

**REV. DR. RENITA J. WEEMS, PH.D.****Presentation To Be Announced**

*Rev. Dr. Renita J. Weems is a writer, a minister, a biblical scholar, and a person who has been journaling for more than 30 years. She was the first African American woman to earn a doctorate in Old Testament studies. Rev. Dr. Weems has taught at Vanderbilt Divinity School and Spelman College. She has served as academic dean at American Baptist College in Nashville, Tennessee. Rev. Dr. Weems received her received both her Doctorate and Master of Divinity from Princeton Seminary; and her undergraduate degree from Wellesley College.*

*She has lectured and written widely on topics of religion, women in the bible, and women's spirituality. Among her written works includes the award-winning "Listening for God: A Minister's Journey Through Silence and Doubt" (2000), which won the Religious Communicators' Council's prestigious 1999 Wilbur Award for "excellence in communicating spiritual values to the secular media."*

**MS. PENNY COST/ISAAC SIMMONS****Divine Creativity: Dwelling at the Convergence of Art & Social Change**

You have heard it said, "A picture is worth a thousand words," but truly I tell you, in times of unknown, your art is priceless. Join Ms. Penny Cost for an incredible workshop exploring the revolutionary power that dwells at the convergence of Artistry and Social Change. Artistic representation has been a key feature of reformation and revolution throughout the entire history of the Church. From satirical writing to poetic witness, from renaissance painting to Drag Makeup, whatever your mode of artistry is, it is good, it is holy, and it is reshaping the world! Let us explore how we can best harness each other's abilities to continue the Christ inspired act of bending the moral arc of the universe towards justice."

*Ms. Penny Cost (She/Her/Hers) is not your average, everyday, bless-your-heart-ing church-lady! She (as her real-life counterpart Isaac Simmons they/them) is reportedly the first Drag Queen in the world to become a Certified Candidate for Ordained Ministry within the United Methodist Church. Due to her ability to reach, empower and celebrate LGBTQIA+ People; her eye-catching ministry has earned her the title of, "The Drag Evangelist"! Ms. Penny Cost has preached to congregations within 25 states and 3 countries. She has been featured by NPR, Sojourners Magazine, the Associated Press, and countless other local news organizations. Ms. Penny's Drag is rooted in a unique reclamation of faith which aims to show all people as Whole-ly and Holy made.*

**REV. R. DEANDRE JOHNSON****Just Worship: Exploring the Intersections of Worship & Justice**

Through his work in churches of various sizes, demographics and worship styles, DeAndre has developed a passion for enlivening congregational song and exploring the ways in which worship becomes a catalyst for true reconciliation and discipleship. DeAndre is one of those rare gifts who can preach, design beautiful liturgy, and lead music. As a gifted pianist and singer, DeAndre will discuss prayers, liturgy, joining song, scripture, and the spoken Word to inspire as he explores the intersections of worship and justice.

*Rev. R. DeAndre Johnson, an ordained deacon in the United Methodist Church, is the pastor of music and worship life at Christ Church Sugar Land in Sugar Land, TX. He received a Bachelor of Music degree in Sacred Music at Centenary College of Louisiana and earned a Master of Sacred Music from Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University. He was the worship leader for the GBHEM Exploration events in Denver (2013) and Portland (2017), a vocational discernment event for college students. In 2016, he served as the music coordinator for both the General Conference of the United Methodist Church in Portland, OR and the World Methodist Conference in Houston, TX. In addition to these, DeAndre has been the chorus master and a frequent guest conductor of the Houston Ebony Opera Guild, a community chorus committed to the preservation and performance of classical music of the African diaspora.*

**DR. CHRISTOPHER HUNT****Giving Christ a New Face: James Baldwin, Black Religion, and the Death of Alabaster Christianity**

In the aftermath of the 1963 bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham Alabama that claimed the lives of four young Black girls, James Baldwin stated: "It is time that we, who in one way or another invented and are responsible for our deities, give [Christ] a new face. Give him a new consciousness." This workshop will offer an intensive examination of images of Jesus in James Baldwin's literature, putting his work into conversation with Black, womanist, and queer theological discourses. In essence, this workshop asks how we might begin to move past the white Jesus, the cisgender and heterosexual Jesus, & the capitalist Jesus, daring to imagine Christ with a "new face... a new consciousness."

*Christopher Hunt is Assistant Professor of Religion at Colorado College. As a scholar of African American religions, his research brings an interdisciplinary lens, including African American religious history, literary criticism, Black studies, contemporary theology (particularly Black, womanist, and queer theologies), and queer studies to bear in exploring the relationship of religion to varying socio-political phenomena, particularly race, gender, and sexuality. Hunt's research explores the relevance and meaning of Black religion for those on the margins of or considered outside of traditional religious spaces, whether due to transgressive religious identities (Black skeptics, agnostics, humanists, or non-theists), or because of non-normative sexual or gender identities.*

### AIMEE WEHMEIER



#### **Making the Path to Worship Accessible for People with Disabilities**

Aimee Wehmeier will share her journey as a late comer to the church. Learn what practices created barriers and what practices brought her closer to God. Discover how inclusion moved her from a seeker to a believer to an investor.

*Aimee Wehmeier, MBA, is the President and CEO of Paraquad, one of the first Centers for Independent Living (CILs) in the country. She has a bachelor's degree from the University of Missouri and a Master of Business Administration from William Woods University. Wehmeier, who has muscular dystrophy, has a passion for public policy, advocacy and increasing opportunities for people with disabilities. She serves as a board/council member for numerous local, regional, statewide and national organizations and foundations geared toward diversity and inclusion, rehabilitation, public health, education, housing access and business.*

### REV. HAROLD "RUSSELL" EWELL II



#### **Beyond Accessibility**

This Is Not Your Ordinary Disability Ministries Training! In this workshop, Rev. Russell Ewell will invite participants to explore the various ways that Ableist thought has informed the theology, ministries, and institutions of the Church. Attendees will discover ways to empower, be in solidarity with, and advocate with the disability community as they work to actualize disability justice.

*Ordained in the Missouri Conference of The United Methodist Church, The Reverend H. Russell Ewell II currently serves as The Pastor of Terrace Lake United Methodist Church (Kansas City MO). Additionally, he is the Chair Emeritus of The United Methodist Association of Ministers with Disabilities, and serves as a board member of Missouri Faith Voices. He gives talks across the country on Disability Advocacy and Awareness, The Disability Rights Movement, The Intersections of Religion and Disability, and The Intersectionality of Disability and Black Theology. Russell is a tireless advocate for a more liberating and inclusive theology of disability.*

### REV. ELSIE QUINTANILLA



#### **Growing Together**

This workshop will help participants understand the perspective of Latino ministries within the church and how they can become multicultural churches, facilitating the transition of first- and second-generation immigrants to insert them into the life and service of local congregations.

*Rev. Elsie Quintanilla currently serves as a senior pastor at New Covenant UMC and Zion UMC in Saint Louis, MO. She finished her Course of Studies at Garret Evangelical Theological Seminary. She has earned a Bachelor of Theology Degree from Latin American Biblical University (Costa Rica) and an MBA from Dakota Wesleyan University. Elsie has been honored to serve in El Salvador as Director of Pastoral Education at the Conference, a youth pastor, and associate pastor in many local and conference-wide capacities. Her passion has always been community service and social justice.*

**REV. POESE VATIKANI****Woven Together In A Context That Is Not Yours**

Woven Together (Lalanga Fakataha in my Native Tongan language) is a rich cultural, communal work that our people still practice on my island back in Tonga in the South Pacific. Our small rural town in Tonga is very rich in familial connections which provides a strong opportunity for building community and calling for unity among diversity. I bring this image of communal weaving from where I was born and raised to apply to a context that is totally not mine in rural ministry here in Missouri. My approach is using what we called in Tonga "lalanga fala" weaving of mats together. We are invited by God to this communal work in the mission field as we journey to build and bridge gaps of diversity in God's Kingdom on earth.

*Rev. Poese Vatikani attended seminary in Tonga and graduated with a Bachelor of Divinity degree. He came to Hawaii under an Asian Pacific Islanders Scholarship to attend Hawaii Pacific University in Honolulu in 1997. He graduated with a BA in History in 2000 and a Graduate Teaching Certificate of Languages in 2003. He worked in Finance until 2013 in Honolulu. In 2013 he was appointed by the Missouri Annual Conference to start a Pacific Islanders Ministry. He graduated from Saint Paul School of Theology with a MDiv in 2019. He serves as the Senior Pastor of Archie UMC.*

**TERESA STEWART****The Distinctive Gifts of Small Congregations:  
Co-Weaving the Kin-dom of God**

What if you had distinctive, urgently-needed gifts that are generally unavailable to big congregations? You do. What if your small-setting ministry is uniquely positioned to avoid risks of top-down deciding, program thinking, and toxic charity? It is. And what if it starts with that familiar gospel pattern of unexpected places, unlikely folks, and care for each precious one? It does. Small congregations: the Church needs your particular kind of interweaving leadership.

*Teresa Stewart is the creative director of Paper Bag Cathedrals, devoted to resourcing small congregations, and author of the blog Small Church, Big God. She has taught and written for the distinctive challenges of congregations with fewer than 95 weekly worshipers. More importantly, she has studied their distinctive strengths and fallen in love with their unexpected, local patterns of ministry. Her work reaches a variety of churches in all fifty states. She worships with Kuomba Pamoja, a United Methodist congregation of Congolese refugees, who continue to teach her about the mysteries of ministry. She welcomes conversations with small-setting pastors and laity at [SmallChurch.org](http://SmallChurch.org).*



**REV. MONICA JEFFERSON****Engaging Your Community with Cultural Sensitivity**

Social Justice requires a range of awareness, knowledge, and skills. Many of our local churches are experiencing the challenge of connecting and communicating with anyone outside of their comfort zones. Knowing where and how to connect requires engaging people, issues, and opportunities with cultural sensitivity. "See All The People" (UM General Board of Discipleship resource) provides an approach for this workshop to help individuals, congregations, and communities begin the work of community engagement for the purpose of interacting effectively with diverse people in different contexts.

*Pastor Monica Jefferson is a native of St. Louis, Missouri. She serves as the Senior Pastor of St. Andrew United Methodist Church, Florissant, Missouri. She attended St. Louis University and Fontbonne University, where she majored in business administration and marketing. She graduated from Saint Paul School of Theology COS in 1997 and was ordained in June 1998. She has served as staff to Bishop Ann B. Sherer and Bishop Robert Schnase as the Associate Conference Council Director for the Missouri East Conference from 1998-2000 and as United Methodist Missouri State Conference Coordinator of Urban and Intercultural Ministries 2000-2007. Pastor Monica (2012-Present) serves as the state of Missouri and Missouri Conference Secretary of the United Methodist Church. She has received awards for Social Justice and Community Advocacy from North County Churches United for Racial Harmony and Justice, The Missouri Conference of the United Methodist Church, and with the help of the office of Communications of the United Methodist Church produced and wrote the script for a training video titled "The Cost of Reconciliation." She serves on the "Solutions Committee" meeting with police chiefs and police officers from St. Louis County and several counties in Illinois to find ways to work together to stop violence through positive engagement.*

**TEDDY STEEN****I Can Do Anything Except the God Thing**

Church can be an important part of bringing people in the recovery community to an active faith. And, the church has received so much in return. This work shop will discuss attraction vs. promotion as a way to change people's stereotypical thoughts on people who are different than they are, why Twelve Step Recovery is a true example of inclusion, and how to change people's minds by first changing their hearts. Teddy is the Executive Director of ASCENT Recovery in Joplin, MO. She is excited to share how she found faith in a loving God through Alcoholics Anonymous and why she changed my mind about "Never being a part of organized religion."

*Teddy Steen is the Executive Director of ASCENT Recovery. Teddy holds a Bachelor of Science Degree in Social Work and a Teaching Certificate in Secondary Education. She holds certifications through the Missouri Substance Abuse Credentialing Board as a SATOP Instructor, Missouri Associate Drug Counselor II, a Certified Peer Support Specialist, a certified Moral Reconciliation Therapy (MRT) instructor, and a Medication Assisted Recovery Specialist. She has 35 years of sustained recovery. She also works for the Jasper County Treatment Courts. She founded ASCENT Recovery in 2008. She has been a member of Saint Pauls United Methodist Church in Joplin, MO for 25 years.*

### SAMANTHA FOMERA



#### Armed for Adulting 101

Youth ministry is FUN and MORE FUN! Adulting is HARD and BORING! Wait, what? Join us for some practical, and still fun, ideas on how to ensure our students have the foundation they need to thrive as adults. Adulting 101 morphs into what your students need and partners with parents and community members to allow you the assurance your students are equipped for adulthood, from car-care to health-care and skepticism

to grace. Learn how to create a low-cost, intergenerational experience that ensures our students have the faith foundation and the core life-skills for life as an adult, regardless of their family or faith context.

*Samantha grew up in the UMC. She earned a Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Central Methodist University and has earned several masters courses in Special Education, Biblical Studies, and Pastoral Care. She's on track to graduate with a Masters in Human Development and Family Sciences with an emphasis in Youth Development from MIZZOU in August 2022. Currently, she works in service coordination alongside people with developmental disabilities and their families, helping them to reach their utmost potential.*

### CHESSEY BRENTON



#### Growing Child Faith Connections Personally and As Members of the Body

Let's talk together about how we can help children grow personally on their faith journeys, with fellow classmates, and intergenerationally to the church body as a whole. Inclusion of young people in the church is vital to our success and longevity, as the Body of Christ. Let's help connect church and community while remembering to advocate for even the youngest members of God's family!

*Chessey Brenton is Director of Children and Family Ministries at Manchester UMC, her church home since childhood. She has a Bachelor of Science degree from Missouri State University, a Master of Arts in teaching from Lindenwood*

*University, and a Master of Arts in zoology from Miami University of Ohio. This opportunity connects all of her passions: education, science, and ministry.*

### NICK MUNDWILLER



#### Work in Progress

Some of us are lucky to have a clear sense of call to pursue a career in congregational ministry. Their roles are defined and come with power in the institution, and then there are the rest of us. In this workshop for laity, Nick will explore call without vocation as we ask ourselves "Who am I?" and "What am I to do?" in the midst of injustice and unjust institutions.

*Nick (they/them) is a community organizer, educator and advocate with over 13 years of experience in community education and facilitation around social justice issues. Trained in elementary education, ethics, theology and street activism, Nick*

*has experience working with schools, religious communities, political organizations, and non-profit organizations on a variety of diversity and justice issues.*