

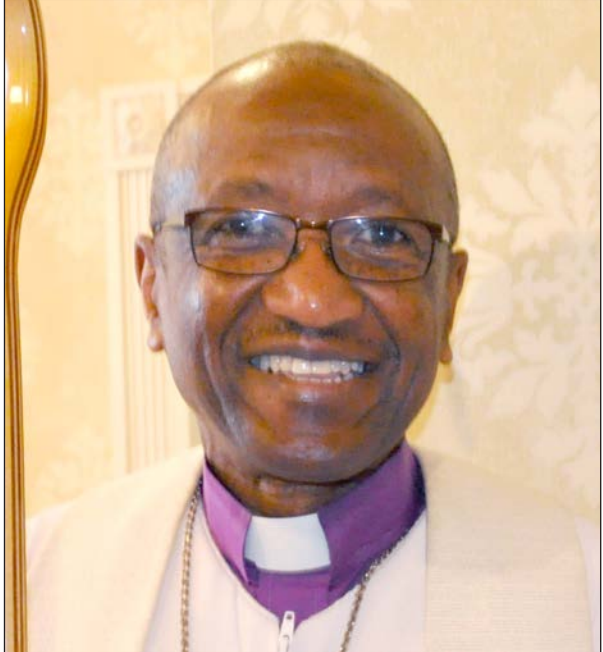


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# **UMC** *Connection*

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## We bid our bishops goodbye, hello, God bless



**Bishop Marcus Matthews**



**Bishop LaTrelle Miller Easterling**



**Bishop Cynthia Moore-Koikoi**

### Bishop Matthews retires after 42 years

By MELISSA LAUBER  
UMConnection Staff

**I**T WAS JULY 25, 239 years ago, when Bishop Francis Asbury wrote, “My desire is to live more to God today than yesterday; and to be more holy this day than the last.”

These words have been echoed each day for the past four years by Asbury’s spiritual heir, Bishop Marcus Matthews, who recites these sentiments in his daily prayers.

In September, Matthews will retire after 42 years of ministry, 34 of which have been in the Baltimore-Washington Conference. In his past four years as the BWC’s bishop, he has focused on making each church a prayer station, creating and strengthening partnerships between churches and area schools, and asking each person to bring one person to Christ.

To mark his retirement, more than \$327,000 was raised and given in a love offering to serve as seed money, breaking ground on a new health and fitness complex at Africa University in Zimbabwe.



While he is officially retiring, the bishop will continue to be in ministry in his new position as executive secretary of the Council of Bishops. His office will be at the Methodist Building in Washington, D.C.

*Read a Q&A conversation with Bishop Matthews as he reflects on his faith and ministry on pages 4 and 5.*

### Moore-Koikoi elected bishop

By MELISSA LAUBER & ERIK ALSGAARD  
UMConnection Staff

**T**HE REV. CYNTHIA Moore-Koikoi, a daughter of the Baltimore-Washington Conference and superintendent of the Baltimore Metropolitan District, was elected as a bishop in The United Methodist Church on July 13 at the 2016 Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference.

“My heart is so full,” said the bishop-elect as she stood at the podium. “I don’t have the words. All I can say is glory, hallelujah!”

Holding her husband’s hand – the Rev. Rafael Koikoi serves Sharp Street Memorial in Baltimore – Moore-Koikoi said that she knows being elected is a sacred trust.

“I’m gonna need your prayers so that I can fulfill that



**Rev. and Bishop Moore-Koikoi greet the NEJ.**

### BWC to welcome its first female bishop

By ERIK ALSGAARD  
UMConnection Staff

**B**ISHOP LATRELLE MILLER Easterling has been assigned as episcopal leader of the Baltimore-Washington Conference, effective Sept. 1.

Easterling becomes the first female bishop in the 232-year history of the BWC.

Easterling was elected as bishop by the Northeastern Jurisdiction on July 14, the second bishop elected.

“As you might imagine, my heart is full,” said Easterling during a brief introductory meeting Friday morning,

July 15, at the Lancaster Marriott Hotel. “I am just overwhelmed with joy; I mean, sheer joy at the fact that I am coming to walk in ministry with you. This is new to us, but it is not new to God. God had this planned, and God is just unveiling it for us today.”

If God had planned this, she said, then God has other things planned “for us.”

“As we get to know one another, if we can just trust that spirit of God, then the mountain tops are just going to be sweet; the valleys are going to be bearable, and we’ll get through all of it with the joy of our Lord and Savior,

*See Easterling, page 3*

trust,” she said. “I give each of you permission to pull me aside when I might be going astray. God spoke through you tonight, and that’s going to continue.”

Moore-Koikoi said that as a bishop, her job will be to point out places where she sees God at work. She mentioned two examples, including a singing group she was once in called “Tapestry.”

“Sometimes, God took all of the single chords and wove them together into something spectacular,” she said. “We need to show the world that God is more than just a

*See Moore-Koikoi, page 3*



# ... well said

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

By MANDY SAYERS  
Pastor, Covenant UMC, Gaithersburg

I SAW AN INTERVIEW with President Jimmy Carter where he talked about growing up on a farm in Plains, Ga., where all his friends and playmates were African American. He said when he was about 14, he remembered coming in from the fields with his two best friends and when they came to the pasture gate, the two boys stopped to let Carter go first.

He said at the time, he thought they did it for a joke. He realized later that these boys had been told by their parents something like “I know you and Jimmy are friends, but now that y’all are 14, it’s best if you start deferring to him in public.”

Carter said he was amazed and sad about this line drawn in the red Georgia clay, and that he saw in that moment that racism is a real thing, something against his Christian faith.

Farm folks learn how to prepare their fields for harvest, and how to sow seeds in such a way to allow them to grow. They’ve got to invest in the potential of the seed, and take time to nurture it, even before it gets large enough to do anything impressive at all.

As children “learn what they live,” a seed, at least most of the time, sprouts and grows as it is sown.

While those boys were out in the fields, in my imagination, there was other holy work going on. Perhaps a mother or a grandmother worked inside, stitching patches onto britches or sewing quilt pieces together. In that work, she didn’t ask the patches or the pieces how they felt about the whole thing.

She worked with sharp eye and practiced hand to mend what was broken and to make scraps and pieces into one strong seam, or a warm covering for someone’s bed at night. She took that which was broken and made it whole, that which was separated and made it one.

Our God is a sower and a sewer too. In Christ, we are called to sow love, and peace and joy and justice, and while we are called to learn from history, we are certainly equally called to make history. We are called to stitch together all humankind, to sow the seed of God’s love and be “repairers of the breach, restorers of streets to live in.” (Isa. 58:12).

We owe it to all our children to sow and sew well. We owe it to young black men who are afraid when they see police lights in their mirrors, in the name of our God, who sides with the oppressed, and who welcomes all God’s children into God’s pasture gate.

... well said

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

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



WHY? IT is a one-word question that has become an all too common refrain.

I have a three-year-old nephew and no matter what you say to him, his response is “why?” The sky is blue. Why? Grass is green. Why? Go to bed. Why? No matter what is said he wants to know why. He wants to know what is the foundational reason for what is being presented. It is because I have had to answer the question “why?” so many times that I found great irony in sitting in my living room Thursday morning looking at the past few days in this country, wondering why.

Last month we celebrated Independence Day and just a few days later, were faced with the deaths of two citizens of the United States at the hands of agents of the state. All I could say was, “why?”

Why was there going to be another family that would have an empty seat at dinner? Why were two free citizens who had just celebrated independence and freedom shot and killed while exercising the very freedom that was being celebrated?

Could it be that when we were sowing our seeds of freedom and independence that we forgot to sow and cultivate love and charity? You see, what you plant is what eventually springs from the ground. What have we sown in our great country that would allow brutality, injustice and inequality to spring up and choke out two lives? Why?

Something was sown and is growing in our great republic and it is our problem.

It is not the problem solely of those who are of a certain color, race, or socio-economic class. It is our problem.

Our nation is sewn together. Like every American flag that stitches together 50 stars and 13 stripes, we as a people are sewn together. No matter what we have sown in the past, we are now sewn together with a common future.

We the people, all the people, are sewn together and it will be we the people, sewn together, that must begin to sow now the seeds of a better, brighter future for all of us. We must do this to repent of the things that were sown into our land. We must do this to continue to be sewn together. We must do this so that the next generation will not be faced with the same “whys” that we face today.

... well said

EVENTS

**CCYM Youth Retreat**  
Sept. 9-11  
West River

The Conference Council on Youth Ministry is holding a youth leadership retreat at West River for 26 youth in grades 6-12. There is no cost for the retreat. The deadline to apply is Aug. 1. For more information, contact Pam Bowen: pbowen@bwcumc.org

**“Lead Like a Woman Not Like a Girl”**  
Sept. 16-17  
BWC Mission Center

The GBOD Path 1 team invites women in leadership to attend this workshop designed to sharpen leadership and communication skills and discover their unique “high performance pattern” as a leader. Email Jo Chesson for more information: jchesson@bwcumc.org

**In the Afternoon of Life: Clergy and Retirement**  
Sept. 22  
BWC Mission Center

The Board of Ordained Ministry is sponsoring a seminar for clergy and their spouses in any stage of the retirement process. Registration is \$35 and includes lunch and materials. E-mail Rev. Linda Warehime to register: lindawarehime@myactv.net

**Sacred art exhibit**  
Now - Oct. 10  
Wesley Theological Seminary

The Luce Center for the Arts and Religion has a new exhibit, “Fragments of a Lived Faith.” It is a collaborative exhibition by Susan Kanaga and Filippo Rossi. It will be on display in the Smith Board Room until Oct. 10. It was originally installed in the Mount Tabor Ecumenical Centre for Art and Spirituality in Barga, Italy. Hours are 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., weekdays or by appointment.

**College is starting soon.**  
Any church wishing to support Campus Ministries can contact:  
  
University of MD: Rev. Brett Pinder  
443-553-7375 – BPinder2@UMD.Edu  
  
Frostburg University: Rev. Cindy Zirlott  
301-687-7490 – c.zirlott@frostburg.edu  
  
American University: Rev. Joey Heath  
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# Easterling: New bishop comes with joy

From page 1

Jesus the Christ.”

The bishop, along with her husband, Marion, stood in the middle of a circle of BWC clergy and laity gathered at the hotel.

“I am what you call a ‘baby bishop,’” Easterling said. “I am going to offer you the very best of myself. I hope that, as I’m learning, that if I misstep here or have a little problem there, you will offer me the grace to allow me to grow into the fullness, the full weight of this leadership position with you.

“And I will offer you grace,” she continued, “that will be necessary as we learn to walk this journey together.”

Easterling, who was the first female pastor of the last church she served in the New England Conference, said that she is fully aware of the historic significance of her election and assignment.

“With (Bishop) Cynthia (Moore-Koikoi) and I being elected together,” she said, “this is the first time in the history of not just the Northeast Jurisdiction, but the history of The United Methodist Church, that two African American females were elected together.”

The bar has been set high for us, she said, “and we have to keep making history. Do not think that it is lost on me that this is the strongest conference in the Northeast Jurisdiction. But God wants to take us higher and further. I am not afraid of getting dirty. I am not afraid of getting a little nicked and bruised for the glory of God. I am ready, with you, to run on to see what the end shall be.”

The new bishop was given gifts from the BWC’s Episcopacy Committee and Episcopal Office staff, including a new, pre-loaded iPad with transition information about the conference.

Easterling most recently served as superintendent of the Metro Boston Hope District and was named dean of the Cabinet in June.

In introducing his newest colleague on the United Methodist Council of Bishops, Bishop Sudarshana Devadhar called Easterling “a prophetess, a pastor who leads the church from her spiritual center, and above all, a beloved sister in Christ who always, always has a passion for the marginalized.”

Easterling told the member conferences of the Northeastern Jurisdiction that no matter where it is, “If God sends me there, I will never look back.”

“I always, always, always stand on the side of justice,” she said, “but I draw the circle wide enough for all of us to be

there – and when I say all, I mean all.”

She became district superintendent in 2012, succeeding the late Martin D. McLee, who was elected bishop that year. She has followed McLee’s path to the episcopacy having served as pastor of Union United Methodist Church in Boston and then as superintendent of the same district he had served.

An Indianapolis native, Easterling, 51, told those at the jurisdictional meeting about a Friday night when she was 16 and sitting in the back of her hometown church.



**Bishop LaTrelle Easterling, holding the chalice, leads Communion with Bishop Cynthia Moore-Koikoi at a worship service in which they were both consecrated as bishops in The United Methodist Church.**

“All of a sudden something started tingling in me,” she said, and her peers asked what she was doing as she moved toward the front. “There was a hand that guided me down that aisle and I gave my life to Jesus Christ and I have never looked back.”

Easterling admitted that she “tried to run” from the call to ministry, “but God was faithful,” and for five days woke her at 3:33 a.m. to say: “Preach My Word.”

She said the Scripture that has carried her through the election process is Jeremiah 12:5, and displaying her gifts as a preacher, said:

“Beloved, we got some horses we got to run with, because we have work to do. We have to come out of the safe places and get into the thickets that means we’re gonna get bruised, that means we’re going to get pricked, that means we’re going to bleed, but in the name of Jesus ...”

Easterling was ordained a Deacon in 1995 and an Elder two years later. She graduated from the Boston University School of Theology summa cum laude in 2004.

She was a delegate to General Conference in 2012 and 2016, and served on the NEJ’s Multi-Ethnic Center Board. She also served on the conference board of ordained ministry.

Easterling earned her bachelor’s degree at Indiana University, and her law degree from the university’s School of Law. Before entering full-time ministry, she worked as a

mediator and as a Human Resources Manager and Director.

She is married to the Rev. Marion Easterling Jr., the pastor of Parkway UMC in Milton, Massachusetts. They are the parents of two sons, Garrett Walter and Miles Teronza.

When asked during the interviews about inclusivity, Easterling said, “I know what it feels like to be excluded. I know what it feels like to be present but ignored.”

But getting to know one another can change that, she said.

“Once we get to know each other, it’s almost impossible to hate, it’s almost impossible to continue excluding, it’s almost impossible to remain where you were. We are changed when we hear one another’s story.”

*Beth DiCocco, director of communications for the New England Conference, contributed to this story.*

## Moore-Koikoi: Called to authentic leadership

From page 1

good and beautiful God; God is a spectacular God.”

Moore-Koikoi says she sees the work of bishops as “overseeing the work of the church, working prophetically, evangelically and apostolically with all as they cooperate

with the Grace of God.”

A key component of that, she believes, is leaving space for the transforming movement of the Holy Spirit, especially at this time in the life of the church when the denomination is divided and many people may be wondering about what the future might hold.

“That’s spiritual work — remembering who God is and who God has called us to be,” she said. “We got God, so we got this.”

The new bishop served as superintendent of the Baltimore-Metropolitan District immediately before her election, where she played a pivotal spiritual role in the city following the unrest in 2015 around the death of Freddie Gray while he was in police custody.

The daughter of a retired United Methodist pastor, she grew up in the church; worked for 17 years as a school psychologist, and was ordained as an Elder in 2010. She has served as a student

pastor at St. Matthews UMC in Highlandtown; an associate pastor at Calvary UMC in Annapolis; a Disciple Guide, resourcing local churches; and as a superintendent of the Greater Washington and Baltimore Metropolitan districts.

She also serves as chair of the conference’s Unified Funding Task Force, which oversees loans and grants, and as the Cabinet’s spiritual director.

Moore-Koikoi sees herself, she said, “as a bridge-builder,” clear and confident about what she believes, while also respecting others who might not believe the same way.

Growing up as an African-American woman in an often discriminatory culture and church, Moore-Koikoi believes she has a unique voice.

“As a woman of color, I have learned the gift of perseverance,” she said, “being able to hold onto hope in the midst of oppression.

“Our denomination needs that,” said Moore-Koikoi. “As our pews become more empty, as we experience more financial difficulties, we have to hold out hope. I’ve had to use my spiritual eyes.”

Her vision is one of a diverse church that embraces justice and the life-saving love of Christ.

When she was a child, she listened to her preacher father. He taught her the 139th Psalm, “especially the beautifully and wonderfully made part.”

As a new bishop, it’s a vision of the church she’s committed to work for. It won’t be easy, and the “awesome responsibility” has her feeling a little scared.

“But I remind myself, God has got this. God is in control,” she said. “My role and the church’s role is to experience the reign of God here on earth and point that out to people.”

Bishop Moore-Koikoi was appointed to serve the Pittsburgh Episcopal Area, which includes the Western Pennsylvania Annual Conference.



**Rev. JW Park, left and Rev. Charlie Parker, right, join the BWC in celebration as the election of Cynthia Moore-Koikoi, center, as a bishop is announced.**





# A conversation with Bishop M

**It's been said, "You can't go home again," but you did. Tell me a little bit about what it was like to come home for your last four years as a bishop before you retire.**

I think people can go back home again. I always like to say, "it's the way you leave home that determines whether you return home." Barbara and my 32 years in the Baltimore-Washington Conference, 18 of which I sat around the Cabinet table as a superintendent and council director, were actually good years in the life of the conference. We were graciously welcomed back and being gone for only eight years, it wasn't like starting from zero.

I think, if there was a low point, for me, it was knowing the persons who faced illness or death. It was emotional, because I knew the people, some of them for all my ministry, and was close to many of them. So if there were any low moments coming home, it was around that issue.



**Looking back, how would you describe yourself as a bishop?**

I see myself as a program-centered bishop. I tend to get more energy when people are doing something, doing mission, doing programs. I can deal with administration, which comes to me in a natural way. But what I get my high off of is seeing people put their faith into action.

For me, ministry is about building relationships. I feel that in order for us to continue to move this church forward, we have to first build relationships. What I've discovered is once you build a relationship with a group, then that moves you to a trust level, that moves you to a place you can do some things that you never thought you would do.

**You've mentioned that Psalm 23 has great meaning for you. How, during your time as a bishop, has that verse influenced you?**

I think mainly because I really do trust. On the night of the celebration of my ministry at annual conference, Bishop May said something that hit me – that I am a person of hope. I firmly believe that God is with me. Because God leads me, there's that hope always present even in the lowest moments. When I think that I'm down in the valley, there's that hope. If I didn't have that hope, I don't think life would have any meaning.



**Does that thought transfer into the way you want the church to be? Have you helped to create a church with hope?**

I'm always hopeful about the church. I believe we can do anything we want to. I think, for example, about how when the BWC first started its partnership with Zimbabwe, it was taboo for people to talk about AIDS. It was hush-hush, there were no signs, no education, none of that. But the church made a difference and found a way forward. Today, there are even billboards put up about it, there is education, and infection rates have dramatically dropped. And so, that's brought me hope. It's that hope that makes me know we'll find the best way to globally address the issue of homosexuality. We will find the path forward.

I also think of our conference's partnership with Zimbabwe. It's unbelievable the large number of people who have been involved since the 1990s in many more ways than I would have imagined. I was always hopeful that it would catch on. We started small. It was a dream. That's how life is. Life starts with dreams.

You've heard me talk about Uncle Bubba. We would sit out fishing and talk. He didn't use the word "goals," and he didn't use the word "vision;" but he would always say, "you can move beyond where you are. You can do this, you can do that." And so hope is just in my DNA.

**You've been known to wear your love of the institutional church on your sleeve. What is it about the church that captures your heart?**

I guess the greatest thing for me is the connectionalism, being part of a connectional church. To me that's just such a good thing to be a part of. When one part needs assistance, another part steps in. When one part can't do something, the others can make it happen.

And I think the other thing I love, which actually took a while for me to grasp, is the value of being a global church instead of a national church. In these 42 years, the church has afforded me opportunities to see and be exposed to the world in ways that another profession, like teaching, could not have.

**Why is it important that we be a global church?**

Because the world is getting smaller and I don't think we will ever be able to move back into silos anymore. I think what we witnessed this last General Conference was, for the first time, the global church. I think we got the church we prayed for, but we weren't entirely prepared for it. God answered our prayer, but we didn't have all the tools to make it happen in a smooth way. I think for going forward we cannot prepare for General Conference in the ways we've always done it.

**You talked a little bit at your farewell celebration about prayer. How has your daily prayer, "God make me a better person today than I was yesterday," been answered for you during these past couple of years?**

I think what it has done is slow me down. It helps me to be more reflective. It's caused me to listen more. Listening is not easy. It's a challenge because we always assume we know the answer.

But to sit and really listen to God helps me to put on the brakes when I need to. Prayer and listening puts something in motion that allows me to go down the right paths.

Prayer really does help. People who are prayer warriors, you can see a difference in them. They have a different outlook on life. Some people will say it's a gentle spirit. I say, it's just being what God wants you to be.

**What words would you share with our churches, or individuals in our pews who want to grow in their faith? What wisdom would you share?**

Don't be embarrassed to be who God created you to be. That goes for individuals and churches, don't be carbon copies. Rejoice in what makes you unique; focus on your personal relationship with God and how you can live that out.

**The inclusion of young people in the church has been a priority for you. What words do you have to offer them?**

This is important. Someone took time to care about me when I was young, that's why I'm in the church. I can do no less. When I was very, very little, clergy and laypersons made space for me to be involved in the church. They helped me, they assisted me, they corrected me. I've always been persuaded I need to pay back.



something about a place that sounds exciting need to be relevant. But I also think we can lower our expectations of young people. of meaning, of significance, that they can think we need to be apologetic about it.

**Tell me about how, over the past 42 years, God have changed? How are you different were when you started as a pastor?**

I tend to see God in the faces of people. My perceptions of God have changed as other cultures, people from around the world. It's seeing God, seeing the holy, in the faces of people.

**Is there anything you haven't done, in that you wish you had done or that you want to do?**

I can say personally, that I really did not and do journaling the way I have always doing that now in a more disciplined way in a way that I can share it. I do think that that would be helpful to persons, especially young people.

I think a lot of young people assume that



I've always had it good, that I've always loved or going to the seminary and those kind of things when I was called "a hell-raiser" in the church. There is a book by Bishop about the Youth Task Force, a group advocating for a group that, at the 1970 special session of the Council of Bishops, took over a room where the Council of Bishops of that group at that time. We were basic African-Americans. In his book, he was from his perspective we were disrespectful a bishop, which was not true. The bishop there were bishops in that room who supported what we did because they thought that was heard.

**People talk about the BWC being a diverse conference. Have we arrived at a point where we can sit back and be satisfied or are there still struggles ahead?**

In our conference and in our denomination, there was a point between the 70s and the 80s, in which we were on the cutting edge of inclusiveness and diversity. People from different denominations were trying to model us. We had started GCORR and other groups. But I think somewhere along the journey, we became comfortable. I think we thought we had accomplished our task. There are folks who are saying, "Okay, we've done





# Matthews as he prepares to retire

s exciting. People shop around. We : we ought not, out of our desperation, ople. We need to give them something y can take ownership of. And, I don't it it.

**2 years of ministry, your ideas about different today, spiritually, then you ?**

people that I meet. And so, I would say d as I have grown and been exposed to the world. It's become less complicated. he faces of others.

**3, in the area of mission and ministry, it you're still looking forward to?**  
did not take enough time to sit down ways wanted to. I'm committed to d way. I have also not written my story nk there are some things in my story pecially to young people.  
ime that because I am a bishop, that



ays been the nice boy sitting in the pew kinds of things. But there was a point he church because I was fighting for hop William Cannon in which he talks o advocating for civil rights. This was ion of General Conference, actually l of Bishops met. I was the chairperson basically demanding rights for young was not accurate in his reporting. pectful. He claimed we knocked down ishoph slipped. But the good thing was o supported and encouraged us to do hat was the only way our voices would



**What kind of things have you done, during the past four years, but also during your entire ministry, that you look back upon as highlights? What will your legacy be?**

Well, outside of the prayer piece, I've been thinking about this – stewardship. I've always enjoyed having that as part of my ministry for some reason. It probably started in my second appointment at Jones Memorial. I followed a pastor who was known as someone who got churches to do things financially. I was kind of thrust into an expectation. I was told they wanted to build a sanctuary. And I realized we didn't have all the income. The blessing came during those very same years. The General Board of Discipleship was looking for persons to be, what they called, Stewardship Associates. I became one and was able to apply those gifts and those skills to my local churches.

What I kind of enjoyed was stewardship education; but not from the sense of hitting people over the head with “give, give, give,” but looking at our stewardship as a spiritual issue, and not necessarily just the dollars. That I thoroughly enjoyed. As a matter of fact, my DMin was kind of on that area, dealing with the spirituality of stewardship, that whole piece.

As I look back over my time as a bishop in the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference, they were weak in stewardship. When I got there they were in the bottom five in terms of General Church giving. I used to do stewardship workshops as a bishop in that conference and I thoroughly enjoyed it. When I would stand, people would tell me, “oh, they're going to beat you up on that, they don't want the bishop telling them about their money.” But those sessions became like revival services. They became a platform for preaching. It was a teaching moment but it was also a moment for them to see that stewardship wasn't about me scolding people. It was something to look at spiritually – why do we give?

This year, the BWC reached a 15-year high in apportionment giving. I think this reflects well on our stewardship. Baltimore-Washington has always been kind of strong dollar-wise, but we still need to be working at our spirituality.



that; we're inclusive.”  
We may be inclusive at the General Church level. But when you get to where the rubber hits the road, which is the local churches, I think we have not done a good job. That is a troubling thing for me to leave. Although I think we have a good number of what I would consider to be diverse congregations, we still don't have enough. We have to work at that. We still need to find ways in which we can make changes so that the 11 o'clock hour is not the most segregated in America.

**What about Barbara, your wife? How has it been having her as a partner throughout this ministry?**

She's kept me steady. She's there as a presence when I need to have someone who I can turn to. Not necessarily to discuss what's going on in the church but to be a kind of rock, someone I could kind of bounce things off of. And I have to say she has been the one who has made sure the house, that the things I need, the care for the children, all those things were cared for so that I could be set free to do the work.



never thought I would have the adventures that I have gone on. The things I've seen, the people I've met, the experiences, the challenges have all been blessings.

**In the big picture, when you look back over your ministry, what do you hope your legacy will be? Can you share one or two things?**

One or two things? That I tried to be an encourager, to help others to reach their potential. I guess this may be kind of similar, I would say I was a leader, but I was a leader who believed in sharing in the vision and decision-making process with the people I led. I also believe in bringing other leaders along with me.

I just simply love, I love people, but I have a high expectation of people and my high expectations push people to do what they thought they couldn't do. I think if you have low expectations as a leader, you get low results. So, I had high expectations of our conference. With Imagine No Malaria, for example, I had high expectations and we reached our goal of \$2.1 million. Because at least for me, if you don't believe it, it just doesn't happen. I just have to believe it, feel it and know that God will help me get it through.

**As you prepare to leave, what's your prayer for the people of the conference?**

I pray that the people will keep building relationships among themselves, that the conference does not go back to being isolated into theological camps, but that we always look at what we have in common and we start from there. Our starting point is always Jesus Christ and our mission, regardless of where we stand, is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

I firmly believe there is room enough for all of us at the table. But I think as an annual conference if we ever get caught letting political ideologies drive us, instead of theological thinking, then we will no longer be the church, we'll become just a social club. Our conference focuses on Jesus Christ. That's what we've got in common.

I think the hot button issue right now is human sexuality. The reality is that there are LGBT persons in our homes, our churches and our communities. The issue is how do we determine how we live together. I think we can. Most of this is simply we've isolated ourselves, we've built up walls. We have to talk to each other. Until you know me, you're not going to trust me.

As always, it goes back again to relationships. Until I have broken bread with you and sat at table with you, or looked at you eye-to-eye, it's hard for me to feel your pain and begin to try to live into what you're experiencing. We are the church. I pray we live, in our sanctuaries and the world, as beloved children of God.



**Every time you're with a group, you seem to say, “thank you.” What words of thanks or gratitude would you want to share with the people of the conference?**

I say that, the thank you, because I don't think people hear it enough. I don't think that we affirm what people do enough. What I've discovered is that something as simple as saying thank you to a group, thank you to an individual, the blessings you get in return are just unbelievable. What it does is it makes people think they can do something that they may not have thought of doing. It's a simple two words, but it tends to hit people in an unexpected way, I've discovered. Even the people who don't want to hear it, it kind of calms the spirit, makes them a little bit more gentle.

**As you leave, are there things you're grateful for?**  
I'm grateful for the people who have been in my life. I'm grateful that God gave me these experiences. I



# NEJ calls to end church’s ‘discrimination’

By Erik Alsgaard & Maidstone Mulenga  
UMConnection Staff

THE NORTHEASTERN JURISDICTION of The United Methodist Church approved a restructuring resolution recommending the bishops’ study commission on sexuality include a plan to allow regional bodies, such as jurisdictions, to decide for themselves to adapt the Book of Discipline within their own ministry context.

Delegates also approved two other resolutions to show disagreement with church law on sexuality issues. One of those, a petition for “non-conformity” to denominational church law, was later ruled out of order by the presiding bishop.

The third resolution, a proposal to have annual conference Councils on Finance and Administration agree that there is “no money” for church trials, was eventually ruled in order after it was amended and the title deleted.

The restructuring resolution, brought by the Rev. Ginger Gaines-Cirelli, from the Baltimore-Washington Conference, called for a recommendation to the bishops’ “Way Forward” commission that is expected to review all church law related to sexuality.

Creed Pogue of Greater New Jersey argued that moving in this direction would create a more independent, non-connectional church. He urged delegates to vote no. The Rev. Charles Parker, Baltimore-Washington, disagreed. “I would respectfully suggest that the point of this resolution is to create a space for people who are in different theological places and ministry contexts to be at the same table together,” he said. “What this resolution does is to lift up a model. The purpose is to create a wider table... and model it for the denomination.”

After further debate, an amendment to add the words, “and with expanded power to make contextual based adaptation of the Book of Discipline to ensure full inclusiveness” was passed. The full motion passed 109 to 56.

The resolution calling for the Northeastern Jurisdiction College of Bishops to stop church trials was deemed out of order before debate began by Bishop Thomas Bickerton, who was chairing the session. But he said he would allow the debate to continue to consider possible amendments that could make it in order.

Bickerton explained that the College had reviewed the resolution and that it needed to be more “aspirational” in nature. As printed, he said, it called for bishops to violate the Book of Discipline.

The Rev. L. Fitzgerald “Gere” Reist II, Susquehanna Conference, offered an amendment, which was adopted 96-64. The final paragraph requested that Councils on Finance and Administration of the jurisdiction’s annual conferences “state that there are no funds available for initiating and processing of complaints and initiating of investigations and trials based upon the sexual orientation or marital status of faithful United Methodists or involving clergy for conducting same-sex weddings.”

Opposition to the amendment centered around the interpretation that this amendment was asking those councils to lie.

After the final vote to approve the “Stop the Trials” resolution, Bickerton declared the motion out of order.

“I can’t remember having a conversation at Jurisdictional Conference on this level,” he said. “The College felt it important not to squelch this conversation. We recognize that there is pain around the issue. We acknowledge that in this room there are a variety of opinions. All of our hearts ache as we struggle. Regrettably, I must call this petition out of order, and we’ll move on.”

But after a discussion on the non-conformity resolution, the “Stop the Trials” petition was re-visited. Bickerton said the College of Bishops was aware that the United Methodist Judicial Council reviews petitions in their entirety. “We have looked at the ‘Stop the Trials’ resolution as it was amended,” he said. “Our finding is that the title is not compatible with the content of the petition, and that if a motion is made to amend the title, the petition is properly in order.”

A motion to “strike the title” was made and approved, 111-53, allowing the final version of the resolution to be adopted.

However, Jeffrey Raffauf of Eastern Pennsylvania made a motion for a decision of law regarding the “untitled” resolution, asking whether the approved resolution was in order regarding paragraphs 20, 523, and 525 of the Book of Discipline and the Judicial Council Decision 96 and 886.”

Bishop Mark Webb, who was presiding at that time, said he will issue a ruling within 30 days.

Bishop Peggy Johnson, supported by Bishop John Schol, initially ruled the petition on “non-conformity” out of order because it was calling for the jurisdiction’s annual conferences to not conform or comply with provisions of the Discipline that discriminate against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual persons. It also asked that the jurisdiction not participate in or conduct judicial procedures related to those prohibitions.

When Johnson ruled the resolution out of order after it passed, as amended, 91-74, some delegates invited the bishops to consider being out of order with them.

Vicky Flippin, New York Conference, was one of those delegates. After thanking the college for allowing the jurisdiction to have a time of sacred conversation, she urged the bishops to take a bold stance and join in non-conformity.

Johnson replied that the College of Bishops would, in fact, receive the invitation and have a conversation. She said that they would get back to the full body before the end of

the conference.

When Bishops Johnson and Schol returned to the stage following the dinner break, the College had not accepted the conference’s invitation. “We know that we are all not of one mind,” said Johnson. “We honor the work of the body, where 60 percent were in favor of this,” said Schol. “And, we also honor the 40 percent who disagreed.”

Dorothee Benz, New York Conference, then issued an appeal of the chair, seeking to have the resolution declared “in order.”

To help understand the parliamentary situation the jurisdiction found itself in, Schol spoke off-the-cuff from the podium. “We are all struggling,” he said. “We recognize that there are annual conferences and individuals who have very different views of the Book of Discipline.” Noting that the vote to maintain the current disciplinary language at General Conference is about the reverse of what it is in the Northeastern Jurisdiction, Schol said that the bishops are charged with looking at this issue from both places.

The vote to uphold the decision of the chair was affirmed by a vote of 94 to 73, which meant the non-conformity resolution remained out of order.



Rev. Ginger Gaines-Cirelli proposes legislation at the 2016 NEJ conference.

Melissa Lohrer

## MAKING A DIFFERENCE

### Church works to ‘Stop Hunger Now’



Courtesy of Rev. Robert L. Wellman

On July 8, the youth of Sandy Mount UMC in Finksburg hosted a meal packing event in conjunction with Willet Missions and Stop Hunger Now. More than 10,150 meals were packed by a group of over 60 volunteers. Soy, rice, vitamins and dehydrated vegetables were measured, poured, weighed, sealed and packed in boxes. The goal of Stop Hunger Now is to end global hunger in our lifetime. The children and youth of Sandy Mount UMC raised funds to host this event through yard sales, pancake suppers and by making and selling fried egg sandwiches after church services.

### Church offers prayers and plants flags

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Members from Metropolitan Church’s multi-site community left the church for the street corner after the three services on Sunday following the Orlando shooting on June 12. They joined in prayer and planted 49 rainbow flags in honor of each one murdered in the Pulse Nightclub, largely frequented by LGBTQ young adults.



Courtesy of Rev. Charles Parker

At the suggestion of Bishop Matthews, Metropolitan UMC joined in prayer on the street corner where we planted 49 flags in honor of those murdered in a night club shooting in Orlando, Fla.

They joined in a “Litany for Orlando,” written by Patrisha House, which confessed that “their grief is our grief.

### ‘God’s Foolish Ones’ recognized

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The Methodist Federation for Social Action and BWARM presented a “God’s Foolish One” award June 3 to Bishop Forrest Stith. Stith was honored as a “fool for Christ,” for his many years of service in the church as Conference Council director, district superintendent and bishop.

TC Morrow was also honored at the banquet. She was denied commissioning at the Clergy Session earlier that day. “She is a woman of courage and a ‘fool for Christ,’” said the emcee, the Rev. Maynard Moore.

Morrow stayed because “You never give up on family.”



Courtesy of Wera M. Littlejohn

### Honoring the church’s newest members

Jaelyn Smith, Briana Hicks, Da Quan Graham and Gianni Swann were recently confirmed at Smith Chapel UMC in La Plata.



# Bishops issue statement to address racism

A STATEMENT BY THE NEJ COLLEGE OF BISHOPS

**A**S WE GATHER for this Jurisdictional Conference many persons have been confronted and consumed with the overwhelming reports of shootings and violence. Life taken! Trust broken! Anger and fear growing!

Frustration and despair looming. We believe that God's heart breaks as our hearts break with these acts of violence – fed and complicated by fear, prejudice, racism and privilege. We pray for each family and each community affected by profound loss and grief. We pray for the ripple effect of these acts of violence that strip away certainty of safety, sanctuary, value and trust.

The death of young black males in encounters with white law enforcement officers calls for response. The loss of life within our Hispanic/Latino community and among our brothers and sisters identifying with the LGBTQ community in Orlando, calls for response. The death of police officers protecting the rights of persons to peaceably protest, points to a destructive cycle of violence and retribution and calls for response.

We, the College of Bishops of the Northeastern Jurisdiction stand together to respond, and our response is not just for the moment. Our response is a commitment to acknowledge our participation in the sin of institutional racism and to have ongoing conversations within the College about racism, privilege and oppression.

Our response is to give leadership and develop plans to continue these conversations within and among the Jurisdiction and with the leadership of the annual conferences to which we are assigned. The purpose of these dialogues will be to talk about our own racism and prejudices, to heal the wounds that have been caused by racism, privilege and oppression, to train our leadership and churches in intercultural competency, and lead them to celebrate diversity. We will lead and offer training for leaders in the craft of building bridges across cultures and

ethnicity so that all those whom we profess to acknowledge as created in the image of God and persons of sacred worth, will truly feel welcome and find the safety, sanctuary, value and trust these recent and ongoing acts of violence have robbed from them. We in the college will hold one another accountable for this action, reporting to our Conferences at their annual sessions and providing a report to the 2020 Jurisdictional Conference. At the Jurisdictional level we will partner with both the Multi-ethnic Center and the Vision Table in our ongoing response.



**Rev. Joe Daniels introduces a resolution based on the NEJ bishops' statement on race.**

Together, we claim the need to listen more deeply and to seek greater understanding for those who cry out for justice. We commit ourselves to seeking justice, supporting faithful law enforcement officers, and empowering the movement of people toward more healthy community engagement within the areas we serve.

Because we believe that all persons are created in God's image, from our United Methodist faith perspective, all people matter, all are valuable. In these particularly violent and life taking incidents and times, however, we need to intentionally lift up that black lives really do matter and the lives of all persons of color really do matter. The lives of

our LGBTQ brothers and sisters really do matter. The NEJ College of Bishops believes that in the midst of the chaos, fear and violence, there is a rich opportunity for the church to be the church. We seek to be the leaders of this church. We seek justice, repentance and reconciliation. We seek not just to love peace, but to be peacemakers. God's people need us to be bearers of peace.

At the beginning of this Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference, we ask you to join us. Join us as we make this response not just for the moment, but effecting the future. Our hope is that, together, bishops, clergy and laity, we might be quilted together more strongly in our work of allowing God to transform us, so that we might go out with God's great transforming love – to bring healing, hope and peace to the world.

As a beginning, we would ask that you think and reflect with us on these questions: How will you be a peacemaker in the midst of the storms of violence and destruction? How can you be a peacemaker and at the same time work for justice? What can you do to help develop a sense of well-being and harmony in your life, in the lives of neighbors, strangers, friends and communities? What social problems move you to want to make a difference by building bridges, making connections, valuing people? Blessed are the peacemakers! Blessed are the peacemakers! Blessed are the peacemakers!

In the midst of all the storms encountered and perpetuated in this life, please think on these things! This work begins with each one of us – first individually and then collectively. We, your bishops, will not only be thinking on these things, but are moving in response. We seek your prayers and support as we take this action.

"But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the Head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love." (Ephesians 4:15-16)

## Bishop Stith reflects on the global church

BY BISHOP FORREST C. STITH

*In June, Bishop Forrest C. Stith, who is retired and lives in Upper Marlboro, reflected upon the 2016 General Conference. His thoughts filled more than 16 pages. We share a small portion on the Global church with you.*

**A**T THE 2016 General Conference in Portland, Ore., for the first time, United Methodists experienced a new reality – what it means to be a global church. Some people commented on the presence of spontaneity, passion, evangelistic fervor and vitality offered by churches from Africa and the Philippines. It was reported that this year 44 percent of the body came from the Central Conferences. Beyond the euphoria of great and diverse fellowship, I feel compelled to raise some questions.



**Bishop Stith**

### **First, can we afford the current model?**

One of the primary escalations of costs for the denomination is attempting to evolve from an American church with global partners to a fully participatory global church structure. Major costs include transportation. At General Conference, the average travel costs for participants outside the U.S. was \$3,000 per person.

Ten languages were spoken at the General Conference. Almost 200 interpreters were needed along with support staff. The cost was astronomical, exceeding \$2.3 million.

### **Second, how do logistics relate to cost factors?**

There is an underlying assumption that to be a global church, all of the continents should mimic what happens in the church in the U.S. This leads to challenges. For instance, while Americans take travel for granted, in much of Africa, public transportation is limited and erratic. Communication systems are also often nonexistent or fragile. It is therefore difficult for Central Conferences to operate committee meetings, such as a College of Bishops, episcopacy committees or executive committees. There is also the practical reality of periodic threats of violence or international diplomatic issues that limit visas and travel.

The paradox is that while churches in Africa and the Philippines are the fastest growing, they are limited in their financial ability to support existing congregations, to undergird growth, and implement global structures. The conundrum is that churches in the U.S., which are losing members and resources, are placed in the untenable position of increasing support to others. This can create even more decline.

### **Third, what does it mean to be inclusive?**

We need to redefine inclusiveness. In an attempt to be inclusive, the General Church uses the formula of proportional participation based on numbers of constituents as the only criteria.

In the U.S., for more than 40 years, we prided ourselves on an inclusiveness model based on diversity of language, ethnicity, culture and geography — not numbers. The ramifications are major. Left off the table of decision-making are large segments of the denomination, who lack large numbers but often bring unique and differing perspectives.

Meanwhile, small churches in rural or impoverished areas of the U.S. are expected to give sacrificially in order to support a global church, which may in turn set priorities and make the decisions for their ministry without their involvement.

Perhaps we need to review what a board might need to be from a global perspective and possibly have sub-committees working regionally.

During the racist days of the Central Jurisdiction, most African-American churches proudly paid their full apportionments, which were often based on membership, not financial viability. Remember, most black communities have historically received income at one-half the income median of white America. But these churches perceived that paying a full share was the reality of full participation and equality.

The General Conference on Finance and Administration recently introduced a formula for Central Conference churches to contribute more equitably, but it will not compare with Jurisdictional giving.

### **Fourth, Autonomy versus Accountability**

Many American churches are deeply involved in mission support and funding, but they do not always find that the funds raised for Africa are used appropriately.

In a few instances, some of the newer conferences have serious financial issues. In at least one conference in Africa, even GCFA and GBGM, after several audits, are unable to gain restitution for missing funds or accountability of hundreds of thousands of dollars given by U.S. churches. There seems to be no Disciplinary process for global accountability. Can we be global if part of the church is not accountable?

A similar concern is assuring membership statistics are accurate. How can we be assured that such statistics are valid without the resources and personnel to implement a membership audit?

When I visited Africa, I had no doubt that the church was growing rapidly. However, no one was counting, or even knew the names of, many of the attendees. Instead, the pastor estimated the number present in what we used to call "a preacher's count." However, the General Church is using these soft statistics to determine representation on boards, agencies, committees and even the General Conference.

I would hope that GBGM would offer a membership audit before 2020 to assure correct proportionate representation, before the implementation of new areas and the fair distribution of resources.

### **Fifth, how do we address cultural diversity?**

To be a global church is to understand that the cultural and governmental systems are very different in a given continent. How does a global church fairly relate to multiple cultural and political styles and issues in its Social Principles or proclamations?

While I lift up a number of questions, my greater concern is that we are not addressing realistically how to be a global church. Do we need a model like the World Methodist Council, or regional bodies with some kind of semi-autonomy? Even the proposed Global Discipline is limited in scope. I would suggest that any Social Principles need to be based on the geographical/social/political climate to which it is addressed.

I am certain that absolute solutions will not be found in legislative action. We must seek a methodology of living together in a diverse world and a diverse church. It would also help to study church history, and how the church has survived and thrived amidst divisions of theology, culture, and race. And, as we await what the Lord will do, let us pray that we all may be one in Christ Jesus.



# BWC delegation creates Christ-connections

*“We have heard the stories of our past.  
We come to create new stories for our future.  
We are an unfinished church.”*  
— NEJ Litany by Tanya Linn Bennett



Following worship, Charlie Moore spoke out for integrity amid social action as delegates earnestly participated in holy conferencing.



The Rev. Joe Daniels introduced legislation about Black Lives Matter and dismantling racism that will move beyond rhetoric and put the Church’s hearts, hands and voices to work for justice. The first step was prayer. He joined hands with Rev. Charles Parker.



The Revs. Joan Carter-Rimbach and Jason Jordan-Griffin rely on the power of prayer. “Watch God work!” says Carter-Rimbach in response to many of the delegates’ actions.



Jen Ihlo led efforts to rewrite the Jurisdiction’s rules. Sometimes the rules you choose to play by can change the world.



During a moment in the plenary session, when parliamentary procedure and strict adherence to the Discipline seemed to be carrying the day, a young adult stood and asked the members to reclaim the “fire.” The BWC’s youth representatives, Erich Wildberger, left, and Nito Slack brought the fire. Their enthusiasm for God and the church inspires.



Amid the holy conferencing and voting, members remembered the reason we come together – to serve God by serving Christ in vital piety and social action. Above, the Rev. Evan Young, left, and Matt Sichel remember their baptisms.

The 24-member BWC delegation brought leadership and joy to the 2016 Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference July 11-15 in Lancaster, Pa. As a group, they know: “You gotta dance when the spirit says dance.”

