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UMC Connection

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Girls explore LeadHERship at camp



Nora Meeks, left, and Kennedi Jones were two of the campers who learned about leadership at West River Camp this summer. The camp featured guest speakers, including Bishop LaTrelle Easterling, the BWC's first female bishop.

Oakland UMC starts ministry anew after painful split

By MELISSA LAUBER & ERIK ALSGAARD
UMCConnection Staff

SOME CONGREGATIONS “do” church well. But “being” church is harder. On July 22, United Methodists from the Frederick District gathered with the people of Oakland UMC who, in the midst of significant turmoil, are striving to “be” the church of Jesus Christ.

Their journey has been marked with highs and lows, but it has also been a season of rediscovering the strengths of United Methodism, Oakland’s core leadership team says. Worshipping with one another was one of a continuing series of opportunities to celebrate what Bishop LaTrelle Easterling called in her sermon, “Being a Community of Love.”

The congregation at Oakland UMC in Charles Town, W.Va., is starting their church anew after two-thirds of the congregation left the denomination in May.

The split, led by the previous pastor and his family, who also served on the church’s staff, centered around the issue of homosexuality, interpretations of Scripture, and, some in the church claim, “personal agendas” that were played out in the pulpit and pews.

The split has been a painful one. “I lost my son in this,” said Lay Leader Iwayan Rata, whose son joined those who left the denomination.

“We’re being painted as the ones choosing to stay behind in Sodom and Gomorrah,” said Treasurer Sharon Carrigan.



D.S. Edgardo Rivera (center) prays with Sharon Carrigan and Pastor Rick Shuman

After several months of unraveling what some in the church see as lies, deception, financial mismanagement, and lost friendships, “you think you’ve worked through it,” said Joe Logan, a

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By MELISSA LAUBER
UMCConnection Staff



IT WAS A week of LeaderHERship. The “her” in question were 19 very diverse teenage girls, gathered from across the Baltimore-Washington Conference for a week of summer camp at West River, near Annapolis.

The girls – they admitted – reflected every good and bad stereotype you might imagine; they also shone with the light of Christ that could dazzle the world with possibility.

When they first gathered, “some of them were insecure and vulnerable.” But as the days passed, “they were changed – strong, coming into their voice,” said the Rev. Bonnie McCubbin, who created the camp and brought in three other strong women to serve with her as camp counselors.

National statistics indicate that these girls had a lot to feel insecure and vulnerable about.

- Seven in 10 girls believe they are not good enough or do not measure up in some way.
- One in four girls today fall into a clinical diagnosis – depression, eating disorders, cutting and other mental/emotional disorders.
- 92 percent of girls believe anyone can acquire the skills of leadership, but only 21 percent believe they have the key qualities required to be a good leader.

In many ways, their feelings are justified. Within the U.S., only 34 women have ever served as a governor, as opposed to 2,319 men; only 3 percent of Fortune 500 CEOs are women; and in 2017, within The United Methodist Church,

two constitutional amendments that sought to ensure women an equal place in the life, worship and governance of the church were defeated.

During the afternoons at camp, the girls did all the normal camp things – playing on boats, paddle boarding on the river, climbing on the ropes course, playing camp games, singing camp songs, and joining in evening worship. The highlight, most of them said, was forming deep friendships.

During the morning, they participated in conversations with women leaders in the Conference, including T.C. Morrow, who works with the National Religious Campaign Against Torture; the Rev. Julie Wilson, chair of the BWC’s Church and Society ministries; and the Rev. Laura Norvell, a vice president at Wesley Seminary who shared insights into fundraising.

The purpose of these conversations, McCubbin said, was to give the girls exposure to ideas and skills so that they could go home with a “toolbox” to be leaders in their churches and schools. One of the key tools in this toolbox came from Bishop LaTrelle Easterling, the first female bishop in the 234-year history of the Baltimore-Washington Conference, who shared with them the importance of self-acceptance.

“As you focus on what it means to be a leader, don’t ever be afraid to embrace how God created you. God created you the way you are for a reason. God has a plan for your life,” the bishop said.

“We must learn to embrace who we are – uniquely, beautifully, every inch of ourselves. I know we live in a world that

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The Commission on a Way Forward’s final report is now available in four languages: English, French, Portuguese and Swahili.

Visit: bwcumc.org/wayforward





Ancient church mothers and fathers often greeted one another with the phrase, "Give me a word." This greeting led to the sharing of insights and wisdom. Today we continue this tradition with this monthly column.

BY MANDY SAYERS
Pastor, Covenant UMC, Gaithersburg

"Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ." (1 Cor. 11:1)

As I WRITE this, it is late May, and I am looking at an empty suitcase that I will soon pack with Annual Conference essentials: snacks, chocolate, charger, comfy pants I hope I don't run into the bishop or my DS while wearing, and walking shoes for the Back on My Feet Initiative. It's hard to write about excitement right now, because anxiety in the body of the UMC feels very high. The Way Forward is on our minds along with the holy work we have to do together. Sometimes the burden feels heavy. It can be hard to get excited.

Then I remember that excitement, true excitement, comes from seeing the work of the risen Christ in the world. Excitement comes because God acted, sending the Light into our darkness, making us, who were NO people, into GOD'S people. Excitement comes when we are behind locked doors afraid, but brave enough to gather in one place, and then Jesus shows up and breathes the Holy Spirit, and we speak in different tongues but hear each other anyway. Excitement comes when Peter sees the Holy Spirit fall on those he least expected and his eyes get wide. Excitement comes when you forget what you came to the well for because this Jesus is there, telling you your life and about living water.

Maybe we will forget that we came to Annual Conference to fight, win and be right, and we will instead remember that joy, that excitement that comes from an encounter with Jesus and with each other. Maybe we will remember that God is alive, that Easter is real, that the Spirit is blowing where She wants to. Maybe we will even see that we all bear the image of God and are called to be on this journey together, even when we do not agree.

I'm excited because God is at work here in the BWC. I'm excited because disciples of Jesus are being made and they are changing the world. I'm excited because the unruly dove on my stole for Pentecost reminds me that Jesus shows up whenever two or three are gathered. I'm excited because we are One Beneath the Cross.

EXCITE

BY DARYL WILLIAMS
Pastor, St. Paul UMC, Oxon Hill

ONE OF THE most dangerous things in the life of a Christian is when the holy becomes the ordinary. When we are new believers, everything is exciting and new. We are excited to learn to pray. We are excited that we get to discover the great mysteries of the faith. We are excited when we get to go to worship and get to go to Bible Study and get to be in the presence of God.

Then something happens. Time creeps in and what used to be exciting becomes routine. What used to get our blood pumping becomes just another day at the office. The holy becomes ordinary and, if we are not careful, what was exciting becomes obligation.

We should never allow our relationship with God and our walk of faith to become ordinary. Ordinary is when you know what to expect, nothing new ever happens and everything is always the same. When we are walking with God we are invited into a great adventure where no two days have to be the same and we can be excited every morning when we get up.

As believers, we get to be a part of what God is doing in the world. We get to be a part of changing lives, healing bodies, changing minds and repairing a broken humanity. Every day is another day that God can do something awesome and we can be a part of it. Now that's exciting!

So don't get lulled into thinking that nothing can change, or that things are so bad that nothing can be done. That train of thought is a trick of the enemy designed to steal your joy and your excitement. Every day is a day to be excited. Every day is a day that God can do something new. Every day is a day that you can step out on faith, walk in your destiny and see what new things God can do.

The world is not static, all is not lost; God is still mighty and God still loves you. Don't let any day be just another day. This is the day that the Lord has made so anything is possible, and that should excite you.

It certainly excites me.

EVENTS

Momentum

Aug. 18, 11:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
BWC Mission Center in Fulton, Gethsemane UMC in Capitol Heights and Cokesbury UMC in Abingdon
Sessions of the School of Congregational Development will be streamed to these three locations. A Spanish-only session will be held Aug. 17, from 7 to 10 p.m., at the BWC Mission Center. Learn more at www.onlineteachingevent.org.

Youth Pool Party

Aug. 19, 2 to 5 p.m.
West River Camp
Registration deadline is Aug. 12. Visit www.eventbrite.com/e/youth-ministry-pool-party-tickets-48213106700

Young People's Ministries Focus Groups

First week of September
As the BWC realigns its ministries for young people, feedback is being sought. Register and participate in one of three focus groups during the first week of September. The data collected will be used to create a strategic plan for Young People's Ministry within the BWC. To register, visit goo.gl/WcktGC. For questions or additional information, contact Cheryl Cook at ccook@bwcumc.org. Registration closes Aug 30.

Discipleship Agencies meet

Sept. 8, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.
BWC Mission Center, Fulton
The first quarterly meeting of all conference discipleship agencies and areas. An invitation will be sent out to all participants.

NEJ BMCR meeting

Oct. 11-12
St. Marks UMC, Hanover
Learn more about this Black Methodists for Church Renewal annual meeting at <https://www.nejbmcr.org/events-1>

Stepping up to Staffing and Supervision training

Nov. 6-7
Foundry UMC, Washington, D.C.
With ground-breaking consultant author and coach Susan Beaumont. \$550. Learn more at www.bwcumc.org/event/1174899-2018-11-06-stepping-up-to-staffing-and-supervision/

Bishop's Advent Day Apart

Nov. 13, 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.
Epworth UMC, Gaithersburg
A time apart for clergy with guest preacher, the Rev. Kirk Byron Jones. Learn more at www.bwcumc.org/event/1184253-2018-11-13-bishops-pre-advent-day-apart/

EXPLORING A WAY FORWARD

WITH REV. TOM BERLIN

Sept. 15, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Nichols-Bethel UMC, 1239 Murray Road, Odenton, MD

The Rev. Tom Berlin, who spoke at this year's Annual Conference Session, will help you understand the issues and options facing The United Methodist Church as it approaches the February General Conference and makes decisions on how the Church will address issues of homosexuality.

bwcumc.org.wayforward

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UMConnection is the newspaper of the Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church, whose vision is to become fully alive in Christ and make a difference in a diverse and ever-changing world.

The **UMConnection** (USPS 005-386), August 2018, volume 29, issue 7. Published 11 times per year by the Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church, 11711 East Market Place, Fulton, MD 20759-2594. Subscription price is \$15 per year. Periodical postage paid at Baltimore, MD. **POSTMASTER:** Please send change of address changes to: UMConnection, 11711 East Market Place, Fulton, MD, 20759-2594.

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LeadHERship: 'Love who God created you to be,' bishop says

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kind of makes that difficult, that makes us want to question who we are. So, the first thing a good, strong leader has to do is love who they are."

The conversation moved on from there, as the girls posed questions to the bishop: How does she handle stress? What do you do if people you're leading want something that's not good for them? What made her want to be a bishop? What do you do when you're nervous in front of people? How do

you know for sure it's God talking to you? How do you love yourself?

Together, in a circle, they became vulnerable and magnificent as they cried, embraced, questioned, planned and learned from one another.

"God doesn't take you where God hasn't prepared for you to go," Bishop Easterling told the girls. "Each one of you has gifts inside of you that you don't even know about yet. There are seeds planted in you that haven't even blossomed yet because

you haven't had to call upon them. As you begin to live into the next thing God is calling for you to do, you just have to allow it to blossom, to grow, and allow

God to use you. You learn to grow wherever you're planted, you really do."

After their time of getting to "dish with the Bish," the girls practiced the song they were leading in worship that evening. As they sang "Every Praise is to Our God," they changed the words: "Yes, She is," they sang.

"God is Spirit," the bishop told them. "If we are created in the image of God, there are aspects of God that are feminine. You need to know and believe that. ... Lean into the wisdom God has for you."



Strong leaders need to love who they are, Bishop LaTrelle Easterling shared with LeaderHership campers at West River.



Oakland: Church rediscovers gifts of connectionalism

From page 1

trustee at Oakland. But the grief still erupts at unexpected moments. "We are a church that believes in biblical truth," said Logan. "But we've even been told that God is no longer with us, no longer in our building. There is a lot of hurt."

At the worship celebration, the churches of Frederick District joined with the faithful remnant at Oakland UMC for a time of prayer, praise and a celebration of the connection that unites them as makers of disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

In a time of prayer, Bishop Easterling anointed the church's core leadership team following a sermon on the love of God.

"Love is what has given us salvation. Love is what binds us together," she said. "We must remember who and whose we are and reclaim our commitment to Christ every single day." The church, she said, can't be all that God calls us to be "if we don't walk and live and sing and teach and pray and preach and baptize and serve and build and go in love."

The bishop encouraged the people of Oakland UMC and all those present to abide in God's love. The term "abide," she said, "means 'to remain in, tarry, spend some time.' Abide evidences a lifestyle, not a transitory, short-lived experience. Abide means to take up residence. This is the commandment that precedes the next: to love one another. Not a superficial love; not a transactional love; not a fleeting love. Rather, it is a love that forms a lasting bond. ... In this communal embrace we can create real community."

In light of recent events, living in this love has been a challenge for some in the church.

On Palm Sunday, March 25, the Rev. Jo Anne Alexander preached a sermon at Oakland UMC calling The United Methodist Church "an apostate church," said the Rev. Edgardo Rivera, superintendent of the Frederick District.

An apostate church is defined as one that was Christian but has rejected or rebelled against Christianity.

Alexander; her husband, the Rev. Kent Tice, who pastored the church; and Alexander's son Joshua, who was also on

staff, were, "for lack of a better word, 'bashing' The United Methodist Church because they did not perceive it as biblical or solid in its orthodoxy," Rivera said. This dissatisfaction with the denomination had reportedly been cultivated over time.

The Sunday after Easter, the members were scheduled to vote, taking an assessment on remaining within the denomination, Rivera said. So, on Easter, he shared with the congregation a letter from Bishop Easterling, addressing their concerns about the church's stance on homosexuality.

"There is a way for us to remain united, even as we have differing theological and doctrinal views," the bishop wrote. "The belief in one Lord, one faith, one baptism and one God binds us together as believers and unites us."

The bishop stressed that "our core message is Christ, above and before anything else," and Rivera called on them to move beyond their single focus and to embrace the more-encompassing banner of God's ministry.

However, on April 7, the Saturday after Easter, the congregation voted 81-16 to leave the denomination.

Both Alexander and Tice have served the church since 1993. She retired in 2014, and he retired Jan. 1, 2018, and was being allowed to serve the church full-time as a retiree.

In mid-May, the couple started a congregation, Oakland Community Church, holding their first service in an area funeral parlor.

But their departure was filled with grief and anger, said Rivera, that has left the 41 people who now attend worship at Oakland UMC with several challenges.

One of the principle ones is financial. "They left no money," said Rivera.

They left us with nothing in the church's bank account, said treasurer Carrigan. "We're looking at healing and a way of going forward, but we want to acknowledge there were issues. It would not have been as difficult as it has been if the pastors had not left us with a negative bank account."

The Baltimore-Washington Conference Board of Trustees and the Board of

Pensions are working with church leaders. Conference staff are also providing training and other assistance for Rick Shuman, who has been appointed to serve as pastor of the church.

Shuman grew up in the area and is a good leader and a good match for the church, Rivera said.

Shuman believes that reclaiming the missional spirit of the church by continuing to serve the community will bring healing.

The church has reopened its preschool and is working to reopen Paul's, a popular restaurant in the church that serves meals for the community. Based on congregational interests, he is also exploring ministries that address addiction and disaster relief.

Shuman and Rivera are also working to dispel rumors, like the notion that Tice is not receiving a pension from The United Methodist Church. In reality, both Tice and Alexander are vested in the denomination's pension plan and are receiving their full pensions.

Social media has been a source of misinformation and misunderstanding, Rivera said. He is troubled by the anger and vitriol and finds himself

returning to thoughts from John 13:35, "By this everyone will know that you are my

disciples, if you have love for one another."

As the church's interim pastor, the Rev. Ed Grove made efforts to ignite the connectional spirit of United Methodism within the people of Oakland UMC, who had grown isolated in the past several years.

Mount Wesley UMC, where Grove also serves, had a spaghetti dinner to raise funds for Oakland UMC. That gesture deeply touched the Oakland members.

"We were like an island," said Logan. "We were isolated and alone. Now we're connected."

Working toward this connection is a holy endeavor, Bishop Easterling said.

"The church must be a unity, holy and universal. ... The church transcends, it must transcend, human avarice, selfish motivations and fleshly desires, to stand as the universal translation of Christ to the world. ... We are created, called, and covenanted to be a community of love."

"Together," Rivera said, "united in Christ, Oakland now has the opportunity to do something, built on the gifts of the past,

but something fresh and new that will provide a new way of hope for the future of ministry in that location.

I think that potential is there," Rivera said.

"We've taken the rearview mirror down," said Logan. "It's time to move forward."



Bishop LaTrelle Easterling anoints Joe Logan, who serves as a trustee at Oakland UMC, at a worship celebration of unity.

PHOTOS BY ANISSA BOURDET

Melissa Lauber

Wesleyan Pilgrimage transf



WHICH CAME FIRST: John Wesley's conversion experience ("I felt my heart strangely warmed..."), or that of his brother, Charles Wesley?*

Knowing the answer to this question was just one of the fun facts I learned during a 10-day Wesley Pilgrimage in England. Sponsored by the Board of Discipleship, the Board of Higher Education and Ministry, and the General Commission on Archives and History, the July trip was almost non-stop learning, bus rides, walking tours and incredible experiences. And no rain.

Our leaders were magnificent. The Rev. Paul Chilcote, Professor of Theology at Asbury Theological Seminary, Florida Dunnam Campus, was a walking history book of the Wesleys. His puns and frequent references to the movie "Zoolander" were most(ly) welcome, but his keen insights into the life and times of Samuel, Susanna, John and Charles Wesley were spellbinding. The Rev. Steve Manskar, now pastor at Trinity UMC in Grand Rapids, brought the covenant discipleship aspect of the Wesley's to the fore, reminding us that the genius of the Methodist Movement lay not only in it's ability to hold in tension two opposing forces (social holiness AND personal piety, for example), but in how it built disciples of Jesus Christ that really did transform the world (i.e., Francis Asbury).

SALISBURY

We 38 pilgrims began our time together in Salisbury, staying at Sarum College directly across the street from the cathedral. This was my first time in Salisbury, and the cathedral was absolutely magnificent. Viewing an original copy of the Magna Carta on display there at the Chapter House was a highlight, as was simply walking through the building, soaking in the views of stained glass, vaulted ceilings, soaring arches, and ancient sarcophagi.

John Wesley spent considerable time in Salisbury, first visiting in Feb. 1738, mainly because his mother was staying there at the time. It was here that John came in June that same year to tell her about his conversion experience.

Wesley established the Methodist society in Salisbury in 1750, and by 1758, a building was erected for a chapel. We visited that church for a lecture by the church's pastor, the Rev. David Hookins, and again on a Sunday morning worship experience where we were warmly welcomed.

That warm welcome stood in stark contrast to the scene just a few blocks from the church, where police had blocked off a whole city street. White tents and people in haz-mat suits walked about. This was one of the areas where two people unwittingly, it appears, were poisoned by a nerve agent apparently used by Russian hitmen in an attempt to silence a former spy and his daughter three months ago. They survived, but one person died as the result of the exposure when, according to reports, she found what appeared to be a perfume bottle and sprayed Novichok on herself June 30.



Salisbury Cathedral at dusk. This glorious church was built in just 38 years, from 1220 to 1258.



The Rev. Steve Manskar, center, leads a group of pilgrims through the streets of Oxford.

We also took note of the Oxford Castle Prison, where members of the Holy Club visited inmates on a regular basis. Many of the prisoners were in jail because they couldn't pay their debts (Samuel Wesley, the father of John and Charles, once spent three months in debtors' prison). Their visits were especially important because, in the 1720s and 30s, there was no system in place to care for the inmates. That is, they were totally reliant on family members, friends or church members for food, clothing and other items.

EPWORTH

Now here is a place truly off the beaten path. One of the distinguishing marks between a tourist and a pilgrim, in my mind, is the intentional seeking out of things/places/events that don't matter to the vast majority of people. Epworth is such a place.

A small village even today, Epworth is where John and Charles Wesley were born. Their father, Samuel, served as Rector of St. Andrew's Parish, appointed there by the queen after he had written a poem, "The Life of Christ," and dedicated it to her. (He also wrote another poem on maggots, but that's another story.) Their mother, Susanna, bore Samuel 19 children: nine died in infancy; a maid accidentally smothered another infant; and when she died, only eight of the children were alive.

Life at the rectory was hard for Susanna. Samuel was away much of the time, and she was left to care not only for the children – who had a strict schedule of daily life – but, often, the church, too. I was surprised to learn that, at one point, when Samuel was away in London, 200+ miles to the south, Susanna started teaching parishioners in the kitchen. That's because the associate pastor Samuel had left in charge was proving to be ineffective.

Soon, more people were attending her "services" than were attending church on Sunday morning. The associate pastor wrote letters to Samuel, complaining. Samuel then wrote letters to his wife, demanding that she (as a woman) stop doing this. One of her letters ended with these words:

"If you do, after all, think fit to dissolve this assembly, do not tell me that you desire me to do it, for that will not satisfy my conscience; but send me your positive command, in such full and express terms as may absolve me from all guilt and punishment for neglecting this opportunity of doing good, when you and I shall appear before the great and awful tribunal of our Lord Jesus Christ."

We visited the rectory, and I was thrilled to stand in the garret on the top floor of the house where the home's ghost, Old Geoffrey, lived.

But the biggest thrill of the pilgrimage awaited: the holy ground of St. Andrew's Parish. Here, we stood around the baptismal font that was used to baptize John and Charles. Here, we held the silver communion chalice used for communion not only by Samuel, but by John and Charles. Here, we worshipped using an order of prayer from the 1600s. Here, we saw Samuel's grave, just outside the church. It's this grave that John famously stood on and preached from in 1742 when he was denied the pulpit inside the church.

OXFORD

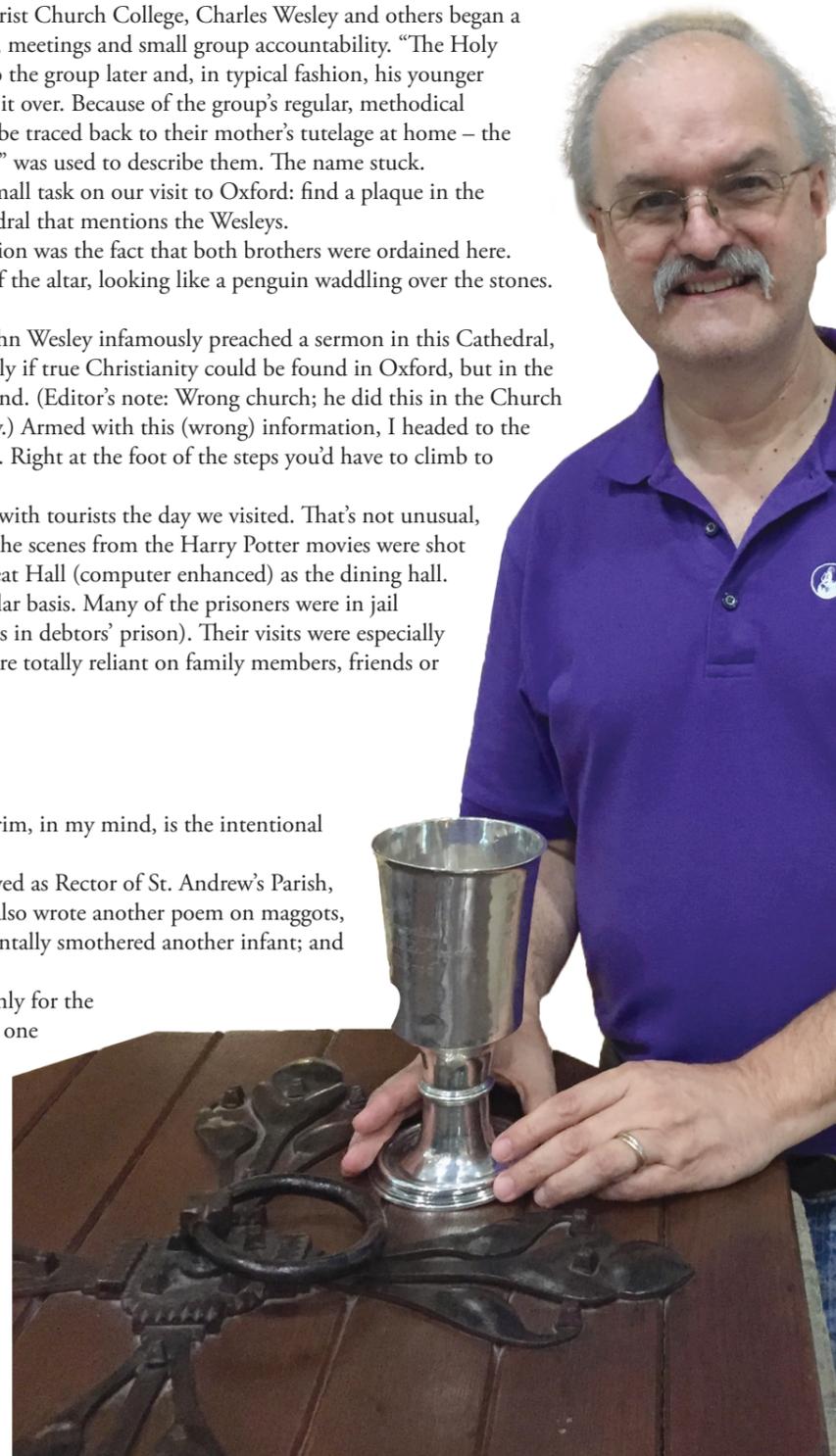
The First Rise of Methodism began at Oxford, where both John and Charles Wesley were students. While attending Christ Church College, Charles Wesley and others began a regimen of daily prayer, study, meetings and small group accountability. "The Holy Club" was born. John came to the group later and, in typical fashion, his younger brother, Charles, let him take it over. Because of the group's regular, methodical practices – which I think can be traced back to their mother's tutelage at home – the derogatory name "Methodists" was used to describe them. The name stuck.

We pilgrims were given a small task on our visit to Oxford: find a plaque in the floor of Christ Church Cathedral that mentions the Wesleys.

My first clue as to the location was the fact that both brothers were ordained here. So, I walked up to the front of the altar, looking like a penguin waddling over the stones. No luck.

Then I remembered that John Wesley famously preached a sermon in this Cathedral, wherein he questioned not only if true Christianity could be found in Oxford, but in the whole of the Church of England. (Editor's note: Wrong church; he did this in the Church of St. Mary the Virgin, nearby.) Armed with this (wrong) information, I headed to the pulpit, and voila! There it was. Right at the foot of the steps you'd have to climb to preach.

Christ Church was packed with tourists the day we visited. That's not unusual, I was told, because several of the scenes from the Harry Potter movies were shot there, including using the Great Hall (computer enhanced) as the dining hall.



The author stands at the baptismal font used to baptize John and Charles Wesley at St. Andrew's Church in Epworth. The silver chalice was also used by the Wesley



David Worthington, right, Director of the New Room in Bristol, points out a feature of the chapel. It was here that Methodism had its “Second Rise” after Wesley built it to meet the needs of a growing Methodist presence in 1739.

BRISTOL

If Oxford was the First Rise of Methodism, the Second Rise happened in Bristol. This southwestern city in England was important in Wesley’s day as a port which, infamously, made itself rich through the selling and buying of human beings. John Wesley was invited to come to Bristol by George Whitefield, who had been preaching to the poor and outcast. In March 1739, Wesley arrived, and within days he writes in his journal, “I submitted to be more vile,” (April 2, 1739) and he began to preach in the open air.

As a seminarian, I was fascinated by this “open air” preaching. It wasn’t until this pilgrimage, however, that I understood how radical it truly was. In those days, in the Church and England, the conventional wisdom was that a person could only be saved “inside” the church. That is, they had to literally be in the building to hear the sermon and be saved. Wesley’s words “to be more vile,” in my opinion, means that he saw an opportunity to reach more and more people with the Gospel and said, “to heck with the conventional wisdom,” and began to preach.

The results speak for themselves.

At Bristol, we pilgrims toured the New Room Chapel. Built in 1739, this is the oldest Methodist building in the world. The New Room was so-named because the two Methodist societies in Bristol at the time were

running out of space in which to meet. Wesley built it to not only meet that need, but it was also an outpost for serving the community: food and clothing were given to the poor; visits were made to the nearby prison; a medical clinic was established; and more.

One feature pointed out by David Worthington, Director of the New Room, is that the ground floor of the building has no windows. The reason? In those days, Methodists were under attack by religious groups who considered them “enthusiasts,” or by people who simply didn’t understand what was going on.

As the New Room’s website describes it, “The early Methodists were frequently attacked by mobs. The lack of windows on the ground floor was a safety measure against such attack. The building was also designed so that it was difficult for any mob that broke in to reach the preacher quickly – witness the limited access upstairs (in the two-tiered pulpit).”

It was in Bristol that the resident Church of England bishop asked Wesley why he (Wesley) was infringing on his (the bishop’s) parish. You know – or should know – Wesley’s response. “Sir, I look upon the whole world as my parish.”

The New Room is also famous – at least in the United States – as the place where Francis Asbury attended his first Methodist conference (1771) and heard the call to go to the Colonies as a Methodist missionary. I was surprised to learn that Asbury is almost unheard of in British Methodist circles. My guess is because once he went to America, Asbury never returned, the only preacher sent by Wesley to stay. In fact, Bishop Asbury is buried in Baltimore.

For more information on how you can go to next year’s Wesley Pilgrimage, or if you’d like to be a financial supporter, contact the Rev. Steve Manskar at steven.manskar@gmail.com. The 2018 pilgrimage was the last one sponsored by Discipleship Ministries, Manskar said. “If you want to be a benefactor and help form the leaders that this denomination needs,” said Manskar, “I’d like to talk to you.” The funding from the three General Agencies, he said, allow for the reduction of the registration fees for Provisional Elders and Deacons, and for Licensed Local Pastors, but don’t pay for the whole trip.

LONDON

Our pilgrimage ended, appropriately, in London. I say “appropriately” because this is where John Wesley’s earthly pilgrimage ended, too, in 1791. He is buried behind the church he started there, now called Wesley Chapel. His mother, Susanna, is buried across the street in Bunhill (“Bone-hill”) Fields, along with about 100,000 other people (including Daniel DeFoe, John Bunyan – author of “Pilgrim’s Progress” – Isaac Watts, and William Shrubsole**).

Built in 1778 by John Wesley, the chapel that now bears his name was a replacement for the Foundry Chapel that began in 1739. Wesley’s townhouse, next door to the chapel, still stands, and it was here that he died.

Sitting in the pews at this chapel is always breathtaking to me. The pulpit here is one that John Wesley used many times. Margaret Thatcher was married here and later donated money to build the Communion railing. The baptismal font isn’t original – it was installed for the commemoration of the 100th anniversary of John Wesley’s death – but the Victorian bathrooms downstairs are, built in 1891 by Thomas Crapper.

It was in London that another highlight of the pilgrimage happened. On July 18, we pilgrims had the honor of sitting in the choir at St. Paul’s Cathedral for Evensong. My seat was at the far edge, second row, closest to the High Altar. Just sitting there gave me chills.

And so the pilgrimage came to an end. There is so much more I could write about – I have almost totally neglected the impact the Wesleys had on systematic disciple making that was stressed repeatedly during our pilgrimage – but I have run out of room and you, of patience in reading.

**As in more than a few other situations, Charles preceded John. Charles’ happened on May 21, 1738; John’s on May 24, 1738 (one wonders if the three days was significant).*

***William Shrubsole wrote the hymn tune “Miles Lane,” to which is set one of my favorite hymns, “All Hail the Power of Jesus Name.” It’s not the tune you think you know...*



Side view of St. Paul’s Cathedral in London.

UMs aid Puerto Rico

BY ALFREDO SANTIAGO*

TEN MONTHS AGO, Hurricane Maria slammed Puerto Rico. This summer, members of the Salem Baltimore-Hispanic UMC went to help rebuild amid the continuing devastation.

On June 30, “Faithful Marylanders,” as we called ourselves, set out on the mission trip. The team included members of Salem Baltimore-Hispanic UMC, including myself as mission coordinator, Pastor Jorge Moreno, Kate Jakuta and William Escobar. We went to Patillas, Puerto Rico, as volunteer relief missionaries.

The mission trip focused on repairing a home in Arroyo. We joined members of Dilworth UMC in North Carolina in a continuing repair project to a second-level home. It was rewarding to directly help a Puerto Rican family and, as a connectional church body, work with other United Methodists.

To do this work, we coordinated with UMCOR (United Methodist Committee on Relief) and ReHace IMPR – Rebuilding Communities with Hope. The biblical motto for the week was Philippians 4:13: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Four hammers were provided to the team with the Bible verse to keep all of us missionaries in one accord.

It’s hard to imagine the disruption and damage people in Puerto Rico are still experiencing, even 20 months later. The hurricane caused a total blackout to the islanders and also limited internal and external communication. In some parts of Patillas and Utuado, people still do not have electricity and intermittent blackouts continue.

As we spoke to different Puerto Ricans regarding their personal experience, one common theme was obvious: “Hurricane Maria brought out the best of the best in people.”

The United Methodist women in the retreat center prepared hot meals,

which were either picked up or delivered, sometimes by foot, to locals in the area, who oftentimes had no access to money to purchase food or had money but found the stores closed due to empty shelves.

The mission trip ended on July 7 as all the missionaries left the Myriam Visot United Methodist Women’s Camp. During our time there, prior friendships were strengthened, new friendships were formed and faith and hope were augmented.

Our trip was just one taken by members of the Baltimore-Washington Conference. A handful of other churches are also working with the people of Puerto Rico, helping to restore homes, churches and lives.

At the recent Annual Conference Session, the Rev. Isabelino Rivera Silva, a Regional Supervisor from Puerto Rico, reminded members that the Baltimore-Washington Conference has a covenant partnership with the Methodist Church of Puerto Rico.

Silva thanked the BWC for the \$6,000 it contributed to hurricane relief efforts immediately following the disaster. This contribution and the work of several mission teams enabled them to receive solar powered generators for power, provide mental health care and strategic and sustainable planning to include 450 communities, 39 congregations, 10 distribution centers and staff and support of at least five sustainable health clinics by 2020, he said.

According to Silva, more than 100,000 houses were destroyed by Hurricane Maria, and 39 church sanctuaries were damaged; 10 of those were completely destroyed.

If you are considering participating in a Volunteers in Mission trip, there is information on the BWC website at www.bwcumc.org/ministries/disaster-response-and-volunteers-in-mission. For more information, contact the Rev. Stacey Cole Wilson, executive minister of justice and service, at scolewilson@bwcumc.org.

*Alfredo Santiago is the mission coordinator at Salem Baltimore-Hispanic UMC.



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- Life after Death in World Religions and Secular Thought

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

New steeple graces church

FALLSTON – Fallston UMC installed and consecrated a new steeple in early June.

“Our steeple reminds the community and the world of what we believe — that we serve a risen Savior who won the victory over the cross,” said the Rev. Karin Walker. “... The steeple is the unifying symbol of all that we are as we bear witness to the kingdom and nothing shall separate us one from another or from Christ.”

Grants enable Deaf ministries

BRUNSWICK – Three recipients of the 2018 grant cycle from The United Methodist Committee on Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Ministries are from the BWC.

New Hope UMC in Brunswick will use the \$1,500 grant to provide a weekly interpreted service and offer ASL classes.

Liberty Grove UMC in Burtonsville will use its \$1,000 grant to assist in the installation of an Assistive Listening Device system, along with training in Deaf ministry and system use.

The third grant will enable the committee to host a seminar on Deaf ministry start-ups for the conference.

Church is big blood donor

FREDERICK – Calvary UMC was recently recognized by the American Red Cross for its nearly two decades of successful blood drives. It has become one of the largest blood collection sites in the

region. Since 2000, the church has collected 3,681 pints of blood; these life-saving gifts impacted 11,043 lives.

Gold Star monument dedicated

HAVRE de GRACE – The Rev. Norman Obenshain, pastor of Havre de Grace UMC, led the invocation at the dedication of the Gold Star Families Memorial Monument in mid-June. More than 500 people gathered at Concord Point for the solemn ceremony.

The Gold Star designation is for people whose loved ones – spouses, children, siblings, parents – died while serving in the U.S. armed forces.

“Bring us to such a place, to such a place in human affairs that new monuments like this one will no longer be necessary,” prayed Obenshain in the benediction.



MARTINSBURG, W.VA. – Pikeside UMC hosted law enforcement and first responders for a Blessing of the Badges Service & Breakfast in May. Pastor Bill Ball offered prayers of protection, strength and peace.



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dream. discover. discuss. dismantle.

DREAM. DISCOVER. DISCUSS. DISMANTLE.

Sermon preparation process: How it works for me

By Ianther Marie Mills*

Editor's note: This article reprinted by permission from "By Faith Magazine," May/June 2018 issue. By Faith is a magazine celebrating the gifts and ministry of Black United Methodist churches. The article here was written by Mills as part of the magazine's request for how Black preachers go about the task of preparing to preach.

When and how do you choose your sermon text/title?

I am primarily a lectionary preacher and usually use one or more lectionary texts; however, I also preach sermon series. The lectionary text and sermon series themes I choose are based on the congregation's current context, hopes, dreams and challenges. I plan themes one-to-two months in advance, but the scriptures and sermon titles may change. I was taught to



brood over the text, so, sermon titles arise through reading the text several times and listening for a word or words that speak to my spirit and the congregation's context.

Often, in the midst of my one-hour commute between home and church, a title, text, or theme emerges. Inspiration may come from a book, an article, a smartphone news feed, Facebook post, commercial, or something else. Driving in downtown Washington, D.C., I recently noticed a larger-than-life pencil eraser outside one of the Smithsonian art galleries; that reminded me of our new life in Christ and the invitation to begin again.

When do you begin working on your Sunday sermon?

Each week my typical routine is a Tuesday morning reading of the lectionary and discerning a text, theme and title. The Friday reading involves researching and writing; and Saturday morning rewriting and final composition. However, I may brood over a text, theme, or title for weeks before preaching on it.

What are some of your study resources and routines?

My favorite exegetical study resources are the New Interpreter's Bible Commentary 10-Volume set, Interpretation Bible Commentary Set, and Anchor Bible Dictionary. I use professional online sermon preparation resources (e.g., Homiletics, sermonwriter.com, and textweek.com). Although the African American Pulpit Journal is no longer published, the African American Lectionary remains available online as a resource. Daily I read the digital

Washington Post, a personalized newsfeed, and trending stories on Facebook and Twitter.

Do you talk to anyone about your sermon?

My sermon preparation does not include structured discussions with others; however, I do talk with colleagues and parishioners about general sermon ideas and themes. That experience has led me to consider having an ongoing lectionary study/discussion group. Additionally, recently our congregation revised its worship services, and working with the Worship Committee Taskforce through that process has confirmed the value of using a Worship Team for planning, including sermon preparation ideas.

How do you address/deal with controversial issues – in and outside your church?

In cases of controversial issues, I lean toward a teaching sermon that considers: What is the issue? Why is it important? What does the Bible say? What is our response?

A recent example is the #BlackLivesMatter movement, which was initially met with skepticism and concern from some churches and Christians because it was not birthed in the church. After preaching on the #BlackLivesMatter Movement, which included how it was started, its principles, a biblical rationale for social justice advocacy, and how the church may faithfully respond, many congregants were appreciative of the teaching and were empowered to move forward as advocates

for social justice and supporters of #BlackLivesMatter.

About how many hours does it usually take in your weekly sermon preparation?

Typically, I spend 12 to 16 hours weekly. My usual routine is starting with the theme, brainstorm ideas and illustrations, outline the sermon, then write two drafts before writing the final.

What is the most challenging aspect of your sermon preparation?

The most challenging aspect is having to prepare a message for an unfamiliar ministry context. I overcome this by research and requesting information on the ministry, people, hopes and concerns. I find preaching in a different setting quite freeing. I sometimes get too immersed in the exegetical aspects of preparation. So, I ask: What does this say to me and the people about our life and Christian witness? Additionally, a strong inspiring conclusion requires special effort and attention on my part because my preaching style, while grace-filled, tends toward challenge and a charge to go and act rather than celebration.

What would you advise young pastors to pay close attention to in their sermon prep?

#1 – Do not use illustrations without fact-checking them. #2 – Time to prepare is very important, but expect the Holy Spirit to continue working throughout sermon delivery and even beyond.

**Mills is senior pastor of Asbury UMC in Washington, D.C.*

UMs gather Aug. 12 to stand against hatred and for hope

By KEN HUMBERT*

WHY... UNITED TO LOVE? Because Jesus says so, every which way. Take just these. "Love one another as I love you." "Love God with your all (after all, God IS love), and your neighbor as yourself." Utterly basic! Also, love has consequences. "For God so loved the world..." You know the rest by heart. And this, "neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female; you are all one in Christ Jesus." Among us United Methodists, it shouldn't take much argument to say: 1) love is godly; 2) love unites, not divides; and 3) what is unloving is ungodly and divisive. Nothing more compelling can or need be said.

Why are we gathering on the National Mall, Aug. 12, a Sunday, from 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. under the banner "United to Love"? Because it is godly. It is of Christ and at Christ's command. Because at that hour, at Lafayette Park, with 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue as its backdrop, thousands will gather to "Unite the Right." Their message: "Only white is right, white is superior, hate has a place when the issue is race."

Someone needs to answer, "This is ungodly, divisive, not God's best dream for God's children, all of whom God fashioned in God's own image and into whom God breathed God's very own breath. To deny that is, quite literally, to try to take God's breath away."

United Methodists are prepared to answer hate with love: publicly, audibly, visibly, powerfully. And as important: invitationally. United Methodists are a friendly people: friends with God, with one another, with many, many others. Now is the time to invite them all, unite them all.

But there's a catch. Nobody invites friends to the house or picnic in the park, then fails to be there to open the door or hand out the hotdogs! Radical hospitality requires radical

presence. And ever since God chose coming-in-Christ over sending-a-surrogate, Heaven has signaled, "You gotta be there to make a difference." This is why we need you, your church, your friends to be present at United to Love: to make a difference.

It will take some doing. You might do church on the bus that day. Or let this event be your worship. Imagine: church

we can do this. Imagine: our 626 BWC churches send a mere tithe of our average 56,505 weekly worshippers and over 5,600 Methodists literally face the nation's Capitol with a message of love and racial inclusion. If we all bring a friend, Methodist or otherwise, we can make a mighty witness.

What a counterpoint to the message in that other park, facing that other national

called, then nearly pushed aside, for asking how our pale church could partner with neighbors of another hue. Because by 20... I could see racial victims and victimizers.

I looked more like the latter class, but marching (just a little). Because by 33, a threatened cross-burning greeted our efforts to stand by newly arrived neighbors the KKK said didn't "look right." Because our 11-year-old said on our Main Street parsonage front porch, "Dad, there's guys in the street at the corner with white robes. Kinda like yours. Are they like us? They got mask-hats, dad. They look a little scary."

Why will I be there Aug. 12? Because there are still folks on the corner and people watching who need to be moved, even in their hearts. Because I don't want the city homicide detectives investigating any other pastors' anonymous mail or under-the-office-door threats when they marry cross-racial couples or others "unapproved" by somebody.

Because there's more, but this is enough. And because I came into a Baltimore-Washington Conference of 792 churches, with a weekly attendance 33,460 greater than now, with a cadre of clergy and lay saints who taught me more than I was willing to learn, and urged me to do more for Christ than I was ever bold enough to achieve. And because a Church that shows its face in the face of evil, clears its throat and speaks love to hate, rises to lift a people or a nation, and stands in the way of those who would lower both. This is a church I'm willing to commit to and God in Christ is prepared to bathe with grace and multiply in witness. And this is why I pray to see you too, Aug. 12, on the National Mall.

**The Rev. Ken Humbert is a retired pastor in the BWC who has a passion for love and justice.*

UNITED TO LOVE

Sunday, August 12, on the National Mall
in front of the National Museum of the American Indian
11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Church-on-the-Mall, Gathering to make a difference,
to answer hate with love, because silence is no answer at all.
COME. With your whole heart. And your whole church.
PLEASE.

at home is earlier, or briefer, then we head for the rally. Imagine: everyone can't or won't go, but those who will...attend your local church, are consecrated there as ambassadors for Christ and "sent forth on a mission" to speak love-to-hate on behalf of your congregation so the region, the nation and the world can see.

Pastors and congregations will need to be creative as well as committed. But

landmark. And what a travesty it would be for hate to poll 10,000 that day and love some lesser number.

Why? Why will I be there? Because Jesus says... Because there's a difference to be made. Because there's a church to be gathered for justice, for mercy and for Jesus' sake.

And because it's personal, too. Fifty-three years worth. Because at 17... I was

Baby turtles serve as evangelists to power of miracles

By DOTTIE YUNGER*

Around Ash Wednesday, a pastor's thoughts naturally turn to spotted turtles. Wait. What?

As I prepared for Lent this year, those preparations included ashes for worship and an incubator for turtle eggs. Working part time as pastor of Solomons UMC and aquarist assistant at the Calvert Marine Museum, this marine biologist minister often has an eclectic To Do List any given week. The beginning of Lent this year was no exception. The spotted turtles at the museum had been mating, and we came in one day to find two elliptical eggs in the tank. The female had laid them in the water, which is not typical; females dig a nest on land with their hind legs. Without knowing if the eggs were even fertilized, let alone still viable after being submerged, we decided to put them in an incubator we had on hand.

I researched the incubation period for spotted turtles, which is the amount of time the eggs remain and develop in the nest. For spotted turtles it can be around six weeks. "That means they will hatch around Easter," I told the aquarist. "The odds aren't good," she said, "so I wouldn't get your hopes up." I responded, "We are talking about Easter. Getting our hopes up is exactly what it's about."

Lent came and went, and Holy Week brought its usual worship, reflection and focus, which is to say I forgot about those two tiny white eggs tucked into the incubator. On Easter Monday, I was

recharging my spiritual batteries caring for the creatures at the museum, when the aquarist said, "Dottie, stop whatever you are doing and come here now." No, it is too soon after Easter to do anything quickly, I thought, until it occurred to me, Yes, it is Easter Monday, the perfect time for a turtle miracle! (Isn't that what all pastors think?)

And it was. The lid of the incubator was lifted back when I got there, with an empty turtle shell inside. One of the turtles had hatched, and the other was just beginning to. At about an inch long and with bright yellow spots, the hatchling was surveying her new world around her. The life that had been developing and growing and persevering in the dark burst forth into the light. And everyone there who saw it, regardless of his or her faith or lack thereof, proclaimed the same thing – "It's an Easter miracle!"

I never imagined a tiny turtle would be such a powerful evangelist. But that's what Dash – that's what we named her – was that day. By the next day the second turtle hatched, though more slowly and needing some help from us. Her spots were even more pronounced, and we named her Dot (a proud day for me). A spotted turtle can have over 100 spots, and no two turtles' spots are the same. Each is a unique, individual, one-of-a-kind creature (that will preach).

Why work part time at the Calvert Marine Museum, and why spend Easter Monday there instead of resting from Holy

Week as pastors do? Why ponder the theological significance of a baby turtle? For me, because this is the call God has placed on me; this is the ministry to which I am called. To care for God's creation, all of it, all of us. To consider God's people and the sparrows and the lilies, and to pastor to them all. Both my theology and my ecology studies inform this ministry to all of God's creation.

In his article, "Consider the Turtles of the Field," Brian McLaren describes emerging theological values that we all might embrace, not

just marine biologist ministers like me. They are:

1. **Increased concern for the poor leads to increased concern for all creation.** The same forces that hurt the widow and the orphan, the elderly, children, and minorities, hurt turtles, trees, soil, water, air. These are forces such as greed, impatience, selfishness, arrogance, hurry, anger, competition, irreverence. When those forces are exposed and rejected by God's people, God's people and all of creation are then re-valued, re-deemed, and made sacred again. This includes the redemption of a tiny spotted turtle and her hatchlings. They are seen as the priceless creatures of God for which they are, not deemed worthless by a society who values a road through their wetland habitat more.
2. What Brian McLaren describes as an **"eschatology of abandonment"** is replaced by a gospel of the kingdom. This understanding of end times focuses almost entirely on God bringing us to heaven, beyond time, beyond matter, beyond this creation entirely. All of creation, therefore, is wrapped up like an empty candy wrapper and thrown in the trashcan. Creation is seen as the "cosmic backdrop" for human salvation; there's no continuity between this creation and the new heavenly creation. This "candy wrapper creation" is ultimately discardable, because, "Why get sentimental about a cheap container destined for the cosmic dumpster of nothingness?" This view causes as much harm as an actual discarded candy wrapper does, as plastic whose manufacture, incineration, and accumulation without ever biodegrading pollutes and poisons the land, water, air – and the communities who live connected to them. The gospel of the kingdom values creation here and now, and in and of itself. McLaren persuasively states: "In this kingdom, Jesus said, sparrows matter. Lilies of the field matter. Yes, people matter even more, but it's not a matter of either/or; it's a matter of degree in a world where everything that is good matters — where everything God made matters."
3. Finally, and maybe the most difficult to practice in our American culture, is the concept of **private ownership replaced with an ethic of biblical stewardship.** A capitalist economy is replaced with a stewardship economy. This economy of God's kingdom has very clear values, and those values have correlation with the ecological principles. That correlation is how I understand myself

as a scientist and a person of faith, and the relationship I see between science and religion. When I realized the reasons I cared about turtles in my science world were connected to the reasons I was a person of faith and vice versa, I realized I could accept a call to ordained ministry.

Those values, and the correlation to ecological principles, include:

- **Community** – seeing beyond the individual to the communal. This theological value is reflected in the scientific concept of an ecosystem, a community of organisms interacting with each other and their physical environment. A spotted turtle is an individual species, and it is also one species interacting with other turtles, raccoons and muskrats, and the habitat including the stream, mud, leaf litter, etc.
- **Fellowship** – sharing and holding in common with the community. The scientific concepts of coevolution and symbiosis reflect in some ways this fellowship. As two or more species change over time, they affect each other's evolution, such as the way flowering plants and insects have. Scientists classify some of these interactions as symbiotic – relationships between two or more organisms that live closely together. Some of these relationships are mutualistic; both organisms benefit in ways they could not if they lived separately.
- **Mission** – participation in God's kingdom for God's purposes. Scientists use the term "niche" to describe an organism's role in an ecosystem. When we alter or destroy the habitat of spotted turtles, we alter or destroy the purpose for which God created spotted turtles. And we act like we know better than God how spotted turtles should be spotted turtles.

After Dash hatched, I gently picked her up and placed her in the palm of my hand. Spotted turtles are semi-aquatic, and it was time to introduce her to water. I poured a small amount in my cupped hand and watched her reaction. She put her head under the water and looked around, then began to move around in her new watery environment. Yet another entirely new way for her to view her world. As she did, I considered this turtle of the stream, this creature of God, and I whispered, "I now baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

Amen.

*The Rev. Dottie Yunger is pastor of Solomons UMC in Solomons.



Rev. Dottie Yunger introduces a baby turtle to water and the turtle introduces her to wonder.

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