

2012 Annual Conference to be short and sweet



Virginia United Methodist

Advocate

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The background of the cover is a close-up, slightly blurred image of a car's speedometer. The needle is pointing towards the 40 km/h mark. The speedometer has a black face with white markings and numbers. The text 'Vital Congregations' is overlaid on the speedometer in a large, bold, yellow font with a red outline. The text 'Church moving forward with ways to measure vitality' is overlaid below the main title in a smaller, italicized, red font with a white outline.

Vital Congregations

*Church moving forward with
ways to measure vitality*

**"We envision faith communities
where all God's people are
welcomed at table, nurtured
and transformed to be
Christ to others in the world."**

— Virginia Conference Vision Statement

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Church life is always an interesting road trip



Neill Caldwell
Editor

In Bishop Kammerer's words, the Virginia Conference is already "moving the train down the tracks toward General Conference" and toward the Vital Congregations proposals that have grown out of last year's "Call to Action" report.

There's just no way to fit a train metaphor into an issue where there's so much talk about "dashboard indicators," "drivers" and even Larry Davies' new hybrid car (pg. 3).

As Bishop K, Marc Brown and I sat down and discussed this issue, and how the *Advocate* could help folks understand what steps will be needed along the way, the bishop added that "people really need to be getting this" before local churches start in on goal-setting. Bishops have been asked to collect those goals and bring them along to

General Conference in Tampa.

Fortunately, the Virginia Conference is well-positioned for this new initiative thanks to the work already done for "All Things New," as Marc points out in his article on pg. 5.

Still, all this talk of goal-setting and monitoring of attendance and other statistics has our laity and clergy on edge.

"They need to know this is not the end of the world," says Brown. Or as he advises local church leaders as they set goals, "Think of the story God is asking you to tell through these goals. How will your church look different (if you achieve these goals)?"

Setting goals means making a few changes that address these targets, and this is where some churches tend to run off the road and wind up in the ditch, so to speak.

In their book *Switch: How to Change Things When Change is Hard*, brothers Chip and Dan Heath have come up with a fairly simple theory: the rational side of our brain wants change for the better, but the emotional side loves the comfort of the existing routine. Their solution is also simple:

"If we need to make major changes, then (by definition) we don't have a near-spotless report card. A lot of things are probably wrong. The 'report card' for our diet, or our marriage, or our business, is full of Cs and Ds and Fs. So if you ask yourself, What's broken and how do I fix it?, you'll simply spin your wheels. You'll spend a lot of time agonizing over issues that are 'TBU': True But Useless. When it's time to change, we must look for bright spots, the things that are working, the first precious As and Bs on our report card. We need to ask ourselves a question that sounds simple but is, in fact, deeply unnatural: What's working, and how can we do more of it?"

We need to avoid the "wheel spinning" part of the process if we want to make progress. In the meantime, I will fall back on the advice that Barney Fife once gave Gomer Pyle on an episode of TV's popular "The Andy Griffith Show": "During our lifetime we travel many roads... big roads and little roads, rocky roads and smooth roads... dirt highways and improved roads..."



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Neill Caldwell

Vital congregations are like new hybrid automobiles

by Larry Davies



I was spending way too much money for gas, so I purchased a hybrid automobile claiming to achieve 50 miles per gallon. Great! But my journey of change was just beginning. Upon taking delivery, I was informed that in order to achieve 50 miles to the gallon my driving habits would also have to change.

Feeling frustration, I was willing to change but in a way that would be relatively painless: drive a different car. Instead, I discovered my journey of change was just beginning and was much more involved than I imagined.

The United Methodist Church I know and love is declining. Since 1968, while our nation has grown, The United Methodist Church has declined from nearly 11 million members to 7.7 million. Membership, worship attendance and number of churches have all declined. The average American is age 35 while the average United Methodist is age 57. If this trend continues, within another 15 to 20 years many of our current members will be gone.

In 2010, the Council of Bishops and other bodies of The United Methodist Church empowered a team to identify what makes a congregation vital. Why vital? Vital is defined as:

“crucial: extremely important and necessary, or indispensable to the survival or continuing effectiveness of something.” Another definition: “Needed for life: required for the continuation of life as in vital body organs.”

The mission of The United Methodist Church is to “Make Disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” (Matthew 28:18-20, Matthew 22:36-40) This mission is achieved through vital congregations that equip and empower people to be disciples of Jesus Christ in their homes and communities around the world. (From UMVitalCongregations.org)

What makes a congregation vital? More than 32,000 congregations, small, medium and large, were surveyed in order to answer that question. The report, titled “Call to Action,” found several factors:

1. Inviting and inspiring worship.
2. Engaged disciples in mission and outreach.

3. Gifted, equipped and empowered lay leadership.
4. Effective, equipped and inspired clergy leadership.
5. Small groups, that include special interests, children, youth and adults.

All churches have some of these characteristics, but vital congregations have most of them and more.

In other words, becoming a vital congregation can’t happen with a few adjustments or a quick fix. Instead, our journey of change is just beginning and is more involved than we imagined.

Learning to drive a hybrid meant changing bad habits and I would not change easily. However, the manufacturer provided help through “immediate feedback.” Within the dash is a multi-colored light ranging from blue (bad) to green (good) to guide acceleration. At first, the only color visible was ‘bad’ or blue. But as I eased up on the accel-

erator and drove more slowly, the light gradually shifted from blue to green.

Thanks to the immediate feedback provided by the manufacturer, I learned to drive more effectively and in the process discovered several benefits of successful change. One benefit occurred every time I

purchased gas. An unexpected benefit was a huge smile on Mell’s face. In the past, my wife, Mell, dreaded riding with me. Today, she smiles more because I’ve become a safer driver.

Making the decision to become a more vital congregation involves difficult choices, but help is provided by The United Methodist Church and the Virginia Conference in the form of immediate feedback, and there are wonderful benefits to watching the church you love become more vital.

So, what do our churches need to do to become Vital Congregations?

1. Study the Web site: <UMVitalCongregations.org>. Everything you need is provided for you.
2. Form a leadership team and agree to meet regularly for at least six to eight months.

(Continued on next page, Hybrid)

Just as driving a hybrid car (above) means changing bad habits, becoming a Vital Congregation will demand the same.



This hybrid’s colorful dashboard provides feedback to make that successful change, much like the help provided to congregations for becoming more vital.

Hybrid

(Continued from previous page)

3. Download "The Vital Congregations Planning Guide" and the "Companion Guide" found on the Web site to guide your initial get-started meetings.
4. Set your goals in five areas as listed on the Web site: Average Weekly Worship Attendance, Professions of Faith, Small Groups, Members in Mission and Dollars Given to Mission.
5. Begin to develop strategies that will help you accomplish your goals.
6. The Virginia Conference uniquely provides help through "All Things New," a core strategy to help our churches and church leaders learn to be "faith communities where all God's people are welcomed at table, nurtured and transformed to be Christ to others in the world."

Jeremiah 29:11 states "For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope." A future with hope reminds us that God does have a vision and a purpose for our church. Together, we are invited to set goals that will move us forward in our mission to "Make Disciples for Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world." (From the Planning Guide)

How do we receive immediate feedback?

As you enter the goals on the Web site, you will see statistical information about your church already listed to guide your planning. Throughout the year as you enter current information on the Web site, you will receive immediate feedback on how you are doing – the equivalent of a blue light pointing to areas needing improvement and a green light celebrating areas of vitality. In addition, you can read the stories of other churches who are struggling with the same issues as you and learn how they are doing.

What about the benefits? As a district superintendent, I work with many different churches, all of them unique. But vital congregations have an attitude that distinctly separates them from the others. You can feel the energy and excitement as you enter the church.

- There is the benefit of seeing new people deepening their relationship with Christ.
- There is the benefit of seeing children and youth nurtured and strengthened in their faith.
- There is the benefit of groups going out into the community to help those who are hurting.
- There is the benefit of seeing members become disciples and disciples become leaders.
- There is the benefit of a belief that God is working within your church accomplishing miracles.

One pastor said: "You know your church is a vital congregation when you believe your best days are ahead of you... not behind you."

Jesus said: "Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20)

The greatest benefit in becoming a Vital Congregation is in doing what Jesus commanded:

- Go and make disciples of all nations.
- Baptize them in the name of the Father and Son and Holy Spirit.
- Teach them to obey all the commands we've been given.

Then as we work hard to become more vital, we trust in Jesus' promise: "Be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

For all of us, this is the greatest benefit of all. □

— Larry Davies is superintendent of the Lynchburg District and the Cabinet's "point man" on Vital Congregations.

Leaning into

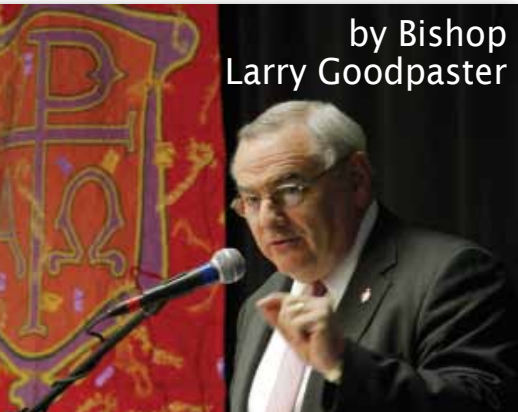
The "Call to Action" report invites us into an adaptive challenge that will "re-direct the flow of attention, energy and resources to an intense concentration on fostering and sustaining an increase in the number of vital congregations effective in making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world."

In order for us to lead the way, we must lean into a future that is flexible, nimble and adaptive. The reverse of that means that we cannot be set in stone, stiff, unmoved and immovable. Some of the rules and practices that we have come to think of as the only way to do church must fall. In a rather uncomfortable observation, the "Call to Action" report puts it this way: "Leaders, beginning with the bishops... must *lead* and immediately, repeatedly and energetically make it plain that our current culture and practices are resulting in overall decline that is toxic and constricts our missional effectiveness."

Leaning into God's future must move us toward accomplishing the mission by empowering and equipping women and men in thousands of local churches around the globe to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. We join in a global lament that while our bureaucracy has expanded, the world remains in desperate need of transformation as we continue to confront issues of racism and prejudice, of war and violence, and of anger and suspicion that contribute to an inability to engage in civil discourse. As the operational assessment pointed out, we are experiencing a "creeping crisis of relevance," brought on partially as a result of the current economic situation, but also as a result of an institutional inertia that does not inspire or equip the church either for our evangelistic mandate or for living out our social justice commitment. The bishops of the church must act decisively and with a sense of urgency to cast the vision, exercise influence, persuade, lead and begin immediately to lean into a relevant future.

The "Call to Action" emphasizes "the value and need for the Council of Bishops

by Bishop
Larry Goodpaster



to exercise strong and courageous leadership, working in concert and fostering alignment throughout the connection.”

If we have not already done so, we will soon resurrect the old lines about bishops being “potted plants” or stage decorations in Tampa. We will bemoan the fact that we have no voice or vote; yet, we will do our best to prepare ourselves to preside over a holy conversation about our church and the future. But what if General Conference 2012 becomes a sign of our leaning into God’s future? What if our leaning simply challenges assumptions about the atmosphere that surrounds General Conference and opens the door for discerning a different future for our church?

Before we go there, let me offer a series of invitations. Let us proactively prepare ourselves for leading and listening with the whole church.

Each of us should covenant to weekly prayer for the 2012 General Conference.

Let us enter into a dialog and discussion that “fosters alignment” and “advances collaboration” about how we once again become a movement for Christ, developing a missional focus that, by God’s grace, transforms the world. Through these groups, we bishops can listen and learn, so that we begin to discern what the Spirit may be saying to the church.

With great hope and anticipation of what God will do with us and among us, I believe it is time for us to lean into God’s future, fish from a different side of the boat, and prepare to be astounded by the results. □

— Bishop Goodpaster is episcopal leader of the Charlotte Area and current president of the Council of Bishops.

Vital Congregations soil already tilled in Virginia Conference by All Things New

by Marc Brown

Two riddles about which came first: The first riddle – “Which came first: the chicken or the egg?” The second riddle – “Which came first: “All Things New” or the Vital Congregations project?” While there are no clear answers to the first riddle, there is a very clear answer to the second riddle: “All Things New.” Here is why the answer to the second riddle is clear.

In 2008, the focus of the Virginia Conference was established through the approval of *“All Things New: The Virginia Conference – Fruitful and Multiplying.”* Responding to the stated goal of changing the culture of the Virginia Conference from survival to greeting the risen Christ who waits to greet us in the dawning of a new day, conference ministry structures began to align through the dual invitations of beginning new faith communities (An Invitation to Plant) and strengthening existing congregations (An Invitation to Harvest). The focus of An Invitation to Plant has resulted in the launching of 19 new faith communities across the Virginia Conference beginning with 2008. The focus of An Invitation to Harvest has resulted in a movement from conference programming to congregational resourcing through leadership development (a reduction from 84 conference-funded programs in 2008 to 33 conference-funded programs in 2011.) Some of the fruit of this shift in emphasis has been the 5 Talent Academy, training of mission mentors to assist local congregations, VocationCARE to help congregations provide nurturing environments for people discerning God’s call upon their lives, Mid- and Small- Church Leadership Initiatives, and a developing plan to provide regional congregational resource leaders.

In 2011, the Vital Congregations project developed as the Council of Bishops declared a priority on congregational vitality. There are five areas of emphasis for this priority: worship, professions of faith, small groups, personal engagement in mission and giving to mission. Across The United Methodist Church, annual conferences are determining how they shall respond to Vital Congregations. In the Virginia Conference, we are responding to Vital Congregations through the soil that has been prepared during the past three years. As Bishop Kammerer has said, “‘All Things New’ is the Virginia Conference’s blueprint for Vital Congregations.”

Which leads to a third riddle: “Is the Vital Congregations project replacing ‘All Things New’ in the Virginia Conference?” The clear answer to this riddle is “no.” A focus on existing congregations (An Invitation to Harvest) and the planting of new faith communities (An Invitation to Plant), will continue to be a priority of our conference as we continue the journey we began in 2008. There is no riddle about that. □

— Marc Brown is the Virginia Conference director of Connectional Ministries.

A farmer tills the soil in preparation for his crops much like how “All Things New” has prepared the Virginia Conference for the Vital Congregations project.



Nineteen new faith communities planted in past four years

by Mark Ogren

Answering God's call to take the gospel into all the world, the Virginia Annual Conference approved "All Things New" in 2008. This vision for ministry includes an invitation to plant (begin 250 new faith communities over the next 30 years) and an invitation to harvest (strengthen our existing churches). The focus of "An Invitation to Plant" has resulted in the launching of 19 new faith communities in the conference.

These 19 new faith communities represent a spectrum of possibilities for new church beginnings. Eight of the new faith communities are primarily ethnic churches: three Korean, four black and one Hispanic/Latino. Seven of the new faith communities were started with the support of an anchor church. Three are legacy new church starts where a congregation has passed on its physical structure for use by a new faith community. Three of the new faith communities were initiated and financed totally on the local church level with no district or conference funding.

Our young adult faith community, RISE, in Harrisonburg, represents a partnership between the Board of Higher Education and the Church Development Team. One new faith community,



Waters Edge Partnership, represents a partnership between the Virginia Conference and the Baltimore-Washington Conference with a ministry located in the Baltimore Inner Harbor. The new faith community in Amelia, Journey, is the first new church start in the Farmville District in 75 years.

Since 2008, the creation and implementation of the 5 Talent Academy has contributed to accomplishing our goal of creating new faith communities. More than 110 churches have joined together in a three-year commitment to hold one



Ghana Wesley Mission choir.

another accountable for specific goals in five areas: ministry with the poor, worship, faith development, stewardship and evangelism. A sixth commitment has been accepted: to birth or partner in birthing a new faith community over the next five years. On Feb. 23, 5 Talent Academy churches will meet for a "Church Planting Day" in order to consider faithfully this sixth pledge. Already two churches in the 5 Talent

Academy group have served as anchor churches for new faith communities.

Exciting things are happening. On Dec. 23, the Rev. Mike Davis led Journey in the first public worship service at its location in Amelia, a former mechanics' garage. The highlight of the service was the baptism of a 13-year-old. This new faith community rejoiced as the extended family surrounded this new disciple. Parents and grandparents wept for joy as the new faith community affirmed the purpose of their fellowship – to make disciples of Jesus Christ in fruitful ways, reaching the formerly unchurched.

"All Things New," and its invitation to move from maintenance to multiplication, is the pathway for the Virginia Conference as we continue to establish new faith communities and as we renew our existing congregations. □

— The Rev. Mark Ogren is conference director of Congregational Excellence.

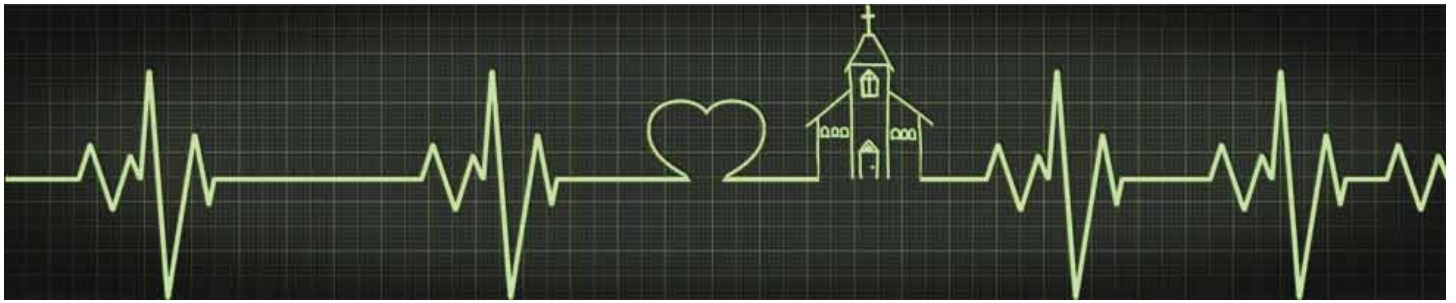
Locations and pastors for the conference's 19 new communities:

2008: *Living Grace* is at Emmaus UMC at Stratford Hills with Jonathan Parks focusing on second-generation Korean members; *Korean UMC of Greater Washington* has a Sunday afternoon service at Centreville UMC, a service with various associate pastors preaching; *Cana UMC* (Korean), served by Joo Sup Park, meets at Cranford UMC; *Ghana Wesley Mission*, served by Emmanuel Nkrumah, has two sites – St. Paul's, Woodbridge, and Calvary, Arlington.

2009: *Crossroads UMC's* second site in Brambleton is served by Jim Chandler; *Crossroads Hispanic* is served by Flor Norris; *Bloxom House of Prayer* is served by Greg Duncan; *The Gathering*, started out of Community Courthouse UMC, is served by Rachel Gilmore; *The Vine*, a legacy church of Dunn Loring UMC, is served by Todd Schlechty.

2010: *The Stand UMC*, served by Gina Anderson-Cloud, ministers to the Fort Lee area; *Lincolnia House Church*, led by Bill Heinzman, gathers West African immigrants; *RISE*, a young adult faith community in Harrisonburg, is served by Amanda Garber; *Spirit and Life* in the Montclair area of Manassas is served by Matt Meisenhelter; *Timberlake East*, a legacy church, is served by Timberlake UMC pastor Rob Colwell and the associate; *The Point* at West Point is served by Betsy Basehore; *Bread and Jam*, served by Carl LeMon, is at Ebenezer UMC in the Portsmouth area.

2011: *Journey*, in Amelia County, is served by Mike Davis; *Worship and Praise* is served by Tim Kirven and is a legacy church of Aldersgate, Richmond District; *Waters Edge* partnership is led by Sandy Boone in Baltimore. □



Study identifies key factors impacting Vital Congregations

Lively, vital churches come in all sizes, locations and settings says a study commissioned by The United Methodist Church, but they consistently share some common factors that work together to influence congregational vitality. That means what works to make those churches energetic and growing can likely work for other churches too.

Dynamic churches with high attendance, growth and engagement tend to have inspirational topical preaching, lots of small groups including programs for children and youth, and a mix of both traditional and contemporary worship services including contemporary music and multi-media in contemporary services. Other factors include effective lay leaders, rotating lay leadership, pastors who work at developing and mentoring lay leaders, and length of pastoral appointment.

An essential finding of the research was that it's the combination of factors that contributes to vitality, rather than any one or two.

"We've taken a data-driven approach to identify what works for thriving congregations large and small, both rural and urban, all over the U.S.," said Bishop Gregory Palmer, chair of the denominational "Call to Action" committee that engaged the global consulting firm Towers Watson to conduct the study. "While there's no silver bullet, we believe these findings can lead to vitality for many more congregations."

"Lively churches offer more than one style of worship. They work hard to make preaching interesting and relevant. They encourage more lay members to take on leadership roles. They start small groups and keep them going," Palmer said. "If more churches do these things, we believe we will see measurable positive results over time."

Robust and comprehensive research on data from various sources using proven data collection and analysis techniques was conducted in order to gain highly statistically reliable information about the cluster of factors that lead to congregations being more vital as evidenced by selected vitality indicators.

The process included interviews with stakeholders across The United Methodist Church, group meetings, and surveys targeted at different stakeholder groups. In addition, data on attendance, growth and engagement from more than 32,000 United Methodist churches in North America was analyzed.

Because of the survey methodology utilized and the high

response rate, the report concludes that the findings apply across the whole North American United Methodist population and would be replicated if the study were done again.

While the drivers of vitality were consistent regardless of church size, predominant ethnicity and geographic location; there were additional nuances by church size and regional area. The study also identified other factors that did not appear to have a significant impact on vitality, including whether outreach programs are local or global, the number of programs for adults and young adults, the use of experiential activities during worship services, length of sermon, type of music used in traditional services, and whether the pastor graduated from seminary or not.

The full report is available for review at <www.umc.org/vitalcongregations>. □ — *United Methodist Communications*

Conference spring training events

The Virginia Conference Cabinet and Connectional Ministries staff is coordinating Vital Congregations training events in the spring.

Saturday events start with registration 8:30–9 a.m., followed by a short welcome and introductory session, and two rounds of workshops (with a break in between) ending by 12:30 p.m. Workshop leaders will make themselves available until 1 p.m. for questions from individual church leaders. Registration for Sunday sessions will begin at 1:30 p.m. and the workshops will end at 5:30 p.m.

Confirmed dates for spring training events are:

April 14 – Lynchburg District (Timberlake UMC)

April 15 – Danville District (First UMC, Martinsville)

April 22 – Harrisonburg and Winchester Districts (Woodstock UMC)

May 12 – Alexandria and Arlington Districts (St. Matthew's UMC)

May 19 – Elizabeth River District (location TBA)

Additional dates may be added. (Staunton's event has been rescheduled to the fall.)

For more information, contact Martha Stokes at 1-800-768-6040, ext. 154 or (804) 521-1154 or <marthastokes@vaumc.org>. □

WHY SET GOALS?—

A theological rationale

by Amy Valdez Barker

“Whoever, then, loves his/her neighbor aright, ought to urge upon him/her that he/she too should love God with his/her whole heart, and soul and mind. For in this way, loving his/her neighbor as himself/herself, a person turns the whole current of his/her love both of himself/herself and his/her neighbor into the channel of the love of God.”
— St. Augustine, “On Christian Doctrine”

If we, as Christians, were to be completely obedient to the commandment given to us through the words of Jesus (Matthew 22:36-39), then there would be a deep desire for us to do all that we can to bring every person we encounter into the great and wondrous love of God, our Creator and Redeemer. God has a vision for this church, which is revealed in the depths of the Scriptures, confirmed by our traditions, vivified by our experiences and rationalized through God’s wisdom and grace.

Let us consider the parable of the valuable coins (or talents). (Matthew 25:14) We understand that the coins or talents that have been entrusted to the servants are very valuable in the eyes of all participants in the story. Some believe that it is equivalent to 15 years of income. This is no small token that the master has entrusted to these servants. It is a great honor and privilege to be given this responsibility. Each recipient approaches the opportunity through different angles of motivation. One knows the master well, respects the master’s authority and honors the master’s will by investing the talents with which he has been entrusted and multiplying those talents. The second recognizes the honor and out of that authority, he, too, takes initiative and invests these talents and is blessed by the wisdom of his investment. The third servant, however, operates out of fear and insecurity. He does not trust himself with the talent he has been offered and therefore “went out and hid the (your) talent in the ground.” (Matthew 25:25) We all know the end result of this act of fear and doubt. And yet, these words are conveyed in the Scripture as instructive to the call God has placed in our lives.

We do not set goals for the mere sake of increasing numbers or making our statistics look good. We set goals because it is a step in the direction of the wise servants who knew how to multiply the talents the master had bestowed upon them. And even more important than talents, are the valuable and worthy lives of people. Statistics are numbers that represent people. Behind every single number is a child of God. Therefore, goal-setting is an exercise in faith. It allows us to be proactively involved in the second commandment of loving our neighbors. We must not be convicted by fear, but rather step out in hope towards the path where our Creator is leading us. Therefore...

Churches set goals to:

- 1. Give clarity and focus to ministry.** Clarity and focus connect disciples to purpose and focus their attention toward the purpose of the church. (Matthew 28:18-20, Matthew 22:36-40)
- 2. Move the church forward.** Without goals, congregations can become stuck in a rut, doing the same things over and over without making progress.
- 3. Create greater accountability.** (Matthew 25:21) Goals that are prayerfully developed and discerned with God in mind keep us accountable to the ministry of Jesus Christ. Holy Spirit-inspired goals that are achieved make us more like the body of Christ.
- 4. Make the congregation better.** There is a saying, “you do not have to be sick to get better.” Good goals make us better. Not for better’s sake, but make us better for serving the community. (From UMVitalCongregations.org)

Researchers have identified that goals make the difference in success or failure for people of similar backgrounds and educational standards. Studies find that 3 percent of people are highly successful in their life plans and careers, 30 percent are moderately successful and 67 percent just exist. The significant difference for the 3 percent who are highly successful is that they have written down specific goals. The 30 percent who are moderately successful have a general idea of where they are going but don’t have any goals formalized. The rest are happy to watch the world go by. □

— Amy Valdez Barker is a youth minister from the North Georgia Conference. She is currently a student at Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary and is working with the Vital Congregations project.



Barker

Steps to build a vital congregation

Major plans for congregational development are under way for the Goromonzi Township in Zimbabwe. The community is filled with couples below the age of 40. Church leaders there say new residential construction in the area has great potential for membership growth. Energetic church members are considered one of the strengths in this area; lack of funds presents the biggest challenge. Leaders are clear that their mission in the township is to create new disciples and equip them with knowledge to continue reaching new members. Leaders hope to nearly double their average worship attendance and the number of people joining by profession of faith by 2015.

This single assessment is only a small portion of the Zimbabwe East Conference Vital Congregations Strategic Plan. The conference is among the first to submit their overall vision to the Council of Bishops. The plan outlines how they will work to meet the denomination goal of fostering and sustaining an increase in vital congregations.

This is something that every conference in the denomination is being asked

by Mary Brooke Casad

to do through Vital Congregations. The Zimbabwe East Conference used a planning tool that can be found on the Web <www.vitalcongregations.org>. There you can find tools for setting goals, key ministry strategies of highly vital congregations and resources to set, monitor and reach five goals: weekly attendance, new believers, small groups, mission engagement and benevolent giving.

The Web site also shows that much is already being done to implement the “Call to Action” that was supported by the Connectional Table and the Council of Bishops. We agreed that focusing on creating vital congregations would be a denominational priority starting in early 2011. It’s exciting to see the thoughtful vision developed out of the “Call to Action” report begin to take shape in resources that will help our local congregations look to the future.

The goal-setting process for congregations and annual conferences builds on the church’s **Four Areas of Focus** – 1) new places for new people, 2) devel-

oping principled Christian leaders, 3) improving global health and 4) engaging in ministry with the poor. The Four Areas are reflected in the identified “drivers” or qualities found in vital congregations, such as engaged and competent clergy and lay leadership, disciples who are engaged in mission and who donate generously to missions. As described in the *Vital Congregations Planning Guide*, missional ministries are examples of Wesley’s “means of grace” – works of mercy and justice that include ministry with the poor and the marginalized and improving health globally.

For conferences and local congregations, setting specific goals to start new vital congregations is the heart of the matter – creating new places of vitality where disciples of Jesus Christ are born and nurtured in the faith.

For more information about the “Call to Action” and recommendations being made to General Conference, visit <www.umc.org/calltoaction>. □

– Mary Brooke Casad from Texas is chair of the denomination’s Connectional Table. (Note: See related story on pg. 18.)

Do membership and worship attendance tell the whole story?

The most frequent complaint with The United Methodist Church’s Vital Congregations project is that church vitality must be measured by more than numbers. One of the critiques of the project relates to collecting membership and worship and Sunday school attendance numbers and having those numbers publicly posted. Some view this process as one that could shame a congregation without understanding its purpose.

Others view counting numbers as an inadequate measurement of the denomination’s goal to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.”

While I agree that numbers alone do not provide the big picture of the vitality of an individual congregation, they do keep us accountable to one another.

This piece of Wesleyan heritage should be simple to accomplish, yet it is usually just passed around as a catch phrase instead of living into the practice.

The Wesley brothers believed in accountability. Each time members gathered in holy groups, covenant groups or assemblies, they were asked about their faithfulness since the previous gathering. There were consequences for not being faithful. When we are accountable to each other, we are also better able to move beyond complacency. How do we keep one another ac-

countable? While we need to know the numbers, they must be reported within a larger context.

by Julie Kathleen Schubring

It is interesting that the project is known only for the number portion, not all five components. What does that tell us about our relationship to numbers?

Members of vital congregations live out their membership vows on a daily basis, and they are not afraid of accountability, but we need to be reminded of the stories that go along with the statistics.

Vital congregations have leadership that is shared by both clergy and laity. The laity also takes ownership through small groups, education of all levels and contribution to mission.

The project’s Web site will be a place to share challenges, report successes and receive inspiration. It is also a place to receive information that will help us live out our mission statement.

As we attempt to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world,” we must remember that numbers inform us about where we came from and where we are going.

But it does take more than counting attendance to be a vital congregation. □

– Julie Kathleen Schubring is a student at Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary, Evanston, Ill.

Virginia

Annual Conference preview: A lot will be packed into a short time

The 2012 Virginia Annual Conference session, scheduled for June 22-24 in Roanoke, will be noteworthy for its brevity. The compressed three-day Friday afternoon to Sunday morning schedule will mean fewer speakers; many items will be limited to what's in the *Book of Reports*. It also means less time for the banquets and meetings that normally accompany conference.

The theme for the 230th Session of the Annual Conference will be "You Are the Seeds."

It also will be the last Annual Conference to be presided over by Bishop Charlene Kammerer, who is retiring this summer. The schedule will include a brief time for honoring the bishop and her family.

Other agenda highlights will include the official election of an episcopal nominee from the Virginia Conference, a report on the 2012 General Conference, information about the conference's response to the Vital Congregations project with opportunities for response by congregations, the Annual Conference

offering. The Service for the Ordering of Ministry, the Service of Remembrance and the honoring of this year's class of retiring clergy also will be included as always. And conference will again be the collection point for United Methodist Committee on Relief kits.

Because of the tighter schedule, the conference Rules Committee is working on a "Consent Calendar" concept, where many "non-controversial" items of business will be voted on as a package without discussion. A vote will be required to lift an item from the Consent Calendar to debate it and vote on it separately.

Jim Bennett, last year's music director, will again lead the musicians. Speakers for Annual Conference have not been announced by Bishop Kammerer, although she has said they will all be from within the Virginia Conference.

In other news at the recent meeting of the Annual Conference Planning Committee, director of Connectional Ministries Marc Brown reported that the Site Selection Committee has had conversations with officials in Richmond about



hosting the conference in 2018 and beyond and will bring that information before the Annual Conference this year. "There has been a lot of pro-Richmond feedback," Brown said, "so our meeting planner (Kirk McNeill) has been meeting with people at the Richmond Convention and Visitors Bureau and the hotels around the Coliseum."

Brown also said that electronic voting machines may be used when the next election year rolls around in 2015.

Recipients of the Annual Conference offering this year will be Initiatives of Hope partners Brazil and Mozambique and the new partner, the Methodist Church in Cambodia, along with Richmond District's Shalom Farms project. □

Bishops at LARCUM meeting issue unity statement

The annual LARCUM Conference was held in December in Waynesboro. Four Christian communions are part of this covenant group – Lutheran, Anglican (Episcopal Church), Roman Catholic and United Methodist.

At this year's conference there were 10 bishops present from the respective denominations. The bishops gathered a day early in a retreat setting. The following statement was shared with all the participants in the conference, as agreed upon by all the bishops present.

Bishop Charlene Kammerer wanted United Methodists in Virginia to know about this statement and the unity in Christ it represents. This is the text of the statement:

"As Christians united in the one Lord Jesus Christ, sharing one baptism, receiving the same Scriptures, professing the same creeds, while recognizing the differences in our expres-

sions and practices of faith,

"We are united in affirming efforts throughout the Commonwealth to foster deeper understanding of our various traditions;

"We applaud ecumenical Bible study, participation in joint worship services;

"We encourage the sharing of resources to address human need, hunger, homelessness, illness and poverty;

"We commit ourselves to seeking a deepening of Christian faith and service to meeting for four days in 2012 in prayer for one another, Bible study, working against childhood hunger and child trafficking, and finding ways to improve our ongoing communication and meeting time among us;

"We invite other religious leaders and persons of faith to join in this common call." □

Roanoke District adds director of Church Development position

In Matthew 28:18, Jesus' mandate is, "Go out and train everyone you meet...in this way of life." (The Message) The Rev. Lynne Alley-Grant, the first director of Church Development for the Roanoke District, says, "Our model (for church growth in The United Methodist Church) for years has been, 'If we build it, they will come'... The interesting thing is the biblical mandate that Jesus uses, is 'go.'"

The veteran pastor says the paradigm shift from "come" to "go" changes United Methodists' perspective when thinking about church development. There's been talk in the Virginia Conference about growing the church body by including more young and diverse people. "And so, our challenge that we have is to learn how to practice what I'm calling 'acts of inclusion.'"

Alley-Grant left her position as pastor of Thrasher Memorial UMC in Vinton in July after serving for three years, and says she came into her new appointment from a "deep, deep pondering and concern for the future of the church."

It all started with a conversation with District Superintendent Steve Hundley in December 2010, saying she wanted to spend some time pondering the future of the church. "I still believe the local church is the hope for the world." The position of director

of Church Development evolved out of that conversation.

In December, she went to people's homes and asked them why they loved the church. "Time after time after time, I heard love stories of the church being community for each other. The church community helping you out whenever you were at the bottom and couldn't see straight. If the church really is the best thing in our lives, how is it that we open our doors? How is it that we share it? Since the only way we can ever be receivers of it is if someone has shared it with us? Because all of us are standing on the shoulders of somebody else."

And that's where the church slogan "Open hearts. Open minds. Open doors." comes in.

"The challenge that we have is opening ourselves up to understand that that means we have to meet people where they are.

"My greatest concern with our 'open hearts, open minds, open doors' is that right now, in The United Methodist Church, we have a credibility gap. And that grieves my soul because The United Methodist Church is full of really, really, really good people who want to give their lives to loving God and loving people. And so that is really what I'm focused on is how do we translate this and help our church be the relevant community it's created to be."



Alley-Grant

She says the motto signifies inclusion, but United Methodists must take the initiative. "We have to become what we say we are; so, practicing contextual ministry, which essentially is churches exploring opportunities where their churches are located."

She says the path to church growth lies with meeting the people's needs in the local community, "and the Holy Spirit takes care of the rest. People will come to something that meets their needs and is authentic."

The first step, according to Alley-Grant, is to ask what the mission opportunity is in the local church's community by talking to people on the front lines.

"You talk to educators; you talk to counselors... the people who see the blatant needs of children and young people and adults in the communities where we live."

Next, find out what the critical problem is and there may be a learning curve for the congregation as members learn how to speak the language of those outside the church. Some churches may want to support established programs in the neighborhood, while others may want to create programs to meet the need.

As an example, church members at Thrasher Memorial UMC in Vinton chose to take over the town pool when the local government wanted to close it because of the economy. □

— Beverly Amsler is a journalist who lives in Roanoke. She is a member of Providence UMC in Knox, Penn.

Volunteers needed to assist local PAUMCS leaders with hosting national conference in Richmond, April 12-15

The Professional Association of United Methodist Church Secretaries (PAUMCS) will hold its national conference in Richmond April 12-15 at the Hilton Richmond Hotel and Spa at Short Pump. Administrative assistants, secretaries, financial directors, office managers and newsletter editors, full-time or part-time, paid or volunteer, local church or conference agency are encouraged to attend and participate. Visit <www.vaumc.org/PAUMCS> for more information. Deadline to register for the event is March 15.

Virginia Conference members can lend a hand to local PAUMCS leaders who will be hosting this event by volunteering with registration and hospitality. To volunteer, contact Virginia PAUMCS president Susan Petrey at (804) 521-1124, or e-mail <SusanPetrey@vaumc.org>. □

Conference 'one of a kind,' Rev. Jim McClung, dies after courageous battle with cancer

He was founder of Camp Rainbow Connection

Memories and laughter were the order of the day as hundreds of friends and family members gathered Jan. 11 at Reveille United Methodist Church in Richmond to honor the life and ministry of the Rev. James A. McClung.

"Jim," age 68, died Jan. 7 at Thomas John's Cancer Hospital (Johnston-Willis) in Richmond after a courageous battle with non-Hodgkin lymphoma and other complications. (See pg. 30 for related obituary.)

"Everywhere I've been in the past few days people have been telling Jim McClung stories," said the Rev. Karl Netting, "and there are a lot of Jim McClung stories to tell."

Other comments spoke of McClung's



Jim McClung (far right) sings right along with the campers and volunteers at the 2001 Camp Rainbow Connection, an annual weeklong respite camp for individuals with intellectual disabilities, founded by McClung in 1985.



artistic (the printed program cover was of a painting done by McClung) and musical talents, and his advocacy for the differently-abled.

"Jim invited me and my children to come visit Camp Rainbow Connection," said the Rev. Roland Barnhardt, "and of course we got hooked. We wound up

coming back twice in many summers."

Delivering the eulogy, close friend the Rev. Linwood Cook reminded the crowd that McClung had visited more than 900 of the 1,200 churches in the Virginia Conference. "He is better known than the last five bishops put together!" Cook said. "He had a heart bigger than the Virginia Conference."

"I imagine a very long line in heaven of people waiting to greet Jim today," Cook said.

Many of the comments were on the "larger than life" quality that McClung displayed. "Jim was known for his outgoing personality," said the Rev. Franklin Gillis. "Being in his presence always made you feel good. He was an optimistic participant in living life to the fullest."

As quoted by Cook from the Rev. Jim Noland, "Some people enter a room and fill it with their ego, but Jim entered a room and filled it with love." □



Solar panels installed at Conference Center

Workers from Johnson Controls install solar panels on the roof (above) of the United Methodist Center in Glen Allen in early January (side view of the office center is at right). The conference center's "Green Team" came up with the idea of adding the panels early last year as a response to the Council of Bishops' pastoral letter, "God's Renewed Creation: A Call to Hope and Action," and received funding from the conference Trustees, Common Table and Council on Finance and Administration. The panels will not only lower the building's energy usage – and



bills – but will generate tax credits that the conference can sell. Visitors to the building will find a monitor in the lobby that shows a real-time read-out of how much power the panels are generating and how that power translates into real savings to the environment. (Photos by Neill Caldwell)

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Galloway UMC helps children in Falls Church by Laurice Jones-Wilks get “Jumpstart” for school

This summer, members at Galloway UMC in Falls Church in northern Virginia decided to move beyond the boundaries of their four walls in order to reach the children in the surrounding community.

Since 2009, Galloway has recognized a need and desire to impact the lives of the next generation by taking the Scripture “Train up a child in the way they should go...” (Proverbs 22:6) to heart. The desire is to reach out to them, acknowledge their God-given gifts and talents and introduce them to ways they can use their gifts and talents to glorify God in their schools, in their homes, in churches and in their communities.

We began by ministering to our own children in 2010. The thrust was to revitalize our Children’s Choir and Junior Usher Board. However, early this year we realized it was time to take the bold next step out into the greater Falls Church community by identifying and addressing needs of our neighborhood’s children.

The greatest need was that the children needed support with elementary education. During our discovery and discerning process, we became increasingly more aware of and very sensitive to the challenges children face as young learners today. We also became aware of how diverse Falls Church has become during the past few decades and the unique challenges children of first-generation immigrants face. And yet we were confident this was indeed a challenging need we wanted to address because God has gifted the Galloway Church family with a significant number of educators and other members who possess a heart for children and outreach.

After prayerful consideration, we decided to offer a two-week late-summer tutorial program for neighborhood elementary students. The program’s name, “Jumpstart,” reflected our desire to give our participants a leading and learning edge for the upcoming school year. In order to maximize our efforts, we invited others to join us in this work. As God would have it, we had been in

(Right): Tutor Rachel Pak keeps the third- and fourth-grade girls eagerly engaged in the day’s lessons. (Below): Jumpstart tutor Sun Park with her first-grade students.



the reading skills enhancement break-out sessions, according to grade levels, with tutors. The mid-afternoon snack and storytelling was a favorite with the children. The second skills enhancement session, math, was followed by the day’s wrap-up and review session with the coordinator. This closing activity was a particular joy for the participants and “Jumpstart” staff

alike. At this time, the children willingly and cheerfully volunteered to lead their fellow students and the “Jumpstart” staff in prayer before returning with their counselors to the James Lee Community Center.

At the end of “Jumpstart,” Galloway, Vision of Peace and the James Lee Community Center celebrated the fact that through the tutors’ light-hearted yet intentional approaches to learning, we were able to assist parents in our community by instilling into their little ones the joys and benefits of learning. Tutors also provided notes and comments on their student’s progress each day, from which our coordinators assessed their capabilities and offered written comments to aid parents in preparing for the upcoming school year.

The feedback from participants, parents, tutors and counselors has encouraged Galloway to plan to repeat the “Jumpstart” program in 2012. □

— The Rev. Laurice Jones-Wilks is pastor of Galloway UMC.

conversation with Pastor Keith Lee of Vision of Peace Ministry about engaging in a joint outreach ministry program. Over the years, Vision of Peace has conducted a number of successful youth ministries and missions programs and they eagerly offered their expertise and assistance by providing some of our tutors and supplies.

Tanya Hardy, chair of Galloway UMC’s Nurture ministry and an educator in the Fairfax Public School system, took on the task of developing the program content and curriculum. Providentially, God added the third member to our partnership, the James Lee Community Center, located just a few blocks from the church. James Lee’s assistant director, Kimberly Kardelis, agreed to assist with recruiting, registering and transporting students from their programs to and from our program.

From Aug. 1-12, Galloway offered 22 “Jumpstart” tutoring participants opportunities to enhance their reading and math skills. Students ranged in ages from 5 to 13 (kindergarten to sixth grade), representing our newest Hispanic, African, Middle Eastern, Korean, African-American and Jewish neighbors. Their days with us began at 12:30 p.m. with group sharing as a gathering activity in our sanctuary, followed by

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Virginia pastors reflect on visit to Korea

In October, 23 Virginia clergy participated in a spiritual pilgrimage to Korea led by conference clergy of Korean heritage. The host church, Bupyeong Korean Methodist in Incheon, showed incredible hospitality by housing and feeding the group free of charge for a full week.

Every day began with prayer as we joined 500 others attending Bupyeong's 5 a.m. morning prayer service. The rest of our waking hours were packed with activities. Our host church pastor offered lectures on Korea, past and present, the missionary background of Korean Christianity, and factors contributing to the current vitality of the congregations there.

We went to a missionary cemetery and a missionary museum, two world-class, church-related Korean universities founded by missionaries, and awesome community-oriented ministries run by Jesus Town Korean Methodist Church and the international Dail Community. We also visited the Royal Palace and Seoul Tower, and did souvenir-hunting in Insadong.

One evening, we attended small groups in host church members'

homes. We worshiped with the entire congregation on Sunday morning and Wednesday evening, and were honored guests at a mass choir festival at the church on Sunday night.

A sampling of post-pilgrimage testimonies to "pollen" gathered during our journey, the sweet honey of faith and ministry in the making:

"I learned that prayer must go first. Impressive, too, was Jesus Town Church, which through grace, prayer, and hard work in a broken part of the city, brought 'dry bones' back to life." — *The Rev. Chris Riedel, Arcola UMC, Sterling*

"Koreans know how to pray... and cook." — *The Rev. Steve Vornov, Capron UMC, Southampton County*

"I was impressed by people's commitment to the 5 a.m. prayer ministry, ... also, the Jesus Town ministry — humble, hard-working believers bringing light and transformation to

the community while living out their faith in obedience and joy!" — *The Rev. Jennie Ailstock, Sleepy Hollow UMC associate, Falls Church*

"Our welcome into universities, hospitals and clinics, feeding ministries, day-care centers, businesses, and museums displaying the history of Korea and the movement and impact of Christianity was renewing for me." — *The Rev. Pat Tony, Main Street UMC, Emporia*

"Stories about the missionary movement helped me to see the value of missions in a new way." — *The Rev. Kathleene Card, on personal leave of absence*

"I have never in my life seen ministry excellence in every respect nestled in the heart of a predominately lower-income area. I have never seen such physical or passionate fervor of worship in such a pristine church setting. I have never seen so many unpaid volunteers working in the church. More

time is needed to fully unpack the various dynamics and values that allow Bupyeong Church to live with such vitality and excellence... I believe the key rests in leadership, *followship*, sacrifice, suffering and gratitude. The people of the Bupyeong church clearly know their reason for being and are embracing it wholeheartedly. What a blessed experience."

— *The Rev. Dwight Hughes, St. James UMC, Newport News*

"The pilgrimage was like experiencing 'grace upon grace' — the thundering sound of prayers, the continual waves of generosity (each one larger than the first), the fruitful ministry that American missionaries planted 126 years ago, and the gentle touch of the Korean people." — *The Rev. Won Un, Mount Moriah UMC, Charlottesville* □

— *The Rev. Ruth Burgess is pastor of Bruen Chapel UMC in Fairfax.*

Directed by the Rev. M.J. Kim, Virginia clergy sing for the 11 a.m. worship at Bupyeong Korean Methodist Church at Incheon, Korea.



Pastors from Virginia helped serve the homeless in Incheon, Korea.

Virginia Advocate production coordinator leaves after more than 25 years of service to conference

Debbie Duty began putting together black and white pages of the *Virginia Advocate* on April 3, 1986. She was lucky she didn't slice off her finger. You see, that was back in the days when galleys of type were set on special paper, sent through a chemical process, waxed on the back side of the paper, trimmed with a very sharp X-acto knife, and then pasted on special pasteup boards made of card stock — ready for pickup by a currier sent from a local printer.

Almost 26 years later, she produced this issue's color pages on a 20-inch computer monitor with every photo, ad and text block in place; the 32-page file saved electronically and sent to the printers.

Duty announced in early January that, after careful consideration, she was leaving her longtime position of Production Coordinator/Graphics Communicator in the Virginia Conference's office of Communications, effective Jan. 31.

"I will miss serving the pastors and laity of the local churches of the Virginia Conference, but at this time in my life, I am feeling a stronger pull to serve elsewhere," said Duty. "I covet your prayers during my time of transition."

Along with layout and design of the

Virginia Advocate, Duty has produced other conference-related printed materials such as the annual "Mission Opportunities" booklet, program booklets used at Annual Conference, pictorial directories, *Heritage* historical semiannual publication, *Neighbors* and other newsletters, banners, brochures, letterhead, business cards and other information pieces.

Nicknamed "Eagle Eye" by many in the conference, she, along with other conference staff, has won numerous national awards for page layout and graphics design for the *Virginia Advocate* newsmagazine and "Mission Opportunities" booklet.

"I was sorry to receive the news that Debbie has resigned as Production Coordinator/Graphics Communicator," said Marc Brown, conference director of Connectional Ministries. "Debbie has been



(Below): Debbie Duty assists with a beachside photo-op by holding one of the beach balls that was given out during the 2001 Virginia Annual Conference held in Virginia Beach. The ball was part of the new "Open Hearts. Open Minds. Open Doors." evangelism campaign.



a friend and colleague for many years. Her ministry has touched the lives of people across the conference and the connection of The United Methodist Church. I am grateful for her devotion to the churches of the Virginia Conference and pray for God's blessings as she steps out in faith on the next steps of her life journey."

Advocate editor Neill Caldwell shared, "It will be impossible to replace Debbie's treasure of knowledge about the Virginia Conference and its people. Her high standards for excellence, accuracy, hard work and first-rate customer service serve as a model for all of us in the conference Center. We all will miss her and wish her well in the next chapter of her life."

"Debbie brought incredible knowledge about the conference, The United Methodist Church and Virginia local churches to her work," said Linda Rhodes, director of Communications. "While we may be able to find someone with layout and design skills to fill this position, it will be impossible to find someone who has as much historical knowledge about this organization. Debbie will be truly missed."

Debbie and her husband, Ronnie Bolton, live in Ashland along with their very talented and entertaining calico cat. A lifelong Methodist, Debbie and Ronnie currently attend Kenwood UMC. □

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Onsite registration begins at 9:00 a.m.



Next 5 Talent Academy session to feature bishop from Cuba

The next gathering of the 5 Talent Academy will be held Feb. 23 at Ebenezer UMC in Stafford, with a focus of planting or partnering with new faith communities.

More than 100 conference churches are participating in the 5 Talent Academy, part of "All Things New" which deals with re-energizing existing churches.

The morning speaker for the upcoming event will be Methodist Bishop Ricardo Pereira from Cuba. The afternoon speaker will be Mont Duncan, director of Congregational Development for the Florida Conference. There also will be discussion time.

The Methodist Church in Communist-controlled Cuba has gained much more freedom and is growing at a rate that would be the envy of any denomination in the United States. In the past 12 years, the church has grown from 9,000 members to 30,000 members. In fact, Cuban Methodists are even sending mis-

sionaries overseas; a couple recently was sent to East Angola as evangelistic and medical missionaries.

"People ask us in Cuba, 'What must we do to join your church? What are your prohibitions?' We say, there are no prohibitions. The Christian life is positive. The Christian life is a party," Pereira said. "In Havana, the churches have grown to the point that some of them have to hold more than one service to meet the needs of the people. In the rural areas and smaller cities, the church buildings are smaller and are holding several services during the week, not just on Sunday."

Registration begins at 9 a.m. and the event will be held from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. The cost is \$25 per person.

Register online at <www.vaumc.org> and click "Events." For more information, e-mail Pat Hickman at <PatHickman@vaumc.org> or call 1-800-768-6040, ext. 155, or (804) 521-1155. □

Society for Wesleyan Studies event set for March 28 in Ashland

The Society for Wesleyan Studies will host Rev. Dr. Jason Vickers of United Theological Seminary on March 28 from 9 a.m.-3 p.m. at Duncan Memorial UMC in Ashland.

Vickers will help participants consider "Resurrection and the Christian Life: The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Wesleys (and in Methodism today)." Registration is \$45 and includes a boxed lunch. CEU credit is available. Both laity and clergy are welcome.

Send registration to the Rev. Myron Simmons at 5 Johnson Rd., Hampton, VA 23664. For more information, e-mail the Rev. Bruce Johnson at <rbrucejohnson2010@gmail.com>. A brochure will be available soon in the "Events" section of the Web at <www.vaumc.org>. □

"Where will my child live when I am gone?"

Over 17,000 adults with intellectual disabilities live in Virginia with parents over the age of sixty.

More than 5,600 are on waiting lists for housing and services.

Over 3,056 are in urgent need of residential services.

With so many individuals in need, how can anything I do possibly make a difference?



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Students at Shenandoah celebrate with Jewish and Muslim sisters and brothers

by Amy Howard

The Spiritual Life office at Shenandoah University defines campus ministry a little differently than most. For us, campus ministry involves partnering with our sisters and brothers of various faith traditions as we, together, celebrate and cherish our religious holidays.

There are many prejudices alive in the world today, and it is through learning and relationships that these biases can be torn down. We offer an understanding of campus ministry that is rooted in loving our neighbors while we learn together and support each other.



One example of this is celebrating the Jewish holiday of Sukkot, or the Feast of Tabernacles. During this holiday, which is celebrated for seven

Students of various faiths join together in the construction of the "Sukkah" in front of the chapel at Shenandoah University. Pictured are: Quartaz Foster, president of the Jewish Student Association; Joshua McCauley, a religion major and a member of the Just Faith Christian Leadership Program; and the Rev. Justin Allen, Dean of Spiritual Life and Director of the Institute of Church Professions at Shenandoah University.

days, we are called to remember the make-shift shelters of the Israelites in the wilderness. Throughout the holiday, a "Sukkah" is used as a place to eat meals, sleep and offer prayers of blessing around the world.

In the beginning of September, we stood in solidarity with our brothers and sisters of the Islamic faith as together we celebrated Eid at the end of Ramadan. Students had the floor to share the story of their faith, why they fast, and what it means to them to be a Muslim. The Eid celebration included traditional Saudi Arabian cuisine, henna tattoos, signing of cards for the Islamic community in Winchester, and students teaching other students to write their names in Arabic.

It truly is a beautiful witness when we come together, embracing our differences, and eager to learn from each other. The Spiritual Life office at Shenandoah is creating that space for this great learning to blossom. We live in a diverse world. It is through understanding the faith of others that we ask questions of our own faith, and it is through this questioning that we are called to a deeper relationship with our Creator, with Christ, and through the Spirit. As an expression of our relationship with Christ, we stand in solidarity with our neighbors both near and far, offering signs of support, understanding and love. □

— Amy Howard is Spiritual Life coordinator at Shenandoah University.

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Nation & World

‘Call to Action’ plan ready for General Conference consideration

Conversations continue in response to the “Call to Action” report and proposals that appeal for amplified attention across The United Methodist Church to increasing the number of vital congregations.

The Council of Bishops and Connectional Table initiated the “Call to Action” process “to reorder the life of the church” two years ago, mindful of the urgency of our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world – and in the wake of four decades of declining U.S. membership alongside increasing constraints on finances for churches and annual conferences magnified by the 2008 global economic crisis.

“We can have strong episcopal leadership while preserving our democratic decision-making if we pay attention to what is ahead of us,” says Jay Brim, lay leader of the Southwest Texas Conference and chair of the Connectional Table’s Legislative Task Force. “We need our best and brightest clergy consecrated to leading the spiritual and temporal affairs of this denomination, and we need to make the job doable for those we choose for the position. We also need to consider whether we are giving them useful tools for the job while tying their hands with the many roadblocks to centralized authority we have erected over the years.”

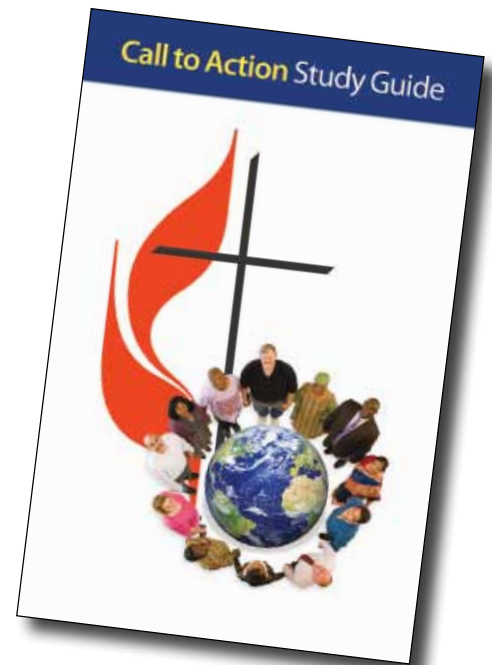
The Council of Bishops and Connectional Table have endorsed proposals to be considered by the General Conference including redirecting up to \$60 million in General Church spending in 2013-2016 for specific work needed to create and sustain vital congregations; combining nine of the current 13 general agencies to achieve greater focus for impact, integration and economies;

measures that provide for the Council of Bishops to elect a full-time, four-year president to lead and work with other bishops; realigning the Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns as an office of the Council; and support of recommendations from the Ministry Study Commission regarding the appointment of clergy and from the General Board of Global Ministries to make the Women’s Division structurally separate.

The General Conference will consider the legislation to consolidate several of the general agencies into a new Center for Connectional Mission and Ministry. A 15-member board of directors would govern the Center and be accountable to the General Conference and a 45-member General Council for Strategy and Oversight. This would replace the Connectional Table that currently works to help coordinate the denomination’s ministries and resources.

The reorganization plan originated with the Interim Operations Team, eight laity and clergy working with denominational leaders to implement the Call to Action recommendations. The Connectional Table refined and endorsed the team’s recommendations in July. The bishops issued a supporting statement, “For the Sake of a New World, We See a New Church: A Call to Action,” in November.

“The first Methodists accomplished amazing ministry in a very difficult socio-economic and religious context. I think this institutional memory is what pains so many of us who lead in the 21st century American United Methodism,” says the Rev. Jorge Acevedo, Lead Pastor of Grace Church, a multi-site United Methodist congregation in



Fort Myers, Fla. “The ‘Call to Action’ research put a crystal clear spotlight on our lack of vitality at the corner of Main and Church Street as well as our lack of institutional effectiveness at our judicatory headquarters. Could it be that in The United Methodist Church, just as in the life of an individual follower of Jesus, change begins with confession and repentance?”

Other expressions of support and of concern have been heard from various groups. The Iowa and Louisiana General Conference delegations have announced their support of the principles and directions in the Bishops’ statement (visit the Web at umccalltoaction.org). Some respondents affirm the idea of a full-time Council of Bishops president, while others do not.

Leaders of five groups that advocate in behalf of several racial/ethnic constituencies caution that the proposed restructuring “minimizes and will exclude the participation of racial/ethnic persons, and works against the principle of inclusiveness that we see as one of the important values our church has to offer.” Members of the denomina-
(Continued, next page, Call to Action)

United Methodist programs help transform lives of children in Cambodia

Thery's family was living in extreme poverty and could no longer care properly for their young daughter. They found a home for Thery at Cambodia Light Children's Orphanage and the affiliated Methodist school. Teachers recognized that she was a gifted dancer and nurtured her passion.

Today she is 19 years old and attending the Royal University of Fine Arts. She continues to live at the orphanage and teaches dance to the children. The children's dance performances help raise funds to support the orphanage.

Opportunities for education are vital in Cambodia, a nation that is struggling to recover from years of war and genocide. Educated people were targeted in the 1970s by the Khmer Rouge and were either killed or fled the country. It is rare to see people who are over the age of 55.

"Fifty percent of the people living in Cambodia are children," says Romeo Del Rosario, a General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) missionary from the Philippines who leads the Cambodia Mission Initiative. "If the church is to make an impact in Cambodia, we must start with education."

Clara Biswas is a GBGM missionary from Bangladesh who works with the Cambodia Street Children's Ministry. Working with orphanages allows her to reach out to the most vulnerable children. From that base, the ministry invites the surrounding community to participate. For example, at Cambodia Light, 80 students live in the institution, but 120 students attend the school. "We are not just providing them with a place to live. We are offering them a future through education. We are protecting them from being trafficked. We are helping them know that each one is a beloved child of God. We are raising a generation of confident leaders in Cambodia."

The street children's ministry also supports the local economy. All of the material is purchased from

within Cambodia. Students from the university are hired to work at the schools supplementing their income while they attend college. Working with the children also gives them practical work experience for when they graduate.

The community-focused model of these ministries grows in ways that reinforces and strengthens the work that is happening. For example, Sry offers vocational training to young people who are interested in dressmaking and tailoring. She grew up in the Kien Khleang Orphanage. As an adult, she married and moved away. After having her daughter, she and her husband separated and Sry returned to the orphanage with her daughter. Her daughter attends the nearby public school, and Sry supports them by giving back to the community that raised her.

Biswas steps out in faith, trusting that the necessary funds will be available to continue the ministries, but she says that when churches and

conferences make multi-year pledges, "it helps us with strategic planning to dream in new ways for the long-term."

She is thankful for the prayers and support of United Methodists who make the ministry possible. "It truly does transform lives," she said. □

— Melissa Hinnen,
General Board of Global Ministries



(Above): Thery was raised at Cambodia Light Children's Orphanage and is now a college student. She is pictured with Global Ministries missionary Clara Biswas (right). (Left): Children at Cambodia Light Children's Orphanage learn traditional Cambodian dance. (Photos by Melissa Hinnen, GBGM)



Call to Action *(Continued from previous page)*

tion's unofficial caucuses Good News <<http://goodnewsmag.org>> and the Methodist Federation for Social Action <<http://mfsaweb.org>> also have weighed in.

A study guide for persons interested in considering and reflecting on the 'Call to Action' is available. This and other information is available at <umccalltoaction.org>.

Meanwhile, the most important efforts of providing encouragement, support and resources for the day-by-day work of increasing and sustaining the number of vital congregations is already under way in communities, churches and annual conferences, supported by general agencies and others. Ideas, ministry resources and stories can be found at <umvitalcongregations.org>. □

— United Methodist News Service

General Conference rule changes proposed

The Rules Committee of the Commission on the General Conference has announced their recommendations for changes to the Plan of Organization and Rules of Order which provides the governance structure for the 2012 General Conference. The changes will be presented to delegates for consideration at the opening session.

“Our goal was to create a hospitable environment and an efficient structure for all delegates,” said Judi Kenaston, committee chair. “Some of the significant changes will provide for worship and rest on the Sabbath, specify a set deadline for evening adjournment, and expand the time scheduled for legislative committee work by approximately 25 percent during the first week.”

Kenaston said the committee worked diligently to correct oversights, errors and problems that had been identified since 2008, as well as to keep abreast of technological advances. Both official motions and unofficial requests from the 2008 General Conference were incorporated in order to improve and streamline plenary and legislative committee proceedings.

The proposed rule changes include the following recommendations:

- Make administrative committees more geographically representative by including at least one person from each central conference and jurisdiction, beginning in 2016.
- Designate the members of the Committee on the Plan of Organization and Rules of Order to serve as the Committee on Ethics (a new committee requested by General Conference 2008 to investigate alleged rule violations).
- Make training mandatory for those elected to serve as committee and sub-committee leaders.



Delegates at General Conference 2008 in Fort Worth, Texas.

- Require that plenary sessions and legislative committees adjourn by 9:30 p.m. each day, and that committee meetings not conflict with plenary meetings.
- Increase the time for legislative committees (23.5 hours of legislative time will be provided in the first week, mostly in the morning and afternoon, compared to 18.25 hours in 2008).
- Set a deadline for legislative committee work to be completed by adjournment on Saturday of the first week. Legislative work not dealt with by this deadline will be reported to the plenary session as “not considered.”
- Prioritize calendar items brought before the plenary by the Calendar and Agenda Committee in this order when possible: items affecting the global church, items with financial implications, items with minority reports. (Priorities have not previously been specified.)
- Stipulate that motions supported by the legislative committees be reported as disciplinary items recommended for adoption; non-disciplinary items recommended for adoption; or items recommended for referral. Items not placed on one of the three consent calendars will be listed in the *Daily Christian Advocate* as not acted upon

because another petition dealing with the same subject was acted upon; not supported by the legislative committee; or not considered by the legislative committee.

- Focus initial debate and voting on substitute motions and minority reports on the question of whether or not they should replace the main proposal put forward by the legislative committee. Once a preliminary decision has been made,

debate will ensue on whatever motion remains before the body.

Further explanation of the proposed changes and a complete draft of the Plan of Organization and Rules of Order are available on the General Conference 2012 website, <www.GC2012.umc.org>. □

— *United Methodist Communications*

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Best way churches could minister to young people may be finding them a job

There has long been urgency for The United Methodist Church to bring more young people into its pews and its pulpits, and this year there is evidence that it may be happening.

The annual report on clergy age trends in the denomination, conducted by the Lewis Center for Church Leadership of Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C., revealed a 10-year high in the number of United Methodist clergy under the age of 35.

The church holds numerous events throughout the year to reach young people and build stronger relationships. Events like Youth 2011 and Relevance X

are designed for various age groups and stages of faith. Exploration events, sponsored by the United Methodist Board of Higher Education and Ministry, help young people feeling called to ministry better understand where God is leading them.

A main concern of young people the past several years has been the bleak job outlook. To help reach out to those struggling to find work, job ministries have been popping up at churches nationwide. One such ministry at Roswell United Methodist Church outside Atlanta attracts as many as 300 job seekers at its twice-monthly network-



Melissa Wheatley (right) helps with Sunday school classes at Trinity Church in Spring Hill, Tenn. (UMNS photo by Mike DuBose)

ing events. Many of the participants are recent college graduates, frustrated that they are now saddled with college debt, can't find a job to help pay off that debt and may wind up living back at home with family.

Roswell's job ministry provides networking opportunities, support groups, résumé-writing services and even a clothing boutique so people have proper attire for interviews.

In this tough job market, becoming a United Methodist pastor is one of the last secure jobs left. But that may be changing.

If the recommendations of the Ministry Study Commission are approved by delegates to the 2012 General Conference, clergy no longer will have guaranteed appointments, but the steps to ordination will get a lot easier.

If the commission's legislation is approved by the church's top legislative body, elders and deacons could be eligible for ordination as soon as they complete their educational requirements. After serving a minimum of two years as a provisional elder or deacon, they would be eligible for full conference membership. But, the security of guaranteed appointments would be replaced by various steps to gauge the effectiveness of each pastor's ministry.

Additional legislation proposed by the Connectional Table would allocate \$50 million in church funds as an investment in recruiting and training clergy younger than 35. □

— *Joey Butler,*
United Methodist Communications

United Methodists get highest favorability score

Almost two-thirds of adult Americans have a favorable impression of United Methodists. That's according to a new survey from LifeWay Research that looks at perceptions of faith groups among adults in the United States.

United Methodists had the highest percentage of favorable impressions among the faith groups included in the survey – Roman Catholics, Southern Baptists, United Methodists, Mormons and Muslims – with 15 percent of respondents reporting very favorable impressions and 47 percent reporting somewhat favorable.

United Methodists also had the lowest percentage of unfavorable impressions: only 23 percent, compared to 38 percent for Roman Catholics, 40 percent for Southern Baptists, 52 percent for Mormons and 63 percent for Muslims.

Americans in the South were the most likely to have a very favorable opinion. Americans with a college degree were also more likely to have a very favorable opinion than those without a degree. Those in the West and Northeast were most likely to be not familiar with United Methodists. Americans who never attend a worship service are the least likely to have a very favorable opinion or a somewhat favorable opinion and the most likely to have a very unfavorable opinion.

The LifeWay research reinforces the findings of a 2008 Gallup poll that showed "Methodists" to have the highest positive ratings of religious and spiritual groups in the U.S.

The United Methodist Church began the "Open hearts. Open minds. Open doors." ad campaign in 2001 in order to increase awareness and recognition of the denomination's basic beliefs and to promote willingness to visit a United Methodist church.

The campaign evolved in 2009 with the launch of Rethink Church, an effort targeted at globally minded 18- to 34-year-olds that highlights the many opportunities available within United Methodist churches to make a difference in the world – from literacy programs to feeding the poor.

For example, 82 percent of volunteers at a recent service event in El Paso, Texas, were not part of the local church, and four out of 10 of those volunteers were from the target 18-34 age group. Likewise, a day of service recently hosted by 20 United Methodist churches in Topeka, Kan., drew nearly 1,000 volunteers to do outdoor cleanup work; 200 of the volunteers were new to the churches. □

— *Diane Degnan, United Methodist Communications*



Local Church



▲ United Methodist Women at **Burnt Chimney UMC**, Danville District, made up these cookie trays for the shut-ins of the church for this past Christmas season. The congregation also collected a variety of gifts for foster children in the county, and food for the local food bank.



▲ For the past nine years, the story of Christmas has been an interactive experience for Caitlyn Johnson, thanks to **Peakland UMC**, Lynchburg District. That's when the church began hosting a drive-through Nativity, where Johnson, an 18-year-old Jefferson Forest High School senior, and her sister, 16-year-old Madison, play the parts of Mary and an angel. This year, the Nativity attracted more than 250 cars over two nights in early December. "It's an outreach to connect with the community and share with them," says Barbara Nelson, who works at Peakland UMC. "I think that this time of year, people are wanting to be touched with the spirit of Christmas." (Photo by Jill Nance, *The News & Advance*, Lynchburg.)

Southview UMC, Roanoke District, hosted a Society of St. Andrew (hunger relief ministry) "Potato Drop" in early December. More than 47,000 pounds of sweet potatoes were bagged to be distributed to area food banks.



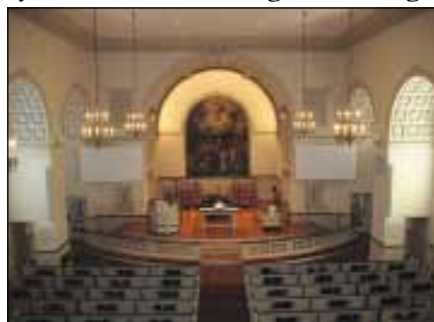
▲ The **Braddock Street UMC** Needlers, Winchester District, began a prayer shawl ministry in 2009. The group of 18 members meets twice a month to craft the shawls and say special prayers for recipients. Seventy-one shawls have been distributed to date. Last fall 23 new shawls were blessed and dedicated. Pictured with the display of shawls are (from left) Elaine Layman, Betty York, Judy Werner and Doris Zimmer.



▲ **Emmanuel UMC**, Lynchburg District, is the prime mover of a program to provide weekend food for hungry Amherst County students. The program has more than doubled the number of children served since it began last year. Now called Amherst Cares, it has expanded to serve Monelison Middle School and will begin serving at Central Elementary and Amherst Elementary schools next year. Amherst Cares, begun by teacher Elizabeth Schupp and now-retired counselor Karen Cecil, has grown from serving about 65 students at Amherst Middle to providing weekend food to 150. (Photo by Jill Nance, *The News & Advance*.)



▼ The sanctuary at **First UMC** in Charlottesville is more than 85 years old. Recent renovations were completed just in time for Christmas. "The challenge is how do you maintain that traditional feel and yet be flexible enough to provide for future generations where the traditional maybe isn't as meaningful to them," said Senior Pastor Al Horton. The million dollar project includes new paint and refinished hardwood floors. There are also flat screen TVs, projection screens and a sound system. The amenities give the roughly 1,000 members a better experience, but it was important not to destroy the church's historic integrity with all the upgrades. First UMC began sharing space with three other faiths at the courthouse in downtown Charlottesville in the 1820s, but after building two churches on Water Street, the congregation moved to its current home on East Jefferson Street in 1924. (Pictured is the interior of the newly-renovated sanctuary.)



Homeless shelter at Basic UMC opens its doors

On the coldest night Waynesboro has seen this winter, the much-anticipated cold-weather shelter finally opened, with a dedication service at the **Basic United Methodist Church** youth center on a Monday night.

The shelter has been a work in progress for more than a year, and members of the Waynesboro Area Ministerial Association (WAMA) and the Waynesboro Area Refuge Ministry (WARM) were extremely pleased to see their hard work come to fruition.

"It's been a collaborative effort of the whole community," said Basic UMC Pastor the Rev. Don Gibson, adding that the need for a homeless shelter in the city came to the forefront after a killing in a tent village by the South River in spring 2010.

WAMA formed the WARM board in October 2010, with the intent of creating a cold-weather shelter for the homeless.

Officials gave credit to Katie Morrison, a sixth-grader at Kate Collins Middle School, who spearheaded a successful drive at her school that resulted in two boxes of toiletries being donated to the WARM shelter.

The shelter's site was to remain at the Basic's youth center for the next two weeks and then move to Springdale Mennonite Church.

Gibson said that two other local churches are in the process of joining as host sites. The WARM shelter is modeled after operations in Harrisonburg and Charlottesville, in which the shelter's host site rotates among local churches.

The shelter will remain in use until March 15.

— Dustin Woolridge, The News Virginian, Waynesboro



The Rev. Howard Miller (right) pastor of Waynesboro Mennonite Church and chair of the Waynesboro Area Refuge Mission, leads a prayer to dedicate a cold-weather shelter at Basic United Methodist Church. (Photo by Rosanne Weber/The News Virginian)

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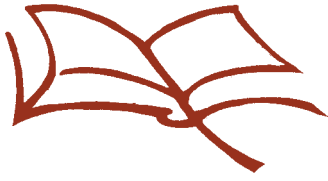
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Living the Word



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:
Jake Paysour, a member of Fincastle United Methodist Church, earned a B.A. in economics from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Jake is currently a Master of Theological Studies student at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C. He is, happily, a PK (preacher's kid), and a lifelong United Methodist. (His dad is the Rev. Doug Paysour, pastor of Calvary UMC, Staunton District.)

February 5, 2012

What makes us Christian?
Galatians 2:15-21

One of the great debates of Paul's time was over the distinguishing features of the Christian faith. Jesus and his closest followers, after all, were all Jewish. Even today, we use the Hebrew Scriptures as part of our canon. Throw in Paul's own complicated story – from the Jewish persecutor of Jewish Christians to perhaps the greatest champion of the Christian faith among both Jews and Gentiles – and it is understandable that differentiation between Jews and Christians would be at the forefront of issues addressed by Paul.

Today, almost two millennia removed from Paul's context, it's difficult to appreciate the tension in the early Christian community between Jew and Gentile Christians. It is a little strange to hear Paul, as representative of Christianity as anyone in the New Testament save Jesus, say that "we ourselves are Jews by birth." While the relationship between Jews and Christians in the United States might not be as pressing a theological concern as it once was, the question still remains – what makes us distinctly Christian? In an age where Christianity is increasingly in contact with other faiths, and even those of no faith, it is still a vital question. In today's passage, Paul provides an answer – it is the fact that we believe that we are justified "through faith in Jesus Christ" (2:16). It is tempting to place the emphasis on the former part of that statement, that "a person is justified not by the works of the law" (2:16), but this emphasis is too easy to take out of context.

Such passages, not uncommon in Paul's writings, for the above reasons, are frequently used to downplay the

importance of living out one's faith in action. Can it really matter what we do, if we are after all, justified by Christ? Absolutely! It's the difference between means and ends – what Paul is preaching against is not the vitality of faith in action, but rather the belief that we can save ourselves, or that God's grace, manifested in Christ, is not necessary. "Works" are not the means of justification, but the end result. Paul writes that "the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (2:20). The results of Christ's sacrifice are not simply life after death, but a life beyond death – a life lived here and now, in gratitude for that sacrifice, after the model presented in Jesus' life. After all, "it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me" (2:20). It is this distinctiveness to which we are called, and to which we must be honest throughout our lives. It is in this distinctiveness, and the security thereof, that we can enter into dialogue with those of other faiths and no faiths – honest, unthreatened and nonthreatening dialogue. It is essential that, in such a pluralistic society, we remain both true to the promise we have received in Christ and true to the relationships we have been given with all of our brothers and sisters in every walk of life. □

February 12, 2012

Upon further review
Galatians 3:1-14

There are some strong words from Paul in today's passage – the Galatians are "foolish," having been "bewitched," later saying that, if they continue to err along the same path, they will remain "under a curse" (3:1, 3:10). What has gotten Paul's blood boiling so? The Galatians, "having started with the Spirit," are

now thinking that God is moving among them because they are “doing the works of the law” (3:5). In Paul’s argument against this belief, he makes an interesting use of several Old Testament Scriptures, including the promise to Abraham in Genesis and one of the Levitical curses of Deuteronomy. In so doing, and in bringing in these two Scriptures in forming a theology of Christ’s salvation, Paul provides an incredible reinterpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures. This leap by Paul is radical for him, once very much an Orthodox Jew. One begins to see how this offshoot of Judaism could be seen as problematic by the Jews of the time, and, perhaps even more so, one begins to see how radical a claim it is to make that “Christ redeemed us” (3:13).

Paul walks a very fine line here. As Christians, we affirm the holiness of all Scripture, and the Old Testament must be allowed to stand on its own. The Hebrew Scriptures, in and of themselves, are a valued testimony to the power of the God we proclaim, and must be allowed to stand of their own merit. Within that, though, we recognize that the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth provides a lens of interpretation that we cannot ignore at any point. We hold both of these in tension when we read the Bible. Perhaps as important, for our purposes today, is the very principle of reinterpretation that Paul acknowledges. In Christ, we are called to re-evaluate, revalue and repent. In this turning, we find that the ways of life we once knew are an insufficient response, in our own souls, to the grace of God. Are you sure you need that new phone? Are you sure those men or those women don’t belong in the church? Are you sure you can’t spare a moment to talk to that person on the street? Are you sure there isn’t enough to take care of you and yours, and still give of what you have been given to others? You might want to think again.

In the answers to these, and so many other questions, we find that we “receive the promise of the Spirit through faith,” that we open ourselves to the grace that has been offered through the Holy Spirit, sent by God

and God’s only begotten Son. Upon further review, then, we find that we are offered the gift of the Spirit, through which we may work in the name of Jesus, the gift of God. □

February 19, 2012

First-world problems

Galatians 3:15-18; 4:1-7

There’s a memo going around, whereupon people poke fun at their own ridiculous complaints by recognizing that they are “first-world problems.” Your smartphone robs you of a high score on the game you’re playing when it runs out of battery? That’s a first-world problem. Feel a little sickly after you ate too much at Thanksgiving? That’s a first-world problem. Can’t find the remote to change the channel from a show you’re not wild about to a show you just sort of like? First-world problem.

You get the idea. Another first-world problem we have here in the United States? We occasionally have a little trouble with the concept of freedom. So many of us have so little experience with its converse, we have trouble in valuing the freedoms we do have. It makes it quite difficult for us to fully appreciate the last verse in today’s passage. What could it possibly feel like to go from being a slave to a child? What joy to which we have reference could we possibly attribute to such circumstances? I’m still struggling with that one.

I do know what it’s like to be a child, though. I recognize that I am very fortunate to have had incredible parents, with whom I can at least find analogy to the cries of “Abba! Father!” that Paul describes (4:6). How much more, then, must Jesus have felt when he uttered that same cry, a cry overflowing with love and gratitude, towards his heavenly parent? It is in this relationship that we truly recognize just how human Jesus was. Paul emphasizes that Jesus was “born of a woman, born under the law.” He sets out Jesus’ particularity, how Jesus occupied a particular time and space in his time on earth, just as we do.

What does it mean to be a child of

God? It means that, in Jesus, we find ourselves adopted by one greater than all. From the one offspring, we are all drawn into the family, according to the promise of God. Because Jesus became our brother in humanity, God is our parent. The image of parent is striking – it both acknowledges God’s sovereignty, yet leaves room for the mutuality of relationship that we find to be true in the experience of God. God is not puppet-master, pulling strings as we are tossed about on stage. God is Father, watching over us, teaching us, guiding us. And God is Mother, caring for us, comforting us, helping us to navigate life. What freedom that is! We have room to grow, room to make mistakes, but also to experience success and true joy. And it is comforting to know that, no matter how mature we may grow to be, we are still God’s child. Despite my first-world problems, that is a joy to which I can relate, and that is a joy that I try to relish each and every day. □

February 26, 2012

Share the fruit

Galatians 5:22-6:10

The opening portion of this passage is familiar to most of us – the fruit of the Spirit, the gifts manifested in our lives through the power of the Holy Spirit. We may not necessarily be able to name all of them from memory, but the list is fairly noncontroversial. There isn’t really anything on there to make you do a double-take. I think we can all agree that love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control are good things. The only question is, where can I get some? At the risk of making an awful pun, they don’t sell this fruit in the produce section.

The next section gives us a clue. Paul’s focus on the relationships between the members of the community helps us to recognize that only in community can the fruit be manifest. It brings to mind Jesus’ promise in Matthew 18:20 that “where two or

(Continued on next page, Living)

Living the Word

(Continued from previous page)

three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.” It does take two (at least). This is sometimes difficult for Westerners to grasp. We tend to want to abide by a “bootstrap ethic,” that each may help him or herself. It’s become an aphorism that “God helps those who help themselves.” This phrase is not biblical, though. It’s attributed most commonly to Benjamin Franklin, though it may be older.

Paul’s message in these verses is often confounded to conform to such an individualist ethic. “All must test their own work” – really, what else could this mean, right (6:4)? Everyone needs to take responsibility for her or himself. In fact, I’ve even seen such verses used to defend an unfettered market and a lack of concern for communal welfare – you take care of you, and I’ll take care of me, and that’s the way it should be.

This is confusing – Paul just told us to “bear one another’s burdens.” How can we be expected to test our own work if others are bearing our burdens or we have to bear others’ burdens? The answer lies in Paul’s emphasis on the community – after all, Paul is writing not to an individual, but to an entire community of faith. For Christians, bearing one another’s burdens is part of the work that we are to test. It is not an extra – take care of yourself, then, if you get a chance, help out others. No, it’s an essential part of our very being. Part of our self-definition, as the church, is that we reach out to each other, and beyond. The walls of the church are not borders to our community. As United Methodists, we participate in a lived theology of “open doors.” If we fail to live up to this, we fail to bear fruit, and all of those great things we mentioned, all derived from the love ethic that is so central to our faith, are left to rot. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control – we do not just “do” these things, rather, they are made a very part of us through the Spirit, made manifest

not in isolation, but in community, as broadly defined as we can imagine. □

March 4, 2012

Listen up (please)!

Proverbs 8:22-35

We often construe wisdom as shrewdness, cleverness, the ability to discern quality from lack and right from wrong. We see wisdom as judgment, like Solomon choosing between the two women, both claiming to be the mother of a child. Wisdom is solemn, firm, unyielding. But is that too limited a definition? The passage from Proverbs today would seem to indicate that it is. The author hearkens back to the creation story, going back to the beginning of the beginning. It is tempting to read this poem back into the creation story, or even, as Christians, to equate wisdom to another person of the Trinity, present at creation. The poem is not trying to rewrite the creation story, though, but rather to make a statement about the value and character of wisdom.

Wisdom literature can be dangerous – it’s easy to fall into the trap of utter self-sufficiency, attempting to justify ourselves through an exemplary life. It can also ring hollow for us, at times. When a job is hard to come by, we don’t want to hear about the rewards for the hard work of the righteous. When grief overwhelms us, we don’t want to read about how it is the wicked who get their comeuppance. And that’s okay. Some parts of the Bible speak to us more strongly in some times than in others. But we should also recognize that wisdom is not simply following such a system that it may dole out rewards rather than punishments. According to the passage, wisdom was a “master worker” assisting God as God laid out the cosmos and the world (8:30). Wisdom is both God’s “delight” and itself rejoices at what God has called good (8:31). Wisdom is not nearly so stuffy as we might imagine. As we move through this season of Lent, then, this time of fasting (from whatever we might have chosen to forgo during

this season) and preparation, let us not lose sight of the joy that is to be found. What has been created by God has been called good, and in which we are called to rejoice. To do otherwise, to just go through the motions, struggling to do it on our own, is the antithesis of wisdom. To neglect the joy we find throughout our lives is to neglect wisdom itself.

This is not to say that we will always be happy if we can just manage to act wisely. Far from it. In the world in which we live, eternal happiness is not possible. Nor is this even a command to be ever-joyful. It’s an invitation to partake in the bounty that God has provided, by heeding and by spreading the Good News. We have been given great instruction, and this is an invitation to listen. “Hear instruction and be wise,” tune in to the world as God has created it, to each other, in the image of God, and to the places where the Reign of God is breaking through! □

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FEBRUARY 2012

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Feb. 10-12. Camp Overlook, Keezletown. Grow in your love and commitment to God and one another. Join with other married couples to enrich your relationship in the context of Christian faith and action. Trained leaders will guide participants through a series of exercises, activities and worship experiences. For more information, call the camp office at (540) 2MY-CAMP or e-mail <campoverlook@gmail.com>.

'Hiding Place': A Contemplative

Retreat, Feb. 25-26. Camp Overlook, Keezletown. Positioned during the season of Lent, "Hiding Place" is a safe time and place for you to be still, to search your own heart, and to make ready for Christ. It is a good time to follow Christ's example and do some soul searching in the wilderness. Led by Sheila Lloyd, gifted songwriter and worship leader. A spiritual director will be present. Cost is \$58/person for quad room occupancy; more private options available. For more information, e-mail <CampOverlook@gmail.com>, call (540) 2MY-CAMP, or visit the Web <www.campoverlook.org>.

APRIL 2012

'ReFirement: A Creative Spark' for Older Adults, April 20-21.

Blackstone Conference and Retreat Center. Sponsored by the conference Older Adult Council, this retreat will focus on fostering the spark of creativity in order to enrich the lives of older adults and enhance the ministries of the church. Workshops include watercolor and acrylic painting, music, liturgical movement and knitting/crocheting for making prayer shawls. Why attend? A resolution to the 2005 White House Conference on Aging stated: "Research suggests that active participation in the arts and learning promotes physical health, enhances a sense of well-being among older Americans, improves quality of life for

those who are ill, and reduces the risk factors that lead to the need for long-term care..." For more information, contact the Center for Lay Leadership Excellence, (804) 521-1153 or 1-800-768-6040, ext. 153, or <marthastokes@vaumc.org>.

MAY 2012

Festival of Homiletics, May 14-18.

Atlanta. The Virginia Conference Order of Elders encourages all pastors to consider attending this week of preaching and teaching. The festival is the premier training event in preaching in the country. A link is provided on the Virginia Conference Web site to help connect clergy who want to carpool to Atlanta. Registration information is available on the Web at <www.vaumc.org> in the "Events" section. Scholarships may be requested through the Virginia Conference

Clergy Development program. An application and instructions may be accessed from <www.vaumc.org>, click "Administrative Services >> Center for Clergy Excellence >> Continuing Education for Clergy >> Clergy Development." **Deadline is Feb. 10.**

JUNE 2012

United Nations Seminar, June 25-29.

New York City. An exploration of social justice issues and systemic causes (locally and globally), this trip will help young people ages 16-22 discover a passion to change the world. Sponsored by the General Board of Global Ministries, seminars are presented for a minimum of 15 people. Estimated cost is \$800/person. If interested, e-mail Becky Tate in the conference office of Ministries with Young People at <beckytate@vaumc.org>.

Generations Together

"Exploring the World of the Boy Jesus and His Family"

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Letters & Commentary

There are better ways to measure churches

Numerical growth and institutional maintenance have captured the thinking of many who write about the vital signs of effective congregations. I must admit that when I was serving as a pastor and as a bishop I was caught up in the same swirl of understanding. I am now feeling that there should be a different standard of measurement for meaningful congregational life.

Instead of numerical growth and stabilizing the institution, we need to put strong determined effort into a deeper set of measurements such as growth in compassion, forgiveness, mercy, kindness and justice. These are the benchmarks that bear kingdom fruit. It is possible for a congregation to experience financial and numerical strength and not grow in the fruits of the spirit.

I recently served as interim pastor of a congregation. As I was leaving the office one day to make hospital calls, I met a lady on the parking lot of the church whom I did not know. After a rather casual greeting, she pointed to the church building and said, "Is there someone in there who can teach me how to pray?"

I was stumped by her question. She was pointing to a full service mega-church that offers day care, a weekday school, athletic leagues, mission trips, social services, worship, choirs, a vibrant youth ministry and Sunday school for all ages. At a deeper level, she was inquiring about learning how to practice the spiritual disciplines. I had no answer to her question. I gave her my card and requested that she give me a call so that we could have conversation. She never called and I never saw her again.

When I got back to my office I looked at the calendar of activities for the week and not one had anything to do with learning, experiencing or keeping the spiritual disciplines. How can believers grow in the fruits of the spirit if spiritual practice is neglected?

Since 1996 I have preached in more than 400 congregations. In each of these I have looked at the "opportunities for the week" that are listed on the worship sheet. It has been rare for me to see any emphasis on how to pray, how to search the Scriptures, how to do spiritual reading, or how to practice deeds of mercy and kindness. Yet these are the disciplines that strengthen the inner life. These help us to be formed into a living, loving relationship with God.

If we pay attention to spiritual practices we will be more able to get in touch with the gifts of a particular congregation. I hold to the belief that God has gifted every congregation. It is not necessary to search frantically for new gifts. We, as pastors and lay leaders, need to build on the

gifts that are already present in the congregation. Not all congregations are gifted in the same way, but all are gifted in some way.

**Commentary by
Bishop Joe Pennel**

Wise leaders find ways to maximize the spiritual gifts that are already in the hearts of the people. This has nothing, absolutely nothing, to do with the size or location of a congregation.

United Methodist people are searching for a meaningful relationship to the sacred, one that allows us to remain working, playing and loving; a path that enables us to experience the holy in the kitchen, in nature, in art and in others. There is a gnawing hunger for doors to be opened to deeper levels of meaning and living. The church needs more and more congregations which truly believe that the inner life is more important than numerical and financial growth.

So, if we are focused on spiritual practices, what would be the return? It would evoke harmony and genuine love toward the people around us, our families, spiritual associates, the poor and the marginalized. For others the return might be doing deeds of mercy and kindness in the community. For some it would result in a deepening of one's commitment to meditation, prayer, cultivation of virtue and a more regular association with some who have the same desire.

I cannot prove it, but I am of the opinion that congregations that focus on growing in compassion, forgiveness, mercy, kindness and justice have a stronger and more authentic commitment to social witness than those that are not so concerned. Such congregations are better able to organize themselves around the pain that is in the community where they happen to be located. Mr. Wesley taught us that real social concern grows out of vital piety. It is the latter that is missing from the church at all levels.

I am now 72 years old and I have been a pastor since 1959. As I look back over my years as a pastor I find myself wishing that I had organized my congregations around worship, searching the Scriptures, more Holy Communion, deeds of mercy and kindness, prayer, meditation and Christian fellowship. I now see that these are the most important means of Grace. □

— Retired Virginia Conference Bishop Joe E. Pennel Jr.
is currently a professor at Vanderbilt Divinity School.

This column originally appeared in the United Methodist Reporter.



Pennel

Wage theft: Corporate greed is in our midst

While corporate greed on Wall Street makes headlines, it's also rampant in Virginia. When Patrick, a member of Lakeside UMC in Richmond, asked for leave in April from his nursing home job to visit his ailing 90-year-old father in Sierra Leone, he was falsely accused of wrongful behavior and suspended. A few days later he was asked to resign or be fired. Certain that he had done no wrong, Patrick refused. He was then summarily fired with cause – which meant that he lost his job, all his benefits and his eligibility to apply for unemployment compensation. Soon thereafter Patrick, a hard-working naturalized citizen, also lost his apartment and became another homeless man.

Welcome to the reality of wage theft in Virginia. In Staunton, retired United Methodist pastor David Reed reports that homeless persons staying at the Valley Mission have gone out and done a day's work, only to be paid nothing. In Falls Church, Just Neighbors [providing legal services to low-income immigrants and refugees] reports that some people who come for help have been victims of practically all types of wage theft. At Rising Hope UMC in Alexandria, a man recently told about his employer refusing to pay him anything for three days' work.

Like Patrick, these and thousands of other persons living on the edge of survival are victims of wage theft: they are defrauded by employers paying less than the minimum wage, compensating workers for fewer hours than they worked, issuing checks that bounce, refusing to pay overtime, paying in cash to avoid payroll taxes, taking illegal deductions, practicing wrongful termination, confiscating workers' benefits, or not even paying workers anything.

Unfortunately, such practices are widespread. They are found from small businesses to some of our nation's largest employers. A recent study found that nearly *half* of all day laborers have been victims of wage theft. The Economic Policy Institute has estimated that in unpaid overtime *alone* companies cheat workers out of at least \$19 billion every year. Such wage theft harms us all: the working poor, ethical employers who are forced to compete with unethical employers, and our common life together by robbing us of tax dollars needed for public services.

Wage theft is wrong. It violates our United Methodist *Social Principles*, such as the right of every worker to a living wage, to sharing fully in the prosperity of society, and placing the needs of persons before profits. These values are of fundamental importance to us as people of faith because wage theft violates basic biblical teachings such as Leviticus 19:13, "You shall not defraud your neighbor; you shall not steal; and you shall not keep for yourself the wages of a laborer until morning."

In view of such concerns raised by the "Stop Wage Theft" resolution at 2011 Virginia Annual Conference, the conference Board of Church and Society was asked to offer viable options for ministering to low-wage workers and employers. Consider some of the following actions that you and your

congregation can undertake to combat this immoral practice:

First, learn about low-wage workers living on the margin. Those living on the edge of poverty are often outside the church. The Half in Ten campaign reports that more than 11 percent of Virginians live below the official poverty line. Wage theft keeps this vicious cycle going and contributes to ill health, homelessness and school dropout.

Second, develop a relationship with low-wage workers and the unemployed. "Do good" by being a compassionate neighbor. Work at the food pantry in your church or community and welcome victims of wage theft.

Third, create a team to identify and respond to wage theft in your community. An excellent resource is *Wage Theft in America: Why Millions of Americans are Not Getting Paid – And What We Can Do About It*, which includes a helpful Congregational Study Guide.

Fourth, consult our *Social Principles* and affirm such fundamentals as the right of every worker to a living wage.

Fifth, make certain your church is fair to its own employees.

Sixth, support ethical employers and contractors, and avoid those who steal wages. Before hiring a company, be sure the workers are properly paid, and that the company provides workers' compensation.

Seventh, organize a community forum on wage theft and workers' rights. Invite workers who have had their wages stolen to tell their stories. Listen carefully and compassionately, and commit to support those who have been wronged.

Eighth, maintain grounding in our biblical faith tradition. Ponder biblical teachings such as James 5:5, "Listen! The wages of the laborers who mowed your field, which you kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of Hosts"; and Matthew 20:1-16, where Jesus, in his parable about the laborers in the vineyard, teaches about God's generosity that takes care of the needs of even those who were able to work for only one hour.

Ninth, be prepared for a long-term effort. After losing his job, Patrick sought the help of his pastor, the Rev. Charles Swadley. Together they sought to speak with the nursing home director but were denied access. Referred to the corporate office, they received no response at all. With some encouragement, Patrick filed an unemployment claim – which the employer contested but ultimately lost at both the initial hearing and a subsequent appeal. Obtaining unemployment compensation gave Patrick some temporary relief. Nevertheless, he lost his job and earned benefits, and the corporate office is yet to be held accountable for wrongful termination.

What work he has found since has not been for more than 10 hours per week; he continues to need help. □

– The Rev. Hunter Mabry (retired)
for the Virginia Conference Board of Church and Society



Clergy & Diaconal

Deaths

The Rev. William P. "Bill"

Combs, 88, retired elder, died Dec. 20, 2011. He began his ministerial career in 1949, serving churches in the Western North Carolina Conference. He transferred to the Virginia Conference in 1961, serving Fletchers Chapel (in the former Ashland District), Carmel Church, as associate at Raleigh Court, then as pastor of Roanoke District's Buchanan Charge (at that time, consisting of Trinity, Andrew Chapel and Ebenezer in Botetourt County), Highland Park in Roanoke, Monroe-Bethany Charge (Charlottesville District) and Victoria UMC. He retired in 1987. During his retirement, he served the Montvale Charge (Lynchburg District).

Survivors include his wife, Jeanette Hester Combs; two sons, the Rev. Stephen Reynolds Combs [Western N.C. Conference] and William Jonathan Combs; daughter, Marian Combs Gogel; four grandchildren; and three nieces.



Combs



Condrey

The Rev. **Eugene S. Condrey**, 86, retired elder, died Jan. 4, 2012. He began his ministerial career in 1977 at the Emmaus-Diamond Hill Charge. He went on to serve Gladys and Con-

cord, all in the Lynchburg District. He retired in 1993 and then served Forest in the Lynchburg District, Peakview in the Lynchburg District, Shiloh in the Harrisonburg District, and Wesleybury in the Harrisonburg District.

Survivors include his wife, Evelyn Nash Condrey; three sons, Herbert A. Condrey, Richard F. Condrey and Michael S. Condrey; one daughter, Patricia C. Harrup; eight grandchildren; and five great-grandchildren. He was preceded in death by a daughter, Deborah C. Gorman.

The Rev. **James A. "Jim" McClung**,

68, retired elder, died Jan. 7, 2012. He began his ministerial career in 1969, serving the Stem-Bullocks Charge (N.C.) while a student at Duke Divinity School. During this time, Jim served as a student chaplain at both Duke Medical Center and Murdoch School and Hospital for Mentally Handicapped Persons. He then did his internship as a chaplain at the University of Virginia Hospital. He went on to serve Rustburg UMC, then as director for the Virginia United Methodist Agency for the Retarded (VUMAR), renamed Commission on Ministry to Persons with Handicapping Conditions. In 1985, he started Camp Rainbow Connection for mentally handicapped youth and adults that continues today. (See related article on pg. 12.) He returned to parish ministry serving Ramsey Memorial UMC, Laurel Hill UMC (both in Richmond) and Miles Memorial UMC in Norfolk. He then served as director of Church and Community Relations for Virginia United Methodist Homes, Inc., for five years. He retired in 2011.

Survivors include his wife, Elizabeth Beckner McClung; twins: a son, James Walter "Walt" McClung, and daughter, Tondra Elizabeth Atkins; three grandchildren; and many nephews, nieces, great-nephews and great-nieces. Among his nephews is the Rev. William L. McClung Jr., pastor of Ghent UMC, Norfolk.



McClung

Carolyn Watkins, widow of the Rev. William P. Watkins Jr., died July 12, 2011.

Edna Mae Heinzman, mother of the Rev. William E. Heinzman II, died Dec. 22, 2011. Bill is pastor of Lincoln UMC, Alexandria District.

Daisy Vest, mother of the Rev. John Vest, died Jan. 12, 2012. John is superintendent of the James River District.

Elton B. Hassmer, father of the Revs. Steve Hassmer and Jim Hassmer, died Dec. 25, 2011. Steve is pastor of Calvary UMC, Arlington District. Jim is a retired elder living in Charlottesville.

William H. Townsend, father of the Rev. Sherry L. Daniels, died Jan. 8, 2012. Sherry is pastor of Norfolk UMC in the Elizabeth River District.

G.M. (Pete) Dunning, brother-in-law of Loreeda Niemann, died Dec. 23, 2011. Loreeda is a retired diaconal minister of the Fredericksburg District, now living in Kingsport, Tenn.

Births

Madison Rae Davis was born Dec. 30, 2011. She is the granddaughter of the Rev. George J. "Jack" Davis Jr., and his wife, Denise. Jack is part-time local pastor of the Center Point/Salem Charge in the Lynchburg District. Madison's parents are Philip and Lindsey Davis of Bedford.

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Conference is bearing much fruit; still on long journey



Charlene Payne Kammerer
Bishop of the
Virginia Conference

Sometimes we can see more clearly where we are heading when we look back at where we have been. The Virginia Conference has been on a journey – a journey toward being the most faithful and most fruitful disciples of Christ we can be. It is a new journey for most of us and not without its stops and starts, its pauses, its unknowns. But I am convinced God's Holy Spirit has been leading us, nudging us, pushing us into a new Promised Land.

As the conference lived into the Common Table structure, our group spent the first few years taking a hard and focused look at ourselves, our conference history and a preferred future. We worked with consultants and outside resources and persons from within the conference. We spent time reflecting together biblically and theologically.

We rehearsed the old, old stories of faith and named where we were and who we are.

Out of those initial steps came a challenge by the 7 Vision Pathways offered to the whole church by the Council of Bishops. Then came the eye-opening knowledge on the floor of annual conference that over 40 percent of our congregations had not received one person on profession of faith in Christ in several years. Next came "Let's Get Growing" as an emphasis on new people, particularly young people and racial-ethnic persons. Then the Rev. Keith Boyette challenged the conference to start 250 faith communities in the next 30 years – audacious? Yes. Doable? Yes, with God's help and the Holy Spirit and a changed culture of our conference toward fruitfulness in ministry, this would be possible. So the 250 Task Force was named.

Out of that group came the 5 Talent Academy, and a sharpening of focus on congregational development and new faith communities. We have had several years of wonderful and exciting resourcing opportunities offered through 5 Talent Academy gatherings. The most enduring fruit out of the 250 Task Force is "All Things New." "All Things New" is our blueprint for creating vital congregations of faith now and into the future.

There has been realignment of conference staff and conference resources to help meet these goals. While the "All Things New" capital campaign did not reach its financial goal, it continues in impact and outreach as those monies come in and are used. To date, this quadrennium, in only three years, the Virginia Conference has created 19 new faith communities. This is quite a new record in the conference, for the Southeastern Jurisdiction and the whole church. Our hard work is beginning to bear much fruit.

When the Virginia Conference participates in the upcoming General Conference, we will be more than ready to join in our primary mission – to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. We are on a journey, a LONG journey for the next decade or more. The good news is that we are not alone. God is with us – thanks be to God!

Grace and Peace,

Charlene Kammerer
Charlene Kammerer

Connecting with the *Virginia Advocate* official newsmagazine of the Virginia Conference of The United Methodist Church

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Deadlines

The *Virginia Advocate* is published once a month. The deadline to submit news and ad copy for the March 2012 issue is Feb. 6. For more information on future deadlines, contact Peggy Cribbs in the *Advocate* office or visit the Web.

Advertising/Tributes

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 (please no more than one item per issue). Color photos 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* reserves the right to edit all letters.

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