



During a Dec. 5 dress rehearsal of "L'enfance du Christ" at Foundry UMC in Washington, D.C., Mary, played by Elizabeth Mondragon, and Joseph, played by Jarrod Lee, travel hopelessly through Egypt with baby Jesus until finally, to their disbelief, someone opens the door to them to give them refuge. See story, below.

**BISHOP'S ADVENT  
MESSAGE ON HOPE.  
PAGE 7**

## Foundry hosts alternative Advent

BY ERIK ALSGAARD  
UMCConnection Staff

**T**HE CHRISTMAS STORY contains the baby Jesus, Joseph and Mary, “no room at the inn,” the manger, the oxen and maybe even the Wise Men. That’s the nice, sanitized, “Hallmark” version.

One of the pieces of the Christmas story, however, that often ends up ignored is the part where King Herod orders the mass murder of all infant boys under the age of 2 (Matthew 2:16) to get rid of this new-born competition for the throne. Joseph was warned in a dream about this, so he took Mary and Jesus and fled to Egypt, staying there “until Herod died.” (Matthew 2:15)

In other words, Jesus was a refugee.

"L'enfance du Christ," an opera written by Hector Berlioz in the

1850's, tells this over-looked part of Jesus' birth. In conjunction with IN Series, Foundry UMC in Washington, D.C., staged three performances during Advent. IN Series, according to its website, works with D.C. artists to create innovative theater grounded in opera and song.

"It's a biblical story not too often done around Christmas time," said Stanley Thurston, Director of Music at Foundry and conductor of the opera. "We normally do two or three major choral works as part of the liturgical season, and this will be our second Sunday in Advent presentation."

Hosting the opera was important for Foundry for two reasons, said the Rev. Ginger Gaines-Cirelli, senior pastor at Foundry.

"First, one piece of our sacred

resistance work is solidarity and advocacy for immigrant neighbors," she said. "This collaboration provides a way to highlight the plight of refugees and asylum seekers and to raise consciousness about our call to respond as followers of Jesus."

The second reason, she added, is that part of Foundry's vision is to develop mission partnerships to create beloved community.

"This collaboration is a beautiful partnership with the local opera company IN Series and highlights the ways that shared values, the power of art, and relationship-building can result in something really special," Gaines-Cirelli said.

Selections from the piece were shared in worship on Dec. 8, the second Sunday of Advent, focused on the theme "Peace," she said.

*See Advent, page 3*

## District turns parsonage into mission

BY MELISSA LAUBER  
UMCConnection Staff

**W**HEN HE WAS a boy, the Rev. Sam Marullo, a Deacon, worked for his godfather doing odd jobs on construction sites. It ignited a calling that followed him through his doctoral work on racial discrimination and housing, into his local church at Capitol Hill UMC where he actively ministers with the homeless, and now engages him as a leader in the Adrienne Terry Fund affordable housing initiative.

This month, the Adrienne Terry

Fund will see the completion of its first house — the Ager Road UMC parsonage in Hyattsville — rebuilt to provide a home for the working poor.

The Greater Washington District's eight-member Affordable Housing Task Force celebrated the completion of the house, even as it began to look at the momentum the opening will bring, hopefully cascading into a series of unused parsonages being rebuilt as homes for the poor.

"The vision is for the Rev. Adrienne Terry fund to be self-sustaining and become one avenue for providing affordable housing, utilizing property that

is owned by churches and not currently being used. The long-term vision would be to leverage larger donations and to create more affordable housing, utilizing space with some of our churches," said the Rev. Gerry Green, superintendent of the Greater Washington District.

Adrienne Terry is at the heart of these efforts. A pastor in D.C., she and Marullo helped to create the Inspire D.C.'s Affordable Housing Coalition. When she died suddenly in 2016, Green had just been appointed as a superintendent. His first official

*See Parsonage, page 3*

## BWC hatches innovation

BY MELISSA LAUBER  
UMCConnection Staff

**R**EGGAN CHAPIN, 10, loves macaroni and cheese. When her church, John Wesley UMC in Hagerstown, began to brainstorm about innovative ministry and how they could use the church's commercial kitchen to benefit the community, they turned to Katie. Her response?

"Macaroni and cheeses for Jesus."

It was a lightbulb moment in a room full of 48-hours of inspiration and experimentation at the Baltimore-Washington Conference's Ministry Hatchery Nov. 14-16.

Led by the Rev. Kenda Creasy Dean and Ministry Incubators, the Ministry Hatchery gave 12 groups an opportunity to be missional entrepreneurs, creating and planning new ways of being church in their communities.

When Christie Latona, the BWC's director of Connectional Ministries, posted one of the exercises they did on Facebook, people responded, celebrating "the creation of a space for dreaming with God."

"God has promised that God will make all things new, and the way that God does that is through us," Latona said. "It is the

*See Hatchery, page 8*



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

“TELLING THE TRUTH in love” is one of the hardest things to do, or to have done to you. That’s because we all think what we have to say is the truth. And so, it is very easy to think we can “tell the truth in love.”

It reminds me of a technique I know of called the “love sandwich.” You start off with a loving, truthful compliment. “That hat looks really sharp on you.” Then you offer the thing that is harder to say; the behavior you’d like to change. “It would be great if you would maybe read the Scripture you are supposed to read on Sunday, without the 20-minute exposition that takes away from my sermon which immediately follows.” And then you end it with a love statement. “I’m so glad you are a liturgist for our church family.”

Feels artificial, right? But it often works—even on ME! Is this what is meant by “tell the truth in love?”

The longer I live as a Christian, the more I embrace the fact that “the truth” is not a statement or a position; the truth, as a Christian, is a person.

In other words: it’s not a what, it’s a WHO.

And that WHO is Jesus Christ. To tell the truth in love might mean simply pointing to Jesus and letting Jesus show and tell what the truth is. I think that’s why, when Pilate asked, “What is truth?” Jesus just stood there silent. Jesus, his life, death, and resurrection. Jesus IS truth (and also, I read in Scripture, the Way and the Life).

Advent is the time, it seems to me, to be reminded that the Truth is a Who, and also Love is a Who. “Love came down at Christmas, love all lovely, love divine. Love was born at Christmas, stars and angels gave the sign.”

We are preparing for this gift in this season of Advent. How would our hearts, churches, and homes be different if we quit arguing over things and simply let in the One who IS Love, Truth, Joy and Peace?

My prayer is that our Advent is full of encounters with Jesus, and full of ways to get rid of all the baggage and extra noise, to speak the truth in love: God is with Us. Amen.

# TRUTH IN LOVE

*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. This year, the “WORD” will be taken from Ephesians 4:1-16 .*

By DARYL WILLIAMS  
Pastor, St. Paul UMC, Oxon Hill

“DO YOU WANT me to tell you the truth?” I am always taken aback when I hear someone ask that question. The question implies that there are times the speaker has decided not to tell me the truth, but this time they want to make sure it is okay to do so.

Furthermore, the question implies that if I say “no,” this person already has prepared something to say to me that is not the truth, just in case I don’t want to hear the truth.

In short, the question says, for your sake, I am going to give you the option to hear the truth or something that you would prefer to hear.

The funny thing about the truth is that we don’t always want to hear it. While the truth, by definition, is an absolute, how you speak it has shades of gray. We can speak the truth as a salve that brings love,

light, and protection, but we can also speak the truth as a battering ram that tears people down, hurts their feelings, and leads them to prefer lies.

The difference between the two is often in the motive of the speaker. When we speak the truth in anger we are often using it to hurt people, but when we speak the truth in love we are always using it to help people.

Friends, in this season of Advent and as we again approach the manger, speak the truth, but always speak it in love. When we speak the truth in love, it comes out one part hope, one part peace, one part joy, and always with love.

This blend of truth brings people closer to each other as opposed to ripping them apart. This blend of truth helps people help others, not tear them down.

Finally, this blend of truth helps people get closer to the Lord as opposed to presenting him as some far off deity. Take some time this season to spread hope, peace, joy, and love by speaking the truth, in love.

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# Parsonage: Adrienne Terry Fund builds its first home

From page 1

call was from a member of Christ UMC notifying him of her death. He visited Christ UMC and noted, “on one side of the church were newly built apartments and townhouses, and on the other side was more affordable housing, and Christ was in the midst of the two. In those moments,” Green said, “I thought that a way for the legacy of Rev. Terry to live on was to create the Rev. Adrienne Terry Affordable Housing Fund.”

At his installation service, he set forth a challenge. To date, about \$28,000 has been collected for the fund.



Eight months ago, the task force began with “low-hanging fruit,” realizing the parsonage at Ager Road UMC, which had fallen into significant disrepair, would make a good first project.

They hired Emmanuel General Construction, a local firm, to do the rebuilding, stripping the house down to its bare bones and recreating it with new doors, appliances, flooring, cabinets, and more.

To save the costs that contractors add on for purchasing supplies, Marullo and the Rev. David Hall, of McKendree-Simms-Brookland UMC, who has significant real estate expertise, visited Home Depot and other stores and filled pick-up trucks with dry-wall, flooring and other supplies.

The rebuild, they estimate, will cost about \$15,000. The renters, whom Prince George’s County will recommend based on financial needs, will pay back these funds.

When the construction is complete, the Rev. Lucinda Kent, of Van Buren UMC will bring in her church’s decorating ministry. This is a group of people, she said, “from all walks of life who feel a calling to the ministry of turning a house into a home.”

The team does its own fundraising, generates their own donations, and will furnish the house with the incoming family in

mind.

Kent, who has struggled with finding affordable housing for herself and her family, says she appreciates serving on a task force that helps churches find opportunities to be relevant to the communities they are worshipping in.

“It’s great to preach about Jesus. But in this day and age, the world is more interested in our Monday through Saturday Jesus. The members of, and the donors to, the Adrienne Terry Fund are reflecting a Jesus that provides, even if you are a stranger,” Kent said. “No family should have to decide between rent or groceries, rent or utilities. We change lives — one house at a time, one family at

a time, one empty parsonage at a time.”

The task force currently has a list of about 10 area parsonages that local churches have suggested might be rebuilt to provide affordable housing.

For Marullo, completing Ager Road is a milestone, but it’s also a challenge and inspiration to move to the next project

His heart breaks when he encounters people living on the streets, people who are using all their energies just to survive.

“On the streets they have little chance to live in to the God-calling of who God made them to be,” he said. “Finding a home is a first step to become the children of God they were called to be.”



Left to right: Cindy Kent, Gerry Green, Sam Marullo, Amelia Duroska, and David Hall tour the Ager Road parsonage as it is being redeveloped.

# Advent: Church creates interactive justice experience

From page 1

“I used the opportunity to highlight the relative peace that most of us enjoy in our lives,” Gaines-Cirelli said, “and our call to be peacemakers so that those denied this good gift of God might receive shelter and safety.”

“We’re hoping that we open our hearts to everybody,” Thurston said. “We always hear about the ‘no room at the inn’ thing, but they went beyond that. They had to escape.”

Thurston relates that story to the plight of some refugees and immigrants today.

“Some people don’t want you here,” he said. “Some of those same lines come up in the oratorio here when they’re talking about Christ as a child. But what was important was the family that took him in and fed them. I think the story is about that extra step, that you’re clear about being open-hearted.”

Timothy Nelson, artistic director for IN Series, and director of music at Mount Vernon Place UMC in Washington, said that he had wanted to do “L’enfance du Christ” for almost 15 years, since the crisis in Darfur.

“I very much wanted to do this piece,” he said, “because of the way it deals with immigration; it puts it into a context that I think people can understand in a more immediate way. The tie with Foundry seemed obvious because it was also a way to explore the nexus of faith, justice, and art, and how they can work together.”

Gaines-Cirelli echoed that sentiment. “The collaboration is a beautiful partnership with...



Conductor Stanley Thurston, center, leads the choir during a dress rehearsal of "L'enfance du Christ" at Foundry UMC in Washington, D.C. The church hosted three performances in conjunction with IN Series.

IN Series and highlights the ways that shared values, the power of art, and relationship building can result in something really special.”

Art and faith, Nelson said, are tied together through justice.

“Art that is unconcerned with justice is obscene,” Nelson said. “In the same way, I think faith necessarily demands acts of justice. I feel we have a covenant with God to seek justice.”

Nelson hopes that this isn’t the only collaboration between IN Series and Foundry.

“We want our performances to be spiritual experiences,” he said, “and a new way to approach that moment of transformation and to provide a space where music can facilitate faith.”



Ian McEuen plays the narrator of "L'enfance du Christ," helping direct the audience's attention to the direction and tone of this interactive production.

# BWC pastors seek active lifestyles

By ERIK ALSGAARD  
UMConnection Staff

**B**Y AND LARGE, United Methodist clergy are. Large, that is. According to recent survey results from Wespeth, the church’s benefits and investments agency, eight out of 10 United Methodist clergy are overweight or obese (81%). That is more than double the obesity rate in the general population (39.8%), according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

This fact has not escaped the attention of Bishop LaTrelle Easterling, episcopal leader of the Baltimore-Washington Conference. As she travelled throughout the conference this fall, meeting separately with clergy and laity on seven of the eight districts, clergy health was a central element of her message.

The bishop stressed the need for better self-care, imploring clergy to take their days off (at least two per week), to eat better, and to get the help they need if they need it (i.e., seeing a therapist or counselor).

“The pain and weight and burden some of our clergy our carrying in this season in United Methodism is affecting them to the point that they’re ending up in the hospital,” the bishop said. “The healthier we are in mind, body and spirit, the more we’re able to focus on mission and ministry. The more present we are, the better we can serve people.”

Denominational officials have also shared that some of the highest rates of depression among United Methodist clergy are in the Baltimore-Washington Conference. “We need to take better care of ourselves,” the bishop said.

With these statistics in mind, the *UMConnection* reached out to several clergy in the BWC who are taking better care of themselves. We asked them several questions and they responded by e-mail.

Our prayer is that these four stories serve as inspiration for clergy and laity alike, especially as the resolutions for the New Year begin to take shape (pun intended).

## Seeking to live in the fullness of God

**Rev. Donna Claycomb Sokol** has served the Mt. Vernon Place UMC in Washington, D.C., for the past 14 years. She said that taking better care of herself is important because “we cannot be the fullness of who God has called and created us to be if we are not exercising discipline in every aspect of our life — including health.”

Claycomb Sokol confesses to having joined Weight Watchers many times, and successfully



Rev. Donna Claycomb Sokol

COURTESY OF DONNA CLAYCOMB SOKOL

practicing the program through her seminary years. However, her first appointment in the Western North Carolina Conference changed that.

“It was an extraordinary congregation that loved me well,” she said, “with food being a primary love language. This food, combined with a heavy pastoral care load in a large retirement community where work was all consuming, nearly erased that discipline. The weight started to creep back on — until it was all back plus more.”

A heavy workload is often an excuse clergy use for not exercising, Claycomb Sokol said, because clergy are there to serve others before themselves. However, finding and making time for oneself is critical.

“I’m never content with who I am at my heaviest,” she said. “The weight impacts how I live, move, and have my being. And there is no doubt in my mind that it prevents me from being the fullness God has called and created me to be. I want to be this fullness and taking care of myself is critical to realizing it.”

Claycomb Sokol recently joined Omada, an online tool that “empowers people to achieve their health goals through sustainable lifestyle change,” according to their website. The cost is picked up by Wespeth.

“I face the scale every single day not in a way that brings shame, but in a way that reveals how my body responds when I exercise more and eat a significant number of fruits and vegetables every day,” she said. “In fact, Omada is one of the few programs I’ve ever joined that doesn’t feel restrictive but rather offers invitations to try or experiment with what really makes us healthy, whole, and alive.”

In addition to eating better, Claycomb

Sokol is also hitting the gym. “I’ve met some extraordinary people at the gym,” she said, “some of whom have showed up at church.”

But the best part? “It’s super fun to tell people you can leg press more than 340 pounds!”

## Slowing down to prioritize self-care

In July 2017, the **Rev. Twanda Prioleau** was visiting a church member in a hospital and nearly passed out due to exhaustion. The pastor of Christ UMC in Baltimore ended up spending the night in the hospital herself. A couple of days later, a colleague called her.

“Twanda,” the colleague said, “God did not give you a platter. You are trying to lead from a platter. God only gave you a cup and a saucer. You need to decide what you need to give up and concentrate



COURTESY OF TWANDA PRIOLEAU

on one thing.”

That “aha” moment slowly set Prioleau on a new path. She had been serving as a pastor for six years at that point, had gained 30 pounds, her cholesterol was on the rise, and the “weight of ministry,” she said, “was negatively affecting on my mental health.”

Ironically, she said, she kept going. “I was going through the motions of ministry, but not the fulfillment of ministry,” she said.

In February 2018, Prioleau attending the “Tending the Fire” retreat. This retreat, she said, helps clergy be a healthy, non-anxious leader. The second part of the retreat, in May 2018, was another “aha” moment.

“It was around 12 midnight on Friday that week,” she said, “sitting in a hotel room in Philadelphia, anxious about what was on my plate.” She talked

# Contemplative Photo Retreat opens new ways

By ALISON BURDETT  
UMConnection Staff

**A**T THE END of October, the foliage at Camp Manidokan felt heavenly. Thirty-six photography lovers attended the second annual Contemplative Photo Retreat, which was held a week later this year than the previous year so as to more fully enjoy the colors of fall. The theme this year was “Come to the Water,” using Scripture to help the attendees surrender to trust and receive living water through photography

as a spiritual practice. On Friday evening, the first night, the group prayed together to let God be in control. As photographers with many settings to manage, it can be hard to relinquish that feeling of control. But contemplative photography is about receiving, not taking. The expression “taking” pictures was taboo, and the group laughed each time someone said that word by mistake.

According to Wayne Hipley, a co-leader of the retreat, one of the themes of the weekend was “Gratitude.” The images we receive can often be sources of comfort, reflection and grace, he

said. “We do not enter into this contemplative practice merely for self-edification, or to receive the admiration and praise from others. The primary goal is to open our own hearts to something new and exciting for us. These images — these moments in time that excite our sensibilities — are gifts from God. And as with any gift we receive, it’s incumbent on us to express our gratitude.”

Classes offered throughout the weekend included

everything from technical photography skills, to storytelling through photography, to photography as a spiritual practice. Attendees ranged from beginners to advanced, and there was something for everyone. Following sessions, the photographers had time to go out and practice their new skill set in the mountains around Manidokan. A favorite for many was how to photograph water. A team could be seen, all with tripods and cameras set with extended exposures trying to capture that perfect waterfall photograph. Others spent time trying to get as close to a frog on



PHOTO BY TWANDA PRIOLEAU



# s in face of mounting health crisis

with one of her colleagues and it was then that she realized she needed to “tap out,” as she put it. “I had reached my breaking point. I needed a break. I can honestly say that I was ready to throw in the towel. I had given all I had.”

She asked another colleague to preach for her that Sunday. The substitute preacher that morning preached on burnout in ministry, Prioleau said. “God spoke directly to me. It was time to tap out.”

And so Prioleau took sabbath leave of three months.

“Thank God,” she said. “I started taking care of ME. I put me on my schedule.”

For three months, she said, she saw her therapist weekly. Together, they worked out a plan to start healing and return to the church. Prioleau also joined a workout group called “MBS Fitness Lab” and started exercising four days a week. She connected with family and friends and did what was necessary to take care of herself.

Today, Prioleau is doing life differently. “Taking care of myself is number one on my priority list,” she said. She’s lost 35 pound and her cholesterol numbers are stabilizing, as well as her blood pressure.

“I am no longer leading out of an empty cup,” she said.

To her clergy colleagues, she said: “Slow. Down. Enough. To. Hear. God’s. Still. Small. Voice.”

## Getting better — one choice at a time

When the **Rev. Chris Owens** isn’t busy pastoring First Saints Community Church in Leonardtown — and its many campuses — he can be found behind an electric bass guitar, performing with groups and trios around



# of seeing faith and gratitude



the creek bank as possible before it hopped into the water.

During reflection time, group members shared metaphors about how changing ones perspective, like literally laying on the ground to photograph up, changed people's entire outlook. In those times of sharing there was a sense of peace and wonder seeing a group of people express gratitude not only for the images they received, but for the ability to see God’s creation in a fresh way.

It was exciting to see how relationships developed organically among the retreat participants, those present said. People helped each other, collaborating and affirming

Maryland.

“People hold all kinds of reasons for caring for themselves,” he said. “For me, it’s a matter of stewardship. I want to be fully available to God, my family, those I shepherd, and to myself with my very best. I can only do that if I intentionally make the hard choices to keep myself healthy and to get healthier.”

Last year, Owens was given “the great blessing” of adopting his oldest daughter, Kathryn. “I began to think of a suit I wanted to wear, which I knew I would not be able to fit into. At that time, I had a friend who was doing tremendously well with a ‘keto’ diet, which I decided to try. I immediately began to feel better and lose weight, so I just kept going.”

So far, he’s lost 100 pounds and kept it off.

“I lived into a combination of diet change, keeping up with my doctor more, and moderate exercise,” he said. “I then had the motivation to develop better spiritual disciplines to nurture me spiritually and emotionally. As a result, I have the best blood screening levels I have ever had (all normal), more energy, and much greater stress control. Through keeping up with my daily physical and spiritual disciplines, I have been keeping my weight steady, blood pressure down, and my chronic depression at bay.”

Owens knows that taking care of yourself is a choice, and a hard one at that. But, he said, it comes down to loving yourself enough to make small, incremental changes.

“Just give yourself plenty of time to get better, one choice, one shift, one rep, and one pound at a time,” he said. “Don’t rush it. Making a few, easy shifts gets us feeling better and builds our confidence to take on more. I have seen in myself and others that anyone work hard to get healthier and more effective at life and ministry!”

## Seeing ourselves as God's creation

The **Rev. Laura Norvell** came into ministry wearing multiple hats. A mom, a student, and a fundraising professional, she was also very active in her local church. It quickly became apparent that there wasn’t enough of her to go around.

“I began running as a stress reliever during a very hard phase of parenting,” she said, “and as a way of sharing something with my kids. They all ran cross country...and so it gave us more to talk about if I ran too.”

After her father died in 2010, Norvell trained for a half marathon with a couple of nieces for family bonding. But after the race came and went, she stopped running.

“Then a couple of months later, my oldest left



home for college and I found myself sitting in the doctor's office weeping,” she said. “Depression? I’d been through a lot of hard things, but it turns out the combination of the first kid heading to college and a sudden drop-off in endorphins from training were a perfect storm for my mental health.”

Since then, Norvell, who serves as pastor of Faith UMC in Rockville, has worked hard to develop discipline to keep her body moving.

Running, she said, provides a necessary release of stress hormones and yoga helps her to appreciate her body as part of God's good creation.

“I’ve learned that my body has an ideal weight range, and in that range, my physical and emotional health are at a peak,” she said. “Now the challenge is monitoring the busy seasons so that they don't overwhelm my good habits.”

There have been dips since she started, she confesses, “like pushing to graduate from seminary or pushing to make the adjustment from extension ministry to more time spent in the local church. But I get back on track, and I trust myself to do so.”

What results has she seen?

“I’ve lost weight, improved cardiac function, dropped a couple of dress sizes, and developed resiliency,” she said. “And I feel great.”

Eating well, staying hydrated and moving your body can impact so much, Norvell said, and it sets a great example of stewardship.

Her advice to other clergy is that “you've only got this one beautiful created body. Also, I think it is vitally important that we set an example of being embodied and having healthy attitudes about being flesh and bone, sweat and blood and fat. Embracing all of that sets an example for those we serve.”



to see in a new way: it's about "receiving" instead of "taking;" instead of saying "look what I did," the process sparks a response of gratitude and praise for what God is doing. And I for one, am so grateful that my love of photography can contribute to friendships, fellowship and a new spiritual practice for many.

*Alison Burdett, the BWC's Multimedia Producer, is a co-leader of the Retreat.*



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# BWC trustees shelve work on church disaffiliation

BY MELISSA LAUBER  
UMConnection Staff

**I**N RESPONSE TO differences over the church’s stance on homosexuality, the General Conference of The United Methodist Church, in February 2019, added a new paragraph, ¶ 2553, to the Book of Discipline. It outlines how a church might leave the denomination with its property. However, when and how that paragraph on disaffiliation is implemented has become a matter of debate.

Following the 2019 Special Session, the Commission on the General Conference determined that a key preliminary vote on ¶2553 was void, based on voting irregularities, and asked the Council of Bishops to refer the matter to the Judicial Council, the denomination’s top court.

On Nov. 1, however, the Judicial Council announced that it was postponing review of the voting irregularities until next May, the week before the 2020 General Conference, when delegates are also expected to consider new legislation on disaffiliation.

In light of the Commission on the General Conference’s determination that a key vote was void, and knowing that the voting irregularity issue remains pending before the Judicial Council, the Board of Trustees of the Baltimore-Washington Conference announced it would delay issuance of any official disaffiliation policies for local congregations.

Para. 2553 does not stand on its own, explained John Strawbridge, the BWC’s trustee chair, in a Dec. 4 e-mail to local church leaders.

“The General Conference

provided that all disaffiliation agreements between congregations and their annual conference must include certain ‘standard terms’ that were spelled out in ¶2553,” Strawbridge wrote, “but it also authorized annual conference trustees — working with advice from the Cabinet, the conference treasurer, the conference benefits officer, the director of connectional ministries, and the conference chancellor — to establish additional terms and conditions for disaffiliation agreements, provided that none of the additional terms were inconsistent with the minimum standards required by ¶2553.”

The trustees had begun work in earnest on these additional terms but stopped last August when the results of the investigation of improper voting by delegates who were not credentialed was announced.

“Although the Judicial Council completed its Fall Session earlier this month, [in November], the validity of ¶2553 remains too uncertain to allow Conference trustees to complete their work on disaffiliation procedures,” Strawbridge wrote.

His e-mail to local church leaders in the BWC drew objections from the local chapter of the Wesleyan Covenant Association, who affirm the denomination’s more conservative traditional stance on sexual ethics, teachings on marriage, and ordination standards.

“The Trustees neglected to relate the result of Decision 1385 [from the Judicial Council], which states that ¶ 2553 is still indeed in effect,” the Rev. Rudy Bropleh and John C. Hines, the WCA president and vice-president, wrote in a statement of

response to the trustees.

“Not only is the Disaffiliation paragraph in effect, but it has already been considered for use by churches across the Connexion, not least of which being six churches in the Great Plains Annual Conference and one of the largest churches in Texas.”

WCA leaders also pointed out that “the Judicial Council is the only body that can declare an act of the General Conference null and void,” and that the trustees should not heed the findings of the Commission on the General Conference.

“The Baltimore-Washington Conference Board of Trustees, in failing to pursue the completion of the required process for disaffiliation, is failing to comply with the directive of the General Conference,” Bropleh and Hines said.

However, several annual conferences have adopted a similar stance to that of the BWC’s trustees, waiting to formally codify pathways for churches to leave the denomination over issues of human sexuality.

Hearing arguments against the trustee’s decision, Thomas Starnes, the chancellor of the Baltimore-Washington Conference, expressed his support of the trustee’s choice to defer development of disaffiliation procedures until the issues that remain pending before the Judicial Council are resolved.

The question of whether the Commission on the General Conference has the authority to declare votes void is an open question, and one that is currently pending before the Judicial Council, Starnes pointed out.

He added that Decision 1385 is irrelevant.

“That decision did not address the voting irregularity issues, but focused solely on identifying the provision’s intended effective date.

“As a practical matter, it makes no sense to develop and begin implementing disaffiliation procedures when the very validity of a Disciplinary provision that authorized disaffiliation is pending review by the Judicial Council,” Starnes said.

The trustees will continue to monitor action and reaction to disaffiliation processes and how they might relate to the churches of the Baltimore-Washington Conference Strawbridge said.

Before their work was interrupted, BWC trustees were developing criteria to supplement the minimum guidelines developed by the General Council on Finance and Administration, for what churches seeking to leave the denomination with their property must pay.

Under the minimum terms, GCFA said, local churches must:

- Pay any unpaid mission shares for 12 months prior to disaffiliation.
- Pay an additional 12 months of mission shares.
- Pay the church’s fair share of the unfunded pension liability (for their pastors’ retirement, which in many cases can approach approximately a million dollars or more).
- Satisfy all debts, loan and liabilities owed to any other party.

*Changes made to the Book of Discipline, following the 2019 Special Session – including Para 2553, are online at <https://cdn.cokesbury.com/images/community/cokesburyportals/2016boderrata.pdf>*

*The majority of these changes will become effective on Jan. 1, 2020.*

# A word from the bishop

## An Advent Message from Romans 15:8-13

IN MY HOME office, I have a set of three bookcases. At the top of the middle case there is a piece of art placed between two candle sticks. The art is the word, “HOPE.” I received this piece of art when I was the district superintendent for the Metro Boston HOPE District. It now sits atop my shelf and catches my eye every so often. It is especially helpful on days when the clamor of conflicting voices within the conference or the denomination becomes a chorus of chaos.

My eyes gaze upward and see those four letters, H-O-P-E, and I remember. I remember that God is yet in control. I remember that trouble don’t last always. I remember that Christ can do exceedingly, abundantly more than I can ask or think. I remember that greater is he that is within me than he that is within the world. I remember...

The text comes from the apostle Paul, the persecutor turned prophetic pulpiteer who wrote or inspired most of the epistolary letters in the New Testament. Some say the Book of Romans is Paul’s masterpiece. In the words of NT Wright, when it comes to the Book of Romans, “We are here dealing with a work of massive substance, presenting a formidable intellectual challenge while offering breathtaking theological and spiritual vision.”

The Letter to the Romans — and we should remember that that is exactly what we have here and in all of the epistles; they were first letters written to address problems that were arising in the new communities of belief and fellowship — was not written as a theological treatise or historical writing. Again, in

the words of Wright, “Every letter was at first a pastor-teacher’s written response to believers whose particular socio-historical circumstances provoked a spiritual crisis that requires theological explanation and practical solution.”

In other words, much like today, those who wrote these letters were addressing divisions, arguments, disagreements, prejudices, biases and frustrations. They were written to remind their intended audience of who and whose they were.

Paul penned Romans in the year 57 of the Common Era. The letter’s over-arching theme is God’s righteousness. In the face of injustice and persecution and exclusion and oppression, this letter was written to offer encouragement, a reminder of the covenantal promises of God and to give hope.

Paul needed to remind the church in Rome that, “The covenant between God and Israel was established to deal with the problem of the world as a whole. It was established so that YHWH could rescue creation from evil, corruption, disintegration and, in particular, from sin and death.”

At a time when the church was being persecuted and Jews and Gentiles were turning against one another instead of standing with one another, Paul wrote to remind them of the promises made to their forefathers, and therefore to them. Paul reminded them that the Prophet Isaiah preached of the coming One, the One in whom all, including the Gentiles, should hope. He concluded this refresher course with this prayer: “May the God of all hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

During this season of Advent, this time of anticipatory waiting and contemplative prayer, we are called to remember the Advent of Christ breaking into the world, the word made flesh, dwelling among us. In our own times of division and partisan politics and the glorification of money and power and self, we are called to remember who and whose we are.

YHWH, Elohim, Jehovah Jireh, The Great I Am, this God Almighty has promised to be with us, and more so, to triumph over evil with justice; to loose shackles with liberation and to care for all of creation. The Rock of our Salvation remains faithful to us. God moving creation to full restoration and reconciliation. We do not need to wait for another, hope for another, turn to another or go in search of another. Everything we need and desire is found in the Root of Jesse and his name is Jesus.

And yet, even though we in the church today know of Christ’s breaking into our world, we so often struggle to see through the darkness. We struggle to hold on to our hope and maybe even our faith. We keep looking for a reason to hope, to believe. We keep thrashing around looking for answers to our current confusion.

As I ponder our search, I am reminded of the Patti LaBelle ballad, “You Are My Friend.” In the chorus of that tune, Patti sings, “I’ve been looking around and you were here all the time!” Beloved, as we in this country and this denomination look around for an answer, the answer has been here all the time.

We’ve been looking for peace, and peace is found in Christ. We’ve been looking for liberation, and liberation

is found in Christ. We’ve been looking for reconciliation, and reconciliation is found in Christ. We’ve been looking around for someone else to save us, but salvation has never left us. If those who claim Christ would live as Christ lived, humbly, in constant prayer and obedience to God, never seeking anything for themselves but living that others might have more, loving without partiality and advocating for those unable to speak for themselves, if we would live in this way, peace would abound.

As we wait, we do not wait as those without purpose. We wait with purpose and intention. We wait as those called to serve. And, as we wait, we know there is more to come. We know that Christ will come again with final victory and we will all feast at his heavenly banquet. That gives us hope, unbounded hope in the preferred future for God’s creation.

As we wait, may we reduce our use of plastics and our carbon footprint. As we wait, may we seek out the homeless in our communities and build relationships. As we wait, may we adopt a classroom and walk alongside the staff to provide resources and hands-on assistance. As we wait, may the Word of God be as fire shut up in our bones, so that its energy propels us into action. And then through us the world will see Christ, and in Christ the world will find hope.



Bishop LaTrelle Easterling

## Grace breaks new ground

By Erik Alsgaard  
UMConnection Staff

GRACE UMC IN Fort Washington broke ground Nov. 24 on a new \$5 million church that will seat 500, offer updated meeting space and classrooms, and a new fellowship hall. There will also be improved parking, a commercial kitchen, and memorial gardens.

“This project has been in the works for the past five or six years,” Purcell Conway, chairperson of the New Building Committee said. “We’ve had to overcome many obstacles to get here.”

Conway said the congregation

hopes to move into their new church by Christmas 2020.

The Rev. Robert Slade, appointed to Grace in 2011, said the day was exciting and encouraging.

“We’ve been waiting for a long time,” he said. “Pastors before me had the vision and... now we’re able to move. God truly, truly, has been good to us.”

Slade said the vision of the new building is to provide a home for every aspect of their ministry. “Everybody can be right here.”

*Read the full story online at [bwcumc.org/news-and-views/grace-umc-breaks-new-ground-in-fort-washington/](http://bwcumc.org/news-and-views/grace-umc-breaks-new-ground-in-fort-washington/)*



Members of Grace UMC in Fort Washington break ground on a new church.

### LETTER TO THE EDITOR

## 'Embracing Truth'

Why is the biblical stance on "practicing" homosexuality (an abomination to God) being denounced?

Why does the debate continue that the Bible’s printed words on that subject mean the exact opposite — that God sanctions, endorses, and even celebrates the "practice" of homosexuality?

It’s disturbing that those endorsing that view do not back it up with conclusive documented proof.

Is Christianity so shallow today that man decides what God desires? I’ve heard unsupported justifications like some biblical words were not divinely guided, "practicing" homosexuality is only wrong in some situations, and interpretations favoring personal feelings for what is fair, what God really meant, etc. No, God’s word must be upheld as written unless fully-agreed to conclusive documented proof surfaces to the contrary.

Man’s law requires a preponderance of credible evidence to convict. Convicting or changing God’s word should require even greater unquestionable documented proof.

God’s unconditional love extends to all. If God’s love depended on validating behavior as righteous, none of us could be loved. Jesus loved while rebuking unacceptable behavior. The church must uphold God’s word, love without endorsing behavior, follow the Special Session decisions and move on.

Accepting truth in God’s word is the only way we can be set free. Who will set us free of this destructive battle? While praying for affirmation of "truth," we can also do a better job of loving all God’s people.

“Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.” – John 8:32

Robert K. Abel  
Linthicum Heights UMC

For submission guidelines, visit [bwcumc.org/news/submit-and-subscribe](http://bwcumc.org/news/submit-and-subscribe).

# Hatchery: Churches revel in spirit of risk and discovery

From page 1

church's responsibility to be in a posture of creative co-creation with the Holy Spirit."

Too often, churches dream and imagine and plan for months, or even years, and never launch new ministries. The Hatchery, Latona said, "reduced the amount of time between an idea of what God might be calling you to and actually trying something. It's the whole idea of failing boldly and learning quickly, so it's not just in our heads and hearts, it's in our hands and feet, too."

As she and her colleagues gave the 50 participants "the lumber to build ministry plans," Creasy Dean explained that "the goal of what we're doing is not innovating; the goal is finding better ways of loving each other."

"Love," she stressed, "makes us inventors."

She encouraged people to use design thinking – a process that calls on people to empathize, define, ideate, prototype and test. And, she stressed that "human-centered" design is at the heart of everything. "Listen," said Creasy Dean. "Design from the perspective of the person you're designing for. When you start making empathy the starting point, you end up in conversations you never bargained for."

The values with which one creates are also essential.

"How you do things speaks more loudly than the things you say you want to do," said Creasy Dean. To shape shared values, she encouraged those present to: put people first; care for the experiments, not the results; believe it's safe to fail; celebrate what you want more of; and measure what matters or what you measure will be what matters.

As they explored creating avatars of their target audiences, writing mission statements, doing marketing plans, finding income

streams, and more, the participants learned that "part of the magic is just taking yourself seriously," said Trey Wince, one of the presenters.

For the Rev. Bill Brown, the BWC's director of New Faith Expressions, the Ministry Hatchery was an opportunity for people to step apart from church as it has always been done and approach ministry from different angles with new ways of thinking.

"Too often, we're doing the same things we've always done and we're getting the same results," he said. "Experiences like this help us shift our stance and look at things



Rev. Kenda Creasy Dean

differently."

The Hatchery was an expansion of the BWC's Change Maker's initiative, an experience in missional entrepreneurship for young adults, sponsored in part, by the Baltimore-Washington Conference. This experience was open to people of all ages and is part of beginning to build a culture of expectation, Latona said.

The Hatchery's "ecosystem of experimentation was not, ultimately, intended to be about end results and creating spectacular, sustainable ministry," Latona said. "It's about looking outward and developing empathy and faith — empathy for those who are not in our churches and faith that, with God, we can do something about it. It's about loving well. How do we love our neighbor better?"

"We're hatching hope."



At Hughes UMC in Wheaton, their vision is to offer affordable housing. "We have enough land to do this," said the Rev. Diana Wingeier-Rayo. "We may have to demolish some existing buildings,... but we're not afraid of doing all kinds of crazy ideas."



Part of the team from John Wesley UMC in Hagerstown work on their project. This downtown church hopes to provide space and support for small business owners in their community. "The future of Hagerstown is on the kitchen table," they said. "Pull up a chair."



One of the opportunities around Francis Asbury National Korean UMC in Rockville is that many young adult Koreans don't know about God. To reach them, the church seeks to create fun events where 18 to 20 people can build relationships with each other and with God.



In an effort to take the church outside its four walls, New Market UMC is looking at a coffee truck. "Cup of J.O.E." would be a mobile coffee house, ministering to people in the church's ZIP Code. "The coffee truck would be a new door to the church," said Local Pastor Scott Clawson.



At Reisterstown UMC, they've noticed that there is no gathering place for kids in their community. To address the need for an "authentic place," the church wants to open "Junction Coffee," and is seeking support to re-do part of their church building and offer "coffee on the porch."



St. Mark UMC in Hanover realized that many people struggle with loneliness. They want to build a community where everyone belongs, and part of that is "Heart of Hanover." The vision is to create a "third place" that merges Bus Boys and Poets, and the "On Being" project.



Rev. Trey Wince



The Revs. Sarah Elliot, left, and Tiffany Patterson stand with Christie Latona, right, after receiving some seed money for their project. Their aim is to address poverty by working to feed hungry students in Harford County through paying off the lunch debt for more than 900 students.



Members of Colesville UMC have done research in their community and found a lack of opportunity for young adults. Their idea: "SALT - the Social Action Leadership Team," which will be a presence in their area and offer events, forums and platforms for young adults.

To learn more about how your faith community can explore missional innovation, visit [bwcumc.org/missionalinnovation](http://bwcumc.org/missionalinnovation).