

“Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.” – John 13:34



# UMC Connection

Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church • Becoming fully alive in Christ and making a difference in a diverse and ever-changing world • www.bwcumc.org • Volume 29, Issue 4 • April 2018

## UMC seeks way forward

By ERIK ALSGAARD  
UMConnection Staff

**I**N LESS THAN a year, The United Methodist Church will reach a crucial crossroads in its 50-year history. A special General Conference is scheduled for Feb. 23 to 26, 2019, in St. Louis, Mo., to address one topic: how shall the church respond to questions related to inclusion of LGBTQ people?

At its heart, the issue is how or if homosexuals should be allowed in church leadership. As it stands right now – and as it has been officially in the UMC since 1972 – “self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve” in the church (2016 Book of Discipline, ¶304.3). In

See *Way Forward*, page 3



Bishops Bruce Ough, Hope Morgan Ward, Bob Farr, LaTrelle Easterling and Karen Oliveto lead the United Methodists in a DC rally for justice.

## UMs rally to end racism

By ERIK ALSGAARD  
UMConnection Staff

“This isn’t the end of racism. This is the start of the end of racism.”

That was Jim Winkler, president and General Secretary of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, an organization with 38-member communions representing more than 45 million people. He was speaking in the shadow of the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial, surrounded by cherry trees in full bloom, just before the “A.C.T. to End Racism” rally on April 4, the 50th anniversary of the assassination of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

The NCC organized the rally on the National Mall as a continuation of the march towards racial justice, Winkler said. A long-time United Methodist, Winkler said that the rally drew the faith community of America: Jews, Muslims, Christians and more.

“They’ve all come together,” Winkler said, “to not just commemorate the life and legacy of Dr. King and mark the 50th anniversary of his assassination, but to commit ourselves to end racism and to build our beloved community.”

Along with several other United Methodist bishops, Bishop LaTrelle Easterling of the Baltimore-Washington Conference lent her presence to the cause. She said that she has a hard time using the word “celebrate” when talking about remembering King.

His death was an attempted silencing, she said, of a “trumpeter for justice. How can we celebrate those who wanted to end the work of a man who was simply asking that this country live into its creed that all

people are created equal?”

Easterling, who grew up in the 1960s as a child of the Civil Rights Movement, said that King’s life and ministry have greatly impacted her life and ministry. His boldness, his willingness to speak truth to power no matter the cost, have shaped her, she said.

“Certainly, I hope that do we awaken to what is happening in this country,” said Easterling. “In some ways, I fear that we are receding rather than progressing” on the issue of race. “The rhetoric being used in the public square and even, now, from some pulpits is very troubling. I wonder if Dr. King, if he were still alive, would wonder today if he was in a time warp. I hope we awaken to what’s really happening in our country before it’s too late.”

My prayer is that, soon, this work will become something that we talk about in the past tense,” Easterling said. “That my children and my children’s children will not have to gather in this place 50 years from now still fighting for full equality, full justice. It’s my prayer that we will be the people we say we are: transformed by the Gospel witness.”

In the shadow of the rally stands Mount Vernon Place UMC. Its pastor, the Rev. Donna Claycomb-Sokol, spoke to the prayer meeting where several hundred people had gathered. Her church, she said, stands as a witness to the sin of racism and to the power of repentance.

Mount Vernon Place was founded in 1850, Claycomb-Sokol said, after a split in the then Methodist Church over slavery. “People insisted that the Southern church,

See *Ending Racism*, page 8

## Youth combat gun violence

By ERIK ALSGAARD  
UMConnection Staff

**H**UNDREDS OF THOUSANDS of people around the world marched in solidarity with a group of high school students who were saying “enough is enough” when it comes to gun violence, especially in schools.

United Methodists joined in the March for Our Lives in Washington, D.C., and in many of the more than 800 locations on March 24. The rallies and marches brought together celebrities and people from all walks of life to send a message to lawmakers that gun laws need to be changed so people are safe.

The DC rally was led by students from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla., where 17 people died in a mass shooting in February.

United Methodists and other faith leaders lent their voices and feet to the cause. Gathering for a prayer service at the United Methodist Building in Washington, just across the street from the United States Capitol building, leaders prayed for a safe march and encouraged people to put their prayers into action.

Bishop LaTrelle Easterling, the episcopal leader of the Baltimore-Washington Conference, offered a prayer before the event and then took off in tennis shoes to join thousands of marchers. Organizers estimated 800,000 marched in Washington, although some put the crowd at 200,000.

“I’m here because our conference has spoken out already about senseless gun violence and balancing the rights of our citizens with the right everyone has to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness,” the bishop said in an interview. She said it was time to offer action as well as thoughts and prayers.

The bishop urged United Methodists who couldn’t attend an event near them to register to vote and vote in the next elections.

“We’re not interested in denying individuals their Second Amendment rights,” she said. “But those rights have to be balanced against the right of persons to be safe in their communities and their schools.”

“I’m excited by these young people,” Easterling said. “We (adults) should have been leading this, but we had to wait for them to lift their voice,” she said as she choked back tears.

However, she added, witnessing the young people at this moment in history gives her a sense of hope.

“It’s often the young people who have to rise up,” Easterling said. “I think about those teenagers and young people who

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### What’s inside?

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**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.**

By MANDY SAYERS  
Pastor, Covenant UMC, Gaithersburg

**A**S I WRITE this, it is mid-March, mid-Lent and mid-week. Ministry is busy, family is busy and it's not yet the season for vacation. Spring break coincides with Holy Week, as usual, so we are not going away. We're in the middle of a Lenten sermon series. I'm tired, and I don't think I'm alone in that.

In the middle of March, it feels like a march, all right. Put one foot in front of the other. No time for exalting anyone or anything. I don't have the energy to lift anything up but a cup of coffee.

Still, as you are reading this, you have the benefit of knowing that Lent's march, and the month of March, must give way to Easter's April. The never-ending winter of our sin and our burnout gives way, if we will let it, to the green shoot of resurrection and the bright flowers of God's grace.

It seems like exalting Jesus, lifting him up, is something that we do, like just another discipline or to-do list item. But really, it seems to me, Easter is something God does. God exalts the Son. Mostly on Easter, our job as humans seems to be to see the empty grave clothes and run, or to stand about confusing Jesus for the gardener.

What if Jesus is exalted, not because we exalted him, but because God exalted him? What if it was God, and not an industrious board of trustees, that rolled the stone away? Then, praise God, our Easter is not dependent on the world, or the White House, getting its stuff together.

The King is exalted on high because God lifted him up out of the grave of our desperation, discouragement, disillusionment and death. Easter did not depend on us, friends. Easter is God's gift and what the Church then offers to the world. As winter gives way to spring, Good Friday must yield to Easter's Hallelujah Chorus.

Alleluia, Christ is risen! Christ is risen, indeed!

# EXALT

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

**B**EING BUSY HAS become a badge of honor. We are all trying to get more done, in less time, just so that we can get even more done. We use lists to organize ourselves, apps to track our progress, and energy drinks to stay awake while we do it all.

We are so busy that we compare notes with each other in order to get tips on getting things done, but also so everyone knows that we are just as busy as they are, if not more so.

In all this busyness, we exalt our schedules, exalt our task lists and lift productivity to higher heights just to prove that we can get it all done; and it is leaving us exhausted.

We're exhausted because productivity was never meant to be exalted. Task lists, schedules and busyness were never meant to be looked up to; they were only supposed to be tools to help us. When we exalt productivity, we forget that the only exalted thing in our lives should be God.

God is what we are to hold above us and look to as our badge of honor. It is our love of God that allows us to know that we are loved, cared for, and worthy and valuable even when we aren't productive, on task, or busy. It is when we love God and exalt God that we begin to understand that we are not valuable because of what we do, we are valuable because of what God has done and who we are in God.

Now is the time to remember that only God is worthy of our exaltation. When we exalt God, we begin to see that our problems, our tasks, and our busyness are not what is most important in our lives. An exalted God reminds us that we are more than conquerors, more than production units, and more than our schedules, even when we don't think we are making progress on our goals.

Finally, an exalted God reminds us that God will keep us and provide for us, even when we are exhausted from trying to do it all ourselves.

So pull down the lists, close the apps, and take the busyness of the throne and exalt God. When you lift God to God's rightful place, everything else will fall into place.

## EVENTS

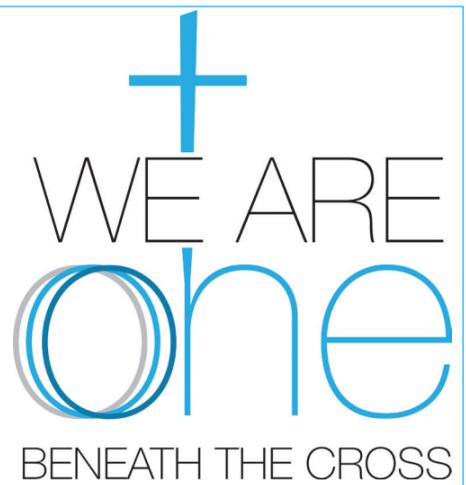
# PHOTO CONTEST

Join our Annual Conference Photo Contest. The theme is "light." Submit as many entries as you like by emailing [mлаuber@bwcumc.org](mailto:mлаuber@bwcumc.org). The deadline for the contest is May 8. Winners will be announced at Annual Conference. Three \$100 prizes will be awarded to the best photographs. An additional \$100 will be given to the best photo taken by a youth age 17 or under.

### Pre-Conference Briefings

**Saturday, April 21**  
**Jackson Chapel UMC, Frederick**  
**St. John's United Church, Columbia**

All lay and clergy members attending the 2018 Annual Conference Session in May should attend one of the two Pre-Conference Briefings to learn about and discuss issues coming before Annual Conference. The sessions are from 9:30 a.m. to noon at Jackson Chapel UMC, 5609 Ballenger Creek Pike in Frederick, and from 1:30 p.m. to 4 p.m. at St. John's United Church at the Wilde Lake Interfaith Center, 10431 Twin Rivers Rd. in Columbia. No registration is required.



[bwcumc.org/events/annual-conference](http://bwcumc.org/events/annual-conference)

### At-One-Ment: Clergy retirement event

**April 19, 9:30 a.m.**  
**BWC Mission Center, Fulton**

A BOOM-sponsored event for pastors to explore issues relating to retirement. For more information, visit [www.bwcumc.org/event/978839-2018-04-19-at-one-ment-clergy-in-retirement](http://www.bwcumc.org/event/978839-2018-04-19-at-one-ment-clergy-in-retirement).

### Taste and See

**April 28, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.**  
**Press Room at the Herald Mail, Hagerstown**

Become a change-maker as you explore missional entrepreneurship; 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Press Room at the Herald Mail in Hagerstown. Learn more and register at [www.tasteandseedmv.com](http://www.tasteandseedmv.com).

### Volunteers in Mission training

**April 21, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.**  
**Otterbein UMC in Hagerstown;**

**April 28, 8:30 a.m. to noon**  
**BWC Mission Center in Fulton**

Learn how to plan and execute a VIM trip. Contact Pam Bowen at [pbowen@bwcumc.org](mailto:pbowen@bwcumc.org) or 410-309-3427.

## UMConnection

**Bishop LaTrelle Easterling**  
**Melissa Lauber**  
**Erik Alsgaard**  
**Alison Burdett**  
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This symbol appears with stories that show your apportionment dollars at work, making a difference in people's lives.

# Way Forward: Bishops hope for unity within diversity

From page 1

addition, the church prohibits its clergy from conducting same gender weddings (§2702.b). This issue came to a near boiling point at the 2016 General Conference in Portland, Ore. But by a narrow vote – 428 to 405 – delegates decided not to take up any legislation related to homosexuality and instead authorized the bishops to form the Commission on a Way Forward.

The Commission’s task, according to its website, is to “do a complete examination and possible revision of every paragraph of the Book of Discipline concerning human sexuality and explore options that help to maintain and strengthen the unity of the church.”

The 32-member Commission has been meeting regularly since 2016. In late February 2018, the Commission presented two different models for moving the church forward, according to United Methodist News Service:

### One Church Model

- The One Church Model gives churches the room they need to maximize the presence of United Methodist witness in as many places in the world as possible. The One Church Model provides a generous unity that gives conferences, churches and pastors the flexibility to uniquely reach their missional context in relation to human sexuality without changing the connective nature of The United Methodist Church.

### Multi-Branch Model

- This model is grounded in a unified core that includes shared doctrine and services and one Council of Bishops, while also creating different branches that have clearly defined values such as accountability, contextualization and justice. The five U.S.

jurisdictions would be replaced by three connectional conferences, each covering the whole country, based on theology and perspective on LGBTQ ministry (i.e. progressive, contextual, traditional branches). Annual conferences would decide which connectional conference to affiliate with; only local churches who choose a branch other than the one chosen by their annual conference could vote to join another conference.

The commission, as a body, has not formed a consensus behind either plan, according to published reports.

“The sketches of these two models represent the values, concerns and feedback we have received since we reported to the Council in November. The two sketches provide avenues for unity, contextualization and mission,” said Bishop Ken Carter, one of the moderators of the Commission and bishop of the Florida Area.

Bishop LaTrelle Easterling has been following the work of the Commission and has hope for the manner in which the people of the Baltimore-Washington-Conference can come together as one to craft a Spirit-filled future.

“The Commission on a Way Forward has been meeting, building relationships, faithfully listening to one another and the Spirit, and earnestly developing their recommendations for the Council of Bishops,” she said. “They met for their final meeting last month, and will deliver their recommendation to the Council during our May gathering. If we are wise, we will learn from not only their recommendation, but also their process. They took the time to get to know one another, disabused themselves of their preconceived notions, and really listened to the concerns, beliefs, theological

and scriptural interpretations of one another. From hearing their testimonies, they have grown to respect one another above their differing interpretations and beliefs, and have listened together for God’s still, small voice.”

Bishop Easterling notes that the Commission has been using the book, “The Anatomy of Peace” as a tool and framework. She gave each delegate from the BWC a copy. She also encourages members of the BWC to read it, and has added it to her recommended reading list for Annual Conference.

“This resource can move us beyond lines drawn in the sand to a more collaborative and unified decision, all the while respecting our differing beliefs,” she said.

“It is not unfaithful, nor an abdication of our responsibility as disciples of Jesus Christ, to remain united within our diversity. We have done just that since the beginning of our denomination. The only times we have failed to do so is when we split over the issue of slavery, and segregated ourselves over the issue of race,” the bishop added.

“Each of those instances in our history is now looked upon with regret. We do not have to make the same mistake here. We do not all agree about infant baptism, and yet we are united; we do not all agree about the frequency of receiving Holy Communion, and yet we are united,” Easterling concluded. “If we can remain united with differing beliefs about our sacraments, certainly we can remain united within our differing beliefs about human sexuality.”

“I pray that we arrive at the Special Session of General Conference in 2019 with hearts of peace, and not hearts of war. I pray we leave room for the Holy Spirit to

guide us into a more perfect way,” she said. I pray that we keep the main thing, the main thing, and model for the world what love looks like among a rich, diverse beloved community.”

Baltimore-Washington Conference leaders expect to hold listening sessions to allow area United Methodists to learn more about and to discuss the Way Forward.

Information about those sessions will be announced when it becomes available.

The BWC delegation to the Special General Conference will be meeting in the fall to review the Council of Bishops’ report and the legislation they propose, according to the Rev. TR Chattin, co-chair of the delegation. Chattin serves as pastor of the Sykesville Parish in Sykesville. In addition, all General Conference delegations in the Northeast Jurisdiction have been invited to a joint meeting on Sept. 22, according to Delores Martin, co-chair of the delegation, who attends Good Hope Union UMC in Silver Spring. The location and time of that meeting has not yet been set.

The Commission on the Way Forward, meeting March 19-22 in Los Angeles, began to put the finishing touches on their report to the Council of Bishops. The denomination’s bishops will use the commission’s report when they meet April 29-May 4 to determine what proposals to submit to the special 2019 General Conference.

The commission will meet again later in May to help provide resources for the wider church, including General Conference delegates.

For more information about the Commission on a Way Forward and its ongoing work, visit [www.bwcmc.org/resources/commission-on-a-way-forward](http://www.bwcmc.org/resources/commission-on-a-way-forward).

# Peace with Justice grant applications due April 30

By ERIK ALSGAARD  
UMConnection Staff

**F**REE MONEY! Yes, absolutely free money! We’re giving it away because that’s how we roll in the Baltimore-Washington Conference!

Now that we have your attention, a brief explanation.

Every year in The United Methodist Church, Peace with Justice Sunday is observed. One of six special Sundays with offering, the money placed in the offering envelopes and online supports peace with justice ministries through the General Board of Church and Society and the Annual Conferences. Peace with Justice Sunday is May 27 this year.

This year, (and here’s the cool part) the Peace with Justice grants will be a pilot initiative for an online conference grant program that supports a variety of creative and fruitful ministries in local churches and faith communities.

The deadline for 2018 applications is

April 30.

Applications can be submitted online at [www.bwcmc.org/ministries/advocacy-action/peace-with-justice](http://www.bwcmc.org/ministries/advocacy-action/peace-with-justice).

In 2017, Peace with Justice funds supported homeless ministry at Foundry UMC in Washington, D.C.; an anti-violence after-school program at Hughes Memorial UMC in Washington; and a shelter for victims of domestic violence at Van Buren UMC, also in Washington. Each of the three churches received \$2,000. Since 2013, the BWC has granted more than \$37,000. It’s one of the best-kept secrets in the Annual Conference.

Christie Latona, BWC’s Director of Connectional Ministries, wants to change that. She sees the Peace with Justice grant money as a great opportunity to create exciting expressions faith communities in action.

One example, Latona said, can be found at Van Buren, located in Ward 4 of Washington. Pastor Lucinda “Cindy” Kent is almost done turning the church’s parsonage into transitional housing for

women and children fleeing domestic violence. When it opens next month, Kent expects between 12 and 15 “guests” to stay. Eventually, when the whole house is made ready, up to 24 people may stay.

“Often, women come to the D.C. metro area fleeing domestic violence or needing shelter for some other reason,” Kent wrote in the application for the grant. “Many have children but cannot obtain shelter because they do not meet the residency requirements for shelter services, and the children can’t go to school without an address and a stable place to live.”

Kent is a Certified Candidate for ministry attending Wesley Theological Seminary, who has served the church since 2016. The transitional housing, she said, will allow women and children to stay anywhere from three to six months.

The \$2,000 Peace with Justice grant the church received went to buy new appliances, especially a deep freeze and refrigerator, Kent said.

“It was a real privilege to go out and get these important items,”

partnership with the House of Divine Guidance, Inc., will receive reclaimed food from throughout the city. But it also needs to buy items in bulk; having a large refrigerator and freezer are a must. Having new appliances is a blessing, she said, because she knows that she can trust them to work both now and in the future.

Kent calls the parsonage the “UMC House,” standing for “Under My Care.” Located near the Takoma Park Metro, the home needs “some love” on the outside but is getting upgraded throughout on the inside. Another grant the ministry received helped to fix the bathrooms, put in new flooring, and patch some of the holes in the wall, she said.

When it comes to financing programs, Kent said that every little bit helps. Money from grants such a Peace with Justice soon add up, enabling ministry to happen that otherwise might not.

For those ministries who have never applied for a grant, Peace with Justice or otherwise, Kent said, “If you never try, you never get. Submit to the process and fill out the applications.”

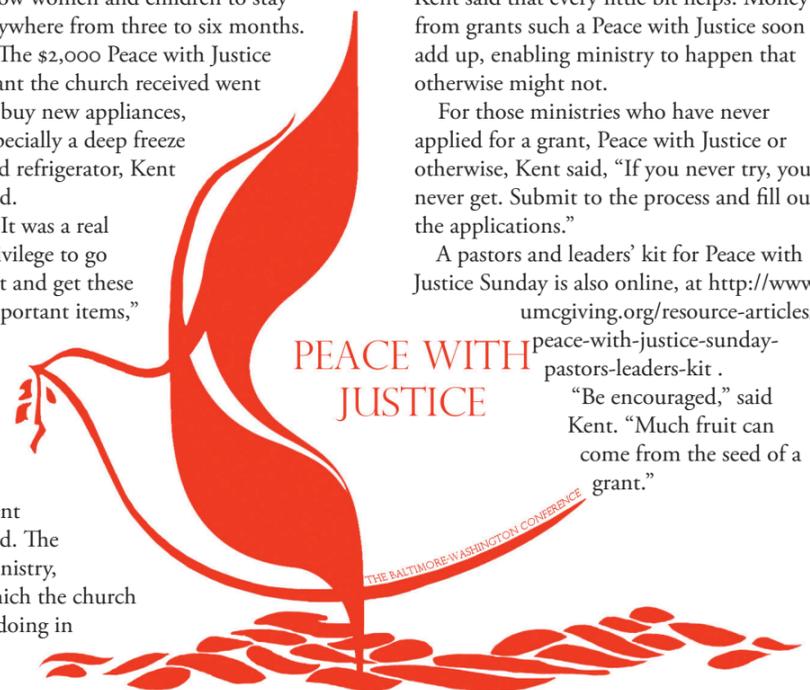
A pastors and leaders’ kit for Peace with Justice Sunday is also online, at <http://www.umcsgiving.org/resource-articles/peace-with-justice-sunday-pastors-leaders-kit>.

“Be encouraged,” said Kent. “Much fruit can come from the seed of a grant.”



The “UMC House,” the parsonage at Van Buren UMC, is being outfitted for transitional housing, in part, using funds from a Peace with Justice grant.

Kent said. The ministry, which the church is doing in



# BOOM revises policy that addresses homosexuality

By MELISSA LAUBER  
UMConnection Staff

**T**HE BALTIMORE-WASHINGTON CONFERENCE'S Board of Ordained Ministry (BOOM) recently released its new policy for examining candidates for ministry. Who can and can't be ordained has been in the news throughout the denomination in recent years as The United Methodist Church wrestles with inclusion of LGBTQ people.

The United Methodist Judicial Council – the church's "Supreme Court" – stated in ruling #1344 that Boards of Ordained Ministry examinations of candidates "must include" questions about gender and sexuality, among others.

The BWC BOOM policy states that, "Knowing each of us is a child of God, made in God's image, and a recipient and vehicle of God's grace, we do not view race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or marital status as a barrier to ministry. We will not consider or evaluate sexual orientation or gender identity, nor see them to be sufficient reasons to deny a candidate's ability to live up to our United Methodist standards."

The policy was created by the Board's Task Force on Human Sexuality and approved by a significant consensus of the 54-member board. It was adopted in October 2017. While there were BOOM members that did not agree with the new

policy, once it was adopted, the Board of Ordained Ministry "speaks with one voice," said the Rev. Melissa Rudolph, chair of the conference Order of Elders.

"We believe this policy fully embraces God's welcome and work in every person," said BOOM chair, the Rev. C. Anthony Hunt, pastor of Epworth Chapel UMC in Baltimore. "In our love and commitment to The United Methodist Church, we offer this policy as our contribution to moving the church forward to that day when all are welcomed into the ministry of the ordained, and into the fullest possible life in Christ's body."

The policy, said the Rev. Amy McCullough, BOOM's vice chair, is grounded in the denomination's expectation of "faithfulness in marriage and celibacy in singleness." Within the BOOM examinations, members expect high moral standards from the candidates and a strong sense of self-awareness about one's relational life, she stressed.

During the past year, BOOM members used the policy in their work of assessing and examining candidates for ministry. The Board is recommending 17 people for commissioning as provisional Elders or Deacons, and 13 for ordination as Full Elders or Deacons.

Those whom BOOM recommends for commissioning and ordination will be voted on by the full Clergy Executive Session, which meets May 30 at the start of

the Annual Conference Session.

The Revs. Amy McCullough and Bruce Jones, who chaired the BOOM task force, acknowledge that the policy "may not be in compliance with the Book of Discipline." McCullough serves as pastor at Grace UMC in Baltimore; Jones is pastor at LaPlata UMC in LaPlata. They also recognize, they said, that "not everyone in the Baltimore-Washington Conference is of one mind on this issue."

Creating the policy was a "very prayerful, thoughtful process that was about being faithful to God and to The United Methodist Church and being good stewards for both the pastors under our care and the churches those pastors serve," McCullough said. "My hope is that this feels respectful. We all want the best for this Church that we love."

The impetus to write the new policy stemmed from Judicial Council decisions 1343 ([http://www.umc.org/decisions/71962/decision\\_number](http://www.umc.org/decisions/71962/decision_number)) and 1344, which made it clear that Boards of Ordained Ministry cannot ignore a candidate's sexual orientation.

The Baltimore-Washington Conference follows a path of transparency and does not require anyone to "hide in the shadows," said Rudolph. Rudolph serves as pastor of the North Carroll Cooperative Parish in Hampstead.

The BWC's Board of Ordained Ministry, under this new policy, also no longer allows

one's sexual orientation to be a disqualifier for ordained ministry. BOOM leaders are aware that the new policy "is not compliant with the Book of Discipline."

Rather, BOOM has opted for a path they believe to be prophetic and focused on justice.

"I really feel like this is Spirit-led. It's not just organizational position-taking," Jones said.

Many in the denomination are waiting for the denomination's Commission on a Way Forward, the Council of Bishops and the delegates at the special-called 2019 session of General Conference to address the issue of human sexuality.

But, BOOM leaders said, waiting did not feel like an option. It felt, said McCullough, like "justice delayed is justice denied."

"It is time," said Jones. "We're at a juncture where this is the primary debate of our church, and there is a kind of fish-or-cut-bait moment that may be the lynchpin upon which the future of The United Methodist Church hangs. We, as a Board of Ordained Ministry, after prayerfully examining and talking and praying and discerning, have come to the conclusion that this is the side on which we believe God wants us to stand."

The full policy and a statement from BOOM Chair, Rev. C. Anthony Hunt, is printed below.

## A statement from the Rev. C. Anthony Hunt, chair of BOOM, along with the full text of the new policy

**D**URING THE 2017-18 Conference year, the Baltimore-Washington Board of Ordained Ministry has served on behalf of all persons across the Conference called to representative ministry of the Church as licensed, commissioned and ordained persons. The Board is comprised of 54 lay and clergy persons who serve on behalf of more than 1100 persons under our care as either candidates for ministry, actively commissioned provisional members, Deacons or Elders in full connection, and retired members.

This year, the Board of Ordained Ministry has sought to strengthen its work by engaging in several initiatives which have included working throughout the year to continue to clarify and affirm our values in light of the stated values of the Baltimore-Washington Conference and The United Methodist Church. Additionally, the Board's Human Sexuality Task Force has worked to help clarify Board policy and practices with regard to the diversity among those we serve on behalf of the Church.

The Task Force was organized at the conclusion of the 2017 Annual Conference with the recognition that in the Baltimore-Washington Conference, many people in our local churches, like our denomination

and our society, are not of the same mind on a number of important matters that affect persons who are a part of us, including matters pertaining to the full inclusion of LGBTQI+ persons in the life of the Church. The Baltimore-Washington Conference Board of Ordained Ministry has conducted its work over the past two years realizing that it reflects this reality.

An important part of the Board's work, in accordance with paragraph 635 of the 2016 Book of Discipline, involves serving as stewards of the process of supporting, evaluating and examining persons who have offered themselves as candidates for ordained ministry as Deacons and Elders. In October 2017, a proposal from the Board's Task Force on Human Sexuality was approved by the full Board, which has served as a framework for the evaluation of candidates for ordained ministry. Our overarching goals have remained to discern ways that together we can continue to engage in ministry that is faithful and fruitful toward the end of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of our communities and the world.

The stated rationale that grounded the Board of Ordained Ministry's discernment and adoption of this policy is that, as a Board, "We believe this policy fully embraces

God's welcome and work in every person. In our love and commitment to The United Methodist Church, we offer this policy as our contribution to moving the church forward to that day when all are welcomed into the ministry of the ordained, and into the fullest possible life in Christ's body."

The rationale and policy affirmed and adopted by the Board of Ordained Ministry in October 2017 states that:

*One of the primary purposes of the Board of Ordained Ministry is "to examine applicants and assess their fitness for ministry." We understand the Judicial Council's most recent rulings to encourage a full and thoughtful inquiry of all persons who come before us, using the range of questions and standards found in paragraphs 310, 324, 330 and 335 of the Book of Discipline for provisional membership, Deacon or Elder respectively. We write in response to these rulings' specific mandate to not ignore in the inquiry a candidate's self-disclosure of sexual orientation. We respectfully disagree with these rulings, acknowledging that the following policy is not compliant with the Book of Discipline.*

*The Board of Ordained Ministry will examine and assess all candidates who come before us. Knowing each of us is a child of God, made in God's image, and a recipient*

*and vehicle of God's grace, we do not view race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, or age as a barrier to ministry. We will not consider or evaluate sexual orientation or gender identity nor see them to be sufficient reasons to deny a candidate's ability to live up to our United Methodist standards. We will utilize our denomination's expectation of faithfulness in marriage and celibacy in singleness within our examination and expect not only high moral standards but also a strong sense of self-awareness about one's relational life. Our aim is to promote well-grounded, Spirit-led, equipped ministers of the Gospel who live up to the high standards for fitness, readiness, and effectiveness in ministry.*

*We acknowledge that The United Methodist Church is not of one mind around issues of human sexuality, and affirm the ongoing work of the Commission on a Way Forward. We believe this policy upholds the expectation of a full inquiry and high moral standards of all candidates. It also reflects some of our core values as a Board, including openness to the Holy Spirit, deep listening to one another, and a commitment to justice for all. We affirm the right and responsibility of all Board members to engage in holy conferencing during deliberations and to vote their conscience following a fair examination of all candidates.*

### We honor excellence

Nominate the people and churches that are making a difference

This year the BWC will present awards (some with cash prizes) for:

- The Harry Denman Evangelism Award; for one youth, one clergy and one lay person
- Youth Worker of the Year Award
- Young Adult Leader of the Year Award
- Advocacy and Action Award for faith communities
- Abundant Health Award for faith communities

The deadline is April 30.  
Learn more at [bwcumc.org/awards](http://bwcumc.org/awards)

# Fresh Expressions give discipleship wings to fly

By MELISSA LAUBER  
UMConnection Staff

## New ministries being hatched

In a nod to the ancient past and the undreamed-of future, a different kind of church is being born. Fresh Expressions unleashes the Holy Spirit to move beyond the sanctuary and create a new kind of church for the Post-Christendom world in which we live.

Several leaders from the Baltimore-Washington Conference recently attended the Fresh Expressions National Gathering, “Steeple to Street,” held March 15-17 in Reston, Va.

## Church grounded by irrelevance

Research from the Barna Group indicates that in 2016, while 73 percent of Americans identify as Christian, only 38 percent are active churchgoers; 43 percent count themselves as “unchurched.”

Alan Hirsch, one of the keynote speakers at the Fresh Expressions national gathering, went a step further, suggesting that “50 to 60 percent of people around us are not coming to our churches no matter how well we do things.”

“The maps don’t fit the territory,” said Hirsch about the church in today’s culture. “Christendom is just plain old obsolete because it was formulated for an entirely different set of conditions. Apple trees don’t produce oranges.”

The challenge for the “inherited church” is to reconsider its notion of church and ask the questions, “How much of what we call ‘church’ are we willing to give up to be the church? Are we open and ready to rethink the day and time of when church gathers, the location, giving up the sermon, our expectations of success, the offering plate and even what membership means?”

## Movement migrates to U.S.

Fresh Expressions “began” in England in 2004. Attendance at the big steeple churches was down, but Church of England leaders were observing new, unusual kinds of faith communities popping up in coffee houses, gyms, pubs and other “third places,” where people gathered when they weren’t at home or work.

Sensing the Holy Spirit might be at work, they began to invest. A few years later, the Baptist General Association of Virginia brought the idea of intentionally organized Fresh Expressions to the U.S. In recent years, United Methodists in the Alabama-West Florida, Kentucky, Florida and North Georgia annual conferences began investing in and forming Fresh Expressions.

They’re really nothing new, Hirsch said. “We are authentically ‘church’ when we are most aligned with the original and originating understanding of church, namely that of a transformational movement.”

## Defining Fresh Expressions

Within the official Fresh Expressions Community (FreshExpressions.org), a definition has evolved. “A fresh expression is a form of church for our changing culture established primarily for the benefit of people who are not yet members of any church,” said Travis Collins, who led an introductory workshop at “Steeple to Street.”

This is not for people in the pew to do mission, or renew a small group, or increase membership in some way. Fresh Expressions are not temporary. They are specifically designed for people unlikely to connect

with a traditional church.

However, they exist in a “mixed economy,” in which the inherited churches invest time, money and leadership into creating and operating the Fresh Expression.

Each Fresh Expression, Collins said, “is contextualized. It fits into, and is tailored for, the local context.” These expressions are generally much smaller than a local church. But they do reach up to God, out to people beyond our circle, inward as they commit to discipleship and fellowship, and they recognize themselves as part of the universal church.

It’s not easy to understand Fresh Expression until you see one in action. “The most important thing to understand is that this is a ministry about ‘and,’” said Collins. Anything and everything is possible as one seeks to listen to the spirit and bring Christ to a community, to a micro-culture, that the church does not traditionally reach.

There are Fresh Expressions led by jazz musicians, banistas, Zumba instructors, mural painters, Narcotic Anonymous group leaders, chatty women at retirement communities and food truck owners.

Some Fresh Expressions are led by clergy. More seem to be led by

## First steps to taking flight

Fresh Expressions begin with a foundation of listening, service, incarnational mission and making disciples. The process varies for each church, but there are some shared processes. Collins shares:

1. Cultivate a missional culture. Embrace evangelistic passions, courage and curiosity.
2. Find out who might want to join the adventure. Not too many people from the inherited church should be involved. The best number is

service over worship has an element of “bait and switch.” Keep your intentions grounded in God, but don’t try to integrate the Fresh Expressions people into the traditional congregation.

The next step is to explore discipleship, helping people find a deeper and more meaningful relationship with Jesus. During this stage, Bible study often focuses on the stories of Jesus and revolves around four simple questions: what is the story about, what does it mean to you, what will you do in response to the story, and with whom will you share the story?

During the final stage, church begins to take shape. But be careful not to revert to styles comfortable to already-believers. Be relevant and creative, follow Jesus’ model of incarnation and explore various approaches to see how best you can communicate divine truth.

“A true encounter with Jesus results in discipleship,” Hirsch said. We follow him and pattern our lives after him and are transformed.”

These steps are not self-contained. They overlap. The key is to be open to the Spirit and consistently plan for sustainability.

Creating a Fresh Expression can be done expensively. Some churches set aside \$50,000 in their budgets; others just spend the cost of renting a room for an hour or two a week. The investment will come in time and energy.

## Taking wing, finding life

One question that is often asked is, “Will a Fresh Expression result in growth for the long-standing congregation that launches it?” The answer is “possibly.” But, said Hirsch, “It seems that when the church engages the fringes, it almost always brings life to the center.”

Does it glorify God? Is it legal? Does it make disciples? Does it expand the vision of this church? Is it according to the Word of God? If so, do it. – Rev. Iosmar Alvarez, Path One

between three and 12. Also make sure to include others who pray for the venture.

3. Decide whom to engage – think “who,” not “what.” Who are you drawn to? Are you a part of some micro-culture? One key part of this decision is to start by looking at everyone as created in the image of God. Your team of pioneers should also include one “person of peace” (as in Luke 10), an insider within the culture you’re serving who will introduce you to people, open doors and show you the ropes.
4. Love and serve. Start with an agenda no more complicated than loving and listening. First, listen to God’s spirit. You are simply joining God in God’s mission and finding your place in it. Ask deep questions and listen to the answers.

5. Build community. Be proximate with the people of the community. Where you stand determines what you see. Relationship is everything.

## Then, learning to soar

These first five steps can take two or three years, or even more. The point is to share your life and serve someone. Jesus will be present, but this is not about persuasion, or selling God. For some people, choosing

bi-vocational lay people. Each is created to be unique and allow people of faith to take church to the people in their communities.

To learn more, visit [FreshExpressionsUS.org](http://FreshExpressionsUS.org). Churches or individuals in the Baltimore-Washington Conference interested in starting a Fresh Expression are encouraged to contact the Rev. Rodney Smother, director of Leadership and Congregational Development at [rsmothers@bwumc.org](mailto:rsmothers@bwumc.org) or 410-309-9958.



# Summer camp comes to spring break for Baltimore kids

**A** DECADE IN THE making, the BWC Retreat and Camping Ministries recently hosted their first ever Spring Break Day Camp for Baltimore children at John Wesley UMC.

Over the week, news of the “fun, friends, and faith” spread and each day new campers joined. The experience was free for the children and is a part of a larger initiative in Baltimore which culminates in an overnight camp experience at Manidokan or West River.

Such growth and enthusiasm is common in the BWC’s camping program which has grown by 37% over the past five years. For more information about summer camp and retreat opportunities, visit [www.bwccampsandretreats.com](http://www.bwccampsandretreats.com).



Photos by Alison Burnett

## MAKING A DIFFERENCE

### UMMs gather for breakfast and inspiration

BALTIMORE – Eighty-seven men from 30 churches gathered for fellowship and breakfast at Eastern UMC March 7. It was their annual prayer breakfast. The theme of the day was “Kingdom Minded Men.” The Rev. Mark Wamble, pastor at St. Matthews and Sollers UMCs, and the speaker of the morning, told the men that “God didn’t save us to be safe but saved us to be dangerous.” We need to share what Jesus has done for us by looking in the rear-view mirror of our lives. ... Remember who we were and how Jesus changed us.



Hampton Conway, the new president of United Methodist Men for the BWC offers welcome.

### Church and school partnership forms

WALDORF – Principal’s Magazine recently feature a school partnership between Good Shepherd UMC and a local school. It started when the Rev. Laurie Gates-Ward and a Lutheran colleague met with Principal Louis D’Ambrosio, school administrators and community leaders to discuss how to work together to benefit the church and community. Their first combined effort was Good Shepherd’s “crosswalk” on Good Friday, starting with a prayer walk around Middleton Elementary, close to Good Shepherd UMC. They have been invited to start a prayer group at Benjamin Stoddert Middle School. Plans are also underway to hold an Earth Day cleanup on April 20.

### Spotlight shines on Native American Ministries

MONTGOMERY VILLAGE – The annual observance of Native American Ministries is in April and all churches are asked to participate.

Covenant UMC organized a special community-wide forum April 14 with Dr. Casey Church, a United Methodist and a nationally known leader in the field as executive director of Wiconi International, based in Albuquerque, N.M. He is an elder in the Pokagon Band Pottawatomi Indians of Michigan.

### Three generations baptized

Three generations of people from one family were baptized at LaVale UMC on Easter Sunday. Generations four and five were on hand to witness. “I’ve baptized two generations on several occasions, but I’ve never had



Pictured (from L to R) are Rev. Frankie Revell, Jerry Albert, Paul Lease, Jaggar Albert, Misty Wilt, Kaiden Wilt, Brittany Wilt, Maverick Guinn, and Michael Guinn.

the honor of baptizing three generations and to have generations four and five on hand is a special blessing,” said the Rev. Frankie Revell.

A recently regenerated faith caused grandmother Misty Wilt to seek baptism. She recalls attending church as a child and teen when she would spend the night with friends but did not attend regularly. When her daughter, Brittany, found out she decided it was a good time to be baptized herself, along with her husband and two children.

Great-grandfather Jerry Albert began attending LaVale UMC and joined about a year ago. Great-great grandfather Paul Lease is a pillar at the church, serving in various capacities.

“For far too long churches have failed to reach younger generations. It is high time that we claimed these generations for the Kingdom of God once again. Today we gained some ground,” said Revell.

# News Analysis: Out of tragedy, God makes a way

BY MELISSA LAUBER  
UMConnection Staff

**U**NITED METHODISTS OF the Baltimore-Washington Conference are called to be the presence of Christ in the world.

Some days that role is harder and more sacred than ever.

On Tuesday morning, March 20, just before classes began, Austin Rollins, 17, walked into Great Mills High School in Southern Maryland, armed with his father's handgun, and shot Jaelynn Willey in the head.

That same bullet hit Desmond Barnes, 14, who was wounded in the thigh as he sought shelter in a classroom.

A school resource officer rushed to respond. He fired a shot, hitting Rollins in the hand, while at the same moment, Rollins turned the gun on himself, firing a fatal shot to his head.

Churches in the area immediately opened their doors to the community for prayer and provided students and their families places to gather to try to make sense of the violence, each in their own unique way.

While many prayed, a handful of United Methodists confronted nightmares.

On the Thursday following the shooting, the Rev. Meredith Wilkins-Arnold, pastor of Calvary UMC in Annapolis, exited the elevator at Medstar St. Mary's Hospital and encountered Jaelynn Willey's parents, Melissa and Dan. The couple had just been notified that their daughter had lost brain functions.

"When Melissa saw me, she just threw her head back and wailed in a way I never heard someone cry. The only thing I can liken it to is Jeremiah 31, Rachel weeping for her children," Wilkins-Arnold said.

Wilkins-Arnold's daughter, Karis, grew up with Jaelynn Willey when Wilkins-Arnold served a church in Southern Maryland. The girls became very close friends, swimming together on competitive swim teams. Wilkins-Arnold was Jaelynn's Girl Scout leader.

Melissa Willey invited them to come to the hospital. While she went to accompany her daughter and to be a friend to Melissa, the necessity for her to be a pastoral presence became immediately apparent.

Wilkins-Arnold watched her daughter sit at the bedside, take Jaelynn's hand and whisper, "I love you; thank you for being my friend."

Several of Jaelynn's other friends were present.

As a way to help those young people and Jaelynn's family grieve, and to give them a ritual to hold their grief, Wilkins-Arnold baptized Jaelynn.

"I didn't need to baptize her to know

God would welcome her home," she said. "It wasn't for me, it was not for Jaelynn; it created a moment of comfort for the people in the room," who stood around what would soon become their friend's deathbed.

One of the girls there, who had known Jaelynn since they were little girls swimming together, was Roman Catholic and had brought with her a container of holy water.

"I asked her, 'Do you want to help me with the baptism?'" Wilkins-Arnold blessed the water and poured it into the girl's hands.

The girl then gently poured the water on Jaelynn, offering an ancient gift of grace and a sacred encounter into the tragedy.

When Jaelynn died March 22, Wilkins-Arnold was asked to lead the community prayer vigil and the funeral service.

As she prepared, she found herself immensely grateful for her fellow clergy



who had been lifting her up in prayer and assisting her in thinking about what message to bring the community. One of the strengths of the connectional system, she said, is having clergy colleagues with whom to share experiences, ideas and support.

Preparing for the service, Wilkins-Arnold found herself remembering back to April 20, 1999, when 15 students were killed at Columbine High School in Colorado.

A new pastor then, she realized she had to address the shooting from the pulpit. But the right words felt elusive.

Today, she still remembers what she talked about and how she lifted up the image of the columbine flower, which "appears really fragile, but is incredibly sturdy and able to stand crazy amounts of wind and weather to come up year after year because that's how God made it," she said.

"It would be easy for some to say that God was absent during that tragedy, but God, Jesus, was right there, lying next to every person wounded," she said.

Throughout the prayer vigil and funeral service, Jaelynn's family and friends kept repeating to themselves and one another, "There are no words; there are simply no words for what we're living through or how we'll face the future."

But standing with the Rev. John Wunderlich, of All Saints UMC in Leonardtown, Wilkins-Arnold had the Word, and she spoke it with tenderness and power to all who suffered.

Responding to her holy calling, she whispered and proclaimed words of solace, of healing and of hope.

In this same tragic story, Desmond Barnes is a beacon of hope.

Barnes is a member of St. Luke UMC in

Scotland, the southern-most church in the Baltimore-Washington Conference.

When she heard that her son had been shot in the leg, Desmond's mother, Kimberly Dennis, rushed to the hospital where she was joined by their pastor, Delonta Hicks.

Hicks, a certified lay minister, rose to the occasion of his holy calling, offering prayers and reminders of God and God's abiding power.

Following surgery, Barnes was released from the hospital. His mother made a public statement, offering prayers for Willey and her family, for the students of Great Mills and young people around the country, urging everyone to "work and fight for a world that is safe for our children."

"Our entire family is eternally grateful that Desmond is alive, doing well and in good spirits," she said. "He is an amazing testimony."

Hicks noted throughout the aftermath of the shooting that the agape love of the church and the community shone through as they supported the students and one another with their faith and presence.

"God did not only show up when I got the phone call Tuesday, March 20, at 8 a.m. God was with us the entire time and still is," Hicks said. "When I arrived at the hospital to be with Desmond and his family, Desmond's first words to me were, 'Hey pastor, I knew you were coming.' ... There were many times my faith was tested, but knowing that my youth was in the hands of God, smiling with a joyful spirit, I knew God was still working."

To his people, Hicks preached, "despite the hell of last week, when everything turned upside down, we never lost our hope. ... Praise is not a style, it's a substance. We never lost our praise."

## Working to develop a complete picture of homelessness

BY REV. KATIE GROVER  
Pastor, Patapsco UMC

*Patapsco UMC in Dundalk was recently cited by Baltimore County for reportedly having trash, debris and human waste on its property, left by homeless people who sleep on the grounds of the church. The citation is part of the continuing struggle of the church caring for the unhoused, poor and marginalized.*

**T**HEY SAY A picture is worth a thousand words. This week, I was sent pictures of soiled toilet paper. I was sent pictures of a person's worldly goods stacked neatly against a brick wall. I was sent pictures of a blanket peaking out from behind a bush. I was sent pictures of trash trapped behind the wheel of a bicycle. Trash trapped along a fence line. The thousand words these pictures may evoke include disgusting, unkempt, negligence,

disarray, ugly, hazardous, unsightly.

But what about the pictures that were not taken?

Where is the picture of the man on the other end of the soiled toilet paper, a man who does not have a place to go to the bathroom with dignity, a man who relieves himself just like an animal? Where is the picture of the man on the bench covered in blankets trying to stay warm in freezing temperatures, no place to go because the cold weather shelter is not open this year?

Where is the picture of the man who found himself on the street when his place of employment folded up shop after he had worked there nearly all of his life? Where is the picture of the woman whose every possession has been abandoned because she went to the hospital? Where is the picture of the person who likely found refuge behind the bush, covered in that

blanket? Where is the picture of the person who is just trying to stash his bike, his only mode of transportation, hoping it won't get stolen?

The pictures not taken, they are worth a thousand words as well. They tell a story of a community of people that are overlooked, a community of people invisible. They are not seen, only the evidence they leave behind.

The pictures taken tell a story of people who are more outraged over something that is not aesthetically pleasing than the ugliness that perpetuates the conditions that create the situation, the ugliness that is homelessness.

Their pictures ignore the ugliness

which is mental illness. The ugliness which is addiction. The ugliness which is unemployment and underemployment. The ugliness which is broken relationships. The ugliness which is hopelessness. The ugliness which is dehumanization. The ugliness which is benefits denied. The ugliness which is poverty. The ugliness which is the callous government and the under-resourced church. The ugliness which is communities unwilling to be the place where shelters and resource centers can be located.

The pictures taken of the outward ugly are only evidence of an ugliness far greater.

How do the two become reconciled? Can they?

The viewpoints expressed in these commentaries do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Baltimore-Washington Conference, its staff or leadership.

# Gun Rally: Youth offer leadership to end school shootings

From page 1

sat at the counter during the Civil Rights movement and allowed their bodies to be battered so that change could really take place. I see the same kind of movement happening right now.”

Hannah Beamish, an 11th grader from Rochester, New York, and a member of Asbury First UMC there, came with her youth group.

“I’m scared to go to school, and I’m sick of it. I’m so done walking into a classroom and looking for the place that we would need to go in a lockdown,” Beamish said. “I’m so done with it.”

For Beamish, this was her first involvement in any kind of organized protest. She was going to march in her hometown, but said, “I figured, go big or go home.”

Jeania Ree Moore, the director for Civil and Human Rights at the United Methodist Board of Church and Society, said the denomination’s position on gun violence reflects its position on violence in general.

“We are called to turn our swords into plowshares,” Moore said. “In other words, to lay down our arms and weapons and not to pick them up again.”

Moore said she hoped that people would realize the work doesn’t stop when the rally stops.

“But this day will not solve it; there is needed work on legislation, on community organizing, intervening in violence and putting down the weapons of war,” she said.

The Board has a host of resources on gun violence, Moore said, including Bible studies, worship resources and more.

A large youth contingent from Emory UMC in Washington, also marched.

“Gun violence has been something that

has been consistent for us, especially in the black community,” said the Rev. Joe Daniels, the church’s pastor. “We simply want to be a part of raising awareness and raising this issue of violence and the need to change it.”

Daniels noted change is needed in a number of areas, none more so than police violence against young black males. “This has impacted our community greatly,” he said. “We need a change, not only with laws, but with hearts.”

He said witnessing the leadership of the

child is simply trying to fight for justice. No one in their right minds.”

Sharon Milton, the church’s director of youth ministry and a student at Wesley Theological Seminary, said the violence “hurts and breaks my heart. There are children not living to see their 18th birthday, and it shouldn’t be that way.”

The Rev. Martha E. Vink, who serves the NOW Cooperative Parish in and around Carmel, New York, said she was inspired to come by the young people.

“I feel like they are the spark that is

supposed to be about. It’s time for us to stand up and say so,” she said.

The Rev. Johnnie Cogman, who serves the oldest African-American congregation in the District of Columbia area, Mt. Zion UMC in Georgetown, brought youth and several members of her confirmation class to the rally.

“Guns have been killing our children left and right. I’m so impressed with how our young people have risen to the occasion. If they can stand up for their rights, I think we can stand up with them,” Cogman said.

Being in the African-American community, Cogman said, she hears about gun violence all the time. She knows that her kids do, too.

“I think it’s very important for (the youth) to experience this,” she said. “To come together – not just a black/white thing – but it’s an everybody thing, against guns. We’re looking forward to trying to make a change.”

Beth Scott, a member at Foundry UMC in Washington, stood on a busy corner across the street from Union Station for several hours, asking passersby if they were registered to vote.

“I support voter registration and having the ability of people to have their voices heard,” she said. Scott was volunteering with Head Count, which in turn was partnering with March for Our Lives.

Scott said it was important to put faith into action.

“Because faith without works is dead. It’s a belief that everyone’s soul is important, and that souls are expressed through action such as marching or registering to vote. We have to continue to do justice, no matter where.”



Hannah Beamish, an 11th grader from Asbury First UMC in Rochester, N.Y., holds her sign for the March for Our Lives rally March 23.

students from Parkland, and other youth, gives him hope.

“Adults have been arguing about this stuff for years,” he said. “For youth to stand up and say, ‘We gotta get something done,’ is huge. Who’s gonna tell a child ‘no’ when a

setting us all on fire in a new way,” said Vink, who planned to drive back after the march for Palm Sunday at her church.

“As a person of faith and a follower of Jesus, I have to speak this message of peace. That’s what I’m about; that’s what we’re all

# Ending Racism: Honoring Dr. King, UMs call for justice

From page 1

the branch that believed holding people as slave was a right, needed a ‘representative church’ in the nation’s capital,” she said.

“Our grand, 1917 building was built as a monument for a denomination in which every bishop held slaves at one time,” she said. “It is a building where people walk below the words, ‘Methodist Episcopal Church South’ as they come inside, with ‘South’ standing not for geography, but for split, for slavery, for sin.”

Claycomb-Sokol outlined how her congregation is confronting its racist history head-on. The church, she said, has named race for what it is: “a social construct.” Mt. Vernon Place has also made their repentance public.

“If you walk past our building today, you’ll read, ‘We repent of our roots in white supremacy’ on a banner that was hung on the 100th anniversary of the laying of our cornerstone,” she said. The church held



an intentional service of repentance where members of the church signed the banner.

The Rev. Ken Crimmel, the Assistant to the Bishop in the West Virginia Conference,

and the Director of Connectional Ministries, came to the rally because he believes in a church for all people.

“I believe all people are really God’s people,” he said. “It’s so easy for us in our context, because West Virginia is 94 percent white, to think everything is okay; that we all get along. We really have to sometimes have this brought to our attention that there are a lot of people who don’t enjoy the privilege that the majority enjoy.”

Being at the rally, Crimmel added, is also part of the conference’s commitment to the Call to Action resolution passed by the 2016 Northeastern Jurisdiction. That resolution calls for “an effort to

address, confront, and otherwise demand systemic fundamental and institutional change both within the church and the world...”

Bishop Easterling, who also spoke and prayed on April 3 at a pre-rally prayer witness in front of the United Methodist Building, said that King was answering God’s call when he was gunned down.

“He was murdered because of the color of his skin and because he had the audacity to call this nation to account,” Easterling said. “We have made great strides. I love this nation, but we have so much ground yet to cover.”

