

THEREFORE, IF ANYONE IS IN
CHRIST, HE IS A NEW CREATION.
THE OLD HAS PASSED AWAY;
BEHOLD, THE NEW HAS COME.
— 2 CORINTHIANS 5:17

2016

UMCConnection

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BWC sets table for ministry in 2015

See photo feature, pages 4-5



Aaron Burnett

Obama serves dinner at St. Luke's



Getty Images / Pool

President Barack Obama, left, standing next to his two daughters, serves a veteran a Thanksgiving meal at St. Luke's Mission Center in Washington, D.C., on Nov. 25.

By ERIK ALSGAARD
UMCConnection Staff

IT'S NOT EVERY day that the president of the United States comes to your church and serves dinner. But that's exactly what happened the day before Thanksgiving at St. Luke's Mission Center, part of the multi-site ministry of Metropolitan Memorial UMC in Washington, D.C.

As cameras recorded his every move, President Barack Obama served a traditional Thanksgiving dinner to military veterans as part of the feeding ministry at St. Luke's. He was joined by the First Lady, Michelle Obama, their two daughters, Sasha and Malia, and the First Lady's mother, Marian Robinson. Other guests and extended family members, numbering about 30 people, also attended.

"The 'Feast with Friends,' as the event was called, was

for veterans, their families and formerly homeless participants in Friendship Place's Veterans First program," said the Rev. Dottie Yunger, lead pastor at the Mission Center since July 1, 2013.

The food for the meal was provided by Campus Kitchen, an organization run out of St. Luke's for the past three years. It is part of a national organization that utilizes volunteers, especially college students, to recover food from local restaurants, grocery stores and farmer's markets. Each month, Yunger said, Campus Kitchen DC gathers about 5,000 pounds of food which is turned into about 1,500 meals.

Friendship Place is a non-profit organization that is working to end homelessness in the District, Yunger said. Its administrative offices are housed at St. Luke's. Friendship Place also has a welcome center on Wisconsin Avenue, near the Tenley Metro, and Campus

See President, page 3

Ames UMC floods

By ERIK ALSGAARD
UMCConnection Staff

CHURCH SERVICES WERE cancelled Jan. 3 at Ames UMC in Bel Air after a pipe cracked and covered almost the entire church with several inches of water.

The Rev. Michael Parker, pastor, said a pipe in a hot water heater cracked sometime after a Watch Night Service that ended early on Jan. 1. The heater is located in a utility closet in the church's fellowship hall which is only separated from the Sanctuary by a folding partition.

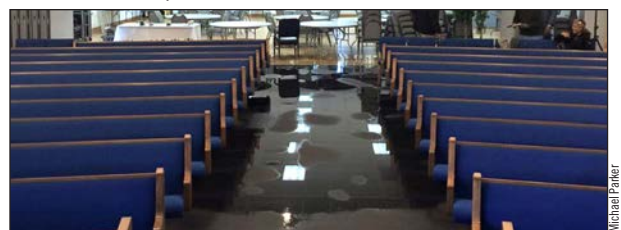
The church has insurance, Parker said, and church leadership and insurance adjusters are currently assessing the damage.

Because the church is built all on one level, water spread everywhere. In a photo Parker posted to his Facebook page, water can be seen covering the entire sanctuary. He wrote that all of the pews had been damaged. Only the prayer room was spared, which Parker said was "very interesting."

Because furniture and other fixtures sat in water for at least two days, most of that is a total loss. Water also damaged many of the interior walls of the church and they will need to be fixed, too. All the flooring will have to be removed.

Parker expects the church to be out of its space for at least the next month. He says that prayers are needed most and that the church is looking into setting up a fund to receive any donations.

"I want to thank everyone in the connection for their prayers and support," Parker said. "I've seen the connection come alive in the past 72 hours. I've received e-mails and text messages from all over the United States. Thank you."



Michael Parker

... well said

(a chance to express what that word means to you.)

By MANDY SAYERS
Pastor, Covenant UMC, Gaithersburg

WE DON'T KNOW too much about Jesus' boyhood. There's that bit about his parents losing track of him in Jerusalem when he was 12, of course, but not too much other than that. We do know, however, that he "grew in wisdom and stature." (Luke 2:52). He didn't stay a babe, wrapped in swaddling cloths. He grew up and learned to walk and talk, and eventually met his ministry down by the Jordan River, where he was baptized by John.

Just as Jesus grew in wisdom, we are also called to grow and learn. As we start a new year, where is God calling us to "grow in wisdom?" How can we give thanks for all the teachers who have helped us come this far by faith? And how are we being called to invest in those coming behind us, to help them grow and learn?

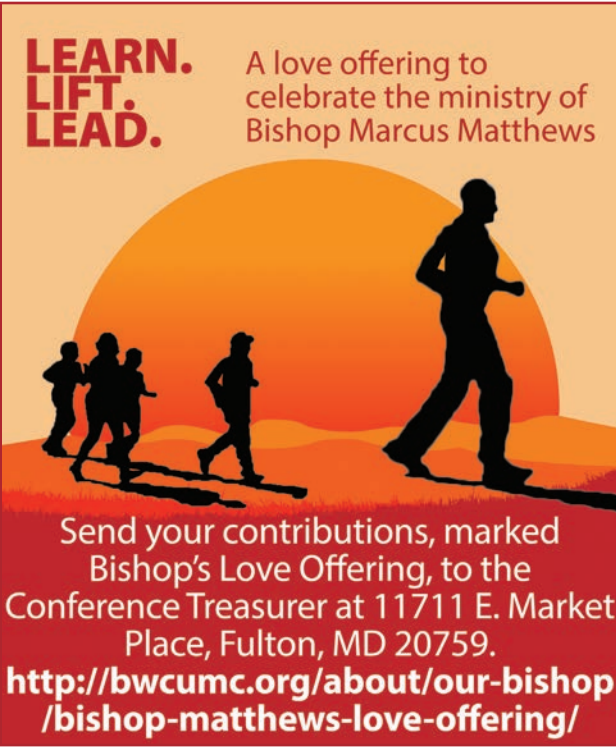
I tell the folks at our church that I make a dozen mistakes before breakfast, most days, but I promise them to learn from those mistakes. I tell them I will try not to make the same mistake twice. Instead, I resolve to make new ones.

I am trying hard to learn, in this work, and in my life, so that I'll be a "better person today than I was yesterday" (something our bishop prays about himself each day). My prayer is, if I cannot be "better," at least maybe I'll be a little wiser, a little more faithful, or someone more willing to take risks for the Gospel today than yesterday.

If I'm going to make a new mistake every day, I better get busy with trying new things.

Learning is the antidote to ignorance and fear. It can help us build bridges between human beings, as we learn about the hopes, needs and dreams of others. It unlocks the Divine Image in the learner, as that person goes on to create the next "new thing" God has in mind. It helps us see new possibilities and potential, and it can mediate God's blessing in the life of another, as learning becomes clean water, or medicine or friendships between people who used to be enemies.

In the New Year, let us not just "resolve" about things. Let's learn, and put that learning into practice, for the sake of the new world God brought us on that first Christmas Day.



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

ONE OF MY favorite movies of all time is "Men In Black." It wasn't the special effects, the plot or the acting that made me fall in love with the movie. The thing that made me fall in love with it was one speech. Early in the movie, Tommy Lee Jones' character is speaking with Will Smith's character and says the following: "A person is smart. People are dumb, panicky, dangerous animals and you know it. Fifteen hundred years ago, everybody knew the Earth was the center of the universe. Five hundred years ago, everybody knew the Earth was flat. And 15 minutes ago you knew that humans were alone on this planet. Imagine what you'll know tomorrow."

What struck me then about that quote is the truth contained in it. The quote made me resolve that I did not want to be a dumb, panicky dangerous animal. I wanted to be a smart person. It was in that moment that I decided that I would make learning a life-long objective. I decided that year by year, I wanted to learn more to make sure that I was like the person described in Proverbs 18:15, which says, "Intelligent people are always ready to learn. Their ears are open for knowledge."

Being always ready to learn requires three things: desire, opportunity and exposure. It all starts with desire. You have to *want* to learn. That desire comes from wanting to know more, so you can do more and ultimately be more.

Secondly, you have to have or make opportunities to learn; you have to find opportunities to learn. Sometimes that means going back to school, sometimes it simply means turning off the TV and reading a book or listening to a podcast.

Finally, you have to have exposure. We can get comfortable knowing the same people and doing the same things which makes our world more narrow. When we desire to learn, we have to expose ourselves to new things. We have to go to new places, meet new people and experience new things. All that exposure will broaden your world and let you learn.

This year, become a Proverbs 18:15 person. Well-up the desire, take the opportunity, and expose yourself to new things so that you can be ready to learn. The difference between who you are on Jan. 1, 2016, and who you will be on Jan. 1, 2017, is what you will learn in between.

Take the next 366 days and go learn.

President: Visit reminds staff of their good work

From page 1

Kitchen provides lunch there every day.

Not a lot of people know about the ministry of Campus Kitchen, or St. Luke's, or Friendship Place, said Yunger. The president's visit has helped to validate some of their hard work over the past few years.

The visit also highlighted the plight of veterans in Washington. "One out of four homeless persons in the District is a veteran," said Yunger.

The congregation at St. Luke's merged with Metropolitan Memorial UMC about eight or nine years ago. Since becoming a Mission Center, its focus is on serving the community. That's how it came to house Campus Kitchen, which is reaching out across the city to bring food abundance to what Yunger calls "food deserts."

In fact, most of the meals are served outside the Mission Center. Meals are usually delivered to where they are needed, such as Mt. Vernon UMC in Ward 7 in the District, where they provide lunch and dinner on Wednesdays, and lunch on Saturdays.

"We partner with congregations who are the presence in their neighborhoods," Yunger said. "They open their doors and serve the meal."

Another example is at Hughes Memorial UMC in Washington. On Tuesday nights, the church hosts a community anti-violence program which consists of dinner and a mentoring/tutoring program for youth in the neighborhood.

"We started partnering with them," said Yunger, and Campus Kitchen started providing the meals. Word has spread among the kids in the community because the quality of the food has improved. "The kids come and they do a Bible study and they have college students come from Howard University to do the tutoring."

It's all meant to provide a safe place for the kids on a weeknight, she said, along with a wholesome delicious meal.

"Those kids are now starting to come to that church on Sunday morning," she added. "The kids know that this is the safe place to go if I need dinner or I need help with my homework; if I need to get off the street and out of the violence, I go to the church. And they're joining the church because of it."

On the day of the president's visit, Yunger said, their partners at Friendship Place wanted to do a lunch for veterans who had come through their programs. Those veterans, she said, returned home from serving their country and didn't have a job or a home. "This was going to be a Thanksgiving meal for those clients."

Friendship Place leaders reached out to the First Lady to see if she would be interested in coming to lunch, Yunger said. They also asked Campus Kitchen to make the meal.

On the Friday night before Thanksgiving, the White House called Friendship Place and said, "Mrs. Obama is

tell anybody who was coming or what was happening, just that a special guest was coming."

Some of the folks, Yunger said, thought maybe the mayor was coming.

"All of a sudden, President Obama and Mrs. Obama... walked in the room. Immediately, the 60 or so veterans and their families, plus all of the staff and volunteers, were up on their feet applauding."

The president served the turkey; the First Lady served the vegetables, Yunger said.

"She was very excited to hear how our Campus Kitchen works," Yunger said.

The First Family was extremely gracious to everyone who came through the line, Yunger said. The president thanked each veteran for their service and inquired as to how they were doing.

The guests and family members packed bags with snacks, toiletries and other items for a street outreach effort of St. Luke's, Yunger said. The bags are part of their "Grate Patrol" program in partnership with the Salvation Army, who delivers the bags to people living on the streets.

At the end of the meal, Yunger, along with other staff from the various agencies, had a chance to meet the president.

"He walked right up to us, introduced himself, shook our hands and asked us what our names were," said Yunger. "For the life of me, I couldn't remember what my name was."

Eventually, her nerves calmed down and she could recall her name, and Yunger was able to engage the president about the Metropolitan Memorial shirt she was wearing.

The shirt, which read, "Radical, Change, Justice." "The president said, 'I don't know many pastors who talk about radical change.' And I couldn't think of a thing to say back to him," said Yunger. "But it occurs to me now that I don't know any pastors who aren't about radical change."

Yunger said the president's visit was a shot-in-the-arm for their ministry.

"The energy and the enthusiasm and the excitement that was in the room when the president and his family were there," said Yunger, "has been very meaningful for the clients who were there and for the staff who do this on a day-to-day basis. It reminds us why this is important and why this is good work."



The Rev. Dottie Yunger, right, greets the president.

not coming for lunch on Wednesday. Instead, the whole First Family is coming for dinner with 30 guests and relatives who are in town for Thanksgiving," Yunger said.

Friendship Place then called Campus Kitchen, asking if they could provide both lunch and a dinner. And those 30 guests who are coming? They wanted to do a service project while the First Family served dinner.

Yunger and her team sprung into action.

Lunch was served as per usual on the Wednesday before Thanksgiving, Yunger said, for the clients of the Welcome Center. Dinner was served, by the First Family, to more than 75 people.

"Before the dinner," Yunger said, "everyone had to be sitting down in the room, for security reasons. We couldn't

'You Have the Power' theme inspired by area ministries

By MELISSA LAUBER
UMConnection Staff



THE THEME FOR the 2016 Baltimore-Washington Conference, "You Have the Power," was chosen after leaders reflected on area congregations and noticed that God is beginning to move in new ways throughout the BWC, empowering pastors and laity to do transformative ministry that brings profound and genuine change to people's lives.

"Never content to be the same today as they were yesterday, our churches are increasingly claiming the power of the Holy Spirit to do new things in Christ's name," said Bishop Marcus Matthews. "They're moving outside their doors and leading and creating possibilities for healing, hope and wholeness. They're making a difference."

One of the most powerful witnesses to God's love came in the fall of 2015, when the congregation of Rodger's Forge UMC in Baltimore gave their building to Eden Korean UMC.

Rodger's Forge is an historic, mostly white, aging congregation that had dwindled to about eight people in worship. Two years ago, they began having conversations about their legacy and decided to keep the facility and resources alive.

At that same time, Eden Korean UMC was looking for a new building. They were a growing congregation with an active youth group that couldn't find a new space they could afford.

The two entered into a conversation, said the Rev. Cynthia Moore, superintendent of the Baltimore Metropolitan district. "The conversation was a holy one. The end result was that Eden Korean took possession of the building with the proviso that the eight ladies will be able to continue to worship there as long as they want to."

On Nov. 22, at 4 p.m., a worship service celebrated Eden Korean's missional move and the empowering generosity of

the Rodger's Forge congregation.

Also this fall, on Sept. 20, Brooks UMC in St. Leonard, broke ground for a new church facility. The expansion project is a spiritual one guided by principles of the church-created "Nehemiah Movement."

Brooks is a congregation empowered by its pastor, the Rev. Jason Robinson. In the last five years, they have brought in 205 new disciples and started live-streaming worship that takes God's message to viewers in 15 countries.

Their new building, which sits next to the current church, will hold a sanctuary that seats 460 worshippers, a multi-purpose fellowship hall and two classrooms.

"It's up to us to become the Gospel of Jesus Christ," Robinson said.

Spirit-filled growth and mission arose in several other locations throughout the Baltimore-Washington Conference in 2015.

- Brooklyn UMC in Baltimore joined with three other churches to feed 13,000 people in their community this year.
- On April 9, Simpson Hamline UMC in Washington hosted 400 District of Columbia sanitation workers in memory of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., who was slain while upholding the rights of sanitation workers.
- Epworth UMC in Gaithersburg is providing computer and English tutoring for young people in the community.
- Ellerslie UMC, north of Cumberland, owns two buildings. They have turned one of them, a former Evangelical United Brethren Church, into a community center and thrift shop. The thrift shop generates more than \$25,000 a year for missions.

"You Have the Power" reflects the ministry lived out in churches throughout the conference in 2015 and challenges United Methodists to even greater things in Christ's name.



Many BWC churches, like Brooks UMC, above, adopted a bold sense of growth in 2015.

... well said

... well said

EVENTS

Resolutions Due Jan. 15

Anyone wishing to submit a resolution to the BWC's 2016 Annual Conference Session should send it via e-mail to the Conference Secretary, the Rev. Mary Jo Sims, at mjsims@bwcumc.org. Information about submitting resolutions is on page 572 of the 2014 Conference Journal.

ROCK 2016

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Leadership Days

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- Feb. 20 and March 5 - "Navigating Discipleship," Southern Region
- Feb. 27 - "Guiding Today's Disciples to Become Tomorrow's Servant Leaders," Western Region
- March 5 - "Dare to Lead," Washington Region
- March 5 - Baltimore Region

Bishop's Farewell Gatherings

United Methodists across the conference will have the opportunity to honor Bishop Marcus Matthews this spring as he plans to retire in September. Regional gatherings will be held from 3 to 5 p.m. on:

- April 9 at Epworth Chapel UMC in Baltimore;
- April 10 at Middletown UMC near Frederick;
- April 16 at Westphalia UMC in Upper Marlboro;
- April 17 at Asbury UMC in Washington, D.C.

BWC Annual Conference June 1-4

Marriott Wardman Park Hotel, D.C.

Churches are advised to budget for attendance for their clergy and lay members. The cost for a three-night stay, including registration and parking but not including meals, is \$833. Breakfast at the hotel is \$26; lunch is \$35 and diner is \$45. The Pre-Conference Session is scheduled for April 30, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., at First UMC in Hyattsville.

THE CHURCH GATHERS

The **2016 General Conference** will be held May 10-20 at the Oregon Convention Center in Portland, Ore. General Conference is the denomination's top policy-making body. Meeting every four year, General Conference can revise church law as well as adopt resolutions on current moral, social, public policy and economic issues. It also approves plans and budgets for church-wide programs. The BWC will send 12 voting delegates (see page 7). Learn more at <http://bwcumc.org/sessions/general-conference-2016>

The **Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference** will be held July 11-15 at the Lancaster Marriott in Lancaster, Pa. Delegates from the Jurisdiction's 10 annual conferences will elect one bishop.



Bishop Marcus Matthews
Maidstone Mulenga

Resident Bishop
Assistant to the Bishop,
Director of Connectional Ministries

Melissa Lauber
Erik Alsgaard
Alison Burdett
Kat Care
Linda Worthington
Kayla Spears

UMConnection is the newspaper of the Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church, whose vision is to become fully alive in Christ and make a difference in a diverse and ever-changing world

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2015

BWC DARED TO BELIEVE

2015 was a year of new and expanded ministry partnerships in the Baltimore-Washington Conference. It was a year in which our 631 churches touched the lives of millions of people.

As United Methodists, we dared to believe in hope, justice, grace and prayer in action. We believed in joy. We made disciples of Jesus Christ and transformed the world.

They say a picture is worth 1,000 words. We offer these images as a glimpse of United Methodists being the church.



Inter-faith musicians pursue harmony

By KENNETH CLARK
Special to UMConnection

IN DECEMBER, COLESVILLE UMC hosted an unlikely Jewish-American and Palestine-Muslim duo in concert, entitled “In Pursuit of Harmony.” The members of In Pursuit of Harmony are celebrated and award winning Jewish-American songwriter/producer Michael Hunter Ochs and noted Palestinian songwriter/recording artist and Peace Activist Alaa Alshaham, who delivered a powerful message on how previously perceived enemies became friends.

Through their original compositions in song, their frank discussion of their own personal history and videos documenting their meeting and journey together, Ochs and Alshaham discussed their fears and triumphs of crossing



Alaa Alshaham and Michael Hunter Ochs perform at Colesville UMC.

political, cultural and religious lines to find a path to peace and friendship with each other.

Their life experiences in traveling between Israel and the West Bank provided lessons of mutual respect and understanding that they now teach in schools, synagogues, churches and concert halls throughout the world.

Their Sunday afternoon concert followed a special worship service, built around the Rev. Michael Armstrong’s

sermon, “Pursuing Harmony.” The Rev. Kathy Kohl coordinated with Armstrong to have an inter-faith service, where the entire hymnology and litany for the service spoke to welcoming strangers, spreading peace and sharing the love of God.

In his message, Armstrong encouraged the congregation to “move past the walls we have built up between ourselves and those who are different from us but who are also children of God.”

During the worship, the Communion ritual was altered to a service of “Sharing at the Table of Peace.” Designed to be open for anyone of any faith to partake, rather than grape juice and wine as the elements, clumps of real grapes and pita bread were offered celebrants in a symbolic “sharing of a meal.”

The Table was decorated with words of peace in Arabic and Hebrew, and a dove, a universal symbol of peace.

As a preview to the afternoon concert, Ochs and Alshaham sang two songs in the morning service. They engaged both the choir and congregation in lively singing of one of their songs. For the afternoon program, the Colesville Bell Choir joined In Pursuit of Harmony in a specially arranged song.

One member of the church stated, “I hope our congregation appreciated how prescient this concert was,” referencing the current tensions surrounding Muslims and others. Many of the church’s members were tearful with joy at the potential of peace that was demonstrated by Ochs and Alshaham.

Among the guests attending the afternoon concert was Dr. Amjad Chaudhry, Leader of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community of Silver Spring. He joined Armstrong at the end of the concert to provide remarks, including Scripture regarding peace from the Quran.

The afternoon concert was co-sponsored by the Eastern Montgomery County Cluster of Churches that shared in the expenses and planning support. The Revs. Sandy Rector of Oak Chapel UMC, and Stacey Cole-Wilson of Good Hope Union UMC were also in attendance. Cole-Wilson provided the opening prayer for the afternoon concert. The overall event was coordinated by Jocelyn Johnson, music director and at Colesville UMC.



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If you have any questions, contact Kayla Spears at 410-309-3420.

VIEWPOINTS

BWC delegation finds strength in its diversity

By MITTIE QUINN*

EVERY THIRD SATURDAY, you will find a group of Baltimore-Washington Conference United Methodists huddled together at the Conference Mission Center discussing everything from Scripture to the Book of Discipline and Social Principles; from human sexuality to global relationships, economic indicators, regional variability and back again to Scripture.

These are the 32 clergy and laity (16 of each) that members of the BWC elected to be the representatives at the 2016 General and Jurisdictional Conferences. Eight clergy and eight laity form the core delegation that will vote at General Conference in Portland, Ore., in May; 16 more are added to represent us at Jurisdictional Conference in July. Some of these are alternates; all are committed to represent you.

At each meeting I am in awe of the collective wisdom, collegiality, spirit and faithfulness of this group. I am also in awe that we of the Baltimore-Washington Conference are probably the most diverse delegation that will be present at the spring and summer conferences.

My life has been repeatedly enriched by the variations of humanity represented in this Conference. I was shocked recently to learn that in the whole United States, United Methodists are 95 percent white.

The Baltimore Conference is diversity at its best. We are male and female, black, white and tan, and we are descendants of great Africans, Europeans, Latinos and Latinas, and Asians. We are BWC.

It isn’t just our color, ancestry or gender presentation that differentiates us. The churches we represent are big and growing bigger, small and family sized, and everything in between. More than 90 percent of our churches pay their apportionment in full.

We come from churches working toward full inclusion of LGBTQ persons into the life of the church, and from churches working toward maintaining the current Discipline stance on homosexuality being “incompatible with Christian teaching.”

Our churches have rock bands, praise bands, gospel choirs, vocal ensembles, robed choirs of all descriptions, or simple recorded music for worship. We are Republicans, Democrats, and Independents. And yet, we come together to be the church.

So why do we come?



The Baltimore-Washington Conference delegation to the 2016 General and Jurisdictional Conferences

These monthly meetings present the delegation with information about General and Jurisdictional Conference so that we all will be ready to represent you to the best of our abilities. At times it is overwhelming:

- How can we be socially responsible in our spending while maintaining fiscal responsibilities we have to our clergy pensions?
- How are bishops elected? Will we recommend someone to be elected? How will we choose? Who will be appointed to BWC to fill the void created by Bishop Matthew’s retirement?

- How can we move into the future and continue to represent the rich diversity that we are? How can we continue to make disciples of Jesus Christ?

Under the leadership of Delores Martin, our lead lay member, and the Rev. T.R. Chatrin, our lead clergy member, we manage to have fruitful, productive and collaborative meetings. We are learning some answers and developing more questions. We are finding ways that we can network and collaborate, at meetings and in between.

I know that there are those who would question the ability of this UM “ship” to stay together in such rocky times. I would say that we, the Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church, have the opportunity to model the “way forward.”

We can be a church of diverse understandings of what it means to be a United Methodist; of what Christ calls us to be and do in this world; of people with differing opinions about how to make disciples of Jesus Christ. We are called to show the world how to resolve conflicts because there is so little of that going on. We are called to act with justice, to love tenderly, to serve one another and to walk humbly with our God.

If you would like to know more about the delegation, follow this series of monthly reflections published by BWC Communications, or check out the General Conference Website (<http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/general-conference-2016>), or contact one of the delegation members. Join the journey.

**Mittie Quinn is a member of Dumbarton UMC in Washington, D.C., and chair of the Conference Commission on Communication. She is an elected alternate delegate to Jurisdictional Conference.*

‘The Darkest Night’: remembering the homeless

By C. ANTHONY HUNT*

On Dec. 20, the Rev. C. Anthony Hunt of Epworth Chapel UMC in Baltimore preached at Baltimore City’s Memorial Service for the homeless men and women who died in 2015. Below are excerpts from his remarks.

ON THIS FIRST night of winter, one of the longest, coldest nights of the year, we gather in solidarity with and for those in our city, state, nation and world who are forced to endure the night. We gather to remember those who in this year and in years past have died while enduring the night.

The night. By its very nature, the night is supposed to be a point and place of rest and respite from the work of the day. The night is meant to be a place of peace and quiet and tranquility from day-time’s hustle and bustle.

But for far too many of our sisters and brothers, the night is a place of prolonged agony and despair. The night is a place of dark want and desperate need, of painful isolation and luminous want. For many, far too many persons in our city and our state, the night is their home, the place where they are forced to lay their heads and wonder with seemingly perpetual dismay: how long the night will be, and if the day will ever come for them.

Elie Weisel, in his book entitled, “Night,” depicts night as embodying, in its most hopeful dimension, a transition from darkness to light, filled with the promise of the beginning of a new day. But Weisel wants us to see that there is too often a certain tragic irony and finality of the night that results in everything coming to an end.

In “Night,” Weisel said, “I wanted to show the end, the finality of the event. Everything came to an end — man, history,

life and meaning. There was nothing left.” This is the fate of too many of our homeless sisters and brothers in Baltimore.

As we gather this evening in Baltimore, the largest city in the wealthiest state in America, we gather amidst the very real contradictions of wealth and poverty, abundance and scarcity, among us.

These contradictions affect every aspect of our lives together. Homelessness — the plight of the unhoused and housing insecurity — is related to scarcities that are found in lack all around us: inadequate healthcare and malnutrition, under-education, under and unemployment, and safety for the poorest among us.

In Baltimore, the fifth most violent city in the nation, much of our attention continues to be focused on the gun violence and gang violence in our midst. But, Mohandas K. Gandhi intimated years ago that “Poverty is the worst form of violence.” It is incumbent upon us who are concerned about the plight of our unhoused, homeless neighbors to see homelessness as, in and of itself, inflicting violence upon its victims — violence on the souls and dignity of homeless persons, violence which affects their physical well-being and threatens their lives, violence which impacts potential and possibility of individuals and society as a whole.

It is incumbent upon those who are charged with establishing policy and setting political agendas, to see the moral implications of homelessness.

Some of what underlies our will to such violence, and our inability or unwillingness to house all of the homeless among us, are the very real and deep racial and class divides that exist among us. Ta-Nehisi Coates, in his book, “Between the World and Me,” writes about

growing up on the streets of Baltimore, and states that “race is the child of racism, not the father.” I’d add that class is the child of classism, not the mother.

The twin evils of racism and classism serve as severe detriments to bringing about wholeness for those among us who find themselves living on the margins of our city.

In his book, “Jesus and the Disinherited,” Howard Thurman asks a haunting question (especially) for persons of faith: “What does Jesus of Nazareth have to say to those who have their backs against the wall?”

What does God — the divine — have to say about the way the poor among us are treated?

In Matthew 25, Jesus says, “... for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me... and Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these, you did it to me.”

Our divine and moral prerogative is to speak out and act out — individually and as a society — with and for our neighbors. To speak out and act out in compassion and justice. To speak out and act out in ways that address the immediate needs of God’s people who must endure the night — those on our city’s margins — by providing shelter and food and clothing and healthcare while also addressing the serious systemic political, economic, moral questions as to why our sisters and brothers are forced to endure the night in the first place.

I was grateful for the opportunity to be part of this journey and am appreciative for the experience. My ministry has not been the same since.

**The Rev. C. Anthony Hunt is the pastor of Epworth Chapel UMC in Baltimore.*



MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Congregation supports Syrian refugees

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The Church Council and more than 55 members of Dumbarton UMC signed an open letter expressing opposition to any legislation that would prevent Muslim refugees and people of other faiths from accessing the U.S. refugee resettlement program. The letter was sent to House Speaker Paul Ryan, Vice President Joseph Biden and the governors of Maryland and Virginia. “End the debate over whether this nation welcomes Muslim refugees — it denigrates us and is derogatory,” the letter stated.

There are an estimated 12 million people who have been displaced or otherwise affected by the ongoing conflict in Syria. “The U.S. refugee resettlement program has been and should remain open to those of any religious tradition who face persecution,” the signers affirmed in the letter. “The United States has an ethical obligation as a world leader to reduce this suffering and generously welcome Syrian refugees into this country.”

To read full letter, go to www.dumbartonumc.org/text-open-letter-regarding-muslim-refugees.

New counseling center in Frostburg

FROSTBURG – “Counseling services are very limited in this rural area,” said the Rev. Cynthia Zirlott, campus minister at Frostburg University. Last spring, nine students sought Christian counseling, but she could only respond to three. She began intentional prayer for a solution to the problem. She enlisted board members, campus officials and the ministerial community to open an office and ministry for Christian counseling.

As if in answer to prayer, a graduate student, also a clergy woman, came on the UCM Board after earning her Master’s degree in counseling, and needed supervised hours to become fully licensed. The counseling services began in September.

“This fulfills one of our goals to be a resource and bridge between the university and community,” Zirlott said.

UM leaders support Syrian refugees

WASHINGTON, D.C. - In mid-December, spokespersons for 49 prominent religious organizations of many denominations signed on to “An Open Letter to American politicians and the American public,” deploring

and disclaiming any support by politicians for banning Muslims from the presidency or entering the U.S. as refugees, or registering Muslims and closing mosques. Such actions are both “un-American and un-Constitutional.”

Among the signers was Bishop Warner H. Brown Jr., president of the United Methodist Council of Bishops.

GW District wants to ‘stop hunger now’

BURTONSVILLE – The Greater Washington District held a “Stop Hunger Now” event Nov. 21, at Paint Branch High School in Burtonsville. In a few hours, volunteers packed 79,794 meals into boxes to distribute to hungry people. Eleven churches participated and provided about 200 volunteers.

The meal boxes contain rice, some spices, vitamins and other non-perishables. The boxed meals begin their journey first to the Stop Hunger Now warehouse in Ashburn, where they are added to a container shipment of 250,000 meals, explained Stuart Genua, outreach chair at Liberty Grove UMC. Packaged meals are delivered to 71 countries, primarily in Central America and Africa. This shipment is destined for Swaziland in southern Africa.

This was the first of two Stop Hunger Now events; the second will be held Saturday, March 12, from 3-5 p.m., at Howard University. It’s not too early to sign up as a church or individual to commit to this mission. Learn more and sign up on: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/GW-SHN>.

Meeting space took 12 years to rebuild

GLEN BURNIE - It’s taken 12 years, but Hall UMC celebrated the completion and occupation of its new space in September. “To God be the glory,” said Lay Leader Brenda McIlwain.

In 2003, the church lost the use of its fellowship hall, kitchen, classrooms and bathrooms to a severe snow storm. Since then they’ve had porta-pottys in the parking lot. After worship the Rev. Harry Smith joined with other clergy and lay people for a ribbon cutting ceremony of the long-awaited facility. “God has blessed us that we may continue to be a blessing to our community and the expansion of the Kingdom of God.”

BWC pastors offer themselves as episcopal candidates

After a period of discernment, the Revs. Cynthia Moore-Koikoi and J.W. Park are offering themselves to be considered as candidates for the ministry of bishop in The United Methodist Church. Their candidacy will be considered by the BWC's General and Jurisdictional Conference delegation in January and an endorsement of neither, one or both of the candidates will be made to the Annual Conference when it meets in June. The election of one bishop to serve in the Northeastern Jurisdiction will be held in July at the Jurisdictional Conference July 12-15 in Lancaster, Pa. Conference rules require that the names of these candidates and statements by them be shared in the UMConnection. These statements are below. Other candidates from the BWC can become official candidates if they are endorsed by an official UMC caucus groups such as MARCH, BMCR, and others, or if they are nominated from the floor of the Annual Conference Session and endorsed by the body.

By Rev. Cynthia Moore-Koikoi

AFTER SIGNIFICANT DISCERNMENT, I believe God is calling me to offer my name for consideration for the episcopacy. This call began with an unsettling, spiritual nudge. Then some laity and clergy shared that God showed them I was called to be a bishop. Because of the sacredness of the episcopacy, I asked God to give me more than a nudge and others' revelations. So, my husband and I entered a period of discernment.

During this discernment, God reminded me that throughout my local church appointments parishioners had affirmed my leadership and call to the broader church. God reminded me how much I love the UMC, and how much my great-grandparents, grandparents and parents loved Methodism even with the injustices they endured. I remembered how I initially felt ill-equipped for each of my appointments and how God gave me the gifts I needed. Then, I felt a sense of peace — the same peace I felt when I surrendered to my call to ordained ministry.

God also sent people who affirmed this call on a pragmatic level. They said God had been preparing me for "such a time as this." They showed me that 17 years as a school psychologist and years of service on the BWC Conflict Transformation Task Force prepared me to be a non-anxious presence with gifts in conflict transformation. These gifts are needed at a time when, as a denomination, we must bring persons together with varying perspectives, serving in all levels of the church, to do life-changing ministry.

Throughout my ministry, God has urged me to work against systemic and individual gender, racial, economic, and sexual-orientation injustice. Such passion is necessary during a time when, as a denomination, we need to embrace our diversity rather than fear or ignore it. I am called to help move the church beyond mere proportional representation to intercultural competence and equity at the table.

By the grace of God, the churches I pastored grew in vitality. Therefore, I feel called to support and resource laity and clergy to make disciples, not members. I am called to support and hold congregations accountable for transformational ministry, not "numbers" ministry.

I serve on the Budget Committee of CFA and Arrearage Task Force. Consequently, I have come to understand the power of responsible, ministry-guided budgeting and loving, esteem-building accountability. I am called to guide the church to make decisions based on a theology of abundance and life, not scarcity and death. As Spiritual Director for the Cabinet, I am called to provide for the spiritual nourishment of conference leaders.

Finally, during the unrest in Baltimore, I was blessed to lead a phenomenal group of pastors and laity as we bridged the evangelical and social gospels. The church is called to lead the conversation and work on issues of justice in urban, suburban, and rural settings. This type of prophetic work is essential if our church is to become more relevant in our global culture.

Clearly, God's unsettling nudge became a tender push.



By Rev. JongWoo "JW" Park

I BELIEVE THAT GOD has called me to the episcopacy of The United Methodist Church to strengthen the local church, uphold the theological traditions of the UMC, order the church, and make disciples of Jesus Christ to transform the world. My calling to the ordained ministry is based upon Psalm 146, which reminds me of the sovereignty of God and God's sensitivity to the weak and the marginalized.

I am a "generation cusper," born and living between the Baby Boomer and Gen-X generations. A first-generation immigrant, I am fully bilingual. I understand the complexity of diverse cultures. My life itself is an example of bridging the West and the East. Church leaders are called to be "global bridge builders."

As an Asian American, my contribution to the church is to offer leadership through deep listening, providing a space for others and promoting mutuality, which is the foundation of Christian conferencing.

In my ministry, I have been very active in promoting the inclusion of everyone regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, theological or socioeconomic differences. For example, I have been a member of Black Methodists for Church Renewal, the NAACP, and a strong supporter of the Methodist Federation for Social Action. I was the president of the National Association for Korean United Methodist Pastors Serving Cross-Racial Appointments and a member of the Northeastern Jurisdiction Korean American Mission Council.

I have also been a strong advocate to remove discriminatory language from paragraphs 304.3 and 2702 of the Book of Discipline. For me, the debate on homosexuality is about human rights and dignity; however, I am committed to uphold the Book of Discipline for the order of the UMC. I consider myself to be a progressive-evangelical who is open to the new possibilities in our faith journey, as well as being firmly centered in Christ for personal piety.

I am comfortable with technology and open to new innovations. I bring a calm presence wherever I go. People have told me that I am a good listener and possess a profound sense of empathy. They also comment on how effective I am in processing conflict transformation. I am also good at business administration, which I studied in undergraduate and graduate schools. I believe that my financial management skills contribute greatly to the NEJ Committee on Finance and Administration, of which I am a member.

I have served as a pastor in local churches in cross-racial and cross cultural appointments. I have grown churches — increasing the number of young families with children, creating strong youth and young adult ministries and ensuring financial stability. I have been serving as the first Asian American district superintendent and the dean of the Cabinet of the Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference with confidence and an exuberant spirit.

In my life and ministry I have been richly blessed. I feel called to use these blessing in service of God's church as a bishop.



Photos by Ben Richards