Remembering Francis Asbury

By Erik Alsgaard
UMConnection Staff

Bishop Francis Asbury was remembered as the “The Prophet of the Long Road” on the 200th anniversary of his death during worship at Lovely Lane UMC and ceremonies at Mt. Olivet Cemetery, both in Baltimore, on April 3.

Asbury, an icon of Methodism from its start in Colonial America, arrived on these shores from England in 1771 at the age of 26. He had answered a call as a lay preacher from John Wesley to go to America. At the time, there were about 600 Methodists in the colonies.

At the time of his death, on March 31, 1816, Asbury had ordained about 1,000 clergy and membership of the Methodist Episcopal Church, which he co-founded, stood at more than 200,000.

These facts are well known, said the Rev. Alfred Day, General Secretary of the General Commission on Archives and History, who preached at Lovely Lane to start the commemoration. However, Asbury’s message for today, he said, is just as important and often missed.

“He stayed,” Day said of Asbury. “When the war for independence was won; when British-born preachers packed up and headed home, British-born Francis Asbury stayed.”

Asbury’s endurance and persistence are not to be overlooked, Day said. “There was no mountain too high, no valley too low, no river too wide to keep him from spreading his version of the Methodist message.”

Asbury, Day said, was an effective leader but not a great preacher. A man who possessed keen organizational skills, Asbury’s genius was derived from his simple mission to bring the Gospel to everyone he met. One piece of American culture he abhorred was slavery; Asbury called it a “moral evil.”

And yet, Asbury made accommodations for slave-holding Methodists, mostly in the South, in order to hold the church together. Day said, “This haunted him the rest of his life.”

At the Christmas Conference of 1784, held in Baltimore, Asbury was ordained a Deacon on one day. Elder the next, and consecrated bishop the next. He became the leader of the new Methodist Episcopal Church.

The Rev. Cynthia Moore-Koikoi, superintendent of the Baltimore Metropolitan District, brought greetings at the cemetery on behalf of Bishop Marcus Matthews. The bishop was in Korea, attending the Namboos Annual Conference with which the WBC is in partnership. The relationship between the two groups goes back 130 years, when the Rev. John Goucher, then pastor of Lovely Lane, had a vision of taking Christ to Korea.

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John Strawbridge, a direct descendant of Robert Strawbridge, a layman who proclaimed Methodism in what is now Carroll County years before Asbury arrived, spoke at the dedication. Robert Strawbridge, John’s seventh great-grandfather, is buried in the Bishop’s Lot.

Asbury knew popular American culture long before anyone else because of his extensive travels, Day said. His mission was to make the Gospel relevant to everyone he met. One piece of American culture he abhorred was slavery; Asbury called it a “moral evil.”

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The Rev. Alfred Day, General Secretary of the Commission on Archives & History, looks at a model of Francis Asbury at Lovely Lane UMC.

BMCR meets in Baltimore

By Melissa Lauber & Larry Fryer*
UMConnection Staff

Standing before the 130 members of the national Black Methodists for Church Renewal, who gathered in Baltimore March 10-12, U.S. Congressman Elijah Cummings shared how, as a child, he could not come into downtown Baltimore because it was a segregated city and he was black.

“When Holy Meets the Hurting.” He challenged people to recognize that compassion comes through experience. “So often, out of our pain, comes our passion to do our purpose.”

BMCR is one of the denomination’s five ethnic caucuses. Its mission is to raise up prophetic and spiritual leaders who will be advocates for the unique needs of black people in The United Methodist Church.

Within the denomination, in the United States, 6 percent of United Methodists are black. In the
The Rev. Craig McLaughlin, of Mt. Zion UMC in Bel Air, will be the keynote speaker for the 2016 BWC Annual Conference. He will speak on the theme of the conference, “Let Us Love.”

MORE INSPIRATION

M’s family or origin was not a fan of the phrase, “I love you.” It just wasn’t something we said out loud to each other. I asked my mom why we never said “I love you” growing up. She was shocked. She said, “Have you ever for one second doubted my love for you? All these years, each day, have you ever for one moment thought that we did not love you?”

I had to admit I had not even doubted her love. She said, “We can say it if it makes you feel better, but if we already know it, if we love it, in my mind we don’t need to say it.” Jesus commands us to “love one another as I have loved you” and the idea that “God is love” both show us that love is an action word, a verb. It’s certainly not something so squishy and changeable as a feeling.

Love is something you do, like washing feet or feeding the hungry or visiting the prisoner. This is a liberating thought, because it means that we could even get better at love through practice, again without regard for something like how we felt about things.

Still, spiritual disciplines are a response to God’s grace and an invitation to that grace. In this dance of faith, the Holy Spirit has a way of “forming the Savior in the soul,” to quote Charles Wesley. Faithful actions put us at risk to have the hunger or visiting the prisoner. This is a liberating thought, because it means that we could even get better at love through practice, again without regard for something like how we felt about things.

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Asbury: ‘Prophet of the Long Road’ remembered

From page 1
beside these people: beside Francis, and John (Emory), and Enoch (George) and Beverly (Waugh). Besides Robert,

Strawbridge, Vice President of the United Methodist Historical Society of the BWCC, said that the gathering at the cemetery was to dedicate a monument, a word that means “reminded,” he said, “which stands firmly on the ground, but drawing from an ancient symbol that points heavenward.”

Also in attendance at the cemetery was Jim Winkler, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches, who brought greetings from its 38 ecumenical partners. The Rev. Emtora Branham, BWCC historian and president of the UMHS, spoke about the journey Asbury took, even in death.

After Asbury died in Virginia, his body was buried there. The 1845 General Conference ordered his remains moved to Baltimore, where it was reported that 20,000 people lined the funeral procession. He was re-interred at the Eutaw Street Church.

The 1845 General Conference authorized the transfer of Asbury’s remains to Mt. Olivet Cemetery, just southwest of Baltimore. It was at that spot that people gathered in the afternoon of April 3 to dedicate a new memorial to Asbury and the other bishops and pastors buried in what is now called “The Bishop’s Lot.”

“One of the highlights of the session was the Spirit Banquet, which honored five retiring episcopal bishops, Warner H. Brown Jr. (a native of Baltimore), Robert E. Hayes, Jonathan D. Keaton, James R. King Jr. (who will be a guest preacher at the June Baltimore-Washington Conference caucuses of BMCR) and Marcus Matthews. Matthews is the resident bishop of the Baltimore-Washington Conference. He retires in September after 42 years of ministry.

During his ministry, most of it as a leader in the Baltimore-Washington Conference, Bishop Matthews served as the founding president of the local chapter of BMCR, as treasurer of the National BMCR, was president of the Northeastern Jurisdiction BMCR, and is an honored Harry Hosier member of the organization.

The memorial for Francis Asbury, Enoch George, John Emory and Beverly Waugh is unveiled.

The Rev. Emory Branham, BWCC historian and president of the UMHS, spoke at the memorial.

The Revs. Michael Parker, left, and Tony Hunt share a laugh during a BMCR presentation on prophetic preaching.

Bishop Jonathan E. Kaston, second from left, of the Illinois Great Rivers Conference inspects a retirement gift while bishops Warner Brown, James King and Marcus Matthews look on.

LOVE ELECTED
The Rev. Tony Love was elected to serve as Vice Chair of the national Black United Methodists for Church Renewal caucus. Love currently serves as co-ordinator of the Baltimore-Washington Conference caucuses of BMCR and works in ministry as the conference Director of Vibrant Communities.

Baltimore-Washington Conference, 59,339 — or 25 percent — of United Methodists are African Americans. Twenty-eight percent of the churches in the Baltimore-Washington Conference are black and 29 percent of the clergy are African Americans.

Within BMCR, two of the emphases are servant leadership and prophetic preaching, said Willie Kynard, immediate past coordinator of the conference’s BMCR chapter.

To welcome BMCR to Baltimore, Kynard organized a project that drew upon Bishop Marcus Matthews’ initiative for churches to partner with local schools.

Kynard invited the Maryland Governor’s Office to participate and they responded by sending more than 300 books and art supplies to Furman L. Templeton Elementary School in Baltimore.

BMCR members then met at the school and read stories about African-American issues and heroes to the kindergarten and first graders.

“IT’s easy to paint a wall or clean up a building, but BMCR believes in reaching out to the community, to serving children, and to promoting justice and wholeness in authentic ways that nurture relationship and faith-sharing,” she said. “Church is about helping others, not ourselves.”

As the BMCR readers left the school, the teachers said they wished more “church people” would share of their time with the students.

During the BMCR plenary sessions at the old Masonic Lodge on Charles Street, members discussed the upcoming session of General Conference, supporting the Historic Black College Fund and saw the unveiling of a U.S. Postal Service stamp honoring the Rev. Richard Allen, founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

One of the highlights of the session was a presentation by four young adults clergymen on prophetic preaching.

The panel was led by

the Rev. C. Anthony Hunt, pastor of Ewing Chapel UMC in Baltimore. Among the participants was the Rev. Michael Parker of Ames UMC in Bel Air.

Prophetic preaching, Hunt said, “calls persons and structures back into relationship with God and paves the way for the coming of the reign of God.” It speaks to the hopes and hurts, he said.

Equipping young clergy to preach prophetically often requires mentoring and the sharing of learned wisdom, Parker said. In the Baltimore-Washington Conference, he pointed out, there are only seven pastors of color under the age of 35, and only two of them are female.

There should be more, and those who are ordained, need to be set loose in setting where prophetic preaching is valued and imagination and excellence have not been snuffed out, he said.

As a pastor with 15 tattoos, Parker said he has gained an understanding that he must pastor and preach from a place of authenticity. He advises his peers to do the same.

“God made you to be who you are on purpose,” he said. “Don’t lose yourself.” Having a mentor can help, he added, so can being willing to take risks and have fun.

“Every day,” Parker said, “should be something new. … God has every desire to exceed your expectations.”

A highlight of the BMCR meeting was the Spirit Banquet, which honored five retiring episcopal bishops: Warner H. Brown Jr. (a native of Baltimore), Robert E. Hayes, Jonathan D. Keaton, James R. King Jr. (who will be a guest preacher at the June Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference session) and Marcus Matthews. Matthews is the resident bishop of the Baltimore-Washington Conference. He retires in September after 42 years of ministry.

*Larry Hygh serves as Director of Communications for the California-Nevada Conference. Hygh began his communications ministry in the BWCC as a one-year Racial Ethnic Scholarship winner from United Methodist Communications.
In today’s world of church growth, vitality is something to which congregations aspire. But in the Washington Region, five unique congregations have begun to lead the way out, in the best ways they know, the Great Commandment and the Great Commission.

They love their neighbors and make disciples. On 4 April, Christie Latona, seen below, the Washington Region Resource Person, gathered the pastors of these churches together at Leadership Days for a panel discussion. In the music room of Reservoir High School in Fulton, they shared glimpses into the “crazy growth” God has brought them and the shifts their congregations had to navigate back in sync with God.

The word is ‘pastors’

Two years ago, the Rev. Armon Nelson, became the pastor of the Mt. Vernon UMC in Washington, D.C. The church is situated in a community with one of the highest rates of unemployment in the nation. Nelson spent six months surveying the poverty-struck community and asking profound questions of the congregation. Among them: Do you want a pastor or do you just want to pay someone to do your ministry?

He asked the trustees to take the locks off many of the doors. Noting that “the church was in a ‘food desert,’” he engaged the congregation in starting a hot-meals program and partnered with Metropolitan Memorial UMC, a more affluent church in Northwest D.C. More than 310 come each week to eat.

Nelson asked: How can we serve you, believing that in serving, the church was honoring God. He also set about creating a welcoming community. What is important is vibrant, healing worship that focused on healing and celebrating the good things happening in people’s lives.

“We understood that together we needed to become a witnessing congregation,” he said.

The word is ‘community’

The Rev. Mary Ka Kanahan pastors St. John United Church, a unique interfaith experiment begun in Columbia in 1969. Today, the 100-member United Methodist and Presbyterian congregation worships in Wilde Lake Interfaith Center. Many of her members are immigrants from Africa.

When she arrived three years ago, the church was in decline. Kanahan reminded them that United Methodist pastors are appointed to parishes and communities, not just churches. In the past 13 to 18 months, members have stopped focusing inward and realized that the church exists to serve the community, Kanahan said.

Developing relationships with people in the community is important, she said, noting that 1,700 luxury apartment units are being built nearby.

In addition to serving and meeting the needs of the community, the congregation has been working on revitalizing worship, including more global music, and nurturing small group studiers and ministries. About 70 percent of church members are in a small group.

The word is ‘spiritual’

The vibrancy of Goshen UMC in Gaithersburg is the result of a merger of two small African-American churches and the diligence of its pastor, the Rev. Shawn Wilson, who ensures the 500-member congregation is grounded in spiritual discipline.

Born and raised in a family bringing with United Methodist pastors, Wilson is in his fifth year at Goshen. “What’s lacking in the church gospel?” Wilson is frequently asked. He’s definitive in his answer: “We focus on the means of grace.” Prayer, Bible study and immersing lives in the Gospel is crucial. Shaping this word in a faith community provides a narrative framework for people. Bible study and prayer lead to serve, Wilson said.

The question is, he asks, “How do we pay attention to what God is saying?”

The word is ‘life-bringing’

At first blush, the 104-year old Chevy Chase UMC, in an affluent Washington suburb, might not have seemed troubled. However, as with many churches, there were currents of unrest among some in the congregation. "This unrest led, in recent years, to decline and budget deficits of almost $200,000.

But rather than stepping in as a new pastor and working to immediately fix things, the Rev. Kuldien Reynolds led his congregation through an analysis to discern “what God would have us do.”

What’s working? What brings life? What’s not working? What needs to be changed? What can be kept?

To fulfill their calling to proclaim the Gospel and make disciples, clergy must recognize their power and their boundaries.

Boundaries.

Led by Sondra Wheeler, a professor of Christian ethics at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C., the group considered how the priesthood is the world’s oldest profession, followed by medicine and law. These original professions, Wheeler said, make commitments to forms of human wholeness and well-being — pastors to salvation, doctors to bodily health, and lawyers to justice. With these professions, Wheeler said, make commitments to forms of human relationships. Friends are the other half of one’s life. Friends are the other half of one’s life. They share meals, conversations at Starbucks, are present at special events, and offer God’s love and comfort in difficult situations.

FRIENDSHIP, in this model, they said, “can be the pinnacle of human relationships. Friends are the other half of one’s self. A friend is the one to whom you open your soul.”

Relationships, Wheeler said, are “the foundation of human relationships. Friends are the other half of one’s self. A friend is the one to whom you open your soul.”

In small group discussion, the pastors considered these situations. Friendship can be seen as a model for ministry.

BOUNDARIES AND POWER

But these boundaries are not about transgression or sin. Boundaries are to keep you out of the wilderness, when you get a new reality, you can experience extremeness. “God gave us the law in the wilderness, that was better even than manna. God gives life in the wilderness.”

And, the panelists added, “when things die in the wilderness, when you get a new reality, you can experience God’s preferred future with less resistance.”

They also encouraged others seeking transformation to stay faithful and focused, and to remember the saying, “Make sure what you’re doing is fun,” Reynolds said. “Have more fun.”

Be Melissa Lauer
UMConnection Staff

From full-time elders with decades of pastoral service to new Certified Lay Ministries, it categories of clergy lead the 85 churches of the Cumberland-Hagerstown District. The diversity of their gifts and spiritual gifts is intensely broad.

But how many of them would “friend” you on Facebook? On March 7, the pastors gathered at Hancock UMC for a continuing education event where they explored how the act of befriending had less to do with knowledge of social media and more to do with ideas about ethics and clergy boundaries.

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The word is ‘being’

Abnormal was normal at Community UMC in Washington, D.C. The church, said the Rev. Jalene Chase-Sands, sits on a corner known for the past 65 years as a place where drugs and people were sold. As a former police officer, she recognizes the signs, the pain and the danger.

In ministry, you have to know what you’re getting into,” said Chase-Sands. “Hope was missing when I got there.”

She began her ministry by listening to the Holy Spirit. “God said, ‘love them and help them with their grief.’” She did that in the only way she could, by authentically loving people.

“I told them, ‘Community is our name and our mission,’” she said. “In my ministry, you have to be. Be. Be. Being. Believing.

Drawing inspiration from Howard Thurman’s book “Jesus and the Disinherited,” Chase-Sands found ways to be present in the community to work through spiritual expectations. “Ministry has to be an adventure,” she said, “something you have a passion for. I am in awe of God all the time.”

New realities
The participants listening to the panel discussion had several questions as they try to figure out how to take their next best step as they move from the “wilderness” to creating vitality.

In the wilderness, the panelists assured them, was not a terrible place to be. “The wilderness can be a place of extreme possibility,” Wilson said. “God gave us the law in the wilderness, that was better than even manna. God gives life in the wilderness.”

And, the panelists added, “when things die in the wilderness, when you get a new reality, you can experience God’s preferred future with less resistance.”

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Clergy learn about boundaries and social media

Consider vacation photos or the sharing of personal thoughts. Wheeler said. “I don’t use Facebook is like posting on the bulletin board in the narthex.”

Even subdividing one’s presence and only allowing certain people access to parts of one’s page can raise concerns.

The Cumberland-Hagerstown clergy concluded, “should offer devoted personal service, but not friendship.”

“Unfriending” people when one moves to a new appointment so that the authority of the new pastor is not challenged can also cause difficult issues, the pastors said.

Facebook is to be used in ministry. “We have to be friends with congregants,” said the Rev. Susan Boehl, who chairs the district’s committee on ministry, which sponsored the Boundaries and Social Media discussion. “But we’re learning and having conversation. That’s important.”

The Rev. Conrad Link, District Superintendent, said he strongly believes in the importance of continuing education. It is one of the strengths of his district and the clergy gather regularly to learn, share ideas and resources and network with one another.
Resolution 1

Rationale: This resolution is to make clear the members of the Baltimore-Washington Conference that we are unable to continue as a result of the financial difficulties experienced in the past year.

Budget Implications: None

For the past two Annual Conferences (2013 and 2014), the BWC used the Circles of Grace process to discuss and vote on certain resolutions. This year’s budget implications include the following:

• Developing new financial processes to ensure that the conference can remain solvent.
• Identifying qualified clergy and lay persons as guides for these participants.

Resolution: The Baltimore-Washington Conference Connectional Table considered this resolution, 27 members voted concurrence, 2 voted non-concurrence.

Resolution 2

Rationale: The Baltimore-Washington Conference Connectional Table considered this resolution, 27 members voted concurrence, 2 voted non-concurrence.

Resolution 3

Rationale: Recognizing that a change in pastoral appointment is an ideal time for a church and its congregation to do a substantial review of its financial and membership status, District Superintendents shall advise pastors who will be leaving their churches to ensure that all the processes are followed properly.

Resolution 4

Resolution 5

The Baltimore-Washington Conference Connectional Table considered this resolution, 27 members voted concurrence, 2 voted non-concurrence. By unanimous vote, it was decided that the Rules Committee would authorize an alternative resolution at the Pre-Session Conference April 30.
Feeding the homeless

By LINDA WORTHINGTON
UMConnection Staff

A

ny of us see homeless people on the streets and we generally avert our eyes to make them even more invisible than they generally are. It’s not that we don’t care, but we don’t know what to say, or we worry that any money we give will be used for drugs or alcohol.

“I don’t want to give them money and I felt awkward passing them by,” said Allison Gee, who helped spread the idea of making “care packages” to the Missions Committee and throughout the congregation at Chaye Chai UMC.

“Whatever their motivation is for panhandling,” Gee said, “they need help. What seems like your worst day, someone else is having worse.”

Feeding America, the largest domestic hunger relief charity in the country, provides assistance to more than 3 million low-income people in the United States, which includes more than 9 million children and almost 3 million seniors. Being hungry or food insecure is not necessarily being homeless, but being homeless is almost always being hungry.

The CCUMC Missions Committee began a food drive for items to include in care packages. The congregation was asked to contribute non-perishable food, bottles of water and individual servings of applesauce. During the winter months, they also contributed warm socks, which are put in each bag. Money donations are also accepted.

When the collection bins are full, various groups in the church, including the youth and children’s ministries, staff Ziploc bags. The bags included a plastic spoon and a note of the source of the food, but even more, it includes words of encouragement and that God’s love is always present. Initial funding was provided by the UMW and the Missions committee.

From the pulpit, the Rev. Kirkland Reynolds, the church’s senior pastor, encouraged members to take the bags on their daily outings and give them to those on the streets looking for handouts. To date, they’re working on the 800th bag that is helping feed someone who is hungry.

Gee and her children took 10 bags and began really seeing the person behind the outstretched hand or homemade sign around his neck. She spoke friendly words to him as she offered the food.

“I want my children to know about serving others,” she said. “I’m hoping they’ll see the homeless a little differently.”

Gee encounters some of the men regularly at an intersection or in Washington, D.C., near the Verizon Center; others she sees only once. She’s also met a woman near the Bethesda Metro garage. One man turned her down; he only wanted money, she said. “I’m sorry, I can’t help you,” she told him.

Last year, in wealthy Montgomery County, advocates, in an annual exercise, counted 891 homeless, including 35 veterans and 176 chronically homeless. That was 11 percent fewer than the total 2014 count was.

Of Montgomery County’s 195 medically homeless people last year, 110 now have homes.

Christ watches over cemetery

The Rev. Jay DeMent, center, and members of Salem UMC dedicate a new sculpture of Christ.

UPPER FALLS — Last fall, the trustees of Salem UMC decided the large red oak tree in its 166-year-old cemetery was dying and for safety reasons needed to come down. After removing all the large branches, a 30-foot trunk was removed.

The Rev. Jay DeMent and some of the church members were inspired. Why not make a sculpture of it? They contracted Paul Wielo from Steustatown, Pa., a chainsaw artist, to carve a sculpture of Christ, the Good Shepherd, to watch over the cemetery and the community.

Many friends and neighbors joined church members to watch the progress, which began in January and was finished three weeks later. On March 20, Palm Sunday, following worship, DeMent led the congregation to the cemetery for the sculpture’s dedication.

“Christ now stands tall on the cemetery hillsides” said family ministries coordinator Judy Jones.

Church partners with hospitals

Baltimore — Gwynn Oak UMC has recently become a partner in a pilot project for a new hospital program. When an elderly parishioner wound up in the hospital recently, the Rev. Debye Hinton didn’t find out until days later, an experience many pastors have had. “A lot of times people go to the hospital and they don’t think to call the church or they are too sick to call,” Hinton said.

Gwynn Oak UMC and others hope to build a direct link between the places of worship and LifeBridge’s hospitals, Sinai of Baltimore, Northwest in Randallstown and Carroll in Westminster. The link begins when a person admitted to the hospital consents to allowing the hospital to call the church. The trained faith liaison then will begin coordinating support services for the patients and their families. These might include providing transportation, picking up prescriptions or scheduling follow-up appointments.

In the long run, the hope is the new focus will not only save money but create a healthier population.

UMM distributes 20 tons of potatoes

FOREST HILL — A new United Methodist Men group has formed from the churches in northern Harford County, and they’re wasting no time becoming involved in “good deeds.” Their first community project was a Potato Drop, coordinated by the Society of St. Andrew.

A tractor-trailer carrying 40,000 pounds (20 tons) of Maine potatoes arrived at the Dublin UMC parking lot early on March 11. Approximately 40 volunteers from Dublin, Darlington, Deer Creek, and Mt. Tabor UMCS came together to make quick work of unloading the potatoes into manageable 50-pound bags.

They then distributed the potatoes free of charge to the greater Harford County community, both to families in 50-pound bags or entire pallets given to area food pantries, shelters and churches to directly benefit needy families in the area.

Grow your gift for others

WESTMINSTER — Not only did the community benefit from The Giving Project, but so did the church and ministries in other states. The Carroll County Times first reported the story.

The Rev. Michael Stranathan, a community pastor at Salem UMC, chose to participate in the Giving Project. His church knew the church had a growing number of military families and wanted to be sure their families were able to take the necessary steps to set up housekeeping.

Military Outreach USA, is a national organization, that incorporated Christmas and the new year. They were to report the results six weeks later, a time span the church believed it would not have to wait to see the results.

As of Jan. 1, 22 responses had been received and the $2,000 yielded $6,800 in generosity, according to the Times.

One church family multiplied the money with their own and bought gifts for a mother and her 3-year-old. Another helped a family with grocery certificates and paying for the installation of a new door.

Helped vets set up housekeeping

ARDEN — Arden UMC was quick to respond when Military Outreach USA sent a “blind e-mail” to houses of worship in the Frederick District, seeking help for collecting basic Move-In-Essential items for veterans moving from homeless shelters to permanent residences.

“What do we need to do?” the church asked.

The task was to collect cleaning supplies, toilet paper, towels and other items for 15 vets in the Martinsburg, W. Va., area.

Military Outreach USA, is a national organization, whose mission is to help veterans move out of homelessness. It has members in its Military Caring Network who can answer a call for assistance for vets when needed. To learn more and how your church might help go to www.militaryoutreachusa.org.

“I’m proud to hear of churches like Arden that actively provide for the many veterans that served our country and now are struggling for many reasons,” said District Superintendent, the Rev. Edgardo Rivera.
Lives shattered in the blink of a bullet

By Donna Claycomb Sokol*

It was three weeks ago this morning when I walked past my favorite chair with a cup of hot coffee on the table next to me and opened the pages of the Washington Post. It’s my favorite routine for a Saturday morning, one that normally encourages the calmness we seek for our only day off together. But Saturday, Feb. 10, was different because rather than reading about another homicide in our city on the front page of the Metro section, I was actually reading about someone who was once part of my community.

I knew Clifton as someone who came to our church’s shower ministry a few years ago and then to our Tuesday morning “Hope 4 All” group. Along with another church member, I took him to lunch on his birthday. I served Communion to him on Christmas Eve. I also knew one of Clifton’s roommates. He, too, had been a Shower Ministry guest and then a Hope 4 All guest. And so when I first read about Clifton’s death, my mind also immediately went to this third roommate who we prayed was still alive. We located him a couple hours later, safe.

But I’d never known anyone who was murdered. I’ve never read about a homicide that includes the name of someone whose story I know well. How could this be? The waves of pain and anger crashed again in my mind when I got a message saying, “Ivy died. Ivy. How could Ivy have died? Ivy is one of the reasons we started our Tuesday morning group. I first met her on a cold January day in 2015 when I went outside with a colleague to make sure everyone was okay. The temperature was cold enough to kill someone. When we peeled back the layers of green tarp and blankets, we found a cozy communal space holding a few prescription drugs, some food, and lots of clothing all covered with more blankets. It was Ivy’s space, Ivy’s belongings, Ivy’s temporary home.

And it was this image that captured our congregation’s attention enough to figure out how we could offer hospitality in a different way. Since then, a group of individuals have gathered every Tuesday morning with the exception of one. Each gathering starts the same, with an invitation to tell us who you are and what you have done in the last week to get closer to housing and/or employment. Everyone’s answers are recorded so we can hold people accountable the following week.

Two of them are now dead.

First Clifton and now Ivy. While it would not have surprised me to learn that Ivy had died several months ago — her body was so frail — she was doing incredibly well. Sheld put on at least 20 pounds, looked healthy, and had returned to our group a few weeks ago to start offering encouragement to others. She was housed but she came to tell others they could do it.

Just two weeks ago, she sat next to me. I can still hear her saying, “You cannot!” to another participant. “I’m in pain. You can do this.” She was overflowing with goodness and health and wisdom and triumph.

So, how could Ivy be dead? That was the question that kept going through my mind last Monday night only to later see this article being shared by another person from our church. Ivy had been shot in broad daylight. The one who was rebuilding her life one painful step at a time had everything robbed from her in the blink of a bullet. I’ve never felt this kind of pain when it comes to knowing someone has died. The tears of grief started to overflow on Wednesday morning after I successfully kept them tucked inside on Tuesday. How could someone who

Is the church ready?

We have to come to scoffing the Book of Discipline whenever it is convenient to appear someone from the LBGTQ community. True, we cannot judge the person’s soul, but we judge their actions by the Discipline, but most importantly, by the Bible. God’s holiness, inspired Word. In the article, the approval was, among other things, based on the word “practicing.” (T.C.) Morrow became

practicing-openly when she ‘married’ another woman. I find it hard to believe that Morrow is celibate in her relationship with her partner. Did anyone ever ask Morrow if she were a practicing homosexual? Marriage by two people of the same sex itself is a qualification as practicing. In Mark 10:6-9, Jesus confirmed what was written in Genesis 2:24-25, that a man should leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife. Perhaps those of us who still believe that God’s Word holds true and all other words are considered old fashioned. I say, let us be old fashioned. Instead of trying to justify sin, we better start preaching repentance of that sin. I know that I do not want any person to look up from Hell one day and say, “I am here because George Harpold did not warn me of my sin.”

Our nation is also deeply broken by our addiction to guns. Lives and families and communities are being shattered. The madness needs to stop. Changes in policy are needed. Will you pray for peace, please?*  

Ivy changed my life. I pray her memory is one of the last things I forget and that it also propels me to encourage our congregation to do everything we can to journey with people and prevent further lives from being robbed.

Donna Claycomb Sokol is pastor of Mount Vernon Place UMC in Washington, D.C. Reprinted and edited with permission from her blog at wordsfromwashinton.blogspot.com

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**By Rev. Angela Flanagan**

The millennials are leaving! The millennials are leaving! Just read one more blog claiming to have all the answers to why millennials are leaving.

“Mainstream churches are dying!” “Attendance is down!” “Where are the regular fillers?” “Doom and gloom.” It seems as though we are too busy picking out a gravestone for the church as we know it to notice that God is in the resurrection business. We are stuck on Good Friday (and we all know weekday services are poorly attended!) while God is calling us to be an Easter people.

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Q & A with Regional Resource People in the BWC

The Baltimore-Washington Conference is blessed to have several men and women, both lay and clergy, serving as Resource People for each of the four regions. We asked these four questions about their current ministry, and thought we'd share their answers with you.

1) What are you reading?

Rev. Bill Warshie, Resource Person, Western Region — One of my favorite readings is and has been “The Life Cycle and Stages of Congregational Development,” by the Rev. George Bullard. I use his material extensively with churches seeking to understand where they are and how they can or must change.

Sherie Koosh, Resource Person, Western Region — I’ve been reading Joe Daniels’ “Walking with Nehemiah” along with several of the Clergy Cluster Groups the Rev. Ed Grover leads in the Frederick District. It’s been interesting reading this with them and the using love Joe’s experiences in DC can be transferred to their areas in West Virginia. One of our pastors told us recently how the chapter on “Take the Risk” helped push her to step out of her comfort zone and speak up for inclusion before the City Council in direct opposition to clergy from other denominations. She felt validated in doing so when one of the other clergy commented that she would burn in hell.

2) What are you teaching?

Koosh — On the teaching front, I’ve been working with Pastor John Unger of Bolivar UMC in Harper’s Ferry (and the Lutheran and Episcopal churches there) to put together a 4-hour workshop we can take to different churches. It includes getting to know the Social Principles, helping the congregation identify one that resonates with them, and creating ways to address that issue, including best practices for advocating with local and state governments. We’re also reminding them they can identify needs in their surrounding community like MissionU3e and can use Readiness360 as a tool to help identify programs/areas their congregation is ready to work on/in. In addition, I’m working with a few folks on how the church can address the needs of families dealing with mental illnesses and additions.


3) What do churches need to know right now?

Grove — A consistent part of my teaching is personal spiritual discipline and nourishment. Clergy are, by education and training, focused on the care of others. Personal soul care is too often placed on the back burner while other pastoral and ministerial duties are left unattended. The business of pastoral schedules often makes spiritual discipline a low priority, which weakens the impact of pastoral ministry.

Cardwell — I'm introducing Hugh Halley's and Mart Sykes' "The Tangible Kingdom" structure and mission principles to the church, Community UMC of Cohutta, TK actually fits nicely into the United Methodist’s Nurture, Outreach and Witness with easy handles — Loving God, Loving One Another and Loving Our World. The Kingdom of God requires all three, not two out of three. So everyone has the opportunity to ask and reflect on these three areas of "low life." It’s giving us a framework for making Jesus followers while helping us embrace our call to be missional community. I’m also introducing “The City” — a social media platform for churches. It's going to improve our communications significantly and give us a way to connect with one another outside Sunday and church activities.

Latona — Two primary things: how to love better and what is required — relationally, spiritually, and tactically — to make the shift from membership to discipleship. In my consultative work within Greater Washington and Central Maryland Districts in churches of all sizes, the recurring low scores on the RE-forms 10-20 are in the areas of Dynamic Relationships (how well does our church form relationships and partner with another, gaurd and communicate ministry, how well do we handle inevitable conflict and Missional Alignment (how aligned are we around the Great Commission). This requires more in individual and corporate practice of the means of grace (spiritual disciplines), deep work on forgiveness and communication, and refocusing hearts and minds back on the Great Commission and Commandment.

4) What thing one do churches not know right now that they need to know?

Colbert — That the Southern Region has three Strategists, the Revs. Katie Paul, Rev. Stan Cardwell, and Min. Nona Colbert, who are eager to serve their needs.

Latona — Churches need to know that bringing people to their church is not the same thing as bringing people to Christ — especially if their church is focused on membership issues instead of forming mature disciples.

For more information or to contact any of the Resource People, visit bwccumc.org/about/our-staff/