

he had his small groups meeting on Zoom; and he sent a church update every Wednesday via email. But Pastor Hoyt has done so much more. Here are just a few of the creative ways that Pastor Hoyt engaged with his congregation, including metimeter clouds, videos of congregation members reciting their favorite bible verses, praised band videos, and online story time for children.

You can read the whole story about Pastor Hoyt by visiting <http://bit.ly/RevHoytBrown>.

Churches found creative ways to reach the homebound

First United Methodist Church of East Greenbush (FUMCEG) decided early on that a major target of their focus should be the elderly population, who were among those most adversely affected since the onset of the pandemic. Fortunately, their con-



gregation already had established long-standing relationships with several area facilities where many senior citizens reside.

Working independently from their own homes, their volunteers maintain contact with individuals who are otherwise feeling the burden of extreme isolation. Note cards are collected and delivered by mail to the nursing/rehab centers. Phone calls are made. Connections are kept! You can read the full story about East Green Greenbush's ministry with seniors by visiting http://bit.ly/EastGreenbush_senior_ministry.

Dismantling racism became imperative

In 2020, there was also a wave of high-profile incidents of racial violence that challenged us in new ways. The Black Lives Matter movement was reinvigorated after these incidents.

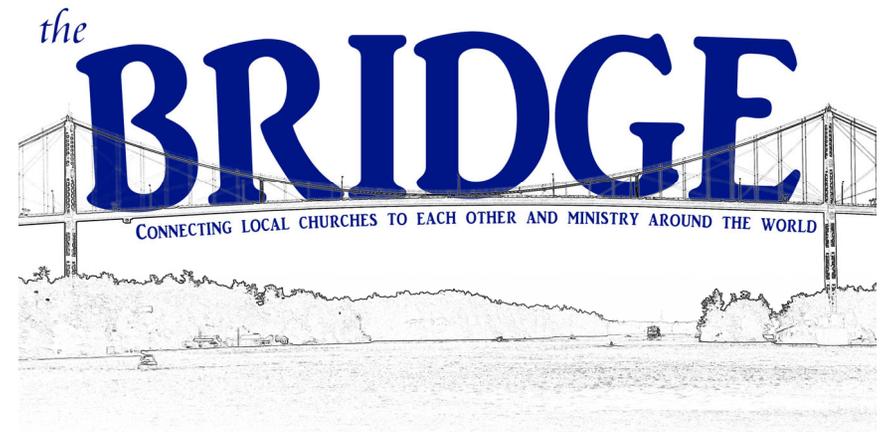
Upper New York alongside the United Methodist Church became very intentional in addressing the importance of addressing institutional racism every week in the *Weekly Digest* since June and published an *Advocate* issue devoted to dismantling racism in our churches, communities, and personal lives. You can read this issue by visiting <https://www.unyumc.org/news/advocate>.

What positives have you experienced in 2020? Share your stories by emailing news@unyumc.org.

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. For more news and stories visit:

www.unyumc.org

Human Relations Day is Jan. 17. Visit <http://bit.ly/UMCHumanRelations> to learn more.



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!

Some positive stories from 2020 in UNY and beyond

Page 2

Some positive stories from 2020 in UNY and beyond

Since March of 2020, the coronavirus pandemic changed our lives entirely, including the way we attend church and worship God. While the pandemic has had countless negative effects (deaths, job loss, missing in-person connections, and more), there have been some positives in Upper New York.

Chittenango UMC experienced many positives during the pandemic

Retired pastor, the Rev. John Fulton, took on a part-time appointment to become Chittenango's pastor eight years ago. He said, "It's weird to think that the pandemic impacted the church in a positive way, but it kind of did."

About 30 people filled the pews every Sunday for Rev. Fulton's services the past eight years. Forced to think creatively in March when the pandemic hit, Rev. Fulton closed his church doors and held services via Zoom. Prior to the pandemic, the church did not have any form of electronic communication.

The unexpected happened. The attendance more than doubled. Previous church members now living across the country from Virginia to Oregon, started attending Chittenango's Zoom services. And the giving was more generous than ever.

The Chittenango UMC congregation's generosity impacted many ministries in a positive way.

Each year the church contributes financially to Clear Path for Veterans and were able to give generously this year with a matching donation. The organization was so grateful that they named one of their recent dogs in their Dogs 2 Vets

program after the church with the name "Faith."

Dogs 2 Vets trains service dogs and connects them with veterans diagnosed with post-traumatic stress (PTS), traumatic brain injury (TBI), and/or military sexual trauma (MST). This evidence-based training has proven success in mitigating symptoms related to PTS and increasing self-compassion.

The church has continued to support two food pantries and recently filled two truck loads of nonperishable foods.

Church members recently asked Mary Rose Health Clinic in Oneida, NY (one of the only free health clinics in the area) what the church could do to help. Rev. Fulton said, "Many of the people that go to the clinic have to bring their small children with them because they do not have childcare. The clinic said they'd love to have books for the children to read in the waiting room."

The church has since donated books to the clinic for the children not only to read at the clinic, but also, for them to take home.

Rev. Fulton said, "Some of the books are Christian. Some are not. We put little stickers on them that say compliments of Mary Rose Health Clinic and Chittenango UMC."

Chittenango's church building needed significant repair. Rev. Fulton started the first capital fund campaign the church has had since 1987—they needed \$125,000 and ended up raising \$200,000.

When Rev. Fulton arrived at the church eight years ago, the church had-



n't been able to afford its paid Ministry Shares for years. He said, "For the past four or five years, we have paid our Ministry Shares in full and have been able to pay all of our bills." And this year, the offerings have been so tremendous that the church's Administrative Council voted to give \$500 to four different United Methodist churches in the area that needed help with their bills.

It has been a successful journey for Chittenango UMC over the past eight years. Rev. Fulton said, "We crawled from the basement and now we're out in the sunshine. We have paid all our bills and local church expenses. The pandemic hasn't hurt us and hasn't hampered our outreach and ministry."

Now that the church doors have reopened, there are about 20-30 people attending Rev. Fulton's services in-person and 50 or more attending on Zoom.

Rev. Fulton concluded, "Of the eight

years I have been here, this year has been the most successful."

Churches became more technologically savvy

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Rev. Hoyt Brown, the pastor at Livonia UMC, wouldn't consider himself tech-savvy. Learning that churches could not remain open during the pandemic, Pastor Hoyt (as he likes his congregation to refer to him as) decided to learn quickly! Not only did he attend every webinar he could find about how to engage digitally with his congregation, but also, Pastor Hoyt passionately researched what other churches all over the country were doing.

The platforms Pastor Hoyt learned, the response he got, and his consistent creativity is impressive. Like many churches, Pastor Hoyt made it a point to pre-record a worship service to post every Sunday;

Continued on Page 4