

Bishop Janice Huie to Serve in a Unique Interim Role in the Rio Texas Conference

For the next eight months, Bishop Janice Huie will serve as the interim Bishop of Record for the Rio Texas Conference, alongside three other bishops filling the vacancy that followed the resignation of James Dorff.

In early January, when Mr. Dorff submitted his resignation as bishop of the Rio Texas Conference and surrendered his credentials, the South Central Jurisdiction College of Bishops (according to the Book of Discipline p. 407) were responsible for providing leadership. They launched a creative team approach until a new bishop is named this July.

Four bishops, who began their ministry in the Episcopal area, along with lay and clergy leaders of Rio Texas and the Southwest Conference will manage the day-to-day ministries of the conference. Texas Conference Bishop Janice Riggle Huie will work alongside Bishops J. Michael Lowry, Robert Schnase and retired Bishop Joel Martinez who have all volunteered to take a specific part of the Episcopal duties.

Bishop Huie will be responsible for leadership of the Cabinet and appointment making. Bishop Mike McKee, will continue his involvement as President, of the South Central Jurisdiction. Notes Assistant to the Bishop Rev. B.T. Williamson, “Bishop Huie has assured the Cabinet of the Texas Annual Conference that she will be available and continue all of her responsibilities while adding the Rio Texas position as the Bishop of Record.” Bishop Huie adds, “Anyone who knows me well, knows my love for my home conference. Those Methodists encouraged me and loved me into ministry at a time when few women were called. I will always be grateful. This is an opportunity to serve there again and to repay some of that great generosity.”

The Rio Texas Conference is a young conference, having been created just over a year ago. The conference has now addressed the unique challenge of needing episcopal leadership just eight months before the time a traditional episcopal appointment will be made. Since this vacancy comes at the end of a quadrennium, the leadership gap brings challenges of its own.

“The team approach is unique,” Bishop McKee, President of the South Central Jurisdiction Council of Bishops, writes in a letter to the Rio Texas Conference, “but I am confident that it will serve the Rio Texas Conference well until a new bishop is assigned at the South Central Jurisdictional Conference in July.” That new bishop begins serving on September 1.

Bishop Huie will be responsible for the appointive process, working with the Cabinet to assign pastors to churches for the 2016 conference year. She has previously served as the District Superintendent of the former San Angelo District of

the Southwest Texas Conference and as pastor of Manchaca United Methodist Church in Austin, First UMC Mason, and St. Mark in Austin.

Bishop Robert Schnase, Bishop of the Missouri Annual Conference, will plan and lead the sessions of the 2016 Rio Texas Annual Conference meeting. Bishop Schnase was ordained Deacon in 1981 and Elder in 1986 in the Southwest Texas Conference. From 1989 to 2004, he served as Senior Pastor of First United Methodist Church of McAllen, Texas. From 1984 to 1989, Rev. Schnase served as pastor of Wesley United Methodist Church in Harlingen.

“Rio Texas is my home conference,” offers Bishop Schnase. The churches, the pastors, and the laity of the Rio Texas Conference stimulated my yearning to follow Christ when I was a child, cultivated my calling when I was a teenager, and encouraged me in my ministry at every stage. I am forever indebted. Like my colleagues, I am eager to help in any way to assure that the Conference remains focused on the mission of Christ and effective in all its ministries. It’s a privilege to be able to help.”

Bishop J. Michael Lowry, Bishop of the Central Texas Conference, will oversee the annual conference nominations process for 2016. He will also lead this year's Clergy Convocation, the annual gathering of clergy at Mt. Wesley on Feb. 22-23. In addition, Bishop Lowry will assist in any transition issues for the new bishop. Bishop Lowry was ordained Elder in the Southwest Texas Conference. He served as Executive Director for New Church Development and Transformation for the Southwest Texas Conference, University United Methodist Church in San Antonio, Bethany in Austin, Asbury in Corpus Christi, Wesley in Harlingen, St. Paul's in Kerrville and as an Associate Pastor at Plymouth Park in Irving.

Bishop Lowry states, “Prior to my election and appointment as Bishop of the Central Texas Conference, I spent the majority of my ministry in the old Southwest Texas Conference. As a child of that conference, I bring a great love and respect for the people and ministries of the newly formed Rio Texas Conference. I’m humbled by this opportunity shared with Bishops Huie, Martinez and Schnase to help the local churches of Rio Texas continue to move forward in our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. It is good to be coming home.”

Bishop Joel Martinez, Retired Bishop of the Southwest Texas Annual Conference, returns to preach special services around the conference, attend to pastoral ministry, and oversee mission, service and justice ministries. He will also represent Rio Texas in connectional relationships such as Methodist Healthcare, Huston-Tillotson University, Lydia Patterson Institute and the Texas Methodist Foundation. Martinez was ordained deacon and elder and held membership in the Rio Grande Conference until his election to the episcopacy in 1992. Prior to that, he served pastoral appointments in Dallas, San Antonio, and El Paso.

Rev. John Wright, Senior Pastor of First Church Austin is excited about this creative leadership approach, saying, “Who knows us better than the son- and daughter-bishops who will serve on this team to provide interim episcopal leadership. This is an outside-the-box solution from which we may learn something new.” Rev. James Amerson, Pastor of St. Paul United Methodist Church in San Antonio echoed that excitement. “As we begin this new year and the dawn of the Río Texas Conference, it is a godsend to have former clergy who have served pastoral appointments in this area to give collective episcopal leadership. At such a time as this, their directives will be beneficial to all.”

These four Bishops will serve together with a leadership team comprised of lay and clergy conference leadership. The remainder of the team will be comprised of Rev. Laura Merrill, District Superintendent of El Valle District and leader of the General Conference delegation; Rev. Dr. Ruben Saenz, Executive Director of the Mission Vitality Center and Director of Connectional Ministries; Rev. Carl Rohlfs, Superintendent of Las Misiones District; Eradio Valverde, Superintendent of the Coastal Bend District; Sandra Nieto and Ralph Thompson, Co-Lay Leaders of the annual conference; and Teresa Keese, lay member of the General Conference Delegation. Support for the team will be provided by Dalia Trevino, Executive Assistant to the Office of the Bishop, Rev. Bill Wyman, Conference Treasurer, and Rev. Will Rice, Conference Director of Communications. This team will meet weekly using video conferencing technology. This meeting will allow them to plan and attend to the work of the annual conference during this important season.

“I am quite confident that Rio Texas will move forward under the leadership of these four quality bishops,” said Bishop Dan Solomon, Bishop in Residence at McMurry University. “The collective wisdom, experience, and sensitivity to the power of the Gospel and the importance of compassionate discipleship embodied in these leaders will unite the conference in embracing God’s healing grace and resurrection mission.”

Bishop Huie reminds us that, “This is the fruit of the connectional church. The four bishops including myself are determined to serve Rio Texas well while continuing our duties at home. I am grateful for the leadership of the TAC cabinet and center leaders who are supporting me in this effort. I am also eager to share with Rio Texas the things we have learned together in the Texas Annual Conference. I am taking our experiences with “mission field” appointments to our brothers and sisters in Rio Texas to help assure that we are matching talents of clergy with the needs of congregations and their mission fields. It is my honor to serve.”

National Training Propels Leaders along Their Journey of Discernment

A dozen clergy leaders explored new ministry options with TAC Director of New Church Development Rev. Jeff Olive at the New Church Leadership Institute.

To be, or not to be – a church planter? That was the question on the minds of 12 eager clergy leaders from the TAC who recently attended a 3-day retreat event hosted by the New Church Leadership Institute. According to Rev. Jeff Olive, TAC Director of New Church Development, the event is an exploratory conference for lay or clergy who are just slightly curious or strongly interested. “In our group, several are ready to plant and others are exploring the possibility,” notes Jeff. “This no-commitment event allows participants to hear and know more about what it takes to start a new congregation.” Texas conference representatives included:

- Rev. Wesley Duncan
- Rev. Jon Thornsbury
- Rev. Ben Bagley
- Rev. Keith Tilley
- Rev. Danny Yang
- Rev. John Wayne McMann
- Rev. Karen Tyler
- Rev. Trent Oliver
- Ms. Katie Oliver
- Rev. Jacob Breeze
- Rev. Franklin Rodriguez
- Rev. Meredith Wende
- Rev. Danny Yang

“I really enjoyed the NCLI seminar,” shares Rev. Keith Tilley, **Klein UMC**. “It provided insight and tools for personal discernment. Prayerfully processing it all and writing up a reflection helped me to listen more carefully to the Lord and to see more clearly whether planting a church is something He might be calling us into.”

“I consider NCLI analogous to Candidacy Summit,” adds Rev. Jacob Breeze, **Chapelwood UMC**, “in that it is a great first step in the journey we call discernment. If you think it is possible that the living God is calling you to partner in God’s work of establishing new churches, perhaps you should attend the next NCLI.” Jacob is already laying the foundation for a new ministry this year.

Jeff will lead another group next fall to NCLI and has scholarship money available for those interested in attending. He says the goals of the event are four-fold:

- Assist pastors and laity to discern if they are called to be a new church planter
 - Connect potential church planters with successful new church planters
 - Equip potential church planters with knowledge and skills for successful church starts.
 - Prepare pastors and laity for a variety of New Church Start strategies/models
- Rev. Danny Yang, **St. Paul’s UMC**, Houston, adds, “For anyone thinking about church starts, NCLI is an amazing gift that offers you several days to reflect on what it takes and whether you have the right DNA. Even more valuable than the course is the

opportunity to take the class with colleagues and reflect together on the exciting things GOD has in store for our Conference."

According to Jeff, only some of the graduates may eventually have the opportunity to be appointed to start a new church or be the second pastor of a new church--yet, all will gain from better understanding the role of new churches in the spread of the gospel and revitalization of the church. For information on participating in this year's NCLI contact Jeff Olive at (jolive@txcumc.org) or [713-521-9383 ext. 313](tel:713-521-9383).

Meet the Texas Conference Mission Depot Staff

Executive Director Rev. Scott Moore is building a team to help manage the Conroe-based Mission Depot training and empowerment center focused on disaster relief.

Few can imagine the horror of seeing your furniture soaked with dirty water and a thick layer of mud in every direction. Flood victims have this and much more to contend with, along with the pressure to maintain some degree of normalcy in the home. Tornado victims have a more dramatic scenario to sort through, on the heels of great personal loss and the aftermath of intense weather-induced fear.

Many friends, loved ones and fellow Texans are still recovering from the Houston area floods around Memorial Day and Halloween and the tornados in North Texas at year-end. Prior to that, the conference dispatched help in the wake of the explosion in West, the fires in central Texas and to address the widespread needs following Hurricane Ike. In times like these, families across the conference, the state – and beyond are more than thankful for the Texas Annual Conference disaster relief volunteers, resources and expertise.

Disaster relief is one of the many passions of Rev. Scott Moore who serves as the Executive Director of the new Mission Depot that is being built in the Conroe, Tx area as a warehouse and "command central" for all things related to recovery. "As the Assistant Director in the Center for Missional Excellence," shares Scott, "I oversee TACCOR and all disaster response ministries in the TAC. Once the Mission Depot is completed, I will office from there. We will warehouse all disaster response equipment and supplies and process relief kits bound for UMCOR Sager-Brown Depot in Baldwin, LA. I will also be responsible for overseeing missions training and many of the mercy and justice ministries operating under the Center for Missional Excellence."

The Depot is located on 5.8 acres east of Conroe – outside of the typical hurricane's path and with easy access to every major road artery in Texas to get materials to disaster sites quickly. "We have accumulated tools and equipment that need to be stored, organized and prepared for the next emergency," he adds. "Before we had a central warehouse we had equipment scattered in various churches, homes and in a rental unit, so this will be much more efficient going forward. We will also serve as a mini relief supply storage, inventory and staging area to prepare flood buckets and

such for Sager Brown.”

While some of the disaster response and missions staff work on location at the present time, the Depot facility will office other team members as needed.

Carol Greenslate is now serving as TAC Disaster Director, having joined the staff under contract as Disaster Consultant following the Memorial Day floods to oversee the disaster relief operations, primarily in the hard-hit Southwest Houston area. Explains Scott, “Carol was later hired as the Disaster Director to manage our long-term recovery efforts. She sits as the UM representative on the Greater Houston Storm Recovery Network and oversees the TAC staff working directly on storm recovery.” Although she deals in helping others out of chaos each and every day, she loves her job. “I have been involved in this type of ministry for seven years,” she shares, “and feel so blessed to now serve as the director of the conference response to assess and handle hundreds of cases on behalf of flood and tornado victims.” Carol offices out of Westbury UMC and works cases primarily in Houston and Harris County, although she consults with and advises volunteers and long-term recovery personnel in counties throughout the conference.

She is thankful for the reinforcement provided by Peggy Wieting who serves as Disaster Administrative Assistant on a part-time basis to run the TAC Disaster Recovery Office established at Westbury UMC. Peggy is responsible for office and clerical duties for the office and the recovery staff operating at Westbury. “It is a pleasure to be in a position to work with other Christians, helping the people of the Houston region,” shares Peggy. “Setting up an office from scratch has been a new experience - an enjoyable one - and definitely a work in progress. Additionally, I’m learning a new language I’d call the *Disaster Language*! It’s gratifying to contribute my talents to the efforts of a team that relieves the misery of flood victims. I look forward to seeing the changes that the Disaster Response team of the United Methodist Church can help bring about.”

The team member with the longest history in missions work is Jan Bierwirth, the Depot Administrative Assistant. The most recent team member is Pyppa Johnson who recently began serving as a full-time Disaster Case Manager. Jan handles the office and clerical duties relating to the Mission Depot, disaster relief, training, and mercy and justice ministries. She currently works from the Conference Service Center in Houston but will move to the Mission Depot when construction is completed. Pyppa works directly with clients recovering from the Memorial Day and Halloween floods of 2015. Adds Scott, “Her job is to walk beside clients as they navigate the confusing process of insurance, grants, loans, rebuilding, and addressing unmet needs. She connects survivors with agencies and support to help them establish a *new normal* following a disaster and also supervises a team of volunteer case workers.”

Shares Pyppa, “Based on my years of missionary experiences, both international and domestic, I have come to the conclusion that I was born for this. This call is as

natural as breathing. I don't have to think about it, I just do it. *For in Him, we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28).*”

Her mission field, the survivors of the May and October floods, is one of devastation. “The people I have encountered are still absorbing the shock. Regardless of age, race, or income, no one ever expected to be in this situation of having to rebuild their lives,” she adds. “People are broken physically, emotionally, spiritually, and financially. The common denominator is for me to remind them that they are not forgotten and we (UMC) are there to help.” Throughout all of the hurt and heartbreak that she experiences on a daily basis, she clings to Zechariah 4:6. “I am reminded that it is *not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit*, that we will help the survivors rebuild,” she says.

Always on Call

A former police officer and front line responder when Hurricane Rita hit Beaumont, Scott dearly loves connecting with churches, providing training, and seeing fellow Methodists take on the lion’s share of the work when people are in need. Prior to taking this newly created role, he has served as a leader in the Social Principle Implementation Committee, Conference Board of Church and Society and the Conference Missions Committee. “I’ve long had a desire to see this Mission Depot become a reality, and want to always be on the lookout of other ways to use it. We continue to study best practices of organizations doing similar work, and are poised to respond as we are needed.”

Tutoring Program Provides “Helping Hand” to Local Students and those Displaced after Recent Tornados

Edom United Methodist Church volunteers are providing much needed stability and encouragement to students needing “a little extra” help with academic challenges.

Edom UMC member Barbie Clay beams with happiness to know she has been able to “pay it forward” in her hometown church by revamping the tutoring program that was so beneficial to her own daughter years ago. “When my daughter was in elementary school, she had some struggles in learning as she was the youngest in her class,” notes Barbie, “and we were put in touch with the ladies at **Edom UMC** who led a program called *Community in Action*. They offered after-school tutoring one day a week for those that needed that little extra one-on-one education. Thankfully, the program helped my daughter go from being the last one in class to one of the leaders for years to come and she ultimately graduated with wonderful grades and felt good about herself.”

In recent years, Barbie began noticing children in Sunday school were struggling with reading and understanding things of the Bible and lessons. “I thought that it would be a great idea to revamp or restart the program all over again and, due to a variety of challenges it took two years to come to fruition in October 2015,” she says, “when about 20 children showed up!”

Last year's horrific tornado near Edom displaced many students from their homes and their schools, adding to their struggles. Explains Barbie, "We sent out forms to all of the campuses from kindergarten through high school and, even though this is a small district, we have students coming to us for the extra help."

"The great thing about Edom UMC is when one person says *"We're going to do this,"* lots of people jump in to help," says Rev. Jason Huffman. The volunteers knew there would be a handful of students from within the congregation who would participate, but weren't sure how many others would come. By the time the program began, there were nearly 20 kids registered with over half of those students being from outside of the congregation.

"Local counselors and teachers from two campuses have started to see a bit of an improvement in the students' grades," she adds, "and they are certainly encouraged about what is going on. We have many volunteers that come and donate their time and energy on Tuesday afternoons. Most of them are retired teachers and members who wanted to step up and help. Regardless of the students' church membership status, we treat them all as if they were our own."

The parents are also excited and thankful for Edom's new ministry, particularly the help they receive in assisting their children with challenging schoolwork. Edom volunteers have purchased books for lessons and sought websites for age and grade appropriate studies to help build their self-esteem while learning something new. "There is nothing more exciting than to see a child's face light up when they finally figure something out! I am so honored to work with these kids each week and to see their bright smiling faces as they come through the door and quickly touch my heart."

Barbie is doubly blessed having a pastor that is also a regular tutor. "When the kids arrive, we always start with that day's homework first then when that is done, we do practice work on areas of emphasis where their parents indicated they need help," notes Rev. Jason Huffman. "We have also utilized our church library where students can check out books to take home or they can read them when they are finished with their homework. "

In order to help parents who work late, Van ISD agreed to bus the children to the church instead of their usual stops. When children arrive, they enjoy a snack and begin working with an adult on their homework for that day. Tutors then help with specific areas of need based on input from the parents on the registration forms. Students read books, practice handwriting, and do age-appropriate math worksheets.

On the registration forms, parents were asked if they would like more information about the church. Jason adds, "I am there to greet parents for drop off and pick up and was able to give families information about the ministries and programs of the church. It would be a huge win if the church picked up a couple of new families through this

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program, but that is not the reason for doing it. The church is meeting the needs of the community and investing in the young - that is most important.”

How to Start an After School Program

Joe Cuthbertson, Lay Leader/Task Force team lead, says, “We formed a Task Force for Church Growth a couple of years ago to function as a visionary group. Barbie brought her vision to the group and the task force wholly supported her vision along with our Church Council that set the *tutoring ball* in motion.”

Barbie had the support of the church and she ran with it. She would be thrilled to help other churches lay the foundation for a similar program. Adds Joe, “God does work in wonderful ways. Sometimes we have to do things that may not increase our numbers, but simply provide a ministry to others. If the numbers come, fine - if not, fine too. We never know who and how we affect others by our simple acts.”

February Brings Impressive Youth Ministry Trainings and Special Events

Upcoming training events for youth workers will include insight from Next Generation minister, writer, speaker Jeremy Steele and a number of other UMC experts seeking to help the conference “Invest in the Young.”

Against the backdrop of Powerball mania, 2016 kicked off, giving everyone a clean slate in a new year -- to consider what is truly valuable in life. Director of Youth & Young Adults, Eddie Erwin is excited to encourage youth workers to consider how they will invest in youth in the coming year. To that end, he will welcome expert Jeremy Steele (<http://jeremywords.com>) to Houston for a very special training opportunity called “Why Grace?” on Wednesday, February 17, from 10am – 2pm at Lakewood UMC, 11330 Louetta in Houston.

Jeremy has a connection with youth as he personally felt the call to ministry as a sixth grader while attending summer camp. He now oversees a ministry to teens, young adults and families at **Christ UMC** in Alabama. “Jeremy will share with us about how we can enhance our Wesleyan approach to youth ministry,” adds Eddie, “and anyone who works with students is welcome to attend.” The event includes lunch and a registration fee of \$15, and will cover topics ranging from the Missional Wesley concepts of the means of grace, quadrilateral doubting, and how to recruit and keep volunteers. [RSVP here](#) and address questions to: [Eddie](#).

February 18

Additionally, Jeremy, Eddie and other Texas Annual Conference speakers will be presenting at a one-day regional conference on February 18 at **Faithbridge UMC** called New Room. Jeremy and Eddie will lead breakout sessions on youth ministry and Rev. Eric Huffman and wife Geovanna Huffman, pastors of **The Story Houston** will share expertise on church planting. Lay leadership will be the topic of **Faithbridge** pastor Rev. Ken Werlein, and Rev. Jessica LaGrone, Asbury Theological

Seminary will speak on preaching. This [event](#), geared for individuals and ministry teams takes place at **Faithbridge** in Spring, Texas from 9 am-4pm.

Coming Soon

- IGNITE 2016 - Retreat for 7th-12th graders
<http://www.txcumc.org/ignitemidwinter>
- Texas Youth Academy – two- week Christian Community for selected high school sophomore & juniors <http://www.txcumc.org/youthacademy>
- Conference Council on Youth Ministries- [Accepting applications](#)
- Conference Young Adult Ministries - [Accepting nominations](#) of 18-30 year olds
- College Pastoral Intern Project - [More Information](#)
- Project Transformation - [Young Adult Internship](#)
- Looking for a college-age student ministry intern? [Email Eddie](#) a job description.

Memorial Drive UMC Members Experience the Joy of Helping Two Families with Resettlement in Houston

Church members empathize with the plight of two refugee families by helping them establish homes in Houston.

Born in Vietnam, **Memorial Drive UMC** member Rick Ngo and family bounced between several refugee camps in the mid 1970s before a small church in Panora, Iowa sponsored them and helped them resettle in the United States. “Thankfully, the members of that tiny church gave us an apartment, helped my dad find a job, and got my siblings enrolled in school,” he recalls. Rick’s wife Nicole recalls four churches that sponsored her family as they resettled to the United States. “With the refugee crisis in the headlines in recent months, God put it on our hearts to tell our personal story in our church and on [video](#), and to help take the fear out of this incredible ministry opportunity here in the States,” adds Nicole.

Finding Families

As a member of the YMCA of Greater Houston’s board for the International Services Center, Rick learned of the urgent needs of a family from Syria and one from Afghanistan as they resettled in Houston. Rev. Daniel Irving, Lead Pastor for The Journey Worship Community at **Memorial Drive UMC** knew that the church would jump at the opportunity to reach out with hospitality and serve God by loving our newest neighbors. Shares Daniel, “ The refugee crisis was in the headlines, but it took on a personal tone as Rick and Nicole shared their story with our congregation. It put a familiar face on what seemed to be a foreign story. So it was wonderful to see our congregation respond to these refugee families who truly are our neighbors. In doing so, I hear the echo of Jesus’ words, *when I was a stranger, you welcomed me*. I’m proud to serve such a generous and Christ-like congregation.”

Explains Nicole, “People and families leave for various reasons, but typically they flee war torn countries, leaving everything behind and risking everything to escape. We shared the needs of our Syrian and Afghanistan families with our congregation prior to Christmas and thus began a very special relationship with them that continues.”

Members are collaborating with the YMCA International Services to provide home and personal necessities for both families, even visiting these newest residents of Houston to learn more about their story. “Several of us visited the families and brought our children and it was a wonderful experience,” adds Nicole. “They have very basic apartments and furniture but invited us **all** in to visit. They graciously served us coffee and juice as we took time to get to know one another. The family from Afghanistan speaks English quite well so our kids were able to ask the father about their home country and a brief history of how they came to the US.” Nicole still recalls the faces of the Syrian family, particularly one of the five boys. “The fifth grader does not know anyone in Houston and was so happy to see us and interact with children his age,” she shares. “These families are experiencing a sense of poverty. They have truly lost everything from their belongings to their community and friends and even their relationship with God and self in some cases.”

Brooke Daniel brought her family along for the visit as well. Notes Brooke, “My husband and I feel it is important to involve our two children in opportunities like this that remind us what God wants us to do for others. We have often adopted local families but this was different because we spent an hour with each of these families learning about a new culture, and they were each so very grateful to meet us.” She adds, “When we got back in the car, my daughter told us her heart felt very full. As a family we are excited to learn what else we can do to help these families have a happy transition to Houston.”

Memorial Drive UMC members are seeking other churches and training to expand their resettlement ministry as a next step. “The heart of our church is open, we just need to know how to best help, but I know it will be more about relationships than things. Perhaps we can offer tutoring and help families with budgeting. At the end of the day, our families will be seeking to heal these losses by befriending these new Houstonians and show them the love of Christ.”

Conference Committee Prepping Spiritual Formation Resources for Local Congregations

Under the impassioned leadership of Dr. Jim Reiter, the Faith-Forming Relationships and Spiritual Direction Committee is regrouping with new ideas and expertise to share in areas championed by the Center for Congregational Excellence.

Catalysts are change makers. Catalysts create sparks and often cause activities to accelerate. Being a catalyst for the Kingdom is the individual and collective goal of the members of the conference committee focused on Faith-Forming Relationships

and Spiritual Direction and some are seeing sparks flying from Dr. Jim Reiter, **First UMC, Jefferson**, as he fires up other volunteers on behalf of local congregations across Texas. “I’m more than excited to facilitate a group that wants to offer new programming and ideas that foster spiritual formation,” he shares, as the interim chairman who has spent recent months in the phase of revising and reforming the focus of the group.

After a period of dormancy, the committee is re-energized about being available to local churches, providing materials and ideas and collectively imagining what might be on the horizon to help others have a richer spiritual life. “We held our first face-to-face meeting as a group last fall via Skype,” he adds, “and got to know each other and exchanged ideas to identify our core structure and vision.”

The “Big Three” of this Committee at present include:

1) **Charis**

Few may realize that this program was inaugurated almost a decade ago by the former Spiritual Formation group with a mission to recruit, train, and deploy Spiritual Directors within the bounds of the Conference. Spiritual direction is a one-with-one relationship between a trained director and a directee who seeks guidance in recognizing and responding to God’s presence in his or her life. The three-year Charis program was expressly designed to combine the ancient Christian tradition of spiritual guidance with the Wesleyan spirituality that informs and inspires the United Methodist faith. To date, 48 Spiritual Directors have received Completion of Training Certificates. Class 4, with 14 participants, will complete training in June 2017.

Recruitment for Class 5 begins this fall for the class that starts in August 2017. Trained spiritual directors engage in and lead many ministries of spiritual formation throughout the conference. In order to build community, this group sponsors the Gathered Community of Spiritual Directors, welcoming all trained spiritual directors to join in days of renewal and continuing education. According to volunteer coordinator Becky Oates, this Gathered Community offers two contemplative retreats per year with support from Lakeview and the Center for Clergy Excellence, provides spiritual directors for TAC conferences and events, and refers covenant spiritual directors who follow ethical guidelines and our communal rule of life.

The Charis website at www.charis-txcumc.org provides information about the program, includes a link to other Spiritual Direction schools of training, as well as opportunities to respond to seekers nationwide. For information about training, contact Becky Oates, 979-690-9193 or havenofrest@earthlink.net. For information about joining the Gathered Community of Spiritual Directors or if you are seeking a spiritual director to companion you on your spiritual journey, please contact Rev. Cindy Serio,

832-330-3973, cserio@m-sfm.org.

2) **Spirit Journey**

Under the direction of Kathy Reiter, this is a conference-sponsored program of the Upper Room. The next retreat takes place October 20-22, 2016 at Lakeview. Dr. Elaine Heath, the McCreless Professor of Evangelism at Perkins School of Theology, will be the featured presenter. Kathy shares that the 2015 Spirit Journey retreat “saw a significant increase in participants with Jerry Webber of **Chapelwood United Methodist Church** serving as faculty.” The event drew registrants from the TAC as well as the North Texas Annual Conference and included several different denominations. Adds Kathy, “The purpose of Spirit Journey is to provide a rich yet shorter retreat experience than the Upper Room’s Five-Day Academy for Spiritual Formation or the Two-Year Academy for Spiritual Formation.” This abbreviated event is offered in hopes that Spirit Journey will be a stepping stone experience to the more comprehensive Benedictine-modeled retreat opportunities. (For more information, go to the Facebook page, “TAC Spirit Journey” or contact Kathy Reiter, kathy.reiter@live.com.)

3) **Christian Educator’s Fellowship**

Often referred to as CEF, this group is dedicated on an international basis to fostering Christian fellowship and inspiration, the organization of prayer groups, learning more effective ways of working with and counseling students, deepening the spiritual life of every educator in the organization, learning more effective ways of witnessing to fellow educators, learning how to take positive stands on public and national problems, and the recruitment of outstanding evangelical Christian teachers to the profession. Rhonda Taylor is the contact for CEF: rhonda.taylor@chapelwoodumc.org.

Jim, an ordained elder for more than 25 years has held many appointments across the conference and is ready to lead this committee “down the court” with regard to being a resource to conference churches and leaders. “We are seeking others who are passionate about anything and everything that enriches our spiritual lives,” he adds, “including the refocused attention to the labyrinth we have that anyone can borrow and use as a tool and fantastic allegory of the spiritual life.”

Visit the Resource Table

Committee members will host a joint resource table at Conference – in proximity to the Center for Congregational Excellence table as a way of highlighting the ministries, disseminating resources, and giving greater attention to this emerging effort. “This will be the first time this group has had a table at Conference in a long time!” notes Jim. “It is one signal that we are all about reinventing, reimagining and rebuilding this committee to be a resource for the Conference, and we welcome new ideas and new passions along our journey.”

Best Communication Idea Contest 2016

The TAC Communications Committee is hosting a “Best Idea in Communications” contest and the winners will receive prizes – and be announced at Annual Conference.

Your success might be that your church started a Facebook page or did a special video for your church anniversary. The members of our committee welcome ideas and success stories that we can share across the conference. We will pick several winners, award prizes, and congratulate them at Annual Conference this May. *Was your BEST IDEA an event, an app, video, special project, web or digital initiative, printed piece, new procedure, a revamp or _____?*

To enter the communications contest, send the information below to April Canik, Cross Connection editor, at the Conference office at 5215 Main, Houston Texas 77002 or email to acanik@txcumc.org by April 15, along with a picture or sample if one is available. Address questions to April at 713-416-6837

Church Name

Church Address

Website:

Submitter’s Name, Phone contact and Email:

Describe your Communication Idea (What was the goal and how did you implement it?)

How was it a success? What response followed this idea?