



Judith Davies, of Emmanuel UMC in Laurel, reads to the students at Little Flowers Early Childhood and Development Center in Baltimore. Among the regular volunteers is 91-year-old Nesbitt Blair who plays the harmonica for the children. The ministry at Little Flowers is just one of Emmanuel's many mission initiatives.

'COUCH-SURFING IN GOD'S HOUSE': HOW A TRIP TO THE BORDER CAN SHAPE YOUR FAITH.
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Emmanuel 'engages with Christ'

BY MELISSA LAUBER
UMCConnection Staff

A SIGN OUTSIDE OF Emmanuel UMC in Scaggsville tells a story: “Following Christ requires engagement with this world.” Sometimes, that’s easier said than done, but the sentiment now defines the congregation.

On Feb. 25, the second resident moved into the transitional housing in the church’s former parsonage. The new apartment stands as a symbol of the spirit of mission at Emmanuel.

When the congregation completed an addition to their church building two years ago, the youth moved out of the parsonage basement and Mike Barbusca and several others began living out a vision.

Emmanuel members had established a 30-year ministry

relationship with Laurel Advocacy and Referral Services (LARS) and knew of the need for transitional housing in the area. The idea to turn the basement into an apartment for LARS clients began to take shape. Barbusca picked up his hammer, putting his heart and soul into a labor of love that spanned hundreds of hours of renovation work.

Soon after work began, during a worship announcement that half of the Christmas Eve offering would be given to creating the apartment, the pastor, the Rev. Stephanie Vader, mentioned that “if any of you are plumbers, we can use you.” George Giddings called the next week and said, I’m a plumber, I’ll do the work. “He brought his crew with him and didn’t charge us anything,” Vader said.

Spirit-led moments like that

surrounded the project.

On Dec. 30, 2018, a woman and her twin teenage sons moved into the apartment. Because she did not have a car, church members got to know the family when they drove the boys to school and the mother to work.

“Ministry is about relationship – with God and with others,” Vader said “It’s an on-going thing.”

The new resident, a single woman, is just settling in, but expects to have a short-term stay. Two church members, Penny Merson and Teri Sprague, check in with the resident each month, doing a site visit and making sure all is well.

“I feel that our family has been very blessed. We have never wanted for a roof over our head, clothes to keep us warm, or food

See Emmanuel, page 3

Summit offers new ideas on leadership

BY MELISSA LAUBER
UMCConnection Staff

THE BALTIMORE-WASHINGTON CONFERENCE entered a new age of training with the inaugural Connect Leadership Summit, held March 7 and 14 in four regional locations.

“The age of ‘one and done’ is over,” said the Rev. Bill Brown, the conference director of New Faith Expressions. Training at the conference level will now be designed for participants to take resources and knowledge back to their local churches to expand the impact.

The Connect Leadership Summit also featured the creation of six tracks, which will draw people into cohorts for long-term, in-depth learning in six areas: deepening discipleship, abundant health, generosity generators, new level leaders, new faith expressions, and young people’s ministry.

“This is a new day,” said the Rev. Rodney Smothers. The Connect Leadership Summit “is laying a foundation for learning.”

Rather than a plenary address, the Summit’s speaker, Daniel Im, provided four Ted-talk style videos and participants divided into small groups to discuss

how the lessons could be applied at their churches. Those who registered were given copies of Im’s book, “No Silver Bullets,” access to the summit videos, an online workbook, and a chance to follow up with Im in an online question-and-answer session March 24.

Im, who pastors Beulah Alliance Church in Edmonton, Canada, was chosen to speak to BWC leaders because of his unique perspective on creating discipleship systems.

Im stressed to those present that, in today’s culture, everyone

See Summit, page 3

BWC leaders endorse Protocol

BY MELISSA LAUBER
UMCConnection Staff

THE BALTIMORE-WASHINGTON CONFERENCE delegates to the 2020 General and Jurisdictional conferences voted to endorse The Protocol on Reconciliation and Grace through Separation, which is slated to come before the denomination’s top law-making body May 5-15 in Minneapolis, Minn.

The Protocol was also endorsed by the BWC’s Discipleship Council, a 14-member body charged with aligning the Conference’s resources, ministries, vision and strategic direction.

The Protocol (www.gracethroughseparation.com) seeks to end more than 40 years of stark disagreement over the church’s stance on LGBTQ issues, including the ordination of gays and lesbians and same-gender marriage. It allows for a pathway for the creation of new Methodist movements, including a new traditionalist denomination. Such a denomination is being proposed by the Wesleyan Covenant Association.

The 16-member team that

See Protocol, page 4



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

ONCE UPON A time, a long time ago, I was a young adult attending my Charge Conference under the leadership of the district superintendent, the Rev. David Argo. We had just finished doing skits to demonstrate all the fruit of our ministry that year at Glen Mar UMC. (It was before the current, streamlined model.)

As Argo settled us down into the business of the meeting, he said he often asked a specific question at Charge Conferences: “If this church were to close tomorrow, would anyone in the community notice?”

He said in some churches, that question was met with silence so deafening you could hear a pin drop. That hasn’t been the case at any church I’ve ever been a member of or been a pastor of, but the question has stayed with me.

Wesley’s admonition to “Do Good” feels like Argo’s question. It is the firm belief that if there are United Methodists in the neighborhood, the neighborhood should certainly “notice.” Doing good also means that they should do more than notice. It means that the neighbors should be blessed because of it. Poverty should be less, and hope should be more present.

I think Wesley’s exhortation to do good is in line with Dr. Martin Luther King’s observation that the church should be a thermostat, not a thermometer. A thermostat changes the room, alters the environment, makes things different. A thermometer merely reports the way things are.

To “do good” is to be a thermostat. It is to ask where God is moving in the neighborhood, or where God needs to move, and putting on some work gloves and getting to work.

It’s easy to get a sort of paralysis these days — perhaps we are paralyzed by denominational stalemates or the bad press the church received after General Conference in St. Louis. Perhaps the craziness of the current political climate has us paralyzed, feeling helpless. If we’re not sure what to do, then let us be about doing good.

In Galatians 6:9, Paul puts it this way, “So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all ...”

This month, get “noticed,” church. Do good.

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

SPEND A DECENT amount of time these days serving as my son’s taxi service. It amazes me how many places we have to go, appointments to attend, and events to appear at that one toddler can have in a month. Because we are always going somewhere, we spend a lot of time in the car.

When we travel, my son puts on a headset to watch Elmo, which gives me plenty of time to listen to sports radio. The joy of sports radio is that everyone has an opinion or a hot take on sports. They all know

what the team should do, should have done, or could be doing, and they are perfectly willing to discuss it for hours on end. The funny thing is: all of the people with opinions and comments didn’t play in the game; they just watched it.

Listening to the radio, it occurred to me that we, as the church, are often like sports radio hosts. We watch the world going on around us and we make comments on it. We see things and we talk about how someone could do something about it, or someone should do something about it, but we don’t get

in the game. We look for someone else to get involved and make the changes that we know should be happening while we just talk about them, waiting for change to show up on our doorstep.

It does not have to be that way. Instead of talking, we could do some good.

Friends, as believers and as United Methodists, we should do some good. We all know the problems, we all know the issues, but we can all do some good. We can all roll up our sleeves, get to work, and start creating the world that we so often talk about.

Every Lenten season we talk about what we are going to “give up” for the next little while. Instead of doing that, how about this Lent, we stop talking and start doing?

Take a weekend to volunteer at a shelter. Take an evening to read to kids at the local school. Take a week off from buying coffee and donate that money to one of the very worthy United Methodist relief agencies.

No matter what you choose to do, stop talking, and choose to do some good.

EVENTS

'Leadership in Times of Change' viewing party
BWC Mission Center in Fulton
Williamsport UMC in Williamsport
Community UMC in Crofton
March 17, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Viewing party to listen to the livestream of Susan Beaumont on her new book, "How to Lead When You Don't Know Where You're Going."

Training Tuesday with Daniel Im
Online webinar
March 24, 7:20 p.m.
A Q&A with the speaker from the recent Connect Leadership Summit.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) training
March 28, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.
BWC Mission Center
Camping and Retreat Ministries and the BWC will sponsor this important event that explores the evidence-based research on long-term physical and mental health implications of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), toxic stress and trauma. Learn more and register at <https://tinyurl.com/vjyjf4l>.

Seeds of Security Golf Tournament
Hobbitts Glen Golf Course, Columbia
April 27, 9 a.m.
A fundraiser to address domestic violence. Single player, \$150; team of four, \$500. Learn more and

register at bwcumc.org/sos.

Pre-Conference Briefing & Lay and Clergy Sessions
April 18, 9:30 to 4:30
Ranson Civic Center and Asbury UMC
The briefing to prepare for the Annual Conference session is in the morning. The laity session will meet at 2 p.m. at the Civic Center. Clergy will meet at 2 p.m. at nearby Asbury UMC. Lunch will be provided. \$30. Register at bwcumc.org/precon.

236th Session of Baltimore-Washington Conference
Waterfront Marriott Hotel, Baltimore
May 27-29
Registration is now open for the BWC Annual Conference session, which includes ordination, worship, fellowship, the business of the church, holy conferencing, Bible study, mission opportunities, and more. Learn more at bwcumc.org/ac2020.

NEJ Conference
July 13-17
Delta Hotel, Hunt Valley
Volunteers are being sought to help host the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference. Contact the Rev. Patricia Allen at pastorp527@gmail.com.

Bishop Easterling invites you to a Critical Conversation about General Conference and The Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation.

Sat., March 21, from 9:30 a.m. to noon
Harmony UMC in Falling Waters, W.Va.

bwcumc.org/criticalconversation

Bishop LaTrelle Easterling
Melissa Lauber
Erik Alsgaard
Alison Burdett
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UMConnection is the newspaper of the Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church, which affirms that *"transformed lives transform lives."*

The UMConnection (USPS 005-386), March 2020, volume 31, issue 3. Published 11 times per year by the Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church, 11711 East Market Place, Fulton, MD 20759-2594. Subscription price is \$15 per year. Periodical postage paid at Baltimore, MD. **POSTMASTER:** Please send change of address changes to: UMConnection, 11711 East Market Place, Fulton, MD, 20759-2594.

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Summit: Im offers insights into discipleship pathways

From page 1

is looking for the quick fix, the magic bullet that will solve all their problems. “We’ve been conditioned for the instant, it’s our hidden addiction,” he said. But leaders today need to realize “it was by perseverance that the snail reached the ark.”

Rather than focusing on large and grand changes that people implement hoping to solve everything, Im recommended five “micro-shifts,” small, manageable changes that create a culture for transformation.

Principle among these changes is moving from a mindset of “destination to direction,” recognizing that discipleship is not about an end goal, but rather, is on-going process of growth and maturity. “It is about setting our eyes on Christ and continually moving toward him,” Im said.

Other micro-shifts include moving from output to input, from sage to guide, from form to function and from maturity to missionary.

With the move from output to input, Im first explained that there are eight outputs by which one can measure healthy discipleship. They are Bible engagement, obeying God, serving God and others, sharing Christ, exercising faith, seeking God,

building relationships, and being unashamed of one’s faith.

But just focusing on these outcomes, rather than providing specific ways for people to grow in these areas, is not the best way to move forward. Im drew the analogy, “You can create conditions for sleep to come, but you can’t make yourself sleep,”

Churches need to focus on the specific inputs, the means that allow people to live faithfully and move toward Christ. There are many kinds of input, which include such things as reading the Bible, attending worship, serving in an area outreach, confessing your sins, and setting aside time for thanksgiving.

The outputs, Im said, will be a fixed part of everyone’s discipleship journey. The inputs, which are ways of helping develop the outputs, will vary with every church’s context.

But change is never easy, said Im. Churches, like organ donor recipients, reject the unfamiliar. They even fight it, fearful of the damage newness might bring.

Citing the work of John Kotter and Thom Rainer, Im outlined eight steps for leading fruitful change:

1. Stop to pray;
2. Confront and communicate a sense of urgency;
3. Build an eager coalition;

4. Become a voice and vision of hope;
5. Deal with people issues and communicate the vision;
6. Move from an inward focus to an outward focus;
7. Pick low-hanging fruit, focusing on the easier solutions;
8. Implement and consolidate change.

However, Im warned, “unless a change leads you closer to the vision God has called you to, you’re wasting your time.”

“Creating and managing meaningful change is going to be essential to church leaders in the season ahead. People who are

caught up in the status quo are not going to survive,” said Smothers. “Effective leaders will need to be nimble, flexible, open to change, willing to share power and position, and sensitive to the cultural shifts that are happening in their midst.”

People who attended the Connect Leadership Summit “left with a lot of handles, a lot of practical information,” Smothers said. “Leaders in the church today don’t want to be caught sleeping, knowing a tsunami of change is heading their way. This is one of the first of many opportunities to inspire and equip leaders to connect more people to Jesus.”



Leaders from National UMC in Washington discuss possibilities for change and growth at the Connect Leadership Summit.

Emmanuel: Creating futures that might please God

From page 1

to fill our bellies,” Sprague said. Working with the residents is her way of giving back.

“You do make a difference even if it is small,” she said. “It is a great feeling when a little act of kindness gives them hope.”

Such outreach is possible, Vader said, when the church doesn’t have a lot of gatekeeping to slow ministry down. The church policy, she said, is “one of permission-giving.” As a result, “this place is alive with ministry. I’m proud.”

While Emmanuel UMC operates a preschool at the church, providing services to 190 families, one of the congregation’s most heralded ministries is with Little Flowers Early Childhood and Development Center at St. Peter Claver Catholic Church in Baltimore.

In 2015, shortly after the death of Freddie Gray while he was in police custody, the Sandtown-Winchester neighborhood erupted in unrest.

Emmanuel UMC, a predominantly white, suburban congregation, was wondering how they might respond. They decided the first thing was to educate themselves. They invited police officers, teachers and others from Baltimore City to come and talk with them. They learned about redlining and systemic racism.”

They also heard about Crystal Hardy-Flowers, the director of Little Flowers, and had a conversation with her.

Hardy-Flowers is an exceptional person, said the Rev. Ed DeLong, an Emmanuel member who volunteers at Little Flowers. She has created “a bright light that shows a way for children to have a future that will allow them to be what God intends for them.”



Susan Hill at Little Flowers

Crystal told us that a lot of well-intentioned volunteers pop in, give toys, and only show up once. The children and their families knew that people didn’t want to come to their neighborhood and that made them sad, Vader said. “She asked us to show up regularly and keep showing up, and we did.”

A group of volunteers goes into the center at least twice a month and they do whatever the director and teachers ask of them. To date, a group of about 78 volunteers from the church has been involved with Little Flowers.

One 91-year-old man, Nesbitt Blair, goes every time and plays his harmonica and sings with the 4-year-old children. They adore him.

This ministry initiative is led by Sue Hill, who was asked to serve on the board of directors of the childhood development center.

“What a gift!” Hill said of the relationship with Hardy-Flowers and the center. “Our entire church is understanding the impact of poverty and racism on the children we have come to know by name.”

She coordinates the trips to Little Flowers and activities with the teachers. She also is mentor and works with children. On a recent trip, she led animal yoga with the 4-year-olds.

One of the best parts of the experience, she said, is the car rides to and from Baltimore. On the trip there, some people share about feeling outside of their comfort zones. On the way home, the talk almost always turns to justice and how acts of compassion are a good starting point, but there is also a need to ask the harder questions of why.

The people at Emmanuel also reach out to the teachers. At an upcoming day for the staff, which centers around training and relaxation, the church arranged to have two monks, Anh-Huong and Thu Nguyen, teach the center’s staff about mindfulness and give them spiritual tools to help themselves and the children.

“We walk the path with the 180 children, staff, and families in this neighborhood as family. We see and respect them,” Hill said. “We are a

part of their family. We love them and they love us. We are bonded by love.”

The church doesn’t know which ministries will emerge next. But they stay true to that sentiment of engagement. “Collectively,” said Vader, “we believe God’s dream for the world is a place where people have enough to eat, there is access to health care, justice is operating and we try to live out the mission Jesus stated from the scroll of Isaiah,” to bring good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.

“We collaborate with God to do that work,” Vader said. “We look for opportunities to do that.”



Members of Emmanuel UMC in Laurel renovated the former parsonage basement to serve as transitional housing.

Protocol: BWC delegation working to shape UMC's future

From page 1

wrote The Protocol, which was made up of bishops and leaders representing widely diverse theological viewpoints, allotted \$25 million for the establishment of a new traditional denomination and \$2 million for other Methodist denominations. Baltimore-Washington Conference Bishop LaTrelle Easterling was part of The Protocol team.

“If The Protocol achieves the vision of those on the mediation team, it will create a denomination without the restrictive language currently in our present Book of Discipline, requiring everyone to embrace contextualization and theological diversity,” Easterling said. “We have always been a big tent denomination, eschewing constraining doctrinal rigidity in favor of broad theological interpretations. The Protocol continues this practice, while maintaining our global witness.”

The Protocol is designed to allow for a gracious exit, permitting churches to take their property with them if they leave to join one of the official new expressions of Methodism.

In addition, \$39 million has been earmarked over the next eight years to support communities within the post-separation United Methodist church that have been historically marginalized by the sin of racism. The money is intended to strengthen Asian, African American, Hispanic-Latino, Native American, and Pacific Islander ministries, as well as Africa University.

The United Methodist Church will continue to exist as it has since 1784. Annual Conferences and churches that do not vote to leave will retain their membership in The United Methodist Church. (See chart with timeline below.)

Discipleship Council endorses Protocol

The 14-member BWC Discipleship Council voted Feb. 18, asserting that the Protocol "provides a way forward for the church's mission," while also “acknowledging the deep division, pain, and conflict within our church in recent decades.” In an online statement, they announced that, "While we lament a separation of any kind within the body of Christ, we believe that The Protocol represents a call to a renewed life for the church and its people." (www.bwcumc.org/news-and-views/discipleship-council-supports-protocol)

The Rev. Ianther Mills, pastor of Asbury UMC in Washington and leader of the BWC General and Jurisdictional Conference delegations, agreed.

“The Protocol represents a foundational step toward moving beyond a place where some theological divides were so deep that living and serving God together had become untenable,” she said. “The Protocol lights a path for moving beyond the impasse in which the UMC has been embraced for years.”

Bishop Easterling is also hopeful about the church’s future. “While the Protocol offers a

path for separation, it does not presume nor force persons into separation,” she said. “It is still my earnest hope that laity, clergy and congregations within the BWC will decide to remain within The United Methodist Church.”

Regionalization Plan also endorsed

In a related action at their Feb. 15 meeting, the BWC delegation voted to support the Connectional Table’s resolution to create a US regional conference. This new structure mirrors the current “central conferences” that exist outside of the United States.

This resolution intends to offer United Methodists in the United States a connectional structure to deal with matters pertaining specifically to the U.S. context, including pensions, strategies and priorities, and adaptations to the Book of Discipline.

The delegation supported this petition, along with The Protocol, as part of process that will lead to a more just church and the reduction of harm to LGBTQ members and people of color. While The Protocol won’t immediately accomplish all the changes they hope to see, many delegates expressed the view that “this is the smart work that will get us to a place where we can live into an aspirational vision.”

The delegation voted to support The Protocol following a presentation from Bishop Easterling.

Mills said it is her hope that if The Protocol is adopted, the denomination’s “infighting will subside and the hard work of tackling systemic oppression will begin.”

Other issues face General Conference

Delegation members, who have been meeting monthly since last summer, have also heard a number of presentations about other legislation coming before General Conference. During the two-week session, delegates from around the world will consider at least 714 petitions on a vast array of subjects.

Drawing particular attention this year are new Social Principles for the denomination and a proposed new pension plan for clergy.

The Social Principles, (<https://www.umcsocialprinciples2020.org>) which were rewritten by a global taskforce over eight years, are being promoted as being more focused, succinct, and globally meaningful. The revisions divide the Social Principles into four sections: creation, economic, social, and political.

Wespath, which oversees the denomination’s pension plan, is seeking to move active clergy from a plan that combines both defined-benefit and defined-contribution components to one that is entirely based on a defined contribution. (<https://www.wespath.org/assets/1/7/5447.pdf>)

A defined-benefit plan provides a monthly pension payment for life, with the employer (in this case, conferences) assuming the investment risk. A defined-contribution plan — like the



The Baltimore-Washington Conference delegates to the 2020 General and Jurisdictional conferences.

401(k) plans most U.S. corporate employees now have — provides an account balance to use during retirement, with the clergy person assuming the risk of sustaining the money through the end of his or her lifetime.

Changing to a defined-contribution plan would not reduce benefits that retired clergy already receive or reduce what active clergy have already earned.

Delegates to General Conference are also studying the proposed 23 percent cut to the denomination’s \$498.65 million budget for the next four years. The brunt of these cuts would be borne by the general agencies.

For a complete guide to all the petitions coming to General Conference, visit www.resourceumc.org/en/content/general-conference-2020-advance-daily-christian-advocate.

According to Mills, the BWC Delegation is “prayerfully, earnestly, and intentionally considering the legislation that will come before General Conference,” she said. “In these months prior to General Conference, we have sought to be as well-informed as possible through presentations from boards, agencies, caucuses, and groups; attending preparatory gatherings by our jurisdiction, UMCOM, and others; and reading the ADCA and other material as it becomes available. We have had presentations from all of the major plans for structuring the UMC, including the Indianapolis Plan, UMC Next, UM Forward, and the Protocol of Reconciliation & Grace Through Separation. We approach our work with deep deliberation and respect for one another. Pray for us that we not grow weary in our well-doing.”

NEW DENOMINATIONS

- January 1, 2021 – Any new Methodist denominations that have already been legally constituted may begin to function.
- May 15, 2021 – Deadline for registering intent to form New Methodist denomination.

LOCAL CHURCHES

Local churches do not need to vote to remain in The United Methodist Church. Local Churches that disagree with the position of their Annual Conference may vote. The voting threshold to join a New Methodist denomination will be either 50% plus 1 or two-thirds as established by the local church.

- January 1, 2021 – Apportionments are set by, and paid to, any New Methodist denomination for those churches who have decided to align with it, unless the separation date is later.
- Dec. 31, 2024 – Deadline for local churches to vote to align with a different Methodist denomination than their annual conference or to disaffiliate.

ANNUAL CONFERENCES

Annual Conferences do not have to vote to remain in The United Methodist Church. 20% of lay members to Annual Conference desiring a vote can trigger a vote. 57% must vote to join or form a New Methodist Denomination for the Annual Conference to separate.

- July 1, 2021 – Deadline for annual conferences in the United States to vote to align with a New Methodist denomination.

CENTRAL CONFERENCES

Central Conferences do not have to vote to remain in The United Methodist Church. A two-thirds vote to form or join a New Methodist denomination.

- December 31, 2021 – Deadline for central conferences to vote to align with a New Methodist denomination.
- July 1, 2022 – Deadline for annual conferences outside the United States to vote to align with a different Methodist denomination from that of their central conference.

BISHOPS AND PASTORS

- July 1, 2021 – Deadline for bishops to notify their authorities of a desire to align with a New Methodist denomination.
- July 1, 2021 – Deadline for clergy in the U.S. to notify their bishop and other authorities of a desire to align with a different Methodist denomination from that of their annual conference.
- July 1, 2022 – Deadline for clergy outside the United States to notify their bishop and other authorities of a desire to align with a different Methodist denomination from that of their annual conference

BWC border trip inspires return journey of faith

By MELISSA LAUBER
UMConnection Staff

SHE DIDN'T KNOW it was brave. She was just following her heart. But in February, Tracey Beall, a young interior decorator from Baltimore, went to a canyon in Tijuana, Mexico, to live for 10 days in a tent city for immigrants to see how she might make a difference.

Describing what she experienced there is difficult, she said. "It was all the words."

Beall said she felt compelled to go because of a previous trip to the same location – *Embajadores de Jesus* – a church that houses migrants awaiting hearings as they attempt to settle in the United States.

That trip was in October 2019, when a team from the Baltimore-Washington Conference went on a three-day border immersion experience. It was a sunny afternoon when their van drove deep into a valley where the rocky roads are so dusty that large rainstorms strand residents in their homes for days. When they road became unpassable, they walked, to the Ambassadors of Jesus Church, where more than 300 immigrants live in tents inside the church building.

Sitting on the church steps, the children immediately surrounded Beall, who took a few small games out of her backpack. In that moment, something in her soul shifted. She barely heard the official presentation that followed; being present with the children moved her. "I said, 'I want to come back,'" she remembers.

And so she did.

On her solo return trip, Beall learned that "when a family arrives at *Embajadores de Jesus*, they are given an area to sleep — either available single beds pushed together or a tent set up inside the church to give a little more privacy. I saw their bathrooms that don't have flushing toilets. I saw their 'showers' where you fill up a bucket of room-temperature water and go into a room with a drain to sponge bathe yourself. Trust me; it's awful."

Beall also saw the lines of people waiting to receive their dinner, which all depended on what food the facility had at that moment. "I learned that people either have jobs within the church — cooking, cleaning, managing supplies — or they are assisted in finding jobs in the surrounding area of Tijuana upon arrival. Everyone is self-sufficient, has their own supplies, takes care of their family, and helps others as needed," she said.

The migrants run the shelter, cooking about 900 meals each day, cleaning, and keeping things operational.

The almost 100 children who live there run around inside, playing games that they've made up in their heads, Beall said.

"When I took the books that I brought out of my bag, there was never an instance where a book wasn't being read or looked at by a child," Beall said. "Some books were in English, some were in Spanish, but whichever language, the kids were just as excited to see what the next page said. In other words, they were ecstatic to learn."

While she was there, Beall was tasked with teaching English to the children. It saddened her that

there was no teacher there so that the children might receive an education. Throughout her stay she felt like an investigator, discovering the dramatic and overwhelming needs of the residents of *Embajadores de Jesus*.

The adults there "have the burden of struggling to prepare for their next hearing at the immigration court; they wonder what tomorrow's food source will be; they have to leave their children



at the church to go make money to buy things as basic as toilet paper; they have to make sure that their family stays healthy since they are constantly surrounded by over 300 other people; and they have to cope with what happened in their past that led them to this point.

Most families do not try to cross the border into the United States because they hear its "nice over there," Beall said. "Rather, most

families were forced out of their homes, forced to flee from the towns they grew up in, where they met their wife or husband, where they watched their children take their first steps — where they had bright plans for their future. Imagine people coming to your house and saying 'We like your house. You have five hours to leave, or we will kill your entire family.' What are you supposed to do when you know that they are serious? This is the reality of the situation, the real reason that people are seeking refuge."

Since she returned, Beall has been wrestling with what more she might be doing.

Some soul searching led her to realize that she is not a teacher, nor a doctor, nor a lawyer, all skills desperately needed at the Border. Rather, she discovered "the best way I can benefit them is to work here and continue to have an income so that I can help from where I am in Maryland."

Sometimes she feels like her efforts and those of others are "still just a band-aid on a giant gaping wound." But being present has increased her resolve to be part of creating a beautiful community – for the migrants in Tijuana and in her own life.

She is now a member of Salem Hispanic UMC in Baltimore, where she works with the youth and is beginning to volunteer with the Justice for our Neighbors legal clinic.

She's not sure exactly what the future holds, but she is open to continuing to experience "all the words."

'Couch surfing' in God's house

EDITOR'S NOTE: After living with migrants in a tent city in Tijuana, Mexico, Tracey Beall, of Salem UMC in Baltimore, (profiled in the story above) shared some of her thoughts on faith and immigration.

"People who just want the same things we do, in the land of the free." -The Killers

GOD NEVER INTENDED for us to have ownership over God's land. God intended for us to have stewardship over the land, to take care of it and our brothers and sisters around us.

Somehow, we have decided that this is our land, that we can dictate who can and cannot inhabit different areas. We've decided that we can put up walls to keep other people out and that certain skin colors are more superior than others.

Normally, God's house refers to a church, but let's look at the earth as God's house for a minute. God prepared the land and built the house brick-by-brick, all by himself. God then invited us into his house to sleep, eat, shower, and live our lives, even though we don't pay God any rent.

There's nothing that we did to deserve to live in God's house, but God loves us and wants us there.

It's like we're all crashing on God's couch. We are able to use all of the amenities of the house: the kitchen; the bathroom; whatever we need for our daily routine. But when you're crashing on someone's couch, you don't have the right to determine the house rules.

You can't dictate the design that the owner has already worked so hard on, you can't throw away their house plants, you can't change the locks on the door, and you certainly can't decide to put up new walls. You should be grateful that you have a place to stay and do your part to take care of the home.

We are all "in" God's house", but we've begun to decide who can go where in this house. "All people with this skin color who were born in this area, you may sleep on the couch. All people with this skin color who were born in this area, you must sleep in the garage. If you would like to leave the garage and come sleep on the couch, you may ask, but it is ultimately up to those who are already sleeping on the couch to decide whether you are worthy enough to come inside."

What a false ownership and superiority we have created for ourselves.

I spent 10 days living in the garage with families who should be inside. I learned how they managed with only a utility sink and

pull-string light bulb. I saw how they entertained themselves with none of the indoor amenities while they waited to find out if someone, equal to them in every way besides birthplace and skin color, has decided that they can come inside.

This story and experience are not about me. I am simply the vessel to bring this information to the forefront of your mind. My job is to ensure that you – yes, you – understand to the best of your ability what it is like for a person seeking asylum.

My job is to remind you that you are not better than them, that you are not more worthy than them. You are simply luckier than them. That's why you are in the United States – by pure luck of being born there.

Remember: this isn't your house. Remember that you have the power to stop people who are trying to throw away plants, change the locks, and build walls. If you continue to sit on the couch, watching TV and ignoring the people knocking on the garage door, then you are letting the problem persist.

All you have to do is get up and try to help open that garage door. You'd be surprised by the incredible people you'll meet on the other side and what they have to bring to the table.

Border Immersion

Last year's Border Immersion Trip struck a deep chord in many of those who participated. Several people who went on the trip recently raised more than \$5,000 for showers and plumbing for the John 3:65 Dining Hall, a ministry of the Mexican Methodist Church, which serves migrants in Tijuana.

"People's hearts were touched by what they saw and learned and they came back wanting to do more," said Emma Escobar, the BWC's coordinator of Hispanic Ministries who leads the Immersion trips.

Another trip to the Mexican border is being planned for Oct. 9-12. Young adults who are interested in going on the trip will be asked to fill out an interest form, which will be released soon.

For more information, contact Escobar at eescobar@bwcumc.org.

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UMCs tackle school lunch debt in Harford Co.

BY ERIK ALSGAARD
UMConnection Staff

A MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENT walks into her cafeteria and makes a beeline for the food. She picks out her favorite foods and takes the tray to the cashier. It's then and there that she's told: no deal. She's not able to buy the food her peers can because she owes money for previous lunches. Instead, she may be served something else.

And for a middle schooler, that difference is embarrassment enough to cause shame.

Lunch debt is very much alive in Maryland and around the country, affecting thousands of children.

During the 2018–2019 school year, over 900,000 children attended a public school throughout Maryland's 24 public school systems, according to a report from Maryland Hunger Solutions. "Across the state, these schools served a combined average of over 240,000 breakfasts and 405,000 lunches to students every school day," the report noted. When a student who is required to pay the full or reduced cost of their meal arrives in the cafeteria without funds to purchase their meal, they start to accrue school meal debt.

The problem is so bad that Fallston UMC provided relief for many families through their Christmas Miracle Campaign. This mission was selected based on the number of families for which it would make a difference, according to the Rev. Karin Walker, the church's pastor.

Over Christmas, the church raised \$25,000 which was distributed to 14 schools. The gifts ranged from less than \$300 dollars to over \$8,000.

Students in elementary school are not restricted for their lunch and thus accrue debt which then follows them to middle and high school. Families are informed immediately; however, they often cannot pay consistently. Once the student reaches middle school, if there is debt, they can not receive a hot lunch.

Debts were paid through the efforts of Fallston UMC for some elementary, middle and high school students.

"We hope to track the debt at these schools and provide ongoing assistance in each of them in other ways as well, as we already do for quite a few schools," said Walker. "It's a local mission that speaks to the hearts of many."

She went on to say that helping families understand the benefit of free and reduced lunches is really a key to the whole issue. "Fear and suspicion are two reasons parents do not follow through," she said. "We also believe that the

drug addiction issue in Harford County dovetails with the significant debt."

The Revs. Tiffany Patterson and Sarah Elliot, both pastors in the BWC, received a grant for alleviating school lunch debt at the Ministry Hatchery event last December. Patterson serves Cranberry and Presbury UMCs near Edgewood; Elliot serves the Susquehanna Charge in Havre de Grace.

The Advocacy and Action grant from the Hatchery will be used to bring in a consultant to help bring more people together to address the problem, said Patterson. The grant was for \$1,000.

Patterson said that Presbury UMC simply asked a nearby school, "What's your biggest need?" The

answer was lunch debt.

"They told us that at this middle school, if a student has a lunch debt over \$7.50, they cannot receive lunch," Patterson said. "We were very concerned about that."

That lead to a group of people learning more about the issue, discovering Maryland state policies, and figuring out the best way to respond effectively. A lot of conversations were had, and many connections were made, she said.

Patterson has taken a three-month sabbatical, ending March 31, to focus on this issue.

"I'm studying food insecurity among children in my county," she said, "making connections for my churches."

One school official, responsible for oversight of the cafeteria services at a middle school Fallston UMC helped, was in tears, said Walker.

"You don't know how much this means," he told Walker. "The hardest days for me are when I have to look a student in the eye and take away their tray and tell them they can't have that hot lunch today, but instead they can grab a sandwich. It breaks my heart. They just don't understand."



What God can do with dust

By Rev. Shannon Sullivan*

OUR FIFTH FROZEN embryo transfer (FET) was on Ash Wednesday last year. Our first pregnancy ended on an Ash Wednesday three years before that. In between those experiences, Lent became a time not for deepening my connection with God but to try and wrangle my body into pregnancy through fertility treatments. I did not know if this last transfer then was ominous or an opportunity for redemption. The senior pastor I worked with took care of everything that Ash Wednesday. I didn't have to scramble to write notes for someone else to preach from as I did three years before while bleeding and cramping and crying. I didn't just go to worship and sit on a stool to preach because I was so uncomfortable in preparation for an egg retrieval as I did two years before. I wasn't meticulously planning my days around food, shots, and yoga as I was just one year before on Ash Wednesday. I had wanted then to be healthy and give myself the best opportunity to get pregnant, and I found out on the last day of that Lent that I was pregnant, only to miscarry again. Lent, the season of forty days before Easter beginning with Ash Wednesday, should be a season of preparing our hearts for resurrection, of looking at our lives to see what we need to change to draw closer to God, of spending time in contemplation and prayer and discernment. Instead, for me, it has become a desperate struggle to keep believing resurrection is possible at all. It has been a desperate struggle to make meaning of the phrase from dust we are and to dust we return, instead of finding it a truth of the vast emptiness of my life. Without a congregation to preach

to, without ashes to affix to my own head, I murmured to myself throughout that Ash Wednesday last year: From dust you are, and to dust you shall return. These are the words we use when we dip our fingers into ashes, those burned bits of something that was once alive mixed with a bit of oil, and make the sign of the cross on the foreheads of our siblings in Christ on Ash Wednesday. We recite the words from the second story of creation in the Bible, where God creates humanity from the dirt, from dust, and breathes into it to give us life. We use the language to point to another common saying recited at funerals: ashes to ashes, dust to dust. The tradition of putting ashes on one's head is mentioned throughout the Bible as a sign of both repentance and mourning. When those stories come up, the ash isn't explained, not really. Perhaps it is self-destructive: we hate our lives in the wake of loss, we hate our bodies after experiencing violence, we hate ourselves when we recognize the depth of our sin, and so the itch and discomfort of sackcloth and ashes are nothing to us. But perhaps it is a reminder, as the words of the Ash Wednesday ritual point to, that as creation dies and becomes ash, so we will die and become dust. We are mortal, God is not. Therefore our mourning and pain are not the end of the story, even if it feels that way to us, our sin is not the end of the story, even if it seems impossible to imagine our way out of it. From dust you are, to dust you shall return. You are a swirl of dust in the middle of a story much larger than yourself. Bones seem a pretty final end to the story, especially ones dry enough to crumble into dust. That's what I

felt like on Ash Wednesday last year. Dry bones. Dust. But even Scripture has a story about life breathing back into dry bones in Ezekiel 37:1-14. Israel, we learn from this passage is like the dried up bones, completely without hope for redemption or salvation. But just because we don't have hope doesn't mean God no longer has hope. "Can these bones live?" God asked Ezekiel. If God asked me if dry bones could live, I would have flat out said no. Absolutely not. After so many years of infertility and loss, I felt like a dried up husk of the person I once was. But last Ash Wednesday, there I was, feet sprawled apart under exam room lights, waiting yet again for someone to prophesy to the breath. I had no hope, but I was going through the motions anyway. And that Ash Wednesday life breathed into me. But it wasn't just the life of an embryo taking hold within me, it was also a commitment within myself to work with God to find new life. Instead of waiting for a miracle, I sought out God to change my life. That Lent I took time to reconnect with God, reading daily devotions but also reading joyful works of fiction. I made time to discern what was next, applying to programs that I thought would be life-giving and

working with my church to change my job description. I began to believe that my grief, my dustiness, wasn't the end of the story, even if I never had a baby. But I did. That embryo stuck this time and grew into a baby who was born just before Advent. And so as I come to this Ash Wednesday with an infant, four years after that first loss. I am remembering what God can do with dust. I am again seeking a Lenten season of reconnection and discernment, of prayer and deep breathing. I don't feel so dry and dusty anymore, but I know God is still breathing into me, still calling me into ever more abundant life, into resurrection. May the ashes of our grieving be the soil of our growing, we clergy proclaim as we impose ashes. I haven't always believed that to be possible. I probably won't always believe it to be possible. But if I keep putting one foot in front of the other, keep working with God to find the good I can, I know God can do amazing things with dust.

**This article first appeared on the Young Clergy Women International website: youngclergywomen.org*
**Rev. Shannon Sullivan is the associate pastor of Calvary UMC in Frederick.*



Rev. Shannon Sullivan, left, with her husband, introduce their son, James Ezekiel Sullivan-Harrington, to the congregation at Calvary.

Offering to support literacy in Ranson, W.Va.

By Rev. Melissa Rudolph
Pastor of North Carroll Cooperative Parish

WHEN THE PRE-CONFERENCE session of the Baltimore Washington Conference meets on April 18 in Ranson, W.Va., we will be collecting a special offering to support the expansion of library access for local children in memory of my father, A. David Hamill. Hamill was the mayor of Ranson for 30 years and a leader at Asbury United Methodist Church, serving as Lay Member to Annual Conference, certified Lay Servant, and many other roles. He also spent a season on a BWC task force to establish procedures for entering into partnerships with outside groups. He died of cancer four years ago. He came to Christ through a lifelong road of recovery that led through the West Virginia Emmaus (weekend #1), Kairos ministries, and teams with Chrysalis. In Canada, he had always been an outsider: "that Hamill kid." He was more often found shooting pool in the Victoria Pool Hall in Kitchener, Ontario, than in school. But, he loved to read. Poetry, Shakespeare, Scripture: he would quote his favorites to anyone who would listen. When Hamill became a U.S. citizen,

he immediately entered local politics. Under his leadership, Ranson quadrupled in size by annexing properties and being strategic about growth and development. The city took an abandoned warehouse and converted it into the Ranson Civic Center. Some of the other pieces of that land house a park and community garden. Hamill is still beloved by the community because he forged so many relationships where his faith and office would overlap. He would frequently visit constituents and take them an Upper Room, he would sing hymns at the nursing homes, and worship with all of the faith communities. He sought reconciliation, even calling political rivals to his bedside near the end of his life, and knew himself as a sinner in need of God's grace. That carried into everything he did for the city as well as the church. It is fitting to write this during Read Across America Week, because one of Hamill's favorite things to do was visit Ranson Elementary School to read to the students or participate in their walking school bus and other activities. Ranson is a Title I school, where over 90 percent of students receive free or reduced

lunch. Hamill realized reading was his gateway to education. When he would say something my siblings and I didn't understand —like who Roger Bannister was — we were sent to the encyclopedia set on the shelf to look it up. When trying to think of the most fitting way to honor Hamill's legacy in Ranson and Charles Town, the need to expand access to the library seemed fitting. It turned out that he and the city manager had already begun conversations with the Charles Town Library Director, Dr. Marcella Genz, about how to work together. Possibilities include a new children's room, a bookmobile, or even a satellite library to make it even easier for the children to access services. We are thrilled that the BWC is partnering in this work.



A. David Hamill

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Two BWC youth change lives with moral courage

BY ERIK ALSGAARD
UMConnection Staff

THE BALTIMORE-WASHINGTON CONFERENCE'S Moral Courage Awards celebrate people who put their faith into action, especially when doing so is uncomfortable or unpopular.

Two youth winners received this prestigious award at the ROCK retreat in early February, held in Ocean City.

Abbey Duncan and Ethan Tiao, both 17, received the award onstage in front of thousands of cheering peers. Duncan attends Frostburg UMC; Tiao attends Chevy Chase UMC.

"Love of God is always linked with love of neighbor, a passion for justice, and renewal in the life of the world," said the Rev. Stacey Cole Wilson, Executive Minister of Justice and Service for the BWC. She presented the awards on-stage at ROCK. "The Moral Courage Awards seek to identify, inspire, and encourage persons of various ages who are alleviating human suffering, boldly living their faith, and then sharing their stories with the invitation for persons to consider that they have the power to change and influence."

Duncan received recognition for her work with the Fellowship of Christian Athletes and bringing that program into her school. She started this effort when she was in 8th grade, she said, with about five or six members. It now has between 50 and 60 members.

"We used to meet in one of the classrooms at school," she said. "But we've grown and grown so

now we meet in the library."

The program has also reached beyond her local school to touch other high schools throughout the county.

A typical Fellowship of Christian Athletes meeting, Duncan said, starts with an icebreaker or other fun activity. Then a student leader reads the Scripture and "delves deep into what the Scripture means," she said, "and relates it to life."

Duncan, who's a cheerleader and on the tennis team, recently led one of the meetings and her topic was on how "tomorrow is not promised."

"We need to love each other and be kind to each other because you never know when your last day is gonna come," she said.

Duncan said that the FCA has touched her life in many ways.

"I've attended many (FCA) camps," she said, "and at them, there's speakers ... who are professional athletes, professing their faith and teaching other aspiring professional athletes how to live their life ... and walk that path with God."

Tiao's project, Youth Creating Change, is what he describes as a "social justice incubator." They provide student activists with grant funding to address injustice in their communities. Tiao said that seeing other students speaking out for what they believed in, especially around gun control, inspired – he uses the word "forced" – him to think of different ways. "I could help activists turn their ideas into reality," he said.

YCC started out, he said, as only a funding mechanism. However,

he said, he soon realized that activism requires more than just money: it takes training, learning how to organize, how to deliver an effective call to action, how to facilitate a meeting, how to manage a team, mentorship and guidance, and much more.

The end result is the current YCC which, Tiao said, is a "comprehensive program that provides people with a platform to do just that."

Tiao started the program in 2017, when he was 15. His support comes

activists receiving support, Tiao said, working on 33 different social justice projects.

"Being able to support other students has shown me the vast range of injustices that students go through," Tiao said, "whether that's the achievement gap or being affected by gun violence or climate injustice. It's been pretty incredible just learning what students are doing."

It's also shown him something sorely needed in today's world: unity.



Youth Moral Courage Award winners Ethan Tiao and Abbey Duncan (in red shirts) stand with Bishop LaTrelle Easterling, left, and Rev. Stacey Cole Wilson.

from fundraisers, Communities United Against Hate, street fairs, online gifts, and more. To date, they've raised more than \$25,000. In 2019, they administered \$8,000 in grants, and hope to do even more this year.

That translates to 66 student

"I've seen the power of coming together, putting aside differences, and collaborating to make a more powerful impact. We bring students together during these trainings to foster collaborations across the county," he said.

Ames UMC takes first steps on community center

BY ERIK ALSGAARD
UMConnection Staff

FOR THE PRINCELY SUM of only \$13,000, Ames UMC in the Sandtown neighborhood of Baltimore has claimed a new future. That was the amount needed to buy a vacant lot across the street from the church that used to be home for 11 row houses. In their place, a \$17 million, multi-story community center will rise to meet the growing needs of its people.

The Rev. Rodney Hudson, who has served Ames for 12 years, said the new community center, when built, will be 35,000 square-feet and hold a children's early development center for 250 children; an Umar Boxing facility; and a facility with the Boys and Girls Club of America.

"Those three partners," Hudson said, "will be renting space from us. We will have a commercial kitchen, a gymnasium of some sort, and space to continue our present ministries of feeding the hungry and providing health services."

The new building is years from completion, Hudson said, but they wouldn't have made it this far without the support of the Baltimore-Washington Conference, both prayerfully and financially, and from its many partners involved in the project.

"Our people are very excited for this opportunity," Hudson said. "The work that we already do in our community will only be heightened. The building

itself is not the reason why we're doing the work; we're already doing the work now. We're not building a building to do the work. We're building the building because we need to continue and grow the work."

Hudson said the church gained "site control" of the property in late February, culminating at least two years' worth of "untangling a mess." Part of that untangling was conducting environmental impact studies on the property, and geo-technical studies to make sure the property was not in a flood zone.

Attorneys, working pro bono, assisted in navigating the process with the City of Baltimore in buying the land, and working up a contract.

One of the key partners in the project, Hudson said, is the Episcopal Housing Corporation in Baltimore and its CEO, Daniel McCarthy. McCarthy will serve as project manager while the Corporation serves as the "clearinghouse" for grant writing and receiving and distributing money.

The vision for the project began when Hudson went to a certificate program – paid for by the BWC – with the University of Baltimore where he learned about "doing development between faith-based organizations and the public and private sectors," he said.

After completing the program, Hudson began sharing ideas throughout the community and curating partnerships and interested

individuals. Early supporters included Bishop LaTrelle Easterling and then district superintendent, the Rev. Ed DeLong.

Hudson, who said the center is being built in an "Opportunity Zone," fully expects the building to be paid for through grants, including state and Federal grants, local foundational grants, and the church. McCarthy has already identified sources for at least half of the money.

The BWC provided funding for the initial start-up, Hudson said, so that they could buy the

property, pay for the site manager, and contract with an architect for initial design work. The BWC grant, Hudson said, was for between \$300,000 and \$400,000, with \$150,000 having been spent. That money was granted in 2017-2018.

"This project would not have been possible without the help of two individuals," Hudson said. "Van Beall and Robert Wilkins." Both men are members of Glen Mar UMC and assisted in getting the project in front of key members of government and philanthropy. "These fellas made this possible."



An architect's drawing shows early plans for the Ames UMC Community Center.