

The COVID crisis interrupted the plan and threatened to derail progress, but God was at work again. The team stalled for a hot minute, then decided to launch via livestream—in fact, to create hope@central as an online presence, which will eventually include in-person attendance opportunities. The budding small group switched to meetup, Core Team sessions shifted to Zoom; social media amped up; and the first livestream worship launched on YouTube on Saturday, May 2, after a fast four days of reformatting and planning. In a classic Holy Spirit move, the launch ended up

happening on the third anniversary weekend of Central becoming a Reconciling Congregation.

Launch night attracted 123 viewers, and at this writing, 167 persons have watched it. The team plans a worship experience the first Saturday of each month at 7 p.m. but keep up with our Instagram for each month's final date. Visit <https://bit.ly/unyhopeumc> to check out the past videos that are located (for now) on the Central UMC Endicott YouTube channel.

Follow hope@central on Instagram, or through our website at <http://www.hopeatcentral.org/index.html>.

## Virus Spreads the Word

**By Bob Kern, Ministry Coordinator, Covenant United Methodist Church**

When in-person worship and Bible study were halted at Covenant United Methodist Church in Rochester, senior pastor the Rev. Dr. Ann Kemper and retired pastor the Rev. Margaret Scott launched online worship and devotionals. These broadcast air on the church's Facebook page four times a week (Monday, Wednesday and Friday at noon; Sunday morning at 10).

Each broadcast focuses on a Scripture reading from the lectionary, so that all four Bible lessons are covered in the course of the week. Far more people view these videos than ever showed up at a conventional Bible study — and their lives are enriched with the “glimpses of truth” offered from God's Word.

Viewers describe how they receive comfort, hope, and strength from these devotions. They've also been motivated to put their faith into action. During the broadcasts, Dr. Kemper and Rev. Scott highlight specific needs — such as items for the church's Blessing Box, drivers for a meal program run by a sister church in the neighborhood, food for an immigrant family from Ghana — and people respond.

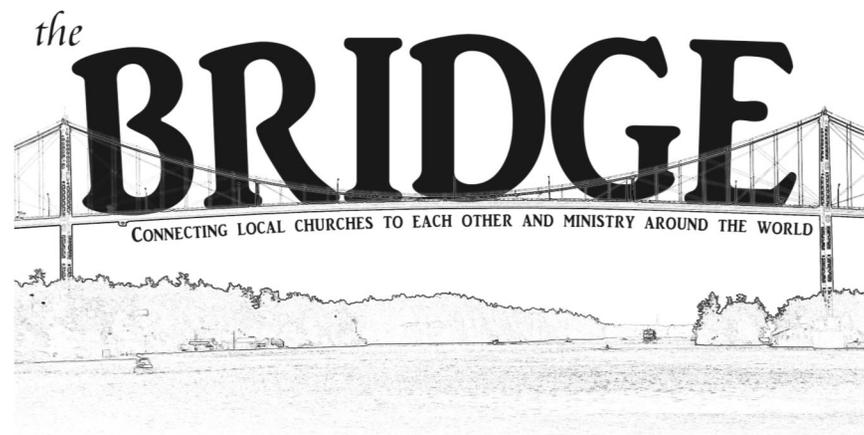
Prayer is an integral part of this. The hosts lift up prayer concerns and pray while the music director plays the piano softly in the background. Viewers are encouraged to share their prayer requests via Facebook or email.

This new ministry, started as a response to a crisis, has become an important venue to spread the love of Christ.

*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](http://www.unyumc.org)**

Learn more about the response to the COVID-19 pandemic throughout Upper New York at <https://www.unyumc.org/about/uny-covid-19-response>



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.

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# Amazing ministries happening in UNY despite the pandemic

**Editor's Note:** *In the midst of a pandemic, churches across Upper New York are finding new ways to reach their members, neighbors, and even people across the globe through digital means and other ways. This issue of the Bridge features two such stories. In the next few weeks, watch for the digital publication of the Advocate, which includes many more uplifting stories of how churches are staying connected—positive news that was catalyzed by the COVID-19 pandemic.*

## Central United Methodist Church, Endicott launches hope@central

By Rev. Dr. Michelle Bogue-Trost

Who says you can't launch a New Faith Community in a pandemic? **hope@central** just did, and the story of it getting there is a wild ride—at least as experienced by its Core Team.

First, the backstory: More than two years ago, the leadership of Central UMC in Endicott (Binghamton District) began talking with me, their pastor, about crafting a vision for the future. Located in a deeply depressed area, in a rapidly-shifting neighborhood, with strong mission DNA, and a long history of work on justice issues, including a new identity as a Reconciling Congregation, their question on behalf of the congregation was, "what's next for Central's future?"

A Vision Team explored questions of demographics; attendance patterns; location; need; people, time, and money resources; wild ideas; and big dreams, all rooted in a stated commitment to "offer hope to Endicott and the surrounding area." There was a clear understanding

of the necessity for the hope God offers in Christ in a place and time like Endicott, for that moment and beyond. They created RenovateCentral, which looked at all aspects of Central's ministry and began reconsidering and refitting the building for different uses, creating a specific social media presence and strategy with dedicated staffing, and reimagining mission, service, and faith formation. They even began a committee to restore the organ.

It also became unexpectedly clear that part of the RenovateCentral work should include developing a New Faith Community—a church-within-a-church, designed to reach people a traditional church could not, for various reasons. This wild idea actually started to make sense when things started falling into place to make it happen—people with specific skills and gifts started showing up and an unexpected money gift appeared, among other things. The Vision Team all recognized the movement of the Spirit and brought the proposal to the Church Council for consideration and prayer.

One month later, the resolution passed, incidentally on the very same day as did the Organ Capital Campaign resolution—that was a very big night at Central, affirming the work of the congregation both as it was, and as it could be. As work continued on the Renovate-Central initiatives, a core team was developed for this new thing, shorthanded "Central 2.0," which grew its purpose and vision.

The Central 2.0 Core Team grew almost instantly to 11 people, ranging in age from their 20s to their 60s, with backgrounds in traditional, evangelical,



and none-in-particular churches, some from Central, some not, all committed to and heavily invested in developing a new and different experience of faith. The team worked for almost two years on identity, purpose, intention and mission, all based in Central's inclusive ministry and mission DNA, yet going beyond it to create a boldly progressive new congregation with the hallmarks of "fearless authenticity," and "spiritual curiosity."

One year in, a consultant joined the staff and coached the team through some of this work, which included difficult conversations together about theology and church, worship and music, prayer, and evangelism. Important questions emerged:

- What would worship look like?
- How would faith formation happen?
- Who would 2.0 reach?
- What about funding?
- What does it even mean to be boldly progressive, spiritually curious, and

fearlessly authentic?

- How can this church, combined with the gifts and potential of those reached, be a God-led movement to transform the world?

With team members from all over the map on these issues, the work was deep, sometimes painful, yet always fruitful. Those conversations continue as the team explores what it means to create a church that hopes to be all these things in order to offer the good news of Christ to the community and the world around it.

The team soft-launched (by invitation) worship in December 2019, during which the new church's permanent name finally emerged and became clear:

**hope@central.** Soft launch worship happened in Jan. 2020 and again in Feb., and the team was aiming for a hard launch (wide public launch) during Easter week.

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