



The Oasis

July 2026

Cross in the Desert UMC

Where God's Love Transforms Lives, building a just and joyful community.

**42nd Annual Conference of the
Desert Southwest Conference of the United Methodist Church
June 18-21, 2026**

Report of Delegates - Rhonda Mortenson and Romi Simons

This year's Annual Conference was held at the Lakeview United Methodist Church in Sun City, AZ. Some meetings were held at nearby First UMC in Sun City and Arizona Korean UMF in Glendale. The four days were packed with worship, prayer, music, work, fellowship, learning, appointments and commissioning. The theme was "A Healthy Church for a Healthy World: We Are the Church Together." This focus was the second year of the "A Healthy Church for a Healthy World" series, with this year focusing on the health of local churches.

The morning of Day One of Annual Conference had separate meetings for Laity and Clergy. Dr. Ev Taylor and Rae Lathrop led the Laity Session. Ev encouraged participants to think creatively about how to attract new people to the church by filling out the worksheet "Attracting & Engaging Gen Z & Other Unchurched People: A Home Church Assessment," which summarized the meaningful discussions about their findings, and practical ways to reach new people. Participants were encouraged to think creatively about outreach, identify barriers and opportunities, and remember that "having the right information is key to turning a good idea into a successful one." Rae shared information about our amazing learning platform DSCGrow.com, which offers resources, courses, videos, and ideas to support ministry growth and innovation. We encourage you to go onto the Desert Southwest United Methodist Church website and see these resources for yourself!

After lunch on Day One, Bishop Carlo Rapanut kicked off the plenary session with a powerful message challenging the members to embody a vision of church that brings healing, hope, and transformation to a fractured world.

Joanne Miles-Long led us in a land acknowledgment. Land acknowledgment begins with words, but its true impact is realized when those words are backed by understanding and action. Joanne told us about the history of the tribal lands where all of our ministries are located and the Indigenous Peoples who have stewarded this land. We are encouraged to research the original inhabitants and by doing so, honor Indigenous Peoples in a meaningful way and foster a deeper appreciation and respect for their cultures, wisdom and stewardship of the land.

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Pastor's Corner



Introducing Pastor Tu'ulauena Lolohea, who begins his appointment with us on July 1, 2026. He is from Fakakai, Ha'Apai, Tonga, and graduated from high school in Hawaii. He played football for the University of Hawaii as a linebacker. He studied at Sia'atoutai Theological College in Nuku'alofa, Tonga, where he met his wife Taina. Both are PKs. Pastor T's dad, Taike Lolohea, is the pastor of the Tongan UMC in Mesa. Tu'ulau is coming to us from an appointment at St. Mark's UMC Sanctuary Campus in Tucson.

Pastor T. will be with us in a half time position beginning July 1st. We will be sharing him with Mission Bell UMC, 4645 W. Bell Rd in Glendale. We have changed service time to 9:00 am, and Mission Bell has changed their time to 11:00 am, so don't expect Pastor T. to hang around on Sunday mornings to chat! He needs to get on the road!

We are looking forward to welcoming Pastor T., Taina, and their children to CITD!



Names matter—let's get it right!

TOO-OOH-LAO-ENA LO-LO-HAYA

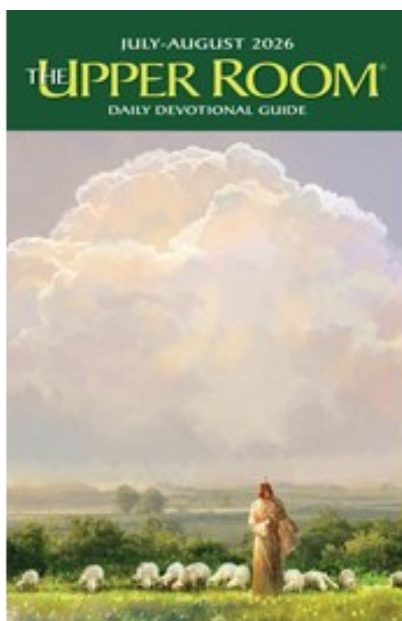
PASTOR TOO-OOH-LAO



July Birthdays

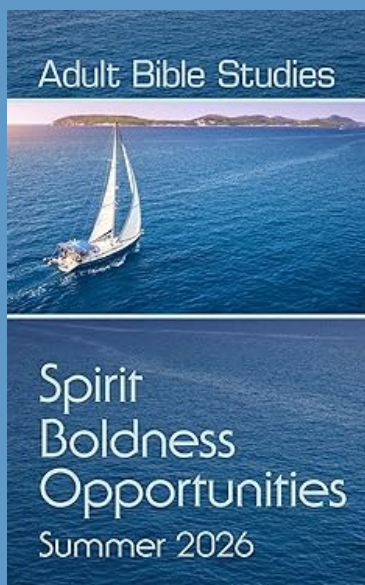
Beverly Ashcraft	July 2
Diane Ingold	July 2
Fran Kirk	July 3
Curt Robinson	July 5
Beth Bulkeley-Brown	July 7
Marlene Thompson	July 8
Wendy Pleake	July 11
Suzy Zarkovich	July 11
Rod Gaylor	July 16
Gina Pollard	July 16
Gretchen Miller	July 20
Heather Foster	July 23
Margaret Bridgewater	July 25
Jeannette Delster	July 26
Junior Harlan	July 26
Kathy Seward	July 30
Mary Tassi	July 30

We apologize if we have missed your special day. It means that the office does not have your information. Please notify the office if we need to update your information.



The *Upper Room* makes a perfect devotional, so be sure to pick one up today. It is available in a large print version as well as a regular print compact version that is perfect for pocket or purse.

A small donation is appreciated if you are able, but feel free to take one even if you can't donate.



Women's Bible Study
Tuesdays at 11:00 am
In the Library

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We took time to honor retiring clergy, celebrate newly ordained clergy, and those just starting their ministries:

New Local Pastors:

Terry Luiken

Trever Rook

Jasmine Griffin

Amanda "MJ" Shepherd

Presented as Associate Member:

Taike Lolohea

To Be Commissioned:

Adriana Hernandez - Provisional Deacon

Rachel Mosher - Provisional Elder

To Be Ordained:

Lauren Coffman - Full Elder

Asa Holly - Full Elder

Kevin Lester - Full Elder

Retiring Ministers:

Rev. Sandy Lynn Johnson, Elder in Full Connection

Rev. Arthur Tom Jelinek, Elder in Full Connection

Pastor Wendi Aitken, Associate Member

Rev. Mary Beth Klaehn, Elder in Full Connection

Pastor Tracy Perry, Local Pastor, Retired status as of July 1, 2026

Pastor Taike Lolohea, Associate Member as of June 18, 2026

Pastor Sandy Lee Johnson, Serving as an LLP for 14 years



Above: Outgoing Pastor Rev. Gina Pollard with "flat Carlo", the Bishop of New Mexico, and our delegates Rhonda Mortenson (l) and Romi Simons (rt).

Below: Incoming Pastor Tu'ulauena Lolohea with our delegates.



First UMC at Bisbee has served its faithful completion and has closed. A memorable history and video was shared. Conference leaders offered words of gratitude and formally moved for closure of these churches according to the Book of Discipline, paragraphs 2549.1a and 2549.4b. A vote was taken and passed.

On Thursday evening, our very own Rev. Gina Pollard delivered a moving Memorial sermon from Joshua 4:1-7, gently reminding us that we gather in the sacred tender twilight of memory to honor those who have gone before us.

Days Two and Three were spent voting for Lay and Clergy delegates for the 2028 General and Western Jurisdictional Conferences. Voting was very long and drawn out but after a day and a half, we were able to pick the top 9 people in each area. Top votes went to a simple majority half plus 1. It took one afternoon to get 3 Laity seats and 1 Clergy seat. Then our own Rhonda Mortensen brought a motion to amend the voting on the reserves for advancement based on the top 5 candidate percentages rather than a simple majority. A runoff was done based on ties with the most votes winning the 5th spot. Her idea saved us SO MUCH time! When the Clergy were ready to vote, a motion was brought amending their reserve votes to follow the leadership of the Laity. Just proves that the Laity are very smart and important people too!

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We celebrated the 70th anniversary of women's ordination in the United Methodist Church with stories and remembrance of the accomplishments of women in the Church. Rev. Mary Bullis was at Conference this year. She was the first ordained Deacon woman to serve. She was pregnant, and the church didn't know how to deal with her maternity leave! She laid the foundation of women serving as clergy/elders/deacons/laypersons, because out of a total of 150 serving, 74 are women. How far the women in this Conference have come!

The Conference approved a new structure and the Districts were renamed. The Desert Southwest Annual Conference now has three Districts, rather than the previous four. The North District is renamed the Canyon District, which includes Nevada, the Prescott area, Flagstaff, and the northeast. The East and West Districts are renamed the Valley District, including the Greater Phoenix area, from Buckeye to Globe and from Anthem south. The South District is renamed the Sonoran District, including Tucson, Yuma, and the southeast.

Day Three we had the joy of meeting Rev. Tyler Sit. He invited us to "Move Like Jesus" using stories from his ministry during Operation Metro Surge in Minneapolis. Rev. Sit challenged the Conference to see discipleship as embodied in action. His story of Minneapolis Clergy bravely facing down the powerful people in Minneapolis this past winter during that time of strife was compelling. We encourage you to listen to his story on the Desert Southwest United Methodist Church website at <https://subsplash.com/u/lakeviewunitedmethodistc/media/d/xhnf4sm-dsw-annual-conference-saturday-am-plenary-session>, forward at about 1 hour and 38 minutes. We promise it will be most worth your while.

The 2026 mission project for Annual Conference was to support the Solidarity Fund. Over \$31,000 has been raised so far, and we hope to grow the fund to \$40,000 by the end of June. The Solidarity Fund was established to support immigrants facing financial hardship amid increased immigration enforcement (the Asylum Refugee Immigration Task Force).

In many of our communities, detention and deportation leaves family members behind. Those families still need to pay rent and other important bills, while they work to continue to support themselves. Additionally, the fear of detention and deportation place additional strain on families who are already vulnerable. This fund offers direct, short-term assistance for basic needs such as rent, utilities, food, transportation, and medical expenses. By sharing our resources, we bear one another's burdens and offer a tangible witness to God's compassion and care for immigrants among us. Your generosity is a faithful act of solidarity with our immigrant siblings and neighbors, affirming the sacred worth of every person.

Day Four concluded the Conference. The pastors who will serve the congregations and ministries in the coming year were announced. We continued by worshipping with Iglesia Aliento and Lakeview UMC. The service was spirited and meaningful. It was a great way to end the productive four days of Annual Conference. Bishop Carlo Rapanut delivered the sermon, acknowledging that healing starts with each one of us. Bishop Carlo noted, "If we are about the healing of the world, we need to start with our own healing: physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health. The truth is that hurt people will hurt people. But healed people and those in the process of healing will help healing because they've experienced the transformation that healing brings. We ended the session by sharing Holy Communion with the Great Thanksgiving presided by Bishop Carlo Rapanut. We were then sent off to be a healing, hopeful, justice-seeking congregation.

We encourage each of you to go to the attached link to watch the daily recaps from the conference.

https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=dscumc+annual+conference+2026



June 14, 2026—Rev. Gina's Last Sermon at CITD



On Sunday, June 14th, we bid a very fond farewell to our departing pastor, Rev. Gina Pollard. While we wish her well on her new adventure at Paradise Vally UMC, we were sorry to say goodbye. In her three years with us we accomplished so much through her leadership with the funds donated to *Together We Can*. Her motto of "Get Stuff Done", all while studying for her commissioning, was a real asset to CITD.

We celebrated with an amazing worship service! There were sunflowers and bling everywhere!

Thomas selected favorite music for the choir and included songs from *Godspell*, one of Gina's favorites. We opened the service with "Prepare Ye" and followed with "By My Side", featuring guest soloists Mars Madison, and Shelby Hanks. Rev. Gina gave an inspiring message "Passing the Baton".



Thank you Pastor Gina

"Let your Light Shine..." Matthew 5:16



Pastor Gina's last sermon at CITD is
June 14th, 2026 at 9:00 AM

We will be celebrating her and
sharing our appreciation with a

Brunch Potluck

Members are encouraged to express their appreciation.

After the service we moved to Fellowship Hall for a Brunch Potluck. The CITD cooks outdid themselves with breakfast casseroles and other goodies. Everyone had a chance to talk with Pastor Gina and show their appreciation for her time with us and wish her Godspeed.



Saturday at the Movies

JULY 11

Double Feature!

Matinee Showing *Moana*

Doors open at 1:45 pm, show at 2:00 pm

2nd Show *The Devil Wears Prada 2*

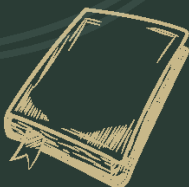
Show starts at 4:00 pm

CITD Youth Room

SUMMER VIRTUAL BIBLE STUDY · 2026

Bible Study for the *Busy*

Good
News



Hard
News



*Your bible
This week's news
A community that listens*

Thursdays at 7pm • June 4 - Aug 27 • Virtual - Zoom



PRAYER

LET'S TALK ABOUT JESUS

Elizabeth Weir, S.D.

NEHEMIAH 8:1,3 All the people came together as one in the square before the Water Gate. They told Ezra the teacher of the Law to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded for Israel.

He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of all who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law.

As the body of Christ, we can take inspiration from these verses in Nehemiah. Ezra reading aloud God's Word to the people of Israel led to a period of awakening, revival and repentance. The Israelites were so inspired, they set about to rebuild the temple. Along with Nehemiah the Israelites rebuilt Jerusalem's walls. Now, today, we must step up to answer the call to bring our nation back to its spiritual foundations. May God cause a great revival and awakening in the hearts of our and inspire folks throughout our land to read the Word and share its truths for the next 250 years and beyond.

Valley District Prayer Focus for July

Christ Community UMC—Avondale

Rev. Carl Peterson

Community Church of Buckeye—Buckeye

Pastor Christine Jones

Dayspring UMC—Tempe

Rev. Jeffrey Procter-Murphy

Rev. Shirley Wells

Desert Chapel UMC—Apache Junction

Pastor Philip Tesarek

Desert Foothills UMC—Phoenix

Rev. Robert Payne

PRAY
without ceasing
1 Thessalonians 5:17



As the Summer heats up, take some time to cool off and join CITD's UWFaith for lunch. All Members are invited to meet Wednesday, July 15 at Chili's, 12660 N Tatum, 11:00am. Please RSVP to Mary Ann Crist.

There will be no Leadership Team meeting in July.

Mary Martha will meet not be meeting for the summer.

Devotions and Dinner will meet at Chompies, 3212 E Cactus Rd, on Tuesday, July 21 at 6:30 pm.

Bookworms will meet on Wednesday July 5 at 9:00 am via ZOOM. Please note the change of day! In celebration of the USA's semi quincentennial the book for July is "*What Does the Constitution Actually Say?*" by Ben Sheehan. You can find the link in "It's Happening Here." Join us for a lively discussion. New readers are always welcome!



Mission u

In person - July 16-18 at Trinity United Methodist – 3600 Fourth St., Flagstaff, AZ 86004

[Click Here for in person registration](#)

Registration deadline July 9

Virtual via Zoom - August 4-6

[Click Here for virtual registration](#)

Registration deadline July 28

This year's theme will explore times in the Bible when people experienced "God with us," especially times that involve God "calling" people to a particular action or way of being. Through these stories we will explore what these experiences can teach us about God and what God desires for this world and the ways we move through it.

HOTEL INFORMATION for in person

We have a reserved block of rooms at the Days Inn by Wyndham, 3601 East Lockett Rd, Flagstaff, Arizona. Use this link to book your room: [Click here to book](#) There is a complimentary hot buffet breakfast provided.

All rooms must be reserved by July 1st to receive the discounted group rate.

Select the correct dates on the reservation page to receive these discounted rates. · Rates are: \$110 weekday / \$165 weekend (plus taxes)

Questions, Lorraine Shaw, Mission u, Dean, ladyinsurance@att.net

Clair Hart, Mission u, Assistant Dean, hartcd89131@gmail.com



I'm very happy to report that we are now at 97.7% of our General Capital Campaign Goal so we are well on our way to meet or exceed our goal of \$215,000 by year-end. Projects outside the original Together We Can Campaign have also run through the Together We Can designated account, but we're keeping the reporting separate below. Our 97.7% progress does not count the other \$198,000 in additional projects funded by the CITD Foundation.

Together We Can Financial Status as of	6/11/2026
Together We Can General Capital Campaign	
Goal	\$ 215,000.00
Received Funds	\$ 209,972.18
% of Goal	97.7%
Total Funds Spent	\$ 153,467.97
Total Funds Committed	\$ -
Money left to be spent	\$ 56,504.21
TWC Designated for Digital Sign Expenses First from CITD Foundation	
Received Funds	\$ 45,000.00
Total Funds Spent	\$ 8,402.65
Total Funds Committed	\$ 27,787.95
Money left to be spent	\$ 8,809.40
TWC for Sewer Expenses First from CITD Foundation	
Received Funds	\$ 120,000.00
Total Funds Spent	\$ 120,000.00
Total Funds Committed	\$ -
Money left to be spent	\$ -
TWC Designated for Repaying Preschool from CITD Foundation	
Received Funds	\$ 33,000.00
Total Funds Spent	\$ 33,000.00
Total Funds Committed	\$ -
Money left to be spent	\$ -

Projects in progress:

Digital Sign

Grass replacement and further landscaping improvements

For more information on the status of these, please see the Leadership Board Report. If you have any questions or input, please see or



Desert Southwest Conference

The United Methodist Church

Milestones of Memory: Observance of Anniversaries at the Desert Southwest Conference

Published on Jun 20, 2026 Annual Conference Annual Conference Sessions Committee News

In our 2026 Annual Conference session, members of the Desert Southwest Conference marked several anniversaries in United Methodist history.

*Rev. Sylvia Harris, Chair of the Commission on the Status and Role of Women led the body in honoring the **70th Anniversary of the Ordination of Women** through sharing stories of early women in clergy in our conference, including but not limited to Rev. Mary Bullis, Rev. "Tweedy" Evelene Sombrero Navarrete, Rev. Mary Klaehn, Rev. Lynn Bartlow, Rev. Tina Rees, Rev. Jen Lambert, and Rev. Dee Dee Azhikakith. After these remembrances, Rev. Sylvia Harris led us in a liturgy of confession as prepared by the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women.*

It is also the **30th Anniversary of the Order of Deacons** in 2026, following its establishment in 1996. *Rev. Tina Rees, Chair of the Order of Deacons, remarked that "we express gratitude for the faithful servants in our community who have responded to the call to serve as Deacons. We acknowledge their attentiveness to their calling and their willingness to engage in ministry in unfamiliar contexts, thereby gaining a deeper understanding of needs beyond our church doors" and led the body in a prayer for our Deacons."*

One final United Methodist anniversary for 2026 is the **50th Anniversary of the United Methodist Volunteers in Mission - UMVIM**, which we observed by watching a video describing their ministries. **UMVIM** began in 1976 as a grassroots movement within the United Methodist Church to equip short-term mission teams to work on projects globally. Over the past 50 years, more than half a million volunteers have been deployed altogether.

Conference Contacts

Bishop: Carlo A. Rapanut

Bishop's Assistant: Julie O'Neal joneal@dscumc.org

Conference Lay Leader: Alberta Farnsworth

Valley District Superintendent: Melissa Rynders

Assistant: Jeannine Marinoni jmarinoni@dscumc.org

Valley District Lay Leader: Trinity Donovan

Director of Communications: Christina Dillabough

cdillabough@dscumc.org

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Cross in the Desert UMC Staff

Pastor

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Youth and Technology Coordinator
Kevin Joy

Administrative Assistant

Julie Wagner
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Music Director
Thomas Hartwell

Financial Secretary

Alice Easter
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Building and Grounds Concerns
Please contact the office by phone or email so
the Property Team may be notified