

Connecting with the

**Virginia Advocate**The official magazine of
the Virginia Conference of
The United Methodist Church

FROM THE EDITOR



Madeline Pillow
Editor

**Witnesses to
the light**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. — John 1:1-10

“He came only as a witness to the light.”

I am both awed and haunted by that verse. Of course that verse refers to John the Baptist, the final voice telling us that Jesus was coming. The reason I have multiple feelings about this verse is because of its power.

Here, our Scripture sets the stage. Picture a void of black, blurry at first but coming closer into view. Hear the thrill of notes coming from a John Williams-directed orchestra. Hear a voice of power like Morgan Freeman laying these words on our ears, slowly, as it builds to a crescendo.

Not all of Scripture has this kind of theatrical power that silences us in an instant. Some of it is quieter; some of it is the longer story. This is the silencing kind. The kind that reminds us of the power of God, the power and might of God's story.

But it's not just the power of God's plan here that gets me. It's the powerful part that John had to play in it: “a witness to the light.”

His role reminds us that we are also witnesses to the light. In awaiting Jesus' second coming, a part of the Advent season, we are witnesses to the light of Jesus.

Recently, Starbucks came under fire from some Christians upset by the fact that their holiday-themed cup has no hint of Christmas whatsoever.

I waited for the “So, what?” in all the controversy that followed and have yet to really find it.

As Christians, should it really surprise us that things in the secular world don't reflect Christian beliefs? After centuries, if we still haven't figured it out, I'm a little worried. On any given month or year, there always seems to be a group of Christians asking why some object or some group of persons is not doing it the Christian way.

The question is, why are we waiting for the outside world to reflect our beliefs? We are witnesses! We are supposed to be the witnesses to the light of Jesus.

Not coffee cups. Not the outside world. Us. You and me. Christ followers.

What I like about the word “witness” is its connotations. To some people, our witness to God might just be in our actions. For others, we might need to be vocal about why we are doing something. I think being a witness can be both a loud and quiet action. It reminds me that words are power and when we are boisterously arguing over coffee cups, we are sending people the wrong message.

Witness.

Through our witnessing, we point to the One who is the change.

Look to the One who is coming. Be a witness. 



Madeline

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The Advocate is published once a month. The deadline to submit news and ad copy for the January 2016 issue is December 1. For more information on future deadlines, contact the Advocate office or visit the website.

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Rates for advertising and tributes are available upon request.

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.

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LETTERS

With this coat

The little girl came into church with her two brothers and her two older cousins. I noticed she was shivering and that her hoodie looked pretty threadbare. The weather had turned colder, and it was only supposed to get worse over the next three months. Suddenly, for all the work we were doing as a church, it still felt like we weren't doing enough. But what could we do when dozens of kids didn't have coats?

The year before, only five kids were showing up. In the span of two months, there were now 20 to 30 of them showing up at a time. From dual-working parent homes, from single-parent homes, from grandparent homes, from bunking-with-a-cousin homes. They came hungry, and we fed them. They came searching, and we tried to point out the answers. They came without Bibles, and we provided them. They came without hope of Christmas celebrations, and we applied to Toys for Tots. But what about coats for dozens of kids, the ones we know about, 40-50 kids?

Awake that night I wondered, if someone reading my blog post, "What If All The Kids Had Coats: Praying For A Christmas Miracle" would e-mail or message me that they could help.

An hour after the post published, the mother of a friend of mine wrote

that they'd give three new coats. My mom said that a check was in the mail. Friends shared the blog with others, their family and their friends, and complete strangers got involved. Our church people shared the blog and heard from people who've never been there and who live in other states. Peakland UMC, Lynchburg District, collected coats and toys.

By the end of the first week, we had 40 coats. But then more kids came. And the list grew. By 25 kids in the next two weeks. There was no way the donations could keep up.

We received more donations, but the list of kids grew again to 94. It's almost overwhelming, sometimes, to think about it. But the miracle wasn't over.

I think back to the first day we handed out coats to the kids who needed one at church, and the eight-year-old who started it all walks up to me as I'm cleaning up, smiling profusely.

"Pastor Jacob," (because a bunch of them call me that), "do you know what I'm going to do with this coat?" (She holds up an old, well-used coat that's obviously too small for her.)

"No," I say, not paying as much attention as I should. "What are you going to do with it?"

"I'm going to find someone who doesn't have a coat and give them this one."

My little friend understood the true meaning

of Christmas— and she taught me about what the kids are paying attention to in church. Everyone has someone who needs help, and everyone has a way they can help. Everyone can be part of the miracle.

A year later, we've been blessed by dozens of people who have donated thousands of dollars to make our dream – that every child would have a coat – into a reality. A man driving home from vacation stopped for worship, heard our story and later donated stocks worth a thousand dollars through the Virginia UMC Foundation. The Petersburg Third Presbyterian Foundation donated \$1500 so that this year we would be able to reach more people with coats and necessities this Christmas. Food Lion has stepped up corporately to make a larger donation of food for Christmas baskets, inspired by our coat initiative.

We've been providing help to families in the community and students at Richard Bland College this fall, as our "community" continues to adapt. We don't know who all will be fed or clothed this year through our church, but we recognize that we're the ones who have been truly blessed.

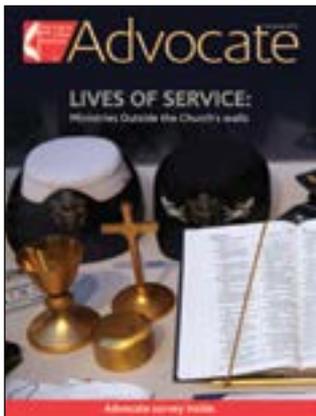
—The Rev. Jacob Sahms serves Blandford UMC, James River District, teaches English at Richard Bland College and edits ScreenFish.net.



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.

Hospital chaplains make a difference

I wanted to let you know how touched and moved I was from reading this issue (November 2015 *Virginia Advocate*) on hospital and hospice chaplains. The series of articles titled "Ministries Outside of the Church's Walls" was absolutely outstanding.



I recall several times in the past during hospital stays with both my mother and father the dedication of several hospital chaplains and how incredibly supportive they were to me and my family. I also see that service repeated at our local Sentara RMH Hospital on a daily basis during my periods of volunteer service especially in the Emergency Department. Unfortunately, because of privacy concerns, access to patients in our health care facility is somewhat restricted which makes it difficult for the local ministers to "pop into" a patient's room without prior approval.

My wife recently retired after 24 years of faithful

service as a hospice staff nurse at our local hospital and during that time had the opportunity to serve with two outstanding ministers assigned to her department. They were incredibly helpful and supportive in a variety of situations with end-of-life issues – medical, emotional or spiritual. There were countless times that these chaplains were the only ones from organized religion that had made a relationship with these terminally-ill patients and quite often performed their funeral services with limited knowledge of the deceased or their families. In some cases, these chaplains offered much greater support and insights to the patient than their local ministers.

The article detailing the Rev. Pam Meeuwissen's responsibilities at Mary Washington Hospital really provides an excellent description of what hospice chaplains do on a daily basis 24/7. They need to be commended for their dedication and service!

Again, thanks so much for providing such stimulating articles of ministries "Outside the Church's Walls."

–Frank H. Vetting, Bridgewater, Va.

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COMMENTARY



What goes with orange? Reflections of a Hokie in “C-ville”

When my fellow Virginia Tech alumni ask me what it’s like to be a Hokie in Charlottesville, I usually tell them it’s not so bad. Outside the immediate vicinity of the local university, it’s a nice, small city with some interesting amenities. Heading back to Blacksburg is an easy day trip. When my wife and I moved here in 2007, the United Methodist church a mile from our house had two Hokie pastors. And though the Hoos will likely beat us in football again some day, that’s not something we’ve had to worry about yet!

A few years after the move, I jumped at an opportunity to serve first on the support council, then on the board of the Wesley Foundation at UVa. Campus ministry was a rock for me at Virginia Tech, shaping me even before I met a transfer student at one September Wesley Singers rehearsal who eventually became my wife. College rivalries, silly or even occasionally serious, are one thing, but faith is quite another, and it seemed like a fun chance to help students along a path parallel to the one I’d trod a few years before.

It’s a little bit different here, of course. The language: first-years through fourth-years, “The Grounds,” calling

Ph.D.s “Mister” and “Ms.” rather than “Doctor.” The visuals: neo-classical architecture (oops, “Jeffersonian” – another one for language!) instead of military, clean-lined, gray limestone; different student demographics reflecting the universities’ different academic specialties. And let’s be honest: you’d never see a grocery store-sized, temporary J. Crew outlet materialize on the way into Blacksburg before move-in weekend, as happened on Route 29 inbound from Northern Virginia for the past few Augusts.

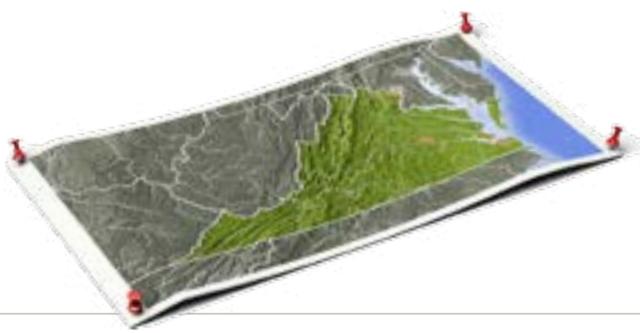
But what isn’t different? Start with the look on new students’ faces as they walk into the Wesley building in the middle of their first week of classes, looking for an environment they understand and in which they can be understood during the biggest transition of most of their lives. Move along to the service project photos on the wall – an afternoon gleaning with the Society of St. Andrew, or a spring break trip repairing homes. Talk to the student struggling academically for the first time, or reaching an understanding that a childhood dream career might not be their life’s vocation. Drop in on the conversations that make lifelong friendships. See the joy in graduations, marriages and other new beginnings built with what and who they’ve found in this place.

Listen for the response

to university tragedies, looking for Christ’s light amidst the darkness and helping our communities find a faithful response to the pain. Watch youth-group faith (important as it is for that phase in life) develop through study and action into the foundation for independent adult Christian life. Meet alumni bringing their children back to the place and the community that shaped their lives. They start out barely old enough to tell the difference between the Hokie Bird and CavMan – then years later they come back themselves, starting school and preparing to build their own adult faith.

This is what we do, in Charlottesville, in Blacksburg and beyond. This is why campus ministry matters — and why it’s been a privilege to help here in a small way, no matter whether game day pairs maroon or blue with our orange. 🍊

– Josh Crockett is a 2002 alumnus of the Wesley Foundation at Virginia Tech, a software developer in Charlottesville, and a member of Aldersgate UMC who served on the Wesley Foundation at UVa board from 2012-15. He revels in Hokie football each fall, then spends basketball season relearning humility. (This reflection was originally published in “The Wesley Word,” the newsletter of The Wesley Foundation at UVa, and has been republished with permission by the author.)



The United Methodist connection in **VIRGINIA**

Goodson Academy for Preaching holds renewal event at VUMAC

The Goodson Academy for Preaching held its renewal event Sept. 21-24 at Virginia United Methodist Assembly Center (VUMAC) in Blackstone with 30 participants and a team of nine.

Dr. Paul Scott Wilson, author of *The Four Pages of a Sermon* and professor of preaching at Emmanuel College in Toronto, was guest presenter. Theme was “Craft and Creativity: Preaching in the Context of a Rapidly Evolving World.” The Bishops’ Foundation sponsored the event.

Dr. Wilson gave five lectures and preached the closing worship service. All participants were in small groups and each preached twice, sharing feedback and incorporating elements gained from Dr. Wilson.

The Goodson Preaching Academy is named after the late Bishop Kenneth Goodson, a former Virginia Conference bishop who was highly regarded for his preaching skills. It was begun at the request of Dr. James Logan, working with Larry Buxton and Kendall Soulen, and modeled after The College of Preachers. The Academy was active from 1999-2008 giving over 100 clergy the opportunity to enrich their preaching in a collegial setting that provides real interaction with others.

It is hoped that this “resurrection” will provide a springboard for regular reoccurring academies. 🍷



Pictured: Dr. Paul Scott Wilson, left, and the Rev. Larry Buxton, Burke UMC, visit during the Goodson Academy for Preaching. Photo by the Rev. Tim Tate.

The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



VUMPI implements strategy for Pre-82 Plan funding requirements

By John Fuller

The pension program commonly known as the Pre-82 Plan, providing eligible clergy with a pension based on their years of ministry with The United Methodist Church prior to 1982, is a financial liability that Virginia United Methodist Pensions, Inc. (VUMPI) Board of Directors developed and implemented a strategy for in 2014.

This resulted in deployment of funds from VUMPI's financial reserve, specifically to offset the amounts that would otherwise need to be passed on to the Virginia Conference churches through apportionments.

The total financial obligation projected to

be paid under the Pre-82 Plan to retired clergy of the Virginia Conference is currently approximately \$63 million. Total plan assets are several million dollars short of that total projected liability. Each year, VUMPI recommends an apportionment from the Virginia Conference to meet the annual Pre-82 Plan funding obligation, and we anticipate achieving a fully funded status for the Plan within the next several years. There are, however, factors associated with the program that make achievement of a fully funded status somewhat more challenging.

The total projected liability associated with the Pre-82 Plan is calculated by General Board of

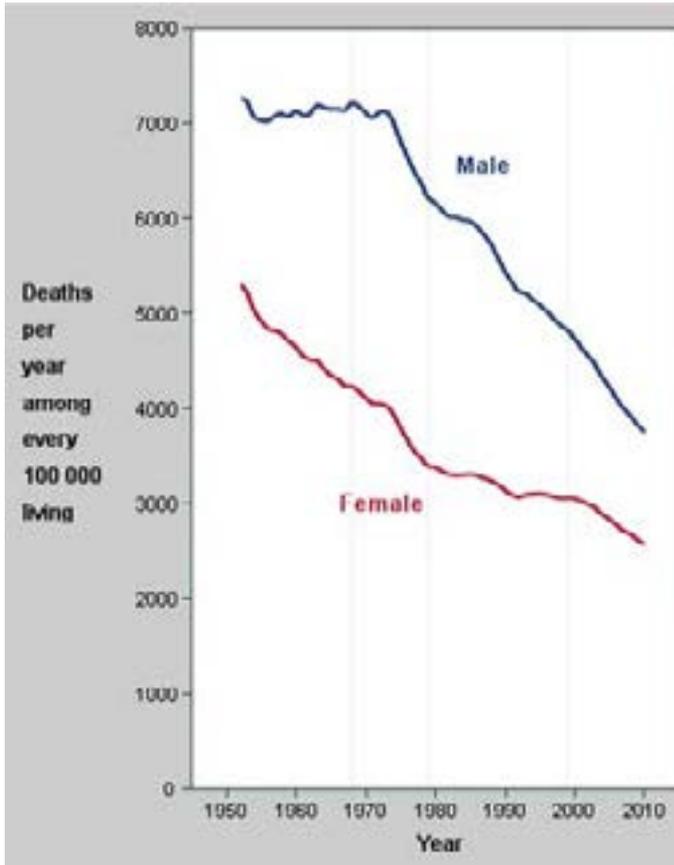
Pension ("GBOP") actuaries and reflects the sum of all anticipated pension benefit payments that will be made to clergy and their surviving spouses. As pension benefits are paid for the duration of the retiree's life, an important factor in those calculations is the projected longevity of retirees receiving benefits. Actuaries use a tool referred to as a "mortality table," which provides guidance in the projection of retiree longevity. As the life expectancy of Americans has been increasing, projected longevity has increased. In connection with that increase, the GBOP actuaries recently announced adoption of a new mortality table which reflects improved longevity expectations for retirees receiving pension benefits. Because the new calculations project a longer duration of benefits payments, the total projected liability under the Pre-82 Plan will increase with the impact beginning with the annual funding obligation to be paid in 2018.

Based on preliminary projections, the impact of the improvement in projected mortality could result in an annual funding obligation in 2018 that is approximately three times the current funding obligation. In the absence of strategies to mitigate the impact of that increase, the increased annual fund-



The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

Declining US Mortality Trends
Ages 70-79



Source: Mortality-trends.org

ing obligation could lead to an increased financial burden on Virginia Conference churches. Fortunately, however, VUMPI has implemented strategies that are intended to ease the financial burden associated with the Pre-82 Pension funding requirements.

Through 2015, VUMPI's Board of Directors has already committed over \$5 million from reserves to offset the Pre-82 Plan apportionments. In addition, VUMPI has worked closely with our conference Council on Finance

and Administration and our conference treasurer to develop a strategy in which annual Pre-82 Plan apportionments are managed to reduce the potential for volatility in the apportionments.

Factors such as significant changes in financial markets, along with the impact of the changes in projected retiree longevity described above, can have a significant impact on our resulting annual pension funding obligation. However, the strategies that VUMPI has adopted will

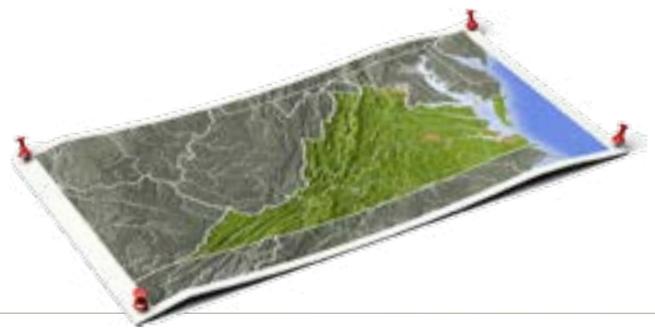
help ensure that we are keeping the financial promises that have been made to our retired clergy, while at the same time employing strategies to minimize the burden of those promises on our Conference's churches.

Virginia United Methodist Pensions, Inc. ("VUMPI") is the Virginia Conference's agency charged with administering a range of benefit programs for our Conference's active and retired clergy and their families. Benefit programs include health coverage for active clergy and retirees, along with pension programs which are designed to provide a financial benefit to retired clergy and spouses.

In the administration of these pension programs, VUMPI confronts the financial liability associated with the promise of future benefits to our Conference's retirees. The financial liability associated with each of our denominational pension programs is funded primarily through apportionments and direct billing to churches. 🇺🇸

– John Fuller is executive director of the Virginia Conference Pensions and Benefits office.

The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



Thirty-three Virginia Conference clergy traveled through South Korea as part of the fourth Pilgrimage for Spiritual Renewal led by Bishop Young Jin Cho.



- Charles Bates
- Steven Bird
- Russell Cheatham
- Rob Colwell
- Penny Cory
- Kirk Culppepper
- Larry Davies
- Brad Dulaney
- Jennifer Fletcher
- Doug Forrester
- Janet Grissett
- Sarah Harrison McQueen
- Stephen Hay
- Donna Holder
- Alex Joyner
- Sarah Locke
- Meredith McNabb
- Pat Money
- Linda Monroe
- Jonathan Page
- Hieu Phan
- Jan Prentace
- Brandon Robbins
- Alison Rosner Bass
- Brian Sixbey
- Debra Straughter
- Won Un
- Vivian Utz
- Tim Ward
- Faith Weedling
- Justin White
- Sung Yoo
- Young Jin Cho
- Kiok Cho



Early Morning walk with Bishop Cho.

Korea trip renewed my commitment to prayer

By Allie Rosner Bass

I'm not a morning person, so getting up each morning for the 5 a.m. prayer service at Bupy-eong Methodist Church in Incheon, Korea, was a new experience for me. In my half-asleep state, it all seemed a bit surreal: people shouting and rocking and clapping their hands in

prayer while the organ played peppy hymns over and over in the background. While many members of our group raved about the passion and fervor that filled the sanctuary at this early hour, it took me until the end of our week there before I began to feel like I could pray in the midst of it all.

One member of the church who shared her testimony with us said the idea of being in a room with everyone shouting out loud was strange to her at first, too. She stuck with it and, over time, the energy in the room became contagious. It helped her to pray with more spiritual fervor when she could hear everyone else around her praying. Another man told us that the service

was important to him because he works long hours, and early mornings are the only chance he has to spend time with God. Overall, I was impressed with just how many people made early morning prayer a regular part of their day. The huge sanctuary wasn't packed, but it was full—of hundreds of people. Somehow that's pretty hard to imagine back home.

We visited a number of other churches in and around Incheon and Seoul during our week in Korea, and they all emphasized spiritual discipline in their own ways. One encouraged people to come together for regular silent prayer. Another had grown strong by bringing back a class meeting structure. Another church we visited



The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

grew around its ministry of journaling, in which participants keep a daily account of how they remain focused on Jesus.

And yet, at none of these churches were prayer and discipline the end goal: changed lives, changed congregations and changed communities were. One night, during a multi-church choir festival at Bupyeong, the offering was announced and I reached into my bag. But instead of taking up a collection, the senior pastor presented tens of thousands of dollars to ministries around the city, such as Dail, where we served lunch to 700 homeless people one day. Jesus Town Ministry in Seoul raised up leaders through its class meetings who started ministries in its immediate neighborhood: a

music school, a clinic, a day center for elderly people and a homeless ministry. Good Shepherd Church ran a school for North Korean refugees. Kipun (Joyful) Church, in a town outside Seoul without much else going on, discerned God's call to serve its community through a children's library, a cultural center and a ministry for Indonesian immigrant workers.

The future of the church isn't all rosy in Korea. Alongside the impressive spiritual fervor and commitment we witnessed, Christians in Korea struggle with many of the same things we do in the U.S.: finances, declining numbers and a bad image in the wider society, perhaps owing too much to the high-profile sins and failings of some megachurch pastors. In a way, it was

oddly comforting to know that Christians around the world share the same fears and struggles, and still, we have a lot to learn from each other about faithful discipleship.

I can't say I plan to start getting up at 5 a.m. to pray on a regular basis, but I did come back from Korea inspired by the way the churches we visited all, in their own ways, connected deep spirituality with lives of love and service. I came back with a renewed commitment to living a life infused with the rhythm of prayer and with the hope that that prayer might bear fruit in my own life, the life of my congregation and our community. I'll just start a little later in the morning. 🍀

—The Rev. Allie Rosner Bass
is pastor of Arlington Temple
United Methodist Church, Arlington
District.

These churches met financial, evangelism and other issues using their faith to get them through rather than logic.

Some of the churches we visited had problems early on that honestly most Americans would have said we can't overcome and gave up. Instead, they prayed harder, and they followed the leading of the Holy Spirit and God led each church to a successful place.

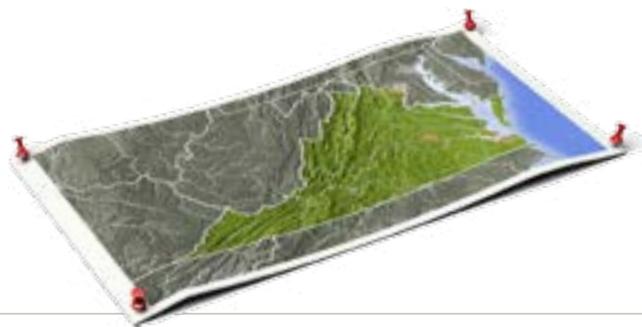
I have faced tough issues in my own ministry and I have met good folks with solid business backgrounds that were ready to say we can't do it. What I learned on this pilgrimage is that if it is God's will, you will be shown a way and if you are faithful you will be showered with blessings many times over.

— R. Kirk Culpepper,
Community-St. Mark Charge and
Conference ERT Coordinator,
Elizabeth River District



The pilgrimage group visits Yonsei University.
Photos courtesy of Hien Phan.

The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



Pastors in prayer

*Time: 5 a.m.
Place: Bupyeong Methodist Church in Incheon, Korea*

by Larry Davies

We started the prayer service singing familiar hymns, but we were singing more quickly than I was accustomed. To make sure we didn't slow up, the song leader pounded one hand on the podium in beat with the music while we clapped. The atmosphere as we sang was joyful and celebratory. Lyrics in Korean and in English were conveniently located on screens in front of us.

The singing was followed by a reading from 1 Thessalonians 5:17. "Never stop praying."

The Rev. Hong, Eun-Pa, pastor of Bupyeong Methodist Church, proclaimed, "We gather together to

pray, to wake up our souls in the presence of God. I am sure God will listen to our prayers and answer our prayers. Christians pray continually. Pray without ceasing. Prayer is like breathing. We must continually breathe or die. When we do not pray our souls will die. We may look alive but in reality our soul is dead. The church should be a house of prayer. We pray continually."

He added, "The Korean church started with early morning prayer services in 1905. Only two churches participated at first but as time went by, more joined. Many churches across our country now have early morning prayer service. Prayer is a critical part of our history in Korea."

Following the message, we sang more hymns followed by a prayer. At the conclusion of the prayer

instead of saying "Amen," the speaker and the entire congregation simultaneously raised both hands high and shouted, "Lord, Lord, Lord."

This was the signal to begin praying. Koreans describe this form of prayer as "Tongsung Kido" which means "fervently praying together out loud." This is a common prayer used to free participants from their troubles and give everything to God.

With the organist playing hymns in the background, 500-600 people in the church began fervently praying out loud. Some quietly, others shouting and others moaning as people expressed themselves before God. Being a relatively private person, I was at first intimidated, but as I listened and

(Continued on page 15, "PRAYER.")

Stain glass window at Foreign Missionaries' Cemetery. Photo courtesy of Hien Phan.



EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY

Advent outreach ideas

By Jeremy Steele

Most people want to make the Christmas season about more than decorating, shopping and parties. Many want to reach beyond their families, friends and themselves to share God's love. The ideas below can help your congregation and individual members reach out to the community in new ways this Advent.

Scavenger hunt ministry

Most youth scavenger hunts focus on collecting clues or pictures and using a lot of gas while having a great time with friends. The youths at First United Methodist Church in Port Saint Joe, Fla., transformed this good time into an opportunity for outreach. They made it a "Random Acts of Kindness" game. Youths meet at the church and are divided into teams (cars) and receive instructions for eight to 10 activities to complete. The acts of kindness range from taping quarters to machines at a coin-operated laundry to helping someone carry groceries to their car to picking up trash at the local park. The teens run all over town serving in small ways.

Pitching a tent for worship

Almost every church offers a Christmas Eve service. The reality is many

people cannot attend because of work schedules. Others are hesitant to walk into the church down the street but still feel called to celebrate the birth of God's son—in church. In Longview, Texas, the people at Grace Crossroads United Methodist Church take a page from the Old Testament and pitch a tent for worship on the Sunday before Christmas. They set up a tent in the parking lot of the local high school, plug in microphones and worship without pews. The Rev. John Whitehurst says 25 percent of people who show up each year are not a part of the congregation!

If tents aren't feasible, you might consider using the gymnasium at your high school or the meeting room in a local business. You know best how to take your service into the community.

Christmas Eve goodies for people who must work

The people at Trinity United Methodist Church in Waverly, Iowa, decided Christmas Eve would be more than a time to have a special Communion service. They knew people in their community were working on a night many reserve for worship and gathering with loved ones. Early on Christmas Eve day, the Rev. Deborah Wise

gathers with youths and college students to make and bag Christmas treats (usually chocolate-covered pretzels). After Christmas Eve worship, families attending take the goodies and hit the streets. They stop at hospitals, fire stations, gas stations—anywhere they know people may be working—and share the expressions of God's love with everyone they meet as they travel home.

Advent is enough

In the small town of Salem, Ark., Viola United Methodist Church is the

only mainline church and the only church that follows the liturgical calendar. During Advent, they add extra community-building opportunities before and after worship. Rather than playing down their traditions, they celebrate them and focus their advertising on the unique voice they offer in their community. The Rev. Cherie Baker says many people in their community who have come from more traditional church backgrounds attend the services simply to

(Continued on page 15, "EQUIPPING.")



Photo and idea courtesy of www.liluna.com

DISCIPLES HELPING TO TRANSFORM THE WORLD



▲ **Benn's United Methodist Church in Smithfield (York River District)** is a sponsor of the Red Bird Mission that serves an area of Kentucky located deep in the Appalachian Mountains, an area that suffers from extreme poverty. The Mission was founded in 1921 with just a school and has grown into a full-service mission of The United Methodist Church, the only one of its kind in the United States. It serves approximately 14,000 people each year. United Methodist Women and children at Benn's UMC have made 60 fleece blankets for children there. In December, the blankets will be taken to Henderson, Ky., by a group from the Smithfield area who are going there to help organize and distribute Christmas gifts to the area residents. Pictured is Emma Jean Brady, coordinator of the blanket project.

At its Annual Meeting Oct. 25 at Virginia United Methodist Assembly Center (VUMAC) in Blackstone, **Virginia Conference United Methodist Women** held a live and silent auction with all proceeds going to the United Methodist Women's Legacy Fund. All 16 districts in the Virginia Conference were asked to donate a theme basket with items from their districts. The auction had over 200 silent auction items which included crocheted items, artwork, carvings, quilts, theme baskets such as tea baskets, spa bas-

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

kets, taste of fall, etc. Retired Virginia missionaries, including Dana Tyson and Walt and Betty Whitehurst, donated items from the countries they served. Twenty-two baskets and a diamond and emerald necklace were auctioned at the live auction. A total of \$5,421.50 was raised for the UMW Legacy Fund, a fund established to ensure UMW will continue for many years to come. ▼



On Oct. 29, the **James River District** hosted several hundred students and adults at a showing of the Erwin Brothers' film, "Woodlawn", in Colonial Heights. The film tells the true story of Hank Erwin (Sean Astin), whose faith impacts the Woodlawn High School football team, especially future NFL running back Tony Nathan (Caleb Castille). Following a successful set of advance screenings to football teams at the University of Alabama, University of South Carolina, University of Georgia, Ole Miss and Temple University, the film is currently playing in theaters across the country. Churches from the district were encouraged to bring their youth groups and to invite young people from the community. The audience that night included dozens of students from Richard Bland College and Virginia State University, as well as members of the Prince George High School football team. Groups were asked to pay \$1 per ticket, and the Board of Missions covered the additional cost. Group leaders were equipped with a reflection guide for small group discussion after the film. ▼





◀ **Otterbein Chapel United Methodist, Harrisonburg District**, celebrated its 180th Homecoming on Aug. 2, with 130 people attending. Bishop Young Jin Cho gave an inspirational message on prayer. Four former ministers and their families were present and shared memories about their years with Otterbein. The worship service included special vocal music, Holy Communion and a superb, catered lunch afterward under tents. Otterbein’s current ministers, the Rev. Darlene Wilkins and the Rev. Lisa Coffelt, presided over the events of the day.

(“EQUIPPING,” continued from pg. 13)

connect with long-standing expressions of faith. Follow the lectionary, she advises. Meditate on peace, joy and love, and maybe even have a Twelfth Night celebration. Celebrate your traditions, and you will find people who love them as much as you do.

Try these ideas—or come up with others of your own—to reach into your community and embody the very thing we celebrate: God’s love coming in human form as Jesus Christ is born. 🍷

–Article from *United Methodist Communications*.

(“PRAYER,” continued from pg. 12)

quietly began to pray, I stopped thinking about myself and began to focus more on connecting with God. After a few moments, I found myself talking, asking for help. My feelings of intimidation gradually gave way to a feeling of comfort and peace. I, too, desperately needed to release my struggles and burdens before God. I, too, needed reassurance that God loved me in the midst of my turmoil.

All too quickly the music began to fade and the lights in the sanctuary became brighter. The hour for prayer was coming to a close. Some people would stay and continue praying, but most would quietly file out of the church and continue on their way to work, or school or home.

Our group attended the 5:00 a.m. service every day. I was beginning to understand why I felt led by God to join other pastors on this journey to Korea. I was no longer here to please the Bishop or to take a trip. My journey was becoming a personal part of my walk with God. I have questions and burdens and doubts. I needed reassurance that I was fulfilling the calling God placed on my life. I, too, needed an opportunity to deepen my relationship with the God who has loved me and nurtured me. 🍷

– The Rev. Larry Davies is the Lynchburg District superintendent.



More photos from the Korea trip by Hien Phan:
(Top) Seminar led by Rev. Hong, senior pastor of Bupyeong Methodist Church.
(Bottom) Pastor Hong, pastors and elders of Bupyeong Methodist Church welcome the Pilgrimage.

WAITING ON

“The days are surely coming,
says the *Lord*, when I will
fulfill the promise I made to the
house of *Israel*
and the house of *Judah*.
In those days and at that
time I will cause a righteous
Branch to spring up for
David; and he shall execute justice
and righteousness in the land.”

JEREMIAH 33:14-15

N A PROMISE



The four-week season before Christmas, Advent, is a time when Christians from all denominations mark the first coming of Christ, a birth in a stable with the magi, angels and shepherds all gathered around.

It also marks anticipation for his ultimate second coming in our lives. “Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.” Hebrews 9:28

The timing of Advent varies, as the first Sunday of Advent can be as early as Nov. 27 or as late as Dec. 3. The word, “advent,” in Latin, *adventus*, means “coming” or “arrival.” Scripture and worship during this time, therefore, look backward and forward with passages from both the Old and New Testament relating to the expected Messiah and Jesus coming as the judge of all.

Each Sunday of Advent has a distinct theme. The first Sunday is Christ’s coming in final victory. The second and third Sundays focus on John the Baptist and his ministry. The fourth Sunday surrounds the events prior to Jesus’ birth (*The United Methodist Book of Worship*).



Advent History

An important distinction is that the Advent season is not part of Christmas; it prepares us for the Christmas season.

But where did Advent come from? Though it is based on resources from the Bible, it was not until churches wove together the strands of hope, promises and sense of waiting to create the season. At the end of the 20th century, the denominations of Christianity created a revised calendar of the year and the three-year lectionary system that have been widely accepted, leading to a broad adoption of Advent as its own season.

Traces of Advent first surfaced in the early fourth century. Advent was a time of preparation under Bishop Perpetuus of Tours (490) who instituted fasting from Nov. 11, the feast of St. Martin, to Jan. 6, Epiphany Day. Advent worship practices emerged from Ravenna, Italy, in the mid-fifth century with the expectation of the celebration of the birth of Christ as central theme. Under Gregory the Great (590-615), there were four Sundays of Advent. In the 12th century, purple vestments were adopted by Rome and the word "Gloria" was omitted until Christmas in order to reflect a waiting period until it could ring out in newness at Christmas (Learn more of this history from Discipleship Ministries).

The Colors of Advent

The colors of the season are either purple or blue (*The United Methodist Book of Worship*). In recent years, blue has become an accepted alternative to purple through a

rethinking of the Advent season.

The introduction of blue is largely because the color purple has been reflective of the Advent and Lenten seasons. And while the seasons have had similar colors, the two seasons have different focuses: Advent is about expectant hope and waiting, while Lent is about repentance. To better differentiate the two, the introduction of blue during the Advent season has become popular.

Also found in history, the color blue has defined the Advent season in the eighth and 12th centuries in The Swedish Church.

The Advent Wreath

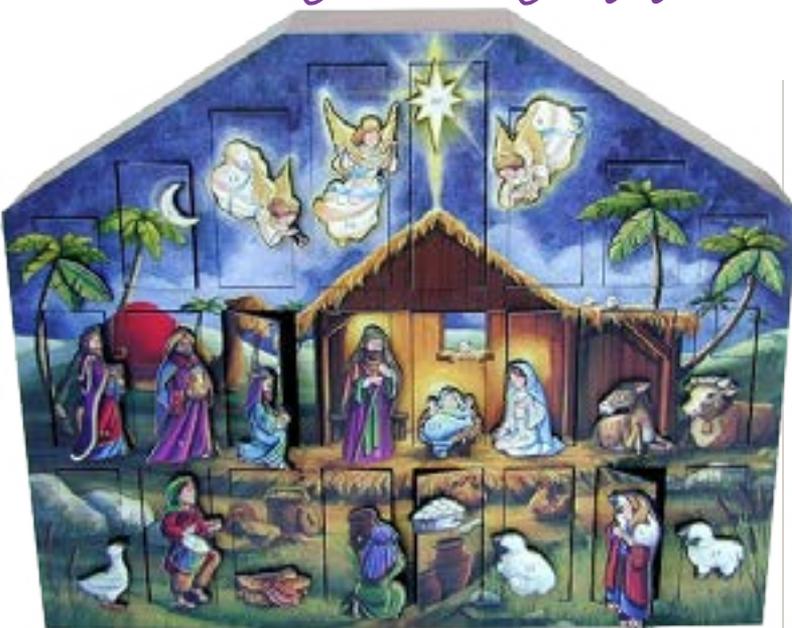
A tradition of the season is the Advent wreath made up of five candles. From German origins, candles are surrounded by evergreen branches representing everlasting life. The wreath, in its circular form, represents God's unending love and ultimate victory. The middle candle, which is white, stands as the Christ candle and is lit last as a reminder of Jesus as the light of the world. The four candles surrounding the white one represent the four weeks of Advent. The other four candles are blue or purple with one pink candle.

Continue reading this feature to see how churches and individuals around the conference celebrate the Advent and Christmas seasons. For more Advent resources, read the "Equipping for Ministry" and "One Last Word" sections to reach more people during Advent and to prepare your family for Advent, respectively. 

– Madeline Pillow is editor of the Advocate.



Advent gathering of faiths makes incarnation real



By Glenn Rowley

It was our first Advent and Christmas in our new assignment as missionaries in Dakar, Senegal. This was not our first holiday time away from our families in the U.S., but it was the first one in a country and culture that is not predominantly Christian.

The country is 95 percent Islamic, and we were only a few months into serving as part a group of three families who were called to begin a United Methodist presence in Senegal. As a part of that work, we were working primarily in community development with young adults who were still trying to understand what these white, Methodist (whatever that means!) missionaries from the U.S. were trying to do as we struggled to understand culture, language and faith. There were plenty of differences, but we also sought common ground as we impatiently worked at building trust and relationships.

Our family decided to host a meal at our home a few days before Christmas and invite many of the young adults we were working with to share a bit of our Christmas faith tradition. As a part of the evening, I read the nativity story from the Bible and was surprised to find that many of our Muslim friends were familiar with the story of Jesus' birth to Mary as it is recorded in the Koran. There was discussion about the differences in who Jesus is in both faiths but also where we can share teachings and wisdom from our sacred texts.

We had a nativity scene and Christmas tree, of course, prominently displayed in our living room. At one point after dinner our young daughter decided it was important to tell our guests about her Advent calendar as well as describe all those present at the nativity. She dramatically described Mary, Joseph, the baby Jesus, shepherds, wise men and the animal attendees. She then decided the importance of explaining all the ornaments on our Christmas tree. I was not sure our guests were that interested.

Our tree was decorated primarily with ornaments and objects that were gifts from our support churches across the U.S. She told them about each decoration and where the church was that sent it: Maryland, New York, Oklahoma, Missouri, North Carolina, Connecticut, Kansas, etc.

At one point as she was expounding on this star or that crocheted cross, one of the young men said, "These things on your Christmas tree are from other Methodist Christians in the United States?"

"Yes," I responded.

"So you aren't here just because you wanted to come. You were sent by a lot of people who help you be here?"

"Yes, there are a lot of people who not only sent us and support us with their gifts of money but they are also praying for us and for you. We are connected all the way back there and with you here."

"I'm thankful they sent you," he said.

As our evening concluded, we prayed together for our connected lives and for our work together as Christians and Muslims. For our family that year in a very special way the incarnation became real as we recognized God with us across borders, cultures, languages and even faiths! 🇺🇸

— The Rev. Glenn Rowley is Virginia Conference director of Justice and Missional Excellence.



'Tis the season of Shalom, Salaam, Peace

By John Copenhaver

Advent is my favorite liturgical season. It invites us to anticipate – in our daily life – God’s coming reign of justice and peace. We regularly pray, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,” but Advent invests that prayer with a certain urgency. The Lord is coming: “Prepare the Way of the Lord.”

Some Christians prefer to use “kin-dom” to “kingdom,” which I find consistent with Jesus’s intention in the prayer. “Kin-dom” is a recognition of our familial relationship to God, to one another and to all God’s creatures. The word “kind” means treating others as kin. Advent calls us to em-

brace all people and all creation in kinship and kindness.

The first weeks of Advent remind us to prepare for God’s reign by working for justice for the needy, the poor and the vulnerable.

The fruit of justice is peace, which becomes a prominent theme later in Advent. For as long as I have been reading the Psalms, I have joined the psalmist in “praying for the peace of Jerusalem.” (Ps. 122:6) The whole verse reads: “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem, may they who love you be secure.” (NIV) The three Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) all love Jerusalem and consider it a sacred city. My prayer for the region is that all these traditions can live there in peace and security. In Hebrew the name “Jerusalem” means “city of shalom” or “city of peace,” but in our time we see Jerusalem and the Holy Land suffering from violence and oppression. Our hopes and prayers for peace seem almost like a fantasy. But, pray we must because the psalmist calls us to pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

Years ago I remember reading a devotion that said we must “put feet on our prayers.” Prayer doesn’t change God – it changes us. If we pray with earnestness, we are not content with words alone. Just as the “Word became flesh” we must incarnate our prayers.

So, it is in that spirit that five members of the Virginia Conference (Steve Jones, Keary Kincannon, Garey Eakes, Haniel Garibay and me) joined the Interfaith Peace-BUILDER (IFPB) delegation traveling to Israel/Palestine this November. We traveled at a time of increased tensions between Israelis and Palestinians. We went in humility to learn from Israeli and Palestinian peacemakers and to offer our encouragement to them. As we stayed in the homes of Israelis and Palestinians during part of our visit, we shared, in some small way, the struggles and humiliations of Palestinians living under the occupation and of Israelis living with indiscriminate spasms of violence.

Our delegation was called “The November Olive Harvest Delegation” because we spent a few days assisting Christian and Muslim Palestinians with the annual olive harvest. The Palestinian olive harvest season is generally a time of community activism, where people of all ages from Palestine, Israeli peace and justice groups and international groups join farmers as they reap their harvest. International support from delegations like ours makes the harvest possible in many years. We heard from Palestinian farmers and learned of the importance of agriculture to the Palestinian economy and culture.



The Rev. Steve Jones, center, is among the Interfaith Peace-BUILDER delegates touring the marketplace in Jerusalem’s Old City.



Virginia Conference members of the Interfaith Peace-BUILDER delegation to Israel/Palestine are, left to right, Garey Eakes, Steve Jones, Keary Kincannon, John Copenhaver and Haniel Garibay.

American Jews for a Just Peace/ Jewish Voice for Peace sponsored our delegation and helped choose our itinerary. The Virginia Conference Board of Church and Society was associate partner for this delegation, which didn't require any financial support, but gave us a voice in the planning. We traveled with a diverse interfaith group of 30 people.

As a key aim of IFPB delegations is to understand all sides in conflict, we also met with Jewish settlers and were reminded of the ugly and violent history of anti-Semitism in a visit to Yad Vashem (The Holocaust History Museum).

One goal of our Virginia Conference delegation was to provide a model for travel in the Holy Land. In Resolution #6031 (2008) General Conference urged United Methodist "to hear the concerns of

both the Israelis and Palestinians who live there, as well as visit the biblical and historical sites." Too often tour groups hear only one side of the story or hear the story only from Israeli approved tour guides.

But, you do not have to travel to Israel/Palestine to participate in "putting feet to your prayers" for peace. There is a lot we can do in our communities and in the United States. General Conference resolution #6073 (2012) points the way (see sidebar).

We do not claim to have "the solution" to the conflict. We go to learn and to encourage those working for nonviolent solutions to the conflict, and to share what we learn. As we pray for peace this Advent, Christians cannot help but think of the Holy Land, of Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Nazareth. We pray that Jews, Christians, Muslims, Israelis and Palestinians may all live in peace and security. Shalom, Salaam, Peace. 🍀

– The Rev. John D. Copenhaver Jr. is Professor Emeritus of Religion and Philosophy at Shenandoah University.

(Left) Interfaith Peace-BUILDERS delegates were hosted in villages around Jenin (Northern West Bank) by Palestinian families who are part of the Palestinian Fair Trade Association cooperative headquartered in Burqin village.



General Conference resolution #6073 (2012)

We urge all United Methodists to:

1. Read about the suffering of Israelis and Palestinians and nonviolent ways of ending the Israeli/Palestinian conflict from the perspective of all faith communities including the "Kairos Palestine" document; and
2. Encourage members of each congregation to study the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from all perspectives by inviting speakers to church events, reading books, using audiovisual resources in educational forums, and getting information from websites. We especially commend the 2010 British Methodist Church's call "on the Methodist people to support and engage with [a] boycott of Israeli goods emanating from illegal settlements," as well as a call for nonviolent actions issued by several annual conferences.
3. Provide financial support to the Palestinian people through contributions to the General Board of Global Ministries;
4. Support, and participate in, the work of international peace and human rights organizations, such as the Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine & Israel and Christian Peacemaker Teams, to provide protection for Palestinians and Israelis seeking nonviolently to end the occupation; and
5. Reach out to local synagogues, mosques, and Christian faith groups by engaging in interfaith and ecumenical dialogue on nonviolent ways to promote justice and peace in the Holy Land; and

That the General Board of Global Ministries, working together with the General Board of Church & Society and interfaith organizations, develop advocacy packets for use in local congregations to promote a just and lasting peace and human rights for all in the region.



Bethany UMC emphasizes the true trimmings of Christmas

By Mary Caldwell and the Rev. Jennifer Vestal Moore

When you walk into the sanctuary during the Advent and Christmas season at Bethany UMC in Rustburg, you will find all of the traditional trimmings that adorn most churches during the festive season with one exception; there will be no live poinsettias on display. It's not that the people of Bethany are opposed to these beautiful Christmas plants, it's just that they felt their money could be put to better use.

In the weeks prior to Advent, an invitation is given to the members of Bethany to honor a loved one by giving \$5 per name for the person they wish to remember. Instead of using this money to purchase a plant which may die before it makes its way home, the congregation uses the money to buy Christmas presents for approximately nine children from Campbell County Social Services. In the four years since the inception of this program, the people of Bethany have brought Christmas to more than 36 children and spent nearly \$5,000 on children and families who might otherwise not have had any presents to open up on Christmas morning.

On a Sunday in late November, members of Bethany UMC meet at the local K-mart. The men head off to the toy department while the women spend their time making sure that a coat, shoes, socks, pajamas, underwear and at least two outfits are in the shopping cart for each of the children. A Bible is also bought and given to each family. After purchasing all the items, the shoppers head out to dinner to share in the fellowship and love of the season. The true meaning of Christmas is celebrated that day: giving to others out of our blessings and then sharing in the joy of the season with family and friends around the table.

Jesus tells us in Matthew 25:35, when we do it to the least of these, we are indeed serving him (Christ). Our conference theme this year has been turning members into disciples. When it comes to following Jesus' words and serving our poor and needy neighbor, the folks at Bethany

UMC truly know what it means to be a disciple following in the ways of our Lord and Savior.

*Note - During the Lenten season, instead of filling the church with Easter lilies, folks are invited to honor a loved one with a financial gift of \$5. All the money collected is sent to REAP (Rural Emergency Assistance Program) to provide for our neighbors in need. 📧

- Mary Caldwell is Lay Delegate to Annual Conference.
The Rev. Jennifer Vestal Moore is pastor at Bethany UMC,
Lynchburg District.





Advent resources

What is a Chrismon tree?

Ornaments made from Christian symbols (or Chrismons, a contraction for "Christ monograms") and the Chrismon tree were first developed by Frances Spencer and the women of the Ascension Lutheran Church in Danville, Va., as a suitable way to decorate the Christmas tree to better reflect Christian beliefs.

Spencer and the other women decided to start with the name of Jesus and his title, Christ, on the tree using Greek symbols. "Chi Rho" (symbols that look like an "x" and "p") stands for Christos, the Greek word for Christ. From this starting point, the women created other ornaments to decorate the tree including references to Jesus' life, ministry and teachings.

These ornaments are traditionally white and gold. White represents the purity and perfection of Jesus with gold signifying Jesus' majesty.

Today, many churches have followed in these early footsteps to decorate a Chrismon tree during the seasons of Advent and Christmas.

—(from www.umc.org)

Learn more about the Advent wreath and Chrismon tree with "Chuck Knows Church" video at www.umcdiscipleship.org along with Advent and Christmas Leadership Resources.



2015 Advent Wreath Meditations

This set of brief meditations and scripture may be used in lighting the candles of the Advent wreath in worship at church or home. Each meditation uses one of the 2015 lectionary readings for that day. The readings are divided into sections that can be assigned to various persons participating, including children. Choose from among the hymn options to conclude each meditation. Permission is granted to download, copy, adapt, edit and reprint for home or local church worship with the inclusion of the copyright citation on each copy.

www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/2015-advent-wreath-meditations-year-c-mcintyre



Rethink Church provides Advent sermon starters, postcards and door hangers for Advent resources at www.umcom.org.

The Society of St. Andrew offers a devotional booklet, *My Soul Magnifies the Lord*, that focuses on Jesus' concern for the least, the last and the lost available at www.endhunger.org.

Hanging of the Greens Service

The Hanging of the Greens service provided here (www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/hanging-of-the-greens-service) is an alternative to "Hanging of the Greens" in *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, 258-260. Planners may want to incorporate parts of that service into this one, depending on the context and the elements of "greening" intended. In a time when people are crying out for liturgy as symbols deeply lived, this can be a multisensory communal event.

The service as provided here aims at participation of many hands, including children. Careful planning and preparation will allow for full participation of all present. The service assumes either that, at a time prior to the service, the community gathers to first prepare these decorations, or that a servant group has prepared them for the gathered community to hang. Depending on the space and how elaborate the decoration will be, some things, such as placement of lights, the tree in the stand, and so forth, may need to be done ahead of time.

This service may be used as a specially scheduled service early in Advent or as part of a regularly scheduled worship service. ☞

EVENTS



December

High School Retreat

Dec. 4-6, Eagle Eyrie, Lynchburg

During this weekend retreat, youths are challenged to grow as disciples of Christ through worship, Bible study and small groups while building friendships with others from all over Virginia. For more information, contact Becky Tate at Becky-Tate@vaumc.org or call **1-800-768-6040, ext. 139**. Fee is \$135 person. Register online at www.vaumc.org/youth.

Wounded Hearts, Healing Love

Dec. 4-6, Camp Overlook

Have the circumstances of life returned you to singleness, perhaps through separation, divorce or death? Camp Overlook in Keezletown is offering a special time apart with other singles to allow you to explore the trials, hurts and loneliness of being single again and search for the road leading to healing and wholeness. Cost is \$105 per person (some financial assistance available). More information and registration found online at www.campoverlook.org.

Winter Camp for children

Dec. 4-6, Westview on the James, Goochland County

Westview on the James in Goochland County is providing a three-day Winter Camp Dec. 4-6 for children ages 7-12. Theme is based on Charlie Brown's Christmas. Activities will include Christmas crafts and carols, games, making cookies and treats to share with the local nursing home and recording Christmas Carols to be sung with nursing home residents. Each camper is asked to bring an unwrapped, new \$10 toy which will be donated to the Henrico Christmas Mothers Program. Cost is \$125. Register at www.westviewonthejames.org.

UMVIM Team Leader Training

Dec. 5, Trinity UMC, Richmond

United Methodist Volunteers In Mission (UMVIM) Team Leader Training, required for all first-time UMVIM team leaders, will be held Saturday, Dec. 5, 9:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m. at Trinity UMC, 903 Forest Ave., Richmond. A \$55 registration fee, payable when you register, covers mandatory background check, team leader handbook from the Southeastern Jurisdiction and lunch. Continuing Education Units (0.5) will be provided for those needing CEU certification. Pre-registration is required by noon Monday, Nov. 30. For more information or to register, visit the conference website at www.vaumc.org under "Events" and the date. Or contact the conference office of Justice and Missional Excellence at **(804) 521-1139 or toll-free at 1-800-768-6040, ext. 139**, or Forrest White, Virginia Conference UMVIM coordinator, at **(804) 938-1026** or VirginiaUMVIM@gmail.com.

UMVIM Team Leader Recertification training

Dec. 6, Trinity UMC, Richmond

United Methodist Volunteers In Mission (UMVIM) Team Leader Recertification training will be offered 1-3 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 6, at Trinity UMC, 903 Forest Ave., Richmond. This training is required for all UMVIM team leaders who completed basic team leader training five years ago or longer. Focus of this training is to update leaders on Virginia Conference UMVIM policies and guidelines, to share best practices and to answer any questions. At least five participants are needed to offer this training. A \$25 registration fee is payable when you register. Note: This fee does not cover an optional team leader handbook, which will be available for purchase (\$20) at the training, or the new A Mission Journey book, which is available through Cokesbury. A meal will not be provided. All registrations must be in the office of Justice and Missional Excellence by noon Monday, Nov. 30. For more information or to register, visit the conference website at www.vaumc.org under "Events" and the date. Or contact the office of Justice and Missional Excellence at **(804) 521-1139 or toll-free at 1-800-768-6040, ext. 139**, or Forrest White, Virginia Conference UMVIM Coordinator, at VirginiaUMVIM@gmail.com or **(804) 938-1026**.

Evening at Blackstone

Dec. 12, Virginia United Methodist Assembly Center, Blackstone

Virginia United Methodist Assembly Center, 707 Fourth St., Blackstone, will hold its annual "Evening at Blackstone" at 3:30 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 12. A matinee performance by The Hunts from Chesapeake will be followed by a banquet dinner, carol sing, shopping at The Acorn and World Gifts, Nativity tour, Advent celebration and light refreshments. Lodging (with breakfast) is available for those who want to spend the night. For more information and reservations, call **(434) 292-5308**.

Walk to the Manger

Dec. 18, Camp Overlook

Camp Overlook in Keezletown will again present Walk to the Manger—a live, interactive nativity experience. Meet the shepherds, hear the angels announce the good news, visit a young couple and their Holy child and help point a few kings toward the treasure they seek. Tours will begin continuously from 6 to 8 p.m. The experience will last about 30 minutes. Dress warmly, wear sturdy shoes and keep children with a responsible adult at all times. For out-of-town guests, this program will be followed by Walk to the Manger Bed and Breakfast where couples, families and individuals can warm up at Blessings Lodge, enjoy the fireplace, reflect, participate in and enjoy fun activities, snacks and a private room. Pack-

EVENTS

age includes breakfast before departure on Saturday morning, Dec. 19. Details online at www.CampOverlook.org.

January

Candidacy Summit

Jan. 8-9, Virginia United Methodist Assembly Center, Blackstone

The Candidacy Summit is an event for considering or admitted candidates for ministry in the Virginia Conference. You must be a high school graduate to participate. All candidates are required to attend a Candidacy Summit prior to certification. Another Candidacy Summit will be held in July 2016. Prior to the Candidacy Summit, participants must complete a strengths discovery assessment and the River of Life Activity and bring both to the Summit. Registration is required 48 hours prior to the event in order to ensure sufficient materials are available for all participants. For more information or to register, visit the conference website at www.vaumc.org under "Events" and the date. Or contact the Center for Clergy Excellence at **(804) 521-1126 or 1-800-768-6040, ext. 126**.

UMVIM Team Leader Training

Jan. 16, Bethany UMC, Rustburg, Lynchburg District
United Methodist Volunteers In Mission (UMVIM) Team Leader Training, required for all first-time UMVIM team leaders, will be held Saturday, Jan. 16, 9:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m. at Bethany UMC, 2772 Bethany Rd., Rustburg, in the Lynchburg District. A \$55 registration fee, payable when you register, covers mandatory background check, team leader handbook from the Southeastern Jurisdiction and lunch. Continuing Education Units (0.5) will be provided for those needing CEU certification. Pre-registration is required by noon Monday, Jan. 11. For more information or to register, visit the conference website at www.vaumc.org under "Events" and the date. Or contact the conference office of Justice and Missional Excellence at **(804) 521-1139 or toll-free at 1-800-768-6040, ext. 139**, or Forrest White, Virginia Conference UMVIM coordinator, at **(804) 938-1026 or VirginiaUMVIM@gmail.com**.

UMVIM Team Leader Recertification

Jan. 30, Burke UMC, Alexandria District
United Methodist Volunteers In Mission (UMVIM) Team Leader Recertification training will be offered 4-6 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 30, at Burke UMC, 6200 Burke Centre Pkwy., Burke, Alexandria District. This training is required for all UMVIM team leaders who completed basic team leader training five years ago or longer. Focus of this training is to update leaders on Virginia Conference UMVIM policies and guidelines, to share best practices and to answer any questions. At least five

participants are needed to offer this training. A \$25 registration fee is payable when you register. Note: This fee does not cover an optional team leader handbook, which will be available for purchase (\$20) at the training, or the new A Mission Journey book, which is available through Cokesbury. A meal will not be provided. All registrations must be in the office of Justice and Missional Excellence by noon Monday, Jan. 25. For more information or to register, visit the conference website at www.vaumc.org under "Events" and the date. Or contact the office of Justice and Missional Excellence at **(804) 521-1139 or toll-free at 1-800-768-6040, ext. 139**, or Forrest White, Virginia Conference UMVIM Coordinator, at **VirginiaUMVIM@gmail.com or (804) 938-1026**.

February

United Methodist Day at the General Assembly

Feb. 4, Bon Air UMC and Capitol Square, Richmond
This annual event, sponsored by the conference Board of Church and Society and United Methodist Women of the Virginia Conference, is an opportunity to help faith communities become empowered to serve as missionaries of justice as well as the more traditional missionaries of mercy. Participants will gather Thursday, Feb. 4, at 7 a.m. at Bon Air UMC, 1645 Buford Rd., Richmond, for registration and breakfast and then travel together on buses to the General Assembly and Capitol Square where they will attend committee hearings and meet with legislators in order to advocate for social justice. At 12:30 p.m. participants will return to Bon Air UMC for lunch followed by speakers and discussion. The \$25 early bird price is available until Jan. 15. Registration increases to \$35 on Jan. 16. Final registration deadline is Jan. 29. Space is limited to 300 persons. For more information or to register, visit the conference website at www.vaumc.org under "Events" and the date. Registration questions may be directed to Monica Sprague at **(757) 766-9418 or monicaleighsprague@gmail.com**. General questions may be directed to Pat Shipley at **(804) 353-1387 or plsrevdoc@aol.com**.

Clergy Ethics II Training

Feb. 18, Dayton UMC, Harrisonburg District
All clergy and certified church professionals are required to attend an Ethics II training during this quadrennium (2012-2016). The next training will be 9:30 a.m. to 3:15 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 18, at Dayton UMC, 215 Ashby St., Dayton, on the Harrisonburg District. Registration fee of \$12 includes lunch and training materials and is payable by credit card. For more information or to register, visit the conference website at www.vaumc.org under "Events" and the date. Or contact

(Continued on pg. 28: "EVENTS")

LIVING THE WORD



The Rev. Lindsey M. Baynham is an ordained elder currently serving as the Minister Director for ARISE Campus Ministry at George Mason University. She received a B.A. in Religious Studies with a minor in Music from Randolph-Macon College in Ashland, and her Master of Divinity from Duke Divinity School in Durham, N.C. Lindsey enjoys time with family and friends, her dog, Charles (rightfully named after her favorite Wesley), and a good laugh.

Dec. 6, 2015

“Rest from the Grind”

Exodus 16:23; 20:8-11; 31:12-8

There is a phrase I cannot stand: “I’m too busy.” No matter the event, whether it was church-led, something in the community or for fellowship and devotion, this phrase is always the same. The problem is not that people are always too busy, it is rather that they, we, have forgotten how to rest from the rhythms of life. If we have a day off here or there, it’s almost second nature to fill it with something else. Every nook and cranny is crammed with places to go, people to see and activities to do. Furthermore, this is not an issue unique to a particular region, it is, unfortunately, a human matter. Instead of taking a moment to be still or linger in the silent space, we keep running in an endless wheel that we think is life-giving.

The observance of Sabbath described in the Ten Commandments is interesting in that it is a command to observe that which was created for us. Let me restate that. The Sabbath is an instruction to the people to remember a gift that was given for them. In the creation narrative, God establishes differing aspects and calls them each good. At the beginning, God creates. When finished, God rests. “And on the seventh day God finished the work...and rested on the seventh day. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work done in creation” (Genesis 2:2-3 NRSV). The creation account in chapters one and two of Genesis are truly miraculous: The sky and waters are separated, animals are brought to life, there is night and day and humankind is created in God’s image. A busy six days packed full of creativity and life. But the gift of the seventh is one that acknowledges a need for restoration and rest in the Creator.

In The Sabbath, author Abraham Heschel writes “every seventh day a miracle comes to pass, the resurrection of the soul, of humankind and of all things” (Heschel 83). When we bypass the day of rest created intentionally for us, we are bound to feel incomplete. Despite our efforts to fill empty space with more things, only can we find true completeness in our creator God. The interwoven nature of our created being is tightly bound with the reality of holiness—being set a part for God—and completeness that is found as

we rest in God’s created space. Remember the Sabbath—a created space of rest—and keep it holy, set a part for God.

Dec. 13, 2015

“An Awkward Request”

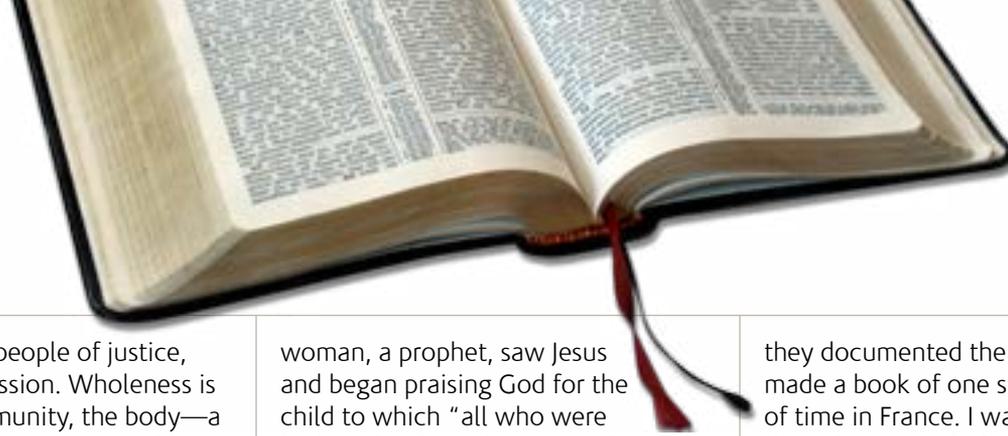
Romans 12:1-2

A few weeks ago I was sitting in worship and had the strangest epiphany. Offering might be the most awkward moment in a worship experience. Now before those passionate in finances or the heads of stewardship campaigns get all worked up, hear me out. As I sat there, we came to a particular time within the worship setting, people were summoned forward, or simply knew to come forward. In this case, the pastor made prefatory comments, but often times this does not happen. So those unfamiliar with the experience are confused or uncomfortable. The ushers began to pass the plate and I watched people as a wave of emotions flooded those around me.

“Man, I’m not ready!” or “What will the usher think when I do the ‘no thanks’ wave?” or “Money is really tight this month...is it okay if I only give this much?” or maybe it was the general and all too common feeling that we are unworthy to offer anything to God, to sacrifice anything for God. In this sacred space, a ritual act of giving a tithe or portion to the glory of God becomes dreaded or uncomfortable or what may even be worse—an auto-piloted act out of obligation.

The apostle Paul is using the ritualistic image of sacrifice, a well-known action of the Jewish people, to paint the picture of thanksgiving and an offering given to God. The twist comes when Paul poses the offering as a full body experience, not to be performed at a distance. If you think the passing of the plate is awkward or difficult, the call on our lives that Paul describes is a much stronger request. The appeal to be in full body, spiritual worship is real and tangible and visceral. We are not simply moving to a spiritual level or realm but we are living out God’s grace in earthly ways.

The transformed body of Christ is not sensible religion that merely sits in pews, reads the Bible, robotically places a check in a plate and leaves after an hour. To be renewed and transformed for God can be messy and risky because holiness



invites us to be a people of justice, mercy and compassion. Wholeness is found in the community, the body—a people of forgiveness, grace and love. To sacrifice is to die to what the world tells us and to live in a new way that proclaims the overwhelming mercies of God. Is this an awkward request we are willing to respond to?

Dec. 20, 2015

“Present Messiah”

Luke 2:21-39

My grandfather was notorious for giving the most unlikely Christmas gifts. At first we shrugged it off as a one-time thing, but over the years my brother and I would receive fancy golden pens with our names on it, an Olympic jacket, binoculars and more. We never really understood why we received these things, but we were always grateful. We would try and figure out what he had intended and all our grandfather would say is, “You never know when you’ll need [insert gift here].”

After their son came into world in an unlikely and humble way, Mary and Joseph were prepared to follow the law according to Moses, in order to purify the mother and dedicate or present the child to God in Jerusalem. In the midst of travelling for an age-old custom, they experience two people who testify fully to the majesty of his presence.

Simeon, a righteous man, comes into the temple and when he sees Jesus he praises God saying, “My eyes have seen your salvation...a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel” (Luke 2:30-32 NRSV). In spite of all they had seen, Mary and Joseph were still amazed about this bundle of joy, their son. Simeon’s words over the child foreshadow that the light of Christ will even cast shadows for some in Israel—a suspect statement. Then, another individual in the temple, a

woman, a prophet, saw Jesus and began praising God for the child to which “all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem” (Luke 2:28 NRSV).

On what seemed like a routine journey to present the child, Jesus was made known as the Word made flesh—unexpected and yet exactly what was needed in order to show the tenderness, salvation, redemption, mercy and the closeness of God. The Christ child was and is a deliverance from the present reality—a gift and invitation to live into the kingdom of God breaking in.

Christmas can persuade us to focus on the rituals of cookies, gifts, trees and decorations, but we have to remember that our precious gift in Christ is not just a baby in a manger. It is this but also, “it is also the Messiah, the One who came to challenge our faith and promises the joy of a brand new world filled with righteousness and peace” (New International Lesson Annual 180). You never know when you’ll need this overwhelming, unexpected and grace-filled promise.

Dec. 27, 2015

“Brought Low”

Matthew 23:1-12

One summer I served as a chaplain student intern at an assisted and independent living facility. Our weeks comprised of class time to hear from residents and medical professionals, processing time and sharing experiences in our visits. However in the midst of all the group time we were visiting residents on different floors in varying stages of health.

One woman in particular has resonated in my soul from that summer to now. She was a writer—poetry in particular. She travelled all over the world with her husband, and as she wrote to describe the architecture as well as the beauty, he expressed the same beauty through pictures. Together

they documented their life. They even made a book of one specific period of time in France. I was given some of this information before I met her, but I was also told that her memory was slowly fading. I remember the first time I walked into her room. Immediately uncomfortable, feeling like I had something to prove as the pastor in the situation—the one to offer something to her in our visit together. Oh boy was I wrong. When I walked into the room, her bed was low to the ground because it was easier to move from her wheelchair at this level. Nervous in my own skin and role I began rambling. Just talking a mile a minute. I noticed that as I chatted on and on I could hear her faint voice saying, “There’s just too much...too much pain. I can’t. Too much pain.”

If I wasn’t already on edge, this pushed me over. I distinctly remember snapping my mouth shut and looking around at the exit. Maybe she hadn’t seen me. I could always make rounds another time. I wanted this to be the perfect visit, the best connection between chaplain and patient. But something came over me: let’s say it was the Holy Spirit. I slowly sat down, on the floor, next to her bed. I placed my hand on hers and was present. From that moment on I didn’t say another word out loud, I listened to her groaning pains.

What an amazing thing when my preconceived notions of being revered as pastor and chaplain are brought low to their rightful place—servant, friend and faithful follower of Christ. Oh that we would be attuned to the Spirit in order to encounter the holy in everyday happenings and gracious moments. 🍷

CLERGY & DIACONAL



DEATHS

Frances Belman Haddock died Sept. 5, 2015, in Fredericksburg where she was born Jan. 17, 1927. She was a lifelong member of the United Methodist community, including active roles at Trinity UMC in Richmond and Fredericksburg UMC.

Ruby G. Simon died Sept. 15, 2015. She was the wife of Patrick Simon, retired local pastor who resides in Lynchburg.

Wayne Hartwell, brother-in-law of the **Rev. Joe Shoop**, died Oct. 15, 2015, in Bowling Green, Ky. Rev. Shoop is pastor at Bethel UMC, Alexandria District.

Anne Hilton Snead, 87, of Boones Mill, died Oct. 15, 2015. She was preceded in death by her husband, the **Rev. Andrew Davis "Dave" Snead**. Anne was born in England where she met her husband in 1945 while he was stationed there during World War II. She was a member of Highland UMC. She faithfully served alongside her husband for 23 years during his ministry. Even after his passing, she continued to serve the people in her church where she taught Sunday school for many years. She also served in her community where she was a longstanding member of the Garden Club. Funeral services were conducted at Highland UMC on Oct. 19 with the Rev. Amy Pannell, the Rev. Larry Mann and the Rev. Bob Sowder officiating.

The Rev. Sidney S. Tate, brother of the **Rev. John B. Tate Jr.**, died Oct. 16, 2015, in hospice care in La Grange, Ga. He was a member of the North Georgia Conference and served churches in that conference for over 40 years, including 20 years working at LaGrange College and at the University of Mississippi in the area of financial aid. He retired in 2002. He is

survived by his wife, Enid Smith Tate, two sons and their wives and four grandchildren. A memorial service was held at First UMC in LaGrange, Ga., on Oct. 24.

Mary Mahaffey Norris, 67, sister of the **Rev. Jim Mahaffey**, died Oct. 24, 2015. Rev. Mahaffey is retired from the Harrisonburg District.

Carla Moravitz, daughter of Carl and Delila Moravitz, died Oct. 28, 2015, in Laurel, Md. Carl is currently chairperson of the Virginia Conference Trustees and has been Alexandria District treasurer for many years. He formerly served on the Conference Council on Finance and Administration. He and Delila are members of Fairfax UMC in the Alexandria District.

Barbara Pierce Amon, 80, of Warsaw, died Oct. 29, 2015, surrounded by her family. She was a member of Warsaw UMC and the daughter of Thomas and Virginia Pierce. She is survived by her husband, the **Rev. William "Bill" E. Amon**; three daughters, Ginger Goodman, Terry Hutnyan (Paul) and Millie Heath (Chris); 12 grandchildren; 28 great-grandchildren, and 15 great-great-grandchildren.

BIRTHS

Leighton Grace Gundry was born Oct. 7, 2015, and is the first child of the **Rev. Sean Gundry** and his wife, **Robin**. Rev. Gundry is associate pastor of Gainesville UMC on the Alexandria District.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Sydenstricker UMC member sets weightlifting records

Clay Thomas, son of the **Rev. Jim and Amy Thomas** (Sydenstricker UMC in the Alexandria District) and grandson of the **Rev. Doug and Janet Hill** (retired), participated in the Virginia weightlifting championships in Lynchburg last month with weightlifters from several of Virginia's largest colleges and universities. In his first competition as a weightlifter, Clay participated in the Junior category for weightlifters under 24 years of age at 275 lbs. His three lifts were squat, bench press and dead lift. In the squat, he set the new state record at 551.1 pounds which also surpassed the open record giving him two state records on a single lift. In the dead lift, he tied the existing "raw," unassisted by straps or braces, state record at 600.7 pounds. When all scores were tallied, his combined three lifts set a combined record at 1,488.1 pounds, and this doubled up, giving him five state records.

("EVENTS," continued from pg. 25)

the Center for Clergy Excellence at **(804) 521-1126 or 1-800-768-6040, ext. 126**. Registration is required 48 hours prior to the event in order to ensure sufficient materials are available for all participants.

March

Bishop's Convocation on Prayer March 5, Trinity UMC, Richmond

The Bishop's Convocation on Prayer will be held Saturday, March 5, at Trinity UMC, 903 Forest Ave., Richmond. Theme is Deepening Discipleship: Piety and Mercy through Prayer. Plenary speaker will be Dr. Frederick Schmidt, Reuben P. Job Associate Professor of Spiritual Formation at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, Evanston, Ill.

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FROM THE BISHOP



Prayer Covenant Congregation

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

It is already December, the last month of this year! Our daily life is becoming busier as the end of the year approaches. But according to the church calendar, December is the beginning of a new year as we celebrate the seasons of Advent and Christmas.

Our Lord Jesus Christ came to us as a baby about 2,000 years ago. He lived among us and died on the cross. But that is not the end of his story. He was raised from the dead and is alive. He comes to us through the Spirit now and will come again in the end for the consummation of history. So this month is full of gratitude, expectation and hope. I pray that in this joyful season Christ will be born anew within us, among us and in our churches and the world.

This month I would like to talk about "Prayer Covenant Congregation." This will conclude my series of articles

on prayer which started last October under the title "Why Prayer?"

When I was elected Bishop and assigned to the Virginia Conference, I started challenging the clergy and laity to dedicate at least one hour daily for their spiritual disciplines. As I said in my final speech at the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference, my hope and prayer is to spread the culture of prayer to the churches in our conference because I believe that it will be impossible for the churches to be turned around without rediscovering spiritual vitality. This is what Scripture and the Methodist movement were saying about the vital church.

In 2013 we gathered in Hampton for our Annual Conference with the theme "Lord, teach us to pray." After Annual Conference was over, I began thinking about how to follow up on our theme and spread the prayer movement. With the help of the Prayer Convocation Planning Team and the Cabinet, we developed the Covenant for Spiritual Discipline and invited the churches during the Charge Conference time to become a Prayer Covenant Congregation.

The content of the covenant is as follows: (1) Having at least one weekly prayer group that will include weekly prayers for the renewal and revival of their congregation, the Virginia Conference, and The United Methodist Church; (2) Offering at least one class on prayer annually; (3) Participating in conference and district prayer equipping (training) events; (4) Moving toward at least 10% of the laity practicing a "one-hour daily" spiritual discipline; and (5) Indicating commitment to this covenant through approval by the Church Council.

Since we began inviting churches to this covenant in 2013, more than 30% of the congregations in the Virginia Conference have become a "Prayer Covenant Congregation." I thank God and the clergy and laity for their commitment to spiritual discipline. I reset the goal this year for at least 50% of clergy to engage in one-hour daily spiritual

discipline and for 50% of the congregations to become a Prayer Covenant Congregation.

I know becoming a Prayer Covenant Congregation is a great step for the churches to pay more attention to the spiritual foundation of their mission and ministries, but it is not easy to continue to grow as a Prayer Covenant Congregation. Especially, moving toward at least 10% of the laity practicing "one-hour daily" spiritual discipline is not an easy task (though some churches have already reached that goal). And it is another challenge to help and equip the congregation to go deeper in their spiritual life.

This is the reason I am planning to visit each district and meet the clergy and laity of the Prayer Covenant Congregations. This will be one of my important plans for my final year as Bishop. I want to meet the leaders of the Prayer Covenant Congregations and listen to their stories. I want the leaders to share their experiences of joys and challenges and to encourage one another. I want these meetings to be times to pray and grow in Christ together. My prayer is that becoming a Prayer Covenant Congregation will help the churches to be more open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and more obedient to our Lord.

I believe that prayer is the essence of our faith and ministry. I believe that God still listens and answers our prayers. I believe that if we humbly kneel down before God and seek God's will first, we can have a different future. So, why not become a Prayer Covenant Congregation?

Have a very blessed Advent and Christmas!! 🍷

In our Lord,

Young Jin Cho



ONE LAST WORD

Prepare your hearts to receive

In this time of preparation, Advent, we ready ourselves to receive God's gift of Jesus. Below are some ways to prepare with yourself and your family to welcome the Savior:



Make an Advent wreath.

The wreath, because it is a circle, symbolizes God's never-ending love. The wreath, because it is green, symbolizes life. An Advent wreath contains four candles representing the four Sundays leading to Christmas. Many people place a white candle in the center of the wreath to symbolize Jesus.

You can make a wreath using a Styrofoam base, greenery and purple or blue candles. If you do not have a Styrofoam base, place your candles in candleholders. Arrange them in a circle, with the white candle in the middle. Place greenery around the candles.

Use the Advent Worship Service for Families (found at [www.umcdisciple-](http://www.umcdisciple-ship.org)

[ship.org](http://www.umcdisciple-ship.org)) and worship together daily during Advent, lighting the candles on your wreath.



Make an Advent prayer chain.

Use construction paper cut into 24 strips. Write a prayer concern on each strip. Use tape to tape the first strip into a circle. Take the second strip and insert it into the first strip before taping it into a circle. Continue until you have a chain. On Nov. 30, open your first strip and pray together as a family for what is on the strip.



Make a family blessing jar.

Place an empty jar on your dining table. Each day during Advent, state one blessing for which you are thankful. Write the blessing on a slip of paper and put it in the jar. On Christmas Day, pour out the blessings. Read together and give thanks to God for the blessings you have enjoyed during Advent.

Tell the story of Christmas.



Focus on one of the people or groups of people in the story of the birth of Jesus, for each week of Advent. Tell one another the stories from the Bible about:

- Week one: the Prophets
- Week two: Mary
- Week three: Joseph
- Week four: Shepherds

– Article found on the Discipleship Ministries webpage.

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See the Christmas Gifts of Hope catalog for more details.



With prayers and best wishes from all of us here, we wish you and your family a Merry Christmas and a most Happy New Year!

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