

# NEW Spirit!

UNITED METHODISTS OF EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA  
& GREATER NEW JERSEY

SUMMER 2023  
Vol. 1/No. 2

epaumc.org ■ gnjumc.org

## SUMMER CAMP 2023

# Opportunities to Share the Love of Jesus

By John W. Coleman

**T**he four, diverse Eastern PA Conference Camp & Retreat Centers are a closeknit family, united and inspired by their mission to share the love of Jesus among visitors, volunteers and staff who come from all over. Indeed, they are part of an extended family that warmly embraces churches from across the region and now also the Greater New Jersey Conference.

Those familial bonds are most evident during this season, when the four centers open their summer camps to visitors of all ages and from all places. They welcome all to come join in fun-filled, faith-forming, festive activities, both outdoors and indoors, surrounded by the matchless, miraculous beauty of God's Creation. Here are reports provided by our family of four:

### Carson Simpson Farm, Hatboro (Willow Grove), PA

It is summertime, and we are off to a beautiful start at Carson Simpson! For the nine weeks of this season, we are happy to serve campers from ages 3 to 14.

We have 55 paid staff and six volunteers serving; and the commitment made by the staff this year is to be proactive and prayerful. Each day the team is committed to providing a unique, Christ-centered experience that glorifies God and encourages constant fellowship with our Creator.

We have 300 campers registered and are excited to have two more weeks of PEACE ministries this summer. We're



Challenge Campers and staff at Innabah Camp & Retreat Center *Innabah photo*

eager to serve our ever-growing camp community. Our CSF Gives Back Program, where staff and campers raise money for families in need, is excited to raise funds for refugee families from Ukraine this year. This program is near to all our hearts as it allows our campers and staff to support those in greater need and to lift these families in prayer as the war continues overseas.

Throughout the season, we are sure there will be many memories, programs, Bible lessons and positive relationships that will continually exemplify the quality that the EPAUMC has in its camp and retreat ministries. If you want more information or wish to support our ministry, give us a call or visit our website at [www.csfarm.org/rates-registration](http://www.csfarm.org/rates-registration).

### Gretna Glen Camp & Retreat Center, Lebanon, PA

Our favorite time of year is here again. Summer camp began June 18 with our Camp Can-Do Sibling Camp (siblings of kids with cancer) and Knack Track Day Camp. Over eight weeks we will serve over 1,200 children and youth.

Our 39 trained staff from six countries are a reflection of the many others who came before—decades of wonderful volunteers and summer staff who built Gretna Glen into what it is today.

Our full programs and waitlists of campers hoping to get a spot are a sign of the Christ-like service of those that have led Bible discovery time, played crazy games in the meadow, led campfire

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# Moving Forward on Two Journeys to End the Sin of Racism

By John W. Coleman

**T**he United Methodists of Eastern Pennsylvania and Greater New Jersey are committed to "Ending the Sin of Racism," a clarion call answered in both conferences by some promising initiatives. They include coaching, giving grants and other support to racial-ethnic leaders and congregations, various racial learning opportunities, and efforts to grow and ensure success for cross-racial and cross-cultural ministerial appointments.

Bishop John Schol recently commended EPA and GNJ churches that "strive to deepen their understanding and commitment to end the sin of racism." He called them "true difference makers," in a letter he sent June 30, following the U.S. Supreme Court's decision that outlawed Affirmative Action policies to ensure equity and diversity in higher education.



Eastern PA's diverse 2023 class of newly ordained or commissioned clergy are (from left): The Revs. Gabriel Lopez, Katherine Swan, Jason Perkowski, Karen Bartkowski and Towanda Connelly. *Corbin Payne photo*

"Racism stands in direct opposition to God's intentions and the ministry of Jesus Christ," the bishop writes. The underrepresentation of people from rural, urban and racial-ethnic communities in higher education is "a consequence of systemic barriers... that hinder equitable access and support for those who are economically disadvantaged or marginalized based on race.

"To truly combat the sin of racism," he explains, "we must foster a transformative change in our understanding and in the discriminatory systems that perpetuate inequality."

EPA & GNJ conferences are each trying to foster broad, transformative change and remove their own barriers to growth, inclusion, equity and opportunity among churches and clergy of color. And that is becoming a united quest for both conferences, as they share their goals, strategies and efforts with one another in the wisdom and spirit of their emerging affiliation.

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## A MESSAGE FROM OUR BISHOP

## The Power Has Gone Out from Me



Bishop John Schol

**“W**ho touched me?” Jesus asked his disciples on a crowded street, “for I know that power has gone out from me.” (Luke 8:46) “There is a great crowd,” his puzzled disciples answered. “Everyone is touching you.” But Jesus felt the power go out from him because there was a healing of a woman in his midst.

I recently traveled with representatives from our EPA and GNJ conferences to teach in a United Methodist Pastors School in Tanzania. Tanzania is a fairly new mission field for our church. The Rev. Mutwale Ntambo Wa Mushidi was sent there as a missionary in 1992 by the bishop of the North Katanga Annual Conference in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) to start congregations in Tanzania.\*

**“PRAY UNTIL THE POWER GOES OUT FROM YOU. IT MAY BE THE ONLY WAY POWER WILL BE RESTORED FOR THE HEALING OF OUR SOULS, FOR THE HEALING OF OUR CHURCH, FOR THE HEALING OF THE WORLD.”**

—BISHOP JOHN SCHOL

Today there are almost 100 churches. The Pastors School we lead is one of the few pastoral and theological training programs that pastors in Tanzania receive. And they receive that teaching with great joy and appreciation.

This was my third time teaching there. Bishop Mande Muyombo of the DRC said to the gathered pastors, “I have set up a small room, and any pastor who would like Bishop Schol to pray for them, go to the room and he will pray with you.”

For two hours, pastors came to me for prayer. Here are some of their prayer requests: “I have prostate cancer and cannot afford the surgery. Pray for me.”

“I told my husband that the bishop has appointed me to a new church far from where I am serving now.” (Her husband responded, “If you go, I will not go with you. I will find a new wife.”)

“In addition to pastoring, I worked in a hospital. I took provisions home from the hospital for the very poor people in my village. I was fired from my job, and I do not know how I will provide for my family.” (The average pastor in Tanzania was paid a total of \$68 last year.)

“I do not know how to read, and it makes it very hard to teach and preach to my congregation.”

“My congregation is in great turmoil, and I do not know how to bring peace.”

After praying for two hours with pastor after pastor, offering one heartfelt prayer after another, I felt the power go out from me. I was sad. I was drained. I was exhausted. The power went out from me.

The last person to come and see me was Frederic. I got to meet him in 2019, at the last Pastors School we led before the Covid pandemic. He had been pastoring for a number of years.

Frederic had a severe limp back then, and his speech did not always make sense. His district superintendent told me that he had been in a severe automobile accident that damaged his leg and his brain.

This time Frederic said he wanted to be the last pastor to see me. “I don’t want you to pray for me,” he said.

Just before the 2019 Pastors School a doctor had told him he would not be able to continue to serve a church because of the accident. “I asked you to pray for me then,” he recalled, “and you did. I was healed. My leg is better, and my mind is sharp. And I have continued to pastor a church.”

At that moment, the power was restored within me.

I invite you all—clergy and laity—to pray with others, for others, without ceasing, especially in very challenging times. Pray until the power goes out from you. It may be the only way power will be restored for the healing of our souls, for the healing of our church, for the healing of the world.

Keep the faith!.

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

\*The Rev. Mutwale Ntambo Wa Mushidi went to Tanzania with his wife, Kabaka Ndala Alphosine, also a missionary. The two worked together to serve the people and lead in the development of churches and various ministries, with support from Greater New Jersey, Eastern PA and other U.S. annual conferences.



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## AUGUST BOOK STUDY

*Both/And: Maximizing Hybrid Worship Experience*

WEDNESDAYS

11 AM | ZOOM



# GNJ Rekindles Cross and Flame Connection with Tanzania United Methodists

By James Lee

DAR ES SALAAM, TANZANIA

A team of dedicated leaders representing United Methodists of Greater New Jersey embarked on a two-week journey to Tanzania in late May to resolidify our partnership with The United Methodist Church of Tanzania.

This transformative visit marked GNJ's first in three years since the pandemic. It was time to rekindle our twin flames of a collaboration that first ignited during the Miracles Everywhere Campaign in 2018. The team's purpose was twofold: to facilitate the highly anticipated Tanzania Pastors' School and to witness the inspiring growth and progress within the Tanzanian church.

Our team spent an unexpected Sunday morning at First UMC of Dar es Salaam, the capital city, due to a day's delay in our trio of flights. As we gathered in the sanctuary for worship, the iconic United Methodist cross and flame logo stood there as a powerful symbol of our shared faith and unity.

That powerful emblem accompanied us throughout our journey, welcoming us at our ultimate destination, St. Mark's UMC in Kigoma, the venue for the Tanzania Annual Conference and Pastors School.

The ordination service there was a remarkably joyous, resounding celebration, as participants sang, and threw flower petals. For the GNJ team, witnessing this sacred moment and experiencing the rich traditions and vibrant expressions of faith within the Tanzanian church was deeply impactful.

The ordinations stood as a testament to the dedication of these individuals, so committed to their callings. We were profoundly moved by the transformative power of these sacred rites in their lives.



**Bishop John Schol (center) welcomed by Bishop Mande Muyombo (right) as the GNJ team arrives at the newly-built St. Mark's United Methodist Church in Kigoma, Tanzania.** James Lee photo

in ministry. Notably, the Greater New Jersey's Miracles Everywhere Campaign, which raised \$500,000 for Tanzania in 2018, proved instrumental.

Instead of using the entire amount immediately, the Tanzania Annual Conference wisely invested the funds, drawing down a 5 percent annual amount to support vital initiatives. This strategic approach enabled them to: fund the annual Pastors School; construct new churches, clinics, and mission centers;

"Words fail me when describing the hospitality, spirituality, worship and grace experienced in Tanzania," shared the Rev. Dawn Taylor-Storm, mission team member and EPA&GNJ's Assistant to the Bishop on Leadership Development. "I was particularly moved to see that the number of women serving as clergy and district superintendents continues to grow.

"Truly, this experience gives me hope for the future of The United Methodist Church.

was in East Africa to teach preaching and prayer, it was clear that God sent me to learn from them!"

As the team bid farewell to Tanzania, they returned to the United States carrying treasured memories, strengthened friendships and a special symbol of unity. Each team member donned a hat gifted to them by our Tanzanian siblings, which proudly displays the emblematic cross and flame of the United Methodist connection.



**Director of Connectional Ministries Eric Drew and Director of Communications Rev. James Lee delivering Tanzania Pastors' School booklets to participants.** William Carter III photo



**Rev. William D. Carter III (left) and Rev. Jeremiah Ibrahim (right) co-leading a course on Preaching.** James Lee photo

and provide ongoing support for low-paid pastors and their ministries.

The team from Greater New Jersey was deeply moved by the financial challenges faced by pastors in Tanzania. The revelation that the average clergy member's monthly salary is \$25 USD highlighted the immense sacrifices made by these dedicated leaders.

Additionally, we learned that approximately \$45,000 could construct a new church building. It was a humbling discovery, as we witnessed faith communities gathering in tents and makeshift structures made of corrugated metal.



**Teaching the United Methodist method of hosting Holy Communion. From left: Translator and youth leader Nyasinde Pablo, Skylands District Superintendent Rev. Eunice Vega-Perez, Assistant to the Bishop Rev. Dawn Taylor-Storm, District Superintendent Rev. Idda J. Ngowi, and Pastor of St. Mark's UMC of Kigoma Rev. Mwanzo Mbaruku.** James Lee photo

Together, GNJ and the Tanzania Annual Conference are working to raise up new leaders and grow the kingdom of God."

## Pastors School a Milestone in Our Partnership

The return of the mostly GNJ-led Tanzania Pastors School, since the pandemic, marked a milestone in the partnership between the two conferences. The school provided valuable training on essential topics such as the Gospel of Luke, Preaching, Wesleyan Theology of the Sacraments, Prayer and the Wesleyan Spirit of Evangelism.

Throughout their time in Tanzania, the GNJ team witnessed the unwavering commitment and passion for Christ displayed by the Tanzanian pastors. The school offered a platform for fruitful discussions, exchange of ministry insights, and a deepening grasp of Methodist teachings and practices. The team was inspired by the Tanzanian pastors' dedication to serving their communities and by their entrepreneurial spirit in leveraging existing resources for impactful outreach.

"This trip gave me a greater understanding of how people experience God in new and creative ways," reflected the Rev. William D. Carter III, Senior Pastor of Franklin St. John's United Methodist Church in Newark, NJ. "While I thought I

## 'The Cross and Flame Represents Hope'

Reflecting on the power of this emblem, one Tanzanian pastor shared the profound meaning it holds in her community. "In my side of the world, the cross and flame means something," she explained. "When a person in Tanzania sees the United Methodist emblem, they know that they can be fed, clothed, educated and seen.

"The cross and flame represents hope."

These heartfelt words will long serve as a reminder of the transformative impact and hopefulness that The United Methodist Church brings to communities in Africa and around the world.

The ongoing partnership between the United Methodists of Greater New Jersey and Tanzania will continue to foster growth, empower leaders and embody the hope and world-transforming power symbolized by the cross and flame. 🇺🇸



*The Rev. James Lee, EPA&GNJ Director of Communications, served on the GBJ mission team to Tanzania and taught during the Pastors School.*

Miracles Everywhere

## Miracles Everywhere Campaign Funds Invested

Bishop Mande Muyombo, who leads the North Katanga, Tanganyika and Tanzania conferences in the Congo Central Conference, shared insightful reflections on the profound impact of faithful investment



**Pastors engaged in group discussion, led by District Superintendent Rev. Yunis Kulanga (center).** James Lee photo

## Summer Camp 2023

Continued from page 1

worship, and all the other great camp adventures. As we strive to keep our tradition going, what an honor it is to know that we have the opportunity to spread the love of Jesus to all these children and youth.

If you want to be a part of creating a welcoming space for kids to fall in love with God, creation, and themselves, give us a call. Or visit our website at [gretnaglen.org](http://gretnaglen.org).

### Innabah Camp & Retreat Center, Spring City, PA

At Innabah we are so excited to hear the sounds of campers laughing



Lunchtime at Carson Simpson's Summer Camp



Climbers helping each other at Pocono Plateau's Summer Camp

and singing during the summer camp season of 2023! Our mission is to provide experiences that last a lifetime in an environment where campers and guests can make new friends, challenge themselves, and explore and grow in their faith.

Our 20 staff and over 60 volunteers for the summer enjoy seeing all the smiling faces as we make s'mores, search for crayfish in the creek, slip and slide down the foam slide, shoot colorful targets at the sling-shot range, and learn how we can praise God's name every day.

We have 110 young campers registered for the seven weeks of summer day camp. And we have almost 400 total overnight campers registered for our six weeks of overnight camp. In addition, we have other programs where parents can come with their children and grandparents can attend with their grandchildren.

Innabah is very fortunate to provide overnight summer Challenge Camp programs for adults with intellectual disabilities. Watching these individuals experience all that camp has to offer

truly brings us so much joy! For more information about what we do and for ways you can help support our ministry, visit us at [www.innabah.org/camp-information](http://www.innabah.org/camp-information).

### Pocono Plateau Camp & Retreat Center, Cresco, PA

Pocono Plateau is excited to have a new summer season! We welcome campers from ages 5 to 18, and we hosted families during the July 4th holiday. We have 14 summer staff and about 100 volunteers throughout the summer.

Campers are learning about God's boundless presence, grace, and love in their lives. Campers also explore nature and challenge themselves to grow spiritually and socially through recreation, adventure programs, and fellowship. We have over 300 registered for overnight camp and expect that to grow to about 500 by the end of summer.

Because of the need for childcare in our expanding local area, we are also offering two weeks of day camp this year. Next summer we plan to launch a full summer of day camp!



Gretna Glen Summer Camp's wilderness explorers



Swimming at one of Innabah's several Challenge Camps

Emma Kleckner is our waterfront director this year. She started coming as a tag-along 20 years ago and has been back almost every summer as a camper, counselor or summer staffer. "Pocono Plateau is my home away from home," she says. "I would not be where I am today in my walk with God without Pocono Plateau. I want to give that back to the next generation of campers. Camp provides a firm foundation for a good relationship with Christ." Visit us online at [www.pocconoplateau.org/summer-camp/](http://www.pocconoplateau.org/summer-camp/).

## Come to IGNITE 2023, Where You *Belong!*

*So, in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.*

— ROMANS 12:5

The IGNITE Conference is a powerful, worship-filled, Spirit-led weekend for middle and high school students in Greater New Jersey, Eastern Pennsylvania, New York and beyond. The purpose is for young people to come together to:

- **Connect** with God and each other through sessions, workshops and games.
- **Grow** in their faith through worship, talks and small groups.
- **Lead** by developing their leadership skills through practical training and experience.

Students who attend IGNITE experience high-energy worship, inspirational messages from nationally known speakers, engaging workshops led by dynamic professionals, hands-on mission with vital mission partners, and of course, the life-changing power of community that comes from the Kingdom of God joining together.

"IGNITE is one of the events that I most looked forward to each year as a youth



student," said Hailey, a former attendee and now a member of the young adult IGNITE Squad. "The friendships, passion for community and moments of connection between peers and with God make this event a moment of light, filled with anticipation before and continual reflection after!"

We are deeply aware of the effect that the pandemic and now post-pandemic world has had on young people in our

youth groups, churches, and communities. Young people desperately need interaction, connection, community and most of all, deep encounters with Jesus.

The lives of our young people significantly benefit from the powerful experience of attending the IGNITE Conference: the worship, the messages, the workshops, the missional initiatives, the small groups, the prayer... and most importantly, the community that can only come

### TICKETS:

#### July 1 – July 31 | Early-Bird Pricing

- 1-9 Registrants \$65
- 10-29 Registrants \$60
- 30 or more Registrants \$55

#### Aug. 1 – Sept. 15 | Regular Pricing

- 1-9 Registrants \$70
- 10-29 Registrants \$65
- 30 or more Registrants \$60

#### September 15 – 28 | Late Pricing

- 1-9 Registrants \$75
- 10-29 Registrants \$70
- 30 or more Registrants \$65

through the powerful movement of the Holy Spirit.

IGNITE is a great opportunity to start, rebuild and grow youth ministry programs! Gather a group of students, head down to Wildwood to experience the Holy Spirit at work in the young people of your church.

Register your youth to attend IGNITE 2023 today at [ignitenj.org!](http://ignitenj.org/)



## GNJ Annual Conference Encouraged to have Faith in *Possibility*

By John W. Coleman

For the first time in three years, the Greater New Jersey Annual Conference met in person May 21-23, at the Wildwoods Convention Center. More than 800 members and visitors gathered under the theme *Possibility* (from Matthew 19:26) for the first annual conference held onsite since 2019, after three years of online sessions only.

“Welcome back, it is great to be together in person,” said presiding Bishop John Schol. “I see Jesus-possibility because I have witnessed Christ in you.”

In a time of great change in our church and society, visiting Bishop Cynthia Moore-Koikoi urged conference members, during her morning teaching session, to focus not on the uncertainty of mere chance, but on faith in the possibility that “something good or better may happen.”

“You can’t see what you don’t have



Wildwoods Convention Center



Bishop John Schol, Conference Secretary the Rev. Shelly Smith and new Conference Lay Leader David Yamoah provide leadership at GNJ’s 2023 Annual Conference. Corbin Payne photo

faith in,” said the episcopal leader of the Western Pennsylvania Conference and co-episcopal leader of the Susquehanna Conference. “You won’t see it if you don’t believe it’s possible.” She ended her session, which drew Amens and a standing ovation, by proclaiming, “We are a possibility together in Jesus Christ.”

Possibility was evident throughout the session.

- In Bishop John Schol’s encouraging Episcopal Address, where he offered several local church examples of the *Possibility* theme.
- In the informative and inspirational Conference Leadership Address.
- In the commissioning and ordination of 15 clergy—two as deacons, 13 as elders—and the commissioning of

three deaconesses.

- In the Service of Passage, where retiring clergy celebrated newly commissioned and ordained clergy.
- In the unanimous election of new Conference Lay Leader David Yamoah.
- In the \$8,000 given to support the conference’s Hurricane Ida recovery efforts (A Future with Hope) and the 7,000 meals assembled and packaged by volunteers for Rise Against Hunger.
- In the 16 resolutions faithfully discerned, discussed and modified through the legislative process.

That two-day legislative process often reflected the equanimity of John Wesley’s principles of Holy Conferencing and seemed elevated by the frequent prayers, spiritual praise and worship

that consecrated the conference from beginning to end. Worship and praise moments were enriched by a band as diverse and gifted as its heart-stirring music, as well as the included sacraments of baptism and communion, and the sermons preached by both bishops.

Bishop Schol called on new ordinands and commissionees to embrace humility and hospitality toward others in their ministry. And Bishop Moore-Koikoi comforted families of deceased clergy and clergy spouses with the assurance that their loved ones are cheering them on from heaven’s cloud of witnesses.” (Hebrews 12:1-2)

“The greatest possibility for our future is through vital mission congregations... (that) connect with the people in their communities in new and relevant ways,” said Schol in his Episcopal Address. He lauded congregations for manifesting faith, vision and courage to weather challenges—from the Covid pandemic, to declining resources and growing demands, to disaffiliating churches. He further commended them for recognizing and seizing mission opportunities in the face of those challenges.

The bishop highlighted three conference resources to help congregations chart new directions in ministry and

*Continued on page 7*

## EPA Annual Conference Adopts New Strategic Direction

By John W. Coleman

For the first time in three years, the Eastern Pennsylvania Annual Conference met in person May 18- 20, at the Greater Philadelphia Expo Center in Oaks, Pa. More than 700 members and visitors gathered under the theme *Possibility* (from Matthew 19:26) for the first annual conference held onsite since 2019, after three years of online sessions only.

“The Church’s One Foundation” sang the body during its opening worship celebration. And throughout the two-day session that truth prevailed in moments of communal worship, fellowship and giving, in the commissioning and ordination of five clergy, and in the faithful discernment and discussion of 12 resolutions.

Bishop John Schol, in his episcopal address, praised God for the Christ-likeness of the United Methodists of Eastern Pennsylvania who led people through the pandemic, were innovative in their leadership and continue to serve in challenging times. “I see great possibility in our future,” he said, “and our greatest possibility is through our congregations.”

Members passed resolutions including a leadership nominations report, equitable compensation for clergy, support for EPA Advance Special mission projects, a modified Safe Sanctuaries policy that now extends to vulnerable adults, updates in the clergy pension program, the disaffiliation of five congregations and the discontinuance of six congregations.

A new Strategic Direction was discussed and approved by a wide margin. It outlines the conference’s goals and path forward to increase vitality and effectiveness among its congregations and church leadership. It includes a collaborative



Bishop John Schol, Conference Secretary the Rev. Jacqueline Hines Tilford and Conference Lay Leader William Thompson provide leadership at EPA’s 2023 Annual Conference. Steward Warner photo

affiliation between the United Methodists of Eastern Pennsylvania and Greater New Jersey that focuses on growing transformational leaders, making disciples, growing vital mission congregations and transforming mission in our communities and around the world.

The introduction of a new Strategic Direction, new pre-charge conference forms for pastors and congregations, and strategic affiliation with Greater New Jersey has aroused concern among some members that too much change is happening too fast, without a full understanding of the plans and processes.

The Extended Cabinet pledged to continue working with laity and clergy to better understand their concerns, to

clarify changes and to modify the pace of change. Bishop Schol has held meetings with members via Zoom in July and will embark on a tour of listening sessions before September.

### Special Session Sept. 9 to Adopt 2024 Budget

As requested, the bishop and Cabinet called a Special Session of the Annual Conference on Saturday, Sept. 9, at Lititz UMC, primarily to review and adopt a 2024 budget. Other resolutions that were not addressed in May due to time constraints may also be on the Sept. 9 agenda as time allows.

The Council on Finance & Administration’s proposed consolidated budget



Greater Philadelphia Expo Center

Steward Warner photo

reports all projected income and spending, conforms to The Book of Discipline and follows best practices of non-profit management, Treasurer and Chief Financial Officer Jo Fielding assured members.

CFA also proposes a new system of funds management to enhance the conference’s accountability for designated and restricted funds and to grow its investment in mission.

In other highlights, the Rev. Enger Muteteke of the General Commission on Religion and Race, led a well-received teaching session on “systemic racism, implicit bias and their impact on ministry efforts.”

Bishop John Schol presided over the conference. He delivered his episcopal address, celebrated new clergy retirees and preached for the Commissioning and Ordination Service. Four clergy were ordained, and one was commissioned.

The Rev. James Lee, EPA&GNJ Director of Communications, preached for the opening worship. The Rev. Eunice Vega-Perez, Superintendent of GNJ’s Skylands District, preached for the memorial service, where 33 deceased EPA clergy and clergy spouses, plus two United Methodist bishops and two bishop’s spouses, were remembered. 🇺🇸



EPA & GNJ 2023 ANNUAL CONFERENCES COVERAGE



Irene Dickinson, who chairs EPA's Council on Finance & Administration, delivers CFA's 2024 budget proposal, as (from left) the Rev. Jennifer Freymoyer, Jo Fielding and Lawrence Lee wait their turns to speak. Steward Warner photo



The Rev. Enger Muteteke, of the General Commission on Religion and Race, teaches the EPA conference members about the prevalence and impact of implicit bias and racial prejudice. Corbin Payne photo



Bishop John Schol prepares a font for infant baptism at the Annual Conference's opening worship, as two young friends hold his crozier. Sabrina Daluisio photo



Bunnie Bryant joins in Holy Conferencing with a question at microphone #3. Corbin Payne photo



The Rev. Evelyn Kent Clark discusses benefits of EPA's proposed Strategic Direction during a conversation on-stage, flanked by other leaders (from left) Judy Ehninger, the Rev. Dawn Taylor-Storm and the Rev. Andrew Foster III. Corbin Payne photo



The Rev. James Lee, EPA&GNJ Director of Communications, preaches about embracing innovation during the opening worship service. Corbin Payne photo

EASTERN PA ANNUAL SESSION



The Rev. Jason Perkowski is ordained by Bishop John Schol, who preached for the Service of Commissioning and Ordination. Corbin Payne photo



The Rev. Eunice Vega-Perez, a GNJ District Superintendent, preaches during the Memorial Service. Steward Warner photo



Clergy ordained and commissioned at the 2023 Annual Conference—(from left) the Revs. Karen Bartkowski, Katherine Swan, Towanda Connelly, Gabriel Lopez and Jason Perkowski — wear shawls placed on them by clergy retirees during the Passing of the Mantle ceremony. Steward Warner photo



The Rev. Alice Cook speaks at the Service of Passage, honoring fellow clergy retirees. Steward Warner photo



Bishop John Schol celebrates clergy retirees. Steward Warner photo



Steward Warner photo



Bishop John Schol recognized EPA's delegates who will represent the conference at next year's General and Northeastern Jurisdictional conferences. Corbin Payne photo

We have plenty more vivid photos from both EPA's and GNJ's Annual Conferences for you to enjoy. Visit both conference websites' and find Annual Conference photo album links on their home pages: [www.epaumc.org](http://www.epaumc.org) and [www.gnjumc.org](http://www.gnjumc.org).



Family members remember loved ones during the Memorial Service. Shari DiAngelo photo



Youngkwang Jun and a seven-member praise band led conference worshipers in praise. Shari DiAngelo photo



Bishop Cynthia Moore-Koikoi, leader of the Pittsburgh Episcopal Area, preaches for the Memorial Service. Shari DiAngelo photo



The Rev. Elouise Hill-Challenger celebrates her ordination with other clergy. Shari DiAngelo photo



Two ordinands share a moment of blessing. Shari DiAngelo photo

## GREATER NEW JERSEY ANNUAL SESSION



Bishop Schol leads a procession of families for the Memorial Service. Shari DiAngelo photo



Conference members and guests celebrate in worship. John Coleman photo



Bishop Schol consecrates a new Deaconess during the Service of Commissioning and Ordination. Shari DiAngelo photo

### GNJ Annual Conference

Continued from page 5

leadership development: the **Pathways for Fruitful and Healthy Ministry** initiative; the evolving **Leadership Academy**; and the new **Engage** initiative to offer coaching and other support to pastors and church leaders. He expressed continued encouragement by GNJ's ongoing commitment and progress to end the sin of racism.

The conference's Leadership Address—delivered by multiple presenters—emphasized the value and efficiency of developing and offering helpful resources and programs—like Next Generation and Camping and Retreat Ministries—in mutual affiliation with the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference (EPA). That collaborative affiliation is a key aspect of the goal-oriented Strategic Direction Resolution presented by the GNJ Cabinet and Connectional Table.

The conference referred to the Connectional Table a request to create a broadly representative task force to provide more details about the shared roles, authority, procedures and costs of the GNJ and EPA affiliation.

"We will address each of the concerns," Schol informed staff after the conference session, "build on what we are doing well and continue our mission to recruit and develop transformational leaders to make disciples of Jesus Christ and grow vital mission congregations for the transformation of the world."

Members approved numerous reports and resolutions including: the Council on Finance & Administration's proposed \$23 million 2024 budget; the Conference Leadership Committee's Nominations Report; Equitable Compensation for clergy, updates to parsonage standards, clergy pensions and billing arrearage policies; GNJ support for Advance Special local mission projects; and a modified Safe

Sanctuaries policy that now includes policies to protect vulnerable adults.

The disaffiliation of eight congregations was approved, as well as the discontinuance of 11 closed churches.

Also passed was a resolution to support the sale of The Pinelands Center at Mouny Misery by Next Generation Ministries, an independent nonprofit that now owns the conference's former camping and retreat property. Since care and use of the property is no longer financially sustainable, the conference affirmed Next Gen's intention to sell the land and "strongly urged" it to use any sale revenue to offer "camperships" to help GNJ youth attend other Christian camping ministries.

In addition, conference members endorsed the Christmas Covenant, proposed by leaders in some United Methodist Central Conferences in Europe, the Philippines and Africa. It calls on the 2024 General Conference to reorganize the church into regions, including a new

U.S. region, to promote more equity and contextual legislating across the denomination. The resolution proposes that non-doctrinal laws and other matters pertaining only to U.S. churches should be legislated by U.S. members in a regional conference, rather than by the entire, global General Conference.

GNJ members also said yes to a resolution, titled A Safer GNJ, that calls on GNJ to:

- utilize trauma-informed practices and resources that support survivors of sexual abuse in the church;
- require training in sexual ethics and sexual abuse prevention for all clergy, church staff, lay leaders and youth ministry leaders; and
- promote sexual ethics education and resources on GNJ's website.

The measure also mandates the conference to offer access to and reimbursement for trauma-informed care for those who have suffered from clergy sexual abuse. 🏳️‍🌈

## Moving Forward on Two Journeys to End the Sin of Racism Continued from page 1

### EASTERN PA CONFERENCE

EPA is focused on at least five priorities that involve churches and clergy of color:

- **Recruitment and Retention of Clergy of Color:** Only one clergy member of color was ordained in 2022. But the 2023 Annual Conference ordained the Rev. Towanda Connelly, who is African-American, and the Rev. Gabriel Lopez, who is Latino. Meanwhile, 14 more persons of color are exploring pastoral ministry at different stages of the process—from candidacy to licensed local pastor, to preparation for ordination as deacons and elders.
- **Revitalization of Racial/Ethnic Churches:** Four racial-ethnic churches in the South-East Region (South and East districts) and one church in the North-West Region (North and West districts) are being aided in assessment and planning for mission and development through the Pathways to Congregational Fruitfulness & Health Initiative.
- **Grants for African American & Ethnic Congregations:** Thirty-two grants, totaling \$152,123, have been given by Metro Ministries, the Urban Commission, the Latino Commission, the Congregational Development Team and Equitable Compensation.
- **Reductions in Apportionments for Racial/Ethnic Churches:** Twenty-three churches have received reductions of 30-45% in Connectional Ministries Fund apportionments, based on their communities' median household income. The total reduction in their apportionments is \$74,035.
- **Leadership Representation:** Persons of color occupy 41 percent of the top leadership roles—chairs and vice-chairs—on conference boards, councils and committees. Meanwhile, districts are urged to increase representation of laity and clergy of color, including Spanish-speaking members, among their leaders.

Leading much of this effort are the conference's Extended Cabinet, Economic Justice Council, Board of Ordained Ministry, Committee on Leadership, Connectional Table and groups with grantmaking resources.

How does the conference help predominantly White congregations to participate in ending the sin of racism? That goal is one of the six Pathways options for churches to focus on as they seek to become more healthy and fruitful, especially those wanting to increase their ministry relationships in racially diverse communities.

### Learning Opportunities for Dismantling Racism

There are also learning opportunities offered in Dismantling Racism weekend workshops that are required for all clergy and lay persons serving in ordained, licensed and certified ministry. The Board of Ordained Ministry oversees the basic, twice-yearly Dismantling Racism Level I training events, which have returned to onsite, in-person gatherings.

The Healing the Wounds of Racism Core Accountability Team plans Dismantling Racism Level II workshops that address more advanced topics like racial microaggressions, congregational racial reflective audits, and the cultures and challenges of individual racial-ethnic groups in America. The next Dismantling Racism II workshop is scheduled for Nov. 18. All Level II workshops are offered via Zoom.

EPA's Commission on Religion & Race (CORR) also provided in-depth learning opportunities via Zoom when it cosponsored with the Congregational Development Team (CDT) two monthlong, conferencewide book studies in 2021 that focused on racism in America.

The February 2021 book study explored *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*, Isabel Wilkerson's celebrated masterpiece on America's racial caste system that combines social analysis with compelling narratives. It was led by an interracial trio of EPA pastors.

The October 2021 study of *Plantation Jesus*, led by co-author Andi Cumbo-Floyd and a team of CORR members, covered challenging topics related to race, ethnicity, American Christianity and cultural competence.

The next CDT/CORR-cosponsored book study in October will focus on Jemar Tisby's *The Color of Compromise*. The acclaimed work explores how people of faith historically have worked



ABOVE: EPA's Commission on Religion & Race (CORR) sponsored a Spiritual Retreat for Clergy of Color in May at Innabah Camp & Retreat Center. John Coleman photo



LEFT: EPA CORR's Cross-Racial/Cross-Cultural Ministry Training and Companions Coordinating Team met in June to discuss the future and mission of CR/CC ministry. (From left) Dennis Fisher, the Rev. Dawn Taylor-Storm, the Rev. Deborah Tanksley-Brown, the Rev. Stacey Jones-Anderson, Cynthia Lyman and the Rev. Anita Powell. John Coleman photo

against racial justice; and it calls for an urgent response by all Christians today.

Bishop Alfred Johnson, a retired clergy member of EPA and former bishop of Greater New Jersey, will lead the study. He has directed New York Theological Seminary's Center for the Study and Practice of Urban Religion since 2017. Greater New Jersey members are invited to participate in the group study via Zoom.

CORR also sponsored a long-awaited, interracial Clergy of Color Retreat June 9-10 at Innabah Camp & Retreat Center. Attendees bonded while sharing challenges and coping strategies in their pastoral journeys, including those serving predominantly White congregations.

### Cross-Racial/Cross-Cultural Ministry

But the most intensive, up-close and personal racial-ethnic learning opportunity for both clergy of color and predominantly White congregations may be the experience of Cross-Racial/Cross-Cultural (CR/CC) ministry.

Members of CORR have collaborated over the past decade to develop a system of training and support for persons engaged in CR/CC ministries. That system begins with orientation for pastors and laity new to the experience. And it extends to training and companionship for clergy and church leaders, as they forge an uncertain pathway toward interracial understanding, acceptance and cooperation.

The journey can be a lonely and tense one for many clergy in such appointments who struggle to establish mutual trust, respect and satisfaction in their pastoral relationships. But the goal is for clergy and congregation to make that risky, winding journey toward transformation together. Some do approach success, but qualified CR/CC trainers and companions are themselves carefully trained, resourced and deployed in teams to help pastors and church leaders improve their chances.

At least three biblically and socially insightful training events for CR/CC trainers and companions have occurred since last September. Plus, Bishop John Schol shared conversation over brunch with participating CR/CC pastors. And clergy and church leaders in new CR/CC appointments attended an annual training. That annual EPA training, June 3, was held via Zoom videoconferencing for the first time to also welcome participation by CR/CC pastors and church leaders in the Greater New Jersey Conference. Over a hundred persons participated.

EPA has over 50 CR/CC appointments, including 11 made just this year. Greater New Jersey has about 125 at last count, including 39 made this year. Many are Korean-American pastors—mostly educated at Drew Theological Seminary—serving predominantly White and multiracial churches.

"We celebrate the promise of CR/CC Ministry and the fact that CR/CC clergy and congregations are positioned to be at the forefront of ministry in their changing communities," said the Rev. Stacey Jones-Anderson, who

helps coordinate CR/CC Companions Ministry, along with the Rev. Anita Powell. Both have led predominantly White congregations in cross-racial appointments.

### Diverse Churches Among the Fastest Growing

Churches that are racially/culturally diverse are among the fastest growing in the denomination. "We challenge all of our clergy and lay members to become intercultural competent, whether or not they have CR/CC appointments," said Powell, "because it prepares them to effectively reach, learn about and serve their diverse communities."

Intercultural competency involves learning and using non-judgmental awareness of cultural differences while practicing emotional intelligence in encounters with others. It demands understanding overt, covert and internalized racism and also challenging the all-too-common implicit bias and racial microaggressions that people of color must endure.

"The reality is that this is not easy work, but God is with us in this work," said Dennis Fisher, who coordinates CR/CC trainers along with the Rev. Beverly Andrews. "Jesus was the one who crossed all boundaries, and we are committed to going into our communities with the love of Jesus to meet all people where they are."



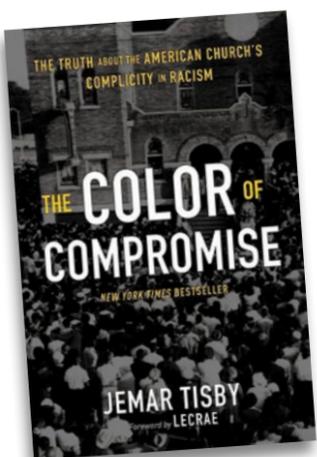
The Rev. Robert Johnson preaches at Messiah UMC in Lafayette Hill, representing his first and the church's first cross-racial appointment. John Coleman photo

Following a mid-June meeting with Bishop Schol, these CR/CC coordinators met with the Rev. Dawn Taylor-Storm, EPA Director of Connectional Ministries, to discuss the future and mission of CR/CC ministry. They delved into the recruitment, training, deployment and support of CR/CC trainers and companions and how these efforts can interact with new EPA&GNJ strategies for training and coaching leaders through the Leadership Academy and the emerging Engage initiative.

The coordinators also asked for more involvement from district superintendents, whose crucial role is to connect pastors and laity in CR/CC appointments with CR/CC trainers and companions and to encourage them to attend CR/CC training events.

Other ideas included creating focus groups of CR/CC clergy to learn more about their needs and concerns, and increasing the visibility of CR/CC ministry while integrating it more into the vision and life of the annual conference.

*Continued on next page*



## GREATER NEW JERSEY CONFERENCE

## Two Journeys to End the Sin of Racism

Continued from previous page

## Journey of Hope

"GNJ enjoys great diversity, and yet has room to grow as we work together to end the sin of racism, build on past progress, and create a more just, inclusive, and equitable church and world," writes the Rev. Ronell Howard, Central District Superintendent, in "Journey of Hope: Get In Where You Fit In" (October 11, 2022). As the former resourcing director of GNJ's Journey of Hope initiative (JOH), she described it as a plan that "calls us to go beyond hoping for an end to racism and towards leading the charge in dismantling the systems, practices and beliefs that allow inequity and exclusion to flourish."

The term "journey" is apt because ending the sin of racism begins with churches first assessing where they are in their understanding and commitment and then charting their course forward by engaging in anti-racism work and vital relationship-building.

GNJ is helping congregations begin that journey through the "Ending the Sin of Racism" Pathway for Fruitful and Healthy Ministry, as well as other selected Pathways. Here they can engage in facilitated, action-oriented learning that leads to cultural competency and greater vitality. Trainers have benefited from Fearless Dialogues, a resource for engaging in difficult conversations, in their preparation to work with congregations—work that will begin in the coming months.

For churches whose members don't reflect the diversity of their community, the year-long Bridges program can help them explore the gift of diversity and missional



GNJ's new Conference Lay Leader David Yamoah (left) is introduced by Connectional Ministries Director Eric Drew at the 2023 Laity Session. John Coleman photo

And the number of People of Color serving in conference committee and agency leadership roles has increased.

Moreover, GNJ launched an effort this year to help at least 25 racial-ethnic and multiracial congregations—15 African American, five Hispanic, and five Asian—strengthen their worship, ministry and finances, using strategic coaching and consultation, leadership development and financial support.

The Normalizing Next™ Cohort, an innovative first step toward that goal, provides groups of pastor/lay leadership teams with individual coaching and collective training by the Rev. Olu Brown, a successful, innovative church planter, pastor, author and coach.

Founder of the progressive, Atlanta-area Impact Church in 2007, he led it to become one of the fastest-growing churches in United Methodism with over 5,000 members active onsite and online. After pivoting during the Covid pandemic to advance Impact's virtual and hybrid methods of doing ministry, he retired in June 2022. He now pursues an entrepreneurial and consulting career helping churches and organizations grow leadership for their future.

*Normalizing Next*, a key resource for the cohort, is the title of Brown's 2022 book that helps church leaders plan and execute strategic ministries to navigate an evolving, post-Covid social landscape. He is teaching the cohort in six, five-hour sessions from February to October at GNJ's Mission Resource Center. Topics range from dynamic vision casting and leadership development, to growing membership and generosity, to creating impactful worship and ministries that use technology and relate to new generations that we want in our churches.

"It is important for leaders to be flexible and be able to pivot in the new era of leadership," says Brown. "This is accomplished through simple systems and organizational design. Simplicity, not complexity, is the driving force of healthy and vital churches and organizations."

"That really spoke to me. It's something that I've embraced," said the Rev. Wayne Brown, pastor of Ferry Avenue United Methodist Church in Camden. "My church was doing so many things, but we weren't always doing them well. So, I've been sharing this concept with them to do less better. That's what we should all be working towards."



The Rev. Olu Brown (right) talks with members of GNJ's Journey of Hope cohort about "Normalizing Next"™ strategies for enhancing worship. John Coleman photo



The Rev. Sooah Na, pastor of Centenary United Methodist Church, Metuchen, NJ, a cross-racial/cross-cultural appointment.

An implementation period will follow the six plenary sessions and individual coaching sessions, as GNJ staff facilitators help church teams to put their new wisdom to work and begin to create their "next."

To enhance the value of this substantial investment, the conference also requires participating churches to do the Pathways congregational health and vitality assessment, guided by circuit elders and resource directors. And they may apply for congregational grants if they choose to pursue a Pathway they feel is best suited for them. 🌈



Alyssa Ruch (top-left) helps a focus group at GNJ's Annual Conference understand the Journey of Hope Bridges Project that she directs. John Coleman photo



outreach opportunities, while cultivating relationships that can span differences.

GNJ embarked on a Journey of Hope plan in 2020 to help end the sin of racism, and it recommends that churches develop their own plans. Its plan has "Keystone Measures" with timelines that include:

- Training and deploying facilitators to work with congregations on their Journey of Hope plans.
- Increasing the representation of People of Color in conference committee and agency leadership roles.
- Helping to create new racial-ethnic congregations and strengthening the worship, ministry and finances of existing congregations of color.
- Reviewing and updating GNJ's policies and procedures to ensure that they reflect racial justice, equity and inclusion.
- Investing \$4.1 million in debt forgiveness, equitable salary support and adjustments in Shared Ministry apportionments and billables for churches serving in low-income communities. Also, investing an additional \$1 million for Native American sacred land/church preservation.

## Making Progress Toward goals

GNJ is making measurable progress toward those goals.

Shared Ministry apportionments and billables have been reduced for 66 qualifying congregations so far, while some congregations benefited from a one-time limited debt forbearance.

GNJ's Implicit Bias Review Team has reviewed and sought to ensure that the language in policies and procedures, as well as Annual Conference reports, is bias-free.



## Sharing the Journey to End the Sin of Racism

EPA&GNJ staff leaders met April 27 at EPA's Carson Simpson Farm Camp & Retreat Center to learn about each conference's work to end the sin of racism and to explore how they might work together in affiliation. "We saw significant alignment and synergy in our vital ministries," said Eric Drew, GNJ Director of Connectional Ministries.

The team created an inspirational video about their efforts, shown at both Annual Conference sessions in May. It highlights the spirit and accomplishments of the retreat and includes testimonials from participants. View the video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GjyRvXq7CEU>).

EPA&GNJ conferences are now collaborating in their mutual commitments to:

- Recalculate Shared (*aka* Connectional) Ministries apportionments and billings more equitably for the churches serving in low-income areas.
- Increase diversity in conference leadership by growing the percentage of board, committee and agency chairpersons who are people of color.
- Increase numbers of appointed clergy of color.
- Help strengthen racial-ethnic congregations.
- Make conference administration more equitable via reviews of all conference policies, procedures, reports and legislation to identify and eliminate implicit bias.
- Train and deploy facilitators to help congregations create and implement plans to end the sin of racism in their churches and communities.
- Increase the number and potential for success of cross-racial/cross-cultural (CR/CC) pastoral appointments.

"Working together to end racism is one excellent example of how affiliation comes about organically and helps us further our mission," Drew explained. He plans to develop and share a "Scoreboard" with leaders of both conferences that shows our progress in some areas and areas that aren't making progress, "so we can hold ourselves accountable and keep moving forward." 🌈

## EPA&amp;GNJ ADVANCE SPECIAL PROJECTS

# Loving Abundantly, Pursuing Possibilities

By Krista B. Jefferies

**“W**ith God, all things are possible.” (Matthew 19:26) The spirit of that scripture, which inspired the 2023 Annual Conference theme *Possible*, is also infused into the work of both Greater New Jersey’s and Eastern Pennsylvania’s Advance Special Projects.

Both conferences endorse and support a variety of church and community-based projects throughout their regions that are engaged in local or global outreach. And each ministry provides much-needed assistance and encouragement to people from all walks of life.

## Advance SPECIAL PROJECTS

### Greater New Jersey Advance Special Projects

“Loving Abundantly!” That’s the motto of The Neighborhood Center, a GNJ Conference Advance Special project in Camden. Their website URL proclaims “Neighborhood rising.” It’s part of their bold witness to the world that says, “We are working with an abundance of love to transform our community.”

The Neighborhood Center, established in 1913, is also one of GNJ’s 25 Hope Centers that receives special recognition and conference funding each year. It’s just one of the many ways, Bishop John Schol says, we can “pursue God’s purpose and possibilities.”

The Neighborhood Center seeks to break the cycle of poverty for young people by offering “academic, athletic and arts” programs. “Our programs provide a safe and fun space for children and teens to engage in activities that challenge them,” said Michael Landis, Executive Director. “We try to drive sustainable programs that help a child aspire, achieve and be successful in school, and along the way, to learn about Christ.”

Likewise, children and youth are also the focus of programs like CAMP YDP, which uses recreation and enrichment-based instruction to help young people foster relationships and engage in fun, safe, team-building activities, as they develop a sense of belonging.

Meanwhile, the Camden Urban Ministry Initiative (C.U.M.I.) provides a safe environment for youth activities, after-school care, Bible study,

choir and preparation for work and careers.

Pennington School is a UMC-related college preparatory institution that nurtures students’ talents and values, while also preparing them to make a positive difference in the world.

Ranch Hope/Victory House provides counseling and ministry to troubled teens to help them with behavioral treatment, spiritual wellbeing and academic development. And the Christian Outreach Project enlists youth and adult volunteers to do home repairs and improvements for neighbors in need.

### Helping Immigrants and People in Poverty

Advance Special project First Friends of New Jersey and New York provides resources for both detained and recently released immigrants. The program supports the dignity of immigrants while they navigate the immigration enforcement system.

Meanwhile, Justice for Our Neighbors (JFON) provides immigrants with free or low-cost immigration legal services, while advocating on a variety of immigration issues.

Other projects focus on alleviating food insecurity and poverty. CUMAC/ECHO (Center of United Methodist Aid to the Community Ecumenically Concerned Helping Others) runs Passaic County’s largest food pantry, feeding over 3,000 people monthly. Their Depot warehouses over two million pounds of food annually to sustain approximately 40 partner feeding programs.

CUMAC/ECHO also has: a Community Closet, which offers clothing and household items; a Pathways to Work program, which imparts job skills and hands-on experience; a Place of Promise that offers housing for the unhoused; and other seasonal projects that furnish school supplies and holiday gifts for children in need.

And the Maker’s Place in Trenton connects neighbors through a resource center that empowers poor and marginalized people to experience “the wide welcome of God.” It seeks to cultivate relationships that can help people build bridges out of poverty and create a multiethnic and economically diverse community.



Mission First, a new EPA Advance Special project in Pottstown, feeds hungry and unhoused neighbors.



The Neighborhood Center (website photo)

Learn about all the Greater New Jersey Advance Specials and Affiliated Organizations on the GNJ website. (<https://www.gnjumc.org/advance-specials-affiliated-organizations/>)

### Eastern PA Advance Special Projects

Eastern PA Conference members and churches support Advance Special projects like Cokesbury Summer Reading and Lunch Program in Marcus Hook. Its mission is to fight illiteracy, poverty and food insecurity through its free summer reading and lunch program for children in its low-income neighborhood. Read about this ministry in “Giving to Advance Specials aids ministries in need” on EPA’s website. Hazleton Enlarged Ministry has a similar goal. It provides childcare for families and offers a six-week summer camp for kids that includes games, crafts, and nutritious meals. It also supports Your Sisters’ Closet, which offers women clothing and other resources to help them feel confident in themselves as they reenter the workforce.

Both the Liberia Education Project and Light of Marnie bring educational opportunities and safe learning environments to the people of Liberia, in West Africa, especially disadvantaged kids in rural areas. Additionally, Lumina serves nearly a thousand economically disadvantaged individuals in Lancaster, Pa., providing summer camps and other

children’s programs, clothing, nutritional food and cooking lessons, and affordable housing.

Ministry in Motion, a new EPA Advance Special project at Mother African Zoar UMC in North Philadelphia, uses a converted recreational vehicle to respond to needs of disadvantaged neighbors, delivering food, clothing and referrals for health screenings, mental health care and housing resources. For some the response most needed may be prayer, and members offer that too, along with invitations to come experience potentially life-changing ministry with Methodism’s oldest historically Black congregation.

Mission First, another new EPA Advance Special project, is located at the former First UMC in downtown Pottstown, where it feeds hungry and unhoused neighbors almost daily, while also providing clothing, rent assistance, household items, an outdoor phone-charging station, and access to onsite medical services.

One finds plenty of love there in tangible forms. “Lockers of Love” provides storage space for those who need it. “Laundry Love” helps neighbors get their clothes clean at a laundromat across the street. And the “Library of Love” offers an outdoor collection of books for the taking. Read “Merged churches inspire hope through mission center” on EPA’s website.

Learn about all the “2023-2024-EPA-Advance-Specials” on EPA’s website. 🌟

THE NEIGHBORHOOD CENTER  
CAMDEN, NJ

# CAMP KUMBAYA

A place full of fun and  
adventure!

FUN & CREATIVE OUTDOOR  
ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN

# EPA Partners with Chaplain to ‘Remember Those Who Are in Prison’

By John W. Coleman

*Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them...*

—HEBREWS 13:3, NRSV

“God’s Partners in Prison.” That’s one title used to describe prison chaplains, who many in the corrections industry feel are “among the most important staff in prisons.” And it’s a title that certainly describes Carmelo Urena, Philadelphia Prisons Director of Chaplaincy/Religious Services.

Fortunately, Urena is also a valued partner to the Eastern PA Conference Prison Ministries and Restorative Justice Team, which works with chaplains and others to help the conference minister to people living in prisons throughout our region. The team is grateful that its partners in 16 penal institutions have facilitated its delivery of thousands of signed Christmas cards to prisoners since 2015.

But Urena has gone steps further in partnering with us to help him serve the roughly 7,000 men and women whose spiritual needs he and his team care for in the six Philadelphia institutions.

## EPA Sends Over 10,000 Christmas Cards to Prisons in 2022

First, he asked the team to provide not just signed Christmas cards but also unsigned ones that prisoners could use to send greetings to their families and



Chaplain Carmelo Urena

other loved ones. Done. In addition to delivering 5,700 signed cards to 13 correctional facilities in 2021, EPA also donated about 1,500 unsigned cards to prisoners in the Philadelphia institutions. And in 2022, EPA delivered 6,960 total signed cards to 12 correctional facilities, plus 3,187 requested unsigned cards to the Philadelphia system.

Then Urena asked for donations of underwear in 2022 because each prisoner receives only one pair of underwear upon entering the system. He wanted to provide them with at least one additional pair. Done. Our “Undies



for Easter” campaign collected and provided over 5,000 undergarments for incarcerated men and women.

Now he’s asked for much-needed toiletries to support prisoners’ hygiene health. That request has led to the first-ever Toiletry Bowl campaign. The team asks donors in EPA and Greater New Jersey to purchase online toothpaste, bar soap, deodorant and hand cream for incarcerated men and women because they receive only small quantities of each when they arrive. Many lack the resources or family support to obtain more from the expensive prison commissary.

## Toiletry Bowl Campaign Ends August 15

The Toiletry Bowl campaign, which began June 15, will end August 15. A

variety of toiletry items (two competitive brands each) are available for purchase and donation on our Amazon Toiletry Bowl Gift List at <https://tinyurl.com/toiletry-bowl>. These small items will make a big difference in the lives of many persons in prison.

Simply select the delivery option for EPAUMC Prison Ministry Team, and the purchases will be shipped automatically to them, in care of Grove United Methodist Church, 490 West Boot Road, West Chester, PA.

The Rev. Marilyn Schneider, team leader, will announce the “winning,” or most-purchased, brands for each toiletry item, as well as the collected totals at the conclusion of the campaign. She will then deliver the items to Urena for distribution to our brothers and sisters who need them. 🇺🇸

# Summer Youth Service Project Uplifts Homes and Hearts

By John W. Coleman

The Christian Outreach Project (COP), based in Rahway, N.J., welcomed in late June 63 volunteers—youth and adults—from 10 area churches to its 41st summer of helping grateful neighbors with needed home repairs and improvements. The special week, June 25 to July 1, was a mutual win-win for both givers and receivers.

Volunteers came from Milton, Succasunna, Trinity, Branchville, Sparta, Morrow Memorial and New Dover United Methodist churches. Twenty-two families living in Morris, Sussex and Warren counties applied for COP’s help, and nine were initially selected. “However, we had amazing volunteers this year, as we always do,” said Dave Kihm, COP executive director, “and a total of 12 homes ultimately received repairs and renovations.”



Those repairs and renovations included: roofing; ceiling replacement; ADA accessible ramps; porch replacement; landscaping; insulation and sheetrock replacement; interior and exterior painting; gutter replacement; and deck repairs and rehabilitation.

“Participation increased by over 30 percent from 2022, and our volunteers were able to help over 70 percent

more families,” said Kihm. COP is a GNJ Advance Special project, endorsed and supported by United Methodists of Greater New Jersey.

“I’ve gone to COP twice now, and it’s always been my favorite week of the year,” said Aidan Heindl, 15, of Morrow Memorial UMC. “You get to spend a week surrounded by amazing people, while helping people in need. You learn a lot about construction, but even more about life. I’ve made lifelong friends and stories I’ll be telling for years. It’s changed people’s lives, including mine, and I always leave the week wishing it wasn’t over.”

## ‘The Best Week of My Life’

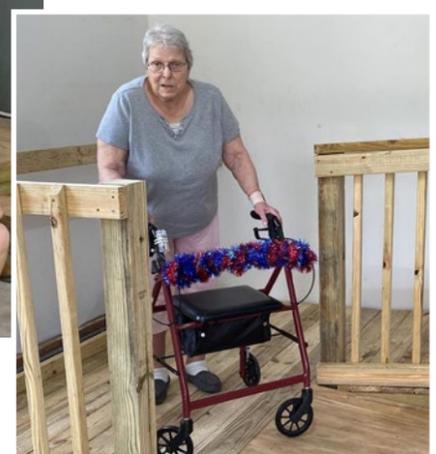
Aidan’s sister Bridget Heindl, 17, calls COP Week “the best week of my life year after year.” For that she credits the “incredible connections with people on our crews, as well as the homeowners we are helping.”

“COP has helped me find my purpose in the world,” she said. “Being able to see the effect that helping people has on me is something that makes me come back each year. COP has opened my eyes to the impact that people can have on others by coming together to do good. It is such a rewarding experience to know that you have the opportunity to be a light for others and have a positive impact on their lives.”

“Some of my favorite memories are the conversations I have with homeowners, and seeing their children and grandchildren come out into the heat or the rain, eager to help us with our work. Every year I can’t wait to come back and have



COP volunteers surround a new friend, grateful for the ramp they built for her rolling walker.



the opportunity to learn new skills and connect with more people.”

Krystal Woolston chaperones the teens from Morrow Memorial. “COP is a transformational service project for youth and adults,” she said. “I’ve been bringing youth for the past three years, and every year I have had the opportunity to witness students light up for service and grow in their faith. When I have gone, I too, have had the opportunity to grow in my understanding of my own faith a little bit more each year.”

The Rev. Eunice Vega-Perez, Superintendent of GNJ’s Skylands District, called her two days spent with the COP team “an unforgettable experience. Witnessing their unwavering dedication, hard work and genuine love for the tasks assigned to them left a profound impact on me. The passion and compassion radiated from their eyes as they served the members of the houses they were assigned to.”

## Longing ‘To Bring About Positive Change’

Vega-Perez shared her admiration with both EPA and GNJ conference staff when she preached for their weekly joint chapel service July 10.

“What struck me the most was the collective effort of both young individuals and adults coming together for a common mission: to be the hands and feet of Christ. It was a deeply moving sight, reminding me that today’s youth are not merely concerned with buildings or church traditions. Instead, they long for tangible ways to bring about positive change in their communities and the world at large. Their desire to make a difference extends far beyond the confines of a church building; it resonates with a deep yearning to impact the world outside those walls.”

COP will have a reunion August 13, from 2 to 6 p.m., at Sparta United Methodist Church, where board members hope to reconnect with participants and alumnae from past summers.

Learn more and view plenty of photos and videos on COP’s website, Facebook page and Instagram page. Contact Dave Kihm at [director@christianoutreachproject.org](mailto:director@christianoutreachproject.org). Donate to COP as a GNJ Advance Specials project. 🇺🇸

# Find Renewed Faith, Purpose in September Walks to Emmaus

By the Rev. Gina Yeske\*

In life there are moments when hope fades and uncertainty looms. This is the place where we find two weary travelers journeying to a village called Emmaus, feeling discouraged and perplexed after Jesus' crucifixion. As they trudged along the road to Emmaus, these travelers carried the weight of lost dreams and shattered expectations. The road to Emmaus is the place between fear and hope, the road between the place where all is lost and the place of resurrection.

Two thousand years later, the road to discipleship can still be long and challenging. This has definitely been the case for many of our church leaders over the past few years. These faithful servants went above and beyond during the pandemic to ensure that while our church doors might have been closed, our hearts and minds remained open and committed to doing the work of Jesus Christ.

Then when we reopened our buildings, we discovered that we had moved into a new era for the church. The road back has been long and challenging, often leaving our leaders and volunteers burned out and worried about what the future might hold. The work is hard, and in many cases, there are few persons available to help. Our dedicated volunteers are weary.

But just as Jesus came beside the weary travelers in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus comes alongside the servants of the church today to offer fresh hope and renewal. Some of us are longing for

something that will illumine our hearts to remember who we are and why we follow Jesus. One of these opportunities for renewal is the Walk to Emmaus.

## A Spiritual Retreat and Renewal Program

The Walk to Emmaus is a spiritual retreat and renewal program that originated from The Upper Room, a ministry of The United Methodist Church. Participants embark on a three-day immersive experience designed to inspire and strengthen the faith of participants. It happens through a combination of worship, small-group discussions and reflections on a series of talks, guided by a team of both clergy and laity volunteers who have previously completed the Walk.

The **Walk to Emmaus** is not an exclusive club. Instead, it seeks to create a community of believers who can support and encourage one another on their spiritual journeys. However, the primary mission of the Walk is to strengthen the local church.

"One of the purposes of the Walk is not only to help you become a better disciple," shared Jack Scharf from Morristown UMC, "but also to reinvigorate and renew the church."

After a weekend filled with Christian love in action, the attendees are equipped for new levels of grace-filled service and leadership.

Emmaus Walks help mature Christians, disciples of Jesus Christ, to strengthen their personal holiness and activate their faith commitment. They encapsulate the United Methodist core values and Wesleyan principles of grace. It's a weekend filled with laughter, love and a deep renewal of one's spirit.



## 'A Whole Change of Atmosphere in the Church'

Tracy Allen, of Covenant UMC in Plainfield, shared how her church grew, not just in numbers but by inspiring "a whole different change of atmosphere in the church." She points out that she can sense the change that has recently taken place since some members attended a Walk last fall.

The Skylands Area's next Walk to Emmaus will be offered in September. **The Men's Walk will be held Sept. 14-17; the Women's Walk, Sept. 21-24.** Both will be hosted at Sacred Heart Retreat Center in Newton, NJ.

The Walk begins Thursday evening and concludes Sunday evening. During the retreat participants are encouraged to set this time apart from the world to fully immerse themselves in this experience. The Rev. Dawn Maffetone, of Rockaway UMC, shared that she has many good memories of her Walk. "I laughed, I cried, and I learned to live again."

There are three chartered Emmaus Communities in New Jersey: Skylands, Garden State, and *Comunidad Emaus Latina Emanuel* (CELE), which became the

second Hispanic Emmaus Community in the nation in 2016.

Only Skylands is offering a Walk in 2023. Members of that Emmaus community are eager to present the ministry to churches through in-person visits or videoconferencing via Zoom. Contact Stephen Yeske, [stephenyeske@comcast.net](mailto:stephenyeske@comcast.net), for a presentation.

To attend a Walk to Emmaus, each person receives a sponsor who has been through an Emmaus experience and wishes to support a new Emmaus participant. If you are interested in the Walk, the Skylands Emmaus Community will match you with a sponsor. For more information please contact, Don Schulz, Community Lay Director, [dnschulz2@gmail.com](mailto:dnschulz2@gmail.com).

The Emmaus community will accept applications for the September Walks until August 15. There is a \$300 fee that covers all expenses including food and a private room with bath. The community does offer some partial scholarships. Your sponsor can help you with those details.

"God uses these three days in a mighty and powerful way," says Stephen Yeske, Lay Director for the upcoming Men's Walk, "to allow people to see what it is that God is calling them to do in their ministries, be it lay or pastoral ministry." He invites leaders of local churches to prayerfully consider attending the walk.

"We are excited to see how God's Spirit will move," adds Elena Van Schaak the Lay Director for the Women's fall Walk. "It's a powerful weekend." 🌈

*The Rev. Gina Yeske is Director of Resourcing for GNJ's Metro-Highlands Region. The Rev. Gabrielle Corbett, Skyland's Emmaus Community Trainer, helped with this article. Learn more about the UMC's Walk to Emmaus ministry.*

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