

The Old Apple Tree



*East Ohio Conference Retirees Association
Winter 2026*



A Message from Bishop Jung

With One Heart Again

Dear Beloved and Honored Retired Clergy,

Grace and peace to you in the name of Christ, whose faithfulness has sustained your long journeys of ministry and continues to bear fruit through your lives.

The East Ohio Conference stands today at a meaningful and hopeful turning point. We have come through seasons marked by separation, disagreement, and painful dissonance within the wider church. These years have not been easy. Yet, even in the midst of struggle, I have come to trust deeply that God has not abandoned us to fragmentation but is calling us forward—toward a renewed culture, a restored trust, and a church that grows again with one heart.

In these recent months, I have been profoundly moved by encounters with many of you. I have met retired pastors who have accepted reappointment to serve local congregations once more, and others who, without any formal appointment, faithfully offer themselves in local churches as volunteers, mentors, teachers, and prayer partners. Your quiet, steady presence is a powerful testimony. It reminds me that the true strength of The United Methodist Church has never rested in structures alone, but in covenantal faithfulness lived out day by day. For this, I am deeply grateful.

The United Methodist Church, through the actions of General Conference, has chosen a clear and courageous path. We have affirmed our identity as an open church. We have created space for regionalization and contextualization, allowing conferences and churches to engage in mission shaped by their own realities. We have also embraced the structural reconfiguration that names the United States as one of regions—an act I understand not merely as administrative reform, but as a theological posture of humility, trust, and shared accountability before God.

As bishop, one conviction guides my leadership: the local church remains the fundamental unit of disciple-making and mission. Everything we do as a conference must honor, strengthen, and support the life of local congregations. My ongoing commitment is to rebuild trust, to respect the dignity and calling of each church, and to nurture a conference culture that values spiritual depth, relational healing, and missional growth—not driven by fear but shaped by hope.

At this moment, your prayers matter more than you may know. I ask you to remember us in prayer as we seek to live faithfully into this calling. Please pray that we may remain true to the covenant and

commitments we share together. Pray especially for the continued close collaboration and mutual trust between East and West Ohio, as we strive to embody unity not only in vision, but in daily practice.

The wisdom of Scripture guides us in this season. Proverbs remind us:

“Without counsel, plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed.” (Proverbs 20:18)

Your lives, your prayers, and your counsel—spoken or silent—are among the gifts God is using to steady and guide this conference. The paths you have walked, often with perseverance and sacrifice, continue to shape who we are becoming.

With gratitude, humility, and hope, I thank you for walking with us still. Together, trusting the Spirit’s leading, we look toward a future where the church once again grows—not only in numbers, but in love, faithfulness, and joy.

With deep respect and prayerful gratitude,

Bishop Hee-Soo Jung
East Ohio Conference

News from Conference Benefits Office

Hi EOC Retirees!!

This past summer, EOC was presented with quite a significant increase (29%) in the cost for the renewal of the retiree Medicare Advantage Plan for 2026. The Board of Benefits was able to negotiate a lower increase, but still an increase of 15%. We have made the decision to increase the retiree premiums by only 5%. The Board of Benefits will pick up the extra 10%. You will see the increase in your January 2026 premium deduction.

Good news is ... there will be **NO CHANGES** in the plan design for your Medicare Advantage Plan. Healthcare expenses are tough to manage, but the Board of Benefits continues to advocate for our retirees! We love you all! Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions at (330) 499-3972, Ext. 152 or robin@eocumc.com.

I hope you all had a very **Happy Thanksgiving** and **Merry Christmas!!** May 2026 be filled with much joy and happiness!

God Bless,
Robin Whitacre
Director of Benefits

We received this note from Wespath after donating to the Central Conference Pension Fund following our Annual Meeting in October:



Dear Friends:

On behalf of the Central Conference Pensions, we are grateful for your new gift of \$500.00. Your ongoing contributions are giving new hope to Christ's servants who lead our Church in the central conferences.

As you know, the Central Conference Pension is designed to become a long-term solution and a foundation for retirement security for the dedicated church leaders who would otherwise have little or nothing. You are helping to provide hope that will sustain and encourage important ministries.

Again, thank you for your leadership and dedication to this effort that will make a difference in the lives of thousands. Your witness to God's love is most appreciated.

Yours in Service to Christ,

Dale Jones

Connections

We tell each other our hobbies, new ventures, and many ways of serving Christ within and beyond "appointment" ministries. We may be retired, but we are still alive in Christ and active in the church and in the world. We also ask for prayer in the challenges of elder years.

West Plains District

West Plains Book Club

There has been a clergy book club in the old Firelands District since Bruce Batchelor-Glader and Gary

Olin started one at Sandusky Trinity UMC in 2007. Now it meets at Vermilion Grace UMC. Presently, most of the participants are retired UMC clergy but it is open to all clergy and friends. The meetings are held the third

Thursday of each month, August through May (except for December) 1:30-3:00. Host minister, Preston Walkins provides the zoom capabilities. Anyone can join in the discussion from a distance. The selections for the

remainder of the year are: *Demon Copperhead*, by Barbara Kingsolver (Jan. 15), *The Road to Character*, by David Brooks (Feb. 19), *Twist*, by Colum McCann (Mar. 15), *The Violent Take it by Force*, by Mathew Taylor (Apr. 16), *The Secret of Secrets*, by Dan Brown (May 21). Those interested in more information, contact Gary Olin glolin456@aol.com.

Sue Antolik: In January of 2025, I had hernia surgery and from then I have not been able to walk. I have been in a rehab rehabilitation center trying to get to walk again. But, at this point to no avail, I have now moved over into assisted living and have done the best to get back to a normal life. Unfortunately, as people might've known, I was able to sell my house and buying a condo. Had it all set up and ready to go, I only lived in it a couple weeks before I had the surgery. So now I have to sell it and see what happens from there. This doesn't sound like great news, but it's news of what has happened to one of us clergy. We were not promised that a cherry life or glorious time, but it's life as we have to live it. I am doing pretty well, but it's hard to take all that when you're a widow, but God has provided a family of friends that have surrounded me and helped me in any way shape that I need. I hope that if one of us gets into a position

like this we are circled by a great cloud of friendship. Well, that is life in my neck of the woods. I'm in New Albany care center. No, I will take that back. I am in Cranberry something or other – the assistant living portion. We'll talk to you again sometime. Blessings to you all.

Bill McCartney, now in his 28th year of retirement, continues to enjoy various church related activities. This includes being in the clergy preaching schedule in his retirement community. When talking about his first sermon, in February, 1950, in a small Presbyterian Church that paid college students \$5 per Sunday to fill their Pulpit, Bill says he's sure they did not get their money's worth for their \$5. Of course, his ministry grew in the years since October 1, 1953, when he took his first official church pastoral assignment.

Steven K. Brown: Since this quotation mentions the apple tree, I thought it might be worthy of inclusion in TOAT. It comes from a calendar from Boston University School of Theology, December, and was written by Louise Erdrich:

"Life will break you. Nobody can protect you from that, and being alone won't either, for solitude will also break you with its yearning. You have to love. You have to feel. It is the

reason you are here in earth. You have to risk your heart. You are here to be swallowed up. And when it happens that you are broken, or betrayed, or left, or hurt, or death brushes too near, let yourself sit by an apple tree and listen to the apples falling all around you in heaps, wasting their sweetness. Tell yourself that you tasted as many as you could."

In personal news, **Linda** has been in remission from multiple myeloma since Oct. 1 and we plan to be in Ohio for a couple of weeks in December before returning to Florida for the winter. Thanks to everyone for your kind thoughts and prayers.

Tom & Kitty Snyder continue to live in retirement in Ashland, Ohio. I am fully retired from teaching at Ashland Theological Seminary, MTSO, & Course of Study, all of which were deeply fulfilling. I also retired from serving as Visitation Pastor for Christ and First churches in Ashland, where we continue to be affiliated & worship at both. We are deeply appreciative of our ministers, Mar Bruner and Derek Kubilus, and of both faith communities. I was deeply honored to participate in this summer's Reinstatement Service at Cuyahoga Falls, and present stoles on behalf of all of us conference retirees to those reinstated. We are

grateful for the annual retiree's luncheon at Ashland University (nice to have it almost in our backyard!), and the work of Paul White and the board. We experience the scope of ministry and cherished colleagues each year at that event. Despite health challenges, especially Kitty, we keep on doing the things we love as much as possible, and the people we love sharing in them, including family, fellow retirees, and friends from former churches. We sat in our sunroom the other morning setting doctors' appointments (sound familiar?), yet still uttered prayers of gratitude for all the blessings we experience every day. We pray this gratitude for all of you, along with all the blessings of this Holy Season.

Northern Waters District

Don & Mary Lou Lefelar share their Thanksgiving/Christmas letter with you from their home at 2154 Dover Center Rd., Apt. 230 Westlake, OH 44145.

It's me, Oscar, that exceptionally cute schnoodle who enlivens the lives of Don and Mary Lou. It's time for me to shine the light on what the Lefelars have been up to. We moved, all three of us. I overheard some muffled whispers when the two-

leggeds thought I was asleep, that only two would make the move to Concord Reserve retirement home. It was very upsetting, but things worked out for all of us; Dad made the cut!

For me, it's been a great move. After so many years at the last home, I was getting tired of the same old smells. You know, familiarity can breed contempt. Now every walk has some new exciting smell. Every bush and tree within a quarter of a mile has experienced a dribble or two of me, if you know what I mean. But that's the least of it!! The attention and ear rubs have exploded exponentially. Some say I'm the cutest pooch in the whole place. I tend to agree.

We are in what's called an independent living residential community. Dad says it's like being in a college dorm except for less drinking and less running in the halls, which are tranquil by 9 PM. Mom and Dad like the place. It's more social, which I like, because when they stop to talk to people, I benefit from their attention. Truthfully, I think I'm the main event.

Mom has fully recovered from her two broken femurs from 18 months ago and is very active. She even went cross-country skiing last winter and can't wait for the snow to fall.

She walks with new friends and goes to exercise classes. Apparently, although not yet proven, Dad is getting smarter. He gave up falling, for the most part. In 2024, he fell 9 times, never breaking a bone, but ending up in the hospital once with a bump on that big head. Maybe it knocked some sense into it because he's only fallen once this year. Perhaps you can teach old guys new tricks.

More good news. On May 31, Molly and Kevin had a baby boy named Kevin Michael Davet. Molly and Kevin love being parents. Mom and Dad love being great-grandparents. Their other grandchildren are flourishing as well. Katie of North Carolina is engaged to marry W. Trey Wilson in September. They've been dating since junior high, both have graduated from UNC, and have good jobs. Katie's little brother, Grant, also graduated from UNC and is working for the majority leader of the North Carolina House of Representatives. Daniel is a junior at Miami University in Florida, majoring in Finance. He is spending the semester in Barcelona, which is someplace I don't think I'll ever be able to pee. Mom and Dad's kids, Scott and Stephanie, and their spouses, Katie and Mickey, are doing well and enjoying life.

So, we had lots of good news this year. But wait, there is more! I turn 14 on December 24. My birthday should remind you of the really Good News of December 25. (Dad told me to do that. Apparently, he is some type of theologian.) The Good News is the birth of Jesus, who loves us with a love that will never let us go. Tummy rubs forever. That sounds great to me.

With Love, Mary Lou, Don,
and Oscar, the Almost
Wonder Dog

Stan & Carol Wallace can't believe they are in their 80's, They welcomed their daughter Beth to an early Thanksgiving dinner before she flew off to Barcelona, Spain to see her daughter Chloe who is in a Master's degree program in digital marketing and data analysis. Their twin grandchildren Jackson and Sarah have been accepted to Western Washington University where they will begin studies in the Fall. All quiet on the home front.

Paul & Linda Beal wish Happy holidays and Happy New Year to all our colleagues and friends in East Ohio. We are now retired 24 years and are in good health and very happy to welcome a new year. God bless!

Marv & Sandy Brown:
GREETINGS to ALL! First

and foremost, Sandy and I wish all our friends a special Christ filled, holiday season. I don't know how many of you know it, but I hail from the sunshine and sandy beaches of Virginia Beach. And here Sandy and I are, retired, living in the snow belt of northeast Ohio -- "go figure". Like many of you, Sandy and I look forward to spending these special holiday days with our two daughters, our two sons-in-law, and our five grandchildren. We plan to laugh a lot, cry joyful tears and hopefully make memories that will be remembered for years to come. Our one grandson is attending Denver University, where he also plays lacrosse. We've never visited the mile high city but have plans to do so in February. Pray Sandy and I will not make fools of ourselves in the stands as we cheer for our grandson, hopefully to victory. May God bless all of you immensely. Stay safe and "warm".



South Forrest District

Brad Call has been serving as interim pastor at Carrollton First and The Bridge since Nov 1. He will conclude his service there December 31.

Central Valley District

Anne Fisher, retired licensed local pastor, is serving the Trinity Cooperative Parish [The UMC of Uniontown and Greentown UMC (originally including Clearview UMC)] 1/4-time as pastoral care pastor. Anne thought she was retired for good and was enjoying being laity as a member of Clearview UMC (where she had served as pastor for 7 years until she retired on December 31, 2013, due to her husband, Bill's, ill health). Over the years, as other members died or were unable to volunteer, Anne took on the role of church treasurer, bulletin preparer, newsletter editor (= writer), counter, Zoom operator, etc., and support and coach of Clearview's process of considering its future. In 2024, the several remaining active members who were able to meet finally and formally realized the church could not continue because they were running out of (not money) people. Early in 2024, Anne had already decided to give up

all her "jobs" except as treasurer as of June 30, 2024. Then, out of the blue in April, God called her back into active ministry. Clearview held its final service of worship on June 30, 2024 -- Anne's ministry of pastoral care began on July 1. In the fall of 2023, Anne was questioning what she was doing for the church and realized that what brings her joy is not the paperwork of administration -- what brings her joy is conversations about things that matter. And that's where God led her. Thanks be to God.

Jim Skinner: As you can imagine, with the death of my beloved Karen in April, this has been a difficult year. I am still adjusting to her absence, coping with bouts of grief and loneliness, and creating a new rhythm of living. For the past six years Karen has not been part of our family holiday observances, but still I could visit her every day and experience her presence, however limited the conversation. Nevertheless, I have been comforted and encouraged by family and friends for which I am deeply grateful. This October I was able to take my two youngest granddaughters on a trip to Boston and greatly enjoyed their company. I look forward to family time at Christmas.

Beth McGuire: After 30 years of marriage, Dave and I are still together, but living separately. Something we didn't look forward to but the reason we moved to this retirement community and its wide range of health care & living options. David's health has continued to decline, and he moved to an Assisted Living apartment in March of this year. I continue to live in the villa. After numerous falls and multiple interventions, we purchased him an electric wheelchair. Although his mobility has continued to decrease, so have the falls and he is stable. I join him regularly for a variety of activities held on the three floors of units including games, arts and crafts, educational and music programs etc.

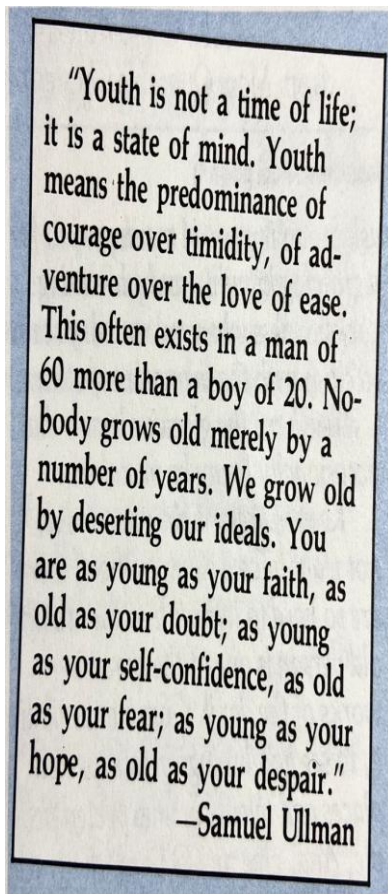
Dave's daughter, KayDee, came from LA to visit her dad in the middle of April and again at the end of October, giving me the opportunity for a break and time to get away. I visited Jeremy and Steven in April and traveled to The Wilds with my best friend, Cindy in October. The Wilds is a 10,000-acre reclaimed strip mine committed to wildlife conservation. It is located in Cumberland Ohio (near Zanesville) and an extension of the Columbus Zoo. It is home to 18 endangered species with plenty of room for them to

roam year-round. Dave and I made plans to go for our 25th anniversary but Covid shut it down and since he is no longer mobile Cindy and I traveled there and experienced on an off-road safari ride into the pastures, stayed overnight in a yurt and I finally ticked off my bucket list of ziplining!

I remain active on our campus as chair of the resident prayer chain and spiritual life committee. In addition to weekly vespers, we support other activities. Lent began on Ash Wednesday with 5 interactive reflection stations (ashes, prayer, oil, clay, water), we held our first pet blessing and remembrance service on the Feast of St. Francis in October, hosted the new Bishop of East and West Ohio UMC, a Kirkin' O' the Tartan service by our new chaplain (complete with a bagpiper), our first hanging of the greens with new Chrismons made and decorated by residents, our first Longest Night/Blues Christmas service and we acquired new handbells. I also try to stay active physically, taking advantage of our swimming pool on campus and practicing yoga at home and at church. I am still counting birds and monitoring our nest box.

We pray this finds you well. May you receive and reflect the light of Christ to others.

Cindy Theobald retired from active ministry July 1st. She and her husband, **Kerry King**, are now both fully retired from active ministry. We have purchased a home in Creston, Ohio – about halfway between Wooster and Medina. We enjoy being with the Creston Canaan UMC on Sundays. We now have more time to spend with our families and friends without the urgent need to attend to pastoral responsibilities. We are looking forward to travelling more and settling into our new home as well.



Out of Conference

Jim & Bonnie Magaw share
One of the first things one sees
when entering our Assisted
Living home is this acrostic:
When you
Enter this
Loving home
Consider yourself
One of the special
Members of an
Extraordinary family!
What a beautiful description
of the loving community we
call **CHURCH!**

Out of State

William John ("Jack") Kouth: I have finished 21 years of retirement and am showing and feeling the effects of aging. My brother Dick died this year in hospice in Knoxville, TN. Our sister Mary died in 2017. I am the youngest of 3 and now am the sole survivor. My wife, **Mary Sue**, an Episcopal Deacon died 4 years ago. My 2 surviving sons live here in Omaha. My youngest and his partner have a 7-year-old son. My daughter Tami is a retired Navy RN living in FL. Her son and daughter both got married this year. We had a "family trifecta" on Jan. 4th: My sister's granddaughter was married by the Mayor of Massillon, my granddaughter

was married in Winter Park, FL and Mary Sue's granddaughter had a baby girl that night in Omaha - our 7th great-grandchild. Please pray for my daughter. She has gone over to "the dark side"- the Methodist Church she attends broke with the UMC and is now Global and she says that "God saved Trump" and that Democrats are Communists.
William John ("Jack") Kouth
5176 S. 149th CT
Omaha, NE 68137-1456
(402) 639-6516
wjackkouth2@gmail.com

Nancy Hull: I recently moved to Tallahassee, Florida and am enjoying the sun and warmth. I've never been a cold weather girl. Enjoying grandchildren here, attended my granddaughter's wedding last week, enjoying time with my daughter, Shelley and family.

My new address is 3055 Bent Grass Lane, Tallahassee, Fla 32311. Email is the same: revnancy95@msn.com. Phone is the same 330-441-7188.

Russ & Ellen Martin of Twin Lakes Community in Burlington, NC have been traveling some new paths this year into adventure and growth. Russ accepted the Directorship of the Capital Funds Campaign at his church and along with a great staff of dedicated volunteers raised \$500,000 for building

improvements and upgrades. He has also taken on the chairmanship of Democratic Precinct in which TLC is located. Through monthly open listening sessions and daily political news updates to all interested parties, the Precinct (largest in the county) helped turn all Mayoral and Council seats to Democratic officeholders. For a pastor who was never very political, it was a steep learning curve.

Ellen remains active in Handbells at both church and TLC and served as Chair of the Prayer Shawl Ministry at the church giving 2+ prayer shawls per week to recovering and grieving members of the church and community. She is also active in the TLC Library and along with Russ walks about two miles per day, exercises in the active aging classes and chair yoga as well as volunteering in many areas of care for TLC residents. Life is busy and good - cold at times, but NO SNOW. Call us at 336-395-8622 if you are in the area

Don and Tammy Kuntz: Our transition to N/S bicoastal experienced only minor turbulence. Tammy's Montana driver's license took two weeks. My Texas driver's license took eight. We have solar panels on the roof, but they are not yet connected to the grid. We are connected with a medium-sized (high

impact) congregation in both places. We have facilitated the transport of four mission teams across the border, to Manos Juntas Mission, including a donated church bus and hundreds of pounds of supplies. Tammy works remotely and travels to her nine states as work requires. I miss the taste of Akron city water, and the blessing of city sewer as we are septic system dependent in both states. Our part of South Texas is still in drought, so I am bottle feeding the baby avocado trees we planted. We will be in Ohio for Christmas to see snow.



The deadline for submitting materials to be included in the 2026 Spring Issue of TOAT is April 15, 2025. Submit materials to paulw2800@gmail.com

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Association**

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East Ohio Conference UMC
8800 Cleveland Ave. NW
North Canton, OH 44720
800-831-3972

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East Ohio Conference UMC
PO Box 2800
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Please keep in prayer the families of the following retirees who have entered the church triumphant since our last reporting September 1, 2025:

Edwin D. Aluzas, *retired Elder*, died March 4.
Robert Edgar Sherman, *retired Elder*, died August 18.
Carl G. Beighley, *retired Elder*, died August 25.
Dolores Gerycz, *surviving spouse of the Rev. Paul Gerycz*, died August 25.
James G. Verbridge, *spouse of The Rev. Becki Bowan Verbridge*, died August 28.
Phyllis Costello, *spouse of the Rev. Floyd Costello*, died September 2.
Madlynne Webber, *retired Associate Member*, died September 6.
Rita Myers, *spouse of The Rev. George (Skip) Myers*, died September 21.
Joseph P. Platt, *retired Elder*, died October 8.
Ela Snehleta Howard, *spouse of The Rev. Charles Howard*, died October 19.
Warren C. Hill, *West Ohio retired Elder (formerly of East Ohio)*, died November 2.
Phillip R. Gibson, Jr., *retired local pastor*, died November 5.
Patricia Pfander, *spouse of retired Rev. James Pfander*, died November 21.
Sam L. Slack, *retired Elder*, died November 24.
Dean V. Roush, *retired Elder*, died November 27.
Linda E. O'Donnell, *retired Local Pastor*, died November 30.
Jeannie Beighley, *retired Elder*, died December 2.

(Please note that a family member should contact the bishop's office at time of a death. Send notices to Melissa McGee at mmcgee@eocumc.com).