

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

— Virginia Conference Vision Statement

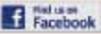
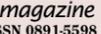
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From the Editor's Desk

We must embrace young adults before they're all gone



Neill Caldwell
Editor

On the Cover:
A "Wordle" is a cloud of text created from a specific set of words, in this case from all the articles on young adult leadership and campus ministries found in this month's issue. The design gives greater prominence to words that appear more frequently. Visit <www.wordle.net> to make your own Wordles.

A couple of weeks ago I was talking to one of the most faithful young Christians that I know. But his dedication seems a little "cooler" now. Maybe it's because he's about to graduate from college and unsure of what his future holds, but he's no longer playing in his church's praise band and has decided not to go to seminary – at least for now.

Some rough experiences with church people and the organized church "structure" have not yet driven him away completely. But these experiences have definitely reduced his enthusiasm.

"Young people love Jesus," he told me flatly, "but they don't love the church."

Yikes! That notion does not bode well for the future of our church.

Young people of a certain age drifting out of church has been common for years. I was guilty of that while I was a college student. Research has shown that more than two-thirds of young adults who attend a Protestant church stopped attending church regularly for at least a year between the ages of 18 and 22.

But this trend seems more than college freshmen exercising their freedom to sleep through Sunday mornings. It's a real growing disconnect between churches and young people who are not feeling spiritually fed inside those churches.

Your Virginia Conference is working to do something about that problem, or at least to listen to the causes and offer churches some ways to reverse the trend.

And just in time, too. According to the 2010 *State of the Church* report, the median age of the population in the United States is 35, but the median age of attendees in The United Methodist Church is 57. And while 13 percent of the U.S. population is between the ages of 18 and 24, the denomination can claim only 5 percent in that age bracket.

The Young Adult Leadership Initiative is designed to nurture and lift up our young adults rather than let them drift away. It's time to give our younger members more voice in what happens in our churches, and to listen and respond to their suggestions.

We're also looking at how we can do a better job of supporting our very crucial campus ministries in a time where financial resources are reduced.

It's up to us as the church structure to offer more points of entry for young people who have never known a world without personal computers and MTV. That's a big part of the denomination's "Rethink Church" effort. Young people are drawn to a church that is authentic about being in mission, says the Rev. Kenda Creasy Dean, associate professor of youth, church and culture at Princeton Theological Seminary. "Young people don't care if we [the church] are more Methodist; they care if we are more authentic," she says. "Wesley didn't set out to be a Methodist either. He just set out to be the church."

Neill Caldwell

"The few in the pew": Importance of equipping young adult leaders leads to new initiative

by Jessie Squires

One of the questions being asked at United Methodist churches across Virginia is a demographic one: "Where are all the young adults?"

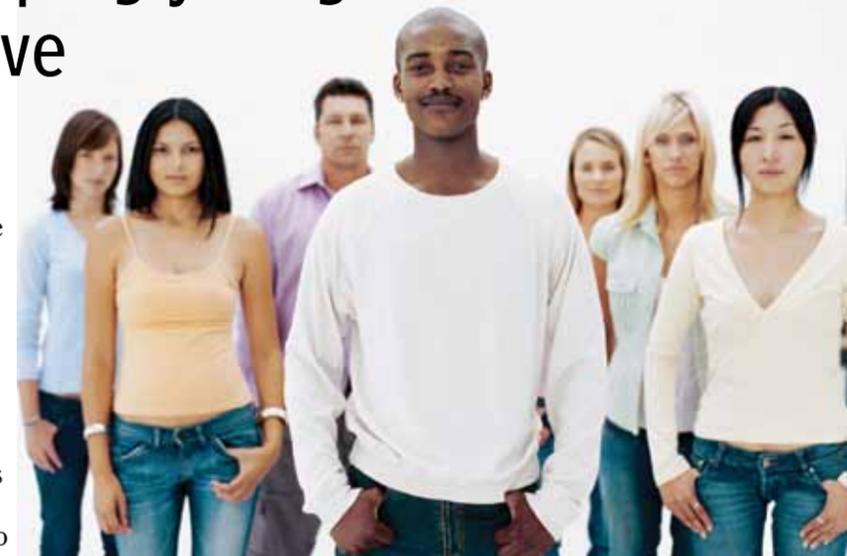
If you go to a coffee shop, concert or college football game you will see a plethora of young adults, but when it comes to Sunday morning worship, attendance is sparse. To counteract this reality and "make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world," our conference adopted the "All Things New" strategy in 2008. By developing new faith communities that are relevant and practical to the lives of young adults, the hope is that they will return to church or go for the first time.

This is a great idea, but what about the young adults who are still present in the pews on Sundays? What can we do to equip and empower them?

The excitement of getting young adults back into church blinds us to young adults who are still in our midst offering themselves and their gifts to God. An important part of "All Things New" which is often overlooked is to "strengthen the ministries of existing churches." We cannot move forward and start new faith communities if we do not have effective leaders to start them. The main focus of this initiative is really about leadership development.

Many churches do not know what to do with the young adults they have. They are excited to have them, but they do not know how to equip and empower them. To confront this, Virginia Conference staff, in partnership with the Young Adult Council, took action. They joined forces a year ago to hold three focus groups on leadership development. Groups met in the northern, southeastern and western regions of Virginia in order to foster young adult clergy and laity participation. A conference staff member and a Young Adult Council member facilitated each group.

The resounding theme from these young adults was that they are still in ministry and service today because someone believed in them and saw their gifts for ministry. Someone gave them a chance and mentored them so that they could be formed into spiritually grounded, confident and effective leaders. After the focus groups met, a discussion about the results was held by the Young Adult Council and other focus group participants in January 2010. Following that meeting, members of the conference staff met to incorporate the fruits of these discussions into a final product. This is how the Young Adult Leadership Initiative was born. This initiative was approved last February by the Common Table and was presented at 2010 Annual Confer-



ence by Alan Combs, chair of the Young Adult Council.

This initiative is spiritually grounded though the sacrament of baptism. When children are baptized, the church promises, with God's help, to "surround *this* person with a community of love and forgiveness, that they may grow in their trust of God and be found faithful in their service to others." The Young Adult Leadership Initiative is an intentional way to call Virginia Conference members to live out their baptismal vows and create opportunities for young adults to "grow in their service to others." It is also a strategic plan to empower and equip young adult laity and clergy for mission and ministry.

The Young Adult Leadership Initiative calls every conference agency and board to action by asking them to "intentionally engage in the calling, forming and sending of Christian young adult leaders for the transformation of the church and world." Through this initiative, lay members have the opportunity for spiritual formation and discernment through mentoring relationships and leadership positions at the local church and conference level. Clergy are given even more resources to build a vital support system that will equip them to participate in healthy self-care habits, including opportunities for spiritual nourishment and Sabbath. Through this initiative, the Young Adult Council will provide adequate assistance, resources and partnership to the conference boards so that together they can empower and equip the young adults in our midst.

The hope for the Young Adult Leadership Initiative is that our conference will make a concerted effort to nurture, receive and take seriously the gifts for ministry and mission of young adults. □

— The Rev. Jessie Squires is associate pastor at Warwick Memorial UMC in Newport News, where she leads The Lampstand emergent worship service.

VocationCARE practices help young people find their paths into leadership

by Alan Combs

One of the points of the Virginia Conference's Young Adult Leadership Initiative about which the Young Adult Council has been the most excited is the charge to "resource local churches on ways to incorporate young adults in leadership, including mutual mentoring."

Our understanding is that all Christians have a call from God that is grounded in the baptismal grace that draws us into Christ's Body and follows us our whole lives being nourished by the grace we receive in Holy Communion at the Lord's Table.

In our search for material to help resource local churches, we were especially concerned that such material be applicable to as many people as possible. With the Fund for Theological Education's VocationCARE, we believe we have found just what we were looking for.

What compels the Young Adult Council about VocationCARE is that it gives people space to consider potential answers to the question "Is there more to life than this?" VocationCARE is a journey with young people to identify their deepest passions, to discover how those passions intersect with the needs of the world, and then to respond to God's call to act on and live out their discovery. The way that this happens is spelled out in the "CARE" part of VocationCARE:

- C: Create space to explore Christian vocation together;
- A: Ask self-awakening questions together;
- R: Reflect theologically on self and community;
- E: Establish and enact ministry opportunities.

Rather than being abstract principles related to vocation, each step of VocationCARE is accompanied by concrete practices that allow an embodied participation in the process. Thus, participants journey together in a safe

space with the goal at the end of taking particular actions as a result of what they have discerned in the experience.

The beauty of VocationCARE is that it is adaptable to many different contexts. We are already working to introduce these practices in many different areas in the life of the conference. VocationCARE is not an initiative or program that we are trying to impose upon the conference. Instead, it is an invitation.

We are beginning by exploring particular contexts that we believe would be fertile ground for VocationCARE practices. We are working to introduce VocationCARE practices into the conference's Calling 21 program, the mentoring process for those seeking to discern whether they are called to enter into the ordained ministry candidacy process, and we are also in the process of identifying churches and other ministries with potential or existing young adult ministries.

VocationCARE can be transformative in any context that takes it seriously, even in churches that currently have few young adults. Intergenerational VocationCARE experiences have great po-

tential to transform the life of a church. Creating spaces for persons of different ages to share their stories with one another creates opportunities for churches to discern new directions to which God might be calling their church. It also creates opportunities for mutual mentoring where younger folks learn from more experienced folks as well as the experienced folks learning from their younger brothers and sisters.

To truly get a sense of VocationCARE's worth is to go through the process. Imagine a culture in your congregation that creates space for young adults to connect with God in ways that make a real difference in their lives and their desire to make a difference in the world. Imagine what it would look like in your church to have a growing number of folks who are actively considering the ways that their own passions connected with God's larger story. Imagine the ways committee meetings could be transformed for folks with a common language working to discern God's call on their lives and on the lives of the congregation as a whole.

If you are interested in learning more or even being trained in this process, e-mail me at <assocpastor@humclynchburg.org>, or Angie Williams at <AngieWilliams@vaumc.org>. □

— The Rev. Alan Combs is associate pastor at Heritage UMC in Lynchburg.



(Above: right) Angie Williams, conference director of Children's, Youth, Young Adult, and Higher Education Ministries, lunches with Jessie Squires (left) and other young adult leaders attending a recent VocationCARE meeting in Atlanta. (Right) Alan Combs makes a poster for one of the workshops at the Atlanta gathering.



GREENHOUSES OF HOPE: Congregations learn how to grow young leaders

Make green a desert place. Take something barren, lifeless even, and slowly tend it with the right amounts of water, sunlight and nutrients. Watch life return. In time, green shoots emerge.

We've been looking for green shoots lately. We've been scanning congregations for where youth and young adults want to be, where young people are heard to say "If this is church, bring it on!" In the midst of somber news about mainline denominational instability, we hear whispers of other realities, of a renewed imagination for the role of young leaders. Where young people want to be, young leaders will arise.

We tell the story of seven of these churches in thick, rich detail for a book called *Greenhouses of Hope: Congregations and the Practices that Nurture Young Leaders* (2010, Alban Institute). A "Greenhouse of Hope" is a congregation freeing itself to experiment both with newly imagined and time-honored ways of following the path of Jesus. Its members respond to God's love through practices that genuinely embrace the gifts of youth and young adults.

Our researchers paint pictures of these greenhouse churches — not as sterile, tidy hothouses — but more often as messy, organic, creative, intentional and sometimes even seemingly chaotic places that in richly varying ways cultivate just the right nutrients to sustain and strengthen emerging young Christian leaders. We tell these stories in hopes that readers will recognize familiar longings, catch glimpses of their own stories reflected, and be inspired to act more fully upon how they imagine church could be.

We hear about a church where young people regularly shape the liturgy. We see congregations reaching out in quirky new ways to their neighborhoods. We find a church creating hospitable space that invites the live questions and doubts of young people in unhurried, unworried ways. We know congregations where young people's gifts are not stored in the basement, but brought forth and celebrated as sustained whiffs of fresh air. If these churches were gardens, they'd have signs that say "flourish" and "grow" strategically placed where young people walk.

Researchers spent a year imbedded in these congregations, coming to know them inside and out. They invite you to view these congregations as you might visit a garden, noticing the native species and the kinds of care provided them. Wonder about what species grow in the soil of your congregation?

young leaders

Every single one of us has a good work to do in life. This good work not only accomplishes something needed in the world, but completes something in us. When it is finished, a new work emerges that will help us make green a desert place.

— Elizabeth O'Connor, Cry Pain, Cry Hope



by Dori Baker

What does your Greenhouse of Hope look like? Think about the ways your congregation is creating space for the dreams of young people to be grafted into God's dreams for the world.

At Calling Congregations, an initiative of the Fund for Theological Education, we are convinced that such congregations spring up from an intelligent awareness of their particular context, history, people, resources and crises. Each one looks different; there's no kit to buy, blueprint to

copy or curriculum to adopt. A "Greenhouse of Hope" may be a local congregation, a campus ministry, a spirit café or a house church. But there are specific communal practices at work in communities of faith that nurture vocation. We call these practices VocationCARE (see article on pg. 4).

We see these practices at work in vastly different ways in each of the "Greenhouses of Hope" we researched, and we envision a greenhouse movement as more congregations become intentional about engaging in these practices. To seed this movement, we are sharing these practices through the VocationCARE approach, which is flexible, adaptable and highly context-sensitive. VocationCARE involves forming a team of leaders who genuinely enjoy each other's company and the practices that lead to deeper knowledge of ourselves and one another. In the midst of this kind of space, we envision together how God is calling our community into the work of caring for vocation, in ourselves and in others. Training in the VocationCARE approach enables a team of leaders from congregations and church-related organizations to imagine and prototype the particular dream they sense that God has for their community. As these visions get enacted, the future of the church emerges. These are the green shoots that we hope for and create with the help of the Spirit.

Churches — institutions with deep roots and ancient ways — are catching glimpses of the future reflected in the eyes of their young. Teens and 20-somethings are seeing visions. When the adults who love them embrace this glimmer, when they nurture these young leaders, we see congregations engaged in God's good work of making green a desert place. □

— The Rev. Dori Baker is scholar in residence for the Fund for Theological Education. This essay is excerpted from *Greenhouses of Hope: Congregations Growing Young Leaders Who Will Change the World*, edited by Dori Baker. Copyright 2010 by the Alban Institute in Herndon. Used with permission.

Conference implementation team is 're-thinking' campus ministry

by
Jeff Harlow

Sometimes change is good. Sometimes deep change is necessary. Campus ministry is an exciting and complicated expression of God's reign on campuses across our Virginia Conference. The Board of Higher Education Ministries is proactively preparing for a new generation of students on our campuses by engaging in an intentional process of deep change.

About 18 months ago, the Common Table requested that a Campus Ministry Discernment Team be formed to evaluate current models of campus ministry as practiced in the Virginia Conference. This discernment team identified and recommended a set of changes to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of campus ministries in our conference.

The first step was to highlight where change is needed. The second step is to make the change happen. A follow-up Campus Ministry Implementation Team (CMIT) was formed to assess the initial recommendations and launch a corresponding set of implementation strategies.

Since June, CMIT has been reviewing the following recommendations identified by the discernment team:

1. Objectively and consistently evaluate the effectiveness and fruitfulness of campus ministries, including the development of a ministry assessment tool.

2. Objectively and consistently evaluate the best stewardship of campus ministries property.
3. Determine the most effective campus ministry organizational structure (in the context of all conference ministries), including the clarification of reporting relationships.

The CMIT is focused on a response to the three recommendations that helps conference campus ministries improve their effectiveness. This has led to extensive review of the conference's shared vision for campus ministries in the context of our shared mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

The nature and form of campus ministry program, leadership and funding are being reviewed. Ultimately, a comprehensive set of effectiveness measures will be identified for use across all campus ministries. The measures will be used by local campus ministry boards and staff, along with the Board of Higher Education Ministries to make changes that will improve local effectiveness.

The CMIT will continue its work in order to submit a report to the Common Table by the spring. □

— The Rev. Jeff Harlow is pastor at Brosville UMC, Danville District, and a member of the Campus Ministry Implementation Team.



Engaging in 'faithful grappling' at the University of Virginia

by Deborah Lewis

How does campus ministry look like ministry in other faith communities, like the local church?

Every week at The Wesley Foundation at the University of Virginia (UVA), we worship and celebrate Communion, gather for dinner and a discussion on issues and events, spend time in Bible studies

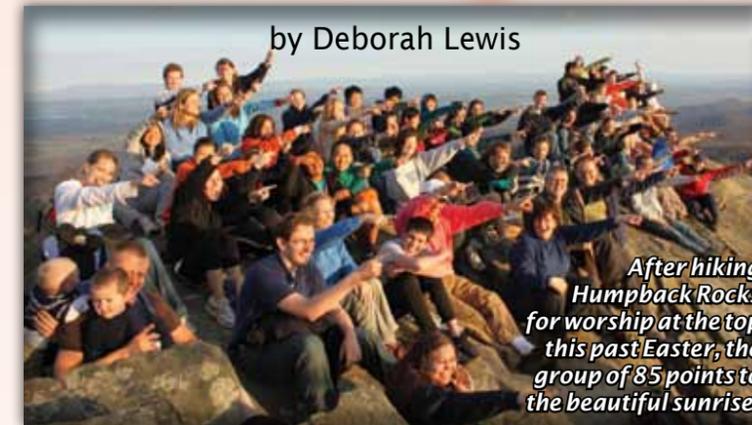
and other small discipleship groups, and blow off steam playing intramural sports (aka "Methodists with Muscles").

We reach out to the Charlottesville community and beyond, in mission with the PACEM (People and Congregations Engaged in Ministry) rotating homeless shelter, the women incarcerated in Fluvanna prison, and in various far-flung places on our spring break mission trips.

Like all faith communities, we are called to grapple with our faith and our location, called to be involved in the issues and concerns of those around us, called to let the love of Christ shine through our lives and our congregational life and out beyond the walls of the church into the life of the world.

For us, in our location at UVA, this means being active participants in a diverse, academic, fast-paced community of students, scholars, staff and local folks. In addition to our regular dinners, worship, small group studies, mission opportunities and fellowship events, here are a few ways our faithful grappling has taken shape recently:

- For the past three years students have gotten up in the wee hours of the morning (this year we began at 2:30 a.m.) in order to cook breakfast for students in the Muslim Student Association during the month of Ramadan, the Muslim religious holiday when students who rely on dining halls would have to skip breakfast because of their requirement to eat before the sun rises.
- In an effort to address the tragedy and the issues surrounding the death of Cavalier lacrosse player Yeardeley Love last spring, along with campus ministers and other local faith leaders, I led an interfaith worship service for the community.
- Each Easter morning we hike Humpback Rocks for our sunrise service. Last spring, 35 Wesley families, church members, alumni, students and another 50 friends from two other UVA Christian groups joined us at the top for worship.
- We offer a free drop-in yoga class on Wednesday nights which is open to the university community. We began this hoping to offer a place of respite and holy space during



the busy week and also as an outreach initiative. We have met new students, staff and faculty who've made this a regular part of their week and their spiritual practice.

- As part of our ecumenical work with other campus faith organizations, we sponsored two events this fall to promote un-

derstanding between people of differing religious views: "God on Grounds: A History of Religious Life at UVA" and "Conversation, Conversion, and Coercion: Interfaith Relations at the University."

- After reading *Finding Sanctuary: Monastic Steps for Everyday Life* by Abbot Christopher Jamison, students in our Wesley Residential Community are challenging themselves by going on a two-day silent retreat at Holy Cross Abbey monastery in Berryville during Christmas break this winter. (Just think of the true challenge this is to the ultra-connected Facebook generation!)
- Last winter we brought pastor/artist/writer Jan Richardson to town for a retreat-workshop that gathered 35 people from around the conference and beyond.
- We recently offered our building for a memorial service held for a longtime 12-step member who felt most at home in the Wesley Foundation, where he had come for meetings every week for years.
- We donated 50 candles to the Accept vigil at the Rotunda last month, organized to remember and call attention to the recent spate of suicides by young gay/lesbian/transgender students across the country.
- A Wesley student concerned for a friend involved in a coercive religious group invited the friend to Thursday night dinner so she could talk with me and ask questions.

Even in these difficult economic times, your campus ministry is thriving, reaching out in love, making disciples of Christ and transforming lives. Though Virginia Conference funds for campus ministry have decreased in the past few years, I know our conference's strong support for campus ministry has not diminished. Continued conference support is vital to creating and sustaining faithful, effective campus ministry. Your support is crucial to this mission of the church. You make it possible for people in this wide, diverse community to see the face of the church as a kind one and to trust it. □

— The Rev. Deborah Lewis is campus minister and director of the Wesley Foundation at the University of Virginia.

Campus ministry at Virginia State has impact on the community

by
Delano Douglas

United Campus Ministries at Virginia State University (VSU) is committed to spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ on campus and beyond through worship and Christian education, fellowship and community service.

Worship has been enhanced by new partnerships and offerings. In September, the music ministry was placed under the leadership of two VSU students who arrange songs of praise and worship for our 2 p.m. Sunday services (with an average attendance of more than 100). Musical groups from area churches in Petersburg and Richmond have also visited. We have a Praise Dance team of 17 students, and on Wednesday nights we have a powerful prayer and *Lectio Divina*-centered devotional hour, "Speak Lord: A Time to Hear from God."

Campus ministry partnered with several departments of the university, a member of University Relations and St. Joseph's Catholic Church to bring God's



Trombones to VSU in August, and more than 700 people were in attendance for this presentation of the James Weldon Johnson classic. On Dec. 3, we sponsored *Gospel Jam*, a Friday night open mic praise and worship celebration. During the Wednesday of midterm and final exam periods, members of the United Campus Ministries' board prepared a free fellowship meal for 300 students.

Our campus ministry has engaged in outreach to the cities of Petersburg and Richmond, and the counties of Dinwiddie and Chesterfield. Campus ministry staff, along with Bermuda Hundred UMC of Chester and VSU professionals, pro-

vided a lunch per month for the homeless citizens of Petersburg. In September and October, students ventured to Safe Haven of Richmond, partnering with volunteers from the city of Richmond and Union Presbyterian Seminary to prepare, serve and share a meal with the residents. Since June, VSU faculty, staff and students have been in relationship with the Dinwiddie County Department of Social Services to provide assistance for USDA commodities distribution.

On Oct. 18, a mentoring ministry called "Men of Troy" began at Ettrick Elementary School. Twenty-one male students were trained by the Virginia Mentoring Partnership to serve as mentors. "Men of Troy" meets Mondays after school and focuses on the development of a healthy mind, body and spirit through study groups, exercise and physical fitness activities and social skills workshops.

(Continued on pg. 9, VSU)

'The Gathering' offers transformative experiences for young adults

by Rachel Gilmore

In the summer of 2009, I arrived in Virginia Beach to start my first appointment as a Provisional Elder. My appointment was slightly unorthodox: I was being called by God and the Virginia Conference to plant a new faith community for young adults with the help of Courthouse Community United Methodist Church, the Norfolk District, and the Church Development Team. The Rev. Fran Cooper had a vision for reaching young adults in the Tidewater area and her church served as fertile ground to begin this new ministry.

At the start, there were 10 young adults who were active in a small group at Courthouse Community UMC, but by September there were 40 young adults involved with four weekly small groups. God was moving in this new faith community, which was named "The Gathering" United Methodist Church, and we held our first monthly worship service in November 2009.

As the community grew, we decided to move our Sunday morning worship services from Courthouse Community UMC to a local performing arts center in the heart of Virginia Beach. We launched our public worship service in that new venue on Sept. 12, 2010, and had 132 in attendance.

While worship attendance has dipped to around 90 people a week, there are weeks when we have 50-70 people attend a small group. This demonstrates a principle deep at the heart of our ministry: the Wesleyan model of small group formation and accountability is crucial in the discipleship process. We began by offering small groups that targeted young adults in various stages of life. For instance, the YUMs were Young Un-Married adults, while the YAMs were Young Adult Marrieds and the Pregs and Babes were couples who were expecting a child or had recently given birth.

This helped us draw in more interested young adults who were in a particular life-stage before we offered more curriculum-based small groups.

Currently, there are seven small groups that meet weekly, one that meets bimonthly and two that meet monthly.

How are we drawing in young adults in their 20s and 30s? By offering a variety of service opportunities and fellowship opportunities. We volunteer at Heart Havens, we helped to sponsor and build a Habitat for Humanity house, we hosted a Bulgarian missionary, raised money for Nothing but Nets malaria prevention campaign and hosted a Christmas party with free books and pizza for elementary school kids in a lower income neighborhood.

What do our fellowship events look like? We had Halloween murder mystery parties, "Worship at the Beach," "Chick Flick" movie nights and "Gathering Guys" events at local sports bars or baseball games.

I used to think a young adult was a single college student or young professional aged 18-25, but at The Gathering, we've realized that a young adult isn't defined by age or whether or not they have kids, but by the way they see life. Young adults are curious about faith, but cautious about becoming overly committed to something too soon. Young adults are serious about volunteerism and outreach work while spending a substantial amount of their income at Starbucks or on an active social life.

Young adults are longing for a place to belong and serve, but are not necessarily drawn to a traditional church setting. So, at The Gathering, I've preached a sermon on foot washing while washing the feet of others in a kiddie pool. We've broken tiles to make mosaic crosses in worship. We write letters to God after listening to the sermon. We sing modern songs and ancient hymns to modern tunes. We celebrate Communion every week and pray the "Lord's Prayer," but I wear jeans with my clerical collar.

In the last four months we have rejoiced in two adult baptisms and an infant baptism as we see the Holy Spirit continue to move in this faith community. We've



Pastor Rachel Gilmore (right) and others from The Gathering UMC give some hands-on assistance with a Habitat for Humanity house.

rejoiced as some amazing individuals in their 40s, 50s, 60s and 70s have joined us for worship and found a place to connect and participate in this youthful church. The leadership team at The Gathering also formulated our vision statement: "Gathered together, empowered by Christ, transforming the world."

So, what's in store for The Gathering? More small groups, more leadership training for our committed core team, more outreach projects, more emergent worship and more excitement as we see how God is making All Things New. □

— The Rev. Rachel Gilmore is pastor of The Gathering in Virginia Beach.

On the RISE: new faith community in Harrisonburg takes flight

"Last fall there were a lot of miracles going on in Harrisonburg," says the Rev. Amanda Garber, and she's not talking about James Madison University's football upset of Virginia Tech.

It's the successful start of something new: a faith community birthed out of the old campus ministry at James Madison University (JMU) by Garber and her team.

Like many church-related things, the idea started as a small mustard seed: In this case, the need for more parking at the Wesley Foundation.

"There was tremendous potential that was not being realized," said Garber. "We realized God was calling us to do a new thing."

A year ago a leadership team was formed as the first step in establishing a new faith community that would be more than expanded campus ministry. "We needed a community that would connect with adults age 18 to 30-ish," said Garber, 36, "but welcome everyone with open arms."

The name RISE says different things to different people, she says. "To me it is resurrection imagery, a verb instead of a noun. We wanted something with passion and vibrancy. 'Wesley Foundation' just didn't have a lot of meaning, even for our United Methodist students."

Garber says RISE extends beyond the university community but is still very much connected to JMU. In fact folks from three other area colleges — Eastern Mennonite, Bridgewater and Blue Ridge Community College — have been involved.

In the fall the new faith community began meeting in the basement of a restaurant/bar on Main Street in downtown Harrisonburg. In January the congregation will move to a larger venue, Court Square Theater, having already outgrown the restaurant. Worship attendance had held steady around 125.

RISE has a handful of key tenants. One is passionate worship, which starts at "exactly 10-ish" on Sunday mornings. Another is connecting with the local community.

"Our students inside the 'JMU Bubble' have no connection to Harrisonburg," Garber said. "So we are going to the places where pain and hope intersect, the places where lives can be transformed."

The ministry's "Blue Skies" list includes plans for a homeless ministry called RISE and Shine, a bakery ("with a name like RISE you have to have a bakery," muses Garber), mission trips and small groups. A series of "bridge events" are envisioned, things that will build bridges between the JMU and Harrisonburg communities.

Another important element is a peer-to-peer mentoring program — Sister2Sister and Brother2Brother — which involves



(Above) Young adults join the RISE leadership team for a worship service in the parking lot to celebrate the former campus ministry's new identity.



(Above) Julie Yannuzzi, Brittany Conley and the Rev. Amanda Garber greet passersby in downtown Harrisonburg as part of their outreach to get to know people in the community.



around 60 children and 75 young adult mentors.

"We're seeing a huge variety of people coming through the doors," said Garber. "We're connecting with a lot of people who were disconnected."

Garber said there's already a perception around town that RISE is "that hippie church." It might be because RISE's leaders don't take themselves very seriously, she says. "We do take following Jesus very seriously. We just have a playful way of communicating where we are."

The end result is "so much more incredible than anything I can imagine," Garber says.

For more information, visit <www.RiseHarrisonburg.com> or look for RISE on Facebook. □

— Neill Caldwell

VSU Campus Ministry (Continued from pg. 6)

In November, campus ministries participated in the 34th annual downtown Petersburg churches' United Walk Against Hunger. Seven students walked representing campus ministries, and four positioned themselves at a water stop on the course to hand out refreshments for participants.

You can see photos of our students at work serving God and neighbor on our Facebook page.

United Campus Ministries at VSU is ambitious in serving Christ through this kind of work. It has been a blessed experience to see the work of the Lord being done through these young adults. They truly are making a difference and having a tremendous impact on the community. We are thankful to God for the Virginia Conference and the Petersburg District for providing continuing support. □

— The Rev. Delano Douglas is director of United Campus Ministries at Virginia State University.

Virginia

Bishop Kammerer, Cabinet announce new 16-district configuration for Virginia Conference

Bishop Charlene Kammerer and the Cabinet have announced new boundaries, district names and local church district assignments that will reduce the number of districts in the Virginia Conference from 18 to 16, effective July 1.

Three districts – Ashland, Portsmouth and Rappahannock – will be discontinued, and a new Fredericksburg District created. Three other district names will be new, all named for major waterways in the corresponding parts of the Commonwealth: the James River District, the Elizabeth River District, and the York River District.

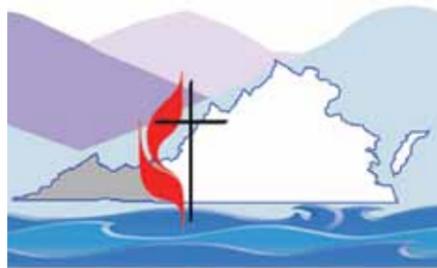
“The Cabinet has unanimously approved the new names and is pleased to share this information with everyone across the conference,” said Bishop Kammerer. “We are grateful to all those persons who suggested names for consideration.”

Work was finalized at the Cabinet’s December meeting.

At its June 2010 session, Annual Conference approved a Task Force on Redistricting recommendation to reduce the number of districts to 16. Neither district names nor final district boundaries were officially presented to the Annual Conference by the task force because, according to *The Book of Discipline*, “it is the duty of the bishop to form the districts after consultation with the district superintendents and after the number of the same has been determined by vote of the annual conference.”

The Task Force did, however, present a scenario to demonstrate the feasibility of its proposal. The Cabinet’s plan is quite similar to the model put forth by the Task Force on Redistricting.

The reduction won’t officially take effect until July 1, following 2011 Annual Conference. This is the first time district lines have been redrawn since 1972.



The graphic illustration above is part of the official logo for the Virginia Conference of The United Methodist Church. The section in white represents the area that contains the 18 districts that make up the Virginia Conference. That area has been reconfigured to 16 districts, effective July 1, 2011. The gray area represents the southwestern portion of the state included in the Holston Conference.

The **Richmond District** will be expanded from 44 churches to 66 churches, due primarily to the inclusion of 15 churches from Hanover County (which are currently in the Ashland District), and also from churches in New Kent and Powhatan counties.

The new **Fredericksburg District** will include churches from the current Ashland and Rappahannock districts and Fauquier County churches from the Alexandria District.

The **Elizabeth River District** will be an expanded version of the Norfolk District, with 20 more churches, the majority coming from Portsmouth and Chesapeake.

Multiple churches from Hampton and Newport News plus churches from

the current Rappahannock District will form the new **York River District**.

The new **James River District** will be slightly larger than the current Petersburg District, mainly from the addition of churches from the current Portsmouth District.

Seven Mecklenburg County churches and 11 Brunswick County churches, all formerly on the Petersburg District, help expand the **Farmville District** from 92 to 109 churches.

The **Winchester District**, which currently has the largest number of churches with 99, will lose 13 churches in the realignment.

Alexandria, Arlington, Harrisonburg, Lynchburg and Charlottesville districts will see only minor changes, while the **Roanoke, Eastern Shore, Staunton and Danville** districts will not be changed at all.

For a complete list of new districts and the charges/churches within them, visit the conference Web site <www.vaumc.org>. □

2010 Conference Journal now posted on Web site

The 2010 Virginia Annual Conference *Journal* is now available on the conference Web site, <www.vaumc.org>. One printed copy will be mailed to each local church. One copy on a CD will be mailed to each active clergy, retired clergy and spouse of deceased clergy at no cost. Additional copies may be purchased at a cost of \$10 for CD or \$25 for print version by calling the Virginia Conference Communications office at (804) 521-1110 or 1-800-768-6040, ext. 110. □

Dean of Duke Chapel, GBGM General Secretary to speak at 2011 Annual Conference

“Being Christ to Others: Snapshots of the Kingdom” will be the theme when 2011 Annual Conference convenes June 15-19 at the Roanoke Civic Center in June. The focus of the gathering will be on mission . . . as well as electing delegates to 2012 General and Jurisdictional conferences.

Bishop Charlene Kammerer has invited the Rev. Sam Wells, dean of Duke Chapel in Durham, N.C., to be the conference preacher.

A native of England, his experience includes working in inner-city Liverpool and service at four parishes as a Church of England priest from 1991-2005. He has an M.A. in Modern History from Oxford, a B.D. in Systematic Theology from Edinburgh University and a Ph.D. in Christian Ethics from Durham University. He has published six books, including *Community-Led Estate Regeneration and the Local Church* (2003), *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics* (2004) and *Speaking the Truth: Preaching in a Pluralistic Culture* (Abingdon, 2008). He also teaches Christian Ethics at Duke Divinity School.

The Bible study leader will be Thomas Kemper, new General Secretary of the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM). Kemper, from Germany, is the first lay person to serve as General Secretary of GBGM and the first person from outside the United States elected a General Secretary of The United Methodist Church. A former missionary in Brazil, Kemper led the Germany Central Conference Board of Missions for 12 years. He can speak five languages.

The Rev. Gerry Reist, secretary of the General Conference, announced that the Virginia Conference will elect 13 clergy and 13 lay delegates to 2012 General Conference. An additional 13 clergy and 13 lay persons will be elected delegates to the South-



Thomas Kemper (left), GBGM General Secretary, and Sam Wells (below), dean of Duke Chapel, will speak at this year’s Virginia Annual Conference in Roanoke.



eastern Jurisdictional Conference and also will serve as reserves for General Conference delegates. Another 10 clergy and 10 laity will be elected jurisdictional conference reserves.

Because it’s a voting year, Annual Conference will start on Wednesday night with the separate clergy and laity sessions. A nominating ballot for clergy will be taken during this session; there will be a “meet the lay nominees” time after the laity session. The first ballot will occur Thursday morning after the Rules Committee report and following a short “centering” worship service.

The ordination service will be on Friday night and the memorial service on Saturday. A Thursday evening service will be a worship service celebrating conference mission. There will be exhibits related to mission in the Civic Center.

Organizers are working to improve the accessibility issues that the Roanoke Civic Center presents, which has been a challenge in years past, according to Martha Stokes, conference staff liaison to accessibility issues.

“The building is older and was not built to current ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) codes,” Stokes said. “We have many of the same concerns as are usually heard from our older local churches.”

Recently, a team that included persons from the Blue Ridge Independent Living Center and Lisa Moorman from the Civic Center, did an audit of the facility’s handicapped accessibility.

“As a result of the audit, the Civic Center has scheduled sensitivity training, which made a big difference between the two years we spent in Norfolk,” said Stokes. “This will benefit not only our conference, but all who use the Civic Center.”

The staff at the facility is working to correct what it can, but problems will likely persist. The only fully accessible restroom available is in the Special Events Center lobby; other restrooms are not wide enough for wheelchairs.

There is no access between buildings without steps without having to go outside. The only accessibility is through the staff lounge – which Civic Center representatives have agreed to open for this purpose.

The Civic Center says it will add more handicapped parking spaces for outside, and have greeters directing arrivals to the registration area. Planners also have talked about having accessible transportation to lunch and banquets. □

January closings announced for conference offices

Offices in the Virginia United Methodist Center, located in Glen Allen, will close Monday, Jan. 3, for New Year’s and Monday, Jan. 17, in observance of Martin Luther King Jr.’s birthday.

'Together we can': United Methodist Church puts new emphasis on connectional giving

As the national economy continues its sluggish recovery, connectional giving is receiving new emphasis in The United Methodist Church.

"When we give, great things happen," said Mary Lynn Holly of United Methodist Communications. "We can do together what otherwise we cannot do separately."

Church resources are focusing on the commands of Christ and our Wesleyan heritage as the basis for a worldwide network of transformational ministries.

"A network of interconnected relationships – from local church, district, conference and general church mission and ministry – are essential to fulfilling Jesus' Great Commission," Holly added.

Rising health care costs, insurance costs, utilities and building maintenance costs are all putting additional pressure on churches.

In 2009, the Virginia Conference paid 83.24 percent of its general church apportionments, broken down this way:

- 84.94 percent of World Service Fund;
- 81.14 percent of Africa University Fund;
- 77.90 percent of Black College Fund;
- 88.47 percent of Episcopal Fund;
- 77.15 percent of General Administration Fund;
- 78.19 percent of Interdenominational Cooperation Fund;
- 77.45 percent of Ministerial Education Fund.

In addition, churches from the conference contributed these amounts for the church's six Special Sunday offerings:

- \$12,993 for Human Relations Day;
- \$92,498 for One Great Hour of Sharing;
- \$11,714 for Native American Ministries Sunday;
- \$5,199 for Peace with Justice Sunday;
- \$24,901 for World Communion Sunday;
- \$14,115 for United Methodist Student Day.

Because people are more likely to open their wallets when there is an emotional component, United Methodist church members are always quick to give for special needs, such as Hurricane Katrina relief along the Gulf Coast, or following the January 2010 earthquake in Haiti. In 2008, the 34,000 churches and 45,000 clergy in the denomination gave a total of \$6.3 billion. That's \$121 million a week, or about \$12,000 per minute!

These gifts to the Advance and other designated areas are considered "second mile" giving. The apportioned funds are "first mile," or the first priority of members and churches. These funds provide the framework of the entire denomination, and enable us to help more people in more ways.

Some members grumble that apportionments are a "tax" or even a "franchise fee." There's also misconception that the general church receives a large portion of the apportionment. But for every \$1,000 in apportionment

money received, \$845 is returned to the local church in various services and programs; \$124 goes to the conference, district and jurisdiction, \$22 goes to apportioned funds including places like Africa University and the Ministerial Education Fund, and \$9 goes to the general fund.

Clergy leadership on giving is important. The church conducted research from 2006-2010 and found that many church members say they seldom receive information on giving from their pastors. The research identified a 16 percent increase in participation when conferences made a point of asking its ministers to emphasize a Special Sunday offering or other specific area.

United Methodist Communications has developed DVDs, posters and brochures on giving. Look for "Together we can," the theme for 2009-2012. Visit <www.umcsgiving> to learn more and to access these resources. □

– Neill Caldwell

Jim Bergdoll stepping aside as Virginia United Methodist Foundation president, executive director

James R. Bergdoll, president and executive director of the United Methodist Foundation of the Virginia Conference, Inc., announced his retirement at the meeting of the board of directors on Dec. 9 to take effect this spring.

Bergdoll has served as president and executive director of the conference Foundation since 1999, following 41 years in college administration, first at Randolph-Macon College in Ashland and 32 years at Virginia Wesleyan College in Norfolk. He was serving as vice president for development and college relations when he retired from Virginia Wesleyan in December 1998.

Bergdoll is a member of the Virginia Conference Board of Laity, secretary of the board of the Preachers Relief Society and vice chair of the Norfolk District Board of Missions. He was a delegate to the General Conference of The United Methodist Church in 1988 and 2004, and has been a delegate to

the Jurisdictional Conference of The United Methodist Church from 1980 until 2004. He also served terms on the General Board of Higher Education and the Lake Junaluska Assembly Center.

The assets of the Foundation have grown from \$19 million in 1999 to \$34 million as of November 2010. More than \$3 million in new funds have been invested with the Foundation in 2010.

Bergdoll has traveled nearly 200,000 miles to visit in churches and with church groups throughout the Virginia



Bergdoll

Conference to make presentations on endowment and planned giving and investment of local church funds.

"We are grateful for the dedicated service Jim has provided to the Foundation," said Lorilei Roberts of Purcellville, chair of the Foundation. "Jim has nearly doubled the Foundation's managed assets despite two significant market down-turns in the past decade and has worked tirelessly around the conference promoting, teaching and facilitating the values of Christian stewardship."

A search committee has been formed and the process is under way to hire a new executive director. The board hopes to name a successor by the Foundation's board meeting in May. (See ad on pg. 34 of this *Advocate* or review a complete description on the Web at <www.vaumc.org/jobs>). □

Planned gifts provide key funding for future ministries of the church

The start of a new year is a good time for people to review their financial plans. Special gift opportunities are available to individuals through planned or deferred gifts. These are gifts that are planned now but benefits to the local church are deferred until a later date. Very often these planned or deferred gifts can provide an immediate income for the donor with significant tax advantages plus the satisfaction of knowing that you have made provision for your local church, or church agency or institution, for the future.

There are basically four kinds of planned or deferred gifts:

1. **Bequests:** This is the simplest way to make a deferred gift. You place in your will appropriate language to bequeath to your local church, or church agency, a specific amount, a percentage of your estate, or the residue of your estate after other provisions are made, either for a specific purpose or as an unrestricted gift.
2. **Insurance:** You file a beneficiary designation form with your life insurance company indicating that your local church, or church agency, is the full beneficiary or the partial beneficiary, or the contingent beneficiary of a life insurance policy which you now have. There may be cases where you would want to name the local church, or church agency, as the beneficiary AND the owner of the policy.
3. **Life income vehicles:** These fall into two categories: A **charitable gift annuity** is when a donor (or husband and wife together) sets aside some funds from which the donor, or the couple, will receive a guaranteed in-



come for life based on the age (or ages) of the donor or donors at the time the annuity is established, and the amount that is initially set aside for the annuity. For instance, at age 70, a single donor who sets aside \$10,000 will receive an annual annuity payout of 5.7 percent or \$570. If it is a two-life charitable gift annuity for two persons age 70 each, the annuity payout on the \$10,000 is 5.2 percent or \$520 jointly. The amount of the annuity payment never changes. However the higher the age when the annuity is established, the higher the payout rate. A significant portion of the annuity payout will likely be tax exempt. The initial gift to establish this kind of charitable annuity can be treated as a charitable deduction, within the tax code, and the donor has the satisfaction of knowing that at the death of the annuitant, or annuitants, the remainder value of the initial amount placed in the annuity will go to their local church, or some other United Methodist cause which the donor has designated. There are tax advantages to gifting appreciated securities to fund a charitable gift annuity. A **charitable remain-**

der trust is similar to a charitable gift annuity in that the donor receives a life income from the trust and then the local church, or other beneficiary, normally receives the remainder value of the trust at the death of the donor. There are several variations in this type of trust. The big difference in a charitable trust is that the donor receives a set percentage of the fair market value of the trust (say 6 percent) at the end of each year and the amount of the annual payout will vary depending on the value of the trust. This payout percentage rate is set when the trust is established. Appreciated securities, or property, are often given to fund the trust.

4. **Other planned or deferred gift opportunities** are available with IRAs or other tax-deferred instruments.

In all of these matters you will want to seek qualified legal and financial counsel. The Virginia United Methodist Foundation is available to assist you in planning and implementing these gift opportunities and can assist your local church in presenting these special opportunities to provide funding for ministry. For further information, contact the Foundation at 1-800-768-6040, ext. 122 or at (804) 521-1122; or by e-mail at <Foundation@vaumc.org>. □

– Jim Bergdoll, president of the Virginia United Methodist Foundation

Joint Holston-Virginia conferences ministry will bring *Disciple Bible Study* into prisons

Officials from the Virginia and Holston conferences and Chaplain Service Prison Ministry of Virginia met Nov. 30 with the executive director of *Disciple Bible Outreach Ministry* (DBOM) to develop a working agreement for expanding prison ministry within the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Meeting at Bonsack UMC in the Roanoke District, United Methodist Men presidents Jim Green of the Virginia Conference and Mike Smith of the Holston Conference signed the agreement along with prison chaplains from both conferences and the Rev. Mark Hicks of North Carolina-based DBOM.

United Methodist Men on the denominational level has targeted prison ministry as one of its primary focuses.

Gene Mims, a lay person from the Petersburg District, is the chair of the task force that is creating a new entity, to be called *Disciple Bible Outreach Ministry-Virginia*. A more official affiliation document should be ready in January after the new board applies for 501.C3 nonprofit status.

Responding to a call from Gil Hanke, president of United Methodist Men, Hicks said he began looking at how the ministry he's led since its inception might grow from a one-state, two-conference partnership to something that could happen across the connection.

"We've decided to establish affiliate organizations in their own areas," said Hicks, "since prison systems are somewhat different in each state, and people like to support ministries in their own area."

DBOM began in 1999 as a joint ministry of the North Carolina and Western North Carolina conferences to promote the popular Bible study series in prison settings – and in all local churches. The ministry has grown to more than 300 volunteers involved in 70 correctional centers across North Carolina. In 2002, the organization was allowed to also enter the state's juvenile justice system and developed its own youth curriculum, "Rings of Fellowship," which is based on *Disciple Bible Study*.

Retired Bishop Richard Wilke, author of the four-part adult Bible study series, is an active member of DBOM's ministry.

DBOM will spin its current operation – which is based solely in North Carolina – into a national division with a North Carolina affiliate. The national office will then provide affiliates with training, materials and guidance. The organization is looking to establish affiliates in Tennessee, Kansas and New York, so the joint Virginia-Holston effort will be a pilot.

All volunteers must go through a certification process. The organization will offer training for those volunteers who want to lead the Bible study in a local correctional facility.

"The training is exactly the same everywhere," said Hicks. "We have to maintain the quality of the program. And it's important that volunteers behave a certain way (inside the prisons) and know that they'll be terminated if they do not."

DBOM will set up a training session for prison chaplains in March and then a larger statewide volunteer training in the fall.

Involvement of the chaplains' group will help ease the start of this expansion of prison ministry, said the Rev. Randy Myers, vice president of Chaplain Services of Virginia. "A smooth relationship is so key," Myers said. "Having that will really make everything flow together."

There are six correctional centers in the Holston Conference part of the Common-

wealth, and 40 within the boundary of the Virginia Conference. Plus there are three juvenile facilities, all located in central Virginia.

The plan is to offer *Disciple Bible*



Gene Mims (seated), a lay person from the Petersburg District in the Virginia Conference, signs an agreement to establish a new prison ministry in the Commonwealth of Virginia with Disciple Bible Outreach Ministries. Standing, from left are: Mike Smith, president of UMMen in the Holston Conference; the Rev. Paul Beighley, chaplain at Greensville (Va.) Correctional Center; the Rev. Randy Myers, vice president of Chaplain Service Prison Ministry of Virginia; the Rev. Mark Hicks, executive director of Disciple Bible Outreach Ministries; the Rev. Glenn Rowley, director of Mission and Global Justice for the Virginia Conference; and Virginia Conference UMMen president Jim Green.

Study groups in women's facilities as well as men's, and the "Rings" course in juvenile facilities.

"We don't want to forget our United Methodist Women," said Mims. "They're the hardest-working folks we have."

Also on the task force are the Rev. Glenn Rowley, Mission and Global Justice director for the Virginia Conference; the Rev. Gaye King of the Holston Conference staff; the Rev. Paul Griffith, prison chaplain from Holston; the Rev. Paul Beighley, prison chaplain from Virginia; Linda Crane; LeRoy Henry and Lyman Hubbard.

To learn more about DBOM, visit <www.disciplebibleoutreach.org>. To learn about how your church might become involved in this ministry, contact Mims at (804) 733-8623 or <gene.mims@comcast.net>. □

– Neill Caldwell

Petersburg and Hungary districts are 'In Mission Together'

The Petersburg and the Hungary districts have completed their first year *In Mission Together*, a program of the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM). This mission partnership links churches and districts in Central and Southern Europe with the churches of the Petersburg District in the Virginia Conference for the purpose of friendship, mutual understanding and support.

GBGM is encouraging these relationships in order to strengthen the work of The United Methodist Church in these areas where the church has had to struggle with the long-term effects of secularization, atheism, cynicism and political prohibitions that came against the church during the Communist era when they were controlled by the Soviet Union.

It was an exciting moment in November 2009, during the Eastern Europe and Balkans Consultation in Greensboro, N.C., when the Petersburg District signed the document to become a partner with the Hungary District during a live, worldwide streaming computer broadcast, made possible by GBGM. Following that event Urs Schweizer, assistant to Bishop Patrick Streiff, bishop of Central and Southern Europe, sent the following message to Linda Carty, former missionary to the Czech Republic, and to me as the Petersburg District superintendent:

"I would like to let you know how grateful I am for this new relationship. The United Methodist Church is a global church, and we are one family even if we live in very different countries. However, as good (as) this may sound, it will always be a somehow theoretical issue – unless people start to get involved in personal relationships with brothers and sisters abroad; unless they start to visit others – and experience gracious hospitality; unless they start to get to know unknown people – and experience that these unknown people become dear friends; unless they start to support a local

church in another country – and experience that the faith stories of the people in this church are an encouragement for their own faith.

"I am very grateful that you decided to be *In Mission Together* with the members and friends of the UMC in Hungary, and I do hope that your relationship will bear fruit in the Petersburg District, in Hungary and wherever people may hear about it.

"It is a happy fact that every church or charge in the Petersburg District is contributing to this Advance Special. While the individual churches or charges were not asked for large monetary gifts, the important thing is that every church responded affirmatively. The churches of Hungary are small-membership churches and the same holds true for many of the Petersburg District churches."

A wonderful solidarity has taken place between the two districts in finding that we have much in common. Our district-to-district outreach has done much to help our Hungarian partners to extend their work with the Roma people, as described by the Rev. Istvan Csernak and his wife, Eva, who visited the district this past September. As speakers during the District Conference, they thanked the Petersburg District churches and explained how this important relationship is helping them to advance the cause of Christ, especially with people like the Romas (sometimes known as gypsies), who have had a difficult time finding a place in society, and to address many other challenges in this formerly Communist nation.

During the Csernaks' visit, they had the opportunity to visit and speak in a number of churches during a district-wide *Mission Saturation*, plus travel to a tobacco farm and attend a tobacco auction, meet with Bishop Charlene Kammerer, visit Wesley



The Rev. Istvan Csernak and his wife, Eva, from Hungary visit the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall in Washington, D.C.

Theological Seminary, and tour our nation's capital. Lay persons of the district hosted our esteemed guests in their homes, enjoying table fellowship, and helped them travel to their next destination.

The Csernaks, along with Bishop Streiff, invited me to attend their next Annual Conference in Budapest in April, to preach and to share the significance of the *In Mission Together* partnership from an American point of view with their pastors and lay members. Plans are also in the making to send a Volunteers In Mission team to Hungary during the summer to participate in a joint mission project, intended to meet human need and to deepen the relationship with our new friends. Carty is coordinator of this effort and can be reached through the district office at <Petersburgdistrict@vaumc.org>, if you have an interest in participating.

Dick Arnold of Blacksburg is the GBGM partnership coordinator and can be contacted at the following e-mail address: <dick.arnold@comcast.net>. The hope of GBGM is that many more Virginia churches and districts will become involved, discovering the deep faith of United Methodists in Central Europe and sharing with them in bringing the light of Jesus Christ to places that have suffered from political oppression and scarcity of resources. □

– The Rev. Jack Martin, Petersburg District superintendent

Small Church Leadership Initiative task force to begin meeting this month

The Small Church Leadership Initiative (SCLI) will be the next component in a series of conference-sponsored initiatives focusing on leadership in similarly sized congregations.

The SCLI follows the large and mid-size church initiatives, which were begun under the leadership of Bishop Charlene Kammerer as a partnership that included the Leadership Development Institute, the Board of Ordained Ministry and the Cabinet. The first two initiatives focused solely on the role of the lead pastor. The SCLI, however, will acknowledge the vital importance of the clergy-lay partnership and leadership in the small church. The task force will be composed of both clergy and lay members from across the conference.

The task force will serve as the study team to develop a strategic plan for leadership excellence. The first meeting has been set for Jan. 25 with Julie Kuhn Wallace, formerly with the General Board of Discipleship.

It is anticipated that the task force will meet for 1-2 years before an implementing body moves forward on recommendations that would be approved by the bishop, Cabinet and Common Table. The work of the task force will focus on churches within the conference that have an average worship attendance between 50 and 150. This is a total of 487 churches.

Bishop Kammerer has named members of the task force. Lay members are: Susie Wolf (chair) – Kenbridge UMC, Farmville District; Laura Babbitt – Community of Faith UMC, Arlington District; Stacy Gilman – St. Peter's UMC, Ashland District; Ronnie Justice – Asbury Memorial UMC, Richmond District; Rosabeth Kissman – Lower UMC, Rappahannock District; Dan Lovern – Central UMC, Roanoke District; Alice Richardson – St. James UMC, Peninsula District. Clergy members are: Mike Davis – North Amelia Charge, Farmville District; Alex Duncan – Jackson Street-Trin-

ity UMC, Lynchburg District; Mike Mayton – Wesley UMC, Winchester District; Hyung Il Moon – Epworth UMC, Norfolk District; Jan Prentice – Bermuda Hundred UMC, Petersburg District; Gail Thornberry – Crimora UMC, Harrisonburg District.

In addition, several other conference initiatives are in the works. The Associate Pastor Initiative is in a very early development state, as part of the Young Adult Leadership Initiative. Clara Gestwick has agreed to serve as chair of a task force that will study the issues relating to associate pastors and make recommendations on

how to move forward.

Also, the bishop, Cabinet and Board of Ordained Ministry will develop a plan to do cross-cultural training as part of the leadership excellence focus of the conference. Missional churches is yet another area that the conference is talking about for future initiatives.

"We want to be able to move with the needs of the moment with people who are passionate about that particular subject area," said Beth Downs, conference director of Ministerial Services. □

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Youth retreat participants celebrate God's creation

Picture this scene from the Eastern Shore District Youth Retreat this fall: Seventy-five youths and adults noisily emerge from the forest to find a quarter moon hanging over the dark water of the Chesapeake Bay. The moon illuminates, with the stars, thick, moist streams of fog that have settled around them in a wide field. Many kids are awestruck. Some have never been to camp or witnessed this beauty. A circle is formed and we receive the gift of bread and grape juice.

A significant migration of "Earthkeepers" gathered at Camp Occohannock, on Virginia's Eastern Shore, in November to glorify God and learn to become more attentive stewards of God's creation. The annual retreat attracted youths, ages 11-17, who arrived from as far away as the southern tip of the Shore and beyond its northern boundaries into Maryland, to a large group who traveled by boat from their homes on Tangier Island.

In addition to an adult support team of 20 local youth workers, including Camp Director Jerry Mobley and his wife, Debbie, the Rev. Pat Watkins, executive director of Caretakers of God's Creation, served as the worship leader throughout the weekend experience. Watkins is a Church and Community Worker through the General Board of Global Ministries in the Virginia Conference.

As Christians, these young Earthkeepers were called to examine through Scripture, conversation and action, the three most important and interconnected relationships in their lives: their relationships with God, one another and the earth, understanding that the earth belongs, not to us, but to God.

Much of the weekend was spent outdoors. Early Saturday morning after worship, teams worked to clean up the shoreline and to remove invasive saltwater bushes to make room for indigenous plant life. While a group prepared a garden for next season, another picked up litter on the roadsides outside of camp. A final group was



(Above) A group picture of the youths and adults who attended the retreat at Camp Occohannock on the Bay. (Right) Part of the group cleans up the garden, getting it ready for next season.



busy in the kitchen making chicken vegetable soup from scratch to serve participants.

After lunch, a handful of youths stayed in the kitchen to learn how to make jam while others chose from the variety of "break-out" sessions offered. These included basketball, outdoor games, archery, bicycling, repurposed art projects and a musical jam session (not to be confused with the "jelly" session above). An "Interplay" workshop was also offered where storytelling, movement, silence and music were used to build spontaneity, self-awareness and collaboration with others.

The evening hours became more introspective, with a testimony from one of the adult youth workers and the query of how we can redeem our relationships with each other and with creation. Part of the discussion considered how we are called, as part of creation, to practices of good self-care. We were asked to identify our unique gifts, no matter what they are, and recognize that God can use them to be who God created each of us to be.

Strong student leadership provided role models for participants. Joel Joyner, 17, a student intern at Franktown UMC, led ice-breakers Friday evening and was also audiovisual technician for the event. Music was

led by 17-year-old Daniel Hiler and two younger participants: Caroline Hiler, 13, and Rachel Joyner, 14. As the weekend progressed, others joined the band, and lots of joyful noise was made with musicians sharing the instruments available.

As a way to keep the cost of the retreat more affordable, organizers Peter Surran and Karen Hatch identified churches to provide and supplement meals with volunteers and donations. Crews arrived from Painter Garrison, Market Street and St. Thomas UMCs to help with lunch and dinner – and donations from the youth participants, and from Swain and Franktown UMCs – kept the breakfast and snack tables well-stocked. An offering of \$202 was collected at worship Sunday for Caretakers of God's Creation.

The weekend culminated with worship, prayers, hugs, laughter, goodbyes, then standing at the foot of the cross in solidarity with Christ and all creation for a group photo. The moment was captured after great fun and the planting of many seeds, with confidence in the harvest to come. □

– Karen Hatch, the Eastern Shore District youth coordinator

All Things New strategy bearing fruit in conference

All Things New is bearing fruit in the life of the Virginia Conference.

One of the most recent examples is the launching of "RISE: A United Methodist Faith Community" in Harrisonburg (see story, page 9). Focusing on ministry with young adults, this new faith community began in September and is aver-

aging 120 young adults at worship with an average age of 23. Since the annual conference's approval of *All Things New* in 2008, 14 new faith communities have been planted and 10 more are currently in the planning phase in all regions of our conference.

More than 100 congregations are participating in the 5 Talent Academy

as they discern how they may respond faithfully through the gifts with which God has blessed their churches. Part of these congregations' covenant is discerning how they may begin or partner in beginning a new faith community by 2016. In addition, new and innovative ministries are being formed for existing congregations as transformational leadership development is emphasized through the resources of our conference.

A "direct visit" financial campaign was conducted during the past conference year to generate funds for start-up costs of new faith communities and the strengthening of ministries for existing faith communities. This effort generated \$2.7 million in pledges and financial support.

In January, a DVD is being produced along with other informational material sharing updates on *All Things New*. This material will include information about an invitation for partnerships with new faith communities as the *All Things New* vision of "reclaiming our Wesleyan heritage as a missionary movement of the Holy Spirit" is realized.

The *All Things New* financial campaign committee expresses its appreciation to all persons who continue to pray and support this strategy of living into the conference vision of "faith communities where all God's people are welcomed at table, nurtured and transformed to be Christ to others in the world." □



UNITED METHODIST DAY AT GENERAL ASSEMBLY

19th Annual
Thursday, February 3, 2011

7-8 a.m. **Registration and breakfast** at Bon Air UMC, 1645 Buford Rd., Richmond.

8 a.m. **Load buses and travel** to Capitol grounds.

8:30 a.m. **You may attend committee meetings** and visit the offices of your legislators and take a Capitol tour. **Contact your legislators' Richmond offices in advance to set up an appointment/group meeting.**

11:30 a.m. **Gathering** for large group meeting with Legislators.

Noon. **Joint Session** of Senate & House.

12:45 p.m. **Return to Bon Air** for lunch and remarks from guest speakers.

3:30 p.m. **Adjourn.**

For Directions to Bon Air UMC: visit <www.vaumc.org>, scroll down to "Upcoming Events" and click on "United Methodist Day at General Assembly." We encourage car/van pooling. Early arrival is recommended.

Hotel Reservations: Rooms for Feb. 2 are available at the Hyatt Place Richmond/Arboretum Hotel, 201 Arboretum Place, Richmond. Please refer to "United Methodist Day" when calling (804) 560-1566 for reservations. **(Deadline: Jan. 14.)**

For more information, contact Natalie May at (804) 320-8524 or <nbmay@verizon.net>

This event is presented by the Virginia Conference Legislative Network and cosponsored by the Virginia Conference Board of Church & Society and the Virginia Conference United Methodist Women.

**NEW THIS YEAR:
Online Registration!**

REGISTRATION FORM:

Clip and mail this registration form (feel free to photocopy) or download a brochure and form or register online from the Web at www.vaumc.org, click on "Events" and then the date.

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Phone (_____) _____
E-mail _____
Church _____
District _____

Age: 21 and under 36-45 56-65
 22-35 46-55 over 65

Special Needs: _____

I am [check all that apply]: UMW UMM BCS member other
Is this your first time attending UM Day? Yes No

Boxed Lunch Menu: Hummus, Feta, Veggies on Wheat Chef Salad
 Cranberry Walnut Chicken Salad on Croissant Roast Beef on Italian
 Salami & Turkey with Caisar Aioli

Early bird registration and payment of \$20/person must be received by Jan. 21, 2011. (\$25 after that date)
(Includes packet, hot breakfast, snack, lunch, free parking at church, and transportation to & from Capitol grounds.)

If sending registration for a group, please mail one check together with a completed registration form for each person.

Make checks payable to "Virginia United Methodist Conference" (earmarked "UM Day") and mail, along with registration form, to:
Camey Chiles, 10 South Rowland St., Richmond, VA 23220

Registration questions? Call (804) 922-1195 or e-mail cameychiles@aol.com

No refunds after Jan. 21, 2011.

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Upcoming Events - for all ages!

FEBRUARY

UM Day at General Assembly, Feb. 3, Richmond. This annual event is for all United Methodists concerned with issues before the Virginia General Assembly. For the past 18 years, United Methodist Day at General Assembly has helped faith communities become empowered to serve as missionaries of justice, as well as the more traditional missionaries of mercy. UM Day gives congregations a vehicle for reaching beyond themselves and introduces them to the *Social Principles* of The United Methodist Church in a meaningful way. Visit the Virginia Conference Web site at <www.vaumc.org> under "Events" to register and pay online or use the registration form on pg. 18 of this *Advocate*. A brochure is also available for download from the Web site. **Early bird registration** and payment of \$20 must be received by **Jan. 21**. After that date, registration will be \$25 and no refunds will be available. **Deadline for hotel reservations** at the Hyatt Place Richmond/Arboretum Hotel near host church Bon Air UMC is **Jan. 14**.

'Celebrate Your Marriage' Retreat, Feb. 11-13, Blessings Lodge, Overlook Retreat and Camp Ministries in Keezletown. Join with other married couples to enrich your relationship in the context of Christian faith and action. Grow in your love and commitment to God and one another. Trained leaders will guide you through a series of exercises, activities and worship experiences. For more information, call the camp office at (540) 2MY-CAMP, or send an e-mail to <campoverlook@gmail.com>. Cost is \$265/couple.

5 Talent Academy, Feb. 19, 10 a.m.-3:30 p.m., Floris UMC, 13600 Fryling Pan Road, Herndon. Ted Hart, CEO of Hart Philanthropic Services and author of several books including *People to People Fundraising: Social Networking and Web 2.0 for Charities*, will be featured speaker at the 5 Talent Academy teaching event on Stewardship. Attendees are encouraged to read

this book before the academy event. It may be ordered through Amazon.com. **Cost is \$20 if you register by Jan. 31, \$25 after Jan. 31.** Register online at <www.vaumc.org> and click on "Events," then the date.

Lay Servants Academy, Feb. 25-27, Virginia United Methodist Assembly Center, Blackstone. All laity are invited to the first Lay Servants Academy and the 33rd annual Lay Speakers Training. You do not need to be on track to become a Local Lay Speaker or Certified Lay Speaker to attend, although these programs are developed to challenge the Lay Speaker to become skilled to the level of certification and offer continuing training for re-certification. Every chairperson, committee member, teacher or congregational leader is encouraged to take the introductory course and overview of United Methodism. **Registration deadline is Feb. 11.**

To download a brochure and registration form, visit <www.vaumc.org> and click on "Events," then the date.

APRIL

Confirmation Camp, April 15-16, Blessings Lodge, Overlook Retreat and Camp Ministries in Keezletown. Gather with youth from other UM churches to discover what it means to "Claim the Name" *Christian* and bring an interactive and connectional element to the content already being shared with the confirmands in your church. Six sections (4-8, 12) of the "Claim the Name" curriculum will be shared through a variety of experiences and from special guests. Cost is \$46 per youth or adult (one or more adult with each group). Discounts apply for early registration. For more information, call 540-2MY-CAMP, or send an e-mail to <campoverlook@gmail.com>.



"Going Places"
Dramatic Live Presentations by Lee Weaver





For more information contact Epworth at 912-638-8688 or visit our website at www.epworthbythesea.org.

Springtime By The Sea

An Event for Older Adults

May 16 - 19, 2011

Epworth By The Sea

St. Simons Island, Georgia

- "Into The Valley with David and Goliath"
- "To The Stable with Joseph, the husband of Mary"
- Going to Jekyll Island - Tour and Tea at the Jekyll Island Club Hotel.
- "To The Crucifixion with Judas, The Betrayer"
- "To The Empty Tomb with Peter, The Big Fisherman"
- "To Heaven, with all the Saints"

After 34 years in pastoral ministry the Rev. Dr. Lee Weaver has retired and now travels across the country bringing exciting, Christ-centered preaching and monologues to groups.

Weaver is a veteran of both the dramatic and musical theatre; most recently playing the leading role of Don Quixote in "The Man of LaMancha" and Charlie Anderson in "Shenandoah."



Nation & World

United Methodist Women register to vote in Sudan

United Methodist women in Southern Sudan are joining their neighbors in enthusiastically registering to vote in a January referendum on whether their war-torn land will split off from the north of the country.

When a 17-day registration period began, United Methodist Women members were among the first in line.

“We all registered early the very first day. We are excited to be able to vote to separate ourselves from the northern government, because for years and years it has oppressed the south,” said Cecilia Akuyu, a United Methodist Women member in the village of Pisak.

The referendum on independence is scheduled for Jan. 9, and Cecilia Asha, another United Methodist Women member in Pisak, said she knew no one who planned to vote against secession. “Everyone in this village is voting yes,” she said.

The Rev. Isaac Sebit, a United Methodist pastor in nearby Yei, said people were enthusiastic about the opportunity to participate in the referendum.

“We’ve lived with war for too long, and it’s our destiny to be independent. God wants us to be free,” he said.

Registration is taking place at more than 2,000 sites across the country and in eight countries abroad. In order to pass, the January referendum will need at least 60 percent of those who registered to actually cast a ballot.

The vote on independence was mandated by the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) that ended nearly five decades of conflict – including two civil wars – between the north and south of Sudan. Yet implementing the peace deal hasn’t been easy, and many observers criticize the government in Khartoum

(Below) Sarasia Emilio Anisie puts her fingerprint on a registration document as citizens of Southern Sudan lined up to register to vote in the January referendum on secession from the north of the country. At right, she shows her new registration card and a finger she dipped in ink as part of the registration process. (Photos by Paul Jeffrey/response)



for both dragging its feet on key provisions of the CPA while at the same time allegedly working to destabilize the south in the run up to the vote.

In several villages around Yei, United Methodists and other residents have suffered from repeated attacks by the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), a brutal Ugandan rebel group that has morphed into a transnational terror squad.

Although mostly quiet for the past two months, the LRA has especially disrupted life in Western Equatoria State along the border with the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which the LRA is currently using as a base. Given the LRA’s use as a proxy militia for the government in Khartoum in years past,



many believe the LRA is currently being encouraged by the northern government to launch a series of attacks in early January with the goal of disrupting voting.

“The LRA is ready to disrupt the elections because they don’t want the Sudanese to vote for separation,” said Sebit, who is the associ-

ate district superintendent of The United Methodist Church in Southern Sudan.

Given the fears that a peaceful referendum is unlikely here, Christian leaders inaugurated in September the campaign of “101 days of prayer for a peaceful referendum in Southern Sudan.” A joint effort of churches in Southern

Sudan and abroad, the ecumenical effort has brought together people around the world to pray that no matter the outcome of the vote, peace will prevail.

United Methodists in Yei participated in an ecumenical service in the Roman Catholic cathedral, joining people of other denominations in specifically praying that the registration would be successful and peaceful.

In the United States, Sudan was a special focus of United Methodist Women-sponsored schools of mission during the past two years. □

— Paul Jeffrey, senior correspondent of *United Methodist Women’s response magazine*; currently on assignment in Southern Sudan

Appalachian Ministry Network draws attention to increasingly overlooked rural poverty

The people of Appalachia are resilient – a quality the United Methodist Appalachian Ministry Network (UMAMN) must have to continue its work in a church that is moving away from programs that address rural poverty, members of the network’s advisory board said at its most recent meeting.

“We are a disparate group, but we represent all of Appalachia. We feel the passion for the hands-on work that we do; we are all about having ministry in Appalachia,” said the Rev. Chuck Jack, a pastor in the Redbird Missionary Conference, who was elected chair of the advisory board. Jack, who was the vice chair of the advisory board, replaced Bishop Thomas Bickerton, who now heads the Global Health Initiative for The United Methodist Church.

In addition to electing a new chair, the network approved a \$58,428 budget for 2011, began planning for the 2011 assembly, approved grants for new and ongoing programs and toured the cannery and home-building ministries of the Upper Sand Mountain Parish, a cooperative ministry of eight local United Methodist churches serving 1,000 square miles of Jackson and Dekalb counties located in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. Their projects aim to help families living in poverty reach a level of sustainability.

Members...shared concerns that rural poverty and particularly poverty in Appalachia are being forgotten.

Members of the advisory board said they believed networking is a vital role for the group. They also shared concerns that rural poverty and particularly poverty in Appalachia are being forgotten. The Rev. John Baney, a pastor in Austin, Pa., said part of the role of the advisory board is to get the word out about the work being done by ministries in Appalachia.



The poverty-stricken Appalachian area of the United States in need of your support covers 22 United Methodist conferences within three jurisdictions.

The network was designated in 1972 by the General Conference to work with local, district, conference and church leadership to coordinate United Methodist ministries in Appalachia. Bob Wilkins, the part-time executive coordinator of UMAMN, said that grants, which in the past have focused almost exclusively on hunger, are being shifted toward mentoring programs and poverty initiatives that address the systemic causes of poverty.

You can support this ministry by giving to the Appalachian Hunger and Poverty Advance #982039. □

— Vicki Brown,

General Board of Higher Education & Ministry

Virginia-based teacher ‘Skypes’ Bible class to students in Russia

In 1993, the Rev. James “Jerry” John made a trip to Russia with four members of his Court Street UMC, Lynchburg, congregation. This led to many other trips by Virginians to Stavropol and Pyatigorsk and other trips of Russians to Virginia. Two churches slowly grew in those two cities.

Many Virginia Conference teams have visited Russia to hold Bible studies, do special ministries in orphanages, share with business personnel, relate to a university and be supportive to the Russian Orthodox churches and a seminary in Stavropol.

Johns taught Bible classes every year from 1994-2001. This year, the retired elder returned to teach by Skype, a software that allows free computer-to-computer international calling. There is a class in session at Asbury UMC in Harrisonburg and one in the church in Stavropol, Russia. At the end of the class, one of the participants in each place introduces him/herself. A feeling of spiritual kinship is developing out of these sessions. The Saturday class meets at 9 a.m. in Harrisonburg and 5 p.m. in Stavropol.

The class is using the *Survey of the New Testament* by Frank Warden, which highlights the facts, meaning and application of the Bible. The materials have been translated into Russian and an interpreter translates the lecture for those in Russia who do not know English. □



Jerry Johns teaches a Bible study class with students in Asbury UMC in Harrisonburg and in Stavropol, Russia, who participate via Skype.

Disconnected connection?

Are general agencies a long way from the pews?

A few weeks ago, United Methodist lay person Richard Hearne faced a group of 25 angry, frustrated people at a church meeting in Wichita Falls, Texas.

Their beef: Why had The United Methodist Church endorsed the October "One Nation Working Together" rally in Washington, D.C., along with groups like the Communist Party?

Hearne, a member of University Park UMC in Dallas and a member of the General Board of Church & Society (GBCS), explained that the social action agency, not the denomination, had endorsed the rally. GBCS eventually withdrew its support as rally organizers issued increasingly political statements and as more extremist groups signed on.

In turn, Hearne urged attendees not to demonize agency staff and to get informed on the workings of the general church. It's a conversation Hearne said he has had many times. The issues change, but the conflicts are symptomatic of a bigger issue. Hearne said there's a "disconnect" between the people in the pews and the general agencies of The United Methodist Church.

Hearne's not alone in that observation. Reducing "the perceived distance between the general church [including the general agencies], the annual conferences and local congregations" was a key recommendation in the recently released "Operational Assessment of the Connectional Church," commissioned by the denomination's Call to Action Steering Team.

"Many people in the pews do not see how the work of the general boards relates to our mission of making disciples for Jesus Christ," said the Rev. Bill Bouknight, a retired United Methodist pastor and associate director of the Confessing Movement, an unofficial evangelical caucus within the denomination.

Most church leaders agree that at least a perceived distance exists. But ask them why that is, or how it affects

the church's effectiveness, and you'll get a wide range of answers. The issue is complex, and that's part of the problem.

And at a time when apportionment payments are falling short – in 2009, they came in at \$24 million less than the \$150.3 million budgeted at the 2008 General Conference – the question is more than just academic.

Four general agencies handle the church's program and ministry functions: GBCS, the Board of Discipleship (GBOD), the Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) and the Board of Higher Education & Ministry (GBHEM).

Each has a staff as well as its own board of directors, ranging from 60-90 members. The boards' quota systems ensure ethnic, age, racial and geo-



Jim Winkler,
chief executive
of the General
Board of Church
& Society for The
United Methodist
Church.

graphic diversity. But it's costly to fly in board members for meetings, some from overseas. These four agencies have had total combined budgets of more than \$127 million in 2010.

Two other general boards handle pensions, health benefits, finance and administration. In addition, eight commissions address specific areas at the denominational level, including communications, publishing, interfaith concerns, racial and gender issues.

Jim Winkler, GBCS's chief executive, believes the "disconnect" is largely perception, and he's frustrated by it.

"We publish a weekly (electronic) newsletter that we try to get out to as

many United Methodists as possible," Winkler said. "If the pastor at the local church level chooses not to inform his or her congregation, they are at the mercy of whatever they happen to hear from whoever they happen to hear it."

Winkler said GBCS' work follows the mandates of the denomination's Social Principles.

Wayne Rhodes, GBCS director of Communications, serves as designated listener for angry phone callers, mostly lay people who don't like the agency's stance on issues.

"What I find, and I can say this unequivocally, is that 100 percent of the time the person calling does not know that The United Methodist Church has a Social Principles statement," Rhodes said. He added that it's the GBCS mandate to speak out on those principles.

The Call to Action study noted, however, that pastors receive an overabundance of communications from the general agencies, more than they could possibly pass along to their flocks.

"What I was told was, when you stand at the level of the local church, it's a cacophony of voices,"

said study investigator Mark Harrison, principal of the Apex Healthcare Group. "Many of the agencies have their own 'brand' and their own communications team, even though there's another agency that's solely focused on communications. Those brands and those communications compete with one another.

"So you have the agencies saying, 'Here's our portfolio of good things that we want to do,' and the local churches saying, 'Wait a minute, we can't do it all, we're forced to prioritize.'"

Many of the direct communications from the general agencies to the local church relate to Special Sunday offer-

ings and other requests for donations, an added burden when many congregations are already struggling just to meet their budgets.

"I don't think it's a matter of just information," Bouknight said. "If the people in the pews knew more, I think the opposition would be even greater."

Hearne, the GBCS board member, calls himself a "Bubba," a political conservative. Hearne said he's a minority voice on the board. He said he believes diverging political differences between the people who staff the agencies and people who sit in the pews is part of the problem.

"Jim Winkler is a personal friend," Hearne said. "The people on the board are committed and compassionate, but most of them are progressives. The general boards all need to have more voices on their staffs that are a little more conservative. We need to have more 'Bubbas' represented."

Many United Methodists aren't familiar with the alphabet soup of acronyms that represent the denomination's general agencies and commissions – with the possible exception of UMCOR, the United Methodist Committee on Relief. UMCOR is an agency within GBGM that handles disaster relief.

That's because most people can easily see what UMCOR does: helping people affected by disasters like the Haiti earthquake. They understand the need for a central organization with infrastructure and expertise to help in that kind of situation.

The broader role of GBGM is more complex but just as crucial, said Thomas Kemper, its general secretary. He described it as to set up the kind of long-term, ongoing partnerships between churches and missions that effect lasting change.

"A global church needs a global agency to send missionaries from everywhere and to everywhere," Kemper said.

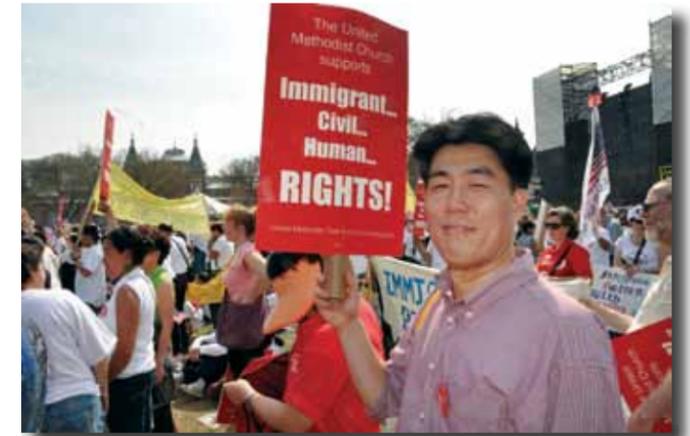
GBGM has a natural "entry point" in UMCOR that connects the agency with folks in the pews, but not all the agencies do.

"Our services go more directly to people who have come out of the pew

and are now serving as leaders of the congregations and the annual conference," said Sharon Rubey, GBHEM interim associate general secretary. The agency connects directly with United Methodist students who receive scholarships and with young people who attend the biennial Exploration events as they consider a call to ministry.

Beyond that, the agency depends on its Web site and e-mails to its constituents, such as its board, bishops, campus ministers and other church leaders, to get out the word.

And Rubey said they have good sto-



The Rev. We Chang, pastor at First United Methodist Church of Manchester, N.H., participates in a 2010 immigration rights march on the National Mall in Washington, D.C.

ries to share about people who found a life of faith through campus ministries or benefited from the scholarship and loan program. "Sometimes our stories are some of the best stories that do not get widely read or shared or heard," Rubey said.

In their interviews with bishops, jurisdictional and local church leaders for the Operational Assessment, researchers repeatedly heard comments that the general agencies "dictate rather than serve" and "compete with the annual conferences" for resources and attention.

Theoretically, the agencies collaborate, but in practice, each agency has its own operating board, Harrison pointed out. Agency staffs are accountable only to their boards, and each board is essentially only accountable to the General Conference. That fosters territorialism and internal competition, according to him.

"There's no mandate to collaborate," Harrison said. "As you can imagine, where your accountability is to a third party that only meets once every four years ... that's a fairly weak accountability system."

So what needs to be done?

"In a time of shrinking financial resources, I think most of the general boards need to be sharply reduced, and some need to be eliminated," said Bouknight.

The Rev. Riley Case, another member of the Confessing Movement and a retired United Methodist pastor,

wants to disband most of the general agencies, with the exception of UMCOR. He proposes turning over GBOD's function to the United Methodist Publishing House and moving GBHEM's seminary affiliation authority to the annual conferences and local churches.

"If the church desires to be a movement again instead

of a dead institution, then it must structure itself so that local churches can be freed to follow their passion for ministry without hindrance from institutional distractions," Case said. And for good measure, he'd like to toss out the 1,084 page United Methodist *Book of Resolutions*, too.

The Call to Action report's recommendations were less draconian: Consolidate the general church agencies to better align their efforts with the mission of the denomination and reorganize the agencies' boards with smaller, competency-based boards.

Whether these recommendations can be executed is another question; as is the nature of entrenched institutions, no one's likely to vote themselves off the island. □

— Mary Jacobs is a staff writer for the United Methodist Reporter <www.umportal.org>. Reprinted with permission.

Transgender pastor urges church to continue sexuality debate

The Rev. David Weekley thinks it's difficult for the church to have meaningful conversations about sexual and gender identity.

So, for years, the Portland, Ore.-based United Methodist pastor, husband and father of five kept his own secret about having been born a girl but never feeling like one. Then, on Aug. 30, 2009, he decided it was time to start telling the story of his experience as a transgender man, beginning with his own congregation.

Now, Weekley wants to widen the discussion about sexuality throughout the denomination, despite what he perceives as an increasing reluctance to discuss such issues. The recent refusal of the United Methodist Judicial Council to reconsider its 2005 decision upholding a pastor's right to reject someone as a member of his church is an indication of the urgent need for conversation, he said.

He has even written a book about his own experience, now in the final editing stages, which he hopes can be used as a conversation starter once it is published by Wipf and Stock of Eugene, Ore.

Some church members believe there has been more than enough conversation on the topic. The Rev. Thomas Lambrecht, a United Methodist pastor from Wisconsin and a representative of Good News, an unofficial United Methodist evangelical caucus, said "the continued focus on sexuality issues" is a reflection of western culture rather than a theological imperative.

"What we need to focus on is becoming disciples of Jesus Christ and living that out in a variety of ways," he added.

Conversation, however, can take issues of sexuality out of the cerebral and into the personal, says the Rev. Troy Plummer, executive director of the Reconciling Ministries Network. While some segments of society, as well as some churches, are having those conversations, "it mostly feels

like the church wants to avoid conflict and discomfort" on issues of sexuality, he noted.

Such discomfort is familiar to Weekley, one of the few transgender pastors in The United Methodist Church. The denomination's book of law currently has no prohibitions against ordaining transgender persons, and Weekley remains in good standing with the Oregon-Idaho Conference.

His own transformation – from female to male and from alienated Christian to ordained pastor – began in 1972, when the 21-year-old started the gender-reassignment process at University Hospitals in Cleveland. After completing the medical transition in 1975, he attended graduate school at Miami University of Ohio and started searching for a faith community.

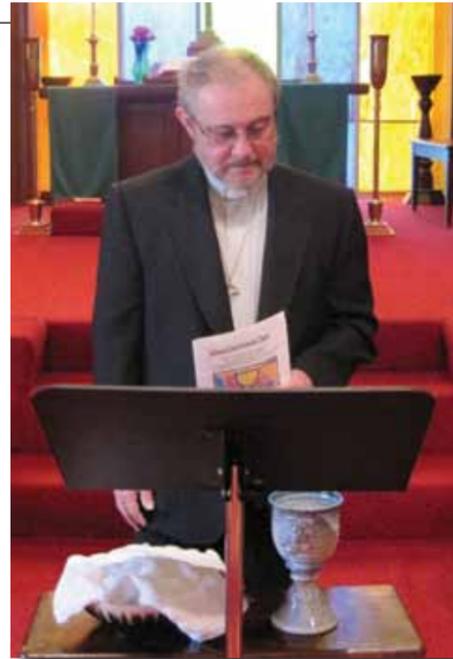
Walking into a United Methodist congregation in Oxford, Ohio, and, like John Wesley, finding "my own strange warming of the heart experience there" on World Communion Sunday was the first step in Weekley's faith journey, he recalled.

The journey took him from serving as a volunteer at the campus ministry center to studying at Boston University School of Theology to beginning the ordination process in 1982. He became an elder in the Oregon-Idaho Conference in 1984.

Weekley said he never buried his former identity, but often wrestled with the issue of when and how he should share his story.

"One of my hopes was by working quietly with people, trying to be a good pastor, it would give people a lot of opportunity to get to know me as a pastor." Then, when he did share his story, he reasoned, "it would have a positive impact."

Indeed, the congregational support was immediate. "The day of the service, people broke into applause at the end of my message." Later, however, a small group of members



The Rev. David Weekley prepares the elements for Holy Communion on his first Sunday morning at Sellwood United Methodist Church in Portland, Ore. (Photo by Tina Todd)

seemed to complain more often to him. "I was never sure whether it had to do with my being transgender and sharing that ... but it eventually led to my decision that it was best to move," he said.

Today, Weekley appreciates being in a two-point charge – Sellwood and Capitol Hill churches in Portland – where members were aware of his transgender identity right from the start.

While he understands not wanting to usurp the authority of the pastor, "when I think about the bigger picture, I wonder if the case would have been the same if it had been about ethnicity or race or gender," he said. "As a pastor, I can't imagine telling someone who wants to be part of our faith community that they weren't welcome."

Lambrecht, who had participated in the Judicial Council's oral hearings on the matter, said he felt the council acted with integrity "in terms of upholding church law and recognizing the separation of powers between the legislative and judicial areas of our church." □

— Linda Bloom,
United Methodist News Service

United Methodist bishops face challenges on same-sex unions

The legalization of same-sex marriage in some states and countries is complicating a long-simmering debate on how the church ministers to gays and lesbians.

The challenge, say bishops from areas where same-sex marriage is legal, is encouraging dialogue and mutual respect among all parties in the debate in the pews while at the same time upholding church law.

"Even though people are coming from across the theological spectrum, we trust that they are willing to engage in conversation with integrity, respect and sensitivity," said New York Area Bishop Jeremiah Park, whose episcopal area includes Connecticut. "And that's something we can celebrate. We are not in a perfect place, but at least I see a sincere intention to have holy conferencing on an issue like this."

At present, Connecticut, Iowa, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont and Washington, D.C., grant civil marriages for same-sex couples. Outside the United States, 10 countries also offer legal recognition to same-sex couples.

During the most recent Council of Bishops meeting, bishops from areas where same-sex marriage is legal met to discuss how their congregations are dealing with the issue.

"The conversation was centered around that as more states make it legal, more congregations will be involved (in the debate), and we need to find a way to respond," Park said.

The United Methodist Church opposes same-sex unions and forbids its pastors from performing such ceremonies or allowing them to take place in United Methodist churches.

The Book of Discipline states that the practice of homosexuality is "incompatible with Christian teaching." The Judicial Council, the denomination's top court, ruled in 2009 that it is a chargeable offense for United Methodist clergy to perform ceremonies celebrating same-sex unions, even in states where such unions are legal.

However, some United Methodist con-

gregations that welcome homosexual members are debating how to handle marriage requests. On Sept. 26, members of Foundry UMC in Washington, D.C. voted 367 to 8 to allow same-gender marriages to be performed in its building.

Following Foundry's vote, Washington Area Bishop John R. Schol released a statement to clergy and lay leaders in the Baltimore-Washington Conference. "In the midst of these difficult matters of the church," he wrote, "I will do all I can to be fair and compassionate as I work to maintain the unity and witness of the church."

But as a bishop, he noted, he is responsible for upholding church law and "will process and follow through with any complaint or charge against a United Methodist clergyperson of the Baltimore-Washington Conference who performs a same-gender wedding or holy union."

At the Council of Bishops meeting, Schol reiterated that stand. "*The Book of Discipline* is very clear."

The subject of same-sex unions has sparked debate every four years at the gathering of General Conference, the denomination's top lawmaking body. Delegates have consistently voted not to change *The Book of Discipline*. But neither supporters nor opponents of same-sex marriage expect the debate to end.

In the United States, public support for same-sex unions has been growing over the past decade, but that support is still in the minority. This year, a Pew Research Center poll found 42 percent in favor of same-sex marriages and 48 percent in opposition. That marks the first time in 15 years of Pew Research polling that fewer than half opposed such marriages. □

— Heather Hahn,
United Methodist News Service

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Dallas church tending to flock using Facebook, Twitter

The Rev. Mark Craig was about to address hundreds, possibly thousands of his flock at Highland Park UMC in Dallas, the denomination's second-largest church in the nation. "Let me think about this a second," he said.

He collected his thoughts – and then, with furrowed brow and folksy candor, began speaking to a lone camera in the calm of his office. The church's "Communion Sunday" was approaching, he said – a monthly occasion that sees regular attendance drop 30 percent. Why? It was a mystery.

"I suspect that it's because it forces us to look inward and be more introspective about our lives," Craig said into the camera, urging churchgoers to brave the task and show up.

Welcome to ministry in the age of social media, as religious leaders nationwide realize that in order to reach their flocks – and to thrive, if not merely survive – they have to go where the people are.

Craig's video was posted on the church's Facebook page, where 1,000-plus "friends" will be able to see and share it with others.

According to a recent Nielsen study, Americans spend nearly a quarter of their time on social-media sites such as Facebook and Twitter – a 43 percent increase over the year before.

Gradually, churches, synagogues and mosques have planted their flags in cyberspace, with profile pages teasing upcoming sermons, noting meetings and special events, culling for volunteers or posting a verse of the day.

Such strategies are espoused by even Pope Benedict XVI, whom digital news source Mashable dubbed "the social media pontiff" for urging priests to use new technologies to bring people to the church.

Social media's casual and interactive nature is especially well-suited to purposes such as establishing community and conducting outreach, especially in bigger congregations where one can be lost amid the crowd.

At Highland Park UMC, spokeswoman Kim Gifford said churchgoers

loved it when Craig, the church's senior minister, did a recent video teasing an upcoming sermon that referenced the Food Channel series *Chopped*.

"We never think of him sitting down and watching reality TV," she said.

And while there is no real evidence to back it up as yet, such outreach can bring more faces to the aisles. After Craig's *Chopped* video, Gifford said, "membership jumped."

The church's Facebook page lets people check church activity schedules, preview Sunday services, see photos of sponsored events and submit prayer requests.

"With a church this large, there's no way we can put in our bulletin all the prayer requests we have," Gifford said. "This makes a giant church seem small." □

—Mark Ramirez, The Dallas Morning News



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Clergy & Diaconal

Deaths

The Rev. James Mason Cosby, 81, retired elder, died Nov. 15, 2010. He began his ministerial career in 1957 as a student associate in the Louisa Larger Parish. He went on to serve the Daleville Charge in Roanoke (now St. Mark's UMC), as associate at Dulin UMC, as pastor of Watson Memorial UMC, Herndon UMC, Dunn Loring UMC, Warrenton UMC, Burke UMC, Leesburg UMC, Great Falls UMC and Arlington Forest UMC. He retired in 2000.



Cosby

Survivors include his wife, Clair; daughters, Sarah McGiverin and Sallie Hess; son, James Cosby; and granddaughter, Hannah McGiverin. He was looking forward to the birth of two grandsons in December. Also surviving him are two sisters, Alma Pope and Margaret Higham; and numerous nieces and nephews.

The Rev. Earl S. Tyson, 82, retired elder, died Nov. 27, 2010. He began his ministerial career in 1953 in the North Carolina Conference. He transferred to the Virginia Conference in 1957



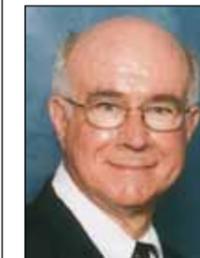
Tyson

where he served Surry, as associate at Centenary in the Richmond District, as pastor of Smith Mountain, Central Chapel in Richmond, Huguenot Road in Richmond, and West End in the Roanoke District. He became a conference evangelist in 1971, a position he served until his retirement in 1993.

Survivors include his wife, Betty, and his daughter, Teresa Radford.

Teresa is wife of the Rev. Jim Radford, who is pastor of the Singers Glen Charge, Harrisonburg District.

The Rev. Carl W. Ulrich, 66, elder in full connection, died Dec. 4, 2010. He began his ministerial career in 2000 as a student local pastor at Accotink, then Silverbrook (both in the Alexandria District). He went on to serve Central, Rappahannock District, then Belmont, Richmond District, where he was serving at the time of his death.



Ulrich

Survivors include his wife, Christine R. Ulrich; two daughters, Susanna V. Ulrich and Catherine L. Ulrich; a grandson, Cassius Corey; and two stepsisters, Juliette "Archie" Cooper and Helga Reaves.

The Rev. L. Lawson Byrd, 84, retired elder, died Dec. 9, 2010. He began his ministerial career in 1972 with the Gretna Circuit. He went on to serve Chatham Heights, High Street in the Portsmouth District, Asbury in Newport News, Zion in the Peninsula District, Burkeville, Providence-Woodland, and New Hope in the Rappahannock District. He retired in 1988.



Byrd

Survivors include his wife, Ann.

Cecil Martin Camlin Jr., 76, died Nov. 18, 2010. Rev. Camlin was a retired member of the South Carolina Conference who served Boulevard UMC, Richmond District, as pastor of visitation for a number of years.

Survivors include his wife, Sara Greer Camlin; three daughters; and four grandchildren.



Hall

The Rev. Herbert Pollard Hall, 88, retired elder, died Dec. 14, 2010. He began his ministerial career in 1947 with Gordonsville. He went on to serve Melfa-Keller-Locustville, Pocomoke, Whaleyville, Bethel-St. Matthews (Richmond District), Atlantic, McCanless Memorial, New Hope (Fredericksburg), Lebanon (Ashland District) and Memorial (Richmond District). He retired in 1987.

He was preceded in death by his wife, Roberta Dunaway Hall. Survivors include three sons, Herbert Pollard Jr., Rev. Wesley Hall and Kenneth Hall; and five grandchildren.

Ellen Rebecca Yow, 91, retired lay supply pastor, died Dec. 3, 2010. In 1940, she founded Becky's Kiddie College in Danville, which is still in operation, and has been involved in The United Methodist Church throughout the Southeastern Jurisdiction, training teachers and officials for many years. She served on the Virginia Conference staff and taught at Lake Junaluska. She was coordinator of Ministries at Mount Vernon UMC, Danville, from 1973-1979; served as lay supply pastor of the Danville Circuit from 1979-1985, before retiring. She worked under the District Board of Missions in the conception and chartering of Trinity UMC, Danville. After retirement, she served as Visiting Minister for Main Street UMC, Danville.

Survivors include two sisters, Juanita Yow Holloway and Carolyn Yow Cuthill; nine nieces and nephews; 20 grand-nieces and nephews; and 10 great-grand-nieces and nephews.

(Continued on pg. 34, Clergy)



Local Church



▲ **St. Mark's UMC**, Petersburg District, had its first "Trunk or Treat" event on All Saints Day eve. Many members participated in this "radical hospitality" event. Petersburg District youth were also there to help hand out candy and goodies to more than 100 children and adults. The Petersburg Elks' Lodge No. 237 also gave out candy, coloring books and drug awareness information. Pictured, Eric Hamilton, a member of St. Mark's and the Elks' Club, gives treats to some of the children.

The 15th Annual **Fairfields UMC** Fall Festival Arts and Crafts Show was a great success, according to Jim Holland, the festival chairperson. "We were able to donate \$7,500 to various charities and other organizations that contribute to the welfare of our community." Recipients were: Covington/Hurst Education Fund, Northumberland County Sheriff's Safe & Secure Program, Mid-County Rescue Squad, Northumberland Rescue Squad, Callao Rescue Squad, Northumberland County Elementary School Discretionary Fund, Northumberland County Middle School Discretionary Fund, Northumberland High School Discretionary Fund, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Northumberland High School ROTC, Interfaith Service Council, Northern Neck Free Health Clinic, Fairfields Fire Department, Callao Fire Department, Heart Havens and Fairfields UMC Discretionary Fund.

Culpeper UMC, Charlottesville District, has felt called to assist those people within the church and the community who are seeking jobs due to the high unemployment in the area. The church is maintaining a job board in the Fellowship Hall, and for those who leave resumes, volunteers call to let them know when a possible job match is available. "We ask those who have received a job due to our postings to let us know so that we can rejoice with them," writes Linda Lamb, church receptionist and volunteer coordinator. "We have had quite a few who have told us they have received employment due to our Job Board." The church also has "Bucket Sister Sunday" on the third Sunday of each month where loose change is collected from the congregation to help church and community members with electric and heat bill assistance. "We continue to live out our mission statement 'Focusing on Jesus and making him known' within the Culpeper community," said Lamb.



▲ **Old Bridge UMC** in Woodbridge held its 16th Annual Community Thanksgiving Dinner on Thanksgiving Day, serving 240 people and providing a place for those without family to gather with others for a traditional meal and a place for single parents to bring their children. The goal for the dinner was that no one need be alone on Thanksgiving.



▲ **United Methodist Women (UMW) of Assawoman UMC** of the Oak Hall Charge, Eastern Shore District, which includes several members from **Downings UMC**, wanted to send love to college students from the churches and community and to their shut-ins. Members met over several weeks and made 19 "no-sew" fleece throws, laid hands on each one and prayed for the recipients, mailed them to students away at school, and personally delivered those close to home. Throws in school colors were distributed to students at Virginia Tech, ODU, UNC, Towson and Frostburg, and several community colleges. Assawoman UMW also provides Christmas gifts for residents in a nursing home and cash assistance to a family with financial needs.



▲ **At Burnt Chimney UMC**, Danville District, "Bags of Thanks" were collected by the congregation to be given to Heavenly Manna, an emergency food pantry in Rocky Mount. The final total was 30 of these "Bags of Thanks," the church's November mission project.



▲ **Kenbridge UMC**, Farmville District, recently celebrated homecoming. Many gifts given to the church over the past several years were dedicated. In the last year, Kenbridge completed a major construction and renovation project, and members were excited to share all the new amenities with many of the out-of-town visitors. The project included a new kitchen, an elevator, new carpet in the sanctuary, new heating and air systems, and all classrooms renovated. Kenbridge also celebrated a mission team trip (pictured) this past summer in southwestern Virginia at Project Crossroads, where more than 20 people traveled to Saltville and repaired a woman's home. Kenbridge UMC's Food Pantry, which was started in the last two years has been a successful project. **Williams** and **Antioch UMCs** have also started supporting the food pantry, along with Kenbridge Baptist Church.



▲ **Salem UMC**, Ashland District, sponsored its first Community Thanksgiving Dinner, which was held at Widewater Fire Department. The event was a joint effort by members of Salem UMC, **Falmouth UMC**, Oak Grove Baptist Church and the choir at St. William of York Catholic Church. Volunteers began arriving at 4:30 a.m. to smoke the 10 turkeys for the meal, while others arrived to prepare traditional side dishes. Members of the community were invited to either dine at the firehouse or to call in for delivery of the meals to their homes. During the event, church members served or delivered more than 120 meals.

'Burning bush' transforms Immanuel UMC and other congregations using its facilities

The most astonishing thing happened at Immanuel UMC in Alexandria District. On July 24 last summer, when the temperature was a record-setting 102 degrees, bushes beside the sanctuary ignited on their own and began burning. The fire quickly leapt up to the edge of the roof, raging out of control, yet the sanctuary itself never caught fire!

A worship service was held on Oct. 31 to celebrate this "Holy Fire" story. There are three congregations that worship in the building: Sharon Korean Baptist, Iglesia Adventista de Annandale, and Immanuel UMC. Members from all three churches came together to give witness to God's mighty action. Pastor Pedro Huaranga (Adventist Church) preached on Exodus Chapter 3, the story of Moses and the burning bush. He told how he came to the church on July 24 for a 3 p.m. meeting and he saw the burning bushes and phoned the fire department. It took the fire truck about seven minutes to arrive. Meanwhile, Adventist Church members ran to get water and a fire extinguisher. The fire was gaining in strength moment by moment and the people quickly realized that they could do nothing with their own hands to affect it. So they lifted their hands in the air and called out to God. They knew that if the flames made contact with the hot roof tiles, the tiles would certainly ignite. The people were praying for God's protection and the fire was roaring right at roof level and even higher in a nearby spruce tree when the fire truck pulled up. The fire was put out in 30 seconds and amazingly there was not one black mark to be found on the building!

Jesus teaches that holy fire does not consume or destroy; it purifies and cleanses. In Exodus 3, the holy fire was in the bush and therefore it was not consumed. At Immanuel, it seems the holy fire was in the sanctu-

ary — because there the fire did not consume.

This is also a call story. God spoke out of the holy fire in the bush and called Moses to allow God to transform him so that he could free God's people from slavery. God is also speaking out of the church, calling its members to be transformed and empowered to serve. In his sermon, Pastor Huaranga challenged the people to hear God's voice calling them to preach the gospel in the neighborhood.

The worship was a fitting service of celebration, with pews filled with Hispanics, Anglos, Koreans, Africans and Pakistanis all praising God and giving thanks in one Spirit and with one voice.

This was quite a mysterious event. It seems to be a confirmation of God's great desire to work through the church. Since this event, Immanuel UMC has seen its outreach ministries newly blessed by the Holy Spirit.

Members of Immanuel UMC won-



The burned bushes beside the sanctuary of Immanuel UMC. No damage was found on the building.

der if there are other congregations in our Virginia Conference having any experiences similar to this, of God calling the church. Churches and individuals are invited to send their thoughts through e-mail to <pastor@immanuel-umc.org>. □

— The Rev. Deborah Austin, pastor of Immanuel UMC, Alexandria District



Letters & Commentary

The perils of 'Wannabe Cool' Christianity

by Brett McCracken for The Wall Street Journal

How can we stop the gusher?" may have been the question of 2010. Yet for many church leaders, the leaking oil well in the Gulf was nothing compared to the threat posed by an ongoing gusher of a different sort: Young people pouring out of their churches, never to return.

As a 27-year-old, I understand the concern. My peers, many of whom grew up in the church, are losing interest in the Christian establishment. Recent statistics have shown an increasing exodus of young people from churches, especially after they leave home and live on their own. A 2007 study determined that 70 percent of young Protestant adults between 18-22 stop attending church regularly.

Statistics like these have created something of a mania in recent years, as baby boomers frantically assess what they have done wrong (why didn't megachurches work to attract youth long-term?) and scramble to figure out a plan to keep young members engaged in the life of the church.

Increasingly, the "plan" has taken the form of a total image overhaul, where efforts are made to rebrand Christianity as hip, countercultural and relevant. As a result, we got something called "the emerging church" – a sort of postmodern stab at an evangelical reform movement. Perhaps, because it was too radical, it fizzled quickly. But the impulse behind it – to rehabilitate Christianity's image and make it "cool" – remains.

There are various ways that churches attempt to be cool. For some, it means trying to seem more culturally savvy. The pastor quotes Stephen Colbert or references Lady Gaga, or a church sponsors a screening of an R-rated movie. For others, the emphasis is on looking cool, perhaps by giving the pastor a "metrosexual" makeover, with skinny jeans and an \$80 haircut, or by insisting on trendy eco-friendly paper on all printed materials. Then there is the option of holding a worship service in a local bar.

"Wannabe cool" Christianity also manifests itself as an obsession with being on the technological cutting edge. Churches like Central Christian in Las Vegas and Liquid Church in New Brunswick, N.J., for example, have online church services where people can have a worship experience at an "iCampus." Many other churches now encourage texting or Twitter interaction with the pastor during their services.

But one of the most popular – and most unseemly –

methods of making Christianity hip is to make it shocking. What better way to appeal to younger generations than to push the envelope?

Sex is a popular shock tactic. Books like *Sex God* (by Rob Bell) and *Real Sex* (by Lauren Winner) are typical. At the same time, many churches are finding creative ways to use sex-themed marketing gimmicks to lure people into church. Oak Leaf Church in Cartersville, Ga., created a Web site called <yourgreatsexlife.com> to pique the interest of young seekers. Flamingo Road Church in Florida created an online, anonymous confessional <IveScrewedUp.com>, and had a series called <MyNakedPastor.com>, which featured a 24/7 Web cam showing the life of the pastor, Troy Gramling. Then there is Mark Driscoll at Seattle's Mars Hill Church – who posts Q&A videos online, from services where he answers questions from people in church, on topics such as "Pleasuring Your Spouse."

But are these gimmicks really going to bring young people back to church? Is this what people really come to church for? Maybe sex sermons and indie-rock worship music do help in getting people in the door, and maybe even in winning new converts. But what sort of Christianity are they being converted to?

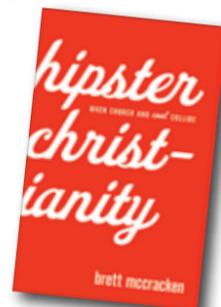
If leadership thinks that "cool Christianity" is a sustainable path forward, they are severely mistaken. As a 20-something, I can say with confidence that when it comes to church, we don't want cool as much as we want real.

If we are interested in Christianity in any sort of serious way, it is not because it's easy or trendy or popular. It's because Jesus himself is appealing, and what he says rings true. It's because the world we inhabit is utterly phony, ephemeral, narcissistic, image-obsessed and sex-drenched – and we want an alternative. It's not because we want more of the same. □

– Brett McCracken's book, *Hipster Christianity: Where Church and Cool Collide* (Baker Books) was just published.



McCracken



Mission without a budget

A week ago, I was asked to make a brief presentation to our multi-church Charge Conference highlighting some aspect of our church's programming. Although we are in the midst of a building program, I chose to talk about our missions programming (interestingly, each church there chose to discuss a mission-related activity).

In January of 2010, we introduced a new missions chairperson who had transferred to our church from a United Methodist church in New England. Anne's first question to me as lay leader was, "What is my budget?" I hemmed and hawed and finally said, "Well, Anne, we don't have a budget for missions."

Hardly had those words left my mouth before Haiti had an earthquake and UMCOR (United Methodist Committee on Relief) requested a massive shipment of health kits. The missions committee went into action and 90 kits were procured without a missions budget. One month later, UMCOR requested layette kits and 15 were taken by our committee to the Merci Center in Goldsboro, N.C. I am told 400,000 health kits were sent by United Methodists to Haiti.

Later, Anne learned that our previous fall school kit collection month provided 75 school kits for Annual Conference and for 10 years the children of High Street UMC had been sending 1-2 children to school in the Dominican Republic (Advance Special COPA – Community Partners, Inc.) by collecting pennies. We had no missions budget though.

She also learned that since 2005, High Street UMC had been a Global Mission Partner supporting a missionary and mission in the Congo. This mission activity was supported through gifts by the congregation in memory and in honor of loved ones at our Christmas Tree of Stars and Easter Lenten Crosses.

In looking for her budget, Anne discovered that our special holiday offerings were, at Easter, given to our Global Mission Partner program; at Thanksgiving, to a United Methodist hunger-related mission; and at Christmas, to UMFS (United Methodist Family Services). She noted boxes around the church for monthly specific food requests to our local cooperative ministry and was surprised that our gifts at the Communion rail supported individuals with needs who came to our church for assistance.

As I was preparing my thoughts for the Charge Conference, I looked at the front of our church presentation and saw the words "Leading by following Jesus." It all made sense. You know, I doubt that Jesus had a mission budget in his ministry. I believe that Jesus appealed to those who followed him to meet the needs of the struggling world around him.

And I guess that is what mission is about, and how can you have a budget for that. □

– Dr. Mike Ponder, lay leader at High Street UMC, Franklin

Small, medium or large...

I thought I could put the [November 2010] *Advocate* [on small churches] aside like a mail-order catalog, but churches and congregations are my passion.

We have served them all – sometimes three on a charge. My Methodist journey began in two large churches: Washington Street in Poughkeepsie, N.Y., and Washington Street in Alexandria. But in 1957, I became preacher's wife to a student pastor appointed to the Lynchburg District. This wonderful congregation mentored me in the skills I was lacking: canning beans, cooking ham, drying apples and enjoying a "pounding." Church members wanted the best for their young couple. Joe Moses' cows came to the fence almost every Sunday to hear this young man preach, with no complaints from the preacher or the cows.

Each week I gathered the neighborhood children and had choir practice in the parsonage. All-day church and dinner on the grounds was heavenly. Hymns had a tendency to get slower on the fourth or fifth stanzas because the pump organ was slowing down.

Then one day a member became upset with me over a simple suggestion I had made. The children were taken out of choir, the family left the church and a new church was built down the road using the same plans as our church.

Church "hurts" came on other occasions and my heart was broken, but if I had left my calling as a preacher's spouse I would have missed Mrs. Perdue's big bowl of potato soup that she would bring when anyone was sick. I would not have met Joan Quass, who believed every baby in the world should have a beautiful blanket all their own, or all the wonderful people who walked with us and shared their faith with us during our own crises.

Church has been fun, with good old bathrobe Nativity plays, music of all kinds, friends caring, people reaching out to others around the world. □

– Alouise Ritter, wife of retired pastor James Ritter, Hartfield

In UMC, it's OK to disagree without becoming disagreeable

I have been Methodist since I was conceived so am one conservative who is not going anywhere. While there are a number of issues that I disagree with the church's official position on, especially the death penalty and immigration, I know that I am not only free but, in fact, encouraged to think for myself.

In the mid-1980s, the church used a slogan that included the phrase, "Proclaiming grace and freedom." I wish they hadn't stopped using it. I have never had anyone within the church, lay nor clergy, try to force me to change my beliefs. On the other hand, I have been party to many lively but friendly discussions of issues faced by the church in which the views of all participants were respected. These were not only allowed, but, in fact, facilitated by the pastor.

I don't think this would be tolerated, let alone accepted, in many other denominations. In The United Methodist Church, it is OK to "disagree without becoming disagreeable." For that reason, no matter what the General Conference or any other governing body of the church does, I was conceived, born, baptized and confirmed Methodist/United Methodist. I will die as same. □

– Kim Young, member of Chester UMC, Petersburg District



Living the Word



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Edward M. Garrett Jr. retired in 2007 with 42 years of service in the Virginia Conference. He graduated from the University of Richmond (B.A.), Duke Divinity School (B.D.), Union Theological Seminary (M.A.), and St. Mary's Seminary and University (D.Min.) He is the author of two books on Christian worship and he still conducts numerous leadership training workshops across the conference. Currently he is teaching at the L.L.I. (Life-Long Learning Institute) in Richmond and is on the Board of Directors for CCHASM (Ches-terfield, Colonial Heights Alliance of Social Ministry). He has contributed numerous articles for the Advocate over the years. He and his wife, Marian, are active in Chester United Methodist Church in Chester.

January 9, 2011

Time-out
Isaiah 45:18-24

I believe in time-out. My parents were strong advocates of time-out. I had a time-out chair – with my name on it. (My sisters didn't believe they deserved one.) My sons were regular visitors to the time-out corner. Do you believe in time-outs? The Bible does.

The biggest time-out experience in the Old Testament is the Babylonian exile (c.597–c.533 B.C.). God had had enough of the Hebrews' three S's: selfishness, self-centeredness and sin ("missing the mark"). God sent them hundreds of miles from their homeland for more than 50 years. It was a serious consequence for their disobedience and lack of faith. The people had received warnings from the prophets for decades. Their time-out was a period for self-examination, reflection and repentance.

Two key themes concerning time-out are in Isaiah 45: truth and order. Let's consider each. We believe in truth, but we don't always practice it. We don't like really facing ourselves.

Truth requires honesty and sincerity. When workers in marble in ancient Rome accidentally chipped their statues, they would fill in the chipped places with wax of the same color as the marble and then sell their work as perfectly made. Other statue makers, wishing to sell honest products, stamped their product *sine cera* (without wax). From this custom has come the word "sincere." God wanted the Hebrews to stop parading around as perfect, when in fact there was still construction work to be done in their faith and daily living.

Order was what God promised from the beginning of creation. Originally God put things in perspective, but

over time the people drifted from God's plan of responsibility. They followed their own paths. God needed to reaffirm God's rightful claim of power and glory.

God's order was not that the people were to live in constant fear and worry, but that they turn from their own patterns and make a conscientious, consistent effort to rely on God daily. Verse 24 is central: "Only in the Lord are righteousness and strength!"

Our challenge is to discern if God's truth and order are being lived out daily. And if they are not, we must turn to God and to whomever we may have offended, and say, "I'm sorry." Then we also must adjust our attitude. We are to live as if we are truly God's children.

Now, no more temper tantrums or we will end up in time-out, just like the Israelites. □

January 16, 2011

Redemption and reassurance
Isaiah 48:14-19, 21-22

On the cover of Johnny Cash's album, *American Recordings*, is a picture of two dogs. One dog is black with a white stripe. The other is white with a black stripe. In an interview with *Rolling Stone* magazine, Cash explained what the two dogs mean: "Their names are Sin and Redemption. Sin is the black one with the white stripe; Redemption is the white one with the black stripe. That's kind of the theme of the album, and for me, too. When I was really bad, I was not all bad. When I was trying to be good, I could never be all good. There would be that black streak going through." Cash's message is: no one is all bad; no one is all good. We are all sinners who need to be redeemed. We all need God.

Johnny Cash might have been in the crowd who heard the prophet Isaiah speak God's word concerning their captivity and release from Babylon (Chapter 48). Isaiah makes two important points: (1) God is our true Redeemer. God forgives sin. God restores people to righteousness. In other words, God heals us and allows us to begin over. Powerful!

(2) God reassures God's people of God's love and continuing presence. The Lord knew the Israelites were slow to understand God's purposes and even slower to respond. The Jews were not sure of their present or future. Yet, God's guiding spirit would be with them now and forever. That promise still holds true today! Listen to verse 17: "I am the Lord your God, who teaches you for your own good, who leads you in the way you should go."

We all need redemption and reassurance. These essentials can be understood in our "letting go and letting God." There are definite places in our personal and congregational lives where the Lord challenges us.

To "let go" is to admit I am powerless over many things and God is in control. It is:

- not to change or blame another; I can only change myself;
 - not to judge, but allow another to be a human being;
 - not to be overprotective. It is to permit another to face reality;
 - not to nag, scold, or argue, but to search out my own shortcomings and correct them;
 - not to adjust everything to my desires, but to take each day as it comes;
 - not to be frightful of the future, but to grow and live for the future.
- "Letting go" is to fear less and live and love more. □

January 23, 2011

Called to what?
Isaiah 49:1-6

God's message spoken through Isaiah now moves from a strong proclamation of redemption and reassurance to a personal messenger. Isaiah is a "suffering ser-

vant," an instrument of God's witness, who has a distinct message.

What is the "suffering servant" calling God's people to do? There are three points to his message here in Chapter 49.

(1) **God has saved you to be a servant, not a sensation.** The Lord has blessed you with new beginnings, with talents and resources that need to be shared with others. They are not to be kept for yourselves, but lovingly given to the least, the lost and the lonely. This sacrifice of love and service is to be done by everyone. It is not the responsibility of just the pastor(s) or paid staff. (Oh, my goodness!)

(2) **God calls you to raise up, to restore the survivors of Israel.** Notice the call is not to "put down," but "raise up" those in need. Too often in the church we "put down" without even realizing it. Our stares, sneers and sarcasm cause damage that is hard to overcome. Let's work on our smiles, support and sacrifices instead.

(3) **God sends you to be a light to the nations.** You have been rescued. Now you are being released to be God's witnesses and to serve others in a positive, loving spirit. You are to empty yourselves in caring and sharing and not expect others to wait on you. You are to share God's salvation of love with everyone you meet.

Businessman Harvey MacKay, who wrote *Swim with the Sharks*, tells about the importance of leaders being willing to do any kind of work. As an example of being willing to serve, MacKay mentions Philip Pillsbury of the Pillsbury milling family. Mackay writes: "The tips of three of his fingers were missing... That's the unmistakable mark of a grain miller... Philip Pillsbury had an international reputation as a connoisseur of fine foods and wines, but to the troops, his reputation as a man willing to do a hard, dirty job was the one that mattered."

The best Christians and leaders in the church see themselves as servants. The people who are greatest in the kingdom of God are those missing the tips of their fingers.

Are we willing to serve others as a "suffering servant" or do we just want others to wait on us? □

January 30, 2011

Third-class tickets
Isaiah 53:4-6, 10-12

In early American stagecoach operations there were three ticket types: first-, second- and third-class riders. In case of an accident or breakdown, first-class passengers could remain in place. Those occupying second-class space were expected to leave the coach, but not to work. Third-class travelers were not only expected to leave the stage, but also to help with repairs, or to lift the vehicle out of the mud.

In my ministry, I have observed three types of church members. Some have not wanted to give of themselves in any way. They simply sit and complain about the church and do not lift a finger to help in ministry – first-class ticket holders. Next are those who consider themselves "too good" to participate in real service. They are on the sidelines, not wanting to get their hands dirty – second-class holders.

Then, there are those who eagerly volunteer in teaching, cleaning, giving of themselves, helping in every way possible. No task is too demeaning. They feel privileged to be assisting in God's work – third-class ticket holders. Which are you?

Observe the sensitivity and compassion of the "suffering servant" in Isaiah 53. In verses 4 and 5, six verbs are used to describe the nature of the servant. He took up our infirmities, carried our diseases, was struck down, afflicted, wounded for our transgressions, and crushed for our iniquities. Also, notice the summary of his humbleness and compassion in verse 12.

In his autobiography, *All Rivers Run to the Sea*, Professor Elie Wiesel, a survivor of Hitler's concentration camps, reflects on the Nazi years. Living under cruel demands, denied basic rights and daily staples, Wiesel praises the character of their housekeeper, Maria. This courageous, uneducated, Christian woman continued her service to the family. She not only took great risk by bringing them food, but also offered to hide them in her mountain cabin. Her loyalty was humbling – definitely a third-

(Continued on pg. 34, Living)

Clergy & Diaconal

(Continued from pg. 27)

Isaac E. "Ikke" Pridgen, father of Janet Hopkins and father-in-law of the Rev. Edward A. Hopkins, died Nov. 6, 2010. Edward is pastor of Wellspring UMC, Peninsula District.

Lyle Zimmer, father of Katheryn Driscoll and father-in-law of the Rev. Jim Driscoll, died Dec. 17, 2010. Jim is pastor of Baylake UMC, Norfolk District.

Juanita Thorpe, mother of the Rev. Deborah T. Marion, Kilmarnock UMC, died Nov. 24, 2010. Deborah is pastor of Kilmarnock UMC, Rappahannock District.

Randy Parson, brother of the Rev. Derrick Parson, died Nov. 17, 2010. Derrick is pastor of Asbury Memorial UMC, Richmond District.

Steve Bates, brother of the Rev. Matthew Bates, died Nov. 19, 2010. Matthew is pastor of Verona UMC, Harrisonburg District.

Births

John and Sharon Edwards announce the birth of their first grandson, **Christopher Thomas Edwards**, Sept. 27, 2010, to their son and daughter-in-law, Jordan and Jennifer Edwards. John is director and Sharon is business manager of Westview on the James, the United Methodist camp and retreat center in Goochland County.

The Rev. Peter M. Vaughn and his wife, Carole, announce the birth of a grandson, **Charles Alexander "Charlie" Vaughn**, Nov. 11, 2010. Peter is a retired elder and Carole is former conference director of Communications. They live in Woodford. The Vaughns' son and daughter-in-law, Mark and Michelle Vaughn, are Charlie's parents. Charlie has two proud big sisters, Carter and Charlotte.

The Rev. Sarah Locke and her husband, Joseph, announce the birth of a son, **Joseph Edward "Jed" Locke II**, Nov. 20, 2010. Sarah is associate pastor at Calvary UMC, Staunton District.

Living the Word

(Continued from pg. 33)

class ticket holder.

Wiesel concludes that help came not from the intellectuals, dignitaries or community leaders. It came from a peasant woman. This distinguished world citizen raises a pertinent question: "Of what value was their faith, their education, their social position, if it aroused neither conscience nor compassion?"

My question is: "What good is it to call ourselves members of a congregation if it does not make us third-class ticket holders?" God is handing out third-class tickets each time we gather in God's name. Receive it humbly and use it daily with compassion. □

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Grace Notes

A gift that keeps on giving



Charlene Payne Kammerer
Bishop of the Virginia Conference

I want to lift up a unique and transforming ministry within the conference that directly engages young people in exploration of ministry and service in the church. It is Calling 21, now several years in existence.

The purpose of the summer Calling program is for congregations to be paired with young people wanting to explore ministry. The goal is preparation for young people to be engaged in ministry for the 21st Century. So far, we have offered congregations of different sizes across different districts the opportunity to be matched with exploring young people. This team of Calling 21 interns comes together in the beginning of the summer for preparation and the end of the summer for reflection and evaluation. Pastors and laity surround the interns with an immersion experience of day-by-day "walking with the people, following the footsteps of Jesus." It is the kind of experience that guarantees transformation.

Transformation always happens within the young people. However, transformation, a closer sense of how God is working in the world through the saving ministry of Jesus, also happens to a congregation and its members because they are blessed by the presence of a new disciple in their midst. Not surprisingly, a strong number of these young people selected to be interns end up going to seminary and answering God's call to service in The United Methodist Church.

Every one of us is called by God to introduce new generations of youth and young adults to the saving presence of Jesus Christ and his Good News for the whole world. I can't think of a better way to do so than to take a risk to become a Calling 21 congregation. This means you make a financial commitment and a radical hospitality commitment to nurture someone in Christ in an intentional way. Of course, along the way, you will become the ones being nurtured spiritually by the new gifts an intern will always bring to the life of a congregation.

At our upcoming Ministers' Convocation, I have chosen Calling 21 as the recipient of our offering at our opening worship service. This will be a sign of appreciation and acknowledgement from our pastors that this unique program is worth supporting and also an incredible opportunity to partner with God in lifting up leaders for this century in the life of our church.

Calling 21 — one of the best Spirit-led and emerging ministries in the conference! Please join me in offering prayerful and tangible support to guarantee that this ministry will continue to thrive.

Grace and Peace,

Charlene Kammerer
Charlene Kammerer



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Deadlines

The *Virginia Advocate* is published once a month. The deadline to submit news and ad copy for the February 2011 issue is Dec. 31. For more information on future deadlines, contact Peggy Cribbs in the *Advocate* office or visit the Web.

Advertising/Tributes

Tributes are published for a fee on a space-available basis. Rates for advertising and Tributes are available upon request.

Local Church News

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

Letters

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

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