



Conference calendar to heat up in September

BY JOHN W. COLEMAN

When summer begins to cool down in September, the Eastern PA Conference calendar will heat up with potentially life- and church-changing special events that many leaders and members should find valuable for their ministries.

Following a leisurely lull from August through Labor Day, our weekends and some weekdays will get busy with important learning and sharing events from September through November, proving the conference's eagerness to invest in and live out its vision statement to become more "United in Christ, Committed to Transformation."

An assortment of serious learning events will focus on:

- How to recognize and heal from the traumatic, stressful impact of racism on people of color (**Impact of Racism on People of Color workshop, Sept. 14**)
- Hopewell UMC's annual leadership development and transformation seminar, featuring Jen Hatmaker, a popular Christian author, speaker, blogger and television presenter. (**Planting Seeds for Ministry Growth, Sept. 21**)
- How churches can address the damaging causes and consequences of domestic violence, especially the errant socialization of boys and men that causes toxic masculine attitudes and behaviors. (**Domestic Violence, the Church Responds II, Sept. 28**)
- How churches can form and mobilize vital, visionary leadership teams to launch into bold, life-changing and church-changing ministries.

(**Leadership Launch Workshop, Oct. 5**).

And there are more dynamic events scheduled that will focus on:

- Understanding appropriate and inappropriate behaviors and boundaries for persons in ministry. (**Basic Sexual Ethics, Oct. 12**)
- Understanding and dismantling individual and institutional racism. (**Changing Racism, Oct. 19-20**)
- An encore of dynamic ministry stories and strategies to inspire small-membership churches. (**HOPE! Talks 2.0: ReBoot!, Oct. 19**)

And yes, there are more serious, informative and innovative events planned well into November.

But first, we will start this busy season with two fitting events after Labor Day that promise some good, old-fashioned—and maybe some new-fashioned—fun

Continued on page 2--CALENDAR

New UMC separation plans emerge for 2020

Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand." —Matthew 12:25

No doubt many have considered how Jesus' warning might relate to The United Methodist Church in its current, critical state of division. And surely, some have asked if the denomination, now in turmoil over its lesbian, gay and bisexual members' rights to marriage and ordained ministry, can be divided not against itself but within itself.

The consistent answer emerging in several recent UMC reorganization plans is no.

"It appears that we are unable, for now, to walk the same path forward," said a statement offered with the **UMC-Next** coalition's new proposal, released August 19. "We can choose to part with a blessing, understanding that our Wesleyan roots will always bind us together even as some may choose to branch

out into distinctive expressions of the church."

Eleven Eastern PA Conference leaders attended the progressive/centrist group's major planning meeting in May at the UMC Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kansas. A follow-up meeting there, Sept. 25-27, during the church's annual Leadership Institute, will review the new proposal.

It will include legislation proposed in petitions to the 2020 General Conference (May 5-15 in Minneapolis, Minn.). Sept. 18 is the deadline for General Conference petitions.

The UMCNext plan would eliminate the denomination's restrictions against ordination and same-sex weddings for LGBTQ* members, while allowing local churches that disagree to depart and organize into new forms of Methodism. This latest effort to address deep, longstanding division over homosexuality comes from the coalition's convening team, which includes Reconciling Ministries Network, Uniting Methodists and Mainstream UMC.

"The UMCNext Proposal allows a creative way for churches to build a new expression of Methodism if desired and a path to create a renewed global United Methodist Church for those who remain," said the Rev. Junius B. Dotson,

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It appears that we are unable, for now, to walk the same path forward.

- UMCNext convening leaders



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Conference elects diverse delegates; OKs centrist resolution (page 7). See our complete Annual Conference 2019 coverage, including: our two-page photo collage (pages 8-9); "Young adult speakers reveal what to 'tell the coming generation'" (page 10); and "Conference honors exemplary leaders, churches" (page 11).

SEPTEMBER

SEPT. 6-7

Camping at the Crossroads: Youth Ministry Retreat, Bath Township.

SEPT. 7

Celebrating our Cultures: A Cookout/Picnic for Fellowship & Networking, Especially Among People of Color. 11 AM - 2 PM, Camp Innabah. \$10 per adult, children under 16 are FREE.

SEPT. 14

Racism, Post-Traumatic Stress, & Transformation: 8:30 AM - 3 PM at Simpson House, Philadelphia. Speaker: Rev. R. Dandridge Collins, Ph.D., M.Div. Cost \$25.

SEPT. 21

Hopewell UMC's "Planting Seeds for Ministry Growth." Keynote Speaker: Jen Hatmaker.

ERT (Early Response Team) Training @ 8:00 am - 4:00 pm, Cost: \$25. Grove UMC, West Chester.

Claiming Sabbath for Clergy Spouses: 9 AM to 5 PM, at the Franciscan Spiritual

Center in Aston, PA. Retreat Leader: Julie Anderman. Cost \$50.

SEPT. 28

Domestic Violence: The Church Responds II--*Breaking Out of the Man Box*. 9 AM - 3 PM, Simpshon House, Philadelphia. Keynote Speaker: The Rev. Rickie Houston.

OCTOBER

OCT. 5

"Leadership Launch" Conference & Retreat: 9 AM - 3 PM, Quakertown UMC.

OCT. 12

Basic Sexual Ethics Workshop: 9:30 AM - 3 PM, Bethel UMC. Presenter: Rev. Wanda Sevey.

OCT. 19

Hope! Talks 2.0: Reboot! Inspiration for Small Congregations. 9 AM - 12 Noon.

OCT. 18 - OCT. 20

Dismantling Racism Workshop: Level I. Desmond Hotel in Malvern. \$300 Cost. 2 CEU's.

OCT. 19

UMW's 46th Annual Celebration

OCT. 20

Laity Sunday

NOVEMBER

NOV. 2

Four Stations of the Holy Spirit training: at Covenant UMC, Bath Township.

NOV. 9

Dismantling Racism Level II Workshop: Site & registration TBA

NOV. 13

"Churches as First Responders to the Military and Veteran Population:" 9 AM to 12 Noon at First UMC Phoenixville. \$10 cost. For clergy and laity.

NOV. 16

Emotional Intelligence and Diversity Training: 9:30 AM - 2 PM.

NOV. 20

Elders Day Apart with Bishop Johnson: 9 AM - 12 Noon.

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and fellowship.

The first event, **Camping at the Crossroads, Sept. 6-7**, will be "part festival, part rally, part retreat, all rolled into one event to reach youth and young adults for Christ." All Eastern PA Conference youth and young adults are invited! Covenant UMC of Moore Township (2715 Mountain View Drive, Bath, PA) is the host and site. The Conference Young People's Ministries department is a cosponsor.

Participants can camp out Friday night, starting at 3 PM, or come Saturday and spend the day enjoying insightful and uplifting messages and music from a full menu of speakers and performers. The event starts Friday at 7 PM and will end at 7 PM Saturday; but campers are invited to stay over to Sunday and join Covenant's congregation in worship.

Simultaneously, people of all ages and races—but especially people of color—are invited to join in **Celebrating Our Cultures on Saturday, Sept. 7**, from 11 AM to 2 PM, at Innabah Camp & Retreat Center. The 3-hour family cookout, picnic and cultural celebration, sponsored by the conference Commission on Religion and Race, will be an enjoyable time for fellowship, networking, sharing, learning and play.

All are invited, but racial-ethnic

members of our conference and churches are especially encouraged to attend and share with one another gifts of their respective ethnic cultures—foods, songs, dances, stories, poetry, prayers, visual art and artifacts, etc. The suggested donation is \$10 per adult, but free for children under 16.

The cultural celebration will feature personal reflections highlighting cultural concerns and also popular conference musical performers, including the Philadelphia UMC Mass Choir and the Rev. Lydia Munoz. Innabah's playground, fields, Gaga and basketball courts will also be available for play.

NEWSpirit Communications will feature these and other conference events in our various media over the coming months. That includes the **Bishop's Days on the Districts**, which will happen in early fall.

Bishop Peggy Johnson will climax each district visit (including two separate visits to the expansive North District) by meeting with clergy and lay members at 6:30 PM. She will speak about General Conference 2020 and the Annual Conference 2020 theme of Evangelism, among other topics of interest. Her visits will be:

- Sept. 23 - North District (East side), at Pen Argyl UMC
- Sept. 24 - North District (West side) at

Frackville: First UMC

- Sept. 25 - West District at Manheim: Ruhl's UMC
 - Oct. 1 - East District at Simpson House, in Constitution Hall.
 - Oct. 2 - South District at Valley Forge: St. Matthew's UMC
- Other fall (and pre-fall) conference events scheduled include:

- Mondays—September 9, 16, 23 and 30: The 9th Annual North District Laity Academy, sponsored by Methodists United (the Shamokin Area EPA Conference Mission Link comprising 11 North District congregations).
- September 21: Claiming Sabbath for Clergy Spouses
- October 19: UMW's 46th Annual Celebration
- October 20: Laity Sunday
- November 13: "Churches as First Responders to the Military and Veteran Population"
- November 16: CORR Emotional Intelligence and Diversity Training, 9:30 AM to 2 PM
- November 20: Elders Day Apart with Bishop Johnson, 9 AM - 12 PM



Celebrating Our Cultures

A Cookout/Picnic for Fellowship & Networking, Especially Among People of Color

Sept. 7, 2019 @ 11 am - 2 pm
Camp Innabah (712 Pughtown Road, Spring City, PA). \$10 per adult. Children under 16 FREE. Bring cultural side dishes to share!



Camping at the Crossroads

Part festival, part rally, part retreat, all rolled into one event to reach youth and young adults for Christ.

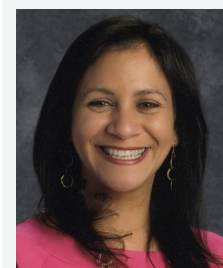
Sept. 6, 7 PM - Sept. 7, 7 PM
 Covenant UMC, 2715 Mountain View Drive, Bath, PA 18014

Cost is \$10 per person, or the group rate (10 or more people) is \$100 total. Come camp out Friday night, or come Saturday for the day.

New EPA Conference Staff

The Rev. Lillian "Luky"

Cotto is the Conference's new part-time Latino Ministries Coordinator. She works with the Latino Commission in a Connectional Ministries staff role to help develop its ministries and relationships with Latino clergy and laity and other conference programs.



Jezerel Gutierrez is the Conference's Associate Coordinator of Youth Ministries, working with Coordinator David Piltz to help the Conference Council on Youth Ministries organize nurture, fellowship and mission activities and events.



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What's in Your Heart?

BY BISHOP PEGGY JOHNSON

Doctors have perfected many kinds of tests that diagnose heart disease. From coronary artery blockages to arrhythmia, to heart valve disease—with modern testing equipment, we can know what is in a person's physical heart.

However, when our Scriptures speak of the heart, it is far more than a body



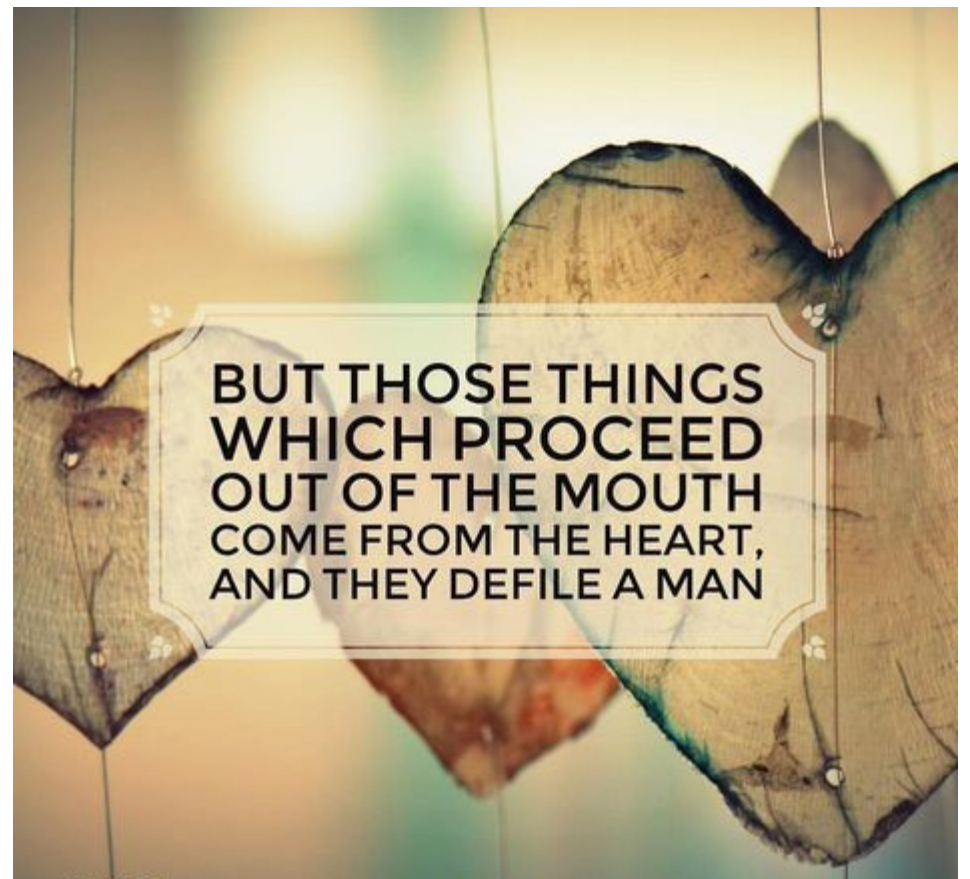
organ. The “heart” is found 762 times in the KJV Bible, and it tends to mean what it is the central core of a person's desires, wonderment and passion. It is our true best self. One cannot test this kind of heart with a stethoscope, but it is easily discerned by a person's words.

Jesus taught his disciples that eating food with unwashed hands does not defile a person: “Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled?”

He goes on to assert the true test of a person's heart: “But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person.” (Matthew 15:17-19)

What is in our heart is evidenced by the way we talk. Just listen to what a person says. Listen to yourself talk. No special equipment necessary; just listen with your ears... and your heart.

This is no little thing. The Book of James reminds us, “The tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire. And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness... it is a restless evil... full of deadly poison.” (James 2:5-6, 8b)



In our current political climate, we are experiencing countless inflammatory words whose name is legion. Many of them come from a heart of racial bigotry, sexism and classism. Calls for congresswomen to be “sent home” and unkind words about Baltimore being an unlivable “rat and rodent infested mess” are disappointing and hurtful. It stirs up more and more strife between people as the cycle of harsh criticism and insults goes on and on.

However, we are not sitting above it all in holiness and purity. In the life of the church, mean-spirited words are spoken against one another as well. James says, “Every kind of beast and bird or reptile and sea creature can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue.” (2:7).

Sadly, it is part of the human condition to speak unkindly. So, do we just take it as a “given” and keep on hurting one another with insults and slander? I think not! We have a God who can understand our weakness and will help us.

Paul teaches, “No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to humanity. And God is faithful; and he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, God will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.” (I Corinthians 10:13)

May we use God's preventive medicine for the heart disease of slander and evil words spoken against each another. Indeed, may we use that same medicine to also cure the callous, heinous and even murderous actions that too often

are prompted by our words. Should we be surprised that hurtful public policies and personal threats and attacks often seem to follow hateful public discourse?

May we continue to pray and work unceasingly for a world in which every-



one is given respect in our thoughts, words and deeds, and where the better angels of our nature lead us to promote inclusion and equality for all. If each of us takes responsibility for what we think, say and do in this world, our church can still become part of the beloved community that God intended.

This essay is available as a Church Bulletin Insert on our Church Media Resources page at www.epaumc.org/ministry/communications/church-media-resources



Summer of Love

Don't miss the joy of reading Bishop Peggy Johnson's “Summer of Love” essay on her always thought-provoking, heart-touching Bishop's Blog. “This season I have been pondering “love,” she writes, love that “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (I Corinthians 13:7).

At the UMC's quadrennial Youth 2019 gathering in Kansas City in July, she joined over 3,000 young people and adults to celebrate youth ministry. Their theme was “Love-Well.” Their topics spanned immigration, our environment, LGBTQIA+ members of our church, and the hard challenge of loving “enemies.”

Bishop Peggy co-taught a class there on creating accessibility for youth who have physical and emotional challenges but also gifts to share.

“At the end of the day,” she writes, “it is all about love. It is that simple, it is that hard. It means waking up every morning and praying that one can be an agent of love in the world. It means doing the challenging work of getting yourself out of the way and putting Christ and others first.”



*Faithfully Yours,
Peggy A. Johnson*

Bishop's Annual Conference report urges unity in Christ

BY JOHN W. COLEMAN



In her June 13 State of the Church Report to the Eastern PA Annual Conference Bishop Peggy Johnson addressed several topics but zeroed in on a singular, hopeful theme. In the words of an old, popular Al Green R&B song, it's "Let's stay together."

Lamenting The United Methodist Church's growing impasse over whether to condemn or condone homosexuality in ordained ministry and marriage, the episcopal leader told Annual Conference members, "We will be sorely hurt and our effectiveness and witness will suffer if we divide over this. We need each other. We especially need the people we don't agree with."

In comments during her **State of the Church Address**, her first in 11 years as bishop, she admitted "the divide is deep. The fight has been going on for some time and it is entrenched."

"We United Methodists disagree on almost every social issue there is: war, immigration, abortion, gun control, Israel and Palestine, death penalty," she said. "I deeply respect your right to your opinion and your heart."

But, she added, "If Jesus asked you to find a way to work together, would you

do it? I respect everyone's right to follow their understanding of Scripture, but remember how much we need each other."

Bishop highlights conference ministries

Citing appeals for unity that defines the church and its mission—from Ephesians 2:19-22 and a recent Council of Bishops statement—Bishop Johnson extolled recent ministries happening across the conference's four districts. Her cabinet of district superintendents did likewise in their later report.

Among her highlights: response to natural disasters; training in Bible study, preaching and church leadership; ambitious church and community development projects; medical missions in the Democratic Republic of Congo; local initiatives in housing and feeding ministries; youth leadership development; training for more cross-racial/cross-cultural church ministries; and leading efforts to dismantle racism and injustice.

She offered her own hopes and dreams, including: more evangelism and discipleship growth; continued work to "heal the breach of racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, and ableism"; a greater commitment to personal and social holiness; and a "smooth transition in 2020 to a new bishop."

Bishop Johnson announced that she will not retire in 2020, as many have wondered, but she would look forward to serving a final quadrennium in another conference, after 12 years of leading the

Philadelphia Area.

"I have loved you all so much and appreciated the faithfulness, the deep faithfulness of laity and clergy, the vibrant diversity, the amazing missions and ministries," she said. She added that whether or not the Northeastern Jurisdiction will lose a bishop in 2020 and have to realign episcopal areas due to its decline in overall membership has yet to be decided.

Yet, she reiterated that her priority concern is denominational healing and unity.

'A great deal of hurt and suffering'

Bishop Johnson explained the February 2019 Special General Conference's approval, by a narrow 54-vote margin, of the proposed Traditional Plan that strengthened prohibitions against full inclusion of gay and lesbian persons in ordained ministry and marital rites. But she lamented the impact that "caused a great deal of hurt and suffering to the LGBTQIA community," suffering she said she has witnessed since February in visits to 29 churches and in meetings with various groups across her two conferences, Eastern PA and Peninsula-Delaware.

"It is hard to say one is truly welcome if they are denied full inclusion, such as heterosexual people have," she said. "This is, of course, the point of our division; and people of goodwill in this conference and the denomination are of different beliefs."

"Personally, I supported the One Church Plan," she said, "because I believed it would give space for everyone to live out their conscience, and the unity of the church would be best

preserved. Among the bishops, 87 percent supported it. It was not a perfect plan, but it allowed for some flexibility and freedom."

"It is my prayer that we will someday find peace over this and not divide," she continued. "Schism is never the will of God, but it is necessary at times because of our human frailty and lack of creativity."

The bishop voiced her wish that "we were more like the Acts 15 church, where the Jerusalem Council simply allowed people the freedom to do things differently and not adhere to a certain set of laws." She also favored the Apostle Paul's vision of unity expressed in 1 Corinthians 12, "where each body part is respected and cherished and indispensable."

Acknowledging that the 2020 General Conference may mean "voting on this impasse once again," possibly with new results, she ended her report ever faithful to her main message: "So let us be prayerful. Let us be in love and charity with one another. Let's believe that with God, all things are possible, even unity among us."

Council of Bishops statement

"The unity of the church is for the sake of the mission. The unity of the church is a by-product of the mission. The mission of the church is derived from the nature of a missional God. The mission of God breaks down barriers and transcends languages..."

...The faithfulness, unity and fruitfulness of the church form a whole. We cannot be one without abiding in Jesus, we cannot be spirit-filled without loving our neighbor; we cannot experience revival as we sow divisions in the body."

Remembering August 25, 1619

BY BISHOP PEGGY JOHNSON

"On August 25, 1619, the White Lion (pirate and slave ship) entered from the Chesapeake Bay and arrived at Point Comfort, an English settlement...at the mouth of the harbor, 20 nautical miles downstream from Jamestown (Va.)." (www.Project1619.org) Thus began the scourge of slavery in this country that has continued on for 400 years.

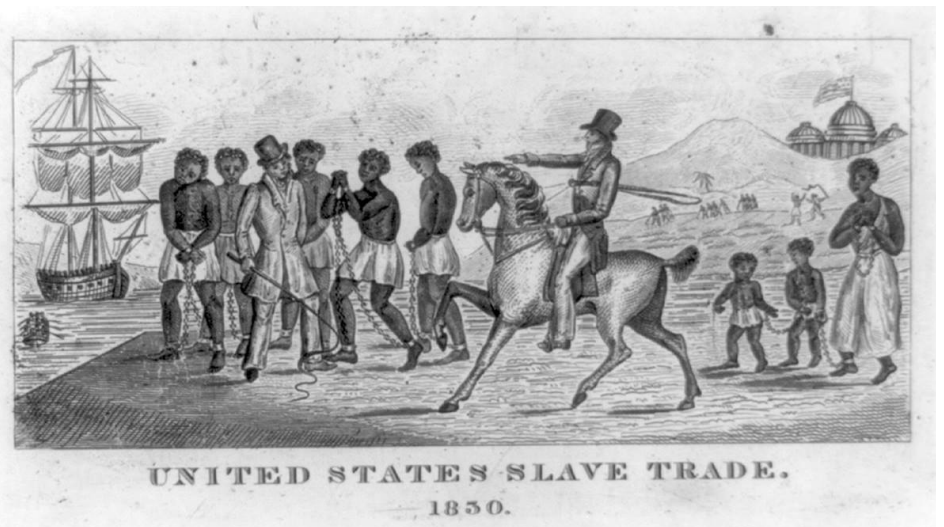
According to an article in the Sunday Tribune by Michael Coard, 12.5 million stolen Africans were brought to this country. By the time of the Civil War there were 4 million enslaved people and 1.32 million of them were children.

They were sold on slave blocks, treated inhumanely, and whole families were separated: "...mother from daughter, father from son, brother from sister, husband from wife. Following these forced

separations, they were scattered across the country. And they would never touch or even see one another again." (Sunday Tribune, July 28, 2019, p 2-A)

It can well be said that the wealth and success of this country came on the backs of enslaved people. Again citing Coard's research: Of the 56 signers of the American colonies' Declaration of Independence, 41 had slaves. Of the 55 signers of the U.S. Constitution, 25 owned slaves. One in six households had slaves in Philadelphia in the 1760's, and even William Penn himself had three. George Washington had 316 slaves.

The Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 did little to improve the lot of enslaved people. And through the years the scourge of slavery has continued to wound and scar us through Jim Crow laws, stubborn racism and racial inequities, white privilege, white Nationalism and mass incarceration.



August 25 is a date to acknowledge the grievous sins of this nation against not only slaves but also first-nation peoples. It is a time to also recognize the ongoing attacks on immigrants and migrants in this country.

It is a time to remember and reflect on how the hunger for gain and material wealth has caused people to subjugate

and enslave their fellow human beings. It is said well in one of our rarely sung hymns: "O shame to us who rest content while lust and greed for gain in street and shop and tenement wring gold from human pain." (UM Book of Hymns, No. 726)

It is a time to commit the church—our

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Rev. Junius Dotson

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executive convener of the diverse team and head of the UMC's Discipleship Ministries agency.

'Respectful separation' to keep the UMC intact

Though the plan is still being developed in petition form, backers say it would keep the UMC intact, while also allowing greater autonomy among its global regions and a liberal "gracious exit" for congregations that want to leave. The plan clearly anticipates the exodus of some churches.

"Respectful separation is a way for us to keep faith with how each region and sector discerns the will of God for Christian living and mission while doing no harm, doing all the good we can and sustaining our attention to loving and serving God," says a statement released with the plan's basic components.

The UMC has faced conflict for decades over how accepting to be of homosexuality. The volatile 2019 special General Conference in St. Louis — which by a 438-384 vote approved the Traditional Plan reinforcing restrictions on ordination and same-sex weddings—has led to broad agreement that separation or some form of major reorganization is needed.

The UMCNext Proposal follows the recent public debut of the **Bard-Jones Plan**, offered by two United Methodist bishops, which called for the denomination to remain as an umbrella organization for mostly separate groups.

Also recently unveiled is the **Indianapolis Plan**, developed since June by a small group of centrists, progressives and traditionalists. It would create at least two, and possibly three, separate denominations.

'We can live next door to one another'

"We've discovered The United Methodist Church can't live in the same house together peaceably, but we can live next door to one another," said the Rev. Kent Millard, president of United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio, and one of the 12-member group's organizers.



The Rev. Kent Millard

The Indianapolis Plan envisions a Traditionalist United Methodist Church that would maintain the denomination's current restrictions on same-sex weddings and ordination of "self-avowed practicing" gay clergy.

A separate Centrist/Progressive United Methodist Church would remove those restrictions, as well as church teaching that the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching.

Each denomination would decide what to call itself and could incorporate "United Methodist" into that name. A third, Progressive denomination might also form to require immediate full inclusion of LGBTQ persons.

The Rev. Keith Boyette, president of the traditionalist Wesleyan Covenant Association, was among the dozen leaders, as was the Rev. Darren Cushman-Wood, host pastor of Indianapolis' North UMC.

The plan calls for "legal continuation"

of the UMC, thus avoiding dissolution, and allows most general church agencies to remain with the Centrist/Progressive church. The group is seeking more input to refine the plan into a General Conference petition.

Talks are ongoing among various groups of church leaders. One, convened by bishops from non-U.S. central conferences, met in mid-August in Virginia and reviewed the UMCNext plan and others. "During candid and prayerful discussions, the group agreed that it seems inevitable that there will be some form of separation of the church as a way to resolve the impasse," a press release said.

The UMCNext proposal would declare an immediate moratorium on charges against LGBTQ clergy, on clergy performing same-sex weddings and on other charges stemming from provisions of the Traditional Plan.

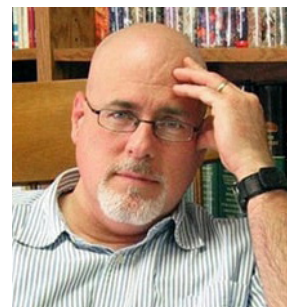
It would also remove from the UMC's Book of Discipline all language used to restrict pastors and churches from conducting same-sex weddings and annual conferences from licensing or ordaining "self-avowed practicing homosexuals," the church's official policy since 1972.

Churches may leave but not annual conferences

The plan would let local churches



The Rev. Keith Boyette



The Rev. Darren Cushman-Wood

in annual conferences—whether in U.S. jurisdictional or non-U.S. central conferences—decide by a two-thirds vote to "enter a new life as a Wesleyan church." That exit offer extends through 2024.

Groups of departing churches that "form a viable denomination," in the plan's language, will receive start-up resources using a formula devised with help from a professional mediator. The plan "provides a gracious exit for those who wish to leave, and it allows pastors and churches to minister according to their convictions," said the Rev. Adam Hamilton, pastor of the UMC of the Resurrection which hosted the May meeting.

The plan currently does not allow for annual conferences to leave the denomination.

Dotson said the UMCNext Proposal is designed to be timely and simple, and to avoid the lengthy process of constitutional amendments. "The concern is that the Judicial Council may not uphold the departure of an annual conference as constitutional," he said.

Other components of the UMCNext Proposal include:

- Retaining current doctrinal standards of the Book of Discipline.
- Creating a Commission on the 21st Century Church to prepare a comprehensive structure and governance plan for consideration at a special General Conference in 2022 that would serve as a constitutional convention. That assembly would remove all church policy language related to LGBTQ persons and deal with regional conference legislation and adaptation of the Discipline as well as new concordat or covenant agreements among Wesleyan groups.
- Passing legislation currently proposed by the Connectional Table to create a U.S. regional conference
- Allowing departing churches in viable new denominations to contract for services with United Methodist agencies, including Wespath, the United Methodist Committee on Relief and the General Commission on Archives and History.

Dotson said a group of departing churches using Wespath could save at least 40 percent over market rate "to secure their share of unfunded pensions liability." He said Wespath would define standards to assess the viability of such groups.

**This story is adapted by John W. Coleman using two UM News Service stories written by Sam Hodges.*

***While the identification LGBTQ is commonly used, actual UMC prohibitions are against lesbian, gay and bisexual persons only.*

REMEMBERING—continued from page 4.

church—to name racism when we see it, to work harder to achieve equality and shared leadership and wealth for all, to carefully monitor our elected officials and vote for those who have hearts of justice, and to promote laws that encourage reparations, affirmative action and fair voting rights, policies and alignment of districts.

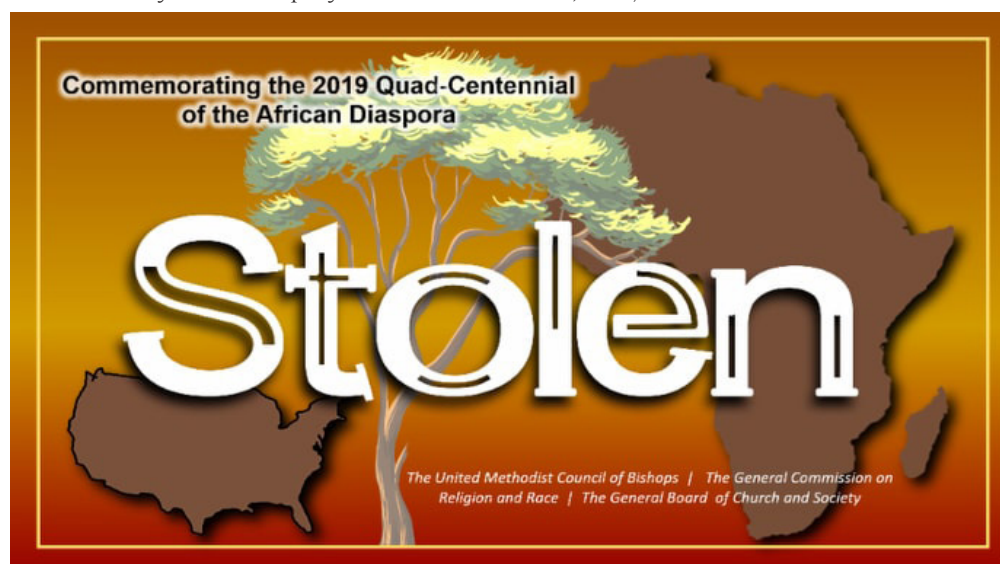
The road is long and the battle lines are deeply entrenched in this country presently. But each of us can do our part and together the Church of Jesus Christ can make a difference. Start by praying this prayer at church on August 25.

Gracious God of all people, we acknowledge and repent of the grievous acts of inhumanity against people of African descent in our long history. We know that much generational wealth in this country has been in the hands of European-American people at the expense of people of color.

Forgive us we pray and on this anniversary of 400 years of American slavery. We commit ourselves anew to work for justice, peace and equity. Give us the strength to step out in faith to do our part. And give us the courage to face the persecution that comes with justice ministry. This we pray in the name of

the lover of our souls and of all: Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Learn more about this poignant anniversary of a momentous event in American history. Read "Slavery anniversary leads to new discussions," by Jim Patterson of UM News Service (July 8, 2019)



Laity Academy: new site, new courses, new learners

BY JOHN W. COLEMAN



Tacking eastward into a new, more academic setting, the Eastern PA Conference Laity Academy dropped its nets at Eastern University's scenic, Main Line campus in St. David's, August 2-4, and gathered in a larger catch of eager learners this year, including 40 first-timers.

The 2019 academy welcomed 167 registrants to an exciting weekend of classes, fellowship, worship, entertainment and hospitality. Most came from the nearby East and South districts, and others from the North and West.

Recent-past academies were held in Quakertown, Cedarville and Reading. Organizers have already decided to return, by popular demand, to Eastern University in 2020, August 1-2, on a new, two-day schedule.

With the theme "Cast Your Net: Gather and Grow," the academy invited attendees to learn ways to find, grow and prepare disciples for God's Kingdom

while navigating the torrents of change in our church and society.

- A mix of 14 new and returning favorite courses included:
- Basic Christ Servant Ministry (CSM) training for members who feel a call to lay ministry and want to understand God's presence, gifts and mission in their lives.
- Speaking (or Hablando) I, a basic speaking, sermon preparation and preaching course offered in English and Spanish. (Also a secondary course: "Preaching by Number")
- Bible Study for 21st Century Learners
- Working With Conflict: Making the Most of Diversity
- Exploring Methodist Theology and Doctrine
- Evangelism and Church Growth
- Ministry in the Margins, about social justice ministry
- Making Every Prayer Count: Moving from ME to WE
- Empowering, engaging and nurturing our aging congregations

Other courses covered modern uses of Spiritual Gifts, Technology for Worship and "Intense Bible Study Games," a new course on engaging "game theory, multiple intelligences, interactive teaching methods and Scripture" to develop



Rev. David Piltz (right) leads a new Laity Academy class on "Intense Bible Study Games."

All photos by John Coleman

creative adult Bible studies.

"The Laity Academy is not just for current CSMs (Christ Servant Ministers)," said Diana Wrisley, lead planner, citing the attendance of 40 first-timers, along with returning students, clergy and Certified Lay Ministers. "We encourage all people to come and experience learning and finding their place in ministry through the academy. It's a fabulous opportunity for the conference members to spend time together learning, worshipping, and enjoying fellowship."

With classes held in three close-by buildings, attendees found comfort and convenience at Eastern University's campus, including the spacious classrooms, dining hall and theater, and

Conference Lay Leader Dave Koch and two District Superintendents—the Revs. Dawn Taylor-Storm and Steve Morton—attended portions of the academy, while nine clergy members taught classes.

The Rev. Rick Wrisley, Academy Dean for the past three years, credited these and other leaders, and the planning team, for helping to "grow the academy" from eight to 14 courses and moving into a university setting, which he described as "both challenging and rewarding. I pray that those who experienced the event this year will spread the news and their perceptions."

Since Wrisley is now a licensed local pastor and must step aside, Diana Wrisley, his wife, will become Dean of the 2020 Laity Academy, which will offer another major change: a two-day, Saturday-to-Sunday schedule on August 1-2.

"The Laity Academy is not just an outreach ministry for us but truly an act of love," she said. My CSM specialties are in Leadership and Education, and being able to offer an event like the Laity Academy is like planning a VBS program for adults. It is for everyone in the conference, laity and clergy. The water is deep for all of us; but knowledge, inspiration and fellowship are always available."

If you are interested in supporting the Laity Academy as an instructor, as a member of the planning team, as musician, or as a prayer partner, contact Diana Wrisley at dianawrisley@verizon.net.



Mission U marks 150 years of UMW in mission

The UM Women's 2019 Mission U, held July 19-20 in Reading, drew over 100 people—mostly women but also men and teens—to their annual, multi-faceted learning adventure. They celebrated the 150th anniversary of the global women's mission organization.

Attendees from dozens of churches learned about UMW's heroic past, present and future as global leaders in mission and advocacy. Other nationally chosen topics, addressing social justice and financial stewardship, were: "Practicing Resurrection: The Gospel of Mark and Radical Discipleship" and "What About Our Money?"

The classes, taught by expert, well-prepared instructors, were full, active and dynamic, including music, ample literature, audiovisual materials, interactive exercises and candid, justice-oriented discussions. Popular pre-conference events included enlightening presentations by several missionaries and preparing school supplies for two outreach ministry agencies.

"It's great to get together as a sisterhood in mission," said Jean Twardzi, Mission U Dean. "We come from various backgrounds and experiences, and that adds to the excitement of our learning and fellowship together. We're truly all about growing our faith, hope and love in action."



Popular musician Warren Cooper leads his Spiritual Jazz Ensemble

hospitality from student assistants. The 10 hours of classes—required for CSM credits—included focused lectures, impassioned student discourse and abundant resources.

The Threefold Blessing choral ensemble again inspired attendees on Friday night. Music producer, band-leader, vocalist and radio host Warren Cooper delighted a small theater crowd with music from his Spiritual Jazz Ensemble on Saturday night.

But the Saturday evening highlight was the surprise presentation of the annual Walter King Award to Aubrey Bates of Bethel UMC in Spring City, a highly regarded, longtime lay ministry leader and teacher across the conference.

Bishop Peggy Johnson,



Aubrey Bates (center) receives the annual Walter King Laity Award from John Paylor (left) and the Rev. Rick Wrisley, Academy Dean.

Conference elects diverse delegates; OKs centrist resolution

BY JOHN W. COLEMAN

The 2019 Eastern PA Annual Conference, meeting June 13-15 in Oaks, Pa., elected eight delegates to represent it at the 2020 General Conference (GC2020), May 5-15, in Minneapolis, and elected eight more delegates to join them at the next Northeastern Jurisdictional (NEJ) Conference in July 2020.

Meanwhile, the annual conference declared itself, by a narrow vote, “a One Church Plan Conference in spirit.” The declaration counters new church laws enforcing restrictions that forbid LGBT members from being married or serving in ordained ministry in United Methodist churches.

Those laws were passed by the Special General Conference in February 2019, where the conservative Traditional Plan narrowly defeated the centrist One Church Plan. The resolution, presented by the Rev. James McIntire, calls for ongoing efforts to embrace LGBTQ people and to support “ministry to, for and with all persons, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.”

“We are broken. We are in disagreement. We are hurting. We are afraid,” read McIntire, pastor of Royersford UMC, in beginning his presentation statement. “We are apologetic to the communities in which we minister. We need healing.”

McIntire cowrote the resolution with the Rev. Lydia Muñoz, his wife who was reelected to General Conference during the session. “We as an Annual Conference say, ‘Do no harm. Do good. And stay in love with God,’” he concluded, quoting John Wesley.

Hotly debated resolution passes by just 66 votes

The hotly debated resolution passed by just 66 votes, after one attempt to alter it with new wording and another to table it indefinitely both failed. When challenged for letting the resolution proceed to a vote despite its disagreement with church law, presiding Bishop Peggy Johnson called the measure “aspirational” and thus admissible, according to a recent UMC Judicial Council ruling. Nonetheless, conference members voted to appeal her decision to the Judicial Council.

The controversial resolution was one of 18 the body approved, while only one was voted down: an attempt to adopt and recommend to the denomination

a modified, more Bible-centered advertising slogan. That resolution, #2019-10, which did receive some support, asked that “Open Bibles” be added to the popular but unofficial UMC slogan “Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors.”



The Rev. James McIntire presents his “One Church Plan Conference” resolution to the annual session. John Coleman photo

The GC2020 primary delegates elected are:

- Clergy: The Revs. Dawn Taylor-Storm; Andrea Brown; Lydia Muñoz; and Johnson Dodla.
- Laity: Judy Ehninger; Krystl Johnson; Ann Jacob; and Lenora Thompson

Taylor-Storm and Ehninger were each elected first. They were also elected first to the 2016 General Conference and coled that delegation in 2016 and 2019.

Six more Eastern PA Conference members were elected as alternates for 2020. (See full list below.) The full delegation is half-clergy and half-laity, as required. Four of the eight GC2020 delegates also represented the conference at General Conferences in 2016 and 2019.

While only one of the eight primary General Conference delegates is male, the entire delegation is diverse in gender, generation—seven are under 40—and race and ethnicity—including Caucasian, African American, Latino and Indian-American members.

The elections took all three days and many ballots to complete, as nominees attracting fewer votes began withdrawing from the balloting to facilitate completion. Five of the 22 delegates were nominated on the floor of the conference or as write-in candidates.

Other resolutions that passed included:

- New temporary rules allowing churches that wish to disaffiliate from the conference and denomination by December 31, 2023, to retain their properties under certain conditions and in compliance with annual conference policies and protocols. Those protocols include paying all apportioned obligations and remittances due, and satisfying prescribed clergy pension

obligations. Resolution 2019-19L temporarily supersedes rules adopted by the 2015 Annual Conference when Wesley UMC Quarryville left the denomination and was able to take its heavily mortgaged church building at a cost.

- Resolution #2019-18L, also requires compliance with the Book of Discipline’s new ¶2553 mandate that allows a church to disaffiliate from the UMC after paying its “withdrawal liability in an amount equal to its pro rata share of any aggregate unfunded pension obligations to the annual conference.”

The recently reconstituted Healing the Wounds of Racism (HWR) Core Accountability Team will again supervise all required mandated training to help clergy, lay ministers and conference staff understand and help to dismantle racism through their ministries. That training will now include basic and advanced courses, still provided by the current training firm Visions, Inc. (Resolutions #2019-9, #2019-11 and #2019-15.)

- Approving Resolution #2019-14, the conference agreed to advocate for protection of and respect for Native American land rights based on treaties between Native tribes and the U.S. government.

Other approved resolutions addressed economic, pension and health care concerns of clergy retirees, plus updated housing allowance and equitable compensation amounts for active pastors. Two recently closed churches (Diamond UMC in Hazleton and CC Hancock UMC in Springfield, Pa.) were discontinued. And 10 Advance Special mission projects were approved for local church funding.



The Rev. Tim Fisher offers a substitute motion to the “One Church Plan Conference” resolution, as a group of supporters waited to speak for the resolution. Fisher’s motion did not pass. John Coleman photo

Thanks to passage of Resolution 2019-02, organized clusters of neighboring churches working together in mission, known as “Mission ConneXions” since 2013, are now “EPA Mission Links.” The name change is in response to a copyright challenge by a national mission training and support agency based in Oregon.

The final vote taken, on Resolution #2019-17, came quickly, with limited debate, in the waning moments before a time-mandated adjournment at 5 PM on Saturday. Members affirmed asking the denomination to allow all local pastors and provisional clergy—including those who have not completed seminary or the course of study—as well as student pastors to be eligible for election as delegates to General and Jurisdictional conferences and allowed to vote on constitutional amendments.

The changes would be made to the UM Constitution and Discipline if first approved by the 2020 General Conference and then by an aggregate of two-thirds of annual conferences.

Delegates elected to GC2020 and to the NE Jurisdictional Conference 2020:

- Clergy: The Revs. Dawn Taylor-Storm; Andrea Brown; Lydia Muñoz; and Johnson Dodla.
- Laity: Judy Ehninger; Krystl Johnson; Ann Jacob; and Lenora Thompson

Delegates elected to the NE Jurisdictional Conference 2020:

- Clergy: The Revs. Robin Hynicka; Daniel Lebo; Edward Locke Cameron; Hannah Bonner
- Laity: David Koch; Samuel Longmire; Clarita Anderman Krall; Elizabeth Fisher

Alternate delegates elected:

- Clergy: The Revs. Christopher J. Kurien; Mandy Miller; Monica Guepet
- Laity: Matthew Calderone; Kristine Adams; Susan Grimm Mattox



2019 Annual Conference Photographers: Sabrina Daluisio, James Mundell, Paul Davis, John Coleman, Steward Warner, Mandy Bartkowski

Young adult speakers reveal what to 'tell the coming generation'

BY JOHN W. COLEMAN

Three young adult speakers featured at the Eastern PA Annual Conference, June 13-15, evoked its theme, "Tell to the Coming Generation" (from Psalm 78), by telling their older peers what the younger, "coming generation" needs to hear.

Krystl Johnson, a young, seasoned leader of youth and adults at St. Daniel's UMC Chester and a returning delegate to General Conference, spoke first at the annual Laity Session June 13, that preceded the start of the annual session.

Samuel Longmire, youth minister at First UMC Lancaster, spoke on stage during the opening worship, while other young adult voices were heard via video recordings.

And campus minister **Derrick Laruth Scott III** provided a powerful, 90-minute teaching session the next morning, June 14. He is Executive Director of the Campus to City Wesley Foundation (CCW), serving college-aged young adults on three campuses in Northeast Florida.

The three millennials (the generation born 1981-1996) each work closely with post-millennial youth and/or young adults, engaging them in relationships and diverse ministries, through which to reach, listen and speak into their lives. They advised their listeners to do likewise.

Each speaker suggested what young people need and want to hear. They urged conference members to provide honest, compassionate, intentional guidance that patiently meets young adults where they are and helps them grow to where Christ wants them to be.

Samuel Longmire

Longmire emphasized the impact such guidance can have when it comes through intergenerational relationships. He recalled learning that as a sophomore at Lancaster Bible College, when a retired minister engaged him in a chat over lunch in the school dining hall.

The college allowed such non-staff retirees to hang out there to listen and talk to, pray with and befriend young students. Their hope was to "personally invest in the daily lives of students in whatever ways they could," offering guidance and moral support.

Longmire's encounter with "Jim" did lead to a trusted friendship, in which the mentor impacted the young student with "his deep love for God and contagious passion for the gospel." Longmire learned from Jim how to develop and witness to his faith among others on campus and in the community.

"Jim was the one who motivated me to seek and walk with God," Longmire recalled, "not because of some specific thing he said that stuck with me but because of the overall testimony of his life: a testimony that pointed straight to God..."

The youth pastor concluded from his and other testimonies that "intergenerational ministry is most effective within intentional, personal relationships," in which older generations can "tell the coming generation" about God through "the testimony of their lives and ...the ways that they have seen God work."

He recommended, for example "marriage mentoring" that pairs "older, godly married couples" with young newlyweds for guidance.

The division of young and older adults in separate age-level ministries is "a deterrent to substantial, genuine relationships between generations," Longmire explained. He called for more informal relationships and intergenerational ministries "so that testimonies of God can easily move from generation to generation."

Krystl Johnson

Krystl Johnson titled her Pentecost-themed Laity Session address "The FAQs (as in Frequently Avoided Questions): A Millennial Update."

"The church hates us! Why does it hate us?" she asked on behalf of young people. She is St. Daniel's UMC's youth ministry coordinator and also chairs its Administrative Council. "I have stopped counting the meetings I've attended where young people are trampled for not being present and not being pleasant.... That clanging chorus of complaints is the sound of a church that is running and hiding from its responsibility to tell, teach or show the coming generation anything."

Johnson is Executive Director of the Delaware County Pregnancy Center in Chester. She also serves on the UMC's General Board of Higher Education and Ministry. She represented the conference as a delegate to the 2016 General and Jurisdictional conferences and will do so again in 2020.

"When we override the coming generation's advocacy interests by ignoring the social and economic injustices within our own conference and communities, or by failing to take up platforms to challenge them, we are running and hiding," she told the assembled laity. "When we choose not to mentor and train up our young people because 'he' doesn't do anything without earphones around his neck and 'she' is always twerkin', tweetin', or talkin' on her phone, we are

running and hiding."

Johnson called on her audience to "maintain personal and spiritual accountability for the actions, behavior and mindsets of our younger brothers and sisters in Christ."

"The next generation is supposed to bring regeneration. Yet, the church is still dying. We have become our own silent killer," she asserted. "The church is not holding people accountable for their actions, and it has failed to practice Christian correction. When I think of what causes silent killers like drug addiction, HIV, and human trafficking to run rampant in our communities, it is because people choose to be hush hush, when they could be helping and holding people accountable to their available resources, rights, and responsibilities. We can't run and hide from the truth."

A doctoral student at Evangelical Seminary in Myerstown, Johnson cited Psalm 78 as a call to the church to "assert its Biblical authority and accountability" and to "love its young people enough to speak to their unruliness and unfaithful hearts."

She said the coming generation wants a church that provides them with community and acceptance for who they are, as well as opportunities to serve and change the world. "But they also need a church that will challenge them to be more than what they are... to grow into the people the Lord wants them to be."

Cautioning her listeners that young people today often don't answer phone calls and prefer text messages and tweets with visual emojis, memes, snaps and gifs, Johnson said, "Our young people can go an entire day communicating without ever using anything we, as an older generation, would recognize to be a real word." Still, she said, we should proclaim the gospel with our lives, manifesting the popular

adage, "Preach the gospel at all times, and when necessary, use words."

Derrick Scott

Derrick Scott, in his teaching session, focused less on telling the coming generation and more on listening to help them discern and respond to their life mission. He has directed the Florida Conference's Campus to City ministry for eight years, serving students at the University of North Florida, Jacksonville University and Flagler College. Previously, he directed collegiate ministries and music at CrossRoad UMC, a small but vibrant church in Jacksonville.

Scott shared stories and insights about some of the young people he has engaged in his work, helping them to hear God's voice, identify their life quests and gradually step into ministry leadership roles, including seminary for some. He used various scriptures to reflect their need for relevant biblical and spiritual interpretation to understand the Christian faith and how it can relate meaningfully to their lives.

"Who's going after them?" he asked. "We need to be the church that's willing to go after them and sit with them as they discern their call."

However, he cautioned listeners about the growing trend of public denominational conflicts, exclusionary policies and talk of schism that can turn many young people away from the church. "They may not be in your churches, but they are watching what you say and do.... What we do as the church, the way we are, how we handle our differences do affect the next generation."

Scott emphasized the importance of being available, patient, imaginative and flexible to communicate with young adults on their own terms. That can mean lots of candid chats in cafés and bars, he said, asking questions like, "How is it with your soul?" and "What's the last thing you heard God say to you?"

Reaching the next generation "can take a lot of time and energy...and more

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than a 10-hour-a-week part-time staff," he said, quoting Florida Area Bishop Kenneth Carter: "We need to overinvest in the next generation."

Active in young adult ministry for 17 years, Scott said being serious about such ministry requires a willingness to

change how we do things and why. Yet, he said, "I can't tell you how many times a young person has told me, 'I need someone older to sit with me...and tell me the history of the church.'"

NOTE: Annual Conference recordings of two featured young adult speakers' presentations, which were video livestreamed,

may be viewed on the conference website's **Annual Conference 2019** page. **Samuel Longmire's** speech is in video segment #1 at 16:47. **Derrick Scott's** presentation is in video segments #10 and #11. Longmire's speech and **Krystl Johnson's** Laity Session speech, which was not video livestreamed or recorded, may both be read on the

Annual Conference 2019 page.

Additionally, you can also read Krystl Johnson's speech, "Re-envisioning the Global Church," presented to the Wesleyan Covenant Association Northeastern Regional Meeting, May 11, 2019, at Washington Crossing UMC. Find it in our website's From Pulpit & Pew blog section..

Conference honors exemplary leaders, churches

BY JOHN W. COLEMAN

Among the largest groups who come on stage during Annual Conference are people recognized for exemplary ministries over the past year or over a lifetime. A remarkable gathering of such "good and faithful servants" filled the stage June 14 for the 2019 session's presentations of awards.

The 2019 Eastern PA Annual Conference gave its annual Harry Denman Awards for Evangelism to three leaders and its annual One Matters Award to one remarkably fast-growing church. But it also honored both a longtime, retired clergy member and a group of urban churches by presenting them all with a new urban ministry award named in his honor.

Suzette James of the conference Congregational Development Team presented The Harry Denman Awards for Evangelism to:

- The Rev. Steve Morton, North District Superintendent, who received the clergy Denman Award for his 21 years of pastoral leadership at Hopewell UMC in Downingtown. James credited his exemplary "team-based approach to ministry, commitment to community engagement and international missions, children's and youth ministries, and Lenten Bible studies shared across the connection." Morton left Hopewell to become a district superintendent in 2018.
- Carrie Argro, a Certified Lay Minister at St. Daniel's UMC in Chester, who received the laity Denman Award for leading prayer teams throughout the church's community and "meeting neighbors where they are" to address their spiritual and social needs. She is helping to lead St. Daniel's new Hope Point community development initiative at the former Trinity UMC

Chester.

- Jose Tirado Jr., of Cristo Rey UMC in Grove, who received the youth Denman Award for his "love and passion and radical hospitality" and for "sharing his personal testimony countless times," said James. The personable high school senior is president of the Conference Council on Youth Ministry.

Haven-Peniel UMC in Philadelphia received the One Matters Award, delivered to the annual conference by Jeff Campbell, Associate General Secretary of UM Discipleship Ministries, which provides the plaque and a \$1,000 monetary award.

"The One Matters Discipleship Award lifts up churches that move from zero baptisms and professions of faith into positive numbers, as they begin to focus on intentional discipleship" Campbell explained. "We ask what they are doing differently that is helping them to turn things around by God's grace."



The Rev. William Brawner and Mildred Lillieoff Haven-Peniel UMC Philadelphia receive the One Matters Award from the Rev. Tracy Bass and Jeff Campbell of Discipleship Ministries.

The Rev. Tracy Bass, East District Superintendent, presented the award to the Rev. William Brawner, pastor, and several of his members. He cited the congregation's innovative ministries "that have reached beyond the church walls" in the past two years to attract numerous young people and

address local concerns, including neighborhood gentrification and gun violence. Meanwhile, he said, "Haven-Peniel has baptized 40 people."

But the climax of the awards ceremony this year was the new Herbert E. Palmer Award for Urban Ministry, named for a venerable, retired former pastor, district superintendent and



The Rev. Herbert E. Palmer, standing with his wife Peggy Palmer, is honored by the Annual Conference for his many years of ministry and leadership. A new Urban Ministries Award was also named in his honor.

executive director of Metro Ministries revered by many as an elder statesman among clergy in the conference.

The Rev. Herbert E. Palmer, 94, became a pastor in 1963, was ordained in 1965 and retired in 1994. But he unretired numerous times to respond to the need for his leadership of urban churches and ministries.

Bishop Peggy Johnson and the Rev. Anita Powell, Director of Connectional Ministries, together honored Palmer for his "tireless service, impact and influence" on the conference, especially among African American clergy and laity.

"I have enjoyed being a pastor, preacher and worker in the church for God," said the humble clergyman, who was greeted by a standing ovation. "I have been blessed to fellowship and work with a lot of people; and whatever I have accomplished has been because of so many people who held me up, taught me, guided me and made me keep on going when I felt like stopping."

Palmer is the father of Philadelphia native and Ohio West Area Bishop Gregory V. Palmer, who offered his personal congratulations in a surprise video greeting at the close of the awards ceremony.

The first urban

ministry awards in Palmer's name were presented, on behalf of the Urban Commission, by the Rev. William Brawner, conference Urban Ministries Coordinator, to three urban church partnerships, called Urban Alliances, and to one individual Urban Initiative church.

Herbert E. Palmer Urban Ministry Awards

- MANIFEST Urban Alliance (Lancaster, West District) Provides access to warm, safe, dry, decent, affordable housing to economically disadvantaged Lancaster residents.

- Salem and Asbury UMCs Urban Alliance (Allentown, North District) Food pantry serving 300-500 families twice a month.

- Wharton-Wesley and Calvary UMCs Urban Alliance (Philadelphia, South District) Educational enrichments programs using theater and science for children in underserved areas in West Philadelphia.

- Bickley's New Beginning UMC Urban Initiative (Philadelphia, East District) reach children through music ministry, operate a monthly food pantry and young women's outreach initiative reaching over a hundred impoverished women, plus a community issues awareness program.



Suzette James (from left) presented the 2019 Harry Denman Award to the Rev. Steve Morton, Jose Tirado Jr. and Carrie Argro.



The Rev. William Brawner, Urban Ministries Coordinator, presents the new Herbert E. Palmer Award for Urban Ministry to (clockwise from top-right): the Rev. Jackie Stewart, with her husband Thomas Stewart, of Bickley's New Beginning UMC Philadelphia; Correen Russo and Frances Keller of MANIFEST Lancaster; the Rev. Navin Satyavrata of Salem UMC Allentown; and Lenora Thompson of Wharton-Wesley UMC Philadelphia.

All photos by Sabrina DaLuisio.

Conference summer camps impact, transform lives

BY JOHN W. COLEMAN

"God's Place Apart, Transforming Lives." At the Eastern PA Conference's four Camp & Retreat Centers the truth of that motto is most abundantly clear during the 7 of 9 weeks of summer camp.

Diane Deemer shared her life-transformation story with us, responding to our July appeal for summer camp memories. She attended Pocono Plateau's summer camp in 1967.

"I grew up in the church, loved Jesus, attended Billy Graham meetings; but I just couldn't connect. It didn't feel real," she recalled. "Then came the week of summer camp in '67. We were having a vesper service behind the brick dormitory. The pastor who was speaking was telling us how to 'know' Jesus.

"Then he said, 'It's a relationship.'

Suddenly, it was as if fireworks were exploding! A RELATIONSHIP! Jesus loves me! I can love Him! Not the idea of Him, but the real, living Jesus! As the old hymn says, 'joy flooded my soul.'

"That was over 50 years ago, and the joy is as exciting today as it was then. I'm so grateful for the camping ministry. I know I'm not the only camper who found the Lord there!"

Sleeping in tents and cabins. Swimming and boating in lakes. Playing zany, creative games. Zip lining. Rock climbing. Getting up close and personal with animals and critters. Roasting marshmallows at dusk. Singing and laughing. Discovering new talents and abilities. Meeting new friends.

The amazing fun and fellowship our summer camps offer to thousands of young people yearly, surrounded by the sheer beauty of Creation in full bloom,



is simply indescribable. But the faith formation many of them undergo is unforgettable.

Served and guided by hundreds of staff, counselors and volunteers, many campers are still discovering and deepening their relationship with Jesus Christ and finding their lives transformed in that perfect retreat setting known as "God's Place Apart."

Carson Simpson Farm

Carson Simpson Farm Christian Camp (CSF) celebrated 100 years this summer of being that special place apart for generations of campers. With nearly 1,300 campers, their highlights included a visit from the Peaceable Kingdom traveling zoo, a July 4th parade, learning sign language with the Sign Out Loud troupe, the Ultimate Human Game Show, Puppets Pizzazz and their closing Super Hero Farewell Carnival.

Their first Jr. Chef Class, taught by the camp's cooks, was a huge hit, said Meg Neitz, who has managed CSF with her husband Ray Neitz for over two decades. They celebrated the camp's centennial with a Family Night of fun activities, including Belgian horse and wagon rides, just like those offered back in 1919.

Meanwhile, their daily Bible studies and Disciple devotions evoked their theme, "Faithful: Celebrating 100 Years of God's Faithfulness." And young campers raised \$700 for the annual "CSF Kids Give Back" project—this year to aid Willow Grove UMC's participation in the Appalachian Service Project.

Gretna Glen

Gretna Glen increased its attendance this year, welcoming 1,135 campers— including 371 first-timer—to its 60th season of hosting

summer adventures. Those adventures included trips to the Ninja Warrior Gym, tubing behind a motorboat on a lake, paddling a canoe down the Swatara Creek, and learning archery, yoga, animal care and other healthy skills.

The 43 overnight and daytime programs, each with its own thematic "twist," gathered campers spanning in age from 4 to 76, including the Grandparents and Me Camp that several sites offer. Apryl Miller, director, is grateful for "the support of our community, participating churches and campers' families."

Campers and staff also enjoyed Hillside Haven, the new Bible Discovery site. And with "Peace Works" as this year's theme for daily study and discussion, campers learned about the nature and nurture of peace in today's multicultural but conflict-ridden world, including practical ways to make it a part of our lives.

Innabah

Innabah hosted 27 overnight camps and over 540 campers, including over 175 newbies. Volunteers helped install a new ADA (American Disabilities Act)-friendly playground and also a new, comfy Hammock Village for rest and relaxation.

"Our Experiments and Explosions Camp was a blast," reports Michael Hyde, director, offering one of several painful puns in his report. Also popular were Children's Hilltop and Youth Hilltop camps, Archery Camp, the inaugural Dance Camp and several Family Camps. The several Challenge Camps, a longtime staple, offer participants with intellectual disabilities rich opportunities to experience camp activities and learn more about God. Some have attended this favorite camp for decades.

The camp celebrated Christ daily, but especially on Sunday evenings with guest preachers to share weekly messages of faith. Worship after supper featured preaching by Bishop Peggy Johnson, the Revs. Diana Esposito (Deacon), Sue Ketterer, Jim McIntire, Mark

Continued on page 13—CAMPS



Conference youth grateful for journey to Youth 2019

Eleven youth, 6th to 12th-graders, and three adults from the Eastern PA UMC Conference trekked to Kansas City, Mo., July 8-15, to join thousands of their peers at **Youth 2019**, July 10-14, a quadrennial, national convocation of United Methodist youth and youth leaders. Together they explored and celebrated Christian discipleship, worship, Bible study and mission service, all under the theme “Love Well.”

The nearly 18-hour, 1,100-mile journey through five states in a 15-passenger van was a costly adventure made possible by generous donors who provided supplies and much-needed funds. “Every donation was a blessing, and our Conference Council on Youth Ministries (CCYM) extends grateful hearts to all those who donated to this trip,” said the Rev. David Piltz, Conference Coordinator of Youth Ministries.

The most meaningful experience to CCYM president Joseph Tirado Jr. was “being able to worship with others who

were excited to worship. That allowed me to feel God’s presence.”

Another youth said hearing a speaker talk about his own childhood “made me know I’m not alone in my struggle.” And another spoke for many in expressing thanks for being given the opportunity “to change my life so I can help change other lives in the name of Christ.”

“Our youth opened up to share their challenges as teens living with single parents and struggling with friendships, body image, death, peer pressure and not feeling loved,” said Piltz. Associate Youth Ministries Coordinator Jezerel Gutierrez and Jose Torres both joined Piltz as adult leaders on the trip.

“We listened, supported, prayed for them and role-modeled what it means to ‘Love Well.’ The Eastern PA UMC Conference is blessed to have adult youth leaders everywhere ready to do whatever it takes to help

youth personally experience God and the redeeming love of Jesus Christ.

Read more about this youth

experience on our website and see photos and see EPAC Youth 2019 photos on our Flickr page.



CAMPS--continued from page 12.

Moore, Dawn Taylor-Storm, and Jason Perkowski.

Pocono Plateau

Pocono Plateau drew 590 campers to 23 camps, offering several new fun features. Mystery Quest an escape-room style camp, delighted and challenged campers to use their minds to complete puzzles, open locks and solve mysteries.

The Human Foosball Court, built by volunteers, offered a life-size version of the popular table game. And Garbage Graveyard, a Creation Care teaching tool, helped campers understand the need to reduce, reuse and recycle waste to decrease the amount discarded daily.

“In today’s culture, summer camp still provides children and youth with

opportunities to experience an authentic Christian community surrounded by God’s creation,” said the Rev. Ron Schane, director. “Campers can be themselves while enjoying fun activities, making new friends and creating memories that can last a lifetime.

“Removed from the noise and distractions of their everyday life, they can reflect on the Word of God and grow in their relationship with Jesus. God’s still small voice can impact them in mighty ways.”

NEWSpirit Communications thanks all four Camp & Retreat Center directors and staffs for providing information and comments about their summer camps and for their hospitality during staff visits.



Pocono Plateau

Disaster Response training, 9/21 More ERT Volunteers needed

The Eastern PA Conference Disaster Response Ministry (DRM) will sponsor a Emergency Response Team training on Saturday, Sept. 21, from 8 AM to 4 PM, at Grove UMC, 490 W Boot Road, West Chester, PA.

The early fall training event, offered locally several times a year, is open to all. It offers training for initial response after disasters, not the later recovery work done by UM Volunteers in Mission (UMVIM) teams. Grove UMC is the latest church to partner with the conference DRM as a training host.

The mission of Early Response Teams (ERTs) is to provide skilled support to disaster survivors as soon as communities allow response teams into disaster-impacted areas. Robert Simcox, the conference’s Disaster Response Coordinator, will lead the ERT training. Contact him at drc@epaumc.org or 610-427-0470.

The training cost is only \$25 per person and includes a training manual, other materials, a light breakfast and lunch. Trainees will receive a ERT badge after completion.

Early Response Teams are “background-checked, badged, trained and motivated to be a caring, listening Christian presence,” said Simcox. “You will learn how early responders prevent

further damage by tarping roofs, stabilizing structure, and clearing out debris and water-soaked materials.

ERTs know how to prepare a structure for UMVIM recovery teams to do their work and how to “provide hope to desperate survivors that God’s people do care about their lives and their homes,” Simcox explained.

“The goal is for you to have a better understanding of the roles of team members and the ‘team’ as a whole, the concepts of ‘prevent further damage’ and ‘do no harm,’ and an understanding of where ERT fits into the disaster response process. We will also cover the importance of safety and the importance of listening.

“Presently we have a shortage of trained and badged ERT’s in our conference,” said Simcox. “We are looking to grow the ERT ministry to be able to respond as quickly as possible in our own neighborhoods and beyond when disaster strikes.”



EarthKeepers trained in environmental stewardship

BY JOHN W. COLEMAN

Marion Grayson and her church, Cokesbury UMC in Marcus Hook, Pa., are seeking new ideas to help feed their community, a place with plenty of working-poor families but a lack of good-quality, affordable food.

And she may have found some new ideas during a visit to The People's Garden, managed by Serenity House in

North Philadelphia (1201 W Lehigh Ave.), thanks to training offered by the EarthKeepers program of United Methodist Global Ministries.

Arch Street UMC in Philadelphia hosted the August 8-11 training, which included the visit to Serenity House, its extended community outreach ministry. Grayson was one of 22 trainees of EarthKeepers, a three-year-old program that equips United Methodist clergy and laity in the U.S. to engage in environmental projects in their churches and communities.

Six participants live or work in Eastern PA. Others came from the Susquehanna Conference and from New Jersey, Maryland, Washington DC, Tennessee and North Georgia. They learned about eco-theology, community organizing for social change, anti-racism, project planning and

other aspects of environmental justice and stewardship, along with protecting and caring for God's Creation. Global Ministries covered their training and lodging expenses for the event.

Participants had to examine and articulate an understanding of themselves and their communities in regard to the environmental challenges they want to address, as well as strategic methods, resources, potential partnerships and desired outcomes.

Grayson described Marcus Hook's poverty and lack of grocery stores—making it a “food desert”—but also her church's nutritional survival ministries, which include providing neighbors with a food pantry, community fellowship suppers on first Sundays, “budget meals in a bag,” and its summer Lunch & Learn program for children. Now, she wants to help the church develop a community garden and train neighbors how to plan, grow, harvest and manage their own plots.

Other EarthKeepers trainees will explore developing community gardens but also increasing home use of solar energy, encouraging recycling and waste management, advocacy for environmental justice and teaching stress management and other self-care skills to busy peers. Some may apply for small grants from UMCOR (United Methodist

Committee on Relief), which administers the EarthKeepers program for Global Ministries.

“Our participants came from a variety of economic, racial and theological backgrounds, and they were curious about and respectful of each other's stories and perspectives,” said the Rev. Jenny Phillips (left), UMCOR's Creation Care Program Manager.

The training offers a strong focus on racial prejudice, white privilege, environmental racism, and other forms of oppression. The Philadelphia training was the seventh and most diverse one yet, said Phillips. “We became more deeply aware of the work we need to do to build the Beloved Community—a society described by Martin Luther King Jr. as one in which all share in the fruits of creation without discrimination.”

The next EarthKeepers training events are in Austin, Texas, Sept 26-29, (deadline to apply is August 23) and in Chicago, Oct 24-27 (deadline to apply is Sept. 16). Learn more at www.umcmmission.org/earthkeepers.



Eastern PA participants joined other EarthKeepers trainees in caring for Serenity House's community garden, a ministry of Arch Street UMC. From left are: Chris Foster, the Rev. Marsena Mungin, Rebecca Parsons, Marion Grayson, the Rev. Tom Lank and Gretchen Boger. Lank, a Deacon in the Greater New Jersey Conference, lives and works in the Philadelphia area. John Coleman photo.

Training disciples to share their faith through sacraments

Mount Zion UMC in Philadelphia hosted the Eastern PA Conference's sixth **Four Stations of the Holy Spirit** training event July 20, extending a growing initiative to teach and embolden lay members to offer sacramental prayer to one another and to neighbors beyond their church doors.

The itinerating, half-day training drew attendees from several churches, including nearby Haven-Peniel UMC. Conference Congregational Development Team (CDT) leaders, the Revs. Mike Netznik, chairman, and Gordon Hendrickson, coordinator, led the training. The Rev. Elena Ortiz, pastor of Nuevo Nacimiento (New Birth) UMC in Lebanon joined them to offer the training in Spanish if needed.

Four Stations teaches lay people to 1) pray one-on-one with others; 2) anoint others with oil; 3) serve Communion (with pre-consecrated elements) wherever and whenever people need it; and 4) help those in search of “newness of life” in Christ to affirm their baptism. Some clergy also attend, eager to introduce the ministry to their congregations.

The sacramental teachings are rooted in biblical theology and our Wesleyan heritage of empowering lay evangelism. There are always candid questions, concerns, opinions, suggestions and testimonies. Participants also engage in

practice sessions, anointing and sharing Communion with each other.

“What continues to amaze me is how the Holy Spirit always shows up, especially when we do the anointing, reaffirmation of baptism, and Communion,” said Hendrickson. “It truly is a mystery how much power there is in these elements when used as an extension of prayer and when people are open to receiving the power of the Holy Spirit.”

CDT member and conference Associate Lay Leader Suzette James was pleased to help host the training at her church. “One of the biggest takeaways is the opportunity to look at the sacraments from the point of serving others,” she said. “Adding

this experience to one's personal witness gives laity a transformative feeling that makes them want to share more with others. It's about making disciples who can share their faith in tangible ways.”

The next Four Stations training will be Nov. 2 at Netznik's church, Covenant UMC in Bath Township.



The three clergy leaders of Four Stations of the Holy Spirit training events pray with attendees at the July 20 event at Mt. Zion UMC in Philadelphia. Shown clockwise from top-right are: the Revs. Mike Netznik (left); the Rev. Elena Ortiz (left); and the Rev. Gordon Hendrickson (right). John Coleman photos

Latino Camp celebrates faith, family, fun

Nearly 75 children and youth, from 3rd to 12th-graders, came from Latino churches across the Eastern PA Conference to revel in learning, laughter, love of nature, lessons of life, heart-lifting worship and loads of fun at Latino Camp June 30 to July 5. Next year the annual camp turns 40 years young.

Hosted for many years by Gretna Glen Camp & Retreat Center in Lebanon, they used its "Peacemakers" summer camp curriculum for children. Meanwhile, various leaders taught classes in leadership development for youth and parenting skills for adults.

Topics included stewardship, preaching, faith-sharing, prayer and meditation, social media, UM church structure, and liturgical dance with flags and mime. High-spirited worship, with inspired preaching, music and testimony climaxed each evening. July 4th featured annual Family Day fun and festivities, including special Latino food provided by Nuevo Nacimiento (New Birth) UMC in Lebanon.

Madeline Gonzalez-Lopez and the Rev. Angel Lopez, who serve Nueva Creacion (New Creation) UMC in Lancaster,

co-led the camp, while Joseph Torres and Jezerel Gutierrez coordinated programming for youth and children. About a dozen other lay and clergy members of the Latino Commission volunteered to teach classes, facilitate activities and serve in other ways.

The closing presentations made by each cabin-group interpreted the week's highlights and important lessons learned in creative, often hilarious ways, according to the Rev. Luky Cotto, who brought 21 children and youth from her church, Casa del Pueblo in Hatboro, Pa.



Photo by Jezerel Gutierrez.

"The Latino camp program is a celebration of all that is good," said Apryl Miller, Director of Gretna Glen, which supports the camp yearly with staff help, scholarships and amenities.

"Pastors, church leaders, parents all come alongside their children and youth during this impactful week to raise them up in their faith journey and build healthy relationships. Their investment is more valuable than we know for the future of the church, and it all happens with God's love through the camp experience."

Latino caucus addresses U.S., UMC conflicts

Racism, gun violence, the immigration crisis and internal clashes in The United Methodist Church were discussed at the 48th annual assembly of the Hispanic-Latino United Methodist caucus Aug. 1-4, in Philadelphia.

"We know that Hispanic-Latino ministries are going to be impacted by any of the decisions taken by the 2020 General Conference," said Bishop Elias Galvan, Executive Director of Methodists Associated Representing the Cause of Hispanic-Latino Americans. "So, it is essential that the caucus take the voice of our people to General Conference."

MARCHA, founded in 1971, is an unofficial UM organization that promotes

concerns, contributions and cultural values of Hispanic-Latino people in the church and in society. "We condemn the current immigration laws for being inhuman, immoral, unfair, insensitive and racist, because they challenge the human dignity of the poorest and oppressed," said the Rev. Joel Hortiales, MARCHA's Director of Advocacy.

"What is happening in our country is deeply painful," said the Rev. Dorlimar Lebrón of New York during a sermon. She recited the names of young immigrants who have died recently in the U.S. government's custody.

During devotions one morning, mylar space blankets like those used in immigration detention centers were displayed and distributed to symbolize overcrowding and human rights violations of detained migrants, especially children. The 129 members present prayed for those subjected to abuse and injustice in their home countries and here.

The assembly also looked at the denomination's divisive views about including or excluding LGBTQ persons from ordained ministry and marriage. They considered the probability of schism in 2020 and various plans of reorganization being presented.

In 2018 MARCHA officially supported the One Church Plan, which would have allowed churches and conferences to decide their own policies. That choice led some conservative members to withdraw from the caucus.

Presenters at this meeting analyzed

biblical and theological perspectives on the church's internal conflicts and its loss of membership.

"Enough talking about the church is dying...because of secularity, postmodernity or homosexuals," said the Rev. Edilberto Lopez-Rodríguez, a seminary professor in Puerto Rico. "It is dying because we are not on mission, for lack of passion for Jesus Christ...(and) because we are not living or ministering in social holiness."

The Rev. Luky Cotto of Eastern PA joined two other members in sharing their views and experiences after the 2019 Special General Conference. Together, they broke a clay vessel to symbolize the impact of decisions made on them, their ministries and relationships.



Photo by Michelle Maldonado, UMCOM.

In a discussion of various options for the church's future and possible effects on Hispanic-Latino ministries, 60 percent of attendees chose to "stay, resist and transform the church." One-fourth preferred to dissolve and create a new

In Memoriam

Full death notices are available at www.epaumc.org/death-notice

The Rev. Edgar W. Donnon, Jr.

The Rev. Edgar W. Donnon, Jr., 73, of West Bradford, passed from this life July 29, 2019. As a fulltime local pastor, he served in the following appointments: Feltonville UMC 1982-1988; and Pomeroy UMC 1998-2007. He was a member of Hopewell UMC in Downingtown.

Rev. Donnon is survived by his wife Patricia A. Donnon, after 58 years of marriage, and by three adult children: Jo-Anne D. Blank and husband Lee; Edward "Ted" Donnon and wife Lisa; and George Donnon and wife Deborah. He also leaves seven grandchildren and five great grandchildren.

The Rev. Bill Keeler

The Rev. William J. Keeler, a retired elder, passed away on July 12, 2019.

Rev. Keeler served the following Eastern PA Conference churches: New London, Marshallton, Quarryville: Memorial, and Telford: Grace.

He is survived by his wife, Mrs. Mary E. Keeler. Expressions of sympathy may be sent to her at 527 Park Avenue, N304 Dyrness Building, Quarryville, PA 17566.

The Rev. Carol V. Lawfer

The Rev. Carol V. Lawfer, retired elder, passed away on June 9. She served the following Eastern PA Churches, until her retirement in 2012: Lansford, Summit Hill, Berne: Salem-Berne, and Hazleton: Diamond.

Rev. Lawfer is survived by her husband, Mr. Norwood H. Lawfer, and her children-Nathan Lawfer, Brian Lawfer, and Laura Orr. Expressions of sympathy may be sent to Mr. Norwood H. Lawfer at 2653 Route 737, Kempton PA 19529.

denomination. And 10 percent wanted the U.S. to become a regional body like the non-U.S. central conferences.

MARCHA will ask General Conference 2020 to extend the National Plan for Hispanic-Latino Ministries into the next quadrennium and to increase the UMC's missionary collaboration and development efforts in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The caucus honored the Rev. Lydia Muñoz of Eastern PA, a 25-year member, with its Latino Excellence Award for "embodying MARCHA's values and commitment" in her life and ministry.

This story was adapted from a UM News story, "MARCHA: Hispanic-Latino voice needed at GC2020," by the Rev. Gustavo Vasquez. Content about the Rev. Lydia Muñoz was added.



Rev. Lydia Muñoz

Walking the 'Good Road' Together

BY VERNA COLLIVER*

"They never taught us that stuff in school." That comment was heard after Sherry Wack spoke at the Native American Ministry Sunday (NAMS) celebration at Christ UMC Lansdale in May. It was their first service intended to create awareness of the gifts and contributions of Native Americans in our society.

Christ UMC received the NAMS offering, one of the UMC's six churchwide Special Sunday offerings. It funds scholarships for Native American UM seminarians, ministries in Native American churches and communities, and outreach and education in annual conferences like ours.

We celebrate churches in our conference that support this important cause, including those we recognized at Annual Conference in June. We celebrate churches that implement special worship services and activities and that use resources provided by the UMC and our conference Committee on Native American Ministries (CoNAM).

At **Bickley's New Beginning UMC**

in Philadelphia Karen Boyd used information from www.umcgiving.org to share some challenges and joys Native Americans experience in their lives. As the church's CONAM Representative she said, "I just love my role. I am always looking for something new about Native Americans to share with the congregation."

When Sherry Wack, conference CoNAM co-chair, spoke at **Grove UMC** she focused on the widespread oppression and displacement that have affected Native Americans politically, spiritually, physically and socially, both in history and presently. Challenges range from boarding schools, like the one in Carlisle PA that iconic Native American athlete Jim Thorpe attended, to today's controversial, demeaning Native American names and mascots still used by many academic and professional sports teams.

At **Linwood Heights UMC** the Rev. Ethel Guy planned a service that included an audio podcast of Native American local pastor Terry Wildman telling the story of "The Fall of Man." During the Children's Time, a lay member taught about the four directions of

Native American culture and connected that belief to our relationship with Christ.

First UMC of Germantown (FUMCOG) in Philadelphia, invited Cynthia Wilks-Mosley from St. John UMC in Bridgeton, N.J., the closest Native American UM congregation to our conference. She shared the history of the Lenape people, the 1840 Indian Removal Act and how it gave rise to St. John UMC in 1841.

She told of the cultural trauma of having to hide in plain sight but also how things are different today since their conference's Act of Repentance. Then she invited them to visit St. John's summer Vacation Bible School, which 16 FUMCOG members did in 2018 to participate in their Native American curriculum.

These stories should inspire you to plan your church's Native American worship and activity celebration. Visit



CONAM leaders (from left) the Rev. Gary Jacobella, Verna Colliver and Sherry Wack present the committee's report to the 2019 Annual Conference. James Mundell photo.

CONAM's page on the conference website for more ideas and contacts. We are grateful for your contributions to the NAMS special offering. It shows your love and concern for our Native American brothers and sisters in the UMC and throughout our communities. Contact us at epaconam@gmail.com.

**Verna Colliver is Secretary of the Eastern PA Conference Committee on Native American Ministries and a member of First UMC Lansdale. This article was adapted from the report CoNAM presented to the 2019 Eastern PA Annual Conference. A longer version appears on our website. The title is from Black Elk's "Prayer for All Life."*

BMCR supports education, hurricane relief

BY THE REV. SHAYLA L. JOHNSON*

The Eastern PA Conference caucus that represents African American members and churches has been actively supporting education and disaster response in 2019.

Philadelphia Black Methodists for Church Renewal (BMCR) and Black UM Preachers (BUMP) awarded scholarships to new collegians at their joint annual scholarship luncheon, June 22. While these luncheons have been held at the Conference Center in Audubon in recent years, we decided to return this year to a local church setting. The site was Eastwick UMC in Philadelphia.

Scholarship awardees Christian Neal and Nahema Marius are both members of Eastwick UMC.

Neal graduated from Upper Darby High School and will attend the Culinary Institute of America in the fall. He plans to travel the world in his career to

experience food in different cultures. Then as a chef, he wants to open a black-owned restaurant for fine dining.

Marius is a graduate of George Washington Carver High School of Engineering and Science in Philadelphia. She will attend Clark Atlanta University, a United Methodist-related institution supported by our apportionments through the Black College Fund.

Marius will study fashion merchandising and cosmetology. She plans to add needed diversity and make "a positive difference" in the design merchandising field and also teach young African Americans skills needed to work in media professions. It is also her dream to have her own fashion and cosmetics lines.

We decided to have the luncheon at a local black church to allow more caucus members and supporters of the scholarship recipients to attend, along with conference leaders. Bishop Peggy Johnson and members of our Cabinet joined us, as they do every year.



Recipients of 2019 BMCR & BUMP College Scholarships, (center) Christian Neal and Nahema Marius, both of Eastwick UMC, pose with their parents, flanked by their pastor, the Rev. Tracy Duncan (left) and the Rev. Shayla Johnson, BMCR Chairperson. John Coleman photos

themselves. "Always shine your marvelous light," she said. "Dream something impossible and be the powerful person you were born to be in Jesus Christ."

The pastor of both scholars, the Rev. Tracy Duncan, expressed her excitement for them, anticipating where God will take them on their journey in life through their gifts. And the Revs. Dawn Taylor-Storm and Tracy Bass, superintendents of the South and East districts respectively, also encouraged the new collegians to take their time, trust in God and allow themselves to be open and receive what God is saying to them.

We also acknowledged the successful accomplishments of the Rev. Olivet Brown and the Rev. Eric Carr Jr., who were both recently ordained as elders in the conference, and Kenneth Woodson, who graduated this year from Lutheran Theological Seminary with a Master of Divinity degree.

BMCR also sponsored a half-day financial literacy forum at Mother African Zoar UMC June 1 to benefit local residents. About 40 people came and learned much from members of the Philadelphia Chapter of the Society of Financial Service Professionals. They touched on financial circumstances related to wills, estates, beneficiaries, executors, power of attorney, changes in tax laws, Medicare options, home equity,



At National BMCR's General Meeting in April, the Rev. Shayla Johnson (right) presents Philadelphia BMCR's donation for hurricane recovery assistance to the Rev. Byron Thomas, Southeastern Jurisdiction BMCR president.

caretaker responsibilities, Social Security and more.

As part of its own commitment to financial stewardship and mission, BMCR raised funds in 2018 to respond to the historic damage and destruction caused by hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria in 2017. Surpassing its goal, the caucus raised and donated \$1,500 to BMCR caucus leaders in the Southeast and South Central jurisdictions to help churches severely damaged there and to the Eastern PA Conference's campaign to help the Methodist Church of Puerto Rico with its recovery efforts there.

Philadelphia BMCR will meet again Sept. 22, at 3 PM, at St. Daniel's UMC's Hope Point ministry center in downtown Chester, Pa.

**The Rev. Shayla L. Johnson is Chairwoman of Black Methodists for Church Renewal's Philadelphia Caucus and the pastor of Mother African Zoar UMC in Philadelphia*