



## **United Methodist Men: Growing Deeper in Discipleship**

By Rev. Dr. Richard "Rick" Vance, General Secretary, GCUMM

Across the connection, United Methodist Men are rediscovering what it means to be disciples who make disciples. Recently, I had the privilege of joining men from across the Florida Annual Conference for Florida Man Ministries gathering.

The Florida Man Ministry leaders are leaning into the vision that men's ministry is not simply a meeting—it's a movement. Their time together was filled with prayer, teaching, and fellowship focused on helping men deepen their faith, strengthen their families, and serve their communities. The energy and passion I witnessed there are reminders that God continues to call men to step forward as spiritual leaders in their homes, churches, and communities.

As we look ahead, United Methodist Men everywhere are invited to renew our commitment to discipleship that transforms lives. The Apostle Paul wrote, "Be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2). This transformation begins when we commit to

intentional growth—through study, accountability, and service. Whether through small groups, local mission projects, or mentoring relationships, every man has an opportunity to grow deeper and to help another man do the same.

Our calling as men is not just to gather—it is to go. When we live out our faith with courage and compassion, others will see Christ in us. I encourage every conference, district, and local church to follow Florida's example by creating spaces where men can connect, be challenged, and grow in grace together.

Let's continue to travel with our "why," pursuing the purpose God has placed before us: to be renewed and relentless disciples of Jesus Christ love boldly, serve joyfully and lead courageously.

**Rev. Dr. Rick Vance**  
General Secretary, GCUMM



## United Methodist Men Monthly Word

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### **Bridging Generations: Mentoring the Next Wave**

(Joel 2:28 – "Your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.")

Dear Brothers in Christ,

The Church is strongest when generations walk side by side. Today, younger men long for guidance and belonging, while seasoned men may wonder if their best days are behind them. Scripture reminds us that both are essential.

## **Why Mentoring Matters**

Mentorship is not optional—it is a vital part of discipleship. Younger men need encouragement and wisdom, while older men need opportunities to invest their stories and faith in the next generation. Together, they form a living witness of God's grace across generations.

## **Disciples in Every Season**

Many seasoned men quietly ask, 'Do I still matter in the church today?' The answer is yes. Psalm 92:14 promises, 'They will still bear fruit in old age; they will stay fresh and green.' Your presence, wisdom, and prayers remain gifts to the Body of Christ.

## **Pathways to Engagement**

Here are simple ways to step into mentoring relationships:

- Join a Men's Bible Study group—where questions are welcomed and wisdom is shared.
- Rediscover Wesleyan Class Meetings—time-tested circles of mutual accountability and spiritual growth.

Use the resources and devotions designed to equip men of all ages.

Connect with your community's events, be present, and engage through for bridging men across churches, generations, and nations.

## **Study Starter: Generations Together – Mentoring in Faith**

Scripture: "Your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions." (Joel 2:28)

Reflection: God designed His people to walk together across generations. When older and younger men share faith and life, both grow stronger.

A Story to Consider: A young college student joined a men's Bible group where an older veteran had been attending for years. At first, they seemed worlds apart. But over months of coffee, Scripture, and honest talk, the younger man admitted, 'You're the father I never had.' The older man replied, 'You've given me purpose again.' Two generations found healing by walking together in Christ.

Discussion Questions:

1. Who has been a mentor in your life, and how did they shape your faith?
2. How can you invest in a younger or older brother in Christ today?
3. What would make our men's groups more welcoming across ages and stages?

Prayer Challenge: Ask God to connect you this month with one brother—older or younger—who needs encouragement.

Did you know that the United Mobile App offers more engaging study guides that support mentoring, discipleship, and shared spiritual growth?

### **Building the Bridge**

At GCUMM, we believe the future of men's ministry lies in unity, not division. The dreams of seasoned men and the visions of younger men are both needed for God's mission. Mentoring is not about teaching alone but about listening, walking together, and discovering God's grace in relationships.

**Rev. Dr. Sterling Eaton**

*Director, Men's Ministries*

*General Commission on United Methodist Men*



### **Strengthening Our Commitment to Youth Safety and Well-being**

Dear Local Church,

I hope this message finds you well. As we continue to nurture and guide the young members of United Methodist congregations, it's essential to consider how we can best ensure their

safety and well-being. One significant aspect of this is our involvement with youth-serving organizations (YSOs).

A recent study titled *Child Sexual Abuse and Boundary Violating Behaviors in Youth Serving Organizations: National Prevalence and Distribution by Organizational Type* by Assini-Meytin et al. (2024), [PubMed](#) provides valuable insights into this matter. The study found that:

Survivors reported experiencing a lower proportion of child sexual abuse within the "Big 6" settings (4-H, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Boys & Girls Clubs, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and YMCA) than older adults.

These findings suggest that the implementation of robust abuse prevention strategies in these organizations may be effective in reducing incidents of abuse. When looking to identify which changes had the largest impact, the study identified over 1,400 changes. It was not a single change but a complete cultural change of putting youth safety first.

By partnering with established and reputable youth-serving organizations, we can:

- **Enhance our protective measures:** These organizations often have comprehensive policies and training programs in place to safeguard children.
- **Provide additional support:** Collaborating with experts can offer our youth access to specialized resources and mentorship.
- **Demonstrate our commitment:** Active engagement with trusted partners showcases our dedication to the safety and development of our young members.

In contrast, choosing not to engage with such organizations may inadvertently expose our youth to higher risks due to the lack of external oversight and resources.

I encourage us to consider the long-term benefits of collaboration over isolation. Together, we can create a safer and more supportive environment for our youth.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Warm regards,

Steven Scheid, Director

Center for Scouting Ministries

## Strength for Service Story

Before it went out of print, more than one million copies of *Strength for Service to God and Country* were distributed during World War II and the Korean War.

Fifty years later, in 2002, Evan Hunsberger was inspired by his grandfather's worn copy and, with the assistance of several GCUMM advisors, republished the book as his Eagle Scout project.

While many World War II veterans reported how the original book carried them through difficult days and years following the war, it was underestimated how much the pocket-sized books would be appreciated today.

After publishing almost 500,000 copies, the Strength for Service leadership team introduced a second volume, *Strength for Service to God and Community*, a book written for professionals and volunteers who serve as first responders.

We often forget that after families and friends of victims have been rescued, comforted or consoled, our first responders are also in need of emotional and spiritual support. *Strength for Service to God and Community* provides spiritual encouragement and emotional strength for police officers, firefighters, emergency medical technicians and all those who are engaged in the service of others in time of greatest need. The Rev. Dr. Daniel G. Tackett, director of the International Police and Fire Chaplains Association, said the book will be an important tool for police and fire chaplains.

The Strength for Service To God and Country devotional book was used to lend spiritual support to our U.S. armed forces personnel during World War II and the Korean conflict. Following the attacks of September 11, 2001, the General Commission on United Methodist Men (GCUMM) has been actively raising awareness and financial support to supply a copy to every man and woman serving in the U.S. armed forces worldwide.

Strength for Service to God and Country is a book of daily devotions for military personnel and veterans. It was written to answer life's tough questions for individuals who stand in harm's way, questioning the spiritual affects and consequences of the events and trials they face.

Strength for Service to God and Community is a book of daily devotions for law enforcement personnel, firefighters, healthcare workers and other first responders. This book is written for men and women who rush into situations where others are running the opposite direction.

Strength for Service to God and Community (Scout Edition) This pocket-sized resource is full of daily devotional messages – the perfect gift for Scouts of all in your community!

Below are some interesting facts about *Strength for Service* and the impact this organization continues to make in the lives of our military, veterans and first responders.

- Since 2002, *Strength for Service* has distributed more than 1,000,000 books.
- In 2008, more than 35,000 books were distributed, proving the need for *Strength for Service* continues to be great.
- *Strength for Service* has partnered with a variety of military service organizations to increase distribution of the books to our nation's troops.
- *Strength for Service* provides 25 books at no cost to five (5) chaplains a month (shipping costs will apply). Churches often provide monthly or quarterly financial support to help cover these shipping costs.
- churches and individuals to provide it to the military free of charge.

These were handed out to Ohio County Sheriff's Department on Monday, July 14, 2025.

### Ohio County Sheriff's Department



Left to right: Superintendent Rev. Neil Leftwich, Ohio County Sheriff Nelson Croft, West Virginia Conference President Wayne Custer, Chief Deputy Kent Lewis, Pleasant Hill United Methodist Church Men's President George Cunningham, Seated United Methodist Men Jeff Sterling.

The United Methodist Men handed these out to the brave men and women who put themselves in harms way on the weekend of June 15, 2025. There was loss of lives, houses, and total devastation including the Triadelphia Fire Department and some of their own volunteers. But, they still went above and beyond to respond to other's needs.

### Triadelphia Volunteer Fire Department



Left to Right: Don McCrosky, Alyssa Kalo Jon Miller, United Methodist Men Jeff Sterling, Dave Patterson, West Virginia Conference President Wayne Custer and Mason Phillips. Kneeling is Pleasant Hill United Methodist Men's President George Cunningham.

### **Valley Grove Volunteer Fire Department**



Left to right - Pleasant Hill United Methodist Church Men's President George Cunningham, Angie McCave, Amy Pritt, Janet Blacker, and Cortne Pierce, West Virginia Conference President Wayne Custer and United Methodist Jeff Sterling.

For More information on this you can contact Strength for Service, Inc. 810 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue S., Nashville, TN 37203.

### **Pleasant Hill United Methodist Church**

Pleasant Hill United Methodist Church in Sherrard, held their "Care With Bears" program on Sunday, September 28, 2025 at 9:00 a.m. Wayne Custer read the history of how the bear program was started. Pastor Gary Rankin blessed the bears with a poem that was written by Rita Custer.

Christine Watson with Mortimer, buried in the bears is Sadie Roush, Lizzy Durrah, Raylin Ruskin, and Louise Wise were there to help set up the bears.



Corporal Alex Kirksmiller was there to accept the bears on behalf of the Ohio County Police Department. Mike Dougherty, Marshall County Sheriff was there to accept bears on behalf of the Marshall County Police Department. There were 329 bears and 580 other stuffed animals for a total of 909 blessed and turned over. They had to call in reinforcements where some were turned over to the West Virginia State Police. Detective Doug Sayman and 1<sup>st</sup> Sargent Rodney Sleeth came to assist Sheriff Dougherty to assist in gather animals and turn some over to the State Police. Deputy Chase Smith came to assist Ohio County Alex Kirksmiller in gathering the animals. This was the largest amount at one service they have turned over.





Front Row: Christine Watson, Jordie Simmons, Raylin Ruskin, Lizzy Durrah, Louise Wise, Marshall County Sheriff Mike Daugherty, Wayne Custer, Ohio County Corporal Alex Kirksmiller and Reverend Gary Rankin

The service was followed by a social hour.

The church is already started to collect for next years' service.

Since the program started in 2001, they have since blessed and turned over approximately 10,000 bears.





**New York Times**  
**December 5, 1989**  
**By Donatella Lorch**

**The “Care With Bears” program was started in October of 1987 in the San Francisco Police Department. Lt. Alexander Stevens said that “having an object like a Teddy Bear really gives them a little friend.”**

**The next were Seattle and New York Police Department to follow. The bears are meant to provide solace as well as forge a bond between the officer and the child. Sgt. Nellie Torres, commander of the Sex Crime Liaison Unit, said “It’s a way of hugging the child without physically hugging them. “ It is not meant to be a replacement for professional therapy, but it’s the first step.” The bears were originally offered to the children under the age of 11 with the consent of the Parent or Guardian.**

**Caring for Children Inc. is a nonprofit organization dealing with preventative mental health, works with the police department and the social service agencies because of their frequent contact with abused and traumatized children. President Samantha said “It’s not a toy. It’s a therapeutic tool. It gives the child the impression somebody cares.” They have donated several thousand bears over the years to New York, Los Angeles, and Staten Island. They also have donated over 3,000 bears in orphanages in Bolivia and El Salvador through Save The Children – U.S. and the Salvation Army.**

**The bears were originally a foot high, soft and light brown hair and were originally used for sex crime victims. They have since expanded to bears of any shapes and size and are used for victims of fires, accidents, and in domestic violence situations.**

**The Care with Bears program relies solely on donations. Most of these come from Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and other church organizations.**

LORD, PLEASE BLESS THESE BEARS  
AS THEY SPREAD JOY THROUGHOUT  
MAY THEY BRING A SMILE TO A CHILD  
AND RELIEVE AND FEAR OR DOUBT

MAYBE IT WILL BE FOR A VICTIM OF A FIRE  
A CHILD WHOSE HOUSE BURNED DOWN  
A BEAR TO START A NEW BEGINNING  
SOMETHING TO REVERSE THEIR FROWN

IT COULD BE FOR A SCARED LITTLE CHILD  
WHERE THE PARENTS WERE TAKEN AWAY  
A BEAR TO LISTEN TO THEIR PROBLEMS  
AND TO TALK TO EACH AND EVERY DAY

IT COULD BE A MOTOR VEHICLE ACCIDENT  
MOM AND DAD ARE NOWHERE IN SIGHT  
A BEAR FOR THE CHILD TO HOLD ONTO  
AND SOMEONE TO SAY "EVERYTHING IS ALL RIGHT"

THESE ARE CHILDREN OF YOURS LORD  
HURTING AND EXPRESSING THEIR FEARS  
WITH THE LAW ENFORCEMENTS HELP  
A BEAR JUST MIGHT STOP THE TEARS

WHATEVER THE REASON MAY BE LORD  
WE KNOW THAT YOU ARE THERE  
TO HELP HEAL A CHILD'S HEART  
WITH A SIMPLE LITTLE BEAR.

RITA CUSTER  
AUGUST 27, 2006

***UMMen Newsletter***