UMs respond to Baltimore unrest

By Melissa Lauber & Erik Alsgaard

It was an emotional roller coaster of a week in Baltimore as people protested, rioted, addressed the hurts and scars of the city and, on May 3, witnessed the indictment of six police officers on charges of police brutality in the case of Freddie Gray who died of injuries to his spinal cord while in custody.

At Ames UMC in the Sandtown-Winchester neighborhood of Baltimore, near where the riots took place, United Methodists were packing hygiene items and food to give to local residents. UMCOR — the United Methodist Committee on Relief — had provided more than 4,500 health and school kits, and hundreds of layette sets.

As the group was preparing the items, the Rev. Cynthia Moore-Koikoi, superintendent of the Baltimore Metropolitan District, stepped in and reminded them that they had forgotten to pray. Prayer, she said, is action; “our doing is prayer.”

Moore-Koikoi prayed, reminding those present that God does some of God’s best work with our confused feelings and that we are a people who believe in, and count on, resurrection.

It was that kind of week in Baltimore — tears, rage and confusion intertwined with hope, faith and a vision of justice and resurrection.

The week sprang from the April 12 arrest of Freddie Gray, a resident of Sandtown-Winchester, who was picked up when he ran away from police. Police said he was carrying a switch blade, a charge later refuted. He was placed in a police van without a seat belt and experienced what has been called “a rough ride,” while his pleas for medical attention were ignored. He suffered severe injuries to his spine. Gray died April 19.

In death he joined a roster of other African American men from across the nation recently killed or severely injured by police.

In a movement that surprised many in its swiftness, the Baltimore state’s attorney brought charges against the six officers. One of the officers, the driver of the van, was charged with second degree “depraved heart” murder.

Dare to Believe

“Peter got out of the boat and was walking on the water toward Jesus.” — Matthew 14:29b

UM Bishop elected to new post

Washington Episcopal Area Resident Bishop Marcus Matthews has been elected Executive Secretary of the Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church effective Sept. 1, 2015.

In this new position, he will be based in Washington, D.C. His work will include building and maintaining ecumenical and interfaith relationships, establishing relationships with embassies and various national and international governmental agencies to expedite the global concerns of the Council of Bishops, acting as communications officer and working with the denomination’s General Secretaries to maximize the effectiveness of the total mission and ministry of the Church.

Matthews retires as bishop of the Washington Area on Aug. 31, 2016.

Bishop Bruce R. Ough, of the Dakotas-Minnesota Episcopal Area, was elected as president of the Council.

Bishop Matthews combines two leadership posts

Bishop Marcus Matthews has appointed the Rev. Maidstone Mulenga to serve as Director of Connectional Ministries for the Baltimore-Washington Conference, effective July 1. Mulenga will also continue to serve in his current role as assistant to the bishop.

In making the appointment, the bishop praised Mulenga’s strong leadership skills, innovation, drive and deep spiritual commitment to ensuring that the Conference and its 442 churches continue to grow in their ministry — becoming fully alive in Christ and making a difference in an ever-changing world.

Before coming to the Baltimore-Washington Conference in 2012, Mulenga served as Director of Communications in the Upper New York Annual Conference. Prior to that, he pastored three churches in New York. Mulenga also worked as a journalist and editor for the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle newspaper and for newspapers in his homeland of Zambia.

Retiring from the position of Director of Connectional Ministries is Sandra Ferguson, who has worked in mission and ministry for the Baltimore-Washington Conference for 29 years.

Ferguson has played vital roles in mission, justice, mercy and visioning ministries in the conference and beyond, the bishop said. “She has made immeasurable contributions to making The United Methodist Church a positive force that brings God’s love to our communities and the world.”

In recognition of Ferguson’s ministry, a celebration will be held Friday, May 29, at 8:30 p.m. at the Waterfront Marriott Hotel in Baltimore, as part of the Annual Conference Session.

BWC set to address Baltimore unrest during Annual Conference Session - see page 2.
A s I write this, there is unrest and violence on the streets of Baltimore, and we are all, as a conference, praying for the leaders and the people of the city, and for our country, as so much is broken that needs healing, justice and reconciliation. We are also, as a conference, preparing to gather for our Annual Conference Session in late May in that same city, with the theme “Dare to Believe.” It’s hard to think of that on days like this, with so much that looks so contrary to our vision of the Kingdom of God.

The Bible is filled with the prophetic voices of those who were called to be daring in the midst of hard struggles. Nearly every prophet was called to speak a word contrary to current conditions: a word of hope to people in exile; a word of judgment for people who got comfortable with the status quo.

So much of what we are about in the church requires a certain daring to hold forth for the vision of God’s Kingdom in the face of how things currently are. What looks like often defies conventional description and labels: clergy who march in peaceful protests and call for an end to violence; preaching a vision for renewal to a church that looks like it’s dying; or a church that invests in its community.

Together, we must continue to hold the vision before us of God’s sovereignty and love. We must hold onto the conviction that Christ has come and changed the world. Together, we must continue to hold the vision before us of God’s sovereignty and love. We must hold onto the conviction that Christ has come and changed the world.

Together, we can dare more boldly than we ever could on our own. Together, we can pray and work so that the Kingdom of God can “break out” and break through, wherever God’s will is done.

I dare to believe that the gospel is real and true. I dare to believe that gospel can change a heart, a life, a community. I dare to believe that is what can transform the world and that we can do it, together.

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.

BY MANSEY SAWERS
Pastor, Covenant UMC, Gaithersburg

O n April 27, the city of Baltimore exploded in tears, sadness and despair. This explosion of emotions led to protests, marches, violence, looting and confrontations between citizens and law enforcement. It was so sad to watch. It truly grieved my heart.

I was stunned by some of the media coverage. There was an amazing focus on what was going on, who to blame and what should be done to “those people,” but nobody ever asked why it was going on.

For year there have been “those people.” Every time we speak of “those people,” we put a gulf between ourselves and other Americans. Every time we say “those people,” we minimize their experience, we minimize their desires, their dreams, their despair and their pain, because it is “those people.”

I am saddened that the only voice that some people in Baltimore thought they had was violence and disorder. I am saddened but I understand. I understand that when you feel you are not being heard you shout anyway you can. I understand that injustice eventually is met with righteous anger. I understand that this was not what anyone wanted to see happen. I also understand that unless we truly seek justice for all people in this country, rich and poor, regardless of color and place, this won’t be the last time we see this. I don’t agree with the methods, but I completely understand the anger.

As a Christian, though, I can’t stop there. I have to dare to do something about it. I have to dare to keep hope. I hope to dare to believe that justice can still roll down like a river and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Today, I dare you – no, I double dare you – no I double dog dare you, to believe with me, pray with me, and work together so we can bring God’s shalom to the city of Baltimore.

EVENTS

Pre-Conference Briefings
Saturday, May 16
Damascus UMC from 8:30 a.m. to noon
First UMC in Hyattsville, 2 to 5:30 p.m.

Lay and clergy Annual Conference members are encouraged to attend one of these briefings to learn and discuss the proposed 2018 budget, and the resolutions and petitions they’ll be called to vote upon at the May 26-27 session of the Baltimore-Washington Conference in Baltimore. Learn more about the session at http://bwcumc.org/ac-2017-ac-sessions. Members are encouraged to read the resolutions and petitions online before they come and to print them if they want hard copies.

Concert for Imagine No Malaria
Saturday, May 23, 8 p.m.
Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington, D.C.

Tickets are now available for the Wesley Festival, a choral concert given to support Imagine No Malaria, to be given at the Kennedy Center. Tickets are $30 to $50, and available at the box office, by phone at (202) 488-4600, or online at kennedy-center.org. Imagine No Malaria is The United Methodist Church’s effort to rid the planet of this deadly but treatable and well-said

... to express what that word means to you.

BY DARRELL WILLIAMS
Pastor, St. Paul UMC, Oxon Hill

This symbol appears with stories that show your apportionment dollars at work, making a difference in people’s lives.
More than 1,400 United Methodists and their guests are expected to attend the 231st session of the Baltimore-Washington Conference, which meets May 28-30 at the Marriott Waterfront Hotel in Baltimore. Before attending members may wish to:


Purchase books to bring for the BWC Outreach, providing books to children in Baltimore’s elementary schools. A list of teacher-requested books is available online at http://bwcumc.org/ac-sessions/2015-ac-sessions; scroll down and click “Mission Project.”

Become familiar with the candidates seeking to become delegates to the 2016 General Conference. Clergy can vote for any ordained Elder or Deacon, but a profile of those asking to be considered can be found on the annual conference page. A booklet with the lay and clergy candidates’ information will also be handed out at registration.

Read the petitions and resolutions all members will be asked to vote on. You’ll also want to look online at the proposed 2016 conference budget. Printed copies of these will also be in the booklet distributed at registration.

Get ready to Tweet. #bwcumc2015

Take a collection from your local church to add to the offering plate for the Susanna Wesley House in Baltimore at the opening worship service at Foundry UMC in Washington, D.C., they were met by a small group of same-sex marriage opponents shouting through bullhorns, “You are going to hell,” as they waved signs reading, in part, “Your dog dare ya.”

Faithful people cannot be ordained. I want to hear them leave their bullhorns at home.”

“I conceded that our denomination has a prohibition against same gender marriages and ordaining self-avowed practicing homosexuals,” Hand said. “I also mentioned there was time when the denomination did not fully except Black people or ordain women. I told him God’s spirit moved and our denomination was transformed. I believe the same will happen with this issue. He did not want to hear that.”

To counter the protesters, the lead pastor, the Rev. Ginger Gaines-Cirelli, invited some of the congregation to gather and sing hymns. “Our LGBTQ community are strong, faithful people,” Hand said. “Our church is stronger because of our LGBTQ community and all of us allies who believe that all people are of sacred worth.”

Protestors flocked to the nation’s capital because the Supreme Court heard arguments on gay marriage on April 28. Four states — Michigan, Ohio, Tennessee, and Kentucky — are defending their bans. They won their case in the lower court, and because other appeals courts threw out bans enacted in other states, the Supreme Court now must resolve the conflict. Gay marriage is legal in 36 states, including Maryland, and the District of Columbia.

The United Methodist Church’s official stance is that homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. United Methodist pastors may not officiate at same-sex weddings; same-sex weddings cannot be held in United Methodist churches; and “self-avowed practicing” gay people cannot be ordained.

On Monday, April 27, Hand said, she once again encountered the same protesters that had been at Foundry. Hand said she engaged with one of the group, calling him “brother.”

“He asked me not to do that,” Hand said, “because he said I wasn’t a Christian. He said that women shouldn’t be preachers.”

Hand offered the man communion, but he declined, saying, “you’re not a real pastor and you’re not worthy to give communion.”

Hand agreed. “I told him none of us are (worthy), and that’s the beauty of being in God’s Kingdom,” she said. “Saints and sinners, God loves us all.”

“Kathy Gilbert is a multimedia news reporter for United Methodist News Service. Erik Alsgaard contributed to this story.”

Gay marriage opponents protest at Foundry UMC

Gay marriage opponents protest at Foundry UMC

A crowd of people gathered at the US Supreme Court April 27.

At the Annual Conference Session in Baltimore, May 28-30, members will have the opportunity to hear from friends of Freddie Gray and listen for new insights into the issues of justice and racial reconciliation.

In addition, plans are underway for a dramatic expression of prayer as Annual Conference members leave the ballroom and pray in the community. Opportunities to sign up for specific projects that rebuild hope will be available.

As United Methodists, we are called to make a difference in a diverse and ever-changing world. The upcoming session will provide a setting for exploration, consecration and transformation.
W

hen she smiles, she is just like any other young woman, yet her face hides immense pain. When she is among her peers, she bubbles with enthusiasm and yet she is homeless.

Fabiola Nziyigymana is from Burundi, a war-torn country in the eastern part of Africa. She is an orphan. But she was able to receive a scholarship from the Baltimore-Washington Conference. Fabiola at least belongs to something, she is a student at United Methodist-related Africa University.

Fabiola’s life is marked with the scars of war, pain and death. She hangs on to the hope that one day, as a graduate of Africa University, she would be able to lead a normal life and take care of her family.

“I am very happy to be studying at Africa University,” she said in a recent interview on the main campus in Mutare, Zimbabwe. “It is really wonderful for me. And I am very thankful for your help. Thank you very much for offering me a scholarship.”

Hearing her tell her story is as heart-rending as the story itself as she pauses now and then to fight back a tear or an emotion.

She is learning the English language as well as her first year studies in health science.

“Both my parents were killed when I was watching,” she said in an almost catatonic manner. “Therefore, I am a refugee in this country of Zimbabwe. I do not have any relative in this country or in my original country but I have two children, a boy of five years old and girl of three years old.”

She told of a story of running away from Burundi in September 2007 because soldiers were after her as she tried to get back on her feet and providing assistance.

So she left Burundi, passed through Zambia and came to Zimbabwe. When she got to Harare, the capital city, she was taken to a refugee camp.

With other refugees from other countries, she stayed at a shelter and was given food because she was very weak.

“When the second born was 1-year-old, my husband told me that he’s going to look for money so that we could survive,” she said, looking down. And then, in an almost sorrowful voice added, “Sir, from that time I have never seen him again. It has been more than two years and I never hear anything from him. I don’t know whether he’s alive or he’s dead.”

She was a teacher in the government school but “as children we didn’t know that he was participating in war. We were just children, who depended upon them for their survival.”

Fabiola said she spent the night and the next day in the bush, without eating or drinking water. On the third day, she went to the pastor of a nearby Catholic Church, who hid her in the house. But when they heard that the soldiers were looking for her, the pastor gave her some money and told her to leave the country.

So she left Burundi, passed through Zambia and came to Zimbabwe. When she got to Harare, the capital city, she was taken to a refugee camp.

“There were no facilities, no schooling, no opportunities,” she said. “I immediately went to the church and was able to get food.”

The church has answers and the power to affect change,” said the Rev. Rodney Hudson, the church-responds-to-Baltimore-unrest. “We are here to help people see God’s presence in the community.”

Matthews and other conference leaders are experiencing Gray’s death as a wake up call to renew the church’s efforts to address the poverty, violence, addiction, lack of education, joblessness and hopelessness that plague significant parts of Baltimore.

“We are a church that seeks the peace of the city,” he said. “We joined other city church leaders in calling for on-going action, saying, “the issues before us will not be satisfactorily resolved until all of God’s children in this city and in this county have the same basic human rights.”

A significant part of the church’s immediate response is addressing some of the needs of the residents of Sandtown-Winchester. This community is ranked among the poorest in Baltimore, said the Rev. Rodney Hudson, pastor of Ames UMC in that neighborhood.

Nearly one percent of Sandtown’s residents live below the poverty line, the unemployment rate is above 50 percent, there is a 77 percent school dropout rate and the community has the highest crime statistics in the city, Hudson said.

The riots in Baltimore on April 27 resulted in a local CVS pharmacy and other drug and grocery stores being looted and closed.

Many of these smaller, corner stores were owned by Korean families, who depended upon them for their livelihood. Moore-Koikoi is investigating how to help them to get back on their feet and providing assistance. A collection of hygiene items and perishable food from throughout the conference was also taken to provide for the low-income residents in need of these staples.

“Fabiola Brown Carter, Lay Leader for the Baltimore Metropolitan District from New Wavelry UMC in Baltimore, said to pack food items on May 2 at Ames UMC,” said Brown-Carter.

“I am just pleased and over when I got my first conception because I was very weak.”

During the week, he called for the church to do its job. “The church leaders are the ones that are here to lead the community,” Moore-Koikoi said.

His words were greeted with enthusiasm and yet she is thankful for your help. “I want to thank you very much, the whole conference of Baltimore-Washington; thank you, may God bless you.”

And she walked off to class, carrying her books, her burdens, her pain, and her hopes for a better tomorrow.

Fabiola Nziyigymana, left, stands with the Rev. Maidstone Mulenga, center, and Jeremy Shanga Djamba.

Freddie Gray: In ministry to bring hope, healing to Baltimore

From page 1

murder.

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**ARTIST TURNS DEAD STUMP INTO HOPE**

EMMITSBURG — When the large tree on the church lot decayed and died, the congregation of Tom’s Creek UMC did something special with it. Instead of cutting it down and hauling it to the dump, they turned the stump into a message of hope. A church member picked up the costs.

“The visible hand of Christ on the statue shows it is a one-oldstyle/zero-oldstyle-foot wooden carving of Jesus holding a lamb. We had it cut down to a 10-foot stump and then had it carved,” said the Rev. Heath Wilson. “We took something that was dead and dying and gave it new life.”

They turned to Jason Stoner, a local artist and businessman, to transform the stump into a message of hope. A church member picked up the costs.

The 10-foot wooden carving of Jesus holding a lamb faces out into the world to let the passersby know Jesus cares. The visible hand of Christ on the statue shows it is pierced, a reminder of Christ’s death and resurrection.

“So, just imagine a dead tree that was resurrected to be a message of hope that Christ opens up healing and grace to all,” Wilson said.

“Come by and see it,” he added.

**BERKELEY COUNTY UMS TO BUILD FIFTH HOUSE**

MARTINSBURG, W. VA.—Twenty-five United Methodist Churches of Berkeley County, W. Va., held a Music Fest at Spring Mills High School in January to raise funds for their next Habitat for Humanity build.

It will be their fifth Habitat house. Members from all the churches work together on the construction.

“Our emphasis for this house is to build it for a veteran,” said the Rev. Ed Grove, who retired in 2009 but continues to serve the Mt. Wesley-Greensburg Charge. Among the featured individual acts at the concert were the Rev. Edgardo Rivera, Frederick District superintendent, a united children’s choir under the direction of Barbara Suffecool, a Guide for the Western Region; and a 55-voice United Choir made up of representatives of the Berkeley County Churches. Rivera also led a commitment service.

Habitat for Humanity of the Eastern Panhandle is still seeking funding to complete its $50,000 goal for the project, nor have they yet identified a veteran family who qualifies for the home, Grove said. The goal is in sight with more than $52,000 raised by the end of January.

**PEACE WITH JUSTICE GRANT GIVEN LOCALLY**

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The General Board of Church and Society distributed $45,000 in grants from the 2014 Peace with Justice Special Sunday offerings in March. A grant of $5,000 went to a BWC-based organization, the Nahda Museum Project of Memory and Hope.

This art- and storytelling-based project is a stepping stone toward a museum in Washington, D.C., “to tell the Palestinian refugee story, one that has been silenced or ignored for too long,” according to Bohacs Nassar, founder and executive director.

The goal of the project and museum is to deepen the conversations on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict to develop a “more balanced view” by relating the experiences of people who had homes, but were forced to become refugees. The museum will be a space that simply tells the human story, with all its paradoxes and pathos.

The United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries awarded Nassar a scholarship two years ago that enabled him to get a master’s in Conflict Transformation at Eastern Mennonite University.

**HUNGER OFFERING BENEFITS YOUTH GARDEN**

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The Washington Youth Garden was one of two awards the General Board of Church and Society gave at their March annual business meeting. The award was from the hunger offering of $1,573 the board took and was split between the Youth Garden and the Asuncion Perez Memorial Center in the Philippines.

The Washington Youth Garden, located at the National Arboretum on New York Ave., N.E., works with low-income and underserved communities to engage healthy lifestyles through gardening. It provides a year-round environmental science and food education program. To learn more, go to www.washingtongoutharden.org.

**GBGM BOOSTS QUALITY OF LIFE RETREATS**

FULTON — Recently, the Quality of Life Retreats received a grant of $50,000 from the Global Health Unit of the General Board of Global Ministries. The grant will support retreats in 2015.

Quality of Life Retreats, which began in 1998, are a ministry of the Baltimore-Washington Conference. The retreats meet for four-day weekends four times a year and bring together people who have HIV/AIDS and are 18 years of age or older. Participants may be from any religion, any church or no church, nor do they discriminate on the basis of gender, sexual preference or orientation.

“We offer a unique and holistic, participant-centered approach to educating and supporting people living with HIV,” explained the grant proposal.

The grant funds will be used for the retreats in 2015, as well as to expand the community outreach, both to possible participants and to supporting churches in the conference area.

**EASTER SUNDAY, Bishop Marcus Matthews and the Rev. J.W. Park, Maidstone Mulenga and Dae Sung Park traveled to South Korea, retracing the steps of the first Methodist missionaries who arrived in South Korea on Easter Sunday 150 years ago. The team joined an international delegation that celebrated the history of the Korean Methodist Church and prayed for peace and the reunification of North and South Korea. Read the complete story at www.bwcumc.org/korean_missionary_journey.**

**BWC VISITS KOREAN METHODISTS**

In May 2015 Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church
Changing the conversation from ‘Yes, but,’ to ‘Yes, and...’

I t can be very difficult to talk with someone with whom you disagree. One of the troubles we have communicating with people who have different ideas than we do is that we unwittingly shut down the discussion. When we disagree with something someone says, we often blurt out “Yes, but...” and then we launch into our opinion. Often we have hardly heard what the other person has been saying because we are intent on getting our view out. The next thing you know, lines are drawn and both parties become frustrated trying to convince the other of their position. Or the discussion stops and both become quiet. Before long, we walk away from the verbal joust with not much to show for it.

There is, however, a simple way to keep communication open. It is called “Yes, and...” “Yes, and...” is a means for us to keep communication flowing. “Yes, and...” is based on core values including: acceptance of the other person as a child of God, mutual respect, openness to learning, and appreciation of each other’s individuality. We have been well trained to look for what doesn’t work, therefore we typically respond to new or different ideas with “Yes, but...”, not even considering what may be of value in the other person’s perspective. In the long run, “Yes, but...” has the effect of narrowing our world down only to our own ideas and ways of thinking and acting. It assumes the posture of “don’t confuse me with the facts.” “Yes, and...” requires that you listen to what the other person says and acknowledge the value of the person and their opinion. If you view a conversation like two people walking together, “Yes, and...” has the pair continuing to walk, while every time an “and” is mentioned, they probably veer in one way or another. If, when walking together, “Yes, but...” is uttered, it is as if the pair is stopped in their tracks. Including the word “but” has the effect of bringing the conversation to a halt. Movement stops as claims are stacked, or silence ensues. From this frozen state, another phrase “no, because” can actually push the walkers back in the direction they came.

Undoubtedly a “Yes, and...” approach is an attitude of acceptance of the person as they are. Acceptance comes first, followed by a level of understanding. Lastly, the parties may find that they agree. A “Yes, but...” approach assumes that we need to push for agreement first. Understanding follows and lastly we come to accept the other person. “Yes, and...” is grace centered. “Yes, but...” is focused on persuading and convincing, and so is focused on the ideas and not the person. It is position centered.

I call on our Conference, clergy and laity, to have more “Yes, and...” conversations and fewer “Yes, but...” conversations. With this call, I am inaugurating a “Yes, and” campaign for our Annual Conference. I challenge all of us to shift our language. This will require a shift in attitude and approach. It will move us to spend more energy listening and less trying to make points. It will require us to walk with each other and not away from each other. It will require us to acknowledge the good in the other person and their perspectives, even when it is not immediately obvious to us. It will move us to listen and respect each other. It will require meeting one another in relationship before pointing at ideas and positions. And ultimately, it will lead to more dancing, even while sometimes sitting on our hands and less leaving each other on the dance floor.

“Yes, and...” conversations will take some practice before becoming natural. Our upcoming Annual Conference Session offers an ideal time to practice. I am crazy enough to believe that this simple shift in language can help bring about a shift in the way we are with each other. It can also be a lot of fun. So, let’s start hearing your “yes, ands...”!

The Rev. Rod Miller is chair of the BWC Commission on Religion and Race.
A journey back in time to Selma, Alabama, 1965

By Maynard Moore

Retired Elder of the Baltimore-Washington Conference

Fifty years ago, voting rights in the South were a serious issue that was continuing to etymos efforts by the African-American community in their efforts to gain significant representation in state legislatures and in Congress. In 2005, we are seeing much of the gains beginning to erode as legislatures pass restrictive voting rights laws. In the federal courts, judicial decisions are compromising the initiatives guaranteed by the Voting Rights Act signed into law by President Johnson in 1965 and since reenforced twice by Congress.

My return to Montgomery, Ala., for the celebration on March 25, on the steps of the state capital, was not an act of nostalgia, rather, it was a chance to reconnect with a serious social and political issue still with us.

Several of my colleagues were at the Edmund Pettus Bridge on March 8 when Presidents Obama and Bush, and more than a million people, walked across that now historic structure and spoke about the progress that has been made. Certainly, bully clubs kept in their sheathas is a mark of progress. But black folks in the South are still facing obstacles when they attempt to register to vote, and others in states across the nation now have to take a variety of steps to register.

In 2005, the 500 young people who had been selected to start the March from Selma were wearing special T-shirts in red, white and blue – they had been selected through a nationwide essay contest writing as to what they would mean to their communities and their march for voting rights.

It was somewhat nostalgic for me to re-trace that route from 50 years ago, walking along with the chanting and singing young people and bus-loads of others. But this time, instead of hostile young white ruffians taunting us and threatening us, we were lined with local black folks, on doorsteps and church steps, passing out bottles of water, cheering us on.

Still, it was depressing to see how many humming and dilapidated buildings and homes could be observed along the route. It was still obvious to us where we have and have not progressed, and how stark the economic differences are between “historic” black communities and the state and the rest of the state. Quite a difference in the March then picked up in a new chant, “We’re Bad! We’re Bad!”

At the Capital, two flatbed trucks were positioned exactly as when Dr. King spoke 50 years ago. On those trucks were two huge billboards with images of Dr. King speaking to that crowd. The crowd for this occasion, a local radio host, explained to us the symbolism. At her signal, the trucks moved away and behind the billboards, and the steps of the Capital were open before us.

Later, as we headed home, it was clear to us that this struggle has yet to conclude – the image of Dr. King still lives in our land, perhaps not overtly as before, but with subtle currents and deep roots.

I also reflected on two signs that I had seen while in Alabama. The first was an image of the Confederate emblem – a pedestal engraved: “We Dare to Defend our Rights.”

An important principle is that the congregation’s fiduciary responsibility with respect to its investments must honor not only the narrow requirement of financial stewardship, but must honor the causes and principles for which the donations behind the investments were made.

“With what Jesus do we have his portfolio?” The Mid-Atlantic Foundation, which follows the SRI principles as defined by the General Board for Pension and Health Benefits, is an important resource for congregations as they consider issues related to responsible investing.

4. We commend the CFA for voting to establish an investment working group. We recommend that the investment working group (a) be comprised of nominees from the Board of Trustees, the Board of Pensions, the Board of Church and Society, and the Trustees; and (b) include in its responsibilities the promotion of socially responsible investment at the Annual Conference and local church levels.

Report to Annual Conference: Divestment Working Group

Submitted by Rev. Jackson Day

Background

A Divestment Working Group, as mandated by the Annual Conference, (2004, Journal, p. 333) was formed with the purpose of addressing the concerns of the Conference Boards of Church and Society, Pensions and Health Benefits, and the Conference Council on Finance and Administration.

Following Annual Conference, the working group held meetings to identify the issues involved, to hear from experts in the field, to be informed about the location and nature of investment; to hear from Wespath, the investment body of the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits, as well as the Mid-Atlantic Foundation, and to formulate this report.

Findings

The Baltimore-Washington Conference currently has about $132 million invested assets. The majority of these assets are pension and benefit funds which are held at Wespath and the Mid-Atlantic Foundation. In addition, the Conference has about $1 million in invested assets. The majority of the remaining assets include investments in alcohol, “adult entertainment”, tobacco, weapons, gambling and operating private prisons. If a particular company derives 10% or more of its revenue from such activities, the company is screened out. In the case of nuclear weapons, the threshold is 1%.

The General Board of Pension and Health Benefits has the ability to add additional criteria to the Screen which are not specifically mandated by our Social Principles. An outstanding example of this was the decision of the General Board in response to Resolution 407-5, a subsequent advocacy, to add private prisons to the list of investments we avoid. The Divestment Working Group found that the General Board pays close attention to the resolutions of the General and Annual Conferences.

Recommendations

1. Social Witness is an intrinsic expression of the Christian faith. Annual Conference Resolutions in support of, or in opposition to, various activities and entities, both domestic and international, are a necessary expression of our faith. When such resolutions require investment decisions for their implementation, we call upon Conference members to direct the call for such resolutions to the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits, which continually evaluates the SRI screens.

2. We call upon the Conference Communications Office to publish an understanding of Socially Responsible Investing through the media at its disposal.

3. United Methodist congregations in the Conference have their own investment decisions to make, and we urge the Annual Conference to promote SRI by our congregations. If a congregation makes investment only on the basis of financial return, and pays no attention to where the money is invested, it is out of compliance with United Methodist principles.

An outstanding example of this was the decision of the Conference Boards of Church and Society and the Board of Pensions, the Board of Church and Society, and the Trustees, to avoid investments in alcohol, “adult entertainment”, tobacco, weapons, gambling and operating private prisons. If a particular company derives 10% or more of its revenue from such activities, the company is screened out. In the case of nuclear weapons, the threshold is 1%.

Any plan of fiduciary responsibility with respect to its investments must honor not only the narrow requirement of financial stewardship, but must honor the causes and principles for which the donations behind the investments were made.

“A divestment portfolio reflects the Christian commitment to social justice and the promotion of socially responsible investment.”
We become what we behold. We shape our tools, and thereafter our tools shape us.

Marshall McLuhan

(RE)building the way we think about ministry...together

How are you and your congregation being shaped by your work with the poor, the hungry, the imprisoned, the naked, and the marginalized? Find tools for getting involved in social justice and making a tangible difference in your neighborhood in the Community Transformation section of the Ministry Toolbox.

As we are experiencing currently in Baltimore, the community is begging for the church to be a transformation partner. We can be the church made visible in the world and bring the reality of the Gospel to life for all people—especially those who are disempowered by systems of oppression. In the toolbox this month, you will find racial justice and reconciliation resources that you might use to begin having authentic dialogue that leads to sustained action that creates—along with prayer—transformed lives and communities. We hope you will add what you have found helpful, as you have sought to join Jesus’ mission “to preach the message of good news to the poor to announce pardon to prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to set the burdened and battered free, and to announce, “This is God's year to act!”” (Luke 4:18-19, MSG)

The first 100 people to ask a question, submit a tool or add knowledge to an existing tool will be eligible to receive a $100 Cokesbury gift certificate.