

UMCConnection

Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church • Becoming fully alive in Christ and making a difference in a diverse and ever-changing world • www.bwcumc.org • Volume 25, Issue 12 • December 2014



Dear Friends,

As the fall leaves give way to the crisp cool air, we know that the Christmas season is upon us once again. Barbara and I would like to wish you a blessed holiday full of the joy, hope and wonder inherent in this special season.

Even when faced with the glitter of all of the secular commercial enticements or the dreariness of human activity, we, as people of God, must always remember to keep our focus on the incredible light and gift of that first Christmas. What a powerful night that first Christmas was! Yes, because Jesus was born into our world that night, we have inherited hope for each of us who once dwelled in darkness.

Barbara and I feel blessed being assigned to the Washington Episcopal Area since Sept. 1, 2012. Returning to the Baltimore-Washington Conference has given us more opportunities to once again feel the blessings of family and friends who have all helped us

to experience the special love and fellowship of Christ throughout the years.

In these months, much has happened. I have been privileged to travel the entire Area again to see how many of you live and serve in a variety of missional settings. I have seen our youth actively involved in community activities and I have heard from many of our churches how you have been faithfully confronting the economic challenges. We have prayed for one another and I have heard you share your commitment to becoming more alive in Christ and making a difference in this diverse and ever-changing world. We have seen how the grace of God has touched us all in our circles of life.

We pray God's richest blessings on you this new Christmas season and beyond! May we join the multitude of angels who erupted in joyful praise to God when Christ was born, shouting: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward all." (Luke 2:13, 14)

BWC hits \$2.1 million malaria goal

By ERIK ALSGAARD
UMCConnection Staff

IN THE END, it's more than just about the dollars.

Yes, \$2.1 million is a lot of money. And yes, congratulations need to be expressed loud and clear. You did it.

The Baltimore-Washington Conference, in mid-November, officially reached its stated goal of raising \$2.1 million in gifts and pledges for the Imagine No Malaria campaign.

You. Did. It.

But again, it's more than just about the dollars.

It's about lives. That \$2.1 million represents 210,000 lives saved; 210,000 lives touched (and more); 210,000 people who will be around to grow up, watch their children have children and, who knows, someday, maybe, one of the 210,000 may find a cure for this horrible disease.

210,000. That's more people than there are United Methodists in the Baltimore-Washington Conference. The cities of Frederick, Rockville, Gaithersburg and Laurel have a combined population of 211,496. In one year, United Methodists in the Baltimore-Washington

Conference, through the Imagine No Malaria campaign, raised enough money to save just about all those people who live in these cities.

Again: It's more than just about dollars, it's about saving lives.

And United Methodists in the BWC have shown when it comes to that, we put our money where our hearts are.

"What can I say but 'thank you!' and 'praise God, from whom all blessings flow!'" said Bishop Marcus Matthews in an e-mail to churches. "In the last year,

See *Imagine No Malaria*, page 3

... well said

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

By MANDY SAYERS
Pastor, Covenant UMC, Gaithersburg

WHEN I WAS a kid, Christmas was all about the presents. Favorite gifts from my childhood included a stuffed panda named Theodore that became a treasured part of my stuffed-animal family, and a purple bike with streamers on the handles and a basket on the front with a plastic daisy on it. Good times.

Things I did not look forward to receiving as a child included socks, underwear or decorative bath soap. Once, my mother got me a book about how to fold napkins. When I was 16. If you know me, you know she was being ironic. All I wanted for Christmas was a specific present that you could wrap and put under the tree.

These days, all I want for Christmas has to do with flipping the script on the constant barrage of consumerism and violence and tragedy that fills my Twitter feed and my CNN screen.

I believe the world changed forever because of the first Christmas, when God sent the Son to be God-With-Us. What I want for Christmas is to experience that gift in fullness and to share it with people for whom Christmas is just another Thursday.

I want us all to stand, wide-eyed and waiting, looking at the marvel of God-With-Us, coming to us not as a pop star or a man with a gun, but as the child of a blue-collar teenage mama.

I want to kneel at the manger and I want to get up different, to walk away changed. I believe the world changed forever because of the first Christmas.

And now, I want to let it change me and our church and our neighborhood. I'd like to sing "Joy to the World" as we change systems that oppress and as we feed the hungry and bring good news to the poor and set the captive free.

The Rev. Mike Slaughter, of Ginghamburg Church, has coined the phrase, "Christmas: It's not YOUR birthday."

This Christmas, all I want is for the Birthday Boy to get all HE wants for Christmas.



By DARYL WILLIAMS
Pastor, St. Paul UMC, Oxon Hill

DECEMBER IS ONE of my favorite months of the year. Two of my favorite songs seem to be played only during December: "All I Want for Christmas is My Two Front Teeth," and Mariah Carey's rendition of "All I Want for Christmas is You." These songs always get me thinking about what I want for Christmas.

If I were making a Christmas list this year I would want hope, love, joy and peace. I would start with hope because we must always have hope for a better future. No matter what circumstances the world presents us, as long as we have faith in Christ we have a hope for a better future.

Next, some extra love would be great. Love is what reminds us that we are God's treasured possession. Love reminds us that God is always watching, always cares and is always there for us.

Some joy is great for when times get tough. Joy is the warmth on the inside that keeps a smile on our face when the outside world is bringing us down.

Finally some peace would be great. When the storms of life are raging, it is great to have some peace. Peace of mind, peace of heart, and peace of spirit help all of us stay anchored in our faith even when the harsh winds are blowing.

Also, I want some more time. I want more time to share the Gospel with more people. I want some time to participate in service projects to make the lives of people better in the world. I want some time to participate in justice initiatives to give equal protection under the law to those who believe justice is not only blind but also too often unavailable. I would want some time to not just tell my loved ones that I love them, but to show them I love them by giving them the precious gift of my unobstructed time.

More hope. More love. More joy. More peace. More time. That's all I want.....

To see some other things I wouldn't mind having for Christmas follow @BWCUMC and @RevDaryl on Instagram.

... well said

... well said

EVENTS

Potato bagging for the hungry
Annapolis District UMM
Saturday, Dec. 20, 7-10:30 a.m.
Come to Eastport UMC, 926 Bay Ridge Ave. in Annapolis to help feed 5,000 needy families in Anne Arundel County with 45,000 pounds of potatoes provided by the Society of St. Andrew. Reply to rcampbell@bwcumm.org if you wish to reserve potatoes for your church or organizations.

Apportionments due
Tuesday, Jan. 13
Churches who have not yet completed their connectional giving for 2014 should submit their apportionment payments before Jan. 13. Questions? Contact Pier McPayten at pmcpayten@bwcumc.org.

Resolutions Due
Thursday, Jan. 15
Submit all resolutions and General Conference petitions to be considered at the 2014 Annual Conference session to the Conference Secretary, Rev. Mary Jo Sims, at msims@bwcumc.org. For more information, visit <http://bwcumc.org/ac-sessions/2015-session>.

Human Relations Day
All churches
Sunday, Jan. 18
Held closest to Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday, one of six Special Sundays with offering. The focus will be on the rehabilitation of youth offenders. Resources are available from www.umcgiving.org.

Leadership Days
Register today for leadership training throughout the BWC:
Jan. 24 in the Western Region;
Feb. 28 in the Baltimore Region;
Feb. 21 and March 7 in the South; and
March 14 in the Washington Region.
Learn more at <http://bwcumc.org/leadership-days>.

ROCK
Ocean City Convention Center
Feb. 6-8, 2015
Featuring Reggie Dabbs and music by BJ Putnam and Jimmy Needham. Added this year is an "Adults-Only Room" (for adults 18 and over without chaperoning responsibilities) For more information, visit <http://bwcumc.org/rock>.

Annual Conference 2015
Baltimore Marriott Waterfront Hotel
May 28-30, 2015
Registration is scheduled to begin Feb. 11, 2015. New this year, the clergy executive session will be held just prior to the annual conference session on Wednesday, May 27, 2015, from 2 to 5 p.m. at the hotel. The retirement luncheon, Extension Ministry dinner and laity session will also be held that day. Two preconference sessions will be held Saturday, May 16, from 8:30 a.m. to noon, at Damascus UMC, and from 2 to 5:30 p.m. at First UMC in Hyattsville.

ADVENT DEVOTIONAL
Prepare for the coming of Christ with this photo-based BWC Advent devotional by the Rev. Terri Coffiell. Visit <http://bwcumc.org/devotional-2014>.

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Melissa Lauber
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Alison Burdett
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Clergy explore ‘Emmanuel’ at Bishop’s Advent Day Apart

BY MELISSA LAUBER
UMConnection Staff

IT’S BEGINNING TO look a lot like Christmas. But within the church, United Methodists are taking the time for anticipation and reflection as they prepare to celebrate the coming of the Christ. On Nov. 18, Bishop Marcus Matthews called the clergy of the Baltimore-Washington Conference together for an Advent Day Apart at Trinity UMC in Frederick.

Matthews thanked the clergy for all they do in serving the 640 churches of the Baltimore-Washington Conference and led them in a time of learning, fellowship, worship and the celebration of Communion.

Together one of most diverse collection of pastors in the denomination, the clergy raised their voices in the ancient hymn “O Come, O Come Emmanuel.” The hymn served as the foundation for reflections from the Rev. Bruce C. Birch, Dean Emeritus and Professor Emeritus of Biblical Theology at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington.

Birch, a renowned Old Testament scholar, spoke and preached on the nature of Jesus as both fully human and fully divine.

The Advent tradition “claims boldly and unequivocally that the Christ Child, for whose coming we wait, is both the Son of David and the Son of God,” Birch said. “In this convergence is the heart of what Incarnation is all about.”

The Gospel of Matthew begins Jesus’ story with a genealogy, claiming him as the son of Abraham and David. The Christ child comes into the world

with a history, but he also comes with a context and that context is exile, said Birch, who recited the words of the hymn “And ransom captive Israel; That mourns in lonely exile here.”

That exile, Birch explained, is not merely an historic one. In 587 BCE, the Babylonian Army broke through the walls of Jerusalem and “from that moment forward exile became the ongoing story of the context in which we wait, generation after generation, for forgiveness, for hope and the coming of the Messiah.”

That profound sense of exile, Birch suggested, is summed-up in Psalm 137, when the Israelites sat down by the rivers of Babylon and wept because they could no longer “sing the Lord’s song in a strange land.”

Exile transcends geography. “It is the time when the songs don’t come from our lips. When we despair of hope and settle for survival,” Birch said. “Exile becomes the descriptive reality of the crisis of hope in every generation.”

But Advent provides a spiritual space to look for and renew that hope.

“When the community despairs of singing the Lord’s song, what is needed from the leadership in the community of God’s people is to give singing lessons,” Birch declared. The clergy applauded.

But what enables the church to sing to the Lord a new song? (Is. 42:10) On one hand, Birch said, we’re called to remember. “The community of faith has a memory; it knows what God has done.” But God’s grace is not just in memory. The prophet also tells us God says, “I am about to do a new thing.”

Memory, Birch stressed, “must

be coupled with vision. What God has done enables recognition of what God can do. ... Incarnation is the culmination of all God has been doing!”



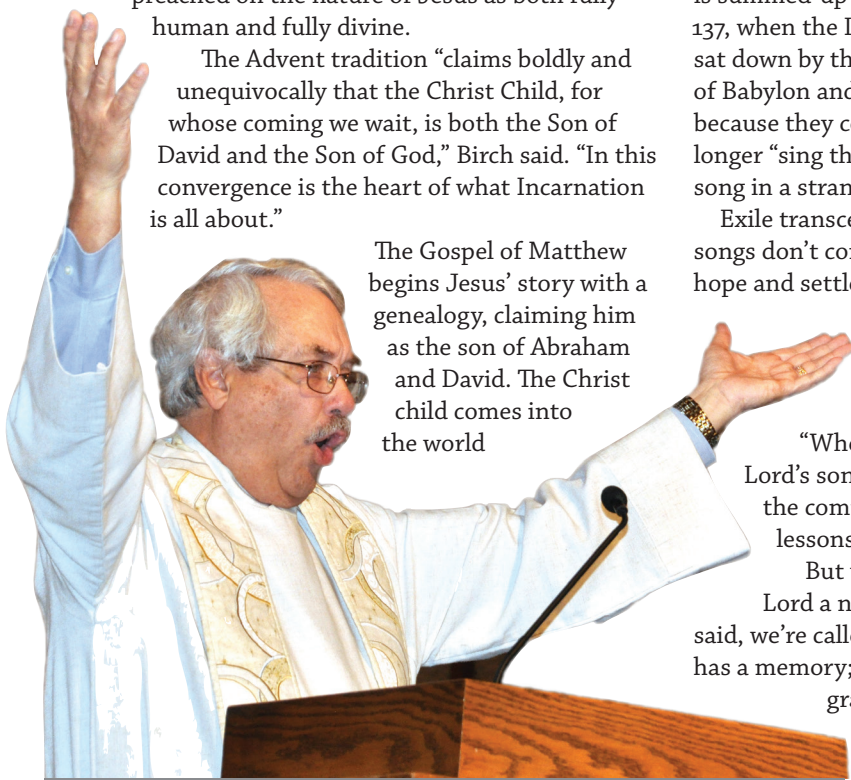
District Superintendents, the Revs. JW Park and Rebecca Iannicelli, serve communion during the Bishop’s Advent Day Apart held at Trinity UMC in Frederick.

But the anticipation doesn’t just end with Christmas. Advent begins a journey that passes through Lent and into Easter and the people of God travel it together, confident in the history of all God has done for God’s people and hopeful in what God will do in our future.

With a call to the church to “prepare ye the way of the Lord,” Birch prayed: “Make us singers of the Lord’s song, proclaimers of hope and salvation; love and justice ... restore in us the capacity for wonder at the possibility that the divine can become a part of our humanity and restore our resolve to live more fully as those created in the image of God.”

Bishop Matthews meets with the clergy of the Baltimore-Washington Conference for a time of fellowship and spiritual renewal each year just prior to the seasons of Advent and Lent. The next Bishop’s Day Apart for Clergy will be held Feb. 17, 2015.

Transcripts and Power Point slides from Birch’s lecture and sermon can be found online at <http://bwcumc.org/resources/resource-library>.



The Rev. Bruce Birch preaches at the Advent Day Apart for Clergy.

Imagine No Malaria: BWC initiative saves 210,000 lives

From page 1

many generous individuals and 450 churches pledged to make a difference in the world by taking on the treatable, beatable disease of malaria. Their giving came from children collecting coins in Sunday School classes, youth holding fundraisers in church parking lots, and from adults of all ages seeking to listen to God’s call to care for those in dire need. One church at a time, we connected over the past year to do a remarkable thing. We surpassed our goal of raising \$2.1 million in gifts and pledges to end malaria, and I have a feeling we may not be quite done.”

The Rev. David Simpson and his wife, Sylvia, were given the task by Bishop Matthews to chair the Imagine No Malaria campaign. Simpson said that it was the bishop’s words at the Advent Day Apart for Clergy on Nov. 18, in Frederick, that did the trick.

“Your words,” Simpson wrote the bishop in an e-mail, “were just what we needed to take us over our goal of \$2.1 million. To God be the glory!”

So many churches and individuals made sacrificial decisions to support INM that it’s hard to list them

all, Simpson said. (The list of 453 churches who have contributed is found at www.bwcumc.org.)

As of Nov. 25, Simpson said, \$1,251,897 had been received through pledges and/or donations. The remaining \$854,269 is expected to come in before the end of 2016.

“Churches struggling to meet an annual budget, churches in the middle of capital campaigns, churches who were already significantly committed to other worthy missions... all of them saw this as a life-giving witness and said yes to Imagine No Malaria,” he said.

Simpson said he was grateful for two things.

“This achievement did not happen at the expense of apportionment giving or sacrificing other local or regional missional needs,” he said. “This was truly second-mile giving. And many churches responded in faith saying, ‘I don’t know how we are going to do this, but we are trusting in God’s provision and abundance.’”

Simpson said, officially, it was a pledge from John Wesley UMC in Glen Burnie that put the effort over the top.

“I hope we are not finished yet,” Simpson said. “Just because we have ‘met the goal,’ we should not relax. We still have nearly 200 churches we want to encourage to be a part. We still need to encourage one another and resource churches to fulfill their commitments.”

Sylvia Simpson, co-chair of the campaign, said that this experience has given her great joy.

“It is not surprising to see the people of our great denomination willing to give of themselves with passion and compassion for INM,” she said, “but it is indeed, rejuvenating in mind and spirit.”

Churches or individuals who are planning – or who wish – to make a contribution, may do so by going to <http://bwcumc.org/ministries/imagine-no-malaria/>.

The United Methodist Church, as a denomination, has pledged \$75 million towards eradicating malaria

around the world. Thanks in part to its efforts, and in partnership with numerous other health-related organizations around the world, the rate of malaria



The National City Christian Choir sang in October to help raise money for Imagine No Malaria.

deaths in sub-Saharan Africa has been cut in half in the last five years.

Bishop Thomas Bickerton, of the Western Pennsylvania Area, has chaired the denomination’s effort since the start.

“The meeting of this goal represents a tremendous commitment on the part of the leadership of the BWC as well as the committed and dedicated giving of the people who sit in the pews of your churches,” Bishop Bickerton wrote to Bishop Matthews. “Their efforts, and yours, will go far to enable our church to meet its internal \$75 million dollar goal and its external goal of eliminating malaria-related illness and death across the world. I just wanted to write and acknowledge the receipt of this great news and to offer my personal words of congratulations and thanks.”



Young adults from the BWC participated in a dodge-ball tournament fundraiser for Imagine No Malaria.

Cumberland-Hagerstown clergy help flash flood victims

BY ERIK ALSGAARD
UMConnection Staff

THURSDAY, JUNE 12, 2014, was the last day of school in Clear Spring, Md. The forecast called for rain, but when it arrived, the clouds seemed to never move. In one hour, 7 inches of rain fell, three times what would happen normally in the entire month.

The water came rolling off the surrounding mountains, headed for Tom's Creek. To get there, the flash flood had to go through the downtown area. Buildings became islands; 20 homes were deemed uninhabitable; children were trapped in one of the schools until 9 p.m.



The Rev. Grant Spong hangs insulation in a basement.

The flood waters were so fierce that in several buildings, the pressure pushed out stone foundations. Basements and first floors were flooded. People were evacuated to makeshift shelters. Later, those that could found refuge in family and friend's homes; others were put up at a local hotel.

They're still there today.

Clean-up efforts are on-going in Clear Spring, and on a November day that couldn't have been more unlike June 12 – sunny with nary a cloud in sight – 19 clergy

members from the Cumberland-Hagerstown District spent a day putting up insulation, installing dry wall and siding, and lending a hand wherever it was needed.

The Rev. Conrad Link, superintendent of the Cumberland-Hagerstown District, came up with the idea. Rather than have another typical district clergy meeting, he said, he thought it would be better to hold a clergy day of service.

The closest United Methodist church to Clear Spring is in Big Pool, Md., about 7 miles to the southwest. The Rev. Grant Spong serves as pastor and said that some of the church's members are from Clear Spring. He reported the relief efforts to Link and helped to get the VIM (Volunteers in Mission) teams involved.

"Right now, we have about a \$50,000 shortfall on the funds needed to do the job here," he said, taking a break from installing insulation in the basement of a house. "That's probably our biggest concern right now."

Donations have been coming in from interested parties but not from FEMA, he said. "They're not helping us at all," he said. "We didn't reach their dollar threshold, their artificial dollar amount that you have to have for them to step in, so they said, 'too bad, so sad.'"

Pastors and churches in Clear Spring have pulled together, Spong said, one of the good things that has happened after the disaster. The local ministerium created and manages the Clear Spring Relief Fund, which pays for the materials and supplies needed for the repairs. They are also paying for the 10 families still housed at the hotel.

Bradley Horst, with Christian Aid Ministries, an Amish-Mennonite group equivalent to VIM, has been involved with the relief efforts since the start. His group has been working to repair eight homes and is constructing a new house to replace one that had to be demolished. He welcomed the help of the United Methodists.

"This is the first time that a group of clergy have shown up and tried to help. Emphasize the word 'try,'"

he said with a laugh.

Horst, who also owns his own construction company, was the ad-hoc supervisor of the clergy on this day.



Clergy from the Cumberland-Hagerstown District.

When asked what the target date for completion of the repairs was, Horst replied, "yesterday." He added that he doesn't like to give target dates.

"The home-owners ask me for dates," he said, "and when you're working with plumbers, electricians, floor installers that are all donating something, you can't say 'be here tomorrow.' They're all working this in alongside their own businesses. Some of these people have waited two weeks to two months for things to get done. It's a real challenge."

The Rev. Ray Roberson, pastor of the Mount Nebo UMC in Boonsboro, brought the church's disaster relief supply trailer. The church's Volunteer in Mission team was also there, having started work in the area in October, along with other volunteers from Harmony UMC in Falling Waters, W.Va.

"The local ministerium has been doing a heroic effort," he said, "raising money, dispersing assistance. The Mennonite community has been doing just tireless work since June."

Farr urges United Methodists to 'stop playing church'

BY MELISSA LAUBER & ERIK ALSGAARD
UMConnection Staff

TO CHANGE THE world, we must first change the church, the Rev. Bob Farr told more than 200 local church leaders in training sessions Nov. 7 and 8.

Farr, the director of Congregational Excellence for the Missouri Annual Conference, led three workshops, two in the Western Region and one at the Mission Center, on helping churches more effectively reach out to their communities.

In Missouri, in what some would consider the Bible Belt, Farr said, 80 percent of the population doesn't go to church; 60 percent doesn't identify as Christian.

"We are not living in a Christian culture," he said. "If 1956 comes again, we're well prepared." But unless we're ready to make substantive changes, the continuing decline and dissolution of United Methodist churches is easy to forecast and track.

"I'm tired of playing church," Farr said. "But there is a place for a Wesleyan voice in America and we need to claim it. ... Nobody will just show up in your church. You have to bring them in."

But in order to claim those not in the pews, the church has to realize that "niceness" should not be its highest value. Instead, genuine and robust hospitality is what is called for, Farr said.

People don't care what you believe, they want to be connected. "We don't need more friendly churches. We need churches that actually connect. It's not about greeting people; it's about connecting with them," said Farr. "We don't need members, we need missionaries."

To truly renovate, United Methodists also need to realize that successful churches no longer embrace the pastor-centered congregation but have moved on to the pastor-led congregation. The day of shepherd is over, the time of pastor-as-leader is here, he said.

"However, people are not used to pastors leading. They're used to pastors caring for them and keeping things calm and comfortable," Farr continued. Pastors

should consider, "when is the last time you've brought someone to Christ or into your faith community? How much time a week do you spend with people you do not already know? What is keeping you off the mission field? The number one task of the pastor is to be missional."

The laity also need to claim their role as disciples. "Everywhere you are is a mission field." Throughout their day, Farr said, people should be having conversations



Bob Farr makes a point during his presentation at Williamsport UMC.

and sharing their faith stories. "Is there a God and does that make a difference in my life?" That's the question the laity can answer, he said. "We don't need to do evangelism on street corners. Just invite people to the gathered community of faith. We'll let the Holy Spirit do the salvation, converting and convicting."

So rather than become overwhelmed by thoughts of evangelism, Farr encouraged those at the training sessions to "make friends" with people, but "with a purpose." It's important not to invite un-churched people to worship right away; for this group, nothing could scare them more. Besides, he said, "many of our worship services are really bad."

Instead, Farr suggested building trust and relationships with those outside the church. "Show some mutual respect, work slowly and become a model of

what the Christian life is like to other people," he said. "You gotta have your radar up, so start paying attention to what God is up to around you."

For those churches wondering about discipleship, Farr recommends concentrating on the basics: practicing radical hospitality, passionate worship, intentional faith development, risk-taking service and extravagant generosity. "If your people are practicing these things

you're on the way."

If a church is struggling, Farr recommends jump-starting it by focusing energies on improving the worship, hospitality or children's ministries. Most of all, "we need churches that are compelling," he said.

Those in attendance said they appreciated Farr's "down-to-earth" teaching. "I like the ideas that are being presented," said the Rev. Richard Baker, pastor at Walkersville UMC. "Why is it easier to go 600 or 700 miles to do mission and evangelism? Why can't we do that at home?"

The Rev. Jenn Webber, pastor at Frostburg UMC, agreed. "He's reaffirming what our purpose is," she said, "and that is building relationships. I'm encouraged to go back to my church and teach some of the ideas he's presented here today."

This was good news to district superintendents, the Revs. Conrad Link and Edgardo Rivera. "We all need ideas, opportunities and challenges for growth," said Link, who leads the Cumberland-Hagerstown District. "That's what Bob is bringing us here today. It's hard to hear some of what he has to say, but we need to hear it."

For Rivera, superintendent of the Frederick District, the training was "a good reminder that we need to get out of our churches and build relationships," he said. "This is important work to do."

Farr's trainings provide a number of practical, hands-on methods for reviving churches. More information can be found in his books "Renovate or Die," "Get Their Name," and his new book, which comes out next year, "Nine Things Effective Pastors Do Differently."

Nurse reflects on her ministry in the AIDS epidemic

By ELLA P. CURRY, PHD, MTS, RN
Special to UMConnection

DECEMBER 1, 2014, marked the 26th annual observance of World AIDS Day. It also marked my 26th personal observance of the day.

World AIDS Day began in 1988, which was the year I, as a registered nurse who had spent 12 years in critical care nursing, completed my Masters of Theological Studies at Harvard Divinity School and made the commitment to engage full-time in nursing with persons living with HIV infection and AIDS. I moved from Cambridge, Mass., to Washington, D.C., to serve in a city that was, and remains, at the vortex of a modern pandemic.

My first position was as a supervisor/case manager in an AIDS-dedicated home care agency. My patients were young men and women, very ill and stunned by the rapidity at which their lives were spiraling toward death. Yet they and their caregivers allowed me into the intimacy of their homes to learn about their disease in a deeply meaningful way that could not have happened in other settings. I remain forever grateful to each one of them.

In 1990, the Division of Infectious Diseases at the Georgetown University Medical Center offered me a newly-developed position to manage patient transitions from the hospital to home, hospice, or sub-acute facilities while preserving continuity of care in our outpatient clinic. That is where I spent the next 23 years as a Clinical Nurse Specialist, doing work that evolved as we improved treatment options, research and survival rates.

I describe my past 26 years as the most painful, meaningful work I have ever done. I bore witness to human experience at critical junctures: confirmation of terminal illness; despair at the loss of relationships,

jobs and a future; deep grief in permanency planning that codified the fact that others would raise one's children; devastating failure of bodily defenses and bodily functions; longings to return to one's home of origin to die; relentless leveling of brutal judgments from church and society that stigmatized disease and crushed spirits with overwhelming shame; and deaths in numbers that were staggering...I stopped counting as the number of bedside deaths, funerals, life celebrations, and memorials I attended exceeded 800.

I also bore witness to the resilience of the human spirit, the gift of reconciliation with self and others, and palpable peace when one feels prepared to die. Advances in treatment bring hope for the future, and those fortunate to have access to medication and care may experience nearly normal life expectancies. But our work is not done.

I approached this World AIDS Day with a heavy heart. I fear that this ongoing pandemic (2.1 million new infections worldwide in 2013, with 47,500 of those here in the U.S.; 35 million living with HIV) continues to slip from our collective consciousness. A 2010 poll showed that most Americans no longer consider AIDS a problem.

On Dec. 1, I walked to the Methodist Building on Capitol Hill to participate in the Board of Church and Society's World AIDS Day program. I intentionally walked by the Newseum to look at the 60-plus front pages of newspapers posted daily from each state and several countries. Only four front pages had words about World AIDS Day (Miami, Atlanta, Indianapolis and Minneapolis).

I wore one of my special red ribbons all day in the city, but I never saw another one outside of the gathering I attended. I was thrilled that a very large ribbon hung again this year in the portico of the White House. But

I can now say that I have had the disheartening experience of someone asking me, "Are you wearing that red ribbon for a special reason?"

Four-thousand one hundred people die with AIDS every day. Those are 4,100 needless deaths from a fully preventable viral infection. We have knowledge and experience to realize an AIDS-free world.

Do we have the historical memory and collective will to make it happen?



Ella Curry

Renewing HIV/AIDS Ministry

In 2015, the Baltimore-Washington Conference will be renewing its emphasis on HIV/AIDS ministries, announced Sandra Ferguson, director of Connectional Ministries. The Revs. Cary James of Sharp Street UMC and Brian Jackson of Randall Memorial UMC in Washington are the BWC's new AIDS ambassadors. They are currently conducting an audit of ongoing local church AIDS ministries. If your church has such a ministry, please contact Ferguson at sfergson@bwcumc.org.

Ella P. Curry is a member of the Dumbarton UMC in Washington, D.C. and a member of the Conference Episcopacy Committee. Her recorded sermon for World AIDS Day 2014, entitled "Lest We Forget," is available on the DUMC website.

Bishop calls for action at World AIDS Day observance

By MELISSA LAUBER
UMConnection Staff

ON WORLD AIDS Day, Dec. 1, while thousands of people gathered around the globe to "focus, partner and achieve," 4,100 people died of AIDS, just as they had the day before and probably will tomorrow.

This fact angers, saddens and inspires Susan Greer Burton, director of Women's and Children's Advocacy for the General Board of Church and Society, who called upon those gathered at a special observance to address the HIV/AIDS crisis with "an imagination of the heart," to dream big, and make a difference in the lives of those who are affected and infected.

"What's most important is not what we say today, but what we do today," Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton (D) told those at the observance in the United Methodist Building across from the U.S. Capitol building.

Norton, a delegate to the U.S. Congress representing the District of Columbia, was instrumental in getting a legislative rider removed from a bill that would prohibit the city of Washington from paying for needle exchange programs. The needle exchanges end up saving countless lives, she said, and reversed the spread of HIV/AIDS in D.C., which had the highest rates of this disease in the nation, rivaling Sub-Saharan Africa.

One of the ways HIV is spread is through the sharing of needles among intravenous drug users. Thousands of people died in the city because of Congress and its willful refusal to remove the rider. Today, cities and states can fund the needle exchanges; and approximately 166 cities in more than 30 states do. But more money is needed and federal funding is hung up in a legislative rider that prohibits funds to be spent on syringe exchange programs, she said.

In 2012, just two years after a 21-year ban on federal funding was lifted, Congress voted to again deny this source of funding for programs that provide sterile syringes to injection-drug users. The ban, Church and Society leaders say, runs contrary to scientific evidence.

It's also a matter of simple economics. According to the Centers for Disease Control, the annual average cost of HIV care per person in the United States is between \$15,747 and \$40,678. The cost per needle at the average exchange program is approximately 97 cents.

In 2012, The United Methodist Church adopted a resolution that calls on its members to advocate for the implementation and expansion of needle exchange programs in order to reduce the spread of HIV.

In a panel discussion, the Rev. Joan Carter-Rimbach, pastor of First UMC in Hyattsville, who works with the denomination's Global AIDS Fund, and public health advocates Ron Daniels and Jasmine Tyler outlined the benefits of the needle exchanges.

When IV drug users use these free exchange programs, they do not share needles, Daniels said. It is this sharing that could lead to them contracting HIV/AIDS or Hepatitis C. In addition, interacting with people at the needle exchange centers provides opportunities for testing, resources to seek treatment for addiction and assistance with case management if someone is HIV positive. People in the exchange also hand in their used needles, rather than disposing of them in alleys, playgrounds and other locations, which could jeopardize public safety.

Needle exchanges, they said, "are a bridge to treatment."

People of faith need to be pushing their elected representatives to see that federal funding for needle exchanges becomes possible, Tyler said. "The science is on our side. Lives are on the line."

"Locally and across the globe, this is an area of ministry with which our churches need to be involved," said Bishop Marcus Matthews of the Baltimore-Washington Conference. Since the epidemic hit in 1981, "the church has done much in AIDS ministry to be proud of, including the creation of the denomination's Global AIDS Fund. [<http://umgaf2014.wordpress.com>]

But while statistics around AIDS in Washington, Maryland, the nation and the world are improving, the toll HIV/AIDS is inflicting is still too high," he said. "This is important. More people, more churches need to be involved."

At First UMC in Hyattsville, Carter-Rimbach said, testing to see if someone is HIV positive is offered on a regular basis. It is the only testing site in Prince George's County housed at a faith-based center. Currently, she pointed out, there are about 1.2 million people living with

HIV in the United States and a fifth of these people are unaware of their infection. "Are you positive you're negative? That's the question," she said.

Prayer stations at the General Board of Church and Society shared some other statistics on HIV/AIDS:

- At the end of 2011, approximately 34.2 million people were living with HIV/AIDS.
- More than 30 million people around the world have died of AIDS-related diseases.
- In 2011, an estimated 2.4 million people became newly infected with HIV/AIDS, including 300,000 children.
- Every hour, 50 young women are newly infected with AIDS.
- The rate of new HIV infections among black women is 15 times that among white women.
- It is estimated that 16 million children have been orphaned by AIDS.
- People who inject drugs are 22 times more likely to contract HIV/AIDS.

"We have a lot more work to do and a lot of barriers to overcome," said Carter-Rimbach. "We need to address those communities where the epidemic is growing and we need to be nimble in our response."

Of course, Norton said, "we will not be satisfied until, worldwide, we have eliminated the AIDS virus. We want, and can get, an HIV/AIDS-free world."



Bishop Marcus Matthews views the AIDS quilt with Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton at a General Board of Church and Society event at the Methodist Building in D.C.

Manna House shares breakfast and hope in Baltimore

By MELISSA LAUBER
UMConnection Staff

WHEN SALEEM GAUHAR gets overwhelmed or disheartened with his job, he stops eating for a day. He fasts to feel hungry, and in that hunger, he’s reminded of the 55,000 meals the Manna House serves and the people who depend upon him to make it through the day.

He knows his small bit of hunger is not the same as those who live in poverty in the blocks around 435 25th Street in north Baltimore, but as the executive director of Manna House, it helps Gauhar identify in a small way with those he serves.

Service is a way of life at Manna House, which started 48 years ago as a largely United Methodist outreach to the poor and homeless of Baltimore. While the facility has broadened its scope and outreach over the decades, the connection with United Methodism remains strong.

Gauhar is the lay leader at Linden Heights UMC; several members of Lovely Lane UMC serve on Manna House’s board of directors and volunteers from Arnolia, Towson and St. John’s are at the house on a regular basis, sorting through and making sense of the clothes handed out each day from the clothing closet. In one year, more than 2,500 bundles of clothes are distributed.

Forty-seven United Methodist congregations are a part of the 83 donors that serve breakfast each morning at Manna House.

The dining room at Manna House seats 26. They serve 200 people each morning. They also offer showers, clean clothing, a day shelter, HIV/AIDS testing, assistance finding supportive housing and more. But their pride and joy is the Breakfast Club.

Manna House is the only place in the city that serves breakfast 365 days a year, said the Rev. Cynthia

Moore-Koikoi, superintendent of the Baltimore Metropolitan District. Seventy-five percent of those who eat there are homeless, living in cars, under bridges, in parks and in abandoned housing. The need is tremendous, but no one is ever turned away.

It is Gauhar’s vision to recruit enough church and other groups who will provide the food or pay for the meal and serve it to the clients. “We want everyone to join the Breakfast Club,” he said. “It’s a powerful experience to be able to serve people in this way.”

Providing breakfast for 200 people for one day costs \$450. Having outside groups take on one day of providing breakfast for hungry people would also free up vital funds for other ministries, especially case management, medical and housing assistance. “We want to put people on the path to independence,” Gauhar said.

On a recent tour of the facility, Bishop Marcus Matthews praised the efforts of Manna House and their willingness to reach out to actively engage with some of the city’s most needy people. “Giving of one’s self in ways that make a real difference in the life of another person is an expression of faith,” said Matthews.

The bishop encouraged every United Methodist to find a way to serve and lifted up belonging to the Breakfast Club as a significant and transformative ministry. “Christ calls us to make sure our brothers and sisters are fed,” he said. “Feeding and clothing the poor is a part of who we are.”

Matthews also applauded Manna House for the way they share Christ with those they serve.

“We know that people can be made whole again,” Gauhar said. “All our best stories here begin with our vision of Christ, who can make all things new.”

One of the many stories of transformation at Manna House is that of Mary Scheffer. Gauhar remembers her

first coming in as a woman of 30 to 35 years who looked like a person in her late 50s. She had been severely abused by her father and ran away from home when she was a teenager. She struggled with addictions. Gauhar remembers her large blue eyes. At Manna House, she learned about the love of God.

“I remember her saying that ‘something that had been chewing on her all her life’ was now gone,” Gauhar said. “Our work, with God’s help, is putting people on these paths to independence.”

In addition to serving as a one-day sponsor of the



Manna House receives a check from BWC leaders.

Breakfast Club, the Manna House is in need of casual men’s clothing. In addition, they are eagerly seeking a new or used van.

“Thousands of pounds of food is thrown away every year by hotels, caterers and restaurants and we spend money buying food,” Gauhar said. “If a new or used van was donated to us, waste could be reduced, we would save money and the homeless will eat high quality food.”

To learn more about or contribute to Manna House, visit www.mannahouseinc.org or give to 410-889-3001.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE



Bishop Marcus Matthews stands alongside Bermuda’s Premiere Michael Dunkley, center, at Centenary UMC.

Marsden UMC offers hurricane assistance

BERMUDA – When two hurricanes, Fay and Gonzalo, struck Bermuda, the United Methodist churches there that are part of the Baltimore-Washington Conference, received considerable damage. But that has not deterred the Marsden UMC members from reaching out to others in need as a result.

The church provides food vouchers to families in need and facilitates the cleaning of water tanks contaminated by the storms. With a grant from the United Methodist Committee on Relief, the church “is witnessing to the compassion of the global church,” said the Rev. Joseph Whalen.

Marsden received major damage to its roof and was without power for several days. “It is nonetheless concerned about reaching out beyond its four walls to extend the love of Jesus Christ to those in need,” Whalen said.

In November, Bishop Matthews visited Bermuda and worshipped at Centenary UMC, where the Rev. Dick Stetler is pastor.

Religion and politics meet in W. Va. churches

BOLIVAR, W. VA. – When the Rev. John Unger, an ordained Lutheran, came to Bolivar UMC a year ago, it had 11 members; today there are 40 and they share their pastor with two other churches, one Lutheran, one Episcopal. And each church has grown under his shared leadership. It is believed that his ministry to three churches of different denominations is unique. How does he do it?

“I’ll tell you that I can’t do it, not alone,” he said. “I recognize my limitations. But I believe that with God all things are possible.”

“If these three denominations can sit down and have Bible study ... and Communion and still go back to their respective positions and doctrines and traditions,” he said, “surely we ought to be able to do the same thing in our political realm.”

Politics is something Unger knows about. He’s also a state senator, a Democrat who has been the majority leader of the West Virginia Senate.

‘Princess Leia’ thanks church for its generosity



LUTHERVILLE – When the Rev. Carol Pazdersky challenged her two churches, St. John’s at Lutherville and Idlewyde to help feed the hungry, she didn’t know what a response she’d get. So to sweeten the pie, she promised her parishioners that if they collected 450 food items in October to donate to the Assistance Center of Towson churches, she’d preach in costume.

The congregation responded by donating almost 1,000 canned and dried food products.

Pazdersky came to church Nov. 9 dressed as Princess Leia, her favorite character.

Sermons from 35 years in the pulpit

REHOBOTH BEACH, Del. – The Rev. Tom Starnes recently wrote a book, “No One Knows When It’s a Good Day, and a Few Other Things I Have Said on Sunday Mornings.”

The book is a collection of sermons, preached over a 35-year period to congregations he served in rural, suburban and urban settings. The book is “not afraid to raise questions that challenge the very faith that is being preached,” said a reviewer of the book.

He is also the author of a memoir, “Through Fear to Faith: A Spiritual Journey.” Both are available on Amazon.com.

Retiree sets world record in tennis

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The Rev. Tom Brunkow who retired in 2006 continues to set records in tennis. Last month he and his partner, Bill Poist, took the silver medals as finalists in the 75 and over doubles event at the Senior World Tennis Championships held in Antalya,

Turkey. The event included 495 men and women from 47 countries.

He is the #1 ranked player in the world in his age group. During 2014 he played doubles in six major events with six different partners, where he won three national titles and placed second in three others.

Church feeds its neighbors for Thanksgiving



Members of Liberty Grove UMC in Marriotsville operate a feeding ministry, My Brother’s Keeper. At Thanksgiving, the need was great and the church responded with grace.

Be the Change pays debt

Baltimore-Washington Conference Treasurer Paul Eichelberger has announced that Be the Change Washington has made a payment of \$210,509.07 to settle a loan owed to the Conference, and a payment of \$562,475 to settle another loan owed to Metropolitan Memorial UMC in Washington, D.C.

Eichelberger also said plans were underway for the Be the Change organization to dissolve the entity. BWC Trustees will be consulted to act on behalf of the Conference in the matter since the bylaws of Be the Change Washington identify the Conference as the beneficiary of the dissolution.

The payments transactions were made possible after Be the Change received full compensation from the New York City based non-profit supportive housing developer, Community Solutions, under the terms of their May 2013 agreement. That agreement transferred full ownership of the North Capitol Commons development to Community Solutions as Be the Change ceased its involvement in the project.

Be the Change, a 501(c)3, was developed by a group of Conference leaders to create and provide permanent supportive housing to the homeless in Washington, D.C.

The Christmas app gift list for effective ministry

By JOHN RUDOLPH
Special to the UMConnection

WE LIVE in the golden age of media solutions. No longer is technology a luxury only for large budgets, nor should it be. Churches of all financial means have access to the support and tools of technology once reserved for the select few that could afford costly installs and software packages.

Twenty years ago, to outfit your office with a simple computer, word processor and printer would leave your finance committee uttering

everyone's favorite phrase: "capital campaign."

With the advent of the "app" age, Apple, Google, Amazon and Microsoft have flooded the market with useful tools. Every imaginable problem — even ones we didn't know we had — can be solved with an app store search.

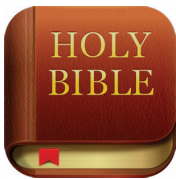
Best of all is the cost. Most mobile apps are either free or very low cost, assisting us in being good stewards of money and time.

Consider one of the most frustrating aspects of ministry. Statistical reports? Nope. Charge conference forms? Hardly. Working out the logistics of a counseling session or meeting? Jackpot!

Finding a mutually agreed-upon time to meet leads to voicemails, phone tag and e-mail exchanges. When you finally have the time set, something comes up. Everyone is sent back to ground zero of the when, where and what time.

At the North Carroll Cooperative Parish, we discovered freedom through Simplifythis, a scheduling app that works

across platforms. Now when someone needs to see us, technology does all the time consuming work: checking schedules, working out details. It even creates calendar events and sends out



notifications and reminders. I'm not trying to sell you the Simplifythis app; I'm not trying to sell anything; you don't have to buy anything and that's the point.

Recently, a group of provisional clergy gathered at our church for a technology workshop. During one of our sessions, we looked at Paragraph 340 of The United Methodist Book of Discipline, where Elders find their call divided into Word, Sacrament, Service and

Order. It's actually a daunting task to go through the list, let alone to live it out effectively.

We divided into groups and looked at each ministry task, taking a few moments to discuss apps that would help live out our call more efficiently.

The purpose of the exercise was

not just to list the apps; we engaged technology as a ministry partner and practiced these efficient ways to use media tools that are already at our fingertips.

Under "Service," we are called "to build the body of Christ as a caring and giving community." Leaders know that in order for ministry to take place, a great deal of time can be spent on recruiting, scheduling and communicating with volunteers. There are apps to help with ordering the life of volunteer ministry.



administrative tasks of managing ministry volunteers, including sending out reminders.

It works across multiple platforms at no cost, just another example of technology freeing up leaders to lead and having zero negative impact on the ministry budget.

Other favorite apps and inexpensive technologies include:

- Dropbox for file storage and file sharing;
- iTunes, Spotify and Pandora for worship;
- mobile phone cameras for visuals;
- Expensify for pastoral expense tracking;
- iPastor for tracking prayer requests and pastoral care;
- YouVersion for various interactive Bible readings;
- Faithlife for Bible study;
- Google hangouts for meetings;
- iPhoto and iMovie for editing content;
- Wiggio for team management and virtual conferences;
- Spreecast for live streaming video;
- Mixlr for live audio streaming.

With a simple search, you will also discover various apps for online and text giving.

In all we shared over 50 apps and ideas that day which help support ministry through technology. Using these resources can streamline any ministry, leaving more time to build the community of faith.

The Rev. John Rudolph is a pastor at North Carroll Cooperative Parish.

There's a fine line between sharing and vanity

By ALISON BURDETT
UMConnection Staff

VANITY IS A hard thing to avoid in this age of social media. A friend of mine has never created a Facebook page because, he said, it's used too much for vanity.

My immediate reaction was, "No it's not." Then he said, think about it: How many times do you log back in to see how many "likes" you got on something you posted.

Guilty.

If you're a tweeter, don't you love when someone re-tweets you? And how many times do you hope that people click that little heart in Instagram?

This is not to say that social media is bad. I use it to keep my family up-to-date on my life. Yes, I check to see how many "likes" I get on things I post, but I mostly look to see if my mom liked it. We use it at the Conference Center to aid in sharing the news of the church and in getting the word out about events. It is a vital communication tool for every church.

So how do you, as an individual, walk that fine line of sharing vs. vanity without crossing it? A more appropriate question may be: how do you, as a follower of Christ, share your day-to-day on social media without giving in to the sin of vanity?

Last year I wrote an article on gluttony. I bore my struggles with temptation and weight loss for many to read. Since writing that article I have lost more than 20 pounds. I am not saying this to brag, just to help you, the reader, understand where this is all coming from.

I have worked hard and I am proud of myself. I no longer run away when someone is taking a picture, and I no longer am embarrassed to have pictures of myself on my Facebook page. Does this make me vain? Can't I be proud of myself and how hard I've worked? Can't I share

the joy of the experiences that were photo-worthy?

I think the answer is yes. I can share those moments without being vain. The Rev. Kevin Baker, senior pastor at Oakdale Emory UMC in Olney, said something in a recent sermon that resonated with me. "Don't confuse your message with your method."

I can never do justice to the message of his sermon, so I recommend watching it on their website. However, what I got from it was that while our forms of communication change constantly, the message never does. My mission as a Christian is to live my life as an

example of God's love. I pray often that God uses me to show others the joy of God's love.

The other day, since losing the weight, someone saw me happily dancing along to a current pop song. It broke my heart that their immediate reaction was, "Oh no, now that she's losing weight she's going to become a 'Mean Girl'." Granted, I did tell that person that I used to be obsessed with my looks. I've always felt

overweight compared to other women my age, but the truth is, there was a period of my life where my self worth came from how others perceived me. It's a very easy thing to fall into.

But as a follower of Jesus Christ, my self worth comes from his love. Not my looks, not how others think of me.

Conversely, you can go ahead and call my bluff, because this whole article stemmed from how upsetting it was to me that someone would think my weight loss would change who I am as a person.

I am a self-described happy girl. I love carrying that personality trait. I have been happy while overweight, and I'm still happy now while also being proud of myself for my weight loss accomplishments. I would have danced when fat, and I'm not going to stop dancing now. This is who I am.

I'm not showing off, I'm not vain. I'm happy. I'm happy because God the father sent his only Son, born in a manger in the town of Bethlehem, to die for my sins. He has forgiven me for the vanity of my past, and he has paid the price for every other sin I have committed and will commit in the future.

My prayer is that while my appearance continues to change and forms of communications continue to change, God keeps sending me people like Kevin Baker to remind me that my method might have changed from passing notes to sending text messages, but the message that God put me on this earth to share, has not.

So I will continue to post on Facebook and show the world the abundant blessings that come along with a life in Christ.

Alison Burdett is the Multimedia Producer at the Baltimore-Washington Conference. She wrote this article with the hopes that just as Kevin was used to deliver this message to Alison, God will use Alison to encourage reflection within your own hearts.

Artist and his dog inspire D.C. church to new ministry

By ERIK ALSGAARD
UMConnection Staff

IN 2008, CRAIG Nelsen, an artist and resident of Washington, D.C., experienced the tragedy of loneliness. A neighbor in his apartment building, David, took his own life and no one noticed for days. It wasn't until the stench in the hallway became noticeable that Nelsen knew something was wrong.

"He was intelligent, neighborly, overweight, 50-something, gay, and he didn't have any friends or family that I noticed," said Nelsen. Authorities came to remove the body and all traces of David's life.

Nelsen snapped a photo of David's belongings. They had been thrown out a window and into the back yard of the apartment building.

In the two years that Nelsen lived near David, and during the whole clean-up process, Nelsen said that he "never saw a single person who could be described as a member of David's family, or as a friend of David's, come to our floor."

Nelsen believes that David died of loneliness.

"I believe that had there been a place for him to go — a community — he would be alive today," Nelsen wrote. "I knew David was in distress before he died, but I didn't act to help him, save for one tepid Christmas invitation. I believe that had there been a place for him to go — a community — I might have helped him."

Nelsen thinks that loneliness is epidemic in today's society, especially with the advances in the internet. People, he said, don't have to leave their house to interact with other people. But yet, something's missing.

So Nelsen began what he called "Buddy's Club," whose sole purpose is creating the places where community might exist.

"Buddy's Club is an effort to try and facilitate community," said Nelsen. "It's an effort to get people to have human contact with each other."

The only pre-requisite for joining a Buddy's Club, according to the group's website, <http://www.buddysclub.org/>, is the promise to eat one meal a day with another person.

"If you are a member of a BuddysClub, someone on the planet knows — and cares — that you are alive today," the website notes.

Enter Buddy the dog. Nelsen takes Buddy — a pit-bull mix — for daily walks. Everywhere they go, he said, people wanted to come up and visit Buddy.

Buddy's Club was called "Buddy's Club" long before Nelsen got Buddy. Nelsen also didn't name the dog Buddy; someone else did. He calls it "coincidence" that that happened.

We mentioned that Nelsen is an artist. So, he did what artists do: create a thing of beauty. Nelsen, in this case, created a mosaic of Buddy, four feet wide and eight feet tall, composed of more than 30,000 cubes of three-eighths-inch cut stone.

After creating the piece, Nelsen wanted to display it. So on or about the night of Oct. 4, Nelsen and his friends "installed" the mosaic at the National City

Christian Church on Thomas Circle. The photograph he used for the mosaic was of Buddy sitting in front of that church.

The only problem was he didn't have permission to do so.

That Sunday morning, church members were less than pleased to have been given the gift of the mosaic.

John Kelly, a columnist for the Washington Post, detailed the story in the Oct. 20 issue of the paper. Kelly interviewed the senior pastor at National City, the Rev. Stephen Gentle.

"At that point, we had concerns about the disruption it was creating and the potential safety hazard it created," said Gentle. "So we asked him to remove it."

Enter the Rev. Donna Claycomb Sokol, pastor of Mount Vernon Place UMC in Washington, D.C., four blocks from National City. She had read the article in the Post. If National City Christian Church didn't want to display the mosaic, she knew a church that would.

Hers.

And so, with the assistance of Bill Hillegeist, an active member of the church who had been in Nelsen's art studio a time or two, a contact was made. Nelsen was invited to display the art on the front steps at Mount Vernon Place UMC.

"Because of the trees, it's harder to see it here," said Nelsen, standing next to the mosaic while Buddy (the dog) sat nearby, eyes focused on a squirrel. Nelsen's goal is to create several more Buddy mosaics, each with a background of a different location in Washington, and then display the art in that location. The back of each mosaic would have information about Buddy's Club.

On Nov. 2, Nelsen and his partner were invited to Mount Vernon Place and spoke for several minutes during the worship service about Buddy's Club and the mosaics.

"I keep explaining to Craig that his vision is actually church at its best," said Claycomb Sokol. "It's also our vision at MVP: to live in such a way that individuals in the community know they are never alone."

The pastor said that Nelsen had painful experiences of the church as a child and is "in no way ready to connect with the church." However, she adds, "I cannot help but wonder how many people are just like him, longing for something the church is called to be at its best but somehow convinced that the church cannot possibly provide this because it's been a place of too much pain in



Artist Craig Nelsen stands with his dog, Buddy, and the mosaic he made of Buddy, in front of Mount Vernon Place UMC in Washington, D.C.

the past."

Nelsen has powerful things to teach the church, Claycomb Sokol said, and she's grateful for the new relationship with him.

"I pray we can all work together to offer places of hospitality and hope that provide assurances that no one is ever alone. Period. No matter what," she said.

"Craig's outreach is so similar to what we do at church," said Hillegeist. "We reach out to those who are home-bound, who need care and love and support when they're in need. All he asks is that people reach out to those who are alone and care for them and be kind to them. I think that's a beautiful story, it's our Christian story."

But, Hillegeist added quickly, it doesn't have to be a Christian story.

"It's a human story," he said. "People need other people."

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