Vacant parsonage becomes house of healing for women

BY ERIK ALSGAARD
UMConnection Staff

EVERY SUNDAY MORNING for months, Pastor Lucinda Kent stopped in the breezeway between the parsonage and church at Van Buren UMC in Washington, D.C. Quietly, almost without notice, she painted one of the bricks on the empty house, reminding her of the vision she had for a building that had hit hard times: a family of raccoons had inhabited the attic and church members were afraid to enter the building; some turkey buzzards had set up shop; it sat empty for about 15 years; bamboo was threatening to take over the yard.

In mid-October, Kent stopped painting. Her vision had become reality.

At a ribbon-cutting Oct. 13, Kent was joined by Ward 4 Washington, D.C., Councilmember Brandon Todd, the Rev. Tony Love, assistant to the bishop, and church members as they unveiled the “Under My Care (UMC) House.” The UMC House will offer transitional housing to women and children ages 5 and younger who are coming from domestic violence situations.

The UMC House is a partnership that came together to birth an entrepreneurship ministry. A $2,000 Peace with Freedom Grant to Buren UMC in Washington, D.C., helped fund the project.

At the ribbon-cutting, Pastor Wallis, president and founder of Sojourners, and Marvin McMickle, president of Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School, experimentally painted a mural in the breezeway between the parsonage and church at Van Buren UMC.

See Van Buren, page 3

reCall Summit fights racism

BY ERIK ALSGAARD
UMConnection Staff

WHEN FIGHTING RACISM, sexism, xenophobia, misogyny and other “isms,” United Methodists are at a distinct advantage. Because we are connected in Jesus Christ and work together as a connectional church, coming together across theological and political lines is part and parcel of what we do.

That was part of the hope and challenge offered by Jim Wallis, president and founder of Sojourners, and Marvin McMickle, president of Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School, at the reCall Summit Oct. 26 and 27.

More than 100 United Methodists from throughout the Northeastern Jurisdiction were implored to move towards advocacy and action on these issues at the Summit, co-sponsored by the Baltimore-Washington Conference and the Multi-Ethnic Center for Ministry of the Northeastern Jurisdiction.

This was the second such annual gathering. Two years ago, delegates at the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference pledged to work intentionally to “fight the scourge of racism” and unanimously approved a “Call to Action.”

In May, they’ll take next steps to accelerate their social innovation and create a new expression of church. Along the way, mentors accompany the Change Makers in having vocational and theological conversations.

In San Antonio last month, five young adults from the BWC came together with leaders from London’s Matryoshka Haus, pioneers in Christian social innovation. The five had missed the main trip to London, but they’ve begun sharing ideas and experimenting.

“This is very experimental. But I’d rather live with failure than regret.”
— Ram Gonzalez

In a whirlwind week, they heard from entrepreneurs changing the culture in San Antonio, a city with immense personality and the nation’s largest disparity between its wealthiest and poorest people.

Chiefs, farmers, business people, designers, artists, journalists, investors, a meditation teacher, tour guides, historians, social workers, chefs, farmers, business people...
Training 12:30 p.m. — Benevola UMC invites us to open our hearts and lives, trusting God to do a new thing, looking for God to act in a way that defies our mundane expectations. If we have an intentional Advent, with spiritual disciplines and preparations for the birth of Jesus rather than seeking the demise of our credit score, we just might see the season did not expect, showing up around the edges, sanctifying the ordinary and making space for big and small miracles. How will your church wait and prepare, not for the Advent We Expect, but the Advent God is Expecting? How can we turn the world’s expectations upside down this year? What would that look like for your neighbors, who may think they know just exactly what to expect, in a November election year, with the holidays around the corner like a test coming you didn’t study for? When it comes to Jesus, it’s best to expect the unexpected. Like the last being first, and the first being last. Like sowing love instead of hate. Like being ready when the Holy Spirit blows apart our expectations in favor of God’s expectations. Happy Advent. Expect the unexpected.

Bishop’s Advent Day Apart
Nov. 13, 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. — Epworth UMC, Gaithersburg
A time apart for clergy with guest preacher, the Rev. Kirk Byron Jones. Learn more at bwcumc.org/pre-adventdayapart

Conversation on a Way Forward
Nov. 28, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. — Gaithersburg UMC
Rev. Tom Salsgiver, Assistant to the Bishop in the Susquehanna Conference, and a member of the Commission on a Way Forward, will be the speaker. Bring your lunch or plan to eat at one of the nearby restaurants. Info: bwcumc.org/wayforwardconversation

Early Response Team Training
Certification: Dec. 1, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. — Benefo UMC
Re-Certification: Dec. 1, 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. — Benefo UMC
The BWC’s Abundant Health Board is committed to organizing teams of skilled individuals to be ready to respond to any form of disaster. bwcumc.org/ministries/abundant-health/disaster-mission/

ROCK 2019
Feb. 8-10, 2019 — Convention Center, Ocean City, Md.
Registration is now open for ROCK 2019, a retreat for youth. The featured speaker this year will be Ben Glenn, the Chalk Guy. Salvador will provide the music and Egypt Speaks is the weekend's spoken word artist. ROCK is designed as a God-encountering, life-changing, high-energy retreat focusing on revival for youth and adults. Registration costs increase Dec. 1. bwcumc.org/rock

Retracing the Steps of Freedom
April 6-11, 2019
This immersion experience will visit some of the most significant venues of the Civil Rights movement. Costs include motor coach to Birmingham, Ala., lodging, and immersion sites. bwcumc.org/steppsofreedom

We strive for accuracy in the UMConnection.
In the October issue, a photo on page 1 is of Linda Flanagan, not the Rev. Angela Flanagan.
On page 6, the Discipleship Academy should have been called the Discipleship Agency in the headline.
We regret the errors.
Van Buren: ‘Our community will know we're not dead’

From page 1

Justice grant from the Baltimore-Washington Conference helped buy new appliances for the kitchen. A $10,000 grant from Global Ministries furthered the work, while construction contractors pitched in with reduced price work. Countless hours of volunteer work helped to bring the house up to code, including colorful painted seats and art throughout. The church also partnered with another nonprofit in the community to help screen potential residents.

Kent said that the first residents at the UMC House will arrive in November, each family staying between three and six months. The house is capable of handling between eight and 12 people. Each family will have its own bedroom and there’s a separate playroom just for the children. A full kitchen, pantry, and dining room offer communal space, as well as a large living room.

“Every person who is displaced has different levels of need,” Kent said. “Because we won’t have full time counselor people in the house, we need people who are fairly independent with living and don’t have issues with substance abuse, or who have very high security types of situations, or children that have special needs that we’re not equipped for.”

The UMC House is a signal, Kent said, that the church wants to work with its community. That’s why it was important, she said, to have the church’sTodd present. “If this church was full of people, it would be awesome,” Kent said. “However, I don’t think that’s our best possible ask that today and age, we have to be relevant. People are evaluating churches by our work, and they are interested in what you might have to say on Sunday if they cannot see who you are Monday through Saturday.”

Julia Maxwell, a long-time member of Van Buren and one of the leaders behind UMC House, said that she was thrilled the parsonage was being returned to active ministry. “I wouldn’t be come inside,” she said. “There were animals all over the place.” Maxwell added that the floors of the house needed to be cleaned and refinished; walls needed repairing and painting; everything was a mess. But sitting on a couch in the House after the ribbon-cutting, Maxwell smiled. “I think this is wonderful,” she said. “Half of the people working here are not members of our church; they’re members of other churches. Our community knows that we’re not dead; we’re still alive.”

Kent is a certified candidate for ordained ministry on the Elder track, and currently enrolled at Wesley Theological Seminary. She also serves as Director of Operations for National UMC in Washington. She had been seeking clarity around her call to ministry prior to coming to Van Buren.

Amid struggles with her candidacy and course work, she received a phone call from the district superintendent on a Friday night. She was introduced at the church on Saturday. She was announced as the new pastor on Sunday.

“When I arrived the first day, that Saturday, to meet the community as their pastor, I saw the house and I was thinking, ‘Now I know why I’m here,’” said Kent. A licensed local pastor who is in her first appointment, Kent has a background in property development. “This is something I know how to do,” she said. “I can take land and do something with it. I’m a builder.” In her “previous life,” as she calls it, Kent served as the CFO of a “significant real estate developer and property management company” in Chevy Chase. Putting those skills from corporate management to work at Van Buren was only natural.

When she first walked through the parsonage, Kent said that church members were nervous both for her safety and what she might find. “They didn’t know who or what was living in there,” she said. “I can be fearless. I trust God a lot. But they wanted me to be a bit more level-headed about it.”

Kent sees the opening of the UMC House as a beginning, not an end. So, what’s next for Van Buren? Kent has a “small” vision: tiny homes, built in the spacious area behind the church.

Bishop LaTrelle Easterling, center, preaches at the opening worship of the reCall Summit.

“God lays sovereignty to everything God made,” he said. “God has no favorite nation, no favorite race, no favorite nothing. You are not just patriots, you are witnesses to the global God who has the whole world in his hands.”

Wallis brought a similar message as McMickle. Noting that President Lincoln, years ago, appealed to “our better angels,” he said that recent events have shown just how close to the surface our demons are.

“Jack is out of the box,” Wallis said. “There’s a direct strategy of fear, led by Washington, trying to evoke fears, resentments and hatreds of the ‘other.’ The elephant in the room, is that by 2009-something, we’ll no longer be a white majority nation. We’ll be a majority of minorities. A lot of white folks have no idea how to deal with that.”

Wallis agreed with McMickle that it is long past time for preachers and pupils to change the world, adding that pupils don’t change the world unless they spark movements of ordinary citizens.
Expert explores vibrant youth ministry

By Erik Alsgaard
UMConnection Staff

T he definition of youth ministry, according to Mark DeVries, is “one failure after another, with enthusiasm.” DeVries, the founder of Ministry Architects in Nashville, Tenn., offered that bit of truth Oct. 20 at Bethany UMC in Ellicott City, as children and youth ministry staff and volunteers came together for training.

Blending humor, biblical truths, and the stories of more than 20 years of experience as a youth pastor, DeVries addressed how to start and keep children’s and youth ministry sustainable and vibrant.

At the heart of it, DeVries said, is the Gospel message of God’s love shown through Jesus Christ. Getting that message to children is the task of this ministry.

Having DeVries present the training is part of an ongoing effort to create skilled servant workers in young people’s ministry for the Baltimore-Washington Conference, said Cheryl Cook, coordinator of Young People and Special Projects.

During the Young People’s Ministry focus groups, which were held in September, “one of the key take-aways… was a strong desire from local church staff members and volunteers for more training opportunities,” Cook said. “We know that children and youth workers often burn out, and the turnover can be really high. Building sustainable, long-term ministry is essential for every local church.”

That’s because, according to recent statistics, youth pastors average about three years in each job, and the Internet is filled with horror stories of volunteer and staff burnout.

DeVries thinks he has an answer to this: laying a solid foundation using systems that work, time after time.

Offering 15 essential systems for ministry, DeVries focused on three during the workshop. These systems, he said, happen beneath the surface of your ministry and are not what people see on a day-by-day basis. “Like your indoor home plumbing, you only notice it when it breaks,” he said.

“The most important system is a data base. This doesn’t have to be high-tech and expensive, he said, adding that he’s seen effective data bases done on 3 by 5 index cards.

“We’re keeping up with real-life human beings,” he said. “Who are ours? Who’s baptized here? Whose parents are here? Make a list of who your kids are. Anyone you meet belongs in the data base.”

Then, utilizing a calendar system — the second-most essential system — invite the people in the data base to special events. The calendar system, DeVries said, is used to map out what your ministry is going to do over the next 12 months. “Not the ‘every week’ stuff,” he said, “but the big stuff.”

And when you invite children and youth to these events, invite them to serve alongside you. “Adolescents are hard-wired for heroism,” DeVries said. “They love to, and need to, serve.”

Relationships between adults and youth are essential, he said, because transformation happens one kid at a time. Thus, building a sustainable children’s and youth ministry is all about creating experiences where real relationships can happen.

In his work as a consultant, DeVries said that many times he is asked to help a church “un-stick” themselves in children’s and youth ministry.

“You know you’re in a stuck ministry,” he said, “when the answers you get when you start with the words, ‘we just…’ ‘We just need more money…’ ‘If we just had more kids…”

However, he said, isn’t a quick fix but instead, a systematic approach. He encouraged patience, prayer, and more persistence.

It’s critical, DeVries said, to attend to the “dance floor” of any ministry, but especially for children and youth. DeVries used the image of a ballerina dancing at Carnegie Hall to illustrate his point.

“The floor is beautiful, but all the wear — the dust, flaws, no one notices it, except the dancer,” he said.

“And when you invite children and youth to these events, invite them to serve alongside you. “Adolescents are hard-wired for heroism,” DeVries said. “They love to, and need to, serve.”

“Children’s and youth ministry are so critical,” DeVries said. “You get to step into the gaps that happen between kids and their parents. No parent – no leader – can do it by themselves.”

One of the other great benefits of the training on Saturday, Cook said, was seeing the connectional church being connectional.

“There were two youth workers who ended up at the same table,” she said, “and they found out that they were not only in the same district, but they were both from the same town only a few miles away from each other and they had never connected before. They shared contact info and began talking about ways they could partner and share resources.”

Campus Ministry relies on Student Day gifts

By Melissa Lauber
UMConnection Staff

UM Student Day is Nov. 25. On this special Sunday, churches are asked to take up a Special Offering to support scholarships nationally, and to assist four area campus ministry’s. One of these ministries is at Frostburg University.

Starting college can be a stressful time in any young person’s life, but for a selection of UM students at Frostburg University, the fall of this year took on new challenges, which they were able to meet only with the assistance of the Campus Ministry there.

These students, explained the Rev. Cynthia Zirlott, are the ones aging out of foster care. She cannot share the numbers or names of these students. However, national statistics show that each year, more than 23,000 children in the United States age out of the foster care system; 20 percent of them are instantly homeless.

Only six percent of the children who age out of foster care attend institutions of high learning; only 50 percent of those will graduate with a degree.

These stark statistics make the students at Frostburg rare and prized, Zirlott said.

But when they arrived on campus this fall, the checks that they would receive for work study didn’t start for a month. So they, and others, were forced to figure out how to get money to eat and for other expenses.

Zirlott has a student fund, which she tries to keep at $300, and churches and individuals give her $25 gift cards to share with the students.

“But this semester has been more urgent,” she said. “I had five students come to me this semester. They don’t come to me this for financial aid will go further.”

Zirlott and the Campus Ministry offer all the “normal things,” one would expect: Bible studies, groups, a dance ministry, chapel services on Sunday nights, service Saturdays, mission trips, leadership training and more. Last year, 147 students participated.

But it is often the students with pressing needs that most touch Zirlott’s heart.

“I’m not surprised by anything anymore,” she said. “I’ve been dealing with this for 11 years. It can be heartbreaking.”

But, she said, she never stopped.

“I was one of those students,” Zirlott said. “I’m a product of extreme poverty. I put myself through school, too. I kind of know where they’re coming from.”

She remembers learning to live on $25 a week for food, spending just $2 on a meal, and working four jobs to put herself through college.

“I had a hard time making ends meet between making good grades and making okay grades to work more hours,” she said.

The shamed, hopeful churches will remember these students who live so close to them and give practically everything up, a dance ministry, to campus ministries, or to the annual Student Day offering.

“People helped me along the way, too,” Zirlott said. “I want to help as many students as I can.”

For more information, contact unitedcampusministry@frost.edu.

Send checks for the Student Day offering to: BWC Treasurer, 11711 E. Market Place, Fulton, MD 20759.
Change Makers: A new way of doing/being church

From page 1

activists and others shared how they are bending and breaking the boundaries between business, government, neighborhood groups, education and religion to create something new that blends profit, gift, purpose, community, faith and social action.

In the BWC group, ideas for mission-oriented entrepreneurship began to bubble up:

• The Rev. Carver James of Shagon Street Memorial UMC in Baltimore envisions a culinary program that includes job training in food service and food industries and a cooking competition.
• Rachel Livingston, youth pastor at Towson UMC, is designing a Freedom School.
• Rachel Luna, director of Project Transformation in Washington, D.C., is expanding her creative reach for helping needy children in D.C. with literacy and providing leadership and internship opportunities for young adults.
• Mark Bacolod, who moved to Baltimore to live in intentional community, is exploring starting an incubator group for young adults that focuses on leadership and community development.
• Joseph Kitchen, an assistant principal in Prince George’s County, is continuing to build on his already successful summer experience for youth at risk, from his home neighborhood in Fresno, California.

During the week, they were immersed in the design thinking process of empathize, define, ideate, prototype, test. But more importantly, they were encouraged to let their imaginations soar.

Too often in the church, people get too busy or too focused to stop at the end of his paintbrush. Rex and his parents go. They hope to mend the world.

Remember the Alamo!

At the Alamo, one of America’s iconic landmarks, Matt Valler shared his City Hack story-telling ministry. It was a remarkably simple idea: wander and wonder around a specific place, ask questions and delve into history, character and setting. What resonates, what causes dissonance, and how is that dissonance resolved? In that story-based exploration, insights emerge.

New flavor of mission

We went on a taco tour of the city’s best flavors. Ram Gonzales shared how he uses his financial expertise as the CEO of a new investment company to assist people who face foreclosures. He believes if you can help, you should help, otherwise, you become part of the problem. “This is very experimental,” he admits. “But I’d rather live with failure than regret.”

Tastes of Faith

Gastronomy is the lore and love of food. Chef Josh Schwencke has a passion for food: how it heals, delights and comforts, enables people to transcend differences and ego and the stories told about and over food that define people and whole cultures. With the Gastronomy Company, he’s using that passion to change the world, one plate at a time.

'Entrepreneurs' sow hope

Elizabeth Biedrzycki calls herself an “intrapreneur,” serving with humility, building relationships, noticing where God’s people are living in broken places and putting her heart to work there. She sees the border as two pieces of cloth, sewn together and now being pulled apart in ways that weaken the stitches, fray the edges and rip the material. She hopes to mend the world.
“a long time ago,” said her daughter, “Old Dawson Church (i.e. before Teen receives award
Youth winner at the 13th annual 1938). She first joined as a teen-ager, Westminster H.S., was recently the week after week after week and when she is able.

with his  has been built in 1938. Her husband, just do it,” are what makes the community extraordinary, said community extraordinary, said Audrey Cimino, executive director of the Community Foundation. For Jordan, philanthropy is being involved with her school, her church and the county’s NAACP organization.

Among her many activities, she has helped to raise money for youth mission trips for Strawbridge UMC and is the president of the Stand Up Club at her high school, which puts on the annual Unity Day and culture festival at Westminster High and provides a safe environment for students who have been bullied.

John Wesley UMC turns 205
BALTIMORE - John Wesley UMC in Baltimore is coming to the culmination of celebrating 205 years in ministry. Throughout 2018, the members have participated in various community service projects and fellowship, as well as intentional worship, prayer and fasting. On Oct. 20, District Superintendent Wanda Duckett spoke at an anniversary banquet held at the New Psalmist Baptist Church Hall. The celebrations aren’t over yet: Bishop LaTrelle Easterling is scheduled to preach at the 11 a.m. worship service Nov. 25.

‘Boot Camp’ for Deaf ministries
PASADENA — “It’s important that churches be more accessible and empowering for Deaf, hard of hearing and Deafblind persons and their families,” said the Rev. Leo Yates Jr., to those gathered at Magogy UMC Church of the Deaf for “Deaf Ministry: Boot Camp” Oct. 13. The workshop included an introduction to sign language, empowering Deaf leadership and Deaf music ministry. Other topics of interest were implementing a hard of hearing ministry, a disability ministry, mission opportunities and best practices. The full day was indeed full of many resources and ideas for an inclusive ministry to the Deaf.

At the end of the day, participants prayed with each other and encouraged each other in their endeavors, both for new ministries and expanding already existing ministries to the Deaf and hard-of-hearing.

Shank enters Hall of Fame
Havre DE GRACE — Soon to grace a hallway of Havre de Grace H.S. will be four portraits of inductees to its Hall of Fame. One of those is Mitchell “Mitch” Shank, a member of Havre de Grace UMC. The Hall of Fame inductees are recognized for their extraordinary accomplishments and providing role models for current students, staff and community.

Shank was selected for giving teenagers their first job at his River City Ice Jam, his promotion of tourism as director of the HdeG Decoy Museum and working with the Lock House Museum and Decoy Museum. History and decoy making have been a huge part of Shank family life. He is active with the local Chamber of Commerce, as well as the church and the Elementary PTA.

Learning faith from a dog
HAGERSTOWN — From “no pets allowed” to a dog-based devotional may seem like a long leap, but for R. Eileen Reid, the wife of the Rev. Randy Reid, pastor of Emmanuel UMC, it’s a new life. Eileen Reid recently self-published a devotional book, “Just Another Dog Devotional: 201 Devotions Inspired by Our Pups.”

“My marriage had been pet-free for 28 years due to my allergies,” she wrote. Then one night a daughter dropped a chocolate lab puppy on her bed stating that her apartment didn’t allow pets and would you keep it until...

The puppy-sitting grew, soon another, then their son added a husky. “Life as we had known it changed drastically,” Reid said.

The experience has led her to believe that one seldom finds anyone or anything as faithful as a dog. “I’ve learned a lot,” she says, “They have taught me love, obedience and faithfulness.”

She’s sharing the lessons she’s learned through the devotional. “I believe we can become more like our Lord, Jesus Christ, by observing our loyal pets and best friends, the family dog.”

The book is available through Amazon and may be ordered on her blog, justanotherdogdevotion.com. Ten percent of sales will be donated to organizations that help animals and 10 percent to Emmanuel UMC. “It is my prayer that every book will not just be a sale but a soul drawn closer to God.”
A word from the bishop
Before It Is Too Late

Editor’s note: Bishop Easterling shared this ‘sacred poem’ on Facebook on Oct. 27, the day of the Pittsburgh synagogue shootings.

I do not know exactly what lies ahead; how far we will have to travel on the road of unrest. I cannot tell the number of bombs that will have to explode or the lives that will have to be lost before...

Before we understand that we cannot kill each other into the future we think we have imagined. We cannot rape each other enough to feel well.

Before it is too late we understand that the call is coming from inside the house. Before it is too late we comprehend that the Steinch

Sacred resistance is a stance, a way of being in the world, and an ongoing orientation to the world. As followers of Jesus, sacred resistance is at the heart of our being, not just our doing.

When we gather for the called General Conference in 2019, my deep prayer is that those like myself who are honored with the responsibility to speak and vote as delegates will come without defensive resistance toward other people, a resistance fueled by preconceived or hardened opinions.

Instead, I hope we will arrive committed to “sacred resistance” toward the destructive energies that seek to terminate our communion and to harm those most vulnerable among us. I pray we will arrive energized and fueled by love of God and love of all our neighbors. I firmly believe this is possible — because with God all things are possible! — and that this is the only way we’ll discern a creative way forward that is truly aligned with God’s vision. If we truly try to follow Jesus, we’ll understand that God’s creative, mending, saving love is extended to the whole world and is particularly focused on the vulnerable and those experiencing pain or injustice. Even a cursory review of the Gospel accounts of Jesus’s life reveals that he spent most of his energy in the margins, healing the sick, feeding the hungry, confronting injustice, restoring life and dignity to those for whom these gifts had been denied.

There are innumerable persons around the world who suffer the indignities of poverty, violence, injustice, and prejudice. Thanks be to God that our denomination is in solidarity with so many people across the spectrum of human affliction. Yet the UMC singles out LGBTQ persons — who often face stigma and rejection — and labels these human beings “incompatible with Christian teaching.”

Among us are persons of deep and thoughtful faith who are unable to reconcile their reading of scripture with the claim that LGBTQ people are just like them except for sexual orientation or gender identity. There are amazing, faithful, Jesus-following LGBTQ leaders and participants across our church at every level. Many of these persons have great compassion for those who struggle with the scriptures, because they have done the same! There are LGBTQ persons called by God to serve in ordained ministry. There are children in our pews soaking up what they see, hear, and feel, and some of them are LGBTQ.

How to love through resistance

Viewpoints

How to love through resistance

By Ginger Gaines-Cirelli*

The language of “resistance” has a long history. I’m not a political theorist or activist; I’m a pastor-theologian and a follower of Jesus. Thus, the language of “resistance for Christians evolves through prayer, conversation, and practice in a different way.

Sacred resistance


BWC WCA Board responds to bishop

How to love through resistance

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Our Annual Conference is blessed to have Bishop Easterling as our leader. She is a person of fierce integrity and a truthful voice of Jesus Christ. We pray constantly for our bishop, her family and for her leadership among us.

At this critical time in the life of our UMC, we continue to be confused by the mixed messages coming from our Conference and denominational leadership. However, we write today to address some of the critical issues affecting our Church, and to present to you our perspective of a grace-filled, hopeful future.

We are proud that our UMC recognizes women as equal partners in ministry and leadership. There are many places in Scripture where women’s leadership of Israel and the church are held up as positive and creative, mending, saving love is a blessed way forward that is truly aligned with God’s vision. If we truly try to follow Jesus, we’ll understand that God’s creative, mending, saving love is extended to the whole world and is particularly focused on the vulnerable and those experiencing pain or injustice. Even a cursory review of the Gospel accounts of Jesus’s life reveals that he spent most of his energy in the margins, healing the sick, feeding the hungry, confronting injustice, restoring life and dignity to those for whom these gifts had been denied.

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How to love through resistance

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How to love through resistance
Lovely Lane UMC brings art into sacred spaces

**BY MELISSA LAUBER**
UMConnection Staff

**EVER SINCE HUMANS** etched their story on caves more than 35,000 years ago, art and sacred space have been intertwined in human history. From its creation in 1884, Lovely Lane UMC in Baltimore has recognized this relationship. Recently, they moved to intentionally strengthen the link between art and sacred space by opening their building to the creation and exhibition of an installation by Melissa Webb.

Both art and religion are transcendent. “They open us up to something larger than ourselves,” said the Rev. Debbie Scott, even the building the people of Lovely Lane worship in is an acknowledged treasure of architectural art. A descendant of an architect Stanford White, Lovely Lane is patterned after churches in Ravenna, Italy. The bell tower, which has captured Scott’s imagination, echoes the campanile of the 12th century church of Santa Maria at the Abby of Pomposa near Ravenna. The stained-glass windows are by Tiffany. The church today needs to more than people ministering. “Our legacy should be proclaiming Jesus and living out our faith in the world,” she said.

**Shrine looks at how history illuminates today**

**BY MELISSA LAUBER**
UMConnection Staff

**THE CALLED SESSION** of General Conference in February is raising many questions about the future of The United Methodist Church. Members of the Strawbridge Shrine Association are finding answers from history, and the year 1712, when Francis Asbury first confronted Robert Strawbridge, and in the end, the group was asked to discern how they, acting as Asbury, would move forward. In the discussion that followed, history came to life in a spirited way.

The conference lay leader, explored how the legacy of this renegade of faith might shape the church today. Tzan unveiled a case study on Robert Strawbridge, which will be part of new pilgrimage initiative being created by the BWC’s Archives and History committee. The case study was written through the eyes and experience of Francis Asbury, who became Methodist’s first bishop. In it, Asbury knows that an unordained lay person is celebrating Communion and performing baptism, contrary to Christian practice, and it might split the church.

As Tzan continued to speak, the case study unpacked the two approaches to church, obedience and discipleship held by Asbury and Strawbridge, and in the end, the group was asked to discern how they, acting as Asbury, would move forward. In the discussion that followed, history came to life in a spirited way.

The church today needs to more boldly claim that spirit, said Robert Strawbridge, who pointed out that his ancestor was ministering in a time of political tension and divisiveness and the people of the colonies debated about rising up against the government.

“He knew the world was his parish, even when the bishop said, ‘go back and stay in your place.’” John Strawbridge said. “He lit a fire that warms us today.”

Strawbridge left no sermons, letters or other written words. But his actions are a witness, John Strawbridge said. “We need to show a divided world that we're not as different as we fear. We all have a holy spark within us."

Martin echoed this call for the laity to claim their passion for ministry. “Our legacy should be

**An art installation by Melissa Webb,”Proficiencies for Living in Ruin,” adorns part of Lovely Lane UMC in Baltimore.**

Marian Gottle, the Tour Guide Coordinator at Strawbridge Shrine, plays the piano during the Shrine’s annual meeting.