Maryland church aims for hunger-free ZIP code

For the pastor and congregation at St. Paul’s UMC in Kensington, it all started three years ago.

“We believed, with all our heart, that God was calling us to feed hungry people,” said the church’s pastor, the Rev. Adam Snell.

And the church responded, he said, with small steps: feeding people at Thanksgiving and Christmas, handing out coupons to a monthly pancake breakfast, handing out 1,500 reusable bags that were handed out to members of the church with an invitation to fill the bag when they went grocery shopping and return the bag to the local food pantry.

“God is calling people to be the church,” Snell said. “They can’t just stay at home and wait for us to come to them. God is calling them to be the church.”

Speaking at a Sept. 10 press conference on the church’s front steps, Snell outlined a program whereby the church’s ZIP Code – 20895 – would become the first hunger-free zone in the country.

In partnership with Bethesda Help, an organization that provides emergency relief and food assistance to area residents, the church’s vision is that chronic hunger in 20895 would be eliminated.

“Our promise is that anyone living in 20895 who is hungry will be fed,” said Snell.

According to the 2010 United States Census, ZIP code 20895 had a population of 19,054, with an average income per household above $111,000. With those statistics, it might be hard to imagine anyone not having the resources to buy food, or anyone going hungry.

And yet, in 2012, Bethesda Help assisted more than 300 households, according to Karen Auerbach, president of the organization and another speaker at the press conference.

“Through the first six months of 2013,” she added, “we fed 180 people a week.”

This fall, in six distinct worship services, the people of the Baltimore-Washington Conference officially welcomed district superintendents to their new ministries, creating the most diverse Cabinet to ever serve this conference.

The new superintendents’ appointments began July 1. However, they were officially installed during these services, which were held in their home districts over three weekends.

The Rev. JW Park is serving the Central Maryland District; the Rev. Edgardo Rivera leads the Frederick District. The Rev. Joseph Daniels is superintendent of the Greater Washington District and pastor of Emory Fellowship UMC; and the Rev. Rebecca Iannicelli will serve the Washington East District. The Rev. Laura Easto leads the Baltimore Suburban District and Cynthia Moore-Kokos is superintendent of the Baltimore Metropolitan District.

When choosing the people who would serve as superintendents, Bishop Marcus Matthews said a number of factors guided his discernment.

“They must love God, the bishop said, and live out that love in daily ways. They must be connectional and understand and uphold the polity of The United Methodist Church; they must understand what it means to be part of a team. And, said Bishop Matthews, “they must have integrity. They must be someone with whom I can trust my life.”

“I see those qualities and characteristics in all the superintendents,” Matthews said. “God has called these people and set them aside for this office.”

Edgardo Rivera – Frederick District

At the first installation service Sept. 14 at Trinity UMC in Frederick, Rivera shared stories from his homeland of Vieques, Puerto Rico, where he took his first steps in the Lord. He also confessed his initial reservations about being a superintendent and how God liberated him from fear with the realization that “the bishop and Jesus didn’t call me to be somebody else. Jesus called me to be myself. Jesus called Edgardo.”

Rivera encouraged all the people of the Frederick District to realize that God is calling them to be exactly who they are. “Risk,” he said. “Put out into the deep. Dare to dream. What an awesome opportunity we have to share the dream of God in our lives.”

The service closed with the congregation rising to dance throughout the sanctuary as Rivera’s son, Eduardo, sang “God’s Dance Floor.”

See DS, page 3
W hen Christians talk about hope, what do they mean? Is it a wish? Is it like holding your breath as a “Hail Mary” pass flies to the hands of a wide receiver?

To Emily Dickinson, hope is “the thing with feathers that perches in the soul.” For the apostle Paul, Christian hope is rooted in God’s action in Christ. God has saved us and our response to that salvation is something rising up in us called “hope.” In Romans 8:24 we read, “For hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.”

When a Christian talks about hope, it’s not just an ethereal wish. It’s grounded in God’s saving action in Christ. Christian hope is a lot like the Christian notion of mystery. My systematics professor told us that Christian mystery is not just a throwing up of hands. It is a mystery. My systematics professor told us that Christian mystery is not just the gap of government shutdowns and a collective lack of hope, like Dickens’ wild bird of the soul. It stands in the gap of government shutdowns and a collective lack of hope, like Dickens’ wild bird of the soul. It stands in the gap of government shutdowns and a collective lack of hope, like Dickens’ wild bird of the soul. It stands in the gap of government shutdowns and a collective lack of hope, like Dickens’ wild bird of the soul.

Hope is wild and untamed and audacious hope, like Dickinson’s wild bird of the soul. It stands in the gap of government shutdowns and a collective lack of options to whisper words about angels and Easter and a love that is stronger than death. It allows for mustard seeds turning into great shrubs. However, it’s not a cotton candy hope. It’s a hope that’s firmly grounded in God’s promises in Christ. It is invisible and mysterious, and at the same time, strong enough to risk everything for. That’s why we can stand at a graveside and proclaim, “Christ is risen, Christ will come again.”

Christian hope is wild and untamed and audacious hope, like Dickinson’s wild bird of the soul. It stands in the gap of government shutdowns and a collective lack of options to whisper words about angels and Easter and a love that is stronger than death. It allows for mustard seeds turning into great shrubs. However, it’s not a cotton candy hope. It’s a hope that’s firmly grounded in God’s promises in Christ. It is invisible and mysterious, and at the same time, strong enough to risk everything for. That’s why we can stand at a graveside and proclaim, “Christ is risen, Christ will come again.”

“Hope (all wild and audacious, all unruly and unlikely) is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness. On Christ the solid rock I stand (sometimes my legs quiver, but I stand), all other ground is sinking sand. All other ground is sinking sand.”

EVENTS

UMM annual meeting
Oct. 12
Arbutus UMC, Baltimore, 8 a.m.
Bishop Marcus Matthews will be the guest speaker.
Cost is $25 per person. RSVP online at www.bwcumc.org.

Strawbridge Shrine annual meeting
Oct. 12, 10 a.m.
St. Paul UMC, New Windsor
Guest speaker will be John Strawbridge, a direct descendant of Robert Strawbridge.
Lunch is provided for reservation for $12.
For more information, contact William Louis Piet at julio@verizon.net, or call 410-751-9049. Visit the shrine’s website at www.strawbridge shrine.org.

Youth Lay Servant training
Nov. 9, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.
BWC Mission Center, Fulton
The basic course for Lay Servant Ministries will be taught to youth.
Register by Oct. 15. Registration is $25, includes lunch and snacks.
Register online at www.bwcumc.org/academy.

‘Building Healthy Congregations’ Friday, Oct. 18, Liberty Grove UMC in Odenton, and Saturday, Oct. 19, at Washington Square UMC, Hagerstown, both from 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.
The Rev. Bob Farr, Director of Congregational Excellence for the Missouri Annual Conference, will lead. Cost is $35 per person. Registration is by church teams online through Gateway. For more information, contact Jo Chesson at jchesson@bwcumc.org, or 800-492-2525, Ext. 490.

Older Adult Day Away
Wednesday, Oct. 23, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.
West River Camp & Retreat Center
Bishop Marcus Matthews will be the keynote speaker.
For details and registration information go to www.bwcumc.org/WRDayAway.html.

Older Adulthood workshop
Oct. 24, 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.
Ashby Methodist Village, Gaithersburg
“Exploring the Longevity Revolution: Ministry with Boomers and Beyond,” a workshop for clergy and laity interested in learning more about ministry across the mid-life and older stages of life, will be led by the Rev. Rick Gentzler, former director of the Center on Aging and Older Adult Ministries for the General Board of Discipleship. Registration fee is $35, includes lunch. For more information contact Rev. Wayne A. DeHart at 240-316-1265 or wdehart@asbury.org.

Bishop’s Day Apart with Clergy
Dec. 3, 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
Catonsville UMC, Catonsville
Dr. Marvin McMickle, president of Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School will be the featured speaker. The new Imagine No Malaria campaign will also be launched.
The cost is $15. Register before Nov. 25 at http://www.bwcumc.org/events/bishops_advent_day_apart_clergy.
Participant will receive 3 CEU’s

UMConnection is the newspaper of the Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church, whose vision is to seek to become like Christ as we call, equip, send and support spiritual leaders to make disciples, grow vital congregations and transform the world.

By Mandy Sayers
Pastor, Covenant UMC, Gaithersburg

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By Daryl Williams
Pastor, Nottingham Myers UMC, Upper Marlboro

H ave you considered the old proverb, “Give me a word.” This greeting led to the sharing of insights and wisdom. Today we continue this tradition with this monthly column.

To register visit www.bwcumc.org/rock

Special guest speaker Preston Centuolo
Featuring praise and worship music by Mandisa from American Idol and Unsearchable Riches
January 31, February 1 and 2, 2014 – Ocean City, MD

By Daryl Williams
Pastor, Nottingham Myers UMC, Upper Marlboro

I have to confess, from time to time I lose things. I think I know where they are, but when I need them I just can’t seem to find them. The most popular thing that I lose is my keys.

Then’s why we can stand at a graveside and proclaim “Christ is risen, Christ will come again.”

In those moments that I frantically run around upsetting everything trying to find my keys so I can get on with my day. It seems the more important it is for me to get going, the harder it is for me to find my keys.

I know where my hope is, I am prepared to tackle big challenges, speak truth to power and never give up no matter the circumstance. I keep my hope safely tucked away in Jesus Christ so I can do all things because he strengthens me. “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but lean on Jesus’ unsearchable Riches.”

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I am losing my house.

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Losing them always sets me back, slows me down and makes me late. I could just keep up with my keys I would be able to get a lot more done, in a timely fashion and under a lot less stress.

I never lose my hope because I know exactly where it is. Where is your hope?
Joe Daniels – Greater Washington

Daniels’ installation service on Sept. 21 was held at Brightwood Education Campus in Washington, D.C., two blocks from the church he also serves, Emory UMC. As if to solidify the importance of being in ministry with schools, an opening prayer was offered by Dr. Kaya Henderson, Chancellor for the Washington, D.C. Public Schools. Henderson said that Daniels often meets in her office with her and others on her staff for Bible study. In his sermon, Daniels urged his audience to “claim your ZIP code for Christ.”

One way to do this, he said, is to preach. He implored clergy and laity to preach at all times, because, he said, “God has something greater for me – and for you!”

In 20895, Snell said, there is a population of immigrants, transients and people who are hungry. “The need is great;” he said, “the reality is, it will always be great here. For whatever reasons, there are people who run short of food. When people call, and we’re able to respond and people get fed, it’s hunger-free.”

The church’s district superintendent, the Rev. Joe Daniels, spoke at the press conference and applauded the efforts of the congregation.

“It is always good to meet the needs of the community,” he said. “Hunger is a problem, not just here but throughout the region. This church is doing a wonderful work in meeting the need.”

Snell said that members of the church have three ways they can become involved in the campaign, either through being a driver to help deliver food, packing the food into boxes for delivery, or for someone to coordinate the responses to requests.

“We promise to deliver a three-day supply of food to those people who are hungry in our neighborhoods,” said Snell. “All they have to do is simply ask for it.”

To spread the word about the campaign, the church has produced lawn signs and postcards in both Spanish and English. Members of the congregation will be coordinating the responses to requests. In 20895, Snell said, there is a population of immigrants, transients and people who are hungry. “The need is great;” he said, “the reality is, it will always be great here. For whatever reasons, there are people who run short of food. When people call, and we’re able to respond and people get fed, it’s hunger-free.”

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To spread the word about the campaign, the church has produced lawn signs and postcards in both Spanish and English. Members of the congregation will be coordinating the responses to requests, especially targeting other houses of worship.
By Maidstone Mulenga
UMConnection Staff

When the Judicial Council – the highest court of The United Methodist Church – meets in Baltimore this month it will be tackling four cases that address the issue of homosexuality in the denomination.

It will also be weighing the links between non-profit corporations and annual conferences that would make annual conferences guarantors of any failed obligations of such entities. In the first case involving the issue of homosexuality (1013-10), the Judicial Council will decide whether the North Carolina Annual Conference’s decision to include money in its budget to support the North Carolina Council of Churches (NCCC) is allowed. The NCCC is associated with the denomination, which gives money to regional Councils of Churches which are members of the NCCC.

The court will have to decide whether the amount budgeted for the NCCC violates ¶132.20 of The Book of Discipline, which forbids the giving of “United Methodist money” to any gay caucus or group, or otherwise use such funds to promote the acceptance of homosexuality.

If any extreme research into the North Carolina Council of Churches position, I could find nothing that provides the practice that the right of homosexuality is in the sin or a call to repentance. Quite the opposite – all the literature, position papers, etc. sound the call that the practice of homosexuality is to be accepted as a normal lifestyle,” said Chris Humphreys, a clergy member who attended the annual conference. The Rev. John Ellsford said in his request for the ruling.

If the Judicial Council rules against the North Carolina Annual Conference, a number of conferences with gay caucuses or regional Councils of Churches may be affected.

The second case involving homosexuality is from the Southwest Texas Annual Conference, where a candidate for ministry was discontinued. "I request a ruling of law as to whether a Board of Ordained Ministry can discontinue the candidacy of a certified candidate for ordained ministry who has been appropriately recommended by a District Committee on Ordained Ministry without an interview and examination by that Board of Ordained Ministry,” the Rev. John Ellsford said in his request for a ruling. The Southwest Texas Annual Conference Bishop Jim Dorff ruled that the request, as presented, was moot and hypothetical.

By church law, all bishops’ rulings on law are forward to the Judicial Council for review. The case centers on Mary Ann Kaiser, whose candidacy for commissioning and Provisional Membership in the Annual Conference was denied by the Executive Session of the Southwest Texas Annual Conference, following the recommendation of the Board of Ordained Ministry (BOM).

According to the Reconciling Ministries Network, Kaiser’s candidacy was halted because “Mary Ann identifies herself as a lesbian.” As quoted on www.rmnetwork.org, Kaiser says: “I am called by God to serve The UMC as a Deacon. ... But the Southwest Texas Conference Board of Ordained Ministry won’t interview me because I identify as a lesbian.”

The question before the Judicial Council is whether BOM’s actions have been consistent with the Book of Discipline.

In two other cases about non-profit organizations and their associations with annual conferences, the Judicial Council has been asked to decide whether the Greater New Jersey Annual Conference should serve as the organization that underwrites the administrative overhead for “A Future with Hope” organization and provides volunteers and administrative staff.

In a related case, the Judicial Council is being asked to clarify the role of the Greater New Jersey president of the Council on Finance and Administration and his role as president of the Board of Directors of the Future with Hope Corporation.

Among those actions would be the approval and implementation of a “A Future with Hope” corporation and electing its board of directors. Since there have been no requests for oral hearings for this session of the Judicial Council, all of the work will be in closed session. These decisions will be made as soon as possible following the court’s adjournment.

You can read about the decisions as they are posted on the Baltimore-Washington Conference’s Facebook page, www.facebook.com/BWCUMC.

In 2006, the Baltimore-Washington Conference embarked on a $1 million fundraising campaign. Two hundred thousand dollars went to help rebuild Mississippi churches damaged by Hurricane Katrina; $200,000 benefitted UMC, one of the final parsonages, was carried over into Hurricane Katrina; $200,000 benefitted UMC, one of the final Washington Conference.

During Phase 1 of the Hope Fund, from 2009 to 2012, nine projects were completed. One project, the Shurry Parsonage, was carried over into this year. Thirteen Hope Fund projects were completed during Phase 2 this year. The roof was put on the sanctuary of Gwese UMC, one of the final projects.

The Hope Fund encouraged churches to complete as much as they could on their own. Many of the churches molded their own bricks. Assistance for the final stages of the building was delivered by the Baltimore-Washington Conference.

In addition to these Hope Fund projects, the Baltimore-Washington Conference provided $200,000 to finance the first phase of a comprehensive Broadband Internet project to bring an infrastructure to communications ministries in the country. The United Methodist Church in Zimbabwe has 66 institutions, which include hospitals, clinics, schools and district offices, of these have no access to the Internet. The Broadband project brought electronic access to many of these institutions in the form of self-sustaining Internet cafes. Members of the conference also shared in the labor of building churches, parsonages, clinics and schools.

Many BWC Volunteer in Mission teams visited to help construct buildings and create relationships with United Methodists in Zimbabwe.

“Hope Fund money allowed churches and parsonages to rise. There is much need. But Gourley also found exceptional faith in the people he encountered.” – Jim Gourley of Nichols Bethel UMC in Odenton who, during seven trips, spent 13 months during the past four years as an Individual Volunteer in Mission in Zimbabwe coordinating the Hope Fund projects. Gourley, who retired from the Navy, became devoted to ministry in Zimbabwe at the 2007 annual conference, when he heard two women from Zimbabwe detoured his departure until Oct. 11, Gourley returns to Zimbabwe. It touched his heart and he answered an altar call to “go and help.”

Political turmoil and violence in Zimbabwe derailed his departure until 2009. On his first trip, he went for five and a half months, by himself, living in a small cottage, often spending the evenings sitting by candlelight because there was no electricity.

Zimbabwe, he explained, is the second poorest country on earth. One in four children has been orphaned by AIDS and there is much need. But Gourley also found exceptional faith in the people he encountered. He worked with the bishop and other United Methodist leaders in Zimbabwe, assessing needs, getting estimates, project managing and also helping to build.

He confessed he didn’t know “which end of the hammer to hold” in 1996 when he retired from the Navy and began volunteering with Habitat for Humanity. “Our presence, just our simple presence, there is so important,” he said. “We vow to give the church our prayers, presence, gifts and service. Jesus tells us to go out into the world and work among all his people. We’re commanded by our Lord to go and try to do something. At this point in my life I’m still physically able.”

According to Gourley, “the Hope Fund helps us put our wants and words into action.” Now that the 23 churches and parsonages have been completed, Gourley hopes the partnership the Baltimore-Washington Conference has with Zimbabwe will begin to shift to address educational and medical projects, which he believes are areas in which the church can reach the largest numbers of people. “Eds and meds” is what the Rev. Joseph Daniels, chair of the BWC Zimbabwe Initiative, calls this approach.

On Oct. 11, Gourley returns to Zimbabwe and will work in ministry there through Dec. 15. While his mission is self-funded, he has raised more than $15,000 from his congregation. He hopes to see it put to good use at rural medical clinics in Mutare.

“All those people who gave their nickels and dimes and all those who gave thousands of dollars to the Hope Fund ought to know what their money has gone toward,” he said. “The Bible says God will provide. With the Hope Fund, we got to participate in that provision.”

**Hope Fund Projects**

**Phase One**
- Bikita Parsonage - $24,455
- Chegutu Parsonage - $20,000
- Gwindingwi Parsonage - $10,000
- Nyamuzizi Parsonage - $7,771
- Shambra Parsonage - $9,682
- Gudyanga Church - $21,162
- Juri Sanctuary - $15,000
- Muradzikwa Church - $30,840
- St. Dorcas Sanctuary - $20,000
- Munyaradzi Clinic - $100,000

**Phase Two**
- Chitungwiza Maondera District Parsonage - $22,400
- Kadoma East Parsonage - $22,230
- Malen Buhesa District Parsonage - $17,000
- Mudzingwa Parsonage - $33,500
- Mutasa Nyanga District Parsonage - $17,600
- Chemhondoro Sanctuary - $16,000
- Domborwaiwai Sanctuary - $21,900
- Gwese Sanctuary - $20,300
- Gwindingwi Sanctuary - $33,000
- Kamburra Parsonage - $20,800
- Matenderuva Sanctuary - $32,000
- Mukoba North Sanctuary - $19,500
- Mupandawana Church - $45,737

**Other Hope Fund Expenses**
- Bishop Nhometown Emergency Funds 2008 - $5,000
- Pastor/Spouse Workshop 2008 - $1,720
- Pastor School 2009 - $6,500
- Laity School 2007 - $2,500
- Zimbabwe Partners Summit 2009 - $2,290
- Zimbabwe Project Office Support - $3,000
Celebrate a river baptism

Manidokan - Campers at Manidokan continued their tradition of giving and this summer reached their two year goal of raising $5,000 to make an “Ark” level donation at the shrine “are no mere museum pieces, but tools to tell an important story.” Learn more about the shrine and its role in its history at www.StrawbridgeShrine.org.

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UNConnection Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church October 9, 2013

Summer campers give ‘ark-full’ of animals

Summer campers at Manidokan continued their tradition of giving and this summer reached their two year goal of raising $5,000 to make an “Ark” level donation. The donations will provide two of every type of animal donated more than $13,500 to various projects around the world.

Shrine hires new curator

The Board of Child Care is seeking a Director of Spiritual Life

The Director of Spiritual Life is responsible for ensuring that all youth admitted to our program have an opportunity to develop spiritually while in our care, regardless of religious affiliation.

Duties include, but aren’t limited to:

- Providing regular Chapel Services on campus.
- Working as part of an interdisciplinary team, participating in initial spiritual assessments, treatment planning, discharge planning, and review meetings.
- Acting as an effective resource for children, youth, and staff requiring his/her expertise.
- Teaching issues relating to morality and ethics in group settings for children and youth.
- Providing supplemental community service opportunities to those planned by the Residential Program, and ensuring proper documentation of such opportunities.

A Master’s Degree in Divinity or Pastoral Counseling is preferred. The ideal candidate will have a demonstrated history of designing worship experiences for youth and youth activities. He/she will also possess the ability to lead large and small groups, and be comfortable with public speaking. Candidates must be willing and able to relate to youth in small groups and one-on-one.

This position is open to all qualified candidates, regardless of religious affiliation.

Please forward resume to Stacey Nickerson at snickerson@boardofchildcare.org.

Church receives grants

WASHINGTON, D.C. - The General Commission on Religion and Race (GCORR) awarded nearly $98,000 in grants in September. Among the seven recipients was Epworth UMC in Gaithersburg, which was granted $100,000. The church, partnered by the Rev. Jennifer Ferraer, serves a Spanish-speaking community and a growing African community. The grant will enable the congregation to grow its multicultural-multilingual community, with an emphasis on children, youth and adult discipleship.

Mission trip changes lives

BALTIMORE – Jan Keadle, a member of Hiss UMC, made a second mission trip to the Dominican Republic. “It was hard work but by far the most rewarding experience I have ever had,” she said.

During the week, the mission group from Timonium and Hiss UMCS, held vacation Bible school for the children, handed out rice and beans and laid cement floors in 14 homes. But what she liked best, Keadle said, “was building relationships with the children in the bateyes.”

“Tendrano anyone who has been trying with the idea of going on one to just take the plunge and do it,” she said.

Quality of Life retreats celebrate 25 years

FULTON - The Quality of Life retreats observed their 25th anniversary during the fall gathering Sept. 5-8 at Mar-Lu Ridge, a Lutheran campground in Jefferson.

About 30 participants, all living with HIV/AIDS, attended and the Rev. Terri Rae Chattin, "mother" of the retreats, which she started, was a speaker.

Chattin recalled some of the highlights of the retreats and their birthing pangs. And she lamented, “This is a disease that hasn’t gone away.”

The first retreat in 1988 was “hit or miss” she said. Among the 12 who came, “some were active church-goers, but no one in their churches knew they had HIV”, she said.

“I’m always amazed at how God works through each of us to help one another face our trials,” said Pastor Nancy Green, who co-directs the summer retreat at Manidokan with her husband, Steve Green. “We can’t travel our journeys by ourselves. We need to be there for each other.”

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BMYR considers state of the black church

By Cynthia Belt
Centennial- Caroline UMC, Baltimore

The crises facing the black community today are legion. There is the issue of poverty with disproportionate numbers of persons living at or below the poverty line identified as persons of color. There is the atrocity of the prison industrial complex, mass incarceration, inadequate public school education, unemployment, which is in the double digits for persons of color. There is the atrocity of the prison industrial complex, mass incarceration, inadequate public school education, unemployment, which is in the double digits for persons of color. There is the atrocity of the prison industrial complex, mass incarceration, inadequate public school education, unemployment, which is in the double digits for persons of color. There is the atrocity of the prison industrial complex, mass incarceration, inadequate public school education, unemployment, which is in the double digits for persons of color. There is the atrocity of the prison industrial complex, mass incarceration, inadequate public school education, unemployment, which is in the double digits for persons of color.

In the words of Rev. Dr. Gil Caldwell, one of the founders of BMCR, “BMCR exists to represent and reflect the best of the social justice community of Methodism as well as that of activism in the Black Church. Many of us view there is a great need for Black United Methodists to articulate and express a Scripture-based prophetic ministry in these ‘best of times, worst of times’ situations. We cannot be seduced by the ‘best,’ when the ‘worst’ is so evident: Income inequality, inadequate public school education, mass incarceration, black-on-black violence, signs every day that this is not a ‘post-racial/racist’ time. What we need in this climate is genuine, biblical concern of each other because ‘We Are (or should be) Family.’ It is the task of the church to cast the light of God’s kingdom where all of God’s children find a welcome.”

Caldwell’s words are words of encouragement and words of challenge as we seek to move from a place of complacency to a place of scripturally based, God-ordained action in the world.

Part of our problem, particularly in ‘The United Methodist Church, is our failure to grasp the fact that many people we evangelize would be neither spiritual nor unspiritual – they are simply trying to survive. We are planning programs to attract mostly the middle class, young people with jobs and futures, and

we have disregarded the masses of poor. We can’t preach about heaven if we’re not willing to deal with the day-by-day problems of the people.

The key problem we face as a Church, and as a caucus, is “the ills of the world.” The key problem we face is one of irresolution.

We are good at programs and pronouncements, but not so good at building the kinds of relationships that help people to survive. We excels at resolutions, but are less successful at forging relationships with people who can help us out of our pockets and in the hands of those who might not even become members of our churches.

We’ve been challenged by our bishop to connect with schools in our neighborhood, but how many of us have gone into the homes in our neighborhoods to assess the challenges our children face with education even before they leave home?

Showdown.

Our Church and our caucus must answer the call to shift its focus away from programs toward people, away from individualism toward community, away from exclusion toward the inclusion of all of God’s children.

In order to move forward, we have to be willing to take a risk. That is, we must put our faith and trust in God and launch out into the unknown. This might require us to expand our view of the connection and realize that we might need, as the Rev. Vince Ross says, “to look at those places where churches are doing ministry in the world on behalf of the connection.”

In taking the risk that we are called to take, the church has to be constantly reminded that it is the least and the lost, those who are dispossessed and in despair, the diseased and the dispossessed that should set our agenda.

Their concern is not religious platitudes or necessarily social transformation – it’s simply to survive. We need agitators in positions of power who can certainly need social transformation – but when we determine that our primary focus will be at the seat of power, we become irrelevant to the world that we are called to serve.

Restoring health in the black church and the black community involves understanding our history as people of the African diaspora, claiming our unique identity as black United Methodists and continuing to tell the story of black people in ‘The United Methodist Church.

Navy Yard shooting raises tough questions about faith

By Rev. David Graves
Trinity UMC, Annapolis

Note: On Monday, Sept. 16, a mass shooting at the Navy Yard in Washington, D.C., killed 12 people, including the shooter. Bishop Marcus Matthews issued a statement that day, calling for the church to pray and to act. “After the shooting, the community is in need of support, and it is our role as the church to come alongside, to assure our beloved that they are not alone.”

“We must stand up to the pain these acts of violence inflict. Connected to one another and to God, we must take a stand for peace so that Christ’s ‘shalom’ is available to all.”


I write this two days after the shooting at the Navy Yard. I wish I could say the nation is still in shock, but it seems that this kind of thing has happened so much recently that we have become largely numb to it.

Yet the questions remain. Where was God in all this? Why were some people killed and others escaped? Did God cause it, or allow it, or ignore it? Or was God powerless to prevent it?

One of our members works on the same floor where the shooting took place. He did not plan to stay home that morning. We praise God for that decision, and rightly so.

He decided to stay home that morning. We praise God for that decision, and rightly so. Yet, was that God’s divine intervention? If it was, why didn’t God keep the victims home from work? Does God play favorites?

In the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus told us to pray for God’s will to be done on earth as it is done in heaven. If everything that happens is God’s will, Jesus wouldn’t have told us to pray that prayer. Any way in which in earth is different from heaven is a way God’s will is not being done on earth – and it’s a call for Christians to work to change it.

In Luke 13:1-5, Jesus as much as says that you can’t judge people’s righteousness based on what happens to them. Fallen people in a fallen world make fallen decisions and take fallen actions, and those decisions and actions often harm innocent people. I do think it’s safe to say that a person who is an active Christian, seeks to transform the moment to live for God, and surrounded by a loving, supportive Christian community, will not be the perpetrator in a tragedy like that of the Navy Yard. But I don’t think we can say that such a person would never be a victim.

I believe every Christian can and should cultivate an awareness of the Holy Spirit’s guidance in our lives to point to the path that we can take to avoid warnings about situations of danger. And I do believe in the power of prayer for protection. However, neither of those beliefs should be construed to say anything about the spiritual standing of someone who suffers a tragedy. Tribulation in this world is the birthright of every Christian (John 16:33).

And most importantly, we must live knowing that God is love. We know, by faith and by much testimony, and by personal experience, that despite the seeming logic of the question of evil, God is all loving, God is all knowing, God is all powerful. That means we can trust God. We can rest in God. We may not understand it, but we don’t need to. In words familiar to many at the Navy Yard, there’s another Bible verse, “That’s above my pay grade.”

“God knows, and that’s good enough for us. After all, if we could explain everything, where would be the need for faith?”

The Bible says God has gone into the homes in our neighborhoods to assess the challenges our children face with education even before they leave home. We help the survivors, we look to our own standing with God, we speak of a God who is God.


LETTER TO THE EDITOR

By Cynthia Belt
Centennial- Caroline UMC, Baltimore

I am tired of saying goodbye to God-fearing Christians as they have taken their families to non-UMC churches in search of fellowships that speak of a God who is more than a source of “cheap grace” (Bosheffer). I am tired of trying to explain to church members how some in our UMC leadership can make statements that are so out of line with our Church’s historic and current stance on Scripture and thinks God expects holiness of living. The lack of balance in the article makes it sound as if Talbert’s views are now our conference’s position.

I am so damaged by our cry for God-fearing Christians to have their families to non-UMC churches in search of fellowships that speak of a God who is more than a source of “cheap grace” (Bosheffer). I am tired of trying to explain to church members how some in our UMC leadership can make statements that are so out of line with our Church’s historic and current stance on Scripture and thinks God expects holiness of living. The lack of balance in the article makes it sound as if Talbert’s views are now our conference’s position.

Rev. David Graves
St. Paul UMC, Lubby

An extended version of this letter is available online at www.bwcumc.org/Graves_letter.pdf.

Letter to The UMConnection will be considered for the “Viewpoints” section, as space is available. Letters should be no longer than 250 words and be submitted at least two weeks prior to publication. Please include your name, church, daytime phone number and/or e-mail address.

Be what you proclaim, ‘says Wesley Seminary’s new dean

JOHN WESLEY’S ADOPTION OF “unite the pair so long disjointed, knowledge and vital piety,” is carved in one of the cornerstones of the library at Wesley Theological Seminary. It also served as a touchstone at the installation of the Rev. Robert K. Martin as the seminary’s new dean.

On Sept. 10, Martin was installed as Wesley Seminary’s seventh dean and professor of Christian Formation and Leadership during worship at Oxnam Chapel on the Washington, D.C. campus.

Lifting up Wesley’s quote, the seminary’s president, the Rev. David McCollister-Wilson, said that “Wesley has a long history of faithful, church-focused, scholarly deans. We continue this tradition with the selection of the Rev. Dr. Robert Martin. I anticipate his leadership will be central to our growth in the coming years.”

Bishop Marcus Matthews, who serves on the seminary’s Board of Governors, also celebrated Martin’s appointment to the school.

“As dean, Robert Martin will bring a creative, scholarly and practical approach to the development of Christian leaders,” he said. “Wesley is known as being a seminary for the church. I’m excited about how our new dean will deepen that relationship and enrich the way we are able to engage disciples for the transformation of the world.

Martin, an Elder in the Missouri Conference, has served on the faculties of St. Paul School of Theology in Kansas City and Yale Divinity School. He earned his Ph.D. from Princeton University in practical theology with a concentration in Christian Education, and is author of “The Incarnate Ground of Christian Faith.”

In a lecture following his installation, Martin explored how traditional ideas about the nature of church are going through a sea-change. Providing a bold and faithful approach to theological education, and embodying Christ in transformative and incarnational ways, is crucial, he said.

“Conventional communities and patterns of practice are less meaningful for more and more people,” he said in an e-mail. “For more and more people to do more of what we used to do will not be very productive. But we should not be chasing every fad, either.

“Rather, in order to align ourselves with the ‘new thing’ that God is doing in a particular context, we need to dive deeply both into the foundations of faith and the context, anticipating that the synergy between the two will emerge creatively in and through us. We need to lead change in the community, but that process is difficult and complex, it does not happen well by accident.”

“The intentional learning and missional opportunities that seminaries provide make them important partners for local churches.

“Education is absolutely essential to developing the capacity of faith communities and their leaders to grow spiritually and minister more effectively,” Martin said. “Learning is the only way we transcend our current habits and abilities so that we can better meet the challenges of a new era.”

Wesley Seminary equips local church leaders by engaging the foundational resources of the faith at deeper levels, expanding their horizons and enabling them to think about life in new ways and assisting them to learn ministerial skills that foster greater discipleship, said Martin.

But seminary is also a place for exploration, discovery and transcendence.

Martin shared some of his thoughts on this in his sermon at the installation service. Preaching on Communion, he invited those present to ingest Christ’s presence in their lives and to “practice the presence of God.”

“Encouraging the seminarians and the church to ‘become bread and wine for all the nations,’” Martin prayed. “‘May we become more fully what we dream about. May we become the reality we proclaim.’

I saved people from Africa.

Seven-year old Nicolina Stine is sitting at her dining room table with her mom, Michele, and dad, Kenny.

Nicolina is talking about how she has raised more than $2,000 in the last two years to help fight malaria.

“AT church, there was this thing, and we raised money at church and I thought about it and did it for my birthday,” she said.

What Nicolina had heard that day, more than two years ago, was a presentation about “Nothing But Nets,” which is a donation bought an insecticide-treated bed net that would help stop the spread of malaria.

Later, at home, Nicolina emptied her piggy bank and rummaged through the house, gathering all the loose change she could find. When Michele asked her what she was doing, she realized five year-old said she was doing what they said in church to do: get money to save lives of people living in Africa.

Michele matched the amount Nicolina had found: $70.

Nothing But Nets was launched in 2006 by a partnership that included The United Methodist Church.

Today, “Imagine No Malaria” continues the Nothing But Nets campaign, but with additional emphasis on prevention, treatment, education and communication.

The denomination is seeking to raise $75 million through Imagine No Malaria to rid Africa of a disease that claims one life every 60 seconds. The Baltimore-Washington Conference goal is to raise $1.2 million as part of that overall commitment.

Active members at Mt. Carmel UMC in Frederick, the Stines were further amazed when Nicolina announced to them that for her sixth birthday, she didn’t want presents; instead, she wanted people to donate money to buy nets.

“I didn’t want presents,” Nicolina said. “So I made my birthday into, like, where people give money to people in Africa and they buy nets.”

Nicolina might not have the distribution information just right, but she is clear on what the nets do: “They cover themselves with them so the mosquitoes don’t get them,” she said, “and they don’t get malaria.”

When Nicolina first told her mom about her idea – at age 5 – she told her mom she wanted a “bug party.”

Michele’s reaction was predictable. “She made the weirdest face,” said Nicolina. “She said, ‘Is everyone going to bring bugs to the party?’ And I said, ‘No, people bring money so I can save kids in Africa.’”

With her being so little when she did that, I didn’t understand what she meant,” said Michele. “We almost got into a little bit of a heated conversation because she wasn’t exactly getting her point across.

Once everyone understood the request, Michele sat in her office and cried for about two hours. And they were tears of joy. ’I was just floored,’ Michele said. “I couldn’t wait for my husband to come home.”

“I’m just very proud of her,” said Kenny. “I’m taken aback by the way she’s approached this whole project. I was real surprised by the way all the parents thought it was a great idea too. Instead of going out and buying something that would end up in a yard sale, it was a simple thing and a great thing to do.”

Kenny and Michele sat down with Nicolina, just to make sure she understood that this was what she really wanted to do.

“I wanted her to understand the magnitude of what she was doing and that there would be no presents,” said Michele.

Nicolina, she said, understood. “She said, ‘Mom, I got it. The kids are gonna bring money and we’re gonna buy nets.’”

So the family sat down and began to plan for the party, which included pony rides, snacks and a moon bounce at their home. They raised about $700 at that first party, with additional contributions coming in in the weeks and months afterwards following an article in the local newspaper about what Nicolina had done.

The following year, for her seventh birthday, the party grew larger. They invited Nicolina’s entire first grade class, the Girl Scout troop, friends from dance class and children from Sunday school. The party moved to the church and they raised more than $1,000.

In addition, the local mall in Frederick set aside all the money thrown in the fountain for Nicolina’s campaign, bringing in another $251.

“We had to collect it and clean it,” said Kenny. “It took us three days to clean all those coins.”

Nicolina is already planning on doing another “bug party” for her eighth birthday next summer.

“Because, I just want to. Bigger. More people, more money.”

How does raising all this money make Nicolina feel?

“Happy, because kids are getting saved.”

7-year old saves lives, raises $2K for Imagine No Malaria

BY ERIK ALSGAARD

UMConnection Staff

“I saved people from Africa.”

Seven-year old Nicolina Stine was sitting at her dining room table with her mom, Michele, and dad, Kenny.

Nicolina is talking about how she has raised more than $2,000 in the last two years to help fight malaria.

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