Easter people, let us sing!

By Bishop Cynthia Moore-Koikoi

Easter season, or Eastertide is the 50-day period starting at sunset on the eve of Easter and continuing until Pentecost, which is on June 9 this year. So we are right in the middle of a season where we rejoice and experience anew the fact that Christ is risen. During this season we remember our baptism and ponder and celebrate what it means to be an Easter/Resurrection people. We contemplate what it means to follow a Jesus who conquered death and the grave and lives. We examine our lives and attitudes and discipleship journeys to ensure that we are living and acting as people who serve a risen savior who is in the world today. We rehearse again and again “He lives, He lives! Christ Jesus lives today.”

There are spiritual forces of wickedness that cringe every time we sing that refrain. Those forces are invested in us living and acting as if our God is dead. I must confess that on Easter Sunday morning when I awoke to the news that hundreds of people in Sri Lanka who were worshiping on one of the most sacred days in the Christian year were blown up, I was overwhelmed with grief and it was hard for me to feel like an Easter person.

I remembered the massacre at the mosque in Christchurch. I thought of the murders at Tree of Life Synagogue. I recalled my visit to Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina following the massacre there. All of these thoughts were going through my mind as I was getting ready to go to Easter Sunday morning service. All of these thoughts continued with me during this Easter season. Now the death of Lori Gilbert Kaye, shot by a gunman who entered Chabad of Poway as worshipers gathered to celebrate the last day of Passover, has invaded my meditation and prayer time.

During my prayer and meditation, it occurred to me that if I let my dismay over these events negatively impact my relationship with God, thus preventing me from realizing the full blessings God has for me during this Easter season, I will have let the spiritual forces of wickedness be victorious.

These attacks on places of worship ought to impact how we think about safety in our places of worship, but they should not negatively impact the worship that happens there. In fact, perhaps our shouts of “He lives, He lives!” should be louder and more intense to show our defiance of the forces of evil. It doesn’t matter what the world may do, it does not change the fact that on the third day Jesus the Christ rose from the dead. He is Lord and Risen Savior!

When we stand against hate, particularly during a time when hate crimes are on the rise, we are declaring, “He lives. He lives!” When we hold our loved ones accountable for racist, anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, or homophobic hate comments, we are declaring, “He lives. He lives!” When we reach out to the Jewish and Muslim communities, uplifting our common Abrahamic roots, we are declaring, “He lives. He lives!”

This Easter season I am reclaiming my identity as an Easter person. I am going to raise my voice as loudly as I can with my words and my deeds declaring, “He is risen”. And during this season I implore you ...

Easter people, raise your voices,
sounds of heaven in earth should ring.
Christ has brought us heaven's choices;
Heavenly music, let it ring.
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Easter people, let us sing.

"Easter People, Raise Your Voices"
William M. James
The United Methodist Hymnal, No. 304
I am exceedingly grateful to the men and women who serve on the Judicial Council of the United Methodist Church. This group of nine laity and clergy persons who are elected by the General Conference is charged with the responsibility of determining if the actions of General, Jurisdictional, Central and Annual Conferences are constitutional. It also rules on whether the actions of other official bodies of the denomination are consistent with the Book of Discipline.

I am sure that when the current council members accepted their nominations, many of them did not realize the intensity of the legal, emotional, and spiritual work that would be before them as we United Methodists expressed our differences in perspective on the role practicing homosexuals should play in the life of our beloved denomination. Regardless of your particular opinions about their rulings, I urge you in your personal and collective prayer time to thank God for them. For obvious reasons, their personal contact information is not shared widely, so I’m not encouraging you to email them, but if you ever encounter members of the council in person, please thank them for their service.

On Friday, April 26, the Judicial Council released their rulings on the legislation passed by the Special Called Session of General Conference. Because of the diversity of perspectives in Western Pennsylvania, the rulings have been received with joy by some and with great pain by others. Some have mixed feelings. It is my prayer that we will continue striving for perfection in love and continue to grow in our understanding of and compassion for the feelings of all of the members of our Western Pennsylvania Conference family.

The following is a summary of the rulings:

While about half of the petitions that made up the Traditional Plan were found to be unconstitutional, the Judicial Council ruled that because each petition could each stand independently of the overall plan, the constitutional petitions in the plan would go forward. However, the seven unconstitutional petitions (90033, 90034, 90035, 90037, 90038, 90039, and 90040) and the second sentence of one other petition (90045) were ruled null and void. The eight constitutional petitions (90032, 90036, 90042, 90043, 90044, 90046, 90047, and all except the second sentence of 90045) will become effective in the United States on January 1, 2020 and one year after the end of the Special Called Session in late February 2020 in conferences outside the United States.

The petitions that will be implemented have added to or clarified the complaint process. A complaint is a written document filed with the bishop of an area stating that a clergy or layperson in the United Methodist Church has violated the Book of Discipline. A complaint triggers a formal process which can only be dismissed if there is no basis of law or fact for the complaint and the reasons for dismissal are shared with the complainant.

If a complaint is filed, a bishop must first try to resolve the complaint through a just resolution. A just resolution identifies what harm was done by the violation of the Book of Discipline and what will be done to address that harm. Now just resolutions must identify all harms that have been done and how those harms will be addressed. In addition, now “every effort” must be made to have the complainant agree to the just resolution. If a just resolution cannot be agreed upon, complaints can be sent to a church trial. If a trial court finds a clergy person guilty of officiating at a same gender union, the penalty for the first offense is a one-year unpaid suspension. For a second offense, there is termination of credentials.

The approved petitions also added some clarity to the ordination process. One clarified that being “a self-avowed practicing homosexual” now includes living in a same-sex marriage, domestic partnership, or civil union. Another states that bishops cannot consecrate “self-avowed” homosexuals as bishops or ordain candidates that the Board of Ordained Ministry determines to be “self avowed”. Petition 90036 removed “practicing” from the prohibition, so any self-avowed homosexual, whether practicing or not, cannot be ordained or consecrated. However, the Committee on Correlation and Editorial Revision (CCER) met after the Special Called Session and corrected the inconsistencies in this petition with other paragraphs in the Book of Discipline. The committee added the disciplinary phrase “self-avowed practicing homosexual” to petition 90036. In addition, the Board of Ordained Ministry must do a “full examination” of each candidate.

The Judicial Council also modified its prior ruling on the disaffiliation plan previously known as Petition 90059. (By action of the General Conference, Petition 90059 is now referred to as Petition 90066). In its new ruling, the council said, “We reluctantly declare amended Petition 90066 constitutional,
but stress at the same time that the General Conference bears the responsibility to legislatively address the deficiency identified...". The result is that now, if a local church, as a matter of conscience, disagrees with the denomination’s stance on homosexuality, it may disaffiliate from the denomination through a process that, among other things, requires the following three steps:

1. The local church would have to, by a 2/3 margin, vote at a church conference to disaffiliate.

2. Then, the Conference Board of Trustees, acting on behalf of annual conference entities and the bishop, shall establish a disaffiliation plan. The plan shall establish a date of disaffiliation and terms and conditions. The terms and conditions of the disaffiliation must be consistent with church and state laws and must be agreed upon by the local church. Church law now includes provisions from Wespath legislation which says, in part, that disaffiliating churches must compensate annual conferences for pension and apportionment liabilities.

3. Finally, the Annual Conference would need to ratify the agreement by a majority vote at a session of the Annual Conference.

It is important to note that legislation passed by General Conference only provides for disaffiliation of a local church for reasons of conscience because they disagree with the provisions and requirements of the Book of Discipline regarding homosexuality.

As the Judicial Council alluded, the work of the General Conference with regard to the role of practicing homosexuals in the life of the church is not finished. And as many of you have been reading online or hearing from various caucus groups, we will still be debating homosexuality at General Conference in 2020. Groups on all sides began meeting almost immediately after the Special Called Session.

I continue to have hope that we will find more loving, compassionate, humble, creative, wise, and Spirit-filled ways to engage in conversation about our perspectives, hopes, dreams, and concerns related to the role of practicing homosexuals in the life of the church.

To facilitate this, we invited interested clergy and laity to gather for conversation to discern ways in which we in the Western Pennsylvania Conference might continue together in ministry with convicted humility in light of our various views. Please register to be part of these conversations if you want to grow in understanding others, you value relationship with those who disagree with you, and you want to vision and dream about our beloved denomination. Please do NOT register if you want to convince others you are right.

There will be an organizational meeting of all who register. Then those who registered will be encouraged to, on their own, form small groups that will continue to meet for conversation. Each group will set its own parameters for meeting. The goal of the registration and the organizational meeting is merely to put people together who have a desire for conversation. To register, visit www.wpaumc.org/joindiscussiongroup.

Kane youth kick off new season of ministry

By Jay Tennies

Youth from McKean, Potter, Cameron, Forest and Warren counties gathered at First United Methodist Church in Kane on April 7 to kick off a new season of ministry. Kane District Youth Coordinator Rev. Jonathan Bell and Young Adult Coordinator Kayla Schwanke organized an evening of worship, games, and food designed to help build friendships across the district.

Rev. Bell shared about the positive influence that District Youth has been in his life and ministry. His devotional centered around his life verses with special emphasis on Romans 12:9-10 from The Message, “Love from the center of who you are; don’t fake it. Run for dear life from evil; hold on for dear life to good. Be good friends who love deeply; practice playing second fiddle.”

He promised that District Youth will be a place where, “you will find a group of people who will never be fake with you.” Admission to the event was a personal hygiene item which would be donated to The Sharing Room Ministry in Kane. Bonnie Fuller explained how these items are available to the community and she invited the youth for a quick tour.

The evening brought youth together in a positive way that could be summed up in a quote from one of the worship leaders. James McDonald said, “It warmed my heart to see young people praising God together.”
About 1800 clergy and laity will gather at Grove City College for the 2019 Western PA Annual Conference session from June 6-8. Voting members -- all clergy and an equal number of laity representing churches, charges or districts -- will worship and pray together, hear a State of the Church report from Bishop Cynthia Moore-Koikoi, consider proposed legislation and elect voting delegates for the 2020 General Conference.

Conference attendees will also witness the ordination of three deacons and seven elders and commissioning of five new provisional clergy members; honor members who have died in the past year during a memorial service; and celebrate the ministry of 39 retiring clergy.

Bible study leader for the annual conference will be Dr. Yung Suk Kim, a Korean-American biblical scholar specializing in the New Testament and early Christianity. He is on the faculty at Virginia Union University and is editor of the Journal of Race, Ethnicity and Religion.

A pre-conference Leadership Seminar featuring Rev. Olu Brown, lead pastor of the fast-growing Impact Church in Atlanta, and Kay Kotan, an author, coach and church consultant, will be offered Wednesday afternoon, June 5. Kotan will teach around her recent book on reclaiming the role of lay ministry. Brown will focus on 4D Impact, considering four aspects of vital, healthy churches in the 21st Century. The seminar is open to all laity and clergy.

One important task of annual conference members will be electing delegates to the 2020 General and Jurisdictional Conferences. Six lay and six clergy will be elected for General Conference and an additional six clergy and six laity, as well as alternates, will be elected for the Jurisdictional delegation. Jurisdictional delegates, usually the first two elected in each category, serve as alternate delegates to the General Conference.

The number of delegates to represent each area is determined by the Commission on the General Conference using a statistical formula in The Book of Discipline for 2016 based on the number of clergy and professing lay members of each annual conference. The maximum number of delegates is capped at 1,000. For 2020, there will be 862 delegates.

In the elections, clergy vote for clergy delegates and lay members vote for lay delegates. Candidate biographies are available in the Pre-conference Journal, which is online at wpaumc.org/AC, but eligible lay members or clergy who did not submit a biography also are listed on the ballot.

Among the legislation submitted for consideration by members is a new apportionment formula and a Connectional apportionment budget of $8,847,347 for funding ministry. The budget reflects a decrease of more than $650,000 from the prior year. The decrease was achieved in part by establishing an income stream from reserve fund interest, while preserving the principal. The income will be used to pay the benefits cost of Conference staff funded through the Connectional Apportionment budget.

“For 2020, a key goal was to apportion local churches an amount that more closely aligns with their ability to pay,” said the Rev. Seth McClymonds, chair of the Council on Finance and Administration. “The proposed legislation will shift the apportionment calculation from the current expense based formula to an income-based formula. It moves us toward a more biblical foundation in how we apportion and aligns apportionments with what is actually being collected and used to fund the annual operating budget of the church.”

Details of the apportionment budget, projected apportionments for each church, legislation and other information on annual conference are available on the Annual Conference page of the Conference website -- www.wpaumc.org/AC.
God is at work within the recovery community. Alcoholics and opioid users are earnestly seeking God’s help with their addictions. And your church can be equipped to be the healing hands of Jesus at an Empowering to Combat Addiction workshop on Saturday, June 22.

Last June I had a moment of clarity when God grabbed my attention. Our church had agreed to open our gym for a regional Alcoholics Anonymous gathering. Even though our church had been neck deep in recovery ministry for nearly seven years, I wasn’t prepared for what I was about to see.

Entering the gym to make my pastoral “cameo appearance”, I was taken aback. The place was crammed with 180 people, sitting at tables and taking notes as though their lives depended upon it. And for some, the message could indeed have saved their lives.

The speaker was from Sandusky, Ohio, and he spoke with the fire of an evangelist. Walking through each of the Twelve Steps, he repeatedly proclaimed, “People, you need God to get you through these steps! And once you are free of alcohol, you need to do the steps again, because God wants to deal with your sex life. He wants to address how you spend your money. In fact, he wants you to become more and more like the image of your Creator!” Wow.

Three and half hours of solid teaching, and no one looked bored. A warm summer day in a hot, stuffy gym, and no one left early. In fact, most stayed afterwards to help with the cleanup.

What grabbed my heart was this: Most of those dear people don’t see the local church as relevant. It would never occur to them that they could find God’s help at a church service. They would gladly attend an AA or Narcotics Anonymous meeting in a church building, and they might even attend three or four of those meetings each week! But walk into worship? No way.

Everyone called into ministry believes in the transformational message of the Gospel. We’ve experienced the life-changing work of the Holy Spirit in our own hearts, and are excited to see God do the same for others. But over time we become jaded by viewing the same faces in the pews, and doing ministry “the way things have always been done.”

On any given Sunday at Ashes to Life in Beaver Falls, we see more men than women, more tattoos than gray hair, people more familiar with pot than with potlucks. Lives are changing. People have begun to see Sunday church as an energy drink for their spiritual lives as they seek God’s grace and strength. They’ve come to discover their Higher Power’s name is Jesus.

Ashes to Life Ministries is a bit unusual. I get that. Few churches can make the dramatic transition from the traditional Sunday morning fare to a service that has the look and feel of an AA meeting. No question. But with the current crisis of opioid addiction and the resurgence of Twelve Step meetings, there is a mission field right in our backyard. Radical hospitality and creative evangelism can make a huge difference. But how do we move forward?

This June you can have your own moment of clarity. Recovery ministries from around our connection are gathering to educate, inspire and resource those who sense a calling to the addicted. Join us for this Addiction Recovery Ministry workshop, scheduled for Saturday, June 22 at Butler First UMC. Registration and further details will be available on the Conference website. Go to the date on the calendar or search for “Addiction.”
“A sermon in a song” is how the Rev. Rick Howe, pastor of the Luthersburg Charge, describes the Christmas and Easter cantatas performed with the support of his three small churches in the DuBois area. What started nine years ago as a simple 20-minute cantata and a request for a few people to perform has grown into an area-wide music ministry that includes annual Easter and Christmas cantatas, a December Choir Fest and “Summer Hummer.” Along with a 20-member choir, there are two violinists, a flute, trumpet, and pianist.

Audiences average about 140-150 people for each performance. In essence, this small charge has year-round events that invite community members to join in performing or simply experiencing the uplifting joy of music.

Rev. Rick has always loved music. In school, he sang in choirs and performed in the high school band. Although dismissive of his own musical background, he looked perfectly at ease, joyous even, as he led his choir in practicing this year’s Easter cantata.

“Our community used to have weekly services on Wednesdays during Lent, but these were attended by fewer and fewer people,” he said. To help put people into the religious frame of mind and prepare for the Christmas event, he schedules the Christmas cantata for the Saturday before the start of Advent and the Easter cantata for the Saturday before Palm Sunday to prepare listeners for Holy Week.

The three Luthersburg Charge churches – Luthersburg, Salem, and Home Camp -- are small-membership churches of 30 or less. None has a full choir. But, as other small congregations have learned, big things can grow from small packages.

Rev. Rick’s love of music, his belief that “ministry doesn’t just happen in the pulpit” and “music draws us closer to God and keeps our hearts sensitive and open” has helped the small charge to draw in the community.

“It has,” as Sarah Winslow, one of his church and choir members says, “grown the church’s heart and has shown the community that heart.”

Many of the choir members, ranging in age from pre-teens to seniors, are from neighboring churches or the community. No one is turned away and all seem happy to be giving up an hour a week for several months to be part of this extraordinary group. “I’d put them up against any other cantata around,” the pastor whispered.

Five years ago he introduced a Choir Fest in early December. It includes choirs from the Luthersburg charge and four neighboring UM churches, each performing two selections and finishing with a piece performed by all of the choirs together. Attendance is close to 200 people.

Rev. Howe and Susie Greathouse came up with the “Summer Hummer” – a summer talent show held at the Home Camp church. Anyone can perform “anything appropriate for a church,” Howe explains. “It is what we do in the summer for fun.” The event is always followed with ice cream sundaes.

The music celebration “gets me through the rough parts,” says soprano Wendy Weber, who has called Home Camp her church since her neighboring church closed.

“I wake up in the morning with a song in my head,” says Carol Saxton, a lifelong member of Home Camp. “I didn’t have the nerve to do this (sing in the cantata) until I was invited.” Jen Krisner agrees. “You don’t feel as though you have to have musical training to jump in and make something beautiful.”

There is a ripple effect to this celebration of music. When Sarah Winslow, a local music teacher and Home Camp congregant, approached Rev. Howe and the congregation to ask if she could use the church for summer piano instructions, the response was. “We’ll have a key made for you.” She said she had “never been to another church that would have done that just like that.” “This church is a magnet for musicians,” Sarah added. “It breaks down barriers. I would say that this church overcomes denomination boundaries.”

Stephanie Penrose and Andrew Hipwell from the nearby Lakeside Church agreed, with the enthusiastic support of the newly appointed pastor, to keep conducting the cantatas at Home Church after Rick’s retirement June 30.

What has started with a tiny, single performance has grown into a ministry. “He knows what he wants and he encourages everyone,” Stephanie Penrose says of Rev. Rick. Sometimes his choir looks at the cantata he has selected for them and wonders if it might not be “beyond their reach.” But Rick knows his group and believes in them, and that belief shines from every one of them.

Small church music ministry has big reach
By Jane Murphy
This spring, Bishop Cynthia continued the tradition of the Wesleyan Heritage tour to England with ordinands. This trip allows the ordinands to connect more deeply with the roots of the Methodist movement. The ordinands, their spouses and Conference leaders traveled to notable Wesley spots to stand where Susanna taught her children, to look out over the port where Asbury and Coke left for America, and pray where John Wesley preached. Each day, a different traveler reflected on the day.

EPWORTH

“I got teary-eyed as I thought of the diligence of Susanna in raising up her children in the faith. What a heritage she instilled in the people called Methodists.”

The group visited Epworth and toured the Wesley’s home. They then walked to the churchyard where John Wesley preached atop his father’s gravestone. Bishop Cynthia had the ordinands gather with their hands on the gravestone while everyone else lay hands on them. Bishop prayed for the group and for their time together.

COVENTRY

“...this was not a case of forgive and forget or forgive but keep at arms length...this was a case of forgive, live, rise above and transform. This was love and everlasting peace through the redemptive work of the Holy Spirit.”

During WWII, the city of Coventry was heavily bombed because of its manufacturing industry. A casualty of the bombing was Coventry Cathedral. Rather than completely demolish the building after it was damaged, a few of the outside walls were left standing as a reminder of the price of war and a testament to the spirit of reconciliation. The group spent time in reflection here, taking photos and slowly walking this holy space. Bishop Cynthia led us in prayer and a song for peace on earth.

PORT OF PILL

Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord? I have heard you calling in the night I will go, Lord, if you lead me I will hold your people in my heart

Because of the drastic tide changes, this port appeared to be just a collection of boats stuck in the mud. But Francis Asbury in 1771 and Thomas Coke in 1784 sailed from this place for America and the significance of this location was felt deeply by all. The group joined together and sang “Here I Am, Lord”, reaffirming their commitment to going where they are led.

HOLY CLUB IN OXFORD

One of the most meaningful experiences for many in the group was the visit to John Wesley’s room at Lincoln College where the Holy Club met for prayer, bible study, and discussion. A kind fellow at the college allowed us to step into the room and spend some time in reflection of all that had occurred in this place.

NEW ROOM/HANHAM MOUNT

“I believe God is calling me to step out of the places that are comfortable and build relationships...preaching and sharing Christ in all places. John Wesley was able to make the world his parish, and so can I.”

The group spent a substantial amount of time in Bristol at the New Room, built by John Wesley as a place to preach, meet, and minister to those in need. It remains the oldest Methodist building in the world. We toured the museum and Bishop Cynthia led communion, serving from the same table Wesley himself had served. After that, we walked to the home of Charles Wesley.

To end the day, we prayed at Hanham Mount, one of the first places John Wesley preached in the fields to primarily coal miners and laborers.

PALM SUNDAY IN LONDON

“We waved palm branches, sang, and disrupted traffic. It was a special experience as a hundred or more Christians from 40 different nations processed together in the name of unity and the witness of Christ’s triumphal entry.”

The group began Palm Sunday by visiting various important places around London, including Aldersgate Street where John Wesley felt his heart “strangely warmed.” The group then worshiped at Wesley’s Chapel in London. This church is incredibly diverse and full of life. As part of the service, a donkey named Dan was led through the streets at the head of a processional of at least one hundred people singing and rejoicing.

During this unforgettable trip, the group met with incredibly hospitable, kind and welcoming people. It was noted time and again that God’s presence was truly felt as we explored and felt the legacies of John and Charles Wesley. More pictures from this trip can be viewed at flickr.com/wpaumc.
The Wrestling with Racism group, which was launched by Pittsburgh’s Warren and First United Methodist churches, sponsored an Abolitionist Tour of the Pittsburgh area on Saturday, May 4. Historian/storyteller John Burt provided the commentary on people and places while the packed tour bus traveled from Pittsburgh to Washington, PA and back again.

The focus was on antislavery efforts of women and men in Western Pennsylvania before the Civil War and included stories of how the Underground Railroad operated in the area.

The first stop was LeMoyne House in Washington, one of several sites in Washington County on the Underground Railroad. Dr. Francis Julius LeMoyne, a physician, was active in the anti-slavery movement, not only providing safe shelter, but assisting many escaping slaves financially or through his connections.

Nelson Gant, for example, spent several days at Dr. LeMoyne’s home and told the LeMoynes about his efforts to buy his wife Anna Maria’s freedom. Dr. LeMoyne put him in touch with Dr. Martin Delany of Pittsburgh, who had apprenticed with Dr. LeMoyne and later went on to serve with the "U.S. Colored Troops" in the Civil War. With the help of Dr. Delany and others in Pittsburgh, Gant worked to earn enough to gain his wife’s freedom, but when her owner refused to sell, Gant attempted to help her escape. Although they were caught and jailed, they were later acquitted and Anna Maria’s freedom was secured. The cost of their trial and her freedom was $775, much of which came from Drs. LeMoyne and Gant and other friends. The Gants eventually settled in Zanesville, Ohio, and built a home where they helped others on the Underground Railroad.

The Abolitionist Tour bus then drove along the North Side of Pittsburgh and across the river to Allegheny Cemetery in the Lawrenceville section to visit the sculpted grave marker of Charles Avery. Avery was a Methodist minister, industrialist and philanthropist who made his fortune in cotton milling and lived in Allegheny City, now the Northside of Pittsburgh. He founded and incorporated the Allegheny Institute and Mission Church, later Avery College, intended for the formal education of Blacks, in 1849. The Institute building, also a stop on the Underground Railroad, survived on Ohio Street in the heart of the Northside’s Deutschtown neighborhood until it was demolished in 1969-70 to make way for Interstate 279.

In downtown Pittsburgh, the tour stopped at First Ave. and Smithfield Street near the former Monongahela Hotel and John Vashon’s barbershop and safehouse, where slaves could change their appearance and a continue on the path to freedom. By one account, the hotel was by day a business, social and political gathering place for white leaders, by night it was a station on the Underground Railroad. The hotel staff of free blacks reportedly assisted many slaves escape from their masters staying there.

At the Heinz 57 Center on Sixth Street, the bus stopped near one of two historical markers in the region dedicated to Jane Grey Cannon Swisshelm, who witnessed slavery first hand while living in Kentucky and pledged to work to abolish it. Swisshelm, incensed by laws making women the property of their husbands and restricting their act without permission, also played a key role in the suffragette movement. She became a journalist, first writing under a pen name to tell some of the stories of oppression, then publishing an abolitionist newspaper in Pittsburgh.

The tour brought together a diverse group, including some from other denominations and faith communities, to learn about the region and spend time together.
Cheryl Bedick Keafer is the new executive director of United Methodist Human Service (UMHS) in Johnstown. She was hired earlier this year to fill the position vacated when Joy Baker was married and moved out of the area. Cheryl offers this letter of introduction to the people of the Western PA Conference.

It is an honor to introduce myself to the Western Pennsylvania Conference of the United Methodist Church. Soon after moving to Johnstown in 1980, I became a member of Oakland United Methodist Church, finding there a loving community in which to grow in my faith and later to raise my son.

I have been an active member, whether singing in the Choir, leading worship on Sundays or at the Camp Allegheny Women’s Retreat in the summer, serving as Lay Leader or Small Group Coordinator, and just about any committee you can imagine! After getting my Master of Social Work degree, I began working in the mental health field in various capacities, primarily as a counselor and then Director of Counseling at New Day, Inc. After 30 years I never thought I would be anywhere besides New Day, but when God nudges it’s always a good idea to obey!

With the great team here at UMHS I am excited to partner with the churches of the Johnstown District to serve and empower those in need. I’m also excited about what our programs have to offer the community. Along with an active Food Pantry, help with baby care and personal care items, Biblical counseling, and Project Shoes, the Bridges to Success Program provides a viable pathway toward sustainable solutions for the under-resourced, with hands on help along the way.

As I settle into this new season, I look forward to meeting with pastors and church leaders to hear about what congregations are doing and discern how we might be able to help. If you are interested, I would be available (as well as several of our Board members) to come to your church to share information or bring the message on a Sunday.

My prayer for all of us is that in every way we minister we reflect the heart of God as found in Micah 6:8: “...to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God.”

Please check out our website for more information on our programs and how you might get involved: www.umhumanservices.org. You can contact me at: cheryl@umhumanservices.org

United Methodist Resources

Discover more great content from these sites

UMC.org ResourceUMC.org UMNews.org

United Methodist Communications has launched a new website for church leaders. ResourceUMC.org is a centralized place for United Methodist leaders across the globe to find helpful information, tools and assets.

This single web address provides easy access to all of the agencies of The United Methodist Church and their ministry resources. The easy-to-navigate website simplifies finding content from across the UMC connection, saving leaders time when looking for specific resources and tools for their particular ministry. The materials provided include the how-tos of doing ministry, as well as stories that will motivate, encourage and inspire those in leadership roles.

Companion ResourceUMC Facebook and Twitter channels provide a place for leaders to participate, interact, share with and learn from one another. “The Source” e-newsletter updates users about interesting and timely content.
The Board of Directors of Olmsted Manor Retreat Center has selected the Rev. Al Hammer, an ordained deacon in the Baltimore-Washington Conference, to become the Center’s executive director, effective July 1. Jody Larson, the current executive director, informed the board last year of his intention to retire in the summer of 2019, after serving 41 years at Olmsted, in Ludlow, PA. A search committee was formed to seek candidates and select a new executive director.

Rev. Hammer is the registrar of the Board of Ordained Ministry in Baltimore-Washington and most recently served as Associate Minister/Chief Operations Officer at Foundry United Methodist Church in Washington, DC. In his eight years there, he managed church operations, finance, long-range planning, facilities and staff, and led several successful annual stewardship campaigns. He also was instrumental in developing a master plan for renovation of the 110-year-old facility and initiated a successful campaign that generated more than $3 million for the first phase of the project.

Al’s call to ministry came through church retreat ministries and he served at camps and as leisure ministries coordinator at churches in South Carolina, Kentucky and Florida, where he served in diaconal ministry.

He moved to the Baltimore-Washington Conference as minister of administration at Glen Mar UMC in Ellicott City, MD, and played a pivotal role in a study of church ministries and the community to determine if an on-site expansion or a complete relocation would be the most effective way to reach more people. Over the next 12 years, he helped to lead the congregation through several capital campaigns, location selection, construction and moving to the new church facility.

Al earned a bachelor’s degree in psychology and recreation at Emory and Henry College in Virginia, and an MA degree in Christian Education, specializing in Leisure Ministries, from the Methodist Theological School in Ohio.

Jody Larson, who became the Center’s fourth executive director in 2001 after serving in maintenance and facilities management for 21 years, will continue to live in Ludlow with his wife Marie during his retirement and will assist in the transition.
Bikers raise money for camperships

By Rev. Chris Kindle, Coordinator of Discipleship and Spiritual Formation

SEPTEMBER 30-OCTOBER 5
PITTSBURGH TO WASHINGTON, D.C.

A little over a year and a half ago, our Bishop invited us to participate in the Deeply Rooted, Upward Reaching campaign for our camping and retreat ministries in Western PA. It was an invitation to invest in the present and future of our incredible ministry centers. A handful of us began to talk and brainstorm about how we might participate using a shared passion for bicycling. From that meeting the first Campership Bike-A-Thon was created.

Last year’s ride was a great success. We had 9 riders travel the entire distance and 4 joined us for the first day’s ride. We raised over $11,000 dollars for camperships. In other words, this $11,000 is going to send children and youth to camp that would not be able to afford it on their own. This year we already have 18 riders signed up. Imagine how this week is going to impact the lives of children and youth for the Kingdom of God.

LODGING AND MEALS We will be staying in churches and/or church member homes during the ride. You can bring an air mattress or something similar.

For meals, our support vehicle will be meeting us and will provide a lunch for us. Breakfasts and dinners may be included at the churches, but if not we will be on our own for the dinner meal. As details continue to emerge, we will provide more clarity on this.

FUNDRAISING As you know, the main reason behind our ride is to raise money for camperships. We are asking each participant to raise at least $500. You can ask friends, family, or your church to sponsor you for the ride. People can respond by sending a support check to the conference center, in care of Chris Kindle. We will also have a special link for individuals to give electronically at WPAUMC.org (link is not ready yet. I will inform you when it’s ready).

Register at wpaumc.org/register.

New faces at the Conference Center

There are new faces in the finance wing at the Conference Center! Jason Dix was selected as the new assistant treasurer and had been serving as interim since November. Kristin Poerschke handles accounts receivable.
Mission u

July 18-21, 2019 -- California U of PA

Take a deep dive into the Gospel of Mark, the topic of money, and the inspiring story of women organized for mission.

Get details, register at wpaumc.org/Missionu

Study Leaders: Rev. Eric Park, Sandy McKee, Lynn Sibley, Julia Tulloch, elmira Nazombe