



NEW Spirit!

UNITED METHODISTS OF EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA
& GREATER NEW JERSEY

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The Urban Summit, Feb. 5, at Jarretstown UMC, brought about 80 Eastern PA and Greater New Jersey clergy and conference staff together to discuss joys, hopes and challenges for ministry in urban churches and communities. The Rev. Noé Gabriel López, an urban associate pastor and EPA's new Associate Superintendent for Urban Ministry, preaches to the assembly. *James Lee photo*

Urban Summit Imagines New Horizons

By James Lee

DRESHER, PA

In the serene setting of Jarretstown United Methodist Church in Dresher, PA, a groundswell of passion and purpose filled the air February 5, as about 80 clergy from the urban heartlands of Eastern Pennsylvania and Greater New Jersey gathered for an Urban Summit. The daylong retreat was designed to stir their imagination, encourage deep connections and inspire a renewed commitment to urban ministry.

The event kicked off with a palpable anticipation as participants, some reuniting with old colleagues amid new faces, shared in the joy and camaraderie that only those committed to the challenging yet rewarding call of urban ministry can truly understand.

The hum of conversations was replaced by the strong, joyful singing that filled the fellowship hall, led by the Rev. William D. Carter III of Franklin-St. John's UMC in Newark.

While EPA&GNJ District Superintendents led the morning's proceedings, a highlight was the introduction of two new Associate Superintendents, the Rev. Lore-



Noé Gabriel (Gabe) López

lei Toombs and Rev. Noé Gabriel (Gabe) López. López, who will be serving with EPA's South-East Region, with a focus in Urban Ministry, delivered a thoughtful sermon that touched the hearts of many.

Growing up in Philadelphia's beleaguered Kensington neighborhood and raised by Guatemalan immigrant parents, he brought a unique perspective to his message and will likely do so in his urban ministry work and relationships. López challenged attendees to embrace urban ministry as a sacred call and a choice that disregards the "opportunity costs" of worldly alternatives.

"Friends, you and I are here today because we made a choice to be here. With us saying 'yes' to urban ministry, we are saying 'no' to a history that has discarded black and brown bodies as disposable and nonessential," preached López. "This history is contrary to the gospel of Jesus. Will you answer the call to follow Jesus once again to the unknown and the uncomfortable?"

'Let Us Go Into a Space of Imagination'

The Rev. Evelyn Kent Clark, Dean of the EPA Cabinet, led a prayer inviting all into a space of imagination and possibility.

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Bridges Teaches Church Teams Connective Power of Story-sharing

By John W. Coleman

Story is the language of human experience. Every time we tell a story we build community.

—MARK YACONELLI

NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ

Offering coffee and conversation after Sunday worship, monthly Meals of Love, and affordable clothing and household items in its Blessed Treasures shop, Beverly (NJ) United Methodist Church is committed to doing community outreach. But now, thanks to the Greater New Jersey Conference's Bridges Project, the two-century-old congregation is learning to also do what one might call *inreach*.



Storyteller David Gonzales speaks to church teams at the recent Bridges Project training.

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FOR TANZANIA
Building Churches, Paying Pastors



Tanzania conference leaders and landowner holding up the land purchase agreement for what will be the foundation of Bamia United Methodist Church in Dar es Salaam, where construction has begun on a new sanctuary, thanks to funds raised so far by fellow United Methodists in Greater New Jersey.



The Rev. Mutwale wa Mushidi (left) and Kabaka Alphonsine, longtime Global Ministries missionaries in Tanzania, will visit and fellowship with United Methodists in both Greater New Jersey and Eastern PA from mid-February to early March 6.

A MESSAGE FROM OUR BISHOP

The Lengthening of Our Days

Bishop John Schol



These days we are traveling through the season of Lent, the weeks from Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday—40 days, excluding Sundays. While we may honor sacrifices during Lent, Sundays are considered mini-Easters and are not days to sacrifice, but to celebrate and enjoy.

However, in my childhood, my mom made huge sacrifices on Sundays to get four children up, fed, dressed and to the church in time for Sunday school.

The word Lent is from the old English word “lencten,” meaning Spring season or lengthening. When you think of it, Spring is the season of lengthening of our days and our sunlight.

For Christians, Lent is traditionally the season of preparing for Easter through fasting, sacrifice, repentance and study. In a sense, this is lengthening as well. We increase our commitment to spiritual disciplines for renewal in our preparation to celebrate Easter.

While on one hand we are in a season of lengthening, that means something else is being reduced. For instance, while daylight is lengthening, the night is growing shorter. When we increase fasting, prayer and study, it means other things in our lives have to decrease.

The Christian seasons bring balance and order to church life and to our daily lives. Balance and order are important. Many of us live this life between chaos and order.

Sunday mornings in my house while growing up were a dance between chaos and order. Sometimes it looked like chaos was winning; but in the end, we would all arrive fed, dressed and ready for Sunday school.

Sometimes in the world, and in the church, it looks like chaos is winning. But just as in the Creation story, God has a way of making beautiful things out of chaos. It is a delicate balance of the right amount of lengthening some things and shortening others.

I have always found in the midst of chaos that prayer, fasting and sacrifice widen my perspective and bring order and balance.

In the church we have been through some difficult seasons, and now we are emerging on the other side. I am grateful for how we are able to balance all of the challenges together and now find ourselves ready to embrace all that God has for us. Thank you for being a Lenten and Easter people.

Keep the faith!

Bishop John Schol
The United Methodists of Greater New Jersey
and Eastern Pennsylvania



Irina Iriser photo

EPA, GNJ Both Appoint New Associate Superintendents

The Eastern Pennsylvania and Greater New Jersey conferences both have created the new position of Associate Superintendents to further assist District Superintendents in fostering transformational leaders and vital congregations. Four Associate Superintendents have been appointed in GNJ and two in EPA.

GNJ’s four regional Directors of Resourcing—the Revs. Kate Monahan, Sammy Arroyo, Gina Yeske and Juel Nelson—took on the new title of Associate Superintendent January 1 to manifest their broader ministry support responsibilities.

In February, EPA announced the appointment of two new Associate Superintendents, as of July 1.

The Rev. Noé Gabriel López, now associate pastor of First UMC of Germantown (FUMCOG) in Philadelphia, will serve the South-East Region and resource churches involved in Urban Ministry. The Rev. Lorelei Toombs, now pastor of Willow Grove UMC, will serve the North-West Region and resource churches for Leadership Development and Community Engagement.



FROM LEFT: The Revs. Sammy Arroyo, Gina Yeske, Kate Monahan and Juel Nelson.

Help Grow Transformational Leaders, Vital Congregations

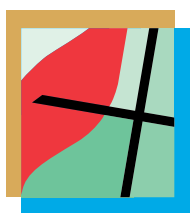
GNJ’s Resource Directors have supported District Superintendents at the



FROM LEFT: The Rev. Noé Gabriel (Gabe) López and The Rev. Lorelei Toombs.

district and regional levels to help recruit and develop transformational leaders and grow vital congregations. They will continue that work with the new title that reflects the valuable, growing, multifaceted roles they play, said Human Resources Director Jay Kim.

Monahan also coordinates efforts to recruit young clergy to gain experience by serving churches through EPA&GNJ’s Mosaic Ministries. Arroyo also coordinates GNJ’s Ending the Sin of Racism efforts. Yeske also coordinates GNJ’s engagement with churches in the Pathways to Congregational Health and Fruitfulness initiative. And Dr. Juel Nelson also serves as GNJ’s Director of Leadership Development.



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John R. Schol, Bishop

United Methodists of Greater New Jersey
205 Jumping Brook Road, Neptune, NJ 07753

James Lee, Director of Communications
732.359.1044 | jlee@gnjumc.org

Joshua Watkins, Communications Administrator
732.359.1063 | jwatkins@gnjumc.org

John Coleman, Editorial Manager
jcoleman@epaumc.church

Lindsey Cotman, Graphic Designer
lcotman@epaumc.church

David Beverly, IT and Web Specialist
dbeverly@gnjumc.org

Corbin Payne, Video Producer
cpayne@gnjumc.org

Christopher G. Coleman, NEWSpirit Designer
chris@cgolesman.com

New Subscriptions, renewals, address changes, and corrections should be addressed to Communications Department at info@gnjumc.org or by mail to: NEWSpirit | 205 Jumping Brook Road, Neptune NJ 07753

FOR ADVERTISING RATES, INFORMATION & PLACEMENT

Contact: info@gnjumc.org

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Both Greater New Jersey and Eastern Pennsylvania will have their Annual Conference sessions in May at the Wildwoods (NJ) Convention Center. GNJ’s dates are May 19-21. EPA’s dates are May 21-23. Their mutual theme, *Belong*, is from Romans 12:5—“So in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.” Preparations are underway, and registration for conference members is scheduled to open March 1. Pre-Conference Workbooks, with details for each conference, will be published in April. Look for more agenda highlights and details on both conference websites in March.

Urban Summit

Continued from page 1

Bishop John Schol echoed that sentiment, emphasizing the critical role of visionary leadership in the church's mission. He introduced the concept of "the law of the lid," illustrating how the limits of leadership capacity determines organizational growth and underscoring the need for continuous leadership development.

Discussions throughout the day were vibrant and varied, touching on joys, hopes, challenges, race relations and expectations, and the urgent but often deferred needs of urban ministry. Topics ranged from the tangible—like aging, inadequate church buildings and cross-cultural language barriers—to the strategic, such as leadership development and community engagement. These conversations not only provided insights but also fostered a sense of solidarity among those gathered.

The day concluded with Holy Communion, led by Bishop Schol, who tied the day's themes to the table of the Lord, reminding everyone that Jesus is the primary pioneer leading the way forward. This day of imagination has set the stage for what may well become a vibrant and impactful chapter in the life of urban ministry among United Methodists in Eastern PA and Greater New Jersey.



At the Urban Summit Feb. 5, nearly 80 EPA & GNJ clergy and staff joined in probing dialogue, revealing urban ministry challenges and possible solutions, and in uplifting worship, fellowship and communion.

Photos by James Lee and John Coleman

"I'm inspired by the passion and dedication I've seen," concluded Bishop Schol. "Our journey doesn't end here; it's just beginning. Every step we take in our urban ministries is a step towards

transformation—not just of our cities, but of hearts and lives. Let's keep moving forward, together." 🇺🇸



EPA Tools for Ministry Gatherings Will Offer Learning for Leaders

*Blessed are those who find wisdom,
those who gain understanding.*

—PROVERBS 3:13

Several hundred lay and clergy members of Eastern PA will spend three brief but full Saturday mornings in February and March drilling down into a deep well in search of refreshing insights about church ministry and leadership. They will use expert teaching, probing questions, innovative concepts, shared experiences, biblical interpretation, creative media, helpful resources, and other Tools for Ministry to seek and find blessings of wisdom and understanding.

Three district/regional Tools for Ministry events will offer learning for leaders in dual 90-minute sessions:

- West District: February 24 at Salem United Methodist Church in Manheim, PA
- South-East Region: March 2 at Eastern University in St. David's, PA
- North District: March 9 at Asbury United Methodist Church in Allentown, PA

West District Tools for Ministry, Feb. 24

In the West four courses will focus on financial stewardship—offering timely wisdom to treasurers, finance committees, pastors and grant-seekers working with "shoe-string budgets."

All three Tools sessions will offer courses aimed at training lay leaders, trustees, SPRCs and church leaders interested in shifting to the popular, streamlined One Board Model (aka Simplified Accountability Structure).

"Effective Youth Ministry" will tell leaders "How to Start and How to Keep Going." And the always needed Safe Sanctuary course will address child abuse, sexual misconduct, vulnerable adults and safe digital policies.

Members of EPA's Commission on Religion & Race will teach on Cross Cultural/Cross Racial Ministries and "How to Talk with People about Race and Racism." Another course will help people learn to "Have Hard Conversations" and lead ministry "in a Polarized World." And another will teach how to start Church and Society advocacy ministries.

"Church Growth 101: Hospitality & Welcoming Guests" should attract those who want their churches to grow. And for pastors and church leaders who feel weary in well-doing, the "Building Personal Resiliency" might prescribe some remedies.

Meanwhile, the future is here. So, it's time to start using Chat GPT to do AI research for your sermons, Bible studies, forms, and so on. And "How to Get Free and Cheap Technology for your Church" should help leaders affordably address technology needs.

All Tools sessions will offer a primer on the 2024 General Conference, just two months away.

South-East Region Tools for Ministry, March 2

The South-East Region will return to the much appreciated, Eastern University campus, offering "passionate, relevant and new workshops and presenters," said the Rev. Evelyn Kent Clark, South District Superintendent.

"One workshop will open our eyes to a new look at youth ministry for today, with real, hands-on ideas and strategies to impact young people in our churches and communities," she continued. "One of the most essential parts of our week is the worship experience. Is your worship experience



uplifting, creative and connected with powerful preaching and worship design? If not, find out how it can be. If it is, find out how to take it to the next level.

"We are called to serve our communities as lay and clergy disciples. Hear new ways to transform lives and innovative ways to connect with neighbors. Introduce your neighbors to Jesus Christ. Assist and support community members. Assess and supply their needs. Teach and equip them to change and become agents of change.

"Is getting your church on the website driving you crazy? Find out how to make your church's website work for you. How many members in your church have heard God's call to ministry in the last ten years? We have a workshop on cultivating the culture of discerning, sharing and responding to God's call."

While all Tools academies offer required continuing education for Christ Servant Ministers and Certified Lay Ministers, the South-East will also tie some of its courses to elements of the Pathways to Congregational Fruitfulness & Health.

- "Identifying Resources for Ministry" (Pathway: Sustainability)
- "Building Vital Congregations" (Pathway: Vitality)
- "Youth Ministry" (Pathway: Next Generation Ministries)
- Staff/Pastor Parish Committee (Pathway: Conflict Resolution)
- "Deacons, Deaconesses and Home Missioners, Oh My!" (Pathway: Community Engagement) and
- "Organizing the Local Church for Mission" (offered in Spanish and English) and "Connecting with Our Missionaries" (Pathway: Journey of Hope).

Additional courses will focus on Safe Sanctuaries, "Selfcare & Mental Health" and "Churches Walking with those coming home from Prison."

North District Tools for Ministry, March 9

The North District will feature "Launching and Growing Family Ministry" to explore how to welcome, support and involve young families in a church's full ministry. And a special introduction to the Pathways initiative will lead attendees to "Embark on a Transformative Journey" that can revitalize their churches.

"Methodists: A Singing People" will fill the classroom and perhaps the hallway with melodious voices as it teaches and celebrates the denomination's proud tradition and practice of church music—especially Wesleyan hymns.

"So you want to lead a Bible Study?" will teach a primer in strategies, structures and contemporary scriptural insights for teaching Bible study in various settings. Meanwhile, "Christian Spiritual Practices" will prepare attendees to relieve worry and distraction and listen more deeply and calmly for God's voice through time-honored, transformative spiritual practices.

Finally, as each district/region intentionally offers courses related to the conference's mission to "End the Sin of Racism," the North will offer "How to Start a Conversation on Race." And EPA's Committee on Native American Ministries will lead a Path Toward Wholeness/Journey of Hope session in the North and the South-East titled "William Penn's Holy Experiment—Did It Work as He Intended."

The workshop will examine the horrific Conestoga Massacre and the forced assimilation of children at the Carlisle Indian School to show how William Penn's friendly relationship with the Lenape gave way to hostility and brutal attempts to solve the "Indian problem." In the journey toward hope and healing, understanding the intergenerational impact of this brutal history on Native Americans should lead one to advocate for justice and fairness in issues facing Native Americans today. 🇺🇸

Bridges Project

Continued from page 1

Members are learning to reach into the lives of others through the sharing of stories—personal, poignant, passionate and often powerful stories that can reveal the deep, inner dimensions of people's lives—who they are, how they feel, what they need, and more.

It might happen over a cup of coffee, a meal, a store transaction or an informal interview. But the small team of church leaders who attended their second Bridges training in February are trying to gather 50 or more personal stories told by fellow members and neighbors.

"Our introduction to Bridges last September was fascinating and beneficial to our personal growth and connections," recalled the Rev. Anna Thomas, Beverly UMCs pastor, who immigrated to New Jersey from India. As her members learn to become vulnerably honest and share life experiences with one another, they are also learning to invite stories from their church's visitors and neighbors.

That's the humble but potentially impactful *modus operandi* of the Bridges Project: storytelling and story-listening to help congregations engage with the diversity of their surrounding communities. Stories are the little-known secret to deeply touching and possibly transforming people's lives and relationships. And while Bridges is part of GNJ's Journey of Hope initiative to end the sin of racism, it spans not just the deep currents of race and culture but other differences as well.

'A Culture of Going Beyond Just Serving People'

"It gave us a culture of going beyond just serving people, but also talking to them," said Thomas. "The stories people share with us are like precious gems that teach and inspire us and bring more meaning to what we do."

Beverly's and nine other church teams from around the conference make up Bridges' second cohort in the three-year program funded by a \$1 million Lilly Endowment grant in 2021. They met for their second gathering February 3-4 at the Heldrich Hotel in New Brunswick, and they will have one more gathering in May.

Until then, they will meet via Zoom with coaches and complete important assignments:

- to collect, share and learn from more stories while connecting with their neighbors;
- to grow their church's participation in Bridges by fostering a culture of personal and communal story-sharing; and
- to share with members a new, thought-provoking game called



ABOVE LEFT: The Rev. Anna Thomas (center), pastor of Beverly UMC, talks with her Bridges second cohort team about how to advance their church's story-sharing progress to more deeply engage the community they serve. TOP-RIGHT: A young Bridges participant shares information about her church's ministry outreach and community. RIGHT: Mark Yaconelli, master storyteller, introduces Bridges' third cohort to the art, craft and practice of storytelling and story-sharing.

John Coleman photos

Ripple Effects, created by Discipleship by Design, that can help them better understand compounding social problems in their communities and explore possible solutions.

The third and final Bridges cohort of 15 church teams simultaneously began their training in February, meeting mostly apart from the second cohort. They will have two more trainings, May 3-5 and August 23-25, in this final year of the program. A team of young facilitators from Ministry Architects provides training, coaching and consulting as partners assisting GNJ's Bridges director Alyssa Ruch.

"Storytelling is an act of hospitality... (and) an enemy is merely someone whose story you don't know," said Mark Yaconelli, a master storyteller from Oregon, who founded The Hearth to teach "personal storytelling practices to help communities and individuals deepen relationships, address injustices, and cultivate compassion."

In teaching the third cohort, he offered ample narrative wisdom and drew the same from participants by creating a safe space for small-group, reminiscent storytelling, individual story-writing and candid reflections.

Storytelling is 'Folk Medicine' for Healing, Restoration

Some described feeling vulnerable, honored, angry, compassionate, grateful, recognized, reconnected, unalone, liberated, more trusting and other reactions that they



realized they could likewise inspire in others through the power of stories. Yaconelli likens storytelling to "folk medicine" that can provide profound healing and restoration.

David Gonzales, another proficient storyteller, poet and playwright also enlivened a two-hour plenary session with enlightening and at times emotional poetry and group story-sharing.

"Most of the things we have in common are the things we don't share," wrote one participant during the story-writing exercise, where participants' honest, anonymous writings were taped to walls around the ballroom for all to read.

"This exercise felt very sacred, almost like church," said the Rev. Catherine Jordan-Latham, who serves in cross-racial appointments as the pastor of Broadway and Port Colden UM churches. "This whole experience was hard for a lot of us—the emotional sharing and committing to the time and travel to be here. So, it's a privilege to hold (in our hearts) the words people felt the need to put on paper... What is not getting done in our relationship-building is because we can't for a lot of reasons. But ultimately, this is about us trusting."

"So many people in the room are from different backgrounds and experiences, but somehow this turned out to be what each person needed," said

Alyssa Ruch. "It's a lot to plan logistically, but God shows up and it always ends up working out."

Standing in a circle at the end, participants—who numbered nearly 120 in total—shared their takeaways from the experience: joy, gratitude, hope, possibilities, courage, new friends, the ability to listen and hear, and to speak and be heard. Asked what they would leave behind, they named: loneliness, doubt, worry, numbness, the act of "putting on a show."

'Our Communities are Going to Change the Church'

"Our communities are going to change the church," said Ruch. "Our relationships and our connections matter, and the only way the church is going to grow and be effective is to build relationships with the community."

The Bridges Project training is free, funded by the Lilly grant. "It's a gift to the congregations that we work with because it allows all our congregations to participate without financial burdens or implications," said Ruch.

Moreover, "it is designed "to address cultural competency by developing and practicing skills for deep empathy," she explained. "Our churches are given skills to notice 'the other' within their communities; but rather than judge, they are able to approach others with a sense of deep curiosity and to learn how the church can be a friend and partner.

"It is not the traditional anti-racism work, but our congregations are getting curious about the people who don't look like them in their communities and how we can be connected to the felt needs of the community."

Visit the Bridges section of GNJ's website to learn more. And view the short videos where 2023 cohort participants reflect on their learning experiences with storytelling and how it impacted them.

Ruch is recruiting a few extra participants who want to participate in the May 3-5 Bridges training to help them connect their communities through story-sharing. Contact her at aruch@gnjumc.org.

Some content for this story was provided by writer Krista B. Jefferies.



COUNTER-CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Aqeelah Ligonde helps a Bridges second-cohort team from the UMC of New Brunswick work with the Ripple Effects game to understand and address compounding social problems in their communities. Phyllis Myung listens as the second-cohort team from Galilee UMC of Englewood discusses approaches to welcoming, learning and responding to the needs of their neighbors. The Rev. Wil Wilson (standing) helps his second-cohort team from First UMC Williamstown journal their progress.

John Coleman photos



A New Sanctuary to Rise *For Tanzania* in Dar es Salaam

By James Lee

Bamia, a burgeoning neighborhood on the outskirts of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, witnessed a landmark event on January 13. United Methodist District Superintendent Isaka Ibrahim, alongside Nyasinde Pablo and the Rev. Mutwale Ntambo Wa Mushidi, Tanzania Conference Director of Church Development and Evangelism, congregated on a parcel of land earmarked for hope and unity.

In a gesture transcending cultural and religious boundaries, a Muslim landowner and his family extended their hands in fellowship, as they sold a plot to The United Methodist Church.

Here, the Bamia United Methodist Church, under the spirited guidance of Pastor Adrosia Josia, plans to erect a new sanctuary. This growing congregation of 70 members, currently worshipping weekly beneath iron sheets, is poised for continued growth in a town where the Muslim community constitutes 75 percent of the population.

Dar es Salaam, Tanzania's largest city, is home to 7 million inhabitants and seven United Methodist congregations that serve the spiritual needs of that community. Only the First UMC of Dar es Salaam has a physical building.

Now, with construction underway, Bamia United Methodist Church is set to become the second. The excited anticipation of this significant development has garnered Bamia UMC the honor of hosting the next session of the Tanzania Annual Conference, scheduled for the end of May.



"Bamia is a neighborhood brimming with potential, and having a church building here is a big step," remarked District Superintendent Isaka Ibrahim. "It will not only provide a home for worship but will also be a school for many children who walk very far to get to school right now. And the new building will greatly support Pastor Adrosia Josia and her leadership in the mission to share the gospel and grow our community."

This special moment was made possible by the generosity of the United Methodists of Greater New Jersey. Launched last fall, the *For Tanzania* campaign aimed to raise \$100,000 to construct a permanent church building in Dar es Salaam and to ensure a livable wage for United Methodist pastors in the Tanzania Conference for one year.

So far, GNJ members and friends have raised over \$75,000 towards the campaign, and their outpouring of generosity has facilitated this initial land purchase and laid the foundation for a new edifice of worship.

But it's more than just a building. "It's a testament to the unity and transparency valued by the church," shared Nyasinde Pablo, a conference leader present at the land purchase. "Principles of grace and love were demonstrated through the collaboration of local government leaders, the Bishop's office, and the Church Council of Bamia UMC."

The narrative of Bamia UMC intertwines with the transformative journey of Pastor Adrosia herself. Once a follower of Islam, her life took a



Pastor Adrosia Josia (left), pictured here with the Rev. James Lee and Nyasinde Pablo at the 2023 Tanzania Pastor's School, leads Bamia United Methodist Church. *Eric Drew photo*

dramatic turn through the evangelical work of Rev. Wa Mushidi. Later, her conversion led her from the pews of First UMC in Dar es Salaam to a deeper calling.

She eventually became the Women's Coordinator both at her church and on the district. Now, as she continues her pastoral studies in Morogoro, she serves as the pastor of Bamia UMC, appointed by Bishop Mande Muyombo.

"I am overly excited to have church land, but not only land. We will have a new permanent building for people to worship," expressed Pastor Adrosia. Her vision is clear: "A new building will not just be a shelter but a beacon for the gospel, inviting many to join the family of God."

The *For Tanzania* campaign and the story of Bamia UMC offer a clarion call, an invitation to United Methodists in Greater New Jersey to contribute the remaining \$25,000 of the campaign. When they do, pastors like Pastor Adrosia Josia can be equipped with a livable wage and boldly continue the mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ to transform the communities in Tanzania.

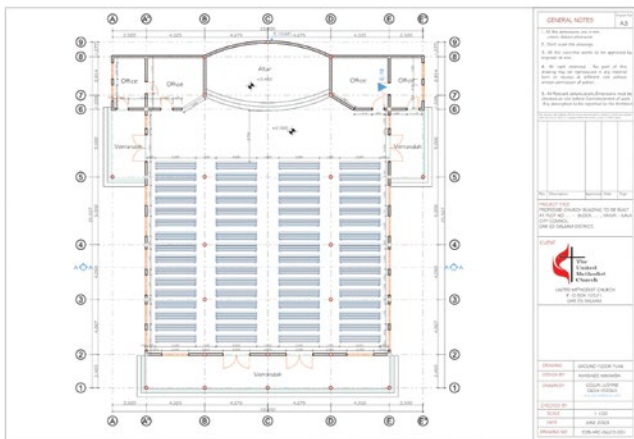


Tanzania conference leaders and landowner standing on the purchased land that will be the foundation of Bamia United Methodist Church. *Photo provided.*

As the morning sun rises on the Dar es Salaam's horizon, its rays illuminate the future site of the Bamia United Methodist Church.

"I would like to express my gratitude to all the people in New Jersey and around the world for your big support," proclaims Pastor Adrosia, as she envisions the church rising, much like the dawn, to bring light to the lives of many. "The joy of the Lord is our strength." 🌅

To learn more about the *For Tanzania* campaign, and to join the Circles of Giving, or to just give and join the movement, please visit: www.gnjumc.org/fortanzania.



Initial architectural drawings of the future Bamia United Methodist Church. *Provided.*

Tanzania missionaries to visit GNJ, EPA from mid-February to March

The Rev. Mutwale wa Mushidi and Kabaka Alphonsine, longtime Global Ministries missionaries in Tanzania, will visit and fellowship with United Methodists in both the Greater New Jersey and Eastern PA conferences from February 17 to March 6. They will visit four churches in GNJ, February 17-24, and then five churches in EPA, February 25 to March 6.

Two of those EPA church visits are open to all. But all EPA and GNJ members can greet the couple and hear their story on a Zoom call March 7. Check the EPA and GNJ Digest newsletters and websites for more information.

Their latter itinerary will include a visit to EPA's South-East Region Tools for Ministry leadership training event at Eastern University in St. Davids PA, expected to draw about 200 attendees. They will speak to a class learning about our covenant relationships with missionaries. And they will visit the EPA Conference Office March 4 to speak to the combined EPA&GNJ staffs at their weekly joint staff worship service.

Mushidi and Alphonsine have served in Tanzania since 1992, when they and four other missionaries were sent by their bishop in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) to develop a United Methodist mission presence. They became Global Ministries missionaries about 20 years ago and have led in the development of the small but growing Tanzania Conference of the UMC—including churches and mission enterprises.

They joined Bishop Mande Muyombo and other clergy last spring in welcoming the post-pandemic return of Bishop John Schol and clergy from GNJ to attend their annual conference and teach at their Pastors School. The clergy there expressed gratitude for GNJ's teaching, fellowship and financial support, including the new *For Tanzania* fundraising campaign to help build a church in the largest city, Dar es Salaam, and to help pay under-compensated pastors a living wage for a year.

Meet Tanzania Missionaries Rev. Mutwale & Kabaka	Meet Tanzania Missionaries Rev. Mutwale & Kabaka
Saturday, February 17 Red Bank UMC 11:30 am Lunch & Program	Sunday, February 25 First UMC Phoenixville 10:00 am Worship & Reception
Sunday, February 18 Red Bank UMC 10:00 am Worship Service with Soup & Sandwiches to follow	Saturday, March 2 South & East District Tools for Ministry at Eastern University presenting on Connecting with our Missionaries. Registration required.
Tuesday, February 20 Nutley Vincent UMC 6:00 pm Regional Supper & Program	Sunday, March 3 First UMC Lancaster 8:15 am, 9:30 am, & 10:45 am Worship Services & Reception
Wednesday, February 21 Brick St Paul UMC 7:00 pm Mid-week Service	Thursday, March 7 Zoom gathering for EPA & GNJ to hear their testimony.
Saturday, February 24 Jackson UMC 10:00 am Breakfast & Program	

Mushidi and Alphonsine will share information and insights about their challenging work in starting churches, building an annual conference ministry center, training women and widows in building skills and financial capacity to care for their families, and teaching and nurturing children and orphans.

The Rev. Umba and Ngoy Kalangwa, fellow missionaries from the DRC also serving in Tanzania, visited EPA churches and staff last October to worship, fellowship and share inspiring information about their mission work. 🌍

Leadership Academy Introduces New Online Courses to Train Church Leaders



LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

EPA&GNJ's Leadership Academy announced in early January its first online courses for training church leaders, using the new Teachable platform, one of the nation's top online learning management systems. By February 1 over 200 individuals had responded.

Five initial courses are available now—the most recent being a trio of basic courses for Church Councils, Trustees and Staff-Parish Relations Committees. In addition, there are courses to train churches in facilitating Pastoral Transition and Safe Sanctuaries.

By the end of February four additional courses should be available:

- Congregational Vitality—Community Engagement and Missions, led by Denman Evangelism Awardee the Rev. Kofi Ashley.
- The Basics of the Lay Leader and Lay Member to Annual Conference Roles, led by EPA Certified Lay Ministry Coordinator Judy Ehninger and Yattah Jones.
- The History of Race and Racism and the Methodist Church, led by the UMC's General Commission of Archives & History General Secretary Ashley Boggan.

Teachable, a multimedia, fully accessible digital platform, enables creation and hosting of a variety of instructor-led courses using videos, quizzes, text and PDF files.

The EPA&GNJ collaborative Leadership Development Team, led by the Rev. Dawn Taylor-Storm, who serves as Assistant to Bishop John Schol for Leadership Development, introduced pastors to the academy's new online courses as a convenient option for training both new leaders and continuing church leaders.

Jay Brown, a Certified Lay Minister and Supply Pastor in GNJ, plans to recommend the overview courses to his church's leaders and engage them in diving deeper into the material. They "may stimulate discussion and address some issues that individuals were uncomfortable asking their church leadership about directly," he said.

Academy Courses Funded by Shared Ministry Giving

The Leadership Academy basic courses, which have been in development for months, are funded by both conferences' Shared Ministry giving and are offered free of charge. They are designed to help strengthen local church leaders in their roles and assist pastors in advancing discipleship. Future subjects may include Transformational Leadership, Organization and Ministry in the Church and Ending the Sin of Racism.

"We are very excited by the interest shown in our courses and the opportunities for learning that are now more widely available and accessible to our



clergy and laity without the cost and time of having to travel for learning experiences," said Megan McKay, Leadership Development Team Resource Manager.

"In-person, synchronous learning remains important; but we are thrilled to see the response our online, asynchronous courses are receiving."

Camps Welcome EPA & GNJ Young People to Enrich Faith, Enjoy Fellowship Together

By John W. Coleman

"Come many, come all" is the modified clarion call of the Eastern PA Conference's Camp and Retreat Ministries, as it eagerly invites participants—from EPA, Greater New Jersey and beyond—to its four centers for life- and faith-enriching events and activities this spring and summer amid the wonders of God's creation.

GNJ will cover at least \$150 per student for one week of camp. And more financial support is available through the camps' need-based scholarships. "This financial commitment supports our mission to disciple our children and youth in transformational ways," said Connectional Ministries Director Eric Drew.

But until then, enjoy exciting spring retreats and events at three, year-round camp and retreat sites.

Christian nurture and memorable experiences for children of God.

And Innabah's 10th annual Spring Challenge Trail 5k race happens April 6, a perfect time to run, walk, romp and hike around its scenic, rolling hills and dales, alongside French Creek. Start the day with the popular pancake and bacon breakfast and the race. Then stay to enjoy the free Spring Fest, including an Easter egg hunt, games, wagon rides, camp tours and more.

Confirmation Retreats Coming in April

Both Gretna Glen and Pocono Plateau are preparing to welcome youth confirmands and their counselors for two Confirmation Retreats in April. Gretna Glen will host theirs April 12-14. Confirmands will explore the compelling question, "Are you Ready to Embrace Your Faith?" as membership vows are enlivened through activities, mission experiences and thoughtful discussions about confirmation and lives guided by actionable faith. Teambuilding exercises, like the trust trail, and evening worship around a campfire will also highlight the agenda.

Pocono Plateau will host their Confirmation Retreat April 19-21, with the theme "My Methodist Identity." Confirmands will explore how to embody a life-changing commitment to their baptismal and membership covenant vows. They will join with youth from other congregations to jointly explore their identity and purpose as Christians in the Methodist faith.

"Thousands of youth going through their confirmation have enjoyed this

religious retreat experience as a part of their Christian journey," said Gretna Glen director Apryl Miller. "There is no better environment in which young people can have this experience of learning Christian faith, values and relationships together."

And there is no better environment than summer camp for young people to experience and enjoy a fuller, more fun-filled immersion into their Christian faith, while learning many ways to love Christ and love one another.

In May and June, all four camps, including Carson-Simpson Farm Christian Center, will welcome everyone to their annual Open Houses, where visitors can get a peek at their preparations for the summer enjoyment and enrichment experiences soon to come.

But slots are filling up. So, EPA and GNJ families should register for summer camp soon to offer their young people inspiring memories that will last a lifetime. Visit the four centers' informative websites to learn more.



Pocono Plateau's 2023 Confirmation Retreat gathering.

Winter Blasts and Winter Jamborees have drawn plenty of children and youth in February, and the start of spring in March will usher in more seasonal events. Meanwhile, families are registering for what is expected to be another historic summer camp season. And more New Jersey families should be among those registrants, since GNJ is investing in its children's and youth's future by offering scholarships to help them attend EPA's summer camps.

Pocono Plateau will host an Easter Family Retreat March 22-24, featuring the stations of the cross, an Easter egg hunt, crafts, games and Palm Sunday worship, all in the peace and sacredness of the camp's mountaintop. A Spring Day Camp will follow March 28 and April 1, and the fascinating, fearless annual Father & Son Dangerous Retreat will happen April 26-28.

Gretna Glen will host a 24-hour Children's Spring Blast retreat March 22-23, offering music, games, food,

CONFIRMATION RETREATS

Pocono Plateau

APRIL 19-21, 2024

POCONOPLATEAU.ORG

CAMP@POCONOPLATEAU.ORG

570-676-3665

Gretna Glen

APRIL 12-14, 2024

GRETNAGLEN.ORG

CAMP@GRETNAGLEN.ORG

717-273-6525

Youth Leader Days Ignite Shared Learning, Support for Youth Ministries



NEXT GENERATION

By James Lee

Post-pandemic youth ministry is hard. So hard, in fact, that the leadership of EPA&GNJ Next Gen Ministries recognizes the folly of going about it alone and offers opportunities for youth ministry leaders to network and help one another.

The United Methodist Church of West Chester in Eastern PA became a hub of inspiration on January 27, as it welcomed more than two dozen youth leaders and volunteers for the first 2024 IGNITE Youth Leaders Day. The next one will happen in Greater New Jersey February 24, 9:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., at Aldersgate UMC in East Brunswick, NJ.

Focused on growth and connection, both events offer a platform for learning and networking among those dedicated to youth ministry.

Former Next Gen Ministries Coordinator Mike Nelson illuminated the West Chester UMC gathering when he spoke on “Reigniting Your Faith.” The youth minister at Norwood UMC emphasized the importance of self-care and personal investment for leaders, a crucial aspect for those guiding young people in faith and discipleship.

Josh Good from Christian Endeavor contributed to the day’s learning with his workshop: “Less Like Hippos More Like Honeybees.” This session focused



Elizabeth Moore, Assistant Director of Princeton's Institute for Youth Ministry

on transforming youth from passive consumers to creative individuals, embracing their unique gifts and identities.

Christian Johnson, of Purpose-Filled Life Coaching LLC & The Elevate I.T. Podcast, led a workshop on empowering young leaders. He encouraged attendees to follow their “Inner Tugging” (I.T), focusing on personal development and growth.



Musicians from the Ripe Creatives young artists collective lead worship at the January 27 IGNITE Youth Leaders Day. Corbin Payne photo

At the next Youth Leaders Day happening on February 24 at Aldersgate United Methodist Church in East Brunswick, Elizabeth Moore, Assistant Director of the Institute for Youth Ministry at Princeton Theological Seminary, will lead a large-group session titled “Becoming Ourselves.” She will address the exhaustion many leaders face and the need to engage in healthy self-care while rediscovering the joys of youth ministry.

Moore has a decade of experience in youth ministry and pastoral leadership, most recently serving with Vineyard Church. Her dedication to fostering sustainable ministry practices and advocating for social change has made her a sought-after teacher and preacher.

Networking Inspires Community, Shared Purpose

The highlight of the first Youth Leaders Day for many was the communal meal that gave leaders an opportunity to network and discuss various aspects of their ministries. They shared their experiences, discussing both the challenges and opportunities they face in their respective youth ministries. The networking fostered a sense of community and shared purpose that post-pandemic youth leaders have been especially craving.

The impact of the day was evident in the reflections of the participants. Brian

“IT’S AMAZING TO BE IN A ROOM WITH LIKE-MINDED PEOPLE THAT HAVE A PASSION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE!”

—BRIAN GAINES, VOLUNTEER YOUTH LEADER, PHILADELPHIA

Gaines, a volunteer youth leader from Philadelphia, shared, “It’s amazing to be in a room with like-minded people that have a passion for young people!” Echoing this sentiment, Mike Hardie from Grove UMC in West Chester noted the importance of focusing on “the impact of my ministry,” rather than just numbers.

While the IGNITE Youth Leaders Day couldn’t possibly address every query within the evolving realm of ministry for rising generations, participants departed with a “reignited” spark to explore,

imagine, and innovate. Most importantly, they left knowing that in the rigorous but rewarding journey of youth ministry, they are not alone but are accompanied by a supportive community of peers.

That spark of confidence will no doubt be reignited at the next Youth Leaders Day—for both EPA and GNJ youth leaders—on Saturday, February 24. Those interested in joining this growing community of passionate youth leaders should be sure to register at <https://www.ignitenj.org/> and attend. 🇺🇸



Jan. 27 Youth Leaders Day speakers (from left): Josh Good, Michael Nelson and Christian Johnson. Corbin Payne photo

IGNITE YOUTH LEADERS DAY

A RESOURCING & TRAINING EVENT FOR YOUTH LEADERS

FEBRUARY 24, 2024

ALDERSGATE UMC

EAST BRUNSWICK, NJ

[IGNITENJ.ORG](https://www.ignitenj.org)

Young Black Interns Sought to Explore Pastoral Ministry

By John W. Coleman

A unique Greater New Jersey Conference internship established in 2022 is recruiting and helping youth and young adults of African descent to “discern and clarify their call to ministry.” GNJ’s Black Methodists for Church Renewal (BMCR) caucus and Strengthening the Black Church for the 21st Century (SBC-21) initiative developed the internship with support from the conference’s Connectional Table.

Zachary Holder, of Roselle United Methodist Church, is actively engaged in his internship at St. Mark’s United Methodist Church in Montclair, where he began in July 2023 and will finish in June. The hope is that a third intern will follow him in July once BMCR leaders receive recommendations to consider.

Holder followed Monica Grady, a member of The Church of the Good Shepherd UMC in Willingboro, who served as the first recruited intern at Haddonfield UMC in 2022-2023.

Initially called the Home-Grown Recruitment Internship as a pilot project, the pre-ministerial recruitment and orientation initiative is intended to help young Black participants discover a call to ministry in their lives and possibly become successful pastors in GNJ churches. It is a response to a scarcity of Black clergy in GNJ, as well as in other conferences.



Zachary Holder with his mother, Ann Allison. She came to the U.S. with her son in 2013 to receive special treatment for a severe autoimmune disease. He calls her cheerful faith, despite a painful illness, “my motivation. Her experience brought me here, and it’s grown my spiritual life as well.”

The internship is funded through GNJ’s Journey of Hope Plan, which seeks to help congregations end the sin of racism and make GNJ more inclusive in developing transformational leaders.



FROM LEFT: The Rev. Rev. Kay Dubuisson, pastor of St. Mark’s United Methodist Church in Montclair, with intern Zachary Holder. John Coleman photo

Learning the ‘Ins and Outs’ of Church Matters

“He came to us really grounded in ministry already at his church; so it’s been easy to work with him,” said the Rev. Karline (Kay) Dubuisson, St. Mark’s pastor. “We try to work with him on things that I know he hasn’t experienced much.”

Holder has held several leadership roles at Roselle UMC, where he is a Certified Lay Servant. But at historic St. Mark’s he is “learning the ins and outs” of church finances, property management, mission outreach, men’s ministry and strategic planning. He has not only the pastor but a team of lay church leaders who mentor him, a key ingredient of the internship’s design.

He has also preached and helped lead worship. “Every opportunity I get to bring the word, I really want it to be transformational, a word that motivates people to move beyond themselves,” Holder said. “And so that’s kind of what I’ve tried to bring here.”

What he loves is the church’s new “single board model” of leadership that relies on small teams rather than full committees, and also fewer meetings. “I love this more simplified model,” he said. “I’m trying to really understand it so I can teach it to other congregations. I like that it helps the church to be more about mission.”

Holder planned and wrote curriculum for St. Mark’s Vacation Bible School and works closely with the men’s Community Pantry and Pop-up Community Market

that provide neighbors with healthy, free food that locally is in short supply. The project recently received a GNJ Peace with Justice Grant. (Read “Men at the Mark share a bond of service with community” on GNJ’s website.)

Recommendations Sought from Clergy Leaders

Now recommendations are being sought from clergy leaders to help identify more youth and young adult prospects, ages 16 to 25, who manifest pos-

in our churches, pastors who love God and love people.”

While he’s learning much about local church leadership, Holder is already a leader beyond the local church. He chairs GNJ’s Young Adult Ministry Committee and serves on the Connectional Table and the Meadowlands District Superintendency Committee. But it all began with his involvement in 2014 as a youth at IGNITE, GNJ’s annual youth conference, and then as a young adult IGNITE “squad leader.”

Holder wants to help his own church become more mission-minded. And he wants to help St. Mark’s leaders learn to integrate more youth and young adults “into our adult-driven ministries. We need to create more opportunities for them to be involved.”

As the church develops its new ministries with children and youth, those opportunities may emerge. That’s one of many reasons why Dubuisson will hate to see her maturing intern depart. “He’s been so valuable; we wish we could keep him here on staff.”



Zachary Holder and Rev. Dubuisson pose with St. Mark’s men at their Pop-up Community Market.

He also is helping the church develop two new, local partnership initiatives, each funded by the Children’s Defense Fund: the six-week Freedom School it will start in July for children K-6; and the Welcome Home program it started in 2023 to welcome and engage youth—including those who are LGBTQIA—in the life of the church.

‘I Think This is Confirming My Call to Ministry’

Raised in Barbados until age 14, Holder arrived here in 2013 with his ailing, beloved mother, who was seeking urgent medical treatment. They were faithful churchgoers; yet, he was considering careers in engineering and other fields.

“But every time I’ve thought I needed to be in some other space, God has positioned me to come right back here to the church,” he said. “So, I think this is confirming my call to ministry. And now, it’s helping me to figure out what I’m supposed to do next.”

Dubuisson has no doubt what her bright but modest young intern is supposed to do next. “I see him in pastoral ministry and even as a future bishop. I mean, he has a lot of passion for Christ and for people. And that’s what we need

sible gifts for ministry, as demonstrated by their current work in local churches. The next internship will begin July 1 and end June 30, 2025.

Applicants will undergo a selection process before acceptance into the program. Those accepted will be expected to work in a church—primarily a Black or multiracial church—for 20 hours a week, including Sundays, aided by the pastor, staff and key church leaders. They will earn a \$10,000 honorarium for the year.

Interested, eligible persons will need a recommendation from their pastor and written approval from their church’s Staff-Parish Relations Committee (SPRC). Completed applications and recommendations should be emailed to Rosa Williams at rosamw@optonline.net by the May 30 application deadline.

Interns and pastors of participating churches will receive an orientation to the program. Interns may not be assigned to the church that recommends them.

For more information, read the letter requesting pastors’ recommendations on GNJ’s website and share the internship application with prospects. Or contact Rosa Williams of the Internship Program Committee at rosamw@optonline.net or 201-833-0352. 🏳️‍🌈



Monica Grady (with flowers) served as the first BMCR/SBC-21 intern at Haddonfield UMC, with support of pastors and other leaders.

Program Connects Churches with Student Pastors for Mutual Benefits



Mosaic Ministries Expands to EPA and Seeks to Revive Culture of the Call

By John W. Coleman

Just like a mosaic is made up of many individual tiles, our lives are made up of many individual moments, experiences, and choices. Each tile, each moment, is unique and contributes to the overall picture. From "Piece by Piece: The Power Of Life As A Mosaic."

Mosaic Ministries, the Greater New Jersey Conference's innovative, aptly named model of pastoral recruitment, engagement and support, provides a variety of young student pastors and churches with a diverse mosaic of ministry opportunities and beneficial leadership experiences.

And that mosaic is growing in size and shape, as it seeks and welcomes participation from seminary students and churches in the Eastern PA Conference, making Mosaic Ministries an important aspect of both conferences' emerging collaborative partnership.

Isaac Minkah served Methodist churches in his native Ghana, West Africa, for years in various roles—including youth pastor, media technology and lay pastor—all of which revealed to him and to others that God was calling him into pastoral ministry. Even his Muslim friends knew it.

Isaac came to the U.S., enrolled in Drew Theological Seminary in New Jersey and began working with youth at the Ghana Calvary United Methodist Church in Verona. But when he was introduced to GNJ's Mosaic Ministries program, he met other seminary students with diverse backgrounds from across the U.S. as well as Zimbabwe, Korea and other countries. Now he serves as a part-time Mosaic student pastor at Park Avenue-St. John's UMC, in East Orange, a true blessing for a church that could not afford to employ a pastor otherwise.

Isaac and his Mosaic peers each have a unique story of God's call on their lives. Currently nine are serving churches and their communities around the conference, as more are being recruited. They



At the recent Bridges Project training event, Leslie Gallagher, of the Human Library, shares her life story with Mosaic pastors, as they learn to listen carefully without judgment and ask good questions. John Coleman photo

attend the UMC's General Conference in Charlotte, NC.

These fortunate seminarians can already point to a rich, colorful mosaic of helpful relationships and learning experiences. And so can the various churches they serve.

A Diversity of Mosaic Churches, Student Pastors

Mosaic churches are diverse in their sizes and settings—diverse geographically, numerically, racially, economically, theologically and more. When congregations receive a novice seminary student as a lead or associate pastor, the encounter can be mutually beneficial.

Church members patiently teach, encourage and also compensate the students as they learn to become pastoral

leaders. Meanwhile, the members learn about the lives, concerns and perspectives of young adults—which they need to learn if they want to reach, invite and engage with more young people.

"I've had a good relationship with my church members," said Isaac, whose

Wesleyan background is rooted in British Methodism. "Since I have a lot of church experience, I'm able to do some things for them, but they have taught me things also."

"We look for a church that is ready and willing to open their doors to a student who will come in and share their leadership skills and the expertise that they're learning in the classroom," said the Rev. Kate Monahan, director of Mosaic Ministries and a GNJ Associate Superintendent. "We want churches that can create a welcoming space for young students to learn and grow and who are willing to learn from the student as well."

She recalls finding that welcoming space in the church that nurtured her own call to ministry decades ago and led her

to attend seminary, become ordained and serve three churches before joining the conference staff. "From the time I was a teenager, I felt a call to ministry because I was involved in a church that was really interested in investing in me and helping me see myself as a leader, giving me opportunities to serve, regardless of what age I was, and expressing a belief that they saw God's purpose in me, that I was called the something of God in the world."

Monahan shares her testimony when she explains the Mosaic model to interested church leaders and when she visits students, faculty and administrators at seminaries in New Jersey (Drew and Princeton) and Eastern PA (Palmer, Lancaster and Moravian).

"We've been doing this in New Jersey in various iterations over the last eight years or so," she said during an information session offered via Zoom January 31. "Every year we have had anywhere between three and 15 students in the program."



Kate Monahan

We have learned that students are really interested in this type of experience. It gives them practical skill building, and it boosts their resume. It sets them apart from their peers who may be graduating from seminary without this kind of experience. And so, they tend to really like it, especially when they're in the right appointment. The cabinet works very

hard to try to make good appointments that work and fit."

Many churches have also benefited from such appointments, Monahan said. "A lot of Mosaic churches are really excited about the energetic, thoughtful leadership that students bring, students who are thinking about how to help congregations move forward in these challenging seasons. Churches appreciate that."

Now she's hoping to help EPA churches think about being places "to raise up Mosaic student pastors and make this type of beneficial, supported investment."

And what is the investment? "We try to work with churches that can pay something toward a student's salary." Students receive a pastoral salary of \$12,000 and a reimbursement account of \$1,500. Each participating church also pays a \$1,000 program fee, which helps the program fund special learning opportunities for its students. So, it's close to a \$15,000 investment on the church's part."

Churches may be able to explore sources of financial help to afford the costs—perhaps from their members, districts or supportive partner churches.

'What Else Can Mosaic Ministries Become?'

But Monahan and others are also asking, "What else can Mosaic Ministries become?" Her larger role is to help both conferences and their churches think about ways to recreate a virtue many churches once had: "a culture of the call." It's the same culture she once experienced, one that identifies and recruits younger leaders—not just those already in seminary—to consider ministry.

"It starts with kids and youth and young people," she said. "This is a conversation we want to be having with people as early as possible in their lives: that God created you for a unique purpose, that God has a plan for your life, that God is actively moving in your life and wants you to participate in ministry in the world in some way. And it doesn't

Continued on page 11



also gather in monthly cohort sessions via Zoom and occasionally in person to learn pastoral practices and church wisdom not taught to them in seminary. And their learning and skill-building is bolstered by clergy mentors available to help them one-on-one.

The learning sessions teach church budgeting, conducting funerals and managing congregational conflict, among other topics. In early February they attended together the GNJ Bridges Project's latest training of church teams. There they learned about the use of storytelling and story-listening as a bridge to connect more deeply with people's lives in order to foster closer relationships and more effective ministries. And in April they will

Elevate Your Church's Worship with New Breakthrough Series for 2024



Thanks to the new 2024 Break[1] through Worship Series, many churches in Eastern PA and Greater New Jersey started the New Year digging into the “Roots” of their faith to find spiritual nourishment from our shared legacy as the people called Methodist.

Now many of us will go “Through the Valley” with God, using Breakthrough’s new Lenten worship series. We may wander through a wilderness of lament, but spiritual nourishment can be found again in the refreshing company of one who overcame the wilderness.

The recommended liturgies, sermon starters, song suggestions, graphics, videos and more in Breakthrough’s new Lenten series assure us that “we can discover what it means to wander through these parts of life in honesty with God through the practice of lament. We will learn how crying out to God in our need can help us to fully embrace what it means to be human beings held and loved by a God we can trust. We will learn that even through the darkest valleys, Jesus both goes ahead of us and walks with us.”

After we wander through the dark winter wilderness of lament during Lent, we can celebrate the radiant bloom of Spring, Easter and Eastertide using the next Breakthrough worship series, “A New Creation.”



“This spring, as we embrace the new life given to us in Jesus, let us expand our vision to realize that this new life is not only spiritual and not only human, but a new life for all of creation. We will explore our place in God’s wide creation and our special responsibility to care for the earth. As the environment suffers, we are called to take courageous action that reflects God’s plan for the flourishing of all creation.”

Visit Breakthrough’s website at www.breakthroughseries.org/2024 to benefit from using creative worship resources for these seasons and to see a preview of future ones. This free, comprehensive resource will help you plan faith-inspiring sermon and worship series that relate to the various calendar and Christian seasons of our year.

Composed by writers and contributors in both EPA and GNJ conferences, Breakthrough 2024 is an indispensable, adaptable resource. It is designed to provide easy-to-use best practices so that congregations can enhance their worship, spend less time preparing details, and focus on what really matters: sharing the gospel in many ways to make disciples of Christ for the transformation of the world. 🌍

EPA’s Takes Steps on its Path Towards Wholeness

By John W. Coleman

The Eastern PA (EPA) and Greater New Jersey (GNJ) conferences share a common goal and collaborative strategies to End the Sin of Racism*. While GNJ calls its endeavor a Journey of Hope, for EPA it’s “A Path Towards Wholeness,” the title of its 2022 Annual Conference legislation.

A key part of EPA’s efforts is the hard work of its Economic Justice Team, composed of church and conference leaders, which has prepared a 2023 progress report to share with the 2024 Annual Conference. As the report’s preamble states:

We understand that only through a just and equitable church will wholeness be possible for all congregations. Racial economic justice means building economic/financial systems and processes that enable all people to live more equitably in all areas of life. This requires us to address the inherited system inequities within our congregations and the resulting disadvantage of churches of color.

The plan’s largest goals are scheduled to be fully achieved by 2027—for example:

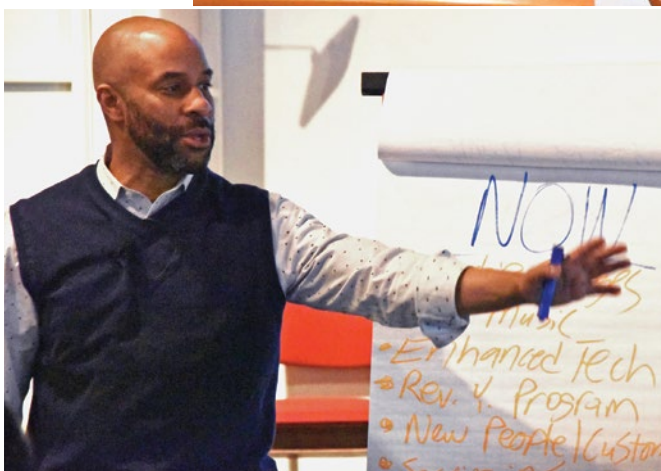
- Strengthen and increase the vitality of 10 existing congregations of color.
- Develop four new faith communities of color.
- Invest \$1.5 million in clergy of color and churches of color through equitable salary, reduced apportionments and targeted development funding.



Over 40 clergy and laity from mostly racial/ethnic churches attended the first of six Normalizing Next™ sessions Feb. 15 at Willistown UMC to learn about shaping their vision, mission and goals to increase church attendance and ministry effectiveness.

The Rev. Olu Brown, a successful church planter, trainer and coach, teaches church teams about Normalizing Next™, his strategic approach to achieving more effective discipleship and outreach.

John Coleman photos



But some 2023 and 2024 goals are showing progress now.

- Six prospective clergy of color have been recruited among the four districts (three in the East) to begin the process towards ministerial candidacy, including Local Pastor Licensing School.
- There are 84 self-identified clergy of color serving presently: 44 Black;

22 Asian; 17 Latino/Hispanic; and one multiracial.

- EPA is helping two Latino faith communities to become new church starts through grants and other support. El Buen Pastor was started at West Lawn UMC in Reading. And Casa del Pueblo, now a mission church in Warrington, will become part of a two-point charge with Philadelphia’s Espiritu Santo (Holy Spirit) UMC.
- Six racial/ethnic churches in all four districts are engaged in revitalization with

conference assistance. Plus, a cohort of 25 racial-ethnic congregations have begun receiving training together to envision a new future for their ministries, led by the Rev. Olu Brown, an innovative church and leadership transformation expert and coach. 🌍

*To learn about Eastern PA’s collaborative work with Greater New Jersey to End the Sin of Racism, read “A Path Toward Wholeness | Journey of Hope” on Eastern PA’s website.

Fostering a Growth Mindset

By the Rev. Juel Nelson

“He’s a natural,” I said aloud while watching a 13-year-old take a stance, swing at a pitch, and hit one over the fence. As the boy made the lap around the bases and was high-fived by his team, I recognized it was more than natural talent.

In the stands, I recalled the afternoons and evenings my father and brother were at the ballfield, even at times shoveling the late spring snow from the diamond. My brother may have seemed like a natural too; but behind his homerun swings were hours of practice.

There are still times when I encounter an exceptional leader and think, “They’re a natural.” While this is meant as a compliment about the person’s skill, it may undercut the effort and discipline they have taken to build upon their strengths.

A “fixed mindset” may lead one to categorize some individuals as “naturals” and others not, prompting feelings of inadequacy, a lack of motivation and even questions about one’s own giftedness. On the flip side a “growth mindset” recognizes that gifts and talents endowed by the Holy Spirit can be further developed over time through practice, input from others, hard work and the ongoing work of the Spirit. Here are just a few questions to ask as you consider fostering a growth mindset.

Am I listening for the Spirit? Is a still, small voice speaking to you about how you might use your giftedness in a new season of ministry? You have unique gifts to offer your family, friends, church and community. What may God be calling you to do next?

Have I tried something new? This could be a new sermon style or committee meeting structure, a new recipe or exercise routine. Those with a growth mindset are more willing to experiment with the unknown and are less fearful of failure because learning and failure are part of the growth process. When was the last time you used the phrase, “What if I/we tried...?”

Who are my influencers? From books to podcasts, a ministry coach to a mentor, having a growth mindset often means



The Rev. Juel Nelson

intentionally surrounding yourself with positive influencers so that you are not the smartest person in the room. Ask yourself, “Who is one person that I would like to influence my life and ministry?” Then take action by picking up the phone, attending a conference, reading a book or scheduling a lunch.

“A ‘growth mindset’ recognizes that gifts and talents endowed by the Holy Spirit can be further developed over time through practice, input from others, hard work and the ongoing work of the Spirit.” —The Rev. Juel Nelson

Am I open to collaboration? When strategizing and solving problems, do you recognize others’ insights and input as key to the next step? Having a growth mindset creates a sense of empowerment and commitment among the team and can lead to greater innovation. Decide at the next team meeting to leverage the potential for collaboration, rather than just giving reports.

Do I celebrate effort? In what ways do you celebrate the effort and not just the accomplishment? If you wait for the final accomplishment, it could take a long time. On social media, in worship, or through personal notes of gratitude, celebrate honest effort and create positive momentum along the journey to accomplishment.

Does your church have a growth mindset? Since church culture often reflects the core leadership’s culture, you may be able to discern this answer. There are few if any “naturals” when it comes to ministry.

Just reflect on the ministries of Jesus’ disciples. Consider the mindset the first disciples needed in order to embrace the work of the Holy Spirit, to grow their faith and to plant new communities. What next steps can you and your leadership take to embrace your giftedness and foster a growth mindset? 🌱

The Rev. Dr. Juel Nelson is GNJ’s Director of Leadership Development and an Associate Superintendent for the Metro Highlands Region.

Mosaic Ministries

Continued from page 9

have to look like ordained ministry. But you’ve got unique gifts that God wants to use to make a difference in the world. We want to equip churches to be able to have that conversation with people across the age span.”

Monahan is also exploring partnerships with EPA and GNJ programs that already offer places and resources to support the culture of the call—for example:

- NextGen Ministries, which sponsors annual IGNITE youth conferences and other events for youth and their ministry leaders.
- EPA’s Camp & Retreat Ministries, where numerous young people have heard the inner whisper of God’s call that led them to consider ministry.
- GNJ’s new BMCR/SBC-21 program that places young members of African descent in yearlong church ministry internships.
- The EPA Board of Ordained Ministry’s Vocational Intern Program for college-age young adults considering ministry vocations in The United Methodist Church.

Meanwhile, Mosaic and NextGen Ministries are planning a 10-week



FROM LEFT: James Murray shares insights with fellow Mosaic pastors Isaac Minkah and Jacqueline Chipongo during the Bridges Project training, as the Rev. Kate Monahan listens.

summer internship, titled Cultivate, to help high school and college students in EPA&GNJ explore vocations in ministry while working in various settings, including summer camps, Hope and Wholeness centers and disaster response sites.

“Mosaic is in a season of evolution,” Monahan said. “And part of what we’re

thinking about is not just how do we get seminary students connected to our local churches, but how do we create opportunities for students throughout the span of their lives to engage and ask questions about, ‘What is God’s call for me? How can I use the gifts I’ve been given for the church and for the community around my church?’”



This could produce “a real, needed turning point in the life of The United Methodist Church,” said the Rev. Evelyn Kent Clark, Dean of EPA’s Cabinet, citing the current shortage of young pastors to lead EPA churches. “We’re talking about helping not just college students and seminarians, but also children from a young age to begin to realize that God may be calling them.

“I think Mosaic Ministries is picking up the challenge to help make sure that young people of every age begin to ask, ‘What is my purpose? Where do I belong? Is the church willing to embrace me and see me as one of those that God is calling?’”

Monahan is hopeful. “I really think churches are where we can invest in generations of leadership that are going to lead our churches in the future,” she said. “So, this is a really a wonderful ministry that both GNJ and EPA can develop in contextual ways together.” 🌱

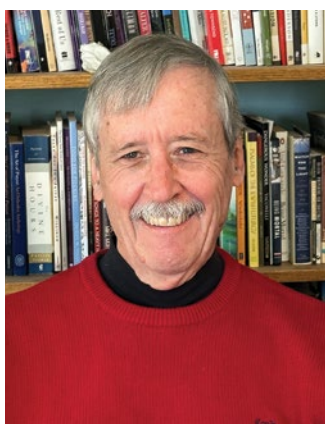
Busy Pastors Can Benefit from Monthly Spiritual Retreats

By John W. Coleman

BANGOR, PA

Sixteen participants—12 onsite, four on Zoom—attended the first monthly spiritual retreat for clergy and lay pastors February 7, held at Richmond United Methodist Church in Bangor, PA, on the North District. The small, hybrid gathering may have seemed like a perfect size for the intimate sharing that happened. But more participants are certainly desired and welcomed.

The next half-day retreat is scheduled for Wednesday, March 6, at St. Andrew's UMC in New Berlinville, on the East District, and via Zoom. The time may again be 12:30 to 3:30 p.m., but that may change. Check the EPA website for more information. Other monthly retreats will be planned for locations around the conference, a gift to pastors from the Eastern PA Conference Cabinet.



The Rev. Peter Jamieson

"We had a good group with some good discussion," reported the Rev. Peter Jamieson, retreat facilitator and the host pastor. "And we had a time of silence. I told the group that just because we will be in silence doesn't mean we can't move around if we feel the need. Some chose to sit in the social hall, others in the sanctuary, and one found a comfy

chair in the nursery. But others went outside and just walked around."

Indeed, the silent sitting and walking-around gifted participants with external and internal observations often overlooked or ignored by busy minds focused on daily responsibilities. They shared some of those observations in open discussion and responded with helpful suggestions to one another about spiritual practices.



Onsite participants of the first monthly spiritual retreat for clergy and lay pastors gathered at Richmond UMC in Bangor, PA.

That may be one of the best things about a spiritual retreat: not so much getting away from one's ordinary life but coming back to it with an extraordinary gift.

That happened for Lela Hartranft, a Certified Lay Minister and the pastor of Emmanuel UMC in Allentown. She heard a fellow retreatant discuss the comfort of his intentional reading of Scriptures from the Psalms each morning, and she decided to try it for herself.

"I decided to follow up on that," she wrote to the others in an email message after the retreat. "Since I am my husband's caregiver, after I got him settled for bed last night, I looked up the following Scriptures. I read: 'I called you. You are my servant. I have chosen you and have not rejected you. So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you...'"

She quoted more from Psalms 41 and 43 and also thanked her peers for "listening to my story" about the challenges she faces caring for her husband and her church. "It is my

first assignment as a pastor. I have been there just over a year and a half. But this is truly the best time of my life. God is good all the time. All the time God is good."

Jamieson will use his many years of experience to lead the monthly retreats. He appreciated attending the Cabinet's first of three 2023 "Rhythms of Grace" retreats last April, with 25 other EPA clergy members. He hopes this year's retreats will "teach spiritual practices that can be a source of strength and trust in God, as we continue to lead our congregations during a time of transitions."

A retired elder from the Greater New Jersey Conference, Jamieson came to Richmond UMC in 2020 on his continuing spiritual journey. It began with a Walk to Emmaus gathering in 2004 that led him to answer God's call to pastoral ministry.

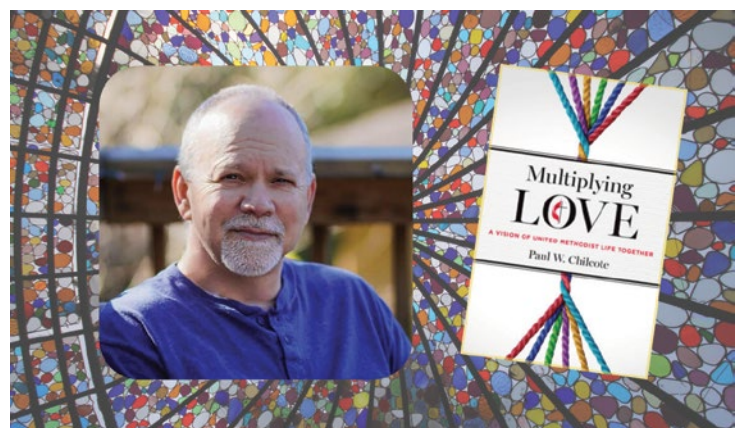
"Gathering with others enables the Holy Spirit to work within each of us to become more open to God's presence and calling," he said. "We need some sense of support and nurture from each other." 🇺🇸

Undies for Easter AN ACT OF LOVE

The EPA Prison Ministry & Restorative Justice Team has launched another **Undies for Easter** campaign. A successful campaign in 2022 led to the donation and delivery of 2000 briefs and 2000 undershirts to men in Philadelphia's prisons who receive only one pair of briefs upon entry. The new campaign will run until Palm Sunday, March 24, so that donated underwear can be delivered by Easter. Using our gift registry link below, anyone can purchase online packages of selected Hanes underwear or Hanes undershirts to benefit the health and wellness of our incarcerated brothers.

[TINYURL.COM/2024UNDIES4EASTER](https://tinyurl.com/2024undies4easter)

All donations must be made online and delivered to the Eastern PA Conference Office P.O. Box before Palm Sunday, March 24, 2024. Contact the Rev. Marilyn Schneider at PRISONMINISTRIES@EPAUMC.ORG with any questions or concerns.



MULTIPLYING LOVE: A VISION OF UNITED METHODIST LIFE TOGETHER

Global theologian, historian and author Paul Chilcote will explore with us his groundbreaking new book that prioritizes the power and principle of Christ's love above all else.

Join us via Zoom on Wednesdays, April 3, 10, 17 and to 24, from 11 a.m. to noon.

Register for free and get the book (which is recommended reading for the 2024 General Conference). Don't miss one week of this valuable discussion. The first 25 people to register get a free copy of the e-book.

Register: EPAUMC.ORG/APRIL24-STUDY