

the pastor would call her out in front of the congregation and say that if she didn't straighten up, God would kill her.

Vicki added, "At 23, I left God for good; I said, 'If you are going to kill me, do it.' I lived in a very dark place for 18 years."

She said, "I spent 23 years in and out of mental institutions; I was diagnosed with everything you can imagine...I was on medications for everything—eight different medications. And nothing helped me."

In her last of several suicide attempts, she felt the Holy Spirit speak to her telling her to get herself to a hospital; she died and had to be resuscitated. She woke up in the ICU and felt a deep desire to connect with the Lord. I called out to him and he delivered me from all my fears."

She said, "I was so wounded for so many years, but I have since learned that God is a God of love."

Vicki cited Jeremiah chapter 18; she explained that God is the potter, and she is the clay.

She then played an acoustic guitar and sang beautifully about how she is a vessel and how God has created everyone to be a vessel.



The relationship Vicki ended up developing with God is inspiring.

In addition to the Tuesday evening service, Harris Hill also offers a Thursday morning gathering that starts with meditation and prayer, Lectio Divina...and then diving into scripture."

Harris Hill also offers a Saturday morning bible study, at a local restaurant, owned by a member of the congregation.

Katie said, "Who starts all of this in the middle of a pandemic?"

Katie uses the phrase, "But God..." all the time to explain how all of this has been possible.

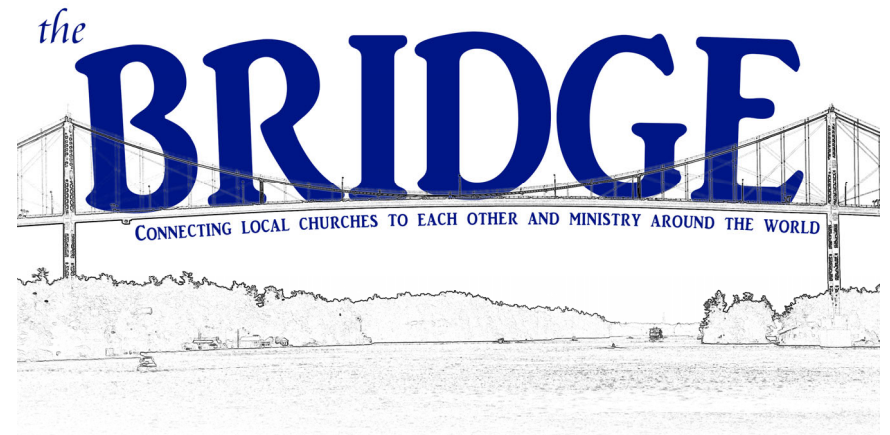
Pandemic and all, Harris Hill UMC showcases how they live out Upper New York's vision to "be God's love to our neighbors in all places."

**Editor's Note:** *This is an excerpt from the article about Harris Hill. To read the full article, visit <https://bit.ly/ButGodatHarrisHill> for the full story.*

*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)

The memorial service for Bishop Yeakel that had been planned for October has been postponed health and safety concerns due to the surge in COVID-19 cases. A future date has not yet been set.



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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# UNY Churches offering unique worship experiences

By Shannon Hodson

Throughout the Upper New York Conference, there are many churches that are offering services beyond their traditional Sunday morning services. If your church offers unique services, we'd love to hear about it; email us at [news@unyumc.org](mailto:news@unyumc.org). Here are a couple recent stories that caught our eyes.

## Praise and Pizza at Baldwinsville UMC

"People need to remember that there are six-and-a-half other days of the week." This is what Albany and Adirondack District Superintendent, the Rev. Debbie Earthrowl said about the opportunity to worship at Baldwinsville UMC's "Praise and Pizza" Friday night worship services that began in July.

Praise and Pizza is a casual service offered in Baldwinsville UMC's chapel and is hosted by the Rev. Bill Mudge and Nairobi O. Smith. The service runs from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. Nairobi provides worship music with her acoustic guitar; Rev. Mudge or a guest preacher delivers an inspiring message, and pizza, salad and



drinks are served!

How did this idea come about? Rev. Mudge recognized that the church's Sunday traditional service was very important to the members and very impressive.

Rev. Mudge said, "We have a tremendous music ministry; I want any service offered here to be done with excellence and that is what our Sunday morning service offers. I want people to still be able to enjoy the giftedness of our musicians like Nancy James and our organist Maryann Myles."

Rev. Mudge expressed that he wanted to keep that service that grew digitally during the pandemic, but also, wanted to provide another opportunity for people to worship in a casual and contemporary style.

When talking to his administrative council about this idea of a casual service offered on Friday nights, he said, "This is an opportunity for folks of all ages and for some who want to connect with others and aren't interested in the bar scene. This is here for folks who may not

even realize what they hungry for."

Church member Shelly Hoffman, chimed in and mentioned how a church she knew in Pittsburgh offered a similar service, and they would say, "Before you go to the bars, come worship with us."

Baldwinsville's admin-

istrative council approved of the idea.

Enter Nairobi O. Smith. Nairobi is a talented musician well-known throughout the Upper New York Conference. Rev. Mudge has known Nairobi since she was a little girl and told her from a young age, "Someday we are going to do ministry together."

Nairobi said that she approached Rev. Mudge a year and a half ago and said, "Were you serious about doing ministry together?" He said he was.

When they started planning how to collaborate; COVID-19 changed the world as we know it. Nairobi and others helped to equip Baldwinsville UMC to be able to offer online and livestreamed worship services and offered her music as well.

And now she and Rev. Mudge are offering Praise and Pizza together. While the ministry is small now with around 10 people in attendance each week, Rev. Mudge and Nairobi as well as guest preachers are really enjoying the time.

Nairobi said, "My favorite part of this service is the people. It's nice to see faithful people each week and connect with them, to find out how their trip they went on was."

Rev. Earthrowl travels from afar as often as she can to attend this service. She said, "This is a great opportunity for pastors. As clergy, we don't get many opportunities to worship together with our schedules. This is the perfect opportunity."

Visit <https://vimeo.com/585971801> to watch a video to see what a typical Praise and Pizza service looks like and learn how this unique idea came together.

## But God—How Harris Hill UMC triumphed through the pandemic

Starting in November of 2020, two new in-person gathering opportunities started at Harris Hill UMC

Each Tuesday, starting at 6:30 p.m., the "Path Gathering" service begins with video music, word of prayer, and every week a person shares a testimony of how they see Jesus working in their life; then someone shares a scripture; they have communion together, then the person who shares scripture can ask open-ended questions for discussion.

Each Tuesday night, the church has welcomed anywhere between 16 and 35 people to this service.

The testimonies shared are touching. Katie Zettle, the pastor at Harris Hill UMC, said, "The people are very open and vulnerable...it's a way to offer the hope of Jesus Christ in a brand-new way...You bring your doubts and questions in a casual environment."

For example, Vicki, a vibrant, middle-aged woman said. "God has definitely transformed my life" as she stepped up to share her testimony of what she called "woundedness and purpose" with the guests of the Aug. 3, 2021 service.

Vicki shared her history of being sexually abused as a child and entering a physically abusive marriage at the age of 15.

She explained that she went to church as a child, and "the God they gave me was standing over my head with a hatchet." She felt she could never measure up;

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