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Since the Autism Society spans an eight-county area, Rev. Kinney said this program has the potential to expand beyond the Upper New York Conference and into the New York Conference. Those involved with the program are trying to get other denominations involved as well.

"I'm hoping that we will be able to provide not just respite care, but the churches that are being trained will be able to open their doors to

people who are on the spectrum," Rev. Kinney said. "There are other portions of our population who cannot worship in the way that we worship because of being differently abled, but how do we help them grow in their discipleship and their understanding of God's grace, of God's love?"

Editor's Note: Read the full version of this article on the Conference website at <http://bit.ly/UNYrespite>.

In Brief

Holy Land tour with Bishop Webb scheduled for Jan. 2018

Join Bishop Mark J. Webb and his wife, Jodi Webb, on an 11-day trip (January 9-19, 2018) to the Holy Land through Educational Opportunities Tours. This journey will deepen your experience and bring to life the Scriptures. You will have the opportunity to explore Jericho and Qumran; Bethlehem; Caesarea, Mount Carmel, and Megiddo; The Galilee; Cana, Nazareth, Samaria, and Jacob's Well; Jerusalem; and Ein Karem, Nebi Samuel, Emmaus, and the Valley of Elah. Go to <http://bit.ly/UNYholyland2018> for more information, including the cost and ways to save.



Important dates for 2017

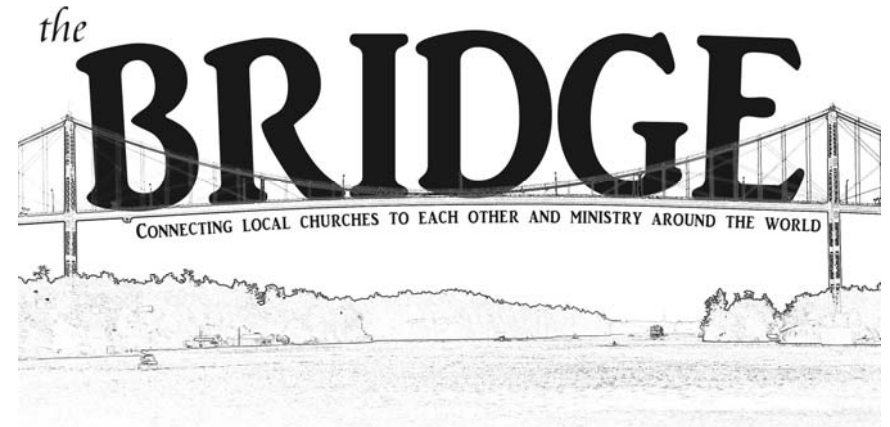
Mark your calendars now for these important 2017 dates and deadlines.

- Jan. 10: Final day to submit Ministry Shares
- Feb. 1: Deadline for individuals, churches, and unofficial bodies of UNY to submit petitions and resolutions
- March 1: Reports and action items from Conference teams due
- Early March: Annual Conference Registration opens
- Early April: Vol. I of the Journal is available
- June 1-3: Annual Conference

*The **Bridge** is a Conference Communications Ministry tool that delivers to local churches news and stories of ministry from around the Upper New York Conference and the world.*

www.unyumc.org

Learn about the ministry of Upper New York Conference staff with the Day in the Life blog at: <http://bit.ly/UNYdayinthelife>



The Upper New York Conference's vision is to live the gospel of Jesus Christ and to be God's love with our neighbors in all places.

A look inside!

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The four Sundays of Advent and their meaning

The season of Advent is celebrated over four Sundays in The United Methodist Church – this year, those Sundays are Nov. 27 and Dec. 4, 11, and 18. The season begins four Sundays before Christmas, ending at sundown on Christmas Eve. The end of Advent marks the beginning of the liturgical or church year for Christians.

During Advent, United Methodists prepare for and anticipate the coming of Christ.

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

To prepare for the coming of Christ, each Sunday of Advent has a distinctive theme. In addition to these themes, Discipleship Ministries has crafted a new approach to worship planning, and its Advent 2016 Worship Series has its own themes for each Sunday of Advent.

First Sunday

The United Methodist Book of Worship calls for the theme of the final return of Christ in victory and the Second Coming for the first Sunday of Advent. Discipleship Ministries marks the first Sunday of Advent with the theme “Watch,” as Advent begins with the call of Jesus to his disciples to stay on watch for the fulfillment of all things.

Second and third Sundays

The Book of Worship calls for the second and third Sundays of Advent to focus on John the Baptist’s role, words, and teachings. Discipleship Ministries’ theme for the second Sunday is “Turn.” As United Methodists become aware of the universe that Christ will bring about, they are invited to repent, to turn from their attachments to the powers of death and destruction of this age, and live out the Spirit-led mission of the coming reign of God. Under the new series, the third Sunday’s theme is “See” because once United Methodists have turned toward the fulfillment God in-



tends, they can begin to see the world and treat others in a new way.

Fourth Sunday

The Book of Worship’s theme for the fourth Sunday of Advent involves the events immediately preceding Jesus’ birth. Discipleship Ministries’ names the fourth Sunday’s theme “Dream.” As United Methodists begin to see God’s

way of compassion and mercy, they also come to acknowledge their reliance on God communicating with them and transforming them, not only in their conscious lives, but also in their sleeping, unconscious lives.

Editor’s Note: Information from this article comes from umc.org and umcdiscipleship.org.

Respite program for families with autistic children aims to foster community

By Kathleen Christiansen

The Autism Society of the Greater Capital Region recently received a \$5,000 seed grant from the New York State Caregiving & Respite Coalition to begin a respite program for families with autistic children. The society is currently working with United Methodist churches in the Albany area to get

the program up and running.

The Rev. Alan Kinney, pastor at the Eastern Parkway UMC in Schenectady and on the Autism Society’s board of directors; the Rev. Steven Smith, pastor at the Newtonville UMC; and Pastor Jonathan Walter, serving at the Stanford UMC in Schenectady, are among those helping to turn this vision for a

respite program into a reality.

“What we are looking to provide are for families who have family members who are on the autism spectrum an opportunity for some respite, a place where they could bring family members and know that they’re safe, know that they’re cared for, know that they’re enjoying themselves and provide a rest

for the family,” Rev. Kinney said.

“Autism can be draining for the family.”

The coalition approached Janine Kruiswijk, the Executive Director of the Autism Society, telling her they were interested in expanding the reach of voluntary, community-based respite programs.

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