



Linda Midwig, far right, stands with the Rev. Mark Gorman during a prayer vigil Sept. 28 at Cranberry UMC in Perryman. A mass shooting Sept. 27 happened just a mile from the church. See story, below.

## Laity: From volunteer to disciple

BY MELISSA LAUBER  
UMConnection Staff

**L**AY PEOPLE THROUGHOUT the Baltimore-Washington Conference's 631 churches volunteer countless hours to ministry. Or do they? Words matter, and the word "volunteer" may need to be stricken from the church's lexicon in favor of "disciple," many church leaders are claiming.

"They are disciples," said Bishop LaTrelle Easterling. "Disciples do not volunteer their time; rather, disciples are living out the commitment affirmed during their baptism."

Linda Flanagan, the new conference director of Certified Lay Servant Ministries, appreciates this distinction.

"It all comes down to call," she said. "What is God calling you to do? What's your passion? Where do you see God has led you? Sometimes we can feel God saying, 'I gave you these gifts, use them.'"

Flanagan refers to these holy leadings as "God's bread crumbs," and she's pretty sure God doesn't call God's people just to provide "volunteer opportunities." By virtue of their baptism, she said, quoting the Book of Discipline, "all Christians are called to minister wherever Christ would have them serve and witness in deeds and words that heal and free."



Rev. Angela Flanagan

The laity, she said, are called to leadership, caring and communications. Each baptized person is a minister, Flanagan stressed, called to be light and salt to the world.

In her first few months on the job, she is focusing on helping to interpret the different types of certified ministry available to the laity. Changes at the denominational level, which began in 2012, have created a level of complexity that is just now beginning to be fully understood and lived out among

See *Laity*, page 3

## In ministry after shootings

BY ERIK ALSGAARD  
UMConnection Staff

**F**OR THE REV. Tiffany Patterson, it was déjà vu all over again.

She was sitting at a local McDonald's Sept. 20, she said, when the news came: another mass shooting, this one at the Rite Aid Distribution Center less than a mile from one of the two churches she serves, Cranberry UMC in Perryman.

It was in this same restaurant 11 months ago that she heard the news of another mass shooting, that one at Advanced Granite Solutions in Edgewood. Patterson's other church, Presbury UMC, is located two

miles from there.

In both cases, Patterson reached out to her parishioners first, then the community, but not before others reached out to her. What she learned in responding to two mass shootings in less than a year is something she is sharing with others in hopes that preparation can make for more effective ministry in tragic situations.

Connections and relationships, she said, make all the difference.

"The most powerful thing in this has been the fact that I haven't had to do any of these past few days alone," Patterson said four days after the Rite Aid incident.

See *Shooting*, page 3

## Prepping for Gen. Conf. 2019

BY ERIK ALSGAARD  
UMConnection Staff

**W**ITH THE SPECIAL Session of General Conference less than six months away,

Bishop LaTrelle Easterling has a message for her flock: be informed, be engaged, be pro-active.

The four-day meeting, Feb. 23-26, will take place in St. Louis, Mo., to receive and act on a report from the Commission on a Way Forward. The 32-member Commission was authorized by the 2016 General Conference and appointed by the Council of Bishops to examine paragraphs in The Book of Discipline

concerning human sexuality and exploring options to strengthen the unity of the church.

The bishop wants clergy and local churches talking about it now, rather than later ... or, even worse, not at all.

"For me, right now, it would be unacceptable for any pastor serving in the Baltimore-Washington Conference that has not made themselves aware of the plans and can answer some basic questions about the plans," said Bishop Easterling. "What would also be unacceptable to me is that churches are not sharing information from sessions like today."

See *Way Forward*, page 4



Video resource on General Conference 2019 plans:  
<http://tiny.cc/tomberlin>

A word from the bishop:  
"Why I support the One Church Plan" pg. 7



BY MANDY SAYERS

LEAD Pastor, Glen Mar UMC, Ellicott City

AS I WRITE this, I am about two weeks into a new appointment. As many folks do when we get a new job, I am using this change as a chance to recommit to self-care, including shedding a few excess pounds.

This excess has me thinking about the ways that, when humans do “excess,” it can point us away from God’s best for us. When we get scared or feel insecure, we think there is “lack” and so we try to guard our resources and keep the “excess.” Perhaps that’s why God gave manna in the wilderness that was “just enough” for all and when we tried to hoard the “excess,” it spoiled.

Humans don’t, in general, deal with “excess” very well.

#biggerbarns #prodigalson

However, when we look at Jesus, we see excess done differently. When God does “excess,” it is an outpouring of grace upon grace and a way to show God’s excessive love for humanity. Jesus’ feeding of the 5,000+ resulted in many baskets of “excess” when there didn’t seem to be enough to start with. When Mary anointed Jesus with an “excess” of perfume, Jesus rebuked Judas’ criticism that the action was a waste — excessive.

Jesus’ first miracle turned a lack of wine into an excessive amount. Sometimes when I take Communion out of those teeny plastic cups, I think of those casks of wine, filled up to the brim and more, for the wedding feast. It makes me tear off bread in huge hunks to give to the people on Communion Sundays, just on the principle of the thing.

What if we let God redefine excess for us? What if we saw all that we have and all that we are as gifts from God, sent to show God’s excessive love for others?

What are ways that God is calling your church, and you, to model and share this love? What are ways in which we have been too stingy with what God has given?

In a world where “there’s no such thing as a free lunch,” how are we called to show that God’s economy is a little different — a place where the widow’s mite becomes more than a millionaire’s check, and a place where there’s no such thing as too much mercy or too much grace?

I’m grateful for this excessive God of ours, aren’t you?

## EXCESS

**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

I STARTED THE MONTH of September with a mission.

I had seen a challenge on the internet, and while I don’t usually do this, I decided to participate. It was a challenge to become more minimalist.

The idea was that for each day of the month, you would remove a certain number of things from your home. So, on the first day you would get rid of one thing; on the second day, two things; and on and on until 30 things on the thirtieth.

So I decided that I would spend the month trying to consciously get rid of the excess things that were in our house.

What I found over the month was that we had an excess of excess.

We had furniture stacked up in the garage that was put there because we didn’t need it in the house, but we held on to it.

I found clothes in my closet that, while they were in style at some point in time, I was neither going to fit into or wear them again.

We found appliances that we didn’t realize we had more than one of because one was being used and one was stored in the back of a

cabinet in almost new condition.

So, we made the decision that month to day-by-day evaluate what we needed, and what we didn’t need, and to give away the excess.

All of us have some excess in our lives. Sure, we live in a culture that tells us that there is no such thing as enough, but there really is.

As the prophet Forrest Gump of Alabama once said, “Now, Momma said there is only so much fortune a man really needs, and the rest is just for showing off.”

Sometimes we have to take a moment to stop, look at how much God has blessed us with, and take a moment to bless someone else by giving away the excess.

### We’ve changed our look!

With this issue, the UMConnection has changed to make your reading experience better.

We have a new headline font (Kepler) and body copy font (Nimrod) that are industry standards designed to make reading easier and, frankly, they look better.

Let me know what you think and how we can continue to improve.

Erik Alsgaard  
ealsgaard@bwcumc.org



*The symbol to the right appears with stories that show your mission-share dollars at work, making a difference in people’s lives. For more information about where your dollars go, visit: [bwcumc.org/administration/finance/apportionment-giving/](http://bwcumc.org/administration/finance/apportionment-giving/)*



## EVENTS

### 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 [bwcumc.org/pre-adventdayapart](http://bwcumc.org/pre-adventdayapart).

### Ministry Hatchery

Nov. 8-10, Manidokan Camp and Retreat Center

Are you nursing an entrepreneurial idea for ministry, but don’t know how to get it started (much less fund it)? Is your church ready to move a social enterprise idea down the field that serves a need in your community while funding other aspects of ministry? Could you use the wisdom of others to test-drive an idea for missional innovation?

Are you curious about what’s involved in starting a sustainable nonprofit or forprofit ministry and have a real-life example to learn on? Join us! More information: [bwcumc.org/hatchathon2018](http://bwcumc.org/hatchathon2018).

### reCall Summit

Oct. 26-27  
BWI Double Tree Hotel

The reCall Summit is a time of courageous conversations as the church explores racial justice and reconciliation at the DoubleTree Hotel by the BWI Airport. Featured speakers will include Jim Wallis of Sojourners and Marvin McMickle of Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School. Learn more and register at [bwcumc.org/recalls Summit](http://bwcumc.org/recalls Summit).

### Ministry Innovation Grants

Deadline: Nov. 1

Applications for Missional Innovation grants within the Young People’s Ministry, Advocacy & Action, and Abundant Health Networks are now being accepted. Visit [bwcumc.org/grants](http://bwcumc.org/grants) to apply and learn more.

### 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 [bwcumc.org/steppingup](http://bwcumc.org/steppingup).

### ROCK 2019

Feb. 8-10, 2019  
Convention Center, Ocean City, Md.

Registration is now open for ROCK 2019, a retreat for youth. The featured speaker this year will be Ben Glenn, the Chalk Guy. Salvador will provide the music and Egypt Speaks

is the weekend’s spoken word artist. ROCK is designed as a God-encountering, life-changing, high-energy retreat focusing on revival for youth and adults. Info: [bwcumc.org/rock](http://bwcumc.org/rock).

# ROCK

## UMConnection

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# Shooting: Lessons learned from two tragedies

From page 1

“The outpouring of support from clergy colleagues, from the conference, from the district superintendent, has been really powerful for me.”

After the Edgewood shooting last October, Patterson reached out to a clergy colleague and together, they decided that they had to do something. The result was a prayer vigil the night of the shooting, but it didn't go quite as smoothly as expected.

They got in touch with the chaplain at Chesapeake Medical Center nearby, “and he was amazing,” Patterson said. “He led us through planning that vigil.”

That prayer vigil, she said, was held at a blocked-off intersection near a gas station near I-95. It was a hectic scene, she said, with media everywhere.

“I learned so much from that,” Patterson said. “In my opinion, it was really hard for that to be a safe space for victims and their families because it was such a media event.”

Patterson made sure to put down

boundaries following the Rite Aid shooting. “It was important that we protected families and victims,” she said, “and made it a safe space.”

The vigil at Cranberry, less than a mile from the Rite Aid Distribution Center, was held on Sept. 21 at 7 p.m., on the front lawn of the church. Media were cordoned off for the duration of the vigil, allowing Patterson to focus on being the pastor she needed to be in that situation.

“Media were able to do their job,” she said, “but the sole reason for that event was not that it was a media event.”

Dealing with the media — both times — was something new, Patterson said.

“I had never dealt with media in ministry before,” she said. “You maybe have a piece in the paper if you have a church anniversary, but something like this where you're not looking for media attention for yourself... and they are looking for stories, and if you don't quite think through those boundaries, it can be a frenzy.”

Another learning for Patterson was that, when any tragedy happens, people want to respond. There's often an urgency around that need to help and often, no sense of what to do.

“What a colleague reminded me of last week,” she said, “was that we were doing everything that we could do. You can't do everything; you are trying your best, and that is what matters. Have grace on yourself and know that what you give is enough.”

Patterson said she has felt the strong presence of God in both incidents.

“People, throughout the whole (Thursday) and the next day, and the whole weekend, reached out to me and said, ‘How can I help?’ I learned that I need to just receive that and that I don't have to carry any of this alone,” she said.

But perhaps the biggest learning, Patterson said, is the power of connections, especially the church with its community.

“If you're not connected within your community,” Patterson

said, “as a pastor or a church, then you have a really hard time doing something like (a prayer vigil). We realized, as clergy in our community, that we are not connected enough. The more you have those connections prior to a tragedy, the better you can respond.”

And it's not just United Methodist clergy, she said; it goes for ecumenical connections, too, because not everyone involved with a mass shooting is Christian, Patterson said. Thus, at the Sept. 21 prayer vigil, for example, an Imam and a Rabbi offered prayers. Business, community and law enforcement connections are important, too, she added.

“Working together to provide care and support,” Patterson said, “is a powerful thing.”

*Note: Erik Alsgaard, the reporter of this story, is trained in crisis media relations and helped respond to the Rite Aid shooting with Rev. Patterson. You can contact him at [ealsgaard@bwcumc.org](mailto:ealsgaard@bwcumc.org).*

# Laity: Opportunities for learning and growth abound

From page 1

the grassroots.

In a nutshell, she explained, certification does not mean anyone is better or more advanced than anyone else. Rather, it is an opportunity for lay people to be trained and held accountable to a set of defined standards.

“When you get to the point where you want to be the best you can be, learn all you can and use your call to the best of your ability, you might want to be certified,” she said.

For those who seek certification, there are three levels.

## Certified Lay Servant

These people take one “basic” course in leadership, caring and communicating, and one advanced course. These courses are offered on the district level, although in the BWC, they can be taken in any district a person chooses, or online at [beadisciple.com](http://beadisciple.com). Lay Servants are approved by their local church and district committee on ministry and must take another advanced course every three years to be recertified.

## Certified Lay Speaker

Requires the basic course and six additional courses. This track is for people with a more narrowly focused gift. They tend to provide pulpit supply, preaching when pastors are away. Those seeking to be certified must be approved at the local, district, and conference levels. They are also required to be recertified every three years.

(Some of the confusion, Flanagan notes, is that before 2012, all the certified lay people were called “Certified Lay Speakers.” Today, some people have not noted this change and still self-identify as lay speakers, whether they have had the training or not.)

## Certified Lay Minister

This is not “the next step” in the certification process,

Flanagan explained; it is in no way hierarchical. Rather CLMs, as they are called, undergo a two-year training track to serve as leaders of small churches, as assistants to clergy, parish nurses, Christian educators, in parish ministry or in many other specialized forms of ministry. They are approved by the local church, the district superintendent and the District Committee on Ministry, and the Conference Committee on the Ministry of the Laity. Certified Lay Ministers require a different level of commitment, training and accountability, Flanagan said. Currently, the BWC has 120 CLMs, more than almost any other annual conference.

Flanagan, and Conference Lay Leader, Delores Martin, are working with district chair people to help them understand and better document the certification process and to shepherd the laity who are enthusiastic about pursuing opportunities for learning and growth.

Martin is excited when the laity seek to serve God in any significant way, certified or not. The first converts to Methodism in the New World were made by a laywoman, Elizabeth Strawbridge, in her kitchen in New Windsor, she noted. This tradition of laity expressing their faith in their daily lives and in their churches is a strong one in the Baltimore-Washington Conference, she said.

Flanagan said she believes she received her call when she was a child and “felt drawn to God.”

She remembers a Communion service at Camp Pecometh in Centreville on the Eastern Shore, and being told, “If you feel God calling you, we invite you to float your candle on the river.” She did.

Her adult life led her to work as a reporter and later, for 40 years, as a teacher and educator.

Her husband, Michael, was

Roman Catholic and active in his church. She was active in lay ministry at Good Shepherd UMC in Waldorf and the two learned from one another and grew in faith together.

When he died in 2000, his death and other family events led her to “really rely on God fully and listen more carefully.”

In 2013, she took a pilgrimage to England with Discipleship

Ministries in Nashville to follow in the footsteps of John Wesley, the founder of Methodism. In 2017, she became a certified lay minister and now works with Good Shepherd as a “minister of connection.”

“Every day since I've retired, I feel drawn to serve in whatever God puts in front of me,” she said. “I'm energized by the work. It just feels right, it feels right,” she said.

To those people who are searching for their call and wondering how God might be leaving breadcrumbs for them,

Flanagan advises “pray, pray, pray, pray, pray, and then you gotta listen.”

She also invites the laity to put their candles upon the water and see how their light is reflected in their congregations and the world.

For more information, visit [www.bwcumc.org/ministries/ministry-of-the-laity](http://www.bwcumc.org/ministries/ministry-of-the-laity).

## HOW IS YOUR CONGREGATION MAKING DISCIPLES AND OFFERING HOPE TO YOUR COMMUNITY?

SHARE YOUR STORY OF H.O.P.E. AT [LAITY@UMCDISCIPLESHIP.ORG](mailto:LAITY@UMCDISCIPLESHIP.ORG).



God is actively present in the lives of all members of the Body of Christ. Our children and youth are all called to and engaged in the core process of H.O.P.E. For age-specific resources, and for more information about the H.O.P.E. process, visit our website at:

[www.UMCdiscipleship.org](http://www.UMCdiscipleship.org)

Oct. 18 is Laity Sunday. The theme of this year's Celebration is “Offering Christ.” Learn more about this theme and HOPE: a lay tool for transformational discipleship, at <http://tiny.cc/4molzy>.

# Way Forward: Tom Berlin outlines plans for GC 2019

From page 1

The bishop was referring to a time of listening and conversation with the Rev. Tom Berlin, held Sept. 15, at Nichols-Bethel UMC in Odenton. Berlin, lead pastor of Floris UMC in Herndon, Va., was a member of the Commission. He spoke for an hour at the 2018 Annual Conference Session of the BWC in Baltimore; he spoke for nearly three hours at Nichols-Bethel. (Both sessions are at [www.bwcumc.org/commission-on-a-way-forward/](http://www.bwcumc.org/commission-on-a-way-forward/).)

Bishop Easterling noted that the denomination has been talking about human sexuality since restrictive language was placed in the Book of Discipline in 1972. The current iteration of conversation began after the 2016 General Conference, when the Commission was formed.

“There’s been different levels of interest and access of this information,” said the bishop. “But as far as I’m concerned, the time has come where everyone needs to be aware of the conversation our denomination is in, and the very important decision that is about to be made.”

Berlin echoed the bishop’s concern, saying that he’s been urging clergy and lay leaders for a long time to have this conversation. The problem becomes, he said, of how do you do that?

Berlin began his presentation by noting that there are United Methodist churches in 95 percent of the counties in the United States, in states red, blue, and purple, and in countries in Africa where homosexuality is illegal and punishable by death. Into that context, then, comes the choices United Methodists must make.

“There is no definitive answer, except for those people who have their own definitive answer,” said Berlin.

The bishop said that it was important to remember that in this long-running conversation, the church is not merely talking about facts, statistics, and figures. In fact,

she said, “Wherever we fall on the spectrum of theological ideology, it remains true that we are talking about our brothers and sisters in Christ.”

The One Church Plan, Bishop Easterling said, received overwhelming support from the Council of Bishops. After a review by the Judicial Council, she said, all three plans – the Traditional and Connectional Conference plan being the other two – will come forward to the Special Session “in

slated to come before the Special Session. The plans, in the four official languages of The United Methodist Church, are available at [www.bwcumc.org/resources/commission-on-a-way-forward/](http://www.bwcumc.org/resources/commission-on-a-way-forward/).

The One Church Plan was overwhelmingly supported by the Council of Bishops, who stated in a May 4 press release, “The values of our global church are reflected in all three plans. The majority of the Council recommends the One Church Plan as the best way forward for The United Methodist Church.”

Bishop Easterling was clear that she supports the One Church Plan.

“I wholeheartedly endorse and

of Discipline related to marriage and ordination of self-avowed, practicing homosexual persons, maintains the current structure of the church, and continues the current relationships between the church and all general agencies and commissions.

This plan, said Berlin, comes from the idea that The United Methodist Church ought to have one unified stance on issues related to marriage and sexuality.

The Connectional Conference Plan creates three values-based connectional conferences: traditional, unity, and progressive, Berlin said. What that means, he said, “is that we would take all United Methodists and all annual conferences ... and say, ‘You can be in one of these three (value-based) groups.’”

The three groups, he said, are divided only by this topic. In the traditional group, there can be no same-gender weddings and no homosexual clergy. In the unity group, it would be more like the One Church Plan, Berlin said. In other words, when it comes to same-gender weddings and homosexual clergy, “all can, no one must; some will, some won’t.” And in the progressive group, “all shall,” he said.

“So the Baltimore-Washington Conference would have to make a decision” if this plan passes, Berlin said. A local church could opt-out of what the annual conference decides, Berlin said. “The default would be what the annual conference chooses, but churches could move from one group to another.”

Also, the majority of the current general boards and agencies of the church go away, Berlin said. “The reason? You can’t afford it if we all go our separate ways.”

Berlin said that there are three possible outcomes from the 2019 Special Session: “No change; one of these models could be chosen; or a third thing is that a hybrid of these models and some idea that the Commission didn’t think of could be chosen.”

**OCTOBER  
23-26, 2018**

Judicial Council rules on constitutionality of plans  
[tiny.cc/umcjudicialcouncil](http://tiny.cc/umcjudicialcouncil)

**NOVEMBER  
2018**

*Advanced Daily Christian Advocate* is released with all petitions

**FEBRUARY  
23-26, 2019**

Special Session of General Conference, St. Louis, Mo.  
[tiny.cc/2019specialsession](http://tiny.cc/2019specialsession)

## GC 2019 TIMELINE

Legislation passed at a General Conference is effective January 1 following General Conference unless otherwise specified. The One Church Plan suggests December 31, 2020, implementation. The Connectional Conference Plan would have to wait for ratification of constitutional amendments by annual conferences (2/3rd aggregate voting total needed for passage).

one way or another.”

The plans, and thus the choices to be made, vacillate between two points, Berlin said, between “law” and “grace,” and between “centralized” and “decentralized.” “Which side of the polarity must the UMC now lean into in order to live into its next guiding story?” he asked.

Berlin outlined three plans — two of which were written by Commission members, including himself as part of a writing team (One Church and Connectional Conference; the Traditional Plan was written by “a few bishops,” according to the report) — that are

fully support the One Church Plan,” she said at the Nichols-Bethel event. “I think it allows us to concretely and faithfully continue what we’ve already been doing since 1972. We have not agreed on all things theological ... but we have found ways to live with one another. It gives us room to serve our communities and one another while still being able to live out our biblical understanding, our scriptural interpretation, but with the strength of a united body.” (Read her column on page 7.)

The Traditional Plan, Berlin said, streamlines the process to enforce penalties for violations of the Book

## THE COMMISSION'S REPORT AND OTHER RESOURCES

The Commission’s Report and other resources may be found at: [www.bwcumc.org/resources/commission-on-a-way-forward](http://www.bwcumc.org/resources/commission-on-a-way-forward)

### The Commission’s report includes:

- History of the Commission’s work
- Key Foundational Ideas (Common Core, Need for Space, Global Church, Public vs. Private Mission, etc.)

- Missional and Theological Framework
- The Three Plans
  - One Church
  - Connectional Conference
  - Traditional

- The Appendices include information about the possibility of churches who desire to change their relationship with the UMC, the Council of Bishop’s recommendation, and Wespath implications.

## ONE CHURCH PLAN

- Recognizes the diverse theological and scriptural understandings of our global church
- Provides generous unity for conferences, churches, and pastors
- Removes the restrictive language from our current Book of Discipline
- Maintains the current structure of the denomination
- Does not require any annual conference, bishop, congregations, or pastor to act contrary to their convictions
- Allows congregations and pastors greater freedom to reach new people

## CONNECTIONAL CONFERENCE PLAN

- Unified core that includes shared doctrine and services
- Creates three values-based connectional conferences: Traditional, Unity, and Progressive
- Allows for a Book of Discipline within each connectional conference
- Reduces General Boards and Agencies to a few shared services: Wespath (health and benefits), Publishing House, Finance and Administration, Commission on Archives and History, United Methodist Committee on Relief, parts of Global Ministries.
- Current central conferences have the choice of becoming their own connectional conference or joining a values-based connectional conference
- Council of Bishops is focused on shared learning and ecumenical relationships
- Episcopal oversight, accountability, elections, assignments, and funding occur within the College of Bishops of each connectional conference
- Jurisdictional Conferences choose their connectional conference
- Annual Conferences can choose a different connectional conference than Jurisdictional Conference
- Local churches can choose a different connectional conference from their annual conference

## TRADITIONAL PLAN

- Strengthens the current language of the Book of Discipline concerning human sexuality and increases accountability
- Asks annual conferences and bishops to certify they will support the Discipline
- Streamlines the process to enforce penalties for violations of the Book of Discipline related to marriage and ordination of self-avowed practicing homosexual persons
- Maintains the current structure of the church
- Continues all general agencies
- Designs process for those who cannot live within the Discipline to change their relationship with the UMC

# Border trip brings immigration to life

BY ERIK ALSGAARD  
UMConnection Staff

**I**N MID-SEPTEMBER, A group from the Baltimore-Washington Conference went to the Mexico-United States border near Tijuana to learn more about immigration issues facing our country.

Led by Emma Escobar, Coordinator of Hispanic/Latino Ministries for the Baltimore-Washington Conference, the trip was designed to take pastors, youth and young adults to a deeper understanding of the immigration process so that they might better minister to their congregations.

Over four days, the group of 16 travelled to Tijuana, Mexico, spent time with refugees at Christ Ministry Center in San Diego, Calif., and met with pastors from Methodist churches in Mexico. They also helped to serve meals at a park and served Communion at the border.

"This trip to the border was a very impactful and meaningful experience for me," said Sofia Téllez-Fenner, 14, from Gaithersburg. She was on the trip with her mother, the Rev. Jennifer Fenner, pastor of Epworth UMC in Gaithersburg.

"I was exposed to things that I have not been exposed to before," she said. "I have heard and seen certain things regarding the difficulties of immigration, but I never was as bothered by it until I went and saw what people are really going through and experiencing daily."

Téllez-Fenner said that watching how people were treated, and how unjust the immigration system

was, "genuinely makes me angry." These people are refugees from their countries, she said. "They are willing to put their families and their own lives at risk just because there is a small chance that they will have a better life in the United States."

The part that impacted her the most, she said, was when they visited the Juventud 2000 Shelter. They were able to go and speak with the people at the shelter, and she and her mom talked with a woman.



Members of a delegation from the Baltimore-Washington Conference listen to refugees at the Juventud 2000 Shelter in Tijuana, Mexico, as part of a trip to learn about immigration issues at the border.

"Listening to her story made me feel so many different emotions at once," Téllez-Fenner said, "that I was not able to clearly process everything until we got back onto the bus, at which time I started crying. The amount of pain that she has gone through in her life is more than anyone should ever have to go through. Ever."

Another participant, Vanessa,\*

said that one of the reasons she went on the trip was to personally experience the stories of those at the border.

"There is no doubt that the injustice in the US immigration system is real," she said. "However, through this trip, I was able to see that justice is being done and is being fought for. Not only in the US, but in several countries through several resources provided by churches and nonprofit organizations.

"We, who experienced this trip,

a Mexican immigrant, attends Hughes-El Buen Samaritano UMC in Wheaton. She is going through the immigrant process right now but said she had become slowly numb to the issue over time. The trip changed that, especially visiting the border wall.

"As I began to see the border wall, it all began to feel surreal," she said. "I was reminded that immigration is more than just policies and laws and those who make them. It was about people. People that, for various reasons, chose to leave, and many times, needed to leave."

Seeing all this, she said, brought many questions to mind, notably about how the human race could divide God's creation. "How much further would our selfish and greedy ways take us? But most importantly, what was I going to do?"

The trip served as a wake-up call for Gasca. "I have to ensure that those feelings of frustration will turn into actions, because there is too much happening in the world for me to not work towards helping my neighbors."

\*For privacy reasons, we are using only her middle name.

## About Immigration

The United Methodist Church has several official statements related to immigration.

They can be found at [www.umc.org/topics/topic-immigration](http://www.umc.org/topics/topic-immigration)

# FROM RUSSIA WITH FAITH

BY ROD MILLER\*

**W**E CERTAINLY HEAR a lot in the media about Russia — to the extent that we may wonder what the people are really like. I spent a wonderful 10 days in Russia this summer and I am pleased to report that the Russian people are as warm and welcoming as ever. The United Methodist Church is alive throughout Eurasia and members are continuing to grow in faith and discipleship. I came away with great admiration for the courage and spiritual strength of our friends there.

The BWC has had an ongoing covenant relationship with the Black Soil District in Southern Russia since 2008. I was given the opportunity to help build on this partnership in August when I spent 10 days at Camp Krystal near Voronezh in Southern Russia.

Rev. Elena Malnekova, coordinator of Women's Ministry for the Eurasia Conference, focuses her ministry on empowering women's lay leadership across the Conference. Each summer, women gather at the camp for training, learning, fellowship and renewal. This year, 40 women came together

from August 15 to 19 for leadership training followed by a spiritual retreat at what they call "The Women's Conference." My role was to support Elena in her work with these phenomenal women.

In a number of ways, my presence and participation offered a dose of cultural diversity to the group. As an American male clergyman who spoke a different language, I brought a different set of understandings, experiences and assumptions. There were times when I absolutely felt a part of all that was going on. After all, we are all United Methodists who care about our relationships with God and our Church!

And there were times when I felt uniquely out of place and was both puzzled and curious about what was happening. It was clear that for us to simply engage one another was sometimes effortless and sometimes challenging. For me, the whole experience was astounding in its richness and uplifting in its impact.

The women came from all across the Russian area. Enya, an 18-year old from Vladivostok, came 5,000 miles to meet with women she hadn't met before and was supported and embraced as a

leader by the older women. Three women from Luhansk in Eastern Ukraine asked me to pray for them and their churches, which are in a sensitive area. One woman and her husband, who are starting a United Methodist Church in Kyrgyzstan in Central Asia, asked what I thought were the keys to starting a church in a country that has an Islamic majority. Another woman from Katka, in the Ural Mountains, said she was going to take the idea of knitting prayer shawls back to her church. Another wanted me to know about her ministry with drug addicts in Voronezh.

The Women's Conference is financially supported by the participants with help from the United Methodist Women through the New York office. I am a proud witness of the amazing and vital work of empowering women which is going on through the UMW. Thanks to Elena and to

all who are focusing our church's resources in these ways, they are making a huge difference where it is most needed. I am grateful for experiencing a small part of the transformative work being done by The United Methodist Church around the world.

\*Rev. Rod Miller is a newly retired (again) Elder in the Baltimore-Washington Conference.



Rev. Rod Miller, center, stands with Gayane, left, and Zalena at the United Methodist Women's Conference located at Camp Krystal near Voronezh, Russia.

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Superintendent, Baltimore-Metropolitan District  
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## MAKING A DIFFERENCE

### Church provides summer lunches to 70 children

WHEATON – After seven summers of serving lunches to school children, Hughes UMC finished up this year's ministry just before school started. Volunteers at the church made and served "kid-friendly" lunches to 70 children in 26 families living near the church, twice a week.

The program has grown as it has evolved. In their first attempt, they provided packaged lunches to the children who had to eat them in the church and had other restrictions imposed by the county/federal program that provided the lunches.

In 2018, the volunteers made the lunches and they delivered them to the homes a few blocks from the church. They prepared and packed the fresh made sandwiches, chips, fresh fruit or vegetable, milk or juice, and dessert throughout summer vacation.

"For the past four years," said Carol Whitney, who chairs the ministry, "we have received help from youth in our church as well as several community youth." Two of them, she said, "have been faithfully preparing and delivering lunches nearly every day of the past three summers." Though students are offered Student Service Learning hours, most say they'd do it anyway, without the hours, Whitney said; "I just want to help people," the students say.

### Eagle Scout-to-be builds gardens

COLUMBIA – In addition to earning 21 merit badges to become an Eagle Scout before age 18, a young man must also complete a service project. Alex "AJ" Conway,

15, who attends Locust UMC, turned to the church to offer his services.



AJ Conway, above, works in the new Memorial Garden at Locust UMC.

The Rev. Jane Wood suggested building a rain garden on the west side of the church property, which he enthusiastically began. But then, a surveyor in the preliminary work to further plans for an extensive church building project, discovered human remains buried just outside the church cemetery.

"Once I was informed ... that we needed a memorial garden, I was like, 'Why not do it right here?'" Conway said. He also placed a headstone in the garden from Boyd Fowler, who died in the 1800s, and he's searching for the two more from the original site.

"Words cannot describe how elated and proud we are of AJ," Wood said. "The beauty of both (gardens) looks as if we hired a professional to design and implement (them)."

### Church helps in recovery of body

BEL AIR – The body of Melissa Anne Lehew, 34, who was swept away by storm water Aug. 30 as she tried to rescue 67-year-old Daniel Samis of Abingdon, was found

Sept. 3 in Harford County. Samis was killed when the sedan he was driving was swept away in the rushing flood waters in Harford County.

Some two-dozen people joined the search after learning about it on social media. Associate pastor Brian Malcolm organized members of Mt. Zion UMC in Bel Air, which Lehew had attended during the summer, and joined the search in James Run creek bed Sept. 2 and 3.

After the body was found, Malcolm wrote on Facebook: "It is an extremely sad day... our hearts break for you and your family. It was amazing to see the light in your soul from knowing Jesus."

### Reaching out to the hungry

BRUNSWICK – In a small town with a good history of helping others, especially veterans, the local food bank is near the top of the list of the 31 non-profits working in Frederick County.



Rev. Katie Bishop, center, helps in the Brunswick Food Bank.

The Brunswick Ecumenical Assistance Committee on Needs started the Brunswick Food Bank, which is supported by the churches. It also serves families in the surrounding area.

Managing the food bank is the Rev. Katie Bishop, pastor of Brunswick UMC, one of

four churches on the Greater Brunswick Charge. It serves about 220 households. It's not surprising to learn that a majority of Brunswick residents are unable to afford basic needs, she said.

Of the families that use the food bank, a third are senior citizens trying to age in place and another third are working families that can't stretch their income to cover all expenses.

### Church teen a champion

BALDWIN – Recently, Lynne Thomas, an active teen member of Union UMC, was crowned the 2018-2019 Maryland Dairy Princess. She has a lot of other achievements, too: selected as a drum major of the North Harford High School Marching Band; first place with her prepared speech at the Maryland State FFA Convention; a number of ribbons at the Baltimore County 4-H Fair, including many as "grand champion" of cakes, yeast breads and cookies; and she will represent the county in the Maryland State 4-H Fashion Revue.

On the farm front, Thomas received awards in showing Wool Sheep and was grand champion in Dairy Showmanship. At the Maryland State Fair, she won first place and Champion in both the 4-H Top Chef Tailgate Contest and the One-Pot Meal Challenge. At the State Fair, she carried home ribbons in child care, teen baking, wool fleeces, ready-to-wear formal wear and others.

She's contributing some of her baking skills at the church to anyone who donates \$9 or more to Operation Christmas Child as the church begins this annual mission. She'll give them a loaf of homemade English muffin bread.

# A word from the bishop

## We Can Remain Together: Why I Support the One Church Plan

FAMILIES ARE OFTEN torn apart by divorce. Persons who once had love and concern for each other, spent holidays and celebrations together, who claimed one another beyond bloodlines suddenly are not speaking at all. Persons once so close you couldn't slide a piece of paper between them now act like total strangers. Yes, I know some families have been able to rise above this kind of rancor, but all too often that is not the case.



Bishop LaTrelle Easterling

Another common facet of divorce is a fixation on something such as custody of children, a portion of a retirement, or real property. Perhaps without even articulating it, that something

becomes understood as the prize, and whoever wins that prize has "won" the divorce.

It feels like The United Methodist Church is in this position. No, there has not been a divorce, but some have resigned themselves to the belief that we have irreconcilable differences. And the fixation that grips this family, the "thing" that must be won in this situation, is who is right concerning human sexuality. At times, it seems as though whoever emerges victorious on this debate will have "won." But, sometimes, winning is really losing.

What the Bible does or does not say concerning homosexuality has been debated ad nauseam.

Biblical scholars on all sides of the debate have conducted exegetical, historical, and doctrinal analyses and arrived at differing conclusions. Deeply committed Christ-followers who have combed the texts, engaged in faithful study and prayed for inspired understanding have also arrived at varied conclusions. General Conference after General Conference has seen delegates proclaim that they love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength and yet reach differing understandings of scriptural teachings concerning human sexuality and same-gender relationships.

There are only a handful of texts that speak to the issue of same gender relationships, and a few more if you read the Genesis account of creation as a mandate from the Creator concerning gender, love and marriage. Yet, these few texts have caused more arguments, accusations of heresy and finger pointing than any of us can count. As I heard an episcopal colleague lament, "When did we as United Methodists decide that human sexuality was the litmus test for godliness and membership?"

I keep asking myself the exact same question.

The United Methodist Church has never required its members to walk in lock step theologically. The theological breadth within our denomination has always provided enough room for varied perspectives. This has been especially true when it comes to non-sacramental subjects. For instance, some believe the most important aspect of Christ's existence for salvation is his birth.

Others believe it is the morality and obedience he exhibited during his life. Yet others place their marker on his death, and still some believe salvation was not completed until the resurrection. While this divergence of opinions might lend itself to raucous debates over lattes, in recent times it certainly has not led to threats of schism or accusations of heresy.

It is my belief that we can maintain our unity beyond differing understandings of God's intention for human sexuality. The One Church Plan would allow us to do just that. It does not require unanimity of belief or action, but does permit contextualization and allows persons to follow their theological convictions and conscience.

Is it perfect? No, it is not. But we have not arrived at perfection on the matters of gender and race either, although we addressed them in 1956 and 1968, respectively. It would, however, rid us of charges and trials that deplete our resources and curtail our focus on mission.

Some are concerned that it will create burdens for church membership, appointments and even episcopal assignments. However, if we are completely honest, we already navigate those realities. Individuals and families find churches that meet their needs; bishops and jurisdictional episcopal committees appoint and assign clergy balancing myriad factors; and our Central Conferences contextualize as allowed by Discipline. In other words: we do not presently walk in lock step with one another, and we are yet alive.

I am aware that for some, the

One Church Plan does not go far enough because it would not guarantee all the benefits of membership or allow for the ordination of all qualified candidates. That is true, but it does move us beyond a complete restriction of the same.

Conversely, others argue that to condone homosexuality in any way is to condone sin based on their scriptural interpretations. And yet, in our history we once supported slavery and prevented the ordination of women. Both of those beliefs were justified by deeply held interpretations of Scripture that we no longer accept. In other words, we have sometimes been wrong about scriptural interpretations.

Is it not possible that we are wrong again? Moreover, those who do believe it is wrong would not be required to perform same-sex marriages, ordain or appoint gay or lesbian pastors.

We do not have to schism. We have a viable path forward that will offer contextualization, open our hearts, minds and doors more widely, and retain the strength we have in mission and ministry. We do not have to end up in a theological divorce. And, it isn't about winning at all, it is about glorifying God.

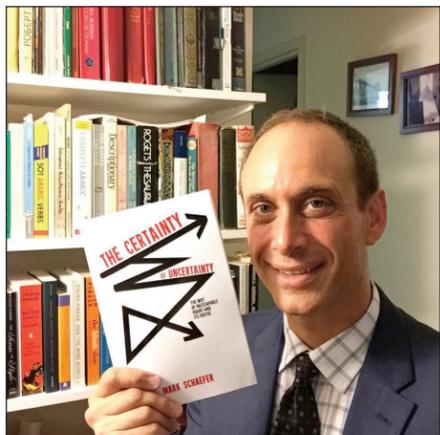
As the Preamble to our Constitution states, "The church of Jesus Christ exists in and for the world, and its very dividedness is a hindrance to its mission in that world." May we not further that dividedness. May we be one in ministry to all the world.

*Bishop LaTrelle Easterling*

## The Certainty of Uncertainty

By MARK SCHAEFER\*

THE WORLD HAS a certainty problem. Right now, there are a great many people who are very certain about things: certain that their political ideologies are the right ones; that their religious beliefs are absolutely correct; that their understanding of the world is entirely accurate. This certainty has several ill effects. It is dividing our communities into ever more



Rev. Mark Schaefer with his new book, "The Certainty of Uncertainty."

rigid camps, who are quick to condemn each other as "other." It causes otherwise good people to resist hearing different points of view for fear that that would make them unfaithful or, worse, that they might begin to doubt what they had previously believed with such certainty. And this certainty becomes a source of harm — emotional, psychological, and spiritual — to anyone who admits even the slightest doubt.

This last point is the one I am concerned about the most. I have served nearly two decades in ministry working with college students, faculty and staff. I have seen how people can feel such great pain at the very idea that they don't know something. They're not sure what they believe. They don't know what they want to do with their lives. And worst of all, they feel bad because they feel this way, especially over questions of faith.

In religious communities that place a high priority on certainty, admitting doubt can feel like failure. If I am having these doubts, they think, what is wrong with me?

The struggle to reconcile faith and doubt is real.

In my book, "The Certainty of Uncertainty," I explore the question of certainty and doubt. The more I looked into the question, the more it became clear that absolute certainty is impossible. I also came to understand that uncertainty and doubt are not only unavoidable, they're necessary, especially if you want to live a life of faith. Indeed, there is a clue in the story of "Doubting Thomas" that tells us as much.

See, Thomas isn't really a name. It's a nickname; it's the Aramaic word for "twin." And that raises an interesting question: whose twin is he? You can't just have one twin, after all. And even if he's called that because he just looks a lot like someone, who is that someone?

Remember, this group of disciples had nicknames related to or given by Jesus: the Rock, the Sons of Thunder, and the Twin. And this, in turn, makes an interesting point: for if Jesus is the model of perfect faith and Thomas is the model of doubt, then what

we come to understand is that faith and doubt are not antitheses, they're twins. For if faith is ultimately about trusting, then it cannot be about perfect knowledge. As one observer said, when asked how he could really know that he could trust someone, "I don't; that's what trust is."

And indeed, that is what faith is. It's not about having all the answers or about certainty of belief. It's about trusting in the promises of God, in the hope that faith brings and in the message that has resonated so powerfully with us.

Claiming our unknowing and uncertainty can make our declarations of faith even more powerful, because they represent real faith — a faith that embraces all its uncertainties and steps boldly ahead, nonetheless.

*The Certainty of Uncertainty* is available from Amazon.

\*Rev. Mark Schaefer is the University Chaplain at American University (AU) in Washington, D.C. and Director of AU's Kay Spiritual Life Center.

# Discipleship Academy begins connecting

BY ERIK ALSGAARD  
UMConnection Staff

*“Look, new things have arrived!” –  
2 Corinthians 5:17b*

**M**INISTRY AT THE Annual Conference level is now being organized in a way that creatively matches people’s gifts with the work they’re called to do. The outcome, BWC leadership said, will be striking.

More than 60 people gathered Sept. 8 at the BWC Mission Center to start this “something new” as the Discipleship Academy started.

The old model of doing ministry wasn’t working, said Christie Latona, Director of Connectional Ministry for the BWC.

Over the past few months, five “tables” were formed, leaders elected, and new paths of ministry charted. The five tables are: Leadership Development, New Faith Expressions, Young People’s Ministry, Abundant Health, and Advocacy and Action. This new structure will be tested between now and next year’s Annual Conference Session, where final recommendations will be put to a vote.

The Discipleship Agency concept is one designed to better connect the BWC’s mission, work, and ministry, said Latona.

“This is a way of connecting people in both the culture that we’re



**Members of the Discipleship Academy gather Sept. 8 at the BWC Mission Center to begin their work of connecting people in ministry.**

seeking to create, the framework we’re seeking to live into and explore, and hopefully it will help us gain momentum,” she said.

“Every person in this room is God’s gift for something that’s new and unique and powerful and wonderful and undiscovered, that we’re going to put our hands around,” said the Rev. Rodney Smothers, Director of Leadership and Congregational Development for the BWC as he introduced the “why” of the Academy.

“We really do need an army of skilled servant workers,” said Smothers. “We don’t need committee members; we need skilled servant workers.”

This new culture, Latona said, is inspired from Ephesians 4 and is one of shifting from isolation to

coordination. “It’s shifting from the fits and starts into a sustained effort towards something that we understand is ours to get together. I think that that’s a huge shift that a lot of people aren’t aware is actually needed.”

Ephesians 4, Latona said, at the beginning talks about disciples being on the same road, in the same direction, moving rhythmically and easily together. To do this, she added, requires deep spiritual leaders, permeated with one-ness.

“That’s a requirement,” she said, “because you can’t be quick at mending fences if that’s not there, and you can’t subordinate your own desires and your own goals... it’s very hard to subordinate that if you’re not rooted in Christ.”

Latona is very excited about

this new start, confessing that she couldn’t sleep the night before the meeting.

“I’m excited that we have way more young people around these tables,” she said. “There’s very intentional diversity of perspectives and types of churches that are here.”

There’s also a few of the “usual suspects,” she said, but they, too, are excited to do this new thing.

The new Discipleship Academy will meet quarterly, helping to organize the work of ministry for the conference.

Leaders elected at the meeting include:

Abundant Health: Heath Wilson (Chair); Jane Grays (Vice Chair)

Advocacy and Action: Thomas Contee (Chair); Kate Nash (Vice Chair); Shannon Sullivan (Secretary)

Leadership Development: Nona Colbert (Chair)

New Faith Expressions: Karin Walker (Chair); Bill Brown, Interim Director of New Faith Expressions

Young People’s Ministry: Shemaiah Strickland (Chair); Jack Arnold (Vice); Christie Hoffman (Secretary); Chiara Blair (Secretary).

People interested offering their gifts, time and talents to the BWC’s Discipleship Academy need to go online first and fill out an interest form: <https://arenaweb.bwccumc.org/default.aspx?page=3660>

## Starting a ‘new old’ faith expression

BY MELISSA LAUBER  
UMConnection Staff

**W**HAT IS GOD doing, how is the Holy Spirit moving and how can we be a part of that?

Those questions enliven Audrey Hill, a lay woman from Mt. Gregory UMC in Glenwood. They even keep her up some nights. Today, she has more than 50 other lay and clergy people in the Central Maryland District asking the same things.

The answers they’re discovering may transform the way they think about, and do, church.

It has already sparked a handful of clergy to begin exploring how they can resurrect practices from early Methodism, like circuit riding, to shape their leadership. It also drew the modern-day architect of Wesleyan covenant discipleship groups, the Rev. David Lowes Watson, to travel from Nashville to Mt. Airy to participate in the conversation.

This awakening to the Spirit’s call for renewal all started last December when Bishop LaTrelle Easterling held a listening session on the Central Maryland District. Several small churches expressed concerns and the bishop challenged them to step out of a “bystander” mentality and begin to pray and take action in mission and ministry.

Hill heard that call. She stepped up to the microphone and called on the laity of small churches to get together, support one another, and address the concerns of their hearts.

They met last February and have met every other month since then,

raising concerns as diverse as youth groups, data bases and forms, and church security.

Hill told the Rev. Phil Ayers of Howard Chapel-Ridgeville UMC in Mt. Airy about the group. He began to join them and invited other clergy to join the conversation.

Ayers began talking about some of Hill’s ideas with the Revs. Sung Hwan “Steven” Cho of Zion UMC in Westminster, and Alice Ford of Glenelg UMC.

Ford is close friends with Lowes Watson. When she told him about the small church conversation, he became excited about the grassroots, spirit-led dimensions of what seemed to be unfolding in Central Maryland and responded enthusiastically to an invitation to address the laity when they gathered Sept. 14.

Influenced by many of the principles and practices of early Methodism, the clergy trio began brainstorming about the strengths of the circuit-riding pastors in colonial times.

Circuit riders preached the Gospel on the frontiers, where it hadn’t yet taken root, and the laity served as class leaders and were responsible for keeping established churches alive and thriving in discipleship, Lowes Watson explained.

Modern-day circuit riders could have a number of geographically connected churches and share pastors and lay people – with everyone focusing on their gifts and best skills. In addition, circuits would create opportunities for sharing programs and mission opportunities.



**Audrey Hill leads laity and clergy from the Central Maryland District in song as they meet to consider discipleship in small churches.**

“Are there ways for clergy to come together today to serve the circuit as teams of clergy?” Ayers asked.

Classes, or small accountability groups, were at the heart of early Methodism, Lowes Watson said. “The flagship of United Methodism are the small membership churches. Small churches are not the burden. They’re our base.”

However, what is too frequently missing, he continued, is “strong lay pastoral leadership, the laity sharing their gifts and graces in meaningful, regenerative ways. That’s a big part of what’s missing from our churches today,” he said, “and it’s crucial.”

Ford suggested that it may be time to “lean into the strengths of our laity. What is the Holy Spirit doing in our small churches and how do we align ourselves with that work?” she asked.

In the Sept. 14 meeting, those

present stressed that adopting these principles of early Methodism would enable congregations to be invitational, connectional and collegial. “No church is an island,” those gathered said. “We need each other.”

Lowes Watson and others marveled at the fact that the churches discussing these changes were the spiritual ancestors of those who served on Methodism’s very first circuit, which carried Bishop Francis Asbury from Baltimore to Frederick, and was rooted in the power of Robert and Elizabeth Strawbridge and other strong lay people.

What’s old is new again, they said. “We’re starting a new old faith expression.”

Hill agreed. “Even these threads of conversation,” she said, “are Spirit-led.”