

UMW, as well as the deep history of justice work, walking away during a time like this is not an option!

Jesus clearly calls us to a higher level of understanding. He modeled acceptance every time he entered into a new place, was greeted by a large group of people, or even when he met a single person face to face.

- Jesus loved.
- It was unconditional.
- It was for everyone.
- Through this practice, “hope” thrived.

In her bible study found in the *UMW Response Magazine* (Jan/Feb 2022 edition), Jasmine Smothers writes, “When what is can no longer be, the church needs leaders who make room for hope to emerge!” Dear ones, this is what I have come to understand as a leader in UMW, in Global Ministries & UMCOR, and within my home church; the HOPE that Jesus gives through his gift of Grace and Unconditional Love can and will see us through each day, even when those around us pressure us to believe otherwise.

No matter what comes to the denomination called “United

Methodist,” the mission work still needs to be done.

The justice work will still need to happen.

The least and the last and the marginalized will still need someone to stand for and with them!

For me, that reality pushes me forward and keeps me focused on the task of sharing Jesus’ message of grace and inclusion with everyone I can. A reality that I live out by intentionally exposing and including those with special needs and abilities and mental illness into worship experiences and small group learning moments that inspire all the senses through textures, pictures, special lighting, safe scents and sounds or vibrations; while ensuring that everyone is not only included but also involved, heard, and valued during their time within the faith community that is created.

I pray that we will find our way through the pressures and the stresses, beyond the nay-sayers and the closed minded, and continue to have HOPE for the possibilities of a church that will completely fulfill the Good News of Jesus.



*“...walking away during a time like this is not an option!”
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 *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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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

Keeping focused in a distracted world

These days it's so easy to be pulled in different directions or be distracted. We are consumed by all the ways in which COVID-19 is challenging us with death, illness, and disruption of our daily lives. Many of us are feeling isolated by the virus as it steals opportunities for us to gather in person. We're also living with the uncertainty of General Conference—will General Conference meet this year and what will happen if it does or if it does not?

These are all serious concerns that cause anxiety and stress in our lives. We're weary of living in uncertainty. It's all very distracting.

Scan the QR code or visit <https://vimeo.com/677235169> to watch a video of Upper New York's Bishop's Operational Team member Lindsay Martin and Conference Leadership Team member, the Rev. Steven Taylor, providing encouragement and tips on how to maintain focus in our distracting world.



Storytelling in a distracted world

By Jee Hae Song

I will tell you a story. A few months ago, I was contacted by an independent reporter in Syracuse, NY, who wished to write an article about me. He was doing profiling of Asian Americans, as he was Asian American himself, and believed that telling stories was transformational. I said yes, and after several interviews of myself and people around me, he came up with a beautiful story about me. It was published in the *Post Standard* newspaper.

Stories are transformational. When we hear other people's stories, we do not only learn new things, but are enlightened, confirmed, and/or challenged.

Storytelling is beneficial for the teller as well. Storytelling enables the teller to translate abstraction into everyday language that is grounded in experience.

I was very surprised to see the impact of my story. I found people reposted the story on their social media because it was enlightening. It was both a proud and humbling moment for me. It was also beneficial for me as a storyteller because it helped me to verbalize my beliefs, my life, and my passion in an approachable way.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought us many challenges. Among them all, the biggest challenge for Christian communities was isolation. For

months, we were locked in our own homes, unable to have in-person events, unable to have any real human interactions.

At the beginning of the pandemic, I tried to mend this situation by replacing traditional ways of communicating with new digital methods which resulted in livestreamed Sunday service, Zoom Bible studies and prayer meetings, and weekly emails to congregants.

We first attempted these things so that we could continue what we'd been doing. But the lesson we learned is the importance of communication. These new methods should not be just a replacement for the old but should give birth to new ways to tell and listen to stories.

The Church has a mission—making disciples for the transformation of the world. That's the basic that doesn't change. On the flipside, the world changes and so our mission should take on new flesh by finding new ways to apply

those basics to an ever-changing world. So, Church must be able to discern what is constant and what is changing.

To accommodate both, we need a strategy that binds and transforms. That's where storytelling comes in. Storytelling is something that is constant. Storytelling has been done since the time of the patriarchs to Jesus to Paul, from the early Church to post-modern Church. We've been talking about God's salvation story and stories of our changed lives. Under that story, we are a Church.

At the same time, storytelling is transformational. Storytelling can be easily adapted to new modes of communication. Especially in such a disconnected world, stories can help us to connect.

Stories have power. Stories are transformational and binding. In such a time as this, full of uncertainty, anxiety, and conflict, I believe storytelling is very meaningful way of doing the mission.

Keeping focused in a distracted world: Hold onto the hope of Jesus

By Carmen Vianese,
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Given the uncertainty, the continued anxiety, and the conflict that continues not only in society around us, but also within our denomination across the global

connection, one would think it would just be easier to walk away from it all. However, as a United Methodist Woman (UMW) who is steeped in the grace offered throughout the sisterhood of



Vianese

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