

Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church • To inspire and equip local faith communities to develop disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world • www.bwcumc.org • Volume 29, Issue 11 • December 2018



Bresean Jenkins, the BWC's new artist-in-residence, discusses the Advent devotional he and his D.C. students created. Jenkins will be using art and creative expression to help enliven faith and discipleship throughout the Conference.

Art installation offers colorful new way of seeing Advent

By MELISSA LAUBER UMConnection Staff

VER THE CENTURIES people have ascribed countless names to Jesus, but seldom has he been thought of as a graffiti artist. However, Bresean Jenkins, the new artist-in-residence for the Baltimore-Washington Conference, has no problem seeing Jesus as a dangerous artist, creating outside the mainsteam.

Jesus, he said, "takes our broken pieces and puts them together to create rare and beautiful things."

This year for Advent, Jenkins invited his students at the West Education Campus in Washington, D.C., where he teaches, to assist in the making of an art piece for the Baltimore-Washington Conference to use in its observance of Advent. "With art, I never care about what is. I always care about why," he said "Why does this look like stained glass windows with art imposed onto it? Because that is how I see the church - beauty and ugly coming together to re-create something completely new. This is how I see the church: graffiti. "I think Jesus was the graffiti guy, Jenkins continued. "He was a rogue. He found beauty wherever he went. Beauty comes from broken pieces, and that's the beautiful thing about stained glass. It's pieces — all coming together to let the light shine through."

grade, for four weeks. After much discussion and thought, they developed the concept for the piece. The kids chose the color schemes based on their impressions of Advent's weekly themes of hope, peace, faith and love.

"As it was being created and people were seeing it, there was a lot of pride," Jenkins said.

They even decided to let the imperfections stay. "Imperfections make art," he said. "In art, young people get to make their own rules. There are techniques in art, but there is no right or wrong way to do it and we have to respect that."

Reflecting on the Advent words, Jenkins and his students saw faith as "an unequivocable belief that something is going to happen when you have no evidence;" hope as "almost a divine optimism;" love as "an unspeakable emotion of care and concern that propels you to action;" and peace as "calm." Jenkins painted the center panel of the installation himself. It features the infant Christ child being lifted by hands. The images of baby Jesus are different for everyone, Jenkins said. "I'm thankful Jesus did not have an Instagram page and did not take selfies. I'm thankful for that because my connection and how I see him are shaped and framed by my sacred experiences." He said one of the things that did influence him was the African

Whom Do We Represent?

AN ADVENT MESSAGE FROM Bishop Latrelle Easterling

"Come, thou long expected Jesus, born to set thy people free; from our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in thee. Israel's strength and consolation, hope of all the earth thou art; dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart."

This is the opening stanza of "Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus," one of my favorite hymns, which is usually only included in liturgy during the

Advent



Bishop Easterling

season. It offers a beautiful and harmonious melody, and the words invite us into a season of preparation and waiting.

During Advent, we are called to wait. The word Advent comes from the Latin verb *advenire*, which means, "to come toward, to draw near, to approach." During these four weeks of Advent, we remember and celebrate God's getting proximate with humanity in the incarnated infant, but also the promise of his second coming. In Christ's second coming we have the promise of the fulfillment of the kingdom of God, and final victory over evil.

In our churches we hang festive greens and celebrate by lighting the Advent candles. Each element of the wreath provides rich symbolism for our understanding and remembrance. The circular wreath demonstrates the eternal, unending love of God, and the evergreens evidence eternal life. Four of the candles represent the virtues experienced in Christ: hope, joy, love and peace, while the

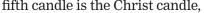
Youth applications are now available for the United to Love Moral Courage Awards. The awards will be presented to youth, ages 11-18, who are able to put their faith in action for the sake of justice despite risk, comfort, or societal silence.

The application deadline is Dec. 20. The awards will be presented at ROCK on Feb. 9.

bwcumc.org/moralcourage

Jenkins worked with 12 students, from fifth to eighth

See Jenkins, page 7





See Advent Message, page 7

EXCLAIN



By MANDY SAYERS LEAD Pastor, Glen Mar UMC, Ellicott City

HEN I THINK about what it means to "exclaim," I think of the old Schoolhouse Rock episode on interjections. I always loved the flashing graphics and the grand orchestration of the song, set to a version of the Hallelujah Chorus: "In-ter-jections show excitement — or emotion — usually set apart from a sentence by an exclamation point (or by a comma if the feeling's not as strong)...." Big puffy exclamation points flashed on my 1970-something TV screen. Wow!!! Hey!!! Good stuff.

As we come to Advent and we prepare for the birth of Jesus the Christ, I know we are all getting ready to sing "Silent Night." But in a way, the birth of Jesus is God's exclamation point. Jesus is the interjection (pun intended) of our God into our world.

God is taking on vulnerable baby flesh and dwelling among us to share our pain, to know our sufferings and joys, and to bridge the divide between God and humanity and between neighbor and neighbor. The birth of Jesus is God's "exclamation point"—good

tidings of great joy for all people. The sound of a crying baby in a manger merges with the singing of angels and the amazed shout of shepherds.

We Christians make the audacious claim that the world changed with the Advent of our Lord that night. What we thought we knew for sure now looks different by starlight, and what we were afraid to even dare to hope

for looks real and present. God is here, and in the manger, and the world is not the same.

Churches, this Advent, let us find our shouting

voice, our exclamation voice, to tell the folks that didn't get the word, that the Word is on the way. Go tell it on the mountain, go tell it in the valley, go tell it with your cantatas and your canned food drives, that Jesus Christ is God's exclamation of love and hope and joy for the world.

Gloria in excelsis Deo! Hallelujah!

By Daryl Williams Pastor, St. Paul UMC, Oxon Hill

XCITEMENT IS A powerful thing. When we are excited, we are willing to do things that may not seem rational, take us out of our comfort zone, and let the world know that there is something different going on.

We see it at sporting events all the time. When someone's team is doing well, especially unexpectedly, introverts become extroverts, strangers become friends, and other

> friends become family. We gather together and cheer because while

Ancient church mothers and fathers often greeted one another with the phrase, "Give me a word." This greeting led to the sharing of insights and wisdom. Today we continue this tradition with this monthly column.

we thought there could be a defeat, we are excited by the unexpected victory. When this happens, often there is the natural inclination to exclaim, "WE WON!"

The natural outgrowth of an unexpected victory is to shout with joy. Overwhelming joy can emotionally move us to shout from the rooftops about what we have seen or are experiencing. That is why "Hark the Herald Angel's Sing" is my favorite Christmas song. (Yes, now that Thanksgiving has officially passed, we can talk about Christmas music.)

I love "Hark" because it does not begin with a whimper of a melody, but rather with an attention grabbing, exclamation of HARK! Every time I sing the song, admittedly off key, the opening stanza reminds me of the overwhelming joy of knowing that unto us a child is born, a savior who is Christ the Lord. Two thousand years ago, while the earth was shattering, unexpected news that we were going from losing to winning and winning forevermore was announced by angels on high. That kind of comeback is a reason to exclaim victory all the more.

This Advent season, I'd like to invite you to join me in exclaiming that we have a savior and through Him, we have victory. We can join together in making a ruckus that will allow all to know that we are on the winning side. We can exclaim from the rooftops in one voice, on or off key, "Hark the herald angels sing, Glory to the new born King."

EVENTS

Sexual Ethics and Boundaries Opioid Epidemic Town Hall training

January 29, 30 and 31, 2019

A required training for all clergy and other conference leaders on understanding, establishing and maintaining healthy boundaries for ministry and an exploration of the BWC's policy on sexual ethics, with Becky Posey Williams, senior director of sexual ethics and advocacy for COSROW. The standalone sessions will be from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.:

Jan. 29 - Brook Hill UMC in Frederick;

Jan. 30 - Arnolia UMC in Baltimore; Jan. 31 - Westphalia UMC in Upper Marlboro.

ROCK 2019

March 9, 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. **BWC Mission Center, Fulton** A frank and informational discussion on the opioid epidemic and how the UMC might respond.

Retracing the Steps of Freedom April 6-11, 2019

This immersion experience will visit some of the most significant venues of the Civil Rights movement. Costs include motor coach to Birmingham, Ala., lodging, and immersion sites. bwcumc.org/stepsoffreedom.

Leadership Days

2019 **Regional training opportunities** for local church leaders are being planned. Save the dates: **Southern Region - March 2** Washington Region - March 16 Western Region - March 30 **Baltimore Regions - April 6**

GENERAL CONFERENCE PETITION DEADLINE



The 2020 General Conference of The United Methodist Church will be held May 5-15 in Minneapolis, Minn. (This is distinct from the Special Session of General Conference Feb. 23-26, 2019, in St. Louis, Missouri.)

Petitions to be submitted from the Baltimore-Washington Conference to the 2020 General Conference will be considered at the 2019 Annual Conference in May. The deadline for submitting these petitions to the BWC Conference Secretary, Cynthia Taylor, is Jan. 15, 2019. Petitions can be submitted directly to the General Conference by churches and church members, but must be submitted no later than 230 days before the opening of General Conference.

Feb. 8-10, 2019

Convention Center, Ocean City, Md. Registration is now open for ROCK 2019, a retreat for youth. The featured speaker this year will be Ben Glenn, the Chalk Guy. Salvador will provide the music and Egypt Speaks is the weekend's spoken word artist. ROCK is designed as a God-encountering, life-changing, high-energy retreat focusing on revival for youth and adults. bwcumc.org/rock

BWC Connects

Morning, March 2, 2019 **BWC Mission Center, Fulton**

Following the Special Session of General Conference, Feb. 23-28 in St. Louis, Bishop LaTrelle Easterling will connect with members of the Baltimore-Washington Conference in a live-streamed gathering. More details to come at bwcumc.org.

Advocacy and Action Team Signups

The BWC has six active teams to mobilize: Creation Care (Climate/ Eco-Justice), Gender Equality, Gun Violence Prevention, Immigration Rights, Racial Justice and Wealth Equity. If you are called to serve in one or more of these areas, sign-up at www.bwcumc.org/ministries/ advocacy-action.

Contact Cynthia Taylor at ctaylor@bwcumc.org for a set of guidelines for submitting a petition.

UMConnection

Bishop LaTrelle Easterling Melissa Lauber **Erik Alsgaard Alison Burdett** Myca Jones Linda Worthington

Resident Bishop Director of Communications Managing Editor Multimedia Producer / Graphic Designer Webmaster / Video Producer **Communications Associate**

UMConnection is the newspaper of the Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church, whose vision is to become fully alive in Christ and make a difference in a diverse and ever-changing world.

The UMConnection (USPS 005-386), December 2018, volume 29, issue 11. Published 11 times per year by the Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church, 11711 East Market Place, Fulton, MD 20759-2594. Subscription price is \$15 per year. Periodical postage paid at Baltimore, MD. POSTMASTER: Please send change of address changes to: UMConnection, 11711 East Market Place, Fulton, MD, 20759-2594.

> To subscribe, email ealsgaard@bwcumc.org. Postmaster: Send address changes to: UMConnection, 11711 East Market Place, Fulton, MD 20759-2594



A special 4-page resource for local churches

In February 2019, The United Methodist Church will gather in St. Louis to choose a way forward as it seeks to create common ground on homosexuality. This is a critical moment in United Methodist history. "Even if nothing gets approved, we will have a different denomination on March 1," said Bishop LaTrelle Easterling.

We affirm that all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God. All persons need the ministry of the Church in their struggles for human fulfillment, as well as the spiritual and emotional care of a fellowship that enables "The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexual-ity and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teach-ing. We affirm that God's grace is available to all. We will seek 4TH

to live together in Christian community, welcoming, forgiving, and loving one another, as Christ has loved and accepted us. We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons.³

H) Family Violence and Abuse-We recognize that family violence and abuse in all its forms-verbal, psychological, physical, sexual—is detrimental to the covenant of the human community. We encourage the Church to provide a safe environment, counsel

OLY CONFERENCING IS a foundation of our United Methodist faith. As the church prepares for this Special Session of General Conference, several informational sessions have been held within the **Baltimore-Washington Conference** to share accurate information and to address people's questions.

The Q&A below were gathered from sessions Bishop LaTrelle Easterling held on each of the four regions in the Baltimore-Washington Conference this fall and presentations by the Rev. Tom Lambrecht, a member of the Commission on a Way Forward and Vice President and General Manager of Good News, at Oakdale UMC Nov. 17, and by the Rev. Tom Salsgiver, a member of the Commission on the Way Forward, at Grace UMC in Gaithersburg Nov. 28.

shall not be conducted by our ministry nor in our churches. The current rules are cited in the 2016 Book of Discipline in paragraphs 161F, 304.3, 341.6, 613.19, and 2702.1

For an overview, visit www. umc.org/what-we-believe/ human-sexuality-backgrounder

? What is General Conference and how does it relate to the local church?

General Conference is the top policy-making body of The United Methodist Church and the only entity that speaks officially for the church. It normally meets every four years and is made up of 850 delegates representing the 12-million-member international denomination. The two-week sessions are a time of worship, holy conferencing and parliamentary proceedings. The policies and polity passed by General Conference are recorded in the Book of Discipline and the Book of Resolutions. The last time a Special Session was called was in 1970, to organize the union of the Methodist and Evangelical United Brethren churches.

number of proposals dealing with issues surrounding same-sex marriage and the ordination of LGBTQ clergy. The debate became increasingly divisive. In a vote, the bishops (who have neither voice nor vote at General Conference) were asked to step in and provide leadership.

The Council of Bishops created the Commission on a Way Forward and called upon its members to bring a plan that focused on "contextualization and unity" to a called three-day Special Session of General Conference, to be held in February 2019.

4 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW

If you only have time to scratch the surface on the 2019 Special Session of General Conference, we invite you to read or watch the following:

- 1. "We Can Remain Together Why I Support the One Church Plan": A commentary by Bishop LaTrelle Easterling bwcumc.org/wecanremaintogether
- 2. "Finding Our Way Forward," A BWC Resolution bwcumc.org/findingawayforward
- 3. Compatibilists and Sugar Packets: A blog and video by the Rev. Tom Berlin http://revtomberlin.com/ talking-about-lgbtq-inclusionin-the-umc/#sthash.L25CjD0F. dpbs
- 4. A summary understanding of the three plans bwcumc.org/resources/ commission-on-a-wayforward/#plans



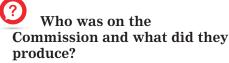
(? What is the UMC's current stance on homosexuality?

The UMC affirms that all persons are individuals of sacred worth and that God's grace is available to all. And that certain basic human rights and civil liberties are due all people.

Currently, the denomination "does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching." Self-avowed, practicing homosexuals are not permitted to be ordained or appointed. Homosexual marriages

? How did the Way Forward **Commission begin?**

At every General Conference since 1972, delegates have sought to change the "incompatible" language in the Book of Discipline. At the 2016 General Conference, there were an overwhelming



The 32 members of the Commission were chosen by the Council of Bishops. It was a diverse group, with people from nine countries on all sides of the issue, including gay and lesbian members. It was charged with creating a way forward for the denomination that was contextual, offered space for as many people as possible and was faithful to the mission of The United Methodist Church.

The Commission worked for 18 months, meeting for a total of 26 days. In November 2017, it submitted three "sketches" to the Council of Bishops: the Traditional, One Church and Connectional Conference plans.

How did the Council of **Bishops receive the plans?**

The Council studied, debated and requested further work on the One Church and Connectional Conference plans and advised setting the Traditional Plan aside. Later, the bishops changed their minds and included the Traditional Plan in those to be submitted to the Special Session.

? Why did the Judicial Council review the plans?

Because the Special Session is only three days, church leaders wanted to ensure that the information delegates would be voting on was not unconstitutional before the delegates gathered so that time would not be spent waiting for a declaratory decision.

Continued on next page.

What did the Judicial Council find?

Meeting in Zurich in October, the Judicial Council, the church's "Supreme Court," chose to not rule on the Connectional Conference plan because it had too many constitutional amendments that had not yet been voted upon.

In considering the One Church Plan, the council struck three sentences that were not constitutional. They found that about one-fourth of the Traditional Plan was not in harmony with the Constitution. (See story next page.)

When and where is the 2019 General Conference?

The Special Session of General Conference will be held Feb. 23-26, 2019, at the Dome, part of the America's Convention Complex in St. Louis, Missouri.

How will the General Conference delegates move forward in their work at this session?

Normally there are nine to 12 legislative committees that perfect the resolutions that come before the plenary session. At the Special Session, there will be one legislative committee, focusing on this one issue. In a time of holy conferencing and parliamentary procedure, the delegates are expected to perfect the plan they wish to consider. This plan will then go to the body for debate and a vote.

Will the delegates consider other resolutions besides the three plans?

Yes, an additional 51 petitions that have been deemed "in harmony" with the call of the Special Session have been received. The 48 petitions from the plan, along with the additional ones, can be found in the Advanced Daily Christian Advocate at www.umc. org/who-we-are/gc2019-advanceedition-daily-christian-advocate.

Who will preside over the legislative session?

One of the officers who served a legislative committee in 2016. The Committee on General Conference will bring a slate of names for members to vote on.

Who will preside over the plenary session?

Members of the Council of Bishops preside over the plenary sessions. March 1. We will still be called to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. God holds the future of The United Methodist Church."

Bishop Easterling has endorsed the One Church Plan. Why does she support it?

?

Bishop Easterling stands with the more than 80 percent majority of the Council of Bishops who endorsed the One Church Plan. She has said it is her belief that homosexuality should not be a litmus test over who should be called United Methodist. "We can maintain our unity beyond differing understandings of God's intention for human sexuality," she said. "The One Church Plan would allow us to do just that. It does not require unanimity of belief or action, but does permit contextualization and allows persons to follow their theological convictions and conscience." A commentary with her thoughts is online at www.bwcumc.org/newsand-views/a-word-from-the-bishopwe-can-remain-together-why-isupport-the-one-church-plan/.

What happens if the pastor and the congregation do not agree on same-gender marriages?

Accommodations can be made, inviting in a guest pastor or holding the ceremony in a different location.

Has any research been done on the number of people or churches that are expected to leave the denomination?

No. So far, talk about schism and people leaving is only conjecture. However, some members of the Wesleyan Covenant Association have expressed their intention to leave.

Can churches take their buildings with them if they decide to leave the denomination?

No. First, it is important to note that a church is much more than a building. If people decide to no longer be members of their United Methodist church, they can leave. Second, the trust clause, which holds all property in trust for the annual conference, assures that



Bishop Easterling, left, and members of the BWC delegation pray for the church. Members include (L-R): JW Park, Joseph Daniels, Delores Martin, Ken Ow, Ginger Gaines-Cirelli, Christie Latona, and Mary Kay Totty.

If the One Church Plan passes and a clergy person does not agree with the majority of the BWC's leadership on this issue, will this be held against them during the appointment process?

Absolutely not. Bishop Easterling has pledged, "If I ever use the appointment process as a weapon, I will need to surrender not only my assignment, but my credentials." Currently, the bishop and Cabinet take pastors' theological beliefs and other factors into consideration before making an appointment. They expect this practice to continue. "Pastors' gifts and graces would be matched with churches that have commensurate theologies." people will not take their buildings if they choose to leave the denomination. In the recent past, some United Methodist churches have bought their buildings from annual conferences at fair market value when they left the denomination.

How can I express my opinion on this issue?

The BWC delegates have expressed a willingness to receive information and thoughts from everyone. A listing of the delegates and their e-mails is online at www.bwcumc.org/awayforward. The chairs of the delegation are Delores Martin and the Rev. T.R. Chattin.

What can I or my church do before the Special Session?

All congregations are asked to have conversations about the Commission on a Way Forward's work and our UMC process so that people in the pews understand our current position. A Prayer initiative also calls on United Methodists to pray for the church each day from 2:23 to 2:26 p.m.

Which delegate is my church's delegate? Do delegates seek to represent local church's wishes with their vote?

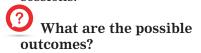
In effect, all of the delegates are yours. Each church sends their pastor(s) and lay member(s) to an Annual Conference Session. At those sessions, delegates for the entire Annual Conference are elected. The first six laity and six clergy are General Conference delegates; the next six laity and clergy are Jurisdictional delegates; and the next four laity and four clergy serve as reserves. The delegation meets as a whole but only the first seven (six plus one reserve) clergy and laity are sent to General Conference on our behalf. The majority of delegates on the BWC delegation understand that they were elected because people in the Annual Conference believed in them. They are open to receiving input from others as part of their discernment process, and vote from a place of discernment, which includes their conscience.

What does the Bible say about homosexuality that should inform a Way Forward?

People who hold a high value of Scripture with a deep love of God and a deep love of the Word of God, come down on differing sides of this issue and others. Part of being United Methodist includes the value of loving alike without thinking alike, informed by Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. Learn more about the Wesleyan quadrilateral at www.umc.org/what-we-believe/ wesleyan-quadrilateral.

How will the potential changes affect clergy and other pensions?

What has been paid into the pension plan cannot be taken away. Everyone will still have the money they contributed. However, this is a complex issue. Depending upon the outcome, it might take 20 years to fully resolve itself. Wespath has done some analysis, which is



The delegates may choose to adopt a revised version of any of the three plans, or they might, for a variety of reasons, change nothing of substance at this session. One thing we do know, Bishop Easterling said, "the mission of the UMC will continue on available at www.wespath.org/ wayforwardwespathfaq.

A Way Forward

One Church Plan

- The One Church Plan attempts to provide as much space as possible for people who do not share the same views on homosexuality.
- The language that "homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching," will be removed from the Discipline and replaced with "We agree that we are not of one mind regarding human sexuality." It removes language stating that marriage is just between a man and a woman.
- It does not force or penalize pastors to perform a same sex wedding nor does it force or penalize churches to hold same sex wedding ceremonies on their property.
- Each Annual Conference Board of Ordained Ministry would determine whether to ask questions about whether a person affirms that he/she is LGBTQ.
- Bishops would not be forced to ordain or not ordain LGBTQ people if they cannot in good conscience do so.

Connectional Conference Plan

- This plan would replace the current five jurisdictional conferences (geographic regions in the United States; outside the United States, they are called Central Conferences) with five Connectional Conferences: Progressive, Traditional, and Unity.
- This plan calls for numerous Constitutional Amendments.
- All three would use a general Book of Discipline with the ability to adapt other portions to their context for ministry.
- Local churches would choose which Connectional Conference they would join; laity may find themselves in a church which votes to join a CC with which they don't agree.
- Clergy would choose which Connectional Conference they would join.
- Jurisdictional Conferences would vote to join a Connectional Conference; annual conferences who want to join a different Connectional Conference may do so by vote.

For more information, visit www.bwcumc.org/awayforward

Traditional Plan

- The Traditional Plan provides for stronger accountability to the Book of Discipline.
- There are specific accountability processes for Boards of Ordained Ministry, clergy, bishops and annual conferences who violate the Discipline.
- Marriage is seen as between one man and one woman.
- No clergy may perform same sex weddings.
- No ordination of LBGTQ people.
- Automatic penalty for pastors who perform same sex weddings.
- Laity would participate in a local church conference vote on whether to exit from the UMC; laity may find themselves in a church which with which they don't agree.

* Judicial Council ruled 3 parts of the One Church Plan, and 9 parts of the Traditional Plan, unconstitutional. They did not rule on the Connectional Conference Plan. See story below.

Starnes offers insights on Judicial Council rulings

By Melissa Lauber UMConnection Staff

s UNITED METHODISTS move forward in determining the church's stance on human sexuality issues, the Judicial Council met in late October to examine the three plans being brought to the Special Session of General Conference.

Tom Starnes, the chancellor of the Baltimore-Washington Conference, was in Switzerland for the Judicial Council hearing.

Starnes, a partner at Drinker, Biddle and Reath LLP in Washington, D.C., did not speak in his official role. Rather, as a son of the church and someone whose faith intersects with his passion for the law, Starnes had filed an amicus brief on behalf of a group of 24 conference chancellors who believe strongly that the unity of The United Methodist Church should be preserved notwithstanding that its members have differing perspectives on issues regarding human sexuality.

During the oral hearing in Zurich on Oct. 23, Starnes presented arguments that both defended the constitutionality of the One Church Plan and challenged the constitutionality of the Traditional Plan. On Oct. 29, the Judicial Council handed down a 58-page opinion that deemed parts of both of those plans to be unconstitutional. Meanwhile, the Council deferred ruling on the Connectional Conference plan, reasoning that it lacks jurisdiction to assess the constitutionality of proposed legislation that itself includes proposed changes to the constitution. Starnes was

invited to attend a Nov. 10 meeting of the delegation of the Baltimore-Washington Conference, who will be voting on which plan to adopt at the upcoming Special Session in St. Louis, in an effort to help the delegation digest the Judicial Council's lengthy opinion and rulings.

The denomination's current Book of Discipline calls homosexuality "incompatible with Christian teaching." It bans the ordination and appointment of "self-avowed practicing homosexuals," and it prohibits same-sex marriages from being performed by United Methodist clergy or in United Methodist churches.

The core changes proposed in the One Church Plan are to strike the "incompatible" language, along with the corresponding ordination and marriage bans, and allow each annual conference's Board of Ordained Ministry and clergy session to determine standards for ordination, including standards related to human sexuality.

Similarly, the One Church plan proposes to let each pastor decide whether or not they will perform same-sex marriages, and to let each congregation vote on whether same-sex marriages may be celebrated in their buildings. The Judicial Council upheld the constitutionality of those core aspects of the One Church Plan, Starnes said, reasoning that "connectionalism does not require uniformity," but "allows for contextualization." At the same time, the Judicial Council ruled that parts of three of the One Church plan's 17 proposed petitions violated "separation of powers" principles included in the denomination's constitution:

- 1. A proposal authorizing bishops to seek the nonbinding advice of the annual conference session on ordination standards, in order to "inform the Board of Ordained Ministry in its work," was held to risk "crossing the line between episcopal and administrative functions."
- 2. A provision requiring reassignment of a pastor in case of "unresolved disagreement" with a congregation concerning same-sex marriage was held to violate the bishop's constitutional prerogative to appoint pastors to their charges.
- 3. A provision that allows bishops to limit the frequency of clergy session votes on ordination standards infringes on the clergy session's constitutional authority to vote on all matters relating to the character, conference relations, and ordination of clergy.

The Traditional Plan, the United Methodist News Service reported, seeks to enhance enforcement of current bans related to homosexuality, including imposing mandatory penalties on violations. Starnes had reservations about whether the Traditional Plan should even come before General Conference. He argued that the Traditional Plan is not "in harmony" with the purpose of the called Special Session, as required by Discipline ¶14, because the Traditional Plan rejects the idea of "preserving unity amid diverse perspectives on human sexuality," and is instead based on "the presupposition that The United Methodist Church ought to have one unified moral stance on the issues of marriage and sexuality."

The Judicial Council did not agree with Starnes on that issue, but it ruled that certain portions of the plan strayed from the constitution on matters of due process and by elevating adherence to requirements related to homosexuality above all other requirements.

Of the Traditional Plan's 17 distinct petitions, the Judicial Council held that seven were unconstitutional in their entirety, and it identified unconstitutional portions in two others. The constitutionally defective provisions included those seeking to allow congregations to withdraw, in what has been called a "gracious



exit," from the denomination.

The third plan, the Connectional Conference Plan, would reorganize the church in the U.S., with conferences aligning based on theology or perspective on LGBTQ ministry. This plan calls for multiple constitutional amendments and because of this, was not addressed by the Judicial Council, Starnes said.

Starnes hesitates to predict what might happen when the General Conference meets Feb. 23-26 in St. Louis.

However, his love for the church and his understanding of Methodist polity have convinced him, as he said in his brief, that "schism need not be the inevitable result of our connection's seemingly interminable controversy over human sexuality issues."

Our response to God's call continues.

Moved to

The foundation of The United Methodist Church has always been to follow God's call of making disciples of Jesus Christ. We do that in many ways and many places. Yesterday. Today. Forever.



Open Hearts. Open Minds. Open Doors. The people of The United Methodist Church®

Learn more at umc.org/movement

Advent Message: We renew our witness to the world

From page 1

the very center of our being. The light of each candle reminds us that Jesus is the Light of the World.

We may only sing our Advent hymns during this season, but as with any celebration, the poignancy and deeper meanings are lost if we only recognize them once a year. The hope, joy, love and peace that we celebrate now is our longed-for hope, but also our present witness to the world.

As John the Baptist made clear, he was a witness to the Light of Christ. John understood that his life was a testimony to the truth and promise of the coming Messiah. As Christ-followers, we are also called to be witnesses to the same. We are called to not only believe but to testify to that Light; the hope, joy, love and peace, which is ours through Christ. Do our lives offer such testimony absent words?

When our children were younger we would ask them a question as they prepared to leave every morning for school. Just before leaving the house we would ask, "Whom do you represent?" They understood the only correct answer was, "God and my parents."

This was our way of trying to remind them that their actions didn't just reflect upon them, but upon the communities to which they belonged. Although that question did not make them perfect, we'd like to think it did help them avoid major trouble. But even more importantly, we believe it planted a seed within them that their confession of faith in God was more than mere lip service. That confession required a daily commitment to live Christ-like lives.

As we reflect upon the promise of this Advent season, may we also ask ourselves, "Whom do I represent?" What testimony does my life offer? Am I a witness of the Light? Do I live as a person full of hope, joy, love and peace? Even as the world grows more and more divided and rancorous, do I live as a witness to the present and coming kingdom of God? As we experience the Messiah during our contemplative meditation, may we continue to be conformed and transformed into his likeness. May we represent God well.

The second and final stanza of that great hymn states: "Born thy people to deliver, born a child and yet a King, born to reign in us forever, now thy gracious kingdom bring. By thine own eternal spirit, rule in all our hearts alone; by thine all sufficient merit, raise us to thy glorious throne."

May it be so during these days of Advent and every day.

Jenkins: Advent art and devotional invite reflection

From page 1

tradition of holding up a child, and presenting it as something precious and holy to God. "There's something so sacred about Mary and Joseph just taking that baby and saying , 'I don't know all the parts and pieces, but we're going to hold this baby up, because whatever God said is going to happen.""

As a pastor at Ebenezer UMC in Washington, D.C., Jenkins works with other churches in the area, helping to redefine the community with the arts.

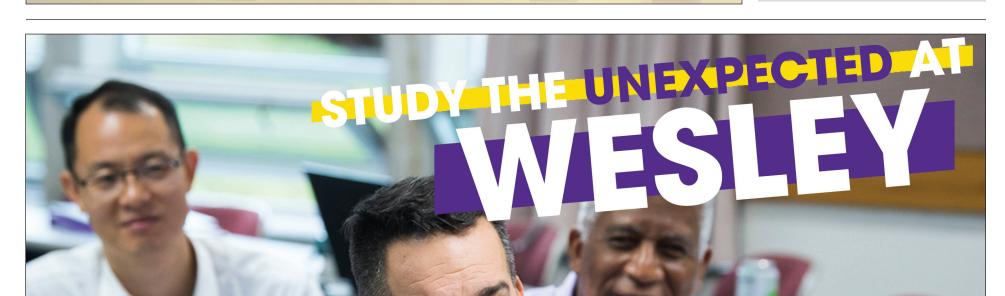
"The arts are the only thing that transcend race, color, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic backgrounds and sexual orientation. It transcends all of that. When you get people concerned about the making of art, people find out all the things that they have in common, instead of focusing on the ways that they are different."

This Christmas, with the Advent devotional, people in the BWC may have the opportunity to reflect upon a different interpretation of Jesus as graffiti artist. "I wonder about the Bible story of the woman caught in the act," said Jenkins. "I wonder if instead of writing in the sand, what would Jesus have done with a wall and can of spray paint? I wonder."

See the artwork and read the devotional pieces, written by leaders of the Baltimore-Washington Conference, at www.bwcumc.org/ god-words.



D.C. students create the art for the BWC's Advent devotional.



Beyonce and the Hebrew Bible • Faith on Film • The Gospel of Peace in a World of Violence • ...AND MORE!
Beyonce and the Hebrew Bible • Faith on Film • The Gospel of Peace in a World of Violence • ...AND MORE!
Beyonce and the Hebrew Bible • Faith on Film • The Gospel of Peace in a World of Violence • ...AND MORE!
Beyonce and the Hebrew Bible • Faith on Film • The Gospel of Peace in a World of Violence • ...AND MORE!
Beyonce and the Hebrew Bible • Faith on Film • The Gospel of Peace in a World of Violence • ...AND MORE!
Beyonce and the Hebrew Bible • Faith on Film • The Gospel of Peace in a World of Violence • ...AND MORE!
Beyonce and the Hebrew Bible • Faith on Film • The Gospel of Peace in a World of Violence • ...AND MORE!
Beyonce and the Hebrew Bible • Faith on Film • The Gospel of Peace in a World of Violence • ...AND MORE!
Beyonce and the Hebrew Bible • Faith on Film • The Gospel of Peace in a World of Violence • ...AND MORE!
Beyonce and the Hebrew Bible • Faith on Film • The Gospel of Peace in a World of Violence • ...AND MORE!
Beyonce and the Hebrew Bible • Faith on Film • The Gospel of Peace in a World of Violence • ...AND MORE!
Beyonce and the Hebrew Bible • Faith on Film • The Gospel of Peace in a World of Violence • ...AND MORE!
Beyonce and the Hebrew Bible • Faith on Film • The Gospel of Peace in a World of Violence • ...AND MORE!
Beyonce and the Hebrew Bible • Faith on Film • The Gospel of Peace in a World of Violence • ...AND MORE!
Beyonce and the Hebrew Bible • Faith on Film • The Gospel of Peace in a World of Violence • ...AND MORE!
Beyonce and the Hebrew Bible • Faith on Film • World • ...AND MORE!
Beyonce and the Hebrew Bible • Faith on Film • ...AND #AND # ...AND # ...AND # ...AND # ...AND # ...AND # ...AND #

Christmas Tour takes Jesus to the Inner Harbor

By Erik Alsgaard UMConnection Staff

s TOURISTS AND Christmas shoppers strolled the promenade at Baltimore's Inner Harbor Nov. 29, a slightly different experience awaited them by the ice rink. The True Meaning of Christmas Tour arrived in time for the afterwork rush, handing out free hot chocolate and invitations to experience God's love at nearby United Methodist churches.

An innovative outreach effort that partnered local churches, the Baltimore-Washington Conference and United Methodist Communications (one of 13 general agencies in the UMC), the Tour featured a bright red food truck, a selfie station, and a place for people to make Christmas cards. Volunteers from the Baltimore Metro district's "Beloved Community," both lay and clergy, passed out hot cocoa and invitations to Christmas worship services.

The Rev. Wanda Duckett, superintendent of the Baltimore Metro District, said that the "Beloved Community" initiative is a group of people from 20 BWC churches who have come together for conversations around race relations and implicit bias to help build relationships across the district. Volunteering at the TMCT was a natural fit for the group.

During the three-hour stop, more than 100 pairs of gloves were handed out, Duckett said, "to show that we are God's hands and we want you to be warm."

In addition, she said, information about Christmas Eve worship services was passed out along with locations where hot meals are available during the week, not just during Christmas.

Duckett said it was important to take the church outside its own walls. "So often we meet within our safe community where we know



Members of Baltimore Metro District's Beloved Community participate in a marketing outreach to bring people to church this Christmas.



Rev. Wanda Duckett shares a cup of hot chocolate with a passerby at the Inner Harbor as part of an innovative national United Methodist tour.

everybody," she said. "This was a way for us to take what we learned about our differences and biases and actually bring it out to the community. This is just one event, but this will continue."

Betty Kolbe, a member of Otterbein UMC in Baltimore, was handing out information on her historic church near Camden Yards and its special Christmas worship services.

"I'm here to let people know that Otterbein is a thriving church," she said, "and that they should come and join us. We've got lots of love for the people that live here in Baltimore."

The pastor at Sharp Street Memorial UMC, the Rev. Carey James, brought four people from his Baltimore church to volunteer. They were at the first True Meaning of Christmas Tour in 2016, and they liked the concept so much, they came to help out again. "We like the concept of changing the narrative of consumerism and bringing back the real meaning of Christmas, of service, of love, of joy," James said. "The true meaning of Christmas for me is that Christ took on humanity and became Emmanuel, 'God with us,' to save humanity."

Serving others is just one thing Christians can do to join in that salvific work, he said, and that's why he and his church members stood in the cold, greeting strangers.

"The true meaning of Christmas is exactly this," said Duckett. "It's coming down from a place of prestige, privilege or comfort to people where they are, to being that bridge of reconciliation. That's what Christ did for us. We can't represent the true meaning of Christmas inside the church; we have to go out and reach across our lives of difference."

Innovation Hub offers new avenues for ministry

By Erik Alsgaard UMConnection Staff

N AND AROUND Washington, D.C., young adult ministry has proved challenging to create and maintain. But young adults comprise about 20 percent of the population (ages 20-29) in the District, which had an estimated 693,972 residents in 2017 per the U.S. Census Bureau.



As churches search for ways to minister to, for and with young adults, help has come in the form of an "Innovation Hub," based at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington. Several Baltimore-Washington Conference churches are participating in this program, thinking outside the box and making new disciples of Jesus Christ in this hard to reach generation.

The biggest challenge may

just be casting aside assumptions about young adults and developing deeper empathy for them, said the Rev. Beth Ludlum, vice president for Strategic Initiatives at Wesley and a co-director for the Hub. The Hub provides training, including seminary classes, seminars and retreats, said Ludlum. Each church brings a team of lay and clergy leaders to head up their projects. After six months of learning, teams create proposals for their method of engagement and apply for a \$20,000 grant. Funding for the Hub has come from a \$1.5 million grant from the Lily Endowment. Fifteen churches from

in and around Washington were selected for the second round of the Innovation Hub. After finding out where young adults were already engaged — or not — in their local churches, last September, church leaders began their work by interviewing young adults in their community. In November, the churches gathered again to share what they had learned and to map out next steps for ministry.

One of the benefits of the Hub process, Ludlum said, is that young adults are involved in the program from the very start. As a result, several young adults have felt empowered by the process, "found their voice," she said, and stepped up to other leadership roles in their churches. The other thing they've seen is a deeper understanding of innovation and design thinking, especially as a process that a church can embrace, she said. "The process starts with deep empathy of the people you're trying to reach," Ludlum said. "Really getting to know them and their stories, and then going through a creative process around that. What we're finding is that it makes sense to congregations once they practice it, and it offers an alternative to what is otherwise a frustrating cycle of 'We're going to do it the way we've always done it,' or 'We're going to chase one great idea until it fizzles."

Lark Lewis, a young adult from Capitol Hill UMC in Washington, said that her church was involved with the Hub because they have noticed a need in their community.

"The area is changing quickly," Lewis said, adding that she had noticed the difference after moving to the area two years ago. "We are trying to actively define how we reach out to those young adults in our area."

The church's pastor, the Rev. Alisa Lasater Wailoo, said that the church has been effective in reaching young adults who have grown up in the church. However, "we aren't effective in reaching young adults without a church background. That's why we're in the Hub." The Rev. David Deans, associate pastor at Oakdale UMC in Olney, was at the meeting along with Ricky Atkins, a co-leader of the church's young adult ministry. Oakdale Church is involved with the Hub because it was an opportunity to be creative and innovative in reaching young adults for Jesus, Deans said. "We have a thriving young adult ministry already," Deans said, "but we're always looking to expand that and learn more. By being a part of this cohort, it forces our team to focus on this area of ministry more intentionally. I'm hoping that this will bear some fruit with creative ministry."

The Rev. Beth Ludlum illustrates a point during the Innovation Hub meeting Nov. 10.