

**\$39,600 invested in new ministries**



More than \$39,000 in grant money has been invested in several new ministries in the Baltimore-Washington Conference (see story, below). L-R: Sophia Didawick; Voices in Praise Youth Choir; and Project Transformation D.C.

## 2019 Session to reimagine young people's ministry

BY MELISSA LAUBER  
UMCConnection Staff

“WE ARE ONE: United to Love,” will be the theme of the 235th session of Baltimore-Washington Conference when it gathers Wednesday, May 29, through Saturday, June 1, at the Baltimore Marriott Waterfront Hotel.

This year, an extra day has been added to this time of holy conferencing, which is expected to draw more than 1,500 lay and clergy members from the BWC's 628 churches in Maryland, Washington, D.C., Bermuda, and the panhandle of West Virginia.

The additional time will focus on celebrating youth and young adults and their ministries. Organizers are planning a conference-wide confirmation service to celebrate the young people who commit themselves as members of The United Methodist Church.

Congregations are encouraged to notify their youth and encourage their attendance in this special worship experience.

The ordination service will be held Friday evening May 31.

This year, the Rev. Ianther Mills, pastor of Asbury UMC in Washington, will preach at the Memorial Service; Marcia McFee, a worship expert and consultant, will speak at the laity session; and the Rev. Marvin McMickle, president of the Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School in New York, will lead the Bible study.

At this year's session, delegates will be elected to the 2020 General Session. A series of several electronic ballots is expected. The deadline for the delegates nomination statements is April 1.

April 1 is also the deadline for resolutions to be considered by the members of the session. The format for the resolutions, which should be submitted to the Conference Secretary, Cynthia Taylor, can be found at [www.bwcumc.org/events/annual-conference](http://www.bwcumc.org/events/annual-conference).

Questions about the resolutions can be addressed to Taylor at [bwcsecretary@bwcumc.org](mailto:bwcsecretary@bwcumc.org).

A Pre-Conference Briefing will be held at two locations, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, on May 18. Locations and times will be announced soon.

The foundational Scripture for the Conference continues to be Ephesians 4:1-16. The missional partnership to combat homelessness with Back on My Feet ([www.backonmyfeet.org](http://www.backonmyfeet.org)) will also continue.

For information about the election of General Conference delegates, see page 4.

## Missional Innovation Grants support creative discipleship

FROM THE BWC'S CONNECTIONAL MINISTRIES STAFF

**I**N A DRAMATICALLY new way of pursuing God's kingdom, the Baltimore-Washington Conference has issued its inaugural batch of \$39,600 in Missional Innovation Grants to 10 recipients.

The grants recognize that discipleship often has the most impact when it is done at a local church level, with people living out their faith assisting people in their communities. The conference seeks to support these efforts by enabling creative and vital expressions of God's love as it inspires and enables discipleship.

These annual awards were given by the Interim Discipleship Agency Boards in the areas of Advocacy and Justice, Abundant Health, and Young People's Ministries.

Money for the financial assistance was provided by grants received by the Conference from

a variety of sources and mission shares contributed by local churches. For more information, visit [www.bwcumc.org/resources/grants-and-awards](http://www.bwcumc.org/resources/grants-and-awards).

Here are this year's recipients:

**The BWC's Abundant Health Board is pleased to support four vital ministries in the amount of \$10,000.**

**Care Pack Ministry - \$3,000  
Union Chapel UMC  
Sophia Didawick**

Sophia Didawick is a high-school senior in Morgan County, W.Va. The Care Pack Ministry was born during



See Grants, page 3

## King's message still challenges church today

BY REV. TONY HUNT  
Special to the UMCConnection

**T**HIS YEAR MARKS the 90th anniversary of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birth, and the 51st year after his assassination on April 4, 1968, in Memphis, Tenn. As was the case in 1968, the nation and world today are wrought with social, economic, political and religious upheaval. Over the past several years, in the United States and across the globe, we

have become more divided along various lines. In the U.S., the social and political division that we now experience is not really new, but it challenges our sense of normalcy in ways that perhaps we have not been challenged in the past.

In April 1963, King wrote a letter to eight clergymen in Birmingham, Ala., which has come to be known as the Letter from the Birmingham Jail. On August 28 of the same year, at

the urging of gospel singer Mahalia Jackson, who shouted to King to "Tell them about the Dream Martin!", he delivered the concluding recitation in what has come to be known as the "I Have a Dream" speech.

In the Birmingham letter and Washington, D.C., speech, King most demonstratively outlined that his singular vision was for the realization of the Beloved Community. King's assessment

See MLK, page 7



BY MANDY SAYERS  
LEAD Pastor, Glen Mar UMC, Ellicott City

**R**UN!  
The writer of Ephesians calls himself a “prisoner for the Lord” or, in The Message, “locked up here, a prisoner for the Master.” (Eph. 4:1). If the writer is called to be “locked up,” the church is called to move.

“Walk — or better yet run — on the road God calls you to travel.”

It’s hard to “walk or better yet run” in ministry. Like that law of physics where objects at rest tend to stay at rest, the status quo can take over. The worship can get a little stale. Another new year, another Auld Lang Syne, and the same issues are there on Jan. 1 that we faced on Dec. 31, or even last Jan. 1.

What’s a UMC to do? The Altar Guild is still burned out and everyone and their dog has winter soccer practice on Sundays.

Brothers and sisters, I think this start of Ephesians is designed to light a Holy Spirit fire under us in this new year, to counteract all those other voices that slow us down, that whisper about all the reasons why the church can’t do and be what God calls it to be.

What if we decided that no matter what happens in the world, or in our denomination, we were determined to run as hard and as fast as we can down the road God calls us to travel? What if we were about taking holy risks, and being the church for the world in new and deeper ways? What if this is the year that we stop standing still out of fear and walk, or better yet run, outside our church doors and into our communities, bringing Jesus and the new life he offers?

There’s a lot about church I cannot fix. I cannot please everyone on any day and some days I can’t please anyone. But I can run hard on the road God calls me to travel. I can do my very best to please God with that good-news-to-the-poor, release-to-the-captives, and year-of-the-Lord’s-favor job we have, every day.

The year of our Lord 2019 is going to be a very good year, I think, because Jesus is Lord and we get to serve him. Ring the bells, gather the people, go preach and live the gospel. In other words, run!

**RUN**

*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. This year, the “WORD” will be taken from Ephesians 4:1-16.*

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

**T**HERE IS NO single word that inspires action more than the word “run.” Whenever we hear the word, we automatically picture fast, decisive action in a specific direction.

If we are in a crowded place and suddenly hear someone shout “run!” — after a split second of silence, people take off running in every direction simply because they heard the word!

When people want to make a change in our country, they will often announce that they are about to “run” for office.

When you hear the word “run,” you know something is about to shift and something is about to change, so why is it that we rarely hear the word “run” when we go to church?

The Prophet Habakkuk stated, “Write a vision, and make it plain upon a tablet so that a runner can read it.” Yet it seems that when we enter into the house of the Lord now, we are invited to do everything but run. We are invited to sit so that we can listen to a

sermon, or join in a small group, or occasionally enjoy a church potluck. We are invited to stand in honor of Scripture or to affirm a vote and sometimes to encourage someone around us who needs support. We kneel to pray, or to receive Communion. Yet, to sit, to stand and to kneel is not to RUN.

This year, I want to invite you not only to sit, stand or kneel, but to run. Run after a vision for renewed disciple making in the church! Run after a chance to share the gospel with the friend, family, or co-worker so that they can come to know the saving grace and peace of a relationship with Jesus Christ! Run after an opportunity to serve and change the world!

As we enter the new year, now is the perfect time to make the decision to not have another year of business as usual but to have a year that is an unforgettable chance to live your best life. Don’t hesitate, don’t wait and certainly don’t do more of the same.

Now is the time to make a decision to get ready, get set and go. Now is the time to RUN!

## EVENTS

### Sexual Ethics and Boundaries training

January 29, 30 and 31

A required training for all clergy and other conference leaders on understanding, establishing and maintaining healthy boundaries for ministry and an exploration of the BWC’s policy on sexual ethics, with Becky Posey Williams, senior director of sexual ethics and advocacy for COSROW. The stand-alone sessions will be from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.:

Jan. 29 - Brook Hill UMC in Frederick;

Jan. 30 - Arnolia UMC in Baltimore;

Jan. 31 - Westphalia UMC in Upper Marlboro.

### Living Your Call 2019

Feb. 2, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

BWC Mission Center, Fulton

The Culture of Call committee of the BWC Board of Ordained Ministry invites you to attend its second annual Ministry Summit. Exploring how to respond to God’s call on your life. Featuring worship keynote by the Rev. Tony Love.

### ROCK 2019

Feb. 8-10

Convention Center, Ocean City, Md.

Registration is open for ROCK 2019, a retreat for youth. The featured speaker this year will be Ben Glenn, the Chalk Guy. Salvador will provide the music and Egypt Speaks is the weekend’s spoken word artist. ROCK is designed as a God-encountering, life-changing, high-energy retreat focusing on revival for youth and adults. [bwcumc.org/rock](http://bwcumc.org/rock)

### Laity Fix Workshop

Feb. 15 or 16, 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

BWC Mission Center, Fulton

This Office of Leadership and Congregation Development workshop, offered both on Friday and Saturday, is led by Lynda Byrd. It explores the value of the congregational analysis; offers strategies for sustained leadership development; and identifies growth opportunities through mission and ministry initiatives. Free.

### United to Love: A Way Forward

Morning, March 2

BWC Mission Center, Fulton

Following the Special Session of General Conference, Feb. 23-28 in St. Louis, Bishop LaTrelle Easterling will connect with members of the Baltimore-Washington Conference in a live-streamed gathering.

### Opioid Epidemic Town Hall

March 9, 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

BWC Mission Center, Fulton

A frank and informational discussion on the opioid epidemic and how the UMC might respond.

### Leadership Days

2019

Regional training opportunities for local church leaders are being planned. Save the dates:  
Washington Region - March 16  
Western Region - March 30  
Baltimore Regions - April 6  
Southern Region - April 13

**For additional information and more events, visit [www.bwcumc.org/events](http://www.bwcumc.org/events).**

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Director of Communications  
Managing Editor  
Multimedia Producer / Graphic Designer  
Webmaster / Video Producer  
Communications Associate

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# Grants: Funding reflects new approach to ministry

From page 1

her sophomore year when she discovered that essential hygiene items were not available to a close friend. Sophia quickly stepped into action and supplied her friend with these items, as well as helping hundreds of other students living below the poverty line in Morgan County. Today, Sophia packs and distributes over 175 care packs each month. Every care pack contains a bar of soap, body wash, hand soap, a bath sponge, deodorant, shampoo, conditioner, a toothbrush, toothpaste, floss, and mouth wash.

(Sophia Didawick also received \$5,000 from Young People's Ministry for this bold outreach.)

## Save the Sanctuary - \$2,500 Ames UMC Marlon Tilghman

Ames UMC of Bel Air has had a Save the Sanctuary Program since 2015.



Developed in response to statistics showing that obesity, lack of physical activity,

and unhealthy nutrition were the most direct causes of health concerns affecting the minority communities of Harford County, Save the Sanctuary was designed to inform and make pastors healthier, thus, inspiring their congregations and communities to do the same.

Save the Sanctuary provides participants with a tote containing all of the materials a pastor or lay person may need to introduce, implement, and sustain a health and wellness ministry within their local church.

The program additionally seeks to dispel the myths surrounding food, fitness, and faith, while providing spiritual and biblical principles of healthy living for disciples of Jesus Christ.

## Our Journey of Hope - \$1,500 Macedonia UMC Cynthia Gibson

The Health and Welfare Ministry at Macedonia United Methodist Church in Annapolis has made a commitment to begin Our Journey of



Hope — a training

program offered through the Cancer Treatment Center of Philadelphia. The program will train lay members on how to attend to the spiritual, emotional, physical, and social needs of patients, caregivers, family, friends, and others impacted by cancer. Once trained, each member of the Macedonia UMC Health and Welfare Ministry will minister to at least one person in the community impacted by cancer by the end of 2019.

## Fully Alive - \$3,000 Petworth UMC Valeria Stevens



Fully Alive is a community ministry sponsored by Petworth UMC in Washington, D.C. The program offers holistic, multi-level, physical, mental, and spiritual health engagement opportunities for everyday men and women trying to make ends meet within our busy culture.

Fully Alive seeks to offer a place of solace and support to those who feel tired and isolated, and those who may currently see the church as disconnected with today's reality.

Through a spiritual lens, the program will allow people to "look at their bodies differently and to know they have a faith community that can support them in becoming strong temples with enough energy to serve in greater capacities in the world."

Fully Alive will include a gifts inventory, Bible studies relevant to issues specific to today's working adult, and various workshops on topics such as financial health, maintaining a healthy work-life balance, and recognizing and advocating for changing unhealthy relationships, as well as resources on QPR suicide prevention and human trafficking awareness.

## The BWC's Advocacy and Action Network is pleased to award \$10,475 to three outstanding ministries.

### Project Transformation - \$5,000 Project Transformation, D.C. Rachel Luna

Project Transformation's mission was honored for its ongoing commitment to enhancing youth literacy and academic excellence in Washington, D.C. (See a description under the Young People's Ministry, right, which also awarded Project Transformation \$5,000.)

### Criminal Justice and Mercy Ministries (CJAMM) - \$4,975 Pat Marks



CJAMM is an initiative of the BWC where people of faith come together to improve the criminal justice system in Maryland and the District of Columbia. CJAMM initiatives are designed to foster congregations and their member's spiritual focus of mercy and compassion for all persons involved in the criminal justice system, including: families; victims; those incarcerated; returning citizens (people who have been incarcerated); and those who work within the criminal justice system, including law enforcement and court officials.

## Cultural Competency Training - \$500 Wesley Freedom UMC Elizabeth LeMaster



Wesley Freedom UMC's Family Resource Center has partnered with Johanna Dolan, Director of Innovation, Strategy and Development for Axiom Sober Coaches, to host a Train the Trainer Cultural Competency Training.

Training module topics include LGBT elders, HIV, LGBT youth, trans health, race, and violence. The training covers adult learning and theories of change.

While sharing the facts is important, a specific goal of this training is to help change attitudes and behaviors so that LGBT clients will have a different and better experience when they engage with social service and other programs in our community.

Their efforts to love all, provide safe spaces and create new forms of community will encourage people to develop to their fullest potential.

## Young People's Ministry is pleased to support five innovative ministries with \$19,125.

### Care Pack Ministry - \$5,000 Sophia Didawick Union Chapel UMC

Sophia Didawick is a high-school senior in Morgan County, W.Va. who assembles and distributes 175 care packages for her peers each month. (See more about her in the section on the Action and Advocacy Network on page 1, which also awarded her \$3,000.)

### LeadHer Ministry for Young Women - \$1,000 LeadHer Ministry Bonnie McCubbin



LeadHer Ministry for Young Women is a program seeking to help young women hone their leadership skills and meet women who are leading in their fields, from church, politics, academics, business, and beyond, so that they can build up networks of professional women as mentors, friends, and colleagues to become the leaders of today and tomorrow the church and the world so desperately need. Beginning with a week-long summer camp for girls entering 7-12th grade in 2018, the ministry is seeking to expand to include girls in 5-12th grade in 2019 and adding additional quarterly events.

## Voices in Praise Youth Choir Summer Camp - \$5,875 Voices in Praise, Inc.



Voices In Praise will offer a four-day summer camp for youth choirs and their directors, with the goal of inspiring attendees and equipping them with the tools necessary for building, operating, and sustaining modern youth choir programs. Despite the overwhelming benefits of youth choirs, few resources exist to create, sustain, and support choirs and choir directors. This camp hopes to inspire the next wave of choir directors and usher in a new era for youth choirs within the Baltimore-Washington Conference.

## Project Transformation - \$5,000 Rachel Luna



Project Transformation D.C.'s mission is to engage young adults in purposeful leadership and ministry while providing support to children in holistic development and connecting churches with communities. Their unique model of partnering with local churches and hiring young adults to serve the children in the communities while also learning essential leadership skills is a perfect match for the goals of the Young People's Ministry Board. They are pleased to support Project Transformation DC with \$5,000 as they continue to connect churches and communities in DC and engage young adults during a crucial stage of their lives.

## Baltimore-Suburban District Youth Ministry - \$2,250 Susan Harry



The District Youth Coordinators of the Baltimore-Suburban District (Susan Harry and Bill Jones) continue to seek ways to connect youth workers and youth themselves across the district for the sharing of resources and opportunities for fellowship across churches.

This grant will allow them to organize a district-wide youth event so that youth and youth workers can connect in a time of fellowship as well as provide physical resources for youth workers across the district.

# BWC leaders bear witness at the border

BY ERIK ALSGAARD  
UMConnection Staff

**A**BOUT TWO WEEKS before Christmas, Christie Latona, Director of Connectional Ministries for the Baltimore-Washington Conference, Emma Escobar, Coordinator of Hispanic/Latino Ministries for the BWC, and Julie Wilson, Chair of the BWC's Immigration Task Force, were south of San Diego, Calif., at the border with Mexico. They were there as part of a group of more than 300 faith leaders who marched to the wall on International Human Rights Day, Dec. 10, in a "moral call for migrant justice."

"The Bible presents migration as an on-going, human phenomena, not as a crisis to be managed or a policy problem to be solved," wrote Latona during the four-day trip. She shared her thoughts and lessons learned on the BWC website ([www.bwcumc.org/united-to-love-at-the-border](http://www.bwcumc.org/united-to-love-at-the-border)).

The trip was transformative. It also took her out of her comfort zone.

"I have a confession," she wrote. "This kind of thing makes me very uncomfortable. I have never considered myself a protestor or social activist. While I have marched and helped plan and execute a rally in recent years, I have never participated in an action where civil disobedience was a part of the plan. I ended up as a part of our BWC delegation because Bishop Easterling's and Stacey Cole Wilson's, Executive Director of Justice and Service, schedules didn't allow them to go."

Latona said that she wasn't prepared to participate in the act of civil disobedience, but that Escobar and Wilson were. "I was seeking to discern what God was calling me to do."

At 9 a.m. the day of the march, Latona suddenly found herself the keeper of several items for safekeeping. Watches, phones, jewelry, a Bible, and "a backpack that contained a battery with

enough juice to recharge a car battery." Latona carried that on the bus ride to the park, and the subsequent march to the ocean and the border.

"Soon after the picture of the United Methodist group was taken, buses were loaded based upon our role," Latona wrote. "Risk-takers first, Peace Keepers second, and then the rest of us. The Rev. Carlos Rodriguez (Peninsula Delaware Annual Conference), the Rev. Duane Anders (Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference), Lori Valentine de Segovia (Virginia Annual Conference) and I redistributed our loads to accommodate the backpacks and bags of the risk-takers and boarded a bus.

Rodriguez was the designated UMC spokesperson who wasn't in the risk-taking group, Latona said. On the bus, he circulated the group photo and a message crafted in conjunction with the organizers of the action as an example of what can be shared.

At a press conference before the march, UMC participants stated

their reasons for being at the wall.

"(The) UMC presence in San Diego, CA, at the 'Love Knows No Borders' faith manifestation demands the US government to:

- Respect human rights with dignifying treatment to asylum seeking sisters and brothers coming from Central America. They have the right to present their asylum story.
- End militarization in border communities. No more guards, soldiers and border patrol officer.
- End detention, separation and deportation of immigrants.

#Loveknowsnoborders"

Before the march, Latona wrote that they were powerfully reminded of why they were there.

"While people were there for a variety of personal reasons — including the recent tear-gassing of children, wanting to make love visible, and to help shed light on the current unjust immigration policies and more — we were there

for a common purpose," she wrote.

Dozens of protesters, including two United Methodist pastors, were arrested and charged with civil disobedience when they stepped across the barrier set up by the U.S. Border Patrol. Neither were from the BWC.

At the end of a long, emotionally exhausting day, Latona spoke with United Methodist News Service.

"The whole idea of humanization and how we miss that when we call people categories of things — migrants, immigrants — we lose the thread of the individual human story," she said. "There is a lot of misunderstanding about what is a human right versus the political spin on the law. It is way more complex than many people understand."

In addition to the blog posts, you are invited to go deeper by exploring a piece of the immigration/migration topic with a nine-part daily devotional that encourages you to pray, love and do. Learn more at [bwcumc.org/united-to-love-at-the-border](http://bwcumc.org/united-to-love-at-the-border).



United Methodists, including the BWC's Emma Escobar, far right, and Julie Wilson, third from right, join other faith leaders as they attempt to offer a ceremonial blessing at the fence between the U.S. and Mexico in San Diego Dec. 10.

## Guidelines announced for electing delegates

BY MELISSA LAUBER  
UMConnection Staff

**T**HIS WINTER, CLERGY and lay people are invited to a season of discernment to assess if they wish to serve as delegates to the 2020 General Conference of The United Methodist Church and the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference.

The General Conference, the denomination's top legislative body, will meet May 5-15, 2020, in Minneapolis, Minn. The Jurisdictional Conference, a regional gathering, will meet July 13-17, 2020, in Baltimore. (These events are distinct from the special, called Session of General Conference, Feb. 23-26, 2019, in St. Louis.)

When it gathers at the Marriott Waterfront Hotel in Baltimore for this year's Annual Session, May 29 to June 1, the

Baltimore-Washington Conference will elect six clergy and six lay people to General Conference, six clergy and six lay people to the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference, and four clergy and lay alternates — 32 delegates in all.

The number of delegates each annual conference is allotted is based on membership statistics. There are 12,557,214 professing members and 65,055 clergy in the denomination, who will be represented by 862 delegates at the 2020 General Conference. In the Baltimore-Washington Conference, the 12 delegates represent 1,049 clergy and 164,799 professing members.

According to the Conference rules, all ordained clergy are eligible for election. Any clergy person who wishes to be a candidate will submit a petition of support, on a form provided by the Conference Secretary, bearing the signatures of 15 clergy who are

full members of the Conference. (Clergy may also nominate their colleagues as candidates.) In addition to the petitions, clergy must submit a written statement of qualifications, relevant experience and other information. These statements should not exceed 150 words. Both are due by April 1.

Lay members who wish to become a nominee should submit a written statement of qualifications, relevant experience and other information to the Conference secretary by April 1. To be eligible, all laity, who are members of the Annual Conference, need to have been professing members of The United Methodist Church for at least two years next preceding the election, and have been active participants in The United Methodist Church for at least four years.

Before submitting their names, people are asked to consider the substantial time commitment

delegates will be required to serve.

"This is not a commitment to be taken lightly," stressed Delores Martin, the chair of the current delegation. In addition to mandatory monthly meetings, members are expected to do a significant amount of reading and other preparation for the two-week General Conference session., which some have compared to a marathon.

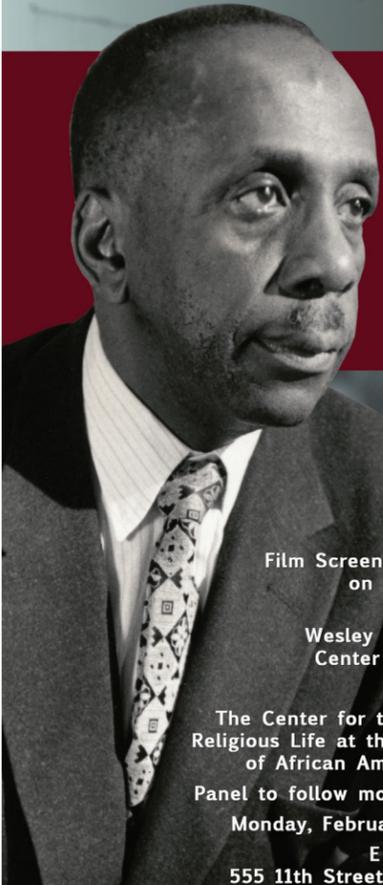
Before the nomination process even begins, people must reflect on whether they will be able to add this significant commitment to their schedules and lives, former delegates have said. "The work is too important to not take seriously."

Delegates are also cautioned that campaigning of any kind is not allowed prior to or at the Annual Conference Session.

To submit your nomination, send an email to Cynthia Taylor, BWC Secretary, at [bwcsecretary@bwcumc.org](mailto:bwcsecretary@bwcumc.org).



From the director of  
*BONHOEFFER, The Power of Forgiveness, and  
An American Conscience: The Reinhold Niebuhr Story*



# BACKS AGAINST THE WALL

The Howard Thurman Story

A film by  
Martin Doblmeier

Film Screening and Panel Discussion  
on Howard Thurman

Sponsored by  
Wesley Theological Seminary  
Center for Public Theology  
and  
The Center for the Study of African American  
Religious Life at the Smithsonian National Museum  
of African American History and Culture

Panel to follow moderated by NPR's Michel Martin  
Monday, February 25, 2019, 6:30 - 9:00 PM  
E Street Cinema  
555 11th Street NW Washington, D.C. 20004

Free of charge, but registration is required -  
seating is limited.  
Please RSVP to reserve your seat at [www.wesleyseminary.edu/thurman-rsvp/](http://www.wesleyseminary.edu/thurman-rsvp/)

    
[www.journeyfilms.com](http://www.journeyfilms.com)

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Rev Dr. Wanda Bynum Duckett  
(Doctor of Ministry Class of 2014)  
Superintendent, Baltimore-Metropolitan District  
Baltimore-Washington Conference



### There is still time to start your Wesley Doctor of Ministry degree in 2019!

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- **Spirituality and Story**
- **The Winds of the Spirit and Ministries for a Changing World (at Wesley House, Cambridge, UK)**
- **Church Leadership Excellence**

## MAKING A DIFFERENCE

### Mt. Winans brings blankets to homeless in Baltimore



Mark Johnson, the lay leader at Mt. Winans UMC in Baltimore, has a heart for others. Recently, he brought together three other churches in the area to unite in love and collect 160 blankets, hats, socks, and sandwiches. After the holidays, he went out with other people of faith to the streets where the homeless live to share all that was gathered, said Pastor Nathaniel Green.

### Ministry to immigrants expanding

BALTIMORE - Salem-Baltimore Hispanic UMC recently received a grant for \$5,000 from the General Board of Discipleship to develop a ministry for undocumented immigrants afraid to participate in faith communities for fear of deportation. The church is located in an area with many Hispanic immigrants. Its outreach will be into that community, said Emma Escobar, the BWC coordinator of Hispanic/Latino ministries.

The project, "Resurrection Baltimore," includes in-home worship, prayer and pastoral care. It also includes leadership training and education for the children and other young people.

"We want to see church members reach out to a hurting world and embrace those who need Jesus (as they) create new avenues of discipleship," Discipleship Ministries officials said.

### Planning justice and mercy for incarcerated

FULTON - An ecumenical group of 55 people, all criminal justice advocates, gathered at the BWC Mission Center Dec. 8, to hone their plans and work for "brothers and sisters currently navigating the justice system," wrote William Carpenter in a report of the event.

The program was sponsored by the BWC's Criminal Justice and Mercy Ministries.

In breakout sessions participants covered topics from the School to Prison Pipeline, to the special needs of female inmates and reintegrating into the community after serving time.

Reintegration and mentoring programs are important for giving formerly incarcerated persons a real chance to become positive members of the community, to live with dignity, Carpenter said.

At the end of the day, 11 participants agreed to form a Steering Committee to further the

work and mission, including Pat Marks, a deaconess working in this conference.

They shared ideas for proposed activities and many left with renewed energy and purpose in their ministries.

### Special needs folks enjoy a costume dance

LUTHERVILLE - St. John's/Idlewylde UMC Cooperative Parish hosted a Costume Dance Party for people with special needs. Idlewylde began the outreach ministry years ago, which has grown significantly under the leadership of Sandy Berl. The ministry now includes Palm Sunday and Christmas services, sponsors a Special Needs Boy Scout Troop and has a relationship with a Baltimore school for grades pre-K through 8.

This year's Costume Dance was an added endeavor and, "it was a blast!" said Pastor Carol Pazdersky. It was held at St. John's because "the Idlewylde Hall is not large enough for dancing," she said.

### Acts of kindness boost the community

SEVERNA PARK - On the first Sunday of Advent, Severna Park UMC gave out \$100 bills to 200 members of the congregation. They've added another 20 since, bringing the total to \$22,000, provided by the generosity of several members of the church.

This wasn't a free Christmas present. Each recipient was asked to share the love of Christ with someone who needs it and to "use your heart and imagination" in sharing. They were also asked to

tell their stories to the Rev. Ron Foster, senior pastor.

This was the second year for the project and last year the news spread from the Capital Gazette to the Washington Post and the Associated Press where it appeared all over the country.

Who received the \$100 gifts? Missions in Costa Rica, Uganda, Haiti, Nicaragua and others; a family shopping for Christmas in a Dollar Store; local charities such as Manna House and CASA; animal welfare agencies; families facing hard luck such as a house burning down; students in need at elementary schools.

"It is not only a blessing to the recipient of the \$100 or those who use it for a worthwhile purpose but also the member that has the privilege of giving," expressed many of the givers.

### Church musician retires after 29 years

BRUNSWICK - The congregation of New Hope UMC is saying goodbye to their longtime — 29 years — church organist Betty Richardson, now in her eighties. She is retiring. A member of the United Methodist Church her entire life, she began her music career at age seven.

At the Woodberry Methodist Church in Baltimore, she accompanied the Junior Choir. She later was an organist at Glen Mar, Pasadena, and Sandy Hook UMCs.

Now after 29 years at New Hope, she will sing "Rain Down" with the choir as her farewell song. However, she plans to continue to share her love of music in retirement, especially with the elderly who reside at Taney Village.

# A word from the bishop

## The Work of Christmas

*When the song of the angels is stilled,  
when the star in the sky is gone,  
when the kings and princes are home,  
when the shepherds are back with  
their flocks,  
the work of Christmas begins:  
to find the lost,  
to heal the broken,  
to feed the hungry,  
to release the prisoner,  
to rebuild the nations,  
to bring peace among the people,  
to make music in the heart.*

**M**ANY OF US are familiar with this poem written by Howard Thurman in *The Mood of Christmas and Other Celebrations*. It is a beautifully written piece that beckons us to understand Christmas as more than a day or even a season. We know that the world has already moved on from the holiday as Christmas carols have ceased and the accouterments in store windows have miraculously morphed into pink and red hearts.

But I do not believe this abrupt shift only occurs in the secular community. Even within the church, the transition away from Christmas and all that it entails gives way to either returning to our regularly scheduled worship services or preparing for Lent. The spirit of Christmas that moves

many to visit nursing homes to sing carols or share a meal, the concern for feeding the hungry that takes us to food banks or community centers in November and December suddenly ceases. And yet, the need of the lonely and hungry continues. Even more importantly, our missional call to be the hands and feet of Christ does not dissipate after Christmas.

Thurman's words remind us that the birth of Christ, the coming of "Emmanuel" – God with us – is the literal embodiment of God's call to all disciples. Yes, the life of Christ is an example of how to resist temptation, remain faithful and obedient to God and sacrifice all else in pursuit of God's call. It is also a living witness and testimony to the daily pouring out of love, healing, presence, advocacy and sacred action. We intentionally prepare for the birth of Christ during Advent, celebrate the incarnation during Christmas and Christmastide, **and** we live the truth of Emmanuel every day.

I have appropriated the phrase, "Transformed Lives Transform Lives" as a way of expressing my belief that as we are transformed by the gift of grace, we cannot help but live that transformation. As we have experienced God's forgiveness, we will forgive others. As we have experienced God's unconditional

love, we will unconditionally love others. As we have experienced the presence of God in our darkest hours, we will offer the ministry of presence to others.

The kind of transformation I am referring to does not occur instantaneously. The moment John Wesley described as one's "heart being strangely warmed" may occur in an ecstatic moment, but the real transformation is deepened through the disciplines of meditation, prayer, study, fasting and service. I witnessed this kind of transformation in the lives of those who engaged in the 34-week Disciple Bible Studies. I have not met one individual whose life was not radically changed after participating in that long-term study.

Over the last few days I have seen a cartoon by JM Nieto that I believe illustrates Thurman's message quite profoundly. Two characters are conversing and the first asks, "Why so optimistic about 2019? What do you think it will bring?" The other responds quite boldly, "I think it will bring flowers." The first then asks, "Yes? How come?" To which his friend replies, "Because I am planting flowers."

Like the second character in the cartoon, I am optimistic about 2019. Not because I am naive or in denial

about the fear and angst surrounding the Special Session of General Conference, or the challenges any particular vote may produce. Rather, I am excited because I also hear

persons talking about our mission, our core mission, the mission of Jesus Christ. I hear conversations acknowledging that the need for evangelizing will be as great on March 1, 2019, as it was in the days of John the Baptist. I see persons winnowing away the non-essentials and reclaiming the essentials of our faith. This gives me great hope.

May we boldly and faithfully proclaim that this will be the year of deep discipleship and spiritual growth.

How can we make this prediction? Because we will be doing the work of Christmas every day.

We are planting flowers.

*Bishop LaTrelle Easterling*



**Bishop LaTrelle Easterling**

## MLK: What if King wrote a letter to today's America?

From page 1

in the Letter from Birmingham Jail was that churches had been found wanting in the sphere of prophetic witness, and had too often remained complicit in their silence and inaction. He stated that "The church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state. It must be the guide and the critic of the state." And he further stated that, "There comes a time when silence becomes betrayal."

In the "I Have a Dream" speech, King described to the world his dream of the Beloved Community, when girls and boys of all races could play together and go to school together, and where people would be judged by the content of their character and not the color of their skin.

And so today, we might then wonder what Martin Luther King, Jr. would have to say if he were to write a letter to America. Here might be King's letter to America in 2019:

*Dear America:*

*I greet you in the Agapic Love of Christ our Savior. I pray that all of you who now dwell in what is deemed to be the land of the free and the home of the brave find yourselves reasonably well.*

*In looking back over the more than 50 years since my last address at Mason Temple Church of God in Christ, in Memphis, Tennessee, on the night of April 3, 1968, and my assassination on a balcony at the Lorraine Motel at 6:01 p.m.*

*the following evening, much has occurred in America.*

*Much of the progress that was eventuated up to my death, as seen in the passing of national Civil Rights and Voting Rights legislation, seemed to come to full fruition with the election of Barack H. Obama in 2008 as the 44th President of the United States, the first African American to hold the nation's highest office.*

*And yet, subsequent years have seen the heightened emergence (or re-emergence) of evils such as racism, classism, sexism and misogyny, homophobia, war and terror that have served to divide much of society, and even large segments of the churches.*

*I remind you of what I deemed to be the "triplets of evil" – racism, classism/poverty, and war – and that these continue in many ways to encumber America's progress as a nation.*

*In light of the challenges that confront you, I remind you to remain cognizant that, as I also shared during my life, there is a certain collective force among those of you who are committed to living the sentiments of the prophet Micah to "love kindness, do justice and walk humbly with God." (Micah 6:8)*

*As I stated, "For when people get caught up with that which is right, and they are willing to sacrifice for it, there is no stopping point short of victory."*

*America, in light of all that now fractures you, like immigration at your borders and violence on many of your city's streets, I want*

*to also remind you of how each of you has been created. The nature of humanity is that you have all been created by the same God, and God loves all of that which has been divinely created.*

*Therefore, I remind you of the inherent worth and "somebodyness" in each of you. As I shared years ago, "all life is interrelated." All of life is part of a single process; all living things are interrelated; and all persons are sisters and brothers. Because all of you are interrelated, one cannot harm another without harming oneself.*

*There is a great deal more I can share, but I will conclude my letter by encouraging you to never give up hoping.*

*Regarding hope, I remind you of my past sentiments that "hope is the refusal to give up despite overwhelming odds," and that hope is "animated and undergirded by faith and love." Remember, if you have hope, you have faith in something.*

*Never forget my words on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in August 1963, in the dream that I shared with the nation on that day that there would someday be "hewn out of the mountain of despair, a stone of hope."*

*My dream for you, America, remains the same as it was almost 56 years ago. As always, I pray that your best days and most blessed days are not behind you, but in your future.*

*With Agapic Love,  
Your Brother, Martin*

*(The Rev. Tony Hunt serves as pastor at Epworth Chapel UMC in Baltimore.)*

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