Girls explore LeadHERship at camp

By Melissa Lauber
UMConnection Staff

It was a week of LeaderHERship. The “her” in question were 19 very diverse teenage girls, gathered from across the Baltimore-Washington Conference for a week of summer camp at West River, near Annapolis. The girls – they admitted – reflected every good and bad stereotype you might imagine; they also alone with the light of Christ that could dazzle the world with possibility. When they first gathered, “some of them were insecure and vulnerable.” But as the days passed, “they were changed – strong, coming into their voice,” said the Rev. Bonnie McCubbin, who created the camp and brought in three other strong women to serve with her as camp counselors.

National statistics indicate that these girls had a lot to feel insecure and vulnerable about.

• Seven in 10 girls believe they are not good enough or do not measure up in some way.
• One in four girls today fall into a clinical diagnosis – depression, eating disorders, cutting and other mental/emotional disorders.
• 92 percent of girls believe anyone can acquire the skills of leadership, but only 27 percent believe they have the key qualities required to be a good leader.

In many ways, their feelings are justified. Within the U.S., only 34 women have ever served as a governor, as opposed to 2,319 men; only 3 percent of Fortune 500 CEOs are women; and in 2017, within The United Methodist Church, two constitutional amendments that sought to ensure women an equal place in the life, worship and governance of the church were defeated.

During the afternoons at camp, the girls did all the normal camp things – playing on boats, paddle boarding on the river, climbing on the ropes course, playing camp games, singing camp songs, and joining in evening worship. The highlight, most of them said, was forming deep friendships.

During the morning, they participated in conversations with women leaders in the Conference, including T.C. Morrow, who works with the National Religious Campaign Against Torture; the Rev. Julie Wilson, chair of the BWC’s Church and Society ministries; and the Rev. Laura Norvell, a vice president at Wesley Seminary who shared insights into fundraising.

The purpose of these conversations, McCubbin said, was to give the girls exposure to ideas and skills so that they could go home with a “toolbox” to be leaders in their churches and schools.

One of the key tools in this toolbox came from Bishop LaTrelle Easterling, the first female bishop in the 234-year history of the Baltimore-Washington Conference, who shared with them the importance of self-acceptance.

“As you focus on what it means to be a leader, don’t ever be afraid to embrace how God created you. God created you the way you are for a reason. God has a plan for your life,” the bishop said.

“We must learn to embrace who we are – uniquely, beautifully, every inch of ourselves. I know we live in a world that...”

See LeaderHERship, page 3

Oakland UMC starts ministry anew after painful split

By Melissa Lauber & Erik Alsgaard
UMConnection Staff

Some congregations “do” church well. But “being” church is harder. On July 22, United Methodists from the Frederick District gathered with the people of Oakland UMC who, in the midst of significant turmoil, are striving to “be” the church of Jesus Christ.

Their journey has been marked with highs and lows, but it has also been a season of rediscovering the strengths of United Methodism, Oakland’s core leadership team says. Worshipping with one another was one of a continuing series of opportunities to celebrate what Bishop LaTrelle Easterling called in her sermon, “Being a Community of Love.”

The congregation at Oakland UMC in Charles Town, W.Va., is starting their church anew after two-thirds of the congregation left the denomination in May.

The split, led by the previous pastor and his family, who also served on the church’s staff, centered around the issue of homosexuality, interpretations of Scripture, and, in some of the church claim, “personal agendas” that were played out in the pulpit and pew.

The split has been a painful one.

“I lost my son in this,” said Lay Leader Iwayaa Rata, whose son joined those who left the denomination.

“We’re being painted as the ones choosing to stay behind in Sodom and Gomorrah,” said Treasurer Sharon Carrigan.

Pastor Rick Shuman
D.S. Edgardo Rivera (center) prays with Sharon Carrigan and Pastor Rick Shuman

After several months of unraveling what some in the church see as lies, deception, financial mismanagement, and lost friendships, “you think you’ve worked through it,” said Joe Logan, a member of the congregation.
Youth Pool Party

As the BWC realigns its ministries for young people, the Excitement comes when you forget what you came to Annual Conference for because this Jesus is there, telling you your life and destiny. This is the day that the Lord has made so anything is possible.

It certainly excites me. The world is not static, all is not lost; God is still mighty and we are a part of it. Now that’s exciting!

Every day is another day that God can do something awesome and we can be a part of it. Now that’s exciting! Don’t get lulled into thinking that nothing can change, or that things are so bad that nothing can be done. That train of thought is a trick of the enemy designed to steal your joy and your excitement. Every day is a day to be excited. Every day is a day that God can do something new. Every day is a day that you can step out on faith, walk in your destiny and see what new things God can do.

The world is not static, all is not lost; God is still mighty and God still loves you. Don’t let any day be just another day. This is the day that the Lord has made so anything is possible, and that should excite you. It certainly excites me.

 EVENTS

Momentum
Aug. 18, 11:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
BWC Mission Center in Fulton, Gethsemane UMC in Capitol Heights and Cokesbury UMC in Abingdon
Sessions of the School of Congregational Development will be streamed to these three locations. A Spanish-only session will be held Aug. 17, from 7 to 10 p.m., at the BWC Mission Center. Learn more at www.onlineteachingevent.org.

Youth Pool Party
Aug. 19, 2 to 5 p.m.
West River Camp

Young People’s Ministries Focus Groups
First week of September
As the BWC realigns its ministries for young people, feedback is being sought. Register and participate in one of three focus groups during the first week of September. The data collected will be used to create a strategic plan for Young People’s Ministry within the BWC. To register, visit goo.gl/WkdtGC. For questions or additional information, contact Cheryl Cook at ccook@bwcumc.org. Registration closes Aug. 30.

Discipleship Agencies meet
Sept. 8, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.
BWC Mission Center, Fulton
The first quarterly meeting of all conference discipleship agencies and areas. An invitations will be sent out to all participants.

NEJ BMCR meeting
Oct. 1-12
St. Marks UMC, Hanover
Learn more about this Black Methodists for Church Renewal annual meeting at https://www.nejbmcr.org/events-1.

Stepping up to Staffing and Supervision training
Nov. 6-7
Foundry UMC, Washington, D.C.

Bishop’s Advent Day Apart
Nov. 13, 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.
Epworth UMC, Gaithersburg
A time apart for clergy with guest preacher, the Rev. Kirk Byron Jones. Learn more at www.bwcumc.org/event/1184253-2018-11-13-bishops-pre-advent-day-apart/.

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 Mandy Sayers
Pastor, Covenant UMC, Gaithersburg

“Youth Pool Party”

As the BWC realigns its ministries for young people, feedback is being sought. Register and participate in one of three focus groups during the first week of September. The data collected will be used to create a strategic plan for Young People’s Ministry within the BWC. To register, visit goo.gl/WkdtGC. For questions or additional information, contact Cheryl Cook at ccook@bwcumc.org. Registration closes Aug. 30.

EXCITE

“Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.” (1 Cor. 11:1)

I’m excited because God is at work here in the BWC. I’m excited because disciples of Jesus are being made and they are changing the world. I’m excited because the unadvolved oven on my stove for Pentecost reminds me that Jesus shows up whenever two or three are gathered. I’m excited because we are One Beneath the Cross.

By Emily Williams
Pastor, St. Paul UMC, Oxon Hill

“Momentum”

The first quarterly meeting of all conference discipleship agencies and areas. An invitations will be sent out to all participants.

NEJ BMCR meeting

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EXPLORING A WAY FORWARD

WITH REV. TOM BERLIN

Sept. 15, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Nichols-Bethel UMC, 1239 Murray Road, Odenton, MD

The Rev. Tom Berlin, who spoke at this year’s Annual Conference Session, will help you understand the issues and options facing The United Methodist Church as it approaches the February General Conference and makes decisions on how the Church will address issues of homosexuality.

bwcumc.org/wayforward
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kind of makes that difficult, that makes us want to question who we are. So, the first thing a good, strong leader has to do is love who they are.

The conversation moved on from there, as the girls posed questions to the bishop: How does she handle stress? What do you do if people you’re leading want something that’s not good for them? What made her want to be a bishop? What do you do when you’re nervous in front of people? How do you know for sure it’s God talking to you? How do you love yourself?

From page 1

Together, in a circle, they became vulnerable and magnificent as they cried, embraced, questioned, planned and learned from one another.

“God doesn’t take you where God hasn’t prepared for you to go,” Bishop Easterling told the girls. “Each of you has gifts inside of you that you don’t even know about yet. There are seeds planted in you that haven’t even bloomed yet because you haven’t had to call upon them. As you begin to live into the next thing God is calling for you to do, you just have to allow it to blossom, to grow, and allow God to use you. You learn to grow wherever you’re planted, you really do.”

After their time of getting to “dish with the Bishop,” the girls practiced the song they were leading in worship that evening. As they sang “Every Praise is to Our God,” they changed the words: “Yes, She is,” they sang.

“God is Spirit,” the bishop told them. “If we are created in the image of God, there are aspects of God that are feminine. You need to know and believe that… Lean into the wisdom God has for you.”

The bishop encouraged the people of Oakland UMC and all those present to abide in God’s love. The term “abide,” she said, “means to remain in, carry on, spend some time. Abide evidences a lifestyle, not a transitory, short-lived experience. Abide means to take up residence. This is the commandment that precedes the next to love one another. Not a superficial love; not a transactional love; not a fleeting love. Rather, it is a love that forms a lasting bond.

Rather, it is a love that forms a lasting bond.

… In this communal embrace we can create real community.

In light of recent events, living in this love has been a challenge for some in the church.

On Palm Sunday, March 25, the Rev. Jo Anne Alexander preached a sermon at Oakland UMC calling The United Methodist Church “an apostate church,” said the Rev. Edgardo Rivera, superintendent of the Frederick District.

An apostate church is defined as one that was Christian but has rejected or rebelled against Christianity. Alexander; her husband, the Rev. Kent Tice, who pastored the church; and Alexander’s son Joshua, who was also on staff, were, “for lack of a better word, ‘backing.’ The United Methodist Church because they did not perceive it as biblical or solid in its orthodoxy,” Rivera said. This dissatisfaction with the denomination had reportedly been cultivated over time.

The Sunday after Easter, the members were scheduled to vote, taking an assessment on remaining within the denomination, Rivera said. So, on Easter, he shared with the congregation a letter from Bishop Easterling, addressing their concerns about the church’s stance on homosexuality.

“There is a way for us to remain united, even as we have differing theological and doctrinal views,” the bishop wrote. “The belief in one Lord, one faith, one baptism and one God binds us together as believers and unites us.”

The bishop stressed that “our core message is Christ, above and before anything else,” and Rivera called on them to move beyond their single focus and to embrace the more-encompassing banner of God’s ministry.

However, on April 7, the Saturday after Easter, the congregation voted 81-16 to leave the denomination.

Both Alexander and Tice have served the church since 1993. She retired in 2014, and he retired Jan. 1, 2008, and was being allowed to serve the church full-time as a retiree.

In mid-May, the couple started a congregation, Oakland Community Church, holding their first service in an area funeral parlor.

But their departure was filled with grief and anger, said Rivera, that has left the at people who now attend worship at Oakland UMC, and others, turned to find healing, comfort and unification.

As the church’s interim pastor, the Rev. Ed Grove made efforts to ignite the connectional spirit of United Methodism within the people of Oakland UMC, who had grown isolated in the past several years.

Shuman grew up in the area and is a good leader and a good match for the church, Rivera said.

Shuman believes that reclaiming the missional spirit of the church by continuing to serve the community will bring healing.

The church has reopened its preschool and is working to reopen Paul’s, a popular restaurant in the church that serves meals for the community. Based on congregational interests, he is also exploring ministries that address addiction and disaster relief.

Shuman and Rivera are also working to dispel rumors, like the notion that Tice is not receiving a pension from The United Methodist Church. In reality, both Tice and Alexander are vested in the denomination’s pension plan and are receiving their full pensions.

Social media has been a source of misinformation and misunderstanding, Rivera said. He is troubled by the anger and vitriol and finds himself answering to thoughts from John 13:35.

“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

As the church’s interim pastor, the Rev. Ed Grove made efforts to ignite the connectional spirit of United Methodism within the people of Oakland UMC, who had grown isolated in the past several years.

Mount Wesley UMC, where Grove also serves, had a spaghetti dinner to raise funds for Oakland UMC. That gesture deeply touched the Oakland members.

“We were like an island,” said Logan. “We were isolated and alone. Now we’re connected.”

Working toward this connection is a holy endeavor, Bishop Easterling said.

“The church must be a unity, holy and universal. … The church transcends, it must transcend, human avarice, selfish motivations and fleshy desires, to stand as the universal translation of Christ to the world. … We are created, called, and commissioned to be a community of love.”

“Together,” Rivera said, “united in Christ, Oakland now has the opportunity to do something, built on the gifts of the past, but something fresh and new that will provide a new way of hope for the future of ministry in that location. I think that potential is there,” Rivera said.

“We’ve taken the rearview mirror down,” said Logan. “It’s time to move forward.”

Bishop LaTrelle Easterling anoints Joe Logan, who serves as a trustee at Oakland UMC, at a worship celebration of unity.

Oakland: Church rediscovers gifts of connectionalism

From page 1

Bishop Easterling anoints Joe Logan, who serves as a trustee at Oakland UMC, at a worship celebration of unity.
Wesleyan Pilgrimage transforms heart and soul

WHICH CAME FIRST: John Wesley’s conversion experience (“I felt my heart strangely warmed…”), or that of his brother, Charles Wesley?

Knowing the answer to this question was just one of the fun facts I learned during a 10-day Wesley Pilgrimage in England. Sponsored by the Board of Discipleship, the Board of Higher Education and Ministry, and the General Commission on Archives and History, the July trip was almost non-stop learning, bus rides, walking tours and incredible experiences.

And no rain.

Our leaders were magnificent. The Rev. Paul Chilcote, Professor of Theology at Asbury Theological Seminary, Florida Dunnam Campus, was a walking history book of the Wesleys. His puns and frequent references to the movie “Zoolander” were mostly welcome, but his keen insights into the life and times of Samuel, Susanna, John and Charles Wesley were spellbinding. The Rev. Steve Manskar, now pastor at Trinity UMC in Grand Rapids, brought the covenant discipleship aspect of the Wesley’s to the fore, reminding us that the genius of the Methodist Movement lay not only in it’s ability to hold in tension two opposing forces (social holiness AND personal piety, for example), but in how it built disciples of Jesus Christ that really did transform the world (i.e., Francis Asbury).

Oxford

The First Rise of Methodism began at Oxford, where both John and Charles Wesley were students. While attending Christ Church College, Charles Wesley and others began a regimen of daily prayer, study, meetings and small group accountability. “The Holy Club” was born. John came to the group later and, in typical fashion, his youngest brother, Charles, let him take it over. Because of the group’s regular, methodical practices – which I think we can trace back to their mother’s tutelage at home – the derogatory name “Methodists” was used to describe them. The name stuck.

We pilgrims were given a small task on our visit to Oxford: find a plaque in the floor of Christ Church Cathedral that mentions the Wesleys. My first clue as to the location was the fact that both brothers were ordained here. So, I walked up to the front of the altar, looking like a penguin waddling over the stones. No luck.

Then I remembered that John Wesley infamously preached a sermon in this Cathedral, wherein he questioned not only if true Christianity could be found in Oxford, but in the whole of the Church of England. (Editor’s note: Wrong church; he did this in the Church of St. Mary the Virgin, nearby.) Armed with this (wrong) information, I headed to the pulpit, and voila! There it was. Right at the foot of the steps you’d have to climb to reach it.

Christ Church was packed with tourists the day we visited. That’s not unusual, I was told, because several of the scenes from the Harry Potter movies were shot there, including using the Great Hall (computer enhanced) as the dining hall.

Salisbury

We 38 pilgrims began our time together in Salisbury, staying at Sarum College directly across the street from the cathedral. This was my first time in Salisbury, and the cathedral was absolutely magnificent.

Viewing an original copy of the Magna Carta on display there at the Chapter House was a highlight, as was Sunday morning worship experience where we were warmly welcomed.

Epworth

A small village even today, Epworth is where John and Charles Wesley were born. Their father, Samuel, served as Rector of St. Andrew’s Parish, when she died, only eight of the children were alive.

Now here is a place truly off the beaten path. One of the distinguishing marks between a tourist and a pilgrim, in my mind, is the intentional seeking out of things/places/events that don’t matter to the vast majority of people. Epworth is such a place.

A small village even today, Epworth is where John and Charles Wesley were born. Their father, Samuel, served as Rector of St. Andrew’s Parish, appointed there by the queen after he had written a poem, “The Life of Christ,” and dedicated it to her. (He also wrote another poem on maggots, but that’s another story.) Their mother, Susanna, bore Samuel 19 children: nine died in infancy; a maid accidentally smothered another infant; and when she died, only eight of the children were alive.

Life at the rectory was hard for Susanna. Samuel was away much of the time, and she was left to care not only for the children – who had a strict schedule of daily life – but, often, the church, too. I was surprised to learn that, at one point, when Samuel was away in London, 200+ miles to the south, Susanna started teaching parishioners in the kitchen. That’s because the associate pastor Samuel had left in charge was proving to be ineffective.

Soon, more people were attending her “services” than were attending church on Sunday morning. The associate pastor wrote letters to Samuel, complaining. Samuel then wrote letters to his wife, demanding that she (as a woman) stop doing this. One of her letters ended with these words:

“If you do, after all, think fit to dissolve this assembly, do not tell me that you desire me to do it, for that will not satisfy my conscience; but send me your particular commands in such full and express terms as may absolve me from all guilt and punishment for neglecting this opportunity of doing good, when you and I shall appear before the great and awful tribunal of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

We visited the rectory; and I was thrilled to stand in the garret on the top floor of the house where the home’s ghost, Old Geoffrey, lived.

But the biggest thrill of the pilgrimage awaited: the holy ground of St. Andrew’s Parish. Here, we stood around the baptismal font that was used to baptize John and Charles. Here, we held the silver communion chalice used for communion not only by Samuel, but by John and Charles. Here, we worshipped using an order of prayer from the 1660’s. Here, we saw Samuel’s grave, just outside the church. It’s this grave that John famously stood on and preached from in 1742 when he was denied the pulpit inside the church.

We also took note of the Oxford Castle Prison, where members of the Holy Club visited inmates on a regular basis. Many of the prisoners were in jail because they couldn’t pay their debts (Samuel Wesley, the father of John and Charles, once spent three months in debtors’ prison). Their visits were especially important because, in the 1720s and 30s, there was no system in place to care for the inmates. That is, they were totally reliant on family members, friends or the church, too. I was surprised to learn that, at one point, when Samuel was away in London, 200+ miles to the south, Susanna started teaching parishioners in the kitchen. That’s because the associate pastor Samuel had left in charge was proving to be ineffective.

SALISBURY

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SALISBURY Cathedral at dusk. This glorious church was built in just 38 years, from 1220 to 1258.

The Rev. Steve Manskar, center, leads a group of pilgrims through the streets of Oxford.

The author stands at the baptismal font used to baptize John and Charles Wesley at Andrew’s Church in Epworth. The silver chalice was also used by the Wesley
The author stands at the baptismal font used to baptize John and Charles Wesley at St. Andrew's Church in Epworth. The silver chalice was also used by the Wesley brothers. The building was also designed so that it was difficult for any mob that broke in to reach the preacher quickly – witness the limited access upstairs (in the two-tiered pulpit).

As a seminarian, I was fascinated by this "open air" preaching. It wasn't until this pilgrimage, however, that I understood how radical it truly was. In those days, in the Church and England, the conventional wisdom was that a person could only be saved "inside" the church. That is, they had to literally be in the building to hear the sermon and be saved. Wesley's words "to be more vile," in my opinion, means that he saw an opportunity to reach more and more people with the Gospel and said, "to buck with the conventional wisdom," and began to preach.

The results speak for themselves. At Bristol, we pilgrims toured the New Room Chapel. Built in 1739, this is the oldest Methodist building in the world. The New Room was so-named because the two Methodist societies in Bristol at the time were running out of space in which to meet. Wesley built it to not only meet that need, but it was also an outpost for serving the community: food and clothing were given to the poor; visits were made to the nearby prison; a medical clinic was established; and more.

As the New Room's website describes it, "The early Methodists were frequently attacked by mobs. The lack of windows on the ground floor was a safety measure against such attack. The building was also designed so that it was difficult for any mob that broke in to reach the preacher quickly – witness the limited access upstairs (in the two-tiered pulpit)."

It was in Bristol that the resident Church of England bishop asked Wesley why he (Wesley) was infringing on his (the bishop's) parish. You know – or should know – Wesley's response: "Sir, I look upon the whole world as my parish."

The New Room is also famous – at least in the United States – as the place where Francis Asbury attended his first Methodist conference (1771) and heard the call to go to the Colonies as a Methodist missionary. I was surprised to learn that Asbury is almost unheard of in British Methodist circles. My guess is because once he went to America, Asbury never returned, the only preacher sent by Wesley to stay. In fact, Bishop Asbury is buried in Baltimore.

For more information on how you can go to next year's Wesley Pilgrimage, or if you'd like to be a financial supporter, contact the Rev. Steve Manskar at steven.manskar@gmail.com. The 2018 pilgrimage was the last one sponsored by Discipleship Ministries, Manskar said.

"If you want to be a benefactor and help form the leaders that this denomination needs," said Manskar, "I'd like to talk to you." The funding from the three General Agencies, he said, allow for the reduction of the registration fees for Provisional Elders and Deacons, and for Licensed Local Pastors, but don't pay for the whole trip.

LONDON

Our pilgrimage ended, appropriately, in London. I say "appropriately" because this is where John Wesley's earthly pilgrimage ended, too, in 1788. He is buried behind the church he started there, now called Wesley Chapel. His mother, Susanna, is buried across the street in Bunhill ("Bone-hill") Fields, along with about 100,000 other people (including Daniel Defoe, John Bunyan – author of "Pilgrim's Progress" – Isaac Watts, and William Shrubsole*).

Built in 1778 by John Wesley, the chapel that now bears his name was a replacement for the Foundery Chapel that began in 1739. Wesley's townhouse, next door to the chapel, still stands, and it was here that he died.

Sitting in the pews at this chapel is always breathtaking to me. The pulpit here is one that John Wesley used many times. Margaret Thatcher was married here and later donated money to build the Communion railing. The baptismal font isn't original – it was installed for the commemoration of the 100th anniversary of John Wesley’s death – but the Victorian bathrooms downstairs are, built in 1891 by Thomas Crapper.

It was in London that another highlight of the pilgrimage happened. On July 18, we pilgrims had the honor of sitting in the choir at St. Paul's Cathedral for Evensong. My chills.

And so the pilgrimage came to an end. There is so much more I could write about – I have almost totally neglected the impact the Wesleys had on systematic disciple making that was stressed repeatedly during our pilgrimage – but I have run out of room and you, of patience in reading.

*As in more than a few other situations, Charles proceeded John. Charles happened on May 21, 1738; John's on May 24, 1738 (one wonders if the three days was significant).

**William Shrubsole wrote the hymn tune "Miles Lane," to which is set one of my favorite hymns, "All Hail the Power of Jesus Name." It's not the tune you think you know...
UMs aid Puerto Rico

By Alfredo Santiago*

Ten months ago, Hurricane Maria slammed Puerto Rico. This summer, members of the Salem Baltimore-Hispanic UMC went to help rebuild amid the continuing devastation.

On June 30, “Faithful Marylanders,” as we called ourselves, set out on the mission trip. The team included members of Salem Baltimore-Hispanic UMC, including myself as mission coordinator, Pastor Jorge Moreno, Kate Jakuta and William Escobar. We went to Patillas, Puerto Rico, as volunteer relief missionaries.

The mission trip focused on repairing a heavily damaged steeple of Dilworth UMC in North Carolina in a continuing repair project to a second-level home. It was rewarding to directly help a Puerto Rican family and, as a congregational church body, work with other United Methodists.

To do this work, we coordinated with UMCOR (United Methodist Committee on Relief) and ReFace IMPR – Rebuilding Communities with Hope. The biblical motto for the week was Philippians 4:13: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Four hammers were provided to the team with the Bible verse to keep all of us missionaries in one accord. It’s hard to imagine the disruption and damage people in Puerto Rico are still experiencing, even 20 months later. The hurricane caused a total blackout to the islanders and also limited internal and external communication. In some parts of Patillas and Utuado, people still do not have electricity and intermittent blackouts continue.

As we spoke to different Puerto Ricans regarding their personal experience, one common theme was obvious: “Hurricane Maria brought out the best of the best in people.”

The United Methodist women in the retreat center prepared hot meals, which were either picked up or delivered, sometimes by foot, to locals in the area, who oftentimes had no access to money to purchase food or had money but found the stores closed due to empty shelves.

The mission trip ended on July 7 as all the missionaries left the Myriam Visot United Methodist Women’s Camp. During our time there, prior friendships were strengthened, new friendships were formed and faith and hope were augmented.

Our trip was just one taken by members of the Baltimore-Washington Conference. A handful of other churches are also working with the people of Puerto Rico, helping to restore homes, churches and lives.

At the recent Annual Conference Session, the Rev. Isabelina Rivera Silva, a Regional Supervisor from Puerto Rico, reminded members that the Baltimore-Washington Conference has a covenant partnership with the Methodist Church of Puerto Rico. Silva thanked the BWC for the $167,000 it contributed to hurricane relief efforts immediately following the disaster. This contribution and the work of several mission teams enabled them to receive solar powered generators for power, provide mental health care and strategic and sustainable planning to include 419 communities, 33 congregations, 10 distribution centers and staff and support of at least five sustainable health clinics by 2022, he said.

According to Silva, more than 100,000 houses were destroyed by Hurricane Maria, and 33 church sanctuaries were destroyed, 10 of those were completely destroyed.

If you are considering participating in a Volunteers in Mission trip, there is information on the BWC website at www.bwcumc.org/ministries/disaster-response-and-volunteers-in-mission. For more information, contact the Rev. Stacey Cole Wilson, executive minister of justice and service, at scowilson@bwcumc.org.

*Alfredo Santiago is the mission coordinator at Salem Baltimore-Hispanic UMC.
**Sermon preparation process: How it works for me**

By Ianthe Marie Mills

Editor’s note: This article reprinted permission from *By Faith Magazine*, May/June 2018 issue. By Faith is a magazine celebrating the gifts and ministry of Black United Methodist churches. The article here was written by Mills as part of the magazine’s request for how Black preachers go about the task of preparing to preach.

When and how do you choose your sermon text/title?

I am primarily a lectionary preacher and usually use one or more lectionary texts; however, I also preach sermon series. The lectionary text and sermon series themes I choose are based on God’s current context, hopes, dreams and challenges. I plan themes one-to-two months in advance, but the scriptures and sermon titles may change. I was taught to brood over the text, so, sermon titles arise through reading the text several times and listening for a word or words that speak to my spirit and the congregation’s context. Often, in the midst of my one-hour commute between home and church, a title, text, or theme emerges. Inspiration may come from a book, an article, a smartphone news feed, Facebook post, commercial, or something else. Driving in downtown Washington, D.C., I recently noticed a larger-than-life pencil eraser outside one of the Smithsonian art galleries; that reminded me of our new life in Christ and the invitation to begin again.

When do you begin working on your Sunday sermon?

Each week my typical routine is a Tuesday morning reading of the lectionary and discerning a text, theme and title. The Friday reading involves researching and writing; and Saturday morning rewriting and final composition. However, I may brood over a text, theme, or title for weeks before preaching on it.

What are some of your study resources and routines?

My favorite exegetical study resources are the New International Bible Commentary (Volume 10: Sermon preparation, Interpretation Bible Commentary Set, and Anchor Bible Dictionary). I use professional online sermon preparation resources (e.g., Homiletics, sermonwriter.com, and textweck.com).

Although the African American Pulpit Journal is no longer published, the African American Lectionary remains available online as a resource. Daily I read the digital Washington Post, a personalized newsfeed, Dictionary. I use professional online sermon preparation resources (e.g., Homiletics, sermonwriter.com, and textweck.com). After preaching on the #BlackLivesMatter movement, which was initially met with skepticism and concerns from some churches and Christians because it was not birthed in the church. After preaching on the #BlackLivesMatter Movement, which included how it was started, its principles, a biblical rationale for social justice advocacy, and how the church may faithfully respond, many congregants were appreciative of the teaching and were empowered to move forward as advocates for social justice and supporters of #BlackLivesMatter.

Do you talk to anyone about your sermon?

My sermon preparation does not include structured discussions with others; however, I do talk with colleagues and parishioners about general sermon ideas and themes. That experience has led me to consider having an ongoing lectionary study/discussion group. Additionally, recently our congregation revised its worship services, and working with the Worship Committee Taskforce through that process has confirmed the value of using a Worship Team for planning, including sermon preparation ideas.

How do you address/deal with controversial issues – in and outside your church?

In cases of controversial issues, I lean toward a teaching sermon that considers: What is the issue? Why is it important? What does the Bible say? What is our response?

A recent example is the #BlackLivesMatter movement, which was initially met with skepticism and concerns from some churches and Christians because it was not birthed in the church. After preaching on the #BlackLivesMatter Movement, which included how it was started, its principles, a biblical rationale for social justice advocacy, and how the church may faithfully respond, many congregants were appreciative of the teaching and were empowered to move forward as advocates for social justice and supporters of #BlackLivesMatter.

By Ken Humbert

WHY...UNITED TO LOVE? Because Jesus says so, every which way. Take just these. “Love one another as I love you.” “Love your God with all (after all, God IS love), and your neighbor as yourself.” Utterly basic! Also, love has consequences. “For God so loved the world....” You know the rest by heart. And this, “neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female; you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Among us United Methodists, it shouldn’t take much for you to...”Unite the Right.” Their message: “Only white is right, white is superior, hate has a place when the issue is race.”

Why? Why will I be there? Because we can do this. Imagine: our 616 BWMC churches send a mere tithe of our average 66,000 weekly worshippers and over 5,600 Methodists literally face the nation’s Capitol with a message of love and racial inclusion. If we all bring a friend, Methodist or otherwise, we can make a mighty witness.

What a counterpoint to the message in that other park, facing that other national landmark. And what a travesty it would be for hate to poll 10,000 that day and love less number.

The Rev. Ken Humbert is a retired pastor in the BWC who has a passion for love and justice.

UMConnection 7

UMS gather Aug. 12 to stand against hatred and for love

By Ilyasah Shabazz

Sunday, August 12, on the National Mall in front of the National Museum of the American Indian 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Church-on-the-Mall, Gathering to make a difference, to answer hate with love, because silence is no answer at all. COME. With your whole heart. And your whole church. PLEASE.
recharging my spiritual batteries caring for the creatures at the museum, when the aquarist said, "Dottie, stop whatever you  do and come here now." No, it is too soon after Easter to do anything quickly, I thought, until it occurred to me. Yes, it is Easter Monday, the perfect time for a turtle miracle! (Isn't that what all pastors think?) And it was. The lid of the incubator was lifted back when I got there, with an empty turtle shell inside. One of the turtles had hatched, and the other was just beginning to. At about an inch long and with bright yellow spots, the hatching was surveying her new world around her. The life that had been developing and growing and persevering in the dark burst forth into the light. And everyone there who saw it, regardless of his or her faith or lack thereof, proclaimed the same thing — "It's an Easter miracle!"

I never imagined a tiny turtle would be such a powerful evangelist. But that's what Dash — that's what we named her — was that day. By the next day the second turtle hatched, though more slowly and needing some help from us. Her spots were even more pronounced, and we named her Dot (a proud day for me). A spotted turtle can have over two spots, and no two turtles' spots are the same. Each is a unique, individual, one-of-a-kind creature (that will probably work part time at the Calvert Marine Museum, and why spend Easter Monday there instead of resting from Holy Week as pastor do? Why ponder the theological significance of a baby turtle? For me, because this is the call God has placed on me; this is the ministry to which I am called. To care for God's creation, all of it, all of us. To consider God's people and the sparrows and the lilies, and to pastor to them all. Both my theology and my ecology studies inform this ministry to all of God's creation.

In his article, "Consider the Turtles of the Field," Brian McLaren describes emerging theological values that we all might embrace, not just marine biologist ministers like me. They are:

1. Increased concern for the poor leads to increased concern for all creation. The same forces that hurt the widow and the orphan, the elderly, children, and minorities, hurt turtles, trees, soil, water, air. These are forces such as greed, impatience, selfishness, arrogancy, hurry, anger, competition, Irreverence. When these forces are exposed and rejected by God's people, God's people and all of creation are then re-valued, re-deemed, and made sacred again. This includes the redemption of a tiny spotted turtle and her hatchlings. They are seen as the priceless creatures of God for which they are, not deemed worthless by a society who values a road through their wetland habitat more.

2. What Brian McLaren describes as an "ecology of decadence" is replaced by a gospel of the kingdom. This understanding of end times focuses almost entirely on God bringing us to heaven, beyond time, beyond matter, beyond this creation entirely. All of creation, therefore, is wrapped up like an empty candy wrapper and thrown in the trashcan. Creation is seen as the "cosmic backdrop" for human salvation; there's no continuity between this creation and the new heavenly creation. This "candy wrapper creation" is ultimately discardable, because, "Why get sentimental about a cheap container destined for the cosmic dumpster of nothingness?" This view causes as much harm as an actual discarded candy wrapper does, as plastic whose manufacture, incineration, and accumulation without ever biodegrading pollutes and poisons the land, water, air — and the communities who live connected to them. The gospel of the kingdom values creation here and now, and in and of itself. McLaren persuasively states: "In this kingdom, Jesus said, sparrows matter. Lilies of the field matter. Yes, people matter even more, but it's not a matter of either/or; it's a matter of degree in a world where everything that is good matters — where everything God made matters."

3. Finally, and maybe the most difficult to practice in our American culture, is the concept of private ownership replaced with an ethic of biblical stewardship. A capitalist economy is replaced with a stewardship economy. This economy of God's kingdom has very clear values, and those values have correlation with the ecological principles. That correlation is how I understand myself as a scientist and a person of faith, and the relationship I see between science and religion. When I realized the I cared about turtles in my science world were connected to the reasons I was a person of faith and vice versa, I realized I could accept a call to ordained ministry.

Those values, and the correlation to ecological principles, include:

- **Community** — seeing beyond the individual to the communal. This theological value is reflected in the scientific concept of an ecosystem, a community of organisms interacting with each other and their physical environment. A spotted turtle is an individual species, and it is also one species interacting with other turtles, raccoons and muskrats, and the habitat including the stream, mud, leaf litter, etc.

- **Fellowship** — sharing and holding in common with the community. The scientific concepts of coevolution and symbiosis reflect in some ways this fellowship. As two or more species change over time, they affect each other's evolution, such as the way flowering plants and insects have. Scientists classify some of these interactions as symbiotic — relationships between two or more organisms that live closely together. Some of these relationships are mutualistic; both organisms benefit in ways they could not if they lived separately.

- **Mission** — participation in God's kingdom for God's purposes. Scientists use the term "niche" to describe an organism's role in an ecosystem. When we alter or destroy the habitat of spotted turtles, we alter or destroy the purpose for which God created spotted turtles. And we act like we know better than God how spotted turtles should be spotted turtles. After Dash hatched, I gently picked her up and placed her in the palm of my hand. Spotted turtles are semi-aquatic, and it was time to introduce her to water. I poured a small amount of water and dangled her and watched her reaction. She put her head under the water and looked around, then began to swim around in her new watery environment. Yet another entirely new way for her to view her world. As she did, I considered this turtle of the stream, this creature of God, and I thought, now baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

*The Rev. Dottie Yunger is pastor of Solomon's UMC in Solomons.*