and employees spend time in the church’s kitchen, gleaning baking skills, refining customer service and engaging in fellowship that had been missing from their lives over the past 15 months amid the lockdown.

“There are really no services for kids with special needs who age out of school-based programs,” said Sharkey who added that Compassion Café hires people of all ages and from all areas of New Jersey.

The new program, which hopes to grow to about 60 employees, is good for the community who feels good about buying their coffee there. It also means a burden



lifted for many parents, who have been unable to access special services during the lockdown.

“All my life I have marveled at God’s goodness. I had children who excelled at school, rode a bike and could just be independent. I’ve always been blessed. These parents have real struggles.”

Sharkey, who grew up in Beach Haven and is a member of a Baptist church in town, was also quick to emphasize that she and her team would not be able to do what they do unless it was not for her dedicated volunteers and generous sponsors like First UMC and Barry and Nicole Baxter who own Barry’s.

“We do not make financial sense,” said Sharkey. “We make sense that comes from the heart of the people we care

about, and their parents are so thankful for the opportunity that we are providing for them. There’s something to a wing and a prayer.”

In addition to training and support, the Compassion Café team accommodates employees as best as they can, offering more breaks, allowing some to sit down while they work and offering flexible work schedules.

“For one employee, we slammed the cash register over and over again in front of him to get him used to the environment,” Sharkey said. Anger management training is also provided for the volunteers.

For Bostwick and his congregation, this is a great beginning to help the marginalized.

“Everyone knows someone who is special needs. Now we can contribute toward



For two hours each week, volunteers and employees spend time in the First UMC of Beach Haven Terrace’s kitchen, gleaning baking skills, refining customer service and engaging in fellowship.

making their lives better,” said Bostwick who remarked how one employee is writing a book on friendships while working at the Café.

Sharkey spoke to the congregation on May 23, thanking them for their generosity. She said the team is planning on doing a pop-up coffee hour for church members this August to show their gratitude.

“God’s got a plan, and that’s how we’re doing things right now.”

The Café is accepting applications for both employees and volunteers and would love to have people from the churches to support and be part of the volunteer staff. For more information, visit their website, [www.compassioncafelbi.org](http://www.compassioncafelbi.org). Barry’s Do Me A Flavor on Centre Street in Beach Haven.



# Dover UMC Stretches its Outreach to India Through Fundraiser

*“The wound is the place where the Light enters you...you have within you more love than you could ever understand.”*

—RUMI

By Heather Mistretta  
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EDISON, N J

In early May it was reported that an average of 120 people were dying each hour from COVID-19 in India. About 400,000 people were infected. More than eight thousand miles away, a family at Dover UMC in Edison grieved for 14 family members who were among the dead.

“They are suffering, and they can’t be there for each other,” said 70-year-old Robin Christian, who said the deaths in his family have left a 16-year-old and 13-year-old orphans.

“They found 250 bodies floating in the Ganges River. There’s no oxygen and no resources for testing,” said Christian who noted that a Christian church in Maninagar, where his wife is from, rings the bell each time a life is lost, and that bell has been ringing 5-7 times per day.

Following widespread elections, Indian religious festivals and misinformation, India’s national healthcare system buckled under the pandemic’s second wave in April, as the nation became the global epicenter of the pandemic amid a high unemployment rate, rampant poverty and a lack of transportation. For over two weeks, the number of deaths recorded per day exceeded 3,000. On April 22, India recorded what was then the highest daily increase of cases in the world since the start of the pandemic, with 314,835

new infections. Since then, the country has added more than 300,000 cases a day. That includes a record 414,188 new cases on May 7 alone.

“When we saw what was happening, we knew we needed to do something,” said Rev. Chuck Coblentz. “When one of our member families hurt, we all hurt.” He added that this family was among several others at his diverse church who were grieving lost family members in India.

Knowing that time was of the essence, the church created a GoFundMe page to raise the \$38,000 needed to outfit an entire ICU room in a hospital on the southeastern coast of India where a bed shortage was one of the main reasons for the staggering number of deaths. An ICU unit includes a bed frame, mattress, linens, pillows, respirator, iv stand, monitors, pulse oximeter and a blanket warming device.

In a country, which despite being a quarter the size of the United States yet has four times the population around 1.4 billion, the Christian Medical College & Hospital of Vellore (CMC) is a beacon of hope. The organization currently serves more than two million patients each year.

Its mission for more than 100 years has been to “seek to be a witness to the healing ministry of Christ, through excellence in education, service and research.” Known for never turning anyone away, CMC is a medical center founded by an American missionary, Ida Scudder in 1900 who at only 20 discovered that God was calling her to serve the women of India. She returned to the U.S. to become a doctor, graduating in the first class that accepted women at Cornell Medical College in 1899. She established an institutional structure for transformative learning to deliver equity in healthcare



Rev. Chuck Coblentz stands with Robin Christian, who has lost 14 relatives in India during this second wave of the pandemic.

that is both patient-centered and population-based.

Dover UMC knew that CMC, with more than 100 satellite locations throughout India, would be the recipient of its fundraiser. The Vellore Christian Medical College Foundation’s Director of Church Relations Deepika Srivastava and President John Riehl stepped in to help make this happen.

“As we’ve taken up the challenge to help CMC ramp up its ICU capacity to care for patients, our faith-based partners have responded to this “Kairos” (Kairos is the Greek word that describes an opportunity to respond with God’s empowerment to those in desperate need) moment with urgency and unwavering support,” said Srivastava who experienced first-hand the “Compassionate Care” that is synonymous with CMC when she was born there.

Throughout the hospital, in addition to a commitment to excellence in care, there are Bible verses on the walls and a large chapel that opens its doors to all visitors, said Srivastava, who added that

each morning there are Bible studies and hymnal singing in the hospital.

On June 1 CMC launched a new initiative called “Vaccinate Vellore” with a goal of fully immunizing 70,000 people within the next 60 days. She added two of CMC’s doctors have also joined a recently formed national task force to address the health crisis. CMC is also in the process of building a maternity and neonatal hospital to accommodate the gaps in healthcare for women.

“But I am amazed to see how the faith-based community has stepped up,” said Srivastava, who noted that 100 percent of the proceeds of New Dover’s fundraiser will go toward patient care. “God’s light continues to shine amid all the darkness.”

For Christian, whose father was a Christian minister in Brooklyn and who now helps distribute food to the homeless in Elizabeth, the fundraiser is a sign of hope amid so much misery. Exacerbating the health crisis has been a wave of Black Fungus, which has developed from the sharing of oxygen tubes and mismanagement of medications like steroids. This affects all vital organs and is making people even more fearful about going to the hospital, said Christian.

Coblentz said this mission gives his church the opportunity to broaden its outreach from feeding about 1,500 people each week in its community for the past year to saving lives in India.

He noted that all money raised will be given to CMC, including any donations received after the new deadline of June 30.

“Now Christians and Hindus are working together to help people heal,” said Coblentz. “It’s also our way to spread the Gospel in India.”

## A Disciple in the Midst

By Heather Mistretta  
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SUSSEX, N J

On January 31, 2021, James Griffin was baptized, not cradled in the arms of his parent but rather standing tall as an adult who had grown up in what he called a “half-hearted” Unitarian family but was now ready wholeheartedly to become a disciple of Christ at Sussex UMC.

**“I TALKED WITH HIM BY PHONE A NUMBER OF TIMES, TO ANSWER HIS QUESTIONS AND TALK ABOUT JOHN WESLEY, WESLEYAN THEOLOGY, THE UNITED METHODIST COMMITMENT TO MERCY AND JUSTICE AS WELL AS DEVOTION AND OUR CONGREGATION’S HISTORY OF COMPASSION AND SERVICE IN THE COMMUNITY.”**

—Rev. Dan Gepford

Having gone for many years with no religious affiliation, Griffin knew it was time to find a spiritual home. After the beginning of the pandemic, he began a time of soul-searching and wanted to explore the Christian faith more deeply.

“I was not raised as a regular church goer. I’m middle aged now and had been meaning to join a church for several

years but never followed through,” said Griffin, who is a machinist at Thor Labs in Newton.

“During the pandemic and lockdown, many congregations hustled to provide services remotely. This allowed me the freedom to cautiously investigate several options. My grandparents on both sides were Methodist, so that’s where I focused my search.”

With research in hand, he contacted the church office at Sussex UMC to ask what would be involved in being baptized.

“I talked with him by phone a number of times, to answer his questions and talk about John Wesley, Wesleyan theology, the United Methodist commitment to mercy and justice as well as devotion and our congregation’s history of compassion and service in the community,” said Rev. Dan Gepford.

“We talked about baptism and the meaning of membership and about the commitments professing members make. James raised excellent questions, which I did my best to answer, and I enjoyed our conversations a lot,” added Gepford who is retiring from his role as a pastor this year.

When asked what led him specifically to the church in northwestern New

Jersey, Griffin said it was Rev. Gepford’s voice.

“Dan Gepford’s voice during a sermon let me hear, really hear and understand, the meaning of the Words in a way that I couldn’t understand when I read them on a page.”

A date was arranged when he and his girlfriend could come to the church during Sussex UMC’s livestream worship service, when the church council president, organist and Gepford’s wife could also be present in the sanctuary, wearing masks and social distancing.

The day was a momentous one for the pastor and congregation at Sussex UMC as evidenced by the many celebratory comments on Facebook during the livestream service. Despite the empty pews, the enthusiasm was felt that day in the sanctuary.

“I think everyone found special joy that day in welcoming James and singing



James Griffin received a warm welcome online from the congregation following his baptism.

our traditional baptism theme song, the hymn ‘I Was There to Hear Your Boring Cry,’” said Gepford. “Since then, James has been eager to participate in our small group gatherings and get to know the congregation. I am really happy and inspired that he has chosen to be part of our church family.”

Griffin said he’s looking forward to meeting his neighbors and getting involved in the local community. Currently, he’s doing his part to plan the church’s annual rummage sale scheduled for June 5.

Gepford’s journey will also take a turn this year when he retires for the second time this July. Before becoming a pastor, Gepford was a lawyer for AT&T for 28 years. Despite a constant nudging from God all throughout college, Gepford said, he pursued a secular career after ending up as only the runner-up for a Rockefeller Scholarship, which would have enabled him to pursue a career in ministry.

“I saw that as a sign,” said Gepford. In fact, throughout his life he paid attention to those signs. In 2001 after 9/11 shook not only the world but also Gepford’s life, he listened to his wife and as he puts it, “the constant nagging from Jesus,” and enrolled in seminary full time.

Today, as he looks toward retirement when he hopes to spend more time with family and travel, and he embraces with gratitude all of his life experiences and the people who helped him along the way, Gepford said he has no regrets.

Here is a link to the video recording of the livestreamed service: <https://www.facebook.com/1251416778320239/videos/1670450279813267>.



# Rev. Tim Conaway's Pull to Ministry

By Denise Herschel  
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**H**e experienced his first pull toward ministry during his childhood years growing up in Mullica Hill, NJ. It was then that Rev. Tim Conaway listened to numerous conversations around his family dinner table; discussions that were a mix of stories, jokes, talk, philosophical debate and theology. His grandfather, Rev. William Thielking was the pastor of the First UMC in Glassboro and his father, Rev. Glenn Conaway, a pastor as well, having served during his ministry at Fairton UMC in Fairfield, First UMC Moorestown in Moorestown and Trinity UMC Mullica Hill in Mullica Hill.

"I had felt a tug toward ministry but kept it at bay or ran away from the idea. Growing up I did not want to be a minister. That was my dad's and my grandfather's profession," he said.

So he made the careful decision to pursue other opportunities that were not within the ministerial realm. He attended Asbury University in Wilmore, KY, where his grandfather, his father and his sister all had graduated previously. After his graduation, he worked as an intern at WHYY in Philadelphia and then as the media director at Trinity UMC in Mullica Hill, a position he had for seven years until he became a pastor.

In the winter of 2018, he worked A/V for a pastor's retreat on storytelling. He had helped lead a story at an event and during that event, Brian Roberts, district superintendent of the Cape Atlantic District, approached him and said, "I see call in you, Tim. I believe God is calling you."

"I was taken aback. I had been running from this very thing my whole life. I know my family felt it, and even I did, but fought it every time," he added. "Brian and I met and talked, and I finally allowed myself to be open to the idea and doors opened wide. I went to local licensing school, was appointed to Hammonton, and a year later started seminary at Drew Theological School."

Conaway has now been the pastor of First UMC of Hammonton for the past three years with this being his first appointment as a licensed local pastor.

Rev. Glenn Conaway grew up in the First UMC in Glassboro. He attended Asbury University as a History/Sociology Secondary Education major. However, he felt his calling to ministry at a summer camp between his junior and senior year of high school.



**Rev. Glenn Conaway and his son, Rev. Tim Conaway both share a joy in walking alongside people, in whatever their journey of faith may be.**

I worked at Pitman Manor, a Methodist retirement community. I enjoyed working with people, and they encouraged me to keep going in college and prayed for me and my coming ministry."

After he graduated from college, Conaway attended Eastern Theological Seminary where he received an MDiv. While in seminary, he served as a student pastor at Fairton UMC. He then served at First UMC Moorestown, Trinity UMC Mullica Hill and is now district superintendent of the Delaware Bay District, Southern Region Leader, having just completed four years.

Both father and son agreed that their greatest joy as pastors has been sharing God's love, grace and mercy with their communities.

"My family is so blessed to be part of the Hammonton community. Our con-

servant leadership was a part of everyday life. It is a lifestyle that I have continued to live out today," he said.

Rev. Glenn Conaway echoed his son's sentiments and added that his joy of serving God has been walking alongside people, in whatever their journey of faith may be.

"There is the joy of watching some commit their lives to Christ for the very first time, to see others in a disciple class get excited about hearing God's Word, and exploring how it pertains to their lives. And there are those who have spent a lifetime walking with God and who have challenged me to rethink, relook and re-discover what it means to be a pastor in the valleys and the mountaintops of life," he said.

"This past year has been a valley where I often felt like many clergy wandering in circles in this desert, unsure where we will go or be as the church. Yet, it has been in this year that I have found strength in my personal prayer time and devotions."

Rev. Tim Conaway said that as he reflects upon his upbringing, he believes that God has and is using all his life experiences for this moment.

"My grandfather, dad and other family members' storytelling, sharing jokes, debating and having theological and philosophical conversations as well as my college education, working on church staff and missions have all shaped me for this time. I have never been more filled with joy and humbled to be where I am," he said.

Rev. Glenn Conaway continued that what inspires him the most every day in life is his belief in hope.

"I read about hope in Romans," he said. "But more than that, I see the hope that Christ brings to people's lives and realize that at any given moment or day, Christ is not only at work but breaks through with hope." 🇺🇸

**"THERE IS THE JOY OF WATCHING SOME COMMIT THEIR LIVES TO CHRIST FOR THE VERY FIRST TIME, TO SEE OTHERS IN A DISCIPLE CLASS GET EXCITED ABOUT HEARING GOD'S WORD, AND EXPLORING HOW IT PERTAINS TO THEIR LIVES."**

—Rev. Glenn Conaway

"The church became a big part of my life from the time I sang in the cherub choir at age six.

My mom made church a priority in her life for all three of her children. She worked mostly behind the scenes but was there to show us that faith and work go together," he said. "For me it was choir, youth group, bell choir, mission projects, and going out to serve others. I think that is why during high school and college

gregation is so loving, caring and compassionate to not only my family but all who they work with and serve," Rev. Tim Conaway said.

He added that working alongside his father at Trinity UMC had been a wonderful experience for both of them.

"He is an incredible pastor, teacher and leader as well as a father and grandfather. I loved being able to work creatively with him for those years at Trinity. Growing up,



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## ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2021



## Annual Conference

*Continued from page 1*

have, instead of looking to what is next. Celebration also changes things.”

Bishop Schol celebrated GNJ clergy, laity and the lay certified ministry and lauded women clergy on the 65th celebration of when they were given full clergy rights in the Methodist Church. From discipleship at any age to clergy paying it forward to help the underserved, Schol celebrated the wonderful ministries at GNJ and the people who infuse vitality into local churches.

“We have more ministries than we can celebrate, but the one that’s impacting people’s lives in these ever-changing and challenging times, is the hospitality ministry,” said Schol who recognized churches who are feeding the homeless, caring for the marginalized and making masks to keep those in their communities safe.

Amid the challenges are signs of hope, said Schol who is looking forward to working together toward ending the sin of racism and building congregational vitality through *A Journey of Hope* and a rebirth of worship and ministry following the pandemic.

In celebration of our similarities and differences, Schol said, “We are a holy communion of different races, ethnicities, cultures and perspectives united by the Holy Spirit, driven by the mission of Christ and bearing the good news of an unmerited grace that changes lives and transforms communities.”

Following the Episcopal Address, Conference Secretary Rev. Shelley Smith opened the session, emphasizing God’s grace and calling to “pour out your spirit in each of us,” each of us “at the point of our need.”

Rev. Juel Nelson, director of leadership development, encouraged laity and clergy to take advantage of what the new Leadership Academy will offer and how it will help church leaders connect, grow and lead. During the first and second rounds of the short-term courses, 110 laity took part in the new program designed to foster a collaboration between clergy and laity.

From short-term courses to those that directly align and support *A Journey of Hope*, the Leadership Academy “is truly a collaboration between laity and clergy,” said Nelson whose foray into proclaiming God’s word began when she was only 13 when she preached her first sermon at her home church in Edison.

Rev. Enger Muteteke, who will be a GNJ director of resourcing this July, said *A Journey of Hope* is continuing to move forward with the selection of the consultant, Fearless Dialogues, who will equip 150 leaders to lead the project into the next phase of providing training support to our churches as we grow our vitality and engage in the community and work together to end the sin of racism.

Helping to strengthen the mission, the conference passed legislation to strengthen the five-year plan—ensuring equity, ensuring congregations in low-income communities are apportioned shared ministry at a reduced amount and ensuring that all congregations are treated the same regardless of their shared ministry.

As the names of those who passed in the last year were read, Rev. Dr. Gina Hendrickson called on people to remember all who died since the last Annual Conference.

“We haven’t been able to grieve together, to hug each other,” said Hendrickson who cited many “dark valleys” she encountered over the past year.

“The 23rd Psalm has been balm for my soul,” she said as she encouraged everyone to let it become their voice as it has for her and to “fear not!” Hendrickson will transition from her leadership as Northern Shore District Superintendent to become the lead pastor at First UMC of Moorestown on July 1.

In addition to ceremony, the two-day service was balanced by some impactful legislation that helps to move our ministry and mission forward. On Monday, GNJ passed legislation related to the Trustee Enabling Resolutions, which gives the Board of Trustees the authority to carry out its work, set minimum salaries for clergy and approve 11 advance specials for mission and ministry in the community.

The GNJ Designated Fund Policies legislation was postponed to the adjourned session, which will be October 14, when the financial and property sales reports will be provided.

Although not part of the original program, GNJ quickly responded to the sexist clause found in the United Methodist Men report in the Preconference Workbook by sharing testimonies and passing new legislation, which was presented by Rev. Iraidia Ruiz De Porras, Commission on Status and Role of Women chairperson, and senior pastor, Christ UMC in Lakewood (sidebar on page 7).





ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2021

CFA Chair Vasanth Victor shared with us that billing collections this year are up 29%, and that our churches have received about \$5.9 million in PPP funding in 2021. He also reiterated that vigilant efforts would continue to be made toward budget control and oversight.

Also passed was Intersectional Peace with Justice legislation from the United Methodist Women (UMW) as presented by GNJ UMW President Sue Zahorbenski to “work for justice through compassionate service and advocacy to change unfair policies and systems” and “provide educational experiences that lead to personal change in order to transform the world.”

The legislation, making the Educational Society of the GNJAC a subcommittee of the Board of Higher Education and Ministry, also passed. The Educational Society has provided financial help through scholarships and loans to students pursuing ministry in the former Southern NJ Annual Conference and GNJ since at least 1863.

At the Service of Passage, GNJ celebrated the ministries of 22 clergy who retired, including Palisades District Superintendent Rev. Dr. Gina Kim who has faithfully served God full time for 30 years as youth pastor, associate pastor, senior pastor and district superintendent.

On day two, Rev. Kim called on everyone to “tap into the reservoir of the power of the Holy Spirit,” and Bishop Schol encouraged us to narrow our paths and focus more on clarity, play and loving and nurturing each other to become closer to God.

GNJ commissioned and ordained 13 clergy, including Bridget Galvin as a provisional deacon; David Ledford, Jaemyoung James Lee, Joshua Shuster and JiSun Yang as ordained elders; and Brendan Galvin, Elouise Hill-Challenger, Eunkyong Kim, Geralda Aldajuste, Hyunsook Song,

Hyun Woo Kim, Laura Steele and Tiffany Murphy as commissioned.

The service was graced by two powerful and passionate testimonies from Laura and James who shared with us their unique circuitous journeys that brought them to this place and how they listened to the voice of God along the way.

“To that voice today that says imposter, I say impossible,” said Laura as she shared with us her journey from growing up with a single mom, battling the Imposter Syndrome and discovering her voice.

Speaking in spoken word form, James delivered poetic prose as he too spoke of his arduous journey to discover his calling. “After three jobs and three kids, I heard the small voice again...I was told, ‘James, I love you for who you are, not what you do.’”—it was then that he pursued a life of ministry and learned to “live a life of no walls.”

Although not spoken, each of the 13 clergy present that day for the ceremony embraced their own unique stories that led to them being there. For some, the reaction was visible, for others, more introspective. For Rev. Dr. Tiffany Murphy, who recently attained a doctorate in leadership of missional church renewal, she felt gratitude for those who journeyed with her (story coming in the July Relay). 📖

**Photo 1:** Bishop Schol ordained or commissioned 13 clergy, calling on the more than 1,500 people who tuned in to celebrate.; **2:** Rev. Dr. Gina Kim, a clergy leader and mentor to many for more than 30 years, will retire this year.; **3:** Rev. Elouise Hill-Challenger, overcome with emotion during her commissioning, shares her celebration with her family.; **4:** Rev. Geralda Aldajuste (left) shares a moment with her Rev. Dr. Tiffany Murphy during the ordination service.; **5:** Gateway North District Superintendent Rev. William M. Williams III prays over those lives that were lost in the past year.; **6:** Rev. James Lee shares his story through powerful prose he called “a still small voice.”; **7:** Rev. Bridget Galvin (center), of Grace UMC, was ordained that day as a provisional deacon.; **8:** Rev. JiSun Yang, of Haddonfield UMC, was ordained as an elder at the 2021 Annual Conference.; **9:** Rev. Laura Steele, of Hopewell UMC, delivers a powerful story of overcoming the imposter syndrome.; **10:** Hyun Woo Kim was among those commissioned last month.; **11:** Among the celebrations that day was the 65th anniversary of when women were given full clergy rights in the Methodist Church.; **12:** Rev. Dr. Gina Hendrickson (center) will transition from district superintendent to senior pastor at First UMC of Moorestown next month.

Photos by Shari DeAngelo



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GNJ COSROW Response to Harmful Remarks in the GNJ Pre-Conference Journal



12

Bishop Schol, clergy, and lay members of the Greater New Jersey Annual Conference, my name is Iraidia Ruiz de Porras, pastor at Christ United Methodist Church in Lakewood, NJ. I am also a member of the GNJ Commission on the Status and Role of Women.

I stand here today with a heavy heart representing the commission to raise a deep concern regarding remarks published in this year's Pre-Conference Journal that are part of the report of the GNJ United Methodist Men.

The mission of the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women (COSROW) is “to challenge The United Methodist Church at all levels to work for full and equal participation of women in the total life of the denomination, including ordination of women, equal access to policy-making and recognition that Jesus Christ calls men and women alike to salvation, liberation, discipleship and service in church and society.” Words from Paul to the Galatians affirm that “There is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28)”

Over the past two days the GNJ COSROW drafted the following legislation for the prayerful consideration of the Annual Conference session.

To see the new legislation, visit the “Recap” at [www.gnjumc.org/2021-annual-conference/](http://www.gnjumc.org/2021-annual-conference/).





## GO TELL IT ON THE MOUNTAIN

The Relay encourages clergy and laity alike to share their experiences in their own words of adapting ministries and how that adaptability shines the light on others in the new section, "Go Tell it on the Mountain." Do you have Good News to tell? Contact Heather Mistretta at [hmistretta@gnjumc.org](mailto:hmistretta@gnjumc.org).

# Making an Environmental Splash in South Jersey

By Rev. Cricket Denton  
seavilleumc@gmail.com

## OCEAN VIEW, NJ

Seaville UMC has a vision of making a splash in the community through their environmental ministries. They have taken some bold steps to "go green," to ensure that they are able to leave the planet a better place for those that will come after them.

Creation care has been the center of their mission, and they have weaved it into every aspect of their ministries. The phrase, "reduce, reuse, and recycle," serves as a reminder to be more environmentally sustainable.

The church's Lenten project last year challenged members to reduce their use of disposable plastic and the church has made a covenant to only allow reusable water bottles on the property.

They encourage the reuse of clothes by providing an entirely free "Kids' Closet," which is open to the public and is filled with gently used children's clothes.

The church promotes recycling by modeling proper recycling practices. Members also by lead recycle walks where they educate beachgoers about appropriate recycling rules.

This year the church has taken their vision one step further by hosting one-day Eco Retreats. Church and community groups are encouraged to book a Saturday retreat at "The Splash Pad," the church's eco center. Because of the pandemic, all retreat activities will be held outside and include both a mission-centered, spiritual formation component and a fun fellowship activity.

Over 90% of plastic that has ever been made on earth has not been recycled,



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Carol Thompson takes a break on the beach at the midway point of her kayak adventure.; Charlie, Faith, Brighton, and Olivia enjoy taking a break from climbing to pose for the camera.; Jen Battersby is having a blast tight rope walking up in the trees.



and a majority of that finds its way to our water systems.

Groups are invited for a morning hike into the bay where the significance of plastic reduction is brought to life. Each group will be guided through the importance of connecting creation care with their faith, before taking a break for lunch. The afternoon is filled with a fun activity, surrounded by nature—groups will choose either kayaking in the bay or a zip line and aerial obstacle course. A beach option is also available for groups that are looking for something with a little slower pace.

Seaville UMC has envisioned a future where creation care isn't a choice; it's a way of life. God commanded us to be stewards of the earth; there is no Plan B, and there is no Planet B. All are welcome to #BeTheSplash and start learning what you can do to ensure a better world for tomorrow, and generations to come.

The Splash Pad is now taking reservations for this summer. If you book a group of 10 people or more by July 4, you will automatically receive \$500 off the cost of your retreat.

Visit [www.seavilleumc.com/eco-retreats](http://www.seavilleumc.com/eco-retreats) for more information.

# Wall UMC: The Little Church That Could

By Mary Beth Malick

## SPRING LAKE, NJ

The pandemic has changed the way of doing ministries and Wall UMC did this one person at a time, one meal at a time, one phone call at a time and one social distanced gathering at a time.

We didn't just maintain our missions, we adapted to change and created ways to better serve our church and community. We focused on those living alone, shut-ins, and those impacted financially.

Church members started to make food at their homes to bring to those who lived alone, shut-ins and those who, prior to the pandemic, depended on their meals from nearby restaurants and were no longer able to go out to eat.

This morphed into a core of church members gathering in our large church kitchen, practicing social distancing while cooking meals and then delivering dinners to individual doors every Friday throughout the entire pandemic to 20 friends and families of the church. This began the first week of the pandemic in March and continues to this day and is now called "The Friday Dinner."

We shopped for groceries, essential items, and we visited from afar. We wrote



One way Wall UMC adapted to the new environment was with "The Friday Dinner."

notes, we made phone calls, and we learned how to Zoom! We had meetings via Zoom, knitting via Zoom, and a bible study via Zoom!

We followed worship attendance guidelines and closed our house of worship when directed. We then had online

services, which continued as we once again followed guidelines when returning to limited in-house services. And we continue to do this with many of the congregation coming back to in-house services as vaccines become more readily available.

Our congregation donated to our scholarship fund because we value education and our youth.

Our church organist continued to play and also added to her role as church secretary, helping our pastor in reaching out to our church family, doing the weekly bulletin, and editing the newsletter.

A church member volunteered her time to maintain our encouragement board in front of the church bringing the messages of hope and a sprinkle of humor with her clever notes.

Our "little church that could" supported an event by collecting non-perishable foods for St. Luke UMC's food pantry. While at the same time, we collected food for West Belmar UMC's Food Pantry.

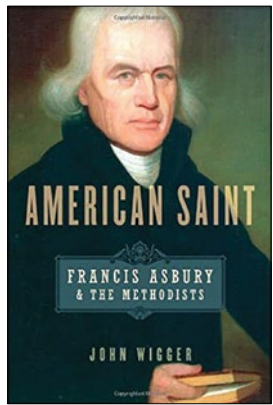
We revived our church newsletter and circulated the newsletter via e-mail. We fed local residents living in motels during the holidays. With the help of a United Methodist Church grant, we helped three single parent families in our community with a monetary donation for food and utilities for five months. We maintain our cemetery and cleaned out an entire wooded area on our property.

All of this would not be possible without the faithful dedication of our congregation members who are always so willing to help.



## JUNE BOOKSHELF

This month's bookshelf is dedicated to our fathers and our children and all that they bring to our lives. This collection explores our fathers and youth or offers selections written by fathers, with content intended to enrich and empower our lives.



### American Saint: Francis Asbury and the Methodists

(2009, Oxford University Press) by John Wigger

*American Saint* is a definitive biography of Francis Asbury and, by extension, a revealing interpretation of the early years of the Methodist movement in America. Asbury emerges here as not merely an influential religious leader, but a fascinating character, who lived an extraordinary life. His cultural sensitivity was matched only by his ability to organize. His life of prayer and voluntary poverty were legendary, as was his generosity to the poor. He had a remarkable ability to connect with ordinary people, and he met with thousands of them as he crisscrossed the nation between his arrival in America in 1771 and his death in 1816.

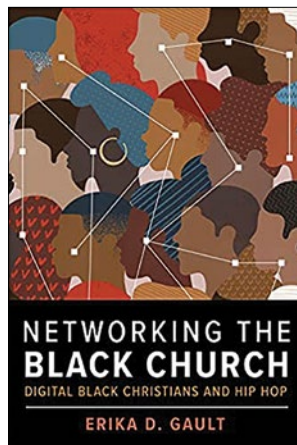
John Wigger is Professor of History at the University of Missouri.

### Networking the Black Church: Digital Black Christians and Hip Hop (Religion and Social Transformation, 13)

(2022, NYU Press) by Erika D. Gault

*Networking the Black Church* provides a timely portrait of young Black Christians and how digital technology is transforming the Black Church. They stand at the forefront of the Black Lives Matter movement, push the boundaries of the Black Church through online expression of Christian hip hop and redefine what it means to be young, Black and Christian in America. Young Black adults represent the future of African American religiosity, yet little is known regarding their religious lives beyond the Black Church. This book explores how deeply embedded digital technology is in the lives of young Black Christians, offering a first-of-its-kind digital-hip hop ethnography.

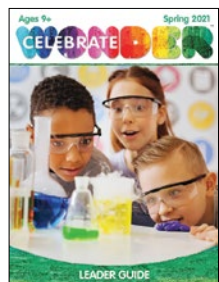
Erika D. Gault is assistant professor in the Africana Studies Program at the University of Arizona and co-editor of *Beyond Christian Hip Hop: A Move Towards Christians and Hip Hop*. She is a scholar, poet, and ordained elder whose justice-centered work blends research, art, and religion to advocate for the rights of young Black people.



### Celebrate Wonder Ages 9 Leader Spring 2021

(2021, Cokesbury)

*Celebrate Wonder* is a guide to quick and easy classroom preparation. It includes Bible background, flexible activities, step-by-step instructions, reproducible pages, helpful tips and a spiritual practice for the leader and the children. All activities are designed to help the children engage in open-ended exploration of the Bible stories and develop techniques for engaging their spirituality and faith for years to come.

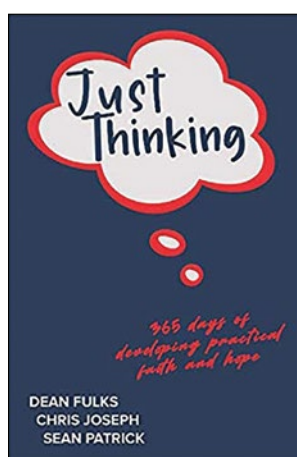


### Just Thinking: 365 Days of Developing Practical Faith and Hope

(2020, Author Academy Elite) by Dean Fulks, Chris Joseph, Sean Patrick

Relating the Bible to humorous, engaging stories, (like finding yourself on a live stage in front of 60,000 screaming fans at a rock concert), *Just Thinking* shares authentic insights that will inspire the faith of young and old alike. *Just Thinking* is a 365-day journey designed to develop the way you think about God. What you discover in *Just Thinking* will reshape the way you see God, others, and yourself.

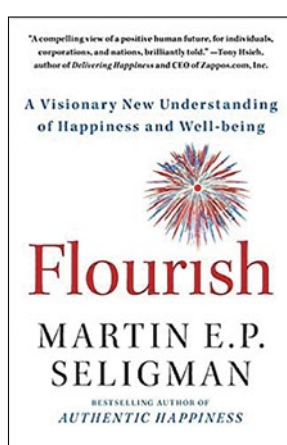
Dean Fulks is the lead pastor at Lifepoint Church on the north side of Columbus, Ohio. He leads his local congregation and works with SEND North America to make disciples and multiply churches in Mid-Ohio, the Midwest, and the world. He and his wife, Angie, are the parents of three great kids.



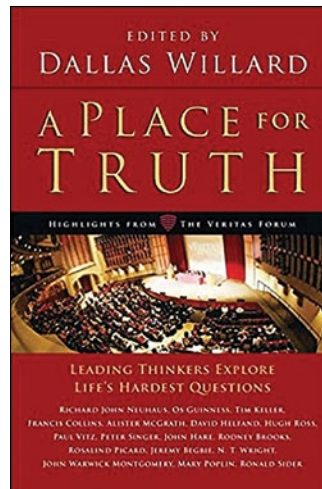
### Flourish (A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-Being)

(2012, Atria Books) by Martin E.P. Seligman

*Flourish* explores and refines the Positive Psychology movement, building on Dr. Seligman's game-changing work on optimism, motivation and character to show how to get the most out of life, unveiling an electrifying new theory of what makes a good life—for individuals, for communities, and for nations. While certainly a part of well-being, happiness alone doesn't give life meaning. Seligman now asks, What is it that enables you to cultivate your talents, to build deep, lasting relationships with others, to feel pleasure and to contribute meaningfully to the world? In a word, what is it that allows you to flourish?



Martin E. P. Seligman is the Robert A. Fox Professor of Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania. His visionary work in Positive Psychology has been supported by the National Institute of Mental Health, the National Science Foundation, the Guggenheim Foundation, the Mellon Foundation, and the MacArthur Foundation.



### A Place for Truth

(2010, Veritas Books) by Dallas Willard

*A Place for Truth* is a collection of content from some of The Veritas Forum's most notable presentations, with contributions from Francis Collins, Tim Keller, N. T. Wright, Mary Poplin and more. Volume editor Dallas Willard introduces each presentation, highlighting its significance and putting it in context for us today. Also included are selected question and answer sessions with the speakers from the original forum experiences.

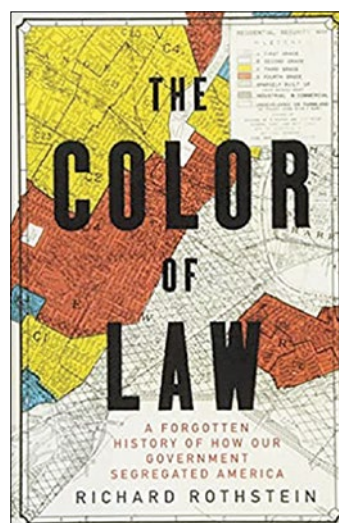
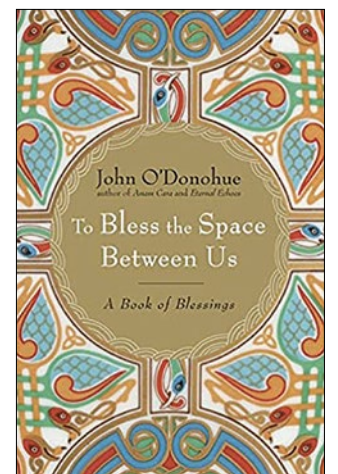
Dallas Willard (1935-2013) was a well-renowned, well-regarded Christian scholar and author. His other books include *The Divine Conspiracy*, *The Spirit of the Disciplines* (1988) and *Renovation of the Heart* (2002). Dr. Willard displays a scholarly acumen and a pastor's heart, seeking to integrate philosophy, theology, and ethics with practical discipleship and Christian day-to-day living. A professor's professor, Dr. Willard is interested in reaching out to skeptical college students and to their even-more skeptical professors. He has long been a professor of Philosophy at the University of Southern California, working in the field of logic and epistemology. Dr. Willard studied at William Jewell College, Tennessee Temple College, and Baylor University before earning a Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Wisconsin.

### To Bless the Space Between Us: A Book of Blessings

(2008, Doubleday) by John O'Donohue

*To Bless the Space Between Us* is a collection of blessings to help readers through both the everyday and the extraordinary events of their lives. It is a compelling blend of elegant, poetic language and spiritual insight that offers readers comfort and encouragement on their journeys through life as it looks at life's thresholds—getting married, having children, starting a new job—and offers invaluable guidelines for making the transition from a known, familiar world into a new, unmapped territory. Blessing is explained as a way of life, as a lens through which the whole world is transformed.

John O'Donohue was a poet, philosopher and scholar, a native Gaelic speaker from County Clare, Ireland. He was awarded a Ph.D. in Philosophical Theology from the University of Tübingen, with post-doctoral study of Meister Eckhart. His numerous international best-selling books include: *Anam Cara*, *Beauty*, *Eternal Echoes*, and *Walking in Wonder: Eternal Wisdom for a Modern World*. More information can be found: <https://johnodonohue.com/>.



### The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America

(2017, Liveright) by Richard Rothstein

*The Color of Law* is a history of the modern American metropolis, which exposes the myth that America's cities came to be racially divided through de facto segregation—that is, through individual prejudices, income differences, or the actions of private institutions like banks and real estate agencies. Through extraordinary revelations and extensive research, *The Color of Law* chronicles an untold story that begins in the 1920s, showing how this process of de jure segregation began with explicit racial zoning, as millions of African Americans moved in a great historical migration from the south to the north.

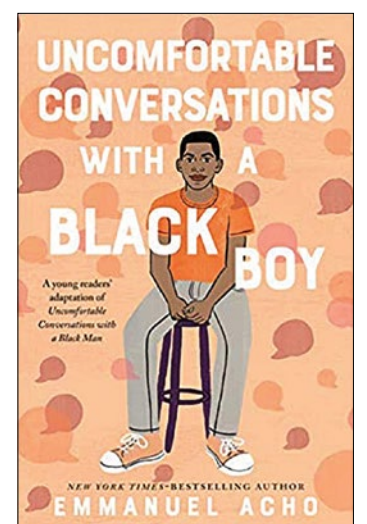
Richard Rothstein is a research associate of the Economic Policy Institute and a Fellow at the Thurgood Marshall Institute of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. He lives in California, where he is a Fellow of the Haas Institute at the University of California—Berkeley.

### Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Boy

(2021, Roaring Brook Press) by Emmanuel Acho

In *Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Boy*, no question is off the table. Approaching every question with openness and patience, Emmanuel connects his own experience with race and racism—from attending majority-white prep schools to his time in the NFL playing on majority-black football teams—to insightful lessons in black history and black culture. Filled with honest answers and actionable advice, this book is a must-read for those in our youngest generation looking to understand and dismantle racism within their own communities.

Emmanuel Acho is a Fox Sports analyst and host/producer of "Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Man," a web series about racism to drive open and uncomfortable dialogue. After earning an undergraduate degree in sports management in 2012, Emmanuel was drafted by the Cleveland Browns. He was then traded to the Philadelphia Eagles in 2013, where he spent most of his career. While in the NFL, Emmanuel spent off-seasons at the University of Texas to earn a master's degree in Sports Psychology. In 2016, Emmanuel left the football field and picked up the microphone to begin his broadcast career. In 2018, Emmanuel was promoted within ESPN, where he served as the youngest national football analyst and was named a 2018 Forbes 30 Under 30 Selection. In 2017, he and his family's non-profit organization, Living Hope Christian Ministries, raised enough funds to build a hospital in rural Nigeria.





# Making the Maker's Place: Reflections on Poverty and Change

By Rev. Michael Reed

Recently I was listening to an interview of Jacqueline Novogratz, a philanthropist and author who is changing the way the world tackles poverty. She said something that resonated with me: “The opposite of poverty is dignity.” She goes on to say: “Dignity is freedom. It is choice. It is having control over decisions in our lives.”

I’ve been thinking about that as I reflect back on the last three years of ministry with the Maker’s Place, a Hope Center and diaper bank. As you may know, I moved to Trenton to help launch the Maker’s Place in 2018. And as you may not yet know, this summer I’ll be moving

with my family to the Boston area. After much conversation and discernment, my wife Elena has accepted a teaching position at Phillips Academy Andover. It’s a dream opportunity for her, and I’m tremendously excited about the opportunity for my family, even as I’m terribly sad to be leaving Greater New Jersey.



Rev. Michael Reed

Credit: Shari DeAngelo Photography

Still, I couldn’t miss the opportunity to ponder, reflect and say thank you. These last three years, United Methodists have shown their dedication to mission and ministry with the poor. Together, we’ve collected more than 350,000 diapers and half a million baby wipes.

We’ve built a new Hope Center from the ground up. We raised money, hired staff, established a nonprofit board of directors and mobilized an amazing volunteer team

that stepped up and showed up, even during the rages of COVID-19. More than 100 United Methodist churches have donated diapers, joined us as volunteers or partnered in some other way. Our new directors—Alyssa Ruch and Callie Crowder—are ready to keep growing Maker’s Place as a center for hands-on mission and ministry. Praise God, and thank you!

But how do we know if we have been successful? Building organizations is great. But Christ does not tell us to build great organizations. Christ tells us to love our neighbors. Which brings me back to that intriguing idea: “The opposite of poverty is dignity”—in other words, the economic, social, and spiritual freedom to be a maker of one’s own destiny.

Rev. Héctor Burgos once reminded me that no one thinks of themselves as poor. He’s right. People don’t typically self-identify as “poor.” There’s just no dignity

in it. When I’ve hit upon difficult financial times in years past, I don’t think of myself as a poor person. I’m just someone who has to wait until Friday to buy groceries. And when I talk to people in my Trenton community, someone might say, “Well, so-and-so is struggling a bit right now.” But pronouncements about poverty are for economists and fundraisers.

And yet, the struggle that many families face is real. It sits beside the cradle or crib and bites its nails in the line of the grocery store. In a recent survey of our Maker’s Place member families, we learned that 95% of the parents we work with worry about how they will afford diapers for their child. Eighty-five percent have had to choose between buying diapers and purchasing other essentials like food for their family. Since the pandemic began, our requests have increased between 85-100%—in other words, the number of families seeking help with diapers has doubled because of COVID-19.

How do you fight poverty and preserve dignity? As I look back on these last three years, I’ve come to recognize that the answer was with us from the start. It’s in our Methodist theology of the human person—our firm belief that everyone is a beloved child of God, already blessed with God’s gifts and a built-in desire (even if they don’t fully recognize it yet) to be an agent of God’s blessing to others. If the Maker’s Place has had any true success, it is because we believed from the start that our job is not to remind people of their poverty by highlighting their supposed needs (and by implication, the power that we have over them to fulfill those needs). No, our job is to connect gifts with gifts, strengths with strengths and neighbors with neighbors; to catalyze abundant community by pointing to the fundamental capacity of everyone to be part of the answer for everyone else. Novogratz calls it dignity. We sometimes call it mutuality. And it’s fair to say that Jesus calls it the Kin(g)dom of God.

So, for example, after diapers and wipes, the number one request our families have is for baby clothes. The Maker’s Place didn’t have any baby clothes, but that didn’t matter, because our community did. So, we invited families to donate clothes their children no longer wore, and shop for free from other’s donations. The result was an explosion of baby apparel. Importantly, this “Swap Shop,” as I call it, allows people the joy and choice of reciprocity: one week I may receive diapers and donate clothes or extra food; another week I might volunteer, or pick up something for a friend. As we sometimes say, at the Maker’s Place, no one is needy—everyone is needed. That’s how abundant community works.

I believe that the Maker’s Place is just getting started. Great things are ahead. As I step away to new opportunities in New England, I know we’ve got great leaders in Callie and Alyssa. I’m also entirely confident that GNJ will continue to pray, give and serve alongside us—collecting diapers at Christmas, and joining in to the divine economy of abundance playing out in Trenton. The main thing to always remember is this: poverty can never be eradicated at the expense of the full selves of our neighbors. In the recognition of one another as beloved children of God, with each one of us called to both receive and share God’s blessings to the world, we can be part of a different kind of community. A different kind of place. The Maker’s Place, where we too are makers of the better future that God intends for all God’s children.

Thanks for your partnership in ministry. It’s been a joy to be part of what God is doing through GNJ. I look forward to all that lies ahead! 🇺🇸

## Need to disconnect from the chaos of ministry and enjoy some fun and cathartic time outside with your family?



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## UPCOMING EVENTS

June 15	Last Day to apply for scholarships
June 16, 30 & July 7	Leadership Academy's IGNITE Youth Discipleship Calendar from 7:00 – 8:30 p.m.
June 20	Summer Camp starts!
June 26 at 2:00 p.m.	Atlantic City IGNITE Community
June 30	Last Day to Submit Clergy Appraisals
July 11-23	One-week Family Camps
October 1-3	IGNITE Conference
October 3	World Communion Sunday
October 17	Laity Sunday
November 28	United Methodist Student Day

## OBITUARIES

Our thoughts and prayers are with the families and friends of the following:



### GNJ Mourns the Loss of Rev. Dr. Frank L. Fowler III

Rev. Dr. Frank L. Fowler III, full elder, died May 21. A viewing was held on May 28, followed by a memorial service the following day at his church, Trinity UMC in Hackettstown.

Memorial donations may be sent to: Mortgage Fund For Trinity UMC, Trinity UMC, 213 Main Street, Hackettstown, NJ 07840 or Trinity UMC (for Haiti in Memory of Rev. Frank Fowler). Expressions of sympathy may be sent to: Karen Fowler (spouse), 76 Cemetery Rd, Great Meadows, NJ 07838.

**Rev. Roderick B. Mills**, retired full elder, died May 13. A memorial service was held May 19 at Pearson Memorial UMC. Memorial donations may be sent to: Pearson Memorial UMC, 71 Pearson Dr., Trenton, NJ 08610-4301. Expressions of sympathy may be sent to: Carol Mills (spouse), 17 Kent Dr., Brick, NJ 08723-7128.

**Grace Troutman Benson**, retired local pastor, died March 31. Memorial donations may be sent to honor Grace in her mission to end hunger by donating to: Food Bank of South Jersey, 1501 John Tipton Blvd., Pennsauken, NJ 08110.

## PHOTO OF THE MONTH



Each month we will highlight one photo sent in from our congregations that really exemplifies the wonderful ministries they are doing. This month we celebrate St. John Fordville UMC in Bridgeton and its Memorial Day ceremony when they dedicated its new Veterans memorial in partnership with the Nanticoke-Lenape Tribe. Native Americans serve in the military at a higher percentage than any other ethnic group. Since 9/11, nearly 19 percent of Native Americans have served in the armed forces, compared to an average of 14 percent of all other ethnicities. We celebrate all our churches who are working hard to see and hear everyone in their own light! If you would like to submit a photo, please email Heather Mistretta at [hmistretta@gnjumc.org](mailto:hmistretta@gnjumc.org).



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