The hundreds of mourners who gathered at Asbury UMC in Washington, D.C., on March 30, bore witness to that fact.

By Melissa Lauber
UMConnection Staff

Celebrating past with new vision

AFTER THE ISRAELITES defeated the Philistines, the story goes, the prophet Samuel erected a stone and named it Ebenezer, which means “Thus far the Lord has helped us.” On March 19, echoes of that same story continued as the people of Ebenezer UMC in Washington, D.C., met to praise God and celebrate their Founder’s Day – claiming God’s power as they seek to renew their historic church.

The congregation began 215 years ago, as part of Capitol Hill Methodist Episcopal Church, with 61 white and 25 black members. They worshipped in the spot where the National’s Baseball Park stands today, said Sam Ford, a member Ebenezer’s Historical Committee and a

See Ebenezer, page 4

Church honors Bishop May’s life

IN A WORSHIP SERVICE packed with Bishop May’s favorite hymns – including “Joy to the World,” as the opening hymn – and special music that brought people to their feet, bishops, district superintendents, General Secretaries, clergy and laity came together to say goodbye to a lion of the faith.

• A man who was born in 1935 Chicago, educated in public schools, and who was elected to the episcopacy in 1984.
• A man who started a new church in Chicago, with his wife, Phyllis, that began with 15 families and grew to 200 members.
• A man who became the first bishop in United

See May, page 3

Diversity is key to discipleship

BY MELISSA LAUBER
UMConnection Staff

T O REALLY BE THE CHURCH God intends, United Methodists “need to get comfortable with being uncomfortable,” said Pamela Ramon Jackson of Inspire D.C. in Washington, D.C.

Jackson was one of seven members of the Baltimore-Washington Conference who traveled last month to a Path One Multicultural Church Conference in Oklahoma City to learn how to do just that as they explored how “differences matter” and what it means for a church to reflect the many faces of God.

Their participation was underwritten by the BWC’s Office of Vibrant Communities, which is committed to creating vital local churches that reflect the fullness of God.

“The purpose of the gathering, said the Rev. Elaine Robinson, a professor of Methodist studies at Oklahoma City University, was to live out the mystery of our Gracious God, which lies in our ability to enter into right and radical relationship with the vast irreducible whole of God’s creation.”

Within The United Methodist Church, 90 percent of the members in the United States are white. Nationally, 64 percent of the population is white. This dominant white culture can lead people to believe “the image of God is what I look like. The image of God is what I prefer,” Robinson said.

But homogeneous churches are nothing new, Robinson said. In one of the first Christian churches in Corinth, which was a bubbling cauldron of diversity, the apostle Paul scolded the people — Jews, Greeks, Romans, freed and slaves — for their division and lack of unity in Christ.

“When you isolate a people-group for the sake of Christ, they become less effective,” said Brian Leander of Adelphi University, plenary speaker for the Conference.

A researcher on intercultural competencies and their impact on churches and businesses, Leander has found that there is one thing multiethnic, multicultural, multiracial and multifaith groups have in common: they are “diversity-oriented.”

Rather than focusing on trying to attract certain quotas of groups of people, Leander encourages churches to become diversity-oriented churches. Cultural, economic, social and religious diversity “comes right from the heart of

See Multicultural, page 3

HE IS NOT HERE; HE HAS RISEN, JUST AS HE SAID.
– MATTHEW 28:6

UMConnection
Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church • Becoming fully alive in Christ and making a difference in a diverse and ever-changing world • www.bwcumc.org • Volume 28, Issue 4 • April 2017

Pastor Bresean Jenkins prays at Ebenezer UMC.
Easter is at the heart of the church to which Christ has called us to proclaim the good news. We can’t promise that life with Christ will mean you won’t get cancer or car trouble. After all, the One we follow said “Foxes have holes, birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.”

We can’t promise that people will like you, or say nice things about you. Jesus even said, “Blessed are you” when people revile you on account of him and other scary and unappealing things (like being blessed, the meek, those who mourn… and that bit about losing your life to save it). What we can give, what we can promise, is Easter.

Our Easter is not just one single day, a kind of Mardi Gras party with a hangover following it. Our Easter is not about chocolate eggs (though I do love a good chocolate egg), or that toxic plastic Easter basket grass. The Easter we offer is about new life and new life eternal, the sure and certain hope of the resurrection. The Easter we offer has made sin, hell and death mere shadows of their former selves. And if that’s all Easter did, that would be enough to make confirmation class worthwhile.

But Easter is more than that — this Easter that we offer the world. The world. The Easter we offer runs on our present life, on our morning routines. It whispers new life into old marriages and sends hope into desperate situations. It causes stones in front of tombs everywhere to shudder: the tomb of the 17th IEP meeting for a precious boy, the tomb of the layoff, the tomb of the middle crises, the tomb of addiction, the tomb of despair. What’s a well-meaning, lifelong Methodist to do with such an Easter as that? It’s enough to make even the most jaded among us stare wide-eyed and slack-jawed. A stone rolled away. Graveclothes folded. Normal, rational, reasonable people… United Methodists, even… running from the tomb away. Graveclothes folded. Normal, rational, reasonable people… United Methodists, even… running from the tomb away. Graveclothes folded. Normal, rational, reasonable people… United Methodists, even… running from the tomb away. Graveclothes folded. Normal, rational, reasonable people… United Methodists, even… running from the tomb away.


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Paul tells us not to simply rejoice always, but to rejoice in the Lord always. Paul understood that there will be times when our circumstances will not dictate joy as a response, and when our feelings will not dictate joy as a response, but when we put our joy in the Lord, joy is always available. No matter how good or bad things may be, the Lord is always there. The Lord is there in our highest of highs, and does not abandon us in our lowest of lows. The Lord promised that he will be there always. It is in this promise that we can find peace, contentment and joy.

As we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord this month, take time to rejoice. Rejoice that God loves you. Rejoice that the Lord will always be there for you. Rejoice that Jesus conquered death and the grave. No matter where you are, or what you are going through, always know that the Lord cares for you, and that is a reason to rejoice!

EVENTS

Registration open for Annual Conference session Rates go up April 13 www.bwcumc.org Online registration costs go up April 13 for the 23rd session of the Baltimore-Washington Conference, which will be held Wednesday, May 31-Friday, June 1, at the Woodland Park Marriott Hotel in Washington, D.C.

Older Adult Day Apart April 26, 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. West River The theme is “Reclaiming Yourself in Christ.” Rev. Michael Parker leads worship and Bible study; workshops include art with Ruth Bailey, discovering your spiritual gifts with the Rev. Mary Dennis, gardening for small spaces, and boat rides on West River. bwcumc.org/event/940688-2017-04-26-west-river-center-spring-day-away/

VIM Training April 29, 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Conference Mission Center The training will educate participants on all VIM procedures, selecting destinations and projects, registering your trip, recruiting a volunteer team, obtaining volunteer accident insurance and necessary travel documents. The cost is $25. bwcumc.org/event/945052-2017-07-28-vim-training-vim/

Native American Ministries Sunday April 30 Half of the Native American Ministries Sunday special offering supports Native American outreach within the BWC to strengthen Native American ministries. umcgiving.org

Mission u July 28-30 Come join the Global Board of Ministries and the United Methodist Women for Spiritual Growth and to expand your knowledge and concepts of mission. Studies are: Living as a Covenant Community, Climate Justice: Call to Hope and Action, and Missionary Conferences of The United Methodist Church in the United States. Registration and refund deadline: July 11. bwcumc.org/event/945052-2017-07-28-mission-u/

By Mandy Sayers Pastor, Covenant UMC, Gaithersburg

Rejoice! By Daryl Williams Pastor, St. Paul UMC, Oxon Hill

REJOICE!

This symbol appears with stories that show your apportionment dollars at work, making a difference in people’s lives.
May: Bishop created life of holy and bold faith

Methodist history to request and receive a special assignment from the Council of Bishops. He was sent to Washington, D.C., to work on the epidemic of drug and alcohol abuse.

• A man who created “Saving-Stations” in more than 60 cities around the United States.

• A man who raised funds to build a non-denominational chapel at Camp David.

• A man who was named by President Clinton as a member of the White House Presidential Mission on Children Orphaned by AIDS.

• A man who played a key role in the development of Africa University and who, himself, made at least a dozen trips to Africa.

• A man who, in retirement, continued to actively serve the church he loved.

• Those very public highlights of his life are well known. The most intimate, personal side, was revealed during his Celebration of Life, as long-time friend, Bishop F. Herbert Skeete, brought the story.

Preaching from Romans 8, Bishop Skeete painted a portrait of a man who had the “confidence of an old warrior who had lived amid diversity,” said attendee, the Rev. Brenda Lewis, an African-American pastor who attended the Conference.

Drawing a knowing laugh, Bishop Skeete said that “Bishop May lived intentionally. You knew where he stood. He was serious about his faith and had little patience for distractions.”

He built, Bishop Skeete said, for love and justice all his life that way. He illustrated that with a story of Bishop May and himself going to church one day while attending a Council of Bishops meeting. They came back to the hotel which, Bishop Skeete said, was “located right next to the tracks.” They noticed that two little boys had crossed the tracks, entered the hotel, evaded security, and were now gazing longingly at the hotel buffet.

Felton heard one of the workers say that he had called security to get those kids out of here,” Bishop Skeete said. “Felton rushed over to the kids immediately and said to the kids, ‘Would you like to have a tour?’ Security arrived and Felton said to them, ‘They’re okay, they’re with me.’

“That was Felton,” Bishop Skeete said. “That’s how he served God and neighbor with holy boldness.”

Even toward the end, Bishop Skeete said, Bishop May was worried that the people called Methodist would lose their “mission spirit.”

“Our brother Felton would challenge the church to look beyond its fears,” Bishop Skeete said. “But we live in a time when the church is facing serious challenges on the right and on the left. … While we are busy in degenerative naval-gazing, we maintain our broken structures. Politically, in the U.S., we hear much about making America great again. For some of us, it means making America selfish and white again.”

Bishop Skeete said that “Felton would remind us that we need to ‘look up, church.’” Instead of closing churches in poor neighborhoods, Bishop Skeete said, we know that there is a way forward, and that way requires holy boldness.

Bishop John Schol, who served the Baltimore-Washington Conference from 2004 to 2011, following the retirement of Bishop May, actually began working with Bishop May during the Communities of Shalom work in the early 90s.

During their time together, more than 2,000 people were trained in the Communities of Shalom ministry. Bishop Schol said.

Bishop Marcus Matthews, who served on Bishop May’s Cabinet in the BWC before being elected to the episcopacy himself in 2004, first met Bishop May in the early 1970s, he said.

“When I first met him,” he said, “I saw a man of boldness, a man who was committed to the church and anchored in the faith. A lot that I’ve learned about ministry, I’ve learned from him. Once a person meets someone like Felton Edwin May, one should never be the same because he pushed you to excellence. He was a special man.”

“Felton was a person who never took vacations,” said Bishop Joseph Vaekel, who served the Baltimore-Washington Conference just prior to Bishop May’s arrival. “The things that were important to him occupied him at all times. You never wondered where Felton stood; he made sure it was expressed. We were blessed by him and he will be long missed.”

Throughout the two-day conference, leaders from multiracial churches offered ideas for embracing diversity. They included:

• Create a sense of urgency and have an intentional plan for becoming more cross-cultural;

• Don’t make unity about sameness;

• Everywhere people look in your church they should see diversity – in the demographics of the leadership team, the worship style, the website and the outreach;

• The church should wade into community struggles;

• There is 100 percent chance you will offend people; move forward anyway;

• Set realistic goals and benchmarks;

• Make sure people are “doing life together,” not just worshipping in the same space;

• Model what you hope to create, encourage people’s hearts;

• Practice patience, persistence and perseverance;

• Frequently ask, “When you look within this church, whose image do you see?”

• Remember, diversity is more than just a good idea; it’s a God-given vision.

Those moving toward becoming diversity-oriented churches will soon discover what happens when “human resistance meetings divine persistence,” Leander said. “Let us listen. We all have a story of divine persistence living in us.”

In the BWC’s 637 churches, there are 75% white members, 23% black members, and 1% of both Asian and Hispanic members. The chart below illustrates the demographics of the leadership church they should see diversity – in the ethnic population.

GOD’S MANY FACES

In the BWC’s 637 churches, there are 75% white members, 23% black members, and 1% of both Asian and Hispanic members. The chart below illustrates the demographics of the leadership church they should see diversity – in the ethnic population.

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- Asian

- Multiethnic

- Hispanic

- African-American

- White

- BWC Churches

- 67.2%

- 27.2%

- 1.3%

- 0.2%

- 13.8%

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Ebenezer: Church draws on arts for growth

From page 1 reporter for ABC/7 WLTV-7.

But the two groups did not remain together long. In the early days, black Methodists were relegated to the balcony, said Ford, who went on to quote from a history of Capitol Hill UMC.

“Perhaps the most notable incident was a confrontation that occurred in 1863 in the church’s history. In that year, the church had opened its doors to black members, who were previously excluded due to the church’s policy of racial segregation. The confrontation occurred when a group of black members attempted to sit in the white section of the church, which was the dominant section of the church at the time. The group was met with resistance from the white members of the church, who were opposed to the idea of integrating the church. Despite the resistance, the group of black members persisted in their efforts to integrate the church, and in the end, the integrated section of the church was established. This event marked a significant milestone in the history of the church, as it represented a step towards greater inclusivity and equality within the church.”

However, Jenkins is intent on bringing the church back to life by empowering all who come through Ebenezer’s doors to find the gifts God has given them and to bring them to life for the church and community. “So far, it’s working. Talented jazz, Go-Gos, and other genre of musicians enliven worship. On sunny days, the church doors have been open and passersby were drawn into the sanctuary.”

An artist at heart (and an art-educator with the DC public school system during the week), Jenkins is a creative and energetic leader. On many days at the church, he intentionally wears mismatched socks as a subtle message to all he meets that no one “is all together.” They, too, are loved.

Members of Ebenezer UMC gather at the altar for prayer on Founder’s Day.

Essex UMC opens new doors to ministry

By Melissa Lauber UMConnection Staff

A t Essex UMC, there is an entire community that comes in through “the other doors” of the building. “A lot of these people experience the love of God in one of the congregation’s best strengths,” said Ford, who went on to quote from a history of Capitol Hill UMC.

In 1838, 179 years ago, the congregation raised their Ebenezer as a small wooden church. It was the same year abolitionist Frederick Douglass escaped slavery in Baltimore by posing as a sailor and making his way to New York City. There is no direct evidence that Ebenezer was a stop on the Underground Railroad, a network of safe places for those escaping slavery. However, Thomas Smallwood, who was one of the two men who created the first branch of the Underground Railroad, was a member of the congregation, Ford said.

While the church has had a bright and history-shaping past, in recent years it has fallen on difficult times. When Pastor Breeton Jenkins arrived last July, there were sometimes as few as a dozen or so worshippers on Sunday mornings.

The Rev. John Warren and Kevin Smalls also came out of Ebenezer UMC, as did the Rev. Charles Y. Davis Jr., pastor of the Full Gospel Baptist Church in Cockeover, who preached at the Founder’s Day worship service.

Davis got emotional about “coming home” to Ebenezer. He wept when his father, Charles Y. Davis Sr., introduced him before the sermon. “What it all comes down to, both Davis men said in their own ways, is ‘try’.”

Robinson grew up in the inner city of Baltimore. County government-sponsored school for black children in Washington, D.C., was established and housed at Ebenezer, Ford said.

The church has erected three successive buildings on its current site. But even more important than the structures are the people Ebenezer UMC has lifted in ministry and service to God, said Cheryl J. Kelley, the church’s lay leader.

Robinson is encouraged at how people come together to strengthen their ministry with homeless and near homeless people. “I don’t see the people who come as homeless,” Robinson said. “I see them as my congregation, and because I see them accomplishing this is focusing on the arts.”

The Arts are our spark,” said Jenkins. “The congregation is using them as a means of engagement.”

One of the first steps in that engagement is the NoelSoul Conference, scheduled for June 30. Drawing on nationally known performing artists, the conference will focus on dance, acting, music, puppetry, and spoken word and how these arts can energize churches in meaningful ways.

In ancient Greek theater, Jenkins noted, there used to be a place on stage called the “abode,” or “place where god speaks.” What’s ancient is also new at Ebenezer when one claims the arts in new and fresh ways, Jenkins said.

Celebrating Founder’s Day, the congregation celebrated its past, proudly claiming, “thus far the Lord has helped us,” even as they look with hope to tomorrow and listen for God to speak.

The Rev. Ed DeLong, superintendent of the Baltimore Metropolitan District, is excited about this strategic approach to addressing homelessness.

“Community members prepare for the Table of Grace meal at Essex UMC.

In a meeting with county leaders and the new steering committee, DeLong said that the number one issue during last fall’s change conferences related to homelessness and how the many ministries offered by local United Methodist congregations could be strengthened if churches worked together. He expressed optimism about these churches providing resources that could prepare people to move toward a more self-sufficient life.

At Essex UMC, Robinson has a vision of using the church’s classroom space to offer GED, English as a Second Language, and computer classes to educate and empower the church’s neighbors to go out and be productive. It will be another door by which people can enter the church.
With reconciliation, cemetery returns home

By Mary Kay Totty & Johnsie Cogman*

Dumbarton and Mt. Zion United Methodist churches have a long history. In 1816, Mt. Zion UMC was formed when African American members (slave and free) left Dumbarton UMC (founded in 1772) to form their own congregation because of the discrimination and oppression African American members endured. Mt. Zion UMC thus became the oldest African American congregation in Washington, D.C., celebrating its 200th Anniversary in October 2016. Over the years, Mt. Zion UMC and Dumbarton UMC have sought new leadership and worked to strengthen both their shared ministries and friendships with one another, yet there has been an unresolved matter between them: the ownership of the Mt. Zion Cemetery. In the 1860s, Dumbarton leased the cemetery to Mt. Zion for a dollar for 99 years. That lease expired in the 1970s. As falling health, Bowman worked tirelessly until his death at 92 in September 2004 to preserve the legacy of the cemetery. The process to transfer the deed has taken longer and been more complex than anyone thought, however. The Revs. Mary Kay Totty of Dumbarton UMC and Johnsie Cogman of Mt. Zion made it their goal to get this task completed.

When Mt. Zion and Dumbarton gathered together for Sunday morning worship on March 5, the service included the symbolic handing over of the deed for the Mt. Zion Cemetery. The congregations celebrated that the deed legally had been transferred from Dumbarton to Mt. Zion.

The ownership of the Mt. Zion Cemetery is now with Mt. Zion UMC where it rightly belongs. Connie Willkommen, one of Dumbarton’s trustees and an attorney, shepherded the process in recent months. On Feb. 9, Vernon Ricks, Chairperson of Mt. Zion Trustees, and David Cook, then Chairperson of Dumbarton Trustees, met and signed all the paperwork for the deed transfer.

Both Dumbarton and Mt. Zion rejoice that they have taken this important step in their shared journey of reconciliation.

*Mary Kay Totty is pastor of Dumbarton UMC, and Johnsie Cogman pastors Mt. Zion UMC in Georgetown.

American University students serve in ASP mission

By Joey Heath*

JUNE 25, 2016 began as just another normal rainy early summer day in Rainelle, WV. Unfortunately, the day took a turn for the worse and led to devastating flooding. By the time the flood waters receded, 90 percent of the homes in the downtown area were no longer livable. As one trooper said, “it looked like a warzone.”

The Appalachia Service Project (ASP) already had a presence in the community. Once they were able, they got right back to work, this time working on disaster relief rebuilding. To date they have built over 100 homes and renovated many more. Enter college Spring Break 2017. Many students at American University spend Spring Break taking a break from the intense pace of college studies and internships. Others spend their break doing something different: attending alternative spring break programs.

This is exactly what led the AU United Methodist- related community to Rainelle and ASP. They were looking for something different, to go out in the world and give back as hands and feet of Christ. This meant spending the week working in a house without electricity or plumbing.

The work day started at 8:30 a.m. and lasted until 4 p.m. with a lunch break in the middle. When it snowed overnight on Monday night, they still went out to work Tuesday morning. When the temperature dropped in the teens, they used a contractor’s heater to keep the inside of the house warm enough to keep working. They placed some of the finishing touches on a house, putting insulation under it, putting in wall trim, and lots of painting.

They did have time for some fun as well. In the evenings there were programs, board games, and fellowship with each other and the other college groups. It was a long week, but deeply satisfying to look at the house at the end and see a space almost ready for the homeowner to move back in.

Joey Heath is the United Methodist Campus pastor at American University.

Lenten journey calls community to prayer

By Rev. Jennifer Karsner

Pastor Asbury UMC in Arnold

PRAYER. It’s something anyone can do, yet almost no one feels like a master at prayer. Most Christians long for a deeper and more meaningful prayer life. What better way to take the next faith step in our prayer life than by studying the prayer Jesus taught his disciples? During the season of Lent, Asbury UMC in Arnold is working through the Lord’s prayer. Each week, we are immersing ourselves in one petition of the Lord’s prayer through worship, sermons, small groups, and even indoor prayer stations.

But we decided that we didn’t want to take this journey alone. We want to invite the community to walk with us, without expecting the community to step inside the church building. We began asking ourselves, what would it look like to pray with the community rather than for the community? The answer...

Dear God, Please help my friend because

Pray every way you know how, for everyone you know. 1 Timothy 2:1-2

Prayer stations are designed to make the lesson on that part of the Lord’s prayer accessible to the community and invite them to join with us in various forms of prayer.

Each prayer station can be set-up an indoor prayer station in the lobby near our family life center that our preschool children visit during their class, and it’s available for the outside groups that use our facility.

Jesus’ disciples said, “Lord, teach us to pray.” It’s a joy to see that prayer still being answered today as preschoolers, families walking to school, Boy Scouts, churchgoers, Narcotics Anonymous, Alcoholics Anonymous, bus seekers, grocery shoppers, and church by-passers pause long enough to be gathered around Jesus.

Most of the ideas for our prayer stations were adapted from the ideas of others. We are happy to share the resources we have put together. See the end of this story online (http://www.bwumc.org/news-and-views/ an-experiment-in-prayer/) for links to resources such as outside prayer stations, family life prayer stations, prayer starters and meal prayers.

By Mary Kay Totty & Johnsie Cogman*
MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Church on the corner boldly proclaims God

Baltimore – Inspired by the Rev. Alfreda Wiggins’ call to action, members of St. Luke’s UMC in Sandtown-Winchester area brought the community together. They organized an outreach event that morphed into a full-fledged community festival, said Frances Muldrow, the Community Liaison.

On Saturday, March 25, 126 church and community families registered and 200-plus from the nearby housing areas came from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., to access services such as legal aid, family services, substance abuse treatment, and information on bus schedule changes coming up. People signed up to participate in the Mayor’s Spring Clean in April, and six block captains agreed to make their blocks “Clean and Green.”

“It’s a great set up for local mission teams that want to serve somewhere with an ‘international’ feel but accessible and affordable,” Walker said. Passports are not needed and much of the population speaks English. Anyone wishing to explore further, contact Walker at Karin.walker@fallstonumc.org.

Ministry with our partners in Puerto Rico

FALLSTON – A team from Fallston UMC worked on this building in Puerto Rico.

Diversity and unity themes of worship

GAITHERSBURG – In one of the most diverse churches in the conference, members and friends of Epworth UMC came together Feb. 19 to celebrate their African congregants and culture.

BRIEF

WASHINGTON - The Rev. F. Douglas Powe Jr. will become the new director of Wesley Theological Seminary’s Lewis Center for Church Leadership on July 1. The Rev. Lovett H. Weems Jr., the center’s founding director, is stepping down but will remain on staff as senior consultant.
Young adults find renewed faith in Cuba

By Rev. Angela Flanagan

n March 3-12, four young adults from the Northeastern Jurisdiction traveled with two United Methodist Volunteers in Mission leaders on a journey to Cuba. The trip was open to both clergy and laity. As young adults in the American United Methodist church, our age tends to make us restricted entry to our borders — whether temporary or permanent — any more than it means unrestricted entry to the island also allow for continued education for not only seminarians, but also lay people. After completing an extensive seven-month training to be baptized in the Cuban Methodist Church, these new members are immediately enrolled in additional training such as these local seminaries and begin to learn their craft, teach, and share the Gospel.

The young adult leadership, extensive (even methodical) nature of discipling efforts, and the sheer passion with which the Gospel is lived out by Cuban Methodists echoes back to our early Methodist roots — both the Wesley brothers’ Holy Club in England as well as the Methodist camp meetings of the American frontier. While on the surface Cuban Methodist worship more closely resembles Pentecostalism to our American eyes, a deeper look reveals its strong Wesleyan foundation.

The Cuban Methodist Church has demonstrated once again the elasticity of our Methodist heritage, living into their Wesleyan identity in a fully Cuban manifestation — complete with dancing, lots of dancing. Experiencing the intense joy, passion, and hospitality of the Cuban Methodist Church has been a transformational experience for our UMVIM young adult team. We returned knowing that the vitality of the Cuban churches is not a formula that can simply be transplanted. However, we do return seeking to discern how the intense joy, passion, and hospitality — that come from Christ, not just Cuba — might be revived in our own contexts of ministry.

The goal of this mission was two-fold. As a typical UMVIM team, we built relationships with the local churches and worked on building housing for the Methodist Evangelical Seminary. However, this mission was unique in that each young adult participant was also being trained to be a UMVIM leader. The NEJ matched our funds to help make this a more accessible program for young adults. In return, we agreed to lead a trip within 18 months of returning.

While the average age of UMVIM leaders is climbing, training young adults creates leaders who can continue to serve and lead throughout their entire lives. Our small team had only six people in it, but the reach of this team will multiply throughout the following decades as we lead our own teams to UMVIM sites throughout the world. The jurisdiction’s UMVIM hopes to replicate this fruitful and sustainable model for expanding young adult leadership by offering similar opportunities in the future. As UMVIM leaders, we are busy forming our own teams, ready to guide others into equally transformational mission journeys in which we all might serve, grow, learn, and form bonds across our Methodist connection with brothers and sisters in Christ who have so very much to teach us about what it means to faithfully follow Jesus. If you would like to learn more about my experience or UMVIM opportunities in Cuba, please feel free to reach out to me. I would be happy to meet with you or with a group in your local church.

As young adults who would be interested in participating in a similar mission journey and leadership training next year, they are invited to reach out to Rev. Tom Lank, the UMVIM coordinator for the NEJ, at coord@umvims.org.

*The Rev. Angela Flanagan serves as the assistant pastor of Calvary UMC in Mt. Airy and also serves as the Central Maryland district representative on the BWC’s Young Adult Council. She can be contacted at angela.m.flanagan@gmail.com.

In response to immigration reform

Thank you UM Connection. I recently read Richard Mitchell’s Immigration Thoughts published in the March 2017 issue. It is refreshing to read something aren’t caring or loving.

March 3-12, four young adults from the Northeastern Jurisdiction traveled with two United Methodist Volunteers in Mission leaders on a journey to Cuba. The trip was open to both clergy and laity. As young adults in the American United Methodist church, our age tends to make us restricted entry to our borders — whether temporary or permanent — any more than it means unrestricted entry to the island also allow for continued education for not only seminarians, but also lay people. After completing an extensive seven-month training to be baptized in the Cuban Methodist Church, these new members are immediately enrolled in additional training such as these local seminaries and begin to learn their craft, teach, and share the Gospel.

The young adult leadership, extensive (even methodical) nature of discipling efforts, and the sheer passion with which the Gospel is lived out by Cuban Methodists echoes back to our early Methodist roots — both the Wesley brothers’ Holy Club in England as well as the Methodist camp meetings of the American frontier. While on the surface Cuban Methodist worship more closely resembles Pentecostalism to our American eyes, a deeper look reveals its strong Wesleyan foundation.

The Cuban Methodist Church has demonstrated once again the elasticity of our Methodist heritage, living into their Wesleyan identity in a fully Cuban manifestation — complete with dancing, lots of dancing. Experiencing the intense joy, passion, and hospitality of the Cuban Methodist Church has been a transformational experience for our UMVIM young adult team. We returned knowing that the vitality of the Cuban churches is not a formula that can simply be transplanted. However, we do return seeking to discern how the intense joy, passion, and hospitality — that come from Christ, not just Cuba — might be revived in our own contexts of ministry.

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In response to immigration reform

Thank you UM Connection. I recently read Richard Mitchell’s Immigration Thoughts published in the March 2017 issue. It is refreshing to read something written responsibly with wisdom and common sense regarding the temporary immigration ban.

When laws have been ignored and terrorism concerns are at all-time highs, it is not unreasonable to attempt to gain better understanding and control through, at least, temporary measures.

Who at some time has not, unfairly, had sanctions, controls or limits placed on them because they were part of or identified with a certain crowd? Often, life isn’t fair but it’s a part of life and we can learn from it. Tough love is important but it doesn’t mean we aren’t caring or loving.

It is time to put the so-called “politically correct” attitude to rest that to love someone we must accept, condone and sanction anything someone does or dismiss the odds associated with certain groups or organizations.

Yes, the United Methodist official theology may be to welcome the stranger and stand with the marginalized and oppressed. But that shouldn’t mean that we must, out of Christian love, allow unrestricted entry to our borders — whether temporary or permanent — any more than it means we must leave the doors to our homes unlocked so that strangers may freely enter.

Thank you, Mr. Mitchell, for your insight and taking the effort to share it at a time when we all need to face the realities of today’s world.

Robert Abel
Linthicum Heights UMC

We need gun legislation that works

I hereby humbly offer my rebuttal to the March UMConnection, I shared the story of Smithfield UMC supporting the education of a young man in Zimbabwe. A couple of things have happened already because of this article. Someone has contacted me and wants to sponsor one of the other three boys (Emmanuel) at university. He is sitting for his A Level exams in late October and if he does well this person will sponsor him at university for four years. This can only be through God’s caring and loving hand. I am so happy.

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Creative sharing sparks new ideas about church

By Melissa Lauber
UMConnection Staff

“It takes only a spark...” goes the praise song. On March 10, more than 360 sparks were ignited as clergy and lay people from the Washington Region gathered at Leadership Days to ignite new ways of doing and being church designed to transform lives and create thriving communities.

The flames were lit in a series of seven Spark Talks, resembling TED talks, whose content spanned the spectrum of discipleship. The talks were part of a day of continuing education, with workshops in the afternoon. Each region in the Baltimore-Washington Conference holds its Leadership Days to provide learning opportunities for church leaders.

Methodist's founder John Wesley was already well into his ministry when he had an experience at Aldersgate and his heart was strangely warmed, noted Washington Region strategizer Christie Latona, who prayed that hearts would catch fire that day. “If you have a spark, you can pass it on. It gets passed when we talk with the love of Christ,” Latona said, “sowing the good news of the Gospel everywhere we go.”

Smoke in the Youth Room
Sharon Milton, the Youth Ministries Director at First UMC in Hyattsville, was first to take the stage at Reservoir High School. She was joined by 17 youth from the Washington Region, who enacted their frustrations with adults in their churches who are afraid of the chaos that might accompany new things and who prize tradition over experimentation.

Too often, Milton said, the church's youth are like smoke detectors – when they initially sound off, people pay attention, but they quickly mute and silence them to go about life as usual. Sometimes, people even go so far as disconnecting them, so that they won't be bothered in the future.

“We can be vision killers and not even know it,” said Milton. “We need to let them sing the song as God has given it to them.”

The youth shared their dreams and offered the church a message: “Let the fire burn.” Let it blast!

Prayer is the Engine for Change
Don Floyd, the retired CEO of 4-H, has traveled to more than 60 nations and spoken with an executive's voice, but it's the prayers he's whispered and the people that matter most to him.

An important part of Floyd's walk was as a founding member of Bridgeway Community Church in Columbus, which started with 20 blue chairs in a Howard County College meeting room. As one of the church's five leaders, he remembers there were never agendas or votes. The leaders met, prayed to ask what God wanted, “then we made the decision on our knees,” he said.

Today, that congregations has 10,000 members at three services each week and will hold their Easter service at Merriweather Post Pavilion, a concert venue.

Floyd is now a member of Linden-Linthicum UMC in Clarksville, which recently had a prayer campaign that led to the church raising $612,000 to retire substantial debts, and he experienced the power of prayer in his personal life, after his wife asked him for a divorce. Praying “on the armor of God,” heartfelt, Spirit-led prayer taught them both about forgiveness and his marriage turned the corner.

Always pray, Floyd said. “Always be fearless ambassadors for Jesus Christ, as he alone changes lives.”

From Bias to Belonging: Change Yourself, Change the World
“Every child needs at least one adult who is irrationally crazy about him.” This sentiment inspired Dushaw Hockett to believe he could change the world.

Hockett, the executive director of Safe Places for the Advancement of Community, Justice, and Equity in D.C., assists people in recognizing and addressing bias as a critical step in communities of Hope — healing, opportunity and possibility for everyone.

Implicit bias, he explained, gets in our way of seeing each other. Implicit bias operates on a subconscious level, is contrary to our conscious beliefs about who we are, and is triggered in rapid and automatic associations. It filters how we see the world, often in ways we're not aware of.

A significant amount of harm in situations involving racism and discrimination stem from implicit bias, but most of the tools designed to address the harm are explicit. This disconnect is something the church must consider if real change is to be made, Hockett said.

Information about implicit bias, and a test that can serve as a predictor of behavior is available at thesapacesproject.org. To move from bias to belonging, “we need to do the internal change work to make the external work possible,” Hockett said.

A Young Adult and a Skeptic Walk into a Church
The Rev. Bonnie Scott's Spark talk began in a way that sounded like the start of a joke – but nothing could be more serious for churches today than reaching out to skeptics and young adults.

Being real — practicing authenticity — is the key, said Scott, pastor of Trinity UMC. “I don't claim to have found the truth,” she said, “but I know it has found me.”

As a pastor, she shares that truth, putting aside the “pretty faith,” with its “thees” and “thous,” and speaks to people's pains, confusion, fears and pride with honesty, humility, trust and openness.

Scott remembers as a new pastor being asked by a woman to do the funeral of that woman's daughter and two-year-old granddaughter, who were murdered by the daughter's abusive husband.

It felt like an impossible funeral homily to write. “What do you say in situations like that?” she asked.

But, standing at the intersection of life and death, she shared the story of Jesus raising his friend, Lazarus, from the dead. Scott realized she just needed to share her humanity, the idea that Jesus was human too, and that the mourners' questioning had a place in Jesus' arms.

“This was an unfair tragedy,” she told them, “recognizing how Jesus had wept at his friend's death. ‘So there's something very holy about your tears this morning.’”

She also noted the domestic abuse that had been experienced. When Jesus raises Lazarus, he unbinds him, Scott said. “Natalie was bound in the shackles of domestic abuse, and while we grieve the tragedy, she's been set free.”

“Unbind her.”

That language of humility and honesty is the native tongue of skeptics and young adults, said Scott.

One of her colleagues questioned mentioning the abuse was “risky.”

“But this was the reality that was on everyone's mind,” Scott said. “What kind of person would I be if I didn't name that reality and wrap it up in resurrection?”

Be the Bible
With arms full of tattoos, long hair wrapped in a bandana, torn jeans, chains and a black leather biker's vest, Rod Fry interrupted the audience, “What's all this in your hand, a stick?”

He evoked the story when God asked Moses, “What's that in your hand, a stick or a staff?” Our Creator God has given you power, Jenkins told those present. Things that are trendy for churches to do can turn into miracles. “It's time to be gathering sticks and turning them into staffs.”

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Ignite Creative and Artistic Ministry: Dream BIG!
When he was younger, Breecen Jenkins was, he said, “on drugs – drug to church, drug to Sunday School...” All this drugging, he confessed, was his parents' response to the fact that he loved Sesame Street and wanted to marry Miss Piggy.

“I've always been a little different,” said Jenkins, who pastors Ebenezer UMC in Washington. Church and his grandmother helped him to value the things that made him different. But his life changed forever when he saw the musical “Dream Girls.”

“I found my people,” he said.

Jenkins studied the performing arts and, when God called him to ministry, he brought his creative spirit along, recognizing that God had given him “dreams too big to be ignored.”

“The God you serve is an artist,” Jenkins said. However, he warned, the arts are not a trendy thing for churches to do as a gimmick. “They are methods of engagement.”

He offered those at the Leadership Days some instructional advice about doing arts ministries, including the absolute importance of thorough rehearsals, the need for all participants to be involved and faithful, and a reliance on the Holy Spirit.

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Explore MOSAICS. This devotional is now online to help prepare you for this year's Annual Conference, produced by creative voices from throughout the BWC.

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