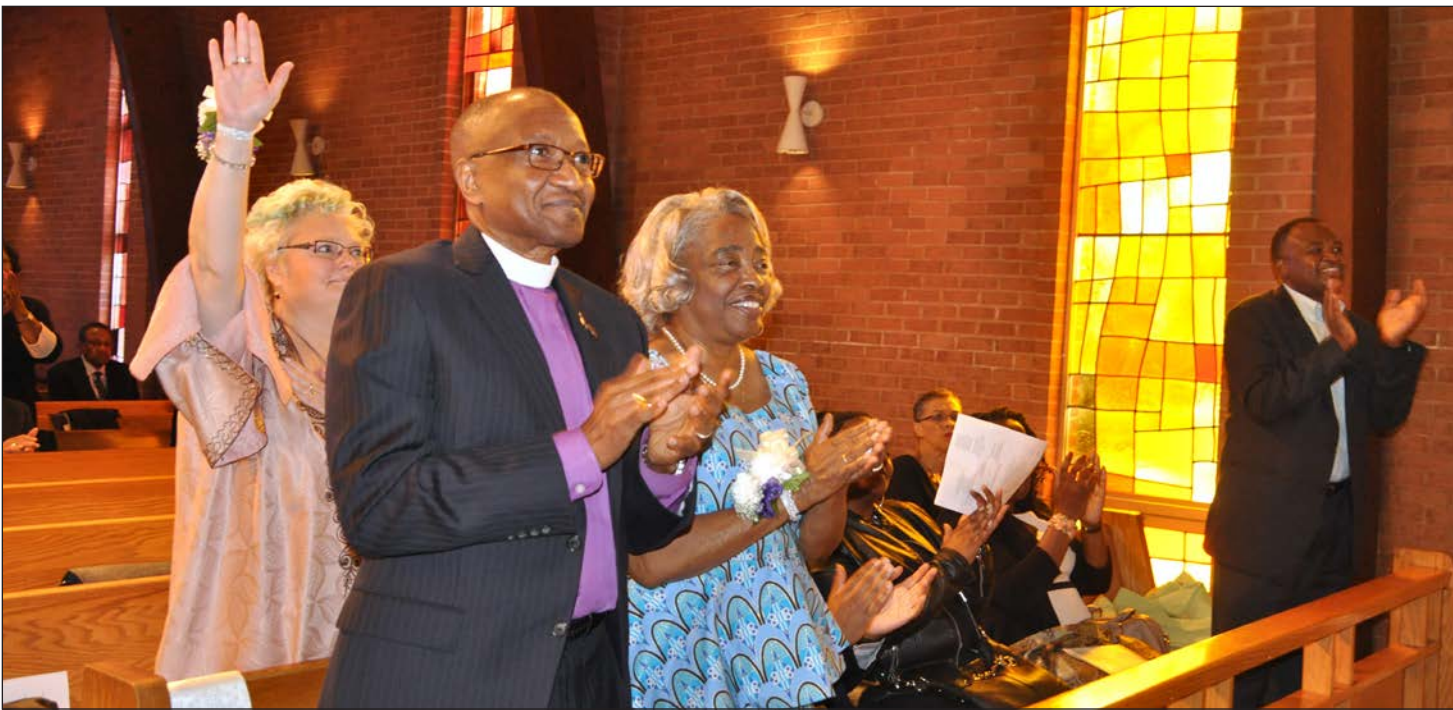




UMCConnection

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Bidding the bishop a fond farewell



By MELISSA LAUBER
UMCConnection Staff



WORDS OF HEARTFELT gratitude and soulful reflection marked each of the four regional farewell ceremonies that honored Bishop Marcus Matthews for his 42 years of ministry, of which all but eight years was spent serving God in the Baltimore-Washington Conference.

At the celebrations, held April 9, 10, 16 and 17, the Deaf choir sang “Did you Ever Know that You’re my Hero,” African dancers, liturgical dancers, and diverse choirs performed, favorite hymns were sung, the bishop’s grandson portrayed him in a skit, and memories were shared in times of fellowship and refreshments. But most of all, there were words of tribute and gratitude for moments of shared ministries.

“It is grace,” said the Rev. Ianther Mills, pastor of Asbury UMC in Washington. Those were the first words Bishop Matthews spoke to the Washington Region when he arrived to lead the Conference during a welcome service Sept. 22, 2012.

It was grace that brought a boy from South Carolina to become a bishop in The United Methodist Church, said Mills. “It is always the grace of God.”

Matthews said he experienced that grace anew, sitting in the pew in the church where his ministry as a pastor began, and where, steps away, he married Barbara Walker Matthews 42 years ago.

During the service, Matthews was honored for his

accomplishments throughout the seasons of his ministry. Common threads were woven through the remarks by his colleagues. The bishop, it was noted, is a man of God, who actively lives a faith-based life. He’s a pastor’s pastor, who brought healing to the Baltimore-Washington Conference by always putting people first.

“As a leader, he doesn’t mind other people shining,” said the Rev. Lillian Smith. “If you had any giftedness, he would push you out front, because he wanted you to shine.”

At the farewell service in the Southern Region at Westphalia UMC in Upper Marlboro April 17, the Rev. Mark Venson of Ebenezer UMC in Lanham delivered the opening prayer. He cited Bishop Matthews’ journey – and how he first visited D.C. as part of his school’s safety patrol, marching as a boy in the Cherry Blossom Festival.

Venson lifted up the bishop’s gifts as a leader who brings healing and meaning to those he serves, calling him “a shepherd among shepherds. ... You modeled for us what grace looks like,” he said.

Also sharing his appreciation was the Rev. Robert Rodeffer, who has been ordained for 61 years. At this service, four youth also read excerpts from the bishop’s first sermon to the annual conference session in 2013, calling on United Methodists to create prayer stations in their churches, to bring at least one person to Christ and to form a relationship with a school in their ZIP code.

Kathy Myers, of Metropolitan UMC in Indian Head, shared how her church took the challenge to be a prayer station to heart and began praying for, by name, those serving in the sheriff’s department. By chance, one morning she ran into an officer and told him her church was praying for him.

He related how just a short while ago, a man had held a gun to his head and pulled the trigger; but the gun did not fire. The officer attributed it to God.

So did Myers, who ran to her car, got her prayer notebook and discovered the officer whose life had been spared was one of those she had prayed for.

“I knew it had to be God who saved me,” he said. “God is so good. Prayer works!” Myers said, and embraced Bishop Matthews.

In the Western region, at Middletown UMC, the celebration took on the feel of a family reunion as people reminisced and sang old hymns. They thanked the bishop for “his prayer and his care.” The Rev. Edgardo Rivera,

Green appointed as new superintendent

By MELISSA LAUBER
UMCConnection Staff



BISHOP MARCUS MATTHEWS has named the Rev. Gerard “Gerry” A. Green Jr. to serve as

superintendent of the Greater Washington District. His appointment begins July 1.

Green will replace the Rev. Joseph Daniels, who has been serving as a superintendent and senior pastor of Emory UMC in Washington.

Beginning in July, Daniels will focus more fully on Emory and the congregation’s creation of a \$56 million affordable housing project.

“Rev. Green will serve the Greater Washington District and this annual conference well,” the bishop said. “He is someone who knows how to grow a church. He is a pastor’s pastor who understands the value of relationship and partnership. He has a heart for mission, is wise, and brings a multitude of gifts to the Cabinet table.”

Green has served in Extension Ministry since 2011 as a staff pastor and pastoral counselor at Asbury Methodist Village, a continuing care retirement community in Gaithersburg. Prior to that, he served for 13 years at Epworth UMC in Gaithersburg and Metropolitan UMC in Severn. Before entering the ministry, we worked for 34 years as an educator and counselor in the Howard County Public School System.

Green is also a licensed clinical professional counselor. His doctoral degree is from Loyola University in Maryland. He has two Masters degrees from Boston College and a Masters of Divinity degree from Wesley Theological Seminary.

Green said he was initially surprised when the call from



Rev. Gerard Green Jr.

LOVE OFFERING

Throughout his ministry, Bishop Marcus Matthews has been led by the love and imagination of God. As he retires at the end of August, that sense of love and creativity will live on in an innovative building project at Africa University. You and your congregation have the opportunity to express your love and appreciation for the bishop’s ministry by helping to build a new health and sports complex on the campus of Africa University, located in Zimbabwe. Many churches have already donated. Second-mile giving is now encouraged. Approximately \$500,000 is needed to start building. Bring your gift to opening worship at Annual Conference or visit bwcumc.org/love.

See Farewell, page 3

See DS, page 3

... well said

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

By MANDY SAYERS
Pastor, Covenant UMC, Gaithersburg

SOMETIMES I WISH Jesus didn't say "Go." You know, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations..." I wish after he did something hard, or told some hard parable, he didn't say "Go and do likewise." I wish Jesus said something like, "Sit tight. It's all good. Embrace the status quo."

I wish the gospel didn't make so many claims on us. I wish the Holy Spirit of Pentecost was more of a nice breeze than an unruly wind.

But God calls us always to go outside our comfort zones, to some new place we never thought we'd be, often to minister to or to love some person that we never thought we'd come to know. Jesus is consistently breaking down barriers that divide "us" (whoever WE are) from "them" (whoever THEY are), and calling us all to follow him.

Sometimes my desire to "stay" and to "leave well enough alone" is motivated by the knowledge that to "go" will mean to "change" and to have to navigate hard, complicated challenges.

Fortunately, we are seldom called to "go" alone. We are called into community, into church, in part so that when we "go," we can "go" together. I have committed laity who courageously "go" where the Holy Spirit leads them, who faithfully wrestle with the next step outside their comfort zones that the Holy Spirit is calling them to take. I have friends who gently remind me that the Kingdom of God is really the one to which I have made my commitments, in a world where other kingdoms call me. Inspired by them (a word that means, "to breathe into"), I find I can "go" to the next place God is leading (pushing, pulling or shoving) me to go as a leader.

As United Methodists gather in Portland for General Conference, they gather as those who are "sent," to be the church, to make disciples, to follow the leadings of the Holy Spirit. May we be surprised by the rush of a mighty Holy Spirit wind. May we be encouraged that the word "go" is not always a comfortable word, but we have a Savior and a Spirit that calls us forth, that goes ahead of us.

Ready? Set? Now...Go!



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

WHILE YOU CAN'T tell now, when I was younger I was quite the runner. I ran everywhere. Go to the store for mom? I ran. Get excused from class to go to the bathroom? I ran. No matter where, near or far, I ran.

But there was one type of running that I enjoyed more than all the others combined: racing. While racing was really just running, racing came with magic words. You see, as a child, every race began with, "On your mark, get set, go!"

It was the "on your mark, get set, go!" that made racing special. In those moments, you knew that something different was about to take place. Someone announced that you had to get on your mark. You couldn't be just anywhere; you had to be in your place at an appointed time to do something specific.

Then you had to get set. Getting set made you alter your mindset. Your muscles tensed, you focused and then you waited for the magic word: GO!

No matter how on your mark you were, or how mentally set you were, nothing happened until someone said GO! On Go!, you burst out of your stance and gave it all you had until the race was run.

Many of us are reading and praying about General Conference in Portland right now. As we do, I would encourage you to be in prayer for our church. Be in prayer that we will be on our marks. That we will not try to be anywhere and everywhere, but rather that we will gather to be in the lane that God has assigned for us.

Secondly, I want to encourage you to pray that we are set. That we set our minds not on personal agendas, not on what divides us, but that we set our minds on the high calling and assignment that God has for us.

Finally, I encourage you to pray that when all is said and done, we Go! Nothing will happen until we do. Lives will not be changed unless we Go! into the highways and the by-ways seeking out the least and the lost. Finally, we must Go! out of our buildings, out of our meetings and into the world and show them the love of God and make disciples of Jesus Christ. After all that is our assignment: to GO!

So, On Your Marks...Get Set...GO!!!!

... well said

... well said

EVENTS

Farewell Celebration for Barbara Matthews
May 28, 1 p.m.

A farewell celebration honoring Barbara Matthews, the wife of Bishop Marcus Matthews, will be held at the BWC Mission Center in Fulton. Tickets are \$25. Register at bwcumc.org.

BWC Annual Conference
June 1-4
Marriott Wardman Park Hotel, D.C.

Churches are advised to budget for attendance for their clergy and lay members. The cost for a three-night stay, including registration and parking but not including meals, is \$833. Breakfast at the hotel is \$26; lunch is \$35, and dinner is \$45. More information about the Annual Conference Session is online at <http://bwcumc.org/sessions/2016-session/>.

United Methodist Day at Kings Dominion
June 11

Tickets, which can also be used June 18, 25 and July 2, and 9, are \$34. For more information, contact Deb Trowbridge at 410-290-7302.

Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference
July 11-15
Lancaster, Pa.

"Quilted by Connection" is the theme for this quadrennial meeting which is responsible for electing new bishops and assigning all bishops to their respective Areas. The BWC will have 24 delegates at the conference. More information is available at nejumc.org/2016conference.html. Full coverage will be online at bwcumc.org, and in the July/August issue of this newspaper.

Mission u
July 29-31
Bethesda Marriott Hotel

Join the Board of Global Ministries and United Methodist Women for spiritual growth and to expand your knowledge and concepts of mission. Studies include: The Bible and Human Sexuality; Latin America: People of Faith; and Climate Justice: Call to Hope. A youth Mission u will run the same time. More information at bwcumc.org/event/2016-mission-u/

YOUR EYES AND EARS IN PORTLAND

Stay connected to the 2016 General Conference through the communications ministry of the Baltimore-Washington Conference.

The theme of the conference is "Therefore, Go." In the blog "Thus We Went" we'll explore how local people and churches are impacting, and impacted by, General Conference.

bwcumc.org/general-conference-2016-blog

THUS WE WENT

Bishop Marcus Matthews
Maidstone Mulenga


Melissa Lauber
Erik Alsgaard
Alison Burdett
Kat Care
Linda Worthington
Kayla Spears

Resident Bishop
Assistant to the Bishop,
Director of Connectional Ministries

Director of Communications
Managing Editor
Multimedia Producer
Web Content Manager
Communications Associate
Communications Coordinator

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 **This symbol appears with stories that show your apportionment dollars at work, making a difference in people's lives.**

Farewell: Districts express thanks for bishop’s ministry

From page 1
superintendent of the Frederick District, remembered when Bishop Matthews laid hands on him during ordination in 2005 in Philadelphia. Rivera remembers the bishop

preaching from an old gospel song, summing up for many, his lifestyle: “Let nothing come between me and my Savior.”
At the Baltimore Region farewell worship service, the Rev. C. Anthony Hunt recalled how Bishop Matthews

drew more than 270 people into the Epworth Chapel congregation in just four years as a pastor there. Throughout his ministry, Hunt said, the bishop has “led with a pastor’s heart, with wisdom and with grace.”
The Rev. Craig McLaughlin shared the story of the Gerasene demoniac and Jesus traveling with his 12 disciples across the sea to save just one man, living in a cemetery, from his demons. “I’ve been in that cemetery,” McLaughlin said. “Some people we love have been in the cemetery.”
He thanked the bishop for challenging the Church to pray, to go and tell people how good Jesus is and to adopt a school. He also thanked the bishop for a well-timed wink and mischievous smile and for helping to give him and others the courage to reach out in meaningful ministry.
At each of the sessions, the bishop, who officially retires Sept. 1, thanked those present and asked them to continue to pray each day, tell the story of Christ in their lives and reach out to children.
As part of the bishop’s legacy, members of the Baltimore-Washington Conference are collecting funds to build a fitness center at Africa University, where the bishop serves at chair of the Board of Trustees.
The Baltimore region contributed \$30,587; the Western region gave \$13,869; the Southern Region \$46,409 and the Washington Region gave \$116,291.
The conference is hoping to raise the \$600,000 necessary to complete the building of the fitness center by June 3, when Bishop Matthews will be honored at a celebration at the Annual Conference Session.
To contribute or make a second-mile gift to this Love Offering, visit www.bwcumc.org/love.



Bishop Marcus Matthews, right, visits with the Epworth UMC children’s choir at a farewell celebration Sunday, April 17, at Asbury UMC in Washington, D.C.

DS: Green follows Daniels in Greater Washington

From page 1
the bishop came. However, after hearing about the district’s missional priorities and its work in clusters meeting the holistic need of individuals and communities, he is deeply excited about the possibilities.
As a leader, Green defines himself as supportive, resilient, and as a resource. Our pastors, he said, have the gifts and graces and know what is going on in their communities. “As a district, I hope we’ll be living out the Great Commandment and exemplify our love of God by how we care for one another. ... As followers of Wesley, we’ll do all the good we can, for all the people we can, wherever we can.”
This receiving and deepening of faith and putting it into action has been a part of Green’s life since he can remember. As a child, he remembers observing his mother, Ida Pearl Green, who is now 97. She would go into the living room and kneel in prayer. He knew that she might be upset about something, but after she finished praying there was always, in her, a sense of relief.
“I knew that if my mom could take her concerns to God in prayer, I wanted to have that also,” he said. “She has always been my example. Hers is the type of faith I want to have. Regardless of the challenges, God is always present. There is nothing, with God’s help, that one cannot overcome.”
Green’s mother made sure he attended church. He remembers when he was still in elementary school and attending Pleasant View Methodist Church. The pastor, Thomas Harrington, said from the pulpit, “one of you might be called to ministry.”
“Something, maybe the way the light from the stained glass window hit his glasses, made me believe he was speaking directly to me,” Green said. “From that point on I was being nurtured.”
When he was a young man, Green recalls, a church meeting in which Pleasant View, a black church, was meeting to consider merging with the white congregations of Hunting Hill and McDonald Chapel.
The three did come together, creating Fairhaven UMC. But during one of the meetings about the potential merger in April 1968, a knock on the door interrupted the conversation and those present were told that the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. has just been assassinated.
Green kept his eyes open during the prayers and watched the white pastor pray fervently, with tears streaming down his face, for a black man and for justice. “Dr. King’s life and death wasn’t about black folks. It was about community and coming together,” he said.
Many years later, Green attended an event in Washington commemorating Dr. King’s March on Washington and he

began to feel “that sense of calling coming back again.” This time he answered.
This sense of history being interwoven with the present and future is very real to Green. “I want a sense of from whence I’ve come, so I can get a clearer sense of where I’m going,” he said.
He notes, for example, that there were three ex-slaves who formed Pleasant View Church, along with a fourth man who funded the endeavor – Gary Green – his great grandfather.
The church, along with a school and cemetery, are in the village of Quince Orchard, which has been swallowed up the city of Gaithersburg.
Green’s mother grew up in Quince Orchard, and today his son and daughter have created a documentary about the place. (<http://thequinceorchardproject.com>)
This sense of love and family is at the center of Green’s identity. He has been married to his wife, Rita, for 42 years, has three children and three grandchildren.
He is also defined, in part, by pastoral counseling he does. “I genuinely care about people,” he said. “Each one of us has a story. I feel privileged when someone allows me to enter into their story and shares it with me. When that happens it’s not just the two of you. There’s a presence of the holy. That’s a sacred time.”
To those he counsels, Green works to instill a sense of continuing to experience the joy of living.
That joy is important to him. It’s part of the journey he sees himself on.
“If you see life as a journey, you don’t know what’s around the next corner. Some things are unexpected, and you adapt. We encounter different roads and choices and we take all of it in,” Green said.
“For me it’s been a wonderful journey. The things I’ve experienced have brought me to this point. They’ve made me a better person and better able to serve as a DS.”
Green says he very thankful to Daniels, the current superintendent, for his vision and the way he has created and nurtured such a strong district.
During Daniel’s time as superintendent, the district saw numerical growth in a season when other parts of the church were in decline, and they were faithful in the payment of apportionments, supporting the connectional system with their giving.
Two new churches were also planted – Nueva Vida, a Hispanic/Latino congregation in the College Park/Hyattsville area; and Inspire D.C., a movement of one church with many expressions, targeted toward young adults in Washington.
The district has also started a number of ministries that address hunger. In the 20019 ZIP Code, one of the most

neglected in the city, for example, there is only one grocery story for 70,000 people. Churches are bringing food and hope to the people there. The district has also been active in ministries of racial reconciliation.



The Rev. Joe Daniels steps down July 1 as the leader of the Greater Washington District.

Daniels said he attributes the growth and vital ministries in the district to the leadership of great pastors and lay people. “We’re growing because our leaders and congregations are starting to look externally, not just internally,” he said, “and churches are looking to be relevant, looking to see how they can be a blessing in people’s lives.”
Bold visions and huge undertakings, all wrapped up in dependence on God, have been one of the hallmarks of Daniels’ time as superintendent, leading the district’s 66 churches in 15 ZIP Codes. The ZIP Codes are important, because “our whole vision has been around claiming your ZIP Code for Jesus Christ. We’ve been encouraging clergy and lay leaders to see the community as a congregation.”
“We serve a big God,” said Daniels. “I believe that as we dream God-sized dreams and see God-sized visions, and have the courage and strength to go after them, phenomenal things can happen.”

Exponential Conference focuses on Level Five churches

By MELISSA LAUBER
UMConnection Staff

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN local church leaders from the Baltimore-Washington Conference immerse themselves in learning how to plant new churches? Hopefully, multiplication.

Exponential 2016, a three-day event at First Baptist Church in Orlando, Fla., drew more than 5,000 church planters from around the world, including more than 30 people from the BWC. The event focused around the theme “Becoming five,” an allusion to five different types of church.

Level One, the conference leaders explained, is made up of Subtracting Churches, churches that are slowly dying. Level Two consists of Plateauing Churches that maintain the status quo. Level Three is what many churches aspire to be: Adding Churches that increase a member or two at a time. Level Four is the Reproducing Church, which focuses on multi-site congregations and perhaps planting a daughter congregation. Level Five is the Multiplying Church.

Multiplying churches are viral. Their best staff, most gifted members and significant resources are nurtured and then sent out to create new churches, that in turn create new churches, that in turn

“Here is the truth,” said Dave Ferguson, president of the Exponential Conference. “There is more exponential potential for mission in one multiplying church than in 10 large growing churches.”

Growing churches, he said, can reach and care for thousands of people. Multiplying churches will care for hundreds of thousands. “It is only through multiplication that we will accomplish the mission that Jesus has put before us.”

When a parent has a child, that’s addition. When that child has a child, that’s multiplication, said Jim Tomberlin, the founder of MultiSite Solutions. Multiplying churches don’t focus on planting one new church or creating a new site as a way of growing. “They see every disciple as the seed of a new congregation.”

In addition, said Ferguson, these multiplying churches don’t just think about “here.” They add a “t” and a broad sense of daring; they care about “there.”

Creating this risk-taking, Gospel-centered culture of multiplication is one of the big dreams of the Office of Vibrant Communities in the Baltimore-Washington Conference.

Recent research shows that there are only a handful of multiplying congregations in the United States. (A free online assessment tool of your church can be found at becomingfive.org.) However, those at Exponential believe

they are launching a movement.

And one of the keys of that movement, said the Rev. Tony Love, BWC’s director of Vibrant Communities, is intentionality. “We must be intentional and be willing to give generously of our time, talent and resources if we truly seek to create a culture of growth and multiplication,” he said.

Currently, in the Baltimore-Washington Conference, no multiplying congregations and only a small number of reproducing churches have been identified. But Love is convinced that, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, BWC churches can grow beyond scarcity thinking and even an attention on growth, and begin to focus on being a Kingdom movement.

“It’s not about seating capacity,” he said, echoing several of the Exponential speakers. “It’s about sending capacity.”

At the conference, Ed Stetzer shared several steps in becoming a multiplication church, which Love believes could be inspiring for any church, at any point in their spiritual journey. Among them:

- Connect multiplication to the missional nature of God.
- Humble, persuasive, passionate leaders with a strong vision are essential. Pastors must be well-trained and prepared to prosper.
- Share stories about the impact the Gospel and God’s love have had on communities and individuals.
- Celebrate both the big and small wins of your church. What you celebrate you become.
- Be intentional about evangelism. If an apple tree doesn’t produce any apples, something is wrong. In the same way, disciples are made to create disciples and churches should produce other churches.
- Set aside a portion of your church budget specifically to engage “the lost” in your community.
- Empower others to lead.
- Work for diversity.
- Create a clear, concise strategy that becomes central to the congregation’s life together.
- Don’t operate out of fear. Contextualize. Develop a missional imagination.
- This is not easy. Count the cost, pay the price. Dream big.
- Refuel with God’s grace and joy throughout the journey.

It’s also important, Love said, to realize that the connectional system binds United Methodist churches together. “You don’t have to do this alone,” he said. The Office of Vibrant Communities offers assistance and resources for planting new churches and redeveloping existing churches. Visit bwcumc.org/ministries/vibrant-communities.

At the Exponential Conference in Orlando, Fla., April 26-28, 181 speakers and teachers shared insights on God, the church and faith. Among them:

“The church is proof that God dreams.”
– Erwin McManus

Hope in the past is called regret. You are designed by God to create the future. ... What would happen if the church became an incubator of humanity's best future?
– Erwin McManus

We're too focused on our little kingdoms 'here,' and not focused on what God wants us to do 'there.'
“... Every church has a life-cycle. You're not getting tweets from Laodicea. Ours is a there-kind-of God. We're called to go there.”
– Dave Ferguson

“The best question is, 'If I knew I wouldn't fail, where would be make the biggest Kingdom-impact for God?’
– Dave Ferguson

Most people are bored in our churches. They have a nagging sense they should be doing meaningful mission. They sit in church and wonder if God will rebuke them for not doing the meaningful thing they were supposed to.”
– J.D. Greear

Mega-churches make a big bang. “But the future of the church is in multiplying leaders who carry the Gospel wherever they go. Raising up leaders doesn't make a lot of noise. But it will change the face of the church in the United States. ... This is too urgent to 'play church.’
– J.D. Greear

“Kingdom things happen at the speed of a seed.”
– Mark Batterson

You'll never be ready for what God calls you to do. God asks you to step out in faith and take a risk. You'll never be more than 80 percent certain. At National Community Church, our mantra is 'Go, set, ready!'
– Mark Batterson

Think of Moses and the burning bush: “God has a reputation of tapping you on the shoulder just when you get comfortable. God didn't call you to comfort, God called you to Kingdom. It's time to begin again.”
– Albert Tate

“Your God is bigger than your problems. Open your eyes and see that the Truth is bigger than the facts.”
– Albert Tate

“All God needs from you is a 'yes'; a 'thank you, Jesus'; and a good old 'hallelujah!'”
– Albert Tate

IT’S NOT JUST ABOUT BIG CHURCHES...

By Mark Batterson

In 1983, a physics professor named Lorne Whitehead published an article in the American Journal of Physics, titled “Domino Chain Reaction.” The domino effect is nothing new, but what Whitehead discovered is that a domino isn’t just capable of knocking over a domino the same size as itself. What he discovered is that a domino can actually topple a domino that is 1.5 times its own size.

So a 2-inch domino can knock over a 3-inch domino. A 3-inch domino can knock over a 4.5-inch domino, and I’m not real good at fractions so we are going to stop there.

Here’s the amazing part, by the time you get to the 18th domino, you could topple the Leaning Tower of Pisa! Of course it is leaning so that’s cheating. With the 21st domino, you could take down the Washington Monument, and with the 24th domino, you could take down the Empire State Building.

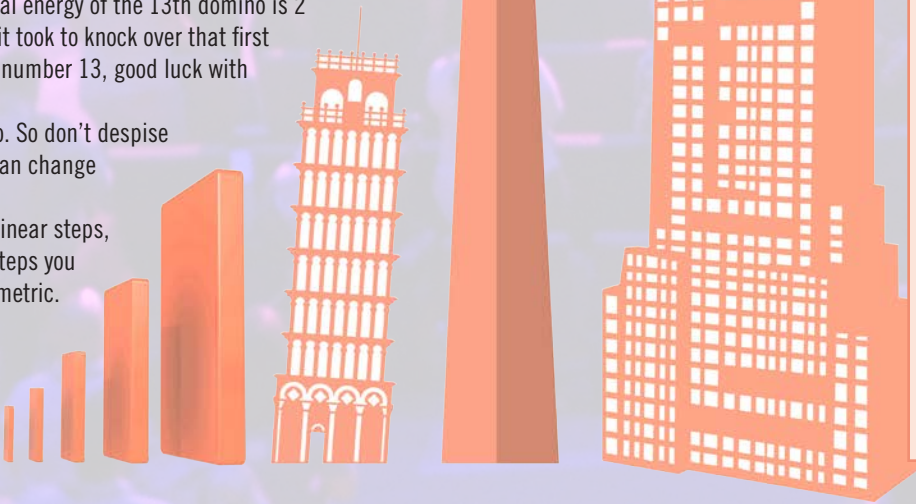
I think you get the point. It is not linear progression, it is geometric progression.

Check this out, the gravitational potential energy of the 13th domino is 2 billion times greater than the energy that it took to knock over that first domino. So, if you try to start with domino number 13, good luck with that, it’s not going to happen.

But anybody can topple a 2-inch domino. So don’t despise the day of 2-inch dominos. One little yes can change everything.

Now imagine the steps you take. In 30 linear steps, you’ll travel 90 feet. But in 30 geometric steps you can circle the earth 26 times. Faith is geometric. When you take one little step, you never know what the domino effect may be.

What’s the risk you need to take? What’s the two-inch domino you need to push over?



BWC members inspired at Exponential Conference

By Erik Alsgaard
UMConnection Staff



MORE THAN 30 clergy and lay members from the Baltimore-Washington Conference attended Exponential 2016 (see article, page 4), an ecumenical conference for church planters in Orlando, Fla.

The Rev. Cary James, pastor at Emory UMC in Washington, D.C., has attended 10 of these meetings. “The biggest thing I learn is the network,” he said. “I come and meet new people and learn new things and continue to network with them beyond the conference.”

James said he also benefits from learning about cutting-edge techniques for reaching new people with the message of Jesus Christ, especially in the areas of leadership development and evangelism. Some of the techniques aren’t really all that new; they go back, he said, to the days of John Wesley where he took the church outside its four walls.

“It’s in our DNA,” James said. “We just have to do it in the 21st century.”

For James, Exponential helped him learn the mindset of not just growing a church, but multiplying it.

“This helps me to not be complacent in my own ministry; not just settling for addition – adding one person at a time – but to think as the early church did in the Book of Acts, about multiplication, where we’re igniting a movement.”

James envisions a time when his church is multiple churches with multiple buildings and

ministries. He said helping other people thrive is the key to this effort.

James was delighted that the BWC had such a large attendance at Exponential. When he first started coming 10 years ago, he said, there were maybe one or two others in attendance from the BWC.

“To see so many here is a great thing,” he said. “I think we’ll go back to the Baltimore-Washington Conference and really ignite a movement there because we have a critical mass to do it.”

The Exponential Conference had an immediate impact on the Rev. Johnsie Cogman, pastor of Mt. Zion UMC in Georgetown. Her main learning: multiplication instead of addition.

“If each person in the church would multiply him or herself and encourage others to do the same... God’s kingdom would grow exponentially,” Cogman said. “We would multiply not in our building but in our communities. Our multiplication focus will be on making disciples not just members.”

Cogman said that she had three leaders from her church with her in Orlando. She brainstormed with them during the meeting as to how to multiply Mt. Zion.

“For example, I challenged each leader to start a small group of some sort, in which relationship building and disciple-making occurred,” she said. “We are going to implement these groups using technology and social media, beginning in May 2016.”

The BWC’s office of Vibrant Communities provided scholarships for many BWC people to attend. It was an intentional effort, said the Rev. Tony Love, director, to expose as many people as possible to the need for starting new churches.

“We know that one of the best ways to reach new people for Jesus Christ is to start new faith communities,” Love said. “In order to do that, we have to bring up leaders, both clergy and laity, willing to make the sacrifices to start a new church.”

In the past four years, the Baltimore-Washington Conference has started 14

new faith communities. The most recent, a multicultural worshiping community by InspireDC at Columbia Heights, began last Easter.

As a denomination, The United Methodist Church has declared that starting new churches is one of its “Four Areas of Focus.” Path 1, part of Discipleship Ministries, was created to offer a variety of tools and resources. Path 1 was one of the partners with and at Exponential.

Path 1’s stated objective is to equip 2,016 church planters who will start 1,000 new congregations. Each of those congregations will commit to starting another new congregation within its first 10 years of existence, thus becoming a level 5, or multiplying, church.

The Rev. Gail Button serves Messiah and Solley UMCs in Glen Burnie. After attending Exponential for the first time, she asked her congregation to pray about three things she learned there.

“First, are we working towards building our kingdom or God’s Kingdom,” she said. “Are we growing or sending? Are we relaxing or taking risks?”

Both of her churches are small-membership churches, she said, but that doesn’t mean they can’t be Level 5 churches; churches that multiply. Solley UMC has thousands of townhouses being built nearby, but there is no place for small groups to meet, like a Panera.

“We’re thinking of creating a coffee shop,” Button said, “a sort of ‘third place’ for people to meet.”

Button attended a workshop on this type of multiplication, noting that starting a coffee shop costs about 30 percent of a traditional church start.

“We’ll see what the Spirit does here,” she said.

The Rev. Rodney Smothers, pastor at Liberty Grove UMC in Burtonsville, echoed Button’s strategy.

“The one thing I carry away from Exponential is that if you’re going to evoke that change, the way to do that is in small, strategic groups,” he said.

Smothers said the conference helped him think about how to do that with a group of leaders at his own church, including a group of new-comers and young people in the mix.

Noting that many of the attendees at Exponential were young adults, Smothers said that many new faith communities are born out of the failure of the traditional church to meet people’s needs.

“What we have to do is really create a church within a church,” he said, “and be intentional about it.”

That intentionality requires tools, he said, such as the information and resources being provided at Exponential.

Changing the narrative from additional to multiplication, he said, is a game-changer in thinking about evangelism. “You move from adding one plus one plus one,” he said, “to a place where we go out and invite others.”



Jo Chesson, left, and the Rev. Tony Love, both from the BWC’s Office of Vibrant Communities, prepare for a day at Exponential 2016, a church planters conference in Orlando, Fla.

Fasten your seat belt - thoughts on Exponential 2016

By Christine Kumar*

AFTER FUMBLING TO get my seat belt fastened on the plane, I was ready to go to Orlando, Florida, to attend the Exponential Conference at First Baptist Church. My colleagues, Olivia Gross, Melissa Lauber and Erik Alsgaard, were on the same early morning flight.

At the conference, the music was lively, plenary speakers were exceptional and I filled my notebook with handwritten notes from the workshops attended. This conference was primarily for church planters, but not all the content dealt with church planting.

There were workshops on mission, evangelism, social media applications and discipleship. I work as the district administrator for the Baltimore Metropolitan district and attend Liberty Grove UMC in Burtonsville. I am grateful for the opportunity to attend the conference. I believe that we are called to be the Body of Christ and each one of us can make a difference in this world. In fact, we are all called to be and make disciples for Christ.

Exponential’s theme was “5IVE” (FIVE), which is a challenge and goal for pastors and leaders to reach a level five church, which is a multiplying church. Some of the points that spoke to my heart were:

- True discipleship is not about egos or our agendas; it’s about Kingdom building.
- We work collectively to build God’s Kingdom. Ryan Kwon, one of the keynote speakers, said, “The family wins together and the family loses together.” Again, it’s not about us.
- You never know how your works can impact the life of others. Keynote speaker Ralph Moore said

that if we didn’t have Barnabas, we wouldn’t have Paul. Barnabas was instrumental in encouraging Paul while others doubted Paul’s conversion. (Acts 9:26-30)

- We must have a sense of urgency for Jesus, said Ajai Lall, church planter from India.
- Matt Chandler, pastor of Village Church, urged the 5,000 men and women to look to places where the wind blows; that we can’t control the wind. He gave everyone a reality check by saying that we are not the good news, we are here to bring the good news.
- When you trust God, there is no need to verify, said Cynthia Marshall, a top executive at AT&T.
- Mark Batterson spoke about taking risks and not to let the budget determine your vision. God gives provisions, Batterson said.

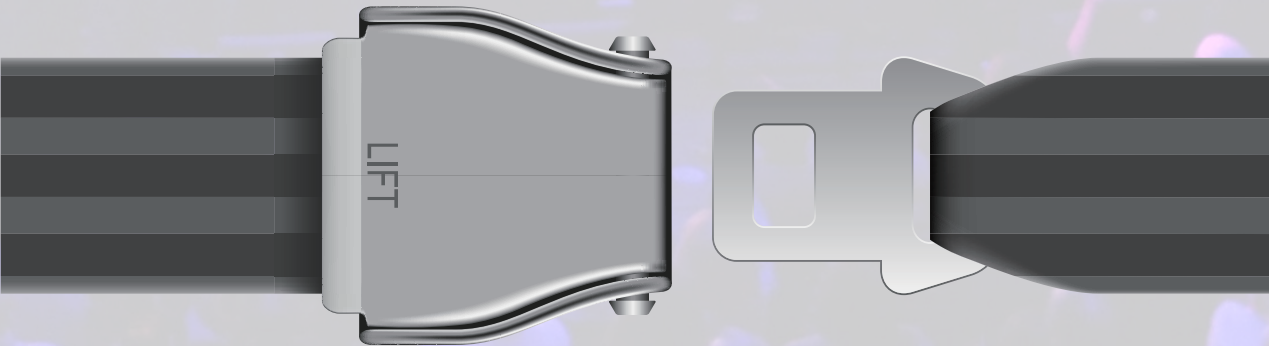
As I think about taking risks, it seems fitting that the conference was in Orlando, the place where millions of people from around the world visit Disney World. What if Walt Disney didn’t take risks? What if he didn’t have the

sense of urgency to create so that people will be intrigued, inspired and look for hidden Mickey’s? What if he didn’t work collectively with so many artists and technical savvy people? Suppose he resisted the wind? Maybe there was a Barnabas in his life who encouraged him.

I was surprised to read that Disney was fired as a reporter from the Kansas City Star newspaper for his “lack of creativity.” Years later, the Disney Company bought ABC which owned the Kansas City Star.

We all fail at something or another, even in our church. We have to get back up, fasten our seat belts, and “Dream Big,” which is next year’s Exponential theme. Disney dreamed big and so can we, the church. Whether we are flipping burgers or leading a congregation, we all have a part in building God’s Kingdom.

**Christine Kumar is the district administrator for the Baltimore Metropolitan District.*



Is Baltimore ‘rising’ a year after Freddie Gray’s death?

COMMENTARY BY THE REV. CYNTHIA MOORE-KOIKOI
Baltimore Metropolitan District Superintendent

“STILL I RISE,” by Maya Angelou, has been a source of empowerment for African American women since it was written. It has become a source of inspiration for the city of Baltimore since the unrest last spring. As I have reflected on the events of the past year, I have heard the city defiantly speak these final words of the poem to me.

*Out of the huts of history's shame/I rise
Up from a past that's rooted in pain/I rise
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.
Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear/I rise
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise/I rise/I rise.*

Baltimore is rising following the death of Freddie Gray. But as Baltimore rises, it is fair to ask if The United Methodist Church in Baltimore is rising, too. A year ago, on the day after the unrest started, Baltimore City Public Schools were closed and our churches opened to provide a safe place for students. I met a young adult who came to help at Metropolitan UMC. He told me that he was an atheist, but had heard about what the United Methodist Church was doing and thought he would come to help.

During a lull in our work, he and I sat down and talked. He told me that he thought the church was complacent in the issues of poverty, racism and economic injustice that fueled the unrest. It was clear to me that he thought the church had power to change systems and organizations, but that we, the church, had chosen not to do so in order to preserve our own interests.

It was also clear to me that this young man's professed disbelief in God was a direct result of his observation of the church. He did not believe in God because we had not shown him a God he should believe in.

So, over this last year, I have asked myself what message we are sending to others about who God is.

Are we portraying a God who is eager to come down from lofty places in order to be with the people who most need God's love? Are we portraying a God who chose to sacrifice God's only Son on the cross? Are we portraying a God who is willing to fight for the salvation of God's people? Are we portraying a God who has enough power

to resurrect Jesus from the dead? Are we portraying a God who is rising? You decide.

With funding and volunteers from churches all across this annual conference and denomination, we were able to run three, two-week camps simultaneously in Sandtown-Winchester and the surrounding communities last summer. Camping ministry also held a week-long day camp for the first time in Baltimore City. Metropolitan, along with the Bar Association and Baltimore United for Change, held several sessions of passive resistance and peaceful protest



training for young adults. Ames, John Wesley, Metropolitan and Unity UMCs became distribution centers for food, toiletries and baby supplies to the Sandtown-Winchester community. All summer long, volunteers from our connection brought themselves, their supplies and their prayers to the city. Last summer more than 2,700 people were served at just one of our churches.

Into the fall, winter and spring, we continued to work at making greater connections with the community in order to address some of the issues that led to the unrest. Mt. Zion hosted “Black Lives Matter: The Seven Last Words of Summer.” Epworth Chapel has been working with the Baltimore County Police Department and local government on issues of public safety and church-community-police partnerships. The Baltimore Metropolitan District collaborated with community activists, the Baltimore

City Police Department and mental health professionals to provide training for those who wanted to join neighborhood trauma response teams. Part of that training included ride-alongs with the police department.

During our annual Baltimore Region laity gathering, the laity were charged with using their power to revolutionize our church to be more relevant and contextual. They were asked to use the power of love to fight for the salvation of God's people. This spring, the district partnered with the BWC's Office of Vibrant Communities to provide a workshop, led by Romal Tune, to discuss “Gangs of the Gospel” and “Clerestory Ministry and Leadership in a New Light.”

Donations to the Stronger Baltimore Fund and other sources, along with volunteers from many organizations including Howard University and the Black Staff Association of The United Methodist Church, were used to spruce up some of our church buildings to make them more hospitable for ministry.

We are still evaluating proposals for the use of the remaining funds received for the Stronger Baltimore Fund. A group of pastors who named themselves “Thinking Beyond the Cathedral” has been tasked with developing a plan to utilize the building, property and financial assets we have in the city of Baltimore. They will be working with the District Building and Locations Committee to help us make some hard decisions about how we can use our property resources to do more effective ministry in Baltimore City.

There is still more rising to come. Gwynn Oak UMC is planning to open a community center that focuses on the arts. Ames Memorial is continuing its renovations so that it can open a housing center for veterans. Sharp Street Memorial is going to expand its YMCA partnership, “YMCA Together Hood at Sharp Street,” to include monthly movie nights for the community. Mt. Zion is starting a young adult Friday night street corner prayer ministry.

This summer, the BWC's Camping Ministry is taking over the operations of the summer day camps specifically looking to recruit and train camping leadership from Baltimore City. Fallston and Reisterstown UMCs will be sending funding and volunteers to help run these camps.

I think about that young man I met at Metropolitan often. He did come back to volunteer at the church several times last summer. It has been my prayer that we showed him a more accurate picture of who God is. It is my prayer that we continue to show an accurate image of God.

Baltimore is rising. But if it is to continue to rise, it will need the power of the church. Even the atheists know we've got the power. With God's help, we will use it to the glory of God!

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Spirit goes home to Zimbabwe

CROFTON – It was an emotional journey for the 14 members from Community UMC who carried the ashes of Cleo McCoy to Zimbabwe. She was one of the founders 19 years ago of the partnership between the Baltimore-Washington Conference and Zimbabwe West Conference's Murewa District.

McCoy and Emily Frye went to Zimbabwe in 1997 and a year later spent six weeks at Murewa Mission teaching women how to sew. The community, children and adults alike, called them “gogo,” a local term for grandmother.

Upon their return, they raised \$40,000, which helped establish orphan trusts in Zimbabwe. The Emily/Cleo Orphan Trust at Zaranyika UMC is still active.

“Half of Cleo's ashes were buried at home last year, and we brought the remainder here because she wanted to return home to Zimbabwe,” said Charlie Moore, who led the group. When the villagers asked which part of McCoy they were burying, Moore told them, “it was her heart, for she really loved the people of Murewa District.” She was buried alongside Frye, who died in 2012.

While in Zimbabwe, the group spent half its time at Africa University working with a VIM team to put a roof on a church, and the other half in Murewa District where they participated in the dedication of two new school blocks and a power project.

Emily's and Cleo's spirits “live on through us and the work we are doing,” Moore said.

License to Preach School brings in 21 laity

WEST RIVER – Twenty-one lay people, many of whom are serving local churches as “DS-Hires,” logged over 68 classroom hours at the 2016 License to Preach School, held at West River Camping Center April 16-23. They were a wide variety of ages, men and women, several ethnicities, all on the path to being Local Preachers.



Members of the recent License to Preach School pose at West River Camp last April.

Their courses covered a wide array of topics: dealing with ministry, evangelism, theology, worship planning, sermon preparation, Christian education, sacraments, spiritual development, ethics, boundaries, church finances and pastoral care, all designed to make them better able to serve their churches.

The days were long, each one beginning with devotions at 7:30 a.m. and classes stretching to 9 p.m.

“We are so different on the outside. But the more we shared of ourselves, the more it became evident that our love for Christ transcended different geography, past religious experiences, styles of worship, color, gender, economic status, learning style, and methods of expression,” said one participant.

A preaching practicum will be held May 14. Then the Board of Ordained Ministry will recommend licensure at the Clergy Session of Annual Conference.

Environmental and criminal justice acts pass

ANNAPOLIS – The conference's United Methodist

Women and the Board of Church and Society advocated on three issues — environment, criminal justice and economic justice — during the Maryland General Assembly, which ended its 2016 Session April 11. About 50 participants started the day at Asbury UMC Feb. 17 for a program that included a plenary, issue focus breakouts and office visits with Maryland State legislators.

Those bills that passed were the Clean Energy Jobs Act, the Renewable Greenhouse Energy Act and the Justice Reinvestment Act. This latter will offer major improvements to Maryland's criminal justice laws. The Maryland Healthy Working Families Act, which calls for paid sick days, passed in the House but didn't make it through the Senate. It will be reintroduced in next year's General Assembly, said Melissa Broome, a facilitator.

The Conference Legislative Advocacy Coordinator is the Rev. Kevin Slayton.

Ministry of Love assists veterans

LA PLATA – Some 40 veterans are now able to start claims with the Veterans Administration since Pisgah UMC aided them in the La Plata American Legion Stand Down event April 9. Pisgah UMC was one of 28 vendors, but the first time a religious organization has participated in trying to help veterans get the services they need.

“As the pastor and a (Vietnam-era) veteran, it's kind of cool to be able to get involved,” said the Rev. Jeanne Parr. “Being here is not about ... getting more people in the pews. It really is about showing veterans the love of God and our church's Ministry of Love program.”

The Stand Down's main function is to help veterans understand the services available and initiate the claims process. “Claims are always a big thing because people have no idea where to turn or how to get started,” said George Hawley, a veteran representative for southern Maryland who organized the event.

VIEWPOINTS

Thirty years after the Psychiatric Unit

By Rev. Bob Hunter*

TOO OFTEN WE read the circumstances about a person's battle with depression and/or anxiety and say to ourselves, "That's not me!" For that reason, I'm not going to share the issues that brought me to my stay in the psych unit. People have issues, and how we manage with them makes a lot of difference. This would seem obvious, right? But depression and anxiety are not that simple.

In 1986, I was in a great marriage, with two kids, eight and six years old. We didn't want our kids raised in daycare, so I was the stay at home parent, working part time jobs in between. We attended a great church. We had friends. We lived in a great neighborhood.

Things were great on the outside.

But on the inside, I was angry, addicted to overeating, struggling with over-spending and who I was supposed to be in life. I was 36-years old, so my midlife crisis was a part of this, too.

I had two "hot-button" issues that I blamed other people for. I felt that I had to prove that I was worth something, which led to my becoming a jack of all trades and a master of none. This process began almost nine years prior to May, 1986.

Then it happened. Late in April 1986, I thought I was having a heart attack. I was in the emergency room from 7 a.m. until 4 p.m. It was a case of acute gastritis, and my heart was very healthy. However, the next four weeks would be the most frightening of my life...and I couldn't figure out why!

I was terrified all the time. I was convinced that I was going to

drop dead from a heart attack. I spoke a mile a minute, shaking like crazy. My teeth chattered and my knees knocked together. I couldn't sleep. After four weeks of sleep deprivation and terror, I was getting to the point where it had to stop.

I called my doctor again. He referred me to a psychiatrist, who gave me an anxiety medication, but the next day I imagined killing myself to get the terror to stop. I called the doctor and was admitted to a psych unit.

In our first private session, the psychiatrist told me to describe how I felt. I said, "I'm buried alive in a coffin six feet down, with about a half-hour's worth of oxygen...and NO ONE KNOWS I'M DOWN HERE!"

He calmly said, "I know you're there. Your wife knows you're there. We have a backhoe. We'll be with you in a few minutes."

That was the beginning of my recovery.

Simply stated, depression usually manifests itself slowly. The sufferer sees fewer options or solutions to life's problems. Some sufferers even get to the

point of where they believe that taking their own life will be better for everyone involved.

It's not about self-pity. It's the only solution they see as viable.

There is a chemical imbalance in the brain. In my case, that was what "long-term" meant. The imbalance wasn't permanent, praise God! But it wasn't going to improve without medication and resolution of my issues.

Simply stated, anxiety triggers our "fight or flight" system when it doesn't necessarily need to be. If we perceive danger, our adrenal glands send out adrenalin to our body to deal with the

danger. If we are sitting, the adrenalin causes the shakes, knee-knocking and teeth-chattering, to name a few symptoms.

I was told by my psychiatrist that medicine without resolving issues doesn't work. One of my two main issues turned out to be utter nonsense: a "demon" with no reality to it. The second issue was going to take a lot of work on my part. I did, and it's been resolved for many years now.

After two years, I was no longer taking an antidepressant. After three years, I was no longer regularly taking antianxiety medication.

In the 30 years since my hospitalization, I have completed my undergraduate degree and my master's degree. After a life-long call from God, I finally said "yes" in 1991 to go into ordained ministry. I am about to complete my 24th year as a pastor. I'm still married to my high school sweetheart. We will celebrate our 39th anniversary this August. I have lost 70 unhealthy pounds.

I have a long way to go, but God is with me!

Get your Bible and read I Kings, Chapter 19. You'll read how Elijah had major anxiety trouble, hid in a cave where he couldn't see options (depression), and how God told him to come out and see what he couldn't while in the cave. Elijah listened to God and recovered.

If depression and anxiety are treatable "in the natural," just think what God can do. Let's not blame the sufferers for being weak, or lacking moral fiber, or having a low character. Let's not "condemn to Hell" those who lose their struggle and take their own life. Sadly, I have presided over two such funerals. God is merciful!

Let's not allow the possibility of embarrassment to stop us from approaching people we are concerned about. Get help. Call your doctors. Get referrals. I know it's an old cliché, but if, "by the grace of God, I recovered, you can too!"

**Rev. Bob Hunter is pastor of Thurmont UMC.*

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

I READ WITH INTEREST the Viewpoint in the April 2016 UMConnection ("Lives shattered in the blink of a bullet"). While I understand the author's reasons for writing it, I disagree with her statements, "Our nation is also deeply broken by our addiction to guns," and, "The madness needs to stop. Changes in policy are needed."

She seems to think that by outlawing that which is already illegal (gun crime), the problem will be solved. The problem isn't with guns; it's the myriad reasons people resort to using guns to commit crimes.

Firearms are simply tools, tools sometimes used by criminals to ply their trade. Contrary to popular belief,

they are not easily legally obtained. Any firearm purchased from a dealer must have the buyer's ability to purchase affirmed by a government check. Additionally, it is illegal for one person to buy a firearm for another without that person's background being checked. And, if the gun being purchased is a handgun, the buyer must wait seven days before taking possession, plus the buyer must have a state issued Handgun Qualification License. These are the hoops one must jump through simply to buy a gun in Maryland.

I would wager that 95 percent of gun crimes committed are the result of an illegally obtained gun. Simply put, criminals do not get their guns legally. That's why more laws

will not stop the violence. Additionally, more people are killed in automobile accidents every year than those killed by firearms.

So, how do we fix the problem? The answer lies in the root causes of social unrest and crime. Don't focus on the tools used (guns, knives, clubs, fists), focus on the underlying causes. Only then will we come close to reducing crime.

*John Cullom
Stone Chapel UMC, New Windsor*

BWC delegate reflects on General Conference 2016

By Jen Ihlo*

AS YOU READ this, I will be sitting in the Portland, Ore., Convention Center for the 2016 General Conference. I will be there with 863 other delegates from around the world. Because the quadrennial meeting of the General Conference is the only time that any changes can be made to the Book of Discipline or the Book of Resolutions, serving as a delegate is an esteemed honor that comes with enormous responsibility.

I've been a bit overwhelmed with where to start and what to say in this article. I think — and hope you agree — that the best option is to highlight some of the issues with which we'll be wrestling — there are a lot of them and, yes, it often feels like wrestling. So, here we go...

The very first order of business is to decide on our rules. Those of you who know me well know that this is something I really enjoy. Most of the rules are the usual — what time to adjourn each day, what's the order of business, parliamentary procedure, that sort of thing. And consequently, that debate at GC is usually rather mundane.

This year, however, we are being asked to approve a new rule, Rule 44, which would establish a discernment process for deciding legislation relating to a specified subject area using a non-Roberts

Rules method. This method is loosely similar to the Circles of Grace process that the BWC Annual Conference Session has used the past couple of years.

If Rule 44 passes, we will be asked to decide on the subject matter for this process. The Commission on General Conference, which plans the conference, is recommending that the discernment process in 2016 be used to discuss

petitions related to "human sexuality." While this is the phrase they are using, you need to know that we won't, of course, actually talk about human sexuality. Rather we will talk about more than 95 petitions that propose to remove, to temper, or to strengthen all the discriminatory language in the Book of Discipline that is currently used against LGBTQI people in The UMC.

The "process" will involve facilitated round table discussions of 15 folks and submission of a report from each table about what we decide. The reports of all the tables — about 58 of them — will be submitted to a Facilitator Group of six people. This group of six will be chosen from 24 persons recommended from across the denomination, based on their ability to be neutral, discern trends in the reports, and write legislation. They will have a day to do their work and present their recommended legislation to the plenary, which will then debate and vote. I think it will require at least four votes, assuming no amendments are offered to anything, before we ever have the first discussion.

A major area of legislative discussion before the GC will involve various plans to restructure, reorganize, or discontinue The United Methodist Church. There are 13 of these proposals involving 61 petitions, which will be considered by nine of the 12 legislative committees. What could possibly go wrong?

There is one global plan, proposed by our Northeastern Jurisdictional Global Structure Task Force, of which I was a member. Eight of the 13 plans propose some restructuring related only to the U.S. Jurisdictions.

Plan UMC Revised, a remix of the Plan UMC that was held "unsalvageably unconstitutional" by the Judicial Council soon after it passed at the 2012 General

Conference, is related to how The UMC is organized. Among other things, Plan UMC Revised proposes to significantly increase the power of the Connectional Table (CT) and the General Commission on Finance and Administration, reduce the General Commission on Religion and Race and the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women from Commissions to a mere monitoring committee on inclusiveness under the CT, and similarly reduce the authority of the General Commission on Archives and History.

Finally, there is a proposed plan to discontinue The UMC at a special General Conference to be held in 2018.

There are, of course, other matters that will demand our attention. Needless to say the various opinions on all these issues range from one end of the spectrum to the other and everyone is passionate about their respective position. This diversity of opinion should provide for a rich, full, and respectful discussion that would enable us to arrive at well-reasoned decisions — but sadly, the GC does not always do rich, full, and respectful discussions well.

One thing we will do well, however, is worship. Times of worship during General Conference are inspiring and uplifting. These will be the times when we can breathe deeply and fortify ourselves for the other facets of the conference.

My goal is to show up, to be prepared, and to fully participate in all aspects of GC, as I seek to find a path for a UMC in which everyone, everywhere is safe, welcome, valued, and loved in UM churches around the world.

**Jen Ihlo is a member of Dumbarton UMC in Washington, D.C. This article reprinted, by permission, from the church's newsletter, "Chips Off the Old Rock."*

BWC leaders attend Korea Annual Conference

By MELISSA LAUBER
UMConnection Staff



OFFERING HOPE AND a challenge to a gymnasium full of middle school girls at the Holston School, sharing his faith journey with college students at Mokwon University, celebrating and challenging 23 pastors about to be ordained, joining



The Rev. Maidstone Mulenga celebrates with youth at a Next General Festival in Daejeon.

the 1,500 clergy and lay people in holy conferencing and bridging cultures with the love of Christ were the highlights of Bishop Marcus Matthews' journey to Daejeon, South Korea, April 1-5.

In 2002, the people of the Baltimore-Washington Conference began a partnership with the members of the Nambu (South) Conference of the Korean Methodist Church.

This annual conference, located about two hours south of Seoul, has 583 churches, 320 of which are small-member churches and are not considered "independent." It has 736 pastors, 33 of whom are clergywomen.

The conference is led by Bishop Seung Chul Ahn. In the Nambu Conference, bishops serve for two-year terms and also continue to serve their local churches while they are bishops. Ahn is the pastor of the Central Church, a mega church in Daejeon, the fifth largest city in Korea.



Bishop Marcus Matthews, center, prays with BWC leaders and the pastor and members of a church in Jeonju, Korea. Prayer is one of the foundations of the BWC and South Korea partnership.



(L-R) The Revs. JW and HiRho Park, Bishop Matthews and Wesley Seminary alum and missionary Rev. Ohoon Kwon at Mokwon Univ.

Approximately 20 percent of the population in South Korea is Protestant. (About 20 percent is Buddhist and 50 percent are unchurched.) Korean Methodists are facing a plateau in membership growth, Ahn said. He attributes this to the challenge of attracting young adult members and a growing secularization of the culture.

However, among existing members, prayer and vital discipleship are hallmarks of faith, and most churches offer daily dawn prayer services that attract large numbers of people.

In the partnership, led by the Rev. JW Park, superintendent of the Central Maryland District, one of the successful programs has been a cultural exchange, with several of the BWC's young adult clergy visiting Korea and members of the Nambu Conference visiting Baltimore and Washington in alternating years.

This partnership, Park said, allows members of the Baltimore-Washington Conference to more fully appreciate and participate in the global church.

Changes coming to BWC health plan, 2017 budget

By ERIK ALSGAARD
UMConnection Staff



AT THE JUNE Annual Conference session, BWC members will hear about changes to clergy health insurance and vote on the 2017 budget. These items were discussed at the Pre-Conference briefing on April 30.

HEALTH INSURANCE

Participants in the Baltimore-Washington Conference's HealthFlex health insurance plan will have more options to meet their health insurance needs in 2017 under new provisions adopted by the Conference Board of Pensions and Health Benefits and outlined at the April 30 Pre-Conference Briefing. The new options are offered by the United Methodist General Board of Pension and Health Benefits in Illinois, and replace the current plan, which will no longer be available in 2017.

Under the changes, participants will have more choices, according to the Rev. Jackson Day, chair of the BWC's Board.

"Insurers believe that offering consumers more choice and more responsibility will help reduce the rate at which health costs grow," Day said. "Therefore, the HealthFlex plan developed by our General Board will offer six different plans rather than the one at present."

For those who prefer minimum change, Day said, the BWC's Board has made sure that one of the plans is as close to the current plan as possible. "We have worked closely with the General Board and our own consultants to minimize the impact that rising costs of health care may have on plan members," Day said.

Currently, all full time clergy members of the BWC must be enrolled in the conference's health insurance plan, called HealthFlex, which currently has only one option.

The per-pastor cost to local congregations for health insurance will remain at \$840 per month, Day noted, regardless of the choices made by participants. This is not a

"premium" but a share of the overall plan cost. The Board of Pensions and Health Benefits considers it very important to keep this amount the same for all congregations so that health care cost considerations do not intrude on appointment decisions, Day said.

Day noted that plans are now identified by colors, with Bronze, Silver, Gold and Platinum plans designed to cover 60, 70, 80, and 90 percent, respectively, of health care costs. The BWC's current plan is considered a "Gold" plan, Day said. Participants who opt for this plan will see little change in the personal premium costs that they pay. Different options will offer differing degrees of coverage and health savings or health reimbursement accounts. A clergy family with few health issues may choose a plan offering less coverage, but with a greater health savings or health reimbursement account from which future expenses can be paid.

Day also observed that a greater degree of choice will require more detailed decision making by participants as they make their choices for 2017. The Board of Pensions and Health Benefits will be holding an orientation session On Wednesday, June 1, at 8 p.m., at Annual Conference. Additional sessions will be held in the fall.

All of the new plans offer the same network of providers and the same prescription drug formularies, according to a chart provided by the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits.

CONFERENCE BUDGET

At the Pre-Conference Briefing, the Rev. Ann Laprade, chair of the BWC's Council on Finance and Administration, celebrated outstanding stewardship and giving in 2015 while looking forward to 2017.

"2015 was amazing," Laprade said. "Apportionment income was up 1.8 percent, or \$245,000. Total income was up 0.9 percent, and expenses were down 0.6 percent, or \$111,000. At the end, we achieved the goal of all non-profits: We spent on ministries what was budgeted, and the net income for 2015 was zero."

In 2015, she added, the overall collection rate for

apportionments was at a 15-year high, 91.7 percent.

For 2017, CFA is recommending a 17.75 percent benevolence factor and the 92.0 collection rates, the same as for 2016. "This will result in an apportionment income decrease of \$112,000 to \$14.2 million," Laprade said. "This is a 0.8 percent decrease and it ties directly to the observed decrease in the apportionment base."

Laprade said that the 2017 budget request is "flat" from 2016, and would be the fifth year in a row.

The 2017 budget, however, will not be a "typical budget," Laprade said. That's because the Conference Board of Pensions and Health Benefits found it possible to implement a "significant strategic shift in how we can fund Retiree Medical expenses in 2017," she said.

The BWC has a surplus of \$28.3 million in a fund created and set aside to fund clergy who are under what is called the "Pre-82" retirement plan. Part of that surplus -- \$1.5 million -- will be used in several ways in the 2017 budget, if approved. Part of the \$1.5 million will be used to pay down debt on the loan for the BWC's Mission Center in Fulton, and the new dining hall at West River Center.

"Four years of debt reduction at an average rate of \$700,000 per year will shorten our loan from 13 years to 6 years, save \$1 million in interest, and enable a 15 percent reduction in the budget at the end of the 6 years," said Laprade.

The remainder of the \$1.5 million will go towards replenishing reserves, providing needed salary and benefit increases, including the creation of a new position for a new Center for Clergy Excellence (\$275,000), paying increases in General Church apportionments (\$90,000), and other budget expenses.

Details of the 2017 budget proposal are online at <http://bwcumc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/2016-Budget-PreCon.pdf>

Read a "Q & A" about the budget and other items coming to the 2016 BWC Annual Conference Session at bwcumc.org/sessions/2016-session/pre-conference-briefing.