

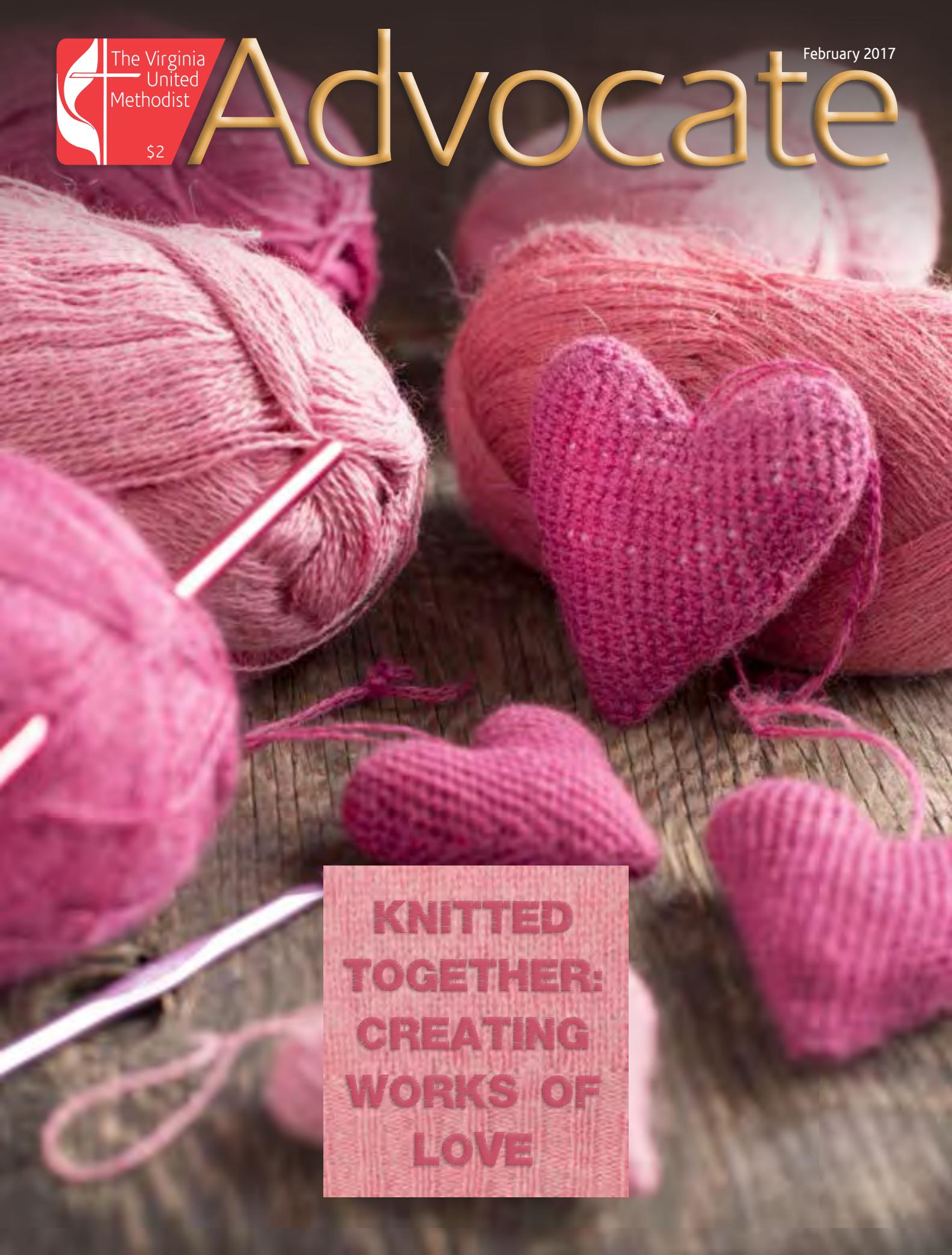


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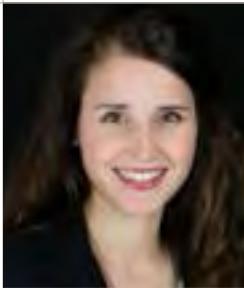
February 2017

# Advocate



**KNITTED  
TOGETHER:  
CREATING  
WORKS OF  
LOVE**

# PILLOW TALK



**Madeline Pillow**  
Editor

## Finding Plenty



**One of the conference's pastors recently shared on Facebook, a great passage from the book, *Reasons to Stay Alive* by Matt Haig.** While the book is a memoir about a major depressive disorder, I think it can also speak to people in other places in our society. Haig talks about how the world is designed to depress because as he says, "happiness isn't good for the economy." He goes on to say, "If we were happy with what we had, why would we need more? How do you sell anti-ageing moisturizers? You make someone worry about ageing. How do you get them to buy insurance? By making them worry about everything."

Haig mentions that being calm and being happy with what you have becomes a revolutionary act. This is very accurate when I think about how products are marketed toward society and the emphasis on buying goods.

Anyone who knows me knows that I have a slight addiction to the website *Wayfair* which claims, "Wayfair, you have just what I need." And yes, in my case, this claim is true.

What worries me though is when I try to fill holes within myself with the perfect pillow for my living room couch or that vintage-inspired bread holder for my kitchen. The initial thrill of hitting the purchase button and then opening the box to place it in my space is soon dampened by the need for something else. "Oh, the new bread holder has made me realize I need..."

Fill in the gap.

It makes me wonder if I had an infinite amount of money to create the perfect apartment, would I feel the hole inside me fill? Would it somehow magically disappear?

Our lives are comprised of these holes, of trying to find ways to fill them in whatever ways we think will help. But those holes never fill because we are using sub-par material. The real fix is on a harder and longer path. It will require all of our attention, skills and heart. It will require us to be vulnerable, uncomfortable and afraid. It will not always have a pat on the back or a gold star at the end of the day, making us take comfort in our decision.

Philippians 4:12 tells us, "I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want."

I want to challenge myself in the coming year to know what plenty feels like. To find it in the non-material places, to find it in people, places and experiences.

Here's to 2017. To helping each other, no matter clergy or laity, to finding plenty. Let's put into practice finding plenty in things with substance.

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## Advertising/Tributes

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## Local Church News

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

## Letters

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

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# COMMENTARY



## Reimagining “Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors”

By Deborah Austin

For 15 years now, United Methodists have held onto the tagline “Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors.” It’s a phrase that calls us to be a people welcoming of others. Still, these words carry an additional meaning — one centered not just on an openness to people but on an openness to God as well. It’s a phrase beckoning us to open our hearts

and minds to God, to open even the doors of our souls. “Open your hearts. Open your minds.”

The words “open your doors” connect with Revelation 3:20, where Jesus summons us, “Behold! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come into you and eat with you, and you with me.”

I’ve been thinking for a long time about the opening of hearts and minds to God. I go around and discuss it with people. One day my sister, Anne Kolbe, and I were talking about it.



*Letters to the Editor are printed on a space-available basis. Letters may be e-mailed to [MadelinePillow@vaumc.org](mailto:MadelinePillow@vaumc.org) by the first of the month.*

Anne is a retired UM missionary, and I am a retired UM pastor. We long for God to raise up new faith in The United Methodist Church. Suddenly we saw a different meaning in our catchphrase that surprised us. It was like a truth had been sitting in front of The United Methodist Church, silent and unrecognized.

How does this catchphrase connect with John Wesley’s beliefs? Think of the image of the house that he gave for the way of salvation. The porch is repentance. The front door is faith. The house is holiness. And this is all God’s good gift through Christ, available to us not through our own work and efforts, but through our openness in receiving, in our willingness to stop resisting God. Wesley believed that even our act of repentance is made possible only through God’s prevenient grace leading the way, enabling us. Repentance, faith and holiness — these are all God’s gracious gifts.

Wesley teaches that there are riches to be had when we daily open our hearts and minds to God. We learn that we must wholly trust God to have complete access to our inner being. God wants not only to pardon us from our sin, but also to reign within us and save us from the root of sin and restore us to the image of God. Wesley

# COMMENTARY

opened himself to God, and he experienced a warming of his heart. He said he came to a knowledge of God not possible in any other way. He knew God was loving him and refining him and making him holy. He even experienced "a new class of senses opened in his soul, not depending on organs of flesh and blood." These new senses enabled him to discover the reality of the spiritual world. (Henry Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, Third Edition, 2002, page 385.)

I have talked to a few bishops about this. They are our spiritual leaders, and all of them agree that openness to God is essential if we are to move beyond mere human strategies in our discernment of God's vision for the UMC. Bishop Sharma Lewis says she regularly speaks to churches about wholeheartedly receiving the church's mission — that of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. And how do we receive such "a beautiful mission?" We let the God who stands at the door knocking come in and work faith and holiness within us.

Bishop Young Jin Cho said he believes that the UMC has become "more focused on head knowledge of God than heart knowledge" and that we need to keep a "vital balance" between the two, as

John Wesley ingeniously did. It is our openness to the Spirit that will allow us to be an "authentic and biblical church."

Bishop Lawrence McCleskey sees that secularization has impacted the UMC, weakening our spirituality. He says he thinks it is noteworthy that when the Pew Research Center surveys Americans, many (including the "Nones") say they consider themselves to be spiritual people. He said he believes this is a clear societal acknowledgment of the need for being connected to spiritual matters, and it points to an important opportunity for the church. Will we pay attention?

Bishop Ray Chamberlain's insight is that we have taken this catchphrase and given it a horizontal interpretation. The focus is on ourselves; that we are good, unbiased, accepting people. We well know the trap in this, for the Pharisees too saw themselves in a righteous light. "The better way is to open our hearts wide to God, interpreting the catchphrase vertically. Then we are able to make the horizontal experience of open hearts an authentic expression of God's encompassing love. 'Let this mind (heart) that was in Jesus Christ be in us.' The failure of not beginning with the vertical is that the catchphrase becomes

mere humanism. Pagans try to have open hearts and minds too."

Opened Hearts, Minds and Soul-Doors. This is both a paradigm shift and a coming home for The United Methodist Church. ☩

— Deborah Austin is a retired elder in the Virginia Conference.

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# COMMENTARY



## Learning inclusive language

By Sarah Wilkinson

You might be familiar with this classic children's lesson: squirting some toothpaste on a plate, passing it around with a spoon and asking the kids to put the paste back in the tube. Result: Nobody's able to do it. Why? Because once it's out, it's out. The moral, of course, is that our words are just like the toothpaste. Once they're out, they're out, and even when we apologize, we can never truly take back the ugly words we say.

As Christians, we're called to seek justice and love kindness, meaning that the words we choose always matter. We must always ask ourselves: are our words inclusive? Are they kind? Are they showing the love of Christ? When we refer to people as "retarded," the answer to such questions is "no".

At one time, "mentally retarded" was accepted as

the polite term for people we now refer to as "having intellectual and developmental disabilities." However, the old term became a pejorative, and is often thrown around as an insult. When was the last time you heard someone say, "That's retarded," when they were frustrated or unhappy with something? The term is not person-centered. When someone is referred to as "retarded," they are being defined, first and foremost, by their disability, which thus devalues them as a human being. This is hurtful.

After the tireless campaigning of people affected by intellectual disabilities, the term "mental retardation" was replaced with "intellectual or developmental disability" at all levels of government and in medical literature. In short, to use the term "mentally retarded" in 2017 is incorrect and insensitive in that it ignores the wishes of those labeled as "having an intellectual disability". Why do we think it's okay to refer to someone with a word we

wouldn't want ascribed to ourselves?

I assure you, there is so much more to the people that Heart Havens supports than just their disability. Lyvette is a cornhole shark. Barry loves history. Christina is a huge music fan. Steven enjoys kickboxing. Lyvette, Barry, Christina, Steven, and everyone else with an intellectual disability deserve to be seen for the whole people and blessed children of God they are, and treated and spoken about as such. They are just as much a part of the body of Christ as you and me.

February is "Heart Havens Month," and this year, we're celebrating our unity as parts of The Body of Christ, regardless of our individual abilities. After all, as Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 12, just because the eye isn't an ear doesn't mean it's not part of the body! People with intellectual and developmental disabilities bring so many different gifts and talents to the Body of Christ, and God values each and every one of them!

I invite you to take February to learn more about Heart Havens and the wonderful people we support. Our website was recently redesigned, and has lots of information about programs offered and the people we support. There are also many resources to help you plan your church's Heart Havens Month observance, including meditations, prayers, and liturgy. All of these resources, as well as bulletin inserts and mission ideas, can be downloaded at [www.hearthavens.org/resources/worship-resources/](http://www.hearthavens.org/resources/worship-resources/). Heart Havens does not receive any funding from apportionments, so we depend on the support of our friends across the Virginia Conference to make our mission possible.

I, or another Heart Havens representative, would also love to visit your congregation, United Methodist Men, United Methodist Women or other small group. We can provide a program of almost any length that will help you learn more about our mission of empowerment and the people we support. We're happy to provide a speaker year-round, not just in February (though February is an extra-special time to host us.) If you'd like to schedule a speaker, please call me at (877) 442-8368. ☺

- Sarah Wilkinson is the Communications and Volunteer manager at Heart Havens, Inc.



# The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

## Theme announced for 2017 Ministers' Convocation

By Lisa Barber

**S**pring is just around the corner, and the season is a great time to enjoy a break for fellowship, worship and learning with colleagues.

"Making Space for Yourself and Others" will be the theme for the 2017 Ministers' Convocation. The event, held at Virginia Crossings Wyndham Hotel & Conference Center May 8-10, celebrates a time for pastoral Sabbath retreat, learning and fellowship amongst ministry leaders, including clergy, diaconal ministers and professional/paraprofessional certified ministers in the Virginia Conference of The United Methodist Church.

With Dr. Amy Oden, a professor at Saint Paul School of Theology in Oklahoma, participants will explore the topic of "making space" as a discipline and spiritual practice. This period of learning will also examine how the church can extend itself to become a more open environment for others.

The schedule will be complemented by a Bible study and workshops with those who have creatively made space for others through groups, improvisation, podcasts and worship

space. A panel will also be hosted with church leaders and clergy who have offered their space to outside and controversial groups.

There will be several opportunities for worship with Bishop Sharma Lewis and the Rev. Dr. Joel LeMon, an associate professor at Candler School of Theology at Emory University.

For registration and additional information, visit [www.vaumc.org/MinistersConvocation](http://www.vaumc.org/MinistersConvocation). You are encouraged to register before Holy Week to ensure lodging availability. The deadline for in-residence registration is Monday, April 17, 2017. To see who has registered, to find a roommate or a way to carpool, view this link:

[www.eiseverywhere.com/directreports/?4koD2+HXTyEB3wEq2S7+Ng](http://www.eiseverywhere.com/directreports/?4koD2+HXTyEB3wEq2S7+Ng).

A 1.0 or 0.5 CEU is available for the event, depending on the number of sessions participants attend. Continuing Education Funds are available at [www.vaumc.org/clergycontinuingeducation](http://www.vaumc.org/clergycontinuingeducation).

—The Rev. Lisa Ann Barber is pastor of Crooks Memorial UMC and part of the Design Team for the convocation.

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# DISCIPLES HELPING TO TRANSFORM THE WORLD

## Church supports national organization helping Afghan interpreters

By John Nash

**W**hen many of us received our visas to immigrate to this great country, we left behind almost everything and came with only what we could carry in our luggage," said Ajmal Faqeri, speaking to a December meeting of the women's group of St. George's United Methodist Church in Fairfax, Va. He is a former Afghan interpreter and representative of No One Left Behind, an organization that helps wartime allies who have supported American forces in their countries.

"Not only do these families face constant threats in their own countries from anti-American organizations such as the Taliban but the families who receive special immigration visas face a culture shock when they arrive here," said Faqeri.

No One Left Behind, a national organization, helps those receiving Special Immigrant Visas as they transition into many areas of the United States. Keith Saddler, a member of the board of directors of No One Left Behind, emphasized the importance of the organization in helping these families.

"These men and women provided valuable services to the U.S. and allied forces in their countries, for example, by serving as interpreters, cultural advisors or drivers, often as part of combat operations. They really took a big risk in helping the United States forces, and, as a result, they and their families are now targeted for severe reprisals by anti-American groups in their native countries," said Saddler.

Saddler noted that more than 300 families have successfully immigrated to the Northern Virginia region. Although the U.S. govern-

ment provides limited and temporary financial support, many families face great hardships in trying to adjust to the new culture and way of life in the United States.

"The needs are absolutely staggering, including speeding up the visa-approval process and educating others about the importance of this program," said Saddler, who himself works diligently to arrange donations and increase awareness of the needs of these people.

Janis Shenwary, another member of No One Left Behind, indicated the mounting pressures being faced by those who helped the U.S. forces. Security and personal safety is worse today than ever. Approximately 100 people are killed each day by the Taliban or other anti-American groups.

Hamid Farid, who attended the presentation with his wife and small daughter, described some of the problems families face when they step off the plane. "Not only do we have very little with us, but often we have no place to live or livelihood waiting for us. It's very difficult establishing a new family life with such limited resources," he said. "We appreciate the support provided by No One Left Behind and churches like St. George's. We all want to be good and successful citizens of this great country."

At the conclusion of the presentation, United Methodist Women (UMW) president Dorothy Dowdy presented a generous check to Keith Saddler for No One Left Behind and gave more than 15 baskets of household goods assembled by the

Representatives of No One Left Behind at UMW meeting.  
Photo by John Nash.



# DISCIPLES HELPING TO TRANSFORM THE WORLD

women's group to be distributed to new families.

"We're so pleased to be able to support such an important mission," said Dowdy. "This clearly demonstrates the Christian spirit of caring for others. We hope other United Methodist Women will support this cause."

No One Left Behind is a non-profit organization whose mission is to help America's wartime allies with Special Immigrant Visas resettle safely in the United States. The organization bridges the gap that exists between State Department and Non-Government Organization (NGO) refugee relief programs by providing assistance with housing, employment and cultural adaptation. You can find more information about the organization and how you can help this important group of people by visiting the website at [www.nooneleft.org](http://www.nooneleft.org). 

- John Nash is a member of St. George's UMC.



► The Rev. Dawn-Marie Singleton and **Oakton UMC, Arlington District**, have created a beautiful partnership with Oakton Elementary and Mosby Woods Elementary schools. The congregation donated Christmas presents and food gift cards to support six needy families, with 22 children. One hundred twenty-five presents and five \$50 Giant gift cards were collected. A special thanks to Mrs. Joan Walton who spearheaded the collection. The congregation helps both schools throughout the year by keeping them stocked in snacks as well as other things the guidance counselors and/or social workers may need. Oakton UMC is grateful to be able to help the children and youth within their own community.



► **Good Shepherd, Alexandria District**, concluded its five-month Jubilee celebration with a member recommitment service and a look to the future on Jan. 16, 2017. Founding pastor, W. Benjamin Pratt, returned in November and lauded the willingness of black and white neighbors in the newly-developed community of Dale City coming together as congregants. Chartered December 4, 1966, at the height of the civil rights era, this was the first Virginia Conference church to start with an integrated congregation. District Superintendent Jeff Mickle praised Good Shepherd at the September Jubilee service for its continued welcoming of all persons.

# EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY



## Beyond New Year's resolutions — make 'faithful intentions'



By Laurens Glass

New Year's resolutions have always been a very pass/fail sort of test for me. I set myself up to forgo chocolate and lo and behold, two weeks into the New Year, I find myself munching nonchalantly on fudge. In the immortal words of comedian Steve Martin, "I forgot." But worse, one slip up and I feel like I have failed. I can't go back to "the day before the fudge" so what's the point? My record is no longer perfect.

But that is the whole point from a spiritual perspective. We're not perfect. But we are improving.

Resolving to be more spiritual is not a hard date to keep or a hard bar to leap over. It's a daily resetting of your mind and soul. It's trying again when you "fail" and knowing that you can never fail if you're trying. It is...grace. Here a few ideas for growing spiritually and for spurring you to think of your own.

### 1. Count to 10

Your mother was right – or, maybe it was my mother – but counting to 10 is an age-old axiom for a reason. Our first reactions to things may be influenced by how stressed we are at the moment, what just happened in that meeting or where our blood sugar levels are hovering. Do you really want to snap at someone because you are mad at someone else? Especially, if it that someone else is yourself?

Taking a few seconds to think before speaking takes discipline and practice. But taking time to respond when you feel emotional is a spiritual exercise that will help you be more centered and more caring. Make sure you eat first.

### 2. Breathe

But I am! Right? Breathing is an involuntary response of the body. One that happens regardless of whether we're aware of it. But breathing can become shallow or quick when we are anxious or stressed – and that is when we need oxygen the most.

There are over 30 verses in the Bible that mention breath and they seem to often be connected to or representative of Spirit, of God.

"The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life." – Job 33:4

"And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'" – John 20:22

Mindful breathing is essential to our spiritual life because it connects our heads with our bodies and our bodies with our hearts. When I feel afraid or physically sick, I breathe 10 times as deeply and calmly as I can and remind myself that it will be OK. And it is.

### 3. Think positive thoughts

I read that human beings think three or four negative thoughts to every positive one. My friends admit to beating them-

selves up for their shortcomings or worrying to the point of distraction about the future.

When things are going wrong, that's the most difficult time to be positive – and sometimes you just have to go to bed! But a steady stream of hopeful or reassuring thoughts can help bring us back to the truth that we are not alone.

"I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13) or simply, "It's going to be OK!" are better thoughts to think than, "I'll never be able to do it!" Thinking on the true and good thing (Philippians 4:8) is far better than allowing fear to overcome you. No matter how bad the situation is, remember you are loved beyond measure.

## *4. Pray – right where you are*

I tend to agree with writer Anne Lamott that prayers are usually "Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!" or "Help me! Help me! Help me!" But as I grew spiritually, I began to pray for other people when I myself was hurting. It's been a powerful practice that has changed my perspective about what others go through and how many

blessings I actually have.

Pray. Pray in the way that works for you. If you haven't in a while, if you don't believe it works... then pray that. God's not afraid of your doubt. Praying is something you can do wherever you are.

## *5. Be grateful – and be joyful*

I woke up one morning when all I wanted to do was cry, and I heard clearly in my head:

"This is the day that the Lord hath made. I will rejoice and be glad in it."  
–Psalm 118:24

So, I played "Happy" by Pharrell Williams, instead.

Gratitude is a spiritual practice that will change your life. It's not just that it shifts your focus from what you don't have to what you do have. It can lift your spirits in such a way that helps you cope when you are down.

Joy is an inside job but it can be inspired by external things. Music. Children. Nature. Art. Find them.

## *6. Think of the other fellow*

That is what my mother used to say. "And you'll feel better."

When I was little, I thought doing things for others was about, well,

others. It was the right and proper thing to do, but I wasn't sure it was necessarily fun. But as an adult, I realized it did far more for me than it ever did for anyone I ever helped.

The Wesleyan tradition holds that faith and good works belong together. "We offer our lives back to God through a life of service."

You cannot help someone else and not be changed yourself. Which may be the coolest paradox of "do unto others as you would have done unto you." Try it.

You don't have to master all spiritual practices this week or even this

year. But you can earnestly strive to be more spiritual at any point in time. It is an ongoing practice. A resolution you can re-make daily. ☺

-Laurens Glass is website manager for umcom.org.



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# KNITTED TOGETHER: CRI



**"In the beginning, Creator God, you formed my being. You knit me together in my mother's womb. To my flesh and blood you gave the breath of life. O Loving One, renew me this day in your love. Grant me life as a gift of your faithfulness; grant me light for my journey by granting me hope to sustain me. Let this shawl be a sign of your presence. Let it warm me when I am weary; let it surround me with ease of my suffering; let it encircle me with caring when I am in pain; let it bring peace when I am in turmoil. O Christ, who healed the broken in body and spirit, be with me and all who suffer today. Be with families and friends of those abiding with and comforting the sick, broken, and hurting people and places in our world. Amen." (Prayer given with each Prayer Shawl at Fredericksburg UMC)**

# EATING WORKS OF LOVE

**T**he ministries of knitting, crocheting and sewing within churches provide tangible works of art, sharing both the love and care of the creator. These ministries are about fellowship as well as providing items of need, from blankets to hats.

For the Sewing Sisters at **Wellspring UMC in Williamsburg**, the group began as a merger of a prayer shawl ministry and Mary Johnson's overflowing quilting studio. As the group cleaned out the studio, a crafting ministry began that soon had to move to a larger Sunday School room at the church.

The group knits and crochets prayer shawls. They've also made bags to hold school kits for Annual Conference and sewn more than 100 pillow cases for domestic violence shelter and a local Christian outreach center. This past winter they created knit hats and scarves for the homeless shelter, and they have plans to create some baby layettes with donated materials.

Member Beth Burroughs said, "What one person thinks is not important can be the very thing someone else needs."

For Burroughs, this ministry has not only encouraged creative crafts but emphasized how craft making can fulfill mission needs.

At **Manor Memorial UMC in New Market**, a group of women gathered in 2004 for a study titled "Beautiful Threads – Pieces of Encouragement for Quilters." Some of the women had quilted before but some had not. After hours or working together, a quilt emerged. The study reminded the women that just like each square, God pieces them together with threads each day and God's work is not yet done.

Because of this experience, the women decided to continue the group and are still working together today. Through other studies, the women have learned Swedish weaving and made

afghans for lap robes for nursing home residents as well as infant gowns for the Shenandoah County Pregnancy Center. Another member made dresses for children in Haiti.

Each year, the women choose a study that will develop their faith and help them encourage each other. Member Patricia L. Brumback noted that the group has been a way to reach people. "Even though we did not start out as a knitting club, we have used this avenue to reach many who need to know that someone cares and is praying for them as they create their prayer shawl or lap robe," she said.

Over 10 years ago, Barbara Kline and Judy Pulley began a prayer shawl ministry at **Great Bridge UMC in Chesapeake**. Since then, hundreds of shawls have been created.

Member Angie Rinehart said that these shawls provide a tangible comfort to the people they are given to because prayer goes into their creation.

"The handcrafted prayer shawl can be given to someone to provide a type of embrace that not only warms the recipient's body but also warms their heart. The shawls are woven by the hands of those wanting to share God's love with others. The shawls are prayed over while they are crafted.

"Many times the shawls are made specifically for a person in need, but often they are made not knowing who the recipient will be. In each case, the patterns are chosen by the crafter, and prayers of healing, love, comfort, and peace are thought and said while the shawls 'come to life.' When the shawls are complete, the members of the prayer shawl ministry lay their hands on the shawls while a blessing is given to the recipient and to the hands that made the shawl," said Rinehart.

Learn more about this ministry and its fellowship and mission in the rest of this issue.



# PRAYER SHAWL MINISTRY WRAPS INDIVIDUALS IN PRAYER

By Larry Davies

*"I've been battling breast cancer for almost four years now..."*

*"Losing my husband of 52 years has been very difficult..."*

*"I was at death's doorstep after a recent heart attack..."*

*"I had just given birth to my baby girl and was feeling scared..."*

**E**ach person struggled physically, emotionally and spiritually. Each one received a gift of a beautiful prayer shawl knitted and prayed over by members of **Fredericksburg UMC**. With each shawl came a note:

“Knitting yarn into shawls and weaving prayers into the shawl creates a vessel for God’s presence in people’s lives. The Prayer Shawl Ministry of Fredericksburg United Methodist Church has lovingly and prayerfully created this Prayer Shawl for you. Let it be a witness of God’s love in a very tangible, concrete form and a source of strength and comfort to you. Whenever you place it on your shoulders, we hope you will imagine yourself enfolded and surrounded by the love, prayers and compassion of all those who love you—even those you do not know. May God bless you this day and every day.”

From the woman battling breast cancer: “God’s love is amazing through many prayers, acts of kindness, and your lovely shawl. I will cherish it forever and feel the warmth of God’s love.”

From the person who lost her husband: “It’s a blessing to know that folks I don’t even know are praying and thinking of us.”

From the one at death’s doorstep: “I could not sleep unless I was covered with my Prayer Shawl.”

From the new mother: “My baby is now wrapped and bundled in love.”

The Prayer Shawl Ministry at Fredericksburg UMC started in 2004.

“In 12 years of ministry, we’ve had women and men who knit and crochet. Our experience ranges from novice to advanced. To date, we have given out more than 700 shawls plus many more going with mission groups traveling to other countries,” said Nancy Swift, leader of the ministry.

The ministries’ monthly meeting serves multiple functions.

“We meet monthly to work, to bond, to pray, and to offer our talents as comfort. Many of our members work from home following our guidelines. Occasionally yarn is donated by a grateful recipient, but mainly is purchased by those who do the knitting and crocheting. We consider the yarn and the approximately 40 hours of time it takes to make each shawl a gift of Christian love.

“Our prayer shawls are always blessed and prayed over before given away and they are given in love to those who need comfort or need to be uplifted or to a newborn baby. We believe that the prayer shawls wrap the recipient in love and prayers,” said Swift. ☩

— The Rev. Larry Davies is pastor of Fredericksburg UMC.





# GIFT OF A SHAWL ENCOURAGES CREATION OF MINISTRY

By Suzanne Ackley

I first heard about prayer shawl ministries when a friend of mine gave me a shawl after my colon cancer diagnosis a few years ago. My mother, Sandra Ackley, a lifelong knitter and crocheter, went over that shawl with a fine tooth comb, checking out the yarn and stitching, all the while wondering if we could create such a ministry at our church. Since "we" meant "me" too, that idea was daunting. I decided to just appreciate my own shawl until the following January, when I attended a "Hands On Mission" workshop at the UMC Bi-District Training for the Alexandria and Arlington districts. It turned out to be an hour-long session discussing the merits of various types of fibers for use in prayer shawls. That's right: me, a non-knitter, spent an entire hour listening to someone talk about yarn. My mother and I decided that after two nudges from God about prayer shawls, it was time to start our own ministry at our home church, **Franconia UMC, Alexandria District**, before God's nudges got any stronger.

My mom was the creative force behind our new ministry, and I was the administrative support. Between approaching those who we knew already enjoyed the hobby, a few pre-workshop pulpit announcements and my mother offering

classes in knitting and crocheting, we soon had people meeting weekly. Kits were created so our artisans could pick them up to work on at home or to take on vacation. Soon plastic bins stuffed with colorful shawls and kits were stored at our church, and our ministry was in full swing. Several times a year the completed prayer shawls are laid on the altar and the congregation is invited to pray over them. Our ministry includes traditional



shawls, wheelchair lap blankets and baby blankets.

Our prayer shawls are like a hug from God, bringing the gifts of warmth, comfort, healing and peace. We've had prayer shawl recipients tell us that they can feel the love and the power of prayer coming off the shawls. Some are incredulous that they can simply request a shawl without having to pay for it. We tell them "prayers are free" because that's what our prayer shawls are-- tangible prayers. This ministry is funded through a line item in our budget that is augmented by a few Sunday morning breakfasts a year.

What we've discovered is that the need for prayer is universal. One of the first prayer shawls distributed was in the form of a baby blanket to Emma, who was born with Trisomy 18 (a chromosomal abnormality). The pregnancy was high risk, and despite specialists advising the mother to expect the worst, the mother was adamant about carrying her baby to term and then making sure Emma received life prolonging treatments. This infant was wrapped in prayers and Emma is now a beautiful 3-year-old starting preschool. Another prayer shawl was given to a church member who hadn't been to church in years due to health issues. She fingered the work and marveled, "You didn't forget me." Word of the ministry grew and our shawls were distributed, including one to our former pastor and at the time, Alexandria district superintendent, the late Ken Jackson. When my coworker was grieving the sudden death of her only child, she told me the shawl I gave her not only provides warmth on cold nights, but makes her feel wrapped in God's love. That is the power of a prayer shawl... being tangibly touched by God; by something beautiful, soft and warm, created just for you.

My mother's health worsened in 2016, but she continued making prayer shawls for as long as she could although she had to stop the classes. My mother was hospitalized repeatedly during the summer and autumn, but she kept me busy bringing prayer shawls to the hospital because she kept handing them out to her roommates. My mother passed away peacefully covered by a prayer shawl, but her work in this ministry will live on as new classes will form in this new year. ☺

-Suzanne Ackley is a member of Franconia UMC Prayer Shawl Ministry, Alexandria District.



# KNITTING MINISTRY LEADS TO SUPPORTING CANCER PATIENTS

By Kathy Carol

**W**hen I came to **Rehoboth UMC** in April 2007, the Prayer Shawl Ministry there was just getting started. Since then we have made a couple thousand Prayer Cloths (for the sick, hospitalized and visitors), dishcloths, shawls, "lapghans," special afghans, crocheted crosses for Easter, numerous items for Wounded Veterans Fishing Day (including fish-shaped dishcloths and crocheted octopus), teaching women in the congregation how to make ruffled scarves, hats and scarves for our Food for Life workers and taking hats, scarves, Prayer Cloths and more to the local cancer center.

Members of our group are known as the "Craft Ladies" at Rehoboth. The members of the group have changed – some have moved, new members joined, some retired from crafting, and some are crafting with our Heavenly Father. But they have always been willing to work – no matter the task! They are willing to do what is needed, they love to try new things, and we are about to start a new phase.

Like so many people everywhere, cancer has touched members of our congregation and their relatives. So when I heard a member's relative was going shopping for a breast prosthesis, the crafter part of me bet there was a pattern for breast prosthesis covers made in soft cotton yarn. A couple of weeks later I got an email from Lyon Brand Yarn with a link to a website called KnittedKnockers.org. I remember sitting at my computer with my mouth open in amazement, knowing God was sending me a message.

Now that God had my attention, I immediately went to KnittedKnockers.org and found patterns for knitting with DPNs (double pointed needles); crocheting with straight and circular needles; and aids to use in promoting this project

with doctors, hospitals and clinics.

Did you know some hospitals give patients no information on how or where to get a prosthesis? It was the same 36 years ago when another friend had a mastectomy and she "improvised." She tried our newly-made Knockers and was very impressed by how good it felt.

There is also a list of people and groups around the United States who are already contributing to this effort, including a yarn store named Apple Yarns in Bellingham, Wash. A group of "Knockerettes" meet weekly at Apple Yarns to collect and distribute as many as 1,000 Knockers per month to women who request them – free of charge. I can't explain how amazed and excited I was to know about this effort.

I contacted Apple Yarns, and they are great and willing to help anyone get started and answer any questions. I have also talked to Suzy Woollam, owner of "The Scenter of Town" in Fredericksburg and coordinator of Fred Knits Knockers, a local group of knitters who have a constant stream (over 50 pair) of Knockers going to Mary Washington Hospital Cancer Center.

We have four pairs made by two of our crafters and are anxious to get the other ladies started. We have received God's message and opened the door for God to join us as He guides us to promote it and create something so needed by many women.

If you are reading this article, take it as a nudge to open the door for God to help you get started. I don't know where God and this project will take us or YOU. But if one woman feels better about herself because we got out the message to knit Knockers, it will be worth the effort. Take a step in faith; God will lead the right woman to that Knocker!

Check out the website, KnittedKnockers.org, and tell others about it. Dust off those knitting needles and register with KnittedKnockers.org to get started. Make it, donate it, give it to someone who needs it, SMILE and decide what color to make next! That is what we will be doing. Don't you think God will be smiling too? ☺

*-Kathy Carol is a member of the Rehoboth UMC Crafters at Rehoboth UMC in Beaverdam.*

*Photo of knitted "Knocker" (left) courtesy of KnittedKnockers.org.*



# A PATCHWORK OF CRAFT MINISTRIES FROM ACROSS THE CONFERENCE

The Needlework Guild at **Main Street UMC, Suffolk**, began as a prayer shawl ministry in 2005. It quickly accelerated into a very active group of women who gather once a week to knit or crochet prayer shawls for the sick and bereaved. In addition they put their sewing skills to work and for several years made over 100 school kit bags for conference. They also spent many months during the year making doll clothes that would dress 100 dolls for the Salvation Army to give away at Christmas and making knitted hats for the homeless. This group of dedicated women with happy hands have blessed hundreds of people through their ministry.



The Knitting PALS at **Belmont UMC** was started in 2006 with a small group of women. The prayer shawls are given to anyone who is ill, having surgery or had a death in the family. We also give baby blankets to all new babies. Each shawl is given with a card.

For the past several years, we have been able to be self-funded. We get many donations of yarn and also monetary donations from people who receive shawls and want to help us continue our ministry. We have also been blessed with donations of completed projects by people outside

of our church who know about our ministry. This group of 8-10 women who meet twice a month has given out 326 prayer shawls, lap robes or baby blankets.

Our PALS ministry embodies these four characteristics:

**Prayer:** Although we do not know who will receive the project as we make it, we pray in the beginning that God will bless the hands that make the shawl and the one who will receive it.

**Action:** This is the actual making of the items.

**Learning:** We teach this skill to anyone who wants to learn so we can pass it on.

**Serving:** These handmade gifts remind the one who receives it that they are not forgotten, they are loved and are being prayed for.

**Cherryvale UMC, Staunton**, has a group called Hearts & Hands who knit and crochet items for NICU babies at John Hopkins' hospital in Maryland. Hearts & Hands has 10 active members who meet once a month for lunch and to work on projects. They make sweater sets, ventilator caps and mittens, blankets and regular hats and mittens. Their goal is 25 sets each of boy and girl every six months.

The Prayer Shawl ministry is alive and well at Mount Olive UMC at Hayfield, Winchester District. We have one person who knits and two people who crochet lovely prayer shawls. The very softest yarns are used to bring extra comfort to those who get a prayer shawl. There is no one pattern that each maker follows, and the color selection is left up to the maker too. Although we have few makers, we have lots and lots of help – in the prayers said while the shawls are being made, in donations for the cost of the yarn, and particularly in the giving of the prayer shawls to those in need.

Once several shawls have been made, they are displayed on the altar railing, and the Rev. Victor Gomez and the entire congregation dedicate them to the service and comfort of others for the glory of Jesus Christ.

Prayer shawls have gone to infants, to centenarians (103) and to all ages between. The shawls have gone to the newest members of God's flock on earth (infants), to homemakers, mothers, fathers, retirees, brothers, sisters,



other family members, people near and dear, people dear and far away, and to anyone who has a need for the prayers and comfort that the prayer shawls give.

Our prayer shawl ministry was started at **Corinth United Methodist Church, Sandston**, in 2009 with three faithful members. Those who have received these shawls have been uplifted and affirmed, as if given wings to fly above their troubles.

Compassion and the love of knitting/crocheting have been combined into a prayerful ministry and spiritual practice which reaches out to those in need of comfort, healing, solace, as well as in joy and celebration.

Many blessings are prayed into every shawl. The shawl-maker begins with prayers and blessings for the recipient. The intentions are continued throughout the creation of the shawl. Upon completion, a final blessing is offered before the shawl is sent or given to the receiver. Some recipients have continued the kindness by making a shawl and passing it on to someone in need. Thus, the blessing ripples from person to person, with both the giver and receiver feeling the unconditional embrace of a sheltering, mothering God!

We have given more than 200 shawls and blankets (for infants at baptism) since we first started this rewarding ministry. They have been given to members, friends, graduates, for births, and for marriages. We have received many beautiful words of gratitude, and I believe many have been blessed – as we have – to be a part of this ministry.

Each shawl has this message tied to it: "Made by hand and threaded with prayers of love and hope. This shawl is a gift to you. May it bring blessings of comfort, gifts of warmth and the knowledge that you are loved."

The Tabernacle UMC, Poquoson, prayer shawl ministry started in 2010 when the call came for prayer shawls to be sent to the 2010 quadrennial conference. Some interested women decided to put out a call via the church bulletins, newsletters and word-of-mouth asking for those interested to come to a planning meeting. We welcomed those who were experienced or who just wanted to learn to knit and crochet. We also visited other churches with active prayer shawl groups (**Chestnut UMC in Newport News** and **St. Luke's UMC in Yorktown**) to learn how they were organized. We decided to meet on a weekday afternoon for two hours, with some people coming each week and some sporadically and some creating at home and bringing their completed work in to the church. We pray over each shawl

as we begin it and multiple times as we work. By June, we were able to send nine shawls to conference!

During our time together we have formed new friendships, enjoying the fellowship and sharing of skills, yarn, patterns, laughter and ideas. We decided to keep the ministry going, providing shawls to those locally who needed a tangible reminder of God's love and the prayers of their church family whether due to health issues or loss of a loved one.

Some of our shawls became lap robes and afghans since those were more useful to some of our ailing members. We added creating baby blankets for newborns in the extended church family and wedding afghans for newly married couples who had a connection to Tabernacle.

Many members supply their own yarn, but the ministry is supported by the entire church with donations of funds and yarn. Additionally, we have held fundraising dinners which provided more opportunities for getting to know one another better and cementing our friendships through a common work effort.

The Prayer Shawl Ministry at **Good Shepherd United Methodist Church, Henrico**, started 10 years ago. What began as a meeting of a few individuals interested in exploring the then-new concept of a prayer shawl ministry grew into a vital ministry that has touched hundreds of people. Approximately 30 individuals currently craft items, or donate materials for the ministry. A smaller group meets monthly to work and pray together. At least 12 shawls go out each month, picked up from the altar railings on Communion Sunday or from our shawl closet.

From its earliest days, the group has reached far beyond the walls of our Henrico church. One of the first shawls went to a teenager in Winchester. Several months later, in response to the tragic shootings at Virginia Tech, Good Shepherd contacted the national prayer shawl network and in combination with our own shawls, delivered several hundred shawls to students the week of exams. The dedicated men and women of this ministry have created shawls, lap robes, lap quilts, fabric wraps, baby sweaters, fleece blankets, and children's hats, all in the name of wrapping others in God's love. As one recipient wrote, "It really does feel like a hug from God."

To meet the needs of our ministry members, we have experimented with weekly meetings, yearly retreats, and giving lessons in basic knit and crochet techniques. We have handed out patterns, needles and yarn to crafters. Along the way we have also inspired other churches to



create shawl ministries of their own. In our early days, we often appealed to the congregation for donations of yarn. In the past couple of years, we have found that yarn and monetary donations tend to appear in abundance, without our making any requests at all. We believe this happens because the people of Good Shepherd have felt the deep love of God expressed through our work and are responding in kind.

Truly the Prayer Shawl Ministry is a call for us to be the hands of God to those who need His comfort most.



Photo courtesy of Jane Dixon.

**Clarendon UMC's (Arlington District)** knitting story began in Virginia/Maryland and spread to the small village of Furcy, Haiti. It begins with Tom and Wendy Vencuss, the founders of Mountains of Hope for Haiti (MHH) – <http://mountainsofhopeforhaiti.org> – a Methodist Mission that supports a Methodist school, church, clinic and agricultural center in the mountains outside of Port-au-Prince. They had received a donation of dozens of skeins of yarn for

the women in Furcy to make items to sell. A small (five women) mission group was leaving in October to spend a week at MHH. We were the first team to visit the Methodist Mission guest house since Hurricane Matthew, and though we did not see the devastation on the coast, we felt the desperate need of the whole country. Along with other needed supplies, we took the yarn plus needles, scissors and a pattern to teach knitting to women in Haiti.

A group of young women was assembled, and with the help of an interpreter, we begin to "teach" them how to knit. Little did we know that though knitting was foreign to them, their crocheting skills were masterful. They were very patient with our feeble efforts to teach them and one by one began to produce their crochet hooks to create works of art.

On our last day in the village, the young women brought us crocheted creations using the yarn we had brought from the United States...beautiful purses, skirts and tops (see photo on left). We named the group FAITH (*Furcy Artisans Inspired through Hope*) and brought back the articles they had created to sell in America. We have since sent more yarn (all donated by friends in Virginia and Maryland) with more patterns for dolls which will be marketed in the United States.

We learned much from this experience, as well as a dose of humility as we tried to teach them something we thought they needed, and in fact, they were the masters of their own beautiful skills. We hope to continue our relationship with them through encouragement, materials and avenue to market their creations.

The **Bethany UMC at Gloucester Point HUGS** ministry stands for *Hands Unto God's Service*. Since starting in 2009, our church has provided 412 prayer shawls, lap robes, baby afghans and quilts to give warmth, comfort, hope and love to those who receive those items. Wrapping up in a prayer shawl, lap robe, quilt or afghan is a physical representation of a spiritual hug – little *h*, little *u*, little *g*. I know everyone recognizes the comfort a hug can provide.

Every recipient shares the knowledge that they are being thought of and prayed for by our congregation. That prayer process begins when the items are being knitted, crocheted or sewn. The many ladies who donate their time, talent and materials pray for whomever will be receiving their work in the future. None of us knows who that person will be while we are making that particular shawl, lap robe, afghan or quilt. That is determined later when the need becomes apparent. Then the congrega-



tion has the opportunity to pray over them as well when the items are placed on the communion rail on a Sunday morning.

This ministry has spread beyond the limits of our church family and community. We have shared God's love throughout our nation to people in Vermont, New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, North Carolina, Florida, Texas, Arizona, Colorado, Kentucky and Iowa to name a few locations. Our efforts have even motivated two church congregations to start a prayer shawl ministry of their own.

There are many ways we can be God's hands and feet here on earth. As Christians, God expects us to obey that little, small voice in our head telling us what God wants us to do. Ephesians 2:10 says, "For we are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." So when you think about the Bethany HUGS – big H, big U, big G, big S – ministry, I hope you will also think about the hugs – little h, little u, little g, little s – that this ministry represents. What is God asking you to do?

We Care at **Ebenezer UMC** began as a baby blanket and a baby bereavement ministry prior to 2009. The blankets are knitted, crocheted and sewn. These are given to local hospitals' labor and delivery and the NICU. Gowns and buntings are provided to infants who came to God too soon. Then, we began to hear of needs other than babies, so we expanded by offering prayer shawls and lap blankets which go to care facilities. The local foster program receives travel bags for children removed from their homes. We have many military families in our congregation, and because of them we have reached out to the Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society with baby blankets for their parent support group. For our church family, shawls and lap blankets are available each Sunday so they may share the love and compassion the shawls represent with friends and neighbors.

Our small group (affectionately referred to as *The Knit-Wits*) at **Bethany UMC in Weyers Cave**, embarked on our knitting ministry Sept. 2016 when we chose to knit "story blankets" using the resource from *Biblical Bits for Knit-Wits* by Summer Munble and Vicki Bedford.

We plan to dedicate our first hand-knit story blankets in church and then donate them to our shut-ins. Future projects include: hats and blankets to be donated to our local cancer center, crisis pregnancy center, domestic abuse center, NICU and dialysis center.

Information about our study book and patterns can be found at: [www.biblicalbits.com](http://www.biblicalbits.com).

Having read about prayer shawl and yarn ministries and deciding that was a beautiful extension of God's love, one woman (with absolutely zero skills in knitting, crochet, and no knowledge of yarn) armed with a dream and a willing heart, prayed and made herself available to the Lord's leading. And God led her right around the corner to her friend and fellow church-going neighbor who happened to be quite gifted in all things yarn.

Together, they planted the seed for a yarn ministry at **Mountain View UMC in Forest, Va.** and **From These Hands** yarn ministry was born. The name was chosen because we see ourselves acting as God's hands in service to His family near and far; even our signature Scripture reflects the service aspect of the work we do.

The small group has grown as has the "neighborhood" we serve... no longer only across the sanctuary or across the street, but across town, across the United States, across borders into Canada, and most recently across the Atlantic Ocean in support of The Ruth House ministry in Liberia, Africa (joining with another local yarn ministry). We truly are feeling and seeing the blessings of being "connectional servants" of the Lord!

Twice-monthly gatherings are informal, filled with fellowship and fun, devotion and prayer, and open to everyone regardless of one's "yarn skill level." Whether one knits, crochets or loom weaves, every skill level is able to contribute the work of our hands.

Items lovingly handcrafted and prayed over by our members include prayer wraps and shawls, baptism blankets, lap robes and afghans, scarves and hats for the homeless, chemo caps and more. Whatever is crafted always finds a home to bless our neighbors. Everything is accompanied by a handwritten note and prayer for the recipient, and our signature red heart – which we consider a portable version of each item made. All are given free of charge, when we learn of a need. They are reminders of God's love, sending a message of hope and healing, comfort and encouragement.

Want to learn more about the yarn ministry or request an item for someone you know? Contact our facilitator, Kim Phillips ([kimberphi@aol.com](mailto:kimberphi@aol.com) ATTN Yarn Ministry) or the church office (434-525-6612). Better yet, join us and find out for yourself! We do pray for the empty chair to be filled by someone new... perhaps that someone is YOU! 



# EVENTS

## February

### United Methodist Day at the General Assembly

**Feb. 2, General Assembly, Richmond**  
The Conference United Methodist Day is Thursday, Feb. 2, 2017. It is an avenue of faithful advocacy that helps participants look beyond mercy ministry and join together with elected officials to make a difference and exercise the Social Principles of the UMC. Final registration will be Friday, Jan. 29 and cost is \$35. Registration questions may be directed to the Rev. Barbara Lewis at [Barbara-Lewis@vaumc.org](mailto:Barbara-Lewis@vaumc.org). General questions may be directed to the Rev. Pat Shipley at [plsrevdoc@aol.com](mailto:plsrevdoc@aol.com) or to the Rev. Randy Harlow at [crhncboy@aol.com](mailto:crhncboy@aol.com). To register and for more information, visit this link: [www.vaumc.org/UMDay](http://www.vaumc.org/UMDay).

### UMVIM Richmond District Team Leader training

#### Feb. 25, Shady Grove UMC, Mechanicsville

Team Leader Training is required for all first time United Methodist Volunteers In Mission team leaders, but all interested persons are welcome to attend whether leading a team or not. The Virginia Conference offers sessions in different parts of the state. To register online and pay by credit card, visit this link: <https://www.vaumc.org/pages/events/2017-events/umvim-training-2-25-17>. Shady Grove UMC is located at 8209 Shady Grove Road, Mechanicsville, VA 23111. The fee is \$35 for this session and the training will be held from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. on Saturday, Feb. 25. For more information, email Forrest White at [virginiaumvim@gmail.com](mailto:virginiaumvim@gmail.com).

## March

### Faithful Aging Conference

**March, Lynchburg College, Lynchburg**  
Faithful Aging will be the first statewide, faith-based conference on aging addressing opportunities related to an aging

congregation and meeting the needs of older members. Presented by the Beard Center on Aging at Lynchburg College and Virginia United Methodist Homes, Inc. (VUMH), this conference developed following listening sessions across the Virginia Conference to hear directly from clergy and laity about the needs of older adults in their congregations and communities. The Virginia Conference Older Adult Council is a Gold Sponsor for the event. A .5 CEU has been approved for Virginia Conference clergy and certified professionals as well as five hours of credit toward recertification for Lay Servants. Details and registration information will be available later this month about the event.

### UMVIM Roanoke District Team Leader training

#### Mar. 11, First UMC, Pembroke

Team Leader Training is required for all first time United Methodist Volunteers In Mission team leaders, but all interested persons are welcome to attend whether leading a team or not. The Virginia Conference offers sessions in different parts of the state. To register online and pay by credit card, visit this link: <https://www.vaumc.org/pages/events/2017-events/umvim-training-3-11-17>. First UMC is located at 5908 Virginia Avenue, Pembroke, VA 24136. The fee is \$35 for this session and the training will be held from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. on Saturday, Feb. 25. For more information email Forrest White at [virginiaumvim@gmail.com](mailto:virginiaumvim@gmail.com).

### UMM Visioning event

#### Mar. 25, Virginia United Methodist Center, Glen Allen

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

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

### Lay Servant Academy

#### Mar. 31- Apr. 2, 4H Educational Conference Center, Wirtz

The Lay Servant Academy is about equipping laity to carry out the mission of the church of making disciples for Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. All courses are open to everyone. Each course is designed to help those serving the local church to learn more about leadership, personal faith development and a deeper understanding of the UMC. Many courses offered this year will support those seeking to become Certified Lay Servants and Lay Speakers. Address for 4H Educational Conference Center is 775 Hermitage Road, Wirtz, VA 24184.

To register for the Academy or for more information about the event or courses, visit the conference website, click on the conference calendar at the top right on the main page and click the link for this event under the corresponding date. Registration questions may be directed to Sandy Kelley at [sandkelle@yahoo.com](mailto:sandkelle@yahoo.com) and other questions to Beth Christian at [bethchristian@vaumc.org](mailto:bethchristian@vaumc.org).

# Devotions from International Lesson Series

# LIVING THE WORD



*Emily Howdyshell  
is the Director of  
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**February 5, 2017**

**"The work of unity"**

**Galatians 3:26-4:7**

**A**s Paul writes this letter, it is important to understand that this letter isn't written to one church. Instead he is addressing the entire region of Galatia, or modern day Turkey. These people of Galatia have been focusing on what divides them and have once again forgotten to focus on what brings them together as Christians: baptism.

In Paul's world, there were very real divisions as listed in the Scripture: "Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female." However we as Christians in 2017 face some very real divisions ourselves. Let's start by looking at the congregation to which you belong. Are there any divisions there?

If they are hard to see, think about who is currently missing from your congregational makeup. When you look outside of your church, is there division amongst the Christians in your community? I've heard it said and will admit to having said it myself that, "Those churches are missing the point" or "What they are doing isn't bringing light to this world." However Paul, and more deeply God, calls us to something greater and deeper than a war of who has more warm bodies in the pews and better attendance at their Wednesday night dinners. God is calling us to unity.

Merriam-Webster defines unity as "a condition of harmony." How might this affect how we live as Christians? What would it look like for us to work together with others in our communities to bring people to Christ?

With these ideas in mind let me be so bold as to say something else. To be unified does not mean that everyone looks, thinks or believes the same. The work of unification as Christians is to say that we will work together to show the love of God, spread the Gospel and be the body of Christ.

Diversity is a gift from God, a gift that we, as God's Church, must work to embrace. We cannot focus on the color of skin, the outward appearance of economic status or the presentation of gender. We have an obligation to find things that unify us and, as Paul states, the base of that is

our baptism.

I challenge you this week to work at finding ways to unite your church and your community. How can we work to make the Jews and Greeks, slaves and free, male and female, all feel as though they are free within the loving embrace of God?

**February 12, 2017**

**"Some rules are made for breaking"**

**Galatians 4:8-20**

**I**n this week's Scriptures we find Paul asking the people of Galatia to become more like him. It seems as though they have, once again, reverted to the practice of getting caught up in the laws and forgetting how to be the church.

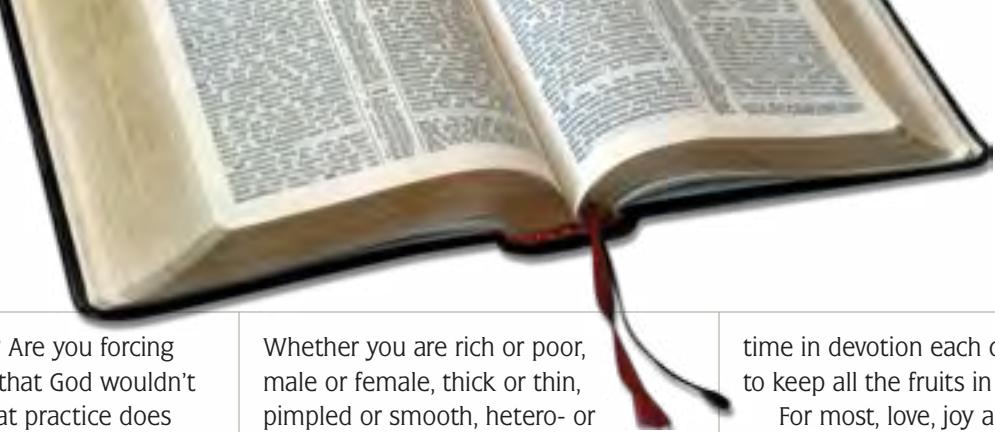
We all are subject to this, this trying to define the things you have to do in order to be a "good Christian" or have a "nice worship service." But when we set up limits for how things have to happen are we then limiting the power of God? Are we tempted to let unhealthy practices and traditions become Gospel-like truths in our eyes so that we can continue to live our comfortable lives?

I've visited many churches in the past and there is always one particular rule that gives me a laugh. These rules are about where you can and cannot eat or drink in a church. The reasons for these rules seem even sillier to me than the rules themselves. "We don't want crumbs on the carpet," "someone may spill a drink" or even "what if the spilled item stains the floor?" What if by making these rules we are not living within the radical love that God has called us to show one another?

After all there are vacuums for the crumbs, towels or carpet cleaners for the spills and sometimes a stain can become a great memory.

The church's history is made up of rule breakers, the most known of which is Jesus. Jesus challenged social norms by eating and socializing with people whom he should not have associated with; so what makes us think that churches should continue to do things the way that they always have? That is not how we grow or learn.

I challenge you to look at how you speak about what it takes to be a Christian. Are those



things truly biblical? Are you forcing people into a mold that God wouldn't place on them? What practice does your church participate in that isn't growing and thriving because of restricting rules?

If we are striving to be more Christ-like and to spread the love of God we must challenge ourselves to break down the barriers that keep us where we are comfortable.

## February 19, 2017

"Begin with loving"

Galatians 5:1-17

**F**or you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another" (Galatians 5:13.)

This is a hard text to wrestle with. In a society where it is all about "me" or "I"; "what do I want," "what will make me happy," "what will I gain," it is hard to "become slaves to one another." However, isn't this what all of Scripture is pointing us to. It even says, "The whole law is summed up in a single commandment, 'you shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" If we are going to be honest this in and of itself is a two-step process. In order to love our neighbor we must first love ourselves.

I remember very distinctly my teenage years. I believe this is one of the periods where it is hardest to love yourself. Your body is awkward, your voice is changing and you are having all these feelings that you never had before. But when things are not going the way you want them to, it can be hard to love yourself. Loving yourself starts with small steps, and the easiest place to start is to remember that God made you perfect just the way you are.

Whether you are rich or poor, male or female, thick or thin, pimpled or smooth, hetero- or homosexual, God made you just the way you are. If God made you that way, then God loves you that way, so step one, love yourself.

Once you love yourself you can then begin to love your neighbors. Remembering first and foremost that God made them just the way they are too. Rich, poor, African-American, Latino, gay, straight, single parents, drug users or late-night partiers, God made them all.

Just as Jesus was sent into the world, not to condemn it, but to save it, we are sent into this world to spread the love of God.

How might you show love to yourself this week? Maybe you need to take a day of Sabbath. Maybe you need to forgive yourself. Once you have done something for yourself think about how you may begin to show love to a neighbor. Maybe this looks like donating some old coats to a homeless shelter. Maybe you cook a meal for the couple at church that just had a baby.

The work of loving is not an easy task and when you most feel as though you can't love someone else, remember to love yourself because God first loved you.

## February 26, 2017

"God's great fruit bowl"

Galatians 5:18-6:10

**I**n the Scriptures this week, Paul spells out for us the fruits of the spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. I'm not sure how you feel, but even as a Christian who works for the church, who prays regularly and who attempts to spend

time in devotion each day, I find it hard to keep all the fruits in my bowl.

For most, love, joy and kindness come easily. But what if we start to look deeply into our patience, generosity and self-control? These specific fruits are a bit harder. Generosity and self-control are so deeply intertwined. If we think of generosity for a second as, let's say, tithing to the church. If we practice a little more self-control in our joyful spending then maybe it wouldn't be so hard to give the extra five dollars in our generous offering. I don't want anyone to think I'm sneaking in a devotion on tithing so let's look at other ways that the fruits of the spirit can give us a set of checks and balances in our lives.

I often think of faithfulness, patience and kindness when I think of our children's ministry workers. They faithfully teach Sunday school and Wednesday night messy church. They have great patience when we hand them a bag of popsicle sticks, some glitter and glue and ask them to re-create the manger scene. They patiently wait for the children to recall the stories of the Bible they've learned from week to week. They are great to learn from.

I challenge each of you to write down the fruits of the spirit and review them from time to time. We should strive to hold ourselves accountable to living within these, however we must not be tempted to get down on ourselves if/when we fall short.

Learning and growing in our faith is a lifelong journey. May you always remember that the day you stop growing is the day you take your last breath and until then may you use the fruits of the spirit to help keep your feet pointed on the path, which God has already walked before you. ↗

# CLERGY & DIACONAL



## DEATHS



**The Rev. Herbert Randolph "Randy" Arrington**, died Dec. 10, 2016. He began his ministerial career in 1953 at Kenwood in the

former Petersburg District. He went on to serve Kenwood in the former Ashland District; Campostella and St. Paul's in the former Norfolk District; Scott Memorial, Westhampton and Mount Vernon in the Danville District; and Epworth in the former Norfolk District. In 1983, he was appointed superintendent of the Winchester District. He served as senior pastor of Bon Air UMC from 1988 to 1990 and was then appointed as conference director of Ministerial Services and president of the UM Foundation. He retired in 1998 and served Prospect in his retirement. A service to celebrate his life took place on Dec. 17 in Mechanicsville.



**The Rev. Nancy B. White**, a retired elder in the Virginia Conference, died Dec. 14, 2016. Nancy began serving churches in 1991.

She was appointed to the Culpeper Circuit, Amissville, and the Cedar Run Charge (Mt. Horeb and Trinity in Fauquier County). She retired in 2001 but served as pastor of Liberty UMC one year in retirement. When not appointed, Nancy and her husband Douglas worshipped at St. Thomas UMC in Manassas. Alongside her husband Douglas, Nancy leaves behind three adult children: Forrest, Patton and Jennifer White.

**Betty R. Wickham**, mother of **the Rev. Charles Wickham**, died Dec. 17, 2016, in Montpelier, Va. A graveside service will be on Mar. 11, 2017 at Shiloh United Methodist Church in Montpelier with her son, the Rev. Wickham, officiating.

**Martha Elizabeth Fritz Coleman**, 84, of Crozet, Va., died Dec. 11, 2016, in Charlottesville. Martha was the wife of **the late Rev. Gerald P. Coleman**, mother of **the Rev. Nancy Coleman Johnson** (Emmanuel UMC, Amherst), and mother-in-law of **the Rev. R. Bruce Johnson** (Manor Memorial, New Market).



**The Rev. Donald Purgold Davis**, 82, died Dec. 12, 2016 at Heron Cove in Gloucester. Don was born in Seaford, Va., on Oct. 15, 1934.

He was a 1952 graduate of Poquoson High School, a 1956 graduate of Randolph-Macon College and received his Masters of Divinity from Duke University. He also received a Masters of Education from the College of William and Mary. Don retired from ministry and from the Gloucester County School System after 25 years as a 4th grade teacher. He was also a member of the Stephen Ministry, the United Methodist Men, taught Sunday school and was a choir member for over 60 years. He was a long-time member of the VA Poultry Breeders Assoc. and an avid gardener and poultry breeder his entire life. Don was preceded in death by his wife, Anne Presson Davis, his parents, Leonard and Virginia Davis and his sister Dolores Hautz. He is survived by his loving wife of 31 years, Miriam Davis, his five children.

**Roma Reed**, 87, died on Dec. 10, 2016, at Martha Jefferson Hospital in Charlottesville, VA. For 61 years, Roma was the devoted wife of retired United Methodist pastor **the Rev. Claude Reed**. The Rev. Reed served churches in the Virginia Conference including being the founding pastor of Aldersgate Church, Charlottesville District, in 1963. The Reeds had made Aldersgate Church their church home in recent years.

**George Harris**, 88, died Dec. 10, 2016, at Peninsula Regional Medical Center, Salisbury, MD. Harris faithfully served as a lay supply pastor to Snead Memorial UMC on the Eastern Shore District for 24 years, retiring in 2006.

**Goldia Miller**, widow of **the Rev. A. Ray Miller, Sr.**, died Dec. 10, 2016. A funeral service was held at Dec. 14 at Oakey's South Chapel in Roanoke, Va., with L. Gerald Carter, chaplain, officiating. Interment followed at Red Valley United Methodist Church Cemetery, Boones Mill.

**Elizabeth Worden**, wife of **the retired Rev. Richard Worden** died Dec. 7, 2016 at the Virginia Mennonite Retirement Community (VMRC).

**Mansell Edward "Eddie" Hosey**, 96, of Richmond, husband of Bessie Gibson Hosey, died in Woodford, Va. on Dec. 19, 2016. A 26-year USMC (Captain) veteran, he served in WWII and Korea before retiring. His final tour of duty was at Marine Barracks, 8th & I Streets, Washington, D.C. He subsequently worked at General Testing in Springfield, Va. and Rappahannock Electric Cooperative in Bowling Green, Va. An avid outdoorsman, marksman and lover of his family and church, he was preceded in death by his first wife,

Doris Bruce of Woodford, Va.; father, L. L. Hosey and mother, Bettie Fay Jackson of Centralia, W.Va. He is survived by his second wife of 40 years, Bessie Gibson Hosey; and daughters, Carole Vaughn (Peter) of Woodford, Va. and Marsha Jordan (Max) of Lincolnton, N.C.; and his grandsons, Dr. Mark E. Vaughn (Michelle) of Richmond, Va. and Jason D. Jordan of Charlotte, N.C.; three great-grandchildren, Carter, Charlotte and Charles Vaughn of Richmond, Va.; nephews, Bruce Edward Hosey of Lewisburg, W.Va. and Charles P. Hosey of Morgantown, W.Va.

## BIRTHS

**The Rev. Jimmy Calhoun**, Mount Olivet, Danville District, and spouse, **Kyle**, celebrated the birth of daughter, **Hattie Jane Calhoun**, on Dec. 8, 2016. Hattie weighed 6 lbs, 8 oz. at birth and was 18 in. long. Hattie has an older brother, Joe, and an older sister, Piper.

**The Rev. Eric Song** and his wife, **Dr. Heather Weger**, had their baby boy, **Asher Gibbeum-Stanley Song**, on Dec. 3, 2016. He was born at 7:45 am; 5 lbs. 13 oz. and 19 in. Eric is the pastor at Church of the Good Shepherd, Arlington District.

**The Revs. Bob Weeks** (Harrisonburg District) and **Leon Basham** (York River District) welcomed a new grandson on Oct. 29, 2016. **Andre Robert Basham** is the son of **Justin and Lydia Basham** and the brother of Mateo and Annie Basham. ☩



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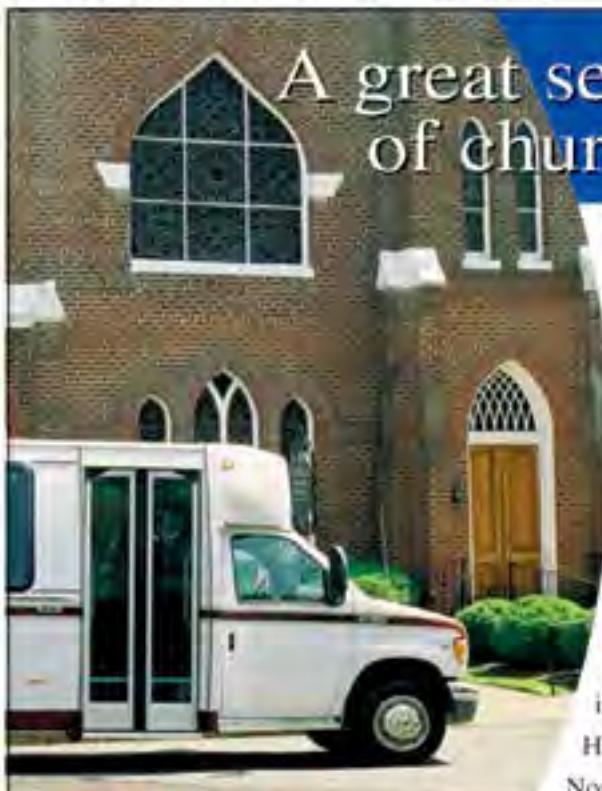
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# FROM THE BISHOP



## Bishop Lewis on the Chat & Chew District Discussions

On the Bishop's more travel-heavy months, the Advocate staff will do our very best to bring you news and words from your Bishop. The text you see below is a transcript of the Bishop's very first video column alongside some extra footage that was not featured in the video.

### Dear Virginia Annual Conference,

I have said that the reason why I am taking the opportunities to participate in the Chat and Chews is because I want to be in the atmosphere, I want to be with the people in the districts, I want to hear the hearts, I want to hear the passion of the clergy and the laity in the Virginia Conference.

### What was the idea behind the Chat and Chews?

So the reasoning of doing the Chat and Chews is to be able to cast a vision, a relevant vision for this annual conference in the years to come. Many people as I was coming here to Virginia, many people have asked me, "Bishop, what is your vision for the annual conference?" Of course we know from a biblical base that Proverbs 29:18 states that people perish from a lack of vision. I believe in a collaborative vision. Thom Rainer who is a church development guru teaches that a collaborative vision is yourself, God, people and community. And so what I wanted to do was spend the time in each of the districts getting to know them.

### What has been the impact so far?

I'm just encouraged by the attendance, I'm encouraged by the energy, I'm encouraged by the passion of the clergy and laity in this annual conference, I am encouraged that people in this annual conference really have a passion for the church and also have a passion for making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. What I have found very interesting is that people are very excited to be engaged with me about their passion, their hearts and desires. As I go about to these final Chat and Chews I will be looking for the commonalities that we have here in the Virginia

### Remaining Chat and Chew Listening Sessions

**Jan. 21 Staunton**  
*St. Paul's UMC, Staunton*

**Jan. 28 Alexandria**  
*Grace UMC, Manassas*

**Jan. 29 Charlottesville**  
*Aldersgate UMC, Charlottesville*

**Feb. 4 Fredericksburg**  
*Wright's Chapel UMC, Ladysmith*

**Feb. 18 Arlington**  
*Floris UMC, Herndon*

**Feb. 26 Harrisonburg**  
*Asbury UMC, Harrisonburg*

**Mar. 4 Eastern Shore**  
*Metropolitan UMC, Onancock*

**Mar. 5 York River**  
*Warwick Memorial, Newport News*

**Apr. 2 Lynchburg**  
*Pearland UMC, Lynchburg*

**May 20 Farmville Crenshaw UMC**  
*Blackstone*

**May 21 Roanoke**  
*Thrasher Memorial, Vinton*

**Jun. 3 Elizabeth River**  
*Courthouse Community UMC*

Contact your district for more information.

Conference to be able to equip and empower our clergy and laity.

### Final words:

I would like to encourage our clergy and the laity to please come out. I have been very pleased with the attendance. And so the only way as an episcopal leader that I will get to know this annual conference is for me to take that time to be with the clergy and laity. I am also encouraging the transparency and vulnerability in the question and answer session.

*Peace and Blessings,*

Bishop Sharma D. Lewis

Check out the Bishop's video column on the website at <http://vaumc.org/BishopLewis>

# ONE LAST WORD

## A Covenant Prayer

I am no longer my own, but thine.  
Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.  
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.  
Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee,  
exalted for thee or brought low by thee.  
Let me be full, let me be empty.  
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.  
I freely and heartily yield all things  
to thy pleasure and disposal.

And now, O glorious and blessed God,  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,  
thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it.  
And the covenant which I have made on earth,  
let it be ratified in heaven.

*Amen.*

"A Covenant Prayer in the Wesleyan Tradition" is used in the Covenant Renewal Service, often celebrated on New Year's Eve or Day. This version is on page 607 in the United Methodist hymnal.

*Part of the*



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