Bidding the bishop a fond farewell

LOVE OFFERING
Throughout his ministry, Bishop Marcus Matthews has been led by the love and imagination of God. As he retires at the end of August, that sense of love and creativity will live on in an innovative building project at Africa University.

You and your congregation have the opportunity to express your love and appreciation for the bishop’s ministry by helping to build a new health and sports complex on the campus of Africa University, located in Zimbabwe. Many churches have already donated. Second-mile giving is now encouraged. Approximately $500,000 is needed to start building. Bring your gift to opening worship at Annual Conference or visit bwcumc.org/love.

Green appointed as new superintendent

Bishop Marcus Matthews has named the Rev. Gerard “Gerry” A. Green Jr. to serve as superintendent of the Greater Washington District. His appointment begins July 1.

Green will replace the Rev. Joseph Daniels, who has been serving as a superintendent and senior pastor of Emory UMC in Washington.

Beginning in July, Daniels will focus more fully on Emory and the congregation’s creation of a $56 million affordable housing project. "Rev. Green will serve the Greater Washington District and this annual conference well,” the bishop said. “He is someone who knows how to grow a church. He is a pastor’s pastor who understands the value of relationship and partnership. He has a heart for mission, is wise, and brings a multitude of gifts to the Cabinet table.”

Green has served in Extension Ministry since 2011 as a staff pastor and pastoral counselor at Asbury Methodist Village, a continuing care retirement community in Gaithersburg. Before entering the ministry, he worked for 34 years as an educator and counselor in the Howard County Public School System.

Green is also a licensed clinical professional counselor. His doctoral degree is from Loyola University in Maryland. He has two Masters degrees from Boston College and a Masters of Divinity degree from Wesley Theological Seminary.

Green said he was initially surprised when the call from
 다양하고 다양한 경험을 통해 축복받을 수 있습니다.  

**Quoted by Connection** is the theme for this quadrennial meeting which is responsible for electing new bishops and assigning all bishops to their respective Areas. The BWC will have 24 delegates at the conference. More information is available at nejumc.org/2016conference. Full coverage will be online at bwcumc.org, and in the July/August issue of this newspaper.

**Mission u**
July 29-31
Baltimore Marriott Hotel

Join the Board of Global Ministries and United Methodist Women for spiritual growth and to expand your knowledge and concepts of mission. Studies include: The Bible and Human Sexuality; Latin America: People of Faith; and Climate Justice: Call to Hope. A youth Mission u will run the same time. More information at bwcumc.org/2016-mission-u/
Bishop Matthews laid hands on him during ordination in 2005 in Philadelphia. Rivera remembers the bishop preaching from an old gospel song, summing up for many, his lifestyle: “Let nothing come between me and my Savior.”

At the Baltimore Region farewell worship service, the Rev. C. Anthony Hunt recalled how Bishop Matthews drew more than 270 people into the Epworth Chapel congregation in just four years as a pastor there. Throughout his ministry, Hunt said, the bishop has “lived with a pastor’s heart, with wisdom and with grace.”

The Rev. Craig McLaughlin shared the story of the Gruesome Demonic and Jesus traveling with his 12 disciples across the sea to save just one man, living in a cemetery, from his demons. “I’ve been in that cemetery,” McLaughlin said. “Some people we love have been in the cemetery.”

He thanked the bishop for challenging the Church to pray, to go and tell people how good Jesus is and to adopt a school. He also thanked the bishop for a well-timed wink and mischievous smile and, for helping him and others the courage to reach out in meaningful ministry. At each of the sessions, the bishop, who officially retires Sept. 1, thanked those present and asked them to continue to pray each day, tell the story of Christ in their lives and reach out to children.

As part of the bishop’s legacy, members of the Baltimore-Washington Conference are collecting funds to build a fitness center at Africa University, where the bishop serves as chair of the Board of Trustees.

The Baltimore region contributed $30,587; the Western region gave $93,869; the Southern Region gave $46,409 and the Washington Region gave $32,227.

The conference is hoping to raise the $600,000 necessary to complete the building of the fitness center by June 3, when Bishop Matthews will be honored at a celebration at the Annual Conference Session. To contribute or make a second-mile gift to this Love Offering, visit www.bwcumc.org/love.

From page 1

the bishop came. However, after hearing about the district’s mission priorities and its work in clusters meeting the holistic need of individuals and communities, he is deeply excited about the possibilities.

As a leader, Green defines himself as supportive, resilient, and as a resource. Our pastors, he said, have the gifts and grace and know what is going on in their communities. “As a district, I hope we’ll be living out the Great Commission and exemplify our love of God by how we care for one another. … As followers of Wesley, we’ll do all the good we can, for all the people we can, wherever we can.

This receiving and deepening of faith and putting it into action has been a part of Green’s life since he can remember. As a child, he remembers observing his mother, Ida Pearl Green, who is now 97. She would go into the living room and kneel in prayer. He knew that she might be upset about something, but after she finished praying there was always, in her, a sense of relief.

“I knew that if my mom could take her concerns to God in prayer, I wanted to have that also,” he said. “She has always been my example. Hers is the type of faith I want to have. Regardless of the challenges, God is always present. There is nothing, with God’s help, that one cannot overcome.”

Green’s mother made sure he attended church. He remembers when he was still in elementary school and attending Pleasant View Methodist Church. The pastor, Thomas Harrington, said from the pulpit, “one of you might be called to ministry.”

“Something, maybe the way the light from the stained glass window hit his glasses, made me believe he was speaking directly to me,” Green said. “From that point on I was being nurtured.”

When he was a young man, Green recalls, a church meeting in which Pleasant View, a black church, was meeting to consider merging with the white congregations of Hunting Hill and McDonald Chapel. The three did come together, creating Fairhaven UMC.

But during one of the meetings about the potential merger in April 1968, a knock on the door interrupted the conversation and those present were told that the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. has just been assassinated.

Green kept his eyes open during the prayers and watched the white pastor pray fervently, with tears streaming down his face, for a black man and for justice: “Dr. King’s life and death weren’t about black folks. It was about community and coming together,” he said.

Many years later, Green attended an event in Washington commemorating Dr. King’s March on Washington and he

During Daniel’s time as superintendent, the district saw numerical growth in a season when other parts of the church were in decline, and they were faithful in the payment of apportionments, supporting the connectional system and their giving.

Two new churches were also planted — Nueva Vida, a Hispanic/Latina congregation in the College Park/Hyattsville area, and Envision D.C., a movement of one church with many expressions, targeted toward young adults in Washington.

The district has also started a number of ministries that address hunger. In the 20019 ZIP Code, one of the most neglected in the city, for example, there is only one grocery story for 70,000 people. Churches are bringing food and hope to the people there. The district has also been active in ministries of racial reconciliation.

The Rev. Joe Daniels steps down July 1 as the leader of the Greater Washington District.

Daniels said he attributes the growth and vital ministries in the district to the leadership of great pastors and lay people. “We’re growing because our leaders and congregations are innovative, flexible, externally, not just internally,” he said, “and churches are looking to be relevant, looking to see how they can be a blessing in people’s lives.”

Bold visions and huge undertakings, all wrapped up in dependence on God, have been one of the hallmarks of Daniels’ time as superintendent, leading the district’s 66 churches in 11 ZIP Codes. The ZIP Codes are important, because “our whole vision has been around claiming your ZIP Code for Jesus Christ. We’ve been encouraging clergy and lay leaders to see themselves as a congregation.

“We serve a big God,” said Daniels. “I believe that as we dream God-sized dreams and see God-sized visions, and have the courage and strength to go after them, phenomenal things can happen.”

DS: Green follows Daniels in Greater Washington
 exponential conference focuses on level five churches

By Melissa Lauber
UMConnection Staff

At the Exponential Conference in Orlando, Fla., April 26-28, 818 speakers and teachers shared insights on God, the church and faith. Among them:

**The church is proof that God dreams.**

Erwin McManus

**The best question is, ‘If I knew I wouldn’t fail, where would be the biggest Kingdom impact for God?’**

Dave Ferguson

**Mega-churches make a big bang. But the future of the church is in multiplying leaders who carry the Gospel wherever they go. Raising up leaders doesn’t make a lot of sense. But it will change the face of the church in the United States. … This has to urgently be ‘play church.’**

J.J. Goode

**IT’S NOT JUST ABOUT BIG CHURCHES…**

By Mark Batterson

1803, a physics professor named Lorne Whitehead published an article in the American Journal of Physics, titled “Domino Chain Reaction.” The domino effect is nothing new, but what Whitehead discovered is that a domino can actually topple a domino that is 1.5 times its own size. So a 2-inch domino can knock over a 3-inch domino. A 3-inch domino can knock over a 4.5-inch domino, and I’m not real good at fractions so we are going to stop there. Here’s the amazing part, by the time you get to the 18th domino, you could topple the Leaning Tower of Pisa! Of course it is leaning so that’s cheating. With the 21st domino, you could take down the Washington Monument, and with the 24th domino, you could take down the Empire State Building. I think you get the point. It is not linear progression, it is geometric progression. Check this out, the gravitational potential energy of the 13th domino is 2 billion tons. It is more than twice the energy that it takes to knock over that first domino. So, if you try to start with domino number 13, good luck with that, it’s not going to happen. But anybody can topple a 2-inch domino. So don’t despise the 2-inch dominos. One little piece can change everything. Now imagine the steps you take. In 30 linear steps, you’ll travel 30 feet. In 30 geometric steps you can circle the earth 26 times. Faith is geometric. When you take one little step, you never know what the domino effect may be. What’s the risk you need to take? What’s the two-inch domino you need to push over?

**Exponential Conference in Orlando, Fla., April 26-28, 818 speakers and teachers shared insights on God, the church and faith. Among them:**

**How do you focus on what God wants us to do there?**

Every church has a life cycle. You’re not getting leaves from London. Ours is a theme: ‘God. We’re called to go there.’

Dave Ferguson

**You never be ready for what God calls you to do. God asks you to step in faith and take a risk. You’ll never be more than 80 percent certain. At National Community Church, our mantra is ‘Go, set, ready!’**

Mark Batterson

**What would happen if the church became an incubator of humanity’s best future?**

Erwin McManus

**We’re too focused on our little kingdoms, ‘Hey, and not focused on what God wants us to do there.’**

Every church has a life cycle. You’re not getting leaves from London. Ours is a theme: ‘God. We’re called to go there.’

Dave Ferguson

**The best question is, ‘If I knew I wouldn’t fail, where would be the biggest Kingdom impact for God?’**

Dave Ferguson

**Kingdom things happen at the speed of a seed.**

Mark Batterson

**You’re never ready for what God calls you to do. God asks you to step in faith and take a risk. You’ll never be more than 80 percent certain. At National Community Church, our mantra is ‘Go, set, ready!’**

Mark Batterson

**Think of Moses and the burning bush. God has a reputation of tapping you on the shoulder just when you get comfortable. God didn’t call you to comfort, God called you to Kingdom. It’s time to begin again.**

Albert Tate

**Your God is bigger than your problems. Open your eyes and see that the Truth is bigger than the facts.**

Albert Tate

**All God needs from you is a yes, a thank you, Jesus; and a good old “halalibi!”**

Albert Tate

**Haven’t in the past is called erem. You are designed by God to create the future … What would happen if the church became an incubator of humanity’s best future?**

Erwin McManus

**IT’S NOT JUST ABOUT BIG CHURCHES…**

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BWC members inspired at Exponential Conference

By Erik Alsgaard
UMConnection Staff

MORE THAN 30 clergy and lay members from the Baltimore-Washington Conference attended Exponential 2016 (see article, page 4), an eccumenical conference for church planters in Orlando, Fla.

“The Rev. Cary James, pastor at Emory UMC in Washington, D.C., has attended 10 of these meetings. “The biggest thing I learn is the network,” he said. “I come and meet new people and learn new things and continue to network with them beyond the conference.”

James said he also benefits from learning about cutting-edge techniques for reaching new people with the message of Jesus Christ, especially in the areas of leadership development and evangelism. Some of the techniques aren’t really all that new, they go back, he said, to the days of John Wesley where he took the church outside its four walls.

“It’s in our DNA,” James said. “We just have to do it in the 21st century.”

For James, Exponential helped him learn the mindset of not just growing a church, but multiplying it.

“This helps me to not be complacent in my own ministry; not just settling for addition – adding one person at a time – but to think as the early church did in the Book of Acts, about multiplication, where we’re igniting a group of some sort, in which relationship building and disciple-making occurred,” she said. “We are going to implement those groups using technology and social media, beginning in May 2016.”

The BWC’s office of Vibrant Communities provided scholarships for many BWC people to attend. It was an intentional effort, said the Rev. Tony Love, director, to expose as many people as possible to the need for church planters.

Jo Chesson, left, and the Rev. Tony Love, both from the BWC’s Office of Vibrant Communities, prepare for a day at Exponential 2016, a church planters conference in Orlando, Fla.

The Exponential Conference had an immediate impact on the Rev. Johnnie Cogman, pastor of Mt. Zion UMC in Georgetown. Her main learning: multiplication instead of addition.

“If each person in the church would multiply him or herself and encourage others to do the same... God’s kingdom would grow exponentially.” Cogman said. “We would multiply not in our building but in our communities. Our multiplication focus will be on making disciples not just members.”

Cogman said that she had three leaders from her church with her in Orlando. She brainstormed with them during the meeting as to how to multiply Mt. Zion.

“First, I encouraged each leader to start a small group of some sort, in which relationship building and disciple-making occurred,” she said. “We are going to implement those groups using technology and social media, beginning in May 2016.”

• The biggest thing I learn is the network,” he said. “I come and meet new people and learn new things and continue to network with them beyond the conference.”

By Christine Kumar

AFTER PUMBLING to get my seat belt fastened on the plane, I was ready to go to Orlando, Florida, to attend the Exponential Conference at First Baptist Church. My colleagues, Olivia Gross, Melissa Lauter and Erik Alsgaard, were on the same early morning flight.

At the conference, the music was lively, plenary speakers were exceptional and I filled my notebook with handwritten notes from the workshops attended. This conference was primarily for church planters, but not all the content dealt primarily for church planters, but not all the content dealt...
Is Baltimore ‘rising’ a year after Freddie Gray’s death?

COMMENTARY BY THE REV. CYNTHIA MOORE-KOIKOI
Baltimore Metropolitan District Superintendent

"Still I Rise," by Maya Angelou, has been a source of empowerment and inspiration in the Baltimore Metropolitan District over the last year. It was written. It has become a source of inspiration for the city of Baltimore since the unrest last spring. As I reflect on the past year, I have heard the city defiantly speak these final words of the poem to me.

Out of the busy of billy’s chanell rise
Up from a post that’s wetted in pascal rise
I’m a black ocean, leaping and wide,
Welling and swelling I hear in the tide.
Leaving behind alligants of terror and fear
I rise
Just a daybreak that wondrously clears the sky.
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the late.
I rise, rise, rise.

Baltimore is rising following the death of Freddie Gray. But as Baltimore is rises, it is fair to ask if The United Methodist Church in Baltimore is rising? A year ago on the day after the unrest started, Baltimore City Public Schools were closed and our churches opened to provide a safe place for students. I met a young adult who came to help at Metropolitan UMC. He told me that he was an atheist, but had heard about what the United Methodist Church was doing and thought he would come to help. During a call in our work, he began to ask questions. He told me that he thought the church was complacent in the issues of poverty, racism and economic injustice that fueled the unrest. It was clear to me that he thought the church had power to change systems and organizations, but that we, the church, had chosen not to do so in order to preserve our own interests.

It was also clear to me that this young man’s passion to help his church in God was a direct result of his observation of the church. He did not believe in God because we had not shown God in our actions. Upon his return, he started a campaign to remove racial barriers in the church. So, over this last year, I have asked myself what message are we sending to others about who God is?

Are we portraying a God who is eager to come down from lofty places in order to be with the people who most need God’s love? Are we portraying a God who chose to sacrifice God’s only Son on the cross? Are we portraying a God who is willing to fight for the salvation of God’s people? Are we portraying a God who has enough power to resurrect Jesus from the dead? Are we portraying a God who is ready to rise for your needs? Do we have the power to change the world?

With funding and volunteers from churches all across this annual conference and denomination, we were able to run three, two-week camps simultaneously in Sandtown-Winchester and the surrounding communities last summer. The summer camping ministry also held a week-long day camp for the first time in Baltimore City. Metropolitan, along with the Bar Association and Baltimore United for Change, held several sessions of passive resistance and peaceful protest training for young adults. Ames, John Wesley, Metropolitan and Unity UMCs became distribution centers for food, toiletries and baby supplies to the Sandtown-Winchester community. All summer long, volunteers from our connection brought themselves, their supplies and their prayers to the city. Last summer more than 4,700 people were served at just one of our churches.

Into the fall, winter and spring, we continued to work at making greater connections with the community in order to address some of the issues that led to the unrest. Mt. Zion hosted “Black Lives Matter: The Seven Last Words of Summer.” Ewport Chapel has been working with the Baltimore County Police Department and local government on issues of safety for schools and church-community-police partnerships. The Baltimore Metropolitan District collaborated with community activists, the Baltimore City Police Department and mental health professionals to provide training for those who participated in the demonstration.

We were able to provide training for those who participated in the demonstration. The lay were charged with using their power to revolutionize our church to be more relevant and contextual. They were asked to use the power of living parable to serve the people. This spring, the district partnered with the BWCC’s Office of Vibrant Communities to provide a workshop led by Romal Tune, to discuss “Clerestory Ministry and Leadership in a New Light.”

Donations to the Stronger Baltimore Fund and other sources, along with volunteers from many organizations including Howard University and the Black Staff Association of The United Methodist Church, were used to supply some of our church buildings to make them more hospitable for ministry.

We are still evaluating proposals for the use of the remaining funds received for the Stronger Baltimore Fund. A group of pastors who named themselves “Thinking Beyond the Cathedra” has been tasked with developing a plan to utilize the building, property and financial assets we have in the city of Baltimore. They will be working with the District Building and Locations Committee to help us make some hard decisions about how we can use our property resources to do more effective ministry in Baltimore City.

There is still more rising to come. Greater Oak UMC is planning to open a community center that focuses on the arts. Ames Memorial is continuing its renovations so that it can open a housing center for veterans. Sharp Street Memorial is going to expand its YMCA partnership, “YMCA Together Hood at Sharp Street,” to include monthly movie trips for church members.

This summer, the BWCC’s Camping Ministry is taking over the operations of the summer day camps specifically looking to recruit and train camping leadership from Baltimore City. Fallston and Reisterstown UMCs will be sending funding and volunteers to help run these camps. We think about that young man I met last year often. He did come back to volunteer at the church several times last summer. It has been my prayer that we showed him a more accurate picture of who God is. It is my prayer that we continue to show an accurate image of God.

Baltimore is rising. But if it is to continue to rise, it will need the power of the church. Even the atheist know we’ve got the power. With God’s help, we will use it to the glory of God!

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Spirit goes home to Zimbabwe

CROFTON – It was an emotional journey for the 14 members of Community UMC who carried the ashes of Cleo McCoy to Zimbabwe. She was one of the founders of the School of Cleo McCoy to Zimbabwe. She was one of the founders of Summer.” Epworth Chapel has been working with the Baltimore Metropolitan District Superintendent in order to make greater connections with the community in order to address some of the issues that led to the unrest. Mt. Zion hosted "Black Lives Matter: The Seven Last Words of Summer." Ewport Chapel has been working with the Baltimore County Police Department and local government on issues of safety for schools and church-community-police partnerships. The Baltimore Metropolitan District collaborated with community activists, the Baltimore City Police Department and mental health professionals to provide training for those who participated in the demonstration.

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LA PLATA – Some 40 veterans are now able to start claims with the Veterans Administration (VA) thanks to the Baltimore-Washington Conference of the United Methodist Church (BWC), which aided them in the La Plata American Legion Stand Down event April 9. Pisgah UMC was one of 28 vendors, but the first time a religious organization has participated in trying to help veterans get the services they need.

“As the pastor and a (Vietnam-era) veteran, it’s kind of cool to be able to get involved,” said the Rev. Jeanne Parr. “Being here is not about getting a different group of people in the pew. It really is about showing veterans the love of God and our churches’ Ministry of Love program.”

The Stand Down event is an initiative to help veterans understand the services available and initiate the claims process. “Claims are always a big thing because people have no idea where to turn,” said the Rev. Lauren Martin, a veteran representative for southern Maryland who organized the event.

Their courses covered a wide array of topics: dealing with ministry, evangelism, theology, worship planning, sermon preparation, Christian education, environment, spiritual development, ethics, boundaries, church finances and pastoral care, all designed to make them better able to serve their churches.

The days were long, each one beginning with devotions at 7:30 a.m. and classes stretching to 9 p.m.

“We are so different on the outside. But the more we shared of ourselves, the more it became evident that our love for Christ transcended different geographic, past religious experiences, styles of worship, culture, gender, economic status, learning style, and methods of expression,” said one participant.

A preaching practicum will be held May 14. Then the Board of Ordained Ministry will recommend licensure at the Clergy Session of Annual Conference.
Thirty years after the Psychiatric Unit

By Rev. Bob Hunter*

Too often we read the circumstances about a person’s battle with depression and/or anxiety and say to the person, “That’s not me!” For that reason, I’m not going to share the issues that brought me to stay in the psych unit. People have issues, and how we manage them makes a lot of difference. This would seem obvious, right? But depression and anxiety are not that simple.

In 1986, I was in a great marriage, with two kids, eight and six years old. We didn’t want our kids raised in daycare, so I was the stay at home parent, working part time jobs in between. We attended a great church. We had friends. We lived in a great neighborhood.

But on the inside, I was angry, addicted to overeating, struggling with over-spending and who I was supposed to be in life. I was 36-years old, so I was beginning to see the end of my midlife crisis was a part of this, too.

I had two “hot-button” issues that I blamed other people for. I felt that I had to prove that I was worth something, which led to my becoming a jack of all trades and a master of none. This process began almost nine years prior to my stay in the psych unit. People have issues, and how we manage them makes a lot of difference.

I was in the emergency room with a heart attack. I was in the hospital for about a half-hour’s worth of oxygen—and NO ONE KNOWS I’M DOWN HERE!” He calmly said, “I know you’re there. Your wife knows you’re there. We have a backline. We’ll be with you in a few minutes.” That was the beginning of my recovery.

Simply stated, depression usually manifests itself silently. Some sufferers even get to the point where they believe that taking their life will be better for everyone involved. It’s not about self-pity. It’s the only solution they see as viable. The depression and the imbalance in the brain. In my case, that was what “long-term” meant. The imbalance wasn’t permanent, praise God! But it wasn’t going to improve without medication and resolution of my issues.

Sim ply stated, anxiety triggers our “fight or flight” response. One doesn’t necessarily need to be. If we perceive danger, our adrenal glands send out adrenaline to our body to deal with the danger. If we are sitting, the adrenaline causes the shiver, kneeknocking and teeth-chattering, to name a few symptoms.

I was told by my psychiatrist that medicine without resolving issues doesn’t work. One of my two main issues turned out to be utter nonsense: “a demon” with no reality to it. The second issue was going to take a lot of work on my part. I did, and it’s been resolved for many years now.

After two years, I was no longer taking an antidepressant. After three years, I was no longer regularly taking anti-anxiety medication. In the 10 years since my hospitalization, I have completed my undergraduate degree and my master’s degree. After a life-long call from God, I finally said “yes” in 1991 to go into ordained ministry. I am about to complete my 24th year as a pastor: I’m still married to my high school sweetheart. We will celebrate our 39th anniversary this August. I have lost 70 unhealthy pounds.

A.B.C.D.C. This article reprinted, by permission, from the church’s newsletter, “Chips Off the Old Block.”

*Rev. Bob Hunter is pastor of Stone Chapel UMC, New Windsor, MD.
Offering hope and a challenge to a gymnasium full of middle school girls at the Holston School, sharing his faith journey with college students at Mokwon University, celebrating and challenging 23 pastors about to be ordained, joining the 1,400 clergy and lay people in holy conferencing and bridging cultures with the love of Christ were the highlights of Bishop Marcus Matthews’ journey to Daejeon, South Korea, April 1-5.

In 2003, the people of the Baltimore-Washington Conference began a partnership with the members of the Nambu (South) Conference of the Korean Methodist Church.

This annual conference, located about two hours south of Seoul, has 36 churches, 320 of which are small-member churches and are not considered “Independent.” It has 716 pastors, 33 of whom are clergywomen.

The conference is led by Bishop Seung Chul Ahn. In the Nambu Conference, bishops serve for two-year terms and also continue to serve their local churches while they are bishops. Ahn is the pastor of the Central Church, a mega church in Daejeon, the fifth largest city in Korea.

In the Baltimore-Washington Conference, clergy health insurance plan will have more options to meet their health insurance needs in 2017 under new provisions adopted by the Conference Board of Pensions and Health Benefits and outlined at the April 10 Pre-Conference Briefing. The new options are offered by the United Methodist General Board of Pensions and Health Benefits in Illinois, and replace the current plan, which will no longer be available in 2017.

Under the changes, participants will have more choices, according to the Rev. Jackson Day, chair of the BWC’s Board. “Insurers believe that offering consumers more choice and more responsibility will help reduce the rate at which health costs grow,” Day said. “Therefore, the HealthFlex plan developed by our General Board will offer six different plans rather than the one at present.”

For those who prefer minimum coverage, Day said, the BWC’s Board has made sure that one of the plans is as close to the current plan as possible. “We have worked closely with the General Board and our own consultants to minimize the impact that rising costs of health care may have on plan members,” Day said.

Currently, all full time clergy members of the BWC must be enrolled in the conference’s health insurance plan, called HealthFlex, which currently has only one option. The per-pastor cost to local congregations for health insurance will remain at $840 per month, Day noted.

Participants in the Baltimore-Washington Conference’s HealthFlex health insurance plan will have more options to meet their health insurance needs in 2017 under new provisions adopted by the Conference Board of Pensions and Health Benefits and outlined at the April 10 Pre-Conference Briefing. The new options are offered by the United Methodist General Board of Pensions and Health Benefits in Illinois, and replace the current plan, which will no longer be available in 2017.

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The per-pastor cost to local congregations for health insurance will remain at $840 per month, Day noted, regardless of the choices made by participants. This is not a “premium” but a share of the overall plan cost. The Board of Pensions and Benefits considers it very important to keep this amount the same for all congregations so that health care cost considerations do not intrude on appointment decisions, Day said.

Day noted that plans are now identified by colors, with Bronze, Silver, Gold and Platinum plans designed to cover 60, 70, 80, and 90 percent, respectively, of health care costs. The BWC’s current plan is considered a “Gold” plan, Day said. Participants who opt for this plan will see little change in the personal premium costs that they pay. Different options will offer differing degrees of coverage and health savings or health reimbursement accounts. A clergy family with few health issues may choose a plan offering less coverage, but with a greater health savings or health reimbursement account from which future expenses can be paid.

Day also observed that a greater degree of choice will require more detailed decision making by participants as they make their choices for 2017. “The Board of Pensions and Health Benefits will be holding an orientation session on Wednesday, June 1, at 8 p.m., at Annual Conference. Additional sessions will be held in the fall. All of the new plans offer the same network of providers and the same prescription drug formulas, according to a chart provided by the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits.”

CONFERENCE BUDGET

At the Pre-Conference Briefing, the Rev. Ann Laprade, chair of the BWC’s Council on Finance and Administration, celebrated outstanding stewardship and giving in 2015 while looking forward to 2017.

“2015 was amazing,” Laprade said. “Apportionment income was up 1.8 percent, or $245,000. Total income was up 0.9 percent, and expenses were down 0.6 percent, or $111,000. At the end, we achieved the goal of all non-profits: “net income was up 2 percent.”

In 2015, she added, the overall collection rate for apportionments was at a 25-year high, 91.7 percent.

For 2017, CPA is recommending a 17.75 percent benevolence factor and the 9:4:1 collection rates, the same as for 2016. “This will result in an apportionment income decrease of $112,000 to $14.2 million,” Laprade said. “This is a 0.8 percent decrease and it ties directly to the observed decrease in the apportionment base.”

Laprade said that the 2017 budget request is “flat” from 2016, and would be the fifth year in a row.

The 2017 budget, however, will not be a “typical budget,” Laprade said. “This is because the Conference Board of Pensions and Health Benefits found it possible to implement a significant strategic shift in how we can fund Retiree Medical expenses in 2017,” she said.

The BWC has a surplus of $28.3 million in a fund created and set aside to fund clergy who are under what is called the “Pre-81” retirement plan. Part of that surplus – $1.5 million – will be used in several ways in the 2017 budget, if approved. Part of the $1.5 million will be used to pay down debt on the loan for the BWC’s Mission Center in Fulton, and the new dining hall at West River Center.

“Four years of debt reduction at an average rate of $750,000 per year will shorten our loan from 15 years to 6 years, save $1 million in interest, and enable a 15 percent reduction in the budget at the end of the 6 years,” said Laprade.

The remainder of the 8.1 million will go towards replenishing reserves, providing needed salary and benefit increases, including the creation of a new position for a new Center for Clergy Excellence (675,000), paying increases in General Church apportionments (930,000), and other budget expenses.

Details of the 2017 budget proposal are online at http://bwcumc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/2016-Budget-PreCon.pdf.

Read a “Q & A” about the budget and other items coming to the 2016 BWC Annual Conference Session at bwcumc.org/sessions/2016-session/pre-conference-briefing.