

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

# THE VISION



January 2020

## Bickerton Joins Others to Craft Plan Preserving UMC

### FROM LOCAL REPORTING AND UM NEWS REPORTS

New York Conference Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton is among a diverse group of United Methodist Church (UMC) leaders and advocacy group members from around the world who have created a proposal that would preserve the church while allowing traditionalist-minded congregations to form a new denomination.

Details of the proposal called the "[Protocol of Reconciliation & Grace Through Separation](#)," were released January 3 in a nine-page document along with a [press release](#) and a [detailed list of frequently asked questions](#).

"This work has provided a pathway for separation which leaves the current United Methodist Church in place while blessing groups that feel as if they can no longer remain," Bishop Bickerton explained.

"After 47 years of debate over differing theological perspectives, we cannot reconcile our differences without some feeling that there are winners and losers. We want to avoid a repetition of the hurtful manner in which the 2019 Special Session of General Conference unfolded, prevent the dissolution of The United Methodist Church (UMC), and provide a graceful way for other Methodist denominations to emerge."

The 16-member group came together as an outgrowth of a consultation initiated by bishops from Central Conferences located outside the United States. Representatives of traditionalist, centrist and progressive advocacy groups joined with bishops from the United States, Africa, Europe and the Philippines to reach the agreement with the help of high-profile mediator Kenneth Feinberg. Those who signed the proposal have promised to support only the protocol leading up to the 2020 General Conference at the Minneapolis Convention Center.

The protocol expects that a new traditionalist

Continued on page 6



Rebar is cut and tied, above, to reinforce the exterior walls being constructed by an NYAC mission team, below, at a home in Puerto Pico

### NYAC MISSION VOLUNTEERS

## Mission Teams Share Gospel By Presence, Action, Word



Nearly two and a half years after Hurricane Maria hit, an estimated 30,000 homes in Puerto Rico are still in need of repair. Understanding this, the healing and rebuilding in Puerto Rico continues with mission teams from churches throughout the New York Conference (NYAC) and across the denomination.

In October, the Connecticut District sponsored a team of volunteers for a mission project on the island. The Poughkeepsie United Methodist Church also sent volunteers to help rebuild in two communities with the Methodist Church of Puerto Rico and ReHace, their humanitarian and mission outreach organization.

The Connecticut District group and the Poughkeepsie UMC volunteers are but two of

Continued on page 4



For a full lineup of events, go to: [www.nyac.com/conferencecalendar](http://www.nyac.com/conferencecalendar).

### 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).

### 1/20 Conference Office Closed

The NYAC office in White Plains, N.Y., will be closed for the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday.

### 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](#).

### 1/31 Statistical Reports Deadline

Each church must submit its statistical tables for 2019 by midnight. The tables are located at <http://ezra.gcfa.org>. A detailed discussion of the [tables and instructions](#) as well as a list of district statisticians is available on the conference website.

### 2/4 Citizen Preparedness Course

The Bayport UMC on Long Island will host the NY Citizen Preparedness training program that provides the tools and resources to prepare for, and respond to, any type of disaster. Participants will learn to develop a family emergency plan; each family at the 7 p.m. event will receive one preparedness kit. All participants must register in advance at [www.prepare.ny.gov](http://www.prepare.ny.gov).

### 2/11-13 Bishop's Convocation

Join in conversations with Bishop Thomas Bickerton, workshops on clergy coaching with Val Hastings and fearless dialogues 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 21. *See related story on Page 3.*

### 2/17 Conference Office Closed

The NYAC office will be closed for the Presidents' Day holiday.

### 3/25 Pre-Retirement Workshop

More details are to come on this 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. event for clergy at the White Plains conference center. Email [Sally Truglia](mailto:Sally.Truglia) with any questions.

### 4/10 Conference Office Closed

The NYAC office in White Plains, N.Y., will be closed for Good Friday.

### 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](mailto:Dudkewic81@gmail.com).

Continued on page 10



The **Vision**



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](http://www.nyac.com)  
 Vision e-mail: [vision@nyac.com](mailto:vision@nyac.com)

# Bishop Urges Prayer & Action in Wake of Violence

January 2, 2020

## Dear Friends & Colleagues,

Last Tuesday night, Sally and I attended a midnight Christmas Eve Candlelight Service at one of our churches. When we got out of our car, we quickly noticed that this was one of those rare, beautiful nights. There wasn't a hint of a cloud in the sky. Being removed from the lights of the city, we were able to clearly see the stars shining above us. And it was quiet—so very quiet.

Just two blocks from our home is a major interstate. There is always noise that breaks the holy silence of a quiet night. There is always a city light that drowns out the pure beauty of a star lit sky. There is always something, . . .

Last Sunday a gunman entered the West Freeway Church of Christ in White Settlement, Texas and opened fire leaving two men dead. And, last Saturday, a man with a knife burst into the home of a Hassidic rabbi in Monsey, N.Y., stabbing and wounding five people as they were lighting candles for their Hanukkah festival. These are the two most recent in a successive line of violent actions that prohibit the light from shining. They are horrible events that break the silence of a quiet night. They are yet another obstacle that stands in the way of peace being felt in the lives of good, innocent people. There is always something, . . .

Living in a world where events like 9/11 and Sandy Hook are never far from our minds, stories like these should immediately cause us to intercede on behalf of people with prayers they are unable to pray. We can also express a deep concern that conveys that we truly want to understand. And we do want to understand. The video of the shooting in Texas reveals horror and panic on the faces of the parishioners. A *New York Times* article on the stabbings in Monsey tells a story of fear and anxiety on the part of those in attendance. The people in both settings will deal with the anxiety and uncertainty now associated with places that for them, up until this point, were sanctuaries and places of peace. There is always something, . . .

The story of the stabbings at the rabbi's home is somewhat close to our United Methodist family. The intruder, Grafton Thomas, is the son of a long-standing member of the Harriman United Methodist Church, pastored by our own Wendy Paige. Wendy has known this gentleman for years and has visited with him in the hospital and in his home. While it is easy for us to immediately call this just another act of terrorism, Wendy shares a different complexity,



“These tragic events, . . . have shaken our community. Grafton Thomas has a long history of mental illness and hospitalizations.” This should not be seen as an excuse for his actions, but it does cause us to go deeper in our struggle to understand the reasons behind such a terrible act of violence. And it does cause us to pray for a mother, a church, and a community that is struggling to make sense of it all. There is always something, . . .

When we assume there is peace, there is always something that disrupts the calm. When we assume there is silence, there is always a noise that interrupts the solitude. When we are quick to make assumptions about the motives behind someone's actions, there is always something that makes an easy answer far more complicated. There is always something, . . .

In the midst of shootings, stabbings, mental illness, a mother's anguish, and fears now held by people simply seeking a place to celebrate and worship, it seems that we always end up searching for what we can do. We want simple answers. We somehow want to figure it all out. And in the midst of our search, it may seem that simple prayers are not satisfying. So be specific

**Continued on page 10**

## Will You Make a Splash at Bishop's Convocation?

The Bishop's Convocation is moving to a new venue this year and is promising multiple opportunities for both learning and relaxation. With the theme, “Courage, Conversation and Connection,” the three-day event is scheduled for February 11–13 at the Kartrite Resort and Indoor Waterpark in Monticello, N.Y.

The event has been planned to include:

- New ways to bond with fellow clergy, while sharing and reflecting on life and ministry, struggles and triumphs.
- Small setting occasions to connect with Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton.
- Sessions to learn from noted experts and engage on matters of importance to the life of the local church and the denomination.
- A flexible schedule to allow for more time for family and relaxation.
- More time with the conference leadership team to discover how they can help take your church and congregation to the next level.
- Plenty of on-site ways to have fun with your family in a convenient, approachable and family-friendly venue.

The specialized training sessions on leadership development will be led by guest speakers, Rev. Gregory C. Ellison II and Dr. J. Val Hastings.

Ellison an associate professor of pastoral care and counseling at Methodist-affiliated Emory University Candler School of Theology. His teaching draws from his work with [Fearless Dialogues](#), a grassroots community empowerment initiative he co-founded to create unique spaces for young people and community



**Rev. Gregory C. Ellison II**



**Dr. J. Val Hastings**

to have heartfelt conversations on difficult subjects.

His sessions will provide ways to create spaces for unlikely partners to engage in conversations that reveal gifts in other, give value in stories, and work for positive transformation in self and other.

Hastings, a master certified coach, is the founder and president of Coaching4Today'sLeaders and [Coaching4Clergy](#). Hastings hired his first coach while he was serving at a United Methodist Church. He has developed four coach training programs that are accredited by the International Coach Federation.

Hastings' sessions will focus on encouraging clergy to reflect on their own development, expectations, and role as leaders.

The convocation begins at 2 p.m. Tuesday with check-in and fellowship time with Bishop Bickerton; it ends after lunch on Thursday. [Register online](#) at the NYAC website by January 21 for the early-bird rates; register by February 2 to insure a hotel room.

# Mission Teams Share Gospel by Presence, Action, Word

Continued from page 1

the eight teams sent out by the NYAC to assist in Puerto Rico and Florida in 2019; some 70 people comprised those teams. In the last two years, NYAC churches have deployed 15 teams to Puerto Rico, North Carolina and Florida as part of hurricane recovery efforts. Five NYAC volunteers have also recently served in Saipan, and another two in St. Croix.

The NYAC track record of successful mission work prompted the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) to designate the conference as the organizational office for all UMC teams going to Puerto Rico. Across the denomination, 118 teams comprised of 1,310 volunteers served in Puerto Rico in 2019. Already for 2020, there are 65 teams (including one from the NYAC) and 747 volunteers registered to make the journey.

The recent string of earthquakes in Puerto Rico have only increased the need for help on the island nation. ([See accompanying story on Page 5.](#))

## Giving of Time and Hearts

The Connecticut District's mission focus for 2019 was "Rebuild Puerto Rico," a promise taken to heart by a team of nine volunteers who traveled in October to Arecibo, a community on the northern coast of Puerto Rico, about 50 miles west of San Juan.

The Connecticut volunteers split up to cover two worksites. At one site, four volunteers did the ground work needed to install a new roof on a home. The team installed rebar to reinforce the structure, mixed and poured concrete, and completed metal work. The other team of five worked to rebuild a 12 x 24-foot addition on a home where a section had been literally blown away by Hurricane Maria. Their work included framing and constructing interior walls.

Neither crew of volunteers—the third team of volunteers from the Connecticut District to serve in Puerto Rico this year—were able to see the projects through to completion. However, each left knowing that within weeks, two families would finally be able to return to a more "normal" way of life than they have had in years.

"Being on a team such as this, is so much more than simply putting a house back together" said Jill Wilson, Connecticut District Mission chairperson, who has travelled to Puerto Rico with each team.

"It includes opportunities to bond with new friends on the team, work together toward a shared goal, get to know the homeowners and hear their story, work with a local foreman and his crew, share worship with a local Methodist



**Members of the Connecticut District mission team join their Puerto Rico counterparts for a photo during their October trip.**

congregation, experience a different culture, including food, terrain, and hospitality . . . and feel God's hand in every step of the experience."

## Making Love of God Visible

The NYAC has a long and vibrant history of mission work, supporting Volunteer in Mission (VIM) trips both domestically and internationally, in places where the assistance is more than welcomed.

In fact, the NYAC is one of the UMC regional conferences across the United States that has devoted a full-time mission and disaster response coordinator, which shows a tangible commitment to this area of ministry.

The missions office also supports the mission initiatives established as priorities by the conference—currently Mozambique, Haiti, Puerto Rico and the Caribbean Mission Partnership.

Volunteers from churches across the conference are sent to offer a hope that can transform the lives of those in the most difficult situations and where natural disasters have turned life upside down. To prepare volunteers to serve effectively, the missions office regularly offers [training sessions](#).

The NYAC team is currently gearing up to send the first teams for recovery work in the Bahamas this spring.

If you can't serve outside of the United States, the missions office also provides local volunteer opportunities through two programs—"Church to Church" and "Done in A Day"—as a part of the conference's ministry of "care and repair." Funding support is available for both these programs from the missions office.

"Done in A Day" had its beginnings in the

**Continued on page 5**

## 5 Ways to Support Mission & Outreach

One of the keys to vitality in a local congregation and in our denomination is a commitment to, and participation in, hands-on mission.

Mission work is transformational to individuals, churches and communities. Consider the five options below and contact the NYAC Missions Office for information on how to help.

- Sponsor a congregant to serve on a disaster response team.
- Sponsor someone as part of an international mission team.
- Support a youth for an international trip through Youth Ambassadors in Mission (YAM) or for a domestic experience with [UM ARMY](#).
- Host an Abundant Health event at your church to explore how best to minister to the body, mind and spirit of your local community.
- Schedule a mission or disaster response training event or mission talk.

# Mission Opportunities

## Puerto Rico

The NYAC Missions office has been in contact with the Methodist Church of Puerto Rico (MCPR) and UMCOR concerning the recent earthquakes. Tom and Wendy Vencuss have traveled to the island on behalf of UMCOR as part of an advance support team. The missions office will continue to monitor the situation and provide updates, but as most of the earthquake damage has been in areas not directly served by the Maria response effort, volunteer teams are still being deployed.

All team scheduling and volunteer inquiries should be directed to Tymera Jackson, mainland volunteer coordinator, by [email](#) or phone 914-615-2248 at the conference office.

A new team is forming; for March 23 to 30. Mike Butler is the team leader; cost is \$650.

## Bahamas

Five members of the NYAC Missions office and Caribbean Mission Partnership traveled to the Bahamas and met with church and disaster recovery leadership to assess the situation for potential NYAC support. Our point of contact for volunteer deployment will be the Bahamas Methodist Habitat (BMH), working in collaboration with the Methodist Churches in the Bahamas. At this point a priority is repairing two church structures, one on Grand Bahama and one on Abaco, both severely damaged, which will serve as volunteer housing sites.

A formal response volunteer structure is being developed. Most likely, volunteer teams will not be deployed until early spring. All initial volunteers will need to be ERT-certified, in good physical condition, and willing to accept very basic living conditions. Special volunteer skills may also be needed; all team leaders must be experienced. Email [Tom Vencuss](#) for more information.

A small team from the conference will be traveling at the end of January to offer disaster

response training workshops for church and community leaders.

The missions office has provided funds to jump start the volunteer recovery effort. If you would like to donate to this effort, send checks to the New York Conference, 20 Soundview Ave., White Plains, NY 10606, Attn: Fran Collins. Make your check out to the NYAC and include "Bahamas response" in the memo line. All funds will go toward providing direct assistance to affected communities.

## Youth Missions

United Methodist Action Reach-out Mission by Youth (U.M. ARMY) has summer 2020 opportunities for all size youth groups, but especially for small to mid-size groups. Check out all the details at U.M. ARMY [Northeast website](#).

## International Trips

### Haiti: May 2–9

- Focus: Medical/dental team in Furcy, but other volunteers are needed as well. Week will include visits to cultural sites and other community activities.
- Cost: \$1,200
- Email [Wendy Vencuss](#), Mountains of Hope for Haiti, for more information.

### Mozambique: August

(2 weeks to be determined)

- Focus: Visit orphanages in Beira and Cambine to work with students, provide community activities, and some work projects.
- Cost: \$4,500
- Email team leaders, [Jerry and Kay Jones](#), for more information.

### Mozambique: October 12–23

- Focus: Visit orphanages, Nampula UMC, and refugee camp.
- Cost: \$4000
- Email team leader, [Rev. Wayne Lavender](#), for more information.

# Mission Teams Share Gospel

## Continued from page 4

Hurricane Sandy recovery and works with churches to identify local homeowners who may not be able to afford repairs to their homes. Teams are given a specific task that can be completed in one day.

The pilot program for "Church to Church" was at First Spanish UMC/Primera Iglesia Hispana Metodista Unida in East Harlem, where volunteers rallied to paint, lay a new floor,

remove rubbish, and other simple but essential projects. The program pairs workers from the home church with volunteers from other NYAC congregations.

There are many opportunities within the NYAC to put your faith into hands-on action. All it takes is a desire to show the world the God in you by being in service to God's people.

Have a question about mission? Contact [Tom Vencuss via email](#), or call 914-997-1570.

# Grants Available for Ministry With Deaf

The [Deaf and Hard of Hearing Ministries Committee](#) of the General Board of Global Ministries has grants available to provide support and/or consultation for local churches to start a deaf ministry.

Grant requests must be related to one or more of the following purposes with some type of community impact:

- Seed money for beginning or enhancing a ministry with deaf, late-deafened, hard-of-hearing, and/or deafblind people.
- Purchase of equipment or other resources to make activities accessible to deaf and deafblind people.
- Community impact based on the church's context and extended community.
- Hire a deaf or hard-of-hearing individual as staff to support and coordinate the church's deaf ministry.

Applications can be [found here](#) and must be submitted by January 31, 2020. Grants of up to \$5,000 will be awarded. Contact Rev. Leo Yates, Jr. via [email](#) with any questions or ministry ideas.

# Tax on Transportation Benefits Repealed

## BY ROSS WILLIAMS Conference CFO

There's some great news for churches in the spending bill passed and signed December 20, 2019: the tax on nonprofit employee transportation benefits, written into federal law in 2017, was repealed.

This illogical and harmful law forced churches to pay a 21 percent tax on employee benefits: yes, a tax on expenses. If a nonprofit paid for transit passes or employee parking—even on property they owned—they had to pay 21 percent of that amount in taxes. There was a complicated formula involved to compute the tax and many small churches were exempt based upon that calculation.

The new law repeals the tax retroactively. Churches that paid the benefits-related unrelated business income tax (UBIT) for tax year 2018 will be entitled to a refund of the taxes paid, but not the administrative and accounting expenses incurred in calculating it.

The parking tax repeal was championed by the General Council on Finance and Administration (GCEA) in concert with many other religious and secular not-for-profit entities and passed in Congress with bipartisan support.

# Bishop, Other Church Leaders Craft Plan Preserving UMC

Continued from page 1

Methodist denomination will be created. Once formed, the new church would receive \$25 million over the next four years and give up further claim to the UMC's assets. An additional \$2 million would be allocated for potential additional new Methodist denominations that emerge from the UMC.

In acknowledging the historical role of the Methodist movement in systematic racial violence, exploitation and discrimination, the protocol also allocates \$39 million to ensure there is no disruption in supporting ministries for communities historically marginalized by racism.

According to the bishop, this work is still in development. He stresses that "legislation is being prepared for the General Conference delegates to consider and the period of transition will take several years to accomplish if the General Conference embraces this work."

While the work accomplished by the mediation team marks much-needed progress, the bishop acknowledges that it is not accomplished without a sense of sadness and loss.

"The results we anticipate in this work is not without heartbreak. As I have stated throughout the NYAC parish events this fall, we need to be anticipating change taking place within our denomination. We will not look the same as we do now. That reality is closer to us now than ever before," Bickerton said.

"In the midst of the work that is presented today, as well as the conversations that emerge in the days to follow, we need to exercise great care for one another in the midst of our disagreements for the sake of the mission of the church as a whole."

In expectation of a need to personally connect and minister to all NYAC members, the bishop began a series of face-to-face meetings with clergy and laity in every cooperative parish



**United Methodist Mediation Team meeting in Washington, D.C., December 17, 2019. Back row left to right: Rev. Keith Boyette, Rev. Junius Dotson, Bishop Christian Alsted, Bishop John Yambasu, Dr. Randall Miller, Rick Godfrey, Bishop Kenneth Carter, Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton, Bishop Gregory Vaughn Palmer, Rev. Thomas Berlin, and Patricia Miller. Front row left to right: Lawyers Wendy Bloom and Kenneth Feinberg, Jan Lawrence, Bishop Cynthia Fierro Harvey, Bishop LaTrelle Easterling, and Rev. David Meredith.**

within the annual conference, focused on openness about the future and support.

"I pledged in the parish meetings that we would walk through these days together, no matter one's theological preference or desire. This is an extremely important time for us exercise the love of God through the Holy Spirit to enable us to together get through these days of transition."

The bishop says there will be more information in the upcoming days and weeks, adding that he "pledges to continue to be transparent in providing opportunities for conversation and dialogue each step of the way."

In order for the "Protocol" to be implemented, legislation incorporating its terms will have to be presented to the GC2020 and

then be adopted by the delegates there. Such legislation is currently being drafted and will be presented to one or more annual conferences meeting in special session for adoption as a petition to the 2020 gathering. Under ¶507.6 of the *Book of Discipline*, legislation from an annual conference must be adopted by March 20 in order to be considered by the GC2020. Alternatively, such legislation can be scheduled at the discretion of the Committee on Reference or moved as a substitute for a petition already pending before the 2020 General Conference.

A live-stream event on January 13 with members of the mediation team, including Bishop Bickerton, was recorded by UM News and is available for viewing by [clicking here](#).

## UMC Deacon Elected Ulster Co. District Attorney

There's finally a winner in the race for district attorney in Ulster County, N.Y. Rev. Dave Clegg, Clegg, a deacon in the New York Conference, was declared the winner by 78 votes over his Republican opponent, Michael J. Kanavagh.

After the balloting on November 5 was too close to call, the election process went before a judge for litigation and finally to a hand recount by the county Board of Elections. In a Facebook post January 9, Clegg said his win was a "powerful reminder that every vote truly makes a difference.

"We achieved this historic win for criminal justice

reform through people power and faith in a better future. Thank you for your support and for your votes! I look forward to leading Ulster County into a 21st century vision of justice—one that is safer and more just for all."

A civil rights lawyer, Clegg ran as a progressive on a reform platform calling for the use of restorative justice and diversion programs instead of incarceration for nonviolent offenders. He was to be sworn in on January 17.

Clegg, who is appointed to serve the St. James UMC in Kingston, was ordained as a deacon in the United Methodist Church in 2016.



**Rev. Dave Clegg**



Jesse Lee Memorial UMC  
Ridgefield, Conn.



## Telling the Story

Whether in a pageant or a living nativity, churches across the conference shared the good news of Jesus' birth in the days leading up to Christmas. Children portraying Joseph and Mary, above, wait to make their entrance with the Christ child at First UMC in Stamford, Conn.



United Methodist Church of Mt.  
Kisco



Vanderveer Park UMC, Brooklyn



North Shore UMC, Wading River, N.Y.

# Special General Conference Tops News in 2019

BY LINDA BLOOM  
UM News

For the second year in a row, the United Methodist Church's struggle to stay together despite longstanding division over homosexuality was the denomination's top news story of 2019.

This year, however, the focus was on unity efforts by the Commission on a Way Forward and others, culminating in a special called session of General Conference February 23–26 in St. Louis.

Thirty-eight ballots were cast by church communicators and United Methodist News staff for the top five United Methodist news stories in 2019. February's special General Conference had 154 total votes, including 28 first-place votes.

Other stories that made both the 2018 and 2019 top-five list were the United Methodist response to immigrants and asylum-seekers and the church's relief and rebuilding work after natural disasters. Rounding out the "Top 5" this year were voting irregularities related to the special General Conference and a revote on an amendment to the church's constitution.

Here's a more detailed recap of the top stories and related articles:

## #1: GC2019 makes headlines

A special General Conference called to deal with the decades-long division over how to be in ministry with LGBTQ people ended with the 438-384 vote passage of the Traditional Plan. That vote, and the divisiveness on display, drew news coverage around the U.S. and beyond.

The Traditional Plan, which took effect January 1, tightens bans on same-sex weddings and "self-avowed practicing" gay clergy. In April 2019, the Judicial Council found that while some provisions of the plan were still unconstitutional, the rest of the Traditional Plan could stand.

But with the next General Conference just around the corner—May 5–15 at the Minneapolis Convention Center—[alternative plans](#) have been developed and submitted as legislation and debate continues over whether The United Methodist Church will hold together.

Last May and June, U.S. annual conferences elected more delegates who publicly oppose the Traditional Plan than did so during February's special General Conference. Active efforts, including officiating at same-sex weddings or supporting gay clergy, are being made to resist its implementation.

While advocates from various perspectives



PHOTO BY MARY ELIZABETH SMITH

**Local activists, religious leaders (including the NYAC's Rev. Vicki I. Flippin, at center), and family members gather on the steps of the Circuit Court of Appeals in St. Paul, Minn., on May 14, 2019, in support of Nelson Pinos, who has been living in sanctuary at First and Summerfield UMC in New Haven, Conn.**

agree the shift was unlikely to be big enough to overturn the plan, strategizing continues to occur ahead of the 2020 General Conference.

## #2: Providing assistance to immigrants, refugees

Throughout 2019, United Methodists and Methodists extended helping hands to displaced people on the U.S.-Mexico border and those fleeing violence in Congo.

United Methodists and members of the Methodist Church of Mexico in El Paso, Texas and Juárez, Mexico, help migrants stranded in Mexico while awaiting asylum. Methodists in Mexicali, Mexico, helped migrants who have fled violence in Central America with food, while in McAllen, Texas, churches help with a respite care center for migrants. Rev. John Fanestil, a United Methodist pastor, serves Holy Communion weekly as U.S. citizens gather in Friendship Park to glimpse loved ones on the other side of the border wall.

National Justice for Our Neighbors, a United Methodist group, provides free or low-cost immigration legal services to vulnerable immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers.

The United Methodist Committee on Relief is providing close to \$2 million in grants to JFON and Church World Service to support a

three-year pilot project of the Board of Global Ministries, its parent agency, aimed at asylum seekers in the U.S.

Some United Methodist churches in the U.S. also provided [sanctuary for immigrants](#) facing deportation. Two NYAC churches, First and Summerfield UMC in New Haven, Conn., and St Paul and St. Andrew UMC in Manhattan have provided sanctuary.

In Congo, the United Methodist Church offered shelter to more than 2,500 displaced people who fled violence to Uvira to avoid conflicts between the Banyamurenge and Bafuliro tribes.

## #3: Responding to wind, water and fire

Again and again in 2019, United Methodists responded to natural disasters, supported by the United Methodist Committee on Relief and its partners.

In the U.S., the approach of spring came with deadly consequences. United Methodist pastors of Lee County, Alabama, became a team of crisis counselors after a March 3 tornado killed 23. As the month progressed, churches in Nebraska and other states were dealing with widespread flooding.

Continued on page 9

# Disaster Response, Sanctuary Top UMC News in 2019

Continued from page 8

By the end of May, United Methodists were continuing to respond to flooding in various U.S. locations and assisting those affected by tornados, including one that struck the Dayton, Ohio, area. And California residents once again faced an extended wildfire season.

In Africa, Cyclone Idai tore through Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe in March, ripping tin roofs off houses and hurtling them like deadly missiles that killed and maimed. Otherwise placid rivers jumped their banks and submerged towns and villages, drowning hundreds and leaving hundreds of thousands more with no homes or possessions.

United Methodists were among those picking up the pieces after an April 22 earthquake struck the main island of Luzon in the Philippines and killed at least 16 people. Local churches and homes were among the buildings damaged.

Hurricane Dorian struck the Bahamas on September 1, 2019, and lingered, creating both physical and psychological devastation. UMCOR has been working with the two Methodist denominations in the Bahamas to assist with recovery.

“Emotionally, it’s going to scar us for some time to come,” said Rev. Kenneth Lewis of Freeport. “I have to deal with members who lost everything. The house is gone, belongings gone, no food, no clothing, no vehicles.”

## #4: Voting irregularities

Voting irregularities revealed soon after the adjournment of the special 2019 General Conference called into question at least one crucial vote. A motion to substitute legislation that spelled out a pathway for churches to depart the denomination over LGBTQ issues passed by just two votes.

The General Conference Commission promised a full, independent investigation and decided in a closed-door meeting last August to void the vote on the motion to substitute and ask the Council of Bishops to request the Judicial Council to rule on what the effect of that vote nullification was.

In its October 30 oral hearing on the matter, the Judicial Council questioned the lack of documentation and decided to reschedule the case for the 2020 spring session, noting “our inability to get the information requested during oral argument.” The council did rule on the effective

date of the petition, saying it went into effect when the special General Conference ended.

## #5: Constitutional amendment revote

After a revote, United Methodists around the globe have amended the denomination’s constitution to proclaim, “Men and women are of equal value in the eyes of God.” The newly adopted measure also commits United Methodists to work toward ending discrimination against women and girls.

## Selecting the Top 5

Conference communicators and editors, as well as United Methodist News staff, vote each year on what stories were the biggest news in the denomination.

Other stories getting multiple votes in the survey included the:

- Continued response to the Ebola outbreak in Congo;
- Proposed 2021–2024 general church

budget, the smallest in more than 20 years;

- Reaction to a video released by the North Carolina Conference that featured male clergy reading aloud comments their women colleagues endured;
- Return of Native American land in Ohio and Oregon;
- Action by churches in West Virginia and around the U.S. to help deal with the crisis of opioid-related deaths;
- Focus on global health in Africa and the Philippines;
- Condemnation by Filipino United Methodists of human rights abuses, extrajudicial killings and the treatment of indigenous people in the Philippines;
- Struggles by individuals and churches affected by the economic hardships in Zimbabwe.

*Bloom is the assistant news editor for United Methodist News Service and is based in New York.*



## Raising the Roof On New Church

The congregation of the Walden United Methodist Church is watching their dream to build a new church come alive—day by day, stick by stick. According to Tony Zirilli, co-chair of the church’s building committee, the decking boards have capped off the building and shingles will soon follow on the structure being built in the village of Montgomery. The church is still hoping and planning to be in this new 3,500-square-foot space by Easter.



# Bishop Urges Prayer & Action in Wake of Violence

Continued from page 3

in your prayers today.

Pray for the families of the two men in Texas, their friends, and their church home. Pray for the families, the friends, and the home of the Hasidic rabbi in Monsey. Pray for Grafton Thomas and his mother Kim. Pray for Wendy Paige and the pastoral care she is called upon to provide in this difficult time. And couple your prayers with specific actions. Generate simple acts of kindness. Be a participant in creating the kind of world you dream of being a part of. And don't stop. Because every day, there is always something, . . .

Human "somethings" deeply upset and depress us. They make us feel powerless. They are noises that disrupt any semblance of peace, solitude, and joy in our world. But know that there is something more. There is

a peace that passes our understanding. There is a strength we cannot generate on our own. There is a power beyond our human abilities. It is the thing that people of faith like us lean on when there is nowhere else to turn.

There is always something, . . . the presence of our God to give us strength and open the door for peace. In times like these, may we never forget it.

May it be so. May it be so.



Thomas J. Bickerton  
Resident Bishop



Continued from page 2

## 5/3 Recognizing Older Adults

Choose this Sunday, or any Sunday in May, to honor the older adults in your congregation. Resources are available on the UMC Discipleship [website here](#).

## 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

Laity 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 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](mailto:vision@nyac.com).

## Apply for Scholarships, Loans Now

Each year the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM) offers financial aid to United Methodist students pursuing undergraduate and graduate degrees. An average of \$5.5 million in scholarships and loans is awarded annually to help students in the United States and abroad pursue their dreams through higher education. This aid allows students of all backgrounds to earn their degrees and serve as the next generation of leaders for the church and the world.

Instructions and applications for the scholarships and loans can be found on the [GBHEM website](#). The application period for 2020 fall term scholarships opened on January 3 and runs through March 5. The online process eliminates any paper submission by the applicant or their references and allows the applicant to be considered for all programs for which they may be eligible.

Funding for all GBHEM loans and scholarships comes from five primary sources:

- 63 percent from endowments
- 22 percent from wills and annuities
- 13 percent from United Methodist Special Sundays
- 1 percent from online gifts
- 1 percent from fiduciary income

## Churches Re-Focus on Serving Neighbors

A third "Who is My Neighbor?" seminar to be held on Tuesday, Jan. 28 will explore how to develop congregations and neighborhoods that include and serve all people. The event is scheduled for the Community Reformed Church in Manhasset, N.Y., and is sponsored by the New York State Council of Churches, Pace University Land Use Law Center, Goldstein Hall Attorneys at Law, Long Island Housing Partnership, ERASE Racism, the Community Development Corporation of New York, Enterprise Community Partners, and American Institute of Architects.

Seminar participants will have the opportunity to discover how to:

- Refocus their mission to serve their neighbors well.
- Build relationships in communities to address the challenges that prevent cities from welcoming people of all races and incomes.
- Restore sanctuaries and community space, maximize rentals, build childcare centers, schools, arts centers, food pantries, and construct affordable housing.
- Explore opportunities for financing.

For more information and to register, go to the New York State Council of Churches' (NYSCOC) [website](#). Contact Rev. Peter Cook, executive director of NYSCOC by [email](mailto:email), or at 508-380-8289.