Hezekiah House creates new space for new disciples

By Melissa Lauber
UMConnection Staff

Dream no small dreams. That’s the message Pastor Ginger Medley preaches as she continues to strive to create a new ministry movement at Asbury UMC in Shepherdstown, W.Va.

Asbury itself is strong, said its pastor, the Rev. Rudy Bropleh. But with Hezekiah House taking center stage at the church at 9:30 a.m. on Sunday mornings in the new Family Life Building, the church is responding to its call to minister in new ways and with new people.

It’s a vision of “offering strength for today and hope for tomorrow,” they said. “It’s a vision that is people-focused and Spirit-led.”

It’s also a vision that caught the attention of Bishop Marcus Matthews when he attended and heard the story of Ashley Walizer, a student at Shepherd University. Walizer had been to church a few times in her life, but fell away, said Medley who leads worship at Hezekiah House.

According to Medley, at “Hez House” Ashley experienced grace and became a new convert to the faith. “Her mother said Ashley’s light has returned. The light in her eyes has returned,” she said.

“It’s a special place,” the bishop said. “The story of this young woman’s baptism is a powerful one that illustrates the power of meaningful ministry.”

Bropleh, the senior pastor of Asbury, agreed. “She surrendered everything to God,” he said. “That’s the essence of church — that high moment when we turn everything over to Christ. Heaven rejoices.

“Lots of churches are program-driven,” Bropleh continued. “Our church is about people. One person came to God, Rippling and running, it makes

See Hez House, page 6


It’s a gesture in a continuing series of actions by local churches seeking to respond to perceived incidents of racial injustice involving police shootings that have recently taken place around the country.

As the headlines around these shootings fade, people of faith are continuing the conversation.

“The pains and wounds of decades of racial, economic and social injustice have come into play for everyone,” said the Rev. Rod Miller, chair of the Baltimore-Washington Conference’s Commission on Religion and Race. “The church has a unique place of trust in our society and it can be a place to hold the difficult conversations that need to be held.”

Conversation to Leverage Change

On Dec. 16, more than 100 people gathered at Capitol Hill UMC to consider issues of justice and race, “which continues to be the main dividing point in this nation,” said the Rev. Joseph Daniels, superintendent of the Greater Washington District.

“We need to have the conversations that get at changing hearts so that systems can change. … The church ought not tolerate systems of oppression.”

Daniels shared how, after the grand jury decided not to indict Police Officer Darren Williams in the killing of Michael Brown, he was too consumed by anger to even talk with his daughter. She wanted to know what she should tell the school children in her class the next day about the events in Ferguson, Mo.

Eventually, he recalled himself enough to answer: “Tell them to love themselves and to love each other and if they do that, it’ll go a long way in getting us where we need to go.”

The conversations at Capitol Hill were grounded in thoughts of recent events in Ferguson, a lack of indictment of a police officer in the choking death of Eric Garner in Staten Island, N.Y., and the police shooting of Tamir Rice, who died Nov. 22 while playing with a pellet gun in a park in Cleveland, Ohio.

“Most of the shootings take place in the margins; most of the oppression takes place in the margins,” Daniels said. “How does the church come back into the margins? How do we influence private industry and government to preserve life, to change life and give life an opportunity?”

Those present divided into small groups to discuss how the church can use its influence to bring about racial justice and reconciliation, and how the church can best bring its resources to marginalized communities so that systems can change and lives preserved.

In what was hailed as “first step conversations,” the remarks
**T**he phrase “Let it go,” for those of us with kids, is all about the movie, “Frozen,” and Queen Elsa’s song about releasing her gifts and being herself.

After hearing my daughter and her friends sing it 8,000,000 times, I’m truly ready, when it comes to this song, “to let it go.”

The sentiment, however, has its place. As we start a new year, we have the chance at the turning of the calendar page to make changes in our lives.

New Year’s resolutions are often about things we are going to do and to take. We may resolve to work out more, or quit smoking, or take on tasks at our jobs or stay on top of household chores. All that added work can feel like added burdens on top of our already full schedules.

I read somewhere that instead of a longer “To Do” list, it can be even more valuable to have a “Not To Do” list — a list of things we are going to STOP doing or NOT do at all. In other words, things and patterns that God would have us put down, give up or put away.

Perhaps we are being called to “let go” of old resentments or patterns or sins or self-talk that is destructive and unhealthy for us. Take the first part of January to pray about what God is calling you to release, in order to make room for what God wants to do and to be in your lives this year.

After all, Christmas is was about a God who intervenes in our lives and comes into our mess to save us when we could not save ourselves. If God is God and we are not, that’s some of the best news I’ve heard all year. Perhaps that means I can let go of the chains that Christ has loosed by his grace in my life. Perhaps I can accept that’s some of the best news I’ve heard all year. Perhaps

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# EVENTS

**2014 Statistical Reports due**

All churches Jan. 23, 2015

Sample tables, instructions, compensation worksheet and other materials are all available at www.bwcumc.org. Click on Statistical Reports.

**Leadership Days**

All regions Various dates

The annual opportunity for church leaders, lay and clergy, to grow their faith and improve their leadership skills is held in various locations and dates. Registration required. Go to www.bwcumc.org/leadership-days. The events will be held in:

- Western Region, Jan. 24, 8 a.m.-3 p.m.
- Baltimore Region, Feb. 28, 9 a.m.-4 p.m.
- Southern Region, Feb. 21, 8 a.m.-3 p.m.
- Western Region, March 14, 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

**UMM Annual Retreat**

Annapolis District Jan. 30-31

“Building Men to Lead Like Jesus” is the focus of the Annapolis District UMM’s

Leadership Training, which will provide training for leaders who want to start a men’s ministry at their church, ignite their men’s ministry, or ensure the passion continues for men’s ministry that is changing the church and community.

**ROCK**

Ocean City Convention Center Feb. 6-8, 2015

Featuring Reggie Dabbs and music by BJ Putnam and Jimmy Needham. The event is sold out except for seats for the “Adults-Only Room,” for adults 18 and over without chaperoning.

**Bishop’s Lenten Day Apart**

Trinity UMC, Frederick Feb. 17, 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

The Rev. Dr. Harold Rineson will speak and lead discussion on “Awake in the Gospel: Walking the Way of the Cross.” Registration is open to all clergy. Cost is $15. Go to www.bwcumc.org to register. Participants may receive 3 CEUs. For information, contact Joy King at Bishopmathessexoffice@bwcumc.org or 301-492-2555.

**In Memoriam**

Rev. Franklin Bailey Phelps, a retired Elder, died Dec. 25. Condolences may be sent to his wife, Mrs. Betty Bailey Phelps, 5903 Bing Court, Alexandria, VA 22315.

Rev. Ronald Carr, a retired pastor on the Frederick District, died Dec. 18 and over without chaperoning.

Participants may receive .3 CEUs. For information, contact Joyce King at Bishopmathessexoffice@bwcumc.org or 301-492-2555.

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Pastor Erma Dyson, a retired pastor on the Frederick District, died Dec. 24. Condolences may be sent to her husband, the Rev. Richard Dyson, at 5559 Wicomico Circle, New Market, MD 21774.

The Rev. Charles Donophan, a retired Elder, died Dec. 25. His last church was Wesley Chapel in Lothian in 1993. He retired in 1995. Condolences may be sent to his wife, Paula F. Meland Donophan, 1 N. Charles St., Suite 2525, Baltimore, MD 21201.

The Rev. Ronald Carr, a retired Elder and the husband of retired Elder, the Rev.orraine Carr, died Dec. 18 in Melbourne, Florida. His last church was Messiah UMC in Glen Burnie, from 1987 until his retirement in 1997.

Condolesences may be sent to her husband, the Rev. Roline Carr, at 2129 W New Haven Ave., Apt. 310, West Melbourne, FL 32904.

Louise Phelps, 97, the widow of the late Rev. Franklin Bailey Phelps, died Dec. 25. Condolences may be sent to her son, Paul Phelps, 5059 Bing Court, Alexandria, VA 22331.

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From page 1 and ideas were recorded and are being compiled for follow-up discussions and action within the district and beyond.

Clergy rally and pray

In Annapolis on Dec. 12, clergy led a “kneel-in and prayer” protest against the police shootings.

The Rev. Stephen Tillet, pastor of Auburn-Breadneck UMC and president of the Annapolis Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance, told the local media that while drug use and drug selling happens in Anne Arundel County in numbers proportional to that county’s population, African-American residents, who make up 13 percent of the area’s population, face more than 50 percent of the criminal charges. Those numbers reflect a system that has lost its moorings and that is operating in an unjust and immoral manner.”

Tillet and the clergy also called for an independent prosecutor to be empowered to provide over all grand juries where a police shooting/killing is involved.

Not a protest, but a promise

On Friday, Dec. 12, volunteers from nearly 30 churches gathered along 16th Street in Washington, D.C., to stand for justice. Hundreds of people lined the sidewalk of the street, which leads from the city’s edge to the White House. At Foundry UMC, just folks from the White House, dozens of members met in the church basement to prepare luminarias, filling them with sand and tea lights. 

Marching out into the cold night, the members and volunteers lined the street with their luminarias, lighting the way for justice. As traffic drove by, the church bells rang and volunteers held signs stating that they stood for justice.

After a few minutes, the cars passing by began to honk and wave in appreciation for their efforts, including public busbers. One woman pulled over and rolled her down window to thank those who were standing out in the cold to help raise awareness. She had her young son in the backseat and began to tear up thinking about if her son was ever in the type of situation Young Michael Brown found himself in, in Ferguson, Mo. 

Ben Roberts, director of social justice ministries for Foundry, said the General Board of Church and Society, along with other local churches who helped organize the event, contacted him to ask for his church’s participation. Roberts said the swear grew out of younger members of the church who wanted a way to be in solidarity with others around the country.

The idea for the vigil grew out of that as a way to it is wrong and to say that they want it changed.

The event came together in less than a week, with an outpouring of congregations from not only 16th Street but around the District coming together to pull it off. All who were in attendance were passionate about issues of justice. Nancy Gregory, a physically handicapped member of Foundry, sat in her wheelchair on the sidewalk near the street because “black lives matter and disabled lives matter.” She went on to say that she was out there for Ethan Saylor, the man from Frederick with Down Syndrome who was killed by off-duty policemen because he would not leave a movie theater. “For an $1 movie ticket, that’s now the price of a human life,” she said.

All in all, the event was a success, raising awareness in the District, as photographers and journalists from the Washington Post and elsewhere covered the event.

Church and state officials meet together

In Plaza, on Dec. 8, the Rev. Rebecca Iannicelli and pastors who live and work in Charles County met with Charles County Sheriff Troy Berry and Anthony B. Covington, State’s Attorney for Charles County, who is responsible for the enforcement of the law.

It is humbling to think that God has entrusted us with making these words — justice and mercy, peace and love — come to life in real and authentic ways,” Iannicelli said.

In an evening of candid questions and sharing, the group engaged in conversation about how faith communities can relate to governments and the local church can begin to make a systematic difference in ensuring communities are safe and justice is offered in all.

In early December, Berry was sworn in as the first African-American sheriff in Charles County’s 356-year history. Covington is also African American. Both were focused on the importance of having a police force and prosecutor’s office that reflects the community. About 52 percent of the Baltimore-Washington Conference residents are people of color. Currently, the state attorney’s office is racially diverse.

However, only about 20 percent of its police force is made up of African-American, Hispanic, and Korean officers, Berry said. He has pledged to broaden that diversity and to go after “the best and brightest” when hiring people to serve in law enforcement.

In a conversation on how many black men feel uncomfortable about being pulled over by police, Covington advised cooperating at the scene and addressing any issues at a later time.

Last Thanksgiving, he said, he was “pulled over by a police officer who was wearing a white police uniform” in Charles County.

“The police officer tried to tell me that ‘x-y-z’ was wrong with my car. He was trying to tell me what the law is — me — I’m the state’s attorney. I tell people what the law is in Charles County. But I knew I would not have won an argument at the side of the road at that point: You will never win an argument at the side of the road, deal with it in court,” Covington said.

The county officials and clergy broadened the conversation to what the church might do in the areas of law enforcement and public safety. Berry stressed that he believes information and perception is essential.

“People’s perceptions of us become reality,” he said. He urged pastors to invite police officers to their churches to share information, especially with children and youth about the dangers of drug use, a growing problem in Charles County.

The conversation between churches and police and legal officials, Iannicelli said, will be first of many.

“We want to have a conversation that is more than ‘the system is broken,'” she said.

“That understanding will lead to trust and serve as a foundation for peace and justice in our community. … When events unfold in the same situation, we often do best to act on the local stage and go deep.”

R esolutions to be considered by the members of the Baltimore-Washington Conference at the May session are due to the Conference Secretary, the Rev. Mary Jo Sims, (mjims@bwcumc.org) by Jan. 15.


Any congregation, clergy or lay member from a church who wishes to submit a resolution to the Baltimore-Washington Conference may submit a resolution.

Once submitted, the Conference Secretary will oversee the review the resolution to ensure its compliance with the conference rules and the Book of Discipline. If it has financial implications or amends the rules of the conference, it must be reviewed by the appropriate committee.

All resolutions will be considered by the Connectional Resolutions Committee at the meeting on March 7. The Table’s members will vote either concurrence or non-concurrence. This recommendation will be taken to the General Conference.

All resolutions will be published on the conference website.

Any questions about resolutions or petitions can be addressed to the secretary at bwcumc@qandaresolutions.org.

General Conference Delegates

At the May 28-30 session of the Baltimore-Washington Conference, members will elect up to six clergy delegates and up to six lay delegates to serve at the 2016 General Conference. In addition, six lay and six clergy delegates, along with four bishops and four alternate delegates to the 2016 General Conference. Delegates may also be submitted directly to the General Conference by UMC clergy, laity, and congregations. It is not necessary to first submit it to the BWC; that option should be used only if you want the petition to be submitted as a petition from the BWC.

Petitions from Individuals or congregations may be submitted directly to General Conference by UMC clergy, laity, and congregations. It is not necessary to first submit it to the BWC; that option should be used only if you want the petition to be submitted as a petition from the BWC.

Nominations will be accepted beginning Feb. 27.

All lay and clergy delegates and bishops must be members of the Baltimore-Washington Conference and must have a vote in the 2016 General Conference.

To be elected to serve as a General Conference Delegate, a delegate must be a member of the Baltimore-Washington Conference and must have a vote in the 2016 General Conference.

The deadline for submitting these forms is April 7.

The statements will be published in the UMConnection and on the website.

All clergy are eligible to be elected. However, the published statement will not be used as a basis for the election of the delegate. Because of the responsibilities and rigorous schedule required of the delegates, nominees are asked to carefully consider their interest in serving.

Our conference rules state that February and March be set aside in the conference for discussion of the qualifications and relevant experiences, which will be available on the BWC website Feb. 19. The deadline for submitting these forms is April 7.

The statements will be published in the UMConnection and on the website.

All clergy are eligible to be elected. However, the published statement will not be used as a basis for the election of the delegate.
More than 6,000 youth and their leaders from the Conference gathered in Ocean City, Md., Jan. 10-Feb. 1, for ROCK 2014. Using the theme “Got Love,” the festive three-day revival featured concerts, guest speakers and time for fellowship and reflection. The gathering also raised $14,000 for the BWC’s Imagine No Malaria campaign.

In Greenbelt, members of Mowatt UMC addressed the issue of bullying in their community by creating a bridge of caring and Christ’s love. The Rev. Fay Lundin, the church’s pastor, said that most of the students at nearby Eleanor Roosevelt High School have to walk over a pedestrian bridge to get back to town. One of her church members told her that students were being harassed and beaten up on the Greenbelt side of the bridge. The church took action by handing out cookies on the bridge and developing relationships with the students.

On June 23, exactly 175 people became members of the newest United Methodist church in the Baltimore-Washington Conference. The Mizo UMC was chartered on that day. “God is indeed good,” said the Rev. Joseph Daniels, superintendent of the Greater Washington District, as he handed the church’s charter to its pastor, the Rev. Biak Chhunga. The new church started as a fellowship in 2004, reaching out to immigrants from Burma and the Mizoan state of India.

Jane Grays, who was consecrated as a Deaconess during the closing ceremony of the United Methodist Women’s Assembly in April, and who was commissioned by Bishop Matthews during the Annual Conference Session in May, began her ministry with the Maryland Convictional Institution for Women in Jessup, Deaconesses and Lay Missioners — the male equivalent of a Deaconess — are trained professionals approved by a process established by the UMW and are consecrated, commissioned and appointed by a bishop.

The Strawbridge Shrine celebrated its 250th anniversary in June with a festive day of food, song and worship. Robert Strawbridge preached throughout the (then) Colonies in the 1760s, from New Jersey to what is now West Virginia, riding on horseback. John Strawbridge, a direct descendent of Robert Strawbridge, was in attendance. The Rev. Frank Schaefer, who had had his ministerial credentials taken away following a church trial for performing his son’s same-gender wedding in 2007, won his appeal, held at a hotel near the Baltimore Washington International Airport, and had his credentials returned.

Hispanic Heritage Month was celebrated Oct. 4 with a gaya festa at Hughes-El Buen Samaritano UMC in Wheaton. “If the church is to move forward, Latino minority has to be a part,” said the Rev. Eleverte Valentin Castellon, pastor at Trinity UMC in Frederick and chair of the BWC Committee on Hispanic/Latino Ministries.

Metropolitan Memorial UMC in Washington, D.C., was packed on Oct. 5 to honor and pay tribute to the late Bishop James K. Matthews. Eunice Matthews, his widow, now 100 years old, was present to help unveil a plaque honoring the couple. At a gala banquet just outside of Baltimore, hundreds of people honored the former racially-aggregated Washington Conference on its 150th anniversary. Created in October 1864 at Sharp Street Station in Baltimore, the Washington Conference existed until it merged with the Baltimore Conference in 1965. Bishop Warner Brown Jr., a product of the Washington Conference, now resident bishop in the San Francisco Area and president of the United Methodist Council of Bishops, was the keynote speaker.

The Judicial Council — the church’s highest court — upheld Bishop Marcus Matthews’ two rulings of law regarding the “Circles of Grace” process used by the Annual Conference Session, and if any of the resolutions on human sexuality adopted by the Conference violated the church’s Book of Discipline.

The Board of Child Care welcomed its new CEO, Laurie Ann Spagnola.
In the Year of Our Lord, 2014, we learned several things, including these: new words: “photobomb” (to interrupt another person’s picture by inserting yourself in it); “overshare” (as in giving out too much information); and “hashtag” (a Twitter hashtag used to criticize or mock another).

In the Baltimore-Washington church, the year began with a Baltimore church wondering how to recover from a massive fire and ended with the celebratory news of the Conference raising $2.1 million for Imagine No Malaria. And so, without further ado, our 2014 Year in Review, presented without one single photobomb. We apologize if this is oversharine; if so, please don’t use a hashtag when Tweeting about it.

On March 3, many BWC churches took including the Rev. Stephanie Vadder of ashions in front of a nearby McDonald’s, than 100 young adults from throughout having of fellowship, workshops, apel UMC in Belville, the day was sater, the Rev. B. Kevin Small, said, for authentic relationships. “Young are with outside of their race, strengthened its on-going partnership—the partnership is mutually inga, Assistant to the Bishop. said that its CEO, Thomas Curcio, would 1995.

Twenty-one members of the BWC travelled to South Korea to renew a partnership agreement with Methodist there. Bishop Matthews, along with Cabinet members and other staff, visited the South Conference Center in Daejeon to build upon a partnership that was started in 2003 to focus on building up young adult cultural exchanges and nurturing global on and ministry. shops Angeles, Los Angeles of a demonstration July 31 in front of lined with hundreds of other people nacted and enforced by the Obama Sector of Vibrant Communities, and the or of Global Initiatives.

In late April, several young adults from the BWC travelled to Newark, New Jersey, to help a home damaged Hurricane Sandy. was the first adult mission trip sponsored by the Conference in anyone’s collective memory. Also in April, the Rev. Adam Hamilton, senior pastor at the largest United Methodist church in the United States, said the first adult mission trip sponsored by the Conference in anyone’s collective memory.

Comedian/actor/T.V. star Robin Williams suicide on Aug. 11 shocked the nation, but it opened doors for people to talk about the painful truths of depression, loneliness and isolation in today’s society. The Rev. Sarah Schlechtart, pastor of Afton UMC in Martinsburg, W.Va., offered a poignant commentary after Williams death, reflecting on the suicide of her brother, the Rev. Dan Andrews. “I believe that if you are struggling today with stresses, illness and burdens that seem overwhelming, you can find help and live a life not controlled by those,” she wrote. “It may (and likely will) be hard work.”

In a commentary in this newspaper, the Rev. Jo Daniels, superintendent of the Greater Washington District, said this about the events of Ferguson, Mo. “This is a stark reminder to us: those who believe that America is in pain, racial or not, really need to take their heads out of the sand. Racism is alive and well. The militarization of the police against a segment of society which has deep history, anger and pain regarding those who wear the badge is not the answer. Never has been, never will be.”

On Dec. 1, a large group of clergy and lay met in the basement of Capitol Hill UMC to consider the issues of justice and race. Called together by the Rev. Joseph Daniels, Greater Washington District Superintendent, the purpose of the night was to have a conversation that “gets at changing hearts so that systems can change,” he said. “The church ought not tolerate systems of oppression.” The event mirrored several other gatherings and protests around the BWC, including a candle-light vigil on 24th Street in Washington, a “kneel-in and pray” protest in Annapolis, and a Dec. 8 meeting in LaPlata between the Rev. Rebecca Jensen, assistant superintendent of the Washington East District, and law enforcement and community officials.

On Dec. 2, tens of thousands of UMC members throughout the BWC gathered to remember and celebrate a baby born in a manger in the tiny, out-of-the-way town called Bethlehem. He’s the reason not only for the season, but for all we do in the Baltimore-Washington Conference.

The 230th Session of the Baltimore-Washington Conference opened on May 29 at the Marriott Waterfront Hotel in Baltimore. Meeting with the theme, “Building Bridges, Be Love,” was a huge banner spelling out “L-O-V-E.” At the front of the ballroom, lay and clergy members from 640 United Methodist churches gathered for worship, fellowship, teaching and church business. Conference members broke new ground when they suspended the rules that called for debate and participated in “Circles of Grace,” a process that used holy conferencing to talk about the five human sexuality resolutions that came before the Conference. A question of law was raised about the process, which automatically triggered a review by the denominations’ Judicial Council.

During the Conference Session, Bishop Marcus Matthews ordained 8 Elders and 1 Deacon, and commissioned 25 candidates. Bishop Kenneth Carter (Florida Conference), who preached both the Ordination Service and Memorial Service, along with retired Bishops Joseph Yeakel and Violet Fisher, assisted in the ordinations. James Salley, associate Vice Chancellor for Institutional Advancement at Africa University, served as the Bible study leader, using Luke 10:25-37 as his text. Conference members unanimously adopted a $17.3 million budget for 2015; affirmed the dangers of fossil fuels but postponed a response to the companies using them; postponed indefinitely a resolution on divesting from corporations making money from the Israel-Palestine conflict; remembered the 71 clergy spouses and lay members who had died in the previous year; and commissioned Richard Williams as a missionary.

As achieved in November, with the good news via e-mail to all BWC members, the campaign exceeded 200,000 lives saved. It came together in Clear Spring, Maryland. More than 20 families lost their homes in the fire. More than 20 families lost their homes in the fire. The Mid-Atlantic United Methodist Foundation celebrated a tripling in assets in the past four years. The BWC is one of three conferences in the MAUMF, which was created in 2010.
Hezekiah House: Strength for today and hope for tomorrow

From page 1

everything else, it makes it all worth it.”

Bropleh and the congregation of Asbury have been nurturing the vision for Hezekiah House for several years. In 2012, the Baltimore-Washington Conference gave its blessing to the creation of Hezekiah House, a new church start in the Charles Town/Ranson area in West Virginia.

However, advice from a church-growth coach and strategic analysis by church leaders indicated that paying rent for a facility and incurring other expenses for a distinct congregation would be an uneconomical use of resources at this time. Asbury UMC completed the new $3 million Family Life Building Center as an extension of its building, and the new modern, airy space lends itself well to the atmosphere and theology of space that Hezekiah House wanted to create.

In July, Medley (left) began leading the Sunday high-energy contemporary worship, which now averages about 32 in attendance. The theme of all they do is “hope, help and healing.” Everything in the worship — the liturgy, the space they meet in, the greeters, the sermon, and even the wardrobe of the preacher and musicians — is centered around the idea of “Welcome Home.” Medley said, “These T-shirts also say it in Spanish. ‘Bienvenidos a la casa.’

“It’s all about the people,” she said. “Everyone has a place here.”

Many of those who attend Hezekiah House, including most of the board, are from Shepherd University. Medley also leads small groups in nearby Charles Town, near Ranson.

Building a congregation that can be self-sustaining is not easy work. “College students often barely have money for pizza,” Bropleh said. Sometimes the new group also faces challenges from members of Asbury UMC, who are not always comfortable with the new way things are being done.

“But Hezekiah House is still an infant,” Bropleh said. “It’s six months old. When a baby is born, you don’t expect it to do a 100-meter dash.

“But overall, we’re handling things well,” Bropleh said. “We’re forward-leaning and forward-thinking. Your glory is not in yesterday; it’s in tomorrow. We’ll keep looking to tomorrow.”

Hezekiah House was named after King Hezekiah, the 15th king of Judah who ruled between 715 and 686 BCE. He repaired the Temple, enacted sweeping religious reforms in the name of Yahweh and was hailed as a great king. The Bible, in 2 Kings 18:5, says Hezekiah “trusted in the Lord the God of Israel, so that there was no one like him among all the kings of Judah after him, or among those who were before him.”

That sense of unique and fervent faith appeals to the people at Hezekiah House. “We don’t do ‘cookie-cutter’ here,” Medley said. “But we do offer strength for today and hope for tomorrow. That’s it. That’s what Hezekiah House is.”

As reported on WBAL-TV Dec. 11, the Ravens recognized them for their outreach activities to help poor and homeless people. Though the youth group, made-up of members 11-18 years-old, has a number of outreach projects throughout the year, the one that caught the Ravens’ attention was the Good Sam Project, which the youth do this time of year. Members packed and delivered bags of necessities for the homeless. The bags contain ingredients of food, Christmas was a little brighter. As reported on WBAL-TV Dec. 11, the Ravens

Making a Difference

Youth group sits front and center

PIKESVILLE — Did you see that group of young people sitting in a press release. The 6-feet square stained glass window was hand-crafted specifically for the chapel. It features Paul Kolanowski, whose family has performed for four generations and who is a grandson of the performance’s founder, commented, “Seeing that shining star really made you feel like you were in the middle of Bethlehem.”

Johnny Johnson and his wife Mary coordinate the event. Today, because of technology and experience, it takes a few hours instead of an entire day to set up the scene, recruit volunteers for the cast and obtain the live animals (sheep, goats, donkey) that makes the scene come alive.

Several years ago, when her mother was ill at Christmas time, Mary Johnson told the Gazette newspaper, “It really helped me get through that Christmas.” She wanted to express her appreciation, so when the church was looking for someone to coordinate the event, she volunteered.

Chapel and window dedicated to Poe family

LAUREL — The historic Poe family was honored at First UMC in September with the Poe Chapel dedication and installation of the Good Shepherd stained glass window.

The Poe family has been part of the church community for more than 100 years and Gertrude L. Poe, a member, celebrated her 99th birthday during the event.

The Poe Chapel was built as “an intimate gathering place for spiritual events and personal reflection,” said a press release. The 6-foot square stained glass window was hand-crafted specifically for the chapel.

The Poe family moved to Laurel in 1927. “Miss (Gertrude) Poe and her sisters have been instrumental in helping to preserve the history of Methodism and in the growth of this Methodist Church in Laurel,” said Gertrude’s great niece Vici Rodgers.

WW II veterans honored

HANOVER — St. Mark UMC celebrated their veterans at a special worship service Nov. 9. The service included the participation of retired veterans from World War II. Otto Duffie, MSG USAF, opened the morning with prayer. Dorothy J. Green, MSG USAF, spoke of her own experience in the Air Force and recounted strides and accomplishments women have made in the military.

Ron Davis, SSG USA, led a litany for Veteran’s Day.

For most in the congregation too young to remember the Normandy Invasion and Pork Chop Hill, Master of Ceremony Carl Rutledge, sSGT USA, gave a brief history lesson. An award was presented to Ellsworth Gaither, CPL USA, a survivor of Normandy, and to Earl Pott, CPL USA, who survived Pork Chop Hill.

The Message of Hope Choir from the Maryland Center for Veterans Education and Training (MCVET) in Baltimore, sang, a cappella, “America the Beautiful.”

The Rev. Herbert Watrous received a lapel pin that deemed him to be an honorary service member. “It was indeed a worthy and memorable celebration,” said Hillary E. Brown.

Bell ringers mix (very) young and old

CHARLES TOWN, VA. — The Aubay Youth Bell Choir, ages 2nd -5th grade) had the experts teach them recently. They sat in the front row while the Sixth Dimension Bell Choir performed a concert at the church Dec. 14. The Sixth Dimension is a regionally acclaimed bell ensemble. “The children are ready to get back to work for their performance in January,” said Kelli Polen.

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Heavy hearts sing an all too familiar song of lament

By Michael Parker*

“Southern Tree Bear Strange Fruit, blood on the branches and blood at the root. Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze, strange fruit hanging from the poplar tree.”

These are the opening words of the song made famous by Baltimore native and jazz artist Billie Holiday. It is a song that became both prophetic and important during a time when the fabric of our nation was woven and sewn together with cords of hatred, racism, injustice, pain and the consistent reminder that if your skin was anything other than white, and your gender was anything other than male, it was wrong.

Well, Billie Holiday has been dead for 55 years and no longer do we see people strung up on trees for all to watch, but I think we would all agree that the words of this song still ring true.

Our hearts are heavy because in a nation that people of color have worked tirelessly to assist in building, often times without compensation, we must contend with the numb reality that people of color are still susceptible to the stench of racism and hatred.\n
When my mother reproached because her empty womb had been divinely filled with the atonement for sin, other mothers lament and weep because their gifts from God were taken from them in one of the most inhumane and unjustifiable ways possible.

What shatters my heart even more is that Lesley McSpadden isn’t alone this year; there are other mothers that join the chorus of weeping for their lost children.\n
Sabrina Fulton is still in that choir. Eric Garner’s mother is in that choir. Samaria Rice, mother of 12-year-old Tamir Rice, is in that choir.\n
And there are countless mothers whose names we will never know that are also adding their voices to the songs of lament over the loss of their gifts from God.\n
For four and a half hours, Michael Brown’s lifeless body laid in the middle of today’s poplar tree, the cement, as no medic or emergency response teams were summoned to the scene. Our hearts are shattered because we understand that his death was not just felt by his family, but it was felt by all of us who descend from African roots, and many of us asked God the chilling question, “When will this stop?”

As if the sting of the judicial blade was not enough, we then had to listen to the man that Maryland elected to be our next governor say that the decision in Ferguson had nothing to do with us here in Maryland.

Nothing is further from the truth.\n
The same situation could (and has) happened on Maryland soil. Martin Luther King Jr., said, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere,” and we are living in a time in which nobody — Black, White, male, female, gay, straight, young, old, rich, poor, Republican, Democrat, liberal or conservative — is safe from the pains and ills of our nation.

The breaking news broke our hearts as we heard that another child’s life would be counted as just another number and not, as we in The United Methodist Church say, a life “of sacred worth.”

The saints used to sing a song that said, “If we ever needed the Lord before, we sure do need Him now.” Here we are in the midst of troubling times, and yet, and still, there’s good news.

The good news is that God has not forsaken us. God does not ignore us. And certainly, God still loves us with an everlasting love that removes itself with the rising of the sun every morning. God still provides every need we bring before Him. God’s grace is still on assignment to cover a multitude of sins. God’s favor still rests on us, even though the favor of the land is absent.

That love was made manifest and tangible for us years ago when Jesus, the seed of David, the Lamb of God; Jesus, the atonement of our sin, entered the scenes of our world. Now, for us who were unable to do for ourselves and introduced us to a relationship that still remains unmatched.

It is out of this conviction that God calls us to fight for justice, build a Kingdom with which God can be pleased, and validate the existence of all humankind. As Marvin Gaye sang, “Mother, Mother, there’s too many of you crying. Brother, Brother, Brother, there’s too far many of you dying. You know we’ve got to find a way to bring some lovin’ here today!” Yeah!

*Michael Parker II is lead pastor at Ames UMC in Bel Air, Md.
"Welcome." It’s a phrase Bishop Marcus Matthews and leaders of the Baltimore-Washington Conference hope United Methodists will be learning in the coming year.

“If we are to be the church of God, welcoming all people, we must speak the language of those just outside our doors,” the bishop said.

“In Montgomery County, more 5-year-olds now speak Spanish than speak English,” Bishop Matthews said. County officials reported that in 2014, Hispanic children accounted for 32 percent of all kindergartners. “What implications does this have for today’s Sunday School classes and for tomorrow’s church?” the bishop asked. “Throughout our conference, we increasingly need to speak Spanish if we want to talk with our neighbors.”

Leo Rodriguez, the BWC director of Hispanic/Latino Ministries, and the conference Committee on Hispanic Ministries is available to assist churches that want to expand their welcome to the Hispanic community. “It is important that in reaching out, we learn more than just language. We must also learn about culture,” Rodriguez said. Contact him at lrodriguez@bwcumc.org.

For this new year, we offer a brief primer to introduce words and see where God leads.

Just a note on pronunciation: In English there are five vowel sounds and each is pronounced in only one way.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sound</th>
<th>Pronunciation</th>
<th>Example in English</th>
<th>Example in Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>“ah”</td>
<td>like father or saw in English</td>
<td>en, a, aga</td>
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<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>“eh”</td>
<td>like bed or fed; bee; i</td>
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<td>I</td>
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<td>like bee or leaf, i</td>
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<td>O</td>
<td>“oh”</td>
<td>like low, know; loco</td>
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<td>U</td>
<td>“oo”</td>
<td>like sue, do, grupo</td>
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Advent birth gives this parsonage family a story to tell

By Melissa Laub
U麦Connection Staff

It is a Christmas he will always remember. In the moments surrounding his daughter’s birth, Pastor Kyle Durbin was running across the church yard. He could hear his congregation singing “Hark the Herald Angels Sing.” Just minutes before, on Dec. 3, he was standing in the pulpit at Centenary UMC in Shady Side at a Wednesday night worship service.

He had been monitoring his cell phone all evening but turned it off to preach. When he sat down, he turned the phone back on and saw a myriad of text and phone messages from Joanna, his wife, who was going into labor in the parsonage next door.

The music director took over the service and Durbin dashed to her side. Harrison, 3, was helping his mother stay calm, but Kyle immediately called the fire department, two houses down the road.

Within minutes, paramedics were at the house, but it was too late to try to get to a hospital. The baby was on her way. Joanna lay down in a small hallway. It was 7:02 p.m. when Kyle left the church and at 7:16 p.m., Penelope Joy Lynn entered the world — 6 pounds, 12 ounces, healthy and happy — a Christmas miracle.

The family rode to the hospital, where mother and baby were checked out. On Friday they returned home about 20 minutes before the church Christmas play was to begin. Kyle had written the play. Both new parents went and played their parts.

Throughout it all, there has been much rejoicing. Durbin said he couldn’t help noting the similarities between the birth narratives. “But instead of shepherds, we had paramedics; instead of a stable, we had the parsonage; instead of wise men, we’ve had visitors from the congregation come with gifts,” he said.

Harrison is thrilled with his new baby sister. He can tell you all about the safari animals Santa brought him for Christmas. And he can also tell the story of Penelope’s birth, and what a big help he was to his mother.

“Waiting on the coming of the baby takes on whole new meaning this Advent,” Durbin concluded. “There’s been plenty of reason in his home for the Herald Angels to sing.

The congregation, which Durbin has served since July, has also been extremely helpful, he said. “We couldn’t ask for more.”

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