



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.

Asbury 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.”

Asbury 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 1926, 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 Asbury, page 3

'Coop's Soups' reinvents church

BY ERIK 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 Commandment. (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.’”

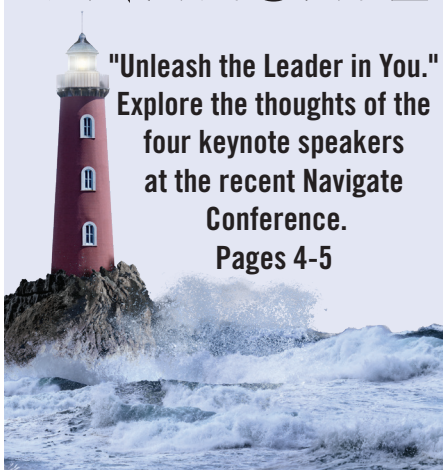
In that same week, Cooper said, Cheryl Cook, on staff for Young Adult Ministries at the BWC, reminded Cooper of the Change Makers Project coming up. Cooper registered, even though she didn’t have a project; only this idea of “neighboring.”

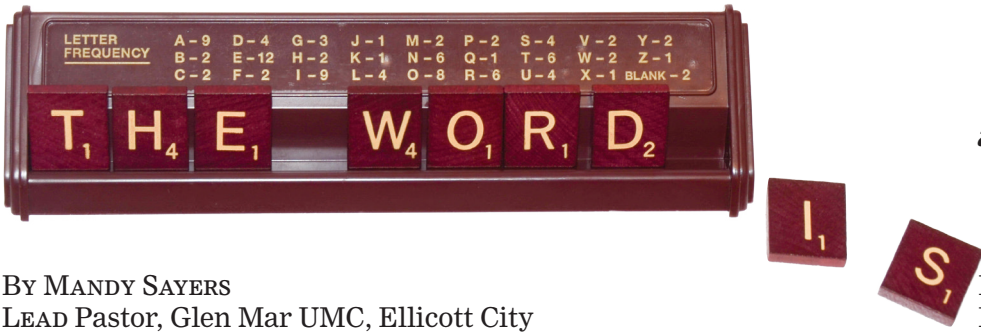
Cooper became a part of the 2018 Change Makers Project, along with about 20 other

See Hatchery, page 8

NAVIGATE

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





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

ISAW 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 would 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.

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.

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 DARYL WILLIAMS
Pastor, St. Paul UMC, Oxon Hill

IWILL 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 said to 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

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.

Friends, just like my principal, God has been watching us and God 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

EVENTS

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/lycsummitt

Historical Society meets
Saturday, Oct. 5, 10 a.m.
Cokesbury UMC in Abingdon
The Rev. David McAllister-Wilson, president of Wesley Theological 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. Johnsie 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

Contemplative Photo Retreat
Oct. 25-27
Camp Manidokan
A weekend of creative expression and seeing God in new ways. Visit www.bwcumc.org/photo-retreat

Multiply ministry workshop
Nov. 8, BWC Mission Center
Nov. 9, St. Matthews UMC, Bowie
Church growth and creativity expert Jason Moore, of Midnight Oil, leads the workshop "From Franchise to Local Dive: Multiplying Your Church by Discovering Your Contextual Flavor," from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Visit www.bwcumc.org/event/1321358-2019-11-08-from-franchise-to-local-dive-multiplying-your-church-by-discovering-your-contextual-flavor.

Ministry Hatchery
Nov. 11-14
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.

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. 7-9, 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.

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 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

FOR MORE EVENTS, VISIT:
BWCUMC.ORG/EVENTS



Bishop LaTrelle Easterling
Melissa Lauber
Erik Alsgaard
Alison Burdett
Myca Jones
Linda Worthington

Resident Bishop
Director of Communications
Managing Editor
Multimedia Producer / Graphic Designer
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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.

"If 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



Brent Bayes, left, and Rev. Malcolm Frazier share a vast array of activities offered at Asbury. To learn more, contact Bayes at bbayes@asbury.org.

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."



David Notley, who was mourning his wife, finds a bit of joy in reading each week to his friends.

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 LaTrelle 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 is 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.

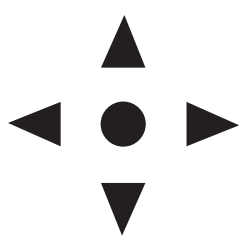
New denominational standards require that episcopal residences have a bathroom and bedroom that are accessible on the first floor. The BWC's new parsonage for the bishop's family meets that standard.

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

Held strategically in Baltimore, and rooted in John 10:10 and Micah 6:8, reCall 2019 will use various forms of art to explore the roots of privilege, power and poverty in the American experience. Join us, featured keynote speaker Dr. David Hooker Anderson, and a host of other thinkers for this powerful discussion.

OCT. 18-19
ST. MARY'S ECUMENICAL INSTITUTE
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bwcumc.org/recall



'Be conveners of the people'

THE PASTOR OF one of the world's fastest growing United Methodist churches is thinking about the new normal, one in which goldfish have longer attention spans than people.

Time Magazine recently reported that scientists indicate that the average human attention span has fallen from 12 seconds in 2000 to eight seconds today. In comparison, scientists believe that goldfish have an attention span of nine seconds.



In fact, the Rev. Olu Brown is convinced that this attention span may be closer to seven seconds.

"Every seven seconds, the world shifts," he said.

Brown's church has grown from a core team of 25 people in 2007 to having 2,400 worshippers on site, 1,600 online each week, and a budget of \$4 million.

He's not entirely certain how to address people's ever-shifting perceptions. But he is certain we are living in an Exodus 1:8 world. That passage reads: "Now a new king came to power who didn't know Joseph."

"There are new kings and queens

now who don't know United Methodism or the cross and flame," he said. "A new generation has been born who does not know your traditions."

To address this "new normal," Brown is leading his church in focusing on four key areas: hospitality, technology, systems and worship design.

He is also suggesting churches who want to move into the new normal look to the following three ways to create collaborative and generative leadership.

1. Crowdsourcing, or enlisting large number of people to contribute via the Internet. "Our box, our vision, our systems are too small," Brown said. "Too often we have a top-down approach." Crowdsourcing allows you to reach out rather than in.

2. Pay attention to your neighbors and reclaim your neighborhood.

For many churches, Brown said, the value is no longer in their prophetic voices, their value is in their real estate. Churches are large buildings getting in the way of community. But this is one of the greatest opportunities in our lifetime to witness, plant new churches, and create micro-churches and pop-up churches.

"We have to go back to extreme hospitality where we'll welcome you as you are, understand and love you," said Brown.

3. Data-driven evangelism. "If we're going to be the church of tomorrow, we must be spiritual and strategic," Brown said. We must manage the hard data in the form of numbers and graphs and the soft data of human intelligence. "When we do evangelism via data, we must make course adjustments."

At Impact Church, a dramatic course correction recently begun to unfold. A few years ago, the church bought a huge warehouse. They were in the process of increasing the sanctuary and worship space when they were confronted by data.

When he was speaking to students at a nearby school, Brown saw a memorial on the street corner dedicated to a young man who was killed in front the school. As the boy lay dying on the outside, his sister was on lock-down inside of the school.

This was a data point, Brown said. "We were concerned more about seats in worship than the children in our community," he said.

He and his congregation began to collect more data and found that, in the vicinity of Impact, the

poverty rate was 41% while it was only 24% in the region.

"When you get data like this, you stop praying. You know what God wants you to do," said Brown. "We course corrected."

The congregation came together and instead of building a space for more seats, they're building a 24-hour, seven-days-a-week gymnasium, thematic rooms for children and youth for tutoring, culinary arts, film editing, and learning coding. They're also working on starting a business incubator.

A priority, Brown said, is "now bringing people in the marketplace together with the church to help solve some of our biggest issues.

"We can't just preach great sermons and say good prayers," Brown said. "We have to be conveners of the people in the community to bring them together so we can solve the problems of our world. ... I believe there is hope. We are living in the greatest evangelistic season of our lifetime."

'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 their 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 Leadership Development 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 embraced 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 truth, but the full truth told in love can restore relationship. 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.

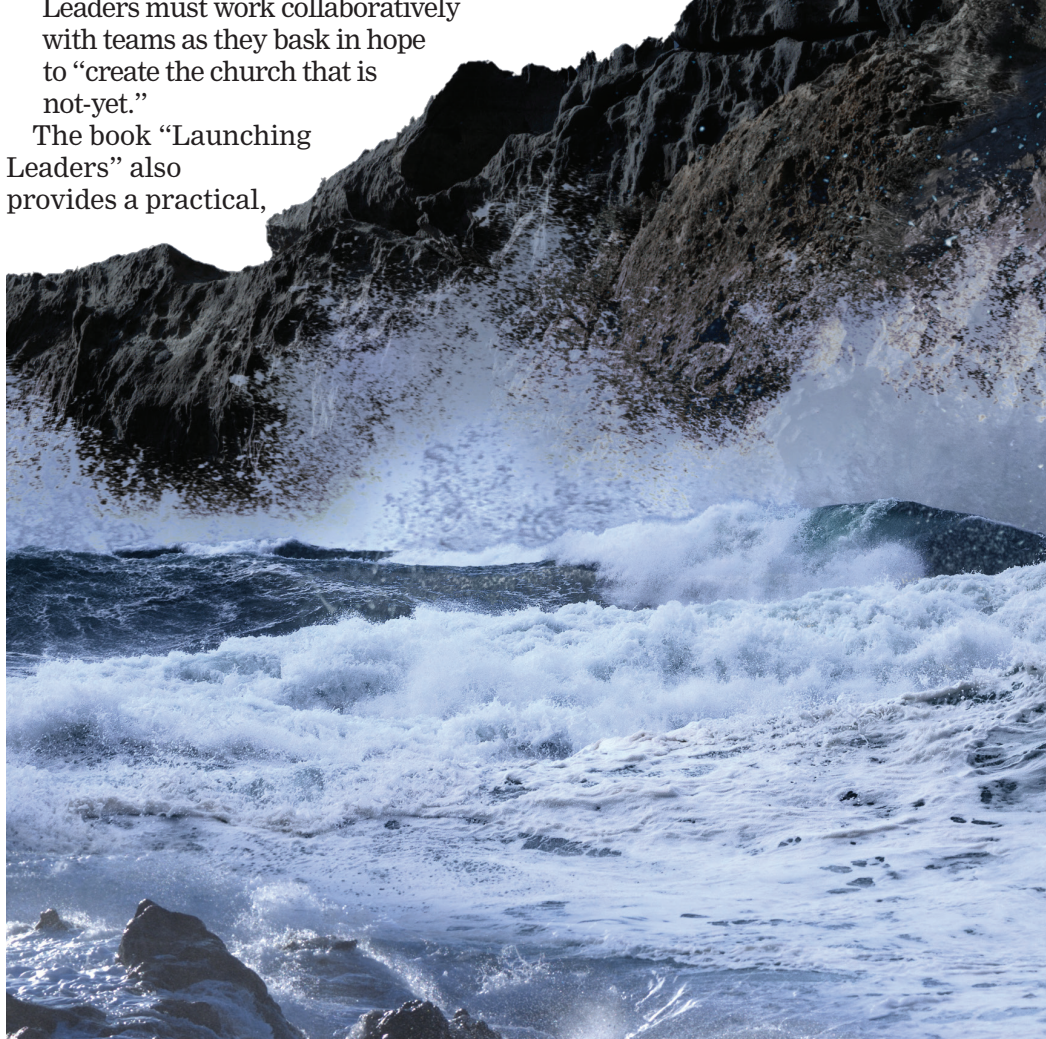
5. Humbled Confidence: Leaders don't "go out and get" humbled confidence; it happens to them as they respond to the "glorious mistakes" they make. Too many

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.



al leaders today face a stormy culture and waves of challenges and obstacles.
te,' held last month in Harrisburg, Pa., provided a beacon of information and hope.

'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.

Creasy 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 church, but are now living in a new

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 Shalom 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 improvise 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 baked 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 200 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 mind-set 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 find every mean 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/wagonwheeleexercise

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 them)
You now have an inner circle and an outer circle, with partners facing each other.
4. Say: "We're going to have a series of 1 minute conversations, 30 secs. 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 secs. 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 secs. 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/offerings 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 fleece? (Judges 6:39-40):
"Ok 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?

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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, sands

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 to 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/blessingboxmissionmrb/)

“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 there's 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.



Children pose with a Blessing Box at Calvary UMC in Martinsburg.

A word from the bishop

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

AS I HAVE heard throughout the Baltimore-Washington Conference and beyond, one of the highlights of the Annual Conference Session this year was the Samoan Circle Process. (See the video at tiny.cc/samoancircle) It was offered as an opportunity to hear perspectives and voices that we may not often engage in a respectful and open manner.

As I shared during the introduction of the process, we live in an age of echo chambers and bubbles; we often socialize with, share social media space and even worship with persons who are like-minded. While doing so may offer a level of comfort in our lives, it also robs us of the opportunity to hear different viewpoints, experiences and understandings.

It is affirming to have our opinions and beliefs confirmed, but growth occurs when we stretch ourselves to hear and appreciate the stories of others. Opening ourselves to conversations and study beyond our well-crafted affinity groups offers an opportunity to gain different insights and even develop more compassion for those who have experienced the world in profoundly different ways.

This is the impetus behind the new curriculum entitled, “Who Are We: An Introspective Analysis of Head and Heart.” This 18-week curriculum is comprised of three,

six-week studies, which will help participants reflect upon who we are as the people of God, the people of the movement called Methodist, and the people of the Baltimore-Washington Conference.

By exploring these three sections and their corresponding Scriptures, we will wrestle with such topics as: how do we each come to understand the nature of God; what the Exodus story teaches us today; how John Wesley welcomed women into ministry during his time; and what lessons can we learn from our past here in the BWC around race and inclusion, and how can those lessons help inform our current struggle of including our LGBTQIA+ brothers and sisters?

During this time of uncertainty and endless conversations about the future of our denomination, one over-arching question lingers: who are we? I believe the answer to that question, both individually and collectively, can and should guide our ministry and mission together as the disciples.

The Book of Ecclesiastes is often overlooked in the study of Scripture, but Christians and non-Christians alike are probably familiar with at least a portion of one verse: “[t]here is nothing new

under the sun.” That phrase is part of a longer text which states, “What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; there is nothing new under the sun.” (Ecclesiastes 1:9)

The shorthand portion of the Scripture is often used to express the belief that there is nothing new to experience or understand about life. As a friend of mine often said, “Been there, done that, and I have the T-shirt to prove it.”

There are cycles to life and repetitions that occur, but there is also the evolution of thought and advancements in understanding. Pluto was once considered a planet on par with Mars and Jupiter; cancer was once thought a punishment for sin; and a fuller understanding of biology emerged only in the early 20th century. Each of these examples represents a new understanding and few would argue their existence. And, the sun yet shines.

It is my hope that congregations will engage this study with another congregation to create an even richer sense of diversity. There is power in hearing the Exodus story through the cultural experience of descendants of enslaved persons; the story of Mary and Joseph

comes alive in the lived experience of an immigrant; wrestling with Galatians 3:28 (“There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free; nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus”) in a diverse group could be eye-opening.

It is often said that the opposite of faith is not doubt, but certainty. Does certainty leave room for the mystery inherent in God? Have we placed God in a box of our own making through the construct of theological certitude?

May we engage this study with humility, intellectual curiosity and grace. The study is not meant to become a weapon to brow beat one another, or to necessarily change anyone’s theological understanding of human sexuality. Rather, it is intended as an opportunity to engage the Scriptures in the richness of diversity, listen to one another, and hear God’s voice in our current milieu.

Come, let us study together.

Bishop LaTrelle Easterling



Bishop LaTrelle Easterling

bwcumc.org/whoarewe

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

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.

Pastor: write a book.

Modern publishing is amazingly easy, and people need to hear what pastors have to say. Your only question should be, “Which book do I write first?”

For me, the answer came when I was leading workshops for pastors in Turkey. Many are converts from Islam who never experienced an established church. They knew how to evangelize, but then they were stuck. They needed practical pointers on the life and job of a pastor. That was the start of my book, “Pastoring: The Nuts and Bolts.”

They’re not alone. A Facebook group called “Things They Didn’t Teach Us in Seminary” has over 16,000 members. Knowing the Bible, theology and church history is vital, but you also need to know how to run a church.

Thirty-four years pastoring in the Baltimore-Washington Conference, with its excellent continuing education and diverse and learned pastors, plus a varied denominational and academic background, added up to more than just teaching notes.

I realized I had a book.

Experts say it’s important to expand your author platform. I

started “friending” every name that popped up on Facebook and offered to email my manuscript to anyone who would give feedback. I was blown away when a leader in Kenya asked to use it to teach his pastors. He turned it into a 60-hour course of study. On August 25, sixty-three men and women received certificates of completion.

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 taught in India and Pakistan. Since it came out online in August, a publisher in India has asked for rights and I’ve had offers to translate into several languages. You never know what God might do with what you write.

You might think, “But I just preach what every pastor preaches. Why should I write a book?”

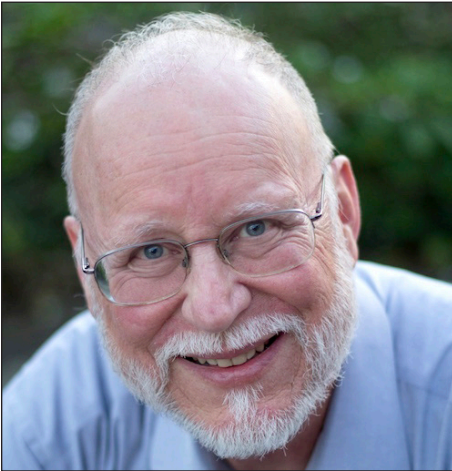
I thought I just knew what every pastor knows, but apparently not. You have unique experiences, perspective and voice. Somebody out there needs that.

Here are snippets of things I wrote about:

1. A pastor’s job is to equip God’s people to do God’s work until they resemble God’s Son (Ephesians 4:12-13). Focus on that and God will take care of the rest.
2. If you please your members, you will be popular and your church will be small. If you please

outsiders you’re getting warmer. But if you please God, watch out — you might catch fire.

3. God doesn’t condone human sacrifice. Don’t lay your family on the altar of your church.
4. Your people don’t care about theology, so you have to. Nobody ever set out to invent a heresy. Your knowledge of theology and church history is your people’s spiritual safety harness.
5. Never overestimate people’s vocabulary; never underestimate their intelligence. Some really smart people don’t know what “infralapsarianism**” means. If you can’t put it in simple words, you don’t either.
6. Learn from everybody. Worship in as many ways and with as many kinds of people as you can.
7. Sometimes God wants Lazarus dead. Jesus didn’t automatically answer Martha’s summons, he asked God what to do. Don’t let expectations drive your ministry.
8. If someone can possibly find a way to misunderstand you, they will. Vet your words for ways that might happen, before you put them out there.
9. Your church sign is important; your name on it isn’t. Unless your name is Billy Graham, nobody cares who the pastor is. They just want to know what time to be there, in letters they can read at the speed limit.
10. Have each other’s backs. I’ve



Rev. David Wentz

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.

These are things I’ve learned; you have learned different things. We need to know them.

Pastor, you should write a book.

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

*** 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.”*

Hatchery: 'Dinner church' meets around homemade soup

From page 1

young adults, seeking ways to make a difference in their communities. The Change Makers Project, according to its website, “supported young adults in hearing God’s call to innovative ministry through mentoring, missional immersions, entrepreneurial community engagement, and vocational conversations.” The project was funded by a grant from the Young Clergy Initiative from the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, the BWC, and Wesley Theological Seminary.

As part of that cohort, Cooper went to London, England, with a team from BWC’s Connectional Ministries, to gather first-hand experience of what doing church differently might look like.

That challenged her way of thinking about ministry. Instead of saying, “I’m here; how can I bring God to here?” her focus shifted to “God’s doing something; how do I work in accordance with that?”

Energized by her experiences, last October, Cooper and her husband, Brandon, opened up their home “to build intentional community in the name of Jesus,” she said. Their dinners, she said, were symbolic of Communion and included some neighbors and young adult friends.

On the menu: soup.

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 to where 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



On a typical Wednesday night, about 20 to 30 people gather for a dinner church, led by Christin Cooper, in what she calls a ministry of 'neighboring.'

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.”

Want to join in with Cooper and others doing missional innovation? Have a vision for doing ministry “outside the box?” Register for the Ministry Hatchery event, Nov. 14-16, at the Maritime Conference Center in Linthicum Heights.

Begin with an idea for a new kind of ministry that meets a tangible need with and in your community, spend a few days with experts and coaches in an incubator environment and leave with a polished pitch to apply for grants and obtain other types of support. We encourage teams to attend to increase the impact.

Learn more and register:

bwcumc.org/hatch

See God in new ways at upcoming photo retreat

By TERRI COFIELL
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
And Eternity in an hour....”*

THESE OPENING LINES from William Blake’s “Auguries of Innocence,” while not a definition of contemplative photography, embrace its essence: resting in God by opening the eyes of our hearts to experience God’s presence around us.

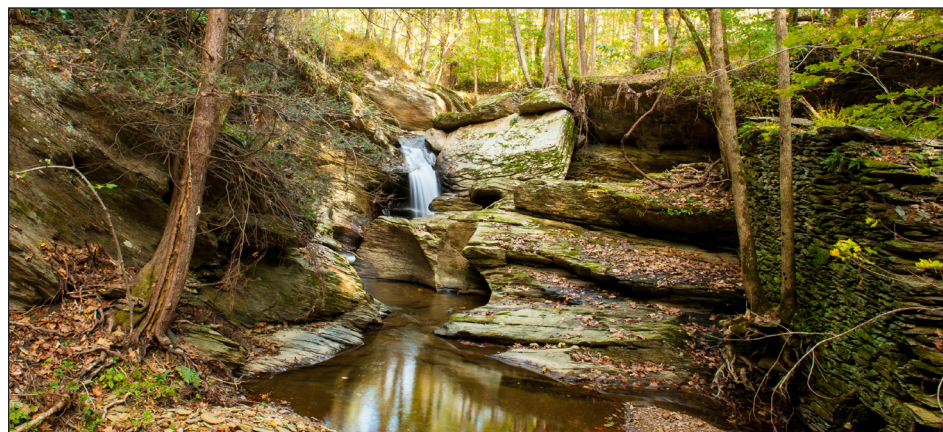
For those who attended last year’s Contemplative Photography Retreat at Manidokan, this Holy Presence was discovered in a new way — through the lens of a camera.

From beginners with cell phones to accomplished and well-equipped photographers, those who attended formed a new faith community around a shared passion as “hobby” became “holy.” Many of last year’s participants have stayed in touch via a Facebook group where they continue to share their creations and insights.

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 meets God 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 looked at each other’s images, there was tremendous “ooing and ahing” over extreme close-ups of bark and toadstools!



This photo was taken by Margie Hughes during last year's Contemplative Photo Retreat at Manidokan Camp & Retreat Center.

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.

