

Golfing for a cause: Seeds of Security benefit



The Rev. Conrad Link, in the red shirt, celebrates a good putt at the recent Seeds of Security Golf Tournament in Columbia. Joining him are the Rev. JW Park, left, and Rob Morgan. This first-ever outing raised money to help women who are overcoming domestic and intimate partner abuse. Read the full story on page 3.

Judicial Council ruling stirs debate

FROM THE UNITED METHODIST
NEWS SERVICE*

RULINGS BY THE United Methodist Church's Judicial Council on General Conference 2019 actions have some church members celebrating and some planning exit strategies.

Whatever happens next, it's clear significant changes are coming to the 12.5-million-member denomination that just celebrated its 51st anniversary and remains deeply divided over the role of LGBTQ people in the church.

The church's top court ruled that parts of the Traditional Plan are in line with the denomination's constitution and struck down other parts. The result is that a good portion of the plan that strengthens enforcement of church bans on same-sex marriage and "self-avowed practicing" gay clergy will be added to the Book of Discipline, the denomination's policy book.

The church court, modifying an earlier decision, also upheld legislation that in effect suspends the denomination's trust clause and opens the way for congregations under certain conditions to leave with their property. The Judicial Council stressed that annual conference approval is among those conditions.

The church-disaffiliation legislation takes effect immediately. The constitutional parts of the Traditional Plan will take effect on Jan. 1, 2020, in the United States, and 12 months after the 2020 General Conference in Africa, Europe and the Philippines.

Late last month, the Discipleship Council of the Baltimore-Washington Conference issued a statement in response to the Judicial Council's decisions (see pages 6-7). In "Grounded in Love" (www.bwcumc.org/resources/away-forward/discipleship-council-statement/), they write about who is or isn't qualified to be ordained, and who gets to make that decision. "We believe that one of our (United Methodist Church) Constitution's most resolute commands is that such decisions are reserved exclusively to the clergy members of each annual conference."

They also state that they "dream and work for a church where no candidate for ordination in the Baltimore-Washington Conference will be disqualified based on any legislated litmus tests that short-circuit the exclusive constitutional prerogative of the annual conference's own clergy to vote

See Judicial Council, page 3

New ways of claiming church's resurrection

BY MELISSA LAUBER
UMConnection Staff

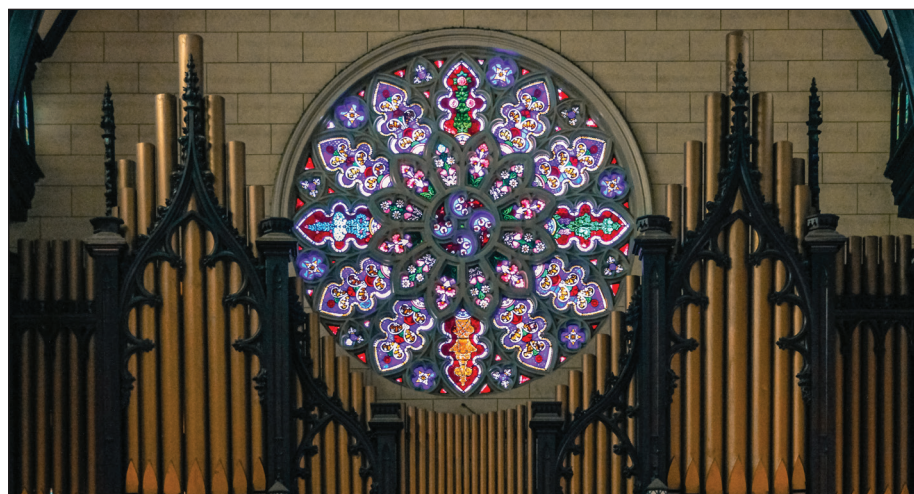
FOR 147 YEARS, Mt. Vernon Place UMC has defined Baltimore's landscape. One of the city's three Gothic buildings, it soars with grandeur, even as it anchors a Charles-Street square defined by culture and history. But this year, the church voted to abandon the glory of the building to resurrect hope for the congregation.

At a Church Conference on Jan. 20, in a vote of 20 to 1, the members voted to give the building to the Baltimore-Washington Conference, which

will oversee its upkeep and sell it, hopefully to a missionally-minded organization that will serve the community. In the interim, the congregation will rent back space, either in the church parlor or in the adjoining Asbury House, an historic Italianate Renaissance home attached to the church.

Released from being suffocated by the tremendous financial burden of the buildings, they will begin to redefine themselves as a new faith community. It's an unprecedented leap of faith, filled with grief, fear, remembrance, relief and possibility for both the conference and congregation.

See MVP, page 4



The Rose Window at Mt. Vernon Place UMC is a feature that makes the church one of the "most significant buildings" in Baltimore.

**WE ARE ONE:
United to Love**

Learn about the
resolutions coming
before the Annual
Conference Session.

See page 5.



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

“You were all called to travel on the same road and in the same direction, so stay together, both outwardly and inwardly.” Eph. 4:4

MY BROTHER HAYDEN and I are very different from each other. He likes computers and tech things; I like poetry and metaphor. Hayden would like to live in the country and raise chickens and learn how to make his own, well ..., everything. I like the country but have never ever thought, “I’d like to have a composting toilet.” Hayden is the sort of guy who, as he says, “absolutely has to learn things the hard way.” I wanted to get A’s and please the teacher.

We don’t have a lot in common, really, but our parents never cared about that. They would say, “You shared a womb, and we are a family. You are brother and sister and that is what matters.”

They never cared much whether we agreed and never tried to make us agree about anything we argued over. They made us stop fighting and agree to stay in the car together on long car trips, to stay at the table, and to stay together.

The writer of Ephesians seems like he’s trying to get the family to the destination God has in mind,

together. The call to “outward and inward” togetherness is hard, but I think outward togetherness is easier.

Outward togetherness is as simple as wearing the same team jersey or the same logo. The inward togetherness thing is the real challenge, because it means finding places where “your heart is with my heart” (John Wesley) and building on that and leaning on that. That takes

STAY TOGETHER

humility, time and commitment. Staying together requires that both “sides” place value on the relationship more than being right. Staying together requires a degree of flexibility and compromise.

My brother and I are still different — so much so that sometimes it’s hard to have long conversations on the phone. (He talks a lot about bitcoin and I don’t get that.) But we’re glad our parents helped us “stay together.” As adults, we see clearly what we would have lost without each other.

I hope the UMC can find a way to create a huge family car and a long family table. I hope we can create space for us to “stay together.”

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

“IF WE STAY together, we can win this!” I will always remember those words from my basketball coach. We were playing in the most prestigious tournament in our area, and, as a team, we simply were not getting along. There was some disagreement that was spreading through the team that had some players picking sides, some players disinterested, and others wanting

to quit and go home. The only problem was that we lucked up and won our first game. We were playing the number one seed in the tournament, and their best player came down with the flu. With him out, even with all of our dysfunction, we got it together just enough to win. Then the problem was, we had several more games to win if we were going to win.

It was in that moment that, as a team, we made a decision. We decided to lock in, for the time being, suck it up and get to work. We understood that no team could win if they were not playing together. We understood that no matter what else was going on, we had taken down Goliath by luck, so we had a real chance to make history and win this tournament,

but we had to do it as a team. So we did something that is not popular these days: we sucked it up for the greater good. We focused on the task ahead. I wish I could tell you that we won the tournament. We didn’t. We lost in the championship game. But a funny thing happened: we never fought with each other again in that tournament or in the years that we played with each other. You see, when we focused on the task at hand we realized two things: 1) we needed each other to do this; and 2) we actually liked each other.

Working on the common goal reminded us that even when we disagree, we have a lot invested in each other and we wanted to see each other win as much as we wanted to win.

Sometimes in life, you have to suck it up and stay together. The truth is, every day won’t be rosy and there will be times of struggle and disagreement. But accomplishing great things means working through challenges and remembering why you started in the first place. Accomplishing great things will require you to focus, compromise, love when you don’t want to, forgive and ask for forgiveness, but it keeps you with the people you need to accomplish the task at hand.

Friends, as Al Green famously said, “Let’s Stay Together.”

EVENTS

Pre-Conference Briefings
Saturday, May 18
Learn about what will be coming before the 235th annual session of the Baltimore-Washington Conference. Morning session, at Jackson Chapel UMC, 5609 Ballenger Creek Pike in Frederick, 9:30 a.m. to noon. Afternoon session, at St. Johns United Church at the Wilde Lake Interfaith Center, 10431 Twin Rivers Road in Columbia, 2 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference Session
May 29 - June 1
Marriott Waterfront Hotel, Baltimore
For more on this session, visit www.bwcumc.org/events/annual-conference.

Discipleship Systems workshop
Sept. 6, 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.
BWC Mission Center, Fulton
Sept. 7, 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.
Location to be determined
Rev. Quincy D. Brown will lead a workshop that walks participants through a three-D journey of discernment, dreaming and development. \$35. Contact Jo Chesson at jchesson@bwcumc.org or 410-309-3490.

Financial Leadership Academy
Sept. 30; 8 sessions, sponsored by the MidAtlantic Foundation
Eden Resort, Lancaster, Penn.
Comprised of eight sessions held over 18 months: the first four sessions involve financial best practices for clergy and managing your change. Trained coaches will work with clergy and a small group of members from their congregations to build a team that can help effect a real sea change in a church’s culture. Contact Frank Robert for applications at www.midatlanticfoundation.org, or 410-309-3475.

Multiplying your Church workshop
Nov. 8, 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.
Nov. 9, 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.
Locations to be announced
Jason Moore will lead a workshop to assist churches in learning to multiply ministry by starting a new worship service, new campus, or some other expression of faith in “From Franchise to Local Dive: Multiplying Your Church by Discovering Your Contextual Flavor.” \$35. Contact Jo Chesson at jchesson@bwcumc.org or 410-309-3490

Rise
AGAINST HUNGER

821 MILLION
people in the world don't get the food they need to live a healthy life

ONE IN NINE
people goes to bed hungry each night

JOIN THE BWC FOR A MEAL PACKING EVENT
at Annual Conference, in the movement to end hunger by the year 2030.
bwcumc.org/RAH

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FOR MORE EVENTS, VISIT: BWCUMC.ORG/EVENTS

Judicial Council: *Parts of Traditional Plan upheld*

From page 1

on all matters concerning the ordination of clergy, or that violate the Constitution's command of inclusiveness by excluding persons from becoming clergy members based solely on status.”

They also “dream and work for a church where clergy members will not be prosecuted for ‘chargeable offenses’ that turn solely on

whether any given General Conference has unilaterally ‘declared’ that a particular ‘practice’ is ‘incompatible with Christian teaching.’”

The statement, which is aspirational in nature, does not come before the Annual Conference Session this month for a vote, and is not representative of the whole conference.

Other responses throughout the church have been more supportive of the Judicial Council rulings.

“This is a significant step forward in restoring the accountability of our covenant,” said the Rev. Thomas Lambrecht, one of the primary authors of the Traditional Plan. He is also the vice president of Good News, an unofficial advocacy group. He said the group and other members of the

like-minded advocates plan to bring legislation to fix the constitutional problems and add other reforms to the 2020 General Conference.

“This clear ruling should help moderates and progressives realize that the decision of General Conference is not going to be changed in the near future,” Lambrecht said.

**Erik Alsgaard contributed to this story.*

What in the Traditional Plan is constitutional?

The Judicial Council, The United Methodist Church’s top court, ruled that the following changes in the Traditional Plan can take effect in the United States on Jan. 1, 2020:

- A more specific definition of “self-avowed practicing homosexual,” to say it includes people “living in a same-sex marriage, domestic partnership or civil union or is a person who publicly states she or he is a practicing homosexual.”
- A ban on bishops consecrating gay bishops elected by a jurisdictional or central conference.
- Prohibitions on the recommendation or approval of clergy candidates who do not meet clergy qualifications, including those related to homosexuality. The prohibitions also now require bishops to rule any unqualified candidate out of order even if approved by the clergy session.

- A minimum penalty for clergy found guilty of performing a same-sex wedding — one year’s suspension without pay for the first offense and loss of credentials for the second.
- Requirements that bishops only dismiss a complaint against clergy if it has “no basis in law or fact” and that they share those reasons with the complainant.
- The requirement those filing a complaint be involved in any agreement to resolve the case without a church trial.
- The right of the church to appeal church trial findings “based on egregious errors of church law or administration.”

Download a chart of the Judicial Council decisions: www.umnews.org/en/news/2019-general-conference-legislation-judicial-council-decisions

Golf outing raises funds for Seeds of Security

By ERIK ALSGAARD
UMConnection Staff

AMID LAUGHTER, SUNSHINE, friendly competition and fairways, several dozen golfers came together April 22 in Columbia for a tournament to raise money for a serious and worthy cause: Seeds of Security. This was the first of what organizers expect to become an annual event.

Seeds of Security, a ministry of the Baltimore-Washington Conference started by Bishop LaTrelle Easterling, is a collaboration of networks and people committed to educating, advocating, resourcing, and providing safe havens for survivors of Domestic Violence/Intimate Partner Violence (DV/IPV). The money raised by the tournament will help provide resources for people to get to a temporary place of shelter as they “begin to figure out the next step” of their lives, the bishop said.

That support may include temporary housing in a hotel or other location, or plane tickets or bus fare to a safe place or a relative’s house, Bishop Easterling said.

“Most importantly,” she added, “it is to get them out of that hostile environment, give them a

respite for a few minutes, and then help them to go on again. We’re planting seeds and helping people to be able to find peace of mind for them and their families.”

The Center for Disease Control states on its website that “Intimate partner violence is a serious, preventable public health problem that affects millions of Americans. The term ‘intimate partner violence’ describes physical, sexual, or psychological harm by a current or former partner or spouse. This type

of violence can occur among heterosexual or same-sex couples and does not require sexual intimacy.”

Seeds of Security has a special place in the bishop’s heart, as she herself is a survivor of DV/IPV from a previous relationship. “For me, as a woman who has survived domestic abuse — I am a survivor

— it means a great deal to me that there are persons and resources available to help,” Bishop Easterling said.

Her husband, the Rev. Marion Easterling, an avid golfer, organized the benefit for S.O.S. after organizing golf tournament fundraisers in the past. He serves as pastor at Wesley Grove UMC in Hanover.

“He thought this would be a great way to have some fun,” Bishop Easterling said, “but also to get people together doing something different. A lot of pastors might have a ‘competitive edge,’ one might say, so he said that this would be a great way to have some good holy fun.”

Golfers at the tournament were each given a white ball cap and green polo shirt adorned with the Seeds of Security logo. Along with lunch before the round, soft drinks on the cart, and dinner after, the players were well taken care of.

Marion Easterling, an 8 handicap, said he wanted to raise money for a very good cause.

“Not only is it a worthy cause to help,” he said, “to help those who can’t help themselves, but it also provided us an opportunity to come together as a conference, just before Annual Conference, to build some camaraderie and relax after Easter.”

At the Annual Conference Session in May, Easterling said, a presentation will be made of the money raised at the tournament. He also thanked the many sponsors and supporters of the tournament.

The Rev. Stacey Cole Wilson, Executive Minister of Justice and Service for the BWC, served on the

organizational committee for the tournament. She said the event was the first fundraiser for Seeds of Security, which was followed by a gala banquet on April 26 to honor people who have been involved in this work for years.

Cole Wilson noted that at the recent ROCK retreat in Ocean City, one of the partners with Seeds of Security, the One Love Foundation, presented two workshops to more than 600 young people, introducing them to the signs of DM/IPV and how to help. The Seeds of Security webpage (www.bwcumc.org/ministries/abundant-health/seeds-of-security/) offers numerous links to resources, including bulletin inserts that local churches can use to increase awareness. The page also has links for people to apply for assistance.

“We’re looking for partners who can help in this work,” Cole Wilson said, “along with churches who might have unused parsonages. We just want to continue to bring attention to domestic violence and intimate partner violence. This is work that the church should be involved in, and is involved in. It’s a proud moment for us here in the Baltimore-Washington Conference to know that we are the church and the church extends far beyond the walls of the building.”

MORE INFORMATION:

National Domestic Violence Hotline:
www.thehotline.org/

National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline:
www.loveisrespect.org/

National Sexual Assault Hotline:
www.rainn.org/about-national-sexual-assault-telephone-hotline

National Resource Center on Domestic Violence:
<https://nrcdv.org/>



ALISON BURGETT

MVP: a 'Holy Spirit' moment in times of transition

From page 1

Since becoming the district superintendent of the Baltimore Metropolitan District in 2017, the Rev. Wanda Duckett has been focusing on bringing new life in new ways to the city. “This is a resurrection project,” she said about Mt. Vernon Place UMC. Duckett believes that in this challenging time for the church, our future is wedded to the ability to seize unique opportunities like this to be creative and entrepreneurial.

“We’ve named that this is the grain of wheat that needs to fall to the ground. This (the attachment to the building) is what needs to die; this is where God is moving,” she said.

Duckett describes this as an organ transplant. Removing the heart of the church — the congregation — from the ailing church building may be necessary to save the body. The courageous question that Duckett asks is, “What can we let go of so that we can work on this new thing?”

A dwindling city congregation struggling with costs of maintaining a massive building is not a new thing. But Mt. Vernon Place had reached what Beth Gotjen, the Church Council chair, calls “a breaking point.”

A crumbling area of the ceiling makes it potentially unsafe to be in the sanctuary, which seats 900 people. Monthly operations for the buildings total about \$8,000 for the church and \$1,000 for the Asbury House, and the 30-active member congregation owes more than \$20,000 in debt. Other debts, like unpaid rent from a day-care center, also trouble the congregation.

“This is not a situation we can pray our way out of,” said Geof Hart, the church treasurer. In the past, “the congregation would have been offered two options: disband and give up the building, or stay together knowing we have the

responsibility of the building.”

But the Board of Trustees of the Baltimore-Washington Conference, at Duckett’s urging, saw a path that might open new frontiers for faith communities in the city. The congregation could transfer their property to the Conference, which would assume all the liabilities and sell it. Net proceeds would be split evenly between the congregation and ministries of the Baltimore Metropolitan District. Along the way, efforts would be made to creatively engage with the buyer of the building to try to find space for the congregation in the new setting.

“It is different. This is unique. This is a first-time-ever opportunity,” Hart said. “We are in a new day and age.”

“Removing the overwhelming weight of carrying the building on our back will free us to be able to dream again and actively think about and engage in ministry in the community — ministry that’s vitally needed,” said Mt. Vernon Place member Jerome Paylor.

But parting with the sanctuary is not easy. Conceived of as a “cathedral of Methodism,” the building is a literal treasure, noted by the American Institute of Architects as “the most significant building in the city of Baltimore.” It is also a national historic landmark, sitting on the site of the former mansion of Charles Howard, in which Francis Scott Key, the writer of “The Star Spangled Banner,” died. It houses the burial plate of Francis Asbury, Methodism’s first bishop, and a pulpit that Asbury once preached from. The American walnut pews, hand-carved by one man, and the stained-glass rose window, are two of the most noted features in a church designed to point worshippers to God’s glory and grandeur.

But it is not just the tangible details that make the church hard to give up. History has it

that during World Wars I and II, thousands of soldiers found a home away from home sleeping and eating at the church and joining in dances held on Saturday evenings. In more recent years, the church opened its doors for more than a decade each Saturday night to feed the homeless and hungry in the community at Carpenter’s Kitchen.

Dal and Eleanor Bunker said they fell in love in the 1950s at the church’s Sunday Evening Club. The year they were married, there were 17 other weddings with brides and grooms from the club. They all raised their children at the church. Jack Mitchell, who is now in his 90s, served as treasurer of the church and as a trustee for 40 years. He did it as a labor of honor and love, because his mother and father raised him at Mt. Vernon Place.

The trio were present at the church conference and admit that watching the church’s decline has broken their hearts. But they now see hope — even if it’s guarded hope — in the future.

John Strawbridge, the president of the Conference Trustees, is a member of Lovely Lane UMC, just up the road from Mt. Vernon Place. At the church conference, he shared how in recent years he noted that Mt. Vernon Place was struggling and felt that spiritual imagination might be an important part in addressing this situation.

A few months later, in 2018, he found himself leading the Trustees and in a position to make a difference. Strawbridge, Duckett, and many others are beginning to see this as “a Holy Spirit moment.”

The Rev. Rod Miller, who is serving as pastor of the congregation in this season of transition, agrees.

“We’ll have to work together in new ways,” he said. “It can’t be business as usual. This is a very special group of people, as diverse as any I’ve seen. We’re broken and a little wounded. But there is a

certain strength in that.”

On Easter, the congregation welcomed two new members. They also recently adopted an overseas mission project, assisting orphans in Sierra Leone.

The buildings are for sale by Praise Buildings, a religious property brokerage. There has been some interest expressed in them, so far mostly by non-religious organizations looking for a spectacular and unusual space.

But Miller and the congregation now feel free to truly be a community of faith — a catalyst — creating a new way of being the body of Christ. “Can you feel the Spirit moving,” he asked. “I can, I really can.”



Rev. Rod Miller

At this session of Annual Conference, members will vote to approve the closing of 10 churches. After months, and sometimes years of discernment, the congregations voted to move beyond struggling to keep the doors open and create ministry legacies.

Their willingness to apply resources where they can best serve God’s mission doesn’t always dull the intense grief and mourning people sometimes experience. In that Good Friday season, sometimes Easter is difficult to embrace. Every church has a significant history and is home to the stories of thousands of souls.

But across its broad panorama of churches, Baltimore-Washington Conference leaders are committed to move beyond caring for the upkeep of buildings to create communities of faith that broaden the Kingdom of God.

“Resurrection requires sacrifice,” said the Rev. Wanda Duckett, superintendent of the Baltimore Metropolitan District. “For some churches, this means a restructured budget, a new configuration of a church or charge, or even giving up a former practice or style of worship so that new disciples and fresh expressions of ministry can be realized. In some cases, it means leaving a treasured space and holding history in our hearts while walking boldly into the future, unafraid because that future is ultimately in the hand of the author and finisher of our faith. Although the tomb of sacrifice is difficult for all of us, what excites me about this work is that in the emptiness of the tomb lies the power of resurrection.”



In an innovative move, the Baltimore-Washington Conference trustees will sell the Mt. Vernon Place building while the congregation begins afresh as a faith community without a permanent home.

Annual Conference to consider several resolutions

By ERIK ALSGAARD
UMConnection Staff

THIS YEAR, THE Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference Session will be exercising its electronic voting devices by not only electing General and Jurisdictional Conference delegates, but also by voting on numerous resolutions.

This year, 20 resolutions were submitted. This does not include recommendations that come as a part of reports from the Conference Finance and Administration area, or the various ministries of the BWC.

Each resolution has a note from Conference Secretary, Cynthia Taylor, whether the resolution is consistent or inconsistent with the "current Book of Discipline." Authority is given to the Conference Secretary for this review in the BWC's rules, para. 3006.2.c.

Several resolutions appear to be in response to the recent Special Session of General Conference. Seven resolutions have been ruled "inconsistent with the current Book of Discipline." Those resolutions are:

- Conservation of Conference Ministry Funding;
- Do No Harm through Ordination Process;
- Do No Harm through Marriage Prohibition;
- Do No Harm Across the Northeast Jurisdiction;
- Use of Conference Funds to Support LGBTQIA+ Faithful and their Allies;
- Affiliate with the Western Jurisdiction;
- Constitutionality of Discipline Paragraph 304.3.

Of those seven, six were sent in by the Rev. Debbie Scott, pastor at Lovely Lane UMC in Baltimore, and the Rev. Angela Flanagan, pastor of Silver Spring UMC, on behalf of the Baltimore-Washington Area Reconciling United Methodists (BWARM), a group not officially connected with the BWC that seeks full inclusion and participation of LGBTQIA+ people in the life of the church.

The other 13 resolutions were



found to be "consistent with the current Book of Discipline," Taylor wrote. Among them are:

- The Rev. Rudy Bropleh, lead pastor at Asbury Church in Shepherdstown, W.Va., along with co-sponsors, Pastor Bill Rowley, Chestnut Hill and Shenandoah Memorial Charge; the Rev. Jerry Lowans, Washington Square UMC in Hagerstown; Matthew Sichel, Lay Member to Annual Conference, Wesley UMC in Hampstead; and the Rev. Frankie Revell, LaVale UMC, are calling the Conference Sessions Committee to research the viability of finding other locations for holding Annual Conference Sessions.

Part of the rationale for this move, they write, is the hardships placed on pastors who must travel long distances to Baltimore or Washington, D.C., and the expenses incurred by their local churches. The last time a regular Annual Conference Session met somewhere other than the Baltimore or Washington, D.C., area was in 1992, when it met at Western Maryland College in Westminster.

By Discipline, Annual Conference Sessions "shall be held in places that are accessible to people with disabilities." (§603.4) One of the reasons cited by conference leaders for meeting in Baltimore and/or Washington, D.C., is because they are the only locations with hotels large enough to host us.

- Also related to Annual Conference Sessions, a resolution calling for a "one day special session of the Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference no later than Nov. 16, 2019 (preferably a Saturday to facilitate attendance for as many as possible)" was submitted by the Rev. Debbie Scott, Phil Potter, president of the Conference Finance and Administration, and John Strawbridge, president of the Conference Trustees. The reason, they write, is "to fully understand options available to us and decisions we might make as an annual conference and individual churches in response to the January 1, 2020, anticipated implementation of policy established in St. Louis Feb. 2019 at the Special General Conference."

- Scott and Flanagan, Co-Chairs of the Advocacy Committee for BWARM, in a separate resolution, seek to have "LGBTQIA+ persons" added to a list of people/groups in our conference rules that have "special attention... given for inclusion" on BWC agencies.

- Another resolution, coming from the BWC's Board of Trustees, seeks approval to sell the current Episcopal Residence and buy a new one using proceeds from that sale. The Episcopal Residence was remediated in March and April 2019 from a black mold incident that was very disruptive to the

Episcopal family, the resolution notes, and the Episcopal Residence Committee and Conference Trustees approved relocating the Episcopal family to a 6-month short-term rental home on April 17.

- One of the resolutions calls for every district or conferencewide event that includes the sacrament of Communion to offer only "gluten-free, egg-free, dairy-free, nut-free" bread. The resolution, brought forth by the Rev. Julie Wilson, a Deacon serving Calvary UMC in Frederick, notes that between five and 10 percent of Americans suffer from some form of "gluten sensitivity or worse, celiac disease, and 2 percent of adults are allergic to milk, 1 to 2 percent are allergic to tree nuts or peanuts, and 0.4 percent are allergic to egg."

- One resolution, if adopted, would place the BWC on record as supporting "the ongoing deliberations between various leaders within our United Methodist Church to explore new expressions of Methodism, wherein all can find a home with like-minded members, without compromise of their core beliefs or encumbered by strained organizational relationships, to worship and minister as they feel led by the Holy Spirit."

This resolution, brought forth by John C. Hines, Jr., a Lay Member to Annual Conference from Mt. Zion UMC in Lothian and co-sponsored by Greg Witte, Lay Member to Annual Conference from Cedar Grove UMC in Deale, is an effort to end the "in-fighting," the resolution states, "and to see all of our members pursue the mission of the church in the manner that they feel led by the Holy Spirit."

- One resolution deals with the duties and responsibilities of the BWC's Rules Committee. Submitted by the Rev. Mark Gorman, pastor at Centre UMC in Forest Hill and chair of the Rules Committee, this proposal would mandate that the Rules Committee "shall review all proposed changes to the structure of the Annual Conference and shall report its concurrence or non-concurrence to the Annual Conference."

- Another resolution from the Rules Committee would require the Discipleship Council and the Nominations Committee to hold votes of concurrence or non-concurrence on restructuring plans before being considered by the Annual Conference.

Resolutions to be voted on by the Annual Conference Session can be found online at <https://www.bwcumc.org/events/annual-conference/ac-2019-resolutions/>.

In addition, a printed version of the resolutions will be available at the Pre-Conference Briefings May 18 (see below).

PRE-CONFERENCE BRIEFING INFORMATION:
A Pre-Conference Briefing is scheduled for Saturday, May 18. The morning session will be held at Jackson Chapel UMC, at 5609 Ballenger Creek Pike in Frederick from 9:30 a.m. until noon. The afternoon session is at St. Johns United Church in the Wilde Lake Interfaith Center, at 10431 Twin Rivers Road in Columbia from 2 to 4:30 p.m.

Bishop LaTrelle Miller Easterling Cordially Invites You to the Baltimore-Washington Conference's

CONFIRMATION CELEBRATION
JUNE 1, 2019

Baltimore Waterfront Marriott Hotel
700 Aliceanna St, Baltimore, MD 21202

9:30 AM	Opening Experience
10:00	Plenary Speaker: Mark DeVries
10:30	Young People's Plan Presentation
11:00	Learning Labs
12-1:30	Lunch
1:30	Confirmands Assemble
2-4 PM	Confirmation Celebration & Commissioning

bwcumc.org/confirmation

Vision Statement by the Discipleship Council Enacted During the 2019 General Conference



On April 29, the Discipleship Council of the Baltimore-Washington Conference released a vision statement in response to legislation passed by the 2019 General Conference on the church’s stance on homosexuality. The 14-member Discipleship Council is charged with functioning between sessions of Annual Conference as necessary; ensuring conference resources and ministries align to its mission, vision and priorities; and discerning, developing and evaluating the strategic direction and movement toward the BWC’s vision and goals.

The vision statement, said the Council’s Chair, the Rev. Jessica Hayden, is in keeping with this charge. The statement casts a vision grounded in love, lifting up the BWC’s history and Wesleyan principles. The statement is not a resolution or petition and will not be voted on at the Annual Conference Session.

Grounded in Love

“I pray that according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love.” (Ephesians 3:16-17 NRSV)

The Apostle Paul’s prayer for the church in Ephesus reminds us that God’s people grow in faith and love toward God and one another when we are firmly rooted in the love of God made known to us through Jesus Christ. This is true for all seasons of life, but especially so in this present moment of challenge and distress for The United Methodist Church.

As the birthplace of Methodism in the United States, the people of the Baltimore-Washington Conference seek to ground ourselves in God’s love through the Holy Scriptures and our commonly held Wesleyan beliefs.

We grieve the deep sorrow and pain we have caused one another by failing to love one another as God has loved us, and all the ways we have neglected to place love, justice and mercy at the forefront of our walk with God.

We lament that differences over interpretation of Scripture have resulted in brokenness in our denomination and conflict over our understanding of Christ’s call to include fully the marginalized and oppressed in the life of the Church.

We recognize that our conference and our churches hold a myriad of views on the issue of human sexuality and many other issues. And yet healthy congregations have figured out how to flourish together in spite of that and have found value in worship, studying and serving together.

Remembering Our Shared History

We know that the Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church — for all the good it has done and will do in the future — is no stranger to policies of exclusion and discrimination. Though called to a higher calling in Christ to a ministry of reconciliation, we have yet to overcome the sins of racism, cultural privilege, sexism, ableism, economic and sexual exploitation.

- We know that during the first 80 years following the founding of our denomination — on Christmas Day in Baltimore in 1784 — some members of our church owned other members as slaves, as if our brothers and sisters in Christ could be bought, sold or inherited as chattels. Moreover, African American Methodists remained relegated to racially segregated annual conferences until 1968.
- We know that it was not until 1956 that the denomination’s General Conference was finally persuaded to grant full clergy rights to women.

We are fully aware that, even though the Church has modified the Book of Discipline to prohibit discrimination on the basis of “race, color, national origin, status, or economic condition” (Discipline ¶ 4), vestiges of racial and gender discrimination continue to burden the Church, inflicting new and continuing harm on many of its own members, and undermining the effectiveness of the Church’s witness and ministries.

And, most acutely now, in this particular moment of the Church’s history, we are not only aware, but saddened, that our denomination’s chief legislative body has narrowly voted to not only retain, but to enhance and impose mandatory minimum penalties for violating disciplinary provisions that require the Church to discriminate against some of our LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, and asexual or allied) family members in Christ.

It is against that backdrop, and in this moment, that we, the Discipleship Council of the Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church, make the following statement — a statement that expresses our vision of the Church that we firmly believe this Conference is called to be, both by Scripture and by an informed understanding of the bedrock principles of Wesleyan polity and theology.

Rooted in Our Shared Wesleyan Experience

- We believe — as stated in the preamble to our General Rules — that United Methodists are "no other than a company of [men and women] having the form and seeking the power of godliness, united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation.” [2]
- We believe that what distinguishes

[1] John Wesley, “The Character of a Methodist,” in John Emory, *The Works of the Reverend John Wesley*, Vol. V, 240 (New York 1831).
[2] 2016 Discipline ¶104, page 78 (quoting John Wesley, “A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists” in John Emory, “*The Works of the Reverend John Wesley*,” Vol. V, 176; New York 1831).
[3] John Wesley, “Thoughts Upon a Late Phenomenon,” Nottingham, July 13, 1788, found [here](#).
[4] 2016 Discipline ¶4.
[5] 2016 Discipline, ¶336, “Historic Examination for Admission into Full Connection.” See footnote 27: “These are the questions that every Methodist preacher from the beginning has been required to answer upon becoming a full member of an annual conference. These questions were formulated by John Wesley and have been little changed throughout the years.” p. 271
[6] John Wesley, “A Letter to the Rev. Mr. Clarke,” July 3, 1756; [link](#).
[7] 2016 Discipline, ¶104, page 71
[8] 2016 Discipline, ¶104, page 70

Discipleship Council in Response to Legislation

2019 General Conference



Methodists — again as framed by John Wesley — is principally this: "They do not impose, in order to their admission, any opinions whatever..... They think, and let think. One condition, and one only, is required, — a real desire to save their soul. Where this is, it is enough: They desire no more: They lay stress upon nothing else: They ask only, 'Is thy heart herein as my heart? If it be, give me thy hand.'" [3]

- We believe that our founder's vision on all these points is now comprehensively embodied in the Inclusiveness provision of Article IV of the Constitution, which commands as follows: "The United Methodist Church acknowledges that all persons are of sacred worth. All persons without regard to race, color, national origin, status, or economic condition, shall be eligible to attend its worship services, participate in its programs, receive the sacraments, upon baptism be admitted as baptized members, and upon taking vows declaring the Christian faith, become professing members in any local church in the connection. In The United Methodist Church, no conference or other organizational unit of the Church shall be structured so as to exclude any member or any constituent body of the Church because of race, color, national origin, status or economic condition." [4]
- **When it comes to the government of our church — our polity — we believe:**
 - The United Methodist Church and its General Conference are not one and the same, just as the United States of America and the US Congress are not one and the same.
 - The General Conference's power extends solely to legislative matters
 - Our Constitution, using terms that were in place at the outset and remaining fully operative today, makes clear that the General

Conference's purely legislative authority, however expansive, does not extend to defining church doctrine or “Christian teaching” — that such matters constitute the organic law of the Church, which the General Conference is neither authorized nor competent to define.

- **When it comes to deciding which persons are called and qualified to be ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in The United Methodist Church:**
 - We believe that one of our Constitution's most resolute commands is that such decisions are reserved exclusively to the clergy members of each annual conference.
 - We believe that John Wesley's historic examination of clergy is good enough for today's church. (§ 336 “Historic Examination for Admission into Full Connection”) [5]
- **When it comes to Christian marriage and marriage ceremonies:**
 - We take John Wesley at his word when he declared in 1756 that "[a]ll the children of God may unite in love, notwithstanding difference in opinions or modes of worship." [6]
 - We take seriously Article XXII of our Articles of Religion, which states that “[i]t is not necessary that rites and ceremonies should in all places be the same, or exactly alike; for they have been always different, and may be changed according to the diversity of countries, times, and . . . manners.” [7]
 - We believe, as our Discipline has long held, that the decision on whether to perform a marriage — any marriage — belongs to our pastors alone. (§ 340.1-§ 340.2(a)(3)(a)) [8]

Claiming Our Vision

We dream and work for a church where the whole church acts in accordance with these bedrock principles, loves God and neighbor, seeks justice, cultivates disciples, welcomes all and bars none.

We dream and work for a church that acts now, not later, in accordance with Scripture, with the Articles of Religion, with the Confession of Faith, with the General Rules, and with the Constitution of The United Methodist Church. We will adhere faithfully to the legislative enactments of the General Conference, but only insofar as our consciences permit us to conclude that such legislation is consistent with those higher authorities.

We dream and work for a church where no candidate for ordination in the Baltimore-Washington Conference will be disqualified based on any legislated litmus tests that short-circuit the exclusive constitutional prerogative of the annual conference's own clergy to vote on all matters concerning the ordination of clergy, or that violate the Constitution's command of inclusiveness by excluding persons from becoming clergy members based solely on status.

We dream and work for a church where clergy members will not be prosecuted for "chargeable offenses" that turn solely on whether any given General Conference has unilaterally "declared" that a particular "practice" is "incompatible with Christian teaching."

We dream and work for a church where our clergy members retain the right and responsibility to determine which couples to join in marriage, and where our congregations may decide for themselves whether to allow same-gender marriages in their sanctuaries.

Being rooted and grounded in God's love and vision for all of God's creation, we are hopeful that the Baltimore-Washington Conference will be a means of grace and witness of Christ's love for the world.

Discipleship Council Members Include:

Rev. Jessica Hayden, Chair
Barbara Parrish
Delonta Hicks
Joe White
Rev. Bonnie Scott
Nancy Erskine
Rev. Andre Briscoe

Hazel Jackson
Carol Travis
Rev. John Wunderlich
Rev. Bob Kells
Rev. Jenny Cannon
Delores Martin
Shemaiah Strickland

Ex-officio members, without vote, include:
Bishop LaTrelle Easterling
Rev. Conrad O. Link
Christie Latona
Paul Eichelberger
Melissa Lauber

Cogman named Washington East superintendent

BY MELISSA LAUBER
UMConnection Staff

IF YOU WANT to know the real Johnsie Cogman, watch her direct a gospel choir. Heart and soul, she leans into the music, abandons herself to the Spirit and calls forth beauty, joy, suffering and redemption. It's glory come to life.

In July, the Rev. Johnsie Cogman will be taking those same instincts for collaborative leadership and applying them to her new appointment as superintendent of the Washington East District.

She follows the Rev. Rebecca Iannicelli, who has been appointed by Bishop LaTrelle Easterling to serve the Annapolis District as superintendent.

Cogman admits that she tends to address life and ministry "wholeheartedly" and with a smile. The smile is intentional, she said; a way of addressing the world with joy.

Cogman doesn't take that joy for granted. At times, in fact, it means more to her because it was forged in a refiner's fire crafted from a series of tragic circumstances.

Before entering the ministry, she worked as an officer in the US Air Force. At every assignment, from Michigan to Japan to Delaware to the D.C. area, she served with the base chaplain, directing the choir and providing pastoral care to service members and their families.

In that service, she began to sense a call to ministry, but wore out a lot of running shoes running from her calling, she said.

Part of the reason for her running was anger. It began in 1986, with the

death of her adopted mother. Two years later, she ended her marriage to an abusive husband. And less than a month later, her three-year-old son Stevie died.

Two years after that, her biological father, whom she was close to, died. Then her newborn daughter Bianca died.

Two years after that, her twin sons, Jacob and James were born. They have grown to be exceptional young men. But when they were young, Cogman was diagnosed with stage-3 breast cancer.

One of her friends was also diagnosed with cancer around the same time. "She's not here anymore, but I am," Cogman said.

This incident, and God's continual and insistent call upon her life, nudged her "to want to bring some joy," she said.

"When you see so much evil, hurt and sadness in the world, people need to see my joy," she said. "They don't need to know my story, but I hope my story — and my smile — connects with theirs."

The same day that Cogman's father died, in 1990, she was scheduled to speak at a Toastmaster's competition. She was representing her district and felt like she would let people down if she cancelled.

Her speech was on power. She called on God, asking for the courage to do what she needed to do. She delivered the speech and won.

She also heard God that day. "I heard God clear as day," she said. "God said, 'I told you to inspire people with my words, not

your words. So now, go.'"

She did, but she also placed demands on God to show her signs of God's presence.

Each time, she said, and even today, "God continues to show God's self. God is doing remarkable things."

One of these remarkable things is the way her twin sons, who are now finishing up their theological studies, have answered their own distinct calls and are certified candidates for ordained ministry in the Baltimore-Washington Conference.

Another remarkable and beautiful part of her life is her relationship with her husband, Billy. "I could not be without him," she said.

Cogman also sees God's hand in her being chosen to serve in this new capacity in the district in which she started her ministry in The United Methodist Church.

Cogman has served Zion Wesley UMC in Waldorf; Bells UMC in Camp Springs; and Mt. Zion UMC in Georgetown.

She is excited about the possibilities of working with the clergy and laity of the Washington East District and discovering the many ways they can, working collaboratively, ensure that churches are vital to the community and making disciples in creative and

innovative ways.

Throughout it all, she'll carry a song with her. Her favorite, she said, is Eddie James' "You've Been So Faithful." The lyrics say, in part: "I can never repay You Lord for what You done for me; how You loosed my shackles and you set me free. How You made a way out of no way; turned my darkness into day."

"I am very humbled to be invited to serve at this table," Cogman said.

Cogman and Iannicelli begin their new appointments July 1.

Iannicelli has also been chosen by Bishop Easterling to be the new dean of the Cabinet. She follows the Rev. Conrad Link, who is retiring as the superintendent of the Cumberland-Hagerstown District, June 30.



Wunderlich to serve Cumberland-Hagerstown District

BY MELISSA LAUBER
UMConnection Staff

IF THERE'S ONE thing the Rev. John Wunderlich wants you to know, it's that he's excited about serving in the Cumberland-Hagerstown District.

Wunderlich, the pastor of First Saints UMC in Leonardtown, has a reputation for being an innovative, risk-taking, church-growing teacher and preacher.

At first glance, leading the more rural region of Western Maryland, with its many smaller, lay-led churches, might not have seemed like the most natural appointment.

But Bishop LaTrelle Easterling saw potential, and so does Wunderlich.

His grandfather's grandfather was an EUB circuit rider. Wunderlich grew up in Carroll County and has an affinity for the mountains. He's looking forward to the natural beauty of the region. He's also excited about working with the people.

"I'm not so idealistic that I can't see there will be challenges," he said. "But my default posture is to find opportunity in the face of challenges. I'm hopeful about being greeted by people who are the same, people who know there are challenges, but can envision opportunities."

"I believe the best days are in front of us," he concluded, but then quickly added, "by the grace of God."

The grace of God is important to Wunderlich.

As a student of history, he's watched it in action. In his own life he's noted how God has been at work in one part of his life preparing him for the next.

Wunderlich felt a call to ministry as a teenager at summer camp but didn't enter the ministry until 1992. He has served at St. James/Stone Chapel in Westminster; Wesley Freedom in Eldersburg; Christ-Ballenger Creek in Frederick; and, in 2008, landed at First Saints.

First Saints is a multi-site church, with four worshipping communities in four locations in St. Mary's county. The four communities are one congregation joined by a shared vision, mission and leadership structure.

The "one church in four places" arrangement allows for unique collaborations and "lets us contextualize things for the communities where we do ministries," Wunderlich said.

Each of the locations also, intentionally, has a strong relationship with the school closest to them. In fact, the California campus meets in a school.

Operating in this unique multi-site structure has called for creativity, Wunderlich said. "We try stuff, we take calculated risks. I'm not scared or threatened by change. Things that don't change tend to atrophy. Being creative in ministry is a way to keep things alive."

Lately, Wunderlich's creativity is being broadened by the increase in reading he's doing in his personal life.

"God is pushing me to read more and to read more diverse authors," he said. "The result is that I feel God challenging me to go deeper with my

spirituality. ... It's easy to think you've arrived. But I think God always has something to teach me."

Wunderlich is accompanied on his ministry journey by his wife, Carol, with whom he graduated seminary. Her ministry is with children and youth. They have two sons: John, who is a youth pastor in an Episcopal Church in Virginia; and Joshua, who is in college.

For those in the Cumberland-Hagerstown District, meeting Wunderlich for the first time, they might notice his earring.

He got it in college, but not as a fashion statement, he said. During that time in his life, he was struggling with his faith and what to do with his life.

In his struggles, he read about a tradition from an ancient culture in Exodus 21:1-6 and Deuteronomy 15:12-17. When a slave was freed but chose to remain in the service of the household, the master of the house would stand, very publicly in the doorway, and pierce the ear of the former slave.

It was a way to signify liberation, and a willingness to serve because one freely chose to, of his own accord.

Since age 19, Wunderlich has intentionally been choosing to serve God. "It's a way to remind myself about what I choose. Some days I do better than others," he admits, "but it's a commitment I make over and over again."



Brown to lead BWC's New Faith Expressions ministry

By MELISSA LAUBER
UMConnection Staff

THE REV. BILL Brown, the newly appointed director of New Faith Expressions for the Baltimore-Washington Conference, is a runner at heart.

Some days, running transcends mere exercise and becomes a spiritual discipline for him. On those days, he finds himself noting that 51 percent of the people in his ZIP Code are not attached to a faith community.

“The people in every other house I run by don’t go to church,” he said. “And some statistics tell us that approximately 80 percent of people living in the United States have no ongoing relationship with a faith community.”

Brown recognizes that there is no one, overwhelming reason for this state of affairs, just as there is no one “silver bullet” to solve it.

But in his new position, he’s ready to take calculated risks, examine possibilities, and see how he might explore the unknown and capture some of the pieces of Methodism’s past and enact them in fresh ways.

Brown currently serves as senior pastor of Wesley Freedom UMC in Eldersburg. As a pastor for the past 27 years, he has come to see that his call is “to connect people with one another and to connect people with God.”

He’s also gained an understanding that ministry, like life, is a marathon, not a sprint.

“The journey is not the destination,” he said. “Yes, there’s a finish line, but that’s not the destination. All the preparation, all the miles, all the people you run with, all the sights you see, all the euphoric moments and the painful moments of injury – that’s the journey.”

Brown’s new journey leading New Faith Expressions began last year, when Bishop LaTrelle Easterling named him to begin researching how the BWC could create new places and spaces for new people. He has served as a part-time interim in the role since August 1, 2018.

“The Rev. Dr. Brown will be a powerful and critical addition to our leadership team. He has been a disciple-making pastor and understands the importance of offering Christ to new persons,” Easterling said. “His focus on new faith expressions supports my vision of bringing creativity and passion to our mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.”

Brown has shared his year’s learning with the bishop, and they’ll be incorporated into the new ministry. His first step, he imagines, will be “starting with people, with training and leadership development, talking with clergy and laity in the annual

conference and finding out what makes their hearts sing.”

Over the past year, Brown said he found himself intrigued by many best practices in new church starts.

There is a lot of conversation about returning to house churches as a network of worshipping communities, he said, “with 20 people or so worshipping in homes as a small group and doing life together.”

He’s also grown increasingly interested in exploring how healthy churches can multiply and how a culture or ethos of multiplication might be created in the Baltimore-Washington Conference.

Too often, Brown said, people think of church as a stand-alone community of faith centered on a building or location.

“I’m looking beyond that physical building and onward to the idea of creating a community

on purpose,” he said, “with a purpose to engage people in a life-giving relationship with Jesus.”

Methodism began in this region. It’s first church starts were here, Brown said, “but it was not done with a lot of money and staffing. It was a passion to reach people with the life-changing story of Jesus.”

Brown, who was interviewed along with several other candidates for the new conference

position, will start officially July 1. “It’s exciting and frightening and adrenaline-rushing and reflective-pausing, all rolled up into one,” he said. “But we serve a God that brings order out of chaos, that creates new things and breathes life into dry bones. I’m counting on that.”



COURTESY OF BILL BROWN

BWC'S BEST KEPT SECRET

Accept our invitation to come to our annual Colonial Day, Saturday, June 15th from 10:00 am to 2:00 p.m. Family friendly, historic exhibits, period music, tours, craft-people, purchase "famous fish" & chicken from the U.M. Men of the Strawbridge Church. Bring a lawn chair!

THE HISTORIC STRAWBRIDGE SHRINE

Visit the place where it first happened!

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For more information or to plan a tour call Curator Helen Kemp 410-635-2600 or 443-536-8030 or Lou Piel 410-751-9049. Visit our web site www.strawbridgeshine.org

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MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Shining bright for 150 years

LUTHERVILLE – April 28 was a stellar day for St. John’s UMC as the congregation, friends and neighbors celebrated the church’s 150th anniversary.

The Idlewylde UMC congregation, which is part of the two-point charge joined in the celebration. Former pastor, the Rev. Earl Mason, delivered the message and local dignitaries presented proclamations and citations. The Rev. Carol Pazdersky



consecrated new altar furnishings that had been commissioned and personalized, including the words “Lighting the Community for 150 years.”

YAs hold service for mission

FREDERICK – About 70 people attended a Sunday night praise and worship service April 28, hosted by Trinity UMC’s Young Adult Ministries. The two-hour event featured local praise teams, fellowship and words of hope.

The event was visualized and organized by Kevin Welker, chair of Young Adult Ministries.

The evening offering supported

the mission of Laura Welker, Kevin’s mother, for a trip to Tanzania in June as part of Operation Christmas Child.

Unique church reaches 50

COLUMBIA – The Rev. Claire Matheny pastors a unique church that doesn’t carry the “United Methodist” name. She’s the senior pastor of Kittamaquundi Community Church. The church with 115 regular attendees, is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year.

The church was founded by James and Elizabeth Rouse, who built the planned community of Columbia and wanted a church as an independent, ecumenical Christian community open to all. In December 1969, they began holding services at Oakland Manor, built in 1811. In 1970, the congregation purchased Oliver’s Carriage House, a barn on a plantation, and members began a major renovation, which in 1977 held its first service on Easter Sunday.

The cross on the massive stone fireplace in the sanctuary was created by welding together tools and bits of metal that members unearthed during renovation, according to Jack Dunlavey, 76, the artist. He has been a member since the beginning.

County honors centenarian

FALLSTON – The Harford County Council recently honored Mary Katherine Smith Jennings as the latest inductee into the county’s Century Club for people who have reached 100 years. She

had been a member of Fallston UMC for many years, teaching Sunday School and with her late husband serving as counselors to the youth group.

Jennings lives in the same house she has since age 18. She was raised by her grandparents when her mother died from the global flu epidemic just days after her birth.

“I just want to give the Lord the credit,” Jennings said. “I couldn’t live this long without his help.”

Organist for 60 years honored

BALDWIN – Union UMC is honoring Anne Allgire, who, for 60 years, has been the church organist and music director. For 30 of those years, she also played the organ at Wilson UMC. It was quite a feat to get from one church to another in time for the next service, she said. Since 2002, she has played only for Union.

The first organ she played was a pump organ, meaning the bellows were powered by foot pedals. She was thankful when it was replaced with an electric organ, she said.

Old Otterbein creates colorful witness

BALTIMORE – The week before Easter, members of Old Otterbein UMC, the oldest continuously occupied church building in Baltimore, placed 300 rainbow-colored ribbons on the church’s elegant iron fencing at the corner of Sharp and Conway.

It was their way of sending a message of disagreement with the denomination’s recent Judicial

Council decisions that reaffirmed its ban on gay clergy and marriages.

“We are a church entwined with the history of the denomination, but we are also a vibrant community of people in service to our community,” said the Rev. Cynthia Horn Burkert a retired UMC pastor who is part of that community. The ribbons will remain in place until the end of Baltimore Pride month, June 2019. The installation may be seen during the Annual Conference Session.



Terry Arthur, Esther Benjamin, and Daniel Fisher test spacing for the 300 ribbons in preparation for the installation of a rainbow on the fencing at Old Otterbein United Methodist Church, in time for Easter Sunday, April 21.

A word from the bishop



'We are in need of holy quietness'

If you want to make people nervous, let silence fill the room. There is immense discomfort in silence. Even in the sacred rhythm of worship, there is little appreciation for stillness. In a world filled with talking heads, hand-held devices, music on elevators, in our cars and at the check out stand, when are we ever silent or in midst of silence.

When we board planes, we reach for our headphones or ear buds to listen to music or watch an in-flight movie. Whether we're on the train, walking to lunch or pushing a stroller, we are likely engaged in a conversation on our cell phones. When was the last time you sat in utter and complete silence?

Silence is defined as the complete absence of sound. At times that would almost feel like a vacation. And yet, in this age of constant noise I believe we require something deeper than the absence of noise.

The absence of outer noise does not guarantee that I am experiencing the absence of inner noise. While devices within my hearing may be silenced, that does not mean that I am not replaying that last conversation, thinking about the three items remaining on my to do list, or trying to recall the item I forgot to purchase earlier at the store. I believe we are in need of holy quietness.

Psalm 46, contained in Book Two of the Psalter and usually categorized as a Psalm of praise,

extols the assurance of protection and strength found in the presence of God. The reader is invited to release all fear, even in the most distressing situations, because God is “an ever-present help in trouble.”

However, if the reader continues reading the text, they will find that God admonishes them to “be still, and know that I am God...” In order to fully relax into God’s divine providence, we are invited into stillness. I believe this is more than the absence of noise. I believe this is inner silence and solitude. When was the last time you experienced real internal solitude?

The mystics understand the unparalleled blessing of holistic silence. In her published diary, Divine Mercy In My Soul - Diary of St. Maria Faustina, she states, “A talkative soul lacks both the essential virtues and intimacy with God. A deeper interior life, one of gentle peace and of that silence where the Lord dwells, is quite out of the question. A soul that has never tasted the sweetness of inner silence is a restless spirit which disturbs the silence of others.”

That cuts to the essence of stillness or silence. It provides an intimacy with God that leads to strength and peace and blessing. Mother Teresa also spoke of the deep grace of silence when she stated, “We need to find God, and he cannot be found in noise and restlessness. God is the friend of silence.”

For many United Methodists, the prevailing mood or sentiment seems to be anxiety. The Special Session of General Conference has provoked this deep anxiety because we do not know what the future holds.

For some it feels as though the foundations of United Methodism have given way and fallen into the waters of dissension. Those waters roar and foam and cause the very faith of some to quake. Perhaps, more than ever, we need to be reminded that the Lord Almighty is with us; the God if Jacob is still our fortress. Perhaps, more than ever, we need to be still.

Unfortunately, the Bishops Day Apart for Lent was cancelled this year due to weather. We were going to focus on contemplation as a spiritual discipline. We were going to invite participants to walk a labyrinth, practice meditative prayer, sacred journaling and contemplative silence. I felt that more than a great orator or prophetic preacher, we needed to practice the sacred art of silence.

In business, many have accepted the time-tested truth that working faster does not always produce better results. Many have come to understand that working slowly moves the work along more rapidly. By slowing down there are fewer mistakes, less waste and better organization. It seems counter intuitive, but faster is not always better.

I believe that principle also applies to speech. As creatures of language, we often believe more talking produces better results. And yet, in times of anxiety it often creates more chaos.

Perhaps in times such as these a new proverb is warranted, “There is much to discuss, so first let us be still.”

In that stillness may we be reminded and assured that God is yet ending wars, breaking the bow and shattering the spear and burning shields with fire. May we know deep within, between the bone and the marrow that the Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

Be still and know that I am God
Be still and know that I am
Be still and know that I
Be still and know that
Be still and know
Be still and
Be still
Be
Amen.

Bishop LaTrelle Easterling



Book notes ways to transform church

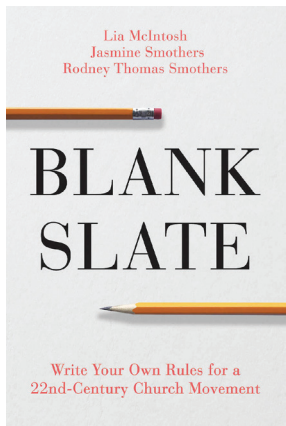
By MELISSA LAUBER
UMConnection Staff

There’s an intriguing blurb on the first page of the Rev. Rodney Smothers’ new book.

“In a time when so many of us want a blueprint on how to do ministry in a rapidly changing world, McIntosh, Smothers and Smothers hand us a pencil and tell us to draw it ourselves.” Smothers, the Director of Leadership and Congregational Development for the Baltimore-Washington Conference, wrote “Blank Slate” with his daughter, the Rev. Jasmine Smothers, a pastor in Atlanta; and Lia McIntosh, the associate director of congregational excellence in Missouri.

Together, the trio explores why the mainline church faces such difficulty in reaching young adults. In an inter-generational exploration of faith and marketing, they encourage every church leader to proactively fill a blank slate of ministry potential.

To assist with this endeavor,



the authors provide some fundamentals about how design thinking has been used successfully to address Millennials and Gen Z-ers, and then outlines seven mindsets for those seeking to transform their churches and communities.

Along the way, they lean heavily on Rodney Smothers’ expertise in coaching — believing that each person who faces a problem has the answers and abilities to solve them.

To better reach the people the church is missing, Smothers recommends seven mindsets:

1. See differently. How might you design for church if you see what God sees?
2. Let go of the outcome and be willing to fail. As Nelson Mandela said, “I never lose. I either win or I learn.”
3. Decide that innovation is mission-critical. Methodism’s best traditions began as risky changes that met people’s needs. Do not be afraid of breaking new ground.
4. Practice storytelling and naming. Our stories define us, they also illustrate and illuminate the power and love of God.
5. Be relentless in empathy and belonging. Relationship is a foundation of evangelism.
6. Practice the work of empowerment.

7. Imagine, hope and act. One definition of faith, Smothers writes, is “a life orientation of the whole person in partnership with God.” A mindset of imagination, envisioning and hopefulness is foundational to transformation.

Developing these mindsets and shifting from just providing services to creating memorable experiences, is not an option for church leaders, Smothers maintains.

Within The United Methodist Church, the average number of people who attend weekly worship has declined from 3.6 million people in 1972 to 2.6 million people in 2016. That’s a decline of nearly one million people (26 percent) over the course of 44 years.

In the Baltimore-Washington Conference, the decline was even greater. Since 1972, when 87,242 people attended Sunday services, 31,007 worshippers left, creating a loss of 35.5 percent.

“Wake up, everybody,” Bishop Gregory Palmer of the West Ohio Episcopal Area wrote after reading the book, which he said, “creatively invites us to be church, which is always to authentically commend the eternal gospel of Jesus Christ to an ever-changing culture.”

"A MUST-READ FOR ANYONE WANTING TO FACILITATE A MISSIONAL CHANGE."

JOSEPH W. DANIELS JR.
CHRISTIE LATONA

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How to Engage People, Churches, and Partners to Inspire Hope in Your Community

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From hate crime to church: a redemption story

By MELISSA LAUBER
UMConnection Staff

FOR MANY, LAST year’s vandalism at Glenelg High School was a headline about racist graffiti that sparked thoughts of hate and intolerance and faded with the next week’s news. But for the Rev. Gayle Annis-Forder and Linden Linthicum UMC, those events are still shaping lives — for the good — and leading to new, courageous conversations about faith and forgiveness.

On May 23, 2018, at around 11:30 p.m., Tyler Curtiss and three other teens were caught on video surveillance, wearing masks and hoods, as they spray painted symbols and racial epithets in several locations at the Howard County high school. Prosecutors of the crime said the vandalism was discovered three hours before an awards ceremony for graduating seniors.

Annis-Forder, the pastor at Linden Linthicum UMC in Clarksville, was initially as “horrificed as everyone else” when she read about what was being considered by some to be a hate crime and by others to be a disgusting senior prank.

But when she read Curtiss’ open letter to the community on Facebook, she paused.

In the statement, Curtiss wrote about defacing his school with racist and profane graffiti, and how dishonoring his principal, David Burton, made him ashamed of himself.

“All of the students and faculty, especially minority members of the school and staff, were forced to see hateful and disgusting images and words on the walls of their school. No words of apology could ever make up for that, but I am truly sorry and humiliated,” he wrote. “Yesterday, I spent all day wondering how in one impulsive and stupid moment, I could have put myself in a situation where I would disgrace myself and my family, ruin relationships that I have built over the past 18 years, and generally ruin my life.”

Annis-Forder admits that the first response that came to her mind was,

“you got caught, that’s why you’re feeling remorseful.” But then she started to think about the things she professes about forgiveness and repentance. She told herself, “take a deep breath here.”

She also found herself responding to “that nudge that you’re supposed to do something about something,” she said.

“If somebody says they want to be better, well, isn’t that what we’re all about as Christians?” said Annis-Forder.

She then invited her congregation into a conversation. She reached out to a church member who knew the Curtiss family, and then to Tyler Curtiss and his mother. She also reached out to the school principal.

Curtiss responded and the two met. The church offered to help provide him with opportunities to perform community service hours and he eagerly took them up on the work.

But he also wanted to attend church and so Annis-Forder and the congregation made sure he was welcomed.

Over time, Annis-Forder connected him with people he could learn from and serve with, including Rabbi Amy Scheinerman, the Revs. Andrea King and Cynthia Belt, two African-American United Methodist pastors who had him work with their Toys for Tots program, and with Bruce Kopp, of Salem UMC in Hebbville, who chairs the Night of Peace Shelter board.

“I have been a pastor for 35 years and have had numerous opportunities to walk with people who have done terrible things, up to and including murder,” Annis-Forder said. “Tyler is unique in my experience. He is not blaming anyone else or dodging responsibility for what he did. He is willing to take on the anger and pain of those who have been hurt by his actions.”

On April 4, Curtiss was sentenced to eight weekends and one day in jail. He was taken out of the courtroom in shackles. On his first weekend in the Howard County Detention Center, he turned 19.

Annis-Forder and Rabbi Scheinerman visited him his first weekend and gave him “homework,” advising him to listen and learn some things about others and their experiences and stories. He’s doing just that.

His absence at church, while he serves his time, has been noted. Curtiss joined Linden Linthicum UMC on March 31.

“I’d never seen anyone so excited about joining church. Curtiss had never been a church member, so he’s learning about faith,” said Annis-Forder.

Kopp shared with the young man the importance of the Bible, which he pointed out was full of stories of people who had done bad things and found new futures with God. The Bible study groups at Linden-Linthicum bought Curtiss his own Bible.

When he didn’t know where to begin to read, Annis-Forder recommended the

resurrection story, which he read on Easter Sunday in the detention center.

Because he was working to help, in part, pay his parents back for legal expenses, Curtiss missed the closing ceremony of Howard County’s Courageous Conversation Circles.

He was one of 11 people from the church participating in these discussions on race, culture and faith and bias. He was a participant, Annis-Forder said. He was also the subject of conversation in several of the circles and deemed by some as “hopeless.”

Over the past year, Annis-Forder said, Curtiss has grown from “being willing to put himself in uncomfortable and challenging situations in order to forge new relationships with communities and people previously unknown to him. ... He does not hide his own sin, but lets it be a catalyst for change, not only for himself, but anyone who will listen to what he will share about what he has learned.”

At Linden-Linthicum, people are certain that repentance means more than regret and apology. It’s about committing to make a change.

Welcoming and working with Curtiss has opened up conversations about forgiveness and what it means to be community for one another.

For Annis-Forder, it’s also meant delving into the question of, after one has sinned and made amends, is there a time when that atonement is complete? How long is the redemption road?

In his initial Facebook statement, Curtiss addressed this topic.

“I realize that my actions have caused wounds that will take much time to heal — if they ever do,” he wrote. “I only ask that you keep an open mind as I attempt to redeem myself by my actions as I go forward. I promise that in the future, you will see a different man, a better man, and I hope that one day those actions will lead to forgiveness.”

For Annis-Forder, the journey with Curtiss over the past year has been “life-giving and wonderful for me, and for Tyler, I think,” she said. “This is what we are, what the church is supposed to be doing. It’s a good example of listening to whatever your nudge is, and then doing it.”



The Rev. Gayle Annis-Forder stands with Tyler Curtis.

COURTESY OF GAYLE ANNIS-FORDER

BWC contributes to Cyclone Idai relief efforts



BWC members gave \$117,000 to assist with cyclone relief in Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Malawi. Leaders in Zimbabwe sent words of gratitude via video, and photos of the relief efforts. To make a donation, visit www.bwcumc.org/news-and-views/how-to-help-after-cyclone-idai.