

"Write the vision clearly on the tablets, that one may read it on the run." – Habakkuk

THE VISION



September 2019



Linda Mellor, left, and Matilda Vandepuije atop a roof they were repairing in Saipan. Below, the team takes a break; from left are Carlos Figueroa, Art Mellor, Linda Mellor, Bob Snyder from Georgia, and Matilda Vandepuije.

New Home For Conn. Church Takes Shape

BY JOANNE S. UTLEY
Editor, *The Vision*

Come Christmas, the First United Methodist Church of Middletown, Conn., is hoping to leave behind their itinerant days of the last five years and settle into a new home. A 2,000-square-foot church is being constructed on former farmland about five miles from their old sanctuary in the middle of town.

The congregation made the difficult decision to sell what had been their home since 1931, citing dwindling membership and increasing expenses. Their last service on Old Church Street was on August 31, 2014; the sale of the building had been all but finalized.

They first moved their worship services to the ballroom at the local Elks Lodge which held its challenges with the weekly setup and teardown. They've since left that location and are worshipping with the South and First Congregational churches.

The groundbreaking for the Tuttle Road building took place in October 2018 with Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton, Connecticut District Superintendent Alpher Sylvester and other members of the cabinet; the bulldozers came in earlier this summer and work has progressed steadily ever since.

"We were just looking for real estate that was available in Middletown," said Pastor Barbara Marks,

Continued on page 3

How NYAC Team Ended Up on Saipan Roof

BY REV. CARLOS FIGUEROA

Pastor, Peekskill UMC

Super Typhoon Yutu made landfall in the Northern Mariana Islands on October 24, 2018. The islands of Tinian and Saipan were the most heavily damaged in this remote American territory in the western Pacific Ocean. The typhoon brought torrential rains alongside sustained winds of 180 mph and gusts of 220 mph. The Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) requested help from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to deal with one of the most powerful storms to make landfall on American soil since 1935.

The first help to the islands came from the TETRIS program, a partnership between CNMI, FEMA and the Department of Defense that provided temporary housing solutions through military grade tents

Continued on page 9





For a full lineup of events, go to: www.nyac.com/conferencecalendar.

9/28 *Safe Sanctuaries: Train the Trainer*

This 10 a.m.–1 p.m. workshop at the United Methodist Church of Shrub Oak, N.Y., is directed toward the person(s) responsible for training church staff and volunteers in the church's Safe Sanctuaries policy. Topics will include reviewing and editing the policy, cyber safety, and vulnerable adults. Participants will leave with tools to help facilitate training at their home church. To register or for more information, email childrensministry@nyac-umc.com.

9/28 *"Are You a Ready Church?"*

The New York Conference Missions office is offering a series of workshops around the theme, "Are you a Ready Church?" The role of the church in disaster preparedness and response is critical to the well-being not only of its members but to the communities in which they serve. The workshops will be offered at:

- **September 28:** Prospect UMC, Bristol, Conn. Register [here](#).
- **October 19:** St James UMC, Kingston, N.Y. Register [here](#).
- **November 2:** First Church Baldwin, Baldwin, N.Y. Register [here](#).

Depending on the location, the workshops may include: Connecting Neighbors, early response team basic and re-certification, disaster emotional and spiritual care, basic tool use and safety, team leader training, CPR/AED, and Civilian Emergency Response Team. For additional questions or information, email Tom Vencuss at the NYAC Missions office.

10/11–13 *"Hatch-a-Thon"*

What new ministries to engage youth and young adults might be conceived during this three-day event? How can we imagine the world with the kind of imagination that God would want us to have? The NYAC, in conjunction with Ministry Incubators, invites all churches to put together a team of five to attend this event to be held at Asbury Crestwood UMC in Tuckahoe, N.Y. Each team will create at least one new ministry idea for their church or community, and then pitch the plan to receive ministry grants ranging from \$500 to \$7500. Check the NYAC events page for additional information, lodging details, and to [register online](#).

10/26 *UMM Annual Retreat*

"Hearts on Fire for God II" runs from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Memorial UMC in White Plains. \$25 donation is requested. Rev. John Simmons Jr. and Rev. Matt Curry will be guest speakers. [Register](#) online.

10/31–11/2 *CrossRoads Anti-Racism Training*

This three-day event at the Center at Mariandale in Ossining, N.Y., provides training for both clergy and lay leaders on the church, district and conference levels to address the on-going challenge of racism. It is sponsored by the Conference Commission on Religion and Race and is open to NYAC members, United Methodists from other conferences, and persons not affiliated with the UMC. Lodging and meals will be provided. Check the [event details](#) to register and determine if you are required to complete this training.

11/9 *Faith, Activity, Nutrition Program*



The Abundant Health Ministry is sponsoring this event for those interested in implementing health and wellness programs in the local church. The goal of FAN—increase health-related awareness and activity among people of all ages—is now more important than ever. The event is from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at the New York Conference Center in White Plains. Registration is \$25; a light breakfast and lunch will be served. For more information, email Wendy Vencuss, or call her at 860-324-1429.

11/16 *Laity Convocation*

Guest speaker Dr. Jacqui King from Discipleship Ministries will explore what it means to "lead courageously." The 8 a.m.–3:30 p.m. event at the Tarrytown House Estate in Tarrytown, N.Y., will include worship, fellowship and communion. Cost is \$30. Register on the [NYAC website](#) by November 8.

Vision Deadlines for 2019

The Vision is a monthly online publication of the New York Conference. Deadlines are always the first Friday of the month, with posting to the web site about 10 days later. The deadlines for 2019 are September 6, October 4, November 1, and December 6. Please send any stories, photos, ideas, or questions directly to vision@nyac.com.

The News of the New York Conference of the United Methodist Church

Bishop: Thomas J. Bickerton
 Communications Director: **Lisa Isom**
 Editor: **Joanne Utley**

New York Conference of The United Methodist Church
 20 Soundview Avenue, White Plains, NY 10606
 Phone (888) 696-6922
 Find us on Facebook:
[New York Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church](#)
 And on Twitter: [@nyacumc](#)
 Website: www.nyac.com
 Vision e-mail: vision@nyac.com

Conn. Church Hopes to be Home by Christmas

Continued from page 1

who has led the church for four years. "This lot was the right size . . . it has better demographics than the old church area."

She said that there are a number of single parent families nearby, and there are plans for 140 apartment units in a mixed residential and retail project. The site is also in close proximity to the middle and high schools.

"God has given us this site," Marks said.

Ironically, the site has connections to the family of Debbie Camp, a member of the trustees and the church council chair. Her great-grandfather had owned and farmed the property and his old barn still sits atop the ridge behind the construction zone. The barn will be coming down eventually, Marks said, with the intention to repurpose some of the wood in the new building.

The sale of the old church and some smart investing gave the church \$1 million for the new build. The 2.8 acres of land were bought for \$250,00 and the cost of the church will be in the high sixes, according to Pastor Marks. One sticking point has been the town's insistence that the church pay taxes on the property until it becomes a permanent house of worship. That is costing about \$10,000 a year.

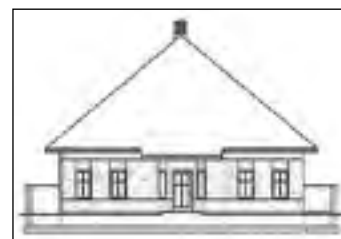
The structure has been designed as a "foundation church" with the back and two sides built into the hill; only the front elevation is fully exposed, according to Marks. The trustees opted for a roof with a steep pitch that could be lifted to add a second level at a later date. Inside is one large gathering room that will be filled with moveable furniture, and an office, kitchen and classroom.

Marks admitted that the whole process has been a huge learning curve for her.

"I don't know anything about this kind of thing. It's been difficult not knowing what the resources are . . . not knowing what to expect," she said, but



Above, the First UMC of Middletown, Conn., as it appeared on August 25, and below, just 10 days later. Architect's drawing shows a steeply pitched roof.



added that they had been "blessed by a wonderful project manager" and members of the Branford and Wethersfield UMCs that she "borrowed" to be on our building team.

Marks' late husband, David, set a lot of things in motion for the process.

"He got the architect, knew who to pull in as a project manager," Marks said. "He did a lot of the early legwork."

A couple of months after David Marks died in 2018, the congregation was scheduled to hold its first outdoor service at the site on Pentecost Sunday. The sky was overcast and threatening rain, but the congregation wanted to go ahead with the service.

"Then the sun came out, and we knew," Pastor Marks said. "We knew that Dave was there." To honor his contributions, one of his shovels was used in the groundbreaking.

She and Camp both credited Pastor John Blossom in helping to secure the property. (Blossom, who had been leading the East Berlin UMC and Trinity UMC in Meriden, Conn., passed away on September 15 after he became ill while on a trip to South Korea.)

Marks has been amazed by the dedication and perseverance of the congregation who were still grieving their former building when she arrived.

"They are very faithful," she said. "They knew they did not want to join forces with another church.

They wanted to be *the* United Methodist Church in Middletown."

Camp said that one of the biggest impacts on the congregation was the realization that the "church is not a building." After bouncing around from the Elks to church to church, "people are still there and wanting to stay together," she added. The church is also starting to see some generous donations coming from outside the congregation, some of them with promises of matching funds.

"Pastor Barbara is really moving us forward," said Camp, who has been a member of the church for 25 years. "I can't believe that this is happening."

Marks is challenging the congregation to step farther out in faith as they rebuild and start anew.

"We're still trying to figure out how to do mission, but I know we're in a good place to do it," she said.

Outreach A Bonus As Walkers Get More Fit

BY JOANNE S. UTLEY
Editor, *The Vision*

The desire of a few congregation members to get more physically fit over the summer, turned an occasional group of walkers into a daily club at St. Paul's UMC in Middletown, N.Y. As they put the miles in together, the group spent a lot of time talking and getting to know one another and the community. Members of the congregation have been walking together off and on for a couple of years, but the summer provided the opportunity to walk each day, according to the pastor, Rev. Charles Ryu.

Eighteen different people joined in over the course of the season with the daily route selected with the walkers' varying abilities in mind. No one was ever left behind; those who were faster would simply walk a little ahead. Those with strollers, wheelchairs and dogs were welcome to join in.

"We had no set agenda, except to walk," said Meg Ann Baisley, the church worship chair and one of the walking group's instigators.

Members of the church meet each weekday at 7 a.m. for prayer, and the walkers would set off about an hour later. Oftentimes, the conversations were peppered with the thoughts and issues that had been brought up during the prayer group. There were conversations about faithful responses to the news and others about individual and family struggles.

When 82-year-old Middletown native Dave Bechtel came along, the group would all learn about the history of the neighborhoods and buildings on their route.

Baisley was thrilled by the amount of participation, and the fellowship and outreach that occurred.

"I knew these people on committees, but never really had the time to bond," she said.

They also struck up conversations with the people they met while walking—a grieving mother in the cemetery, or a young woman pushing her child in a stroller. One woman, who is not a member of the church, saw a photo on Facebook and showed up to walk with the group.

There were stops to visit a church member recovering from knee surgery and to pick up bread for the free weekly Wednesday night



Above, a few members of the summer walking group at St. Paul's UMC in Middletown, N.Y.: from left, Ziva Tillman and her mom Tawanna Tillman, Bob Baisley, Donna Damico-Zodikoff, Susan Petrosky, David Bechtel, and Meg Ann Baisley holding Rascal. At left, Matt Airall and David Bechtel stroll through a cemetery.

Ryu and Baisley, a teacher who returned to school this month, are eager to keep the momentum going.

"We are evolving . . . changing focus a bit," said Baisley. They are planning a special version of a CROP Walk and have invited parents and grandparents to bring their children for a Thursday afternoon walk in Fancher-

Davidge Park. According to Ryu, there will also be some hikes planned. He had previously organized hikes in a variety of locations as an activity that might appeal more to young adults.

Baisley estimates that the summer group walked about 100 miles over the course of 45 days. "We really improved the health of our minds, bodies and spirit," she said.

The group walked through the summer's rain and sunshine. On the days when the rain was too intense, they did laps in the church. On the final jaunt of the summer on August 30, the group walked three miles.

Baisley estimates that the summer group walked about 100 miles over the course of 45 days.

"We really improved the health of our minds, bodies and spirit," she said.

Opportunities for Mission, Disaster Response

BY TOM VENCUSS
Coordinator of Mission
Ministry

Hurricane Dorian: Bahamas Update

UMCOR has been in contact with the leaders of the Methodist Church in the Bahamas. An initial “solidarity grant” has been provided to support the emergency response efforts and UMCOR will continue to work with church leadership. It will be months before volunteer teams will be able to be safely and effectively deployed. The NYAC Missions office has been asked to serve as a clearing house for all Volunteer in Mission teams seeking to serve in the Bahamas. Until that opportunity is available, teams will be referred to other ongoing efforts in Florida, Georgia, Alabama, the Carolinas, and Puerto Rico. For an early UM News report about the hurricane damage, [click here](#).

NYAC “Church to Church”

The missions office is piloting a concept called, “Church to Church,” in which volunteers from one local church would assist another church with repairs and other volunteer-friendly needs. This will allow our current emergency response teams (ERTs) and disaster volunteers some local hands-on work, provide for new volunteer opportunities, and offer cross-conference connections. The first project was at First Spanish UMC in Manhattan on September 13-14 for painting, carpentry, flooring, and minor masonry and electric work. Dates at other churches will be forthcoming.

Fall Disaster Response Forums

September is National Preparedness Month, a designated time to promote family and community disaster and emergency planning now and throughout the year. With that in mind, three disaster response forums—with the theme, “Are you a Ready Church?”



have been scheduled:

September 28: Prospect UMC, Bristol, Conn.

October 19: St. James UMC, Kingston, N.Y.

November 2: First UMC, Baldwin, N.Y.

Workshops will include ERT training (basic and recertification), disaster care teams, team leader training, CPR/first aid, Connecting Neighbors, and others depending upon the location. For more information and the online registration forms, [click here](#).

The role of the church in disaster preparedness and response is critical to the well-being not only of its members but to the communities in which they serve.

Puerto Rico Update

The Methodist Church of Puerto Rico will recognize the second anniversary of Hurricane Maria on September 20. Tens of thousands of survivors remain in homes requiring permanent repairs. Tom and Wendy Vencuss have been invited to attend the services.

Additional NYAC teams are scheduled for:

September 25–October 2:

Poughkeepsie UMC, N.Y.

October 17–24: Connecticut District-based team

Team leaders are needed for future teams. Individual volunteer cost is \$650, which includes airfare. Financial assistance is available to qualified and experienced team leaders. Contact the [missions office](#) for more information.

Developing an Ecuador Task Force

The New York Conference has had a long and strong mission connection with Ecuador. Following the visit of the Youth Ambassadors this summer, Bishop Silvio Cevallos and Sara Flores, General Board of Global Ministries missionary, requested that New York consider re-establishing that connection. If you are interested in exploring future possibilities for the conference and the Methodist Church of Ecuador, contact the [missions office](#).

YAM Leadership Team

[Youth Ambassadors](#) (YAMs) is one of our strongest conference youth missions. Most recently we



First Spanish UMC in Manhattan got some TLC during the “Church to Church” project; at left, Rev. Bill Shillady adds to the dumpster, above, Pastor Dorlimar Lebrón Malavé turns the walls blue.

have relied upon individuals to assist in the development of the program. But now we would like to form a YAM leadership team of adult and youth who will further develop the mission, not only planning future trips, but other YAM-related activities throughout the year. This would include both former and future YAMs. We would like to identify one person from each district. For more information, contact the [missions office](#).

Are you in a mission church?

While we have a formal process for engaging local churches in mission, there are a number of churches that send out mission teams to international or disaster response sites apart from the conference. It is important that we know about these efforts—both for liability and reporting issues, and to understand the full breadth of the work of NYAC churches. If you have deployed teams, let the missions office know.

In a short time, we will also be collating information about the local missions in which our churches engage.

Bishop's Memo Sets Course for Fall Season

September 6, 2019

Dear Friends & Colleagues,

Grace and Peace to each of you! As I write the summer is winding down and we are beginning to set our sights on the work that lies ahead of us this fall season. As a result, there are several items to bring to your attention.

Hurricane Disaster Response

I have written a [letter](#) as the chairperson of UMCOR making a special appeal for offerings in response to the devastation caused during this hurricane season. Please be sure to have this letter brought to the attention of your congregation, hopefully this Sunday or shortly thereafter, and consider receiving a special offering for the work urgently needed by our United Methodist Committee on Relief.

In addition, I want you to know that I have corresponded with the Theophilus N. Rolle, the bishop of the Bahamas, Turks, and Caicos Islands Conference of the Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the Americas expressing concern and pledging our prayerful support for our sisters and brothers in the Bahamas who have suffered catastrophic damage from Hurricane Dorian. I have also met with our Coordinator of Mission Ministry, Tom Vencuss, about the specific responses that could be initiated from the New York Conference. Tom has been working closely with me and the staff at UMCOR to coordinate the denomination's response to this disaster as well. At this point, the best we can do is coordinate financial offerings through UMCOR as an initial response. At the appropriate time, once the organization structures are in place, we will initiate the recruitment of volunteer work teams from NYAC to the Bahamas in order to provide a hands-on response. In the meantime, let us be faithful and earnest in our prayers for anyone anywhere who has been affected by this latest natural disaster.

Apportionment Giving

I want to first of all express my heartfelt thanks to so many of you within our congregations that are maintaining consistent and faithful giving to our 2019 Conference Apportionments. Your commitment is enabling us to carry out our goals and objectives as an Annual Conference in ways that are deeply appreciated.

Still, as we enter the last four months of this year, we find ourselves running 1.5 percent behind our collection rate of last year. I want to urge each of you to work hard to achieve 100 percent giving to your conference apportionments by year's end. We are working hard to be faithful stewards of our resources in the midst of these challenging days and need your committed giving to help us live into the strategic goals related to our Mission, Vision, and Core Values.

Let's work together to make this fall push for apportionment giving a great success for our Annual Conference.

Staff Additions

Directly related to apportionment giving is the exciting news that our



Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton

Conference Staff development goals have been accomplished with the addition of Doris Dalton, our Director of Leadership Development and Intercultural Competency, Lisa Isom, our Director of Communications, and Jenna Johnson, our Youth Coordinator. These three persons are the fulfillment of several of the goals identified as a part of strategic plan of the Annual Conference that are a direct result of our Mission, Vision, and Core Value work.

Doris, Lisa, and Jenna all have specific portfolios that we believe will help us go to the next level in leadership development, intercultural competency, communications, and youth work. These are areas of significant need throughout our Annual Conference and these staff additions will center specifically on how to improve our ministry in these areas.

I urge you to pray specifically for Doris, Lisa, and Jenna as their work unfolds in our midst and invite them into conversations with you in ways that would be helpful in your particular local church ministry.

Cooperative Parish Conversations

This week I, along with Matt Curry, Doris Dalton, and David Gilmore, began a robust schedule of meetings in the newly formed Cooperative Parish cluster groups throughout the Annual Conference. This schedule, which extends through mid-December, is designed to give me the opportunity to meet with every pastor and representatives from each local church in our Annual Conference. These gatherings will also provide an opportunity for us to form our new Cooperative Parishes and begin to lay out a framework for leadership development and support among our leaders.

The importance of your participation in these gatherings cannot be underestimated. This is a time for us to engage in deep listening and honest sharing on a more intimate level. There is information that we will be bringing regarding the current state of the church, developments on our future as a denomination, and ways in which to engage in important and meaningful conversations among your people. There is also information that we need to gather as we plan and prepare for the days that lie ahead.

It is my goal to meet with every pastor and local church lay leadership before the end of the year in this format. Please make every effort possible to be present on the date when your Cooperative Parish is scheduled to meet.

Along with this letter, I send along my sincere thoughts and prayers for each of you. I pray that God may continue to bless you with what you need in order to fulfill the calling that God has placed on your heart. Know that you are precious and important to me and that I look forward to the days that lie ahead when we will see each other's faces and unite together in meaningful conversation and discernment.

Please stay well and be blessed.

The Journey Continues, . . .

Peace & Joy,

Thomas J. Bickerton
Resident Bishop

Hatchathon: Cracking Open New Youth Ministries

So often churches voice the desire to reach more youth and young adults, but struggle to find ways to do so. That's where the "Hatchathon" can help.

The New York Conference, in conjunction with Ministry Incubators, has invited all churches to put together a team of five for this October 11–13 event to conceive and plan for new ministries. In other words: How can we imagine the world with the kind of imagination that God would want us to have?

Each team will create at least one new ministry idea for their church or community, and then pitch the plan to receive ministry grants ranging from \$500 to \$7500. One member of the team should be a youth, age 13–18.

During annual conference in June, the gathering heard about the "Hatchathon" from Rev. David Gilmore, and guest speaker, Rev. Dr.



Kenda Creasy Dean, who asked, "Why do it? . . . Big ideas will not save the church, only Jesus Christ can save the church. Only love matters; love makes us inventors. Do it for love."

The event at Asbury Crestwood United Methodist Church in Tuckahoe, N.Y., begins with a Friday night check-in from 5–6 p.m. and ends at approximately 8 p.m. on Sunday after a "Stakeholders' Pledge Banquet and Festival of Dangerous Ideas."

The registration fee is \$500 per team, but each team entered will

receive a minimum ministry grant of \$500, with the top 3 teams receiving grants of \$2,500, \$5,000, and \$7,500.

Special lodging rates have been secured at two nearby hotels for those who prefer not to commute. Several meals and snacks will be provided.

For additional details and to register, go to the conference [events page](#). For questions, contact Carol Merante at 914-615-2228, or via [email](#).

MFSA to Show, Discuss 'From Selma to Stonewall'

The local chapter of the Methodist Federation for Social Action (MFSA) has scheduled a showing of the documentary film, "From Selma to Stonewall," from 3:30 to 6:30 p.m., Sunday, September 29, at Asbury United Methodist in Croton-on-Hudson, N.Y.

The movie touches on the events surrounding the Selma, Ala., march and the uprising at the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village and engages in conversation with contemporary activists to explore the similarities, differences and conflicts between the civil rights and gay rights movements. The film was produced by the Rev. Gil Caldwell, United Methodist pastor and longtime civil rights activist who walked with Dr. King at the 1964 Selma march, and Marilyn Bennett, activist and former executive director of the Reconciling Ministries Network,

A panel discussion will follow the viewing and a meal. Panelists will include:

- Dr. Traci West, professor of ethics and African American studies at Drew Theological Seminary
- Rev. Dr. George McClain, who marched at Selma and was former executive secretary of MFSA
- Jonathan Citron a Methodist from Puerto Rico now living in New York who is active in the Latin American gay rights movement, and
- Gail Douglas-Boykin is retired from the NYPD a leader with Black Methodists for Church Renewal (BMCR) and a deaconess candidate.

Reservations may be made with Marisa Villarreal at 917-880-9893 or via [email](#). For more info, contact Rev. Ed Horne at 203-247-6919 or via [email](#).

CrossRoads Anti-Racism Training Offered

The Conference Commission on Religion and Race is hosting another session of anti-racism training for clergy, conference staff, and many of the laity in leadership positions on the local, district and conference levels. Legislation was passed at the 2018 New York Annual Conference requiring a minimum of 10 hours of training every quadrennium to address the on-going challenge of racism.

The CrossRoads training is also open to United Methodists in other conferences and to those outside the UMC. The event begins at 6 p.m., October 31, and ends at 5 p.m., November 2 at the Center at Mariandale in Ossining, N.Y. Lodging and meals will be provided.

Attendance is free for those affiliated with the New York Conference. CCORR covers the full cost of the training, but a \$250 refundable deposit is required to secure a place and complete the registration. This fee will be

returned to NYAC registrants after training is completed. Registrants who do not attend, or do not cancel within two weeks of the training will forfeit the \$250. Participants must be present throughout the three days to receive credit for the training.

Those from outside the New York Conference are welcome to attend. Fees for those participants are:

- Registrants from another United Methodist conference: \$250. A \$250 deposit is required, but \$100 will be refunded after the training is complete. CCORR leadership is willing to work with participants and their conferences to find funding as needed.
- Registrants not affiliated with the United Methodist Church: \$250.

[Register online](#) through the conference events calendar. For any questions, contact Rev. Sheila Beckford via [email](#).

Retired Clergy: A Neglected Resource?

By **JACOB DHARMARAJ, Ph.D**

President, Retired Clergy and Spouses Fellowship

A “SWOT” analysis is a basic tool many businesses and not-for-profit organizations use to assess their prevailing programs and make plans to move forward. The acronym stands for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

SWOT enables the user to do an objective assessment of existing resources, helps them become attentive to the task ahead and challenges the user (like a painter) to abandon representation in order to concentrate on canvas, color, and light.

Pundits and experts who have given plentiful suggestions and assistance to move the church forward during changing times over the years. Yet, we could not stem declining worship attendance or diminishing resources. Many initiatives fell by the wayside not because of meticulous plans or poor execution, but often because of one key factor: complexity. Championship boxer Mike Tyson is reported to have said, “Everybody has a plan until they get punched in the mouth.”

For the church, the impact from a punch—bleeding membership, dwindling resources and folding congregations—is complexity in action.

A Case for Greater Engagement

The church today, like many other institutions, is caught between what was and what is emerging. Church is lost when it is taken for granted. We have taken ours for granted for too long. Perhaps, we can revisit the “what” (everything we say, believe and do) of the church. It is at the “what” level that relevant ministry and authentic mission happens.

Church is the family we build together. It is about collective belonging for a common mission. The act of engagement creates belonging for the long haul. Comfortable or otherwise, we all have a fatal fondness for easy answers. Author William Somerset Maugham once observed, “There are three rules for writing a novel. Unfortunately, no one knows what they are.”

In lieu of three rules, I submit just one possible solution for our church during these complex times: In order to fulfill its mission, the church needs to better engage and connect with under-utilized or over-looked resources within its boundaries. Newly retired clergy are one of those resources.

The church is always in missionary relationship with its surrounding complex culture. The church is to redesign and reimagine its mission enterprise and ecclesial practice in the ever-emerging context of mutuality and networking relationships. It succeeds when it forges new relationships with its partners and allies; those who are inside and outside.

During these uncertain times, the church must mine the impressive trove of resources in its own backyard. Our denomination routinely mobilizes its resources to fight epidemics such as malaria and Ebola, and to stand opposed to societal evils and inequality. We can certainly mobilize our power and influence to revitalize the church with a right mix of planning and preparation.

The church cannot miss an opportunity to capitalize on the wisdom, experience, and resources of retired clergy. It is a valuable lesson to learn from the well-greased university alumni model or congenial hospital development office.

“Methuselah Moments”

Hundreds of pastors across the connection retire from active ministry every year at annual conference sessions and with them go several

thousand years of service.

In the New York Conference alone, this year’s retirement class of 22 had served for a total of nearly 730 years. These retirees and their spouses possess critical knowledge and matchless skills acquired over decades of experience during good times and not-so good times. Their careers may come to an end, but their calling to serve God continues. This community is neither sleeping nor slumbering, but may be busy playing golf largely because many have not been recruited for greater tasks. They are gold watches that spend most of their time tucked under a sleeve.

The retirement issue has come to the forefront in recent years as people are living longer. Retirees are busily engaged in other activities for as much as another 30 years. Many congregations have five-generation families whose missional potentialities have not been fully engaged. This is what I would call the church mission’s “Methuselah Moment” (after the longest-living man who is named in the Bible). During this Methuselah moment we need to cultivate and recruit these largely untapped “boomerang workers.”

Every day, 10,000 baby boomers reach the full retirement age of 65—a trend that will continue until 2030, according to Pew Research. About half of the boomers say they feel nine years younger than their chronological age. Some 43 percent say they are robust members of their religion and attend religious services at least once a week.

Only 13 percent say they have no religious affiliation, less than that of younger adults but more than older adults.

The statistics show that we already have a goodly number of people—clergy and laity—inside the church whose gifts and talents have not been fully employed for mission advancement, especially the newly retired. Not all of them can take care of the church property, but they can certainly offer tangible, professional services.

Traditional models or a “spray and pray” method of volunteer recruitment won’t work. The post-modern world giving a place to a quantum age calls for a reformulation of traditional ideas. While working with seniors the challenge is to manage the dynamic and not the pieces. They may not give a vast amount of their time or share their resources. But they will not hesitate to share their expertise for the building of the church or community. Let’s put them to work.

Johnson Named New Youth Ministry Coordinator

Jenna Johnson has joined the New York Conference staff as the youth ministry coordinator. She has already been at work with some of the youth in the conference, serving as the youth director at St. Paul and St. Andrew in Manhattan for the last two years.

A native of Mississippi, Johnson was commissioned as a provisional deacon in that conference in June. A few weeks earlier, she graduated from Union Theological School in Manhattan with a master’s of divinity degree.

Johnson said that she has known since she was a freshman in college that she was called to serve in youth ministry. She is passionate about teaching youth to connect faith to their lives, including opportunities for service.

She hopes to provide a space for young people to “question deeply and still hold onto their faith.”

Johnson can be reached at the conference office [via email](#).

COMMENTARY



Jenna Johnson

“JFON Gave Me My Life Back”

After years of living on the streets without identification, Albert Lattibeaudierre, a Jamaican-American, ventured into a New York Justice for Our Neighbors’ (JFON) clinic. Like many of JFON’s immigrant clients, he was fearful.

“Someone at the shelter gave me a number and address of this church where they help immigrants. I called but when she picked up, I hung up because I knew it wasn’t going to work,” he said. I had nothing to show for myself. Why should they be able to help when no one else could?”

Lattibeaudierre eventually called back and was scheduled for an appointment with JFON’s managing attorney TJ Mills. Mills encouraged Lattibeaudierre to look in a number of unique places for documentation.

“I still didn’t think it would work, and neither did anyone else around me—at the shelter and on the street. But TJ did.” Eventually, Mills used an old school report card to provide proof that Lattibeaudierre had lived in the United States.

Even then, Lattibeaudierre needed to go to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to get the documents he needed.

“I had to go to 26 Federal Plaza in NYC. . . It’s not a friendly place. Immigrants go in there and they don’t come out. And we had an appointment there.

“TJ said it would be fine but I was worried,” Lattibeaudierre



recounted, “I was sure I wasn’t coming out of there.”

Mills had reassured Lattibeaudierre that papers confirming his citizenship would be found. They were. “I had been a US citizen all the time,” Lattibeaudierre said.

“TJ and the people at Justice for Our Neighbors gave me my life back. Since getting my ID, everything has changed,” he said. “I got a job at Fairway in the produce department. I followed the rules at the shelter. With their help, I got my own apartment, here in the Bronx.

“I want to say this: I had been so hopeless for years, but never once did they give up. TJ believed in me when nobody else did.

“Maybe it’s that others don’t dig as deep,” he continued. “TJ reminds me of Columbo, the TV character, how he always stops at the end to ask another question. Columbo solved the cases by paying attention to the details. That’s how it was with TJ and Justice for Our Neighbors.”

Gala Celebrates JFON’s Success

New York Justice for Our Neighbors (NY JFON) will celebrate 20 years of helping low-income immigrants transform their lives by providing free legal services; more than 5,000 immigrant clients have been served. The anniversary gala is from 6:30–9 p.m., October 17, at Christ United Methodist Church in Manhattan. To support JFON’s good work and to purchase tickets or sponsorships for the event, click [here](#).

How an NYAC Team Ended Up on a Saipan Roof

Continued from page 1

and roofing repairs. Engineers from the Army, Navy and Air Force completed more than 560 roofs out of the 3,727 houses with major damage.

But that program ended in February 2019, and the CNMI needed more help. Enter the VALOR program (Voluntary Agencies Leading and Organizing Repair). This is a pilot initiative in which voluntary agencies use building supplies purchased by FEMA to make emergency repairs, returning damaged homes to a safe, habitable and functional living space. The VALOR program is targeting some 600 households that for various reasons will not qualify for any other federal assistance.

Eventually the Western Jurisdiction of the United Methodist Church got involved in the recovery; the island of Saipan is part of the California-Pacific Conference in that jurisdiction. The need for help was so great that the Western Jurisdiction’s UMCOR/UMVIM extended the invitation to other jurisdictions.

One well-placed announcement within an email blast—that was actually read—planted the seed. That seed grew to a small contingent from the New York Conference. But this NYAC group was missing a key component, a construction lead. The VALOR program requires a two-week commitment, and that made it impossible

for many willing contractors to go. But God had a plan for that little NYAC contingent that could. God roused a sole United Methodist—a retired structural engineer from Georgia—to go. It would be the second time Bob Snyder had participated with the VALOR program. The team was now complete and we got the green light to go.

The team of five went with the intent of working on as many roofs as possible, but the weather thought otherwise. A storm grounded our roof aspirations for about a third of the trip. Thankfully, the mission scope also included plumbing and electrical work, doors, windows, and walls. We went to work rebuilding termite ridden walls, replacing windows and doors as well as rewiring a dangerously wired home. Once the weather allowed it, we also replaced the missing half of the roof.

All in all it took:

- 24+ hours of travel per team member
- 450+ volunteer hours
- 2 new 13 x 8-foot walls
- 2 interior doors
- 1 4 x 4-foot window
- 2 2 x 2-foot windows
- 500+ feet of Romex cable
- 13 outlets
- 4 light switches
- 8 junction boxes

- 7 new circuits
- 10 light fixtures
- 1 breaker box ground rod
- 4 trusses
- 22+ 16-foot 2 x 4s
- 8+ half inch 4 x 8-foot plywood panels
- 6 fascia panels
- 5 gable trims
- 8 quarts of roof cement
- 1,000+ square feet of metal roof sheets
- 2,000+ screws and nails
- Innumerable gallons of sweat
- Various government agencies and offices
- 1 homeowner pitching in

To create:

- 1 newly habitable house
- 5 lives changed
- and 5 very tired, but satisfied, United Methodists

The most gratifying aspect of the experience for me was to work alongside the homeowner. As much as he could, he would clock out of his shift at McDonald’s, put on his gloves and work with the team to repair his house. I did not feel like a savior flown in from across the world to help but a brother helping another rebuild his home. Despite a language barrier, we know for certain that for that man and his family it is a new day!

OBITUARIES

Rev. John Blossom

The Reverend John Blossom died on September 15, 2019.

Blossom was in South Korea with a group of clergy and district superintendents from the New York Conference when he became ill and was taken to the hospital.

He was commissioned as a provisional elder in June 2019 and was appointed to East Berlin UMC and Trinity UMC in South Meriden, in the Connecticut District.

Blossom is survived by his wife, June-Ann, and son, Christopher.

Funeral arrangements are not yet known.

Diann Marcia Franson

Diann Marcia Franson, 75, died September 9, 2019, at her home in Lime Rock, Conn., after a long struggle with multiple myeloma. She was born July 20, 1944.

She was the wife of the Reverend Carl Franson, a retired elder who is serving East Chatham and Chatham UM churches in the Catskill Hudson District. Prior to his retirement, he served churches in Pleasant Valley and Sharon, Conn., and churches in the Troy Conference.

Franson had been involved in several programs in El Salvador, Bolivia, and most recently in Guatemala where she helped underprivileged families gain the tools to make a career, get an education, and improve health and living conditions.

She was an accomplished seamstress who created many colorful quilts and church banners. She also loved to create unique farm-to-table dishes in the kitchen.

In addition to her husband, Franson is survived by her children, Cory McCrory (John, Jema, Ivy, Bevan, Aidan, Rory); Troy Shooter (Jennifer, Kylie, Preston); Liv Franson (Esperanza, Hannah, Olivia); Paxton Franson, and Eric Franson (Asa); and by her siblings, Carolee Bell, Rick Bell, and Jeffrey Van Slyke. She was preceded in death by her parents, Edith and Richard Bell, and a grandson, Cruz Quiroz.

A funeral service was held September 14 at Sharon UMC, with Pastor Margaret Laemmel officiating.

Memorial donations may be made to her Guatemala outreach with a check made out to Carl Franson and mailed to 417 Lime Rock Road, Lakeville, CT 06039, or through PayPal to Livfranson@gmail.com, with a note for Guatemala.

Pre-GC2020 Briefing Scheduled

United Methodist News will host a pre-General Conference news briefing on January 23–24, 2020 at the Omni Hotel in Nashville.

The briefing—in preparation for the 2020 General Conference—aims to help delegates, communicators, agency and annual conference staff and other interested parties prepare for the denomination's legislative body when it meets in Minneapolis, May 5–15.

A reception is planned for 7 p.m., January 22 to allow attendees to get to know others who will be at General Conference. The following two days will provide opportunities to learn about key topics and legislation, what to expect in Minneapolis and much more.

Delegates and communicators are invited to participate in breakout sessions and networking events are scheduled for the evening. An exhibit fair will showcase resources available from United Methodist agencies and partners.

[Register online](#) for \$199 before Oct. 31 and \$249 thereafter. Guests at the Omni Nashville Hotel will receive a \$100 rebate toward lodging costs.

Email questions about the briefing to PreGC2020@umcom.org.

Terrence L. "Terry" Smith

Terrence L. "Terry" Smith, 74, of Cornwall, Pa., died on August 22, 2019, at Hershey Medical Center after a brief struggle with pancreatic cancer. She was the widow of the Reverend Gene M. Smith.

She was born in River Falls, Wisc., on October 20, 1944, the daughter of Donald D. and Betty Jane (Moss) Chapin. She graduated from River Falls High School and attended the University of Wisconsin.

Rev. Smith served the following churches in the Catskill Hudson District: Kenoza Lake, Fosterdale, and Jeffersonville; Milton and Marlboro; and Monticello. He was elected conference secretary in 2004, and was serving at Monticello UMC and as conference secretary at the time of his death in May 2007.

Smith was a member of the United Methodist Women, serving her district as well as working within the conference and attending a number of national assemblies. Smith, a master cross stitcher, served as president of the local chapter of the Embroiderer's Guild of America for several years.

After her husband died, Smith moved to Modena and joined New Paltz UMC, where she served on the worship committee. Smith could be found greeting visitors on Sunday mornings, working in the church kitchen or dining room, teaching children to make blankets for the Children's Home, or setting up a sewing marathon to make pillowcases for hospitalized children.

She is survived by a son, Scott M. Smith of Middletown, N.Y.; grandchildren, Terriann Smith, Scott Patrick Smith and Connor Martin Smith; and a brother, Daniel D. Chapin of Berea, Ky. She was preceded in death by a daughter, Heidi Chapin Smith.

Services will be at the convenience of the family. Memorial donations may be made to the [Cornwall Manor Benevolent Fund](#), 1 Boyd Street, Cornwall, PA 17016, or to [New Paltz UMC Organ Fund](#), 1 Grove Street, New Paltz, NY 12561.



Celebrate Hispanic Heritage

Hispanic Heritage Month, an official celebration of people whose ancestry can be traced back to Spain, Mexico, Central and South America and the Caribbean, is September 15–October 15.

Hispanic Heritage Month pays tribute to generations of Hispanic/Latinx and their contributions to the church, community and society.

What began as a weeklong festival in 1968 expanded to a four-week celebration 20 years later. It starts in the middle of the month, as opposed to the end, because September 15 marks the independence days of five Latin America countries: Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. Mexico, Chile, and Belize follow shortly after on September 16, 18 and 21. Find resources for your church, including bulletin inserts and social media images, on the [UM Communications website](#).