



“Let justice roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.”
—Amos 5:24

UMC Connection

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At Mt. Zion UMC in Bel Air, crafts, dancing, Bible study and worship are part of “Beyond Capernaum,” one of the largest ministries in the nation for people with special needs. About 600 people attend the church’s programs every week.

Church opens doors to hope

By MELISSA LAUBER
UMConnection Staff

AT MT. ZION UMC in Bel Air, they never underestimate the power of God acting through one person. When Joshua Cooney was younger, his mother, Terri, worried that he needed friends to spend time with and care about. Joshua has special needs. In 2009, she collected a small group of people at her church, and began an informal fellowship.

Today, that group has grown into one of the largest ministries for people with disabilities in the nation, and the largest in Maryland. During a good week, 600 people will attend the five programs, which include a worship service, a Bible study, and sessions for recreation, socialization and fun.

Cooney remembers that she was a new believer when the Lord led her and her family into foster care and adoption. She told God she was willing to adopt any child, except one with special needs. “We were simply not equipped to do that,” she said.

God gave them Joshua, who was handsome, sweet and healthy at age 1, and by age 2, showed signs of autism that

sent his mother “kicking, screaming and crying, into the world of the special needs community.

“I was a woman of faith who believed that with love and prayer, God would heal Josh, but instead God healed me,” she said.

The community at Mt. Zion embraced the Cooney family as they faced new challenges. But Cooney’s eyes were also opened to the “tremendous hurt, need and isolation so many families like ours go through.”

She recruited the church’s youth group to help her offer a twice a month fellowship for Joshua and his peers.

From that beginning a huge ministry blossomed, said Cooney. “God used the very thing I feared to change my whole life and to impact our church and our entire community.”

Today, on Tuesday evenings and Thursday mornings, the fellowship hall tent at Mt. Zion UMC is buzzing with activity. There’s basketball, dancing, crafts, games, snacks and live performances. There’s also some prayer.

“How much does Jesus love you?” Brian Malcolm greeted a woman named Rachel. “So MUCH!” Rachel exclaimed. She provided the prayer, it was simple and beautiful, just like her.

See Mt. Zion, page 8

Duckett named Baltimore DS

By MELISSA LAUBER
UMConnection Staff

BISHOP LATRELLE EASTERLING has appointed the Rev. Wanda Bynum Duckett to serve as superintendent of the Baltimore Metropolitan District.

Duckett, pastor of Mt. Zion UMC in Baltimore, will begin this ministry July 1, taking over for interim



superintendent, the Rev. Ed DeLong.

In discerning who might lead the district, the bishop said she sought “a pastor who is spiritually mature, embodies their faith and leads with integrity.” She lifted up Duckett as a proven leader who has a demonstrable record of fruitfulness and is capable of crafting a fresh vision for the future.

“Both the Cabinet and the Superintendency Committee unanimously agree that Rev. Dr. Duckett is overwhelmingly qualified to assume this leadership position,” Easterling said.

“I’m humbled by the opportunity to serve, and by humbled, I mean blown away,” Duckett said. “I really look forward to getting to know better what the needs and the gifts of the churches are and to working with them to support, resource, pray and serve with them, so that we can be the best we can be for God.”

Duckett’s knowledge of, and love for, the region is already immense. She is a daughter of Baltimore, as “homegrown as it gets.” She was born in West Baltimore’s
See New DS, page 5

E-giving builds steady stewardship

By ERIK ALSGAARD
UMConnection Staff

HOW WOULD YOUR church like to increase its income by 26 percent this year? How would your church like to increase its income by 26 percent with the membership you already have?

You can do that by using

electronic giving.

There are several companies offering electronic giving services to United Methodist churches, including E-Zekiel, eChurchGiving, and Vanco, just to name a few.

But only Vanco is in a partnership arrangement with the denomination’s General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA).

Vanco did an analysis recently of more than 2,300 congregations, and those with debit/credit/e-checking giving streams reported a 26 percent higher income than those who did not accept those forms of payment.

According to Paul Eichelberger, Baltimore-Washington Conference treasurer, there are 87

churches in the conference using Vanco, including 21 of 52 churches with an average worship attendance of between 250 and 500 (40 percent), and 42 of 153 churches with average worship attendance between 100-249 (27 percent).

One of the primary benefits of electronic giving, said Eichelberger,

See Online Giving, page 4

... well said

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

By MANDY SAYERS
Pastor, Covenant UMC, Gaithersburg

I DON'T KNOW ABOUT you, but for me, 2016 left a lot to be desired on a variety of fronts. Work, a.k.a., pastoring, was great. But many of my teenage musical influences and people I thought were too young to die were called home to glory. I'm still dealing with the aftermath of the most surreal election of my lifetime. I don't think I'm strong enough to even write about it yet.

Now, here it is, 2017, and several of my friends see little reason for hope that change, helpful change, is going to come.

Where is hope to come from? Is it "Morning in America?" as Maya Angelou read at Clinton's inauguration? Are "Happy Days" here again, as Reagan assured us? Is there a reason to say, "Yes, we can" as Obama cheered?

What's left is "Drain the swamp, build the wall," and scary tweets and hateful words, and some days I just want to eat carbs and stay in bed. "Renew" feels like just a brand of carpet cleaner or maybe some strawberry-scented shampoo.

But what if the turning of the year, and our own renewal, does not depend on our level of optimism about politics or our own abilities to keep resolutions? What if our renewal as children of God depends on the help that comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth? God's mercies, new every morning, Christ's call to follow, Christ's command to forgive (and his offer of forgiveness) ...all these things are gifts from God. It is also God's gift to get to see the start of a new calendar year.

It's time to be renewed. (Note the passive; something God does for us). And then it's time to share God's renewal with others. Do you need a new beginning? God has one ready for you, and for all of us.

Could it be that the Holy Spirit is still moving and getting ready to move in our churches, in our relationships, in our nation? God's new life means the status quo ain't what it used to be, friends.

As Easter people, we would be foolish to discount what God can do. This God of the empty tomb isn't pessimistic about 2017. After all, this God whispers to all our inertia, our fear, and our crossed arms of doubt and exclusion: "Behold, I am making all things new."

... 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

THIS TIME LAST year, my parents asked me to do them a favor. They were about to celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary and wanted me to renew their vows. It was amazing to me for my parents to ask such a thing.

You see, I have never been my parent's pastor. I have never been their spiritual advisor or congregational leader, either. I have always just been their dutiful, watchful son.

It was my parents who showed me what it meant to be married. It was my parents who showed me what "for better or worse" looked like, so it was almost surreal to be the person asked to help them renew their vows. Since I wasn't there the first time they said those vows, it was awesome to help them 50 years later.

It was preparing for their wedding that got me thinking about what it meant to renew something. After 50 years, what would it mean for my parents to renew their vows? So I wondered what was the point of going to all of this trouble. Was it just to have a nice party and gather friends together? Was it just a way to get some new wedding presents? Why go through all this planning, expense, and pretense for something that is already said and done. So I did what any curious child would do: I simply asked.

I asked my parents why they were going through the trouble 50 years later, and their answer was simple yet profound. They told me, "We are doing it so we can say "YES" again."

They wanted to say that after all this time, they would still choose each other. They wanted to say that after all the ups and downs in marriage, they would say yes to do it all over again. So last March, I stood in a ballroom and helped my parents say yes again.

As we enter into a new year, what do you need to say yes to again? This year, I have decided to say yes to faith all over again. I have decided to renew the faith that I have that all things are possible with God. I choose to say yes again to hope. I choose to still believe that there is better on the horizon after this and that the best is yet to come.

Finally, I choose to say yes again to love. I choose to love God, love all of God's people and always love myself. No matter what the world looks like or what is happening around you, you can always choose to renew and say yes again.

What will you renew and say "yes" to this year?

... well said



EVENTS

ROCK 2016

Feb. 3-5

Convention Center, Ocean City

This annual youth retreat will feature speaker Preston Centuolo. Learn more and register at www.bwcumc.org/rock.

Leadership Days

In each region

Registration for Leadership Days begins later this month. The dates for these important learning opportunities are:

- Baltimore Region: Feb. 11
- Southern Region: Feb. 11 and March 4
- Western Region: March 4
- Washington Region: March 11

Videos for lay leadership on the local church Finance and Staff-Parish Relations committees and the Board of Trustees are available at <http://tinyurl.com/bwleadership>

Faith and Science discussion

Sunday, Feb. 12, 3 to 4 p.m.

BWC Mission Center, Fulton

Are our children at risk? Wesley Nexus will sponsor a panel discussion on food insecurity, climate change and racial bias. The panel will include Bishop LaTrelle Easterling, the Rev. Amy Stapleton of the General Commission on Religion and Race,

and scientists Gary Sherman and Frank Niepold. The event will be live-streamed. Learn more at www.wesnex.org.

Registration opens for Annual Conference session

Wednesday, Feb. 15

www.bwcumc.org

Online registration opens Feb. 15 for the 233rd session of the Baltimore-Washington Conference, which will be held Wednesday, May 31-Friday, June 1, at the Wardman Park Marriott Hotel in Washington, D.C.

Lenten Day Apart

Wednesday, Feb. 22, 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Queens Chapel UMC, Beltsville

Bishop LaTrelle Easterling will host a Pre-Lenten Day Apart for clergy. The preacher and presenter will be the Rev. Dr. Zina Jacque, pastor of Community Church in Barrington, Ill. Registration opens Jan. 30.

Scholarships available

The Baltimore-Washington Conference is offering college scholarships for the Fall 2017 semester. Students can apply through March 1 at www.bwcumc.org/administration/finance/local-church-resources/scholarships.

Disability Awareness Sunday

Observe It On Sunday, February 5th

Go to the Baltimore Washington Conference website to download the Disability Awareness Sunday Church Kit
www.bwcumc.org/ministries/disability-ministries

UMConnection

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

7 questions with Emma Escobar



By ERIK ALSGAARD
UMConnection Staff



Emma Escobar started July 11 last year as the Hispanic/Latino Ministries Coordinator for the Baltimore-Washington Conference. This after working at the General Board of Church and Society in Washington, D.C., for two years. She comes to us from the New England Annual Conference and is just starting the process of full clergy membership as a Deacon. We spoke to her recently in her office.

Q: What do you do in your position as coordinator?

A: This is a new position, so we're still trying to develop it. There are three areas of focus: leadership development, congregational development, and advocacy. As I have visited churches and pastors, I have seen the need to develop leaders. There are the possibilities of starting new ministries in various districts, but we do not have the leadership for it. We're also wanting to train our young people to be active in our churches, and to send them to academies like the Hispanic Youth Leadership Academy.

Q: What is new in Hispanic/Latino congregational development?

A: We have eight Hispanic ministries right now in the conference and we are seeing the need, again, for education. A lot of times, we have people who come from a Catholic background, or evangelical Protestant, and there is a need to provide the pastors with a curriculum they can use to teach the history and doctrine of The United Methodist Church. We're also envisioning new church starts. For example, how do we start a ministry with Brazilian people? I am also working with the Committee

on Hispanic/Latino Ministries for the conference to develop a strategy for the next quadrennium, including reaching out to second and third generation Latinos who speak English more than they speak Spanish.

Q: And in the advocacy area?

A: There are a lot of struggles that touch on Hispanic/Latinos, just like any other minority group in the United States. Our pastors minister with undocumented people, and with that there are a lot of struggles, such as in finding a job or in obtaining health care. Where the advocacy comes in to play is to be relevant to their needs and how we advocate for a just immigrant policy and immigration reform. Immigration is a global issue, not just in the US.

Q: What excites you the most about your ministry?

A: The stories and the relationships. As I have come to meet with all the pastors in the different communities, looking at that diversity – because we tend to think “Hispanic/Latinos” and put them all in one box; we don't think how multi-cultural we are – and just listening to those stories on why they're here, how they ended up in The United Methodist Church, and why they decided to stay. That's what has fascinated me the most. It reminds me of why I am a United Methodist.

Q: How did you come to The United Methodist Church?

A: My father came to the United States a couple of times, and when he was coming here, a friend of his that he knew back in El Salvador became a pastor in The United Methodist Church, in Chelsea, Mass. My

dad used to come and help with the church. Eventually the conference found out he was helping, and came to him and offered him the opportunity to open the first Hispanic/Latino church in Providence, Rhode Island. That's how we all ended up here. I was 14-and-a-half, and myself and my whole family came, not knowing the language, not knowing nothing, a new adventure. Of course, I was complaining because all my friends are in El Salvador.

Q: Talk about a culture and climate shift...

A: It was Jan. 23, 2003, when we came. I was fascinated by the climate. I love snow!

Q: It must have been difficult.

A: It was difficult on many levels, because before that, I was a member of the Assemblies of God church – I had been baptized in El Salvador in the Assemblies of God, and that's all I knew because my dad was a pastor for the Assemblies of God – and I didn't know what Methodism was about. I ended up going to the Hispanic Youth Leadership Academy, and that's when I learned about The United Methodist Church. I received my calling because all my doors were being closed and I always ended up back in the church, doing ministry. I was complaining to God, saying “I don't want to be a pastor,” but all the doors were closing for anything else. Then I went to HYL A and I heard about the ministry of the Deacon. I felt like John Wesley felt; I felt my heart strangely warmed; that's how I felt when I first heard about the ministry of the Deacon, being that bridge between the church and the community. I said, this is what God is calling me to.

7 questions with John Nupp

By MELISSA LAUBER
UMConnection Staff



The Rev. John Nupp serves as the Director of the Center for Clergy Excellence for the Baltimore-Washington Conference. After a half-a-year working in this new position with the clergy of the Baltimore-Washington Conference, we invited him to reflect on a few questions:

Q: How would you describe your ministry with the clergy of the Baltimore-Washington Conference?

A: The Board of Ordained Ministry had been discussing with the bishop and the Cabinet about creating a new staff position at the conference level to support their work. When I received a call this past spring to move from 22 years of pastoral ministry into a new field of ministry, I believe I was called to be an environmentalist. I simply use the gifts God has cultivated in me to come alongside those serving in various fields where God's grace brings growth. To use those familiar rhythms of grace we learned from John Wesley, my environmental tasks are three-fold: Preventive, to work alongside our eight District Committees for Ordained Ministry and the Board of Ordained Ministry's Culture of Call to develop support for those experiencing an awakening to God's call; Justifying, to serve as the point of continuity in our conference, directing my office to act as the clearinghouse for those who are navigating the steps of the formal “justification” process toward recognition of orders or licensing requirements; and Sanctifying,

to provide for continuing education and ongoing development for clergy. As we continue to serve, God challenges us to re-examine those key questions that got us started in the first place.

Q: What do you see as the two or three greatest challenges facing the BWC's clergy?

A: Institutional discouragement and spiritual inertia are the greatest challenges.

Q: If you could ask the clergy to reflect on one or two questions as they seek to grow in their ministries, what would those questions be?

A: Reflect on what God has already provided. What has God already done for you? What has God already placed around you, in terms of supportive clergy and gifted laity? Where do your own gifts intersect with the passionate interests of those around you to meet the needs of challenges of your church, your community? I routinely challenge clergy, both long-time colleagues and newcomers to the process, to connect their story to the larger story of salvation in Scripture.

Q: Guiding Scripture?

The Sower and the Soils (Mark 4) has figured very prominently in my heart and my plans. We participate in a lot of work that seems wasted or goes unnoticed. But what little does take root and grows, by God's grace, makes a huge impact.

Q: Are there one or two thoughts from religious thinkers you would commend to the leaders of our churches?

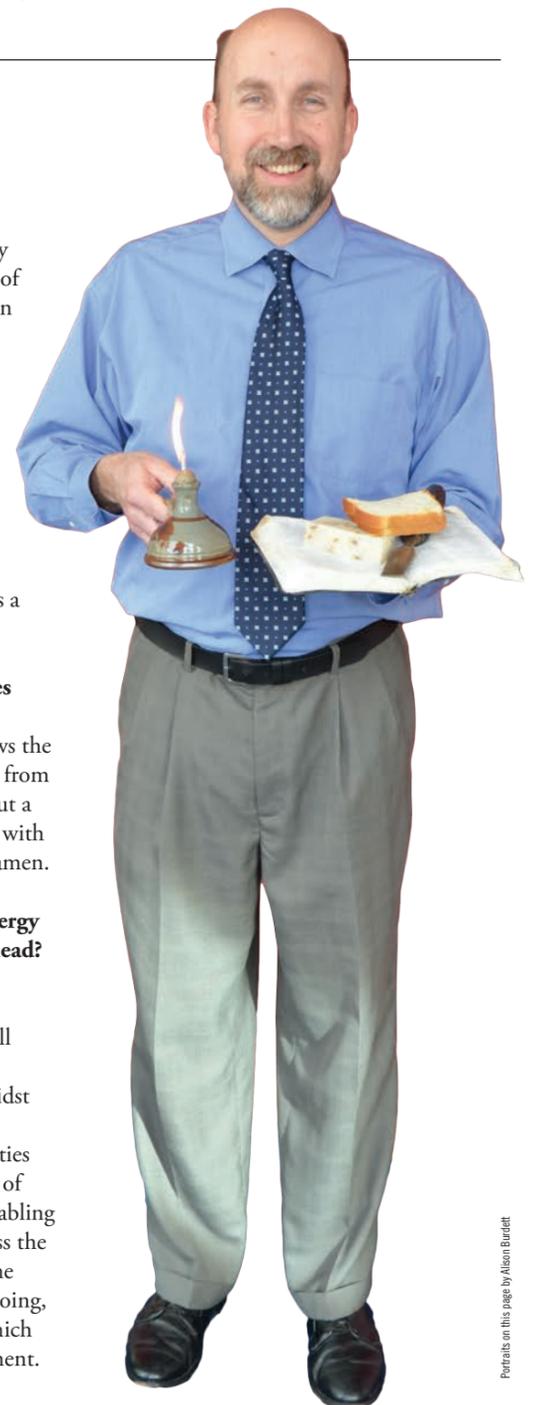
A: I find myself returning to “The Sacrament of the Present Moment,” by Jean-Pierre de Caussade. In the midst of the demands of life and ministry, it can be freeing to know that God is always trying to get through to us, that the emphasis is not on our spiritual labor so much as just joining in. I love the quote where de Caussade affirms God breaking in to the midst of life: “Yes, all that happens to me becomes bread to nourish me, soap to cleanse me, fire to purify me, a chisel to carve heavenly features on me. Everything is a channel of grace for my needs.”

Q: What role do spiritual disciplines play in your life?

A: Staying connected with God follows the form of a simple Rule of Life I gained from time with other pastors facing burn-out a number of years ago. Each day begins with praise and ends with the Prayer of Examen.

Q: How do you see the Center of Clergy Excellence developing in the year ahead?

A: In the coming year, the Center for Clergy Excellence hopes to cultivate clarity for those first experiencing a call to ministry (Prevenient), to multiply mentoring support for those in the midst of the ordination or licensing process (Justifying), and to provide opportunities for sacred study which raises our level of Spiritual Literacy (Sanctifying). By enabling greater consistency in these areas across the conference, we can collaborate with the Spirit in the wonderful work God is doing, to which God is calling us, and for which God is equipping us moment by moment.



Online Giving: On the rise in the BWC

From page 1

is it prevents the “hockey stick” graph of local church income.

“Most local churches receive double their usual monthly income in December,” Eichelberger said. “Their yearly giving, plotted on a graph, looks like a hockey stick.”

In years past, the BWC saw a similar trend with about 14 percent of total yearly apportionment receipts received in December. A steady stream of income would see about 7 to 8 percent coming in every month, Eichelberger said.

When church giving is that dependent on year-end giving – and sees a dip in giving in the summer months – cash flow can become critical, he said, because churches need greater reserves to pay bills when giving dries up.

“With electronic giving,” Eichelberger said, “you get more even, steady giving. You allow your church members to contribute their tithes and offerings even when they’re not able to attend worship.”

Vanco recently launched a new UMC electronic giving program that waives many of the monthly and start-up fees, Eichelberger said.

“New customers can join at the company’s starting level and the monthly fee of \$10 is waived for the first 24 months,” he said. In addition, more advanced services are offered with those fees waived for the first six months, he said. The offer is good through the end of June.

“The conference does not get any funds from Vanco under our agreement,” Eichelberger said. “What I really like is how the savings will be driven back to the churches.”

Rev. Vivian McCarthy, pastor at Reisterstown UMC, said her congregation has been using Vanco since before she arrived in 2013. About 30 people and/or

families use the service, she said, which has been a real blessing.

“Their giving is stable and regular,” she said. “I’m very grateful for this method of giving.”

McCarthy said that even if the church closes for a snow storm, “you can depend” on electronic giving to still be there. Several of her top givers use e-giving, she said.

Vanco also offers flexible giving opportunities, McCarthy added. Special appeals, such as flood relief in West Virginia, or registering for a special event, are easily done through the service. “You can do almost anything through Vanco,” she said.

One small draw-back, she said, is that her church has had to change its promotions of special Sunday appeals. With paper envelopes, she said, when they are printed, you can add the special days to the packet. McCarthy – who herself is an e-giving user – said, for example, that it was almost mid-December before she realized she had missed their special Thanksgiving-day offering.

Reisterstown UMC hasn’t yet explored some other giving modules Vanco offers, such as giving by text message, or offering giving kiosks in the church.

Good Shepherd UMC in Waldorf has used Vanco for the last three years, according to its pastor, the Rev. Laurie Gates Ward. About 50 people, mostly young adults, use the service. Electronic giving, she said, represents about 20 percent of their total income.

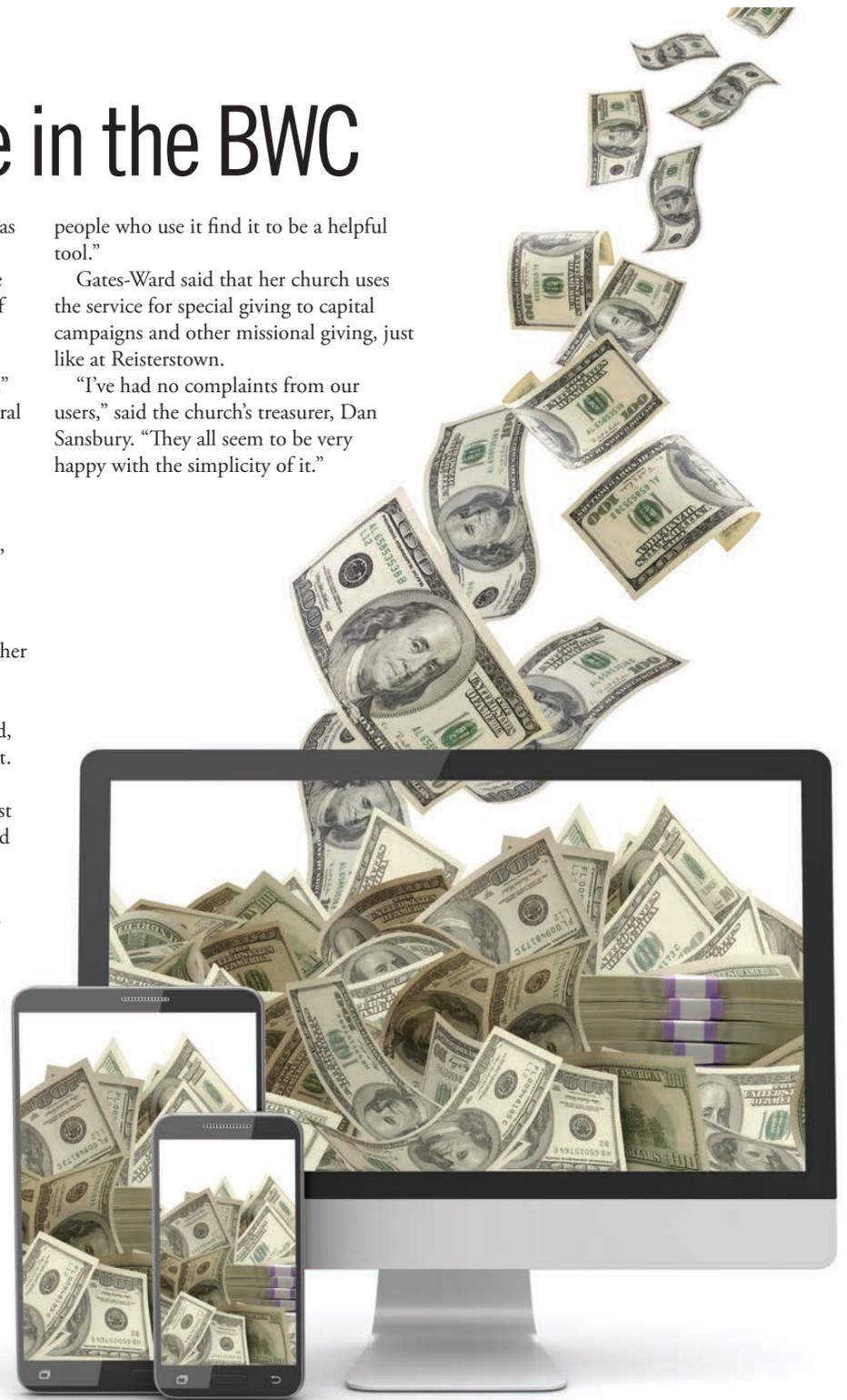
Gates-Ward said Good Shepherd offers the service because a number of their members don’t worship with them every Sunday.

“This is a way to help them to be faithful givers,” she said, “even when life makes it challenging to be present in worship each week. I think that the

people who use it find it to be a helpful tool.”

Gates-Ward said that her church uses the service for special giving to capital campaigns and other missional giving, just like at Reisterstown.

“I’ve had no complaints from our users,” said the church’s treasurer, Dan Sansbury. “They all seem to be very happy with the simplicity of it.”



Bethany UMC celebrates diversity as new reality

By MELISSA LAUBER
UMCConnection Staff

AT FIRST GLANCE, Bethany UMC in Ellicott City may appear to be a white suburban church. But this Christmas, the congregation learned anew that they are a multi-cultural congregation, representing the vast diversity of God’s kingdom.

This lesson in their truly global nature came when the Rev. Andrew Cooney, Bethany’s senior pastor, suggested they hold a “Christmas around the World” event, inviting people to celebrate their culture, background and heritage and to share how Christmas is celebrated in that culture.

On Dec. 11, in the fellowship hall, people representing 16 cultures shared their homeland through dress, decorations, music, and food, said Cooney. Among the countries represented were Italy, Latvia, the United Kingdom, South Korea, the Bahamas, Guyana, India, Burma, Mexico, Lithuania, Liberia, Zambia, Ethiopia, and Guinea.

“People really invested themselves in it,” Cooney said. The West African contingent, led by Comfort Monger, had four warming dishes with food to share – a meal’s worth of food.

“I’ve been here 10 years and I miss my home every day, especially my grandfather,” Monger said. “This made me feel connected, with my culture and traditions and with my church family. At Bethany, they don’t see color. They see you as a child of God. You, me, we belong in the family of God.”

Suzy Manglani was born and lived in India for 28 years. On her table, she shared

many knick-knacks, including Christmas decorations. “Sharing Christmas in church is nice because it helps re-live parts of culture from home. It’s like we are all here from somewhere else celebrating the birth of Christ in our own way together,” she said.



Members of Bethany UMC celebrate “Christmas Around the World.”

Four women at the church, were not from Burma, but as an outreach they tutor and mentor people from the Burmese subculture in Columbia, Md. They teach them English and help the immigrants get established in their new lives in the United States.

People are products of their culture. It shapes identity, so “sharing stories is huge,” said Cooney. The Liberians at the church, for example, can trace their relationship with Bethany to the time, several years ago, when Bethany did refugee resettlement work with people fleeing from the war-torn country.

One of church’s members escaped

Liberia in the trunk of a car. “If you’re friends with someone, if you care for them, understanding their background and sharing life stories is a part of that,” Cooney said.

It’s unity amid diversity – but it’s not about concepts or ideas. “It’s all in the

relationship,” Cooney said.

This year, and at the 2017 Annual Conference Session in June, the Baltimore-Washington Conference will be celebrating the theme “We are One: Connected in Covenant.”

Cooney smiles at this theme and at the idea that his seemingly homogenous congregation is actually multi-cultural. He himself is quite global.

As one of 10 children, he has nine adopted brothers and sisters. One sister is Caucasian – the others span races from across the globe. And, his two daughters are adopted from China.

“The notion of people being from

different backgrounds being together, being one with one another – that’s my family.

“In that context,” he explained, “what you do is get to know each other. As you know each other, and live together and share together, you develop a oneness. Oneness to me is a product of authentic relationship.”

That, he said, is true around the family table, at church, and throughout the Baltimore-Washington Conference.

“You don’t philosophically become one,” Cooney said. “As you understand each other, and do life together, your hearts become knit together and a natural unity develops.”

The Rev. Lem Dominguez, the associate pastor at Bethany, traces his heritage to Mexico. Dominguez has noted the church now finds itself in a multicultural community that didn’t used to be multicultural. As a result, he notes, “there is a vestigial racism that permeates the area.”

However, he is convinced that change is inevitable and applauds the congregation for their welcoming stance and their burgeoning ministry with those who have immigration issues.

“We, like so many United Methodist churches, have a long way to go. The intention is there, though, and it gives me hope,” Dominguez said.

At the Christmas Around the World celebration, Dominguez greeted members of the Korean congregation with which Bethany shares its space. He listened to the African choir share their song as he worked in the kitchen on his Mexican hot chocolate.

“It lifted my spirit in a powerful way,” he said. “The Holy Spirit manifested itself that morning, and the event was a dream come true for me.”

praxis

spirituality in action

A subversive spirituality for followers of Jesus

By MANDY SAYERS*

ONE OF MY favorite quotes from seminary comes from Dr. Sondra Wheeler, Ethics professor at Wesley Theological Seminary. It's something like, "Don't have a relationship with God by memory." By this, she means, it's easy to get so caught up in the daily work of pastoring (and the ministry of the laity, too), that we no longer have any kind of ongoing, daily, current, relationship with God. There were groans of guilt and conviction in the class, since preparing for Bible studies and sermons, and studying for class, can readily replace listening for God's voice and being truly open to the Holy Spirit's leading in the here and now.

As a pastor, I live in constant danger of making my professional duties a sort of replacement for a spiritual life. It's very difficult for me to justify, to find time, for the sort of spiritual practices that might feed my soul, because I'm already working on "Spiritual Stuff" for the church. The sort of connection to the divine that nourishes the Christ within us can take time, like any relationship, to develop. Just getting quiet enough to hear God's "still small voice" over the tumult of work and family and stress

and traffic is often more than I can manage.

Eugene Peterson, in his great book, "The Contemplative Pastor," outlines the problem well. He says that pastors need to claim three important adjectives: unbusy, subversive and apocalyptic. I think maybe the church and laity would do well to claim them, too.

"Unbusy": It's easy to claim "busy-ness" as a sort of badge of honor. Good pastors, good churches, good Christians, are "busy," right? But how can we be led by still waters if we never stop moving? We need to take enough control of our time to allow God to be God and to spend our time doing the important, vital, "unbusy" work we are called to do. Peterson lifts up praying, preaching and listening as some of the vital work pastors do. That "work" takes time and space, and may involve being inefficient, at least by the world's standards. So many times we meet God in the margins of our days, in the details that we'd miss if we weren't truly listening and breathing and being present. We miss the Good Samaritan in the ditch, but we also miss the star in the sky, the Holy Spirit at work right now in our churches, in our ministries, and in our listening and speaking and taking time for each other.

"Subversive": Peterson says pastors are

called to be "subversive." I would argue this applies to all Christians. Our baptisms call us into this covert operation, where love and mercy trump hate and fear, and where Jesus (from Nazareth, of all places) is proclaimed to be Lord, not just of our lives but of all creation. We are part of a kingdom that looks nothing like Caesar's kingdom, but we operate subversively within it. Jesus himself was in a sense subversive — using parables and proclaiming the reign of God as here and also, coming. We hold up stunning claims that a baby's birth in Bethlehem changed the world, that God's Spirit is on the move, that a risen Savior is on the loose.

When I was little, I wanted to be a spy. When I became a Christian, I realized I was always about my new Master's business, overcoming evil with good, overcoming hate with love. That's subversive stuff.

"Apocalyptic": Peterson calls for the church to regain its "apocalyptic" voice. This conjures up scary images of people holding "The end is near" signs on street corners, but this isn't what Peterson means. Instead, I think he means that it's important to point to the mystery and the "godliness" of God, who is bringing to consummation that which was created and redeemed in Christ. The church is not just another "corporation," but rather, and always, "the

body of Christ." There is a temptation, I think, for our values to devolve into simply "being nice." This is church as social club, as civic hobby, as time-filler on Sunday mornings. If I get too busy, too neglectful of space for the God of the burning bush, very quickly I start to think I'm working for the god (small "g") of yard sales and coffeepots. Now, I love a good yard sale and I love coffee, and the Lord has used both of those things to make disciples. But my point is, the God of the Exodus, the God of the Magnificat, the God of Paul and Silas, the God of Genesis, Jesus, Job and Revelation calls us to move on up a little higher. We are about this work because old Herod trembled at the news that Jesus was born. It may look like a little mom-and-pop business, this Church, but we are about transforming the world. Not because we're nice, but because "the Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

May your spiritual walk be blessed by these thoughts. As for me, I've got to go be about the work of the one who got me into this mess. The One I met at the riverside of baptism. I've got to go be unbusy, subversive, and apocalyptic.

*The Rev. Mandy Sayers is the pastor of Covenant UMC in Gaithersburg.

New DS: 'I have a lot on my heart about the city'

From page 1

McCulloh Homes housing project, attended Baltimore City public schools and spent most of her life in the city, spending 22 years working with the Department of Defense.

Her spiritual life was also lived out with Baltimore as a backdrop. She accepted Jesus as her savior at Mt. Zion Baptist Church. She preached her first sermon in a nondenominational church in East Baltimore where God called her to preach, she sensed, in a dream. That sermon led her into a journey pursuing the ministry in the African Methodist Episcopal Church and classes at St. Mary's Ecumenical Institute of Theology in Baltimore.

There, the Rev. C. Anthony Hunt, a professor and then superintendent of the Baltimore Metropolitan District, hired Duckett to pastor Monroe Street UMC in 2006, and later to serve as a Hope Fellow in Baltimore.

Monroe Street, near the Pigtown neighborhood of West Baltimore, was a community rocked by racial tension, extreme poverty, rampant drug addiction, violence and hopelessness. "I wasn't unacquainted with these things, but I had

never seen such a deep concentration of some of the city's most dire issues like that before," Duckett said. "Monroe Street was a place to learn and grow in terms of compassion and the application of the Gospel to the least of these in a very real sense. And, at the same time, to meet and serve with some of the most wonderful people. The strength of that ministry was in the necessity of partnering. The work was so heavy nobody could do it alone."

After being ordained as an Itinerant Elder in the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 2010, she was appointed as full time pastor of Mt. Zion UMC.

At Mt. Zion, she continued to build on the idea of partnerships in ministry. In 2014, she also received her doctorate from Wesley Seminary. Her dissertation was entitled "Sacred Slam: Spoken Word Poetry as Sacred Art for Sacred Space."

This poetic combination of soul with jazz, the blues, and hip-hop, gave Duckett a different language for sharing the Gospel and has opened doors to new venues of sharing her faith.

Her poetry also winds its way into her style of leadership, reminding her that authenticity and creativity are essential parts of "who God is calling me to be

under the realms of grace and obedience," she said. "Poetry has helped me to realize I can't lose my voice or I'll die. I can't lose my personality or the uniqueness of my experience for the sake of being complicit in other people's expectations or in trying to fit in or trying to hide."

As a spoken word artist, Duckett was invited to deliver an original poem, "For Such a Time as This," at Bishop Easterling's welcome service in September. At that time, she never dreamed she'd serve on the bishop's Cabinet. "She's so authentically herself, so warm and so open, and yet so very capable," Duckett said about the bishop. "I'm ecstatic about the possibilities to serve in this capacity."

Duckett said she is also excited about building on DeLong's dynamic ministry and the work of Bishop Cynthia Moore-Koikoi, who was superintendent of the Baltimore Metropolitan District before she was elected as an episcopal leader in July.

"I have a lot of thoughts," she said. "I have a lot on my heart about the city," she said. Much of it revolves around ministry that is "urban, relevant and targeted at seeing people whole and free." Duckett envisions empowering churches to address the issues of violence and the

cradle-to-prison pipeline that keeps so many men, women, and families in bondage.

She is confident and hopeful that the United Methodist presence in Baltimore will grow in its transforming power. "We just need to be who we say we are," Duckett said.

In assuming the role of superintendent, Duckett is quick to acknowledge the love and support of her family. She is the mother of two adult daughters and one son in college, the grandmother of a four-year-old girl, a sister, and the daughter of a woman who supports all she does in ministry. "My family is my outlet, my strength," she said.

Duckett admits she's excited, and a little surprised, about being asked to serve as superintendent. She invites others to share in the district's ministry as the people of Baltimore seek to continue their work to bring glory to God.

"In short, Duckett said, "I love God; I love Baltimore; and I love the church."

The Baltimore Metropolitan District, which includes the city of Baltimore and a few surrounding suburbs, like Towson, is made up of 77 churches, with 71 active pastors and 18,716 members. The average weekly worship attendance is 6,685.



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MAKING A DIFFERENCE



Tatyana McFadden, right, and her sister Hannah McFadden, competed in the Rio Paralympic Games.

Home from Rio Paralympics with six medals

CLARKSVILLE – Tatyana McFadden, 27, a member at Linden-Linthicum UMC, is a many time winner from her wheelchair in the Rio Paralympics and other national and international competitive events. From Rio, she took home four golds and two silvers.

Two days later, the super athlete was teaching kids in wheelchairs at New York's PS 333 in Manhattan how to race in a wheelchair and giving them hope for the future.

McFadden was born with spinal bifida and paralyzed from the waist down. She spent six years in a Russian orphanage before being adopted by an American family, Debbie McFadden and Bridget O'Shaughnessey, who encourage and support her in her many endeavors, as does her church, says her pastor, the Rev. Gayle Annis-Forder.

McFadden's younger sister Hannah, an amputee, also competes in the Paralympics. She took fourth place in the 100 meters.

"I have to finish what I didn't finish in Rio," McFadden told her parents as she prepared for the NYC Marathon. She

won it two minutes ahead of the second place finisher, and capped a sweep of the four major marathons (Boston, London, Chicago and New York) for the fourth straight year.

Teacher shepherds church's 'lambs' for 47 years

WASHINGTON, D.C. – After 47 years, Metropolitan Memorial UMC's Nursery School is saying good-bye to Donna Parzow, who has shepherded the two- and three-year olds during most of the existence of the nursery school.

"Miss Donna" as her young charges call her, is retiring at the end of the school year. The parents, some of whom were under her care as preschoolers, will miss her calming style. "(She) was the perfect entrée to school from home," said Helen Simon, a member of the church whose son Christopher was one of Miss Donna's many pupils.

The kids are emotional wrecks when they first start at the beginning of the school year and face separation from parents and caregivers, according to Anita M. Seline.

But, "in a week or two, I have them all calmed down," Parzow said.

"Donna has a natural gift for loving and caring for the very young," Simon said. "She genuinely respects who they are, understands them and cares for them. She is so patient."

The nursery school marked its 50 years in September with a picnic and in October with a celebration, during which they recognized Parzow's service.

Historic church joins celebration

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Asbury UMC participated in the grand opening celebration of the National Museum of African American History and Culture. Thousands of people from all over the world converged to celebrate the opening of this newest museum on the mall.

Forty people, including members, neighbors and visitors attended Asbury UMC for a Watch Party from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. during the day-long events on the mall. The church served a continental breakfast and lunch and attendees watched the opening of the museum and other events on a large screen TV.

One person commented that he "started watching at home but came because he needed to be in community with others." Another said, "Thanks for this awesome opportunity to view this historic event with you."

Watch Nights go back to the 1700s, often held on New Year's Eve, explained Carol Travis. They have special significance for black churches, harking back to 1862 on the eve of emancipation, when slaves watched for the coming of freedom at the stroke of midnight.

"It is fitting that we gather as a community to 'watch' for the long-awaited opening of the National Museum of African American History and Culture," Travis said. "We have come a long way and yet still have a long way to go."

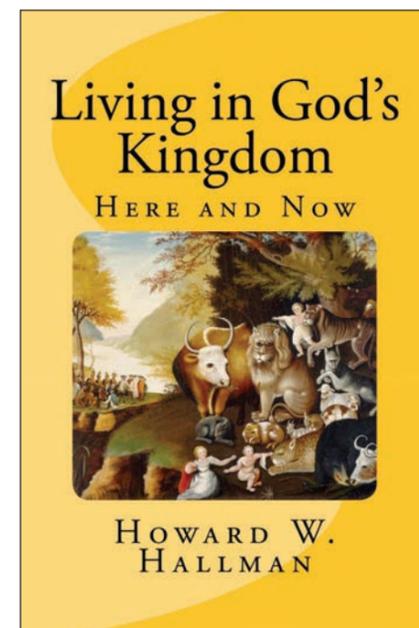
'Living in God's Kingdom'

BETHESDA – "Living in God's Kingdom: Here and Now," is the title of a new book by Howard W. Hallman, an active lay member of Bethesda UMC and husband to retired pastor, the Rev. Carlee Hallman. They live in Asbury Village in Gaithersburg.

Jesus told the Pharisees that God's kingdom was already among them. Thus Hallman asked the question, "How do we actually live in God's kingdom here and now?" The book seeks to answer that question.

Its 129 pages are written in clear and simple language, making it suitable for young people as well as seasoned readers. The short chapters include many Bible quotes and the book could be easily adapted for Bible study.

Sample the paperback book at www.livinginGodskingdom.org. It can be ordered from Amazon.com and is also available as a Kindle book.



Howard Hallman's new book.

Building Beloved Community

By C. ANTHONY HUNT*

DURING HIS LIFE, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. intimated that “everyone could be great because everyone could serve.” In the uncertain times that we find ourselves in as churches and society, making a sincere commitment to community-building and social engagement, to serve the causes of promoting peace with justice, is how individuals, churches, groups, organizations, institutions and even governments can act to continue to perpetuate the pursuit of Dr. King’s (and other’s) vision of the Beloved Community.

Here is a Ten-point Action Plan that individuals, churches and other organizations can enact with the goal of promoting peace with justice.

1. Support and develop community-wide plans aimed at expanding economic opportunities for racial-ethnic persons and women specifically in the areas of housing, banking and employment practices.
2. Actively participate in programs that reach out to help those in the most need – the hungry, the homeless and the unemployed.
3. Adopt an inner-city or rural school. Offer your skills where appropriate. Do your part to assure that every inner city and rural young person can look forward to an adequate education.
4. Encourage schools, colleges and universities in your community to include Dr. King’s (and other freedom fighters) teachings in their curricula and programs.
5. Take specific actions to deal with the problems of drugs, alcohol dependency, teenage pregnancy and family violence in your community.
6. Become an advocate and encourage church, political and community leaders to advocate for the removal of all weapons from our streets, homes and schools.
7. Support causes that promote freedom, justice and peace abroad. Help extend human rights, dignity, and health and economic well-being to all persons.
8. Take a stand and encourage persons in your church and community to actively oppose those groups that promote hatred and violence. Actively and vigilantly oppose racism, homophobia and other forms of xenophobia in our communities.
9. Sponsor and participate in programs that encourage interracial, intercultural and inter-religious goodwill and unity.
10. Read the Social Principles of The United Methodist Church (or another denomination/faith group) and strive to make them an integral part of the faith and life of yourself, your church and your community.

* *The Rev. C. Anthony Hunt is senior pastor of Epworth Chapel UMC in Baltimore and a professor at the Ecumenical Institute. This list comes from one of his classes on Martin Luther King, Jr. For more, see his book “Blessed are the Peacemakers.”*

United Methodist Roadtrips

By CHARLES HARRELL*

BWC Communications offers a new feature on bwcumc.org, called “Traveling the Circuit.” Written by the Rev. Charles Harrell, each article is a roadmap for Methodist historical journeys.



BARRATT’S CHAPEL:

The plainness of this small, colonial-style chapel, set on a rise just east of Highway 1 near Frederica, Del., belies its grander significance. If Lovely Lane in Baltimore is the “Mother Church of American Methodism,” here is where “Mom” got her first date with destiny.

bwcumc.org/news-and-views/traveling-the-circuit-barratts-chapel/

A TRIO OF HISTORICAL PLACES IN NORTHERN VIRGINIA:

There are three places on the Virginia side of the Potomac that the savvy United Methodist traveler won’t want to miss: Old Town Alexandria, St. John Academy in McLean, and The Old Stone Church in Leesburg.

bwcumc.org/news-and-views/traveling-the-circuit-a-trio-of-historical-places-in-northern-virginia/



GEMS IN THE HEART OF THE OLD WEST:

Where can you find a building that’s an historic treasure with a rich history, home to a missionally vital church – and within easy reach of a strategic strong point for connectional outreach? The answer may surprise you: Salt Lake City.

bwcumc.org/news-and-views/traveling-the-circuit-gems-in-the-heart-of-the-old-west/

How diverse is the Baltimore-Washington Conference?

By DARYL WILLIAMS*

WE LIVE IN a diverse country and nowhere is that better seen than on a Sunday afternoon. If you ever have the chance to attend a live National Football League game, you will see the diversity of our great nation on full display.

At the one o’clock hour and the four o’clock hour, people stop being Black, White, Latino, Asian or anything else and simply become fans. They are either there to support the home team or the road team and they are bound by their common belief, pride and support of that team. They wear the same jerseys, high five people they don’t know after a great play, and grouse together about bad calls by referees. No matter their differences, they are all bound by their common support of the team.

Perhaps this is what Paul had in mind when he wrote to the church at Galatia saying, “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Unfortunately, the diversity seen at the game does not mirror the diversity in the pews that many of these fans were in just hours before.

A recent study by the Pew Research Center’s Religion and Public Life group painted an interesting picture of diversity among religious groups in the United States. In looking at 30 religious groups, including Protestant denominations, other religious groups, and three subsets of people who are religiously unaffiliated, it seems diversity can vary widely and sometimes prove quite elusive.

Using five racial and ethnic groups – Hispanics, as well as non-Hispanic Whites, Blacks, Asians and an umbrella category of other races and mixed-race Americans – Pew created a Religious Diversity Index giving each group a score on a scale of 1 to 10, (1 being least diverse; 10 being very diverse). The baseline score for all U.S. adults based on the demographics of the U.S. population was 6.6. This score was based on the U.S. population being 66 percent White, 12 percent Black, 4 percent Asian, 15 percent Latino, and 4 percent Mixed race or Other. Therefore, a score above 6.6 means a group is more diverse than the United States as a whole, and a score under 6.6 means a group is less diverse than the population as a whole.

According to the Pew Study, the most diverse religious group in America today is the Seventh Day Adventist Church with a score of 9.1. The Seventh Day Adventists are 37 percent White, 32 percent Black, 8 percent Asian, 15 percent Latino,

and 8 percent Mixed/Other.

By contrast the least diverse religious group in the country is the Historically Black National Baptist Convention, securing a Pew score of 0.2 and being 99 percent Black and having no other group accounting for 1 percent.

Those stating to be of no particular faith as a group garnered a Pew score of 6.9. They are 64 percent White, 12 percent Black, 5 percent Asian, 15 percent Latino and 5 percent Mixed/Other.

As the largest Mainline Protestant group, The United Methodist Church garnered a Pew Score of 1.4. The United Methodist Church in the United States is 94 percent White, 1 percent Black, 1 percent Asian, 2 percent Latino, and 2 percent Mixed/Other. Out of the 30 religious groups in the survey, The United Methodist Church ranked 26th out of 30 in diversity.

There is good news and reason for hope in the Baltimore-Washington Conference. The Baltimore-Washington Conference

is one of the most diverse conferences in The United Methodist

Church. We are 74 percent White, 23 percent Black, 1.3 percent Asian, 0.5 percent Latino and 0.8 percent Mixed/Other. These numbers compare more favorably to the demographics in the State of Maryland, which is 53 percent White, 29 percent Black, 6 percent Asian, 9 percent Latino, and 3 percent Mixed/Other.

While there are strides to be made, the BWC, on its own, would have a Pew Score significantly higher than The United Methodist Church score as a whole.

Let’s not let the NFL be more welcoming and diverse than the church. We are God’s people and we are called to be radically hospitable to the stranger. The great commission implores us to go into the world and make disciples of all people.

It is up to us as a church to go to the stranger and invite them to be in our midst.

We must invite those that do not look like us to worship with us, find the same God that we have found and the same salvation through Christ that we have found. We must make an intentional effort to be missionaries, not just around the world, but also in the world around us.

Take some time to invite someone who does not look like you to worship with you. Let them know that Red and Yellow, Black and White, we are all precious in His sight, and that all are welcome in our doors. So between high fives and touch down celebrations, invite somebody to share the call to worship with you, not just the kick off.

**The Rev. Daryl Williams serves as pastor at St. Paul UMC in Oxon Hill, and he is the statistician for the BWC.*



UMs address homeless crisis in Baltimore region

By ERIK ALSGAARD
UMConnection Staff

PATAPSCO UMC IN Dundalk, which was facing a \$12,000 fine for allowing unhoused people to sleep on their property, has resolved the issue, according to the Rev. Ed DeLong, interim superintendent of the Baltimore Metropolitan District.

"The church found a way for the three persons residing on the property the past few months to find more permanent solutions," DeLong said. It was those three people, DeLong said, that brought the ire of a neighbor who brought the matter to the attention of Baltimore County officials.

One of the men, he said, went to live with his son. Another man is living in a shelter, and a woman has found her own apartment.

"It's been difficult, in my heart, to have to look past an individual, recognizing that in looking past that individual, maybe we can do something for him and others with a more lasting solution in the future," said the Rev. Katie Grover, pastor of Patapsco UMC.

With the resolution of the complaint, both Grover and DeLong said, the case brought by the county will be dropped and the church will not have to pay the fine. However, addressing this instance has brought the crisis of homelessness to the fore in a way that has churches in the area examining partnerships so that they can respond more systemically.

Bishop LaTrelle Easterling, speaking at the Homeless Person's Memorial Day service in front of City Hall in Baltimore

Dec. 21, said that to address homelessness, we first have to see homeless people as children of God.

"It's so easy to look up, look down, look around – we don't make human contact," she said, speaking at the War Memorial Plaza. "The promise of Christ is that light came into the world and that the darkness would not overcome it."

The bishop said she wrestles with the term "homeless," just like she wrestles with the term "slave." That's because, for her, when a person is identified by a status, the danger is the whole person becomes defined by that word, she said.

"No one has ever been born a slave," Bishop Easterling said. "Rather, you are enslaved. Very few have been born homeless; rather, they are rendered homeless by circumstances some, yes, by their own making, but far more by those that are imposed upon them beyond their control."

Bishop Easterling called for people to live out the Scripture imperatives to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God every day, not just acting them out on occasion.

"Our justice acts, our merciful acts, yes, they must meet the immediate needs of those who are most vulnerable among us," she said. "But we cannot stop there. If we stop there, we are only appeasing our own guilt and assuaging our own egos. No, after that, we must shine a light on the systems and the strongholds that create the vulnerabilities in the first place and find creative ways to dismantle them."

How do we, as fellow human beings, and especially those who have the audacity to



The Rev. Rodney Hudson, pastor of Ames Memorial UMC in Baltimore, posts the name of a person who died in 2016 at the Homeless Memorial Service, Dec. 21, in Baltimore.

call ourselves "Christ-followers" live in this juxtaposition, the bishop asked.

"May we not wait until next year at this time to recognize in death those whom we ignored in life," she said. "May we see them; may we look at them; may we acknowledge them; may we liberate and love them every single day."

The Rev. Dennis Dorsch, a retired Associate Member of the BWC, is the founder and organizer of the event.

DeLong, who attended the Memorial Day service and helped read the names of the 165 people who died in the past year who were known to have experienced homelessness in the Baltimore Metropolitan

area, said he sees the Patapsco story as a springboard to greater intentionality throughout the United Methodist churches in Baltimore and beyond.

Grover sees United Methodists playing a central role in a larger conversation about homelessness, noting that we are citizens of both the kingdom of God and the country. "Citizens of the kingdom are called to address this," she said, "It's a Gospel mandate."

"Where we're going will be a great story," DeLong said. "We have a rich tradition in The United Methodist Church of working with the poor, going all the way back to John Wesley himself. It's in our DNA."

Mt. Zion: Largest ministry of its kind in state

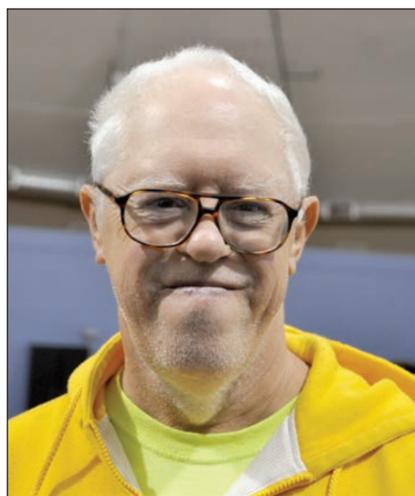
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Bowing their heads near Rachel were Jenya, who was adopted from Kazakhstan when he was 13 and Donald, who some people call the "junk man," because of his love for taking apart electronics.

Ben Einolf, who has high functioning Asperger's, runs the sound system for Rachel and provides technical support for the ministry, shared up a mantra of the group: "The only disability," he said, "is a bad attitude."

One of the highlights of the morning is bingo. The participants get to call the game. There are only eight patterns on the cards, which creates a lot of winners, and everyone who plays gets a prize, which are donated by JoAnne Zimmerman. She scours flea markets and yard sales, paying for the Bingo prizes with the \$40 a week that's set aside from her household income each week.

"When I first came, it was hard seeing all these people with cerebral palsy, in wheelchairs, blind, or with autism," she said.



Donald "The Junk Man"

"I felt sorry for them and didn't know if I'd come back. But my friend said, 'Look at their faces.' I did. There was joy. There were smiles. This is a very happy place."

Overseeing the chaos just below all the happiness is Brian Malcolm, the director of Beyond Capernaum, as the disability ministry is called.

Malcolm preaches at the worship service for special needs people and their families, leads the Bible study, cares for everyone, coordinates volunteers, cleans up messes, and knows everyone by name. He's like the pastor of a 250-member church – only his people feel free to ask questions whenever the spirit moves; make requests to do impromptu Elvis Presley concerts; fall asleep if they're so moved; eat brownies during the sermon; and speak honestly what's on their hearts and minds, often without the assistance of internal filters for politeness. By design, or not, everything is interactive.

There is no charge to the people who come to any of the programs. The approximate \$75,000-a-year budget comes from the church budget, although the ministry does enthusiastically accept contributions from others.

"A program like this can cost a lot," said Malcolm. "We can spend \$10,000 annually on pizza."

But money is never the bottom line of ministry, said the church's pastor, the Rev. Craig McLaughlin.

"Jesus said that when you give a feast don't invite persons who can repay you by inviting you to their feast in return. Instead, he said, invite people who can never repay you, and then you will be greatly blessed by God. Beyond Capernaum is a beautiful example of this. Mt. Zion invites persons who cannot repay us to a beautiful feast of love, and God has richly blessed us."

The ministry does not apply for any state or federal grants, Malcolm said. "We're preaching the Gospel. We're all about that."

The "Jesus part," is important to Malcolm.

"Everything we do is centered around



Brian Malcolm (l) and Ben Einolf

those with disabilities and their needs," he said. "We make them the stars. But all we do leads to Jesus."

Malcolm sees this ministry, to which he often devotes 60 hours a week, as a calling. A former marketing and public relations professional, he had become addicted to drugs and alcohol. In recovery, "Jesus saved me," he said.

He also feels Jesus directed him to McLaughlin and Mt. Zion, which has a significant addiction ministry. "People are dropping dead every day in Harford County," Malcolm said. "They flock here for hope."

He began to help the church with its marketing and volunteering. "Pastor Craig helps us learn to be obedient," he said, "to follow God with my whole heart."

"I don't like saying all this about my addiction. But at this church, we're

transparent. It's a kind of witness," he said.

At the church, Malcolm initially began volunteering with the disabilities ministry, and three years ago, when Cooney stepped aside, he became its director.

As a former marketer, he has sometimes considered changing the name of the ministry. Not everyone knows what "Beyond Capernaum" means.

Capernaum, he explained, was a place where Jesus did miracles, where people went to find hope and healing. "How can you change that?" he asked.

In addition to ministering to people with disabilities, Beyond Capernaum also reaches out to meet the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of their families and caregivers. Providing a welcome to everyone is important, Malcolm said. "Many families have been hurt by God and the church. They find comfort here."

The ministry also empowers the lay people who lead and serve. At Mt. Zion, the laity are urged to ask the Lord what they are to do, McLaughlin said. "Ministries like Beyond Capernaum happen when leadership gives people permission to dream big as they follow Jesus."

As pastor, he's delighted to see how people with disabilities, who are sometimes ignored, forgotten or even feared, are welcomed. Just as the apostle Paul wrote, the church is learning, McLaughlin said, that "persons with disabilities, though often considered weak by the world, are indispensable to the work of Jesus."

Malcolm carries a photo of those whom he leads in worship. They're holding up banners that say, "Love Always Wins." That's our motto, he said. "That's why we're here. They all deserve respect and love, even if they're a little different," he said. "We're all a little different. We all have special needs – and love always wins."