Annual Conference Preview: ‘Building bridges; be love’

By Melissa Lauber
UMConnection Staff

More than 1,500 members of the Baltimore-Washington Conference will celebrate a United Methodist home-coming when they gather at the 230th session of the Baltimore-Washington Conference May 29-31 at the Waterfront Marriott Hotel in Baltimore.

“For our clergy and laity, annual conference really is like coming home,” said Bishop Marcus Matthews, who will preside over the session. “It's a gathering of ‘God's Morning Vietnam!’”

Chinese pastors at Wesley... Clinton encourages UMW... Bridges as spiritual icons... Love appointed director... Hamilton speaks on Bible... Retirees serve 772 years... Making a Difference... Imagining No Malaria...

Today, only 17 percent of Americans worship in any church, synagouge or mosque on a weekly basis,” he said. “They're saying we're irrelevant. We need to begin to take the Gospel to the streets, get to know people by name and engage where there is the greatest need. Only then will lives change; even the church will change.”

Bishop Matthews encouraged those present to “Seize the very moment in which we are living. Don't get caught holding onto past stuff,” he said. “We are the one God is looking toward to make a difference.”

Throughout the eight districts, members shared the new ministries and ideas they were embracing. Two of the laity sessions were canceled due to the weather.

In Frederick, they heard about how the church is supporting Ellie Walton, a documentary filmmaker who is a member of Middletown UMC, in making a film about the Hope School for the Deaf in Monrovia, Liberia.

During the filming, American and Liberian rap stars Famus, Takun J, and Trade, serendipitously met and joined forces to make a music video about the school called “Just Like You.” The sign language for that title is becoming a common greeting for people across Monrovia, said the Rev. Susan Hale.

The Cumberland-Hagerstown District held an impromptu book sale during their session, raising money for the Imagine No Malaria campaign.

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HELP is not a word that’s easy for us to say. My own reflexive response to someone who asks if I need help, in any form, is “No thanks, I got it.” Even when I don’t “got it.” Even when I would like some help.

It’s a reflex. Like saying “time” when someone asks how you are, even when you spilled coffee on your suit, your kid has an ear infection, your mom is having surgery today and you are down to nothing in the fridge but ketchup and pickles. Help is a hard word, at least for me.

But in the church, our model of ministry is a holy, where all the parts work together for the common good. Doesn’t the hand need the help of the eye? Doesn’t the foot need the help of the leg? Our most wonderful and “successful” ministry comes where we all pitch in together, where music ministry and preaching and art and prayer all come together in a sort of Holy Spirit dance.

At a larger level, I’m grateful all the time for an Annual Conference where the churches help each other, and for Conference staff that stand by to help, with workshops and seminars and advice. We are not left to do ministry “all by ourselves.”

All this is of course built on the foundation of the help that comes to us from God, through the Holy Spirit, sent as comforter and advocate, and coming to us in the form of hands to help and hearts to love. Psalm 121 tells us: “I will lift up mine eyes to the hills, from where shall my help come? My help comes from the LORD, Who made heaven and earth.”

Very often the help that comes from the LORD looks mightily like a sister or brother to lend a hand at the soup kitchen, an accountant helping with a church audit, an unhoused neighbor who sings in our choir, or even a district superintendent with some ideas for how to serve our neighborhood better.

In Jesus, God sent “help” when we could not help ourselves. And when we are seeking to do God’s will, or our neighborhood better.

The United Methodist Men of the Baltimore Region is asking every Methodist fellowship at this 30th anniversary event. Tickets must be purchased online. Log in as: nickname – @UMC; password – @UMC.


MISSIONARY AVAILABLE TO SPEAK

May 15-29

To schedule the Rev. Richmond Williams, a professor at Africa University, contact BWC Secretary of Global Ministries, N. Sharon Leatherman, at 301-333-2643, or bwcmisionseomail.com.

Care kits for Baltimore

Annual Conference

May 29

The Baltimore Region is asking every church to donate 10 care kits for those who are un-housed in Baltimore City. Bring care kits to Annual Conference for distribution. Visit www.bwcumc.org/carekits for all the details.

Register for Summer Camp

West River, Manidokan

Now through summer

Get registrations in for summer camp experiences. See www.funfriendsfaith.org for details on programs and schedules. Campership applications are available for churches to apply for summer camp assistance.

Golf Tournament

National Golf Club in Fort Washington

June 9

The United Methodist Men of the Baltimore Washington Conference are sponsoring a golf tournament to support Imagine No Malaria, hunger ministries and Sozoing. For more information, e-mail golf@bwcumc.org, or visit www.bwcumc.org/golf.

Mission u

Bethesda Marriott

Aug. 8-10

The Roma of Europe, people with disabilities, and balancing inner and outer dimensions of the Christian life will be the classes of the 2014 Mission u.

The event is sponsored by the Board of Global Ministries and United Methodist Women. Cost varies depending on room accommodations and ranges from $160 to $385. A youth session is also available. For registration information, contact Dyllyn McCrea at darmacrse@yahoo.com.

EVENTS
Area bridges help illustrate Annual Conference theme

BY ERIK ALSTGAARD
UMConnection Staff

The theme of the 39th session of the Baltimore-Washington Conference – coming up later this month – is “Building Bridges: Be Love.” The logo features four bridges, one from each region of the conference. In previous issues, we’ve learned about the Burnside Bridge at the Antietam Battlefield (Western Region) and the Howard Street Bridge (Baltimore Region).

In this issue we’ll look at the Taft Bridge (Washington Region) and the Chesapeake Bay Bridge (Annapolis-Southern Region).

The Taft Bridge, located in Washington, D.C., is an iconic reminder of days gone by. Built between 1897 and 1907, the bridge carries traffic on Connecticut Ave. over Rock Creek Gorge.

The bridge is well known for the statues of lions that guard each entrance. Originally made out of concrete and installed in 1906, the lions have been restored – twice – with mixed results. The current statues were erected in 2000. Around Christmas, local residents have been known to decorate the lions in festive attire.

The bridge also features beautiful lampposts along the structure, installed in 1906. Each of the 24 lampposts features a decorative eagle on top.

The Chesapeake Bay Bridge, often the bane of travelers headed to or from Atlantic Ocean beaches, was originally opened in 1952. The parallel span was added in 1973. Officially called the William Preston Lane Jr. Memorial Bridge – after the Maryland governor who initiated the construction project – the two spans are some of the longest over-water crossings in the world. Bridge traffic numbers about 61,000 vehicles per day (but why does it seem all of them are trying to cross eastbound on Friday night?).

Recently, ospreys have built a nest on the bridge, right in front of one of the traffic cameras, blocking its view. The Maryland Transportation Authority has removed the nest three times (according to the Baltimore Sun), and each time the nesting pair have returned.

The Annapolis-Southern Region is home to two districts: Washington East and Annapolis. Washington East sees 8,575 people, on average, in worship each weekend from its more than 19,500 members. The district is served by the Rev. Rebecca Iannicelli, superintendent.

The Annapolis District is led by the Rev. Evan Young, superintendent, and the district averages 8,717 in worship each week from its more than 24,200 members.

In preparation for the annual conference, members will hear reports on a wide variety of ministries, vote on a $17.3 million budget and consider 14 resolutions on subjects as diverse as the conference moving policy for clergy, to guidelines on how outside groups might partner with the conference, to aligning investments with resolutions on Israel/Palestine.

This year, members are also invited to minister to people of Baltimore by bringing Care Kits for the homeless. The kits will be distributed to shelters in Baltimore on the evening of May 29.

The theme of the 230th session of the Baltimore-Washington Conference – coming up later this month – is “Building Bridges: Be Love.” The Rev. Ianther Mills. “Today’s test is tomorrow’s testimony,” he said. But he also challenged the clergy and laity of the Baltimore-Washington Conference. “I don’t think our job is to just feed people what they want. Our job is to speak the Gospel the best that we know how,” he said. “It is time for us to do what God has laid on our hearts and minds.”

Areas bridges help illustrate Annual Conference theme

AC Preview: Looking forward to the annual reunion

From page 1

Imagine No Malaria campaign to help rid sub-Saharan Africa of the treatable, preventable disease.

The Memorial Service, honoring those who have died in the past year, will be May 30 at 10 a.m.

The Service of Ordination will be in the hotel’s Grand Ballroom May 31 at 2 p.m. This year, one Deacon and nine provisional Elders will be commissioned and one Deacon and eight Elders will be ordained.

Preaching at both of these services will be Bishop Kenneth Carter of the Florida Annual Conference.

The Rev. Stacey Nickerson shared information on the Malaria initiative. In the Baltimore-Suburban District, 8,735 in worship, more than 8,900 in 22,667 members, with Rev. JW Park. Greater Districts: Bishop hears joys and concerns of area churches

Greater Washington, served by District Superintendent, the Rev. Joe Daniels, and Central Maryland, served by District Superintendent, the Rev. JW Park. Greater Washington boasts 22,667 members, with more than 8,000 in worship each Sunday. Central Maryland has 25,144 members, with 8,735 in worship.

By Erik Alsgaard
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In preparation for the annual conference, members will be attending pre-conference information sessions. These sessions, on May 15 at Towson UMC for the clergy and May 17 at John Wesley UMC in Hagerstown for the laity, will also include worship led by the Rev. Cynthia Moore-Koikoi, superintendent of the Baltimore Metropolitan District, and the Rev. Conrad Link, the Cumberland-Hagerstown superintendent. James Salley will speak at the Laity Session in the afternoon, the clergy will hold their executive session after lunch.

For more information on the Annual Conference Session, visit www.bwcumc.org/events/annual_conference_2014.
Beijing pastors provide rare glimpse into Christian China

By Amy Shelton* & Erik Alsgaard

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ypical Sunday for the Rev. Wang Xuan includes preaching to more than 10,000 people, leading a choir practice, visiting home-bound parishioners, handling administrative tasks, and preparing for her next sermon. She is one of six pastors serving this church, which held multiple worship services every Sunday, with an attendance of 5,000-6,000 every service. Xuan is one of the leading Chinese pastors in Beijing, China, and she’s spending the semester at Wesley Theological Seminary to complete an intensive study – the first of its kind in the United States. Recently, she and her classmates shared details of their ministries and their lives in the People’s Republic of China.

“I hope to gain more knowledge and spiritually and to improve my pastoral skills this semester at Wesley,” said Xuan. “I had been praying to find a way to utilize my bilingual skills, and when this came, I thought, ‘Why not?’”

Wang said that it occurred to her one day that the work she was doing could — and would — have an impact on tens of thousands of Christians in China some day.

“We all have gifts,” she said. “God has a way of using us for His purpose. Sometimes we don’t see this, but it’s there.”

Wang said that she was impressed with the Chinese pastors’ evangelistic zeal.

“We talk about decline here (in the United States) all the time,” she said. “But there, they’re growing like crazy. God’s work isn’t limited to just one area of the world, this growth cannot happen just in China. Pay attention to where God’s working and see how that can impact your ministry.”

The visiting pastors are leading their churches in a country that has an estimated 14 million to 130 million Christians, within a total population of more than 1.3 billion people. While Christianity is growing faster in China than in any other region of the world, there is ample need to educate — and evangelize.

“People are usually surprised that I’m a Christian pastor,” said the Rev. Wang Hai Qain. “Some don’t know what a Christian pastor is. And sometimes people don’t understand the difference between Protestant and Catholic or Muslim, but more and more, people in China are gaining more knowledge about Christianity.”

In addition to evangelists such as Qain, people typically become followers of Christ in China because of curiosity, a connection to a Christian, or through searching for help.

“Though Christianity might not be the cultural force in China that it is in America, there are tremendous similarities between the visiting pastors and their American counterparts. When asked what their prayers and hopes were, one pastor answered, ‘For my church to feel the will of God’s working and see how that can impact our connection.’”

The retirees will be honored at a luncheon at the Conference Center May 13.

Retirees share 772+ years of service

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<td>Victor E. Sawyer</td>
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leading Chinese pastors, who are studying at Wesley Seminary, join in worship.

By Amy Shelton* & Erik Alsgaard

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HE IS NO one ‘most memorable’ occasion in his 49 years of service to the church, said the Rev. Dean Snyder. “I could give you 100 memorable times.”

Snyder is one of 32 clergy retiring this year, representing more than 772 years of service to God and the church. In The United Methodist Church, ordained clergy may retire at age 65, and must retire by age 72.

Exactly half of the 2014 retirees class is clergy women. The longest serving clergywoman retiring is the Rev. JoAnne Alexander in the Frederick District who has served 57 years. Her ministry has been as part of a clergy couple, with the Rev. Kent Tice.

Together, they have served Oakland UMC in Charles Town, W.Va., for more than 20 years. She said she did not encounter opposition to clergywomen “even back then,” when she stepped into a three-point charge that had seven student pastors in seven years. She assured them she wanted to grow the church and put down roots in the community. That she did, and she continues serving there with her husband as a part-time church hire.

The Rev. Sandy S.W. Taylor, the only retiree from the Washington East District, has served 49 years. Snyder is the longest serving clergyman, with most of his years served elsewhere, but 17 of them in the Baltimore-Washington Conference, including the past two as senior pastor of Foundry UMC. Among his memorable moments, he said, is “receiving Frank Schaefer into membership at Foundry church after he was defrocked for conducting his son’s wedding.” He also recalls “writing stories about the work of the UMC in Zimbabwe.”

Perhaps what he’ll remember most, he said, were the “important moments (that) were not high profile,” such as the homeless man on the streets of Philadelphia who picked up coins and took them to the church, “because he wanted to make an offering to the church that welcomed him.”

Close behind Snyder in years of service is the Rev. Al Clipp, who, along with 10 other retirees, is from the Frederick District. He has served 47 years, almost 20 at Calvary UMC in Martinsburg. Many will remember Clipp as the Secretary of the Annual Conference in the 2000s.

On the other end of the spectrum – clergy serving the fewest years – is the Rev. Janice Leith with nine years, all at the Texas Charge in Cockeyville. The Rev. Stella Tay, an ordained Deacon, is credited with nine years, but before her ordination she served another dozen years. Most of the dozen pastors who are retiring with fewer than 20 years of service had another career before heading the call to ordained ministry.

One former district superintendent, the Rev. Mark Derby, is retiring. He was a D.S. from 2000-2004, then two more years while also pastoring the church from which he is retiring, Grace UMC in Gathersburg. Serving as a district superintendent “helped me to see the importance of our connection,” he said. As a local church pastor, he sought to help congregations to become Christ-centered, he said, then as a D.S., “I saw much more clearly the importance of our relationships as colleagues and as sister churches.”

Derby said he’s looking forward to continuing ministry in other forms. “I plan to work with Ambassadors for Christ International, a mission agency,” led by a seminary classmate. And “when I’m not traveling, I’m looking forward to working with Habitat for Humanity.”

Each retiring pastor has poignant memories of his or her time serving the church, not all good, but by this time in their lives, they say, along with Alexander, “I have been blessed!”

The retirees will be honored at a luncheon at the Conference Center May 13.
On Thursday, April 24, ten young adults departed from the Conference Center to travel to Seaville, NJ for a Hurricane Sandy relief mission trip. Before leaving, Washington East District Superintendent, the Rev. Rebecca Iannicelli, gathered with us to pray, read Scripture and share Communion. She read from John 20, emphasizing verses 21 and 22: “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

Iannicelli pointed out that this is the Scripture read the week after Easter. She told us we were being sent, by Jesus, with three things: peace, the breath of the Holy Spirit, and a responsibility to spread the word of God. Three-and-half hours later, we arrived at Seaville UMC where we would be staying for the duration of our mission trip.

We traveled from Seaville to Delmont to work on an elderly couple’s home near the Delaware Bay. The home had been raised 10 feet in order for the homeowners to keep their flood insurance. The two of us split into two teams and we got to work. Almost immediately, the homeowner, George, came out to greet us, leaning on his cane with one hand and holding his Chihuahua, Rocky, in the other. George was extremely grateful for the help, and was excited to see the work being done, as they had been living in a trailer in the yard for the past four months, after about a year of shuffling between family members.

The inside team was busy hanging drywall. Their task wasn’t particularly easy, as they had to avoid covering any electrical wires so the electrical work could be inspected the following week. The outside team had some difficulties of their own, as they needed to use power tools and the home still had no electricity. Thanks to a very long extension cord from the neighbor’s house, which George and his wife, Pat, were using for their trailer, we were able to get squared away with our circular saw. By the end of the day, the inside team had completed one whole room and the outside team had measured, cut, bolted and spindled one section of railing.

Saturday was a day of full endurance. We knew it was our last day and we had goals of how far we wanted to get before the next team came in. Because it was a Saturday, Pat was home and we got to visit with her for a bit. Pat asked if she could pray with us. We all stood in a circle, holding hands, and she prayed for us and thanked God for sending us.

The dry wall team finished a hallway and stairwell. The deck team completed nearly four sections of railing. We cleaned up the worksite, took a few photos, and headed back to Seaville UMC. We had dinner at the local diner and enjoyed the fellowship that grew between us all throughout the weekend. Sunday morning we had one last devotional time together. The Rev. Kirkland Reynolds, from Chevy Chase UMC, asked what we got out of the trip. One person said it made her want to reach back out to people she’s done mission work with before and reconnect. Another said it made her want to do outreach to the homeless or to seniors on a local level. We all said that we hope this is the first of many young adult mission trips.

Reynolds pointed out that “Our Lord and Savior was a young adult. There is a biblical mandate for us to serve.” He then talked with us about the Emmaus story and how the disciples didn’t recognize Jesus, but Jesus made himself known to them when he broke the bread. The disciples then had to go back to Jerusalem and tell the people that they had seen the face of Jesus and how he made himself known to them. He wrapped up the devotional by saying, “We are away from our homes and we have seen Jesus and it is time to go home and tell people we have seen him.”
Tony Love named new Vibrant Communities director

BY MELISSA LAUBER
UMConnection Staff

BISHOP MARCUS MATTHEWS has appointed the Rev. Antoine Love, pastor of Journey of Faith Church in Waldorf, as the new Baltimore-Washington Conference director of Vibrant Communities, effective July 1.

Love, who is also the conference chair of the Board of Trustees, takes over from the Rev. Andy Lunt, who will return to retirement on June 30. The position will now be full-time.

In his new appointment, he will be building on the Vibrant Communities ministry, which has included starting eight new faith congregations in the past two years and assisting several existing congregations with strategies for growth.

Q: You were recently appointed to serve as Director of Vibrant Communities for the Baltimore-Washington Conference. Which part of this ministry are you most looking forward to?

A: I am excited about the future church development work already started by our Office of Vibrant Communities. I am excited about helping our churches and new faith communities to introduce all persons to Jesus Christ as friend, Lord and Savior, as we share the Gospel and make our presence known and real in our “back yards and beyond” through our love, our witness and our service.

Q: Within the last year, the BWC launched eight new faith communities, but before that we did not have a lot of success in creating new churches. Have we, as a conference, turned a corner? What do you think might be some of the most important challenges and opportunities facing us as a conference?

A: I celebrate our starting eight new faith communities, and our commitment to launch new congregations in the past two years and assisting several existing congregations with strategies for growth.

Q: How would you describe your style of leadership?

A: I would describe my style of leadership as open and collaborative. I believe the Holy Spirit is at work in the church and in our leaders, and I want to be a partner with them as we cast a vision for the future together.

Q: Sometimes the church development portion of Vibrant Communities gets overlooked. Are there one or two lessons, ideas or best practices that you would encourage our churches that are struggling to consider?

A: Prayer is, and should be, the starting point for churches that are struggling. I affirm that a congregation who prays together starts to see evidence of God’s presence in their midst. Following prayer, the church can begin the process of discernment: who are we as a church? What has God given us, which often leads us to see what God is calling us to do, for the sake of our community? From discernment, the church seeks to become equipped to do the work of ministry and mission.

Q: What role do metrics play in your thinking about vibrant congregations?

A: I affirm that metrics are important and necessary as a way to measure effectiveness and fruit, as we strive to reach new disciples and grow disciples for the world’s transformation. I can appreciate when metrics provide the space and opportunity for honest and candid conversation to occur, especially when there must be a reconsideration of a current thought or direction. Metrics are one tool to evaluate the health of a community. All churches, regardless of size, can be vibrant communities. Health and vitality are important hallmarks to be considered at every church.

Q: How would you define the current, and then perhaps the best, relationship between a local church and the annual conference?

A: I think the best relationship that can exist between the local church and an annual conference comes when all parties provide mutual respect, extend grace, and show a willingness to work toward the fulfillment of God’s plan and purpose.

Q: Has your vision had an initial vision of what you want to accomplish in the first year of this ministry, what might it entail?

A: I would like for the Office of Vibrant Communities to become an integral part of the life and language of every local church and new faith community in this conference by continuing to provide leading-edge training to empower and equip our clergy and laity. We should inform and inspire a culture that is invitational and intentional about discipleship and evangelism.

Q: How would you describe yourself?

A: Wow. This question is difficult for me to answer. I am a “sold out” disciple who seeks to give in Christ daily, a man of prayer who finds joy in helping others grow in their faith, and I try to bring joy, hope and laughter to my work. I am a collaborator who is relational and committed to building upon the legacy of the Vibrant Communities. I am any visionary who wants to see this ministry go to the next level.

Q: What’s the first thing you look forward to doing after July 1?

A: Believe it or not – after I settle into the office, I actually can’t wait to start traveling throughout our conference to hear all the inspiring stories of how God is moving in our local churches. I’m excited to see where opportunities are being created and formed to inspire and grow persons into a new faith relationship.

Q: Any other thoughts for the moment?

A: Yes, I ask for prayer … that I will remain open and faithful to the Holy Spirit’s leading as together our conference and our Vibrant Communities’ office reach out to discipulate all persons through our existing congregations and in new places.

Maryland volunteers help New Jersey victims

BOONGSARO – Mt. Nebo UMC’s Mission Team worked this May on helping New Jersey’s recovery from the devastating effects of Superstorm Sandy.

They volunteered with A Future with Hope for the recovery work and worked in Keansburg. More than 25 different mission teams have volunteered in the last year.

Governor Kim Guadagno, and Bishop John Schol expressed their appreciation.

The homeowner shared his experiences during the storm when nearly three feet of water submerged the house; he and his teenage son escaped through the attic, he said.

BCC Youth exhibit their artworks

BALTIMORE – A new exhibit opened May at the American Visionary Art Museum, which includes artwork from the resident children at the Board of Child Care ages 12 to 14.

Open Eyes, Open Minds: Raising Mental Health Awareness through Art,” is the second annual art exhibit presented by the Maryland Coalition for Mental Health Awareness. To learn more, visit www.boardofchildcare.org.

Residents of the Board of Child Care had their art displayed at the American Visionary Museum.

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Reaching out to Vietnam, one bicycle at a time

By Rev. Ron Foster
Bethesda UMC

In February, I had the privilege of traveling to Vietnam with Phuong Bui, a member of our congregation, to deliver 408 bicycles that had been donated by members and friends of our church as part of a special Christmas Eve outreach through her foundation, Children of Vietnam. The following is an excerpt from my “God’s Morning, Vietnam!” blog (CHWUMC Blogger.com).

Our day began early with a 5:30 a.m. departure from Saigon. There is no such thing as going fast as we are constantly making our way through a maze of motorbikes, pedestrians and an odd assortment of other vehicles. After close to three hours, we finally arrived at the school for the first distribution of 50 bikes where we were greeted like rock stars. Phuong made a moving speech to the children, telling about how her mother had been a teacher in Vietnam before the war, and then she presented about 25 scholarships to some very happy children. Just $50 will cover a year’s tuition, but for many families even that is beyond reach.

We were then all eager to move on to the presentation of the bikes. We had prepared a sign for each child indicating the donor of their bike over a colorful backdrop of hands washing feet to connect it to our church’s mission; there is a need to be subtle in a Communist country. We took pictures of each of the children proudly receiving their bikes and, though polite and reserved by nature, there was no hiding their pride and joy. We even got one group to do a victory lap around the courtyard.

Driving through the Mekong Delta on our way to Bac Lieu was a fascinating mix of shanties, banana trees, rice fields and overburdened motorbikes carrying everything from roasted pigs to mirrors to large baskets of produce. The roadside was littered with makeshift markets and small business stalls all day long.

We had been invited to a local Buddhist temple for dinner that night and again we were received like royalty, greeted with tea and a vegetarian meal. The host nun graciously invited us to tour the grounds and to take pictures at the evening prayer service. The chanting was hypnotic and what a treat to end the night connected in prayer both worlds and religious traditions apart.

Sunday morning, we headed from Bac Lieu toward Cam Mau and then took a longboat ride up-river to deliver 76 bikes at a remote Buddhist temple. The 30-minute journey through these backwaters of the Mekong Delta in itself was a poignant privilege that I could barely take in. extreme poverty on the water’s edge co-mingled with the stark beauty of the landscape. The feeling of being at the edge of the world far, far away from Bethesda, was overpowering.

When we finally arrived at our destination, the place was buzzing with people and anticipation. Children and adults had gathered from many miles and villages around to receive their bikes and the food distribution the same stuff as they were.

Our trip to Phan Rang the next day was pleasant and brought quite a change of scenery. Gone were the rice fields and in their place we saw rubber trees, dragon fruit cactus and evergreens. Our local hosts, Mi and Long, were both retired teachers who now devote a good deal of their time caring for the poor and most vulnerable in their community. We got to see and be part of their work firsthand as we visited a school for severely disabled and disfrugiled individuals throughout the community our first night, and then helped with their monthly rice and financial outreach the next morning. It was by far the most heartbreaking and difficult part of our trip.

They started lining up early in the morning, hours ahead of the official distribution time. One by one they came, mothers carrying grown and maimed children, blind men hobbling on canes, one woman literally dragging her body across the concrete sidewalk to the doorstop. An endless sea of human need.

I was often asked to make the presentation of rice and money and, while I felt totally inadequate, did the best I could. I’d kneel low, look into their eyes and use some variation of this simple script each time: “This gift means you are loved and not forgotten. There are people who care about you. May God bless you.” Sometimes I would sing a blessing, always I would say a prayer in silence as part of my sacred assignment: “The crush of people, the outstretched hands, the begging eyes. Kyrie eleison. Lord, have mercy.”

Hillary Clinton encourages United Methodist Women

By Kathy L. Gilbert
United Methodist News Service

Louisville, Ky. — Hillary Clinton shared her love and gratitude to all the United Methodist women in her life and those she met on the 7,600 United Methodist women before her to go out and “make it happen.” About 130 participants were from the Baltimore-Washington Conference.

Clinton spoke for 45 minutes at the Saturday, April 26, morning worship service for the 2014 United Methodist Women Assembly. The gathering took place at the Kentucky International Convention Center.

“We need to wake up our world to what can and should be done,” she said. United Methodist women have a great tradition of “rolling up our sleeves and taking the social gospel into the world.”

In introducing Clinton, Yvette Kim Richards, board president of UMW, called her “a daughter of The United Methodist Church and United Methodist Women.” She added that Clinton declined the honorary degree offered by UMW “and paid her own expenses.”

That was one of the many times the crowd responded with applause and cheers. United Methodist Women, the official women’s organization of The United Methodist Church, and the former U.S. secretary of state share a common concern for women, children and youth.

Clinton started her speech talking about the influence her United Methodist family had on her life. She spoke of the “great witnesses” of seeing her father kneel by his bed to pray every night. She also said her mother taught Sunday school and was committed to social justice issues. It was her grandmother, Hannah, “a tough Methodist woman” she said, who “taught me to never be afraid to get your hands dirty.”

But it was Don Jones, her youth pastor at First United Methodist Church in Park Ridge, Ill., whom she credited with being the first person to teach her to “embrace faith in action.”

She commented that the event’s theme “Make It Happen” was such a fitting title. The biblical text for the 2014 Assembly was “Christ’s instructions to his disciples to organize the people into groups of 50 to feed them with five loaves of bread and two fish.” Throughout the event, participants grappled with Jesus’ instructions for his disciples to “give them something to eat.”

“When we finished helping and feeding and praying with the people, this miracle was enough. We saw a great potluck supper,” she said. Jesus responded by serving the community.

It is what women do every day: we feed the multitudes.”

As the nation’s first lady, she spoke before the 1906 United Methodist General Conference, the denomination’s top legislative body. At that time, she urged the church to continue its social witness for the world’s children and cultivate “a new sense of caring” about its responsibilities to the larger society.

Clinton, on April 26, commented on the church’s dedication to global health and, especially, the campaign Imagine No Malaria.

“I know what a difference you make,” she said. The nearly 800,000-member United Methodist Women is the denomination’s official women’s mission organization. Members raise more than $1.6 million annually for mission with women, children and youth.

Even when the odds are long, even when we are tired and just want to go somewhere to be alone and rest, let’s make it happen.”

Farileen Coates, a United Methodist Woman from Kansas City, Mo., had to miss breakfast to get in line outside of the doors to see Clinton. She was happy with her place on the end of a row, even though it was several rows from the front.

“This has been a wonderful assembly,” she said. “It just shows how great United Methodist women are.”
Adam Hamilton ‘makes sense of the Bible’ at Foundry UMC

By Erik Alsgaard
UMConnection Staff

The Rev. Adam Hamilton wants to invite you to a conversation. Not any ordinary conversation, but one about the Bible.


Hamilton, senior pastor of the United Methodist Church of the Resurrection near Kansas City — the largest United Methodist Church in the United States — repeatedly called for a more sophisticated view of the Bible, and reminded the several hundred people gathered at Foundry and online that the Bible itself allows for latitude in its interpretation.

“Is the Bible ‘the Word of God?’” he asked. “Was it dictated? Is it infallible and inerrant, written without errors?”

Hamilton explored these questions during his talk, noting that the New Revised Standard Version has the phrase “word of God” 40 times in its pages. These references, he said, do not refer to a book, but to the way that God speaks to us. “And God is not silent. God speaks to us in a lot of ways,” Hamilton said.

“God wants to speak to us,” he said. “In the beginning of John’s Gospel, Jesus is ‘the Word’ made flesh. For me, Jesus becomes the only inerrant word of God.”

Hamilton noted that he was not trying to undermine anyone’s sense of the authority of the Bible in writing the book. “I love this book,” he said, holding out his own Bible. “But the Bible is a bit more complicated than many of us give it credit for.”

That’s because, he said, “there are things I read and I think, ‘What am I going to do with that?’”

In the book, Hamilton deals with thorny issues such as science and the Bible, women and the Bible, slavery, homosexuality, and all that violence and killing in the Old Testament. In his talk at Foundry, he touched briefly on each of these subjects.

Hamilton offered his own model of a way to view biblical texts. Using three “buckets” of various sizes, he suggested that biblical teachings can be placed inside one of the three.

The first — and largest — bucket contains the teachings that you just know are good and right, he said. “Love your neighbor, love God, love one another,” for example, he said.

The second — and medium-sized — bucket contains those teachings that were relevant for a particular time and place, but are not applicable for today. Hamilton noted circumcision and kosher laws as two examples Christians have discussed and come to different agreements about over the years.

The third — and smallest — bucket is the place for things that “never ever reflected the heart of God,” Hamilton said. Using Leviticus 20:13 as an example, Hamilton said that he knows no one who would “put to death” practicing homosexuals as is commanded here. Instead, he said, “Progressives would put it in bucket 3, conservatives in bucket 2, but no one sees it as a bucket 1 command.”

“Here’s the point,” he writes in the book (p. 273), “there are things commanded in the Bible, in the name of God, that today we recognize as immoral and inconsistent with the heart of God.”

Hamilton argued that everyone “judges” Scripture at one level or another. To illustrate his point, he pointed to a conversation he had with a fellow United Methodist pastor. During the conversation, the other pastor was saying that people should refrain from interpreting Scripture — judging Scripture — through their own eyes. Hamilton asked the pastor if he had a pension. The pastor said yes. Hamilton asked if the pastor contributed to his pension. The pastor said yes.

Hamilton then asked the other pastor what he thought about the passage in the Gospel of Matthew about “not laying up treasures on earth.”

“I'm inviting you to judge Scripture,” Hamilton said, “but to do so through the lens of Jesus. When confronting difficult issues, ask: Does this really capture the heart and character of God?”

Hamilton briefly addressed the difficult issues of homosexuality and same-gender marriage, issues, he said, that are threatening to tear apart the church. “United Methodists on the extremes aren’t looking for dialogue,” he said. “They seem to want to defend their own points of view. Perhaps we need a middle way.”

The “middle way,” Hamilton said, means that faithful Christians can disagree on these (and other) issues.

“We’re not disagreeing on the authority of the Bible,” he added. “If we can get to this place, we won’t need to divide. We have to figure out how to live with people who are in different places. Either we’re going to blow the church up or learn how to live together.”

Hamilton continues to read the Bible every day, carrying around a “pocket” testament wherever he goes. “I challenge you,” he said, “to carry one, too, and to get caught reading it.” In fact, he added, Hamilton wants to be buried with a pocket testament.

The Bible, Hamilton said at the end of his presentation, “is more complicated than we think. God speaks to us through it. In it, we find life and meaning.”

By the numbers: UM initiative to eradicate deaths by malaria

Imagine No Malaria is an extraordinary effort by the people of The United Methodist Church, putting our faith into action to end preventable deaths by malaria in Africa, especially the death of a child or a mother.

Achieving this goal requires an integrated strategy against the disease. As a life-saving ministry, Imagine No Malaria aims to empower the people of Africa to overcome malaria’s burden. We fight malaria with a comprehensive model of prevention, education, treatment, and communications. For more information, visit www.bwcumc.org/ImagineNoMalaria.

Resources Requested through Grant Funds

15% - Operating Expenses
15% - Health Worker Training Supplies
10% - Prevention Campaign
1% - Communications

6% - Bed Nets
2% - Preventive Medicine
2% - Medical Supplies

5% - Clinic Support
12% - Medical Center Rents
34% - Malaria Treatments

To date, United Methodists have supported Imagine No Malaria in gifts and pledges totaling $6 million, which has helped us to provide over the life of our campaign...