



being so welcoming and have joined the church.

Todd said, "I have one person with a developmental disability who sings in the choir. I have another who grew up Jewish and wanted to be baptized—she is now a trustee at the church."

The partnership that Todd has formed with the enrollees in the HCS day program in the church's basement is a beautiful example of the mission of the UNY Conference, "to be God's love to our neighbors in all places."

Joanie Parker, the Associate Vice President of Education and Employment at HCS, attended the Thanksgiv-

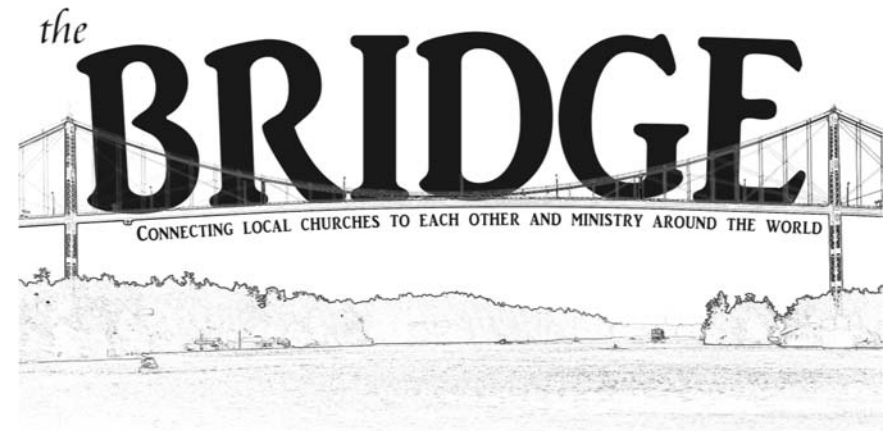
ing celebration. She said, "This particular day program, with this particular church, with this community is a model for how day communities should be. If I could bottle the magic that happens here and put it in every other location that we have, it's the perfect recipe for a fruitful faith-program partnership."

Visit <http://bit.ly/HCSgrateful> to see a video of the HCS day program enrollees saying what they are thankful for. Some are only able to provide one-word answers, but their smiles alone speak volumes of their gratitude. East Rochester UMC makes them feel welcomed, important, and loved.

*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)**

Visit <http://bit.ly/UMCThanksgiving> for creative ideas on how to give thanks this Thanksgiving.



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!

Celebrating friendship at East Rochester UMC

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# Celebrating friendship at East Rochester UMC



**By Shannon Hodson, Writer/Editor**

Smiles, handshakes, and hugs greet you as you enter the basement of the East Rochester United Methodist Church. Four years ago, this basement was transformed into one of Heritage Christian Services' (HCS) 29 Day Centers in the Rochester-Buffalo area for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. At a Nov. 9 Thanksgiving celebration, gratitude was expressed by both the day program enrollees and staff for the partnership that the Rev. Todd Goddard, pastor at East Rochester UMC, has formed with the day center.

John Bucheri, who is referred to as "Bush" by many of his differently-abled



friends, is the Senior Direct Support Specialist at this HCS location. He said, "We have a great relationship with Todd. He's fantastic. He comes down and plays cards with us and eats lunch with us a couple days a week."

This day program has about 12 enrollees. John explained, "The goal here is to help individuals get to the next level. They volunteer here by cleaning the room where Alcoholics Anonymous meets numerous times a day, sorting clothing donations, and more. We are helping them learn the skills they need to get a full-time job and become more independent. We recently had two people leave for internships that transition into full-time jobs at the local Jewish Community Center."

John continued, "...but really, I need to say, that developing positive relationships is huge here."

Ian, one of the enrollees, chimed in, "No fighting is very important. God is very important. Peace is very important."

Todd refers to the enrollees as his best friends. He said, "I have a special friendship with each and every one of them."

Todd shares his love of coffee with Ian—Ian makes sure that Rev. Goddard's coffee is perfect every day. If he goes upstairs to check on Todd's coffee and Todd is not there, Ian writes Todd a letter. Todd has hundreds of letters written by Ian. Visit <http://bit.ly/ToddandIangrateful> to see a video of Todd and Ian talking about their friendship.

Gavin, another enrollee, shares a spe-



cial relationship with Todd related to their mutual interest in trains. Todd and Gavin enjoy lunch together regularly at a place where they can watch trains go by. "Gavin is proud of his part-time weekend job at the Rochester chapter of the National Historic Railway Society," Todd said. Gavin smiled widely as Todd shared this.

Todd hosts several celebrations throughout the year where he invites members of the day program, their families, and his congregation. In addition to an annual Thanksgiving celebration, he hosts a Christmas pageant and party (the day program enrollees star in the pageant), a Mardi Gras party (the day program enrollees laugh and have a great

time wearing silly costumes, extra-large glasses and hats), a St. Patrick's Day party, an Easter Egg hunt, and a summer picnic at his cottage on a lake (where the day program enrollees can swim, boat, and play outdoor games).

These celebrations foster friendship.

Word has spread about Todd's inclusion of people who are differently-abled, and his congregation is growing. Now twenty percent of his congregation is differently-abled. These are not only people from the day program in his basement, there are people throughout the community who have heard about the members of East Rochester UMC

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