

THE RELAY

UNITED METHODISTS
OF GREATER NEW JERSEY

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“You are the light of the world. Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify God in Heaven.”

—MATTHEW 5:14-16

Walking Alongside Our Neighbors on the Road to Renewal

By Heather Mistretta
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As Hurricane Ida ripped apart houses in southern Jersey and flooded out cars and buildings in the north, many others slept peacefully never knowing what destruction the storm had caused overnight. Abandoned cars, downed trees and several feet of water in basements were left in her wake. Unlike superstorm Sandy that covered swaths of areas, Ida dug her way into pockets of neighborhoods, many of which were hidden in urban areas like Newark, Jersey City, Paterson and Roselle Park. The news coverage was sparse and short lived.

But in the early morning hours of September 2, we saw GNJers step out to offer a lending hand. Centenary UMC rolled up their sleeves to help their neigh-



A team of volunteers from Butler UMC participated in a muck-out at Christ Church in Jersey City.

bors pick up the pieces caused by the tornadoes and opened up their building to a local food pantry. Others helped muck out the UMC of Bound Brook who had just finished rebuilding what had been demolished during superstorm Sandy. Still others started food and clothes drives and opened their doors to those who needed a safe, dry place to sleep.

As United Methodists, we are taught that everyone is a neighbor and that we should be lending a hand and heart to all

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“And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.”

—1 PETER 5:7-10

Breaking the Stigma of Addiction with Hope, Love and Grace

By Heather Mistretta
hmistretta@gnjumc.org

SEA BRIGHT, NJ

According to the National Center for Drug Abuse Statistics, each year over 70,000 drug overdose deaths occur in the United States. From April 2020 to April 2021 alone, that number exceeded 100,000 as the pandemic strangled freedoms and burdened the livelihoods of many. Research also shows that an estimated 65 percent of the U.S. prison population has an active substance abuse addiction

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Embracing the Legacy of Aldersgate

“It only takes a spark to get a fire going, and soon all those around can warm up in its glowing. That’s how it is with God’s love once you’ve experienced it; you spread his love to everyone; you want to pass it on.”

—LYRICS FROM *PASS IT ON*,
A SONG OFTEN PLAYED AT ALDERSGATE

By Heather Mistretta
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NEWTON, NJ

The legacy...and spark of Missionary Henry Appenzeller and memories of campfires, discovering a calling and singing songs were alive on the afternoon of Nov. 27 on the main campus of Aldersgate Center as about 65 former campers, counselors and friends from as far as Ohio and England gathered to bid farewell to a special place.

From the fireplace room in Wesley Lodge, Dietz Swimming Pool and lemon meringue pies to the music and drama camps, the fire circle with the cross and the talent shows in the dining hall, these



Rev. Gabrielle Corbett of Pearl River UMC, instrumental in planning the ceremony, shared stories of when she was a camper.

memories and many more of Aldersgate Center are intact and ones that many GNJers still see as seminal moments in their lives.

“It was such a moment to be able to say goodbye to a space that has meant so much. I am grateful for a space to be able to say goodbye and to dream about what is to come,” said Rev. Gabrielle Corbett of Pearl River UMC who led the coordination of the event and shared a

blessing and benediction for those who attended on that sunny, chilly day in Newton, NJ.

“My ‘funeral’ today was the closing and deconsecration of Aldersgate. It was painful and wonderful, sorrowful and hopeful. Losing it feels like losing a piece of myself, but I am reminded that when one grain dies, a hundredfold can come forth,” she added.

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A MESSAGE FROM OUR BISHOP

Advent/Christmas: A Hard Fought Hope

Bishop John Schol



Pastoral theologian, Frederick Buechner described what God said to Job about suffering and calamity, “You don’t want to know why things happen. You want to know that I love you.”

Job, one of the books in the Bible, describes the story of a man who lost everything but his life, and after losing everything else, he wished he lost his life too. Job lost his wealth, his family, his friends and his health. *Left utterly and completely alone, he wanted to go nose to nose, toe to toe with God and ask, why? Why did you allow this to happen to me?*

“IT’S HARD, AND YET, IT IS WORTH FIGHTING FOR BECAUSE GOD FOUGHT FOR US, A LOVE GREATER THAN WE COULD HAVE IMAGINED, THAT CAME AS A WHISPER IN THE BIRTH OF A CHILD.”

—Bishop John Schol

Can you blame Job. Who wouldn’t? I haven’t lost as much as Job, and I have look God straight in the eyes and asked, why?

At some level, all of creation is in a Job moment. Disasters, poverty, racism, a pandemic have brought the world to a common experience—tragedy and loss. We have lost family, friends, time, identity, health, trust, jobs, time with people, innocence, confidence, and the list goes on. It is not just what an individual has lost, but the community—family, church, social relationships, school, the neighborhood. People in our networks are all experiencing similar loss. Collectively, we most



likely have never globally and collectively known such loss, tragedy, fear for such a sustained period of time.

You would think people would lose faith, belief in God. Nope. A recent Pew study found that people’s faith at this moment has not changed because of the pandemic.

We cling to the Advent/Christmas story in which God said, I love you. This faith, this love, this hope does not come easily. It is hard fought. Just ask Job, or your friend who just lost their mother, or the parents who have been at their wits end working, engaging children in online learning and struggling with not enough room in the house to find a quiet space for an important Zoom meeting.

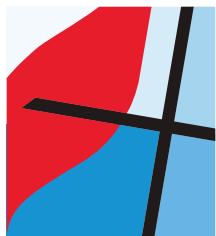
It’s hard, and yet, it is worth fighting for because God fought for us, a love greater than we could have imagined, that came as a whisper in the birth of a child.

This Advent/Christmas season, don’t forget in the midst of the tragedy and challenges, you are loved. And don’t forget to love someone else. It may be their only means to know that they too are loved by God.

Blessed Advent and Merry Christmas.

CORRECTION:

In the article *On the Journey for Justice with Courage* on page 3 of the November issue of *The Relay*, it should have stated that Ingres Simpson is one of four, not two, Black members at First UMC, Glassboro and Patricia Heritage the lay leader. We regret the error.



THE RELAY

UNITED METHODISTS
OF GREATER NEW JERSEY

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A Journey of Hope

Every community deserves to be
healthy in mind, body and spirit.

LEARN MORE AT:
www.gnjumc.org/journeyofhope



UNITED METHODISTS
OF GREATER NEW JERSEY



11 THINGS GNJ IS THANKFUL FOR

1 United Methodists who make disciples of Jesus Christ by shining their light for others and letting them know they matter and are not alone.

2 The laity who continue to implement new and innovative ways to feed, comfort and bless others with their physically - but not spiritually - distant ministries.

3 The clergy who continue to open up their hearts and minds to new things so that they give their best every day to God, the people of our congregations and the people throughout the world.

4 The hundreds of thousands of meals that have been distributed through food pantries over the past two years.

5 The clergy who joined together to create the Breakthrough 2022 Series.

6 Hope Centers who continue to morph as the environment continues to change, providing food, counseling, education, affordable housing, diapers and more!

7 Our veterans and current military service people, who courageously and selflessly put their own needs aside to help others wherever they may be.

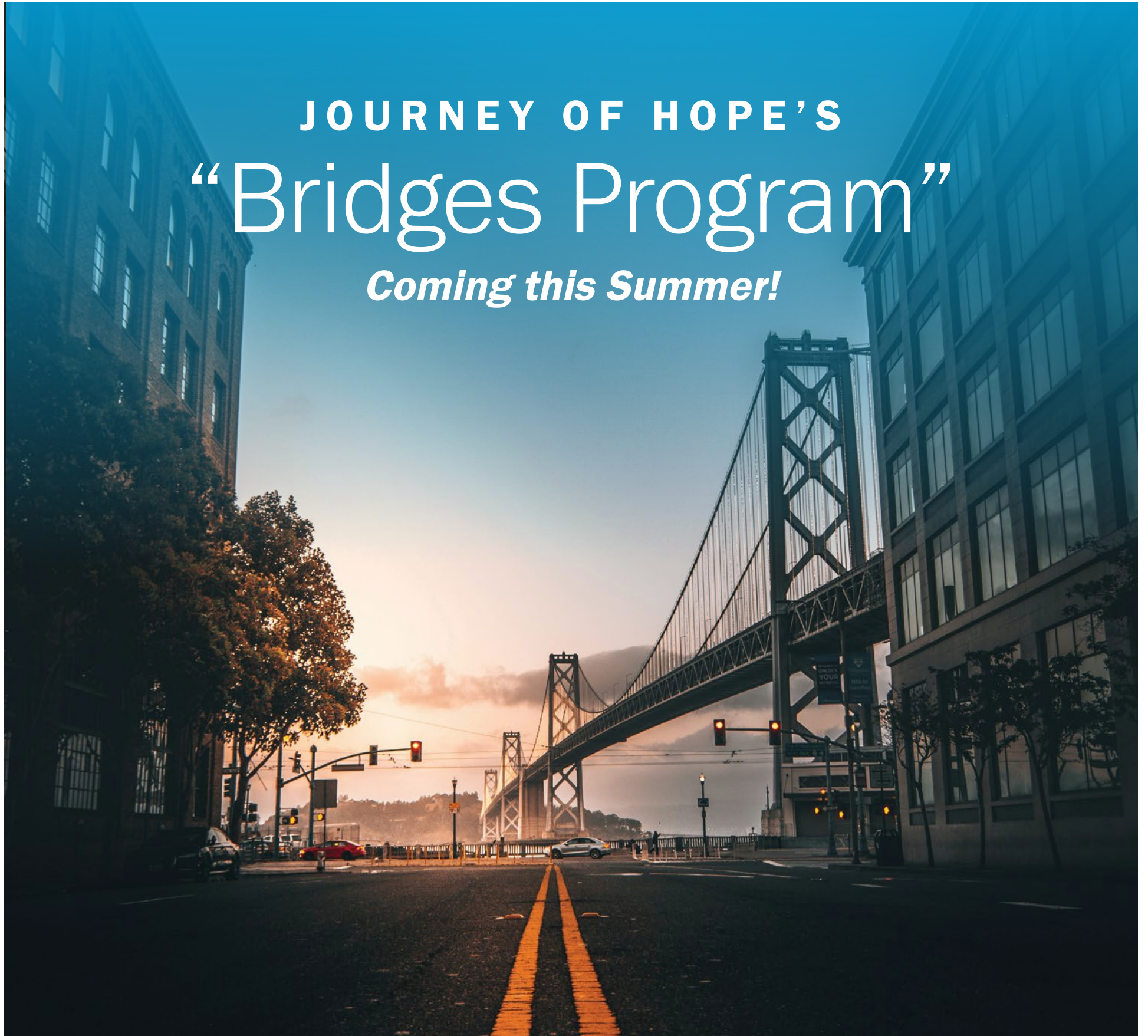
8 The Leadership Academy who continues to roll out new programs from stewardship and community engagement to an advent workshop that support congregations in becoming more fruitful and stronger disciples.

9 The Ida Road to Recovery Fund that will be there for GNJ churches and their communities until the end.

10 Committee and agency leadership who have guided GNJ through uncharted territory, helping them make difficult decisions and continue to engage with each other and move forward!

11 Our commitment to work together toward ending the sin of racism through A Journey of Hope.

JOURNEY OF HOPE'S “Bridges Program” Coming this Summer!



By Enger Muteteke and Trey Wince

Back in the fall of 2019, GNJ voted on a significant commitment toward ending the sin of racism. On its own, this legislation represented a dedication of real effort, attention and money toward combating one of America's greatest sins.

Within weeks of this legislation, GNJ received a generous grant from the Lilly Endowment for the “Bridges Project,” an effort oriented around community reconnection, storytelling and antiracism. Director of Resourcing Enger Muteteke described this moment, “With Kairos timing, God has enabled us to explore many routes on the same mission to combat racism.” She went on to point out that the sin of racism is so deeply entrenched in our culture that there is, of course, not one solution. Rather, it will take a concert of efforts, voices and leaders to accomplish real healing.

This is A Journey of Hope's commitment, to create partnerships with incredible organizations like Fearless Dialogues and the Lilly Endowment, to experiment with different approaches to connecting churches with their surrounding communities, and to create financial opportunities for congregations of color who have traditionally faced under-resourcing.

The Bridges Project is one part of A Journey of Hope's broader effort to combat racism. In particular, A Journey of Hope intends for the Bridges Project to equip congregations with the proper tools to engage the diversity of their surrounding communities. We have noticed that without these tools, a lack of community engagement turns to fear, then insularity, irrelevance and even closure. However, con-

gregations who have done the hard work of cultivating relationships across lines of difference demonstrate a resilient joy. The Bridges Project takes participating churches through a 12-month process that makes this kind of joy likely. We recognize that building community delight takes time, and we are inspired by the image of slow revelation in Luke 24's story of Jesus' walk to Emmaus. With this image in mind, the yearlong process will take on three phases, characterized by (1) Noticing, (2) Mission, and (3) Practice.

“A JOURNEY OF HOPE INTENDS FOR THE BRIDGES PROJECT TO EQUIP CONGREGATIONS WITH THE PROPER TOOLS TO ENGAGE THE DIVERSITY OF THEIR SURROUNDING COMMUNITIES.”

Overview

Participants will engage in a 12-month cohort experience punctuated by three onsite events. Through a highly experiential program rooted in relationship, playfulness, storytelling, and self-reflection, participating congregations will emerge with:

- 1) an ability to identify their own social location
- 2) the skills to practice deep empathy, even amidst difference
- 3) a deeper theological understanding of the role of diversity in the Imago Dei

- 4) a clarified sense of their Christian values and mission
- 5) a renewed engagement in meaningful spiritual practices
- 6) more delight in both God and others

All three phases will include the following:

- a multiday gathering experience
- a rhythm of storytelling, story listening and deep reflection
- ongoing homework assignments supported by focused coaching

Participants

Each yearlong cycle will accept up to 25 congregations within GNJ. Each team will be made of four to seven laity and clergy. These teams will be responsible for developing and implementing a final project in their context.

Again, we are thrilled that the Lilly Endowment has invested so significantly in our mission, and we look forward to our first yearlong cohort to begin in early summer 2022!

God's Clarion Call

Jesus issues a clarion call of sorts to his disciples in Matthew 28:19-20. The Greek word for ‘nations’ in verse 19 is ‘ethne’ or ‘ethnos’ meaning ‘a race, people, a nation’; properly, people joined by practicing similar customs or common culture. Our call, by virtue of our baptized identity as children of God, is to lift the common culture of Jesus we share high in our world. We do so affirming that it takes all of us—each with the imago Dei (image of God) reflected in us—to undo the sin of racism so that all are freed in Jesus' name. 🇺🇸

Sea Bright UMC

Continued from page 1

(SUD). However, there is also growing evidence that when treated, many of these inmates break the cycle of recidivism that is so insidious to live fruitful lives.

For almost two decades, Pastor Michael Turner of Sea Bright UMC has been visiting East Jersey Prison in Rahway every Friday evening to teach a 12-week step program to help inmates with their addictions. For the past two of those years, he has not been able to visit due to COVID-19 restrictions.

"We have been told that we are not allowed because we are not considered essential, but we are essential to those people strangled by addiction," said Turner.

But on a Sunday afternoon in Sea Bright, truth with love was the prevailing feeling as six bands, 15 tents, purple flags to signify the lives lost to addiction and the aroma of barbecued burgers and hot dogs donated by the local Windmill restaurant filled the air at the second annual Fall Freedom Fest.

Hosted by Sea Bright UMC in collaboration with other organizations like RAFTS (Recovery Advocates for the Shore), this year's event embraced the theme,



Giglio from North Shore Fellowship, David Clauser from Robert Wood Johnson's IFPR (Institute for Prevention and Recovery) Hope and Healing, Nicole Doherty from the Monmouth County STAR Program, JBJ Soul Kitchen, Pamela Capaci from Hope Sheds Light and Joan Ruffin from Sea Bright UMC for the planning and preparation for this event. Those people responsible for making it so successful are the wonderful organizations that participated and those who came out in support of our cause."

For the past two years, these groups have been working together to empower families to have the courage to change and have been celebrating recovery and reducing the stigma of substance abuse disorder.

In 2021, HOPE Sheds Light entered a



The second annual Fall Freedom Fest's theme was "Uniting Resources for the Courage to Change." HOPE Sheds Light, a family-focused non-profit organization offering education, resources, support and hope to anyone impacted by substance use disorder, was at the Fest to offer valuable resources and crafts for the whole family. Sea Bright UMC is committed to providing hope and a way forward for those with addictions.

The festival all started with a conversation Turner had with Mayor Brian Kelly. That conversation turned into the first year's event. There were 10 tents and enough enthusiasm to carry it into this year's event, which saw about 30 different ministries, including a vaccination clinic led by VNA, a table representing 180 Turning Lives Around and the "Hope Van" from the Monmouth County Sheriff's office. In between, powerful speakers who moved the crowd, there were pumpkins, face painting and many resources for awareness, support and treatment.

Pamela Capaci, CEO of HOPE Sheds Light, said, "It was wonderful to see so many members of the community come together to support and celebrate friends and families directly impacted by substance use disorder. Through events like these, we can show the world that recovery is possible, and we can make a difference together."

It was a time to recognize brokenness and how by working together they could be instruments of education, healing, and restoration.



But for Pastor Turner, the prevailing question for everyone he helps is what were you saved for?

It's also a question he asked of himself over 20 years ago when he struggled with his own addiction. July 15 will mark the 21st anniversary of his sobriety. His first inclination to be a pastor began when he was 14, but life events shrouded that pursuit until he discovered his calling and the reason he was saved.

It is with this courage, candor and compassion that Turner continues to help others find the light toward their own recovery by erasing any stigma and discovering their own purpose no matter where he meets them.

More information can be found on Sea Bright UMC's Facebook page. [Facebook icon](#)

**"BE WISE IN THE WAY YOU ACT TOWARD OUTSIDERS;
MAKE THE MOST OF EVERY OPPORTUNITY.
LET YOUR CONVERSATION BE ALWAYS FULL OF GRACE,
SEASONED WITH SALT, SO THAT YOU MAY KNOW HOW
TO ANSWER EVERYONE."**

—Colossians 4:5-6

"Uniting Resources for the Courage to Change," giving hope to all who attended that there was indeed freedom from addiction, fear and co-dependency.

"It was such a wonderful event full of hope!" said Turner who has been leading the church for the past 10 years. "Special prayers of gratitude for Pastor Raphael

joint venture with RAFTS to expand its recovery services throughout Ocean and Monmouth counties. RAFTS Inc. is a non-profit, non-clinical, peer-based recovery community organization providing support and resources to individuals and families impacted by substance use and related disorders.

Hurricane Ida

Continued from page 1



Members of Butler UMC rolled up their sleeves to help clean up Christ Church in Jersey City as disaster relief continues to be the main focus.

our neighbors. Right now, our neighbors really need our help. From broken boilers and electrical panels to growing mold and broken walls, more than 20 of our churches and some of their communities are overwhelmed by what the journey ahead looks like.

Even though the damage may not be visible because it's hidden in basements or the consequences of water that has already receded, the need is real in those 12 NJ counties declared as disaster ar-

reas, and the volunteer assistance that was available after superstorm Sandy is now being spread out over 70 areas in the United States also declared as major disaster areas. More than 75,000 people applied for assistance from FEMA.

"The impact may not be visible to anyone else, but Greater New Jersey has not forgotten them, and A Future With Hope has not forgotten them," said Andrea Wren-Hardin, GNJ's disaster relief coordinator and a Hope Center developer who brings exten-

sive experience in case management and community engagement to this role and has proven time and time again that she is committed to helping others and being the hands and feet of Jesus, whether they are at-risk youth as a Court Appointed Special Advocate or leading a team in Haiti to foster healthier communities.

The Ida Road to Renewal Fund from A Future With Hope is a way to get those impacted by the first major disaster declaration since Sandy the sustainable help they need, so that for some, they are able to resume important ministries and missions, and for others, so that they can go home.

"It's about being efficient without duplicating services to those who need them, plus being effective so families can actually go home," said Wren-Hardin, who was an active volunteer in the aftermath of Sandy as a member of Morrow UMC and has been instrumental in providing relief as a member of NJ Volunteers in Mission.

Wren-Harden emphasized the need for more collaboration and coordination with partners like NJVOAD (NJ Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster), which for more than 30 years have been providing preparedness, resilience, response or recovery.

GNJ is grateful for the volunteers who have stepped up and said I want to help during what continues to be a challenging time. Volunteers like Butler UMC have started mucking out buildings, but we're only in the relief stage. We still have the rebuild, recovery and renewal stages to

get through, and what we're seeing is that our churches and communities are just not going to have the money they need to make this happen. Walls need to be rebuilt; boilers need to be replaced; and electrical panels need to be fixed.

One hundred percent of the Fund's proceeds will go toward program goals and direct assistance to communities in need. Those program goals for 2022-2023 include:

- Engage 200 households to help them complete their recovery
- Repair 50 homes
- Engage nearly 2,000 volunteers to be able to do the work with nonprofit builders

"As United Methodists, when we see people in need and we know people are in need, it calls us to respond because that's what we do as United Methodists, and the Ida relief fund is part of that," said Wren-Hardin. "The Fund will use all of those resources to help them go home and have a new normal in the near future."

"What I love about the United Methodist Church is that it grows our faith and our relationship with God to inform how we act in the world and to inform how we engage and treat others, and that we build our relationship with others because we have a relationship with God who loves us." [Facebook icon](#)

To find out more information about training and volunteer opportunities, visit the GNJ website, or contact Rev. Cricket Denton at cbrennan1@drew.edu.



Aldersgate

Continued from page 1

Prior to the ceremony, some attendees came early to take a walk on the campus and reminisce. They were welcomed into the Appenzeller Chapel by YoungKwang Jun, Denville UMC's director of music and worship media, at a piano playing music written by Mark Miller, professor of Church Music at Drew Theological School who grew up on the property with his family and later led a music camp along with Rev. Dr. Tanya Linn Bennett.

Bennett, who preached at the service and whose own journey began in 1969 sleeping at Hogan's on a platform, said, "A heartfelt celebration and thanksgiving for Camp Aldersgate. So glad to see all who have been encouraged, affirmed and loved unconditionally—and who have shared this ministry with decades of young people."

A place to belong. Thanks be as it moves to next life as a NJ state park. May many be blessed by the beauty and power of God's creation," said Bennett who recalled how inclusive the environment was and how the outside allowed them to connect so closely to God as she shared some of her stories of love, acceptance, belonging and community.

Rev. Sang Won Doh recounted the history of Henry Appenzeller and the building of Appenzeller Chapel, which was dedicated by GNJ Korean Caucus and Korean Methodist Churches in Korea over 20 years ago. After a passion for ministry and discipleship was ignited in the heart of the 26-year-old Appenzeller in 1885, he later went on to found a church, start a school and assist in medical missions. The chapel named after a man who transformed many lives was built and consecrated through the sacrificial donations of about \$600,000 from



85 churches including the Methodist churches in South Korea, Korean United Methodist Churches in the United States, many organizations and many individuals to honor his memory.

Although the camp closed in 2013 and the difficult decision was made in 2020 to sell the property to be used as a park by the Department of Environmental Protection, Director of Connectional Ministries Eric Drew, who had also been a camper there, shared how excited the leadership team was about the prospect of hosting several events at the Dietz Lakefront Property in Spring 2022.

"Personally, I was touched to see several of my counselors from seventh grade, to sing familiar songs in the chapel and to reflect on the legacy and transformation from GNJ leaders, especially Rev. Steve Bechtold and others," said Drew.

"Camp Aldersgate was important in my faith journey and the journey of many of our clergy and congregational leaders. It was moving to gather with them again and I have great hope that the legacy of Aldersgate will continue to be passed on through Dietz, Next Generation Ministries, and the many passionate clergy and congregational leaders who have experienced it."

Other clergy and lay people like Rev. Charles Perez of Barryville UMC, Sue Brogan and Rev. Dave LeDuc of Nutley UMC also contributed to that day in liturgy offering prayers and readings.



Friends gathered at Aldersgate to reminisce and revisit the campgrounds that brought back so many happy memories *Credit: Betty Sayner.* **Rev. Dr. Tanya Linn Bennett (center) with Noreen and Gary Scully, former camp nurse and chef** *Credit: Tanya Linn Bennett.* **In addition to leading communion, Rev. Sang Won Doh recounted the history of Missionary Henry Appenzeller and the building of Appenzeller Chapel.**

In reflecting on the day, LeDuc said, "Karen and I were honored to participate in a closing service there on Saturday. It has meant so much to our family and to my faith and ministry journey."

Rev. Dave Tillisch of First UMC of Blairstown, also instrumental in the planning of the event, shared how people could get in touch with him to be involved at the Dietz Lakefront Property that he now leads.

Former Conference Director of Lay Servant Ministries, Warren Harper reveled in the energy of the day, saying, "Great memories and many calls answered. I was counselor in '65-'66. I was there for the opening of the chapel. Many hearts are sad but always looking forward."

Lisa Holmgren Burse echoed that sentiment, reflecting as so many did about how the legacy was shared from generation to generation: "So many wonderful memories there as a camper in the 60's. My son also spent many weeks there at the summer camp. Sad to see it close."

So did former camper, Allyson Brandford: "I can't quite put into words what this place has meant to me for 34 years of my life. I first stepped foot into Wesley Lodge when I was 12 for a Fall Away weekend with David LeDuc. That was when I found my love for conference youth activities. I enjoyed every moment of time spent there over the next few years. Fast forward 1992: I was due there for CCYM training less than a week after my dad passed away. I went and the people and experiences there continued to shape my life in amazing ways. Fast forward many years, Brian and I worked there as admin, living in the gatehouse,

for a few years. We found out we were pregnant while there, and also suffered a loss there too. Through the ups and downs, I met the absolute most incredible people that I still love and cherish to this day. I will miss this camp like crazy but will visit when it's reopened as a state park and again visit the chapel where we said farewell to camp today."

Following the ceremony and another walk across campus, a group gathered at a nearby Applebee's to share a meal and continue telling their stories of calls to ministry, experiences of God and lives transformed.

"It was an incredible experience to be able to fill the room with people who so deeply loved Aldersgate and were reminded that even as one chapter of Aldersgate closes, God is faithful to us and will continue to shape and reshape the land, and that the best parts of Aldersgate live within each of us," said Corbett as she reflected on the day.

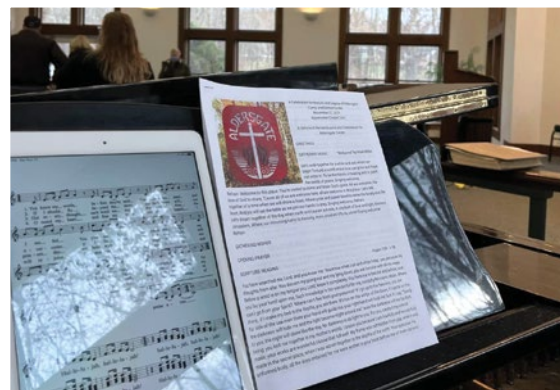
"For so many, Aldersgate was a place where people could come and be accepted for who they were and given the sense of belonging to explore all parts of who they were and to find a community that has withstood the tests of time and distance. We said goodbye, but we rest in the sure and certain hope of resurrection—one fruit of which we are hoping to see in the vision of the Dietz property."

LeDuc also embraced the memories he holds for this special place but is hopeful that more memories are to come. "From youth retreats to summer camps to spiritual formation experiences to church picnics from childhood to now, God has used this place to shape me and countless others in faith and for service in Christ. Thank you to those who birthed it, nurtured it and now have reimagined the purpose of this land. May the fire that was and is Aldersgate burn on in me and in those who caught the Spirit here for generations to come."

Stay tuned for new events coming in 2022! 🎉



Young Kwang Jun, Denville UMC's director of music and worship media, played music written by Mark Miller, who along with Tanya Linn Bennett led a music program at the camp for 20 years.



RESPONSE TO REFUGEE STORY FROM *THE RELAY*—NOVEMBER 2021

We want you to know GNJ’s response to the story, “Neighbors Welcoming Neighbors” did not go unnoticed. When you saw an opportunity to help others, you acted boldly with vigilance and compassion like United Methodists do. We are grateful for your outpouring of support.

Some of the response we received is below.

- Island Heights UMC has been working with the NJ State Police Muslim Officers Society collecting urgently needed winter coats for Afghan refugees. Within one week, the church collected over 100 coats. The drive will continue, with an overall goal of collecting 7,800 coats!
- Morganville UMC donated nearly-new clothing and other items to the refugee resettlement effort as part of a recent pop-up Thrift Shop they hosted.
- Buttzville UMC and a Presbyterian church in south Jersey, also reached out to see how they could also donate items to the effort.
- Trinity UMC in South Amboy donated in late October 346 non-perishable food items to their neighbor, Messiah Lutheran Church Food Pantry, which also operates a Blessing Box. The church is now collecting socks as part of its “Holiday Sock Drive” through Dec. 20 to be donated to a local homeless shelter.
- Masonville-Rancocas UMC collected toys and other items to be donated. 🇺🇸

If we missed your response, please let us know!



Island Heights UMC worked with Detective Malik of the NJ State Police Muslim Officers Society collecting urgently needed winter coats. They learned of his work through a meeting with Congressman Andy Kim and his senior advisor, Lynette Whitman.



After collecting hundreds of canned goods for refugees, Trinity UMC in South Amboy is now hosting a sock drive to support the local homeless.



BREAKTHROUGH

A GNJ guide to best practices for worship

Watch out for a whole new line-up of Breakthrough Sermon Series for 2022!

Choose from

“Drink From the Fountain of Grace,”

“To Be or Not to Be the Church,”

“Celebrate”

and others!



FOR MORE INFORMATION:

www.gnjumc.org/breakthrough



UNITED METHODISTS
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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.

From Rev. Glenn Stoudt as part of the weekly "Storytellers"

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away."

—REVELATION 21: 1-6

by Rev. Glenn Stoudt

The church, at its best is a community, which reaches out to serve a larger community. This was certainly true in the rural area of Kentucky where I grew up. My grandmother told me stories about her grandmother who lived in a remote area where only dirt roads existed. That made travel in buggies and wagons almost impossible when it was rainy. The only time she could get out and be with other women was at church.

My first year in seminary was a wonderful new experience. I drank in all the new ways of considering my faith. One of my greatest blessings was weekly community worship at the seminary. A professor who I journeyed with for many years wrote this beautiful prayer for one of these services. I have used this prayer every year since in my local church Advent services.

Another beginning...another season...

another year...

but also, another ending...

another page turned...

another chapter concluded...

God of endings and of beginnings,

may your presence be felt in more than subtle ways

healing the wound...forgiving the failure...

smoothing the jagged edge...

filling the void of life already spent...



To sign up for the weekly "Storytellers," visit www.gnjumc.org/40-days-of-prayer/.

so that we may embark on this Advent journey with a fresh desire to see and to celebrate your not so subtle movement among us...

planting seeds of hope

whispering words of encouragement

inspiring gestures of grace

blessing our "everyday"

living each and every day of this new season.

Prayer: Savior of the world, as I prepare for your coming afresh in this Advent season. Help me not to lose sight of the power of your cross which is life-giving to me—especially in the midst of these days which can become frantic. May I know the power of your peace and delight in the power of your salvation! In Christ I pray. Amen. 🙏

GO-Open the Door

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

—HEBREWS 12:1 NIV

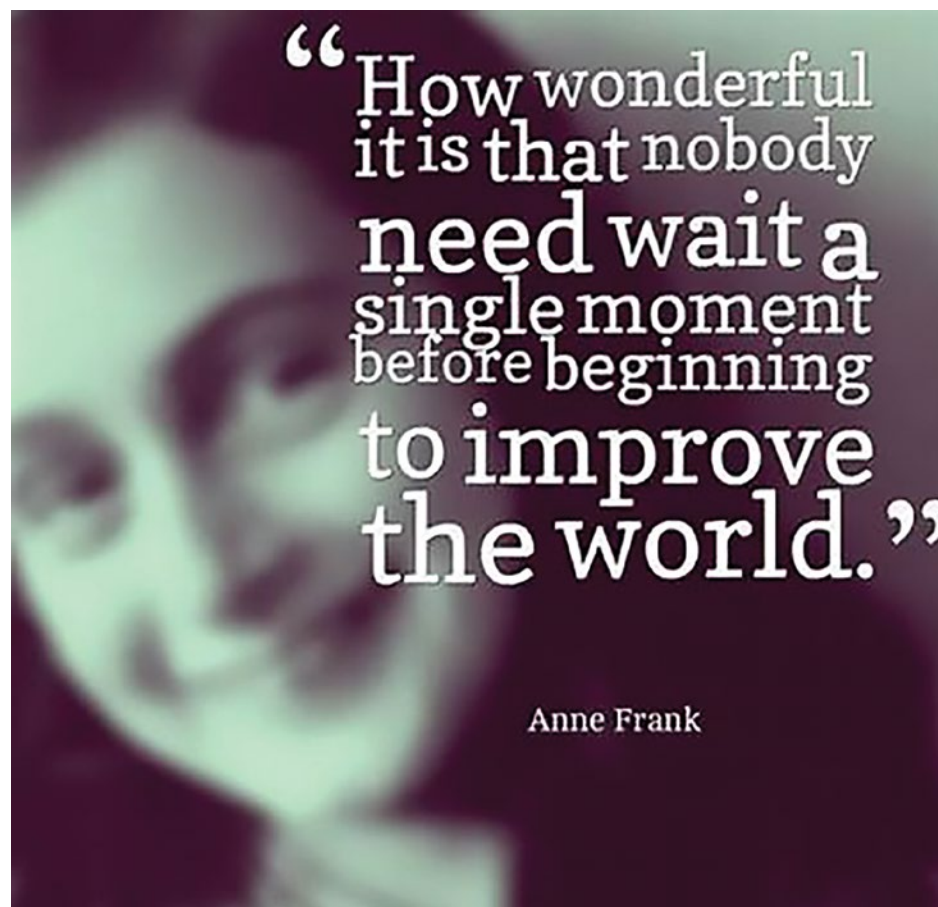
By Kathy Miller, layspeaker
Haddonfield UMC

HADDONFIELD, NJ

The theme for this week is GO! What does this mean?! We're still in a pandemic! So this can be hard to do. Where are we supposed to "go"? A lot of us still haven't even left our house! And we kind of like it—especially those who isolate and don't socialize anyway. There are many who no longer want to return to work and are content to zoom.

Thank goodness for technology-keeping us safe when we had to "shelter in place". We could get most anything we needed on-line and delivered!

For another generation, to "shelter in place" meant turning lights out and retreating to basements and sewers because bombers were overhead. For Anne Frank, who I quoted here, it meant going to a "secret annex," because she and her family were Jews hiding from the Nazis. All these people wanted to escape and "go," and they found survival, not in technology, but through supporters. The supporters were always the ones giving hope when things seemed hopeless.



Anne Frank

So, for part of my reflection I want us to think of our "supporters" who are helping us survive through this pandemic. It is why I choose this Bible verse. We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses! We have a lot to owe to people that did "go"; they went to work on vaccine research, in hospitals, police and fire departments, grocery stores, pharmacies, gas stations and delivery trucks. They were on the front-line, in-person as our essential workers/supporters, giving us

hope. Our own church may have closed building doors but reopened new virtual doors by delivering messages of hope on-line and through other outreaches.

While we were closing our doors these people were opening theirs. In fact, it made me think a lot about doors for my reflection. How we open and close them. Especially in our mind and heart. Can we "throw off everything that hinders us and the sin that so easily entangles"?

And so that brings me to the second part of my reflection—the most important thing I want us to think about when we hear "Go." Especially when God is calling us to do a hard thing. And I think the hardest thing is dealing with people that make us uncomfortable. Can we persevere? Because these are the people that can "challenge us into new ways of thinking" as Richard Rohr points out. And "you can only grow when you're awkward and uncomfortable when you try something new," Brian Tracy emphasizes.

It's not what inspires us, but how we can inspire others. For we are meant to "go" and inspire others by giving them hope through the sharing of our faith in love. It is why I tried to be inspiring in my past reflections. And when I had nothing to say I used the words of others. You can too! Because you don't have to leave home to write a message or make a phone call to someone. If you do go out; remember the impression you make on others in your encounters.

And so, I come back to Anne Frank who, after everything she endured, said, "In spite of everything I still believe that people are good at heart." Let us "go" then to the door of the hardened heart and keep "knocking" by sharing our faith in love so hope can enter in.

On this day, Jesus says, "Behold I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come into him, and sup with him and he with Me." (Rev. 3:20)

Even when it seems the door is closed—somewhere there's an open window! 🙏

DECEMBER BOOKSHELF

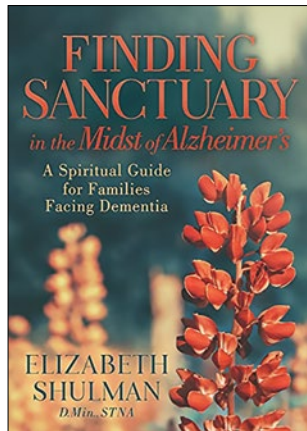
This month we are hoping for peace on earth for all our neighbors. Discover the varied selection of books below, including a children's book written by GNJ's Rev. Geralda Aldajuste. We invite you to read these on your own or consider using one for a book club small group.

Finding Sanctuary in the Midst of Alzheimer's: A Spiritual Guide for Families Facing Dementia

(2021, Morgan James Faith) By Elizabeth Shulman

Just released in September, *Finding Sanctuary in the Midst of Alzheimer's* is currently the only Bible study available that addresses common challenges for dementia caregivers using both scripture and personal narratives. Because each section is self-contained, *Finding Sanctuary in the Midst of Alzheimer's* is not just for churches; it can also be used for personal spiritual exploration or for individual groups such as senior centers, assisted living facilities, or support groups looking to integrate a spiritual component. With special sections that address the unique caregiving challenges for spouses, adult children and the community surrounding caregivers, this book offers comfort and hope to caregivers while giving others the opportunity to walk in their shoes and experience the struggles unique to dementia caregiving.

Elizabeth Shulman, D.Min., STNA has over 30 years of experience in both parish and healthcare ministry. Her devotions for caregivers have appeared in *Guideposts' Strength and Grace*, and she frequently speaks to churches, retirement communities, and other community groups on dementia and caregiving. A spousal caregiver for 8 years, she now trains congregations to be more comfortable and confident in ministering to families impacted by dementia. Elizabeth's presentations, *Mary and Martha Caregiving* and *A New Pair of Glasses*, inform audience members on the challenges of caregiving and offers hope to caregivers by providing new ways to reframe their experience. She and her husband, Leo, share 7 wonderful daughters and live near Cleveland, Ohio. To find out more, please visit her website at <https://elizabethshulman.com>.

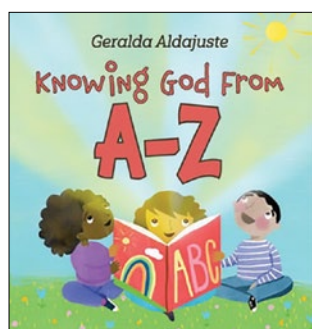
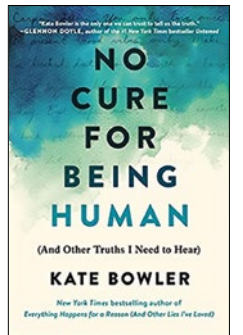


No Cure for Being Human

(2021, Random House) By Kate Bowler

No Cure for Being Human is one woman's search for a way forward after being diagnosed with cancer. The book chronicles her journey as she grapples with her diagnosis, her ambition and her faith in an attempt to come to terms with her limitations in a culture that says anything is possible.

Kate Bowler, Ph.D. is a New York Times bestselling author, podcast host and a professor at Duke University. She studies the cultural stories we tell ourselves about success, suffering and whether (or not) we're capable of change. In her twenties, she became obsessed with writing the first history of the movement called the "prosperity gospel"—which promises that God will reward you with health and wealth if you have the right kind of faith. She researched and traveled across Canada and the United States interviewing megachurch leaders and televangelists and everyday believers about how they make spiritual meaning out of the good and bad in their lives.



Knowing God from A-Z

(2021, Vine Publishing) By Geralda Aldajuste

Knowing God from A-Z, which was released on Dec. 5, teaches children the alphabet while they also learn about God. It introduces the youngest of children to the character of God. Start your child's faith journey at an early age so that they will become the person who God has called them to be.

Geralda Aldajuste is the pastor at St. Paul UMC in Willingboro. She is also a professor, a Licensed Funeral Director licensed in both NY & NJ, a Certified Grief

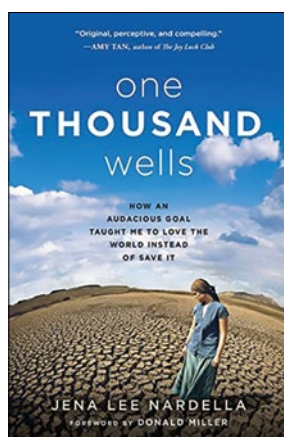
Recovery Specialist, Notary Public and Life Insurance Agent. She is also a former Hospice Volunteer, Clinical Pastoral Education Chaplain (CPE), Medical Death Investigator and Middlesex County Medical Examiner's Bereavement Counselor.

One Thousand Wells: How an Audacious Goal Taught Me to Love the World Instead of Save It

(2016,) By Jena Lee Nardella

One Thousand Wells is the story of the nonprofit, Blood:Water. Working throughout 11 countries in Africa, Blood:Water has provided healthcare for over 62,000 people in HIV-affected areas and has partnered with communities to provide clean water for more than one million people in Africa. The book chronicles the difficult path along the way, challenges that tested her faith. Jena Lee Nardella discovered true change comes only when you stop trying to save the world and allow yourself to love it, even when it breaks your heart.

Jena Lee Nardella is the cofounder of Blood:Water, which she started 10 years ago at the age of 22 with the band Jars of Clay. Following her vision and leadership, the organization has brought clean water access to more than one million people in Africa and provided healthcare for more than 62,000 people in HIV-affected areas. In 2012, Jena was invited by President Obama to pray for the nation in front of a TV audience of 20 million. She has been honored as an Epoch Award Winner and as one of *Christianity Today's* 33 under 33 Christian leaders shaping the next generation of faith. She serves on the core team for Praxis, a venture group helping entrepreneurs build high-impact organizations and served on the board for Equitas Group, a philanthropic organization focused on ending child exploitation in Haiti and Southeast Asia. Jena and her husband, James, and their son, Jude live in Nashville and East Africa.



Overflow: Increase Worship Attendance & Bear More Fruit

(2013, Abingdon Press) By Lovett H. Weems Jr. and Tom Berlin

Overflow offers practical research-based insights and tactical ideas that result in improved worship attendance and in fruitful congregations. The authors identify practices that lead to increased attendance. They offer clear instruction, showing church leaders the areas where we must pay attention throughout the year, and demonstrating new ways to approach worship planning.

Lovett H. Weems Jr. is distinguished professor of church leadership and director of the Lewis Center for Church Leadership at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C. He came to this position in 2003 after 18 years as president of Saint Paul School of Theology in Kansas City, MO. A native of Mississippi, Dr. Weems is a graduate of Millsaps College, Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University and Wesley Theological Seminary. The author of several books published by Abingdon Press, his most recent includes a revised edition of his classic, *Church Leadership: Vision, Team, Culture, and Integrity*. He co-edits the online newsletter "Leading Ideas," available free at ChurchLeadership.com.

Tom Berlin is Lead Pastor of Floris UMC in Herndon, VA. A graduate of Virginia Tech and Candler School of Theology at Emory University, Berlin is author of *Defying Gravity: Break Free from the Culture of More*, *6 Decisions That Will Change Your Life*, *6 Things We Should Know About God*, and *6 Ways We Encounter God*.

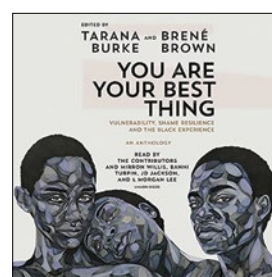
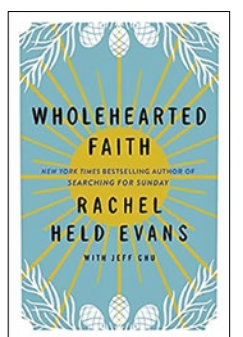
Wholehearted Faith

(2021, HarperOne) By Rachel Held Evans

Wholehearted Faith is a collection of writings from Rachel Held Evans written before her untimely death in 2019 with the help of her close friend and author, Jeff Chu. The book has been woven together with some of her other unpublished writings into a rich collection of essays that ask candid questions about the stories we've been told—and the stories we tell—about our faith, our selves, and our world.

Rachel Held Evans was the *New York Times* bestselling author of *Inspired*, *Searching for Sunday*, *A Year of Biblical Womanhood*, and *Faith Unraveled*. Her words about faith, doubt and life were featured not only on her own blog but also in numerous publications, including the *Washington Post*, *The Guardian*, and the *Huffington Post*. She appeared on NPR, BBC, the Today show and The View. She served on President Obama's Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships.

Jeff Chu is co-curator of *Evolving Faith*, alongside Sarah Bessey, who founded the gathering with Rachel Held Evans. He is also the author of *Does Jesus Really Love Me?* and an editor-at-large at *Travel+Leisure*. He, his husband, Tristan, and their dog, Fozzie, live in Grand Rapids, MI.



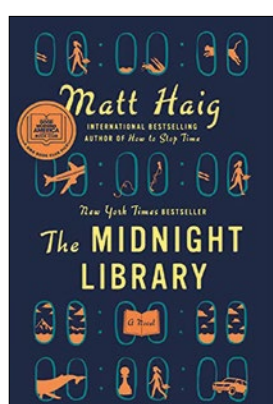
You Are Your Best Thing: Vulnerability, Shame Resilience, and the Black Experience

(2021, Random House Audio) By Tarana Burke and Brené Brown

You Are Your Best Thing is a collection of writings from a dynamic group of Black writers, organizers, artists, academics and cultural figures to discuss vulnerability and shame resilience. Together, they create a space to recognize and process the trauma of white supremacy, a space to be vulnerable and affirm the fullness of black love and black life.

For nearly three decades, activist and advocate Tarana J. Burke has worked at the intersection of racial justice, arts and culture, anti-violence and gender equity. Fueled by commitments to interrupt sexual violence and other systemic inequalities disproportionately impacting marginalized people, particularly Black women and girls, Burke has created, led and participated in various campaigns focused on increasing access to resources and support for impacted communities, including the 'me too.' movement, which to date has galvanized millions of survivors and allies around the world.

Dr. Brené Brown is a research professor at the University of Houston where she holds the Huffington Foundation Endowed Chair at The Graduate College of Social Work. Also a visiting professor in management at The University of Texas at Austin McCombs School of Business, Brown is the author of five #1 New York Times bestsellers and is the host of the weekly Spotify Original podcasts *Unlocking Us* and *Dare to Lead*. 📖



Midnight Library

(2020, Viking) By Matt Haig

Midnight Library is a novel that tells the story of your life as it is, along with another book for the other life you could have lived if you had made a different choice at any point in your life. While we all wonder how our lives might have been, what if you had the chance to go to the library and see for yourself? Would any of these other lives truly be better? We have noticed that this book has been used by some of our churches as part of their book clubs.

Matt Haig is the number one bestselling author of *Reasons to Stay Alive*, *Notes on a Nervous Planet* and six highly acclaimed novels for adults, including *How to Stop Time*, *The Humans* and *The Radleys*. He also writes award-winning books for children, including *A Boy Called Christmas*.

Humans and *The Radleys*. He also writes award-winning books for children, including *A Boy Called Christmas*.

“THE ELDERS WHO RULE WELL ARE TO BE CONSIDERED WORTHY OF DOUBLE HONOR, ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO WORK HARD AT PREACHING AND TEACHING.”

—1 TIMOTHY 5:17



The Covenant of the Elders in GNJ

From Rev. Frank Davis of Leonia UMC

Paragraph 306 of the *Book of Discipline* reminds us that the purpose of the Order of Elders is to respond to the spiritual hunger among clergy for a fulfilling sense of vocation, for support among peers... and for a deepening relationship with God.

The Order of Elders can only fulfill its purpose if we create a space of mutual support and trust. To achieve this, we must hold fast to the Covenant of your Ordination vows. In the covenant, we promise to:

- Pray for one another and agree to be supportive of one another's ministries by acts of both intention and restraint. By intention, through public prayer and means of

communication that offer support. By restraint, through avoidance of collegial gossip or other such acts which tear down each other's ministries.

- Be intentional about nourishing our spiritual lives and encouraging others to do so. This can be done through participation in the means of grace: Study of Scripture, Prayer, Fasting, Holy Communion and Conferencing.
- In Conferencing, find ways to connect collegially by understanding our ordination within the Wesleyan tradition. The Order of Elder is unique to the ministry of the church. Our distinctive Wesleyan heritage enables us to be set apart as leaders which the church needs. The Elder is ordained to the ministry of Word, Service, Sacrament, and Order. Therefore, it is important and

necessary for these unique attributes of this office to be explored, understood, and celebrated.

Ways this may be achieved is by:

- Attending functions that will edify our need for further theological reflection and enhance needed leadership skills. It is crucial that those who belong to the Order of Elders continue to strive to link knowledge and vital piety.
- Meetings should revolve around the historic questions asked at our ordination (¶327) and the General Rules (¶101).
- Further conversation should include methods that will strengthen the mission of the church and support our common ministry. 🇺🇸

Year-End Resources for Giving

The GNJ cabinet and our Stewardship Foundation want to help you finish strong, so here are a few ideas to help your congregation celebrate God's blessings and end the year with strength and joy:

- Have Christmas offerings inviting people to give in thanks to how God is providing this year and so the congregation starts 2022 strong.
- Send hand-written thank you notes to your top 15 givers in the congregation expressing your gratitude for their support to the vision and ministry of your congregation.
- Form a team to help write Christmas letters to members and friends inviting them to give to God in response to how they have experienced or seen God move in 2021. Templates for letters available below.
- Hold "Receiving and sharing God's great gift" worship services the Sunday before Christmas Eve. Work with a team to make these in person or online service engaging, heart touching, joy lifting encounters with God as you receive these special offering.
- Remind people that there are different ways to give.
- Invite leaders to give online to model this practical method and then have them share about it.
- Share creative and beneficial ways people can give.
- Celebrate, share stories and stir joy!
- Hold an evening before Advent when people join via ZOOM to put them together in their homes alongside others in the congregation.
- Post a daily 30-second video on Facebook and other social media platforms from members of your church sharing how your congregation is a blessing in their lives.
- If you don't feel comfortable meeting indoors, plan an outdoor Christmas Eve worship service with fire pits on the lawn or in a park nearby in addition to what you are already planning. Some of our churches are planning live nativity scenes or pageants!
- Consider giving to A Future With Hope's Ida Road to Renewal Fund so that those impacted by the hurricane can return to fruitful ministry and mission or have a place to call home again.

Additional resources, including a collection of holiday letters and Horizons Stewardship year-end giving guide, can be found here: www.gnjumc.org/umsf/resources-for-giving/. 🇺🇸

UPCOMING EVENTS

Jan. 15	2022 Local Pastor School applications due
Jan. 15	2022 Certified Lay Minister Course registration ends
Jan. 15 from 9:30 a.m.—noon	GNJ's United Methodist Women's "Lead Like MLK" training event
Jan. 18 at 8 p.m.	Raise Up Your Voice Against Racism's webinar called "Racism and the Disparities in Health Care." More info can be found on the Asian American Language Ministry website.
Jan. 31	Glenn Mandeville Memorial Scholarship applications due. More info at www.eecu.org/home
Feb. 1	2022 Laity Ministry Recognition Award nominations due
June 18-25, 2022	Joshua Generation Civil Rights Pilgrimage

Additional details can be found on the GNJ website at gnjumc.org.

OBITUARIES

Our thoughts and prayers are with these families and friends.

Jane Powell Sell, spouse of Rev. Ronald Sell, died on Nov. 8. Memorial donations may be sent to: Bluegrass Hospice Care at www.bgcarenav.org/. Expressions of sympathy may be sent to: Rev. Ronald Sell at 78 Woodhills Est., Corbin, KY 40701-3801.

Rev. Albert Joseph Daniel Aymer, retired full elder, died on Nov. 5. A memorial service will be held on Dec. 11 at 11:00 a.m. at South Orange-Vailsburg UMC, 150 S. Orange Avenue, South Orange, NJ 07079. Memorial donations may be sent to: The Albert J. D. Aymer Endowed Scholarship Fund at Hood Theological Seminary. Expressions of sympathy may be sent to: Margaret Aymer Oget (daughter) at 5800 Woodrow Avenue, Austin, TX 78756.

Jo D. Malessa, former lay member, died on Sept. 24. Memorial donations may be sent to: Epworth UMC in Palmyra for the Jo Malessa Memorial Fund or Women's Association of Methodist Hospital in Philadelphia. Please email Rosemarie Caporale on how to donate at rosemarie.caporale@jefferson.edu. Expressions of sympathy may be sent to: Joy Malessa Catania (daughter) at 634 South Melrose Street, Casper, WY 82601 and Laura Burgess (daughter) at 4 Penniman Lane, Hampton, NH 03842.

PHOTO OF THE MONTH



This month we feature two photos. The first is the new music ministry at Trinity UMC in Highland Park that reflects how music has the power to connect us deeply with the presence of God. The second is from Trinity UMC Hackettstown where Rev. Dr. Brad Motta, who retired in 2019, had the pleasure of baptizing his own grandson. Discipleship in the making!

Each month we will highlight one photo sent in from our congregations that really exemplifies the wonderful ministries they are doing. If you would like to submit a photo, please email Heather Mistretta at hmistretta@gnjumc.org.

CURRENT JOB POSTINGS

P/T Bookkeeper/Administrative Assistant – Calvary UMC Dumont

This well-organized and flexible team member will work independently with minimal supervision, working an average of 24 hours per month. This position may allow for some remote working, but office hours will be required to file paperwork, pick up bills, work with other team members, etc. It is important for this team member to honor confidentiality with personal and confidential information.

Musician – Browns Mills UMC

Please contact Harry Bishop at 609-206-5363.

Transformational Experience Specialist – UMW

To apply, send resume/cover (with salary requirement) to employment@unitedmethodistwomen.org with 'TRANSFORMATION POSITION' in the subject line.

Family Ministries Pastor (P/T) – St. Andrew UMC Cherry Hill

For additional details, <https://saumcnj.org>.

Minister of Music – Covenant UMC

Send resume to Gerard Simmons, SPRC Chair at covenantumcplfd@gmail.com or mail to 631 E. Front Street Plainfield, NJ 07060. For more information, call (908) 756-2684.

Director of Music – Vincent UMC in Nutley

Interested candidates should submit a cover letter, resume, and three references to the church via email to vincentumc@verizon.net.

GNJ JOB OPPORTUNITIES

- Regional Administrative Assistant
- Administrative Assistant (P/T)
- Director of Resourcing
- Next Generation Ministries of Greater New Jersey | Aldersgate Caretaker
- General Secretary, the General Commission on United Methodist Men

All details can be found at www.gnjumc.org/job-opportunities. If you'd like to have your job published, please contact Heather Mistretta at hmistretta@gnjumc.org. Your posting can also be placed in the weekly Digest.



United Methodist Communities
Abundant Life for Seniors



Tapestries®: Individualized Memory Care

At United Methodist Communities, our Tapestries Memory Care model focuses on the strengths and preferences of residents living with dementia.

Let us help you find an alternative that will enable you and your loved one to live life to the fullest. To learn more about Tapestries, visit umccommunities.org.

Home Office
3311 State Route 33, Neptune, NJ 07753
umccommunities.org







BRISTOL GLEN | COLLINGSWOOD | PITMAN | THE SHORES



BE THE LIGHT

Share the light with A Future With Hope's
Ida Road to Renewal Fund.

One hundred percent of the proceeds will go toward program goals and direct assistance to communities in need.



A FUTURE WITH HOPE
UNITED METHODISTS
OF GREATER NEW JERSEY

To learn more about A Future With Hope's Ida Relief Fund, go to:

www.gnjumc.org/afwh/ida-relief-effort