

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



THE VISION

April 2020

SPECIAL: IN RESPONSE TO CORONAVIRUS CRISIS



Clockwise from above, St. John's UMC in Queens raised the handprints of hospital workers on Palm Sunday; a place for prayer created at Trinity-Boscobel UMC in Buchanan; employees of St. Catherine of Siena Medical Center receive Girl Scout cookies thanks to an initiative by Commack UMC.



Seen & Heard

Staying Connected: Ideas, Tactics to Emulate

BY JOANNE S. UTLEY
Editor, *The Vision*

Clergy and congregations all across the New York Conference are finding ways to adapt, adjust, and pivot their ministries within the confines of social distancing guidelines due to the coronavirus pandemic. Here are a few of their stories:

Ministry in "Containment" New Rochelle UMC (MET)

New Rochelle rocketed into the national spotlight in early March as an epicenter for the spread of coronavirus. Sitting in the middle of the one-mile "containment area" put in place on March 12 is the New Rochelle UMC.

When that directive came down, Pastor Angela Redman was in England with the bishop's Wesley heritage tour. The group cut short their trip and returned on Sunday, March 15. That night, Redman was joined by about 30 people in a Zoom call to chat and pray and touch base.

"This church is amazing. They are the most resilient bunch of people I've ever met," said Redman. "We can laugh a little about being in containment, but there's also some concern from co-workers when they know you live in New Rochelle."

Redman has continued to connect with members every night at 6 for prayer, scripture and Bible trivia. She's trying to find ways to bring some joy to her members in the midst of the crisis.

"Everyone is calling someone," she said. "The congregation understands that they need to be at home."

They continue to worship on Sundays at

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Bishop: Let's Live as Easter People Amid Coronavirus

(Editor's note: This is an excerpt from Bishop Bickerton's April 9 update.)

“So, if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, . . .”

—Colossians 3:1–2

Dear Friends & Colleagues,

Grace and peace to each of you in the midst of this unusual, yet blessed Holy Week.

Even as I write, I am compelled to change some of my standard greetings. Normally, I write something like, “I pray that each of you are well and blessed.” I cannot write that today because I am fully aware that some of you are not well. I write today expressing concern for the growing number of pastors, spouses, and laity who have contracted the COVID-19 virus. Our prayers are extended to you, in particular, with a hope that you will find healing as quick as possible.

Today I write on the day after the largest single increase of death in New York and Connecticut. At this writing, nearly 6,000 people have died in our region. Every number represents a soul. With every number there is a grieving family or loved ones who need our intercession.

Still, there is word of hope on the horizon. The hospital admissions and ER admissions

are dropping. The death rate is high today because the admission rate was much higher a week to 10 days ago. With the admission rates dropping, we can anticipate that the death rate will soon plateau and begin to drop. And with those changing numbers, we edge closer to a day when this pandemic will run its course.

Yesterday, the governor of New York extended the ban on gatherings of people until the end of April.

The governor of Connecticut has also continued his ban as well. These decisions continue the effort in our region to create appropriate social distancing so that the transmission of this virus is lessened. Now is not the time for any in-person gatherings. For that reason, all of our churches in the New York Annual Conference will remain closed through April 30. As we near that date and receive more updated information, I will communicate with you what our plan will be moving forward.



Watch the March 26 video, 20 Questions with Bishop Bickerton, by clicking [here](#).

I cannot emphasize enough the importance of being smart and making wise decisions these next few weeks. The weather is getting nicer, cabin fever is increasing, and the temptation to get back to some sense of normalcy is growing. Governor Cuomo said this morning in his press conference, “It’s about ‘we,’ not ‘me.’” This is so true. Every risk you take potentially impacts another life. Every ill-advised decision you make potentially adds a greater burden on an already over-extended hospital worker. As the governor has repeatedly said, “Stay Disciplined. Stay Safe. Stay Smart. Stay at Home.”

I also wanted to alert you to some ongoing developments that you should be aware of:

The Payback Protection Program (PPP)

I want to thank our treasurer, Ross Williams for the excellent work he has done to make us all

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Latest New Appointments

Resident Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton announces the following 2020 appointments, effective July 1 unless otherwise noted:

Leslie Duroseau to First UMC, Central Islip, and Hauppauge UMC

Cleaven Johnson to Jesse Lee UMC, Easton, Conn.

Thomas Gye Ho Kim to Kaaterskill, Tannersville; East Jewett; and Lexington-Westkill UMCs

Yongyeun Lee to Prospect UMC, Bristol, Conn.

Phyllis J. “PJ” Leopold to Darien UMC, Conn.

Jeremiah Paul to South Meriden Trinity UMC, Conn.

Wayne Redman to Seaford UMC, N.Y.

Amy Royal as associate pastor to Kaaterskill, Tannersville; East Jewett; and Lexington-Westkill

Milagros Solorzano adds Immanuel-First Spanish UMC to New Jerusalem UMC, both in Brooklyn

Barbara Whitlow to UMC of Huntington-Cold Spring Harbor, Huntington, N.Y.

Noel Chin to Crawford Memorial UMC, Bronx

Karen Eiler as associate pastor to Mary Taylor Memorial UMC, Milford, Conn. (effective April 1)

Kevin Gruver to St. Paul’s UMC, Staten Island

Michael Jenkins to First UMC, Ansonia and UMC of Watertown, both in Conn.

Steve Young Dong Kim to Pound Ridge Community Church, N.Y.

Yountae Kim to Mid-Hudson Korean UMC, Poughkeepsie, N.Y.

George Mangan to Union UMC, East Northport, N.Y.

David Mantz to Kensington UMC and Newington UMC, both in Conn.

Rev. James Midgley to Faith UMC, North Haven, Conn.

Dawn Marie Richards to Gilboa, Grand Gorge, and Harpersfield UMCs, N.Y.

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

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Financial Relief for Church Benefit Obligations

The New York Conference is working to assist churches in this time of crisis and great uncertainty.

Apportionments:

Apportionments represent your church's fair share of the conference budget. They are an "ask" and not a "bill." While we expect churches to pay 100 percent, there have always been struggling churches who could not do so. We often get calls asking for apportionment reductions from churches that are in financial distress. Rather than reducing apportionments, which transfers a church's obligation to all other churches, our approach has been to ask churches to simply do the best that they can. We therefore ask that your church continue to pay what it can against your 2020 apportionment budget to continue to fund the ministries of the conference.

We cannot do our job of responding to the critical needs of our people in the midst of this crisis without the support of our churches. We understand that there will be churches who cannot pay what they had intended due to a decline in giving. Please do the best that you can under these extraordinary circumstances and know that we appreciate whatever you can do.

From the bishop about pastoral salaries:

As we journey through these uncertain days, it is important for every church/charge to continue your commitment to fully compensate your pastor in the amount agreed upon at your most recent charge/church conference.

I have placed high demands on the shoulders of our pastors, as I know you have, in these exceptionally challenging times. Beyond being able to rely upon their salary, please do all that you can to support your pastor and encourage them to engage in practices that will keep them spiritually, mentally, and physically healthy. Thank you in advance for all that you do to help ensure that these matters are cared for properly.

Church benefits waiver:

Beginning with the April 2020 health and pension invoice and extending through May 2020, churches will not be billed for pension

and health benefits. Benefit obligations waived include:

- Employer Pension billings (CRSP-DB, CRSP-DC)
- Employer Death & Disability billings (CPP)
- Employer UMPIP contributions (for clergy serving less than 75%)
- Employer Healthcare billings (HealthFlex Uniform Rate of \$1,520/month, \$18,240 annually)

Frequently asked questions

Q. How much funding is required to support this initiative and what is the source of the funds?

The two-month waiver will require approximately \$640,000 for healthcare obligations, \$610,000 for pension obligations and \$80,000 for death and disability obligations. Funding will come from undesignated reserves of the Conference Board of Pensions and Health Benefits and the Conference Council on Finance & Administration.

Q. Will clergy benefits or health coverage be impacted in any way by this waiver?

No. Clergy benefits and health coverage will not be impacted due to this waiver.

Q. Will churches be asked to repay the amounts that are being waived?

No. Churches will not be asked to repay such amounts.

Q. Will the waiver include billings to clergy for their share of benefits?

No. Clergy are still be expected to pay their portion of health insurance, as well as any dental and vision coverages since churches are expected to continue to pay pastoral salaries.

Q. Will the waiver include clergy payroll deductions?

No. The waiver does not cover clergy payroll deductions that are made to fund the United

Methodist Personal Investment Plan (UMPIP), HealthFlex premiums, health savings accounts (HSA), and flexible spending accounts (FSA), which include both medical reimbursement accounts (MRA) and dependent care accounts (DCA). All payroll deductions should remain in place and will appear on your normal monthly bill from the conference. It is illegal for any organization to withhold but not remit payroll deductions.

Q. Will the waiver impact the W-2s of clergy?

No. The W-2s for clergy will not be impacted by this waiver since benefit-related payroll deductions will continue to remain in place.

Q. Will the waiver cover UMPIP contributions that churches may be making for lay employees?

No. The waiver solely pertains to benefit costs of appointed clergy.

Q. How will the waiver be handled for churches that have pastors that are appointed less than ¾ time (across all appointments) and for whom pension costs are not being billed by the conference?

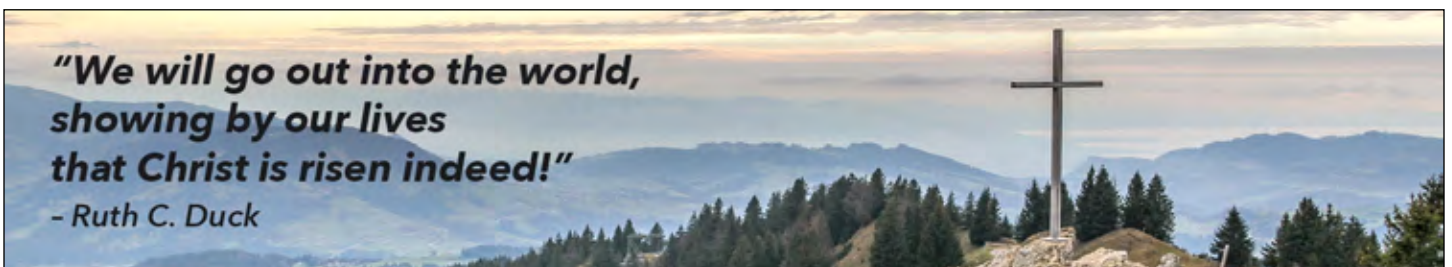
According to the policies adopted at Annual Conference each year, churches that have clergy serving less than ¾ time (across all appointments) are supposed to be making pension contributions directly to Wespith in the amount of 10.8 percent of total compensation (or 11.8 percent if the clergy voluntarily contributes 1 percent). Such churches can request reimbursement from the conference for the actual amount of these contributions (up to 11.8 percent) for the months of April and May. Such requests should be made in writing and sent to Ross Williams along with supporting documentation.

Q. Are district hires or other locally-hired pastors covered by this waiver?

No, the waiver only extends to clergy that are appointed by the bishop.

**"We will go out into the world,
showing by our lives
that Christ is risen indeed!"**

- Ruth C. Duck



How New Law Helps Churches Amid COVID-19

BY HEATHER HAHN, UM News
With local reporting

For churches that were already struggling financially, the COVID-19 pandemic creates new challenges while collection plates are not being passed down the pews. Some churches in the New York Conference had already integrated [online giving](#) into their finances, and now many others are considering the need to do so.

But churches may find some relief in the recently passed U.S. stimulus package by applying for a small-business loan under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security or CARES Act.

The U.S. CARES Act—signed into law March 27—has the potential to offer struggling churches a boost at a time when giving is down and ministry needs are on the rise. Ross Williams, the NYAC chief financial officer, is urging all churches to look into applying for these loans that are being offered by the Small Business Administration (SBA).

How can new law help churches?

Among other relief efforts, the U.S. CARES Act creates [the Paycheck Protection Program](#) with the goal of helping small businesses keep workers on the payroll during coronavirus-related closures.

Under the program, the SBA and its partner banks offer about \$349 billion in federally guaranteed loans to businesses with fewer than 500 employees. The SBA will forgive loans if all employees are kept on the payroll for eight weeks and the money is used for payroll, rent, mortgage interest or utilities.

Usually, the federal agency works with for-profit businesses. However, the law makes clear that nonprofits—including churches—are eligible for these loans.

The window to apply for this loan is short: Applications opened Friday, April 3, and close June 30. They also will be awarded on a first-come, first-served basis, and church leaders expect the money to go fast.

How large can a loan be?

Churches face the same limitations as all other recipients of these loans. The maximum loan under the Payment Protection Program is the lesser amount of either \$10 million or 2.5 times a church's average monthly payroll. The program is meant to cover eight weeks of payroll and operating expenses.

To qualify for loan forgiveness, at least 75 percent of the loaned funds must be used for payroll costs. The rest must be used for mortgage interest, rent or utilities.



Photo by Nattanan Kanchanaprat, courtesy of Pixabay; adapted by Laurens Glass, UM News.

What happens if a church uses the money for other needs?

If the funds are used for unauthorized purposes, the SBA will direct the borrower to repay.

The federal agency says forgiveness also will be reduced if the number of full-time employees declines, or if salaries and wages decrease. Loan recipients have until June 30 to restore full-time employment and salary levels for any changes made between February 15 and April 26 this year.

If churches do need to repay the loan, they will have two years to do so and an interest rate of 1 percent. The program has no penalties for early repayment.

Where can churches apply?

Organizations can apply for the program by calling their banks directly or through [this application form](#) on the Small Business Administration's website.

The United Methodist General Council on Finance and Administration and the auditors LBMC, have put together a [list of the documents](#) that might help churches in their loan application.

The NYAC is providing a [sample PPP application](#) that churches can use as reference when filling out their own forms. According to Williams, churches should first reach out to banks where they already have an account if it's an approved SBA lender.

Also available are sample resolutions that the church's [finance committee](#) and [church council](#) should adopt authorizing the church's loan application. If those votes are to be conducted via email, the church must vote beforehand to

authorize the use of email elections.

Will UMC affiliation count against churches?

That's been a concern for some church leaders. The loans are limited to organizations with fewer than 500 employees. But taken together, all the United Methodist churches, conferences and agencies have far more than that.

The SBA already has agreed to make loans available to individual McDonald's franchises. Individual United Methodist organizations might expect similar treatment.

In a compilation of [frequently asked questions](#), the agency said a religious organization qualifies for an exemption from its usual affiliation rules. This applies if the churches are tied together by religious beliefs and an internal constitution, not for solely non-religious reasons.

In any case, [the Church Alliance said](#) it plans to work with the federal agency to help it understand the unique nature of church employers. The alliance is an interfaith coalition that includes The United Methodist Church's Wespeth Benefits and Investments.

What about separation of church and state?

Some Christians have worried that accepting such a loan will result in the federal government intruding on a church's religious liberty, and the Small Business Administration has tried to ease those concerns.

The agency requires loan recipients to follow certain federal nondiscrimination rules. But it

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Bishop: Easter Call to Worship, Action

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aware of the provisions and guidelines for this federal program . . . Please do your research and make this application. It will provide a loan for payroll purposes that will not need to be paid back if the provisions are followed. This can be a real lifesaver for some of our congregations, of which everyone is eligible. I encourage you to reach out to Ross at rwilliams@nyac.com should you have any questions on the program.

Financial Anxiety

I am fully aware of the financial burden these last four to six weeks has placed on our local churches. These are challenging times, especially when we think about what was and what will be. Our initial response has been to provide a two-month holiday on any pension and health care payments, but we realize that there will need to be more collaboration and partnership between our local churches and the Annual Conference moving forward. I simply wanted to acknowledge that I am aware of the struggle and urge you to take one day at a time and not make long-term decisions that might adversely affect your ministry moving forward . . .

Annual Conference

As you are aware, Annual Conference 2020 has been postponed until the fall. It is important to realize that even though we expect that the pandemic will flatten and drop before the regularly scheduled date of Annual Conference, we are unsure the extent to which large crowds will be permitted or encouraged. In addition, each of us will have plenty of work to do in order to restore the day to day ministry of the local church in order to re-establish and reinforce the relationships we hold so dear within them. As of today, we still do not have a firm date for the rescheduled 2020 Annual Conference . . . You can, however, expect a very abbreviated session that will focus on the essential elements which will need approval . . .

Move Day & Retirements

The cabinet has worked hard this season to lessen the impact of moves as much as possible. We have reduced the number of necessary moves this year by close to 50 percent . . .

The cabinet is actively discussing when move day 2020 will take place. Until you hear otherwise, everyone should continue to

anticipate July 1 as the official move date for all pastors . . .

Pastors who are anticipating retirement will be retired on July 1 “ad interim” with final approval taking place at Annual Conference this fall.

Regardless, all churches facing moves need to focus on necessary and appropriate improvements to the parsonage, transition teams to provide support for the incoming pastor, and intentional events to say goodbye and hello to your pastor and her/his family if applicable.

Stress & Anxiety

There is no doubt that this pandemic has placed an increased burden on all of us. Whether you are in leadership within a congregation, a family member who is dealing with an infected loved one, or a person who is frightened by all of the events surrounding us, these are days that have evoked many different feelings and emotions. For some, a crisis emboldens and drives them into creativity and potential solutions to the problems we face. For others, a crisis creates confusion, anxiety and high stress. Regardless of the position you find yourself, I want to encourage you to be very intentional in the manner in which you take care of yourself . . . And, for the sake of this conversation, seeking the support and assistance from another voice is critical. Whether it is engaging in a virtual counseling session or simply asking a friend or colleague for some time just to “unload,” please take care of yourselves. As stress and anxiety rise, so do frayed emotions that often lead to poor decisions that potentially cause unintended harm. Let us be careful with ourselves so that we can exercise great care with one another.

Transparency and Good Communication

I pledge to you that I will continue to provide you with regular updates and do my best, with the help of my cabinet and our conference staff, to provide you with clear and transparent communication. We ask the same of you. We want to join you in prayer for those in your midst who are hurting. We want to intercede to provide assistance and support in situations that have become difficult to navigate. We want to project a realistic but hopeful vision for our future as we walk into this “new normal” as a church. It will require good communication

from you and from us. Let’s do our best in this regard.

Easter Blessings

In my Easter sermon that will be broadcast across the Annual Conference this weekend, I say that this has been a strange Lenten season. A most unusual Holy Week. A less than majestic Easter. If anything, this Lenten season has been a 40-day Good Friday with pain, heartache, and death happening all around us. We haven’t needed a Good Friday service. We’ve been living it every day recently.

But thanks be to God that we are not a Good Friday people. We are an Easter people—a people that believe in resurrected life, a people that believe that hope was offered to us eternally when Christ rose from the dead. We celebrate life and know that suffering and death is not the end of the story. There is yet another chapter that includes the glorious conclusion that we are claimed, called, and loved by our God. This is the heart of the Easter story and it is, by faith, that which will see us through these challenging days.

This is the Good News of Easter and the Good News of our faith.

In her resource book entitled, “*Bread for the Journey*,” Ruth C. Duck offers these words as an Easter benediction. I share them with you as an Easter “Call to Worship” and an Easter “Call to Action:”

Now that you have heard the good news, what will you do?

We will go out into the world, showing by our lives that Christ is risen indeed!

Praise God! How will you do this?

We will tell the story of God’s love for the world in Jesus Christ, and we will continue Christ’s loving act among humanity.

Alleluia! Praise God! Christ is risen indeed!

Amen!

Let us resolve today that we *will be* Easter people who raise our hopeful voices to a broken world. May it be so. May it be so.

The Journey Continues, . . .



Thomas Bickerton
Resident Bishop

Spiritual Therapy in These Anxious Times

BY THEA CRITES, M. Div., LMFT

We are in early days of the national United States experience of a global pandemic. We're each feeling the loss of freedoms, contact, so many parts of our usual lives. We're settling into tentative new routines, working from home, connecting only by omnipresent ZOOM meetings. Church people are recognizing and struggling with the enormous need for spiritual presence and comfort during any crisis. The Vision contacted me, a deacon in the NYAC and pastoral psychotherapist, for tips on coping during this "new normal".

Extra stress

The first thing to say is that everything we do takes more energy right now. Our daily lives have been radically changed by the call for social distancing. Also, whether or not we recognize this, we all feel the threat of this health crisis, and stress as a result. There will be phases of our common experience as weeks and months go by. In this first phase, if we don't appreciate the extra load of stress in our current days, while we adjust and find our way with work, families, etc., we can exhaust ourselves.

Those of us caring for others—pastors, chaplains, parents, managers of work groups—can get especially overloaded. We are each coping with enormous change in our own lives before any responsibility we feel for others. Even if you can push yourself to another call, another piece of work over the internet, if we aren't attending to our own wellbeing, we may burn out. Do not expect yourself to have the same levels of energy and focus you had before this crisis! Give yourself breathing space, however that is a true break for you, time for rest, for walking, for doing nothing, for staring at four walls, for Netflix. In a stressful time, we all need comfort—real comfort even if it's not our ideal—give yourself a break if you crave some comfort food and that Netflix show.

Many of us may now find comfort in a smaller, simpler life, to a routine that becomes familiar, to home activities like cooking, craft—familiar, simple. It helps! Like any trauma, this time of stress leads us to the natural need for simple, grounding activity. We put blinders on horses moving through environments that could startle and overwhelm them. We know children are soothed by familiar routine; the same is true for adults under stress. Some basics that help many people in this new routine: getting out to a green place. Nature soothes and grounds

us. Movement, exercise of your choice, lowers stress. Connection and support with the people we love—now with physical distancing! Simple self-care, good sleep, healthy food.

Time of sabbath

Religious people have a category for intentionally simplifying life. Can we think of this time of staying close to home, with our families, as sabbath, Lent, as spiritual practice? If we were choosing this time to practice simplicity, time without distractions of our usual rush. The right question is, what would promote a spiritual experience for you in the quiet? Meditation? Long walks in nature? Could home become more of a sanctuary? Would a return to playing music, journaling or writing poetry, reading, dance, bring you to a more present experience of God's presence? There is no right or wrong in this holy gift of everyday life, slower,



quieter. What is it for you, small or dramatic, that brings some sense of God's presence with you into daily life? This time could be an opportunity to bring spiritual practice into daily life.

Lastly, wisdom from the psychological world of cognitive and behavioral therapy. Let's call it spiritual CBT. We happen to be animals whose whole state of being—body, mind and spirit—reacts powerfully to where our focus is. It is entirely natural in a time of fear or anxiety that we go to the fight, flight or freeze focus. What does that do to us? We're tense, feel fearful and anxious, think thoughts that center on dangers, and emotionally may feel quite low, depressed, in a dark place. This is natural, the function of the primitive part of our brain which is ever vigilant for dangers.

It is amazing what happens when our focus goes to thoughts, images, etc. that we might call positives, identify with higher functioning parts of ourselves. For some of us those are traditional things of faith. "Remember your baptism" calls some of us to a world of connection with a loving church and loving, constant God. Scripture, The Upper Room, meditation

or prayer, may bring you to an experience of "blessed assurance."

For others, the sound of that song, "Blessed Assurance", or other sacred music changes their mood, relaxes the body and reconnects them—restoring their soul. For other people, these traditional routes are not so effective, or even have some negatives connected to them. For those of us, the answer to the question, what starts that process of opening to the Spirit, takes more reflection.

Spiritual gateways

For some of us, we need a different kind of gateway into a spiritual state. Deeper, slower breathing is a good start (remember, the exhale must be as slow as possible!), those New Age sounding techniques like an imagined body scan with a soothing color in mind, meditation, can help to set the stage. What in your unique experience truly starts to open you to God's presence, to a spiritual state, or, more simply, helps you to move out of a funk?

One man I know feels closest to God while on a run. For others, a person, either a person of inspiring faith or a person who truly loved you, opens our hearts. The key to the gateway is being specific and experiential, imagining concrete details (with each of our senses, touch, sight, sound and smell) of a scene with that person or of a place where you've felt entirely safe and at peace.

I can be quite down or stressed when I bring up my gateway to faith. I picture my beloved grandmother (UMW church lady extraordinaire and church musician) sitting beside me on the piano bench beaming with pride and love as I struggled through a Mozart piece. A warm feeling spreads. I relax inside. I remember the tactile feeling of the cool, smooth keys under my fingers, my seat on the hard bench, foot on the pedal. I see her very specifically and the room around us, the little upright piano, I hear the notes, uneven and sometimes off, feel the cool air of the room, smell the sweet air coming through a window in rural Ohio. Emotionally I feel deeply happy, loved and loving, and focus on that feeling, let it build. When I'm there my whole system is open, relaxed, open to joy and to God's Spirit. Now I am more ready for traditional "spiritual practice."

We, religious folk, have wonderful resources to restore the soul. Bringing them alive for ourselves in our daily life can involve some intentional focus and gateways that are uniquely ours.

Missions Office's COVID-19 Efforts

One of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic is food insecurity. Some food banks throughout the conference area report as much as a 300-fold increase in requests for assistance in the last few weeks. The need will only grow as time goes on.

The NYAC Missions office has formed a task force to help coordinate and support local church food ministries. If your church sponsors or supports a food pantry, soup kitchen, or other emergency-type ministry, please let our office know. Given the presence of our churches in so many areas this is a way we can make a significant difference in the life of our communities. It is important that we have a larger perspective on the mission outreach of the New York Conference for this, and future, times.

Any proposal drafted by the task force will then be submitted to the bishop and cabinet for consideration. The leadership team includes MET: Dorlimar Lebron, LIW: Gia Hall, LIE: Hal Low, CH: Ed Mackey and Margaret Howe, CT: Herron Gaston and Ed Dayton, and CT/NY: Nikki Edleman, and Steve and Nan Ernst.

Personal protective equipment (PPE), gloves, N-95 masks, and other supplies, from our disaster trailers were recently delivered to the Suffolk County Office of Emergency

Management and a hospital and nursing home on Staten Island. If you have UMCOR clean-up buckets in storage you are encouraged to remove masks and gloves (keeping a record of items removed) and deliver to local response agencies.

The Missions office is working with New York Disaster Interfaith Services (NYDIS) to facilitate a chapel in the Javits Center which has been established as a COVID-19 response hospital. The request came to NYDIS through the New York National Guard.

For more information on how you can help during this time, email [Tom Vencuss](mailto:Tom.Vencuss).

Haiti Remains Vulnerable

In response to the coronavirus outbreak, Haiti has closed its borders, shut down all commercial flights, and closed most businesses, churches, and schools throughout the country.

With a very fragile health care system, every precaution is being taken to limit the effects of the virus in a country which only a few years ago saw more than 12,000 deaths due to a cholera epidemic.

Mountains of Hope for Haiti (MHH), the NYAC mission in Haiti, remains in contact with church and community leadership. In the village



of Furcy—the center of the MHH mission—life continues as farmers plan for the spring planting season. MHH provided seed and fertilizer to more than 75 families in the community. Through the sewing ministry women are making dresses to wear and to sell.

The NYAC Missions office and the Caribbean Mission Partnership also provided funds for a rural school in Fond Doux, Haiti.

The NYAC Missions office remains in contact with church and disaster response leadership in Puerto Rico and the Bahamas as all volunteer disaster response efforts have been suspended.

For more information about Mountains of Hope, email [Wendy Vencuss](mailto:Wendy.Vencuss).

GBGM Missionaries Dealing With Pandemic

As the coronavirus pandemic continues to be felt across the world, Jill Wilson, conference secretary of Global Ministries, reached out to missionaries in Mozambique and Cambodia. Here are their reports:

John Nday

Agricultural coordinator at Cambine Mission, Mozambique

Florence Kaying

Nurse practitioner in maternity and child health, Cambine Hospital/Clinic, Mozambique

April 1: Thank you so much to you and the New York Annual conference for thinking about us and praying for us here in Mozambique. Please continue to do so because our work is not easy. Florence, my wife, cannot leave the patients or sick persons at the clinic, I also cannot leave the chicken and crops to die and leave people to starve with hunger in this difficult moment. So we do not stay home like others, but we are out

to try save lives of people in other ways.

Please, we need your prayers and the New York Annual Conference is in our hearts; praying for all of you, also.

(Editor's note: As of April 1, Mozambique was reporting 10 confirmed cases of COVID-19.)

Helen L. Camarce

Treasurer of GBGM's Cambodia and Southeast Asia Missions

March 31: I am doing okay together with my colleagues in the office. We decided to work at home and follow social distancing protocol. This is our own decision in the office.

The scary part is that the Cambodian government is not declaring any lockdown so people still move around, transportation is still open. Only borders and some countries are banned to come or fly into Cambodia. Only schools are closed. So we are a little anxious that we may become another epicenter of the virus one day.

My son, Amiel is in Malaysia alone, in his dormitory, and tending to himself. All his dormmates were asked to go home, but he cannot return to the Philippines as our country is also on lockdown. My other two children, who are all married with kids, are in the Philippines.

All I can do is just pray for God's protection for them and me here in Cambodia.

I am hearing a lot about the U.S. My sister is a nurse in New Jersey and I know it is also bad; they said in their hospital they do not have enough PPE to use. My mom stayed at home.

I pray to God to give us the wisdom to look at what God is preparing us for. To trust in Him fully on this. Let's continue to pray for each other that this will end. I hope to itinerate in August.

"For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have."

—2 Corinthians 8:12

(Editor's note: As of April 2, Cambodia had a total of 110 confirmed cases of COVID-19.)

Alternatives for Children's Ministry During Quarantine

BY CASSANDRA NEGRI

Children's Ministries/Safe Sanctuaries consultant

Deep Blue Cokesbury

During this time churches are having to make tough decisions about how to remain close as a faith community when they can't gather together.

Amplify has made several resources **free** to help communities remain engaged in the Bible, including the [Deep Blue Kids Spring](#) curriculum videos!

If your church uses the Deep Blue Sunday School program, you can forward the student materials home for the families to work on with the videos.

Practical Resources for Churches

PRC, which is based on Long Island, has a page with many [children's ministries resources](#) for you to create something for your children's programs.

Moving Online

Many of our churches are moving worship service to an online service. You could do the same thing with your Sunday School/children's ministry program. The lesson could be recorded and a file sent to families to watch when it best fits their schedule or done as a live stream at a different time from the worship service. Remember to confirm copyright permission for the lesson and any music you may be using. If you use children in your video/livestream, be sure you have photo and video permission from the child's parent or guardian.

Using Snail Mail

While the internet can be a great tool, we have to understand that not all families have access to this. Perhaps a letter with a lesson or two can be mailed to the children or "Sunday School in a Box" could be sent to a family to do altogether.

This is a time for us to be creative in different ways in our ministries. If I can help with any other suggestions, let me know. I would also like to hear about what you are doing in your ministries so I can share your stories with others.

For questions or resources, contact Contact Cassandra Negri via [email](#).

UMCOR Donates Masks to La. First Responders

GLOBAL MINISTRIES

Needed supplies stored at the United Methodist Committee on Relief's Sager Brown Depot are being distributed to first responders in Louisiana as part of the agency's effort to help fight the spread of the novel coronavirus and the disease it causes, COVID-19.

More than 80,000 masks in sealed and unopened cartons purchased for future use are being distributed to first responders serving communities near the UMCOR Sager Brown Depot in Baldwin, La.

"In normal times, United Methodists and friends of UMCOR make thousands of UMCOR relief supply kits," said Thomas Kemper, general secretary of Global Ministries, which includes the United Methodist Committee on Relief. "Now, some of these kit supplies are being used to support and protect first responders on the frontlines of the fight against COVID-19."

"One never knows the impact an UMCOR kit, or its parts, will have on someone's life," said Amy Fuselier, director of the UMCOR Sager Brown Depot. "This donation is a great example of UMCOR's efforts to address an immediate need and the impact of kit supplies being felt in unanticipated places."

The Sager Brown depot serves as the repository, inspection site and distribution hub for the kits assembled by volunteers across the country.

Grants Available for Use of Zoom

The NYAC is making grants available for clergy and churches who want to use [Zoom](#) video and audio conferencing for worship, Bible study and meetings.

A basic Zoom account is free and allows 40-minute meetings with up to 100 people.

The next level plan is a [Pro account](#) for \$14.99 per month, also for up to 100 participants, but with a 24-hour limit on meeting length.

NYAC will reimburse the subscription cost for the first two months or longer if the congregation cannot meet in-person for Sunday worship.

If your church has a need that exceeds either of these two options, contact [Matt Curry](#), director of Connectional Ministries, to discuss individual circumstances. All support on this level will be decided on a case-by-case basis.

Tips for Secure Zoom Meetings

With many organizations turning to telecommunication platforms, such as Zoom, some public meetings have become more susceptible to a new attack called "Zoom-bombing." According to UC Berkeley's Information Security Office, Zoom-bombing occurs when "uninvited guests share their screens to bombard real attendees" with disturbing imagery. Moderating participants and comments are important when using any digital or telecommunication platform.

Zoom has responded to this problem by enabling the waiting room feature and require **additional password settings** for all basic users on free accounts and accounts with a single licensed user.

Here are some tips Zoom recommends to manage participants and protect your meeting:

- Only allow hosts or co-hosts to access the screen sharing feature.
- Use passwords to protect your meeting from uninvited guests.
- Lock the meeting after it has begun.
- Allow only signed-in users to join.
- Remove disruptive participants.
- Stop a participant's video stream.
- Change a participant's name that is displayed in the meeting.
- Place attendees in a waiting room.
- Disable private chats between participants.
- Turn off file transfer.

For more helpful tips, watch these videos on how to [manage participants](#) and learn about [meeting controls](#), and read "[Top Ways Zoom Hosts and Admins Can Ensure a Secure Meeting Experience](#)."

Information from the website of the [North Carolina Conference](#) of the United Methodist Church.

Looking at New General Conference Dates in 2021

BY HEATHER HAHN
UM News

General Conference organizers are exploring potential new dates in 2021 for The United Methodist Church's top legislative assembly after the coronavirus pandemic forced postponement.

The Commission on the General Conference determined that multiple factors meant it would not be feasible to reschedule to hold the international 10-day gathering this year.

"These issues include the undetermined length of the pandemic, uncertainty around travel bans in different areas of the world, delays in processing visas due to government and business closures and other questions," Kim Simpson, commission chair, said in a statement.

At this point, the commission does not have specific dates to announce.

However, commission members also resolved that they wanted to keep the next General Conference in Minneapolis. They authorized Sara Hotchkiss, the event's business manager, to pursue negotiations regarding other dates available at the Minneapolis Convention Center, the original venue for the 2020 General Conference.

"Continuing to work with the Minneapolis Convention Center and area hotels will help us avoid competing with other groups for space

in those facilities if they did not already have a contract," Hotchkiss said in a statement.

Simpson also credited the host team from the Dakotas and Minnesota conferences with being willing to work toward a new date.

The multinational commission held an emergency meeting by teleconference March 21 after the Minneapolis Convention Center, which was to hold General Conference, [canceled events](#) into May to reduce the spread of the coronavirus.

In opening the meeting, commission members acknowledged they were dealing with an unprecedented challenge.

"Almighty and loving God, we have made plans and they have been upended," prayed the Rev. Beth Ann Cook, a commission member. "We are at a loss and feel disoriented, but we know that you are God."

The spread of the deadly virus that causes COVID-19 has threatened and disrupted lives around the globe and has required people to keep their distance from public spaces.

Delaying General Conference a year raises a numbers of potential challenges.

Under The United Methodist Church's constitution, General Conference is to meet every four years "at such time and in such place" as determined by General Conference

itself or "by its duly authorized committees."

The gathering—the only body that officially speaks for the entire United Methodist Church—is responsible for many crucial decisions. These include electing members of the Judicial Council, the denomination's equivalent of the Supreme Court, and [voting on the four-year budget](#) that funds denomination-wide ministries.

Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton, the Council of Bishops representative on the General Conference commission, said the bishops are discussing with their chancellor the ramifications of the constitution's four-year requirement.

"We are cognizant of those issues and are exploring those at this point," he said.

He and other bishops [urged the postponement](#) because of the coronavirus and related travel restrictions.

Whatever happens, Simpson spoke with confidence that General Conference organizers are up to the challenge.

"We are strong people, and we are fit for what comes ahead," she said at the meeting's end. "And I hope we'll all come together, as we've done in the past, to try to find the best way to bring the vehicle for General Conference."

Wrestling with Budget After GC2020 Postponed

The pandemic-forced postponement of General Conference has left United Methodist financial leaders with big questions about the denomination's budget.

The General Council on Finance and Administration board spent much of a March 27 teleconference grappling with how to act within the bounds of church rules while recognizing the new economic realities caused by COVID-19.

The board was dealing with the unprecedented situation of needing to set 2021 apportionments—that is, requested giving from conferences—before the denomination's top lawmaking

assembly can adopt an apportionment formula for the 2021–2024 general church budget.

Ultimately, a majority of GCFA board members decided they had no choice but to extend into 2021 the apportionment calculations approved by the 2016 General Conference.

A majority also voted to request that the Judicial Council, the denomination's top court, rule on whether the board's action was in keeping with church law. Neither voice vote was unanimous.

Rick King, GCFA's chief financial officer, told the board that whatever apportionments

the next General Conference sets would apply retroactively to the start of 2021.

The GCFA board already was planning to submit to the next General Conference the smallest [denominational budget](#) in more than 30 years.

A number of board members expressed concern that using the higher apportionment base rate approved in 2016 would make the board look out of touch in a health crisis causing rising death, unemployment and canceled worship services around the globe.

—Heather Hahn, UM News

Student Loan Payment Suspensions Available

A three-month suspension of student loan payments is being offered by the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM) in response to the economic impact of the coronavirus. The pandemic may cause financial hardship for many paying off student loans.

Borrowers currently in repayment may email

umloans@gbhem.org to ask for a payment suspension request form. Interest will accrue during the [payment suspension](#) once the request has been verified by GBHEM. Borrowers may pay interest or partial payments at any time.

Payment suspension request forms must be

completed and signed by both borrower and cosigner (electronic signatures accepted) by April 15.

GBHEM may in its sole discretion, discontinue taking new applications for payment suspension at any time without notice.

Wespath Urges Companies to Support Workers, Markets

Wespath Benefits and Investments has joined a group of global institutional investors in signing a Statement on Coronavirus Response” calling on members of the business community to personify their corporate citizenship and support communities amid the COVID-19 crisis.

The [Statement](#)—organized by Domini Impact Investments, the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility and the New York City Comptroller’s Office—urges companies to prioritize the welfare of their stakeholders and to consider proactive steps such as paid leave and employment retention. Some 195 investors representing over \$4.7 trillion in assets had endorsed the statement as of March 30.

As the COVID-19 pandemic evolves from a public health emergency to a major economic and labor market crisis, Wespath believes near-term decisions made by corporations will play a crucial role in defining the speed and nature of the recovery.

“Now is a time for big thinking and big action,” said Dave Zellner, chief investment officer. “It is important that investors, companies, banks and public policymakers form a collective response that takes immediate steps to respond to the crisis and builds a long-term path toward a sustainable global economy.”

Beyond the recommendations of the Statement, Wespath believes companies and financial institutions can take additional steps to accelerate the economic recovery. Specifically, Wespath appeals to banks to support their trusted borrowers and otherwise viable small business owners through direct action, including:

- Offering emergency loans with 0% interest rate for purposes of payroll and solvency for operations
- Offering a percentage reduction to monthly loan payments for the next three to four months

- Providing increased credit lines
- They also urged all employers to educate and encourage their employees to find ways to support small businesses in their local communities.

OBITUARIES

Rev. Amanda Iahn

The Reverend Amanda “Mandy” Iahn, 41, died March 29, 2020, in Wilmington, N.C.

Iahn was serving as the pastor of Oleander United Methodist Church in Wilmington. She was ordained an elder in the New York Conference in 2010, and served the following churches in New York: Town of Esopus UMC in Port Ewen; Lloyd UMC in Highland; Bullville UMC; Trinity UMC in LaGrangeville; and Park Avenue UMC in Manhattan.

Funeral arrangements were pending at press time.

Messages of condolence can be sent to her family and the congregation at Oleander UMC, 5810 Oleander Drive, Wilmington, NC 28403.

Rev. James P. Veatch Jr.

The Reverend James P. Veatch Jr., died March 28, 2020, at Long Island Jewish Medical Center, New Hyde Park, N.Y.

He was a retired elder in the New York Conference.

Veatch was admitted to the hospital on March 21 because of a heart problem.

Funeral arrangements are pending. Messages of condolence may be sent to his wife, Laura, and family, at 204-15 Foothill Ave., Apt A-44, Hollis, NY 11423.

Rev. Sherrie Dobbs Johnson

The Reverend Sherrie Dobbs Johnson died on March 27, 2020. A former district superintendent in the Greater New Jersey Conference, she was the wife of retired Bishop Alfred Johnson, who served as the lead pastor of the Church of the Village from 2005 to 2015.

She served as pastor in local churches in New Jersey and Brooklyn, was a former managing editor for United Methodist Women’s “response” magazine, and a former director of public relations at the United Methodist Publishing House in Nashville

Funeral arrangements are pending.

New Law Can Help Churches Cover Payroll Expenses

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insists it will not apply those rules to a church’s ministry activities.

“Congress enacted the CARES Act to afford swift and sweeping stopgap relief to Americans who might otherwise lose their jobs or businesses because of the economic hardships wrought by the response to the COVID-19 public health emergency,” the agency said, “and SBA has a compelling interest in fulfilling that mandate to provide assistance broadly.”

Is there anything else to keep in mind?

Loan applicants will need patience. Keep in mind this law went on the books less than two weeks ago, and the SBA is still finalizing rules for administering the program. Williams is encouraging churches who had difficulty in filling in the first few days, not to give up.

The agency also will take time to get money out. It handled about \$30 billion in small business loans in 2019. Now the agency has the responsibility of distributing more than 10 times that amount. With that said, many applicants

agree time is of the essence.

If a church’s only employee is the pastor, the church might not have a 941 form (employer’s quarterly federal tax return) or other payroll forms to present with the loan application. In these cases, according to Williams, provide a copy of this [letter](#) from the IRS confirming that your church is not required to file such forms.

Resources on loan program

Various groups have put together resources to help churches understand and possibly use the Payment Protection Program.

- To read a Q&A about the CARES Act, click [here](#).
- To view the Church & Tax Law recorded webinar on the CARES Act, click [here](#).
- Overview of [the Paycheck Protection Program](#) from General Council on Finance and Administration.
- GCEA has answered questions [about other parts of the U.S. CARES Act](#).
- Wespath, the denomination’s pension agency, has [a summary of the U.S. CARES Act](#).



Rev. Dr. Leslie Duroseau has taken her spiritual yoga class online; bags of food wait to be distributed from the sanctuary of St. Paul and St. Andrew UMC.



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 11 a.m. with Zoom, but without their musicians who had to be furloughed. A Lenten book study using “Soul Reset” by Junius Dotson had already been scheduled online as the leader now lives in Florida.

When Redman first reached out to the youth one of them said that they didn’t miss school, but they did miss the people.

“They miss not being physically around their friends,” Redman noted. “They are discovering that the cell phone isn’t the be all-end all.

Redman was grateful for the New York National Guard who came in to clean the church, disinfecting the entire building including the day care center. The Guard had been called in to clean public spaces and hand out food to those who need it.

After a dramatic slowdown of positive cases in New Rochelle, the

containment order was lifted on March 25.

Daily Zoom with Kids
 Kripplebush UMC, Stone Ridge, N.Y. (CH)

Pastor Valerie Paul-Greenaway has been using Facebook Live to stream worship at both churches that she serves—Kripplebush UMC and the Federated Church of Kerhonksen. So on March 15, she easily transitioned to virtual services without a congregation.

Following worship that day, she felt the Spirit ask about the children in the Kripplebush congregation.

There are about 10 kids, ages three to 11 years old, and Paul-Greenaway wanted to find a way to connect while the schools are not in session.

So each weekday at 11:30 a.m., Paul-Greenaway is meeting with the children via Zoom for an interactive time of Bible reading, singing and drawing. On the first

day, five children participated and learned about Psalm 23, and drew pictures representing each of the verses.

Paul-Greenaway expects the sessions to last from 20 to 30 minutes and to continue until the schools reopen. She’s eager to share her knowledge and also to have other churches join in. She can be reached by [email](#).

Grateful for Palms
 St. John’s UMC, Elmont-Valley Stream (LIW)

Rev. David Ball has a unique perspective on the coronavirus pandemic. His wife and two daughters all work in local hospitals. His wife, Faith, handles patient registration and often finds herself providing pastoral care. Part of her role is to counsel parents who are unable to visit their

children in the hospital.

She follows an elaborate protocol before and after she gets home to mitigate the possible spread of the virus.

“This has certainly changed the way that we live,” Rev. Ball said. “It has definitely changed the way we greet one another.” The couple checks in with their daughters and grandchildren every day for a time of family devotions.

St. John’s also has a number of members who work in healthcare and Ball has been especially watchful for them and the senior members of the congregation.

As Holy Week was approaching, Ball believes that God gave him a vision about what he needed to do for Palm Sunday. There would be no green leafy palms to wave this year, but there were many other palms at work fighting the coronavirus that needed to be celebrated.

He went in search of some bed sheets to use as a canvas for the project, but the lines at Walmart were too long to wait. Just as he was about to give up, he drove by a print shop where the owner was closing up. He pitched his idea to the man, who loved it so much that he cut a 4-by-5-foot banner for Ball.

He sent the banner to work with his daughter at the Queens hospital along with some finger paints. The doctors, nurses and all of the staff



Prayer cards thanked hospital employees parked at the Northern Westchester Hospital in Mount Kisco.

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were invited to add their palm prints to the banner. In all, about 70 prints covered the canvas.

“God gave us built-in palms to celebrate—caring palms, palms on the front lines,” Ball explained. “That’s a small portion of all the palms that God is using in this battle.”

The banner will end up hanging in the church as reminder that God provides even in difficult times. Ball bought a second banner so the hospital could duplicate the project and hang the finished product to encourage its staff.

“We wanted to celebrate them and show how much we care,” she said.

Park & Pray, Feeding Community Commack UMC (LIE)

Rev. Roslyn Lee has begun driving around Commack with a church directory in hand as a way of caring for her congregation. She stops in front of a house or pulls into the driveway before calling the parishioner and offering to pray with them. This “park & pray” allows Lee to maintain a ministry of presence in difficult times.

Parishioners—at least one still wearing a bathrobe—take their phones and open their front doors so they can make eye contact with Lee in her car.

“It’s been great to see people smile, if only for a moment,” Lee said.

Commack UMC has also set up six care teams of able-bodied members who are willing to do grocery runs or errands for those at higher risk levels. The team members are checking in on 39 people and then share the needs

and prayer concerns with one another.

Lee was also looking for a way to enlarge the care ministries by engaging some of the other mothers in her daughter’s Girl Scout troop who want to help.

“People pitching in beyond the local church is the beginning of connecting the dots,” she said.

So she helped start a town-wide initiative, “[Commack Feeds Our Heroes](#),” by bringing together area restaurants to donate food that is delivered by community members. The local fire and police stations, hospitals and extended care facilities have been fed with Girl Scout cookies, donuts, roasted chicken dinners, sandwiches, sushi and more.

Lee has been encouraged by the immediate support for the initiative, which has extended to accept donations of gift cards and money.

But she also admitted to feeling a little overwhelmed in this new world of parish ministry.

“I’m used to a lot of this technology, but it’s totally new to most of my members,” Lee noted. “I feel like I’m on, and I’ve been on, and it feels like there’s no off switch.”

Planning a Second Easter Sayville UMC (LIE)

For the [Sayville UMC](#), the first step in suspending worship services was to activate their “disaster relief protocol” which meant a team of eight trying to reach every member by phone.

The church is relying on recorded services posted to YouTube along with an emailed list of questions that families can discuss at home. The March 22

service included Rev. Richard Allen delivering the [children’s message](#) to a gathering of assorted stuffed animals.

In addition, there is a Sunday school page with lessons for use during the shutdown and a new hymn page with peaceful modern worship songs. The church is also prepared to offer childcare thanks to some returning college students. Another team has been doing outdoor home repairs.

Allen and his congregation already have a plan for their return to in-person worship.

“Whenever we get back, even if it is in July, we will be holding all Holy Week services,” Allen wrote in an email. “With so many things being taken away, it was nice to know one would be given back.”

Food in the Pews St. Paul & St. Andrew UMC, Manhattan (MET)

In New York City, no worship is taking place at the UMC of St. Paul and St. Andrew (SPSA). But a vital mission remains, which is filling the pews of the sanctuary at West 86th Street and West End Avenue.

The [West Side Campaign Against Hunger](#)—a supermarket-style food pantry program founded and actively supported by SPSA—has moved its operations there from the basement’s fellowship hall. While the organization has been forced to temporarily drop its direct engagement to promote

self-reliance for customers, it can still distribute shelf-stable food through its mobile sites and 86th Street locations, says Greg Silverman, executive director.

“We just needed a massive increase in space to put all that food together,” he explained. “The sanctuary is set up in some ways for that because we can create rows of food in some pews. At the same time, it allows for social distancing because people can work in remote corners of that huge space.”

While less community-focused, the campaign against hunger’s current operations are working like clockwork, Silverman said, while allowing people to be safe. “In some ways, it plays to all of our strengths,” he added. “We’re used to prepping and organizing huge quantities of food for upcoming events.”

During Holy Week, their operations expanded into the church’s chapel and parlor as they begin bagging food for Bellevue Hospital. The result will be 1,750 sets of food each week, given to COVID-19 patients leaving the hospital.

—Linda Bloom, *UM News*

Making Masks First UMC, Flushing (LIW)

In Queens, the borough with New York City’s largest rate of infection, First United Methodist Church in Flushing has donated

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Rev. Richard Allen delivers the children’s message to some furry friends at Sayville UMC.



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handmade face masks to two senior living communities. The goal is to donate 10,000 masks to the people who need them most, according to Rev. Chongho Kim.

—Linda Bloom, *UM News*

Making Masks II
Jesse Lee Memorial UMC,
Ridgefield, Conn. (CT)

Rev. Maria-Pia Seirup, a deacon appointed to Jesse Lee, has teamed up with some friends to create a production system for making masks and sharing supplies. About one-half of the sewers come from the community and hundreds of masks have already been sent far and wide. Two plastic bins sit on Seirup’s front porch; one with finished masks that have been dropped off and the other holds kits to be picked up for assembly.

Her husband, Peter, has been drafted for the mission and has cut the fabric for 600 mask kits himself. The kit includes a pipe cleaner for over the nose, and ties cut from T-shirts which are much more comfortable for extended wear.

Batches have been sent to local doctors’ offices and physical therapists, nursing homes, a pediatric cancer unit, two residential mental health centers, and 60 went to Anchor House, the substance abuse treatment facility in Brooklyn. And requests continue to pour in to Seirup’s Facebook page.

One request came from a student nurse in Boston who has participated in one of the Jesse Lee teams to the Appalachia Service Project. She and her fellow students have been pressed into

service to provide care during the pandemic and were in need of masks.

Laity Leading the Way
Conesville UMC (CH)

Conesville UMC in the Catskills may not have an appointed pastor, but that’s not stopping them from conducting virtual worship every week. After their first Zoom service on March 15, the congregation decided that their twice-a-month gatherings were not enough during this time of social distancing. They’ve drawn about 18 people each week for the services that are normally led by lay speakers, and occasionally, by Rev. Dottie Morris who leads the Gilboa and Harpersfield churches. Some of the senior members who had not been able to physically attend are now showing up virtually on Sunday afternoons at 4.

A week later they added Sunday School to the mix for eight kids

who range in age from three to 12, according to teacher Kimberly Young. The kids have created cards for the local nursing home, and made rainbows to display at home as part of the [518 Rainbow Hunt](#).

On Wednesdays, there’s also a new mid-week fun group for crafting and time for online socializing. The kids are eager to see one another and find out what’s going on with their friends. Young demonstrates the crafts through a YouTube video.

On Easter, they plan to decorate the outside of the church with each family individually making something to display.

Defining Community
HA:N UMC, Manhattan
(MET)

One of the challenges of a new church start is finding ways to develop community, a task made even more difficult for Pastor Daniel S. Cho in a time of social distancing.

“Our group is very dispersed. We’re still trying to figure out how to connect ourselves,” Cho said. “Zoom worship has allowed us to start inviting people from across the country, to invite other progressive Asian-American Christian folks to our services.”

Their services are normally interactive with a time of questions and conversation about the

sermon. Cho has been exploring the capabilities of Zoom—like the breakout feature—and is working to tailor his worship to make optimal use of the video/audio conferencing service.

The church previously had online giving as an option, so Cho continues to include an offering time in the service. He instructs people about giving during worship or doing it later.

Something is working for HA:N because Cho noted that participation has been going up each week. The church’s average attendance had been between 15 and 20. On March 29, it was up to 26.

“This is making us think of community more broadly, than locally,” Cho said. “We’re working to get more connected with each other, to be more social, and provide emotional support.”

The pastor does know of one member who has been diagnosed with COVID-19. He paired up households as a way of checking in with one another to make sure “no one falls through the cracks.”

Comfort from the Chapel
First UMC, Torrington (CT)

First UMC in Torrington, Conn., had been using Facebook Live to stream their Sunday morning services, but decided to create their own YouTube channel for worship beginning March 22. Pastor Ximena Varas led worship in front of a stained-glass image of Christ in the church’s chapel – a comforting image for many of the members.

For Varas, one of the most challenging parts has been getting all the music licenses in place. But she’s grateful for the promotions being offered by many of the licensing companies.

Pulling Together for NOSH
Glen Cove, N.Y. (LIE)

Houses of worship, local government and hunger assistance organizations are coming together in Nassau County’s North Shore communities to ensure that



Rev. Maria-Pia Seirup is heading up an effort to make hundreds of much needed face masks.

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individuals and families have food to eat. According to its Facebook page, [NOSH](#) was founded to support food insecurity in the area safely and responsibly during the outbreak of coronavirus and after.

"This shows the beautiful side of humanity," said Rev. Gia Hall, who serves the Glen Cove community. "When something terrible like this happens, everyone pulls together."

Hall is putting the FEMA training she got following Hurricane Sandy to work as NOSH's data manager. She's keeping track of requests, what teams are sent out, and who is getting served. Each day the need continues to grow with requests from senior centers and churches, posts to Facebook, and calls to a phone bank. NOSH's efforts are also focused on kids home from school, business owners who've had to close up shop, and the existing homeless population.

"We want to be a go-to resource for this community. If you need help, we can get you food," said Hall. "The Holy Spirit is definitely at work. Every day there is a new wave of people volunteering to help."

NYAC Missions Coordinator Tom Vencuss is also involved with the program by helping with access to the geographic information systems (GIS) database and the 211 social services network, and with items like health kits.

Feeding the Students Mamaroneck UMC (MET)

Volunteers from the Mamaroneck UMC are assisting with the feeding of children while the Mamaroneck Schools are

closed. The first week they handed out lunch and breakfast bags. When the rules changed the second week, they transported the bags to three school parking lots where the students and parents picked them up, according to the pastor, Rev. Karen Burger.

Zoom Coffee Hour UMC of Westport & Weston (CT)

Rev. Heather Sinclair, who has been using a mix of YouTube and Zoom for ministry, is thinking ahead to how the church will continue its online outreach once in-person gatherings are allowed.

"We've had good attendance with regular members, and even some snowbirds and people who have moved to Florida," Sinclair said. "I've also heard from people in the community who are checking in to watch."

On Palm Sunday, the church went to a pre-recorded service with readers and musicians in different locations. Sinclair is exploring ways to better interface between YouTube and the church's relatively new website.

Zoom "coffee hours" after worship have proven successful.

"We use the time to chat, care for one another and lift up any prayer requests," Sinclair said.

Daily Virtual Classes First UMC, Greenwich (CT)

A weekly slate of learning opportunities via Zoom video conferencing is making connections at [First UMC](#) in Greenwich, Conn. On Monday it's sign language, Tuesday is "Bach to Rock," Wednesday and Thursday are Bible studies. The week wraps

up at 3 p.m. on Friday with coffee, tea and conversation. The "Daily Virtual Gathering" classes are all being led by members of the church, according to Pastor Dong Hyun "DH" Choi.

For more than a year, the church has been on a journey to discern the gifts of its members, and how those gifts might be used to connect to the community. They had had some limited success, but felt that there was more to do after they started their virtual Sunday worship services on Zoom. The result was the lineup of classes at 3 p.m. Monday through Friday.

"We have prayed for sharing our gifts since last year, and now God allows us to use this crisis as an opportunity to serve God's people," said Choi. The Zoom gatherings are open to anyone; login info is available from the church.

Creating Space for Prayer Trinity-Boscobel UMC, Buchanan (NYCT)

A space newly cleared of trees on the church property prompted Sunday School Director Meg Greiner to ask about the possibility of creating an outdoor place for prayer. And all too soon it was accomplished.

Greiner's father, Al Hansen, found some old lumber in the church basement and erected a large cross outside. Hansen added a white bench from the basement, and his wife, Peg, draped the cross with a purple cloth. Neighbors across the street from the church planted hyacinths at the base of the cross. A couple of solar lights were installed to illuminate the cross at night.

According to Rev. Linda Willey, the resting place—with plenty of open space around it—is already getting some use as people pass by in cars or on foot. A hand-lettered sign makes the invitation to "Come, sit. Pray for the world."

Willey, who started an online Sunday night worship service on Zoom last October, didn't know how important that decision would prove to be just a few months later. She's now also using the video

conferencing service on Sunday mornings for meetings and Bible study.

"It's been a real Godsend in this time of social distancing," Willey said. "People have been comforted to see one another. They really like the intimacy of seeing faces rather than the back of someone's head."

Time to Say Goodbye Crawford Memorial UMC, Bronx (MET)

For Rev. Janet Hodge, this time of social distancing from her congregation has been extra difficult.

"I'm retiring at the end of June. It's my last few months and I need to see my people," Hodge said. "My prayer is that we come back together before I go."

The church has been using Facebook and Zoom for worship and has just updated their computer system to improve capacity with a WiFi extension to the sanctuary to come. Hodge checks with her people every night in an online prayer group; sometimes she offers the devotions, sometimes it is one of the lay leaders.

Her confirmation class loves meeting via Zoom.

"They thought we would be hesitant to do it," she said. "It's fun for them to see one another, but we've also realized how much the physical community means to them."

Search for Living Water Park Slope UMC, Brooklyn (LIW)

Park Slope UMC ventured into virtual church territory using Zoom, and Rev. Melissa Hinnen says it's her "new favorite technology." She had only used Zoom herself a few times.

Hinnen put together a script indicating cues for the worship leaders who would all be in different locations, and sent it out Saturday night. An invitation and instructions for the congregation was emailed and posted to social media on Friday night.

Despite a few technical challenges, Hinnen said she was

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impressed by how many people participated—58+ households—including some members who had moved away.

With the story of Jesus and the woman at the well as the day’s reading, Hinnen invited people to respond in the online chat about where they were finding “living water” amid the current fear and anxiety.

She said she was most struck to hear the Lord’s Prayer being recited from all the different places as photos of the families flashed on the screen.

Hospital Prayer Cards
UMC of Mount Kisco
(NYCT)

With the Northern Westchester Hospital just two blocks away, the cUMC of Mount Kisco made an effort to shower some extra love on all of the dedicated people still working there each day—from food service and cleaners to doctors, nurses and technicians. Cards with the message, “Thank you for your commitment to keeping us safe & healthy. We love you & are praying for you,” were printed in the church office. Rev. Joanne Utley and member Lisa Porter left a card on every car in the employee parking areas.

Spiritual Yoga
Hamptons UMC,
Southampton, N.Y. (LIE)

The church’s spiritual yoga class, offered on Tuesday mornings, is now being offered online via a YouTube channel. Rev. Dr. Leslie Duroseau began the class last fall to introduce the benefits of yoga, both spiritually

and physically. The goal was to create an inclusive community within and beyond the church walls; usually six members from the church participate as well as six or seven from the community.

Social distancing creates a new challenge for creating inclusive community, Duroseau said.

“First, we make an inclusive for ourselves: body, mind, spirit,” she said. “Then we invite others in however we can by sharing and connecting via social media, phone calls, or artwork. Whatever comes to our creative selves.”

Software & Apps
Grace UMC, Valley Stream
(LIW)

Rev. Gertude Nation, who was using a weekly email newsletter to communicate with her congregation, is now employing a pair of messaging services to connect with the members.

MemberCaller.com allows

the pastor to record one message and then send it out to as many telephone numbers as she wants. Whatsapp on cell phones is also allowing for easier messaging and group chats so that the church leaders and members can stay connected.

Nation is noticing a change in relationships, a deepening of connection in the congregation.

“Folks are getting closer to each other because they’re having longer phone conversations, reaching out to people because they are not coming together,” said Nation.

Drive-In Pantry, Candles of Presence
Ulster Heights UMC,
Ellenville, N.Y. (CH)

This small church has been hosting a food pantry twice a month for the last six years. Members of the church drive their own trucks to Monticello or Kingston to pick up food from the Food Bank of Hudson Valley. Usually some 40 families are served.

But on March 25, they offered a drive-thru pantry for the first time, starting work at 2 p.m. and ending at 8:30 p.m. Nearly 100 families showed up for the distribution.

“We were tired and exhausted, but felt blessed by the work,” said Pastor Seijin “Sam” Cha, who

also serves St. Mark’s UMC in Napanoch.

Two days later, a man from the community gave the church a \$10,000 donation for the pantry.

“We feel so very encouraged, feel really connected to our community,” Cha said. The man who is known by some parishioners, but does not attend the church “saw how we helped the community and was moved to donate.” The church is exploring the best way to use the gift for the pantry.

Cha has been putting together videos for Sunday morning worship and engages the congregation by asking them to shoot phone videos for different parts of the service, like the call to worship led by multiple generations of a family. He then edits it together and plays it for both churches.

He was looking for a way to let the congregation feel more connected as he preaches from the sanctuary. He borrowed an idea from a New Jersey colleague and placed electric tealights on the altar surrounding a Christ candle. The name of each individual church member is written on the candles.

“I wanted them to feel more included,” Cha said. “They might not be present physically, but they are together there in spirit.”

YouTube Starts the Day
Bayside UMC, Queens
(LIW)

Every weekday morning from 6:30 to 7, Rev. Jung Ung Moon has begun hosting a time of prayer and worship on YouTube audio. That’s in addition to Sunday worship and prayer meetings on Zoom. He’s been trying to upgrade the church’s online service, while reassuring those who aren’t comfortable with using the internet.

“I tell them that this is just temporary,” he said. “The best way for us is to meet and touch each other. This is an emergency.” For the older members of his congregation, Moon makes time to call them individually to read scripture and pray with them.



Candles on the altar at Ulster Heights UMC bear the names of every congregation member.