



UMC*Connection*

Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church • Equipping Disciples to Transform the World • www.bwcumc.org • Volume 24, Issue 11 • December 11, 2013

Bishop offers Christmas greeting of joy and hope

IN THIS ISSUE

The Word is 'Presence'.....	p. 2
Recalling a Historic Sermon	p. 3
In Praise of Otterbein.....	p. 3
A Global Deaf Witness.....	p. 4
Clergy Gather for Day Apart	p. 4
Bishop Reflects on Journey	p. 5
Viewpoints: How Do We Move Forward?	p. 7
Dodging Malaria.....	p. 8
Reflecting on Advent.....	p. 8

God's Purpose was Love



"She will give birth to a Son and you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins."
— Matthew 1:21

In this season, we gather across the Baltimore-Washington Conference to welcome the Christ child's birth.
We know that his destiny was the cross;
We rejoice that his purpose was love; and
We live, certain beyond a shadow of doubt,
that it was for you and me.

Chook Sung Taan • Feliz Navidad • S Rozhdzestvom Khristouym • Schastlivogo Rozhdestva • Mwe neKisimusi inofadza • Merry Krismas • Merry Christmas!

Pastor suspended for same-gender wedding

BY ERIK ALSGAARD
UMC*Connection* Staff

THE REV. FRANK Schaefer, the United Methodist pastor found guilty Nov. 18 of disobeying church teaching on same-gender unions, has until Dec. 19 to decide if he is able to uphold The United Methodist Church's Book of Discipline "in its entirety" or surrender his credentials.

The all-clergy jury, which found Schaefer, pastor of Zion UMC in Lebanon, Pa., guilty of performing the

same-gender wedding for his son Tim in 2007, and disobedience to the order and discipline of the United Methodist Church, said that if Schaefer violates any of the provisions of the Discipline during that 30-day period, he will immediately be asked to surrender his credentials.

During the 30-day period, Schaefer is to engage in reflection about his calling to the LGBTQ community. If he determines at the end of that period that he cannot uphold the Book of Discipline in whole, he is to turn in his credentials, thus removing himself from the pastoral office.

Schaefer's district superintendent, the Rev. James Todd, will be responsible for supervising the implementation of the verdict. At the end of the 30-day period, Schaefer is to meet with the Eastern Pennsylvania Annual Conference Board of Ordained Ministry to report on the results of his period of discernment.

The counsel for the church, the Rev. Christopher Fisher, said that he believed the penalty to be "gracious" because it places the responsibility of determining the outcome ultimately upon Schaefer.

See Trial, page 5

... well said

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

BY MANDY SAYERS
Pastor, Covenant UMC, Gaithersburg

THIS TIME OF year, there is a longing for times and places and people gone by, and I find that buying “stuff” gets less and less satisfying. There is a longing within each of us for something money can’t buy, and we can’t arrange for ourselves, even though we try.

The story of Christmas is that, when we couldn’t save ourselves, God gave us what we could not “get” for ourselves. God sent Jesus to be God-With-Us. Not presents – but Presence.

Presence - a sense of Christ’s coming - is what we long for this Advent and Christmas. We yearn for an encounter at the manger to call our own, and an in-breaking of wonder and awe at Incarnation even in an era of cynicism and pain.

It isn’t anything we can buy at the store, and it’s not even a longing for days gone by. It is a longing for a glimpse of the Star in the East, a need to feel the rough wood of the manger, a need for a new inbreaking of God’s surprising Presence.

The birth of Christ happened a long time ago and nothing has been the same since, but every year people long for an experience of this birth for ourselves, a new birth of Christ in our hearts, and the wide-eyed recognition, in 2013, of God made flesh in a vulnerable blue-collar baby.

The Presence that was and is and is to come means that what looks to us like a dead end may not be the end at all. If, as Carl Sandburg once said, “A baby is God’s opinion that the world should go on,” then perhaps the Christ child is God’s opinion that the world is not left to its own devices, that Caesars don’t carry the day, and that the hole in us that only God can fill is no longer of an uncertain shape. It is the shape of this baby, the shape of the cross, the shape of a stone rolled away.

May we experience anew the wonder of God’s in-breaking into our Christmas-as-usual, with a real hope, a real joy, and a real Savior.

... well said



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

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, New Hope Fellowship UMC, Upper Marlboro

I ALWAYS LOVED CHRISTMAS morning as a child. There was no sleeping in for me. As soon as my little eyes popped open I was up and at ‘em. I wanted to get the day going and get on with it. After all, I had been good all year, or at least the last two weeks or so when it really counted, so I knew how this was supposed to turn out.

I knew that my name was not on the naughty list so I knew that Christmas Day was going to be really, really, big for me. So every year, I knew that I was going to get a great reward for all of my being good, and there it was – presents everywhere. It was awesome, but looking back it was not because of the presents, it was the presence that mattered.

Looking back I can tell you that I don’t remember most of the presents that I got for Christmas. I also don’t remember which presents I did not get on Christmas that at one time I may have thought was the end of the world.

What I remember is the presence of Christmas. I remember the joy I felt of having my mom and dad with me all day as we just enjoyed each other. I remember family and friends stopping by, and going out to visit them throughout the holiday season and just enjoying their company. It was not the presents, but the presence.

If we are not careful the world will try to convince us that presents matter more. There will be commercials, songs and advertisements trying to get us to spend, spend, spend. The logic being the more we spend the better we will feel.

The only thing you really need to spend this season is time, giving your presence. Be there with your family and friends. Be there with your children. The presents don’t really matter, your presence does. There is nothing you can buy that does as much as just being there.

Remember, this all started when our Heavenly Father decided to come and give us the present of his presence by dwelling among us. So this year let God’s presence be with you and let your presence be with those you love.

... well said

EVENTS

Black Methodists for Church Renewal celebration

Friday, Dec. 13, 6 to 9 p.m.
Queen’s Chapel UMC, Beltsville

BMCR annual meeting, “Soul CHRISTmas Celebration,” with Pastor Rudy Rasmus, author and humanitarian from Houston, in conjunction with the Northeastern Jurisdiction BMCR. For information, contact Rev. Dred Scott at 443-629-8772 or dredsconfig@gmail.com; for registration, contact, Darlynn McCrae, 443-254-2083 or darmccrae@aol.com.

Volunteers in Mission training

Saturday, Jan. 18, 9:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.
Conference Mission Center.

Register online from the United Methodist Volunteers in Mission (UMVIM) Leadership Training Seminar. Cost is \$15. For more informatin, contact BWC VIM Coordinator, Dennis Schulze at dschulze423@comcast.net or 443-324-7861, or Nancy McCarthy at nmccarthy@bwcumc.org.

ROCK 2014

Friday, Jan. 31 through Sunday, Feb. 2
Convention Center, Ocean City

Got Love? More than 6,000 youth and their leaders will explore that theme at the ROCK reterat with speaker Preston Centuolo and music by Mandissa and Unsearchable Riches. Learn more at www.bwcumc.org/rock.

Leadership Days:

Washington Region
Saturday, Jan. 25, 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Blake High School, Silver Spring
Enthusiastic Leadership will be the focus of this vibrant training event. In addition to a morning plenary, participants will enroll in two 90-minute workshops or one 180-minute track. Online registration, which is due before Jan. 8, is \$35. For a complete event guide, visit www.bwcumc.org/leadershipdays2014/washingtonregion.

Western Region
Saturday, Jan. 25, 9 a.m. to 12:15 p.m.
Otterbein UMC, Hagerstown
Participants can choose between 14 workshops to help them grow as church leaders. Online registration, due Jan. 15, is \$20; registration by paper is \$30. For more information, visit www.bwcumc.org/leadershipdays2014/westregion.

Baltimore Region
Saturday, Jan. 18, 9 a.m. to 3p.m.
at Pleasant Hill UMC; and
Saturday, Jan. 25 from 9a.m. to 3 p.m.
Towson UMC in Towson

Correction:

In the Rev. Hal Recinos’ column in the Nov. 13 UMConnection, Dr. Paul Rothman was misidentified. He is the dean of Johns Hopkins Medical School, not at Southern Methodist University.

<https://www.facebook.com/BWCUMC>

<https://twitter.com/bwcumc>

UMConnection

Bishop Marcus Matthews	Resident Bishop
Melissa Lauber	Director of Communications
Erik Alsgaard	Managing Editor
Maidstone Mulenga	Assistant to the Bishop
Alison Burdett	Graphic Designer
Linda Worthington	Communications Associate
Harrison Zepp	Webmaster
Kayla Spears	Communications Associate

UMConnection is the newspaper of the Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church, whose vision is to seek to become like Christ as we call, equip, send and support spiritual leaders to make and cultivate disciples, grow vital congregations and transform the world.

The UMConnection (ISSN 005386) is owned and published by the Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church, 11711 East Market Place, Fulton, MD 20759-2594. Telephone: (410) 309-3400 • (800) 492-2525 • fax: (410) 309-9794 • e-mail: milauber@bwcumc.org. Subscriptions are \$15 per year. The UMConnection is published monthly. To subscribe, email kspears@bwcumc.org. Postmaster: Send address changes to: UMConnection, 11711 East Market Place, Fulton, MD 20759-2594.

Pastor calls on the power of the pulpit after JFK assassination

By SAM HODGES
United Methodist News Service

MANY, IF NOT most, sermons fade from memory by Sunday lunch, but people in Dallas still talk about one the Rev. William Holmes gave there 50 years ago, just after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

While he didn't blame Dallas for the crime itself, Holmes unflinchingly described the city as an incubator for political extremism and incivility, the kind of place where many worried an assassination might occur.

The sermon made the CBS News anchored by Walter Cronkite and brought the young Methodist pastor death threats, forcing him and his family to go into hiding under police protection.

In short, all hell broke loose because of the tough love Holmes preached in Dallas two days after Kennedy's killing there in November 1963.

Holmes is 84 now, retired in Maryland after a long, accomplished ministry career. He's hard of hearing and walks with a cane; but he's written books in recent years, and for the 50th anniversary of the JFK assassination he updated an 8,000-word memoir of the sermon controversy that he wrote for his grandchildren.

"It's always been an important memory for me," he said.

Others, such as historian Stephen Fagin, call what happened with Holmes one of the more emotional and compelling subplots of the frenzied assassination aftermath.

"Dallas was blamed by many after the assassination for being a toxic environment, and Rev. Holmes really hit on that in his sermon," said Fagin, associate curator of Dallas' Sixth Floor Museum, which commemorates the JFK assassination story. "The fact that it achieved international notoriety ... is something Holmes clearly didn't ask for."

On Nov. 22, 1963, Holmes, then 32, and his wife, Nancy, had joined the crowd at the Dallas Trade Mart, awaiting a luncheon with President Kennedy and the First Lady, Jacqueline Kennedy.

His joyful expectation turned to shock when they learned Kennedy had been shot as his motorcade passed through downtown Dallas. Driving home, they heard by radio bulletin that Kennedy had died at Parkland Hospital.

That same afternoon Holmes began working on the sermon he would give on Sunday, Nov. 24, at Northaven Methodist Church in the Dallas suburbs.

In his 14-minute sermon, titled "One Thing Worse Than This," he argued that Dallas couldn't wash its hands, Pontius Pilate-like, of the tragedy that had occurred in its midst. Good people of Dallas had for too long, he said, stood by silently, giving free reign to political extremists.

His indictment culminated with Holmes describing how children in a fourth-grade classroom in North Dallas

had cheered the news of Kennedy's assassination.

"In the name of God, what kind of city have we become?" he said.

Holmes devoted the balance of the sermon to challenging Dallas residents to stand up to extremists, on the right and left, and create a more wholesome atmosphere for politics and governing.

"If Dallas rises from this monstrous moment in her history, a new city where different political opinions and the people who hold them are respected, then John Kennedy will not have died in vain," Holmes said. "But that remains to be seen. Until then, the one thing worse than this assassination in our midst, is that we, the citizens of Dallas, should wash our hands and say, 'We



The Rev. William Holmes is shown in this archive photo.

take no responsibility for this man's death."

Holmes was hardly the only Dallas preacher to hold up a mirror to the city that Sunday. Given that he was a young pastor in a small church, his sermon might well have had no life beyond his congregation.

But CBS television had aired a post-assassination report featuring Dallas officials who offered an upbeat, Chamber of Commerce assessment of the city. The network got complaints that the report was a whitewash and went looking for a balancing view from within Dallas.

On Tuesday evening, the network broadcast included Holmes reading a lengthy portion of the sermon,

including the part about the cheering schoolchildren.

The New York Times covered the death threats against Holmes and noted other reports of local children cheering at news of the assassination. Meanwhile, Holmes received strong backing from most in his congregation, as well as public statements of support from the Perkins faculty and "The Dirty Dozen," a study group of young, somewhat rebellious Methodist pastors to which he belonged.

Hundreds of letters, hostile or supportive, arrived and are now collected at the Sixth Floor Museum. Encouraging notes came from former classmates Paul Tillich as well as from Hugh Brannun, a Methodist minister's son better known as "Mr. Green Jeans" on the popular children's network TV program "Captain Kangaroo."

Holmes recalls sleeping little in the first days after the broadcast, given the disruption and tension. But there were humorous moments.

During his stay at a friend's house, Holmes was visited by Harvey and Schubert Ogden of the Perkins faculty. As they were talking, Harvey saw through the window that Bishop W.C. Martin was approaching the front door. Harvey sounded an alert, and Holmes began frantically extinguishing the pipe he was smoking, since Methodists officially disapproved of tobacco use.

In his memoir, Holmes wrote, "I jumped up to stash my smoking materials in another room, when I heard Schubert exclaim, 'There goes our fearless prophet!'"

Holmes added that Martin could no doubt smell the pipe smoke, but overlooked it and provided steadfast support.

The Holmes family soon would come out of hiding, and Holmes credits his wife – usually cautious on every matter regarding family health and safety – with insisting he preach at Northaven the following Sunday.

"She had utter clarity about the importance of not allowing Dallas to drive me from my pulpit," Holmes said in a 2007 oral history interview with Fagin. "She put that clarity above all of her anxieties and usual precautions."

Holmes would stay at Northaven through 1965, eventually assuming the high-profile pulpit of Metropolitan Memorial UMC in Washington, D.C. He was there for 24 years, preaching to a congregation that included members of Congress and the U.S. Supreme Court.

But the Dallas controversy stayed with him.

"Undoubtedly, there were other times I chose to be passive and sided with the status quo — even when I knew a prophetic word was needed," he wrote.

"But in such moments, for all my rationalizations, I have never been entirely able to shut out the radical reminder of my ordination: 'Take authority as an Elder in the Church to preach the Word of God.' Against this awesome privilege and its imperative, and ever conscious of 'Dallas memories,' which remain as fresh with me as the day they happened, I have struggled throughout my ministry with what it means to cry, 'Thus saith the Lord.'"

Otterbein remembered for historic contributions to UMC

By MELISSA LAUBER
UMConnection Staff

CELEBRATING COMMUNION NOV. 17, Bishop Marcus Matthews raised the simple, historic silver chalice of Bishop William Otterbein. It was an act of remembrance and a reclaiming of the history of the Evangelical United Brethren Church, who shaped today's United Methodist Church.



Rev. Wilson Shearer shares Bishop Otterbein's history.

The United Brethren Church, one of the precursors of The United Methodist Church, was the first uniquely homegrown American church. The denomination was founded by Bishop Philip Wilhelm Otterbein in 1800 in Frederick, Md. Otterbein died 200 years ago this past Nov. 17.

In Baltimore, the anniversary of his death day was observed in the churchyard of the church that bears his name and where Otterbein is buried. It was a day for remembrance, gratitude and "claiming the living hope given to us through the resurrection of Jesus Christ," said Bishop Marcus Matthews., resident bishop of the Baltimore-Washington Conference.

"Our lives become the stars that others steer by," said Matthews, reflecting on Otterbein's legacy and the inheritance of all people of faith.

In those reflections, Matthews joined the Rev. Emora Brannan, chair of the conference's Commission on Archives and History; the Rev. Donald Burgard, pastor of Old Otterbein; and the Rev. Wilson Shearer, who has a passion for church history, especially the history of the Evangelical United Brethren (EUB) Church.

These leaders, along with the congregation and several guests, worshipped together and then placed a wreath at Otterbein's grave, which now has a footstone noting the 200th anniversary observance.

Shearer, wearing an EUB preacher's hat that belonged to his father, shared biographical information about William Otterbein. The bishop, he said, citing Henry Boehm's "Reminiscences," was "tall, being six feet high, with a noble frame and a commanding appearance. He had a thoughtful, open countenance, full of benignity, a dark-blue eye that was very expressive. ... He had a high forehead, a double chin, with a beautiful dimple in the center. His locks were grey, his dress parsonic."

Otterbein was born in Dillenburg, Germany, a twin and one of 10 children. He was ordained into the German Reformed Church in 1749 and three years later

emigrated to Lancaster, Pa., where he became a circuit rider, traveling the region, even coming into Maryland, to conduct class and meetings and open-air worship.

In 1767, during a camp meeting, Martin Boehm, a Mennonite preacher, told his salvation story. Otterbein rose from his seat, embraced Boehm and declared in his native German, "Wir sind bruder," or "We are brethren."

Otterbein was known as a preacher of great evangelistic zeal, even to the extent that he was barred from many church pulpits and he was forced to preach outdoors in groves of trees, barns or church yards. His sermons, some historians say, reminded the baptized that membership is more than ink on a church register.

In 1774, Methodist Bishop Francis Asbury persuaded Otterbein to be pastor of a church in Baltimore. In 1785, the present church structure, at which Otterbein is buried, was built. It became "the mother church" of the United Brethren in Christ, and today is the oldest church sanctuary in continuous use in Baltimore and the only extant eighteenth century church in the city.

Otterbein served as pastor of this church for 39 years. He died at 10 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 17, 1813. He was 87.

Otterbein's last words, Shearer reported, were labored: "Jesus – Jesus – I die; but thou livest, and soon shall I live with thee – the conflict is over and past – I begin to feel an unspeakable fullness of love and peace divine, – lay my head on my pillow, and be still."

A few months after his death, Asbury eulogized his friend. "Forty years I have known the retiring modesty of this man of God; towering majestic above his fellows in learning, wisdom and grace, yet seeking to be known only of God and the people of God."

BWC clergy gather to worship at Bishop’s Advent Day Apart

By MELISSA LAUBER
UMConnection Staff

IF PASTORS WANT to minister well, they must not minister alone. Draw the circles wider, they were told by the Rev. Marvin McMickle at the Bishop’s Advent Day Apart for Clergy on Dec. 5. These wider circles are not just a good idea, they could change a person’s world.

Although he is now president of Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School in New York, there was a time, McMickle said, when he was convinced he was heading to prison or an early grave. But then a man at his mother’s church reached into his life and gave him his first lesson in pastoral care that goes beyond the pastor.

The man drove him around Chicago. They talked and stopped by the local prison. He walked McMickle over to the wall and told him, “If you don’t change the way you’re living, change the course of your life, next time I’ll be visiting you in this place.”



“I can still feel the brick and mortar of Cook County jail in my hand,” McMickle told the more than 350 pastors from the Baltimore-Washington Conference who gathered at Catonsville UMC Dec. 5 for the Bishop’s Advent Day Apart. “This man was not my father, nor my pastor. He was just somebody who understood that ministry is for all the people.”

Bishop Marcus Matthews suffered a death in his family and was unable to attend the Day Apart. But he had invited McMickle to share a word about pastoral care and how pastors need to develop an deep understanding of Ephesians 4, which calls for all the saints to be equipped for the ministry of the church.

In understanding pastoral care, it’s helpful to think of three concentric circles, McMickle said.

A concentric circle is like an impression in the water when an object is dropped in it, he said. The bigger the object and the deeper the water, the larger the circles.

The first circle, he explained, represents pastors caring for their congregation with pastoral calls and counseling at points of need throughout the members’ lives. But most pastors, McMickle said, have convinced themselves that they are the only ones who can do this ministry. “They ignore Ephesians 4 as if their role was not building up of the body of Christ to do the work of the ministry,” McMickle said.

Stuck in this ego driven perspective, pastors burn out and suffer health problems. “You need to purposefully and intentionally share ministry with people. If you’re not, you’re not doing your job,” he cautioned.

The second circle holds members of the congregation

caring for one another.

To illustrate these second-level circles, McMickle told a number of Bible stories, including the one in Mark 2 about “some men,” nameless and faceless, who instead of just seeking a blessing for themselves, picked up and carried a paralyzed man to see Jesus. When they arrived, the house was full, so they pulled the paralyzed man onto the roof and lowered him down into the presence of Jesus. The man was healed and Jesus said that healing came, not from his power, but by the faith of “some men.”

In this passage, McMickle said, ministry extends itself



beyond the walls of the sanctuary.

“I know we love the Lord, but most of us love the Lord most in the sanctuary. Most of us praise the Lord most of the time in the sanctuary. It’s a great spot to praise him,” said McMickle. “But this is not where the Lord needs us most. Mark 2 asks us, ‘Who have you paused to pick up?’”

In going beyond, the third circle comes into play. It represents the congregation being motivated to reach outside the walls of the church and to care for the people and problems that reside well beyond its reach.

To illustrate this story, McMickle shared the story of Lazarus, who was a beggar, and the rich man in Luke 16:19-22. Lazarus lay covered in sores at the house gates of the rich man, who was inside dressed in fine clothes and eating sumptuously. He did not offer Lazarus even the crumbs from his table.

When the two died, Lazarus went to heaven, the rich man was sent to hell.

McMickle told the pastors he sees equivalent stories being lived out in our churches today.

“We need to enter into ministries that require us to engage in creative and meaningful ways with the Lazarus just outside our doors,” he said. “If all you do is have churches with Advent services, carol singing,

pageants, Christmas cookies and punch, the Lord will have a word for you: ‘Go to Hell. Go directly to hell. You had the chance to minister to Lazarus while you were still here.’”

Quoting James 2:14-17, McMickle asked, “What good is it if you see a brother hungry, a sister thirsty or a stranger cold, and say to him, ‘Be warm.’ How does one ‘be warm’ unless the Baltimore-Washington Conference provides the means?”

The church in the third circle provides the kind of pastoral care that reaches beyond culture, custom and religion to engage people and make them feel like children of God.

At the Day Apart, pastors were given the opportunity to practice this kind of “third-circle outreach” by making a pledge to the Imagine No Malaria campaign, in the which conference is seeing to raise pledges and gift of \$2.1 million by May 2014.

The campaign, explained the Rev. David and Sylvia Simpson, is an attempt by The United Methodist Church to end deaths by malaria. This treatable disease claims the lives of a child ever 60 seconds. In Africa, it kills more than 655,000 people a year.

Since The United Methodist Church has become involved in eradicating malaria, the death toll has been cut in half, saving nearly 1,800 lives a day.

In an Advent litany, the pastors were encouraged to “be light in the darkness,” and to make a personal pledge. They were also encouraged to invite their churches to give.

In the Baltimore-Washington Conference, on any given Sunday, there are about 65,000 people in worship. If each of these people pledged \$10 for the next three years, they could raise more than \$1.9 million, David Simpson said.

Information about the Imagine No Malaria Campaign can be found at www.bwcumc.org/ImagineNoMalaria.

The closing words of the Advent litany cited an African proverb: “If you think you are too small to make a difference, try spending the night with a mosquito.”

To Go Deeper, Check out These Books:

“Caring Pastors, Caring People: Equipping Your Church for Pastoral Care” by Marvin McMickle

“The Externally Focused Church” by Eric Swanson and Rick Rusaw

“Fling Open the Doors” by Paul Nixon

Area UMCs help lead global Missions Conference of the Deaf

By ROY WHITE*

TWO EVENTS IN Kenya this past summer played a key role in Deaf United Methodist community: our Kenya Deaf Mission trip, and the 3rd Global Methodist Missions Conference of the Deaf.

To prepare for our mission, Dan Kenyon, Carrie White and I attended five planning meetings at Magothy UMC of the Deaf in Pasadena, and in Orems UMC.

Together with eight others, we prepared two Bible stories that would be done in storytelling, drama and crafts for two Methodist Deaf schools. The participants also brought donated school supplies and sport items as well as money from their home churches. All the items were packed in luggage called “God Bags.”

On July 24, we, along with five other team members from around the United States, checked in for an overnight stay at Comfort Inn near Dulles Airport for our final planning meeting.

After arriving in Africa, we rode in safari vans for a 4-hour drive north to Meru where Kaaga School for the Deaf and Kaaga Methodist Church were located. We checked in at the Methodist Bio-Intensive Agriculture Training Center in Meru for room and board. All the meals were prepared from their garden and livestock.

Over the next four days, we divided into two teams to do a 2-day Bible storytelling and role-playing at each school. While Dan and Carrie’s team taught about Moses and the 10 Commandments at Kaaga School for the Deaf with 166 students on Monday and Tuesday, I was with the second team teaching the Good Samaritan story at Njia Special School in Maua, about a 45-minute drive

away. This school has about 140 students, of which 93 are Deaf and the rest are mentally challenged and physically disabled. On Wednesday and Thursday, the teams switched to other schools.

At both schools, the children eagerly introduced themselves by fingerspelling and signing their names; all were very enthusiastic being involved in role-playing the Bible lessons.

Farewell ceremonies were held at both schools on Friday, August 2. Team members presented God Bags, and the schools gave each team member a gift. Also, each school was given \$3,000 to buy a commercial washing machine. (For years, the housemothers and students have done all their laundry by hand and lay their clothes on stone fences and big rocks to dry.) After getting to know so many of these children and teachers, leaving them was heartbreaking for all of us.

The next week, we returned to the Methodist Guest House in Nairobi to attend the 3rd Global Methodist Missions Conference of the Deaf. The theme was “The right time is now, change and believe the good news.”(Mark 1:15)

About 140 people came from America, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Sri Lanka, South Korea, Nigeria, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Ghana and Burundi. During every presentation, sign language interpreting of different languages was done simultaneously. For example, as every presentation was voice interpreted in English, the interpreter for each country interprets in his or her native sign language. The participants from each country signed their songs for others to follow.

The program over the next three days included reports

about education of the Deaf in Kenya and the need for a better Kenya Sign Language training program. I gave a short presentation about the Deaf Fellowship Ministry of Emmanuel UMC while Dan led the first morning’s devotion with a brief sermon and also gave a talk about the United Methodist Congress of the Deaf, of which he is president.

This conference was wonderful in that Deaf people from many different countries shared their stories that may be useful to other Deaf ministries and missions. They had a great time signing songs and praising God together. Every person there was the same; yet different sign languages never prevented them from communicating with each other.

Returning to the States turned out to be challenging, yet God was with our team. The Aug. 9 departure was the first day that Nairobi airport opened, two days after a major fire occurred there. Our team was stuck there for eight hours; our flight was delayed four hours. Thus, we missed our connecting flight at Addis Abba, Ethiopia, by 40 minutes. We thought we would stay only one day but ended up staying two days due to miscommunications with the hotel, airlines, and airport staffs.

During our brief stay in Ethiopia, many of the team members took advantage by visiting churches, the Haile Selassie Museum, and other places. The whole USA team was relieved when we finally returned home on Aug. 12 after a long flight.

*Roy White is a member of Emmanuel UMC in Beltsville, where he has chaired the Deaf Ministry Fellowship.

Bishop encourages older adults to reflect on life’s journey

By LINDA WORTHINGTON
UMConnection Staff

MORE THAN 90 older adults gathered at West River campground near Annapolis Oct. 23 to learn, participate in Bible Study, and share their life stories.

Although our life stories are all different, said Bishop Marcus Matthews in the keynote address, they share some commonalities, such as “we’re all Christian.” He briefly shared his life journey, from Cumberland UMC in Florence, N.C., to today.

The church and his family, he said, “gave me a glimpse of what I couldn’t see then.”

Bishop Matthews said his family and church taught him three lessons:

1. “Interdependence is key to survival.” Though people have different gifts, there is “some God in all of us.
2. Positive thinking. When God blesses us so much, how can we not speak good things, he asked.
3. “Blocks.” Not all blocks are stumbling blocks, he said, some are opportunities to move forward. “God is with you even in low moments.”

Seniors, he said, referring to each member of the audience, should re-imagine (reevaluate) themselves. He then gave six steps to do that: reflect, connect, explore, choose, repack, act.

With most steps he shared a bit of his own story. To connect, he said, “I circle myself with a small group who can give me honest feedback.” This covenant group is made of trustworthy friends beyond spouses. His has four members and they talk to each other often.

“Open yourselves to the unknown,” he said as he

spoke of “explore.” This is not always easy for older adults to do, he said, but he urged them to “try something different. Work at it; it takes effort.”

“Choose” and “Repack” fit together, the bishop said, because there comes a time where you have to whittle down your options so life isn’t so cluttered, and then repack what is essential for the road (of life) ahead. Many people after retirement face such an experience, that of down-sizing, he added.

“Make your possibilities (perhaps ascertained from the “reflect” step) real by taking action.”

Bishop Matthews noted that many Baby Boomers (those born 1946-1964) who are now beginning their retirements and are very active, should not retire. By 2030, the population in the U.S. will have 72 million Boomers and, by 2016, the first of them will reach age 70.

In his early years, the bishop said, he learned a good lesson from the shut-ins he visited each month with Communion: don’t assume you know what a person can do. He said he found out they wanted to give, not just receive, and he changed that church’s assumption that the older folks had little money and wouldn’t give to the church. “Let the people make the decision themselves,” he said. “Our task is to make disciples for Jesus Christ.”

During a Q & A, someone commented that the assumption in church is often that older people are not active.

“The majority of people in our churches are over 50,” the Bishop replied. “It’s up to us to determine how church values older adults. You’re the decision-makers. It’s up to you to say this is what we need to do so older adults can participate in the local church.”

Several in the audience shared what their churches were doing to involve older adults more actively in the life of the church, in effect “telling their story.” As one pointed out, Asbury UMC in downtown Washington brings a busload of seniors to both the Fall and Spring Older Adults Day Away.

Sandra King-Shaw noted that many of the churches have an Older Adult Ministry. “I’d like to see us (the churches) get together,” she said. It would be a time to support each other and share ideas.

“I thank you for not just what you did yesterday and also for this very moment, for your prayers. ... I ask God to bless all the clergy, all the laity... Be prayer warriors for Jesus Christ,” the bishop charged the audience.

At the Older Adults Day Away, the Rev. Sandy Taylor, pastor of Mt. Harmony-Lower Marlboro UMC, led a Bible study on Ephesians 4:29.

Taylor emphasized Christian conduct with four points: Truth-telling is a moral necessity; we all get angry, but anger for the larger community is “good anger;” “thievery” plagues God; and fill mind and mouth with edifying speech.

Four workshops were held after lunch. The Rev. Vivian McCarthy facilitated her groups on “What it means to be a spiritual leader,” with heavy participation by group members. Sylvia Simpson explained the conference campaign to raise \$2.7 million for “Imagine No Malaria” and the reasons to be engaged in the effort. The Rev. Lloyd McCanna and Debora Mooney explained the conference’s trip to Zimbabwe last July, and Ruth Bailey, a local artist, gave participants a chance to explore art and create their own watercolors.

Trial: Pastor’s son speaks out on his same-gender wedding

From page 1

He said the trial will send a message to other clergy considering performing same-gender ceremonies.

“When we make our vow as ministers, we promise to uphold the discipline of our church,” said Fisher at a press conference after the trial. “If we’re not willing to keep those promises, then there’s a judicial procedure.”

At that same press conference, Schaefer said he was still trying to sort out what the penalty meant, but grateful to still be ordained, at one point holding up his name tag that had “Rev.” written on it. “It’s still there,” he said.

“When I addressed the jury tonight, I gave them every excuse in the book to defrock me immediately. But that did not happen. Now, I’m still wondering what that means, the conditions they’ve set. But I told them clearly that I could no longer be a silent supporter, but now I feel I have to be an advocate, an outspoken advocate for all lesbian, gay, transgender and bi-sexual people.

“And I also told them that I would not refuse ministry to anybody regardless of gender, race, nationality, socio-economic status or sexual orientation. They came back and didn’t defrock me. They gave me 30 days, basically, to change my mind. That’s how I see it right now. I’m here to tell you that I will not change my mind. What I said tonight is the truth and the full truth, and so we’ll see how the church is going to deal with it in 30 days.”

During the penalty phase testimony, jurors heard from Tim Schaefer, Frank Schaefer’s son. He testified that he struggled for years with his sexual orientation, and at times was suicidal. After coming out to high school friends, Tim said, he thinks a friend’s mother called his dad to tell him of his suicidal thoughts. It was then that his parents asked him about it.

“I knew my dad loved me unconditionally, but I was afraid,” Tim Schaefer said. “I had seen others come out to their parents and be thrown out of the house. My parents hugged me and said they loved me.”

Tim Schaefer said that he was 99.9 percent sure his father would say “yes” to doing the wedding. “Saying ‘no’ would have hurt, but I would have understood,” he said.

Frank Schaefer also took the stand, and, in a powerful moment, donned the multi-colored stole signifying affirmation of full inclusion for homosexuals in the church. As he put on the stole, he made a covenant: “From this day forward,” he said, “I vow never to be silent, and to be a visible symbol. This is what I have to do from now on.”

Counsel for the church, the Rev. Christopher Fisher, asked Schaefer under cross examination if he was willing to repent of his actions.

“I cannot,” was Schaefer’s reply.

Fisher then asked if, going forward, he would be obedient to the Book of Discipline. Schaefer replied, “I cannot make that statement.”

“I feel called to minister to everybody,” Schaefer said earlier in his testimony. “This experience has transformed me. I am now an advocate, a spokesperson for a cause.”

Schaefer said that he has embraced this role as a new calling from God.



The Rev. Janet Wolf, left, shows her support for the Rev. Frank Schaefer after his trial.

The jury also heard from four members of Zion UMC of Iona, located in Lebanon, Pa., where Schaefer served as the pastor for the past 11 years. These members testified how Schaefer’s actions drove them away from the church.

William Bailey, who has been a member since 1977 and said he had held virtually every office at the church, said that after he learned of his pastor’s actions, he and his family could no longer attend church.

“And the sad part,” Schaefer said, “was that they took their wallets with them.”

Bailey said that the church is no longer able to pay its apportionments, which is a change from the previous three years when they had paid 100 percent.

“If I violate a rule,” Bailey said, “I expect to be punished. I expect nothing less from my church.”

A newer member of the church, Christina Watson, next took the stand and testified that at first Schaefer was very welcoming to them when they arrived at the

church five years ago. A retired member of the Air Force, Watson said that during a time of personal struggle, Schaefer, for some reason, “wouldn’t or couldn’t get close to me. It was painful not having a minister minister to me.”

Watson said that when she found out about the wedding, she was in shock. “My daughter is a young believer,” she said. “And then she was seeing a pastor violate the rules. She helped me conclude that we needed to not be subjected to the teachings of Rev. Schaefer.”

The Counsel for the respondent, the Rev. Robert Coombe, called two witnesses from Zion UMC who support Schaefer’s ministry.

Dr. John Schlegel has been attending Zion UMC since 1979. He said the church grew under Schaefer’s leadership.

“The faithful are still here,” he said “We are looking forward to his return. A lot of parishoners will feel deprived if he’s removed now, especially with the holiday season coming.”

Drew Gingrich, 21, said that he was born and raised at Zion UMC and has been active in the church’s youth group.

“Pastor Frank conveys the unconditional love of Christ,” he said. “It’s evident anytime you see him speak.”

Gingrich said that Schaefer invites everyone to the table, even those whom others might reject. “He is the embodiment of Christ. I could not be more honored to call him my mentor, my hero, my pastor.”

The Counsel for the church also called as a witness the Rev. James Todd, superintndent of the Southwest District of the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference. He testified that he was Schaefer’s superintendent when Schaefer submitted a ministerial profile in 2006, writing that he was going to perform his son’s same-sex wedding.

Todd said that after receiving profiles from all the clergy in his district, he only reviewed those whom the Cabinet thought might be up for a new appointment. Since Schaefer wasn’t on that list, he didn’t read his profile.

Todd also said that Schaefer conducting the wedding was not the only source of conflict at the Lebanon church, adding at one point that most of the criticism had to do with his handling of the choir director situation. The choir director at the time was Deb Boger; she was asked to resign shortly before the charges were filed. Her son, Jon Boger, is the person who filed the complaint.

The jury also heard expert testimony from the Revs. Paul Stallworth, Janet Wolf, Leister Longden, Thomas Frank, and Keith Boyette.

Bahret Church Interiors

We can fulfill all your church interior needs

- Steeples
- Cross & Flame (Interior Exterior)
- Church Interior Design & Restoration Services
- Pews/Chairs/Theatre Seats
- Pulpit & Alter Furniture
- Baptisries
- Stained & Etched Glass
- Metalware
- Draperies/Blinds
- Stage Curtains
- Carpeting & Other Flooring
- Lighting
- Chairs & Tables
- Pew Padding & Repair
- Refinishing
- Painting
- Vestments/Hangings/Paraments

1-800-280-1747

JOIN THE CONVERSATION

FIND US ON FACEBOOK



facebook.com/BWCUMC



EXPLORE YOUR CALL IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

Wesley Theological Seminary serves future Christian leaders. Our students are aspiring ministers, professionals and young people, who yearn for a prophetic voice in the public square and who seek a theological foundation for a life of service and meaning.

Be among tomorrow's messengers of hope. Join us.

MASTER OF DIVINITY
MASTER OF THEOLOGICAL STUDIES
MASTER OF ARTS
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY



To learn more about the practical, spirit-filled theological education we offer, visit WesleySeminary.edu/BWC

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Children and ukuleles, who can beat that?

OLNEY –Oakdale Emory UMC is expanding with building and launching of two new campuses. One of those is The Solana Olney, an assisted living facility. Oakdale volunteers staff the weekly services at the facility, attended by residents and visitors.

Making the Nov. 3 service extra-special to the residents was “Shine”, the church’s children’s choir, leading the service.

Children read the Scripture, offered prayers and provided the prelude and postlude. They also sang songs, some accompanied by ukuleles played by some of the children and the choir director, Peggy Manion.

The children also played for the residents in the memory care unit “The smiles and reactions of obvious joy from the residents certainly gave you God bumps,” said Terri Axtell, who leads the ministry. After the service the children who played ukuleles, let the residents who wanted to give ukulele-playing a try play on their instruments and offered assistance.



Kassidy Kepner, Charles Benedict, and Peggy Manion, play the ukulele at an assisted-living facility.

Manion and Axtell plan to return to Solana in the spring with ukuleles in hand to see if the residents would like to learn to play them. “We all know how the gift of music stirs the soul,” Axtell said.

Church aids homeless female veterans

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Douglas Memorial UMC has

become the headquarters for the Women Veterans Resource Center, largely due to the effort of its pastor, the Rev. Helen Fleming.

More than 10-12 percent of the nearly 7,000 homeless people in Washington are veterans, according to a 2012 report. And many of them are women.

When Fleming learned of the number of homeless veterans who were victims of rape and abuse, she decided it was time to act.

The Women’s Veterans Resource Center invites any veteran regardless of religious affiliation or none, to use the facility and services. Some dozen churches are involved and offer services such as computer labs, a career closet, prayers, hot meals, a thrift store, and counseling services.

In collaboration with the White House, other government and private veterans’ affairs offices, Douglas Memorial has hosted benefit conferences, job development sessions, social media training, job fairs and orientation training for pastors, Fleming said.

“We’re in the middle of planning another collaborative effort with several veteran agencies to have a holiday celebration service with give-a-ways for the military families,” she said

Bishop Fisher inspires youth

JESSUP – Organ, keyboard, drums, bongos and the Youth and Young Adult Praise Team greeted Bishop Violet Fisher, retired, at a Student Day service at Asbury-Jessup UMC Nov. 21.

The church, with a capacity of 99, had 136 in attendance, ranging from 87-year-old Hilda Hebron to 4-year-old Bridgette Colbert.

Bishop Fisher told of preaching her first sermon at age 16 in Jessup at a Baptist Church. She focused on the many young people present and preached on forgiveness.

She told the congregation that her only adopted son is not in the church and has piercings and tattoos. But, she said, it doesn’t matter what our young people look like, we have to learn to embrace them and not mold them into what we prefer them to be.

Recognition and awards went to 37 students, from young Bridgette to a senior graduating with honors from Strayer University and freshman Chad Carden, the son of Pastor

Gay Green-Carden, with 4.0 in business administration from the University of Maryland, University College.



Bishop Violet Fisher preaches at Asbury-Jessup UMC.

Bishop Fisher’s message reached the students. At the close of the service, “three came to the altar in tears thanking God for allowing her to minister to their hearts,” Green-Carden said.

Church serves Thanksgiving dinner

GAITHERSBURG – The United Methodist Women at Mt. Zion UMC (Brookeville) prepared Thanksgiving dinner and hosted the meal at the Montgomery Avenue Women’s Center on Thanksgiving Day.

The Center provides support services to vulnerable women faced with homelessness. It is a place where women are assured of their safety and well-being; it provides food and clothing for them, said the Rev. Debbie Tate.

Sochi church seeks support

STAVROPOL, RUSSIA – The Rev. Irina Mitina, who attended last May’s session of the Baltimore-Washington Conference, is now serving as superintendent of the North Caucas District. She invites United Methodists to support the church in Sochi, Russia, where the Winter Olympics will be held in February. Contact her at mitina191060@gmail.com.

Viewpoints: How do we move forward as the Church?

On Nov. 19, the Rev. Frank Schaefer, a pastor in Lebanon, Pa., was found guilty of not upholding the United Methodist Book of Discipline and performing the same-gender wedding of his son in Massachusetts in 2007 (see story, page 1). On the following day, the jury of 13 of his peers punished Rev. Schaefer with a 30-day suspension during which he must decide if he will embrace the entire Book of Discipline or surrender his credentials as a United Methodist minister.

United Methodists have expressed a broad array of responses to the verdict and the issue of clergy performing same-gender unions. In the midst of these responses is the question of how we will live together, moving forward as a Church, united in Christ.

The church has lost its way

By JIM RICHARDS*

"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." Ephesians 4:1-6

THIS ENTREATY FROM the postle Paul is the glue that keeps the Church together as we "bear with one another in love." But in bearing with one another, what do we do and how do we react when we have serious doctrinal disagreements?

This is where it gets difficult, especially where emotionally charged issues are involved. There is much pain in people's lives and, believe me, I hear it every Sunday as we gather for worship and lift up our prayers.

People are looking for healing and hope and no matter who they are, they need to find that in the Church. The Gospel is powerful and transformational and when we enter into a relationship with God, through faith in Jesus Christ, we are changed. We don't look at the world the way others do, because we have been given new spiritual eyes with which to see.

But there is a cost for this grace and mercy that we have been given so abundantly. The cost is repentance for the sin-filled lives we have lived and a directive to put aside our old self and seek to live lives of righteousness and holiness.

The United Methodist Church, in its Book of Discipline, states that "homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching." I believe that Scripture, our ultimate authority in these matters, clearly bears this out.

Some people within the Church, not content with what has been decided upon at General Conference, have now taken to defying church law. Pastors are performing same-sex marriages and recommending defiance of the stated beliefs of the denomination.

When "equippers of the saints" that Paul describes in Ephesians (i.e. apostles; prophets; evangelists; pastors; and teachers) espouse a doctrine that not only defies Scripture, but also defies the rules that the Church has established for itself to maintain unity and order, we are in trouble.

Unfortunately, this is where we are today.

In case you haven't noticed, The United Methodist Church is in decline in the United States, but is growing in Africa and elsewhere in the world. Why is this? I submit that it is because we have lost our way in this country, both in terms

of theology and in terms of evangelism. As we seek to be "politically correct," we lose our footing because we choose to stand on ground other than Christ and his Word.

When pastors, bishops and other church leaders defy the authority of the church, they set a terrible precedent that will only make matters worse and lead ultimately to further church defections and perhaps, sadly, a complete split within the denomination.

I know there will be those that will call me sanctimonious. However, I know full well that I am a sinner in need of a savior. The Holy Spirit convicts me all the time of my sin, and I thank God for him because he keeps me on track. "I fall down, and then get up..."

When I witness to people, whether to an unbeliever, or to a believer with sincere differences in

opinion, I always say this – "I can only reason with you from the Scriptures, because this is my play-book for life."

If we are sincerely seeking the truth, as Christians, this must be our source – not a political party, not what's approved of by society, not what's condoned by the culture, but God's Word alone.

*Jim Richards is the lay leader of Thurmont UMC in Thurmont.

We stand at a crossroads

By DONNA CLAYCOMB -SOKOL*

ALLOWED MY TWITTER feed to pour into my day like hot coffee following a sleepless night throughout the Rev. Frank Schaefer's trial. I watched anger, heartache and hopefulness being expressed through 140-character tweets. I also fed the fire by questioning how any pastor could possibly say "yes" to the denomination and "no" to his children.

No one wins through this process of putting ministry on trial. Rather, our denomination continues to lose. We are losing faithful pastors, deeply committed disciples, and the chance to be in ministry with the 80 percent of the population living around us that does not regularly come to church to worship. It was a very specific prayer that led me from my role as a seminary director of admissions to the local church:

"God, take me out of my place of comfort and success. Give me a heart for hurting and broken people. Make me more

when I make my way to lunch. There is heartbreaking injustice all around us. But nothing has broken my heart more than the stories I've been told by men and women who have been pushed outside the doors of God's church, leaving them to question if they're also outside God's all-encompassing love and grace.

Part of my deepest call as a pastor is to seek to enter into the hurt of others – to pay attention to where Jesus is breaking my heart and trusting that those spaces are the places where Christ can use me the most. Paying attention to this pain has been instrumental in creating a beautiful expression of the Body of Christ in downtown Washington.

Together, we all come to a table on the corner of 9th and Massachusetts where all are fed and no one is turned away. We have the privilege of entering into an authentic community where all receive the same welcome, the same grace, the same Savior and the same blessing. One of the greatest gifts we offer as pastors is a blessing. It's an extraordinary gift entrusted to us, and I cannot imagine withholding a blessing from some people in my congregation while freely lavishing it upon others.

We are at a crossroads as a denomination. Many historians are predicting a split. Is there a faithful way forward?

I find the power of real community in Ephesians 4:11-16, where Paul writes about the diversity of gifts – specific roles that are needed for building up the body so there might be unity of the faith which leads to maturity that enables all people to see Christ. We're not to be tossed to and fro by doctrine. Rather, we are to speak truth in love, growing more like Christ.

But our body is hurting. One of the greatest gifts of the Baltimore-Washington Conference is our diversity. We are geographically, racially, theologically and economically diverse. I am reminded every time I am with our colleagues of how diversity is essential if we are to effectively minister in the rural communities of Western Maryland and the inner city of Washington, not to mention the island of Bermuda.

At the core of a pastor's heart is a desire to reach more people and build the body. It takes different types of people to reach different types of people. Our calls and our gifts are thankfully not the same.

Can we honor the diversity found in our clergy, in our laity, in our communities? Can we honor the different ways we are building up the body, and commit to allowing Christ to be our guide rather than being "blown about by every wind of doctrine?"

People are hurting. Trials will lead to more hurt. Our conversations might also hurt. But I believe having conversations with the goal of building the body until we look more like Christ is the only path forward.

*Rev. Donna Claycomb-Sokol is pastor of Mount Vernon Place UMC in Washington, D.C.





BWC young adults create & share Advent Devotional

The UMConnection is pleased to share with you two selections from the 2013 Young Adult Advent Devotional. A new devotional will be featured on our web site, www.bwcumc.org, every day during Advent. We encourage you to use these words as a way to “prepare ye the way of the Lord” in the coming days and weeks.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 8 • SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT • REV. KATIE BISHOP • BRUNSWICK NEW HOPE UMC • FOCUS: KEEP WATCH • MATTHEW 24:36-44

WALKING THROUGH THE store, it’s as if I am in a daze. Christmas music is being pumped through the speakers, while shoppers weave in and out of the racks, each of us engrossed in our shopping list. I have just a few more people to cross off my list; just a few more random gifts to put in a box with a bow; just a few more things to “finish” Christmas. My three-year-old holds my hand. Why Eden won’t go in the cart, I am not sure. But pushing the cart with one hand and gripping her with the other isn’t leaving me much space to get Christmas done. I let go for one second – to cross a name off the list – and she is gone. Keep watch.

Now I am frantic. The crowd is building, people are frenetic, and I am unable to breathe. Where is my child? Where is my Eden? Keep watch. There – in the aisle – I spy a blond bob. Standing mesmerized by something, she is engrossed, but in what? Leaving the cart, I rushed to my child. What is she staring at? What has captured her attention? A small nativity. Simple. Just Mary, Joseph and the Christ Child, nestled in a bed of straw. Simple and yet beautiful. Big blue eyes look up at me with a full smile. She points and simply says, “Look mom, it is Jesus.”

Yes, my child. I see him now. Despite the chaos of Christmas, I see. Despite the list of Christmas I had before, I see. Despite the growing crowd, pushing, pressing, I see. Keep watch. So overwhelmed by the stuff of Christmas – the lights, the gifts, the chaos – have we forgotten to watch for the signs and wonders of the Kingdom of God around us? So distracted by all that has to be done, have we forgotten to watch for signs of what God is doing among us, with us, in us? Keep watch, my friends. Keep watch.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 18 • SHANNON SULLIVAN • PRESBYRY UMC, EDGEWOOD • FOCUS: OPENING YOUR EYES TO HOPE • ISAIAH 35:1-10

IN THE DESERT where we were, a tall blue flag shot up into the sky, anchored to the dusty earth by a blue jug. Water. Here, on the border, where so many are lost in the wilderness, whether the symbolic wildernesses of greed or grief or the actual desert, here, there was water breaking forth. This hospitality is what we had been waiting for, whether we knew it or not. We were a group of young adults participating in an experiential education program focused on immigration. Earlier that day, we met with some high school students living on the border who, when we shared our names and what the border meant to us, overwhelmingly spoke of death.

That stuck out in my mind as we saw this flag that symbolized water, which was being offered by a migrant shelter in Altar, Mexico, a simple place with hot food and a warm place to sleep. When we arrived, no one was there yet for the night, so we waited. We had no idea what we should expect, but one of us got out a guitar and began to sing. Slowly, people began to arrive, including a young family, a teenage boy and two brothers. They were exhausted and the language barrier made it difficult to strike up a conversation, but they joined us in song. Then we ate together, piecing together stories. That night was filled with life and warmth, even though the realities of the dangers of the desert hung over us.

Reading Isaiah brought me back to that night at the migrant shelter. Isaiah’s litany is one of hope in the midst of death; the hope we have been waiting for in the midst of the death we have seen around us. Preparing ourselves for Jesus’ arrival this Advent season is about opening our eyes to that hope at the same time it is about how we can nurture those blossoms God has planted in the wildernesses of this world. As that shelter on the border was, we can be waters breaking forth, offering life to people in their wilderness places. PRAYER: Holy One, we reach out to you, seeking relief from the wildernesses around us. But we know we aren’t the only ones. Return us to your joy, and give us the courage to bring your realm to this place. Amen.

Dodging Malaria: Young adults play to raise life-saving funds



By ERIK ALSGAARD
UMConnection Staff

THE BALTIMORE-WASHINGTON CONFERENCE continues to raise money to fight the killer disease of malaria. The Conference is committed to raising \$2.1 million for Imagine No Malaria as it joins Annual Conferences from around the world towards the The United Methodist Church’s goal to raise \$75 million for the effort by 2015. Pittsburgh Area Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton told the Council of Bishops in November that the Imagine No Malaria campaign is nearing \$60 million in its goal to eradicate the disease in Africa. “It is all good news,” said Bickerton, who leads the Western Pennsylvania Annual (regional) Conference. “We have the end of this campaign in our sights and we believe we have the roadmap to get us there,” said Bickerton. “The vast majority of the money we have raised has come from the people of The United Methodist Church



who sit in our pews every Sunday,” he said. “We are ready to eclipse the \$60 million mark because of the grassroots efforts.” In late November, a group of energetic young adults got out of their pews and did their part to raise money by playing three-dimensional dodge ball. On trampolines. “We’re here to support the cause and have fun,” said Carrie Larsen, a member of Bethany UMC in Ellicott City. She and four others came from the church dressed in matching t-shirts, face-paint and headbands, to form the “Bethany Ballers,” whose goal it was, she said, to “intimidate” the opposition. “Any chance to put on face-paint and have fun, you take it,” said Amor Woolsey, also from Bethany. Kelli Hood, from Covenant UMC in Montgomery Village, was there to support the cause. “This is a fun way to raise money for Imagine No Malaria,” she said. She had never before played dodge ball on a trampoline, but after receiving an e-mail from her pastor, she thought she’d give it a try. The same was true for Chad Seller, a member of Glen Mar UMC in Ellicott City. He thought the event sounded like fun, and was a great way to raise money for a good cause. The Rev. Martin Brooks, associate pastor at Bethany, was part of his church’s team.

“I’m dizzy,” he said after the first two games (which the “Ballers” lost). “I’m not used to jumping on a trampoline.” Cheryl Cook, the Baltimore-Washington Conference young adult staff person, came up with the idea along with Larsen. The event was held at the Sky Zone Indoor Trampoline Park in Columbia. Each person on a team took their position on a rectangular trampoline. The rules of dodge ball, two-dimensional, apply, except with trampolines underfoot and to the sides, jumping and bouncing made dodging the balls all that much more fun. “If one of us could throw, we’d be doing okay,” said Carley Vitek from Bethany. “We dodge pretty well.”

