



TIDINGS

MARCH 2024

Good News from Brown Memorial Park Avenue

Upcoming Events

Lenten Activities & Worship Services

Adult Education Series “Finding Hope in Uncertain Times”

Wednesdays, March 6, 13, 20
Simple Dinner 5:30 pm
Program 6-7:30 pm
Location: Brown Memorial

Join members of Brown Memorial Presbyterian, Memorial Episcopal, and Corpus Christi Roman Catholic churches for dinner, followed by education and discussion on questions of finding hope in uncertain times.
See page 19 for full event details.

For links to join hybrid events virtually, please visit the church calendar at
www.browndowntown.org

For almost 40 years Brown Memorial clergy and lay leaders have built relationships and helped change Baltimore through our membership in BUILD.
Pages 11-13



Hardly a week goes by here that I don't see faith and action at work.

ANDREW'S MESSAGE

Changing the World Through Faith AND Works

I recently heard the story of the late community organizer and Catholic sister Christine Stevens, who declared before a packed room at the American Academy of Religion, “You know, if seminaries did their jobs, we wouldn't have to be training community organizers.” Stevens' point seemed to be that the life of faith is foundationally a life about changing the world, a life that requires basic knowledge of power — the ability to act in ways that bring about change.

The fact that theological education has separated knowledge from action was an oxymoron that needed to change. I would like to expand her statement to include not just seminaries but the Church itself. The idea of spiritual awareness, knowledge, and insight, detached from action, is nonsensical at its roots. This is not an attempt to undermine some core theological insights of the Protestant Reformation, including the understanding that we are justified by faith, not by works, but rather an embrace of the purpose of the faith that God gives to us in the first place: to transform us and our world into the creatures and communities God intends us to become.

Continued pg. 2 →



ANDREW'S MESSAGE CONT.

Faith in action at Brown

There is the obvious example of the BUILD organization's decades-long, broad-based work of bringing the conscience of the faith community and the power of the people into the public square to effect change around the core values spoken by our faith [see page 11]. There's also the communal way we've rallied around our Afghan neighbors, new to this country, with all kinds of spiritual, material, and emotional support they need to build a new life in a new home.

There are the random ways that I see that faith at work each week — supporting a young man recently out of homelessness with a few extra dollars to stock his fridge before that exciting day when his first paycheck would come through, or watching a lunch table of Brown Memorialites helping to contain the manic energy of a visitor in the midst of a mental health event simply by listening to her sometimes troubling thoughts for the better part of an hour. Or rallying around a Honduran woman in crisis and her kids who showed up at church for help on a Thursday and was bathed in the love of a full pantry and some cash support three days later. (Miracles in our tradition always seem to happen on the 3rd day!)

And then there are the very personal ways that I've seen faith in action such as the stories that I heard at Kaley Kathryn Vides' memorial service — a church family making the decision to welcome a child with special needs into their family with little consideration of the emotional costs they would incur — with church members volunteering to read, and write, and love.

What I didn't realize in my early years was just how deeply the wisdom of this interconnection between faith and action could strengthen the internal bonds of our community as well as the internal capacity for my own change and transformation as a person. The model I've been trained in of listening that leads to action, followed by reflection and more listening, is not just the formula for social justice in the world, it's the formula for faith formation itself, individually and collectively as God's people.

This connection between faith and action is the thing that's kept me here all these years, and I know the same is true for many of you. It's also the thing that attracts new people hungry for a community that wants to be part of changing the world for the better.

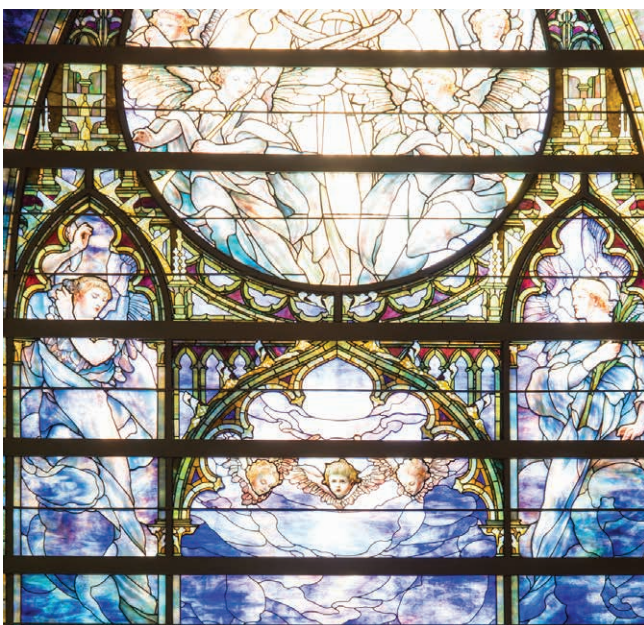
action

When something's amiss in our church community, or in my own internal world, one of those three ingredients — listening, action, reflection — is typically out of whack. It's worth considering as we march toward an election season that has many of us already shaking our heads with anticipation of losses of some kind — loss of community, stability, rationality, security, hope, or something else. We need to pay attention to our communal rhythms as well as our personal ones to be sure we are receiving and giving what we need from each other.

I'm excited that our educational seasons seem to be navigating these rhythms with this kind of balance. I'm hopeful that the upcoming Session and Deacons retreats, followed by the All Church Retreat, will provide even more space for reflecting on where we've been, where we are, and what we need to strengthen our faith for the facing of the hours to come.

More and more of you seem to be reenaging in some of these conversations and the community that supports them. That's a good thing as the more voices we have in the mix, the more we can create together what our diverse community needs. Though I had to go beyond the seminary to receive community organizing training, I'm thankful that it's been continually reinforced inside our church. I thank God for a living faith that keeps me listening, acting, and reflecting in ways that leave me feeling hopeful about just what is possible when God's people come together.

Peace, Andrew



WANDERING HEART

Faith is a constant journey of steadfast pursuit, one that ebbs and flows, seeks and wanders. Wandering is exploration, not necessarily distance from God. This Lent, we will walk with Peter in our devotional material where through his story, we are reminded that God loves imperfect people—in fact, time and again, that's precisely who God claims and calls. Like many of us, Peter has a wandering heart. His journey is not polished, or linear, or perfect, but he is always tethered to the love of God. Connection with God is not won or bargained for it is freely and lovingly given, and yet, too often we close our eyes and hearts to it. In our Adult Education Series we will wander through spiritual practices as we seek to open our eyes and hearts to God's unwavering presence in our busy lives. We hope you will join us in our wanderings.

— A Sanctified Art (adapted)



A WARM WELCOME TO DR. MICHAEL STEFANEK, OUR NEW MINISTER OF MUSIC

Christy Macy

A choir leader and recital organist, Michael comes to Brown Memorial with the highest of music credentials. Originally from Green Bay, Wisconsin, he launched his music career at the age of six when he began singing in the Green Bay Boys Choir. He went on to earn his Masters and Doctorate of Music degrees from the University of Michigan and has since won many academic awards and honors from around the country. Over the years, Michael has served as music director in numerous churches — and for the past eight years has been the Director of Music Ministries at the Asbury United Methodist Church in Salisbury, Maryland.

Over the course of the search, the committee received some 50 applications for the job, and selected Dr. Stefanek by unanimous choice in November. “Michael’s delightful personality, team spirit, mature faith, and robust sense of humor make him the perfect addition to our staff,” says Rev. Andrew Connors.

Michael shares Andrew’s excitement. “I’m so grateful and thrilled to be the next Minister of Music at Brown Memorial. During the interview process I felt an immediate connection with Pastor Andrew and the staff, the search committee and the choir. Brown is a true spiritual gem in Baltimore, and I have already experienced the authenticity of its mission by the warm welcoming embrace I have been given. I look forward to building relationships at Brown and the greater community while shepherding the music ministry. I’m excited for what the Lord has in store for us.”

Michael and his partner Chris own a home in Salisbury and an apartment in Baltimore. Their “spoiled rotten” dog is named Jelly Bean. Michael loves to travel and walk on the beach. When not working, he attends concerts, the theater, and the latest art show. And, yes, he loves amusement parks.

“It is a joyful privilege to welcome Michael Stefanek to Brown Memorial and to the musical community of Baltimore. I look forward to the artistic and spiritual gifts which he will bring to this congregation and to this city.”

John Walker, Brown’s Minister of Music Emeritus

Michael and Jelly Bean on a walk.



Speaking on behalf of Brown Memorial’s choir and the congregation, we want to express our deep gratitude to Adam Graham, who served as interim choir director after Michael Britt’s death, and kept us going in those sad and tough times.

Many thanks as well to John Walker and Tom Hall for holding the choir together during those past few weeks.

Michael officially began his role as Minister of Music on February 1. He began playing February 4, and was officially installed Sunday February 25. Please give Michael a hearty and thankful welcome.

Much appreciation goes to those church members who served on the search committee and spent countless hours interviewing the top candidates: Kathy Arnold, David Bielenberg (chair), Larry-Fletcher Hill, Roberta Heath, David Miller, Mike Reed, Deborah Richardson, Court Robinson, Elizabeth Tatum, and Viviane Thorpe.

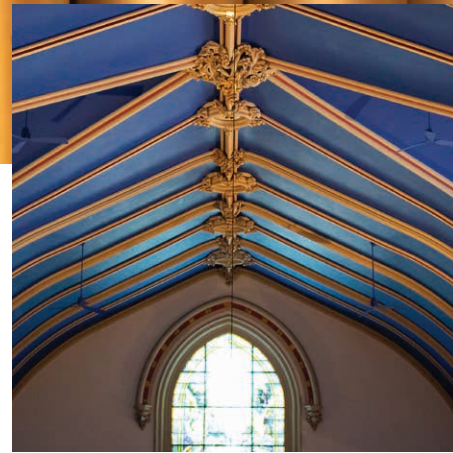


CO-CLERKS' REPORT

Covering major Session activity November 2023-January 2024 / Susan Stroupe and Vi Thorpe

Session:

- approved the creation of a Safety Committee to address various preparedness issues, encompassing both environmental and personal safety needs. The committee is currently creating a proposed initial spending plan for trainings and equipment, which Session will hear, discuss, and vote on this spring. The Safety Committee includes managing a small group of congregation member volunteers who will act as a “conciierge” in the front of the church on Sunday mornings, to make sure everyone feels welcome, all needs are met, and any safety concerns can be addressed quickly.
- continues to work with the Trustees on the 5-year plan for a sustainable process for repairs and projects on the building and grounds. Approved plan for 2024 to renovate and repair the North Tower.
- approved Andrew’s proposed terms of call, including a 4.5% cost of living increase (COLA), and more time off for writing during the year (terms of call approved by congregation at Annual meeting, Jan 28, 2024).
- approved a plan created by the Diversity Committee with Trustee approval to evolve signage outside the



church, creating space for both information, events, and welcoming messaging. Session approved \$2000 that was no longer being used for The Center of Baltimore Presbytery.

- approved 2024 budget, which is detailed in the Annual Report.
- approved plan for Retirees small group to work with staff to open up the sanctuary during the week for people to walk the labyrinth.
- heard a report from Tutoring Commission that they will be seeking interest and support from the congregation for participants and donations for money and materials. The Tutoring program is celebrating its 60th years of existence, and is working to make sure it can remain a great program for Baltimore City’s students for more decades to come.

Looking into 2024 and beyond, Session will be grappling with how to reduce endowment draw and create a sustainable system for caretaking of the buildings, while continuing to center the work God is calling us to do in the world, and the wellbeing of our staff and congregation.

SMALL GROUPS (TOO GOOD A THING TO LET GET BY)

Judy Jones

Spring is sooo close. Blue crocuses and tiny white snowdrops dot the untended areas of lawn and the edges of the beds. It feels like we're about to slide out of grey February and into the first colors of March. I'm more than ready. You?

Spring seems always a good time for something new. Like taking up Thai cooking. Like clearing out the old gardens. Like maybe joining that small group you thought about last year.

And it is, indeed, a fine time to get started. Currently, three groups are operating with people asking to join. Plus, Theology on Tap, which meets monthly, offers a real opportunity to 'talk religion over a beer.' Talk to Sam Edgin for more info.

Start small.
Two are company.
Three's a group.
Go from there.

I'd like to propose a couple more opportunities (and be sure to see the list tucked into these pages of all that's going on at Brown these days). Please note that none of the following exists currently. But if an idea appeals, let one of us know, and we'll help you get something going.

Here are just a few ideas for a small group with a focus: Hiking or biking on Baltimore trails, reading/book groups, writing, museum hopping, games (cards, boardgames, cribbage), crafts, and more.

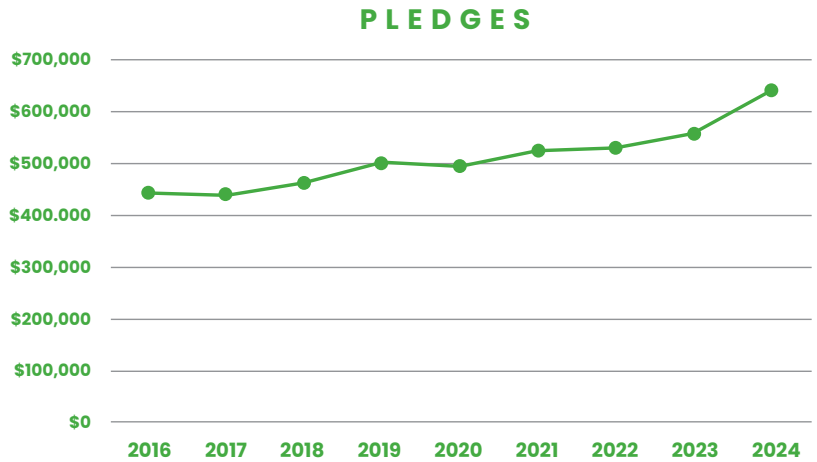
It's a perfect time for the year to start small groups. Call one of us, and we'll get you linked to someone else: Vi Thorpe, Susan Stroupe, Judy Jones.

PLEDGES SURPASS GOAL WITH RECORD-HIGH INCREASE

For this year's annual campaign, the Stewardship Committee invited congregants to meditate regarding the ways that they sense renewal is alive in Brown. Based on the robust response from the community, it is clear that people are excited for the church's next chapter. The Stewardship Committee is thrilled to announce that Brown surpassed its lofty goal of \$630,000 in pledges for this year's campaign. We now have commitments from 114 households for a total of \$641,697. This represents the highest annual increase over the last 10 years!

Pledge totals have risen dramatically in recent years, with a record-high increase for 2024.

These pledge figures are essential to aid Session in creating a healthy budget for the church in 2024. Based on the congregation's generosity, Brown will be able to reduce its endowment draw while still maintaining its beautiful facilities and supporting the church's important mission projects. That Brown was able to surpass its goal in a time when churches are experiencing decreased attendance is a testament to our wonderful congregation.



Thank you to all who continue to be so generous in the giving of your time, gifts, and talents to Brown.

Judson Arnold, Committee Chair • Jack Hodges, Kelly Knock, David Nyweide, Ann Teaff

NEW MEMBERS

Brown GROWS and GROWS and GROWS! Welcome these new members from 2023.

Al Fisher



Deb Bowers

My husband Steve and I live on the farm where I grew up, in Harford County. My sister Colleen and her husband Dean introduced me to Brown years ago and I am so happy to finally join the congregation. I transferred from my home church because I need the type of spirituality and messages I hear and see at Brown.

My parents were from Baltimore, but my father spent his childhood on a Virginia farm. I was born a few blocks from Brown, at the Women's Hospital, now used by MICA. I was the last of five children.

I worked for local government and nonprofits for 30 years, helping farm families protect their land from development. I published a newsletter and co-authored a book. I now continue to do this kind of work as a volunteer. Earlier I was a newspaper staff writer and editor, beginning with The News American in Baltimore. I lived in Mount Vernon and enjoyed walking to work. I love Baltimore despite its problems. I have been participating in BUILD and see its mission as the other end of the spectrum from farmland preservation.

I am researching and writing a history of the community where I live, The Rocks of Deer Creek. I begin with the original inhabitants. I will be so glad to finish it! I also enjoy poetry, travel, hiking, birdwatching, antiques, and historic places.



*Elizabeth
"Betty" Dickey*

I was born and raised in Richmond, Virginia and graduated from the University of Richmond with a BA and MA in English literature. I have worked as an advertising copywriter, assistant editor of a company magazine, public relations assistant, and freelance writer. I finally found my true calling at the library at the University of Richmond where I worked in reference, cataloging, book repair, and archiving and special collections.

Greg and I married 42 years ago. We have two children, Grant and Reid. Grant is married with two children of his own and works at NPR. Reid is a librarian at the University of DC. And of course, this is what brings us to Baltimore!

A lifelong Presbyterian from a long line of Scottish Presbyterians, I have served as a deacon and an elder and taught many different Sunday School classes for both children and adults. I love reading and deepening my knowledge of the Bible. I am very happy to have found my way to Brown Memorial to continue that journey.

growth

NEW MEMBERS, CONTINUED



Greg Dickie

I grew up in Henderson N.C. where my family were members of the First Presbyterian Church. My faith was shaped by my parents and the wonderful members of that congregation.

I received my undergraduate degree from St. Andrews Presbyterian College and an MBA from the University of Georgia. I worked as a property and casualty insurance underwriter and manager for 18 years. I retired in 2014.

Betty and I have been married for more than 42 years. We have a daughter and son who have two children. Our desire to be closer to our children and grandchildren prompted our move to Baltimore this past August.

An ordained deacon and elder, I served on the capital campaign of our previous congregation as well as on the Pastor Nominating Committee. I am particularly interested in mission work. For the past few years that volunteer work has been focused on helping recent immigrants. Roger Gench, Brown Memorial’s previous pastor, is a friend of ours. He encouraged us to visit this church, and his advice was excellent. I am so glad to be a part of this wonderful congregation.

I am particularly interested in mission work. For the past few years that volunteer work has been focused on helping recent immigrants.

- Greg Dickie

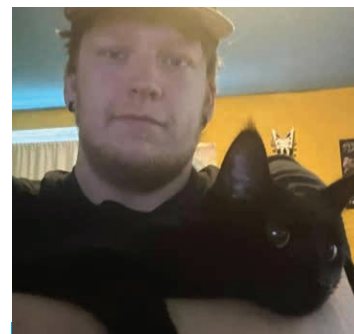
Will Kuethe

Will Kuethe came to Brown Memorial as a substitute singer for Jim Cox in the spring of 2021. Michael Britt asked him to stay on as a staff singer for the next year, and Will has since joined the church as well.

While he was growing up, Will’s family went to Crofton United Methodist Church, where his parents were members of the praise band. He also went to school at Monsignor Slade Catholic School and Mount St. Joseph High School. Will was a staff singer at Severna Park United Methodist Church.

He is also on the staff at Anne Arundel Community College, where he works in the box office and sings in the two choirs. Will was active in the Student Government Association at AACC, where he was the President of the Campus Activities Board, developed the outreach committee, and served as the first VP of Community Outreach and Engagement, for which he organized and led students in community service endeavors twice a month.

Will enjoys volunteering, is passionate about nature, and is interested in finding a way to help take care of the earth. He has been a vegetarian for eight years. He is extremely happy to be a part of the Brown family with such great people in the congregation and such a cool music ministry.



His other musical jobs have included singing at Baltimore Hebrew Congregation, Bach in Baltimore, Washington Master Chorale, and Washington National Opera Chorus.

NEW MEMBERS, CONTINUED



Funmi Olowabi

Hello, everyone at Brown Memorial! My name is Funmi Owolabi, and I grew up in England. I moved here with my parents and two of my siblings; then I completed my Master's at the

University of Baltimore. I have been living in the United States for the last 6 years and love it!

Growing up, I attended a variety of churches, ranging from Pentecostal to non-denominational. I was drawn to Brown Memorial because of how friendly everyone has been, and my first visit was very relaxed. I really enjoy the atmosphere at Brown Memorial, and I am happy to be a member. I enjoy playing the piano and reading non-fiction books, and I am currently learning Spanish in my spare time. In my previous church, I was a member of the prayer team, and I have been happy to learn that Brown Memorial has a similar team.

It's been a joy to be a part of the congregation here, particularly its worship services

- Sarah Lane Cochrane-Payne

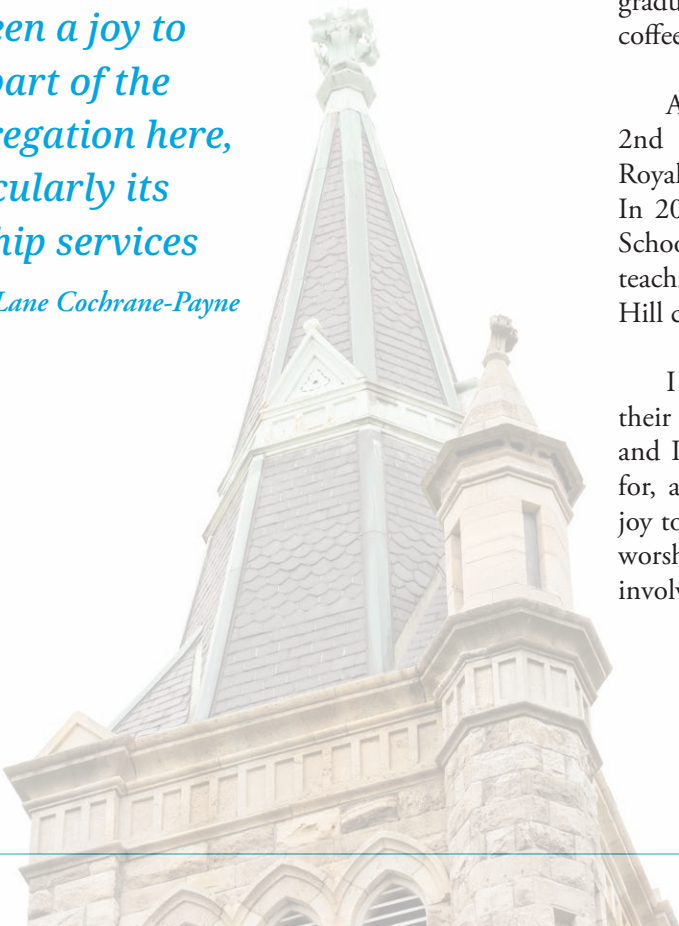


Sarah Lane Cochrane-Payne

I'm originally from Winston-Salem, North Carolina. I am the oldest of four siblings and grew up with a deep love of my community, imaginative play, and reading. I attended Covenant College in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and graduated in 2020 with a degree in elementary education. Soon after graduating, my husband (Will Payne) and I married and moved to Baltimore for graduate school. Will and I enjoy hiking, finding new coffee shops, and exploring new places.

After a year of full-time study, I started work as a 2nd grade English Language Arts teacher at Mount Royal Elementary while continuing my graduate studies. In 2022, I received a MS.Ed from the Johns Hopkins School of Education. I am now in my third year of teaching at Mount Royal, and I deeply love the Bolton Hill community.

I initially learned about Brown Memorial through their tutoring program and partnership with my school, and I was drawn to Brown Memorial's intentional care for, and commitment to, their community. It's been a joy to be a part of the congregation here, particularly its worship services, and I look forward to becoming more involved as a member.



NEW MEMBERS, CONTINUED

Will Payne

I grew up in Cartersville, Georgia, a small town situated about halfway between Atlanta and Chattanooga. My parents both worked in the medical field, and I grew up with a deep love for science and writing. I attended Covenant College in Chattanooga, Tennessee. While there, I received my bachelor's degree in environmental biology and international community development.

My wife (Sarah Lane Cochrane-Payne) and I were married in the summer of 2020 after having graduated earlier in the year, and we moved to Baltimore soon thereafter to begin master's programs. I attended the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health from 2020 to 2022, earning an MHS in Social Factors and a graduate certificate in Public Health Informatics. Today, I work at the Maryland Department of Health Developmental Disabilities Administration, where I serve as a policy analyst focusing on legislative and intergovernmental affairs.

I was drawn to Brown Memorial both because of its welcoming attitude towards visitors and its affirming stance towards women's rights and LGBTQ+ rights. As I have grown older, I have come to see it as deeply important to be part of a congregation which extends fellowship equally to everyone, and which avoids legalism and fundamentalism in its theological and political orientations. Brown Memorial is self-evidently a truly special church, from its music and teaching to its warm community. I am glad to be a part of Brown Memorial, and I look forward to becoming further involved!

*Mark Shifflett*

I was born and raised in Severna Park, Maryland, the son of Donald and Virginia (Ginny), and I have two older brothers, Donald and Jeffrey. My parents passed away three years ago, and that loss affected me spiritually and emotionally. After my father's passing, I spent the last year of my mother's life assisting in her care.



I was raised in the Lutheran Church and my parents provided me with a strong spiritual foundation. After graduating from Chesapeake High School I went to work in the banking industry. After a couple years at Anne Arundel Community College I attended Graham Webb Academy in Washington D.C. and earned my degree and eventual certification as a Senior Cosmetologist. I have been working the last twenty years as a professional stylist at a number of hair salon/studios in Lewis and Rehoboth, Delaware; Annapolis; and Baltimore City.

I was introduced to the Brown Memorial Church community over a year ago and found a church home. I have enjoyed meeting other church members and volunteering during church services and various activities. I am continuing my spiritual journey and am appreciative as a new church member and trying to learn more about myself as I face the challenges of life, health, loss, and hope for the future. I am very grateful for the support and kindness that our church family has provided me.



BUILD, A POWERFUL FORCE FOR CHANGE IN THE CITY AND AT BROWN: THE EVOLUTION *Karen Nelson*

Beginnings...

In the mid-eighties, Brown Memorial Park Avenue was reorganizing itself after a large part of the congregation had started a new site at Brown Memorial Woodbrook in Baltimore County. Brown spent some time as one church in two locations, but maintaining two sites proved costly, and closing Brown Memorial Park Avenue was considered. Park Avenue members narrowly defeated the vote to close, however, doing so because they felt the church had a role to play in the City. What that role was, was to be determined. Pastor David Malone, who had been part of the clergy of the two Brown Memorials and became the Senior Pastor at Park Avenue, felt he knew the answer.

While in training, he had been involved with an offshoot program of The Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) organization, which had impressed him with what it could do for the voiceless majority of low-income city residents. The IAF recognized that the majority of low-income people in cities had no access to organizations, such as unions, to represent their interests with city leaders. But they did have congregations, schools, churches and neighborhood associations which could band together and help their members organize their power. When David came to Baltimore, he learned that there was an IAF affiliate here: BUILD (Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development), and he felt that this might be just the right opportunity for Brown Memorial Park Avenue to find a new purpose and goals. BUILD was led by some of the foremost Black pastors in the City. They were not entirely trusting of being infiltrated by someone from the white church. But as David tells it, he was persistent, and had the experience and the endorsement of the contacts at the IAF affiliate in New England.

And so, in 1985, Brown Memorial Park Avenue became a member of BUILD.

Rev Roger Gench who followed David Malone as senior pastor at Brown, also became a co-chair of BUILD.

Enter new pastor Andrew Connors 2004

When Brown Memorial was again seeking a new Senior Pastor after the departure of Roger Gench, being a part of BUILD was an explicit expectation of a new pastor by the search committee. This was a selling point for Pastor Connors in considering whether to accept the call to Brown Memorial. He had had some experience in community organizing during his training and had seen its value. So Andrew Connors came to Brown, and in time, also served as co-chair of BUILD. He continues to serve on the BUILD Strategy Team.



“I choose to be active with BUILD because BUILD is the most authentic, effective organizing entity I have ever encountered. I trust the leaders, and have found over the years that BUILD’s “why” and my “why” are always in alignment.”

- Erika Brockman



“The BUILD organization has been the single most important factor in developing me as a pastoral leader. In addition to granting me a way to act on my convictions and invite others to do the same, it has given me the tools to think relationally instead of bureaucratically, be strategic with my use of time, and grow personally and professionally in a multifaith community of leaders who wish to be held accountable for their impact as well as their actions.”

- Andrew Connors (note: the picture is from 2008)

Lay leadership, an important element of BUILD...

Rev. Malone asked me to serve with Hilton and Mary Randall as the first BUILD core team at Brown. Many other members have served on our core team over the years, including Elizabeth Reichelt who currently serves as one of the lay co-chairs of BUILD.

BUILD work over time: local neighborhood-based issues to larger citywide issues. Key citywide campaigns include:

- Founding ChildFirst Authority – which provides community school and after school programming in twelve schools in Baltimore.
- Winning \$1billion for 21st Century School construction in 28 schools in Baltimore.
- Founding the Turnaround Tuesday jobs movement — which organized with local employers and has put more than 1,825 returning and underemployed citizens to work in living wage jobs.
- Founding ReBUILD Metro — which has invested over \$200m in eradicating vacants and rebuilding communities in three East Baltimore neighborhoods.

Whatever the issue, BUILD knows how to throw a good meeting, with enough attendance to ensure media coverage and presence (or at least response) of political leaders. Meetings include presentations from ordinary citizens concerning their problems and needs and clergy and other leaders presenting proposed solutions. Invited attending elected officials and corporate leaders are asked to respond publicly. I always leave a BUILD meeting feeling a little more hopeful than when I came in.



“I have worked at Shock Trauma for the last decade. I spend my days focused on the care of individual patients, mending bodies only to be sent back to systems that seem to fail them. I got involved with BUILD because I desperately needed people who believed that change was not only

possible but achievable. After the first BUILD action I attended I remember thinking, “I want to know these people!” Whether it was public education, vaccine access, safety or housing, it all seemed to relate. BUILD feels representative of every part of Baltimore and I’ve never been in a space like it.” - *Rachael Edgin*



“I have stayed engaged with BUILD over the decades because it has been a space for me to experience the joy of relating to people across the city. There is no other place in my life in Baltimore that creates this opening, and it has profoundly changed how I view the world. I have been

involved in many BUILD campaigns, some successful and some not, but the constant has been to keep moving, alongside others, towards the world we all want to live in. I can’t walk away from that.” - *Cheryl Finney*



“I stay involved with BUILD because I see people from all walks of life who care deeply about Baltimore and their neighborhoods and families building relationships on the common ground of desiring positive and permanent transformative change.”

- *Patti Flowers-Coulson*



“We have lived our entire married life in the city of Baltimore, and have raised our family in this place. We have remained faithful to Brown Memorial Church and its association with BUILD because these institutions have consistently sought economic and social justice for all the residents of this city.”

- *Bonnie & Elden Schneider*



“Being involved with BUILD is my response to God’s question “what role have you had in creating the two Baltimores and what role are you going to have in reconciling them?””

- *Elizabeth Reichelt*

Above: Karen Nelson, Lynda Burton, Carol Graves, Sandra Fink and Elizabeth Reichelt in Annapolis with BUILD in 2009

BIG CHALLENGE: TAKING ON THE VACANTS NOW!

Karen Nelson

BUILD's current, urgent citywide campaign is to address the 70,000 abandoned homes, vacant lots, and houses at risk for becoming vacant.

BUILD brings to this struggle the knowledge gained from successfully rebuilding three East Baltimore neighborhoods with neighborhood leaders, churches, and ReBUILD Metro, using the Whole Block, Whole Neighborhood approach. The rebuilding resulted in population growth, higher property values, and lower crime rates, without displacement of neighborhood residents.

BUILD has partnered with the Mayor and the Greater Baltimore Committee and has the initial support of the Governor. It will require work in many neighborhoods and a \$3 billion investment over 15 years. Funds will come from a combination of sources:

- \$300m in city bonds and TIFs that Mayor Scott has committed
- \$300m in private and philanthropic investment, and
- \$2.4b in investment from the State.

The Governor's proposal to increase CORE funding to \$50m and to increase the flexibility in how CORE funds can be spent would yield approximately \$1.2b in state funding over 15 years.

BUILD's goals this legislative session are to prevent any cuts to the Governor's proposed CORE budget and to ensure passage of his housing legislation.

Such a complex undertaking must be overseen by a strong administrative body that has the authority to issue bonds, ensure adherence to our stated production goals as well as our agreed-upon core values. BUILD is asking the Governor to designate one of the State's existing special purpose entities e.g., The Maryland Stadium Authority, the Maryland Economic Development Corporation, etc, by the end of this legislative session. BUILD will be back in Annapolis next year to secure the remaining investment!

Careful financial analysis indicates that investing \$3b in Baltimore's neighborhoods over the next 15 years will produce an additional \$7b in city and state revenues over the next 30 years, not to mention a more livable city.

DISCRIMINATORY HOUSING REGULATIONS: THE PROBLEM AND THE SOLUTION

Christy Macy

As part of its ongoing after-church discussion series, Brown Memorial is focusing in on the issue of government-led discrimination in housing that has been systemic in so many cities across the country, including Baltimore.

These sessions focused on the learning pillar of The Antiracism Steering Committee's strategy in collaboration with the work of BUILD providing an opportunity to take action on one aspect of this issue.

-Taylor Stewart, who along with her husband Tom, organized and led the meeting.

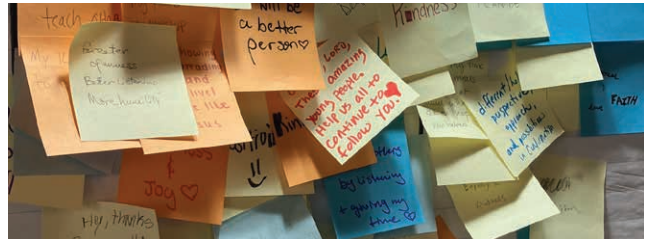
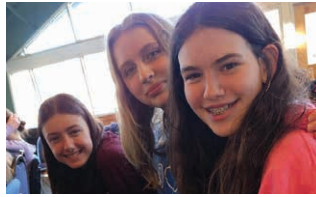
To prepare for the discussion, which began in late December, Brown members organized a book club to read *The Color of Law: Creating Racially Segregated Communities*.

The second session on this topic, held on January 21, focused on the deeply negative impact of redlining and other discriminatory practices that have plagued generations of Baltimore families — many of whom are African American. One example discussed during the session was the "Highway to Nowhere" — a federal plan to build a road that ended up uprooting communities around the Rt 40 corridor in West Baltimore. The highway was never completed — but the project had a deeply negative impact on surrounding neighborhoods and its citizens.

BUILD, and its relationship to Brown, is at the heart of an ongoing effort to end discriminatory practices that have left entire neighborhoods filled with vacant and falling down row houses. Participants at the January meeting told personal stories about how such discriminatory efforts have plagued their communities — and what a significant role BUILD is playing to turn those neighborhoods around.

The sessions were planned and implemented by the Color of Law book group that included Gayle Barney, Pastor Andrew Connors, Susan Haugh, David Lascu, Elizabeth Nash, Karen Nelson, Michael Reed, Elizabeth Reichelt, Taylor Stewart, Tom Stewart, and Susan Stroupe.





CONFIRMATION RETREAT

Michael Cuppett, Confirmation Coordinator

“After a long day of traveling — for some, as long as 11 hours in the car — a gaggle of youth streamed into an auditorium with tired but excited eyes. Adults were peppered into this crowd of a few hundred, squeezed in between students and the corners of the room. Onstage, a woman with high hair and a beautiful Southern accent began to speak while clip art danced onto a slightly-cheesy PowerPoint presentation.

“God is love,” she said. “The Bible is filled with the story of God’s love.” Though those statements aren’t especially profound, what she said next was unassuming, yet carried a world of blessing, promise, and sacred responsibility. “And you are all storytellers.”

Eva Hendrix-Shovlin and I had the privilege of accompanying students for the 2023 Confirmation Conference at the Massanetta Springs Camp and Conference Center, an enclave about two hours west of Washington D.C. Our four confirmands were joined by nearly 200 other students and leaders from churches across Maryland, Virginia, D.C., and North Carolina. The first annual conference included worship, small groups, music, outdoor recreation, quiet time, and plenty of fried chicken. Our confirmands played “Confirmation Bingo,” during the trip, marking off items like “write a take away from Session 1” or “Sit with someone new at lunch.”

The conference speaker is right, of course. God is love, and as Christians, we are commissioned to tell God’s story. But, as Presbyterians, we sometimes focus on the content of stories — what is being said — rather than the art of storytelling itself — how a story is being told. We sometimes read sermons rather than experience preaching (there is a difference!), or fixate on beliefs rather than our walk in faith. That’s a valuable impulse, one that serves us well in many cases. And yet, we know that the art of storytelling matters, and it’s what we love about the Bible. The way we tell stories matters, just like it matters that the Bible is filled with poetry, prose, narratives, myth, epics, and apocalyptic letters. The Christian life requires storytelling and diversity in the way we do so.

Our confirmation students are both inheritors and re-interpreters of the story of Brown Memorial Park Avenue, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) the Church universal, and most importantly, the story of God. I encourage you to consider how you can support their voices, their imaginations, and their remarkable capacity as storytellers. It’s time for all of us to step out of the way, let every Sunday resonate with the insight of young people of faith, and start listening to the stories they are telling about God, each other, and ourselves.

Rev. Michael Cuppett (helhim) Communications and Operations Manager
 Catonsville Presbyterian Church O: (410) 747-6180 | catonsvillepres.org C: (636) 357-9663

AN UPDATE ON THE AFGHAN COMMUNITY

Barbara Cook

The Ministry of Welcome continues to be quite active with the Afghan community on Reservoir Hill. Thanks especially to Robbie Heath and Greg and Betty Dickie for taking several folks to essential doctors' appointments. Because of the difficulty in managing toddlers who don't do well in waiting rooms, we've found they love going to the library while their moms are in the doctor's office.

We had a very successful campaign to raise money for Holiday Love Gifts for the families. Rachel Cunningham's beautifully creative display of all the children who would be recipients in the Fellowship

Assembly Room reminded us of the project. Each family received a Target gift card of \$160, and each member of each family received \$50—so a family of 8 received \$400, for example.

Since several of the women expressed the need to work to help support their families, we advertised their services on the Bolton Hill Facebook page and got several responses. Additionally, some teens have been hired to do yard work and babysitting for several Brown and Beth Am members. Be sure to greet Masrora Arieaey who helps in our Nursery. She is easy to recognize in her hijab!

Be sure to put the next Bazaar on your calendar in the spring. The women are busy making tote bags, aprons, potholders, etc., to sell along with their delicious Afghan food.

Tom Hall interviewed Barbara Cook and Shakera Rahimi on "Midday," on MLK's birthday. They spoke about our work with this community over the past two years — prompting an offer from a volunteer to teach ESOL classes beginning in March and an offer from another to do transportation. John Murphy, who lives nearby, will be presenting Financial Literacy 101 in March.

Be sure to put the next Bazaar on your calendar in the spring. The women are busy making tote bags, aprons, potholders, etc., to sell along with their delicious Afghan food. Don't miss this! It's quite an event that drew overflow crowds the first time.

Lastly, be sure to attend lunch after church on February 18 as the women will be cooking for us. We will ask for donations to say "thanks" for the meal.



FINDING ACCEPTANCE, FELLOWSHIP, AND WORSHIP IN CUBA

Morgana Kinlan

In January, Sarah Ramirez-Cross, Mike Reed, Deb Baer, my husband Matt Mickel and I traveled to Camajuani, Cuba, for a seven-night fellowship trip to visit our partners at Iglesia Presbiteriana de Camajuani.

Three themes really capture the essence of our time in Cuba: Acceptance, Fellowship, and Worship. As I share our experiences in these areas, I hope to convey some of what it felt like to be in-country.

Acceptance — The first time I visited Cuba in 2022, I immediately felt welcomed. As soon as we arrived at the church (via 1950s classic cars), we found ourselves welcomed by a number of community members. While they knew some of us from prior visits, they didn't know me or my husband. Nevertheless, I was greeted by numerous people with a hug and a kiss on the cheek, as if we were old friends or even relatives. I repeatedly encountered the same welcome for the duration of the trip. During our visits to congregants' homes, people's offerings to us ranged from sweet (and very strong) Cuban coffee to gifts of local crafts.

This January's trip to Cuba was different. Instead of feeling like an honored guest, welcomed, but still with a bit of formality, I felt like a friend. My Spanish had improved in the last year, and I was able to speak more easily with the community's elderly members whom we visited. Several people remembered us from our 2022 visit (especially Matt — we joked that all the senior Cuban ladies remembered him because he is so tall), and they seemed happy that we had returned. Returning was a sign that we cared, that we hadn't just “come to dance,” a phrase we heard applied to those who visit Cuba more for entertainment rather than for a sense of connection to the community.

“I got the sense that these classes were less about learning to make a craft and more about bringing people together.”

“...our Cuban friends decided that two of our group members... would be perfect additions to the Three Kings Procession during the Sunday Service.”



Fellowship — With each trip, I'm struck by the strong sense of community and fellowship at the church. In Camajuani, the church seems to be both a place of worship and a community center, providing space for residents to pray together, but also to bond during group activities. On this trip, we joined the Thursday Crafts with Seniors class, where we learned to make adorable gift bags with construction paper. Sitting amid my group and the Cubans, I got the sense that these classes were less about learning to make a craft and more about bringing people together.

Worship — Prayer and worship were very much a part of our trip, as they have been in trips past. Before every meal, our hosts led us in prayer (often sung). We were able to join the weekly prayer group during our stay, led that week by a woman named Yolanda. As I listened to Yolanda's message, which was about thanking God each morning before we begin the day's tasks, I reflected on how I found this message to be relevant to myself, a busy Baltimore office worker, and how it is also relevant to the people of a small Cuban town. I thought about how I wished that my own life was a bit slower-paced, and I tried to think about how I could make changes so that starting my day by thanking God would become as second-nature to me as it seemed to be for these Cubans.

We also had the opportunity to participate in worship directly. Since we arrived on the weekend of the Epiphany, our Cuban friends decided that two of our group members (Mike Reed and my husband, Matt Mickel) would be perfect additions to the Three Kings Procession during the Sunday Service. With assistance from the church members, Mike and Matt were dressed in costume (complete with capes) and carried bags of



Cuba simply has to be experienced in person. I encourage anyone reading this article to attend our monthly Zoom meetings to learn more about our partnership. Hasta la proxima!

presents down the church aisle. After a beautiful song by the children's choir, these presents (small gift bags with toys, stickers, and candy) were given to the children, and we had the fun of seeing them play with their gifts at the end of the service.

Sad to be leaving at the end of the week, I realized that sharing these few memories can't do justice to the experience of being there. How can I convey the conflicting feelings that came with being served a delicious meal three times a day while knowing that the people who served it won't eat that well until the next church comes to visit? How can I clearly describe the enjoyment of bonding over drinks and board games even with the separation of a language barrier? Or the juxtaposition of seeing morning commuters making their way to work on motor scooters, side by side with traditional horses and carts? Quite simply, Cuba has to be experienced in person.





It is always a great day when a child goes home with a new book!

ANOTHER GREAT YEAR FOR THE BROWN TUTORING PROGRAM — THE OLDEST OF ITS KIND IN THE COUNTRY

Tracy Cerrato

Our tutoring year is now more than half over, which is pretty hard to believe, but time certainly flies when you are having fun improving literacy skills! We are so grateful to our sixty-three tutors (six of them Brown Memorial Church Members) who are working with seventy-five children in the first through fifth grades. Forty students come from Mt. Royal Elementary school, twenty-seven from Dorothy I. Height, and eight from Baltimore Montessori Public Charter School.

Part of the Tutoring Program’s mission is to “awaken a love of reading” for our students. One way to achieve this goal is to help them build their own personal library at home, and over the course of the year, we give the children ten brand new books to keep. According to a 2021 literacy survey of children conducted by the UK’s National Trust, “Book ownership was associated with greater reading enjoyment and frequency,” and recent research suggests that “raising children with home libraries has a positive impact on academic growth and job attainment.”

...What an amazing thing for a child who struggles in school to come to a place where a loving adult is focused on that one child for a full hour — no interruptions, no other children. Everything in that one hour is about that one precious child.

- Ann Teaff, Chair of the Brown Memorial Tutoring Program Commission

excellence

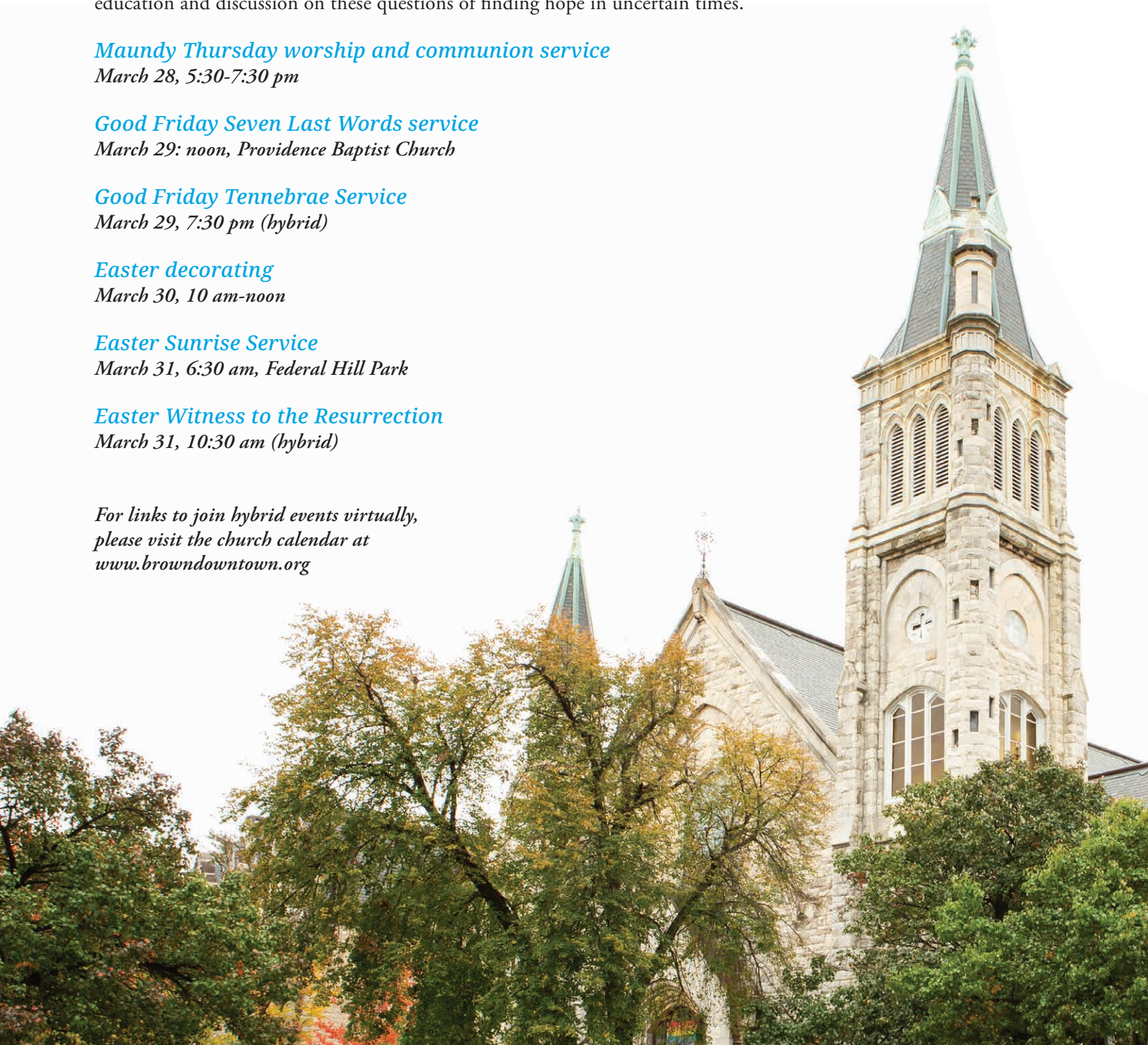
EVENT LIST

Adult Education Series “Finding Hope in Uncertain Times”*Wednesdays, March 6, 13, 20**Simple Dinner 5:30 pm, Program 6-7:30 pm**Location: Brown Memorial*

With the myth of the inevitability of progress wrenched from dominant public discourse, many are facing the painful reality of a world that seems to be drifting away from the future that our faith promises. How do we find energy to continue building toward that holy vision when things get worse, not better? How do we persevere when our actions for a just world seem inconsequential? Join members of Brown Memorial Presbyterian, Memorial Episcopal, and Corpus Christi Roman Catholic churches for dinner at 5:30, followed by education and discussion on these questions of finding hope in uncertain times.

Maundy Thursday worship and communion service*March 28, 5:30-7:30 pm****Good Friday Seven Last Words service****March 29: noon, Providence Baptist Church****Good Friday Tenebrae Service****March 29, 7:30 pm (hybrid)****Easter decorating****March 30, 10 am-noon****Easter Sunrise Service****March 31, 6:30 am, Federal Hill Park****Easter Witness to the Resurrection****March 31, 10:30 am (hybrid)*

*For links to join hybrid events virtually,
please visit the church calendar at
www.browndowntown.org*



**APPLAUSE, KUDOS, CREDITS
TO ALL WHO HELPED MAKE THIS
ISSUE OF TIDINGS HAPPEN (AGAIN):**

Andrew Connors, *Senior Pastor*
Judy Frye Jones, Bill Sheridan (*IT guru*), *Co-editors*

Graphic Design by Design Strength
(Taylor Karabaich and Nicole Byrkit)
designstrengthcreative.com

Special editors and writers: Anne Heuisler, Christy Macy
Contributors: Al Fisher, Judson Arnold, Barbara Cook,
Michael Cuppett, Morgana Kinlan, Karen Nelson,
Elizabeth Reichelt, Susan Stroupe, Vi Thorpe,
Tracy Cerrato, Sharon Holley, Rachel Cunningham,
Louise Wagner.

It couldn't have happened without you!



**BROWN
MEMORIAL
PARK AVENUE**

TIDINGS

browndowntown.org