BWC begins 2013 holy conferencing

More than 1,200 United Methodists packed the hall at Martin’s West in Woodlawn May 4 to celebrate together in worship, learn more about the issues facing the church and begin the business of the 229th Session of the Baltimore-Washington Conference.

Bishop Marcus Matthews, who took over as episcopal leader of the Washington Area last September, presided for the first time over the conference in which he once served as pastor, district superintendent and Council of Ministries director. The bishop stressed the need for lay and clergy leaders to participate in holy conferencing “as we come together as a community of faith to determine where God is leading us,” he said.

As part of the holy conferencing, members learned about the proposed 2014 budget and 11 resolutions coming before the Annual Conference Session, including one on equitable compensation for pastors, five on conference rules and five on social issues.

Reports were also given on business that was carried over from the 2012 Annual Conference Session, including a recommendation for the conference not to move forward with a capital fundraising campaign and clarification of the relationship between the Conference and Be the Change, a 501(c)3 that addresses homelessness. (See related story on page 4.)

2014 Budget Considered

Charlie Moore, the chair of the conference Council on Finance and Administration, went over some of the highlights of the proposed 2014 budget of $16.8 million. The proposed budget represents a 1.6 percent decrease in spending from 2013 and a 7 percent decrease from the 2012 budget.

The proposed benevolence factor for local churches remains steady at 17.75 percent. In its planning, CFA is counting on the collection rate for apportionments rising from 91.5 percent in 2013 to 92.5 percent in 2014.

The proposed budget reflects the conference’s missional priorities, Moore reported. The 2014 budget provides for a new young adult/campus ministry director position to resource local churches. It also reduces the number of Guides from 2 per region to 1.5 per region. The half-time position will focus on developing and nurturing youth ministries.

The budget also increases mission funding by 3 percent, adds $60,000 for congregational development, increases deaf ministry funding to allow for two full-time pastors and adds $213,000 to the Strategic Growth Initiative, which provides associate pastors to ethnic minority churches with high growth potential.

BWC churches also saw a 7 percent increase in the number of ministries for community outreach, justice and mercy, resulting in 1.1 million people – a 5 percent increase – being served by these community ministries.

BWC statistics reflect growth in discipleship, mission & learning

Responding to Jesus Christ’s commandment to go and make disciples, United Methodist churches in the Baltimore-Washington Conference are sending more people on missions and community ministries, according to newly released conference statistics.

The conference is also seeing an increase in Christian formation, Vacation Bible School attendance and in the nurturing of disciples, the 2012 statistics reveal.

The annual statistics report provided by the Conference Treasurer Paul Eichelberger’s office shows that there was a 24 percent increase in the number of people sent out on Volunteers in Mission (UMVIM) teams in 2012 as compared to 2011.

“That is what the church is about – mission,” Bishop Marcus Matthews said in reaction to the numbers, adding, “sometimes we get so preoccupied with numbers that we forget what we are called to do as Christians, which is to make disciples of Jesus Christ.”

Bishop Matthews noted that bringing souls to Christ is the top priority for the church. At the 2013 Annual Conference Session, Bishop Matthews will be receiving an offering of names of those who have been brought to Christ in the last year.

“When we talk about bringing the sacrifices of praise into the house of the Lord, we are talking about offering up names of those we have helped come into a relationship with God,” he said.

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May is the month of May flowers and merriment, as in the “merry-merry month of it.” And it is the whirlwind-fire month of Pentecost. It is also, if all goes right, the month of my ordination as a full member of the Order of Elders. It is a grand day, involving laying on of hands by our bishop and promises on my part to preach the gospel, administer the sacraments, lead God’s people to serve, and order the life of the church. We know that one major characteristic of God is faithfulness and the keeping of covenants (promises), and one major characteristic of ours is a disturbing tendency to be unfaithful.

What’s a fallible, human “new full Elder” to do, in the face of all these intimidating promises, anyway? Fundamentally, it all starts with our promise-making and promise-keeping God, who consistently pledges, “I will be with you always, even to the end of the age.” The bedrock of covenantal promises rests, not on human goodness, but on divine grace. It rests on being a part of something bigger than simply we ourselves. It rests on the Church, which will help us keep promises, love us when we fail, and remind us of our own walk with God.

To promise is to take a leap of faith and to call on the best of who we are, but it is also to call on God to be all of who God is, too. Baptized people have already made some of the most powerful promises I know of. Ordination promises are no less radical than the promises made at baptism or confirmation. In fact, I think they ought to send a news release about this to us in the cluster, in part because we might have to get used to the idea that we might change our minds about what we promise God.

Standing on the promises of Christ my king, through eternal ages let his praises ring. Glory in the highest, I will shout and sing, standing on the promises of God.”

And whether we make holy promises on our knees in an abb underneat a hotel chandelier or seated in a pew on some Sunday morning, or lying in a hospital bed, we make them standing on the promises of God.

What does “promise” mean to you? “chitchat” with us on getUMSocial.com

Congratulations
This month, we also lift up the word “blessing” for the Rev. Daryl Williams, who is one of the writers of the monthly page 2 column, “Well said.” On April 27, Daryl was married to Erin Nicole McCoy. We congratulate the couple and wish them all the best life has to offer. Congratulations!


Workshop on pensions May 29, 9:30 a.m. Baltimore Marriott Hotel A representative from the General Board of Pensions and Health Benefits will explain the changes to the Clergy Retirement Security Plan, (CRSP) which will take effect Jan. 1, 2014. Registration is required through the online annual conference registration process. Re-open your registrations to sign up for this event.

Mission u Marriott Hotel, Bethesda July 26-28 Formerly called the School of Christian Mission, the training offers classes for everyone, youth and adults, women and men, clergy and laity. For information, contact the registrar, Darlynn McRae, at 443-254-2803 or darmacrae@yahoo.com.

Events Retreat on youth violence May 18, 9:30 a.m.-4 p.m. Seneca State Park, Gaithersburg The Central Maryland UMW and UMM co-sponsoring a retreat on the theme “Solving the Silent Crime: Intercepting Teen Dating Violence before It Hits the Evening News.” For information, contact Kathleen Charters at kcharters@macom or 240-803-7598.

60th Anniversary celebration May 18, 9 a.m. to noon Board of Child Care, Baltimore The Auxiliary of the Board of Child Care will observe its 60th anniversary during the Auxiliary’s annual meeting, at 3:00 Gaither Road in Baltimore. The celebration will honor some of the Auxiliary’s key milestones over the past six decades. Registration is at 9 a.m., lunch at noon, followed by the business meeting at 1:30. Visit http://boardofchildcare.org/help/auxiliary.php.

Healing Communities training May 25, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Randall Memorial UMC, D.C. This intensive training helps churches heal broken lives and relationships among former prisoners and the communities that welcome them home. Cost is $25, which includes continental breakfast, lunch and training materials. For more information and to register, visit www.randallumc.org/healing_communities.html.
WHILE THE CONFERENCE REMAINS STRONG IN ITS COMMITMENT TO ADDRESS HOMELESSNESS, A RELOCATION BY THE BISPONC office of the Council on Finance and Administration has made it clear that Be the Change Washington has no official relationship with the Baltimore-Washington Conference. At the Preconference Session on May 4, Charlie Moore, the CFA chair, reported on questions raised at last May’s conference about Be the Change, a 501(c)3 developed by a group of conference leaders to create and provide permanent supportive housing to the homeless in Washington, D.C.

Moore led a six-member Be the Change Relationship Task Force. The four voting members were: The Rev. Dean Snyder, pastor of Foundry UMC in Washington, D.C. and the Rev. Terry McCain, pastor of the former Calvary UMC, which was closed in 2010.

The task force was formed in mid-2012 and the task force members made a recommendation, which was subsequently approved by the conference Council on Finance and Administration.

Concern not ‘what,’ but ‘how’

Karin Walker explained.

The Novak Consulting Group, an industry expert, was hired to conduct a feasibility study and deliberation of this issue, with the help of industry experts, the task force felt that the guarantees would expose the conference to too much risk,” he said. While the task force’s decision puts an end to the relationship with the conference.

The task force rejected the potential guarantor of a $5 million loan. The Baltimore-Washington Conference would be a guarantor, McCormack, Baron Salazar Development, a leading developer of developing of economically integrated urban neighborhoods, who will also serve as the construction firm on the North Capitol Project.

Moore also reported that as a result of this decision, Common ground has assumed all responsibilities for the North Capitol project, ensuring the full repayment of the BWCA’s $188,000,000 loan, plus 4 percent interest.

The other partner is Govans Boundary UMC in Baltimore, which voted in a church conference May 5 to sell a building to a building development group that plans to repurpose the facility to provide 75 to 100 units of housing for disabled veterans.

Be the Change Baltimore begins ministries

The 501(c)3 Be the Change Baltimore was developed in January 2012, but it adopted a different model to address homelessness.

New Hope UMC in Edgewood, plans to sell its property to Epiphany Housing Corporation, which intends to invest $19 million in creating supportive housing for the homeless. New Hope is a “unique mission outpost,” Walker said, which means it provides services to the homeless.

Currently, Be the Change Baltimore is in partnership with two churches.

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They also called on the Discipleship Council has been tasked to develop a protocol to follow, not just for Be the Change, but for any group desiring a relationship with the conference.

The Discipleship Council is expected to provide an update on how such a protocol will be created to the members of annual conference 2013 session May 29-31, said Cynthia Taylor, the chair of the Council, who served on the task force.

Homeless ministry still priority

The person involved in this discussion understands that homelessness is a serious social issue and all are interested in efforts to get our brothers and sisters off our doorsteps and on the path to recovery and out of alleys, and into safe shelter,” Bishop Matthew’s assistant, the Rev. David Cooney, wrote in a letter to church leaders about Be the Change.

“Be to or for against Be the Change as a conference ministry is not to be for or against caring about the homeless. This is a discussion about the path, not the destination.”

However, the Be the Change conversation “has provided a catalyst for Baltimore-Washington Conference, as a whole, to identify a path forward for meeting the social challenges before us as we seek to act, in Christ’s name, caring for the poor and marginalized,” Matthews said.

Addressing homelessness is at the heart of who we are as a people of faith, Matthews noted. “I pray this conference never backs off the issue of trying to find housing for the poor,” he said. “The challenge is how to do that together. At the center of any discussion of homeless ministries must be our commitment to care for the poor as we would care for Christ.”

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Butler provides legacy of outreach

By Linda Worthington
UMConnection Staff

When Phyllis Butler died last June, she left a significant legacy to Arden UMC and the Baltimore-Washington Conference, both of which she served for many years.

Butler's husband, A. Elwood Butler, a farmer and orchardist she married in 1957, died in 2000; and their only child, Steven, now President of UMAMN, died in 1974. She served as accountant for many years for the family business, Butler Brothers Dairy and Orchard, which is still run by family members.

Butler was a good steward and knew she wouldn't spend all that she was caretaker of. So she turned to the conference, where she spent many years in leadership positions, and willed $20,000 as an unrestricted gift.

As the conference learned of her background, they decided the bequest should go to the United Methodist Appalachian Ministries Network. "We looked into her activities and UMAMN seemed to be where her heart was," said Pier McPayton, conference controller. As a member of the Appalachian Development Committee (UMAMN's former name), Butler traveled to all 55 counties in the state, began UMAMN, an UMCOM Advance, covers the Appalachian states from New York to Mississippi. But West Virginia was where Butler's home, mission and heart were.

"It's an overwhelming gift," said the Rev. Bob Wilkins, executive coordinator of UMAMN. "We're very grateful that the conference would allocate the funds to us."

Butler was a dedicated and active member of Arden UMC until her death. She taught Sunday school classes, played piano and organ, directed the choir, was treasurer, lay leader and lay member to annual conferences, and served in many other capacities. She had been elected as lay member this year.

"She was my most avid supporter," said the Rev. Kathy Spitzer. "I owe a lot." Not only did the church benefit from her presence and welcoming spirit, but from her generosity as well. She left a $30,000 legacy to the church. She had already contributed generously to the building of the family life center, which will be named in her honor in the fall.

"She was my hero," said conference Director of Communication Ministries, Sandy Ferguson, who oversaw many of the ministries in which Butler participated. "She had an impact on my life, especially about the conference lay leaders," Ferguson said. "She was the first woman to serve in that capacity."

Butler had polio in her teens, delaying her graduation a year from high school in Martinsburg, and all her life coped with its after-effects. For the past 20 years or so, she was in a motorized wheelchair. But she never stopped her. She broke ground on many fronts as "the first." For five years she was chairperson of the Conference Council on Ministries. She also was a member of the General Council on Ministries for eight years, and enjoyed her work on the Advance committee for United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR).

When the Frederick District was created in the early 1990s, Butler was its first chair. She also held the position of president of the conference United Methodist Women (1976-1980), the first time the position had been held by a woman living outside the Baltimore and Washington Conference offices in Buckhannon, W.Va.

The conference membership elected her as a delegate to General Conference five separate times, encompassing more than 20 years. In 1992, as the first lay person elected as a delegate, she led the delegation.

Spitzer took her to the dedication of the new conference center in August 2010, her last visit to the conference, where she was swarmed with people wanting to greet her. Spitzer said.

Even with all her involvement in the church at all levels, she took time to read and travel. In 1991, she went to Singapore to address the World Methodist Council. In 1990, she attended the Oberammergau Passion Play in Germany, as well as helping on a mission trip to Haiti in 1984. She visited 40 states including Hawaii and Alaska. Her local interests ranged from reading to elementary school children to serving on various local boards and committees.

Phyllis Puffenberger Butler was born in Washington, D.C., but when her mother died at age 5, she moved to Berkeley County to live with her grandparents and aunt, and never really left there. Butler had polio June 8, 1939, a few months short of her 80th birthday. She had had an accident with her wheelchair that she didn't recover from. On the day before her death, she happily confided to her sister-in-law, Jenny Butler, that she saw angels coming for her.

"She was a hard-working, tireless, courageous, eloquent, and respected by clergy and laity alike," summarized Ferguson. "And she was always gracious."

What's UMAMN?

The Appalachian Ministry Network is designated by The United Methodist Church to work with local, district, conference, and general church leaders to develop coordinated ministries that seek justice for all God's people in Appalachia. It particularly focuses on hunger and poverty in Appalachia, an area that includes 20 counties stretching from New York State to Mississippi and encompassing three United Methodist jurisdictions.

Rev. Butler's bequest will help provide education and training for local church leaders, lay and clergy, in an Appalachian context; provide grants to local churches that address childhood health and hunger issues; create a resource for impact Appalachia, such as those related to the coal mining companies; and address systemic causes of poverty in Appalachia, Bob Wilkins said. UMAMN's office is located in the West Virginia Conference offices in Buckhannon, W.Va.

Church addresses human trafficking

By Christine Kumar
UMConnection Corresporndent

Denise Yates has dedicated her life to providing safe harbor to children who fall prey to human trafficking and abuse in Maryland.

More than 40 people from churches and advocacy agencies heard Yates and other speakers at Bethany UMC in Columbia on April 1, as the advocacy group Action Against Slavery and Trafficking held an awareness session about human trafficking and what they can do to help children, adults or foreign nationals who are crying for help.

Yates, the mother of eight children, works countless volunteer hours as the director of Safe House of Hope in Columbia and surrounding areas. The presenters also displayed of those who were convicted of the crime in Maryland. According to the Department of Justice, 300,000 children in the U.S. are at risk every year of sexual exploitation. UNICEF reports that 2.7 million children, especially young girls, are exploited nationwide, making this a $32.4 billion industry.

The presenters also reported that human traffickers are not an exception in Columbia. A running list was displayed of those who reported cases of the crime in Columbia and surrounding areas. The presenters also spoke of how the traffickers prey on victims who are runaways or throw-away youth who live on the streets and are in need of a place to sleep and food to eat.

These victims generally come from homes where they have been abused or abandoned by family members. Traffickers trick them by paying them compliments, providing good meals and giving them a place to sleep before forcing them into prostitution.

The Rev Martin Brooks, associate pastor of Bethany and Emory UMCs, trusts that the church has safe arms to catch those who fall prey to human trafficking and abuse in Maryland. "Our mission will be to guide our most vulnerable children and adults."

During a presentation by the Howard County Advocacy Against Slavery and Trafficking (HoCoAGAST), attendees shook their heads as they heard the statistics:

"If you are interested, broken people fall into your arms," Yates continued. "You've gotta have safe arms."

"The presenters also reported that human traffickers are not an exception in Columbia. A running list was displayed of those who reported cases of the crime in Columbia and surrounding areas. The presenters also spoke of how the traffickers prey on victims who are runaways or throw-away youth who live on the streets and are in need of a place to sleep and food to eat." This resource includes helping countless children who are runaways and throw-aways so that they can be in safe arms. "Christ challenges us to go to the world with our hands and feet," said Brooks. "We have to go and act."

Prized communicator joins BWC Center staff

By Linda Worthington
UMConnection Staff

TARTING APRIL 1, the Rev. Maidstone Mulenga, a clergy member of the Upper New York Conference, joined the conference communications staff, in charge of global affairs and new media. He will also serve half time as a part-time assistant to Bishop Marcus Matthews.

Since 2010, Mulenga served as Director of Communications in the Upper New York Conference in Syracuse, where he worked closely with Bishop Matthews. He is a journalist, with a master's degree in computer-mediated communications in addition to one in divinity. His divinity degree is from Colgate Rochester Crozier Divinity School. He also holds a bachelor's degree from Wayne State University in Detroit.

As a journalist for more than 15 years with the Rochester (N.Y.) Democrat and Chronicle, his particular passion was to internationalize local stories and the reverse to localize international stories, he told his former papers as he left for Syracuse. "I strived to help Rochester understand the world better." This will also be part of his role in the Baltimore-Washington Conference.

He is the founding president of the Rochester Association of Black Journalists and serves as National Chair of the National Association of Black Journalists Ethic Committee. Mulenga is a member of the Board of Directors of the United Methodist Publishing House and was editor of the 2012 Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference Christian Daily Advocate. He recently was elected Vice President of the Black Staff Forum of The United Methodist Church.

Mulenga pastored churches in New York state after leaving his journalism career. He was also an active lay member for several years in his home church, West Avenue UMC, holding positions including Lay Lay Leader, president of the Board of Trustees and was elected delegate to the 2008 General Conference.

And his wife, Charity, and their children, were married in Zambia, their home country, nearly 20 years ago. He has an 18-year-old daughter, Lukonde, who attends the University of Michigan; and a 15-year-old daughter, Malinuka, who attends Atherton High School in Columbia.
Photo contest winners reflect the light of God

By Melissa Lauber
UMConnection Staff

More than 200 photos were entered into the Baltimore-Washington Conference’s Be the Light photo contest. Images of people at play, butterfly wings, numerous sunrises over exotic places, a child coming forward to kneel at the altar railing, reflections, refractions and the sacred and mundane illuminated side by side all made their way into the contest.

Four winners in the categories of nature, people, miscellaneous and youth photography were named. Choosing the winner was a difficult task. So many of the photos drew us into remarkable stories.

We wanted to dance with the students from Zimbabwe, submitted by Lawrence Bennett of Community UMC, and embrace the young girl in Haiti leaning on a laundry line where the sugarcane workers live, an image captured by Terri King of Calvary UMC in Mt. Airy.

Several of the photographers explored a wide range of subjects. The Rev. Sandy Rector’s shot a sack race at Oak Chapel UMC, a castle in Ireland, a beautiful young girl who had lost her front tooth and a butterfly landing on a summer tomato that a squirrel had recently picked.

Melissa Richardson sent a photo of a small blond girl looking straight into the camera from her hospital bed. In an e-mail that accompanied her picture, she wrote, “My daughter after multiple surgeries at Hershey Children’s Hospital. Much LIGHT!” Much light, indeed.

Be Light, the theme of the recent BWC photo contest, ignited the imagination of people throughout the conference. Of particular interest to us were some of the works made by the younger photographers.

Kelly Brewer, 18, of Glenmont UMC took the assignment to heart. She made a collection of photos of feathers and water droplets.

“Sometimes our lives get so crazy that we overlook God’s light shining right in our faces. On the day I took these,” she wrote in an e-mail, “I stepped onto my porch and came upon these gorgeous wet feathers. Looking at them I couldn’t help but notice how the water drops captured and reflected the sunlight. It made me think about my own life and I couldn’t help but think, am I like this water, reflecting God’s light? It’s an important question, as we are the light of the world. I love how God’s light is present in so many ways, everyday. I hope these photos can be a reflection of the joy I took in taking notice of God’s light in nature.”

Stephanie Asher, another photographer under 18, also caught our attention with a photo of five people spelling out the word “JOY” with sparklers. It was perfect and some of the judges began to question if pictures can be too perfect. In the end, we determined, it didn’t matter. Faith and photography are both about capturing joy wherever you find it.

Baltimore-Washington Conference’s Be the Light photo contest winners reflect the light of God.

Rachel Peterson, 16, Wesley Freedom UMC, Sykesville
Winner of first place in the People Category

Katelyn Regipieri, Pasadena UMC
Nicolel Walker
Bryan O’Neill
Bill Conway
Cindy Stegle
Sally Ransom-Knecht

By Melissa Lauber
UMConnection Staff

2nd place winners - left to right
Katelyn Regipieri, Pasadena UMC
Nicolel Walker
Bryan O’Neill
Bill Conway
Cindy Stegle
Sally Ransom-Knecht
Laity explore wide range of ministry opportunities

By Linda Worthington
UMConnection Staff

I n the crowded assembly room at Martin’s West, lay members gathered for the Laity Session of the 2013 annual conference, meeting May 3 in a new way to do yearly ministry. With both clergy and executive sessions meeting in advance instead of May 29, the first day of the session of annual conference.

Delores Martin, the conference lay leader, told a little of what her role is as she introduced herself. She also introduced Sandy Ferguson, the first laywoman to head the Conference Connectional Ministries.

Sandy Jackson, the recently retired director of Connectional Laity Development in the division of Leadership Ministries of the General Board of Discipleship, was the keynote speaker.

Jackson stressed the importance of lay leaders being spiritual leaders first. “As baptized people we’re expected to live holy lives,” she said. “You’re called to be a spiritual leader, both outside and inside.”

Moving from general to specific, Jackson explained the roles of each layperson in leadership.

The lay leader, she said, represents the local church in the community, serving with the clergy. “As a leader, you’re called to model discipleship,” she said.

Lay members, elected by the congregation, are to prepare and participate in all sessions of annual conference and report to the congregation. They also interpret to the congregation the actions that take place at the annual conference. In addition, the lay member serves on the Church Council, the SPRC and Finance committees.

Lay members, like all laity who serve in the church, must be informed, committed and equipped.

To be equipped to be a lay servant and to be certified requires taking several courses, offered by each district twice a year, including preaching, discerning spiritual gifts, leading prayer, United Methodist polity and heritage.

Lay speakers in the audience resisted some of Jackson’s instruction, specifically raising questions about why a lay speaker has to take so many hours of coursework for the new role of lay servant, which they have had to do every year for the training in preparation for lay speakerhood.

Jackson said they could apply those courses to those required of lay servants. She added that in order to do that, the lay speaker would have to have had to first keep up with the required refreshers courses.

Certified Lay Ministry (CLM) is something quite new, requiring two years of training in modules four times a year for seven weeks. Jackson explained Sandra King-Shaw, the conference director for CLM. “CLM is in partnership with God to grow disciples,” she said.

The conference has 136 certified lay ministers (CLM), 19 of the new class of 24 were present. They received certificates of completion of their courses.

What does a CLM do? The answer is wide ranging and includes leading small churches as a local pastor, assisting senior pastors in ministry, teaching courses and classes, serving as a church’s administrative assistant, parish nurses, children’s and youth ministries. “The possibilities are limited by you and your district approval,” Jackson said.

“Lay servants and members can be agents for change in the direction we’re taking the church,” Jackson said.

“Discover your spiritual gifts, discern your passion and listen for God’s direction,” she instructed. “Listen for God’s will in all you do. … It is important that the clergy and the laity … love out our ministry as we have been gifted and called whether it is in the factory, or the hospital, at work or at home, in the church or in the community.”

New associate director reflects on ministry with poor

By Andrea Middleton King
Special to the UMConnection

B y my community’s standards, my family was considered “rich” because we had a cinder block house and an indoor toilet. My father was a truck driver, my mother a homemaker. I was the oldest of the girls.

At age 4, I used to watch my brothers go off to school in the mornings and go to along with them. As a little black girl growing up in the isolated rural South (with a history of slavery and Jim Crow), my dreams were to do except follow my mother around the house and watch television. Soon I developed a morning television ritual and a passion for watching Captain Kangaroo.

I was pretty content with mornings with the Captain and afternoons with Mr. Rogers, while learning to cook and do housework with my mother to fill the hours in-between. Then a few months before my sixth birthday, some people from town and our pastor came to talk with my parents.

After that conversation, my mother announced to me that I finally would be able to go to school, a special summer school.

Even as I watched, President Lyndon B. Johnson on our black and white TV, deliver his State of the Union address Jan. 29, declaring “War on Poverty,” I didn’t realize its impact on me. At the time President Johnson appointed Sargent Shriver to oversee the coordination of academic activists and the assembly of civil rights activists to develop the strategy that would facilitate children in overcoming the obstacles intrinsic in poverty. By May 1965 President Johnson was announcing Project Head Start, an educational program for low-income communities.

In the summer of 1965 I went to school for the first time. At school we learned to read, write, count and color. Grown-ups there checked our vision, hearing, and gave us dental supplies. We ate a snack each morning. By mid-day we were on the way home. The program only lasted for eight weeks, but its impact has lasted a lifetime.

My love for learning had been stimulated, and my passion for Captain Kangaroo had been replaced by a passion for education. I still remember my teacher Mrs. Dantzler, and her daughter Jade, who was a teacher’s aide and a college student. As a 5-year-old I did not realize that I was one of the very first Head Start students. Not until I was well into my adulthood did I understand that I was an active participant in “The War on Poverty.” Recent headlines about the “sequestration,” which has put automatic spending cuts into effect, will impact Head Start programs all over the country.

Pre-school aged children of lower-income families will not only be denied the opportunity to begin the educational process with a solid foundation, they will also be denied nutritional meals, basic medical assessments, and the opportunity to socially prepare for entrance into the public school system. Shortages in educational funding can create long term deficits in the lives of these children and consequently the larger communities in which they will grow, work and live.

Poverty, at its most basic, simply means lack or deficit. As a child in the rural South, poverty meant not having an indoor toilet. As an adult, poverty has taken on a multitude of different meanings, especially after the Holy Spirit led me to read Psalm 86. David cries out: “Bow down. Hear me, Lord, and answer me, for I am poor and needy!”

Wha, overwhelmingly rich King David saying to God. “I am poor and needy”? That’s when the realization hit me that God was using the psalmist to address many areas of life in which we can be impoverished, lacking love, mercy, safety, peace, justice, spiritual soundness, political power, emotional well being, physical health and strength – not to mention educational shortfalls. While David does have economic wealth, the psalm speaks to other gravely impoverished areas of his life, which says to me that each of us has areas of wealth and each of us has areas of lack. The challenge is to pool our collective resources so that we may be able to give and to receive in mutually beneficial ways.

As the new Baltimore-Washington Conference associate director for ministry with the poor, I am challenged to bring what we have to a common table, a place where we share what we have and take what we need to both sustain ourselves and build up others. Considering King David was crying out to God about being poor and needy, I feel certain that he was not only crying out for himself but standing as an intercessory voice for others.

David’s prayer was and continues to be an investment into the lives of others, even as Lyndon Johnson’s State of the Union Address (and his support of early childhood education) became intercession for me and thousands upon thousands like me.
Examining the church’s role in evolutionary
Crafting new rules on the selection of committee
Encouraging the practice of earned sick time;
Electing delegates to General Conference a year
Amending the rules of the session to be more in
Ending bullying;

From page 1

Churches also gave $5.3 million to non-United Methodist
$3.2 million in 2011 to $3.6 million in 2012. BWC
rose from $1.8 million in 2011 to $2.4 million in 2012, a
well.

Church but other benevolent and charitable causes as
their financial support of missions and ministries, and
more of our members to engage in ministries within and

Director of Connectional Ministries Sandy Ferguson.

United Methodists participating in the community

“Even before I saw the statistics, I knew that we were
Director of Connectional Ministries Sandy Ferguson.

Rose from $1.8 million in 2011 to $2.4 million in 2012, a

May 15, 2013 Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church  UMConnection

preached at the Preconference Session.

Chattin celebrated the potential of the seed and the
“great and gratifying things that result from small

she noted that while it has taken some time for some
churches to become more involved, there has been a
significant increase when we encourage and recruit
more of our members to engage in ministries within and
outside our communities.”

In addition to actual mission work, churches increased
their financial support of missions and ministries, and
not only of those sponsored by The United Methodist
Church but other benevolent and charitable causes as well.

The amount of direct costs incurred by the local
churches for mission and community ministry activities
rose from $1.8 million in 2011 to $2.2 million in 2012, a
5 percent increase. The total spent by local churches
On UMC causes and missions was up 14 percent from
$5.2 million in 2011 to $6.7 million in 2012. BWC
churches also gave $5.7 million to non-United Methodist
benevolent and charitable causes, a 6 percent increase.

“Local churches are not only talking about
mission and ministry but committing their resources to
spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ,” Bishop Matthews
said about the increase in missionary giving.

The missions BWC churches are engaged in include
the United Methodist Community Services, Peace
with Justice, criminal justice and mercy ministries,
Imagine No Malaria, Zimbabwe partnership, health and
wellness, Hope for the City, mission in Nicaragua, Asian
Initiative and Russia Initiative. The conference also
sent more than a dozen VIM teams to West Virginia,
North Carolina, Kentucky, Haiti, Liberia, Nicaragua and
Guatemala.

Apart from reaching out and spreading the Gospel,
central church also saw a rise in Christian formation as
there was a 2 percent overall increase in the number of
participants in Christian formation groups and other
small group ministries. More than 18,400 children
participated in Christian formation groups, while
more than 30,500 adults participated in Christian
formation ministries. There was a slight decrease in
the participation of youth and young adults.

While there was an overall 1 percent decrease in Sunday
School attendance, there was a jump in the attendance of
Vacation Bible School. With nearly 25,000 participating in VBS,
the conference saw a 7 percent increase from 2011.

Church experts have noted that churches should
provide Vacation Bible School, since it offers a unique
opportunity to reach out to children and family in an
excellent outreach tool into the community.

Apart from VBS, there was also a 2 percent increase in
the number of ongoing classes for learning for all
ages. Confirmation preparation classes saw a 7 percent
increase, with up to 1,403 participants.

In terms of professing members, the number of
racial and ethnic members continues to grow even as
the number of white professing members continues to
decline.

Hispanic, Asian and multi-racial professing members
rose a combined 25 percent in the BWC last year.
Hispanic/Latino members rose by 3 percent to 672 while
Asian members rose by 2 percent to 1,267 and multi-
racial members by 16 percent to 1,548.

White membership dropped a 2 percent to 129,818,
while African American professing membership was
down 1 percent to 39,559. Pacific Island members fell
by 34 percent to 114 and Native American membership
stood unchanged at 129.

Overall, the total professing members in the
conference was 177,160, down 1 percent, mostly due to
correcting of the previous year’s reporting errors. In
terms of new members, the conference received 9,958
by profession of Christian faith, 718 by reaffirmation of
faith, 1,049 transferring from other United Methodist
churches and 635 by transferring from non-United
Methodist churches.

Average worship attendance at all weekly worship
services dropped 2 percent to 64,542 while the number of
persons who were baptized was down 2 percent to
2,465. The number of baptized members who have not
become professing members was 11,196, a 1 percent
decrease.

On the business side, the market value of church-
owned land/buildings and equipment in the conference
rose to $1.1 billion, a 4 percent increase and there was
a 4 percent decrease in debt secured by physical church
assets.

And therefore, let the immeasurable
come. Let the unnoticeable touch
the buckle of my spine. Let the wind turn
in the tree, and the mystery hidden
in the dirt swing through the air. How
could I look at anything in this world
and tremble, and grip my hands over
my heart? What should I fear? As sure as
God is faithful the harvest will come.

-Benediction from Mary Oliver’s Little Summer
Poem Touching the Subject of Faith

The Rev. Terri Rae Chattin preaches at the Preconference Session.
T RAGEDY comes in threes, some say. If that is so, then we’ve had our share on U.S. soil this spring. What’s left are vexing questions about what we can and will do to limit future tragedies.

The beloved Boston Marathon became a Boston Massacre last month when two unsuspecting terrorists took precious lives of young, blooded victims, along with a nation in shock at its own vulnerability. Then a fertilizer plant’s storage facility exploded in tiny West, Texas, also taking lives, destroying homes and leaving us once again dismayed at our vulnerability — this time to environmental disaster when regulations are too often broken and not adequately enforced.

However, the third tragedy may be the most insidious and lethal over time because it has — and will cost us more many more lives through violence, murder and suicide. I’m referring, of course, to the collection of sensible gun control bills that held such promise for our nation’s safety and sanity. Even the heavily compromised background checks bill failed to reach the U.S. Senate’s 60-vote threshold to become a law of the land. Sadly, the news coverage and painful outcry from that tragedy were too quickly muted.

While the deadly crimes and mayhem in Boston prompts investigations, analyses and maybe public policy decisions, the post-mortem on the Senate vote against gun safety can only evoke just criticism and cries for now.

The devotion some have to their right to possess arms becomes irrational when they see it as a right to willfully buy and sell arms — which is not in the Constitution. And zealous resistance to legal oversight or common-sense requirements in regulating public safety laws is more universal, and thus more effective, is more than irrational; it’s dangerous. To restrict background checks to store sales and not include gun-show, person-to-person and Internet sales makes a mockery of the law and places everyone at risk.

Gun-safety laws have been proven to work, despite the persistent lies of those who assert otherwise. Those who ignore that critical truth and instead submit to the purely mercenary motives of the National Rifle Association will be found on their hands for every death caused by firearms that end up in the wrong hands unnecessarily.

Nevertheless, I am decidedly hopeful — my faith demands as much — that God’s truth is marching on. We must appreciate and be encouraged by the progress of this recent and recurring endeavor. It took advocates a hundred years to fight for laws passed into law two decades ago, although that law was later weakened. The poignant advocacy offered by courageous families of the Newtown, Conn., mass shooting victims failed to force a Senate vote against efforts to prevent it through a filibuster.

“We deserve a vote!” President Obama and the families of many victims proclaimed. And we got one. Now we deserve much more. We must keep going, keep pushing, keep praying and organizing and working for gun safety — indeed, gun sanity — laws that will surely save some lives. Not all, but some.

That’s what the Apostle Paul wrote of his valiant mission to save souls in 1 Corinthians 9:22: “That we might, by all means, save some.” So let us use all means — from hosting prayer vigils, protests and community forums, to buying ads and publishing opinions in print and social media, even to registering, informing and transporting voters to the polls during the crucial 2014 Congressional elections.

Estimates cite more than 3,500 U.S. gun deaths since the Newtown massacre four months ago, and that figure does not pre-date the Boston Marathon massacre. We can’t be daunted by the unprincipled Senators who voted no to sensible gun safety laws, whether they did it for heartless or spineless motives. We still have work to do.

And change to keep a commandment to follow for the sake of thousands of victims and their families and for countless others who will surely become victims if we don’t prevail. By all means, let us try to save some.

Women remember march for suffrage

OVERLEA — The Rev. Karen Davis, megaphone in hand, was on the front lawn of the Overlea-Fullerton Community Center at 8 a.m. on a drizzly Saturday morning Feb. 23. She was there to offer the invocation and march with 200 other women and a few men for the commemorative 100th anniversary of the Suffrage March of 1913. The March, 230 miles from New York City to Washington, D.C., went through Overlea on today’s Belt Air Road, on its way to Baltimore.

Davis, the pastor of the Mt. Washington-Allegare-Overlea Chapel UMC Cooperative Parish, evoked her sisters of old, “Foot-stomping, passionate, out-loud, powerful women. Bruised souls whose blistered feet marched, marched, marched to the heat of those two soul-swaggering sisters: justice and equality …” as she offered a blessing.

The 1913 marchers 27 days to get to Washington, but there they joined 5,000 people in what was considered one of the most dramatic events of the suffrage campaign. It took another seven years, to 1920, to ratify the 19th amendment to the Constitution, for women’s right to vote.

Asbury UMC expands for community

SHEPHERSTOWN, W. VA. - Asbury UMC broke ground March 10 for a new $2.2 million multi-purpose center, 25 years after the current building was opened.

Pastor Ginger Medley led about 200 congregants in a march of 200 other women and a few men for the commemorative 100th anniversary of the Suffrage March of 1913. The March, 230 miles from New York City to Washington, D.C., went through Overlea on today’s Belt Air Road, on its way to Baltimore.

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Church needs to reclaim its language and its power

By Rev. Matt Poole
Senior Pastor, Glen Mar UMC

Evangelism marketing is a rather recent concept in the business community that encourages word of mouth marketing about products or services and promotes customer loyalty. The idea is to get a customer to become so loyal that they convince others to buy and use the product. I find this interesting that the business world is embracing the word evangelism, which means “to share or bring good news,” at the same time the church seems to be rejecting it. I find many Christians who like to hide behind the quote from Francis of Assisi, “Preach the gospel at all times and when necessary use words.” We tend to interpret this as advice not to use our words or say anything about our faith at all. St. Francis was not only a man of action but a man of words. During the crusades while men fought against the Muslims, St. Francis went to the Sultan himself to share the good news with him. The sultan would have been converted to Christianity if it had not been for the fact he would have lost his life as a result. St. Francis also sent out his followers two by two to share the good news as Jesus commanded. This suggests that St. Francis understood that it was “necessary” to be an evangelist in the best sense of the word. He was concerned that our actions and our words be in alignment. There are times when basic needs are to be met before someone can actually hear the good news. This is true in many places, but many people living in America today already have their basic needs met before someone can actually hear the good news. I agree with the words of St. Francis also said, “Start by doing what is necessary, then what is possible, and suddenly you are doing the impossible.” When Jesus invited some fishermen to become followers he encouraged them with the phrase, “Don’t be afraid! From now on you’ll be fishing for people!” (Luke 5:10) So we find that it is necessary to share our faith with others. If we do not use our words of good news, others are unlikely to understand our good actions. They are less likely to connect our good actions to God and we personally get all the credit for the good we do instead of God. Evangelism in its purest and simplest form is to share with others the good news. What may intimidate us or feel uncomfortable to us is thinking that evangelism is converting people to our way of thinking. I am going to go out on a theological limb here and say that God does not ask us to convert people. God is the one who does the converting, not us. As fishers of people we are simply the ones casting the net of good news into the world. Some will swim into the net of good news and some won’t. God only asks us to share our faith with others. And why wouldn’t we share our faith if it is good news? If the message of Jesus Christ is a life giving message that helps people in this life, wouldn’t we want to share it? We share the good news of a birth, a new job, a new car, a marriage, an anniversary and many other good things happening to us. The life giving grace of Jesus Christ is something good that has happened to me and changed me for the better. I can’t think of a good reason not to share this life giving message. God can use each of us through words and good actions to help root people in the life giving message of Jesus Christ. I know Bishop Marcus Matthews has challenged each of us to bring one person to Christ. I once prayed that God would give me the opportunity to bring to people to Christ in one year. Within six months I realized I had shared the good news and prayed with 11 people. After that I stopped counting, because it really isn’t about keeping score. God needed to change me in regards to sharing my faith and not other people. When we are open to the opportunities to share the Good News we will find them all around us.

How do you create a culture of evangelism?

By Rev. Kevin Baker
Lead Pastor, Oakdale Emory UMC, Olney

I remember it like it was yesterday. It has only happened once, but once was enough to make a lasting impression on me. About 15 years ago, I was in the middle of a sermon on an average Sunday morning. I can’t recall much about the sermon except that I was pressing the point that God in Jesus was inviting us home. I was talking about how it felt to be far away from home and desperate to get back. Right then, in the middle of my words, she stood up. She didn’t move, just stood straight up, and said out loud for everyone to hear, “I want to come home!” As I looked at her, she was weeping — not merely crying — but weeping so that her nose was running and tears were pouring down her cheeks. I stopped crying — but weeping so that her nose was running and tears were pouring down her cheeks. I stopped preaching, walked over to where she was and put my arm around her. In a gentle voice, with tears still streaming, she said, “I want to come home and have a relationship with God.” Right there, in the middle of the room, in the middle of the service, I asked everyone to join me and I led her in prayer as she spoke directly to God about where she was in life and what she needed from him. I encouraged her to trust in God’s promises and then we hugged and she sat down. To tell you the truth, I didn’t remember whether or not I finished the sermon. That is a great story, isn’t it? But it doesn’t end there. The following week, I was with some of our longtime church members, and one of the women brought up the incident from the previous weekend. I expected her to have the same joy I had experienced, but I was sorely disappointed. Her comment was, “Things like that have never happened at our church as you would like, below are some cultural changes that might set the stage for the Holy Spirit to move powerfully:

1) You go first. Pastoral and leadership vulnerability is a sensitive issue, but someone has to demonstrate vulnerability. People are more likely to be open to your own struggles, losses and victories helps to create a culture where people understand it is okay to be broken.

2) Have the church go second. Create a culture ripe for evangelism through the regular use of testimonials. Start listening for stories from your members that you know would be appropriate to share and that would increase a culture of evangelism. Every one of us has a story of redemption and God’s work in our lives that will touch someone who is listening.

3) Turn up the volume. Vulnerability and culture change take time, but we must start slowly. As people begin to trust you as their pastor and the church is viewed as a safe environment in which to share their stories, there will be a gradual shift from “I used to struggle with...” to something like, “Right now, I am...” It is easier to share our past struggles than to open up about the current issues in our lives. But as trust grows and culture changes, people will be more and more ready to “get real” about where they are today, which means that the Lord will be able to meet them in their pain right here and right now in your church.

4) Train your leaders. Jesus said the fields were ripe with the harvest but the workers were scarce, so we should pray for workers. I agree, but workers need to be trained. Many of our church members and leaders have never been equipped to help someone go from “I don’t know” to “Sounded.” Take time in your staff, council and committee meetings to help your leaders find their own evangelistic voices. Keeping the process “fun” helps no end.

I remember a United Methodist clergy person once saying to me that in all of her training and church experience, she had neither seen nor helped anyone to accept Jesus as their Savior and Lord. How many of our leaders and church members feel woefully ill prepared to meet someone wherever they are on their spiritual journey and assist them to take the next step? If we can’t do it, then who can?
Premier helps inspire spiritual awakening in Bermuda

BY Carrie Madren
UMConnection Correspondent

Known for its white sandy beaches and azure-tinted waters, Bermuda is undergoing an unparalleled spiritual revival. This island nation, with a population of about 64,000, recently elected a new leader, Premier Craig Cannonier, a long-time member of Marsden First United Methodist Church, which has about 150 members and is one of two United Methodist churches on the island.

Pastor Joseph Whalen has served Marsden for about 13 years. He said that Cannonier and his wife, Antoinette, became the leader of a political party that merged with another party, creating One Bermuda Alliance (OBA), which he led before being elected to represent the Devonshire South Central constituency. In the months before the national election in December 2012, Pastor Whalen played with Cannonier and his campaign workers. “Although the OBA was going up against a political Goliath in the (Progressive Labor Party), we raised a great spirit in that room that night that on the eve of the election — something awesome was happening,” Whalen told UMConnection. Cannonier won 15,949 votes out of 30,862.

The Sunday after he was sworn in, Cannonier invited his Cabinet to attend church with him. In the months since his swearing in, Cannonier sought a national day of prayer. “This came as a result of his acknowledgement that the ultimate answers to our dire national problems and concerns can only come from Almighty God,” Whalen said. During a meeting with island clergy, the Premier shared his desire for spiritual awakening within Bermuda. The passage from 2 Chronicles 7:14 fueled the witness he provides going about these tasks has been unparalleled spiritual revival. This island nation, known for its white sandy beaches and azure-tinted waters, Bermuda is undergoing an unparalleled spiritual revival.

Whalen said that Cannonier, a member of Marsden First UMC, now serves as Bermuda’s new premier.

Whipple honored for leadership in growing Asbury UMC

BY Melissa Lauber
UMConnection Staff

Sometimes Beryl Whipple thinks he needs a nap. But then he receives another word from God and life becomes too interesting not to pay attention, he said.

By night, Whipple stocks shelves and does customer service at a Safeway grocery store. By day, he pastors Asbury UMC in White Marsh and is a doctoral student in the church leadership program at Wesley Theological Seminary.

The witness he provides going about these tasks has not gone unnoticed. In April, he was inducted into the Martin Luther King Jr. Board of Preachers at Morehouse College in Atlanta, his alma mater. With this honor, he was charged “to be a faithful scholarly leader, a guarantor of continuity, celebrator of change, negotiator of structure and facilitator of meaning” and to use his “time, talent, tender and technology” to build a beloved community.

He was one of the youngest people to be inducted into the upcoming annual conference session.

Social media is key

One of the keys to Asbury UMC’s success and growth, Whipple said, is its use of electronic media to tell its story.

“Social networking is free,” he said. “I find those moments when we can update Facebook. We’ve gotten one or two new members a week from social networking. It lets our members showcase their church to others.”

Website - www.acharge2keep.org
Facebook - /AsburyUMCWhiteMarsh
Twitter - @ACharge2Keep
YouTube - ACharge2Keep

19 clergy, representing 565 years of ministry, to retire

BY Linda Worthington
UMConnection Staff

Of the 19 retirees this year, four are women, two are a clergy couple retiring together, one was a Music of Ministry. Their years of service add up to more than 565 years, according to the Office of Pensions and Health Benefits; which means an average length of faithful service is more than 29 years. In that time, a clergyperson could preach more than 1,450 sermons.

The retirees will be honored at a luncheon May 21 and the upcoming annual conference session.

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Social media is key

One of the keys to Asbury UMC’s success and growth, Whipple said, is its use of electronic media to tell its story.

“Social networking is free,” he said. “I find those moments when we can update Facebook. We’ve gotten one or two new members a week from social networking. It lets our members showcase their church to others.”

Website - www.acharge2keep.org
Facebook - /AsburyUMCWhiteMarsh
Twitter - @ACharge2Keep
YouTube - ACharge2Keep