



# UMC *Connection*

Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church • To inspire and equip local faith communities to develop disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world • www.bwcumc.org • Volume 29, Issue 6 • June 2018

## BWC gathers beneath the cross



## *Bishop issues ruling of law*

By ERIC ALSGAARD  
UMConnection Staff



**B**ISHOP LATRELLE EASTERLING issued a ruling of law during the BWC's clergy session Wednesday night, stating that two individuals the Board of Ordained Ministry had approved were not eligible for ordination and commissioning because they are "self-avowed practicing homosexuals."

The Rev. Mark Gorman, chair of the BWC's Rules Committee and pastor at Centre UMC in Forrest Hill, asked for the bishop's ruling after discussion about the Board's report which contained two individuals the Board had approved but which, he said, did not meet the criteria set by the church's Judicial Council for "full examination" of a candidate.

"The matter that was causing us to not be able to move forward was the concern that the Board had not done a full inquiry, as some believe the Book of Discipline requires, and some say that Judicial Council says is required," the bishop said. "Typically, I have 30 days to rule, but I can't wait 30 days here tonight."

She then ruled that the two individuals were not eligible for ordination or commissioning.

The bishop noted that members of the Board met with all 29 eligible candidates during the dinner hour Wednesday night, during a recess in the clergy session, and asked each for full disclosure. The Rev. Tony Hunt, chair of the Board and pastor at Epworth UMC in Baltimore, said that no persons came forward with additional information that the Board did not already have. Two individuals, he noted, had previously stated in writing that they were married to a person of the same gender.

The Board of Ordained Ministry, under a new policy it adopted last October and disclosed this past April, had decided not to ask questions of candidates around sexuality other than if they were faithful in marriage or celibate in singleness. It was that policy that was initially called into question during the clergy session.

The Rev. John Rudisill, pastor at Montgomery UMC in Damascus, questioned Hunt, asking whether the Board acted in harmony with Judicial Council decision 1344. That April 2017 decision mandated Boards of Ordained Ministry to make "full inquiry" as to a candidate's fitness for ministry, including "those provisions set forth in paragraphs that deal with issues of race, gender, sexuality, integrity, indebtedness, etc.,"

**Bishop LaTrelle Easterling, left, holds Abraham James McCubbin-Dominguez, the son of the Revs. Bonnie McCubbin (behind the bishop), and Lemuel Dominguez, after conducting a baptism during opening worship.**

By MELISSA LAUBER  
UMConnection Staff



**W**HILE NEVER DISCOUNTING their many differences in gender, sexual orientation, geography, economics, age, race, culture, physical abilities, education and theology, the clergy and lay members of the Baltimore-Washington Conference gathered together "As One: Beneath the Cross," May 30-June 1 at the Marriott Waterfront Hotel in Baltimore.

The members at the Annual Conference Session, representing 157,060 members in 626 churches, spent much of the time focused on the church's stance on homosexuality. At a prolonged clergy session, Bishop LaTrelle Easterling upheld the Book of Discipline and issued a ruling of law that two Board of Ordained Ministry-approved candidates, who were each married to people of the same gender, could not be ordained (see story at right).

In between the two meetings of the clergy, the members worshipped, erupting into spirited applause several times as Bishop Easterling preached.

"Beloved, to be Christ-followers, we have to be willing to immerse ourselves in love — a love that's self-sacrificing, self-emptying" and embraces those on the opposite political, economic and theological side — those who don't think, act, preach, pray, dance or believe like us, the bishop said.

Proclaiming the need for love and unity might seem, to some, to be hypocritical, she said. But, said the bishop, "some things are true whether we accept them or not. ... The 'is-ness' of God is not threatened by the 'ain't-ness' of man."

She reminded the more than 1,200 lay

and clergy members present that "the road God called us to travel began at the foot of the cross."

But the question is, are we capable of traveling it together, Easterling said. "How can we do that in our present state? We travel it with humility. We travel it understanding ourselves as sinners saved by grace. ... We travel it by allowing the Holy Spirit to transform us. We travel it by embracing the meaning and message of the cross."

### Way Forward on Human Sexuality

The next morning, Easterling attended her son's graduation and Bishop Sudarshana Devadhar of the New England Annual Conference presided over the BWC session. He provided members with a detailed account of how the denomination will be holding a special called session of General Conference in February 2019 to address the issues of homosexuality — including same-gender marriage, the ordination of gays and lesbians, and language in the Book of Discipline that calls homosexuality "incompatible with Christian teaching."

The Council of Bishops will be presenting to the delegates of this special session a One Church Plan that allows each local church and annual conference to decide, based on their own context, how they will address these issues.

The One Church Plan was created by the denomination's 32-member Commission on a Way Forward.

The Rev. Tom Berlin, pastor of Floris UMC in Herndon, Va., and a member of the Way Forward Commission, provided a masterful explanation of the process and the plan. (See the story on page 4 and a video of

See AC, page 8

**INSIDE:**  
Read about two major presentations on the Commission on a Way Forward, and the Council of Bishop's One Church Plan. See p. 4.

See BOOM, page 3

# Conference adopts balanced budget for 2019

BY ERIK ALSGAARD  
UMConnection Staff

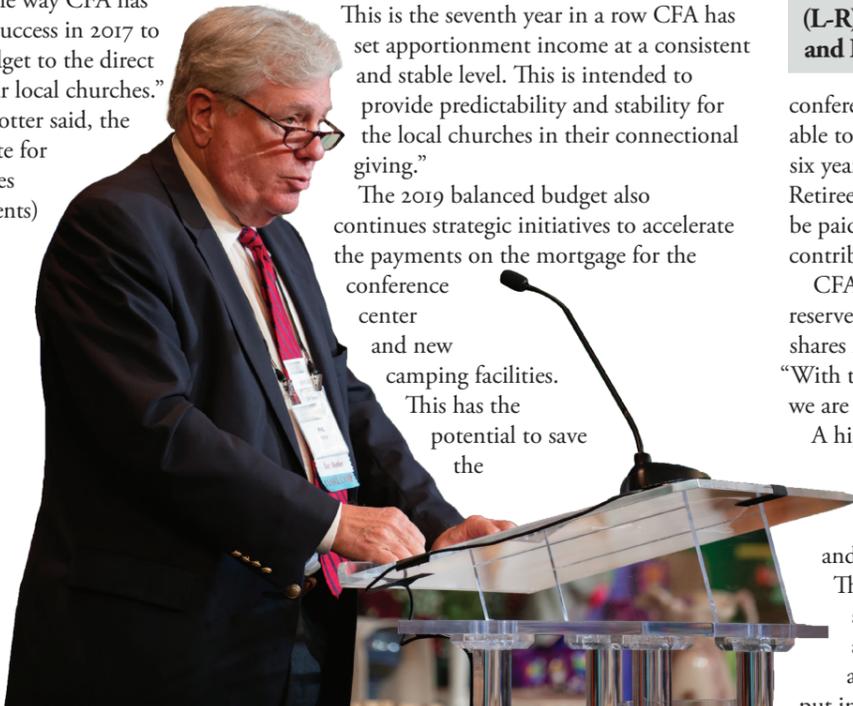


**M**EMBERS OF THE 2018 Annual Conference overwhelmingly approved the 2019 expense budget of \$18.7 million during Friday's session. This includes an income budget of \$14.3 million, or 0.2 percent increase in mission shares (apportionments) from 2018 levels.

Phil Potter, lay member from National UMC and chair of the Conference Council on Finance and Administration (CFA), delivered the financial report to members which included glowing numbers for 2017.

"The CFA report this year celebrates the faithfulness and dedication of the local churches of the Baltimore-Washington Conference," Potter said. "There is good news to be shared, not only in the telling, but also in the way CFA has applied the success in 2017 to the 2019 budget to the direct benefit of our local churches."

In 2017, Potter said, the collection rate for mission shares (apportionments) was 92.45 percent, beating the budget estimate of 92 percent for the second year in a row. The 2019 budget continues this projection at 92 percent, he said, adding that this has been



Phil Potter, chair of CFA, introduces the 2019 budget.

a "realistic expectation" set at the same rate since 2015.

Total local church income for the churches of the Baltimore-Washington Conference grew significantly in 2017, Potter said, continuing a trend since 2012. The mission share base also grew by almost 1 percent in 2017.

"While it seems inevitable that costs will increase each year for both local churches and the conference," Potter said, "CFA undertook to mitigate a portion of that effect for the local churches by reducing the benevolence factor from 17.725 percent to 17.600 percent for the 2019 budget."

This follows a reduction in 2018, he said, and this reduced mission share income by \$100,000 from what it would have been under the 2018 rate. "The effect is to maintain the level of ministry shares between \$14.2 million and \$14.3 million.

This is the seventh year in a row CFA has set apportionment income at a consistent and stable level. This is intended to provide predictability and stability for the local churches in their connectal giving."

The 2019 balanced budget also continues strategic initiatives to accelerate the payments on the mortgage for the conference center and new camping facilities.

This has the potential to save the



(L-R) Brittany Enright of GCEA thanks Bishop LaTrelle Easterling, Phil Potter and Paul Eichelberger for the BWC paying 100 percent apportionments in 2017.

conference \$1 million in interest if it is able to pay off this debt early in 2022, or six years ahead of schedule, Potter said. Retiree medical expenses will continue to be paid wholly from reserves and with no contribution from mission shares.

CFA has also increased its target for reserves from 10 to 15 percent of mission shares income to be completed in 2019. "With the positive fund balance from 2017, we are currently at 13.8 percent," Potter said.

A highlight of the financial report, Potter said, both financially and otherwise, was the outstanding income and program performance of Retreat and Camping Ministries.

The 2019 budget reflects the new structure of Discipleship Ministries and will provide transparency and accountability as this new structure is put in place. It provides increased funding for these ministries. It also includes almost \$80,000 in new outside grant income.

Potter said that CFA has contingency plans in place as the church faces changes in the Federal tax laws and potential schism in the next year or two.

"Either or both of these events may have negative effects on local churches and a ripple effect on ministries of the Baltimore-Washington Conference," Potter said. "CFA stresses that adverse effects are only potential risks and not a certainty. While the effects are currently unknown, they will evolve over the next two years. CFA is boosting its reserves and, together with other affected agencies, will follow events closely, remain flexible and develop strategies to address their effects."

The Rev. Cary James pinch-hit for the Rev. Jack Day, chair of the BWC's Board of Pension and Health Benefits, who was out sick. James presented the good news that health insurance costs for participants and local churches will not go up in 2019.

## EVENTS

**OPEN THE EYES  
OF MY HEART**  
A CONTEMPLATIVE  
PHOTOGRAPHY RETREAT  
OCT. 19-21 | MANIDOKAN CAMP  
& RETREAT CENTER

THROUGH THE OUTLET OF PHOTOGRAPHY,  
LEARN TO SEE GOD IN ALL THINGS.  
BE INSPIRED WHILE LEARNING TECHNICAL  
SKILLS OF PHOTOGRAPHY AND EDITING.  
DETAILS AND REGISTRATION  
WILL BE COMING SOON TO:  
[BWCUMC.ORG/PHOTORETREAT](http://BWCUMC.ORG/PHOTORETREAT)

## By the Numbers

The 2017 statistical reports indicate that within the Baltimore-Washington Conference:

- Membership stands at 157,060, down 1,988 from 159,048 in 2016.
- Worship attendance stands at 56,505, up 270 from 56,235 in 2016. (Note: in a new stat for 2017, our churches reported online worship at 3,174.)
- Church school attendance stands at 17,583, up 1,167 from 16,416 in 2016.
- Professions or reaffirmations of faith for 2017 were 2,600, down 43 from 2,643 in 2016.
- Adults and young adults in small groups for 2017 were at 56,960, down 1,515 from 58,475 in 2016.
- Worshipers engaged in mission for 2017 were at 66,479, down 3,201 from 69,680 in 2016.



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<b>Erik Alsgaard</b>	Managing Editor
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# Bishop Harvey: 'Keep your eyes fixed on the mission'

By ERIK ALSGAARD  
UMConnection Staff



**T**HE ORDINATION AND commissioning service is always one of the high holy moments of any Annual Conference Session. This year's was no exception, but it was again tinged with the reality that individuals who thought they would be commissioned or ordained were not (see Board of Ordained Ministry story, p. 1).

Bishop Cynthia Fierro Harvey of the Louisiana Area, preacher for the Ordination Service May 31, used the images of maps, map-making, the North Star, and Lewis and Clark's expedition to address the 28 women and men candidates for commissioning,



**Bishop Cynthia Harvey**

ordination and readmission. There may be apps for maps, but sometimes you just need one that you can hold in your hand, she said. A big, fold-y map, that is.

"The secret of making a good map is deciding what to leave off," Bishop Harvey said. "Many maps have too much information; your brain can't process it all."

That is why, she suggested, that early navigators used the North Star for guidance. It was simple and constant. "The North Star stays fixed in the sky," she

said. "It's like the hub of a wheel; it appears to stay put."

In our lives of faith, Bishop Harvey said, we need to remember what our center is: our mission. "Imagine a church constantly fixed on the mission," she said. "What is our North Star?"

In Louisiana, where nothing is sacred "but the mission," she said, the focus is on ministry with the poor, the marginalized, the forgotten and the lost. "Imagine if we knew where we were at all times relative to the mission," she said.

Noting the tale of Lewis and Clark as told in the book, "Canoeing the Mountains," she said that the explorers knew what was behind them but weren't prepared for the mountains they encountered. Their canoes wouldn't work in the hills; they had to rely on others to help.

And that help, she said, came from the ones they feared the most: the indigenous people.

"It was the Native People who helped them cross the mountains," she said. "It was the indigenous people who taught them to live off the land. Who are the people we fear?"

They might be the ones that know the way."

Reflecting some of the anxiety the church is facing with the looming 2019 Special General Conference, Bishop Harvey told the assembly that God had called each person to bring light into a dark world.

"We don't know what The United Methodist Church will look like in the future," she said. "But there will still be hungry people needing to be fed, sick people in need of healing, people in prison needing a visit."

She charged those about to be commissioned and ordained to keep their eyes fixed on the mission.

"Don't take your eyes off it, even for a millisecond," she said. "You might be the next Lewis and Clark; you might be the next map maker. Start telling a different kind of story, so that a different kind of future might unfold."

Bishop LaTrelle Easterling, assisted by Bishop Sudarshana Devadhar of the New England Conference, and Bishop Harvey, laid hands on the men and women candidates, blessing and commending them for ministry in Christ's holy church.



**Bishop Easterling, right, is joined by Bishops Sudarshana Devadhar, center, and Cynthia Harvey and others as she ordains the Rev. Giovanni Arroyo.**



**The Rev. Emily Smiley, right, joins with 14 other candidates for commissioning as provisional members in the BWC.**

## BOOM: LGBTQ+ and the UMC issue becomes focus

From page 1

found in ¶¶304.2, 305, 306, 310.

"Was the BOOM faithful to that decision," Rudisill asked. "Did BOOM ask candidates if they were practicing homosexuals?"

"No," replied Hunt. "We asked if they were faithful or celibate."

Bishop Easterling, presiding at the clergy session, ruled in the afternoon session that the part of the Board's report dealing with ordination, consecration and commissioning of people to the clergy session was "out of order" because it failed to ask these mandated questions.

Hunt said that each candidate was asked if they were "faithful in marriage and celibate in singleness." No candidate was asked any additional questions related to sexuality or practice. He added that the "full examination" consisted of psychological reports, credit checks, effectiveness in ministry reports, and recommendations from numerous persons. "It includes multiple facets of a person's life," he said.

The bishop issued her ruling of law, she said, based on Judicial Council decision 1341, the current language of the Board of Discipline which prohibits clergy from being "self-avowed, practicing homosexuals," and the rules of the Baltimore-Washington Conference. Judicial Council Decision 1341 offered a definition of what "self-avowed, practicing homosexual" means. "A same-sex marriage license issued by competent civil authorities together with the clergy person's status in a

same-sex relationship is a public declaration that the person is a self-avowed practicing homosexual for purposes of ¶¶ 304.3 and 2702.1(b)."

The Rev. Dean Snyder, retired, moved to appeal the bishop's decision, stating that he believed Judicial Council decision 1341 to be unconstitutional because it defined what "self-avowed, practicing homosexual" meant, and only the General Conference could do that.

His motion to appeal the bishop's ruling passed, 148 to 123, though only 20 percent "yes" votes was needed for adoption.

By church law, all bishop's rulings of law are reviewed by the Judicial Council. Because the clergy session approved Snyder's motion, his appeal of her ruling, and the rationale for that appeal, will be before the Judicial Council. Their next scheduled meeting is Oct. 23-26 in Zurich, Switzerland.

Following the clergy session, Bishop Easterling issued a statement giving some insight to her ruling.

There are no winners here, the bishop said. "No matter what one decides in these cases, there will be those who feel they have won, and those who feel they have lost," she wrote.

The bishop's statement noted that even though she considered the Book of Discipline "is wrong when it states that homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching," as a bishop, she had to follow what that book said.

"It is the book upon which we order

our work together," she wrote, "and live in covenant with one another. I have not and do not take it lightly. It has guided my work as an episcopal servant and enabled me to respond to many issues as the spiritual leader of this conference. In my opinion, when we pick and choose how and when we will uphold it, we begin the slippery slope towards chaos. While disobedience on the conference level may allow for some persons to seek the outcome they desire, it does not provide concrete systemic change. That only occurs on the General Church level." (Read the bishop's full statement online at [bwcumc.org/AC2018Bishopstatement](http://bwcumc.org/AC2018Bishopstatement).)

In a statement, Tara "T.C." Morrow,

a candidate for Deacon's orders and full membership who is married to another woman, said that she was not going to give up her quest.

"I am convicted now as ever that God is calling me to continue to put myself forward as a candidate," she said. "I pray above all else for grace and fortitude to be faithful as a disciple of my Savior, Jesus Christ."

Morrow is a member of Foundry UMC and that church issued a statement of support. "We affirm that T.C. is called by our Creator into ordained ministry," the statement read in part. "We firmly stand by her as she continues to faithfully respond and serve."



**Bishop LaTrelle Easterling and T.C. Morrow share an embrace, following a prayer after an altar call at the service of Ordination.**

# BWC asks churches to use Covenant as a way forward

By ERIK ALSGAARD  
UMConnection Staff



**T**HE BALTIMORE WASHINGTON Conference adopted an Accountability Covenant (slightly adapted) below, taken from the Commission for the Way Forward, for its own work together as a conference and in our local churches. The resolution that passed called for churches to use this covenant as “we work through the proposals of the Commission and any adopted proposal by the Special Session of the General Conference of Feb. 2019.”

## Accountability Covenant

We covenant to pray for one another, for the Commission, for The United Methodist Church, for the mission of Christ, and for a way forward together.

We covenant to attend all meetings concerning The Way Forward, unless unexpected urgencies prevent us, to prepare adequately for meetings by reading assigned books or papers, to stay engaged and focused, to participate actively in learning experiences and conversations, and to follow through with any assignments or projects that we agree to accept. We will offer our best and highest to the work of

the United Methodist Church as servants of Christ and leaders of the church.

We covenant to treat one another with respect, to assume the best in others, to represent one another in the best possible light, to speak the truth with love, and to practice and expect trustworthiness. We will each do our part to offer grace, to create an atmosphere of hospitality, and to moderate our anxiety through mutual encouragement, good humor, and with genuine love for one another.

We covenant to listen actively to others, to seek first to understand rather than to be understood, to ask for clarity or help from others, to remain attentive to cultural, language, and contextual diversity, to be patient with one another, and to foster hopefulness and mutual encouragement.

We covenant to maintain strict confidentiality, and so we will avoid inappropriate sharing of personal information, stories, or perspectives of other members without their consent.

We covenant to avoid harmful speech toward or about others, during our meetings and outside our meetings. We will refrain from blaming others, misrepresenting others, making judgments about others, or using derogatory speech about others or the Commission.

We covenant to avoid the practices of interrupting others, ignoring others, discounting others, speaking for others,

or exhibiting dominating or domineering behavior. We shall practice self-monitoring, gently holding one another accountable for divisive or hurtful behaviors.

We covenant to avoid dividing into factions, politicizing our processes, and retreating into camps and silos based on ideology or regional affinities. We will intentionally seek to cultivate deeper relationships with those we do not know rather than merely spend time with those we already know.

We covenant to restrain ourselves from distracting behaviors during our meeting sessions so that we may remain attentive to one another and to our work. We will refrain from checking emails, reading online news, and otherwise letting ourselves become distracted by outside obligations.

We covenant to abide by the agreed-upon protocols for sharing news, information, or photos on social media.

Be it further resolved, if conversations have not begun in local churches, they should begin now; this is part of our responsibility as pastors and lay leadership. Superintendents will receive summaries of those conversations at the Fall 2018 Charge Conferences. Addressing the final adopted proposal with our local congregations will also be required. We will report those conversations and work at our Charge Conferences in the Fall of 2019.



The Rev. Deb Scott speaks to one of several resolutions she and BWARM brought before the Annual Conference session June 1.

# BWC votes to support One Church Plan as a ‘Way Forward’

By ERIK ALSGAARD  
UMConnection Staff



**T**HE BALTIMORE-WASHINGTON CONFERENCE has officially supported the One Church Plan coming before the 2019 Special Session of the General Conference. By a vote of 310 to 233, members approved a motion from the Rev. Phil Wogaman, retired, to “welcome the leadership of the Council of Bishops in its proposal of the One Church Plan to the 2019 Special Session of General Conference.”

Prior to that action, conference members heard two presentations related to the Special Session and the work of the Council of Bishops and the Commission on a Way Forward.

Bishop Sudarshana Devadhar, from the New England Conference, presented the history and information of the Commission on a Way Forward, a task force created by the Council of Bishops in 2016 at the response of the General Conference to work on sections in the Book of Discipline dealing with homosexuality. He chaired the Thursday morning session because Bishop LaTrelle Easterling was away to witness her son’s high school graduation.

The Commission, he said, recently completed its work and the Council of Bishops said in May that they are recommending the One Church Plan to the 2019 Special General Conference. Bishop Devadhar said the Council of Bishops is presenting only that one plan; any others are for information only.

The One Church Plan, according to a May 4 press release from the Council of Bishops, “provides conferences, churches, and pastors the flexibility to uniquely reach their missional context while retaining the connective nature of The United Methodist Church.”

It also allows for “contextualization of language about human sexuality in support of the mission; and allows for central conferences, especially those in Africa, to retain their disciplinary authority to adapt the Book of Discipline and continue to

include traditional language and values while fulfilling the vision of a global and multicultural church.”

The press release did not release the vote totals for the One Church Plan, but said it was “strongly approved.”

Perhaps central to the One Church Plan is that it “encourages a generous unity by giving United Methodists the ability to address different missional contexts in ways that reflect their theological convictions. The One Church Plan removes the restrictive language of the Book of Discipline and adds assurances to pastors and Conferences who due to their theological convictions cannot perform same-sex weddings or ordain self-avowed practicing homosexuals.”

Bishop Devadhar, during his presentation, said the full details of the One Church Plan will not be released until July 8, the deadline for submitting petitions to the 2019 Special Session.

“The One Church Plan is the best way forward for our future as a denomination,” the bishop said.

Bishop Devadhar recommended a book by Bishop C. Andrew Doyle of the Episcopal Church, Texas Diocese. Facing a similar split in the church a few years ago on the subject of homosexuality, Bishop Doyle’s book, “Unity in Mission,” was used throughout his diocese. Not a single church left the denomination.

“Friends, we lived until 1972 without restrictive language in our Book of Discipline,” he said, making it clear he was only speaking for himself. “Our youth are crying out for help. There are problems in our world — immigration and drug issues, for example. There are things the church should be doing on the street.”

The Rev. Tom Berlin, pastor of Floris UMC in Herndon, Va., made an hour-long presentation on the just-completed work of the Commission on a Way Forward, of which he was a member. The Commission was proposed by the Council of Bishops and approved by the 2016 General Conference 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 Commission submitted its final report to the Council of Bishops in April.

The Commission met nine times over 17 months. They wrote a covenant with each other that both guided their work and helped to build community and trust. Commission members focused on finding a way forward rather than on representing groups or constituencies.

The Commission reviewed a wide variety of petitions presented as legislation to previous General Conferences regarding human sexuality and examined how other faith communities and denominations are responding or have responded to the question of inclusion of LGBTQ persons.

Berlin said that it was hard work being on the Commission. He said the 32 people on the Commission — who came from nine nations and 15 states — prayed together, worshipped and studied the Bible together, listened to each other, and grew spiritually together.

The report they issued, he said, was a different kind of report.

“It does not come from like-minded people,” Berlin said. “It is not the product of debate and parliamentary procedure. We were, at times, angry and upset with each other, but we never left the table or stopped contributing. This report is a product of conversation, study, prayer, listening, transparency and trust.” (See related story, above.)

Berlin placed the options before the Commission — and the church — as a choice between “contextuality” and unity.

“It would be a lot easier if we were doing this only in the United States,” he said, “or in the Baltimore-Washington Conference. But we are a connective church; we are a global church.”

And in some parts of the world, he said, homosexuality is a crime and, in some cases, punishable by death.

The choice for the 2019 Special Session, Berlin said, is which mission the church wants to pursue: the public mission or

the private mission. Noting that “the majority” of UMC clergy in the United States have not told their church about the Commission, Berlin said that “we don’t want to talk about it because we are pursuing a vision to make our members comfortable.”

“Who will The United Methodist Church be?” he asked. “In what form of faith community? With what unity?”

The BWC’s support for the One Church Plan came during debate Friday afternoon on one of seven resolutions that came before the Annual Conference Session. Wogaman offered a substitute to a resolution titled, “A Fully Inclusive UMC.” That resolution — written before the Council of Bishops issued their decision to recommend the One Church Plan to the 2019 Special Session — said that the BWC would “welcome and encourage the adoption of a proposal by the Special Session of the General Conference in Feb. 2019 that would allow for the full inclusion of persons of all gender identities and sexual orientations when it comes to matters of, but not limited to, marriage, performing marriages and ordination.”

Wogaman’s substitute motion read, in part, that the “Baltimore-Washington Conference urges the Special Session of the General Conference to delete all provisions in the Book of Discipline that prohibit our clergy from conducting same gender weddings and, furthermore, to delete the exclusion of qualified gay and lesbian persons of good character from ordination and appointment. And, therefore, we welcome the leadership of the Council of Bishops in its proposal of the One Church Plan to the 2019 Special Session of General Conference.”

A question was asked if this substitute motion could potentially violate the Book of Discipline, in that only the General Conference can change the language of the Discipline. Bishop Easterling, however, ruled that the motion was in order because it was “aspirational.”

# Bible Study explores Ephesians and the ‘conundrum of connection’

By MELISSA LAUBER  
UMConnection Staff



**D**IVING INTO THE poetic imagery of Ephesians 4:1-16, the Rev. Shively Smith invited the people of the Baltimore-Washington Conference to discover “the landscape of meaning that the letter of Ephesians puts before us.”

During a two-part morning Bible study May 30 and 31, Smith, a professor at Wesley Theological Seminary, shared how the apostle Paul wrote letters that “focused on a vision of locally based churches, wrestling with locally based problems, needing locally informed strategies to navigate in a way that keeps these communities together, safe and flourishing.”

But Ephesians is different, she said. It offers a broader, pervasive and persuasive force. In it, Paul redefines the word “local.”

He uses metaphor to describe the church, calling upon images of church as different kinds of family, as the body of Christ, household of God, and temple of God.

In their meaning-making work today, the people of God are called upon to craft new images of what “connection” means, Smith said.

She invited those present to enter a world of pictures and possibilities, creating and sharing metaphors of connection, envisioning a church that has not yet been imagined.

Connection may be computer cords, social networks, isolated people in crowded coffee shops bonding with others through electronics, or generations baking together as their hands touch in the same bowl of dough.

Word pictures and visuals allow us to

explore God in new ways, ways that should unsettle us. They are expansive and limiting at the same time, Smith said. The Church cannot be defined by one image.

On the first morning, Smith left the crowd with the question: How can two groups, who are connected in Christ but opposed to each other, be connected? “Ephesians is fundamentally a conundrum of connection,” she said. It “invites us into the experience of playing with what’s possible.”

the personified 1 Corinthians, Romans, 2 Thessalonians and others. But then Ephesians would lean in and say, “Yeah, all that local theologizing, all that local God-talk, is important. But right now, I want to go bigger than our individual contexts.”

To survive and thrive, in today’s culture, we must listen to Ephesians and go bigger than our here and now, Smith said. “Ephesians transcends a single contextual space and a single contextual moment in

into landscapes of opportunity, Smith asked the members to again draw on metaphors — this time conjuring up word-images for “oneness.”

After participants shared, Smith lifted up a few of her metaphors for oneness. They included people on a journey on an expanded bicycle built for four; two ropes, or a variety of diverse strings, tied together tightly into a sure and fast knot; a red apple standing out as one in a row of green apples; the sneakered-feet of a bride and groom on their wedding day; a marching band; and puzzle pieces coming together.

“No single interpretive landscape is sufficient unto itself to illustrate God’s relationship between God and God’s people, and God’s people with one another,” she said.

But Ephesians offers a clarion call of what it means to adopt multiple metaphors and “be bigger.”

These metaphors can take us, as God’s adopted kindred, back in time to retrieve our identity, Smith said. Can you imagine, she said, a church before human error, before human division? Can you imagine the church with God Almighty saying, “Let me loose into existence.” Can you imagine a church with Jesus saying, “I will hang on the cross-tree so that you can have the power you need to stand”? The book of Ephesians turns our imaginations loose to discover this reality for ourselves and one another, she said.

“It is the conundrum of connection,” Smith said, “the pre-existing one, with God, with Jesus, with the Spirit, to empower, to do what Ephesians said: “I want to go bigger.”



The Rev. Shively Smith leads a Bible study on Ephesians 4:16, focusing on re-imagining connection and oneness.

The following morning, she asked the members to imagine the different epistles of Paul sitting around a boardroom table. Ephesians would rub elbows with

time. The expansive vision of Ephesians is not just there for comfort. It is there for challenge.”

To move beyond landscapes of meaning,

# Those who have gone before put a calling on us, mourners told

By LINDA WORTHINGTON  
UMConnection Staff



**A**T EACH ANNUAL Conference Session, those clergy and clergy spouses who died during the past year are remembered. Family members or friends light a candle as each name is called. There were 25 clergy and 12 clergy spouses remembered this year, plus three bishops from the global church and six bishops’ spouses. Nine laity members of conference were also honored, including two former staff members.

Opening the Memorial Service, Bishop LaTrelle Easterling said, “We are one, connected in covenant; not even death can separate us from God’s love. ... It’s good to be with others who have the same experiences.”

The Rev. Craig McLaughlin, who for 31 years has pastored Mt. Zion UMC in Bel Air, brought the words of comfort.

He used Hebrews 12:1-2, “We have this great cloud of witnesses around us.”

An audible gasp was heard across the assembly as McLaughlin told of his 19-year-old daughter’s death in 2014 from a drug overdose.

Hannah had struggled for years with drugs and the family had struggled with her.

“The loved ones who have gone before us put a calling on our lives,” he said. For him, part of that calling is to fight drug overdosing.

Speaking directly to the congregation, he said that Jesus gives him confidence that “the struggles and difficulties of this life do not define our existence.” After the period of grieving dissipates, it is time to “run with determination the race that is before us.” (Heb. 12:1b)

Following the words of comfort, the candle lighting in remembrance began. Cynthia Taylor, the conference secretary, read the names, a bell was rung, and family members came from their seats to light a candle.

At the end of the service, she invited all in the room who had experienced the death of a loved one this past conference year to stand and sing “Just a Closer Walk with Thee.” There were not many seated.

After Bishop Easterling pronounced the benediction, she led a procession of the families first, then the rest of the audience singing, “When We All Get to Heaven.”



A family member who lost a loved one lights a candle as the Conference honored the saints of the church who died in the previous 12 months.



The Revs. Joan Carter-Rimbach and Carol Joyce Moore join in liturgical dance during the Memorial Service.



The Rev. Craig McLaughlin preaches at the Memorial Service.

Photos by Terry Richards

# Connectional Ministries shifts to five missional tables

BY MELISSA LAUBER  
UMConnection Staff



**M**EMBERS OF THE Baltimore-Washington Conference connected the dots during the Connectional Ministries presentation at Annual Conference, unveiling a new structure for ministry with “Jesus at the Center of It All.”

The presentation introduced five newly designed ministry networks, created to address the BWC’s previous committee structure. The new structure, which will be lived into and perfected in the coming year, delivers a renewed focus on discipleship, mission over meetings, collaboration, relationship building and resourcing local faith communities.

The five major ministry areas are leader development, new faith expressions, young people’s ministry, advocacy and action and abundant health. (For more details, visit [www.bwcmc.org/resources/realignment/](http://www.bwcmc.org/resources/realignment/))

“It is within these five areas that the Baltimore-Washington Conference will deepen discipleship, develop leaders, promote missional innovation, and build relationships and partnerships so that more people, more diverse people and more younger people love as Jesus loves,” said Christie Latona the conference Director of Connectional Ministries.

During the report, each of the areas presented pieces of their vision for the future and how it will impact local churches.

Raimon Jackson, pastor of The Bridge, a new faith community in Washington, D.C., shared a spoken word piece about how, at 22, he became the foster care father of a troubled 14-year-old. He spoke about the harsh realities they lived through together and how God has been present in the storms and the sun. His son once asked Jackson why he claimed him.

Jackson remembered: “Then with tears falling down he asked, ‘please tell me how come?’ And I replied because God said, ‘You can’t lose even one.’”

“My son saw church in me. Who is seeing the church in you,” Jackson asked.

Among other highlights of the presentation, Camping and Retreats Ministries announced that BWC camps have seen a 37 percent increase in campers over three years and the Volunteers in Mission initiative continues to grow with 28,881 people involved in short-term mission trips, the most of any conference in the Northeastern Jurisdiction.

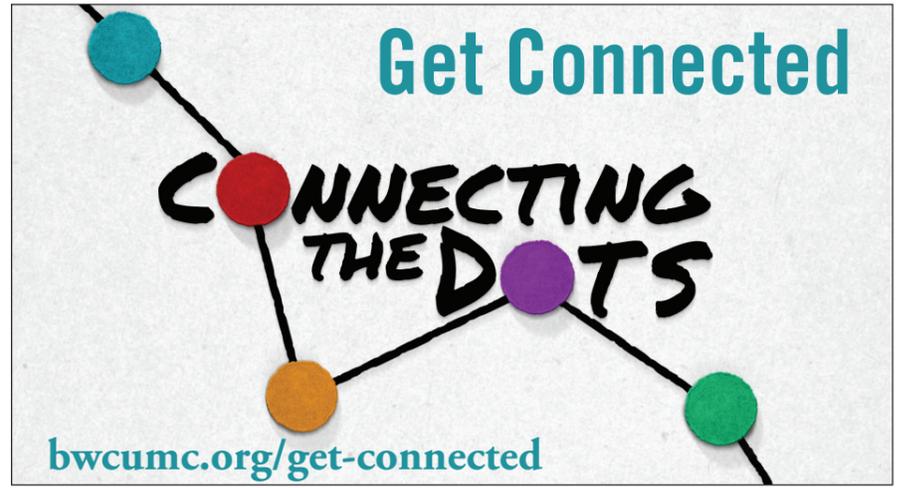
BWC’s covenant partners in Puerto Rico expressed gratitude for the \$56,000 that was given to the Methodist Church of Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria. The funds enabled the shipping and building of generators and the support of a plan to rebuild 450 communities, 39 congregations, and five health clinics by 2020.

“The people of Puerto Rico are living testimonies to the fact that prayer works. The only word we have to the people of the BWC is a deep gratitude. Your annual conference is a blessing to our church and our island,” said Isabelino Rivera Silva.

Participants in the Quality of Life retreats, for people with HIV/AIDS, also expressed gratitude for the ministry being shared by the Baltimore-Washington Conference. (See the video at [www.bwcmc.org/QLR](http://www.bwcmc.org/QLR).)

During the coming months, ministry will continue to grow and expand as efforts are made to fine tune the newly realigned structure.

In the area of young people’s ministries, a survey is being conducted to explore needs and assess people’s interests and skills ([surveymonkey.com/r/BUCUMCYPM](http://surveymonkey.com/r/BUCUMCYPM)). In the fall, a series of focus groups on young adult



ministries will be held. To learn more, visit [goo.g/WcktGC](http://goo.g/WcktGC).

In the arena of Advocacy and Action, people are being sought to work in the areas of racial justice, wealth equality, gender equality, violence, immigration and creation care. To become involved, contact the Rev. Stacey Cole Wilson, executive minister of justice and service, at [scolewilson@bwcmc.org](mailto:scolewilson@bwcmc.org).

During the Connectional Ministries presentation, several awards were presented to celebrate the discipleship of individuals and churches.

The Harry Denman Evangelism Award went to Acell Alexander Spencer, the Rev. Timothy Warner, and Jacob Beal.

When asked about what evangelism means to them, Spencer said, “Evangelism means one thing: spread the love that comes from above.” Warner said, “Evangelism is our opportunity to participate in God’s will for humankind;” and Beal said, “Evangelism is becoming all things to all men, getting down to the nitty-gritty to see what people need to accept Christ and becoming that person to them.”

The Youth Worker of the Year Award went to Sharon Milton of Emory UMC in Washington, D.C.; Hannah Callihan and Zackary Armacost, from Grace UMC in Hampstead received the Young Adult of the Year award.

Emory UMC in Washington, which is building a \$56 million, 99 unit housing facility as part of their already extensive outreach to the poor and marginalized, received the Advocacy and Action Award.

The Abundant Health award went to two local churches: Adullum Community Healthcare Center at St. John’s UMC in Baltimore, and Grace UMC in Fort Washington.

Adullum, a faith-based non-profit primary care and behavioral health center located at the church, cultivates a community of health by providing professional medical care regardless of people’s insurance status.

Grace UMC has a large ministry that cares for its people — body and soul. Some of these ministries include an equestrian camp, Alzheimer’s caregivers groups; mental health programs for African-American boys and men, and much more.

The Abundant Health and Advocacy awards came with \$1,000 to invest in ministry.

“God is calling the people of the Baltimore-Washington Conference to be change-makers, doing skilled servant work,” Latona said. “We have the certainty that God has provided everything we need. It’s up to us to connect the dots to Jesus and to one another. It’s a work in progress.”



Alex Spencer, left, receives, from the Rev. Rodney Smothers, the Denman Award for Evangelism.



Emory UMC in D.C. receives the award for Advocacy and Action.

# Conference adopts new mission statement

BY MELISSA LAUBER  
UMConnection Staff



**T**HE BALTIMORE-WASHINGTON CONFERENCE clarified and affirmed its reason for existence at Annual Conference by formally adopting a Mission Statement.

The new statement, brought forward from the Discipleship Council, aligns the annual conference’s work with the ministry of the denomination, proclaiming “the mission of the BWC is to inspire and equip local faith communities to develop disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.”

During a two-hour session June 1, members also adopted a formal policy of procedures for local churches and conference leaders to use following the death of an active clergy person. The policy was considered in 2016, but had to undergo an evaluation by the Conference chancellor before being formally adopted.

In another policy-related vote, members revised the clergy moving policy in light of the recent congressional tax cut, which eliminated the exclusion for qualified moving expenses.

The resolution said pastors “shall be provided with a tax liability allowance equal to 30 percent of the Conference financial liability for the move.”

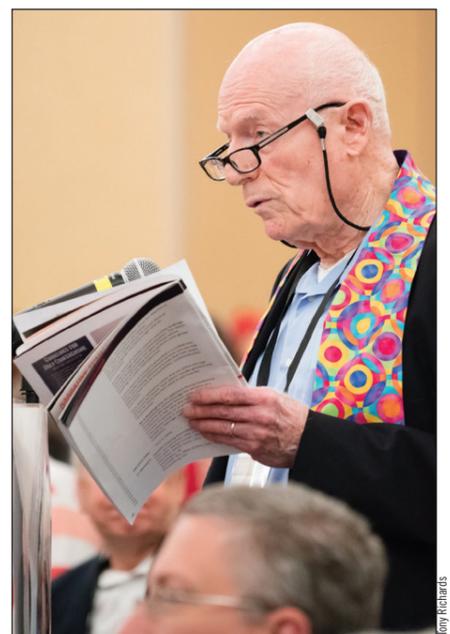
The Conference Nominations report, which assigns people to serve on Conference committees, underwent a change this year. A survey was adopted to allow people to report on their skills and abilities. (<http://tiny.cc/ConferenceLeadership>)

Only people who filled out that survey were placed on Conference committees. This year, Discipleship committees are strategically divided into the areas of leadership, new faith expressions, young people’s ministries, advocacy and action and abundant health. The Nominations report passed 520 to 86.

A resolution on Zimbabwe, proposed by Douglas Schmidt of Grace UMC in Baltimore, asked that the relationship between Africa University, which is a United Methodist school, and the government of Zimbabwe be examined, especially in light of the brutal dictatorship of previous president Robert Mugabe.

The Rev. Maidstone Mulenga, the director of communications for the Council of Bishops, proposed that this resolution be tabled until General Conference advises that the BWC not support Africa University, which receives financial assistance from one of the denomination’s seven apportioned funds. The decision to table passed 417 to 122.

BWC members also voted to “love as Jesus loved,” to use the Covenant of the Way Forward Commission to begin to have conversations in every local church about the church’s response to homosexuality and other difficult topics, and to endorse the One Church Plan at the 2019 General Conference. (See stories on page 4.)



The Rev. Philip Wogaman speaks during Annual conference.

# COMMENTARY: Church must 'uphold God's Word'

BY THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE BALTIMORE-WASHINGTON WESLEYAN COVENANT ASSOCIATION\*

**W**E ARE WRITING on behalf of the Baltimore-Washington Wesleyan Covenant Association (BWWCA) and as members of the Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference.

While there are many things to be celebrated and much to be thankful for here in our conference, we acknowledge the ongoing struggle for theological and missional unity around making disciples for the transformation of the world. This struggle was once again apparent at this year's Annual Conference Session.

However, the BWWCA would like to publicly thank Bishop LaTrelle Easterling for her leadership and integrity during our work together in Baltimore. We appreciate the difficult position our Board of Ordained Ministry placed her in as they chose to ignore our covenant and recent Judicial Council rulings in order to put forth two candidates for ordination who do not meet our UMC standards. Bishop Easterling's steady leadership and pastoral care are to be commended.

We do, however, question the repeated failures of our BOOM in their supervisory and executive duties to both protect and guide candidates and represent the entire Clergy Session in their work. We feel it is an abuse of power to knowingly lead candidates forward in a process that is in conflict with their lifestyle, that uses them to further an agenda, and that subjects these persons to the public pain they experienced. Even if these candidates have been willing participants, the responsibility lies with the members of the BOOM who should know

better and who are charged with their care.

These are extremely difficult days for our denomination and our leaders. As we prayerfully await the decision of the February 2019 Special General Conference, we have all been asked to allow time and space for the Commission on a Way Forward and our bishops to develop a faithful plan to guide and lead us into a promised future. It dismays us then, to see leaders in our conference not respect that request.

For years now in the Baltimore-Washington Conference, lay and clergy who desire to uphold our covenant and offer grace and truth to the world have been told that we are "not on the side of justice." We have witnessed, year after year, candidates come before us who willingly proclaim that they believe our doctrines are in line with the Scriptures, only to step immediately off the platform after making those vows and professions and go to microphones to condemn our standards and practices as hateful and exclusionary.

For years we have been told that a theological position that upholds God's love for all people, offers grace and forgiveness to everyone, and yet heeds Jesus' call to holiness, even in our expressions of sexuality, is not, in fact, loving. We are told that those of us who believe our Book of Discipline aligns with Holy Scripture are "far right" while those who desire to change it are "centrists." We reject these mischaracterizations.

For us, the issues our denomination faces around human sexuality are one aspect of a larger struggle for a coherent hermeneutic that upholds the primacy of God's Word for God's people and properly applies the principles and commands it contains. This

work is often not easy, and the results not always popular, but we are committed to it as faithful orthodox Christians have been for over 2,000 years.

We in the BWWCA grieve over the pain that our LGBTQ brothers and sisters have endured. We agree, and deeply regret, that the church's response to those who experience same-sex attraction has not always been one of love and grace. We affirm God's love for and the sacred worth of all people, gay and straight. We also believe that none of us are without sin (Romans 3:23) and so all of us stand in need of forgiveness. All of God's people are broken, and this brokenness is often reflected in our expressions of sexuality. This includes heterosexual sins that have often been ignored or treated too lightly.

The Good News our faith proclaims is that God's call and God's grace are available to all people and that through repentance and faith in Jesus we are forgiven and transformed into new creatures whose identities are found in Christ.

The BWWCA takes our biblical faith and United Methodist covenant seriously and

believes the current acts of denominational disobedience, while full of passion, are disastrous for our church and create a level of ecclesiastical chaos that continues to keep the UMC from effectiveness. Perhaps in February 2019, the terms of our covenant will change and, at that time, all of us will have to prayerfully decide whether we can live within the terms of the new covenant. Until then, let us be faithful to our current United Methodist covenant for the sake of our church and our mission to make disciples. We believe that it is time for every United Methodist church of every size to get back to boldly proclaiming and modelling godliness for a world that is in desperate need of saving.

We believe the church is the hope of the world and we believe the world is waiting for the witness and invitation to a faith in Jesus that is powerful, transformative and real.

\*Rev. Kevin Baker, Rev. David Deans, Matt Sichel, Rev. Charles Harrell, Johnny Hines, Jr., Rev. Rudolph Bropleh  
*The Executive Committee of the Baltimore-Washington Wesleyan Covenant Association*



Rev. Rudy Bropleh, Matt Sichel, Revs. Keith Boyette, Charles Harrell, and David Deans hosted a meeting of the BWC's Wesleyan Covenant Association.

# COMMENTARY: What's next, chaos or community?

BY REV. C. ANTHONY HUNT\*

**I** AM A FIFTH generation Methodist. I sense that one of the primary reasons that my family members before me remained in Methodist churches — worshipped and served faithfully, and steadfastly supported them — was because of hope. They had hope that despite racism, gender bias and social stratification, the stated leaning toward inclusion that was a theological precept and practice of Methodism's founder, John Wesley, lent itself to their Methodist churches being places where all people could someday find a spiritual home in Christ.

In fact, John Wesley opposed and worked to eradicate the most egregious, dehumanizing social and spiritual American sin of his day — slavery — and its concomitant racism, notwithstanding the social teachings on race of the church of his ordination, the Anglican Church. Wesley preached and practiced a form of social holiness that evidenced that the world (all people) was his parish.

My family remained Methodists holding on to a hope that despite structural segregation and discrimination against Black, Brown and Native American people, women of all races, divorced persons, and others, the church would eventually live into a vision of real diversity and inclusion, and realize that what inclusivity really looks like is spaces where "all people" really does mean "all people."

The reasons that my family members before me remained Methodists are the very same reasons that I choose to continue to live out my faith as a United Methodist today. With the recent gathering of the 234th session of the Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference in Baltimore, we

experienced again that we are challenged to live into fully practicing what we say we believe that "all people" means "all people" when it comes to the full inclusion of our sisters and brothers who are LGBTQI+ as it regards membership, marriage equality, and ordination and ministerial appointments. Again, the Annual Conference Session refused to commission and ordain LGBTQI+ persons who have presented themselves to the Church for service in these capacities.

For me, as Chair of the Conference Board of Ordained Ministry, a member of the Order of Elders, a local pastor, and most importantly, as a disciple and servant of Jesus Christ, my conscience compels me to write, speak and act regarding this. It was Dietrich Bonhoeffer who intimated to the German churches in the 1940s amidst the injustices and atrocities of Nazi Germany against Jewish, gay, "non-white" people and others that "not to speak is to speak, and not to act is to act."

In his 1963 Letter from Birmingham Jail, Martin Luther King, Jr. distinguished between a just and an unjust law: "Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust." He based his understanding of just and unjust laws largely on the teachings of Thomas Aquinas on natural law in *Summa Theologica*. King further said that "One has not only a legal but a moral responsibility to obey just laws. Conversely one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws." This is the nature of civil (and holy) disobedience.

Many persons who, at this juncture, advocate for the full inclusion of LGBTQI+ persons in the Church believe that the 46 years (since 1972) of exclusionary policies

contained in the United Methodist Church's Book of Discipline, and the resultant exclusionary practices, are effectively (church) laws that are unjust.

King's Birmingham Jail letter was written to address eight white clergymen (two of whom were Methodist) and their churches that, in 1963, were insisting on gradual, moderate approaches to change in addressing the atrocious racial and social injustices occurring in Birmingham, Alabama, and across the nation at that time.

Then, a few months after the Birmingham letter, at the March on Washington, D.C., in August 1963, King again addressed the matters of gradualism and moderation, and argued for immediacy, and the "urgency of now" in acting against unjust laws and seeking to move toward racial, social and economic justice for all people. He said, "We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now."

It is my sense that along with a clear sense of their faithfulness, fruitfulness, fitness and readiness for the ministries of Deacon and Elder in The United Methodist Church, this same sense of immediacy and the urgency of now around affirming God's calling on LGBTQI+ persons to serve in ordained ministry is the spirit in which the Baltimore-Washington Conference Board of Ordained Ministry earlier this year conducted our inquiry of candidates presented to us, and arrived at our prayerful decisions to recommend 29 persons for commissioning and ordination, including two persons who are LGBTQI+.

Two questions that persist for me are: 1) what Jesus might do; and 2) what is Jesus doing as it regards the full inclusion of LGBTQI+ persons in the life of The

United Methodist Church? In some of his first recorded public words, Jesus said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. God has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. God has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Luke 4:18-19)

Then, over the next three years, Jesus went about acting on what he said he believed. I believe that Jesus would act today in ways where unconditional love is demonstrated to all persons, and that he'd act in ways that all persons who are on the margins of the Church are welcome and fully included in the Church's life. And I believe that if Jesus deemed laws and rules to be unjust and harmful today, he would necessarily resist, reject and disobey them (as he did in his day) for the sake of the kingdom of God. This is the nature of civil (and holy) disobedience.

As it pertains to the full inclusion of LGBTQI+ and all persons in the life of The United Methodist Church, the path forward now leads to St. Louis, Missouri, the called session of General Conference in February 2019, and consideration of the recommendation of the Council of Bishops and its Commission on a Way Forward. My fervent prayer is that in the weeks and months to come, God's Spirit will move in ways that make it clear what the Church's commitments are, in our words and actions, to the full inclusion of all persons in all facets of the Church's life.

\*Rev. Tony Hunt is Senior Pastor at Epworth Chapel UMC in Baltimore and Chair of the BWC Board of Ordained Ministry.

# AC: Celebrating unity, ministry and God's mission

From page 1

Berlin's presentation at [www.bwcmc.org/](http://www.bwcmc.org/)

Jim Johnson, chair of the Equitable Compensation Committee. the housing



resources/commission-on-a-way-forward/commission-on-a-way-forward-resources/).

"We can't solve our problems with the same thinking we used to create them," said Berlin, quoting Albert Einstein.

He encouraged conference members to realize that The United Methodist Church is facing a polarity — in which two opposite concepts cannot be held true at the same time. "It's like grace and law, faith and works, in addressing issues of human sexuality. The church will have to choose between unity and contextuality," he said.

"You will discover you will have to walk together loosely or part with a blessing," Berlin said.

Considering a resolution brought forward by the Rev. Philip Wogaman the next day, members of the Baltimore-Washington Conference voted 310 to 233 to endorse the One Church Plan, which the Council of Bishops will bring before the 2019 Special Session of General Conference.

BWC members also voted to encourage conversation in all of its local churches, using the covenant created by theologically-diverse Commission on a Way Forward and, in the season ahead, to make efforts to love one another as Jesus loved (see page 4).

## Holy Conferencing

As a part of their holy conferencing, members also passed a budget of \$18,730,264. This is the seventh year that apportionment spending in the conference has remained flat, hovering between \$14.1 and \$14.3 million, said Phil Potter, chair of



the Conference Council on Finance and Administration.

Last year's generous apportionment giving to mission shares allowed the benevolence factor, which determines how much each church will contribute, to drop slightly from 17.725 percent to 17.6 percent.

With this budget, congregations will give approximately 10.5 percent of their income to mission and ministry beyond the local church, Potter said.

The minimum salary for clergy went up 2 percent in 2019, to \$44,012, reported

Jim Johnson, chair of the Equitable Compensation Committee.

During the stewardship report, members learned from the Board of Trustees about a \$546,000 bequest from the Glassman Estate and voted to designate it to go toward new faith expressions, clergy self-care and a facility update to the archives at Lovely Lane Museum.

In other action, conference members heard a report on the possibilities of increased and more vital ministry that could be possible with a realignment of current discipleship committees and commissions.

The new structure would include strategic ministry tables for the areas of leadership, new faith expressions, young people's ministry, advocacy and action, and abundant health.

Members voted 313 to 296 to continue this effort in expanding discipleship and to seek out further intentional input from the BWC's Discipleship Council, Connectional Table, and Rules Committee. They affirmed the specifics of the realignment and of connectional ministry plans more robustly by a vote of 485 to 115.

Because of a 2016 clerical error, a re-vote on a Constitutional Amendment that called for gender equality in the denomination was also taken. The results of that voting will be made public in 2020, after every annual and central conference votes.

Members also:

- Recognized the closing of Centre Street UMC in Cumberland and honored the church for its historic witness.
- Created a new BWC mission statement: "to inspire and equip local faith communities to develop disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world."
- Tabled a resolution to examine the relationship between Africa University and the government of the Republic of

Zimbabwe.

- Revised the BWC moving policy for clergy to address tax cuts that eliminate moving expense reimbursements.
- Adopted a policy to formally guide local churches and conference leaders upon the death of an active clergy person.

## Celebrated in Worship

While all the work of the conference was in a setting of worship, three special

worship services were held. During these services:

- Abraham James McCubbin-Dominguez was baptized (see photo, p. 1).
- 25 clergy, 12 clergy spouses and nine lay people who died during the previous year were remembered in a Memorial Service, at which the Rev. Craig McLaughlin preached (see p. 5). Three bishops and six bishop spouses were also remembered.
- One Deacon and 14 Elders were commissioned as provisional members, and one Deacon and 10 Elders were ordained into full membership at Ordination, where Bishop Cynthia Fierro Harvey, of the Louisiana Area, preached (see p. 3).
- Irene DeMaris was consecrated as a Deaconess.
- Reginald Tarpley was re-admitted as an Elder.
- Offerings at these services brought in \$13,351 for camperships and \$10,329 for Seeds for Security to assist

Grace UMC in Fort Washington, the Abundant Health Award.

- The Rev. Shively Smith of Wesley Theological Seminary led a Bible study on Ephesians 4:1-6 and "the landscape of meaning" it creates.
- Usha Satish, of Bennet College thanked the BWC for their generous gifts to the Black College Fund.
- The Wesley Covenant Association held their inaugural meeting with guest speaker, the Rev. Keith Boyette, the Association's president.
- Acell Alexander Spencer, Rev. Timothy Warner and Jacob Beal were given the Harry Denman Award for evangelism.
- Twenty-four retirees, representing 695 years of service, were honored at a banquet, where Bishop Forrest Stith spoke on call, love and purpose.
- Members applauded the BWC's 24 new Certified Lay Ministers.
- As one of the BWC's covenant partners, Bishop Seung Ho Choi, of



victims of domestic violence.

## Connected as One

The diversity of the Baltimore-Washington Conference was evident in the vast array of activities shared and reports presented. Among some of the highlights of the session:

- At the Laity Session, Barb Lemmel, director of Tending the Fire, spoke on leadership, and the Rev. Rick Vance, of the General Commission on United Methodist Men, shared resources on domestic violence.
- The General Council on Finance and Administration honored the BWC for its 20 years of paying 100 percent of its apportionments.
- Heard a report on the work 376 BWC churches are doing on the Call to Action for Racial Justice and pledged to continue efforts to eradicate racism.
- Connectional Ministries honored several people for their outstanding work including: Sharon Milton of Emory UMC, Youth Worker of the Year; Hannah Callihan and Zackary Armacost, Young Adult Leaders of the Year; Emory UMC in Washington, the Advocacy and Action award; and Adullum Community Healthcare Center at St. John's UMC in Baltimore and

the South Conference of the Korean Methodist Church, along with a visiting delegation from that region, brought greetings from South Korea.

- Caroleann Myers of Glenmont UMC was named God's Foolish One and honored by the Methodist Federation for Social Action.
- The Rev. Albert Mosley preached and celebrated the promises of God at a Black Methodists for Church Renewal luncheon.
- James Salley thanked the BWC for its ongoing support of Africa University in Zimbabwe, making it possible for 7,000 students to have graduated from this pan-African, United Methodist school. He also noted that funds donated by the BWC for a new athletic complex are being used to build a swimming pool at Africa University.
- Celebrated ecumenism with the Right Reverend Eugene Sutton of the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland.
- Hundreds of pairs of shoes were collected, and members walked and ran with Back on My Feet, in ministry with the homeless.

*The 2019 Annual Conference Session is expected to expand by a day. It is scheduled for May 29-June 1, at the Marriott Waterfront Hotel in Baltimore.*



Photos by Alison Burdett and Tony Richards