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Local Church News

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

Letters

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

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PILLOW TALK



Madeline Pillow
Editor

Try a little kindness

There was a picture that I came across on the Internet a few months ago that has stuck with me. The picture was of a simple message board and it said, "Be the person who you needed when you were younger."

I reposted it and I was shocked by the response I received from it: people sharing stories about how it was something they needed to hear, others agreeing with the statement.

I guess I shouldn't be so shocked. If age has taught me anything it's that life's lessons as well as God's messages will keep hitting you over the head until you finally smack your head and understand how the whole thing has been puzzle pieces fitting together.

What I responded to so strongly with that statement was thinking about my younger self. Thinking back to the times of hurt, of loneliness, of insecurity and fear.

I look back on that girl and I want to give her a hug. I want to remind her to keep her head up and to keep pushing. To see in her eyes that she believes me when I say this will only last so long, that it will pass.

Now I'm lucky in friendships and family. I have always had those people in my corner who never let me give up and who believed in me and told me to silence the disbelievers.

But, nonetheless, no matter if we had that support or not, our experiences and feelings have shaped us. They have created and informed who we are today.

Try a little kindness.

What I am still reflecting on when I think about the above statement is about kindness. I have always tried to be kind whenever possible. Being kind makes me happy and most of the time I see no reason to veer from that path. Even in a heated exchange, I've always felt better afterwards if I kept to the path of kindness.

If we all think back to our younger selves, I would think we want to be kind to those people. We want them to know we are emphatic and understand.

Today, and for much of my entire life, kindness feels like an act that gets a bad rap. It's seen as weak or naïve. It's something to use against someone. It makes you less powerful.

I don't view it that way at all. I view it as a strength and, if you wield it for the right purposes, it has enormous power.

I wonder if we all tried to view others around us as their younger selves if we might not also lean more towards kindness, wanting to understand.

If I can encourage anything in such a time as this, in a new year, I would ask for kindness. I would ask that people view it as a strength, with an enormous power that could affect those around you in the most beautiful and far-reaching ways possible. 🍀

Until our next issue,

Madeline C. Pillow



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On the cover: Photo courtesy of Kendra Grimes. A Randolph-Macon student takes part in community service in Ashland.
Above: Photo credit: Joy Chappell. Shenandoah students at a Night Out event with university president Tracy Fitsimmons.

Editor's note:

I apologize for the error in the last issue that featured the January Living the Word instead of December. To those who use these lessons for their Sunday School classes, I appreciate your grace in understanding and hope that, beyond my error, the spirit of the season and the promise of the Christ child was able to help you in your lesson planning. Please enjoy the January lessons in this issue from the Rev. Dan Kim.

The Virginia Advocate Staff

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LETTERS



Mountain Valley Pipeline threatens historic UMC church and community

With so much attention given to the DAPL in North Dakota (rightly so, in my opinion), there are several natural gas pipeline battles raging here in Virginia including the Atlantic Coast Pipeline and the Mountain Valley Pipeline (MVP). Our historic church and community are currently being threatened by the MVP for fracked natural gas to run from Pennsylvania through West Virginia and into Virginia. Because this is a large 42" transfer pipeline that will be used to send gas for export, there is no direct benefit for any of the communities affected by it. In fact, property values will decline. The current route places it about 1,100 feet from our church and threatens the property and homes of families in our community. If the pipeline is built, it will place our 165-year-old church in what is classified by the fossil fuel industry as an "incineration zone."

Additionally, in the small print of the application to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), there is a proposed 500-foot easement for the possibility of adding additional pipelines. This will

cut a huge swath through not only private properties along the route, but also through several national forests. Many families here in Newport continue to get their water from either wells or natural springs. There is a strong possibility that blasting used in the construction of the pipeline would pose a threat to these water systems.

The topography and geology of our community is also a concern. We live in a karst area where there are numerous sinkholes and caves. Several geologists at Virginia Tech are highly concerned about placing such a sizeable line in an area of instability that is frequently subject to small tremors. Leases for pipelines are issued for a 20-year period, after which the company may completely abandon the pipeline, leaving it to rust and potentially allow radioactive compounds that are used to help speed the natural gas through the pipelines to leach out into the soil and water system. A compressor station is being proposed in neighboring Montgomery County causing concern about an additional amount of noise and additional environmental concerns.

Currently there are two groups in Newport working to fight the MVP including the Preserve Giles County group that has been meet-

ing in our fellowship hall for two years. This group has been working the environmental and geological angle.

Another group, Preserve Newport Historic Properties is approaching this from the historical angle. Of what benefit is it for a community to be given historical status if something of this magnitude is allowed to be placed in it? Both groups have secured legal representation and are working diligently to find ways to dissuade FERC from allowing this to come through our area. The Giles County Board of Supervisors has also come out against the pipeline and have their own legal representation as well. Other grass-roots organizations such as Preserve Roanoke and Preserve Franklin County are working in similar ways. 

— Morris V. Fleischer, pastor of
Newport-Mt. Olivet UMC
in Newport, Va.



Letters to the Editor are printed on a space-available basis. Letters may be e-mailed to MadelinePillow@vaumc.org by the first of the month.

LETTERS



Is your church willing to be introspective?

By Bill Pike

During 2016, my wife and I took two long family related road trips: a familiar trip to Pocasset on the Buzzards Bay side of Cape Cod and then a new adventure to Onkama, Mich. Occasionally on our treks, I spotted large, empty billboards with the words "Space Available" displayed for all potential advertisers to see.

The empty billboards made me think about all of the banners I see promi-

nently displayed in prime areas on the lawns of all types and sizes of churches. Mostly, these banners are advertising assorted programs being offered by the church.

I wonder what type of reaction a church might receive if it displayed a "Space Available" banner on the front lawn. Those words might be interpreted in numerous ways. Does it mean space is available on the lawn for an event, is the church open for assorted community organizations or does it indicate pew seat vacancies?

Traveling in southeastern Virginia and driving

along a quiet rural road once, I spotted a marquee in front of a small church: "Welcome Back, Ain't Seen You All Since Christmas." In the life of the church, we were heading into the season of Lent and Easter. The message was referencing the tendency by some churchgoers to attend church only at Christmas and Easter.

The spirit of that message resonated with me as there was an extended stretch in my life when I was only in church at Christmas and Easter. As a youth, unless I was "half past dead," I was in church

(Continued on next page.)

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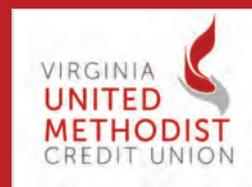
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COMMENTARY

(“AVAILABLE,” cont. from page 5.)

every Sunday for Sunday school, an 11 o’clock service and a late afternoon gathering of middle and high school students.

During college, our first years of marriage and the early years of rearing our own children, church attendance was not frequently on our radar. Interestingly, the growth and aging of our children brought us back in line as regular participants in a church.

Over the last several years, data clearly indicates a downward trend in church attendance for the major denominations across America. So many churches have “Space Available” in their sanctuaries, fellowship halls and classrooms on Sunday morning.

At the 2016 Virginia Annual Conference, more Methodist churches were closed in the history of this organization than ever before. I wonder if other denominations are experiencing this fracture. A church was once the bedrock of every community.

Clearly, I’m no expert on churches, but I have noted the following while serving as the Director of Operations at Trinity United Methodist during the last six years.

The long-time sustainers of churches are slowly diminishing as the aging

process puts many of them in line at the pearly gates. Often, these sustainers were significant economic contributors to churches.

Overloaded individual and families calendars push regular church attendance off top 10 lists of the most urgent items to do. The days when a person or family attended church all 52 Sundays in a year are probably over. Attending once or twice a month might be the new normal.

With 2017 upon us, church leadership, both clergy and their congregations, must carefully look to the future. There is no crystal ball, but asking tough questions about the state of the church are worth pursuing.

What is working? What’s not working? Do we offer opportunities for spiritual development for all demographics? What does our missional work look like? Are we too confined within the walls of the church? Are we too rigid with our traditions? What is a worship experience like for first time visitors? Is our congregation warm and inviting or cliquish and cold? Do we have the capacity to adjust or are we too fearful and reluctant to embrace change?

In truth, for churches there is probably no better time than now to be asking questions and charting a new course based upon

what a church uncovers from their homework. If a church from these findings implements adjustments in their programs, that newness or freshness will need monitoring and tweaking. Building in the capacity and endurance to check benchmarks along the way will be vital for future learning and growth.

American author E. B. White once stated, “The only sense that is common in the long run is the sense of change, and we all instinctively avoid it.” Without question, change can be difficult to embrace. I struggle with change too.

But, at this point in the life of the church, avoiding an opportunity for introspection by asking challenging questions would not be wise. Avoidance in this case is like fuel for an out of control wildfire. Wildfires make space available and we have also learned that with time, wildfires create opportunities for new natural growth.

Don’t misconstrue the wildfire reference, torching your building is not suggested. But continuing on the road trip that avoids internal analysis of the “current state of your church” might accelerate the empty words: Space Available. 

– Bill Pike is director of Operations at Trinity UMC, Richmond District.



The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

Bishop travels to Virginia Beach for Hurricane Matthew relief updates

By Madeline Pillow

Bishop Lewis traveled to Virginia Beach on Nov. 17 to learn more about the relief efforts following Hurricane Matthew. At a meeting at Courthouse Community UMC, Bishop Lewis heard from representatives of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM), Office of Emergency Management (OEM), Virginia Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD) and the Virginia Early Response Team (ERT) about the impact of Hurricane Matthew and the realities that its survivors will face.

Hurricane Matthew as the Rev. Bob Pihlcrantz, Virginia Conference Disaster Response Coordinator, explained was a bit of a surprise, changing its path suddenly, negating previous weather reports. The change in course caused it to sweep across Virginia Beach, impacting a region heavily affected by rainfalls of two prior hurricanes in the weeks before and the loss of volunteer groups heading to the south. The area was so saturated as a result that the ground couldn't absorb the 18-24

inches that fell over the 24-hour period.

"In a flood event, most flooded homes can be repaired," said Amanda Reidelbach, Director of External Affairs at VDEM in the meeting. "As long as they are dried out, there's no mold and then it can be put back together."

ERT teams have already started what is known as "muck and gut". This process is where flooded houses need to be mucked out from the silt as well as sewage, taking care of debris from the flood water and getting rid of anything touching the contaminated water.

What these groups have found is that those

affected by the hurricane can expect monetary awards from FEMA not to meet their needs, leading to homes and families that would need more help.

"What we are finding in this event, are people who already are on the edges of our society, people who were already reliant on our social safety network, were some of the most greatly impacted," said Reidelbach.

Homes and persons that were greatly impacted were lower-income homes, subsidized housing, single parent families and the elderly.

Volunteer efforts to help out persons affected by the hurricane will be shared by the conference

in the coming months, for now, said Pihlcrantz, every church is needed.

"We need the engagement of every person, every church within the Annual Conference connection," said Pihlcrantz.

You can make a gift through your local church. Or, send a check payable to "Virginia United Methodist Conference" to the Virginia Conference Treasurer, P.O. Box 5605, Glen Allen, VA 23058. Designate "Conference Advance #5037-Disaster Response" on your check or apportionment statement. 

— Madeline Pillow is editor of the Advocate.



A volunteer from Bethlehem United Methodist Church, Moneta VA inscribes a message on the frame of a house in progress.

The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



Nat Turner Bible delivers a kind of reconciliation

By Madeline Pillow

Virginia is a state ripe with historical significance. From Jamestown to the Civil War, you can almost guarantee that every Virginian lives just down the road from history.

This is true for Persons UMC where Mark Person, whose ancestors established the church in 1838 in Southampton County, met with Virginia Conference staff to talk about history especially Nat Turner's Rebellion.

With a graveyard sitting parallel to the church, it is the final resting place of Mark's great-grandfather as well as eight Civil War soldiers. It is also close to the site of Nat Turner's baptism in 1827.

According to Mark, one of his ancestors, John Person, owned the land where the church still stands as well as the surrounding acreage. Turner, a slave, was denied baptism at a church, but John Person was welcoming, allowing Turner baptismal rites at his millpond.

Years later in 1831, the county was the site of the bloodiest slave rebellion led by Turner against white slave owners.

Some of Person's family



It is thought that Nat Turner was holding this Bible when he was captured two months after the rebellion he led against slaveholders in Southampton County, Virginia. Turner worked both as an enslaved field hand and as a minister. A man of remarkable intellect, he was widely respected by black and white people in Southampton County, Virginia. He used his talents as a speaker and his mobility as a preacher to organize the slave revolt. This Bible was donated to the museum by descendants of Lavinia Francis, a slaveholder who survived the rebellion. Photo: Michael Barnes, Smithsonian Gift of Maurice A. Person and Noah and Brooke Porter

The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

died in the rebellion, but two slaves saved Mark's great, great-grandmother Lavinia Francis by hiding her in a closet. At the time she was just 19 and eight months pregnant with her first child. This was an act, Marks said, that ensured he is here today to help tell the story.

In the rebellion, at least 55 people were killed including Mark's great, great-uncle. There was a swift rebuttal by white militias who killed 200 African Americans in retaliation.

Discovered two months later on the run, Turner was found with a sword and Bible.

Nat Turner's Bible

In 1912, officials at the Southampton Courthouse were renovating and found the Bible, giving it to Walter Person, father to Maurice Person whose cousin is Mark Person.

This Bible, kept in the Person's family since then, is now a part of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C.

Mark has acted as a spokesperson for the family after his cousin Maurice and his stepdaughter Wendy donated the Bible in 2010.

Going through extensive tests, the Bible, whose size is around 3 inches by 5 with a rag type paper,

was aided in identification when a conservator used a photograph of the Bible from 1900 to confirm. Stains on the Bible in the photograph matched the Bible in the Persons' possession.

As a child, Mark remembers the Bible growing up, laying in a closet wrapped in a family dish towel and people would come visit it.

"We all knew that it was Nat Turner's. He [Maurice] would occasionally bring it to the reunions," said Mark.

The church and the Person family have been able to share their story through a number of media outlets even sharing the story with news sources in Europe. In October 2015, Nate Parker, director and actor in the latest movie, "The Birth of a Nation" even visited with Mark at the church to learn more about the history and to see the grounds.

Through all of the exposure, the official opening of the African American museum in D.C. and the recent movie about Turner and the rebellion, Mark and his family are still in shock from the response that the Bible has elicited. One thing Mark is sure of is where the Bible is now.

"It's in the right place. It hits close to home but it wouldn't have been right to take money for it," Mark said. "I see it as a reconciliation. It was just sitting

in a house and now the whole world can see it."

Creating dialogue

Though the millpond has since dried up and resides with new owners and the Bible now has a new home, the story is creating dialogue.

With racial tensions still high in the country, Mark hopes that those who see the Bible in the museum will consider history.

Taking part in a talk at UVA in January 2016, Mark joined Brian Favors, co-founder and director of Sankofa Community Empowerment, Inc., to share about his family's history with Nat Turner as Favors spoke about Nat Turner and dialogues about race relations in the 21st century.

"I see it as a reconciliation. It was just sitting in a house and now the whole world can see it."

The event had an impact on Mark who said he learned a lot about race relations and the impor-



tance of dialogue.

"We still have a lot of tension in the country and I think communication is key."

He also hopes that the Bible in its new home can help create this dialogue.

"The Bible, I look back at that time, and I think it's a healer by itself, its significance. There's a lot going on in the world today and I think anybody who goes to see it will maybe think more about it," said Mark.

Mark mentioned that while the community knew about the Bible the added media coverage has caused the Bible to be brought back to the forefront and has caused a revival in the sharing of history. 

— Madeline Pillow is editor of the Advocate.

DISCIPLES HELPING TO TRANSFORM THE WORLD



▲ One hundred twenty-four boxes were collected at **Marshall UMC in Marshall** for Operation Christmas Child for 2016. Marshall member Nathan Egeland also asked for socks for his seventh birthday instead of gifts. He collected them for the homeless and they will be distributed through Teens Opposing Poverty in the near future. Nathan collected a total of 580 pairs of socks given by Marshall UMC family, neighbors, family and friends outside of the church, including at Coleman Elementary School in Marshall, Va.

Bishop Lewis attended and preached at the **Roanoke District Conference** on Nov. 20, 2016. Pictured here is the bishop during their hands-on mission project with Stop Hunger Now. ▶



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



EVENTS

January

Candidacy Summit

Jan. 6-7, Richmond Hill Retreat Center, Richmond

If you are considering going into ministry, you are invited, alongside candidates for licensed ordained ministry, to the Candidacy Summit sponsored by the office of Clergy Excellence. During the summit, you can begin to discern your call to ministry with others, learn the requirements for becoming a certified candidate and initiate a mentor group. Attendees must be 18 or older. For more information or to register, go to www.vaumc.org/CandidacySummit.

Conference Legislative Network Celebration

Jan. 14, Centenary UMC, Richmond

The Conference Legislative Committee is hosting a 25th anniversary celebration of United Methodist Day at General Assembly, Saturday, Jan. 14, 2017, at Centenary UMC, 411 E. Grace Street, Richmond, Va. The event will start with registration at 11 a.m., lunch at noon followed by a program at 1 p.m. Pre-registration is necessary and child care will be available. Cost for the day is \$15 or \$35 for both this event and UM Day in Feb. if you register by Jan. 6. Visit this link to register: www.vaumc.org/UMDay.

February

United Methodist Day at the General Assembly

Feb. 2, General Assembly, Richmond

The Conference United Methodist Day is Thursday, Feb. 2, 2017. It is an avenue of faithful advocacy that helps participants look beyond mercy ministry and join together with

elected officials to make a difference and exercise the Social Principles of the UMC. Early bird registration and payment of \$25 per person must be received by Friday, Jan. 15. Final registration will be Friday, Jan. 29 and will cost \$35. Registration questions may be directed to the Rev. Barbara Lewis at BarbaraLewis@vaumc.org. General questions may be directed to the Rev. Pat Shipley at plsrevdoc@aol.com or to the Rev. Randy Harlow at crhncboy@aol.com. To register and for more information, visit this link: www.vaumc.org/UMDay.

March

UMM Visioning event

Mar. 25, Virginia United Methodist Center, Glen Allen

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

Pastors, consider bringing your UMM Men Chartered group, your Men's fellowship, Mission team or Men's Bible study as we present a day to help them discern their place in Christ's Kingdom. The event starts promptly at 8:30 a.m. with a plenary session led by the Rev. Glenn Rowley, conference director for the Office of Justice and Missional Excellence. Breakout sessions will be offered encompassing Values and Vision, Mission and Social Justice, The United Methodist Connection, Men's Ministry and Reverse Mentoring. Fee is \$12 which includes all materials, continental breakfast

served at 7:30 a.m. and lunch. For more information contact Dann Ladd, Vice-President Virginia Conference UMM at ladddann@gmail.com.

May

Shenandoah University Youth Theology Institute (SUYTI)

May 1

The Shenandoah University Youth Theology Institute (SUYTI) is a new program, funded through the Lilly Foundation, offered to Christian youth as a partnership between Shenandoah University, Wesley Theological Seminary and the Virginia Annual Conference of the UMC.

The Youth Institute is designed to educate and inspire young Christians to become better leaders in their local congregations through deep and thought-provoking experiences. Each day at the institute, modeled after ancient monastic pattern, includes academic study and religious reflection balanced with immersive experiences.

The program is a two-week immersive experience for rising 10th, 11th and 12th graders (offered this year July 23-August 5, 2017). For 2017 there is no cost passed on to student participants, except a \$50 registration fee and the cost of travel to and from Shenandoah University.

Pastors and youth leaders can nominate youth they think will benefit from this youth theology institute and students can apply at www.su.edu/campus-life/spiritual-life/institute-for-church-professions/youth-theology-institute/.

The 2017 session of the SUYTI is now accepting nominations and applications until May 1, 2017.

TECHNOLOGY TIPS



How much time should be spent on social media?



By Andrew J. Schleicher

The amount of time that any congregation spends using social media to promote its ministries will depend much on the size of the congregation and staff. Small and average-sized congregations may find it necessary to limit themselves to only one or two social networks.

The key digital communications in any-sized congregation should be the website and email. They are accessible to all who are online even if they never use social media.

By far, the main source of social traffic to UMC.org is through Facebook. Congregations that can only focus on one social network should start with Facebook. The second network you choose likely will depend on your target audience, the type of material you want to share and the knowledge and comfort level of the person who will manage the account.

Consider individual or team for social media maintenance

It may be possible to increase the number of social networks used by sharing duties and starting a social media team, but you will need to make sure

that all communication is coordinated and consistent.

Designate one person on staff or in the congregation to stay up to date on the latest best practices in social media and share that information with everyone who is involved in this effort. The leader of your social media team should be someone who can devote at least 10 hours a week to the efforts.

Larger congregations should consider having a staff person focused part-time on social media and keeping on the cutting edge of digital communications. This should be included in the job description so the person would be expected to devote significant time to this critical communication form.

Many congregations may question whether they can afford to have a person devote significant time to social media. However, research shows that online communication will not only enhance participation in congregational activities, but it will also enhance the impact of fundraising efforts, including stewardship campaigns. The social media manager needs to learn the best methods for online fundraising in addition to having the time to make posts.

The largest congregations should consider hiring a full-time new-media

manager to maintain their social media and blog presence. This would include regular engagement with the congregation and community online and creating graphics to use on the various networks.

No matter your congregation's size, if you find yourself overwhelmed, it is best to cut back on the number of social media networks you manage and focus your efforts effectively.

Managing your social media accounts

How much time should be spent on the various outlets? Do only what you can do well. Don't feel that you must do it all.

❖ **Website and email (five to 40 hours weekly):** Since this is the foundation, remember to spend at least five hours here each week. Large churches could even make this a full-time position.

❖ **Facebook (four hours):** Post and schedule status updates for the church four to six times a week. Include time to respond to comments and track the "Insights" data. You may need to add another hour if promoting an event on Facebook.

❖ **YouTube (one hour):** Upload video, create playlists and subscribe to other feeds. Use this time also to see how other churches and nonprofits use YouTube.

❖ **Instagram (three hours):** Post one or two images or videos daily. Also take time to like other people's posted content.

❖ **Design graphic visual content (three hours):** No matter what networks you use, your efforts will be enhanced by taking the time to build branded images, infographics, videos, presentations and banner images.

❖ **Research (two hours):** Stay current on the latest in nonprofit and church technology by subscribing to the MyCom e-newsletter at UMC.org.

Using additional social networks will require additional resources. Make sure you decide wisely how to spend your time. Learn about the various uses of social networking before making the leap. 📌

— Andrew J. Schleicher is a project coordinator with United Methodist Communications.



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ST SCHOOLS SERVE



Photo courtesy of Joy Chappell.

By John Peters

When asked about their religious preference, the fastest growing category of students on campus reply “none.” On most college campuses that is the reality. Whereas it was once assumed that many students had the experience of being raised in the church or at least having some connection to church, synagogue or mosque, today such a conclusion would be highly inaccurate.

In the Virginia Conference, we have six United Methodist schools served by six United Methodist chaplains. Our schools are Ferrum College, Randolph College, Randolph-Macon Academy, Randolph-Macon College, Shenandoah University and Virginia Wesleyan College. Each of these unique institutions is in partnership with The Inted Methodist Church (UMC) and continues to provide strong lay and clergy leadership for the churches of the Virginia Conference.

When so many students have so little connection to the church, how are disciples being made among them? One of the ways is by giving students the opportunity to serve the poor, the disenfranchised and the needy. Our chaplains on our campuses play a vital role in making this connection. Students seem especially eager to participate in Habitat For Humanity, Stop Hunger Now, disaster relief, local feeding programs and a myriad other mission opportunities. When our chaplains help interpret to students Matthew 25:40, “When you have done it to one of these the least of my brethren you have done it to me,” students begin to “get it.” These ventures of serving teach the ways of Jesus, the ways of faith.

In this edition of the *Advocate*, you will read about the exciting commitment to serve that is evident on our six campuses. For many students, the experience of serving may be their first encounter with the work churches regularly perform. Surely this is a new and vital means of instructing students about the ministry of the church, helping to form disciples on campus among those who may later connect to and lead our congregations.

– John Peters is the Director of Association of Educational Institutions.



FERRUM COLLEGE STUDENTS VOLUNTEER AFTER TORNADO HITS WAVERLY, VA.

By Nia Pettiford

Over fall break, six Ferrum students and two instructors volunteered their time in Waverly, Va. Waverly was hit by a deadly tornado in February 2016 that did tremendous damage to the entire community. With coordination from Dean of Chapel Jan Nicholson-Angles, the work team volunteered with the Virginia United Methodist Volunteers in Mission to help restore the community.

The team worked on a house which belonged to single mother Trenika Stringfield and her two daughters. She lost her 2-year-old son, brother and fiancé in the tornado within five minutes.

Team member Jesse Delph said, "Getting to know Trenika's story was my favorite part. It was amazing to listen to the experience she went through and to be able to see her keep pushing through with the faith of God every day."

Stringfield works two jobs and aspires to be a nurse. Though the loss was great, the family continues to stay strong.

Senior Katie Delph said, "It was an amazing experience to know that a family that was severely distraught by a tornado has the high hopes and spirits that this family does."

After the tornado, Stringfield bought the house so her family could rebuild it. The house needed much renovation. The Ferrum volunteer team mainly worked on the roof and because of severe water damage and rot, the team had to completely tear the roof apart and put it back together.

"The work was hard, but I couldn't stop because I had to do as much as I could for this family," said Casey Hawkins. "Compared to the pain and suffering they had been through, a couple of blisters and splinters meant nothing."

Even though the team gave a lot, they all said they gained a lot as well.

"The time I spent in Waverly was the first time in a long time that I felt useful," said Mark Kellam. "During the trip, all of the troubles, distractions and dreams that normally occupy my mind disappeared; I had been set free. We were only there for a few short days, yet the church we stayed in was home and we were family. I wish we had more time.

The team was great and I would work with [them] again in a heartbeat."

Katie Delph perfectly captured the experience in one sentence: "This trip gave an emphasis to the phrase 'every little bit helps.'"

The team's accomplishments wouldn't have been possible without Virginia United Methodist Volunteers in Mission. There is always room for donations to help the next family that suffers a disaster.

Ferrum College Spiritual Life is planning another work team opportunity for students, faculty and staff over Spring Break 2017. They are scheduled to go to the Virginia coast to assist with Disaster Response/Recovery following Hurricane Matthew.

To make a donation for Trenika Stringfield's house, please make checks payable to: Virginia United Methodist Conference with Disaster Recovery TSH in the memo line. Mail to: VAUMC Office of Missions, Attn: Forrest White, PO Box 5606, Glen Allen, VA 23058. An additional \$35,500 is needed to rehab Trenika's house. 

– Nia Pettiford is a freshman at Ferrum College.





RANDOLPH
WildCats

LIVING LIFE ABUNDANTLY AT RANDOLPH COLLEGE

By Jennifer Vestal Moore

*Life more abundant!
"Vita Abundantior."*

*"I have come that they might have life
and have it more abundantly!" (John 10:10)*

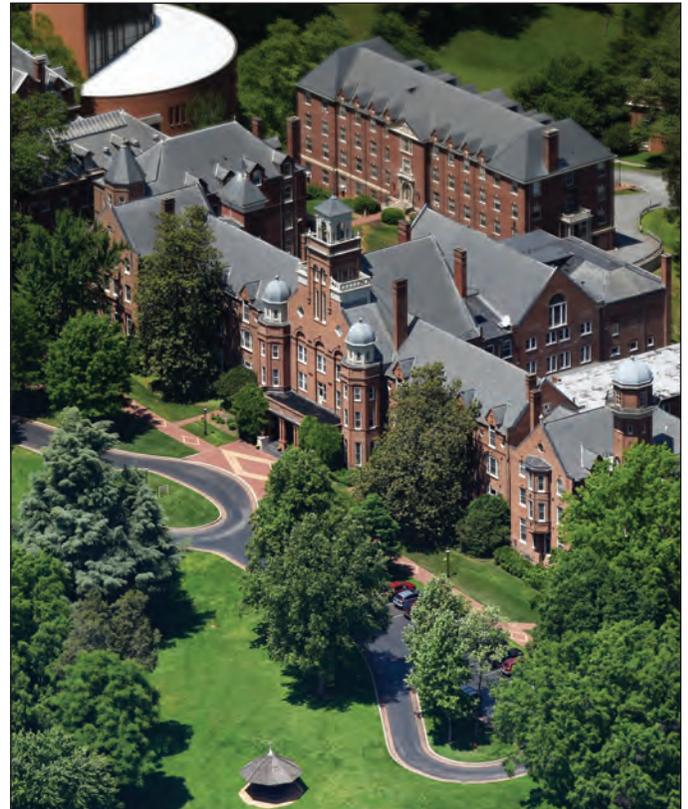
Whether it's the name of a program, a college motto or words of our Savior, living life abundantly – to its fullness – includes serving our brothers and sisters in need.

Even though the students at Randolph College live behind the Red Brick Wall in a small community of about 700 students, the mission of Randolph's Life More Abundant Program is to instill a sense of civic responsibility in our students with the purpose of improving inequalities in our local and global communities. At Randolph, we believe that the world is the classroom, and it is our responsibility to raise awareness about crucial social concerns. It is also our responsibility to help our students view themselves as part of the global community and to challenge them to seek solutions to complex root causes of these systematic problems.

Randolph College has a strong commitment to community engagement and partners with four local ministries: *Miriam's House* – which provides shelter for abused women and their children; *Rush Homes* – which provides affordable and accessible rental housing opportunities to people with disabilities and low incomes; *Jubilee Family Development Center* – which provides after school care and summer programs for underprivileged children while helping the whole family; and *Links Program* – which builds self-esteem, encourages and supports academic achievement, provides a variety of cultural and recreational experiences, promotes character-building activities and assists in career exploration and learning for high school-age students.

Jamaica is this year's mission destination for Randolph's spring-break students. While there, students will be participating in numerous hands-on opportunities as well as engaging in conversation with the Jamaican people around social justice issues.

With the appointment of one pastor to serve both a very mission-focused church and a forward thinking college, the



result has been shared ministry opportunities where both communities use their hands and hearts to serve God's people together. You can regularly find students and church members working side by side in our "Food for Family" program feeding the hungry at our United Methodist Parkview Missions. Our Randolph students find a special touch and loving connection from the parishioners of Bethany UMC, Rustburg, in the joyful learning, sharing and growing that happens when they worship God together.

In the words of our Methodist founder John Wesley, "Do all the good you can. By all the means you can. In all the ways you can. In all the places you can. At all the times you can. To all the people you can. As long as ever you can." I'm thankful to say that the students, faculty and staff at Randolph College, as well as the parishioners at Bethany UMC, live out these words through their words and actions. 

– The Rev. Jennifer Vestal Moore is the chaplain at Randolph College and pastors at Bethany UMC, Rustburg.



RANDOLPH-MACON ACADEMY CHALLENGED TO SERVE THEIR COMMUNITY

At Randolph-Macon Academy (R-MA) in Front Royal, Va., serving others is an intrinsic part of the student experience. There is no minimum requirement for community service because the academy's philosophy is that students should help others because it is part of building character. As they are taught through one of the Air Force JROTC core values, "Service before Self," students are to serve others not to mark off a box on their college resumes, but because it is the right thing to do.

Throughout 2016, there have been several community service projects headed up by Chaplain Joshua Orndorff. The students traveled to Washington, D.C., with Teens Opposing Poverty and gave food to the homeless. They joined with Front Royal United Methodist Church to package food for the hungry through Stop Hunger Now, served as ushers and assistants for local events and held a food and coat drive for the local Salvation Army. But when asked which community service event in 2016 really stood out in his mind, Orndorff quickly named one that is close to his heart: Kelsey's Big Give. The community service organization and its annual days of service are named after Orndorff's sister Kelsey, who while a senior in high school, died in a car accident.

"These community service days were originally Kelsey's idea to bring churches, schools and organizations together to serve those in need," said Orndorff.

Kelsey's Big Give for 2016 took place at the end of the first week of school, on Saturday, Sept. 10. While many students took advantage of the chance to sleep in, 18 Randolph-Macon Academy students chose instead to wake up even before the sun rose over the mountains. They traveled to the northern part of Front Royal to Riverton United Methodist Church to join oth-

ers in various service projects throughout the day.

"Our students shone bright as one group helped redo a garden in memory of Kelsey at Riverton Church as well as other landscaping work. Another group did yard work for a man who had recently become a paraplegic," said Orndorff.

"Kelsey's Big Give was an inspiring project that I enjoyed being a part of," said Zainab Salami, a Randolph-Macon Academy senior from Texas. "I loved how the work we were doing was actually doing a visible change in someone's life."

Salami said she particularly enjoyed meeting a woman who was retired military; the time at which this retiree served was when women were still fighting for respect as military personnel.

"She told us stories about how she had to stand up for herself and it was amazing to meet one of the women who blazed the trail for our equality," said Salami. "I will never forget such an amazing experience."

R-MA sits on a hill that can be seen from most of the town of Front Royal, so during the school's weekly chapel services, Orndorff has challenged and encouraged the student body, faculty and staff to serve others and live up to the ideal of being a true "city on a hill." During Kelsey's Big Give, the students did just that.

"Several of the students said they had never worked so hard in their lives, but they were filled with joy and even energy for being able to help others," Orndorff stated. "They truly shone bright like a city on a hill as they lived into

Kelsey's vision of living life with passion for God and for others." 

—Randolph-Macon Academy (R-MA), founded in 1892, is a college-preparatory, coeducational boarding school for students in grades 6 through 12.



Photo courtesy of Josh Orndorff.



'THE BIG EVENT' UNITES RANDOLPH-MACON AND ASHLAND COMMUNITY

By Nia Pettiford

A Randolph-Macon College (R-MC) liberal arts education develops the mind and character of each student. In support of their mission, service to others—whether on campus, in the community of Ashland or around the globe—is an integral part of the community life.

In 2015-16, R-MC students collectively amassed more than 27,400 volunteer hours and donated \$49,897.71 to various causes. Students in Fraternity and Sorority Life contributed more than 13,600 hours of collective service to the community and donated \$1,737.73 to various organizations and philanthropies. In addition, \$21,000 was raised and donated to the American Cancer Society from the annual Relay for Life. Opportunities such as the Service Fellows, the SERVE (Students Engaged in Responsible Volunteer Experiences) program, and Service Saturdays offered by the college chaplain create many opportunities for students to learn as they serve.

One of students' favorite opportunities to serve is known as The Big Event. This is an annual opportunity for Randolph-Macon College students to express their gratitude to their Ashland neighbors. The most recent Big Event took place Nov. 20, 2016. Student volunteers rolled up their sleeves, performing a variety of service projects across the Ashland community, including window washing, mulching and leaf-raking.

The Big Event was founded in 1982 at Texas A&M University by Joe Nussbaum, vice president of the Student Government Association. Today, this one-day community service project occurs on more than 75 campuses throughout the world. In its second year at R-MC, 315 students volunteered to work on projects, a remarkable 59 percent increase in participation from last year.

"Throughout the years, the Town of Ashland has shown tremendous support to the students of R-MC," said Jayme Watkins, director of Student Life. "Because of this, the Stu-



Photo courtesy of Kendra Grimes.

dents Engaged in Responsible Volunteer Experiences (SERVE) program at Randolph-Macon College strives to give back to the residents of Ashland. The Big Event is one more way for the Yellow Jacket community to perform community service in a very hands-on way."

Volunteers created a courtyard garden at Duncan Memorial United Methodist Church, winterized garden beds for local residents, raked leaves around Ashland and helped with other home projects. At the end of the day, volunteers enjoyed dinner provided by Jake's Place, an Ashland restaurant.

Emily Nicholson, a 2018 English major, said, "If we as the college want to be valued as members of the community, we need to do something for the community. I think it's really important that we are a part of the Ashland community."

Lyn Hodnett, a lifelong member of Duncan Memorial United Methodist Church, said of The Big Event student-volunteers, "It's just a marvelous gift that they are giving us. Students created a beautiful courtyard garden for the church. We simply needed so much help with the heavy lifting. And these great guys showed up from Randolph-Macon who were polite, cordial, willing and able. We were just very grateful to have their help."

Biology Professor Nicholas Ruppel, along with a dozen students, gathered at the college's Brian Moores Native Plant

(Continued on next page: "RMC.")



("RMC," continued from previous page.

Garden, located at the corner of Smith and Henry streets, to prepare the garden for the winter by weeding, raking, edging and mulching. All of the students are members of the Service Fellows program, a multi-year experience that integrates service opportunities with an exploration of the contexts and root causes of social needs. Ruppel routinely uses the garden as a teaching space in his plant-themed classes.

"The hard work and effort of The Big Event student-volunteers will help to promote a happy and healthy native plant community for the next growing season," said Ruppel. "Also, the space is an important bridge between the R-MC campus and the Ashland community, and regular upkeep like we did makes it a more inviting space for the students and local residents who pass by it every day. I can't thank the student volunteers and Big Event organizers enough for all their help to make this happen."

"The Big Event was a huge success," said Watkins, "not only for R-MC, but for the Ashland community as a whole. It is amazing to see the impact this program has on helping our students and residents become more connected. This is always one of my favorite days of the year. Our students have such positive attitudes about the day and always return to campus excited, with stories to share."

Of course, developing the mind and character of a student takes more than a single event. Leadership development is one of the primary focuses of R-MC's Office of Student Life. With programs and initiatives such as the Student

Leadership Conference, the Leadership Fellows program, and Leadership Week, R-MC prepares students to be the leaders of tomorrow. The multi-year Leadership Fellows program instructs participants on the theories of leadership, including the Social Change Model, Servant Leadership and Transformative Leadership. The program is designed to build upon itself year after year, with students helping to direct their own personal experiences and educate their peers.

The SERVE program provides students with dynamic opportunities for service and service-learning, and helps them explore the root causes and contexts of social needs through connections with the greater community. SERVE students engage in a variety of service activities throughout the year, including Macon a Difference Day, the culmination of a week-long community-service initiative that brings together students, faculty and staff to help beautify the R-MC and Ashland communities.

The Service Fellows program is designed to operate much like a not-for-profit service organization. Fellows have the opportunity to progress through four years of guided service, exploration and reflection in this co-curricular program. Fellows work together and with other community organizations to provide service to others. 🍀

— The Rev. Kendra Grimes is chaplain at Randolph-Macon College. Randolph-Macon College strives to educate the next generation of servant leaders. Providing ongoing and well-developed opportunities to serve, reflect and learn are a central part of Student Life at R-MC. Learn more at www.rmc.edu/campus-life/office-of-student-life/serve.



OFFERING CHRIST IN OUTREACH AND SERVICE AT VIRGINIA WESLEYAN COLLEGE



By Ashley A. Kline

Students at Virginia Wesleyan College have a heart for service and outreach and are not shy about showing it.

"We are intentional about sharing and offering Christ through hands on service and a joyful sharing of the good news of Jesus," said Chaplain Greg West.

There are 17 different gatherings under the Marlin Ministries banner taking place on campus every week. Two of these are worship gatherings and the others are life groups for discipleship and prayer. Virginia Wesleyan College has a very active Community Service office and academic requirements are putting more emphasis on learning and serving outside of the classroom. Having a heart for God and others is lifted up in the Marlin Ministries vision statement: "Discovering who we are in God's eyes. Experiencing Jesus' love and truth together. Living by the Spirit as we share Jesus' life, ministry and story with everyone."

Marlin Ministries provides training and opportunities to serve and reach out, meeting people's spiritual and physical needs. Two examples of these opportunities are The Event and Stop Hunger Now.

The Event is the result of a 2014 collaboration between Chaplain Greg West and Young Life Area Director Joshua Shaw. It aims to create a fun atmosphere with games, laughter, refreshments and a way to meet new friends.

Some activities at The Event have included bobbing for goldfish, glow in the dark Ultimate Frisbee and human Hungry, Hungry Hippo. The Event wraps up with one of the student leaders sharing about the person, the ministry of Jesus and how Christ has impacted their own life.

For junior Luke Wentling, a Religious Studies major, working with The Event has assisted him in his walk with Christ by challenging him to step out of his comfort zone, forcing him to be extroverted.

Stop Hunger Now

A resounding gong signifies how many meals have been packaged in Virginia Wesleyan College's gymnasium



Students participate in a Stop Hunger Now event. Photo courtesy of Greg West.

as people of all ages worked in harmonious collaboration. This was the scene during the Stop Hunger Now event hosted at the college on Oct. 29, 2016. Coordinated by a representative of the Elizabeth River District United Methodist youth, Doug Starke, 40,100 meals were packed up to support ORPHANetwork in Nicaragua.

According to Virginia Wesleyan's Director of Community Service, Diane Hotaling, these meals were packaged by a total of 33 volunteers from the college along with 60 United Methodist youth and their families. Hotaling said that this is not the college's first experience with Stop Hunger Now. Wesleyan hosted a Stop Hunger Now Event in 2009, which was attended by Starke. It was the impact of this event that inspired Starke to hold the mission project at Wesleyan.

In planning the event, Starke had the assistance of a district team comprised of 15 youth. The youth played a critical role in advertising the event and raising funds. With costs equaling \$2,900 to package 10,000 meals, the fundraising initiative had to be extensive. In order to meet this goal, the youth contacted mission and outreach coord-

(Continued on page 25: "VIRGINIA WESLEYAN.")



SHENANDOAH UNIVERSITY PROVIDES INTERNATIONAL MISSION EXPERIENCES

By Keith Jones Pomeroy

Each year, Shenandoah University inspires and educates their students by offering service and mission trips around the world. These trips are a collaboration between the Office of Spiritual Life and faculty from different academic departments. Our goal is to have students engage their intellect, their soul and their sense of purpose by being placed in a new and uncomfortable context. It is often in these spaces that we grow the most.

THE MODEL OF MISSIONS

The Office of Spiritual Life has a philosophy of missions that addresses three core themes in all of our trips. Each trip must be:

Mutual. It is common in many mission trips that participants later express, "I think I got more out of this than the community I served." Often that is the case. Though our students are giving their time and energy, they are also gaining immensely. They are given the privilege to travel, to have global experiences and to practice their discipline in a new cultural setting. We are not going to "help," but to listen, to learn, and to serve our brothers and sisters. It is important

that we do this in relationship with communities who ask us to come, rather than assuming that they need us.

Relational. Our trips are built in partnership with organizations on the ground in our host countries. Instead of visiting a different country or location every year, we continue these partnerships for the long-term. We listen to our partners and allow them to lead us, rather than the other way around. This allows for deeper connections and more sustainability.

Sustainable. Within service work, it is important that there is a sustainable model that goes beyond one or two trips. The partners we work with are there before we get there and continue to be there after we leave. Our goal is that what we do helps on-going work that provides development, transformation and growth for years to come.

All of our trips have academic components where students learn more about using their discipline in a new cultural setting while serving. Our host partners provide education about the strengths and challenges of the communities we're serving in, the roots of poverty and basic understanding of the host culture. In addition to this, each trip has stu-



Photos courtesy of Keith Jones Pomeroy.



dents engage in daily spiritual reflections, unpacking their experiences and connecting them to their vocation, goals and understanding of God. Taking time to reflect in a new context allows for deeper growth and transformation.

MISSION DESTINATIONS

Our nursing students travel to Brazil every other year to offer basic medical care to underserved communities who live off the Amazon River. The group works with the Brazil United Methodist Church and travels on the John Wesley Medical Mission Boat to accomplish this. This tends to be a challenging experience for many of our students, who are used to nursing in sterile hospitals and clinics with technology and a surplus of supplies. In most of the villages we visit, we provide care out of small schools and churches with virtually no technology and limited supplies.

On the years that we don't travel to Brazil, our music therapy students travel during spring break to Xela, Guatemala to teach music to both children and elementary school teachers in the Mayan Highlands. The Highland Support Project is our partner here, who works to support local leaders in transformational models of development. While our students teach, they also learn



traditional Mayan songs and dances, and aspects of the difficult history in Guatemala, including their 36-year war, where over 200,000 people died.

Each May, after classes end, graduate students from the physician assistant, physical therapy, occupational therapy and pharmacy programs serve in Leon, Nicaragua. This medical mission trip works with El Ayudante, an organization that provides much needed medical care in the rural mountain regions around Leon. This is our largest group, with around 50 students working to provide care.

TRANSFORMATION OF STUDENTS IN MISSION

Though what students can do is limited within a week, the experience can speak to them beyond that. Our churches are full of people who have been transformed through mission trips, through local service and through relationships. The focus on self-reflection before, during and after the trip can be challenging. When visiting communities where poverty is endemic and opportunities are limited, it provides a space where we can confront the challenges in our own communities. Our hope and prayer is that our students are inspired to work for justice, to transform their hearts and minds and to advocate and listen to those who are vulnerable near them. The trips that we take are a small step toward living into the Kingdom of God. 📖

– Keith Jones Pomeroy is the Spiritual Life Coordinator at Shenandoah University.

SHENANDOAH UNIVERSITY GETS OFF CAMPUS TO HELP HOMELESS COMMUNITY

By Joy Chappell

For many people, the winter months mean holidays, festivities, family and thoughts of sitting by a warm fire with hot chocolate. For others, the drop in temperature means finding ways to stay warm, safe, eating a hot meal and securing a place to sleep at night.

The Winchester Area Temporary Thermal Shelter (WATTS) strives to give those who are homeless in Winchester, Va., a roof over their head and something to eat.

WATTS has been around for eight years with the goal to feed and provide a bed for the homeless community of Winchester during the cold winter months. From November through March WATTS partners with local churches, who for a week provide shelter and meals for those in need. Each winter, up to 35 homeless individuals are able to rely on WATTS for a safe place to sleep and have breakfast and dinner.

For the past eight years, Shenandoah University (SU) has partnered with WATTS by volunteering on Sunday evenings.

The Shenandoah community provides dinner, helps serve and is in community with their homeless brothers and sisters. Sports teams, clubs and other student organizations sign up through Spiritual Life to pick a week in which they can help out in the Winchester community. There are even Sundays saved for staff and faculty to take a turn. It is a chance for SU to get off campus, to help those in need and to get to know the individuals who are experiencing homelessness. Many students and teams end up returning throughout the winter and from year to year, as they gain so much from the experience of getting to know the people who are a part of WATTS.

Shenandoah University's involvement in WATTS is not limited to Sunday nights. The Spiritual Life team is passionate about helping in any way that they can. Luke 9:58 says, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." Jesus relied on community to give him a place to stay and to sleep, so it is our job to provide that for others.

In early November, Spiritual Life organizes an event on



campus focused around raising money for WATTS. For the past four years, Spiritual Life has recruited students, staff, faculty and administrators to sleep out on the quad. This program is currently called "A Night Out," and in the weeks leading up to it, participants fundraise in order to be able to stay warm. Those participating reach out to their friends and family members, sit at tables in the student center and do anything they can to raise money. Each donated amount corresponds to the supplies that they may need

Jesus relied on community to give him a place to stay and to sleep, so it is our job to provide just that for others.

and the layers of clothing they can wear the night of the event. The more money that participants are able to collect the warmer they will be during their night on the quad. The idea is that the participants get a very small, incomparable idea of what someone without a place to sleep experiences. SU's Night Out is usually a fun time, as students are able to gather with friends around a fire, crawl into their tents when it is time to sleep and recognize that this is in no way what it is like to be homeless. The goal is to raise awareness and empathy for those who are not given the choice between a tent and a bed.

Even during A Night Out, students are guaranteed a sleeping bag and a tent, while those individuals and families who are experiencing homelessness are not always sure they will have a place to sleep at night. WATTS provides not only meals, and a place to sleep, but through the cold winter months they provide the comfort in knowing they will be warm and safe. For those at WATTS who move from one church to another every week from November to March, SU is able to provide some consistency, and familiarity throughout those cold winter months. Many of the volunteers get involved knowing that they are doing something good for others, but they also leave with something much more valuable in the friendships that are formed through their experience. ❧

– Joy Chappell is a candidate for her Bachelor's of Fine Arts in Dance at Shenandoah University as well as an intern with the Office of Spiritual Life on campus.

("VIRGINIA WESLEYAN," continued from page 21.)

dinators at churches across the region. Youth additionally assembled posters; some even demonstrating how many meals could be assembled for the price of a Starbucks coffee. In the end, enough money was raised to package 40,000 meals.

"I went in with an attitude that surely God will make this happen," Starke said. He additionally cited Stop Hunger Now as a learning opportunity. "We learned a lot in communication."

Students at Virginia Wesleyan not only aided others by packaging meals, but were also given outreach opportunities at the event. Freshman Lydia Dale said she connected with a high school student during the event and shared information regarding the college. Dale also said that she would definitely participate in Stop Hunger Now again in the future.

"It's like we're all parts of a machine. No job is more important than any other. It shows you the value of what people can do when they come together with a common goal. It's the heart behind the assignment that causes you to make a difference, and we had so much heart we finished an hour early," Dale said.

Writing this article for the *Advocate* was special to me as I have personally experienced the power of the campus's outreach efforts. At the end of the fall 2015 semester, I was brought to faith in Christ out of my lowest place through the outreach efforts of Marlin Ministries. I was not the only one who experienced Christ's power that semester, as the hearts of seven others were brought to life through Christ. ❧

– Ashley A. Kline is sophomore double major in Psychology and Religious Studies at Virginia Wesleyan.



LIVING THE WORD



The Rev. Dan Kim is pastor of Kenwood UMC, Richmond District. He received a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology from Virginia Tech. He received his MDiv in Practical Theology as well as his ThM in Theological Education from Boston University. Rev. Kim is a second generation Korean American, identified as an ESFJ and is a fan of the Hokies, Patriots, Red Sox and Celtics.

January 1, 2017 New Year Opportunity Psalm 33:1-9 [CEB]

While making my rounds of pastoral visits one day during my time in CPE (Clinical Pastoral Education), I heard one of the most beautiful sounds I had ever heard. It was coming from the room of a resident that I didn't know, in a section of the nursing home that was colloquially known as the "Memory Unit." I looked at my phone, figured I had some time before my next appointment, and decided to get lost for a bit investigating the whereabouts of this sound. As I made my way into the unit and got closer to the source, the sound got clearer but I still could not identify it. I intentionally slowed my walking pace so as to give myself the maximum amount of time to eavesdrop into the room while also maintaining the façade of walking with a purpose in case someone in the room would notice. This was a skill that I had perfected over my middle school years of dodging teachers and hall-monitors in school. For just a fraction of a moment, I caught the glimpse of an elderly women playing a kind of harp I had never seen before. It was much smaller than the kind I had seen in various orchestras. It was just small enough to be hand-held. Only much later did I learn that this person, while suffering from memory loss, did not lose her memory and ability to play one of her favorite instruments known as a lyre. And when she played, nobody dared interrupt her. I'm glad I didn't.

The Psalmist in this chapter beckons its readers to rejoice in the Lord. With shouts of joy, lyres, harps and new songs, the reader is invited to join in the celebration in their own way. Speaking of celebrations, Happy New Year! This week is indeed cause for celebrations. The New Year is an opportunity for all of us. It's a gift of more time to create memories that will outlast our ability to recall them. In the midst of our festivities, get-togethers, family traditions, it's an opportunity for us to join in the kind of celebrations that has gone on since the first New Year. How will you start the New Year rejoicing the Lord?

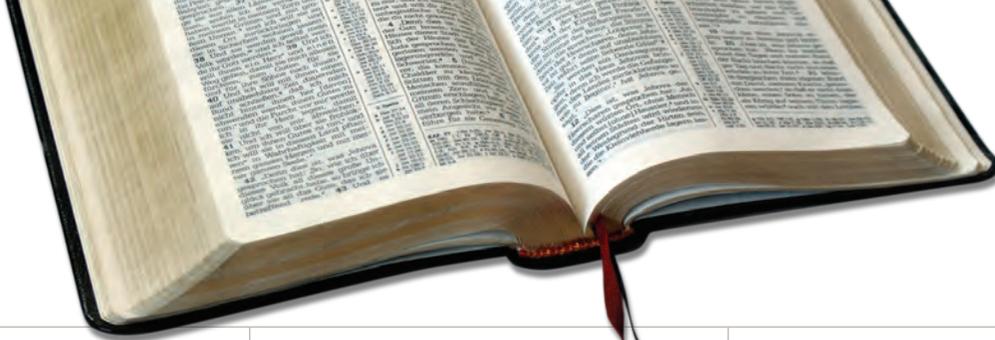
January 8, 2017 Land and LEGO Psalm 96:1-6 [CEB]

As I'm writing this lesson, there is a contentious standoff between the protestors of the Dakota Access Pipeline and militarized police officials. This \$3.7 billion dollar project to cross four states and change the landscape with a U.S. supply of crude oil is, depending on who you ask, a much needed economic blessing that marks a significant step towards U.S. energy self-sufficiency or an offense to sacred Native American lands and a potentially colossal environmental disaster waiting to happen. Spelling out any more details than that would exceed the perimeters of this lesson, but it suffices to say that the conflict over land has waged on since humanity has had the notion of owning land.

Out of such notions is the willingness to conquer and hurt one another and exploit the land for our own utilization. What if we could conceive of another notion that we are not owners of anything, but merely stewards, and responsible guardians of that which God is its true owner? In the end, it all goes back to God anyways. How would that change the way we think about, develop and appropriate the earth and its resources?

I think of it this way. My three-year-old son likes to play with LEGO. It's a beautiful thing, except when my two-year-old daughter also likes to play with LEGO. There are plenty of LEGO for the both of them, but somehow, by fault of nature and nurture, they always seem to fight over the same few pieces. What they don't realize is that they don't own the LEGO. I bought the LEGO, sometimes I play with LEGO (don't judge me), and therefore I own these LEGO. So if they insist on fighting over them, I will come over, remind them of that truth and serve out what I think is a fair and just arrangement. Which usually ends up with nobody having LEGO.

A notion of this kind wouldn't actually be all that novel. It would be biblical though. Psalm 96 invites us to consider all of creation as a witness and testimony to God as the ultimate creator and owner. And in verses 10-13, the Psalmist is clear that all creation longs to celebrate the day when



the Lord comes to establish justice on the earth, in the world rightly, and among all people fairly. All of creation eagerly awaits for the Lord to return and serve what is a fair and just arrangement for all. Do you long for that day as well? My sense is, it will depend on whether we think God is coming to take “our” land from us or not.

January 15, 2017

Why Can't I see God?

Psalm 65:1-2, 5, 9-13 [CEB]

One of my favorite times in ministry was when I was a director of the children's ministry at a United Methodist Church in Lexington, Mass. Not only did I learn so much about children, but I learned a lot about God. Three years of graduate level theological education was easy compared to one year of teaching Sunday school to upper elementary school kids. I remember fumbling over one of the most simple yet exceedingly difficult questions I have ever been asked; Why can't I see God? Although I don't remember how I answered that question, what I do remember is the expressionless look on their faces after I tried and wishing I could harness their skill to stare blankly into space for my next poker game.

Sometime later, I processed my utter failure with one of my favorite professors and he recommended a book, *Where does God Live? Questions and Answers for Parents and Children* by Marc Gellman and Monsignor Thomas Hartman from the show “God Squad.”

In this book is a chapter entitled, called “What does God look like?” and it describes God as not having any edges. Or in other words, God does not have a beginning or an ending. And because God doesn't have any edges, we can't see God in the same way as we see other things that do have edges,

like you and me.

This Psalm, and other Psalms that praise God, tends to wax poetry and go into exhaustive detail to describe the extent of God's reach, which in other words is simply endless. Even the vastness of the earth, we know, has edges. Perhaps not the kind that we can “fall off” of, but certainly the kind that has a beginning and an ending. Psalm 65 claims God as “the security of all the far edges of the earth.” Other translations have *hope* or *confidence* in the place of the word *security* found in the CEB. Although each translation could stand on its own merits as a correct translation of the Hebrew, I'm grateful for our God that doesn't have a beginning or an ending to God's hope, confidence and/or security.

Jan 22, 2017

The Platypus

Psalm 104:1-4, 24-30 [CEB]

If you ever have doubts about God's creativity, take a good look at the platypus. One third duck, one third beaver, one third otter; all fabulous. If Frankenstein's monster had a pet, it would be the platypus. Admittedly, I've never seen one in person. I've only read about them in biology books and nature documentaries, but knowing a little bit more about them, I need to see one up close. Not too close though. The males have are venomous, with strong stingers on the heels of their hind feet ready to incapacitate any animals multiple times its size. One of the many purposes of science is to seek information and understanding. And a method of understanding something is to develop a system of categorization and labels to help organize the information. And yet, the platypus has eluded and even defied our best attempts to categorize it.

Is it a mammal? But it lays eggs. Is it a reptile? But it lactates to produce milk. I don't pretend to be savvy in taxonomy, so I leave the difficult work of biological scientific classification to the experts. But I see the existence of the platypus as an opportunity to theologically explore this bio-diversity inherent within creation. The discipline of theology is, like science, on a similar journey towards understanding the divine. And like taxonomy, theology uses systems, categories and labels. Perhaps our attempts to systematize God is, like our attempt to classify the platypus, a journey towards understanding God, in that the more we think we understand God, the more God slips from our theological fingers and refuses to be categorized.

The Psalmist here praises God's creativity in creation without casting a shadow of a doubt that all of it was purposely and brilliantly made. If this is the case, then even the most odd and peculiar living creatures of this world were created with God's wisdom and therefore a purpose in mind. Without this lesson devolving (pun-intended) into a faith and science debate of intelligent design vs evolution, can we at least agree to appreciate the wonder of the natural world around us while recognizing the serious need to preserve and protect it? Although the purpose of such creature, other than to baffle taxonomists and humor grade-school children, eludes us for the moment, one purpose is apparently clear. The diversity of creation reflects the diversity of God. And to that end, who are we as one of God's creations to question such wisdom and even undermine God's purposes by exploiting them for our own purposes?

(Continued on page 29: “LIVING WORD.”)

CLERGY & DIACONAL



DEATHS



The Rev. Hugh Jackson Winston Jr., 96, died Nov. 21, 2016. He began his ministerial career in 1953 at Hanover. He went on to serve

as the associate pastor at Highland Park UMC, then as the senior pastor at Waverly, New Hope UMC in Fredericksburg, associate pastor at Arlington Forest UMC, senior pastor at Culpeper UMC, Main Street in Suffolk, Wesley in Vienna and Reston. He retired in 1989.

Mirrel J. Neil died Nov. 27, 2016 at Thorncliffe Place Seniors Residence, Ottawa, Ontario. Mirrel was predeceased by his beloved wife of 54 years H el ene Lancop. He is survived by his son the Rev. Nelson Neil, pastor of Culmore UMC, Arlington District, (Elizabeth); grandchildren Allison, Wesley and Patrick; and his niece Shirley Jacobs (Stewart Jacobs). He made his career in the pulp and paper industry, retiring as Maintenance Planning Supervisor of the Abitibi Consolidated paper mill in Beupre, Quebec, where he lived for most of his life. Additionally, Mirrel proudly served his country as a member of the Royal Canadian Air Force between 1939 -1946 in Western Canada and England. He was a past master of St. John's Masonic Lodge, Quebec, and a lifetime elder at Chalmers Wesley UCC. Visitation and funeral services were held Dec. 3 at Chalmers Wesley United Church in Quebec City.

Dorothy (Dot) Gardner Groves Friend died Nov. 26, 2016. She was a member of First United Methodist Church in Norfolk. Dot was prede-

ceased by her husband of 73 years, Eddie, and survived by two children **the Rev. Robert E. 'Bobby' (Debbie) Friend, Jr.**, a retired Virginia Conference elder, and Susan Friend Fisher; six grandchildren; and 13 great-grandchildren. A service was held Dec. 2, 2016 at First United Methodist Church.

Laura Lee Bradley, 78, died Nov. 23, 2016, surrounded by her loving family and friends. She was born in Norfolk, Va., to the late John C. Bramble Jr. and Laura B. Harrell. Laura was a member of Thalia UMC, Virginia Beach, serving as an Office Angel and was an active member of the "Ties That Bind" ministry where she made crafts. She is survived by her daughters, LeeAnn Matroni, Karen L. Kiel (Randy) and Susan K. Johnson (Doug). Laura's funeral service was held Nov. 28 at Thalia UMC with the Revs. Joe Varner and J. Randall Kiel officiating.

Constance (Connie) Jackson Fair, 87, died Nov. 12, 2016, in Woodinville, Wis. Connie was married to Don Fair for 65 years. She is survived by her three children, including **the Rev. Chris Fair**, Antioch UMC, Fredericksburg District; six grandchildren; and four great-grandchildren.

Evelyn Yancey Jones, 71, of Charlottesville, Va., died Nov. 7, 2016, at the University of Virginia Medical Center. Born on May 29, 1945, she was the daughter of the late Charles Yancey and Virginia Mae Yancey. She is survived by a brother, Charles W. C. Yancey; nephew, Kareem Yancey; and niece, Sari Caldwell. A memorial service was held Nov. 12 at Ivy Creek United Methodist Church with Pastor Ed Rigg officiating.

Births

The Rev. Wayne Moore and spouse Lorrie, celebrate the birth of grandson, **Brooks Cartwright Moore**, born Nov. 30, 2016 to Ben and Kelsey Moore in Roanoke. Wayne is the pastor at St. John's/Whitmell UMC in the Danville District.

The Rev. Matt Benton and his wife Emily are the proud parents of **Evan Robert Benton** who was born on Nov. 17, 2016. Evan also has a proud big brother, Patrick. Matt is pastor of the Montclair campus of Spirit and Life Church in Prince William County, Alexandria District.

("LIVING WORD," continued from page 27)

January 29, 2016

Universal Praise
Psalm 148 [CEB]

The Korean language has two very distinct levels of expression; one formal using a system of honorifics and etiquette rules and the other informal. Knowing which level to use largely depends on who you are, to whom you're talking to and the social setting in which you find yourself.

In short, the Korean language is a reflection of the Korean culture and its people. And it can make for an awkward, or at worse, offensive situation when one is unfamiliar with the nuances. Although the Korean language is widely considered an easy language to learn grammatically, it is also difficult to master due to its culturally embedded semantics. The same could be said about English though. For example, what do you say to comfort a grammar perfectionist? There, Their, They're. Although I consider myself bilingual, as a second generation Korean American,

my English ability is far better than my Korean ability. So much so, in fact I dream in English, which says a lot about the way I communicate subconsciously. I pray, read scripture and sing in English. And perhaps most important of all, I praise the Lord in English.

I wonder what language God speaks. I know it's an absurd question, but in Genesis 1 it describes God speaking all of creation into brand new existence. I wonder what language God used to do that. French? Every time I hear it, it sounds very avant-garde. Psalm 148 is very simply a call to "Praise the Lord." It calls to everyone and everything to Praise the Lord. This psalm goes to some length to underscore the inclusive nature of praising the Lord by calling on the young, old, men and women to join in the multiplicity of voices already doing the same. It's a call to Praise the Lord in whatever language, slang, verbal or non-verbal, that comes most natural to you. What I'm grateful for is the fact that, when it comes to praising the Lord, no translation is needed. I don't have to worry about grammar, syntax or semantics when it comes to praise. Hallelujah is 할렐루야 is Alléluia is... etc. because of whom I'm talking to.

Praising the Lord is not incumbent on our expert ability to do so. Praising the Lord is as natural as dreaming because of inclusive nature of the God whom we praise. Perhaps this says more about the nature of praise as well. Maybe praising the Lord isn't about knowing what to say, or how to correctly pronounce YHWH. It's about expressing yourself in the way that comes most natural and creatively to you. Dance? Sing? Write? Try them all. God knows exactly what you're trying to say. ☞

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FROM THE BISHOP



The Bishop's New Year's Challenge

Dear Virginia Annual Conference,

I think you would agree with me that every New Year there are individuals who decide to make a New Year's resolution. I googled "New Year's resolution" to discover that there are several articles written on this popular subject.

All of us have made New Year's resolutions ranging anywhere from losing 10-20 unwanted pounds, starting a new exercise program, paying off our credit cards and giving up a bad habit.

I've always found it interesting that people will go to great lengths to make a New Year's resolution – throwing away food that tempts their cravings, buying expensive exercise equipment with a voice-activated trainer or being the first person to

join the gym. Unfortunately, it has been proven that New Year's gym resolutions are normally broken in 90 days, and the gym equipment becomes the new and latest clothes rack in our homes.

I've always wondered when individuals are making resolutions if they ever considered making a "Christian resolution." For example, resolving to pray daily for your church, to become an active agent in inviting people to your church or to increase their participation in a ministry in their local church.

As your new bishop, I would like to challenge you to look at this yearly tradition from another perspective.

Let's make a "Christian resolution" by joining me in reading the Bible together this year:

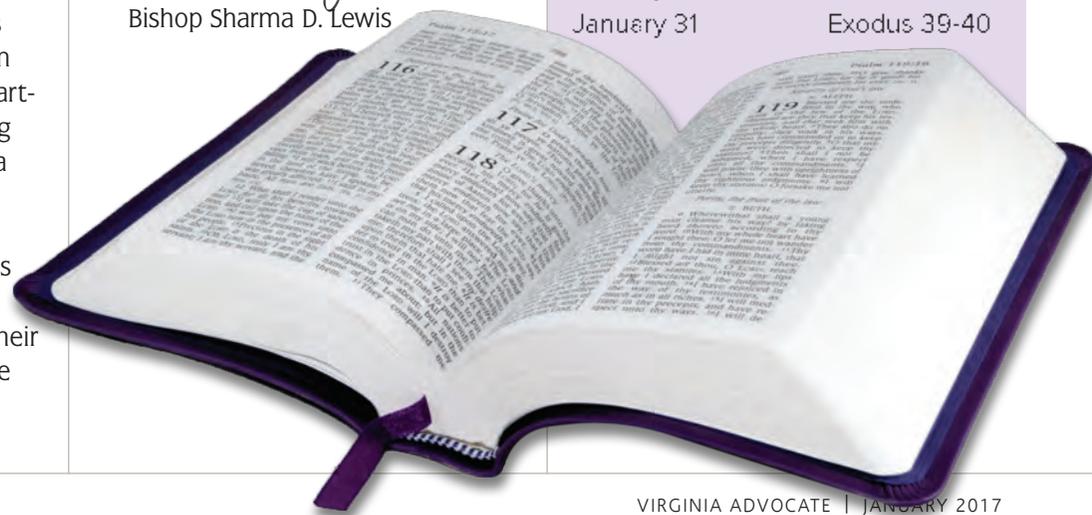
- ❖ Choose your own translation to make this experience engaging and exciting.
- ❖ Invite others to join you on this journey.
- ❖ Commit to sticking to the outlined plan at this link: <http://backtothebible.org/reading-guide/15/1>. January's outline is at the right. Let's become Bible scholars in 2017.

Peace and Blessings,

Bishop Sharma D. Lewis

The readings for January

January 1	Genesis 1-3
January 2	Genesis 4-7
January 3	Genesis 8-11
January 4	Genesis 12-15
January 5	Genesis 16-18
January 6	Genesis 19-21
January 7	Genesis 22-24
January 8	Genesis 25-26
January 9	Genesis 27-29
January 10	Genesis 30-31
January 11	Genesis 32-34
January 12	Genesis 35-37
January 13	Genesis 38-40
January 14	Genesis 41-42
January 15	Genesis 43-45
January 16	Genesis 46-47
January 17	Genesis 48-50
January 18	Exodus 1-3
January 19	Exodus 4-6
January 20	Exodus 7-9
January 21	Exodus 10-12
January 22	Exodus 13-15
January 23	Exodus 16-18
January 24	Exodus 19-21
January 25	Exodus 22-24
January 26	Exodus 25-27
January 27	Exodus 28-29
January 28	Exodus 30-32
January 29	Exodus 33-35
January 30	Exodus 36-38
January 31	Exodus 39-40



ONE LAST WORD

THOUGH WE CANNOT

THINK ALIKE

MAY WE NOT

Love alike?

MAY WE NOT BE OF

ONE HEART

THOUGH WE ARE NOT OF

ONE OPINION?

WITHOUT ALL DOUBT



WE MAY.

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