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The CONNECT Project: Collaborative Community Development

A unique partnership between St. Luke's' UMC - Gethsemane Campus and several community groups is designed to revitalize an entire neighborhood.

“If the church is to transform Houston with the love of God and redemptive power of the gospel, then the time is now,” says Rev. David Horton, teaching pastor for **St. Luke's UMC Gethsemane campus** in southwest Houston. “We find we can do more for the Kingdom by ministering *with* our neighbors rather than ministering *to* them,” he adds, “so St. Luke's is proud to be a founding member and active partner of Connect Community where the work is all about relationships. For the last year we have been working alongside our other partners, being humbled by their impressive ministry, and stepping up to the plate to sit at the same table with them. It is also about relationships with those we serve. As a pastor and a Connect collaborator, I am learning that ministry *with* is always better than ministry *to*.

What is Connect Community about?

Connect Community is a broad-based and expanding coalition of best-in-class service providers and organizations who are working in partnership to provide aligned education, literacy, career, and spiritual, health, and wellness services in the Sharpstown/Gulfton community, a high-poverty area of Houston. The founding organizations—KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program), YMCA, Legacy Community Health Services, and **St. Luke's United Methodist Church**—are working together with additional collaborating partners, including Houston Center for Literacy, Sutton Elementary, Collaborative for Children, and Breakthrough Houston, to help families break down barriers to accessing resources so that they can build confidence, accountability, and success.

According to Founding Director Anne Whitlock, Connect Community was formed when KIPP purchased the land immediately contiguous to **St. Luke's Gethsemane campus**. KIPP approached **St. Luke's** about use of a vacant field, and a conversation began. Notes Anne, “**St. Luke's** was looking for ways to make a greater impact to bring renewal to the neighborhood, and KIPP wanted to help provide access for their students to the additional wellness resources they need to allow them to focus on education. The conversation led to Purpose Built Communities out of Eastlake community in Atlanta, and the YMCA and Legacy Health care joined in the conversation as well.” Collectively, the group agreed to become an epicenter for renewal and community building in the Gulfton and Sharpstown neighborhoods.

What each founding partner brings

- KIPP brings excellence in education.
- The YMCA works for youth development, healthy living, and social responsibility.
- Legacy Community Health opens their doors and hearts to people from all walks of life by providing a wide range of quality health care services.

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- **St. Luke's** offers multi-lingual worship services and classes for persons of all ages. The church also hosts community celebrations and provides hospitality and safe sanctuary for persons of all faiths or no faith within the community.

Adds Anne, "At Connect, we work to create opportunities for members of our community in Sharpstown/Gulfton by connecting them with essential resources, local institutions and one another to help build a brighter future for us all." She lists the collaborative vision and values as:

- Children and families will succeed.
- Families are the change leaders.
- Relationships are the crux of our work.
- Diversity is an asset that is woven into our processes and systems of support/service.
- Partnership creates spiritual, behavioral and economic prosperity.
- Partners have made a conscious commitment to improve outcomes.
- Change happens at "the speed of trust".
- Data drives leadership efficacy.

At present, Connect Community is focusing its efforts and measuring its impact within a clearly delineated geographic area called the Impact Zone, which encompasses an approximately one-mile radius around the Connect campus located at **St. Luke's Gethsemane campus** in the 6800 block of Bellaire Boulevard. Within this Impact Zone, approximately 65% of the residents are from Central America and Mexico, and 30% are refugees from around the world (primarily Iraq, Afghanistan, Burma, and the Congo).

Anne reports that statistics for the census tracts within the Impact Zone underscore the economic and other difficulties that this community is facing. Due to low levels of educational attainment, limited English literacy, low wages, high crime rates, and lack of awareness about opportunities, families in the Connect Community Impact Zone face significant challenges to building thriving families and a flourishing community.

Dr. Tom Pace, Senior Pastor, **St. Luke's UMC** says, "This initiative has involved amazing friendships and relationships between leaders of these organizations, and we believe we have a holistic model that can really make an impact on families. Connect is a place where people can connect to resources for mind, body, and spirit. More importantly, they can connect to one another. God is really doing something in this partnership."

Key organizational accomplishments during 2015-2016 include:

- Developing the vision, mission, and strategic plan for Connect Community,
- Hiring a Founding Director for Connect Community in January 2015,

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- Completing schematic master site plan drawings for the new Community Center in March 2015 and are currently being revised,
- Developing a plan for ongoing community engagement and over the past year eight major community engagement initiatives have been carried out, using over 200 volunteers and engaging over 500 residents through a Community Walk, Parent Workshops, Newcomer Thanksgiving Dinner and a Valentine's "Connecting through Love" Pop-up event, and
- Establishing 2 collaborative partnerships (early childhood education and expanded summer learning).

David is thrilled with the outlook of this unique model of collaborative partnership. "May the relationship-building, Kingdom-constructing, God-glorifying work of Connect Community continue for years to come," he says. "May it make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world."

Pastors Gain Ministry Skills through Hospital Training

Leaders exploring a career in chaplaincy might be interested in one of the hands-on clinical programs at Houston Methodist Hospital.

Many Texas Conference United Methodists know Houston Methodist Hospital for its excellent patient care. Perhaps a lesser known fact is that it's also a training site for pastors and lay ministers seeking to grow in their leadership and care-giving skills. The program for clergy and seminary students is called Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE). Houston Methodist is expanding CPE system-wide, introducing students to Houston Methodist Sugar Land, Houston Methodist Willowbrook, and Houston Methodist West in Katy, in addition to the students at the Texas Medical Center.

Unique Benefits: A Personal Perspective

As he was transitioning from seminary to pastoral ministry, Rev. Kip Gilts, Superintendent of the South District, spent two years at Memorial Hermann Southwest Hospital, earning nine units of Clinical Pastoral Education. "There has never been a day in ministry that I have not utilized the skills and tools I gained in my CPE training," he says. Kip recommends CPE to most seminarians seeking their internship placement. He cites increased self-awareness, experience in providing pastoral care in crisis situations, and skilled supervision for professional development as unique benefits from a CPE internship.

The practical ministry experience gained through CPE has also been valuable for Dr. B.J. Hightower, a senior staff chaplain at Houston Methodist Hospital. CPE helps pastors "navigate the tension between the spiritual and the secular," she shares. The educational process also helps students evaluate their own moral and ethical beliefs in real world ministry, particularly in end of life care.

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According to the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education, the accrediting agency for CPE, the focus of ministry training is on “living human documents.” These are patients served in hospitals, clients served at social service agencies, and the chaplains and care providers themselves. The focus of CPE is on self-awareness in ministry that helps pastors be more aware of their own and others’ emotional needs. Kip believes this is helpful not only in pastoral care, but also in crisis leadership.

One method of learning in CPE is called the Inter-Personal Relationship Seminar or IPR. “This time calls you to the table and gives you a laboratory for confrontation,” he explains. “It allows you to be assertive and ‘try out behaviors’ that you can’t do anywhere else.” It helps the students become aware of how they come across to others.

Rev. Tom Stephenson took his first unit of CPE at Houston Methodist Hospital while serving as a pastor in a neighboring community. “I appreciated the convenience of the extended unit that allowed me to attend class, work with patients, and continue to serve my congregation.” He said he valued the transparency he experienced in CPE. “I learned that I don’t have to be perfect.” He is continuing his CPE training as a resident at Houston Methodist.

As pastor of **Wesley Tabernacle UMC** in Galveston, Rev. Steffon Arrington wanted to gain additional pastoral care skills for his ministry. He is currently doing an extended unit of CPE at a medical center hospital. The convenient class time and weekend hours with patients allow him to continue to serve his congregation full-time. CPE has helped him “develop better empathic listening skills as well as care in grief and crisis situations.”

Flexible Options

There are many opportunities for CPE within the bounds of the Texas Annual Conference, including Tyler and the hospitals of the Texas Medical Center. At Houston Methodist pastors serving full-time appointments can take advantage of extended units, which run from September to May. Classes meet one evening per week, with patient care a couple of weekends per month. Houston Methodist also offers a summer internship, which is 10 weeks of full-time work, and residencies, which are one year of full-time work. More information can be found at houstonmethodist.org, or by contacting Dr. Luis Rodriguez, the CPE Manager, at lerodriguez@houstonmethodist.org or 713-441-2381. There will also be a CPE display from Houston Methodist at Annual Conference this year.

VCI Coaching Role Inspires Retired Clergy

Leaving the pulpit does not mean leaving the ministry for several retired/retiring pastors who are discovering the opportunity to coach congregations in the Vibrant Church Initiative.

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Although he is approaching retirement, District Superintendent Rev. Bill Taylor says, “In no way do I envision myself going out to pasture.” In fact, he adds, “After 43 years of active ministry, I feel as strongly now as ever to respond to God's call on my life by serving God's church. More than ever I believe that the church needs seasoned, balanced, wise men and women to guide and direct our most vital congregations.” In recent years, he has followed the Texas Annual Conference Vibrant Church Initiative closely as a member of the Cabinet and was marginally involved as the District Superintendent of the North District working with the churches and pastors in his district that enrolled in the process. Notes Bill, “My impression is that VCI can help a congregation reach its highest potential.”

Working with vital congregations as a coach will be Bill's next ministry adventure, along with several other retired clergy who are excited to share their experience with a variety of churches in VCI. Rev. Mike Tyson, VCI Director says, “Not every person that serves a United Methodist Church has the gifts and graces to be a good VCI coach. However, it happens that Steve Wende, Chuck Simmons, Jim Bankston and Bill Taylor are all extraordinarily gifted for the role of VCI coach and each bring with them a vast array of experience to help the brothers and sisters they are in connection with to lead their churches through VCI. The beauty of using our retired pastors as VCI coaches is that as they work with VCI pastors and churches to enlarge the Kingdom of God, they maintain a great deal of flexibility to pursue whatever other activities they may choose in retirement. In addition, these “retired” coaches are capable of coaching more than one church at a time, whereas someone under full time appointment can only coach one VCI church at a time. God has sent these skilled and experienced pastors to the VCI process at a critical time when many churches are signing on to participate. I am grateful for their continued commitment to serve the Kingdom of God and I am excited to see how they will help pastors and churches going through the VCI process in the months and years ahead.”

Retirement is not really one of the words that Rev. Chuck Simmons, **Memorial Drive UMC**, uses very often. “Whenever mature parishioners used age as an excuse to drop out of church leadership, I always told them God doesn't have a retirement plan,” adds Chuck. “Knowing *that* applies to me now, after some rest, I'll be eager to find new ways and places to mentor pastors and to help congregations grow in faithfulness and service. It's the ministry God called me to that I still love. VCI creates a supportive partnership for Elders like me to use the practical knowledge and seasoned perspective garnered from decades of frontline experience to benefit younger colleagues and willing churches. I'm excited about it!”

Rev. Steve Wende, **First UMC, Houston**, and others will join these pastors at a VCI coach-training event this August. He, too, is excited about the opportunity to stay connected while helping others. “I love and believe in the United Methodist Church. However, I know that the

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mission field now for pastors and lay leaders is much tougher than when I started in ministry,” shares Steve. “VCI is a creative, efficient and effective way to help congregations deal with their challenges and maximize their opportunities. I am pleased to be part of this program because it allows me to give back to the Church which has given so much to me.”

Rev. Jim Bankston, who retired from **St. Paul’s UMC, Houston** a few years ago has been staying busy serving on various boards and as a VCI resource for churches holding a Day of Prayer and Repentance. He has recently agreed to serve as a coach, saying he is more than glad to share his 45 years of ministry with others in this expanded role. “I have served in suburban, rural and urban environments and even as a District Superintendent and I’m happy to go wherever the need is,” he says. “I am impressed how hard laity and clergy in the VCI process to date have worked to make this a significant time for the church and I am looking forward to the training later this summer and my first assignment as a coach. It will be an extra bonus to work with other retired clergy and stay active in the connection.”

Adds North District Superintendent Bill Taylor, “I still have energy and enthusiasm and want to make a difference for God in the world. Following July 1, my calendar is relatively clear. I expect several weekends will be consumed by VCI as well as a number of days doing one-on-one coaching with pastors and churches. In addition to VCI coaching I hope to keep some contact with several younger clergy I’ve tried to mentor and support. Beyond this, I believe my schedule will be consumed with grandchildren, travel, photography, fly fishing and reading.”

Christian Musicians Impacting Kilgore College Students

Investing in the Young comes in many forms, most recently allowing Kilgore College students to be up close and personal with several popular Christian musicians.

Seven Kilgore College students and their campus pastor, Rev. Karen Bright, attended the “*Hits Deep Tour*” in Bossier City April 1, 2016 featuring national Christian pop artists **tobyMac, Britt Nicole, Building 429, Colton Dix, Capital Kings, Finding Favour and Hollyn**. For the finale, the group was selected to dance on stage with **tobyMac**, performing his new hit song, “*Lights Shine Bright*.” The performance was videotaped for an online promotion of the new single. Afterwards, students met the lead performer and other musical acts backstage for a meet-and-greet.

“We’ve *Invested in the Young* and it’s paying off in ways that are unimaginable for our students,” says Rev. Bright. “The goal was to offer them a memorable experience that would prayerfully be a turning point in their ministry. Out of 5,000 people attending the event, we (along with 20 other individuals) were chosen for this incredible opportunity. It was truly a blessing from God. Everything just fell into place in divine order. Each student was touched in a meaningful and unique manner.”

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All seven of the students will not soon forget this exceptional and inspirational experience. As they share their perspective of the event, it becomes obvious that they were touched in unique and lasting ways.

Stephen Mena, 23 (Chicago, IL) “I was most touched when tobyMac sang his song ‘Speak Life.’ I’ve wanted to write songs so badly for so long, but I’ve always had a fear of it. But after hearing that song and seeing all those people in the crowd when we were on stage with him, I lost my fear. It was God’s way of letting me know ‘You’re going in the right way. Keep going.’”

Isela Guerrero, 19 (Chandler, TX)

“Even though we had front row seats, I stood on my feet most of time. I could not sit down! I was so excited witnessing all of the great performances. Before this concert, I was thinking about changing my major to Ministry – and now there’s no question about it.”

Nancy Garza, 23 (Pine, TX).

“There was a lot of excitement and awe in the atmosphere. It made me want to serve God more, improve my relationship with Him, and steer others to follow Him. It was really surreal that we were on stage with tobyMac for his last performance and able to visit personally with him back stage.”

Destarra Alexander, 31, (Los Angeles, CA)

“The energy and presence of God was in that place. We sang songs and danced praises to God. We all had a clear understanding about one love. This entire experience changed my whole outlook on life.”

Drew Horst, 18 (Kilgore, TX)

“Besides being in the presence of tobyMac and all of the amazing artists, it really opened my eyes to the Christian music genre. It made me want to recommend that music to people at my church – young and old. It’s something that I think would help draw more people to Christ. I was blessed to be able to be a part of it.”

Reagan Silvey, 21 (Kilgore, TX)

“During this concert I could tell that each artist loved God. They showed that love through each of their performances and songs. I was able to hear and sing the songs from some of my most favorite artists who have influenced my life throughout the years and have helped me with my walk with the Lord. The last performance was by tobyMac, who started his performance with his song, ‘Til the Day I Die.’ After we got off stage, I was able to meet him and shake his hand.”

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Holden Silvey, 19, (Kilgore, TX) “The highlight of the evening was a paper that a man handed us before the show, that said that we were selected to go onstage with TobyMac for his finale. I really enjoyed the artists’ music and energy while performing. I also loved connecting and worshipping with other Christians in our group and having great conversations throughout.”

Join an “Open Table” Family Model for Young Adult Orphans

On May 7, learn how the Open Table model trains church volunteers to help resource, empower, and surround aging out foster youth so that they can thrive.

Most of us can’t begin to fathom this:

You’ve just turned 18 and your foster family can no longer support you – financially or emotionally. You are suddenly and frighteningly alone, for the first time, forced into making life-altering decisions for yourself and hoping they are the right ones.

No safety net. No mom, no dad – no one and nowhere to turn should you fail. Of course, you’re not planning to fail. You’re not looking for rescue. But all the “what-ifs” in your life scream in your head as you stare at that entry-level job application and realize you can’t fill box that says “Emergency contact.”

Now remember when you were that age. Think of the ways you were supported – and the ways you weren’t. Think of the plans you had that didn’t turn out quite like you expected, “if I had only known.”

How valuable would it have been to you to have had your very own “advisory board” – a group of non-judgmental adults, committed to you, who could have helped you steer clear of obstacles on life’s bumpy road without shaming, blaming or telling you what to do?

The members of your church have years of life experience as well as personal and professional networks. We have a way for them to share that experience. It’s called, Open Table [click here for website](#). The Texas Annual Conference has joined with the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston and Catholic Charities in launching this national, ecumenical movement in Greater Houston, in order to provide transformational relationships to at-risk individuals.

Explore the Open Table Pilot Program on May 7

According to Katy Sabayrac, TAC Missional Excellence, a Table is formed by six to eight volunteers who bring their vocational and life experiences to the individual. In a one-year commitment, the Table and individual develop and implement a customized LifePlan to help her or him reach full potential.

Table members are blessed while “being the church.” Adds Katy, “It’s a unique opportunity for them to share their time and talents in full knowledge that they are making a positive difference in someone’s life. It’s discipleship in the model Christ taught us: one hand, one

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heart at a time. Table members serving young adults in communities around the country say this experience invites them to live a transformational life with the poor and marginalized and that it transforms them even more than their sister and brother (older youth/young adult participants in Open Table).

This opportunity excites Rev. Diane McGehee, Missional Excellence Center Director. “Foster care children are some of the most vulnerable in our community, especially as they age out. Imagine turning 18 and having no family, alone in the world, with no resources and an uncertain future, having to overcome a childhood filled with trauma, and often coming from a home environment that left you unprepared for adulthood,” she says. “We, as the church, can make a tremendous difference in the lives of these young people. The Open Table model trains church volunteers to help resource, empower, and surround aging out foster youth so that they can thrive. It’s a discipleship model that equips the church to partner with these young people as they move into adulthood.”

Research completed with Open Table 2013 participants established that 95% of graduates remained in relationship with their Tables after two years. “Jesus invites us into this mutually transformational relationship,” adds Katy, who is coordinating the upcoming pilot program for young adults transitioning out of foster care.

“But it won’t work without willing partners,” she adds.

“With this shared model of a family support system, the adults can lend their expertise in a way that does not overwhelm anyone, and meanwhile the model will likely provide for a greater likelihood that the young adult will find a special bond or two within the group that will help them transition into adulthood,” notes Rev. Lyanna Johnson, member of the Missional Excellence Committee and pastor at **Servants of Christ UMC**. “Most of us can’t imagine our young adulthood without having someone to help us look for a job, open a bank account, start a budget or buy a car. This mentoring opportunity allows us to give meaning to another person’s life and be in transformative relationships.”

Call to Action

Join the Exploration Meeting to learn more on Saturday, May 7, from 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., at **Servants of Christ United Methodist Church**, 3827 Broadway (south of the I-45 Hwy and I-610 Loop intersection). Contact: Ann Hallmark, Main #: 713.454.6480 with any questions and to notify organizers of your attendance.

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Lessons Learned: Building the Church Through Communication

Attendees from the recent Small Member Church Retreat share how blueprints, tool belts and budgets relate to building stronger communication programs.

When lay and clergy members from small membership churches gathered at Lakeview for the third annual training retreat in mid-April, they stepped into a classroom resembling a construction zone. Hammers, duct tape, screwdrivers, hard hats and other building materials set the scene for a four-hour communication training session on “Building the Church Through Communication.”

In a matter of minutes, guest speaker April Canik from the Texas Annual Conference Communication Department, was wearing a hard hat labeled “Kingdom Construction Company” and reminding attendees that building of any sort is not for wimps. “Anytime you set out to build anything with some degree of magnitude or complexity, you have to begin with the end in mind,” April shared. “Experienced builders begin with a blueprint, so as we build the kingdom of God in our churches, we should do the same by purposefully planning our communication efforts.”

In this analogy, she added, an intentional communication plan is a first step in capturing the hearts and attention of those seeking answers inside and outside of the church. “Even a simplified blueprint – or basic communication plan -- helps removes barriers and make sense out of the chaos of information,” she adds, “with the goal of helping people connect to Christ.” In this scenario, the blueprint would define audiences the church wants to reach, consider the type of information they would be seeking and how they would want to receive it. Blueprints foster focus and unity so that church leaders can describe where the church is going and invite others to be a part of that vision. Blueprints can help set priorities and define timelines for various milestones.

Blueprint: Start with a Plan

- A plan provides focus.
- The vision defines the unique purpose of each church and distinctive details to communicate about.
- Blueprints/plans provide a strong foundation for communication.
- Blueprints map out the wiring (ie: facilitate critical connections).
- Blueprints are best implemented with a ‘crew.’ It’s everyone’s job to help communicate the good news of a church.
- Blueprints often involve change (continuous improvement).
- Blueprints help builders keep guests in mind (visitors drop by but guests are eagerly anticipated).
- Plans generate excitement by forecasting what is being built.

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By adding a tool belt to her construction gear, April migrated the topic toward the discussion of communication tools. “A tool box or belt is a good visual to demonstrate that there is not just one super tool to build a house or some other project any more than there is just one tool to guarantee that a church is communicating with excellence,” she adds. “Chances are that many of us have a nice shiny clean tool kit at home because it is full of things we don’t know how to use – or want to use. You would think that the more tools you have in your tool kit, the better your building skills are but that is not always true.”

Rev. Jeff Dungan brought a team from **St. Luke’s UMC, Bryan** to the retreat and found inspiration from the “building theme” to take back and apply. Notes Jeff, “The workshop showed us the real need for a communications plan rather than trying to do all things for everybody. We were already using several communication tools, but without focus and a plan, our efforts were not hitting the mark. It was eye opening to see how easily we jump on a communications bandwagon without clearly thinking about the audience. As a result, internal and external communications are often co-mingled, which in turn ends up being ineffective for either purpose. Now we have the exciting, and daunting task of re-evaluating all of our communications from the bulletin to our website.”

Attendees learned that the list of communication tools available to leaders grows every day, many of which can help build or repair a congregation’s communication strategy. Yet just having access to this set of tools is only step one. Each tool serves a special purpose and can be used in combination with others to build life changing relationships and tie mission to ministry in a way that invites others into a rewarding faith journey.

Tool Belt: Decide which communication tool is best for the job

- Websites (serve as the front door to the church)
- Newsletters (allow room for stories that connect heads to hearts and focus on the future not past)
- Bulletin (first impression; ideal keepsake for guests)
- Social media (immediate, free, shareable and relational)
- Displays (engage hearts/ promote the “why”)
- Events (cultivate new ‘family’ members by pursuing relationships and follow up strategy).

The Communication Challenge

“Many folks are looking for inspiration and real answers but, comparatively speaking *next to nothing* about the church these days captures their attention,” she adds.

The final “B” in the building-themed training focused on the budget. The group acknowledged, however, that there are many affordable and free options in the communication tool belt.

Budget: Great communication does not have to be expensive

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- “Raving fans” share and invite others into transformational environments that are blessing them.
- Resources at www.umcom.com and www.churchmarketingsucks.com give budget-friendly ideas and links
- Publish your church wish list in bulletin, on web, Facebook etc... (it might ignite a donor passion).
- Send articles and photos to local paper/community calendar for free publicity
- Consider a “signature event” or project that the church becomes known for or partner with an existing high profile event ideal for forging new relationships
- E-communication is virtually free, instant and easy
- Have more conversations (free) to promote lifestyle evangelism and disciple-making.

Rev. Ben Lohmer, **Pattison UMC** plans to implement several ideas from the training. “It was an AHA moment for me to realize that *everything* communicates *something*—whether that be silence or outdated information,” he shares. “It made me think about what the community is hearing from our church, and what would they say our church is known for.” Adds Ben, “I also learned that communication needs to pass the SO WHAT test, in that we need to communicate the why behind the ministry and not just the details around the *what*.”

“The retreat training demonstrated how to effectively communicate our messages both within and outside our church,” shares David E. Newcomb from **St. Luke’s UMC, Bryan**. “The variety of media April presented will help us reach the people who are looking for God in their lives. The most surprising fact for me was that 80% of people find their churches through the web.”

‘Being the Church’ is Fun for Givers and Receivers

When almost 500 people of all ages collaborate on 20 different mission-hearted activities, they ‘build community’ and strengthen their lifestyle evangelism skills.

Generally speaking, an empty church is only a cause for celebration when it means the missing people are on a mission in the community. On April 3, members and friends of **FUMC Pearland** left the church building and went out in to the community to “*Be the Church*.”

Over 475 children and adults participated in the 20 different projects put together for this day. Projects included: planting trees for Pearland Parks and Recreation, making 1,500 sandwiches for Kids Meals, bagging 8,000 pounds of rice and beans to be taken to Mexico with Builders Without Borders, making and handing out hygiene bags to area homeless and planting corn at the Builders Without Borders facility in Alvin.

Members also had a cookout and outside activities with the residents at Kidz Harbor in Liverpool. Volunteer Mirna Renaud says, “I find it very fulfilling to serve on Be The Church day, and a way to pay forward the blessings that God has given me. It is a joy to spending

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time at Kidz Harbor bringing happiness to children who have been displaced from their homes.”

This was the fourth annual *Be the Church Day* for **FUMC Pearland** and plans are in the works for 2017. **FUMC Pearland** places a high priority on outreach and mission projects and keeps the options “top of mind” on the church website, social media forums and through frequent announcements geared to give members new ways to be externally focused on making disciples and meeting needs in the community.

Genie Potes, Mission and Outreach Director, shares how the event comes together. “I start the official planning for *Be the Church* in January, and our event is held the Sunday after Easter so the timeframe varies a little each year. Preplanning usually begins by setting the date and being on the lookout for new projects throughout the year. There are several organizations we help every year, but the other projects may differ from year to year. I work with a contact person from the organization to iron out the details and see how we can best serve them by filling needs.”

Once the majority of projects are set, focus changes to spreading the word to the congregation. Adds Genie, “Our members sign up online for whatever projects they feel called to, and we offer projects to accommodate ages 5-95. There is quite a bit of behind the scenes organization that goes on prior to the big day, but once the day arrives it is all about our congregation working to serve those in our community and beyond.”

Additionally the sanctuary choir offered mini concerts at both Hope Village in Friendswood and Kidz Harbor. Dr. Hyeok Lee, director of Traditional Music, notes, “It is good for our choir to get out of the sanctuary and be the hands, feet and voice of Jesus out in the community.”

Each year, the Pathfinders Sunday School class designs their own project to fill a need in the community. Their projects are designed to incorporate all ages within a family. Last year they assembled “Blessing Bags” with ready-to-eat foods to give out to homeless people in the area. This year, they assembled emergency diaper bags to give out to moms in need in the area. After assembling the bags, the class goes out in groups including adults and kids to pass the bags out in a variety of places. Class member Aimee Jamison, says “It is rewarding to do a hands-on project where the kids get to see firsthand the needs of people in the community. It is very humbling, and is a living testimony to the kids that we can share good in the world.”

Notes Genie, “Those who are on the receiving end of our projects are always very appreciative. Whether it’s sprucing up our local senior center, doing landscaping at a residential special needs facility, or spending time with kids in a group home, **FUMC Pearland’s** *Be the Church* day is a blessed experience for all involved

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May Brings Mega Opportunities for Youth Leaders and Youth

From intern training to conference gatherings, youth workers and those that aspire to lead youth have several activities to check out.

Summer ministry experiences abound for “all things youth” according to Rev. Eddie Irwin, Director of Youth and Young Adult Ministries for the conference. College students looking to get hands-on experience as pastoral interns can attend one of the upcoming trainings to be better equipped to “Invest in the Young.”

May 26

On May 26, **St. Mark’s Pecore** will host an internship training session from 10am-2pm. The cost is \$15 to cover lunch. The four churches currently looking for interns to serve in their student ministries are:

[Lake Jackson](#)

[Crosby UMC](#)

[St. John's UMC - Richmond](#)

[Clear Lake UMC](#)

There is also a training being planned for college students in the East Texas area.

May 29

The “Under 35” group will host a Meet & Greet during Texas Annual Conference at the Hilton Americas Room 335 from 8pm-10pm.

May 31

Youth Workers will gather for lunch at the Spaghetti Warehouse in downtown Houston from noon-1:30pm. “This is always a good opportunity for camaraderie, a type of casual “group think” session where youth workers, that don’t usually get to hang out together, can share stories and tips on youth ministry,” notes Eddie. No RSVP needed, just look for the group upstairs.

Be sure to check out the job openings for youth directors, camp information and other news about youth ministry on the [youth website](#). For more information, contact eerwin@txcumc.org.

World UMC Conference Table Sponsors Needed

Be a part of something big! Mix and mingle with Methodist delegates from across the globe as a table host and sponsor at the upcoming World Methodist Conference in Houston, August 31-Sept 3. A total of \$54,000 is needed to cover meal costs for delegates over the three days. Approximately 10 of the 36 sponsors needed are confirmed, according to Dr. Pat Sparks,

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St. Peter's UMC, Katy who is heading this effort. The cost is \$1,500 per sponsorship. This amount will pay for 5 tables of delegates and also 10 members from the sponsoring church. The churches can split the cost with the minimum amount being \$500 (which allows for three table hosts from each sponsoring church). To help the Texas Annual Conference welcome this global event to town, contact Pat at psparks@stpkaty.org or 281-492-8031.

“Multi Ethnic Community”

Don't miss hearing Randall Butler, President and CEO of the Institute for Sustainable Peace when he speaks at the Church & Society Committee breakfast during Annual Conference in Room 339 on Tuesday, May 31 at 7 a.m.

contact jbierwirth@txcumc.org. Cost will be \$20 at the door.