



“Very early in the morning Jesus came to his disciples, walking on the lake.” – Matthew 14:25

UMC Connection

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Heroin's tragic story touches UMC



Even when she struggled with her addiction, Hannah McLaughlin, above, was open to God's presence. Her story now inspires others to work to address the scourge of heroin, which is destroying lives throughout Maryland, Washington, D.C., West Virginia and beyond.

BY MELISSA LAUBER
UMCConnection Staff

HANNAH MCLAUGHLIN SOMETIMES saw God in the starry night sky. She was a girl who understood the mystery, and the beauty, of the galaxy. She also loved playing with her dog, Zeke. When she was little, she had plans of growing up to be Santa Claus or a farmer or president. And, at 19, she died broken – a victim of the heroin that took over her life.

She was not alone.

Maryland's new governor Larry Hogan has declared heroin as the No. 1 crime problem facing the state. From 2011 through 2013, the number of overdose deaths in the state spiked by 60 percent to 464, state officials reported. That number continues to rise.

In 2013, in Maryland, more people were killed by heroin than were murdered, and the stats are equally as troubling in West Virginia and the District of Columbia.

In West Virginia, law officials report, two-thirds to three-fourths of the cases they receive on a daily basis are heroin related.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, nearly half a million Americans are thought to be addicted to heroin.

The statistics are troubling, but behind each of them is a story that is often marked with destruction and despair. What amazes people about Hannah McLaughlin's story are the people she leaves behind who are using her legacy to educate others about the lethal dangers heroin poses.

Hannah is a child of The United Methodist Church. She's the daughter of the Rev. Craig and Lisa McLaughlin of Mt. Zion UMC in Bel Air. Lisa wears Hannah's photo in a locket around her neck. On a silver chain, Lisa also wears the serenity ring she and Craig gave their daughter the Christmas before she died.

Hannah wore it in her coffin.

Today the spirit of that simple prayer, "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can..." strengthens the McLaughlins as they tell their daughter's story to anyone who will hear it; to anyone who doesn't fully understand the evils of this drug.

For those who loved Hannah, it's been like a blink of an eye and forever since March 24, 2014, when Craig and Lisa found Hannah in her childhood bedroom, dead of an overdose of heroin mixed with fentanyl. Part of their healing is sharing Hannah's story, creating a legacy of hope and recovery.

'An Instant Addict'

It's a story that started when Hannah was in middle school. She was dabbling with marijuana and alcohol. Noticing troubling changes in her behavior, Craig and Lisa insisted Hannah take a drug test. When it came back, they were shocked to discover she had near fatal levels of Methadone in her system. A friend had given her pills. She began taking them on a regular basis.

"She was an instant addict," Craig said.

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NEJ bishops explore realignment of annual conferences

BY MELISSA LAUBER
UMCConnection Staff

ANTICIPATING A DECLINE in membership that could lead to the loss of an episcopal area, the Northeastern Jurisdiction College of Bishops has begun a proactive study to address the missional needs, strengths and challenges of annual conferences in this region.

"While the statistics to determine if the Northeastern Jurisdiction will be asked to go from nine active bishops to eight are not yet in, the College wants

make sure it is aligning leadership and resources in the most effective manner possible as we strive to make disciples for the transformation of the world," said Bishop Marcus Matthews, who leads the Jurisdiction's Vision Table and led the College of Bishops when this study was announced at a meeting in Baltimore Feb. 13.

"No decisive actions have been taken," Matthews said. "However, the bishops feel it is our role to act faithfully and strategically in looking at the way we align our Areas to best serve the church and its people. Initial indicators seem to point to a few possibilities for realignment that we'll be investigating in the months

ahead."

In particular, the bishop said, the potential and challenges of realigning the Baltimore-Washington and Peninsula Delaware Conferences is beginning to be seriously investigated.

The Northeastern Jurisdiction, which stretches from West Virginia to Maine, has 10 annual conferences and nine episcopal areas and is home to 450,734 United Methodists. Changing borders and restructuring annual conferences requires the action of the lay and clergy Jurisdictional Conference delegates, who meet

See NEJ, page 3

... well said

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

BY MANDY SAYERS
Pastor, Covenant UMC, Gaithersburg

// REMEMBER THAT YOU are dust, and to dust you shall return," are words uttered on Ash Wednesday as someone makes an ash cross on our foreheads.

Dust is a reminder of our earthly origins and the relative brevity of our time on earth. Dust is easily wiped away, with a cloth and some polish or a good hard breeze. We don't want to be "dust in the wind" in the words of the old Kansas song. Surely, we are more important than that, we say. We work so hard to deny our mortality or even our aging. Dust is not something we want to identify with.

But Lent is a time to embrace that God is God and we are not ... always a message I personally need to hear. And we are dust that has been enlivened by the breath of God (Genesis 2). Our dry bones live because of God's creating work and by God's Holy Spirit we are sustained.

Remembering that we are dust is good news if we are called to be Easter people, whose Good Friday bodies pale in comparison to our Easter resurrected selves. Maybe it's time to get rid of some dusty practices or dusty arguments or dusty unforgiveness in our lives to make room for the work of the Easter Holy Spirit.

Lent is a great time to clean our spiritual houses and toss out dust bunnies of complacency and hopelessness. A time to cast off the weight of all the dust that we cling to, in favor of clinging to Jesus, "who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God."

Lent reminds me that I am dust – dust that has been created and redeemed and loved and healed and freed – so that I can look to the potter that has shaped me, and the One who was raised from the dust, for you and for me.

I'm dust, called to bring the good news of the Gospel to a dusty world. I'm dust with a destiny. And so are you. May you observe a holy and life-changing Lent.

... well said



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

THE TABLE HAD been sitting dormant for almost a year. After all, it was only used for special occasions. Those times when there were a lot of people coming over to eat for a really special event. You know, Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving, the big events that bring out the whole family.

So when we went to get it, it was covered in dust. No big deal though: all you have to do is wipe the dust off. Except, dust does not wipe off easily, it just spreads everywhere.

When dinner began, you could tell who had been involved with dusting the table. Everyone that was involved had traces of dust on them. The people that moved the table were dusty. The people who cleaned the table were dusty. The people that set the table were dusty.

Not everyone had the same amount of dust on them, but they all had a little on them. By the time dinner was over, not only did the people who were dusty before the meal have dust on them, everyone had dust on them. They had not all been around the table when it was dusty, but they had all been around people who were dusty, and dust gets everywhere. By the time they left the house everyone that came had some dust on them that they took home.

To begin the Lenten season every year we gather around a dusty table. We accept the imposition of ashes on our forehead and are reminded that we came from dust and to dust we will return. That dust is a sign of our belief, a sign of our faith, and a sign of Christ.

When we go into the world we should be leaving a little dust everywhere we go. Everyone we meet should know that we have been at the table. They should leave with some dust of joy, dust of peace, dust of love and dust of faith just from being around us, because we have dust on us. This Lenten season, make sure you spread some dust around so that everyone can know that you were at that dusty table.

... well said

EVENTS

UMM Annual Prayer Breakfast Community UMC in Crofton March 14, 8 a.m.

The Rev. Michael Armstrong, pastor of Colesville UMC, will be the guest speaker at this annual breakfast. The 2015 UMM awards will also be presented. The breakfast is \$20. For more information, contact Malcolm Clory at 301-420-0299 or 301-233-7376.

Volunteers in Mission Training West River Camp in Churchton March 18-21

The BWC will host a Northeastern Jurisdiction training on volunteers in mission and disaster relief. The cost is \$225. For more information, visit <http://bwcumc.org/ministries/vim> or contact Pam Bowen at pbowen@bwcumc.org.

Conversation on Race Oxnam Chapel, Wesley Seminary, D.C. Tuesday, March 17, 6:30-8:30 p.m.

The Institute for Community Engagement at Wesley Downtown is convening a panel to examine theologically and strategically race relations in the United States. This moderated conversation, moderated by Krista Tippett, host of NPR's "On Being," will help faith communities explore fruitful ways of moving forward. RSVP to events@wesleyseminary.edu by March 12.

Festival of Preaching Ecumenical Institute in Baltimore April 17-18

The Ecumenical Institute in Baltimore will host a Festival of Preaching April 17-18. The theme is "Preaching for Transformation in the 21st Century." The goal is to equip preachers to effectively address the pastoral and prophetic issues facing the contemporary church and society. In conjunction with the festival, a spring minimester course, "Preaching in the Black Church Tradition," will be offered. It will be taught by the Rev. C. Anthony Hunt of Epworth UMC in Baltimore. Learn more at www.stmarys.edu/festival-of-preaching.

Pre-Conference Briefings Saturday, May 16 Damascus UMC from 8:30 a.m. to noon First UMC in Hyattsville, 2 to 5:30 p.m.

Lay and clergy Annual Conference members are encouraged to attend one of these briefing sessions to learn and discuss the proposed 2016 budget, and the resolutions and petitions they'll be called to vote upon at the May 28-30 session of the Baltimore-Washington Conference in Baltimore. Learn more about the session at <http://bwcumc.org/ac-sessions/2015-ac-sessions>. Members are encouraged to read the resolutions and petitions online before they come and to print them if they want hard copies.

Summer Camp Registration is OPEN

It's time to visit; www.bwccampsandretreats.com/SummerCamp.html

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UM's invited to 'Dare to Believe' at BWC's Annual Session

By MELISSA LAUBER
UMConnection Staff

"Dare to Believe" is the theme of the 231st Annual Session of the Baltimore-Washington Conference, which will be held May 28-30 at the Marriott Waterfront Hotel in Baltimore.

on the new BWC app.

The two resolutions being considered this year involve codifying a "Circles of Grace" process for consideration of certain resolutions during Annual Conference, and supporting Maryland's efforts to double the state's renewable energy portfolio standard. This resolution also calls on congregations to implement 40 percent

between science and technology in the Social Principles.

These resolutions will be discussed, and any questions will be addressed, at two Pre-Conference Briefings, which will be held May 16 at Damascus UMC from 8:30 a.m. until noon, and at First UMC in Hyattsville from 2 to 5:30 p.m. the same day.



The theme of the conference comes from Matthew 14:22-36, the story of when Peter walks on the water.

This year's highlights will include the preaching of Bishops Marcus Matthews of the Washington Area and Jonathan Holston of the South Carolina Annual Conference. Bishop Peggy Johnson, a daughter of the Baltimore-Washington Conference who now serves the Philadelphia Area, will speak at a retiree luncheon and extension ministry dinner on May 27.

The Rev. Laurie Haller, a pastor in the West Michigan Conference but who serves in the Detroit Conference, will lead the Bible study. Haller, author of "Recess: Rediscovering Play and Purpose," is known throughout the denomination for her efforts in raising \$1 million, while serving as a district superintendent, to build the Ubuntu Retreat Center at Africa University in Zimbabwe.

Also at this session, members will elect six lay and six clergy delegates to represent them at the 2016 General Conference, which will be held in Portland, Ore., May 10-20, 2016. Members will also elect an additional six lay and six clergy delegates to attend the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference, July 11-15 in Lancaster, Pa. Four clergy and four lay alternates will also be elected.

Other highlights of the Annual Conference Session include opening worship at 10 a.m. May 28; a memorial service on May 29 at 10 a.m.; and the ordination service May 30 at 2 p.m. All of these services, and the plenary sessions, will be live-streamed.

During plenary session, members will adopt the conference budget for 2016, consider two resolutions and vote on sending nine petitions to the 2016 General Conference. Complete copies of these documents are on the conference website and, this year, are also available

renewable energy usage to faithfully respond to global climate change.

Members, churches and organizations have also submitted eight petitions they would like the Baltimore-Washington Conference to endorse and send to the 2016 General Church to become church law or policy.

These petitions:

- Discourage investment in companies involved with Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories;
- Ensure that United Methodist boards and agencies will not offer disability insurance that restricts benefits for nervous-mental conditions;
- Affirm the church's support for people with mental illness and advocate globally on behalf of non-discriminatory long-term disability insurance;
- Create a fossil fuel investment screen that ensures the church does not invest in companies that produce petroleum, coal or natural gas;
- Delete language from Para. 161.F of the Book of Discipline that says the church "does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching;"
- Prevent the expiration of Resolution 1027, in the Book of Resolution, on God's Creation and the Church;
- Revises language in the Social Principles to say the state should not promote particular religious beliefs, including creationism, or requirements for or against contraception and/or abortion; and to state that the church opposes the legislation of any faith-based accounts into public school science curriculum and textbooks; and
- More faithfully and fully define the relationship

Two additional sessions will be held this year prior to the opening session being called to order. On Wednesday, May 27, the mandatory clergy executive session will be held from 2 to 5 p.m. at the hotel. A laity session will be held from 7:30 to 9 p.m.

Also on May 27, three classes in stewardship and a workshop on race and reconciliation will be held at the hotel. These learning opportunities are open to everyone. More information is available on the AC session page at <http://bwcumc.org/ac-sessions/2015-ac-sessions>.

The website also provides opportunities to learn more about annual conference and registration for the event.

The cost of registration is \$110 before April 15 and \$169 after.

Event planners want to note that there is no all-attendee meal included in Conference registration this year. Each conference registrant will be given a \$33 credit that can be applied toward the cost of their meal(s) only. The credit is not transferable toward any other fees. The amount of this credit is equal to the cost of the opening lunch so the money can be put it towards that purpose. Otherwise, members may use the credit toward the cost of any other meal. If a meal option is not included in your registration, those handling registration will assume that you are waiving the use of your \$33 meal credit. You will not be able to reverse your choice after April 15.

This year two offerings will be taken at Annual Conference. At the opening worship, an offering will be taken for the Susanna Wesley House, a home for women and children in Baltimore, and at ordination the offering will benefit Africa University, a United Methodist school in Zimbabwe.

NEJ: Exploring one bishop to lead BWC and Pen-Del

From page 1

every four years. Realigning episcopal areas is under the authority of the regional College of Bishops.

At the Feb. 13 meeting, Matthews reported, a complex and detailed demographic analysis was shared that outlined and ranked the size and complexity, capacity for mission, and present and potential fruitfulness of each annual conference in the Jurisdiction.

Compiled by Bishops John Schol of the Greater New Jersey Annual Conference, Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball of the West Virginia Annual Conference and Bishop Mark Webb of the Upper New York Annual Conference, the Episcopal Supervision Assessment report provides an in-depth look at 23 factors that range from number of churches, pastors and conference staff, to theological and ethnic diversity to apportionment collection, mission participation and more.

The analysis indicated that:

- The fastest de-churching culture is in Upper New York, New England and New York annual conferences. New England is the most challenged conference in the Jurisdiction.
- West Virginia, Western Pennsylvania and Susquehanna annual conferences have the most churching culture in the jurisdiction, but all three show challenges in the area of fruitfulness.
- The greatest strengths in the jurisdiction are in Baltimore-Washington and Greater New Jersey annual conferences.
- Three of the five smallest conferences by worship attendance – Eastern Pennsylvania, New York and Peninsula Delaware – show potential for growth and turnaround.

The bishops are developing a number of strategic initiatives based on the findings in the assessment.

However, one immediate measure is the initiation of a study on aligning the Baltimore-Washington Conference and the Peninsula Delaware Annual Conference as one episcopal area.

The two conferences shared a bishop prior to 1988. Bishop Matthews, Bishop Peggy Johnson, who leads the Peninsula Delaware and Eastern Pennsylvania Conferences, and Bishop Forrest Stith, a retired bishop, were given the task of forming a study group to explore how such an alignment could best take place.

Following their consultation, the trio will report back to the College. Based on their recommendations, the realignment could take place in 2016 or 2020.

The College of Bishops also discussed the possibilities of aligning Susquehanna and Eastern Pennsylvania or Eastern Pennsylvania and New Jersey, or of Eastern Pennsylvania having its own bishop. However, Matthews stressed, these conversations are in the preliminary stages.

Later this spring, the statistics from 2014 will be officially compiled. If the membership drops significantly, there is a possibility that the Jurisdiction will be required to move from nine to eight bishops in 2016.

However, members of the College suggested, the alignment of Peninsula-Delaware and the Baltimore-Washington Conference may multiply mission resources and be beneficial to both conferences and could go forward either way, depending on what the study group finds.

(A pdf. of the Episcopal Area Supervision Assessment is available at <http://bwcumc.org/the-united-methodist-church-northeastern-jurisdiction>.)

What are your thoughts on realigning the Baltimore-Washington and Peninsula Delaware conferences into one episcopal area? What might be gained in this new configuration? Of what things should conference leaders be mindful? Join the conversation. Send comments to connection@bwcumc.org.

Conference Mission Fruitfulness (2013 data)										
	BW	EPA	GNJ	NE	NY	PD	SQH	UNY	WPA	WV
% of highly vital congregations	39%	26%	34%	25%	25%	26%	28%	20%	24%	22%
# of worshipers to make 1 profession of faith	16	18	18	19	17	22	23	23	24	32
% of worshipers in small groups	56%	53%	58%	43%	44%	45%	49%	39%	45%	47%
% of congregation spending on mission	16%	10%	14%	13%	12%	15%	14%	13%	14%	12%
% of congregations growing	35%	31%	39%	27%	31%	33%	30%	32%	32%	32%
10 year trend for worship attendance	(11%)	(19%)	(14%)	(16%)	(11%)	(13%)	(18%)	(24%)	(17%)	(14%)

BW = Baltimore-Washington; PDE= Peninsula Delaware; EPA = Eastern Pennsylvania; SQH= Susquehanna; GNJ= Greater New Jersey; UNY= Upper New York; NE = New England; WPA = Western Pennsylvania; NY = New York; WV = West Virginia

Dealing hope instead of dope: Robert's story and struggle

BY ERIK ALSGAARD
UMConnection Staff

THE EPIDEMIC OF heroin is not limited to neighborhoods in big cities, nor to the suburbs that surround them. In rural areas across the Baltimore-Washington Conference, heroin is often more easy to obtain than alcohol.

The following story is true. Only the names and locations have been changed.

"Robert" drank and smoked pot like a lot of other kids when he was in high school, but he didn't like the way the harder drugs made him feel. What he did like was being part of the "in crowd," so he quickly learned that selling drugs secured the attention he craved.

"If I sold these things, I'd be the life of the party."

His popularity – and market — expanded after high school.

"I was the Sears and Roebuck of the community," he said. "I sold a little bit of everything: cocaine, pot, OxyContin." Even, sometimes, heroin. "Getting drugs is all about who you know."

Robert was never part of a larger operation. One of his primary suppliers was a neighbor with multiple prescriptions for OxyContin. "She had about five prescriptions for 100 pills from doctors around here, and more from doctors in other states," Robert said. And a single gram of heroin, bought in Baltimore for around \$100, could easily return a \$300 or \$400 profit when cut and distributed.

At the peak of his "success," Robert owned a car and shared a townhouse. "I had everything I ever wanted. I never did laundry; I bought clothes and threw them away. I spent my days playing video games."

One day Robert watched a woman struggling to walk

with a broken shoe. He pulled over and gave her his car.

That's right: he gave her his car.

With a growing sense that he was "oppressing" his own community, he walked away from dealing and moved home with his parents. But the transition wasn't easy. Unable to find a job, the temptation to return to his former lifestyle was (and sometimes continues to be) overwhelming. "Even though I stopped, nothing changed."

He realizes now that what he was yearning to grow "closer to God." Robert's close friend, a child of the United Methodist congregation near where he lived, had invited him to church and promised he would find acceptance.

Initially resistant, Robert's first visit to the church was to attend that same friend's funeral after he hanged himself. The young man had been released from prison a few months before, healthy and determined to pursue a better path. Unable to find a job, the pressures became overwhelming and he began using heroin again and spiraled into hopelessness.

The church continues to grieve this young man who, in spite of his despair, trusted God's love and offered it to Robert — with an invitation to worship. Before his funeral, the pastor alerted the hospitality committee to expect a very different crowd to show up, and encouraged them to welcome every young person, every addict, and every dealer (some, notorious in the community) who entered the building as if they were their grandchildren. "I want you to go farther outside your comfort zone than you ever thought possible," said the pastor.

Robert was back the next Sunday, and nearly every Sunday since. Now, he counts elderly ladies and retired business executives among his church friends. They are his church family. He still wears a black hoodie, but now it is embroidered with "Peace United Methodist Church,"

and his framed membership certificate hangs on his wall at home.

He keeps his arms covered even in summer to hide his tattoos. "I cover them because they are who I was, not who I am now." Robert attends worship twice a week and is involved in his congregation's mission and outreach.

"I now deliver food to homes where I used to deliver drugs," he said.

He freely admits that keeping himself involved at the church keeps him busy — "off the streets...out of trouble." Robert is still unemployed and understands why people feel trapped in the drug culture. He also wrestles with his own guilt and struggles to accept Christ's forgiveness for all the lives he damaged.

Without his car, Robert walks to church and sees a syringe on the side of the road at least once a week. When asked how long it would take to secure heroin in this rural community, he answers, "I could have it here within two minutes with one phone call."

He has seen an increase in heroin use in recent years, especially since OxyContin, an opioid, was reformulated to prevent it from being crushed in order to snort or inject the drug. "These people become physically sick without heroin. Desperate. They can't function. They neglect their children."

So Robert delivers food for the children, along with an invitation to church. A one-man evangelization team, Robert has brought many of his former customers to church. Some come for a while, some bring their children to Vacation Bible School, some reject his talk of Jesus and grace, but he doesn't give up.

"Instead of dealing dope, I'm dealing hope, and hope is free," Robert said. "I'm not sure if I made that up or heard it somewhere, but that's my motto."

Heroin: Sharing the story that true love is never wasted

From page 1

While they didn't realize it at the time, Hannah was self-medicating, trying to find ways to deal with sexual abuse, which her family was unaware of, that had occurred when she was younger.

Despite insurance challenges, the McLaughlins found a treatment facility in Indiana for Hannah. She graduated from the program and began to participate in a 12-step program.

It was there she met a young man who introduced her to heroin.

It was the beginning of a five-year spiral into horrors none of them could imagine. There were cycles of hope and despair as Hannah moved through more than 19 treatment programs. Craig and Lisa remember how happy and strong she looked after spending 77 days backpacking in blizzard conditions as part of a wilderness program. They also recall discovering how a man had used their daughter to get money for his own addiction.

"He had her dancing on the Block in Baltimore, panhandling and prostituting herself," Lisa said. "She sold everything she had. We intercepted messages telling her to steal my jewelry."

"Chasing the high" is virtually all heroin addicts can think about, the McLaughlins learned. The addicts' lives become organized around how to get the money and get to their dealer. Everything else falls away. Statistics indicate that 97 percent of heroin addicts die from heroin. "But knowledge of that statistic doesn't stop an addict from using," Craig said. It was explained to him this way: "You might get high or you might die; either one is okay."

Lisa and Craig warned their daughter that if they ever found drugs in the house, they would call the police.

They did.

At 17, Hannah opted to participate in drug court and found herself in juvenile detention and a variety of facilities.

A Spiral Into Darkness

Along the way there were signs of hope.

One day, Hannah and her friend decided to stop using and threw their dope and needles in a dumpster, her parents remember. Later that night, she snuck back to reclaim them, but couldn't find them. She sunk down against the dumpster — beginning to get "dope sick." She was miserable, Craig said. But when she looked back at the dumpster she saw, for the first time, that there was a message written on it: "Everything will be okay."

"She considered this a word from God for her," Craig said.

She came home that weekend and wanted to take her mom to see the dumpster, to share the words she considered her own personal miracle. She wanted to go to church, so Craig asked her to choose the topic for his sermon. She asked him to preach on Winston Churchill's words: "Never, never, never give up." He preached for her.

But it wasn't long before Hannah started using heroin again. And this time, she sought to get clean in a facility in Florida. The program didn't work for her. She was 1,000 miles away from her parents and at one point sent them a text photo of her on a private plane.

She was being trafficked, carried to Columbus, Ohio, where she was held for three weeks, forced to have sex with strangers for money that went to her captors.

Through the Polaris Project and its national trafficking hotline, Hannah managed to get free and her parents went to claim her. But she had begun a spiral in darkness that felt to Craig and Lisa like she might be slowly giving up on life.

Waiting For Death

When she was getting a shower one morning, Lisa caught herself wondering what she would dress Hannah in for her funeral. She began to hate the sound of the phone ringing or the knocks on the door, afraid someone was going to relay the news that her daughter was dead.

"When your loved one's in addiction, unless you have them in your sight, you don't know if they're alive or dead," Lisa said.

The McLaughlins say they sometimes felt as if they were waiting for Hannah's death, "like watching a long, slow suicide."

Still, nothing prepared them for that moment. They were used to checking on Hannah at night to see if she was breathing. But in that instant they realized she wasn't, their hearts stopped.

"Awful sounds came out of my body that I didn't know were ever there," Lisa said.

The devastation and despair enveloped them, but so too did the love of God.

The family embraced the verse from Isaiah 51: "Everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away."

Somehow, in small ways, they began to find ways to feel stronger. They knew that God was with them.

True Love Is Never Wasted

The pair started sharing Hannah's story in their

community, at schools and churches. They've made videos for the sheriff's department that will be shown in movie theaters and people with stories as heart-breaking as their own, often seek them out for advice and prayer. They have started a support group called Loving An Addict for family members and friends of those caught in addiction.

Some churches have asked the McLaughlins what they can do. Craig advises hosting 12-step and Celebrate Recovery programs. He also urges church leaders to speak authentically and candidly to youth about everything. "You're only as sick as your biggest secret," he said.

He encourages pastors to attend these recovery groups to learn the language of addiction and the difficult truths of recovery.

"Too often we say the exact opposite thing that a person with an addiction needs to hear," he said.

To those experiencing addiction, he is blunt. "You can get out of addiction," he says. "It will be hard. The statistics are horrible. But here's what it will take: 1,000 percent effort. That's more than you can give. You will need God. But you can do it. You can't do it with half measures. This is the most radical thing you will ever do. There is hope."

To youth everywhere, his words are simple: "Please, do not do drugs."

While Hannah was alive, her parents prayed for a miraculous healing. "God chose not to do that," Lisa said. But, they both agree, God was always present with Hannah.

"She lived amid all this love and all this prayer," they said. Some may think their prayers were in vain, "but Hannah didn't become a bitter, angry or hateful person. She never lost her heart," Craig said.

On the day after she died, a message was posted on Hannah's Facebook page: Hannah McLaughlin - we love you and miss you - March 25, 2014

"A huge thank you to all of you who loved Hannah, prayed for her, encouraged her, helped her to try to be sober - you poured so much love into her heart. Some people might think it all didn't work, but I know it all made a huge difference. Because of all our love Hannah was able to remain a loving, caring, grateful person despite the horror that she couldn't escape. True love is never wasted."

Perspectives on God, interfaith group explores the truth

BY LINDA WORTHINGTON
UMConnection Staff

ACKNOWLEDGING THAT THE world is filled with tragic misunderstandings, hatred and violence, often in the name of religion, panelists from three Abrahamic religions and a humanist met for a panel discussion at the BWC Mission Center Feb. 15.

About 50 people attended while many more participated via live streaming of the program to several different churches.

The event was arranged by Wesley Nexus, Inc., an online organization created in 2009 as a nonprofit organization dedicated to the dissemination of information about the dialogue between science and religion within the Wesleyan tradition in the 21st century. It was the third annual Evolution Weekend program the group has sponsored.

"Science, Story, Scripture: Living Together with Understanding" featured a panel of a Muslim Imam, a traditional Christian, a progressive Jew and an "unabashed" atheist, to talk about God.

Following a set of pre-arranged questions, each panelist was first asked to summarize their perception of God and communicating with God.

Haytham Younis, a Muslim Imam, a scholar in Arabic and Islamic studies and an architect, said he believed there is "a rational agreement of the existence of a Creator" who must be God who is "One and only One," a belief voiced over and over in the Muslim Holy book, the Quran. Communication with God is through prayer five

times a day.

Dennis Skocz, a practicing Catholic and Adjunct Professor of Philosophy specializing in contemporary European philosophy, first noted that he does not speak for the Catholic Church. His view of God is that the relationship is experiential and comes out of listening to the heart. God can be communicated with through prayer, which itself is a dialogue. "On prayer, we pray first then come to know about God," he said, "We know someone is out there."

The Jewish voice on the panel, Daniel Spiro, an author, lawyer and co-founder of the Jewish-Islamic Dialogue Society of Washington, described God as "great, infinite love – and a divine mystery." Nothing is outside of God and God is not too abstract, he said. He communicates with God through prayer. "Talking to God reveals my innermost feeling of God," he said.

Humanist John Shook is a research associate in philosophy and instructor in Science Education for the University of Buffalo. An "unabashed atheist," in his own words, he said that atheism is not secularism. "Atheism is an ancient way of thinking about the ultimate," he said. "I don't believe in your God or any of the other gods. Religions are built to deal not with God, but with each other."

Another question given the panelists dealt with concepts of evolution, it being Evolution Weekend.

"I'm commanded to follow truth ... and to follow the dictates of science," Spiro said. "Science and religion can't contradict each other. Science is not absolute truth, but says when it doesn't have it. Religion needs science in

order to know what it's dealing with (nature). Science doesn't need religion, ... which operates in the social field. We need to deal with the wisdom of what's coming next (science), not lingering over something of the past (religion)."

"The Quran brings scientific evidences of creation," Younis said, including nature and humans. "There is a Creator. If you examine heaven and earth, you'll never find a mistake," he said and added, "No matter what name, you're talking about One."

In a series of questions, the panelists expounded further on the main panel presentations.

"Take science seriously," Spiro said. "Now too much of religion is dedicated to debunking science. Theology is about what is old; science deals with the new." He spoke about climate change and said that in religion, many people feel like God will take care of us, but, he concluded, "If we want to do something about the world, we better get busy."

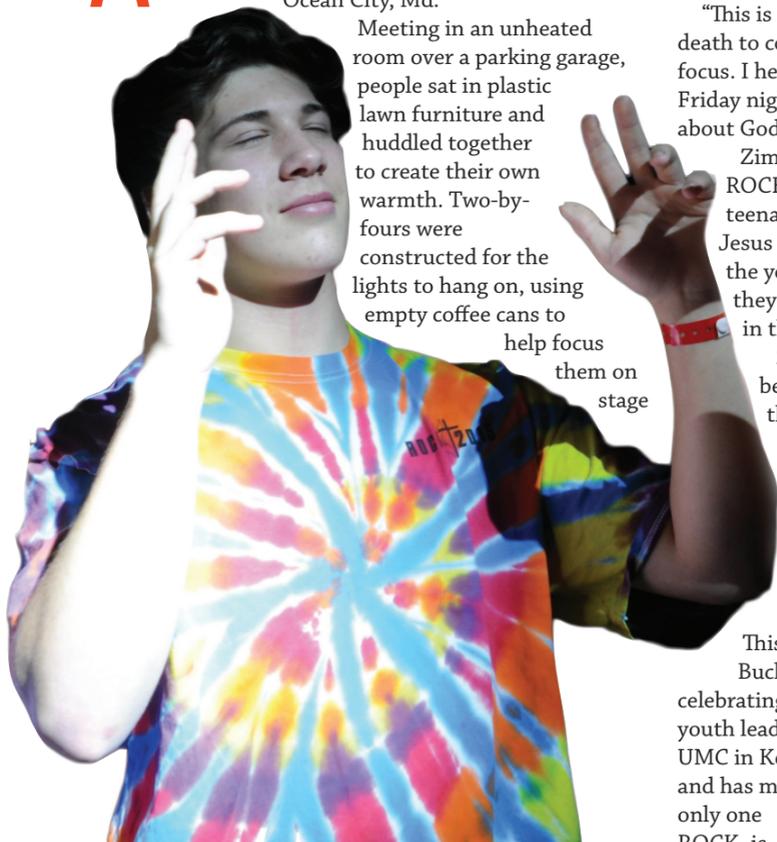
In terms of climate change, Younis said, "The Prophet talks about apocalypse, not the end of the world. ... We understand that mankind will head toward the cliff but God will intervene."

The Rev. William Maisch, a WesleyNexus board member, gave a brief takeaway as time ran out: "When we talk about science I hear there is a place for that. And story has a place, serves a purpose. Story can be harmful or helpful. You all appealed to the holy texts; you sat together; you respected each other; you had a common text; you provided space. In that I see hope."

Youth, youth leaders by the thousands attend ROCK 2015

BY MELISSA LAUBER
UMConnection Staff

AT THE FIRST ROCK youth retreat, held in 1995, about 125 people attended. It was held at what is now the Coastal Palms Hotel on 120th Street in Ocean City, Md.



Meeting in an unheated room over a parking garage, people sat in plastic lawn furniture and huddled together to create their own warmth. Two-by-fours were constructed for the lights to hang on, using empty coffee cans to help focus them on stage

Coordinator at the time, and even at the first ROCK, the teenagers on the Council played an important role in the decision-making process.

"We thought it would be a draw for people, just to come out to Ocean City," said Zima.

The first retreat was in 1995.

"This is all about God," said Zima. "I'm thrilled to death to come back and see that God is still the main focus. I heard the purpose statement from the stage on Friday night, and it was the same one we had. It's all about God."

Zima said that, since the beginning, the idea of ROCK is to build up to a time Saturday night where teenagers are invited into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. Sunday, he said, was a time to prepare the youth to go home with instructions on what they needed to do in their own personal lives and in the life of the church.

Zima, who now lives in North Carolina, hadn't been back to ROCK in eight years. He was thrilled to see what the event had turned into.

"I wasn't here, but I was hearing reports," he said. "This is God's work. There's

no limitation to what God can do. Just to come back and be a part of it, to be present, it's awesome.

"This is a blast!" Buckingham, who is celebrating his 30th year as the youth leader at St. Paul's UMC in Kensington and has missed only one ROCK, is proud of the

legacy of ROCK in that it has always been led by laity, and that teenagers have always been key leaders and decision makers in the planning and implementation of the weekend.

"We've had the opportunity, year by year, to see this grow," he said.

And the growth has not been only with the size and scope of the event, Buckingham said. Lives have been changed.

"Every year, with my group, I get to see kids come to a relationship with Jesus Christ in a new way and with a new perspective," he said. "This is an opportunity where the Spirit can activate the emotions in a young person because they're away from home, it's away from school, it's away from parents, the Spirit works in the mind to re-focus and respond ... to what life really means, what it's all about."

To see images from ROCK 2015, visit <http://bwcumc.org/rock>, or scan the QR code below, and scroll down to the slideshow at the bottom of the page.



because no hotels in Ocean City in 1995 had the proper kind of lights for an event of this scope.

That first ROCK was the spark, and because the spark was "all about Christ," that's why it exploded, said Rick Buckingham, one of the organizers of that very first event.

In early February 2015, more than 5,500 youth, young adults and youth group leaders gathered in the same Ocean City, but this time taking over an entire Convention Center.

And during ROCK this year, those nearly 5,500 people spent a moment to recognize and thank the founders, Buckingham and Jeff Zima.

The idea began in 1994 through the District Council on Youth Ministries in the former Washington West District, Buckingham said. Zima was the District Youth





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MAKING A DIFFERENCE



The Rev. Cynthia Moore-Koikoi, superintendent of the Baltimore Metropolitan District, dives into the icy ocean.

Superintendent takes the plunge for mission

OCEAN CITY – The Rev. Cynthia Moore-Koikoi, superintendent of the Baltimore Metropolitan District, took the “polar plunge” at ROCK this year on Feb. 7. Shivering with her were three members of Halethorpe Relay UMC.

Friends and observers were asked to contribute to the efforts with contributions for Manna House and Safe House of Hope in Baltimore. At last count she had raised nearly \$2,000.

GBPFB divests from coal

GLENVIEW, ILL – The General Board of Pensions and Health Benefits announced in January that it would divest its investments from the coal industry. Global pressure on heavily carbon based energy companies have made coal a poor investment, explained the Rev. Chet Pritchett, executive director of the Methodist Federation of Social Action, which has been advocating for divestment from fossil fuels for years.

GBPFB’s Managing Director of Sustainable Investment Strategies Kirsty Jenkinson commented, “Our climate change guideline focuses on companies operating in the carbon-intensive thermal coal industry. ... We believe our approach can help us fulfill our fiduciary obligations while also creating positive change for people and the planet.”

“We celebrate this divestment and hope the General Board of Pensions and Health Benefits will continue to research and respond to holdings in carbon-based

energy corporations,” Pritchett said. To learn more, go to gbophb.org/climatechange.

Berkeley County UMs start fifth house

MARTINSBURG, W. VA. – Twenty-five United Methodist Churches of Berkeley County, W. Va., held a Music Fest in January to raise funds for their next Habitat for Humanity build.

The Habitat house the cluster of churches will build will be their fifth, with members from all the churches working together.

“Our emphasis for this house is to build it for a veteran,” said the Rev. Ed Grove, who retired in 2009 but continues to serve the Mt. Wesley-Greensburg Charge.

The Music Fest held in the auditorium of the Spring Mills High School in Martinsburg featured patriotic music from the Berkeley County churches. An adult choir with singers from all the UM churches performed, as did a united children’s choir.

UMs rally to change police rules

ANNAPOLIS – As the Maryland General Assembly was about to begin, Jan. 15, more than 50 UMs gathered with 300 other people for a multi-faith ecumenical rally at the state capitol. They were there to advocate for legislative action on laws governing policing across the city and state. The participants ranged from middle-schoolers getting a first-hand civics lesson to grandparents who brought their grandchildren.

The Rev. Eric King from Metropolitan UMC helped with the planning and organizing. Specifically, the rally advocated to amend the Law Enforcement Officer’s Bill of Rights, which currently works in ways to shield police officers from accountability when alleged to have committed abuses against civilians. “We also advocated for lifting the financial limits that victims of police violence can receive,” King said, “and to strengthen the Civilian Review Board.”

The Rev. Stephen Tillett, pastor of Asbury-Broadneck UMC and an officer in the Anne Arundel NAACP, was one of the speakers.

Tre Murphy, an 18-year-old youth organizer at Metropolitan UMC, is a leader in the Baltimore-area Algebra Project, which trains young people in civil activism.

It's not just soup, it's 'souper!'



Members of Mt. Zion UMC sample soups as they raise money for the homeless in their community.

FINKSBURG – The Sunday of the Super Bowl is used by many church youth groups to raise funds for local charities of their choosing. The Mt. Zion UMC has a little different take.

They held their fourth “Souper Bowl” event with 15 crockpots of different soups, reported Barb Hayes, the Missions Chairman. They “charged” a can of soup with a pop top to donate for the homeless in the community.

“We had a great turnout and it was a lot of fun along with receiving a lot of canned soups,” Hayes said.

Churches honor their history

PARKTON – Stabler’s UMC, in Parkton recently celebrated its 200th anniversary with special music by the group “Total Surrender” and preaching from the pastor, Darryl Zoller, who wore garb from the early 1800s.

Circuit riders served the congregation from 1814-1827. Christian Stabler Sr. purchased one-half acre of land for the sum of six dollars “for the sole use and benefit of the Methodist Episcopal Church.” Initially there were disagreements about whether to have a class for infants and one for seniors. Church members argued that “the former were too young to learn, and the latter too old to be taught.” Despite disagreements, the Sunday School and the church prospered.

In other history-related news, Mt. Zion UMC received a \$5,000 capital improvement grant from Preservation Maryland to help put a new roof for its 124-year-old building.

A Lenten reflection on how hope outweighs optimism

In December 2004, a tsunami devastated the South Asian coastline. In an essay, that later became the book *"The Doors of the Sea,"* David Bentley Hart wrote a theodicy exploring the theology of the devastation. In it he states:

Ours is a faith that "has set us free from optimism and taught us hope instead."

This quote was discussed at the January Financial Leadership Academy and the Rev. Conrad Link, the superintendent of the Cumberland-Hagerstown District who was participating in the academy, shared some interesting thoughts about it. During this Lenten season, we share some of Link's remarks and invited others in the Baltimore-Washington Conference to share their thoughts as well. Below are excerpts of their reflections. For more, visit www.bwcmc.org/hope_and_optimism.

By Rev. Conrad Link

Cumberland-Hagerstown Superintendent

To be optimistic is to get excited and worked up that something is going to happen and then, when it does not happen, to be dejected, defeated and demoralized.

Instead, the Christian faith is based on hope, the reality that what is needed, wanted and planned for will happen, not in a prescribed time set by you or me, but in the cosmic time of God. It will happen. We have this hope. In the meantime, keep vigilant, be alert, be smart, be hope-filled, and move forward. We are people of hope, rooted in reality.

There is a great illustration in Jim Collin's book, "Good to Great." Admiral Jim Stockdale, the highest ranking officer held captive in North Vietnam, was asked, "Who didn't make it out of prisoner of war camp?"

Stockdale responded, "The optimists!

"The optimists ... were the ones who said, 'We are going to be out by Christmas'... and Christmas would come and go ... then 'we will be out by Easter'... and Easter would come and go ... then 'thanksgiving'... and thanksgiving would come and go ... and they died of a broken heart."

Stockdale, Collins relates, said, "This is a very important lesson. You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end — which you can never afford to lose — with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be."

We are not, or should not be, people who get optimistic over quick fixes, current fads, easy answers, and contemporary trends that are fleeting. Optimistic ideas and people, with good intentions, often lead us forward with little lasting power because something new and better is always around the corner.

Hope is a foundation block; optimism is the facade.

Hope is the cake; optimism is the icing.

We are people of hope. Tomorrow will come. It might be better, it might be worse. I will deal with it as it comes, keeping my eyes on the hope, the prize, that is not fleeting and cannot be taken away. We are people of hope, rooted in reality. Thanks be to God

By Rev. Mark A. Schaefer

United Methodist Chaplain, American University

The distinction between optimism and hopefulness is not always clear in people's minds. Both seem to look expectantly to a brighter future, where everything will turn out alright. Both seem to anticipate a happy ending to the great drama of history, when all the world's ills will be healed, all the injustices set aright.

But I would submit that optimism and hope have little to do with the future; they have everything to do with the present.

It's an old joke that the optimist believes that we live in the best of all possible worlds, while the pessimist fears that this is so. The Christian, as a practitioner of hope, stakes out a different piece of ground. We know that this world is not the best of all possible worlds, because we have a vision of a better one to compare it to.

We know that this is not the world of perfect peace and justice, of love and fellowship, of reconciliation and community that we know God intends it to be. Looking around, we cannot agree with the optimist that it is the best of all possible worlds. We do not expect things to get better as a matter of course.

In fact, we could be forgiven for thinking that the world is broken, irredeemable, unfixable. Here is where we differ from the optimist, who might expect the future to be better as a result of a kind of inevitability of progress. The cross does not allow us to view the world this way. The cross reminds us of its brokenness, its injustice, its violence.

At the same time, we cannot fear alongside the pessimist that it is never going to get better. Ours is not a faith of resignation, or worse, a faith of escapism wherein we lament the brokenness of the world but look forward to the day when we are able to get out of it. The empty tomb will not allow us to view the world that way.

The Empty Tomb reminds us of God's goodness, God's victory, God's restoration of the world entire. We have hope in the future not because we are convinced of humanity's essential goodness or of the inevitability of progress. We have hope in the future because of our faith in God as known through Jesus Christ.

Ours is a faith that has saved us from optimism. The Christian knows that everything will not be okay — there will still be injustice, suffering, sorrow — but gets out of bed anyway, and gets on with the work of hope.

By Rev. Kevin Baker

Pastor, Oakdale Emory UMC, Olney

I am in full agreement with this statement — as long as we understand "optimism" as referring to the belief that this world is the best of all possible worlds. The world we currently live in was created in beauty and splendor, but is now broken and diseased.

The brokenness has not entirely erased the beauty and, in fact, through the love, grace and power of our Redeemer, often the deeper parts of beauty can be seen and felt through brokenness and pain. But this world is not our true home.

Our hope is that one day, when our King returns, this world will fully become the Kingdom of our God and that all things will be made right and righteous.

While we wait for this consummation, we are privileged to experience a foretaste of God's goodness and light, day by day, even in the midst of pain and suffering. So we stay fully grounded in the reality that there is pain, injustice and suffering in abundance, but we do not lose hope, since the One who lives in us is far greater than the circumstances of this present world.

Our hope is based in the historical acts of God consummated in the Incarnation, Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus. These historical acts and facts, combined with the promises of God, keep us strong in hope and bathed in peace.

By Rev. Ianther Marie Mills

Pastor, Asbury UMC, Washington, D.C.

During Black History Month, I had the opportunity to read a brief biographical sketch of the great pastor, preacher and hymn writer, Charles Albert Tindley. Tindley, who was largely self-educated, overcame extreme obstacles, including the death of his mother at age two and being hired out to work in the fields for people who were often cruel and who refused to allow him to receive an education or even attend church, to become one of the most renowned ministers in all of Methodism.

What motivated Tindley was his faith in God. In "Charles Albert Tindley, Faithful Servant of Christ," Amy C. Smith tells the story of his arrival at his first

appointment in Cape May, New Jersey:

"The area was experiencing a heavy snowstorm, and Tindley and his family were isolated in their new parsonage. They had no food except a stale piece of bread, and had decided to dip that in some water (they had no milk), to soften it up a bit, then break it into pieces to give to the children, Mary and Fredrick. As for

themselves, there would be nothing to eat. In the front room was another baby daughter who had passed away the night before.

"Tindley asked his wife to set the table as though she had the food to put in the dishes. She was understandably reluctant to do so at first, but finally agreed. After the table had been set, he said, 'Now let us get on our knees and have our morning prayer.'

"(Tindley) thanked God for what they had. Then, getting up from their knees and seating themselves at the table, they prepared to say grace over the food that was not there.

"At that moment, they heard someone commanding his team of horses to stop outside their door. Tindley opened the door to find standing there a man who had come to deliver food and firewood to the 'new parson.' It was out of this experience that Tindley wrote the hymn 'God Will Provide for Me.'"

The faith Tindley exhibited is the kind of faith that wrestles with the theodicy question and walks away full. It is a faith that faces both plenty and want, yet trusts that God will provide. It is the faith of Job. It is the faith of every Christian who has exchanged optimism for hope.

By Rev. Tom Brunkow

Retired Elder

The quote from David Hart about optimism and hope calls to mind the perplexity I experience every morning as I read news of trouble in many places: spreading Islamic terrorism, rising racial tensions in US towns and cities, a rekindling of the culture wars, deepening political divisions across the country right up to the gridlocked halls of congress.

This daily onslaught of bad news often brings a feeling of helplessness with my morning coffee. There is precious little news to feed any sense of optimism in my soul.

At such times I try to remember something from Karl Barth that I read in seminary long ago.

Barth himself taught and preached in that darkest hour of history — World War II. Nevertheless, he could write of the Christian life as possessing a kind of nonchalance, a lack of desperation, even a sense of humor in the face of big trouble. Such a disposition comes not from indifference to the world's suffering, or a lack of seriousness about life, or a desire to withdraw from painful reality.

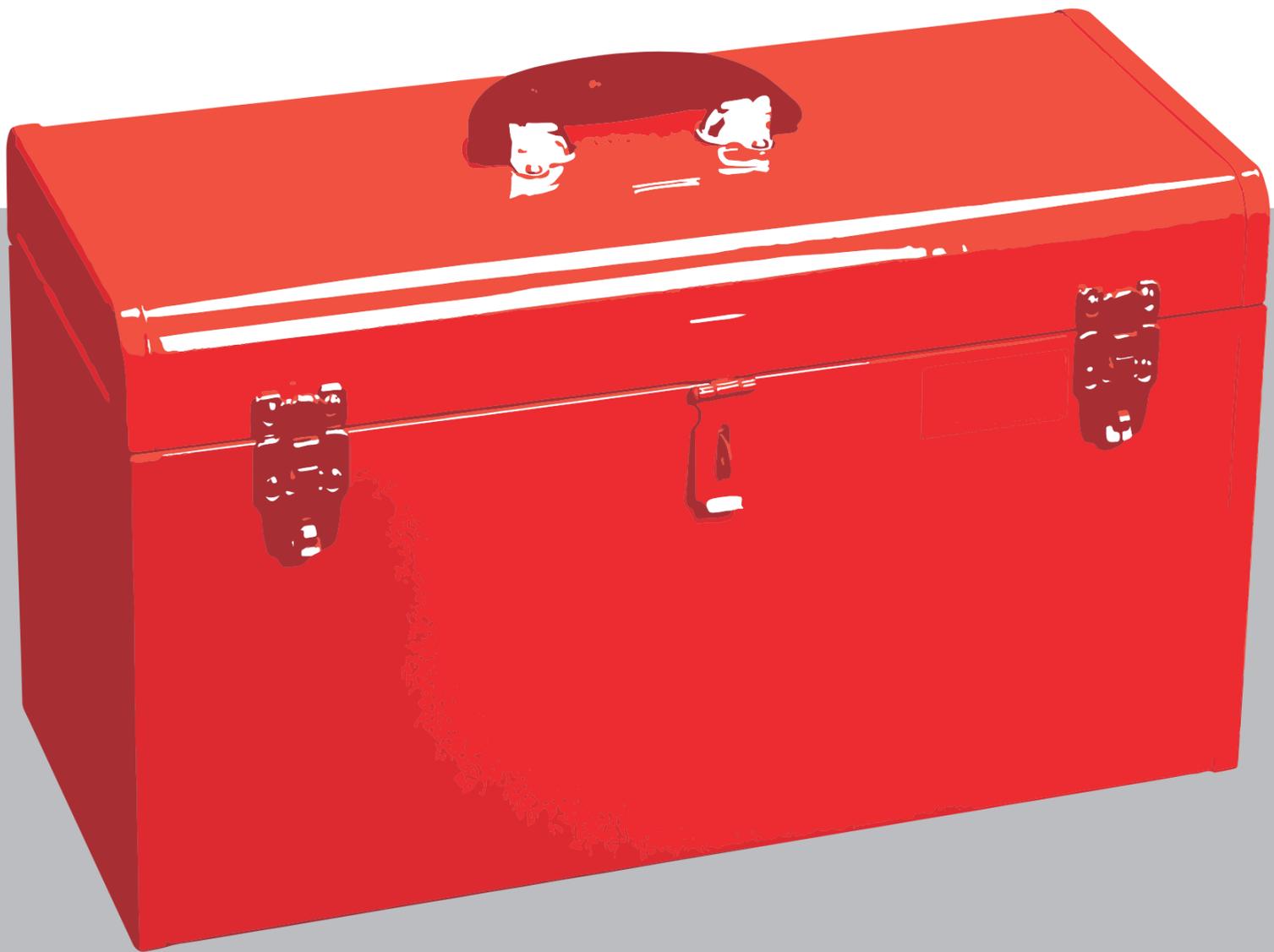
The source comes from the long-view, from a hope that God's purpose of well-being for the creation cannot be thwarted by any opposing powers (even the ones that are scaring us to death in these times).

This nonchalance comes from our seriousness about the nature of Ultimate Reality, our confidence in a Resurrection power which blunts and overcomes all crucifying powers. Christians living by this hope understand that we humans are not able to fix the world's brokenness, that the burden of saving the world is not ours.

So this Christian nonchalance, sense of humor, and even playfulness springs from a deep seriousness of faith. Another way of putting it: When confronted by horrific events across the seas and in our streets we do not have to become paralyzed or passive ... because we know of another reality. We have hope in the God who has made us, the God who has borne the brunt of the storm for us in the cross of Jesus Christ, and the God who grants us the freedom and power "to resist evil, injustice and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves." And this, I think Barth meant to say, is why we can go about our daily rounds with a certain nonchalance, sense of humor, and playfulness.

Ours is a faith that "has set us free from optimism and taught us hope instead."

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