

THE RELAY

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OF GREATER NEW JERSEY

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Doing God's Work by Feeding the Hungry in Bridgeton

By Heather Mistretta
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BRIDGETON, NJ

It is said that the beauty of a city is in its people—the tapestry that wraps up all the different cultures, thoughts and beliefs into the resilient and courageous place it is. But cities are not always places with skyscrapers and busy streets. Some cities are much quieter with tree-lined streets, a smattering of barns and chock full of rich history—qualities that may work to disguise the underlying inequities and struggles that many of their citizens may be facing.

Bridgeton, NJ, is one of those places. Founded thousands of years ago by indigenous people, most notably the Lenni-Lenape Native Americans, the city of more than 25,000 on the Cohansey River in Cumberland County has New Jersey's largest historic district with 2,200 structures; it covers more than a quarter of the 6.2 square miles of Bridgeton.

But interspersed amid the Victorian architecture and lush parks is a poverty rate for more than 30 percent of the city's



Rev. Ricardo Ramos of First UMC starts his days around 6:30 a.m. to prepare for the more 150 families who arrive for boxes of food donations.

population, most of whom are minority. The pandemic has only amplified this for those who are most vulnerable. Two churches taking on the challenge to feed the growing number of hungry people, particularly those who are Latino and Native American, are St. John UMC in Fordville and First UMC of Bridgeton.

St. John UMC in Fordville, which is GNJ's only Native American church and is one of the city's historic sites having been designated one in 2017, serves the large population of Native Americans that still live in the city. The church has been a beacon for feeding the hungry, but the

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A Cluster of Faith, Fun and Food in South Jersey

A Legacy of
Rev. Myrna Bethke

By Heather Mistretta
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"But since you excel in everything, in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you, see that you also excel in this grace of giving."

—2 CORINTHIANS 8:7

CLARKSBORO, NJ

Never did a group of teenagers in South Jersey think they would be watching a 60-something-year-old doing cartwheels on a Sunday evening last November at Zion Community UMC in Clarksboro but that's what kicked off the beginning of what was informally called the Cluster Youth Group.

"Myrna [Bethke] was a kid at heart, body and mind," said one of the leaders, Rev. Dave Delaney of St. Paul's UMC in West Deptford. "I guess you could say in stature too!" Delaney added with a laugh. "Her last text to me was 'LOL.'"



Rev. Tiffany Murphy of Zion Community agreed. "As good as she was with adults, Myrna was amazing with children. She had this uncanny ability to relate to adults and children equally."

Last October under the leadership of Gateway South District Superintendent Myrna Bethke, who often remarked how "awesome" it was, a group represented by local United Methodist churches that also included Clonmell UMC and Mt. Zion Wesley Church in Wenonah, was born. Their first meeting was held in November when they stepped outside their comfort zones to learn about each other and explore how to be more self-aware.

"Myrna wanted to be in conversation with one another to discuss whatever the kids may be facing," said Rev. John Randall of Mt Zion. "It gave them an avenue to talk to someone. This gave them the opportunity to know someone was listening."

The group of church leaders and about 20-30 children, who were predominantly in middle school, continued to meet the first Sunday of every month for about an hour and a half of food, fun and devotions in the fellowship hall at Zion Community UMC until the pandemic hit. The transition to a virtual meeting was seamless as everyone involved remained devoted to

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Developing Leadership Together through a Re-envisioned Leadership Academy

"The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy."

—REV. DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR

By Heather Mistretta
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The Board of Laity is rising to the challenge of new ways of delivering ministry by transforming the Laity Leadership Academy into a multi-faceted remote learning series for clergy and laity.

The Laity Leadership Academy is now the Leadership Academy. Traditionally reserved for a day in September for laity to engage with others and bolster leadership qualities and strategies, the Board of Laity recognized that fruitful ministry involves clergy and laity working together. The all-new Leadership Academy will be offered to both laity and clergy in four different free, live on ZOOM, webinar series from October to February to provide an engaging remote learning experience, respect current social distancing restrictions and to broaden the scope of the Board of Laity's mission.

"Laity and clergy can attend together," said GNJ's Director of Leadership



"We are encouraging teams from churches to attend with your pastor, so together they will acquire skills that can be put into practice to develop vital congregations," said Rosa Williams, who chairs the GNJ Board of Laity.

Development Rev. Juel Nelson. "Now a greater partnership can be made between laity and clergy as they develop their faith, learn and implement ministry together."

Each webinar series, which can be accessed by computer or a smartphone (or via phone for the Small Groups program) will be staggered throughout the year so that participants have the option to enroll in more than one course.

"The Leadership Academy will be hosted by experienced Zoom facilitators," said Rosa Williams who chairs the Board of Laity. "We are encouraging teams to form churches to attend with their pastor, so together they will acquire skills that can be put into practice to develop vital congregations."

The courses are comprised of three 90-minute sessions with pre-work such

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A MESSAGE FROM OUR BISHOP

Waking Up in 2030

Bishop John Schol



What would it be like to wake up in 2030? If 10 years flashed by overnight. The older I get the more I want to slow down passing years.

Ross Douthat, a columnist for the New York Times, recently wrote that COVID-19 will fast forward us to 2030. Instead of things returning to normal after the pandemic, life after COVID-19 will more likely resemble what society and institutions including the church would be like in 2030 if the pandemic had not occurred.

Throughout history there are events that speed up the course of history. The death of Jesus gave rise to a new faith, the fall of the Berlin wall ended the Cold War and created a new Germany, and more recently the Vietnam War, the invention of the computer and

“CHANGE IS NOTHING NEW, NOR IS IT SOMETHING TO BE FEARED. WE ARE ALREADY SEEING SOME OF OUR CONGREGATIONS GROWING DURING THE PANDEMIC AND REACHING NEW PEOPLE.”

—Bishop John Schol

9/11 dramatically changed the way we think about and engage in almost everything. These events not only created change, but they sped up change.

COVID-19 is doing the same thing It will speed up change. People are already examining where they will live, where they will work, how they go about work and will use technology.

It was predicted that in 2030 that at least 20%, and some have said as many as 50% of the nation’s universities, will close or merge with another university and that higher education will be different.

What about the church? Will COVID-19 speed up change in the church? Already a few churches have discontinued because of challenges and circumstances related to COVID-19. It is anticipated that a number of our smaller churches or churches facing financial challenges will have a difficult time rebounding following the pandemic. Also, we anticipate that we will start, or existing congregations will birth totally online congregations that will gather people for worship not only across the nation but around the world.

Change is nothing new, nor is it something to be feared. We are already seeing some of our congregations growing during the pandemic and reaching new people. We have had new members join, we have baptized children, increased giving and new people experienced God’s grace and the rebirth of Jesus Christ in their life all during COVID-19.

When I was five years old, the Methodist congregation my family attended was close to closing. My parents found a new church for our family. It was a hard transition. We were separated from friends. It was the church in which my father and my brothers and I were baptized and my parents were married. It held sacred memories for us. Yet we found a new congregation, new believers to grow with and new kids to run around church with, and it would be the church where Beverly and I were married. Since our wedding, because of schooling and serving the church, Beverly and I have associated with six new churches. Through it all, it was our faith in Jesus Christ that gave us hope and sustained us through change.

I do not know what things will be like three years after COVID-19, but it will be different. Will it be the building, memories of what was or our faith in Jesus Christ that will sustain us? If it is buildings and memories then we will do everything we can to resist change and most likely what God has next for us. If it is Jesus Christ, then there is a resurrection waiting for us. I invite you to look forward with hope for the resurrection God has waiting for us. It is our future with hope. 🇺🇸

Thinking about your year-end generosity?
Wanting to make a greater charitable impact?
Hoping to maximize your tax refund?

INTRODUCING DONOR ADVISED FUNDS

A donor advised fund (DAF) is a charitable giving tool that allows you to reap immediate tax benefits, while creating a lifetime method for supporting your church, UMC missions and public charities. The Stewardship Foundation of Greater New Jersey is now accepting applications to open DAFs from individuals and families who want to simplify their generosity.

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- Receive immediate income tax deduction for this year, with a 5-year carry-forward for unused deductions
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Jana Purkis-Brash
Director of the United Methodist Stewardship Foundation of Greater New Jersey
jpurkisbrash@gnjumc.org
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SMALL GROUPS FOSTER CONNECTIONS WITH GOD AND EACH OTHER.

They allow people to gather together to share life, to grow in faith, to support one another.

Sound like something you need? Consider being a Small Group Host. See tips below to get you started.



KNOW YOUR WHY

What is the main reason for your group? Determining what’s important to you will shape how you share your time together.

PRAY

Pray that God will guide you toward people who are willing to commit to something life-changing and purposeful. Pray for someone to join you in hosting the group.

Partners in ministry make things easier and fun.

MEET

Schedule your first meeting for introductions and brainstorming about next steps and expectations.

Set the tone so that people feel comfortable asking questions.

PLAN

Schedule a meeting with your pastor to discuss your plans and consider resources. Set your schedule for 6-8 weeks to start and stick to it. Publicize and maintain starting and ending times.

If you are a parent support group, you will use different resources than a group that wants to study a book in the bible or those interested in social justice issues.

INVITE

Filling your group may take you outside your comfort zone and outside your congregation, and that’s a good thing. Give them a call, ask them to come.

Make sure you give them something that tells them when and where the group will meet.

HELP

We would like to help you bring your ideas to fruition. Learn more about being a Small Group Host via Zoom. Join us **August 19, 20, 26 or 27.**

Find out more at:
www.gnjumc.org/smallgroups

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:



Gina Yeske | Director of Small Groups
O: 732.359.1042 | E: gyeske@gnjumc.org

Myrna Bethke: Somewhere Over a Rainbow

*She is clothed with strength and dignity,
and she laughs without fear of the future.
When she speaks, her words are wise,
and she gives instructions with kindness.*

—PROVERBS 31:25-26

By Heather Mistretta
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Throughout her life, Myrna made friends all over the world, from her days following the untimely death of her brother on 9/11 when she traveled to Afghanistan to promote peace to the multitude of smaller acts of kindness that encouraged others and gave them hope and often a chuckle...or sometimes even a pie in the face.

Myrna’s impromptu cartwheels were legendary. Her effortless ability to propel her body into the air was only matched by the courage and resilience she brought with her in everything she did. From inspiring youth to dare to dream and promoting peace and justice to baking cookies and assisting with the birth of her grandchildren, Myrna was a powerhouse of grace and humility who made people feel like they mattered.

One friend of Myrna’s recently recalled, “The last three posts on Myrna’s Facebook say it all about Myrna. The one post shares the United Methodist Church’s stance against racism. The second is of her grandchild, Fallon just making Myrna smile at her little ‘dog whisperer’ and the third one is the chalk writing she shared with her grandchild that said, ‘Black Lives Matter.’”

Myrna was a Full Elder and District Superintendent, but she was also a friend, mother, grandmother, wife and advocate for peace, racial justice and the environment. Many of her connections were overlapping because those who knew Myrna through ministry ended up being her friend as well.

Myrna joined the Southern New Jersey Conference in 1982 and during her ministry served nine churches. In 2014, she became Gateway South District Superintendent and served as Dean of the Cabinet for the last several years. A representative from each church that she served was invited to her memorial service held on July 25 at the Mission and Resource Center and broadcast to more than 1,200 people in Greater New Jersey.

One big part of Myrna’s ministry involved youth. She relished every opportunity she had to engage with them and celebrate their joys. Most recently she



CLOCKWISE: **Myrna was a pre-med student before answering a call to ministry, obtaining her MDiv degree and entering the United Methodist clergy in 1982. Shown here with her husband, Drew Burrus (right). Myrna “rocked” with her fellow southern district colleagues, Glenn Conaway and Brian Roberts (right).**



created Cluster Youth Groups, bringing several small youth groups together as one.

“Last year to celebrate the success of our VBS, we set up a dunk tank and she was first in line to be dunked into the water for the sake of celebration,” one friend recalled.

But Myrna’s outreach knew no age limit or boundary. She loved the song, “Somewhere Over a Rainbow” and regularly played it, sometimes while watching her favorite movie, *The Wizard of Oz*.

“Way up high” the song challenged its listeners to dream big, beyond the rainbow and for all your troubles to be behind you. Its words expressed a longing for happiness with a childlike innocence. Through her actions, Myrna embraced these words in the life she led, challenging people to dare to dream and wish upon a star. Every day she strove to clear the clouds for others with her conviction, humor and unwavering compassion.

We hope Myrna is at peace surrounded by hummingbirds, seashells and lifesavers “somewhere over

the rainbow, way up high” sharing her stories of all her “dids” (as shared by her husband, Drew) and her unwavering hope in faith and life.

To view her service at GNJ, visit <https://www.gnjumc.org/events/celebration-of-the-life-and-ministry-of-myrna-bethke/>. To view a beautiful tribute from her friend and senior pastor at Morristown UMC, Luana Scott Cook, visit www.forevermissed.com/myrna-lynn-bethke/lifestory?entity_id=53080.

When given the task to write something about Myrna, I struggled between being grateful and asking myself what right do I have to write about this amazing woman and the incredible impact she had on the lives of many and the lasting legacy she left behind. I listened in awe to the many beautiful eulogies at her service and I thought the pragmatic, level-headed logical side (as expressed by her friends) would not want this piece to be long. She would surely want people to get back to their ministries and missions.

Background photo of a rainbow taken by Myrna’s son, Daniel.

Cluster Youth Group

Continued from page 1

their mission, and the children relished the opportunity to be filled with the perfect blend of spirituality and fun.

“We totally enjoyed listening and watching these teens on Zoom while Myrna and I would be texting back and forth laughing and enjoying the kids,” said Delaney. “She would preach a sermon and then have the church family engage in an adult size version of Jenga. That’s who she was.”

Interspersed with all the laughing and yes, cartwheels, were powerful messages

that kids mattered, that their voices were being heard and that they all had a place in God’s house. During another meeting youth were invited to take part in a scavenger hunt to learn that the church is alive.

“To be able to share faith, answer questions and laugh without hesitation every week is pretty special,” said Delaney.

The last meeting with Myrna was held on June 7 when the group discussed how to combat racism and planned a picnic for the summer.

“I remember that day so well. We talked about racism because Myrna never refrained from tackling any challenge, and the kids were eating pizza like they

never have before. I’ll remember that fondly,” said Randall who recalled his own time spent in cluster groups back in the early-1970s at Pitman UMC with Bill Wilson, said, “Cluster groups give us a greater understanding of who we are, and with Myrna you were not a bystander; you were a participant.”

Myrna’s impression on the youth was



Myrna connected with adults and children alike with compassion, humor and an unwavering faith in God’s grace.

indelible. They quickly learned that her zeal for enjoying life was matched by her devotion to them. The cartwheels she turned in front of the youth put minds at ease for those who may have been nervous to enter into a new group.

“They also taught the youth that church leaders are people who liked to have fun too and that you can laugh and love each

other no matter where you come from,” said Delaney. “The parents don’t know how they’re going to tell their kids she’s gone. They’ve come to love her so much.”

The group is considering starting up again in September to keep the connection ministry alive. They are also looking into implementing a mission project to help others.



The Cluster Groups of Clarksboro, NJ, continued to meet following the arrival of the pandemic via Zoom.

Feeding the Hungry

Continued from page 1
pandemic has compelled them to take their effort many steps forward.

“Our pastor fully believes our church has been left here for 179 years to feed people who can’t feed themselves,” said Cynthia Mosely who is one of the ministry’s leaders.

But with the closing of another local food pantry and the impending end to unemployment bonuses in late July, the future looked uncertain. Amid the bleak forecast, hope was abundant in the church’s parking lot where tables are set up and boxes are packed. Every Wednesday the people of St. John, both young and old, prepare to welcome the approximately 240 families that now visit their food pantry.

“Most of our families visit an average of four times a month,” said Mosely. “The closest store to our community is five miles from the church, which is in the center of the township. People may have food stamps, but they can’t use food stamps for gasoline or to buy a bus ticket, so we are their “go to” source for food during these recent days.”

“OUR PASTOR FULLY BELIEVES OUR CHURCH HAS BEEN LEFT HERE FOR 179 YEARS TO FEED PEOPLE WHO CAN’T FEED THEMSELVES.”

—Cynthia Mosely,
St. John UMC in Fordville

She added that in June, St. John distributed almost 14 tons of food sourced from the Community Food Bank of NJ, the Governors Pandemic Relief Fund, Feeding America and private donations.

“That was our highest ever. We started with 12 people four and a half years ago, and at the close of 2019 we served 65



Cynthia Mosely (center), also a member of the GNJ Native American Ministries Committee, helps to lead the distribution of food and clothes to the needy in Bridgeton each Wednesday at St. John UMC.

families consistently. We average 240 families per day today,” said Mosely who added that the pantry is designated as a healthy pantry.

“We have long recognized the health disparities in our Tribal and neighboring communities, particularly related to diabetes. We offer only healthy choices, and when people ask what they can donate, we always suggest fruit in juice, low/no salt added canned veggies, etc and of course, anything fresh from the farms of the area.”

In addition to food distribution, St. John started a seasonal clothing giveaway about two years ago, but that had to be put on hold until the governor opened the malls in June. “Giveaway” is a word typically used by Tribal people to indicate they are sharing what they have.

“People were clamoring for it to come back,” said Mosely who said the giveaway has grown fourfold since the onslaught of COVID-19. “In June we put out about 1,200 pounds of clothing and at the end of the morning we put 10 pounds or less back in the closet for another time.”

The daunting task does not seem to impede the forward-thinking attitude that people like Mosely and others embrace



Rev. Ramos and his dedicated team at First UMC Bridgeton provide each family with three boxes—one dairy, one fresh produce and one with propane.

and bring with them each Wednesday to the parking lot on Fordville Road.

Hands and Hearts Together for Hope

Down the road from St. John is First UMC, led by Rev. Ricardo Ramos, who self-admittedly likes to look at difficult times as challenges instead of obstacles while he carries his Wesleyan toolkit of

Esperanza,” continue to come up with innovative ways to meet the demand by working with the South Jersey Food Bank who sources their distribution. In the week ending July 25, Ramos said about 150 families were fed on Wednesday and Thursday.

Ramos, who brought bilingual services to his congregation, said last July when the food ministry began First UMC was



St. John’s volunteers pack the more than 200 boxes required to meet the demand at their food pantry.

“WHAT YOU ARE TAKING IN THE BOX WILL NOT LAST LONG BUT WHAT YOU HAVE IN YOUR HEART WILL LAST FOREVER.”

—Rev. Ricardo Ramos, First UMC

rules to do good, do no harm and stay in love with God.

“Our people handle the feeding. I take care of the hospitality,” said Ramos who starts around 6:30 two mornings a week to help set up. He makes a point of remembering each person’s name on the line that stretches out into an S shape for an entire block. The native of Puerto Rico speaks with the mostly Mexican group in their native language of Spanish, telling them that “what you are taking in the box will not last long but what you have in your heart will last forever.”

As the demand continues to grow, Ramos and the ministry now called “Manos y Corazones Juntos para la

serving about 30-40 families weekly. By the end of the summer, as many as 200 families were being fed each week.

Now one year later each family is receiving boxes of dairy and produce. At the end of July, the church also added chicken to the distribution.

But the routine does not always go as planned. One Wednesday in July the food delivery was delayed by hours, causing some people to wait in the parking lot for five hours.

“It wasn’t the best scenario, but God led us through,” said Ramos who discovered his calling at the age of 20 while studying in Alabama to be a surgeon with the Air Force. Now 39 years later, Ramos said he has no regrets. 🇺🇸



PICTURED LEFT TO RIGHT: **Cindy Davis, Susan Hinton, Sandi Gibson, West Milford Mayor Michelle Dale (cutting the ribbon), Karen Parete, Joanne Bush, Margie Sweet, Rev. Jennifer Lovallo, Sandy Otero and Helen Wielhouwer.**

UMC at Newfoundland: Spreading Their Wings in the Community

By Denise Herschel
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NEWFOUNDLAND, N.J.

Although the Angels Community Thrift Shop (ACTS) at the UMC at Newfoundland had only opened its doors for a few months before COVID-19, volunteers were eager to reopen their doors on June 25, with new safety procedures in place, so that they could continue to serve the community.

"Our volunteers are respectful, joyful and compassionate and in this way, they model the love of Christ," said Rev. Jennifer Lovallo, UMC at Newfoundland's pastor.

The ministry looks quite different now that social distancing measures need to be followed.

"We purchased masks, sanitizer and cleaner to have on hand," said Joanne Bush, one of ACTS' leaders who added that a \$3 a bag clothing sale was also held. "All people in the shop are required to wear a mask and socially distance, and a plexiglass shield has been installed between the register and the customer for additional safety."

She added, "The response from the community has been great. Many familiar faces along with some new."

But the road to first open the shop's doors involved plenty of research, dedication and patience and followed a path with curves, much like her own career did.

"We just saw the need in our community and felt that this was a way we could support those families and individuals year-round," Lovallo said.

"I make sure that I serve as a resource, supporter and overseer of this mission," said Lovallo, who added that the thrift shop was initially the brainchild of Eleanor Keating, president of the trustees, who wanted to see her shop come to fruition.

"When I was first appointed at Newfoundland, one of the first things she said to me was that she wished we had a thrift shop. At that time, I was participating in a PaCE (Pursuing Clergy Excellence) group where almost all my colleagues served churches that had thrift shops. I asked them about the pros and cons and was able to do a lot of hands-on research," she said.

Lovallo then began to "plant the seeds" of a thrift shop with her congregation through informal conversations, questions at Church Council meetings and general comments. The church held two annual rummage sales, which wound up being very successful.

"I hoped that we could build upon that success," said Lovallo. "As with most churches in our Conference, we had financial concerns and were constantly debating whether or not our church-run preschool could become self-sufficient."

After consulting with other United Methodist churches in the area who had preschools to see how they

remained solvent, the consensus showed that it was their thrift shop that allowed them to finance the preschool.

"I reached out to the rummage sale volunteers as well as others in the congregation who might be willing to help," said Lovallo. "We got a core group of people, approximately 16 volunteers, willing to commit to one capacity or another."

and clothing into opportunity, by keeping them from going to waste and putting them to good use—providing relief, creating jobs and empowering people to break the cycle of poverty."

"We have had regular customers at our rummage sales every year who struggle financially and really appreciate having a place where they can purchase good

"WE HAVE HAD REGULAR CUSTOMERS AT OUR RUMMAGE SALES EVERY YEAR WHO STRUGGLE FINANCIALLY AND REALLY APPRECIATE HAVING A PLACE WHERE THEY CAN PURCHASE GOOD QUALITY CLOTHING AND HOUSEHOLD ITEMS AT A LOW PRICE. OUR LAY VOLUNTEERS HAVE DEVELOPED NEW FRIENDSHIPS AND DEEPER RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH THEIR TIME SERVING AT ACTS."

—Rev. Jennifer Lovallo, pastor at UMC at Newfoundland

The team met regularly to do research, strategize and put together a proposal for the Church Council. The hard work paid off. The proposal was approved, and the shop was launched in the former library of the church building.

Since its debut, the thrift shop has been thriving with its sale of clothing, toys, shoes, jewelry, linens, kitchenware, holiday items and other household items. Prices range from 25 cents to \$25.00 with most items ranging from one to five dollars. Nothing is consignment-based, and all the proceeds support the mission and the ministry of the church, in particular the preschool. Items have also been donated to families in need and have helped families displaced by house fires. Coats have been donated for winter coat drives and shoes for Soles4Souls, a nonprofit that turns "unwanted shoes

quality clothing and household items at a low price," Lovallo said. "Our lay volunteers have developed new friendships and deeper relationships through their time serving at ACTS."

Lovallo believes that the thrift store's opening at UMC at Newfoundland has been a true blessing providing her with another opportunity to serve her community as well as her volunteers who recognize that they have a chance to share God's love with all who walk through the shop's doors.

For more information about the Angels Community Thrift Shop, contact UMC at Newfoundland at 973-697-2877 or visit umcnewfoundland.org. The church is located at 65 La Rue Road, Newfoundland, NJ.

For more information about PaCE, visit www.gnjumc.org/pace/.



The Angels Community Thrift Shop (ACTS) at the UMC at Newfoundland reopened its doors on June 27.



Summer Reimagined for the Next Generation

By Heather Mistretta
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Proverbs 19:21 says, “Many are the plans in a person’s heart, but it is the Lord’s purpose that prevails.” Next Generation Ministries has worked through God to plan out the next several months aimed at igniting the hearts and minds of youth while providing them with the resources and support they need.

“One thing we have learned from this pandemic is that we need to be resilient and realize that God is guiding us at every step,” said Eric Drew, Executive Director of Next Generation Ministries. “Our goal has been to bring our kids closer together and help them become closer to God by giving them more opportunities to engage.”

The steadfast commitment to youth has only become stronger as they develop online chat rooms, Zoom calls, virtual scavenger hunts and other vehicles to strengthen their faith.

“Our kids are depending on us, especially now. More than ever they needed support, questions answered and just a friendly face or voice to tell them that everything was going to be okay,” said Drew who has been working with his team tirelessly to remain innovative and inclusive in the programming they offer.

In July IGNITE Summer at Home was unveiled. Although they missed going to Pinelands Center at Mt Misery, the need to keep campers safe was far more important. With a choice of Inspire at Home, which included things like photography,

crafts and music, or Transform at Home, which offered ways to be more inclusive, committed to racial justice and faithful to Jesus’ ministry, campers enjoyed reconnecting and learning from their homes. Unlike in the past, some of the youth were joined by their siblings.

They discovered creative and bold ways to follow a Virtual Faith Walk through an Amazon jungle and strengthened their commitment to the mission of helping others and fighting racism with a Prayer Station Walk throughout the virtual world. Youth leaders joined morning devotionals and guided them through lessons and games throughout the day.

Other highlights included origami, best counselor competitions, new Bible stories and a cheer to close out each day.

“The kids had a great time,” said Ryan Clements, Next Gen’s camp program director. “Camper Jacob said his favorite activity was exploring different music genres and making playlists of different music by genre based on our group lesson.”

In August the Next Gen team has prepared Pinelands Center for the all-new Family Camp, a safer alternative to traditional camping. Each family is offered a private cabin and bathroom and then invited to participate in activities like hiking, archery and crafts, and of course, a campfire, for two or six days, all while practicing social distancing with other families.

“Bring your church, coordinate with your youth group or bring your own family,” said Drew. “Turn your summer into something special.”



Next Gen’s newly-developed Summer at Home was a departure from the traditional summer camp with new additions like a scavenger hunt and exploring different music genres.

Some participants have signed up with hopes of reliving some of their own childhood memories of canoeing and swimming at Pinelands as a camper.

Looking Ahead to the Future

Coming up on September 13, IGNITE Communities will resume with a virtual gathering on Facebook Live, Instagram Live and YouTube at 7:00 p.m. Students will share stories, worship, and maybe even be greeted by a special guest.

Next Gen is also encouraging students to be a larger part of the evening by submitting a 30-45 second video sharing how God has moved a mountain in their lives to Brynn Mosello at bmosello@gnjumc.org. Select en-

tries will be shown during the IGNITE Communities broadcast.

Plans for the next in-person IGNITE Communities are underway for November 20 and 22.

The annual IGNITE Conference, usually held in October, has been postponed until January 29-31 to ensure everyone’s safety.

“We’re really looking forward to kicking off 2021 with our IGNITE Conference. Seems like a great way to start a new year following a year filled with so many challenges for our kids,” said Drew.

For additional details regarding their events, including those in 2021, visit <http://gnjnextgen.org/2021-discipleship-calendar/> and check out their Facebook page.

Looking for a safe, fun and affordable place to spend a week with your family and friends?



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NEXT GENERATION
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Chews UMC's Food Ministry Bolstered by UMCOR Grant

By Heather Mistretta
hmistretta@gnjumc.org

G L E N D O R A , N J

The UMCOR COVID-19 Response Fund grant of \$10,000 came just at the right moment for Chews UMC who serves the working poor of Glendora and surrounding areas, which have seen a significant surge in unemployment since the pandemic began, along with high numbers of COVID-19 cases.

"It will be a wonderful blessing for Chews outreach ministry especially through this time of COVID," said Rev. Bill Wilson who was grateful for the assistance he received from A Future with Hope's Andrea Wren-Hardin and Rick Reinhard. "This will give us three months of strong aid."

"Since the pandemic began, we are feeding almost seven times as many people," said Wilson who added that includes 80 families in need (240 people), twice a month. We advertise throughout the community and welcome all people in need, without discrimination, or residential or financial requirements."

Using a drive-up design to maximize safety, they provide boxes of non-perishables, eggs, milk, butter, produce, fresh meat as well as hot meal to go for everyone in line.



Chews UMC volunteers prepare meals for the hungry in Glendora and then distribute the boxed meals via a drive-up. Credit: Janine Flint

Funding from UMCOR will support the purchase of perishables, distribution supplies and a deep freezer. It will also allow the church to purchase disposable

containers for the distribution of food as well as cleaning supplies.

"Chews UMC is a deeply mission-based congregation with numerous

partnerships," said Wilson. "We rely on food banks, local businesses, our members, our large lay leadership group and dedicated volunteers to implement our food program and outreach to the community."

Wilson added that with the grant, the church leaders will be able to save money over the next three months so that they are better prepared for the remainder of the year when demand is expected to continue its climb.

Launched back in April, UMCOR's Sheltering in Love giving campaign is designed to assist vulnerable communities in the United States and around the world, including racial/ethnic and indigenous communities. Since the start of the coronavirus outbreak, UMCOR has worked with health boards, medical professionals, disaster management coordinators and faith leaders to prevent the further spread of the coronavirus.

Through the UMCOR COVID-19 Response Fund, UMCOR has rapidly released grants to equip partners assisting vulnerable populations around the world, including racial/ethnic and indigenous communities in the United States. Grants are currently meeting pressing needs in the areas of health, food insecurity, water, sanitation and hygiene and economic instability. 🇺🇸

Door-to-Door Discipleship at African UMC Gleans One Matters Award

By Heather Mistretta
hmistretta@gnjumc.org

T R E N T O N , N J

There's an old Liberian adage that says, "One tree can't fill a forest," naturally meaning that no one person can do it all alone. For Rev. Moses Jarta Flomo of African UMC in Trenton who emigrated in 1994 to the United States from the West African coast filled with mangrove trees, working together with others is one of the things he does best. He and his congregation have worked hard to build discipleship, and today that has been realized with the recognition of the One Matters Award from Discipleship Ministries.

The award, which for the past five years has recognized churches that are making new disciples comes in the form of an engraved plaque and a check for \$1,000.

But for Flomo, who has been leading Trenton's first African American church

for the past two years and remains steadfast to his commitment of making a difference in his community, the award means so much more than that.

"I am so grateful to all our lay people who made it happen. This reinforces our evangelistic drive, and this recognition encourages us to keep moving forward," said Flomo who called their door-to-door strategy "old-fashioned evangelism."

He added that part of this strategy included something called FRAngelism, which was short for Family, Relatives, Associates and Neighbors. Flomo said church members, including some of the many youth members knocked on doors in their pursuit to make disciples of Jesus Christ.

Discipleship Ministries awards a One Matters Award to one church in each annual conference. The award reflects that each 'one' represents a transformed life—a life that matters to God, and a life that should matter to us. Rev. Dr. Jacqui King, Director of Leadership for congregational vitality at Discipleship Ministries, said, "In this season of great challenge with COVID-19, we are blessed to connect with annual conferences to honor the discipleship ministry occurring throughout local congregations."

Capital District Superintendent Hector Burgos said, "African UMC Trenton, under the leadership of Rev. Moses Flomo, is claiming a renewed vision for ministry that focuses on a loving God and meeting and loving people where they are. The congregation is becoming a multigenerational faith community that is serving African/Liberians in the greater Trenton region in meaningful and contextual ways."



Members of African UMC embrace their heritage and their old-fashioned evangelism called FRAngelism.

Flomo first came to the United States in 1994 on a scholarship to Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D. C. before beginning his service at St. Mary Street UMC in Burlington City where he also still serves. He has a Diploma in Theology (Master of Divinity equivalence) from the Gbarnga (barn'gah) School of Theology—a United Methodist seminary in Gbarnga, Liberia. He served in Liberia for 10 years before emigrating.

Flomo also volunteers as a chaplain of the Burlington City Police Department; coordinator of Team Builders Community Development Corporation—a 501 (c) 3 community development organization; and founding member and chaplain of African Immigrant Community of America, also a 501 (c) 3 organization dedicated to improving the lot of African Immigrants in the United States. 🇺🇸



Rev. Moses Flomo's commitment to discipleship was contagious throughout his congregation leading up to the One Matters Award.



Sgt. David Nordt, who received the Army Commendation Medal in 1978 among others, is committed to making veterans feel like they matter.

St. Andrew UMC Serves, Honors and Supports Veterans

By Denise Herschel
Nj6pack@yahoo.com

Sgt. David Nordt has been committed to ministry and serving veterans for several years. He has always embraced the value of their connection.

In 2010, Nordt created the Veterans' Hour of Power, eventually changing it to the Veterans' Ministry of St. John's UMC with the ministry spearheading its first Veterans' Day church service on November 14, 2010.

"I began the Veterans' Ministry at St. John's UMC, but after moving to the Toms River area in 2018, I became a member at St. Andrew UMC in Toms River, relocating the ministry. We have been at St. Andrew since May 26, 2019 when we celebrated our first Memorial Day service. Our ministry was introduced during this service and the congregation was asked for their support," Nordt said.

And since its inception one year ago at St. Andrew UMC, this volunteer-based, Christian outreach program has strived to serve, honor and support veterans, their families, and all military personnel. Currently, there are eleven members in the ministry, and they are all from St. Andrew UMC.

"We stress that you don't have to be a veteran to join but just have to have a desire to help our veterans and troops around the world," Nordt said. "The Veterans' Ministry takes pride in the commitment its members have to supporting, helping and honoring all service members and families throughout the world."

Nordt, who is the Veterans' Ministry founder/Veterans' Ministry leader, added that they strive to serve all military personnel, current and past.

"One way we accomplish this is to partner with veterans' organizations," said Nordt, referring to the 501 (c) 3 non-profits, Operations Jersey Cares, which functions as a collection site for items requested by our troops; U.S. War Dogs, which collects items needed for the church's four-legged service member; Community Hope, which helps individuals including veterans and their families overcome mental illness, addiction, homelessness and poverty by providing housing and support services; and K-9

Vets -War Dogs Association, which seeks to support current and retired war dogs and their handlers.

Some of the projects and activities that the ministry has participated include attendance at church festivals, Memorial Day parade and veterans' organization functions such as Rise Above Red Tail, The Disabled American Veterans and the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

"Our ministry really strives to cultivate awareness of a variety of veterans' causes and organizations," said Nordt who added that church members have written and sent letters as well as holiday cards to current military personnel and veterans. They also recruit others, like school children, to participate, visit veterans nursing homes, hospitals and shut-ins and host coffee houses occasionally to meet and greet past and present veterans and mentor future veterans joining the armed forces.

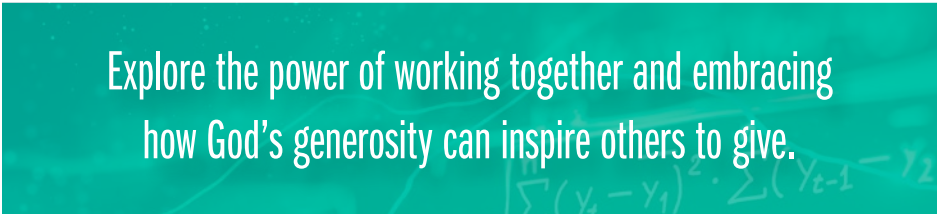
Prior to the pandemic, the Veterans' Ministry was meeting bi-weekly at St. Andrew. There is no fee to join, and all are welcome to attend the meetings with members consisting of both men and women.

"We are planning for our Veterans Day service on Sunday, November 8, 2020. We are also planning for a special presentation by Michael Schaffer, State Chaplain New Jersey P.P.C George P. Vanderveer Post 129, Toms River, giving the congregation an update on new veterans' benefits in 2020. This will all depend on church updates and NJ CDC guidelines."

Nordt added that whenever he leads a group of volunteers to any veterans events he always says, "Our veterans must never be forgotten!"

"We want to provide high-quality, compassionate and comprehensive services to all our veterans and their families. We host discussions on cultivating good citizenship and principles of leadership in addition to reading scripture and praying for God's guidance in our mission," he said.

To learn more about the Veterans' Ministry at St. Andrew UMC in Toms River, visit www.standrewtr.org/veterans-ministry/ or visit their Facebook page at St. Andrew UMC. Further questions can be answered by contacting Sgt. David Nordt at 732-703-0064.




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Young and Old Feed the Hungry at Vincentown UMC

By Heather Mistretta
hmistretta@gnjumc.org

V I N C E N T O W N , N J

When six-year-old Tiffany and her 10-year-old sister, Olivia from Vincentown UMC in Burlington County NJ, saw how many people were hungry, they knew they wanted to help.

“Olivia learned what community was and was worried about her community during this pandemic,” said their mother, Lisa. “We talked about hard times and what is going on with COVID-19. She then was worried her church’s food pantry would run out of food for people. She told me, ‘Mom, we have to do something, we can’t let them run out of food.’ All I could say was okay.”

At Vincentown UMC, the first Saturday of every month has been devoted to feeding the hungry ever since its food pantry opened in December 2017. During the pandemic, the pantry has bolstered its efforts by serving about 60-65 people a month, thanks to committed volunteers like Olivia and Tiffany who



Sisters Olivia and Tiffany helped to make the food pantry at Vincentown UMC a success.

help their mother and grandmother support the ministry.

Lisa added that together they designed a flyer, and Tiffany started helping load and

unload all the donations. In addition to packing their vehicle with food week after week, they are reaching out to local businesses along with Rev. Dave Ledford for more donations.

“As buying in bulk has become very difficult, we asked the church members and others to provide any donations that they could. I am so happy that they have responded above and beyond our expectations,” said Ledford who added that they have been receiving both food and monetary donations.

He added, “God is using the people of the Church to reach out to our community! Another amazing thing is that we have equipped the laity to lead this mission themselves. A great team including George, Missy, Deb, Jenny, Nancy, Carole and Wayne have been dedicated members of the food

pantry team taking care of finances, purchasing, stocking and distributing. Their hard work allows me to just spend time with the people and offer them any kind of pastoral care they may need.”

Olivia is a part of Vincentown’s new younger youth group for ages 7-12.

“This new group was formed by the kids themselves who wanted to do more in church and be at the church more, but they weren’t yet old enough for the older youth group,” said Ledford.

Children in this group are taught how to be disciples, a role that involves a commitment to being active in the church’s prayer life, missional life and worship life.

“Before COVID-19, these young disciples were already serving as liturgists and reading prayers in every worship service. Now, during COVID-19, they are active in a new midweek prayer service that I upload every Wednesday evening,” said Ledford.

“God has worked in their hearts, and the results are more love being shared and more people being served.”

Follow the church on Facebook at www.facebook.com/vumcnj to stay up to date on its ministries including this food pantry. 🇺🇸

Leadership

Continued from page 1

as an article to read or video to watch. This structure provides laity and clergy the opportunity to prepare for the in-class material, digest what they learn each week and then apply it to the following week’s learning.

“The cohesive and progressive learning will be a rich experience for everyone,” Nelson added.

Beginning with a session in October, GNJ’s Director of Worship Lan Wilson will lead “Navigating Worship in the New Day.”

“As new dynamics in worship arise for our churches in this new day, we will address hybrid worship, hospitality in the new normal and more,” said Wilson. “This new approach to worship will enhance the worship experience both in-person and online. We hope to help everyone with setting attainable goals for a less stressful, more spirit-filled, inviting Sunday morning.”

The program in October will cover four areas:

- *Hybrid worship* – combining live worship and livestreamed to engage people in worship, preaching and leading in person and online
- Hospitality in the new normal

- Intertwining worship presentation software and Open Broadcaster Studio (OBS) for live streaming and recording
- *Worship media* – licensing, resources for product

In November Chuck DeCamp, Haddonfield UMC’s worship producer, chair of GNJ’s Communications Committee and stage producer for IGNITE, will lead “Making Worship Work Behind the Scenes.” This course will explore a worship and technology toolbox through the following ways:

- Evaluate current use of technology in worship and create a customized worship plan to embrace something new.
- Benchmark and learn best practices and incorporate worship technology as part of an overall experience.
- Grow leadership skills and learn how to take a team to the next level through communication, recruitment and organization.

Ring in the new year will be GNJ’s Director of Small Groups Rev. Gina Yeske with Certified Lay Minister Daniel Jimenez and Certified Lay Servant Vivian Naa-Awa Nelson-Appiah who will lead “These Small Groups Make a Difference.”

Exploring the dynamics of sharing, learning, prayer and action, this program scheduled for three Thursday evenings in January 2021 will focus on unique



This year’s Leadership Academy will be open to both clergy and laity starting this October.

Credit: David Beverly

styles of gathering that have moved small groups from an activity to a lifestyle: Supper Groups, Covenant Groups and Children’s Groups.

This training, which can be accessed via computer, smartphone or non-Wifi compatible phone, will equip participants with the tools needed to develop, promote and lead transformational small groups in their local church setting and virtually. It is recommended for those who engage in the ministry of small groups, currently lead or are interested in leading a small group in their congregation.

“Small groups are laity-led and clergy-supported. This isn’t just a lecture series. We want people to come with their questions and ideas,” said Yeske who added that virtual small groups will continue even after pandemic-related restrictions are lifted because they give laity the flexibility they need to plan around their families’ schedules.

In February GNJ’s Director of Mission Ashley Wilson along with Rev. Luana Cook Scott of Morristown UMC and Hope Center Developer Andrea Wren-Hardin will lead three Wednesday evening sessions of “Missional Engagement that

Opens Hearts, Minds and Doors,” where participants will learn best practices for engaging in mission that is relational, transformative and uses the gifts and assets of a church and community.

“THE CHURCH HAS BEEN CALLED BY GOD TO ENGAGE IN MISSION. IT IS THROUGH MISSION WE GROW CLOSER TO GOD, OUR COMMUNITY, AND ONE ANOTHER AS WE WORK TO TRANSFORM THE WORLD.”

— Lan Wilson, Director of Worship at GNJ



The new program will offer four different free webinar series from October to February to provide an engaging remote learning experience.

CONFERENCE NEWS

Health Plan Rates Unchanged for 2021

The Conference Board of Pension and Health Benefits (CBOPHB) has set the health insurance premium rates for local churches, effective January 1, 2021. Shown with the 2020 annual rates for comparison, the 2021 annual rates will remain unchanged. See chart below:

Plan Type	2020 Premium	2021 Premium
Employee + Only (single)	\$15,000	\$15,000
Employee + Children (no spouse)	\$15,000	\$15,000
Employee + Spouse (no children)	\$15,000	\$15,000
Employee + Spouse + Children	\$15,000	\$15,000

It was the goal of the CBOPHB, in consultation with the Appointment Cabinet, to develop a “blended” premium rate for all health plans types, so that health insurance cost does not play a role in determining clergy appointments.

Effective 2021, HealthFlex will no longer offer the traditional stand-alone health plan and instead offer the HealthFlex Exchange that includes six medical plans, three dental and three vision plans.

In previous years, the Board had approved an HRA account balance for participants who are active in the HealthFlex plan. Beginning in 2021, with the introduction of the HealthFlex Exchange, the Board is unable to provide the HRA balances that we provide today.

However, the Private Exchange does offer other options including Flexible Spending Accounts, Health Savings Account and premium tax credits (premium tax credits are dependent upon the plan you choose and will be addressed at a later date).

The CBOPHB will soon be announcing virtual educational sessions for the fall. In the meantime, please continue to visit the website for additional information at www.gnjumc.org/healthflexexchange/.



Kindness Rock Garden Brings Serenity to the Rockaways

The UMC of the Rockaways invites people to drop by the outdoor chapel and help them build the kindness rock garden.

“Take one when you need one, share one with a friend who needs some inspiration or leave one for someone else,” a sign in the garden says.

Rocks that reveal messages like “Peace,” “You matter,” “Wag more, bark less” and “Find common ground” among others can be found in the garden.

OBITUARIES

Beverly Jones, retired local pastor, died on July 15. Memorial donations (in lieu of flowers) may be sent to: Toward Compassion International or Joan Mandel, Director of Emergency Housing and Advocacy Program, 41 Throckmorton St., Freehold, NJ 07728. Expressions of sympathy may be sent to: Mr. Raymond Jones at 330 Highland Ave., Neptune, NJ 07753-5642.

Gloria Smith, surviving spouse of Rev. Norman E. Smith, died July 9. Expressions of sympathy may be sent to: The family of Gloria Smith at 274 Honeysuckle Court, Toms River, NJ 08753.

William J. Hockenjos, spouse of retired deacon, Norma M. Hockenjos, died June 3. Memorial service will be held on Friday, August 14, at 2:00 p.m. at First UMC (Westfield), 1 E. Broad St., Westfield, NJ 07090-2157. Memorial donations (in lieu of flowers) may be sent to: First UMC (Westfield), 1 E. Broad St., Westfield, NJ 07090-2157 in memory of William Hockenjos. Expressions of sympathy may be sent to Norma Hockenjos at 9 Quince Cluster, Doylestown, PA 18901-2141.

Elizabeth Brown, surviving spouse of Robert H. Brown, died July 5. Expressions of sympathy may be sent to Barbara Kraemer (daughter) at 305 Shunpike Rd., Cape May Court House, NJ 08210.



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\$350 + per worshipper

- Christ UMC (Piscataway)
- Community UMC (Roselle Park)
- Elm UMC
- First UMC (Bradley Beach)
- First UMC (Freehold)
- Kingwood UMC (Stockton)
- Princeton UMC
- Wesley UMC (S. Plainfield)

Wonder Circle

\$250 + per worshipper

- Bridgewater UMC
- UMC at New Brunswick

Blessing Circle

\$150 + per worshipper

- Fellowship UMC (Haddon Heights)
- New Dover UMC (Edison)
- Smithville UMC (Easthampton)
- UMC in Washington

Gratitude Circle

\$75 + per worshipper

- Allentown UMC
- Asbury UMC (Egg Harbor Township)
- Belford UMC
- Christ First UMC (Hasbrouck Heights)
- Denville Community UMC
- Embury UMC (Collingswood)
- Epworth UMC (Palmyra)
- Grace UMC (Wyckoff)
- Harmony Hill UMC (Stillwater)
- Harvey Memorial UMC (Point Pleasant Beach)
- Hopewell UMC
- Juliustown UMC
- Kemble Memorial UMC
- Kynett UMC (Beach Haven)
- Midvale UMC (Wanaque)
- Milton UMC (Oak Ridge)
- Morristown UMC
- Ridgewood UMC
- Salem UMC (Pleasantville)
- Sparta UMC
- St. Mark UMC (Hamilton Square)
- Trinity UMC (Ewing)
- Trinity UMC (Highland Park)
- UMC in Union

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