



UMC *Connection*

Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church • Becoming fully alive in Christ and making a difference in a diverse and ever-changing world • www.bwcumc.org • Volume 29, Issue 1 • January 2018



Courtesy of Christine Kumar

FOUR GENERATIONS BAPTIZED

Pastor Christine Kumar, second from left, baptized four generations of one family on Dec. 3 at Cowenton UMC in White Marsh: son David Smith (standing next to Kumar); mother Monika Missile (in blue); grandson Ronnie Cardarelli holding great grandson Cade Cardarelli; and daughter JoAnn Smith, far right. Other family members and friends look on.

Bishop Easterling visits ‘on the district’

By MELISSA LAUBER & ERIK ALSGAARD
UMConnection Staff

IN KEEPING WITH the circuit rider tradition, Bishop LaTrelle Easterling recently traveled to the districts of the Baltimore-Washington Conference to meet separately with clergy and laity, to hear what’s on their minds and to share the age-old question: “How is it with your soul?”

At the meetings, a number of common themes emerged. Two of the most popular were how do well-intentioned leaders grow or revive their churches, which for a multitude of reasons are in decline or feel stagnant, and how will the church address issues of homosexuality as members await the report of the Commission on the Way Forward and the recommendations of the Council of Bishops at the called General Conference in 2019.

At the clergy sessions, pastors voiced a shared concern about how to speak prophetically and boldly from the pulpit to a culture that is feeling increasingly divided and losing hope in the church’s relevance. The laity more frequently spoke about their own focus on issues

like prison ministry, health care for the poor, guns and violence, climate control and immigration.

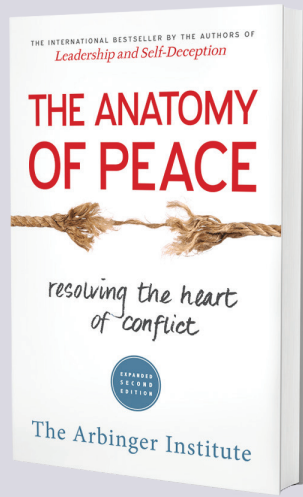
Some people brought their concerns about how well or quickly things were being accomplished by the annual conference. While she took note of every comment to address with staff, Bishop Easterling also “pushed back,” reminding those in both the pews and the pulpits that they, themselves, are the Baltimore-Washington Conference. You are “the connection, ... holy co-conspirators, serving in the Kingdom of God,” she said.

During most of the time during the 14 two-hour sessions on the seven districts, (the Washington East meetings were postponed) the bishop shared her thoughts on creating and sustaining life-transforming faith communities. (See story, bottom of page 8.)

But she also took time at each session to thank and celebrate the people in the BWC’s 628 churches, noting that this conference has an above-average abundance of

See bishop, page 8

**“Please get this book and read it.”
– Bishop Easterling**



Available on amazon.com

UMs build life-changing gift of Africa University

By ERIK ALSGAARD
UMConnection Staff



NORMALLY, A REPORTER such as myself is required to be objective, impartial, as unbiased as possible and simply report the facts of the story.

In this case, I can’t.

I want to tell you about the recent celebration at the Baltimore-Washington Conference Mission Center to mark the 25th anniversary of Africa University, but I also want to testify as to why this is significant. When it comes to this United Methodist institution, I can’t be unbiased. I have an opinion, and I want to share it.

In 1988, the General Conference of The United Methodist Church created Africa University near Mutare,

Zimbabwe. It was chartered by then Zimbabwe president Robert Mugabe in 1992, and 40 students from six countries began their studies.

From that humble beginning to today, more than 7,000 students have graduated from Africa University. The student body today is from no fewer than 32 countries.

James Salley, Associate Vice Chancellor for Institutional Advancement at Africa University, spoke at the celebration on Dec. 8. He said that the BWC was the first conference in the Northeast Jurisdiction to invest in the Africa University (apportionment) Fund at the 100 percent level. He couldn’t thank the conference enough, he said. “We are in your DNA,” he said.

“This annual conference is a cornerstone of Africa

University,” said the Rev. Lloyd Rollins, who works in the Campaign Office of Africa University, housed in the BWC Mission Center. He said that the current \$50 million Campaign for Africa University has already raised more than \$35 million in cash and pledges. The four-year campaign began in September 2016 and will double the school’s endowment fund.

“You are investing in the life-changing activities of people,” Salley said. “Before I sit down tonight, I hope you will understand how important that is.”

I can tell you how important it is.

After years of writing and reading and sharing the story of Africa University, I had the privilege to visit the school in 2015. The trip was life-changing.

See AU, page 3



By MANDY SAYERS
Pastor, Covenant UMC, Gaithersburg

HAPPY 2018 EVERYONE! “Exhale” is something that feels needed after the frenetic “Who-Knew-Christmas-Eve-Could-Fall-On-A-Sunday” that we had this year. My post-Christmas cold and I needed a big nap and a huge exhale. So perhaps part of what we are called to at the turning of the year is the exhale of rest, the exhale of giving thanks and remembering what God has done in the year gone by. Exhale. Certainly, this is a good thing to do.

But in my spirit, I am aware not just of the recovery time that follows a busy December, but the turning of the year to something new.

Have you ever thought about what happens when God “exhales”? When God exhales, things happen. The divine breath breathed out, “Let there be light.” The divine breath brought forth Jesus, born of the Holy Spirit, the Word made flesh. When God exhales, life bursts out all over. When God exhales, clay, dry bones, terrified disciples, they all get new life.

So, after a post-Christmas, pre-Epiphany exhale of thanksgiving, and a moment to rest, let us be ready for the movement of the Spirit that calls us forth again to serve in 2018.

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.
(Isa. 55:10-11).

Jesus is God-With-Us, friends, and the light shines, and the word has gone out from God’s mouth, to accomplish God’s kingdom purposes. So take a breath, my friend. Exhale.

And get ready for God’s mighty Spirit to fill our sails for more transformed lives, more light, more hope and more life. Can’t you feel it? Like the rush of a mighty wind. Bring it, 2018. Exhale.

EXHALE

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 DARYL WILLIAMS
Pastor, St. Paul UMC, Oxon Hill

BREATHE IN, BREATHE OUT. Breathe in, breathe out. Now one more time, breathe all the way in, hold it, hold it, hold it! Now breathe all the way out. This was how my AP English teacher started every class when I was a junior in high school. She was convinced that doing breathing exercises for the first few minutes of class would set the tone and get us focused for the work ahead for the next hour.

Personally, I thought it was nuts. This was an AP English class. We were trying to improve resumes, get ready for college and get a grade. We didn’t have time for this breathe in and breathe out foolishness. That is until I asked her why we had to do it.

What she said has stuck with me till this day. She told me: This is an afternoon class. By the time you all get to me, you have done a morning of school work, had lunch, hung out with friends and suffered some meltdown over teenage angst. So I want you to breathe fresh air in and intentionally breathe out all that has already happened today. I want you to take a minute or two to clear your mind, reset your emotions and get ready for the work that we have to do for the next 50 minutes. So we inhale the good, exhale the bad so that we can be ready for what’s ahead.

As we enter into the new year, take some time to breathe. Before you make a plan, before you make a resolution, take some time just to breathe. Inhale the graciousness of God for allowing you to see another year. Exhale the trials, tribulations and disappointments of the year before.

Inhale the smell of fresh opportunities, new beginnings and unblemished plans for the future. Exhale doubt, disappointment and the fears that hold us back.

It’s a new year for all of us and we have a lot to do, so reset, restore and release all that was last year, so you can embrace all that can be this year.

Breathe in.
Breathe out.
Take a deep breath of the future..., now, exhale.

20 in a row: BWC pays General Church Apportionments

By ERIK ALSGAARD
UMConnection Staff

WITH THE PUSH of a button on Dec. 13, Sharon Shaw, the Accounts Payable manager for the Baltimore-Washington Conference, sent the conference’s final General Church apportionment payment for 2017. And with that same motion, a streak that began years ago reached a milestone: for 20 consecutive years, the BWC has paid 100 percent of its General Church apportionments.

Members of the Conference Council on Finance and Administration, meeting on Dec. 13, celebrated the news as the electronic payment of \$291,501 was sent. The total payment for 2017 was \$3,498,013, Shaw said.

“Having that record for 20 years is a considerable achievement,” said Phil Potter, chair of CFA and a member of The National UMC in Washington, D.C. “It represents well the relationship between our annual conference and the general church, and it speaks to the strength of our annual conference.”

Potter noted that by paying its general church apportionments, the BWC is setting an example for local churches to join in the

connectional ministry aspect of The United Methodist Church. General church apportionments support seven separate funds that support, for example, seminaries, Africa University, and mission and ministry around the world.

According to Rob Matthews, Senior Data Research Analyst at the General Council on Finance and Administration, between 2003 and 2016, the BWC was apportioned \$48,525,512 and paid 100 percent (“or a bit more,” he said) each of those 14 years, for a total of \$48,529,875. Adding in the 2017 payment brings the total

to \$52,027,888. Data before 2003 was not immediately available.

Only three other annual conferences can claim a “100 percent” streak that approaches the BWC’s, according to Matthews. The Illinois-Great Rivers Peninsula-Delaware, and Oklahoma Indian Conferences have also paid 100 percent in the years between 2003 and 2016.

Being connected through apportionments, Potter said, is one of the strengths of the UMC.

“For one, we’re not hanging out there all



by ourselves,” he said. “It’s knowing that you’re not totally independent and have to be completely self-sufficient ... that there are other churches in the conference that are all pooling their resources to help those who need it the most.”

Potter was quick to recognize the leadership and dedicated disciples of the conference who made this 20-year streak happen. He’s aware, he said, that it didn’t happen by accident.

“You look at the bishops that have been part of the Baltimore-Washington Conference” over the past 20 years, he said. “And you look at the staff and the support of the annual conference and what we have achieved there. You look at CFA and the members of local churches who give of their time and volunteer to do this. It’s a commitment that comes through the whole structure. If it were just one committee pushing it, or one bishop pushing it, it wouldn’t have happened for 20 years.”

For more information on apportionment giving, including the 2018 BWC budget and a graphic on where our tithes and offerings go, visit <http://www.bwcmc.org/administration/finance/apportionment-giving/>.

AU: Changing lives, one at a time... including mine

From page 1

I have seen poverty and homelessness in our urban and rural communities, but nothing like what I saw in Zimbabwe. I have witnessed and written about generous people many times, both in terms of material things and spiritual gifts, but I had never experienced the true meaning of that until I was in Zimbabwe. I have seen joy spread across a person’s face and seen their eyes well up with tears, but I’ve never felt the power of that joy like I did in Zimbabwe.

Into that world, we, The United Methodist Church, plopped down a school and called it, with great audacity, *Africa University*. We had the vision to bring people from all across that great continent to learn and study and live together, even though, in some places in Africa, that might be frowned on... and might even be dangerous. We had the vision to create leaders in agriculture, theology, education, and (would you believe it?) peace, leadership and governance.

That last bit is an educational program

that African University started 10 years ago, according to Salley, and it is a shining example of the difference the school is making. The school’s Institute of Peace, Leadership and Governance took their program to every school of higher education in Zimbabwe, and today, Salley said, those schools either have a department of Peace, Leadership and Governance, or teach courses in that area.

Late last year, President Mugabe was replaced as president of Zimbabwe. In a remarkable series of events, the transition of power happened without bloodshed. When that happened, Salley said, it was notable that many of the leaders who now have Cabinet positions in the new government had received education in this area.

“How do you change a country?” Salley asked. “You do it one day at a time by educating its people.”

That’s what Africa University is doing. We can and ought to be proud as a denomination of the difference we are making in and through Africa U.



Present at the 25th anniversary celebration were, left to right: The Rev. Lloyd Rollins, Charlie Moore, Bishop LaTrelle Easterling, the Rev. Marion Easterling, the Rev. Irene Pierce, and James Salley. Rollins noted that the Campaign for Africa University has already raised more than \$35 million.

More about Africa University

Africa University, based in Old Mutare, Zimbabwe, has accomplished much in its brief history.

In 1984, two African United Methodist bishops, Emilio J. M. de Carvalho of Angola and Arthur F. Kulah of Liberia, challenged their colleagues at the United Methodist Board of Higher Education and Ministry to support the establishment of a university in Africa.

The board presented a plan for the pan-African university to the 1988 General Conference, the denomination’s top lawmaking body, which voted to establish the university. The university received its charter from the Zimbabwean government and classes began in 1992.

Today, the university boasts more than 7,000 graduates from 32 African countries. It has an enrollment of more than 1,200 students, both full and

part-time.

Bishop Marcus Matthews, retired, former bishop of the Baltimore-Washington Conference, serves as current president of the school’s Board of Directors. Charlie Moore, a layman from Annapolis and active in the BWC’s Council on Finance and Administration, is also on the board.

The BWC has a more than 20-year partnership with the Zimbabwe Episcopal Area of The United Methodist Church, which includes sending a team of clergy and laity to Africa University every other year to teach pastors school.

For more information on Africa University, go to www.africau.edu. For more on the BWC’s partnership with Zimbabwe, visit www.bwcmc.org/ministries/mission-outreach/zimbabwe-global-partnership/.

EVENTS

Taste and See

Jan. 20, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
University of Maryland Baltimore Campus, Catonsville
Explore innovation and missional entrepreneurship with Kenda Creasy Dean and Shannon Hopkins. This is not your typical training event. It is an encounter with concepts and tools that will transform the way you think about and do good in the world. Learn more and register at www.tasteandseedmvm.com/about.html

Living Your Call

Jan. 20, 1-4 p.m.
BWC Mission Center, Fulton
Explore how God is calling you to ministry. The keynote speaker is the Rev. Theresa Thames of Princeton Theological Seminary. Learn more and register at www.bwcmc.org/ministries/ministry-of-the-clergy/living-your-call/

ROCK

Jan. 26-28
Convention Center in Ocean City
Bishop LaTrelle Easterling will be the speaker at this conference wide youth retreat. Learn more at www.bwcmc.org/rock/

Clergy Lenten Day Apart

Wednesday, Feb. 7, 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.
First UMC, Hyattsville
Bishop LaTrelle Easterling invites all BWC clergy to a day apart before Lent begins. The Rev. Marcia McFee, of Worship Design Studio, will preach and teach.

Maryland Legislative Advocacy Day

Feb. 22, 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Asbury UMC in Annapolis
Sponsored by the United Methodist Women and the BWC Board of Church and Society, participants will learn advocacy techniques and put them in to action with state legislators. \$10.

Junius Dotson at Leadership Day

March 3, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Southern High School, Harwood
The Southern Region invites you to hear the Rev. Junius B. Dotson, General Secretary of Discipleship Ministries, at their Leadership Day. Learn more and register at www.bwcmc.org/event/1048687-2018-03-03-junius-dotson-at-leadership-days/

Kay Kotan at Leadership Days

March 17, 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Otterbein UMC - Hagerstown
At their Leadership Day, the Western Region will host Kay Kotan, author of “Gear Up!” and a coach with the Healthy Church Initiative. Learn more at www.bwcmc.org/event/1032674-2018-03-17-western-region-leadership-day-2018/

Five Things Your Visitors are Thinking But Won’t Ask

March 23, 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.
BWC Mission Center
At this workshop, nationally known worship coach Jason Moore identifies the most pressing issues for visitors and how to address them and grow. \$35. Learn more and register at www.bwcmc.org/event/1036033-2018-03-23-five-things-your-visitors-are-thinking-but-wont-ask/

Annual Conference resolutions due Jan. 15.
Visit: bwcmc.org/news-and-views/guidelines-and-a-format-for-annual-conference-resolutions/

UMConnection

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This symbol appears with stories that show your apportionment dollars at work, making a difference in people’s lives.

Leaders are called to be robust in love, alive in Christ

In light of all this, here's what *I want you* to do. While I'm locked up here, a prisoner for the Master, I want you to get out there and walk—better yet, *run!*—on the road God called you to travel. I don't want any of you sitting around on your hands. I don't want anyone strolling off, down some path that goes nowhere. And mark that you do this with humility and discipline — not in fits and starts, but steadily, pouring yourselves out for each other in *acts of love*, alert at noticing differences and quick at mending fences. You were all called to travel on the same road and in the same direction, so stay together, both outwardly and inwardly. You have *one* Master, *one* faith, *one* baptism, *one* God and Father of all, who rules over all, works through all, and is present in all. Everything you are and think and do is permeated with *Oneness*. But that doesn't mean you should all look and speak and act the same. Out of the generosity of Christ, each of us is given his own gift. He handed out *gifts* above and below, filled heaven with his gifts, filled earth with his gifts. He handed out gifts of apostle, prophet, evangelist, and pastor-teacher to train Christ's followers in skilled *servant work*, working within Christ's body, the church, until we're all moving *rhythmically* and easily with each other, efficient and graceful in response to God's Son, fully mature adults, fully developed within and without, fully alive like Christ. *No prolonged infancies* among us, please. We'll not tolerate babes in the woods, small children who are an easy mark for impostors. God wants us to *grow up*, to know the whole truth and tell it in love — like Christ in everything. We take our lead from Christ, who is the source of everything we do. He keeps us in step with each other. His very breath and blood flow through us, nourishing us so that we will grow up healthy in God, *robust in love*.

Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16

Kaleidoscope Bible Study

Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16 will be guiding the Baltimore-Washington Conference in the coming year. We invite you to more fully explore this passage using the Kaleidoscope Bible Study Process (www.kscopeinstitute.org/kaleidoscope-bible-study) in small group settings. The process can also be revised for your personal devotions.

- Inform participants that the Bible passage will be read three times. After each reading, participants will be invited to share their reflections.
- Invite participants to capture a word, a phrase or an image when listening to the passage the first time.
- Invite someone to read the passage.
- Allow a moment of silence for participants to capture a word, a phrase or an image that stood out for them and then invite them to share their words.
- Ask participants to consider the second question for this passage, which should be one created by the facilitator ahead of time to fit the context of the group and the passage.
- Invite someone to read the passage a second time.
- Hold a moment of silence to reflect on the question, and then invite each person to share his or her reflection.
- Invite participants to consider the following question while

listening to the passage again: "What does God invite you to do, be or change through this passage?"

- Ask someone to read the passage a third time.
- After a moment of reflection, invite each person to share his or her reflection.
- End the session with a prayer circle. Invite participants to join hands in a circle. Invite each person to mentally complete the sentences:

I thank God today . . .

I ask God today . . .

The leader will begin by sharing his or her prayers. After he or she has shared, the leader then squeezes the hand of the person to the right. That will be the signal for the next person to share his or her prayers. If the person does not want to share, he or she can simply pass the pulse to the next person. When the pulse comes back to the leader, he or she can begin the Lord's Prayer and invite everyone to join in.

This Bible Study format was created by the Kaleidoscope Institute, which provides resources to equip church leaders to create sustainable churches and communities. Learn more at www.kscopeinstitute.org.

What images does the Ephesians 4 passage evoke for you?

For the Rev. Johnsie Cogman of Mt. Zion UMC in Georgetown, it conjures up images of her ROTC classmates supporting her to the finish line. "The world needs us, to grow up and understand that together, working as one, with the power of the Holy Spirit, we can do amazing things as Christ leads us," she said. For the Rev. David Cooney of Damascus UMC, the image of a marching band comes to mind, with individual musicians marching with precision because they know the direction they are to travel, and how to move together efficiently and with grace. What's your metaphor and how will you live into being an Ephesians 4 leader? Share your thoughts: [www.Facebook.com/bwcumc](https://www.facebook.com/bwcumc)

We are called to be Ephesian 4 leaders

By Rev. Rodney Thomas Smothers
Director of Leadership and Congregational Development

When I read this text from Eugene Peterson's contemporary version, The Message, what strikes me are the three "m's" that frame Ephesians 4: 1-7, 11-16. They are maturity, ministry and mandate. The first 13 verses of the passage invite us to examine ourselves and gain perspective on what God expects of us personally. That purpose calls us to travel in the same direction, united in a common focus on one Master, one faith, one God and Father of all, who rules through all, and is present in all. This oneness shapes the challenge for us to abandon our self-centered goals and serve together for the cause of Christ.

While oneness is a strong focus of our work together in community, it is in the 11th verse of this passage where God begins to spell out our individual gifts to accomplish effective ministry. God's instructions for us to become "skilled servant workers" are spelled out in describing what gifts we are given to accomplish God's ministry. The ministry gifts of apostle, prophet, evangelist and pastor-teacher are highlighted as different skill sets to accomplish God's larger goal of getting the church to move rhythmically and easily, functioning as fully mature adults, fully alive like Christ.

The beginning point for us as learners and leaders is to be clear about our calling and gifts to fulfill that calling. Ephesians 4 leaders focus on their specific ministry gifts for their personal leadership development and for their leadership of others in the Body of Christ:

- An apostle is sent on a mission to inform and encourage others in the faith.
- A prophet, on the other hand, is thought to be one who is an inspired teacher and proclaimer of the will of God.
- Evangelists are usually thought to be people who convert people to the Christian faith.
- Pastor-teachers have the dual role of caring for the flock and

teaching the flock.

No Ephesian 4 leader possess these ministry gifts in the same proportion. What the Apostle Paul is conveying to us in this writing is that a healthy ministry should have these gifts present among the ministry team. Some believe these gifts only to be present in the clergy. I believe that these gifts are resident in clergy and laity alike in the body of an anointed and healthy assembly of Christian believers.

With maturity and ministry defined, Ephesians 4: 14-16 then moves us to God's mandate: "No prolonged infancies, please." Our mandate is to assist believers to grow up and become healthy in God, robust in love. "No prolonged infancies, please!" The greatest obstacles to growth in congregations are challenges that are rooted in the lack of spiritual maturity of its leaders and members. While we often focus on lack of vision, lack of stewardship or lack of service, it is failure to articulate clear expectations around spiritual maturity that prevent most ministries from growing to the next level.

The mandate to grow up and to know the whole truth and tell it in love is the heart of an Ephesians 4 leader. This mandate is not just for laity, it is also essential for spiritual leaders as a significant tool for our personal growth and discipleship.

When I say that growing up is the heart of Ephesians 4 leaders, I mean that from the heart everything flows. If we don't have our hearts right, then everything else is just messed up.

Among the best-known scriptures regarding the condition of a leader's heart is Proverbs 3:5, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart; don't rely on your own intelligence." Ephesians 4 leaders seek a consistent diet of spiritual wisdom, personal discipline, prayer-centered insight, and Holy Spirit-directed discipleship.

Ephesians 4 tells us that if we grow up, lead others to grow up, and abide in that growth, then we will all grow up healthy in God, robust in love.

Wesley Theological Seminary

Wesley announces the upcoming Doctor of Ministry cohorts beginning in 2019:

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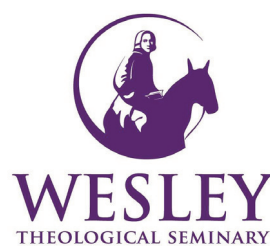
- **Spirituality and Story**

- **The Winds of the Spirit and Ministries for a Changing World (at Wesley House, Cambridge, UK)**

- **Church Leadership Excellence**

“Coming back for my D.Min. was a way of saying that I value the education here. **That’s why I came to Wesley.** What you learn here is pertinent for the local church and for modern-day ministry.”

Rev. Dr. Amanda Stein
M.Div. '98, D.Min. '16
Elder, Wisconsin Annual Conference, UMC



Doctor of Ministry Program accepting applications now for the following tracks (starting May 2018):

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Naming the cause of death at the funeral: overdose

By DAVID HIGHFIELD*

EARLY LAST MONTH, I officiated at an evening funeral of a 33-year-old man, unknown to me, who died of a drug overdose. A phone call came to me from a friend who said the family was seeking a pastor for the funeral. Apparently, four pastors had already said that they were unavailable.

Although I was reluctant at first, I sensed a family in need. After talking with the sister of the deceased, I agreed to participate. In that conversation, I learned that the family was seeking a compassionate, non-judgmental pastor, further confirming my decision to serve.

I asked the family for permission to name the cause of death (not a part of the newspaper obituary) as a part of the funeral and they agreed. Said his sister, “We need to shed some light on this.”

Aware of the drug overdose epidemic throughout Maryland, I also contacted Assess Carroll of Carroll County, an integrated health care clinic that serves uninsured, underinsured, and poor residents of the county. I was aware that recently Access Carroll (www.accesscarroll.org) had expanded their “Ambulatory Detox Services” to seven days a week. I was strongly led to include information about this program as a part of my message at the funeral, believing that addiction is a community and family disease.

I called Kim, the lead nurse for the detox program, who

supplied me with leaflets about the program. When I arrived at the funeral home, the director willingly received the leaflets and placed them visibly at each exit just before the funeral service began.

My message was preceded by scripture and prayers from the United Methodist Book of Worship and by a helpful reflection on her brother's life by his sister. But I knew that more than “verbal thoughts and prayers” would be needed to help stop this overdose epidemic. I spoke of the daily Detox Services available in our community through Access Carroll and encouraged those present to pick up a leaflet for themselves or for someone they knew who was struggling with opiate or alcohol addiction.

In my years of ministry, this was a first for me — suggesting a specific healing program as well as addressing the grief, pain and guilt, and offering words of grace, forgiveness and hope.

I may never know whether anyone took a leaflet (I left them at the funeral home) or whether anyone was helped by this part of my message. I'm sure my ministry to the family and friends was imperfect. But thankfully, this was not about me. I do believe that healing from the disease of alcohol or drug addiction needs to include the power of God through Jesus Christ.

Hopefully, that power and its availability touched someone that evening.

**Rev. David Highfield is a retired Elder in the Baltimore-Washington Conference living in Westminster.*



The Jericho Road

www.bwccumc.org/events/mlk50/

The Jericho Road, a seven-week Lenten devotional that features the writings of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and thoughts from a variety of Baltimore-Washington Conference leaders, is a journey for individuals, small groups and congregations. Explore and create beloved community. This weekly devotional is online now.

To go deeper, join in the MLK50 Memphis Sojourn April 3-7. This soulful trip of remembrance to Memphis commemorates the life of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and marks the 50th anniversary of his assassination, April 4, 1968. Visit bwccumc.org/event/1042457-2018-04-03-mlk50-memphis-sojourn/



What men should be saying right about now

By CHRIS HOLMES*

THE CASCADING LIST of some very public figures being held accountable during this “Season of Reckoning” calls the rest of us men to account for a double standard we have allowed to exist for far too long, rooted in untethered, privileged male conduct.

The advantages of positional power can be intoxicating, especially when leaders are morally unhinged. Many of us men of privilege have felt the allure of entitlement which often comes with positional power in a variety of forms.

And yet, most of us are not predators or sex abusers. Those who are have lost their ethical footing. They harass, violate, or opportunistically take advantage of others because they are adrift in the illusory self-inflation of entitlement. This not only gets expressed as sexual misconduct and abuse, but as discrimination against persons of color and domination over others deemed less powerful or just different.

In society, what we are witnessing in the “#Me Too” movement right now is astonishingly heroic. So, first of all, this is a time for men to listen to the pain of women telling their experiences about harmful male behavior. These are the stories of our mothers, sisters, spouses and daughters.

But after listening and learning, shouldn't men also say

something? I have a sense that our complicit silence right now is part of the larger problem. If so, what might men of privilege and power be saying to ourselves first, then to one another and to our families?

To ourselves we should be saying...

Now is a time for self-reckoning about our individual contribution to, or participation in, the unsafe environment for women. If there is any part of our life, or our conduct, in which we are “out of integrity” with our sacred self, it's

time to correct it. If we have sexual secrets, we must find the courage to share them.

If we have betrayed someone's trust, it's time to ask for their forgiveness.

To our brothers, sons and other men we should say ...

Being a man with a passionate sex drive in not a bad thing; in fact, it is a wonderful thing. God created us this way. And, one of the most important issues of character every man will face is how to responsibly manage his sexuality throughout his life ... whether or not to laugh at, or challenge, “locker room” talk and degrading jokes... what to do about the allure of pornography, bachelor parties, or strip clubs ... and where to establish

appropriate boundaries of intimacy with people other than a committed partner. Universally, men have struggled to define, and redefine, our character in relation to these challenges, with varying levels of success and regret.

We need each other to bring out the best in male behavior. We need to say to each other, “I will not laugh at your misogynous jokes or look the other way, and will count on you to hold me responsible for my own bad behavior.”

Brothers, it is time for us to risk a whole new level of peer accountability in the fraternity of men.

And to women, we should be saying...

As I listen to your stories of pain, I choose to add my baritone voice to the alto chorus clearly condemning all forms of womanizing, sexual misconduct, discrimination and abuse.

As a society, we have tolerated unhealthy male entitlement too long, exonerated powerful men guilty of abhorrent behavior in a culture of low accountability, and not taken sexual misconduct seriously. As a man, I have sometimes been an unwilling, and at times a willing, participant and contributor to the creation of this environment that undervalues women. I am ready to help make the changes in our society which will benefit the humanity of all of us, women and men.

From my place of growing awareness, I will continue to need your help in seeing those things I am blind to, as we together make the changes that are long overdue.

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#metoo

By MELISSA LAUBER

UMConnection Staff

I LOVE THE METAPHOR of the red thread. It's that thought or theme that runs through lives, events, relationships and history. It can be anything — love, greed, thirst, darkness, a passion for winning, homecomings. Mundane or profound, unexpected or rote, the red thread weaves its way through things, creating a story. The Rev. C. Anthony Hunt's latest book, “Stones of Hope,” is a collection of essays and sermons. Hope is its red thread.

As we stand on the threshold of a new year and in this uncertain season for the church, hope is an interesting, messy, intrusive, noisy and demanding idea. It is also essential.

In 2017, we celebrated the 500th anniversary of the Reformation and Martin Luther, who said, “Everything that is done in the world is done by hope.”

In 2018, we'll observe the 50th anniversary of the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., who believed that “hope is that quality which is necessary for life.”

In addition to serving as a pastor at Epworth Chapel UMC in Baltimore, Hunt is a scholar who studies King and his spiritual kinsman, the Rev. Howard Thurman.

The word “hope” is scattered throughout Hunt's book, appearing 449 times and illuminating King's thoughts and how they speak to today's culture.

Hunt writes: “I believe that hope is the window that God has given us to see into God's preferred future for our lives. In the midst of the apparent hopelessness, nothingness, meaninglessness and lovelessness that seem to pervade our collective

reality today, hope lends credence to the promises and possibilities that God has for each of our lives.”

Hunt has internalized this through the living of his faith and his study of King, who refused to give up despite overwhelming odds.

“Hope beckons us to love everybody — both our enemies and allies. Hope helps us to see that we can resist giving up on one another because our lives together are animated by the belief that God is present in each and every one of us. In the third century, Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo, intimated that ‘Hope has two beautiful daughters; their names are Anger and Courage. Anger at the way things are, and Courage to see that they do not remain the way they are.’”

Hunt embraces Augustine's thought and also recognizes the truth of theologian Jurgen Moltmann's words that “hope creates a passion for the possible.”

But he also cautions against romanticizing hope.

“There are times when we tend to trivialize and even mythologize hope so much so that we might not recognize it even when it is in our midst,” Hunt writes. “I say this to suggest that if we take time to look around, we will see hope all around us. Children laughing and playing, that's hope. Music in our ears, that's hope. Food on our tables, that's hope. Clothes on our backs and shoes on our

feet, that's hope. A roof over our heads, that's hope. New awakenings and new beginnings, that's hope!

“And so, whatever our lot today, as people in and of Christ, we've got hope! And let me remind us what hope really is. Hope is in the name of Jesus. Hope lets us wake up knowing — ‘morning by morning new mercies I see.’ (Lamentations 3: 23) Hope lets us lie down at night knowing that ‘weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.’ (Psalm 30: 5) Hope reminds us that ‘faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen.’ (Hebrews 11: 1) Hope is what the Rev. Charles Albert Tindley knew about when he sang, ‘I do not know how long ‘twill be Or what the future holds for (you or) me, But this I know: If Jesus leads (us), (We'll) get home, someday...’”

When we recognize hope, we enliven its power, and like Peter in 1 Peter 1:3, embrace and become “a living hope.”

As King preached and Hunt writes, we don't hope out of selfishness or personal gain.

“Hope for a better future is ultimately rooted and grounded in our shared potential to change the world.”

In his 1963 “I Have a Dream” speech, King intimated that his prayer was that “there would be

hewn out of the mountain of despair, a stone of hope.” The despair that he was alluding to then was capulated in what he deemed to be the ‘triplets of evil’ — racism, poverty (classism) and war (militarism). In King's estimation, these were the major categories of the social dis-ease that afflicted America.

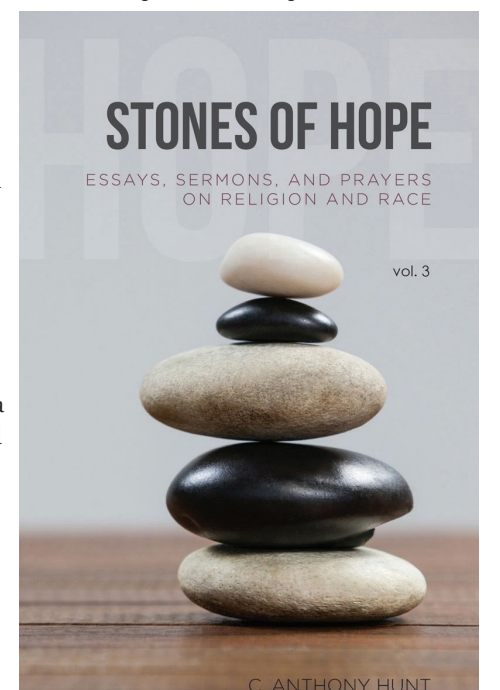
King “framed his vision of hope within the context of Beloved Community” and Christian love served as the found for his vision of this community.

The struggles of the past echo into our future and stain the day. It's easy to feel hopeless, and

Hunt recognizes that one of the things that people of faith wrestle with the most is the matter of hope.

“The yearning to comprehend and appropriate hope is something that we all hold in common. These are days of tremendous change and challenge in our world. From the collapse of domestic and global economics that affect all of us — to the wars that are now being fought in various places across the globe — to natural catastrophes — to the proliferation of violence that affects many people and communities across America and the world, these are days of unprecedented change and challenge.”

But in wrestling to discover and live hope, there is power — and potential. There is a red thread that calls us to strength, to courage, to faith, and to a profound and abiding hope.



Bishop: Talking with laity and clergy across the BWC

From page 1

intelligent and deeply gifted people.

When asked for the advice she would offer to spiritual leaders, she told them: “Service in God’s kingdom is a privilege. Stay on your knees. Being a lone ranger is dangerous. Methodists are connectional — iron sharpens iron. Read everything you can; read ‘til your eyes hurt. Teach. Introduce your folks to books. Intellectual curiosity is a large part of who we’re called to be. This is skilled servant work.”

Noting the profound challenges facing our communities, nation and world, Bishop Easterling called on the pastors to be bold in their leadership.

“We are a people of God,” she said. “Pastors, this is not the time for weak sermons. If you’re still preaching with three stories and a joke, let it go. This is not the time to get weak-kneed. We need to stand up and tell somebody the truth. ... This is a time the clergy have to wear out a good set of knees. We need to lay out prostrate before the Lord, and say, ‘Here I am, God. Use me.’ ... Scripture speaks to us on

studying and creating a way that might allow for unity within the denomination, which considers homosexuality “incompatible with Christian teaching.” Two of the primary topics being considered are the marriage of same gender couples and the ordination of self-avowed, practicing homosexuals. [For more information, visit: www.bwcumc.org/news-and-views/finding-a-way-forward-resources-for-witness-contextual-leadership-and-unity]

Bishop Easterling updated BWC members on this process and asked that, first and foremost, people pray and continue to pray.

“We must remain in prayer, and listen for truth,” she said.

Noting that every other Protestant denomination addressing this issue has failed to stay together, Bishop Easterling related a story.

“An Episcopal priest came to me and said, ‘the world is watching.’ This is our witness to the world. The world needs our deep prophetic voice right now.”

Easterling noted that, for her, one of the



Bishop LaTrelle Easterling, left, makes a point with the laity of the Central Maryland District at Bethany UMC in Ellicott City.



Christie Latona, Director of Connectional Ministries, and the Rev. Tony Love, Assistant to the Bishop, accompanied Bishop Easterling on her visits to the districts. Here, they pray at Epworth UMC in Cockeysville.

every issue under the sun. If we preach the Gospel, full and free, we begin to open possibilities for people to think about things in new and different ways.”

The divides that separate the culture, have, in some ways, entered The United Methodist Church as it addresses its stance on homosexuality.

The Commission on the Way Forward is currently at work for the Council of Bishops

most important parts of this discernment process has been observing how the Commission members “have been able to come together, to get out of their silos and certitude and sit down to know and understand one another more deeply and to listen to one another.

“... We’ve lost the ability to listen to each other,” she said. “If we’re people of God, if we believe that Christ dwells in each one,

how can we hate each other?”

Easterling asked the people of the Baltimore-Washington Conference, as certain and sure as they are, to be still and open enough to take a step back and ask themselves, “What if I’m wrong?” Wrestling with that question, she said, “should open up space and give enough room for healthy and holy conversation.”

The bishop also addressed issues of clergy self-care, sharing that conference pastors have recently reported dealing with suicidal thoughts.

“I never met a pastor who crossed a boundary (into inappropriate behavior) who was taking care of themselves. You all are candidates for bad decision making,” she said, urging the clergy to observe Sabbath and take time for physical, mental and spiritual wholeness.

She also shared, in some sessions, the dangers of people in a congregation who become “clergy-killers” — obstructing and obfuscating and undermining the ministry of the church. We shouldn’t and won’t be imprisoned by those people, she said.

People in a few of the districts also expressed concern and asked the bishop about issues of safety following the shooting of 26 people at First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs, Texas, in November.

At the clergy gathering on the Cumberland-Hagerstown District on Nov. 13, that shooting was front and center. One pastor said that church leadership had decided the answer to church safety was for her/him to wear a gun during worship.

After listening attentively, the bishop

responded.

“I hope we are not locking our church doors, especially on Sunday. We’re all vulnerable. Be vigilant, be prepared. Remember, after Jesus died, the disciples were all together in the Upper Room... and the door was locked. Why? Out of fear.”

The bishop also repeatedly stressed at that and other gatherings that she does not advocate for, nor want, her pastors “packing heat” in church.

“You have to decide,” the bishop said, “can I kill another human being? If not, don’t carry.”

Bishop Easterling also noted that, as she travels throughout Maryland, Washington, D.C. and the panhandle of West Virginia, she finds that the conference is often challenged by racial silos.

“People seem to increasingly want to be with the people who look like them,” she said. “We have to name this. We have to speak to this.”

Addressing the need for more young people in the church was also an issue asked about many times.

“How do we get more young adults in our churches,” several people inquired. To which the bishop replied, “We need to reclaim our joy. Tell it from the rooftops, I’m a bishop who lets people take risks.”

This was the second year in a row that Bishop Easterling visited the districts. In 2016, shortly after being assigned to the BWC, she help similar gatherings across the conference as a way of introducing herself to United Methodists here.

Making and Cultivating Disciples on the Minds of Many

Growth, faithfulness and disciple-making were among the thoughts most on people’s minds when they met in November and December with Bishop LaTrelle Easterling, presiding bishop of the Baltimore-Washington Conference.

More than 40 percent of the churches in the Baltimore-Washington Conference have fewer than 50 people in worship each Sunday.

Many clergy and lay people at the district meetings asked for wisdom in how to grow their congregation. The bishop offered a word of caution and of hope.

“I’m not concerned about growing numerically, I’m concerning about growing spiritually, about making and cultivating mature disciples. We need to reclaim that fire we have as United Methodists,” she said.

“There are not really any small churches, there are just small minds. Sometimes fear holds us back. We’re busying ourselves in meetings because we’re scared to move out of the buildings. What are we waiting for,” the bishop asked. “The Spirit of Christ is already in our midst.”

She urged those congregations seeking to more fully claim that spirit to “take stock of who you are. Do ministry. Do one thing well. Find out what your community is crying out for. Be in relationship and discover ways to provide what they need.

“I hear all the time: ‘we want to grow.’ Folks will say they want that growth, but they don’t want to change.”

An essential part of making that change, she said, is “walking through a deep analysis of the life span of the church. Every church has a life cycle. It’s not about shutting down; it’s about looking introspectively at oneself.”

If, in that introspection, one finds themselves becoming more focused internally, and set on maintaining church buildings, questions should be asked.

Too often, Easterling said, “we are losing ourselves in these structures that are strangling us and causing us not to be able to do missions and ministry. They have become idols to us. We’ll bankrupt ourselves trying to keep the edifice there. We’re not being good stewards when all we’re doing is pouring money into buildings. We’re right on the cusp of a revival — not the kind of revival to fill these pews, but a revival of passion to take us out into the community.”

Two tools that Easterling recommends for a deep analysis of church are Paragraph 213 in the Book of Discipline and Stephen Grey’s book, “Legacy Churches.”

“Legacy” builds on the idea that the spirit of a congregation lives on in new ministry. It is a “must-read” for church leaders, she said.

Easterling also stressed that the BWC will not readily be investing in just brick and mortar any longer. “This is not about pumping more money into churches that have lost their passion of ministry,” she said.

Rather, there will be significantly more emphasis placed on “faith expressions,” small gatherings of people that meet in interesting settings to share and live out the Gospel.

“We have allowed ourselves to become too comfortable. We have forgotten who Jesus Christ — not in myth — who literally, and actually, was. As Christ followers we’re not supposed to be at the Conference Center or in the church, where it’s safe and easy. We’re called to be on the margins with the hurting and dispossessed. That’s where we’re supposed to be,” the bishop said.

“Go forth from here knowing that everybody’s free,” she said. “Everybody is loosed to do mission and ministry in this Baltimore-Washington Conference.”