

THE MISSOURI METHODIST

moumethodist.org • Summer 2026



Salt *and* Light

As Jesus followers, how do we put our faith into action?

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Reaching Out in
Rural Contexts

40 Years of
Mutual Mission

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Meet Our Contributors

Meet the creatives who utilized their skills and gifts to bring this issue of *The Missouri Methodist* to life:



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Aaron Marcell Carter is an ordained elder in the Missouri Annual Conference and is pastor of Peacemakers Church, a new church plant in St. Louis County. Aaron has a heart to see people live with the peace that they are beloved children of a loving, mindful and present God.



ROQUE FACELA

Roque Facela is a trained journalist, radio broadcaster and broadcaster, and photographer. He is a graduate of Pedagogical University of Maputo and the strategic communication program at Africa University. Roque serves as the Information and Communication Technician for the Mozambique Episcopal Area.



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REV. KIM JENNE

Kim Jenne, an ordained elder, serves as Missouri Conference Director of Connectional Ministries. Her work centers on equipping clergy and laity, strengthening connectional life and aligning resources with mission. Kim considers herself an inconsistent but persistent disciple of Jesus Christ.

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The Missouri Annual Conference is located on the homeland of a diversity of Native American nations. These nations had a significant role in shaping the landscape, and they continue a sacred relationship with the lands on which our local churches and our Conference facilities are located. We commit to honor this distinctive cultural heritage in our fulfillment of the Missouri Annual Conference Mission, Vision and Values.

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PHOTO BY SCOTT SCHAEFER

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Called to Be Salty

How Jesus Sent Us to Be Salt and Light • BY BISHOP ROBERT FARR



Bishop Farr invites United Methodists to reclaim their call to share the flavor of God's grace.

This year at Annual Conference our theme was Salt and Light: Seasoned for Service, Shining in Mission. I love the way The Message Bible translates Matthew 5:13. “Let me tell you why you are here. You’re here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth.”

There is no doubt that our world needs God-flavors! It’s a broken world; always has been, since the beginning of time. Therefore, God sent Jesus Christ into the world to save it from itself. The gift of salvation through Jesus Christ is God-flavors right into our midst. Jesus called on his disciples to continue the God-flavoring through our lives.

I’ve had high blood pressure since I was in my early 20’s, and one of the first things the doctors did was take salt out of my diet, which was very hard to do. For the most part, I don’t add salt to my food. But I can hardly eat green beans without it. They just don’t taste the same. I miss salt.

It feels like we are missing salt in our world today, and our world needs the salt of Jesus Christ. Without the flavoring of God’s grace, everything becomes much coarser. I think we are losing the common decency in our American culture. We are losing the

common good in our communities. We are losing our connectedness to neighbors and our compassion toward the stranger and the immigrant. Without the flavor of God’s grace through Jesus Christ and his Church, the world becomes even more of a broken place and more disconnected.

Matthew’s gospel goes on to say, “Here’s another way to put it: You’re here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We’re going public with this, as public as a city on a hill.” (Matthew 5:14-16, The Message)

Every time I read this verse, I think of the children’s song, “This Little Light of Mine.”

This little light of mine, I’m going to let it shine, let it shine, let it shine! Everywhere I go, I’m going to let it shine!

This year’s annual conference emphasized salt and light in hopes that our churches would carry that theme into our ministries and communities around the state.

This year at annual conference we celebrated:

- An increase in average worship attendance in 2025



VISION

*The Missouri
Annual
Conference equips
pastors and lay
leadership to love
boldly, serve
joyfully and lead
courageously in
their local
community.*

MISSION

*Making disciples
of Jesus Christ for
the transformation
of the world.*

- UNITE registration at capacity for the third year running
- Extravagant generosity by Missouri churches, which collectively gave more than \$1.09 million through the Advance in 2025, ranking third in the worldwide United Methodist connection
- 40 years of partnership with United Methodists in Mozambique
- Launching a new partnership with the Methodist Church in Peru
- Improved apportionment giving
- Launching a redesigned quarterly print and digital edition of *The Missouri Methodist* magazine
- The 70th anniversary of women's ordination in The United Methodist Church
- The 30th anniversary of the Order of Deacons
- Launching new ministries supported by outside agency partnerships, like the North Carolina Rural Center and the Lilly Foundation
- More fruitful ministry through the Conference

Friends, the Missouri Conference is strong. A reoccurring trend has begun

in our churches, congregations and communities. It is exciting to see where God is taking the people in Missouri called United Methodist.

In support of this movement of renewal, I've started the Francis Asbury Fund to bring extra resources to bear for Next Generation Ministries, new church starts, discipleship ministries, mission work and scholarships.

We have received a matching grant. Over the next two years, every dollar given to this fund will be matched one-to-one. It's a great opportunity to strengthen our core ministries together. If you might be interested in giving to the Francis Asbury Fund, please contact Rev. Jim Peich at the Conference office or the Missouri United Methodist Foundation.

I know God is working through our people to be the salt and light that Missourians and the whole world need.

In Christ,

Bishop Robert Farr, Resident Bishop,
Missouri Episcopal Area



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Mission *as* Music

Using Jazz as a Metaphor for Ministry

BY REV. DR. BENJAMIN L. HARTLEY AND REV. DR. LUCAS ENDICOTT

There are many ways to think about faithful engagement in God's mission. People often reach for language like "framework," "strategy" or "blueprint." These can be helpful, especially when clarity and structure are needed. But they can also give the impression that mission is something we build, control and execute — something that moves in an always-predictable straight line from intention to outcome.

That has not been our experience.

In practice, we have found that mission rarely follows straight lines. That is true for all sorts of holistic mission — evangelistic as well as political advocacy. Mission in the

way of Jesus is relational, dynamic and often unpredictable. It requires attention, responsiveness and a willingness to be shaped by others and by the Spirit along the way. For that reason, we have found ourselves drawn to a different metaphor — not architecture, but music.

As Dr. Eugene Lowry, former faculty at the Saint Paul School of Theology, and Milt Abel taught, jazz provides a helpful metaphor for how mission is done.¹

Jazz creates a space where structure and improvisation thrive. There are themes, keys, riffs and rhythms that provide coherence, but within that structure there is freedom — freedom to respond, to adapt, to listen and to

create something new in real time. No single instrument carries the whole. Each voice matters. Most importantly, what emerges is not predetermined but discovered together.

Mission, at its best, feels something like this.

What we want to suggest are not blueprints but four "notes" — elements that, when played together, create the possibility for faithful, responsive and relational engagement in mission. These notes do not always appear in the same order. Sometimes one leads, sometimes another recedes.

¹ Eugene Lowry and Milt Abel, *Jazz and Christianity*, audio recording (2008). For over 20 years, Ben has used this recording to introduce the topic of "contextualization" in classes on Christian mission.

“Like jazz, we think mission is something we learn by doing — by listening, by responding and by playing alongside others.”

At times they come into tension. But together, they form a kind of theological and practical harmony.

CONTEXTUAL AWARENESS (POSTURE)

Every faithful engagement begins with attention. Consider our very first songbook: The Psalms. How many of the Psalms sing of the importance of attention, watching and waiting? Psalm 5 is one place to look. There, so many of the sins of the “evildoers” relate to their speech. The faithful watch and listen.

Similarly, mission in the way of Jesus involves growing in contextual awareness that involves more than the mere gathering of information; it is about adopting a posture. It requires taking seriously history, culture, economics, politics and ecclesial life and recognizing that no mission engagement is ever neutral. Every place carries its own stories. Every community has been shaped by forces — some visible, some hidden.²

There is a temptation in mission to move too quickly. Churches and people sometimes assume that the need is obvious, and the response is clear. But when we fail to attend to context, we risk not listening and, as a result, misunderstanding occurs. We may offer solutions that do not fit or, worse, contribute to further harm. Too often, even in heart-wrenching

crises where the urgency to “do something” is great, a “tyranny of urgency” can cause great harm. Before we play a note, we need to know the key.

PROXIMITY AND RELATIONSHIP (RELATIONSHIP)

If contextual awareness is the posture, proximity is the practice.

Faithful mission requires closeness — physical, relational, linguistic and even economic.³ It asks us to move toward one another as neighbors and friends. Friendships take time and trust. This can be difficult for majority culture folks in the United States who can be impatient to let the rhythm of friendship grow. United Methodist mission professor Dana Robert wrote a delightful book a few years ago celebrating cross-cultural friendships for the sake of God’s mission. Ben assigned *Faithful Friendships* to a class of 30 college sophomores who loved it! You might, too.⁴

Is power shared? Are there structural ways to disempower and empower? Good jazz musicians, as well as musicians in other genres, are careful to not overpower an ensemble and yet still boldly contribute for the good of the song. There is a gentleness that one sees in someone who is an excellent accompanist. It reminds me (Ben) of my favorite line in the Russian Orthodox spiritual classic,

² Both of us have long appreciated the work of Robert Schreiter, a Roman Catholic theologian and anthropologist. His *Constructing Local Theologies* (Orbis Books, 2015) was originally written in the 1980s, but it remains a plainly written, helpful field guide for individuals and churches. Jonathan Calvillo’s *The Saints of Santa Ana: Faith and Ethnicity in a Mexican Majority City* (Oxford University Press, 2020) provides an in-depth example of how this kind of approach

informs questions and insights on the ground.

³ For a good primer on the scope of redemption suggested in a biblical theology of mission, see Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God’s People: A Biblical Theology of the Church’s Mission*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010).

⁴ Dana L. Robert, *Faithful Friendships: Embracing Diversity in Christian Community*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019).

“Mission in the way of Jesus is relational, dynamic and often unpredictable. It requires attention, responsiveness and a willingness to be shaped by others and by the Spirit along the way.”

The Philokalia. “There is scarcely any other virtue which the demons fear as much as gentleness.”

THEOLOGICAL PROCESSING IN COMMUNITY (DISCERNMENT)

Mission is not only about what we do; it is about why we do it.

Theological discernment asks us to reflect together on the meaning and purpose of our engagement. It resists the temptation to assume that our motivations are self-evident or universally shared. Instead, it invites continued conversation — sometimes difficult conversation — about how we understand God’s work in the world and our place within it.

All have a stake in this discernment — it is participatory, not imposed. Multiple voices are needed and space is required. This takes time. It requires patience. This takes humility. But this work contributes to something that lasts. This is the work that allows a group to find deeper rhythm as the tune continues.

We may, for a season, do well with careful attention, strong relationships and thoughtful theological reflection, but mission remains dynamic. Circumstances change. New voices emerge. The Spirit moves in ways we do not anticipate. Faithful engagement requires a willingness to adjust — to change course when necessary or, to stay with our musical

metaphor, to delay our desire to “resolve the chord.”⁵

Jesus’ language of salt and light is instructive here. Both are good, even essential. But too much salt overwhelms. Too much light can blind. What is needed is not simply more intensity, but appropriate application. In mission, this means recognizing when our presence, even if well-intentioned, may need to be reimagined. In jazz, this is improvisation — not abandoning the theme but adapting to what is happening in the moment.

MUTUALITY AND DIGNITY (ETHIC)

At the heart of mission is a commitment to mutuality — this is more than collaboration. All participants bring gifts, insights and their agency must be allowed. A shared commitment to dignity embraces an exchange where people can disagree, change their minds and play their unique instrument.

This demands honesty. It honors the dignity of each person and community by taking their voice seriously — not as a courtesy, but as a necessity. I (Lucas) think we should consider “thick and thin” places, to borrow Michael Walzer’s words, to think about where overlapping commitments best converge.⁶ In musical terms, the goal here is to find moments of harmony, not uniformity.

OUTRO: LISTENING FOR THE SPIRIT⁷

We offer these notes not as a finished composition, but as an invitation.

Like jazz, we think mission is something we learn by doing — by listening, by responding and by playing alongside others. There will be moments of clarity and moments of dissonance. There will be times when the rhythm feels steady and times when it shifts unexpectedly. Through it all, the invitation remains the same: listen for the Spirit and contribute toward the present and future for which we hope.

If we can play these notes — attending to context, cultivating proximity, discerning together, remaining open, practicing mutuality and embodying humility — we believe something beautiful can emerge. Not perfect, not predictable, but faithful.

And, like a good piece of music, something that we could not have created alone. ✨

⁵ Ben wrote a blog post on using art in mission teaching and growing in awareness that there is even a chord to be resolved. Read it at www.umglobal.org/2015/09/ben-hartley-they-never-resolved-chord.html

⁶ Michael Walzer, *Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad*, (University Notre Dame Press).

⁷ “Outro” is a musical term that may not be familiar to everyone. It simply refers to the concluding section of a piece of music.



Reaching Out *in* Rural Contexts

Ways to Be Salt and Light

BY REV. SHANNON GREENE

*“As a church,
being salt and
light means
enhancing or
adding value to
the lives that
surround us.”*

Before I was appointed to Excelsior Springs and Camden, I didn’t have much experience serving in rural contexts. Over the past four years, I have learned that while rural communities present complex challenges, they also allow for unique opportunities to be salt and light. As a church, being salt and light means enhancing or adding value to the lives that surround us. It’s asking the question, “How can we benefit our community in Christ’s name?”

ADDRESS LOCAL HUNGER NEEDS

According to Feeding America, nine out of 10 counties with the highest food insecurity rates are in rural areas. First UMC in Excelsior Springs holds a Fifth Sunday Food Drive

whenever there are five Sundays in a month by inviting congregants to make an extra monetary donation toward our local food pantries. In Camden, we have discussed installing a Free Little Food Pantry where local folks can take what they need and leave what they can. People are hungry everywhere – but especially in rural areas that lack adequate transportation and access to healthy, affordable food. We can show Christ’s light by feeding our hungry neighbors.

TEAM UP WITH OTHER LOCAL CHURCHES

When you are a small church located in a rural context, it’s easy to feel isolated and alone in ministry. However, there are many ways you can team up with nearby churches to

address the needs in your community. First UMC in Excelsior Springs partners with another local church each September to host a Community Share Day. Together, we collect hygiene items, diapers and household goods not typically covered by food stamps and offer them for free to the community. Whatever is left over after the share day event is donated to local social service agencies. Even if we have theological disagreements with neighboring churches, we can all agree to follow Jesus' command to love others as we love ourselves. When we team up with other local churches, we make a bigger impact on our shared community as we collectively care for "the least of these" in Jesus' name.

ASSIST WITH YOUR COMMUNITY'S FAIRS AND FESTIVALS

Nearly every small town or rural community has annual gatherings and traditional celebrations: craft shows, county fairs, holiday parades, conferences and other festivals. For example, the City of Excelsior Springs holds WaterFest each June. Rather than hosting a booth for your church or simply attending as guests, ask the festival organizers how you can volunteer at the event. In my experience, they are often desperate for solid, reliable volunteers! Encourage church members to sign up as parking attendants, hospitality hosts, or on the set-up and clean-up teams. Even if your church is volunteering behind the scenes, you will bring value to the event as you serve your community.



First UMC in Excelsior Springs volunteered at the community's WaterFest event. They created a fun, safe and welcoming space through their service in the Kids Splash Zone.

GET INVOLVED WITH CAUSES THAT MATTER TO YOUR COMMUNITY

All rural communities have causes that are uniquely important to them. Maybe they are passionate about economic development or community health. Perhaps local organizations or initiatives are working to address safer roads and cleaner parks. These are great opportunities to jump in and get connected with other community-oriented individuals. In Excelsior Springs, I serve on the board of SAFE Excelsior Springs, our local substance abuse prevention program. This coalition brings together leaders from across the community to address youth mental health and lower risk factors that may lead teens to smoke, drink or do drugs. Similarly, I've participated in events led by Thrive Excelsior, a community coalition committed to increasing life expectancy and quality of life. Is there a similar initiative in your

context? How can you connect with others who are also seeking to bring value to your community?

PARTNER WITH YOUR LOCAL SCHOOLS

One of the beautiful things about our country's public education system is that every small town or rural community has a connection with a local school. Partnering with your school district is a great way to act as salt and light in your area. Last year one of our adult Sunday school classes took up a collection to pay off school lunch debts for our local middle and high school. Additionally, with help from the district social worker, we "adopted" two local families and purchased Christmas gifts from their wish lists. Schools often need volunteers to serve as tutors, classroom helpers, mentors or lunchroom aides. Rather than "reinventing the wheel" by creating new ways to connect with your community, tap into the needs already present within your local schools. ✨



Rev. Jennifer Adams, pastor of Lafayette Park UMC, has served the church since 2025 and is the 2026 winner of the Missouri Conference Unity Award.

PHOTO BY CAT SULLIVAN



Salt and Light WITNESS

Lafayette Park's Ministry of Justice and Inclusion

BY CAT SULLIVAN

“

They [the church] fought decades for me and people like me to be able to participate in this way, so it's sort of the fruition of seasons of justice work that they've run.

– **Rev. Jennifer Adams,**
Pastor at Lafayette Park UMC

On a Wednesday morning at Lafayette Park UMC, the building buzzes with excited energy.

There are people working in the gardens, setting up the resale boutique and making care packages for those in need. Joyous laughter fills the space, and that joy is supplied by Rev. Jennifer Adams, although she would say it's the Holy Spirit.

Congregants and church staff alike describe Adams as someone whose kindness, compassion and joy create a space where everyone feels welcome and loved.

“You would, I believe, be instantly

struck by her magnanimous personality, her joy and her willingness to help,” Lafayette Park Member Ann Mehan says. “She’s always looking for ways to enrich our community, and she’s a lovely, beautiful person with a wonderful sense of humor.”

Lafayette Park Secretary Maria Lawrence looks forward to seeing Adams at work each day.

“Her joy and enthusiasm are contagious,” she says. “So, you look forward to coming in, you look forward to attending service, but I look forward to coming in and just us working together.”



Lafayette Park UMC extends its radical hospitality and inclusivity both on Sunday mornings and throughout the week beyond the church walls.

Adams' endless compassion for all of God's people is just one of the reasons that she is the 2026 recipient of the Missouri Conference Unity Award. The Unity Award celebrates the spirit and work of an individual in line with the values of the Conference, with particular emphasis on inclusiveness, justice and worth. Adams' ministry demonstrates what it means to be salt and light to the community.

With 20-plus years of work in not-for-profit development, Adams' own ministry and life are marked by compassion, justice and faithful service and are a perfect match for the community-minded ministry of Lafayette Park.

Adams described her call to ministry as her own Jonah story.

"I had my own sort of Jonah story, you know, fleeing Tarshish, and I did that for about a decade. It was like the longest boat ride ever," Adams said.

After what Adams described as a decade of running, she found herself in Salem UMC in Ladue at The Connection site. It was there that Adams and her wife became part of a community that would love and accept them.

"My wife and I walked into the church, and we said, 'Are we welcome here?'" Rev. Katrina Drew was, at that time, the pastor of The Connection. She threw her arms open, and she said, "Oh my goodness, yes, absolutely."

Adams became very involved in the life of the church, and the voice of God began to call to her again.

“I got out into the community and started getting to know people, started getting to know some of the not-for-profits that were in the area that were doing work that aligned with the heart of the Lafayette Park people.”

— REV. JENNIFER ADAMS, *Pastor at Lafayette Park UMC*

One day, Drew pulled her aside and asked Adams if she had ever felt called into ministry.

“I started to cry, and said, ‘Yes, I’ve been running from it,’” Adams said. After taking time to pray about it, Adams decided to enroll in seminary.

“I quickly realized that I was not allowed to participate in that way yet,” Adams said. “I stepped out, in faith, just believing that we would get this right and that I wanted to be a part of it. I wasn’t going to leave the

denomination I love, and here I am today.”

During Adams’ final semester of seminary, the 2024 United Methodist Church General Conference voted to remove the 40-year-old ban on the ordination of LGBTQIA+ clergy, meaning that Adams was able to become a certified candidate.

“When I heard the decision, I burst into tears, and I immediately took a picture of myself,” Adams said. “I was overwhelmed with joy. I knew that it

was going to happen because I believed God for it, but I just ... you just don’t know right until it happens.”

Adams was commissioned as a Provisional Elder at the 2026 Missouri Annual Conference Session, a moment that was incredibly special to her and to the congregation at Lafayette Park.

“This commissioning, there’s been a lot of tears, because they [the church] fought decades for me and people like me to be able to participate in this



New Beginnings, a 14-year-old ministry of Lafayette Park UMC, provides household items and starter baskets for displaced neighbors receiving housing.

way, so it's sort of the fruition of seasons of justice work that they've run," Adams says.

When Adams was appointed to Lafayette Park on July 1, 2025, she wanted to lean into the long history of social justice work that the church prides itself on.

"I got out into the community and started getting to know people, started getting to know some of the not-for-profits that were in the area that were doing work that aligned with the heart of the Lafayette Park people."

One of the organizations that Adams became connected with is inExcelsis, a faith-based, volunteer-powered organization serving unhoused people in the St. Louis metropolitan area. The organization offers community fellowship, meals, clothing, a mobile shower unit, emergency winter shelter, bus passes and discipleship with only one qualification for guests: Need.

"She just sustained me and took my hand at my darkest time when I lost my husband, and she's continued to be there for me."

— CAROL ADCOCK



Rev. Jennifer Adams' own ministry and life are marked by compassion, justice and faithful service.

Lafayette Park became connected with inExcelsis through its volunteer Public Relations and Communications Manager Nancy Mack, who is a member of the church.

"Knowing that Lafayette Park is in favor of social justice, I reached out to Pastor Jen and told her everything I knew about inExcelsis," Mack says. "I asked if Lafayette Park would become a partner and help support inExcelsis."

Youth from Lafayette Park volunteer by organizing the clothes in the inExcelsis boutique, serving meals and visiting with guests, paying particular attention to and using their names.

"At inExcelsis, we focus on relationship-building and the dignity of every guest," Mack added.

Providing and serving lunches at Saturday Community Fellowship is on the horizon.

Lafayette Park's partnership with inExcelsis also extends to a ministry within the church that assists the unhoused.

New Beginnings is a ministry that provides furniture and household items for families and individuals who have been unhoused, on the streets, incarcerated, living in someone's basement or in a shelter. Referrals come from behavioral health agencies or inExcelsis. Lafayette Park Member Ann Mehan has been a volunteer at New Beginnings for 10 years and works the help desk on Tuesdays.



A community-centered mindset and a focus on social justice are central to Lafayette Park UMC's identity.

“The process is that the help desk takes orders throughout the week,” Mehan says. “We fill the orders on Wednesdays, and then when it's time to deliver the orders, the men will go to the warehouse, load the furniture in the truck, come by and get the household goods at Lafayette Park, and then make the deliveries.”

Beyond connecting with the community, Adams also provides pastoral care to her congregants, something she has been doing even before she was appointed at Lafayette Park.

Carol Adcock first met Adams on the phone while Adams was working at Salem UMC in Ladue.

“She just sustained me and took my

hand at my darkest time when I lost my husband, and she's continued to be there for me,” Adcock says.

Adcock now attends Lafayette Park and still attends Bible study and events at Salem. She sees Lafayette Park as a perfect match for Adams.

“Knowing Jen, it's just a perfect match for her – her outreach to people, her compassion, her nonprofit background, helping others through philanthropic work is just a perfect and ideal match between Jen and, what the church stands for, helping the people.” ✨

Learn More

Scan the QR code to learn more about Lafayette Park's New Beginnings ministry.





A Partnership That *Transforms* Lives

Missouri and Mozambique Celebrate 40 Years of Shared Ministry

BY ROQUE FACELA AND CAT SULLIVAN



This anniversary invites us to remember where we have been and to look with hope toward what God will continue to do through MI.

– **Rev. Dr. Lucas Endicott,**
U.S.-Based MI Representative

Forty years is a long time to do anything – let alone grow and sustain a cross-cultural, cross-continental ministry partnership.

Since 1986, the Missouri Conference has partnered with the United Methodist Conferences in Mozambique. Now known as the Mozambique Initiative, the relationship, like any time-tested one, has grown, changed and weathered challenges over 40 years. Along the way, countless lives have been changed by access to clean water, health, education and sustainability ministries offered by the partnership.

“The impact of these initiatives is incalculable as they benefit the entire community, from children to adults,

transforming lives and promoting dignity,” Mozambique Bishop Emeritus Joaquina Nhanala said. “The human touch and access to clean water are experiences that cannot be measured.”

The partnership began as a combined effort between Bishop W.T. Handy in Missouri and Bishop Almeida Penicela in Mozambique, with special assistance from Rev. Larry Williams. The Initiative as we know it today began in 1999 as a model that Rev. Dr. Ken Lutgen and United Methodist missionary Carol Kreamer created. Kreamer was the first coordinator of the Mozambique Initiative for the Missouri Conference. She went on to serve in that role for 13 years.

The consultative model Kreamer



Through the Gondola Training Center, MI has supported training for income-generating agricultural projects. Participants return to their communities and implement their new skills.

developed is a relationship-based mission approach in which Missouri and Mozambican United Methodists engage in ongoing dialogue and long-term partnerships.

“The consultations help people understand and learn from each other,” Kreamer said.

Bishop Nhanala says the Initiative fosters a strong connection, both during visits to Missouri and when welcoming missionary teams in

Mozambique. The partnership has always gone far beyond financial support for communities and is marked by a deep spirit of friendship and solidarity.

As the conferences got to know one another, access to clean water quickly became a primary focus as partners learned people were dying of cholera. Kreamer called clean water well dedications “life changing, especially for women and girls,” noting that

nearby wells allow girls to attend school instead of spending hours fetching water.

Ezequiel Nhantumbo, MI representative in Mozambique since 2002, said that the Initiative’s growth reflected the growth of The United Methodist Church itself in Mozambique. The partnership has translated into concrete community development focused on the survival and dignity of rural populations.

Access to clean drinking water, through the installation of 208 hand-pump water systems and 115 solar-powered water towers, has saved lives, reduced diseases in rural areas and contributed to the evangelization of hundreds of people.

Dr. Sarah Bollinger, associate director of the Mozambique Initiative from 2012 to 2015, recalled traveling to remote villages where MI helped drill wells and support malnourished children.

“I held little dying babies who had a chance for clean water again,”

Bollinger said, noting that the work’s impact “still moves me to tears.”

Under her leadership MI underwent a major revisioning process, identifying new focus areas in health, education and sustainability. She said the Initiative experienced significant



The 40-year partnership provides both funds for life-changing projects, like solar-powered clean water wells, and cross-cultural relationships.

“A cornerstone and the foundation for growth, walking side-by-side as partners in excellence.”

– EZEQUIEL NHANTUMBO, MI Representative in Mozambique

growth during that time, supported by strong partners and generous donors.

“I get to be part of an amazing legacy and a great history,” Bollinger said. “The MI has helped people live out values of justice and peace and care for the most marginalized, and I am honored to be part of that.”

Alongside the clean water work, the Mozambique Initiative’s foundation is long-term, church-to-church partnerships that connect Missouri congregations with a parish in Mozambique. Those relationships included mutual prayer, regular correspondence and a yearly financial commitment that helped support pastors, congregations and community projects.

“There were 139 parishes in Mozambique, and they became fully subscribed, meaning there was a partner for every parish in Mozambique,” Kreamer said, calling it “a giant step.”

The focus on relationships shaped the work of Rev. Craig Stevenson, Missouri-based MI representative from 2015 to 2017. Stevenson said he saw the Initiative as the relational component of Missouri’s missional connection, which made the revitalization of church-to-church partnerships especially important. He spent much of his time in local congregations.

“At least 25 Sundays a year I was out in the churches sharing the work that we were doing as a Conference and inviting them as a local church into the ministry even more,” Stevenson said.

For Stevenson, that meant paying close attention to the ties between Missouri churches and their sister churches in Mozambique. Before traveling, he contacted Missouri congregations to ask whether they wanted to send a small gift or greeting to their partner pastor. After returning, he brought small tokens back from Mozambique, tangible reminders that the partnership was mutual and personal.

The emphasis on relationship has impact. Rev. Chris Abel, senior pastor at First UMC in Blue Springs, said the congregation’s Christmas Eve offering became a way to reconnect with the Mozambique partnership. When Abel arrived in 2019, the church had already given away its Christmas Eve offering for a few years, but the practice had not yet captured the hearts of many members. Church leaders began looking for a way to help the congregation see the offering not as a one-night collection but as part of a deeper story.

The church revisited memories from members who had traveled to Mozambique and shared their stories with the congregation. The response

was immediate, and the Christmas Eve offering more than doubled.

Abel said the practice has helped the church grow in generosity, not only toward Mozambique but toward the broader mission of the Church.

“I think people are more generous because of it,” Abel said. “Generosity begets generosity.”

Over time the congregation has supported a wide range of projects including clean water wells, mobile clinics, agricultural initiatives, solar panels and textbooks. Their giving has increased from \$36,000 in 2019 to \$110,000 in 2025, reflecting both deepening commitment and expanding impact. This consistent support has strengthened communities across Mozambique and continues to play a significant role in MI’s ministry.

Nhantumbo recognized the profound bonds of mutual sharing and thanked the people of Missouri and Mozambique for their trust, collaboration and shared growth.

“A cornerstone and the foundation for growth, walking side-by-side as partners in excellence,” Nhantumbo said.

Stevenson describes the Initiative’s heart as “the relational component,” helping churches understand that even from 8,000 miles away, “because of the connectational nature of our



Mutual cultural exchange has been a cornerstone of the Mozambique Initiative. Leaders and teams from Mozambique travel to the U.S. to share preaching, music and testimonies.

church, we are one,” Stevenson said.

Over 40 years, numerous teams from Missouri have traveled to Mozambique and vice versa to share in fellowship and collaboration.

“We witnessed an elevated sense of hospitality and togetherness with our brothers and sisters from the Missouri Conference,” says Armino Mapoissa, the missions coordinator who has journeyed with teams of volunteers visiting Mozambique.

Mapoissa emphasized that the inclusion of pastors in the visiting teams helps communities understand that we are a connectional church.

“The same gospel that is preached in the U.S. is also preached in Mozambique,” he says.

Bishop João Sambo, resident bishop of the Mozambique-South Africa-Eswatini-Madagascar Episcopal Area,

highlighted that the partnership has had a transformative and beneficial impact, both direct and indirect, on the lives of millions of Mozambicans through the empowerment of clergy, who have received academic training, bachelor’s and master’s degrees, and now hold leadership positions both within and outside the Church.

“Pastoral families now have financial support and decent housing, with access to clean water from 24-hour solar power towers, including improved infrastructures and the construction and dedication of new chapels, health clinics and parsonages,” Bishop Sambo said.

As MI celebrates 40 years of ministry, Rev. Dr. Lucas Endicott, the U.S. MI representative since 2017, affirms that the impact of this partnership is seen in the lives changed and the communities strengthened across Mozambique.

“Leaders and partners continue to name gratitude for the legacy that has been built and the work that still lies ahead,” Endicott said. “This anniversary invites us to remember where we have been and to look with hope toward what God will continue to do through MI.”

Bishop Sambo agrees.

“The Mozambique Initiative is indeed a plan of God, which, in a few words, I interpret with gratitude for those first people who launched it, based on the scriptures in Philippians 1:6. A good work has indeed been begun, and what we must do is complete it until Christ comes.” ✨

Learn More



Scan the QR code to donate to the Mozambique Initiative

Being Light *and* Offering Peace

Why We Plant Churches • BY REV. AARON CARTER

On a walk to my neighborhood Walgreens, I noticed something interesting: The Baptists, World Evangelicals and Apostolics all had churches within a 330-foot span. They are literal neighbors. As I stopped to stare, I wondered what made them different from one another. In my online search I found orthodoxy or right belief as the markers of uniqueness. This is not uncommon. Different interpretations of Christendom are why the religion has over 40,000 denominations. While these are important matters, especially to people in the church, I can't help but consider people outside the church.

Do the unchurched, non-religious, non-Christians or seekers see any differences among the sea of churches around them? From my experience, and while not always fair, lots of unchurched people differentiate churches based on how they show up in public. These folks are concerned first with orthopraxy or right practice. When they see the church making a difference in the lives of the least in the community, word gets out that the church is different. While they may not know how this church's beliefs differ from the one down the street, they do know its beliefs inspire action for the common good.

Is there anyone outside these congregations who can name a difference they are making or striving to make in the community? As I continued my walk

home, this is what I was thinking. Then I asked myself if anyone outside Peacemakers Church could do the same.

At the beginning of the plant, our team focused on creating a safe place where people could acknowledge their restlessness, receive Jesus' peace and become peacemakers. Yet, just because you make a place for people and invite them to come doesn't mean they will immediately flood in to fill it.

Admittedly, I've had some dark nights of the soul thinking about attendance for the church we are forming. Some Sundays my disappointment in the turnout had me questioning God when the order of worship read 'Worship God.' I wrestled with myself, too. What in the world am I doing? Why do I feel like something is missing, other than people in seats? I was lost. Then some light came in the form of missional clarity: The vision isn't only to form Peacemakers the church; more importantly, it's to be peacemakers.

What makes Peacemakers a different kind of plant is our new emphasis on making peace through Worship in Action. This means we set up in the community two Sundays a month to spread love and relief. Jesus teaches his followers how public worship can happen when he says, "... let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." When we go where people are



*Rev. Aaron Carter,
Peacemakers Church*

to introduce ourselves as the church, have conversations, share good news, offer relevant services and pray, we are sharing light for people to see that they are loved by God and us.

During our first Worship in Action at a local laundromat, Rahkeem, who is part of the managing staff, told me he decided to stick around after his shift because he was enjoying the "vibe" of what we were doing. I believe he, like our team, was feeling the palpable gratitude from experiencing the grace of God at work in community. For Peacemakers, this is a form of worship.

Ultimately, as a church we desire for people to experience the peace of knowing God and knowing God's kingdom is close to where they are. This is why we are not only worshiping in a building; we are also worshiping in the community. We're not only inviting people to come get peace; we are also following Jesus to places and to people to make peace. ✨



CHURCH *and* POLITICS

Loving Your Neighbor at the Ballot Box

BY LAUREN MIERS

“

*No one lights a candle and
hides it, and so we have
to be active.*

– **Rev. Dr. Emanuel Cleaver III,**
*Senior Pastor of St. James UMC
in Kansas City*

Judge Jon Gray has held many jobs, both paid and unpaid, but his time as an election board attorney sticks with him. Part of the role involved participating in election recounts, where all the actual cast ballots are reviewed.

“Too many times I saw that people would vote for candidates, get to the issues and the propositions and the questions, and just not vote at all,” he says. “In a low turnout election, it’s

the equivalent of a no vote.”

Now, Gray, a member at Centennial UMC in Kansas City, is spending his spare time educating the community on the measures that will be on this fall’s ballot – four in August and three in November.

“I’ve had more than one conversation that started with, ‘Well, I don’t mess with politics.’ And my comeback has always been, ‘Well, politics sure does mess with you,’” Gray says.



Men from St. James UMC took to the streets at a Juneteenth festival to encourage other Black men to vote. Voter turnout in historically Black precincts has been low in recent elections.

We know the Church isn't supposed to mess with politics, per se. But what about civic engagement, voter engagement and justice issues? The United Methodist Social Principles remind us that involvement in political systems is rooted in the Gospel imperative to love our neighbors, to do justice and to care for the vulnerable. This love in action requires political action and engagement for the betterment of society and the common good.

"John Wesley talks about social holiness, so it's important for us to reach beyond the walls and do more," says Rev. Dr. Emanuel Cleaver III, senior pastor of St. James UMC in Kansas City. "Justice isn't political. Fairness isn't political. Equality is not political. Those things are spiritual, but there are political implications. I believe if the Church, those who follow Jesus, who preach justice, who preach compassion, if we are not engaged, then who will be?"

Cleaver and men from St. James UMC spent Juneteenth weekend spreading the word about voting at 18th and Vine. In addition to registering voters at their booth, the group's purpose was to educate other men on why voting is important. The men prepared and studied, so they could easily articulate their personal why.

Cleaver says data shows that Black men could change the tide of elections – if they turned out to vote. In recent Missouri elections, 60,000



Registering and educating voters is one way United Methodists care for their communities.

registered voters in historically Black precincts didn't turn out. The church is using its influence and reputation as a civically engaged congregation to do something about it.

"Even though Americans aren't going to church and aren't as religious as they used to be, I think there's still a

respect for those religious institutions that have remained faithful to the core principles that Jesus taught," Cleaver says.

Persistence and presence, especially in times of tension, cemented St. James as a church for the community. For many decades church leaders

have spoken up and held space for community conversation on charged topics. To Cleaver, the community reputation has been the fruit.

Cleaver recounts one forum St. James held after police shot a Black man. The forum focused on what to do if you're pulled over when you're Black and included local officials and the police chief. After the forum, Missouri's governor appointed Cleaver as the only non-police officer to serve on the Peace Officer Standard Training Commission. The group accredits police academies and, during Cleaver's involvement, established the very first police academy at an HBCU at Lincoln University.

"I've had more than one conversation that started with, 'Well, I don't mess with politics.' And my comeback has always been, 'Well, politics sure does mess with you.'"

— JUDGE JON GRAY,
Member of Centennial UMC in Kansas City



The United Methodist Social Principles remind us that love in action requires political action and engagement for the betterment of society and the common good.

“No one lights a candle and hides it, and so we have to be active,” Cleaver says. “We have to be seen, and a big part of that is the Church is going to have to come outside the building.”

In Florissant, Missouri, a voter registration team from St. Andrew UMC has taken to the streets to both spread awareness and positivity. Initiated by senior pastor Rev. Jacqueline McCall, registering voters is a new endeavor for the church, but leaders see it as a way to spread hope with real impact.

The volunteer team, led by retired elder Rev. Londia Granger Wright, pops up a voter registration station with yard signs that say, “Register to

Vote Here – Five Minutes.” Church members wave flags and smile to encourage drivers to stop.

Wright says that being salt and light means we are seasoned to spread compassion and illuminated to shine hope into communities and systems. Voter registration drives can be a Christian response to injustice.

Yet, registering voters is just one piece of the puzzle. Educating and encouraging voters to go vote is just as important.

REV – Register people, Educate them on the issues and get out to Vote – is an initiative of New Horizons UMC in St. Louis that includes the multi-step process as part of its name. Both

REV and the St. Andrew team encourage voters to make a commitment to vote. REV aims to collect pledge cards to help voters formulate their plan. St. Andrew hands out stickers that say, “I will vote.”

“The problem is that a lot of people think that, because of the political environment, it doesn't do any good to vote,” New Horizons Pastor Ivan James III says. “What we're trying to get people to understand is that because of this political environment, they need to get out and vote. And when they don't vote, they are voting for what they don't want.”

James is no stranger to voting rights work. Many years ago, he and

“The problem is that a lot of people think that, because of the political environment, it doesn't do any good to vote. What we're trying to get people to understand is that because of this political environment, they need to get out and vote.”

– IVAN JAMES III, Pastor of New Horizons

Representative Emanuel Cleaver II were involved with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the organization that John Lewis, Ralph Abernathy, Joe Lowery and others came out of. James says he met many

of those individuals and was in awe of them. Civic engagement became his passion. He pursued it even as he moved across the country for work, raised a family and answered a call to ministry as a lay pastor. Now,

modern attacks on the voting rights of all people, but especially poor people, have James organizing for the big midterm election in November – not for his own sake but for the sake of the community

“How can we be faithful to the mission of our church if we're not concerned about our community? How can we go out and make disciples in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit if we aren't concerned about the community?” he says. “For ages, the Church has been the center part of the community.”

James recognizes the power and influence the Church has in people's lives. Millions of people call themselves Christians and attend worship weekly. That reach and influence is its cultural power. It's time for Christians to encourage one another to engage in the democratic process.

“I have no desire to be an elected official,” Gray says. “I do have the willingness to help guide elected officials and hold them accountable, and to the extent that I need to, to hold myself accountable for participating and trying to do what I can do to make this living situation better for more than just me.” ✨



St. Andrew UMC members share smiles and the opportunity for civic engagement.

PHOTO SUBMITTED BY REV. LONDIA GRANGER WRIGHT

Engaging in Advocacy

Three Questions for Churches to Consider

Understand Lobbying vs. Electioneering

Lobbying involves supporting or opposing legislation, such as ballot measures and initiative petitions – of which Missouri has many this fall. Electioneering means working for or against a candidate running for office. It's what we might refer to as campaigning. Churches can lobby. Churches cannot electioneer.

Ask: Is my church campaigning for a candidate or raising awareness of an issue?

Understand Non-Partisanship

The Johnson Amendment, a portion of the U.S. tax code pertaining to 501(c)(3) organizations, prohibits nonprofits, including churches, from participating in a political campaign of a candidate for public office. Churches cannot contribute financially to political campaigns or endorse candidates in any way.

Related, any voter engagement activities must be non-partisan, meaning they don't favor one party or another. Examples of non-partisan voter engagement include:

- Voter registration drives where anyone of any party can get registered to vote
- Get out the vote efforts that remind voters of any party of elections and ensure they have a voting plan
- Candidate forums that highlight all parties in the race and ask the same questions to all candidates instead of pointed, biased questions



Ask: Are my church's efforts favoring a specific candidate or party?

Understand Personal vs. Professional

Church leaders, including the pastor, can support or oppose candidates in their personal capacity. Though, for pastors, this can be tricky territory. Especially in smaller communities, the pastor's personal and professional persona are closely knit. Pastors should proceed with caution, exercise judgement and be clear when they're acting in their personal capacity. Anyone that lists their name online as "Pastor X" or "Rev. Y" should probably refrain from posting in support of or against a candidate or party.

For example, the pastor sharing their opinions about a candidate on their personal Facebook page and expressly stating it's their personal opinion, not that

of the church, is O.K. by IRS standards, though from a pastoral perspective we might urge you to think twice. It would not be O.K. for the pastor to share their personal opinions of a candidate on the church Facebook page or for the church to share the pastor's personal post to the church's Facebook page.

Ask: Am I acting in my personal or professional capacity? Have I been clear which hat I'm wearing when I'm sharing my opinion? *

From *Let's Get Political: How Religious and Charitable Nonprofits Can Engage in Advocacy (And How They Can't)* by Husch Blackwell.

Learn More



Get access to the webinar recording by scanning the QR code.



PHOTOS BY KRISTEN BLACKSHER AND SCOTT SCHAEFER



Called to Shine

Women's Leadership and the Witness of the Church

BY REV. KIM JENNE



God's call is not limited by gender. The Holy Spirit still calls, equips and sends all who are willing to serve.

Jesus tells the disciples in Matthew 5 that they are called to be salt and light. Salt preserves what might otherwise be lost. Light reveals what others would prefer remain hidden. Both are quiet, but essential, forms of witness.

The Church has often needed both when it comes to women's leadership. Long before the Church formally made room for women's authority, women were already shaping the Church.

They preached. They taught. They organized communities of faith. They carried the Gospel into places where few expected or wanted to hear it from a woman. From the earliest days of the Methodist movement, women

like Sarah Crosby and Mary Bosanquet Fletcher stepped into spaces where many believed they did not belong. In 1771, Fletcher wrote directly to John Wesley, trying to describe something the Church was struggling to understand:

"I do not believe every woman is called to speak publicly, no more than every man to be a Methodist preacher, yet some have an extraordinary call to it, and woe be to them if they obey it not."

That language of "extraordinary call" helped shape Wesley's willingness to formally license women to preach.

Yet progress in the Church rarely moves in a straight line. The openness Wesley showed did not



1771

Mary Bosanquet Fletcher



1817

Jarena Lee



1827

Sojourner Truth



1940

Olive Fay

*“Women’s
leadership is not
an innovation.
It is part of the
Church’s earliest
memory.”*

survive beyond his lifetime. Even so, women continued answering God’s call anyway. Across Methodism, women preached, taught, nurtured communities of faith and widened the path for those who would come after them, even when ordination and full clergy rights remained out of reach.

Then came 1956. Nearly 200 years after Mary Fletcher wrote to Wesley, the Methodist Church finally granted women full clergy rights. Maud Keister Jensen became the first woman to receive them. But that decision did not create women’s calling. It simply recognized what women had already been doing for generations.

Still, policy often changes faster than culture. A vote at General Conference does not automatically reshape assumptions that have been carried for generations. This means every generation of the Church must return to this conversation again – not because the answer changes, but because the Church forgets.

In the decades since, women have served at every level of church leadership: as pastors, district

superintendents, connectional leaders and bishops. Here in Missouri, clergy like Marie Hyatt, Mary Ellen Meyer, Brenda West, Michele Sue Williams and Bishop Ann Sherer-Simpson helped widen the path for future generations of clergywomen. Their witness reminds us that God’s call is not limited by gender. The Holy Spirit still calls, equips and sends all who are willing to serve.

And yet, even nearly 70 years later, the work is not finished.

Earlier this spring I attended a conference where a historian made an observation I have not been able to shake. She suggested that denominations like ours, which believe we settled the question of women’s authority long ago, face a particular risk. Because we assume the question has been answered, we stop doing the work of empowerment. We stop naming the subtle ways women’s authority is still questioned, resisted or quietly undermined.

The reality is that the question is not settled everywhere. We still have churches that say they are “not ready”



1956

Rev. Maude Keister Jensen



1971

Rev. Marie Hyatt



1974

Rev. Mary Ellen Meyer



1992

Bishop Ann Sherer-Simpson

for a woman pastor. We still encounter assumptions that women belong in caregiving roles but not necessarily in visible authority. We still hear preferences voiced aloud for a familiar kind of leadership over the more gifted leader whose wisdom and experience may be exactly what a congregation needs.

And yet, for every resister or underminer, there are also allies: people who hold doors open, challenge assumptions and make room for gifted leaders to respond freely to God's call. Those allies are not just modern examples. I believe the Apostle Paul belongs among them.

Few biblical figures are quoted more often in conversations about women in ministry than Paul. A sentence from Corinthians. A line from Timothy. A handful of verses lifted from letters written to particular churches in moments of conflict and treated as timeless prohibitions.

But if we want to understand Paul's thinking about women in leadership, the most faithful place to begin is with the lived reality of his ministry. Romans 16 offers exactly that.

Paul closes his letter not with abstractions, but with names. Among them is Phoebe, who Paul commends as a minister of the Church and a benefactor to many, including Paul himself. He also greets women like Prisca, Mary, Tryphaena, Tryphosa and Persis, who he describes as those who "worked hard in the Lord." Most strikingly, Paul names Junia as "prominent among the apostles." Long before future generations debated women's authority, the early Church was already being shaped by women's leadership.

Sometimes we act as though women's leadership is a modern accommodation the Church gradually allowed. Paul's own witness reminds us otherwise. Women's leadership is not an innovation. It is part of the Church's earliest memory.

Perhaps this is part of what it means for the Church to be salt and light. Salt preserves truth that might otherwise erode with time. Light refuses to hide the gifts God has entrusted to the Body of Christ.

For 70 years, The United Methodist Church has affirmed what women

across generations already knew: The Holy Spirit does not distribute gifts according to gender. Yet recognition is not always the same thing as belonging. Credentialing is not always the same thing as trust.

The Church still has work to do. We still have work to do. To teach. To remember. To challenge assumptions. To become the kind of community where gifts are recognized, voices are heard and people are freed to become who God has already called them to be. Mary Fletcher understood that all along. She knew not every woman was called to preach. But she also knew some were. And she warned there is danger in silencing that which God has already called forth. ✨

Learn More

View a timeline of the women from Wesley's time to present that have influenced the UMC.



Explore resources for reaching your community through faith in action at moumethodist.org/resourcelibrary.



Salt and Light Teaching Series

This four-week journey through Matthew 5:13–16 and the Epistle of James centers on how God shapes our inner life (salt) and sends us out to shine through good works (light).



The UMC Social Principles: What They Are and Why They Matter

Learn how the Social Principles articulate the Church's moral witness and invite faithful engagement in the world. This video introduction shares theological roots, recent revisions and practical relevance.



Leading and Loving Like Jesus Training

Jesus said to follow him. But what does that look like in today's challenging world? In these videos, Rev. Dr. Emanuel Cleaver III and Rev. Robert Johnson teach on faith, activism and the love ethic of Jesus.



Love Unites Toolkit

A package of downloadable, print-on-demand graphics about the uniting power of love, called Love Unites. Print-ready files are available for download to produce yard signs, banners and T-shirts if your church would like to promote a message of love over hate.



Becoming Good Neighbors Course

Presented by the Missouri Conference Congregations in Action program, this five-chapter course uses data and lived experience to teach about migration and immigration in Missouri and shares community-based responses to newcomers.



The Beloved Community Teaching Series

Guided by scripture, the series explores the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s vision of the Beloved Community. This six-week learning series is designed to help groups learn what it takes to build the life Jesus promises, the Beloved Community.



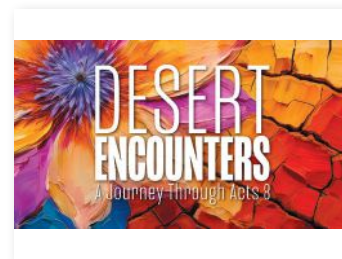
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John Wesley laid out three simple yet profound rules that became an ethical blueprint for faithful action in the world for Methodists all over the world. This three-week series explores those rules: Do No Harm, Do Good and Attend to the Ordinances of God.



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