

**BY SHAUN LANE**  
UMCONNECTION STAFF

*“Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross. Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

*-- Philippians 2:4-11*

*The biblical theme of the 224<sup>th</sup> annual conference*

He has dedicated his life to people who are marginalized by society, who often fear for their safety, and have no one to turn to in a time of need. His phone rings at all hours, sometimes at seemingly inopportune times, but he always responds. Last March, during Holy Week, Rev. Giovanni Arroyo, pastor of Salem-Baltimore Hispanic Charge, received a call from a family in need of comfort and reassurance.

“It was Holy Thursday, and I had just finished two services,” Arroyo said. “I was preparing for Good Friday, getting myself centered and rested. And then my phone rang.”

Arroyo was called to visit a hospital, where a 23-year-old woman died suddenly of an aneurism. Her parents, Latino immigrants, were having trouble accepting her death. Arroyo got to the hospital at 8 p.m. He didn’t leave until 4 a.m.

In retrospect, Arroyo said, he was living out the theme of the 224<sup>th</sup> Baltimore Annual Conference: Poured Out: Serve like Christ. The theme was created by the Young Adult Ministry, based on Philippians 2:4-11.

“In Baltimore, I work with people who have no voice,” Arroyo said. “They need someone to be there for them. The parents of the woman who died told me that they don’t know how they would have made it without me being there for them that evening. That’s why I do what I do.”

In Bishop John Schol’s State of the Church address at the 2008 session of the Baltimore Conference, held May 22-24 at the Gaylord Hotel in National Harbor, he spoke of the need for United Methodists to be “extreme disciples as we grow mission, disciples, spiritual leaders and Acts 2 congregations.”

As Schol addressed the more than 1,500 clergy, laity and visitors in attendance, he said that extreme disciples must be willing to take risks -- like Arroyo does -- knowing that God is on their side.

“United Methodists throughout the Baltimore-Washington Conference are living out their discipleship in bold, audacious and extreme ways, serving like Christ as they grow mission, disciples, spiritual leaders and churches, Schol said. “Extreme disciples are believers who are willing to risk it all for a Kingdom adventure; disciples, who through the Holy Spirit, are shaping the church to be the body of Christ.

“These disciples take time to be quiet and listen with their hearts to hear the voice of God. They are also disciples who speak through actions of justice and mercy. They are Good News, offering God’s grace through Jesus Christ.”

Bishop Schol’s state of the church address, and people like Arroyo, set the tone for a positive and spirit-filled three days of holy conferencing. Important legislation was considered, the rich diversity of the conference was celebrated, traditional and contemporary worship took place, and 19 men and women were ordained to the office of Elder and Deacon within the church.

Bishop Schol’s State of the Church was preceded by an opening worship service that included a sermon from Bishop Minerva Carcaño, episcopal leader of the Desert Southwest Area. Lifting up the conference theme – Poured Out. Serve like Christ – Carcaño said that living with the mind of Christ means reaching out to the marginalized, like the undocumented immigrants who are pouring into the United States, especially in Arizona where they are crossing the desert and the Rio Grande river, many of them dying of thirst or drowning before touching U.S. soil.

“The immigrants are coming here to survive,” Carcaño said. “We are called to help and exclude no one. ... Can you begin to imagine what God can do for you if you allow him to work through you?”

Amidst the praise and worship celebrations, the conference members voted on various motions and lifted up several milestones:

### **Conference district realignment is approved**

In an initiative aimed at better allocating conference resources to help all churches become Acts 2 congregations, the members of the Baltimore-Washington Conference overwhelmingly passed a proposal to move from nine districts to eight. The plan will go into effect July 1.

The new district alignment will give the conference's four regions approximately an equal number of churches, and will allow districts to determine what will be the best fit for them in terms of needs, geography and shared ministry.

A substitute motion was made to move from nine districts to 10, but it was defeated.

In a show of unity, Baltimore City pastors strongly voiced their favor of the move.

The Rev. Emora Brannan, pastor of Grace UMC, said the proposal to move to eight districts and grouping the city churches together will remove the barrier of pastors getting to know each other better in the city.

### **Episcopal endorsement**

The Rev. Peggy Johnson of Christ UMC of the Deaf in Baltimore was overwhelmingly endorsed by the Baltimore-Washington Conference as its candidate for the bishop with 80 percent of the vote in a field of five nominees.

Episcopal elections will be held this July at the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference in Harrisburg, Pa.

Also considered, from nominations made from the floor of annual conference, were the Revs. David Simpson of Bethany UMC in Ellicott City, Laura Easto of Westminster UMC, Cynthia Belt of Centennial-Caroline Street UMC in Baltimore, and Mamie A. Williams of Fowler UMC in Annapolis.

Johnson received the nomination with “exceedingly great joy” and expressed her gratitude to the annual conference in both English and American Sign Language.

### **Conference nearly halfway to goal of Acts 2 congregations**

Three years ago, the conference announced a goal of creating 600 Acts 2 congregations by 2012. Bishop Schol announced that the conference is nearly half way to its goal, with 272 churches. This represents a 200-percent increase since 2005.

“This is a movement of the Holy Spirit. ... The Holy Spirit is demonstrating what God wants to do in our midst,” Schol said. “The mission of Acts 2 churches is to build disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. The point of this accounting is not to meet a numerical goal; the purpose is to have 600 of our churches by 2012 to be spirit led, authentic in Christian community and bearing fruit.”

The 272 Acts 2 churches represent all regions and districts and embody demographics that reflect the diversity of the conference.

### **Hope Fund receives a boost**

Members of annual conference raised \$74,379 in a special offering for the HOPE Fund during opening worship. The HOPE Fund is a conference initiative to raise a million dollars that will benefit ministries in Zimbabwe, the Global AIDS Fund and rebuilding churches along the Gulf Coast that were destroyed by Hurricane Katrina.

This offering, in which the average gift was \$57, takes the HOPE Fund above \$650,000. Conference officials hope to reach the \$1 million point this year.

### **Nominations report approved**

With the approval of the nomination’s report, more than 250 people were elected to serve on various conference boards, commissions, councils and committees. Collectively, they will provide more than 10,000 hours of volunteer service and ministry.

### **A Bermudaful welcome**

The congregations of Marsden First and Centenary UMCs in Bermuda were welcomed as official members of the Baltimore-Washington Conference. This May, the churches completed a six-year process to move from the United Church of Canada to The United Methodist Church.

### **Regional Dialogue Teams to continue**

Annual Conference members voted to continue to create and facilitate regional dialogue teams that will explore together issues related to the full inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people within the life of The United Methodist Church.

These teams, said Adam Briddell of St. Lukes’s UMC in Washington, who presented the resolution, will affirm the church’s “embrace of all hues of humanity,” and ensure that ongoing dialogue within the church is with, and not just about, LGBT people.

### **Churches urged to support pregnancy centers**

Conference members also voted to encourage local churches to pray for, give financial support, and lend assistance to the operation of pregnancy centers in their areas that help pregnant women in the bearing and caring for their children.

This resolution, presented by the Rev. Henry Butler of Damascus UMC in Bethesda, was amended to include concerns raised by the Baltimore-Washington Conference chapter of the Methodist Federation for Social Action to acknowledge that reproductive choices are personal and often very complex and that the conference does not seek to exclude from the church any woman because of her reproductive choices.

### **2009 budget approved**

Conference members adopted a 2009 budget of \$18,829,745, an increase of 2.97 percent over 2008. Members also voted to decrease the benevolence factor a half of a percent from 22.5 to 22 percent. The benevolence factor is the rate churches are assessed for their apportionments.

The Rev. Charles Harrell also reported that during the past year a task force did a comprehensive study of the apportionment formula and determined that the local churches' and conference's best interests will be served if the expense-based formula for computing apportionments continues.

### **COSROW to evaluate women in ministry**

A motion passed without discussion for COSROW to determine what progress has been made since the 2003 study that researched women in ministry in the Baltimore-Washington Conference, as well as determining what needs to be done going forward.

### **Conference honors soldiers and celebrates peace**

The Rev. Clark Carr of Grace UMC in Hagerstown presented Bishop Schol with a number of gifts from the front lines of the Iraq War, including an American flag. Carr, a chaplain with the Maryland National Guard, recently returned from a tour of duty in Iraq.

Bishop Schol accepted the flag on behalf of all the soldiers who have lost their lives in the war. The Rev. Evan Young, a conference Guide and reservist chaplain, then prayed "for a peace that honors justice, a peace that fills our world with a sense of hope."

### **Memorial Service**

The Rev. Al Clipp, conference secretary, read the names of the 11 clergy, eight clergy widows and two spouses of retired clergy, and five lay members of conference who died since the last annual conference, as their names and photos were projected on the screens.

The Rev. Johnnie Washington of Franklin UMC in Churchton, who was in the hospital, died during the annual conference session. He too was honored during the service.

As their names were called, a bell from the old Cokesbury College, founded by some of the first United Methodists in this country, was tolled in remembrance. Retiring District Superintendent Eugene Matthews, dean of the Cabinet, delivered a message of comfort.

### **Ordination**

Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton, of the Western Pennsylvania Annual Conference, preached at the ordination service May 24, at which 18 women and men were ordained as Elders and one woman was ordained as a Deacon. In addition, 15 probationary members were commissioned.

As the 224<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference came to a close, the Rev. Kendrick Weaver, of Glenn Dale UMC, paused to consider the theme of the 2008 annual conference, at which he was ordained.

“When I think of ‘Poured out: Serve like Christ,’ it’s like a complete surrender and just letting God,” said Weaver. “When I decided to become a pastor at 16, it was like a peaceful sense of assurance. When you serve Christ and pour yourself out, you have that same sense of assurance.”

### **Future meetings**

An adjourned session of annual conference will be held later this year to discuss apportionment and stewardship issues. The next session of annual conference will be held June 4-6, 2009, at the Marriott Waterfront Hotel in Baltimore.

