

## Meeting Needs of Clergy Families

Recently Elaine Hopkins, wife of United Methodist Bishop John Hopkins, described a ministry she helped develop in the East Ohio Conference. She and Elsa Court, wife of the Director of the Conference Council of Ministries, developed a list of surviving clergy spouses by contacting the Board of Pensions, District offices, and other conference agencies. They invited those most recently widowed to a brunch at the Episcopal residence, during which they learned that there was interest in connecting with each other, both in person and electronically, and that a major concern for many of them was what to do with their deceased clergy person's robes, stoles, small communion sets, chalices and the like.

Elaine and Elsa approached the East Ohio Conference Retiree Association and learned that some districts already had a ministry with clergy widows/widowers and that the Association could share information through its newsletter. A local church near the East Ohio Area Conference Center Office agreed to house clerical items donated by families of deceased clergy. The Board of Ordained Ministry informs those coming into ministry that these items are available for them, at no charge. The conference Mission Coordinator arranges for some of these items to be shipped in containers or carried by teams to African and Eastern European countries where clergy can use them. The process for donation and the availability of these items is publicized at annual conference and through the Conference Retiree Association newsletter.

In addition, two widows stepped up to coordinate several gatherings a year for spouses of deceased clergy who want to get together in person. One of these is held at Lakeside Chautauqua, site of their annual conference sessions on Lake Erie. Naming themselves SOCS (surviving Our Clergy Spouses), they work to help make widows and widowers aware of the Pastoral Care Counseling services and other supports available for them.

These creative approaches emerged because someone asked people about their needs and responded to what they heard. I encourage all conferences and local churches to do the same, as well as learning about other ways to support clergy families. Please visit [www.marriagelovepower.net](http://www.marriagelovepower.net), click on Best Practices Articles and Recommended Resources, and scroll down to the section on Ministering With Clergy Families. Both "Strengthening Clergy Families" and "Resourcing Clergy Families in Crisis and Transition" offer suggestions and reviews of relevant resources. The "Summary of Responses from Survey of Bishops and Annual Conference Leaders" describes specific actions that have been taken in some areas. In addition, UM Discipleship Ministries and the General Commission on Status and Role of Women are hosting a Healthy Families Webinar Series: "Tackling challenges of clergy families" starting at 2:00 pm Central Time, January 10, 2017. Visit <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/healthy-families-series-tackling-challenges-of-clergy-families> for more information and to register. This webinar, as with the others in the Healthy Families series, will be recorded and posted in the archives at <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/leadership-resources/archived-webinars>.

When clergy and their families feel cared for by the conference, district, and local churches, they will more likely grow in health and well-being, contributing significantly to the effectiveness of the church's ministry. Clergy families should not be expected to be perfect, but rather to be real, to face their challenges – whether predictable or unexpected - with faith and love, modeling for others the way of Christ. I believe that local churches, districts, and annual conferences greatly enhance their ministries when they support and resource clergy families.

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