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, United Methodists in the Baltimore-Washington Conference and the Maryland-National Conference, raised enough money to save just about all those people who live in these cities.

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)
All churches get all HE wants for Christmas. Theodore that became a treasured part of my stuffed animal family, and a purple bike with streamers on the handle 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 captives 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.

To see other things I wouldn’t mind having for Christmas, follow @BwCUMC and @RevDaryl on Instagram.

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

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.

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.


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

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Ancient church mothers and fathers often quoted one another with the phrase, “Give me a word.” This greeting led to the sharing of insights and wisdom. Today we continue this tradition with this monthly column.

By Mandy Sayers
Pastor, Covenant UMC, Gaithersburg

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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 captives free.

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.
Clergy explore ‘Emmanuel’ at Bishop’s Advent Day Apart

By Melissa Landry
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.”

But what enables the church to sing to the Lord a new song? (Is. 44:21) 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!”

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… let us in 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 Advent 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.

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, bearable 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 Imagine No Malaria end of 2016 campaign, Simpson said, 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.

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.’”

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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, renewing 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 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 INM initiative 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 575 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.”
Cumberland-Hagerstown clergy help flash flood victims

By Melissa Lauber & Erik Alsgaard
UMConnection Staff

The Rev. Grant Spong hangs insulation in a basement.

The flood waters were so force 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 change were able to go home. Those that couldn’t were put up at a local hotel.

They’re still there today.

Clean-up efforts are ongoing in Clear Spring, and on a November day that couldn’t have been more unlike June 12 – sunny with a cloudy in sight – 39 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, 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 told, ‘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 home stills 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 didn’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 are 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, as in some other states, Farr said, in 20 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 continued 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. It’s really hard to make a difference in people’s lives,” said Bob 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 pastor-centered congregation, he said, is the way of the future.

“If a church is struggling, Farr recommended a jump-starting with 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,” the Rev. Richard Baker, pastor at Walkerville UMC, said. “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 renewing churches. More information can be read in his book “Remove or Die,” “Get Your 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 F. Curry, PhD, MTS, RN
Special to UMCConnection

December 5, 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 spent 12 years in critical care nursing, completed my Masters of Theological Studies at Harvard Divinity School. I made the commitment to engage full-time in nursing with persons living with HIV infection. 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 stigmatized by the brutality at which their lives were spiraling toward death. Yet they and their caregivers allowed me into the intimacy of their lives 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 bare witness to human beings living with HIV/AIDS and dying of terminal illness; despair at the loss of relationships, jobs and a future; deep grief in permanency planning that defied 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 diseases 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 100.

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 (a 3.5 million new infections worldwide in 2013, with 2,500 of those here in the U.S.; 35 million living with HIV) continues to slip from our collective consciousness. A 2010 poll showed that Americans are uncomfortable sharing HIV/AIDS with friends and family. The ban, Church and Society leaders say, runs contrary to scientific evidence.

I fear this shared that could lead to them contracting HIV/ AIDS or Hepatitis C. In addition, interacting with people who exchange needles also 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 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 exchange 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:// umgofa1414.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 2,200 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.

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

• At the end of 2015, 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 2013, 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 HIV/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 humble 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.”
Manna House shares breakfast and hope in Baltimore

BY MELISSA LAUBER
UMConnection Staff

W HEN SALEM GAUHAR gets overwhelmed or disillusioned 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 expanded 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 Arnohn, 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 with bills, writing a day shelter, HIV/AIDS testing, assistance with bills, writing朋scheduled to settle a loan owed to the Conference, and a

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

Church feeds its neighbors for Thanksgiving

LUTHERVILLE - When the Rev. Carol Panderker challenged her two churches, St. John’s at Lutherville and Idlewylde 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.

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

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. The bylaws of the 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.
By JOHN RUDOLPH
Special to the UMConnection

What are the golden age of media solutions.
That 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
installations 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
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;
• Expenses 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;
• Spreakcast for live streaming
video;
• Not 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

I AM NOT a hard thing to avoid in this age of social
media. A friend of mine has never created a Face-
book 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 get 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’s 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 glutony. 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 is 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 knowing who he is. Not my looks, but 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
in the face 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.

There’s a fine line between sharing and vanity.

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UMConnection
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 stopped 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 there had 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 there had 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 Buddy’s Club, 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 Buddy; someone else did. He calls it “coincidence” that people wanted to come up and visit Buddy.

For Buddy, in Nelsen’s words, “it’s a human story.” He said, “People need other people.”

“People, he said, don’t have to leave their house to interact with other people. But yet, something’s missing.”

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.

“I keep explaining to Craig that his vision is actually for something the church is called to be at its best but we haven’t been given the gift of the mosaic. 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.

Claycomb Sokol, pastor of Mount Vernon Place UMC in Washington, D.C., said, “It’s a human story. I can’t 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 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.”

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.