



**Ambassador**  
*Nurturing the life of the Institute*

# Ambassador Update

## Institute for Discipleship

*Ambassadors nurture the life of the Institute for Discipleship through their prayers, advocacy, and financial support, advancing the Kingdom of God worldwide.*

### **April 2024: Growing**

In the spring we see nature turn from brown to green. I love it! It makes me think about growth.

I have noticed two types of growth--growth that is steady, and growth that is seen in spurts. Here at the Institute, we are experiencing both types.

For our Bishop Scholar program, we have now topped more than 100 graduates in the last 20 years. This was accomplished by having a steady enrollment of top international students who have Methodist connections.

At the same time, we are now watching more than 50 Disciple study groups finishing their 24-week journeys on our new app. Providing new opportunities in new ways to new people required a major growth spurt for the Institute. From app developers, to scholars, to Psalm readers, to editors and audio production, well over 150 persons each had a hand in making this project happen. I am most thankful to everyone who has helped in so many ways.

Thank you for keeping us growing with your prayers, gifts and by spreading word of our ministry to others.



Steve Wilke  
Executive Director

P.S. We are progressing toward our goal of having 100 ambassadors!

[Information About Being an Ambassador](#)

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## BeADisciple expands role with UM's Certified Lay Ministry program

The BeADisciple.com dedication to equipping persons to fulfill their callings is being seen in an expanded presence in the United Methodist Church's Certified Lay Ministry (CLM) program. David Palmer (shown at right) is a CLM and director of Lay Servant Ministries for the North Central District in the Florida Conference, as well as an instructor of courses in the BeADisciple.com CLM certification program. He has now joined the BeADisciple staff to promote and help grow the program.



Palmer and Lori Richey, director of online learning for the Institute for Discipleship, presented updates and met with denominational leaders at the UMC's 2024 Association of Annual Conference Directors of Lay Servant Ministries January convocation in Nashville. They discovered that many conferences are eager to refer their prospective CLM candidates to the four-course BeADisciple program, which is formally approved and supported by David Teel, the UMC's director of laity in leadership.

Twenty-six course modules have been scheduled in 2024 with an additional eight (32 total CLM courses) being planned for 2025 to meet the increasing program interest.

[\*\*More Information on BeAD's Certified Lay Ministry Program\*\*](#)

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## BeADisciple app enters new phase

The BeADisciple Study App finished its beta test with Disciple Fast Track (DFT) I and II in April. The 24-week studies were completed by 53 groups averaging eight persons in each group. These trailblazers offered invaluable insights as the app and content developers polished the final product.



For DFT I and II study groups launching this summer and fall, an introductory price is available to leaders and participants.

Also this coming this fall are a number of new four- to six-week studies. The first will be Rev. Susan Robb's *Called*. Following the Institute mission to assist in helping



Christians explore and discern their personal purpose and life plan, this study explores Biblical characters and their stories of God's call.

We are excited to start offering short term focused studies on the app. This will be a great place for small groups to get started having the fellowship and mutual learning for which the app was built. Please check out [BeADiscipleApp.com](https://BeADiscipleApp.com) from time to time to see new offerings. You can download the app (BeADisciple) free in the Apple store or in Google Play and browse the studies to be added soon.

[Visit the App Website](#)

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## **New members join IFD board in time for spring meeting**

Four new members joined the board of the Institute for Discipleship at its April 20 meeting, bringing a wealth of experience and energy to the group.

- Rev. Vic Casad is a retired elder in the United Methodist Church, retiring in July 2021 following eight years as district superintendent of the East District of the North Texas Conference. Vic has a bachelor's degree from Southern Methodist University, a Master of Divinity degree from Candler School of Theology at Emory University, and a Doctor of Ministry degree from Perkins School of Theology. He is married to Mary Brooke Casad and they have two children and three grandchildren.
- Mary Brooke Oliphint Casad received a bachelor's degree in journalism from Southern Methodist University, and studied at Harlaxton College in England. Casad co-authored a discipleship study series, "The Basics," and was commissioned by the E. Stanley Jones Foundation to write a biography of his life for young readers. She was a delegate to six United Methodist General and Jurisdictional Conferences and is past chair of UMR Communications, Inc., and the Foundation for Evangelism. Casad was director of connectional ministries for the United Methodist Church in the Dallas area (1997-2007), the first woman and layperson named to this position. She is the former executive secretary of The Connectional Table of The United Methodist Church.
- A community servant at heart, Dr. J. Michelle Vann is a TEDx speaker, international presenter, and Amazon best-selling author, empowering women to heal their minds, bodies, and spirits. She's bridging the gap with Vanntastic Solutions, her confidence coaching practice specializing in wellness, and Sistahs Can We Talk, a nonprofit tackling health disparities among women. With 32 years of marriage to Dr. William Vann and two adult children, her passion and purpose remain in mental health. Michelle earned a doctorate in Christian counseling and theology and a Master of Arts in Liberal Studies.
- Bernette Jenkins-Pleas's participation in the Disciple course led her to realize that believers are called by God to love people and to care for God's people--and that all people are God's people. She served on the church council of her congregation in Aurora, Illinois, until 12 years ago, when she and her husband, Ron, moved to Lake Oswego, Oregon. Their Oregon congregation is a multiracial group that spans the spectrums of ideology, socioeconomic levels, and gender/sexual identity. She served as a board member of LO for Love, an organization committed to making Lake Oswego a more welcoming city for people of color, and has participated in peaceful anti-racist activities. She

recently graduated from Indiana Wesleyan University with a master's degree in psychology and now coaches midlife women who are designing vibrant lives as well as being on staff at the Lewis & Clark Graduate School of Education and Counseling.

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