

'FOR THE LORD GOD IS A SUN AND SHIELD' – PSALM 84:11



UM+Connection

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Baltimore-Washington Conference Bishop Marcus Matthews, left, his wife, Barbara (hidden behind the bishop), and the Rev. Maidstone Mulenga, the bishop's assistant, greet women from Hilltop UMC in Zimbabwe during a trip in July to deepen the partnership between the annual conferences.

BWC and Zimbabwe partners adopt a spirit of safari

BY MELISSA LAUBER
UMConnection Staff

IN ZIMBABWE YOU see a different set of stars than the ones that shine above the Baltimore-Washington Conference. In Zimbabwe the average salary of a pastor is \$300 a month; the minimum annual salary and housing allowance of BWC pastors is \$59,262. In Zimbabwe, the church is growing; in the Baltimore-Washington Conference, membership and worship are in decline.

More than an ocean separates United Methodists on the two continents. But from July 12 through July 24, a diverse team of 33 people journeyed to Zimbabwe to deepen the partnership of the Baltimore-Washington Conference and the Zimbabwe Episcopal Area and unite in common ministries.

Encountering God in the faces

The focus of the group was a Pastors' School at Africa University and a mission experience helping to build the sanctuary of Gwese UMC. However, it was often in the unplanned moments when the deepest connections were made.

For Bishop Marcus Matthews, episcopal leader of the Baltimore-Washington Conference, it was looking at the faces of the students who gathered for Sunday School at Hilltop UMC in Sokubva, one of the poorest neighborhoods in Africa. Some of the living conditions startle the soul and "you're aware of the overwhelming poverty. But there is so much more," he said.

For Matthews, and many of the members of the BWC team, spending time playing with children, at Hilltop and with two United Methodist-sponsored program for orphans, felt like an encounter with the living God.

But it was also a prompting to assist these children in overcoming obstacles and reaching the full potential God has in store for each of them, the bishop said.

For Matthews, whose ministry emphasizes education, living in the fullness of God often involves learning. As the vice chairperson of the Board of Directors for Africa University, he was excited about the potential the Pastors' School has to ripple throughout churches and communities, shaping the life of a nation.

Pastors' School offers learning, challenges

Every other year, leaders from the Baltimore-Washington Conference participate in the Pastors' School, which draws Zimbabwe's 425 clergy together for a time of learning, worship and fellowship at Africa University in Old Mutare.

See Zimbabwe, page 4

Working to make peace in Cyprus, one teen at a time

BY ERIK ALSGAARD
UMConnection Staff

IT MIGHT NOT seem strange to see two 17-year old girls playing and swimming together at a pool party. This sort of thing happens all the time in summer.

But it is an extremely unusual sight if you know the history of separation between these two girls – Dize Kibrisli and Meropi Zymaridi – and that they are from opposite sides of Cyprus. In knowing their history, you come to appreciate what is really going on in

cool waters on a scorching July day in the gently rolling hills of Potomac, Maryland.

Meet "pool diplomacy."

The island nation of Cyprus is a country divided. Since 1974, Cypriots have been forced to live apart, needing passports to visit sections deemed off-limits by one side or the other.

Northern Cyprus is an area controlled by Turkey and predominantly Muslim.

See Cyprus, page 3

Rodriguez brings passion to area Hispanic Ministry

BY ERIK ALSGAARD
UMConnection Staff

EXCITACIÓN IS SPANISH for "excitement." It's an emotion that naturally bubbles forth from the Rev. Leo Rodriguez as he begins his ministry in the Baltimore-Washington Conference.

"We're going out to the community, learning from the people on the street," he said in his office, peppering his words with hands pointing this way and that. "We're going to work with them, not for them. We're going to help people be the

protagonist in their own redemption."

Rodriguez is talking about a new energy for Hispanic and Latino ministries in the Baltimore-Washington Conference, and his new position as coordinator of this area.

"The best way I can tell you about my new position," he said, "is to show you a picture."

Rodriguez produces a Smartphone and pulls up a photograph. The image

See Latino, page 8

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

By MANDY SAYERS
Pastor, Covenant UMC, Gaithersburg

THE WORD “AWESOME” used to be reserved for truly breathtaking things: the Grand Canyon, the view of Earth from the Moon, and, of course, our “Awesome God.”

Now anything and everything is awesome. We are losing our ability to be truly awed by much at all. In a flat screen, IMAX, Pixar world, awe feels almost quaint; a feeling for folks who don’t know any better.

Still, there are moments where we feel true awe directed at God, when we get just a whiff of incense, or hear echoes of the “Holy, holy, holy” of the angels. The stillness of a summer night in the mountains or a beach sunset can point to the transcendence of an awesome God. Sometimes, in moments of service to others, we see in a breathless moment how much God really loves, and how seriously God takes that love.

Sometimes, on a normal benign Sunday, the Eighty-Sixty-First Sunday after Pentecost, in Ordinary Time, the Holy Spirit sneaks in through the walls, tucked in unsuspecting bulletins. We feel a strange sensation in our knees, right in the middle of a praise song or an old familiar hymn. We feel the wobbly need to kneel before the one who made us.

The prayer concerns sound different somehow. We look in someone’s eyes during Eucharist and our eyes start to water. We feel the rough cloth of Jesus’ garment and we know that the kingdom of God is at hand, despite appearances to the contrary.

In venerable, majestic old August, may God surprise us enough to unleash awe, driving us to our knees and then pulling us close to God’s heart.

But be warned. “Awe” can unsettle a person. An awe-filled August could change a church’s September, and make a church grow into being the Church. I picture God turning to St. Peter and gesturing down to these unsettled, inspired, determined folks and saying, “See that? That’s awesome!”



what does “Awe” mean to you?
“chitchat” with us on
getUMSocial.com

... well said
(a chance to express what that word means to you.)

By DARYL WILLIAMS
Pastor, Nottingham Myers UMC, Upper Marlboro

HAVE YOU EVER known that you were in the presence of God?

There is something spectacular about knowing that we are so close to the Almighty that makes us feel different. We can find it in many places. Some of us find ourselves in the presence of God when walking through nature noticing the beauty of creation. Others of us feel the presence of God while spending time reading the Word of God and knowing that God is speaking to us. Yet others of us feel the presence of God while spending time in worship enjoying praise, preaching and the fellowship of the saints.

No matter where you find God you know the feeling that it gives you. For me, I know I am in the presence of God when I feel awe.

When I am in the presence of God I feel the strange mix of dread, admiration and wonder that, when combined, can only be described as awe.

When I am in the presence of God I feel dread. Like Isaiah, being in the presence of God reminds me of all that I am not. I am reminded that I am no more than a sinner that lives among sinful people in the presence of a perfect God.

I also feel admiration when God is near. I am reminded of the greatness and power of God when I feel God near, knowing that God is the great I Am.

Finally, I feel wonder when in God’s presence. I wonder what God desires of me, and what I can do to fulfill God’s plan. In short, when God is near, I feel awe.

I invite you to join me in the feeling of awe. The next time you feel the presence of God, take a minute to feel the dread of knowing your imperfections in the site of a perfect God. The next time you feel God, take some time to admire the handiwork of God, knowing God is the creator of all things. Finally, take some time to wonder; to know that you don’t know and wonder what God will do next. In short, the next time God is near, take some time to stand in awe of the awesomeness of God.

... well said

EVENTS

Oasis: A Young Adult Gathering
Aug. 15-18
Mt. Vernon Place UMC and Wesley Seminary, Washington, D.C.
A gathering of young adults from the Northeastern Jurisdiction. Learn more at <http://resgenumc.org/theoasis>.

50th Anniversary of the March on Washington
Saturday, Aug. 24
Commemorate the 50th anniversary of the 1963 March on Washington for jobs and justice. Asbury UMC and several other United Methodist sites in the city will provide hospitality. The Methodist Federation for Social Action office, at 212 East Capitol St., will be open 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. to provide water, bathrooms and a place to put bags. For more information, visit <http://officialmlkdream50.com>.

Planned Giving School
Sept. 9-10
Simpson UMC, Wilmington, Del.
The Mid-Atlantic UM Foundation will host a two-day seminar for training on initiating, managing and marketing planned giving programs. Visit <https://www.epaumc.org/calendar/events/2013-planned-giving-school>.

Church administrators workshop
Wednesday, Sept. 11, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.
BWC Mission Center, Fulton
Explore the power of spiritual development and meditation with the Rev. Kendrick Weaver. Cost is \$25.

BMCR's State of the Black Church
Sept. 13-14
McKendree-Simms-Brookland UMC Washington, D.C.
Black Methodists for Church Renewal will hold their 2013 State of the Black Church event beginning Friday, Sept. 13, with worship and a jazz concert. The conversation will be held Sept. 14 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. For more information, contact dredscott@gmail.com.

Encounter Youth Festival
September 13-15
Manidokan Camp and Retreat Center
An annual weekend festival for youth featuring Stellar Kart and the Wayne Kerr Band. Learn more and register at www.encounterfestival.com/encounter/index.html.

The Longevity Revolution
Oct. 24
Asbury Methodist Village Gaithersburg
The conference Older Adult Ministries Task Force will host a workshop on ministries with Boomers and Beyond. Online registration is \$35. Visit www.bwcumc.org/OlderAdults.

Clarification
In a story on Bishop Philip William Otterbein in the July UMConnection, we incorrectly called the bishop “Philip” in a cutline. In truth, Otterbein never liked the name Philip and never used it. Even his family called him “William.” We encourage you to join in the celebration of his life at Old Otterbein UMC in Baltimore Nov. 17.

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Cyprus: Peace will be solved by these youth, pastor says

From page 1

Southern Cyprus is controlled by Greece and is predominantly Christian. In between, the United Nations patrols a border, keeping an uneasy peace.

Depending on whom you ask, Turkey either invaded the north in 1974 following a military coup, or it came to the rescue of its people. Either way, prejudice runs deep. Children learn early and often to foster hatred and anger against the “others.”

The Cyprus Friendship Program (CFP) is hoping to change that, one child at a time. Breaking down those barriers – both real and imagined – is the goal of CFP, which pairs teenagers between 15 and 17 years old from the north and the south with the goal of forming relationships that will build peace.

“We went to a pool party and met lots of people I didn’t know before,” said Kibrisli. “It was a chance to get closer to people.”

Kibrisli, who is from the north, said that she wants to make peace in her home country. “We don’t have a chance to meet many southern people,” she said. “I have very few relationships with anyone in the south. I need a passport just to visit areas of my own country.”

Zymaridi, who is from the south and paired with Kibrisli this summer, said that many of her best friends back home had doubts about her doing CFP. “Both sides blame the other” for what has happened, she said.

Don and Sarah Fish are host parents in the program, and both are members at Potomac UMC, which is a partner with CFP. They both see hosting as part of their peace-making work.

“It’s important to see that the kids enjoy the same thing,” said Don. “It helps break down the stereotypes.”

“In the church, we often sing ‘Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me,’” said Sarah Fish. “After

being involved with CFP, that song now has a new impact on me.”

Sarah said that doing peace work can often be difficult, but that by hosting two students from Cyprus for two weeks, she is doing her part.

Kim Belvin, another host parent, would agree. This is her third year serving as a host family. The CFP has all the advantages of a short-time exchange program, she said, noting that by being a host family she feels she’s helping to promote peace and reconciliation in the world.

For Belvin, one eye-opening moment came when she realized that many of the teens in the CFP had not informed friends back home of what they were doing in the United States. The teens, she added, were afraid of the peer pressure – of being shunned.

“Peace will be solved by these youth in these countries,” Sarah Fish said. “Not so much by the politicians, not so much by the government or the military. But by these youth, as they grow up, as they recognize and become aware of one another.”

“It’s really not that tough” being a host family, said Don Fish. “We open our house and let them be part of the family for two weeks. In the difficult world of peace-making, this is kind of easy.”

The kids, he said, “take all the risk.”

“They are stepping out of their comfort zones and choosing to see the enemy as friend. The results of their actions could be isolation, both personally and from their friends,” said the Rev. Ann Laprade, pastor at Potomac UMC. “The teens involved in CFP show great courage.”

However, Laprade said, they also understand what’s at stake.

“They get it,” she said, “and that’s exciting to watch. They’re articulate, they see the need, and they see the

practical side of building peace. War is such a waste. It’s in everybody’s best interest to build peace.”

Laprade said that the program doesn’t stop with the four-weeks in Maryland; peace-making and risk-taking continue once they return home.

“We support them in their risk-taking,” she said. “We come along side them.”

CFP provides plenty of opportunity for the teens to meet and become aware of each other. From social outings like pool parties, to classroom sessions at the Potomac UMC, to speaking in front of local civic groups, to living together with host families, these Cypriot teens are changed individuals when their four-week visit to the United States is done.

Two short videos to explain the Cyprus Friendship Program are available to use in worship, Sunday school, or small-group settings.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z8rSmOKgY_4 -- This 2009 video is only 3 minutes long but gives a good overview of the program. It was made by the US State Department.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=egcMoFnj2YA> -- This 2010 video is about 8 minutes long, and was made in part by the teens.

Laprade said that for her congregation, where she has served for eight years, the CFP was a natural fit.

“The DNA of this church is one of reaching across divides,” she said, noting that the church’s history records events going back to Civil War days, when soldiers of both the Confederacy and the Union worshipped together. “The vision of this church was embedded by God, and my job is to make it real. We have a strong history of hospitality and sowing the seeds of peace.

“When those two meet – vision and DNA – it’s a very good thing.”

Laprade’s husband, Tom McCarthy, is the Maryland/DC Coordinator for CFP. The program operates in five locations around the United States. This year, there are 14 teens from Cyprus in Maryland. “Personally, Tom and I, we’re both committed to the same goal of making peace,” said Laprade. “This brings us together around a common issue.”

It has also been good for the church. Laprade said that not only has the church grown spiritually through being exposed to the program, but the church is developing relationships in the community and in the connection. This year, for example, Laprade said that two teens also are being hosted by families from Chevy Chase UMC.

“We have a biblical mandate, and a call from our bishop, to sow the seeds of peace,” said Laprade. “The Cyprus Friendship Program allows us to do that.”

The number of host families has doubled this year, the pastor said, and many more people have stepped up financially to support the cost of bringing teens overseas. According to the CFP brochure, it costs about \$6,000 for airfare and insurance for two teenagers to participate. The teens’ family contributes about half, with the rest made up from donations.

Is all this really worth it?

“Our hope is that Cyprus has a chance to be a place of peace-making in the Middle East,” said Laprade. “The last thing the world needs is an island where Christians and Muslims begin warfare.”

For more information on the Cyprus Friendship Project, visit <http://cyprusfriendship.org/>.



Mission u offers study, fellowship for disciple-making

By LINDA WORTHINGTON
UMConnection Staff

WITH AN AGENDA that included inspiring worship, 10 hours of study, an array of one-hour focus groups, fellowship and good food, 231 people, primarily women, gathered for “Mission u” July 26-28. Thirty-six youth were among the attendees.

Zilpha Pinkney, dean of the school, called the assembly together. “It is our intent in these three days together that we may experience a transformation,” she said. The gathering met in the Bethesda Marriott Hotel on the theme “Learning Together for the Transformation of the World.”

Sponsored by the conference United Methodist Women and the Board of Global Ministries, the opening worship included a glimpse into the character of the 12 disciples in a sermon preached by the Rev. Andrea King. Bishop Marcus Matthews, newly returned from Zimbabwe, celebrated Communion.

The studies in this Mission u, renamed from the School of Christian Mission, included “The Call: Living Sacramentally, Walking Justly,” with the Rev. Ann Laprade leading the spiritual growth sessions. She held a plenary session each of the three days, focusing on prayer, baptism and Communion. “Sacraments are a way for God to be present,” Laprade said.

Each year the school has two major studies in addition

to the spiritual growth topic covered in the plenaries, one geographic, the other an issue. The Roma of Europe was this year’s geographic area.

The Roma are “a nation without a homeland,” said Kathleen Charters, a retired Navy nurse who is a candidate for the order of Deacon, who taught one of four classes on the 10 to 12 million Roma, or gypsies, who live in Europe.

One of the “issue” classes, “Poverty,” was taught by the Rev. Mark Johnson, pastor of Mt. Olive UMC in Randallstown, with his wife the Rev. Sandi Johnson, director of Deaf Ministries for the conference.

Their classes were liberally sprinkled with Scripture stories, clearly showing “God has a preferential option for the poor,” as Mark Johnson said. He introduced three “models” of approaching poverty: poverty alleviation, where one addresses the symptoms; poverty reduction, where various programs are used such as education, job training and “welfare to work;” and poverty eradication, which gets to the issue of economic disparity.

The youth, under the leadership of Pastor Michael Parker and Minister Eleanor Colvin, studied “Welcoming the Stranger: A Youth Study on Migration,” fellowshiped together and packed school kits for children in Washington, D.C., and Baltimore.

Other teachers of the Roma study included the Revs.

Carletta Allen and Johnsie Cogman, and Cynthia Taylor. A class on poverty was also taught by the Rev. Ron Triplett.

During a variety of activities Saturday, the conference’s deaconesses were recognized. Gertrude Daily was commissioned in 2011 and just returned from Germany; Shelly Owen was commissioned in 2000 and works, primarily, with people who have developmental disabilities; Carolyn Anderson was commissioned in 1979 and most recently worked as a program coordinator at Emory UMC in D.C. Soon to join their ranks, when she is commissioned next spring, will be Jane Grays.



The Revs. Andrea King, left, and Ann Laprade bow their heads as Bishop Marcus Matthews leads prayer at ‘Mission u.’

Zimbabwe: 16-year partnership bridges both sides of the ocean

From page 1

Members of the BWC team offered classes on such topics as sacraments, statistical reports, community development, Sunday School and retirement.



Annapolis District Superintendent, the Rev. Evan Young, preaches on ‘fanning the flame’ at Pastors’ School in Zimbabwe.

During one session, youth and young adults from the Baltimore-Washington Conference commanded the energy and attention of the clergy, challenging them to begin to embrace young people as relevant, enthusiastic, authentic and loving members, and as leaders of their churches.

Jordan Warner and Joia Daniels, 24-year-olds from Emory Fellowship UMC in Washington, unpacked the story in Acts 20 of Eutychus who was “preached to death” by the apostle Paul.

“As Christians, we’re responsible for the spiritual death of our young people. As Christians, we must take responsibility for killing them and bring them back to life,” said Warner. Their unusual interpretation of this story was applauded by the Zimbabwe clergy who are just beginning to create ministries for youth and young adults.

Another workshop that drew energy from the pastors was on sacraments, taught by the Revs. Laura Easto and Cynthia Moore, district superintendents in the Baltimore Region. Some of the clergy in Zimbabwe have not had the benefit of a formal theological education and others lack training in United Methodist polity.

A common understanding of the sacraments is elusive and many pastors did not embrace the United Methodist principle of Communion being served to all, questioning whether the un-baptized, un-churched or others could participate in the sacrament.

Their presentations sparked discussion and debate.

Moore was touched when a pastor who barred people from the Communion table approached her and shared that she was going to change her practices in worship to become more welcoming.

BWC pastors also preached during the Pastors’ School. The Rev. Evan Young, superintendent of the Annapolis District, touched a particular chord with his sermon of encouragement and fanning the flame of the Gospel despite personal and societal hardships.

“The message was just powerful, contextual and relevant in assisting the pastor to respond positively to the socio-economic and political circumstances of our time. It is the word of the time,” the Rev. Togara Bobo, pastor of St. Johns Chikanga in Mutare, told the Zimbabwe church press.

“It’s critical that we be here,” said Greater Washington District Superintendent Joseph Daniels, who led the trip. “We live in a global world. The world is bigger than our country and God is much bigger than the world. Our role is discovering and responding to who God is and what God is up to.”

Daniels said he has learned a great deal about evangelism and effective small group ministries from his partners in Zimbabwe. But even more impressive to him is how the pastors “serve God with such joy. This rubs off on you,” he said. “I will take home some of that joy and hope.”

Passing bricks up a hill

The summer’s trip to Zimbabwe marked the first time that a large group of people from

the Baltimore-Washington Conference accompanied those teaching at the Pastors’ School to serve on a mission trip. Twenty-four members of the BWC team worked over two days helping to build a sanctuary at Gwese UMC, a church in the countryside more than an hour by bus outside of Mutare.

Gwese has about 300 members and 150 in worship. Created in the 1920s, the congregation worships in an open air pavilion with stone benches and a stone pulpit, said Mutare District Superintendent Daniel Chitsiku. The members worship from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. on Sunday and during the

rest of the week care for 82 orphans who live scattered throughout the village. They also operate a modest grinding mill to raise money for the orphans’ food and school fees.

While most of the people in the village have cell phones, electricity is limited and people bring the phones to a hut where there is solar energy to be charged. It’s a simple life, said the Rev. Caleb Rubando, the church’s pastor. But it can also be a bit difficult and tricky. His members respond with faith, he said. “They have zeal.”

It is that zeal that enables the church’s United Methodist Youth Fellowship to crush stones to make the sand needed to make bricks. The bricks are being used to build a one-room sanctuary on top of a nearby hillside. Money to build the church is being provided by the Baltimore-Washington Conference’s Hope Fund.

“This new structure is a dream come true,” Rubando said.



“The new church will mean new life.”

Old women and young men from the congregation worked side-by-side with the BWC team. While some in the group did plastering, most joined in a line that wound up a hillside.

“From hand-to-hand we passed the bricks,” said Angelica Stewart of Emory Fellowship UMC. “Hand-in-hand, we’re building a church. If our church connects like that brick line, we’ll get to the top.”

Amid shared songs and sweat, the bricks went up the hill, and then the group took time for worship and fellowship.

“What struck me was that with just simple pews and a pulpit they had everything they needed for worship. It was all about Jesus,” said Sharon Milton, of First UMC in Hyattsville. “They have something money can never buy. There’s a peace about Africa. It’s overwhelming, I just love it. This has been a life-changing experience.”



The Rev. Caleb Rubando, pastor of Gwese UMC, offers a word of prayer for the new sanctuary, built in part by members of the BWC.

ean, bringing joy and hope

Partnership bears fruit
“The partnership between the Zimbabwe Episcopal Area and the Baltimore-Washington Conference was forged 16 years ago by the Holy Spirit,” Daniels, who now leads the Africa Initiative Project said



changes to the leadership of the late Bishop Christopher Jokomo. “When we started the partnership, it was almost taboo to use that word. As partners, we helped to influence their educational process about the disease and today we’re privileged to see the results of it.”
In recent years, the conference has also raised \$600,000 through the Hope Fund for mission projects at churches, parsonages, schools, orphanages and clinics. Volunteers in Mission teams from throughout the conference have been active throughout Zimbabwe assisting with the Hope Fund’s projects.

With the completion of the sanctuary at Gwese and

University, which now has more than 4,000 alumni and 1,399 students in six courses of study, draws together students from 25 African nations.

AU was started 20 years ago by an action of General Conference with 40 students in old farm buildings. The university receives funding from every annual conference through apportionments and other giving.

In the recent “hard years,” that hit Zimbabwe between 2007 and 2010, hyper-inflation was at more than one million percent. “It’s hard to imagine today,” said the school’s Vice Chancellor, Fanwell Tagwira. “You would walk into a shop and price an item and then come back in two hours and the price would have gone up by five times. ... Food was hard to get and planning was impossible because money wouldn’t work anymore.

“The journey has been eventful, but God was there for us,” Tagwira concluded. “We paid our staff through food, but through it all, we never lost a day of learning, not a single day.”

“The Baltimore-Washington Conference has been involved with Africa University from the very beginning and you still are,” Salley said. “That is a God-given gift to us. We can’t say thank you enough for being the church, not only in the U.S., but in the world.”

“This is a spiritual thing for me,” said Bishop Matthews, “because every time I see the students I see the face of Christ in them. Their stories are stories that touch the heart. Many of them have lived lives that have been broken. But the university helps put them back together. This is a place of transformation – for the students and for the continent.”

The Spirit of Safari

During the opening sermon at the Pastors’ School, Bishop Eben Nhwitiwa called on all those present to adopt a “spirit of safari,” traveling on a journey of faith together with urgency, expectancy and an openness to wonder.

Adopting this safari spirit, Daniels then called on the people of Zimbabwe and the Baltimore-Washington Conference “to do new things, do transforming things and do things we never thought were possible.”



the Mutasa-Nyanga District Parsonage, the Hope Fund projects will be complete and much of the ministry efforts of the Baltimore-Washington

Conference in Zimbabwe are expected to shift to supporting Africa University.



The Revs. Raphael Koikoi and Cynthia Moore are married at the chapel at Africa University.



The dream continues

“Africa University is the ultimate connectional story. It is the church at its best,” said the Rev. Jim Salley, Associate Vice Chancellor for Institutional Advancement at the school. Africa

for the conference. It was “designed for long-term learning and spiritual blessing.”

One of the remarkable successes of this partnership has been a focus on HIV/AIDS education at Africa University and throughout the nation that has dramatically raised awareness of the causes of the disease and helped stem its spread.

“It’s one of the greatest things I’ve observed,” said Bishop Matthews, who gives credit for the dramatic



Regional ‘strategists’ offer resources for local churches

BY ERIK ALSGAARD
UMConnection Staff

IT WAS BENJAMIN Franklin who said, “Lighthouses are more helpful than churches.” Darlynn McCrae understands that sentiment. There’s a three-foot tall lighthouse next to the desk in her office. There’s a larger one next to the bookcase. There’s a photograph (or three) as well.

A lighthouse, she believes, is a fitting metaphor for the next phase of her ministry.

McCrae, a member of Ames UMC in Bel Air for the past 40 years, has come to work at the Baltimore-Washington Conference Mission Center as a resource person for the Baltimore Region, which includes the Baltimore Metropolitan and Baltimore Suburban districts.

“I think the lighthouse is appropriate,” she said. “It’s a tool to help steer, to point you in the right direction. I think that’s what I’m called to do.”

McCrae, along with six others, began a new ministry of “steering” July 1. Joining her are the Rev. Chris Owens, working in the Annapolis Southern Region (Annapolis and Washington East districts), and Christie Latona, working in the Washington Region (Central Maryland and Greater Washington districts).

In the Western Region (Cumberland-Hagerstown and Frederick Districts), four people have come on board to be a link between pastors and churches for resources and assistance. They



Darlynn McCrae



Rev. Sarah Dorrance

are: the Rev. Sarah Babylon Dorrance, who also serves as lead pastor at Taylorsville UMC (focus areas are youth ministry, evangelism, mission and leadership); the Rev. G. Edward Grove (focus areas are small membership churches, pastoral spiritual growth and one-on-one consultations); Sherie L. Koob, a certified lay minister and member of Middletown UMC (focus areas are social justice, mercy ministries, leadership development and communications); and the Rev. Barbara Suffecool, a Deacon in full connection who also serves as minister of music at Hancock UMC (focus areas are music, mission, worship, and children).



Sherie Koob

For example, he said, one church needs help right now to focus on where they go in the future. Owens is working with them to help bring about a new vision.

Another church wants to form a covenant relationship with a nearby school, heeding the call of Bishop Marcus Matthews at the 2013 Annual Conference session to do just that. Owens will work with that church on a discernment process and help facilitate a meeting between the church and the school.

“God is always at work around us,” Owens said. “We just ask and pray for God to show where God is at and then we make adjustments. We go, in ministry, in



Rev. Edward Grove



Rev. Barb Suffecool

obedience; convenient grace is already there.”

Owens said that what once was called “guiding ministry” has now changed in the conference. What once may have been perceived as “Junior D.S.es” is now more focused on networking pastors and laity to resources when they are ready to take the next step.

“I’m coming in as a colleague, as a brother in the faith,” said Owens, who most recently served as pastor at First UMC in Laurel. “I’m coming in with biblical principals seeking a definite outcome, but this is a joint venture between the Holy Spirit, me and the church.”

Latona, who also began her new position July 1, is also excited for this next stage of her life.

“I get to do what I feel called to do and sleep in my own bed,” she said. Most recently, Latona has been working as a consultant with the Path 1 team from the General Board of Discipleship, and working with annual conferences and churches in a process often referred to as “coaching.”

“I’m using all that I’ve learned and brought it to this ministry in the Washington Region,” she said. “I’m looking forward to being closer to the mission field.”

Latona said that she has a guiding Scripture for her new ministry. “What does a vibrant church look like?” she asked. “Romans 12 gives you a pretty good description.”

Latona said that she is called to help lay people, especially, come to the understanding that God is calling them, too. To that end, she hopes to be working as a strategist in the area of leadership development in the region’s churches.

“We have to reclaim the idea that disciple-making is relational,” said Latona. “You can’t start with an ideal disciple and work backwards. You need to start with a relationship and move forward into discipleship.”

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Urban and rural youth combat stereotypes

LUSBY – The UMC God Squad is a cross-cultural mission experience for youth of different backgrounds to get to know each other while working together on local mission projects. This past June, youth from Lusby spent a week living in Northeast Washington, D.C., where they were immersed in urban life. The kids worked together daily on projects that spread a positive message of hope.

In July, the exchange of culture happened again when the urban kids traveled to Southern Maryland to join in local service projects with youth of Calvert County.

Twenty-seven kids were enrolled in the four-day camp where they learned about farming, oystering, fishing and crabbing. Local businesses and non-profits partnered to host the camp.

“We all walked the steps of the Lincoln Memorial to the site of Martin Luther King’s ‘I have a dream speech,’” said the Rev. Faith Lewis, pastor at Olivet UMC in Lusby. “They put their feet together on the spot where he spoke those famous words 50 years ago this August. As I took their photo, I realized that these kids are the dream and every one of us is trying our best to live it out.”

Stereotypes about urban or rural communities are often born out of lack of opportunity to know each other, said Lewis, who created the program of cross-cultural exchange for United Methodist congregations as a way to heal the racial divisions that exist within churches. By hosting each other, Lewis said, the kids get to know what it is like to appreciate the hospitality of a stranger and the joy of sharing with others.

Churches provide life-giving water to Zimbabwe

HAMPSTEAD – Two small churches in the Baltimore Suburban District – Shiloh UMC in Carroll County, and Mt. Zion UMC in Baltimore County – recently raised more than \$4,000 in second-mile giving for water projects in Zimbabwe.

The churches’ pastor, the Rev. Denise Millett, said how the two churches raised the money can be attributed, in part, to an apron. “Grandma’s Apron,” Millett said.

“We took an old bib apron with two large pockets and sewed one pocket shut, all but a small slit,” she said. “The other pocket contained the story of ‘Grandma’s

Apron’ and a small family treat.”

The idea, she said, was that each family would share the story and the treat during a family time during the week, then insert their donation into the slotted pocket. The next Sunday, they would pass the apron to another family.

At Mt. Zion, Millett said, the missionary that the church had been supporting retired in 2012. The church had been inspired by a book telling the true story of King Peggy, a poor community in Africa that came under the rule of their first female “king.” The church voted to give 2013 mission money to the goal of buying one water filtration system for the community.

“We learned how the village was challenged by many things that we assume will always be available to us,” said Millett, “water being one of them.”

A congregational appeal brought in \$475. An all-you-can-eat soup meal was held, raising \$367. Grandma’s Apron brought in \$941. Add in a spring fashion show and an Easter pancake breakfast and soon the total reached \$2,700, said Millett.

At Shiloh, they pledged their yearly mission budget to fund the water project, along with monthly special offerings. The United Methodist Women, special donations from local businesses and generous donations from church members helped the church reach their goal and go beyond.

In other Conference news:

- Hughes UMC in Wheaton is providing bag lunches to 30 needy children in the community this summer.



Members of Hughes UMC in Wheaton prepare bag lunches.

- St. Luke’s UMC in Reisterstown is restoring their 1898 community hall, which area historians say is “a perfect example of the post-emancipation settlement pattern for African Americans.”
- Oakdale-Emory UMC in Olney celebrated 30 years of service with the Appalachian Service Project by sending 42 people to work rehabilitating homes in Logan County, W. Va.
- On June 21, the Rev. Barry Hidey blessed “The House that Bel Air Built,” the 71st home that Habitat for Humanity Susquehanna, Inc. has built since 1993.
- Grace UMC and St. John’s UMCs are exploring how they can link their two mission-centered Baltimore congregations.



Ames UMC in Bel Air has filled 16 cleaning buckets for UMCOR. They are pictured here loaded in the Rev. Jay Blake’s Jeep bound for the BWC Mission Hub at Bentley Springs.

- Members of Good Hope Union UMC in Silver Spring participated this spring in the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure in honor of Cherryl Fuches, a member who is being treated for breast cancer. Fuches said of her cancer: “I never saw this coming but God is getting me through it. I have seen the Lord! We can see God in so many ways. I have seen miracles along the way. God promised to be with us everyday. I know that he will not leave me.”

Zimbabwe stories: Life-changing begins to describe it

DONNA YOUNG
SEVERNA PARK UMC

RECENTLY RETURNED FROM a mission trip to Zimbabwe, and all I can say is that the Rev. Joe Daniels was correct when he told all of us preparing for the trip that it would be a life-changing experience.



Donna Young passes bricks up a hill to help build a sanctuary.

My first God moment occurred at Dulles airport just outside the gate as Bishop Marcus Mathews prayed for our journey. As our 33-member delegation gathered for prayer, others around us who saw our circle forming and us holding hands asked if they could join in the prayer.

We learned that we were not alone in our mission efforts. Our 33 member delegation consisted of clergy and laity, teens, young adults, middle age and seniors--truly a diverse and multigenerational group. The other passersby that joined us in our prayer circle were going to Uganda, Tanzania and Panama to build churches, visit orphanages and dig wells. My heart was so full by the end of our prayer time, as I shared with others who, like us, were about fulfilling the Great Commission.

I felt so blessed to have witnessed the collaborative efforts between the BWC and the Zimbabwe Episcopal Area to create the Pastors' School that's held every two years. One of the most moving moments of the Pastors' School events was morning devotions. A member of the assembled group would strike up a song acapella, and soon the whole room reverberated with grand harmonies and infectious, melodious and joyful praise and dance. This was another God moment for sure as I was able to take my worship experience to another level.

While on this trip I learned much about some of the tangible ways our conference is assisting Zimbabwe, particularly at Africa University.

I had an opportunity to meet with faculty, administration and several students from Africa University whose stories of dedication and perseverance truly inspired me. These conversations were another God moment.

Many of the students make tremendous sacrifices in order to go to college, leaving the familiarity of family and friends behind, sometimes not knowing how they will pay their tuition once on campus. But their plans didn't stop with graduation; once they graduated, they had plans to return to their home countries so they could work to improve the quality of life of their countrymen and women.

One of the most enduring memories I take from this trip is my time at the Gwese sanctuary, where I helped in the building of a sanctuary alongside the Gwese township residents, young and old, passing bricks up a hill, making mortar and mudding the church walls.

What I will remember the most is the enthusiasm and zeal for God that my new friends have. By the world's standards, one might say they have little, but I'd say they are much richer than many will ever be, as they are rich in spirit.

I witnessed pure worship in a way I have never seen. I was reminded that there is beauty in living simply, intentionally and purposefully, having a heart for God, a zeal for the Gospel and a love for one another, no matter one's race or nationality.

Talk about God moments! I saw the face of God in children's eyes, I felt the love of God in the warm embrace of my Zimbabwe brothers and sisters, in their expressions of gratitude for our gifts of time and service; I felt God's presence in our shared meals and worship. I experienced the love of God in our shared humanity.

A complete text of this commentary can be found at www.bwcmc.org/lifechanging.

JANE WOOD
PASTOR OF LOCUST UMC IN COLUMBIA

AMAZING, SPECTACULAR, BEAUTIFUL and humbling best describe my mission trip to Zimbabwe. It was a privilege to participate in the Joint Pastors' School at Africa University, which more than 400 pastors attended. We were honored to interact with students from Africa University who were majoring in Health Sciences, Peace, Leadership & Governance and other fields.

The worship services at King David and Hilltop United Methodist churches were exhilarating.

My VIM team went to the village at Gwese to help them complete their sanctuary. It had been a journey of four years for the village to complete Gwese UMC.



The Rev. Jane Wood at the stone pulpit of Gwese UMC.

The pastor, Caleb Rubando, worked alongside us as we formed a line to pass and/or throw bricks from the bottom of the hill to the top.

The women of Gwese taught me and other women to carry water and sand on our heads.

We prayed together, worshipped together, ate together and danced together. We met orphans at Gwese and this experience for me was heart wrenching.

I was honored to preach at Dangamvura East UMC to more than 200 men, women and children. The singing by the choirs was soul-stirring. The pastor there was the Rev. Diana Matikiti. The blessing for me was when Rev. Matikiti placed a baby girl in my arms and asked me to bless her. Oh what joy flooded my soul. My ministry and I are forever changed.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow!

JORDAN WARNER
EMORY FELLOWSHIP UMC

GO ON A safari!" implored Bishop Eben Nhiwatiwa, Bishop of the Zimbabwe Episcopal Area.

A lively and spirited preacher, Nhiwatiwa, in the opening ceremony of Pastors' School at Africa University, tasked us all, in so many words, to be open to new experiences and new people during our "safari" in Zimbabwe, all the while taking the love of Christ along the way.

What an immense, eye-opening and soul-changing experience my safari would prove to be.

In the preparation stages of my trip to Zimbabwe, I was filled with all kinds of reservations and apprehension mixed with excitement and amazement at the opportunity presented to me to serve on the continent of Africa. Here I was, a simple, 24-year old school teacher on her summer break, preparing to embark on not only my very first mission trip, but preparing to speak and present before 400-plus pastors at a Pastors' School at Africa University in Mutare, Zimbabwe, on the topic of youth and young adult ministry.

I mentioned apprehension previously and I most certainly must include outright fear in my array of emotions surrounding the trip.

The Scriptures, however, tell us to "be anxious for nothing" and, in the midst of human fear, to expect God to show up and show off mightily. I should have known all along.

From the moment our group gathered in prayer at the Dulles Airport to embark on our journey, the Spirit of the Lord was preparing our way. A foreshadowing of the work God would ultimately do in Zimbabwe and in me was underway before we even left the ground as missionary groups headed to various countries in Africa

as well as people whom we had never met, joined our prayer circle in the airport.

Once in Zimbabwe, the power and majesty that God displayed is almost too overwhelming for me to put into a coherent description. Beginning with the beautiful landscape and the welcoming spirits of the Zimbabwean people, I was stunned and humbled by the sheer beauty of the country physically and in the beauty of the spirits of the people.

I also grossly underestimated, and was nowhere near prepared for, the way in which the Holy Spirit would work through the human connection. It is one thing to donate money and material from the confines of our

'It is one thing to donate money and material... but is an entirely different and awe-inspiring experience to actually serve and physically encounter the people with whom we are in ministry thousands of miles away.'
— Jordan Warner

homes and churches, but is an entirely different and awe inspiring experience to actually serve and physically encounter the people with whom we are in ministry thousands of miles away.

Witnessing the fierce passion and dedication as hundreds of pastors across the Zimbabwe Episcopal area soaked up hours of intense teaching and information to take back to their respective congregations was nothing short of amazing.

Many had come from far and wide, enduring hours and hours of traveling to gain a greater understanding of what God had in store for their ministries. Ideas were exchanged and relationships were formed across conferences that undoubtedly will withstand distance

and time for years to come.

Perhaps the most life changing aspect of experiencing the human connection in Zimbabwe was service: assisting in the building of a new church for the people of a rural village in Mutare, playing with and listening to the stories of beautiful children at a local orphanage, and witnessing firsthand the fruits of labor planted years ago in previous mission trips to Mutare at a thriving and growing after school program were all experiences that have forever changed my outlook on service and have changed my life in general.

At the very heart of Christianity is the mandate to spread the love of Christ through service to others. Never before has this mandate become more relevant as I begin to understand and respond to all that God has shown me in Zimbabwe.

The true purpose of my living is to serve diligently. I can honestly say that I gave very little in comparison to the amount of spiritual growth and outlook expansion that I gained as a result of my Zimbabwe experience.

A "safari" we did, indeed, embark upon and I will forever carry the spirit of safari with me as I continue to grow in service through Christ.



Jordan Warner shares a snack with a child from Fairview Orphanage.

New quilt shop stitches together faith, fabric and fun

By MELISSA LAUBER
UMConnection Staff

IN A UNIQUE mixture of answered prayers and a fairytale come true, the quilt shop Prints Charming is opening in the Baltimore-Washington Conference Center building in Maple Lawn Aug. 31.

In fairy tales, the heroine's wishes come true and she almost always gets her prince. Several years ago, Sandy Royster and Debbie Albrecht, members of Glen Mar UMC, began daydreaming about pursuing their passions and opening a quilt shop.

In quilting, the fabrics quilters use come in a variety of "prints" and a "charming" is a 5-inch square. The name of their new shop, Prints Charming, was clever, but the pair says it was God, and not some fairy godmother, that brought their dream to life.

"God has been there for everything we've needed," Albrecht said.



Debbie Albrecht, left, and Sandy Royster show off some colorful fabric at their new quilt shop, Prints Charming.

Royster agreed. "God's hand was in all of this. I see God's hand in the timing, in the financing, everything," she said. "Every day, God is here."

This became especially clear when it came time to sign the loan for the funding that would allow them to move forward. Royster was nervous, but then realized while driving to the bank, that "God brought me all this way. I

realized it wasn't only about money. We believe in God's presence in this, in our lives."

With this in mind, the pair is choosing to make Prints Charming more than just a place to buy fabrics, quilting patterns and supplies, quilting-related gift items and to take quilting classes.

"We want to create a sanctuary, a safe place for women and men to come and be themselves, to share their stories, to be heard and be creative," said Albrecht, who believes quilting is a therapeutic endeavor that can help people work out stress and lower their blood pressure.

As trained Stephen Ministers, both Albrecht and Royster recognize that people feel a need to share the things that matter to them. They hope to create a setting where their customers will be comfortable, and if they wish, share the things that are important in their lives.

The shop will also have a mission component, enabling quilts to be made for children at risk, for people with cancer and those in the military.

"Imagine a child being removed from their home. They sometimes leave with only what's on their backs. We'll give them something to wrap up in," Albrecht said.

Some of the merchandise will also have a religious component. The first "block-of-the-month" project Prints Charming will offer is a quilt that illustrates the Old Testament.

A lot of area quilt shops tend to shy away from religion and spiritual themes because they don't want to offend non-religious customers, Albrecht said. But when Cokesbury Bookstore moved out of the Conference Center last spring, the pair knew that the setting could provide a retail space where faith could be an important



Part of the Old Testament quilt.

component.

The store will open with about 1,000 bolts of fabric that span the rainbow. In addition to arranging their displays, Albrecht and Royster are planning ways to create communities for women, through classes for all levels of experience and by bringing in experts to share their knowledge.

Down the road they even imagine their shop being a place where a hotel that's being built in the Maple Lawn community could offer destination quilting retreats.

There's no ending to the planning and dreaming.

The idea for Prints Charming started five years ago, in a conversation the two women shared over lunch. Both are a little amazed as they watch their dream coming true. "Every door has opened up so fast," Albrecht said. "It's scary and it's wonderful."

Splitting the work, Albrecht will focus on the store's finances and gift shop area, while continuing to work upstairs at the Conference Center in the episcopal office. Royster will manage the store on a day-to-day basis.

She's looking forward to that moment when her customers are looking at fabric and a light flashes in their eyes. It's a moment when they "see it," when they know what's possible and what they'll make. That moment spans generations and cultures. "Every quilter knows it," she said.

Recently, Royster brought her grandmother's old Singer treadle sewing machine into the shop. It's a talisman of sorts – a symbol of the past and a prompt for a new future. The two aren't entirely certain how all the pieces will be stitched together, but they know that their "happily ever after," may be just beginning.

Prints Charming, at 11711 East Market Place in Maple Lawn, is open Monday through Saturday beginning Aug. 31. Check out the store hours and other information at <http://printscharmingqs.com>.



Alison Burdett

Latino: Invisible Table one avenue for meeting need

From page 1

shows Israel Suarez loading cases of bottled water into a grocery cart. Rodriguez says that Suarez purchased 10 cases of water and then distributed them in the Hyattsville area, mainly to men sitting under trees.

In other words, temporary workers looking for a job, if any come their way.



Israel Suarez purchases water to distribute to those in need.

"We go out with bottles of water and three questions," said Rodriguez. To date — and it's only been one month, since Rodriguez started his new position July 1 — no one has refused to take a bottle.

Each bottle also contains a small yellow card, written in Spanish, asking, "¿Sediento de amor y esperanza?" ("Thirsty for love and hope?") The card proclaims that Jesus is the "water of life," and gives contact information for Suarez.

"Once they take a bottle, we ask them if they are active in a local Hispanic church. If they say 'yes,' we encourage them to keep going," said Rodriguez. "If they say 'no,' we ask them why not, and what is preventing them from going."

They also ask the person if a new Hispanic church was started, "would you and your family consider attending or knowing more about it?"

Suarez and Rodriguez are doing this exploration, as they call it, to see what needs are present in the Hispanic community, and how the Baltimore-Washington Conference can meet them. They are also going door-to-door, asking people if they have any sick relatives at home or in the hospital, any problems or needs, and asking if they could pray "right now."

"We are working with them, learning from them and loving them," said Rodriguez. "We will see what emerges."

One gift that has already emerged is from Agers Road UMC in Hyattsville. The Rev. Paul Johnson, the church's pastor, has already opened up his church so that Suarez

Learn more about Hispanic Ministries

The Rev. Leo Rodriguez, new Coordinator of Hispanic and Latino Ministries for the Baltimore-Washington Conference, will be holding a "bootcamp" May 7-8, 2014, where English-speaking churches can learn how to better reach out to their Hispanic and Latino brothers and sisters. The training, said Rodriguez, will be intense. For more information, contact Rodriguez at lrodriguez@bwcumc.org.

and Rodriguez can use their facilities to meet with people, use their restrooms and use their kitchen for making coffee.

"Because," said Rodriguez, "after the water comes coffee and donuts."

All of this is part of a strategy that Rodriguez calls "The Invisible Table." That is, people are being invited to a community – to a feast – without actually seeing anything physical.

The needs are great, he said, from learning English to finding assistance with education and jobs.

"It's another planet," he said with a smile, "but it's a good one."

Rodriguez comes to the Baltimore-Washington Conference with a rich background in Hispanic and Latino ministry. A native of Puerto Rico — "where I was born, and born again," he said, his parents separated at a young age. It was the local Methodist Church that hugged him and loved him during that difficult time.

Rodriguez and his wife, Carmen, have been in ministry together for more than 25 years, serving in Chicago, Boston, the mountains of Puerto Rico and, most recently,

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A copy of the card given out with each bottle of water.

Florida, where they started a congregation in Poinciana.

Hispanics currently comprise less than one percent of all members in the Baltimore-Washington Conference, Rodriguez said. But that, for him, means opportunity. Just in the Hyattsville area, he said, there are 76,000 Hispanics, and more than 230,000 within a 10-mile radius of Ager Road UMC.

"We have 19 nationalities of Hispanics and Latinos in our conference," he said, "and I have intentionally worked with all of them at one time or another. One thing I know about these people: they love God, they are family-oriented, and they know that life is a fiesta."

Armed with that knowledge, and led by the Holy Spirit, Rodriguez is already fast at work on the goal of integrating more Hispanics and Latinos into the life of the church.

"My hope is that we can strengthen the churches we already have," he said, "but to also create a DNA where we can begin a different kind of Hispanic church, where they can be self-sustainable. This, in turn, will revitalize the whole church in general."