

Everything God created is good, and to be received with thanks.

1 Timothy 4:4 (The Message)

UMC Connection

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The Revs. Debra Mumford, left, and Tony Love engage in conversation during the reCall Summit Oct. 20-21. Mumford was the facilitator for the event, which addressed issues around race and multiculturalism. See story, below.

Summit invites conversation

By ERIK ALSGAARD
UMConnection Staff

IT DIDN'T TAKE but a minute for people attending the reCall Summit to know what the event was about. "Now is the time to rise up and speak truth to power about race, bias and discrimination," said Bishop LaTrelle Easterling of the Baltimore-Washington Conference at the start of the event. "That is our 'why.' That is why we are here, as spiritual people of God, to address the issues of race and multiculturalism."

Meeting at the Marriott Hotel near the BWI Airport, more than 100 people from across the Northeastern Jurisdiction came together to learn how to reimagine, redefine, reposition and – most importantly – respond to issues around race.

The Summit was co-sponsored by the BWC and the Multi-Ethnic Center for Ministry of the Northeastern Jurisdiction. Delegates at the 2016 Jurisdictional Conference pledged to work intentionally to "fight the scourge of racism" and unanimously approved a "Call

to Action" resolution that called upon the church to do more to fight discrimination, to confront racism and to affirm that all lives matter in God's eyes.

Under the leadership of the Rev. Debra Mumford, the Frank H. Caldwell Professor of Homiletics at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, participants at the reCall Summit came away with a foundation for prophetic race ministry in their own unique context.

To set the conversations, Mumford began with a condensed history of slavery in the United States. "Make no mistake: it was all about money," Mumford said. She also noted the "slave prosperity Gospel," which was espoused first by Cotton Mather in his 1706 essay, "The Negro Christianized."

"Mather's thesis was that Christianized slaves made more profitable slaves," Mumford said.

Mumford also touched briefly on the Civil War and its monuments and statues, over which many people are debating to this day. "The remnants of the Confederacy are still with us," Mumford said, noting the flags of

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Two new superintendents installed

By ERIK ALSGAARD AND MELISSA LAUBER
UMConnection Staff

BISHOP LATRELLE EASTERLING introduced two new district superintendents to the 178 churches of the Baltimore Region at services of installation in October.

The Rev. Ann Laprade was consecrated as superintendent of the Baltimore Suburban District at a worship service Oct. 15 at Linden Heights UMC in Baltimore. The Rev. Wanda Duckett was welcomed to the work of the superintendency Oct. 29 at Epworth Chapel UMC, also in Baltimore.

Both services reflected the personalities and spiritual journeys of the new superintendents and drew upon United Methodist tradition as they were presented with

gifts representing signs of the district superintendency, including a Bible, Communion elements, a hymnal, a Book of Discipline, a stole, towel and basin, a globe, and a prayer shawl.

At Laprade's service, dancers from the district began moving to the song, "I Can Only Imagine." On the final verse, Laprade stepped out of the pew and into the altar space, dancing with the company in her robe and stole.

A liturgical dancer, she preached that the Scriptures remind us that "life is all about movement. We cannot stand still, we are made to move and to act."

Laprade encouraged those present to move, as one, in

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Resolutions due Jan. 15

Individuals and groups are invited to submit resolutions to the 2018 Annual Session of the Baltimore-Washington Conference. The deadline for submitting a resolution is Jan. 15, 2018.

Those who submit resolutions are asked limit the content to a single issue and to follow the format outlined at www.bwcumc.org/news-and-views/guidelines-and-a-format-for-annual-conference-resolutions.

Resolutions should be sent to the Conference Secretary, Cynthia Taylor, at ctaylor@bwcumc.org.

The Annual Conference Session will be held May 30 - June 1 at the Waterfront Marriott Hotel in Baltimore. A Pre-Conference Session, where the resolutions and other conference business will be discussed, will be held April 21. The locations and times will be announced in the new year.

Take the Talent Survey

With what gifts and talents has God blessed you? The Baltimore-Washington Conference is encouraging all clergy and laity to fill out a gifts and skills survey that will be used by members of the Nominations Committee in their efforts to ensure excellence in the conference's leadership and all of its ministries. Everyone is encouraged to respond.

Visit <http://tiny.cc/ConferenceLeadership>.



By MANDY SAYERS
Pastor, Covenant UMC, Gaithersburg

AT FIRST, IT seems that Thanksgiving is frankly all about the food. (And the football.) Just the word “Thanksgiving” makes my mouth water, and I can smell turkey cooking and taste my grandmother’s gravy. And, oh, there’s the biscuits. And the cranberry sauce. And the green beans and mashed potatoes. And the post-meal Turkey Coma, and the parade and the football.

Thanksgivings of the past have all merged into a sort of banquet table of abundance in my memory. But the more I sit with my turkey-flavored memories, and the older I get, the more I come to see that it’s not the food that makes the memory sweetest.

It’s the people I ate with.

It’s faces around the table, and the latest batch of new additions, sometimes kin to me, sometimes invited in by marriage or, at least, Serious Dating. Remembering means snapping beans with people who are now at heaven’s table and hearing the laughter and the stories that make us who we are. Thanksgiving is about seeing the blessings that God gives us every day of the year, all piled up on one big table, and all the people we love that we can possibly fit into the dining room, living room and kitchen.

What if Thanksgiving could be all month long (minus the excess calories)? What if the act of thanksgiving, the practice of gratitude, was something we all did together this month? Remembering each day, the people and stories that tell us we belong to God and were bought with a price might be just the practice for a blustery November. After all, we go from the Communion table of All-Saints and the gathering of those witnesses who call us to remember who we are in Christ, to Christ the King Sunday, reminding us that Jesus is Lord, in a world where so many others seem to want the job.

Will you join me in remembering, in practices of gratitude, this month? I’ll see you at the table, where Jesus feeds us all.

If you want to bring the cranberry sauce, I think Jesus would be good with it.

REMEMBER

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 DARYL WILLIAMS
Pastor, St. Paul UMC, Oxon Hill

MY WIFE HAS recently been channeling my mother. You see, years ago, my mother came up with this statement, “If your head wasn’t attached to your neck you’d lose that, too.” It seems that my constant misplacement of keys and gloves, and occasionally a shoe, led my mother to the belief that I simply could not remember anything, including body parts if they were not attached.

So it amazed me when last week after innocuously forgetting to pick up milk, move one load of laundry to the dryer, and briefly, *briefly*, misplacing the car in a parking lot, my wife said to me, “You would forget your head if it wasn’t attached to your neck.”

If you listened to my wife and my mother, you would think that I have a horrible memory. The problem is, I actually have a great memory; it’s just very selective. While names, milk and car locations escape me, there are some things that I will never forget.

I will always remember playing with my Dad as a child while we watched PBS. I will always remember the first football game I played in that my mother attended. I will always remember where I was when I decided that I was going to ask my wife to marry me. I will always remember the night my son was born. There simply are some things I will forget and others that I will always remember.

What you choose to remember says a lot about you. Take the time to remember the important things in life. Take time to remember the feelings and experiences you have with the people you love. Take time to remember the big events in life that shaped you into the person you are today. Take some time to remember that in good times and bad times, God loves you and other people do also.

And should you not remember where you put the car from time to time, just remember to push the panic button on the remote to set off the alarm. You’ll find it.

EVENTS

A Special Invitation

Share your talents and gifts

The Nominations Committee of the Baltimore-Washington Conference is looking for talented spiritual workers to serve God in our connectional ministries. Share how God has blessed you and how your talents might be used to make disciples and transform the world, and encourage members of your church to do the same. Take the Conference Leadership Survey at www.bwcumc.org/conference-agency-leadership-nominations/

Bishop’s Days on the Districts

Clergy meets from 2 to 4 p.m.

Laity meets from 6 to 8 p.m.

Bishop LaTrelle Easterling continues her listening sessions on the districts:

Nov. 13 – Cumberland-Hagerstown District, 2 to 4 p.m. at Parkhead UMC in Big Pool; 6 to 8pm, Williamsport UMC, Williamsport

Nov. 14 – Washington East District, LaPlata UMC, 3 Port Tobacco Road, LaPlata

Nov. 30 – Greater Washington District, Glenmont UMC, 12901 Georgia Avenue, Silver Spring

Dec. 5 -- Baltimore Suburban District, Epworth UMC, 600 Warren Road, Cockesville

Dec. 11 -- Central Maryland District, Bethany UMC, 2875 Bethany Lane, Ellicott City

Dec. 13 -- Frederick District, Jackson Chapel UMC, 5609 Ballenger Creek Pike, Frederick

Welcoming the Stranger

Nov. 18, 10 a.m. to noon

BWC Mission Center, Fulton

DC-MD Justice for Our Neighbors is hosting a discussion about the critical climate that immigrants and refugees are facing. Featured speakers include Angela Edman, the JFON staff attorney; and Emma Escobar, the BWC’s Director of Hispanic-Latino Ministries.

Living your Call

Jan. 20, 2018, 1 to 4 p.m.

BWC Mission Center in Fulton

Designed for anyone sensing a call to ministry and their mentors or pastoral leaders. The keynote speaker on “Hearing and Responding to God’s Call” will be the Rev. Theresa S. Thames, the associate dean of Religious Life and the Chapel at Princeton University. The event will also include worship and breakout sessions for next steps. Learn more at www.bwcumc.org/ministries/ministry-of-the-clergy/living-your-call/

ROCK 2018

Friday, Jan. 26 to Sunday, Jan. 28, 2018

Convention Center, Ocean City, Md.

Learn more at www.bwcumc.org/rock.

Expectantly Waiting: God Bending Low

Bishop’s Pre-Advent Day Apart

Wednesday, November 29, 2017

8:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Trnity UMC
703 West Patrick St.
Frederick, MD 21701

Register online at:
tiny.cc/PreAdventDayApart

UMConnection

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This symbol appears with stories that show your apportionment dollars at work, making a difference in people’s lives.

BWC contributes \$100,000 to disaster relief efforts

By MELISSA LAUBER
UMConnection Staff

WHEN THE CATASTROPHES that recently struck Puerto Rico, Texas, Florida and beyond required an extraordinary response, the people of the Baltimore-Washington Conference rose to the challenge with more than \$100,000 in relief and recovery funding.

On Sept. 20, Maria, a category 4 hurricane, struck Puerto Rico, leaving its residents without power, major damage to buildings and infrastructure, a critical shortage of food, water and medicine and, in some areas, 30 inches of rain.

As Puerto Ricans began to clean up after the storms, local churches and individuals immediately began giving through the United Methodist Committee on Relief and directly through the Baltimore-Washington Conference, which in 2015 entered into a covenant partnership with the Methodist Church there.

Bishop Hector Ortiz of the Methodist Church of Puerto Rico attempted to speak a word of hope into the suffering, which was exacerbated by transportation issues to the island. "We are alive and we are standing in the fight," he said. "With the strength of God's hope, we will rebuild Puerto Rico again."

Meeting in a regularly scheduled meeting Sept. 27, the Baltimore-Washington Conference's Commission on Finance and Administration (CFA)

prayed for the BWC's partners in Puerto Rico, those around the Gulf Coast and others affected by the hurricanes. They also decided to act, reported Phil Potter, the chair of the Commission.

Charlie Moore, a member of CFA, recommended using a portion of the Conference reserve funds to alleviate some of the difficulties and suffering caused by the hurricanes and begin recovery efforts.

After a financial analysis by the BWC staff, CFA members voted to contribute \$50,000 to the Methodist Church of Puerto Rico designated for equitable compensation to support payment of salary and benefits to clergy during the disaster recovery.

They also voted to allocate \$50,000 to the United Methodist Committee on Relief (#901670) to benefit all areas recently devastated by Hurricanes Harvey and Irma. Texas, Georgia and Florida were struck extremely hard by these storms Aug. 25 and Sept. 10. Recovery efforts are expected to take years.

"The cumulative impact of Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria has created a 'tsunami of need,'" Moore said. "We have not experienced a humanitarian crisis

of this magnitude within our borders for a very long time. We are blessed as a denomination, and particularly as an annual conference, to have the financial resources immediately available to be able to deploy in this manner. UMCOR is positioned to prioritize and deliver substantial relief for both the short-term

to have an understanding and appreciation for the depth and breadth of the impact of their weekly giving.

"The impact of their faithful giving through apportionments is now enabling our United Methodist connection to respond in this time of great need," said Moore. "The members of your Council on Finance and Administration feel blessed to be able to respond this way."

In making these missional gifts, CFA was careful to stay faithful to its role as stewards of Conference finances. Within this role, it oversees the reserve fund, which is kept at 10 percent of the Conference budget and is slated to go up to 15 percent in 2019. These gifts do not compromise the commitment to the reserves, Potter said.

"The creation of 'reserves' is a strategy utilized by our Conference to provide a pool of funds to respond to dramatic and unexpected events," Moore explained. "These events could range from economic downturns to extended legal battles to responding to natural or humanitarian crises, to name a few."

In the past, the BWC has contributed, from its reserves, \$100,000 to assist with the building of the West Zimbabwe Annual Conference Mission Center, with whom the BWC has a covenant relationship, as well as a \$500,000 gift to the denomination's Imagine No Malaria Campaign, which raised more than \$70 million toward the elimination of deaths from malaria throughout the world.

Ours Are the Hands and Feet

'Yours are the feet with which Christ is to go about doing good; Yours are the hands with which he is to bless humanity now.'

- Teresa of Avila

Discover your ministry in the world through VIM or disaster response. Visit www.missiontrips.bwumc.org/

and the long-term. Our new covenant relationship with the Methodist Church of Puerto Rico also provides a reliable and transparent channel for our ministry of support."

Moore, Potter and other conference leaders say they think it is important for their fellow United Methodists "in the pews" throughout the annual conference

Wesley Seminary hosts political theology conference

By ERIK ALSGAARD
UMConnection Staff

OUR COUNTRY AND The United Methodist Church appear to be deeply divided. From *ad hominem* attacks published on Twitter from the top levels of government, to a Congress with near record-low approval ratings because of its inability to work together; from a society where people hide behind the anonymity of social media to churn out diatribes and hate speech, to a church that seems intent on forcing people to take sides as if there really was a difference between Greek and Jew, slave and free (Gal. 3:28), it has become increasingly difficult to talk – and listen – to one another.

That was the stimulus behind the Wesleyan Political Theology Conference, held at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C., Oct. 26 and 27. The nine presenters and three respondents, along with more than 100 participants, met to try and answer the question, "What would John Wesley do in our political climate?"

An initiative of the seminary and its Center for Public Theology, Ryan Danker, Associate Professor of the History of Christianity and Methodist Studies at Wesley, convened the meeting of Wesleyan scholars from across the theological and political spectrum in the school's Oxnam Chapel.

"I think this was a vital conference," Danker said, "because it addresses an issue that people are asking whether or not they are Wesleyan: How do Christians engage within such a volatile, divided, divisive and somewhat aggressive context?"

The answers, as expected, ran the length and breadth of today's thought.

Mike McCurry, who co-hosted the event with Danker and who is the Distinguished Professor of Public Theology at Wesley, started the presentations by exploring what

it meant, to him, to be a Methodist in the public square.

"The church," he said, "needs to offer some kind of response." The former press spokesman for President Bill Clinton who still has deep ties to the Democratic Party, McCurry said that one of the problems he sees is that the conversations that happen in church are not the same as the ones that happen when they get home.

"We need to bring the topics burning the public square to the center of the church," he said, "where genuine and authentic debate can take place."

For that to happen, he said, pastors are going to need to be skilled in leading those conversations. "The church," McCurry said, "needs to be at the center of this 'third place' dialogue."

On the other hand, James Thobeben, Dean of the School of Theology and Formation, and Professor of Bioethics and Social Ethics at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky, argued that John Wesley himself, not being a political or systematic theologian, means that Methodists need to "pull back" from activism.

Wesley would argue, Thobeben said, that there's a distinction between being made in the image of God (Imago Dei) and being a child of God. "One has different duties as a child of God," he said.

William Abraham, the Albert Outler Professor of Wesley Studies at the Perkins School of Southern Methodist University, started his presentation by taking a note of the UMC's mission statement which hints at social action. The addition of the words "for the transformation of the world," he said, was added by the church's Council of Bishops to the original wording, "To make disciples of Jesus Christ."

The whole addition "has an air of theological comedy," he said. "It takes us backwards to the 60s, and suggests that our bishops can improve on our Lord's own

mission statement."

The Rev. Lacey Warner, Associate Professor of the Practice of Evangelism and Methodist Studies at the Divinity School at Duke University, highlighted the lives of three southern women to shed light on the conference's question. Dorothy Ripley, Belle Harris Bennet, and Mary McLeod Bethune all exemplified the Wesleyan combination of personal piety and social holiness, she said.

Ripley, who ministered to African slaves in the United States and met personally with President Thomas Jefferson, visited prisons and wrote against capital punishment. Bennet built schools and labored for social justice which combined with her evangelistic outreach, setting up "Bethlehem Houses" and "Wesley Houses" for the poor. And Bethune, Lacey said, is well-known for her political engagement and public contributions.

The president of Wesley, the Rev. David McAllister-Wilson, said that he was pleased

with the diversity of voices presented during the conference.

"I think they laid a very helpful grounding for anyone, but especially for Wesley and our Center for Public Theology, as we seek to move confidently into the public square," he said.

Danker said that he had a personal take-away from the conference.

"I hope people leave thinking that we can actually discuss the politics of our day and not launch at each other or practice identity politics," Danker said. "There are real disagreements amongst the speakers, respondents and the people here, and yet we're talking about issues that matter to the American people and we're doing it in a civil way. If Christians can't do it, the world won't be able to do it at all."

Videos of the presentations are online at <https://www.wesleyseminary.edu/>, search "videos."



Ryan Danker, left, William Abraham, center, and Luther Oconor, right, answer questions at Wesley Seminary's Wesleyan Political Theology Conference.

reCall: History and hope shape conversations on race

From page 1

Mississippi, Florida and others, and buildings, roads and schools named after Confederate generals.

In table groups, participants tackled hard questions: “What racial history needs to be taught at your church? How might your church become involved in the removal of Confederate monuments from public spaces?” Mumford pushed back to anyone thinking that merely asking the questions was enough. “Make sure you have action steps to put these thoughts into motion,” she said.

In another session, Mumford shared an hour-long video, part of a 2003 PBS series, “Race: The Power of an Illusion.” The video explained how race is not a biological reality but a social invention. It also showed how economic realities based

on race affected housing affordability and procurement after World War II for African-Americans, a practice known as “redlining.”

After more table group discussion, the Rev. Marlon Tilghman, pastor at Ames UMC in Bel Air, shared how he saw the video as a call to action for the church.

“The church needs to be involved in legislation,” he said, “because legislation is what created these systems.”

The topic of fear was widely discussed, about how it is used to motivate, persuade and enable people to act in certain ways.

“Fear is as old as the book of Exodus,” said the Rev. Wanda Duckett, superintendent of the Baltimore Metropolitan District. “There’s been this fear, since the times of slavery, that ‘If they ever get together, they’ll figure something out.’”

Duckett said that having these conversations around race are necessary but difficult. “It’s easier to be with people who look like you,” she said. “It’s not simple work.”

On Saturday morning, Mumford looked at the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.’s “radical side,” she said, to see what lessons people could learn. This was the time when King protested



The Rev. Nancy Webb, left, speaks with the Rev. Brian Jackson during the reCall Summit.



The Rev. Yvonne Mercer-Staten “takes a knee” during the Summit.

the Vietnam War, she said, and when he practiced voluntary suffering.

“Remaining silent in the face of an injustice was not an option for King,” Mumford said. “He was against the war for a myriad of reasons. In its face, he called for a revolution of values.”

Mumford also walked participants through the platform for the Movement of Black Lives. This multi-page document contains six major points, she said, from addressing reparations to economic justice to ending the war on black people.

“Are there Black Lives Matter chapters in your town?” Mumford asked. “Can you partner with them? Can you invite them to come and speak at your church? What goals of the platform can you get involved in?”

Several participants spoke of the concrete action steps they will undertake in their church. One example was from the Rev. Claire Matheny, associate pastor at St.

Paul’s UMC in Kensington, who is a native of Memphis, Tenn. She said that next April 4, on the 50th anniversary of King’s assassination, she plans to be in her home town and was looking for people to go with her on an educational pilgrimage. She also asked that the conference put together a Lenten devotional around the 50th anniversary to help people observe, study and act upon King’s legacy.

“This Summit is necessary because we have to live at the intersection between theology and social construct,” said Bishop Easterling in an interview. “We have to understand the history of this country and how it informs our systems and thinking, even who we are as Christians.”

*LEARN MORE: Visit www.bwcmc.org/resources/call-to-action-on-racial-justice/text-of-the-call-to-action/ to read the *Northeastern Jurisdiction’s Call to Action* document.*

DS: Dance and Diversity featured at installations

From page 1

unity, as described in Eugene Peterson’s translation of Ephesians 4. “God is already working through you in mighty ways,” she said. “I’m excited about what God may do through us as we work together.”

It is her prayer, she said, that the pastors and laity of the Baltimore Suburban District will continue to “move in rhythms of grace and transformation,” from surviving to thriving, from membership to discipleship, and from self-focus to community-focus.

We are called to “show up fully as the person God called us to be — no more,

no less,” Laprade said. “As we dance, we become partners with one another and with God.”

The Rev. Wanda Bynum Duckett was installed as the superintendent of the Baltimore Metropolitan District before a standing-room-only crowd at Epworth UMC in Baltimore Oct. 29. The diversity of the district was on full display during the 150-minute worship service: The Epistle lesson was read in Spanish; the Christ United Methodist Church of the Deaf Choir performed; the Gospel was read half in Korean, half in English. Praise bands featured young and old performers and even Duckett’s granddaughter, Lalya,

participated by helping Dorothy Randall present the new DS with a hymnal and Book of Worship.

Duckett’s sermon, based on Ezekiel 37, encouraged the clergy and laity to use their voices to speak “to the dry bones” in the valley.

Duckett said that there are three lessons to be learned from Ezekiel’s experience in the valley of the dry bones. The first, she said, is that God has called us in our own contexts “for such a time as this” to speak to the valley.

Many of Baltimore’s churches are challenged at how they can remain spiritually vital, prophetically relevant and financially stable.” But despite these obstacles, she said, we have to remember: the valley is a fertile place. “God is with us in the valley. There are bones all around us who need to hear our voices,” she said.

And since God is with us, God has a question, Duckett said. “Can these bones live?” Encouraging United Methodists to use their voices to tell others what they believe, Duckett said that if we don’t believe the answer to the question is “yes,” then “we might as well close up shop.”

Ministry in the valley isn’t easy. “There’s no such thing as boneless or spineless ministry,” Duckett said. “God does the work; God does the heavy lifting. All we have to do is use our voices; God will provide the resurrection.”

Duckett said she doesn’t believe that God calls us to only prophesy to the bones, but like Ezekiel, God calls us to prophesy to the breath.

“How many know that we are not complete without the paraclete?” she asked. Praying that the Breath of God — the Holy Spirit — would come from the four corners of the earth to Baltimore, Duckett said, “breathe upon those who are hurting. Come and breathe on those who are addicted to heroin and crack cocaine. Come and breathe on those who are incarcerated. Come and breathe, from downtown to Dundalk. Breathe.”

Laprade has served five congregations with the BWC, including St. Andrew’s UMC in Hagerstown, Faith UMC in Rockville, West Baltimore UMC in Catonsville, Linden Heights UMC in Parkville and Potomac UMC in Potomac. She has service as chair of the conference Council on Finance and Administration, Council of Ministries, and the Council on Resource Development.

Duckett, a native of Baltimore, served at Monroe Street UMC and Mount Zion UMC, both in Baltimore. She was ordained an Elder by the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 2010, and in 2012 became an Elder in The United Methodist Church. She earned a Doctor of Ministry degree from Wesley Theological Seminary with a dissertation titled, “Sacred Slam: Spoken Word Poetry as Sacred Art for Sacred Spaces.”



The Rev. Ann Laprade, left, dances during her installation as Baltimore Suburban District Superintendent. The Rev. Wanda Bynum Duckett, right, receives a hymnal from her granddaughter, Layla, during her installation service.

Gun Sense takes aim at culture of fear and violence



Clockwise from left: Panelists address the Gun Sense meeting, including (L-R) Susan Henry-Crowe, Mark Schaefer, Major Sheree Briscoe, and Sheriff Troy Berry; Rachel Cornwell and Cary James ask questions; Rodney Smothers and Bishop LaTrelle Easterling welcome and pray for the gathering. Photos by Melissa Lauber.

"It's not the tool alone that's the problem, but it's the fear we have created," he said. "It's the way we look to the tool we have made with our own hands as our salvation, rather than God. It's when we trust more in that tool than in God, whose perfect love casts out all fear."

Unprecedented challenges

In 2017, as of Oct. 14, there were 540 non-fatal shootings in Baltimore; 101 of them happened in the Western District. This 28 square-mile area, with 40,000 residents, was the home of the civil unrest after Freddie Grey died while in police custody in 2015.

Just after that time, Major Sheree Briscoe was brought in to be commander of the Western District. A United Methodist, she brings a faith perspective to her insights from 23 years on the police force.

"The reality is that every day, urban cities are seeing an unprecedented rate of violence," she said. Coming to terms with that violence means understanding that crime is really a "byproduct of an ill community," she said. The church needs to also be in conversation about mental health as it relates to guns and other issues. It needs to wrestle with the interconnectedness of all the challenges stemming from socio-economic conditions, she said, and the disenfranchisement of youth and the expectations and realities facing law enforcement officials.

Briscoe encouraged church leaders to join in partnerships with community organizations.

"Partnerships are everything," she said. "We need to do more collectively to partner and create sustainable programming."

"We are all required to take the Word of God out to the people of God," Briscoe said. "I wear a uniform to do this."

What vision is being cast?

Sheriff Troy Berry of Charles County warned United Methodists about getting caught up in a singular issue. Too often, people want to isolate an issue and their tunnel vision leads to inaction, he said.

Berry stressed the need for those present to challenge their elected officials to express the vision they are casting to spark a dialogue about gun violence and other substantial issues. He also hopes United Methodists will advocate for common sense legislation.

In his 25 years in law enforcement, including time as a homicide investigator, Berry has come to believe that gun ownership is a privilege, not a right.

"People who have mental health issues or a propensity toward domestic violence shouldn't have guns," he said. "I've seen a lot of people who use guns for wrong reasons. That's where the conversation starts."

Taking aim at the violence

As the panel of speakers concluded their remarks, people rose to ask questions and discuss how guns and gun violence might be addressed, particularly in areas where it is hitting very close to home. For example, on the day before the Critical Conversation on Gun Sense, there was a shooting just blocks away from Sharp Street Memorial UMC in Baltimore. The day after, the Revs. Tiffany Patterson and Brenda Lewis led a vigil for five people shot, three of whom were killed, at a shooting in Edgewood.

Some spoke about youth and ministering to them around this issue. One after another, they came to the microphones to speak about advocating for legislation, how to best have controversial conversations, the difficulty of enforcing laws currently on the books, police responses, how issues of mental health and guns relate to one another, and how responsible gun ownership might be distorted by those who are advocates of stricter gun control.

The conversation was lively as people explored how to create a culture in which people feel free again to borrow a cup of sugar from their neighbor, and build communities of respect and empathy. Gun sense was the focus of the discussion, but people delved deeper.

"What's so interesting to me is that when Jesus encounters people, he heals them, he feeds them, he sits with them, he doesn't preach about what they need to believe in order to get into heaven. He's actually meeting direct need. That's what is healing and transformative," Schaefer said. "There are immediate policy things we can do, but I think unless the church is willing to engage in that deeper encounter with one another things won't be fixed. ... If there is an institution that should be about love over fear, it's us."

As the conversation ended, the all clear was given at Howard University. During that brief time, more than 100 D.C. police officers, many armed with semiautomatic rifles, searched campus buildings and classes were canceled for the day.

The conversation, Bishop Easterling said, will continue. "There are many topics worthy of deep, engaging, critical conversation."

WHEN THE CRITICAL Conversation on Gun Sense was starting at the Baltimore-Washington Conference Mission Center at 1 p.m. Oct. 17, the Rev. Kay Albury was receiving news that Howard University was on lock-down. There were reports of an active shooter on campus, where her daughter, the Rev. Alexis Brown, serves as campus minister.

The drama and fear of that situation illuminated some of the deep emotions surrounding guns that inspired Bishop LaTrelle Easterling to call together United Methodists for a conversation. Her call hit a nerve: the event was standing room only.

The bishop shared how, when she was writing a response to the recent mass shooting in Las Vegas, she found herself growing weary of the horror. "The word that kept coming to me," she said, "was 'again. Did this really happen – again?'"

The Pulse nightclub in Orlando. Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina. Virginia Tech. Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut. These are just some of the high-profile tragedies that have been seared into the American conscience. But in the first six months of 2017 alone, there had been 154 mass shootings in the US, and these shootings accounted for just 1 percent of gun violence in America.

Yet even when events become overwhelming or make us weary, Christians are called to act, the bishop said. She reminded those present to never devalue the power and practical witness of prayer and celebrated that social holiness is one of the foundations of United Methodism.

"Our intent is to acknowledge our pain, frustration, fear and sense of paralysis around this topic and discern how we, as the church, can begin to have a meaningful impact in the places God has planted us," she said.

The bishop welcomed four conversation partners to lead the discussion on gun sense: the Rev. Susan Henry-Crowe, General Secretary of the General Board of Church and Society; the Rev. Mark Schaefer, chaplain of American University; Major Sheree Briscoe, commander of the Baltimore Police Department's Western District; and Sheriff Troy Berry of Charles County.

The panel, led by the Rev. Rodney Smothers, the conference Director of Leadership and Congregational Development, spoke about guns from their personal perspectives and then responded to questions from the 220 clergy and lay people in attendance.

'So that we may walk in God's path'

Henry-Crowe shared the United Methodist perspective on gun violence. In front of the Methodist Building in Washington, D.C., she said, is a sign that says we are praying for the victims of the Las Vegas shooting. "But not only must we pray, we must act," she said. "If we remain silent, we are complicit."

Henry-Crowe acknowledged that there are many perspectives in this conversation. "We even come today with many different ways of not knowing what to," she said.

The United Methodist stance on ending gun violence, she stressed, is nuanced. It is outlined in Resolution 3428 of the denomination's 2016 Book of Resolutions and "draws on Micah's inspiration, applying Micah's prophetic dreams of peace to violent realities."

She called on United Methodists to engage in study and educate themselves and others about gun violence; to advocate and organize to address this issue nationally, internationally and in your local context; and to care for your community and the world.

Fear, faith and guns

While Scripture does not make explicit reference of firearms, said the Rev. Mark Schaefer, it does have plenty to say about violence. There are some 407 verses in which swords are mentioned.

"But there's something particular about the gun," Schaefer said. "In the martial arts, by the time a person learns how to take another person's life with their bare hands, they've received so much discipline and training that they don't do that. But with a gun, you don't have any of that discipline and training. It's powerful. It's immediate. It's deadly."

In the US, at this point in our history, he pointed out, there are 112 guns for every 100 Americans. But the large number of guns points to a larger issue, Schaefer said. America is a country of fear which is used to sell products, to push national agendas, and to get people to tune into a news broadcast, he said.

"Fear pervades our national life," Schaefer said. "We're all scared, we're feeling out of control and a firearm is an incredibly powerful tool that gives us the illusion of control."

But in so doing we run a very real spiritual risk, said Schaefer.

Resources for Local Churches

To assist your church in addressing issues surrounding guns and gun violence, we have made a list of resources that is built in and for community. Submit resources you believe will be helpful to church leaders at tiny.cc/GunSenseResources.

Yes, you should talk about money in church

By RACHEL CORNWELL*



*"I hate preaching about money."
"Parishioners skip church if I'm giving a stewardship sermon."
"Pastor, that sermon about church finances didn't feed me spiritually."*

Many ministers have either said, or heard, comments like these when stewardship season rolls around and we have to talk about the church's finances and people's giving. But teaching about the importance of faithful stewardship is not only necessary, it can also be transformational for individuals and for congregations.

Most people want to be generous and they want to support the church of which they are apart, so it's vitally important for congregational leaders to help people do that by regularly preaching and teaching about financial stewardship in three ways.

Make plain the vision.

Stewardship sermons should help people see what their giving can do to increase the ministry of the church and the impact it will have on people's lives. Most church budgets are largely made up of staff and building costs, but without people to lead the church's ministry, or without a building through which ministry happens, the church wouldn't be as effective. Be sure to tell people not only what their giving has done in the past year, but how sustaining or even increasing that giving will enable the church to grow.

Money is a spiritual issue.

Jesus talked about money more than anything else, and people have a lot of worries, anxiety, guilt and shame around money. But it's nothing more than a resource. We can experience both abundance and scarcity. We can use money in responsible, faithful ways, or frivolously. As spiritual leaders, we need to talk through the complex

feelings people have around money and empower them to be faithful stewards of that which God has entrusted to them.

Budgets are moral documents and an indication of spiritual health.

Many people think that budgets are boring, but the financial health of your congregation, and how you spend the money that is given, are reflections of your church's priorities. Do you have a capital reserve fund to care for your church facilities in the future? Are you paying your staff a living wage? Are funds for ministries of justice and compassion included in your budget? Jesus said, where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. These words apply not only to individuals, but to institutions as well.

**The Rev. Rachel Cornwell is affiliated with The James Company (www.jamescompany.com); contact her at rcornwell@jamescompany.com.*

MAKING A DIFFERENCE



UMCOR goal met

FREDERICK – Jackson Chapel's Missions team set a goal of making 200 hygiene kits for UMCOR. And they made it. A yard sale netted \$1,027 to purchase supplies and donate to UMCOR. "It was a great time for prayer and fellowship," said Pastor Rex Bowens Sr. On Sept. 26, members delivered the kits to Mission Central in Mechanicsburg, Pa.



Sharing a common struggle

HARPERS FERRY, W.Va. – The Rev. John Unger, above, a "citizen diplomat" on the US delegation of the Dartmouth Conference, a 57-year-old dialogue initiative that seeks solutions to the acrimony in US-Russian relations, recently returned from Zavidovo, where they met with Russian officials.

Unger is the pastor for three congregations in Harpers Ferry: Lutheran, Episcopal and United Methodist. He was particularly taken by the ancient Russian Orthodox church and its trove of icons.

Unger and other religious leaders, including a leading Russian Muslim cleric, are working to pull together an interfaith dialogue in Kazan next year. Terrorism, hate groups, and drugs are matters of deep concern in both countries.

Church attacks water pollution

SILVER SPRING – Colesville UMC, with a \$5,000 grant from Montgomery County, recently built a rain garden in its front yard. The Trustees had applied for the grant to help manage storm-water run-off from the roof of its Education Wing.

County personnel dug out the initial space and prepared it with spongy soil to allow water to soak into the ground. They then planted native plants to help filtrate the water, filter out pollutants and provide habitat for pollinators.

"Water is the precious elixir of life, without which our earthly existence would cease to be," the Rev. Michael Armstrong said.

The rain garden is a demonstration project for the County to show other organizations and individuals how to create their own RainScape Project. It will also serve as an outdoor classroom for the elementary students who use the building.

Havre de Grace UMC makes public stand against hate

HAVRE DE GRACE – The recent turbulent events around race in this nation prompted leaders of Havre de Grace UMC to make a public declaration against hate. "I felt we needed to speak positive words in a negative situation," said the Rev. Norman Obenshain.

That's what led to the church's 15-member council overwhelmingly adopting a resolution that says in part: "Resolved, that we strongly denounce and oppose the manifest intimidation, violent terrorism, xenophobic biases, and bigoted ideologies being promoted and executed by multiple groups across the country."

Ames UMC, started in 1876, celebrates anniversary

BEL AIR - Ames UMC, the first African-American church in Bel Air, was organized in 1876 in a small warehouse. The congregation grew so large it needed more space and a new church building was erected on the adjoining lot. It was

dedicated and named Ames Methodist Episcopal Church in May, 1887.

The church has experienced steady growth throughout the decades. In 2001, the congregation moved into its current building.

Bishop LaTrelle Easterling spoke in recognition of the church as a place of worship as it celebrated its 141st anniversary, Oct. 8.

Rain doesn't stop a good cause

MARTINSBURG – Despite the rain, United Methodists walked in Martinsburg to raise money to end hunger.

The Rev. Mark C. Mooney, pastor of Otterbein UMC, organized the walk. The event was sponsored by the Berkeley County Ministerial Association and raised about \$7,000.

A quarter of the funds go to the local CCAP Loaves and Fishes outreach ministry and emergency social services. The remainder goes to Church World Service for its worldwide ministry.

The 20 residents walking through War Memorial Park on a rainy Sunday afternoon were part of a nationwide effort that includes 120,000 Americans who raise more than \$10,000,000 every year in about 1,000 walks, according to the CROP Walk website.

UMCs help with food security

SILVER SPRING – Manna Food Center is partnered by at least nine United Methodist Churches in Montgomery County, as well as the old Marvin Memorial UMC at Four Corners, which has become Manna's second Choice Pantry. It also operates 20 distribution sites throughout the county, one of the new ones is Glenmont UMC.

Manna served 32,183 adults and children in need in affluent Montgomery County during 2017, according to its annual report, and provided services such as nutrition classes, distribution of SNAP benefits and advocacy, in addition to several different feeding programs: the new Manna Mobil Kitchen & Pop-Up Pantry, food sacks for

elementary children so as not to go hungry on weekends, food rescue, and regular food distribution.

FSU students focus on health and hunger

FROSTBURG - After the violent hurricanes disrupted lives of fellow citizens, the community at Frostburg State University wanted to put compassion into action, said the Rev. Cindy Zirlott, chaplain for United Campus Ministry. So, student leader Angela Reed mobilized the FSU campus to go to work making health/hygiene kits. Departments and student organizations jumped to the cause and after three weeks, Zirlott delivered 203 kits to UMCOR's collection center.

But the students didn't stop there. They had been planning a Sept. 23 event before the hurricanes entered the picture. It was a Scavenger Hunt for Hunger to support their Hunger Project.

Students divided into two teams and went through neighborhoods pulling little red wagons, going door to door to



collect needed food items for the Frostburg Interfaith Food Pantry. Point values were assigned to the items.

At the end of 2 ½ hours, they came back together at Frostburg UMC to pick the winning team. "It was just a fun competition, we are all winners because we all contributed to fighting hunger in our community," said Andre Glenn UCM's student president,

Laity and clergy in partnership: a vital connection

By ROD MILLER*

LAST MONTH, WE focused on the invitation given to everyone to be collaborators with God. This month we explore the rich and vital collaboration of laity and clergy.

The first place I learned about lay and clergy partnerships was from my parents. Dad taught and served on many of the church committees including as Lay Leader. Mom sang in the choir and chaired the Evangelism Committee.

Together, they led a lively Prayer and Praise Bible study in our home. I can remember discussions around the dinner table about the roles of clergy and laity. I observed that my father, an electrical engineer, and my mother, a typesetter, clearly understood that they were serving as ministers of our church. At the same time, I was aware that my father and our pastor did not always agree about the roles of laity and clergy.

The *UM Book of Discipline* clearly states that all baptized members are ministers of the church by virtue of their calling to share in “Christ’s royal priesthood.” Where do we go off track? Both clergy and laity can become overly controlling about their roles and responsibilities.

Both laity and clergy can develop unhealthy assumptions about “that pastor” or “those lay people.” Clergy and laity can find themselves wrestling over who “runs the church.” Emotional issues can build, sometimes resulting in inaction, sometimes in a compromise and sometimes, fortunately, leading to real and needed discussions about what it means to serve together in the body of Christ.

We can agree that no one wants a pastor or lay person to “take over” the church. Nor is it helpful to have clergy or laity going their own ways. As Ephesians 4 (the Message)

look and speak and act the same... no prolonged infancies among us, please... we take our lead from Christ who keeps us in step with each other...”

The truth is we are one Body with many members. No one person or group can or should do it all. Pastors are authorized to serve the church by engaging word, sacrament and order. Laity are called to discern and respond to God’s calling. At the same time, pastors fulfill their callings when laity are equipped to step into their callings. Laity and clergy are meant to travel the same road by serving as the church together.

Here are some guidelines for living into lay/clergy partnerships:

- Clergy and laity honor and respect one another’s callings.
- Affirmations: I accept you. I value you. I believe there is potential in you to share.
- We don’t always have to agree with one another to trust each other and work together.
- Answering God’s call means asking the question, “how can I help?”
- Remain open to the workings of the Spirit.

Many lay persons serve in amazing ways which extend the ministry of the church far beyond what individual clergy can do. I know of lay persons who are ministering with people every week – reaching people for Christ whom clergy will probably never know. Many more are capable, yet they hold back for various reasons. Now is the time to step out – we need you. Laity can and should serve whenever and wherever God calls you and your call is affirmed by the Body. It is time to make it an ongoing goal to encourage, support and train lay persons to be the people God is calling them to be.

This is the second article in a series on Laity and Call.

**Rod Miller is the interim pastor of Glen Mar UMC. He also works as a coach for clergy and other church leaders.*



says, “Run on the road God called you to travel... do this with humility and discipline... you were all called to travel on the same road, so stay together, both outwardly and inwardly... but that doesn’t mean that you should all

Following study, church repents for historic racism

By KIMBERLY BURGE*

IAM A LIFELONG Christian, but a brand-new Methodist. Last Easter, I became a member of Mount Vernon Place UMC in Washington. Although I have lived in D.C. for two decades and worked at multiple Christian organizations, I hadn’t managed to find that elusive faith community where I felt like I belonged. At Mount Vernon Place, I discovered the things I realized I was seeking in a congregation: a warm welcome and diversity within the congregation, preaching that both challenged and uplifted, and a commitment to social justice in word and deed.

I was especially drawn in by the book group that the church was launching, centered on racial reconciliation and inspired by Black Lives Matter. Several months into attending the book group – in fact, after I’d joined the church – I learned that Mount Vernon Place was originally built as the representative church of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. I learned that this was the Methodist Church that decided to break away from the denomination before the Civil War so its members could continue to own slaves and still be good Methodist churchgoers.

If I had known our history, I probably wouldn’t have visited Mount Vernon Place initially. I would have thought, I don’t want

to belong to that kind of church. Those first impressions would have been wrong, because that’s not who the congregation is today. Yet our founding remains part of our history, one that we can’t overlook, but we might be able to overcome.

At our Sunday worship on Oct. 8, we commemorated the 100th anniversary of the laying of the cornerstone of our church. As we gave thanks for the beautiful building and the welcoming congregation—open to anyone and everyone—that our church has become, we also told the world our truth, announcing it with a banner hung outside for all to see.

We named the sin of racism and repented of our roots in white supremacy.

We repent because we follow a Savior who calls us to turn away from our sin, to start fresh. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus began his public ministry with these words: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

Here’s a confession: When I first learned about white privilege and white supremacy, I felt guilty about being white. But I’ve come to learn that guilt is not the point, and it’s certainly not helpful for where we are now. My faith as a Christian compels me to stand against injustice. One of our nation’s greatest injustices has been the way we’ve treated — the way we continue to treat — people of color, and in particular African Americans.

To be a member of an American Christian church today is to grapple with the sin of racism, or else to choose to ignore it through our silence. Our church’s founding gives us a unique opportunity to



The Rev. Donna Claycomb-Sokol, pastor at Mt. Vernon Place UMC.

serve as a model for what it means to repent of racism. We have the chance to say, “This is who we were. Now this is who we want to be.”

The night before our service of repentance, once again, a crowd of white nationalists with torches marched in Charlottesville, and pledged to keep coming back. I see those men who claim to be speaking out for white people — who claim they’re speaking for me — and I get so angry. I don’t want my anger to drive me to hate the men with torches, because that’s not any more productive than feeling guilty for being white. More importantly, that’s not who God calls me to be.

Mount Vernon Place is a church that’s no longer willing to be silent and complicit when it comes to racial injustice. I’m grateful I’ve joined a community of the faithful who realize that this struggle is not about the past. It’s about the lives that are at stake now. It’s about our own souls.

**Kimberly Burge is author of the book, The Born Frees: Writing with the Girls of Gugulethu.*



Members sign a banner during a service of repentance at Mt. Vernon Place UMC in Washington, D.C., on Oct. 8.

Olu Brown shares leadership lessons from Moses

BY MELISSA LAUBER
UMConnection Staff

TEN YEARS AGO, the Rev. Olu Brown started a worshipping community at Brown Middle School, near Atlanta, Ga. Today, the congregation has 2,400 people in worship and is the largest church in North Georgia, the largest annual conference in the country.

On Oct. 27, Brown led a session at the Baltimore-Washington Conference, and the next day at Jackson Chapel UMC in Frederick, to share some of his ideas about the Future of the 21st Century Church.

Currently, the story of Moses is on his mind, Brown said, particularly the sometimes overlooked passages in Numbers 32.

In this story, Gad and Reuben asked to stay in the TransJordan and not go into Canaan, the land promised to them by God. That's two tribes, more than 80,000 people, that chose to stay in the wildness.

"The results could have been catastrophic," Brown said. But how Moses chose to deal with this "stuff of the journey" shaped his leadership.

Even while struggling with a multitude of emotions, Moses raised his hand and blessed the Gadites and Reubenites.

How today's "leaders and chasers of dreams and promises" navigate the details of difficult situations teaches them the most about life, themselves and God. "Leaders grow only to the threshold of their pain," said Brown, quoting author Sam Chand.

To help leaders learn how to deal with difficult situations, and to move forward toward who God is calling them and

the church to be, is one of the themes of Brown's new book, "Leadership Directions from Moses: On the Way to a Promised Land."

In this book, the Rev. Rodney Smothers, the Conference Director of Leadership and Congregational Development, wrote about how leaders in any age must have difficult conversations, as Moses did, with oneself, others and God "through the twist and turns of exploration, self-examination, and excavation of a leader's cycle of call, chaos and comfort."

Smothers asserts that "balancing the 'go' mandate of God while navigating the doubts of followers takes not only skill but inner strength. This special type of anointed leadership requires a constant recalibrating of the purpose and plans when we are faced with an ever-changing landscape accompanied by fickle and fearful followers."

Leaders will have tension in their lives, Brown said. "When you're asking God for leadership, you're asking for tension to come into your life," he said. The greater the endeavor, the more tension you invite.

As an illustration, Brown handed out rubber bands and asked participants to stretch them. "Too much tension, and the ministry will break; too little tension and the ministry will plateau. This is all about tension," he said. "The most dangerous thing you can do with your rubber band, or your ministry, is to leave it as it is. We need good tension."

To help people find this healthy tension, especially in times of conflict, Brown encouraged them to "trust the pause." That moment of inaction and stillness may feel uncomfortable, he said, but it "gives you



The Rev. Olu Brown speaks at the BWC Mission Center in Fulton Oct. 27. "Jesus' model of ministry is 'go,'" he said.

time to catch your breath, recalibrate and shift into a more positive future."

He also stressed the need for defining and making clear the church's vision.

"Our Bible is a footprint to help us define vision," said Brown. "Every church needs their vision clearly stated and visible in the common, shared spaces. ... Most of our churches don't have a people problem, we have a vision problem."

To pursue the vision, leaders must be willing to risk, to learn new things, be strategic and not just spiritual, insist on excellence, and understand the lifestyle of a church or a ministry, he said.

They also must be willing to work with

four capacity coaches: one to help with goals, one to address failure, one to be a mirror and share unvarnished truths, and one for encouragement.

"Coaching is an essential part of leadership," Smothers said. "Iron sharpens iron. We must get out of our solo environments."

Good leaders are also "catalytic evangelists," going before to create opportunities or atmospheres to connect people with Christ, Brown said. "Jesus' model of ministry is 'Go!' It has nothing to do with staying or with sitting. ... Go is a command, an action, a direction. ... Leaders lead. Leaders go."

Court maintains stand on ministerial candidates

BY LINDA BLOOM*

IN AN OCT. 27 ruling on the duties of a conference board of ordained ministry, The United Methodist Church's top court re-stated its earlier opinion that all qualifications of ministerial candidates must be examined.

The new ruling, on a bishop's decision of law in the Baltimore-Washington Conference, was one of several decisions from the United Methodist Judicial Council's fall session related to the topic of sexual orientation. The council met Oct. 24-27 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, Los Angeles Airport.

In Decision 1352, the Judicial Council affirmed a decision of law by Bishop LaTrelle Easterling that there was no requirement in denominational policy to vote on a certified candidate for the ministry.

The issue arose during the 2017 Baltimore-Washington clergy session when the board of ordained ministry did not include Tara C. Morrow on the approval list for ordination.

The Rev. J. Phillip Wogaman — about to celebrate the 60th anniversary of his elder's ordination — decided to turn in his clergy credentials because Morrow, a lesbian, and "others like her" were excluded by church law.

The Book of Discipline, the denomination's lawbook, prohibits "self-avowed practicing homosexuals" from being certified as candidates, ordained as ministers or given church appointments.

In its decision, the top court noted that a certified candidate must be recommended in writing by a three-fourths majority vote of the board of ordained ministry, saying it was the board's duty "to conduct careful and thorough examination of a candidate, not

only in terms of depth but also breadth of scope to ensure that disciplinary standards are met.

"The board is not required to present to the clergy session a candidate who is not eligible," the Judicial Council decision stated. "The clergy session may not elect a candidate who does not meet this requirement."

In a statement from Foundry UMC, issued before the ruling was announced, Morrow said: "At about the same time as my own confirmation in a small town United Methodist Church in sixth grade, I began to understand that I am a lesbian. As I pray for grace every day to continue responding as faithfully as possible to God's call on my life, I know that no number of delays in my candidacy process for ordination in the UMC halts

Christ's call to follow him into a world that desperately needs to know God's transformative power and love. I continue to answer now. I know God sees me. I ask the Church to see me and many others, not an 'issue' but integral members of the body of Christ also called into ordained ministry."

In other action, the council labeled questions about a clergywoman raised in a request for a decision of law during the 2017 Iowa Conference session as "clear efforts to re-litigate a complaint procedure that was closed and completed by the previous bishop."

In Decision 1351, the court upheld the decision by Iowa Bishop Laurie Haller that she had no authority to reopen a complaint procedure against the Rev. Anna Blaedel, who announced during the 2016 Iowa Conference that she is "a

self-avowed practicing homosexual." That complaint was dismissed on Aug. 30, 2016, by Bishop Julius C. Trimble, the presiding bishop at that time. Trimble said "a letter of reprimand" was placed in her file.

Another question in the request referred to Blaedel making a public statement about her sexual orientation. The court agreed with the bishop's ruling that the question was hypothetical, since it saw no record of such statements since Sept. 1, 2016, or any action by the current bishop.

Two annual conferences, Denmark and California-Pacific, separately petitioned Judicial Council to issue a declaratory decision about "incompatible" language in the church's constitution.

While the United Methodist Social Principles state that the practice of homosexuality is "incompatible with Christian teaching," the Denmark Conference contended that "the question of homosexuality is not addressed in the doctrinal standards of The United Methodist Church."

The California-Pacific Conference cited the "restrictive rule" against General Conference establishing "new standards or rules of doctrine contrary to our present existing and established standards of doctrine."

But the court said it could not consider their arguments because the conferences did not have the authority to ask for a ruling. "The Judicial Council has no jurisdiction to answer questions from an annual conference that does not relate to annual conferences or the work therein," the council stated in Memorandum 1347 and Memorandum 1354.

*Bloom is the assistant news editor for United Methodist News Service and is based in New York



2016-2020 Judicial Council. (From left) Front row: Ruben T. Reyes, N. Oswald Tweh Sr., the Rev. Luan-Vu Tran. Back row: Deanell Reece Tacha, Lydia Romão Gulele, the Rev. Øyvind Helliesen, the Rev. Dennis Blackwell, and the Rev. J. Kabamba Kiboko. (Not pictured, Beth Capen)