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UMC seeks way forward

By Erik Alsgaard UMConnection Staff

In less than a year, The United Methodist Church will reach a crucial crossroads in its 50-year history. A special General Conference is scheduled for Feb. 23 to 26, 2019, in St. Louis, Mo., to address one topic: how shall the church respond to questions related to inclusion of LGBTQ people? At its heart, the issue is how or if homosexuals should be allowed in church leadership. As it stands right now – and as it has been officially in the UMC since 1972 – “self-avowed practicing as it has been officially in the UMC leadership. As it stands right now – and inclusion of LGBTQ people? the church respond to questions related to Louis, Mo., to address one topic: how shall scheduled for Feb. 23 to 26, 2019, in St. By Erik Alsgaard

What’s inside?

Justice Grants ............... p. 3
New BOOM Policy .............. p. 5
City Day Camp ................. p. 6
After the Shooting .............. p. 7

Youth combat gun violence

By Erik Alsgaard UMConnection Staff

Hundreds of thousands of people around the world marched in solidarity with a group of high school students who were straps "enough is enough" when it comes to gun violence, especially in schools. United Methodists joined in the March for Our Lives in Washington, D.C., and in many of the more than 800 locations on March 24. The rallies and matches brought together celebrities and people from all walks of life to send a message to lawmakers that gun laws need to be changed so people are safe. The DC rally was led by students from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla., where 17 people died in a mass shooting in February. United Methodists and other faith leaders lent their voices and feet to the cause. Gathering for a prayer service at the United Methodist Building in Washington, just across the street from the United States Capitol building, leaders prayed for a safe march and encouraged people to put their prayers into action. Bishop LaTrelle Easterling, the Episcopal leader of the Baltimore-Washington Conference, offered a prayer before the event and then took off in tennis shoes to join thousands of marchers. Organizers estimated 800,000 marched in Washington, although some put the crowd at 200,000.

“I’m here because our conference has spoken out already about senseless gun violence and balancing the rights of our citizens with the right everyone has to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness,” the bishop said in an interview. She said it was time to offer action as well as thoughts and prayers.

The bishop urged United Methodists who couldn’t attend an event near them to register to vote and vote in the next elections.

“We’re not interested in denying individuals their Second Amendment rights,” she said. “But those rights have to be balanced against the right of persons to be safe in their communities and their schools.”

“I’m excited by these young people,” Easterling said. “We (adults) should have been leading this, but we had to wait for them to lift their voice,” she said as she choked back tears.

However, she added, witnessing the young people at this moment in history gives her a sense of hope.

“It’s often the young people who have to rise up,” Easterling said. “I think about those teenagers and young people who...”
As I write this, it is mid-March, mid-Lent and mid-week. Ministry is busy, family is busy and it’s not yet the season for vacation. Spring break coincides with Holy Week, as usual, so we are not going away. We’re in the middle of a Lenten sermon series. I’m tired, and I don’t think I’m alone in that.

In the middle of March, it feels like a march, all right. Put one foot in front of the other. No time for exalting anyone or anything. I don’t have the energy to lift anything up but a cup of coffee.

Still, as you are reading this, you have the benefit of knowing that Lent’s march, and the month of March, must give way to Easter’s April. The never-ending winter of our sin and our burnout gives way, if we will let it, to the green shoot of resurrection and the bright flowers of God’s grace. It seems like exalting Jesus, lifting him up, is something that we do, like just another discipline or to-do list item. But really, it seems to me, Easter is something God does. God exalts the Son. Mostly on Easter, our job as humans seems to be to see the empty grave clothes and run, or to stand about confusing Jesus for the gardener.

What if Jesus is exalted, not because we exalted him, but because God exalted him? What if it was God, and not an industrious board of trustees, that rolled the stone away? Then, praise God, our Easter is not dependent on the world, or the White House, getting its stuff together.

The King is exalted on high because God lifted him up out of the grave of our desperation, discouragement, disillusionment and death. Easter did not depend on us, our friends. Easter is God’s gift and what the Church then offers up out of the grave of our desperation, discouragement, disillusionment and death. Easter was not dependent on us, anything or anyone. I don’t have the energy to lift anything up but a cup of coffee.

As winter gives way to spring, Good Friday becomes busy. We, the Church, are given a task that we did not ask for, to offer the things of Easter to the world, to the world, or the White House, getting its stuff together. We’re in the middle of a Lenten sermon series. I’m tired, and I don’t think I’m alone in that.

The UMConnection is the newspaper of the Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church, whose vision is to become fully alive in Christ and make a difference in a diverse and ever-changing world. The UMConnection is the newspaper of the Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church, 11711 East Market Place, Fulton, MD 20759-2594. Subscription price is $15 per year. Periodical postage paid at Baltimore, MD.

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addition, the church prohibits its clergy from conducting same gender weddings (¶760.2.b).

This issue came to a near boiling point at the 2016 General Conference in Portland, Ore. But by a narrow vote – 318 to 405 – delegates decided not to take up any legislation related to homosexuality and instead authorized the bishops to form the Commission on a Way Forward.

The Commission’s task, according to its website, is to “do a complete examination and proposal of possible every paragraph of the Book of Discipline concerning human sexuality and explore options that help to maintain and strengthen the unity of the church.”

The 32-member Commission has been meeting regularly since 2016. In late February 2018, the Commission presented two different models for moving the church forward, according to United Methodist News Service.

One Church Model

• The One Church Model gives churches the room they need to maximize the presence of United Methodist witness in as many places in the world as possible. The One Church Model provides a generous unity that gives conferences, churches and pastors the flexibility to uniquely reach their mission contextual in relation to human sexuality without changing the connectional nature of The United Methodist Church.

Multi-Branch Model

• This model is grounded in a unified core that includes doctrine and services and one Council of Bishops, while also creating different branches that have services and one Council of Bishops, while the core that includes shared doctrine and scriptural interpretations of one another. From hearing their testimonies, they have grown to respect one another above their differing interpretations and beliefs, and have listened together for God’s still, small voice.”

Bishop Ebersteger notes that the Commission has been using the book, “The Anatomy of Peace” as a tool and framework.

One of the moderators of the Commission and bishop of the Florida Area.

Bishop LaTrelle Easterling has been following the work of the Commission and has hope for the manner in which the people of the Baltimore-Washington Conference can come together in one to craft a Spirit-filled future.

“The Commission on a Way Forward has been meeting, building relationships, faithfully listening to one another and the Spirit, and earnestly developing their recommendations for the Council of Bishops,” she said. “They met for their final meeting last month, and will deliver their recommendation to the Council during our May gathering. If we are wise, we will learn from not only their recommendation, but also their process. They took the time to get to know one another, disabused themselves of their preconceived notions, and really listened to the concerns, beliefs, theological and scriptural interpretations of one another. From hearing their testimonies, they have grown to respect one another above their differing interpretations and beliefs, and have listened together for God’s still, small voice.”

Bishop Easterling notes that the Commission has been using the book, “The Anatomy of Peace” as a tool and framework.

“She gave each delegate from the BWC a copy. She also encourages members of the BWC to read it, and has added it to her recommended reading list for Annual Conference.

“Resource can move us beyond lines drawn in the sand to a more collaborative and unified decision, all the while respecting our differing beliefs,” she said.

“It is not unnatural, nor an abdication of our responsibility as disciples of Jesus Christ, to remain united within our diversity. We have done just that since the beginning of our denomination. The only times we have failed to do so is when we split over the issue of slavery, and segregated ourselves over the issue of race,” the bishop added.

“Each of those instances in our history is now looked upon with regret. We do not have to make the same mistake here. We do not all agree about infant baptism, yet we are united; we do not all agree about the frequency of receiving Holy Communion, yet we are united.”

Easterling concluded, “If we can remain united with differing beliefs about our sacraments, certainly we can remain united within our differing beliefs about human sexuality. I pray that we arrive at the Special Session of General Conference in 2019 with hearts of peace, and not hearts of war. I pray we leave room for the Holy Spirit to guide us into a more perfect way,” she said.

I pray that we keep the main thing, the main thing, and model for the world what love looks like among a rich, diverse, beloved community.”

Baltimore-Washington Conference leaders are holding listening sessions to allow area United Methodists to learn more about and to discuss the Way Forward. Information about those sessions will be announced when it becomes available.

The BWC delegation to the Special General Conference will be meeting in the fall to review the Council of Bishop’s report and the legislation they propose, according to the Rev. TR Chaitin, co-chair of the delegation. Chaitin serves as pastor of the Sykesville Parish in Sykesville. In addition, all General Conference delegations in the Northeast Jurisdiction have been invited to a joint meeting on Sept. 22, according to Delores Martin, co-chair of the delegation, who attends Good Hope Union UMC in Silver Spring. The location and time of that meeting has not yet been set.

The Commission on the Way Forward, meeting in Baltimore, has also begun to put the finishing touches on their report to the Council of Bishops. The denomination’s bishops will use the commission’s report when they meet April 29-May 4 to determine what proposals to submit to the special 2019 General Conference.

The commission will meet again later in May to help provide resources for the wider church, including General Conference delegates.

For more information about the Commission on a Way Forward and its ongoing work, visit www.bwcumc.org/resources/commission-on-a-way-forward.

The “UMC House,” the parsonage at Van Buren UMC, is being outfitted for transitional housing, in part, using funds from a Peace with Justice grant.

In 2017, Peace with Justice funds supported homeless ministry at Foundry UMC in Washington, D.C.; an anti-violence after-school program at Hughes Memorial UMC in Washington; and a shelter for victims of domestic violence at Van Buren UMC, also in Washington. Each of the three churches received $2,000. Since 2012, the BWC has granted more than $200,000. It’s one of the key issues to keep an eye on in the Annual Conference.

Christie Latona, BWC’s Director of Connectional Ministries, wants to change that. She sees the Peace with Justice grant money as a great opportunity to create exciting expressions faith communities in action. One example, Latona said, can be found at Van Buren, located in Ward 4 of Washington. Pastor Lucinda “Cindy” Kent is almost done turning the church’s parsonage into transitional housing for women and children fleeing domestic violence. When it opens next month, Kent expects between 12 and 15 “guests” to stay. Eventually, when the whole house is made ready, up to 24 people may stay.

“Often, women come to the D.C. metro area fleeing domestic violence or needing shelter for some other reason,” Kent wrote in the application for the grant. “Many have children but cannot obtain shelter because they do not meet the residency requirements for shelter services, and the children can’t go to school without an address and a stable place to live.”

Kent is a Certified Candidate for ministry attending Wesley Theological Seminary, who has served the church since 2016. The transitional housing, she said, will allow women and children to stay anywhere from three to six months. The $12,000 Peace with Justice grant the church received went to buy new appliances, especially a deep freezer and refrigerator, Kent said.

“It was a real privilege to go out and get these important items, partnership with the House of Divine Guidance, Inc., will receive reclaimed food from throughout the city. But it also needs to buy items in bulk, having a large refrigerator and freezer are a must. Having new appliances is a blessing, she said, because she knows that she can trust them to work both now and in the future.

Kent calls the parsonage the “UMC House,” standing for “Under My Care.”

She sees the Peace with Justice grant as an opportunity to do something no other church in the home needs “someone” on the outside but is getting upgraded throughout on the inside. And the grant the ministry received helped to fix the bathrooms, put in new flooring, and patch some of the holes in the wall, she said.

When it comes to financing programs, Kent said that every little bit helps. Money from grants such a Peace with Justice soon add up, enabling ministry to happen that otherwise might not.

For those ministries who have never applied for a grant, Peace with Justice or otherwise, Kent said, “If you never try, you never get. Submit to the process and fill out the application.”


“Be encouraged,” said Kent. “Much fruit can come from the seed of a grant.”
The Baltimore-Washington Conference's Board of Ordained Ministry (BOOM) recently released its new policy for examining candidates for ministry. Who can and can't be ordained has been a hot topic throughout the denomination in recent years as The United Methodist Church wrestles with inclusion of LGBTQ people. 

The Baltimore-Washington Conference has served on behalf of all persons across the Conference called to ministry that affect persons who are a part of us, and into the fullest possible life in Christ's body. We will not consider or evaluate sexual orientation or gender identity nor see them to be sufficient reasons to deny a candidate's ability to live up to our United Methodist standards.

The rationale and policy affirmed and adopted by the Board of Ordained Ministry in October 2020 states that:

One of the primary purposes of the Board of Ordained Ministry is to examine applicants and assess their fitness for ministry.

We understand the Judicial Council's most recent ruling to encourage a full and thoughtful inquiry of all persons who come before us, using the range of questions and standards found in paragraphs 330, 334, 335 and 339 of the Book of Discipline for provisional membership, Deacon or Elder respectively.

We write in response to these rulings' specific mandate to not inquire in the inquiry a candidate's self-disclosure of sexual orientation.

We respectfully disagree with these rulings, acknowledging that the full and thoughtful inquiry of all persons who come before us, using the range of questions and standards found in paragraphs 330, 334, 335 and 339 of the Book of Discipline for provisional membership, Deacon or Elder respectively.

The rationale and policy affirmed and adopted by the Board of Ordained Ministry in October 2020 states that:

We acknowledge that The United Methodist Church is not of one mind around issues of human sexuality, and affirm the ongoing work of the Commission on a Way Forward. We believe this policy upholds the expectation of a full inquiry and high moral standards of all candidates. It also reflects some of our core values as a Board, including openness to the Holy Spirit, deep listening to one another, and a commitment to justice in all we do. We affirm the right and responsibility of all Board members to engage in dialogue, prayer, and discerning deliberations and to vote their conscience following a fair examination of all candidates.

We honor excellence. Nominate the people and churches that are making a difference.

**This year the BWC will present awards (some with cash prizes) for:**

- The Harry Deeman Evangelism Award; for one youth, one clergy and one lay person
- Youth Worker of the Year Award
- Humanitarians Award
- Advocacy and Action Award for faith communities
- Abundant Health Award for faith communities

The deadline is April 30. Learn more at bwcumc.org/awards

A statement from the Rev. C. Anthony Hunt, chair of BOOM, along with the full text of the new policy.
Fresh Expressions give discipleship wings to fly

By Melissa Lauber
UMConnection Staff

New ministries being hatched

In a nod to the ancient past and the undreamed-of future, a different kind of church is being born. Fresh Expressions unchains the Holy Spirit to move beyond the sanctuary and create a new kind of church for the Post-Christendom world in which we live.

Several leaders from the Baltimore-Washington Conference recently attended the Fresh Expressions National Gathering, “Steeple to Street,” held March 31-April 2 in Reston, Va.

Church grounded by irrelevance

Research from the Barna Group indicates that in 2016, while 73 percent of Americans identify as Christian, only 38 percent are active churchgoers; 43 percent count themselves as “unchurched.”

Alan Hirsch, one of the keynote speakers at the Fresh Expressions national gathering, went a step further, suggesting that “50 to 60 percent of people around us are not coming to our churches no matter how well we do things.”

“The maps don’t fit the territory,” said Hirsch about the church in today’s culture. “Christendom is just plain old obsolete because it was formulated for an entirely different set of conditions. Apple trees don’t produce oranges.”

The challenge for the “inherited church” is to reconsider its notion of church and ask the questions, “How much of what we call ‘church’ are we willing to give up to be the church? Are we open and ready to rethink the day and time of when church gathers, the location, giving up the sermon, our expectations of success, the offering plate and even what membership means?”

Movement migrates to U.S.

Fresh Expressions “began” in England in 2004. Attendance at the big steeple churches was down, but Church of England leaders were observing new, unusual kinds of faith communities popping up in coffee houses, gyms, pubs and other “third places,” where people gathered when they weren’t at home or work.

Sensing the Holy Spirit might be at work, they began to invest. A few years later, the Baptist General Association of Virginia brought the idea of intentionally organized Fresh Expressions to the U.S. In recent years, United Methodist churches in the Alabama-West Florida, Kentucky, Florida and North Georgia annual conferences began investing in and forming Fresh Expressions.

They’re really nothing new, Hirsch said. “We are authentically church” when we are most aligned with the original and originating understanding of church, namely that of a transformational movement.

Defining Fresh Expressions

Within the official Fresh Expressions Community (FreshExpressionsUS.org), a Fresh Expression is a form of church for our changing culture established primarily for the benefit of people who are not yet members of any church,” said Travis Collins, who led an introductory workshop at “Steeple to Street.”

This is not for people in the pew to do, mission, or renew a small group, or increase membership in some way. Fresh Expressions are not temporary. They are specifically designed for people unlikely to connect with a traditional church.

However, they exist in a “mixed economy,” in which the inherited churches invest time, money and leadership into creating and operating the Fresh Expression. Each Fresh Expression, Collins said, “is distinct and unique, and is tailored for, the local context.” These expressions are generally much smaller than a local church. But they do reach up to God, out to people beyond our circle, inward as they commit to discipleship and fellowship, and they recognize themselves as part of the universal church.

It’s not easy to understand Fresh Expression until you see one in action. “The most important thing to understand is that this is a ministry about ‘and,’” said Collins. Anything and everything is possible as one seeks to listen to the spirit and bring Christ to a community, to a micro-culture, that the church does not traditionally reach.

There are Fresh Expressions led by jazz musicians, baptism, Zumba instructors, mural painters, Narcotic Anonymous group leaders, charity workers, Alzheimers communities and food truck owners.

Some Fresh Expressions are led by clergy; more seem to be led by bi-vocational lay people.

First steps to taking flight

Fresh Expressions begin with a foundation of listening, service, incarnational mission and making disciples. The process varies for each church, but there are some shared processes. Collins shares:

2. Find out who might want to join the adventure. Not too many people from the inherited church should be involved. The best number is between three and 12. Also make sure to include others who pray for the venture.
3. Decide whom to engage – think “who,” not “what.” Who are you drawn to? Are you a part of a some micro-culture? One key part of this decision is to start by looking at everyone as created in the image of God. Your team of pioneers should also include one “person of peace” (as in Luke 10), an insider within the church you’re serving who will introduce you to people, open doors and show you the ropes.
4. Love and serve. Start with an agenda no more complicated than loving and listening. First, listen to God’s spirit. You are simply joining God in God’s mission and finding your place in it. Ask deep questions and listen to the answers.

Does it glorify God? Is it legal? Does it make disciples? Does it expand the vision of this church? Is it according to the Word of God? If so, do it. – Rev. Ismar Alvarez, Path One

First experiences can take flight

These first five steps can take two or three years, or even more. The point is to share your life and serve someone. Jesus will be present, but this is not about persuasion, or selling God. For some people, choosing

Taking wing, finding life

One question that is often asked is, “Will a Fresh Expression result in growth for the long-standing congregation that launches it?”

The answer is “possibly.” But, said Hirsch, “It seems that when the church engages the fringes, it almost always brings life to the center.”

To learn more, visit FreshExpressionsUS.org.

Churches or individuals in the Baltimore-Washington Conference interested in starting a Fresh Expression are encouraged to contact the Rev. Rodney Smother, director of Leadership and Congregational Development at rmsothers@bwcumc.org or 410-309-9958.
A decade in the making, the BWC Retreat and Camping Ministries recently hosted their first ever Spring Break Day Camp for Baltimore children at John Wesley UMC.

Over the week, news of the “fun, friends, and faith” spread and each day new campers joined. The experience was free for the children and is a part of a larger initiative in Baltimore which culminates in an overnight camp experience at Mansidokan or West River.

Such growth and enthusiasm is common in the BWC’s camping program which has grown by 57% over the past five years. For more information about summer camp and retreat opportunities, visit www.bwccampsandretreats.com.

Summer camp comes to spring break for Baltimore kids

UMMs gather for breakfast and inspiration

BALTIMORE – Eighty-seven men from 30 churches gathered for fellowship and breakfast at Eastern UMC March 7. It was their annual prayer breakfast. The theme of the day was “Kingdom Minded Men.” The Rev. Mark Wamble, pastor at St. Matthews and Sollers UMCs, and the speaker of the morning, told the men that “God didn’t save us to be safe but saved us to be dangerous.” We need to share what Jesus has done for us by looking in the rear-view mirror of our lives. Remember who we were and how Jesus changed us.

Church and school partnership forms

WALDORF – Principal’s Magazine recently feature a school partnership between Good Shepherd UMC and a local school. It started when the Rev. Laurie Gates-Ward and a Lutheran colleague met with Principal Louis D’Ambrosio, school administrators and community leaders to discuss how to work together to benefit the church and community. Their first combined effort was Good Shepherd’s “crosswalk” on Good Friday, starting with a prayer walk around Middleton Elementary, close to Good Shepherd UMC. They have been invited to start a prayer group at Benjamin Stoddert Middle School. Plans are also underway to hold an Earth Day cleanup on April 20.

Spotlight shines on Native American Ministries

MONTGOMERY VILLAGE – The annual observance of Native American Ministries is in April and all churches are asked to participate. Covenant UMC organized a special community-wide forum April 14 with Dr. Casey Church, a United Methodist and a nationally known leader in the field as executive director of Wiconi International, based in Albuquerque, N.M. He is an elder in the Pokagon Band Potawatomi Indians of Michigan.

Three generations baptized

Three generations of people from one family were baptized at LaVale UMC on Easter Sunday. Generations four and five were on hand to witness. “I’ve baptized two generations on several occasions, but I’ve never had the honor of baptizing three generations and to have generations four and five on hand is a special blessing,” said the Rev. Frankie Revell.

Great-grandfather Jerry Albert began attending LaVale UMC and joined about a year ago. Great-great grandfather Paul Lease is a pillar at the church, serving in various capacities.

For far too long churches have failed to reach younger generations. It is high time that we claimed these generations for the Kingdom of God once again. Today we gained some ground,” said Revell.

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News Analysis: Out of tragedy, God makes a way

By Melissa Lauber
UMConnection Staff

United Methodists of the Baltimore-Washington Conference are called to be the presence of Christ in the world. Some days that role is harder and more sacred than ever.

On Tuesday morning, March 19, just before classes began, Austin Rollins, 17, walked into Great Mills High School in Southern Maryland, armed with his father’s handgun, and killed his high school classmate, Jaelynn Willey.

That same bullet hit Desmond Barnes, 14, who was wounded in the thigh as he sought shelter in a classroom.

While many prayed, a handful of United Methodists confronted nightmares. Some days that role is harder and more sacred than ever. Today, she still remembers what she talked about and how she lifted up the image of the columbine flower, which “appears really fragile, but is incredibly strong.”

Wilkins-Arnold’s daughter, Karis, grew up with Jaelynn Willey when Wilkins-Arnold served a church in Southern Maryland. The girls became very close friends, and Jaelynn had been the chair of the middle school’s cross-country swim team. Wilkins-Arnold was Jaelynn’s Girl Scout leader.

“Karis invited them to come to the hospital. While she went to accompany her daughter and to be a friend to Melissa, the necessity for her to be a pastoral presence was immediate with Desmond,” Wilkins-Arnold said.

Wilkins-Arnold watched her daughter sit at the bedside, take Jaelynn’s hand and whisper and proclaim words of solace, of healing and of hope. “God was still working.”

“Today, she still remembers what she talked about and how she lifted up the image of the columbine flower, which ‘appears really fragile, but is incredibly strong’,” Wilkins-Arnold said.

Wilkins-Arnold’s daughter, Karis, grew up with Jaelynn Willey when Wilkins-Arnold served a church in Southern Maryland. The girls became very close friends, and Jaelynn had been the chair of the middle school’s cross-country swim team. Wilkins-Arnold was Jaelynn’s Girl Scout leader.

“She didn’t have to baptize her to know God would welcome her home,” she said. “It wasn’t for me, it was not for Jaelynn; it created a moment of comfort for the people in the room, who stood around what would soon become their friend’s deathbed.”

One of the girls there, who had known Jaelynn since they were little girls swimming together, was Roman Catholic and had brought with her a container of holy water. “I asked her, ‘Do you want to help me with the baptism?’” Wilkins-Arnold blessed the water and poured it into the girl’s hands.

The girl then gently poured the water on Jaelynn, offering an ancient gift of grace and a sacred encounter into the tragedy. “When Jaelynn died March 22, Wilkins-Arnold was asked to lead the community prayer vigil and the funeral service. As she prepared, she found herself immensely grateful for her fellow clergy who had been lifting her up in prayer and assisting her in thinking about what message to bring the community. One of the strengths of the connectional system, she said, is having clergy colleagues with whom to share experiences, ideas and support.

Preparing for the service, Wilkins-Arnold counseled herself remembering that the Sunday following the shooting, the Rev. Meredith Wilkins-Arnold, pastor of Calvary UMC in Annapolis, exited the elevator at Medstar St. Mary’s Hospital and encountered Jaelynn Willey’s parents, Melissa and Dan. The couple had just been notified that their daughter had lost her brain functions.

“When Melissa saw me, she just threw her head back and wailed in a way I never heard someone cry. The only thing I can like it is to join her, to Rachel weeping for her children,” Wilkins-Arnold said.

Wilkins-Arnold’s daughter, Karis, grew up with Jaleynn Willey when Wilkins-Arnold served a church in Southern Maryland. The girls became very close friends, and Jaleynn had been the chair of the middle school’s cross-country swim team. Wilkins-Arnold was Jaleynn’s Girl Scout leader.

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Wilkins-Arnold watched her daughter sit at the bedside, take Jaleynn’s hand and whisper and proclaim words of solace, of healing and of hope. “God was still working.”

“It would be easy for some to say that God was absent during that tragedy, but God, Jesus, was right there, lying next to every person wounded,” she said. Throughout the prayer vigil and funeral service, Jaleynn’s family and friends kept repeating to themselves and one another, “There are no words. There are simply no words for what we’re living through or how we’ll face the future.”

But standing with the Rev. John Wondrich, of All Saints UMC in Leonardtown, Wilkins-Arnold had the phone call Tuesday, March 20, at 8 a.m. God was with us the entire time and still is,” Hicks said. “When I arrived at the hospital to be with Desmond and his family, Desmond’s first words to me were, ‘Hey pastor, I knew you were coming.’” There were many times my faith was tested, but knowing that my youth was in the hands of God, smiling with a joyful spirit, I knew God was in working.”

To his people, Hicks preached, “despite the hell of last week, when everything turned upside down, we never lost our hope. Praise is not a style, it’s a substance. We never lost our praise.”

Working to develop a complete picture of homelessness

By Rev. Katie Grover
Pastor, Patapsco UMC

Patapsco UMC in Dundalk was recently cited by Baltimore County for repeatedly having trash, debris and human waste on its property, left by homeless people who sleep on the grounds of the church. The citation is part of the county’s effort to improve the appearance of the church grounds for the benefit of the poor and marginalized.

They say a picture is worth a thousand words. This week, I was sent pictures of soiled toilet paper. I was sent pictures of a woman’s worldly goods stacked neatly against a brick wall. I was sent pictures of a blanket peaking out from behind a bush. I was sent pictures of trash trapped behind a fence line. The thousand words these pictures may evoke include disgusting, unkempt, negligence, disarray, ugly, hazardous, unsightly. But what about the pictures that were not taken?

Where is the picture of the man on the other end of the soiled toilet paper, a man who does not have a place to go to the bathroom with dignity, a man who believes himself just like an animal? Where is the picture of the man on the bench covered in blankets trying to stay warm in freezing temperatures, no place to go because the cold weather shelter is not open this year?

Where is the picture of the man who found himself on the street when his place of employment folded up shop after he had worked there nearly all of his life? Where is the picture of the man whose possession has been abandoned because he went to the hospital? Where is the picture of the person who has lately found refuge behind the bush, covered in that which is mental illness. The ugliness which is addiction. The ugliness which is unemployment and underemployment. The ugliness is broken relationships. The ugliness which is hopelessness. The ugliness which is dehumanization. The ugliness which is benefits denied. The ugliness which is poverty. The ugliness which is the callous government and the under-funded church. The ugliness which is completely unwelcome is the place where shelters and resource centers can be located. The pictures taken of the outward ugly are only evidence of an ugliness far greater. How do the two become reconciled? Can they?
Gun Rally: Youth offer leadership to end school shootings

From page 1

sat at the counter during the Civil Rights Movement and allowed their bodies to be bated so that change could really take place. I see the same kind of movement happening right now.”

Hannah Beamish, an eighth grader from Rochester, New York, and a member of Asbury First UMC there, came with her youth group.

“I’m scared to go to school, and I’m sick of it. I’m so done walking into a classroom and looking for the place that we would need to go in a lockdown,” Beamish said. “I’m so done with it.”

For Beamish, this was her first involvement in any kind of organized protest. She was going to march in her hometown, but said, “I figured, go big or go home.”

Jeania Ree Moore, the director for Civil and Human Rights at the United Methodist Board of Church and Society, said the denomination’s position on gun violence reflects its position on violence in general.

“We are called to turn our swords into plowshares,” Moore said. “In other words, to lay down our arms and weapons and not pick them up again.”

Moore said she hoped that people would realize the work doesn’t stop when the rally stops.

“Since this day will not solve it; there is work to do. But this day brought to our attention that there are children not living to see their 68th birthday, and it shouldn’t be that way,” she said. (The Rev. Martha E. Vink, who serves the CWB Cooperative Parish in and around Carmel, New York, said she was inspired to come by the young people.

“I feel like they are the spark that is supposed to be about. It’s time for us to stand up and say so,” she said.

The Rev. Johnnie Cogman, who serves the oldest African-American congregation in the District of Columbia area, Mt. Zion UMC in Georgetown, brought youth and several members of her confirmation class to the rally.

“Guns have been killing our children left and right. I’m so impressed with how our young people have risen to the occasion. If they can stand up for their rights, I think we can stand up with them,” Cogman said.

Being in the African-American community, Cogman said, she hears about gun violence all the time. She knows that her kids do, too.

“I think it’s very important for (the youth) to experience this,” she said. “To come together – not just a black/white thing – but it’s an everybody thing, against guns. We’re looking forward to trying to make a change.”

Beth Scott, a member at Foundry UMC in Washington, stood on a busy corner across the street from Union Station for several hours, asking passersby if they were registered to vote.

“I support voter registration and having the ability of people to have their voices heard,” she said. Scott was volunteering with Head Count, which in turn was partnering with March for Our Lives.

Scott said it was important to put faith into action.

“Because faith without works is dead. It’s a belief that everyone’s soul is important, and that souls are expressed through action such as marching or registering to vote. We have to continue to do justice, no matter where.”

Ending Racism: Honoring Dr. King, UMs call for justice

From page 1

the branch that believed holding people as slave was a right, needed a “representative church in the nation’s capital,” she said.

“Our grand, 1937 building was built as a monument for a denomination in which every bishop held slaves at one time,” she said. “It is a building where people walk below the words, ‘Methodist Episcopal Church South’ as they come inside, with ‘South’ standing not for geography, but for split, for slavery, for sin.”

Claycomb-Sokol outlined how her church’s strong race history head-on. The church, she said, has named race for what it is: “a social construct.” Mr. Vernon Place has also made their repentance public.

“If you walk past our building today, you’ll read, ‘We repent of our roots in white supremacy’ on a banner that was hung on the 16th anniversary of the laying of our cornerstone,” she said. The church held an intentional service of repentance where members of the church signed the banner. The Rev. Ken Crimmel, the Assistant to the Bishop in the West Virginia Conference, and the Director of Connectional Ministries, came to the rally because he believes in a church for all people.

“I believe all people are really God’s people,” he said. “It’s so easy for us in our context, because West Virginia is 94 percent white, to think everything is okay; that we all get along. We really have to sometimes have this brought to our attention that there are a lot of people who don’t enjoy the privilege that the majority enjoy.”

Being at the rally, Crimmel added, is also part of the conference’s commitment to the Call to Action resolution passed by the 2016 Northeastern Jurisdiction. That resolution calls for “an effort to address, confront, and otherwise demand systemic fundamental and institutional change both within the church and the world…”

Bishop Easterling, who also spoke and prayed on April 3 at a pre-rally prayer witness in front of the United Methodist Building, said that King was answering God’s call when he was gunned down.

“He was murdered because of the color of his skin and because he had the audacity to call this nation to account,” Easterling said.

“We have made great strides. I love this nation, but we have so much ground yet to cover.”

Hannah Beamish, an eighth grader from Asbury First UMC in Rochester, N.Y., holds her sign for the March for Our Lives rally March 23.