BWC proclaims unity

By Melissa Lauber
UMConnection Staff

When Bishop LaTrelle Easterling pronounced the 233rd session of the Baltimore-Washington Conference prior to the ordination service June 1, this was Bishop Easterling’s first ordination and commissioning service as a bishop in The United Methodist Church. The service was a highlight of the 233rd session.

Bishop LaTrelle Easterling, center, prays with the clergy of the Baltimore-Washington Conference open, she made history as the first woman to lead the 159,000 members who filled the ballroom to capacity.

The Rev. Nancy Webb, right, and friends celebrate unity in covenant at the opening worship at the 2017 Annual Conference Session.

Some of the tensions the church is experiencing arose at the very beginning of the conference, in the clergy session, when the Rev. J. Philip Wogaman handed in his clergy credentials (see story below).

Easterling’s actions were more focused on the future as she set an ambitious, faith-centered and Spirit-driven vision for the Conference during the three-day event, May 31-June 2, at the Wardman Park Marriott Hotel.

During opening worship, the bishop stressed the theme of the session, “We are One: Connected in Covenant.” She said, “How we choose to live out our expression of what it means to be Beloved Community.

“We solicit your prayers for this very important work,” said BoOM Chair Rev. C. Anthony Hunt, “and look with hope to the day when The United Methodist Church will reflect God’s gracious expression of what it means to be Beloved Community.”

During the session’s times of holy conferencing, members:

- Voted on five amendments to the denomination’s Constitution, including one that addresses discrimination against women and girls within the UMC. The results of these votes will be announced after all the United Methodist conferences, worldwide, cast their ballots.
- Passed a resolution to become a member of the Religious Coalition on Reproductive Choice.
- Chose to participate in a conference-wide boycott of Hewlett Packard products until the company ceases to profit from the Israel-Palestine conflict.
- Rejected calls for the BWC and the denomination’s Constitution, girls within the UMC. The results of these votes will be announced after all the United Methodist conferences, worldwide, cast their ballots.
- Rejected calls for the BWC and Mid-Atlantic Foundation to adopt stronger socially responsible investment screens and to divest from Caterpillar, Hewlett Packard, and Motorola, three companies noted by some for their financial involvement in Israel’s occupation of Palestine.
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In witness, Wogaman surrenders clergy credentials

By Erik Alsgaard
UMConnection Staff

LaTrelle Easterling Wednesday afternoon during the BWC’s clergy session.

Wogaman made the gesture during a moment of personal privilege. He said that his “heart breaks” for T.C. Morrow, a lesbian who was not approved for ordination as a Deacon in 2016 and who was not brought forth to the clergy session this year, and for others who have been excluded “as a result of bad church law, applied legallyistically and hurtfully.”

Phillip Wogaman, who was going to celebrate the 60th anniversary of his Elder’s ordination next month, unexpectedly turned in his clergy credentials to Bishop LaTrelle Easterling Wednesday afternoon during the BWC’s clergy session.

Wogaman made the gesture during a moment of personal privilege. He said that his “heart breaks” for T.C. Morrow, a lesbian who was not approved for ordination as a Deacon in 2016 and who was not brought forth to the clergy session this year, and for others like her with the gifts and graces for ordained ministry “who have been excluded as a result of bad church law, applied legallyistically and hurtfully.”

The United Methodist Church prohibits the ordination of self-avowed, practicing homosexuals, and has since 1972.

Morrow, who sought ordination again this year, had her status remain as a certified candidate after a May 2017 Judicial Council ruling stated that Boards of Ordained Ministry were required to ask about a candidate’s sexual practice as part of their examination. The BWC’s BoOM took that decision into account, said the Rev. C. Anthony Hunt, chair, when it reached its decision not to recommend her to the full clergy session.

In a statement, Hunt said, “In our discernment, the Board recognizes that the Judicial Council, in its recent declarative
A S A M. SUMMER. In our house, summer means we create what we call our “Summer Bucket List.” Each family member gets to add to the list specific things they’d like to experience before Labor Day rolls around. Items routinely include beach and zoo trips, baseball games, fairs, fireworks, pool time and specific roller coasters.

We have had ongoing projects like the Ice Cream Taste Test of 2017, where we sampled the ice cream of every ice cream store within a specific radius to see which one was best. (Butters and Jimmie Cone split our household). For this summer, I’m still in prayer about it as of this writing, but I’m thinking about Never Miss a Sunset and Get Sermons Done Before Saturday…well we’ll see.

Now, you should know that I am NOT a planner by nature. When my work requires it, I can plan, but my nature is to keep options open, make a list and lose it, that sort of thing. I’m a procrastinator (see sermon note, above). I’m the sort of person who buys organizers and then doesn’t use them.

One of the many things I’ve learned as a pastor is that it’s so easy to get absorbed in the work of ministry and miss out on connection with the people I love the most — spouses, children, friends. These folks are God’s gift, just as surely as my vocation is a gift, and very often they pay the price when there’s a funeral or a meeting or church events for seven Saturdays in a row. It would be easy to be so busy hurrying off to church to preach on the Good Samaritan that I pass by several folks in the ditch on the way.

Summer is a precious time where I have permission to slow down and to spend some extra time connecting with people, looking them in the eye, and really listening to them. Summer is a season where there’s just a little more space for rejoicing in God’s creation and in Sabbath rest. It’s Sabbath, rest large, wearing sunscreen and a big floppy hat. I commend it to you.

Sabbath, writ large, wearing sunscreen and a big floppy hat. It’s a time to step away from the day-to-day hustle and bustle of our ministries and spend time with our sister and brothers in Christ, connecting around our common beliefs, our common heritage and our common goals of serving God and making disciples of Christ.

The theme for this year’s conference was “We are one.” We can only be one if we take the time to connect with each other and truly be one with each other. So this year, instead of checking how that friend is doing by looking at Facebook, call them or, better yet, go have a coffee with them. Take time this summer to be with one another. Find some time to reconnect.

By Daryl Williams
Pastor, St. Paul UMC, Oxon Hill
Conference celebrates rich, united ministries

By MELISSA LAUBER
UMConnection Staff

The Baltimore-Washington Conference is a leader in living out the denomination’s four areas of focus, said the Rev. Stacey Cole Wilson in the Connectional Ministries report at annual conference June 2.

Those four areas include developing principled Christian leaders; creating new and renewed congregations; improving global health; and engaging in ministry with the poor.

One of the BWC’s newest initiatives, a Call to Action, stems from a document adopted at the 2016 Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference, which addresses racial justice and reconciliation.

Members at the annual conference filled out Call to Action Covenant Cards, pledging to take suggested concrete actions to address racism in their churches and communities. Pastors were also given Vital Conversation resources by the Commission on Religion and Race to use in their churches.

Information about this new initiative can be found at http://tiny.cc/call-to-action.

In other ministry-related items, members heard from DeForest Martin, the conference lay leader.

Martin praised the covenant partnership that is growing between the laity and clergy within the Baltimore-Washington Conference. She also lifted up the work of the eight district lay leaders, Jolene Flinchum, chair of the committee on certified lay ministry; the more than 1,000 certified lay servants who serve in local churches throughout the conference; and BWC’s 43 Certified Lay Ministers.

She encouraged the members to consider the old saying, “It’s as easy as ABC,” and suggested, for United Methodists, “it’s ABCD – Always Be in Covenant Discipleship.”

One area of discipleship that is growing significantly in the Baltimore-Washington Conference is Hispanic Ministries, under the direction of the new Hispanic and Latin Ministries Coordinator Emma Escobar.

Hispanic ministries are not a caucus, it is a ministry of the entire conference, explained the Rev. Elizer Valentin-Castaneda. Everyone is invited to participate in connecting with the growing Latino populations in their communities, to develop resources and programs for Spanish-speakers and to participate in education and advocacy efforts to assist immigrants, he said.

Annual conference members also heard from the General Board of Church and Society about a new program that addresses places of brokenness around the world and provides the safety and shelter of sanctuary. This new ministry is explained at umcjustice.org.

In an emotional tribute, the conference also honored Andy Thornton, director of Camping and Retreat Ministries, who retired this year after 30 years of ministry.

Over the years, said Chris Schlieckert, director of Camp Mandokan, Thornton traveled more than 300,000 miles on conference business, met more than 15,000 guests last year. “While other conferences are closing their camps, the BWC’s C&RM is thriving,” Bishop Eysterling said.

The BWC has more than 37 committees involved in mission and ministry. But that ministry is not limited by conference borders. There are also active ministries in Puerto Rico, where local churches are creating unique mission partnerships; in Eurasia, especially in the south of Russia where the BWC is supporting congregations that are doing culture-changing work; in the South Conference in South Korea; and in Zimbabwe.

BWC adopts $18.4 million budget for 2018

By ERIK ALSGAARD
UMConnection Staff

By unanimous vote, members of the 2017 Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference approved the 2018 expense budget of $18.4 million. Of that amount, $6.9 million is budgeted to be received by apportionments, the connectional system of giving used by the church to support mission and ministry around the world.

The 2018 budget continues the focus adopted by members last year, according to the Rev. Ann Laprade, out-going chair of the BWC’s Council on Finance and Administration, who gave the report June 3.

In 2018, there continues to be a strategic shift to fund retiree medical insurance from non-apportionment reserves, totaling $1.5 million. This strategy, she said, allows for a faster pay-down on long-term debt on the Mission Center and the dining hall at West River Retreat and Camp; replenishment of conference reserves; and helping to keep cost controls in place.

By paying down the long-term debt, Laprade said, it will result in paying off the debt six years early, saving about $1 million in interest.

The budget calls for increasing the level of conference reserves from 10 percent of the apportionment budget to 15 percent.

The 2018 budget identifies $100,000 for this objective, Laprade said. “This is a small change, but we anticipate it will have a stabilizing impact for future conference budgets,” she said.

The best indication of the continued focus on cost controls within the conference budget, she said, is seen by the change in apportionment income requests over the last several budget cycles.

As we have seen the total budget for the conference go up and down throughout the last seven budget cycles, we have been able to keep the apportionment income budget flat during that same period of time,” Laprade said. “And it is also encouraging to see that when the apportionment budget was reduced by $1 million in the 2013 budget, the continued focus on cost control has enabled us to keep the apportionment request from local churches flat for six straight budget cycles.

Laprade highlighted several key areas of the 2018 budget. Among them:

• the budget shows a 4.5 percent increase for staff salaries. It also shifts funds from the Conference grants to fund the full-time Hispanic Ministries position. This move is budget neutral and it confirms the success of the Hispanic Ministries position that has been supported temporarily by grant funding over the past couple of budget cycles.

• the debt reduction efforts are helping to reduce the Mission Center mortgage in 2018 by $39,000.

• It shows a continuing forecast of good growth at our camps with a 4.2 percent increase in registrations.

Laprade also updated conference members on the continuing “Imagine No Malnutrition” campaign. The BWC had pledged to contribute $2.2 million to this churchwide effort at eradicating this killer disease. To date, she said, contributions total $2.3 million. “This puts us at 92 percent of the goal,” she said. “Even though we have officially closed the campaign, we anticipate funds will continue to come in from individuals, churches and organizations who are still making donations to fulfill their pledges.”

In a separate action, conference members approved a 2 percent hike in the minimum compensation for full-time clergy. The Commission on Equitable Compensation recommended that the minimum salary be $45,149, a raise of $484.

The housing allowance recommendation remains unchanged at $829.86.

The Rev. Jackson Day reported for the Conference Board of Pensions and Health Benefits, saying that health insurance premiums will be going up in 2018.

The total increase for all plans – the amount each church pays for health insurance – will go up $20 per month next year, he said. Participant rates will increase $10 to $20 per month, depending on the plan.

Members of the Conference Council on Youth Ministry share their ‘Stress Less’ initiative and resources June 1.
We’re in this together, mourners reassured

By Linda Worthington
UMConnection Staff

At each Annual Conference Session, those clergy and clergy spouses who died during the past year are remembered. Family members or friends light a candle as each one’s name is called. Those remembered this year included four bishops and four bishops’ spouses, 23 clergy and 17 clergy spouses. Eleven laity members of conference were also honored.

Opening the Memorial Service, Bishop LaTrelle Easterling said, “...We are one, connected in covenant; not even death can separate us from God’s love.”

The Rev. Ginger Gaines-Cirelli, senior pastor of Foundry UMC, brought the words of comfort.

Remembering the death of Baltimore-Washington Conference Bishop Felton E. May in February, she said, “He modeled for me the use of hymns to pray.” She invited the congregation to pray with her the hymn, “Breathe on me, the breath of God, that I may live as thou wouldst have me live. Breathe on us, O breath of God, that we may never die.”

“We’re here today with each other, colleagues, family, all of us. It’s good to be with others who have the same experiences,” she said. Often families share stories of memories and experiences. Jesus did this too, shortly before his death.

In the Scripture reading for the service, John 14:1-4, Jesus told his disciples, “Don’t be troubled, trust in me, my Father’s house has rooms to space, (and) I’m going to prepare a place for you ... You know the way to the place I’m going.”

“One of my favorite parts of this Scripture,” Gaines-Cirelli said, “is that Thomas said, ‘We don’t know the way. Tell us.’ Thomas says what is on others’ minds: ‘How can we know the way? ... Are we to get there on our own?’”

The answer to Thomas’ question, she said, is in the first part of the story: come and see. It is an invitation to be in relation with Jesus, because “I am the way of life in the Kingdom, in God.”

“We gather to celebrate the lives of those who ... join Jesus on the journey to walk in the way of life,” she said. “Directly or indirectly, we have shared a common life — in the church with its gifts and challenges, its weakness and courage, its pretenses and sublimity.” We also know, she said, the peculiar joy of being a clergy spouse, the beauty and challenge of lay ministry, engaged alongside full-time vocations. Across our experiences of grief and struggle, she said, “We are one in God, we are God’s children, bound and blessed together because of God’s mercies.” Nothing can separate us in God’s love in Christ Jesus. “You are held there and deeply connected to each other through God.”

Has not Jesus Christ shown us the way, she asked.

“The way is of love and mercy, of humility and service, and to accept the invitation to dwell in God’s big tent,” Gaines-Cirelli said. “We can’t make our way alone, but Christ will come and take us there, she concluded.

Youngwoo An, in a booming baritone voice with piano and violin, sang the Lord’s Prayer.

Following the words of comfort, Cynthia Taylor, the new conference secretary, read each name, a bell was rung, and family members lighted a candle.

Conference Lay Leader, Dolores Martin, invited all in the room who had experienced the death of a loved one this past conference year to stand and sing “Just a Closer Walk with Thee.”
June 2017

Bible study explores disciples making disciples

BY LINDA WORTHINGTON
UMConnection Staff

The Bible study at annual conference, led each morning by the Rev. Steven Manskar, was inspired by Ephesians 4:17–4:24. In an overview of Ephesians 4:17–4, 11–16, Manskar showed God’s vision for the church where members are “to demonstrate what reconciliation and real justice look like.”

“The church is the instrument of God’s mission in the world,” he said. “When the world looks at the church, it should get a glimpse of God’s Kingdom.”

Paul, in Ephesians, emphasized the unity of God’s church, the “oneness,” Manskar said: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism and one God, the foundation for the church’s life and mission. This unity also provides the foundation members need to fully use the diverse gifts God gives in the life and mission of the church.

Each local church is like an embassy. Manskar noted, and “when we cease to see the threshold of an embassy we leave the U.S. and enter another country.” He asked, “How does your church serve as an embassy of God’s Kingdom to the neighborhood (world)?”

Jesus unites us in faith, hope and the Holy Spirit to go and serve God, he said. “We are equipped to do so through the baptismal covenant in God’s call and claim upon our lives.

“We are called by baptism to be a blessing, to bring to the world into God’s Kingdom and to love one another,” Manskar said. The community of the church also makes promises to the newly baptized “to do all in its power to increase our faith, confirm our hope and perfect us in love.”

“Don’t be distracted by the world’s standards of success: increasing numbers, wealth and power. Keep your eyes and your heart on Christ.”

Leadership in the church must be shared. Manskar said, as he interpreted Paul’s letter further, emphasizing that laity, like their pastors, are equipped to be leaders in the church. “Everyone who is baptized is ordained to ministry,” he said.

“It’s crazy that the pastor should be the (only) one to disciple them,” he said. “Look at Jesus. He discipled maybe 24 people in his three years.” And yet the church spread throughout the world.

There are no lone-ranger members in the church, he said, and the church’s leadership and mission must be shared. As are begetters of good news to the world; teachers, to instruct in the way of Jesus and keep the congregation centered on Christ; and pastors to care for the community, shepherd the congregation, and tend to pastoral needs.

Who are these five in your congregation? Manskar asked. “Our task as leaders is to identify them and remove blockages to grace so they can serve God.”

Manskar, an expert on John Wesley, explained that Wesley’s training of laity was done through weekly “class meetings” led by lay people as class leaders, disciples who could disciple others.

“Class meetings were the community where most people came to Christ,” Manskar said. “They were also where the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers were formed, identified and sent to serve.”

He summed up Ephesians 4:17–4 with a verse from a Charles Wesley hymn, p. 361 in the hymnal, “Jesus, United by thy Grace”:

“Help us to build each other up. Increase our faith, confirm our hope, And perfect us in love.”

The Rev. Steven Manskar is director of Wesleyan Leadership with the Board of Discipleship in Nashville. He is the author of several books, the most recent “Disciples Making Disciples.” He said that staff from GBOD are available for consulting and the Board has many resources to help churches “make disciples for the transformation of the world.” A John Wesley scholar, he leads trips to Wesleyan England each year, in 2018, there will be two, in April and July, for which there are scholarships available. Go to https://www. umcdisipleship.org for information.

BWC debates resolutions and amendments

BY MELISSA LAUBER
UMConnection Staff

An important part of the annual session is holy conferencing, in which United Methodists join in conversation and debate to shape the nature and policies of the church.

On June 1, Baltimore-Washington Conference members joined in holy conferencing around four resolutions, submitted by members, and five amendments to the denomination’s constitution.

In previous years, conference sessions have run out of time before considering resolutions on the conflict between Israel and Palestine. This year, members debated two resolutions that suggested a potential response by the BWC to the conflict.

The first, a resolution to boycott Hewlett Packard products, passed 536 to 38. Boycotting HP products, said the resolution’s maker, the Rev. Shannon Sullivan, would be a witness to peace against a company that manufactured products used by the Israeli military.

“If it’s just a nudge, then let that be our nudge,” said the Rev. Mark Schaefer, speaking for the resolution.

The second resolution suggested “a spiritual language” to encourage the denomination’s Board of Pensions and the Mid-Atlantic Foundation to consider expanding their socially responsible investment screens and refraining from investment in Hewlett Packard, Caterpillar and Motorola because of these corporations’ involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

This resolution was defeated in a close vote of 461 to 350.

During the debate on the complex, decades-old conflict in the Middle East, members spoke out about the need to uphold the United Methodist Social Principles, while not taking fiduciary responsibility out of the hands of investors.

Citing John Wesley, the Rev. Daryl Williams of the Conference’s Council on Finance and Administration, encouraged members to “earn all we can, so that we can save all we can, so that we can give all we can.”

Members also voted 385 to 304 for the Baltimore-Washington Conference to rejoin the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice.

In May, the General Conference instructed the General Board of Global Ministries and the United Methodist Women to withdraw United Methodist membership in this organization.

The vote followed a debate on the church’s “sanctified stance” on abortion and the value of RCRC, a pro-choice organization that also offers medical counseling and training on many aspects of reproductive health.

There are no financial implications to the Baltimore-Washington Conference being part of the RCRC, said Sullivan, who was also the maker of this resolution.

On a more administrative matter, after some questions and consideration about cost, members voted 634 to 44 to adopt a moving policy which will give retirees who are moving similar financial support to that received by active clergy.

The policy will be implemented with this year’s class of retirees.

In other action, BWC members are joining United Methodists from across the world in voting on amendments to the denomination’s Constitution.

The amendments covered such topics as “men and women are of equal value in the eyes of God;”

• adding gender, ability, age and marital status to the list of characteristics that do not bar people from membership;

• ensuring that the election of Central Conference delegates to General Conference will be held only at annual conference sessions;

• making sure the election of bishops in Central Conferences are held at regular sessions; and

• allowing General Conference to adopt provisions for the Council of Bishops to hold individual bishops accountable.

While members debated the merits of the amendments, they could not revise them in any way.

The results of the worldwide vote will be announced by the Council of Bishops when all the voting is complete.

The complete text of these resolutions and Constitutional amendments, along with the approved Nominations Report, can be found at www.bwumc.org/events/ annual-conference/session-documents.
Baltimore-Washington Conference Lay Leader Deores Martin promised a “fact-packed, real facts afternoon” during the laity session May 31. With a standing-room-only crowd peaking close attention, Martin celebrated the ministry of the laity and challenged them to fulfill their role.

Jodi Cataldo, of Discipleship Ministries in Nashville, Tenn., delivers the keynote address during the laity session May 31.

Cataldo presented the core process of discipleship as H.O.P.E. – Hospitality (reaching out to those needing new people); Offering (offering opportunities to make a commitment to Christ); Purpose (growing in faith through participation in the means of grace); and Engagement (helping transform the surrounding community). Cataldo felt her call to be a lay minister at 18 years of age, but knew “I never felt a call to be clergy.” At one point, she lifted high a bottle of yellow-colored water which instantly turned bright green when she added a drop of blue coloring. “One drop transformed the whole,” she said.

Cataldo noted the best way to make disciples is through our lives. “Even the smallest drops can transform the whole,” she asked.

Cataldo was followed by Christine Latona, BWC, regional strategist for resourcing churches. Latona, who will move into the role of Director of Connectional Ministries Judges July 1, highlighted that it is a priority for Bishop Ebenstein to elevate clergy-lay partnerships in discipleship-making. One of the key areas will be advancing the NCJ Call to Action for Racial Justice and Reconciliation.

This initiative is calling Northeastern Jurisdictional conferences to face implicit biases: when someone consciously rejects stereotypes and supports anti-discrimination efforts, but also holds negative associations in his/her mind unconsciously, she said. In this way, people literally do not know they have racial prejudices. BWC members will be encouraged to take the Implicit Attitude Test “to encourage people to do the deep work,” Latona said. The test may be taken at www.bwucc.org/ministers/call-to-action-on-racial-justice.

Latona outlined some of the main strategies for dismantling racism so we can build and be the beloved community, she said. These initiatives include: • naming and addressing racism personally; • increasing awareness of systemic racism and the cultural agility of staff and leaders through relationship building, training and dialog; and • study and respond to the impact of structural and institutional racism.

Latona said that laity are seen to play a key role in this initiative. She then introduced a panel of engaged BWC laity, representing a broad spectrum of how people are involved in making disciples for Jesus Christ.

Among the panelists: • Raimon Jackson, a young adult; • Melissa Lauber, BWC’s Director of Communications; • Deacons Jane Greys; • Elizabeth Stempley, president of United Methodist Women; • Bill Welton, president of United Methodist Men.

For more information on laity in service ministries, visit: https://gbd-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/legacy/Lay/2017/LSM_Brochure.pdf

Emory Grove: an analog refuge in a digital world

By Erik Alsgaard

UMConnection Staff

Emory Grove is a place where there is seemingly stood small. Still cottages line narrow streets where cars are forbidden to go. Majestic trees tower over a large tabernacle, while a 250-year-old hotel with a wrap-around porch greets both guests and residents alike.

Welcome to Emory Grove, an historic Methodist Camp Meeting Ground that has held religious services every summer since its founding by the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1868. This year, Emory Grove celebrates its 130th season, and festivities are planned all summer.

In the 1800s, camp meetings were all the rage in Maryland. Set against the backdrop of the Second Great Awakening, camp meetings were religious revival events that, because travel was difficult and people could not come and go as easily as today, sometimes lasted for days.

And because they lasted for days, it wasn’t long before people began pitching tents for shelter. At Emory Grove, these tents transitioned into more permanent cottages in the 1920s. That’s why the cottages here are so close together: the cottages were built on the pads where the tents were pitched.

To save money and space, people shared stalls on either side of the tent.

There are 47 cottages at Emory Grove, an open-air tabernacle, and the hotel, though it is not used to house guests anymore. Weddings and special events are about the only time the hotel is used. The cottages are all privately owned, with many of them being handed down from one generation to the next. The worship services on Sundays and the Hymn Sings on Wednesdays are free and open to the public.

David and Judy Hughes’ families have owned cottages at Emory Grove for decades. David is a former president of the Emory Grove Association. His first summer at Emory Grove was in 1956; he was 8 months old. His parents, he said, first rented their cottage in 1949 and bought it in 1954.

At Emory Grove, Hughes said, the word ‘association’ is an all-encompassing term. The Association, she said, reflects to both the grounds and the members who are cottage owners.

Cottage owners must adhere to certain rules when it comes to fixing their dwellings, she said, because there is a certain type of architecture they must use along with other rules to follow.

“We want to keep within the original historic appearance of the properties,” she said. “We live in a decidedly digital age now,” Hughes said. “Emory Grove is decidedly analog, which is a double-edged sword. There are so many distractions today – Internet, smartphones, television – that Emory Grove has fallen somewhat out of vogue in that it’s a little backwoods kind of place.

That analog feeling, she said, also works to transform the surrounding community.

“We want to keep within the original historic appearance of the properties,” she said. “Even today, if I’m stressed about something, I’ll just come over here and sit on the porch and get myself together.”

Ann Weller Dahl, whose family first came to Emory Grove in 1939, is a walking history of Emory Grove. A former president of the Board of Directors of the Association, as well as serving in the Ladies Auxiliary, she has photographs, notes and other documents going back generations that tell the story of this sacred place.

“For me, Emory Grove means three things,” she said. “A sense of history, a sense of peacefulness, and a sense of fellowship.”

Emory Grove has scheduled numerous special events this summer to observe their 150th anniversary. Among them:

• A chicken dinner and special appearance by “Billy Sunday,” July 2, 5:30 p.m.

• A historic tour of the historic July 4th “Grove” site, starting at 7:30 a.m., parade and worship service at 10:45 a.m.

• Cottage Tour, Car Show, and Blueberry Bake Sale, July 15, 12 noon to 3 p.m.

• 150th Anniversary Gala, “Through the Years,” Aug. 19, 6 p.m.

For more information, visit https://www.emorygrove.net/150th-anniversary
Commentary: Where do we go from here?

I am a fifth-generation Methodist. I was baptized, confirmed and nurtured in the Christian faith at St. Paul United Methodist Church in Osen Hill, and Gibbons United Methodist Church in Brandonville. I sensed God’s calling on my life to offer myself in service to the church in the ordained ministry as a young adult at Gibbons Church.

I am a United Methodist by birth and by choice. I was born into Methodistism, and I remain a Methodist because the Methodist church has been where God has been most extant and real for me — a place of invitation, welcome and radical hospitality. In many of the places that I have travelled and served in ministry over the years, I have experienced the face of God through such radical hospitality. I have experienced the rich diversity of the church while serving as a district superintendent of two diverse districts, as a denominational executive across the diverse expanse of the Northeastern Jurisdiction, and as a seminary professor where all of the places I have taught have been diverse culturally and in other ways.

I have served as a pastor of churches that have been diverse culturally and in other ways. The congregation that I now serve, with persons who were born in at least 11 different nations, and is diverse in other ways. I am also blessed to now serve as the chairperson of the Baltimore-Washington Conference Board of Ordained Ministry.

I choose to remain a United Methodist as an African-American, and I am fully cognizant of the fact that racial segregation persisted in the American Methodist church’s structures for over 100 years. I am cognizant that the church practiced discrimination against women for over 170 years by denying women the opportunity to serve as fully ordained ministers in the life of the Church.

Today, in the Baltimore-Washington Conference, many people in our local churches, like our denomination and our society, are not of the same mind on a number of important matters that affect persons who are a part of us, including matters pertaining to the full inclusion of LGBTQI+ persons in the life of the Church.

At the 2017 Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference Executive Clergy Conference Board of Ordained Ministry’s decision to delay a prior decision to recommend one of its candidates for commissioning as a provisional member.

I am among those who grapple with Wogaman’s decision to relinquish his clergy credentials. I have known him since my time as a student at Wesley Theological Seminary, where he was then the academic dean, and throughout my entire 25-year career as a pastor in the Baltimore-Washington Conference. One of the highlights of my ministry was having the opportunity to sit together and engage in holy conferencing with Wogaman during the entire 2016 Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference, to which both of us were delegates.

Wogaman’s book, “Christian Moral Judgment,” and his method of positive presumption have shaped my teaching in Christian theology and social ethics. What I choose to remain a United Methodist as an African-American, and I am fully cognizant of the fact that racial segregation persisted in the American Methodist church’s structures for over 100 years. I am cognizant that the church practiced discrimination against women for over 170 years by denying women the opportunity to serve as fully ordained ministers in the life of the Church.

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At the 2017 Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference Executive Clergy session, one of my colleagues, Rev. Dr. Philip Wogaman, decided to surrender his clergy credentials in protest of the United Methodist Church’s current stance prohibiting the full inclusion of LGBTQI+ persons in the life of the Church, and in protest of the Baltimore-Washington Conference Board of Ordained Ministry’s decision to delay a prior decision to recommend one of its candidates for commissioning as a provisional member.

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At the 2017 Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference Executive Clergy
Overview: BWC thrives in holy conferencing

From page 1

used to determine appointments, to 17.74 percent; and affirmed a projected collection rate of 92 percent.
• Increased the equitable compensation rate for clergy by 2 percent to $43,149, with the minimum housing rate remaining the same at $19,866.

In moments of celebration and remembrance, members:
• Rejoiced at the ordination of seven Elders and the commissioning of one provisional Deacon and nine provisional Elders during a service in which Bishop Ernest Ng celebrated Jesus as the bread of life (see story, page 4).
• Gave thanks for the 657 total years of service of 24 clergy who retire July 1 at a luncheon where Bishop Forrest Stith spoke on the importance of passing the torches with purpose.
• Lit candles remembering the bishops, pastors, clergy spouses and lay people who died during the past year during a memorial service led by the Rev. Ginger Gaines-Cirelli. (See story, page 4.)
• Recognized, in the laity session, eight new Certified Lay Members (CLM) who completed their two-year course of study. (See story, page 6.)
• Honored two Cabinets members: The Rev. Laura Easto, superintendent of the Baltimore Suburban District, who has been appointed to serve Potomac UMC; and the Rev. Ed DeLong, interim superintendent of the Baltimore Metropolitan District; and welcomed two new superintendents, the Revs. Wanda Duckett and Ann Laprade.
• Welcomed new conference leaders: Christie Latona, the new Director of Connectional Ministries; the Rev. Antoine Love, who will serve as assistant to the bishop; and the Rev. Rodney Smothers, who will become the BWC’s new congregational development resource specialist.
• In special offerings, collected $10,051 for Seeds of Security, a ministry to assist people leaving situations of domestic violence and $4,075 for scholarships for youth to attend the ROCK retreat.
• In a district-centered retreat.

Penny Way, raised $114 for the Adrienne Terry Affordable Housing Fund.
• In a new tradition, held a worship service recognizing the 75 clergy who are appointed to new churches this year and the lay people who will receive them.

During reports about a variety of ministries, members:
• Committed themselves to personally addressing racism during the Call to Action report, which outlined a new conferencewide initiative on racial justice and reconciliation. (For more information, visit: bwcumc.org/resources/call-to-action-on-racial-justice.)
• Honored Andy Thornton (left), who is retiring after 30 years as director of the conference’s camping and retreat ministries.
• Learned about a new resource for individual and youth groups created by the Conference Council on Youth Ministries called Stress Less, which addresses issues affecting young people.
• Received information about how they can become more involved in the conference’s Young Adult Council, especially in the One Love creative worship experience next fall, and the expanding conference Hispanic Ministries programs.
• Celebrated with BWC Lay Leader Delores Martin how the laity are active in ministry, with more than 1,200 lay servants and 143 Certified Lay Ministers working in covenant relationship with others to glorify God.
• Heard from the Rev. Jim Miller of the Episcopacy Committee how last year, the BWC raised $330,740 to help build a health and wellness center at Africa University.

Members also heard from several honored guests, including:
• The Rev. Steve Manskar, of the Board of Discipleship, who led a two-session Bible study on Ephesians 4:1-24, the guiding Scripture of the Conference Session. During the session, he explored how United Methodists are to be a sign, foretaste and instrument of God as they make disciples, serving as Christ’s ambassadors and servants. (See story, page 5.)
• Bishop Seung Ho Choi, and a delegation of leaders from the South Conference of the Korean Methodist Church in South Korea, who are in covenant partnership with the BWC.
• Tiaara A. Anderson, a student at Howard University, who led a two-session BWC’s new resource for United Methodists to become active in the sanctuary movement, opening their hearts and doors to provide shelter and safety to immigrants in need.
• The Commission on the Way Forward, which showed a video with words of hope about their work addressing issues of human sexuality in the denomination.
• The Committee on Faith and Order which encouraged BWC members to participate in the study “Wonder, Love and Peace,” that explores the United Methodist understanding of what it means to be church.

The 2018 session of the Baltimore-Washington Conference will be held May 30 – June 2 at the Waterfront Marriott Hotel in Baltimore.

Unless otherwise noted, all photos from Annual Conference by Tony Richards Photography. www.tonyrichardsphto.com