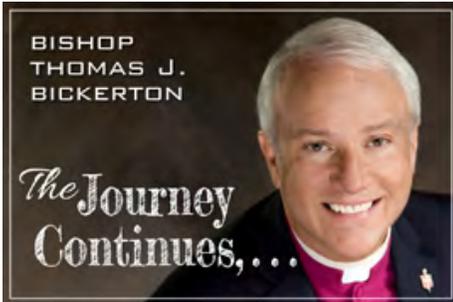


"Write the vision clearly on the tablets, that one may read it on the run." – Habakkuk

THE VISION



Blocking the Noise To Hear Echo of God

This is the day I have been waiting for. A blanket of snow has slowed down the fast pace of the world and forced us indoors. No sounds of cars on the freeway. No roar from planes flying overhead. Today is an unusual day. The world around me is quiet.

Noise is a constant feature in our world. Even my office has a system to create a soft noise so that others cannot hear private conversations. To have spaces and places that are truly quiet are rare indeed.

There is a difference though from "having" quiet to "being" quiet. "Having" quiet is hard given all of the noises around us. But "being" quite may even be more difficult. There are forces at work all around us that cause a disquieted spirit within. Disappointments to our hopes and dreams create a noise within. Distractions in our pursuit of Christ-like holiness

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\$5 Sparks Community Generosity

Editor's note: The "Gone Vital" column will highlight ministries that are helping to create or revive churches and communities.

BY JOANNE S. UTLEY

Editor, *The Vision*

What can you get for \$5 these days? A couple of gallons of gas. A one-month subscription to Netflix. A grande-sized salted caramel mocha at Starbucks.

One Orange County community has multiplied five-dollar bills into

more than \$15,000 thanks to a challenge Rev. Susan Chupungco gave to her Goshen (N.Y.) United Methodist Church congregation back in October 2015.

Chupungco was preparing a sermon on the Gospel lesson about the "rich young ruler" and wanted to inspire her congregation to be generous and experience the true joy of giving. She'd read about another pastor who had handed church members \$5 bills to do something good.

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Rev. Susan Chupungco (in white turtleneck) gathers with church and community members to discuss how the funds they raised will be distributed to help families in the Goshen area.



For a full lineup of events, go to the [web site calendar](#).

2/20 Conference Call Prayer

Join the Task Force on Immigration for a time of prayer for our country and immigrant brothers and sisters. Monday nights from 7:30–8 p.m. until further notice. Call-in number: 641-715-3580; group code: 780-843#. Contact Pastor [Ximena Varas](#) for more information.

2/24, 27–28 Walking the Labyrinth

A labyrinth will be set up in the Learning Center for those who would like to come, pray, and meditate in preparation for Lent. 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. Contact [Lynda Gomi](#) for more information. See story on Page 11.

2/25–26 BMCR Weekend

The weekend theme is “How to Build the Beloved Community—Moving Beyond Racism, Classism and Sexism.” A panel discussion will be held from 9 a.m. to 12 noon on Saturday. At 3 p.m. Sunday, Bishop Tracy S. Malone of the East Ohio Conference will preach and Bishop Thomas Bickerton will preside over Holy Communion. A meal will follow. [Register](#) online by February 13 for this event at Crawford Memorial UMC, 3757 White Plains Rd., Bronx, N.Y.

3/1–29 Wednesday Lenten Series

Praising God with our bodies. Noon to 1 p.m. in the Conference Center each Wednesday from March 8 to 29. See story on Page 11.

3/23 Pre-Retirement Seminar

Check the conference calendar for additional details about this [event](#) scheduled from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Contact is [Sally Truglia](#).

4/22 Disaster Response Forum

Greg Forrester, president and CEO of National VOAD, will be the featured speaker at this one-day forum, “When Disaster Strikes—the Church Responds.” The 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. forum will be held at the White Plains Conference Center. Presentation topics will include the role of the church in a disaster, understanding the big picture, and toward a district-based disaster response ministry. Breakout sessions planned are ERT recertification class, nuts and bolts of leading a response team, caring for the community and developing care ministries.

4/24–28 Clergy/Spouses Health Clinic

Active clergy and/or their spouses are eligible for this health clinic and seminar at New York Presbyterian Brooklyn Methodist Hospital (formerly New York Methodist Hospital). Overnight accommodations and virtually all expenses beyond a \$50 registration fee are covered by the hospital. Give yourself this gift to check out your health. Find the [details](#) on the NYAC website, or contact coordinator, Rev. [Elizabeth Braddon](#) by email, or at 203-481-2789.

4/29 Understanding Elder Abuse

NYAC Older Adult Committee will sponsor the event, “Elder Abuse: Recognizing, Responding and Prevention,” from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Memorial UMC, 250 Bryant Ave., White Plains, N.Y. Contact [Rev. Jim Stinson](#) with questions.

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<p>The Vision</p> <p><small>The News of the New York Conference of the United Methodist Church</small></p>
<p>Bishop: Thomas J. Bickerton Editor: Joanne Utley New York Conference of The United Methodist Church 20 Soundview Avenue, White Plains, NY 10606 Phone (888) 696-6922 Fax (914) 615-2244; Website: www.nyac.com Vision e-mail: vision@nyac.com</p>

Sylvester Named to Lead Connecticut District

Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton has appointed Reverend Alpher K. Sylvester as the new Connecticut District Superintendent, effective July 1, 2017. Sylvester is currently the pastor at Grace United Methodist Church in St. Albans, N.Y. He will succeed the Rev. Ken Kieffer who is completing his eighth year as the superintendent in the Connecticut District.

“Alpher has a wonderful spiritual depth and a proven record of growing churches that are vital and alive,” Bickerton said in an email. “He has a genuine spirit that lends to building relationships and collaborative ministries.”

Sylvester was born into a Christian home in the island nation of Trinidad and Tobago; he is the seventh of 10 children born to Elon and Elsie Sylvester. His father is a retired Baptist bishop.

In his biography, Sylvester wrote that “he accepted Jesus Christ as his savior at an early age and has consistently pursued a course that celebrates his master and his Lord.”

He has used his gifts and testimony to minister to others in Africa, Europe and the Middle East. As part of his ministry commitment, yearly, he sponsors

pilgrimages to Israel, Turkey, Jordan, Egypt, Ghana and South Africa.

“At Grace United Methodist Church where I currently pastor,” Sylvester wrote, “we believe that if excellence is possible, then greatness is not enough. As the leader of Grace United Methodist Church, I have the distinct privilege to lead our congregation to seek justice, love mercy and to walk humbly with our God . . .

“Personally, as a pastor, I have committed to love people. To look beyond their frailties and to see the possibilities that God has endowed within them. I am intentional in ministering to those on the fringes, to those that are sitting under our steeples and yet to enter into our community. It is what Jesus will do and what we must do.

“If all these things are partially indicative of God’s calling on people’s life and evidence of a sense of God’s call on my life then, indeed, I am called to ministry and blessed to be given the opportunity to serve God’s people



Rev. Alpher Sylvester in the pulpit at Grace UMC during the installation of Long Island West District Superintendent Sungchan Kim in October 2014.

in the Connecticut District and God’s church at large.”

Rev. Sylvester holds a master’s degree of public administration from the City University of New York, and a master’s of divinity from Drew University Theological School. He is currently in the writing phase of his doctoral degree at Drew. He and his wife, Carlene, have two sons, Nicholas and Simon, and a daughter Vanessa.

Additional appointments announced:

Jason P. Radmacher to Asbury-Crestwood, MET District
David M. Jolly to Trinity (Bronx: City Island), MET District

Blocking the Noise to Hear the Echoes of God

Continued from page 1

stir an unsettled noise in the soul. Disturbances to the perception of how we think life should be lived creates a restlessness that often causes a loud reaction for all to hear.

Many of us are in positions of leadership where people are wanting to hear what we have to say. Church members attend services to hear what the preacher has to say each week. People who know us expect to hear what Christianity's reaction is to current affairs and world events. We are expected to respond to the noise of the world, so much so that often we forget that our words are only crafted out of the silence.

It is so hard to be quiet. But it is, at times, so necessary.

One of the things that often disturbs me with others and disappointments me with myself is when the response to the noise around us is nothing more than a noise of our own. In my daily discipline, I try very hard to remember that I am a human with sins and shortfalls and opinions that may or may not reflect the will of God in any situation. My human reaction to noise can be harmful or helpful depending on how well I have listened.

One of the most amazing phenomena of this life is the "echo." I'm not talking about the Amazon version. I'm talking about the version found in the natural world. An "echo," according to Webster's Dictionary is "the repetition of a sound caused by reflection of sound waves." Have you ever gone into a cave or stood at a strategic place in a canyon and simply yelled out, "Hello?" That word can be heard echoing down the walls in constant repetition. The echo travels from one place to another repeating itself over and over and over again. Yet, we will never hear the echo if we never take the time to listen for it.

In these days of loud rhetoric and caustic reactions, it is critical for God's people in the church to actively and intentionally listen for the voice of God. In exasperation, there are days when we wonder where God is and when God will speak. Perhaps the reality is that God is always speaking. The real

problem may be that we are not listening for the "long echo" of the voice of God.

Settle yourself. Get in a comfortable position. Close your eyes. Listen for the "long echo" of the voice of God:

- *I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.* (Genesis 17:7)
- *For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven, . . .* (Ecclesiastes 3:1)
- *He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?* (Micah 6:8)
- *But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."* (Matthew 14:27)
- *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.* (Matthew 28:19)
- *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"* (Matthew 22: 37–39)
- *Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.* (I Corinthians 11:1)
- *"I will never leave you or forsake you."* (Hebrews 13:5b)

These are only a sampling of the echoes of God that have been heard throughout the history of humanity. They are words, echos, that have been heard in the midst of natural disasters, world wars, and human atrocities. They are echos that have been heard in the midst of famine, disease, and injustice. They are not new words, but timeless treasures that have never been forgotten because someone dared to be quiet just long enough to listen for the long echo of God.

Webster's offers an additional definition for the word "echo." It is, "one who closely imitates or repeats another's words, ideas, or actions." This is our

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Bishop's Statement on Immigration Order

Read a separate [statement](#) from the Northeastern Jurisdiction's College of Bishops on Immigration.

Dear Friends & Colleagues,

A few weeks ago I made my way to New York City for a meeting. As has become my routine, I drove to the White Plains train station to catch my ride. When I pulled into the parking garage, there were plenty of empty spaces. The only problem was that each one of them had the same message: "Metered Parking. Permit Only. All others towed." Six floors of empty spaces and one message: "You can't park here."

I didn't panic because I knew that the seventh floor had an unrestricted section where anyone could park. However, when I arrived on the seventh floor I quickly discovered that all of the unrestricted spaces had been taken. There was no room for me.

After several attempts and a few missed trains, I finally found a spot some distance away from the station. All I wanted to do was catch the train that would take me to the place I wanted to go.

My own minor encounter with exclusion pales in comparison with the recent Executive Orders to close our borders and build walls. It's one thing to not be able to find a place to park and catch a train. It's another to apply that circumstance to someone's family and life. All they want to do is catch the train to a better life, a life filled with hope, healing, and possibilities to become a fuller expression of who they were created to be.

The hope for healing and possibility is at the heart of who we are as a people of faith. In the Old Testament we are told in Leviticus and Deuteronomy that we are to treat the foreigner as our native born, to leave food for them, and to "love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt" (Deuteronomy 10:18-19). In the New Testament, Jesus was constantly inviting in the loners, losers, and lost ones of the world and imploring his



followers to respond favorably to those around us. "Just as you did it to one of the least of these, you did it me," was his plea (Matthew 25:40).

When the church was established, they quickly began to use the word "sanctuary" to describe the most sacred part of the religious building. The "sanctuary" was a safe place, a refuge from the storm, a haven for

protection from the forces at work around us.

Today we find ourselves immersed in a struggle where our President has declared that there is no room for the foreigner, no place for hope of a greater life, no sanctuary from the storm of life, no opportunity to catch the train to a better life. These decisions are separating families, dismantling communities, and creating a greater division among us that only adds to the discord we feel and the conflict we sense emerging around us.

I believe that we tend to operate most days with a short-term memory. It was not all that long ago that seven brothers immigrated to the United States to find a better life. Four of the brothers settled in Pennsylvania. Three of them in West Virginia. Their names were Bickerton. It was not all that long ago that a man brought his wife and young child through Ellis Island from Syria and began working in a produce warehouse along the Ohio River. His name was Cassis. It was not long ago that a child of the Bickerton family met a child of the Cassis family and fell in love. They married and began to build a life together. They named their first son Tom. I would not be here today had it not been for a place that welcomed the immigrant, provided a place for them to seek employment, and encouraged them to build a life within the bounds of our borders.

My story is not unlike countless numbers of other stories that bear witness to what really made America great. It welcomed those who were struggling to find

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Bishop's Statement on Immigration Order

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their way and offered them the hope of a better life.

That's where we come in. It is time for us to be the church that we profess we are. While we cannot change Executive Orders that oppress and alienate, we in our churches can create an atmosphere of grace and a posture of love that points to a better way.

I would encourage all of you to take to heart the biblical mandate that has been proclaimed in our churches for centuries. I would implore you to take seriously the word "sanctuary" and provide opportunity to make that word come alive in your context. I would ask you to consider what it means to create a story that is far different than the rhetoric we are being exposed to by those who currently have control of the microphone.

Specifically, I would urge you to consider the following:

Pray, teach, and preach

Open the doors of your church to offer constant prayer vigils, provide resources for prayer at the altars of our churches, and have leaders present to pray for those who seek something more. We must create a climate among our people where they are seeking, in prayer, the will of God and the courage that God provides for us to play our part in the redemption of the world.

Explore the scriptures and take leadership to offer words of guidance and hope based on the Word of God. Teach about how we, like Jesus and many

others after him, can play a role in bearing witness to grace, hope and love for all of God's children. Preach about welcoming the stranger, feeding the poor, and including the ones who are left out. Remind your people that we were once foreigners and bridge the gap with the offer to love others as we ourselves have been loved.

Walk the streets

It is time for us to take the word transformation more seriously. If we want to transform the world, we must be in the world we hope to transform. If all we do is pray and preach to those who make up our membership, we will have missed the grand opportunity to more intimately know the hungers and hurts of the people around us.

I urge you to walk the streets of your community and discover where the hurts and fears reside. Go to places where you wouldn't normally go, speak a word that creates a pulpit of grace wherever you may be, ask questions about what the real needs are, and love, simply love, the ones who need a word of hope and healing.

Consider becoming a "sanctuary"

Our president has signed an executive order that will pull funding from cities that are sanctuaries. The church will not do the same. We need to identify, train, and equip churches throughout the New York Conference to become sanctuary churches in the

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Blocking the Noise to Hear the Echoes of God

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challenge, dear friends. This is our opportunity—to listen so closely, so deeply, and so intentionally to the voice of God, echoing throughout the canyons of time, that we are able to be latest voice that imitates and repeats the time honored "word from the Lord."

I once had a mentor who was fond of saying, "You cannot take your people where you yourself have not been." We cannot lead others into the heart of God

unless we seeking and dwelling in the heart of God ourselves.

How does one dwell in the heart of God?

Be still. Quiet yourself. Breath. And listen, deeply listen, for the long echo of God.

May it be so.

The Journey Continues, . . .

Thomas J. Bickerton

Resident Bishop

Event Puts Jan. 20 Spotlight on Immigration

BY JOANNE S. UTLEY

Editor, *The Vision*

In an effort to reframe Inauguration Day, New York Conference clergy and lay persons joined Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton on January 20 to work, learn and pray with members of the immigrant community on Long Island. The daylong Immigration Vigil and Forum, sponsored by the conference's Task Force on Immigration and Board of Church & Society, was hosted by the Hicksville United Methodist Church, which serves a growing immigrant population.

In his opening remarks, Bickerton confirmed that the day had been planned as a "conscientious objection" to what was going on in Washington, D.C. He suggested to the event planners that any prayers offered today "not just be in a sacred place, but in the community.

"We need to be grace for those who are skeptical and afraid . . . a safe place for the loners, losers and lost ones. This is not a smooth transition today. Many are so fearful," he said, before offering a word of prayer.

Much of the day was set aside for learning about the rights of immigrants and the specific issues that they may face. First up was a tour of the food pantry in the Hicksville church that sees about 40 families a week and served 1,060 separate households in 2016. The numbers rise during the winter months when seasonal



PHOTOS BY JOANNE S. UTLEY

Clockwise from above: Maria Larios shares the story of her journey from Honduras to the United States—with the help of translator, Rev. Enrique Lebron. Bishop Bickerton greets pantry workers at the Hicksville UMC in Hicksville, N.Y. Attorney TJ Mills leads a "Know Your Rights" session.



workers have fewer or no jobs.

Rev. Dr. Marjorie Nunes, pastor at Hicksville, said that offering food staples to those in need has been a coordinated effort with other churches in the community. The pantry has been operating for 10 years and had to overcome some initial opposition before it could open.

"I feel very blessed to be

able to do this," said Fern Funk, chairperson of the pantry. She noted that connections are made and relationships develop as the clients share stories about their lives and families with the pantry workers.

"Sometimes we see people leave us, but that's a good thing," she said.

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Event Puts Jan. 20 Spotlight on Immigration

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A “Know your Rights” seminar followed and was led in English and Spanish by TJ Mills, managing attorney for the NYAC’s Justice For Our Neighbors (JFON). JFON currently offers free legal clinics in four places, three of which are UM churches, including the Hicksville church.

Mills explained that the nationwide assistance program first began in churches because immigrants considered them safe places. The JFON work tends to focus on family petitions for reunification, citizenship for permanent residents, and visas in humanitarian, asylum or domestic violence cases. They also educate immigrants about their rights and how to prepare for encounters with the police or Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials.

Mills expressed concern over campaign promises made by President Donald Trump to build a wall between Mexico and the United States, to deport millions of immigrants, and to penalize sanctuary cities by withholding federal funds.

“We do have one thing in our favor,” Mills said. “Gov. [Andrew] Cuomo . . . doesn’t like bullies, and he’ll go face-to-face with Trump to preserve our sanctuary cities.”

Some of the most compelling moments of the day came as two immigrants shared their stories during the prayer service.

Maria Larios left her native Honduras to join her father in



Participants clasp hands while singing, “We Shall Overcome,” at the close of the immigration prayer service at Hicksville UMC.

the United States when she was just 17 years old, she told the gathering through translator, Rev. Enrique Lebron. But because she was undocumented she made the treacherous journey through Mexico and across the border in the hands of a human smuggler or “coyote.”

At many times in the month-long journey, she thought she would die, but “God knew the desert, God brought me through.”

Larios, 42, has since become an American citizen and serves the Hispanic community through the Hicksville UMC.

“This is where I belong,” she said. “God has a purpose for me here.”

Zamzam Quraishy is also in ministry at the Hicksville UMC, serving as an evangelist and lay servant. She converted to Christianity in her native India and worked with the Billy Graham ministries there. After her sons began to be harassed and

threatened because of her faith, Quraishy made the decision to come to the United States.

She came into the country legally and believed that “her status was okay” until an early morning raid on her home. The advice she’d been receiving all along about her immigration status was wrong and she found herself in a New Jersey jail. She reached out to then Hicksville pastor, Rev. Tim Riss, who connected her to TJ Mills and JFON.

Zamzam Quraishy, seated at right, listens to Bishop Bickerton during the prayer service in support of immigrants.

“If the church had not intervened, I don’t know where I would be,” she said. “I came here because I wanted to save my children’s lives . . . I hope they will be able to come here one day.”

In his remarks during the midday service, Bishop Bickerton

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Event Puts Jan. 20 Spotlight on Immigration

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told a story about a man who often came to a church that he was serving to ask for assistance. One day the bishop asked the man why he came to his church and the man walked the bishop down the block to look at a telephone pole. Carved on the pole was a marker directing others to the church as a safe and caring place.

“May the people that see that symbol,” the bishop said, pointing to a cross and flame, “know that we are a safe place. May we carve God’s name on our hearts.”

Bickerton shared that one of the things that breaks his heart and drives his ministry is the “disconnect between those that are privileged to receive the life that God intended for them to live and the life that people live because they’re victimized by the world.

“The only document that I’m

concerned about is the document written on your heart, he continued. “You—in this room—are a child of God . . . you are claimed by God . . . loved by God.”

He continued by saying, “If we only expect those who are disenfranchised and left out to carry the banner we will only continue to feed the rhetoric of anger that exists in our culture.

“It’s the unexpected voices that need to pick up the banner, the ones who’ve been blessed with privilege in their life who need to carry that banner at the forefront and say there is something more and we cannot tolerate the separation between the haves and the have nots,” he continued.

“It’s up to us as people of the church to pick up the banner no matter who we are or where we are . . . this can be and should be the church’s greatest hour.”

The event wrapped up with a discussion about resources to educate churches on how to best serve and protect the immigrants in their communities.

Those planning and facilitating the forum included task force co-chairs, Rev. Karina Feliz and Pastor Pat Chuppe; Board of Church & Society chair, Rev. Paul Fleck; Long Island East District Superintendent Julia Yh Yim; as well as Rev. Dr. Nunes, Rev. Bruce Lamb, Rev. Enrique Lebron, lay minister Denise Allen, and Sherre Elder.

For more information, go to the web sites for the [Task Force on Immigration](#), [Justice For Our Neighbors](#), or the [Board of Church & Society](#).

A photo gallery of the event can be viewed [here](#). Two short video clips of Bishop Bickerton’s remarks can be found on the [NYAC Facebook](#) page.

Bishop’s Statement on Immigration Order

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literal sense—places of refuge, protection, and safety. We will strive to do our part in the annual conference to resource and equip churches that make this decision. What we need today, however, are churches that are making the decision. There are dangerous storms brewing. Won’t you consider becoming a refuge from the storm?

If your church is willing to play this important role, please contact your district superintendent and indicate your willingness to be trained and equipped.

This issue is not the only one facing us in these uncertain times. We must not forget about the positions taken and the actions carried out that are creating racial and gender biases that make children

of God feel less than they were created to be. Our prayer and our intentional work must center around what it means to be hope to the hopeless, joy to the joyless, and love to those who are made to feel less than God created them to be. We must do this for all of God’s children.

I want to play my part in truly making America great again. It all begins with providing a place to park and an opportunity to catch the train to a better life.

Won’t you join me?

The Journey Continues, . . .



Thomas J. Bickerton
Resident Bishop

Train to Respond for Disaster Ministries

Enjoy four days and three night in the Pocono Mountains—Free!

Now that we have your attention ... The New York Conference Disaster Response Ministry is looking to sponsor up to two persons from each district to attend the Northeast Jurisdictional Disaster Response Academy from March 26 to 29. The event sponsored by UMVIM/UMCOR will be held at the Pocono Plateau Camp and Retreat Center in Casco, Penn.

Now, here's the catch—to be eligible for this offer, persons should have a desire to know more about faith-based disaster response ministries, agree to meet ahead of time in preparation for the academy, agree to serve on the Conference Disaster Administrative Committee (CDAC), and commit to work toward developing their district's response capacity and capability.

More information about the academy is available on the [NEJ VIM web site](#), or you may contact [Tom Vencuss](#). Participants will be accepted on a first-come basis.

Early-bird deadline is February 26. Please contact Vencuss before registering.

Disaster Response Ministries Forum

“When Disaster Strikes—the Church Responds” will be held from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., April 22, at the conference center in White Plains. Keynote speaker will be Greg Forrester, president and CEO of National VOAD, formerly of UMCOR and the NEJ VIM coordinator.



Greg Forrester

- Presentations: The Role of the Church in a Disaster; Understanding the Big Picture; and Caring for the Community—The role of the church before, during and after a disaster
- Break Out Sessions: ERT Recertification class; Effective Leadership—Nuts and Bolts of Leading a Response Team; and

Caring for the Community—
Developing Care Ministries

- Plenary Gathering: Toward a District-based disaster response ministry

Retreat/Work Weekends

All early response teams, long term recovery volunteers, and those trained in disaster spiritual care are invited to a retreat/work weekend at Camp Olmsted from May 11–13. During the day, we will put our disaster response skills to work, assisting with work projects; evenings will be spent in fellowship and disaster response-related discussions and workshops. The camp in Cornwall on Hudson, N.Y., will host the weekend free of cost. In preparation, we are looking for several persons with construction/building backgrounds to visit the camp and put together a scope of work for each project. Contact [Tom Vencuss](#) via email, or at 860-324-1424, if you are interested.

We have also been in touch with Camp Quinipet to put together a similar retreat/work weekend there. More details will come.

Archives Grant for Church Records

Are your church's historical records deteriorating? Wondering how to save them? The Commission on Archives and History is offering a grant program to assist local churches with the preservation of their historical records.

The commission is making available a total of \$1000 for this program and expects to distribute this amount through several smaller grants.

The local church must match the amount of the grant one-to-one. Activities such as purchase of storage furniture, boxes/folders, and environmental control equipment may be eligible.

Applications are available on the [archives web page](#) and are due by February 28. Contact Conference Archivist [Beth Patkus](#) by email or at 914-615-2241 with any questions. A promotional [flyer](#) is also available.



Spiritual Renewal Opportunities for Lent

The conference Perkins Learning Center is back up and operating in a new space in the renovated conference center in White Plains. The collection can still be searched and items ordered online through a [link](#) on the NYAC web site.

Two special programs are being hosted by the learning center in preparation for, and during, the Lenten season:

- A canvas labyrinth will be available for quiet times of reflection from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on February 24, 27 and 28. Instructions will be available for those who are new to labyrinth walking. Participants are asked to enter and leave the space in silence. Refreshments and a space for conversation will be available in the lobby area of the conference center.
- Spiritual Renewal Wednesdays will be held from noon to 1 p.m. on March 1, 8, 15, 22, 29, and April 5. The first four sessions will focus on balancing mind and body with movement and prayer as part of the UMC's quadrennial focus on abundant health. Pastor Wendy Vencuss, disaster spiritual care coordinator and Metropolitan abundant health coordinator, will lead the four sessions. The last two sessions will focus on music and meditation.

There will be an option of joining any of the sessions virtually. Log in information will be posted on the Learning Center [webpage](#).

Open Your Church For Sacred Sites Tour

For the seventh year, the New York Landmarks Conservancy is inviting faith communities across the state to participate in its Sacred Sites Open House. The open house allows visitors to experience first-hand the art, architecture and history of New York's religious sites.

The theme for this year's event on May 20 and 21 is "Stained Glass: Windows on this World and the Next" and will highlight works of American stained glass masters including John LaFarge, Henry Sharp, and Louis Comfort Tiffany, as well as prominent European artists and studios.

According to the conservancy's web site, the [Sacred Sites Open House](#) has three objectives:

- To encourage sacred sites to open their doors to the general public. Inviting visitors is a great way to build broad community support for the ongoing preservation of historic institutions.
- To inspire residents to be tourists in their own town, introducing non-members to the history, art and architecture embodied in sacred places. New Yorkers tour religious sites around the world but may overlook those in their own back yard. Developing cultural tourism is key to the future of sacred sites.
- To publicize the many programs and services religious institutions offer their neighbors. The important work these sites provide benefits the entire community—not just the congregation's members—and help ensure the congregation's future.

In 2016, more than 8,000 visitors toured the 169 participating sites—68 that were within New York City).

Further information and requirements can be found on the conservancy's web site. [Register](#) by March 20 to ensure inclusion in press releases, and by April 17 for inclusion in the web site guide.

\$5 Challenge Brings Waves of Generosity

Continued from page 1

Though Chupungco loved the idea, she wasn't sure how the challenge might be received.

"I printed up all the letters and went to the bank to get fives," she said. "I went to bed Saturday night not sure I would do it the next day." But she got up on Sunday, filled and sealed the envelopes.

Her sermon that day debunked the phrase that "money can't buy happiness" and instead suggested that money spent on the right things can bring much joy. Chupungco handed out 60 envelopes, each with a \$5 bill, and provided a few simple rules: Don't spend the money on your household or yourself, give it in the name of Jesus as an act of faith, and report back what was done with the money.

The responses soon came pouring in. One woman bought cookies for one of the recovery groups at the church, and donations were made to the food pantry and other charitable causes. Another added to the \$5 and bought Halloween costumes for her neighbor's children. One family was reminded by the challenge to fulfill a desire to give to the Anchor House addiction treatment program. They also gave a donation to the church in gratitude for the reminder.

The challenge spread beyond the church after one member, Susan Armistead, used her \$5 as seed money to ask for matching donations from 99 friends on her Facebook page. She was shocked when more than 160 friends kicked in a total of \$915. Donations went to local charities and some went to supply bottled water and snacks to the nurses' offices in the local schools.

The idea traveled quickly across social media and was soon embraced by residents and businesses in both nearby Warwick and Tillson. A logo and Facebook page were created. Volunteers signed on to be "captains" to receive donations in their

neighborhoods. Funds have been disbursed to such causes from families facing financial emergencies to procuring a seeing eye dog.

On December 1, 2016—more than a year after Chupungco's initial request—the local community was challenged to give \$5 again by the group that has become known as the Goshen Generosity Challenge Team. Nearly \$4,500 was raised in that effort so Chupungco and the team gathered at a local restaurant to decide where the funds were most needed. In the end, the group decided to distribute 15 envelopes holding from \$100 to \$500 before Christmas. That bought the total given directly to those in need in the community of Goshen to more than \$15,000—collected \$5 at a time.

"I never in a million years thought this is what would happen," Chupungco said. "I just thought it would be in my little church, but the Holy Spirit blew in and fanned the flames in the whole community. The coolest thing about it is, I could never have planned for this."

One of the upshots has been a curiosity about the church, and lots and lots of conversations about generosity and community needs.

"The church keeps getting credit for the \$5 challenge even though it's become a community activity," said Chupungco. "The church is now on the radar of the community."

And how did the congregation receive the lessons about generous giving? Chupungco said that when she arrived at the church in July 2015 they were operating with a deficit. They managed to end 2016 more than \$3,000 in the black, and have an increase in first-time pledgers for 2017.



Finding a Vital Ministry for “Elders”

BY JIM STINSON

Consultant on Older Adults

In his book, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*, Richard Rohr quotes a Native American saying: “No wise person ever wanted to be younger.” In a time and culture where looking good (almost always implying looking younger) is rampant, this statement seems counter intuitive. Yet, when examined, it speaks to a truth we often forget.

Appearances or age are not accurate indications of who a person is and what she might have to offer the world. What we know, through faith and experience, is that the outside of anyone or anything is less important than the inside. Our souls, our spirits, our being, our insides, take time to blossom and grow.

If we embrace aging, with all its pitfalls and trials, and allow ourselves to give what only age and time can provide—experience and wisdom—our insides become visible and matter more than how we look or physically feel. The aging have the potential to become what some cultures respectfully know as “elders,” who are sought out for their learned wisdom and insights. We do our elders an injustice if we do not do so with our older members and friends. It is our task to challenge everyone to continue growing into discipleship, faithfully reminding them (and ourselves) that the call to service does not come with

an expiration date.

Our congregations, with so many aging members, tend to “care for” their elders, rather than “care with” them in ministry. Often we do not invite them to serve however they can—praying for others, calling in person or by phone on others in need of love and hope, writing notes and cards, serving on committees (even if by conference call), working on issues of peace and justice, to name but a few possibilities.

Life is not for the young alone, it is for every one still breathing. Congregations have elders who are still incredibly creative—artists, poets, storytellers whose gifts can still be shared. They have elders who have been caregivers all their lives. The desire of many is that they still can do so. As congregations, we do well to be creative in allowing and teaching new ways for them to share their gifts of faith and talents.

Old men (and women) ought to be explorers

Here and there does not matter

We must be still and still moving

Into another intensity

For further union, a deeper communion.

(From “East Coker” by T.S. Eliot)

The church “ought to be” guides and supporters for the explorers.



New Parsonage for NYCT

Rev. Betsy Ott recently hosted a lunch and tour of the new New York-Connecticut district parsonage for the district board of trustees. The former parsonage was outside the bounds of the district; the new parsonage is in Mahopac, N.Y. Members of the group pictured with Ott include: pastors George Mangan, Douglas McArthur, Jennifer Morrow, and Carol Bloom; Lum Lee, Chan Gillham, Al Hanson, and Myra Tesbir.

CBCS Still Standing with Standing Rock

Last December, when the protests against the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) were gripping the nation, our Conference Board of Church and Society sent a donation of \$1,500 to support the Standing Rock Sioux tribe in its efforts to stop the infringement on their land and the depredation of the environment. (Your Peace With Justice special collection contributions at work.)

Rev. David Wilson, superintendent of the Oklahoma Indian Mission Conference, delivered the funds for us. He writes, “We made our trip last December to Standing Rock to deliver Christmas stockings and other supplies for the camp. The temps were about 15 below zero and we were amazed at how many people were up and around that week. We have also been able to provide some funding to some of the workers there who are working on programs there with the camp and advocacy.”

Shortly after this delivery, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers withdrew approval of the DAPL easement through the tribe’s land and ordered alternate routes to be researched. Many protesters left, but a core group of about 300 stayed and moved the camp in preparation for the spring when the river begins to melt. As Rev. Wilson reports, “They have received about 60 plus inches of snow and it will definitely

melt. They are moving further up to the reservation, which is near the water but out of danger.”

Unfortunately, President Trump has signed an executive order that reinstated the advancement of the pipeline. In a January 24 press release, Standing Rock Sioux Tribal Chairman David Archambault II said the executive order violates the law and the tribe will take legal action to fight it.

“President Trump is legally required to honor our treaty rights and provide a fair and reasonable pipeline process,” Archambault said. “Americans know this pipeline was unfairly rerouted towards our nation and without our consent.”

The existing pipeline route risks infringing on our treaty rights, contaminating our water and the water of 17 million Americans downstream.”

In addition to needing funds to continue support of the protesters at Standing Rock, the tribe is asking supporters to contact their congressional representatives and let them know that they do not stand behind President Trump’s decision. Contact your senators and representatives and let them know that you oppose the Dakota Access Pipeline in its current route. Specific contact information can be found on the [congressional web site](#).

—Sheila Peiffer, churchandsociety@nyac-umc.com

Berry Now Working with Church & Society

The conference Board of Church & Society welcomes Jennifer Berry as an assistant coordinator of social justice organizing, engagement and advocacy.

Berry, a lifelong United Methodist and provisional elder in the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference, received a master of divinity degree from Drew Theological School in 2014.

Prior to answering a call to ministry, Berry worked in legislative government and with the American Civil



**Jennifer
Berry**

Liberties Union. In those capacities she worked to change multicultural education requirements at Penn State University, lower prescription drug prices, shed light on police misconduct after Hurricane Katrina, raise awareness of U.S. participation in torture and, garner media coverage for the unconstitutional profiling of Latino/a people in Hazleton, Penn.

In her biography, Berry wrote that she holds deep convictions that “real justice happens when policies are changed, as Wesley said, because hearts are strangely warmed above when people are looking for a win.”

Beat the Cold: Plan for Summer Camps

BY JANE WAKEMAN

Camping & Retreat Ministries

When the days are short and cold, it's the perfect time to dream of summer days. Basking in the sun by the ocean or paddling a canoe on a lake, memories of summers past, can inspire plans for the coming summer—even on a dark February evening.

Fortunately, summer registration is now open at both camps, Quinipet and Kingswood, and the camping season begins at both locations on June 23. But keep in mind that volunteer work weekends are coming up even sooner. The Kingswood schedule includes:

- **May 6–7:** Spring work weekend planned for men and teen boys.
- **May 26–29:** Memorial Day weekend is setup time, open for all families and friends.
- **June 9–11:** Trail blazing weekend to complete the final touches before campers arrive.

Registration for both camps is available online. If you have a favorite [Kingswood campsite](#), now is the time to reserve as they fill up fast. The Woodsmoke weeks will be July 6–22 this year.

On the [Quinipet web site](#), follow the links to register for the type of camp preferred. If you are not sure and have not visited Quinipet, open houses to tour the camp have been scheduled for 1–4 p.m. on March 18, April 8, and June 23.

Our web sites are continually being update



Kingswood campers enthusiastically enjoy the summer on the Hathaway Pond.

and made user-friendlier to provide a smooth information and registration process. While visiting the web sites, explore the beautiful pictures throughout for a taste of the summer days to come.

We have designated Sunday, March 5 as Camping Sunday. Ask your church's camp coordinator for information or be on the lookout for this year's brochures to pass along to friends and family.

Our camping programs are truly exceptional. What a wonderful way to spread the Gospel and give children and families a taste of the Kingdom of God in these times of stress and strife. Let's give our children time to unwind and "disconnect to reconnect" with their faith, and their friends and their family.

JOB OPENINGS

Children and Youth Leader

St. James United Methodist Church in Kingston, N.Y., is a growing, welcoming congregation that loves children and youth and places a high value on their being an active, speaking, contributing part of our church family. An immediate salaried position is available. For "Safe Sanctuaries" purposes, candidates must be at least 23 years of age. Send resume to St. James UMC, 29 Pearl St., Kingston, NY 12401.

Director of Children's Ministries

Poughkeepsie UMC is looking for a director of children's ministries who will administer and promote Christian education programs for those of pre-school age through high school, under the direction of the pastor and in consultation with the Education Committee. This is a 15-hours-per-week position. Applicants must be available Sunday mornings and for summer Vacation Bible School. If interested, send a resume to: Poughkeepsie UMC, Attn: Pastor Adrienne Brewington, 2381 New Hackensack Rd., Poughkeepsie, NY 12603.

An Invitation to Prayer During the Lenten Season

Editor's note: Since early November 10, Grace UMC has been meeting at a nearby church because of emergency repairs needed at their own. To stay connected during this time of "homelessness," the church began a phone prayer meeting. On weekdays, they pray from 6 to 7 a.m., in both English and Spanish. As they prepare to return to their space, Pastor Lydia shares a few thoughts about the process and prayer itself.

BY REV. LYDIA LEBRÓN-RIVERA

Grace Church UMC—Manhattan

Prayer is a longing to be in communion, is a deep desire to be in relation with life and with creation. Prayer opens the deep wells of our souls, stirring up new spiritual streams, moving deep currents in our being and refreshing us with vitality and joy. Prayer take us to new places, make us new people. Prayer moves us to higher but more humble grounds. Prayers invoke, evoke, and provoke. We need to pray until we have a constant and burning prayer in our heart. Prayer grows in us as we grow in prayer. When you have a constant prayer in your heart you grow in joy and in faith.

Prayers come from deep inside us, they are not the expression of mere words. Prayers need not to be new every day. Prayer is a way of thinking, and speaking and living and being. Prayers can be written or spoken, and can be the same all the time. We need not shape or create prayers, they shape and

create us. Written and oral prayers can come from a heart full of prayer and become our own. Prayers come from a thankful heart, from a concerned heart, from a confessing heart, from a generous, open and loving heart.

Prayer uncovers the worst in us, but moves us to the best in us. Prayer uncovers who we are and how we are and how we should be. Prayer transforms us. Prayer makes us dream and envision that which can be. Prayer makes us care about each other, and connect with each other. Prayer names the evil in the world with a humble recognition of who we are and a graceful understanding of what we can become.



Prayer moves us to carry the longings of the world, to connect with the world rather than escape from it.

Prayer draws us into communion with God and with one another. God and others draw us into prayer. When you live with a constant prayer in your heart and your life is a prayer, you pray with others and for others and for the needs of the world.

We learn to pray when we listen to

prayers that speak to us and touch us as people. We learn to pray when we pray constantly, when we pray together. We learn to pray when we care for the important things in life, and hold them in our souls. We learn to pray when we make the prayers of others our own, and deepen them and expand them. Prayers are never finished. We have always something to add.

Prayer creates community, fosters community and

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An Invitation to Prayer During the Lenten Season

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nourishes community. Every church needs to pray in whatever way and form so they can connect to each other. There's not a specific way to pray, duration or time for prayer. Each congregation knows how to pray. Some people refer to going to church as going to prayer. Because what they do in the liturgy does for them what prayer does, therefore liturgy can also be a prayer, and fulfill that purpose for the community. We do not bring our own prayers as individuals when we pray as a community of faith. Prayers bring us and hold us together.

Prayers are limitless in content, but they need not to be long or wordy. They are focus, simple and clear. Prayers are not meant to impress but to inspire. Prayers touch all things but everything in them touches us. Prayers are not like having a casual conversation with people, going into specific details about people or situations. Prayers do not go on and on without being able to stop. Prayer points out to the basic needs of humanity and the world, to those things that connect us to each other and are common to all. There are no patterns, formulas or

schemes when we pray.

A prayer is not about clichés and phrases or quotes. Prayers need no intonation or rhetorical devices. Prayers are real, and sincere, and plain, and flow from the heart. Prayers do not change God, or move God, or change others. Prayers change us and move us.

We don't pray just to pray or to be in prayer. We pray because we need to pray and not because we have to pray. We pray to learn to live and to be in communion with God and to live out our vocations, and to live with each other. Prayers are not for enduring times of trial but for daily living. Prayer is that which sustains us when the words fail, and our faith is weak.

Prayer is not warfare but love affair. The more you pray, the more you want to pray. There are no prayer warriors but those who love to pray. When we pray incessantly we are no longer in a war zone but in a love zone.

If you want to grow in relationship with God and with one another, join others in prayer during this season of Lent.

Viewing Clinton's Campaign Through Faith, Gender



PHOTO COURTESY OF DANYELLE DITMER

Joining Hillary Clinton, center, at a January 31 lunch at the Interchurch Center in New York, were, from left, the Revs. Jen Tyler, Emily Peck-McClain, Danyelle Ditmer and Shannon Sullivan.

The four United Methodist clergywomen, along with the Rev. J. Paige Boyer, were part of an editorial team sending daily devotions during Clinton's campaign for U.S. president. A [story](#) about the "weppraywithher" editorial team is available in the news section of the NYAC web site.

OBITUARIES

Robert James Dorsey

Robert James Dorsey died from cardiac arrest on February 3, 2017, at Vassar Brothers Medical Center in Poughkeepsie, N.Y. He was the husband of Pastor Scharlise Dorsey, who serves the Wappingers Falls United Methodist Church. Dorsey was retired from Liberty Lines Transit after 28 years of service as a bus driver.

He was born on December 5, 1952, in the Bronx to James and Lillian Dorsey. His father died when he was young, and shortly afterwards his mother had a stroke, leaving Dorsey to be the caretaker at age 14. In June 2016, he was diagnosed with stage IV cancer. Dorsey spoke of being a “modern-day miracle;” two weeks before his passing, an MRI revealed no evidence of cancer in the brain.

In addition to his wife, Dorsey is survived by his sister, Deborah Dorsey; four daughters, Arrettes (John) Hollands, Ebony (Omeal) McFarlane, Daniella Dorsey, and Jaylene Dorsey; four sons, Robert D. Dorsey, Isaiah James Dorsey, Ta’Shawn Dorsey, and Joseph Dorsey; stepson Prince Combs and stepdaughter Princess (Jerrick) Lamb; and cousin, Allen Ray. He is also survived by 10 grandchildren, many nieces, nephews and cousins. He was preceded in death by his parents, James and Lillian, and by a sister, Barbara Dorsey-Coan.

A funeral service was held February 11 at the Wappingers Falls UMC, with Rev. Dr. William Smartt officiating. Burial will be private.

Chanel Gatewood-Brisborn

Chanel Gatewood-Brisborn, the daughter of retired clergy, Rev. Clifton E. Gatewood, died on January 24, 2017.

Rev. Denise Smartt Sears said of Gatewood-Brisborn, “She was the one who looked after me at the Bishop’s Convocation way before childcare was provided. She spent the last decade or so caring for her Dad . . . making sure he was present at every clergy meeting and annual conference. They were both in different nursing homes when she passed away.”

The homegoing service for Sister Chanel will be Monday, January 30, 2017 at 7:00pm at Mt. Calvary/ St. Mark’s United Methodist Church, located at 49-55 Edgecombe Ave., New York, NY 10030. A wake will begin at 6:00pm at the church. Rev. Gatewood requests that clergy attending the funeral wear black robes with white stoles. For more information, contact Rev. Harold Morris at 646-372-7540.

Rev. William A. Johnston

The Reverend William A. Johnston of Fuquay-Varina, N.C., died on January 23, 2017. William was born April 8, 1937.

Rev. Johnston graduated from the University of Nebraska-Omaha, and received his master of divinity degree from Drew University Theological School. A long-time resident of New York, he taught social studies in the Washingtonville School District for many years. As a pastor in the New York East and New York conferences, he served churches in Baldwin, Monticello, Bloomingburg, and Bullville, and Grace UMC in Ridgebury, NY. He retired from the New York Conference in 1983.

Johnston was currently serving as pastor at Zoar Chapel UMC in Bullock, N.C. He served in leadership roles in the Downtown Rotary, volunteered at Area Congregations in Ministry in Oxford, N.C., and was president of his homeowners’ association.

He is survived by a daughter, Christena (Scott) Johnston-Pulliam; a grandson, Brady; a granddaughter, Coryn; longtime partner, Louise Dorton; two nephews, Richard and Ronald Johnston. He was preceded in death by a brother, Robert Johnston.

A celebration of life service was held January 28 at Oxford UMC in Oxford, N.C. Memorial donations may be made to Area Congregations in Ministry, 634 Roxboro Rd., Oxford, NC 27565, or to a charity of your choice.

Edith Mae Grogan Hansen

Edith Mae Grogan Hansen, the widow of Rev. Wilfred Hansen, died January 10, 2017, in Durham, N.C.

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OBITUARIES

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She was 101.

Hansen was born in Manhattan and grew up in Richmond Hill, Queens. She graduated from Jamaica High School in 1930, at age 15. In 1934, she began nursing training at St. John's Hospital in Brooklyn, graduating in 1937.

In 1938, she married Rev. Hansen, who served the New York East and New York Conferences for 50 years. Rev. Hansen led churches at Bellport-Brookhaven, Bensonhurst, Queens Village, South Floral Park, and Islip. He also served in New Britain and Stratford, Conn., before being appointed district superintendent of the New Haven District (later the CT Central District) from 1963 to 1969. He then served nine years at Baldwin UMC on Long Island and one year at Round Hill UMC in Greenwich, Conn. Rev. Hansen retired in 1979, but continued as associate pastor of Golden Hill UMC in Bridgeport, Conn., for nine years. He died in November 1996.

Hansen enjoyed sewing, crafts and raising African violets. She became an expert at making fruitcakes and decorating wedding cakes, all of which she shared with family and friends.

In 2003, Hansen moved from Connecticut to Durham to be near her daughter. She enjoyed the last 13 years at the Croasdaile Methodist Retirement Community.

She is survived by three children: Wilfred J. (Susan) Hansen of Pittsburgh; Joann (Jack) Haggerty of Chapel Hill, N.C., and Meg (Bill) Carpenter of Bothell, Wash; five granddaughters, one grandson, and six great-grandchildren.

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions can be made to the [American Heart Association](#).

Rev. Albert Henry Scholten

The Reverend Albert Henry Scholten, 93, of Middletown, Conn., died at home on January 22, 2017.

Rev. Scholten was born on December 7, 1923, in Minneapolis, the son of Albert, Sr. and Agnes (Hedlund) Scholten. He graduated from Pine City High School in 1941 and enlisted in the United States Marine Corps, serving from 1944 to 1946. He earned the

rank of corporal and participated in action at Iwo Jima, Volcano Islands and the occupation of China.

In 1946, he married Nila Clark. Scholten graduated from the University of Minnesota in 1950 and from Drew Theological Seminary in 1954.

Scholten began his ministry in the New York East Conference in 1954 at Westhampton Methodist Church in NY. He served Simpson Methodist Church in Amityville, N.Y., from 1955 to 1964, and First UMC in Middletown, Conn., from 1964 until his retirement in 1994.

He was also program director at Camp Quinipet on Shelter Island for one week a summer for 17 years, and served on various New York Conference committees, including the Board of Ordained Ministry, town and country committee, central district nominating committee and district committee on the superintendency.

After his retirement from First UMC in Middletown, he served as a minister of visitation for 12 years at Prospect UMC in Bristol, Conn. He was treasurer of the Interchurch Chaplaincy Program of Connecticut and was a co-chair and member of the Hark L. Wright Memorial Scholarship Fund.

Rev. Scholten's wife, Nila, predeceased him in 2009. He is survived by two sons, James (Debra) Scholten of New Britain, Conn., and John (Laura) Scholten of Durham, Conn.; two daughters, Mary (Everett) Tew of Barkhamsted, Conn., and Dara (John) Parent of Middletown, Conn.; seven grandchildren, and six great grandchildren. He was also predeceased by a brother, James Scholten, and a grandson, Alin Clark Tew.

Funeral services were held January 29 at South Congregational Church, 9 Pleasant Street, Middletown, Conn., with Rev. Barbara Marks, pastor of First UMC in Middletown, officiating. Burial will be private.

In lieu of flowers, donations in Scholten's memory may be made to First UMC Building Fund, 221 Ridge Road, Middletown, CT 06457. To share memories or send condolences to the family, please visit www.doolittlefuneralservice.com.

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OBITUARIES

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Doris Robbins

Doris Robbins, 92, died on Nov. 10, 2016 at Oak Hill Assisted Living in Grand Rapids, Minn. She was the widow of Rev. William Robbins, who served the Vail's Gate, Woodycrest, and Yorktown Heights churches in the New York Conference in the 1940s and 1950s. He retired in 1985 and died in October 2008.

Mrs. Robbins was born to Leonard and Mildred Gronlund in the Åland Islands, Finland. When she was six, the family settled in Brooklyn, N.Y.

She met Rev. Robbins while in nursing school and they married in 1944. The next year, he joined the Navy as a chaplain. Beginning in 1946, Mrs. Robbins spent several years as a pastor's wife and mother in the New York area before moving upstate. For the

next 20 years she enjoyed a nursing career working in hospitals, in public health nursing, and in home health care in Utica and Albany.

The couple then moved to Richmond, Va., for 16 years, where Rev. Robbins taught at Virginia Tech. They returned to New York City briefly before moving to Minnesota to be closer to their children. Throughout her life, Mrs. Robbins took pride in her Swedish language and heritage.

She is survived by a daughter, Betsey (Allen) Norgard of Bovey, Minn.; son, Bruce Robbins of Minneapolis; and two grandchildren, Casey of Brooklyn and Adam and his wife, Jen, of New York, N.Y.

A memorial service will be held at a later date. Arrangements are by Peterson Funeral Chapel of Coleraine, Minn.

Commission on a Way Forward Organizes

UMNS | The Commission on a Way Forward held its first meeting in Atlanta on January 23–26 with [32 members](#) from nine countries in attendance.

Led by [commission moderators](#) Bishop David Yemba, Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball and Bishop Ken Carter, members worked and worshipped together and began the foundational work integral to their charge of developing consensus about how to move forward amid different theological understandings of LGBTQ identity.

Presentations from Dawn Wiggins Hare, General Secretary of the [General Commission on the Status and Role of Women](#), and Erin Hawkins, General Secretary of the [General Commission on Religion and Race](#), focused on gender, race and culture and provided some principles for self-monitoring and laid the groundwork for the group to agree on behavioral norms and build a covenant for their work together.

A significant portion of the four-day meeting was spent in small group discussions, with the aim of building relationships and establishing a foundation of trust and understanding among members. Larger group discussion followed.

MyungRae Kim Lee, executive director of the National Network of Korean United Methodist Women

and a lay member of the New York Conference, is a member of the commission.

Reading assignments and learning are a part of how the Commission is approaching its task. Six work groups were formed to begin doing “homework”—engaging in dialogue, interviewing experts and gathering resources to meet these informational needs. The work groups have begun to identify their next steps. Additionally, the commission discussed next steps for understanding the history and theology of the United Methodist understanding of connection/conference/unity/identity.

The work groups include: learning about the experiences of other denominations; looking at the polity and strategy for effective use of the 2019 special session; understanding the experiences of LGBTQ persons; understanding the current denominational situation; understanding what Central Conferences want from a new form of connectionalism; and understanding the power dynamics inherent in the construction of the Commission itself.

The next meeting of the commission will be Feb. 27–March 2 in Atlanta. For more information on the Commission on a Way Forward, visit umc.org/wayforward.



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4/29 Disaster Spiritual Care

This UMCOR basic care training for disaster emotional and spiritual care will take place from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. in the conference learning center. Please contact [Pastor Wendy Vencuss](#) with questions.

5/20 Missional Community Engagement Forum

Rev. Dr. F. Douglas Powe, Jr., author of “Transforming Community,” will facilitate this 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. training event at the Dorral Arrowwood Conference Center, 975 Anderson Hill Rd., Rye Brook, N.Y. This is a follow-up to the Laity Convocation, but even those who did not attend that November event may register. David Gilmore, director of congregational development and revitalization, is the contact. The fee per person is \$55; [register](#) online.

6/7–10 2017 Annual Conference

Stay tuned for more details about this [event](#) for laity and clergy at Hofstra University on Long Island.

7/7–8 UMM National Gathering

Registration is open for the United Methodist Men’s 12th National Gathering, “Discipleship: The Contact Sport,” at St. Luke’s UMC in Indianapolis. Speakers include Bishops James Swanson Sr. and Jonathan Holston, as well as the Rev. Kevin Watson, Candler School of Theology professor, and Shan Foster, national director of MEND, the YWCA program combatting domestic violence. To register, go to the [UMM web site](#).

7/14–16 Mission “u”

This year’s event will be held at the Stamford Hilton, 1 First Stamford Place, Stamford, Conn. Watch the conference [calendar](#) as additional details become available.

Vision Deadlines for 2017

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. Deadlines for 2017 are: March 3, April 7, May 5, June 2, July 7, August 4, September 1, October 6, November 3, and December 1. Please send any stories, photos, ideas, or questions directly to vision@nyac.com.