



Advocate

February 2019

Relationships Heartbreak



Connecting with the

**Virginia Advocate**

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

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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 Chrismon trees or Easter trees/crosses, and any item over two months old. Color photos are encouraged. Photos returned only if submitted with a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Photos included on a space available basis. The editor reserves the right to edit all copy or refuse publication.

Letters

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

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PILLOW TALK



Madeline Pillow
Editor

**Love is a
battlefield**

This month's feature is about relationship heartbreak. From romantic love to friendship, our relationships can cause us pain.

The greatest example of this is the pain Jesus suffered for all of us through his path to the Crucifixion.

Sometimes pain comes from the natural endings of things. We struggle to let go. We struggle to let people go.

We find different ways to deal with this heartbreak. We eat junk food. We watch sappy movies and cry. We shut down emotionally. We lash out at others. We lose passion for things we love. We choose not to deal with it.

As people of faith, we also tend to lean on that faith in times of pain and trouble.

It's important to remember that we don't always know what heartbreak someone might be going through.

It begs the questions:

How can we best express our love and concern to those around us?

What words of encouragement can we use to lift up others experiencing heartbreak?

The latter question seems to me to be one of those eternal questions; one that I hope we aspire to meet faithfully and gracefully in our everyday lives.

Until our next issue,



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COMMENTARY



A message from COD

What is COD? How can COD help you in your local church? COD, the **Commission on Disabilities**, is a group of laity and clergy who work to affirm the responsibility of the church to be in ministry with all persons, regardless of their physical and/or mental conditions.

One of the goals of COD is to promote Disability Awareness Sunday. The Virginia Annual Conference suggests the first Sunday of February* be designated as Disability Awareness Sunday. However, if for some reason this Sunday is not appropriate, another Sunday in February should be selected. This is an opportunity to celebrate the gifts of all individuals and create an inclusive church.

The conference

website has suggestions as to how to include persons of all abilities.

Go to www.vaumc.org/disabilities for resources including sermons, Scripture, liturgy for worship, children's sermons and hymn suggestions. Guest speakers are willing to come and share, including folks from Heart Havens. You may have other ideas. COD is here to help you. Most of our districts have a representative on COD:

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**Disability Awareness Sunday shall be observed annually on a date to be determined by the annual conference. Disability Awareness Sunday calls the church to celebrate the gifts and graces of persons with disabilities and calls the church and society to full inclusion of persons with disabilities in the community.*

Book of Discipline 2016 p. 214.

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EDUCATES
 CONNECTS
 INFORMS





Above: A Shelter 2.0 village going up in Asheville, NC. (Photo courtesy of the Shelter 2.0 Facebook page.)

Shelter design could be aid to survivors of California fires

By Alex Joyner

The traditional spot of Jesus' birth is hardly more than a cleft in a rock. The cave beneath the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem preserves the location with a silver star that pilgrims kneel to kiss as they filter through the hot, crowded space that would have served as a stable. But for Joseph and Mary, it was shelter from the night.

As we see the dev-

Below, L to R: Shelter 2.0 partners, Robert Bridges and Bill Young inside a framed shelter; A short stack of the Mini Shelter parts that are very efficient to crate up; A finished shelter.

astating images from California in the wake of the Camp Fire, maybe you wonder like I do—what would we do if we lost the place we call home? How would we even start to rebuild? How could those many, many thousands of people rebuild?

A few years ago, Robert Bridges, a member of Franktown United Methodist Church on Virginia's Eastern Shore, and his working partner, Bill Young, put together a design to create a safe, secure, shelter that anyone could construct with basic tools. Over the years they have per-

fected the design and now they have a model that could be set up anywhere in about 30 minutes. It's so simple, children have been able to do the construction.

When Bridges heard about the fires in California, he immediately wondered if his shelters could help. He invited others to partner in the project and they are planning a delivery as soon as possible.

I'm proud to be part of this effort. A model shelter is currently touring our district to help Robert and his nonprofit group, Shelter 2.0, to tell the story. Though it would be important any time of year, it seems particularly appropriate to be offering shelter at a time of the year when many of us are thinking about the shelter used by Jesus' family in their time of need.

More information about Shelter 2.0 can be found here: www.shelter20.com. A GoFundMe campaign to get shelters to those in need in California available: www.gofundme.com/6g5ucy8.

—The Rev. Alex Joyner is district superintendent of the Eastern Shore District.



COMMENTARY

Ways you can advocate for change in our government

By Barbara Lewis

Our denomination encourages individuals' involvement in our government to give voice to the voiceless, to work to end injustice and to help the poor. In John Wesley's day, the "bands" participated in social justice as part of their works of piety. They patterned their behavior on Jesus loving those labeled unlovable, seeing those who had become unseen and taking care of those in need.

As our denomination developed, General Conference put together guidelines we still use today called *The Social Principles*. Read them online at www.umc.org. In the section about our political community and our responsibility, our *Social Principles* state:

"The strength of a political system depends upon the full and willing participation of the citizens. The church should



continually exert a strong ethical influence upon the state, supporting policies and programs deemed to be just and opposing policies and programs that are unjust.”

(Social Principles ¶164)

As members of United Methodist churches, we are to be involved citizens using our shared theology to create a just and welcoming community. We acknowledge we will not all agree on all issues or the best ways to bring about justice. But we continue to respect each other,

study together, to learn from each other and, whenever possible, work together.

On January 31, members across our conference gathered at Bon Air UMC to learn more about effective advocacy and helping to shape our government and our Virginia laws. The skills they learned and practiced are ones you can practice in local, state and national government.

There are several ways you can make an impact. With today's technology, you can "sign" a petition electronically, send emails, make phone calls, write letters, show up for hearings, make appointments and more. The more personal the interaction, the more impact it is likely to make.

Below are some help-

ful tips whether you are making a personal visit, calling or writing:

Be civil and friendly

Whether you are attending your local zoning or meeting with a representative, remember to be friendly. Introduce yourself and why you are meeting with them or their staff. Be pleasant and polite, not rude. Listen to what they are saying. Smile. Don't try to start an argument but have a conversation instead.

Be informed; know your stuff

If you are interested in a particular topic, be sure to address the right people or group to

(Con't. on next page: "ASSEMBLY.")



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(“ASSEMBLY,” cont. from page 7.)

accomplish your goals. If your focus is school start times, address your local school board. If concerned about school crossing zones, address your local traffic control overseer.

The most effective way to encourage change is focusing on what you can change. Start small and work toward several small changes to make larger ones.

When advocating state representatives or congressmen during the General Assembly or Congressional Session, it is often best to know what legislation is being considered, what it says and address the bill numbers specifically. The legislators then have a starting point to talk with you and understand your concerns.

Know the status of the legislation. If

the bill has already been killed (voted down), the legislator is less likely to talk with you about it during the session. If it is likely to pass committee and go to the floor of the House or Senate then they may be wanting to have a more involved conversation to help them decide how to vote. Know if the committee has approved changes (amendments or substitutions).

If you are for or against proposed legislation, be able to say so and why. If you are aware of how the legislation is likely to impact your community, be able to say so. If you have found research to support your position, bring a copy with you to share.

Stay focused

Try to identify one primary issue you want to address. If it is a topic such as fracking where there are several environmental issues to consider, then also identify one aspect you want to focus on in that visit.

Keep it personal

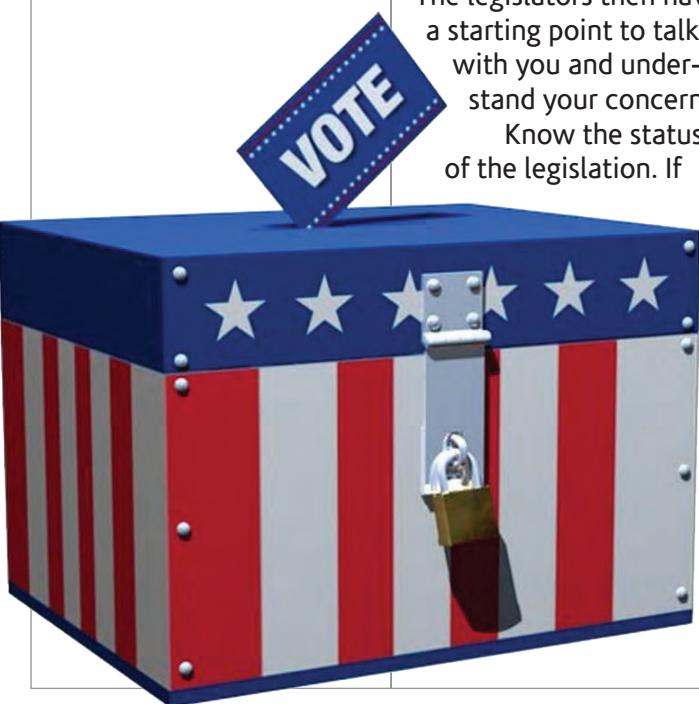
Use your own words. Keep to your topic and be concise. If pertinent, share a personal story.

While serving as a pastor near Emporia, I

witnessed several pay day lending places opening in local storefronts, many within sight of each other. During a visit with a state Senator in favor of pay day lending without regulations, I shared this information and how two of my parishioners had become caught in a loop of taking out loans to pay off loans with very high interest. He seemed surprised there were so many locations in such a small area. Later, I found out he had verified the number of storefronts and had requested information on how many customers repeatedly took out loans. The next year, he introduced legislation that limited interest rates and provided protections for those borrowing.

Be present; show up

Taking the time and effort to comment, sign petitions, or visit those we have place in our government makes a difference. A staffer from my congregation’s local board of zoning noticed I had attended three meetings in a row as I followed a zoning application for property near the church. She made a point of asking why I attended. The supervisor



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for the area asked questions, listened, and obtained more information before the application proceeded because my members and I showed up.

Showing up to vote in elections is just as important. You have an opinion, I know you do; share it. Your calls, emails and letters have an impact. Be present through them as well.

And while our Virginia General Assembly is only in session for a couple of months at the beginning of each calendar year, government happens all year long. Contact your representative in their local office during the year as well.

Follow up

Continue to exchange information on issues you are advocating about with other people working toward the same goal. Take time to continue your own research. Send thank you notes to people who have helped you and with whom you have met. Review what you have done, what worked or didn't and refine your plan. Follow the legislation through to the end. If necessary, take it to the next higher level of government.

Always thank the

people who have taken time to talk with you, listen to you, teach you, or share their research with you. Thank you notes are not a thing of the past whether through snail mail, email or social media.

Pray!

Before, during and after you vote, write, call or visit, PRAY. Pray for those working in government. Pray for those who are working as advocates. Pray for those who are doing the reporting. Pray for those who are not participating. Pray for the poor, the hurt, the hungry, and those who have no voice.

And as part of your praying, listen. Listen to other people. Listen to the Scriptures. Listen to God's guidance.

Your participation, great or small, is important. Whether you can do all of the above or only some, you can be an advocate for justice. You can be involved in changing policy, protecting those in need of protection or encouraging the next leader. Whatever you do, be involved. And know that you are following in the path Jesus started. ☺

-The Rev. Barbara D. Lewis is pastor of Greenwood-Laurel Park UMC in the Richmond District.



Facts about the General Assembly

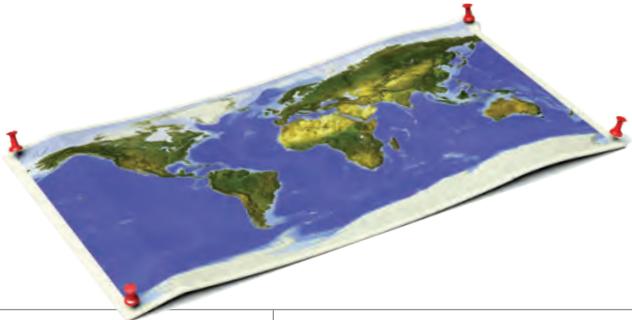
The legislative branch of the Commonwealth of Virginia is the Virginia Legislature made up of the Senate and the House of Delegates that convene in the Virginia General Assembly. It convenes annually on the second Wednesday of January. In even years, it meets for 60 days, and in odd years, for 90 with the option of extending either session for a maximum of 30 days.

It reconvenes for a special session if approved by two-thirds votes of both houses or when called by the governor, usually for the purpose of reconsidering vetoed legislation. This normally occurs on the sixth Wednesday after adjournment and lasts only a few days max.

Meetings of the General Assembly are open to the public by law. The Legislative Sessions are held in the Virginia Capitol which is located in downtown Richmond. The daily sessions of the House and Senate always convene at noon, unless voted on and announced otherwise at the daily session the day before. This rarely happens as hearings, committee and sub-committee meetings usually occur during the morning hours. All senators and delegates have an office in the Pocahontas Building near Capitol Square in Richmond and in their legislative districts.

(Information via: www.virginiageneralassembly.gov)

The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



Yearly church event expresses love and Christmas giving

By Helen Smith

How do you properly express kindness, creativity and love? You go all out. Elf's Corner at New Town UMC in Williamsburg is kindness, love and all of the creativity. The event started 17 years ago with Gretchen Tisone. Now in charge of the preschool, Tisone

Photos courtesy of Helen Smith.

shared that 17 years ago New Town didn't even have a preschooler in the building. Worshiping in a rented room at a local school, the congregation of New Town and Tisone wanted to teach children about giving.

Tisone got church council approval to use the extra funds in the budget to start Elf's Corner. The first year the church had 90 kids, including kids from the church.

The original idea? Everyone is equal in the eyes of God and everyone needs to know how

to give.

This year, they served 150 families, with a large number of spots saved for the homeless living in a local hotel. After 17 years, guidance counselors are no longer the main proponent for getting people involved as word of mouth has taken over.

Two phone lines open the Monday after Thanksgiving for people to call and reserve their spots. Within hours the spots are all filled. A week before the event, people are allowed to start bringing in donated gifts. It usually takes about 2,000 gifts to cover everyone. There are no sign-up sheets. But, without fail, there's plenty every year.

Once kids reach the fifth grade, they are allowed to be an "elf," wearing the costume of smock, ears, striped stockings and even shoe covers that curve upward at the toes. Since the event has been going for so many years, New Town gets a large number of repeat guests and some of those kids end up coming back as volunteers.

When talking about whether it's worth all the effort, Tisone mentioned that a fifth-grade teacher volunteered a couple years back and,



The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

unbeknownst to her, one of her students came to pick gifts that year. The next Monday, when she had her students write about their weekends, her student wrote about the magical place he visited where he got to meet Santa and pick presents for his family. That's why Tisone and New Town continue to put on Elf's Corner year after year. "If one kid comes and, yes, gets gifts and food, but learns about the man named Jesus who loves and cares about them, then this is all worth it," Tisone said.

Walking into Elf's Corner

When families enter into Elf's Corner at New Town, they enter a fully decked-out winter wonderland, complete with upside down Christmas trees, a sled, a balloon animal artist and, best of all, Santa! Each child is assigned an elf and then escorted through the three rooms filled to the brim with presents to choose gifts for each of their family members.

Two elves working that day were Buddy and Snowball who led two young girls through the rooms and helped them pick gifts based on what family members



like, while making a list to ensure sure presents leave with the right people. Buddy and Snowball made sure to walk the girls in opposite directions when the sisters got to the kids' present room and needed to pick gifts for each other so they would both be surprised when they open their presents on Christmas Day.

After presents have been picked, the kids make crafts, decorate cookies, draw, sing and hear stories while 300 elves in the sanctuary wrap the presents.

The wrapping room is organized chaos and enthralling. All the presents for a child go to the same table to be wrapped, while a copy of the list goes to the labeling station so that every gift has a sticker saying who it's for and

from. Everyone is wearing Christmas clothing – fun sweaters, flashing light headbands and even Christmas slippers. A staggering 18 churches were involved in the event, not all of them United Methodist. The community comes out to support the great mission of helping underprivileged families and teaching children about giving; the local Rotary club, for example, donated money to pay for hundreds of bags of food that would be given to each of the families, while Smithfield donated 150 hams!

The parents' room is no less incredible, with tables full of food lining the walls. Volunteers sit and talk with the parents. And there's a separate hallway where parents can pick presents their kids might

not think of, like dishes. Once all the presents are wrapped, a volunteer calls out the number assigned to the child and the parent picks up their kid from the fun room. They leave with a huge basket of wrapped presents and what feels like a 10-pound bag of food.

As I was leaving, I helped a woman carry all of her things to her car. I listened as she talked about the woman she'd run into who convinced her to sign up her child for Elf's Corner, how she was so thankful, how everyone was so nice and how she would have to come back for worship. The North Pole is closer than legend says. In fact, it's in Williamsburg, VA. ↗

– Helen Smith is a member of the conference Board of Communications.

EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY



'Jesus wept': Finding God's comfort when times are bad

By Joe Iovino

Sometimes, watching or reading the news can be depressing. We attempt to follow the biblical mandate to find and think about whatever is true, honorable, just, pure,

pleasing, commendable, and worthy of praise (Philippians 4:8). The stories dominating the media, however, often make us sad, frustrated, or angry.

Additionally, we have personal struggles at home and work, with finances, relationships, illness, and so much more.

We turn to our faith for answers, but answers don't often come easily. There are mostly questions. What are people of faith to do in the midst of overwhelming tragedy and strife?

Jesus wept

The shortest verse in the Bible, in the King James Version at least, is just two words, "Jesus wept" (John 11:35). Though only 10 characters, too short even to tweet, that verse has tremendous significance, especially when we are struggling to find hope.

Jesus weeps in the midst of comforting his friends Mary and Martha who are grieving the death of their brother Lazarus. Yes, that Lazarus. The one famous for being raised by Jesus.

Jesus is out of town when he hears of Lazarus' illness. Rather than adjusting his plans to go

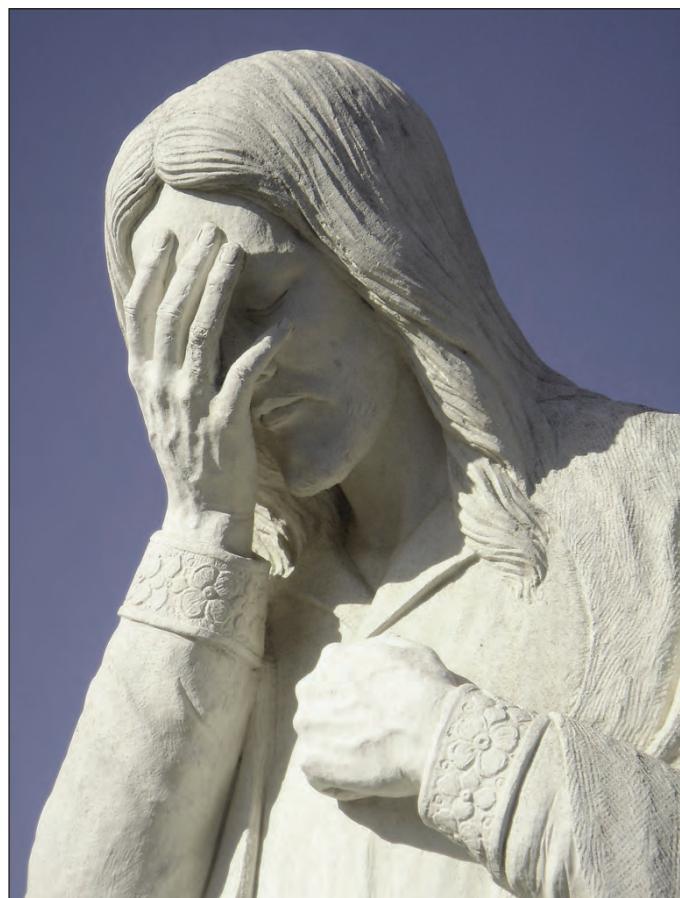
visit this friend whom he loves (John 11:3), Jesus instead decides to stay where he is for a couple of days. He tells the disciples Lazarus' illness will somehow serve the glory of God, and that God's Son will be glorified through it (John 11:4).

By the time Jesus arrives, Lazarus has been dead four days. Mary and Martha, Lazarus' sisters, are understandably miffed at the lack of urgency Jesus showed. In their own way, each of them expresses their frustration with him. They are convinced their brother would not have died if Jesus had come when he was first summoned (John 11:21, 32).

There, watching the grief of this family and community, Jesus begins to cry. There is debate as to why, John doesn't tell us, but I am convinced it is out of empathy for the pain of those he loves. In that moment, Jesus was feeling Mary and Martha's grief, their sense of hopelessness, their pain and loss. So he cries.

Comfort

There is comfort in knowing we don't worship a stoic God. The God we know in Christ Jesus feels our pain



and knows our loss. He weeps with us.

We also worship a God who can take our frustration. Mary and Martha vent, and so can we. As it is in any healthy relationship, we need to be open and honest with those we love, even when we are angry with them. If anyone can take it, certainly Jesus can.

It is also a comforting reminder that even while we are going through our pain, and Jesus feels far from us, it is not because he doesn't love us. He loved Lazarus, the Bible tells us, even while not taking his illness from him.

New life

Lazarus' story does not end with his death. At his tomb, Jesus calls Lazarus' name and the crowds watch in disbelief as Lazarus emerges...alive. While Mary and Martha thought Jesus had come too late to help, we learn there is never a "too late" with God.

We may believe our situation is hopeless. We may not see a solution. We may not have a clue how to get out of the mess in which we find ourselves. In Jesus, though, there is always hope. There is always

the possibility of new life, not just some day in the great by-and-by, but here in this life. This is the whole point of Jesus' Resurrection – new life today, and a new life to come.

Questions

When I finish reading the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, I still have questions. Why did Lazarus have to go through all of this? Why did Jesus come too late to keep him from dying? Why did Mary and Martha have to experience grief?

In the tragedies I experience and read about, I am left with questions also. Why do some feel so hopeless they take their own lives? Why do people of faith receive devastating diagnoses? Why isn't a doctor and hospital doing so much good, supernaturally protected from illness? Why are families rattled by unemployment and lives lost in natural disasters? Why do we suffer?

While we may not receive all the answers we want, we know Jesus weeps with us.

Questions for discussion and contemplation:

- ❖ Have you known anyone whose life changed due to illness, tragedy, struggles? What was your response?
- ❖ When have you felt as though Jesus was distant?
- ❖ When have you wondered why God allowed something to happen, or didn't stop something from occurring?
- ❖ If you struggle with venting your frustration toward God, why is that? If not, why not?
- ❖ How does it help to know there is someone weeping with you when you are suffering?
- ❖ Can you picture God as having emotions? Does God cry? Laugh? Become angry?
- ❖ Why does God allow us to suffer, grieve, and struggle?
- ❖ When you are in a place of desperation, what do you do?
- ❖ Has God brought you peace and newness when you thought it was too late?

❖ How does the hope you have in Christ Jesus keep you going?

Resources for further reading:

When Grief Breaks Your Heart by James W. Moore. This book explores what faith says about the grief experience and how faith helps mend a broken heart.

The Gift of Encouragement: Restoring Heart to Those Who Have Lost It by Marjorie J. Thompson. *The Gift of Encouragement* offers practical help to persons serving those who need comfort.

When the One You Love Is Gone By Rebekah L. Miles. *When the One You Love Is Gone* encourages us to use our scars, messes, and the heartache to give new life to ourselves, and others.

Hope Beyond Your Tears: Experiencing Christ's Healing Love by Trevor Hudson. Hudson offers an excellent resource for exploring the importance of Christ's resurrection for your life. ↗

– Joe Lovino works for UMC.org at United Methodist Communications. This article can be found on www.umc.org and was originally published in 2014.

Relationship



Heartbreak

We have all been there. We have all felt the loneliness and pain that comes from heartbreak, no matter the source.

How can we grow from this pain? What lessons can be learned? How can we be an aid to those around us in this type of situation? Learn more in the articles to follow.



Prayer. Prayer. And more prayer.

By Evelyn Penn

Most of us have been there — a loved one dies and the bickering begins about who gets what, who did the most while the loved one was dying and even final arrangements if they were not made beforehand.

My sister, 11 years younger than me, hasn't spoken to me since our mother died in 2009. Mom had lung cancer that spread to her brain and bones. She was living with me when the diagnosis was made. I loved opening my home to her when she could no longer afford to live alone.

She had the downstairs as her own living space with a bedroom and bathroom. I had the upstairs of the rambler, and we would meet in the kitchen on that level. Mom often cooked our dinner and then we would spend time together watching *Wheel of Fortune* and *Jeopardy*. When the TV was off, she was playing solitaire on her computer or typing tried-and-true recipes we had all enjoyed for years. She put together a cookbook (in a three-ring binder) as our Christmas gifts one year. What a wonderful legacy she gave us.

There were five of us kids. Some visited her at my home more often than others. As the cancer progressed, I continued to work, hiring helpers to stay with Mom during the day until I came home from work. As time progressed, I had to stay in the house all the time once I was home because Mom became unsteady on her feet and would often fall. Hospice was called in and they were so helpful with medical

visits and helping with Mom's comfort — providing a hospital bed on the main level of the house when she could no longer navigate stairs and having a chaplain visit me while the nurse was with Mom.

I was so grateful for the chaplain visits. I attended church on Sunday, while a hospice volunteer sat with Mom. I have always been a Christian, believing and trusting in God and His infinite power and wisdom over our lives. I never questioned God about why Mom had cancer. She had been a smoker for 50 years, and I just figured it would be a matter of time before she was diagnosed with cancer. That hospice chaplain, while I cannot remember anything specific she said, gave me comfort during those visits.

The conflict with my younger sister began when I could no longer afford to care for Mom in my home, paying for the hourly care she needed. After qualifying for Medicaid, Mom was moved to a nursing facility chosen by this younger sister. I wasn't opposed to it. It was closer to my home than hers or the other siblings. I visited her three or four times during the week and told the others the weekends were their time to visit.

The funeral arrangements were made while Mom was still alive. My daughter and I took Mom to make them when she was still able to get around. I talked with Mom about songs and Scripture she wanted, where the funeral would be, and if my pastor at St. Matthias UMC could work with her pastor at her Lutheran church to preside over the service. Pastor Paula had been wonderful supporting me during this difficult time and had visited with Mom at my home. Mom liked her. And Mom agreed with my request.

At the funeral home, conflict with my sister was inevitable. She resented the fact I knew what was to be done and at one point said, "She always gets what she wants," when I said Mom's brothers and sisters should be in the family room with us before the service and walk in with us. I knew Mom would have wanted it that way.

After the funeral and committal ceremony at Quantico, everyone was invited back to my house for food and fellowship. My estranged sister, her husband and two sons did not come.

She has continued to ignore my phone calls, attempts to contact her through social media and declined invitations to my home when hosting all the family at holiday gatherings. Instead she has her



own family gatherings, without me.

So, how do I handle it?

Prayer. Prayer. And more prayer.

It hurts me that she has shunned me all these years.

So I use my faith and hope in God to ease the pain of not sharing things with my sister and her family. One of her sons got married, and I was the only sibling not invited. That hurt. A lot.

But I know that God is always there to hear my prayers and cries, and He comforts me. This is a good point to remember the serenity prayer.

God grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change;
courage to change the things I can;
and wisdom to know the difference.

I cannot change my sister and her feelings and thoughts about me. But I continue to pray for her and ask God to put it in her heart to soften her thoughts about me. ↗

— The Rev. Evelyn Penn is pastor of the Prince Edward Charge,
Farmville District





Pastors are not immune to human tragedies

By Larry Davies

If you were to ask, "What one incident played a major part in shaping your ministry?" I would emphatically answer with one word:

DIVORCE.

If I had not personally experienced the crisis and the agony of marital separation and divorce, I would not be the minister I am today.

No one is immune to the tragedy of marital distress and divorce — not even the men and women who devote their livelihood to the ministry. The same pastor whom others depend upon to provide God's loving grace during a crisis often has no place to turn when the family experiencing calamity is his/her own. This is especially true when the predicament involves separation or divorce. I know! I've been there!

"I'm leaving you. I don't like this town or this life, and I don't love you!" The conversation took longer but this was her message. Within a few days, my wife of 15 years had packed her clothes, half of our furniture and many of our memories in a borrowed pickup truck and moved away to start over. Left behind were two crying children, an emotionally wrecked husband and a confused church community.



So many questions come to mind during an experience like this, and I remember asking them all. "Why is she leaving me? Am I really that hard to live with? How will I care for my children? Will she come back? What if I lost weight? What if I changed my attitude? Oh Lord...why me?"

I also had to deal with questions about my career. "How can I stand in front of my congregation and admit being a failure? Will they let me continue as their pastor? Do I even want to continue? Is this what God had in mind when I changed careers to serve the church? Again, Oh Lord...why me?"

Clergy and their families are not immune to the human tragedies. The Bible explicitly describes how pastors should treat their families: "You must manage your own family well, with children who respect and obey you. For if you cannot manage your own household, how can you take care of God's church?" (1 Timothy 3:4-5) Good question!

Keith Madsen examines the problem in *Fallen Images: Experiencing Divorce in the Ministry*. He writes, "One view is that a minister cannot show any major flaw or failure. The minister has to project the image of a person who has been strong enough to resist the evils with which others struggle." Perfection is an impossible image, and attempts to live up to it can lead to serious trouble.

Divorce explodes the perfect pastoral image. In addition to the excruciating personal pain of a marital breakup there is also the public humiliation of having your leadership abilities challenged before the church and community. So clergy divorce becomes a dual tragedy, personally and professionally, causing severe emotional damage to the pastor and his/her family.

What about the former husband or wife of a pas-



tor? Because most ministers live in church housing, the spouse is always forced to move. What happens to the children? Where do they go? To whom do they turn? The church that was once a source of emotional and financial support is now unavailable.

God says it best, "For I hate divorce..." (Malachi 2:16)

What should the church do? Consider clergy divorce a private matter and quietly offer family counseling? Should church authorities automatically require divorcing pastors to resign?

Offer love, not silence

Within a few hours after my wife walked out, I was surrounded by friends, church members, other pastors and relatives. No one knew what to say but it didn't matter. They quietly brought food and offered reassurance that I was loved. Their gestures touched me in ways I still cherish. A neighbor came over late one night and sat quietly while I talked and cried and rambled and even cursed. He lovingly allowed me the opportunity to be angry...to say stupid things...to be human...to release years of pent-up frustration...to grieve. Thank you, my friend!

This sounds so simple but I've heard that some divorced people said the only response they received from friends and even from their church was silence. No phone calls. No food. No compassionate, listening ear. Just numbing, cold silence. Why? There is a fear of what to say, and perhaps a fear of taking sides between two fighting friends. But for those experiencing divorce the silence is interpreted as rejection. It hurts!

Investigate quickly and respond openly

Within days, I met with three ministerial supervisors to investigate the circumstances involved in my potential divorce. For two hours they questioned and prodded and offered possible options for saving my marriage. They concluded I was doing all that could be done and, even if my marriage ended in divorce, I should learn from my experience and continue my role as minister of the church. A committee at church soon agreed, which brought a needed boost to my self-esteem.

A quick and responsible investigation is vital for

the pastor as well as the church. For a minister it could mean the difference between growing stronger or leaving the ministry in disgrace. For the church it could mean the difference between being in compassionate ministry to a fallen leader or becoming involved in a disastrous church split. An investigation clears the air and squelches gossip.

What if the pastor is guilty of adultery, abuse or forcing the divorce? This also needs to be handled quickly and openly. Without revealing details, church officials can help the pastor face the consequences of his or her wrongdoing. An attitude of love and forgiveness from the congregation is important, but a minister should resign or at least take a leave of absence for the sake of the church.

Because most ministers live in church-owned housing, what happens to the spouse and the children? In the midst of the dilemma surrounding the pastor, their physical and emotional needs are often ignored. It is so important that authorities and church members remember to reach out to them.

Look for signs of growth

Over the next few months after my wife left, I was encouraged to seek out others facing similar difficulties. Eventually we formed a divorce support group and began meeting twice each month. We all needed a chance to talk freely in the company of those who understood the unique problems of separation and divorce. One session would be about anger, then we would do a Bible study on divorce or possibly a discussion on how to raise children as single parents. I soon began writing about those experiences.

As I became involved in helping the divorced renew their relationship with God, my faith strengthened. "God comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others." (2 Cor. 1:4) The love, patience and gentle guidance given by a church family enabled my recovery and helped me discover a new ministry. Does this mean I make it easier for other couples to get a divorce? Absolutely not! Divorce is a horrible tragedy and a sin to the sacredness of marriage. Yet it was in the midst of my sin that I discovered God's truly amazing grace. As a renewed Christian and pastor, I am ever thankful. 

-The Rev. Larry Davies is a retired elder in the Virginia Conference.

Lessons in Love

By Jennifer Boyden

"I want to get married." Not such a big dream for most. But for some, it's a dream that regrettably faces judgment and restrictive thinking.

The dream to marry is one shared by a Heart Havens resident who is dating his high school sweetheart. Neither one has ever had another love interest. Andrew* is a resident with Heart Havens, the organization founded by the Virginia Conference in 1996 to support individuals with developmental disabilities.

Emily and Andrew's relationship started when she asked Andrew if he wanted to date her. He was not surprised. He thought she was interested in him, and he liked her. They have been together now for 25 years.

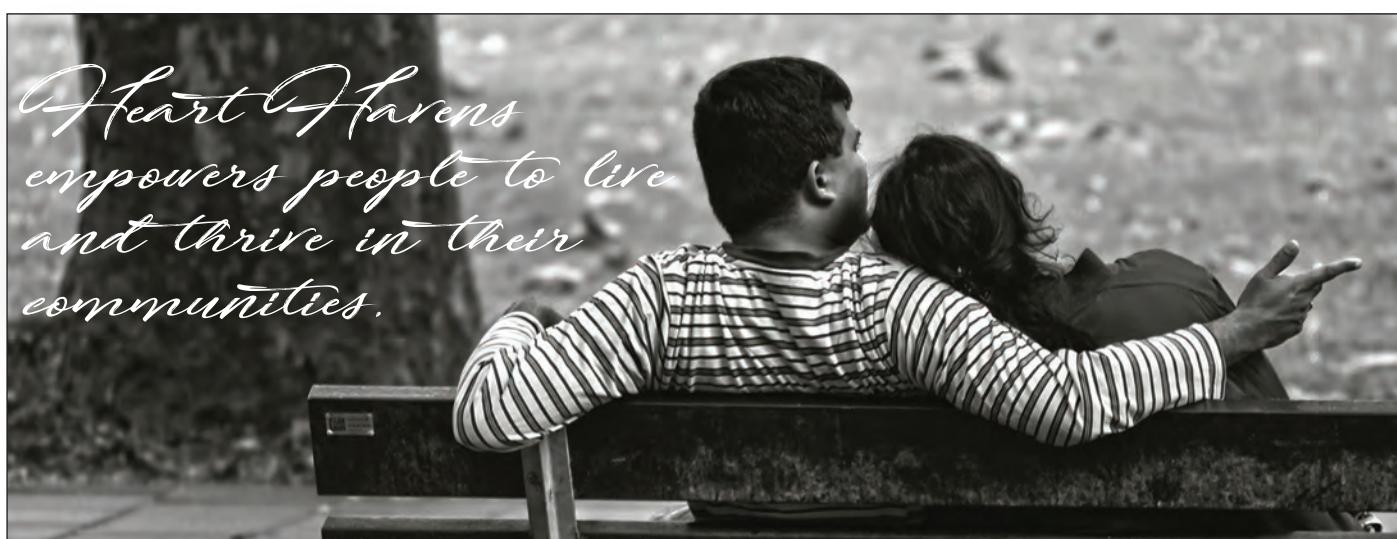
Not too long ago, Andrew went to the bank and made a large withdrawal of his funds and shopped for a ring. A few days later, the staff at Heart Havens got a call from Andrew's family with concerns about such

a large withdrawal. They were worried about theft or fraud. While the family is supportive of the relationship, they are concerned about their future together, the financial planning involved and how living together might work — especially since Andrew has not yet mastered the skills of money management and cooking. (He successfully uses public transportation to and from work, but relies on staff to support him with transportation to all other activities, including grocery shopping.)

Andrew is very sure of his desire to move forward in this relationship. Regrettably, he faces judgment from others who are only willing to entertain this idea to a point. People are willing to have the dialogue about him getting married but maintain the internal dialogue that is restrictive — thinking things like, "Let's face it, he will certainly not be able to get married because he will always require someone to help him take care of some basic life skills."

When some people see Andrew, they perceive his disability and not all the magnificent gifts that he brings to this relationship and his other friendships. Andrew is a devoted, affectionate and loyal boyfriend. He plans dinner and movie dates with Emily. He gives thoughtful gifts. For Valentine's Day, he gave her a heart-shaped locket with his baby picture inside. Andrew and Emily have yet to find an occasion to argue. They love and accept each other fully. Andrew shared that he loves Emily "with all in my heart."

Andrew is a smart, considerate, witty friend who has many interests including music, sports, kickbox-





ing, choir, bowling and local community events. He remembers little nuggets from shared conversations and thoughtfully brings up subjects later. He also enjoys public speaking and has a strong opinion about a number of things. Andrew is so much like you and me; he just needs some extra support to achieve some daily activities.

While people with disabilities have seen significant advances in equal rights in education, employment and community living, affording them equal rights in relationships continues to be an area of weakness.

At Heart Havens, we are committed to the importance of supporting people as they move toward what almost everyone wants in this life — the opportunity to build and maintain healthy relationships. Andrew has the same desire as everyone. He wants to love and be loved.

The support that individuals receive at Heart Havens extends beyond life skills such as cleaning, hygiene and cooking. Besides those valuable skills, we help residents develop a healthy self-esteem and respect for themselves and others, and we help them establish positive and satisfying friendships. Finally, we encourage and support those in the Heart Haven homes to take an active role in the community around them.

In Andrew's case, while it is essential to concede that there are barriers that would make it more challenging for him in a "normal" married life, our mission is to support him to live and thrive in the community, to really listen to his life's dreams and find ways to help him achieve his goals.

Andrew understands the core elements of a relationship and describes it as, "being combined together and spending time together," and "to be a family and go on our merry way." At this time, Andrew has decided that he does want to continue working on developing life skills and dating Emily and his long-range plans continue to include getting married. He knows that he still has to figure out a number of things and that the staff of Heart Havens and his family are there to support his journey. For me, I look forward to learning the valuable lessons in love I see each and every day. ♡

*Name has been changed to protect privacy.

—Jennifer Boyden is Chief Executive Officer of Heart Havens, Inc.

Blessed by Joy

By Andrew Kissell

Nearly 20 years ago I lost my wife to uterine cancer. We had two boys, ages 8 and 10 at the time, and I knew I couldn't manage alone. We had recently moved to Virginia Beach and had begun attending Community UMC where everyone was welcoming and supportive — and the music ministry was superb! Six months before the move I had lost my mother to brain cancer. Two years before that my brother died from leukemia. Needless to say it was a tragic time for our family. Even though I was in a kind of haze after the string of losses, I felt — no, I knew — that God was closer than ever in this time of need.

One of the ladies from my new Sunday school class, Meryl Mosk, helped by watching the boys after school each weekday until I got home from work. My Sunday school class had two other men whose wives had recently died from cancer as well, so the class was prepared to help, if somewhat traumatized by all the loss. My faith in God helped me through a really tough time. My church family held me up when I needed support. Those of us who have experienced a tragedy like this get through the loss, but never over it. I remarried 16 months later, gaining two stepsons as well. A couple years later we had a baby girl whom we named Joy, largely for what God had restored in our lives. She's 15 now, and the four boys are all doing well. I clearly have been blessed by God with a beautiful wife and family. I am also especially thankful for and blessed by my brothers and sisters in Christ's family at Community Church. Praise God! ♡

— Andrew Kissell is president of the conference United Methodist Men.



Heartbreak changes us

By Bruce Lugn

I volunteered to write this article about "heartbreak" because I felt I knew heartbreak in my life — and I do, as do most of you.

Heartbreak is great sadness that seems unbearable at the time. Often it is a gut-wrenching sadness that alters our lives, a sadness that penetrates our whole being, knocks us around like a hurricane, hurts us and rattles our senses so that we are tormented with grief and loss of balance. Heartbreak may come at us like a train screaming through the station, shaking the station platform we are standing on and then barreling on into the darkness. Heartbreak may leave us cold and empty and lost. We cry. Our body shakes. We feel utterly alone even when surrounded by people, many of whom we love and love us.

We may ask, "Where are you God? Why have you left me?" And there is no answer, no response from God. At least not there in our new grief, our heartbreak.

Whatever the event that leads to a broken heart — death of a loved one, being told "I do not love you anymore," the loss of a dream, the loss of our faith, a cancer diagnosis, stroke or heart attack — will grind us to a halt. Sometimes great injustice may break our hearts, and we may feel great pain for others.

Heartbreak changes us

It changes our world, how we experience our lives. Jesus cried from the cross — "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?" Imagine the anguish, the physical and spiritual pain he must have had. And we, too, may cry — My God, my God why have you forsaken me? We have lost sight of life. The thunder, the wind, the rain is all around us and we

crumble at last into the arms of love as Jesus did.

When our lives are so changed, even damaged by heartbreak, we need love, even if we do not realize it or want it. We need people who will just be there for us, to sit with us, to breathe with us.

Healing is rooted in love

One thing I have learned in my life's journey is that love and compassion need to be integral parts of healing and that healing is rooted in love and fellowship.

Gradually, over weeks, months and perhaps years, we are again able to listen to life, and heartbreak is a part of life. Heartbreak is an essential ingredient of the fullness of life, just as great joy and the giving and receiving of love is a part of life. As we look back, particularly at Christmas, Easter and birthdays, we feel that heartache again. Yet, we may feel grateful — grateful that we are whole persons and that our sense of the divine is real and is with us and was with us the whole time. And so we begin to heal, to mend our broken heart.

When my wife Teresa died, now 19 years ago, my father (a wise and humble man) advised me to face my grief head-on. He told me to not recover from my grief, but to recover in my grief. Later, my former wife, Lynne died. My daughters were without mothers. I embraced my children and they embraced me.

Christ within me.

Christ beside me.

Christ around me.

St. Patrick, a sixth-century priest of England and Ireland wrote (or at least it is attributed to him) a poem/prayer which includes these lines: *Christ within me, Christ beside me, Christ around me.* This prayer gave me solace after my wife's death and still does today as I face a church in turmoil, a world in turmoil.

In those moments of sheer emptiness and heart-



break, I turned to my church community, to my friends and to my family so I would not feel so utterly alone. And yet there were times I did not want to be around anyone, though I knew when I needed to be with someone those who loved me were there.

What is your story of heartbreak?

Do you know someone who is experiencing heartbreak? Sometimes we feel numb and speechless when a good friend or family member is so very sad or hurt.

How can we grow from this pain? What lessons can be learned? How can we be a source of hope, comfort and compassion for those around us in this type of situation?

Grieving and healing are intertwined as are laughing and crying. I do not believe we can experience any of those deep feelings without the others. Each is a part of our lives, our human nature. Human emotions are a gift. When we cry with great loss our belly shakes. When we laugh or cry with great joy our belly shakes. Our lives come from the center, we shake in sadness and we shake in joy. Our human nature is a gift from God, the Holy One. It is important to acknowledge and spend time with each.

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." Matthew 5:1-4 (NRSV)

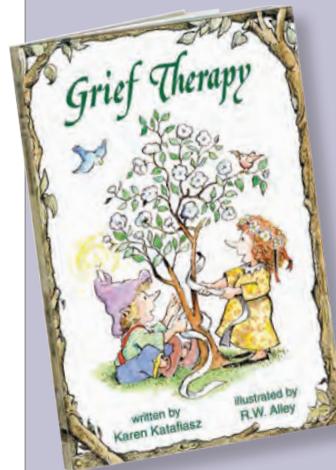
"He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds." Psalm 147:3 (NRSV)

Shalom is a word with deep meaning. It means wholeness of mind and spirit. It means greetings and it means goodbye for now. May *Shalom* be yours as you journey in this beautiful, God-given life. Yes, sometimes we experience great sadness and grief but also great joy and compassion. I leave you in *Shalom*. 

- The Rev. Bruce Luginbuhl is a retired elder in the Virginia Conference.
He is also a member of the Kindred Project.

Resource suggestions

A Grief Observed
by C. S. Lewis



Grief Therapy (a small booklet) by Karen Katafiasz and illustrated by R.W. Alley

Please also see the web page for the Kindred Project, an ecumenical, organic group of clergy and lay persons who advocate for living a contemplative life: www.kindredprojectva.com.

And you can find us on Facebook at:
www.facebook.com/kindredproject.



DISCIPLES HELPING TO TRANSFORM THE WORLD



▲ Several inches of rain were expected on the annual Trunk or Treat event of **Sydenstricker UMC** in Springfield but with some advanced planning and anticipation of possible severe weather, the event went off without a hitch in the spacious fellowship hall. In fact, because Sydenstricker was one of the few organizations able to host their event that evening, approximately 545 little ghosts and goblins and their parents were still able to spend the rainy evening having lots of fall fun! Activities included trick-or-treating through decorated tables, a haunted maze, food and fellowship. Director of Children's and Family Ministry Jennifer Sparlin said some families came expecting there to be

very few people attending and were pleasantly surprised to find the event in full swing. Guests were asked to leave contact information, and the staff will follow up with invitations to future worship services and children and family events.



▲ Pastor Dave Kirkland (pictured right) and Director of Music Ministries Ben Bugaile (pictured left) of **Dulin UMC in Falls Church**, ran in the Whitman-Walker Run to End HIV on Saturday, December 2 in Washington, DC. They raised over \$7,000.

Warwick Memorial UMC celebrated 150 years since a few faithful believers gathered in a home on nearby Mulberry Island in 1868 to form a Methodist Society on Sept. 29 and 30, 2018. At the time of WWI, the federal government established Ft. Eustis on that land, requiring all residents to leave their homes and little chapel. Some families settled in the Denbigh area of Newport News and built a church on the present site. The little congregation persevered when they lost their church building to fire and through financial struggles, gradually growing into the vibrant church of today. The Celebration Weekend included a fun Fall Festival day on Saturday and one joyful worship service on Sunday in the sanctuary, followed by a luncheon and birthday cake for about 275 people in the Celebration Center (a multi-purpose addition). Several former pastors, past members and the oldest member since 1923, Marguerite Proffitt (who recently turned 101), were able to attend, enjoying a very special day of memories and hope for the future! ▼





EVENTS

FEBRUARY

Special Session of General Conference

Feb. 23-26, 2019,
St. Louis, MO

The Council of Bishops has called a Special Session of the General Conference of The United Methodist Church to be held Feb. 23-26, 2019 in St. Louis, Missouri. The purpose will be to receive and act on a report from the Commission on a Way Forward based on the recommendations of the Council of Bishops. The 32-member commission was authorized by General Conference 2016 and appointed by the Council of Bishops to examine paragraphs in *The Book of Discipline* concerning human sexuality and exploring options to strengthen the unity of the church. You can learn more at www.umc.org/topics/general-conference-2019-special-session and get Virginia resources at www.vaumc.org/GC2019.

MARCH

Clergy Spouses Retreat

March 8-9, 2019, Camp Overlook, Harrisonburg, Va.

This year's retreat is "Healthy Transitions for Clergy Spouses" by Julie Anderman of Artos Retreats. Are you anticipating some kind of major transition in 2019? Maybe a new appointment, or retirement or the results of February's denominational vote? This session is designed exclusively for you – the clergy spouse! In confidential small group discussions, prepare your mind and heart with healthy habits and strategies for each phase of a transition. Have fun with other clergy spouses solving real-life scenarios about saying goodbye, dealing with the chaos, and planting new roots. Walk away with meaningful, supportive connections with other clergy spouses. Julie Anderman has been a clergy spouse in the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference for 20 years. She co-founded Artos Retreats two years ago out of a calling to improve the well-being of clergy spouses through

connection and learning. Before starting Artos, Anderman provided independent instructional design and communications consulting for over 20 years. She has facilitated small group learning in both corporate and church environments for 25 years. Cost is \$100 which includes accommodations and meals. The gathering time is 2 p.m., program beginning at 4 p.m. on Friday, March 8. For questions, contact Judy Hall at (804) 264-0524. Learn more at the conference website at www.vaumc.org and click "Conference Calendar" at the top right corner.

Bishop Lewis "Chat and Chews 3.0"

March and April 2019,
Various locations
around the conference

Bishop Lewis will be holding her Chat and Chew sessions around the conference with clergy and laity once again in 2019. This year there will be four regional dates. More information will be forthcoming. Information so far is listed below:

❖ Saturday, March 23, 2019: Western Group

(Charlottesville, Harrisonburg, Staunton, Winchester) Location: St. Paul's UMC in Staunton

❖ Saturday, April 6, 2019: Southwestern Group (Roanoke, Lynchburg, Farmville, Danville) Location: TBD

❖ Saturday, April 13, 2019: Eastern Group (Eastern Shore, Elizabeth River, James River York River) Location: TBD

❖ Saturday, May 18, 2019: Northern Group (Richmond, Rappahannock River, Arlington, Alexandria)

Goodson Academy of Preaching

March 27-28, 2019,
Trinity UMC, Richmond,

The theme for the 2019 Goodson Academy of Preaching is "Preaching at Storytelling." Presenter will be Donald Davis, retired United Methodist elder and well-known as one of the nation's leading storytellers. For more information, email Goodson@vaumc.org. Learn more at the conference website at www.vaumc.org and click "Conference Calendar" at the top right corner. ↗

LIVING THE WORD



Arum Kim is the pastor of the legacy congregation at the Vine Church – Graham Road campus in Falls Church, VA. She earned her B.S. in Biomaterial Science and Engineering from Seoul National University, her M.S. in Biomedical Engineering from University of Minnesota – Twin Cities and her M.Div from Wesley Theological Seminary. She enjoys the company of her husband Joon Shin, their two-year old daughter Virginia and two cats. Arum loves traveling and trying new and exotic food while on the road.

February 3, 2019

**Pressing on toward the goal
Philippians 3:7-14**

There is nothing special about February 5th in the American calendar. You will most likely go about this day just like any other ordinary Tuesday — at work, at school, on the road, etc. But, not in our home in Falls Church. In fact, it's a big holiday for our family, and here's why. It is the New Year Day in the lunar calendar. In some parts of the world, especially in many Asian countries, the lunar New Year Day calls for a massive celebration. In South Korea where I grew up, you don't just get this one day off. You get three consecutive days of national holidays. Just like Thanksgiving and Christmas Day, the lunar New Year Day is an occasion for spending time with family and, of course, consuming a copious amount of food without the usual guilt.

I am grateful that I have my husband and a daughter who keep me company in the United States to celebrate the occasion together. But it's undeniable that my heart yearns for my hometown in South Korea, where my parents, a brother and other relatives get together for the holiday. For now, late night video calls (due to time difference) keep us connected. Korean grocery stores in Northern Virginia provide the traditional Korean food we enjoy. My little Korean world in Virginia faithfully recreates and preserves the Korean heritage of my family on an otherwise ordinary Tuesday in America. It reminds me of who I am.

Each Sunday is like a Christian holiday that comes around every week. We gather with our sisters and brothers in Christ. Coffee and casseroles, the traditional Sunday sustenance of a United Methodist, keep our stomachs full. Unlike any other holiday, however, we gather not to celebrate the day in itself, but to celebrate God's mighty acts through Jesus Christ for our

sake. And this celebration reminds us of who we are. As Paul says in this chapter of Philippians, we are followers of Christ. This is our primary identity that precedes our nationality or allegiance to an organization. Practicing this identity doesn't entirely mean attending every Sunday worship service, nor does it mean knowing the story of Jesus' salvation, nor does it mean simply affirming his authority. Instead, it means living a life that deeply reflects that of Jesus Christ.

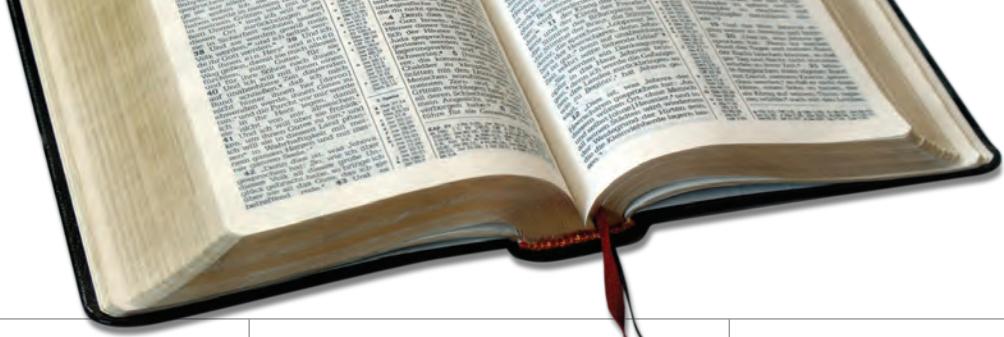
This radical form of life does not come to us overnight. Paul knew this. He struggled as much as you and I. Still, he "pressed on toward the goal" continuously throughout his life. He encourages us to "imitate" him.

What is your plan for this year as a Christ follower? Have you been successful so far? Maybe not. But, don't give up. Keep pressing on toward the goal. The good news is that we still have two more days of the year 2018, according to the lunar calendar. Here is your second chance.

February 10, 2019

**Our true reality
Psalm 48:1-3, 9-14**

Recently, I had a chance to visit the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. Tucked between massive asteroids was a small area with four barstools and a cart. A group of volunteers was busy charging smartphones atop the cart. "James!" yelled one volunteer, marking off a name on a sign-up sheet. A customer came forward from the crowd. The volunteer inserted a smartphone into a goggle where the lens would be. As James carefully sat on a barstool, the volunteer helped him don the contraption around his head. Soon, James began a peculiar interpretative dance. He moved his head and hands erratically in the air. He was not alone; all the other customers before and after him did the same.



"Arum!" yelled a volunteer. I was next. It's called a Virtual Reality (VR) system. Powerful processors and high-tech sensors in smartphones are capable of creating a 360-degree virtual reality. You can look up, down and around as if you are actually there. I dove straight into a virtual galaxy, paid a visit to Mars, and walked around in an actual Ivy League science lab. This made-up reality felt so real, I couldn't believe it wasn't. This virtual reality is an illusion. But my eyes and ears are easily deceived. But in reality I had been sitting on a tiny barstool in a corner of a museum.

The Psalmist and the first readers of this Psalm celebrated the impressive wall that surrounded Jerusalem. For them it was a proof of God's presence and protection. The massive fortress deserved nothing but complete confidence. It was obvious based on what they saw and heard. But it turned out to be an illusion.

In the history that followed the writing of this Psalm, the city walls were demolished by a foreign army and their descendants suffered a long exile in Babylon. The Psalmist and the first readers never imagined this could or would happen. They believed in a seemingly unchanging old reality, but a new reality was revealed in the destruction of Jerusalem. Their world turned upside down. In the midst of this chaos, a true and never changing reality is found: only God was their ultimate protection and security.

The Israelites mistakenly put their trust in the city walls of Jerusalem they could "see" with their own eyes instead of the

"unseen" God. Instead of trusting God, the Israelites placed their confidence in the mere methods through which God was using to protect them.

But the only never-changing reality was and has been since the beginning of the time and is that God is the ultimate source of protection. God is our king and our fortress. Sometimes what we see and hear can deceive us, making us trust in things we "see," but we must never lose the "sight" of the true reality: God is our ultimate protection and security.

February 17, 2019

Come and Hear

Psalm 66

Personal testimony is a powerful thing. During each Sunday service of the Advent season and on Christmas Eve 2018, we played a video of the personal testimony of a member of our church. Each and every testimony told us a story of how the light of Christ has shined in their life. God was with them — when she struggled in an abusive relationship; when he lost a brother and a sister both to cancer within two months of each other when he was only in the sixth grade; when she felt lost and couldn't find a meaning in her mundane life; when he and his family were escaping from a war-torn country; and when a girl in fourth grade was baptized and became a follower of Christ five years ago.

Their stories were moving, powerful and pointed us to God.

They were the modern psalmists.

The old psalmist here does the same: praising God's deliverance, guidance and faithful love. The psalmist remembers and praises God's mighty rescue of Israel from Egypt. He also speaks of how God listened to his prayers and performed a miracle in his own life. God does not just work on a large international stage. God also works on the tiny stage of an individual life. God knows each of his people and hears our prayers. God loves all faithfully.

The personal testimonies of this old psalmist and the stories from the modern psalmists at my church give us a powerful tool when we share about God with others. This is especially true with those who do not yet know God. It is important to tell them that God's interventions and miracles are not limited to the "saints" they see and hear. God works in the life of the ordinary – their family, friend, coworker and neighbor. God's deliverance, guidance, and faithful love have been shown to individuals throughout the ages and are also happening here and now.

Although we live in a world that does not fear God, we can nonetheless share our testimonies. Because we live in the world that does not praise God, it is one of the reasons we should. As we do so (or, perhaps, because we do), we will find ourselves remembering God's history with us and holding on to an unshak-

(Con't on page 28: "LIVING WORD".)

The 2019 Living the Word devotions are from the

Standard Lesson Commentary from Cokesbury.

Note: you can follow the February readings for the 2019 Bible Challenge from Bishop Lewis on pg. 31.

CLERGY & DIACONAL



DEATHS



The Rev. Timothy Vernon "Tim" Satterfield, 63, died Nov. 28, 2018, in Martinsville, VA. He was serving the

Two County Cooperative Parish consisting of multiple United Methodist churches in Martinsville at the time of his death.

The Rev. Dr. James Weldon Smith III, 85, died Oct. 24, 2018, in California. He was a former clergy member of the Virginia Conference, who moved with his family to San Francisco in 1980.

Peggy Joyce Cormany Jones, 79, died Dec. 5, 2018. She is survived by the Rev. LeRoy V. Jones, retired elder in the Virginia Conference.

Nellie Powell Wright, 96, died Nov. 30, 2018, in Martinsville, VA. She is the mother of the Rev. L. Stanley Wright Jr., retired.

Robert "Bob" B. Carpenter Jr., 95, of Altavista, VA, died Nov. 28, 2018. His daughter, the Rev. June Carpenter, is an elder serving Epworth UMC in Thaxton, VA.

BIRTHS

Congratulations to the Rev. Hodae and Veronica Kim on their baby girl, Stella, born Nov. 25. The Rev. Hodae Kim is pastor of the Coastal Charge (Assawoman, Downings and Atlantic churches) on the Eastern Shore District.

(“LIVING WORD” con’t from previous page.)

able faith, regardless of what the world tells us.

What is your history with God? Let’s invite others to “come and hear what God has done” for us.

February 24

**God will do
Psalm 91:1-16**

I cannot pretend that Feb. 24th is just one of four Sundays in February. Yes, I am talking about the 2019 Special Session of the General Conference. Today is the second day of the Conference. We are in the midst of a storm. You do not need to hear yet another explanation from me about why we are sailing through this storm. Whether you have been eagerly waiting for it or not, the day of decision is here. We expect to hear a final decision before the dusk falls on Feb. 26th.

Have you been preparing for what is to come? Some of you might have set an alarm for 2:23-26 a.m. or p.m. to pray for this Special Session. Some might have attended the special meetings led by Bishop Sharma D. Lewis and/or the Rev. Tom Berlin. Some might have spent a lot of time in studying the topic of homosexuality and the three plans presented by the Commission on a Way Forward. Some might have participated in a special Bible study or in discussion sessions on this issue at your local church. Some might have gathered with the same-minded people to share ideas for the future.

Whatever your preparation

may have been, I believe the level of anxiety you feel is intensifying just as it has been with me. Nobody is enjoying the uncertainty of the future that lies just around the corner. This anxiety is inevitable and unavoidable unless the uncertain future becomes a certain reality. How then do we live “with” this anxiety?

From this Psalm, I found a word of comfort and confidence that surpasses my anxiety. God says, “I will rescue you. I will protect you. I will answer. I will be with you. I will save you. I will fill you. I will show you my salvation” (verses 14-16).

There will be moments in our lives in the next few years that we feel disappointed. We may be frustrated by the new governing structure, by certain new rules or simply by someone who sees things differently. But God will not dishearten us. As God has been always, God will do what God has promised for us. Our God is the rescuing God. So, let’s embrace the anxiety and remember that our God is greater than all circumstances.

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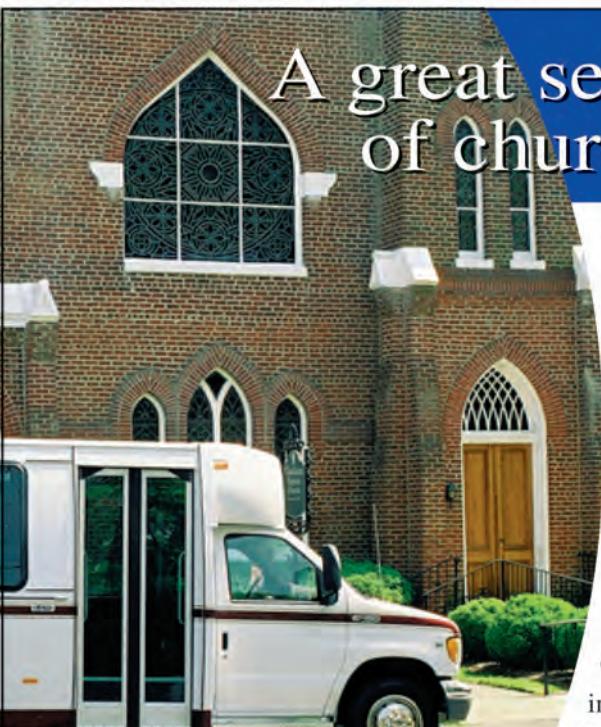
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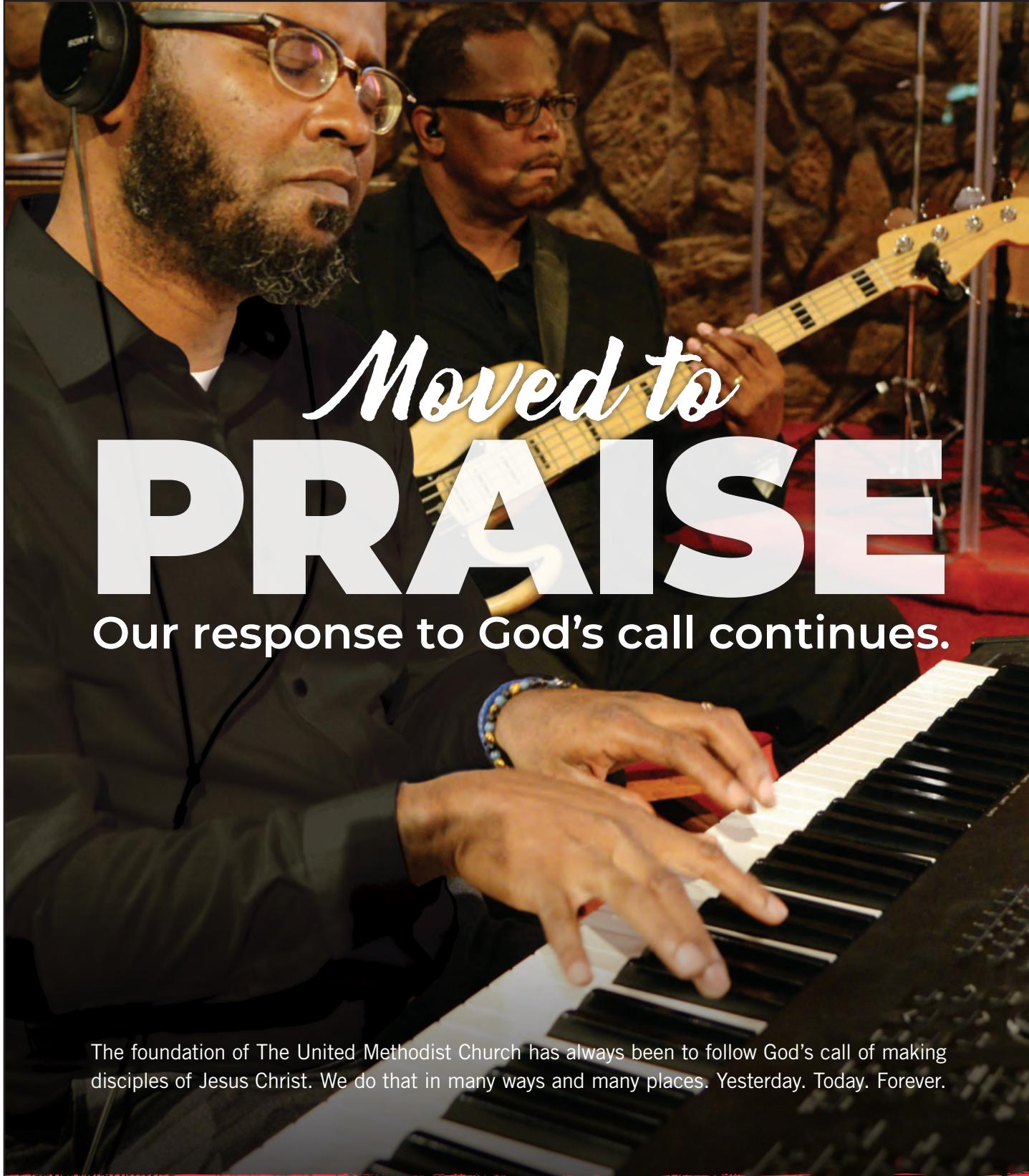
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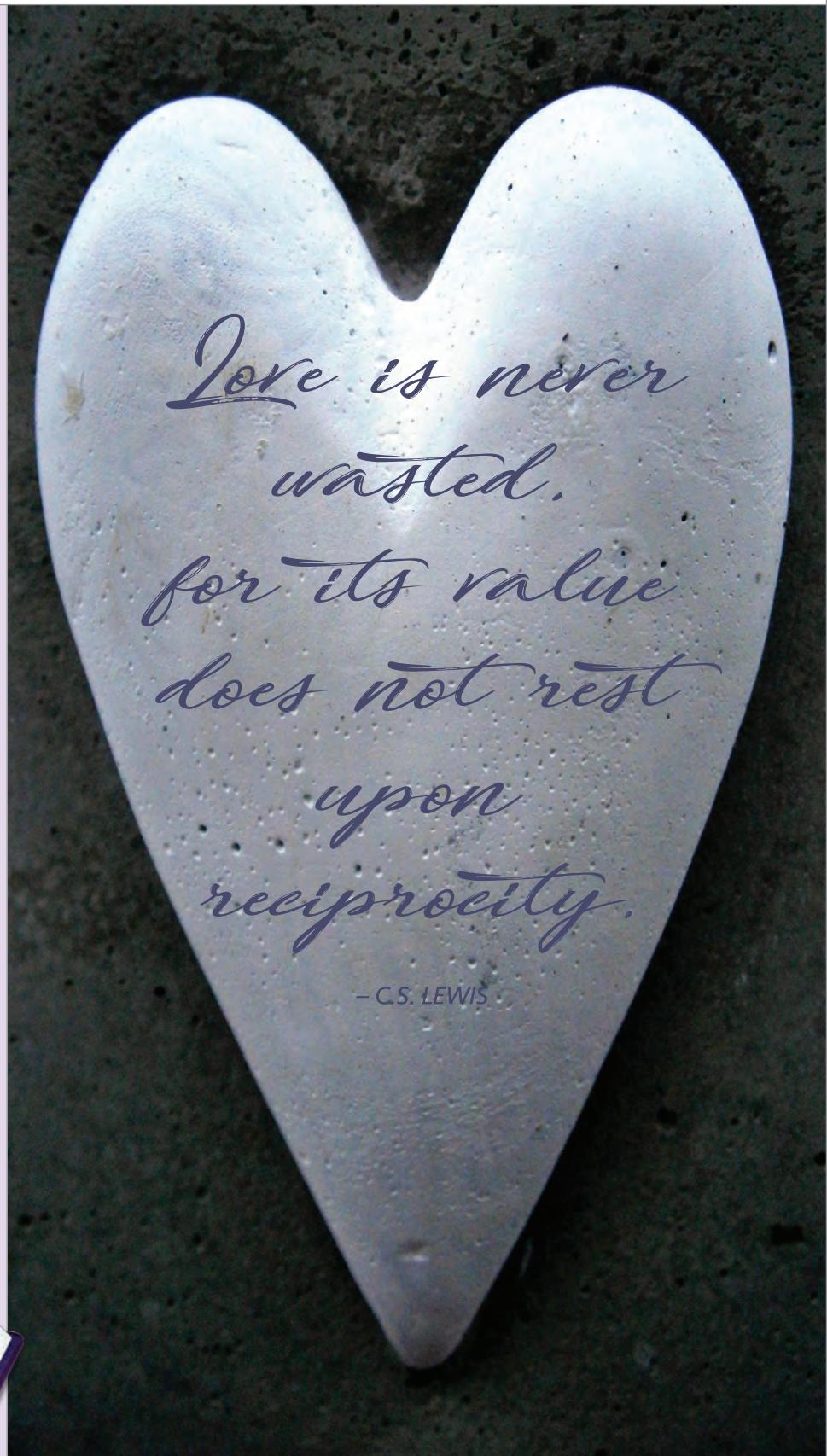
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ONE LAST WORD

Bishop's Bible Challenge readings for FEBRUARY

- Feb. 1 Isaiah 28-29; Mark 7:1-13
- Feb. 2 Isaiah 30-31; Mark 7:14-37
- Feb. 3 Isaiah 32-33; Mark 8
- Feb. 4 Isaiah 34-36; Mark 9:1-29
- Feb. 5 Isaiah 37-38; Mark 9:30-50
- Feb. 6 Isaiah 39-40; Mark 10:1-31
- Feb. 7 Isaiah 41-42; Mark 10:32-52
- Feb. 8 Isaiah 43-44; Mark 11:1-18
- Feb. 9 Isaiah 45-46; Mark 11:19-33
- Feb. 10 Isaiah 47-49; Mark 12:1-27
- Feb. 11 Isaiah 50-52; Mark 12:28-44
- Feb. 12 Isaiah 53-55; Mark 13:1-20
- Feb. 13 Isaiah 56-58; Mark 13:21-37
- Feb. 14 Isaiah 59-61; Mark 14:1-26
- Feb. 15 Isaiah 62-64; Mark 14:27-53
- Feb. 16 Isaiah 65-66; Mark 14:54-72
- Feb. 17 Exodus 1-3; Mark 15:1-25
- Feb. 18 Exodus 4-6; Mark 15:26-47
- Feb. 19 Exodus 7-8; Mark 16
- Feb. 20 Exodus 9-11; 1 Thess. 1
- Feb. 21 Exodus 12-13; 1 Thess. 2
- Feb. 22 Exodus 14-15; 1 Thess. 3
- Feb. 23 Exodus 16-18; 1 Thess. 4
- Feb. 24 Exodus 19-20; 1 Thess. 5
- Feb. 25 Exodus 21-22; 2 Thess. 1
- Feb. 26 Exodus 23-24; 2 Thess. 2
- Feb. 27 Exodus 25-26; 2 Thess. 3
- Feb. 28 Exodus 27-28; Philemon





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