

DO NOT DELAY. DATED MATERIAL.



Residents walk on a damaged road in Rampe, Haiti, Wednesday, Aug. 18, 2021, four days after 7.2-magnitude earthquake hit the southwestern part of the country. (AP Photo/Matias Delacroix)

## UMCOR sends relief to Haiti

The United Methodist Committee on Relief's response to the 7.2 magnitude earthquake that rocked Haiti on August 14 is underway. The quake, which particularly damaged the southern and western regions of the island, left more than 2,200 dead and 12,000 injured.

Several hospitals have been damaged or destroyed. Those still open are completely overwhelmed, lacking sufficient personnel and medical supplies. UMCOR has already awarded grants to provide urgently needed medical supplies. The first grant, to the Église Méthodiste d'Haiti (Methodist Church in Haiti), in coordination with local doctors and nurses, will supply two clinics in

Gebeau and Les Cayes with medical supplies. The second, to Service Chrétien d'Haiti (SCH), will supply Les Cayes General Hospital. These grants will enable the procurement of bandages, gauze, IV fluids, antibiotics, and, given the continuing coronavirus pandemic, Personal Protection Equipment.

Access to the impacted areas is limited due to extensive damage and, sadly, gang violence, but the Haitian government and high-ranking United Nations officials have negotiated humanitarian access for relief convoys.

"UMCOR has a long history of working with partners in Haiti to alleviate suffering

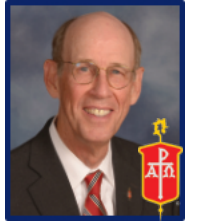
and advance hope and healing. Our response will continue with additional grants to partners in the region providing humanitarian relief. As we know from past tragedies, recovery will have its challenges and will take time, and UMCOR is prepared to assist the long-term recovery as it has done in the past," said Roland Fernandes, general secretary of Global Ministries and UMCOR.

The 2010 earthquake in Haiti was devastating and took the lives of 230,000 people, including two of Global Ministries' executives, the Rev. Sam Dixon, who led UMCOR, and the Rev. Clinton Rabb, director of the Mission Volunteers office.

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## 2021 Annual Conference second session this fall

By Anne Marie Gerhardt, Dir. of Communications

It feels like we just wrapped up the July session of the Northern Illinois Conference and summer is almost over, but the Annual Conference

set, since it covered both sessions. Need to substitute with an alternate member? Please contact Laura Lopez at [llopez@umcnic.org](mailto:llopez@umcnic.org) by Sept. 20 to make the change.

### Important Dates:

**Sept. 1:** Legislation and documents posted online at [umcnic.org/AC2021docs](http://umcnic.org/AC2021docs).

**Sept. 23:** Pre-conference Briefing at 10 a.m.

**Sept. 27:** Pre-conference Briefing at 7 p.m. (A Zoom link will be emailed to all registrants for these pre-conference briefings. Choose one day and time to attend.)

**Oct. 1:** Commissioning and Ordination Service for the 2021 class at 6 p.m. Bishop Tracy S. Malone from the

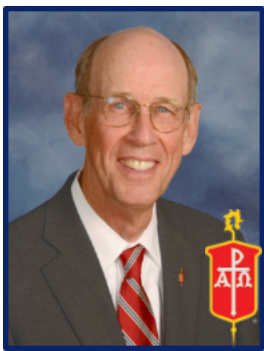
East Ohio Conference will return to the Northern Illinois Conference to preach. Limited in-person attendance (invite only). It will be livestreamed on the NIC Facebook page and YouTube channel.

**Oct. 2:** Fall Session of AC2021 - 9 a.m until no later than 3 p.m. Via Zoom videoconferencing with GNTV assistance. Watch for Voter IDs and Zoom instructions sent to your your email inbox by Sept. 29 from [vote@gntv.info](mailto:vote@gntv.info). Need a refresher on Zoom features, voting guides and how to get recognized, find the Zoom quick tips sheet at [umcnic.org/AC2021docs](http://umcnic.org/AC2021docs).

For updates and more on the October session, bookmark [umcnic.org/AC2021](http://umcnic.org/AC2021).

Committee has been busy planning for our second session coming up this fall on Oct. 1 and Oct. 2. The business of the Annual Conference will include the budget, nominations, UM Foundation meeting, and other reports.

Registration is closed and no new registrations will be taken. If you registered for the July session, you are all



## FROM THE BISHOP: Questions about the future of The United Methodist Church

Through this column over several months, I want to discuss some crucial bedrock issues that will determine the future of our church at every level. In each issue of *The Reporter* the last several months, I have been presenting key questions that each of us must understand to help us move forward together in ministry. Each question has more history than I can tell and more nuances than I can explore. I simply want to engage you in understanding the importance of these questions and let you make your own decisions as a follower of Jesus Christ.

Question 1: "Is the Church a Movement or an Institution?"

Question 2: "Is the Church a Covenant Community or a Voluntary Association?"

Question 3: "Is our mission focus Geographical or Generational?"

Question 4: Question 4 "Is our emphasis on Clergy or Lay Ministry?"

### Question 5: "Do we have a Private Faith or a Public Witness?"

Growing up in Montgomery, Alabama, in the 1950s, I learned that faith and politics cannot be separated. When Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a bus and the civil rights movement began, a young Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. stepped up to express his faith as a Christian pastor. When Dr. King became the pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in 1954, he clearly did not recognize how his six-year pastorate would lead him from the pulpit into the streets for a boycott and from those streets into the newspapers and television sets around the world.

What is compelling about the life of Dr. King is that his theology determined his public witness instead of his political positions determining his theology. He was certainly no stranger to political strategies, but he refused to abandon his theology for a political win. If the civil rights movement was going to succeed, God had to be behind it and not just an accumulation of political power.

The non-violent movement affirmed that the methodology for change had to be consistent with the objective. The end could not be justified by just any means. Those who vigorously supported segregation, even by quoting from the Bible, were seen as children of God who were oppressed in their own way. Redemption was

required of everyone. Justice and freedom would be from God's redemptive action, not that from some political party.

Although many considered Dr. King a communist and an outside troublemaker, a close reading of his life and ministry would show that he simply wanted to do what Jesus would do and proclaim the reign of God in his time.

What does a close reading of your life and ministry show? Do you have just a private faith or do you have a public witness? Not everyone is called to the same ministries. Certainly, there are not many witnesses like Dr. King, but each of us who would dare to call ourselves a disciple of Jesus Christ must find a way to publicly express the wondrous love we have experienced in the private places of our life.

The church today has often been used for political interests that reflect a single issue or to divide our citizens into pro-Christian and anti-Christian groups. This is politics determining theology. Or, even worse, the expression of a theology that seeks to limit God's grace only to those of our political party. Jesus spent most of his time proclaiming the reign of God and calling people to repentance, not condemning those who disagreed with him.

Our United Methodist Church has a proud tradition of encouraging people to express their faith in the public

arena. You can read our history, search our Social Principles, or sift through our many resolutions to understand the breadth and depth of our commitments. We promote these positions out of our theology, not in support of any political party. We hold on to our commitments not because we think they are a means to an end but rather the way God wants us to live.

Ever since Constantine, nations have sought to either establish Christianity as the state religion or to privatize faith and keep it out of the public arena. However, when the love of Christ has been poured out into someone's heart, it naturally overflows to others. Our shared witness as the Body of Christ—the Church—not only transforms individuals but the world in which they live.

Following Jesus, the Church, by its nature, will have a public witness. However, the Church must be 1) Civil without being soft, 2) Engaged without being used, and 3) Political without being partisan. Our first loyalty is to God, and our first political responsibility is to the Church. We should have no other idols before us.

Can you imagine our public witness so powerful that people ask, "What inner strength enables these people to love others so much?" Then we can share how Jesus has changed our life!



## Ways to Connect

◀ Rev. Olu Brown will lead a conference-wide worship service on Nov. 14 at Our Saviour's UMC in Schaumburg.



## DISCIPLESHIP

Task Force of the Northern Illinois Conference

The Discipleship Task Force is committed to building a stronger culture of discipleship in our conference. Please mark your calendar for a weekend of "Tending to the Harvest." We will meet via Zoom on Sat., Nov. 13 from 9 a.m. - 2 p.m. to learn about disciplining youth. Then on Sunday, Nov. 14 at 4 p.m. we will have a conference-wide worship service. The Rev. Olu Brown, Senior Pastor at Impact Church in Atlanta, GA will be delivering the message. Current plans are that the worship service will be in person at Our Saviour's UMC, Schaumburg, but livestreaming will also be available. Additional details will be forthcoming, but please save the date for these two events.

In continuing with the goal of building a stronger culture of discipleship, the Discipleship Task Force has trainers who are eager to work with local churches in helping them to develop an Intentional Discipleship System. If your church is interested in exploring an Intentional Discipleship System, go to the Discipleship Task Force's website for a list of contacts who can work with you at [umcnic.org/discipleship-task-force/intentional-discipleship-system](http://umcnic.org/discipleship-task-force/intentional-discipleship-system).



## Anti-Racism Task Force

A weekend of in-depth anti-racism work will occur in September. On Sat., Sept. 11, a workshop titled *Becoming the Beloved Community* will occur. The workshop will focus on building relationship and sharing stories while using Isabel Wilkerson's book, "Caste," to guide us in the history of racism. This workshop is for clergy and lay. The next day, Sept. 12, a group of clergy will come together for a 3-day, 2-night retreat called Clergy Peer & Reflection Series (CPRES) to delve deeply into their calling as pastors to address the harm of racism. This will be a time of covenant-building and support. Although both events are already filled, the workshop and retreat will be repeated on a regular basis.

The Ephesus Project is a Church/Pulpit Partnership Ministry created by the Anti-racism Task Force. The goal is to partner churches together to learn from each other and build a friendship that supports a greater appreciation and understanding of racial similarities and differences. This will be done through conversations, book discussions, pulpit exchanges, and other events that provide opportunities for learning. The goal is to grow as followers of the faith to get to know each other better through personal interaction and relationships, we might be able "to create one new humanity out of the two." (Ephesians 2:15). To register your church, visit [umcnic.org/antiracism](http://umcnic.org/antiracism).



## Nominations Committee seeking volunteers

Do you have some time to share your gifts? Looking for a way to make a difference? There is a conference ministry opportunity for every interest!

The possibilities can be found on a new webpage of the conference homepage under the tab "Committee Volunteers." While a few committees and boards aren't able to take new members at this time (Credentials, Trustees, Episcopacy, Laity), many opportunities for service are still available.

Do you have a heart for lifting up the next generation? Then consider Young Peoples Ministries, Higher Education & Campus Ministries, or Outdoor & Retreat Ministries. Are you drawn to justice issues? Then perhaps Accessibility, Church & Society, Religion & Race, or Status and Role of Women is where you should be. Looking for mission work? Then Global Ministries is for you. Want to assist in making sure our conference has a solid foundation for the work ahead? Finance & Administration or Nominations would benefit from your time and talents.

Even though the slate has been submitted for publication for Annual Conference in October, Nominations will continue to connect volunteers with a ministry area. For more info, committee descriptions, and a sign up form, please visit [umcnic.org/nominations](http://umcnic.org/nominations).

# UMCOR supports Afghans in need



Afghans at the Kabul airport on August 18, 2021. Photo: Shutterstock

For more than 40 years Afghanistan has been wracked by wars, civil strife, invasion and massive amounts of arms shipped in from outside forces. It is one of the poorest countries in the world, with high infant and maternal mortality rates, and millions of Afghans have been displaced as refugees over these many years.

Today the country is again at a point of transition with great uncertainty about the future. Thousands of Afghans are seeking to flee violence and a fear of persecution. Roland Fernandes, general secretary of Global Ministries and UMCOR, expressed his sympathy for the Afghan people, stating: "The situation in Afghanistan is uncertain and unfolding. It is a tragedy of epic proportions. We pray especially for all of those left behind who now live in fear and for the many communities across Afghanistan also facing extended drought and hunger."

Global Ministries and the United Methodist Committee on Relief have long-standing partners in Afghanistan, with projects and programs dating back to the mid-1960s. The work has been, and continues to be, in partnership with local Afghan communities, as well as with other humanitarian agencies concerned with health, community development and human rights. UMCOR is

working with these partners to determine what assistance is most helpful at this time and the best avenue for ensuring humanitarian relief reaches the country.

Through one project, UMCOR will provide cash assistance to displaced families residing in the Kabul area, enabling them to prioritize their most urgent needs such as food, shelter or medicine.

Those interested in supporting UMCOR's response in Afghanistan can make gifts online at [umcmmission.org/advance-project/982450](https://umcmmission.org/advance-project/982450) or by checks sent to Global Ministries/UMCOR, P.O. Box 9068, New York, NY 10087-9068, with Advance #982450 noted on the memo line.

UMCOR is also prepared to assist with refugee resettlement through its partnership with Church World Service and is currently in conversation about assisting Church World Service with temporary housing for Afghan refugees. Those interested in supporting the UMCOR-CWS partnership can make gifts online at [umcmmission.org/advance-project/3022144](https://umcmmission.org/advance-project/3022144) or by checks sent to Global Ministries/UMCOR, P.O. Box 9068, New York, NY 10087-9068, with Advance #3022144 in the memo line.

## From the Cover

Response to that disaster brought together resources from UMCOR, other humanitarian groups, local churches and volunteer teams to rebuild. At that time, UMCOR also established a field office that directed local program implementation for several years. More recently, UMCOR has supported numerous projects in Haiti, focusing on rebuilding, environmental sustainability, women's economic development, education, food security, and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH).

As the humanitarian relief and development arm of The United Methodist Church, UMCOR assists United Methodists and churches to become involved globally in direct ministry to persons in need. Those interested in supporting UMCOR's response in Haiti can make gifts online at [umcmmission.org/advance-project/982450](https://umcmmission.org/advance-project/982450) or by checks sent to Global Ministries/UMCOR, P.O. Box 9068, New York, NY 10087-9068, with Advance #982450 noted on the memo line.

## Midwest Mission ships timely aid to Haiti



The Midwest Mission Distribution Center quickly sent supplies to Haiti in the aftermath of the devastating August earthquake

Soon after a deadly earthquake hit the coast of Haiti on Aug. 14, the Midwest Mission Distribution Center in Pawnee, Ill., received an urgent needs request and was able to get supplies to their Food for the Poor Partner and to Haiti within 24 hours!

"We are so blessed to be able to provide immediate aid to the people of Haiti and know it'll take a lot more help and we are ready!" wrote Chantel Corrie, Midwest Mission Executive Director in a weekly mission update.

Midwest Mission received an email on Sunday, Aug. 15, from Jisabelle Garcia-Pedroso, Food For the Poor Senior Programs Manager, Operations. She wrote, "because of your support to prepare together as partners, United in God's Work, YOU were already present in Haiti delivering aid within 24 hours."

In addition on Aug. 20, Midwest Mission loaded another shipment of aid for Haiti worth over \$100,000 through their partnership with Food for the Poor in response to the earthquake. This shipment included plastic totes, clothing, Personal Dignity Kits, orthopedic supplies, and hand

sanitizer. A natural disaster can be devastating to any community, but Haiti has an increasingly hard time. Sixty percent of Haiti's people fall under the poverty line and some are still recovering from previous natural disasters.

"Thank you to our volunteers who come in daily to help put together supplies and kits because without you, we would not be able to respond in such a timely and urgent manner!" said Corrie. "We hope to continue to help locally and internationally, especially in response to catastrophic disasters."

Midwest Mission prays for the lives lost due to the Haiti Earthquake and we pray for the families to find hope, peace, and safety in these difficult times. "We cannot imagine losing a loved one along with your belongings, home, and safety," wrote Corrie. "We pray those that are missing are found safe and those that are injured are healed quickly. Please keep Haiti in your prayers."

For more information and ways to volunteer and give, visit [midwestmission.org](https://midwestmission.org).

# Kids Above All thanks donors for helping prepare students for back-to-school

By Catherine Inserra, Kids Above All



On behalf of the kids enrolled in our early childhood programs, foster care, group homes, family child care homes, Camp Sheilah, and Emerge, and their staff who deliver services in Cook, DuPage, Kane and Lake counties, Kids Above All extends deep gratitude to our United Methodist mission partners for the tremendous generosity for the 2021 Back-to-School Drive.

These partnerships not only help to provide practical support to meet the challenges of the new academic year, but a sense of renewed hope during such challenging times. The backpacks and school supplies bless our kids and help them to reach their potential in life.

Thank you to the following mission partners: Barrington UMC, Berry UMC, Cary UMC, Skokie: Central UMC, Chestnut Square, Deerfield: Christ UMC, Naperville:

Community UMC, Downers Grove: First UMC, Elmhurst: First UMC, Park Ridge: First UMC, Lombard: First UMC, LaGrange: First UMC, Wheaton: Gary UMC, Glencoe: North Shore UMC, Northbrook UMC, Chicago: Ravenswood Fellowship UMC, Wespath, Chicago: Redeemer of Calvary, Emma Trevor with NIC's Justice Generation, UMW Princeton, UMW individuals and countless online donors.

Together, we are stepping up to ensure the health, well-being and safety above all else for kids.

As your mission team considers ways to partner during the holidays and possibly volunteer, information about sponsoring a child for the holiday gift drive will be available by October 1.

Contact Deaconess Catherine Inserra, Kids Above All Manager of Faith and Community Relations, [cinserra@kidsaboveall.org](mailto:cinserra@kidsaboveall.org) or (847) 224-2870.

◀ Christ UMC in Deerfield is one of many churches that collected and donated back-to-school supplies for children supported by Kids Above All.



Adobe stock

## Make the most of another pandemic-impacted school year

Submitted by Emily Lipinsky, Director of Development for the Rosecrance Foundation and Vice President United Voices for Children Board

As summer vacation winds down, students are returning to a third pandemic-impacted school year. Uncertainty and anxiety linger as

people balance a wide range of priorities, including mental and emotional needs, to return to once-familiar ways of life, milestone celebrations and support systems.

During times of disruption, youth are more likely to be affected by mental health issues and use of negative coping skills such as substance use. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has reported that mental-health-related emergency room visits for adolescents ages 12-17 increased by 31 percent last year, and suicide attempts of girls were more than 50 percent higher from late February to late March 2021 compared to the same time in 2019.

"While some youth have the resiliency and coping skills to adjust to circumstances, many are struggling," said Rosecrance Director of Outreach Mary Egan. "Those youth really have missed the structure, accountability, and connections of a school routine. Even though we're trying to go back to normal, we can't expect life and supports to

immediately go back to what they were before the pandemic."

**Here are a few suggestions to help families begin the year strong:**

- Watch for any behavior change, mood swings, altered sleep or eating patterns, or self-harm.
- Without becoming a helicopter parent, monitor children's web and social media use for inappropriate content or conversations.
- Have open, honest conversations about current events and life stress as a family. If the adults are honest about their struggles, it will be easier for children to share their feelings.
- If you don't feel comfortable discussing something with family, reach out to a trusted professional. For adults, that could be a counselor, therapist, or religious leader. For youth, that could be a school counselor or social worker.
- Take an occasional break. A walk, quick workout, mindfulness activities, reading books for fun, and other hobbies are excellent stress relievers.

In addition, Rosecrance offers a robust continuum of resources in the Back to School Virtual Resources Toolkit and Rosecrance Virtual hub that families and education professionals can utilize throughout the year at

[referrals.rosecrance.org/educators](https://referrals.rosecrance.org/educators). The back-to-school toolkit provides useful information such as a treatment roadmap, signs and symptoms of behavioral health issues, answers to frequently asked questions, and an introduction to the Rosecrance Café parent support group ([rosecrance.org/resources-for-parents/family-support-groups](https://rosecrance.org/resources-for-parents/family-support-groups).)

At the virtual hub, you will find information about assessments, prevention and early intervention (PEI), intensive outpatient therapy (IOP), interventions, the Rosecrance Family Program, the Alumni program, and a library of video presentations. Many of these services also are available in person.

In addition, we invite you to listen to the "On Your Radar" podcast ([rosecrancercovery.com/onyourradar](https://rosecrancercovery.com/onyourradar).) This is an ongoing series of conversations with Rosecrance experts hosted by WGN radio personality John Williams. The first six episodes in the series focus on substance use and mental health topics related to adolescents and their families.

"Working with teens can be difficult sometimes, and that is why it is so important to work together to support them," Egan said. "When parents, families, schools, and behavioral health experts collaborate, it is easier to remove barriers to lasting recovery."

*Reprinted from the [unitedvoicesforchildren.org](https://unitedvoicesforchildren.org) blog.*



Saving Grace offers clergy, laity and congregations a Wesleyan approach to financial planning. Image courtesy of the United Methodist Publishing House's Abingdon Press.

## A Wesleyan take on personal finance

By Sam Hodges\*

Jesus talked a lot about money. So did John Wesley, Methodism's founder.

Now there's a money-management program meant to reflect Wesleyan Christian values, one that draws on the expertise of a diverse group of United Methodists. It's called Saving Grace, and advocates say it fills a niche in the Christian personal finance advice field, which includes superstar Dave Ramsey.

"Dave Ramsey is obviously well known. Crown Financial Ministries is pretty well known — but they're not inherently Wesleyan," said the Rev. Anna Guillozet, pastor of Linworth United Methodist Church in Columbus, Ohio.

Guillozet is co-host of the videos that accompany Saving Grace. She's joined by the Rev. Tom Berlin, pastor of Floris United Methodist Church in Herndon, Virginia. Berlin says Saving Grace is definitely Wesleyan, embodying the principles of do no harm, do all the good you can and stay in love with God. But he acknowledges it's a bit of a starter kit.

"John Wesley would probably want all of us to go further in our discipleship related to money and wealth," Berlin said.

Debuting late last year, Saving Grace is primarily the work of Wespath, The United Methodist Church's pensions, benefits and investment agency, and the United Methodist Publishing House.

Wespath has long overseen a comprehensive Clergy Financial Well-Being Initiative, with financial support from the Lilly Endowment.

Trying to help pastors with their finances led to the conclusion that there needed to be a Wesleyan money-management program — one that would work for laity, too, said Dale Jones, Wespath's managing director for church relations.

Ramsey's Financial Peace University has been used by many United Methodist churches, and others have gone with competing programs. But leaders of other United Methodist churches made clear they'd like a curriculum that was from a nonprofit, avoided increasing the shame many people feel at

having money troubles, and stressed the idea of money management as a spiritual discipline. Guillozet, 35, has been part of a young leaders advisory board for Wespath — "We jokingly refer to ourselves as the millennial test market" — and she and other board members pushed for a new, Wesleyan personal finance resource.

"The group Anna was part of was extremely helpful in identifying the need," Jones said.

Wespath enlisted the United Methodist Publishing House for editing and publishing, and ultimately involved other church agencies in reviewing curriculum and doing video production. Jones said Guillozet's group previewed Saving Grace, giving feedback to help refine the teaching.

For content, Wespath reached a licensing agreement with the Good Sense Movement to adapt its Freed-Up Financial Living Course.

"It seemed like the closest starting place," Jones said. "They were willing to work with us to modify

*continue on page 7, see Saving Grace*



## New online leader training helps churches begin or expand Stephen Ministry

Stephen Ministries St. Louis is now training caring ministry leaders through a live, interactive

online training experience called the Bridge Leader's Training Course (BLTC). This event fully trains Stephen Leaders—the pastors, church staff, and lay leaders who begin and lead Stephen Ministry in their congregation.

The BLTC draws on newly redesigned and updated Stephen Ministry resources to equip participants with the skills and know-how to lead all aspects of their congregation's Stephen Ministry. This includes training a team of congregation members as lay caregivers (called Stephen Ministers), matching them with hurting people in the congregation and community, and offering ongoing guidance and support to Stephen Ministers as they provide one-to-one, Christ-centered care to people experiencing a wide range of life difficulties.

Established in 1975, Stephen Ministry is a lay caring ministry being used by thousands of congregations of all types, sizes, and settings—across the US, Canada, and 30 other countries. Stephen Leaders in these congregations have equipped more than 600,000 people as Stephen

Ministers, who in turn have cared for millions of people in need. The new training and resources carry this ministry into the future, preparing congregations to meet the ministry challenges of an ever-changing world.

“We've seen a huge increase of interest in Stephen Ministry over the past year and a half,” says Joel Bretscher, Program Director at Stephen Ministries St. Louis. “Pastors have always had an incredible caregiving load, tending to more needs than they could ever meet alone, and the pandemic has brought even more of those needs to the surface. It's underscored the importance of having a team of well-trained caregivers, which is why so many churches have been relying on their Stephen Ministry and so many more are getting it started. The Bridge Leader's Training Course, the new training resources, and the updated system have made it quicker and easier for congregations to begin Stephen Ministry or strengthen an existing Stephen Ministry.”

The Bridge Leader's Training Course is delivered via Zoom to cohorts of twenty people, led by two members of Stephen Ministries' teaching faculty. Each session uses a variety of teaching methods—presentation, small- and whole-group discussions, skill practice, video, and more. The course consists of ten sessions held twice weekly for five weeks or once weekly for ten weeks.

The Bridge Leader's Training Course has welcomed participants from churches across the United States and Canada, as well as from other countries including Australia, China, Germany, and Switzerland. Since the initial cohort in July 2020, more than a thousand individuals representing hundreds of congregations have completed the training from the convenience of their own home or office and are now serving as Stephen Leaders.

“I'm a new pastor at a church that already has a strong Stephen Ministry,” said Rev. Tom Newman from Concord United Methodist Church in Roxboro, North Carolina, which has had Stephen Ministry since 2011. “The Bridge Leader's Training Course was a very positive, engaging experience. Now I'm prepared to support the Stephen Ministry at our church in the best ways I can.”

“The Bridge Leader's Training Course was an amazing experience—thorough, engaging, and uplifting,” said Melissa de Boer, a Stephen Leader with Onalaska United Methodist Church in Onalaska, Wisconsin. “There's really no way I can't succeed as a Stephen Leader after having been through this course.”

To learn more the training course, cost and how to enroll, visit [stephenministries.org/bridge](http://stephenministries.org/bridge) or call (314) 428-2600.



## Early registration open for UMW Assembly 2022

early bird discount of \$30 off the regular registration fee. The discount ends on Nov. 30, 2021. A registration acknowledgement will be e-mailed to you upon completion of your registration.

Please know that proof of vaccination and/or wearing a mask may be required to attend Assembly. The United Methodist Women National Office is following guidelines issued by the Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention (CDC) and will comply with all applicable health and safety guidance to protect the safety of event attendees. We ask that you remain flexible with us as we continue to monitor best options as health guidelines evolve. We are excited to be able to offer both a live and a virtual option for the 2022 Assembly.

### Workshops

Assembly 2022 will feature pre-registered workshops. When you register for Assembly, you may sign up for one

workshop on Friday and one workshop on Saturday. The list of workshops will be posted on the Assembly website, under the Event Info tab—Workshops drop-down menu, so you may review the options prior to registering and make a list of your top choices.

### Virtual option

Can't join us in Orlando? Then join us from your living room! Assembly 2022 has both in-person and online experiences allowing even more women to participate and TURN IT UP! Virtual attendees receive access to all five Community Gatherings, one workshop on Friday and Saturday, exclusive behind-the-scenes speaker interviews, sisterhood networking, and more. Knowing you no longer pay for travel, hotel, and meals—this is a great bargain for the low early registration price of \$199. Please know that your link for the virtual option can only be used with one device and cannot be shared.

Get ready to TURN IT UP! For more information and resources, visit [assembly2022.org](http://assembly2022.org).

Exciting plans are underway for the 21st Assembly of United Methodist Women, May 20-22, 2022, in Orlando, Florida with the theme TURN IT UP!

### Registration

Registration opens Sept. 1, 2021 for either the in-person event or the virtual experience. In an effort to protect our environment and reduce printed resources, registration confirmation and updates will be handled via e-mail. Register early online at [assembly2022.org](http://assembly2022.org) to receive the

## LOCAL CHURCH NEWS

### Sharing hospitality through homemade dog treats

By Annette Spence, Call to Cook Blog\*



Pastor Sherry (third from left) and her family, including Ella and Samson.

It was easy to find Sherry Steele, her adorable daughter, and this recipe for homemade dog treats on the internet.

All I did was search “methodist dog treats,” which led me straight to Plainfield United Methodist Church in Plainfield, Illinois.

Why would I do such a thing, you ask?

I recently noticed dogs are often along for the ride when people come through our free drive-thru meal ministry in Knoxville, Tennessee. Because we love our guests, I wanted to do something nice for the furriest of these.

Then it occurred to me: “We're all about cooking, right? We'll bake our own dog treats!”

Pastor Sherry was all in to help when I called to ask about how to make her dog treats. She explained that the cute video I discovered was filmed last summer, when Plainfield United

Methodist Church and the rest of the nation were staying out of public places due to COVID-19.

“We were spending more and more time at home with our pets and trying to be creative,” said Rev. Steele, who serves as minister of faith formation in a church about 40 miles southwest of Chicago.

In her years of ministry, the pastor noticed that children “love doing anything involving animals.” She had already posted videos for her pandemic-parked church members, “inviting them into my home” to prepare recipes with her family of seven. “People really loved that,” she said.

It didn't take long before the idea for a virtual “Blessing of the Animals” was hatched, and the pastor pulled out her rolling pin to create homemade dog treats for the occasion.

With fun-loving stepdaughter Brooklyn by her side (and two

*continue on page 6, see Dog Treats*

## LOCAL CHURCH NEWS (continued)

### Dog Treats (continued from page 5)



more stepdaughters behind the camera), Pastor Sherry's video on Facebook ([facebook.com/pfumc/videos/320619952658819](https://www.facebook.com/pfumc/videos/320619952658819)) demonstrates the makings of an easy, inexpensive, gobbler-worthy gift for canine kids. The ingredients are probably already available in your pantry. All I personally had to do, before preparing this recipe myself, was to buy cookie cutters in the shapes of dog bones and puppy paws (\$1.60 each at a craft store).

Pastor Sherry says the family dogs, Ella and Samson, adore the peanut butter-flavored treats. When I tested a bone-shaped cookie on my own finicky pet Leland, he made it disappear in a hurry.

I'm excited about sharing these pooch snacks at our next drive-thru meal!

#### Plainfield Pooch Snacks (Makes about 20 treats)

2 cups whole-wheat flour  
1/2 cup peanut butter  
2 eggs  
1/4 cup water

#### Directions

- Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
- Combine ingredients, using hands to blend well. Add more water if needed.
- Dust flour on counter surface and on rolling pin. Roll dough until flat.
- Use cookie cutters to create dough shapes. Place on baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Bake about 15 minutes. Store in airtight container or refrigerator.

(Please be aware that some dogs are allergic to peanuts.)

*\*The Call to Cook is an award-winning food and faith blog published by the Holston Conference of The United Methodist Church, based in Alcoa, Tennessee. The editor and writer is Annette Spence. Write to her at [annettespence1960@gmail.com](mailto:annettespence1960@gmail.com).*

## Youth group strives to be 'hope, love, light' to neighbors

 By Rev. Thomas Kim\*

Youth and adults from Oregon United Methodist Church and St. Mary's Catholic Church, both in Oregon, Ill., repair the porch on a home in Tracy City, Tenn. The team volunteered with Mountain T.O.P., a ministry that serves families in the Cumberland Mountain region of southeast Tennessee. Photo by the Rev. Thomas Kim, UM News.

After missing the opportunity in 2020 due to COVID-19, a youth group from a small northern Illinois town came to Coalmont, Tennessee, in July for its mission trip at Mountain T.O.P., a rural outreach project.

The group consisted of 22 youth and seven adults from two small congregations, Oregon United Methodist Church and St. Mary's Catholic Church in Oregon, Illinois — which has a population of fewer than 4,000.

Until last year, the two churches had shared a mission trip every year since 2011. Oregon United Methodist raised money for the 2020 mission trip, but had to cancel and decided to use it for this year's mission trip instead.

"However, we got more donations of some items that we would use during the mission trip from two congregations," said Nancy Crandall, the youth director of Oregon United Methodist.

Her ministry goal through annual mission trips is to give the youth group different experiences as Christians.

"It is important for youth to see the different living conditions in this country," she said. "We've gone to urban areas, Native American reservations. Through the mission trip, we give the youth different experiences, open their eyes wide to a different part of America, and enhance their lives.

in Tennessee.

"Mountain T.O.P. is a partnership ministry with a goal to help meet the physical, social, emotional, and spiritual needs of all people we encounter," she said. "To achieve this goal, we offer a variety of mission-based programs for youth and adults. Participants can choose to serve with Mountain T.O.P. through home repair projects or day camp programs. It is key for God's creation that we hope everybody has a healthy place to stay."

COVID-19 forced the ministry to find a new model to make its program accessible. The mission program's work ranges from simple service projects to major home improvements such as room additions, repairing floors and roofs.

"I hope campers can continue to develop complex faith to be able to say 'why and how,' rather than saying 'I am grateful for this or that,'" Keel said.

Campers begin their mornings in the cafeteria at 7:30 a.m. with breakfast, personal devotion time and small group meetings before going to mission sites. Mel Noon, a member of Oregon United Methodist Church, spoke to UM News just before the campers spread out to have their personal devotion time.

The mission trip gave them a true sense of servanthood."

For some of the youth, she noted, it was their first trip outside their hometown.

Crandall believes that Mountain T.O.P. is one of the places that can provide her youth group that kind of experience.

Mountain T.O.P. is a mission organization that assigns youth and adult campers places of mission in Grundy County, Tennessee, and which has worked in partnership with the South Cumberland Plateau community since 1975.

Julie Keel, program director and interim executive director, noted that the poverty level of Grundy County is one of the highest

"I have been going since 2009 when my daughter Brenna was 6 years old, and now she is going to attend college," she said. "I am so happy to be part of the youth mission group and to see her and other youth growing and serving others."

At 9:25 a.m., three youth and an adult from the Oregon group visited a home in Gruetli-Laager, Tennessee. It was the first home of the four children's day camps they were assigned in a day. The day camp was like a mobile vacation Bible school led by youth. They read a book, played games and did craftwork for an hour, then moved to another home.

"I think it is a way to spread the love of God with others while we are having a great time with them," said Nora Hammer, an Oregon High School sophomore. "My parents loved the fact that we came here. My mom may join the trip next year."

Brenna Noon, who will attend the University of Wisconsin Platteville this fall, was repairing the porch of a house in Tracy City, Tennessee. She is a veteran of mission trips, having participated in five.

"The mission trip is a great way to use the skills I learned from home for God in God's way and in God's name," she said.

Noon added that her mission trips have allowed her to connect with others from many different states, as well as strengthen her relationship with her family.

At 72, Dave Saam is the oldest among the Oregon mission team. He joined the group after a recent heart procedure.

When asked why he participated in the mission trip, he said he thinks he was called.

"God is right here where we come to serve ... This is the future of our church," Saam said. "When I sit there and watch these kids grow and watch confirmation, I know that this church is in good hands. The church keeps going."

The Rev. Megan Smick, pastor of Oregon United Methodist, was so delighted and proud of her church's youth mission team.

"Our congregation is 100% behind them," she said. "The church did all they can do to support the mission trip. I am grateful for the youth director, Nancy Crandall, and for her effective leadership. All I do is to stay out of her way. They are very faithful to our mission: To be hope, love, and light to our neighbors."

*\*Kim is director of Korean and Asian news at United Methodist Communications.*

# Don't count out small, Rural Churches

By Jim Patterson, UM News



A dozen children from the small farming community in Apple River, Ill., participated in a new expressive art program this summer at Apple River UMC as part of its children and youth ministry outreach.

Bigger and younger is not always better when it comes to churches say United Methodist experts who counsel that community connections and effective ministry are better measures of a congregation's vitality.

Small, rural churches can be as impactful as megachurches, in some cases even more so, if people lose the fixation with attendance, giving and demographics, said the Rev. Allen T. Stanton, executive director of the Turner Center at Martin Methodist College. Stanton's book, "Reclaiming Rural: Building Thriving Rural Congregations," was released in May.

"It's my goal partially to push back against the idea that the goal is to grow a church at all," Stanton said. "Participation is a fine metric. It is helpful." There are, however, many things attendance doesn't reveal, he said.

"It does not tell you who was formed in that community. It doesn't tell you what people are learning," Stanton said. "It doesn't tell you how many people are living out their values. It just tells you who shows up."

## Rural churches do have quite a landscape to negotiate.

"Rural communities are facing unique challenges that are multifaceted," said the Rev. Zach Kingery, who is on the leadership team for the Dakotas Connections Initiative, which received a nearly \$1 million grant from the Lilly

Endowment to test new leadership models and support systems to help rural congregations thrive. Kingery also is pastor at United Methodist churches in Wessington Springs and Alpena in South Dakota.

"It's not just that (rural communities are) being possibly underserved by a church," Kingery said. "It's also access to adequate health care, the education (resources) in the area and the type of employment opportunities. All of those factor into the health of a rural community, as well as the health of the church that is serving that community."

Rural churches typically do a good job of being connected with their congregants and offering help when needed, Kingery said.

Also, rural people "are more likely to be engaged in a civic institution, they're more likely to support a nonprofit or to support

their church community and they're just more likely to engage," Stanton said.

On the negative side, rural congregations are sometimes motivated by fear that the church is declining, so they get defensive and their posture becomes one of fighting for survival, said the Rev. Thomas Tumblin, dean of the Beeson School of Practical Theology at Asbury Theological Seminary, where he serves as executive director of the school's church-planting initiative.

"That self-protective nature will always start to move us towards implosion," Tumblin said. "If we can lay down our fears (and accept) we can't control what's next, then we can ask, 'What is the mission that God has given us?'"

The focus on youth ministries as a reaction to the aging United Methodist membership isn't always the correct path, Stanton said. "There's an idea that in order to have a vital church, you need to grow the youth program," he said. "Because highly vital churches have more young people, right? This is a common idea."

But if you live in a town with a growing senior population, why not expand ministries for the people who are readily there?

"In a lot of rural communities, the biggest growth we're seeing right now is retirees who are moving to these

communities because they want a slower pace of life," said Stanton, who is a youth pastor himself.

"Why are you going to focus on youth programs? Why not focus on people who have resources and time to volunteer and want to be involved in the community?"

Churches fail because they lose their sense of identity, Tumblin said. That stems from "doing church as usual" instead of focusing on what is needed in their community.

"When the sense of mission starts to go fuzzy, we usually lose our sense of direction," Tumblin said.

In the book, Stanton uses First United Methodist Church of Gainesboro, Tennessee, as an example of a church that gained strength by sharpening its mission focus. The church averages a Sunday morning attendance of 55 in a town of about 1,000.

The Rev. Tim Dunavant learned that local contractors were upset that graduates of the public school system didn't have the basic skills needed for them to be hired after graduation. Nearly 50% of the children in Gainesboro live below the poverty rate.

Dunavant started a mentoring program where contractors were paired with youth and taught them job skills such as carpentry, electrical wiring and paving.

"It became like a workforce development initiative," Stanton said. "So the county actually funded it."

People who go into the ministry to make a difference can do so in a rural community, "because you might have the only levers available in that community to do it through the church," Stanton said.

A rural church can be a real anchor institution in a small town, more so than one of hundreds of churches in a city, Kingery said.

"(Rural communities) are facing challenges like the mental health crisis," Kingery said. "The church should be the No. 1 resource where people are connecting with one another and combating this epidemic of loneliness."

One good ministry is plenty for a small church to handle, and they shouldn't feel obligated to stretch themselves too thin, Stanton said.

"There's this idea that more programs are better," he said. "But a rural church that offers one literacy program is highly impactful in that community. They can actually fundamentally transform the community."

## Northern Illinois small/rural churches making an impact

Each year the Keagy Town and Rural Committee awards several thousands of dollars to small and rural churches for creative ministries in the Northern Illinois Conference through the Martin Keagy and Planned Acts of Christian Kindness (P.A.C.K.) grants. Grants have supported ministries

*continue on page 8, see Rural Churches*

## Saving Grace (continued from page 4)

their product to suit our needs."

Saving Grace is a six-session course mainly intended for small groups, with extra content for clergy, who have special circumstances in such areas as housing and taxes. Participants use a workbook (the primary cost), and there's a leader's guide, too. Videos are a major part of the instruction, and they draw on a diverse range of United Methodists — conference treasurers, foundation leaders and clergy with a finance background. Care was taken to have a racial, gender and generational mix of experts. Key subjects of the curriculum include saving, earning, giving, spending and debt.

"(Saving Grace) takes the position that debt may be necessary in some cases and possibly useful if the purchase appreciates in value, but that it shouldn't be crippling to people's financial ability or ability to be generous," Salley said.

Participants in Saving Grace are encouraged to write a financial autobiography. They can purchase an accompanying devotional guide, with brief, Upper Room-like meditations

on the themes of faith and finances.

Saving Grace seeks to advise and be welcoming to different kinds of families (not just the suburban mom, dad and two kids variety) and to offer counsel that works across generations, recognizing that many of today's young adults struggle with student debt and feel bleak about their prospects of home ownership.

For sure, Saving Grace is meant to help people gain control over their finances, and be more at peace. But that's not all.

"The ultimate goal is to use your money in a way that reflects your faith," Salley said.

Wesley was indeed a role model for faith-based financial management. His financial advice is perhaps best known from Sermon Number 50, "The Use of Money," but that's just one example.

"At the end of his life, he began to preach about (money) a lot, and more and more specifically," said the Rev. Charles White, an elder in the Free Methodist Church, a professor at Spring Arbor University and author of a widely shared article

about Wesley and money.

Through sales of his writings, Wesley had a fabulous income for his time, White said. But he continued to live simply, putting nearly all his money toward ministry and charity. As Wesley saw it, the income wasn't his. He was just the trustee.

"It was God's money," White said. "He talks about that a lot."

Berlin agreed that Wesley set a high standard in Christian discipleship, especially with money. A Wesleyan personal finance program can at least get United Methodists and others moving in the right direction, Berlin said. "Saving Grace shows us how to take the next faithful step."

To learn more, visit [abingdonpress.lpages.co/saving-grace](http://abingdonpress.lpages.co/saving-grace).

*\*Hodges is a Dallas-based writer for United Methodist News.*

DYK???



# Sharing compassion and care in times of crisis

Rev. Arlene Christopherson, Asst. to the Bishop/Dir. of Connectional Ministries

During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic last year, there were days when I needed to monitor how much time I spent reading and watching news reports. As the death toll rose rapidly, the story became overwhelming. I still talk with people who have stopped following world events and local news because, frankly, what we hear makes us feel powerless against natural disasters in our world and the forces of evil that seem to be reaching into every corner of our lives.

The month of August has brought us another round of mounting turmoil, pain and suffering. The flash floods in Tennessee with stories of parents whose children were ripped from their arms by the fast-flowing torrents of water. The earthquake in Haiti, where poverty, political uncertainty, and the pandemic are already a heavy burden for this tiny nation. And now, we are witnessing the incredibly rapid turn of events in Afghanistan, accompanied by images of desperate, frightened U.S. citizens and Afghan refugees crowding into the airport in fear of their lives. As I write these reflections, there is news of a terrorist bombing as well. Afghan refugees have been uprooted instantly, leaving behind everything but

what they can carry, facing an uncertain future in countries they do not know.

Through all these bracing images of floods, earthquakes, and refugee disasters, the story of United Methodist compassion and care is woven.

One of the strengths of our connectional system is the power of our pooled resources. The General Board of Global Ministries has announced their focus on support for the unfolding issues for Afghanistan and the migrant refugees. The United Methodist Committee on Relief will provide cash assistance to displaced families in the Kabul area. UMCOR is also prepared to assist with refugee resettlement through its partnership with Church World Service (CWS) and is currently in conversation about helping the organization with temporary housing for Afghan refugees. You can learn more about the UMCOR responses on page 3.

"The United Methodist Church is one of the denominations that helped launch CWS in 1945, and it remains UMCOR's primary partner in refugee resettlement work," said Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton of the New York Conference, president of UMCOR. "It is imperative that we continue this long-standing tradition

as United Methodists by being active in this humanitarian effort."

In the last few years, CWS has resettled thousands of refugee families in the U.S. with visas issued under the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program and SIV Program, a Special Immigration Visa created by Congress to ensure that no U.S. ally is left in danger.

In the Northern Illinois Conference, we built a Migrant Refugee Fund a few years ago through our Bishop's Appeal offering at Annual Conference in 2018. We sent much of the collection to the General Church, but we held a portion within our conference for local use. Our Refugee Coordinators, Rev. Jonathan and Rhodalyne Crail, have reached out to our partners who address refugee issues to see how we can connect and assist. More about how we can help locally will be coming from our Refugee Coordinators and the Conference Board of Global Ministries in the weeks ahead.

Even in the face of overwhelming tragedies, as United Methodists, we are committed to sharing Christ's light and love in the face of human suffering.

## CALENDAR EVENTS

### Join a Fall Lay Academy

#### Prairie South District

Sept. 18 & 25

8:30 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Location: Paw Paw UMC, 370

Wiley Ave., Paw Paw, IL

Cost \$45

#### Prairie North District

Oct. 16 & 17

9 a.m. - 4 p.m. & 1 - 4 p.m.

Location: Harvard: First UMC,

1100 N. Division St. Harvard, IL

Cost: \$25

#### Prairie Central District

Nov. 6 & 13

8 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Plainfield UMC, 15114 S.

Illinois St., Plainfield, IL

Cost: \$40

For course information and to register, visit the NIC calendar and find a lay academy at [umcnic.org/calendar](http://umcnic.org/calendar).



### Save the date Confirmation Retreat November 5 & 6

#### Location:

Wesley Woods on Geneva lake  
Williams Bay, WI

Through Bible studies, group activities, team building and worship, we will explore who we are as individuals, as a community of faith, and as Christians in an ever-changing world. We work with local pastors to ensure that the weekend experience complements and enhances your church's curriculum. Registration details coming soon...visit [niccamps.org](http://niccamps.org).



### Renewable Energy Summit - Postponed

The NIC Eco-Sustainability Task Force and Conference Board of Global Ministries postponed its Renewable Energy Summit scheduled for September 11 due to rising COVID-19 health safety concerns. The goal of the summit was to address and learn more about net-zero emissions.

For churches still interested in taking action now, the NIC Eco-Sustainability Task Force encourages you to attend the Global Ministries October 14 webinar on Energy Star Portfolio Manager for UMCs. Portfolio Manager is a terrific tool for benchmarking energy use, measuring greenhouse gas emissions, and finding ways to save electricity, emissions, and money.

Also, consider joining the Global Ministries Creation Care Network. On the network, you will connect with a group particularly interested in church energy management to share ideas and ask questions. For more information, please visit [creationcare.umcmmission.org](http://creationcare.umcmmission.org).

## Rural Churches (continued from page 8)

ranging from after-school programs and free lunches to elder care and literacy programs.

Some examples of this year's awardees making an impact in their communities include:

- Apple River UMC "Feelings Fitness." Children and youth participated in a week-long therapeutic art program designed by a teacher to help kids, ages 4 through 14, express their feelings, positive and negative, and integrate them into everyday life, especially in light of the challenges and stresses the pandemic has presented them. Each day was centered around a new theme (e.g., community, being encouraging to others, good and not so good superpowers, the masks we wear for the world) and explored through a Bible story, children's literature and an innovative art project.
- Chana UMC "Everyone is Welcome Project." During the pandemic, Chana UMC's playground became a safe gathering place for many families from the community but it's not ADA compliant. The church is making improvements to the playground so it's accessible for everyone, especially the entrance. Chana hopes the play zone will offer hospitality and a welcoming setting to everyone in the community.
- Lanark UMC "Prayers & Batteries for Safe Families & Safe Homes." During this summer's Bible study, the church has been praying for every household in the community for their well-being and safety. During this year's Fire Prevention Week (Oct. 3 - 9), church members and leaders will visit each home in Lanark to offer prayers and free batteries for the homeowner's smoke detectors to help ensure their safety at home.

### Job Openings

For the latest job openings in the Northern Illinois Conference, visit [www.umcnic.org/jobs](http://www.umcnic.org/jobs).

### Stay Connected

Sign up for the weekly NIC eNews, Appointment Announcements and Sympathy notices.

Visit [www.umcnic.org](http://www.umcnic.org) and scroll down and click on "Sign up for our Newsletter" to enter your name and email.

### How to Contact Us

Please submit items at least two weeks prior to publication date. Include your name, address, email, phone number and name of local church. Space is limited. Electronic submissions are preferred with high-resolution attached jpegs. Submissions will be edited at the discretion of Communications staff.

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