



## CONNECTICUT DISTRICT NEWS

The Connecticut District Office of the United Methodist Church  
20 Broadfield Road, Hamden, CT 06517

December 2017 - January 2018

"In Connecticut, After God, We Put People First"

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Superintendent: Reverend Dr. Alpher Sylvester

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## "In Connecticut, After God, We Put People First"

*And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shall call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David:*

The words above are a promise made and a promise fulfilled. It too, is a promise we embrace and celebrate as our savior. Our mantra, "In Connecticut, After God, We put people first," mandates that we pause to celebrate our love for each other in this season but even more so, our love for Jesus. Oh how we do love our LORD Jesus Christ!

Grace and Peace be unto you from God our father and our Lord Jesus Christ!

My family and I are about to celebrate our first Christmas in this district. Our blessing so far, is the wonderful people that God has privileged us to meet and the opportunity to experience your hospitality and love. We celebrate this advent season and rejoice in a year gone by, so quickly! We are thankful for life and God's blessings. How good God has been to us as a district, our individual churches and to our families.

Christmas Message from District Superintendent continued.....

As District Superintendent, I call forth the blessing of God upon your hands and all your past efforts. I decree that God will expand your borders and assure that 2018 far exceed your expectations. May you have success on your jobs and in you neighborhoods; may peace and happiness pursue and overtake you and your families, always and in all things!

We celebrate a shared vision of a glorious future for our community.

A BLESSED CHRISTMAS & HAPPY NEW YEAR

2018

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## DISTRICT OFFICE CHANGES

The New York Annual Conference has made changes to the position of Administrative Assistant for all 6 Districts. There is now one full-time Administrative Assistant who will cover two Districts. All Administrative Assistants will be working from the Conference Center. Please be sure to welcome **Ashley Davis** who is our District's new Administrative Assistant.

What does that mean for contacting the District Office?

**Phone calls:** The District office phone number will remain the same as all calls are now being switched to White Plains and Ashley.

**E-mail:** CT District's e-mail will also remain the same.

**Mail:** District Superintendent Alpher Sylvester has requested that all mail continue to be sent to him at 20 Broadfield Road, Hamden, CT 06517

**Newsletter:** There will be a new Editor and probably a new look. Check it out in February.

After 35 years of being the District Administrative Assistant, Dorothy Chamberlain will be retiring as of December 31, 2017. We wish her well.

# CHRISTMAS TREES, ADVENT WREATHS, AND CRECHES

Ralph Lord Roy

Some historians claim that the celebration of Christmas really began in the 4th century. The early Christian Church in the decaying Roman Empire was attempting to win converts, many of whom were celebrating a festival in late December associated with the birthday of Sol Invictus, the sun god. It was timed to coincide with the winter solstice, when the sun would start its return journey south and daylight would begin to lengthen.

With the holiday gradually came the evergreen tree, revered particularly in northern Europe, widely regarded as a symbol of everlasting life. Often it was decorated to add to the festive nature of Christ's birth, at first with apples and other fruit, then with garlands and tinsel, sometimes with candles eventually replaced by the colorful Christmas lights of today.

The Christmas tree may have been introduced to America by mercenary soldiers from Germany who served in the British army during colonial times. Several towns lay claim to the first Christmas tree in the United States, among them Windsor Locks, Conn., where a tradition says that a Hessian soldier, imprisoned at the Noden-Reed House, put up a tree in 1777. The custom rapidly became popular after an 1848 woodcut of Queen Victoria and the British royal family, around their Christmas Tree at Windsor Castle, was widely circulated here.

By the 20th century Christmas Trees were becoming commonplace in city parks and department stores, and since 1923 a special ceremony has accompanied the lighting of the National Christmas Tree on the South Lawn of the White House. A little controversy has developed. Some charge that it is a violation of the separation of church and state if a sectarian symbol is placed on public land. Lincoln Chafee, for example, former governor of Rhode Island, stated that "it is a Holiday Tree in the Capitol building in Providence but a Christmas Tree in our home." Menorahs in observance of the Jewish holiday of Hanukah are often erected alongside Christmas trees. A few atheists have demanded equal space to express their disbelief on some town greens. President Trump has assured the nation that he will end what some call "the war on Christmas" and that "we're going to be saying 'Merry Christmas' again!"

Christmas trees usually have a star or an angel at the top. Traditions vary some as to when they should be set up and taken down. Today many such trees are artificial - used year after year to save money, preserve forests, avoid shedding, and guard against fire.

Many churches sponsor 'giving trees' or 'mitten trees' to collect clothing, food or cash for the needy. Christmas Trees also have become popular. They were introduced in 1957 at a Lutheran Church in Virginia. Many Christian symbols, among them crosses, stars, anchors, and crowns, are handcrafted, usually from white and gold beads or gold braid and sequins, and placed on trees.

More and more congregations also are lighting an Advent Wreath as part of their preparation for Christmas. This, too, seems to be a contribution of the Lutherans. The Advent Wreath is a circular garland of evergreen branches with five candles, three purple or red and one pink or blue in the circle, representing the coming of Christ. Each Sunday of Advent one additional candle of these four is lighted. There are different traditions as to what each one signifies - hope, peace, love and joy or perhaps Bethlehem, Shepherds, Star and Wise Men, or some other combination. Often different families read the meaning of the ceremony as they light the candles. The larger white Christ Candle in the middle symbolizes Christ's birth and is saved

## **Christmas Trees, Advent Wreaths and Creches continued...**

for Christmas Eve and/or Christmas Day. Some also light an Advent Wreath in their homes.

One of the older Christmas traditions is the creche, also known as the nativity scene. The word creche is from the French word meaning manger. Many homes display small creches during this season.

Tradition attributes the creche to St. Francis of Assisi, the humble monk, who in 1223 was visiting the Italian town of Greccio in a wine-producing area overlooking a beautiful valley. He arrived near Christmas and decided to prepare a manger. After gathering some hay, he obtained an ox and a donkey to make the atmosphere as similar to that first Christmas in Bethlehem as possible.

The best source on this event is found in the "Life of St. Francis of Assisi" by St. Bonaventure. "This man of God," St. Bonaventure wrote, "stood before the manger, full of devotion and piety, bathed in tears and radiant with joy." After he chanted the Gospel, St. Francis "preached to the people about the nativity of the poor King...whom he called the Babe of Bethlehem." According to St. Bonaventure, "the hay of that manger, being preserved by the people, miraculously cured all diseases of cattle and many other pestilences."

This year the Knights of Columbus Museum in New Haven has 60 creches representing over 40 countries, on display since Nov. 18. Its tree exhibit opens on Dec. 2 - twenty-four trees decorated by students who attend Catholic schools in the area. The Museum invites visitors seven days a week from 10-5. Additional information is available by calling [203-865-0400](tel:203-865-0400).

Meriden has a unique situation. The City Creche sponsored annually by Meriden Catholic Women, once placed at City Hall, now is on the lawn of the First United Methodist Church directly across East Main St. - probably the only place in the world where a Catholic nativity scene is on a Protestant church lawn and a superb symbol of present-day ecumenism. Later, on Dec. 19, 21 and 24, the annual Living Creche presented by the Methodists will appear evenings on that same lawn.

In addition to all this, of course, nativity scenes appear in innumerable paintings, stained glass windows, illuminated manuscripts, and murals. The United States Postal Service has issued a series of stamps including paintings of Madonna and Child by famous artists. It also has produced stamps recognizing the holidays of a variety of other religions and cultures.

May Christmas, Hanukah, and joyous religious observances of all faiths promote peace, hope, goodwill, understanding, and sharing.

**Ralph Lord Roy of Southington is a retired United Methodist minister. Email: [ralphlroy@aol.com](mailto:ralphlroy@aol.com).**

**Nominate Students for the 2018 Session  
of the  
Shenandoah University Youth Theology Institute  
in Winchester Virginia!**

The Shenandoah University Youth Theology Institute (SUYTI) is a new program, funded in partnership with the Lilly Endowment, offered to Christian youth as a partnership between Shenandoah University, Wesley Theological Seminary, and the Virginia Annual Conference of the UMC. SUYTI is designed to educate and inspire young Christians to become more effective leaders in their local congregations through deep and thought-provoking experiences at the intersection of Christian faith and justice. Each day includes academic instruction, worship, intentional reflection, and afternoon immersive experiences guided by experienced faculty, staff, and university student mentors. SUYTI students will be exposed to different faith traditions and service opportunities in a diversity of settings: Shenandoah University's Winchester campus, its outdoor "Cool Spring" campus along the Shenandoah River, and Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington D.C. Our program is a two week immersive experience for 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th grade students and will be offered this year **July 15-28, 2018**. We have slots for 24 students per year. Upon completion of the institute (which includes a pre-institute assignment and a post-institute a self-determined justice project in their local faith community) students earn three undergraduate credits from Shenandoah University. For 2018 there is no cost passed on to student participants, excepting a \$50 registration fee and the cost of travel to and from Shenandoah University.

Pastors and Youth Leaders can nominate youth they think will benefit from this youth theology institute from [our website www.su.edu/youththeology](http://www.su.edu/youththeology)

Students can apply from [our website www.su.edu/youththeology](http://www.su.edu/youththeology)

The 2018 session of the SUYTI is now accepting nominations and applications.

# Come Holy Spirit, Come!

On Wednesday, October 26, a group of United Methodist pastors from the CT District of the NYAC met at the Waterbury UMC to join in pray for that church and it's shepherds. In the span of one hour this group bathed the pastor, congregation, building and grounds in powerful united intercessory prayer. This is an inspiring and powerful time where we can come together to strengthen one another and pray for an awakening in the Church as well as revival in the land. This was a great shot of inspiration right in the middle of the week and I am looking forward to this as a weekly opportunity to travel from church to church and pray with fellow clergy. Prayer time starts with 10 minutes of silent prayer followed by intercessory prayer on behalf of the local church and pastor as well as any other spiritual needs. We also will pray a circle around the church building and property. All pastors are encouraged to join us Wednesday's from 9:30-10:30AM.



I am planning to schedule some regional prayer gatherings around the District in the near future so keep on the lookout as these will be for all folks, laity and clergy!

Please set aside some time on Wednesdays between 9:30-10:30AM, wherever you are to pray with us for our churches, pastors, our DS, cabinet and bishop!

Chris Yount

Pastor New Life UMC, New Fairfield CT

[wakeuppc@gmail.com](mailto:wakeuppc@gmail.com) 203-746-3725

12-20-17	Hamden: Hamden Plains -- Paul Fleck
12-27-17	Fairfield: Grace -- KunSam Cho
1-3-18	Forestville: Asbury (Bristol GPS) -- Laura Galbraith
1-10-18	Trumbull: Nichols - David Piscatelli
1-17-18	Wallingford: First -- Steve Peiffer
1-24-18	Huntington -- Inkoo Chung
1-31-18	Litchfield -- Kathleen Reynolds
2-7-18	Meriden: South Trinity - John Blossom
2-14-18	Bridgeport: Golden Hill – Tisha Branch
2-21-18	New Milford – Alex Souto
2-28-18	OPEN
3-7-18	OPEN

## **JOIN US FOR A MULTI-CHURCH MISSION EVENT TO LORAIN COUNTY OHIO THIS SUMMER**

On Sat July 14-Sat July 21, we will transport a team of 20-40 participants, high school age and up, to this economically devastated suburb of Cleveland to help seniors and others with much needed home repairs and upgrades, like handicap ramps. While a work trip, this event will also emphasize personal Spiritual development with morning study, lunch devotions, and evening group worship. Participating churches must send at least one adult as team leadership for every group of youth. Total cost is \$700 per person, \$100 from each individual, \$50 from their church and the rest raised through support letters. There will be three required attendance meetings in the Spring, all at the Waterbury church.

I am available immediately to meet with churches, pastors, or youth leaders for information and planning purposes and a print ready bulletin insert is available by email as requested.

Rev David W Mantz  
Watertown UMC  
E-Mail: [pastordwm@optonline.net](mailto:pastordwm@optonline.net),  
Cell phone: (845) 546 - 4837

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### **Save the Date!**

## **Connecticut District Resource Days**

**Saturday, February 3, 2018 - 9:00 am –noon**

**Sunday, February 11, 2018 - 2:00 – 5:00 pm**

**Please plan to join us for a time of information, inspiration, and opportunities to connect with United Methodists from around our district. More details will be coming soon.**

**Do You Wanna See A Show?**  
**AMAZING GRACE**  
**January 20, 2018**  
**2 p.m.**  
**Shubert Theater in New Haven, CT**

Join the Connecticut District for a matinee performance of *Amazing Grace* on Saturday, January 20 at 2 p.m. at the Shubert Theater in New Haven. This sweeping musical--centering on the life of repentant former slave trader John Newton, the hymn's 18th century author-- tells the inspiring story of how the beloved song came to be.

The Connecticut District has reserved a block of discounted tickets for \$46 each. Please get your request for tickets into Paul Fleck by December 15 and money sent to him by December 20.

To reserve your seat(s): **please e-mail Paul at: [paul.fleck@nyac-umc.com](mailto:paul.fleck@nyac-umc.com)**

To pay for reservation: **please make out a check to:**  
**Connecticut District Council on Ministries**

**Please mail it to:**

**Rev. Paul Fleck**  
**Hamden Plains United Methodist Church**  
**15 Church Street, Hamden, CT 06514**

# AMONG OURSELVES

**Please keep in your prayers:**

The family of Rev. Al Miller who died November 17, 2017.

Barbara (Middletown) and David Marks. David has cancer and is undergoing chemotherapy treatment.

Carol (Southington) and Tom Downs. Tom has cancer and is undergoing chemotherapy treatment.

Laura Galbraith (Forestville) as she undergoes treatment for a medical condition.

Our Connecticut District pastors during the Advent Season.

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## RETIREES' LUNCHEON

### December 21, 2017

All retirees are invited to meet on December 21, 2017 at 11:30 a.m. for LUNCH at Denny's, 631 Queen St. (Route 10) in Southington, just off I-84, exit 32. We meet on the third Thursday of each month for LUNCH at 11:30 a.m.

It helps to know about how many to expect. Kindly contact Ralph Roy at [Ralphroy@aol.com](mailto:Ralphroy@aol.com) or call 860-620-1711 if convenient. If not, come anyway! Please come prepared to share information on any illness, bereavement or other circumstances that should engage the group's attention.

# DATES TO REMEMBER

## **BISHOP'S CONVOCATION**

January 9-11, 2018  
Villa Roma in Callicoon, NY

## **DISTRICT RESOURCE DAYS**

Saturday, February 3, 2018  
Sunday, February 11, 2018

## **ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

June 7-10, 2018  
Hofstra University

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*Merry Christmas  
and  
Happy New Year!*

## **CONNECTICUT DISTRICT IS ON FACEBOOK!**

**CHECK US OUT AT:  
nyacconnecticut district**

**DEADLINE FOR THE FEBRUARY DISTRICT NEWS  
IS JANUARY 20, 2018**