



# **UMC** *Connection*

Annual Conference 2023  
HIGHLIGHTS

The Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church • Transformed Lives, Transform lives • Saturday, June 3, 2023

## Conference declares, 'It's all about love'

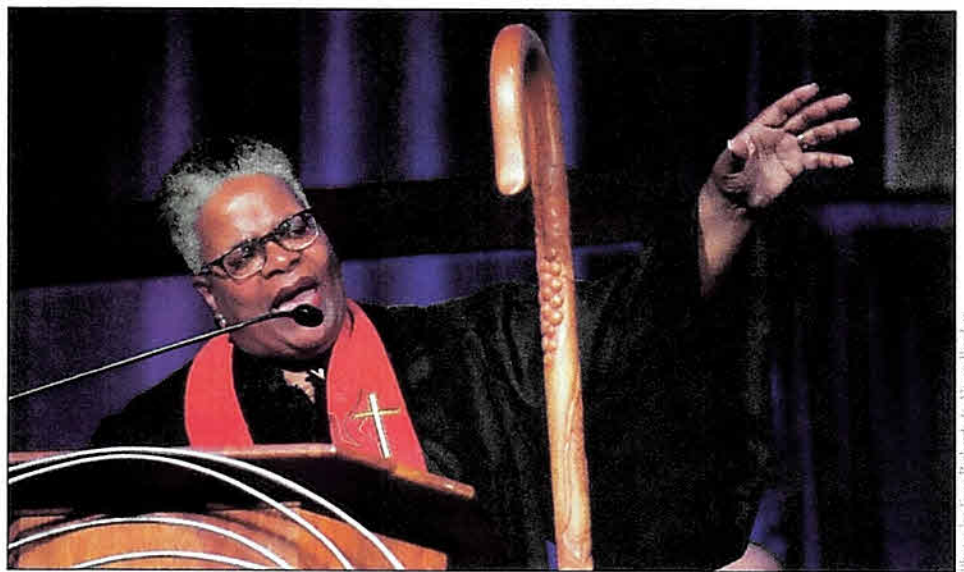
**I**t's all about love – love for oneself, for one another, for God, and the world. Love shaped the 239th session of the Baltimore-Washington Conference held May 31 - June 3 at the Hilton Hotel in Baltimore. Love was present in impromptu offerings that raised \$16,000 to assist victims of domestic violence; in the Love in Action mission project to benefit 12 Baltimore schools; in the Circles of Love conversations that challenged members to create Beloved Community; and even in the business of holy conferencing, which included the the disaffiliation of 23 churches from the denomination and unanimous adoption of a \$18.1 million budget.

"Love is as love does. ... Love is not an emotion; it is an action. It is better provided than professed." Bishop LaTrelle Easterling, the episcopal leader of the Baltimore-Washington and Peninsula-Delaware Conferences, told the 1,300 clergy and lay members at opening worship.

The bishop confessed that the church and its members often "get love wrong" and encouraged United Methodists to commit themselves to theologian Howard Thurman's proclamation that "love means dealing with persons in the concrete rather than the abstract."

These highlights went to press Friday, June 2. Saturday's events will focus on Young People and the Service of Ordination.

Additional coverage of the 239th Session of the Baltimore-Washington Conference will be posted throughout next week at  
**[bwcumc.org/AC2023](http://bwcumc.org/AC2023)**



A hallmark card won't cut it," she said. "We must do love, be love, and give love to one another. Love is as love does."

Bishop Peter D. Weaver, retired, shared how love, when coupled with the power of the Holy Spirit, can transform lives. Speaking in a Bible study on being Spirit-filled and Spirit-sent, he called on United Methodists to "be perpetually Pentecost people."

"The power of love doesn't come because we have meetings and manufacture it," Weaver said. "When we are open, the Spirit moves in and through us so that we become love, become truth, become reconciliation, become justice, become hope, become faith, become love."

And once we're Spirit-filled, we become Spirit-sent, Weaver said. "Our faith community is never complete when it's just 'me and Jesus.' That's not only bad grammar, it's bad theology. ... Once we're walking with Jesus, we are in the Spirit, and the Spirit says, 'go, go, go and share that love.'"



Photos by Tony Richards & Alwon Hundert



# Stewardship is an act of faith

**O**n June 1, members of the Baltimore-Washington Conference voted to approve the disaffiliation of 23 churches from The United Methodist Church. The congregations are leaving because of disagreements over the manner with which the church addresses the practice of homosexuality.



To disaffiliate the churches went through a process outlined by Para. 2553 of the *Book of Discipline* and the Conference Board of Trustees, which required a two-thirds vote of their members at a special Church Conference.

Congregations were asked to pay two years of mission shares, the congregation's pro-rata share of the conference's pension liability, and fifty percent of the value of their church building.

When the process is completed (no later than Dec. 31, 2023), the 23 churches will collectively pay:

- \$605,000 in mission shares, which will go into the Council on Finance and Administration's reserve funds to address needs that might arise with the BWC's 2024 budget;
- \$984,000 in pension-related fees, which will go to the denomination's Wespath benefit's reserves; and

- \$10,805,000 in property payments, which will be invested, and managed by the BWC's Trustees through the MidAtlantic United Methodist Foundation. These funds will be used for future ministries and faith expressions within the Conference.



In a benediction, Bishop Easterling offered a blessing for the departing churches: "May we go with the peace of the living Lord ringing in our ears. May we go in love, not acrimony; in faith not doubt; in hope, not resignation; may we go in joy, even in the midst of our despair, and may we go in peace to love and serve the Lord."

In other stewardship-related actions:

- The BWC's 2024 budget of \$18,107,147 was adopted, including a mission-share income budget of \$12,564,729. The benevolence factor for mission shares was reduced to 17.45 and the collection rate was set at 87 percent, 3 percent less than the 2023 assumption. Overall, the 2024 budget proposal is a decrease of \$116,000 or 0.6% from the prior year.

- The Rev. Cary James, chair of the Board of Pensions and Health Benefits, announced several changes coming to clergy health care, including an increase in premiums. More details about these changes will be provided at a webinar in September to prepare people for HealthFlex selections in early November.
- The Commission on Equitable Compensation increased the base salary for clergy by 4 percent, or \$1,920, which will make the base salary \$49,910; and raised the recommended housing allowance by 3 percent or \$642. This will increase the recommended housing allowance to \$22,036. The commission also reported that \$4,100 is an appropriate amount for clergy's minimum account reimbursement.



## With love and honor:

At the Ordination Service on Saturday afternoon, two Deacons and six Elders will be commissioned, and seven Elders will be ordained. Daphne Hurd will be commissioned as a Deaconess and three children will be baptized.

This year, the BWC honored 31 clergy retirees, who represent 838 years of service to the church.

At the Memorial Service, white doves represented the memory of 24 clergy, 10 clergy spouses, four lay members, including Sandra Ferguson, the former Director of Connectional Ministries, and other loved ones who died this past year.



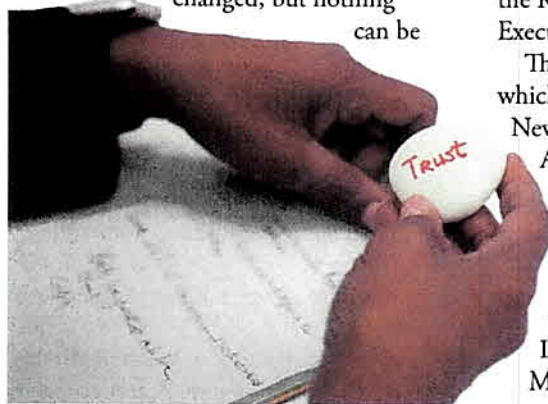


# Ministries celebrate love and vitality

**W**hat you love changes everything; so does how you love. The members of the Baltimore-Washington Conference gathered at 92 round tables in Circles of Love for a two-hour conversation on Jesus' Great Commandment on June 1. Together, they explored how love connects us to do justice, love kindness and journey humbly with God.

In these transformational, co-creating conversations, members explored several questions, including: "All persons are created in the image of God. Yet not all of us look, think, move, dream, love, live and/or experience God alike. With this in mind, how has God's love guided you to love others?"

The experience, led by table hosts, were based on James Baldwin's understanding that "not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be



changed until it is faced." They drew on recent research in social science that showed the most powerful way to build knowledge, awareness, and empathy, and ultimately make progress toward equitable, just and sustaining change is conversation," said the Rev. Stacey Cole Wilson, the BWC's Executive Minister of Beloved Community.

The BWC's Discipleship Ministries team, which addresses Leadership Development, New Faith Expressions, Advocacy and Action, Wellness and Missions, Archives & History, and Young People's Ministries, works to empower churches to grow in vitality. Vitality is measured by the pillars of Seeing All the People, Deepening Discipleship, Living and Loving Like Jesus, and Multiplying Impact.

In a presentation that featured Seasons of Love, the team explored how each church and every person has 525,600 minutes that can be measured in love. Several awards were presented to people and churches who excelled in ministry. The Harry Denman Award for evangelism went to Sadie Kollias of Community UMC in Crofton, Pastor Angelic Williams of St. Luke's UMC in Baltimore, Bart Cookus of the Gathering in Hanover, Pastor Cassandra Nuñez of Salem UMC in Baltimore and Bishop LaTrelle Easterling. The Youth Worker of the Year was Natiya Bennett. Asbury, Jackson Chapel and Mt. Carmel UMCs were awarded the Advocacy and Action award; and Oak Chapel UMC in Silver Spring was honored with the Wellness and Missions award.

## Resolutions address range of topics

Members considered 10 resolutions on myriad topics. They:

- Passed a protocol and policy that addresses paid bereavement leave for clergy;
- Supported steps to ensure the best use of available church properties for missional purposes;
- Voted to oppose apartheid in the Holy Land;
- Supported two weeks of paid maternity and paternity leave for foster/resource parents;
- Affirmed the Queer Delegates' Call to Center Justice and Empowerment for LGBTQIA+ People in the UMC;
- Opposed an aspirational resolution to request district superintendents to preside at each local church conference;
- Moved to table indefinitely a resolution that asks those seeking to leave the denomination not serve in positions of leadership in the conference, districts and local churches;
- Voted to support the creation of a U.S. regional conference;
- Supported removing discriminatory policies from the *Book of Discipline*; and
- Referred to the Board of Trustees the task of setting a policy to clarify the process should a disaffiliating church wish to return to the denomination.





# BWC goes out in mission with love

**O**n June 2, many of the 1,200 annual conference members worked shoulder-to-shoulder in ballrooms packing bags with more than \$15,000 in supplies and books for students in eight Baltimore schools. Other members jumped on school buses to travel to six sites where students live and learn to offer their services. “This,” said the Rev. Wanda Duckett, “was not a pause in the church’s business, but the core and the heart of who the church should be.”

School partnerships are an integral part of ministry among United Methodist churches in Baltimore, said Duckett, the Baltimore Metropolitan superintendent. For her, the service project exemplifies the “all” in All About Love, the conference’s theme.

“In this one way, on this one day, we are doing it all,” she said. “Partnering with schools and investing in children is also economic empowerment of families, it’s prison ministry, it’s increasing cultural awareness, it’s gang intervention and gun violence prevention. It directly and indirectly touches all the bases outlined in Bishop Easterling’s call to Missional Action Planning. It connects us with our communities and ignites a passion to form relationships that can impact generations to come.”

In keeping with their commitment to partner with those in the community, the BWC partnered with Heart of America (HOA), a nonprofit that transforms learning spaces, bridges the resource gap and strengthens communities to give every student room to learn, discover and thrive.

Working at Sandtown-Winchester Academy, the Rev. Tim Warner reflected on the purpose of the day. “Community is God’s invention,” he said. “And the more we wander into it, the more we find God there.”

