



DISCIPLE

GOD@WORK

*Specialists, Resources and  
Events Available to **Build** Your  
Church and God's Kingdom*



Office of Congregational Excellence  
Texas Annual Conference

# Dear friends,

## What excites you about ministry?

It excites me to be able to share that The Center for Congregational Excellence is **always ready** to equip your congregation and leaders with resources to help you transform lives—and entire communities.

We put this report together to make sure you know ***all that*** is available to the local church.

## You are not alone!

Read this update to be encouraged and to learn:

1. **Where God has been @ work** within children's ministry, new faith communities, Hispanic ministry, youth and young adult activities, lay leader development and our revitalization process called *Vibrant Church Initiative* (VCI).
2. **What events, programs and trainings are available** to your congregation in the next few months, and
3. **How you can access people and programs** to take your church from **good to great**.

## Ways You Can Respond:

- **Attend a Training Event**
- **Call a Specialist**
- **Request a workshop**

Use this information to contact us for more information or to access these opportunities designed to help you have greater impact in your unique mission field.

*Rev. Robert Besser*

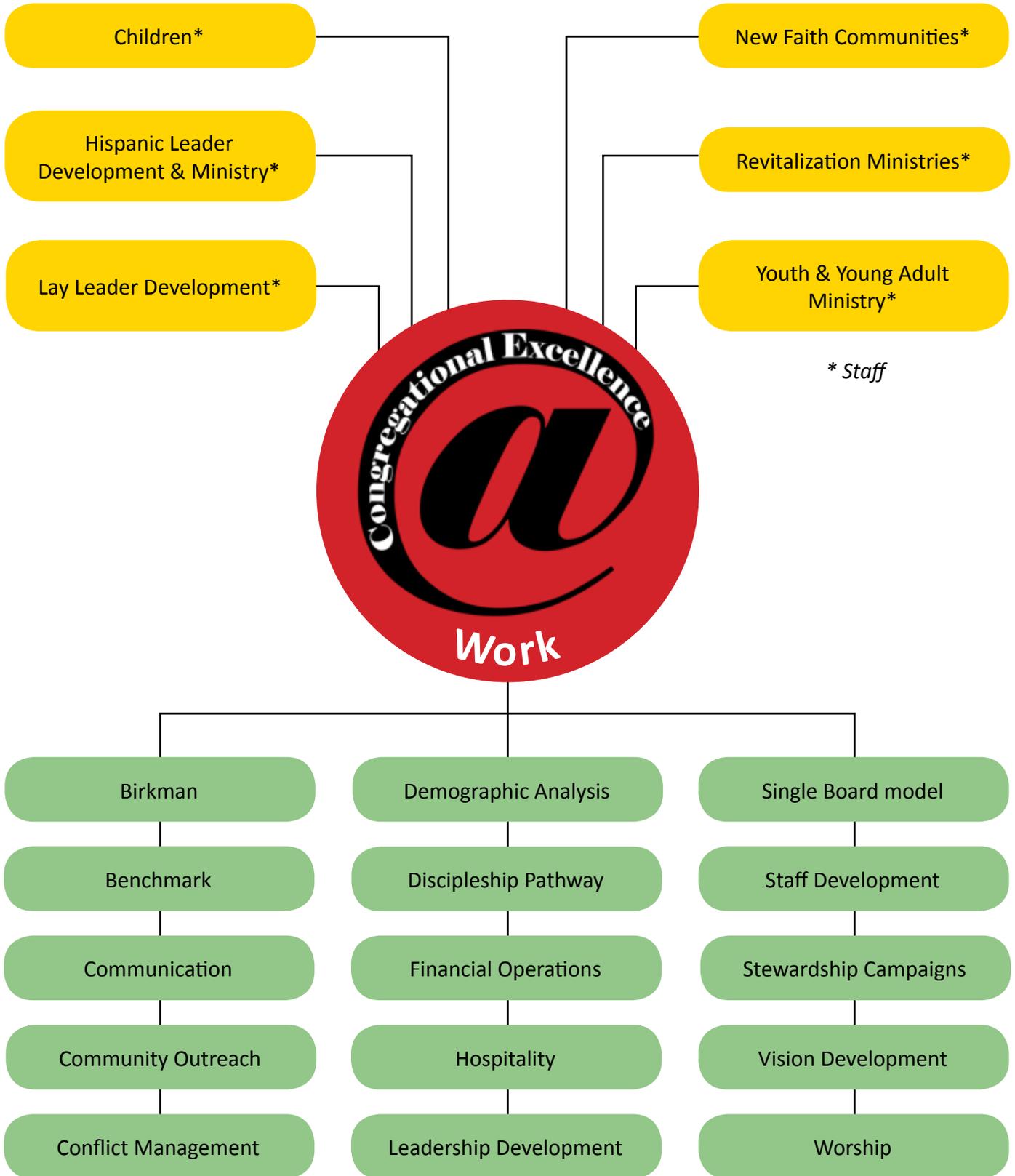


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**Did you know that we have experts in all these ministry areas that are available to help your church?  
713-523-9383**



# GOD@WORK through CCE's REVITALIZATION MINISTRIES

Tools for developing leadership to strengthen congregations



Mike Tyson  
Director of Revitalization Ministries  
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## At a glance:

- 68 churches have participated in the Vibrant Church Initiative since its inception in 2012
- 30 coaches, scribes and consultants trained to help churches discern “what’s next”
- Workshops on Demand: Could your leaders benefit from a half-day workshop on church Communications? Generosity? Clarifying vision? Streamlining the governance structure? We have a series of a la carte workshops for **any size church anywhere in the conference.**

**VCI consultation weekends allow churches to see—with fresh eyes—all the ways God is @ work in their midst.**

## VCI Success Stories:

- Since beginning the VCI process, **St. Stephen’s UMC, Houston**, has welcomed 39 new members and celebrated 21 professions of faith and 8 baptisms.
- Since launching its new contemporary worship service nine months ago, **Bullard UMC, Tyler**, is experiencing record attendance of over 240 in both services and almost two dozen active students in the youth group.

**“VCI has been great for lay leader development at Deer Park UMC. Several leaders have transitioned from the I-am-not-a-leader mentality to having the confidence to becoming impressive problem solvers and heading up bigger and grander initiatives.” – Rev. Kate Walker**

**“VCI showed us the path to take to become the church God wants us to be. If God puts it on your heart to move your church forward, then VCI is a perfect next step.” – Rev. Hazel Jackson, Ashford UMC**

*Wearing her Vibrant Leader t-shirt, Tracy Womack enjoys brainstorming with the VCI Consultation Team visiting Deer Park UMC: retired clergy Rev. Sandra Smith and Rev. Chuck Simmons and Lead Consultant Thomas Billings.*

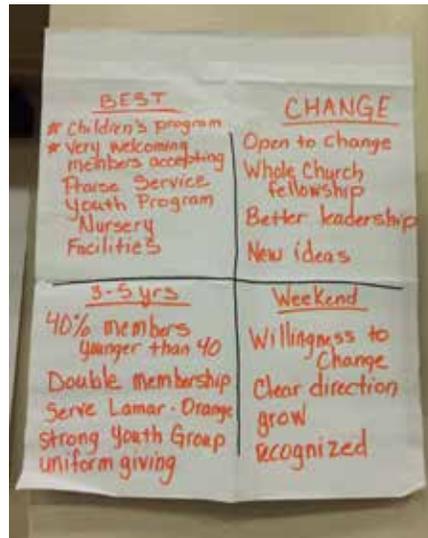




*Church leaders feel energized through the VCI process and appreciate their coaches and consultants for helping them determine ways to be more impactful in their unique mission field*

### Did you Know?

- VCI has a team of 32 clergy (active and retired) and laity ready to work with churches from around the TAC.
- Over 40% of the VCI team is made up of laity from around the TAC.
- There is a team of 20 Subject Experts to help churches grow stronger
- Two studies have shown that VCI slows the decline in declining churches, and enhances the growth of growing churches.
- VCI has helped several to go from declining to growing.
- Most churches going through VCI see an increase in giving within a year after they begin VCI
- A side effect of doing VCI is often discovering new, young and capable leaders.



*After attending the Communication Best Practices workshop offered through the Center for Congregational Excellence, participants are proud to show their certificate designating them as Official Church Communicators.*

# GOD@WORK through CCE's WE LOVE ALL GOD'S CHILDREN

Tools for developing leadership in Children's Ministry



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## At a glance:

- Expanded to 4 new Freedom Schools this summer (in Houston's Third Ward and in the Southeast District: Beaumont) in partnership with the Children's Defense Program, to help reading skills from slipping during the summer months
- Designated 7 churches (in communities previously without licensed childcare) as gold-standard United Methodist Children Centers with community health workers, new playgrounds
- Helping strengthen the ties between churches and their onsite schools to pursue a common vision, meet families' needs and bridge parents and their students back to the church



Bishop Scott Jones joins Freedom School scholars from Jones Memorial UMC's Crestmont Park campus.



Rev. Robert Besser celebrating scholars at Blue Ridge UMC Freedom School.

## Coming in 2020

- Assist in recruiting underserved/unchurched current 2nd–4th graders and volunteers to experience Christ through TAC’s summer camps at Lakeview.
- Local Church VBS Outreach/Mission Projects focusing on WLAGC areas of foci and themed to popular publishers.
- We Love All God’s Children Weekends—Late Summer—4 Locations in diverse, underserved areas of TAC
  - Current Partners: Convoy of Hope; Tom’s Shoes; Discount School Supply
  - Prospective Partners: Local Churches, businesses, schools, city/county/state government and non-profit agencies
  - Included in the weekend: distributions of groceries, health services, haircuts, family portraits, job services, veteran services, a kid’s zone, a hot meal, new children’s shoes, and more—all at no charge to the TAC or guests. Approximately \$1 million worth of goods and services have been promised for distribution to the 4,000 to 7,000 guests of honor expected



**Dear Jill,**

*Well, we are off to a great start of the school year at Bear Creek United Methodist School. The staff and parents are ready to go. Thank you for partnering with us through We Love All God’s Children for a better and broader future for the children in our community. We are continuing to explore our options and gaining knowledge and resources for the school year.*

*Warmest regards,*

*Toni Bejko, Director  
Bear Creek United  
Methodist School*

# GOD@WORK through CCE's YOUTH & YOUNG ADULT MINISTRIES

Tools for developing leadership in Youth & Young Adult Ministries



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## Texas Youth Academy

For many students, Texas Youth Academy (TYA) is a place to search for direction and affirmation in their faith. "I came to see where I am in my faith life and where I might go," stated one student.

Since 2009 the Texas Youth Academy has been encouraging and enabling young people throughout the state to discern vocational calls. As a ministry of the Texas Annual Conference and a foundational element of the Emerging Leaders Initiative, TYA is a valuable tool for discerning vocations. Texas Youth Academy distinguishes itself from other programs through its distinctive Wesleyan voice and its two intentional weeks with theology, worship, mission, and arts on a college campus.

For many, it is an awakening realization that there are other young people who share their calling. "The main reason I came to Texas Youth Academy is that I really like learning theology, and there are not enough opportunities at my church," explains one student. Another student remarked, "I am very passionate about church—I breathe church—and want to connect with passionate peers. I want to learn why we do the things we do." In 2020, Texas Youth Academy will return to SMU for the twelfth year of illuminating deeper discipleship June 15 - 27, 2020. Student nominations and applications for both students and staff are available now at [texasyouthacademy.com](http://texasyouthacademy.com)



### We've seen God@Work in:

- Over 3,000 young people gathering in Kansas City for the national United Methodist Church gathering in July
- Our Conference Council on Youth Ministries student leaders spending time with other conference youth leaders, guided by a representative from Texas Methodist Foundation
  - One of our youth being elected as Jurisdictional Conference observer during our 2020 session in The Woodlands, Texas.
  - Transforming leadership with our ninth graders through our Ichthus retreat that focused on identity, transformation, and community
- Over 40 ministry workers participated in our third annual cruise retreat.
- Ministry partners, including U.M. ARMY, Lakeview, Center for Youth Ministry Training—Texas Innovation Lab, & Reboot Youth Ministry Innovation

### Save these 2020 Dates

- **Ignite:** February 21 - 23, @Carolina Creek: February 28 - March 1 @Lakeview
- **LEAD Retreat:** April 17 - 19
- **Texas Youth Academy:** June 15 - 27
- **Spiritual Formation Cruise:** September 14 - 19

# Young Adult Pilgrimage By Andrew Thompson

*“Catch on fire with enthusiasm and people will come for miles to watch you burn.” – John Wesley*



On the Texas Annual Conference’s ROOTS Young Adult pilgrimage to England, our group got to see the house in Epworth which John Wesley was raised in, seeing how his upbringing shaped his methodical and disciplined spiritual living. This quiet and peaceful town provided an excellent backdrop for his mother, Susanna, to instruct her children with the spiritual substance they needed.

Later on that trip, we visited the historic college town of Oxford in which John attended for his education. His early need for substance in his life motivated him to start his “Holiness club,” where colleagues of his would pray, study scripture, and visit those in the prisons. Oxford was such a historic and incredible town! With the city and architecture being over 1000 years old, I got

to experience first hand the atmosphere that shaped Wesley, academically and spiritually.

Our journey followed a chronological timeline of Wesley’s life and included stops in Bristol and London, each adding to our journey and incredible experience. Consequently, it all climaxed on our last stop. Our tour guide walked us out to a plaque, set on a stone wall, at a busy London intersection. When we read it, we saw that this was the location where Wesley had the well documented experience, where his, “heart was strangely warmed.” We all thought; “this is it?” “This is where the trip climaxes, and such monumental encounter occurred?!?” This famous moment in history, that my Methodist grandmother

repeatedly preached to me about, was a little plaque on the street. The rest of the traffic passed by, almost seeming to pay it the same amount of attention as a nearby dumpster and other ordinary buildings.

**This pilgrimage taught me a lot about what it means to be a minister in the name of Jesus Christ.** It was highly impactful, in that I learned many lessons about my faith and life. I also captured unbelievable pictures, experienced magnificent places, and generated some life-long friends. This expedition rekindled my passion for my vocation, which then pushed me to implement more spiritual practices into my discipleship journey. If you ever have the blessing and opportunity to take a journey.



## GOD@WORK through CCE's NEW FAITH COMMUNITIES

Tools for developing leaders called to plant new faith communities.

### At a glance:

- Helping Chapelwood UMC with a new and ethnically diverse faith community called the Upper Room in the Houston Heights; Rev. Christian Washington and leaders are serving the community mission field in creative ways
- Visiting districts across the conference this year to cast the vision for the many ways churches can be a part of starting or facilitating a new faith community
- Hosting a 2-day fall training for existing and potential church planters and multipliers

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Administrative Assistant  
New Faith Communities & Mission Field  
Development  
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## October 24-25: A Gathering of Planters & Multipliers

**Pastors and Lay people (who either are presently involved in planting a new faith community or are exploring possibilities for future new faith communities) will soon gather to:**

- Hear from ministry innovators working in various kinds of faith settings.
- Get encouragement and practical information on expanding the work of the kingdom in new and innovative ways.

**They will discuss questions such as:**

- What was the vision for your new faith community?

- How did it get started?
- What are your strategies for connecting with your mission field?
- How do you approach discipleship?
- How has being multi campus helped your ministry?
- What have been the challenges and how have you addressed them?

**Thursday:** Participants meet at The Story, a faith community of St. Luke's United Methodist Church located at 3741 Westheimer Rd, Houston 77027. Attendees may then experience an alternative faith community experience called Gastrochurch, where participants experience spirituality over a dinner table,

an approach to ministry that is deeply rooted in scripture but can appeal to people who only see a Bible in a drawer at a hotel. This ministry has been pioneered by Rev. Meredith Wende Mills. "We love getting creative with our themes and menus and seeing where the food takes us," she shares.

**Friday:** Participants will meet at The Heights Theatre, worship location for the Upper Room, a faith community of Chapelwood United Methodist Church at 339 W 19th St, Houston, 77008.

**“With encouragement and tools from the Center for Congregational Excellence, we see God@work in the October launching of the Dayspring-Flint campus. Our countdown steps have focused on building relationships, revitalizing our historic worship space, connecting with the community through a new school partnership, and basically inviting a love-starved world to experience a Christ-filled life.” – Rev. Rusty McKee**



## **Momentum Building for New Faith Community in a Theater**

Upper Room Heights, in one of Houston’s most diverse neighborhoods, is a multiethnic, intergenerational, Gospel-centered community where people of all races come together to cultivate a spiritually fulfilling and socially impactful life. Rev. Christian Washington appreciates the Center for Congregational Excellence of the Texas Annual Conference for providing this new faith community with the equipment and materials to do “portable church.” As the Upper Room community approaches its first anniversary meeting in the Heights theater, attendance has grown to a steady 125 with surges up to 260. “New Faith Community Director Morris Matthis is excited to watch how many diverse families are connecting, inviting friends and giving generously,” Christian says. “By ministering to the ‘none’ and ‘done’ with church, we see individuals each week seeking significance instead of success.” He welcomes all to text GUEST to the Upper Room Hotline at 713-999-3515 or visit [urheights.com](http://urheights.com) to experience the many opportunities available.



## GOD@WORK through CCE's MISSION FIELD DEVELOPMENT

Developing Leaders in Hispanic Ministries.

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Coordinator of Mission Field Development  
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acadar@txcumc.org



### At a Glance:

- Working with pastors to planting new Hispanic churches in neighborhoods and churches with transitioning demographics
- Adding 8 new Hispanic ministry groups in 2019
- Helping grow the 29 existing Hispanic worship communities throughout the Texas Annual Conference



One-year anniversaries are always special, particularly when 150 people are involved. In September, two TAC churches with new Hispanic ministries celebrated the first anniversaries of their worship communities.

As the Coordinator of Mission Field Development, Rev. Arturo Cadar is visibly excited to share about both worship celebrations. "It's a beautiful thing to observe lives being transformed within the new Hispanic worship community at St. Luke's Gethsemane campus and Nueva Creacion held at Glenbrook UMC near Houston's Hobby Airport," he shares.

Rev. Roberto Blanco has enjoyed a year full of blessings since the Gethsemane ministry launched last fall.

Nueva Creacion pastor Rev. Jose Ferrer has been particularly touched to watch families and children grow in their faith through ministry partnerships in the immediate mission field.



**Blessed during Spanish worship by great praise songs, spirit-filled people and the very powerful message given by Pastor Roberto Blanco! This church is poised to make disciples of all nations! Hallelujah!**

**– Arturo Cadar's review on Facebook**



## Happy First Anniversary Iglesia Oasis

Looking back over the first year of the Cumidad Christiana Oasis faith community at the Gethsemane campus, Pastor Roberto Blanco has much to celebrate. “Artie and the Center for Congregational Excellence have been very supportive every step of the way, from our early beginnings with just a few families to our services of about 115 on our first anniversary,” shares Roberto. “I know I can call him anytime and he can share from his experience what works best. We are thrilled that a diverse group of neighbors are coming to participate in ministries for women, men, children, teens as well as home groups and a dancing ministry and drama ministry.”



### Now through March 2020: Hispanic Leadership Apprentice Program

This two-year training program helps Hispanic clergy and laity or leadership teams desiring more knowledge about starting and expanding Hispanic ministry in the United States. There are currently 8 new students and an additional 14 students in their second year of training.



# Save the Date

## October 5 and 12: Growing in Generosity Workshops for Small Membership Church pastors

Choose a day to attend and register now for one of these workshops 8am-5pm at Hallsville FUMC on Oct 5 or Willis FUMC on Oct 12. Teams from Horizons Stewardship will be at each location. Register at: [www.txcumc.org/growinggenerositysmallchurch](http://www.txcumc.org/growinggenerositysmallchurch)

## October 7: Finding God in Divided Times

The Third Annual ARKLATEX Lecture addresses *Renewing our Common Faith amid an Uncivil Culture*. Keynote lecturer is noted author, preacher and professor Dr. Paul Scott Wilson. It is co-sponsored by the Perkins Center for Preaching Excellence at SMU and Williams Memorial United Methodist Church of Texarkana, Texas from 8:30 am-3:30 pm for a fee of \$75. [www.pcpe.smu.edu/event](http://www.pcpe.smu.edu/event)

## October 9: Texas Conference Christian Educators Fellowship (TCCEF), noon at St. Paul's UMC

Teresa Rossy, director of Grow Ministries at Chapelwood UMC in Houston, will lead a program explaining the benefits of professional certification, for the individual, for churches and other ministries. She will share her story of transformation via participating in certification courses and the community of educators in the Texas Annual Conference. Go to [www.tccef.org](http://www.tccef.org).

## October 12 & 26 at Deer Park UMC (or October 5 and 12 at Ore City UMC): Fall Dates for Lay Servant Training

INFO: Anna Rohde 903-522-0490

Oct. 12 and Oct. 26, 2019 (9 am to 4 pm) at Deer Park UMC (South Dist.)

October 5 and 12, 2019 (9 am to 3 pm) at Ore City UMC (North Dist.)

With Instructor: Rev. David Williamson

## October 15: Theology On Tap

From the haunting heebie-jeebies to the Holy Spirit, how do we know what's really out there? Is there a spiritual realm we can't see? Come hear guest speaker, Billy Abraham tackle this topic, and text in your own questions to a panel of experts. Sponsored by Perkins School of Theology, this is open to YOUNG ADULTS only (20's & 30's) at Kindred, 2515 Waugh in Houston. Info: [@sarahmariestone](mailto:@sarahmariestone) or 832-605-8129.

## October 17-19: Spirit Journey spiritual directors retreat at Lakeview Conference Center

This faith enriching experience features highly sought speaker Amy Oden, Ph,D, professor at Saint Paul Seminary. INFO: [jim.reiter@live.com](mailto:jim.reiter@live.com)

## October 21-22: Growing in Generosity Workshops for Medium/Large Church (Pastors only)

Teams from Horizons stewardship, TMF and Wespeth will facilitate the training at Lakeview from 9-5 on Monday and 8-2 on Tuesday. Contact the CCE at [cceoffice@txcumc.org](mailto:cceoffice@txcumc.org).

## November 1-3 - The BIG Event at Cho-Yeh

This weekend retreat for 6th graders is focused on Wesleyan Grace, building community, fostering leadership and having fun. INFO: [www.txumcyoung.space](http://www.txumcyoung.space)

## November 9 (or February 8, 2020): Bishop Jones' African American Church Lay Academy on Evangelism

- Bishop Scott Jones will lead this session on two dates: in November at Jones Memorial UMC in Houston and in February at FUMC Tyler. Both take place 9:30-noon. **Contact CCE to register 713-521-9393.**

### **November 15: Priority deadline to apply to the Texas Youth Academy**

Students in grades 10-12 are selected to participate in an intentional Christian community June 15-27 at SMU. Youth leaders participate in worship, scripture, study, small groups, service projects, art and communion.

INFO: [texasyouthacademy.com](http://texasyouthacademy.com) or [txyouthacademy@gmail.com](mailto:txyouthacademy@gmail.com)

### **November 16: Rev. Olu Brown, 9-noon "4D Impact: Smash Barriers Like a Smart Church" at FUMC Lufkin.**

Registration information at:

<https://www.txcumc.org/4Dimpact>

### **November 20-21: Soul Reset Retreat**

Beginning at 4pm Wednesday, The Upper Room, The United Methodist Texas Annual Conference, and Rev. Junius Dotson, General Secretary of Discipleship Ministries, invite you to a retreat based on Rev. Dotson's newly released book, *Soul Reset: Breakdown, Breakthrough, and Spiritual Wholeness*. The retreat will provide space for clergy and laypersons to move from feeling overwhelmed and depleted toward a life of spiritual well-being. You can register at

<https://www.campallen.org/registerforevents.html>

### **December 3: Open House for Perkins' Houston-Galveston Extension Program**

This open house from 7-8:30pm will include an overview of the new hybrid Master of Divinity and Master of Arts in Ministry degrees available through the Hybrid Houston-Galveston Extension Program, as well as an introduction to the Doctor of Ministry (D.Min.) program. Join admissions staff, faculty and current students to learn more about theological education, curriculum, financial aid and more. Light refreshments will be served. See [www.smu.edu/Perkins/Admission/visit](http://www.smu.edu/Perkins/Admission/visit)



*Pictured from L-R are Jessica Lewis (internship counselor), Tiffany Chandler (St. Johns UMC), Paul Meiller (Central Galveston UMC), Lynzey Guidry (St. Lukes Gethsemane UMC), Madison Garcie (St. Lukes Main Campus), Jimmy Calvert (Onalaska FUMC). Not pictured are Katie Eichler (St. Marks UMC), and Herlisa Gumbs*

**"I'm so thankful for the new hybrid program at Perkins Houston/Galveston. It came just as I received a new appointment about two hours north of Houston in Onalaska, TX. Attending two face-to-face sessions at the beginning and the end of the semester with the rest online has allowed me to serve in my full-time appointment this far outside the city. I appreciate the time and effort that Dr. Hugo Magallanes, Dr. Dallas Gingles and others put in to make it happen. It has truly been a blessing!" –James Calvert**

Texas Annual Conference Center  
for Congregational Excellence  
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## Watch for Details

### Wellness Initiative Facilitates Churches Connecting to the Community

The United Methodist church excels at making connections that make a difference. Congregational Excellence Director Rev. Robert Besser is particularly excited about the potential impact of the new Church and Community Health Initiative, made possible by a grant from Houston Methodist Hospital. Each participating church will recruit a Wellness Lay Leader and organize a Wellness

Ministry to be a support system for people who have received medical help from Methodist Hospital. "One of the most



important first steps to promote physical wellness in addition to spiritual wellness involves

working to set up five church hubs that will have a Conference staff member serving as a Community Wellness Director," he explains. "Who better to connect under-serviced people to chaplains, social workers, assistance ministries, community nonprofits and others, than churches?"

## Meet Amy!

**Amy Stephenson**, wife of Rev. John Stephenson (Faith UMC Richmond) has joined the staff of the Center for Congregational Excellence, following Marylyn Green's move to the South Central District office. Amy will provide administrative support for conference work in the areas of Revitalization, Youth and Young Adults, We Love All God's Children, New Faith Communities and Hispanic ministries. Special thanks to Marylyn for years of committed TAC service in all these areas.

