



DARE TO BELIEVE

231st Session of the Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church – 2015

UMConnection DAILY

The Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church • Becoming fully alive in Christ and making a difference in a diverse and ever-changing world • Friday, May 29, 2015

Conference Members Invited to 'Dare to Believe'

By ERIK ALSGAARD

THE 231ST SESSION of the Baltimore-Washington Conference, meeting less than a mile from where the Methodist movement in the United States began, started with Bishop Marcus Matthews invoking moments of silent and spoken prayer for a hurting Baltimore City.

Following days of unrest in late April and early May, United Methodists from throughout the Conference have responded in numerous ways, both physical and spiritual, throughout the Sandtown-Winchester neighborhoods. "Whatever you do, you're lifting your prayers to God," said the bishop as he opened the session.

In his sermon at Thursday morning's opening worship, Matthews drove home the point that even in times of turbulent and troubled waters, Jesus says, "Don't be afraid."

Preaching from Matthew 14 and the story of Peter walking on the water, Matthews said that very often, "our



Tony Richards

Bishop Marcus Matthews preaches at the opening worship of the 231st Session of the Baltimore-Washington Conference. 'It now appears to be the dawning of a new day' in the city of Baltimore, the bishop said.

capacity to recognize Jesus...will be tested by the turbulent waters of our lives." True faith, he said, can never be real until it is tested.

Jesus understands our fears, Matthews said, and wants us to know that we are not alone in them. "Take heart,' the

Savior said, 'It is I.'"

It is Jesus' presence, the bishop proclaimed, that now gives us "the audacity to believe where we have not yet seen."

This daring to believe, he said, "must be See *Opening Worship*, page 2

BWC Approves \$17.2 Million Budget

By ERIK ALSGAARD


AS MEMBERS OF the Baltimore-Washington Conference celebrated a strong financial year in 2014, they also took a hard look at the 2016 budget.

In 2014, the 641 churches in the conference contributed 90.8 percent of their apportionments, which, according to the Rev. Ann LaPrade, chair of the Conference Council on Finance and Administration, was the highest in the

BWC in the last 10 years. LaPrade serves as pastor at Potomac UMC.

Nearly 82 percent of local churches contributed 100 percent apportionment payments in 2014, she said, on top of meeting the \$2.1 million goal for Imagine No Malaria.

The 2016 budget, adopted overwhelmingly for the third year in a row, is expected to raise \$14.3 million in apportionment income. That money See *Budget & Money*, page 2



We want to hear from you!
 Tweet us your thoughts & pictures of Annual Conference using #bwcumc15

Annual Conference Live Streaming is available at <http://bwcumc.org>.

Mayor Thanks United Methodists for Support

By CRYSTAL CAVINESS

MAYOR STEPHANIE RAWLINGS-BLAKE thanked The United Methodist Church today for its leadership in recent weeks following riots throughout the city spurred by the death of Freddie Gray.

"I cannot say enough about the faith leaders we have across the board in our community of every faith tradition but I also want to specifically thank the members of The United Methodist Church," said Rawlings-Blake.

The Baltimore mayor, who was raised as a United Methodist, was on hand for the opening day of the Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference.

"It is in the tradition of our Methodist social action that I saw so many of you show up for us during the unrest to address the challenges that our residents face," she said. "So whether it's through direct social action, mentoring or just a kind word, you continue to be leaders to help us grow Baltimore."

The task, however, is not done.

"I'm letting you know now," said Rawlings-Blake, "that I'll be calling on you again because there are bridges that need to be built that can't be done without the faith community."

The mayor presented a proclamation to Bishop Marcus Matthews recognizing May 28-30 as the 231st session of the Baltimore-Washington Conference in Baltimore.



Bishop Matthews prays for Baltimore Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake and the city of Baltimore.

Tony Richards

Opening Worship: A new day dawning

From page 1

a dare based on our full, unconditional belief in Jesus' power to deliver and save."

Making reference to the unrest in Baltimore, the bishop said that there were many people who wanted to give in to the belief that, because of its history of "systemic abuse of those with power over those who have been perceived to be without power, that justice would once again be denied to the least and the last."

However, the bishop said, "I'm here in the city of Baltimore today to say that, because of the power of Jesus Christ, and in large part due to the prayers and witness of the community of faith, it now appears to be the dawning of a new day."

The bishop, who applauded the ministry of Baltimore Metropolitan District Superintendent, the Rev. Cynthia Moore-Koikoi, the pastors of the Sandtown-Winchester neighborhood, and all United Methodists who have responded, said that there is much work still to be done. But, he said, "Do we dare to believe that, with God's help, all things are possible, including the prospect and possibility of a new day where justice does, in fact, prevail?"

The bishop continued his call to the 640-plus congregations of the Conference to engage in three aspects of ministry in the coming year: reflecting and praying daily, especially by "putting yourselves in someone else's shoes;" by serving your neighbor, especially by adopting a school in the church's ZIP Code; and by witnessing and committing to bring "just one" person to Christ.

Budget & Money: Faithful Giving Noted

From page 1

funds ministry throughout the conference and around the world. In addition, non-apportioned income from items such as event registrations and grants, is budgeted to bring in \$2.8 million.

The collection rate for 2016 remains the same as 2015, at 92 percent.

Expenses for 2016 are budgeted to be even with income. LaPrade told members that reduced staff wages and benefits have been achieved, saving \$277,000. New Ministry and New Church Start grants have been reduced by \$250,000, and a separate budget line has been created for the ROCK youth event, which is self-funded.

CFA followed-up on a request from the 2014 Session to recommend, or not, a potential conferencewide campaign to support the Africa University Endowment Campaign. After a working group investigated the possibility, CFA decided not to recommend this path.

Instead, CFA proposed that any and all love offerings given to Bishop Marcus Matthews in honor of his retirement in 2016 be donated to Africa University. Bishop Matthews has personally requested that this be done.

The Commission on Equitable Compensation's recommendation that the minimum salary for full-time clergy was raised 1.75 percent, to \$41,473. Housing allowances for clergy remained unchanged at \$19,866.

Conference Assembles in Circles of Grace

By ERIK ALSGAARD

MEETING IN CIRCLES of Grace Thursday night, members of the Baltimore-Washington Conference considered four petitions to send to General Conference. The Circles of Grace process, introduced last year at the Annual Conference Session, is a way of practicing “holy conferencing” that emphasizes respect and discernment. Conference members sat in groups of 10 to 12, each with a trained facilitator. The conversations focused on three questions: “What do you perceive as the impact of this resolution on the BWC in particular and the UMC in general?” “Where do you see God in this resolution?” And, “How do we continue to show God’s love as we discuss this resolution?”

“We’re going to continue to model how we can be the people of faith, the people who dare to trust each other and people who have come together,” said Bishop Matthews in remarks before the process began, “...to talk together and to

prayerfully move God’s church forward.”

“I pray that as we participate in these circles, they will be special moments,” the bishop said. “Not only will we remember, but others who look upon us will look upon us and say, ‘Yes, they did the right thing.’”

Each person was given an opportunity to speak, passing along a “talking stick” – this year, a toy boat – and voting was done by electronic keypad at the end of the session.

One of the petitions for the Circles of Grace dealt with removing language from the United Methodist Book of Discipline that states that homosexuality is “incompatible with Christian teaching.” The petition sought to have the BWC endorse this change in the Discipline and send it on to the 2016 General Conference.

The other three petitions sought to:

- Change the Social Principles, ¶164.V.C, to add language opposing the teaching of creationism in public schools;
- Clarify the relationship between science and faith, in ¶160.F; and
- Revise the Book of Resolutions #1027 on God’s Creation and the Church.

Results of the voting were expected to be announced Friday morning.



Conference members participate in the Circles of Grace Thursday night.

Tony Richards



Sheila George

United Methodists pray and sing at the intersection of Pennsylvania and North avenues in Baltimore during a prayer walk in the Sandtown-Winchester community, one of several events planned during the Annual Conference to promote healing and unity.

Lay Members Gather

By LINDA WORTHINGTON

“YOU BLESS US in so many ways,” Bishop Matthews said in greeting the Laity Session that met for two hours May 27. The session was led by conference lay leader, Delores Martin.

Moses Kumar, a lay person and General Secretary of the Council on Finance and Administration, addressed the gathering. “I challenge you to ‘dare to believe’ in your local church,” he said. He also thanked the BWC for paying 100 percent of its General Church apportionments every year since 1999.

Putting his message of money into a missional context, Kumar showed several slides of missions around the world that benefit from our giving.

Kumar introduced VANCO, a tool to help the local church with giving electronically and tracking statistics. It is available through GCFA.

The Rev. Erik Alsgaard, editor, narrated a brief presentation about the history of the BWC, produced by BWC Communications.

The laity session heard reports from the presiding officers of United Methodist Women, the United Methodist Men, the Conference Council of Youth Ministries, the Young Adult Council, Campus Ministries, and the Discipleship Council. Sandra King-Shaw introduced 10 men and women studying to be Certified Lay Ministers.

“Help your congregation dare to believe,” Kumar said.

231ST ANNUAL CONFERENCE • DARE TO BELIEVE

CONFERENCE AGENDA

FRIDAY, MAY 29

TIME	EVENT	SPEAKER/MODERATOR
8 a.m.	Centering and Bible Study	Rev. Laurie Haller
9 a.m.	Plenary Session	
10 a.m.	Memorial Service	Bishop Holston
12 p.m.	Lunch and Community Prayer	
5 p.m.	Dinner and Opportunities for Community Prayer	
7 p.m.	Plenary Session	

SATURDAY, MAY 30

TIME	EVENT	SPEAKER/MODERATOR
8 a.m.	Bible Study	Rev. Laurie Haller
9 a.m.	Plenary Session	
12 p.m.	Lunch	
2 p.m.	Ordination Service	Bishop Holston

Looking for the full **Nomination Report**? Please visit:
<http://bwcumc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Revised-CONFERENCE-LEADERSHIP-REPORT-05-1911.pdf>

Dare to Believe in Baltimore City Sunday

Motion approved Thursday afternoon: "I move that the Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference designate Sunday, June 7, 2015 as the 'Dare to Believe in Baltimore City Sunday' and invite each local church to take a special offering for the Dare to Believe: Stronger Churches, Stronger Relationships, Stronger Communities Campaign for the rebuilding and ministries of the 6 UM churches in the Sandtown-Winchester, and Harlem Park Communities."

Some of Thursday's tweets using #bwcumc15



- KEEP CALM AND HAKUNA MATATA** **Alison Burdett** @HakunaMatata_UM · 10h
"Many people have risked their lives to partake of this sacred meal. Even here today there is a risk. It might change you." #bwcumc15
- Kirkland Reynolds** @kirkrey · 10h
We don't have to wait until tomorrow to change the world today. We need to focus on Jesus and dare to believe #bwcumc15
- LE** @ArtsHumana · 11h
"It's a Perfecting Storm!" This dramatic #arts performance by our young ppl at #bwcumc15 is giving me life! #artsEd #ministry

Have your tools ready.
 God will find you work.



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

bwcumc.org/toolbox



Churches were requested to donate at least 4 new children books, for grades K – 5 , at this year's Annual Conference. The books are being donated to 12 schools within the Baltimore area that are in partnership with our United Methodist local churches. There were 1,708 books collected by Thursday evening.

Tony Richards