With love and honor, we remember Linda Worthington

By Melissa Lauber
UMConnection Staff

LINDA WORTHINGTON, who wrote more than 800 obituaries and several thousand news items for the Baltimore-Washington Conference during her career as a writer and editor, knew where berries could be gathered by the side of the road between Washington and Luray, Virginia; lived and worked in mission in Vietnam, Thailand, and Senegal; traveled to 35 countries; and belonged to a duck-pin bowling league, died Oct. 20.

That’s the thing about obituaries. There’s always a comma toward the end of the sentence in that first paragraph, and then the word “died.” For some unfathomable reason, the UMConnection never imagined running Linda’s obit. I still imagine seeing her face when I walk down the hallway.

In the past few years, one of Linda’s primary jobs with us was writing the obituaries and memorials for the Journal. Linda tended to the souls of the Baltimore-Washington Conference clergy and their spouses. She listened to people’s tears, collected their stories, and honored all the joy, pain and enthusiasm of their living by preserving their memories. And she did this, like she did everything, with touches of humility, grace and earnest devotion.

Since her death, so many people have lifted up what a conference “bedrock” and “institution” she was. Because, she was.

She began working in the BWC in 1996. She loved language. She yielded her red proof-reading pen with little mercy and some aplomb. She was a reader, a journal-writer and, on her commute in her VW bug, she was known to do the Word Scramble in the Washington Post.

Her heart beat for justice — justice for all people. She had strong convictions. In one of the cubicles she once worked in, she hung up pictures and cards featuring doves — for peace, and for the hope that kindness and mercy and shalom would prevail. She understood the point of righteous anger. She was a woman who took stands and a visionary who was willing, every once in a while, to break a lance for an ideal.

Every Christmas, she gave us jams and salsa she had canned. The little jars held so much love. With love and honor, we remember Linda Worthington.

By Erik Alsgaard
UMConnection Staff

If you look at the masthead on page 2 (that’s the box that lists who’s who, our mailing address, etc.), you’ll see a name printed there for the last time. “Linda Worthington – Communications Associate” is what it reads.

Linda died Oct. 20, and I can’t believe I’m writing that.

Linda worked — either as a paid staffer or as a volunteer — for this publication for 21+ years. She served as a copy editor, proofreader, content provider, obituary writer, and constant critic of what I just did in this sentence. Namely, the serial (or Oxford) comma. When we were editing this publication, I would put it in the serial comma; Linda would take it out. I would put it back in; Linda would take it out again. To avoid her wrath, I’d leave it out… most of the time.

If you go back through previous issues — or even look at this one closely — if you notice the usage of the serial comma, you’ll now know who to blame.

When God created Linda, God took a look at the mold and not only threw it away, but stomped on it, mangled it and mutilated it only to throw it away, but stomped on it, mangled it and mutilated it before it was tossed. To say that Linda was a “tough ol’ bird” is meant as a compliment. Nothing seemed to slow her down until the very end. She was an inveterate advocate of social justice, never letting go of her convictions.

By Melissa Lauber
UMConnection Staff

Bishop holds listening tours

More than 1,000 people gathered in district meetings this fall to be in conversation with Bishop LaTrelle Easterling about the state of the church and the future focus of the Baltimore-Washington Conference.

Bishop Easterling outlined six foci that will drive the efforts and resources of the Conference as it seeks to live out its vision that “Transformed Lives Transform Lives.”

The foci include:
1. Deepening Discipleship;
2. Strengthening Next-Level Leaders;
3. Creating New Faith Expressions;
4. Generating Generosity;
5. Getting and Staying Healthy; and
6. Engaging Young People in Ministry.

The first priority, the bishop said, is deepening discipleship. “How did you die today?” she asked, quoting theologian Cornel West. “What thoughts or behavior did you lay aside? How have you been broken open? What have we been taught that we need to disabuse ourselves of? How did we let go of some lesser...
**GROW UP**

**I want to be a firetruck.**

That was the answer that my niece MacKenzie would give whenever she was asked what she wanted to be when she grew up. We all thought it was cute and just assumed that in her three-year-old mind, she equated being a firetruck and a firefighter as the same thing.

That was not the case. She actually wanted to be a firetruck. I know this because one day I asked her why she wanted to be a firetruck. Her answer was amazing.

"Firetrucks are bright, and red, and loud, and whenever they come by, everyone has to get out of the way. I want to be a firetruck."

And that was that. She had made her choice and there was no turning back.

"Come on," they say to us, "you can do it." Run the race, keep the faith...grow up.

No matter how grown you are, there is still time to grow into who God wants you to be.

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**Who Are We?**

*By Mandy Sayers*

**Lead Pastor, Glen Mar UMC, Ellicott City**

I am now the proud parent of a college student and a junior in high school. In my mind, they are still in the second grade, but physically they have matured. They are not “grown up” fully but they have certainly grown.

When Paul calls us to “Grow up” into Christ, he’s not talking about physical growth. He’s talking about spiritual maturity, which is much harder to measure than a growth chart on a pediatrician’s wall.

You may not know how to “measure” it, but you know spiritual maturity when you see it. That person who prays for you when they say they’re going to; the person who listens deeply and who God is present in your struggle.

And when churches go through spiritual growth spurts, it shows too: the times that the church gets over squabbles to come together for their community; the time when the church puts “the mission” ahead of their community; the time when the church gets their priorities, and their personal, in line with the mission; the time when the church gets their spiritual maturity. They remind us that it is entirely possible and even expected that we would “grow up” in our faith. They remind us that if they can do it, we can do it too. They remind us that whatever schisms or perils the church faces in our day, it has faced worse before, and endured.

That great cloud of witnesses cheers us on, and, I think, holds us accountable too.

"Come on," they say to us, “you can do it.” Run the race, keep the faith...grow up.

---

**by Daryl Williams**

**Pastor, St. Paul UMC, Oxon Hill**

"I want to be a firetruck."

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That was not the case. She actually wanted to be a firetruck. I know this because one day I asked her why she wanted to be a firetruck. Her answer was amazing.

She said, "Firetrucks are bright, and red, and loud, and whenever they come by, everyone has to get out of the way. I want to be a firetruck."

And that was that. She had decided that she wanted to be a firetruck.

Sure, she figured that she couldn’t be a firetruck when she grew up, but now at the age of 16, MacKenzie is living a firetruck-life. She has grown into being an astounding young lady who is bright, makes a lot of noise in everything that she does, and has become a leader who her peers get out of the way of and follow when she is coming because of what she brings to the table every day. I guess she really did grow up to be a firetruck.

Friends, all of us are in the continual process of growing up. Growing up is not the profession that you choose; rather it is growing into the person that God has intended for you to be.

Every day we should be growing up in faith, taking the risks, and believing God for the things that God is calling us to. We should be growing up in joy, finding and celebrating the positive in life day by day.

Finally, we should be growing up in love. Take the time to wrap your arms around and serve people near and far so that they feel and see the love of God.

No matter how grown you are, there is still time to grow up into who God wants you to be.
Strawbridge Shrine: an inspiration for lay revival

By Melissa Lauber
UMConnection Staff

The Strawbridge Shrine in New Windsor, Md., is a Methodist treasure, a testament that faith can unfold over conversations by the kitchen sink and go on to shape an entire continent. The Shrine tells the story of one Methodist maverick, and his wife, who took authority, performed the denomination’s first baptism in America and created bands of people whose hearts beat with the professional class of people who loved her.

The Shrine exists for today’s children to illuminate their heritage, for spiritual seekers looking to discover how to boldly step out into the life of God’s work in the making a difference section of this newspaper, which included news briefs from area churches. Lauder understood what really made the laity, said she, like other historians, senses the fact that Duckpin bowling was way better than Tenpin bowling.

To say that Linda was one-of-a-kind is an over-simplification. Linda loved her family, her work, her church, and her life, usually in that order. She traveled extensively with family and friends, and always documented the trips — and the latest family news — in her annual newsletter, “The Washington Wanderer.”

That homemade newsletter always came out around New Year’s, but not January 1. That’s because it came around the Vietnamese New Year, which as we all came to learn, is celebrated on the first day of the first month in the Lunar Calendar. I will forever remember the first time Linda drove her new VW Bug to work. Silver/grey in color, it was a sight to behold with Linda sitting in the driver’s seat, barely able to see over the dashboard, with a vase of plastic flowers nestled in the center console. I learned to look for that car in the parking lot, often wondering how she ever made it through the ice and snow on those days when most sane people would have stayed home.

But that was Linda. Dedication to the task knew practically no limits. She would finish editing a project in her annual newsletter, which included news briefs from area churches. She never failed to give of herself to her family, her friends, or her co-workers. I will always treasure the jars of homemade mint jelly she made especially for me to enjoy at Rest in peace, thou good and faithful servant. You were an inspiration, a pain-in-the-neck, and a joy to behold. And if I know, you’re up there in heaven, editing the Holy Beacon (or whatever Heaven’s newspaper is called), and removing serial commas left, right, and center?

Or is that “left, right and center?”

You will be missed.

Tribute: One-of-a-kind editor, woman of faith

Lauber from page 1

One of her loves was Chevy Bean; and three great grandchildren. They were her pride and joy.

But she also collected people — people who lived while they studied in the area, people she worked with in the World Hunger Education Service and the International Voluntary Service Alumni Association and others she encountered. Even though she never really had time to talk about her children: Josey, Judy, who married to John Ogram; Laurel, who is married to Greg Maxwell; and Melissa, who is married to Chris Kallal, these three and three grandchildren. They were her pride and joy.

Lauber was lauded with the 2019 Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church UMConnection Award who can do extraordinary things though I’ve never met them, I have an oak tree, or access to an oak tree? You don’t need anyone to give you a hand to lift the Word of God. Do you have an oak tree, or access to an oak tree? You don’t need anyone to give you a hand to lift the Word of God. You have the Word of God. Do you have any help? If you don’t have any help, you can sit down, or sit down in the place to visit. It’s a place to delve into the life of God’s work in the world, said the Rev. Doug Tzan, the Strawbridge Shrine’s co-president. “Robbie and Elizabeth Strawbridge were ordinary and unassuming people, but they had the heart of a king. Their story reveals the truth of the Gospel. … Thanks be to God who can do extraordinary things through ordinary people.”

At the annual meeting of the Strawbridge Shrine Association at Stone Chapel Oct. 26, members reviewed their state of the Shrine, buildings on the shrine’s 33-acre site, which Piel referred to as “the best kept secret in the Baltimore-Washington Conference.”

They heard reports about mold remediation efforts; a new roof put on the John Evan’s House with funds from the Conference Trustees; the work with tour groups by the shrine’s curator, Helen Kemp; the 1,900 visitors to the shrine’s website; and the Christmas Advent worship service Dec. 8 at the Logan Meeting House. Bishop LaTrelle Easterling also addressed the members about the witness of Robert and Elizabeth Strawbridge and the ministry of the laity, who serve as the church’s backbones, the bishop said. She encouraged the laity to change this.

“Do you need a certificate? You don’t need a degree to tell you that you can tell the Gospel story. If you have the word of God like fire shut up in your bones, there will be a reawakening for the people called Methodist.”

The bishop said she resonates with those who suggest that the typical laity-clergy system practiced among most churches is detrimental to believers. In this system, she said, too often the professional class of people preach and preach while the majority of believers sit and listen. In this new system, the bishop proclaimed, “active participation, active going and running, and doing of the work of God and uplifting the ordained clergy’s message might be, as long as there is active ministry, active ministering and preaching Christ, we will lack growth.”

Linda died. Her obituary will continue to out around New Year’s… but not January 1. That’s because it came around New Year’s, which as we all came to learn, is celebrated on the first day of the first month in the Lunar Calendar. I will forever remember the first time Linda drove her new VW Bug to work. Silver/grey in color, it was a sight to behold with Linda sitting in the driver’s seat, barely able to see over the dashboard, with a vase of plastic flowers nestled in the center console. I learned to look for that car in the parking lot, often wondering how she ever made it through the ice and snow on those days when most sane people would have stayed home.

But that was Linda. Dedication to the task knew practically no limits. She would finish editing a project and then come back and ask for more. She worked day and night during several Annual Conference Sessions, never missing a beat or an ill-placed semicolon or comma. It’s just revered as history, we’ve been told. But their story reveals the truth of the Gospel. … Thanks be to God who can do extraordinary things through ordinary people.”

At the early Methodist band meetings, like the one held recently at the Strawbridge Shrine, Bishop Easterling said, Methodist would weekly ask one another these five questions:

What sins have you committed? What temptations have you met with? Have you been delivered? Do you have any questions? Do you have any secrets?
Falston UMC redefines church as it serves veterans

By Melissa Lauber
UMConnection Staff

At Falston UMC, the lines that separate the inside and outside of church often become blurred, said the Rev. Karin Walker. The most recent instance of this surrounds the congregation’s “1111 Project” to create blankets for veterans.

On Oct. 18, members of the church gathered at the grand re-opening of Joanne’s Fabric in Bel Air. “The store wanted to partner with schools and community groups, who wanted to partner with the church, who wanted to partner with Upper Chesapeake Hospital Center — all of whom sought to honor veterans for their service. It was all mission and ministry — just spread out throughout Harford County.

The 1111 Project, inspired by Veterans Day on Nov. 11, is the brainchild of Lynne Heller, who wanted to make 1,111 blankets to give to veterans. The blankets, made of fleece, come in a wide variety of red-white-and-blue patterns and have tied fringe edges.

The church cuts and joins the blanket materials, making kits they send out to community groups to assemble.

Since March, close to 500 blankets have been distributed. She won’t reach her original goal, but Heller is certain that it’s not the numbers that matter. Those that make the blankets and those who tie them are moved by the process, she said. “We’ve gotten past the numbers.”

Heller expects the project will extend beyond Veterans Day. An average of about 30 blankets are handed out each week, Walker said. For those in the hospital, they’re distributed in a special ceremony-like setting in which Pastor Allen Seigel, the chaplain at Upper Chesapeake Medical Center, dresses in his military uniform, says a prayer, and presents the blanket, holding it out, offering a salute and words of gratitude.

“When we provide veterans with these beautiful fleece blankets from the Falston UMC Project 1111 Initiative, a look of joy and wonder radiates across their faces,” Seigel said.

“These blankets warm the body and warm the hearts of our veterans.”

So far, blankets have been made by several area churches, VFW and Lions clubs, Parent-Teacher Associations, the YMCA, Scout troops, school honor societies, the Daughters of the American Revolution, and many individuals. Making the blankets is easy, Heller explained. It essentially involves tying together fringe cut out from the edges.

At Joanne’s, members of the church talked with shoppers passing by and a few stopped to tie some knots. “I just wanted to make a difference in the life of a vet,” to thank them for their sacrifice and service,” one woman said.

Even the church’s new Pickle Ball group has made a few blankets. The monthly Pickle Ball games — held at the church — are another form of community engagement.

Walker is becoming used to this kind of untraditional engagement. Recently, when she was picking up a prescription from a local pharmacy, the clerk handed her a pen that said Falston UMC on the side. The pharmacist had picked a few up at a flu shot clinic at the church.

Walker just smiled and marveled at the church and community continue to engage one another in small and significant ways.

“It’s a good thing,” she said, “when you can’t always tell where the church starts and ends.”

To learn more about or participate in the 1111 Project, visit www.falstonumc.org/1111-project.
A team of 24 people from the BWC traveled to the U.S. border with Mexico Oct. 11-14 to explore questions around immigration and the answers faith and Scripture, and faithfulness in the work of God that I had often think of, to worship together, to gather and offer love. With their yes, God opened up possibilities.

The Rev. Christopher J. Dembeck of Halethorpe-Relay UMC reflects on the “issues” that arose around immigration and the church’s response.

There were many powerful experiences of God that I had during our BWC immersion trip to the U.S. southern border, but I believe it all boiled down to the core realization that we so often think of issues like immigration at our southern border, and others that divide us as just that: issues. The reality is that this “issue” concerns human beings. There are names, faces, and lives behind it. For those of us who call ourselves Christian, we must look past our secondary identities of nationality, political party, or anything else that would divide us and remember that it is actually Christ who is our King and that these who are trying to enter our country are our brothers and sisters.

As Christ who dictates who each of us is, and it is through his cross that we are saved, being set free to love one another as he loved us. And so for those of us who take on the title of Christian, we must look past such divisive issues like immigration and see the faces of the people and recognize that they are like you and me: created in the image of God.

The Rev. Jennifer Karsner of Ashby Arnold UMC reflects on her experiences during a bi-national Communion service at the border.

Communion never felt so broken, so fractured and divided. After a weekend filled with stories of refugees and migrants, the Baltimore-Washington Conference immersion group gathered with the local community to worship together, brothers and sisters in Christ. We sang and prayed, read Scripture, and were reminded of God’s faithfulness in every season of life, all with a wall running down the middle of the worshipping community. Friendship Park, situated half in San Diego, Calif., and half in Tijuana, Mexico, is supposed to be a place for families to gather and international friendships to be formed. Now a large wall of metal beams runs along the international border in the middle of the park, ending a few yards into the Pacific Ocean. The space between the beams offers glimpses of our neighbors and memories of when you could see and touch loved ones on the other side. That was before the United States installed thick metal mesh over the wall, leaving spaces just barely large enough to stick your pinkie through. One side was painted with beautiful, vibrantly-colored murals. Laughing children played among food vendors and Control Officers on horseback and the same prayers being offered in English. For this body of Christ rent asunder by walls and policies, hardened hearts and paralyzing fears, the bread and cup were lifted up, “The body of Christ broken for you. The blood of the new covenant poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. ‘Estes el cuerpo de Cristo y esta es su sangre. La Sangra es de la alianza nuev y eterna de Cristo.’” We rotated through the line, receiving little bread and juice, reminders of our brokenness and Christ’s promise to make us whole. We humans are good at dividing, deciding who is in and who is out. Where you were born, how you got here, the color of your skin, and who you love become the basis for whether or not you have a seat at the table, whether or not you are deemed good enough. As we pray to be one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to the world, our subversive humble God is setting another place at the table, and another, and another. All the while whispering, “You are my beloved.”

The Rev. Kara Scroggins of Glenmont UMC shares the witness of Guillermo who served as a tour guide for the BWC delegation in Tijuana.

He runs a nonprofit out of a building that looks abandoned. The room he rents is a work in progress: the furniture is a mosaic of castoffs from other companies and organizations; yellow paint peels from the walls; two massive desks hold diapirs, tiny socks, and school supplies. In the middle of the room, though, on top of some old school lockers, is a potted plant, lush and green. Guillermo is the kind of person who can look at a room like this – an abandoned building, an abandoned chair, an abandoned population – and see possibility. He is the kind of person who will care tenderly for a potted plant in the middle of the rubble, the broken leaf, this pulled cup, this story of a God who stopped at nothing to bring lost children home. Guillermo will be here, counseling one traumatized man at a time, pulling one trafficked girl out of her hell at a time, fighting for one hungry child at a time, for as long as it takes. He will welcome others to join his efforts, but I look at him and I know this: that even if no one comes to volunteer, or if a few come and fall away after a short time, he will keep going. That plant in the middle of an abandoned building in Tijuana will still be watered. The lighthouse will be fully lit. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not, does not, shall not, overcome it.

Along the way, they watched as families who had been torn apart met, fingertip-to-fingertip, through small holes in the Border Wall. They shared time with 200 immigrants living in a tent city inside a church in a Tijuana canyon.

We sang and were reminded with stories of refugees. The diversity of the group was noteworthy. About half were youth or young adults, about half were people of color. Many were lay people, several spoke Spanish, and some were immigrants themselves, offering unique insights into words like freedom and justice.

The Rev. Kara Scroggins of Glenmont UMC shares the witness of Guillermo who served as a tour guide for the BWC delegation in Tijuana.

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The Rev. Jennifer Karsner of Ashby Arnold UMC reflects on the “issues” that arose around immigration and the church’s response.

There were many powerful experiences of God that I had during our BWC immersion trip to the U.S. southern border, but I believe it all boiled down to the core realization that we so often think of issues like immigration at our southern border, and others that divide us as just that: issues. The reality is that this “issue” concerns human beings. There are names, faces, and lives behind it. For those of us who call ourselves Christian, we must look past our secondary identities of nationality, political party, or anything else that would divide us and remember that it is actually Christ who is our King and that these who are trying to enter our country are our brothers and sisters.

As Christ who dictates who each of us is, and it is through his cross that we are saved, being set free to love one another as he loved us. And so for those of us who take on the title of Christian, we must look past such divisive issues like immigration and see the faces of the people and recognize that they are like you and me: created in the image of God.

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Bishop outlines six priorities for the conference

From page 1 understanding?”

She encouraged every member of the Baltimore-Washington Conference to intentionally grow deeper in their faith.

One resource to assist with this, she said, is the new online Bible Study “Who Are We: A Journey from Head to Heart.” This 18-week study, divided into three, six-week parts, explores who are we as a people of God, as United Methodists, and the people of the Baltimore-Washington Conference.

(Learn more at www.bwcumc.org/resources/who-are-we.)

Despite struggles in the denomination, God is still calling United Methodists to mission and ministry, Easterling said. Strengthening next-level leaders and ensuring that “we learn well today to lead better tomorrow,” is important.

To resource people for this goal, the Connect Leadership Summit, an inaugural event that replaces the former Leadership Days, will be held March 7 in the Baltimore-Washington Conference. To resource people for this goal, the Connect Leadership Summit, an inaugural event that replaces the former Leadership Days, will be held March 7 in the Baltimore-Washington Conference.

(See plans below for a comprehensive plan that will be launched in 2020.)

Growth in discipleship is also expected to come in the BWC’s new ministry focus: New Faith Expressions. The purpose of these, explained the Rev. Bill Brown, director of New Faith Expressions, is “to bring the church Jesus loves closer to the people Jesus loves.”

Brown asked those present to think about their churches and consider two questions: “Who are you not reaching because the only thing you offer is church as you know it?” And, “what are you willing to let go of in order to follow Jesus?”

New Faith Expressions, he said, will “equip and encourage change so change-makers can gather new people in new places.”

Generating Generosity, strengthening revenue streams and finding creative sources and partnerships for ministry is also a conference focus. The bishop encouraged all leaders to be tithing. “We’re living beneath the dignity of leading God’s people if we’re not tithing,” she said.

Strengthening the finances of the conference will enable new ministries, she said, such as a Pastor’s Aid Fund, which can provide money for clergy in need.

“The pain and weight and burden some of our clergy are carrying in this season in United Methodism is affecting them to the point that they’re ending up in the hospital. We want to be able to assist them, that’s how we love each other. This is how we’re in community with each other,” the bishop said. “The healthier we are in mind, body and spirit, the more we’re able to focus on mission and ministry. The more present we are, the better we can serve people. Additional revenue can undercut things like that. We want it to be a deep well.”

On a related note, the bishop warned against “weaponizing stewardship” because of theological or polity differences with the denomination.

“We rob God when we withhold our tithes and offerings,” the bishop said. “Cessing to give points to a serious issue in the relationship between you and God. I pray that we will not withhold giving based on what we think is right or wrong. I pray that we are faithful stewards with all that God has given us.”

Getting and staying healthy is also a missional priority for the conference. Denominational officials have shared that some of the highest rates of depression among clergy are in the Baltimore-Washington Conference.

“We need to take better care of ourselves,” the bishop said. Bishop Easterling also stressed the need to focus intentionally on people under the age of 35.

“The faith that some of our youth and young adults already have is unbelievable,” she said. The conference is working on a comprehensive plan that will be launched in 2020.”

It may take until 2024, the bishop admitted, but she is committed to having 100 percent vital, engaged churches in the conference.

For some churches that might mean creating a legacy and closing; for others, it may mean a vital merger.

“In some instances, we may need to prune to grow,” the bishop said. “Discipleship is an end in itself.”

Several people present at the gatherings raised questions about the denomination’s future as it figures out how to address issues of homosexuality.

Bishop Easterling cautioned people to remain faithful.

“We don’t need bad attitudes infecting us. We don’t need poor practices, nor divisions,” she said. “I don’t want us to keep rehearsing where we don’t agree. We can do mission and ministry across our division.”

For those looking for a way to move forward in the face of worries related to General Conference 2020, the bishop advised:

• Seek out information and be informed, remembering always that it is God who is in control, not us.
• Understand that nothing moves quickly within the institution of the United Methodist Church;
• Have conversation, pray, be open to the movement of the Holy Spirit;
• Stay active in mission and ministry; and
• While we’re doing these, and other things, continue to be the people of God called us to be.

At the district sessions, the bishop fielded more than 18 hours of questions that ranged from the scope of training for lay servants and certified lay ministers, to questions about Camp Joy, the important role deacons play in the church, the superintendents’ role as missional strategists on their districts, best practices for community engagement, gentrification, the hermeneutics of suspicion, the necessity of prayer, the Trust Clause, and keeping Sabbath.

Bishop Easterling will conclude her visits on the districts on Nov. 19 in Reisterstown and Dec. 10 in Catonsville.
Mt. Zion UMC is sustained by the prayers of the broken

**By Craig McLaughlin**

Mt. Zion UMC in Bel Air is bursting at the seams with mission. Its ministry is empowered, in part, by prayer. Its pastor, the Rev. Craig McLaughlin shares vignettes from the church’s Gospel-driven story.

I n 2000 Mt. Zion UMC established an orphan care ministry called Children of Zion Village in the southern African nation of Namibia. The money was raised to build the buildings, hire the staff, feed the children. Others have joined the effort through the years, and many children’s lives have been saved and immeasurably blessed as a result.

I first traveled to the orphanage during its second year of operation. While I was there, I prayed with the boys each night when they went to bed. They prayed in their tribal languages, so I couldn’t understand what they were saying. Among the midst of their prayers I heard them pray for “Mt. Zion Church” and “Uncle Pastor Craig” and “Auntie Sunny.” I was blown away.

These children who had nothing in this world, but who were very rich in faith, were praying for me.

In 2001, Mt. Zion gave $30,000 to a very poor Methodist congregation in Cuba so that they could repair their sanctuary which was in very bad shape. Four years later, I was blessed to be able to go with a small team on a short-term mission trip to Cuba. While we were there, we went to the village where the church we helped is located.

The members of the church came running out to the van when we pulled up. The pastor took us to his parsonage, which was a thatched hut with dirt floors. I was stunned to learn from the pastor that the members of the congregation, in gratitude for Mt. Zion’s gift, had been praying and fasting one a day for four years for Mt. Zion UMC.

Five years ago, I received a phone call from a young woman in a drug rehab. She was close to finishing the 28-day program, and wanted to go a halfway house but she didn’t have any money to pay the intake fee. I told her that we would cover the cost. She was so happy she cried. She has done very well, and tells me to this day that she thanks God every single morning for Mt. Zion UMC.

Three weeks ago, the leader of our Third Saturday ministry (which does home repairs, yard work, etc., for elderly poor residents of Harford County) received back seat fall from his car. While praying to try to calm her down in and out of the house. She was asking if a team could come and help her with another project. The team that was sent was surprised that she remembered his name. She replied that of course she knew his name; she had been praying every night for our church every single day for the past four years.

Mt. Zion has become a home for a lot of broken people.

It is the poor who are rich in faith (see James 2:5). That’s who I wanted to reach out to, and for Mt. Zion. Those of us who have the things of this world have a harder time getting into the Kingdom than a camel does getting through the eye of a needle (see Matthew 19:24).

If we will give to the poor, they will absolutely need, a livable world.

Creation care advocacy and action needed now

**By Mike Koob**

We are facing a climate crisis. The way we humans have lived since the beginning of the industrial revolution has resulted in a negative impact on the natural world. We are beginning to experience the first stings of climate change and are on a trajectory to see the situation getting much worse.

Here in the mid-Atlantic region, we are aware of rain events, flooding Ellicott City; sea level rise and king tides in Annapolis; expansion of the warm season which increases the range of insects bearing illnesses; water quality under stress; raising asthma rates; and exposure to carcinogens. The US military understands that climate change is a threat multiplier to its mission and a climate change multiplier to its mission.

The United Methodist Women’s “Climate Justice” book and resources on our conference website (www.bwcumc.org/ministries/advocacy-action/creation-care), and on our Facebook page. Use the United Methodist Women’s “Climate Justice” book and resources on our conference website (www.bwcumc.org/ministries/advocacy-action/creation-care), and on our Facebook page.

God created a beautiful world for human kind and all God’s creatures to inhabit. Unfortunately, we have not been good stewards or good caretakers of this world. Creation is in crisis.

We have not fully understood how to be good stewards. But there are things we know that are not just about becoming more well known every day.

First, we must stop putting pollution into the air. The burning of fossil fuels contributes to ever-increasing levels of greenhouse gases that are affecting the atmosphere and oceans.

We have to rapidly transition to renewable energy. The transition has to be undertaken with the greatest urgency and at a scale that will prevent us from wrecking the planet further.

Making anything to wind, water, and solar power, we need to simultaneously work on many other things including reforestation, regenerative agriculture, zero waste, clean production, plant rich diets, and creating a better system of living—“Project Drawdown,” the most comprehensive plan ever proposed to reverse global warming, is a good resource.

United Methodists are called to advocacy and action for the change in our communities that will ensure the fullness of life for all of God’s creatures. Our Creation Care team is about sounding the call and offering ways for people in our churches, districts, and our conference to participate in protecting what is so necessary for all of humanity, and very beautiful about God’s Very Good Creation. We have tremendous denominational resources. We have great local interfaith partners in Interfaith Power and Light and Interfaith Partners for the Climate mitigate, and we can all do movement to protect creation.

If we don't get this right it will make it impossible to accomplish everything else our Society calls us to: feed the hungry; clothe the naked; welcome the stranger; care for the ill; and visit the prisoner. Climate and environmental injustice affect the most vulnerable first. The NAACP recognizes this and states, “Environmental injustice, including the proliferation of climate change, has a disproportionate impact on communities of color and low income communities in the United States and around the world. The NAACP Environmental and Climate Justice Program was created to support community leadership in addressing this human and civil rights issue.”

I experience cognitive dissonance whenever I am with, or think about, children and youth. I spent many years teaching young people leading in the classroom and at Camp Manidokan. I am a parent and have grandchildren. We worry over all the stops bringing our children up and yet we are not protecting what we will absolutely need, a livable world.

Find BWCUCC Creation Care on the conference website (www.bwcumc.org/ministries/advocacy-action/creation-care), and on our Facebook page. Use the United Methodist Women’s “Climate Justice” book and resources on our conference website (www.bwcumc.org/ministries/advocacy-action/creation-care), and on our Facebook page. The young man who has been working with me for a few months now he has come in and talks non-stop for an hour. He sweats about a thousand things. He is a real activist and he asks me if he can tell me a poem he wrote. I said, “For sure.”

He starts the poem and the first few lines are, “I sit down, and he stops, and says, “Is it okay if I say that word?” I said, “Yep.” He finishes the poem. He gets up. He prays for my children. I pray for him. He leaves.

What an amazing privilege to serve as a pastor, especially when Jesus leads you to the poor and broken. James 2 says, “has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?”

Let it be so.

*Jamison H.M. Koob is a UM Global Ministries Earthkeeper and chair of the BWC Creation Care team.*
reCall explores narratives of power, poverty, privilege

By Erik Alsgaard
UMConnection Staff

The church, said the Rev. David Anderson Hooker, is in a unique position to address the issues of privilege, power and poverty. That was the message Oct. 18 and 19 in Baltimore as he spoke at the reCall Summit 3.0.

Hooker, who once served as Assistant Attorney General in Georgia, brought razor-sharp insights over two days and four sessions at the summit, attended by about 50 people at St. Mary’s Seminary.

The reCall Summit, now in its third year, is a response to the Call to Action for Racial Justice from the 2016 Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference, according to the Rev. Stacey Cole-Wilson. Lead organizer of the event, Cole-Wilson serves the BWC as Executive Minister of Justice and Service.

“I hope participants come away with a deeper commitment to follow Jesus Christ,” Cole-Wilson said, “and to engage in conversations with people across various lines of difference, real and perceived.”

A major goal of the summit, she said, was for people to come away with tools, resources and strategies for continuing the work of racial justice “in deeper and broader ways.”

Hooker provided ample resources and tools, sharphemis years of serving as a mediator, community builder, scholar and advocate. He began by looking at trauma as it relates to poverty, and vice versa.

“Trauma isn’t just one event or circumstance,” Hooker said. “It occurs when your capacity to respond is overwhelmed. Not all responses to trauma are negative.”

After looking at six types of poverty, Hooker examined in detail the themes of absolute poverty, relative poverty, and social exclusion.

“There are only a handful of organizations, the church being one, equipped to have the capacity to deal with trauma and poverty” at every level, from individual to corporate, he said.

But the cost of changing the face of trauma and poverty, Hooker said, is expensive, not in terms of dollars (although that is needed), but in what needs to change. He listed institutional structures, theology, personal privilege, power, and prestige as examples.

On Saturday morning, Hooker spoke about power and narrative. Using John 5:1-8 and the story of the man who had waited 38 years by the pool of Bethesda, Hooker examined some of the narratives emerging from this passage. He then asked the question, “What impedes you from being whole? What impedes our society from being whole?”

The difference between narrative and story, Hooker said, is simple. “Stories are a particular series of events. The narrative is what gives the story form.”

The words “would/could/should” are elements of a narrative, he added. Changing a narrative is an invitation to make new meanings out of it.

“The idea is not to build a shared vision of the future,” he said. “Our idea is to build a vision of a shared future. There’s a huge difference.”

Later, Hooker unpacked the “meta-narrative” of the hero’s journey. This narrative is seen in Star Wars, the Black Panther, Hunger Games, and many others, Hooker said. It is also seen in the life of Jesus.

“Some otherwise hapless individual is set out on a major task – some transformational assignment,” he said, explaining the hero’s journey. “They either find some compatriots or some wisdom text along the way, add a few new skills, have three or four challenges – falling at the first one or two – and then they succeed and transform themselves and their world.”

Narratives such as this are taught, Hooker said, through songs, movies, games, toys, ancient texts, and social norms, just to name a few. “What Scriptural narrative would we offer to those for framing the conversation between black political folks and white political folk,” Hooker asked. “ list of resources we recognized the inequitable distribution of power in our narratives and then work to change the tale.”

As part of the continuing movement of racial justice, Cole-Wilson is looking for people interested in receiving community organizing training, whether they attended reCall or not.

“Those who raise a hand, we will begin working with them,” she said, “to strategically work in their districts to listen and learn the needs of the people. My hope is that, for example, Cumberland-Hagerstown will begin organizing and then move and work with the Frederick District, and then they will move to Baltimore Suburban and on to Baltimore Metropolitan.

Then, we’ll have four districts working together.”

By September 2020, Cole-Wilson said, the goal is to have every district mobilized to address needs.

“It’s so important for us to hear from persons contextually,” Cole-Wilson said, “and have people tell us what they need instead of us trying to discern what other people need.”

If you’re interested in community organizing training, contact the Rev. Stacey Cole-Wilson at scolewilson@ bwcumc.org.

Lovely Lane UMC receives large grant for restoration

By Melissa Lauber
UMConnection Staff

The Mother Church of Methodism received a $250,000 grant Oct. 28 that will help its members redefine their future as a church and also serves as a thriving arts and community center.

Lovely Lane UMC in Baltimore traces its roots back to the first congregation in Methodism. Its current home, built in 1887 by famed architect Stanford White, has fallen into disrepair, said the Rev. Deb Scott. “But we are now restoring it to its glory as an anchor to the community.”

The church received the grant from the National Fund for Sacred Spaces. It was one of 10 religious organizations to receive funding this year.

Sacred Spaces, headquartered in Philadelphia, works with the Lily Endowment and the National Trust for Historic Preservation to repair and restore historic sacred places for the common good.

Lovely Lane UMC in Baltimore, visit http://lovelylane.net/home/

church was consecrated, was restored in the early 2000’s, Scott said. “Now we are currently underway to add four bathrooms, restore the chapel windows, install air conditioning in the fellowship hall, and add a ramp for accessibility.”

Noller anticipates that these measures and a raft of other improvements will total $2.2 million. The congregation, which averages 60 in worship attendance in a sanctuary that seats 1,000, has started an aggressive fundraising campaign.

A spirit of the creativity and possibility is sweeping through the church and all its does, said Scott, who envisions the church brimming with arts exhibitions, dance, concerts of all kinds, learning, and community events, as history mingles with human spirit and sacred intentions.

“This church is resurrection,” she said. “This is a resurrection story.”

For more information about Lovely Lane, visit http://lovelylane.net/home/