

I can do all things through Christ
who strengthens me.
- Philippians 4:13

UMC Connection

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Kate Floyd, left, Taeron Flemming, center, and the Rev. Chris Bishop, right, engage in the game 'Mission Possible,' inventing potential new ministries at the Taste & See event at American University Sept. 24. See story, below.

Taste & See redefines possibilities of church

By MELISSA LAUBER
UMConnection Staff



ON HIS WAY to the Taste & See event at American University on Sept. 24, the Rev. Rodney Smothers found himself wondering about the purpose, “the why,” of the event. But his thoughts were soon sidetracked by his GPS, which insisted he go a strange, more indirect path.

The route didn't make sense, but his GPS insisted the new “off-the-beaten-path” was preferable, and would help him arrive at his destination in a better way.

Smothers, the Congregational Development Resource Specialist for the Baltimore-Washington Conference, complied. Then he smiled.

His drive to the event, he noted, was a metaphor for the event itself. “The why” was the importance of Church taking new roads, traveling different, and sometimes uncomfortable, paths to arrive at a new distinctive discipleship destination.

Taste & See was an innovative, interactive training event designed to enable participants to better understand and begin to practice “missional entrepreneurship.”

It provided a new road map for doing ministry and being church.

Its purpose, said Christie Latona, the conference Director of Connectional Ministries, was to “launch a missional innovation revolution in the BWC so that more people, more diverse people and more young people love God and their neighbors well.”

Following the day of learning, the more than 60 participants were invited to apply for grants and partnerships that would allow them to put their inventions and innovations into action.

The event was a collaborative effort of Wesley Seminary, Inspire DC, and the BWC's Connectional Ministries and Congregational Development areas. It featured the Rev. Kenda Creasy Dean, a professor at Princeton University and founder of Ministry Incubators (MinistryIncubators.com), and Shannon Hopkins, founder of Matryoshka Haus, an incubator of new social justice initiatives in London that provides resources for innovation (www.matryoshkaha.com/).

Creasy Dean explained how mission entrepreneurship has the potential to re-define the church.

The word entrepreneur, she said, comes from the French words “between” and “undertake.”

“An entrepreneur creates undertakings between what is already there,” she said. Missional entrepreneurship “embodies Christ to solve a community problem in a way that is aligned spiritually, relationally and financially.”

However, Creasy Dean stressed, “entrepreneurship doesn't fund ministry; entrepreneurship *is* ministry.”

Statistics indicate that “worship is no longer the way most people enter into Christian community in the United States,” Creasy Dean said. Rather, people encounter God and the faith community through mission and creative outreach in the community in what social commentators are calling “whole life evangelism.”

To illustrate missional entrepreneurship, Creasy Dean shared the stories of more than 18 ministries. (See page 3.) She lifted up the dramatic outreach of the Rev. Gregory Boyle, a Catholic priest who opened a bakery to address a lack of hope among gang members in Los Angeles. Today, Homeboy Industries provides services to 15,000 men and women. His story is told in the best-selling book: “Tattoos of the Heart: the Power of Boundless Compassion.”

Creasy Dean also shared how the Rev. Richard Joyner in Conetoe, N.C. was “literally exhausted from officiating
See Taste & See, page 3

BWC Immigration ministry aids DACA recipients

By ERIK ALSGAARD
UMConnection Staff



WHEN THE U.S. government announced in early September a proposal to end DACA, the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, hundreds of thousands of people suddenly faced the possibility of deportation.

DACA is a program started in 2012 where undocumented immigrants who arrived in the United States before they turned 16, and who have lived here since June 15, 2007, were eligible to apply for drivers' licenses, enroll in college, and get a job, depending on the state where they lived. An estimated 800,000 people are

DACA recipients.

Bishop LaTrelle Easterling spoke out against repealing DACA at a rally in front of the White House Sept. 5. The bishop said that DACA “really is an issue that tears at the fabric of who we are and who we say we are as Americans.”

The bishop said that the United States is a nation of immigrants and that the children affected by DACA are some of the most vulnerable.

“The individuals protected by DACA were brought here under no control of their own, and no fault of their own,” Bishop Easterling said. “I think it would be a travesty if this country, if this administration, turns its back on these young people now.”

CNN quoted President Donald Trump shortly after

the repeal was announced. “We will resolve the DACA issue with heart and compassion – but through the lawful Democratic process – while at the same time ensuring that any immigration reform we adopt provides enduring benefits for the American citizens we were elected to serve,” the president said. “We must also have heart and compassion for unemployed, struggling and forgotten Americans.”

One critical way the church is responding to this immigration crisis is through JFON, or Justice For Our Neighbors. JFON provides free immigration legal services to low-income immigrants throughout the Washington, D.C., metro region.

See JFON, page 4



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

By MANDY SAYERS
Pastor, Covenant UMC, Gaithersburg

DON'T TELL ANYONE, but after a while, a church person can get burned out. The flame that once burned deeply and creatively for Christ sometimes can become just a smoldering shadow of its former self.

This is not a character flaw. I think it's part of the ebb and flow of the faith journey and the "life cycle" of the church. When you've been working hard in the trenches of ministry for a long time, it's hard to keep being excited and to have creative juices flow.

October is a good time to recommit. As churches do their budgets and have church conferences, perhaps now is time to recommit ourselves to sharing Christ with our communities; perhaps now is the time to recommit to ministry in the community, to reaching out and "being church" where the people are.

How can we share the joy in new ways? Maybe God is calling you to a community day or a Halloween party in the common area of the apartments down the street. Maybe God is calling your church to share a Starbucks gift card with the teachers in your local elementary school.

Ministry, working in the Lord's vineyard, isn't all OUR idea. It's God's gig, not ours. It's Jesus that is the "Way, the Truth and the Life," so we can trust him to bring new life wherever the church is willing to step out of its comfort zones.

How is God calling your church to recommit in this season? Maybe as part of your next never-ending Church Council Meeting, you could send the reports via email and spend the time just sharing where God is working already in your communities. How could your church be a part of that?

When we get into Holy Spirit territory, "recommit" doesn't feel like drudgery. It leads to excitement and joy and laughter in the room. You will know it when it happens. All of a sudden, people are energized again, like the Holy Spirit pouring out, again and again at Communion.

"Pour your Holy Spirit" on us, on the Church. Recommit.



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

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH. I simply can't do this anymore. It is too hard. It is not what I signed up for.

"If I had known it would be like this I would have never agreed to do this. I thought I would see the world, make new friends and help people. For bonus points, I even believed that I was following the will of God, but this, this is just not what I had in mind. My feelings are hurt. People talk about me behind my back. Even children make fun of me when they see me coming. "I quit."

If you have ever felt like this, then you knew what the prophet Jeremiah was experiencing in the 20th chapter of the Hebrew Bible book named for him. Jeremiah had answered the call that God had on his life at an early age but by this time he was ready to give up. He had been faithful, obedient, and done his best to follow the will of God, yet he was in his darkest hour and wanted to give up on his assignment because it was simply too hard.

However, in his darkest hour, Jeremiah felt an inner stirring that made him recommit to his mission, his ministry, and his purpose.

Yes, there will certainly be times when the road gets hard. There will even be times when you feel like giving up and walking away from it all. It is in those times that you have to remember that you are called by God to do his will in good times and in bad times.

It is in those seasons when you want to give up that you have to remember: you have come too far to go back now. It is in those seasons that you must pick yourself up, dust yourself off and recommit to what God has called you to do.

Friends, there is a fire burning inside of you. It may be faint sometimes, it may even seem like it is going out, but recommit to what God has called you to and let the fire burn so you can set the world on fire.

Taste & See: Change-makers called to reinvent church

From page 1

at so many funerals and was asking God, 'What are we going to do?' He heard a voice saying, 'Look around you.' Joyner looked up and saw nothing but land. "

As a former sharecropper, he didn't want to farm ever again, but noting the excessive rates of diabetes and high blood pressure in the community, which had fewer than 300 residents, he began tilling a field in hopes of providing nutritional options in this food desert.

Today, more than 80 young people help Joyner plant and harvest nearly 50,000 pounds of fresh food, which they give to local residents and sell to area businesses and restaurants. The youth also learn to cook the healthy food and funds raised from the crops also pay for school supplies and scholarships.

Entrepreneurial ministry takes away the offering plate, which churches so often depend upon, and offers new models for funding. Sometimes the entrepreneurial work even funds a church's more traditional ministries, but that is never the reason to start the work, Creasy Dean said. "Love is."

"The days of money coming through the offering plate alone are behind us," said Smothers. "We probably also don't need to build any more brick and mortar churches. There are new models."

To help participants discover some of these new models, Hopkins led them through a game called Mission Possible, which simulated the start of outreach for a cause, using creative resources and



Director of Connectional Ministries, Christie Latona, right, introduces Maria Rose Belding, a college student who founded and manages MEANS, a company that connects restaurants' extra food with area feeding programs.

partnerships to create good.

She also shared a hands-on demonstration of Good Brunches, an approach to bring diverse people together to build community and create social change.

"When we see a gap between what is and what there could be, there is a moment where we can choose action or apathy, boldness or blame," Hopkins said. "The key that unlocks the move to action instead of reverting to apathy is imagination, the ability to see and perceive a different future."

She encouraged all those present to build

upon the "blueprint within them that seeks beauty, justice, community and spirituality."

Within the BWC, Latona is hopeful that more people will begin to recognize the possibilities of how we can be "building deep relationships with people in the community, who wouldn't be and aren't in church, in ways that help us discover what God is calling us to invent."

Addressing the participants, Latona stressed that they are "change-makers, called by God to create, discover, connect and imagine."

As such, the possibilities of the day

continued as the change-makers, most of whom were young adults from area college and seminary campuses, were invited to apply for grants that would bring their ideas to life, including a pathway that would include time in London learning with Hopkins and her cohort.

"Design thinking is an iterative process, yet we as the church sometimes think in terms of events, instead of process," Latona said. "From the first moment we talked about this event, the team had next steps in mind. We want to take someone who wants to have a bigger impact for God to living out God's call on their life for the thriving of community. Given that, we are intentionally creating environments and experimenting with processes that empower potential missional entrepreneurs. We are a connectional church. We want to invest in mission-focused innovative ministry."

"Taste & See," said Smothers, "allows us to look at the church with new eyes."

What awakens your heart? Explore this and other questions of faith and creative ministry at the upcoming sessions of Taste & See this spring in Baltimore and the Western Region. www.tasteandseedmv.com

EVENTS

Connectional Table meets Saturday, Oct. 14, 9 a.m. to noon BWC Mission Center in Fulton

A planning meeting for Conference ministry leaders. The Spring Connectional Table has been scheduled for Feb. 17, 2018.

Pre-retirement seminar Thursday, Oct. 19, 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. BWC Mission Center in Fulton

For clergy interested in learning more about retirement benefits, this session provides information on the current pension plan, Social Security, moving assistance and health insurance options available at retirement. \$20 registration fee covers lunch. Visit www.bwcmc.org/event/1004508-2017-10-19-pre-retirement-session/

VIM leaders training Saturday, Oct. 21, 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. BWC Mission Center in Fulton

Volunteers in mission go out in teams to do construction and spiritual formation projects for people and places in need. This training, led by the Rev. Joan Carter Rimbach, is \$10. Visit www.bwcmc.org/event/1014196-2017-10-21-volunteers-in-mission-leader-training-vim.

ERT Refresher training Saturday, Oct. 21, 1:30 to 5:30 p.m. BWC Mission Center, Fulton

For people who have attended Early Response Training and received a badge that is now expired. The cost for the training, which will be led by the Rev. Jay DeMent, is \$25. Visit www.bwcmc.org/event/1014191-2017-10-21-early-response-team-ert-refresher-training.

Future of the 21st Century Church with Olu Brown Oct. 27, BWC Mission Center, Fulton Oct. 28, Jackson Chapel UMC, Frederick 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

The Rev. Olu Brown, pastor of Impact in Atlanta, one of the fast-growing United Methodist churches, will provide insights into leadership. Both sessions, which are \$35, will have the same content. Visit www.bwcmc.org/ministries/congregational-development.

ROCK 2018 Friday, Jan. 26 to Sunday, Jan. 28, 2018 Convention Center, Ocean City, Md.

Learn more at www.bwcmc.org/rock. Register at https://www.eiseverywhere.com/home/index.php?eventid=276641&

The Baltimore-Washington Conference invites you to celebrate the appointments of District Superintendents: Rev. Ann Laprade Baltimore Suburban District - Sunday, October 15 - 3:00 p.m. Linden Heights UMC, 9914 Harford Road, Parkville, MD US 21234 & Rev. Wanda Duckett Baltimore Metro District - Sunday, October 29 - 3:00 p.m. Epworth Chapel UMC, 3317 St Lukes Ln, Baltimore, MD 21207

UMConnection Bishop LaTrelle Easterling, Melissa Lauber, Erik Alsgaard, Alison Burdett, Kat Bowling, Kayla Spears, Linda Worthington. Resident Bishop, Director of Communications, Managing Editor, Multimedia Producer, Web Manager, Marketing Strategist, Communications Associate. UMConnection is the newspaper of the Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church, whose vision is to become fully alive in Christ and make a difference in a diverse and ever-changing world.

New faith expressions create entrepreneurial spirit

At Taste & See, a number of new faith expressions were noted. Flipped churches focus on vocation. How can we champion what we see God doing in you? Uniquely Able - Chicago, Ill. Employs and advocates for people with disabilities. https://nlnhsnorthstar.com/12626/featured-content-gallery/nlnhs-junior-starts-a-business-for-a-cause/ The Robloxian Church - Tacoma, Wash. Daniel Herron is 16. He's also the founder and pastor of an online church that has attracted more than 4,500 members. The virtual church attracts teenagers from across the country and around the world to worship, pray and connect with one another. https://www.faithandleadership.com/teens-online-church-draws-young-people-around-world Fuzzy churches focus on community mission. Where does the church and the mission enterprise begin? Union Coffee - Union UMC Dallas, Texas More than 5,000 people a month walk through the doors of Union. You will see business meetings, students studying, artists imagining, baristas laughing and minds coming together over the most generous cup of coffee in town. Ten percent of all coffee sales goes towards a local non-profit organization. www.uniondallas.org/ Homeboy Industries - Los Angeles, Calif. It started as a bakery, using jobs instead of jail, and drew together members of rival gangs in Los Angeles. Today Homeboy Industries employs and trains former gang members in a range of social enterprises and provides critical services to more than 15,000 people. www.homeboyindustries.org/fatherg/ Go Fish: Getting Kids Hooked on Jesus - Pullman, Wash. A pastor, using salmon fishing as a fundraiser, grew an idea into a comprehensive and creative youth outreach ministry. www.gofishppc.org/about

https://preshouse.org/ The Berean Experience - Raleigh, NC This Baptist church is also an event venue for the community. https://www.thebe.church/ Fresh churches focus on fresh expressions of faith communities. Where could church happen? Underwood Park CrossFit box - Louisville This PCUSA worshipping community meets in a CrossFit gym. https://www.pcusa.org/news/2016/5/13/underwood-park-crossfit-nurtures-bodies-and-souls/ Wildwood UMC - Ocala, Fla. Ministry in a tattoo parlor. Video: www.umc.org/news-and-media/taking-church-to-a-tattoo-parlor Story: www.flumc.org/newsdetail/tattoo-ministry-a-fresh-expression-of-christian-commitment-931588 Ministry + Revenue Stream. One form of ministry funds another True Bethel Baptist - Buffalo, NY Job training is given to teens through a Subway franchise at the church. Profits fund ministries for the entire church. http://blog.acton.org/archives/65945-church-opens-subway-franchise-bring-jobs-community.html The Feed Truck - Kingston UMC, N.J. Provides campus outreach and job training through food justice. https://thefeedtruck.org/ Motown Teen Lawn Care - Columbia Presbyterian Church, Washington Teen mentoring, faith development and job training. https://www.faithandleadership.com/mowtown-teen-lawn-care-social-enterprise-offering-new-model-youth-ministry Try Pie - Vancouver, Wash. Try Pie empowers girls to discover their identity in Christ through meaningful work that combats racism; plus there are delicious pies for order. https://www.faithandleadership.com/mowtown-teen-lawn-care-social-enterprise-offering-new-model-youth-ministry Business as Mission: Independent non-profits and for-profits Neighborhood Film Project - Philadelphia A film company gives the formerly incarcerated a trade in media http://thephiladelphiacitizen.org/meet-the-disruptors-neighborhood-film-company/ Yoga Chapel - Vancouver and Florida City Weaves together the art of Christian storytelling with the wisdom of the yoga practice. www.yogachapel.com/ Independent for-profits Faithful Artisans/As We Dwell - Los Angeles Offers co-working space for artists. https://togetherla.net/faithful-artisan-mission-field/ Giving Keys Employs people recently released from prison to make "pay it forward" jewelry with encouraging words out of old keys. https://www.thegivingkeys.com/

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

Clergywomen's choir meets to celebrate and remember

By REV. RUTH A. WARD
Special to the UMConnection

THE TWO CLERGYWOMEN danced together. Around them, people moved. Some said they weren't dancers, but they, too, stepped energetically in time with the music. Fabric banners swirled and filled the sanctuary aisles.

Still the two danced, their faces wreathed in smiles that radiated beyond the joining of their hands. One was a lithe teacher of dance, her steps sure and Spirit-led. The other abandoned the stick that helps her find her way. She has no sight, but she has a vision that guides her beyond the light and dark she can see. She held on to sure hands that gently guided her as they danced with abandon.

Some of us stood silently, our banners forgotten, watching the joy that infused both of their bodies. Tears streamed down our faces and the lumps in our throats grew. "Hush, hush, somebody's calling my name" filled the air. Later the tears increased as they danced again and we sang, "This is my story, this is my song; praising my Savior all the day long."

Early in the 1980s, some of us gathered to dance, sing, study, and shout our praise to God who called and equipped us for this journey as some of the first clergywomen in The United Methodist Church. We gathered because we needed each other, not just to thrive, but too often, to survive.

We were called a clergywomen's choir, but it was so much more than that. Small groups emerged to study the lectionary, examine issues related to racism plus a host of injustices facing the church and our society, and then we began to design liturgy.

We often sang for those who could not sing for themselves. We shared worship at the Quality of Life Retreats. We sang at the 1988 General Conference in St. Louis, Mo. We sang from our hymnals and song books, melodies both new and familiar. We gathered to feast and share Holy Communion. Our very first Christmas

luncheon was at the home of one of our superintendents and we ate our meals from a variety of decorative church plates.

Something happened in the fall of 1982 after a clergywomen's retreat that changed us. The Rev. Susan Beehler and Bishop Susan Morrison met with the Rev. Daisy Thompson, a local pastor in the Peninsula-Delaware Conference, and listened as she



The Revs. Joan Carter-Rimbach, left, and Nancy Webb dance at the reunion of the BWC's Clergywomen Choir in September.

shared her experience in ministry, at times an excruciatingly painful journey.

Over and over again in the telling, she would pause and proclaim, "But I'd take nothing for the journey." She'd take a breath and continue. When the telling was too much or too painful, she'd take another deep breath and affirm, "But I'd take nothing for the journey."

Her powerfully poignant story gave voice and encouragement for the telling of our stories. We brought our "battered spirits, our broken dreams" and also discovered that we could say, "We'd take nothing for the journey."

Beehler was the first to gather the fragments of our stories and weave them into a tapestry of music that nourished, soothed, and empowered us. She said, "I was able to work with your words and noodle melodies. I wanted music sing-able and accessible so we didn't have to practice much. You don't do it alone. You do it in community."

At our recent gathering, Sept. 11-12 at

Epworth UMC in Rehoboth, Del., we remembered, gave thanks and danced. We celebrated the Rev. Kathryn (Kay) Moore's 50th anniversary of ordination and full clergy status. Of the 33 of us who gathered, we have 1,125 years of ordained ministry. Only two who came had fewer than 28 years and one of them was consecrated in 2016.

We discovered once again that we had a

who began a racism reflection group was transformational for my ministry. There were four African-American sisters and four white: Kay, Ruth Ann, Susan, Suzanne, LaReesa, Rebecca, Joan and me. I'll never forget a meeting when Joan clearly and forthrightly addressed us. "You white sisters will have a celebration of Black History month in your church, won't you?"

"It had not occurred to me," Webb said. "From that time forward it has been very important to lift that up wherever I am and to read something I haven't read by an African-American sister."

"The songs, the music, our gatherings were a life-line for me in my ministry. We loved each other in the midst of painful ministry settings and found courage to face the new day knowing we were not alone," said the Rev. Debbie Scott.

"I was welcomed by Baltimore Conference clergywomen while still in seminary," said the Rev. Gayle Annis-Forder. "They provided financial assistance for me to attend the consultation in February 1983. I sang with them and knew they were my people. So many of the songs told and tell my story. 'Zion's Songs' confirms that we 'give each other power to survive'. It's still tough to be a woman in ministry. I am grateful for the singing and dancing and praying and support, the energy, passions and joy I get from these precious women of God."

"The BWC Clergywomen have played an important and supportive role in my ministry. They mothered me into ministry," said the Rev. Vicky Starnes.

We are grateful to Bishop Peggy Johnson for her gracious financial support to help this gathering happen as well as the staff of Epworth Church in Rehoboth, Del.

The music and dancing will continue. We invite all clergywomen to come to the Baltimore-Washington Conference clergywomen's Christmas lunch on Dec. 4.

If you are interested in purchasing a CD of "A Shared Journey" or in attending the Christmas Luncheon, e-mail the Rev. Deb Scott at Rev.Deb8@aol.com.

JFON: United Methodists share hope with immigrants

From page 1

JFON was established by the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) in 1999. JFON grew out of UMCOR's long-standing work with refugees and immigrants. Today, there are 17 JFON sites in the United States, including one in the Baltimore-Washington Conference that operates four legal clinics.

The DC-Maryland JFON has an annual budget of \$115,000, of which \$72,000 comes

from BWC apportionment dollars. The rest, according to the Rev. Ken Hawes, pastor at Hughes-El Buen Samaritano UMC in Wheaton and chair of the JFON Board, comes from donations and fundraisers. The Hispanic Ministries Committee of the BWC has also been very supportive, he said.

"We hope to continue to expand staff and services and are seeking donors, grants and other funding to increase the size of our office and personnel," Hawes said.

Angela Edman is the one and only staff attorney for the DC-Maryland JFON. A graduate of American University's Washington College of Law, she's been in the position two years and has spent the last nine years working in immigration law, mostly with people seeking asylum because of persecution or torture.

"We do a lot of humanitarian-based claims," Edman said, "with asylum-seekers, refugees, and with people seeking temporary protective

status." JFON also helps with instances of human trafficking, violence against women, victims of crime, and people fleeing "all sorts of violence," she said. Additionally, DC-MD JFON works on family-based claims, green cards, naturalization, removal defense, and of course, DACA.

Edman said that DACA has been "problematic" since the 2016 election. That's because, she added, candidate Trump ran on a platform of ending many immigration benefits. With DACA in particular, candidate and then President Trump continued to vacillate between pledging to end the program and pledging to maintain protection for DACA recipients. That inconsistency made it difficult to determine whether it was safe to help eligible immigrants to apply for DACA, Edman said.

Edman, who attends St. John's UMC in Baltimore, said that her faith plays an important part in her work.

"When I pay attention to what I'm supposed to be doing with my life," she said, "it's this." Her faith also enters when she is dealing with the ugly side of human behavior, such as torture.

"You can kind of go one of two ways when you see that," Edman said. "You can sort of think, 'How can there be a loving God when all these horrible things go on?' or, you can see the face of God in your clients. What I saw and continue to see now, are these groups of people who have

nothing, absolutely nothing to their name, but they always go out of their way to help one another. That is not something you see elsewhere often."

"In such a diverse area," Hawes said, "with a large immigrant population, it is vital that we continue our call as people of faith to welcome and care for the strangers and foreigners in our midst. Hospitality is a key element of JFON and striving to do justice. Helping people be an integral part of God's kin-dom is at the center of who we strive to be."

Learn More

Discover more about Justice For Our Neighbors, and The United Methodist Church and immigration. Visit these websites:

JFON: <http://njfon.org/>

BWC resource page on immigration: www.bwcumc.org/ministries/advocacy/immigration-resources/

What the UMC says about immigration: www.umc.org/what-we-believe/the-social-community#immigration



Angela Edman serves as staff attorney for Justice For Our Neighbors.

Red Stockings: a Board of Child Care legacy continues

By ERIK ALSGAARD
UMConnection Staff

IF YOU GREW up in the Baltimore-Washington Conference, you might remember, as a child, putting to dimes in a slotted, Christmas stocking-shaped card. It was a way to give money to children who were being cared for by the Board of Child Care.

In the 1960s, this offering contributed about 60 percent of the operating budget of the Board, said the Rev. Stacey Nickerson, Director of Church and Community Engagement. Today, the red stockings are still around, but thanks to grants, contracts with various government agencies, and more, the offering is mainly used to help ensure the BCC children and their families have a Christmas.

The history of the BCC goes back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Three facilities, all with ties to the Methodist Church — the Kelso Home for Girls, Strawberry Home for Boys, and Swartzell Methodist Home for Children — merged under one organizational structure, called the Board of Child Care.

After bringing all three of these independent organizations together, a way of funding the work was needed. Their initial suggestion was to have a Christmas offering for every church in the conferences (what is now the Peninsula-Delaware Conference was a part of the BCC in the early 1920s). In 1953, the annual conferences adopted the report of the merger and established the Christmas offering.

The genius of these stockings, Nickerson said, is that they allowed children in local churches to help other children in need. The

Christmas stocking debuted, she said, in 1954. On the BCC's Facebook page, they are collecting stories of adults who, as a child, filled those stockings.

"Over the years, it's changed," Nickerson said, noting that today's stocking card holds quarters. "But I can go in a lot of United Methodist churches today and hold up that stocking and people are like, 'Oh, you're from there!' It's iconic."

In addition to the stockings, the BCC also provides offering envelopes for people who wish to make monetary donations that don't jingle.

"I'd like to see churches take advantage of the Christmas offering more," Nickerson said.

Why? "Because it's a fantastic way for churches to connect with what we're doing here," she said, plus it helps teach stewardship, sacrifice, and more to both adults and children alike.

Nickerson, who has the nick-name this time of year, "The BCC's St. Nick," works with the youth in their residential programs to establish a Christmas wish-list. She then matches those lists with churches and other organizations that want to help. Sadly, there are still children who don't get anything filled on their list.

That's where Nickerson steps in. "I take the money that's been raised through the stockings to go out and purchase what is needed," she said.

"Everyone gets gifts."

Volunteers come in to wrap the gifts, and the children receive them on Christmas morning.

The BCC's Auxiliary also hosts a Christmas store for families of residential



The Rev. Stacey Nickerson holds a Christmas stocking circa 1964, filled with dimes. The iconic offerings for the Board of Child Care continue to this day.

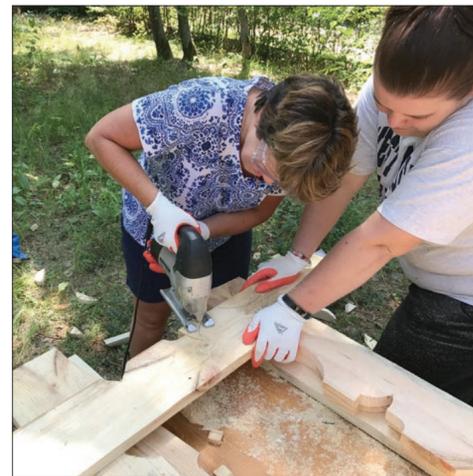
youth, Nickerson said. That's where youth can shop for gifts for their loved ones.

"We've expanded that," she said. "We have a family store, so the families of our students at the school, residential facilities, clients in Pasadena and outpatient mental health, can go and select gifts for their

families, their siblings, and others. It's amazing."

For more information on how to participate in the Red Stocking program, contact Nickerson at nickerson@boardofchildcare.org.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE



Members of a work team do light carpentry work near Voronezh, Russia.

Work and worship unite many in Russia

FULTON — In early August, a team of 11 volunteers including Pastor Rob Pierson from the BWC made a mission trip to Russia. Their destination: Camp Kristall near Voronezh, where at least a dozen BWC VIM groups had gone before. It was the 13th time Pierson had worked at the camp. Each mission group to the camp does similar physical activities, such as repairing, building and refurbishing camp buildings. For Pierson, the mission was focused on Camp Trinity. Each year, a week-long camp is hosted for those with disabilities.

"We painted, scraped, plastered, hefted metal sheets, got tired and frustrated, then enthused and moved to our very souls," said

Zimbabwe Mission expands its scope

SMITHVILLE — Smithville UMC made a VIM trip this summer to Zimbabwe, a mission they began seven years ago as part of the Baltimore-Washington Zimbabwe VIM team, led by Charlie Moore. This year, the church sponsored sports teams from their adopted school, the Hanwa Mission School, which allowed the students from the school to participate in a regional sporting event.

But for David Bonney, a whole new experience opened up when he learned that many students loved to play chess, yet the school had no boards or chess pieces. "I had a chessboard with me," he said. "Little did I know that the small portable set I had

would be the beginning of something much bigger."

He set up his board and soon had about 20 boys waiting to play with him — and he beat them every time. He spotted a girl watching, grimacing at poor plays, and invited her to play. "The room exploded in cheers and hoots when she checkmated me."

Soon an afterschool program took shape, the children making paper chessboards and using paper pieces.

By the time Bonney was ready to leave, a new math teacher became coach to the newly formed Hanwa Mission School chess team. And Smithville UMC provided six new chess sets.

Mt. Gilead celebrates 200

REISTERSTOWN — Begun in 1817, Mt. Gilead UMC is the oldest church on the Boring 3-point charge (Boring, Pinye



Mt. Gilead UMC recently celebrated its 200th anniversary.

Grove and Mt. Gilead UMCs). It began its 200th anniversary celebration Sept. 10, with a balloon release, reported Melinda Rothenberger, the church's administrator.

Following the launch, the 95 people, including past pastors, UMC historian, the Rev. Emora Brannon, spoke, telling part of the church's history from its founder and first pastor, the Rev. Eli Henkle who was ordained by Bishop Francis Asbury in 1810. Several soloists provided special music. One of those was former pastor Mindy Coates, who served from 2004 to 2014.

Flood buckets pouring in

BURTONSVILLE — One of Liberty Grove UMC's missions reaches far and wide: the collection of flood buckets from BWC churches to send to UMCOR.

Since October 2014, Liberty Grove has been a hub of Mission Central, an UMCOR secondary warehouse in Mechanicsburg, Pa.

Since the end of September, eight churches have responded to the call, making about 300 flood buckets and as many hygiene kits. The LGUMC team inspects every bucket assuring they include the proper items. "We open every bucket and verify that the contents are complete and meet UMCOR standards," said Tom Ulrich, one of LGUMC's leaders on the project.

Liberty Grove accepted its own challenge to provide flood buckets: to raise \$6,000 to make 100 buckets, which according to UMCOR, cost about \$65 on average to make, Ulrich said. They raised \$3,700 on two Sundays and expect to complete the hundred buckets in a "Bucket Brigade" in the sanctuary in mid-October.

UMs ask: What is doctrine, what is law and what is right?

By THOMAS STARNES

Editor's Note: When the Judicial Council meets Oct. 24-27, it will be considering petitions brought by the Denmark and California-Pacific annual conferences that argue that the language in the Discipline that deems "homosexual practice" to be "incompatible" with "Christian teaching" violates the denomination's constitution.

Treating Christian teaching as synonymous with Christian doctrine, those annual conferences reason that General Conference legislation that purports to make new proclamations of Christian teaching violates our Constitution's "First Restrictive Rule" (found in paragraph 17 of the Discipline), which states that the "General Conference shall not revoke, alter, or change our Articles of Religion or establish any new standards or rules of doctrine contrary to our present existing and established standards of doctrine."

One of the briefs filed with the Judicial Council on this issue was authored by Tom Starnes, who is the son, brother, nephew and cousin of United Methodist pastors, and now also the uncle of an aspiring pastor, scheduled to graduate from Wesley Theological Seminary next spring.

Starnes was careful to inform the Judicial Council that the views presented in his amicus brief were not being offered in his capacity as Chancellor of the Baltimore-Washington Conference (a position Tom has held since 2004), but rather "as a life-long United Methodist who, besides having . . . a working knowledge of (and deep appreciation for) Methodist polity, finally became exhausted by our church's seemingly interminable debate" over human sexuality issues.

"Our Constitution, properly understood, actually deprives the General Conference of jurisdiction to define church doctrine," Starnes says in his brief, which provides a history lesson in how the church, and who in the church, decides what United Methodists believe. The brief can be read in its entirety at www.bwcumc.org.

In the piece that follows, Starnes explains how he came to address this issue, and how he thinks the viewpoint advanced in his brief might assist the church in remaining united,

notwithstanding its diverging views on human sexuality issues.

EARLIER THIS YEAR, TWO OF THE largest United Methodist congregations in the United States announced that they were terminating their affiliation with The United Methodist Church. Citing the "heartbreaking" divide over human sexuality issues, those congregations announced that they had "no desire to continue to engage in these divisive debates, or to be forced to face the crossfire between multiple front lines," and so they were choosing "to withdraw" and to focus "instead on our mission of connecting people to Christ and to one another."

I know the feeling. I was confirmed as a member of The United Methodist Church in 1970. Two years later – still barely a teenager – a majority of the church's General Conference voted to declare that "The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching." And so it began: for the ensuing 45 years – which is to say, for the entirety of my adult life – our church has been embroiled in a sustained tug-of-war over sexual orientation.

The unremitting controversy has taken its toll. Even lifelong Methodists are increasingly wondering aloud if it is "time to face reality" and part ways. Remaining together demands too much, they argue, requiring either (A) that one "side" or the other capitulate on its principles; or (B) that we continue to tolerate barely concealed defiance of the Discipline, along with the damage that inevitably attends any church trial proceedings initiated in response.

Presented with such miserable options, many think the more principled solution is an amicable divorce, akin to the rupture over slavery in 1844.

I understand this reasoning. I, too, am exhausted by the debate. But I don't want us to separate. It is profoundly important to me that we are a denomination whose members openly acknowledge their differences, even on vital issues, but who

nevertheless choose to heed their founder's admonition that they remain "united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that [we] may help each other to work out [our] salvation." (Discipline, ¶ 104.)

By the same token, I question whether the answer lies in simply down-streaming to annual conferences the debates that have taken center-stage at General Conference for nearly a half century. Annual conferences – even single congregations – are themselves profoundly divided on human sexuality issues, so giving each conference flexibility to adopt its own rules governing ordination and marriage runs the risk of fragmenting the debate, without resolving much, and perhaps even intensifying the "crossfire between multiple front lines" that is driving some congregations away.

While lamenting this dilemma, it recently occurred to me to ask: How in heaven's name did we Methodists ever come to accept the notion that something as sacred as "Christian teaching" (of all things) is reliably and authoritatively revealed by a mere show of hands of a bare majority of General Conference delegates gathered together at any given time?

Previously, I had simply accepted that "resolving" doctrinal disputes was among the General Conference's authorized functions, but that proposition suddenly struck me as unlikely. Ask yourself: Does it seem even remotely plausible that John Wesley (of all people) intended to bestow upon any body of men and women the right to "vote" on religious truth – to decide church doctrine by ballot?

Against that backdrop, I studied a wealth of historical and scholarly material and am now convinced that the conventional wisdom – that the General Conference has authority to define church doctrine – is simply wrong. In truth, the record leaves little doubt that our founders deliberately placed Methodist doctrine "beyond the reach" of the General Conference in 1808, when it first became subject to the Constitution, which included the First

Restrictive Rule. The precise purpose of this rule was to ensure that our then "present existing and established standards of doctrine" – as bequeathed to us by John Wesley himself – would "be preserved sacred and inviolable."

The historical support for this perspective is abundant, but Professor Thomas Oden expressed things succinctly: "Once decided, as it was in 1808, the matter of doctrinal standards needed no further mention or definition because this matter [had been] decided as absolutely and irrevocably as any constitution-making body could possibly act."

Why is this important? It is important because it illuminates a path forward that promises to allow us to remain united, but with fidelity to core Wesleyan principles and without requiring any of us to renounce or submerge our sincerely held doctrinal beliefs.

If we can recover the bedrock principle that we are not empowered to impose our doctrinal perspectives on one another by legislative fiat, then we are freed to re dedicate ourselves to the fundamentally Methodist perspective that our inevitably imperfect doctrinal understandings are to be grounded in the first instance on the foundation laid by Wesley, but are otherwise to emerge as living, biographical realities – to be "worked out" in community, as our General Rules indicate – through the day-to-day application of our multi-faceted conferring processes.

One such uniquely Methodist process, of course, is the one that has always culminated in reserving exclusively to the clergy members of each annual conference the final responsibility of deciding, on a case-by-case basis, which men and women are suited to being ordained as ministers of the Gospel and appointed to serve United Methodist pulpits. Under a proper reading of our Constitution, our clergy may freely vote their consciences in implementing that process, and their exercise of their independent judgment should not be subject to short-circuiting – in one direction or another – on the ever-evolving doctrinal perspectives of a bare majority of General Conference delegates.

A word from the bishop

The Most Dangerous Week

By BISHOP LATRELLE MILLER EASTERLING

ONE OF THE first questions asked after someone is killed by a domestic partner is, "Why didn't they say something?" The question is almost an indictment of their silence and a further victimization of their circumstances.

And yet, sharing that you are the victim of domestic partner abuse is one of the hardest things to do. When those caught in this cycle of violence do seek to talk about their experiences, they are often met with discomfort, denial or traumatizing statements. After amassing the courage to tell their story, the last thing someone needs to hear is, "I would never let that happen to me," or "I wish someone would hit me. They'd be sorry."

Whether the speaker understands it or not, these statements inherently carry the message that it is your fault. If you are in an abusive relationship, it is because you either aren't strong enough, smart enough, courageous enough or (insert adjective here) enough to prevent this from happening to you. Comments such as these intensify the already overwhelming stigma and shame of domestic partner abuse, and inhibit those trapped in its web from seeking help.

Among many other important topics, October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month. As many of you know, this topic is especially important to me as a survivor of domestic partner violence. There was a time when I did not talk about this chapter of my life. As a woman in ministry, or leadership in general for that matter, I was encouraged not to divulge this fact. A woman in ministry

still sparks a discussion in some segments of society, and any deviation from absolute perfection can become fodder for diminution.

And yet, when survivors tell their story, they empower others to be honest, seek help, and reclaim their safety. Every single time I tell my story, someone comes forward and whispers in my ear that they are being abused... Every. Single. Time. Therefore, I will not be silent; to speak this truth is to speak life for someone.

The most vulnerable moment for someone trapped in this cycle is when he or she makes the decision to leave. This fact has become so prevalent it has been given a name, "the most dangerous week." Ariel Zwang, CEO of Safe Horizon states, "In order to reestablish control, abusers may respond in extremely violent and unpredictable ways once they find out the victim has decided to leave. In fact, a recent separation is one of the reliable indicators of lethality identified by researchers who have studied domestic violence homicides." (What You Should Know About the Most Dangerous Week, Ariel Zwang, Huffpost, June 30, 2015.)

This is why we have created Seeds of Security (S.O.S.), a resource for individuals seeking safety from abuse. Those who work in this area are well aware that abusers often maintain the finances in the relationship as another means of control. Having the financial means to travel to a safe space is critical once the decision to leave has been made. I believe we have the means to provide not only the economic resources to seek shelter, but sanctuaries of security as well. I dream of a day when we will have S.O.S. homes in the Baltimore-Washington Conference to

provide temporary shelter for those in transition. A steering committee has been formed to help make my dream a reality. If you are interested in being a part of that ministry, please contact the Rev. Stacey Cole Wilson at the Conference Mission Center, at scolewilson@bwcumc.org.

I also encourage pastors and laity to talk about domestic abuse, invite experts to offer training on the topic, and become partners in our S.O.S. ministry. It is important that we as theologians, disciples, and community partners be able to engage this topic in meaningful ways. While Scripture does encourage partners to honor their marital covenant, remaining in an abusive marriage or relationship can become a death sentence. Our United Methodist Book of Resolutions addresses our commitment to marriage while also recognizing that abuse is "detrimental to the covenant of the human community."

A beloved hymn of the church sung by Mahalia Jackson states, "If I can help somebody, as I travel along. If I can help somebody, with a word or song... then my living shall not be in vain." If our shining a light on this topic helps even one person to safety, then our telling shall not be in vain.

Bishop Latrelle Miller Easterling

We are called to be collaborators with God

By ROD MILLER*

HOW WE UNDERSTAND OUR relationship with God can greatly effect the trajectory of our lives. Where we go, what we do with our gifts and talents, even our attitudes, behaviors and values are all influenced by the nature of our relationship with God.

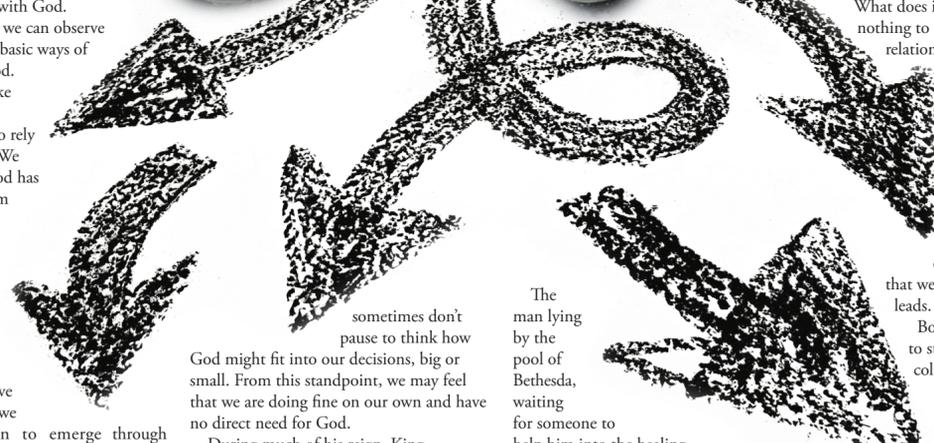
In broad strokes, we can observe that there are three basic ways of interacting with God.

One way is to take complete personal responsibility and to rely very little on God. We may believe that God has given us the freedom and resources to direct and take action ourselves, and so we do.

A second way is to defer all responsibility for our lives to God. This is a passive approach in which we wait for direction to emerge through God's influence and guidance.

A third way is collaboration. More than a combination of both of the previous approaches, the person and God have joint ongoing responsibility for direction and action. The participant and God work together in a collaborative manner to discern direction and action. This "step in – step back – reflect" approach brings all within us and God to play at any moment.

We may recall how we have engaged in all three of these approaches at one time or another. When all is going well, we



sometimes don't pause to think how God might fit into our decisions, big or small. From this standpoint, we may feel that we are doing fine on our own and have no direct need for God.

During much of his reign, King David led, built, judged and acted based on his own considerable abilities while his relationship with God was in the background. All went along well until he went off course and eventually realized that he needed to turn back to God.

At other times, we may think we have little to offer on our own. We may feel unworthy to desire or imagine more than what is already taking place in our lives. Sometimes we feel small because of mistakes, failures, insecurities or debilitating

experiences. We may have trouble seeing the potential within us, so we hold back. In these times, we defer all direction and action to God.

The man lying by the pool of Bethesda, waiting for someone to help him into the healing water may have waited his entire life if Jesus had not come along. Jesus asked if he wanted to be well, or simply to remain where he was.

Often we bounce back and forth between nearly total independence and total dependence. These need not be our only choices.

Collaboration can become the usual instead of the exception. Collaboration can take hold whenever we choose to wait on God and trust that God will provide

whatever we need in the time and manner we need it.

We can come to see that God is continually inviting us off of our own maps and meeting us there.

Peter walking on water was about him learning to collaborate with Jesus. Paul, in his missionary journeys, collaborated with God every step of the way.

What does it mean to go from all or nothing to a real, alive, mutual, trusting relationship with God? Strong marriages are not 50%-50%; they are 100%-100%.

The same is true in our relationship with God. When we are all in and seek God to be all in with us, we become open and attentive to the quiet strength available to collaborators. And we find that we too are able to go where God leads.

Both laity and clergy are called to step out in faith to become collaborators with God.

At the office, in the home, everywhere throughout our lives, we are called to listen, discern and connect wholeheartedly

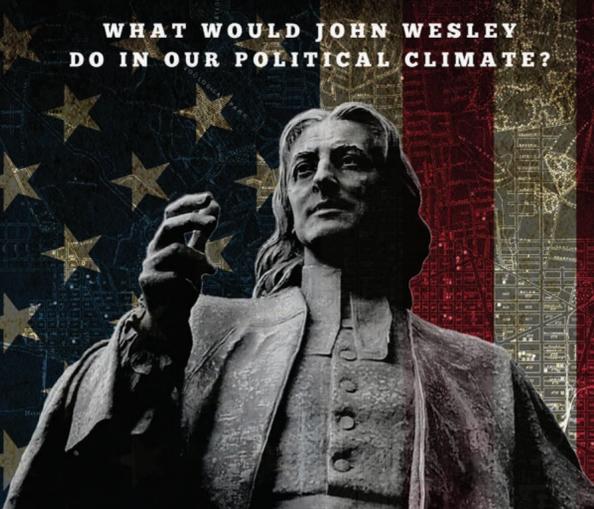
with God so that our whole lives become a response to who God created us each to be.

It's never either/or. God calls us all – always – to live both/and lives of love and service.

We must listen for the call. We must be collaborators with God.

**Rod Miller is the interim pastor of Glen Mar UMC. He also works as a coach for clergy and other church leaders.*

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Emory's beacon illuminates neighborhoods in D.C.

BY ERIK ALSGAARD
UMConnection Staff

TO SAY THAT Emory Fellowship, a United Methodist congregation on the Georgia Ave. corridor in Washington, D.C., is undergoing change would be an understatement.

After years of dreaming and casting of vision, and after at least seven tries at getting started, the church, through its 501(c)3, the Emory Beacon of Light, Inc. (EBOL), is in the middle of a \$55.5 million renovation that will create affordable housing units, homeless units, and more.

Created in 1996, EBOL is the mission arm of the church, said the Rev. Joe Daniels, pastor at Emory Fellowship. The historic church, which has roots in Washington going back to 1832, has found a dramatic way to make a difference in their neighborhood and beyond.

The non-profit, which has its own board of directors, partners with several area service agencies to bring hope and healing to people in D.C. That outreach, when the renovation is done, will be greatly expanded.

"With the issues we had in the community at that time, including housing, drug addiction and alcoholism, ... in order for us to help people become whole, we needed to have an entity that could access greater funding to address these huge needs," Daniels said about the creation of EBOL.

The issues are still present, Daniels said. To address them the Beacon Center, scheduled to open late next year, will have 99 units, 91 of which are designated as affordable housing (60 percent of Area Median Income), with eight units of permanent supportive housing for the homeless; 30,848 square feet of

multipurpose facility and office space (church and EBOL); 9,469 square feet of recreation and community program space; a business center, fitness center, bicycle parking, resident lounge, outdoor courtyard area, resident and community programs, and 87 precious parking spaces.

"We will start the leasing process and marketing for tenants in the next six months," said Hazel Broadnax, a member of the church who is the president of the non-profit Emory Beacon of Light. She has overseen the renovation for the past 10 years, she said, "from the start."

A one-bedroom unit, Broadnax said, is going for \$1,057 per month. "You can't get anything in this city for that," she said.

Of the \$55.5 million for the construction project, Broadnax said, almost \$10 million is to renovate the church and church office space. That money, she said, is coming from two sources: a loan from the United Methodist Development Fund, and a leasing agreement between the church and EBOL. Roughly \$45 million is being used for the residential program, with about \$20 million coming from the District of Columbia's Housing Production Trust Fund, and the remaining coming from the Four Percent Low-income Housing Tax credits, a program of the Federal Government.

Broadnax, who volunteers at EBOL, is a CPA with experience at both the city and federal levels, said she is used to working with big numbers. At one point, she said, she was the controller for Human Services in D.C., with a budget of \$1.4 billion.

"Maybe if I didn't have the background that I have, I would have been afraid to do some of these deals we've had to do," Broadnax said. "There were times when we were looking for, like, \$2 million to close gaps, and I said, 'This is nothing; we can do



A \$55.5 million construction project is underway at Emory Fellowship and the Emory Beacon of Light in Washington. Work is slated to finish in late 2018.

this."

Throughout construction, Daniels said the book of Nehemiah, chapters one through six (restoring Jerusalem's walls), has accompanied him on the journey. In addition, John 10:10 and John 5:1-9 have been foundational Scriptures for him.

"We need to be concerned and we need to be caring, compassionate fighters for justice for people who live on the margins," Daniels said.

One piece of the problem, Daniels said, is that people who serve in the infrastructure of the city – teachers, police officers, hotel workers – can't afford to live in the city.

"The housing we're providing is not only helping people moving from homelessness

to residency," he said, "it is also helping people who are the working poor."

Daniels said he is extremely proud of his congregation, who has had to worship in a nearby school for the past three years. "They have had to weather many storms during this whole construction process," Daniels said. "We've had delays, we've had times when we thought the project was stopped, we've had times when we thought the vision was crushed."

Three principles, Daniels said, have helped the congregation: patience, persistence, and prayer. "Those three things have held us together and gotten us through," he said. "But the good news is, the best is yet to come."

Bishop Moore-Koikoi preaches at homecoming

BY ERIK ALSGAARD
UMConnection Staff

IN 1822, a group of Quakers gave a small parcel of land to a group of freed black slaves in what is now Sandy Spring, Md., for the purposes of conducting worship. Although the men, women and children could not legally worship without the oversight of a white person, it was the birth of what is now Sandy Spring UMC, the oldest black church in Montgomery County.

The congregation planned several events to celebrate its 195th anniversary, including a special visit from a daughter of the church, Bishop Cynthia Moore-Koikoi.

Bishop Moore-Koikoi, whose father served the church in the 80s, preached Sept. 27 for a special homecoming revival. It was her first time being back at the church since she was elected a bishop in July 2016 and assigned to serve the Western Pennsylvania Conference.

"It's wonderful to be back here," the bishop said. "Thirty-six years ago, my sister and I were up here in this choir loft and Mr. Stewart was teaching us Sunday school."

Speaking afterwards, Bishop Moore-Koikoi said that after being a bishop now for 12 months, it was great to witness all the ministries being done in the Western Pennsylvania Conference.

"I'm enjoying the diversity of the annual conference," the bishop said. "It's almost like we're the odd couple and it is working so well. To me, it's a demonstration of the strength we have in our diversity and the power of the unity we have in Jesus Christ."

In a sermon about memorials and monuments, taken from Joshua 4:1-7, the

bishop repeatedly asked, "What do these stones mean?"

The 12 stones the Israelites placed on the banks of the River Jordan after crossing it on dry ground served as a memorial. Today, Moore-Koikoi said, we still erect memorials and statues that point to historic moments or people, "not to preserve history."

Bishop Moore-Koikoi recalled a great-great uncle who used to say, after he had said something profound, "mark my words."

Marking is an important thing to do, the bishop said, so the Israelites, on the bank of the river were doing something of significance: erecting a monument to commemorate what God had done.

"As they were erecting that monument," the bishop said, "they would have no idea

the controversy that monuments would be in 2017 in the United States of America. They had no idea."

The bishop said she wasn't there to preach about those controversies because, as she said, "We're celebrating tonight. But the text does talk about a monument, and it's a good text for an anniversary."

The purpose of a monument, Bishop Moore-Koikoi said, is to remind, advise and inspire people. "Therefore, monuments are there so that we might remember and therefore be inspired."

"Monuments help us to celebrate who we have been so that we will know who we will be in the future."

The bishop said she had been doing some reflecting about some of the monuments

The United Methodist Church has been erecting, and asking herself, "What do these stones tell our children about who God has been to us and who God wants us to be in the future?"

Bishop Moore-Koikoi, who was a district superintendent in Baltimore during the Freddy Gray unrest, said she had a conversation with a self-avowed atheist during one of the community outreach programs churches were doing in Sandtown. The man said that he didn't believe in God, "and you don't believe in the God you talk about, either."

"I said, 'Tell me more,' Moore Koikoi remembered. The man said that if Christians really believed in the powerful God that they talk about, "if you believe what you preach... then we wouldn't be in the space and place we're in now because you would have used that power to bring down these systems that have caused this situation."

"It occurred to me, when I was reflecting on this Scripture, that in Baltimore City, in particular, we've erected a lot of monuments of stone," Bishop Moore-Koikoi said. "All those churches built of fine stone from all over the world. And the children have been asking, 'What do these stones mean?'"

By our actions, the bishop said, "we haven't been saying much at all."

The bishop concluded her sermon by saying it's long past time for the church to be telling the story of a monumental God who can make a way, even through a river, a Red Sea, a death, enslavement, addiction, racism, pain, and more.

And – addressing the congregation – she said, "If you don't have a story, you can use my story."



Bishop Cynthia Moore-Koikoi, right, greets a parishoner at Sharp Street UMC in Sandy Spring following a homecoming revival service.