



survivors in recovery. It is called ERT. It stands for Early Response Team. Early Responders are trained by UMCOR during an 8 hour session with all the Who, What, Where, When, Why and How answers to the typical questions willing volunteers are apt to ask when they feel called to provide help. What do we do? We listen to survivors, we hold trembling hands, we hand out bottles of water, and listen some more. We give hugs; we assure that people care; and then we wash walls, remove wet carpet, wet wallboard, shovel mud, carry out ruined appliances, cover holes in roofs, and make homes secure again. But we don't do repairs. That happens later with rebuilding teams who are often the very same people on the

Early Response Team.

So where can you receive more information and training to become an Early Responder? Attend one of two Basic Early Response training events.

Feb. 8 at Broad St. UMC, Norwich , NY, which is northeast of Binghamton and east of Cortland. Registration information is at <http://bit.ly/2OERTNorwich>

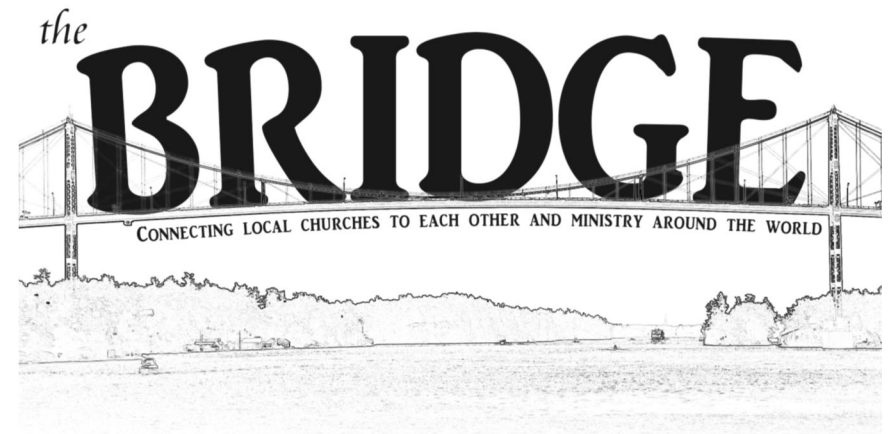
Feb. 29 at N. Chatham UMC, N. Chatham, NY near Albany with registration information at <http://bit.ly/2OERTNChatham>.

By becoming part of an Early Response Team, you can help restore hope for people who lose so much in the aftermath of a natural disaster.

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

Reminder: Petitions and resolutions will need to be submitted to petitions@unyumc.org by Feb. 3 for inclusion in Vol. 1 of the Upper New York Conference Journal. Items not submitted by this date will only be available on the Annual Conference App and on the Conference website.



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!

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Interpreting the Protocol of Reconciliation & Grace Through Separation

Editor's Note: On Jan. 6, 2020, Upper New York Area Resident Bishop Mark J. Webb sent a letter to the Upper New York Conference explaining how the media took an independent team of United Methodist Bishops' Protocol Statement out of context, leading many people to ask the question, "has the United Methodist Church split?" In his letter, Bishop Webb explained that the answer is "no" and that no decisions will be made until the General Conference meets from May 5-15, 2020 in Minneapolis.

Friends,

Grace and peace to you in the wonderful name of Jesus the Christ!

Over this past weekend, various media were filled with stories about the splitting of the United Methodist Church. Based on some of these stories, people have been asking, "has the United Methodist Church split? Has the decision been made?" The simple answer to those questions is no.

On Friday, Jan. 3rd, an independent mediation team, comprised of eight Bishops and eight representatives from advocacy groups, announced a proposal for the separation of The United Meth-

odist Church that it intends to introduce to the 2020 General Conference. This "Protocol of Reconciliation & Grace Through Separation" is one of several proposals that have been prepared for consideration by the General Conference.

It is vitally important to remember our polity and our process. General Conference is the only body that can speak for the denomination and make changes to *The Book of Discipline*. At this point, no decisions have been made and none will be made until the General Conference meets May 5-15, 2020 in Minneapolis. The Protocol itself says it was developed in service to the General Conference delegates who will decide on its adoption or amendment. While there were some Bishops involved in this mediation process, this proposal does not come from the Council of Bishops but is the work and proposal of the independent mediation team.

I have attempted to be consistent in stating that I believe deeper conversations are necessary regarding the future of The United Methodist Church, our differences and the ways in which we might find a path that blesses one an-

other to be the Church we are called to be. This Protocol, along with many of the other proposals and legislation already submitted to the 2020 General Conference, invites us to such conversations. I am grateful for the individuals who have invested in this hard work and the proposals they have shared.

I hope you will continue to look for ways to engage one another in these conversations with love and respect as we seek a way to faithfully and fruitfully live out God's call upon our lives.

While these important conversations continue and we live amid the uncertainty of The United Methodist Church, I am reminded that our mission is not uncertain. God continues to call us to "make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world."

In Upper New York, this mission is lived out through the local church in every community. So, don't stop looking for ways to shine the light of Christ in the place you have been called. Continue to make Jesus known in word and deed. Continue to pray for God's guidance and support. Continue to trust that, whatever the future holds for The United Methodist Church, your call to

live the Gospel of Jesus Christ and be God's love to your neighbors in all place remains the same. Please continue to say yes to that!

Pray for the delegates to General Conference from Upper New York, that God will grant them wisdom, courage and peace amid the work they do and the decisions they will make. Pray for your sisters and brothers in Christ who seek to follow God's call upon their lives. Pray for the future of The United Methodist Church. Know that you are in my prayers.

To read a press release about the Protocol of Reconciliation & Grace Through Separation visit <http://bit.ly/umcprotocol> For the full text of the Protocol of Reconciliation & Grace Through Separation visit <http://bit.ly/umcsignedprotocol>.



Help restore hope for survivors of natural disasters



By Mike Block, UNY Director of Missional Engagement

We have all heard of various natural disasters which have occurred across the country such as floods, tornados, and other severe storms. What we often don't hear about is how survivors struggle to recover during the following days, weeks and often months after the disaster. We don't think of people who have no power, no heat, no water, even

though it is during winter months. We don't think of those who can't live in their home due to mold, or because the house is off its foundation. Instead we watch the news, see the destruction, and then sit down to eat dinner or go about our business the next day.

To bring this closer to home, in our own Conference, in the Utica area, there was a massive flood event on Halloween which damaged some 800+ homes. Peo-

ple are still suffering, cleaning, repairing, replacing furnaces a full two months later. Most of us didn't hear about this flood, or have already forgotten about it.

But we can still help. Our Conference has a program to send people almost immediately into disaster areas to quickly, effectively, and appropriately provide a caring, Christian presence to assist

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