

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

THE VISION



December 2019

After a Fire, Feeling the Love Of Community, Connection

BY JOANNE S. UTLEY
Editor, *The Vision*

After a fire destroyed the East Branch/ Harvard United Methodist Church, the local fire department immediately offered their meeting room for Sunday worship. That first Sunday, 22 people gathered—some members of the congregation and some folks from the community. The firefighters' offer would be just one of many gestures of comfort and help for the congregation in this close-knit community in Delaware County.

One of the calls that Pastor Dora Janeway Odarenko got in the first few days came from Mark Barth, who with his wife, Jannette, owns the building that was home to the Harvard UMC when it merged with East Branch in 1996.

"We immediately wanted to offer it to them until they decided what they were going to do," said Barth, who had attended a few services at the Harvard church while using his vacation home nearby. "We thought it would be a little easier to go to a place they were used to . . . because some had gone to the little church in the past."

Odarenko agreed that the use of the Harvard building has allowed real healing to begin for the congregation, especially for some wounds that have lingered since the time of the merger.

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PHOTOS BY ROLLAND SMITH

Young adults and teens serve guests at St. Mark's UMC community Thanksgiving celebration; below, a perfect purple pumpkin at the "Holy-ween" party.


Young Adults Re-energize St. Mark's

BY JOANNE S. UTLEY
Editor, *The Vision*

It's been a busy fall for the young adult ministry at St. Mark's United Methodist Church in Brooklyn.

In October, the group of about 12 organized the church's "Holy-ween" party for the community. In November, they volunteered to take on the church's Thanksgiving celebration for the community. Before the end of December, the group will have also facilitated the "Holly Jolly" children's Christmas party for the

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WISHING YOU A BLESSED CHRISTMAS

I am bringing you good news of great joy for all people; to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. – Luke 2:10-11



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

12/24-25 Christmas Closing

The conference center in White Plains will be closed for the holiday.

1/1 New Year's Closing

The conference center in White Plains will be closed for the day.

1/18 Writing Safe Sanctuaries Policy

This workshop is for congregations who do not have a written Safe Sanctuaries Policy or need a refresher on editing their policy. A core team of 4–5 will be prepared to work with the congregation to write a policy, as well as providing information on how to train trustees, teachers, parents, and pastors on implementing that policy. The free workshops are from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on the following dates:

- **January 18:** Bullville UMC, 2857 Route 17K, Bullville, N.Y. Register by January 12 by emailing [Cassandra Negri](mailto:Cassandra.Negri). Snow date is January 25.
- **February 15:** New York Conference Center, 20 Soundview Ave., White Plains, N.Y. Register by February 9 by emailing [Cassandra Negri](mailto:Cassandra.Negri).

1/21 Wesleyan Justice Train the Trainer

Those trained as part of a new conference Board of Church and Society initiative will meet with local churches and their leadership to discuss social justice principles, Wesleyan theology, and ways to implement justice ministries in their communities. Those interested in becoming trainers for “Wesleyan Justice: Our Heritage, Our Future” may [register online](#) for a session from 6 to 9 p.m., January 21 at the conference center in White Plains, N.Y. The training is free; dinner will be provided. For any questions, or to schedule a trainer to meet with your congregation or leadership team, [email Erika Panzarino](mailto:Erika.Panzarino), CBCS program coordinator.

1/27 Immigrant Accompaniment Training

The New Sanctuary Coalition (NSC) accompaniment program recruits and trains volunteers to accompany people facing deportation to their immigration hearings and ICE check-ins. This provides moral support to the person facing deportation and enables volunteers to hold immigration authorities accountable. Training is offered from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m., January 27, 2020, at Tremont UMC, 1951 Washington Avenue, Bronx. For more info or to register, [click here](#).

2/3 Facilitating Dialogue Across Difference

Join Rev. Matt Curry and Rev. Doris Dalton via a ZOOM conference call to discuss how to lead dialogues across difference. [Register online](#) for the 1 to 2:30 p.m. session.

2/11–13 Bishop's Convocation

Join in conversations with Bishop Thomas Bickerton, workshops on clergy coaching with Val Hastings and fearless dialogs with Greg Ellison. Plenty of fellowship, recreation and relaxation, too, at The Kartrite Resort & Indoor Waterpark in Monticello, N.Y. [Register online](#) by February 2 to guarantee room availability. Early-bird discount available to those who pay in full by January 15, 2020.

4/24–26 2020 Youth Retreat

Quinipet Retreat and Conference Center on Shelter Island, N.Y., will host youth from around the conference for “Converge,” a weekend of worship, workshops, and plenty of good food. Early-bird registration is \$110 and includes housing, programming, a T-shirt, meals on Saturday and breakfast on Sunday. Cost is \$120 after February 28. [Additional details](#) will be available on the NYAC calendar. Questions? Contact Dana Sarikaya by email at Dudkewic81@gmail.com.

5/5–15 2020 General Conference



The quadrennial gathering of United Methodists from around the world will take place at the Minneapolis Convention Center in Minneapolis, Minn. The theme for the gathering is “... and know that I am God” from Psalm 46. <https://gc2020welcome.org/>

6/11–14 New York Annual Conference

Laitly and clergy will gather at Hofstra University to do the work of the conference, and to celebrate its ministries and mission. The gathering will begin on Thursday afternoon and conclude Sunday afternoon.

Vision Deadlines for 2020

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 2020 are January 3, February 7, March 6, April 3, May 1, June 5, July 3, August 7, September 4, October 2, November 6, and December 4. Please send any stories, photos, ideas, or questions directly to vision@nyac.com.

 <p>The Vision</p> <p>The News of the New York Conference of the United Methodist Church</p>	
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King: Balance in All Things Key to Living One's Faith

BY JOANNE S. UTLEY

Editor, *The Vision*

"God is calling us to mature in our faith," Rev. Dr. Jacqui King told those gathered for the recent Laity Convocation. "Leading takes knowledge, boldness and grace. Holy boldness is not optional in small churches."

King, a UMC elder from the Texas Conference who is director of U.S. connectional relationships for Discipleship Ministries, spoke to 165 laity at the Tarrytown House Estate in Tarrytown, N.Y. In a presentation flooded with humor and storytelling, King provided guidelines for a personal "soul reset" and ways to "lead courageously." She referenced the book, "Soul Reset" by Discipleship Ministries General Secretary Junius Dotson, which chronicles his journey from a breakdown to wholeness.

King called for the laity to develop a balance of work, rest, play, worship, exercise, and eating well that would keep their souls healthy and ready to do the work of the church in the world.

She spoke of the spiritual practice of boldness that she has taken up as a part of her daily life—offering prayer to perfect strangers wherever she might be.

"I asked a waitress, 'How can I pray for you?' And she said she'd never been asked that question before. I prayed and she got teary because she realized she didn't know that she needed exactly what we prayed for," King said.

"God gave me a reset, part of my reset is to be bold, courageous and mighty in the name of Christ," she added. "My mother wanted me to be a quiet girl. I haven't gotten there yet."

At King's urging, the laity offered up a litany of ways that they might begin a "soul reset" that very day:

- Admit that you are stuck.
- Admit that you are human.
- Admit that you can't be all things to everybody. It's okay to say no. Don't be



Rev. Dr. Jacqui King stresses the importance of self-care for church leaders; below, the choir offers a song of praise during worship.



- ashamed of asking for help.
- Effective self-care.
- Learn how to listen.
- Admit you are overwhelmed and need to reorganize.
- Always look for the positive in every negative situation.

And then she asked for a list of practices or attitudes that need to be "unlearned" in order to make room for personal and congregational growth:

- Relearn imbedded theology.
- Old ways of doing.
- We are not "junior" Jesus.
- Selfishness: It's not about us.
- Cliques in the church.
- That God thinks like us.
- That there's only one view.
- Resistance to change.
- Fear of leading.

King reminded the gathering that a "soul reset" is a continual journey.

"You don't just don't just hit the button once," she said with a laugh, before adding some other bits of advice:

- Put self-care in your appointment schedule to stay consistent. Even the prophet Elijah burned out. We need rest to hear God

clearly. We see the big picture when we rest and are able to take a step back.

- Rest needs to be a living practice to "rest in God." Unspeakable joy should bring up a pause in your soul.
- Don't allow self-care to separate you from socialization or community.
- Remember that God is in charge of all aspects of life: faith, family, fellowship, finances.
- Be smooth, comfortable in who you are. Find your purpose. Use what you have. Stay out of other people's lanes.
- Remember the word BUSY means "bound under Satan's yoke. Too busy? I'm too busy. Satan only has an agenda of death."

One of the greatest impediments to reclaiming discipleship in the church, according to King is the lack of a growth plan or a grief plan. Growth

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The chapel at St. Paul's Methodist Church in Freeport sustained significant damage.

NYAC Called on to Assist in Bahamas Relief Effort

Five members of the New York Conference travelled to the Bahamas recently at the invitation of Bishop Theophilus Rolle and President L. Carla Culmer, leaders of the two Methodist denominations on the island nation.

Rev. Wesley Daniel, Rev. Noel Chin, and Gillian Prince, from the NYAC Caribbean Mission Partnership, and Tom and Wendy Vencuss from the missions office met with church leadership, visited areas affected by Hurricane Dorian, and discussed plans in support of long-term recovery efforts. The NYAC team was joined by two members of the Florida Conference, and all were hosted by Rev. Stephanie Gottschalk, former Western Pennsylvania UMVIM coordinator and now director of the Bahamas Methodist Habitat and disaster response coordinator. The team spent a little more than 72 hours on the ground, visiting areas of Nassau, Grand Bahama, and Abaco.

While much of the Caribbean and eventually parts of the eastern U.S. seaboard were affected by Hurricane Dorian, Abaco took the brunt of the category 5 winds and 20-foot-plus storm surge. The hurricane then stalled, producing destructive flooding. In the Bahamas alone, thousands of

homes were destroyed or damaged, more than 70 lives were lost, and more than 300 remain missing.

Immediately after the storm, the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) provided solidarity grants to each church and to the Bahamas Methodist Habitat to support initial response efforts. These funds were used to provide emergency food, water, shelter, and other services to survivors and affected communities. Each organization is now moving into the relief phase of the recovery.

Part of the intent of the visit was to discuss possible NYAC support for both short- and long-term recovery efforts. In conversation with church leaders, the following needs were identified: disaster response training, disaster emotional and spiritual care training, volunteer response teams, a clergy respite program, and direct financial support.

The Caribbean Mission Partnership and the NYAC Missions office will continue to work with Bahamas leadership and the NYAC Cabinet to develop a future plan of action.

More information and reports from other team members will be forthcoming. Those interested in leading, or participating on, a team to the Bahamas should contact Tom Vencuss by [email](mailto:tom.vencuss@nyac.org).



Members of the NYAC team met with Methodist Church Bishop Theophilus Rolle, above center; storm debris lines a street in Hope Town on Abaco.



UMC Launches Major Asylum Initiative with JFON

UMCOR | The United Methodist Committee on Relief has approved a three-year, \$1.8 million pilot project to provide wrap-around services for asylum seekers in New York, Houston, and Miami. Partnering with Church World Service (CWS) and National Justice For Our Neighbors (NJFON), the initiative will provide both resettlement support and legal assistance.

“Bringing these two long-standing partners together will provide a complete package of services for asylum seekers,” said Rev. Jack Amick, director of Global Migration, UMCOR. NJFON, the UMC network of organizations that provides free and low-cost legal services to immigrants, will provide the legal assistance component for asylum seekers. Help in finding places to live, registering children in school, enrolling in language classes, accessing government programs and other services needed to adjust to a new community will be provided by CWS, which has been resettling refugees in the United States for decades.

Rev. Paul Fleck, executive director of the New York JFON said, “We are very excited about the opportunity to serve even more immigrants who have come from the southern

border fleeing violence and deprivation. We are in the process of interviewing asylum attorney candidates as we speak and, though it’s like finding a unicorn, we have some terrific candidates who have applied.”

Rob Rutland-Brown, executive director of NJFON, said that “this grant will ensure that for some of the most vulnerable asylum seekers fleeing to the U.S., there is still hope for safety here.” The partnership of National Justice For Our Neighbors, Church World Service and UMCOR . . . Together, we are sending a message that migrants deserve access to justice, and just as importantly, that they are welcomed and loved.”

With the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program reduced to a fraction of former levels, the Asylum Pilot Project facilitates a shift for CWS from refugee resettlement to asylum seeker resettlement. The administration has set the refugee ceiling for fiscal year 2020 at 18,000, compared with previous average levels of 95,000.

For NJFON, this grant affords lawyers the opportunity to assist in more of the often time-consuming, but extremely significant, asylum cases. Because CWS and NJFON engage local

churches for support of various types, this program will also challenge churches to get involved in migration locally.

Thomas Kemper, general secretary of the General Board of Global Ministries, noted that “the church cannot stand by and do nothing as refuge in the United States becomes increasingly difficult. Instead, if the government will not be welcoming, the church must rise to its biblical mandate to ‘welcome the stranger.’”

Correction

In the November issue of The Vision, awards given out at the 20th anniversary gala for New York Justice for Our Neighbors (JFON) were misstated. The information should have read:

Rev. James Law, pastor of Chinese UMC in Manhattan, and Rev. Pauline Wardell-Sankoh, former pastor of John Wesley UMC in Brooklyn, each received a founder’s award at the gala. The clinic coordinators for both sites were also honored; Diane Larrier of John Wesley UMC and Sue Lee from Chinese UMC received the Lilia Fernandez/Helen Shum awards for their volunteer service.

The Time is Now: Statistical Reports are Here

BY MARGARET HOWE
Conference Secretary

It is that time of the year! It is time to get your information together for the annual Statistical Tables process. This is the system in which churches report their data from 2019:

Table I: Membership and participation

Table II: Church assets and expenses

Table III: Church income.

The *Book of Discipline* requires pastors to give an accounting of their pastoral ministries to the charge and annual conference. There may be other individuals and/or church committees who collect and provide the data for these tables, but the pastor is ultimately responsible for the accuracy of the data submitted.

The submitted data is needed by the conference and the general church for statistical analysis and information for:

- Decision making about churches and the conference
- Determining the number of delegates to General Conference
- Determining the number of Lay Members to Annual Conference
- Setting apportionments for the church and conference

The Statistical Tables will be available online for approximately six weeks—until midnight on Friday, Jan. 31, 2020.

Certain lines from Table II will be used to determine your church’s 2021 apportionments. Once the data has been submitted there is a review period during which the staff and or the district statisticians will review the data with churches. Preliminary 2021 apportionments will be published by the end of March. Once the final apportionments are published in late June, no adjustments can be made to the data.

This year we will be significantly reviewing Table I—Membership

and Participants. Each year more of this data is taken from the weekly vital signs which all churches should be completing. It is important that your membership numbers be accurate and that you are following the procedures outlined in the Church Membership Records Manual.

The data should not just be copied from the previous year. Your church data for the year just ending (2019) will be unique for that year. The tables reflect and capture very important and specific data. Certain lines may be prefilled from the weekly Vital Signs that churches should be entering. If these appear to be incorrect it may be because you did not complete the year and this data is averaged. Please communicate with me if this is the case. As in the past certain lines are prefilled by the conference finance office, such as apportionment payments, equitable compensation, special Sunday giving, and others. Again, if this data seems incorrect, please communicate that with me.

Login Information

The tables are located at <http://ezra.gcfa.org>. A detailed discussion of the [tables and instructions](#) is available on the conference website.

Each district has a trained statistician available to assist with any questions. Their contact information is available on both the NYAC and the EZRA websites (see links above). If you have trouble reaching your statistician, you may email [Margaret Howe](mailto:Margaret.Howe@umc.org) or [Judy Walters](mailto:Judy.Walters@umc.org).

Additional training is always available. If you are interested in hands-on training, please contact me. You can bring your laptop and information to the Conference Center in White Plains and we will work with you.

This information is critical to the now and future of our churches, thank you for your efforts.

Discerning Your Congregation's Future? MIND Can Help

BY REV. JEFF WELLS

Since the Special General Conference in February 2019, many congregations in the New York Conference have felt compelled to begin conversations and offer their members the opportunity to ponder the implications of the majority vote for the Traditional Plan. Numerous congregations have felt energized to engage intentionally in efforts toward becoming fully inclusive and welcoming places for LGBTQI+ persons.

Since February, nine NYAC congregations have voted to sign the [Covenant of Conscience](#). Many more are considering signing. This document is part of the Methodists in New Directions "Welcoming Church Program." It lays out a set of commitments that not only declare publicly a congregation is "welcoming," but pledge to put those words into action. Even if your congregation is already a member of the Reconciling Ministries Network, implementing the Covenant of Conscience is an important next step.

Many NYAC congregations have avoided discussions about full inclusion, but these issues have now reached a point of even greater urgency

for every local church. Every congregation will have to decide its direction as the United Methodist Church divides. Pretending to avoid a decision is a decision itself.

For nine years, Methodists in New Directions (MIND) has been assisting congregations in the challenging and rewarding process of discernment around issues of human sexuality and what it means to become a welcoming church. Methodists in New Directions has resources and experienced individuals who are committing their time and energy to help congregations successfully navigate this discernment process.

MIND members are also available to consult about ways to strengthen your congregation's engagement with the pledges in the Covenant of Conscience and the theology and values expressed in the radical inclusivity of Jesus.

To schedule a consultation with MIND, contact Rev. Jeff Wells at 917-604-5227 or [email](#); or Rev. Scott Summerville at 914-980-7176 or [email](#) for information and guidance.

Survey: Four in 10 Seekers Would Visit a UMC

A new survey from United Methodist Communications found willingness to visit a United Methodist Church rose to 42 percent in 2019 among U.S. adults seeking more spirituality in their lives and who are aware of the denomination. That's up from 28 percent in 2017.

About half of those who would be willing to visit a United Methodist church said they would definitely or probably do so in the next three months. Millennials are more likely than GenXers to say they would probably visit. Among those unwilling to visit, about one in 10 say they might attend if invited by someone they knew.

"The takeaway from this study is that The United Methodist Church garners positive perceptions among potential churchgoers despite ongoing conflict within the denomination," said Dan Krause, chief executive of United Methodist Communications. "We believe it's an indicator of the effectiveness of our advertising messages that willingness to visit increased, while our favorability ratings among the seeker population remain stable."

When asked their impression of the denomination, 30 percent of those surveyed responded favorably, while 44 percent had no opinion. That's compared to 28 percent who had a favorable impression in 2017. The sample is among all seekers.

Awareness of The United Methodist Church was widespread among respondents, with 95 percent of seekers having heard of the UMC. Fifty-eight percent recalled having seen the Cross and Flame logo. Awareness of the denomination's tagline—"Open hearts. Open minds. Open doors."—rose significantly to 52 percent, up from 43 percent in 2017. Seventy-seven of all respondents found the tagline personally relevant. Ninety-seven percent of

spiritual seekers with a favorable impression of The United Methodist Church found it appealing.

Additional survey findings include:

- Nearly half of seekers pray daily or weekly.
- The top motivation for considering attending a Christian church is spiritual development, followed closely by a wish to reconnect with one's Christian roots. Others cited a desire for their children to grow spiritually or learn about God or a need for support during a difficult time.
- Among those who are open to visiting a church, the top reasons for considering a specific church were feeling they would fit in or hearing good things about it. More than one in three would visit if personally invited by someone.

- Feeling accepted and welcomed were the top factors that would motivate seekers to continue attending a church they had visited.

The Barna Group fielded this biennial study August 30 through September 11, 2019, using an online panel. The sample of 675 is nationally representative of U.S. adults aged 18–49 screened to make sure they met the definition of a "spiritual seeker" by identifying with at least five of nine statements.

Twenty-one percent of U.S. adults meet the definition of a spiritual seeker. Seekers are more likely to be from suburban areas than rural/small towns, and more likely to reside in the South. Seekers are more likely to be younger than the average population and unmarried (most likely due to their younger age). They are also more likely to be Latino.

Central Conferences Fueling UMC Growth

UM News | The U.S.'s majority status in The United Methodist Church is coming to an end—and may be there already. That's according to projections from the denomination's General Council on Finance and Administration—based on the continuing decline in U.S. membership as much as growth in Africa. According to the agency's forecast, total membership in the central conferences—church regions in Africa, the Philippines and Europe—will exceed that of the U.S. jurisdictions in 2020.

"We may fall below 6 million (U.S.) members by 2025," Kevin Dunn, the agency's director of data services, told the GCFA board at its November meeting.

It's a significant development for a church whose governance and history have both helped

shape and been shaped by the United States, where the denomination got its start in 1784.

On its website, [umdata.org](#), the agency reports the U.S. church had just under 6.7 million members at the end of 2018—down from about 6.8 million in 2017.

The agency's most recent data for the central conferences is from 2017, when the denomination counted more than 6.4 million members in Africa, Europe and the Philippines. That's up from about 5.7 million members in 2015.

The story of the church in the U.S. is not strictly one of decline. Between 2009 and 2018, the number of U.S. members identifying as multiracial increased from 45,955 to 68,029. In the same period, the number of Hispanic United Methodists has grown from 68,088 to 80,968.



Members of the EBHUMC congregation chat following worship on the first week of Advent in a familiar place—the former Harvard UMC.

East Branch/Harvard UMC Looks Forward in Hope

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“We’re not worshipping in a strange place,” Odarenko said. “They’re going back home in some ways . . . we may have lost one repository, but now we’re able to relive our history through another space.”

The Barths had kept much of the church fittings in place, using the space for an occasional concert, poetry reading, art show, or community gathering. The biggest change was the small kitchen and bathroom that had been added in the rear of the building.

So the Advent season began for EBHUMC with the congregation sitting in familiar wooden pews with the sunlight streaming through the stained glass windows. Extended times of fellowship have followed each service as the congregation lingers longer to care for one another. The church has borrowed UM hymnals from their sister church, Colchester Community in Downsville, where Odarenko also serves as pastor. They will open the doors there on Christmas Eve, too, after signing a six-month lease with a token annual rent of \$1.

Odarenko said she has been amazed by all the emails, calls, cards and “mustard seed” donations that the church has received. She’s also heard from other churches that have lost their structures to fire.

One of those calls came from a member of the Milford UMC in Milford, N.Y., a church the Upper New York Conference which burned down in March 2017. Lola Rathbone had seen photos of the East Branch fire and knew that her

experience at her own church might help the little country church 55 miles to the south. She had served as chair of the Milford building committee and contacted Odarenko to offer her support and knowledge about the best way to move forward after the fire. She told Odarenko not to let the church “forget that they are people of God.”

Rathbone credited her church’s ability to rebuild and grow the congregation to the taskforce’s commitment to gather together for Bible study. Odarenko said she plans to use the same book, “Stepping in the Stream: Learning How to Relate to the Will of God,” by Beth M. Crissman, with her own congregation.

Kevin Keesler a long-time church member, said that the strong community support has really lifted the spirits of the congregation.

“Everyone’s so willing to help out,” he said. “You have people come up to ask how you’re doing when they haven’t heard anything from you lately . . . We know we’re not in this alone. I really believe that we’re going to be okay.”

The only other church in the hamlet, East



The cross, pulpit and altar chair rescued from the flames; Pastor Dora Odarenko, center, and longtime congregation members Joanne and Kevin Keesler stand by as firefighters battle the blaze, which has been blamed on an electrical fault.

Branch Community Church, immediately offered space in their community center for the food pantry that Keesler had been running out of the EBHUMC. With donations from the community and some canned food left unharmed in the fire, the pantry was up and running for its weekly distribution.

Odarenko and the EBHUMC trustees have met with Catskill Hudson District Superintendent Karen Monk and a member of the district building committee to pursue next steps. The church has already formed a taskforce of church and community members to work through the process outlined in the

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PHOTOS BY ROLLAND SMITH

The community Thanksgiving party included a full dinner and tables of clothing for those who needed it. Below, the young adults pose in the “Holy-ween” photo booth, and “Pastor Q” dressed for the festivities.



Young Adults Take Up Leadership Challenge

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community. And then, after they've had a few minutes to catch their breath, the group will begin work on activities for 2020.

All of this work of the young adults is a bit of a revival for St. Mark's. When Rev. Morais Quissico began his appointment at the Flatbush neighborhood church in July 2019, there were only two young adults in worship on Sundays.

“We had no young adults and teenagers,” Quissico said. “This really concerned me. The church is where it is today because we have no young adults.

So he met separately with the two women, Brittany Baptiste and Sharell Peters, and asked them to help create a young adults group. Pastor Q, as Quissico is known, named the pair as coordinators of the group and recruited two adults to support their efforts.

Both women had been much more active in

the church as teenagers. Many of the friends they recruited had drifted away from church because of college or jobs or other commitments.

A launch party for the YA ministry was set for August 28 and everyone in the church was asked for their young adult contacts. Thirteen young adults showed up for the food, music and games. The pastor suggested that they all needed to be in church—many had been baptized at St. Mark's or had grown up in the church. By the end of the night, the young adults had agreed to start their own organization at the church.

They began meeting every Friday night, with Quissico usually in attendance. In order to keep them interested, the pastor assigned them to do community outreach for the church.

“I didn't know who would show up,” he said, “but I wanted to keep them coming.”

They started fundraising to support the outreach ministries; their first bake sale raised

about \$400. Some of the young adults who are working also pledged to give \$10–20 a week for the ministries. The church budget is also helping to fund the effort.

During the church's week-long revival in October, the young adults took over the last night, serving as the choir with some offering their testimony about returning to the church.

At the Thanksgiving feast, there were more than 200 people, including participants from nearby Anchor House, the NYAC-affiliated substance use treatment program, according to Quissico.

“The church was very excited about the turnout,” Quissico said. “The congregation said it was the first time they had served so many people.” In addition to a turkey dinner, free clothing, shoes and houseware items were available.

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OBITUARIES

Rev. Robert Pinto

The Reverend Robert Pinto, 86, died November 22, 2019, surrounded by his family.

Rev. Pinto, the youngest of three children, was born August 22, 1933, in Brooklyn to Madeline Letizia Pinto and Joseph Pinto. He lived a life of service, first in New York City government, and then in ministry as a United Methodist pastor. He also served six years with the National Guard, 71st Infantry. Pinto spent nearly a decade working under NYC Mayor John Lindsay, routinely serving as “Night Mayor,” assuming overnight responsibility for running the city.

During this time, he also became a lay speaker and felt a call to ministry. He studied at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C. Among the churches he served in the New York Conference were: Wurtsboro, Mamakating and Rock Hill. He pastored Rock Hill UMC from 1981 until his retirement in 1999. In retirement, he served the Hurleyville and Woodridge churches.

Pinto continued to lead weekly Bible studies at Bethany Village, the senior community where he lived. He baptized babies, renewed wedding vows, occasionally conducted Sunday services, and provided counseling and consolation to fellow residents and the staff.

He was a husband of 26 years to Patricia Marie Pinto, who died in 1986, and to Bonnie Ecker Pinto, for 17 years, who died in 2013. He is survived by a daughter, Barbara (Andrew Heitner) Pinto; a son, Steven (Paige) Pinto; and stepdaughters, Bonnie Lee (Jordan) Medieros, Andrea (Alan) Long Fuller, and Darlene (Yolanda) Polchowski-Long. He is also survived by grandchildren: Alexandra, Olivia and Steven Pinto, Jr.; Ashley Pihl; Brittney (Jonathan) Kolis; Kristen (Matthew) Dickerman; Brian Medieros; and Riley, Phoebe and Nadia Polchowski-Long; as well as numerous nieces and nephews, including Linda (Gary) Finn and Ken (Shirley) Kondratowski. He was pre-deceased by his brother, Sal Pinto, and sister, Theresa Kondratowski.

The family is thankful to the Bethany Village staff who cared for Pinto and gave him purpose, community and comfort.

A funeral service was held November 26 at Rock Hill UMC, Rock Hill, N.Y., with Rev. Walter Haff, Rev. Chris Yount and Rev. Barbara Snyder officiating. Interment followed at the Rock Hill Cemetery.

Donations in Pinto's memory can be made to [Hospice of the Sacred Heart](#).

Rev. Carol M. O'Hanlon

The Reverend Carol M. O'Hanlon, 87, died November 15, 2019.

In the New York Conference, she served Kings Highway UMC in Brooklyn, and the Farmingdale, Bellmore, and Babylon UMCs on Long Island before retiring in 1998. Prior to O'Hanlon's service in the New York, she pastored in the Western North Carolina Conference.

She is survived by her son, Arthur O'Hanlon. A funeral service was held December 3 at the Babylon United Methodist Church, with Rev. Adrienne Brewington officiating. Interment followed the service at the North Babylon Cemetery.



Bishops Offer Scholarships for Ecumenical Gathering

The Council of Bishops is once again offering scholarships to young adult first-time participants to attend the National Workshop on Christian Unity and UMEIT:USA (United Methodist Ecumenical and Interreligious Training in the USA).

The National Workshop (NWCU) and UMEIT:USA occur parallel to each other once a year in a different area of the United States. This year they will be held in Houston on March 23–26, 2020, at Whitehall Hotel.

The NWCU theme will be “Radical Hospitality,” and the gathering will be an excellent opportunity to worship, learn and network with Christians from many other faith traditions.

The UMEIT:USA topic will be “The Basics of Dialogue,” and is the annual training in the U.S. for Methodists engaged in ecumenical and interreligious ministry through the church. It is recommended that Christian unity chairs from all the U.S. annual conferences attend.

The \$300 scholarship will cover registration and a portion of other costs. The [application is online](#) and has a deadline of February 17, 2020. Questions should be directed to Rev. Dr. Jean Hawxhurst, ecumenical staff officer, The Council of Bishops, by [email](#).

New Wespath Website Aims to Improve Use

Wespath Benefits and Investments (Wespath) has debuted two redesigned websites: Wespath Benefits and Investments ([wespath.org](#)) for participants, conferences and plan sponsors and Wespath Institutional Investments ([wespath.com](#)) for institutional clients.

“We heard loud and clear from several audiences that the current site navigation just wasn't working as well as it should,” said Bill Kavanaugh, chief operating officer. “We heard the need to simplify our content, and create a more intuitive user experience.”

The new sites will provide more concise information about Wespath plans and programs. Additionally, the refreshed websites will offer: mobile-compatible designs; more intuitive site navigation; and independent landing pages, rather than one page that redirects to the two separate sites.

As GC2020 Nears, Fewer UMs Keep to the Sidelines

BY HEATHER HAHN
UM News

In the denomination's longtime homosexuality debate, fewer United Methodists are keeping to the sidelines.

The fallout continues after the 2019 special General Conference in St. Louis adopted, by about a 53% vote, the Traditional Plan that tightens enforcement of church bans on same-sex weddings and "self-avowed practicing" gay clergy.

Some United Methodists are taking public stands to support the plan, while others are taking steps toward resistance. The denomination also has seen [a drop in giving](#) following the rancorous special session.

Meanwhile, various United Methodists are working on ways for the church to split into two or more denominations based on perspectives on LGBTQ status.

Still unknown is what impact all this will have when the denomination's multinational lawmaking assembly next meets May 5–15, 2020 in Minneapolis. There is no guarantee the 862 delegates will adopt any plan of separation.

However, one thing is clear: More United Methodists across the theological spectrum are speaking up and strategizing ahead of the 2020 General Conference.

"Although we are a bit too close to unfolding events to make claims for the importance and uniqueness of this moment in the Methodist experience, we can see some parallels in Methodist history," said Samuel Avery-Quinn, an Appalachian State University lecturer who has written about U.S. Methodist history.

As recently as the 2000 General Conference, he pointed out, the denomination had an extremely contentious dispute over LGBTQ inclusion that led to more than 180 arrests and left anger all around.

What's different now, he said, is that GC2019 "put the future shape of the Methodist connection on the table" and tied differences over LGBTQ rights to broader ideological tensions in the church.

In the days and weeks immediately following the special General Conference, a number of United Methodists displayed their rejection of the Traditional Plan in multiple ways, including wrapping church signs in rainbow flags to show solidarity with LGBTQ people.

Since then, Traditional Plan supporters also have publicly expressed their views.

"We support the decision of the 2019 Special

General Conference and disagree with all actions contrary to the 2019 decision," said the National Chinese Caucus of The United Methodist Church in an October 19 statement. Forty-one caucus members voted for the statement and three abstained.

The Wesleyan Covenant Association, which advocated for the Traditional Plan, has endorsed a GC2020 proposal for separation—New Denominations of United Methodism Plan, better known as the Indianapolis Plan. The group has released a draft Book of Doctrines and Discipline for a new traditionalist Methodist denomination.

However, the WCA also said in a statement, that "if a mutually agreeable plan of separation does not occur," it would push to strengthen the Traditional Plan.

The Association of Korean Churches, a part of the larger United Methodist Korean Caucus in the United States announced in September that it would be connectional with the WCA and work towards amicable separation of the denomination.

"Although we are situated in the rapidly changing circumstances, we promise to do our best in firmly protecting the biblical tradition of the Korean-American Church and making a new expression of The United Methodist Church," the group said.

Nexus, another group in the larger Korean-American caucus, offered a different take. The group mainly represents next-generation, English-speaking United Methodists of Korean descent. Board members say they are not of one mind, but they "are united in the commitment to stay as one ministry and one body, whatever may be the outcome of the 2020 General Conference."

However, traditionalists aren't the only ones

calling for a split. The group UM-Forward has submitted legislation that would dissolve The United Methodist Church entirely and form four new denominations in its wake.

About 60 United Methodists from 28 annual conferences attended a December 3–4 Advent Gathering sponsored by UM-Forward and Methodists in New Directions to cast a vision for a fully inclusive and thriving form of Methodism.

"During the season of Advent, as we prepare to celebrate the 'new thing' God did when Jesus Christ was born, I am more convinced than ever that God is getting ready to birth a new, just and inclusive Methodist Church," said the Rev. Martha E. Vink, co-chair of Methodists in New Directions and a member of the New York Conference.

At the same time, a new effort is gearing up to resist the Traditional Plan, which takes effect January 1 in the United States and a year after General Conference 2020 in central conferences—church regions in Africa, Europe and the Philippines. The new rules include greater restrictions against the ordination of "self-avowed practicing" gay clergy and mandatory penalties for clergy found guilty of performing same-sex weddings.

The coalition of groups behind the opposition effort, Resist Harm, have different opinions about separation but stand together in their rejection of the Traditional Plan. The effort's website offers prayers, worship resources as well as other ways to take direct action.

The five bishops in the Western Jurisdiction, which encompasses seven conferences in the westernmost United States, have pledged to provide "a safe harbor" for LGBTQ clergy and those who officiate at same-gender weddings.

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King: Balance in All Things

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often means change, and people need to be given some time to grieve the changes before they can embrace the new.

One way to prepare for growth is to become comfortable telling one's own faith story, King said. And making sure that the church is providing opportunities for those stories to be brought into the light and shared as testimony.

"Stop being okay without being with light," King said. "You have a savior who paid your

light bill. Stop acting like you don't know Jesus. Stop telling God what you're not going to do.

"To live in the light is to recognize that the light is already in you. God will figure out the wattage. God will figure how bright it needs to be, she said.

Dotson's "[Soul Reset: Breakdown, Breakthrough, and the Journey to Wholeness](#)" is a six-week study that can be used personally or in a small group or churchwide.

As GC2020 Nears, Fewer UMs Keep to the Sidelines

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Individual annual conferences are also preparing in their own way.

The Greater New Jersey Conference voted to allow congregations to decide how to include LGBTQ people in ministry while allowing disagreement.

The Norway Annual Conference established a commission to seek a way to fully include LGBTQ individuals and map possible consequences.

Even as reactions continue to GC2019, a small group of U.S. United Methodists representing traditionalist, progressive and centrist organizations is working with Sierra Leone's Bishop John K. Yambasu to reach some

agreement about separation ahead of the coming General Conference.

There are also calls to find ways for the church to stay together despite differences. In late summer, bishops in Africa and the Philippines each released separate statements opposed to the dissolution of the denomination. Filipino United Methodists have submitted legislation to GC2020 that aims to preserve church unity.

Church splits are nothing new for the people called Methodist. The denomination's U.S. forebears experienced some kind of fracturing every few decades throughout the 19th century—most famously dividing over slavery in 1844.

But today's United Methodists have little experience dealing with the full ramifications of denominational breakups, said the historian Avery-Quinn. For much of the 20th century, church leaders worked toward reunification and stronger connection.

"If the church is to remain united, it will depend on the will of the bishops and other denominational leaders to make bold stances on defining a new Methodist connectionism for the 21st century," Avery-Quinn said.

"Whether Methodists can place their shared religious identity and shared heritage above their current political, tribal identities and accept a bipartisan solution remains to be seen."

Young Adults Take Up Leadership Challenge

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The "Holly Jolly" children's Christmas party will include entertainment, games, gifts, and an opportunity to meet Santa.

Quissico has also invited the young adults to create the worship service on the fourth Sunday of the month, starting in January. They will provide the worship leader, choir, scripture readers and ushers, while Quissico preaches. The children and youth of the church are already helping create worship on the third Sunday of each month, which often includes the newly revived dance ministry.

Peters said that it's been gratifying to see how excited the church is about the YA ministry.

"We've gotten lots of compliments," she said. "They're not looking at us as kids. We are growing adults and this has been an opportunity to show them what we can do."

But the older adults have offered more than compliments. They are pitching in to give their time and energies by helping set up events, or cooking and bringing food.

An email blast from Baptiste instigated a donation drive for clothes, shoes, canned goods, and medical supplies following the Hurricane Dorian's deadly pass across the Bahamas. They have been collecting toys for Christmas, too.

Peters said that she now has a renewed sense of devotion to the church. "Pastor Q gave us a sense of belonging," she said. "I wanted to be around



Musical chairs at the "Holy-ween" party in October.

church family—God's people. This has filled a void."

And as what to expect next from the young adults?

"This is only the beginning, watch for us to do more," Baptiste said.

"We'll start planning for 2020 right after Christmas."

For more information about St. Mark's UMC, go to their [website](#), or the church [Facebook page](#).

East Branch/Harvard UMC Looks Forward in Hope

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[Book of Discipline](#) (§ 213) to assess the potential ministry of a local church. They will discern how the needs of the East Branch/Harvard community can best be served by the United Methodist Church. Eventually, the decision whether to rebuild the church will be made by the bishop and the cabinet.

The fire is being blamed on a fault in the electrical system, most likely somewhere in the

narthex. Complete demolition of the structure, which was built in the 1880s, is expected to take place in the next few weeks, although Odarenko said the church is hoping to save one or two of the stained-glass windows, and to repurpose some of the wood that can be salvaged.

Odarenko noted that in so many ways, the fire was providential.

"We were often limited in our ministries because of the building," she said. "We have

been energized by this tragedy . . . like a phoenix rising from the ashes. One of my trustees said, 'Let's build some new memories.'"

(If any churches have pew Bibles, UM hymnals or copies of The Faith We Sing or Worship & Song that could be donated, contact [Odarenko](#) by email. The church is also looking for paraments and other worship supplies.)