Bishop Felton E. May often spoke of the need for “holy boldness” — and his admirers said he lived the phrase.

“He was a forceful preacher and a force away from the pulpit. “You did not have to ask him to enter the fray,” said James H. Salley, associate vice chancellor for Institutional Advancement for Africa University, a United Methodist School. “If he saw it and felt it was wrong, he opposed it. If he felt it was right and something he needed to support, he did it.”

May died Feb. 27 at age 81, at his home in Ellicott City. He had been under hospice care for pancreatic cancer. Survivors include Phyllis Henry May, his wife of 53 years. Bishop LeTrelle Easterling of the Baltimore-Washington Conference announced May’s passing and extended sympathy to his family. The Baltimore-Washington Conference is still evident. He touched more lives here than we will ever fully know.

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Pastor, Covenant UMC, Gaithersburg
By Mandy Sayers

Years ago, I was a little boy I really enjoyed watching one of the commercials in the after-school specials. It was the one about fire safety.

It was the commercial that told you, if you find yourself in a fire there are three things you must do. Stop, Drop and Roll. I was thinking about that commercial the other day, and I realized that Stop, Drop and Roll is not only good in a fire, it is also what a believer does when they decide to repent.

Many times when we think of repenting, we think it as simple as saying sorry to God for a sin or mistake. But it is not quite that simple. True repentance goes much deeper than just a sorry, it requires you to Stop, Drop and Roll.

When we truly repent the first thing we have to do is STOP. True repentance always requires that you stop doing what you have been doing. It is not enough to say sorry to say sorry you actually have to stop doing the deed.

The second step in repentance is to DROP. When we want to repent we have to drop to our knees and pray to God for his forgiveness. Often times, it is the dropping that is most difficult, but we have to drop and confess what we have done so that God is faithful and just and will forgive us of our sins.

Finally, true repentance requires that we ROLL. After we stop what we are doing and DROP to our knees to ask for forgiveness the only thing left is to ROLL away from the past.

True repentance requires that we make a commitment to roll away from the things that we are stopping and are sorry for. Unless we roll we have the possibility to only have a temporary stop and an empty apology, not true repentance.

So this Lenten season, don’t just give up coffee or sweets for 40 days. Take a moment to Stop, Drop and Roll. It will make all the difference in the world.

CORRECTION:

In the apportionment listings in the February UMConnection, it was reported that Bells UMC in Camp Springs paid only 92 percent of its apportionments. The congregation paid 100 percent. We praise God for their faithful stewardship efforts.

As New Hope Christian Fellowship in Edgewood was incorrectly listed as an apportionment-paying church. NHCF does not pay apportionments because of its status as a Mission Church. We regret any misunderstanding.
Bishop May: ‘Giant of the church’ noted for boldness

From page 1

May was born in Chicago in 1935. He grew up in an apartment on the South Side and attended a Baptist church with his mother and siblings.

While a student at local Judson College, May was part-time a rabbi at a Jewish synagogue. Rabbi Louis Leopold Mann recommended that he become a part of St. James Methodist Church, which had a commitment to integration.

“I think God has called you to be a minister,” May, speaking in 1999 at Wesley Theological Seminary, recalled the rabbi saying.

May also remembered being incredulous at the rabbi’s assertion, but was soon involved in leading Sunday school and youth programs at St. James.

“And then I began to read Methodist literature and its social witness, and it made sense to me. I felt I was called by God to do that,” he told the Baltimore Sun for a 2001 profile.

May was active as a young adult in civil rights work, including Operation Breadbasket. He was ordained as a deacon in the Northern Illinois Conference in 1962 and served two pastoral appointments in Chicago, one of them a church in a neighborhood with a high poverty rate.

To get Maple Park Methodist going, May and his wife knocked on doors, started a children’s ministry and bible study groups. The church was chartered with fifteen families and grew to 350 in weekly attendance during May’s time. It also was active in civil rights and other social justice advocacy.

In 1968, May transferred to the Peninsula Conference and became associate executive director of the Methodist Action Program in Wilmington, Delaware. After earning his master of divinity degree from Crozer Theological Seminary, he was ordained a United Methodist elder in 1970.

May would again serve as a church pastor, then as a district superintendent and as director of the Conference Council of Ministries.

In 1984, he was elected bishop and assigned to the Harrisburg Episcopal Area.

The Rev. Dean Snyder, now retired, worked on May’s staff in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Snyder said some top church leaders buckled under the responsibility, and complained about all the decisions they’re supposed to make.

Not May.

“Father never felt sorry for himself, and he never apologized for exercising his responsibility and authority,” Snyder said.

Snyder added that May could be intimidating, but also strongly backed those under him who took a risk in social justice ministry.

May also had a key role in forming Communities of Shalom, which he named the 1992 General Conference. The conference created a resource to race riots in Los Angeles. Later he successfully pushed for expanding the program into Africa.

“He was the organizing bishop and brought it out internationally,” said the Rev. Michael Christensen, director of the Shalom Initiative for Prophetic Leadership and Community Development at Drew University.

Perhaps May’s highest-profile role came in 1990-91, when he served on special assignment, leading the United Methodist Bishops’ Initiative on Drug and Alcohol Abuse and Violence in Washington. No other bishop has been asked by the Council of Bishops to leave an episcopal area for a special assignment on its behalf, and then return to active service.

In Washington, May and his wife took an apartment in The United Methodist Building, but he spent much of his time working with pastors in the toughest neighborhoods.

“He would be on the street, meeting people where they were,” said Stephen Drachels, who worked with May on the Washington assignment.

Drachels recalled that May heard another pastor refer to churches as “saving stations,” and seized on that term. May and clergy colleagues borrowed tents and erected them on the street, where they held revival-style worship services but also invited drug counselors in to help people battling addictions.

“We must have a holy war against drugs and reclaim our streets,” May told The New York Times.

Baltimore during his final episcopal assignment, leading the Baltimore-Washington Conference. The saving stations idea would be adopted elsewhere and would help lead to the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries’ Special Program on Substance Abuse and Related Violence.

“Alas along as bishop, May showed a deep interest in combating poverty and other social ills in the United States and worldwide.”

In 1994, he visited Rwandan refugee camps as part of a United Methodist fact-finding team. He returned two years later to help dedicate a tent village for orphans provided by United Methodists, a change he called a “miracle” compared to lethal conditions held captive.

May also served on a White House Presidential Commission on AIDS, travelling across southern African in 1999. The trip helped increase U.S. spending on AIDS worldwide by $100 million.

Under May, the Baltimore-Washington Conference formed a partnership with the Zimbabwe Conference.

From page 1

On Feb. 25, during an Open House at the Center, Cornell helped lead tours of the pantry, explaining its purpose and how it works. The food pantry is done in partnership with Manna Food Center, which supplies most of the food items. Manna’s mission is to eliminate hunger in Montgomery County.

“This food pantry requires a lot more volunteers,” Cornell said. “People have really stepped up. We have students from Blair High School and folks from Highland Baptist Church volunteering to help, so we’re developing a community of volunteers, starting to develop friendships. It’s becoming church for people.”

Silver Spring UMC has long been active in outreach and mission, Cornell said, and when they saw that they were doing so many feeding ministries, “and it was something people were really committed to, we made it our mission statement. Our mission is to feed all of God’s children—body, mind, and spirit—so that no one goes hungry.”

One of the key volunteers is Lisa Middleton, the food Ministry Coordinator at the church. It was her vision that helped birth the choice pantry.

“A choice food pantry is where folks can come in and have more of a shopping experience,” Middleton said. Since they’ve opened, they’ve served more than 200 clients, she said, to whom on this day, 42 families were expected.

“The process of creating the choice food pantry took about a year, Middleton said. What got her through it was its faith. “At the beginning,” she said. “It was, Wow, we need this many volunteers, and we need this much space, but we’re here because we believed in the vision. When God is calling you to do something, there’s not going to be anything that stands in the way.”

Pastor Evelyn Rivera is associate pastor at Hughes-Eüb Buen Samaritano, and since January 2008, also the Community Outreach worker for Silver Spring UMC, which allows for both congregations to enter into a partner relationship, she said. The open house was an opportunity, she said, to celebrate the partnership between the two congregations but also to celebrate the service to the community.

“Bishops’ Initiative on Drug and Alcohol Abuse and Violence”

“Programs have had their day,” he said in his 2009 address at Wesley Theological Seminary. “The power of the gospel must rest upon us and our institutions.”

May is survived by his wife, two children, Daphne May Brown and Felton May II, and eight grandchildren.

CONDOLENCES AND MEMORIALS

Condolences can be sent to the May family at 335 Oak West Drive, Apt. 123, Ellicott City, MD 21043. Emails can be directed to Daphne May Brown at daliasjdu1342@gmail.com.

The family asks that memorial donations be made to either Project H.O.P.E. or the Africa University Development Fund. Donations can be directed to Daphne May Brown, the May Family Trust. For Hughes-Eüb Buen Samaritano, donations can be made online or mailed to the Africa University Development Fund, Post Office Box 340007, Nashville, TN 72003.
Is your congregation ready for public violence?

By Jim Skillington*

It’s Saturday night, the sermon is prepared, the bulletin is printed and in the narthex. The pastor is about to go to sleep for the night when a, a parishioner calls and asks if the has heard about the shooting at the local shopping center. Several people have been killed, the caller says, and his son was there when it happened. His son wasn’t injured, he adds, but can the pastor arrange something for the youth on Sunday?

Will the pastor stay up most of the night, tear up her prepared sermon and write a new one, create a new bulletin and call pastoral counselors she knows, hoping one of them can be at church the next day? Or does he go to bed and just add a prayer for those impacted by the violence?

One clergyman described this situation as his “worst pastoral nightmare.”

Public violence — when a random violent incident occurs in a community — is occurring more than once a day in the United States. No community should expect to be exempted.

When an incident of public violence occurs, churches report inactive members and an influx of visitors attend the next day of worship. Whether the visitors return the following week often depends on their experience that day.

While a new sermon and worship service can be created overnight, it is better to be prepared for the inevitable day when public violence occurs in the community.

Creating a plan for the first worship following an incident of public violence should not just be a task for the pastor; members of the leadership team should also participate. It’s better to have leaders agree ahead of time that no matter what special music or service features had been previously announced, the entire worship experience may be changed when violence occurs.

The message for the day should also be outlined in advance. All incidents of trauma have some commonalities that can be used to prepare a generic message; fill in the details when the incident of public violence occurs.

The same is true for the actual service. If printed bulletins are used, produce extras of an undated bulletin and keep the copies offline in case worship has to be moved.

Don’t forget the children’s message if one is normally prepared; make sure it is appropriate and consider providing trauma resource suggestions for families.

A key component of the plan must focus on communication to members and the general public. Who will update the website, the Facebook page, Twitter feed, and email list? Who will write and who will approve the message, and how quickly can it be distributed? Following the Saturday nightclub shooting in Orlando last year, just two local houses of worship included anything on their website and less than five had anything on their Facebook page in time for worship the following day.

Also, decide ahead of time who will speak to the press and be sure that person knows the right information and what to say — and not to say. This is not the time to get into a political debate.

Know where the worship service will be held if the building is within police lines or threatened by a local disaster. Develop a plan ahead of time with another religious community or another appropriate location that is available with little notice.

By definition, public violence causes trauma. As many as 60 percent of community members will need professional help to navigate through the trauma in the coming weeks and months. Identifying credentialed professionals trained in crisis and spiritual care counseling to whom congregation members may be referred when an incident occurs. Include a plan for care for clergy and other staff, who can easily suffer Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) while caring for everyone else.

Finally, plan for the future. Topical workshops, future services of remembrance, and ongoing trauma counseling should all be part of ongoing care following the first worship service. Lives and places are forever changed following public violence, and working through the recovery phases will take years even for the best prepared communities. Be open to offering or participating in new ministries as the community heals.

This article first appeared in MinistryMatters.

*The Rev. Jim Skillington is appointed to extension ministry in the Baltimore-Washington Conference. He is the executive director of the Center for Public Violence Recovery (www.publicviolencerecovery.org) in Orlando.

‘Straight talk on racism’

By Helen Stafford Fleming*

Racism, whether institutionalized or legislated, is being practiced in some form of discrimination that segregates us today. Our nation is still the product of hatred, bigotry and prejudices. How we overcome these negative forces of hatred and racist dialogue, such as, blaming and disrespecting each other that has been embedded in the mind and behavior of people for centuries.

We must stop putting bandages on racism and face the truth by recognizing the trickery of Satan’s plan and realize that God has given us authority over the enemy. While Supremacy or Black Nationalism represent hatred and division that has deceived this country for decades, but the Word of God says, “Resist the devil and he will flee.” Our warfare is not against flesh and blood, but against the powers of darkness. We must realize that all power is in our hand, because, God gave us power and dominion over this earth.

We are charged to love one another and to forgive one another, and then we become more than a conqueror in Christ Jesus. A house divided against itself cannot stand and that is the present state of America. Remember, if we have not love, we have not God.

Let’s unwound the wounds of racism and its injustices so that the pain that has bound us for centuries can be healed. We must come to understand that slavery was never about God’s people hating each other, slavery was about greed, self-absorption and power. However, it has always been the choice of the people to be vessels for Satan’s game in every race.

Let’s continue to review the past and take authority over the future on God’s terms.

*Fleming is a retired Local Pastor. A full version of this commentary is available online at http://www.bwccumc.org/news-and-views/straight-talk-on-racism/.

A Place Called Eastern: How one church saved a life

By Michael Anthony Carrington, Jr.
Pastor, St. Luke’s UMC, Reisterstown

Michael Carrington is the BWC’s youngest pastor.
The church that adopted Tom, Eastern UMC in Baltimore, recently sold its building.

It was an Eastern outreach to recruit the lost, speak to the mute, feed the hungry, mother the motherless, father the fatherless, invite one boy and two girls to a place called “sanctuary;” a place called Eastern.

It was an Eastern outreach to recruit the lost, speak to the mute, feed the hungry, mother the motherless, father the fatherless, invite one boy and two girls to a place called “sanctuary;” a place called Eastern.

You invited me into your home, which was paved with red carpet. You sat me down on your hardwood pews and taught me about the grace that preceded my human circumstances.

For 17 years, four days and 23 hours, you bathed me in Scripture, saturated me in the traditions of a community that protected me, in reason, then sent me on my way with experience.

You drove me to school, visited me at home, fed me, clothed me, taught me, tutored me and then you married me.

You opened your home to me, when I was six, as a boy and two girls a place called “sanctuary;” a place called Eastern!

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This Place Called Eastern

It was a place of discipline, a place of comfort, a place of love, a place of knowledge, ministry, grace and mercy.

It was a place of love, a place for widows; a place for justice. It was the Motherland for those robbed of life, seeking to find their way.

It was a home for the corners of Ninth Avenue and Caroline Street; a home full of ministry; the birthplace for evangelism; a house of hope and prophetic voice; a place called Eastern!

It was a home for me. I am its prodigal. Here, I raise my Ebenezer.
ROCK offers new hope
By Lauren Stitzlein

Lauren Stitzlein first attended ROCK as a middle schooler. Today, she works in full-time ministry foraging the Gospel in college students.

What can we rely on in an ever-changing world? Who can we turn to in the brokenness and craziness that seems to be all around us? These are questions that people, especially youth, feel pressed to know the answers to.

But on Feb. 3-5, about 4,500 youth and their leaders were pointed to the answer. God, The Rock, is the steadfast source of God.

It’s impossible to know all 4,500 life stories that ROCK has the opportunity to impact each year, but one can imagine a few of the common burdens that they carry into the convention center on Friday night. There are burdens of doubt, anger, fear of forgiving, shame, evil, insecurities, and a thousand other emotions and experiences youth carry with them through their day.

But at ROCK, youth can give these burdens to the Lord and experience confidence that can only come from the Rock. Whether in a main session, a seminar, youth groups, youth who come to ROCK will experience their hearts being engaged with the message of hope found only in Jesus Christ in the most ways that their hearts need to hear it.

I say this with confidence about ROCK because 13 years ago, as a seventh grader, my heart was engaged with the Gospel for the first time that I remember at ROCK. I left Ocean City on Jan. 25, 2004, changed by the message that God loved me, had a plan for me, and sent Jesus Christ to live for him and with him forever.

When the message of ROCK intersected with my life as an insecure pre-teen who pressed to know the answers to. When the message of ROCK intersected with my life as an insecure pre-teen who

Religious leaders are “called to live the Gospel we proclaim,” says Bishop LaTrelle Easterling, resident bishop of the Baltimore-Washington Conference.

On Jan. 27, President Trump issued an executive order enacting a 90-day suspension of all visas for nationals from Iraq, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen. This measure and the new administration’s stance on immigration have stirred up conversation and advocacy efforts in the Baltimore-Washington Conference.

The United Methodist Church, in its official stance, upholds a theology that welcomes the stranger, and advocates a witness that stands with the marginalized and oppressed. For thoughts and resources on immigration ministries, visit www.bwcm Duc.org/ministries/advocacy/immigration-resources.

But not all United Methodists are of one mind on this issue, as a member from Pleasant Hill UMC in Owing Mills explains in the commentary at right.

Working to end gun violence
By Richard Mitchell

Immigration Thoughts
By Lauren Stitzlein

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Working to end gun violence
By Richard Mitchell

We suggest that each congregation select a contact person who can gather and share information. E-mail Beth Reilly (breilly@umc-md.org) to be a part.

Residents of Maryland can show your support for bills to prevent gun violence that are moving through the 2017 General Assembly, by calling or writing our legislators. Go to www.mdelect.net to find out who your legislators are. Show your support for the Washington Interfaith Network to advocate for the bill and funding. Contact Ryan Nickens (rbnickens@hotmail.com) to be a part.

City Councilmember McDuffie has a bill, “The Neighborhood Engagement and Safe Response to Violence in our Society Act,” which is based on a violence intervention model that has worked very successfully to prevent gun violence in other parts of our country. You’re invited to work with the Washington Interfaith Network to advocate for this issue.

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Please join us in our work to prevent gun violence.
MARYLAND Lt. Gov. Boyd Rutherford spoke to the group. “In all of its years, this was the first year the Board was able to land a leader from the State House second floor to be Keynote speaker” said the Rev. K.A. Slayton Sr., Advocacy coordinator.


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BWC pastor edits Women’s Bible
WASHINGTON, D.C. — The Common English Women’s Bible has recently been published. Helping to make the three-year project happen was the Rev. Ginger Gaines-Cirrelli, senior pastor at Foundry UMC, one of five women editors. All 80 commentator contributors are also women.

“I think the vast, inclusive number of women’s voices that we have represented in the writing is beautiful and wonderful,” Gaines-Cirrelli said.

The CEB specialty edition, sold and distributed by Abingdon Press, includes an index of all women, named and unnamed, mentioned in both the Old and New Testaments.

Height honored on stamp
WASHINGTON—Dorothy Height, who died in 2010, a United Methodist laywoman who became a civil rights and women’s rights icon over a long career, is the subject of a U.S. Postal Service Forever stamp. It was introduced by the U.S. Postal Service at a ceremony Feb. 1 at Howard University.

UMS advocate in Annapolis
ANAPOLIS – About 70 members of the conference gathered in Annapolis Feb. 15 to advocate with legislators about paid sick leave, fracking, and prescription drug affordability. The annual Legislative Day in Annapolis is sponsored by the BWC’s Board of Church and Society and the United Methodist Women.

Maryland Lt. Gov. Boyd Rutherford spoke to the group. “In all of its years, this was the first year the Board was able to land a leader from the State House second floor to be Keynote speaker” said the Rev. K.A. Slayton Sr., Advocacy coordinator.


Church celebrates 240 years
REISTERSTOWN – Reisterstown UMC celebrated its 240th Anniversary Feb. 12. Bishop LaTrelle Easterling was there and delivered an inspiring message based on the book of Hebrews. RUMC traces its beginnings back to Feb. 6, 1777, when Francis Asbury spoke to a group of Methodists in Reisterstown. The congregation celebrated with music by the Praise Band, Cherub Choir, Chancel Singers, brass, Joyful Noise Handbell Choir, organ and piano. Marion John from the RUMC Prayer Shawl Ministry gave the bishop a prayer shawl in the New England Patriots’ team colors.

Cabinet serves at Manna House
BALTIMORE – For 50 years, Manna House has served Baltimore’s poor and homeless. Started by St. John’s UMC, it serves breakfast seven days a week, some 60,000 meals this past year. On Jan. 22, the nine members of the BWC Cabinet saw that everyone had breakfast. Organized by Baltimore Suburban District Superintendent, the Rev. Laura Easto, they served several hundred people.

Mural unveiled to bring hope
FREDERICK – Asbury UMC provides food and clothing for those in need. Now they’re offering the community an answer to a different kind of need.

Many hands have gone into completing a three-year project, offered to anyone who passes by. The “Mural of Hope” was recently unveiled with a service of thanks for the many hands that went into completing the project. It is mounted on the side of the red brick building housing the church’s food and clothing services.

The project was directed by Rose Chaney, a former art teacher and chair of the Asbury outreach ministry. With help from former colleagues, they created the mural showing rays of sunlight shining down from a blue sky on five very different people staring from windows toward the sky.

“The church has served the city of Frederick a lot,” said Mayor Randy McClement, “and we, the city of Frederick, appreciate everything that this church has done.”

“The Mural of Hope” was created to remind people that hope allows us to face the many difficulties and trials that we have to endure,” said the Rev. Mark Groover.

For more information:
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*Making a Difference is written and compiled each month by Linda Worthington.
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**Clergy take ‘Day Apart’ with bishop to prepare for Lent**

By Erik Alsgaard
UMConnection Staff

The season of Lent is one of the busiest times of the year for local church pastors. In the Baltimore-Washington Conference, there is a tradition of clergy gathering just before Lent to help prepare for what lies ahead.

Rev. Zina Jacque speaks on rest, rise and walk as Lenten disciplines at the Bishop’s Day Apart with Clergy at Chapel UMC. On Feb. 22, more than 200 clergy met with Bishop LaTrelle Easterling at Queen’s Chapel UMC in Beltsville to spend time together in worship, fellowship and learning.

“I love Lent,” the bishop said. “It is an opportunity for us to do what we often don’t spend a lot of time doing, and that’s some introspective analysis.”

Lent is the time, Bishop Easterling said, that “if we’re doing it right, we don’t spend more time looking at other people and wonder ‘who else the pastor’s talking about.’”

But some recent research troubles me. It shows that 3 out of 4 Americans do not observe Lent.

On a personal note, 70 percent of Americans do not observe Easter. “It’s counter-cultural to rest,” Jacque continued. “We are able to rise if we’ve rested. We’re able to rise because God’s mercies are new every morning. Rise gently, caring for yourself; nothing is more important to God than you are.”

And after we’ve rested and risen, Jacque said, comes the third four-letter word: “Walk.”

**As we prepare for Easter, what are you giving up for Lent?**

By Erik Alsgaard
UMConnection Staff

What is Lent? I know it’s trendy these days to add something up. Perhaps it’s a Super Bowl commercial to make it popular again? But I digress.

Lent focuses on giving gifts, not forbidden things. It’s the very fact of giving that makes Lent beautiful! “It is a season of sacrifice,” Jacque said. “We begin our journey thinking how we’re in our spring, we’re tender. This has nothing to do with age. Where you are in your spiritual life!...”

“Here’s the thing about rising,” Jacque continued. “We are able to rise if we’ve rested. We’re able to rise because God’s mercies are new every morning. Rise gently, caring for yourself; nothing is more important to God than you are.”

So, apparently, Lent needs a good marketing campaign. Lent needs a Super Bowl commercial to make it popular again? But I digress.

Why are Americans giving up Lent for Lent? The article notes that Lent focuses on giving things up in order to gain spiritual benefits in preparation for Easter.

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“If a heart, a mind, and a body are to be fed, the body must be fed too, if it is to be fit for the mind and the heart,” a famous theologian wrote about the goal of Lent. “The body must be fed to the mind and heart.”

And after we’ve rested and risen, Jacque said, comes the third four-letter word: “Walk.”

“Walk.”
We made an agreement with the boys that MVP for two years. She said it has been a wider audience," she said, "and I cannot to watch her gifts being recognized by a to God."

ever been played that well.' And yet, Kayla quickly said, 'I'm not sure our piano has Sokol, the church's pastor. "When she first lives with a faithful desire to serve God with

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By David Bonney
Smithville United Methodist Church

Sometimes, it's the everyday miracles that surprise you. In 2015, I went on a Volunteer in Mission trip to a school named Mashambanhaka in Zimbabwe. The school was a Methodist Mission school and had a primary school of over 1,200 students and a newly started secondary school with over 400 students. There were no classrooms, books or supplies for the secondary school students. It was amazing to see hundreds of boys and girls sitting under trees, listening to lectures.

I noticed four boys who were not part of any of the outside lectures. The boys sat a little distance from the classes. After a couple of days, one of the boys approached me and told me their story. They were orphans and each had been turned away from school because they could not pay the #1 school fee.

They always worked together in fields and herded cattle trying to earn money for school, but it was never enough. They supported and cared for each other. I had compassion for the boys and asked the school headmaster about them and I stated that each of the boys were talented and hardworking students. With the help of some of the VIM team, we paid the past due and present fees for the boys.

One of the boys was Albert Mashambanhaka. He was a very skinny, sad-looking boy, and a little shy. As soon as he learned that he was back in school his whole demeanor changed and he had a permanent smile and a walk of confidence. We made an agreement with the boys that if they helped the pastor every week and the school grounds litter free, that the school fees would be paid each term.

The ZIM VIM team finished the school block and provided 80 desks and benches as well as school supplies and, thanks to UNICEF textbooks were supplied for the second year students. With the help of members of the Smithville UMC family paid for his very important Ordinary Level exams. This was the first time any students from the new secondary school would sit for these important exams. The results would determine if a student could continue to Forms 5 and 6 (the last two years of high school).

In early September, Albert wrote this note to Smithville UMC. "The Lord is doing many wonderful things in my life. I am going to write my final exam for form four on the 23rd of October. I am studying very hard because I know education is going to move me from being an orphan. I would also wish to help some of the orphans in our village. I never thought one day I was going to sit for my exams. I had no money for fees and no school uniforms. I sometimes work for other people so in return they offered me money for school fees. You helped me a lot. You removed me from being a slave. I love you and God bless you." The results of the exams were released in early 2015. There were only three students from Mashambanhaka who passed the exams. Albert was the top student at the school. Even though he was the top at the school, his results were not outstanding. But considering that this boy was hungry, had no electricity, walked miles to school, had no reading materials for years and a school with no educational materials, I was very impressed with his results.

I was blessed to be in Zimbabwe with Charlie Moore and the ZIM VIM 2015 team. Albert and I looked to find a high school placement so he could complete high school. One of the only good schools with an available spot was a prestigious boarding school called Nyamuzewe High School. It is a Methodist Mission School. Albert applied to the school but because there was O level results did not meet their minimum requirements, they would not consider him. Nyamuzewe is in the top 10 percent of boarding schools in Zimbabwe.

Albert was selected as the head boy for 2016 school year. He was also the lay leader in the chaplain’s office, the youth fellowship ministries treasurer, member of the entertainment committee and a member of the school debate club. During the two years at boarding school there was a transformation of a very skinny and shy boy to a robust and confident young man. With support from his Smithville UMC family and strong faith in Christ, he continued to be a walking testimony to the power of faith and love of Christ.

Three meals a day, clean water, electricity and a bed changed this boy.

In November, Albert graduated from high school and sat for the Advanced Level exams. On Jan. 23, the results were published and the top student at Nyamuzewe was Albert Mashambanhaka. Albert was also in the top 1 percent for the entire country. This skinny boy, sitting under a tree, starving for knowledge, had overcome all odds and surpassed all expectations. The story is not over.

During a ZIM VIM trip in 2016, a member of the team from Texas became intrigued with Albert’s story. Even before his results were known, she had committed to support him through for years of university. Albert has now been accepted to the University of Zimbabwe and is preparing for this new chapter in his life.

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She also just happens to have the #1 single on Billboard’s Smooth Jazz chart. “Kayla is an extraordinary person who lives with a faithful desire to serve God with all she has,” said the Rev. Donna Claycomb-Sokol, the church's pastor. “When she first interviewed for this position, our organist quickly said, ‘I’m not sure our pianist has ever been played that well.’ And yet, Kayla is amazingly humble and always gives glory to God.”

Claycomb-Sokol said that Waters has brought not only her talent to MVL but her life and joy to worship. “It’s a delight to watch her gifts being recognized by a wider audience,” she said, “and I cannot wait to see where she continues to fly.”

Waters has been director of music at MVP for two years. She said it has been a blessing to her to be there. “I think I’m one of the youngest directors of music they’ve ever had there,” she said. “When I came in, I had very little experience with choral directing, so I’ve kind of had to learn as I go along.”

Her recent single – her first ever – “I Am,” is steadily climbing the Billboard charts after making its debut in January at #97. Her new album, “Apostles,” was released Feb. 24 on Trippin’ N Rhythm Records. “I’m ecstatic and overwhelmed that my songs are getting some traction,” Waters said in a phone interview. “It’s only been out for five weeks. I’m really excited.”

Waters was accepted at Howard University as a piano major, studying with Karen Walwyn, and she received her bachelor’s degree in 2013. Waters lists Walwyn as one of her primary mentors, helping her develop her style in composing and writing. Her other mentor is Kim Jordan, who served as music director for the late Gary Scott Heron for 10 years. The combination of classical and jazz piano is unique. Waters said, and she’s proud of her ability to seamlessly float between the two worlds.

“I kind of taken from them and worked from their experience,” Waters said. “They’ve told me stories and I’ve learned a lot from them.”

The first song on her iPhone, she said, was her own music, perhaps not surprisingly as she anticipated the release of her debut album.

What’s next for Waters is getting tour dates lined up, she said, including a couple of dates playing with her dad. “We’re getting some calls for solo shows,” she said, “and for doing the daddy-daughter thing.”

Upcoming shows are listed at www. tamskeywaterns.com.

“I thank God for every step of the way,” Waters said. “This is not just me, but it’s God who gives me my gift. I give him all the praise for the music that he’s given me.”

Jazz: Waters thanks God with ministry of music

Church opens new horizons for one man’s future

Dave Bonney of Smithville UMC, left, talks with Albert Mashambanhaka in Zimbabwe.