Give thanks to the Lord and proclaim his greatness.

Let the whole world know what he has done.

Psalm 105:1  NLT
Jesus’ prayer for the oneness of his disciples

This phrase reflects what a connectional church such as ours is all about. It affirms and celebrates the stronger and bigger mission and ministry we can accomplish as a connectional church. It also points to the mandate of unity for Christian witness as it sums up the spirit and the focus of Jesus’ prayer for the oneness of his disciples. In the Gospel of John chapter 17, Jesus repeats these words of prayer: “They may be one as we are one.”

Prayer connects the people of faith to God’s way and God’s future. Prayer is an unequivocal expression of faith that, no matter what we go through, we put our trust in God and we know that God is in charge. As we face the unprecedented challenge of the unity of our church, we are to rely on God for a breakthrough by the gift and power of prayer more than anything else.

In sync with the ardent prayer of Jesus for oneness, each year we will lift up a prayer that we offer at the Lord’s Table as a theme:

- 2019-20 - “Better Together: One with Each Other”
- 2020-21 - “Better Together: One in Ministry to All the World”

This year’s priority is DECEMBER 10 for the JANUARY issue.

Send your stories to link@susumc.org

May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace as we trust in God, so that we may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

(Romans 15:13)

With You in Christ’s Ministry, Bishop Jeremiah J. Park
“Money comes through my life like a little trickle. But I want to pass it on in a way that does the most good for the most folks. I see that as my right and as my responsibility. It’s also my joy.” From the book, The Soul of Money, by Lynne Twist

Twist shares the above statement made by Gertrude, an older woman who made a $50 donation to eliminate hunger.

This reminded her that the power of money is really derived from the intention we give it and the integrity with which we direct it into the world. When your giving is done in alignment with your core values, it nourishes your soul.

Gifts to the Benevolent Homes are truly a currency of love, helping to make certain that the needs of those we care for are met each and every day. We celebrate your generosity which ensures that no one, whether young or old, is left out due to financial need. Thank you for choosing to make a positive difference in their lives!

If your church participates in receiving this special offering during Advent, please make your gift at that time. Otherwise, make your check out to Susquehanna Conference, with Benevolent Homes Christmas Offering in the memo line, and mail it to: The Finance Office, 303 Mulberry Dr., Ste. 500, Mechanicsburg, PA 17050
“There is a time for everything, a season for every activity under heaven.” Ecclesiastes 3:1

If there is one constant in this world it’s this—everything changes. In nearly every consultation I have with a church, especially one that is struggling with decline, I hear the lament, “Everything has changed, and nothing is as it used to be.”

Change happens all around us. It is external. We can see change. Look out at your community and inside your congregation. Has anything changed in ten years? One year? This week? Change is a constant part of life and often seems fast.

With change comes transition. Where change is often fast, transition is usually slow. While change is external (something happening to us or around us) transition is internal (something happening inside us). Transition is how we gradually make the internal adjustments necessary to navigate our way through change. Transition is the hardest part of change because it requires a lot from us.

Many years ago, I consulted with a church experiencing rapid decline as their city neighborhood changed due to the closure of several industries that employed many of its people. The church was mirroring the decline of the area and also facing closure. As part of my time with them I helped them understand the changes impacting their world and to consider the internal transitions they were experiencing as a congregation and individuals.

The internal transitions that came with their change involved three phases: ending, wandering, and embracing. See if you can recognize these in yourself or your congregation.

Transition was requiring them to let go of some things, to experience ending. Letting go of many church members and friends who sold their homes and moved away; letting go of a once vibrant children and youth ministry; letting go of a bank account that always seemed to have more money than they needed; letting go of a full-time pastor who would likely be replaced by a part-time person if they remained open at all. The ending of these things brought denial, shock, anger, frustration, stress and sadness. Endings can sometimes shake our faith and cause us to doubt God.

On the heels of some of these endings, transition caused this church to wander around a bit in a kind of wilderness while they tried to find where they fit into the vastly different community that was emerging around them. They wandered and wondered if God had any use for them and if they still had some semblance of missional vitality left for their community. Their wandering in this wilderness made them question who they were and who God was in this important season of change.

During the wandering, we did a study of the community to learn about the predominant population groups around them and their needs. Turned out the people most in need of their ministry were 22-year-old single African American mothers whose greatest needs were childcare and a safe place of Christian community.

With help, this remnant (white and mostly age 60 and above) caught a new vision of ministry to these young mothers and their children. Within six months they opened a day care center that they themselves ran and staffed. The new (and younger) part-time pastor sent to them brought a fresh, but different, approach to worship that appealed to many of these young families.

A year later, when I was invited to preach at this church, I found a congregation of younger and more diverse people with lots of small children and a group of seniors sprinkled throughout the sanctuary seated with their new friends.

Endings, and the wandering that accompanies them, can lead us to embrace new beginnings we would never imagine possible were it not for God’s leading and our faithful response especially in times of change.

Whether the change your church is experiencing is perceived as good or bad, you and the people of your church are in the three-fold process of transition: ending some things, wandering around a bit in a kind of wilderness, and preparing to embrace the new beginning that comes with change.

Some thoughts for helping you to navigate the transitions of change:

- Endings- find ways to celebrate the past. Listen to the people around you and create space for them to express pain, sadness, fear and uncertainty without judgment. Design a ceremony to mark the endings.
- Wanderings- Work together to gain clarity on why your church exists, what values guide behavior, what you should be doing now, and spend intentional time listening for God. Get to know who is around you and begin conversations with them. Encourage folks to keep a journal/diary to jot down thoughts or ideas that come to them especially in times of prayer.
- Embrace- as you prepare to embrace whatever new beginning emerges for you, encourage your leadership to
The story that Gary Shockley tells for his article in this edition of **LINK** is a wonderful example of how Growing Spiritual Transformational Leaders and Equipping Vital Congregations are tied together. The leaders of the congregation in his story decided they had to live and lead in a new way in order to GROW:

**G** – God-focused

**R** – Relationships are key

**O** – Open to opportunities

**W** – Witness to the world

It’s possible that the biggest obstacle that these leaders overcame was their own perceived fear (what might happen) as they navigated to a new reality. This is often true in our local congregations today!

The Conference’s emphasis on how we GROW spiritual transformational leaders is intentional. We recognize that in order to navigate through change and the transitional elements of life today, we have to be faithful leaders who will not just be willing to do things differently, but will live as Jesus followers who are transformed by the renewing of our minds so that God can use us in new ways. (Romans 12:2)

The GROW Team and Staff are working diligently to offer ways to live into this new Conference emphasis on spiritual transformational leadership. We recognize that moving past “we’ve never done it that way before” is a reality, yet we will boldly walk before you and with you as we move through the wilderness of change.

One of the resources that we offer is an opportunity to develop pathways of discipleship for your local church. To help you get started on this work, Kevin Witt hosted a Wednesday Webinar at this link - tinyurl.com/y2gsk3h. Kim Shockley will be leading a workshop about developing Intentional Discipleship Pathways on November 16 for the Scranton Wilkes-Barre District Rally and Resource Day - http://www.swbdistrict.org/.

Intentional leadership development is another way we can provide resources and encouragement. While this is often work that is specific to your congregation, there are ways that we can resource you with a coach who will help define your goals and then make sure you are doing the work to accomplish what you set out to do.

Because the GROW staff is also tied to our Camping and Retreat Ministries, we can help you with planning and implementing faith immersion experiences for all ages. As we highlighted in another article, we have two such immersion’s in the planning stages for 2020 for young people ages 12-18 at Wesley Forest.

A big part of growing spiritual transformation leaders is recognizing that God calls each one of us to be used for God’s purposes. Some of us find that calling as we move into professional ministry opportunities as Deacons, Local Pastors, Elders and Certified Lay Ministers. Others find our calling as we serve in the church and community as lay people – leading teams, building relationships between the church and its community, actively meeting the needs of people within the community, and faithfully praying for the church, its leaders, and its ministry throughout the week. It is also a calling to find a way to live as salt and light of Christ in our secular jobs. Do the people you work with know that you are a person who prays – are you willing to pray for them? Are there significant kindnesses you do for the people around you each week that are opportunities for you to tell of God’s love for each person? What stories do you tell when you meet your co-workers in the break room – do they honor and share God’s love for each person? Cory Booker says, “Leadership is not a position or title, it is action and example.” If this is true, then there are many ways that we are called to lead and influence people toward God!

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’” (Matthew 25:37-40)

If you are unsure of how God wants to use you as a spiritual transformed leader, then take the next month to pray regularly, asking God “How do you want to use me now?” Keep a journal and note things that you see or hear that may be a way to understand the answer to this prayer. God is with you!
Everyone Has a Story

Rev. Judy L. Walker was installed as the Scranton/Wilkes Barre District Superintendent at Shavertown UMC on September 29, 2019. Following is her (edited) installation address.

MARK 10:46-52 CEB
Jesus and his followers came into Jericho. As Jesus was leaving Jericho, together with his disciples and a sizable crowd, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus, Timaeus’ son, was sitting beside the road. When he heard that Jesus of Nazareth was there, he began to shout, “Jesus, Son of David, show me mercy!” Many scolded him, telling him to be quiet, but he shouted even louder, “Son of David, show me mercy!” Jesus stopped and said, “Call him forward.” They called the blind man, “Be encouraged! Get up! He’s calling you.” Throwing his coat to the side, he jumped up and came to Jesus. Jesus asked him, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man said, “Teacher, I want to see.” Jesus said, “Go, your faith has healed you.” At once he was able to see, and he began to follow Jesus on the way.

Everyone has a story. We all have stories about our lives; we have stories about our experiences; we have stories about our faith.

And we all travel on different roads and in different ways in order to accumulate the stories that make up our lives.

Things can happen to us and others that bring us great joy and just bring out of us that thanksgiving and praise. Other things happen that can leave us feeling spiritually depleted and weak. So many things – in our individual lives, in the lives of others, in world situations – can make our hearts heavy.

Even as we gather here this afternoon there are those of you that are celebrating life, and there are those of you that are feeling so overwhelmed that you wonder how you’ll be able to make it another day.

My life has been like most of yours; a series of ups and downs, highs and lows, celebrations and sadness. And I know I’d certainly prefer to remember the good things, rather than the brokenness and pain.

That’s especially true in the life of faith, isn’t it? It’s much easier to focus on the good parts of faith: God’s love for everyone; God’s desire for our well-being; the hope we find in God. But faith doesn’t involve only the good parts.

Faith engages the hard parts too, things like suffering, sin, death, poverty, domestic violence, human trafficking, corporate corruption, climate change, hunger, and the list goes on.

When we look at the world, we see a world that is broken in so many places; we see systems and institutions that are broken. We look at our lives and the lives of so many around us and we see pain and hurt.

I believe faith not only invites us to remember the good promises of God for our lives and for the world, but it dares us to take those good promises that we know so well and not just know them, but use them, act upon them, to bring healing, restoration, transformation, and resurrection!

We might have to look at the ugly, hard things a long time before it happens, but eventually, if we continue to engage not just in the good, but in the hard parts too, we will see lives, and systems, and institutions, and yes, the world, transformed and hope restored.

So, how do we do this? How do we engage the things that are painful and share the promises we know all too well in the midst of the pain? We begin with Jesus. Sounds simple doesn’t it? We begin with Jesus.

This is your installation message, Judy, couldn’t you come up with anything more profound?

That’s as profound as it gets! Whether we’re in Scranton/Wilkes Barre, Harrisburg, Altoona, York, Williamsport, Lewisburg, State College, across the Susquehanna Conference, or throughout the [global] connection, we begin with Jesus.

That’s how my faith life began. In one of the most painful times in my life I began with Jesus – after
trying to do things on my own for 39 years. It's where I had to begin to engage the pain and the hurt, and start the process of healing and transformation.

It started with a simple prayer. I remember the words like I prayed them yesterday (and maybe I did.) My prayer was simply: “I can’t do this alone. There’s got to be something or someone bigger than me out there, so God, if you’re there, I need help. I need you.”

And in that moment, with that prayer, I began my personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Although I had known who Jesus was for most of my life, it was at that moment that I finally accepted the mercy and grace of Jesus and made room in my heart for Jesus to make his home.

And my life has never been the same. I’ve termed my call and my journey in ministry a “whirlwind” because when Jesus got hold of me, or I should say when I got hold of Jesus, there wasn’t any stopping what he would do. Jesus could see in my life what I couldn’t. He could see something beautiful even in the midst of pain.

Friends, it all begins with Jesus. And that's why we have to engage in those hard things, in the painful and broken places of this world.

Because we have a story to share:
It's a story of hope,
It's a story of healing,
It's a story of transformation.
It's a story of resurrection!

And it all begins with Jesus.

Bartimaeus’ story begins with Jesus. “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

As Jesus and his disciples were leaving Jericho, along with a large crowd, Bartimaeus called from the side of the road; in turning to see who was calling out, the crowd saw a blind beggar, certainly, in their minds, unworthy of Jesus’ attention. Some ordered Bartimaeus to be quiet, but he cried out even more “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

He was persistent. This was the opportunity of his life. So, in spite of what some were telling him, he called out — and Jesus heard him!

But then Jesus does something quite odd. Jesus doesn’t answer Bartimaeus directly. Jesus doesn’t go to him. Jesus tells the people to call Bartimaeus. So they called to the blind man, “On your feet! He’s calling you.”

So Bartimaeus jumped to his feet and went to Jesus.

“What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked him.

Bartimaeus said, “Rabbi, I want to see.”

“Go,” said Jesus, “your faith has healed you.” Immediately Bartimaeus received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

I'm going to guess that Bartimaeus’ life was never the same.

Now there's a couple of ways Bartimaeus’ story could have gone. Bartimaeus could have been silenced. He could have been intimidated by the crowd and could have lived out the rest of his life a blind man begging on the side of the road.

How often do we feel like we’re required to keep silent? How often are we asked to keep our voices down, lest there be some offense that would cause a disruption?

How often do we silence others, convinced that their cries for mercy aren’t worthy of God’s attention?

We keep silent. We urge others to do the same.

Not Bartimaeus. His persistent cries brought healing and hope to his life and [possibly] to many others along the roadside that may having been watching his story unfold.

Bartimaeus’ story could have gone yet another way. The people could have refused to call Bartimaeus to Jesus. Why should Jesus waste his time on a blind beggar? Would Jesus then have gone to him? We don’t know. I suspect so. Jesus often works around those who are unwilling.

But what Jesus asks of the crowd is a lesson for us all. “Call him.” Act on what you see.

Do you see what Jesus did there? Jesus empowered the people to have a life-giving part in Bartimaeus’ story. He wanted them to be involved. I think Jesus wanted them to see what he could see; the possibilities of healing and hope for this man's life. YOU call him. Because I see him and I want you to see him, too. And I want you to see the rest of his story. I want you to see what happens when Bartimaeus comes to me with faith.

As we gather at different times across the connection, Jesus wants us to see the pain in the world, to see the brokenness, to see the hard parts. Jesus invites us to call others to him. Jesus invites us to enter their stories and calls us to be part of His life-giving work of bringing restoration, transformation, and hope.

How do we answer this call?
Quite simply, we begin with Jesus.

Prayer

Holy One, we do believe that your love extends to the whole world, to every person, and into every situation. We believe that you are everywhere present, working with all creation for its redemption. Help us to see, God. Help us to see with open eyes and open hearts. Help us to see the broken places of the world, the pain and the hurt that is felt around the world. And then, Lord, help us to see the possibilities; to see the beauty that can come from the ashes. And above all, Lord Jesus, help us to enter into the life-giving work you call us to do in your name. Amen.
Loving Like Jesus

Rev. Brenda Leigey was installed as the State College District Superintendent at Faith UMC, Bellefonte on October 27, 2019. Following is her (edited) installation address.

Whether I am traveling on I-80, I-99, where I can travel 65-70 miles per hour or more; or Pennsylvania Routes 45, 35, 75, 64, 120, 322 – I am surrounded by the majestic beauty of five counties – Clearfield, Centre, Clinton, Juniata, and Mifflin which make up this wonderful district I serve, State College!

It is a mixture of forests, miles of farmland, and an expanse of Appalachian Mountain ranges: Mt. Nittany, Bald Eagle, Shade Mountain, and the valleys – Sugar Valley, Penns Valley, Mt. Nittany Valley, Bald Eagle Valley, and Moshannon Valley.

As I travel to visit churches, I am awed by God’s creation. I even take time to slow down, not only because some of the roads are winding, but to take in the sites. I will slow down as I go by farms to see if there are any horses in the pastures or if there is any activity on a farm. I love the “smells” that are in the air! I slow down to let the critters cross the road – deer, squirrels, rabbits, possums – snakes are another story!

And nestled in the mountains, and valleys, or standing tall in the towns, are the churches of the State College District. I marvel at the fact that we have churches still in existence since the 1800s – one in existence since 1787 – who are still worshiping communities. Even with the passing of time and all the changes over the years the churches remain. I love the smell of the older churches – some of you understand what I mean – that smell in the church that takes you back to the days gone by.

The churches remain because God called and there was a vision to build a church in a community to be a place of faith and worship; a place where people could hear the good news of Jesus; the love of Jesus.

Loving like Jesus.

We are called to love like Jesus.

Jesus gave to us a command: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13)

My friends, it is time, to get back to loving Jesus and loving like Jesus. You have to choose to love like Jesus. It is not a liberal or conservative thing; it is not a Bishop, District Superintendent, or Pastor thing. [Everyone is called] to love like Jesus.

Today, in our society we are struggling to understand what it means and how we are to love and care for one another even in the life of our denomination. We are struggling with scripture and theological understanding on how to love one another. We are in a transitional time, but the heart of the matter, as Christians, is that we are to love like Jesus! At least try to make a heart centered effort to love like Jesus.

Have you ever tried to get a child or a grandchild to try a new food, only to have them make a gagging noise without even putting it in their mouths. And through the gagging noises and resistance we often say: “How can you know whether or not you like it if you don’t try it?”

This is true of many things in life; food, sports, careers... We really don’t know whether we will like it until we try whatever “it” maybe. We may discover in the trying that we like, or even love “it.” And then it becomes a part of our life and we work hard to perfect it or enjoy it more often and we just love it more and more.

When I went off to seminary, I didn’t know whether or not I was going to like the fact that God was calling me into ministry as a pastor. Was I up to the task of leading a congregation; dealing with different personalities in the church; preaching every Sunday, and countless meetings?

It wasn’t until I had the opportunity to give it a try that over time I learned to love it more and more because I realized the depth of Jesus’ love and grace for me.

How can we love Jesus until we realize the depth of His love for us? How can we live to love Jesus if we don’t give it a try?

In the Gospel lesson from John 21, Peter and the disciples go back to fishing on the Sea of Galilee.
Up to this point Jesus had already appeared a few times to the disciples since his resurrection.

I am sure Peter is still in a state of personal guilt remembering the conversation he had with Jesus before Jesus was crucified, and every time Jesus appears Peter relives that moment and other moments. Remember when Jesus called him? He was fishing on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus called and Peter decided to give Jesus a try. Peter committed to giving up his life as a fisherman to follow Jesus and learn from him. Peter confessed that he would do anything for Jesus – in his mind he truly loved Jesus.

Peter revisits in his mind when Jesus told His disciples that He was soon going to be arrested and Peter insisted loudly, “Lord I will lay down my life for you.”

He was probably a bit over-confident about it.

And when Jesus answers him by saying “I tell you the truth, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.” Peter is stunned.

He vows he would never do such a thing! But, sure enough, after Jesus is arrested and as the High Priest is questioning Jesus, we watch helplessly as Peter denies even knowing Jesus.

When the rooster crowed, Peter “broke down and wept.”

Even though the Resurrected Christ has already appeared to Peter, Peter is still a broken and crushed man as are the other disciples.

Getting tired of waiting for Jesus to appear again and not knowing what to do next, Peter throws up his hands and says, “Enough with this, I’m going fishing.” The other disciples go with him. And even though they are expert fishers, they catch nothing!

There they are out on the water with no fish and the sun is coming up – time to go ashore. As they are hauling in their nets, they notice a fire on the beach and it looks like someone is cooking over the coals. John exclaims: “It is the Lord!” And without hesitation Peter jumps out of the boat and swims to shore.

As the other disciples row the boat ashore, no one says a word. They just gather around the fire and eat breakfast with Jesus.

“When they had finished eating,” Jesus said, “(Peter), Simon, son of John, do you truly love me?” At first, Peter’s response to Jesus’ questioning seems evasive.

He doesn’t say, “I love you,” but “You know that I love you.”

And it makes sense when we really think about it.

After all, in the past Peter had boasted to Jesus about how devoted he was to Him and how much he loved Him, but then when the rubber met the road he failed Him miserably.

Was Peter even sure if he loved Jesus? I mean, how could he love Jesus and deny Him all at the same time?

“Do you love me?” Jesus asks.

The next part of the conversation between Jesus and Peter is one of the most awesome conversations in the Bible. The most remarkable thing about it is that Jesus gives Peter the opportunity to be faithful and obedient throughout his lifetime, proving to Peter that he does indeed love Jesus and he can show love for Jesus by loving and caring for others.

“Do you love me?” Jesus asks.

“Feed my lambs.”

“Take care of my sheep.”

“Feed my sheep.”

In essence, Jesus is asking Peter who he is going to be. Is he going to be a fisherman or a disciple? Peter failed by denying Jesus, but was restored in affirming his love. Failing, being restored, and deciding to follow Jesus can describe all of us. For Peter to follow through with that love for Jesus, he must give himself to the service of God’s people.

I can relate to Peter. In my life, I can admit, that I have failed Jesus in countless ways and so many times. How about you?

Friends, we need to love like Jesus. Jesus is calling. He’s calling people who have perhaps made a bit of a mess of things up till now, but whom Jesus is looking at with love, healing, and restoration. Jesus is calling people like us to love and work with him and for him, that his sheep may be fed and that his world may be healed. Because there is more work still to be done.

Caring for other people, feeding other people, loving other people – these are the tangible ways that we come to know that we love Jesus and how we express our love in and for Jesus. Jesus’ love was unbiased, generous, and unconditional. We are to love like Jesus. And loving like Jesus requires a servants’ heart.

• We are to love and feed the hungry (physically and spiritually) and eat with sinners
• We are to love and care for the lonely, the poor, the broken, and discouraged people
• Through Jesus we are to love and liberate those bound by social injustice and prejudice; tearing down the walls of division.
• We are to love and value those who are different and yet who are a creation of God
• We are to love the despised, the oppressed, the sick
• We are to share the Good News of forgiveness and salvation in love

A life lived in Jesus is a life that loves and serves others without boundaries and presuppositions.

My friends we are entrusted to live and love like Jesus! What an awesome responsibility!

Will you love like Jesus?
Online Training Now Available for Safe Sanctuaries

At the 2019 Susquehanna Annual Conference, it was announced that the Safe Sanctuaries training would be delivered online, to provide for greater consistency of training and the ability to better track background checks for all of our children and youth volunteers. The new online training platform: MinistrySafe is now available.

MinistrySafe was created by legal professionals who are sexual abuse experts. After decades of litigating sexual abuse cases, Gregory Love and Kimberlee Norris founded MinistrySafe to help ministries meet legal standards of care and reduce the risk of sexual abuse. Used by several other United Methodist Conferences across the country, MinistrySafe trains 25,000-30,000 people each month—live and online. Their mission is to prevent child sexual abuse in ministry contexts.

Every church has an organization profile where they can create user profiles for all of their staff and volunteers, and they can upload all clearances to be stored digitally.

The October roll out for our new online Safe Sanctuaries platform was a little bumpy, but working together we identified a coding error and resolved all of our “known” issues. Thank you for your patience.

You can find more information, a step by step guide, and the training links at susumc.org/safe-sanctuaries. Training does not need to be completed in one session - you can come back to it.

We are requiring our churches fully implement the program beginning January 1, 2020. For those needing immediate Safe Sanctuaries Trainings, in-person training will be honored through the end of 2019. Please contact safesanctuaries@susumc.org with any questions.

If you have problems, let us know by email at safesanctuaries@susumc.org or call 717-766-7441 and our staff can help you.

Thank you for putting children first!

Interim Director of Communications

REV. JASON MACKEY, Director of Connecting Ministries

Connecting Ministries is pleased to announce that Associate Director of Communications, Janelle Walker, has accepted the position of Interim Director of Communications. Janelle has been with the Susquehanna Conference since 2017 and attended the past two Annual Conferences and General Conference earlier this year. Locally, she was primarily responsible for re-branding the Conference and its website. Of her new position, she says, “I am very thankful for the opportunity to serve the Susquehanna Conference in this capacity. I hope to continue the great work of the Communications Department and the Conference during this time of transition.”

Janelle has extensive experience in communications, social media, web design and public relations, including working with the City of Harrisburg and at the local church level. She is ideally positioned to lead the Communications Department through this transitional period and her new duties begin immediately.
A few weeks ago, while looking through my social media, I came across a vignette depicting Winnie the Pooh sitting on a log, talking with Piglet. In the short narrative, Pooh shared with his friend that he was having a difficult day. Piglet, being a good friend, asked the soft-voiced, cuddly bear if he wanted to talk about it. The reply was, “No, I don’t think I do.”

Piglet responded, “That’s okay,” and then sat beside Pooh on the log. The honey-loving bear looked at his closest friend and asked, “What are you doing?”

“Nothing, really,” was Piglet’s reply. “I know what difficult days are like. I quite often don’t feel like talking about it on my difficult days either.”

Piglet went on to share that difficult days are much easier when you have someone with you.

Piglet’s actions summarize UMCOR’s Early Response Team (ERT) mission of “providing a caring, Christian presence in the aftermath of a disaster. And, that presence is meant to show the love of Jesus as described in John 13:34, where we are commanded to “Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other.” When He gave us this commandment, Jesus turned love into a verb and an action word. Then, He chose to be the example of action. Beyond that, He did not define exactly how you were to act. He lets that up to you. He wants you to find and use your language of love.

In disaster ministry, we often do that by sharing our time and talents to muck out a basement, tarp a roof, or clean up debris for people who are having difficult days. We generally do not make it a practice to talk about those difficulties. Rather, we show them by our actions, that they are loved and not alone. Through this love offering, we carry out the commandment by proving to the world that we are disciples of Jesus Christ (John 13:35).

The Disaster Response Ministry provides many training opportunities for you, your congregation, or small groups to learn how to put your love into action. The ministry can also connect you with opportunities to use those skills to assist people who are having difficult days.

A.A. Milne, author of Winnie-the-Pooh, once said, “You can’t stay in your corner of the Forest waiting for others to come to you. You have to go to them sometimes.”

When was the last time you left your corner of the forest, sat on a log with someone, and provided a caring, Christian presence?
September 18, 2019

Dear Sisters and Brothers of the Susquehanna Conference,

Grace and peace to you in the name of Jesus Christ, Prince of Peace, Healer of our Brokenness and Hope of the World!

There are seasons to everything. I would like you to know that I will retire effective September 1, 2020. After a time of discernment and prayer, I am at peace with my decision and it is well with my soul.

In 2004 I was consecrated Bishop in The United Methodist Church. During 41 years of ministry in The United Methodist Church I have served as Residential Bishop for two Episcopal Areas in the Northeastern Jurisdiction; New York and Harrisburg. I have been exceptionally blessed and honored to serve as your Bishop of the Susquehanna Conference. With the deepest sense of joy and privilege and with gratitude I thank God for allowing me to serve the church with such faithful, committed, generous, and gracious people as those of the Susquehanna Conference for these two quadrennia.

There will be other occasions and opportunities for me to express my gratitude for you and the journey we took together and to communicate the needed transitions that will take place in the most beneficial way for our conference and the new episcopal leader. Together we will prepare our beloved Susquehanna Conference for the next chapter of God’s journey with us. Your prayers for the conference, conference leadership and me during this time of transition would be greatly appreciated. God has been faithful in the past and God will continue to do so in the future. What an awesome God we worship and serve!

Alive in Christ together, I look forward to what we will accomplish together over the next 11 months, all for the glory of God.

May God continue to richly bless and honor you and your ministry.

With You in Christ’s Ministry,

Jeremiah Park
explain what the new beginning is, why it is important, the steps needed to get there and how everyone has a part to play in the new thing. Have faith that God is with you and will do a new thing!

Change is inevitable but it doesn’t mean it has to be the end of fruitfulness. In fact, it may be just the beginning. Right now, claim this promise- “See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; can you see it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.” (Isaiah 43:19 NIV).

Contact evcoffice@susumc.org for more conversation and support!

A great resource for further reading and reflection is “Managing Transitions” by William Bridges.

Vital Churches Create Vital People

Merriam Webster’s Dictionary defines vital as: “of utmost importance; full of life and vigor.”

Vital churches are of utmost importance to the communities they serve. If your church ceased to exist would your community miss you? What is your church’s reputation in the community? What is your signature ministry? Are you known for life and vigor or something else?

Your church will only be as vital as the individuals who are part of it. How is your church creating vital followers of Jesus? Are you striving for life and vigor? What are the signs that your church is positively impacting the community around you? Spend a moment reading John 17 which contains Jesus’ prayer for your church’s vitality.

In 2019 we challenge each and every one of our congregations to start a Fresh Expression of Faith!

What’s a Fresh Expression of Faith, you ask? A Fresh Expression of Faith is a group of non-believers gathering for a common cause to build relationships and explore faith together. Fresh Expressions of Faith take us outside our church buildings and into the community. This might be a gathering of people in a gym, coffee shop, or a park. A ministry that meets people where they are already gathering in new, exciting ways for Christ.

Let’s do this together and let’s have some fun along the way! Challenge the other churches in your area and district to join. Use #SUSUMCChallenge on Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter to show everyone what you’ve been working on.

Visit www.susumc.org/bishopschallenge to keep up to date!
On Sunday, September 8, State College District Superintendent Rev. Brenda Leigey invited all churches in the State College District to participate “together” in a prayer walk in their respective communities.

“God laid this on my heart and guided me to Joshua Chapter 6:2-5,” said Rev. Leigey.

“Then the LORD said to Joshua, “See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men. 3 March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days. 4 Have seven priests carry trumpets of rams’ horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets. 5 When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have the whole army give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse and the army will go up, everyone straight in.”

“We have so many barriers in our communities that are causing people harm,” said Leigey. “Over the years, God has called the church to break down the walls of hatred, violence, abuse, loneliness, hopelessness, hunger, etc. The greatest difficulty in the Christian life and for our churches is to get to the place where one is prepared to admit that the whole thing is too big for us, and that the power of the enemy is too great for us, and if we know what our Jericho is (what walls need to come tumbling down in our communities or in our life) somehow, God must bring it about. When we reach the place that we surrender all to God, God brings spiritual power and victory and blessing into our lives.”

“As communities of faith, we need to be praying for God to lead, guide, and direct us to be the church God needs and wants us to be. Prayer plays a vital role in the life of the believer. It is essential in our living, our witness, and our service before God.”

Leigey encouraged congregations to pray for the people who are not yet worshipping with them and not yet connected to them; to pray for those who are marginalized in their community; and to pray for families. She suggested they ask God to bless their church as a place of love and hope, and pray for a revival in their life and in the church, and for God’s will to be done. She challenge people to identify needs or situations that require prayer and then pray that the walls would come tumbling down.

“The promises of God are not designed to promote inactivity on our part. They are given to encourage and to assure us that if our labors are of God, they will not be in vain,” she said.

The Israelites had to be obedient and faithful to God’s directions and to God’s instructions. Israel’s faith and obedience were the key to their victory. Marching around the city was not only an act of obedience, but also an act of faith. By repeating the marching operation so many times, the people were impressed with their need to trust in God’s Word and to obey.

Prayer Walk Suggestions:

• Pastor’s and churches meet together and identify needs in their community and in the life of the church.
• Hold a prayer vigil for the week prior seeking God’s leading and direction.
• Organize and send out groups (include all ages) throughout the community.
• Choose a “unified” time of 1 p.m. or 3 p.m.
• If the church was not in a town setting participants could walk around their church, or around the Sanctuary, or throughout the church building.
• To listen for God’s voice as they pray. God can bring victory in the areas where walls need to come down and ministry needs to happen!
• Choose the length (at least 30 minutes) of the prayer walk and then come together after to share what God has revealed.
• Think ahead: hold deep conversations over the next year as you listen to God. Do the prayer walk once a month. Were you prompted to act and make plans right away?
• Be faithful, be obedient, take action, give God the glory!

Nearly fifty churches indicated that they took part in the event in some way, many partnering with neighboring churches or participating as cluster groups.

Mcvetown and Wayne UMCs participated together. The children colored postcards that said “You Belong Here” on one side and included church information on the other. They prayed over houses and business as they put postcards at their doors.

The folks of Grace UMC in Mexico, Pa., shared about the history and connections of certain buildings and people as they walked, stopping to pray at various locations, including the Presbyterian church where they prayed for their congregation and for
their pews to be filled each week. "It showed me they care more about the people in the community than filling our own pews," said a participant. They talked to a few residents along the way and new ministry ideas were discussed afterward.

Trinity UMC in Mifflin participants included youth, young adults, and older members of the church. After a prayer inside the church they set off in two groups and went throughout the town praying and distributing brochures that highlighted upcoming ministry events. They prayed outside bars, for the local businesses, at the local Hispanic church, and at the boro building. One group engaged with a group of Hispanic citizens. Afterward one man talked about his desire to see the church become active in helping the community. They hope to connect with the small Hispanic church and possibly share resources and volunteers for ministry in Mifflin.

Members of Thompsontown UMC walked for about an hour, mostly in silent prayer but stopping a few times for group prayer. They prayed for first responders at the Fire Company and the Ambulance Building, for some homes where they knew people were struggling, and for school students at the school. They saw things they don't normally see in the community which brought awareness of folks who are hurting.

Locust Run UMC folks walked up to the community building to pray for healing between the church and the organization. They, too, noted how they saw things differently by walking up the road than by driving up it. Hurting people came to mind as they walked.

The East Salem/Otterbein Charge members walked the community in the shape of the cross, with points being Otterbein at the head, the parsonage at the feet, and the volunteer fire company and the high point of the village at the hands. They prayed along the way, were able to pray for some neighbors who were out, and also got a nice history lesson of the village. Even better, the people from the two churches talked with one another, with some meeting for the first time.

The Clinton County Cluster (Covenant UMC in Lock Haven, Clintondale, Mackeyville, Flemington, Lamar and Mill Hall UMCs) had a gathering in Triangle Park in Lock Haven with a small program to follow.

Howard UMC had an outdoor worship, picnic, and then the prayer walk.

West Branch Charge participated by reading Brenda's letter in an attitude of prayer during the services and then members were encouraged to set aside time at either 1 p.m. or 3 p.m. to pray collectively as a church family.

Moshannon Church held their prayer walk on September 29.

New Hope UMC in Bellefonte was excited by the open discussion they had afterwards

Folks at Pleasant Gap UMC walked from the church to the elementary school and then through part of the development, praying for the school, for those who are struggling, for those traveling on the road, and for the preschool.

The State College Mission Field prayed.

Bald Eagle Valley Community UMC members walked around the elementary, middle and high schools, while Milesburg UMC members walked their immediate neighborhood. Both groups determined they need to do this with consistency, striving to pray every time they drive through or by their mission field and see where God leads them.

St. James UMC in Coburn had their prayer walk following a community picnic at Coburn Park. It was a moving experience for all.

Trinity UMC in Woodward sent one group in one direction, the second in the other, the pastor prayed on the grounds of the church. They took handouts with them and prayed with and for people along the way, connecting with a few folks in need for health or other reasons. They all had ice cream and coffee afterward and chatted about the walk.

Granville UMC had outdoor worship that day and then a picnic lunch. The prayer walk followed. One observed that neighbors don't know their neighbors anymore. It used to be a village where everyone knew everyone. It was a reminder to be neighborly and inspired a discussion about some new outreach ideas.

Laurel Run UMC members had a brief discussion about prayer, their shoes were anointed and in pairs they walked the church property, praying for specific issues as the Lord brought them to mind. The church was anointed with oil, inside and out, each pew, the altar, pulpit, piano, doors, the handicap ramp. They prayed for each member of the
At Seedling Financial Ministry, we have helped hundreds of churches build sanctuaries for growing congregations, repair church buildings and expand current facilities to provide more community outreach. These ministries that were funded represent changed lives and as an investor you are our partner in this ministry!

Investing in Seedling allows you to have the confidence in knowing your money is working according to your values. It gives meaning to your money and aligns your faith and your finances.

Here is another great example of where your investments are growing ministries!

As Calvary UMC advanced its mission in the Lawrenceville-Tioga area, they needed to expand their facilities. The original loan with Seedling was used to build the Friendship Center and purchase a house (Strait House) adjacent to the church.

The Friendship Center houses their Social Hall and Sunday School classrooms. Scouts, community volleyball, AA, Red Cross Blood Drives, Calvary Child Care Center and Tioga County Counseling Center are all housed in the Friendship Center. The Seeds of Hope Ministry, which was born from the labors of building the Friendship Center, fixes local houses and makes bunk beds for children in the community. Perhaps one of the most life changing ministries that the Friendship Center houses is that of Tioga County Homeless Initiative. Many people who have sheltered there in their time of need have shared that the shelter saved their lives!

The Strait House provides space for a food pantry, clothing bank and has a low-income rental unit for families who are not able to pay full rent.

Their second loan with Seedling was to replace roofs, HVAC and to add a security system to help continue to provide a safe and comfortable space for groups to meet. These renovations will allow for Calvary to continue to have a physical presence and missional impact in the area.

“We are open both physical and spiritually for families to use our facilities. Quite honestly we couldn’t have done most of the ministry since the Friendship Center was built without that (loan) money.”

Carl Mattison, Lay Leader, Calvary UMC, Lawrenceville

This does not constitute an offer to sell or a solicitation of an offer to buy any of the investments described herein. This offering is only made by the Offering Circular. No offer or sale of investments is made in any jurisdiction where the offer or sale is not in compliance with applicable laws. Offers and sales may be made only by an authorized officer or employee of the Conference. Conference investments are unsecured obligations of the Conference. Investments are not savings or deposit accounts or other obligations of a bank and are not insured by the FDIC, NCUA, SIPC, any state insurance fund or any government agency.
“While the leader was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.” — John Wesley, May 24, 1738

God calls us to tell our story so that others may come to know Jesus Christ. “Hearts Strangely Warmed” was created to share these stories about transformational encounters with the Living God.

Pastor Beth Pyles

I grew up knowing God and attending church, however, the older I got the further away from God I was. In 2000, I would say a sentence to myself — that looking back was not just a sentence but a prayer — “When I turn 30, everything is going to change”.

God, working only how He could work, answered my “prayer.” On my 30th birthday, I met my husband on a blind date and my life changed. We married and moved from the Washington, D.C. area to my hometown of Breezewood, Pennsylvania. In July, we will have been together 19 years and November 2nd is our 17th wedding anniversary.

God used the passing of my grandmother in June, 2006, to get my attention. I knew that if I wanted to be reunited with her, I had to make changes. In September, 2006, my husband and I walked through the doors at Everett United Methodist Church, not knowing what we would find. The Pastor, Dick Williams, his wife Pam, and the people that welcomed and accepted us set us on our path and ignited the passion that we have for God. It was that group of people that loved and walked with us, that looked past our tattoos and outward appearance, that guided us to where we are today.

I allowed the Lord to use me in any capacity; outreach, visiting, helping in the church office, Altoona Volunteers In Mission, local VIM. I was a willing vessel, trusting where God was leading. In 2010, our Pastor Bob Stroyzk, suggested I speak at our Saturday night service. Suddenly, I wanted to drop the anchor and not be such a willing vessel! However, as an introvert I knew that whatever discomfort public speaking may cause me, it was nothing compared to what Jesus Christ endured for me, so, I said yes.

My calling into pulpit ministry was a quiet whisper, but my calling into a relationship with Jesus Christ was a thundering roar. Reflecting on my journey from 2006 until now, there were significant God moments. One was around 2008 during a worship service. I asked God why I couldn’t have been a mom and clearly, I heard the Lord say, “Because I have other plans for you.” As I walk with God, I have come to realize that those “other plans” change, but what can’t change is my willingness to trust God when the plans change. The second moment was before starting my first appointment as a licensed local pastor in 2012. I was praying and asking God if I should cover my tattoos, remove my piercings, and look more conservative. I clearly heard the Lord say, “I called you exactly how you are.”

As I live each day being authentic in who God has called me to be, I encourage others to do the same. One of my favorite Scriptures is Joshua 1:9, “Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.” I know that the Lord has certainly been with me throughout my life and that I do not have to be afraid or discouraged for whatever plans God has for me God will always go with me.

Beth was commissioned as a Provisional Elder at the 2019 Susquehanna Annual Conference.
Mission Central
Kits Change Lives

This little guy lives in Belize and that smile is because he was given a care kit. A team of 25 volunteers ran a medical clinic equipped, in part, by supplies from Mission Central.

Mission Central care kits change lives both domestically and abroad. They are used in areas that have limited resources as well as in the United States for those impacted by flood/fire, homelessness, domestic violence or reentry into society.

Imagine living where the basic necessities that we take for granted are so greatly needed that a toothbrush or a bar of soap can be a life-changing gift.

This season we are collecting kit supplies for our “Giving Trees.” We are asking churches to collect materials for Mission Central kits. This can be done as part of a Christmas tree donation initiative or through any way the church prefers.

We are collecting for these three kits now:

- Care Kit hand towel, wash cloth, comb, metal nail file/clippers, bath size soap, adhesive bandages, 1 gallon bags
- Baby Kit cloth diapers, undershirts/onesies, infant wash cloths, gowns/sleepers, diaper pins, sweater/jacket, receiving blankets
- Warm Hearts and Hands Kit (Homeless) heavy blanket/sleeping bag, hand towel, wash cloth, bath soap, toothbrush, toothpaste, comb, composition book, pen, socks, gloves, hat, prayer shawl

Your material donations are critical to Mission Central being able to fulfill its goal of “Connecting God’s Resources with Human Need.” In addition to the items needed to assemble various kits, your donations of household goods, furniture, clothing and even computers, can make the difference for someone. You’d be amazed at how much good your GENTLY used household items or unused medical supplies can do! A full list of kits can be found on our website. These include:

- Mission Central Activity Kit
- Mission Central Care Kit
- Mission Central Warm Hearts and Hands Kit
- Mission Central Feminine Hygiene Kit
- Mission Central Blessings Kit
- Mission Central Maternity Kit
- Mission Central Baby Kit
- UMCOR School Kit
- UMCOR Cleaning Kit
- UMCOR Hygiene Kit

Supplies and donations may be dropped off Monday – Friday 9:00 AM – 3:30 PM and Saturday 9:00 AM – 1:00 PM. If your donations fill more than an SUV, please call ahead to schedule your delivery. Our Operations Manager can be reached at 717-766-1533.

For a full list of kits, please visit www.missioncentral.org.

Thank you for your ongoing support of Mission Central!
2019 Faith Build

York Habitat for Humanity Faith Build

on the

700 Block of East Chestnut Street

A partnership with the faith based community starting in October
to build 14 homes for local families through prayer,
volunteerism, and financial support.

Thrivent Financial is sponsoring the 2019 Faith Build
and will match up to $62,000 raised by local churches.

To join the 2019 Faith Build, e-mail the Conference Disaster Response Ministry at drc@susumc.org for more details and a link to sign up to volunteer.
Where Your Treasure Is

Do not store up for yourselves treasure on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasure in heaven...for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Matthew 6:19-21

Rev. Nick Keeney Appointed as Associate Director of The UM Stewardship Foundation

The United Methodist Stewardship Foundation is pleased to announce that Rev. Nick Keeney has been selected and appointed to serve as Associate Director effective January 1, 2020. Rev. Keeney, an Elder in the Susquehanna Annual Conference, is no stranger to the UM Stewardship Foundation where he served as an active board member and was engaged as a member of the Finance Committee and Executive Committee. With his wife Brookye and two sons, Nick served as a pastor in the former Wyoming Conference and now in Susquehanna for last 15 years. He is also active in the Annual Conference by serving as the Executive Secretary of the Student Aid Fund, and a member of the Board of Ordained Ministry. As Associate Director, Nick will execute the policies and programs of the UM Stewardship Foundation. He will also collaborate and network in order to develop and maintain positive relationships with account holders, clergy, laity, and other significant persons related to the United Methodist Stewardship Foundation in the promotion of planned giving. Nick earned his undergraduate degree from Alfred University in Economics and his Master of Divinity from Duke University.

Prayer Walk Unifies State College District

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15

congregation. Afterward they shared insights and concerns about broken families, single parents, children, church facilities, church growth, and the health of members.

Members from First UMC Lewistown walked a three-block radius of the church.

Grays UMC in Port Matilda began at the church and prayed inside and all around the outside of the building, then went to Gray’s Woods Elementary school and prayed at the school and in the adjacent development.

Woodycrest UMC in State College began at the church and prayed inside and all around the outside of the building, then we prayer-walked through the community and at the Woodycrest park. Those who couldn’t walk at the church took the prayer walk resource and walked in their own homes and neighborhoods.

Members of Port Matilda UMC and Hannah UMC in Port Matilda prayed, walked, touched door knobs of the grocery store, touched the swing set, the fire house, the school, etc, and prayed for building projects, and more. They will never look at the neighborhood in the same way again.

Ohio and Grace UMCs in Philipsburg both participated. Ohio had prayer in the community and in the church building for those who were unable to walk. Grace had a time of prayer for the community inside the church building.

Members from Woolrich Community participated at the Clinton County Prayer Walk at Triangle Park on September 8th.

Three teams from Trinity UMC, Bellefonte, walked in downtown Bellefonte and surrounding neighborhoods and prayed that the people in the houses and apartments would be blessed and know God. They distributed door hangers that invited all to a Neighborhood Block Party the following week. Some of the folks who got the invitations came to the block party and they got to know them better.

Members of Calvary and Rock UMCs in West Decatur walked around the two churches while praying for the community: their salvation, purification, and unity in Christ. They handed out invitation cards that briefly introduced the churches and what they were doing as the community of faith.

People at Trinity UMC in Lewistown, Walnut St UMC in Burnham, Aldersgate UMC in Mifflintown, Rebersburg UMC, Madisonburg UMC, Mountaintop UM Charge (Clarence, Pine Glen, and Snow Shoe UMCs) also participated.
Nancy Parr is a retired United Methodist Pastor from the Upper New York Conference, but her mission to encourage hope is never ending. Nancy lives at RiverWoods Senior Living Community and continues to talk with and listen to residents who may have lost hope and need some encouragement. She explained, “I try to write letters to other residents here at RiverWoods to encourage them through tough times. I believe there is always hope. The world can be discouraging at times and it seems, especially now, that many people are discouraged. I just try to be an encourager and a good listener.”

Nancy was one of eleven children growing up in upstate New York. She married Pastor Steve Parr and after having two children, decided to go back to school to become a pastor herself. She started her career in 1979 as the chaplain at Keuka College. After five years, she served as an associate pastor at a few churches before becoming chaplain at a senior living retirement community. When Nancy and Steve retired, they moved to Williamsport to be closer to their daughter, who was attending Lycoming College. They moved to RiverWoods in 2014, when Steve was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s Disease. Nancy cared for her husband in her cottage and Steve passed away in November 2015.

She is now working to get a support group going on campus for people dealing with loved ones who have Alzheimer’s. Nancy enjoys taking part in the group and is hopeful more residents will join.

Nancy also had a great idea on how she could be a part of this year’s annual Car and Tractor Show at RiverWoods. She invited her brothers and their sons and other male members of her family to the show. Fifteen of them came and enjoyed the day at RiverWoods. Nancy said, “They said it was the most relaxing day that they’ve had in a long time. We took pictures and we played some games and we picked prizes. My family was very impressed with the car show. I think what impressed them the most was the fact that the employees here were running the show. They dedicated their time on a Saturday to put on a great show.”

Nancy said family time is so important to her. “I hear so many sad stories of people who haven’t spoken to family members because of a spat. Life is just too short to give up that kind of love for your family. We really have a wonderful time when we get together.”
Churches Offer Mental Health First Aid Training

By Philip J. Brooks
United Methodist Communications

What do you do if someone has a panic attack in the middle of a church service? How would you respond if someone in your congregation expresses suicidal thoughts or shows signs of post-traumatic stress? If someone in your Sunday school class appears isolated and depressed, how would you approach them? These are just a few of the situations where a church leader might encounter mental illness within the congregation.

Mental health first aid (MHFA) is an eight-hour course that trains individuals to identify and respond to signs that a person may have a mental illness, be experiencing substance abuse or otherwise be in distress. Participants learn a five-step action plan that lets them assess situations, listen non-judgmentally and direct those needing assistance to professional help. Prior medical training is not required. Over 2 million people in the United States have been certified in MHFA.

Living The United Methodist Church’s commitment to removing the stigma around mental illness and ensuring quality mental health services for all people, many congregations and annual conferences are beginning to offer mental health first aid training.

The Susquehanna Conference was among the first to offer training for pastors, laity and community members. Sharon Engdahl, then a research analyst with the Mental Health Association for Central Pennsylvania, was serving on the conference’s mental health ministries committee when MHFA began offering trainings in the United States. Engdahl is also the executive director of the Mental Wellness Awareness Association (mentalwellnessawareness.org) in Marysville, PA.

“I was one of the first 100 people in the USA to be trained in mental health first aid,” Engdahl said. “I wrote up a letter of agreement between the conference and the MHFA to host the first training in 2010. It is a one-day event held on a Saturday to accommodate most people’s schedules.” The conference office markets it heavily to local churches and to other non-profits and organizations.

“A major focus of the training is prevention and intervention,” she continued. “We help participants recognize signs that person might be suffering or in distress early on so that their condition can be treated and managed early. Unfortunately, many people have been conditioned to see mental illness as a sign of weakness. We remind everyone that these disorders are real medical conditions that require real medical treatment. By taking part in the program our trainees become better advocates for mental health,” continued Engdahl.

Susquehanna uses the standard MHFA training materials but “also adapted our own Christian resources that use scripture and theology,” said Engdahl. “We offer specific scripture verses that relate to different conditions such as grief, depression and loneliness. The conference also takes a special offering each year in May for mental health ministries.”

“MHFA helped me to recognize when someone might be experiencing a mental health crisis, and it has given me more confidence to reach out and help them. Sometimes it’s as simple as just listening to their story, but it might also involve helping them get a higher level of help, for which I have a list of agencies/resources,” said Sandii Peiffer, a Susquehanna Conference communications specialist.

Other conferences and church networks are following Susquehanna’s example. Among those offering MHFA trainings in 2019 are Great Plains, Iowa, Baltimore-Washington, Memphis and Western North Carolina conferences.

In Great Plains, the Rose Valley, Downs, Osborne and Smith Center United Methodist churches in Kansas collaborated to host MHFA. The churches hosted training days at Osborne and Smith Center in June and August.

“In the rural farming areas where most of us serve, suicide and drug addiction are serious problems,” said the Rev. Michael Ricci-Roberts, Smith Center pastor. “We saw a need for the MHFA in helping us better minister to our communities and make sure we know how to help intervene and get people help early on.”

Ricci-Roberts also ministers to the homeless and prison population outside his congregation and applies his training in those environments. “I meet people with mental illness on the street and in prison all the time. Thanks to the training I am able to be a more empathetic and supportive minister to them as well,” he said.

Like the trainings in Susquehanna, the Smith Center and Osborne events were open to the public and attracted not only pastors and church members, but also teachers, daycare employees, foster care parents and municipal employees. Because MHFA requires responders to be re-certified every year, the churches plan to offer the training annually.

“The training materials were very well-designed and easy to follow,” said the Rev. Dorothy Ellsworth, pastor at Osborne UMC. The instructors used group activities to teach the lessons.”

The training also “helped me become more self-aware of my own mental health,” she said. “As a pastor, I, too, deal with a lot of stress and anxiety, but MHFA helped me learn how to manage my stress better through physical exercise and meditation.”

Mental health first aid is one way United Methodists are working to ensure all persons have access to quality health care within the United States. To learn more about MHFA or find a training venue near you, visit www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org.
Order Your Advent Studies Now!

It’s not Thanksgiving yet, but it’s not too early to think about a study for Advent! Order early to avoid disappointment, as quantities are limited. Choose from the following titles:

**The Gift of the Nutcracker**, by Matt Rawle (2018). Rawle looks at this Christmas classic in a new way: through the lens of faith. He uses the iconic tale to help us understand God’s greatest gift of the Christ child and of the kingdom Christ came to build. 4 sessions. (Also available – study books for Children and Youth.)

**Home for Christmas: Tales of Hope & Second Chances**, by Justin Coleman (2018). This study shares the real-life stories of formerly incarcerated men and women as they find work and opportunity through Homeboy Industries in Los Angeles. As we hear about their struggles, we recognize the Advent themes of hope, love, and peace in their lives. 4 sessions.

**The Case for Christmas: Evidence for the Identity of Jesus**, by Lee Strobel (2018). Strobel reveals what he discovered as he sought to separate the holiday from the holy day, the facts from the fantasy, and the truth from the tradition. You will learn what the Bible says about Jesus’ birth and how you can know it is accurate. 4 sessions.

**Faithful: Christmas Through the Eyes of Joseph**, by Adam Hamilton (2017). As the earthly father of Jesus, Joseph’s place in the Nativity story is sometimes overlooked, but contains valuable lessons for all of us. 4 sessions. (Also available – study books for Children and Youth and a large-print book.)

**The Redemption of Scrooge**, by Matt Rawle (2016). Based on Charles Dickens’ A Christmas Carol, this study explores the world of Ebenezer Scrooge, Tiny Tim, and the Cratchits, with an eye to Christian faith. Along the way we will meet the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present, and Yet to Come and learn about living with and for others in a world blessed by Jesus. 4 sessions. (Also available – study book for Youth.)

**Christmas Gifts That Won’t Break**, by James Moore (2017). As we journey through Advent, we reflect on the unbreakable gifts God has given us: hope, love, joy, and peace…and of course the greatest gift of all: Jesus. 5 sessions.

**Not a Silent Night: Mary Looks Back to Bethlehem**, by Adam Hamilton (2014). Hamilton begins at the end, with Mary at the crucifixion and the resurrection, and then travels back in time as Jesus’ life and ministry unfolds, ending at the beginning: with the Christ Child being born in a stable. 5 sessions.

**Down to Earth**, by Mike Slaughter (2016). Have we ever really grasped the miracle that took place in Jesus’ birth? We will be challenged in this study to respond to this miracle with down-to-earth love, humility, lifestyle, and obedience. 4 sessions.

**The Journey: Walking the Road to Bethlehem**, by Adam Hamilton (2011). Explore the story of the birth of Jesus with fresh ears and eyes. Filmed on location, take your group on a journey with Adam Hamilton as he travels from Nazareth to Bethlehem in this fascinating look at the birth of Jesus Christ. 5 sessions. (Also available – study books for Children and Youth.)

**Finding Bethlehem In the Midst of Bedlam**, by James Moore (2015). This study explores how God comes to us even in the midst of chaos and how we can, in turn, be light that the world seeks, especially during the Christmas Season. Christmas or confusion, Bethlehem or bedlam…which will you choose this year? 5 sessions.

There are many other Advent studies from which to choose. Go to our website, www.discovery-place.org. Click on “online catalog.” You can search by title or author and read full descriptions of the resources listed above. You can also choose “advanced search” and under subject, select Christmas/Advent to see a complete listing of all Advent resources we offer. Place an order directly from the online catalog, call us at 717-766-7968, or e-mail discovery@susumc.org.

God’s blessings to you as we celebrate the upcoming seasons of thankfulness, joy, and hope!

Serving Christ with you, Joni Robison
United Methodist Student Sunday

January 20-22, 2020

Speakers include:

- Jason Mackey
- Arun Andrews
- Janelle Walker
- George Reynolds
- Elizabeth Brake
- Christy Mackey
- Rebecca Holland
- Bishop Park
- Paul McReynolds

Register at www.susumc.org/bishops-retreat

Preaching Festival

Hershey Lodge

Join us for the Preaching Festival — formerly the Bishop’s Retreat. This event will have times of reflection and renewal with opportunities to learn new skills to help grow your ministry, and take an in-depth look at worship services.

Speakers include:

- Jason Mackey
- Arun Andrews
- Janelle Walker
- George Reynolds
- Elizabeth Brake
- Christy Mackey
- Rebecca Holland
- Bishop Park
- Paul McReynolds

Register at www.susumc.org/bishops-retreat

Online Cont. Ed for UM Clergy

Ongoing

Market Square Books has been developing an online training program for United Methodist clergy. Classes will be taught by recognized leaders within the denomination. Classes launched in October 2019.

Online classes are live, and attendees will participate in question/answer session during the final portion of each class, allowing them to ask questions of the instructors.

The fee for each one-hour class is $25. UM clergy will receive a 20 percent discount in November when using the following discount code: clergy20. Upon registration and class attendance, participants will receive a certificate designating their attendance, with applicable information, which can be turned in to district or conference officials.

www.susumc.org/bishops-retreat

Licensing School

February 21-23, 2020
March 13-15, 2020
April 17-19, 2020

All three weekends will be held at Wesley Forest.

The brochure and registration form for Licensing school can be found at the Board of Ordained Ministry Website, under the Candidacy tab, at tinyurl.com/y3usyuur.

Registrations are due by February 1, 2020. Register at www.susumc.org/bishops-retreat

General Conference

May 5-15, 2020

“...and KNOW that I am GOD”

General Conference is the top policy-making body of The United Methodist Church, which meets once every four years. The conference can revise church law, as well as adopt resolutions on current moral, social, public policy and economic issues. It also approves plans and budgets for church-wide programs.

tinyurl.com/UMCGC2020

tinyurl.com/UMCGC2020
VIM Training 2020

It prepares you to lead an UVMIM Team locally, nationally, or globally. Topics covered include: Best Practices, Cultural Awareness, Health & Safety, Team Orientations, Useful Forms, and Fundraising.

Open to all: those who have lead teams, those who have never been on a team. We can all learn to become better missionaries and servants. Taking this training does not require you to lead a trip but equips you for service. We learn from the course materials and from one another.

Learn more about the connectional system of United Methodist Volunteers In Mission.

(Only 1 training is required, pick from any date below that suits your schedule.)

9 AM - 4 PM
Light breakfast and materials provided.
Please bring a bagged lunch.

January 11, 2020
Shiremanstown UMC
125 E Main St, Shiremanstown, PA 17011

March 14, 2020
Beach Lake UMC
7 Milanville Rd, Beach Lake, PA 18405

RSVP to Michelle Schwartzman, Director Volunteers in Mission, 2 weeks prior to the training.
Email vim@susumc.org or call 717-766-7441 ext.3105

What’s Coming for Young People?

KEVIN WITT, Director of Growing Spiritual Transformational Leaders
KIM SHOCKLEY, Coordinator for Pathways of Spiritual Leadership

Two events are coming in 2020 that are specifically planned to train our young people – ages 12-18 – as spiritual transformational leaders.

1. Youth Leader Retreat
   April 24-26, 2020 at Wesley Forest.
   For young people – ages 12-18 who are ready to learn how to “Lead from Your Strengths”. This weekend retreat will help young people learn the art of making things happen, helping your team reach a broader audience, building team relationships, and staying focused on how God wants to use us. The Young People’s Ministry Council is planning this retreat and more information will be coming soon!

2. Faith Immersion Experience
   June 28 – July 3, 2020 at Wesley Forest.
   This is a new development linked with the Young Clergy Initiative grant that will provide an intentional experience for young people – ages 14-18 – who are invited by their church’s leadership team to participate and will live with a covenant as they learn to apply leadership principles when they return to their local community of faith.

If you have questions about either of these events, please contact Kim Shockley at kshockley@susumc.org or (717) 766-7441 x 3604.

KEVIN WITT, Director of Growing Spiritual Transformational Leaders
KIM SHOCKLEY, Coordinator for Pathways of Spiritual Leadership
November 2019

Dear Colleagues in Ministry,

One of the special expressions of the United Methodist polity is the opportunity for members of the connection to offer a resolution for consideration to a conference. The founders of our movement believed that in conferencing the Holy Spirit of God could guide us to consider the prompting of our members. The opportunity is here once again for you, your congregation or any of its members to offer a resolution for consideration at the 2020 session of Annual Conference.

A resolution typically is formatted with a series of statements beginning with “whereas.” These statements provide the rationale of the petitioner. These statements demonstrate the assumptions that the petitioner holds. They belong to the petitioner. After the series of “whereas” statements, there appears at least one statement that begins “Therefore, be it resolved.” This becomes the main motion that is put before the Conference. If more than one action is being petitioned, another statement may be added beginning “be it further resolved.”

Resolutions are an extension of the Susquehanna Conference’s Board of Global Missions and Connecting Ministries team.

Resolutions are to be clearly printed and sent together with supporting documentation. It is preferred that all resolutions be received electronically via email. You can email them to me at ksledge@susumc.org. If you are unable to email the resolutions, please mail them to:

Pastor Kristopher Sledge
750 S. 29th Street
Harrisburg, PA 17111

Please indicate a contact person should we need to contact the petitioner for clarification.

Resolutions must be submitted no later than February 1, 2020.

Sincerely,

Pastor Kristopher Sledge
Training Opportunities

- Connecting Neighbors
- Early Response Team—Basic
- Early Response Team—Refresher
- Early Response Team—200 Level
  - Cleaning Out a Flooded Home
  - Team Leader/Assistant Leader
  - Logistics Manager
  - On-Site Management
  - Safety Officer
  - Site Evaluation
  - Wildfire Response
- CPR/AED
- First Aid/Stop the Bleed
- Spiritual/Emotional Care (coming soon)

For more information, or to schedule a training, e-mail the Conference Disaster Response Ministry at drc@susumc.org.
CHURCH SERVICE PROJECT

We appreciate our churches!

Pray
Pray for the work and mission of Mission Central

Donate
Donate via our website. Financial donations ensure that kits continue to be made, the doors continue to open each day and Mission Central continues to reach out to those in need – locally, nationally and globally

Collect
Collect materials for Mission Central kits:

- **Care Kit** – hand towel, wash cloth, comb, metal nail file/clippers, bath size soap, adhesive bandages, 1 gallon bags
- **Baby Kit** – cloth diapers, undershirts/onesies, infant wash cloths, gowns/sleepers, diaper pins, sweater/jacket, receiving blankets
- **Warm Hearts and Hands Kit (Homeless)** – heavy blanket/sleeping bag, hand towel, wash cloth, bath soap, toothbrush, toothpaste, comb, composition book, pen, socks, gloves, hat, prayer shawl

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

Please Drop Off Items for at Mission Central:
**Monday – Friday 9:00am – 3:30pm or Saturday 9:00am – 1:30pm**

Mission Central – 5 Pleasant View Drive – Mechanicsburg, PA 17050
717.766.1533  www.missoncentral.org
"My goal is always to be a kinder person. In everything I do, I try to be kind and represent God."

—Laura Harness, Gift of Hope Scholar, Wesleyan College, Macon, Georgia

Please make check payable to your local church or give online at www.umcgiving.org/giveUMSD.
November – 100 years ago.

In November 1919 the Wyoming Conference re-structured its Italian ministry in the city of Scranton. Rev. Antonio Sartorio transferred to the New York East Conference and the work was placed in the hands of the deaconesses, Misses Darling and Emery, until the end of the conference year, when Rev. Vincent DeFranco transferred from the Southern New England Conference to be appointed there. In addition, the storefront facility on West Lackawana Avenue was abandoned at this time, and the work was moved to Elm Park until the North Main Avenue property was purchased that served as the Italian Methodist church in Scranton from 1921 until the Italian ministry ended in 1945.

December – 50 years ago

The December 1969 issue of The Central Pennsylvania United Methodist, its last one before becoming THE LINK in 1970, invited 10th-12th grade youth to register for the Senior High Christmas Retreat held Monday to Wednesday, December 29 to 31, 1969 – at two locations simultaneously: the lodges at Camp Greene Hills and at Camp Mount Asbury. The retreat promised opportunity to “study, explore the Bible, eat, explore into the faith, pray, meditate, worship, share and participate in recreation.” The $15.00 cost included six meals, two overnights, insurance and all handouts. The events were organized by Conference Coordinator of Youth Ministries Rev. Bruce Fisher and limited to five persons from any one church.
Walk with Them!

When a new person visits your church, help them navigate your space. Instead of pointing them in the direction they need to go or telling them to follow a certain hallway—WALK WITH THEM and guide them to the space they are looking for. While you are walking with them, introduce yourself, ask them their name, and tell them how glad you are they came. How will you intentionally care for your first time guests? For more information and resourcing contact EVCoffice@susumc.org.