

DARE TO BELIEVE

"Peter got out of the boat and was walking on the water toward Jesus." – Matthew 14:29b

UMCConnection

Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church • Becoming fully alive in Christ and making a difference in a diverse and ever-changing world • www.bwcumc.org • Volume 26, Issue 05 • May 2015



UMs respond to Baltimore unrest

BY MELISSA LAUBER & ERIK ALSGAARD
UMConnection Staff

IT WAS AN emotional roller coaster of a week in Baltimore as people protested, rioted, addressed the hurts and scars of the city and, on May 1, witnessed the indictment of six police officers on charges of police brutality in the case of Freddie Gray who died of injuries to his spinal cord while in custody.

At Ames UMC in the Sandtown-Winchester neighborhood of Baltimore, near where the riots took place, United Methodists were packing hygiene items and food to give to local residents. UMCOR — the United Methodist Committee on Relief — had provided more than 1,000 health and school kits, and hundreds of layette sets.

As the group was preparing the items, the Rev. Cynthia Moore-Koikoi, superintendent of the Baltimore Metropolitan District, stepped in and reminded them that they had forgotten to pray. Prayer, she said, is action; "our doing is prayer."

Moore-Koikoi prayed, reminding those present that

God does some of God's best work with our confused feelings and that we are a people who believe in, and count on, resurrection.

It was that kind of week in Baltimore — tears, rage and confusion intertwined with hope, faith and a vision of justice and resurrection.

The week sprang from the April 12 arrest of Freddie Gray, a resident of Sandtown-Winchester, who was picked up when he ran away from police. Police said he

was carrying a switch blade, a charge later refuted. He was placed in a police van without a seat belt and

experienced what has been called "a rough ride," while his pleas for medical attention were ignored. He suffered severe injuries to his spine. Gray died April 19.

In death he joined a roster of other African-American men from across the nation recently killed or severely injured by police.

In a movement that surprised many in its swiftness, the Baltimore state's attorney brought charges against the six officers. One of the officers, the driver of the van, was charged with second degree "depraved heart

See Freddie Gray, page 4

BWC set to address Baltimore unrest during Annual Conference Session - see page 3.

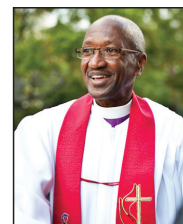
Bishop elected to new post

WASHINGTON EPISCOPAL AREA Resident Bishop Marcus Matthews has been elected Executive Secretary of the Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church effective Sept. 1, 2016.

In this new position, he will be based in Washington, D.C. His work will include building and maintaining ecumenical and interfaith relationships, establishing relationships with embassies and various national and international governmental agencies to expedite the global concerns of the Council of Bishops, acting as communications officer and working with the denomination's General Secretaries to maximize the effectiveness of the total mission and ministry of the Church.

Matthews retires as bishop of the Washington Area on Aug. 31, 2016.

Bishop Bruce R. Ough, of the Dakotas-Minnesota Episcopal Area, was elected as president of the Council.



Bishop Marcus Matthews

Bishop Matthews combines two leadership posts

BISHOP MARCUS MATTHEWS has appointed the Rev. Maidstone Mulenga to serve as Director of Connectional Ministries for the Baltimore-Washington Conference, effective July 1. Mulenga will also continue to serve in his current role as assistant to the bishop.

In making the appointment, the bishop praised Mulenga's strong leadership skills, innovation, drive and deep spiritual commitment to ensuring that the Conference and its 641 churches continue to grow in their ministry -- becoming fully alive in Christ and making a difference in an ever-changing world.

Before coming to the Baltimore-Washington Conference in 2012, Mulenga served as Director of Communications in the Upper New York Annual Conference. Prior to that, he pastored three churches in New York. Mulenga also worked as a journalist and editor for the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle newspaper and for newspapers in his homeland of Zambia.

Retiring from the position of Director of Connectional Ministries is Sandra Ferguson, who has worked in mission and ministry for the Baltimore-Washington Conference for 29 years.

Ferguson has played vital roles in mission, justice,

mercy and visioning ministries in the conference and beyond, the bishop said. "She has made immeasurable contributions to making The United Methodist

Church a positive force that brings God's love to our communities and the world."

In recognition of Ferguson's ministry, a celebration will be held Friday, May 29, at 8:30 p.m. at the Waterfront Marriott Hotel in Baltimore, as part of the Annual Conference Session.



Rev. Mulenga

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

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

I dare to believe that the gospel is real and true. I dare to believe that gospel can change a heart, a life, a community. I dare to believe that is what can transform the world and that we can do it, together.

Postmaster: Send address changes to: UMConnection,
11711 East Market Place, Fulton, MD 20759-2594.

BWC scholarship gives new life at Africa University

By MAIDSTONE MULENGA

WHEN SHE SMILES, she is just like any other young woman, yet her face hides immense pain. When she is among her peers, she bubbles with enthusiasm and yet she is homeless.

Fabiola Nizigiyimana is from Burundi, a war-torn country in the eastern part of Africa. She is an orphan.

But thanks to a scholarship from the Baltimore-Washington Conference, Fabiola at least belongs to something: she is a student at United Methodist-related Africa University.

Fabiola's life is marked with the scars of war, pain and death. She hangs on to the hope that one day, as a graduate of Africa University, she would be able to lead a normal life and take care of her family.

"I am very happy to be studying at Africa University," she said in a recent interview on the main campus in Mutare, Zimbabwe. "It is really wonderful for me. And I am very thankful for your help. Thank you very much for offering me a scholarship."

Hearing her tell her story is as heart-rending as the story itself as she pauses now and then to fight back a tear or an emotion.

She is learning the English language as well as her first year studies in health sciences.

"Both my parents were killed when I was watching," she said in an almost catatonic manner. "Therefore, I am a refugee in this country of Zimbabwe. I do not have any relative in this country or in my original country but I have two children, a boy of 5 years old and girl of 3 years old."

She tells of a story of running away from Burundi in September 2007 because soldiers were after her as she had witnessed the brutal slaying of her parents.

Her father was a teacher in the government school but "as children we didn't know that he was participating in politics. We do not know what he did," she said.

One evening in September 2007, soldiers from the government surrounded their house and started to shoot into the home. "My brothers and sisters ran away but I stayed with my parents because I was the youngest one and I didn't want to leave my parents."

In horror, Fabiola saw the soldiers take her parents out of the house. They stabbed her father and mother to death right before her eyes. "At that point, I just stood up and ran," she said. "They tried to shoot me but they failed by the grace of God and I ran into the bush."

Fabiola said she spent the night and the next day in the bush, without eating or drinking water. On the third day, she went to the pastor of a nearby Catholic Church, who hid her in the house. But when they heard that the soldiers were looking her, the pastor gave her some money and told her to leave the country.

So she left Burundi, passed through Zambia and came to Zimbabwe. When she got to Harare, the capital city, she was taken to a refugee camp.

With other refugees from other countries, she stayed at the camp and "that is where I got married because I was very lonely." She later gave birth to two children.

"When the second born was 1-year-old, my husband told me that he's going to look for money so that we could survive," she said, looking down. And then, in an almost sorrowful voice added, "Sir, from that time I have never seen him again. Now it has been more than two and a half years ago but I never



Fabiola Nizigiyimana, left, stands with the Rev. Maidstone Mulenga, center, and Jeremy Shungu Djamba.

hear anything from him. I don't know whether he's still alive or he's dead."

Fabiola said she remained alone in the refugee camp taking care of her two kids, "crying every day and thinking of how to survive with my two children."

One day, she heard news about Africa University and forced herself to apply for admission and "by the grace of God I got it. After that I applied for a scholarship and I got it also. Thank you so much."

Then she made the tough decision of leaving her children in the camp with her neighbor "so I could study because they do not allow us to bring children here on campus and I have to study so that I can get up to something and be able to support my children."

Her problems did not end with getting a scholarship. "I do not have any relatives here; I do not have anywhere to get money for some of my needs, for example, to get money for printing my assignments, for buying bathing and washing soap, things like that. The children also need to eat... so it is very hard for me."

Her dream is to complete a degree in health sciences and maybe become a nurse. She prays that she would continue to have a scholarship because without a scholarship, "my dream will stop also and I will suffer more than the first time."

She dreams of a time when she can stay off-campus so that she could live with her children instead of them staying in the refugee camp and the neighbor nagging her about taking care of her own children.

"I don't know what to do at this moment because I really need to study but I also need to take care of my children," adding that she prays every day to God for a solution.

Asked if she had any words for the people of the Baltimore-Washington Conference, Fabiola said: "Thank you very much, the whole conference of Baltimore-Washington; thank you, may God bless you."

And she walked off to class, carrying her books, her burdens, her pains, and her hopes for a better tomorrow.

Freddie Gray: In ministry to bring hope, healing to Baltimore

From page 1

murder." Three others were charged with manslaughter. Bishop Marcus Matthews noted the charges as "a vital step toward justice." Throughout the week, he called for fervent prayers for peace.

"This is a moment in our city's life that highlights a long-standing and significant issue, an issue for which the church has answers and the power to affect change,"

To read all the stories produced by BWC Communications around the Baltimore unrest, please visit www.bwcumc.org/church-responds-to-Baltimore-unrest.

he wrote in an e-mail to the people of the Baltimore-Washington Conference. "This is our opportunity to be a transformative presence in the community. This is our moment to be church: Christ in the community."

Matthews and other conference leaders are experiencing Gray's death as a wake-up call to renew the church's efforts to address the poverty, violence, addiction, lack of education, joblessness and hopelessness that plague significant parts of Baltimore.

"We are a church that seeks the peace of the city," he said. He joined other city church leaders in calling for on-going action, saying, "the issues before us will not be satisfactorily resolved until all of God's children in this city and county have the same basic human rights."

A significant part of the church's immediate response is addressing some of the needs of the residents of Sandtown-Winchester. This community is ranked among the poorest in Baltimore, said the Rev. Rodney Hudson, pastor of Ames UMC in that neighborhood.

Nearly 50 percent of Sandtown's residents live below the poverty level, the unemployment rate is above 50 percent, there is as 77 percent school dropout rate and the community has the highest crime statistics in the city, Hudson said.

The riots in Baltimore on April 27 resulted in a local CVS pharmacy and other drug and grocery stores being looted, burned and closed.

Many of these smaller, corner stores were owned by Korean families, who depended upon them for their livelihood. Moore-Koikoi is investigating how to best help them to get back on their feet and providing assistance.

A collection of hygiene items and perishable food from throughout the conference was also taken to provide for

the low-income residents in need of these staples.

Ophelia Brown-Carter, Lay Leader for the Baltimore Metropolitan District from New Waverly UMC in Baltimore, helped to pack food items on May 2 at Ames UMC.

"I am just pleased and overwhelmed by the response the laity has given to the city of Baltimore," she said. "We are here to help people see God's presence in the community."

She, too, had experienced the roller coaster of emotions. "I've been saddened, I've been angry," she said. However, she also said she had been jubilant. "I had to ask God to lead me through all of this because it's very, very difficult."

Looking around the room at all the volunteers helping in the response, Brown-Carter said that this was an example of God's grace in action.

The Rev. Joan Carter-Rimbach, the conference Volunteers in Mission coordinator, is directing the BWC relief efforts. "What we want to do as a church here is to be present, to be that hope and that light, because there are some dark places in the community," she said.

This light, Moore-Koikoi said, will come in part from the \$10,000 grant that UMCOR has sent to address the crisis.

But it will also come from the ongoing support and attention of the connectional system and the outreach of local churches from throughout the conference and across the nation, Moore-Koikoi said.

The superintendent pointed out that United Methodists are known for not pulling out when the headlines fade. We are the ones that will still be there, she said.

Toward that end, Moore-Koikoi and other district and conference leaders are working on creating and strengthening a web of efforts and initiatives that will address the deep and on-going needs of the city. Programs like "Camp Hope" will

be expanded so that children who have experienced violence in their lives can attend summer camp at both West River and Manidokan, but also at John Wesley UMC in Baltimore this summer.

Strategic thinking is being done by conference and local church leaders to determine how to best politically and missionally address the needs of the city.

Ames, Metropolitan and St. Luke's UMCs in Sandtown struggle, along with many of the other 72 Baltimore churches, with declining members, delayed building repairs and low economic resources, said Hudson.

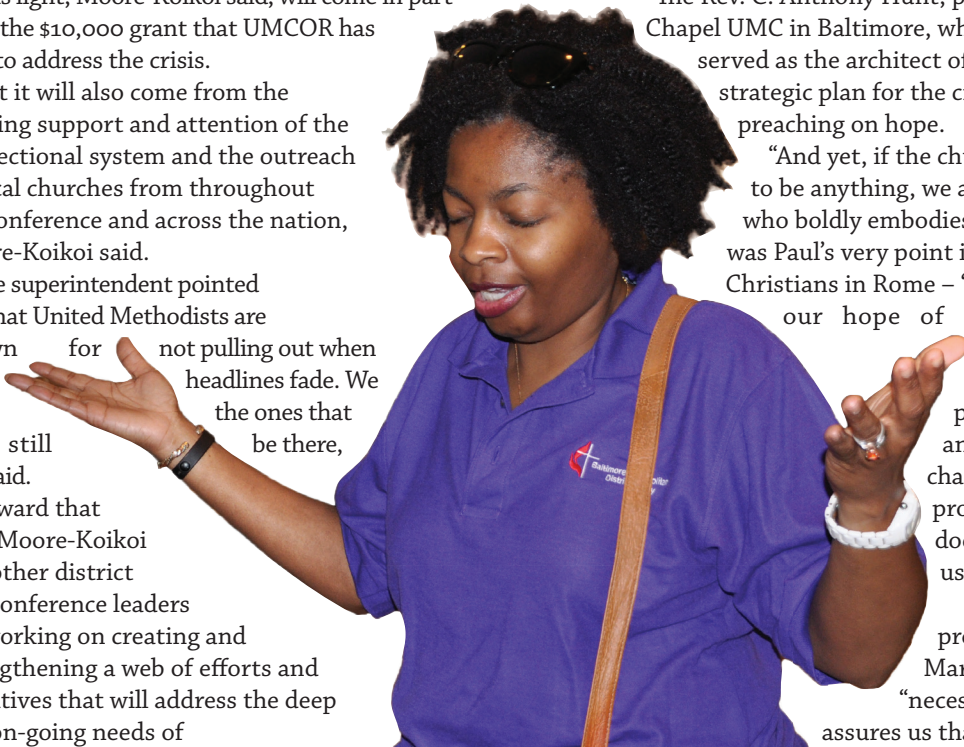
"As tragic as Freddie Gray's death is, it has not been in vain. It has opened the eyes of the world and forced it to see the true issues facing Baltimore," said Hudson. "Indeed it is during moments of crisis that people see God in the faces of the oppressed and have no choice but to live out the call of Jesus and serve. It's been a long time coming."

On Sunday morning, May 3, many pastors in the Baltimore-Washington Conference prayed for and preached on the events in Baltimore.

The Rev. C. Anthony Hunt, pastor of Epworth Chapel UMC in Baltimore, who several years ago served as the architect of the conference's strategic plan for the city, found himself preaching on hope.

"And yet, if the church has been, and is to be anything, we are to be that people who boldly embodies hope," he said. "This was Paul's very point in his words to the Christians in Rome - '...and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God... knowing that our suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us...'"

Hope, Hunt proclaimed, echoing Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., is "necessary to life. ... Hope assures us that justice will come... that peace will come.... And that change is going to come."



Rev. Cynthia Moore-Koikoi offers prayer.



Be equipped to answer
God's call on your life.

Wesley Theological Seminary.

Offering customizable master
of divinity and master of arts
degrees and ministry-growing
doctor of ministry degrees.

Learn more at
WesleySeminary.edu



BWC visits Korean Methodists

ON EASTER SUNDAY, Bishop Marcus Matthews and the Revs. J.W. Park, Maidstone Mulenga and Dae Sung Park traveled to South Korea, retracing the steps of the first Methodist missionaries who arrived in South Korea on Easter Sunday 130 years ago. The team joined an international delegation that celebrated the history of the Korean Methodist Church and prayed for peace and the reunification of North and South Korea. Read the complete story at www.bwcumc.org/korean_missionary_journey.



Photos by Melissa Lauber

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Artist turns dead stump into hope

EMMITSBURG – When the large tree on the church lot decayed and died, the congregation of Tom’s Creek UMC did something special with it. Instead of cutting it down and hauling it to the dump, they “turned the lemon into lemonade.”



A 10-foot tall tree stump was transformed at Tom’s Creek UMC in Emmitsburg.

They turned to Jason Stoner, a local artist and businessman, to transform the stump into a message of hope. A church member picked up the costs.

The 10-foot wooden carving of Jesus holding a lamb faces out into the world to let the passersby know Jesus cares. The visible hand of Christ on the statue shows it is pierced, a reminder of Christ’s death and resurrection.

“So, just imagine a dead tree that was resurrected to be a message of hope that Christ opens up healing and grace to all,” Wilson said.

“Come by and see it,” he added.

Berkeley County UMs to build fifth house

MARTINSBURG, W. VA.-Twenty-five United Methodist Churches of Berkeley County, W. Va., held a Music Fest at Spring Mills High School in January to raise funds for their next Habitat for Humanity build.

It will be their fifth Habitat house. Members from all the churches work together on the construction.

“Our emphasis for this house is to build it for a veteran,” said the Rev. Ed Grove, who retired in 2009 but continues to serve the Mt. Wesley-Greensburg Charge.

Among the featured individual acts at the concert were the Rev. Edgardo Rivera, Frederick District superintendent; a united children’s choir under the direction of Barbara Suffecool, a Guide for the Western Region; and a 55-voice United Choir made up of representatives of the Berkeley County Churches. Rivera also led a commitment service.

Habitat for Humanity of the Eastern Panhandle is still seeking funding to complete its \$50,000 goal for the project, nor have they yet identified a veteran family who qualifies for the home, Grove said. The goal is in sight with more than \$32,000 raised by the end of January.

Peace with Justice grant given locally

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The General Board of Church and Society distributed \$41,000 in grants from the 2014 Peace with Justice Special Sunday offerings in March. A grant of \$5,000 went to a BWC-based organization, the Nakba Museum Project of Memory and Hope.



This art- and storytelling-based project is a stepping stone toward a museum in Washington, D.C., “to tell the Palestinian refugee story, one that has been silenced or ignored for too long,” according to Bshara Nassar, founder and executive director.

The goal of the project and museum is to deepen the conversations on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict

to develop a “more balanced view” by relating the experiences of people who had homes, but were forced to become refugees. The museum will be a space that simply tells the human story, with all its paradoxes and pathos.

The United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries awarded Nassar a scholarship two years ago that enabled him to get a master’s in Conflict Transformation at Eastern Mennonite University.

Hunger offering benefits Youth Garden

WASHINGTON, D.C. - The Washington Youth Garden was one of two awards the General Board of Church and Society gave at their March annual business meeting. The award was from the hunger offering of \$1,573 the board took and was split between the Youth Garden and the Asuncion Perez Memorial Center in the Philippines.

The Washington Youth Garden, located at the National Arboretum on New York Ave., NE, works with low-income and underserved communities to engage healthy lifestyles through gardening. It provides a year-round environmental science and food education program. To learn more, go to www.washingtonyouthgarden.org.

GBGM boosts Quality of Life retreats

FULTON – Recently, the Quality of Life Retreats received a grant of \$10,000 from the Global Health Unit of the General Board of Global Ministries. The grant will support retreats in 2015.

Quality of Life Retreats, which began in 1988, are a ministry of the Baltimore-Washington Conference. The retreats meet for four-day weekends four times a year and bring together people who have HIV/AIDS and are 18 years of age or older. Participants may be from any religion, any church or no church, nor do they discriminate on the basis of gender, sexual preference or orientation.

“We offer a unique and holistic, participant-centered approach to educating and supporting people living with HIV,” explained the grant proposal.

The grant funds will be used for the retreats in 2015, as well as to expand the community outreach, both to possible participants and to supporting churches in the conference area.

Why do United Methodists have apportionments?

By ERIK ALSGAARD
UMConnection Staff

FIRST IN A SERIES

ITEM: In late April, while we were focused on the events of Baltimore City, other United Methodists were focused on bringing relief to the people of Nepal. A devastating earthquake on April 25 claimed the lives of more than 7,000 people. The United Methodist Committee on Relief – UMCOR – has already sent an emergency grant of \$90,000 to Nepal’s GlobalMedic organization to bring fresh, clean water and other relief supplies to the hardest hit areas. In addition, UMCOR provided a \$10,000 emergency grant to the Baltimore-Washington Conference to help with supplies following the Baltimore riots.

ITEM: The Rev. Eric King is pastor of Metropolitan UMC in Baltimore. Following the unrest of April 27, King immediately opened his church to the community, becoming an oasis of food, clothing, comfort and aide in a time of great chaos. Because United Methodists throughout the Baltimore-Washington Conference pay their apportionments, King is able to be a visible presence of Christ in the neighborhood.

ITEM: In 2013, United Methodist churches in the United States paid \$564,169,542 in apportionments to district and conference treasurers. By way of comparison, in 2009, churches paid \$601,696,211.

Ah, yes. Apportionments. The bane of United Methodist churches? The cost of doing business? A “tax” levied on every person who is a member of the denomination? What are they and why do we have them?

the Church.” {emphasis added}
“Conference benevolences,” according to ¶247.14, are the second part of apportionment giving. “Conference benevolences represent the minimum needs for mission and ministry in the annual conference. Payment in full of these apportionments by local churches is the *first* benevolent responsibility of the Church.” {emphasis added}
Notice the similar language? Why do you suppose that is? It’s because, in other words, United Methodists are connectional. We put into practice that if you want to give money beyond your local church and local community needs, the *first* place to look is our connectional system: our general boards and agencies, and the annual conference.

Why? Because United Methodists are a connectional people.
What does “connectional” mean? Since its beginning, Methodism has shared a common tradition of faith, a common polity (or church governance), a common mission (the current mission statement of The United Methodist Church is: “To makes disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world”), and a common way of working together. To enable all of this, the church has created, over time, a way for each local church to share in this common mission and ministry. Thus enabled and connected, every church – regardless of size or location – is able to do much more together than they would on their own.

But to really understand why The United Methodist Church uses an apportionment system, you only need to meet the people and hear the stories of the people whose lives have been impacted and changed because of your giving, like the people in Nepal getting clean water, or the people in Baltimore receiving health and school kits. Offerings placed in collection baskets/plates/bags and automatically deducted through e-giving are shared around the corner and around the world.
And they really do make a difference.

NEXT TIME: John Wesley on money



Through your giving, United Methodists send out hundreds of missionaries across the globe.

Believe it or not, the United Methodist Book of Discipline may be helpful in answering some of these questions.
Paragraphs 247 and 812 of the 2012 Discipline shed light on apportionments.
In ¶ 812, this short paragraph talks about the “World Service Fund” and “Conference Benevolences” as being “basic in the financial program of The United Methodist Church. World Service on apportionment represents the minimum needs of the general agencies of the Church. Payment in full of these apportionments by local churches and annual conferences is the *first* benevolent responsibility of

Changing the conversation from ‘Yes, but,’ to ‘Yes, and...’

By ROD MILLER*

IT CAN BE very difficult to talk with someone with whom you disagree. One of the troubles we have communicating with people who have different ideas than we do is that we unwittingly shut down the discussion. When we disagree with something someone says, we often blurt out “Yes, but...” and then we launch into our opinion.
Often we have hardly heard what the other person has been saying because we are intent on getting our view out. The next thing you know, lines are drawn and both parties become frustrated trying to convince the other of their position. Or the discussion stops and both become quiet. Before long, we walk away from the verbal joust with not much to show for it.
There is, however, a simple way to keep communication open. It is called “Yes, and...”
“Yes, and...” is a means for us to keep communication flowing. “Yes, and...” is based on core values including: acceptance of the other person as a child of God; mutual respect; openness to learn; and appreciation of each other’s individuality. We have been well trained to look for what doesn’t work, therefore we typically respond to new or different ideas with “Yes, but...,” not even considering what may be of value in the other person’s perspective.
In the long run, “Yes, but...” has the effect of narrowing our world down only to our own ideas and ways of thinking and acting. It assumes the posture of “don’t confuse me with the facts.” “Yes, and...” requires that you listen to what the other person says and acknowledge the value of the person and their opinion.
If you view a conversation like two people walking together, “Yes, and...” has the pair continuing to walk, while every time an “and” is mentioned, they probably

veer in one way or another. If, when walking together, “Yes, but...” is uttered, it is as if the pair is stopped in their tracks. Including



the word “but” has the effect of bringing the conversation to a halt. Movement stops as claims are staked, or silence ensues. From this frozen state, another phrase “no, because” can actually push the walkers back in the direction they came.

Underlying a “Yes, and...” approach is an attitude of acceptance of the person as they are. Acceptance comes first, followed by a level of understanding. Lastly, the parties may find that they agree. A “Yes, but...” approach assumes that we need to push for agreement first.
Understanding follows and lastly we come to accept the other person. “Yes, and...” is grace centered. “Yes, but...” is focused on persuading and convincing and so is focused on the ideas and not the person. It is position centered.
I call on our Conference, clergy and laity, to have more “Yes, and...” conversations and fewer “Yes, but...” conversations. With this call, I am inaugurating a “Yes, and” campaign for our Annual Conference. I challenge all of us to shift our language. This will require a shift in attitude and approach. It will move us to spend more energy listening and less trying to make points. It will require us to walk with each other and not away from each other. It will require us to acknowledge the good in the other person and their perspectives, even when it is not immediately obvious to us. It will move us to listen and respect each other. It will require meeting one another in relationship before pointing at ideas and positions. And ultimately, it will lead to more dancing, even while sometimes stepping on toes, and less leaving each other on the dance floor.
“Yes, and...” conversations will take some practice before becoming natural. Our upcoming Annual Conference Session offers an ideal time to practice. I am crazy enough to believe that this simple shift in language can help bring about a shift in the way we are with each other. It can also be a lot of fun. So, let’s start hearing your “yes, and...”!
*The Rev. Rod Miller is chair of the BWC Commission on Religion and Race.

Report to Annual Conference: Divestment Working Group

SUBMITTED BY REV. JACKSON DAY

Background

A Divestment Working Group, as mandated by the Annual Conference, (2014 Journal, p. 333) was formed with representation from the Conference Boards of Church and Society, Pensions and Health Benefits, and the Conference Council on Finance and Administration. Representation was added from the Conference Trustees. The Working Group was tasked with reporting back on the divestment alternatives which are available to the Conference, including the cost of each alternative and its potential impact on Conference Retirees.

Following Annual Conference, the working group held meetings to identify the issues involved, to hear from Annual Conference financial staff on the nature and location of investments; to hear from Wespeth, the investment body of the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits, as well as the Mid-Atlantic Foundation, and to formulate this report.

Findings

The Baltimore-Washington Conference currently has about \$112 million in invested assets. The majority of these assets are pension and benefit funds which are held at Wespeth and the Mid-Atlantic Foundation. (Wespeth manages a total of \$21 Billion for the United Methodist Church and MidAtlantic Foundation manages \$80 million for three Annual Conferences.)

The Annual Conference agreements with Wespeth and the Mid-Atlantic Foundation gives them broad instructions such as how much risk to take, but delegates to them the decisions on which investments to purchase. Our moneys are bundled into pools of funds about which investment decisions are made and these funds contain a constantly changing portfolio of individual investments. Thus, response to a specific request from any one Conference to invest or not invest in a particular company, or to estimate the costs of doing so, is nearly impossible.

Both Wespeth and the Mid-Atlantic Foundation practice Socially Responsible Investing (SRI), and their investments are made based on an SRI screen which currently screens out over 400 companies which have been considered for investment but failed the screen. This screen is developed to include specific mandates from the General Conference and to apply broadly the United Methodist Social Principles. This SRI screen

avoids investments in alcohol, “adult entertainment”, tobacco, weapons, gambling and operating private prisons. If a particular company derives 10% or more of its revenue from such activities, the company is screened out. In the case of nuclear weapons, the threshold is 3%.

The General Board of Pension and Health Benefits has the ability to add categories to the Screen which are not specifically mandated by our Social Principles. An outstanding example of this was the decision of the General Board in response to Resolution 4071 and subsequent advocacy, to add private prisons to the list of investments we avoid. The Divestment Working Group found that the General Board pays close attention to the resolutions of the General and Annual Conferences.

Recommendations

1. Social Witness is an intrinsic expression of the Christian faith. Annual Conference Resolutions in support of, or in opposition to, various activities and entities, both domestic and international, are a necessary expression of our faith. When such resolutions require investment decisions for their implementation, we call upon Conference members to direct the call for such resolutions to the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits, which continually evaluates the SRI screens. In appropriate years, a petition may be addressed to General Conference, which is the sole body entrusted with mandating investment policy for the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits. The resolution may state “There are no financial implications to the Conference operating budget but conference investments will be realigned if the desired action is taken by the General Board or the General Conference.”
2. We call upon the Conference Communications Office to promote an understanding of Socially Responsible Investing through the media at its disposal.
3. United Methodist congregations in the Conference have their own investment decisions to make, and we urge the Annual Conference to promote SRI by our congregations. If a congregation makes its investments only on the basis of financial return, and pays no attention to where the money is invested, it is out of compliance with United Methodist principles.

An important principle is that the congregation’s fiduciary responsibility with respect to its investments must honor not only the narrow requirement of financial stewardship, but must honor the causes and principles for which the donations behind the investments were made. In the end, the operative question might be, “What would Jesus do with his portfolio?” The Mid-Atlantic Foundation, which follows the SRI principles of the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits, is an important resource for congregations as they consider issues related to their investments.

4. We commend the CFA for voting to establish an investment working group. We recommend that the investment working group (a) be comprised of nominees from the CFA, the Board of Pensions, the Board of Church and Society, and the Trustees; and (b) include in its responsibilities the promotion of socially responsible investment at the Annual Conference and local church levels.

Working Group Members:

Board of Pensions and Health Benefits: Rev. Jackson Day, Chair; Larry Haynes; Dayle Hall; Clint Stretch
Board of Church and Society: Rev. Ken Hawes, T. C. Morrow, Mike Koob
Council on Finance and Administration: Rev. Bryant Oskvig; Ken Ow; Gwen Morgan
Trustees: David Hall
Staff: Paul Eichelberger

The Task Force will study the available alternatives regarding divestment from corporations engaged in activities which the Conference may oppose, including Fossil Fuels and Israel/Palestine. The Task Force will report back to Annual Conference 2015 on the divestment alternatives which are available to the Conference, including the cost of each alternative and its potential impact on Conference Retirees. The Task Force will also, if so moved, recognizing that only the General Conference may direct the investment policy of the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits, present to Annual Conference 2015 appropriate legislation which the Annual Conference may submit to the General Conference in 2016.

A journey back in time to Selma, Alabama, 1965

BY MAYNARD MOORE
Retired Elder of the Baltimore-Washington Conference

FIFTY YEARS AGO, voting rights in the South were a serious issue that was continuing to stymie efforts by the African-American communities in their efforts to gain significant representation in state legislatures and in Congress. In 2015, we are seeing much of the gains beginning to erode as legislatures pass restrictive voting requirements, and at the federal level, judicial decisions are compromising the initiatives guaranteed by the Voting Rights Act signed into law by President Johnson in 1965 and since reconfirmed twice by Congress.

My return to Montgomery, Ala., for the celebration on March 25, on the steps of the state capital, was not an act of nostalgia; rather, it was a chance to reconnect with a serious social and political issue still with us.

Several of my colleagues were at the Edmund Pettus Bridge on March 8 when Presidents Obama and Bush, and 10,000 others, walked across that now historic structure and spoke about the progress that has been made.

Certainly, billy clubs kept in their sheaths is a mark of progress. But black folks in the South still face serious obstacles when they attempt to register to vote, and others in states across the nation now have to take a variety of steps to “qualify,” rights that the rest of us take for granted.

I had not been in Selma for that historic event. I was a graduate student in 1965 and I could not skip my exams to get to Selma in time. I did, however, with two different colleagues, get to the final leg of the march into Montgomery on March 25, 1965.

For weeks I resisted the urgings of my colleagues to go back; I just did not feel that a trip down memory lane would be worth all the trouble. But, while at the Wesley Seminary symposium on racism, chaired by Mike McCurry, I decided that I would go.

The gathering would be March 24. Then, on March 25, 50 years to the day that we marched with Dr. King to the State Capitol, we would retrace those steps.

Highlighting the entire event was the presence of 300

young people who participated in what was called the “Walking Classroom.” In 1965, once President Johnson had nationalized the Alabama National Guard to protect the marchers, Dr. King and his SCLC leaders were limited by the injunction to have a maximum of 300 people actually make the five-day, 50-mile march from Selma to Montgomery. They selected 300 young people from the ranks of the movement across the state, including many from Selma, to make that march. In 1965, these original marchers, mostly exuberant youth, were wearing bright yellow traffic control vests so that they could be distinguished, and were at the head of the line of the march with Dr. King on the last day in Montgomery.



Marchers commemorate the historic protest in Selma.

In 2015, the 300 young people who had been selected to start the March from Selma were wearing special T-shirts in red, white and blue – they had been selected through a nationwide essay contest witnessing as to what it would mean to them to combat racism and march for voting rights.

It was somewhat nostalgic for me to re-trace that route from 50 years ago, walking along with the chanting and singing young people and bus-loads of others. But this time, instead of hostile young white ruffians taunting us and threatening us, the route was lined with local black folks, on doorsteps and church steps, passing out bottles of water, cheering us on.

Still, it was depressing to see how many humble and

dilapidated buildings and homes could be observed along the route.... It was still obvious to us where we have and have not progressed, and how stark the economic differences are between “historic” black communities and the rest of us... particularly stark as we walked out of that west end into the downtown center filled with steel and glass office buildings and thriving commercial enterprises.

Nevertheless, the event was exhilarating – especially when we made the last turn from Montgomery Street on to Dexter Avenue and could see the Capital a half-mile up in front of us. Quite a few in the line of march then picked up in a new chant, “We’re back! We’re back!”

At the Capital, two flatbed trucks were positioned exactly as when Dr. King spoke 50 years ago. On these trucks were two huge billboards with photographs of Dr. King speaking to that crowd. The emcee for this occasion, a local radio host, explained to us the symbolism. At her signal, the trucks moved away and behind the billboards, and the steps of the Capital were open before us.

Later, as we headed home, it was clear to us that this struggle has yet to conclude — progress yes, but racism still lives in our land, perhaps not overtly as before, but with subtle currents and deep roots.

I also reflected on two signs that I had seen while in Alabama. The first greeted us as we drove into the state and stopped at the Welcome Center just across the Georgia-Alabama state line. Outside was a pedestal engraved: “We Dare to Defend our Rights.”

One doesn’t have to wonder from whom the state legislature has to put up a defense; the implied enemy is the federal government.

And then, on the way out of town, stopping for gas at a country store, on the wall behind the checkout counter, I noticed another sign. This one read:

“I am not the person I was meant to be.

I am not the person I need to be.

But thank God, I am not the person I used to be.”

I choose to believe that this second sign might be the herald of a better future – IF we continue to engage the issue.

We become what we behold. We shape our tools, and thereafter our tools shape us.

Marshall McLuhan

(RE)building the way we think about ministry...together

How are you and your congregation being shaped by your work with the poor, the hungry, the imprisoned, the naked, and the marginalized? Find tools for getting involved in social justice and making a tangible difference in your neighborhood in the Community Transformation section of the Ministry Toolbox.

As we are experiencing currently in Baltimore, the community is begging for the church to be a transformation partner. We can be the church made visible in the world and bring the reality of the Gospel to life for all people—especially those who are disempowered by systems of oppression. In the toolbox this month, you will find racial justice and reconciliation resources that you might use to begin having authentic dialogue that leads to sustained action that creates—along with prayer—transformed lives and communities. We hope you will add what you have found helpful, as you have sought to join Jesus' mission "to preach the message of good news to the poor to announce pardon to prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to set the burdened and battered free, and to announce, 'This is God's year to act!'" (Luke 4:18-19, MSG)

**COMMUNITY
TRANSFORMATION**
bwcumc.org/toolbox

The first 100 people to ask a question, submit a tool or add knowledge to an existing tool will be eligible to receive a \$100 Cokesbury gift certificate.