

April 2017

Advocate

**Rolling out
the church
"welcome"
mat**

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**Virginia Advocate**The official magazine of
the Virginia Conference of
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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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PILLOW TALK

**Madeline Pillow**
Editor

A season of learning

The season of Lent will be in full swing by the time this magazine is off to print and into your hands. It is personally my favorite because it is a season that lasts. I feel that there is enough time to learn lessons, push yourself and find some way to grow.

It's a season where we usually give something up, but it is also a time where we can add something to reflect on and ponder what it means that we are dust and to that we shall return.

Lent is a time of repentance in preparation for the coming of Easter.

Wouldn't it be interesting this season as Christians to deny ourselves. I'm not talking about denying ourselves sweets or meat (which may really work in self-reflection, in which case I applaud you!), but I mean to deny our self.

What if this season we used this time to learn more about those we don't know? What if we read books about those from different races and creeds than ourselves?

What if we found a way whether through our churches or local organizations to be in ministry with those who are different? What if we think of things that scare us and do them throughout the season whether that's talking to the homeless you encounter or trusting in the path God has given you even if you can't see the path in front of you?

There are plenty of ways to deny ourselves this Lent, but let's also for the sake of our world and for its transformation see what denying our normal self can do. 🍷

Madeline C. Pillow

TABLE OF CONTENTS



SECTIONS

- 4-8 Commentary
- 9-13 Virginia News
- 14 Local Church News
- 15 Equipping for Ministry
- 24-25 Living the Word
- 26-27 Events
- 28-29 Clergy & Diaconal
- 30 From the Bishop
- 31 One Last Word

FEATURE

- 16-23 Rolling out the church "welcome" mat

STORIES

- 7 Learn about the recent VIM trip to the Holy Land
- 11 What are apportionments?
- 12 Experiencing ministry in Cambodia: A reflection from a recent pilgrimage



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LETTERS



Discussion of the unjust judge and the progressive approach

"In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected people." (Luke 18:2 CEB)

In this parable, Jesus draws a connection between the lack of respect for the Lord and a lack of respect for people. An authority that does not fear the Lord is an authority that will not respect the Spirit of God and will not respect the spiritual nature of people.

Progressive believers have repeatedly identified *Hollingsworth v. Perry* (a series of U.S. federal court cases that legalized same-sex marriage in California) as the justification for the progressive understanding of our sense of being. The non-religious experts of this source have limited their understanding to the "psychological" sense of being of humanity while the spiritual nature of humanity has been ignored. These professional experts have provided an understanding of the body and mind but not the heart and soul.

The Lord's instruction did not limit the understanding of our sense of being to a psychological component. The first commandment as revealed in

Mark 12:30 (NKJV) states "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength."

Various petitions and resolutions by progressive believers have referred to the more general term of one's "state of being" but not the more specific term "my soul."

By using the more general term about our "sense of being" it appears that nonbelievers and believers are united in understanding. But the reality is there is no agreement about our sense of being. There are those who believe only in the perishable nature of our sense of being and there are those who "believe in ... the life everlasting." (The Apostles' Creed)

Progressive believers are seeking a path to be united with the understanding of the non-religious experts and are willing to be ruled by authorities who view humanity as non-spiritual beings like the "unjust judge" in Luke, chapter 18.

In 1794, one of our founding fathers condemned such an authority that ruled people based on the "perishable nature of man." In his review of the French Revolution, Alexander Hamilton attacked the understanding "that religious opinion of any sort is unnecessary to Society." Hamilton viewed

these "theories of government" as "unsuited to the nature of man." Hamilton describes the French Revolution as an attack "upon the Christian Revelation; for which natural Religion was offered as the substitute." (Hamilton Papers, Library of Congress)

Substituting an understanding about our "sense of being" is just one component in developing a "substitute religion." An entire set of essential biblical principles will need to be identified and replaced with a set of essential non-biblical principles.

A substitute religion would need to provide an alternative understanding about gender identity, about the authority of gender designation, about designating a sovereign moral authority, about the origin of life, about our relationship with earth and about the designation of a unifying object of affection greater than oneself. ❧

– Ed Craun, Mt. Solon, Va.



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

COMMENTARY

Looking at the church of tomorrow

By Bill Chaffin

We live in the day, *carpe diem*, and only seem to look at tomorrow when planning for vacation, a graduation, a retirement or (if we serve on a Cabinet, executive committee or panel) a long-range plan. We pray for many things. Many of us pray for our family's faith and future. We may pray for our country and its future. I believe I am like many and try to often pray for my church. This prayer is for The United Methodist Church and where we are and where we may be with the decisions that lie before us.

Do we pray for our home church? Do we lift prayers for the building, our clergy, our mission and our church family? Do we find ourselves praying for those outside our church?

If you are like me, and I suppose many are, we pray for our church of today. Our prayers do not likely reach into the next month or year. I am pretty sure those prayers are not for our home church to be vibrant and healthy years from now, after we are gone.

Look around your church. Think of your small group, of your Sunday

school class, of your Sunday morning services. Who fills the pews? Who are sitting in all those chairs? More than likely they are ones much like you and your family. We are all drawn to ones like us.

I imagine most of you reading these words are at least 40 or maybe even 60; perhaps 70. If so, where will your home church be in 20 to 30 years? Now look back around at those pews, those chairs and who comes in your doors.

The Virginia Conference has 1,169 congregations. Bishop Lewis stated, in one of her great Chat and Chew events (make sure you attend the one in your district!) that 634 of those churches have under 50 in regular attendance or membership. If your church is in that category, no matter your age, can you imagine what it will look like in 20 years? What do you have to offer to that young family who may visit? What program offerings do you have for a young mom and dad? What programs do you have for their sons and daughters?

If you have programs, are you the leader? Once again, where will your church be in 20 years?

Our answer is simple. Bring youth programs into your church. Make sure they get formed correctly, staffed with trained leaders and are supported by the

church. Contact your local Boy Scout or Girl Scout Council and tell them you want to start a Scout troop. It doesn't matter if you don't currently have youth. Remember the "Field of Dreams" line, "Build it and they will come"?

The Boy Scouts of America will send a representative to you to plan a Join Scouting event. If you don't know who to speak with, contact your Scouting Coordinator. First, contact me at bcumcbsa@juno.com/804-356-6075 and I will make sure the right people get involved. Remember, the *Discipline* of our church says "We

shall support youth serving agencies such as the Boy Scouts of America and the Girl Scouts USA." This is for our youth and it is for our church. Tomorrow may never look brighter! 

— Bill Chaffin is The Virginia Conference Scouting Coordinator



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COMMENTARY

Working to influence institutional injustices

By Lori Valentine de Segovia

On a beautiful Sunday morning Feb. 12, what did I see on the way to church in northern Virginia? Four separate police cars stationed along the way. Notable for this area because I have only seen one patrol along this route at any time of day; one officer was positioned on a corner of a place that helps refugee and immigrant families.

Photo Credit: Joanna Linter



This was the same weekend when ICE (Immigrations and Customs Enforcement) raids collected immigrants in accordance with the new executive orders.

A friend of mine stated, "I am sure they were helping with traffic." This is a view from one cultural lens, but do you find it a coincidence that this positioning is in visual range of a mosque? If you turn look at it *Patas Arriba*¹, you understand this is the same corridor that was "raided" less than 24 hours prior.

A news release from National Public Radio (NPR) recently warned about legislation for the use of local and state police forces to enforce executive orders in the state of Virginia. I have already seen this in varying forms for years. If you advocate for a minority or the oppressed, this is not news; this is a way of life. So many are shocked that these actions are now taking place on North American soil, but they have been for a long time. I have seen them out of the limelight, but since January these actions are now permissible, acceptable and form a new reality. I see them on each corner in my community each day.

Over the past 20 years, I have spent a majority of my professional life in education and advocacy. I must admit, the irony of how God equips us over our

journey in this realm has not escaped me over the past few months.

We now face the issues of "going through immigration" in an ever-changing landscape. We face the same challenges as other immigrant families who wonder "would it be better to go back?" We plan to visit our family this summer, in the full knowledge that one will most likely not be able to return because of travel bans or quota limits based on certain countries of origin. We are among the countless immigrant families that have to update ourselves daily on the changes. We who have made it part of our Christian testimony to "play by the immigration rules." We've planned on what to do if detained on the way home, or if there is an unexpected knock at the door.

Despite all the uncertainty and the endless streams of media and messages, I still see hope. I see community organizers and advocacy groups mobilizing so fast, one can hardly keep up. I see unity amongst groups, where strife and division used to be the only common thread. I see the kindness of others working toward the unified goal of no longer being the oppressed one, amongst the countless others who marched on Washington this past Jan. 21. I see the

COMMENTARY

formation of a new generation of leadership in unanticipated ways. I see individuals' agency morphing into group agency; that agency is attempting to influence institutional injustices. I was asked, "What effect can a march really do?" For those of us who showed up, are speaking up and living out the call, the historical discourse will tell if we had an effect. We will measure our success in the foundation we lay for our children's future and the lives we touch by doing so. 

– Lori Valentine de Segovia serves on the SEJ Hispanic-Latino Caucus and is co-chair of the Virginia Conference's Committee for Ethnic Minority Concerns and Advocacy (CEMCA) group. She is married to the Rev. Gustavo Segovia.

¹ This is a saying that means "to turn the world on its ear." It also is title of a work of literature that is the view of the world from the Southern Hemisphere, or a Latin American perspective. *Patás Arriba* by Eduardo Galeano.

Seeing "Living Stones" in the Holy Land

By John Copenhaver

Our Volunteers in Mission (VIM) team was honored and humbled to spend so much time with the "living stones" of the Holy Land.

"Like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." 1 Peter 2.5 (NRSV)

Both the Rev. Kristen Brown, a pastor assigned to the Methodist Liaison Office in Jerusalem, and Elias Ghareeb, the Eastern Orthodox manager of Grace Tours, distinguish between "dead stone" and "living stone" tours. A dead stone tour consists of visiting the holy sites of the Bible and seeing the remnants

and ruins of sacred sites, along with the churches and shrines built since then to commemorate the life of Jesus and the history of Israel. These visits may also include serious study and stirring worship, but seldom include genuine engagement with the "living stones" in the Holy Land, those who are the descendants of the first followers of Jesus.

A "living stone" tour may include all the elements mentioned above, but also includes meeting with, listening to and breaking bread with Christians living in the Holy Land. Fortunately, our VIM team (six clergy and 17 laity) worked alongside these Christians in ministries supported by the Methodist Liaison Office in Jerusalem. Although we stayed in a hotel in Bethlehem, we enjoyed having dinner in the

(Continued on next page.)



COMMENTARY

(“JERUSALEM,” cont. from page 7.)

homes of Palestinian Christians in the city. The warm and generous hospitality of our hosts humbled us as we confronted the inadequacy of our service in the face of deep needs.

Early in the 20th century, Christians made up roughly 20 percent of the population of the Holy Land. Today Christians make up only 5 percent of the population of Israel and 1-2 percent of Palestinians living in the West Bank.

One reason for the decline is that Christians in the region tend to be better educated and more affluent than the Muslim population and have more options if they decide to leave. As a small, beleaguered community, life is not easy for those who remain, but their faith is lively and they do not lose hope. We were fortunate to meet with Christians living in Israel (most of whom identify as Palestinians) and in the West Bank. It was also encouraging to meet with an Israeli-Jewish businessman who started a fair trade business, Sindyanna of Galilee, focused on building Arab-Jewish cooperation.

We spent most of our time in Israel in the Galilee region, specifically in and around Nazareth, where our service took us to the town of Ibillin and to Mar Elias, a multi-faith school

founded by Archbishop Elias Chacour. Chacour grew up in the village of Bir'im where his family owned a fig orchard. In 1948, the villagers were forced out of the village and not allowed to return. We visited Bir'im where a former resident, To'mmee Magzal, told us the story of being internally displaced after the village was destroyed in 1953. Chacour is now a Melkite Catholic priest and the author of *Blood Brothers: The Dramatic Story of a Palestinian Christian Working for Peace in Israel and Faith Beyond Despair: Building Hope in the Holy Land*. We were honored he spoke with us for about an hour and half before lunch. During the Q&A time, he said that something that struck all of us.

He declared, “If you want to help the Palestinians, you cannot be anti-Jew—if so, we do not need you.” Peace can only be built on justice and security for all. We spent the afternoon with high school students at Mar Elias. They practiced speaking English with us. Many of them had ambitious goals to go on to a university, but we wondered how many would be able to do so.

In the West Bank, we stayed in Bethlehem and fanned out in service to four different ministries supported by the Methodist

Liaison Office in Jerusalem: Bethlehem Bible College; Bethlehem Evangelical Academy; Al-Malath, an amazing program for youth with mental disabilities; and Hope School kindergarten. In each setting, we had opportunities to interact with those served by these ministries. Although our service seemed very limited, our hosts assured us that our primary service was listening to the people and getting to know them.

For the Rev. Steve Jones and me, this was our first time leading a VIM team. We cast a wide net in recruiting people for the trip, but we couldn't have had a better team if we had handpicked each one. All of us are grateful to have visited the holy sites, but even more we are grateful to feel connected to the “living stones” in the Holy Land.

If you would like to learn more about our trip, see our photos and read our reflections, you can go to Facebook, “Volunteers in Mission (VIM) Trip to the Holy Land” and request to join. Everyone is welcome! 

—The Rev. John Copenhagen
is Professor Emeritus of Religion
and Philosophy at Shenandoah
University.



The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

United Methodist Women Stamps for Mission celebrates 35 years



Can a used postage stamp benefit missions? The answer is yes, and it's an initiative that the Virginia United Methodist Women (VAUMW) began 35 years ago.

Over this period of time, this stamp initiative has raised thousands of dollars for The United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR). UMCOR is a non-profit organization dedicated to alleviating human suffering around the globe. Their work includes programs and projects in disaster response, health, sustainable agriculture and relief supplies, to name a few.

As part of this initiative, stamps that are collected are sold with 100 percent of the proceeds being donated to UMCOR.

If interested in collecting stamps for mission, check out these tips:

1. All stamps from just a few to entire collections, canceled or uncanceled are useful; old ones are extra good.
2. Trim paper around used stamps attached to envelopes leaving a ¼ inch paper border around the stamp OR you can turn in the whole envelope.
3. If you have postcards, turn in the whole card; don't cut or tear the stamp off the card.
4. Leave rows of stamps intact.
5. For the best value, send trimmed cancelled stamps, envelopes or postcards with stamps, and any albums of stamps by hand to a conference UMW event whenever possible. Dis-

trict officers are willing to hand deliver them to a conference event, so you may want to take them to a district event. Often mailing the stamps costs more than the worth of the stamps to missions.

6. If you need to mail the stamps, use stamps, not a meter, for postage on the package and send to: Mike Davis, P.O. Box 100, Jetersville, VA 23083.

7. If you bring stamps to a conference event, Betsey Davis, the technology coordinator, will collect them from you and deliver to our stamp liaison.

If you have additional questions, contact the VAUMW Stamp Liaison, **Rev. Mike Davis at (804) 304-0256** or email: mtdpastor@me.com.



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Applications are now being accepted for Fall 2017.

The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



United Methodists gather for UM Day

By Madeline Pillow

More than 150 United Methodists gathered in a yearly ritual of faithful advocacy at the 25th anniversary of United Methodist Day on Feb. 2 at General Assembly in Richmond.

The tradition began as a district United Methodist Women's (UMW) event that then merged with the conference Board of Church & Society to become a conference-wide event. It is a day that allows United Methodists across the state an opportunity to talk with their legislators and share concerns about upcoming pending legislation.

This year also marked

Bishop Sharma Lewis' first attendance at the event. Bishop Lewis said she felt strongly that United Methodist involvement in the community and governing is integral, necessary and in line with the Social Principles.

"I think it is very powerful for an annual conference to be a spokesperson for the marginalized, the disenfranchised, the voiceless," said Lewis.

Bishop Lewis mentioned that some of the issues that participants were excited to talk about were already voted on by the event date but that their presence still allowed senators and representatives to hear about United Methodist concerns.

Some of the issues that were of concern this year included wage theft, driver's license restoration and healthcare expansion.

Bishop Lewis said that she hopes that the event will continue to grow.

"I would like to see it get bigger and better and have more people join us on this day," she said.

Following a return to Bon Air UMC in Richmond and lunch, retired Bishop Charlene Kammerer, who was also present throughout the day, preached a message focused on the recent immigration actions and discussions in the United States.

She stated that since the inauguration she has been listening deeply and praying without ceasing. "I've had to exercise more self-care, pause to rejuvenate my spiritual life and do a lot more playing with friends," said Kammerer.

"I am genuinely seeking – as I know you are, – a higher response to the challenges and distortions of the almost daily attacks that I hear coming on the beliefs and values of our Christian faith. We cannot quake in fear and remain silent about our civil and constitutional rights in this country. We cannot just dread what our elected officials will do next or fail to do. We must continue to pray, to organize, to stay together in community and act for justice and mercy for all people and groups in this our country." 🍷

– Madeline Pillow is editor of the *Virginia Advocate*.

Bishop Lewis and retired Bishop Charlene Kammerer make their way to the capitol building.



Apportionment Series: What are apportionments?



One of the ways the connection of The United Methodist Church is exemplified is through apportionment giving.

Apportionments are defined as a vital expression of faithful stewardship; a way local churches can connect with annual conferences to be in mission together and add to that mission in a way that is stronger through interconnectedness.

A history of giving

This form of Methodist giving started with founder John Wesley. Wesley noticed that classes of people rather than individuals could assist each other in sharing responsibilities for projects such as the construction of buildings and supporting preachers.

This format has continued today with what we

know as apportionments.

According to Virginia Conference Treasurer David Dommissie, “All giving happens at the local church level, to fund the entire connection.”

It is the support of each local church that supplies an impact on a local, national and global level.

For director of Connectional Ministries, the Rev. Marc Brown, “Apportionments allow individuals and congregations to fiscally and physically participate in transformational ministries in over 130 nations in the name of Jesus. Within the Virginia Conference, the stated purpose of the annual conference is to equip local churches for ministry and provide a connection for ministry beyond the local church.”

Ministries and efforts of United Methodists are supported by these funds affording outreach to young people, global mission and support for the growing churches and new churches in the conference. Example of these ministries that equip local churches include 5 Talent Academy,

livestreamed semi-annually; How to Reach New People workshops, these have included over 350 congregations; infrastructure support for recruitment, certification and clergy relationship process; conference youth retreats; small, mid and large church training events; online and in-person lay servant training; All God’s Children Camp, camps for children with incarcerated parents; 22 higher education campus ministries; disaster response; Volunteers in Mission (VIM) training; and partnerships in Mozambique, Brazil and Cambodia.

How are apportionments calculated?

Using church information from the Equipping Vital Congregations (EVC) website, apportionments are calculated using the prior year’s statistics for each local church. This is why it is integral that information entered into the EVC website is accurate as this information affects the apportionment calculations for the entire conference.

The basic equation is seen below:

Learn more about Virginia Conference apportionments

In the August issue of the *Advocate*, the Mission Opportunities booklet is inserted each year to share opportunities for mission and giving for the next annual conference year.

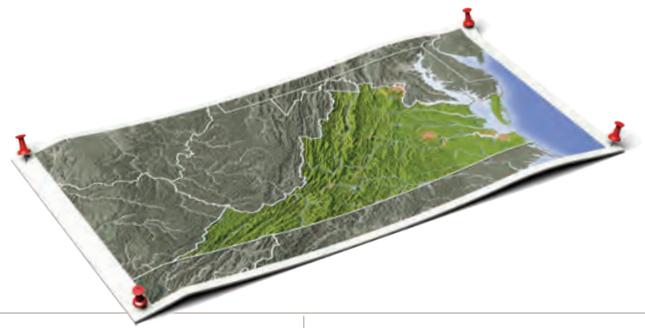
At the 234th Annual Conference session, the 2017 budget decreased 0.91 percent. See the 2017 budget (<http://www.vaumc.org/ncfilerepository/Business/ApportionmentInterpretationandCalculation.pdf>).

Do you have questions about apportionments? Email Communications Director Madeline Pillow at MadelinePillow@vaumc.org to have your questions answered in an upcoming article in this series. Upcoming articles will share information about the last decade of apportionment-giving as well as information on apportionments from the Pensions office.

The primary apportionment formula follows and applies to all apportionments except Active Clergy Health #407.

$$\frac{\text{Net Operating Expenses for your church}}{\text{Net Operating Expenses for ALL VA Conference churches}} = \text{Your Church Decimal}$$

The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



Experiencing ministry in Cambodia

By Barbara Nowak

A team composed of clergy and laity of the Virginia Conference traveled to Cambodia in January 2017 with the focus to provide and opportunities for sharing, growing and learning from and with both laity and clergy of the Methodist mission in Cambodia.

The team was composed of laity and clergy from the Virginia Confer-

Members of the team explored ancient temples while getting a history lesson about Cambodia.



ence. Members of the mission team were Martha Dodson, Lynn Gramzow, John Hemming, Anita Mays, Barbara June Nowak, Nancy Robinson, Glenn Rowley, Nick Ruxton, and Nancy Yarborough. They met up with Juanita and Steve Csontos from the Alexandria District who had traveled to Cambodia before the group arrived.

Learn more about their trip below:

Our trip started off in Siem Reap with a visit to the ancient ruins of three Buddhist temples: Ta Prohm, Angkor Thom and Angkor Wat. Since 90 percent of Cambodia is Buddhist, this seemed like a fitting place to get some historical perspective on the Cambodian culture.

Over centuries of neglect, nature has reestablished massive trees whose roots have found their way through the foundation of the temple and have grown into a tall canopy reaching hundreds of feet skyward to the heavens.

To understand the culture of Cambodia today, you need to familiarize yourself with the Khmer Rouge Regime which terrorized the Cambodian people from 1975-1979 with an ill-conceived plan that attempted to equalize people by returning the country to an agrarian soci-

ety. Outside the capital city of Phnom Penh we visited one of the many genocidal killing fields left from the Khmer Rouge Regime; and a prisoner interrogation center within the city that is a grim reminder of what a deranged dictator can do to people. Under the dictatorship of Pol Pot, his army was ordered to kill off any threat to his communist mandate, from military officers of the opposition party, to anyone deemed a member of educated class including doctors and engineers. Spouses and children were also brutally murdered in an attempt to purge society of any diversity.

As bullets became scarce and were needed by the soldiers on the fronts, other means of bludgeoning people to death were employed. During this time it is estimated 2-3 million Cambodians were killed. The Khmer Rouge Regime destroyed communities, families and trust among its own people.

What our group saw between these two stops on our journey are examples of where Methodists are planting hope and healing for the Cambodian people. Since this was my first visit to Cambodia, and I am not a missionary, I wasn't quite sure of what to expect or how I might be of assistance. I traveled with United Methodists

The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



Barbara Nowak holds a baby chick at a CHAD project that The Virginia Conference helps support.

from the Virginia Conference who support our missionaries in Cambodia, with pastors, translators and others yearning to know more, like myself. We were equipped with a lesson plan designed by Juanita Csontos that included lessons in discipleship and Jesus' parables of the lost sheep, lost coin and prodigal son.

There were also lessons about the Wesley brothers and the history of Methodism during the Industrial Revolution. Methodist churches reportedly started springing up in Cambodia around 1988.

These churches were often started in people's homes. They were drawn by hearing a message

of love and hope. Their children were intrigued by music lessons, soccer teams and even Tai Kwando classes. Children trained as musicians now help to lead praise worship during church service. The service is contemporary with rousing hymns and robust member participation that brings a holy glow to one's brow and the love of Jesus pumping through our veins!

Down the road from Siem Reap, outside a village in the province of Banteay Meanchey, we stopped at one of the many Community Health and Agricultural Development (CHAD) projects supported by the Virginia Conference.

There we met a man named Yem who went to his pastor a couple of years ago with a troubled heart.

Yem often drank too much and, once drunk, would beat his wife. In order to avoid additional abuse and protect her children, the wife packed up and left with them for nearby Thailand. Yem knew his neighborhood Cambodian pastor to be a compassionate man and was desperate to change the direction of his life. With the help of the Methodist pastor, Yem gave up drinking, but he also needed a way to support his family and so he applied for a loan from CHAD. With this assistance, he built a business raising birds for market. Starting out with six chicks, he now has 300 birds including chickens, ducks and quail two years later. His wife and children have moved back home. The inter-

(Continued on page 27: CAMBODIA)



In the floating villages of Siem Reap, structures like this are a part of daily life.

DISCIPLES HELPING TO TRANSFORM THE WORLD

Retired Bishop Will Willimon spoke to a Chatham community gathering on Jan. 22, 2017, at **Watson Memorial UMC in Chatham**. The service began with a joint choir from community churches singing "The Praise of Christ." Willimon, now professor of the Practice of Christian Ministry at Duke Divinity School, spoke on "Small Church Ministry: God's Gift, Our Assignment." Expressing the need and importance of small groups and small congregations, he shared Scripture stories and life stories to inspire the gathering. He shared that the small church is a gift from God and can meet community needs if we only stop to look.

He also stated that we cannot use the excuses of being small, too old or not having enough money. It is God who gives us the opportunity, we just need to seek it.

Bishop Willimon was bishop of the Alabama Conference 2004 - 2012. He has authored over 65 books and lectured at many top universities. ▼



▲ **Asbury Memorial UMC, Richmond District**, hosted a Free Community Valentine's dinner on Feb. 12. Guests were served a free spaghetti dinner that included salad, bread and desserts. A local ballroom dance class provided entertainment for the guests as well as teaching some line dances for all who attended. More than 75 persons attended the dinner and experienced the love of Jesus and some great fellowship.

Special guests on Feb. 12 at **Court Street UMC, Lynchburg District**, were some of the residents and staff from the local Heart Havens homes. Following the worship service the church hosted a Valentine's Brunch with the proceeds benefiting Heart Havens. Pictured are retired Rev. Doug Pillow with a resident from Lynchburg Heart Havens and a member of the staff there. ▼





EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY

5 types of church visitors: Are you ready for them?

By Darby Jones

When we think of welcoming newcomers, we often think first about friendly greeters, good signage, useful Q&A opportunities, clean bathrooms and helpful nurseries. Be assured — every one of those things is important.

However, many visitors make up their mind about a church before worship begins. Within a few minutes, most visitors decide whether the congregation is friendly. There is a small window of opportunity for the congregation to communicate its identity and welcome guests.

Before we welcome newcomers into our congregational "living room," it is important to think about the whole equation: If we attract these people and they become partners in faith with us, how will we change as part of the body of Christ?

For example, we want to attract young adults, those who will be the bridge between the church as we know it and the church of the future. We know people in this generation want to be an active part of any organization with which they associate. They don't want to do something just because it's always been done a certain way. Welcoming young adults means welcoming guests with new voices and new gifts to share. This can mean change.

Welcoming newcomers means initiating relationships with people who will become members of our faith family. Our welcoming ministry begins with laying a good foundation to attract people and to encourage them to return and knowing what to do as they become a part of the family.

Different guests

Identifying different types of visitors can help you to understand what each seeks.



- ❖ Dissatisfied visitors are looking for a "better church." Either yours has what they are looking for or it doesn't. Their decision about returning will be based on these criteria.
- ❖ Invited visitors come at the request of someone they know. They may not be looking for a church, but they may find a reason to return and stay.
- ❖ Seekers want something spiritual. They look for real people with genuine smiles. They want authentic answers to their questions.
- ❖ Skippers jump from church to church. Some like to meet people or network. Others are transient, moving on when something doesn't suit them. Sometimes their job calls for continual travel.
- ❖ Deep-rooted visitors are active in their church and looking for a place to settle in for the long haul. When they move into a community, they are usually ready to serve.

Knowing these categories can be helpful. Understanding what different

visitors seek can guide you as you get to know them and help them understand whether your congregation is a good spiritual fit.

Different welcoming churches

Stationary churches say, "You are welcome to join us." If newcomers fit the existing culture, they become members. If not, they usually leave.

Medley churches welcome diversity because they know they should. This model looks and sounds beautiful. However, if the church does not welcome the rituals of different ethnicities and nationalities, eventually visitors will look for the exit sign.

Transformer churches welcome all newcomers along with their unique gifts from God. They like new ideas, advocate for people and aren't afraid to change the culture and their community.

So, what do we do?

It is good to know our identity as a local body of believers amid the larger community around us. However, if we want to grow, if we believe that's part of God's calling, our identity may change as our membership does. Ministries never envisioned may suddenly be a volunteer away. Discussions never had may be happening in the hall. Ideas never challenged may be questioned. Leadership roles may be filled differently.

As you consider welcoming newcomers, consider the entire cycle of incorporating new people into your fellowship. Tend to first impressions, but know you also are initiating potential family relationships. 📌

— Darby Jones, *United Methodist Communications*

Try a little hospital



Photo by Kathleen Barry, UMNS Accompanies UMNS story #364. 10/25/11.



Welcoming the stranger is a topic that is at the heart of Christian belief and is an especially relevant topic now with the recent immigration policies of a new administration.

Hospitality, at the local church level, can range anywhere from being a good and welcoming presence in your community to providing a warm and helpful presence to visitors.

You may ask yourself as a clergy or layperson, how is my church being hospitable? Am I welcoming to visitors?

The best way to decide this is to do assessments of your church. As church members and leadership, you could gather to try and list how you are hospitable to visitors and to your communities. You could also coordinate to have “secret worshippers” visit your church and provide feedback.

What you will find in your journey is that no one way will work for every church. But consider how you want your church and its people to be received and question whether that personality is coming across correctly to visitors. Think about other organizations that you have felt welcomed by. Are there any ideas that you could use at your church?

Read on to the rest of the feature to envision how you might see your church community in the eyes of a visitor. 



When it comes to church hospitality...take Mom's advice

By Robb Almy

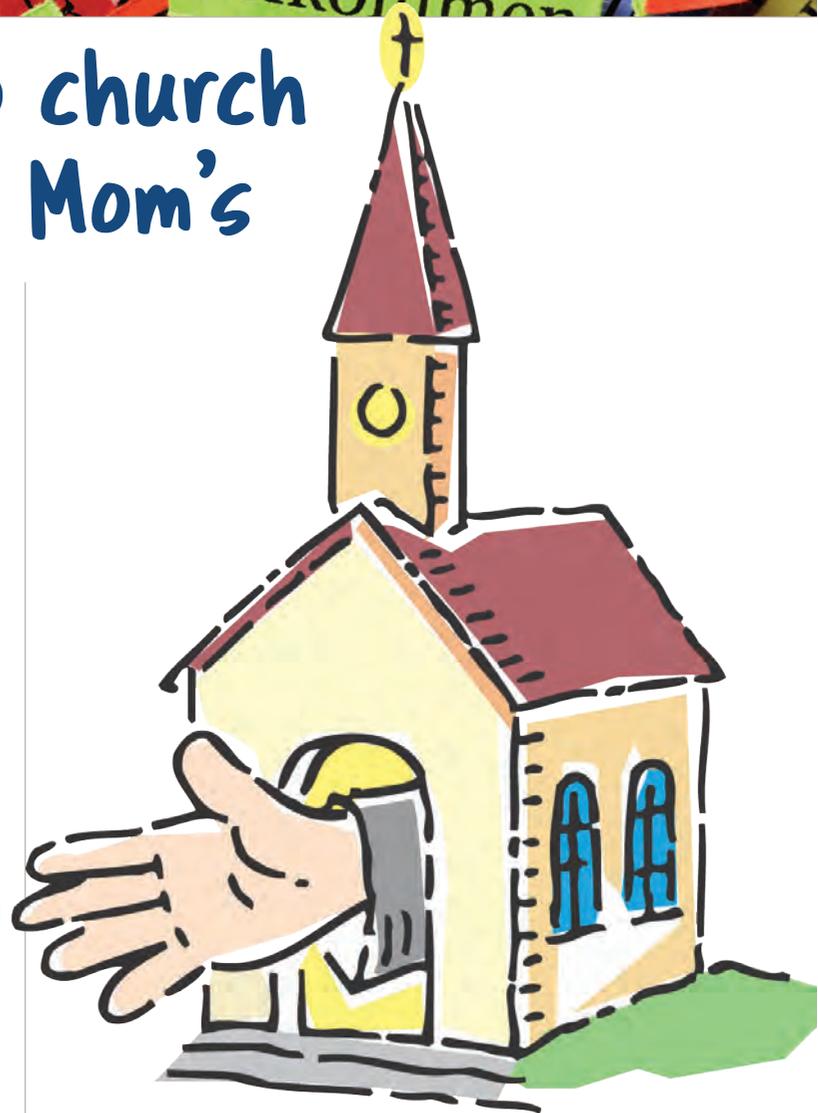
Confession time. Growing up outside of Boston on the poor side of town, my language and that of my young friends could be described as salty at best. Inevitably, one of these salty words would slip from my young mouth in front of my mother (like the time Bill Buckner missed that ball in game six of the '86 World Series) and my mother would say as only moms can, "Watch your language!"

The motherly advice to watch my language has served me well as a pastor when it comes to offering hospitality to guests who come through the doors of the church. I am not talking about refraining from cussing in front of guests, that is, of course, always a good thing. I am talking about how I have intentionally tried as a pastor to lead my churches to watch their language so that guests would feel welcome. Let's face it, our words have power. In the case of guests who come through the church doors, words have power to welcome or not welcome.

Below are seven ways we might watch our language so we can welcome the guests who come through the doors of the church.

1. Recognize that we have guests not visitors.

Think about our homes. Visitors are those who come and go. They might be the sales person knocking on the door or the furniture delivery persons. Guests on the other hand are persons for whom we prepare. When we have guests over for dinner we might clean the house, get out the best dishes and tell the children to behave. Our hope is that our guests will feel welcomed, nurtured and want to come back. By referring to the new persons who come through the church doors as guests we create mind shift in how we approach hospitality.



2. Avoid Christianese and Methodese.

For the person who has never been to church or has stopped going to church and is now returning, words like sanctification, narthex or intinction have no meaning and might as well be a foreign language. Likewise, terms like apportionments, Annual Conference and the Wesleyan Quadrilateral mean little to our guests with little or no church background. Throw on top of this our penchant for acronyms like UMM, UMYF or UMW and we have really confused our guests. This type of insider language should be limited to meetings of the already convinced and connected.



3. Explain how your church receives Communion.

I have served churches in various capacities for almost 20 years, and I still get a little nervous each time I receive Communion in a new setting. Imagine how guests feel when they come for the first time. At Fredericksburg UMC, we explain each Sunday how we receive Communion for the sake of the person who is new and has never experienced the sacrament at our church. I also take time to tell those who regularly attend that the reason we explain the logistics of Communion each Sunday is for the sake of the guest. This helps the congregation become aware about hospitality.

4. Avoid church insider language.

Just as one should avoid *Christianese* and *Methodese* it is also appropriate to avoid church insider language. New persons do not know the inside jokes of the congregation. New persons do not know how to get to the room the Browning Sunday School class meets in order to drop off their food for the food pantry. Churches cannot assume everyone in the pews knows the *Faith We Sing* hymnal is the small black hymnal.

5. Always introduce yourself and have others introduce themselves as this helps guests get to know persons in the church.

Introductions help guests begin to learn names and faces and leaders in the church. I will often say something like “Good morning, my name is Robb Almy and for those of you who don’t know me I serve as the associate pastor here at Fredericksburg UMC.” Likewise, don’t make an announcement and say, “See John for more details.” Not everyone knows who John is. At the very least make John stand.

6. Take time every now and then to explain symbol and liturgy.

I believe liturgy and symbols still have power if they are explained. This is true for regular attendees and guests. You might explain one day what is meant by the “quick and the dead” in the Apostles’ Creed. The quick are not the fleet of foot but those who are alive. Or, you might explain what the “holy catholic church” with a small “c” means or the reason why we light candles is it represents the light of Christ.

7. Acknowledge but don’t overwhelm guests during your welcome.

Most guests want to feel acknowledged but not overwhelmed. It is appropriate to welcome guests at the beginning of the service and even invite them to fill out a pew card, pew pad or registration tear off. Please don’t ask the new family with two kids to teach Sunday school next week!

In the end, if we want to provide a place of hospitality for guests we must always filter our language. We might ask, “Does it honor God?” “Do my words help the guest to experience the love of Christ and respond to the love of Christ through worship?” “Would my words make sense to someone who has never been or stopped going to church and is now returning?”

How we treat our guests and what words we use is really a stewardship issue. Every guest who comes through our doors is a gift from God. We should remove every human obstacle we can, except the cross of Christ, to the end someone might come to experience the love of Christ and give their life in worship and service to Jesus. 🍷

Thanks for your advice, Mom!

– The Rev. Dr. Robb Almy serves as associate pastor at Fredericksburg United Methodist Church and was previously director of an online and onsite church coaching and consulting ministry called ChurchIngenuity.com. He blogs at ChurchIngenuity.com.



Learning to start hospitality

By Alison Malloy

So if you know me, you know I attract weird things, people and situations. I'm like a magnet for them. While we are telling the truth I may as well tell you — I am also weird. I like to call the weird things I attract “holy adventures” as no matter where I go I end up in awkward, uncomfortable or just generally strange situations. These adventures never cease to bring me lessons about following Jesus, hardships, fun, hospitality and life in general. A couple weeks ago, I had a trip to a church meeting that definitely fit that bill. It made me wonder about hospitality and if we, the church, have failed ourselves.

As we arrived, I began to doubt myself and thought perhaps our meeting started at 7 p.m. (not 7:30 as planned). We parked behind the church and ran in where all the others were streaming in. As we followed the crowd, the hospitality was amazing. Someone held the door for us, we met four or five people along the hallway, were offered coffee/snacks and were told we would have cake later and someone helped us find two seats together (as the room was pretty full — probably 50-60 people). People were in conversation all around us. I was really impressed with how engaged and genuinely the group was interacting.

Then the facilitator of the meeting went to the front and said, “Hi, my name is Sarah (name changed), and I am an alcoholic.” Oh boy — another adventure. We were in the

wrong meeting sitting in the front row. Such radical hospitality had been extended to me as I arrived. I am not sure what the opposite of radical hospitality is, but I was pretty sure I would be demonstrating it by getting up and leaving the meeting. Quietly, I tapped the lady next to us and blurted out something to the effect of “Thank you so much for having us, but we’ve just realized that we are in the wrong meeting. Have a great night!” We dashed out as the second person with an announcement said, “My name is Gloria, and I am an alcoholic. Tonight we have cake to celebrate all the anniversaries in the group. I’m so glad you are all here and hope no one gets sick as this is the first cake I’ve made from scratch.”

We went to the next door into the church. I found a group of women sitting at tables, received several smiles and hand waves. We were ushered over to the sign-in table so we could put our names on the list. The lady in front of me handed me the pen and said hello. As I looked at the list I said, “Oh, no! Not again!” The woman looked back at me, and I explained I was in the wrong place for the second time that evening. After a quick conversation, she suggested perhaps I was looking for the church down the street. Right. Of course I was.

How many programs and initiatives do we develop that extend welcome and hospitality for NEW people but forget to continually welcome the members (or repeat visitors)?

Again, we left the meeting. While walking to the car we talked about the crazy levels of welcome we had received and how we had both been surprised at the hospitality extended. Then I began to wonder why I was surprised. Both meetings we started to attend had drastically different methods of welcoming but were warm environments nonetheless.

When we finally arrived where we “belonged,” literally no one looked up as we entered. There were no signs, no directions, no smiles, no waves of the hand (much less handshakes), no welcome, no hospitality. I put my bag down



to pull out my phone and double-check our location before asking my friend to endure yet another adventure. As I was pulling the information up on my phone I scanned the room for a familiar face. Once I found one, I pulled my friend along with me and found a way to insert ourselves into the group.

Since then, I have been wondering and worrying about this situation as a whole. How could it be that amazing hospitality was extended to us in TWO scenarios we weren't a part of while no one took notice that anyone joined the group in the place we were supposed to be? How many programs and initiatives do we develop that extend welcome and hospitality for NEW people but forget to continually welcome the members (or repeat visitors)? If we continue to develop more and more programs for our existing people to facilitate without extending welcoming arms to them also, we may end up in a predicament where we have no existing people to carry out the programs.

It is easy to be part of the problem — I get stuck in my routine and keep my blinders on. If I want to be part of the solution, I need to be honest with myself. I'm wondering if we are forgetting the "continual recruitment" and constantly

extending invitation that is necessary to keep our faith communities plugging along. I wonder if we know that hospitality is actually more than just winging a welcome bag with a mug and some pamphlets at new people when they visit.

I remember something about Jesus calling us to love our neighbor. Maybe we can start by extending welcome to all we encounter. What might that look like? Building relationships, shifting from "transactional" interactions to being in community, living invitation to be with people where they are and constant curiosity might be good options. That might feel like too much. If so, perhaps I can introduce myself to the person I sit next to in worship if I don't know them. That might be a good place to start.

What other lessons can I learn from my friends at Alcoholics Anonymous and the Quilters' Guild? I can only imagine what the experience might have been had I stayed for the meetings. 🍷

— Alison Malloy is a layperson who attends Floris UMC in Herndon. An educator by trade and a volunteer by call, Alison also serves on the Conference Council on Youth Ministries, General Board of Church and Society, and Virginia Conference Board of Church and Society.

How The Gathering at Scott Memorial, Elizabeth River District, shows hospitality:

This might sound a little unorthodox but living in Virginia Beach, which has the highest concentration of military personnel in the world, we have found that doing a Facebook Live video of the sermon each week on our Facebook page has helped us reach out in hospitable ways to our military families. When men or women are deployed, they can watch these when they get in port somewhere or when they have to travel for trainings or other operations,

they can log on to watch them live each Sunday evening. They have repeatedly commented on how much it means to them to be able to hear the same sermon that their loved ones have heard in the pews, even when they are miles away, and it allows them to share the message with their military friends as a form of evangelism.

— The Rev. Rachel Gilmore. Photo credit: Monica Martin



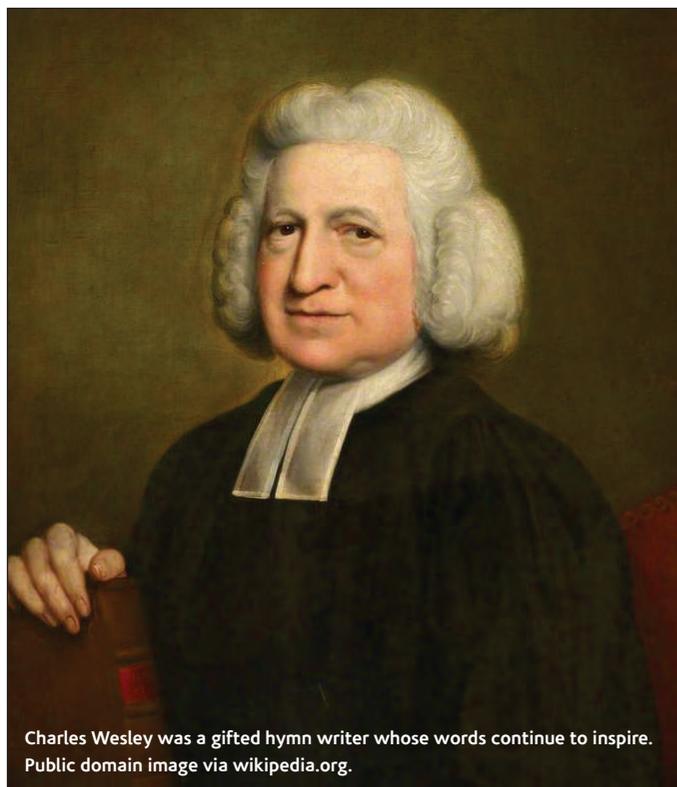


Welcoming everyone: a Wesley hymn for Lenten devotions

By Joe Iovino

United Methodists are likely to sing Charles Wesley's "Come, Sinners, to the Gospel Feast" sometime during Lent or the weeks leading up to Easter. The hymn invites everyone to receive new life in Jesus Christ.

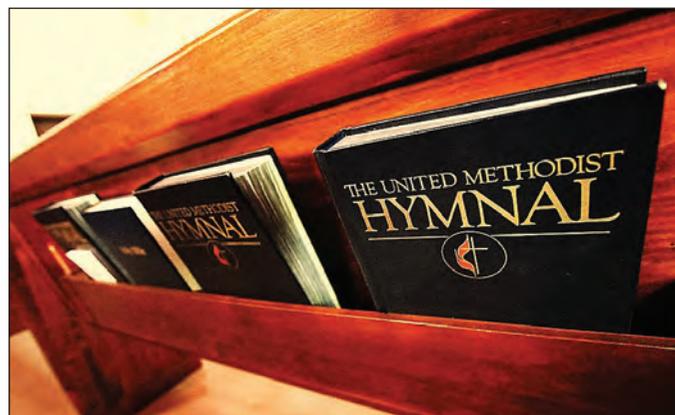
Some people have a spiritual gift for making others feel welcome. Gifted parents make their sons and daughters' fiancées feel part of the family on their first Easter together. Generous students and welcoming coworkers eat lunch with those who are new. Kind church members al-



Charles Wesley was a gifted hymn writer whose words continue to inspire. Public domain image via wikipedia.org.

leviate the anxiety of parents of squirming kids by offering a warm smile from across the row.

Jesus demonstrated the ability to turn a stranger into a friend. He ate with those whom others kept at arm's length; chose a tax collector as part of his inner circle; and made Samaritans heroes in his stories. Jesus invited all to follow him, regardless of their personal history or social standing.



Lent: A season of welcome

Lent is often understood as a time that is all about us, the people who are already part of the church. We use the season to focus on our inner lives through fasting and abstinence and spend extra time in private prayer and devotion. We attend special worship services and Bible studies where we use old words like *penitence* that need explaining. But Lent is also a time of welcome.

Baptism, the sacrament through which we are initiated into the Church, was a central part of the earliest celebrations of the resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday. Before the church formalized Lent into a liturgical season, they used the weeks before Easter to prepare converts to be welcomed into the community of faith through baptism.

In 18th century England, some people felt welcome in the church, while others did not. Righting this wrong was part of the impetus of John Wesley and the early Methodist movement.

The first Methodists were intentional about welcoming everyone. They preached where people gathered—town squares and fields near mines. In their meetinghouses, they educated children and distributed medical care to those who could not afford to see a doctor. They also visited prisons to share the gospel of Jesus Christ there.

These ministries grew out of what Wesley taught about God's grace. He used the phrase *prevenient grace* to



describe the love God has for everyone, even before we are aware of it (*prevenient* means “coming before”).

This also meant Wesley viewed the sacrament of Holy Communion differently from many of his colleagues. He began to celebrate an “open table,” which United Methodists still practice today. This means that regardless of church membership or lack of it, all who love Jesus, earnestly repent of their sin, and seek to live in peace with one another are welcome at the table where they can begin a new life of discipleship.

The invitation in song

Charles Wesley’s “Come, Sinners, to the Gospel Feast,” extends the invitation in song.

First published under the heading, “Hymn 50, The Great Supper, Luke 14:16-24” in *Hymns for Those that Seek and Those that have Redemption in the Blood of Jesus Christ (Redemption Hymns 1747)*, the song invites us both to the communion table (see *The United Methodist Hymnal* #616) and to enter new life in Jesus Christ (see UMH #339). Together, the two occurrences in the hymnal use only nine of the 24 verses Wesley penned.

The scripture reference in the heading is a parable Jesus tells about many who decline an invitation to a banquet by giving a variety of excuses. Wesley as narrator begins in the role of the servant charged with making the invitation on behalf of the host:

**Come, sinners, to the gospel-feast,
Let every soul be Jesu's guest,
You need not one be left behind,
For God hath bidden *all* mankind.
Sent by my Lord, on you I call,
The invitation is to all.
Come all the world: come, sinner, thou,
All things in Christ are ready now.**
(v. 1-2, italics added)

Wesley wants to be sure we each know there is a place for us at the communion table and in life with Jesus. If anyone thinks the invitation is not for them, Wesley is clear,

**Sinners my gracious Lord receives,
Harlots, and publicans, and thieves,
Drunkards, and all the hellish crew,
I have a message now to you.** *(v. 13)*



Charles Wesley wrote many of his hymns at the desk in the upper level of his home in Bristol. Photo by Kathleen Barry, United Methodist Communications.

Living the song

In the verses that follow, Wesley urges us who have accepted Christ’s invitation to become servants who invite others to come to the feast and enter into this new life of discipleship. He puts these words on Jesus’ lips,

**Tell them, my grace for all is free,
They cannot be too bad for me.
Tell them, their sins are all forgiven,
Tell every creature under heaven.**
(v. 17b-18a)

Wesley then closes the hymn with a reminder that this gracious invitation is also a call to live a new life in Jesus that can begin today.

**This is the time, no more delay,
This is the acceptable day,
Come in, this moment, at his call,
And live for him who died for all.** *(v. 24)*

This Lent, as we seek to strengthen our inner lives in preparation for Easter, let us also be people of invitation. May we not only come to the table ourselves, but invite others to join us in a relationship with Jesus Christ. With the words of Wesley’s hymn on our lips, we open the doors of our hearts, homes and churches to welcome all to know the love and forgiveness of God through Jesus Christ. 

– Joe Iovino works for UMC.org at United Methodist Communications.

LIVING THE WORD



Lewis Johnson lives with his wife, Cheryle in Lynchburg and attend Court Street UMC. He has travelled extensively and throughout these devotionals shares his experiences in the Holy Land, where for a period of four years, he visited every year.

April 2, 2017

Psalm 23

“Good paths that lead to life”

Both Old and New Testaments recognize that not all shepherds are created equal. There are good shepherds and bad shepherds. The “green pastures” and “still waters” are pastoral images that may have sentimental appeal to us, but had real-life, practical importance to a sheep.

I have walked through Shepherds’ Field, and it is a good feeling to know that our Lord and Savior was born in a manger in a barn. This was good, and though at the time I visited there was nine inches of snow on the ground, the stars was real bright to me.

It is good paths that lead to life. How important it is to choose “right paths.”

Here is the great beauty of Psalm 23: not that the pastures are always green, but that God is always good.

April 9, 2017

John 3:1-16

“More than we anticipate?”

The Lord promised that anyone who had been bitten could look at the serpents on a pole and live. Jesus identified himself with that serpent on a pole in the wilderness.

The “lifted up” parallel anticipates the cross. The powerful implication is that we who are snake-bitten by sin will find healing in looking to the one on the cross.

This lesson shares that when we serve others, though, the requirements of such a move may require more than what we anticipate. As followers of Christ, what are we willing to sacrifice for others? How far are we willing to go?

When thinking about God’s response to this we know how far God is willing to go: giving up a son, Jesus.

In God’s act, we can find peace as there is

salvation rather than condemnation for God’s people. God’s ultimate purpose is a reconciliation of God’s people as a result of Jesus’ coming, ministry and ultimate sacrifice.

April 16, 2017

John 20: 1-10; 1 Peter 1:3-5, 8-9

“Seeing God in love”

The best proof that Christ has risen is he is still alive. And for the immense majority of our contemporaries, the only way of seeing him alive is for us Christians to love one another.

Paul was educated, a learned Pharisee, who studied in Jerusalem under Gamaliel, one of the most respected rabbis of the day. Some in his social circles would have looked down on Paul’s trade of tent-making. But he insisted on being able to travel and teach without depending on anyone.

In my travels, I have been to all the seven churches that Paul visited. I have even been to the one where the people stoned Paul and Barnabas and almost killed him. Paul said when they do not like us—just knock the dust off your feet and move on.

April 23, 2017

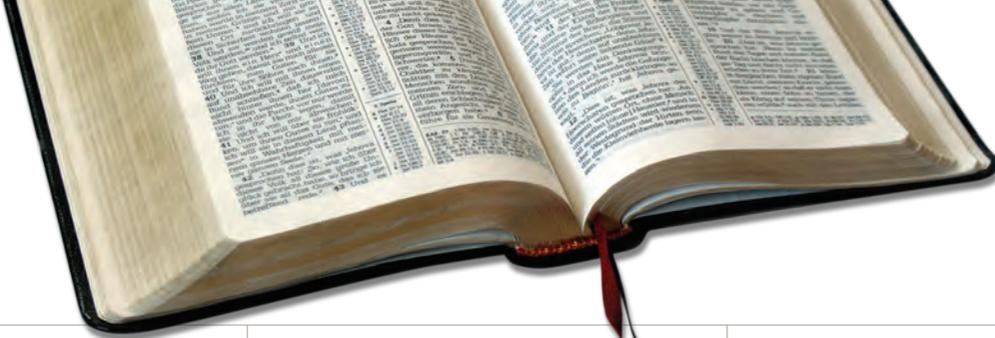
Romans 5:6-11; 8: 31-39

“The love of God in Christ”

“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 8:38

Twelve of us went to Antiqua to teach Bible school for one week in July 1993.

While there, we divided into groups of three and we had classes of kindergarten through high school. This was a God-send trip for me in the many small moments we witnessed.



When we landed prior to Antiqua, we had to wait to get on a smaller plane. While waiting, we met a woman who was retired from the Army and she told us she owned a restaurant in Antiqua.

The next day we needed a place to eat and ran into some women who knew the woman we had spoken to the day before. Calling her up, they shared that the group needed somewhere to eat. Though usually closed on Sundays, this woman provided a wonderful meal for us. Throughout the rest of the trip, her hospitality remained boundless as she let us use her car and cooked for us.

While this was just one instance,

there was much love in our travels on this trip, joining us together though different people from different places.

April 30, 2017

John 10: 1-15

"Finding a leader"

Everyone is looking for a leader who will solve all the problems of the world. Where can we find the leader we seek? Jesus, as the Good Shepherd, is the leader who shows and impacts God's love to those who follow.

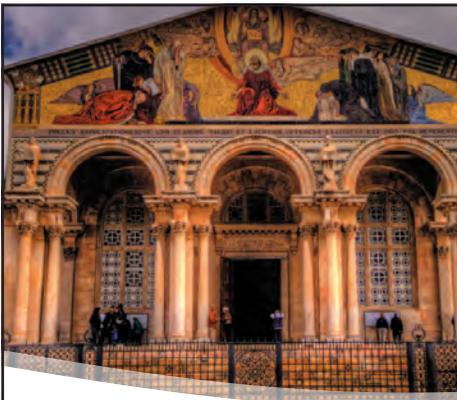
As the Good Shepherd here, Jesus is also the gate to the sheep pen, so the protecting of his flock from anything coming in and out

would need to pass over him.

In our lives, as leaders in our own communities, who are willing to help out in the way? Who in our social groups need that kind of protection and love shown to them?

Though the job as shepherd was common in Jesus' day how might be reinterpret the role and imagery in today's world?

Leaders may be needed, but they are also necessary in the smaller parts of everyday life. And Jesus might be calling us to step into that role for others as well as others in his image. 🍀



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For complete details and to register contact:
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EVENTS



March

UMMen Visioning event

Mar. 25, Virginia United Methodist Center, Glen Allen

How often have you thought your church might need to do more to serve the Lord? How often have you become overwhelmed serving Christ? It seems we live in a world that either leaves us wanting or overburdened. The Virginia Conference United Methodist Men (UMMen) have recognized this and are offering a Visioning event March 25, 2017, at the United Methodist Conference Center in Glen Allen.

Pastors, consider bringing your UMMen Chartered group, your Men's fellowship, Mission team or Men's Bible study as we present a day to help them discern their place in Christ's Kingdom. The event starts promptly at 8:30 a.m. with a plenary session led by the Rev. Glenn Rowley, conference director for the Office of Justice and Missional Excellence. Breakout sessions will be offered encompassing Values and Vision, Mission and Social Justice, The United Methodist Connection, Men's Ministry and Reverse Mentoring. Fee is \$12 which includes all materials, continental breakfast served at 7:30 a.m. and lunch. For more information contact Dann Ladd, vice president Virginia Conference UMMen at ladddann@gmail.com.

UMVIM Team Leader Training, York River District

Mar. 25, St. Luke's UMC, Yorktown Team Leader Training is required for all first time United Methodist Volunteers In Mission team leaders, but all interested persons are welcome to attend whether leading a team or not. The Virginia Conference offers sessions in different parts of the state. The York River District training will be at St. Luke's

UMC, 300 Ella Taylor Rd., Yorktown, VA 23692 from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Register online by visiting the conference calendar at the top right of the conference website at www.vaumc.org. Then, click on the corresponding date. For more information email Forrest White at virginiaumvim@gmail.com.

UMVIM Recertification, York River District

Mar. 26, St. Luke's UMC, Yorktown Team Leader Recertification is required for all United Methodist Volunteers In Mission (UMVIM) team leaders who completed basic team leader training five years ago or longer. The focus of this training is to update leaders on the Virginia Conference UMVIM policies and guidelines, to share best practices, and to answer any questions you may have.

The training will be at St. Luke's UMC, 300 Ella Taylor Rd., Yorktown, VA 23692 from 12:30 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. Register online by visiting the conference calendar at the top right of the conference website at www.vaumc.org. Then, click on the corresponding date. For more information email Forrest White at virginiaumvim@gmail.com.

April

Conference-wide Week of Prayer

Apr. 2-8

This prayer movement is a response to the Council of Bishops initiative called Praying Our Way Forward. We are called to a posture of prayer, praying for God's leadership to guide us effectively in fulfilling the mission of the church. We invite you – clergy and laity, conferences and congregations – across the denomination to pray for God's guidance.

The website umcprays.org will host prayer resources and prayer support for the church. Since each annual and central conference has a designated week

to pray for this important work, our goal is to provide tools and resources that will provide guidance and encouragement.

Bishop Debra Wallace-Padgett of North Alabama Conference and Bishop Al Gwinn serve as co-chairs of the Praying Our Way Forward movement. Bishop Wallace-Padgett says, "Our prayer focus is two-fold: We are praying that God will help us to fulfill the mission of the church, and we are praying to be one in Christ."

Bishop's Convocation on Prayer

Apr. 1, Trinity UMC, Henrico

Bishop Sharma Lewis will host a Bishop's Convocation on Prayer on Apr. 1, 2017, at Trinity United Methodist Church, 903 Forest Avenue, Henrico, VA 23229. The Rev. Juanita Rasmus, co-pastor of St. John's United Methodist Church in Houston, Texas, will be the plenary speaker for the convocation. Workshops on a variety of topics are being offered as part of the convocation and participants will be able to attend two of their choice.

To see the brochure, visit the conference calendar on the conference website at www.vaumc.org and click on the corresponding date. To register, visit <https://www.eiseverywhere.com/ereg/index.php?eventid=224486&>.

May

Shenandoah University Youth Theology Institute (SUYTI)

May 1

The Shenandoah University Youth Theology Institute (SUYTI) is a new program, funded through the Lilly Foundation, offered to Christian youth as a partnership between Shenandoah University, Wesley Theological Seminary and the Virginia Annual Conference of the UMC.

The Youth Institute is designed to educate and inspire young Christians to

become better leaders in their local congregations through deep and thought-provoking experiences. Each day at the institute, modeled after ancient monastic pattern, includes academic study and religious reflection balanced with immersive experiences.

The program is a two-week immersive experience for rising 10th, 11th and 12th graders (offered this year July 23-August 5, 2017). For 2017 there is no cost passed on to student participants, except a \$50 registration fee and the cost of travel to and from Shenandoah University.

Pastors and youth leaders can nominate youth they think will benefit from this youth theology institute and students can apply at <https://www.su.edu/campus-life/spiritual-life/institute-for-church-professions/youth-theology-institute/>.

The 2017 session of the SUYTI is now accepting nominations and applications until May 1, 2017.

Ministers' Convocation

May 8-10, Virginia Crossing Wyndham Hotel, Glen Allen

The Center for Clergy Excellence invites you for a time of Sabbath retreat, learning, and fellowship together as ministry leaders at Ministers' Convocation from May 8-10, 2017. Come be engaged in theological and academic conversation while experiencing rejuvenation for ministry. The theme is "Making Space for Yourself and Others" with an emphasis on hospitality as a practice and spiritual discipline. For more information, contact clergyexcellence@vaumc.org or visit the website for registration and event details including carpooling and roommates at <http://www.vaumc.org/MinistersConvocation>. 📍

(CAMBODIA: Continued from pg. 13)

est rate on these loans is nominal compared to what is required from banks. As Yem pays off CHAD loans to his local church, the funds are used to help other people in the community; thus giving them a better way to earn a living and building trust within their church family and neighborhood.

Our final stop was Phnom Penh. Along the way, we passed rice fields, factories and many flatbed trucks filled with 20-40 people (mostly women) being driven to the factories. It seems to be one of the most common modes of transportation, aside from motorcycles, which were frequently seen with three to five people riding on them.

In a country where few are educated, farms and factories provide employment. We toured the classrooms of the school for street children that Clara Biswas, one of our Methodist missionaries in Cambodia, helped establish.

Many of the children that attend the school are orphans and live in the dormitories above the classrooms. Clara explained that aside from regular academics, classes in music and dance will help prepare some children for the tourism industry developing in the country. Others will go on to the university if they can get a scholarship. One year of accounting or business school costs \$350-\$450, while an engineering or medical student would need an annual tuition of approximately \$1,500. Clara had our driver take us past the old building and trash heap where she started her ministry. The building is crumbling and blackened with pollution. A few people still live there, but it is scheduled for demolition to make way for a new building in a growing urban

neighborhood.

During our time in Cambodia, I learned a great deal about its past and people. Today 70 percent of the people are under the age of 35 and 50 percent are under the age of 19. Many of the people who survived the Khmer Rouge Regime still suffer with post traumatic stress. Another one of the missionaries there, Joseph Chan, is hoping to build a senior center where elderly people can safely gather in Christian community. I also heard testimonies from both young and old people of how their Christian community and the good news changed their lives. 📖

— Barbara Nowak is a member of Burke UMC in Burke, Va. She attended the pilgrimage to Cambodia with other members from the conference in January 2017.

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CLERGY & DIACONAL



DEATHS

Helen Gaylor Hoke, 86, of Elkton, died with her family by her side, Feb. 7, 2017, at Journeys Crossing Assisted Living, Elkton, Va. She was the wife of **the late Rev. John Leegrand Hoke**.

Helen was a member of Dayton UMC, the UMW and District UMC Spouses. She was a certified lay speaker of the Virginia United Methodist Conference. Along with her devoted Christian work, she had a passion for bowling especially with the Valley Belles.

Helen is survived by two sons, Paul (Linda) and Gregory (Kathy); a daughter, Brenda; four grandsons, Jonathan Grattan, Wesley Grattan, Christopher Grattan and Brett Crawford; a granddaughter, Lisa Crawford Davis; four great grandchildren; and a number of nieces and nephews.

Stephen Jent, 57, younger brother of **the Rev. Larry Jent**, died suddenly of heart failure on Feb. 11, 2017, in St. Louis, Mo.

K. Dane Mills, 69, died unexpectedly in his sleep Feb. 5, 2017, at his home in Virginia Beach, Va. Dane was a man of integrity, faith, generosity, humor, service and kindness. After briefly serving as a U.S. Naval officer, he practiced law for 40 years, but dedicated most of his energy to church and community. He served through Princess Anne Rotary Club (past president), Heart Havens, Cox High School '65 Reunions, Tidewater Emmaus, Alzheimer's Association, Virginia Wesleyan and the Scout Show. A pillar of Thalia UMC in Virginia Beach, he held multiple leadership roles there and in the former Norfolk District and Virginia United Methodist Conference. His men's Bible study changed lives, including his own.

His deepest love — even more than his alma mater UVA and the Red Sox — remained his family. He is survived by his high school sweetheart and wife of 47 years, Patricia (Halstead); his sister, Bonnie Mills; his daughters, Jennifer Mills-Knutsen (Joshua) and Lauren Grzymalski (Ken); and three grandchildren, Sadie, Benjamin and Charlotte.

Frances Elizabeth Matz-Dahl, mother of **the Rev. Denise Childers** who is a retired elder on the Alexandria District, died Feb. 9, 2017. A Service of Death and Resurrection was held Feb. 11 in Wisconsin.

Sun Rye Kang, 84, mother of **the Rev. Hyo Lee**, died Feb. 7, 2017, in South Korea. A memorial service was held for her in Korea as well as a memorial service at Sudley UMC in Manassas, where the Rev. Lee serves as pastor, on Feb. 18.

Mildred (Millie) Sunshine Cooper, 95, of Newport News, died Jan. 31, 2017. She was the second daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Augustus Young Cooper Sr., born July 6, 1921 at the home of her maternal grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph George Tennis in Rescue (Isle of Wight County), Virginia.

Millie lived with her parents in Newport News and graduated from Newport News High School in June 1938. After several years of working in various Newport News business offices, she moved to Richmond where she worked as youth director at Ginter Park Methodist Church.

In 1947 she moved to Nashville, Tenn., to pursue studies in Christian Education. In 1953 she graduated from Peabody College for Teachers (now a part of Vanderbilt University) with a BA degree in English. In 1954 she was awarded a MA degree in Christian

Education from Scarritt College also in Nashville. During a period of 15 years, Millie served as the Christian Education Director at Chestnut Avenue Methodist in Newport News (now Chestnut Memorial), Monumental Methodist in Portsmouth and Arlington Methodist Church in Arlington.

She was called, in 1968, to join the leadership staff of the Virginia Methodist Conference in Richmond as the Director of Youth Ministries. As a diaconal minister she worked with all ages, with her primary focus being the Christian education of youth. Millie retired in 1984.

She is survived by her brother A. Y. Cooper, Jr. of Newport News; nieces, Betsy Peters (David) of and Laurie Anne Grecco (Darrell); great nieces, Amy Peters Bowman (Todd) and Sarah Peters Coffman (Ted); great-great nephews, Kyle Bowman and Phillip Coffman; and great-great niece, Jenna Bowman.

Ruth Taylor Reynolds, a resident of The Hermitage in Roanoke, died Jan. 22, 2017. She was born June 2, 1926, in Asheville, NC. She was a member of First UMC, in Salem. She was married to **the Rev. James W. Reynolds**. Included in her many accomplishments in the church, she is responsible for starting the Virginia Annual Conference Ministers' Spouses Retreats, she served as chair of the Conference Credentialing Committee for directors of Christian Education and was Spiritual Life Advocate for the Roanoke District. She is survived by her husband, Jim; a sister, Dorothy Taylor (Simpson) Chidester; two sons, J. William Reynolds, III and wife, Becky, and **the Rev. David T. Reynolds** and wife Charlette; three grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren.

Annabel Winston died Jan. 21, 2017, in Hampstead, Md. She was the widow of **the Rev. Hugh Winston Jr.**

BIRTHS

The Rev. Joe Shoop, pastor of Bethel UMC in Woodbridge, and his wife **Debra Bucklen** became grandparents for the first time on Feb. 2. Their new granddaughter, Joanna Grace Shoop, was born in Albany, New York.

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FROM THE BISHOP



My reflection on the Lenten season

Dear Virginia Annual Conference,

March 1, 2017 began the season of “Lent.” Lent comes from the Anglo-Saxon word “lencten” which means “spring.” This season is a 40-day period – not counting Sundays – which began on (Mar. 1) and ends on Holy Saturday (Apr. 15). Lent is a period of repentance and renewal preceding Easter. This time allows us as Christians to recall and relive the Resurrection story and truly understand its meaning. Because of Christ’s death and resurrection, our lives can be renewed and we have the power to renounce sin and death.

The Lenten season began with Ash Wednesday. It was fascinating to

see on Facebook the many churches offering ways to receive ashes. Ash Wednesday emphasizes a dual encounter: a) we confront our own mortality and b) we confess our sin before God within the community of faith.

The use of ashes as a sign of mortality and repentance has a long history in Jewish and Christian worship. The Imposition of Ashes is a powerful, nonverbal and experiential way of participating in the call to repentance and reconciliation. According to *Nelson Bible Dictionary*, repentance is defined as turning away from our sin, disobedience or rebellion and turning back to God and reconciliation is defined as a change in social relationship in which two parties previously at odds with each other exchange friendship and peace.

When I was a pastor in the church, parishioners would always ask, “How should I observe this Lenten period?” I would encourage all believers:

Self-examination – Set aside this season to truly examine and evaluate your life as a Christian. What is keeping you from having a more committed relationship with our Lord and Savior?

Repentance – Repent from the sin(s) that separates you from God.

Reconciliation – Examine your relationships. Who are you in conflict with that has led to a break or discord in the relationship?

Scripture Reading – Join us in the Bishop’s Bible Challenge at <http://vaumc.org/pages/bishop-lewis/biblechallenge>. It is never too late!

Prayer – Pray an hour a day. The discipline of prayer brings us into the deepest and highest work of the human spirit.

Fasting – allows us to “... loose

the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke” (Isaiah 58:6, NIV). Lenten fasting has a special meaning. It recalls the time Jesus Christ suffered and died to redeem humanity.

During this season of Lent, take the time to reflect on your personal life, reflect on what is hindering your complete devotion to our Lord and Savior and engage in a posture of repentance and reconciliation.

Peace and Blessings.

Bishop Sharma D. Lewis

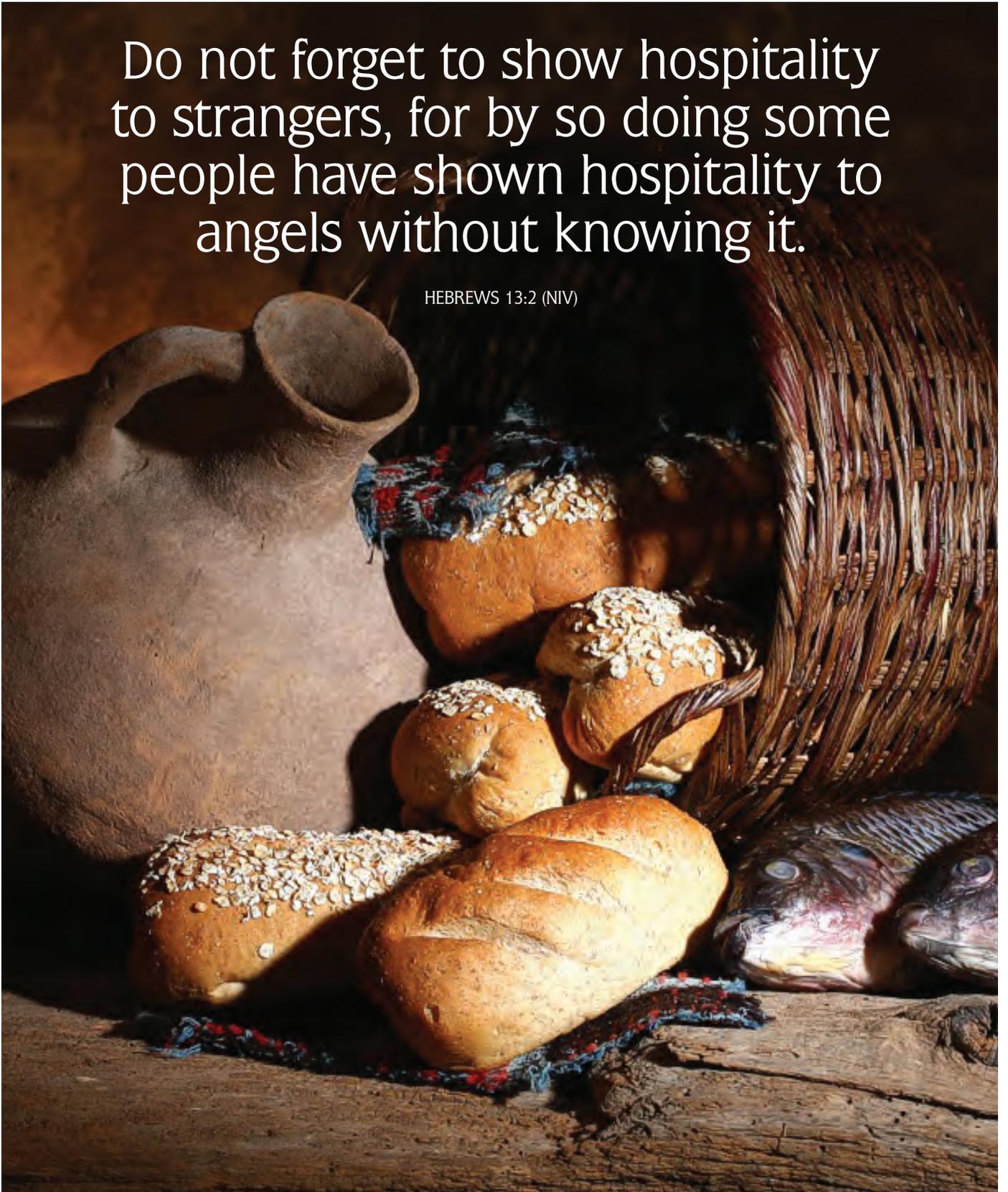
Bishop's Bible Challenge readings for April

April 1	1 Samuel 18-20
April 2	1 Samuel 21-24
April 3	1 Samuel 25-27
April 4	1 Samuel 28-31
April 5	2 Samuel 1-3
April 6	2 Samuel 4-7
April 7	2 Samuel 8-12
April 8	2 Samuel 13-15
April 9	2 Samuel 16-18
April 10	2 Samuel 19-21
April 11	2 Samuel 22-24
April 12	1 Kings 1-2
April 13	1 Kings 3-5
April 14	1 Kings 6-7
April 15	1 Kings 8-9
April 16	1 Kings 10-11
April 17	1 Kings 12-14
April 18	1 Kings 15-17
April 19	1 Kings 18-20
April 20	1 Kings 21-22
April 21	2 Kings 1-3
April 22	2 Kings 4-5
April 23	2 Kings 6-8
April 24	2 Kings 9-11
April 25	2 Kings 12-14
April 26	2 Kings 15-17
April 27	2 Kings 18-19
April 28	2 Kings 20-22
April 29	2 Kings 23-25
April 30	1 Chronicles 1-2

ONE LAST WORD

Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.

HEBREWS 13:2 (NIV)





Come Celebrate!

Randolph-Macon Academy 125th Anniversary Founder's Weekend

Friday, April 28, 2017

Home Sporting Events: Baseball, Lacrosse, Soccer, Tennis
Plus: "Taste of the Town" in Downtown Front Royal!

Saturday, April 29, 2017

Yellow Jacket 5K Run 9:00 am

Community Celebration 11:00 am - 4:00 pm

Toy Drop by the R-MA Flight Department ~ Turbo the Flying Dog
Community Vendors ~ Skits ~ U.S. Customs K-9 Demonstration
Petting Zoo ~ Hot Air Balloon ~ Corn Hole Tournament ~ Hay Rides
Flight Simulator ~ Face Painting ~ Marching for Beginners
R-MA History Display ~ Meet Chase and Marshall from PAW Patrol
Zero Shock Stunt Jump ~ Steve's Amazing Grace ~ Moonbounce
AND MORE!

Plus: "The Hive"--Food by local vendors and entertainment by
"Mandatory Fun," the R-MA Drama Department, and others!

Free and open to the community! Bring your friends!

Sunday, April 30, 2017

Community Chapel Service 9:30 am
Spring Concert in Boggs Chapel 4:00 pm

For more information,
visit www.rma.edu/celebration or call 540-636-5482.

