



Photos by Alison Burdett and Tony Richards

UMC *Connection*

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BWC Session makes history



ALISON BURDETT

Bishop LaTrelle Easterling, left, greets the Rev. Joey Heath-Mason immediately after she ordained him as a full Elder. Standing next to the bishop is Delores Martin, Conference Lay Leader; Rev. Gerry Green, Greater Washington DS; Rev. Chip Aldridge, Wesley Theological Seminary; and the Rev. Mary Kay Totty, Dumbarton UMC.

BY ERIK ALSGAARD
UMConnection Staff

THE REPERCUSSIONS OF the 2019 Special Session of General Conference continue to reverberate throughout The United Methodist Church, and the Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference Session was not immune to its effects.

The February Special Session passed legislation reinforcing the stance that “self-avowed,

practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church.” It also adopted stronger penalties for clergy who conduct same-gender weddings, something also prohibited. Most of the newly adopted Traditional Plan takes effect January 1, 2020.

The BWC’s clergy session, which met the afternoon of May 29, has authority to decide on all

things clergy, including electing clergy to full or provisional membership. Once elected, a full member is eligible for ordination; a provisional member is eligible to be commissioned.

The BWC clergy session overwhelmingly approved two candidates for ministry who are married to people of the same gender – one for commissioning (TC Morrow), and one for ordination (Joey Heath-Mason)

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BWC gathers: United to Love

BY MELISSA LAUBER
UMConnection Staff

A FACEBOOK POST FROM the Rev. Stephanie Vader may sum it up best: “The Holy Spirit blew through our annual conference. She can be such a show off.”

The Baltimore-Washington Conference is one of the most diverse in the denomination and its 235th session, May 29-June 1 in Baltimore, held meaningful moments that illuminated the BWC’s new vision statement: “Transformed Lives, Transform Lives.”

The week was packed with Holy Spirit moments.

One of the most notable of these moments centered around the clergy session endorsing and Bishop LaTrelle Easterling commissioning TC Morrow and ordaining Joey Heath-Mason. Both are in same-gender marriages.

This act of sacred resistance stands in opposition to the Traditional Plan, adopted at the 2019 Special Session of General Conference, that reinforced and strengthened the church’s stance on homosexuality. It goes into effect across the denomination in January.

“Christ is the ultimate alchemist. Christ is ultimately the one who brings us to

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Young people take center stage

BY ERIK ALSGAARD
UMConnection Staff

SATURDAY, JUNE 1, was a special day in the life of the Annual Conference Session. An extra day was added to the agenda and, for the first time in memory, the whole day was set apart to celebrate young people and their ministry.

“We thought that something was missing in Young People’s Ministry in the Baltimore-Washington Conference,” said Christie Latona, Director of Connectional Ministries. “We need to be more effectively reaching the next generation.”

For example, Latona said that 437 churches in the BWC have at least one youth, ages 12-18,



TONY RICHARDS

A young person lifts their hands in praise during worship Saturday morning, June 1. The whole day was set apart to recognize Young People’s Ministry.

participating in a Christian formation group, such as Sunday school or other small group ministries; 37 churches in the conference have 50 or more youth participating in groups. However, 179 churches have zero youth in

such groups.

Those numbers are about to change. In a strategic plan adopted by the conference, the BWC agreed to make the choice to “disproportionately invest in

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BWC elects diverse delegation to chart future

By MELISSA LAUBER
UMConnection Staff

IN VOTING THAT went past midnight, members of the Baltimore-Washington Conference elected 32 delegates to represent them in the year ahead.

Six clergy and six laity will serve as General Conference delegates at the May 5-15, 2020, meeting in Minneapolis, Minn. The Rev. Ianther Mills, of Asbury UMC in D.C., will lead the delegation. Cynthia Taylor, the Conference Secretary who attends Mt. Olive UMC in Randallstown, was the top person on the ballot for the laity and will be her partner.

An additional six clergy and six laity will serve as delegates to the Northeast Jurisdictional Conference, which meets July 13-17, 2020, in Hunt Valley, outside of Baltimore. Four clergy and four laity were also elected as alternates.

The delegation reflects the diversity of the BWC. The General Conference delegation has five white, five

African-American, one Asian and one Hispanic member. It has five men and seven women.

The entire delegation is made up of 18 white members, 10 African Americans, two Asians and two Latinos. There are 18 men and 14 women on the delegation.

It is also the first time that a Deacon, the Rev. Leo Yates, was elected to the delegation.

The delegation will hold its first meeting June 22.

General Conference meets every four years to set the laws and priorities of the denomination. The upcoming session is expected to be a contentious one as United Methodists wrestle with what's next in a global denomination deeply divided over the role of LGBTQIA Christians.

During the coming year, members will help discern who in the BWC may be called to serve as a bishop. Episcopal elections are held at the Jurisdictional Conference.



Conference Secretary Cynthia Talor, left, stands with the Rev. Ianther Mills.

General Conference

Clergy:
Ianther Mills
Joe Daniels
Ginger Gaines-Cirelli
C. Anthony Hunt
Giovanni Arroyo
Sarah Schlieckert

Laity:
Cynthia Taylor
Megan Blizzard
Melissa Lauber
Ken Ow
Sarah Ford
Daniel Colbert

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Jurisdictional Conference

Clergy:
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J.W. Park
Conrad Link
Leo Yates
Kirkland Reynolds
Bryant Oskvig

Laity:
Chris Schlieckert
Christie Latona
Tracy Collins
Sharon Milton
Nathan Jones
Chet Jechura

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czechura@gmail.com

Alternates

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Edgardo Rivera
Malcolm Frazier
Laura Norvell
Melissa Rudolph

Laity:
Mittie Quinn
Charlie Moore
Letebula Danny Pembamoto
Heather Kraus

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Leaders share hurts and hopes for the church

By MELISSA LAUBER
UMConnection Staff

TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE sea-change unfolding in the denomination over human sexuality, Bishop LaTrelle Easterling opted to open annual conference May 30 with the gift of listening.

In a Samoan Circles process, seven conference leaders with varied and diverse perspectives shared about what they believe is unfolding within, and lies ahead, of The United Methodist Church.

The group did unite about what is at stake for the church. “Everything, absolutely everything,” they said.

The panelists included: the Revs. Rebecca Iannicelli, superintendent of the Washington East District; Jessica Hayden, chair of the Discipleship Council; Michele Johns, a member of the Queer Clergy Caucus; Joseph Daniels, pastor of Emory UMC in D.C.; Kevin Baker, of the Wesleyan Covenant Association; Tom Price, the leader of ROCK; and Delores Martin, the conference lay leader.

Several of those speaking got emotional when they spoke about the pain they experienced from the actions of General Conference.

Citing the harm she believed was “planned and done with great intention,” Johns spoke about holding her breath when the votes at the session were taken. “When I

got home, I realized I was holding my breath. It had made me feel as if I was unworthy of breath. This kind of harm impacts us on a cellular level,” she said.

Daniels shared his anger and pain at the church’s continued lack of courage to tackle the issues of supremacy and racism, “which is the source of every other ‘ism’ we experience,” he said. He is hopeful the church will begin to seriously pursue justice – both soul justice and social justice.

Baker was concerned about the clouded narrative that claims “unless I approve of everything you do, I can’t love you.”

But in spite of the pain, members of the circle process said they did feel hope.

Hayden is looking for the moment when the church is going to decide to be the church. “We, who are recipients of grace, are called to be the means of grace,” she said.

Baker is convinced that “God’s business is still transforming lives.”

For some in the Samoan circle, that transformation may occur in a new, or very different Methodist Church that is somehow splintered, or at least no longer “united.” But Daniels and the others were also clear, “We worship a God who loves us and cares for us and wants to do exceedingly more than we can hope or imagine.



Seven Conference leaders share their views about the church's divisions and its future in a Samoan Circle process.

UMConnection

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Melissa Lauber
Erik Alsgaard
Alison Burdett
Myca Jones
Linda Worthington

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Response: *Not all endorse clergy session's actions*

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– by voting on them as part of a block, or group, rather than individually.

The actions of the clergy session caused the Rev. Robert Barnes, pastor of Mt. Oak Fellowship in Bowie, to request three rulings of law from Bishop LaTrelle Easterling.

“The executive (clergy) session was denied an opportunity to individually question the Board of Ordained Ministry and the two candidates” in question, Barnes said. The Book of Discipline requires a 75 percent approval vote.

Barnes’ first request asks if the “process of block voting to approve a group of candidates for ordination or commissioning violated the Disciplinary requirement for a 75 percent affirmative vote for each candidate.”

His second request asks if the “vote to affirm the candidates was consistent with church law, in that only two-thirds of the clergy session voted to affirm the process of voting for all candidates as a block.”

His final request asks if “the two candidates in question” — Morrow and Heath-Mason — “are properly candidates for commissioning and ordination.”

Bishop Easterling, in her response, said that the Book of Discipline gives her 30 days to respond to such requests, and that she would take the 30 days to respond. By Discipline, all responses by a bishop to a request for ruling on church law are reviewed by the Judicial Council, the church’s top court.

At a worship service May 31, Bishop Easterling commissioned Morrow as a provisional Deacon and ordained Heath-Mason as a full Elder.

“I am feeling so wonderful right now,” said Morrow immediately after the service, “and so surrounded by love and people that have been working for this day. I think this is an important day in the life of The United Methodist Church and whatever God is continuing to do in us and through us.”

“It feels a little surreal,” Heath-Mason said. “This was never supposed to happen — at least the church says so — but God had other plans.” Heath-Mason serves as a chaplain at American University in Washington, D.C.

Both Heath-Mason and Morrow are members of the Queer Clergy Caucus, and pledge to be active in the future of whatever’s next for the church.

“Something new is coming,” Heath-Mason said. “Whether it is a birthing or a reforming... something new is coming and I’ll continue to work at it and make it possible for others to follow behind me.”

Morrow, who works at the National Religious Campaign Against Torture in Washington, said she continues on track for full membership and ordination as a Deacon.

“We don’t know where we’ll be in three years as a denomination,” she said, “but I will continue to be on the path to ordination.”

Also during the clergy session, the Rev. Chip Aldridge, an Elder appointed to Wesley Theological

Seminary as Associate Dean of Admissions, spoke about his intention to marry his long-time, same-gender partner.

After noting that he had attended Heath-Mason’s wedding and the blessing of Morrow’s, Aldridge said that he has “blessed the relationship of same gender couples since the 1980s.”

“I refuse to abide by the pastoral limitations imposed on marriage created by the UMC Discipline, and I will continue to resist this prejudiced law which identifies one group for discrimination by our church,” he said.

However, he added, there has been one marriage he has not celebrated, “and that is my own.” Stating that he and his partner have lived together since 1986, Aldridge added that the couple has waited for the UMC to catch up to current laws throughout the United States on marriage equality.

“Our disappointment with the results of the 2019 Special General Conference is reflective of an unknown number of members and clergy of the UMC who are told that the UMC considers them or their loved ones ‘less than.’ The

harm continues,” he said.

Not all people in the BWC were happy with the bishop’s decision to commission and ordain. Pastor Patricia Bittner, who serves the Flintstone Charge, said during a moment of personal privilege May 31 that by commissioning two candidates “who we all know do not meet the requirements, we are openly and blatantly disregarding our current Book of Discipline guidelines. As our Bishop, representing all the people in the Baltimore-Washington Conference, I feel that if they are commissioned and ordained this evening, you are sanctioning this disobedient action and possibly encouraging further disobedience to our Book of Discipline, thus creating more division among us.”



Bishop LaTrelle Easterling commissions Tara Cressler “TC” Morrow as a provisional Deacon.

Young People: *Building today's and tomorrow's church*

From page 1

young people; to focus less on the structure of programs and more on the structure of connections; and to seek to focus the next three years on building the essential infrastructure for a thrilling, integrated, deep-impact ministry to young people in the conference.”

The day began as a youth-led revival broke out in the Grand Ballroom. Shouts of “hallelujah!” echoed through the room. Bishop LaTrelle Easterling was invited to the stage, where young people laid hands on her in prayer. Tears streamed down the bishop’s face and she ended up dancing on the way back to her seat.

Megan Blizzard, chair of the Young People’s Board, spoke passionately about the urgency of reaching young people today.

“One of the core values of Young People’s Ministry is respectful urgency,” she said. “It means engaging in Christ’s work while being humble, faithful and intentional about doing no harm.”

Blizzard – who was elected as a lay delegate to General Conference – said that the Bible is full of young people in ministry. Jesus, she said, was 33; Samuel was 11; David became king at 30.

“God has called us, your young people, and commanded us to speak. Are you listening?” she asked. “If Jesus were one of the young people in your pews, would you follow him or ask him



Young People's Ministry began and ended June 1 with worship. It began with a song from "The Lion King" and ended with a celebration with glow sticks.

to follow you? Would you listen to his gospel, or tell him his ideas are too outside the norm and ‘when he’s older,’ he can be in leadership?”

Mark DeVries, one of the consultants who helped formalize the strategic plan, said that hundreds of people offered input on this new direction. He shared the “why” behind the process.

DeVries used the image of planting oak trees for young people’s ministry. Oak trees, he said, take a long time to grow, and some of them can live for 500 years or longer. The best time to plant an oak tree, if you need a long log with which to create

a center beam, is 500 years ago.

“The second-best time,” he said, “is right now.”

What we’re doing in young people’s ministry, he said, is investing in young people “that you’ll never meet, that will bear fruit 400, 500 years from now. Whose job is it to plant these trees? All of us.”

However, he said, there’s only one substance oak trees grow in: dirt.

“It’s going to get messy,” he said, speaking of young people’s ministry. “But all of the good stuff is on the other side of the mess.”

He encouraged people to be “crazy about the kids” and to “love them irrationally,” because that’s how relationships are formed, and people’s lives are transformed.



Sexual ethics policy passes; many resolutions referred

By MELISSA LAUBER
UMConnection Staff

MEMBERS OF THE Baltimore-Washington Conference went into the plenary sessions May 30 and 31 with more than 30 resolutions on which to deliberate and vote.

However, 10 of the resolutions addressing, in one way or another, the church's stance on LGBTQIA people were tabled, withdrawn or referred to conference agencies or offices for further consideration and action.

One resolution, about Affiliating with the Western Region, was substituted for a motion by the Rev. Bryant Oskvig to create a mission in the Baltimore-Washington Conference that provides ministries to and with LGBTQIA people.

His proposal was referred to the Discipleship Council for consideration.

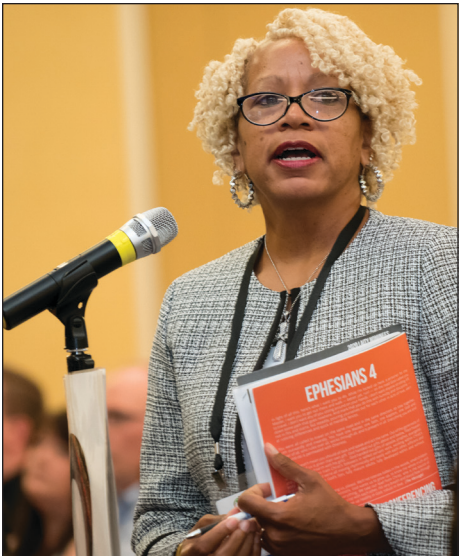
This, and the other referred resolutions, were brought forth by Baltimore-Washington Area Reconciling Methodists. They were considered by their makers to be "aspirational" and received a vote of concurrence from the Connectional Table.

They were referred, in large part, because time for holy conferencing about them was cut very short.

A resolution on supporting deliberations on new expressions of Methodism was tabled.

The resolution disputing the constitutionality of paragraph 304.3 in the Discipline was withdrawn, as was a resolution on calling Methodists back to their roots and celebrating an Easter Conference at Lovely Lane UMC in Baltimore.

Conference members unanimously approved a policy on sexual ethics, "Keeping our Sacred Trust." The policy, which will be used in every local church across the conference, outlines procedures for reporting and responding to complaints of misconduct, offers guidelines for social media and dating between clergy and parishioners, and sets training requirements for ministry leaders.



Rev. Joan Carter-Rimbach

An amendment to the policy mandates the establishment and deployment of a response team to address the needs of individuals and congregations involved in instances of sexual misconduct.

In other action, conference members voted on a number of resolutions that included calling for a station to be set up on the annual conference floor for nursing mothers and setting attendance requirements for General and Jurisdictional Conference delegates (which will be sent to the Judicial Council for a declaratory decision to ensure they are in keeping with church law).

Conference members also voted 781-98 to require gluten-free, egg-free, dairy-free and nut-free bread at all conference, regional and district gatherings.

They gave the green light to the Conference Trustees, in a 771-151 vote, to purchase a new episcopal residence for the bishop. The current parsonage has been remediated after being infected with mold.

Conference leaders were also asked, following a 759 to 140 vote, to research a more geographically central location for annual conference, besides the cities of Baltimore and Washington, and to explore how to provide free accommodations for lay and clergy who can demonstrate need. They will report their findings



Blake Sadler

at next year's session.

The Conference has a contract with Marriot to meet in Baltimore through 2022.

Members also voted to distribute \$25,000 given to Centre Street UMC in Cumberland, which closed this year, to other ministries in Allegany County.

Centre Street was one of 11 churches that conference members approved the congregations' decisions to close this year.

The Rev. Stephen Tillett proposed that money from the sale of Grace UMC in Fairmount Heights and Mt. Zion UMC, be saved for possible use by the African-American community following General Conference 2020. A similar proposal was made for Homestead UMC, but members voted that those funds will go to other ministries in the city of Baltimore.



Conference approves new structure for discipleship

By MELISSA LAUBER
UMConnection Staff

“TRANSFORMED LIVES TRANSFORM lives,” is the new vision statement that will guide the Baltimore-Washington Conference into this next season of equipping and inspiring churches to make disciples for the transformation of the world.

As the body that ensures that conference resources align with the BWC's vision, mission and critical issues, the Discipleship Council introduced a restructuring of ministry that was adopted by conference members at their annual session May 31.

The new structure sets up five areas of ministry: developing leaders, launching new faith expressions, entrusting young people, engaging in advocacy and action, and cultivating wellness and missions.

The re-structuring and realignment of people and resources was implemented on a trial basis last year, while feedback

was gathered from more than 630 people in a variety of settings.

The new structure, said Discipleship Council Chair, the Rev. Jessica Hayden, “enabled the BWC to invest more in local faith communities through missional innovation grants for Young People's Ministry, Advocacy and Action and Wellness and Mission.”

It also resulted in stronger collaborations and enabled ministries to have “more flexibility, nimbleness and visibility,” Hayden said. “More boards are functional and engaged in ministry that is focused on grassroots engagement.”

One of the most significant changes comes in the arena of Advocacy and Action. The restructure creates eight social action teams: climate and environmental justice, gender equity, gun violence prevention, immigration reform, racial justice, wealth equity, and LGBTQIA+ concerns. It also creates three annual forums, which will gather leaders from across the conference

to discuss and act on matters related to small member churches, ethnic local church concerns, and Christian unity and interreligious relationships. Six committees also fall under the Advocacy and Action umbrella. These committees are in ministry with people with disabilities, the Deaf, Asian-Americans, Hispanic/Latinos, Native Americans and African Americans.

Hayden is hopeful that these changes will significantly affect local churches by creating mission alignment, deepening discipleship growth, and providing networking opportunities and money for innovation.

Local church members can learn more about these ministry areas at www.bwcumc.org/ministries.

In other action, the Discipleship Council announced a new partnership between the BWC and Project Transformation D.C.

In this innovation ministry, explained director Rachel Luna, college students invest in the lives

of underserved children while living in community, exploring their calling, and developing as servant leaders. Children from low-income neighborhoods improve their literacy, social-emotional, and spiritual development through participating in high-quality, out-of-school time programs led by college-age young adults.

And, churches in underserved communities host out-of-school programs, reconnecting and building relationships with their neighbors.

Last summer, 98 children participated in Project Transformation at Hughes Memorial UMC and Brighter Day Ministries. Volunteers clocked in 49,210 minutes of reading with the children and 96 percent of participants improved or maintained their reading level.

Volunteers are currently being sought to work at this summer's sessions. Learn more at <https://projecttransformation.org/washington-dc>.



Stewardship remains strong throughout BWC

By ERIK ALSGAARD
UMConnection Staff

BY UNANIMOUS VOICE vote, members of the Baltimore-Washington Conference approved the 2020 budget. Total income, spread between mission shares (apportionments) and other income, comes to \$18,641,514. Total expenses equal income.

The 2020 budget is a 1.7 percent decrease over 2019, according to Phil Potter, chair of the BWC’s Commission on Finance and Administration. The benevolence factor remains the same for local churches, at 17.6 percent, while the collection rate drops from 92 to 91 percent.

2020 by the numbers:

- \$18,641,514 – budget
- 91% – collection rate
- 0% – increase in HealthFlex rate
- \$44,892 - Minimum salary
- \$20,263 - Minimum housing allowance

The challenge for CFA, Potter said, is to sustain ministry into an uncertain future.

“Fundamental to this challenge, we must inherently know that more than 82 percent of our budget never leaves the Conference,” he



The Rev. Daryl Williams, left, stands with Phil Potter during the Conference Council on Finance and Administration report.

said. “That a withheld mission share impacts much needed ministry within our connection, and that attempts to hurt a particular area or person, actually hurts the whole.”

Potter said that CFA prepared a budget that is prudent and “based on solid benchmarks.” And, in case “other events” take place, he said, a number of contingency plans have been developed. CFA, he said, can leverage about 29 million dollars over four years to adjust to any shortfall.

“We don’t anticipate that to

happen,” Potter said.

In response to a question from the Rev. Charles Harrell, retired, about what priorities are in place for such emergencies, Potter said that drawing-down the conference reserves would “probably” come first.

CFA vice chair, the Rev. Daryl Williams, said that the conference is still committed to paying 100 percent of its general church apportionments. The Rev. Maidstone Mulenga, who works for the Council of Bishops, asked CFA if that commitment was still true.

“We have not looked at changes in our global share,” Williams said. “We will take a full look at supporting ourselves as a conference and as a vital connection in the global church.”

The good news from Pension and Health Benefits, shared by the Rev. Carey James, was that rates for HealthFlex – the BWC’s health insurance benefit – will not increase for a third straight year.

Conference Trustee chair, John Strawbridge, updated members on the recent disaffiliation language approved at General Conference. The Disaffiliation Process, he said, has three required components:

1. Local Church Resolution by two-thirds majority;
 2. written Disaffiliation Agreement; and
 3. Annual Conference Ratification by simple majority. The BWC Disaffiliation Procedures will be issued on October 15, 2019 for guidance to Conference churches.
- During the stewardship report, Charlie Moore brought greetings from Africa University and thanked the BWC for its payment of 100 percent of its apportionments. Enrollment, he said, has increased 40 percent in the past four years, and they are 98.3 percent towards a financial campaign to raise 50 million dollars.

McMickle calls on BWC to stop ignoring poverty

By ALISON BURDETT
UMConnection Staff

REV. MARVIN McMICKLE, President and Director of the Doctor of Ministry Program and professor of African American Religious Studies for Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School, led Annual Conference’s two-day Bible study on Luke 16:19-22.

McMickle called attention to the contrast between the rich man in his fine linen who ate sumptuously and Lazarus, the beggar covered in sores at the rich man’s gate. The rich man could not come and go without seeing this man in poverty but did not help him. After they both died, Lazarus woke in the bosom of Abraham in heaven, while the rich man went to hell.

His focus turned to thinking about the poverty we see today, on our way to church, dressed in our fine linens, and the poverty we drive past on our way to brunch to eat sumptuously after church. “It is no longer possible for someone to say, ‘Well, I did not know’ about the suffering of the poor. Poverty has a visibility today that it did not have in the past. The faces of the poor must now be confronted,” he said.

McMickle shared statistics that the United States ranks second out of 35 developed countries on the scale of what economists

call “relative child poverty,” with 23.1 percent of its children living in poverty. Only Romania ranked higher. And, he said, we have such a problem because we tolerate a steadily expanding gap. He said, “the church is an island of prosperity surrounded by a sea of great poverty.”

The poor man goes to heaven and the rich man to hell. Why, McMickle asked. “He paid no attention to the poor man just outside his

door.”

“Luke 16 is a challenge to you to go home to your home church, look outside your window and see who or what is there.”

Reflecting on the harbor of Baltimore, McMickle said, “If you walk around the downtown area, you get one perception of Baltimore. You see yachts and boats and manifestations of prosperity and wealth. But go a mile from here. Go less than a mile from here, and what you will see is Luke 16.”

It’s not about the issue of poverty versus prosperity; it’s the proximity of one to another, he said. “Whether or not we end up in hell depends on the degree to which we have engaged with the poverty that impacts us.”

McMickle laid out four things that can be done to address the issue of poverty.

1. Have a biblical vision of the future; imagine a future different from the ruling elite;
2. Allow your values to inform your behavior.

From Micah

6:8, we know what is good: do justice, love kindness and be humbly obedient to God.

3. Use your voice to speak up and advocate for policies and practices on behalf of economic justice; be a voice for the voiceless.
4. Vote to elect people who will legislate for JUSTICE and not for JUST US.

Both days, McMickle acknowledged the division that the denomination is experiencing over issues of human sexuality. Poverty is our challenge, he said. “I’m not saying it’s the only one. Wherever you come out on issues of human sexuality, just know the rest of us are having the same debate as you are. But whatever you end up with on that issue, this one (poverty) will still be here.”

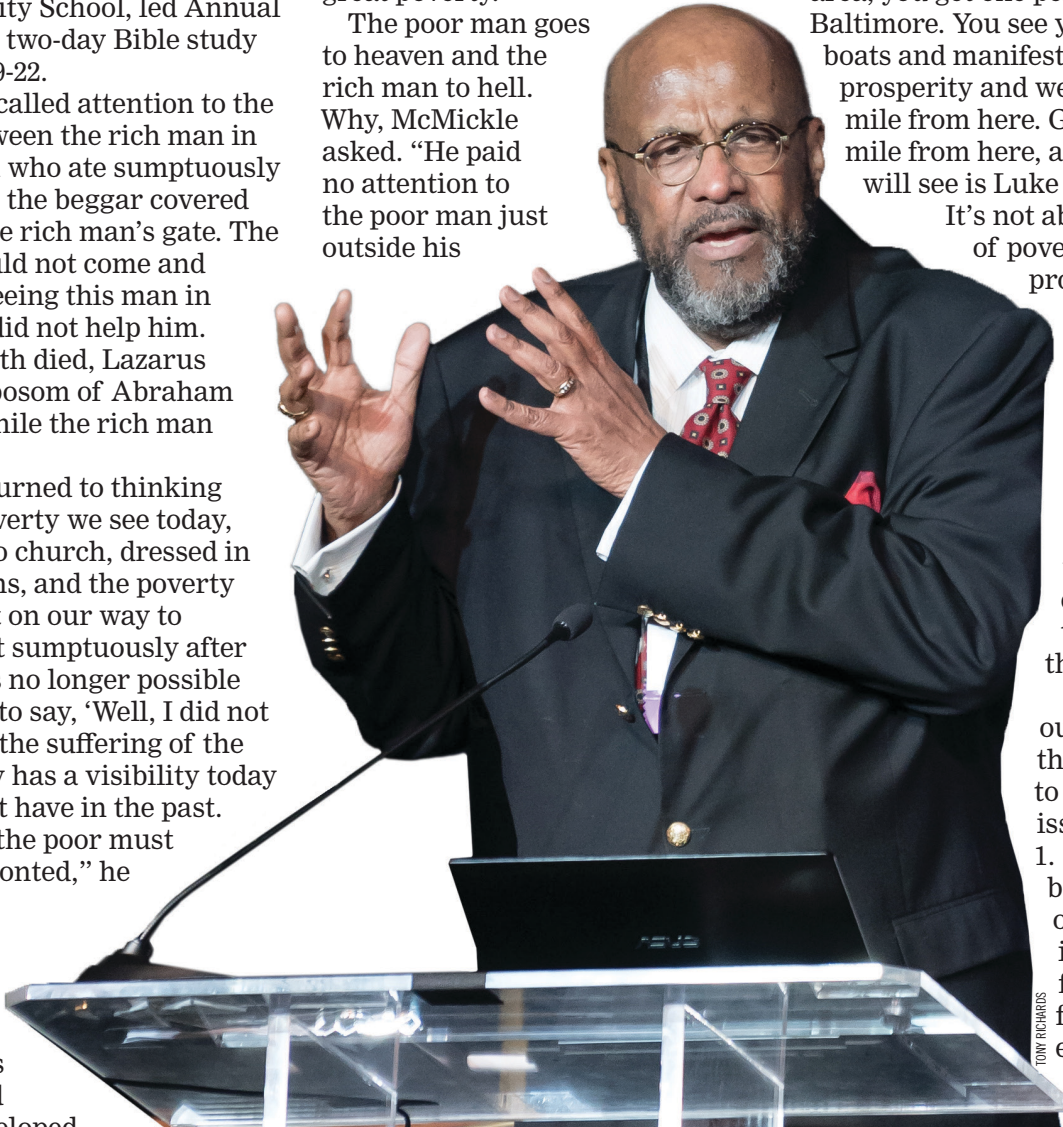
McMickle also called attention to Matthew 10:3-4.

Jesus began his ministry calling everyday, amiable fishermen, a “Galilean mafia,” McMickle said. But then he tossed in Matthew the tax collector, and Simon the Zealot.

Zealots, he explained, hated tax collectors. The pair were natural enemies, but both followed Jesus and were able to co-exist in the same circle. “I can’t think of any two unlikely people to be near Jesus,” he said.

“Some of you may be Matthew the tax collector. Some of you might be Simon the Zealot,” McMickle said.

Learn from your predecessors, he said. The one thing you have in common is that Christ called you to “come and follow me.”



Rev. Marvin McMickle leads the Bible study during the Annual Conference Session. Using Luke 16, his focus was on poverty and the church.

Laity explore worship and embrace ongoing ministry

By MELISSA LAUBER
UMConnection Staff

PARTNERSHIP IS ONE of the defining traits between the laity and clergy of the Baltimore-Washington Conference, said Conference Lay Leader Delores Martin. The ministry of the laity, when supported by their clergy counterparts, brings the church to life.



Conference Lay Leader Delores Martin

On May 29, the lay members to annual conference met with Marcia McFee, a lay woman who was the director of this year's conference worship.

McFee, who oversees Worship Design Studio, explored the meaning and value of worship in people's lives and how each individual experiences worship in different ways.

McFee offers a six-week free "Jumpstart Your Worship" training at <http://worshipdesignstudio.com/jumpstart>. She also has several other resources and encourages lay people to build on their partnership with clergy, as together, they create excellent worship that glorifies God.

During the plenary session on May 31, for

the Laity Address, Martin introduced Scott Johnson of the Upper New York Annual Conference.

Johnson, who served on the denomination's Way Forward Commission, shared his thoughts about the future ahead.

"The Church has turned the proverbial page," he said, "but our shared story is still being written."

Citing the recent HBO Game of Thrones finale, he asked the BWC members to think about what it means to be part of an ongoing story that moves in directions that they weren't

anticipating. But he also assured them that "God, who is the author of your story, is indeed engaged with, in, through and around you."

"Make sure," Johnson stressed, "that you are playing your part in the unfolding story of The United Methodist Church."



Marcia McFee

PHOTOS BY TONY RICHARDS

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Award winners continue to tell sacred stories

By MELISSA LAUBER
UMConnection Staff

I WAS STRUCK BEYOND words when United Methodist Communications presented me with the *Epikoinonia* Award for excellence in communications at the Annual Conference Session. The award is founded on the idea that without communications, there is no community.

It has been a sheer blessing to be able to do this work with other remarkable BWC communicators: the Rev. Erik Alsgaard, Alison Burdett, Myca Jones and Linda Worthington.

We each know in our hearts that every person in the Baltimore-Washington Conference is living a sacred story. We get to share these stories and watch the possibilities of God flow from them into the lives of thousands of people.

The Annual Conference Session is a place where all these stories

emptiness and depression. In 2011, he went, on a whim, on a Volunteers in Mission Trip to Zimbabwe.

Bonney constructed a secondary school at the remote Hanwa Mission School and fell in love with the people he encountered. He felt compelled to do more and sponsored a 13-year-old boy who lived in Hanwa.

He has returned to Zimbabwe every year since and meets with orphans. “God places them in my heart and I feel a responsibility to help them,” he said.

He currently supports 14



J'TA Freeman

art to introduce Jesus and find hidden talents, and to support four young men in their post-secondary education. All four are now employed in a place where 80 percent of others in their age group are unemployed.

He also sponsors the education of three students in Ghana and others in Sri Lanka and Liberia.

“There is a very special story for each of these children,” Bonney said. “They have become a part of my life and I am blessed to be part of their life and a part of their story. It has been difficult financially, but thankfully I am healthy and continue to work well past retirement age. I have also used all of my 401K, but truthfully I can say that every time there is a need, God has provided.”

God also provides for Freeman, a high school senior from Ebenezer UMC in Washington, who serves as the youth mayor of D.C. God grants her courage when she is afraid, she said. That courage has allowed her to do remarkable things.

Freeman’s uncle was killed when he was 18. “He was basically left to die,” she said. But because his voice was silenced, she is using her voice to speak up and speak out against gun violence and other issues.



Brad Grable, center, receives the Youth Worker of the Year award.

In honoring Bonney and Freeman, Bishop Minerva Carcaño (who also received a Moral Courage award for her leadership in the area of immigration) encouraged those present to “trust the voice of God in you.”

“These are people whose lives are so intertwined with God that they’ve become living prayers,” Carcaño said.

And that, for me, is the joy of being in Communications in The United Methodist Church. We get to lift up these living prayers and watch wonder, light, beauty, power and transformation unfold.



Linda Worthington, right, receives the Harry Denman Award for Evangelism during the Annual Conference Session.

mix and merge in interesting ways.

On the final day of Conference, I had the honor of witnessing the accounts of two remarkable people, Dave Bonney and T'JA Freeman, who received this year’s Baltimore-Washington Conference Moral Courage award.

Dave Bonney, his friend Charlie Moore said, went through some difficult years of grieving, anger,

college and university students, six secondary students and three primary students – assisting with school and also helping with those who required clothing, school supplies, laptops and in a few cases, medical, dental and eye care.

Responding to needs as they arose before him also led Bonney to work with a man in Ghana who works with poor children using



David Bonney with some of the students he supports, exemplifying Moral Courage.

Other Conference award winners include:

Harry Denman Award for Evangelism:
Linda Worthington, Chevy Chase UMC;
Alexis Peña Vazquez, Brook Hill UMC, Frederick

Youth Leader of the Year Award:
Brad Grable, Melville Chapel UMC

Seventeen students also received their missionary certificates as graduates of the Hispanic-Latino Lay Leadership School.

Ministry is at the heart of all we do.
There are a thousand ways to 'Get Connected'
as we stand, United to Love.

A large, glowing blue bowl on a stand, set against a background of blurred lights and a cross.

bwcumc.org/ministries

Overview: Youth, on-going missions, deliver hope

From page 1

transformation. But I also know, transformed lives transform lives,” the bishop preached. “When they see us walk different, they take notice. When they see us talk different, they take notice. When they see people abuse us and we smile and bless them anyway, they take notice. When they threaten to file charges on you, but you follow God anyway, they take notice.”

She told those present, “We can’t serve in fear. Fear and love cannot inhabit the same dwelling. And perfect love casts out all fear.”

She applauded those being commissioned and ordained in the tumultuous aftermath of the 2019 General Conference. “You felt the tectonic plates shift under The United Methodist Church’s foundation and you have continued to say, ‘yes,’ anyhow,” the bishop said. “We may not know what tomorrow holds, but we know who holds tomorrow.”

Another notable highlight was the entire day on June 1 being devoted to Young People’s Ministries. Members celebrated the contributions of youth and young adults and set a course for a new future for these ministries in the Conference.

The focus on young people included a dance presentation of “He Lives in Me,” from the Lion King; a spirit-filled moment as the young people prayed over the bishop; presentations on young adult Change-Maker ministries that are already transforming lives and communities; a key-note address by Mark DeVries of Ministry Architects that set the stage for a new strategic plan for young adult ministries; workshops to equip local churches; and a confirmation rally that included glow-sticks and a blessing of all confirmands and young people in the BWC involved in significant ministry.

“You are not the church of the future,” Bishop Easterling told the young people. “You are the church of now. You are the light. You are the light of Christ.” She encouraged them to shine so that the church and the world might know hope, healing, and the reconciliation that leads others to Jesus the Christ.

In other actions, members of the Baltimore-Washington Conference:

- Traveled on “a road to love” in the opening worship, created and choreographed by Marcia McFee. Bishop Easterling preached, illuminating the conference theme: “We are One: United to Love.”
- Stayed in session until after 1 a.m. May 31, electing delegates for General and Jurisdictional Conferences. The Rev. Ianther Mills and Cynthia Taylor will lead the delegations. (See story, page 2.)
- Adopted a new ministries structure that streamlines bureaucracy

and promotes engagement in five key areas: Leadership, New Faith Expressions, Advocacy and Action, Abundant Health and Young People’s Ministries. (See story, page 4.)

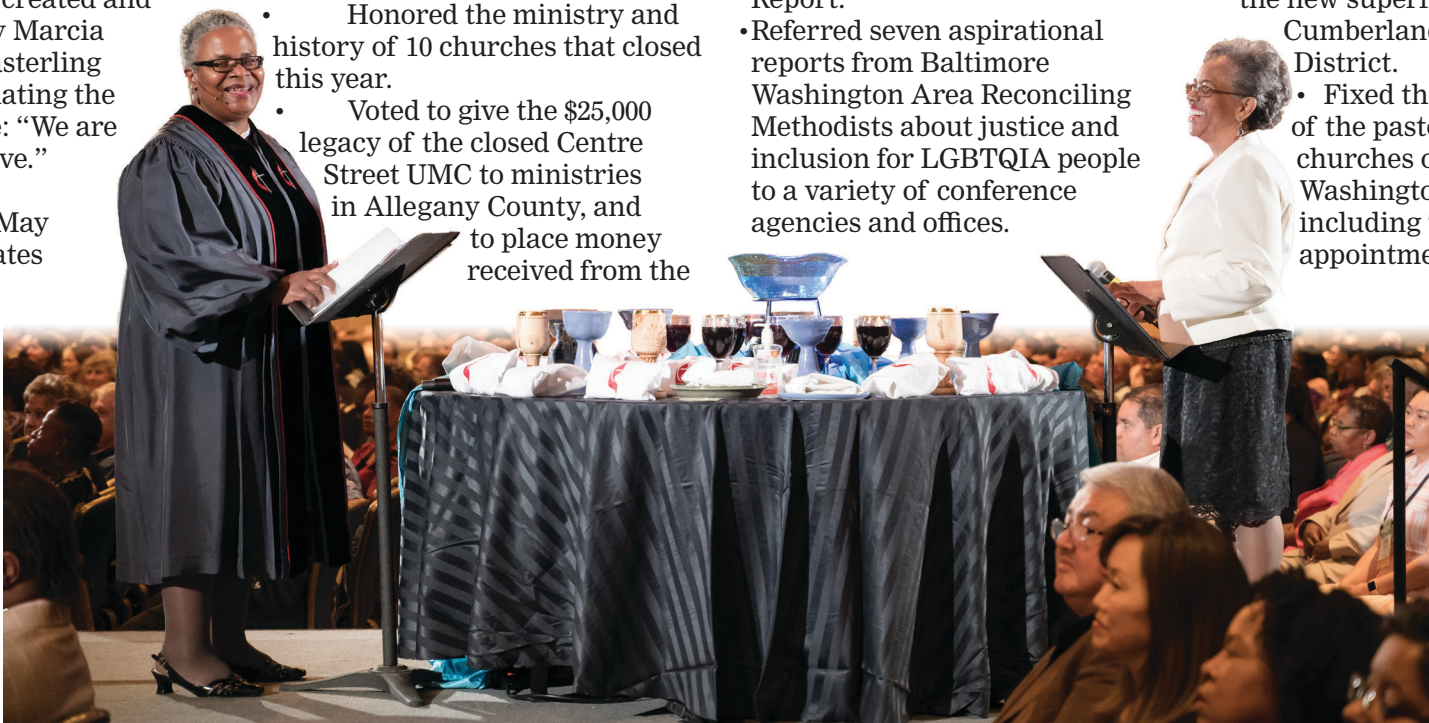
- Ordained one Deacon and 11 Elders; recognized the orders of the Rev. Ronald Fleming-Triplett; and commissioned two Deacons and nine Elders. With great emotion, Bishop Cynthia Moore-Koikoi, a daughter of the BWC, commissioned her husband, the Rev. Raphael Koikoi.
- Remembered and honored 60 United Methodists who died in the previous year.
- Listened to seven people in a “Samoan Circle” intently share their hurts, hopes and a variety of personal perspectives about how the church will move forward after the 2019 Special Session of General Conference. (See story, page 2.)
- Packed 60,000 meals for Rise Against Hunger.
- Contributed, in special offerings, \$9,858 for scholarships to summer camps, \$10,189 for Seeds for Security to provide shelter to victims of domestic violence, and \$1,947 for young people’s ministries.
- Honored 20 clergy retirees who collectively served 545 years in ministry at a luncheon.
- Heard the witness of Janay Parker, who shared how, after struggling with her mother’s addiction and death, she found a place of healing and hope at West River Camp.
- Learned about ways of worship with Marcia McFee of Worship Design Studios in the laity session.
- Voted to create a station for nursing mothers so that they can participate in annual conference, and to serve gluten-free, egg-free, dairy-free and nut-free bread at all conference, regional and district gatherings.
- Provided the Trustees permission to purchase a new episcopal residence after the current parsonage had to undergo mold remediation, and asked Conference leaders to research a centralized location for future annual conferences along with the possibility of providing free accommodations to those who can demonstrate need.
- Tabled a motion on Supporting Deliberations for New Expressions of Methodism.
 - Honored the ministry and history of 10 churches that closed this year.
 - Voted to give the \$25,000 legacy of the closed Centre Street UMC to ministries in Allegany County, and to place money received from the



Bishop Cynthia Moore-Koikoi lifts her hand in holy praise as she commissions her husband, Raphael Koikoi, a provisional Elder Friday night, May 31.

- sale of Mt. Zion UMC in Ellicott City and Grace UMC in Fairmount Heights into savings until after General Conference 2020 so that they might be used by other African-American churches.
- Studied Luke 16:19-22 with the Rev. Marvin McMickle, who taught about our proximity to the poor and how the church too often stands as an island of prosperity in a sea of poverty. (See story, page 5.)
- Was inspired by James Cogman, an ambassador of the Black College Fund
- Presented the Harry Denman award for Evangelism to Linda Worthington, a writer from Chevy Chase UMC who has worked more than 20 years with the UMConnection, and Pastor Alexis Peña Vazquez of Brook Hill UMC.
- Approved, by unanimous vote, an \$18,641,514 budget for 2020; kept the benevolence factor the same at 17.6 percent; and dropped the collection rate from 92 to 91 percent. (See story, page 5.)
- Received an inspirational message about the unfolding story of The United Methodist Church from Scott Johnson during the Laity Report.
- Referred seven aspirational reports from Baltimore Washington Area Reconciling Methodists about justice and inclusion for LGBTQIA people to a variety of conference agencies and offices.

- Awarded the Youth Worker of the Year award to Brad Grable of Melville Chapel in Elkridge.
- Adopted “Keeping our Sacred Trust,” a policy on sexual ethics.
- Heard the Rev. Bob Barnes request a ruling of law from Bishop LaTrelle Easterling about the actions of the clergy session and the approval of two candidates married to same-gender spouses. The bishop has 30 days to formally respond. (See story, page 1.)
- Awarded Moral Courage medals to David Bonney of Smithfield UMC for his work with young people in Zimbabwe and Ghana, and to J’TA Freeman of Ebenezer UMC in Washington, for her work in combatting gun violence as the youth mayor of Washington, D.C.; and to Bishop Minerva Carcaño, for her prophetic work on immigration and other justice issues. (See story, page 7.)
- Celebrated those who completed the BWC’s first Hispanic Lay Leadership School.
- Welcomed the Rev. Johnsie Cogman as the new superintendent of the Washington East District, and the Rev. John Wunderlich as the new superintendent of the Cumberland-Hagerstown District.
- Fixed the appointments of the pastors of the 623 churches of the Baltimore-Washington Conference, including 78 new pastoral appointments.



The next session of the Baltimore-Washington Conference will be held May 27-29, 2020, at the Waterfront Marriott Hotel in Baltimore.