Emmanuel 'engages with Christ'

By Melissa Lauber
UMConnection 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 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,” Vader said. “Ministry is about relationship – with God and with others,”

Summit offers new ideas on leadership

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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 needs something to believe in and rooted in something bigger than themselves. He stressed the importance of a Deeper Level of Discipleship.

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SUMMIT offers new ideas on leadership

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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.

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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
O nce upon a time, a long time ago, I was a young adult attending church camp. There was no internet, no social media, no smartphones, no instant messaging. There was only the traditional 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. “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. Poverty should not mean that the neighbors should be up. So then, whenever we have an evening to read, if we do not give up. Then we, when we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all …”

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

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

The 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.

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
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DO GOOD

To 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 don’t have the skills to fix the world’s problems, 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, let’s 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.

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 do all some good. We can all roll up our sleeves, get to work, and start creating the world that we so often talk about.

So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all …”

Instead of talking, we could do some good.

Do good.

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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, part of the 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 volunteer 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.”

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 giving 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.”
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 Bill 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


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 the plan 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

401(k) plans most U.S. corporate employees now have — provides an account balance to use during retirement, with the clergyperson 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-church-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, 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 this work with great deliberation and respect for one another. Pray for us that we not grow weary in our well-doing.”

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 plus 1 of the clergy and laity of a church. (1) January 1, 2021 – Any new Methodist denominations that have already been legally constituted may begin to function. (2) May 15, 2021 – Deadline for registering intent to form a different Methodist denomination. (3) Dec. 31, 2024 – Deadline for local churches to separate.

NEW DENOMINATIONS

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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 plus 1 of the clergy and laity of a central conference who have decided to align with, unless the separation date is later.

• January 1, 2021 – Apportionments are set by, and paid to, any New Methodist denomination for conferences that have decided to align with a different Methodist denomination. • Dec. 31, 2024 – Deadline for central conferences that have decided to align with a different 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 central 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.
‘Couch surfing’ in God’s house

EDITOR’S NOTE: After living with migrants in a tent city in Tijuana, Tracey Beall, an interior decorator from Baltimore, is now a member of Salem United Methodist Church in Maryland. (The story in the above image) shared some of her thoughts on faith and immigration.

“People who just want the same things, in the land of the free.” The Killers

On her solo return trip, Beall learned that “when a family is staying at Embajadores de Jesús, 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 limited, pull-string light bulb. I saw how they entertained themselves with the books and a few cards 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 completely 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. The length of their stay she felt like an investigator, discovering the dramatic and overwhelming needs of the residents of Embajadores de Jesús.

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 pay for 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 fight for an income so that I can help with their educational needs.”

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

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

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 cannot receive a hot lunch.

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

“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.”

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 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.

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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.

By Erik Alsgaard
UMConnection Staff

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UMCs tackle school lunch debt in Harford Co.
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, I became a bit more open 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 was then orious or an opportunity for redemption. The pregnancy was a desperate struggle to make myself the best opportunity to draw closer to God, of spending time in contemplation and prayer. Instead, for me, it has become a desperate struggle to keep believing and give myself the best opportunity to get pregnant, and I found out on the last day 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 becomes a desperate struggle to keep believing resurrection is possible at all. It has been a desperate struggle to keep making of the story, even if it seems impossible. 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 my 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 and being strategic about growth and prayer.

Without a congregation to preach to, without ashes to affix to my own head, I murmured to myself throughout the week. But on Ash Wednesday last year: From dust you are, and to dust you shall return.

"There 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. When we hear those words from the second story of creation in the Bible, where God creates humanity from the dirt, from dust, and breathes into it the ability to draw closer to God, we use the language to point to another common saying recited at funerals: ashes to 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.

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 would do with dust. I am again seeking a way to change my life.

*This article first appeared on the Young Clergy Women International website: youngclergywomen.org

_Renee Sullivan is the associate pastor of Calvary UMC in Frederick._

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Offering to support literacy in Ranson, W.Va.

**By Rev. Melissa Rudolph**

_Pastor of North Carroll Partnership 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 Ashby 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 Exiles (weekend ski), his ministries, and teams with Chrysalis. In Canada, he had always been an outsider: “that Hamill kid.” He was more often found on a golfing 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 around the city 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 to 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 could only arrive for him to do the work of the city as well as the church.

It is fitting to write this during Read Across America Week, to note 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 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 believe—Alice and 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 library access 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 to get children access to books. We are thrilled that the BWC is partnering in this work._

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_COURTESY SHANNON SULLIVAN_
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 that we already do in our community and then sharing their stories 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 Bible and “delve deep into what the Scripture means,” she said, “and relates it to life.”

Duncan, who was 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 reaching 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 a funding mechanism to address injustice in their communities. Tiao said that seeing other students speaking out for what they believed in, especially around gun control, inspired him. “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 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 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.

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.” Each will have a commercial kitchen, a gymnasium of some sort, and space to continue our present ministries of feeding the hungry and providing financial assistance to low-income families.

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’ve already done 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 2017 by winning a lawsuit for 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 were pro bono and helped 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 are members of Glen Mar UMC and assisted in getting the project in front of key members of government and philanthropy. “These folks made this possible.”

Prominent leaders in Justice and Service for the BWC