



The Virginia
United
Methodist

\$2

April 2015

Advocate

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Call



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Virginia Advocate

The official magazine of
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The Advocate is published once a month. The deadline to submit news and ad copy for the May 2015 issue is April 6. For more information on future deadlines, contact the Advocate office or visit the website.

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Local Church News

Items should be typed (preferably sent via e-mail) or printed legibly, no more than 100 words, and of conference-wide interest. Complete names of individuals, churches and districts should be included. Because of space limitations, the Local Church section prohibits news items related to church members' birthdays (of less than 100 years), wedding anniversaries, receptions for moving and/or retiring pastors, photos of traditional Christmas trees or Easter trees/crosses, and any item over two months old. Color photos are encouraged. Photos returned *only* if submitted with a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Photos included on a space available basis. The editor reserves the right to edit all copy or refuse publication.

Letters

Letters to the Editor are printed on a space-available basis. Letters should be limited to 150 words for space reasons. The Advocate will not print letters addressing a topic beyond two months of the publication of that issue. The Advocate editor reserves the right to edit all letters.

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USPS 660-740

ISSN 0891-5598

Published monthly by Virginia United Methodist Communications, Inc., an agency of the Virginia Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church. Periodical postage paid at Glen Allen, Va., and at additional mailing offices. *The Virginia United Methodist Advocate* is owned by Virginia United Methodist Communications, Inc.

POSTMASTER: Send changes of address to *Virginia United Methodist Advocate*, P.O. Box 5606, Glen Allen, VA 23058. Editorial and business offices are located at 10330 Staples Mill Rd., Glen Allen, Va. Office hours are 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday.

FROM THE DIRECTOR



Linda S. Rhodes
VAUMC Director of
Communications

Led, pushed
or shoved
into
ministry?

A clergy friend of mine in northern Illinois once told me that having a call from God was like needing to vomit.

You can try to put it off for as long as possible, but eventually you must succumb.

This issue of the *Advocate* includes stories from Virginia Conference pastors about their calls to ministry. Many of them talk about this feeling, this urge, that kept after them until they finally followed the path God was showing them.

I, feel that I, too, was called by God into ministry – a lay ministry of professional communications work for the church. In some ways, though, it didn't feel to me like I was led. It was more like I was pushed. And shoved. And blocked when I tried to go another way.

I started out as a newspaper reporter, and felt that I was doing altruistic work for people in difficult situations by shining a light on their stories and, in many cases, causing change for the better.

When we moved to Boston so my husband could get his Master's degree, I couldn't find a reporting job. I was hired by a large commercial bank to write and produce promotional materials. For several years I was a "banker," promoted through the ranks to the level of vice president. When we moved to Chicago for my husband's job, I was hired by another large commercial bank as director of Marketing and Communications.

I thought I was doing well. I was making money. I was serving on fairly prestigious community boards and organizations on behalf of the bank. I attended functions with Oprah. And the whole time I wondered, "Why am I doing this? I'm just helping shareholders make bigger and bigger profits. I'm not really improving the world at all."

I guess God got tired of waiting for me to figure it out. So, as the result of a string of bank mergers, I lost my job. I started my own marketing firm and, through contacts with members of my local United Methodist church, ended up with the Northern Illinois Conference as a client. I found that work more rewarding than my work for financial services clients and retail stores. Eventually, the church became my only client. I worked for the conference for 15 years on a contractual basis.

Through the same local church connections, my husband ended up working for the General Board of Global Ministries as North Central Jurisdiction representative of The Advance ... until 2007 when that position was eliminated.

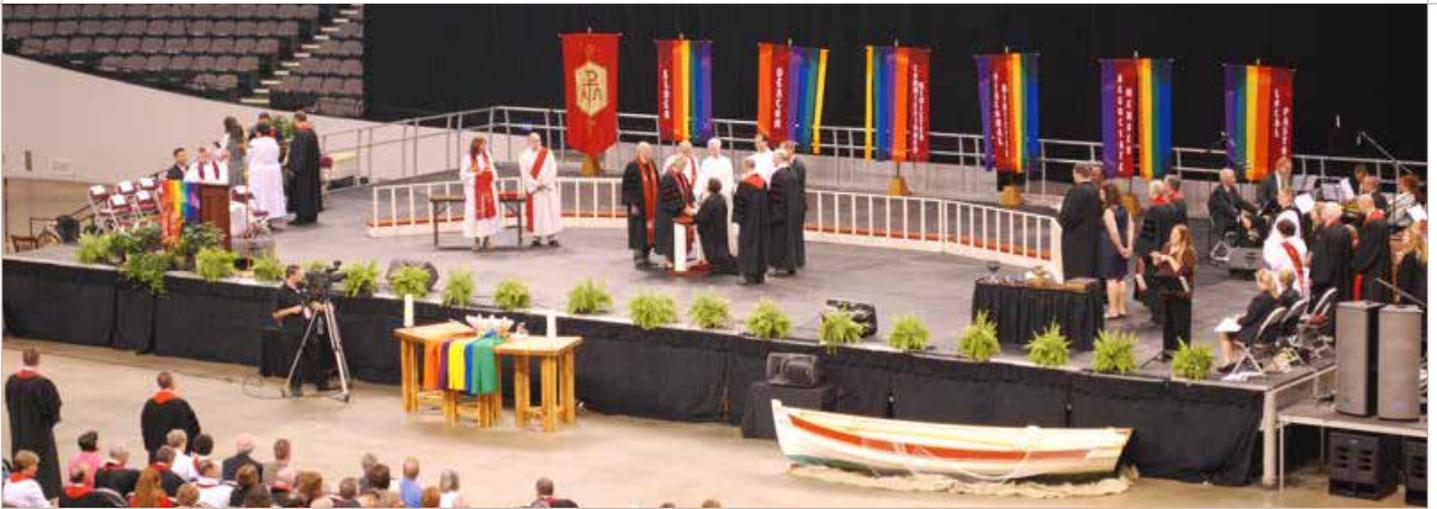
We had no health insurance. We needed full-time jobs with benefits. And then folks at United Methodist Communications in Nashville told me that the Virginia Conference was looking for a director of Communications. Coincidentally (is there such a thing?), the General Board of Church and Society in Washington, D.C., was looking for a Communications director. (That's what my husband, Wayne, now does.)

So, here we are. Responding to our call from God. And we never had to vomit at all. Thanks be to God! ☺

Linda S. Rhodes



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Above: Ordination of Rev. Teresa McRoberts



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The *Virginia Advocate* Staff

Linda S. Rhodes | Virginia Conference Director of Communications

Cathryn Huff | Graphic Designer

Pam Culler | Administrative Secretary

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LETTERS



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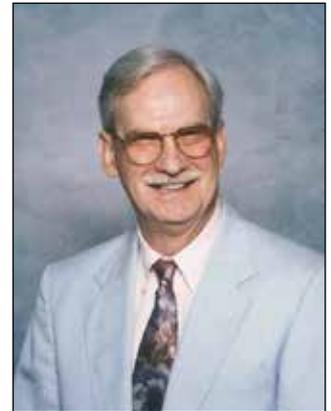


Broken Covenant

During our Holy Conversations proceedings, the point was made that "Pastors who have married same-sex couples have broken our covenant." This led me to review just what is our covenant?

Isn't our covenant to proclaim Christ, to love God and to love all God's people? There is nothing in our ordination rituals about following the *Discipline's* every word. Neither our covenant nor our faith is a set of rules. As preachers of the Gospel, pastors to the people and prophets to the world, is it not our duty to follow the calling we prayerfully discern in every situation?

No pastor needs to marry anyone he or she feels is not ready for the marriage covenant, but the phrases which prohibit marrying same-sex couples should be stricken from the *Discipline* since they violate the very covenant under which we serve. The prohibition is discriminatory and dehumanizing to the people we are committed to love. We and God have moved on beyond Leviticus and St. Paul on the issue of homosexuality just as we have moved on beyond believing that after my first wife died and I married a woman who had been divorced, I therein committed adultery (Mt.5:32). My second marriage is a wonderful covenant full of God's love just as is that of the few same-sex marriages



Rev. R. Carl Ennis

of which I know.

Certainly relationships are strained between conservative and progressive movements in The United Methodist Church, but let us be clear that our common covenant is with God in Christ, not with Paul, Peter, Leviticus or any other interpreter of God's will. Our bond is to follow Christ. Those who have broken the covenant are those who fail to preach, teach and serve Him. Their slogan seems to be "Closed Hearts, Closed Minds, Closed Doors," or, at most, "Open" only to certain ones. ☞

-The Rev. R. Carl Ennis
is a retired pastor.

Measles, mercury and Methodists: A voice of reason in the vaccine debate

By Lisa Sykes

No doubt, the adage, “Where there’s smoke, there’s fire!” can be applied to the debate over vaccines currently raging in the media. Certainly, there is an issue here somewhere, but getting through the haze and seeing it clearly is a challenge.

With 182 cases of measles reported, U.S. Public Health authorities are urging everyone to get their Measles, Mumps and Rubella (MMR) vaccination. This vaccine is long standing, having been introduced in 1971. It has a long track record of safety, and the timing of its introduction in no way parallels the sharp rise in neurological disorders among children which skyrocketed during the 1990s and early 2000s. So why are some refusing the MMR?

In 1998, Dr. Andrew Wakefield published a story in the health journal *Lancet*, associating the MMR with bowel disorders in a very small group of children with autism. Thereafter, Dr. Wakefield, based on his findings and parent reports, hypothesized a connection between the MMR and the onset of autism. Despite the retraction of his article, questions about the safety of the MMR continue to circulate, in large part due to Dr. Wakefield’s personal campaign and charisma.

I believe the assertion that the MMR causes autism is mistaken. It is part of the “smoke” obscuring a very different and well-founded concern about vaccine safety. After all, the MMR has never contained mercury. Simply put, United Methodists are pro-vaccine, pro-MMR, pro-vaccine safety and anti-mercury.

Mercury, in the form of Thimerosal, is a troubling and antiquated preservative in our otherwise modern vaccines. The media seem to have forgotten both the 1999 Joint Statement by the U.S. Public Health Service and the American Academy of Pediatrics to remove Thimerosal (mercury) “as soon as possible” from all childhood immunizations. The press also seems to have forgotten how many vaccines administered in the U.S. still, to this day, contain levels of this potent neurotoxin in excess of EPA safety guidelines that have never been proven safe.

Unfortunately, what I hear all the time is a news reporter, untutored in the details of our current immunization policy, saying glibly, “Oh, the mercury is all out of vaccines, except...” I often wonder if the audience hears the “except” because what follows is critical.

The reporter then adds, “for the flu shot.” The truth be told, Thimerosal remains at high levels in



many U.S.-administered flu shots, which are specifically mandated for administration to those most vulnerable to mercury: pregnant women, newborns and young children. Unsaid, as well, is the fact that mercury remains in our tetanus shots and some meningitis shots.

The public is not only given a false sense of security, but also denied informed consent, having been misled about the presence of the mercury that remains in vaccine supply. Are you, your child or grandchild about to get a flu shot? Did you know that there is a mercury-containing and a mercury-free version, and that you can request the mercury-free one?

And who wouldn’t? Thimerosal is a poison; it can cause mental retardation and motor impairment in the unborn and children (<http://www.putchildrenfirst.org/media/1.13.pdf>). It is so toxic that to put it on your skin is illegal. If we don’t want this mercury
(Continued on pg. 6)



Rev. Lisa Sykes

Letters to the Editor are printed on a space-available basis. Letters may be e-mailed to LindaRhodes@vaumc.org by the first of the month.

COMMENTARY



(Continued from pg. 5)

to touch our skin, why on earth would we ever inject it into a pregnant woman or a child, especially when among American women of child-bearing age, the percentage with concerning levels of mercury in their blood rose sharply from 2% in 1999–2000 to 30% in 2005–2006?

While a handful of industry- and government-sponsored studies contend the mercury-based vaccine preservative Thimerosal is safe, relying only on statistical analysis, almost 200 independent studies demonstrate mercury-induced harms, clinically and statistically, from it. (www.mercuryfreebaby.org)

The tragic story of how Thimerosal has harmed the public and been protected by industry is chronicled in the new documentary “Trace Amounts” (www.traceamounts.com). This film includes footage from 2007 of Tonya Murphy, then-president of the North Georgia United Methodist Women, standing outside the CDC at the “Simpsonwood Remembered Rally,” declaring “If there’s any doubt, take the mercury out!” on behalf of the United Methodist Women who are leading this effort in our denomination.

Modern, safe, much-less-toxic preservatives exist as alternatives to the mercury-based Thimerosal which was patented in 1927, the same era when arsenic was used to treat syphilis. 2-Phenoxyethanol has been

on the market and used in U.S. licensed vaccines for 70 years. When you get a mercury-free vaccine, this is the alternative preservative you are most likely receiving.

So why not just switch? Why is industry reluctant to change? The answer is global distribution. Corporations and western nations have a track record of sending unsafe products to developing nations. So to protect themselves, developing nations have made laws regarding pharmaceutical products, keyed to our American laws. The thinking is, “If the Americans won’t use it, we won’t either, and so we will be protected from harm.”

Sadly, this thinking has been subverted, resulting in industry’s stubborn insistence that mercury remain in some American vaccines, thereby legitimizing its presence in vaccines destined for the developing world.

As a member of civil society to the United Nations Environment Programme, I recall the diplomat from Nigeria who told me she had no idea that mercury was in vaccines until she heard me speak at mercury treaty negotiations in Japan. By the time we met subsequently in Kenya, she had personally checked the accuracy of what I said and turned back a shipment of mercury-containing tetanus shots intended for pregnant women in her nation, where tetanus is still a great threat. Having become informed, she insisted on mercury-free vaccines.

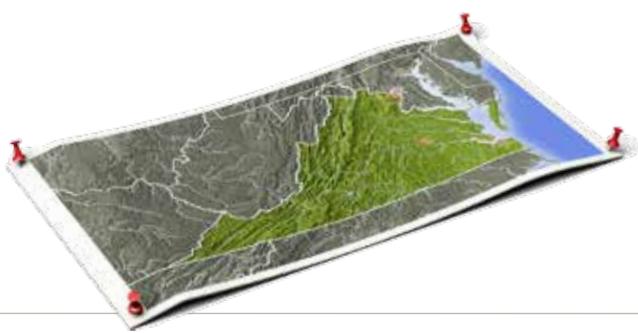
Is it ethical that wealthy

and mostly western nations receive mostly mercury-free vaccines while developing nations receive mostly mercury-containing ones? Is it right that some American children are being exposed to mercury in their vaccines unnecessarily, in order to legitimate its presence in vaccines for the developing world?

Jesus said, let the children come to me and do not hinder them ... any of them. A two-tier standard of vaccine safety, based on national wealth, is unethical. Recently, in the Indian Journal of Medical Ethics, I argued that the current and inequitable distribution of mercury-containing vaccines is a global form of discrimination. (<http://www.issuesinmedicalethics.org/~ijmein/index.php/ijme/article/view/2015>) As those who value all life as God-given, Christians must advocate for one unified and proven standard of vaccine safety for the world and for all the world’s children.

As United Methodists, with a landmark resolution on “Protecting Children from Mercury-containing Drugs” (<http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/protecting-children-from-mercury-containing-drugs>), we know what the real “fire” is, and we are seeking to bring reforms that will put it out, thereby safeguarding all those who receive vaccines as well as the public’s trust in them. 

-The Rev. Lisa Sykes serves St. Luke’s UMC, Richmond District.



The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

Neill Caldwell resigns as *Advocate* editor

The Rev. Marc Brown, Virginia Conference director of Connectional Ministries, announced that Neill Caldwell, editor of *The Virginia United Methodist Advocate*, submitted his resignation effective Tuesday, Feb. 24.

Caldwell served as editor of the *Advocate* monthly magazine, the weekly *Sunday Advocate*, the *Daily Advocate* at Annual Conference, the *Book of Reports* and the *Conference Journal*.

Under his leadership, *The Virginia United Methodist Advocate* won numerous

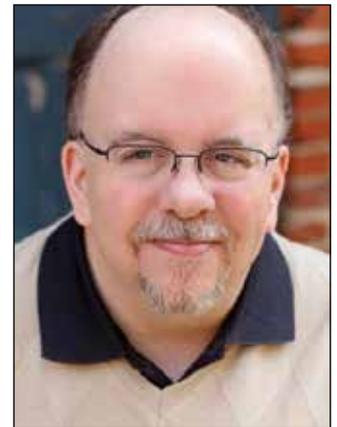
denominational awards, including for best magazine, best printed publication, best visual design for cover artwork and best editorial.

Caldwell also served for a while as United Methodist News Service reporter covering the Judicial Council and currently is president of the United Methodist Association of Communicators (UMAC), the denomination's professional association for those working and volunteering for the church in the field of communications.

"I have always relied on

Neill's dedication and capability as editor of the *Advocate*," said Linda Rhodes, director of Communications. "He has always been committed to the excellence of the magazine and will be greatly missed."

Caldwell joined the Virginia Conference Communications staff in August 2006. He came to Virginia from North Carolina where he worked for daily newspapers in Lexington, Asheville, Gastonia and Charlotte. ❧



Neill Caldwell

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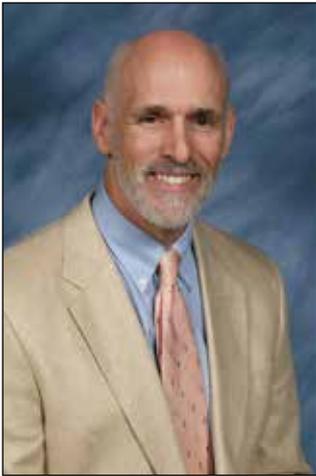


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The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



Bishop announces resolution of complaints against two clergy who conducted same-sex weddings



Rev. Dr. John Copenhaver

By Linda S. Rhodes

Bishop Young Jin Cho announced that two complaints filed against Virginia Conference clergy for conducting same-sex wedding ceremonies have been resolved through the supervisory resolution process stipulated in the *United Methodist Book of Discipline*.

The resolutions, agreed to by all parties in both complaints, mean that the Rev. Dr. John Copenhaver, retired elder who is Professor Emeritus of Religion and Philosophy at Shenandoah University in Winchester, and the Rev. Amanda Garber, founding pastor of the RISE new church start in Harrisonburg, will both be suspended from performing ministerial functions for a time, but they will not face church trials or possible loss of their clergy credentials.

“We worked for four months in an attempt to reach just resolutions,”

Bishop Cho said in a statement. “We experienced many challenges, pain and difficulties along the way, but everyone involved earnestly and prayerfully sought to be open to each other and to the leading of the Holy Spirit.”

In both resolutions, all parties in the complaint process acknowledge that they are “not of one mind on matters of human sexuality.” Both resolution documents reflect these different views “and the conflicts of conscience with regard to differing interpretations of scripture and church teaching.”

Recognizing that these differences are found throughout “our sorely troubled church,” all parties in both complaints “commit ourselves to work for unity and to honor the *Book of Discipline* with prayerful discernment and humility as those who are striving to live as faithful followers of Jesus Christ.”

Copenhaver will be suspended from performing any ministerial functions for a period of three months. Garber will be suspended from her church and from performing any ministerial functions for a period of one month without salary. During their suspensions, both will use the time for reading, prayer and reflection.

Bishop Cho said the

length of suspensions differed because of consideration of Garber’s ministry setting and the fact that Copenhaver is retired and, therefore, faces no financial impact.

Last Oct. 7, the day after the Supreme Court struck down Virginia’s laws banning same-sex marriage, Copenhaver officiated at the marriage of DeLyn Celec and Sarah Celec at Jim Barnett Park in Winchester.

On Nov. 1, Garber officiated at a same-sex wedding ceremony for members of her congregation.

As a result, the Rev. Larry Thompson, Winchester District superintendent, filed a complaint against Copenhaver, and the Rev. Tommy Herndon, Harrisonburg District superintendent, filed a complaint against Garber.

In addition to the two clergy respondents (Garber and Copenhaver) and the two district superintendents, Bishop Cho included the Rev. Tom Joyce, bishop’s assistant, and the Rev. Rob Vaughn, advocate for both of the respondents, in the resolution process.

To read the complete text of the complaint resolutions, go to the conference website, www.vaumc.org.

— Linda Rhodes is the Virginia Conference director of Communications



Rev. Amanda Garber



The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

Annual Conference to be June 19-21 in Roanoke

The 2015 session of the Virginia Annual Conference will be held at The Berglund Center (formerly the Roanoke Civic Center) in Roanoke, VA, June 19-21. Theme of this year's Annual Conference is "From Members to Disciples."

Bishop Young Jin Cho has announced that retired Bishop Charlene Kammerer will preach for the Saturday morning mission service and Saturday evening ordination service. The Rev. Young Bong Kim of Korean United Methodist Church of Greater Washington will preach for the memorial service. Bishop Cho will preach for Sunday morning worship.

Teacher for Annual Conference will be the Rev. Tim Bias, General Secretary for the General Board of Discipleship.

This year Annual Conference will elect delegates to

the 2016 General Conference and 2016 Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference. Electronic voting devices will be used for the first time. Because of the time required for voting, conference will begin earlier than usual. Laity and Clergy sessions will be held Friday from 10 a.m. to noon. The opening plenary session will begin at 2 p.m.

Annual Conference Special Offering



The Annual Conference Special Offering goal will be \$150,000 and again focus on both international and Virginia-based mission needs. The offering goal includes \$50,000

for continued support of our partnership with the Methodist Mission in Cambodia as they continue to purchase property for new churches and expand their fast growing mission. Another \$50,000 is for United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) Global Health ministries to aid the Ebola-ravaged countries of Sierra Leone and Liberia. Both of these countries

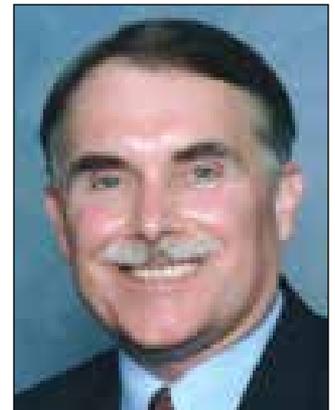


have trained and equipped Health Boards in their United Methodist conferences that are working to meet priorities and needs of communities recovering from the Ebola outbreak as well as a holistic approach to health that empowers people to take charge of their own lives and develop positive health-seeking behavior in their communities. In Virginia, the goal is \$50,000 to support mission projects working with the poor in the Danville and Eastern Shore Districts. Both of these districts are working in ministry in areas of Virginia that are well below the national and state poverty levels.

For more information about this year's Annual Conference session, go to the conference website, www.vaumc.org/AC2015.



Bishop Charlene Kammerer



Rev. Tim Bias



Rev. Young Bong Kim

The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



Claiborne tells 5 Talent Academy: 'It all starts with relationships'

By Neill Caldwell

Alternating from introspective to animated, and sometimes punctuating his comments with a humorous cackle of a laugh, 39-year-old author and activist Shane Claiborne told the Feb. 21 5 Talent Academy teaching session that working with the poor starts with building relationships.

Speaking live at Ebenezer UMC in Stafford and to an audience watching on live-stream at several sites around the Virginia Conference, Claiborne said charity in itself is well and good, but it will never replace those one-on-one relationships.

Six hundred people registered for the event, but snow and ice caused closing of



Shane Claiborne talks about his ministry in inner-city Philadelphia at the 5 Talent Academy teaching session.

several of the remote sites in the western half of the state and held down the crowd at Ebenezer.

One of the founders of The Simple Way Christian community in inner-city Philadelphia, Claiborne peppered his talk with words like "sweet!" and "awesome!" but had a very serious message: "How can our unique gifts be connected to the suffering around us? How can using those gifts help alleviate the suffering in other people?"

As a person who did not grow up poor, Claiborne said, he had to first get to know the people in the neighborhood where he and his wife, Katie Jo, now live.

"We have to rethink the posture that 'we are coming to help you,' that 'I have resources for you.' We have to realize that all of us have something to learn from each other. So let's start by listening. Once we have a relationship, then we can speak the truth in love and get to the root of it."

Claiborne said Christians are losing their ability to offer grace to one another.

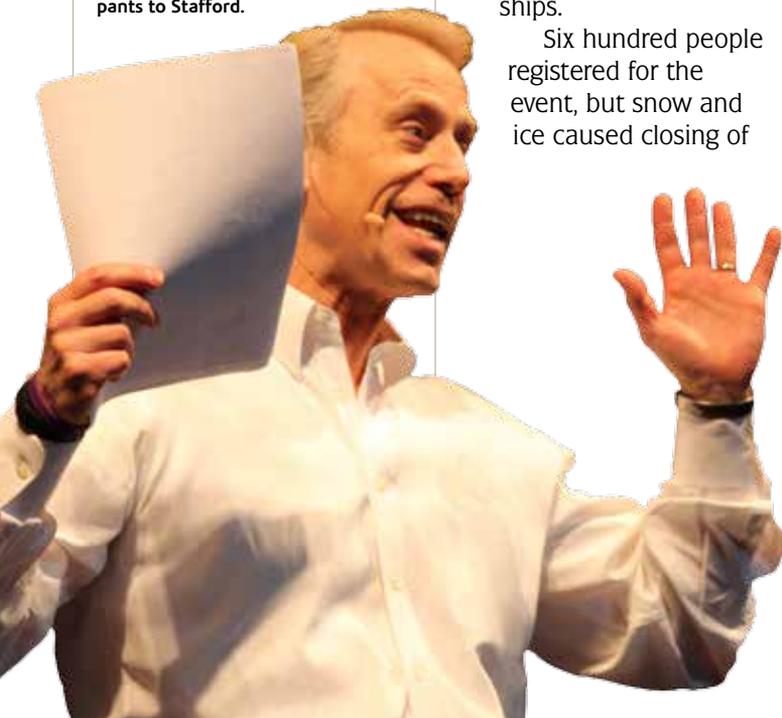
"This thing called grace is in danger," he added. "And yet while we were yet sinners Jesus embraced us. Jesus came to save the world because the world was worth saving. None of us is above reproach, but none of us are beyond redemption."

He later added "if we believe someone is beyond redemption, then we can rip out half of the New Testament!"

Claiborne said that the greatest mystery of faith "is this idea that Christ wants to live inside of us. What would happen if we tapped into that and become the hands and feet of Christ bringing a dying world back to life?"

Claiborne pointed to recent statistics compiled by Barna Research that showed that the answer to the question "what are Christians known for?" was being 1) anti-gay, 2) judgmental and 3) hypocrites. "The very things Jesus

Host pastor the Rev. Mark Miller of Ebenezer UMC welcomes participants to Stafford.



The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

spoke out against..." he mused. "When will we be known by our love again?"

At the same time, Claiborne said that the church deserves credit for "some of the most exciting redemptive work going on around the world" on immigration issues, regional conflict and non-violence.

"We need to celebrate the best of what the church is," he said. "I just worry that the church will sleep through a few things."

He counseled erring on the side of generosity when confronted by a homeless person asking for money. "We don't think ill of what that CEO will do with the money we give them... the woman asking for money for diapers probably needs diapers and is not going to spend the money on drugs."

Claiborne said that his community practices a kind of shared partnership with a lot of things. "Maybe not everyone needs a washer/dryer or a lawn mower."

"Our muscles for community have atrophied," he added. "Independence robs of community. Scripture calls us into interdependence ... 'many hands make light work' and many wallets make light bills. That way of living is richer."

Claiborne, who has made several trips to Iraq and Afghanistan, called Saul of Tarsus a religious extremist in his pursuit of Christians before his conversion moment on the road to Damascus, and that when he reads of the latest atrocities by ISIS or Boko Haram, "I pray that someone gets so knocked off their horse that it would be transformational for the entire region."

He has also made several trips to Ferguson, Mo., in the wake of racial tension and violence there. "When one in three young black men are in prison, we have a problem," he said. "We have some unresolved race issues in this country that we need to deal with."

Other Claiborne words of wisdom:

- ❖ **"You know as Christians we have to look like we have our stuff together. But we as a church don't have it together. (Fortunately) the world is not looking for Christians who are perfect but those who are honest. The church has to be a place where wounded people can come together."**
- ❖ **"In the loaves and fishes story the disciples point out all the**



The Rev. Chip Giessler of Evergreen UMC talks about more than 40 peer groups available for the 5 Talent Academy.

hungry people and Christ says 'you feed them.' Jesus refused to do the miracle alone. God wants us to carry on the work of love. If we ask God to move a mountain, he may hand us a shovel."

- ❖ **"We have to be careful that the church does not become a place where we get stuff and drop stuff off but don't know each other."**

The 5 Talent Academy offers two programs a year to help existing congregations improve their mission and ministry. The next 5 Talent Academy teaching session will be held Tuesday, Nov. 10, and will look at small group ministry. Guest speaker will be the Rev. Dr. Jim Harnish, who recently retired as senior pastor at Hyde Park UMC in Tampa. Harnish will speak at Floris UMC in Herndon, with live-stream sites set up around the conference again. 🍷

-Neill Caldwell is former editor of the Virginia Advocate.



The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



70 Floris UMC members start new faith community in Reston

By Cynthia Lopynski

A new Metro station, an anticipated surge in population and a desire to create a new community – these are some of the factors that went into the decision to say, “yes, I’ll go.” But, by far, the most consistent reason was to share Jesus

by reaching people where they are.

The 70 members of Floris UMC who answered the call to start a new church in Reston consider themselves to be missionaries. They have agreed to leave the original campus for at least a year to do something really new and different – start a new faith community.

Restoration United Methodist Church is focused on reaching young adults and young families who are not currently attending church or not sure what church is all about. The local missionaries, like Linda Ravencraft, are “all in.”

“I am excited about being a missionary right in my own backyard,” Ravencraft explained. “For various reasons I will never be able to travel to another country to share Christ. With this, I am able to be the hands and feet of Christ, and I only have to drive 15 minutes in the other direction.”

Ravencraft’s children are grown, and she and her husband, Matt, are thrilled about this new church plant.

“I can’t wait to see what God is going to do here. It’s not very often you get to start a church,” Ravencraft added.

Maren Gazulis and her family are what she calls “transplants,” a family that has been transferred to Northern Virginia for work and has no family nearby. The Gazulis are also excited

about being local missionaries and eager to meet other young families and build community.

They are enthusiastic about the approach Restoration is taking to evangelism. Sharing the good news of Jesus Christ is not new to Gazulis. She grew up knocking on doors and handing out information about her church. What she loves about the approach Restoration is taking is that it’s not pushy. She much prefers the invitational approach.

“For example, it was great being able to talk to people as they waited for their child’s face to be painted,” Gazulis said. “We want to meet people who don’t have a church home and invite them to come and check us out.”

Prior to the Jan. 4 launch date, the people of Restoration made themselves known in the Reston community. At the Oktoberfest in Reston Town Center they offered face painting, stickers, candy and even a drawing for an iPad. At the Reston Farmers Market they handed out recyclable grocery bags with “Restoration – A United Methodist Church” printed on them to anyone who wanted one. On the Saturday before Christmas they organized a Christmas Sing-Along at the Reston Town Center.

The missionaries of Restoration Church are out in the community reaching people where they hang out on weekends, where



they shop and where they spend their Saturday evenings. The people of Restoration Church “go” just as Christ said in Mat-

thew 28:19, “Therefore go and make disciples.”

-Cynthia Lopynski is director of Communications at Floris UMC in Herndon.



Tim Ward, right, pastor of Restoration Church, shares plans to begin worship services at a local elementary school with folks who stop by the Restoration booth at the Reston Town Center Oktoberfest.



At the Reston Town Center Oktoberfest, Restoration Church members paint faces and share information about their new church.



On Ash Wednesday, Tim Ward, pastor of the new Restoration Church, and Amy Cox, worship leader, provide imposition of ashes for commuters at Weihle Metro Station in Reston.

Society of St. Andrew honors Virginia UMMen as top contributor

United Methodist Men of the Virginia Annual Conference contributed \$21,713 to the Meals for Millions Fund of the Society of St. Andrew, the highest total of all U.S. annual conference organizations.

Wade Mays, national coordinator of the Meals for Millions Fund, listed the top 10 contributors to the 17-year-old fund during a March 7 meeting of conference presidents of UMMen and conference prayer advocates.

Detroit Conference finished a close second with \$20,351. Northern Illinois Conference followed with gifts totaling \$19,171.

Indiana Conference finished fourth with \$18,896; Baltimore/Washington Conference was in fifth place with \$13,842, followed by Missouri Conference with \$12,108.

Susquehanna Conference finished in 7th place with \$9,250 and it was awarded the “Bud the Spud Award” for highest increase from 2013; the conference increased funding by a whopping 311 percent.

North Carolina was in 8th place with \$5,707, followed by Iowa Conference with \$5,205, and Upper New York Conference with \$5,080.

The fund establishes gleaning networks, raises awareness of the extent of hunger in America, and funds hunger relief advocates in 18 annual conferences.

In 2014, hunger relief advocates led 2,320 volunteers into farmers’ fields to pick up 748 pounds of produce. Gifts to the Meals for Millions Fund provided another 8.2 million servings of fresh produce to the hungry.



Wade Mays (left), national coordinator of the Meals for Millions Fund, presents a plaque to Dan Dietze, prayer advocate for the Virginia Conference United Methodist Men.

The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



Carol Mathis retires from Credit Union after 24 years of service



Carol Mathis, retiring CEO of the Virginia United Methodist Credit Union

A major transition is underway in the conference headquarters as Carol Mathis, Chief Executive Officer of Virginia United Methodist Credit Union, Inc., retires after 24 years of service.

Officially, her retirement began Feb. 1, but she is currently serving as a consultant to new CEO Jim Eads, as the credit union transitions from one leader to the next.

When Mathis began her career with the Credit Union in 1991 as a teller, there was only one computer in the office, and that was simply a terminal linked to the conference mainframe. There were only four employees (now there are seven), and they served a membership that was limited to conference pastors and their families. Today, all United Methodists in the Virginia Conference – lay and clergy alike, as well as local churches and conference agencies – are eligible to join the Credit Union and benefit from credit cards and electronic banking that were only dreams two decades ago. In addition, assets have grown from \$11 million to more than \$17 million since she joined the staff.

Mathis' distinguished career includes not only

the opening of field of membership in 2000 but also the establishment of checking, ATM and debit card programs in 1998. In 2002, she helped create the United Methodist Credit Union Association, which meets annually. The association has helped its member credit unions improve their services in the United Methodist community through the partnering of resources, information and technology. The association was particularly helpful in securing partnerships for second mortgages and church loans that were made available in 2003 and 2004, respectively.

More recently, she worked closely with pastors Rodney Hunter and Charles Swadley and Marketing Director Janie Hightower to establish the Jubilee Assistance Fund to help churches work with individuals who would otherwise be targets of abusive pay-day lending schemes. Their efforts caught the attention of the Credit Union National Association (CUNA), which named the Richmond-based credit union the recipient of its 2014 Dora Maxwell Social Responsibility Community Involvement Award. CUNA presented the award at a reception in Washington March 11.

Mathis graduated from Paterson State College – now William Paterson University – in 1970 with a Bachelor of Science degree and earned a Master in Education the following

year from the University of Illinois. She spent seven years teaching health and physical education to students from kindergarten to college and later worked in retail and banking. After taking time off to raise a family, she moved to Virginia and worked in the Virginia Conference Business office. It was from there that she found her way to the Credit Union, quickly rising to CEO.

The credit union celebrated her years of service at its annual meeting in Richmond on March 17. 🇺🇸

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EVENTS

APRIL

UVA Wesley Foundation celebration

April 11, University of Virginia, Charlottesville

On Saturday, April 11, at 2 p.m. the Wesley Foundation at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville will celebrate 50 years of ministry in its current building with an open house and worship service with Bishop Young Jin Cho preaching. Alumni, parents, students and friends from across the conference are invited to attend that day's activities which will include breaking ground on the "Building a Foundation for the Future" capital campaign. Directions and more information are at www.wesleyatuva.org.

Thy Kingdom Come: Where Our Mission in the Commonwealth of God Is Justice

April 17-18, Shenandoah University, Winchester

The Winchester District and Shenandoah University's Faith Seeking Justice Christian Leadership Program invite senior high youth groups, young adults, youth workers and pastors to attend Thy Kingdom Come: Where Our Mission in the Commonwealth of God Is Justice April 17-18 on the campus of Shenandoah University, Winchester. Keynote speakers are Lisa Sharon Harper and Shane Claiborne. Cost is \$10 per person, which will go to Imagine No Malaria. Registration deadline is April 6. Participants are invited to bring a tent and spend Friday night camping out on the field at Shenandoah University to raise money for Teens Opposing Poverty and Imagine No Malaria. Think creatively for ways church members can sponsor you as you sleep out under the stars. For more information, contact Martha Reynolds, Winchester District director of Congregational Excellence, at marthareynolds@vaumc.org, or the Rev. Dr. Justin Allen, Shenandoah University dean of Spiritual Life, at jallen3@su.edu.

Fellowship of Local Pastors and Associate Members Spring Retreat: "Bearing Fruit: Ministry with Real Results"

April 23, Good Shepherd UMC, Henrico

The Fellowship of Local Pastors and Associate Members will hold a one-day Spring Retreat for continuing education and time of fellowship. The Rev. Tom Berlin will share leadership lessons from the book he co-authored with Lovett Weems, and provide the tools you need to assess the fruit your ministry bears in the lives of your congregations, your communities and the world. Barbara Miner, licensed local pastor who serves at Floris UMC, will co-present and share her insights from 17 years of ministry at Floris UMC as it has grown in size and vitality. A 0.5 CEU will be given for full-day participation. Deadline to register is April 23. For more information

and to register online, go to the conference website, www.vaumc.org, click on "Conference Calendar" and the date.

Diaconate Day Apart

April 30, United Methodist Family Services, Richmond

Deacons, Deaconesses, Diaconal Ministers, Home Missioners and Provisional Deacons are invited to worship, fellowship and holy conversation 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Thursday, April 30, at United Methodist Family Services (UMFS), 3900 W. Broad St., Richmond. The Rev. Joe Torrence, Deacon in the Virginia Conference and Minister of Youth and Church Relations for UMFS, will help us learn what we need to know about introducing the ministry of UMFS to our churches and communities. An optional mission project will be offered 2-3 p.m. at UMFS. For more information and to register online, go to the conference website, www.vaumc.org, click on "Conference Calendar" and the date.

May

Virginia PAUMCS 'Get Away from it All' Spring Retreat for Church Secretaries

May 3-4, Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center, Toano

Beanie Rankin, retired assistant director of Records and Statistics of the General Council on Finance and Administration, will offer training in the areas of apportionments, record retention, effective cyber communications, church software and membership records. This event is an opportunity for church secretaries and administrators to learn, network and enjoy fellowship. For more information, call Virginia Chapter President, Bev Myers, at **1-800-768-6040 ext. 134**, or **(804) 521-1134**, or e-mail her at BevMyers@vaumc.org.

June

'Poverty in America' Seminar for Young People

June 22-25, Washington, D.C.

The conference office of Ministries with Young People and the General Board of Church and Society are offering a seminar in Washington, D.C., on "Poverty in America" June 22-25. Registration is open to high school and college-age individuals. Cost is \$430. For more information, contact Derrick Parson at derrickparson@vaumc.org or (804) 521-1135. To register, send e-mail to Becky Tate at beckytate@vaumc.org with the name of participant, age, gender and contact information (phone and email). Send \$100 non-refundable deposit (check made payable to Virginia UM Conference) to **Becky Tate, P.O. Box 5606, Glen Allen, VA 23058**.

“Woe Unto Me if I Do N

In Acts 9, we read about the Apostle Paul's Damascus road experience,

also referred to as God's miraculous conversion of Saul, a religious leader who was actively “breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's followers.” Then, in what seems to us like a skinny minute, Saul is filled with the Holy Spirit, has his name changed, his blindness physically and spiritually removed, is baptized, regains his strength, and begins to preach that Jesus is the son of God. (Acts 9:17-22). Paul's experience is “the call” – a unique and divine assignment given for God's purposes. When the call comes, we are compelled to respond – either by running away like the prophet Jonah or with faithful and active obedience, commitment and devotion.



“Do Not Preach the Gospel!”



by Teresa K. McRoberts

I marked Feb. 7, 1998, in my journal as the date I heard the call to enter into professional ministry. I was reading in two devotional books, *My Utmost for His Highest* by Oswald Chambers (“Utmost”) and *The Upper Room Disciplines* (“Disciplines”) when the themes from each book’s Bible reading converged and the commentary seemed to single me out with a purpose.

Even though it was early in the year, I had already fallen behind in my devotional readings. So, I was playing catch-up as I read the February 2 text and commentary from *Utmost*. Paraphrasing a portion of Paul’s letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 9), Chambers wrote “Beware of stopping your ears to the call of God.” I found it odd that this sentence spoke to me since I had never before been aware of the call of God.

Chambers continued, “When a man begins to overhear that call, then begins the agony that is worthy of the name, every ambition is nipped in the bud, every desire of life quenched, every outlook completely extinguished and blotted out, saving one thing only – ‘separated unto the gospel.’ Woe be to the soul who tries to put his foot in any other direction when once that call has come to him.”

It is difficult to describe how powerfully I felt those words tugging at me as the words of Paul, “Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!” (1 Cor. 9: 16) became my words.

I continued to read in both devotional books, probing for solid ground and mining for nuggets of insight. In both *Utmost* and *Disciplines*, I read the stories of God’s call to Isaiah. In those moments, I acknowledged that perhaps God had been working on me, nudging me before that night. I realized that even without being conscious of a call, I had been wanting or waiting for a singular, distinct pleading from God.

How vain of me! And I admitted that I feared the searing coal and the hard task, preferring to concentrate on (or hide behind) the tasks at hand while claiming that I could hardly hold my own life together. However, just as soon as I had that thought, I knew that I was not holding my life together – God was. And not only that, God was holding my life together in such a patient and loving way so that I could take the time and space to hear God’s call and respond, “Here I am.”

(Continued on next page, “Here I am”)

("Here I am," continued from previous page)

In fact, I believe the only reason I heard and acknowledged my call at all is because February 1998 was the first time in my life I stood still – and it wasn't because I desired or planned to be still. The principal of my elementary school told my parents I was an overachiever. (I am sure he meant it as a compliment!) I graduated from college in three years, and I had already earned both a Master's in Health Administration and a Juris Doctorate. I took pride in my legal career at a prestigious firm in downtown Richmond, working long and hard. "Busy, busy, busy!" as the magician in Frosty the Snowman would say.

My mother had died from breast cancer in 1996 after a 7-year campaign against it. In the fall of 1997, my father was diagnosed with ALS (amyotrophic lateral sclerosis or Lou Gehrig's disease), a fatal motor neuron disease that prevents your brain from signaling and nourishing your voluntary muscles. Over time the muscles become wasted and paralyzed such that walking, sitting upright, swallowing and eventually breathing are impossible.

During my mother's illness, I worked steadily as an attorney, proudly billing thousands of hours and building my practice in the areas of Employee Benefits and Tax-Exempt Financing. When my father became ill, I had a small solo practice, which I let go in order to move in with my father. My husband, Scot, and I had been married for 11 years and had no children. So in January 1998, we moved our bedroom furniture to my father's home and began a new chapter.

By the time he died in 1999, my father was bedridden, had a feeding tube, could no longer speak and could not even lift a finger to scratch an itch. He had around-the-clock care from a team of aides whom we employed and managed for him. However, when we first moved in with him, he needed just a little help – buckling his belt or tying his shoes, for example. I can still recall the ruse I used to bring in his first caregiver. I signed up to take Disciple Bible Study on Thursday mornings at Trinity UMC-Forest Ave with Rev. Dr. James Turner. And then I told my father that even though he certainly did not need care, I needed someone to stay with him so I could feel comfortable going to Bible study for a few hours each week. Thankfully, he agreed to let our first caregiver come for a few hours. And it was because I was enrolled in Disciple Bible Study that I was

doing daily devotions at all.

The same night that I had read "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel" and Isaiah's call, I also read the story of Samuel's call. As I read this story, and the stories of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, Leah, Rachel and Joseph, I had two profound feelings.

First, I felt as if God had been at work in my life already for many years refining and fitting me for the ministry. I recalled listening to Rev. Cecil McFarland present the prison ministry after a magic show at church. I remembered the first time I saw someone receive a UMW Mission Pin and how I wanted to be like the woman who received it. I relived the experience of crying every time I sang "Here I am Lord."

Second, I felt a deep longing to have the faith and ability to surrender to God's will for my life. Until that time in February 1998, I had never had a desire to surrender myself to anything or anyone. But at that time, in all my imperfection, with my hopes of having children quashed by five miscarriages, in the wake of my mother's death at age 56, and in the midst of my father's beginning war with ALS, the glass fragments and plastic shapes in the kaleidoscope of my life formed a beautiful pattern. I saw my own losses, my waning ambitions and my infertility in a new light – the blinding light of God's refining fire that transforms us.

The next day, I called my pastor and asked if he was sitting down. I told him that I did not fully understand it, but I believed God was calling me into the ordained ministry. His response was full of grace as he said, "I have had the same feelings about you." Still, as I confessed this strange-feeling call that was sprouting in me, I felt like Paul, Isaiah and Samuel all rolled into one 20th century, imperfect, female body and spirit. The pieces of my life that seemed to make no sense in my hands revealed a beautiful mosaic in God's hands.

I still give thanks that through God's grace I can see that all I have – my gifts, talents, education and family – and all that I am – diligent, loving, quirky, bold and growing – come from God. It is a privilege to preach the gospel, celebrate the sacraments, order the life of the church, weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who are rejoicing. 

-Rev. Teresa K. McRoberts is the senior pastor at Skipwith UMC in Richmond. She and her husband, Scot, have three children ages 11, 13 and 15, who came through the miracle of adoption after she said yes to a life of serving God in the ordained ministry.



Teresa and Scot McRoberts with their children, Max, Sam and Grace.



CALLING 21

By Meghan Roth Clayton

This past year I applied for full membership as an ordained elder in the Virginia Conference of The United Methodist Church. Instructed to theologically reflect on personal examples of effective ministry, I could not help but see dozens of people with each story I recalled. These are the saints accompanying, inspiring and shaping me on this journey of grace. Many of the faces I saw were those of the community of faith at St. Luke's UMC in Yorktown, my host setting as a Calling 21 intern in its pilot year.

It was the summer of 2007, and I was a rising college senior with a slight inclination to attend seminary following graduation. God's call to ordained ministry had come many years earlier through my home church, Reveille UMC in Richmond, but I kept detouring and pushing it aside. When I learned about the new program, Calling 21 seemed the perfect opportunity to explore ordained ministry without forced commitment or decision.

A partnership among the Virginia Conference Center for Clergy Excellence, the Cabinet, and Shenandoah University, Calling 21 places young adult interns in local congregations to experience the breadth of pastoral ministry. Even in the short period of time, I preached twice, taught classes, helped lead Vacation Bible School, coordinated mission opportunities, attended various administrative and program committee meetings and shadowed pastoral visitations.

Not only did I have the excellent guidance of the Rev. Rhonda VanDyke Colby and the Rev. Don VanDyke Colby overseeing the program from Shenandoah University, but I also had two extraordinary host pastors, the Rev. Doug Gestwick and the Rev. Clara Gestwick, to shepherd me through the experience. In addition, I had several fast friends, the other Calling 21 interns placed around the conference; a lovely host family; and a collegial, supportive group of lay people who held me accountable, provided constructive feedback, and helped me prayerfully discern purpose and passion.

As I now gratefully approach ordination, the summer of 2007 remains a pivotal part of the journey, and while there were many formative experiences, my memory takes me back to the first full week of the internship.

I was to attend the church's annual pilgrimage to Blue-

field, West Virginia, for mission with the Appalachian Service Project. Along with 80 laypersons of all ages, I had every intention of maximizing this trip for personal gain. What an ideal way to just dive in, I thought. I can immerse myself in initiating relationships, sharing my gifts and graces, and developing my capacity for leadership.

Two days into the trip, I woke up with a throbbing headache and a fever. This was not what I had planned! Clara and two other participants took great care of me along with two other youths who had fallen ill. When my conditions did not improve, another participant drove me the 5 1/2 hour trip back to Yorktown. Embarrassed and frustrated, I was concerned what church members would think of me. I blew my chance for them to get to know me!

It turns out that this was one of the most important lessons in faith and ministry anyone could ever learn: It's not about me. In their care for me, I learned that we glorify God by modeling Christ-like humility, service and love. Faith is so beautifully expressed in community. Ministry is shared and mutual, and I would soon crash and burn if I did not learn that lesson early, especially if I pursued pastoral ministry. Of course, years later, I still occasionally forget and have to re-learn this critical lesson! But St. Luke's taught me we were pilgrims together, walking with one another on the journey of grace. Calling 21 was truly a means of God's immeasurable grace, and for that, I praise and thank God. 

-Meghan Roth Clayton is associate pastor at Messiah UMC, Springfield

10 interns selected for 2015 Calling 21, Connection 21

This summer seven interns will participate in the 2015 Calling 21 program. **Casey Akers** will serve at Basic UMC, Staunton District; **Steven Field** will be at Belmont UMC, Richmond District; **Susan Pullin** will be at Braddock Street UMC, Winchester District; **Matt Simpson** at Charity UMC, Elizabeth River District; **JoAnn Batteiger** at Culpeper UMC, Charlottesville District; **Andrew Dietz** at Lane Memorial UMC, Lynchburg District; and **Virginia Greer** at St. Luke's UMC, York River District.

Three young people have been selected to participate in the 2015 Connection 21 program that includes working this summer in the Virginia Conference offices in Glen Allen. Interns will be **Elijah Ferebee**, **Michelle Hettmann** and **Sara Nichols**. Although assigned to the conference center, they will also relate to Boulevard UMC, Woodlake UMC and Welborne UMC in the Richmond District.

God kept calling...even though I turned a deaf ear

By Barbara A. Cousar, pastor of Horntown Charge, Eastern Shore



When I look back over my life, though there were trials and tribulations, I thought I was experiencing the best that life could offer. Due to spiritual immaturity, I did not realize the best was yet to come working for the Lord.

Being brought up in the church and reared by parents of strong faith, I knew the significance of prayer, praise and worship. Though I thanked God for my blessings, in my early adult life I do not recall asking or sincerely listening to God as to my call to ministry. Yet when I was very young, I felt what I know now was God wooing me. However, while enjoying the graces of God and working in the church, I do not recall being deeply in discernment of what God's call was on my life. Even though many people gave me confirmation regarding me becoming a minister, including Bishop Leontine T. Kelly, I turned a deaf ear to it.

In honesty, I dealt too much with the stereotype expectations of the life of a minister (no personal life of your own, care for the needs of others, homebound when not working, no fun). Feeling anxiety, I put me first and said, "God can't be calling me." I really enjoyed being an active participant in church, faithfully holding various positions and helping others, especially the marginalized. I felt this was sufficient response to my profession of faith. Thanks be to God for saving grace. In hindsight, I should have reflected upon what Frank Buechner wrote: "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."

I experienced the Holy Spirit of God calling me more than once, and did not respond. Then great tragedy hit home with a doctor's diagnosis of my father's terminal illness. I witnessed God's marvelous work of grace in the provision of personal care and six extended years of my father's life. I am reminded of 2 Kings 20 where God extended Hezekiah's life because of his faithfulness and cries to the Lord.

I not only acknowledged God's call but also received affirmation when I thanked God for what God was doing in my father's life and heard, "now what are you going to do for me?"

With faith in the discernment process of the quadrilateral, I began the process of attending seminary while being primary personal caretaker for my ailing father, transiting

from my home to my father's home and working. Eventually my father and I moved three-and-a-half hours away to my current appointment of a three-point charge. Though there were times when situations seemed insurmountable, I counted it all as joy for surely God did not bring me to leave me. The adversities of ministry are part of the journey that causes us to continually rely on hope, the hope that does not disappoint.

This vocation is a rewarding one, and my ministry is an awesome journey where I can, through the means of grace, truly spiritually experience Christ's life of service and suffering, death and the power of his resurrection. I am blessed to be able to be a blessing to others. It is good to know I am not on this journey alone, though sometimes it seems like it. Thanks be to God for strong praying persons in my life. As the songwriter wrote, "I am glad God pushed me, pushed me to be what he wanted me to be."

I went from putting out fires to starting them

By Jason Elmore, associate pastor at Bethia UMC, Chesterfield



In August 1993, a devastating F4 tornado blew through central Virginia causing significant damage in the City of Colonial Heights, killing three people and injuring almost 200 inside a Wal-Mart store. It was at that point I realized that I wanted to become a firefighter and emergency medical technician. I joined the City of Colonial Heights Fire Department in October 1993 before changing departments in

2001 to join Chesterfield County Fire and EMS.

For almost 22 years, I have dedicated my life to serving the public by putting out fires and providing emergency medical care for those in need. It wasn't until 2005 that I realized God was not only calling me to extinguish physical fires but God was also calling me to start a spiritual fire within the hearts of people.

My father was diagnosed with lung and brain cancer in 2005 and after a short battle went home to be with our Lord and Savior. It was during the process of grieving that I realized God was calling me to pastoral ministry.

I entered the candidacy process in 2006, became licensed in 2008 and was appointed as associate pastor at Bethia UMC in Chesterfield County. During the past seven years as a bi-vocational pastor, I have experienced the many similarities between my fire/EMS career and my pastoral calling. When a

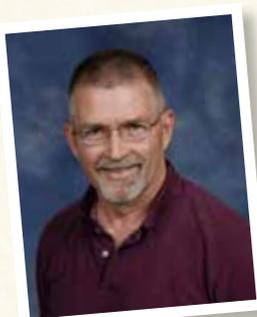
citizen picks up the phone and dials 911, they are experiencing something extremely traumatic to them, and their expectation is that we are going to respond to fix the problem. The same can be said in the parish setting. When a congregant has experienced spiritual or emotional trauma, their expectation is that we, as clergy, are going to respond to help fix the problem. The experience that I have gained over the past 20+ years in communicating with persons who have dealt with personal tragedy has been extremely valuable in my ministry.

One of the biggest differences between these two vocations is the fact that I have taught for years that fire was dangerous, scary and devastating. However, in the pastoral setting my goal is to ignite a fire in the hearts of people for Jesus Christ. I want everyone to feel the fire and power of the Holy Spirit and be able to say, "I felt my heart strangely warmed," as John Wesley did during his Aldersgate experience.

I have a few more years left before I retire from my career as a firefighter and enter into pastoral ministry full-time. Many times I have pondered why I did not answer God's call earlier in my life. But as I continue to experience ministry in the fire department and the church, I realize that I could never be what God has called me to be without my life experiences. The past 20 years have been preparing me for where God is leading for the remainder of this faith journey. It all comes together in God's time.

God systematically removed all the obstacles

By Dickie Coffey, pastor at Corinth UMC, Goochland



It is humbling, as a senior citizen and new to the ministry, being asked to share the story of my calling. For me, it has been a lifelong event beginning as a young teenager and strengthened over the past 40+ years.

My first pulpit experience came when my best friend and I presented the message during 4-H Sunday. After that experience, I spent time with the pastor discussing the call to the ministry. He was very encouraging and supportive as he knew it would not be long before college. At the time, I was feeling drawn to attend then Liberty College to major in religion and pursue the calling. (I guess by now you have figured out I was raised in a Baptist church.)

I was from a single-parent home, and my mother did not have the money for me to attend college nor would I

have received scholarships. However, at the same time, I was offered a job with the Chesterfield Fire Department. God was not pushing; I was being allowed to use free will to decide between two passions, church and firefighting.

Fast forward 34 years to retirement. That same feeling to attend what is now Liberty University was again tugging at my heart. At this time, I was actively involved in United Methodist Men, adult Sunday school and an ecumenical men's prayer breakfast study group at Mt. Pisgah UMC in Midlothian. A member of the men's prayer breakfast brought an application one morning and encouraged me to register for the Basic Lay Speaking Course. I completed the advanced course to become a Certified Lay Speaker.

Retirement offered the opportunity to spend more time studying scripture in preparation for Sunday school and the study group. I kept putting off the calling to attend college by using life's activities as road blocks.

After 36 years, I felt that God had begun a systematic process of removing the obstacles I was using to delay answering God's call. First, my wife decided that she no longer wanted to be married. We divorced after 23 years of marriage. I moved in with my stepfather to help care for my mother after she developed ALS, but she died only three days after I moved in. Within four months, my stepfather did not need my assistance.

In the early part of that year, God moved me to a 620-acre Boy Scout reservation away from the distractions I was using to delay God's calling. That fall I registered at Liberty University and began classes. At the same time, the camp ranger introduced me to the wonderful small congregation at Corinth UMC out near Westview on the James. I spent the next two years as camp director at Boy Scout summer camp and going to college while living in one room of a building at the camp. Except for my clothes and a few essential belongings, everything I owned was in storage.

In the summer of that second year, God introduced me to a wonderful Christian woman. The following year we married, and I was offered the job of full-time Camp Director. Six months after we were married, my wife was diagnosed with breast cancer. The next year was full of lessons on serving and putting others first as we experienced chemo, radiation and over 80 visits to many different doctors. College was put on hold until I could return to a partial schedule.

I am currently at the Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology at Virginia Union University completing a Master of Divinity and serving Corinth UMC, Goochland, as pastor. As you can see God had been calling for many years, and I had not been responding. One thing is certain: God will prepare you for the calling. Be available and willing. It's never too late to say, "...Yes, LORD, your servant is listening." (1 Sam 3:9) 

First class of Virginia Clergy Leadership Program nears completion

by Judy Worthington

The first class of the Virginia Clergy Leadership Program began meeting together in February 2014. It is a group of 20 clergy who applied and were selected to participate in a year and a half of intensive leadership training.

The program's primary goal is to strengthen and build more effective leaders so that we might strengthen and build more fruitful congregations. I was one of those selected to be a part of the training. We meet together for three days of training each quarter over 18 months.

In each session our focus is on one or more significant aspects of leading a church. We have been guided through the strategic planning process; learned how to effectively manage conflict and change; found new ways to express ourselves more effectively when preaching; and explored new practices for reaching out to new and diverse people in our communities.

We have had dynamic and inspiring leaders at each session including our facilitator, Russ Moxley from the Center for Creative Leadership, a nationally recognized organization with a mission "to advance the understanding, practice and development of leadership for the benefit of society worldwide."

Others who came to share their expertise and leadership include Dr. Christine Parker-Burkett, who teaches preaching at Duke Divinity School; Rev. Tom Berlin and Rev. Barbara Miner from Floris UMC, who led us in a discussion of worship planning; Phil Maynard, the author of *Shift: Helping Congregations Back into the Game of Effective Ministry*, who provided us with tools to help congregation members move through the discipleship path from exploring, to beginning, to growing, to becoming mature followers of Christ; and Mary Bendall, who led a discussion about the use of StrengthsFinders to help our



churches become aware of the unique gifts of each person in the congregation.

At the February 2015 session, our fifth, we sat around the dinner table one evening and discussed some of the benefits we had gained from having been a part of this program. One person said, "The unique combination of internal, self-examination and external, church leadership work provided valuable insights into ourselves and our congregations." Another person at the table commented on the importance of the peer relationships she had developed with other outstanding clergy from our Conference. Others at the table echoed these sentiments.

After dinner several of us stayed and continued the discussion as we roasted marshmallows in the fireplace and made S'mores. In warmer weather we often gather around someone with a guitar or banjo, or continue the discussions outdoors, or in our rooms. Each session has invited us into deeper dialogue with each other and into stretching and experimenting with new insights when we return to our congregations. 🍷

-Judy Worthington is pastor of Franktown Charge, Eastern Shore

Applications open for second Virginia Clergy Leadership Program

The Virginia Clergy Leadership Program (VCLP) is about to finish an excellent first year, and the leadership team announced the launch of a new cohort for 2015-16.

If you are an ordained elder or deacon, or associate member, or licensed local pastor (who has completed the educational requirements) who has been under appointment in faith community leadership for at least five years, you are eligible to apply.

The VCLP consists of six three-day sessions at the Roslyn Retreat Center in Richmond with top-notch faculty and expert practitioners and peer group learning. Participants participate at no cost to them other than their travel to the sessions. Applications are available now and due by May 1, including your district superintendent recommendation and SPRC endorsement.

This program is designed to be a "good to great" learning opportunity for fruitful, experienced clergy, and there are a limited number of spaces available in the cohort. Notifications will be made by May 15, and sessions will begin in September. For more information and to download an application, go to the conference website at <http://www.vaumc.org/VCLP>



Clergy Family Enrichment Committee helps clergy families live out God's call on their lives

By Lydia Weeks

Never in the history of Methodism has there been more diversity among United Methodist clergy and their families. They are often culturally dissimilar to the people in the communities they serve. Frequently they are dual-income households trying to juggle a schedule filled with work, school, church and sports activities; often feeling pressured to conform to what a "pastor's family" should look like, act like, sound like. While dealing with these and other pressures, they may also feel hard-pressed to find an extra few minutes for quiet and solitude to hear God's voice, to answer God's call.

Out of a desire to offer support, understanding and encouragement to these contemporary clergy families, the Virginia Conference Clergy Family Enrichment Committee was begun as a desire of Bishop Joe E. Pennel (who served the Virginia Conference from 1996 to 2004) and his wife, Janene. This committee is composed of clergy spouses and a member of the Board of Ordained Ministry. Through the years the committee has sponsored several annual events, including the Annual Spouses' Luncheon, held each June at Annual Conference, and the Annual Spouses' Retreat, held on a Friday and Saturday in March. Both of these events offer a time of fellowship, inspiration and renewal for all clergy spouses.

In looking further at issues that affect clergy families, parsonages and moving issues emerged as growing con-

cerns. Recently the Clergy Family Enrichment Committee worked with the Cabinet to update Minimum Standards for Parsonages, Moving Expenses Guidelines, and all the forms and other support documents related to parsonages and moving.

For a number of years the committee sponsored a "Welcome Lunch" or brunch at Annual Conference. Although the event will be a little less formal this year, it will still be a time to gather and celebrate the beginning of pastoral ministry for those who are accepting their first appointment in the Virginia Conference. Spouses are always encouraged to attend to meet and greet others new to the conference and to their districts.

This committee is also responsible for the Thrival Kit which is given to all new clergy. The Thrival Kit is a journal of inspiration and guidance offering practical information and a road map for new clergy in Virginia and their families. This resource is now available in a PDF format on the conference website at: www.vaumc.org/ThrivalKit.

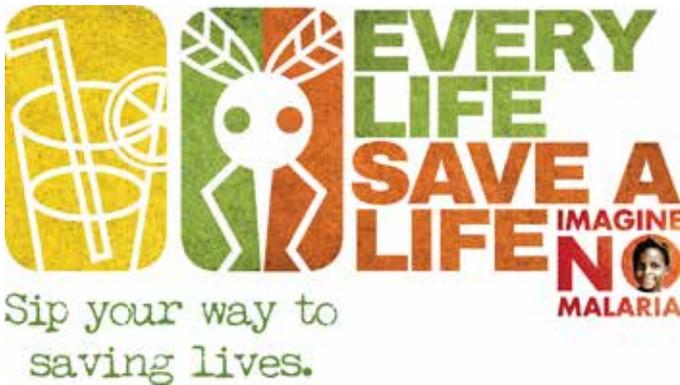
The Clergy Family Enrichment Committee seeks to find new ways to encourage fellowship among clergy families, especially among the rising number of male clergy spouses. Plans are underway for a baseball day for clergy families. There has been some interest in a camp or event for children of clergy. With the rise of social media as a primary means of "fellowship" for many in our society, the committee recognizes that there is still a need for clergy families to be physically present with each other if they are to effectively know and support each other through their journey.

It is the hope of the committee that in providing these events and resources, a climate of caring for each other will be fostered among our clergy families. Through an intentional program of fellowship and support, it is our prayer that all of us can faithfully live out God's call on our lives. 🍀

-Lydia Weeks is chair of the Virginia Conference Clergy Family Enrichment Committee



EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY



Get ready to sell lemonade to save lives on April 25

Bishop Young Jin Cho is asking all churches in the Virginia Conference to observe World Malaria Day – Saturday, April 25, – by selling lemonade to raise money for Imagine No Malaria and “sip your way to saving lives.”

This will be part of the Virginia Conference initiative, approved at the 2014 Annual Conference session, to raise enough money before 2015 Annual Conference to save at least 100,000 lives from the deadly disease of malaria. Every church and every United Methodist in the Virginia Conference are urged to take part.

“World Malaria Day is Saturday, April 25,” Bishop

Cho said. “This day is used to increase awareness about the preventable and treatable disease of malaria around the world. The Virginia Conference is excited to announce our plans for the day. We would like all of our churches across the state to participate by hosting lemonade stands in our communities. We want to connect our neighbors with our churches and help save the lives of thousands in Africa suffering from malaria. I imagine more than a thousand lemonade stands all over the conference.”

Save the date and begin making your plans now.

Wondering why? Wondering how? Watch these videos

But maybe you’re asking, “Why should we do this? How do we do this?” Or maybe you’re thinking, “We don’t have any children in my congregation. We’re all too old for lemonade. I don’t know how to build a lemonade stand.” Well ... to view videos that might help you find answers, go to the conference YouTube site, <https://www.youtube.com/user/vaumc-videos>. You can watch them and show them to your congregation. You’ll find three videos: full-length World Malaria Day video (3 minutes, 36 seconds), Kids at Lemonade Stand (2 minutes, 14 seconds), and Cabinet says: “Sip your way to saving lives” (1 minute, 39 seconds).

Promotional materials available to help you sell lemonade

As you make your plans to sell lemonade on April 25, you can take advantage of promotional materials that have been designed to help you notify your church members and your community. Go to www.vaumc.org/imaginenomalaria to download graphics for promotional materials, including posters that you can print out and put up in your church and around your community; logos to use in your newsletters and on your materials (including your lemonade stand); graphics for your website, Facebook and Twitter pages; postcards to mail out or hand out around your neighborhood; “Thank you” cards (with facts about the deadly disease of malaria) that can be given to those who purchase lemonade or make contributions; inserts for worship bulletins and more.

Tell us about your plans for April 25

The conference wants to let the world know about all of our lemonade stands, so you need to let the conference know about your plans. Go to www.vaumc.org/imaginenomalaria to submit information about your lemonade stand. If you have questions or need more information, contact Maria Maxwell, Virginia Conference Imagine No Malaria field coordinator, at (804) 521-1160 or MariaMaxwell@vaumc.org.



DISCIPLES HELPING TO TRANSFORM THE WORLD



▲ The Rev. Bill Moberly, associate pastor of Senior Adults and Visitation at **St. Matthews UMC (Alexandria District)**, gave the opening prayer at the Virginia General Assembly in Richmond on Feb. 23. He was asked to give the prayer by Del. Jim LeMunyon (67th district) in recognition of his previous work as coordinator for the CIA's Chaplains Program.

The congregation of **St. Mark's UMC in Daleville (Roanoke District)** responded in a huge and very generous way to a recent Soup for Seniors food drive. Approximately 2,106 food items, including soup, tuna, peanut butter, crackers, bread and muffin mixes and more, were donated in a three-week period. The St. Mark's "TAME" Committee sponsored the food drive for the League of Older Americans Soup for Seniors annual event. They collect and distribute soups and other items that elders can have available to bridge the gap in their food budget. "TAME" is an acronym for "That All May Eat."

With snow and ice on the ground, the Rev. Brian Sixbey, pastor of **First UMC Fox Hill (York River District)**, decided to cancel the Ash Wednesday service. In its place, he offered "drive-by ashes" for part of the afternoon. "This way the older folks don't have to get on the ice — or anybody really," said Sixbey. The drive-by ashes

distribution was an experiment — only about four or five families had shown up to receive ashes 45 minutes into the one-hour window he had allotted. However, hosting the drive-by ashes was also a last-minute decision and the first time he offered it, he said. "I don't know if we'll do this every year, but I'm glad we did it this year." — Reported by Andrea Castillo, The Daily Press ▼



After serving as church secretary and administrative assistant at **Main Street UMC, Suffolk (James River District)**, for 35 years, Virginia McNeill is retiring. She came to work in 1980 and served nine pastors. "Virginia has been a tremendous asset to the church and is well known for her outstanding record keeping," said Barbara McPhail, Congregational Care Coordinator at Main Street UMC. "Even though she is not a member of the church she is certainly a part of

the family and she knows the church family very well." Former pastor, Bob Parks said, "Virginia was always dependable, punctual, loyal and dedicated to her job. I never had to ask when she would take vacation, it was always the same weeks every year. She knew Main Street and its members better than anyone. Her confidentiality was superb. Her demeanor was always the same. She never wore her feelings on her sleeve. God bless you, Virginia, you will be missed!" ▼



To have your church or church organization featured in the "Disciples helping to transform the world" section, e-mail your story and photos to LindaRhodes@vaumc.org by the first of the month. Stories should be approximately 100 words, and photos should be 300 dpi jpgs.

LIVING THE WORD



Keri Burkholder Marston is the president of the Board of Directors of Virginia United Methodist Communications, Inc. She serves as Communication Coordinator on the staff of Shady Grove UMC in Mechanicsville, Richmond District. She is a graduate of James Madison University with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Communication Studies. Prior to serving at Shady Grove, she served at Trinity UMC in Richmond and Timberlake UMC in Lynchburg. She and her husband, Chris, have two daughters, Rebecca and Rachael, and are also members of Shady Grove UMC in Mechanicsville.

April 5, 2015

Look to the Sky

1 Corinthians 15:1-11, 20-22

It was two days after Christmas. My grandparents were preparing to drive back to Pennsylvania after having spent Christmas with us. It had been their first time to see my dad preach as he had just been appointed a pastor that previous July. I remember my grandparents walking out the front door of our small brick parsonage that morning, getting in their car. My grandmother paused as she looked back at me and simply raised her hand up and gently put it down, a slow and almost solemn wave goodbye. It is an image I have not forgotten in 22 years.

A couple of hours later, my parents and I would receive word that there had been an accident, a terrible accident that claimed the life of my grandparents as they were driving out of our town that day. I remember the shock, the sadness, the confusion. I remember thinking, as I often have over the years, who ministers to the minister? That day, as word of my grandparents' deaths spread through my dad's four small country churches, I remember parishioners arriving at our door step, one of them had actually been a paramedic who had worked the scene of the accident. He had not made the initial connection. Our district superintendent came to console my family. My small house was bustling with people giving their condolences, hugs and support. I remember trying to find the good in the bad. I remember over and over saying in some ways it was a blessing, they went together and one would never have to live without the other.

By early evening, we had packed our suitcases, ready to make the long drive to Pennsylvania where my grandparents would be laid to rest. The day had been long, the hours emotional, the near future uncertain in my 11-year-old mind. However, as I walked out my front door and down my sidewalk that cold December evening, the same sidewalk I had waved to my grandmother from earlier that morning, I remember looking to the sky and there in front of me was a cross made out of clouds. In that very moment, the stress, the confusion, the heaviness of the day lifted, and I remember knowing, deep down, that everything was going to be

okay. God was there for me and that was my sign that no matter the uncertainty, things were going to be okay. That moment in my childhood has helped shape my faith as I move through life. It has taught me that through the ups and downs life brings, through the happy times, the hardships, the changes and challenges, God sends us what we need.

What events in your life have shaped your faith or your identity? This Easter season, I encourage you to reflect on this and share them with someone you love.

April 12, 2015

Show the LOVE

1 John 3:11-24

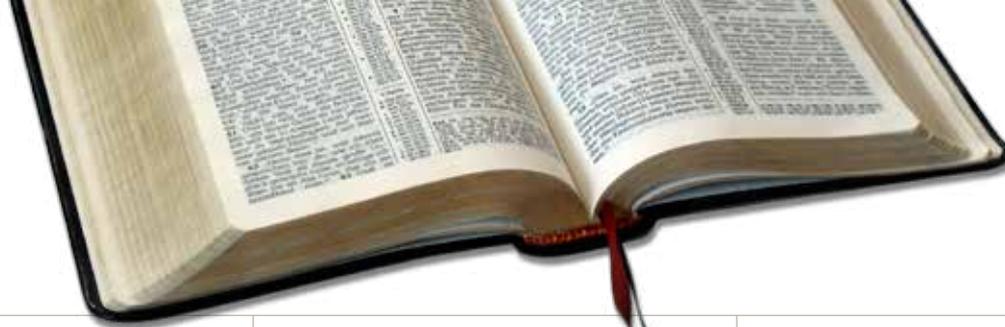
"For this is the message you have heard from the beginning that we should love one another."

-1 John 3:11

Traditionally, we know that Easter is the most-attended Sunday of the year. Wouldn't it be great to maintain the thrill and excitement of Easter year-round? As Christ's disciples, we are called to reflect Christ's love as we witness to others sharing the good news of Jesus Christ and the Easter message. There are many ways we can do this, but wouldn't it be great to get creative with our expressions of love?

Within the past couple of years, the "Virginia is For Lovers" campaign has created LOVEworks, giant LOVE signs around the state. They are key photo opportunities, and you can find them everywhere, from the race track to rest areas, museums and other tourist attractions. These LOVE signs have become so popular that people even travel the state seeing how many of these LOVE signs they can visit.

Wouldn't it be exciting if our United Methodist churches got in on sharing the LOVE? In a time when it seems so much divides us as a nation, and at times a denomination, wouldn't it be great to follow Christ's call to rise above the divisions and simply love? What if we could conceptualize Christ's love by creating our own LOVE signs? With a vast array of mission opportunities and an entire gospel story to tell the world, wouldn't it be great to catch the eyes of people all over the state by sharing the love of Christ in a unique and fun way? The challenge is



before us. How can your church show the LOVE?

April 19, 2015

It Takes a Village

1 John 4:13-5:5

You have often heard the phrase “It takes a village to raise a child.” Through my almost six years of being a parent, I feel truer words could not be stated. I am so thankful for the village that surrounds my children in love, especially that village that resides within my church family.

Just the other day, I was singing “Jesus Loves Me” to my oldest daughter, Rebecca, who will be 6 in June. As I was singing in the middle of my kitchen, I noticed my 2-year-old chiming in with me. Now, you have to know that my precious 2-year-old, Rachael, was slower to speak than some children her age and just within the last six months has really taken off in her speech. I was so surprised to hear her singing many of the words right alongside me. It took a minute or two for me to realize that her very dedicated Sunday school teacher had been teaching her to sing this song each week in class. What a gift I received that day because I belong to this “village,” this worshipping community that invests its time in children.

As a member of this community, however, it is not just enough to receive, we are each called to give back. While my gifts and talents may not reside in teaching, there are certainly other gifts that can be shared with our village, to help enable it to reach out beyond itself.

My church’s newly designed mission statement states our mission is to reach out and serve all people as we grow in relationship with Jesus Christ and each other. As a church, we have acknowledged that this is where the discipleship process starts, for one

cannot become a disciple if he or she has not first been welcomed and shown the love of Jesus Christ. I have witnessed first-hand the difference it makes when this welcome is intentional. Everyone has different gifts, that of hospitality, teaching, singing, organizing, administrating, building, witnessing, cooking, mentoring and so much more. It causes me to stop and reflect, maybe not only does it take a village to help raise a child, but it takes a village to help make a disciple.

April 26, 2015

Deceivers in Disguise

2 John 8

Every now and then I will receive an e-mail or read a Facebook post by someone who is forwarding on a specific “news story” or piece of questionable “factual” information that seems so off base. I stop and think, “Come on, let’s consider the source.” Time after time, I see the sender has been greatly deceived by the story and has bought into it “hook, line and sinker.” How unfortunate! In today’s day and age, we find some news stories and even some supposed news organizations shared through social media to be made up entities used to deceive people into thinking a story is real when in actuality it is not. Even if you aren’t on social media, these same news items are shared around church dinner tables and as side conversations before and after Sunday school each week.

It is so important that we as Christians be aware of such deceivers and focus on the true message of Jesus Christ. It is so important that we as Christians be able to think for ourselves, read the scriptures for ourselves, and pray that the true meaning of scripture be revealed to

us as we interpret the words on each page. There are deceivers out there who want to divert our focus away from the real reasons we are here.

So why are we here? Ultimately, we are here to make disciples of Jesus Christ. We are here to invite others, to be welcoming and show hospitality to strangers. Making new disciples requires being willing to extend a personal invitation. We are here to grow in our faith and knowledge of Jesus Christ and help others to do the same. This occurs as we become accountable to a small group, become active in a Bible study, and not only attend but actively participate in worship on a weekly basis.

Next, to drown out the deceivers we must step up to the plate and serve. By serving we reach out to others with a love that says your needs are more important than mine. We step out with the heart of Jesus and unselfishly, not begrudgingly, give of ourselves. We do not let the liars and deceivers, the naysayers, drown out the message of Christ’s love. We, instead, must stand up for what we know is right.

It is not enough to just go to church; we have to start being the church. How can we be the hands and feet of Jesus in our community? How can we make sure that his message is heard above all others? It may be a challenge, but it is a challenge worth taking, a mission worth accepting, a call worth answering. The result is a church worth sharing. 🍷

CLERGY & DIACONAL

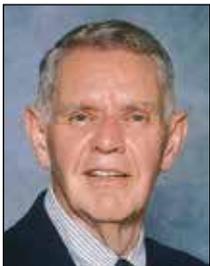


DEATHS



The Rev. H. Warren Landis, 91, died Feb. 18, 2015. He served several churches in the Virginia Conference, including Phoebus in Hampton for

eight years. His final assignment was as chaplain at the Hampton Veterans Administration Medical Center. He also served as an active duty and reserve Air Force chaplain. He graduated from Shenandoah University, James Madison University, Emory University Candler School of Theology and Boston University with a Doctorate of Ministry. As a veteran of WWII, he participated in the Normandy invasion and the Battle of the Bulge where he was captured by the Germans on Christmas Day and imprisoned in two concentration camps. During that time he was wounded twice, but was sent back to continue with his unit. He received various commendations for his service and was led during the war to study for the ministry upon returning home. He served as chaplain of the local and state Ex-POW and Purple Heart organizations. After retirement, he served as a volunteer chaplain at the Hampton VA Medical Center.



The Rev. Robert Lewis Watts, 79, of Roanoke, died Feb. 23, 2015. The Rev. Watts was a retired elder. He began his ministerial career in 1961 at Rem-

ington. He went on to serve Calvary in Salem, Highland Park in Roanoke, Lane Memorial, Court Street in Lynchburg, Ghent, Washington Street in the Alexandria District, and Greene Memorial in Roanoke. He retired in 2001.



The Rev. John Nevin Wimer Jr., 84, died at his home on March 8, 2015, with his family by his side after a long battle with Parkinson's disease. John was

a graduate of Kempsville High School after which he studied Aircraft and Engine Mechanics at William & Mary-VPI, Norfolk. He served in the U.S. Air Force earning the rank of Staff Sergeant at which time he received the call to the ministry. He attended Wake Forest College and Drew University. He was fully ordained in The United Methodist Church in 1964 and served for 36 years at churches in New York and Virginia. While serving First UMC in Hampton, he met his wife of 47 years who unflinchingly travelled with him on their journey in finding faith in God and sharing God's Kingdom.

Anne Duff Williams, 85, of Virginia Beach, died Feb. 5, 2015, after a lengthy battle with Alzheimer's. She was the widow of **the Rev. Joseph T. Williams**.

Beth Joyner Conerly, 87, of Spring, Texas, (formerly of Sandy Ridge, N.C.) died Feb. 16, 2015, at her home in The Village of Gleannloch Farms following a long illness. She and her late husband, **the Rev. Robert H. "Bob" Conerly**, served through The United Methodist Church for 50 years. This included pastorates in Mississippi, Virginia and North Carolina and 28 years as missionaries in Mexico.

Alice Lindsey Peters, 91, died Feb. 18, 2015, in Richmond. She was widow of **the Rev. Howard Peters** and mother of **the Rev. John Peters**, retired.

Frances Anderson Crowder, widow of **the Rev. Joseph S. Crowder Jr.**, died March 1, 2015. She and her husband served churches in the Virginia Conference for 37 years.

Oliver K. Nelan Jr., 84, of Chester, died Jan. 2015. He was the husband of **Beverly Nelan**, a retired local pastor in the Virginia Conference.

Rachel Kirby Pollard, 101, of Charlottesville, died March 1, 2015. Born Nov. 27, 1913, in Albemarle County, she was the daughter of James Henry and Fannie Ann (Bowen) Kirby. In addition to her parents, she was preceded in death by her husband of 70 years, **the Rev. Eugene P. Pollard**.

Frank E. Clegg Jr., 86, of Columbus, Ohio, died March 7, 2015. He is the father of **the Rev. Judy Clegg Oguich**, ordained deacon serving as Minister of Adult Ministries at Trinity UMC, Richmond. Clegg was a life-long Methodist and served on the boards of several of the United Methodist homes in Ohio, as well on committees in the local churches he attended. He is survived by his wife of 61 years, Mildred Clegg, five children and their families.

Delois Rodda McCormick, 63, of Fredericksburg, died Feb. 18, 2015. She is survived by her husband, **John B. McCormick**, who is on Honorable Location with the Virginia Conference.

Susan Perkins, mother of **Nathan Perkins**, died Feb. 22, 2015. Nathan is the husband of **the Rev. Christina**

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Perkins serving Crewe UMC, Farmville District.

Benjamin Harrison Taylor, 72, of Yorktown, died Feb. 16, 2015. He was the father of **the Rev. Ben Taylor**, who serves the North Brunswick Charge, Farmville District.

Jane B. Baisey, mother of **the Rev. Randy Baisey** serving the West Mecklenburg Charge, Farmville District, died Feb. 12, 2015.

Alma Elizabeth "Libbie" Marable Love, 92, of Kenbridge, mother of **Mary Jean Lester** and mother-in-law of **the Rev. Tom Lester**, pastor of Crawford UMC, James River District, died Feb. 12, 2015.

Madison Elsavan "Van" Shamburger III died Feb. 8, 2015. He is the father of **Bane Vaughn** and father-in-law of **the Rev. Rob Vaughn**, pastor at Community of Faith UMC, Arlington District.

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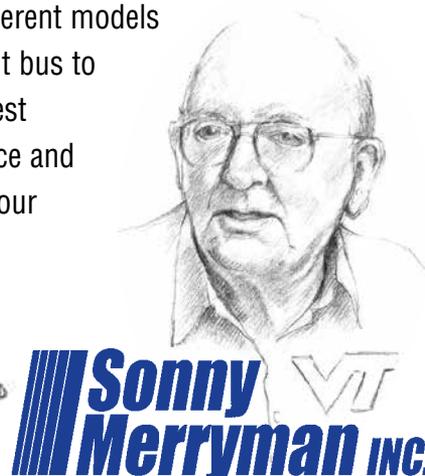
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FROM THE BISHOP



Called by God

Friends,

May the grace and peace from our Lord be with you.

April is the month of Easter. God raised Jesus from the dead. The world said, “No” to Jesus by crucifying him on the cross. Many people thought that was the end of Jesus’ life and ministry. Injustice and death seemed to win the battle. But the victory of darkness did not last long. On the third day, God said “Yes” to Jesus by raising him from the dead. The power of love and truth finally won the battle over sin and death.

We are called to this Good News. We are Easter people. Nothing can shake our hope in Jesus Christ. We believe that truth and life will prevail in the end. Sometimes we experience that the power of evil and injustice win the battle. Our hope in Jesus Christ faces challenges and questions.

However, please do not be afraid or discouraged. We are called to the life of hope and victory. By raising Jesus from death and darkness, our God sent us a clear message that God and the divine truth will prevail in the end. Let us not give up. Hold our hope in Jesus Christ firmly.

The risen Christ is still alive. Since Jesus’ resurrection, we have never heard that Jesus died again. This means our Lord Jesus Christ is still alive. This risen Lord has touched our lives. He has called us to life. I love the refrain part of the United Methodist Hymn #367:

*“... He touched me, O he touched me,
and O the joy that floods my soul!
Something happened, and now I
know, he touched me and made me
whole.”*

If we truly know and believe that the risen Christ has touched us, our hearts will be filled with joy and gratitude. This is truly an amazing thing! Our Lord knows us and loves us even though we have many weaknesses and shortcomings. None of us are qualified to be called by God. However, our Lord has touched us and called us to a new life. And our God wants to use us. What an honor and privilege it is to be called by God!

Some of us were called to the ordained ministry. We were called to the ministry of word, sacrament, order and service. In the case of deacons, they were called to word, service, compassion and justice. Their calling is examined and affirmed by the church. This is a candidacy process, and during this process they prepare themselves and go through a discerning process.

But God’s call to ministry is not limited to people who feel a call to the ordained ministry. God also calls all laity to ministry. The content of laity’s ministries will be different from

the ministry of the clergy, but all of us, whether clergy or laity, are called into God’s ministry. We are called as partners in ministry.

When I attended the closing service of the Lay Servant Academy last February, I told them their ministries are more than volunteer work. Their ministries are their responses to God’s call to ministry. After the service, one lay servant came to me and said that he had thought that lay servant ministry was one of the volunteer works, but now he was beginning to see his ministry as God’s calling. It was an eye-opening experience for him. He and I had a joyful conversation.

If we truly believe that all of us were touched and called by almighty God for Christ’s ministry, we will see our ministry from a different perspective. How gracious it is for us to be called by God. What a great honor and privilege it is for us to be invited to take part in Christ’s ministry. Now, we can serve the Lord with deep gratitude and joy. Ministry will be no longer a burden, but a joy and honor.

In this season of Easter joy, I pray that all of us will give thanks to God for the hope we have in Jesus Christ. I pray that all of us will experience joy and gratitude in our ministries. Jesus Christ is risen! Yes, He is risen, indeed, and he has touched us! Thanks be to God. 🍷

In our Lord,

Young Jin Cho

ONE LAST WORD

Can your church meet UMCOR's Thousand Relief-Kit Challenge?



By Susan Kim

There is a most joyful assembly line at Messiah United Methodist Church, in Springfield, as people stand beside long tables laden with towels, soap, bandages and other supplies. They are putting together United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) health kits that will ultimately connect the local church with people in need across the world.

Assembling UMCOR kits is an activity that draws people of all ages, says Eileen Angle-Sanders, a member of Messiah. In the past, she has organized the assembly of cleaning buckets.

"You can get people of any age to help," she said. "On one occasion, we had mothers read the story of Noah's ark with their children to make the connection with floods."

As Patti O'Neill, a parish nurse, watched the health kits come together, she was especially moved when she thought of the people who would use the supplies. "If everybody shows up here at the church, something good will happen. That's what's happening right now," she said.

Nicholas Jaeger, an UMCOR program manager who has overseen relief-kit distributions across the world, raised a question to churches everywhere: why not put this challenge to your church, or to your conference?

"Could your church meet the Thousand-Kit Challenge?" he asked. "Over

the past couple of years our inventory has been low. We're looking for ways to engage people in assembling kits."

Kathy Kraiza, UMCOR's executive director of Relief Supplies, asked, "Wouldn't it be great if we could get churches to challenge each other within their conferences—and then conference-to-conference and then jurisdiction-to-jurisdiction? We could even get small churches to challenge larger churches if it was tallied by number of kits per number of church members," Kraiza suggested.

At Messiah, church members collected money to purchase the items for the health kits. They then put together instruction sheets for assembly, set up long tables, and coordinated times for kids and adults to assemble. As they worked together assembling kits, they found themselves talking about the rapidly changing needs of the world, and how the church connects people through love and compassion.

This year, UMCOR marks 75 years of being with those in times of crisis. Visit UMCOR's anniversary resources page at www.umcor.org/umcor/umcor-75th/umcor75 and download a Relief-Kit Assembly Fair Guide to help you take on the Thousand-Kit Challenge. 📄

This article was reprinted from the United Methodist Committee on Relief website, umcor.org. Susan Kim is a journalist and a regular contributor to www.umcor.org.



Tweets heard 'round the conference

Larry Davies retweeted The Daily Show @TheDailyShow #TDSBreakingNews McDonalds to stop serving chicken treated with antibiotics. Chickens treated with antibiotics forced to eat at Burger King.

Ed Johnson, Jr @edsedge I wonder how many #preachers are changing #worship experience this weekend to focus on #perspective due to #TheDress?

Alan Combs @thricemantis The FCC just said it is white and gold

bethgivens5 retweeted God @TheTweetOfGod Is this planet blue and white, brown and green, or on the brink of total catastrophe?

Bert Cloud @bertcloud Yes, I'm that guy that snow walks at 4:30 in the morning. @FortEustis / Newport News, Virginia



James Money @doc_money Omg everyone grab all the milk and bread you can find before the snowapocalypse ! #wasted #food

Lisa McGehee retweeted Shane Claiborne @ShaneClaiborne How can we worship a homeless man on Sunday and ignore one on Monday?



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