Severna Park builds haven for Baltimore women

By Melissa Lauber
UMConnection Staff

Two years ago, the property at 9720 Wilkens Ave. in Baltimore was boarded up and abandoned. But on Feb. 17, the congregation of Severna Park UMC claimed the house for Christ. Their prayers of blessing followed two intense years of rebuilding, renovation, decorating and following the nudges of the Holy Spirit, which seemed to lead every step of the way, said Nicole Christopher, the church’s minister of missions.

In a collaborative, ecumenical spirit, the row house was given new life and has become Brigitte’s Place, a day shelter for women in need. There are women in the Wilkens Avenue area who are homeless. Women who are addicted to heroin, the drug of choice; women who are both held accountable to and benefit from the connection with the entire worldwide Church.

The Trust Clause was written into the denomination’s polity in 1797 by its founder John Wesley. It essentially states that while a congregation holds the title of a local church, they hold it “in trust” for the entire United Methodist Church. If a congregation leaves the denomination, its property remains with the annual conference. “The Trust Clause is an outgrowth of how we see ourselves as a family,” said Baltimore-Washington Conference Chancellor Thomas Starnes, who testified at the hearing along with Bishop Marcus Matthews, Conference Lay Leader Delores Martin and Conference Trustee President the Rev. Antoine Love. Even if the repeal passed, it would not change the church law, Starnes stressed. However, the statute’s presence in state law “promotes the certainty of title and provides guidance for from their connection with the entire worldwide Church.”

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The Word is ... Listen!

Ancient church mothers and fathers often greeted one another with the phrase, "Give me a word." This greeting led to the sharing of insights and wisdom. Today we continue this tradition with this monthly column. Voice your thoughts on the word at www.facebook.com/bwvcumc.

By Mandy Sayers

Life is a SEASON for listening - a time for turning down the background noise in our lives to hear the often "still, small voice" of God.

It is difficult for me, because I’m a preacher (a talker!) and too much silence makes me fidgety and anxious. I confess, left to my own devices I am the sort of person that embraces having the TV on or "company." I have to create intentional space for listening to God in prayer, because otherwise God can’t get a word in edgewise.

Thank God for Lent, with its disciplines and spaces to encounter the holy, its spaces to listen.

Listening is an act of faith. It involves faith that the world’s turning does not depend on a pithy, funny or wise word from us. To listen is to quiet ego and open our ears and mind to the message.

Listening is an act of trust that God is still at work in the world. Listening implies an openness to the possibility that the Holy Spirit has something to say through some other vessel than we ourselves. A listening ear is a fine antidote to idolatry and injustice. Listening is the way we discern the "new thing" that our God is always doing, and the way that we follow the Spirit's leading.

Let us devote this Lent to truly listening for the voice of God, in our worship and prayer life and in our time with others. Listening is a foundation for discernment, surely, and even for love. God heard the cries of those in slavery and sent a deliverer in Moses and, of course, in our Lord Jesus. God was listening. God is still listening to those who are in pain and God is still talking. We should be listening too.

We are so overloaded with noise that we no longer listen. The constant roar of the world has made many of us believe that we can’t listen and take in everything at the same time. The truth of that matter is, to listen is not to take in but to give.

When we truly listen we give our undivided attention to a singular source so we can understand what they are trying to communicate. It is more than just hearing and taking in information, to listen is to give the focus necessary to tune everything else out and connect with another. When we truly listen we give another all of us so we can connect with all of them. It is only in connection that we can truly listen.

I want to encourage you to listen. When we listen we can hear the still small voices that are crying out to us in our world. In a still small voice God is calling us to serve. Will you listen? In a still small voice your children are calling you to hear about their lives. Will you listen? In a still small voice the person you love is calling you to reconnect and love again. Will you listen? It is time to tune out all the noise so we can again make real, genuine connections with each other.

It is time to listen.

The Rev. Daryl Williams is pastor of Nottingham Myers/Christ UMC in Upper Marlboro.

EVENTS

Conference registration open

229th session of the Baltimore-Washington Conference

Online registration is open for annual conference and related events. A preconference session will be held May 5 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Martins West in Woodlawn.

The main session will be May 29-31 at the Waterfront Marriott Hotel in Baltimore. Visit www.bwvcumc.org/events/annual_conference.

Preconference briefings

March 2-21

Various districts

These important information sessions, held separately for lay and clergy throughout the conference, continue. The remaining sessions include:

- Annapolis District: Layi, March 16, 10 a.m. - 11:30 p.m. at St. Andrews of Annapolis UMC
- Baltimore Suburban District: Clergy, March 21, 9 a.m. - noon, at Presbury UMC; Layi, March 21, 7 p.m. - 9 p.m. at Timonium UMC
- Central Maryland District: Clergy, March 14, 9:30 a.m. - noon; Layi, March 23, 9:30 - 11:30 a.m., both at Conference Mission Center
- Frederick District: Layi, March 16, 9:30 - 11:30 a.m., Jackson Chapel UMC
- Greater Washington District: Clergy, March 19, 10 a.m. - noon, at University UMC in College Park
- Washington East District: Layi, March 20, 7 - 8:30 p.m at Journeym of Faith UMC

COSROW seminar

March 16, 1:30 to 5 p.m.

Mission Center, Fulton

A Women’s History Month seminar, hosted by the Commission on the Status and Role of Women (COSROW), is titled "Secrets of Survival - SOL." The event will include worship, drama and workshops focused on managing the balancing demands of home-work-church.

Professor Amy G. Oden will be the keynote speaker.

Disabilities Summit

Saturday, March 23

Mount Zion UMC, Bel Air

Unwrap the Gift," a one-day Disabilities Summit, is designed to equip, energize and empower those dealing with family or church members with disabilities. For details and to register, visit www.unrapt(bg)h. weebly.com.

Ecumencial Advocacy Days

April 5-8

Methodist Building, Washington, D.C.

"Let God’s Table: Food Justice for a Healthy World?" is the theme of this event. A thousand participants will provide a Christian response to injustices in local food systems that leave one billion people hungry.

To learn more and register, go to http://advocacydays.org.

How to Reach New People

April 13-14

Fallston UMC in Fallston

May 18-19

Woodside UMC in Silver Spring


Pensions Benefits Workshop

May 29, 9:30 a.m.

Waterfront Marriott Hotel, Baltimore

All active clergy are strongly encouraged to learn about changes to the Clergy Retirement Security Plan (CRSP), which will take effect Jan. 1, 2014. Register as part of registering for annual conference, or reenroll your registration to sign up for this important workshop.

By Daryl Williams

WEB HIGHLIGHTS

Online Lenten Devotional Book

Conference and Baltimore clergy leaders share thoughts on the Lenten journey. www.bwvcumc.org/resources/lentendevotional

Rally to Prevent Gun Violence Video

The UMC leads efforts to curb gun violence in Maryland and beyond.

http://youtu.be/dBuzTuiwl

Amazing Gospel Souls Video

Join Kevin Petty as he performs and shares his testimony in a place where he was once incarcerated.

http://youtu.be/KOJjKvakv

Evolution Weekend Video

What’s the relationship between science and religion? The conversation deepens.

http://youtu.be/xtQBJBu4FM

WE LIVE in an incredibly loud world. No matter where we go or what we do there is always some sort of noise surrounding us. Technology has made it possible for us to envelope ourselves in an ongoing cocoon of sound for every minute of our day.

In most places there is a television playing in the background keeping us informed. When there is no television we have radio, podcasts, playlists and the Internet always at our fingertips. Noise has become the ongoing soundtrack to our daily lives.

We are so overloaded with noise that we no longer listen. The constant roar of the world has made many of us believe that we can’t listen and take in everything at the same time.

Thank God for Lent, with its disciplines and spaces to encounter the holy, its spaces to listen.

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Trusting Clauses: State legislators examine church polity

From page 1

courts to allow for the quick resolution of disputes.

In addition, the reasons churches may want to leave the denomination vary, said Love. For example, some might not want to accept a woman or person of color in their pulpits or as their pastors. “The Trust Clause ensures that churches will be used solely for purposes consistent with the United Methodist mission and that today’s churches will be kept in trust for future generations of United Methodists.”

Also present at the House hearing was the Rev. Douglass B. Sands, Sr. and several members of White Rock UMC in Sykesville, who spoke for the repeal of the statute, as they did at last year’s legislative hearings.

Most of the 132 members of White Rock UMC expressed interest in leaving the denomination in 2011. Some in the 144-year-old church feel the conference expressed interest in leaving the denomination, the members have sought the support of state legislators like Delegate Aisha Braveboy from District 25 in Prince George’s County, who sponsored the bill. Martha Hollidge, a member of Severna Park whose family grew up just a few blocks down from Brigitte’s Place before white flight and the drug epidemic hit the neighborhood, has learned that you never know what to expect when God gets involved.

“I had a life and death experience with ovarian cancer in the early 1990s,” she said. “I had it twice in two years. The doctors weren’t sure which way things would go.” Hollidge attributes being alive today to faith and prayer. “I want to give something back,” she said. “I want to do this work for God. He gave me another chance.”

Hollidge and her fellow parishioners took charge of cleaning and decorating the house. “I went home when we were done and even before dinner I said a prayer, thanking God for giving us the time and ability and strength to do what we accomplished. There’s a God-purpose here.”

She and Christopher sometimes imagine the faces of the 20 to 30 women they expect will use the shelter. In the evenings, they hope the house will open for Bible studies or the teaching of life skills.

“It will be a place where women can get patched up,” said Love, “and inside of how they want to explore a brighter future for themselves. We’ll offer them hope.”

“It is the call of the Christian disciple to be in the challenging places where needed the most, the places where the darkness is the darkest. But we’re not under the illusion that we’ve done it with our own skills. This,” said Christopher, “is a Holy Spirit thing.”

Celebrate Recovery brings Christ to addiction issues

By Christine Kumar
UMConnection Correspondent

The Rev. Cary James, pastor of Sharp Street UMC in Baltimore, was a star athlete and a good student when he was a teenager. But despite his success, James became addicted to alcohol and found the answers to his problems in a bottle. Until God intervened.

“I started secretly drinking alcohol while in the seventh grade to manage the feelings of confusion and inconsistency in my life because my parents divorced. The divorce created a significant emotional need and inconsistency in my life because my parents divorced. As they came to work on the house, some of the people found themselves praying that God would keep them safe. They also slowly found the neighborhood changing around them. When they cleaned up the backyard, both neighbors cleaned up theirs. Some teenage girls from the neighborhood came to help with painting and other tasks during the summer. And one night, when someone broke into the house to steal the tools, a neighbor called the police and reported the incident. Most of the tools were recovered and the police even helped board up the back door. “That just doesn’t happen,” Christopher said. Hollidge attributes being alive today to faith and prayer.

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Severna Park is a place where mission is in the DNA, the lead pastor, the Rev. Jim Farmer. The church pays the way for everyone’s first mission trip to allow them to experience how mission can awaken the soul. Each year, the congregation participates in global, national and local missions. In previous years, their local project has been helping Samaritan Women and women who have been sold in human trafficking. Samaritan Women was doing work with Hope Ministry, who had a van outreach that would take lunch to women working as prostitutes.

“Many of these women were made addicted to heroin to keep them dependent. It’s just destructive – truly an evil thing,” said Christopher.

We knew we couldn’t do what Hope Ministries does, but we could build a house. We have people with a lot of Volunteers in Mission experience. We knew if we took the first step it would be a Holy Spirit thing, and it was. The right resources showed up just at the right time, over and over again. It’s a matter of accepting God’s call, and I think the congregation really embraced that.

The congregation raised $25,000 to renovate the house and joined in partnership with Glyndon UMC, which provided VIM labor, and Wood Presbyterian Church, which renovated the kitchen.

As they came to work on the house, some of the people found themselves praying that God would keep them safe. They also slowly found the neighborhood changing around them. When they cleaned up the backyard, both neighbors cleaned up theirs. Some teenage girls from the neighborhood came to help with painting and other tasks during the summer. And one night, when someone broke into the house to steal the tools, a neighbor called the police and reported the incident. Most of the tools were recovered and the police even helped board up the back door. “That just doesn’t happen,” Christopher said. Hollidge attributes being alive today to faith and prayer.

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VALUES

By Craig McLaughlin
Mount Zion UMC, Bel Air

OUR MISSION IS NOT HARD TO FIGURE OUT. It’s not confusing. Jesus said it straight up: make disciples (people completely focused on Jesus) of all nations. To do this, we need to embrace certain ways of living our life together:
1.) Recognize God’s Word as the final authority for all that we do.
2.) Strive with everything in us to love God and to love one another. To love God is to obey God, and to love one another is to do what’s best for one another.
3.) Make any change, take any risk, make any sacrifice to reach people who haven’t been reached for Jesus Christ.
4.) Don’t be spiritual spectators. We will get on God’s team and into the game.
5.) Don’t hog ministry to ourselves.
6.) Be amazingly generous.
7.) Honor Jesus and his Church with integrity and honesty in all that we do. Without integrity and honesty nothing else matters.

VISION
VISION IS THE ART OF SEEING WHAT MAY SEEM INVISIBLE. It focuses our dreams and blends them with the realities that surround us. Vision is about perspective, it’s also about a point of view that, when large and dangerous enough, can dare to transform the world.

True visionaries look through the eyes of God. Vision evokes clarity. It also delivers meaning, purpose and a sense of what’s possible.

We asked a collection of conference leaders to review the conference’s 2020 vision and offer their thoughts. Their thought-provoking essays, in their entirety, are online at www.bwcumc.org/aboutus/ourvision. It’s time to take a new look. Peer into tomorrow and the day after. What’s your vision? How do you see yourself and your church in God’s preferred future?

IMITATE

By Andrew Cooney
First UMC, Berkeley Springs, W.Va.

WE DON’T GO TO CHURCH. We are the Church. The church is not a building or a program – we sing this in a cute little ditty with our fingers in the shape of a steeple – “the church is the people.” But when a person prays for a colleague at work, the church did it. When I fail to meet the needs of someone in my path, the church has failed to meet that need. Disciples are Jesus’ boots on the ground, hands available, servants who are willing to take whatever assignments they are given. The church together reaches out to the world as Jesus did.

When disciples decide to be the church, rather than simply go to meetings in a building called a church, God begins to do amazing things.

Our first priority, then, is to be in a relationship with Jesus, so that we can learn about Jesus, so that we can be like Jesus, so that we can serve like Jesus, so that God is glorified. We are apprentices of Jesus.

COMING AND SEE

By Faith Lewis
Olivet UMC, Lusby

THE CHURCH’S TASK is not to make disciples, but to invite people into the arena where Christ’s incarnational, living reality is made known.

In John 1:45-61, we learn from Philip that our task is to invite people into a relationship where they grow as disciples. Nathaniel’s grumbling response didn’t spur Philip to argue or redelivery his message in a more relevant fashion. Philip left that to Jesus. He just said, “Come and see.”

I find hope in that story because, as a lifelong United Methodist, I would love to spread scriptural holiness across the world, but so often I am a pessimistic lover of the Lord. I can be like Philip and get overwhelmed by church finances and declare, “there’s not enough and it can’t be done.”

When well-meaning friends tell of the newest thing in evangelism, I sit under my fig tree, like Nathaniel, and grumble that nothing good will come out of it. (Fill in the blank with the Conference, mainline Christianity, the denomination.) I find hope in their story because Jesus looks past their attitude and will perhaps work with me.

As an annual conference, what if we gave up on inventing programs to do what only Jesus can do and embraced the living reality that Jesus is at the center of our churches? What if we invited everyone to “come and see.”

VALUE

By Jason Shank
First Saints Community UMC, Leonardtown

I BELIEVE GOD’S VISION for the church is simple, we just make it too difficult at times. In Mark’s Gospel Jesus said, “Let us go somewhere else, to the nearby villages, I can preach there also. That is why I have come.” We, as a church, must get outside the walls of our sanctuaries if we truly want to reach those who are hurting, neglected, cast off and searching in the communities around us.

Jesus did not set up shop somewhere and expect everyone to come to him. Jesus went to those who needed God’s love and he transformed their lives by meeting them where they were. This is what the church needs to be: passionate and prophetic – taking the Gospel to those around us through our words and our actions.

A VISION OF THIN PLACES

By Andrew Cooney
Mount Zion UMC, Bel Air

May our walls be thin enough to welcome all and sturdy enough to offer sanctuary;
May our skin be thin enough to let our hearts be broken and thick enough to withstand the pain;
May our service be thin enough to offer something of ourselves, and faithful enough to leave ourselves behind;
May our gifts be thin enough to celebrate two coins and abundant enough to make a difference;
May our worship be thin enough to touch holiness and true enough to capture human experience;
May our witness be thin enough to pierce through the noise and strong enough to be prophetic;
May our prayers be thin enough to rise to heaven and grounded enough to cover the earth;
May our faith be thin enough to permeate our pursuit of righteousness and rich enough to be marked by grace.

God, who is light in the darkness
May our church be thin enough for Radiance.
INCARNATE
By Mark Schaefer
American University, Washington, D.C.

THE CHURCH FINDS ITS RELEVANCE in the same way that Christ was relevant: by being incarnational. The central Gospel point that the church needs to remind itself of is that the Word became Flesh. God does not remain aloof in some far-off heaven, but comes to earth in the midst of our lives. The church thrives when it places itself where the people we would seek to reach are. So much of our thinking is the “if you build it, they will come” mentality. But Christ didn’t sit in Nazareth and hold court; he went to where the people were. He went to where the people were hungry and fed them. He went to where the people lived and healed them. He went to where the people worked and stood in solidarity with them. And in response, they followed him. Is there any reason that we as the Body of Christ should not do likewise?

DOING
By Mandy Sayers
Covenant UMC, Gaithersburg

CHURCH, WHEN YOU GET RIGHT DOWN TO IT, is at its best when it is a verb. Like love.

REVIVE
By D. Matthew Poole
Glen Mar UMC, Ellicott City

PEOPLE STILL BELIEVE in God, they just don’t believe in the church. The statistics bear this out. From 2000 to 2009, the BWC saw a 17.6 percent decline in worship attendance and a 10.9 percent decline in membership, while the general population of the area grew by 6.8 percent. If the conference continues to decline in membership and close churches at the same rate as the past decade it will be extinct in 2052.

PUSH
By J. Philip Wagaman
Retired

A VISION OR PLAN cannot hope to be “God-sized” since we are not God, the Source and Sustainer of all being. Still, our vision must be grounded in our deepest faith commitments and as large as we can make it. Our vision must find ways to foster the vocation of citizenship among our people, including focus on serious study of underlying-society-wide problems and a vigorous dialogue among our people on issues like homelessness and the inhumanity of the criminal justice system. There will often be disagreement, but we must not back away from controversy. The whole of society needs to be pushed and we can be pushers.

WONDER
By Jerry Wicklein
Salem UMC, Hampstead

THE CHURCH IS TO BE A COMMUNITY of spiritual wanderers and wonderers. The program of the church should highlight the importance of the spiritual disciplines in life. It is from the disciplined spiritual life that vibrant and honest Christian witness is created and nurtured.

The church is to be the presence of Jesus Christ in the community and world. It is to be relevant, without dumbing down the message of the Gospel. The church is at its most vital when its actions are faithful to the Way of Christ, claiming a listening heart and an open, inclusive spirit. It becomes vital when its members practice Christian discipline, are spiritually centered and always seek new ways to communicate the faith without compromising for numbers or acceptance.

TRANSFORM
By Rod Miller
Towson UMC, Towson

CHURCH AND THE CHRISTIAN LIFE are all about transformation. Transformation is about lives and social structures changing. It is about patterns changing. Perspectives changing. Hearts changing. Actions changing. It’s about diving into the Spirit’s flow and allowing ourselves to be shaped and taken in direction that God is working and we would not choose on our own.

Transformation to occur in the church, the laity need to not only be on board, they need to lead. The way forward for The United Methodist Church is through the laity. The conference needs to engage the power of the Gospel to free the laity to become agents of transformation – wherever they live, work and socialize. They should be empowered to become spiritual entrepreneurs who are trusted and accountable to employ their gifts, skills and tools to witness and connect others to faith in Christ. Transformed laity will re-set the DNA of their churches so that they become missional communities in their geographic areas.

HOPE
Rev. Terri S. Cofiel
Harmony UMC, Marlowe

WHAT ARE WE TO DO? Proclaim Jesus Christ as the Hope, not for the Church but for the world; to proclaim hope by becoming hope – not building, but embodying God’s Kingdom.

One image that brings me great comfort – that is the source of my hope – is Christ Pantocrator: “Ruler of All.” Dr. Joe Weber, my New Testament professor, lamented Biblical Greek being an elective course. “If you know nothing else,” he implored, “know this: ‘Ta panta.’ All things. All things are subject to our Lord Jesus Christ.” The final triumph of God’s righteousness is not a maybe. The reign of Christ is not a possible outcome among many. Christ will come again. And God will run the show.

This absolute hope shapes both our vision and mission. But it’s not an excuse for sitting idly by until the “sweet by and by.” It’s not a free pass to ignore the needs of the poor, marginalized or brutalized people of the world because we’re “only passing through.” Salvation is not escaping the world God created; salvation is embracing God’s grace in Jesus Christ in the here and now and letting God run the show through our ministries of redemption, compassion and transforming love. God placed us here for a purpose. When we claim – and proclaim – our hope in Jesus Christ, we begin to recognize the very real signs of God’s Kingdom all around us. Even in the mirror.

KINGDOM
By Thomas L. Brunkow
Retired

IF WE ARE REFLECTING ON A VISION that is God’s, then by definition it must be biblical. If it is a “vision,” then by definition it must be future oriented. Jesus taught us to say, “Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

One United Methodist theologian summarized the New Testament news about heaven by saying, “The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand but not in hand and we are to be on hand.”

See Vision, page 6
**Vision Quest: Vision 2020 sparks holy conversation**

From page 5

But our waiting is not passivity. We are to build community across the hall or across Kentucky Jesus’ teaching.

In his parable of the Last Judgment in Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus is clear that being “on hand” means caring for “the least of these.” God’s vision for the church couldn’t be more clear. The only question is: Who are “the least of these” among us today?

**Making a Difference**

Pastor is a ‘Watch Dog’ for his son

Martinsburg, W.Va. — Brian Darrell, the Local Pastor who serves Marvin Chapel and Bethel UMCs, had an appearance on the Today Show (ABC) Feb. 11. Not for his pastoral duties, but because Today host Matt Lauer went to West Virginia to chat with the Watch D.O.G.S. (Dads of Great Students) for a feature on the program.

Lauer was kicking off the TODAY Takes Action series with a cause he feels strongly about: the critical need for kids to have a dad or positive male role model in their lives.

Darrell couldn’t agree more, and became part of the “Watch Dogs,” spending Wednesdays in Valley View Elementary with his third-grade son Caleb. The “Watch Dogs,” are “fathers who want to be active in their kids’ education,” Darrell said. “I go, not just for my son, but for other kids. Many children don’t have fathers,” Darrell commented. “This is an opportunity to show the love of Christ.”

This is taking servant leadership in the church beyond the church’s four walls, he said.

“Save lives now; shout at gun control rally

Annapolis, Md. — The Rev. Carletta Allen was one of the United Methodists who loomed at Lawlers Mall in front of the State House in Annapolis March 3, to advocate for gun control measures. Pastor of nearby Asbury UMC, she welcomed the hundreds of people from many faiths and races to the rally in front of the House. “We’re people of many faiths here to say this bill is reasonable.”

She concluded with leading the crowd in the chant, “Save lives now,” a mantra introduced by Vincy DeMarco, director of Faiths United Against Gun Violence, a sponsoring organization. An estimated 200 people waved their hand-crafted signs, chanted and shouted hundreds of times to “Protect our children.”

Testifying at the rally were leaders, teachers, lawyers, religious leaders, hunters and grandmothers from Garrett County to the Eastern Shore. “It’s your voice to take assault weapons off the street... to make Maryland a safer state,” said Lieutenant Gov. Anthony Brown.

As a helicopter hovered overhead, Gov. Martin O’Malley addressed the crowd, “a tremendous turnout...” he said, in a lofty speech that referred to the rally attendees as “children of one God. “We must evercome this sickness in our souls that is violence and gun violence in America,” he said. He concluded his remarks with a prayer.

The bill, which passed the Senate the day before, bans assault type weapons, limits magazines to 10 rounds, and requires licensing, fingerprinting and firearms training for anyone who wants to own a handgun.

**A Methodist Manifesto.**

The church is vital and relevant when it is able to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, and we forget that the “marking” includes ourselves. Growth was never the central mission of our community, being disciples was. That is our challenge today; how do we reconnect ourselves and reconnect ourselves to our unique Methodist spiritual heritage despite the cultural pressures of our society, our own ambitions and our desires? Such a response to the challenges of our time would be an authentic note sounded in the cacophony of noise in this present age. Even if we do, there is no promise that we will grow; in fact, Christ never promised worldly success (worship attendance or otherwise) should we be faithful. We should be willing to take up this cross in faithfulness.

**Sing**

By Bruce Birch

Westley Theological Seminary, Washington, D.C.

As I READ the Baltimore-Washington Conference vision statement, I kept thinking of the lament of the psalmist in the midst of the Babylonian exile crying out “How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?” (Psalm 137:4)

Like the Judean exiles in 587-539 BCE we have come into a strange land, but that strange land is not a new geographic location. It is our own future. Old assumptions no longer hold. Social context for our ministries has changed and continues to change. We are tempted to nostalgia for days past that will not return. We even despair that God has forgotten us.

We no longer feel we can sing the Lord’s song.

The vision statement for our annual conference is a clarion call to our churches not to settle for survival. It boldly suggests that even radical challenges are new opportunities. In the midst of the non-singers by our own “rivers of Babylon” I think our vision statement suggests that we should be giving singing lessons!

In Our Old Testament scriptures exile was a time of despair for some. But exile was also the context for the most hopeful prophetic voices in the Bible.

Grounded in knowledge and experience of what God has done we claim in hopeful confidence what God yet can do. And because God is sovereign over all future possibilities we know that the future envisioned is not monolithic but rich and varied. Diversity of every conceivable variety has been the hallmark and the legacy of this annual conference and the calling of our vision for the future will surprise us with its multi-faceted richness.

**Movement**

By Rachel Cornwall

Woodside UMC, Silver Spring

Accept people as they are, but don’t leave them there.

Remember that being a disciple of Jesus makes you a servant, not a judge.

When people are hungry or bleeding or imprisoned... trust first be fed, healed, freed in order to be saved.

Some of our “sacred traditions” keep us locked up inside our buildings, hiding our light, keeping the Good News to ourselves. Being a movement of love is not about creating programs that will draw people who are like us into the doors of our church. It’s about that great joy that will send us running out the doors bursting with good news, filled with new life, ready to offer it to anyone and everyone that we meet.

45,000 pounds of potatoes delivered

Washington, D.C. — Volunteers from the Greater Washington District United Methodist Men arrived at the Metropolitan Washington Convention Center in Northwest D.C. at 7 a.m. Jan. 5. By 9 a.m. they had distributed 20 tons of potatoes to needy families in Northeast Washington.

Volunteers, which included the men from the district, the UMM Executive Board and some of the Metropolitan police, loaded five trucks with the 50-pound bags to take to designated areas for distribution to the families. The bags of potatoes were donated by the Society of St. Andrew.

The UMM does a “potato drop” a couple times a year, helping at least for a time to alleviate hunger and make the limited budgets go further. “We look forward to helping the community,” said Steve Hill, UMM President for Greater Washington.

Compiled and edited by Linda Worthington.
Faith begs the question: How 'shrewd' are we, really?

BY DAVID W. SIMPSON

T he recent “Call to Action” begs the question: Just how 'shrewd' are we about making disciples? After all, in Luke 16, Jesus said that we should be as wise as those who are savvy, even if their character is unseemly. The point is not to be like them, but to learn something from them in terms of being shrewd. What then does shrewd look like?

Cultural analysts such as Richard John Neuhaus, Walter Brueggemann, Michael Frost and James Davison Hunter say the church faces a situation similar to that of the Jews in Babylon 2,500 years ago. In “To Change the World,” Hunter writes, “Ours is now, emphatically, a post-Christian culture, and the community of Christian believers are now, more than ever – spiritually speaking – exiles in a land of exile.” We cannot equate, in every respect, our current circumstance with that of the Babylonian exiles. But there are parallels. Mike Metzger says if Christians are indeed exiles, strangers in a strange land, then we need to understand the implications. He suggests four that shrewd Christians should consider. (See his blog, Doggibeard.com, 2011.) They are:

1. Are we only whittling rotten wood?

The church needs transformative change. But too often, as church leaders we are guilty of wanting to tweak the system, tinkering with the structure and delivery mechanisms rather than taking on the difficult and risky (but exciting) challenge of embracing transformation. Albert Einstein noted that you can’t solve a problem in the same frame that created it. You need to reframe if you are going to solve the problem. One mark of genius in early Methodism was Wesley’s willingness to embrace, even to create, new forms and methods to pursue the work of the Gospel. He could have continued to use the comfortable models he had inherited from the Church of England, but he did not. Instead, he answered the needs of the day. Preachers were lacking, so Wesley tapped Spirit-anointed laymen and laywomen. The movement needed printed materials (books, pamphlets and tracts, hymn books, a paper), so a press was set up. Parish churches closed their doors to him and his preachers; so meeting houses and chapels were bought or built. New disciples needed grounding in the faith, so brother Charles wrote hymns that taught doctrine. People without access to doctors or financial planning were offered guides to home medicine and advice on the use of money. And it wasn’t just the Wesleys who did this: the Methodists gained a reputation for innovation, adaptivity, and using the technology of the day – all in service to the witness of Christ. We can do it again. We just have to be hungrier for effectiveness and growth.

2. Are we operating in realistic time frames?

Even if we could change how we operate on a dime, we need not be fooled into thinking it will turn around the Good Ship Wesley overnight. God kept the Jews in exile for two generations before they were ready to start over. It has taken us about two generations to get to our current state and we need to be committed to a long term strategy for the UMC. The good news is that we don’t have to go through every intervening step of development between where we are now and where God is calling us to be. Back in the 1880s, India had an antiquated telephone system which reached only a tiny fraction of its people – and faced the proposition of spending fantastic wealth that it did not have, over generations, to wire the country for basic telephone service. With the coming of mobile phones, however, that became unnecessary: by building cell towers India has been able to reach vast numbers of its people with phone service, quickly, cheaply and more effectively. The church, too, would be smart to sidestep many of the issues of the past and get hooked up with God’s cutting-edge work in the world, now.

3. Do we have enough cultural capital to leverage?

To put it another way: are we learning how to speak the language of the culture? Shrewd churches leverage their cultural capital or they work hard at amassing it. Mormonism is doing this. It started out in 1830 with zero cultural capital. Zildz. Today, it has become the fourth-largest religious denomination in the U.S. For Mormonism, becoming a local church or certified lay servant from the previous lay speaker process. There is however, a leader does in that district. Since our initial meeting at the end of last year, some of the leaders have had training sessions for local lay servants and other laity and some other districts are planning similar sessions. In the next few weeks, we will be beginning the laity together for the Pre-Conference Session on May 1. I hope to see you all there.

Laymen adjust as they live into new lay servant role

BY DELORES MARTIN

T he leadership of the laity has a long history in The United Methodist Church. While Methodist pastors rode the circuits, it was the leadership of the lay members of the societies that kept the congregational ministry going. At the 2012 meeting of the General Conference of The United Methodist Church, the body approved legislation to change the name of Lay Speaking Ministries to Lay Servant Ministries.

Discussions for such a change had gone on for several quadrennia and various name changes had been proposed. None of the names adequately described the role of the leadership of lay people.

It was finally agreed that the term “servant” be chosen because it best describes what Jesus told his disciples in John 13, after he himself had performed the duties of the lowliest servant. We should be honored to serve because it best describes what Jesus told his disciples in John 13, after he himself had performed the duties of the lowliest servant. We should be honored to serve in the same way.” (Luke 16:8) Here Jesus is talking about handling money; but it seems that Jesus is looking for his disciples to be wise in every walk of life. He wants us to be as wise as those who are savvy, even if their character is unseemly. The point is not to be like them, but to learn something from them in terms of being shrewd. What then does shrewd look like?

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**Register now for Camp Manidokan!**
[www.funfriendsfaith.com](http://www.funfriendsfaith.com)

**Camp Joy**
July 7-13, July 14-20
Camp Joy is a work camp based at Camp Harmison for youth groups to participate in serving opportunities in the local Berkeley Springs, WV area.
For complete details contact Hancock UMC at 301-678-6440

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<td>Sailing Camp (grades 7-9)</td>
<td>$460</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 14-19</td>
<td>Discovery (grades 9-12)</td>
<td>$445</td>
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<td>Sailing Camp (grades 10-12)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Faith In Action (grades 7-12)</td>
<td>$470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 21-26</td>
<td>Ultimate Middle School</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(grades 6-8)</td>
<td>$455-</td>
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<td>495</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 28-Aug 2</td>
<td>Discovery (grades 3-4)</td>
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<td>Discovery (grades 5-6)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Fishing (grades 10-12)</td>
<td>$470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adult Sailing Camp (ages 18+)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Register now for West River Camp!**
[www.funfriendsfaith.com](http://www.funfriendsfaith.com)

**Camp Joy**
July 7-13, July 14-20
Camp Joy is a work camp based at Camp Harmison for youth groups to participate in serving opportunities in the local Berkeley Springs, WV area.
For complete details contact Hancock UMC at 301-678-6440

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<td>June 30-July 5</td>
<td>Discovery (grades 4-6)</td>
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<td>July 6-13</td>
<td>Great Allegheny Passage Bike Ride</td>
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<td>July 7-10</td>
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