UNITED METHODISTS ‘DARE TO BELIEVE’

BY ERIK ALSGAARD
UMConnection Staff

Meeting less than a mile from where the Methodist Church began in 1784, and just a few miles from where riots broke out in late April 2015, United Methodists of the Baltimore-Washington Conference started and ended their Annual Conference Session with one thought: being Christ’s presence in the City of Baltimore.

More than 1,200 clergy, laity and guests gathered at the Marriott Waterfront Hotel in Baltimore. They heard and saw riveting reports of how the church has responded following the riots that devastated the Sandtown-Winchester neighborhood of southwest Baltimore, and took action to approve a special offering June 7 throughout the BWC to raise money for refurbishing the five churches in the neighborhood.

Conference members participated in a prayer march in Sandtown-Winchester May 27, at the start of the Session. Dozens of people, wearing bright red T-shirts that read “Putting Our Beliefs Into Action” gathered at Ames UMC and moved to what is called “ground zero” of the riots: the intersection of Pennsylvania and North avenues, where the CVS burned on national TV. There, they prayed, sang and were joined by neighborhood residents in comforting a family whose row house had caught on fire while they were there.

Bishop Marcus Matthews, presiding over his seventh Conference Session, started the three-day gathering by inviting members to stand and pray for the City of Baltimore in whatever way they were comfortable. Later, Baltimore Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake greeted the assembly, thanking United Methodists for opening their doors on the day after the unrest and for still being there in ministry and mission long after the TV cameras had left.

Conference members heard a report from the laity and clergy who serve in the Sandtown-Winchester neighborhood, including a stirring biblical interpretive tone poem by the Rev. Michael Parker. Parker, who lives in the neighborhood but who pastors Ames UMC in Bel Air, was commissioned a Probationary Elder by Matthews on May 30. He was joined by 12 other candidates in that category, along with two who were commissioned as Deacon. Seven people were ordained Elder by the bishop, one person was ordained a Deacon, and two others had their orders recognized.

Following the service of Commissioning and Ordination, Bishop Matthews led those newly commissioned and ordained, along with dozens of other clergy all dressed in white albs with flowing red stoles, and processed outside the hotel to pray for the city.

In between the Baltimore City bookends, BWC members witnessed powerful worship, Bible teaching and moments where the Holy Spirit was touchable.

One such moment happened during the Circles of Grace process, which occurred Thursday night. Conference members gathered in...
By Mandy Sayers
Pastor, Covenant UMC, Gaithersburg

Trust is very hard for me, let me just say that up front.

So many times when I was an attorney, my client would say, "I'm trusting God with this hearing/trial/deposition," and I would respond, "Oh sure, but please tell me you brought the contract with you? I mean, there's trust...and then there's the TRUST." In my ministry, I'm coming to learn every day that trusting God is one of my most important responsibilities as both a Christian and a pastor. Trusting God reminds me I'm not God, and trusting God keeps me from being an anxious, reactive presence in the face of trouble. Trusting God allows me to say things like, "I wonder what God is planning to do next? I wonder how I will be a part of that?" rather than, "We've doomed and I think God wants me to work at a miniature golf course instead of pastoring."

Trusting God can start just as an experiment and, like all spiritual disciplines, can become a habit if practiced regularly. Trusting God may not come "naturally" but, in my own experience, as God coaxes me into opening my fists of control and trusting, I find God to be both faithful and strong in my weakness. I'm trying to learn to trust God throughout the whole process and not just when I don't feel I have a choice.

Annual Conference is a lovely reminder that the distinctive features of our polity are about trust. We trust God in each other, so we are connectional and we have God conferringly. We trust God in our bishop, so we have episcopacy. We trust God working in the world, so we have an itinerant system, so we can follow where the Holy Spirit would lead us.

God can work up some amazing things with Christians who trust God, and who trust that God works through us when I don't feel I have a choice.

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Newly elected delegates reflect the diversity of the BWC

By Erik Alsgaard
UMConnection Staff

A husband and wife were both elected to the 2016 General and Jurisdictional Conference delegation by members of the 2015 BWC Annual Conference Session. The Rev. Sarah Andrews Schlieckert, pastor of Arden UMC in Martinsburg, W.Va., and her husband, Christopher, were elected. For Sarah, this will be her first time attending a conference as an elected delegate; Chris was elected as a Jurisdictional delegate in 2012.

In all, six female and six male laity and clergy were elected to General Conference. Five female and one male laity were elected to Jurisdictional Conference, and two female and four male clergy were elected.

The alternates elected to Jurisdictional Conference were evenly split between male and female.

The 2016 General Conference meets May 10-20 in Portland, Ore. Its primary task is to perfect the Books of Discipline and Resolutions. It is the only body that can speak officially for the denomination.


Elected as delegates to General Conference:

- **Clergy:** the Revs. Terri Rae Chattin, pastor, Sykesville Parish (chair of the delegation); Joe Daniels, Greater Washington District Superintendent, pastor, Emory Fellowship; Washington, D.C.; Charlie Parker, pastor, Metropolitan Memorial UMC, Washington, D.C.; Cynthia Moore-Koikoi, Baltimore Metropolitan District Superintendent; JW Park, Central Maryland District Superintendent; and Ginger Gaines-Caroli, pastor, Foundry UMC.

- **Laity:** Delores Martin, Good Hope Union UMC, Silver Spring; Jen Iulo, Dumbarton UMC.

Elected as delegates to the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference (those elected to General Conference automatically serve as NEJ delegates; the first two people elected to Jurisdictional Conference also serve as alternates to General Conference):

- **Laity:** Kelly Robier, Mill Creek Parish, Rockville (alt.); Melissa Lauber, Metropolitan Memorial UMC, Washington, D.C. (alt.); Christopher Schlackert, Arden UMC, Martinsburg, W.Va.; Jordan Andrian, Zion UMC, Lexington Park; Sherrie Koob, Middletown UMC; and Sarah Ford, Sharp Street Memorial UMC, Baltimore.

- **Clergy:** the Revs. Conrad Link, Cumberland-Hagerstown District Superintendent (alt.); Matthew Matthews, Easton; and Tony Richards, Mill Creek Parish UMC, Rockville; and Ken Ow, North Bethesda UMC.

By Erik Alsgaard
UMConnection Staff

As members of the Baltimore-Washington Conference celebrated a strong financial year in 2014, they also took a hard look at the 2016 budget.

In 2014, the 641 churches in the conference contributed 90.8 percent of their apportionments, which, according to the Rev. Ann LaPrade, chair of the Conference Council on Finance and Administration, was the highest in the BWC in the last 10 years. LaPrade, pastor at Potomac UMC, thanked conference members for their sacrificial giving and hard work.

Nearly 82 percent of local churches contributed 100 percent apportionments in 2014, a change from 2013. This came, she noted, on top of meeting the $2.1 million goal for Imagine No Malaria, including raising more than $1.5 million for the ROCK youth event, which is self-funded.

CFA followed up on a request from the 2014 Session to recommend, or not, a potential conferencewide effort to support the Africa University Endowment Campaign. After a working group investigated the possibility, CFA decided not to recommend this path.

Instead, CFA proposed that any and all love offerings given to Bishop Marcus Matthews in honor of his retirement in 2016 be donated to Africa University. Matthews has personally requested that this be done.

The conference adopts $17.2 million budget for ministry

By Erik Alsgaard
UMConnection Staff

A Conference adopts $17.2 million budget for ministry throughout the conference and around the world. In addition, non-apportioned income from items such as event registrations and grants, is budgeted to bring in $2.8 million. The collection rate for 2016 remains the same as 2015, at 92 percent.

Expenses for 2016 are budgeted to be even with income. LaPrade told members that reduced staff wages and benefits have been achieved, saving $277,000. New Ministry and New Church Start grants have been reduced by $250,000, and a separate budget line has been created for the ROCK youth event, which is self-funded.

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“Africa University is a passion for Bishop Matthews,” said Charlie Moore, a member of CFA. “He chairs the university’s Development Committee and he is known as one of the greatest contributors to A.U. in the denomination.”

Speaking as a member of the Episcopal Transition Team, Moore said that the bishop’s request for “no gifts” left them in a bind. As a result, over the next year, to honor the bishop, a love offering will be created that will help establish a health and sports center at Africa University.

“We invite each and every church, over the next year, to take up an offering,” Moore said, “and help tell the story of the love affair between Bishop Matthews and Africa University.”

The Commission on Equitable Compensation’s recommendation was approved. This sets the minimum salary for full-time clergy at $41,473, or an increase of 1.75 percent. Housing allowances for clergy remained unchanged at $10,866.

The Rev. Jackson Day, chair of the BWC’s Board of Pensions and Health Benefits, announced the good news to conference members that there would be no increase in health insurance premiums in 2016. He noted that out-of-pocket maximums will be reduced for both individuals and families.

Two special offerings were taken during the Annual Conference Session. One offering, taken at the opening worship service, received $1,445.52, which will be split evenly between the Susanna Wesley House in Baltimore, and efforts to refurbish five churches in the Sandtown-Winchester neighborhood of Baltimore. The second offering, taken at the Ordination and Commissioning service, received $15,106.87. This money is earmarked for Africa University in honor of Bishop Matthews.
The tragedy of baby elephant syndrome is that adult non-supporters along the way, he said, as he told of Paul's call as read in the Scripture. “God's call is not for the faint of heart.”

“We wonder why God has chosen us. We wonder if we have the stamina or the gift for the work God calls us to do. There is so much untapped possibility in each of you. There may be evil, weeping, challenges, persecution, nobodies, don't be the great somebody.”

He gave the candidates some guidelines for their future ministries as he closed:

- “Love from the center of who you are. Don’t fake it. Run for dear life from evil, and hold on for dear life to good.”
- “Don’t burn out. Keep yourselves fueled and aflame.”
- “Bless your enemies… Make friends with nobodies, don’t be the great somebody”
- “Don’t insist on getting even, that’s not for you to do. ‘T’ll do the judging,’ God says. ‘I’ll take care of it.’”

The 25 persons waiting for the services of commissioning, ordination and recognition, were well blessed, as Bishops Matthews and Holston were joined by retired Bishop Violet Fisher and BWC Lay Leader, Delores Martin, for the service of laying on of hands. Holston and Fisher read the liturgy and Matthews sang private words to each person kneeling before him. The service began with the examination and commissioning of provisional candidates, those who have completed their studies, begun serving in churches, and will now go on a three-year period of learning “on the ground.”

Commissioned as Provisional Deacons:
- Enger Muteke
- Leo Yates

Commissioned as Provisional Elders:
- Giovanni Arroyo
- Andre Briscoe
- Michael Cantley
- Sherrill Comer-Cox
- Lemuel Dominguez
- Kyle Durbin
- Elizabeth LaMaster

Andre Briscoe is commissioned as a Provisional Elder.

shortly after he commissioned a provisional member. Matthew 14:22–36 was the text for Bishop L. Jonathan Holston’s sermon, “What’s Love Got to Do With It?” Holston serves as bishop of the South Carolina Conference.

“Following God’s call is not always easy,” Holston said. “We wonder why God has chosen us. We wonder if we have the stamina or the gift for the work God calls us to do. God’s call is not for the faint of heart.”

“There may be evil, weeping, challenges, persecution, non-supporters along the way, he said, as he told of Paul’s call as read in the Scripture.

“What does love have to do with your church with ministry, with your community?” he asked. “Don’t be so heavenly bound you’re no longer heavenly good. We are not perfect people.”

Referring to Paul’s writings, Holston said that love is more powerful than hate, it transforms the world and gives hope.

“What matters is that you truly love, that you become the hope, change, and love you seek for the world,” Holston said.

“What love got to do with it?” the bishop asked. “Everything,” he said, answering his own question. “God wants us to be worthy of love, of being loved and loving others.”

He gave the candidates some guidelines for their future ministries as he closed:

- “Love from the center of who you are. Don’t fake it. Run for dear life from evil, and hold on for dear life to good.”
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By Linda Worthington
UMConnection Staff

The Rev. Laurie Haller, from Birmingham, Mich., leads a morning Bible study.

We are called to dare in our mission to be water-walkers.

BY MELISSA LAUBER
UMConnection Staff

The United Methodists of the Baltimore-Washington Conference are on a mission from God to be “water-walkers,” the Rev. Laurie Haller said in a two-part morning Bible study at the annual conference session.

Haller, a senior pastor at First UMC in Birmingham, Michigan, outlined this call to water-walking in her exploration of Matthew 14:22–36, in which Jesus walks on the water and calls Peter to join him.

With stories of her own walking on the water on the pilgrim’s path at Lindisfarne in Scotland, Haller shared how “Water-walkers dare to believe by having the courage to get out of the boat.”

“Jesus calls each one of us as individuals to dare to believe that we, too, can do far more than we think we can. It’s the same with our churches,” Haller said. “We have the ability to be the ears, eyes, hands, feet, voice and heart of God by embodying Christ’s love in all that we do. There is so much untapped possibility in each of you and in each one of your churches and it’s waiting to be unlocked.”

Too often, Haller said, individuals, churches and even the denomination, suffer from “baby elephant syndrome.”

In India and Africa, she explained, elephants are born wanting to roam. But they are initially confined by being tied securely to trees. They learn quite early in life that they cannot break free of the rope, so they stop trying. The tragedy of baby elephant syndrome is that adult elephants are capable of breaking free from their bonds, but because they believe they can’t they remain stuck right where they are.

Do you have baby elephant syndrome, Haller asked. Does your local church?

“If you and I want to experience God’s power, we have to dare to believe, break the rope and take the first step. As the old saying goes, ‘If you want to walk on water, you’ve got to get out of the boat,’” she said.

Peter does just that, boldly stepping out into the waves. But then he realized the enormity of the risk he’s taking and begins to sink. Jesus reached out and saved him, saying, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?”

“I think Christian history has done a great disservice to Peter because of how we interpret Jesus’ response here,” Haller said. We often think Jesus is rebuking Peter. “We naively assume the answer to all of life’s difficulties is to just have more faith.” It’s as if we believe an extra dose of courage to stay in a boat that’s taking on water, doesn’t it.”

She thanked the Baltimore-Washington Conference for “daring to believe that by getting out of the boat and by welcoming others into the boat, you are the embodied grace of Jesus.”

She also challenged them, as the most diverse conference in the denomination, to continue to model a firm commitment to stay in the boat together, and to dare to believe that taking risks and leaving the boat will transform not only Baltimore, but the entire world. The bishop’s one word that is repeated three times in Matthew 54, she said, “immediately.”

“Friends, there is no time to waste and no time to wait,” Haller said. “There is an urgency about becoming water-walkers. Now is the time to dare to believe.”

The bishop leads the ordinands out into the world to pray.

Laura Novell
Michael Parker
Jessica Stetsman
Dawn Stewart
Cariusa Surber
Beth Williams

Ordination follows the completion of studies and the provisional time, and each candidate must have an appointment.

Ordained as Full Member Deacon
Angela Maves

Ordained as Full Member Elders
Sheridan Allmond
Kathy Altman
Cynthia Calero
Andrew Greenwood
Elizabeth Jackson
Dana Werts
George Winkfield

Two Elders were recognized. “After due examination of your call and ministry in another part of Christ’s holy Church, we now welcome you to the communion,” Matthews said to the Revs. Johnie Whitfield Cogman and Meredith Anne Wilkens-Arnold.

Before dismissal, Matthews issued an altar call to the laity “to hear God’s call to ordained ministry.” People from throughout the ballroom came forward for prayer and to speak with Elders and district superintendents.

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Clergy families recall their loved ones’ lives, contributions

By Linda Worthington
UMConnection Staff

Bishop L. Jonathan Holston of the South Carolina Conference brought a message of hope and challenge to the families and friends of lay members, clergy and clergy spouses who had died in the past year at the Service of the Saints May 29.

Despite the somberness of the occasion, there were many times of singing, praying and light heartedness, as well as poignancy and remembrance of times past.

Preaching on “An Offer You Cannot Refuse,” Holston painted a pathway through Matthew 6:12-23, the calling of the disciples from their fishing boat.

Those remembered gave themselves to God and to ministry in ways which we pay homage to today,” the bishop said. “We’ve all been in a place with a fork in the road. It’s a place of discovery, where we find hope and resurrection. In that pathway are curves and ridges that can transform the world.”

During the Connectional Ministries report May 29, Ferguson, along with Annika and Asher Rudolph, of North Carroll Cooperative Parish, and Donavan Parris, president of the Conference Council of Young Ministries, highlighted several of the BWC’s ministries.

They included: a local church’s efforts to refurbish bikes that transform lives around the world; initiatives that open up and grow multicultural perspectives; vibrant outreach that brings young adults into leadership in the Church; training to help ex-offenders find their way successfully back into the community; and opening up churches so that all people find their place at God’s table.

Another young voice on the stage was Markus Mulenga, who heads the global initiatives, the Mulenga Foundation.

“Ministry is not about accomplishment; it’s about affecting people’s lives in ways that make a difference. It’s about daring to believe the church can transform the world!”

During the hour-long presentation, Associate Council Director Cheryl Cook and Raimon Jackson shared how the conference is addressing the challenges of bringing young adults into the church and creating a culture of service and discipleship.

This July 24-26, the Young Adult Commission will be building upon last year’s experiences by holding a weekend conference, called Shift. The event, designed specifically for young adults, will be held at Queen’s Chapel UMC in Beltsville, Cook said.

In other reports:
• The Rev. Rod Miller announced a new Board of Religion and Race Initiative, which includes workshops on Intercultural Competency and Intercultural Communications. It will be offered this year to churches and other groups.

• The Rev. Sonia King outlined some of the impact made by the Healing Communities Training, which the conference offers to local churches interested in working with those returning from incarceration. In the U.S., King said, “more African-American males are currently incarcerated than were enslaved in 1850.”

• Becky Price shared how the ROCK retreat, which draws 5,000 BWC youth to Ocean City each year, now offers an adults-only room. In 2015, ROCK participants raised $1,300 to help Northwood-Appold UMC rebuild after a fire. ROCK 2016 will be held Feb. 5-7.

• Cindy Brown shared how reading an article in the UMConnection in 2004 led the congregation at Utterheim UMC in Hagerstown to begin Rides for the World. To date, the ministry has “collected” 2,607 bicycles (plus parts and accessories), 94 portable sewing machines and $6,200 in monetary contributions.” Brown reported.

During a separate report on Global Ministries, the Rev. David Simpson, who co-chairs the conference’s Imagine No Malaria Campaign with his wife, Sylvia, reported that by Christmas last year, the conference had received at least $2.1 million in pledges and commitments to eradicate malaria in Africa. The BWC is now in the fulfillment stage of its campaign.

To date, Simpson reported, 416.5 million, or 78 percent, of the $2.2 million goal has been collected.

In addition, noted the Rev. Maidstone Mulenga, who heads the global initiatives, the conference continues to grow in its partnerships with the Black Soil District in Russia; the South Conference in South Korea, and the Zimbabwe Episcopal Area.

Area young adult clergy will be visiting Korea this summer for a cultural exchange. BWC leaders will assist at a clergy school at Africa University this July; and, in October, the conference will begin a new covenant relationship with churches in Viques, Puerto Rico.

From bikes to malaria, BWC hosts vast array of ministries

By Melissa Lauber
UMConnection Staff

Small groups of determined people, on fire for mission and ministry, can change just about anything,” said Director of Connectional Ministries Sandra Ferguson. “Ministry is not about accomplishment, it’s about affecting people’s lives in ways that make a difference. It’s about daring to believe the church can transform the world!”

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From page 1

Police Station.

One of the greatest needs in her neighborhood, she said, is for the faith-based community to provide safe havens, youth programs and after school programs for the youth. “There are enough churches in our community to open their doors for needed programs,” she said. The Rev. Twanda Prioleau, who serves at John Wesley UMC on W. North Ave., began her talk by thanking God for the connection of the church in action.

Following the unrest, Prioleau took time to walk through her community and engage people in ways she’d never done before. “I saw people who were confused, people who had lost hope, and people who were frustrated and angry,” she said. “It was during that time that I realized that I did not have all the answers.”

It has only been in the last few weeks, she confessed, that she’s been at peace with the idea of not knowing all the answers. “However,” she said, “I realized that we are closer to the answers when we are intentional about who we invite to the table for conversation.”

To rousing cheers and loud applause, Prioleau said that the table needs to be open to “those whom we sometimes consider to be ‘the other’...the drug addict, the prostitute, the down and out, the cast out, the broken-hearted, the abused mother, the drunk father, the runaway girl, that wayward son.”

The Rev. Eric King, pastor of Metropolitan UMC, said he had learned one thing about United Methodists in this whole situation. “We are great at developing any kind of list for any situation.”


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Ferguson honored for 29 years of justice and mission work

By Melissa Lauber

UMConnection Staff

When Bishop Marcus Matthews, then a newly appointed pastor to Epsworth Chapel UMC in Baltimore, drove past his new appointment, he had been told about the woman there who ran the youth and Christian education programs. She would, it was suggested, be a good partner in ministry.

When he arrived, he met Sandy Ferguson and the two started a friendship and a way of serving God together that has spanned more than three decades.

On May 29, he paid honor to Ferguson, who on July 1 will retire as Director of Connectional Ministries for the Baltimore-Washington Conference. She is a “magnificent witness to Christ, doing justice, loving mercy and walking humbly with God in ways that have brought the Gospel to life in settings at home and around the globe.” She is also, the bishop said, someone who has given him a steady supply of beautiful neckties.

Bishops Peggy Johnson, Joseph H. Velek and Felton Edwin May also paid tribute to Ferguson. So did President Barack Obama, Governor Larry Hogan, and leaders from throughout the denomination – praising her heart for hands-on mission and her tireless work for justice.

In a heart-felt note, Bishop May wrote: “If there were an Office in our Denomination with the title of ‘Mother Superior,’ I would campaign for it to be bestowed upon you. You and the colleagues who have followed your leadership have been the reflection of your Holy Robe.”

As the steward of the conference vision, Ferguson set the focus and pace of ministry, not just in the Baltimore-Washington Conference but throughout the denomination, Bishop Velek said. She “led with grace and a spirit of empowerment.”

During her 44 years of ministry, which included 29 years on the conference staff, Ferguson was elected to serve as a delegate to seven General Conferences, served on the denomination’s Connectional Table and the General Boards of Discipleship, Global Ministries and Church and Society. She helped to shape the global nature of Methodism, visiting 20 countries. At home, she oversaw 32 areas of ministry.

To friends, she described her ministry as one which allowed her to meet and share her faith with an incredibly diverse array of people. She was, for example, “able to dance with Archbishop Desmond Tutu and then turn around and dance with prostitutes in the Cumberland-Hagerstown District – knowing joy throughout it all.”

While coordinating the mission response to Hurricane Katrina several years ago, Ferguson led a group of African-American pastors on a Volunteer in Mission trip. The group re-formed for her celebration, leading the Conference in a lively spiritual. Ferguson joined them, too, in a dance.

By Kiershia Johnson

Baltimore: Conference members hear the ‘real story’

King’s church has seen thousands of pounds of food delivered and given out in the neighborhood, along with hundreds of layette kits, health kits and school kits, most given through the ministry of the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR).

“Methodists had been better known for ‘sending’ kits, but many do not ‘come along’ with the kit,” said King. “But during the height of the struggle, Methodists showed up strong in Sandtown. Black and white, young and old, came to the ‘Hood’ to do some ‘Good’.”

The evening ended with Michael Parker, a candidate for prophetic Elder, bringing a powerful biblical interpretation piece, titled “His Words.” An essay Parker had to write for seminary just days after the riots broke out, the piece was met with several standing ovations and shouts of “amen” and “preach it!”

The presentation was videotaped by Good News Television and is available at http://ow.ly/NJ9jB.

Baltimore City Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake thanked the BWC for its ministry and prayers when she visited the Session Thursday afternoon. The mayor said United Methodists “know how to show up and do what’s needed.”

Conference leaders unveiled a website, https://events.rethinkchurch.org/stronger-baltimore, where volunteers could register for one of 16 different projects to help rebuild churches in Baltimore. United Methodist Volunteer in Missions are being sought for this work.

The opening worship offering brought in $12,845.55, one-half of which will go to help Baltimore city churches. Members also approved a special, conference-wide offering on June 7, with proceeds going to help rebuild the churches.

Making a Difference

God’s Foolish One award given

The 150 people attending the MFSA-BWARM dinner at Annual Conference May 29 recognized two important people who have fought for justice all their lives. The Rev. Maynard Moore introduced Sandra Ferguson and gave a long list of her accomplishments as she retires as the conference’s Director of Connectional Ministries.

Moore also introduced this year’s recipient of the annual God’s Foolish One award. The selection of the awardee is carefully guarded so it remains a surprise until the moment in the evening’s program.

“Our award this year ... is a person whose life of service to the church and community has truly been impactful beyond all normal circumstances,” Moore said.

He then named Sharon Leatherman as the recipient. “It’s been a wonderful journey,” Leatherman said in response: “My efforts as an advocate have always been for women and children.”

In other Conference action:

• The Rev. Daryl Williams was elected the BWC’s statistician and Cynthia Taylor was named Conference Secretary.

• Rev. JW Park was selected to continue in his role as Dean of the Cabinet for the coming year.

• Two new Hispanic faith communities were started: one in College park and the other in Middle River.

• The Cabinet named 56 pastors to new appointments beginning in July.

Volunteer in Missions are being sought for this work. Volunteers could register for one of 16 different projects to help rebuild churches in Baltimore. United Methodist Volunteer in Missions are being sought for this work.
Baltimore-Washington Conference members again showed their leadership in the denomination by using the Circles of Grace process to deal with some potentially tricky resolutions.

At its foundation, Circles of Grace is a way to enable “holy conferencing” to take place, said the Rev. Maidstone Mulenga, Assistant to the Bishop, in introductory remarks to the process Thursday night. During the Circles of Grace, members broke into more than 100 small groups of 10 to 12 people each. Sitting in circles, members used a “talking stick” – this year, a colorful toy boat — as they took turns sharing their thoughts on the resolutions. There, after being instructed by the bishop, members took time to listen to one another discuss four resolutions that had come to the conference seeking the BWC’s blessing before being sent on to the 2016 General Conference.

The first petition sought to remove the sentence, “The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching” from the Book of Discipline. The other three resolutions concerned issues between science, theology and the church.

Following the Circles of Grace, members voted on each petition. The first petition was approved by a vote of 539 yes to 234 no. That petition will now go to the 2016 General Conference noting that the BWC has voted this way. Only General Conference has the authority to change the Book of Discipline, and they next meet in May 2016.

The other three petitions received mixed results. A petition that sought the General Conference to re-adopt a resolution in the Book of Resolutions around “God’s Creation and the Church” was approved by BWC members 642 to 127. Two other petitions — one opposing the teaching of creationism in public schools, and one on climate change — were defeated, 370 to 403, and 330 to 438, respectively. Those petitions may still be sent to General Conference by the author of the petitions, but they will not have the support of the BWC Session.

Circles of Grace allow all voices to be heard and respected.

The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homonormativity and considers its practice incompatible with Christian teaching” from the Book of Discipline. The other three resolutions concerned issues between science, theology and the church.

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Rev. Kirkland Reynolds shares his thoughts with the circle.

Circles of Grace — We Dare to Believe in...

Acceptance • Accepted • Accepting • Agape • Bouyant (sic) • Calm • Calming Seas • Candid • Caring • Civilized • Clarify • Compassion • Compromise • Conciliatory • Courage • Creation • Dare to Love • Effective • Embrace • Embracing • Engaging • Enlightened • Enlightening • Eye-Opening • Family • Fruitful • Gentle • Gnarly • Grace-full • Grateful • Heart • Holy • Holy Blending • Honest • Honorable • Inclusion • Inclusive • Insightful • Listening • Love • Maranatha • Mosaic Tapestry • Obedience • Open • Open Crucible • Openness • Overwhelmed • Question Marks • Peter • Prayer • Respect • Respectful • Respectful Listening • Revealing • S.S. Inclusion • Safe • Scripture • Share • Slide • Smooth • Soft-edges • Spirit-filled • Stimulating • Struggling • Synergy • Thoughtful • Togetherness • Truth • Turbulence • Understanding • Welcoming • Yes
From page 1

hoped to bring a way into the Circles process whereby Sichel, a lay member from Wesley UMC in Hampstead, suspended to use the Circles of Grace process. Matthew conference rules. Currently, conference rules must be what is, normally, contentious debate. Jen Ihlo, chair of General Conference by the author of the petitions, but to 438, respectively. Those petitions may still be sent to the teaching of creationism in public schools, and one members, 642 to 127. Two other petitions — one opposing Creation and the Church” was approved by BWC to consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching.” The other three resolutions concerned issues between science, theology and the church. Following the Circles of Grace, members voted on each petition. The first petition was approved by a vote of 539 yes to 294 no. That petition will now go to the 2016 General Conference noting that the BWC has voted this way. Only General Conference has the authority to change the Book of Discipline, and they next meet in May 2016. The other three petitions received mixed results. A petition that sought to amend the General Conference to re-adopt a resolution in the Book of Resolutions around “God’s Creation and the Church” was approved by BWC members, 642 to 127. Two other petitions — one opposing the teaching of creationism in public schools, and one on climate change — were defeated, 370 to 403, and 350 to 438, respectively. Those petitions may still be sent to General Conference by the author of the petitions, but they will not have the support of the BWC Session. Another moment of holy conferencing occurred during what is, normally, contentious debate. Jen Ihlo, chair of the BWC’s Rules Committee, brought a resolution that would incorporate the Circles of Grace process into the conference rules. Currently, conference rules must be suspended to use the Circles of Grace process. Matthew Sichel, a lay member from Wesley UMC in Hamptead, moved to amend the Isho resolution. His amendment sought to bring a way into the Circles process whereby petitions and/or resolutions could be amended during the process. Currently, that is not possible. After several speeches for and against the Sichel amendment (using Robert’s Rules of Order), debate was halted by Bishop Matthews for the Memorial Service, a so-called “order of the day.” When the Session resumed after lunch, Matthews took to the stage. “Who knew that an order of the day would provide an opportunity for us to dare to believe,” he said. “I’m always open to God’s surprises.” During the break, he said, he, Isho and Sichel had had a chance to talk. “It was a time of holy conferencing,” the bishop said. “Matt and Jen have something to share with you.” At that, Sichel and Isho came to the podium. Together, they announced that they had reached an agreement whereby they would withdraw the motion and the resolution to allow a time for reflection and information gathering regarding the Circles of Grace process. “By mid-fall,” Isho said, “we commit to having a working resolution on the Circles of Grace, and we’ll post that on the BWC Website. Hopefully, by Jan. 15, we will have a resolution on the Circles of Grace that embodies the spirit of the Circles process but addresses the concern about perfecting resolutions.” “I would much rather sit down and have a conversation, get everyone’s thoughts, and reach common ground,” said Sichel from the podium. “I appreciated the chance to talk with Jen and the bishop.” Isho closed her remarks by noting that the process she and Sichel had participated in was a “prime example of holy conferencing.” Conference members agreed, giving the pair a 60-second standing ovation. At the Memorial Service, members celebrated the lives of bishops, clergy, clergy spouses and laity who had died in the previous conference year. Bishop L. Jonathan Holston of the South Carolina Conference preached, reminding the friends and families gathered, “Your loved ones’ lives are calling you to follow Christ. Never forget who you are and whose you are. You are children of the king.” In other actions, conference members: • Celebrated the ministry of Sandra Ferguson, who is retiring from Conference Staff as Director of Connectional Ministries. Ferguson has been with the BWC for 29 years (see page 6). • Honored the retirement of 16 clergy, representing more than 450 years of service. • Paused in moments of somber reflection during an Act of Repentance Service and reconciliation between Native American people and The United Methodist Church. • Heard two Bible studies from the Rev. Laurie Haller, co-senior pastor, with her husband, Gary, at First UMC in Birmingham, Mich. Haller said that those who dare to believe must be water-walkers. Teaching on Matthew 14: 22-36, Haller said, “As the old saying goes, ‘If you want to walk on water, you’ve got to get out of the boat. How is God calling you to dare to believe?” (see page 4). • Elected clergy and laity delegates to the 2016 General and Jurisdictional Conferences (see page 3). • Greeted Bishop Peggy Johnson of the Philadelphia Area and a former pastor in the Baltimore-Washington Conference. The bishop spoke at both the retired clergy gathering and the extension ministers’ dinner. • Welcomed Bishop Rafael Moreno Rivas of the Methodist Church of Puerto Rico, and his assistant, Janette Graulau, as they came to strengthen a new partnership between the two conferences. • Welcomed Moses Kumar, General Secretary of the denomination’s General Council on Finance and Administration. He spoke at the Laity Session Wednesday night and thanked the BWC for its continuous 100 percent support of General Church apportionments since 1999. • Overwhelmingly approved a $17.2 million budget. • Celebrated that 82 percent of BWC congregations paid 100 percent of their apportionments in 2014 and 100 percent of their apportionments in 2014. The 232nd session of the Baltimore-Washington Conference will be held June 1-3, 2016, at the Wardman Park Marriott Hotel in Washington, D.C.