

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

THE VISION



October 2017

Focus on Purpose To Create Disciples

BY MARGARET LAEMMEL
WITH XIMENA VARAS

As the clergy from the three northern districts arrived for the tri-district retreat they were presented with two books, "Holy Habits" by Andrew Roberts and "Developing an Intentional Discipleship System: A Guide for Congregations" by Rev. Junius Dotson. Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton began our retreat by leading us in kneeling prayer for the Las Vegas shooting victims. He then introduced guest speaker Dotson, who is general secretary of Discipleship Ministries.

The tri-district retreats for all six districts in the New York Conference took place October 2–4 at the Stony Point Center in Stony Point, N.Y.

Rev. Dotson began by illustrating that all of us—including our churches—have an inner desire for purpose. In order for our churches to heal and grow we must become clear about why our churches exist in the first place, giving them purpose in the world.

People often come to church because they need help for their lives, hope for their present and future, and a home for their hearts. Our answer to people who are searching is the love of Jesus Christ found in their journey of discipleship as they grow in faith. Therefore the answer to "Why are we here?" for churches is to claim the Great Commission of making disciples in the world for Jesus Christ. Once a church knows why it exists, it can focus on what it will do in the church and the community to develop disciples, within its own cultural context.

During the retreat's three sessions we explored some core principles that churches should follow for intentional faith development:

- Leading people to Christ
- Nurturing people to maturity in faith
- Equipping people with skills to do ministry

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Bishop Bickerton and District Superintendent Sungchan Kim, above, greet the 100-person choir at Bupyeong Methodist Church in South Korea.

NYAC PILGRIMAGE TO SOUTH KOREA

Prayer and Hospitality Abound

From August 28 to September 5, Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton led a group of NYAC members on a spiritual pilgrimage to South Korea. The group—including clergy, laity, and members of the bishop's cabinet—was hosted by Bupyeong Methodist Church. Below are portions of the reflections written by members of the team.

The most moving experiences were the strong emphasis on prayer, the commitment to choir, and dedication to faithful worship [of Bupyeong Methodist Church]. The ministers seemed to display a deep spirituality and reverence that seems evident from the position they hold. Senior Pastor Hong's dynamic leadership epitomizes his love for God and strength, even in his time of loss. The sharing about how his mother risked her life to save his was heart-warming.

The call to prayer by the pastor, and the congregation's response, with everyone praying at the same time and then fading to individual prayers was impressive. The church seemed unified by their focus on prayer... I've tried



Frontier Foundation Executive Director Ellen Knudsen, left, and District Superintendent Sungchan Kim, right, at a meeting at the General Board of Global Ministries office in Seoul.

to imagine witnessing the same early prayer meeting in the NYAC; the power it would generate would certainly, "blow the roof off the building!"

The hour of the early prayer meeting, calls

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

Ongoing Immigration Prayers

Join the NYAC Immigration Task Force for a time of prayer for our country and immigrant brothers and sisters on Monday nights from 7:30–8 p.m. until further notice. Call-in number: 641-715-3580; group code: 780843#. Contact Pastor [Ximena Varas](#) for more information.

Oct.–Nov. “Connecting Neighbors” Training

“Connecting Neighbors—Ready Church” is an UMCOR/NYAC program designed to assist churches in their preparation for, and response to, the “when.” All churches are encouraged to attend one of the Saturday training events being offered through our Disaster Response Ministry. All the sessions are from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. For more information, and to register, please visit the [missions/disaster response page](#) on the NYAC web site.

October 21: Seymour UMC, 90 Pearl St., Seymour, Conn.

October 28: Grace, UMC, 121 Pleasant St, Southington, Conn.

November 4: Simsbury UMC, 799 Hopmeadow St, Simsbury, Conn.

November 11: First UMC, Routes 23 and 22, Hillsdale, N.Y.

10/19–22 Women’s Walk to Emmaus

The women’s Walk to Emmaus will be held at Montfort Spiritual Center in Bay Shore, N.Y., on Long Island. The Walk to Emmaus is a spiritual program intended to strengthen the local church through the development of Christian disciples and leaders. Each participant needs to work with a sponsor before registering for the weekend. The experience begins with a 72-hour course in Christianity beginning on Thursday night and ending on Sunday. For additional details and registration info, click [here](#).

10/20–22 Zenkert Celebration Weekend

The life and ministry of Carl Zenkert, who died in January, will be celebrated during a work weekend at Camp Quinipet. A memorial service is planned for 2 p.m. on Saturday. Participants are encouraged to bring a story or photos to share, and a favorite book to donate to the Quinipet library. Donations may be made to the Camp Quinipet Scholarship Fund in Zenkert’s memory.

Register for the weekend by October 11 on the [Quinipet web site](#).

10/20–21 Re-Call Summit

Throughout history people of faith have been called to address racism and hatred. Today the church is hearing that call anew. Join United Methodists for a conference at the BWI Airport Marriott hotel to redefine, reimagine, reposition and respond to race and multiculturalism.

Rev. Jeffery Hooker of the NYAC is one of the key speakers at the event sponsored by the Northeastern Jurisdiction Multi-ethnic Center and the Baltimore-Washington Conference. Click [here](#) for more information, and to register.

10/27 Advent/Christmas Worship Planning

Union Theological Seminary is reintroducing the “Got Sermon?” lectionary study series as a twice-yearly conference corresponding to the liturgical seasons of Advent and Lent. The October 27 Advent/Christmas program will be led by Lisa Thompson, assistant professor of homiletics; Cláudio Carvalhaes, associate professor of worship; and David M. Carr, professor of Old Testament, with other faculty members to be announced. The cost of the 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. conference is \$50, which includes lunch. [Pre-registration](#) required.

10/28 Abundant Health Day

Come learn about the conference’s Abundant Health goals and how to put them to use in your own community from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the conference center in White Plains. Workshops will address activities for kids, community gardens, “Days for Girls” program, addiction and recovery issues, emotional and spiritual care, nutrition and healthy eating, fitness and exercise, seniors ministry, and the Strengthening Families program. For more information and to [register](#), go to the NYAC web site. Email abundanthealth@nyac-umc.com with any questions. Please wear your sneakers and be ready to move!

10/29–30 “Theology in the Streets” Lectures

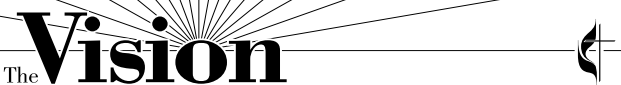
The Tipple-Vosburgh Lectures at the Drew Theological School will feature keynote talks by Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II and Sister Simone Campbell, in addition to presentations by Rev. Dr. James A. Forbes and Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis. Check the [schedule](#) on the Drew web site for further details and registration info.

11/11 Laity Convocation

With the theme, “Pathways and Possibilities . . . the Community Continues,” laity from across the conference will gather at the Stamford Hilton to hear guest speaker, Rev. Dr. Junius B. Dotson, general secretary of Discipleship Ministries. The 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. event will include workshops and Holy Communion, celebrated by Bishop Bickerton. Cost per person is \$25 and includes a continental breakfast, lunch and a copy of the NYAC study book, “Holy Habits.” [Register](#) for the event on the NYAC web site.

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: Nov. 3, and Dec. 1. Please send any stories, photos, ideas, or questions directly to vision@nyac.com.

 <p>The Vision</p>
<p>The News of the New York Conference of the United Methodist Church</p>
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ERTs Forming for Texas, Florida Relief

Texas and Florida

Texas and Florida are now requesting early response teams (ERT). The New York Conference has deployed its first ERT to Rockport, Texas. A second team is being developed for December 2 to 9. We are looking for team leaders for both Texas and Florida. For information or to apply, contact Tom Vencuss (tvencuss@nyac.com).

Puerto Rico and the Caribbean

At this point, much of this area is still in an emergency phase and inappropriate for volunteer teams and response. Bishop Bickerton and Tom Vencuss met recently with members of the Caribbean Mission Partnership and the NYAC Hispanic Council to discuss the current situation, hear concerns, provide updates, and begin a conversation around short and long-term recovery plans.

In addition, there may be as many as 6,600 families seeking temporary relocation to the U.S. mainland from Puerto Rico and other areas in the Caribbean. Vencuss, who serves as the president of the New York Disaster Interfaith Services Board, is working with NYDIS and other city agencies to develop a plan to receive and relocate evacuees. A first “service center” is expected to be open shortly in Harlem. It is expected that faith-based organizations and local churches will be asked to participate in, and assist, this process.

What Can We Do?

Continue to be in prayer for all persons throughout the world who have been affected by hurricanes, earthquakes, wildfires and torrential rains.

Read and share the most recent pastoral letters from Bishop Bickerton ([September 20](#) and [September 29](#)).

Donations

UMCOR has designated two advance numbers for domestic financial donations: [US Disaster Response Advance #901670](#) and the [Material Resources Advance #901440](#). Donations for Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands should be made through the US Disaster Response Advance #901670.

UMCOR has one designated [Advance number #982450](#) for international

relief and recovery efforts

Bishop Bickerton has called for a Conference-wide offering on October 15 to specifically assist Puerto Rico and areas of the Caribbean affected by Irma and Maria. Checks may be made out to the NYAC, with “Hurricane Maria Response” in the memo line. Please send checks to the attention of Fran Collins, NY Conference, 20 Soundview Ave., White Plains, NY 10606

Contributions may also be made to support our volunteer teams to assist in covering on the ground travel and material purchases. Checks may be sent to the NY Conference, 20 Soundview Ave., White Plains, NY 10606, with “New York Disaster Response Fund” on the memo line or donate online by going to <https://ny-reg.brtaapp.com/MakeaDonation> and choose “Disaster Response Fund” in the direct your gift drop-down list.

Clean-Up/Health Kits

Churches should begin assembling [cleaning](#) and [health](#) kits using the instructions found on the UMCOR web site. They should be brought to any of the NYAC collection sites listed [here](#). More than 340 buckets have been sent to Mission Central in Pennsylvania from the NYAC. There will be a general pickup and delivery to the Conference Center from October 12 to 16 with a delivery to Mission Central on October 17.

[Mission Central](#) is now accepting “other” donations for hurricane relief. They will not accept used clothing or food items. They will accept new clothing (especially socks and underwear), paper products, and of course, cleaning supplies. If you have received these approved “other” hurricane relief supplies, please bring them along with the cleaning and hygiene kits to the collection sites.

Early Response Teams

- Consider attending a basic early response team training or an ERT recertification class. A schedule of classes in October and November can be found [here](#).
- Consider serving on an ERT team. All ERT volunteers must have a current badge and background check.
- Consider leading an early response team. All team leaders must have been on a prior ERT and attend an UMCOR team leader training event, or have prior team leader experience.

Partnerships to Assemble Cleaning Buckets

BY NEAL BOWES

Written for the Youth Worker Collective

Giving teens a way to get their hands dirty in response to disasters like Hurricane Harvey is absolutely essential. Far too often churches relegate the hands-on helping to the adults and miss the power of harnessing the passion of students.

What do you do? How do we help channel our students in our churches to make a difference in the lives of those recovering from this tragedy? One word: UMCOR.

The United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR), always in a state of readiness, sprang into action, responding with cleaning kits—formerly known as “flood buckets”—stored in locations around the country. UMCOR will also distribute funding with 100 percent efficiency. (Every dollar you give goes directly to those in need; administrative costs come out of the UMC’s annual budget.) UMCOR will be doing case management

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As one of the ways to mark Peace with Justice Sunday on November 12, the conference Board of Church and Society is inviting all NYAC churches to send Christmas cards, like the one above, to our incarcerated brothers and sisters. Templates for eight different designs that can be printed out are available on the [CBCS web page](#). Church members may write a short message and sign just their first names. The cards are then collected and mailed to coordinator Sheila Peiffer. Peace with Justice Sunday is one of six Sundays on which the UMC receives a special offering. Additional resources for that Sunday can be found on the [UMC Giving](#) web site.



Focus on Purpose To Create Disciples

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- Empowering people to share their faith

There are two sides to this development, the personal and the corporate, since the motivation of individuals for being a Christian will influence the church's direction. The disciple process was also examined along with how to bring discipleship into the corporate structure and actions of the church.

During the entire session the focus was on the intentionality of our actions. Rather than just assuming that people will go to Bible classes or be working on developing their faith, we need to reawaken our congregations to the importance of a church being more than a comfortable social club that occasionally does mission fundraising, craft fairs, and potluck dinners. We need to be exploring why and how the development of our faith benefits individual disciples as well as our communities and the world.

Rev. Dotson reminded us that growing churches all have effective discipleship development, and declining churches do not. People join congregations not denominations; people want relationships not organizations; and people join movements not institutions. Even in decline, rebirth can happen at any time for any church if we are willing to get back to being a place where people can develop themselves in God's and Christ's love.

At the end of the third session, Bishop Bickerton stepped in and said that he was hopeful that we would not be the anxious voice of decline but the voice of movement. He



Rev. Dr. Junius Dotson, above, urged that all churches need to have a clearly defined purpose. Clergy rise in song during worship at the tri-district retreats.

reminded the clergy present that they are not appointed to a building, but to a community; we are using the building to reach out into the community.

Dotson will also be the speaker at the

[Laiety Convocation](#) on November 11 at the Stamford Hilton. For additional resources from Discipleship Ministries—including a free downloadable copy of Dotson's book, go to [#SeeAllThePeople](#).



Lectern Crafted In Gratitude

Rev. Juhye Hahn, center, stands at a portable lectern built by Marco Reyes, at her left, who sought sanctuary from deportation at First and Summerfield UMC in New Haven in early August. Hahn had put out a call for a new lectern because the church pulpit was too high for her 5-foot, 1-inch stature. The church joyfully consecrated the handcrafted gift from Reyes during worship on October 1.



All across the conference, our churches are engaging people in ways that share and spread God's love.

Confronting Addictions

How is your church or community dealing with the opioid crisis throughout the region? The Catskill Hudson Lay Servant Committee and Council on Ministry joined forces to offer drug awareness workshops at Trinity UMC in Hudson and Grahamsville UMC in September.

Some 60 people from 37 churches in the district participated in the training led by Rev. Darlene Kelley and Pastor Jeremy Mills from Clinton Avenue UMC in Kingston, N.Y. Another session will be offered in spring 2018 with an ultimate goal to place Narcan kits in all 103 churches. Narcan (naloxone) can instantly reverse an overdose from opioids including heroin, morphine, codeine, oxycodone, methadone and Vicodin.

The program offered practical responses for both clergy and laity to deal with drug and alcohol addictions in their congregations and communities.

Supporting Immigrants

Alison Castor, a member of the UMC of Litchfield, had been offering updates on Marco Reyes and asked for prayers for he and his family. (Reyes sought [sanctuary](#) from deportation at the First and Summerfield UMC in New Haven in early August.) We are situated in the northwest corner of Connecticut, which can cause us to feel removed by distance from activity regarding justice issues.

After attending a vigil in New Haven, Alison spoke with deep passion during worship on August 27. She enthralled the congregation. My response from the pulpit was, "I will lead a vigil if you will come."

And so it began. We created a service and not wanting to lose the excitement—against my better judgment, so I thought—scheduled it for September 3. I am proud of my congregation



PHOTOS BY JOANNE S. UTLEY

Poughquag UMC put a new spin on Vacation Bible School to promote healthy living by sponsoring a series of "Hero Central" fun runs. Following the first run on September 9, children headed into the church for snacks, a Bible story, crafts and a science experiment. The proceeds from a small entry fee for each child or family will be donated to a local charity. An additional two fun runs are scheduled for November and March.

holding this event as a service to the community primarily comprised of white privilege, and a conservative voting area.

It turns out the service was a grand success. The presence of God's love was palpable and so moving that a few tears were shed. I trust this Spirit-filled experience will strongly influence our community in days and years to come.

The attendance was roughly 25 and at least half were not members of our congregation. A free will offering raised \$125. With five days to prepare, advertisement by word of mouth and a roadside sign, we proved to ourselves that even in a small town so tucked away we could stir the community—even on Labor Day weekend. We are small, the problems are great, but God is greater than all.—*Pastor Kathleen Reynolds*

Providing Clean Water

The Connecticut District's 2016 mission

project helped to provide water filters to 350 families in northern Nicaragua. Working in conjunction with Accion Medica Cristiana (AMC) in the Central American country, the district donated \$17,344 toward Filtron ceramic filters that have improved the drinking water quality for some 1,934 people.

A key part of the filter distribution was education concerning food and nutritional security. Mothers learned about the importance of access and consumption to safe water for the good development of their children. Families with children younger than age five were given priority to receive the water filters.

Seventy filters were distributed to families in each of five communities—Nazareth I, Nazareth II, San Miguel, San Pablo, and Truslaya.

To have your church ministry included in this column, please send an email to vision@nyac.com.

Focusing Our Performance on Fruitfulness

“... Yes, give me wisdom and knowledge as I come and go among this people—for who on his own is capable of leading these, your glorious people?”

—2 Chronicles 1:10

I, like many of you, enjoy reading. I enjoy reading all kinds of books; however, lately I have found myself being drawn more and more to books that challenge some of my conventional ideas concerning “leadership.”

The book I am currently reading is “Owl Sight: Evidence-Based Discernment and the Promise of Organizational Intelligence for Ministry” by J. Russell Crabtree. Is that a mouthful or what? But, more important than the length of the title is a section I recently encountered entitled, “What Is Critical for Leaders to Do Well: The Performance Function.” What makes this section so important is not trying to challenge the usage of metrics, which I find extremely useful. But, rather how the metrics are used to determine the effectiveness of a church and/or church leader to live into the vision and fulfill the mission of the church.

According to Crabtree, a truly effective leader moves the church to address the “performance function” using the following criteria:

- Is the performance function *focused* on fruitfulness?
- Does the church *value* doing the *right* thing as opposed to doing things right?
- Is the church *aimed* at addressing the needs of people on the inside *and* the outside?
- Is the church viewing her *effectiveness* with a *short-term* lens (1 to 3 years)?

I wonder how much of an impact our churches would make in our neighborhoods if we placed equal energy in our administrative and performance functions.

How much greater might our presence be if we focused on “fruitfulness” more than “maintenance”?

How much greater might our presence be if we focused on “doing the right thing” more than “doing things right”?

How much greater might our presence be if we focused on “effectiveness” more than “efficiency”?

How much greater might our presence be if we exerted the same energy addressing the needs of insiders and outsiders . . . better yet if we blurred the lines between insider and outsider?



We are bombarded with quite a bit of gloom and doom when it comes to the future of our church. I close this view with the idea that if we, laity and clergy, focus on becoming more of a “performance functioning” community sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ . . . and living like Jesus is truly our Lord and Savior . . . and loving like Jesus is found in the faces and hearts of people we know and people we don’t know . . . and learning as we follow the One who orders the steps of our lives, we might also then offer more hope than hype to a world hungering for a hope-filled, soul-sustaining, life-giving, lovingly transformational Word from the Lord!

Stepping away from my window . . .

Partnerships to Assemble Cleaning Buckets

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work and organizing volunteer groups for years to come.

More cleaning kits will be needed than what we had on hand, and we need to replenish the supply to be prepared for other events, too. So, here’s how your church can get your whole community involved in an easy and practical way.

Each [cleaning kit](#) consists of 16 items: laundry detergent, household cleaner, dish soap, air freshener, insect repellent, a scrub brush, cleaning wipes, sponges, scouring pads, clothespins, clothesline, trash bags, dust masks, cleaning gloves, and work gloves, all packaged in a 5-gallon bucket. It’s a very practical kit, but it’s also a substantially long shopping list for somebody who will have to pay retail markup and tax.

So why not partner with your local hardware store? Let them know you’re not looking for a donation, but a partnership. Ask them to supply the items at their cost. Then appeal to members of your community to sponsor a bucket. Sponsoring is a lot easier than shopping, and with wholesale prices, you can almost buy two for the price of one. Your church brings the

credibility of UMCOR, so people know their donation will be well used, and the hardware store gets some free advertising and the good will of the community.

It would be difficult for a transaction at the hardware store to be classified as a charitable contribution, but our church has the ability to process credit cards online. So, we have taken to the town’s Facebook page with a link to the form on our website. The local newspaper is running an article about it, and we are using every email list we can and encouraging people to talk it up in their other clubs and organizations, too. We’ll run the campaign to sponsor kits for three weeks and then order all the supplies from the hardware store, which we’ll pay for with our tax-exempt number.

The plan is for our youth groups to get together and assemble all the kits. That is, unless, we are overwhelmed with the number of sponsorships. In that case, we’ll partner with some scout troops and other organizations. We expect to ship our kits to the nearest hub by the end of the month. (If you don’t know the location of your [nearest hub](#), check the “missions” section of the conference web site.)



Here are a couple of bonus tips:

- Accepting credit cards online can be set up pretty easily with PayPal or a similar service.
- Our online form works great on a smartphone.
- Our hardware store has created a display right up front with the bucket and all the supplies.
- We are keeping track of the sponsorships and ordering in lots of 50 so that the hardware store doesn’t overwhelm their suppliers.
- You will reach people and engage them in mission, even though they’ll never come to worship in your church.

Telling One's Story May Set Us Free

"Grandpa, what are those things on your fingers?"

"They are finger sleeves."

"Why do you have them on?"

"Because I have swollen fingers from arthritis and the doctor thinks they might help the swelling recede and make my fingers feel better."

"Oh! Will you have scars when you take them off?"

"No, but Grandpa already has several scars."

"I see one on your face. Where are the others?"

And so went a conversation with a 10-year old-grandson. And so began an internal conversation about the origin of my scars.

Like most everyone, as they age, I have picked up scars on the journey. Many are not visible, many are psychic and spiritual. All of them matter, and to one extent or another, the experiences of getting them, changed who I am and how I see life. That is true for everyone.



That is why ministry through the years has involved a great deal of listening. It is through listening that hidden scars become visible, offering deeper insight into the other person and strengthening the effectiveness of pastoral care.

For those of us in ministry with, and for, older adults, this is especially true. Older adults tend to have more experiences that leave hidden scars than younger people. They often have had cumulative losses—such as the death of a spouse or a child, loss of home, familiar surroundings, or jobs—that leave them with scars that do not always show. Experience has taught me that allowing them to share their stories with someone who listens, without judgment, or the “need” to offer advice, changes them and me. It offers a possibility of understanding, which, in and of itself, lightens the impact of the scars.

Telling one's story, even without getting advice, opens a channel for self-discovery, a channel for seeing the truth, which, in fact, does set us free. It allows the truth and promise of the gospel to be experienced. “Come to me . . . and I will give you rest.”

Wesleyan Covenant Chapter Formed in NYAC

Clergy and laity from the New York Conference gathered in Newburgh, N.Y., in mid-July to form a chapter of the Wesleyan Covenant Association (WCA). Bylaws were adopted and a board of directors selected, as prescribed by the global WCA.

According to their web site, the [Wesleyan Covenant Association](#) (WCA) “connects Spirit-filled, orthodox churches, clergy, and laity who hold to Wesleyan theology. It is a network of individuals and congregations who share a common understanding of our Wesleyan doctrine and desire to become a vibrant, faithful, growing 21st-century church.

“We believe change is coming to The United Methodist Church, and as we live into what comes next, the Wesleyan Covenant Association will connect, encourage, and resource clergy, laity, congregations, and regional chapters by:

- Committing to the primary authority of Scripture and the Lordship of Jesus Christ
- Creating a unified response to the bishops' commission recommendation that would maintain traditional, orthodox Methodist beliefs
- Developing a plan for a positive and faithful future”

The Wesleyan Covenant Association affirms the work of other renewal groups, such as The Confessing Movement, Good News, and UM Action. However, the WCA's purpose is not to fight the political battles raging across the church, but to prepare for and live into a positive and fruitful future.

A Facebook page has been established and anyone interested can request to join the local group page. Or you may contact those elected to the board of directors: Rev. Randy Paige of Christ UMC in Port Jefferson Station; Rev. John Gerlach of Trinity UMC, Windsor, Conn.; Rev. Steve Knutsen of Seaford UMC; Rev. Roy Jacobsen, retired; and David Chr. Wold of First UMC in Greenwich, Conn.

The association held its first global gathering, “Move: On Mission With God,” on October 14 at The Woodlands UMC in Texas. Trinity UMC in Windsor Conn., served as a regional site for a video simulcast of the event.

New Book Reimagines Bible Stories

A new book, “My So-Called Biblical Life: Imagined Stories From the World's Best-Selling Book,” has been released by Rev. Dr. Julie Faith Parker, an elder in the New York Conference.

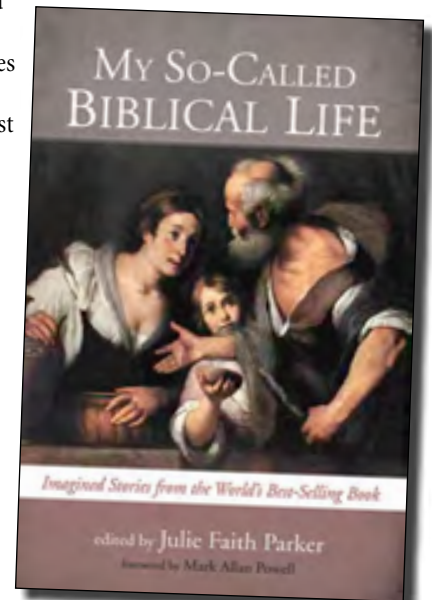
The 12 essays collected by Parker as editor, give “a fresh perspectives to stories from the Bible, imbuing them with powerful, honest emotion,” according to a press release.

Imagine sending away your precious daughter to be a concubine. Suppose your family's survival depended on the sacrifice of your brother's life.

Picture Jesus looking you in the eye and telling you to sell everything you own. What would you do? The original essays in this volume explore these scenarios and more. Readers easily learn about life in biblical times through well-researched stories with supporting footnotes. Questions follow each essay to stimulate individual reflection and group discussion.

Three of the contributors to the book are incarcerated; a portion of the royalties are being donated to the Exodus Transitional Community ([www.etcny.org](#)), which helps people re-enter society after spending time in prison.

Parker is assistant professor of Old Testament at Trinity Lutheran Seminary in Columbus, Ohio. Her father, Rev. David L. Parker, also served in the NYAC.



Rededication Of NYAC Center

On September 30, Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton rededicated the newly renovated New York Conference Center in White Plains. The day-long celebration also included an open house with refreshments, tours of the building led by staff members, and recognition of the churches and individuals who donated to the renovation project.



PHOTOS BY STEPHANIE PARSONS

2019 Special General Conference Set for Feb. 23–26

UMNS—The denomination heads into “uncharted waters” as it prepares for a special General Conference in 2019, said the Rev. Gary Graves, a key planner of the lawmaking body.

Since The United Methodist Church formed in 1968, it has only held its top legislative assembly once outside of the normal four-year schedule. That was in 1970, and General Conference itself called the session to complete the merger of the Methodist and Evangelical United Brethren denominations.

“So when the body left in 1968, they knew they would be gathering back in ’70,” said Graves, the secretary of the General Conference. “We are in a different situation for this one. It’s the first time a session has been called in the interim by the Council of Bishops for a particular matter, and so we are in uncharted waters.”

Nevertheless, Graves and other organizers are making quick work of planning the special session the bishops have called. The Commission on General Conference approved those plans during its Oct. 6–8 meeting at United Methodist-related Camp Sumatanga in Gallant, Ala.

The bishops have set the special General Conference for Feb. 23–26, 2019, at the America’s Center Convention Complex in downtown St. Louis, Mo.

The legislative body will be limited to acting on a report by the Council of Bishops, based on recommendations from [the Commission on the Way Forward](#). The 2016 General Conference authorized the bishops to form the commission to seek a way through the denomination’s potentially church-splitting impasse around how the church ministers with LGBTQ individuals.

The *Book of Discipline*, the denomination’s governing document, requires petitions to be submitted 230 days before the opening day of General Conference. That means the bishops must submit their report by July 8, 2018.

The first day of special General Conference will be the culmination of the bishops’ [“Praying Our Way Forward” campaign](#) to petition God’s help for church unity. That will also give time to accommodate any travel delays caused by winter weather, so delegates are much less likely to miss a vote due to weather concerns.

The estimated cost of the four-day meeting will be a little under \$3.7 million, said Moses Kumar, the General Conference treasurer and top executive of the denomination’s finance agency. Kumar said the General Council on Finance and Administration, the finance agency, will provide \$3 million for the meeting’s costs. Both the finance agency and General Conference itself are supported through church giving to the denomination’s General Administration Fund. The remaining roughly \$700,000 will come from registration fees charged to visitors and others who are not General Conference delegates.

Most of the 864 delegates to the special General Conference will be the same as who attended the 2016 legislative gathering. The Book of Discipline allows annual conferences to elect a new slate of delegates, so long as they keep the same number assigned for 2016.

At this point, Graves said he knows of two annual conferences—California-Nevada and New York—that have made plans for a new election of delegates. He said the Red Bird Missionary Conference has made plans to elect new reserve delegates.

Dec. 3 is Global Migration Sunday

The Council of Bishops is encouraging churches to observe [Global Migration Sunday](#) on December 3, 2017. This is the first Sunday of the season of Advent, a time when we remember the coming birth of the Christ child who himself was a migrant.

A letter from Council of Bishops President Bruce Ough read: “From Asia and Europe to Africa and the Americas, the plight of more than 65 million men, women and children forced to leave their homes and migrate to places unknown calls all Christians to remember what God requires of us.

Wars, natural disasters, persecution, economic hardships and growing violence around the world are the major root causes of the unprecedented global migration we witness with grave concern today. As if these deadly forces were not enough, migrants also face myriad problems including hazardous travel, cultural barriers and the physical and emotional costs of arriving in strange lands where they are not always welcome and they often face persecution.

For most of these migrants, the decision to flee their homeland comes as a last resort effort to live. We are reminded of Joseph and Mary as they sought to save their lives and especially the life of the Christ child as they fled to Africa to escape the wrath of King Herod, who (threatened by the birth of Jesus) ordered the massacre of children (Matthew 2:13–14).

As United Methodists, we believe that the prayers of God’s people can cause the outpouring of God’s mercy and justice. As your bishops, it is our fervent hope that on Global Migration Sunday on December 3, United Methodist congregations in all the places we serve around the world will join our voices to pray for our brothers and sisters who are suffering the

journey of forced migration. In addition, as a people who pray and act upon those prayers, we ask that all our congregations gather an offering dedicated to the human suffering inflicted by forced migration. Offerings collected should be sent to the [Migration Advance No. 3022144](#).

We are grateful for our general agencies who have [prepared excellent resources](#) for Global Migration Sunday in English, Arabic, French and Spanish—including the prayer that we ask all pray on December 3rd.”

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through Christ ...
but sometimes
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Proceeds benefit Young Clergy Debt Assistance Fund**



Revelations About Faith In S. Korea

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attention to the way we should live our lives. This experience calls me to look at my prayer life and those with whom I serve going forward and ask how we can improve on our prayer ministry.

We heard testimony and witnessing about the journey of the Korean people and how their faith in God and the help of missionaries from the United States and other countries had brought them through difficult challenges; such as wars, destruction, desperate poverty, and oppression. The economic growth and progress, both corporate and religious are overwhelming. Faith in God, prayer, revivals, Bible study, Christian education, perseverance, building and planting churches, and caring for each other, growth began.

At Bupyeong Methodist Church, volunteerism has taken on a new meaning. Truly there is a great sense of caring for the needs of the low-income and poverty-stricken families, prisoners, the elderly, churches in need of support, schools, and seminaries, and missionaries all while sustaining the home front, keeping it spotless and immaculate. Bupyeong Methodist is synonymous with hospitality; there was no stone left unturned to extend a heartfelt welcome.

—Roena Littlejohn

In sharing with my congregations about our pilgrimage, I've described attending morning prayer time at the Bupyeong



Clockwise from above left: The Bupyeong Methodist Church; worshippers gather outside waiting for morning prayer to begin; Gail Douglas-Boykin, Rev. Julia Yeon Hee Yim, Rev. Delores Barrett, Pastor Benny Custodio and Tracy Moore take a walk as the sun comes up after morning prayer.

Methodist Church as the closest I may come to a Pentecost experience. As I heard so many voices simultaneously offering their worries, thanksgivings, and burdens to God, I couldn't understand what they were saying, but in the midst of their cries, their shouting, their whispers, their tears of joy and sadness, Christ was present and the Holy Spirit was working.

... I noticed how the churches we visited had been designed to be inviting. Common areas and gathering spaces were very well lit, spaces were freshly painted, clean, and well maintained. At Bupyeong Methodist Church it is virtually impossible to step onto the property or drive into the parking garage without encountering their mission to make disciples around the world.

I was moved by the deep reverence and gratitude for the incredible work of missionaries in sharing the love of Christ in Korea. I found our visit to the Yanghwajin Foreign Missionary Cemetery deeply moving and wish we'd had

more time there. There is room for improvement in how we in the United States view those called to missionary service as well as how we honor the saints who have gone before us.

I give thanks to God for the opportunity to journey with such a wonderful group of disciples from the NYAC and pray that our experience and learnings will continue to impact our ministries and the life and work of the NYAC for years to come.

—Rev. Dr. Jessica L. Anschutz

This experience has left an indelible imprint on my life that will last until eternity. Never in my lifetime have I ever witnessed a body of people with such authenticity in their unquenchable thirst and hunger for God. Looking at a sea of people at 5 a.m. in the mornings worshipping God was spellbound and this celebration of God is done 365 days of the year even on a Sunday with three services made

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no difference. Just the thought of many who had to go to work or have other chores of the day did not matter, it was first coming together as a community to honor, praise, worship and pray at the start of the day. This just blew my mind.

Their hospitality was beyond measure and moved me to a place of inward reflection. Hospitality was a key to the care of humanity from the beginning of time and these people exemplify every ounce of how the good Lord wants us to be with each other. Their respect and humility epitomize the Christ in them. As I reflect on their heart of love sending missionaries all over the world, caring for the cradle to the grave, taking care also of the imprisoned, extending their arms to other communities in building the body of Christ, it's truly a people who do not just speak the word but live by the word in their everyday life.

A people who went through a devastating war that brought the country to ashes and rubble, but when they called upon their God who heard their cry and raised them up they served him in spirit and truth from such time forth and even forevermore. Bupyeong Methodist Church, one of the state of the art churches in South Korea today, stands debt free because of a God who took them out of the miry clay and planted their feet on solid ground.

—Rev. Delores M. Barrett

My experience in Korea has enabled me to further see in reality who God is and who I am



Clockwise from above: It's a full house with a 100-person choir for the daily prayer service at 5 a.m.; District Superintendents Sungchan Kim, Tim Riss, Julia Yeon Hee Yim, Betsy Ott, and Alpher Sylvester pose with one of church members who served as a guide; illuminated signs in the parking garage share the message of Jesus Christ.



in his presence. Like the apostle Paul on the road to Damascus, I was broken in heart for things left undone and made confident in the things God can do through the resources that God has given to me in the NYAC.

I would describe the church in Korea as people with the following gifts:

- A heart of gratitude for the missionaries who brought the message of salvation and the soldiers who fought in the Korean War
- Emphasis on achievement in education
- Emphasis on evangelism mission and

church planting

- The spirit of giving: Gratitude is the force that drives the Korean church stewardship, like donating the sale of a house for building the church.
- Spirituality was taught by example not only from the leader who in this case was the senior pastor but also through the hospitality of individual members eg. a member paid for our last dinner.
- The associate pastors were comfortable in their role because they received the encouragement and support of the senior pastor. There was trust and confidence between the pastors. For example, the senior pastor reported that it took them 15 minutes to make a decision at their meetings.
- The congregation was made comfortable during the morning prayer meeting because there were no restricted prayer topics. (As in written prayers usually said in unison)

—Rev. Samuel Arhin

Since my return I have continued the practice of 5 a.m. prayer. I have invited my members to join me in the sanctuary, but as yet have had no takers. I will continue, but I will also add other times that might be more in keeping with Western culture and work schedules.



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I have also committed to exploring how one changes culture within an organization. I believe that until we experience a culture shift within the church that elevates the practice of spiritual disciplines, joy, and gratitude, we will continue with a lukewarm faith.

Initially, I was discouraged when Pastor Suk-Kipun Church-suggested that it takes 2.5 years to disciple a person. I thought, who has that time? But as I thought about Jesus' example it began to make sense. Jesus spent between two and three years with the disciples—teaching, preaching, and living together day by day—making disciples takes time. Perhaps one thing that the Conference could consider is the length of appointments in churches. It seems that it takes between one and two years for leadership to gain trust and traction with a congregation and possibly another two-to three years to change the culture within the church if necessary and it is only at this point-when trust, traction, and culture meets-that the fullness of life together in Christ begins. Many times, it is just at this point

that moves are made.

—*Pastor Ronell Howard*

A little over 60 years ago, Korea was a country decimated by war. More than 1.6 million civilians lost their lives, over and beyond military casualties. Resources were all but nonexistent. Yet today, we visit a land that is thriving and indeed a world leader in many realms. It seems to me that one of those is the spiritual realm and I suspect that is no coincidence.

Just as Jesus stood filled with love and compassion for the people but virtually no earthly resources [in the feeding of the 5,000], and looked to God in faith trusting in His provision so our host, Bupyeong Methodist Church took what little they had and went to God in prayer—faithful, passionate daily prayer trusting in God's provision.

We heard story after story of the sacrifices made to support the church and its ministries: families selling their homes and giving proceeds to the church; generous donors who

after prayerful consideration increased their donations tenfold, into the tens of thousands of dollars and more. Yet it seems to me that the greatest gift given to this church, and modeled by Rev. Hong, was not the generous financial support but rather, the unwavering commitment to prayer—not just by a few but by a faithful committed community.

This congregation focused not on what their eyes saw before them, but on their Lord and Savior. Today they continue to give thanks to God and invest what they have in His kingdom work, just as those five loaves and two fishes fed thousands and thousands. This faith community is feeding thousands and tens of thousands both physically and spiritually through their outreach ministry which is being multiplied by God's provision through the faithful work of His people as they seek Him in prayer. I give thanks to God for this amazing opportunity to witness firsthand His hand at work in Korea through the ministry of the Bupyeong Methodist Church.

—*Tracy Moore, candidate for deacon*

Clergy Tax-Free Housing Allowances in Jeopardy

UMNS—United Methodist clergy should hold tight, for now, after a U.S. federal judge struck down the law that gives clergy tax-free housing allowances.

That's the advice of the Rev. Nate Berneking, an attorney and the director of financial and administrative ministries in the Missouri Conference.

"Come April 15, 2018, your 2017 taxes will almost certainly be just as they've always been," Berneking wrote in his ["Housing Allowance Case FAQ."](#)

"We would offer a word of caution to pastors and churches thinking of switching from a parsonage to a housing allowance. Given the uncertainty, it might be a good idea to wait for some clarity."

Under a 1954 federal law, a "minister of the gospel" doesn't pay income taxes on compensation designated as housing allowance. The Internal Revenue Service has traditionally interpreted "minister" broadly to encompass rabbis, imams and other religious leaders.

The Freedom from Religion Foundation, based in Madison, Wisconsin, sued the IRS and argued that the law discriminates against secular employees.

U.S. District Judge Barbara Crabb on Oct. 6 largely sided with the foundation, ruling the law violates the First Amendment's prohibition that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion."

She made the decision because the law "does not have a secular purpose or effect and because a reasonable observer would view the statute as an endorsement of religion," she wrote in *Gaylor v. Mnuchin*.

The ruling does not deal with parsonages, which have been tax-free since the United States enacted federal income tax in 1913.

Nevertheless, the stakes of the case could be large for The United Methodist Church. As of 2013, 20,783 United Methodist churches – about 64 percent of the denomination's churches in the United States – paid some amount of housing allowance to clergy, according to General Council on Finance and Administration data. Steve Lambert, general counsel for the agency's legal department, has written a [white paper analyzing the case](#).

"It would be extremely difficult for some of our pastors and maybe even more difficult for our retirees," Berneking told United Methodist News Service. He discusses clergy housing in his book on church leadership.

Without the tax break, both active and retired pastors would need to pay thousands of dollars more to the IRS. That's on top of the self-employment tax active clergy already pay. Many congregations set their compensation for pastors with the tax policy in mind.

However, it's still too soon to say what the impact of this ruling will be.

For one thing, Crabb has not yet ruled on what remedy the foundation should receive in the case. The judge has ordered both sides to write legal briefs arguing what remedies they think are appropriate. Those briefs will not be fully complete until Nov. 8, with Crabb announcing her decision sometime after that.

Whatever her decision, it will likely face appeal.

Crabb previously struck down the housing-allowance tax break as unconstitutional in 2013. However, the 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals overturned her earlier ruling.

OBITUARIES

Adelia Riley

Adelia Riley of Jackson Center, Ohio, died September 24, 2017, at Lane Park of Sidney senior living community, at age 91.

She was the widow of the Rev. Roger D. Riley, who served in the New York Conference from 1954 until his retirement in 1984. He pastored several parishes that included numerous churches in what is now the Catskill Hudson District, including the Jefferson circuit; Windham, Ashland and North Settlement circuit; Rockland Area Ministry; Franklin UMC, and Kenosha Lake Parish. Rev. Riley died in February 2009. The couple was married in September 1944.

Riley was born in Shelby County, Ohio, on July 22, 1926, to the late Samuel H. and Flossie (Glick) Lotz. She was a member of the Jackson Center UMC and the United Methodist Women.

As a preacher's wife, she played an important role in her husband's ministries. She oversaw cooking the board dinners, with barbecue chicken as one of her specialties. At Ashland UMC, she helped in the rebuilding the church after it was destroyed by fire. Her children referred to her as "the early audiobook" because she would read to them during family trips.

Riley is survived by her daughters, Lois (Paul) Derrick, Evelyn (Jeff) Lane and Linda (Jim) Dodge; a son, James (Claire) Riley; grandchildren, Sheila Allen, Paula (Ben) Jackson, Todd (Angie) Derrick, Adam (Maureen) Lane, Bradley (Beverly) Lane, Todd (Christine) Dodge, Asha (Tommy) Keegan, Jordin (Chris) Esserman, Kathleen Riley and James Riley; 11 great-grandchildren; two great-great-grandchildren; brothers, Dennis (Eileen) Lotz and Guy Lotz and his companion, Lucille; and numerous nieces and nephews. In addition to her husband, Riley was preceded in death by a sister, Helen I. Howard, and brother, Leland Lotz.

A memorial service was held September 28 at the Jackson Center UMC. Burial will take place at the convenience of the family in Seventh Day Cemetery in Jackson Center.

Memorial contributions may be made to Jackson Center UMC Memorial Fund, 202 E. Pike St., Jackson Center, OH 45334 or [Shriners Hospitals for Children](#), Office of Development, 2900 Rocky Point Drive, Tampa, FL 33607. Online condolences may be expressed at www.edsfh.com.

Gerry Gehres

Gerry Gehres, 84, died September 15, 2017, at Seasons Hospice of Christiana Hospital in Newark, Del. She was the wife of Rev. J. Philip Gehres, who joined the New York Conference in 1956. In New York,

Rev. Gehres served churches in Grand Gorge, Gilboa, North Blenheim, Manorkill, West Conesville, Hobart, Township, and Floral Park.

Gehres was born on January 6, 1933, to Ralph and Gladys Long, and was raised in West Jefferson, Ohio. She lived briefly in Harrod, Ohio, before moving to Grand Gorge, N.Y., in 1955. In 1996, the couple retired to Delaware.

She was a talented musician specializing in piano and organ. She taught music in public schools, gave piano lessons, and served as a church musician. Gehres organized and accompanied numerous musicals, and concerts.

The couple traveled extensively throughout the United States, completing several cross-country road trips along the Route 66, Route 50, Route 40, and US 30 corridors, as well as many coastal tours of lighthouses.

Survivors include her husband of 64 years, Rev. J. Philip Gehres; son Mark (Jen) Gehres of Ocean Springs, Miss.; daughters Rebecca Gehres of Hurst, Texas, Elizabeth (Tom) Lukacs of South River, N.J., and Deborah (John) Van Varick of Newton, N.J.; daughter-in-law Donna Gehres of Euless, Texas; a sister Judy Biggers of Pensacola, Fla.; a brother Jim (Mary) Long of New Smyrna Beach, Fla.; six grandchildren; and one great-grandchild. She was predeceased by her sister, Suzanne Torres; and a son, Stephen Gehres.

A private graveside service was held September 18, at the historic Barratt's Chapel Cemetery in Frederica, Del. Memorial contributions may be made to support music programs at your local church or school, or to the Delaware SPCA: Stanton Shelter, 455 Stanton Christiana Rd., Newark, DE 19713.

Camille Alethia Shand

Camille Alethia Shand, the daughter of retired clergy, Rev. Wesley F. Shand, died September 14, 2017.

She was born August 27, 1969, in St. Andrew, Jamaica, and immigrated to the United States with her family. Shand graduated from Tilden High School in Brooklyn with honors, and then attended Boston University, graduating with a bachelor of arts in philosophy in 1994. She worked at Joslyn Diabetes Research Center and at The Boys and Girls Club of Boston as assistant director of development operations. She also served as a board member for Dorchester YMCA and was an ongoing volunteer and mentor.

Shand is survived by her parents, Wesley and Hortense Shand; three sisters, Megan, Gail and Carrie-Anne; two brothers, Wesley II and John; and by aunts and uncles, nieces and nephews.

A memorial service was held September 23 at St Paul's UMC, in Brooklyn, N.Y.

Agency Urges 'Critical Thinking' to Help Puerto Rico

The United Methodist Commission on Religion and Race is offering resources on vital conversations and culturally competent action to end racism and cultural insensitivity. In a statement published with the [Puerto Rico Response toolkit](#), the agency said, "We must think critically about the unfolding tragedy in Puerto Rico and examine systems of injustice that keep so many of our brothers and sisters in a place of need and suffering, before and after the storms of life.

"Religion & Race joins people around the

world in witness and concern as the weeks pass since Puerto Rico was subjected to a 30-hour direct hit from Hurricane Maria on September 20th.

We see the courage of the Puerto Rican people, banding together to survive. As the death toll slowly climbs, we anguish with family and friends living on the mainland who can't help but compare Maria to Harvey and Irma. We listen as the US government works to free itself from political distraction and speed life-giving support to its citizens in the US territory.

Therefore, we call upon US citizens of faith and goodwill to hold our government accountable for the immediate escalation of aid to rebuild the infrastructure and protect our fellow citizens of Puerto Rico.

Religion and Race is offering resources to help leaders hold vital conversations and take culturally competent action in the movement to end racism and cultural insensitivity. Prayers are not enough but it is our hope that prayerful reflection will lead to powerful actions that transform the world."