

**Northwood-Appold Community Academy
and
Marriage Education Servant Leadership
Development
Agency History**



Mission and Initial Founding

The Northwood-Appold Community Academy (NACA) and Marriage Education Servant Leadership Development Program (MESLD) are initiatives of the Northwood-Appold United Methodist Church (NAUMC). The vision for the congregation was:

to become and be the center of the community by being an inviting, dynamic outreaching UMC congregation, wherein each member demonstrates deep caring, authentic service, humble leadership, and mature love within the church and throughout the community, following the teachings and emulating the example of Jesus The Christ, imbued with The Power of the Holy Spirit. It relates to making and engaging disciples for the transformation of the world by positioning NAUMC intentionally at the nexus of the point of intersection of faith and works – of loving and trusting God and serving and cultivating people, as we travel the Discipleship Adventure.

The Northwood-Appold United Methodist Church was founded in the late nineteenth century, and through the years has changed from a church serving a white community to serving a predominantly black community. The community surrounding the church, as well as the city as a whole, has exhibited increasing need over the recent years. The church is part of the Baltimore Washington Methodist Conference and comes under a District Superintendent. The church is now led by Dr. Cecil Conteen Gray, who has been pastor of the church since 2002 and is also the lead administrator for both the school and the marriage program. He is qualified to serve in this capacity by virtue of his education: a Masters in Divinity and a Doctorate in Philosophy and History. He also teaches at Morgan State University. Dr. Gray is now in his 22nd year with the United Methodist Church, encompassing his seven years with Northwood-Appold UMC. His official roles for the two initiatives are as program manager for the federally-funded Marriage Education Servant Leadership Development program and operator/president of the Northwood-Appold Community Academy, a public Charter School, which began with grades K-2 and now is expanding to encompass higher levels, including development of a high

school. Each program has its own nonprofit status and has a day-to-day administrator - director and principal respectively. The MESLD director is a retired social worker and the principal of the school is a recently-retired administrator from the Baltimore City Public School System.

NAUMC is a congregation which has grown since Dr. Gray's arrival in 2002 from 50 congregants to 250. Upon arriving at the church six years ago, Dr. Gray found that they had never had a strategic plan. Drawing upon his skill as a facilitator for the strategic planning process, he led the congregation in the development of their first plan. He called upon them to develop a plan for outreach and relevance in their community. During the initial planning sessions, which are now held every six months, members of the congregation called for the creation of a school. Most thought along the lines of a private, Christian school; but Dr. Gray guided them over a period of time in seeing that a Charter School could be more relevant for the needs of the community. At another time, a member of the church asked the pastor to lead a retreat for couples. Two retreats were held initially. They were well received and grew eventually into what is now the federally-funded marriage education program.

The church was successful in the creation of Northwood-Appold Community Academy (NACA), a public Charter School committed to "*preparing students to make a living and a life,*"™ so that they "*navigate the life journey effectively and with integrity,*"™ and become leaders in society. NACA's mission is:

to cultivate with regularity and predictability young people who are proficient relative to academic achievement and intellectual skills; advanced, constructive, and healthy relative to character development; empowered to make a life; equipped to make a living; and positioned to participate fully in freedom and democracy.

NACA's founding group consists of local residents from a number of neighborhoods near the church. According to Dr. Gray, the group's collective qualifications are proficient for founding a high quality charter school in Baltimore and taking stewardship of public funds.

Our founders ranged from residents living and participating meaningfully in the community and city for over sixty years, to recent residents actively and substantively engaged in the community and city. This means that relative to the local community, our founders possess ties that are exceedingly strong and knowledge that runs very deep.

Within the church itself, over 50 educators were identified, up to 10 school principals and administrators, security personnel, government officials, social workers and a number of other skills. Community skill sets included a CPA, attorney, architects and others with connections to area services and agencies. The school is a separate nonprofit and has its own board. There is no requirement for members to be from the church or for staff to be culled from church members. However, there are church members on the board and on staff. Most staff must have the appropriate certification to work at the school, but volunteers from the church and community assist. Few students come from the church; the school is open to residents of Baltimore City, with most coming from the surrounding community.

MESLD's vision and mission is:

To create a Movement in the City of Baltimore, wherein learning about, building, and keeping a healthy marriage moves from being a rarity to being what most people strive for and accomplish... As the Movement picks up momentum and grows into the future, NAUMC and the MESLD Program will continue being part of the vanguard -- creating, cultivating, and implementing effective and successful partnerships with community citizens, faith-based institutions, community partners, businesses, and educational institutions – cultivating Healthy Marriages, Healthy Communities, and a Good Life for All.

As a federally-funded program, MESLD has no faith requirements for hiring and participants are not required to be of any particular faith. As with NACA, participants come from all areas of the city. Advertising is done on buses and billboards as well as through a radio program hosted by the pastor and through announcements sent out to area churches of all denominations and to community programs. Many volunteers from the church assist with the program.

Each of the opportunities, the charter school and the healthy relationships program, Dr. Gray considers as “*manifestations of charity and justice, developing civil society and bringing order.*” The pastor avers that these organizations are progeny of the church; they tend to immediate, existential needs but also, for congregants, they tend to the spiritual and interior life. Some have been awakened to their Christianity through their work in the world, as the pastor helps them find their gifts.

Finances

Following receipt of a \$20,000 grant from the Compassion Capital Fund Program (CCF) via the intermediary, Associated Black Charities, the church began an after school program. With additional proceeds of a \$10,000 grant from the intermediary, a consultant who worked with the church on capacity building gave the suggestion initially for considering going after a Charter School contract from the Maryland State Department of Education.

MESLD as an outgrowth of the marriage retreats built upon the capacity building and technical assistance received under the Compassion Capital Fund Demonstration Program. Although it had not been the culture of the church to seek grants, in addition to the funding for the after school program and capacity building services, they ultimately received \$40,000 in funding directly from the federal government for a targeted Compassion Capital Capacity Building grant. Northwood-Appold eventually sought and received a \$2 million grant for a five-year period. Both of these grants allowed the expansion of what was a couple's retreat for church members into a city-wide healthy marriage program, or as the pastor describes it, a "healthy relationships program", named Marriage Education Servant Leadership Development (MESLD) program. MESLD now pays rent for use of church facilities.

The Northwood-Appold congregation is supportive of the Charter School, including renting its 30,000 square-foot education building to the academy for only \$1 a year. MESLD also pays rent for space. The congregation also approved a \$600,000 loan for renovations to the education building. That loan has now been paid off by NACA. Volunteer resources from the church are strong as are community linkages, but funding now comes from grants and from the Baltimore City Public School System. The church is operating in the black, although all church committees are urged to hold fundraisers to have a cushion for unexpected expenses. An outside capital campaign is being developed.

Milestones

- 1870s Founding of Northwood-Appold United Method Church (NAUMC).
- 2002 Dr. Gray arrives to pastor NAUMC and leads congregation in strategic planning.
- 2002-2004 Federal Compassion Capital Funding in the amount of \$20,000 via intermediary Associated Black Charities for youth programming capacity building; organizational self-assessment and technology assessment conducted leading to strengthening of organization and better use of technology.
- 2004 Proposal to the Baltimore City Public School System to create the Northwood-Appold Community Academy, a nonprofit charter school separate from the church.
- 2005 Charter school, NACA, begins with grades K-2; each year the next grade level is added.
- 2006 Five-year funding received from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services for a Marriage Education Program.
- 2008 Received a grant for facility improvements to the charter school and bond funding from the state toward building new educational facility on vacant church property
- 2009 School expansion to grades 6 and 9



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