Embrace God’s gifts of hope, love, joy, & peace this Christmas.

Go on an Advent journey with beloved teacher and storyteller James W. Moore, exploring the spirit of Christmas. As you light the candles of your Advent wreath, reflect on the unbreakable gifts that God has given us: hope, love, joy, and peace. And remember God’s greatest gift, who comes to us as a baby and leads us through all the days of our lives.

This revised edition of the popular book includes stories, Scriptures, and thoughts to warm your heart throughout the season, as well as devotions by Jacob Armstrong and a new fifth chapter for Christmas Eve/Christmas Day.

From the author of All I Want for Christmas and Finding Bethlehem in the Midst of Bedlam.
With gratitude ...

REMEMBER WELL that Friday afternoon in March 2004 when the Rev. Larry Hollon, then Interpreter publisher, stunned me with an invitation to become editor of this magazine. He gave me the weekend to decide: Continue working with annual conference communicators (still among my favorite people in the church!) or edit a magazine for local church leaders (more favorites). I left knowing I was likely to return to my first love as a religion communicator – producing stories to inspire and challenge active United Methodists to live as faithful disciples and servant leaders.

Fast forward to mid-2016 when we were determining the cover themes for the 2017 issues of Interpreter. We selected “gratitude” for this issue covering two months of holy-days. We didn’t know then that it would also be the last issue of the magazine.

No theme could be more appropriate for it is with gratitude that I say “thank you” to so many.

Thank you, readers – first, last and forever. Without you there is no reason for a magazine – print or digital.

Thank you to all who have shared content – stories, knowledge and thoughts.

Thank you to Larry and to Dan Krause, current publisher, and to my most recent immediate supervisors – Tim Tanton and Jennifer Rodia – for support, challenge, trust and tremendous freedom to develop each issue.

Thank you to Matthew McVane and the crew at GUILDHOUSE Group – our partners in Walla Walla, Washington, who have designed Interpreter since 2007.

Thank you to United Methodist Communications colleagues past and present who contributed editorially in words and photos. Among them are Joey Butler, former managing editor and now multi-media editor; Barbara Dunlap-Berg, Julie Dwyer, Crystal Caviness, Joe Iovino, Mike DuBose and Kathleen Barry, and the United Methodist News Service team – Linda Bloom, Vicki Brown, Kathy Gilbert, Heather Hahn and others.

Thank you to Polly House, contract editorial assistant for the past 18 months, and to the other core freelance writers whose names you see throughout the magazine.

Thank you to other UMCom colleagues – present and past, who are essential to Interpreter’s production – Carlton Loney and Jane Massey and other folk working in marketing, customer service and experience, IT, finance, web production and on the communications team.

Thank you, again, to Dan and Jennifer who are giving me the opportunity to be part of developing a new website and other digital resources for you and other leaders throughout the connection. Yes, I am sad that Interpreter – print and digital – is ending on “my watch.” I’m also excited to be able to continue bringing people, inspiration and information together.

And, finally, great thanks to my husband, Don, who’s shared the celebrations, frustrations and everything else that comes with being married to an editor. We begin this next adventure together.

God blessed me with the opportunity to edit Interpreter; I will continue to be blessed with new work.

Giving thanks with a grateful heart,

Kathy Noble, Editor
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“Helping those in need is not simply a matter of charity, but of responsibility, righteousness, and justice.”

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Emojis: Communicating today, tomorrow and beyond

After nearly a half century of publishing, this issue will be Interpreter’s last.

The theme of this issue is gratitude, which seems an entirely appropriate way to end a great run. All of us at Interpreter are grateful to our readership for your loyalty and to our advertisers for your support over the years. We’re grateful for the opportunities we’ve had to serve the church and to tell its stories. On a personal note, I am also grateful to our editor, the Rev. Kathy Noble, for her leadership and devoted efforts, as well as the many other writers and people behind the scenes that have made Interpreter an award-winning magazine.

With this issue, there is chance for reflection about what communication was like 48 years ago, how it has changed and how it remains the same. Take, for example, emojis.

An emoji, which means picture + character, is a digital image used to express an idea in electronic communication, especially text messages and social media. Shigetaka Kurita originally created them in 1999 for use on Japanese mobile phones, but their usage has skyrocketed in the past few years.

There are emojis for facial expressions, objects, animals, food, weather, sports equipment and more – 2,666 at last count, according to the Unicode Consortium, with new additions being made all the time. The latest include a hedgehog, chopsticks and a coconut.

As our interactions become increasingly digital, emojis allow for the expression of feelings without words, a kind of emotional shorthand. They add meaning that clarifies the intent of the message. Without the benefit of clues provided by tone of voice, facial expressions or body language, a digital message might easily be misunderstood.

Of course, pictorial communication is nothing new, dating back to cave drawings. Images have always been important and will continue to be. But technology has made the sharing of these images exponentially easier. Witness the rise of Instagram, which has users sharing 95 million photos and videos per day. An infographic, with its visual illustration of information and data, is said to be 30 times more likely to be read than text only.

Cisco, a technology company, predicts that Internet video will account for 80 percent of all consumer Internet traffic by 2019.

What are the benefits of using images, like emojis? One is that they transcend language, and in an increasingly global society, anything that makes communication easier is a plus. Also, they are fast and easy to use, making typing a lot of text unnecessary, and, well, they’re just plain fun. So much fun that they have spawned a movie and even a game show.

Perhaps you’re curious about the most popular emoji? It turns out to be the face with tears of joy 😂. In searching for that answer, I came across an article that caught my interest for an entirely different reason. At the top of the article, wedged between the title and the photo, was the notation “2 min read.” I am not sure if it was meant as an enticement or a warning, but it says something about how audiences consume media today. Some readers may choose not to go further because they don’t want to spend an entire two minutes.

This is one of the reasons why printed publications have declined in readership. And perhaps it is one of the reasons why emojis are on the rise, with 60 million emojis used on Facebook every day. People seek direct communication in shorter pieces. People are scrolling rather than perusing. Attention spans are shrinking. In fact, a study by Microsoft says that people’s attention wands after eight seconds. However, the benefit is that communication has become more frequent with messages that can be both targeted and personalized. With digital and social media, two-way communication can now transpire where it was not possible before.

Hence the need to continually reevaluate the ways we communicate in order to meet our audience’s needs and preferences. As we say goodbye to Interpreter, we look forward to sharing inspirational stories and leadership resources in new ways through new channels. Visit us soon at umc.org, where you can also sign up for a new e-newsletter, United Methodist Now: Inspiration for Daily Living.

Dan Krause is general secretary of United Methodist Communications in Nashville, Tennessee, USA, and publisher of Interpreter.
Effective ministry requires effective tools

new releases

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Facing the Future of United Methodism
Wil Cantrell
Foreword by Bishop David W. Graves

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Church warms hearts and bellies

Hot soup on a cold day. Is anything better? Fairview United Methodist Church in Binghamton, New York, doesn’t think so.

In Winter 2016, during what she described as “one of those cold, dreary, gray days in New York,” the Rev. Jan Clark and church volunteers set up a table outside the church building with eight slow cookers, each filled with some kind of delicious soup.

The church is located on a street corner by a bus stop. “Lots of people ride the bus, so it’s a busy corner,” Clark said. “People were waiting for the bus, and others were getting off the bus. When they saw our table and our sign that said ‘Free Hot Soup,’ they were really happy.”

Church members gave away soup for about two hours, until the crowds diminished. Since they had soup left, they decided to take it and some church flyers to a nearby laundromat.

“No one is thrilled to be at a laundromat,” said Clark, “but when we walked in with hot soup and gave it away for free to anyone who wanted it, they were happy.”

They still had soup. (Is this beginning to sound like a story of loaves and fishes?) They took the soup to a second nearby laundromat and offered it to the people there washing their clothes. Again, people were very happy.

“There was still some soup left,” Clark said. There were no more laundromats nearby, but there was an adult bookstore across the street.

“I’d never been in one of those before, but I thought, ‘Why not?”’ Clark said. She took her slow cooker into the bookstore and introduced herself to the owner. “Hello, I’m Jan Clark, and I’m pastor of Fairview United Methodist Church. I have some hot soup and wondered if you and your people would like some.”

Clark laughed, remembering the shock on his face. “He didn’t take any, but the person working the cash register was glad to get something warm to eat.”

Clark has been at Fairview Church for eight years. When she arrived, the congregation numbered fewer than 40. Now, thanks to an emphasis on community outreach, they have grown to almost 100.

“We are committed to serving the community,” Clark said. “We put up a prayer request box on the church on the side by the bus stop. One of the requests was from a person who said it would be great to have a bench there where people could sit while they wait for the bus. My goodness, that was certainly easy enough, so we built a bench.”

Polly House

Cards for towboat crews

For the past two years, Concord United Methodist Church in Paducah, Kentucky, has spread Christmas joy one towboat at a time. It will do so again this year – crafting homemade cards for local towboat crews, who often spend Christmas working on nearby rivers.

Concord’s “Praying in Color” and “Bible Journaling” classes coordinate the effort, but invite all church members to participate. The church’s children get involved too, making cards during Sunday school and Wednesday night activity times.

“They all really have fun doing it,” said Chris Spaeth, the church’s administrative assistant.

Paducah is located near the confluence of the Tennessee and Ohio Rivers, so it is a busy location for towboats working on both rivers.

“We finished the cards, then delivered them to the Seaman’s Church Institute office here,” Spaeth said. “Chaplain (Kempton) Baldridge then distributes them to the men and women working on the boats.”

Baldridge is the SCI’s Ohio River area chaplain.

Polly House
Christmas tree ministry brings joy

While visiting her mother in a nursing home during Christmas in 2007, Carolyn Thompson noticed that several of the residents had few visitors and no festive decorations. She went home, made 12 small trees and distributed them to those folks whom she had noticed. They were so warmly received that she made more the following year.

Thompson recruited several friends and school-aged children to help her with this new budding ministry of Berlin United Methodist Church in Ohio. In 2016, the group created and distributed 690 trees of different colors and styles – one each for every resident of a care facility in Knox County!

The ministry has richly blessed all who participate in it and has stirred ideas of new ways that the congregation can impact the lives of people in the community. Another church member Raemarie Oatman is organizing a church-wide effort to make hand-crafted greeting cards to be included with each tree.

Thompson said she would love to see the ministry spread to other counties in Ohio.

Making a joyful noise for special needs

Churches are considered a refuge. We call our worship space a ‘sanctuary,’” said the Rev. Victor Peterson. “But traditional church does not always feel safe to everyone.”

This reality prompted Ridgewood (New Jersey) United Methodist Church, where Peterson is the pastor, to start the “Make a Joyful Noise” worship service last Advent. Recognizing that there were people in the congregation who experience the world in different ways with different responses to light and sound, Peterson had been looking for a format for an alternative service to meet special needs.

The seed was planted in October 2014 with the church's involvement in Access Ridgewood, a program started by the city's mayor to support community members with special needs. By April 2015, Peterson imagined how those strategies could translate to the worship setting. Working with his wife, Cindy, and church member Kim Roberts whose grandson is on the autism spectrum, he presented the idea to the administrative council. The lay leader and administrative council chair joined the team to develop a new service where children and families with special needs could worship.

Conversations with community leaders and other churches with similar concerns helped them develop “Make a Joyful Noise.” “We learned that people with developmental disabilities need structure. It’s important to maintain consistency and routine from the pattern of the service to where each person sits. Experience is more important than words,” he said.

The ministry meets the needs of the children – and of their families and supporters. “Even if we offer assurance, families often feel self-conscious when their child is making noise or moving around during the service,” Peterson says. When the service is designed to be welcoming and inclusive, families can worship freely without the burden of societal pressure.

An extended version of this story with details about the service originally appeared in The Relay, the monthly newspaper of the Greater New Jersey Conference.
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100% of your gifts goes to The Advance mission or ministry you designate.
Advent outreach resources available for local churches

New resources that support local church Advent outreach efforts are now available. All resources carry the theme, “Unwrap the True Meaning of Christmas,” and complement The United Methodist Church’s national Advent advertising campaign, which will feature children sharing what Christmas means to them.

Available resources include:
» Postcards, customized with information about the local church and mailed within a radius of the church’s address;
» Door hangers with customizable space;
» Invitation cards for church members to use to invite friends and family members to attend a worship service or church event;
» A selfie stand to encourage fun photo opportunities for social media posts; and
» An outdoor banner.

While supplies last, churches can receive a $400 credit toward their print product purchase by using the coupon code at outreach.com/UMC. Further details are available at UMCom.org/advent-resources.

Free downloadable files are also available. They include a how-to guide as well as:
» Advent sermon starters with accompanying videos;
» Social media calendar with pre-written posts and imagery;
» Bulletin and worship graphics;
» Videos for worship and social media;
» Website and social media graphics; and
» January sermon series from Discipleship Ministries with accompanying videos and promotional flyer.

Churches are also invited to be part of the 16-state “True Meaning of Christmas Tour” (www.umcom.org/rethink-church/the-true-meaning-of-christmas-tour) Dec. 2-24. The tour will stop in 21 cities where volunteers will invite guests to visit a local United Methodist church and participate in a mission project, share prayer requests and offer a video booth experience.

Local churches in any location can be a part of the tour by hosting a hot cocoa fellowship event. Tour-branded stickers will be available this fall so that churches can brand hot cocoa cups given out along with invitations to worship services and holiday events. More information is available on the Christmas tour website to support churches as they make plans.

Churches are encouraged to update their Find-A-Church profile with current contact and worship information. To get started, visit www.umc.org/find-a-church/search, search for your church, select the profile, scroll to the bottom of the page and click “Update Church Information.”

United Methodist Communications

World AIDS Day: Working toward an AIDS-free world

World AIDS Day, Friday, Dec. 1, is an opportunity to unite communities around the world in the continuing fight against HIV. It’s a day to remember those who have died, to support people living with HIV, to prevent more from becoming infected and to advocate for the best care and quality of life. World AIDS Day is about people.

“The Abundant Health Initiative: Our Promise to Children,” affirmed at General Conference 2016, charges the General Board of Global Ministries to coordinate reaching 1 million children with life-saving interventions by 2020. Gifts to UMGAF Advance #982345 will help Global Ministries fulfill this promise to pregnant women living with HIV and their unborn children, and to adolescent boys and girls who are among the most-at-risk populations for infection.

Global Ministries’ HIV program supports grassroots projects to create HIV awareness, make counseling and testing accessible to pregnant women and teenagers as well as linking them to consistent treatment and support through home visits. This program also increases community capacity to respond to HIV/AIDS and to fight stigma. Global Ministries collaborates with the United Methodist Global AIDS Committee to strengthen the church’s response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic through education and advocacy.

General Board of Global Ministries
Toolkit to help build relationships

In the wake of deadly violence in Charlottesville, Virginia, and other scenes of protest around the United States, the General Commission on Religion and Race is providing resources to promote awareness and foster relationships across lines of difference.

The Toolkit for Ministry Post-Charlottesville (www.gcorr.org/toolkit-for-ministry-post-charlottesville) offers free, downloadable resources to aid small groups and congregations concerned about white supremacy, hate and violence.

“We are witnessing escalating violence in word and deed from brother-to-brother and sister-to-sister,” wrote the Rev. Grace Pak, GCORR director of Cross-Racial/Cross-Cultural Leadership. “And we experience fear and pain. We mourn and sorrow. We wonder if there is hope for righteousness and justice. In the midst of our questions and uncertainty, we hear the words of Jesus reminding us who we are and what we are about as followers of Christ.”

The resources for laity and clergy can provide learning for individuals and small groups through church wide or church and community conversations, individual reflection and sermon preparation.

General Commission on Religion and Race

Compassion moves Gift of Hope Scholar

UNITED METHODIST STUDENT DAY – NOV. 26

From a young age, Caitlin Jones knew she wanted to help others. This United Methodist grew up in Princess Anne, Maryland, with loving parents and a supportive church family at Antioch United Methodist Church.

“Growing up, I went to a Christian school and was very blessed to have been able to do so. I was surrounded by my church family and knew that I could always depend on them,” she said.

While peer pressure was a challenge as she got older, she persevered by focusing on her studies and being active at church, including singing in the choir.

“Being a good Christian who studied and worked hard was not always the most popular decision, but it was the right one,” she said.

The values her church family emphasized led her to become passionate about helping others, she said. “With 9/11 and many significant natural disasters, including a tsunami in Thailand and Hurricane Katrina here in the U.S., I realized that I wanted desperately to make a difference in the lives of those affected by disasters.”

Now the Gift of Hope scholar is pursuing a career in emergency management at United Methodist-related Randolph College in Lynchburg, Virginia. She wants to work on the international level to aid those affected by disasters of all sorts.

Her Christian upbringing will continue to play a role in her life and career. “I will rely on my faith to convey God’s compassion and love” to those who are suffering, she said.

Jones’ Gift of Hope Scholarship is provided through gifts church members give on United Methodist Student Day – Nov. 26 this year. Gift of Hope is one of several scholarship programs of the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry.

In addition to her studies, Jones has held a variety of leadership positions while at Randolph. She recently received the institution’s Maude Huff Fife Award for leadership and scholastic achievement. “I hope that I am making a difference in the world by portraying effective leadership and by conveying God’s compassion to others in need. ... I hope to lead others to Christ through my example,” she said.

Jones encourages United Methodists to continue to lift up tomorrow’s leaders through their generous giving on United Methodist Student Day.

Adapted from an article by Julie Dwyer, general church content editor, United Methodist Communications, originally published at www.umcorganizing.org.

United Methodist Student Day calls the church to support students as they unite faith with knowledge. Find resources to promote this Special Sunday at www.umcgiving.org.
Several weeks prior to finishing each issue of Interpreter, we email a question to readers asking them to respond with a short answer of 50-75 words. Find many more responses at Interpreter OnLine, www.interpretermagazine.org. Thanks to all of our readers who have responded over the past four years.

YOU SAID ...

I learned to express gratitude from my parents. They did not actually talk with me about gratitude, but I was able to observe on a daily basis how they acted when people were kind to them. I was able to hear conversations that they had with themselves and others about the kindness people showed them.

**Gwendolyn Brooks, Christ UMC, Baltimore, Maryland**

Our mom made us write thank you notes to those who sent Christmas gifts. While some see that as a lesson in good manners, it paved the way for a lifetime of gratitude.

**Lisa Buie, First UMC, Land O’Lakes, Florida**

Several years ago I attended a church where testimonial services were held every first Sunday. During that time, I never gave a “testimony” because I felt that I didn’t have one because I had not experienced any of the issues of drug and alcohol addiction or abuses that were often talked about. I later realized that having NOT experienced those things was my testimony, and I learned to express gratitude for how God spared me from those ills.

**Wanda Clay, Clark Memorial UMC, Nashville, Tennessee**

I learned to express gratitude from my parents and grandmother. They taught me to be grateful for all things: food, shelter, education, church and family. Also, to be grateful for challenges because they will only make me stronger and wiser.

**Doug Drake, Centenary UMC, New Albany, Indiana**

I learnt to be grateful to God by observing the struggle people who grew up with me face due to the lack of consciousness of Jesus’ love in their lives and watching the testimony of people who nowadays are being released from sin jails, through the gospel message. Thanks, Lord God, I will always love and be grateful to you!

**Artur Quicassa, Bishop Ralph Edward Dodge UMC, Luanda, Angola**

I was taught to “pay it forward” when we received by giving grace in all ways. We were taught to “pay it forward” when we could not show our gratitude directly to the one from whom we received.

**The Rev. Matthew Filicsky, Farmount, Fairview and Georgetown UMCs, Georgetown, Illinois**

Parental teaching was how I first learned to express gratitude. I was taught to say “thank you.” I was taught to write notes of gratitude. When learning about prayer and saying table grace, gratitude was a huge part. As I matured in my faith, gratitude has become important. I am grateful God is full of grace and love for all, especially through Jesus. I am grateful I am a Christian.

**Sandy Hieronymus, Myers Park UMC, Charlotte, North Carolina**

When I was a young child, I expected things to be done for me and things to be given to me, sort of the belief of “entitlement.” When I became a teenager, I realized that I was not “entitled” to anything, but that what I received was given or done out of love. At that point, I understood what Jesus meant when he said to love one another and be grateful for love received.

**Tom Long, First UMC, Catawissa, Pennsylvania**

I have learned to show gratitude by paying it forward in the name of God. I was worth dying for; he is worth living for.

**Caesar Marciales, Christ First UMC, Wasilla, Alaska**

You know the expression “heartfelt gratitude?” Gratitude comes from my heart. I learned to open my heart and let the words come forth. When you are truly grateful for your life, the God-given blessings, the words will flow freely. When you see others less fortunate, the words flow. When you help others, expressions of gratitude to God that he gave you the ability to give of yourself for others, words flow easily.

**Sherrill Martínez, Jacob’s Chapel UMC, San Antonio, Texas**

I grew up in a large family and one thing I was taught was to say “please” and “thank you” as an act of courtesy, but I was taught to express gratitude by my actions. We were taught to show gratitude for the grace we received by giving grace in all ways. We were taught to “pay it forward” when we could not show our gratitude directly to the one from whom we received.

**The Rev. Nancy Robinson, Lakeside UMC, Henrico, Virginia**

Expressing gratitude has been a lifelong process. As a child growing up in a Christian home and on a ranch, gratitude was in everything we did. We saw the wonders of God every day and were taught to enjoy and express our love for our Lord through the beauty of his creation.

**Pamela Shaw, St. Andrew UMC, Borger, Texas**
Yet too often any leaning we might feel towards gratitude is displaced by our inclination towards complaining. In a world torn asunder by mass shootings, political divisiveness and natural disasters, perhaps we should commemorate the seasons of Thanksgiving and Christmas by returning to gratefulness.

What might sound like a platitude can actually redirect one’s life, say United Methodists who have joined a quiet movement of people emphasizing gratitude in personal and community life. Churches turn to the praises present in so many of the psalms to stress gratitude in worship. Individual Christians keep gratitude journals. Clergy teach and preach the value of gratitude in a confusing, sometimes less than soulful world.

“The whole idea is we give to God not out of obligation or guilt, but out of gratitude for all that God has already done for us,” says the Rev. Kent Millard,
THANKS IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES

For “thanksgiving is inseparable from prayer,” said Wesley, founder of the Methodist movement in 18th-century England. “It is almost essentially connected with it. One who always prays is ever giving praise, whether in ease or pain, both for prosperity and for the greatest adversity. He blesses God for all things…”

Millard testifies to the truth of Wesley’s words. When his wife died of pancreatic cancer six years ago, he coped with that loss by recalling life and love shared over more than four decades of marriage. A United Methodist pastor for 47 years, Millard served St. Luke’s United Methodist Church in Indianapolis for 18 years before becoming a seminary president. One year to jumpstart what became a very successful fundraising campaign, Millard stressed gratitude to his congregants.

“I asked people to count their blessings. Every blessing in their lives – their loved ones, their family, their friends, their opportunities, their resources,” he says. “Really, the very ground we walk on, the air we breathe and the Christ we serve are gifts from the hand of a generous God.”

Gratitude for all one’s blessings does not depend on having endless money or a stress-free life. Millard quotes the Apostle Paul’s words in 1 Thessalonians 5:13: “Give thanks in all circumstances for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.”

Moreover, Millard notes, “Jesus gives thanks all the time. Before he fed the 5,000. Before the Last Supper. Over and over again, he gives thanks to God.”

THANKING PEOPLE, THANKING GOD

California attorney John Kralik turned his attitude – and eventually his life – around through the practice of gratitude. Kralik’s law practice, personal relationships and financial solvency were all in jeopardy one January when he decided to spend the next year writing 365 thank you notes. He began by sending handwritten notes to 10 people who had given him Christmas presents.

The practice eventually turned into a book The Simple Act of Gratitude.

Now a judge with the Los Angeles Superior Court, Kralik views gratitude as a natural – though often neglected – human response to God. As his thank you note project progressed, he experienced God’s grace.

“I think the Bible reflects a special place in God’s heart for those who are appreciative,” Kralik says. “There’s the story in Luke about the 10 lepers that Jesus healed. Only one of them came back to say ‘thank you.’ Jesus gave him a special blessing. So, for me, appreciation is an expression of love and a manifestation of God’s grace in the world.”

Joyner finds grace as she keeps a daily gratitude journal. When she began, her life changed. “As I saw my joys, concerns, fears and desires written on paper and not just in my mind, they became more real than just thoughts. As I went to God with all that I felt, he came to me while I was writing. Sometimes before I finished a sentence, I felt his response,” she says.

And now? She doesn’t miss a day “writing to God.”

The spiritual discipline has made her a better pastor. “When you write down your thoughts it takes more time than just thinking about something,” Joyner says.

“I have learned to slow down and digest my thoughts which helps me understand people when they talk to me. People learn and understand in different ways. I am a visual learner and do better when I write things down.”

“I am also creative and love art, so along with my written journal I have a daily calendar of the things I talk to God about. The calendar is colored in artwork. As I talk with people I give them ways to express their feelings through written words or art, which I would never have done before I started my journal.”

Two years ago, Long’s Chapel United Methodist Church in Lake Junaluska, North Carolina, launched a year-long observance it called “365 Days of Gratitude.” The idea started with Long’s Chapel’s former senior pastor, the Rev. Chuck Wilson. He learned about it from St. Luke’s United Methodist Church in Oklahoma City.

“Chuck and I began to investigate the concept and then decided to take a couple of our church leaders to do a site visit” to St. Luke’s, recalled the Rev. Justin R. Lowe, associate pastor of Long’s Chapel. “We began to sense the invitation to explore gratitude together as a worshipping community for 2016.

“However, we were very fortunate to learn that John Kralik would be in the Asheville (North Carolina) area in November of 2015 and we did a soft launch of the theme with his visit and interview. Our staff read the book together as did many small groups and Sunday school classes.”

CONTAGIOUS, TRANSFORMING, POWERFUL

Gratitude, it turns out, really can be catching.

“I believe that practicing gratitude causes us to connect first and foremost with others relationally,” Lowe says.

“In our (American) culture where we tend to be so focused on the instant gratification and ‘I want everything five minutes ago,’ practicing gratitude towards others causes us to slow down and see the other person – to notice them and to appreciate...
them as one created in the image of God, one that is of worth.

“I personally experienced more patience as a person – I still have much room to grow and mature in this fruit of the spirit. And I developed the joy of noticing others around me such as the cashier, the custodian, the construction worker and even deepening relationships within the church and my family. At the same time, I noticed how rude, hateful and mean so many fellow human beings were towards others through comments, impatient actions and egocentricity,” Lowe says.

Such actions felt antithetical to the Gospel and to the command “to pick up our cross and bear it daily,” Long recalls. In addition, as he went about his daily life wandering into offices, restaurants and stores, he noticed gratitude notes written by Long’s Chapel members posted on the walls of businesses. The church helped sow the “seeds of gratitude” into community life.

Just as with the biblical miracle of the loaves and fishes when belief meant there was enough food to feed thousands, belief in gratitude is powerful. It winds out of one person, one church, to meander through a town, even a city. Gratitude changes people, one person at a time.

Wheeler knows that to be true. “I have seen people who have been transformed by gratitude,” she says. “Through a crisis – a death, a grave illness, depression, a dark night of the soul. That’s when they’ve really been able to recognize the power of Christ, and within that there is always a natural exuberance of grace.”

Positiveness at any level is contagious, Wheeler says. “I think it’s the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives us that contagious power. What flows from that is we become patient. We are centered. We are calm. We automatically become those things.”

Bringing gratitude into daily life often begins with “spiritual disciplines that help us recognize God’s grace,” she says. “One is definitely the spiritual discipline of patience, waiting on God. Another is daily prayer. When we are still and quiet before God, with God, we usually end up being grateful.”

THE HEART OF CHRISTIAN FAITH

Larry Malone, retired from United Methodist Men, now lives in Rockledge, Florida. “If gratitude comes from an inner place, it’s a genuine thing.” He likens it to the fruits of the spirit outlined in the New Testament book of Galatians.

“As soon as you start recognizing that God not only radically loves me, God loves me in my worst moment, then you can get out of this thing’s way,” Malone says. “When you start to realize that God’s relentless love comes through regardless of my behavior, even in my sorriest moment. When you start to understand that, how can gratitude not become part of who you are?”

Millard traces his devotion to gratitude to his youth. The son of an alcoholic, he was nonplussed and deeply grateful when a United Methodist church in South Dakota welcomed him, his family and his formerly alcoholic father when his dad dried out and decided the family must go to church.

Cecile S. Holmes, longtime religion writer, is an associate professor at the University of South Carolina’s School of Journalism and Mass Communications.

His wife, Diane, is among the blessings for which Larry Malone expresses gratitude. COURTESY PHOTO

Practicing the first step of Alcoholics Anonymous, Millard’s father had acknowledged his powerlessness over his addiction to alcohol. Walking on the South Dakota prairie, his father said to himself, “I just wish there was a power that could save me” from this addiction.

“Then he felt it,” Millard says. “He felt the presence of God around him like a bright light.”

Where Millard lived, everyone knew his dad had a drinking problem. Yet that didn’t stop that Methodist church from embracing his family. Millard was only 11.

“I didn’t know much about God or Jesus but I liked the church people because they accepted an alcoholic and his family,” he says. “I realized you come to church to say thank you to God for what he has already done. Gratitude is at the heart of Christian faith.”
In Paul’s Letter to the Philippians, he writes these well-known words: “Rejoice in the Lord always.” (Phil. 4:4, Emphasis added.) And try as we might to follow Paul’s admonition, there are times when it is just plain hard. There are times, in other words, when tragedy strikes, natural disasters occur, death lands on our doorstep or disease and heartache abound.

Is it possible, even amid tragedy and loss, to find something to rejoice about? Is it possible to give thanks for the thing that happened?

For Christians, our God is one who came to Earth and put on flesh. That means the God we worship knows what it’s like to experience pain, suffering, grief and loss (and, we hasten to add, the joy of resurrection!).

Stories abound of people who have overcome great obstacles to find meaning and purpose in their lives. Helen Keller communicated with the world even though she was deaf, blind and mute. Bill Gates’ first business failed. Stephen King’s first novel was rejected 30 times. Oprah Winfrey gave birth to a child when she was 14; the boy soon died.

Hurricane

The Rev. Hannah Terry knows a thing or two about loss. As one of the pastors at Westbury United Methodist Church in Houston, Texas, she has literally been through the floodwaters of pain and suffering.

In August, Hurricane Harvey came for a visit. Terry’s church is in the southwest side of Houston. While the church did not receive any major damage, the surrounding neighborhood did.

“About 50 people canoed or kayaked to the church during the storm,” Terry said, “including our senior pastor and his family, and they live a block and a half from the church.”

Homes around the church flooded with between 8 and 18 inches of water, Terry said. The church quickly became a “makeshift shelter,” she said, until official shelters opened. They called themselves a “wait station,” she said, until large vehicles — including tanks — could come through the flooded streets and rescue people.

The images of Houston after Harvey are sadly familiar. The recovery is going to take years. Still, Terry finds reasons to smile.

“We’re very grateful for the help,” Terry said. “Our church recently had a team of volunteers from Myers Park United Methodist Church in Charlotte, North Carolina, she said, “and they were awesome. Even in the midst of our tragedy, we were able to offer the gift of hospitality to them.”

Terry is also grateful that God’s abundance has been very clear through the whole ordeal. Not some random incidents, she said; it’s been quite specific. One example stands out.

Several undocumented families live in the church’s neighborhood. At one point, a few families came to the church asking for food. However, the church didn’t have any. It had cleaning supplies and flood buckets and diapers, but no food.

“We went to them, “We’re really sorry, but ...”” Terry said. However, while the families were still in the church, gathering what they could, within three to five minutes of when they first arrived, a truck arrived filled with food.

“People started bringing in bags and bags of exactly what they had asked for,” Terry said. “Particularly in the first few weeks, it was loaves and fishes; it was manna from heaven.”

From six Muslim youth from Sugarland, Texas, who came to help muck out an elderly church member’s home, to people from St. Mark’s, St. Paul’s and St. Peter’s United Methodist churches, people have “magically” appeared just at the right time, Terry said.

“Even when you’re trying to figure out how to fly the broken plane ... you’re still in the air. We crashed, but somehow, we got back up in the air,” Terry said. “God’s provisions were so apparent. It was interfaith. It was intergeneration. It was so beautiful to watch.”

Terry is convinced this was God’s Holy Spirit at work. Or, in more United Methodist terms, “prevenient grace.”
The Rev. Hannah Terry spends time with children outside Westbury United Methodist Church in Houston.

And speaking of the church, Terry is perhaps most grateful for one more thing: the connection. "I am so, so grateful for all the United Methodist congregations that have helped," she said. "We could not have done this without them. Connectionalism really is a beautiful part of being (United) Methodist and how we can actually carry that identity as Christ's body."

GUN VIOLENCE

For Chris Schwind, her experience of loss is one no parent should ever have. Her daughter, Holly, was shot to death by her boyfriend during Labor Day weekend 2004. After killing Holly, the boyfriend killed himself.

Holly graduated from high school in 1992 and had earned a master's degree in business. She was a homecoming queen in both high school and college, and president of her lady's fraternity. She wasn't, her mom said, "the type of girl to be murdered."

Schwind said Holly and her boyfriend had dated for about a year. On the day of her murder, she had told her mom that he had a temper. 'And I thought, 'Oh, good for you; you saw it; you broke up with him,'" Schwind said.

A friend, however, had bought a gun in Texas and given it to the boyfriend who then drove to Michigan. The murder happened in Au Gres, a small community on the shores of Lake Huron, where there had not been a murder in more than 30 years. The police, Schwind said, didn't know what to do.

"I'm part of a club that nobody wants to belong to," Schwind said. "But I don't want to live in the tragedy of her death. I want to celebrate her life. I owe that to her."

One of the ways Schwind celebrates Holly's life is through a fundraising golf tournament held every August. The event provides partial scholarships to send four girls every year to the private high school Holly attended. To date, more than $65,000 has been raised.

Schwind said she is grateful for everyone who helps keep Holly's memory alive. Every year, after the tournament ends, Schwind puts up a Christmas tree, filled with ladybug ribbons (ladybugs being Holly's favorite). Anyone who comes to the house is invited to write a blessing or a "God moment" on the back of a ribbon and tie it to the tree.

"We pray every day over those ribbons," Schwind said. "I am grateful and thankful for my life after the murder of Holly."

The tournament not only keeps Holly's memory alive, it also brings her extended family together. Her brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, cousins and nieces and nephews all pitch in. Schwind's husband, the Rev. Tim Woycik, pastor of Trinity United Methodist Church in Chesaning, Michigan, also helps, even if his golf game is a little wobbly.

"I'm taking really, really bad lemons and trying to make lemonade," Schwind said.

Recently, Schwind has begun speaking out on the issues of gun violence. In early 2017, she and Woycik went to Washington, D.C., to attend a summit sponsored by the Brady Campaign to End Gun Violence. While there, the couple visited with staffers from their U.S. senatorial and representatives' offices, sharing Holly's story.

"I'm here to honor my daughter," Schwind told them. "I'm here to be a voice for her."

At the Summit, Schwind and Woycik learned of other advocacy efforts and ways people were keeping memories of loved ones alive.

"I know that my story is not unique," she said, "but it is unique to me and it's personal to me. So, it's not like I'm just in Washington saying, 'yeah, yeah, yeah, we need stronger gun laws.' It's personal to me. My daughter was murdered."

The Rev. Erik Alsgaard is managing editor and social media editor for the communications ministry of the Baltimore-Washington Conference.
Living with a grateful heart starts with simple practices

The Rev. Rosanna Anderson, Associate Director of Stewardship Ministries for Discipleship Ministries, said cultivating gratitude comes from noticing where God is at work in daily activities.

“I think a life of gratitude can be nurtured when we share conversations around the dinner table,” she said. “We’re on the lookout for where the Holy Spirit has been working in our lives. Instead of focusing on the negatives and frustrations, we can search out the times that were good. That’s helping us grow in spiritual maturity.”

The Rev. Joy Price, pastor of United Methodist Christ Church by the Sea in Newport Beach, California, thinks people create a more grateful spirit by appreciating what others have to offer.

“The attitude we approach the world with that fosters gratitude is the attitude that what other people have to give – no matter what it is – is valuable,” she said. “We should be thankful for it because they’re utilizing the gifts God has given them. I think it’s really easy for us to get so narrow in our belief of what’s important, especially because of the materialism in our world.”

Teach gratitude by modeling

Giaccomo Bono is a psychology professor at California State University and director of the Youth Gratitude Project.

“Our non-verbal behavior is usually more important than what we say,” he said. “Modeling is definitely important because it shows what you value. If you’re not practicing (gratitude) yourself, there’s no point in trying to encourage it in kids.”

The Rev. Ken Sloane, director of stewardship and connectional ministries at Discipleship Ministries, agreed, saying he thinks instilling gratefulness should start at an early age.

“Our kids are going to pick up how we look at the world,” he explained. “If we look at the world as ‘everybody is out for themselves, so take care of number one,’ that’s what our kids are going to learn. That’s the people they’re going to be.”

Bono, who co-authored the book Making Grateful Kids, said he thinks modeling gratitude applies beyond the family setting. He encourages church leaders to be specific in saying thank you and demonstrating grateful thinking by sharing about the blessings they appreciate.

“Making your gratitude visible to the whole community is important, whether you do that at home or at church,” Bono said.

Price said she tries to lead her congregation in this way during church services.

“The purpose of worship is to thank the God who provides all things for us,” she said. “So from that perspective, I like to make certain that our worship has an element of gratitude in it. Whether it be the broader gratitude for our relationship with Jesus Christ or the thank you for the UMW for putting on a fantastic retreat this weekend, it is so critical that, as leaders in particular, we reflect and act on gratitude for our congregation.”

To demonstrate gratitude for the larger community, Price’s congregation that averages 65 people in worship began writing personal thank you notes and delivering them to staff at schools, police stations, social service agencies and other organizations. Over the summer, the congregation wrote 230 thank you notes to local lifeguards.

“The concept behind this is that no one can fully serve a community by themselves,” Price explained. “We really need to...
give ‘atta boys’ to all the people who do that. As partners in this community, we appreciate what you do for us.”

CULTIVATE THROUGH SERVICE, GENEROSITY

Bono encouraged churches to combine gratitude practices with service opportunities to make the activities “truly transformative.”

“It’s possible that one way to have lasting effects with service opportunities is to process it a little bit more after you’ve done it,” he said. “You just helped someone. How do you think they appreciate what you’ve done?”

For teens especially, this conversation regarding service and gratitude helps them “see the meaning in the behavior and hopefully find more joy in doing it,” Bono said.

Generosity is another way to cultivate joy and gratitude, Anderson said, noting the holiday season is a great time to develop these practices.

“We’re going to feel the joy of the season and the gratefulness when we do something that brings other people closer into the kingdom of God,” she said.

“When we get focused on the presents, it reduces the joy and the season of giving. What we really are seeking is these intangible moments and experiences and relationship interactions.”

Bono’s research shows that “practicing gratitude helps children become more purposeful.” He views gratitude as “an intentional skill” we can develop to improve the quality of our lives.

[Gratitude] is strongly related with self-discipline and personal responsibility,” he said, noting the importance of awareness in both hard and good times.

“A lot of times when we’re happy, we’re sort of mindless,” he explained. “It’s worth practicing gratitude to notice what makes you happy and try to plan more of that in your life. It’s about becoming a more intentional person in the world.”

Price agreed, adding that regardless of circumstances, God’s love can be a reason to give thanks.

“How can we not give every ounce of gratitude that our physical being and our emotional being can develop to a God who gives us eternal life?” she said. “Life is hard, but I think when you approach life having this attitude of gratitude, it enriches your spiritual relationship with God and with neighbor.”

“Keep a gratitude journal.”

WAYS TO TEACH GRATITUDE

Giacomo Bono and the Rev. Rosanna Anderson offered these ideas to spark your thoughts about ways to practice gratitude at home or church.

KEEP A GRATITUDE JOURNAL: Bono encourages adults and children to journal. “It’s a great way to start off the week and end the week,” he suggested.

“Challenge yourself to look in different areas of your life.” Strive to find blessings in each of these areas: career, family, finances, spirituality, friends, recreation and more.

DECORATE GRATITUDE CARDS: Design a church-wide event for people of all ages to write on or decorate cards illustrating their gratitude. Read the cards aloud during church, and then use the cards to create a display that furthers the spirit of thankfulness. Making these gratitude cards known, Anderson said, is “a little spark, and then it’s contagious. Seeing what other people give thanks for helps things come to mind. It’s a time of rejoicing.”

EXPRESS THANKS VERBALLY OR IN WRITING: Bono says practicing gratitude in writing and verbally is “really powerful” because “you see the effect on other people, and that’s an important source of joy.” Consider to whom you might write a thank you note, then deliver it and read it to them in person.

DOCUMENT AND CELEBRATE GOD’S WORK: Send young people out into the community to take photos or videos of where they see God at work. Then share the finished product with the rest of the congregation. Anderson said this enables people to be grateful for the contributions of young people in the church while also thanking God for good work in the community.

SAVOR THE MOMENT: Notice the unique qualities of the food you eat, the nature you observe or the activities you participate in. Use your imagination to pretend you’re experiencing these things for the first time. “Curiosity and novelty are very important for happiness,” Bono said. “You realize there’s always more out there that makes the world good.”

HOST A GRATITUDE MEAL: Set up tables for a meal and supply questions to inspire conversations about gratitude. Anderson suggests asking: “What is a recent experience when you were surprised or felt blessed?” or “When in the past month did a family member, friend or neighbor give you some help?” Anderson asked these questions with two groups and said, “It was beautiful to hear what people shared!”
WITH COLORED PENCILS IN HAND, THE REV. NANCY TURNER SITS DOWN IN THE MORNING LIGHT TO WRITE HER THANKFULNESS IN THE SPIRAL GRAPH PAPER NOTEBOOK THAT HAS BECOME HER GRATITUDE JOURNAL.

Turner, a deacon in the West Ohio Conference, has maintained this spiritual practice for several years and said it deeply impacts her life.

Whenever Turner sits down to write in her gratitude journal, she asks herself two questions.

“It’s always asking both sides of this question: For what today am I most grateful? For what today am I least grateful?” Turner explained, adding that these questions are similar to asking about where God is moving in the world. “Where did I see God today? Where did I see the absence of God today? Both questions inform where you are.”

Turner also noticed a pattern in her journaling that proved helpful.

“I found that generally speaking, the things I was most grateful for were things that I had absolutely no control over. That’s a thing to just turn over to God. “That experience has really informed my going forward,” Turner said. “I think that experience of all those years and that continuous practice of paying attention have really helped me move forward in more positive and more optimistic ways.”

The Rev. Nancy Turner
least grateful for were things that I had absolutely no control over. That’s a thing to just turn over to God.

Emily Chastain, a leadership development specialist in the North Alabama Conference, began keeping a gratitude journal this summer after returning from the Wesley Pilgrimage where the rhythm helped her recognize a need to slow down and be reflective and contemplative.

“In the morning, as she’s planning her day, Chastain writes down three things she’s grateful for, and then at the end of the day, she returns to her journal and again writes down three gratitudes.”

“It’s a great way to frame the day and feel like the day has a lot more purpose,” she said.

“I enjoy the ability to reflect in the morning and in the evening. I feel that has lowered my anxiety levels and has really made me look for God throughout the day.”

Writing her gratitudes twice each day also helps Chastain recognize what brings her joy and what leads to discouragement. This gives her an opportunity to more intentionally make healthy choices in her schedule.

Chastain also noticed a pattern in her journaling that proved helpful.

“I found that generally speaking, the things I was most grateful for were very simple,” she said, “and the things I was

BY EMILY SNELL

Gratitude journals
spotlight God’s activity

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BY EMILY SNELL

The Rev. Nancy Turner

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IT IS A HALLMARK OF CHRISTIANITY: gratitude, giving thanks, showing appreciation for all that we have and the wonderful world God gave us. Gratitude journals and lists are all the rage in popular culture, but how often do we plan expressing gratitude or thankfulness as an activity of the church? Here are several ideas for bringing people together in the joyous practice of gratitude.

**POST ON FACEBOOK**
Use your church’s Facebook page to post what your church is thankful for. A custodian? The choir? Your soup kitchen volunteers? An historic sanctuary? The new parking lot? Post daily Bible verses about giving thanks or mindfulness: “Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” (1 Thessalonians 5:18) Ask Facebook friends to add a word or photo every day of the month or week. Create a web page of members’ thankful thoughts and share a little more grace on your church’s website.

**TWEET YOUR THANKS**
Post what you are thankful for on your own Twitter account. Your staff? Your annual conference? Your child? It is a great way to spread a spirit of gratefulness and for others to get to know you a little better. Challenge pastor friends, staff members or others to tweet thanks as well. Tag them in a note of appreciation.

**ASK THE KIDDOS**
Children’s perspectives provide excellent food-for-thought for adults and kids alike. As a Sunday school project, have children draw pictures of people or pets for which they are thankful. Ask them to bring photos or images cut from a magazine of things they appreciate and ask them why they are grateful.

**INITIATE GRATEFUL GROUPS**
Sometimes when adults get together, we can focus on the problems – oops, challenges – we have. It is easy to complain about what is not going well. What if you started a meeting by asking everyone to share something that is going right? Perhaps plan a meeting or Sunday school class around gratitude – only. If you host dinner clubs or small groups, ask each member to share what they appreciate most in life in place of saying grace. Let gratitude be your prayer.

**POST IT – OLD SCHOOL**
Not everyone is on Facebook. As an added visual for your office, clear a bulletin board or put up a presentation board for “thank you notes.” Write “What are you thankful for?” at the top, put out lots of large sticky notes and some pens and see what happens.

**THANK A SOLDIER OR SHUT-IN**
Churches are often a main connection to community for members who cannot be physically present in the congregation. Visits or phone calls are wonderful, but consider sending a note expressing your thankfulness for them. Someone who is ill or not able to be there to lend a hand will know their membership, prayers and support are still needed and appreciated.

**THANK YOUR STAFF**
Have you told them lately that you love them? Make it official with a card or note.

**THANK GOD**
Gratitude is an amazing lens through which to view the world. When we focus on our blessings, we tend to be happier. When we realize how much we possess, we tend to be more thoughtful of those who have less. When we talk about the good together, we tend to appreciate each other more.

Being grateful is really about being more mindful of the abundance in our lives and how we can share it with others. This November, engage in gratitude. And, remember, it only takes about 30 days for a new practice to become a habit.

Thanks be to God!

Laurens Glass is a writer and digital media specialist for United Methodist News Service, a part of United Methodist Communications. Contact her at lglass@umcom.org. This article was originally published at www.umcom.org.

Laurens Glass thanks volunteer Mary Jackson at the food and clothing distribution center at Windsor Village United Methodist Church in Houston.
Celebrating with Gratitude—at Home

“An attitude of gratitude”—that’s what we seek to instill in ourselves and in our family members. Thanksgiving lends itself to helping us name the many ways we are blessed.

Stopping to identify blessings doesn’t mean that life has been easy in the past year. Everyone experiences difficulties and hardships. We can’t ignore the fact that hardships are part of life.

This Thanksgiving, reflect together on families all around the world who have left their homes to move to other countries because of war, because of economic issues or because of instability in their home countries. Many may not have the opportunities to enjoy a meal with family members, to reflect together on the year or to have a safe place to live. Yet, they too may be looking at life with an “attitude of gratitude,” despite finding themselves in new places, with circumstances they didn’t anticipate and with people they do not know.

This year, consider using one or more of the following suggestions when you observe Thanksgiving in your home or with others. Use these suggestions to enable your family to focus not just on being thankful for the food of the day, but also on true gratefulness for the many blessings experienced throughout the year.

» Many countries have a day of thanksgiving to celebrate the harvest of crops and the food provided by the land that sustains us. Create a list of the foods you enjoy. Give thanks for the earth and the blessings of the world that God has created.

» Create a place tag for every person who will share the Thanksgiving meal in your home. On one side of the tag, write the name of the person. On the other side, place a word or phrase from a verse of scripture. Ask everyone to line up so the words from the verse are in the correct order. This determines who sits by whom during the meal. Say the scripture together after everyone has been seated.

» Identify family members and close friends of your family who will not be able to be with you at Thanksgiving. Create or purchase cards for each of these people. On Thanksgiving Day, invite all who are gathered in your home to sign and/or write a note on the cards to those who are missing. Don’t forget to mail the cards on the Friday following Thanksgiving!

» Make a blessing box. Ask different family members to write on slips of paper things for which they are thankful and to place the slips of paper in the blessing box. Use the box as a centerpiece on Thanksgiving Day. Pass around the box, pull out the slips of paper and read the blessings.

» Reflect on the past year. Ask each
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The Rev. MaryJane Pierce Norton is retired from the staff of Discipleship Ministries. This article is updated and reprinted with permission from the Discipleship Ministries website, www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/2016-thanksgiving-celebrations-for-the-home.
A Season of Gratitude

“Gratitude is at the heart of the Christian faith,” says the Rev. Kent Millard, President of United Theological Seminary. While every day should be a day of thanksgiving to God, the weeks encompassing the Thanksgiving (U.S.), Advent and Christmas seasons call for a special outpouring of gratitude.

Use this calendar to engage in daily acts of gratitude and kindness. Most of them can either be done alone or with family or friends. Some require a bit of planning, so you may want to look ahead a few days, or make arrangements to do the actual activity a few days later.

WEEK 1

- **Sunday, Nov. 19**
  Put a gratitude jar in the kitchen with scraps of paper. Encourage people daily to write down things for which they are grateful. Read them on Epiphany (Jan. 6).
- **Monday, Nov. 20**
  Thank God for the weather. Whether sunny, rainy, snowy or windy, find the good in the forecast.
- **Tuesday, Nov. 21**
  Hand write and mail a note to someone you admire or appreciate in your life.
- **Wednesday, Nov. 22**
  Volunteer to read to nursing home residents.
- **Thursday, Nov. 23**
  **Thanksgiving Day (U.S.)**
  Read Psalm 100 to begin your time of everyone sharing blessings of the past year.
- **Friday, Nov. 24**
  Smile and greet everyone you see throughout the day. Ask how they are – then LISTEN to what they say.
- **Saturday, Nov. 25**
  As a family, rake a neighbor’s leaves.
- **Sunday, Nov. 26**
  **United Methodist Student Day**
  Find a former teacher. Thank them for the impact they had on you with a handwritten note, flowers or a gift card.
- **Monday, Nov. 27**
  Print out or draw a coupon book of helpful acts to give as a gift – do the dishes, sweep the floor, dust the living room tables, take out the trash, etc.
- **Tuesday, Nov. 28**
  **UMC Giving Tuesday**
  Donate to an UMCOR Advance project as a Christmas gift in honor of someone.
- **Wednesday, Nov. 29**
  Take flowers or a nice plant to the church secretary.
- **Thursday, Nov. 30**
  Volunteer to provide childcare for someone.
- **Friday, Dec. 1**
  **World AIDS Day**
  Take good magazines and leave in the hospital waiting room.
- **Saturday, Dec. 2**
  Leave sticky notes on various cars in store parking lots or on bathroom stalls in public restrooms with simple messages of gratitude or kindness.
- **Sunday, Dec. 3**
  **1st Sunday in Advent**
  **Global Migration Sunday**
  Spend an hour taking a prayer walk through a natural area. Thank God for the earth and offer blessings for all of creation.
- **Monday, Dec. 4**
  During Advent, commit to placing only positive messages on social media. Consider tweeting or posting a photo of something for which you are grateful each day.
- **Tuesday, Dec. 5**
  Share a favorite book with someone...and encourage them to pass it on.
- **Wednesday, Dec. 6**
  Let the person behind you at the grocery store cut in line.
- **Thursday, Dec. 7**
  **Pearl Harbor Day**
  Send a note to any WWII veterans in your town thanking them for their service. If you don’t know any of the vets, thank their survivors or descendants.
- **Friday, Dec. 8**
  **Offer to babysit for free to give young parents a night out.**
- **Saturday, Dec. 9**
  Look for (and find) people who are doing a good job at a less-than-glamorous task and thank them for their good work. Let their managers know as well.
- **Sunday, Dec. 10**
  **2nd Sunday in Advent**
  Visit a neighbor you have not seen for a while. Offer to help them with something, pray for them or invite them to join you for dinner.
- **Monday, Dec. 11**
  Volunteer a few hours at an animal shelter to care for God’s creatures who need to feel loved.
- **Tuesday, Dec. 12**
  Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 silently or with your family. Talk about blessings you find in difficulties you are facing.
- **Wednesday, Dec. 13**
  Make a casserole or dinner to be placed in your church freezer for anyone who needs it.
- **Thursday, Dec. 14**
  Thank God for quenching your thirst – be it with a drink or companionship, inspiration or spiritual guidance.
- **Friday, Dec. 15**
  Make handcrafted greeting cards with a personal message to show the recipients they are a special enough to be sent something made by you.
WEEK 5

» Saturday, Dec. 16
Tape a $5 bill to a jug of milk in the grocery store.

» Sunday, Dec. 17
3RD SUNDAY IN ADVENT
Phone a friend or relative. Tell them “I was thinking of you so thought I’d call.”

» Monday, Dec. 18
Write a personal note of thanks or encouragement to your local church clergy.

» Tuesday, Dec. 19
Visit a local non-profit to learn about their work and thank them for serving.

» Wednesday, Dec. 20
Tell someone why you appreciate them.

» Thursday, Dec. 21
Be grateful for silence when you can grab a quiet time and say a simple prayer.

» Friday, Dec. 22
Take or ship a friend in need of comfort a meal or treat.

» Saturday, Dec. 23
Pay the toll or the drive-thru coffee or meal of someone behind you. Ask the cashier to give the recipient a note with a gratitude or kindness message. Thank the cashier.

WEEK 6

» Sunday, Dec. 24
4TH SUNDAY IN ADVENT
CHRISTMAS EVE
Make eye contact with each family member or close friend sharing the day with you. Tell them three reasons you are thankful for them.

» Monday, Dec. 25
CHRISTMAS DAY
Start your Christmas morning by reading Luke 2 and having each person share what the gift of Jesus Christ means to them. Thank God for the gift of Jesus.

» Tuesday, Dec. 26
Carry hand-written thank you cards that might include a gift card through a public area. Give to any military personnel you encounter.

» Wednesday, Dec. 27
Take a picture for a tourist or a local family on an outing.

» Thursday, Dec. 28
Smile and hold doors open for people wherever you go; say “hello” to a stranger.

» Friday, Dec. 29
Sit out on your porch or front stoop, or just look out the window, and pray for each person who drives by.

» Saturday, Dec. 30
Help a family member accomplish something on their to-do list.

WEEK 7

» Sunday, Dec. 31
NEW YEAR’S EVE
Begin reading the slips of paper in your gratitude jar (Nov. 19). Plan how you will continue to express gratitude for God’s blessings every day.

Thank you to those who contributed ideas for this Gratitude Calendar:

Alabama-West Florida Conference: Mary Catherine Phillips
Baltimore-Washington Conference: the Rev. Erik Alsgaard
Christ United Methodist Church, Franklin, Tennessee: Anne Weinberg
Ethos Church, Nashville, Tennessee: Emily Snell
First United Methodist Church, Franklin, Tennessee: Cindy Solomon
General Board of Higher Education and Ministry: the Rev. Victoria Rebeck
Great Plains Conference: Todd Seifert
Green Hills Church, Nashville, Tennessee: Polly House
South Carolina Advocate: Jessica Brodie
United Methodist Communications: Steven Adair, Myca Alford, the Rev. Teresa Angle-Young, Crystal Caviness, the Rev. Ryan Dunn, Stacey Hagewood, Darby Jones, Dana Niedziela, Greg Petree, Kim Sanderson, Fran Walsh.
WHAT IS GRATITUDE – OR THANKFULNESS? That was among the questions several youngsters answered late last fall while being interviewed for the “Our Beliefs, Their Words” television campaign of The United Methodist Church. United Methodist Communications produced the television ads in which the children talked about love and kindness, miracles, Christmas and Easter, questions they would ask God, the meaning of “Open Hearts. Open Minds. Open Doors.” and other topics. Here are some of their minimally edited responses when asked, “What are you thankful for?” or “What does it mean to be thankful?”

(On Thanksgiving I was thankful for) my family and friends and that I have a house and food. (I’m also thankful) to be on earth. CADE, 10

I’m thankful for my house and my brother and my family. CLAIRE, 6

I’m thankful for family, friends, animals and video games. GRANT, 9

I’m thankful for my mom and dad and the friends that I have and my house that I have. GREYSON, 8

I’m thankful for my family and friends and that God gave me the opportunity to wake up this morning to be here. I’m thankful for today because not everybody gets today. Some people only got yesterday. (She’s also grateful for her brother even though) he really annoys me a lot, (but) he always loves me. I can talk to him about anything (that) maybe I can’t talk to other people about. Every night, before he goes to bed, we hug. HAILEE, 12

I’m thankful for my life and God and what God did to help me with things. To be thankful means to thank God for what you have. HANNAH, 9

(We) can be thankful for what we have because poor people don’t have that much stuff. I’m thankful for my mom, dad, my brother and my sister and my church and really everything because we can be thankful for what we have already. (Being thankful) leads us to share with other people (who) really are so poor they don’t have what we have. We have to give and (give) thanks for what we have, so people will feel happy that we are caring for them. Some people feel like we’re not caring for them because we’re not giving them anything. JOANNA, 9

You can share love and blessings with other people by being nice to them and not saying, “I don’t want this when they give you something.” KELAN, 7

I’m thankful for my house and my family and my friends and my sister. LIAM, 8

I’m thankful for everything – everything that I have – my family, God and all my friends. Thankful feels like just giving everyone like a big compliment and saying, “I’m thankful for you because you know God and you love me and I love you.” LINDSAY, 7

I’m thankful for God putting me on this earth and to have wonderful parents and family. To be thankful means to be grateful and just to be humble. ... By being grateful and being humble, you can use your humbleness to help and be kind. I can help other people by giving them clothes and helping them and washing cars. ... I think that people need to be humble and not think about themselves and to be kind to others. That’s how problems are fixed, because people don’t worry about themselves. ... I pray about my family, the food, how grateful I am and what things I need help on and stuff like that. TREY, 10

Gratitude is what you should feel after giving. TRIP, 11

Generous is kind of like showing gratitude for somebody. YASMINTE, 9

I’m thankful for my family and all the stuff God has provided us – really cool. I’d say, “Thank you, God, for all my friends and family and all the stuff you’ve done for us.” ZEKE, 8

Mealtime prayers are often where children first learn to say “thank you.” Meals are also a good time to go around the table and have each person name something for which they are grateful that day.
ROLLING RIVER RAMPAGE
Invite children on a white-water rafting adventure to experience the ride of a lifetime with God! Along the river, children discover that life with God is an adventure full of wonder and surprise, and that they can trust God to be with them through anything.

9781501840760 | Available January 2018

24/7 JESUS MAKES A WAY EVERY DAY!
The perfect VBS for churches that celebrate African American history and culture! Lessons are based on stories Jesus told of how God provides every hour of every day so we might have life and live it to the fullest!

9781501850622 | Available January 2018

HERO CENTRAL
Take kids on awesome adventures alongside some of their favorite Bible heroes and discover the qualities that make us truly heroic in God.

9781501820694 | Available January 2018
FOR NEARLY FIVE DECADES, THE MULTI-AWARD WINNING INTERPRETER MAGAZINE HAS BEEN A PRIMARY SOURCE OF INSPIRATION AND INFORMATION FOR UNITED METHODIST CHURCH LEADERS. WITH THIS ISSUE, THE MAGAZINE GOES THE WAY OF LIFE, POPULAR PHOTOGRAPHY, MADEMOISELLE AND NATIONAL LAMPOON AS IT CEASES PUBLICATION.

Looking back over the years, change has been one of the periodical's hallmarks. When the Evangelical United Brethren Church and The Methodist Church united in 1968, each had its own program journal — Spotlight and The Methodist Story. The 1968 Uniting Conference decreed that there should be “a free program journal for pastors and local church leaders.” In May 1968, the two journals became one.

“With this issue, the United Methodist Church unveils the new program journal — the first merged publication in the new church. ... You hold in your hand the first issue of Methodist Story-Spotlight. Its purpose is the same as its predecessors: to help you do your job in your church.” Ralph E. Baker, who was the new magazine’s first managing editor, said the name “became rather cumbersome, so they hunted around for an easier way to identify the publication.” They decided on The Interpreter, despite finding another publication — published by the Idaho State Penitentiary — with the same name. The Interpreter debuted in January 1969, the same month Richard Nixon became President and the Beatles performed in public for the last time. The periodical, mailed to an estimated 325,000 pastors and laypeople, continued in the tradition of its predecessors.

ENCOURAGE CREATIVITY IN LOCAL CHURCHES

The Interpreter had an editorial advisory group with representatives from each of the general agencies. The magazine contained easy-order coupons for resources related to program themes that were available from the various boards and agencies. A stated objective of the journal was to encourage creative program planning by local church leaders. A program planning issue became an annual tradition.

Baker, who later became editor, said one of the most “radically different” issues was the May 1976 issue that included an insert titled “The Adventures of Otto Plan.” Illustrated with cartoon characters, it presented a step-by-step primer for church planning, complete with work sheets.

“That actually was one of the more popular issues,” said Baker. “We had a lot requests for reprints of that, both in English and Spanish. As long as we had copies, people ordered them.”

One constant The second issue of the Methodist Story-Spotlight, published in June 1968, chronicled the story of the April 1968 uniting conference that created The United Methodist Church.
throughout the publication’s entire run has been the ever-popular “It Worked for Us,” which showcases success stories from local churches. In response to reader demand, there was even a special volume compiled of 110 of the best ideas from a 15-year period. The Best of It Worked for Us noted that not only was the section the best-liked department in the magazine, it also generated the most reader mail because churches with success stories want and need a forum to share those stories.

1980s: NEW FORMATS, CONTENT

In 1986, United Methodist Communications, including the magazine staff, made a move from Dayton, Ohio, to Nashville, Tennessee, and the magazine moved to a more contemporary look. Based on a Gallup study that said the magazine could use some “strengthening,” a task force instituted changes, including upgrading the contents to make the copy more inviting with human interest, anecdotes and examples of programs that have been successful in local churches.

At the end of 1988, The Interpreter rolled out a more colorful layout, featuring a full-color photo of two plaid-clad children on the cover, with one lighting an Advent candle. A few inside pages also contained color photos, though most were still black-and-white.

“The format became more contemporary as time went on,” said Baker. “As we progressed, we became open to some of the newer ideas in publishing. Actually, The Interpreter was one of the early magazines in computer layout.”

“It was very modern for the era,” said Joy Bossmann of Beavercreek, Ohio, now age 92, who recalls the magazine from a time when she was very active in the local church through Sunday school and as chair of the ministry councils.

The Rev. Daniel Jones, a retired pastor living in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, became a reader in the early 90s while serving as lay leader of Chestnut Street United Methodist Church. “Especially as a lay leader, I depended on it for guidance.
for Laity Sunday and other special Sundays," he said. "It was very helpful to me." Later, as a pastor, he continued to use it for ideas and even conversation starters—"things I could discuss with folks when I was out visiting."

1990S: NEW NAME, NEW FOCUS

With the January 1992 issue, "The" was dropped from the nameplate and the magazine became simply *Interpreter*. Three years later, United Methodist Communications decided to take *Interpreter* further in a new direction. Garlinda Burton, fresh out of graduate school and "itching to work for a magazine," became the new editor.

"I had some very specific ideas about how to make it what I thought would be more populist ... with kind of a *People* magazine approach to it," said Burton. "That was my model, really, *People* magazine. We added some feature stories and made it not so much agency-driven, but topic-driven."

Burton thought the magazine could use more content showing how local churches were making things happen. New departments debuted, including Potluck, "a collection of short, bright stories about people, churches and trends" and Witnesses, "a salute to people who transform their faith from Sunday worship to weekday actions."

"I had a feature called 'One of Us,' which focused on one or two United Methodists who were doing interesting things. I remember the story of a young woman who started a gun buy-back in her community to get guns off the street," said Burton. "There was a story of a United Methodist pastor whose son had been murdered. He forgave the young man who murdered his son. Eventually, the young man got out of jail, and the pastor performed his wedding ceremony."

Burton said she loved learning about the history of the UMC’s worship and liturgy. "We had a couple of features, one was 'Why We Do That' and one was 'United Methodism 101.' ... I think it was helpful for people to understand the why of our rich traditions, not just tradition for tradition’s sake. I wanted them to understand the meaning of the traditions and be able to teach that along with understanding the biblical teachings."

DIGITAL FORMAT INTRODUCED

The magazine got another makeover at the beginning of 2007, following a year-long research effort aimed at better meeting readers’ needs. The redesigned magazine featured a new, more visually appealing format and a new nameplate. There was also a new emphasis on nurturing leadership skills among potential church leaders, including the introduction of a new department called "Leadership Link."

"We did we did a very comprehensive re-design," said the Rev. Kathy Noble, current and long-time editor. "We started working with what is now GUILDHOUSE Group (to design the magazine), and they have contributed immeasurably to the quality."

In 2009, United Methodist Communications announced the launch of a digital version, as well as the printed version of the magazine. "People are using media today in so many different ways and many different forms. It’s necessary to provide information in multiple channels," said the Rev. Larry Hollon, who was general secretary of United Methodist Communications and publisher at that time.

More recently, the digital edition became available in three different versions. "People can read the stories on the website, but we also produce it in a downloadable format. Some folks want *Interpreter* digitally, but they want to be able to read it offline, or don’t always have good Internet connections," said Noble. "They can read through what we call the ISSUU edition, in which the pages look like a print magazine, so they still get the design elements."

READER-WRITTEN DEPARTMENT

Noble said her favorite part of the magazine has been the cover packages, each of which takes an in-depth look at ideas or
resources addressing a particular topic. “We can take a concept, an idea, an issue or a ministry and explore several different angles,” said Noble. “We ask ourselves, ‘What are some good stories to support the theme? What is going to be helpful and interesting to readers? Is there a way we can challenge people to become part of this?’”

Another of Noble’s favorites was the creation of a new department – as part of an effort to make the magazine more member-oriented – called, “We asked, ‘...’ You said, ‘...’” about four years ago. Subscribers receive a question via email and an invitation to respond. Generally, the magazine receives about 250-300 responses, a few of which are used in the magazine and many more on the website.

“Questions that brought the most responses included, ‘What is your favorite Scripture and why?’ and ‘What are your hopes for the church in the coming year?’” said Noble. “When we asked people how they had received care from their congregations, many of the responses were extremely touching. As much as possible, we’ve tied the question to the cover package and sometimes incorporated some of the answers into one or more of those articles.”

Noble said whenever a program of the general church is the story topic, “we’ve worked to make the local church the starting point. We ask ourselves how does this affect or support the ministry of the local church?”

Joy Uthoff of Ives Chapel United Methodist Church in Baldwin City, Kansas, has been an avid reader of Interpreter for more than 25 years. As a pastor’s wife and someone who has played many different local church roles, she said the magazine provides a good learning experience and helps keep up with the connectional system of The United Methodist Church.

“You go beyond the local to the global,” she said. “You kind of feel like a part of a whole by reading some of those articles. These are some of the reasons why we are United Methodists. It really does help educate us all on our whole standing.”

“It has been a very wonderful helpful resource,” she said. “Thank you for the years we have been given this publication.”

Diane Degnan is director of public information at United Methodist Communications in Nashville, Tennessee.

**AS INTERPRETER ENDS...**

Two free e-newsletters will continue to link United Methodist members and leaders to inspiration, information and resources to aid them in their Christian walk and as they lead in their congregation. Interpreter readers for whom United Methodist Communications has email addresses are being subscribed to “United Methodist Now: Inspiration for Daily Living, an e-newsletter highlighting content from UMC.org, the denominational website. Anyone interested can subscribe at www.umc.org/what-we-believe/united-methodist-now-inspiration-for-daily-living.

Debuting in the coming months will be an e-newsletter for church leaders (from small group and other leaders in local churches to conference leaders and beyond). The e-publication will highlight content from a new leader website to debut in Spring 2018 and other sources.

New World Outlook magazine—Fall 2017 issue

**SERVING:**
The Call to Missionary Service

Missionaries in this issue:
- Global Missionaries
- Church and Community Workers
- National Plan for Hispanic/Latino Ministry Missionaries
- Global Mission Fellows
- Mission Volunteers

Farewell to Interpreter. New World Outlook thanks its sister United Methodist publication for 48 years of dedicated service. Job well done.

**SUBSCRIBE TODAY!**
4 issues for $16.00, online at http://newworldoutlook.org or call 1-877-881-2385. Digital edition for $10 a year
By Julie Dwyer

Making Prayer a Priority

Mary Meyer carried index cards with her wherever she went.

On each was a list of names of people she needed to pray for or other concerns. She would jot down new names and prayer requests as they came to her, and then she’d tuck the cards into her Bible, her purse or even the cushions of her favorite chair.

If she had a free minute, she was praying.

“I think it’s honest to say she was never bored because of her prayer life,” said her grandson, Gilbert C. Hanke, top executive of the General Commission on United Methodist Men.

Hanke said after his grandmother’s death, his parents helped clear out the family’s home in Kansas and found more than a hundred of her prayer cards scattered around in books, drawers and other places.

“It was like seeds that she planted,” Hanke said. “I don’t have much from Grandma, but I do have this memory. Every time I see an index card, that’s what I think of.”

Hanke’s grandfather was a United Methodist pastor and Hanke said both of his grandparents took seriously their membership vows, including the promise to faithfully participate in the church’s ministries through their prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness.

But it was their passion for prayer that stood out for him.

“Grandpa was the best prayer I’ve ever experienced. He prayed all the time. He prayed out loud. If you were at his house and you got up in the morning, you would hear him praying. Whether it was a concern about something happening in the world or a personal concern on his health, there was nothing too small or too great for him to pray about,” Hanke said.

A Vow Explained

Building a solid prayer life can be a struggle for some. While new United Methodists vow to uphold their congregation through their prayers, many don’t know what that means.

“We ask people, ‘Will you uphold this church by your prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness?’ That’s great as far as it goes, but the average person has no real clue what they’ve said yes to,” said the Rev. Dan R. Dick, assistant to Bishop Hee-Soo Jung of the Wisconsin Conference. “Are we talking about praying daily, weekly, monthly, 10 minutes a day, 30 minutes a day? I don’t know that there’s a right answer.”

Dick said it’s important for faith communities to help members understand what is expected of them, not only when they join the church but also as they renew their vows. “If we want to hold people accountable to growing in their discipleship, there has to be a standard,” he said.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Dick analyzed more than 700 United Methodist congregations in his role with the General Board of Discipleship (now Discipleship Ministries). He studied healthy churches that were making an impact in their community, churches helping people grow in their discipleship at the same time they were growing in membership.

The results of the study are published in his book Vital Signs.

“When there were clearly defined expectations, it was easier to measure — to say, how well are people fulfilling the vows, fulfilling the promises they made?” he said.

“In the church, we pay lip service to how important prayer is, but I really saw that where churches have prayer as a common practice and a regular expectation, people were more engaged.”

Accountability Helps

Dick cites several churches during that time that set out to define membership and hold members accountable to their vows. One, Mathewson Street United Methodist Church in Providence, Rhode Island, was a struggling congregation in decline for a significant number of years. Church leaders decided to set standards for membership. While there was pushback and some longtime members left the church, the church found its culture changed.

“It turned things from a negative energy to a positive energy,” Dick said.

“These things weren’t added-on burdens,
requirements and obligations, but were wonderfully valuable ways to build relationships, both with God and with other people in the congregation.”

The power of prayer also is evident at St. Mark United Methodist Church in Harare, Zimbabwe. The church hosts early morning prayer services that draw as many as 500 people.

Known as *rumuko* in the local chiShona language, the prayer gatherings are held from 4 to 6 a.m. each day and focus on individual prayers.

Eggerter Jokomo, 82, a pioneer of the St. Mark prayer program, said some people travel more than 20 miles from nearby towns to attend on Saturdays when evangelist Fred Bande Mutemera conducts spiritual healing and deliverance services.

“Saturday prayers attract the highest attendance,” Jokomo said. “We mainly pray for ourselves, our church and our nation. Early morning prayers are more powerful than those done at any other time of the day. It takes a lot of willpower to rise and leave the comfort of your bed at such an hour.”

For members whose local church doesn’t offer prayer services or small prayer groups, Dick suggests finding a prayer partner for accountability and making a short list of specific things you are going to pray about. “Put it on an index card and hold it in the palm of your hands, and pray those things on a regular basis.”

While index cards weren’t the right fit for Hanke (he prefers Post-it Notes), he has tried to incorporate what he learned from his grandparents into his own prayer life.

“When something comes up, I’ll write it down and stick it in a place where I know where it is. When it’s time, when I’m trying to work through something or I need a break … there’s that reminder of here’s a list of folks you need to be praying for. Sometimes it’s a stock list of family and friends and activities. Sometimes it’s places I’ve been on mission trips. Sometimes it’s people we hear about in the office who are going through hard times.”

**LEARNING TO PRAY IS OK**

Dick said there’s no wrong way to pray and it’s OK to seek guidance.

“The assumption is we’re lifelong Christians, we’ve grown up in the church and we know how to pray. Yet many laity say they don’t know whether they are doing it right,” Dick said.

Hanke agreed, and said he often struggles with his own prayer life.

“I’ve prayed some prayers that were pretty angry and pretty self-centered,” he said. “Then I had to go back and say, ‘Sorry about that.’ … It’s something that is a work in progress for me. It’s probably a work in progress for everybody.”

Dick urges church leaders to get back to the basics and help members be successful in upholding their vows through spiritual disciplines. New member classes are a good place to start. For larger churches, he said small groups often make the most sense.

“Real accountability and engagement requires a level of intimacy that really gets lost when you have hundreds of people present,” he said.

Building a community of prayer starts with building relationships and making a real effort to put in the work needed to uphold the vows of the church.

“We live in a culture right now where trust is pretty low, where one person’s word or promise is not always valued too highly,” Dick said. “We’re living in a world of fake news and alternative facts. Calling people to a level of integrity, to say nobody is telling you what you ought to do, but when you say you are going to do something, it’s important that you do that. I love that message.”

**Julie Dwyer** is a writer and editor for United Methodist Communications. Reach her at jdwyer@umcom.org. **Eveline Chikwanah**, a communicator of the Zimbabwe East Annual Conference, contributed to this report.
GLOBAL MIGRATION

FOCUS OF DEC. 3 OBSERVANCE

The young couple had a new baby, a sweet little boy, and they were thrilled, happy and scared. He was their first, and they were counting on friends and family to help them figure this parenting thing out.

But, then, word came that the future held death for little children. The couple was terrified. What could they do? Like parents everywhere, they would do anything to protect their child.

So they left their home, their family and their friends. They left the only life they’d ever known with just a few meager possessions. All they wanted was a safe place to raise their son.

They became refugees, desperate and scared, but determined.

So Mary, Joseph and their son headed west to Egypt. They had to get Jesus – Emmanuel – away from certain danger. They weren’t especially excited about going to Egypt. They didn’t know what life would be like there. But they knew what it was like at home and it was not good.

MILLIONS DISPLACED

Every minute, an average of 20 people worldwide flee their homes because of war, famine and persecution. To prayerfully remember the plight of migrants, Global Migration Sunday (UMCmigration.org) has been set for Dec. 3, the first Sunday of Advent. On this date, all United Methodist churches are asked to gather in prayer and receive an offering dedicated to responding to human suffering caused by migration.

“The facts are staggering,” said Thomas Kemper, general secretary of the General Board of Global Ministries. “There are more than 65.6 million displaced people in the world today, more than at any time since World War II.”

Displaced people, more than half of whom are under 18 years old, are on the move for many reasons and carry many labels, among them migrants and refugees. About one-third of them, 21 million, have been granted official refugee status by the United Nations and have the potential to be settled permanently in a new home through established systems. Others will continue to search for a sense of safety and home for many years to come.

“United Methodists have a long history of walking alongside people impacted by war, violence, economic hardship, persecution and political unrest,” said Kemper. “UMCOR (the United Methodist Committee on Relief) was established more than 75 years ago to alleviate suffering without regard to race, creed or gender. United Methodists trust UMCOR and its partners regularly work with refugees and are eager to expand this work in response to the rapidly growing needs of those suffering as a result of migration.”

SPECIAL OFFERING ON DEC. 3

The Global Migration Sunday Offering, which will support Global Migration Advance #3022144, can deepen United Methodist congregations’ understanding of the biblical call to welcome and care for people displaced for a myriad of reasons. The Global Migration Sunday offering also will provide advocacy and educational materials and grants to help conferences and congregations become better equipped to minister to migrants throughout the world.

The denomination is committed to working ecumenically on the issue, Kemper said. At least 10 percent of the resources raised on Global Migration Sunday will support the refugee resettlement work of partner organization Church World Service.

“Gifts through the church represent life and hope to those hurting from the experience of displacement and homelessness; they provide not only food, shelter and health services but also a sense of caring about their welfare and future,” Kemper said. For refugees and other displaced people beyond and within the boundaries of their home countries, these issues are critical.

“Some of the major crises today are among refugees from Syria and Iraq; displaced people in East Africa, notably from South Sudan; in-country refugees in central Africa, including those displaced by civil strife in the Democratic Republic of Congo and floods in Mozambique; and migrants, including children, concentrated along the northern and southern borders of Mexico,” Kemper said.

PREPARED TO HELP

The United Methodist Church, through UMCOR/Global Ministries and the network of conferences and partner organizations in the United States and globally, has the infrastructure and contacts to carry out such services with compassion and competence, for example:

» UMCOR is collaborating with Eastern Orthodox, Muslim and ecumenical Christian agencies to address needs among Syrian and Iraqi refugees.

The “Beyond Bethlehem” campaign

RESOURCES FOR GLOBAL MIGRATION SUNDAY

Find a wealth of downloadable worship, educational and promotional resources for Global Migration Sunday at www.umcmigration.org.
initiated at Christmas 2015 has been an effective channel for responding to refugees, notably from Syria and Iraq. 

Global Ministries serves migrants and migrant workers in Malaysia, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Germany, Italy, and Canada, to name a few. Global Ministries currently has 41 missionaries or two-year Global Mission Fellows working with migrants around the world. More are needed.

In the United States Global Ministries contracts with Church World Service (cwsglobal.org) to work with United Methodist congregations to resettle refugees.

The National Justice for Our Neighbors (njfon.org) network, founded by UMCOR and now its own corporation with church support, includes 21 mostly congregation-based locations providing professional legal counsel to migrants in the United States.

The 2016 Book of Resolutions statement “Global Migration and the Quest for Justice” declares, “Global migration as a factor in the quest for justice is a major priority of The United Methodist Church as a denomination that is global in its vision, mission and ministries. This concern is rooted in both a biblical mandate for justice and a commitment to the future of the church.”

When faced with a challenge, United Methodists learn, pray and respond, often by giving.

“United Methodists are disciples of Jesus Christ who have responded to God’s saving, forgiving love,” Kemper said. “We believe in the Great Commandment to love God with heart, mind, soul, and strength and neighbor as ourselves, understanding that all people are our neighbors.”

Based on reporting from Global Ministries, the United Methodist Communications Press Center and a United Methodist News Service story by Julie Dwyer, general church content editor.

This downloadable infographic is one of many resources available at umcmigration.org to promote Global Migration Sunday. The illustration at the bottom is from a downloadable animation created by Firdaus Kharas with Chocolate Moose Media.

CALL TO OBSERVE GLOBAL MIGRATION SUNDAY, DEC. 3

Following are excerpts from the letter Bishop Bruce Ough, president of the United Methodist Council of Bishops, issued on Oct. 12. Read the full letter at www.umcmigration.org.

“I write to you on behalf of our Council of Bishops to invite you to observe Global Migration Sunday on Dec. 3. This is the first Sunday of the season of Advent, a time when we remember the coming birth of the Christ child who himself was a migrant.

“From Asia and Europe to Africa and the Americas, the plight of more than 65 million men, women and children forced to leave their homes and migrate to places unknown calls all Christians to remember what God requires of us.

“Wars, natural disasters, persecution, economic hardships and growing violence around the world are the major root causes of the unprecedented global migration we witness with grave concern today. ...

“For most of these migrants, the decision to flee their homeland comes as a last resort effort to live.

“...As United Methodists, we believe that the prayers of God’s people can cause the outpouring of God’s mercy and justice. ... (It) is our fervent hope that on Global Migration Sunday United Methodist congregations in all the places we serve around the world will join our voices to pray for our brothers and sisters who are suffering the journey of forced migration. ... (We) ask that all our congregations gather an offering dedicated to the human suffering inflicted by forced migration. ... Jesus said, “When you welcome the sojourner, you welcome me.” (Matthew 25:35)

“Let us welcome our migrant brothers and sisters with compassionate care, pray for them without ceasing and give generously that they, too, may have life.”
WHEN IT’S NOT THE MOST WONDEROUS TIME  
Blue Christmas/Service of the Longest Night

Snow angels and sugarplums. Gifts wrapped with big red bows. Tables set with china and flowers. Food shared with family and friends. Candlelight services at church where everyone sings “Silent Night.”

That’s Christmas, right? For some people it is, but for others...

Someone has died. Someone is deployed. Someone is missing. Someone is hungry. Someone needs a job. Someone is desperate.

But, no one says out loud, “I hate Christmas.” It just isn’t done.

Churches understand this. While they plan their congregational dinners, children’s programs, Nativity scenes and caroling, many churches also plan services that speak to sad hearts. These services go by different names: Blue Christmas, Longest Night or Time of Remembrance.

Work with Hospice

The Rev. Carole duBois, pastor of congregational care at Fredericksburg (Virginia) United Methodist Church, directs their service.

The Blue Christmas service is on a Wednesday evening following the church’s mid-week dinner, close to the longest night of the year (Dec. 21).

The service is contemplative, meditative and multi-sensory with incense, candles, music, etc. Scripture readings focus on passages about Christ, the light of the world. They extend invitations to church members, those who come to the dinner and those who have attended classes on grief, death or dying.

A special invitation goes to those who’ve lost loved ones during the year and families connected with their local hospice. Typically, about 100 people attend.

“We also host two other services led by the hospice people,” duBois said. “Hospice is a wonderful organization. They plan the service and lead it. We can have as many as 160 people attend.”

Attendees receive some tangible object as a memory marker.

“Giving people something to take with them, something they can physically hold on to, maybe a shell from the baptismal font, helps serve as a reminder throughout the dark days of winter that they are not alone,” du Bois said.

Adapt Others’ Ideas

The Rev. Steve Heyduck, pastor of First United Methodist Church in Euless, Texas, said their church typically hosts up to 30 people for the Blue Christmas service, which began in 2013.

“That year we had several people in our congregation who had experienced the loss of a spouse or a parent,” Heyduck said. “We had an intern from Perkins (School of Theology), and she was interested in planning that kind of service. It went very well and we’ve hosted one each year since.”

Word of mouth from church members is the primary means of getting the word out about their service. “I think a lot of our people know others who have experienced a loss and would find it helpful,” he said.

The date for the Blue Christmas service is usually on a Wednesday near the winter solstice. This year it will be on Dec. 20.

“The 21st is the longest night of the year, and in our culture we have a tradition of church on Sunday and Wednesday, so that timing seems appropriate,” Heyduck said. “Our service has elements we have borrowed from other services we have learned about. We are Wesleyan in that we have no shame in learning from and using what others have successfully done.”

Recognize Sadness

The Rev. Valerie Tyson, pastor of congregational care and welcoming ministries at Fuquay-Varina United Methodist Church in North Carolina, said the church struggled with the name of its service.

“Blue Christmas’ and ‘Longest Night Service’ both just sounded so sad,” Tyson said. “Your instinct is to try to make something sound more positive, but soon, I realized the reason for the service is to recognize the sadness people are feeling during the season. I feel like it is important to honor that. We settled on ‘Blue Christmas,’ recognizing that it casts a wide net over a lot of circumstances. People come with their burdens. There are many reasons people may be struggling.”

Tyson said the church uses music to minister during the Blue
Candlelighting and Holy Communion are part of “Comfort, Peace and Hope for the Holidays: A Service of the Longest Night” at Christ United Methodist Church in Franklin, Tennessee.

“One year we decided to invite one of our choirs to offer a special selection during the service,” she said. “Surprisingly, choir members talked about how meaningful it was to join the attendees in their sadness and grief, to worship with those in such deep pain. It was a time for them to suffer with those who suffer and mourn with those who mourn.”

Church members are asked to personally invite those they know who are grief-stricken to come to the service. Last year they had about 40 people.

Tyson called it a privilege to host the Blue Christmas service. “I believe it is a sacred thing to take up all that grief and pain and offer it up to God.”

Polly House is a freelance editor and writer in Nashville, Tennessee. She currently serves as editorial assistant for Interpreter.

WHEN PLANNING A BLUE CHRISTMAS/ LONGEST NIGHT SERVICE …

» Assure those you invite that the reason they find the holidays difficult does not need to be a recent event – or even a something they can name. While they may have faded, memories may become more acute during the holiday season. Consider extending direct invitations (written, email, phone call) to people in the congregation who have suffered losses in the past year.

» Keep the service peaceful, quiet, contemplative – and unhurried. Make it participatory – candle lighting, prayers at the kneeling rail, anointing with oil, Holy Communion – but allow people to participate only as they wish.

» Both acknowledge grief, loss and other difficulties people are experiencing and offer hope.

» Include trained congregational caregivers (Stephen Ministers or others) or those with the gifts of compassion and empathy as hosts and worship leaders and to offer the ministry of presence to those who need someone to sit or pray with them.

» Encourage attendees as they wish to remain in the worship space after the service.

» Have boxes of tissues throughout the worship space.

» Consider offering a simple social time after the service to allow people to share words of grief or comfort.

Ideas and suggestions for the service:

» Blue Christmas worship, www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/blue-christmaslongest-night-worship-with-those-who-mourn


The Rev. Kathy Noble, editor, Interpreter

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Step in to help children grieving during the holidays

WHAT IF YOU ARE A CHILD AND HAVE LOST A LOVED ONE – THROUGH DEATH, DEPARTURE, DIVORCE OR DEPLOYMENT – AND IT’S THE FIRST CHRISTMAS WITHOUT THAT PERSON? YOU’RE SAD, CONFUSED AND SCARED.

“Through our baptism, we promise to surround our children with a community of love and forgiveness,” said the Rev. Melanie C. Gordon, director of ministry with children with Discipleship Ministries. “We are that community.”

Gordon and the Rev. Leanne Hadley, founder of “A Time for Children” (www.leanne-hadley.com) and an elder in The United Methodist Church, recently gave suggestions on how to help children deal with crisis and tragedy. These suggestions are adaptable as you work with children in the church setting during the holiday season.

» Support one another as you serve and minister to children.
» Pray with children. Simple prayers like: “Dear God, help and bless ____ (child’s name) ____ Guard him/her all with your care. Amen.”
» Reassure children as you listen to their fears. It is important and reasonable to validate their feelings while keeping a positive outlook on the future.
» Listen to children as they tell you how they feel. Sometimes, this will not be with words. Drawing a picture may allow them to express feelings without words.
» Share your own feelings, letting them know it’s normal and OK to be afraid of what they don’t understand. Fear is a part of the human condition, and it is appropriate to affirm feelings of fear.
» Provide structure through routine and activity. Routines and activities help regain a sense of control and security when so much feels out of control.
» Make objects that encourage play. Children learn through play and often use actions rather than words to express their fears or anxieties.
» Encourage children to draw or write whatever comes to their minds or give them a question or topic to draw about. Follow up by listening to what they may have to say about how they are feeling. Let them talk about their loved one and listen without any judgment.
» Validate their feelings with ongoing communication. Most importantly, end each conversation on a positive note by assuring children of God’s love. Scripture, like “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” or “God is a safe place to hide, ready to help when we need him,” can bring children comfort.

“Create a sacred space where God can join us and heal these children,” Hadley said. “Trust that he will fill the space and bring his peace.”

Remember too, that for a young child, the loss of a beloved pet can be a source of great sadness.

Anna James, a mom of two, remembered when the family dog died, her 2- and 4-year-old sons were very sad.

“For them, that Labrador retriever was most definitely a family member,” she said. “The dog had been in their lives every day since they were born. When she died, they grieved.”

During the holidays, patience and understanding will go a long way in helping children dealing with loss. Be ready to listen with love.

Polly House
FOR MORE THAN 10 YEARS, FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH IN LOMBARD, ILLINOIS, PRESENTED A LIVE NATIVITY FOR THE COMMUNITY. BUT SEVEN YEARS AGO, CHURCH STAFF AND MEMBERS TOOK A HIATUS AND INSTEAD STAGED A DINNER-THEATER MUSICAL FEATURING A MULTI-GENERATIONAL CAST.

While well attended, First Church members and staff decided this year they wanted to reach even more people in the community.

“We met in March and discussed ways we could do this,” said Pamela Lohman, the church’s media/public relations and worship director. “We decided we wanted to bring the Live Nativity back. However, this time we invited sister churches in Lombard to co-host the event with us — including Calvary Episcopal, Holy Trinity Lutheran and St. John’s Lutheran.”

Located at a major intersection in Lombard, First Church will host the event Dec. 10 on its front lawn. All four churches are helping with planning, making soup and donating bread for the post-Nativity supper. Each will supply adult and children’s choir members to help present the story. Much planning and preparation go into the event.

“Consisting of 11 volunteers, the planning folks represent teams such as electrical, sound, lighting, set construction, costume design, dinner/refreshments, music and so forth,” said Lohman.

ANIMALS IN CAST

On the day of the Live Nativity, those attending will see and hear the story of Jesus’ birth — complete with Joseph leading a donkey and one of the three kings leading a camel. Shepherds will have goats and sheep on tethers.

The animals will be available for the children and young-at-heart to pet before and after the presentation. “While we’ve had live animals in past presentations, we are very excited about the camel because this is the first time we’ve been able to include a camel,” said Lohman.

Rounding out the cast are Mary, the angel Gabriel and a host of intergenerational angels, ages four and up. The cast will sing five songs with attendees invited to join the singing of two. A song sheet with lyrics will also provide information for each participating church — name, address, website and phone number, along with service information for Advent, Christmas and New Year’s Eve, Lohman said.

FELLOWSHIP IMPORTANT

Following the final song, attendees will enjoy a light supper and cookies in First Church’s fellowship hall. “Pastors and representatives from each church will welcome folks as they come inside,” Lohman said. “We want to be as welcoming as possible so people can see the Christian and Christmas spirit as we should live it every day.”

This spirit has touched lives through the live nativities as evidenced by stories recalled by Lohman.

“A few years back, our church received a letter and a check from an attorney who represented a Lombard woman, Evelyn Cox, who had recently passed away. She left a very generous sum of money in her will to First UMC Lombard. While Cox did not attend our church, her letter related how she attended the Live Nativity each year and how much she looked forward to the presentation. The Nativity — and the hot chocolate fellowship that followed — was a highlight of her Christmas season! Her generous donation was her thanks to First UMC for sharing this event with the community year after year.”

Another Lombard resident, Marjorie Paine, also loved the Nativity story. While not a member of any church, when Paine died her will directed the estate’s administrator to donate 15 percent of her estate to First Church.

“Marjorie lived very modestly but was able to donate a significant amount to the church. That donation allowed us to pay off the mortgage that was taken out to renovate our sanctuary,” said Lohman. “These generous women attended the Live Nativity, ate cookies and drank hot chocolate with the angels and kings year after year. We were blessed to have crossed paths with these amazing ladies.”

Cindy Solomon is a marketing consultant and content writer living in Franklin, Tennessee.
The United Methodist response to the devastating 2017 hurricane season is getting a boost through new grants from the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR).

During their Oct. 12-14 meeting, directors of the General Board of Global Ministries and UMCOR (a part of Global Ministries) approved more than $7 million in grants for hurricane and other disaster-relief work.

UMCOR already had received some $15 million from donors in recent months to respond to U.S. disasters. Full-page ads in the Wall Street Journal and New York Times have highlighted the denomination’s commitment to long-term disaster relief and that 100 percent of all donations go directly to relief efforts.

Bishop Hector Ortiz of the Methodist Church of Puerto Rico normally would have been a part of the Global Ministries meeting. However, given the continuing dire situation there after Hurricane Maria, Ortiz had a brief livestream conversation with his fellow directors.

“The past three weeks have been truly heartbreaking,” Ortiz said. “Thousands of families lost their homes.” The Puerto Rican church’s partnership with UMCOR and Global Ministries is of utmost importance, he added.

(From left) Denise Santos, the Rev. Laura Ice, and Bob Cholka talk at the Goodland distribution center located on the tip of Marco Island, Fla., a community hit hard by Hurricane Irma. Santos is a volunteer from Goodland, Ice is the director of disaster response for the Florida Conference and Cholka is chairperson of the Wesley United Methodist Church council on Marco Island.
Thomas Kemper, top executive for Global Ministries, said the agency is placing an UMCOR consultant on the island to assist with planning long-term recovery. “They (Puerto Rican Methodists) already have distribution centers in 20 local churches and are trying to stand with the people in Puerto Rico,” he said.

UMCOR sent a $100,000 grant to the Methodist Church of Puerto Rico, and assessments are still in process for a larger grant for relief and recovery work.

Puerto Rico’s hurricane recovery is estimated to cost up to $95 billion, New York Area Bishop Thomas Bickerton, UMCOR president, noted. That, he told United Methodist News Service, is “a signal to faith-based organizations that we need all hands on deck.”

It’s important to view the United Methodist response in Puerto Rico as a long-term program, Kemper pointed out. “We have a whole network (in Puerto Rico), which will be here for the long haul.”

UMCOR also will look to assisting some of the other island nations affected by hurricanes this fall.

Several of the larger grants approved during the Global Ministries meeting relate to Hurricane Harvey, which dumped 40 to 52 inches of rain and caused catastrophic flooding in southeastern Texas and part of Louisiana, and Hurricane Irma.

The Texas Conference – which includes Houston and at least 20 of the 39 counties falling under the disaster declaration by the Federal Emergency Management Agency – will use its $1 million grant for the first phase of a long-term recovery process to assist 300 households.

Rio Texas will use its $816,418 grant to support two field offices and one satellite office for initial recovery efforts in 14 counties. A “volunteer village” was expected to open by Nov. 1 at First United Methodist Church in Sinton, Texas.

Louisiana has received no FEMA assistance for flooding caused by the downgraded Tropical Storm Harvey. A $500,000 grant will allow the Louisiana Conference to “fast-track recovery operations,” UMCOR said.

Winds, rain, flooding and loss of power caused by Hurricane Irma had a
widespread, catastrophic impact on Florida. A $1 million grant to the Florida Conference will initiate the church’s long-term recovery operation with the establishment of five regional centers.

The mid-October awards were the latest disaster-related grants UMCOR has made since August when it sent $10,000 to Sierra Leone in the wake of a deadly mudslide. UMCOR is in communication with the Methodist Church in Mexico and is ready to respond to partners’ requests for relief and recovery assistance from a devastating earthquake in September.

UMCOR also awarded more than $3.3 million in grants to conferences where disasters occurred in 2016 and 2015—underscoring the humanitarian relief organization’s commitment to long-term support of disaster recovery efforts.

Linda Bloom is the assistant news editor for United Methodist News Service and is based in New York.

HOW TO HELP

PRAY.

GIVE. Support U.S. Disaster Response (including in Puerto Rico) through Advance #901670; support non-U.S. territories and international disaster response through Advance #982450. Give through your local church, online at www.umcor.org/Search-for-Projects/Search-for-Projects or by mail to Advance GCFA, P.O. Box 9068, New York, NY 10087-9068. Please note the Advance number in the memo line.

VOLUNTEER.

» Florida: Visit www.flumc.org/disasterrecoveryministry or contact the Volunteer Call Center at 855-228-3862.


» South Georgia: Visit www.sgaumc.org/disasterresponse or email morhilll@gmail.com.

» Texas: Visit www.txcumc.org/disastervolunteerteamreg or email Pypjohnson, pypjohnson@txcumc.org.

STAY INFORMED.

Follow the continuing United Methodist response through United Methodist News Service (subscribe to daily and weekly digests at www.umc.org/news-and-media/daily-digest) and through the United Methodist Committee on Relief website, www.umcor.org.
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NEW STUDIES READY FOR EARLY LENT

Lent 2018 begins on Ash Wednesday, Feb. 14, and ends at sundown on Saturday, March 31. Abingdon Press and The Upper Room have several new resources for groups and individuals to use as they travel through Lent and prepare for Easter.

Easter Earthquake: How Resurrection Shakes Our World (The Upper Room) is a six-week study designed to be used from Ash Wednesday through Easter. Written by the Rev. James A. Harnish, it draws an analogy between earthquakes and Christ’s Resurrection. Just as earthquakes shake one of our most basic assumptions – that the ground will remain steady beneath our feet – the Resurrection shakes some of our most basic assumptions about ourselves and God. It features a guide for daily meditation and prayer and an outline for small-group meetings. Each week contains five readings, a prayer focus, suggestions for small-group interaction and a hymn.

Embracing the Uncertain: A Lenten Study for Unsteady Times (Abingdon) invites readers to engage and wrestle with life’s uncertainties, not ignore them. The first six chapters of Magrey R. deVega’s study focus on six post-Transfiguration, pre-Passion stories in the gospels. Each is a signpost, pointing down at a world filled with uncertainty and pointing forward to a cross that can show how to follow Jesus with courage, hope and obedience.

In Made for a Miracle: From Your Ordinary to God’s Extraordinary (Abingdon), the Rev. Mike Slaughter says that hoping the impossible will occur involves more than praying for God’s transcendent power. Every miracle has two components: divine action and human responsibility. Everyone has specific talents and abilities. For a miracle to take place, God expects humans to apply these talents and abilities – acting with God to perform divine work. In addition to the book, the six-week study for groups or individuals includes a comprehensive leader guide, a DVD and a youth study book.

Sanctuary for Lent 2018 (Abingdon) contains brief readings for each day in Lent, including a Scripture, a short devotion and a closing brief breath prayer. These daily readings by the Rev. Katie Z. Dawson help readers faithfully journey through the wilderness of Lent as they prepare to experience the joy of the Resurrection. Sold in packs of 10, the booklets are designed to fit in a #10 envelope, enabling churches to include them in Lent mailings.

The Lord Is Our Salvation: A Lenten Study Based on the Revised Common Lectionary (Abingdon) invites users to explore God’s saving and redeeming love through a study of the scripture readings for Lent and Easter, inviting us to a deeper understanding of the salvation Christ offers by exploring the various ways God restores us and our world to wholeness. Also by Katie Dawson, the study shows God’s redemption at work in the men, women and communities of the Bible. Readers will hear a call to embrace Christ’s salvation in their lives and in the world around them during the Lenten season.

What Makes a Hero? The Death-Defying Ministry of Jesus (Abingdon) offers an image of what it looks like to be victorious over trials and temptations. As he looks at pop culture heroes and others through the lens of faith, the Rev. Matt Rawle shows how Jesus turned the concept of hero on its head. Continuing with his “Pop in Culture” theme, the book examines how good vs. evil, right vs. wrong and overcoming adversity are fundamental to Christians’ understanding of salvation.

NEW STUDIES READY FOR EARLY LENT
Lucy Chelton

CHRIST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, LANSDALE, PENNSYLVANIA

For 11-year-old Lucy Chelton, a member of Christ United Methodist Church in Lansdale, Pennsylvania, cooking comes as naturally as does walking to a toddler. So much so that she’s been cooking for almost as long as she’s been walking.

Her parents recall the story of the day — she was about two years old — when Lucy came into the kitchen, spotted her dad cooking, pulled over a stool, and said, “I help!” She’s been cooking ever since, becoming more independent with each passing year. Eric Chelton is assistant pastor at Christ Church. Lucy’s mother, Miki, is the music director and Girl Scout leader.

In 2016, Lucy competed in and was the winner on an episode of the Food Network’s “Chopped Jr.” show. This past summer, she competed in the show’s champion tournament. Unfortunately, she was chopped in the second round. But as the youngest competitor by at least a year, Lucy was thrilled to be asked back to compete.

Recalling her experiences on the show, Lucy said, “I was nervous at first but as the rounds went on, I got a little more confident and comfortable with the cast and producers. It was so much fun meeting Ted Allen, the producers, and the judges both times I was on the show. I would totally — and really want to — do it again!”

As an episode winner, Lucy received a cash award and selflessly donated some of the money to Pennridge FISH, a local foodbank. “I donated to FISH,” Lucy said, “because I think everyone should get food.”

Lucy’s penchant for giving back also extends to her church and community. “I am an acolyte, a member of our children’s and chime choirs and participate in a local foodbank ministry ‘Cooking for Manna’,” Lucy said. In addition, she helps with the church’s Circuit Kids — a program for younger children during worship — and is a member of the caring committee. Caring committee members cook for people who are sick and can’t get around in the kitchen.

“L’ve helped preschoolers going into kindergarten learn simple skills so they can make snacks at home such as strawberry banana smoothies and fruit tarts in puffed pastry,” Lucy said. “Some of the skills include safe knife skills — don’t worry, we used plastic knives — making puffed pastry bowls, using a blender and measuring ingredients.”

Active in scouting, Lucy participated in a Camporee this fall, teaching other Girl Scouts how to make energy balls and smoothies as well as sharing measuring and knife skills and general safety tips in the kitchen. She’s also been a speaker at the annual meeting of the School Nutrition Association of Pennsylvania and a judge for a pie contest at a local charity fundraiser.

Food and faith go hand-in-hand for Lucy. “When I bring food to people who need it,” Lucy said, “I feel that I am showing God’s love in action. I can spread God’s love and faith through that little thing; it has helped me be thankful for what I have.”

As for her future? “My hope is to either be a chef or an autistic support teacher,” Lucy said. “If I become a chef, I want to own a family-style restaurant or a food truck with burgers and mac and cheese. I want to have the world’s biggest selection of different mac and cheeses on the menu.”

She continues, “God has blessed me with all the different opportunities I’ve had through my talent — being on ‘Chopped Jr.’ twice, helping others, getting opportunities to talk and teach, and winning money that I can share and also use to prepare for college.”

Indeed, the future looks bright — and possibly very tasty — for Lucy.

Cindy Solomon is a marketing consultant and content writer living in Franklin, Tennessee.
Technology is part of our history

Technology is deep in our DNA as United Methodists. John Wesley used cutting-edge printing technology to do more than make copies of the Bible. He printed everything from hymnbooks to texts filled with home remedies by the thousands. This enabled the people involved in the Methodist societies to grow in their love of God in a way that was accessible to only a very few before printed books were available to enable the spiritual growth of the masses.

United Methodists like the Rev. Lee Barnes continue to leverage technology for their personal spiritual growth today. Barnes is quick to point out a 21st century expression of the Wesleyan proclivity to publishing devotional material for the masses. Rather than coming through a printing press, it comes through an app: “d365 Daily Devotions.” He explains, “It gives you different aspects of prayer and scripture reading to move through.”

Barnes has a busy life as the conference youth and family ministry consultant for the North Carolina Conference. He has found another app that helps counter the distractions. “The ‘Chill’ app helps bring me back to a mindfulness of what I’m actually doing,” he says.

Barnes says that through the very source of the constant distraction – the notifications on our smartphones – the “Chill” app offers prompts like “Is something making you anxious right now?” or “Is your jaw tense?”

“It gives me reminders that help me recognize whether I am out of peace right now so that I can get back into a sense of peace and do my best work,” he says.

Throughout the years, United Methodists and their predecessors have been known for their incredible preachers, many of whom travelled around as circuit riders gathering crowds in each city proclaiming the gospel. To hear some of the greats, thousands of people would travel for miles to attend one of the field preaching services.

Amy Shreeve, coordinator of higher education and campus ministry for the Illinois Great Rivers Conference, does the same thing each week without the hours of travel. “My devotion time is when I run,” she says.

As she cares for her body through physical exercise, she pays attention to her soul by listening to podcasts. She has access to all of the leading voices of the day through this incredible tool. This makes it possible for her to stretch beyond the familiar ideas.

“I always try to expand my perspective and find preachers that will challenge me theologically or socially,” she says.

Her podcast playlist includes “Church of the Resurrection,” “Church of All Sinners and Saints” and “Two Feminists Annotate the Bible,” among others.

With the world at our fingertips, United Methodists are continuing to do the same thing we always have: leverage technology for personal spiritual growth. As we enter a new season in The United Methodist Church with publications like Interpreter fading into online offerings, we celebrate with gratitude the gift of technology and a history of constantly looking forward to use it to make disciples for the transformation of the world.

The Rev. Jeremy Steele is Next Generation minister at Christ United Methodist Church, Mobile, Alabama. He is also an author, blogger at jeremyword.com and a frequent contributor to MyCom, an e-newsletter published by United Methodist Communications. He has written the technology department articles for Interpreter for the past two and a half years.
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—Bishop Richard Byrd Wilke, author of DISCIPLE Bible Study, and Susan Fuquay, creator of DISCIPLE Fast Track
The season of Advent, which comes from the Latin word *adventus* meaning “coming” or “visit,” begins four Sundays before Christmas and ends on Christmas Eve. Advent is the beginning of the church year for Christians.

During Advent, we prepare for and anticipate the coming of Christ. We remember the longing of Jews for a Messiah and our own longing for and need of forgiveness, salvation and a new beginning. Even as we look back and celebrate the birth of Jesus in a humble stable in Bethlehem, we also look forward anticipating the second coming of Christ as the fulfillment of all that was promised by his first coming.

Although we are accustomed to celebrating Christmas on a single day, in both Christian tradition and on the church calendar, the Christmas season lasts from sundown on Dec. 24 (Christmas Eve) through Epiphany of the Lord (Jan. 6). This is sometimes referred to as “the 12 days of Christmas.”

Advent begins with the fourth Sunday before Christmas Day. In 2017, Christmas falls on a Monday, and Christmas Eve on Sunday night. Thus, in 2017 Advent begins Sunday, Dec. 3, and ends at sundown on Sunday, Dec. 24 three weeks plus a portion of an additional day. If Christmas comes on a Sunday, Advent will begin on Nov. 27 and last four full weeks.

The color for Advent has traditionally been purple, although some churches have adopted blue. In practice, however, as churches increasingly incorporate the symbols and decorations of Christmas during Advent, more and more red, green and gold are appearing. The United Methodist Book of Worship upholds the traditional color of purple for Advent, signifying penitence and royalty, but also allows blue, the color of hope.”

Adapted from “What is Advent?” www.umc.org/what-we-believe/what-is-advent, and “Understanding Advent” by Dean McIntyre, retired director of music resources, Discipleship Ministries, www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/understanding-advent.
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