Cristin Cooper stoops low to pass out a sample of her soup to a young boy at a Farmers Market in Olney. Cooper says she was called to a ministry of ‘neighboring,’ and that includes making and sharing soup. See story, below.

"Unleash the Leader in You.
Explore the thoughts of the UM at the recent Navigate Conference. Pages 4-5

'Coop's Soups' reinvents church
By ERIC ALSGAARD UMConnection Staff

IN THE BALTIMORE-WASHINGTON Conference, new ministries aren't just thinking outside the box; they're building new boxes. Take Cristin Cooper, for example. She’s doing ministry in her own context. She makes soup. But not just any soup; a soup that creates and builds community every step of the way.

A recent graduate of Wesley Theological Seminary, and formerly on-staff at Oakdale UMC in Olney, Cooper had a vision — a concept, really — of what she calls “neighboring.” Inspired by that vision, Cooper quit her job at the church a year ago to pursue her call.

“What I had been hearing at that time was this concept of building community around the table and around meals,” she said. “I quit my job so that I could free-up my brain space to be able to be creative and present and responsive to really what I can only say is this call.”

Cooper said her call was to make disciples of Jesus Christ, following Jesus’ Great Commission. (Luke 10:27) She was also inspired by a January 2018 podcast episode featuring Kristin Shell, the originator of The Turquoise Table movement. Shell was seeking a way to live out Jesus’ words in her own Austin, Texas, neighborhood. Shell painted a picnic table turquoise, put it in her front yard, and sat down with her journal and a computer. Within three hours, a neighbor joined her. In a short time, so did others, even if it was for a 15-minute conversation and a cup of coffee.

The idea, Shell said, was to create community in the neighborhood, rather than having to drive across town. “I had this Holy Spirit moment,” Cooper said. “I went to my knees and I just prayed. I said, ‘God, it is very clear that you are calling me to neighboring. Is that my literal neighbors? Is that a concept? And, it doesn’t look like it pays anything. I’m a little nervous.’”

In that same week, Cooper said Cheryl Cook, on staff for Young Adult Ministries at the BWC, reminded Cooper of the Change Makers Project coming up. Cooper registered, even though she didn’t have a project; only this idea of “neighboring.” Cooper became a part of the 2018 Change Makers Project, along with about 20 other

Ashby Village surpasses expectations
By MELISSA LAUBER UMConnection Staff

"ANTICIPATE MORE" is the slogan of Asbury Methodist Village in Gaithersburg. But how much more is possible when older adults come together in community is just now becoming clear to the Rev. Malcolm Frazier, Asbury’s director of pastoral care and counseling.

Frazier began this ministry in February and has been delighted to see first-hand the tremendous impact seniors have on the church and the culture.

Within The United Methodist Church, he noted, the emphasis is frequently on youth and young adults. But it is the older adults that are most often at the center of ministry.

According to census statistics, in 2030, the U.S. will undergo a historic demographic turning point when all the baby boomers will be older than 65, expanding the size of the older population so that one in every five people in the United States will be of retirement age. Within the UMC, the median age is currently 62.

Understanding people in this age group is becoming increasingly important, especially as the church seeks to stay relevant to the culture, Frazier said. “Our older adults should never be ignored.”

Ashby Village, he’s found, is an oasis for seniors that caters, with almost unparalleled excellence, to the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of people ranging from age 60 to 105. The average age of the residents is 81.

Founded by the Baltimore Conference in 1958, on 106 acres of land that was Walter Magruder’s dairy farm, Asbury was created as a “Methodist Refuge for Elderly Folk.”

While it is no longer directly tied to The United Methodist Church, Asbury does embrace Wesleyan principles and provides a home to 1,400 residents. Eighty percent of those residents live independently in apartments, while the remainder take advantage of a continuum of assisted-living care. Most live on the campus for about 15 years — creating a sense of home and community.

Asbury Village, Frazier notes, has also has the Brain Health Center of Excellence, assisting those with dementia with cutting edge principles of brain health.

See Hatchery, page 8

See Asbury, page 3
I saw something on Facebook recently that said, “A disciple is someone who has moved from being the recipient of the church’s mission to being responsible for the church’s mission.” I think that’s a good statement of what it means to be a fully mature disciple.

One of the great joys of my pastoral life is when I see this happen — when people move from being confirmands to mentors; from nervous participants in Bible 101 to small group leaders. It happens as a gift of the Holy Spirit and requires commitment and dedication on the part of the one who is growing.

But mostly, it happens because of other fully mature disciples. I can say that my maturity as a disciple of Jesus is the result of hanging out with, and learning from, more mature disciples. I remember my first Bible study as a young adult, and I was pretty sure I knew next to nothing about the Bible. I knew kids’ Sunday school stories but had no real depth of soil.

My pastor at the time was patient and my fellow class members were too. Together, we studied the actual Bible and we were not afraid to engage around hard questions. Why did Paul write this? What does “koinonia” mean? What does this have to do with my life?

Before I knew it, I was in charge of devotions for said Bible study. Next, I was going on service projects with my church. Other brothers and sisters in Christ gave me opportunities to serve in ways that were outside my comfort zone, and even sometimes to lead. I even had a pastor who spotted a gift for preaching and allowed me to deliver my first sermon.

Fully mature disciples make disciples and together: God uses folks like that to change the world.

Jesus said to his disciples that he called them, not servants, but friends, and that they did not choose him. He says, “I chose you, and appointed you to bear fruit, fruit that will last.” Oh, for a church that takes seriously that spiritual growth is not a luxury, to be done after we retire or when it is convenient. Because just as we ourselves were mentored and “chosen,” we need to move into being mentored ourselves and “choosing” others.

Fully mature disciples make disciples and together: God uses folks like that to change the world.

I will never forget my middle school principal. One day, she called me into her office for a chat. She came around her desk and sat down next to me and began to chat with me in hushed yet direct tones. She told me, “You are really gifted, and I expect great things from you in the future, but you are going to have to grow up to achieve them.” Then she sent me on my way. Usually, I would skip back to class, but this time was different. When she told me that she had expectations of me, I was flabbergasted. It never occurred to me that the principal had expectations for my future. She expected that I would use my gifts to do more than play jokes and kid around; she expected me to one day make a difference in the world. The only problem was I couldn’t do that unless I grew up.

Friends, just like my principal, God has been watching us and is waiting for us to grow up. When we first come to faith, there is plenty of time for fun and games. We can play in the shallow end of the pool, consume content and just have fun. But over time, we are expected to mature. We are expected to begin to take the things of God seriously, so that we can begin to produce fruit for the kingdom of God. God has gifted each of us immensely but we can’t put those gifts to work to transform the world until we fully mature.

Fully mature disciples are those who are living up to and into their full potential. God has gifted each of us with abilities, talents and a measure of faith to make a difference in the world, but we can’t do it unless we grow up.

When we grow up and become fully mature, we are like fruit at the peak of ripeness. We are ready to be picked, perfect to be served, and delightful to those who consume us.

Let’s make the decision to be fully mature so that we can change the world. Let’s be mature in our words, mature in our thoughts, and mature in our deeds. That way, we can live up to the expectations that God has for us.

FULLY MATURE DISCIPLES

Living Your Call Summit Saturday, Oct. 5, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. BWC Mission Center, Fulton A time apart for exploration and learning for those experiencing a call to ministry and their mentors. www.bwcumc.org/bysummit

Historical Society meets Saturday, Oct. 5, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Colesbush UMC in Abingdon The Rev. David McAllister-Wilson, president of Wesleyological Seminary, will be the keynote speaker.

Superintendents installed Rev. John Wunderlich Cumberland-Hagerstown District, Oct. 6, 3 p.m. Hancock UMC in Hancock Rev. Rebecca Iannicelli Annapolis District Oct. 20, 3 p.m. St. Mark’s UMC in Hanover Rev. Johnnise Cogman Washington East District Oct. 27, 3 p.m. Westphalia UMC in Upper Marlboro

Re-Call Summit Oct. 18-19 St. Mary’s Seminary, Baltimore Explore privilege, power and poverty. It’s a soundtrack in four movements with keynote speaker David Anderson Cooper. Visit www.bwcumc.org/recall


Multiply ministry workshop Nov. 8, BWC Mission Center Nov. 9, St. Matthews UMC, Bowie Church growth and creativity expert Jason Moore, of Midnight Franchise to Local Dive: Multiplying ministry workshop at bwcumc.org/rock. Nominate a youth for the Moral Courage Award at bwcumc.org/rock.

Church Leader Training Via Zoom, 7 to 8:30 p.m. Tuesday, Nov. 5 – SPRC Training Tuesday, Nov. 12 – Trustees Training Monday, Nov. 18 – Finance Training Tuesday, Nov. 26 – Church Council Training

ROCK Retreat Feb. 9-10, Ocean City This retreat for youth will feature keynote speaker B. Haley, and the music of Aaron Shust. Learn more at bwcumc.org/rock. Nominate a youth for the Moral Courage Award before Nov. 17. See the link on the ROCK page.

Ministry Hatchery Nov. 12-13 Maritime Conference Center, Linthicum Heights An incubator for new ministry ideas. See related story page 1. www.bwcumc.org/hatch

Border Immersion Trip Oct. 11-14 San Diego, Calif. & Tijuana, Mexico Visit www.bwcumc.org/borderimmersion2019

EVENTS

Bishop on the Districts Bishop LaTrelle Easterling will meet with clergy from 2 to 4:30 p.m. and laity from 6:30 to 8 p.m. The schedule includes:
- Cumberland-Hagerstown District Sept. 17, Parkhead UMC, Big Pool
- Greater Washington District Sept. 26, First UMC, Hyattsville
- Frederick’s District Oct. 8, Trinity UMC, Frederick
- Annapolis District Oct. 10, Severna Park UMC
- Washington East District - Oct. 15, Journey of Faith UMC, Waldorf
- Central Maryland District Oct. 29, St. John United Church, Columbia
- Baltimore Suburban District Nov. 19, Reisterstown UMC
- Baltimore Metropolitan District Dec. 10, Trinity UMC, Catonsville

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FOR MORE EVENTS, VISIT: BWCUMC.ORG/EVENTS

Ancient church mothers and fathers often greeted one another with the phrase, “Give me a word.” This greeting led to the sharing of insights and wisdom. Today we continue this tradition with this monthly column.

This year, the “WORD” will be taken from Ephesians 4:1-16.

BY MANDY SAYER
Lead Pastor, Glen Mar UMC, Ellicott City

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

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Asbury: Seniors among Church’s most influential groups

From page 1

Frazier works with two chaplains, a counselor, an office manager, and an outreach director overseeing the spiritual needs of residents from a wide variety of faith backgrounds. He notes the expansive list of activities the residents participate in involving the arts, continuing education, wellness and fitness, technology, nature and the environment, community service, spirituality and more.

“You can envision it, we’ll have it here,” he said.

On a quick tour of the facility, Marketing and Sales Director Brent Bayes pointed out that the campus has six dining locations, eight libraries, 70 floor plans for the apartments, 23 pianos, a 17-acre nature preserve, a 288-seat theatre, a pool, seven trainers working in the gym, a community newspaper and TV station. It also has Smart Living, which takes advantage of partnerships with area firms to provide residents with state-of-the-art technology; a partnership with the Strathmore to bring cultural events to the residents; and Asbury Village residents play a crucial part in caring for community children in need in the Gaithersburg Beloved Community Initiative.

And all that’s just scratching the surface, Frazier said.

For him, it’s the diversity of the residents that makes Asbury special. At a typical meal, he would not be surprised to find a government executive who shaped global policies, a renowned author, a Holocaust survivor and a retired United Methodist pastor all sitting at the same table.

“This place has a narrative to it,” Frazier said. “Everyone’s story is woven into that narrative.”

For Frazier, part of that narrative is learning to better connect with the residents who are living with dementia.

He has become a certified dementia practitioner and learning how to care for and be an advocate for those with memory loss.

It’s his hope that churches in the Baltimore-Washington Conference begin to address issues of aging in serious ways.

It’s also important, he said, that people realized that Asbury Village is not just a place where people come to be taken care of. “They come here to flourish in their later years,” he said.

But growing older is not always an easy transition and Asbury Village can help churches who want to assist their members age with dignity and purpose.

When people retire and move to Asbury, they often take that opportunity to reinvent themselves, said Bayes. Asbury’s marketing team can help people decide when the best time and way to move into this next stage in the cycle of life might be.

“It is a time, Bayes believes, for courage, for becoming involved in the world in new ways and for legacy-making. Asbury staff also works with local churches to help people understand and live into what they want their legacy to be, he said.

For some people, retiring and entering this new stage of life compels them to seek meaning in new ways and they often turn to God to try to understand the transitions through which they’re living.

Frazier said: “In this spectrum of aging, we slow down in many ways, but in other ways we’re growing, and that growth needs to be honored and encouraged,” he concluded. “Our churches need to examine their ideas about aging.” It’s time to “anticipate more.”

Stewardship guides purchase of episcopal residence

By Melissa Lauber
UMConnection Staff

The Baltimore-Washington Conference recently closed on a new house that will serve as its episcopal residence.

The purchase comes after mold and a variety of other issues were discovered last spring in the house in Clarksville, which was home to Bishop LaTreille Easterling and her family.

In June, members of the Annual Conference instructed the Board of Trustees to do remediation on the house to ensure it was safe to live in and then sell it, purchasing a new residence in keeping with new denominational standards.

The Trustees, led by the board’s president, John Strawbridge, researched 30 homes in the area and selected one, built in 2012 near the Conference Mission Center in Fulton. An offer was made and the new house, costing a little over a million dollars, was purchased.

“This cost is comparable to other homes in the area,” Strawbridge said, “and we are grateful for the efforts of our agent, Jan Hayden, in negotiating the purchase below the asking price.”

The new residence has a similar layout and functionality of the current residence with the advantage of newer energy efficient construction and enhanced safety measures, like a fire sprinkler system. Strawbridge added, “We get a lot of visitors from other conferences and other countries to Baltimore-Washington. As a hosting location, this property represents our conference well and should serve us for many years.”

The previous residence was being placed on the market and is expected to sell for over $900,000. Extensive testing was completed to ensure it is safe for occupancy.

Conference leaders say that the former residence served the conference well for 23 years and proved to be a good investment.

“The new home is similarly situated and is also a sound investment,” Strawbridge said.

As a stewardship measure, the Council on Finance and Administration voted to fund the purchase of the new home with reserves restricted for use at the Episcopal Residence and supplemental funding from an unrestricted Trustee reserve fund, which will be reimbursed by the sale of the old residence. Strawbridge said he is thankful for CFA’s plan.

“We are saving a significant amount of money by not having to seek a bank loan. This plan gives us more security and control,” he said.

New denominational standards require that episcopal residences have a bathroom and bedroom that are accessible on the first floor. The BWC’s new parsonage for the bishop’s family meets that standard.

The current residence was purchased in 1996. The May, Schol, Matthews and Easterling families have lived there.

Photo by Melissa Lauber
Be conveeners of the people

Have the courage of your dreams

How vital and faithful a church is can be traced directly to how vital and faithful its leaders are. “Churches can’t grow beyond the leadership capacity.” The leadership vacuum is stunting the growth of our churches” say the Revs. Phil Schroeder and Kay Kotan in their new book, “Launching Leaders: Taking Congregational Excellence to New Heights.”

“What the church needs,” they say, “is leaders who have the courage of their dreams.” At the Navigate Conference in Harrisburg Aug. 23, Schroeder, the director of the Center for Congregational Excellence in the North Georgia Annual Conference, and Kotan, director of the Center for Vitality in the Arkansas Conference, explored six leadership habits that can be changed by “gutsy leaders.” They include:

1. **Helpful Communication:** Leaders today need to focus less on the interesting and more on the helpful. Helpful communication, which is always well-planned, clarifies. It makes ideas take flight.

2. **Holy Conversation:** Leaders must prepare for holy conversations if they hope to hear the voice of God as people speak to one another. These conversations, which build trust, require leaders to ask the right questions and be open to things beyond themselves and their agendas.

3. **Healthy Conflict:** Leaders can embrace healthy conflict to move beyond insecurities and be able to speak the truth in love. Healthy conflict emanates from a heart at peace and allows people to be heard. It focuses on issues rather than people and allows churches to take risks and move beyond the “healthy mediocre.”

4. **Healing Candor:** If leaders experience healthy conflict, they need healing candor. Some churches tend to dance around the issues rather than people and their agendas. Healing candor often involves apologies for how one’s actions affect people. It also lends itself well to humor and is founded in the idea that there is much more that unites people than divides them.

5. **Humbled Confidence:** Leaders don’t “go out and get” humbled confidence; it happens to them as they respond to the “glorious mistakes” they make. Too many leaders are arrogant, believing they have all the answers, rather than being vulnerable and acting out of a sense of integrity. Leaders with humbled confidence are hero-makers.

6. **Hope-filled Collaboration:** Leaders must work collaboratively with teams as they bask in hope to “create the church that is not-yet.”

The book “Launching Leaders” also provides a practical, resource-based pathway for leaders to grow in these habits as they “ponder, provoke, process, probe and practice” becoming gutsy leaders.
'Love makes us inventors'

How much of the church, as we know it, are we willing to give up to follow Jesus? How do we turn our harebrained ideas into sustainable ministry?

At the Navigate Conference in Harrisburg, Penn., Aug. 23, the Rev. Kenda Creasy Dean helped church leaders discover new ways of being church as they begin to grow the off-beat and innovative ideas God has planted within them.

Creyas Dean, a professor at Princeton University and co-founder of Ministry Incubators, is a global leader in empowering young leaders to dive into the church's entrepreneurial movement. She will be one of the keynote speakers at the BWC’s Ministry Hatchery event, Nov. 14-16. (www.bwcumc.org/hatch)

She likens the church's current stance to that of the American blacksmith’s union in 1909. In that era, their membership spiked, but a decade later, their trade was dead as Model-T cars rolled off assembly lines.

“They still needed leaders in the transportation area, but the kind of leaders they needed was different. I believe seminaries are preparing better blacksmiths today than at any other time in history,” she said.

Most leaders today grew up in an old economics world, Creasy Dean explained. However, a burgeoning movement of Christian social innovation makes this “the best chance we’ve had to be the church in 500 years.”

Christian innovation comes in a variety of forms. She points, for example, to Father Gregory Boyle, who founded Homeboy Industries for young people in San Francisco seeking to get out of the gang life. His entrepreneurial spirit is based on the belief that “nothing stops a bullet like a job.”

Another missional innovator Creasy Dean highlighted was Marguerite Barankitse, who created Maison Barankitse in Burundi to serve some of the 30,000 children made orphans by a civil war caused by ethnic hatred.

This home, raised in a vision of love, has a farm, hospital, theater, mechanic's shop and a pool. "Our duty is not to go to church. It's to give back the dignity to the human person," Barankitse said in a video. "Every day I improve new life."

Creasy Dean is fond of quoting Barankitse's idea that "love makes us inventors." "Big ideas won’t save the church,” she said. “Only Jesus Christ saves the church. Do it for love or don’t do it."

At Creasy Dean’s own church, Kingston UMC in New Jersey, the congregation operates a food truck as a way to hang-out with college students in the community.

One of the key differences between new and old economy churches is that the we used to do fundraising that supplied money for the ministry, she said. In the new economy, fundraising is the ministry. It’s banded. In the food-truck raises money and allows for outreach and creating relationship and community.

After decades of turning-inward, churches are beginning to come beside people working for social good and becoming partners with them. In so-called "flipped churches," church people are saying to young adults in the secular world, "You know that thing you do? I see God in that and I want to help you. The church becomes investors and cheap labor and brings out God's gifts in people.

Another model, Creasy Dean said, is "fuzzy church," where church and the community blur the lines as they work together. For example, a church thought their campus ministry was lame. They had a parking lot and built a dormitory on it, becoming a home for 260 students, some in recovery, vets, theologians-in-residence and other groups.

They paid off the mortgage, and the dorm now generates a million dollars a year to fund campus ministry and the church. "Even the tax code hasn't caught up with that mixture of community and church," Creasy Dean said. "They fell into it and it fell on them. It is community."

A third model of church for missional entrepreneurs is "fresh expressions." "It's based on the question: What if church is so different that people with no framework for Christian faith feel at home?" It helps create a mindset for the unchurched that God is a possibility.

In this model, which is being used extensively in the United Kingdom, religious people befriend others in Christ's name. One bishop summed it up, saying, "If the Anglican Church has to die for people to know Jesus, well, okay."

For those seeking to explore missional innovation, Creasy Dean said to remember:

- Desperation is a spiritual gift.
- We're not called to have a great idea. We're called to have great love.
- Don't quit your day job. Build big ideas bit-by-bit.
- Your past is your future. Only God starts with a blank slate.
- "Every church is a ministry incubator," she said. "It's our job to discover every way possible to reflect Christ's love to the world and to turn harebrained ideas into sustainable forms of mission and impact."

Wagon Wheel Exercise

Kenda Creasy Dean led a group "Wagon Wheel" exercise that stirred imagination for ministry.
Learn more about it at: tiny.cc/wagonwheelexercise

Explain the process (for 10-100 people):
1. Everyone choose a partner. Name one partner “A” and one partner “B.”
2. “B”s—form a circle, facing inside.
3. “A”s—go find your partner and face them (so you can shake hands with each other.
4. Say: We're going to have a series of 1 minute conversations, 30 sec. for each person.
   - Each time you hear the chime and I say “switch” — it’s the other person’s turn to talk.
   - Person “B” will start each conversation (halfway through we’ll change that).
   - Each time you hear the chime and I say “move” — the inner circle moves one person to their left (the outer circle doesn’t move — halfway through we’ll change that)
   - Practice that once.
   - Halfway through exercise — change so Person “A” starts each conversation, and the outer circle moves.

Practice rounds: (30 sec. for each partner per question; when both have shared, move to new partner for next question)
- Who in your community does your heart break for, and why?
- What challenge do they face that you feel called to address?
- Questions: (30 sec. for each partner per question, then move to a new partner for next question)

1. What idea has God given you and who will it help? (From now on, start every conversation by telling your partner what your idea is)
2. Why do you care about this idea so much?
3. Why should the church do this — and not just leave it to general goodwill?
4. What Bible story or Scripture comes to mind as you think about your idea?
5. This idea is kind of like ___ (your analog)
6. What will the core programs/activities/offers of your venture be?
7. What’s already out there that you can piggy back on?
8. What’s the name of your venture?
9. How will it make money? How will it be sustainable?
10. What’s your fence? (Judges 6:39-40): “Oh Lord, I’ll do it if ___”
11. Pretend your venture is a bicycle. What is your guiding wheel (the front wheel, or the mission that determines your direction) and what is your driving wheel (the rear wheel, or the energy/ revenue source)?
12. It’s 10 years down the road, and your project has exceeded your wildest dreams — describe what it looks like.
13. What’s your next step?
In changing times, some things are a constant... God’s love and the essential role of church leaders prepared to lead change. Be prepared with a Wesley Doctor of Ministry degree.

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• Church Leadership Excellence (starting May 2020)
• “The World is my Parish”: Engagement with the World from a Wesleyan/Methodist Perspective (starting May 2020)

Innovative Blessing Boxes aid Martinsburg homeless

By Erik Alsgaard
UMConnection Staff

When is a newspaper vending machine not a newspaper vending machine? When it’s transformed into a Blessing Box.

Nathan Payton, co-director of children’s ministry at Calvary UMC in Martinsburg with his wife, Chelsea, came up with the ministry as a way of meeting the needs of the homeless population in his community.

More than one person in four—27.4%—live at or below the poverty line in Martinsburg, about double the national average. There is a large homeless population, Payton said, that faces hardships despite people’s best efforts.

There are social services trying to help, he said, such as women shelters and other facilities. But they don’t normally supply personal hygiene items, such as soap and toothpaste, and the shelters are often overcrowded.

“We have quite a few tent communities,” Payton said. “If you’re a homeless family, they will take the father into the rescue mission, but that would leave the mother and children, if there’s no room at the Bethany House, on the street. So they decide to stay together. Right now, we have about 300-plus homeless students in Berkeley County as well.”

In 2018, he started the Blessing Box mission. He takes an old newspaper vending machine, fixes it up and adds lights inside, sends off the old paint and stickers, repaints it a bright yellow, adds new stickers, and for about $150, creates a Blessing Box.

The only things missing are a place to put the box and the contents. That’s where local churches like Calvary, come in.

“We will partner with any church that’s willing to let us place a Blessing Box on its property,” Payton said. “The only stipulation is that we ask for them to get their children’s ministry involved.”

Blessing Boxes are stuffed with plastic bags filled with toiletries and personal care products, sometimes including shoes, socks, and small non-perishable food items. The church becomes responsible for keeping the box filled.

What a church typically will do, Payton said, is get their Sunday schools involved to fill up the bags that go in the box. Members of the congregation are asked to donate the supplies, and there have been times when community members help out, too.

The idea is for the kids to learn a little bit about being the body of Christ,” Payton said, “and doing the work, but also learning about our community and that homelessness isn’t something that they should be afraid of, or afraid of people that are homeless. Kind of just letting them know that they are people.”

Payton said the idea for the Blessing Boxes was inspired by “Little Free Libraries” and watching a program on TV where sheds in Alaska are used much in the same way: people leave what they no longer need or use, and take something if they need it.

The idea, he said, started to gel in mid-2017. Both he and Chelsea were laid off from their jobs at the time, raising four children. “Whatever path I was going down wasn’t the path I was supposed to be going down,” Payton said of that time. He looked at the free time he had and wondered what he could do with it. “What is God trying to tell me or do?” he asked. “That’s where this idea came from.”

Not trained as a painter or a metal worker, Payton said that putting together these boxes was “out of his comfort zone. This was something God was calling me to do.”

There are four Blessing Boxes in Martinsburg, Payton said. A Facebook page devoted to this ministry helps spread the word of where the boxes are and if they need to be re-stocked. (facebook.com/blessingboxmissionarb/)

Typically, once a box is filled, the contents will be gone within an hour,” Payton said. “The homeless are a very tight-knit community with an opportunistic mind-set. If one person goes by and they see something there, even if they don’t need it, they know someone back at the camp does. It goes out very quickly.”

One of the most-used items are wet-wipes and baby wipes. That’s because, Payton said, the homeless often lack access to places where they can clean up.

Payton is open to others copying this ministry. He has resources, including logos and instructions on how to put boxes together. His email is nathan.paytonjr@gmail.com.

“It was a big shock to me when God called me to do this,” he said. “Taking someone with zero experience … you know, it was a big test of faith. If God’s put something on your heart, even if you don’t think it’s possible, fully let go and let God take control; crazy things can happen.”

One of those “crazy places,” for Payton is back to school. He started studying online this summer to become a pastor at Luther Rice College and Seminary.

BY ERIK ALSGAARD
Wesley’s Doctor of Ministry

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Blessing Box on its property,” Payton said. “It creates a Blessing Box.

The idea, he said, started to gel in mid-2017. Both he and Chelsea were laid off from their jobs at the time, raising four children. “Whatever path I was going down wasn’t the path I was supposed to be going down,” Payton said of that time. He looked at the free time he had and wondered what he could do with it. “What is God trying to tell me or do?” he asked. “That’s where this idea came from.”

Not trained as a painter or a metal worker, Payton said that putting together these boxes was “out of his comfort zone. This was something God was calling me to do.”

There are four Blessing Boxes in Martinsburg, Payton said. A Facebook page devoted to this ministry helps spread the word of where the boxes are and if they need to be re-stocked. (facebook.com/blessingboxmissionarb/)

Typically, once a box is filled, the contents will be gone within an hour,” Payton said. “The homeless are a very tight-knit community with an opportunistic mind-set. If one person goes by and they see something there, even if they don’t need it, they know someone back at the camp does. It goes out very quickly.”

One of the most-used items are wet-wipes and baby wipes. That’s because, Payton said, the homeless often lack access to places where they can clean up.

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Innovative Blessing Boxes aid Martinsburg homeless

The Rev. Dr. Wanda Bynum Duckett (Doctor of Ministry Class of 2014)
Superintendent, Baltimore-Metropolitan District
Baltimore–Washington Conference

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**A Word from the Bishop**

**Who Are We: Come, let us study together**

By David Wentz

*Pastor, you should write a book. If you can write a sermon, you can write a chapter. If you can preach a series, you can write a book.*

I was blown away when a leader in Kenya asked to use it to teach in a jail ministry. A district superintendent in Kenya and a United Methodist professor in Nigeria have used it. It's been translated into several languages. In Uganda, “Pastoring” was taught in a jail ministry. A district superintendent in Kenya and a United Methodist professor in Nigeria have used it. It's been translated into several languages. In Uganda, “Pastoring” was taught in a jail ministry. A district superintendent in Kenya and a United Methodist professor in Nigeria have used it. It's been translated into several languages.

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**It’s time for you to write that book,** Wentz says

been so blessed by the BWC Order of Elders Facebook page. We may disagree on some major issues, but we are all in this together.

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**The Rev. David Wentz is a retired Elder in the Baltimore-Washington Conference.**

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**From Dictionary.com, infralapsarianism means:** The doctrine, held by Augustinians and by many Calvinists, that God planned the Creation, permitted the Fall, elected a chosen number, planned their redemption, and suffered the remainder to be eternally punished.
See God in new ways at upcoming photo retreat

By Terri Copnell
Communications Commission Chair

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
Via a Facebook group where they come to discernment. She was at first, Cooper thought the group started saying she should sell it. And the soup was so good, people started saying she should sell it. At first, Cooper thought the group was just being nice. “But they were serious,” she said. However, Cooper is a self-confessed “slow cooker” when it comes to discernment. She was uncomfortable with the idea of just selling soup and making money. She wanted the soup to build community.

Last January, Cooper “put herself out there,” she said, made some phone calls and started planning to gather the ingredients for her soup. One of those involved a farm near her that she lives. In exchange for working on the farm two days a week, they pay her not in cash, but in vegetables. The soup is now made in a commercial kitchen on Fridays, with the help of others, and has become another community building opportunity. The 30 or so jars she makes are then sold on Sunday at the Olney’s Farmer’s Market.

“It has been an amazing process,” Cooper said.

Today, Cooper and her husband have moved the meals out of their apartment to a local park. “There, about 20 people gather Wednesday nights around picnic tables for a meal where soup is always on the menu. The oldest person is 45; the youngest is 8.”

“Church” happens, but it doesn’t look like it. “Our ‘call to worship’ is a toast, where we all hold up our water or our lemonade or our imaginary glass,” Cooper said.

“The conversation is based off the Lectionary text for the day, and I give a five-minute commentary based on the Scripture, along with some guided questions for the group.”

The dinner church includes people who previously had no religious upbringing or affiliation. Cooper notes. A group of teenagers, around 16 or 17-years-old, have started to become regulars, helping to make the soup of Friday, sell it on Sunday, and coming for the meal Wednesday night. One recently brought her mom for the first time.

“The Wednesday night community is really what wakes me up in the morning,” Cooper said. “The soup is a tool for conversation, it’s a vehicle to hold space for one another.”

Right now, Cooper doesn’t know where this ministry is headed. “I’m really open-palmed about it all,” she said. I really started this whole thing with just this call, this intuition, this draw, and to now see it manifest, even if it’s only two-months old, is very affirming. It still feels raw and new. But I’m okay with that.”

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By Terri Copnell
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“The second Baltimore-Washington Conference Contemplative Photography weekend will again be held at the Manidokan Retreat and Conference Center, October 25-27. This year’s theme, “Come to the Water,” is an invitation to draw closer to God; taken from Isaiah 55:1: “Let all who thirst, come to the water.” This verse calls us to receive what God so abundantly and freely provides. A critical aspect of contemplative photography is moving from the language surrounding the medium (taking pictures, capturing moments, shooting, etc.) to a sense of seeing and receiving in a new way. The contemplative photographer is in the creative process which allows us to let go of ego: the goal is not to take the best photograph, but to explore the visual wonder of the world around us.

We also had a lot of fun last year. As we look through each participant’s images, there was tremendous “oozing and ahving” over extreme close-ups of bark and toadstools! And while contemplative photography is not about creating technically or artistically perfect compositions, the weekend includes optional clinics which are designed to help participants hone their photographic skills. All this happens in the beauty of Manidokan, undergirded by the hospitality of the Rev. Kirstin Shrom-Rhoads and her wonderful staff. The weekend includes worship as well as time to explore the camp and surrounding area (or catch a nap).

Manidokan is the perfect venue to explore water with its proximity to the Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers as well as a small waterfall a short hike through the woods. Water is vital to human existence and is present from Creation to the River Flowing from the Throne of God in Revelation; we’ll explore these images in the context of trust and gratitude.

So if your soul is feeling thirsty and you’re looking for a sense of renewal, Come to the Water. We hope you can spend the entire weekend, but a Saturday-only option is available. Registration is available online (along with the agenda, cost, and other details) at www.bwcumc.org/photoretreat, or you may contact Alison Burdett in the Communications Office at aburdett@bwcumc.org or 410-309-3428.

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