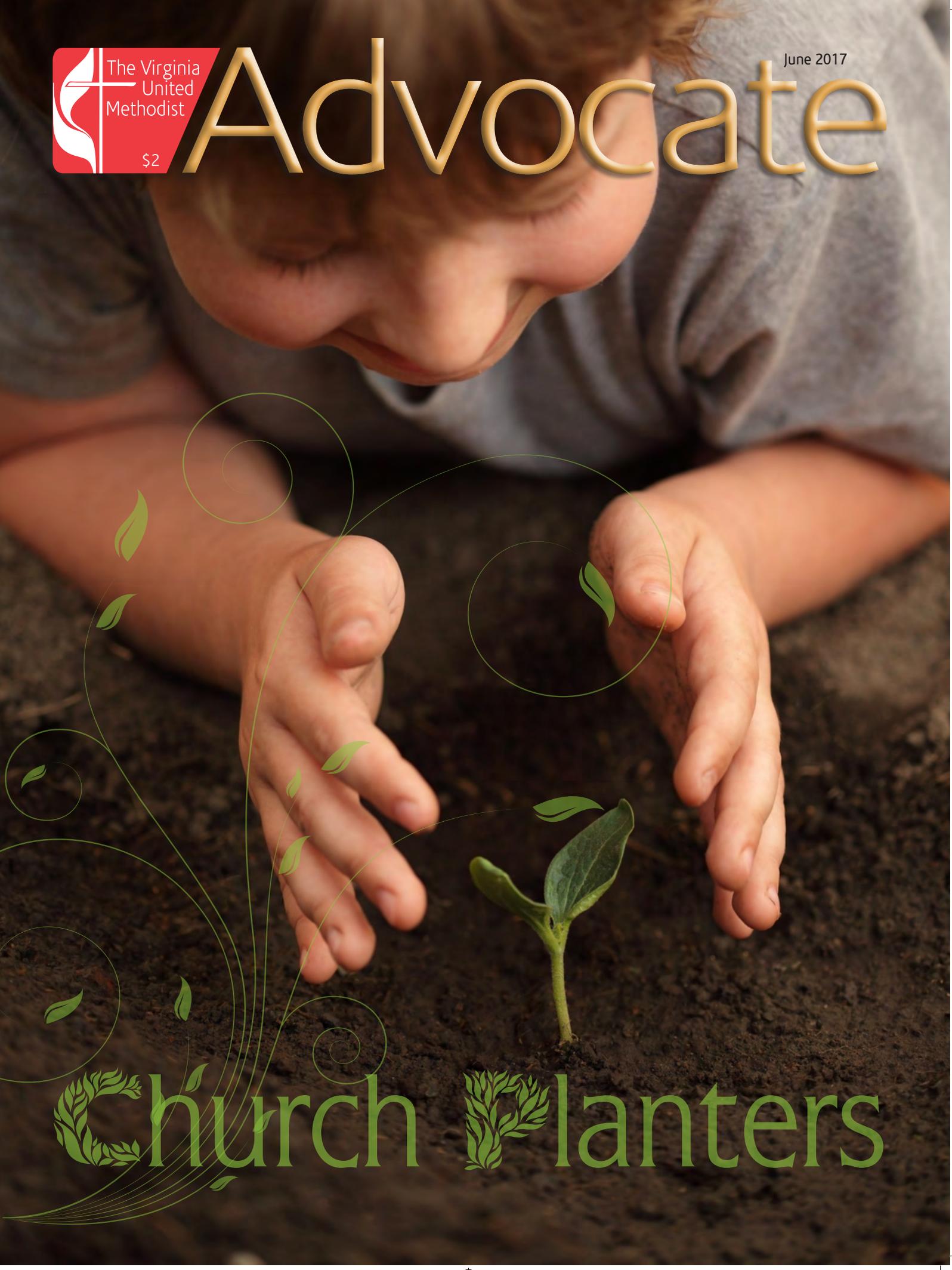


The Virginia
United
Methodist
\$2

June 2017

Advocate

Church Planters



Connecting with the



Virginia Advocate

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

P.O. Box 5606, Glen Allen, VA 23058

Phone: 1-800-768-6040 or

804-521-1100

Fax: 804-521-1174

E-mail: advocate@vaumc.orgWebsite: www.vaumc.orgDetailed guidelines for the following
available upon request.**Subscriptions**

Print subscriptions are \$20/one year; \$30/two years; \$40/three years. Special bulk rate for five or more copies going to a single address is \$12 each for one year. For both printed copy and online access, subscriptions are \$25/year; \$35/two years; \$45/three years. For online only, cost is \$10/year; \$15/two years; \$20/three years. Subscribe online at www.vaumc.org, under "Resources>Publications."

Deadlines

The Advocate is published once a month. The deadline to submit news and ad copy for the July 2017 issue is May 26. For more information on future deadlines, contact the Advocate office or visit the website.

Advertising/Tributes

Rates for advertising and tributes are available upon request.

Local Church News

Items should be typed (preferably sent via e-mail) or printed legibly, no more than 100 words, and of conference-wide interest. Complete names of individuals, churches and districts should be included. Because of space limitations, the Local Church section prohibits news items related to church members' birthdays (of less than 100 years), wedding anniversaries, receptions for moving and/or retiring pastors, photos of traditional Christmas trees or Easter trees/crosses, and any item over two months old. 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.

©2017 Virginia Advocate

USPS 660-740 ISSN 0891-5598

Published monthly by Virginia United Methodist Communications, Inc., an agency of the Virginia Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church. Periodical postage paid at Glen Allen, Va., and at additional mailing offices. The Virginia United Methodist Advocate is owned by Virginia United Methodist Communications, Inc.

POSTMASTER: Send changes of address to Virginia United Methodist Advocate, P.O. Box 5606, Glen Allen, VA 23058. Editorial and business offices are located at 10330 Staples Mill Rd., Glen Allen, Va. Office hours are 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday.

PILLOW TALK



Madeline Pillow
Editor

Taking a break

I'll be honest, folks, trying to write my editorial this month was hard.

It wasn't writer's block or a fatigue of the written word, so I took a moment to process. I've been learning recently that it's good to check in with yourself for self-care purposes. It's good to take sanity breaks. It's okay to have days where your productivity is nonexistent and you can't focus.

When we find ourselves in these places, we need to take notice and try something else. Give yourself room to take a break. Find a day for yourself. Whatever you need.

So maybe I'm overwhelmed by our world right now, our politics or the onslaught of stories of hate in the world. Maybe it's because it's Annual Conference crunch time!

But I know what to do. I have to try something different.

So for this month's editorial, I would like to share one of my top Bible verses that has seen me through some trying times. I pray peace for you today and this month. I hope you will take time for yourself in your stressful and busy moments. Take a breath.

¹You have searched me, Lord, and you know me.

²You know when I sit and when I rise,
you perceive my thoughts from afar.

³You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.

⁴Before a word is on my tongue you, Lord, know it completely.

⁵You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me.

⁶Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.

⁷Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?

⁸If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

⁹If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea,

¹⁰even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.

¹¹If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me
and the light become night around me,"

¹²even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.

¹³For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.

¹⁴I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

¹⁵My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place,
when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.

¹⁶Your eyes saw my unformed body;
all the days ordained for me were written in your book
before one of them came to be.

¹⁷How precious to me are your thoughts, God!
How vast is the sum of them!

¹⁸Were I to count them,
they would outnumber the grains of sand—
when I awake, I am still with you. 

Psalm 139:1-18

Madeline C. Pillow



TABLE OF CONTENTS



SECTIONS

- 4-6 **Commentary**
- 7-14 **Virginia News**
- 15 **Local Church News**
- 16 **Events**
- 24-25 **Equipping for Ministry**
- 26-27 **Living the Word**
- 28-29 **Clergy & Diaconal**
- 30 **From the Bishop**
- 31 **One Last Word**

FEATURE

- 18-23 **Church planting: a different kind of ministry**

STORIES

- 4 **Council of Bishops announce called session**
- 8 **Understanding pensions apportionments**
- 12 **Northern Virginia church implements transformation**



Scan this code to go to the
conference website:
www.vaumc.org

The Virginia Advocate Staff

Madeline Pillow | Editor, Director of Communications

Cathryn Huff | Graphic Designer

Pam Culler | Administrative Secretary

Board of Directors of Virginia United Methodist Communications, Inc.: Keri Marston, chair. The *Virginia United Methodist Advocate* uses the services of United Methodist Communications and United Methodist News Service. The reporting of news regarding any person or event, or the placement of any advertisement within these pages, does not constitute endorsement by the *Virginia Advocate* or any entity of The United Methodist Church. Opinions of writers are solely those of the authors and not necessarily those of this publication.



Council of Bishops
THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



April 24, 2017

TO: Annual Conference Secretaries
Heads of Delegations to the 2016 General Conference (or successors)
Secretary of the General Conference
Chairperson of the Commission on the General Conference

FROM: Bishop Bruce R. Ough, President
Council of Bishops

RE: Special Session of the General Conference

Grace and peace to you from God, our Creator, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Council of Bishops hereby calls a special session of the General Conference per Division Two - Section II - Article II of The Constitution of The United Methodist Church (§14 of *The Book of Discipline (2016)*).

The special session of the General Conference will be held February 23-26, 2019 in St. Louis, Missouri.

The purpose of this special session of the General Conference shall be limited to receiving and acting upon a report from the Council of Bishops based on the recommendations of the Commission on a Way Forward.

According to Article II of The Constitution (§14 of the *Book of Discipline (2016)*), this special session of the General Conference shall be composed of the delegates to the 2016 General Conference or their lawful successors, except when a particular annual conference or missionary conference shall prefer to have a new election.

The Secretary of the General Conference will be in communication with annual conference secretaries regarding updated delegate information, seating of reserve delegates, and the issuance of new certificates of election for annual conferences choosing to hold a new election.

The Commission on the General Conference and the Business Manager of the General Conference will develop and forward additional information regarding the logistics of the special session of General Conference at the appropriate time.

The Council of Bishops encourages the entire church to continue in deep, unceasing prayer for Holy Spirit breakthroughs for the Commission on a Way Forward and the special session of General Conference.

100 Maryland Avenue NE, Suite 300
Washington, DC 20002
202-547-6270

Meeting Together: Muslims, Jews, and Christians

By Bill Pike, Judy Oguich
and Kim Tingler

Without question, our world is impacted almost daily by decisions linked to politics, economics, human rights and attacks related to terrorism. Often entwined in those headlines are references to Muslims, Jews and Christians, and the seemingly incompatible differences found in the relationships among the practitioners in these religions. Over the last several months, members from the Muslim Community Center of Chesterfield County, Temple Beth-El and Trinity United Methodist Church have had opportunities to meet, interact and learn from each other.

The initial seeds for this learning were planted on Aug. 28, 2016, at the Outreach Summer Forum held at Trinity UMC. On that Sunday morning, Malik Khan and Anjum Ali presented their program: Ten Misconceptions about Islam and Muslims. The program outlined the misconceptions while also providing insightful perspectives from Khan and Ali. Additionally, both Khan and Ali took the time to answer questions from the audience.

Then in Oct. 2016, Larry Lenow, Trinity UMC senior pastor, invited a diverse group of religious leaders in the community to attend the annual Dillard Forum. The keynote leader for the two-day forum was Dr. Peter W. Ochs from the University of Virginia. A prolific author, Dr. Ochs teaches modern Judaic studies, and he directs Religious Studies graduate programs in "Scripture, Interpretation, and Practice." (UVA)

Dr. Ochs coined the term "scriptural reasoning," and is the co-founder of the Society for Scriptural Reasoning and of the Children of Abraham Institute. The purpose of these organizations is to promote scriptural study groups and interfaith dialogue among Muslims, Jews, and Christians.

During the second day lunch session at the

Dillard Forum, attendees participated in "Hearth to Hearth," a presentation designed to promote scriptural study, interfaith dialogue and peacebuilding.

Upon the conclusion of the Dillard Forum, Lenow didn't let the opportunity to keep learning through "scriptural reasoning" disappear. A small group consisting of Lenow, Dr. Gary Goldberg (Temple Beth-El), Khan and Annette Khan (Islamic Society), Doug Hill, Jim Noland and Tim Gerde set up monthly meetings. These sessions only served to enhance the opportunity to learn from each other with the Scriptures continuing to be the focus from each religion.

An outcome from these small group sessions was an invitation from the leadership at the Muslim Community Center of

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



(From left to right) Malik Khan, Muslim Community Center of Chesterfield (MCC); Larry Lenow, Trinity UMC; Amir Saeed, MCC; and Gary Goldberg, Temple Beth-El.

COMMENTARY

("MEETING," cont. from page 5.)

Chesterfield County for the congregations at Trinity and Temple Beth-El to attend an Interfaith Conversation.

Led by Malik Khan, Khan's wife Annette and Anjum Ali, a group of over 150 Muslims, Jews and Christians packed the meeting hall. We were treated to wonderful hospitality and delicious food. At our tables, members from the three congregations were involved in conversations geared toward learning about each other. It was fascinating to hear from our Muslim and Jewish friends about their backgrounds and professions,

and the session became even more interesting as we pushed into "scriptural reasoning."

Each table had the opportunity to read and discuss a preselected text from the Quran, the Hebrew Bible and the Bible. The focus was on Abraham's hospitality and the readings were: Scattering (Winds) 51:24-30, Genesis 18:1-8 and Hebrews 13:1-2.

Each table shared a summary of the discussion and as we moved about the room, the insights from the tables were both interesting and thought-provoking. Hospitality was viewed as a means for us to give our best, to honor dignity, to

care and to explore deeper spiritual dimensions. Additionally, we recognized that hospitality might carry some risks while also reflecting that social interaction can be hampered with our reliance upon technology.

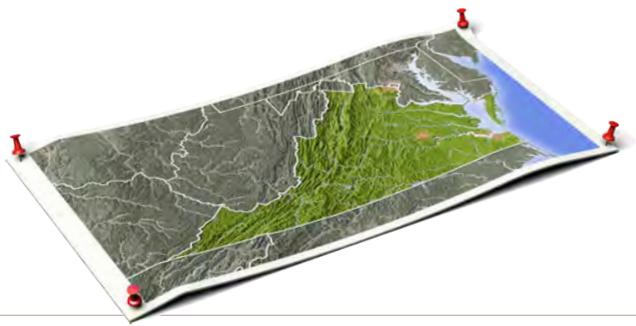
This gathering of dedicated Muslims, Jews and Christians proved to be a beneficial and enlightening opportunity to learn and share. A genuine hospitality was experienced, and it is our hope that more similar gatherings will be organized in the future. 

– Bill Pike, Judy Oguich and Kim Tingler are staff members at Trinity UMC in Henrico.



Bishop Karen Oliveto leans over to speak with her wife, Robin Ridenour (behind Oliveto), prior to a meeting of the United Methodist Judicial Council in Newark, N.J.

Photo by Mike DuBose, UMNS.



The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

Consecration of gay bishop against church law

By Linda Bloom

The consecration of a gay bishop violates church law, the top court of The United Methodist Church has ruled.

However, the bishop “remains in good standing,” the Judicial Council said in Decision 1341, until an administrative or judicial process is completed.

“Under the long-standing principle of legality, no individual member or entity may violate, ignore or negate church law,” said the decision, made public April 28. “It is not lawful for the college of bishops of any jurisdictional or central conference to consecrate a self-avowed practicing homosexual bishop.”

Officials in the U.S. Western Jurisdiction consecrated the Rev. Karen Oliveto as a bishop on July 16, 2016. Based in the Denver area, she is the episcopal leader of the Mountain Sky Area, which encompasses Colorado, Montana, Utah, Wyoming and one church in Idaho.

A petition from the South Central Jurisdiction to the Judicial Council raised four questions about the legality of that election. Judicial Council claimed jurisdiction to review its petition “only with respect to the consecration of an

openly homosexual bishop” and said the rest of the petition, related to nomination, election and assignment, “is improper.”

“It is not lawful for the college of bishops of any jurisdictional or central conference to consecrate a self-avowed practicing homosexual bishop.”

DECISION 1341

The vote on the decision was 6-3. Judicial Council members N. Oswald Tweh and Deanell Reece Tacha filed a joint dissenting opinion that the council had no jurisdiction over the petition. First lay alternate W. Warren Plowden Jr., who was sitting for council member Beth Capen, and council member Ruben T. Reyes each filed a concurring and dissenting opinion.

The court rejected the argument made during the April 25 oral hearing by Richard Marsh, Western Jurisdiction counsel, that Oliveto’s same-sex marriage

to Robin Ridenour in 2014 was not a public statement about her sexual practices.

“A same-sex marriage license issued by competent civil authorities together with the clergy person’s status in a same-sex relationship is a public declaration that the person is a self-avowed practicing homosexual” for purposes of the prohibitive language in the United Methodist *Book of Discipline*, Paragraphs 304.3 and 2702.1(b), the council ruled.

Church law requires all clergy persons to dedicate themselves to “the highest ideals of Christian life,” the decision said, including “their commitment to abide by and uphold the church’s definition of marriage and stance on homosexuality. An openly homosexual and partnered bishop is in violation of those minimum standards.”

The decision further found that an openly homosexual and partnered bishop may be charged with disobedience to church law, along with other bishops and clergy persons who actively participate in the consecration of a bishop who has been found to be a self-avowed practicing homosexual through a judicial or administrative process.

“Self-avowal does not

nullify the consecration and cause removal from episcopal office but is a sufficient declaration to subject the bishop’s ministerial office to review,” the decision said.

Judicial Council spelled out the process required by *The Discipline* for such a review, which begins with the filing of a complaint against the bishop. If action is not initiated by the jurisdictional or central conference, the president or secretary of that body’s college of bishops must take action.

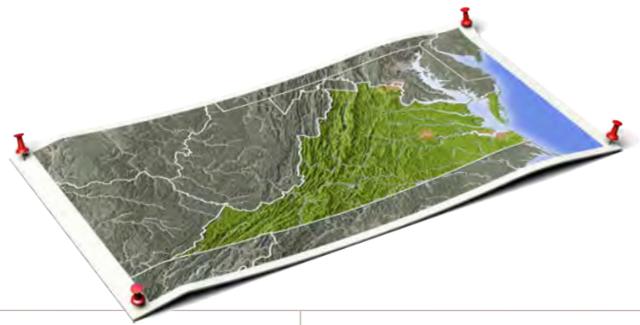
Pending the supervisory response process to review episcopal membership and office, the college of bishops, in consultation with the committee on episcopacy, “may suspend the bishop from all episcopal responsibilities for a period not to exceed 60 days.”

The process allows for a bishop to be placed in the retired relationship “regardless of age” if it is “found to be in the best interests of the bishop and/or the church.”

If there is no resolution, “the president or secretary of the college of bishops may refer the matter as an administrative or judicial complaint,” the ruling concluded. 🍷

—Linda Bloom is the assistant news editor for United Methodist News Service and is based in New York. This article was first published on Apr. 28.

The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



Apportionment Series: Understanding Pensions Office apportionments



John Fuller, director of the Virginia United Methodist Pensions, Inc. (VUMPI) office, shared information about how apportionments and his office function.

Q: What does VUMPI apportion for?

A: There are three things that VUMPI apportions for:

- ❖ **The Pre-82 pension (as noted by its name, a pension program that was in place prior to 1982)**
- ❖ **Active clergy health plan**
- ❖ **Retired clergy health plan**

Our office does not apportion for the current pension programs, as we raise revenue to fund our current pension liability through direct billing.

Q: What are current realities in regards to the Pre-82 pension program?

A: We have an unfunded liability in that program.

Each year, the actuaries who are involved in preparing valuations of the program's assets and liabilities predict the total amount of benefit payments that we will pay until the very last person with a Pre-82 benefit passes away. This represents the total projected liability, and is effectively the total of all the money that they think we're going to be writing checks for. So we're projected to have a liability for many, many years, as there are still active clergy who have a Pre-82 benefit. The actuaries also look at our existing pension assets, and project how much those assets will be worth in the future. To the extent that our projected liability exceeds our projected total assets, we have an unfunded liability. That's currently the case for the Virginia Conference, and VUMPI is working to eliminate that unfunded liability.

Q: What about the apportionments toward clergy health?

In a typical employer-sponsored health plan, the funding necessary to run the plan is raised through the combination of an employer contribution and an employee contribution. The Virginia Conference-spon-

sored health plans are not explicitly built into a corporate budget so, instead, the employer contribution is represented by the health plan apportionments and funded as part of our conference's connection. Each year, VUMPI projects the following year's total health plan costs, and we develop a recommended apportionment to reflect the employer contribution toward funding those plans. We present a recommendation for the active clergy health plan and the retired clergy health plan, and utilize apportionment receipts to administer the health plans for our conference's active and retired clergy. We also recommend each year's participant contributions, which are the amounts paid by clergy enrolled in the conference-sponsored health plan.

A reality of health care costs in the United States is that those costs increase about every year, and annual increases are not uncommon at eight to 10 percent. At VUMPI, one of our primary missions is to manage the conference-sponsored health plans in such a way as to mitigate the impact of cost growth on the plans. We do this primarily through three ways

- ❖ **First, by managing health plan designs**
This includes health

Do you have questions about apportionments? Email Communications Director Madeline Pillow at MadelinePillow@vaumc.org to have your questions answered in an upcoming article in this series.

The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

plan details such as deductibles, co-payments and out of pocket medical expense limits. We manage the plan designs so that the plans remain as generous to clergy as possible, and sufficient to help clergy address the risk of very high health care costs, while striving to mitigate the burden of health plan apportionments on the Virginia Conference.

- ❖ **Secondly, we have a wellness program**
The idea is to spend a few dollars now through things like incentive programs and other initiatives to try and get those who are enrolled in our health plans to engage actively with their own health. In essence, helping them avoid larger costs later on in life. The wellness programs are also designed to help clergy enjoy better personal health, which would be an obvious benefit to them, but would also enable them to be more effective in their ministry than if they had to focus on personal health issues. The expected return on wellness is definitely not only measured in dollars, although that's certainly one part of the equation.

- ❖ **And finally, we engage in active negotiations with our insurance administrator which is Anthem.**
The conference-sponsored health plan is a self-insured plan, which means that we pay our own claims rather than paying an insurance company to bear our health cost risks. In our partnership with Anthem, we capitalize on their negotiations with doctors and hospitals, and they process our health plan claims for us. Every year, we work closely with Anthem to review the financial details of our partnership, and we work to ensure that program costs are minimized.

Overall, by maintaining appropriately designed health plans, encouraging wellness and utilization of preventive health care services, and paying attention to the details of administrative costs, we are hopeful that VUMPI can minimize the burden of the health plan apportionments on the conference.

The good news is that we managed apportionments effectively over the last several years. Between 2001-2014, the annual growth

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

Consider seminary studies in hybrid format this fall.



 Eastern Mennonite University
EASTERN MENNONITE SEMINARY 

emu.edu/seminary/distance-learning

PERSONAL & GROUP COACHING

Led by Dr. Larry Buxton
ACC, BCC (Coaching Certifications)

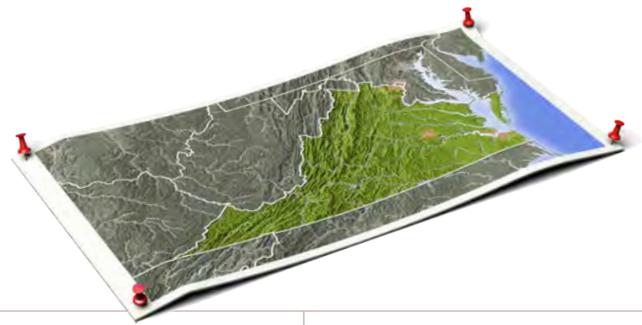
SERMON COACHING w/ Jesus Focus **LEADERSHIP COACHING** w/ Systems Focus



Larry Buxton

Coaching for Clergy Transitions
larrybuxton@vaumc.org

The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



("PENSIONS," cont. from page 9.)

rate in apportionments was 6.7 percent. The annual growth rate in apportionments since then, so from 2014-2018, is negative 0.9 percent. So, if you look at it graphically, we hit an inflection point and changed the curve. Since then, our apportionments have been either flat or negative. I am hopeful that we can maintain relatively flat apportionments for the near future, but as health care cost trends drive aggregate costs higher, VUMPI will likely need to recommend an increase in health plan apportionments at some point in the next few years.

Also, in 2016, we launched a new retiree medical program for the conference's Medicare-eligible retirees. In designing a new program, we were able to keep the generous benefits while reducing overall costs.

Q: What are other current realities in your office?

A: We have assets on account with Wespath, formerly the General Board of Pensions. A meaningful portion of our assets at Wespath are committed to

the various denominational pension programs, and part of the assumption with our assets is that we're going to earn money on those assets.

The actuaries at Wespath look at each conference's projected liabilities and total assets, and they identify the difference between the two numbers. If the number is negative, then there is an unfunded liability, and that liability is amortized similarly to the calculation for a house payment. As is the case with any amortization, assumptions for the rate of earnings growth on assets are built in, and any shortfall in actual market returns generally results in an increase in our subsequent year's funding obligation. Similarly, the calculation assumes certain participant longevity expectations, as detailed in the mortality tables used by Wespath's actuaries. Those mortality tables are updated from time to time, and any increase in projected longevity results in an increase in our total liability. The bottom line is that we're chasing a moving target, and there are multiple factors that influence how much, and in what direction, the target moves.

General Conference voted for conferences to reach a fully-funded status by 2021 and we anticipate

that the Virginia Conference will reach a fully funded status by that date, but it's important to note that the variables that determine our funded status will continue to fluctuate, and the Virginia Conference, like all conferences, will continue to manage the overall Pre-82 program liability even after the fully funded status is initially achieved.

Q: What is your office doing to manage the unfunded liability and to raise the revenue to meet our funding obligations?

A: VUMPI has developed several strategies that we use to try and minimize the burden of the apportionments on the conference. For the Pre-82 liability, we have developed a strategy to maintain a \$1 million apportionment for as long as we have an unfunded liability. Because of the variables I mentioned before, the funding obligation bounces around year to year. The VUMPI board has recognized that apportionments themselves are understood, accepted and agreeably funded by the conference, but we try to avoid volatility in apportionments because we recognize that it is hard for

The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

churches to adjust to apportionments fluctuating by large amounts.

VUMPI tries to manage volatility preemptively with our financial reserve strategy. The financial reserve exists primarily because we administer a self-insured health plan, and we could easily become insolvent if we didn't have a reserve. A few years ago, VUMPI took a close look at the reserve and the various programs that it supports, including the self-insured health plan and other programs like the retiree medical program and the various liabilities associated with the denominational pension plans in order to determine the minimum reserve for those specific purposes.

By closely evaluating the reserve and its various functions, we developed what the VUMPI Board refers to as the reserve's "notional threshold," which is the minimum amount needed in reserve to protect our various programs against insolvency. Any reserve amounts in excess of that notional threshold are considered available for deployment toward other purposes. The Board has since committed over \$6 million of reserve funds toward offset of amounts that would otherwise be included in Pre-82 pension apportionments.

Q: How do financial crises like the one in 2008 affect the pension program?

A: When you have a financial crisis like in 2008, what happens is the value of our assets drops, and in a situation like that, it drops dramatically.

As you can imagine, when actuaries are looking at a total projected liability that remains about the same, but our total asset value declines dramatically, the distance between those two numbers gets much bigger.

And so every year they amortize the difference between those two numbers and then tell us what our funding obligation is going to be next year. In the 2008 situation, the magnitude of the drop in market value of our invested assets led directly to a significant increase in our pension funding obligation.

Q: What are misconceptions you think people might have about your office?

A: A misunderstanding that is fairly prevalent is that if VUMPI was to pay off the unfunded Pre-82 liability, as it exists today, that we could walk away from that liability forever and never

have to look back.

For example, if I called Wespath today and asked the amount of our calculated unfunded liability in Pre-82 and they said \$8 million, and VUMPI sends them an \$8 million check, what that would mean is that for a brief moment in time we would be fully funded.

But our assets will continue to be invested in the market, as is necessary in order to have any chance of earning the investment returns that are assumed in the actuaries' projections. If something happens to rattle the markets, and our asset values go down, in all likelihood we would be right back into an unfunded liability situation. Market corrections, by the way, with relatively big reductions in overall market values of our invested assets, are normal and should be expected. The bottom line is that hitting a fully funded status in the near term would be a fleeting achievement.

The good news, I believe, is that VUMPI's current strategies are designed to get the Virginia Conference to a fully funded status in the Pre-82 pension program with as little volatility as possible. 🍀

— John Fuller is the executive director of Virginia United Methodist Pensions, Inc. (VUMPI).



The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



Northern Virginia-area church implementing transformation in its structure

By Joe Fisher

Cameron United Methodist Church in Alexandria, Va., is not unlike other churches of The United Methodist denomination or even other Protestant churches. It has been struggling for years with an aging and declining membership. Maintaining the church and property, paying salaries and meeting apportionments is getting increasingly difficult as congregational giving declines with the attendance.

At the intersection of Telegraph and Franconia

roads, Cameron UMC is the first and southern-most church along a “Guinness World Record” number of churches between that point and the new Springfield Town Center and Mall. The opportunities for worship to newcomers are extensive, but many of these churches are also suffering the same decline. Everyone is praying for answers.

Efforts toward the Great Commission of making more disciples for Christ have not managed to keep up with the unique dynamics of the Washington, D.C. environment. New military families who become members only reside for three to four years before moving on to new assignments; government workers often move on as administrations come and go. Youth sports and activities scheduled on Sunday morning compete for the

focus of young families. Congregational stability is constantly shifting, but in a slow, persistent decline.

The leadership and congregation of Cameron UMC have been trying for well over a decade to reverse the trend, but their first-hand efforts and victories have not managed to overcome the member attrition rate. Even leasing out some of the church’s unused space to two smaller and independent congregations in recent years has not provided sufficient income to offset the declining giving.

In Aug. 2016, a Korean Baptist group asked for space at a time that finances within Cameron were reaching a critical stage. There was some debate about leasing to this group because the only major worship space left open was the social hall where congregation coffee hours were held after every Sunday service, as well as congregational breakfasts, lunches after service and evening potluck dinners. The new congregation was now potentially going to disrupt Cameron’s worship patterns and traditions.

A renovation opportunity

A solution was found in a separate building that Cameron has on its property, typically used for meetings such as the Boy Scouts. A new

Members of the Cameron congregation pitched in to clean up the exterior area, cutting dead trees and removing brush. Flowers and plantings are planned when warmer spring weather arrives. Photo courtesy of Joe Fisher.



The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

problem emerged as the church considered its rough condition. Though the space would meet the size requirements of the group, the space only had one bathroom, a very small original gas heater, no air conditioning, a floor in poor condition, old electric systems and several boarded up windows and one sealed off door.

The Rev. Oliver Box, pastor at Cameron UMC, proposed that they try to clean up the space enough to accommodate the new congregation. He revealed that a member had gifted the cost of a new floor, and he then proposed that the congregation finance a thorough cleaning and painting of the main area and the one bathroom. The proposal was approved by the Church Council, and then other congregants stepped forward. Work progressed through October and November for a Jan. 1 completion date as a new furnace and AC system, an upgraded electric box and all new wiring, a water heater, the conversion of the one bathroom into two (one handicap accessible), new lighting and painting were underway among other improvements.

One door closes. Another door opens.

In mid-December, the Korean Baptist group communicated that they



decided to move to another facility.

Within days of the Korean church's notification, another request for worship space was received from another small independent congregation, the Well Worship Center. About the same size as the Korean church, they were currently worshipping at a local elementary school with an open lease only requiring a two-week notice to terminate it. They could wait for the renovations to be completed and the space was just the right size for their congregation.

At a first meeting with their pastor, Derrick Burroughs, his wife, Tamika, and Cameron's Church Council, connections were immediately made. He was a graduate of Bridgewater College and they found

both alumni and parents with children attending the college present at Council. She grew up in the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church and felt that the path leading them to a United Methodist Church as a host for their congregation was divinely inspired. An agreement was made for occupancy on Mar. 1.

Even with three congregations providing income to Cameron, it was clear at the January finance meeting that it would probably not be enough to keep things entirely in the black and pay full apportionments.

Box had numerous discussions with district superintendent Jeff Mickle about the issue throughout the years. Box prayed hard for guidance and a new

The renovated hall with its new flooring, paint and lights is now a bright, welcoming center — a comfortable place for worship and meetings.

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

("CAMERON," cont. from page 13.)

pathway, and Mickle challenged Box to then become a "transformational leader" should a solution be revealed to him.

During a vacation in Feb. 2017, Box prayed for inspiration and guidance and reflected on the challenge from Mickle. Back at Cameron in early March, Box called a Town Hall meeting to relay to the congregation the guidance he believed he had been given.

He shared with the assembled group that he had first seen Cameron as a hub on a wheel, acting as within a lease relationship with the three other congregations. The new image he had seen was Cameron as one of six entities around a central core.

A new vision

Box envisioned a new arrangement for Cameron UMC, where the church was more than just a landlord to other smaller but growing congregations. While the UMC would still own Cameron church and the property, and have ultimate control over it, he saw all the groups coming together in a "pastors' council" to cooperatively manage their congregations within the church property. The potential to share services at Christmas and Easter and also combine their efforts at activities and mainte-

nance around the church was enormous.

"Cameron 'the church' could become the 'Cameron Christian Campus,' where six congregations could all worship individually, but within a mutually supportive environment," said Box.

Box had already shared his vision with Mickle, who responded, "When I asked you to be a transformational leader, I didn't expect this much transformation."

"There is no blueprint for what I am proposing we do," Box told the congregation. "We will have to build our relationships and Pastors' Council agreements from scratch."

During the Town Hall, the members were all supportive, recognizing that in order to save Cameron UMC, they now needed to share it with other Christians.

"Imagine how good it would be to have this church filled to capacity again with Christians," said one Cameron member.

"Sharing our building and our church lives with other Christians may be the only way we will keep from losing it," said Box.

Box then shared that another request had been received for space. The request came from a congregation similar in size to Cameron's. The group wanted to use Cameron's social hall which was the only other large space that

they had available. Box emphasized that by accepting their lease, the church's commitment to their new path would be tested.

This insertion gave pause to the Town Hall as congregants considered the cost of hosting this new congregation and if losing use of the social hall would impact their staid and comfortable fellowship lives, perhaps damaging more of the core of their membership that they were trying to save.

But soon, one by one, suggestions were voiced on ways to overcome the impact and support the plan.

"I recognize that God did not command me face-to-face to specifically take this path toward a Christian Campus for our church property. It was only a vision. And I have to believe that all these unsolicited requests for worship space – coming at exactly the time when we needed the financial relief they offer – is not a fluke," said Box. "This last request will take up exactly the number of unused rooms we will have left. I believe these congregations were sent to us for a reason; God wants the space in His Cameron house used for worship and the making of more disciples."

A Christian campus

The congregation of Cameron UMC has em-

barked on a new pathway. At the time of this writing during Holy Week, a four-congregation spring event recently concluded, sponsored by one of the partner congregations. An agreement for a fourth congregation to worship regularly in the building is progressing, but a special arrangement has been made that will allow them to hold Easter worship there ahead of the final agreement – something they have never been able to do before in their public rented facility that was always closed on holidays. Other plans are under discussion for campus-wide children's movie nights and shared meals. Details are being worked out to include members from all the congregations on the Trustees, and possibly Missions and Worship. Joint work days are also being considered.

Christian life at Cameron UMC is now growing. New patterns of worship, activities and cooperation are being forged. New Christians are being made. Cameron's congregation has embarked on a new pathway in faith, trying to make maximum use of God's house for God's people. Will it prove to be the right path? 

– Joe Fisher is a member of Cameron UMC.

DISCIPLES HELPING TO TRANSFORM THE WORLD



▲ **Bishop Sharma D. Lewis** was at the Mary Beth Graff Heart Havens house on Apr. 3. Here she is pictured with one of the residents, Ronnie.



▲ **Vale UMC** spent its Lenten time reflecting on its wide range of mission and service. Each week was emphasized a different aspect of God's work in the world. On the fifth Sunday of Lent, after a brief service of Holy Communion, 78 members of Vale UMC (Ar) were sent out to several mission venues in a "Day of Service." Activities included delivering food to

the homeless in DC, family partners in SE DC, food packages for a local elementary school, working in the clothes closet and singing at a nearby elder-care center.

▼ To observe One Great Hour of Sharing, **Bethany UMC, Gloucester Point, York River District**, dispersed \$22,000 to United Methodist agencies and local agencies which work to improve the lives and provide aid to those who have needs not met through typical channels or resources. Of the 23 not-for-profit recipients,

20 of them were represented during the time of worship on Mar. 26. The monies dispersed were the result of the proceeds received from Bethany's biennial bazaar, and it all goes back into the mission field.



▲ **Boulevard UMC's Rev. Rachel May**, as Mary, delivers the Easter Monologue during the Easter Sunrise Service of Resurrection at Hollywood Cemetery. The sunrise service was hosted by five Richmond United Methodist churches, the **Pace Center for Campus and Community Ministry at VCU** and the St. Andrew's Legion Pipes and Drums. It was the fourth year and by far the largest crowd with approximately 300 people in attendance for the 6:30 a.m. service.



EVENTS



June

Annual Conference

Jun. 16-18, Hampton Roads Convention Center, Hampton

The 2017 session of the Virginia Annual Conference will be held Jun. 16-18 at the Hampton Roads Convention Center. This year's theme will be "A New Thing" based off of Isaiah 43:19 -- "See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland." For information about Annual Conference from housing to banquet information, visit www.vaumc.org/AC2017.

Helping Hands Mission event

Jun. 26-27, Peace UMC, Fredericksburg

Join the Fredericksburg District for a two-day mission experience for children (rising 4th through 6th graders) offered to all member churches in the Virginia Conference. Contact Mandy Robinson at churchyouth@passthepeacechurch.org for more information about the session held in Fredericksburg. Fee will be \$36 which includes T-shirt, meals, snacks and overnight stay.

Three other dates include: Jul. 12-13 at St. Paul's UMC in Staunton with contact Chris Lyle at lyle.chris@gmail.com; Jul. 27-28 at Woodlake UMC in Midlothian with contact MaryKaye Cochran at MCochran@woodlakeumc.org; and Aug. 3-4 at Deep Creek UMC in Chesapeake with contact Robin Cannon at robin.cannon@deepcreekumc.org.

A flyer for the events can be viewed at the conference website by visiting www.vaumc.org, then looking at the top right of the page for "conference calendar."

July

Candidacy Summit

Jul. 7-8, Roslyn Retreat Center, Richmond

The Candidacy Summit is a 24-hour event for anyone (18 or older and out of high school) who is interested in learning more about pursuing ministry leadership in the Virginia Conference of The United Methodist Church (VAUMC). (There are separate events for high school students who are interested in pursuing ministry leadership.) The purpose of the Candidacy Summit is to provide opportunities for vocational discernment, connection with others who are exploring God's call in their lives and deeper understanding about the VAUMC journey toward certified, licensed and ordained ministry. For more information on this event, please visit the Candidacy Summit webpage at www.vaumc.org/CandidacySummit. For more information, contact ClergyExcellence@vaumc.org or **804-521-1126**.

Mission Encounter

Jul. 28-29, Bon Air UMC, Chesterfield

Mission Encounter is THE BEST KEPT SECRET IN THE VIRGINIA CONFERENCE! Although its history began over 70 years ago by the then named Women's Society of Christian Service, and known as the School of Christian Mission for most of that history, the newly-named Mission Encounter is a cooperative event sponsored by the Virginia Conference Missional Ministries Board (formerly the Board of Global Ministry) and the Virginia Conference United Methodist Women

This event offers a wonderful opportunity for your whole congregation to come alive to mission, by participating in an exciting weekend mission education experience. There are classes for

adults where men, women, clergy and laity alike come to learn and be involved in mission groups by choosing one class out of three choices — a spiritual growth study, geographical study or social issue.

This year from Jul. 28-29, the classes offered will be climate justice, living as a covenant community and the missionary conference of The UMC in the United States (Red Bird, Oklahoma and Alaska). Contact Gail Sutcliffe with questions at **703-490-3381**. 📞

The *Advocate* magazine publishing schedule requires that information be compiled sooner than the month for which is published. For events you are interested in, please contact those listed for the events as points of contact for the most up-to-date information and for questions.

African American Church Studies

@Wesley Theological Seminary



WESLEY
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Wesley Theological Seminary announces two new ways to support your ministry, addressing the issues and challenges of leadership in African American contexts and communities:

- New African American Church Studies specialization for all Masters degrees
- A Certificate in African American Church Studies to resource local church members and leaders.

for more
information

- wesleyseminary.edu/aacs03
- ☎ 202-885-8659
- ✉ admissions@wesleyseminary.edu

Applications are now being accepted for Fall 2017



Advocate

The Virginia United Methodist

SUBSCRIBE NOW!

- See who benefits from your stewardship of time and money through The United Methodist Church's local, national, and global mission work.
- Gain new ideas for your local church from others' success stories.
- Stay informed with up-to-date information on issues affecting Virginia United Methodists.

**EQUIPS
CONNECTS
INFORMS**

Go to www.vaumc.org/advocate
or call the *Advocate* office at:
1-800-768-6040, ext. 110
or (804) 521-1110.





Photo credit: Monica Martin

ANNOUNCEMENT

A DIFFERENT KIND OF MINISTRY



Since 2008, the Virginia Conference has established 42 new faith communities with 22 Anglo and 20 ethnic faith communities. These ethnic churches include African American, Ghanaian, Hispanic, Korean and West African. The combined average worship attendance per Sunday for these faith communities was 2,012 persons for the Jan.-Jun. 2015 time period.

It was decided at the 2008 Virginia Annual Conference to adopt the *All Things New* initiative as a core strategy for reaching more people, more diverse people and more young people with the goal of moving into a culture of multiplication rather than on of maintenance. In the last quadrennium, creating new and renewed congregations was also one of the four areas of focus of the UMC.

The pastors who answer this call experience a non-traditional kind of ministry. How would you describe the ministry of a church planter? What kinds of difficulties do these pastors face?

Continue reading in this feature for the story of two planters, how they view their ministry and in what form it's taken since they began.

ONE CHURCH PLANTER'S

monly-held beliefs on how to be church?

Yes, and, unfortunately, I feel that the main hope for reaching folks outside of the church is through a church plant because plants aren't afraid to risk or try totally new paradigms of ministry.

Established churches want a pastor to come in and save their dying church by magically bringing people in with him or her but churches aren't

usually willing to make the difficult choices and changes necessary to become vital and welcoming again and sustain any growth.

Many seasoned United Methodists would cringe at the thought of "church" in a pub or on a beach or developed from a yoga and hiking group that meet each month, but these are organic ways to form faith communities. The downside to church planting is that it is harder to find financial stability in out-of-the-box churches.

Can you share the journey from conception to planting *The Gathering* in 2009?

My story is atypical. Most planters know that this is what they want to do. My district superintendent called and told me this would be my first appointment out of seminary without ever having been vetted as a church planter. When I told him I wanted another appointment (please), he said, "Welcome to the itinerant system. This is your call; you will plant a church."

So I showed up in July 2009 with a 6-month-old son and a husband who was also a United Methodist pastor. With the support of my stakeholders, as coach the Rev. Paul Nixon, District Superintendent Brad Phillips and Church Development Team liaison the Rev. Mark Ogren, I began to meet as many people as possible (up to 40 new people a month).

The initial plan of the anchor church was to reach out to 18 to 25-year-old single, young adults but I was a 27-year-old mother so I was drawing in more folks from my affinity group of young moms. One small group of 10 young adults at the anchor church split into four small groups which each had eight to 10 people in them within three months.

We had monthly worship beginning in November 2009 and launched weekly worship at the anchor church in Feb-



Photo credit: Monica Martin

How would you define a church planter?

A church planter is someone who is compelled to constantly rethink and rework what church is and does to help folks living on the fringes of faith who would never naturally walk into the doors of a church in the 21st century.

What does the ministry of a church planter look like?

The ministry of a church planter, especially in the early days, has nothing to do with an office or church building and everything to do with the context or community to which the planter is called.

There is no set schedule or routine other than to meet people and allow them to share their life story.

As the community forms, the planter has to find meaningful ways to create an authentic space for folks to reconnect to God, others and themselves. This also includes the planter delegating or training leaders so that the planter doesn't become the spiritual superstar or immovable hub of this growing faith community.

What is the process of planting a church?

Pray without ceasing, seek God's vision for this new faith community, reach out and meet people, gather them into groups, fail and make mistakes but learn from everything and try again.

In *Flipping Church*, a book that focuses on the ministries of several successful church planters, editor Michael Baughman wanted to bring together church planters to discuss the ways that church planting is flipping upside down the traditional notions of how to be a church. Do you think church planting has flipped com-



ruary 2010. By the summer, we had so many children that we needed a location change. Together we decided with the anchor church to move and our first Sunday of community public worship was Sept. 2010.

After two years at the theater, we moved into a warehouse space that we renovated and stayed in for another two years until we merged with Scott Memorial UMC to form The Gathering at Scott Memorial UMC in 2016. The vision God gave us back in 2009 was to be a safe space for spiritual nomads to reconnect to God. Over the years, we have refined that vision which is now: we exist to help people reconnect to God, others, themselves and creation through authentic accountability, experiential worship and incarnational missions.

How has the combination of The Gathering and Scott Memorial shifted what your initial intentions were going into a planting a church to where you are now? How (if at all) did goals change?

Merging was always part of our plan because we realized we could do more and reach more people with a central base of operations, a central hub for our ministry, but we wanted to be eco-friendly and fiscally responsible so we did not want to spend millions of dollars building another church when there were so many beautiful churches on our district with a great location and potential.

We also wanted a congregation that was diverse in all aspects of life but found that, prior to the merger, our congregation was almost exclusively under 50 years old. The merger helped both churches grow but it has been challenging. We learned from the experience. We are now open to starting more campuses of The Gathering at churches that may be struggling or would like to rethink church.

What are continued goals you have moving forward at The Gathering at Scott Memorial? Where do you hope to be in the next five to 10 years?

In five to 10 years, we hope to have two to four campuses of the church and three to five campuses of our missional preschools throughout Hampton Roads. We will continue to live into our vision of helping people reconnect with God, others, themselves and creation and will continue to have a thriving ministry to families in need.

Can you share about your ministry: did you think you would be called to be a church planter?

I never thought I would be a church planter. Apparently church planting already has a high failure rate and women, especially young mothers, have an even higher failure rate.

The that I live in has a few, thriving, non-denominational church plants that are male-led and do not believe that women should be in leadership in the church. I have been effective as a planter for two main reasons: the Holy Spirit has truly been a part of every step of this church plant and has moved in powerful ways and I have been extremely blessed to have the relentless support and encouragement of a spouse who is also a pastor and understands how difficult ministry can be.

My parents are also both ordained and have decades of ministerial experience that I have drawn from over the last eight years; my time as a Peace Corps volunteer taught me how to learn about my surrounding community and enact change with very minimal resources which has served me well as a church planter. I feel so blessed to have fallen into this call and to be able to serve the incredible people at The Gathering at Scott Memorial UMC. 🍷

– Rachel Gilmore is the pastor of The Gathering at Scott Memorial UMC, Virginia Beach.



Photo credit: Monica Martin.

SCHOOL-CHURCH PARTNERSHIP SEEN AS



The Rev. Delano Douglas is part of the partnership between Virginia State University (VSU) and Ettrick UMC in the James River District. He is the director of the United Campus Ministries on campus as well as the associate pastor at Ettrick.



For Douglas, rather than a plant, the partnership feels more specifically like that of an “implant.”

“The initial concept was to do a hybrid. Ettrick Church is a very historic church; it has been around a long time, and since those beginnings, the Ettrick community has changed, especially in the past 25 years,” said Douglas. “So the idea

was to connect the campus ministry with the local church for the purpose of developing a new faith community. I think what it has turned out to be more than anything else is more like a ministerial partnership. They are doing a lot in partnership together.”

Douglas emphasized that there has been a focus on partnering with the church in areas of need.

“We feel like it’s a great mission opportunity, but we also feel like there is room for the church to grow. Our

campus ministry is working with this church to help grow the church and not only its mission but hopefully in the future its members,” said Douglas.

This involves students participating in active outreach.

“Some of our students have the desire for outreach, so we are preparing them to go out into the community. Honestly, if you were going to do some door to door conversations in the Ettrick community right now, the current membership physically doesn’t have that possibility,” said Douglas.

The ultimate intent, Douglas said, is not only to build relationships between the students and the church but for both entities to collectively find ways to reach out to the Ettrick community with the Gospel.

The “implant” officially started in Feb. 2015. Since that time Douglas has already seen relationships form as more students take part in the church’s 11 a.m. worship service. Over 200 student volunteers have taken part in different restoration work at the church including in the basement. And in 2016, the students during their 2 p.m. worship services contributed \$4,600 over the course of the year to Ettrick for ongoing development in the church and whatever needs they may have.

Even the relationship between VSU and Ettrick UMC has grown. Douglas shared that VSU paid for a new sink and





Photos courtesy of Delano Douglas.

toilet in the church, at no cost, when they found out that the church had been without that particular bathroom for six months.

Currently, the group is working with the College of Business at VSU to develop a business plan. This is in the hopes that the university volunteers can steadily be brought in to work on behalf of the church in the community.

The university embraces the campus ministry, Douglas said, as well as Ettrick as the de facto chapel of the university which is a blessing.

Douglas shared that he has personal hopes for the ministry to further be in community with Ettrick.

"I would like to see the church be identified as a church

for the village of Ettrick, for the fold who live there, and as a mission center for the people in the community." 

– The Rev. Delano Douglas is the director of United Campus Ministries at VSU and associate pastor at Ettrick UMC.

EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY



50 ideas for opening lines in church lessons

By Jeremy Steele

“*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”*

What a great opening line! Hopefully, people don't need an awesome opening line to be inspired to read the *Bible*, but when

it comes to getting them to pay attention in church or small groups, you may need a little extra help to pique their interest. Starting with a great idea is important, but making your first line interesting and imaginative can draw people in the same way excellent titles do on a website.

Here are 50 great opening lines and ideas to get you started:

Ask a compelling question

Starting with a question is unusual and will grab attention because of its novelty. Beyond that, a good

question will spark people's imagination as they begin considering an answer in their head.

- ❖ *Have you ever wondered what Nostradamus and the Book of Revelation have in common?*
- ❖ *Have you ever wondered why God heals some people and not others?*
- ❖ *What is the one question you've always wondered about faith but have never had it answered well?*
- ❖ *God loves freedom and gave everyone free will. Does that mean that*



EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY

God loves the democratic system of government?

- ❖ *What happens when a dream dies?*
- ❖ *Where are our modern-day Michelangelos?*
- ❖ *Have you ever been turned off by a Christian you happened to see on television?*

Say something shocking or surprising

Making a shocking statement grabs attention as well as a good question. However, a shocking or surprising statement has the ability to get people off balance to listen carefully to what you have to say.

- ❖ *This week, I discovered something in the Bible that I will never forget.*
- ❖ *Paul was wrong. (You can insert other characters.)*
- ❖ *Jesus was Jewish.*
- ❖ *We all know that life isn't fair, but when you read the Bible, it's clear that God isn't fair either.*
- ❖ *Sometimes anger is the most godly reaction we can have.*

Ask a shocking question

A shocking question doesn't need to seem false, it may just be a question they never thought a Sunday school teacher or

pastor would ask. When you combine the question and the shock well, the engagement can go through the roof.

- ❖ *Did you know the Bible contradicts itself?*
- ❖ *Where do dinosaurs fit into the Bible?*
- ❖ *How can you know whether to take the Bible literally?*
- ❖ *What does the voice of God sound like?*
- ❖ *Why on earth did God tell the Hebrew people to kill so many people in the Old Testament?*

Make a unique observation

Sometimes the intriguing curveball isn't shocking or formed into a question. Sometimes, all you need is a unique observation or piece of information to draw your members in.

- ❖ *I have discovered the secret to never feeling lonely (or whatever is the end result of your study).*
- ❖ *The New Testament writers didn't have the New Testament. When those writers speak of "Scripture," they are referring to the Old Testament.*
- ❖ *If we aren't careful, when we study or remember influential religious leaders, we can overlook their imperfec-*

tions. Did you know that John Wesley had serious questions about his faith throughout his life?

- ❖ *Look for the most influential leaders in the Bible and you'll find a bunch of messy people: murderers, adulterers, liars and betrayers.*

Ask people to use their imagination and/or participate

When you want people to become actively involved in a lesson, taking time to craft an opportunity to do so is both direct and effective.

- ❖ *What if you could go back in time?*
- ❖ *Could you define Christianity in a sentence? What about in seven words or less? I'll give you a couple minutes to try.*
- ❖ *This week, I was on Facebook and saw this quote ... Do you think it's from the Bible or somewhere else?*
- ❖ *Repeat after me: God is neither a Republican nor a Democrat.*

Make a big promise (and deliver)

People come to church ready to think about life's biggest problems and experience life's greatest mysteries. When you are going to engage at that

level, let people know it up front, but make sure you deliver on the promise.

- ❖ *Today, we are going to discover a mystical truth at the heart of prayer.*
- ❖ *Today's Bible passage seems to be ripped from a reality TV show.*
- ❖ *Happiness can seem elusive. The Bible, though, has several practical tips to put happiness within reach.* 📖

– Jeremy Steele works with United Methodist Communications.

Devotions from International Lesson Series

LIVING THE WORD



Jonathan Page is the pastor at Fieldstone in the New River Valley of Virginia. An alumnus of Christopher Newport University (BA, Modern Languages) and Duke Divinity School (MDiv), he was commissioned in 2011 and ordained as an elder in 2014. He is married to Kelly, a teacher with State Operated Programs serving at a Juvenile Detention Home. They have two dogs, Scotty and Winnie. Jonathan loves all Atlanta sports teams (the Super Bowl ended in the third quarter this year, he thinks) as well as traveling, trivia and enjoying good meals with good friends.

June 4, 2017 I'll Go With You Judges 4:1-10

I can remember the moment so well. I was a freshman in high school and my youth group was visiting Busch Gardens in Williamsburg. Up until that point, Busch Gardens had been the place I visited with my parents. We would see shows and have ice cream, but we never dared get on any of the big, scary rides. On this trip, the rides were the only thing anyone cared about! What was I to do? I didn't want to chicken out, but how could I be sure that those shoulder harnesses on the Loch Ness Monster could actually keep me from falling out?!

While Deborah and Barak weren't at Busch Gardens in Judges 4, they were facing a daunting situation. In the midst of oppression, God speaks through Deborah, a prophet. It's time to go and fight, the two of you and 10,000 more. Wow! Talk about a monster of a vision! Barak, hearing these words, is scared.

Sometimes fear looks like a big yellow roller coaster. Other times it sounds like the very voice of God. How do we handle this kind of fear? Because it's not just Barak and me who have these moments. Throughout our neighborhoods and throughout our world, there are people who are scared. Some are scared because of how they look, others because of what they believe and plenty more have even more reasons to live in fear.

But the promise of God's love is that fear never has the last word. That day at Busch Gardens, in the midst of my visible uncertainty, a friend walked up and said four simple words: "I'll go with you." As we boarded the ride, I was still scared; however, I knew I had someone with me to share in the experience, no matter how terrifying it might be.

Deborah, hearing Barak's uncertainty, says a similar phrase: "I'll definitely go with you." It wasn't a promise that the battle would be easy, but it was a reminder that no one would be alone in pursuing God's vision of freedom.

As followers of Jesus, God's persistent invita-

tion to us is to be with people. Where are there places of fear in your neighborhood? How might you be embodying God's presence by simply showing up and being present alongside someone today?

June 11, 2017 With All Due Respect Judges 6:11-18

Have you ever had someone speak to you and start a sentence with "It's nothing personal, but..."? Doesn't that sentence almost always end with something extremely personal? Recently, I had someone stop by my office and offer this to me: "It's nothing personal, but I really don't care for the way you preach and so I'm going to a new church." Nothing personal? That's completely personal! Sometimes, our qualifiers don't make much sense.

This is where we find Gideon in the sixth chapter of Judges. God is calling Gideon. There isn't a lot of wiggle room here - a divine mandate is happening over Gideon's life. And how does Gideon respond to this call? "With all due respect..."

What follows isn't a respectful word; rather, what follows is a plethora of excuse-filled words. Gideon sounds a little like me when my wife asks me to empty the dishwasher! In the midst of God's calling, all Gideon can focus on are the reasons he shouldn't follow God's lead.

How often is this our story? In the times of greatest clarity, of God speaking truth over us and in us, how often is our response like that of Gideon? If you're anything like me, this is a place of constant struggle. It's a combination of doubts. I doubt God at times and I doubt myself even more.

Here's where God continues to work on my heart, and hopefully a place where God can be at work in your heart too: God doesn't make junk. You and I, we weren't made to be ordinary or to be just another pile of flesh and bone. Just as Gideon was made for his purpose, so too have you been made for a purpose. And you haven't been made by some random being! The God that created the heavens and the earth is the same God who stitched you together in your mother's womb. It's



the same God that has been with you through everything to this point and is with you now and will be with you for all of eternity.

So, with all due respect, I hope you'll listen for God's call on your life. Know that God is big enough to hear your questions and to hold your doubts. And, completely personally, I pray that you will trust God with your life, following wherever God may lead you.

June 18, 2017
Opening the Door
Judges 11:4-11, 29-31

The elders of Gilead and Jephthah's family aren't pals. For who knows how long, tension and rift have been their story. But, as we soon discover, there is a need for reconciliation in their story.

For the elders of Gilead, they know that without Jephthah's leadership, they won't be able to win a victory over the Ammonites. So they sacrifice their pride in order to gain the victory they need.

Jephthah, then, turns to God. Having reconciled with the elders, he now understands that he is in a place of leadership. But he knows that he won't be able to lead well without God's presence leading him. So he commits to sacrifice whatever comes out of his door, no matter how close he is to it, in order to gain the victory he needs.

Out of the desire for reconciliation comes the need for sacrifice. I wonder where we might be looking for reconciliation and what we might need to sacrifice to get there? In my brief time in ministry and on this earth, I've learned that in order to participate in reconciliation and leadership, you have to be willing to sacrifice a couple of things: your ego and your heart.

This is hard work! Being able to let go of ego in an effort to come to the table and discover unity afresh is challenging. But, in the midst of the challenges it can present, it also offers us an opportunity. Mainly, it is the opportunity to discover that we aren't our own salvation and we aren't in charge.

And as we let go of our ego, I think we begin to allow our hearts to open, too. I believe that God desires our hearts to be an open door, because God is ready to take on whatever comes out, whether it be joy or pain, certainty or uncertainty, or anything else we may have behind those doors.

But as we let the doors to our hearts come open, we don't only let our stuff out. We let God's stuff come in. Perfect peace. Love beyond compare. Hope bigger than words. It is God who brings us the reconciliation with each other that we desire and God who fills us with the capacity to lead and move and breathe.

So may you let go of yourself and open your heart, trusting that God holds it all in God's hands!

June 25, 2017
A Consecrated Life
Judges 13:2-7

Samson will be born, raised, and live as a Nazirite. This term derives from a root word that means "to consecrate." Maybe you've heard this word before. Consecrate is a word we use in church at times, most of the time over the elements of Holy Communion, although sometimes we use it to talk about a building or a mission team. If you google the definition of consecrate, you'll find it means to make something sacred, dedicating it formally to a divine purpose.

I'm comfortable with the idea of consecrating things. I even think consecrating time can be a good call. But what would it look like to live a consecrated life? A life made sacred, dedicated to a divine purpose.

I don't know about you, but that sounds daunting to me! Part of that must be because, at least in my mind, there must be some rules to follow in order to live a consecrated life. We see this in the words of God's messenger to Samson's mother: Don't drink alcohol, don't eat unclean food, don't shave your kid's head. Those "don't's," in this time, were a part of keeping the law. Keeping the law, for the Israelites, was keeping it holy!

But for you and me, law looks a little bit different. And because of that, keeping it holy, living a consecrated life, might look a little different too.

Jesus is hanging out with some folks, and one of them, a Pharisee, asks him a question: "Teacher, what is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replies, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: You must love your neighbor as you love yourself. All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands." (Matthew 22:36-40 CEB)

Love is our law. Loving God and loving people is what a consecrated life looks like. Out of that love, we may discover some habits that go alongside it. But without love, those habits will be nothing more than a clanging gong, a noise with no purpose.

So you want to live a consecrated life? Don't focus on the "don't's" or "what you should do." Love God and go love somebody, all the while discovering the purpose for which you have been created. 

CLERGY & DIACONAL



DEATHS



The Rev. Ernest Dyson died Apr. 22, 2017, at Mary Washington Hospital, in Fredericksburg, Va.

Ernie was born Sept. 6, 1926, in Philadelphia. He served in the U.S. Merchant Marine and the U.S. Navy, participating in the invasion of southern France.

He left the Navy in 1946, and received a Bachelor of Science from Temple University in 1950, as well as a Masters and Doctorate in Education in 1956 and 1965. He received a Master of Divinity from Wesley Theological Seminary in 1984.

After a career in public school education, he decided to enter the ministry, pastoring in Virginia at Hopewell, Bowling Green, and most recently, Hillcrest UMC.

Dyson authored two books, *Living With God in Loss* and *Yearning For Eden*. He was on the staff of Fredericksburg Personal Counseling Service for many years. More recently, he counseled at Lake of the Woods Church and also Wilderness Community Church, where he was a member and preached.

He is survived by his dear friend and partner, Helen Ramsey; by his brother Ronald and sister-in-law, Linda; loving nephews; and by his "adopted" children, Robert and Cathy Kravetz.

The Rev. James Shank Angle died Apr. 13, 2017, after several months of failing health. He was born on Nov. 19, 1936 the only child of Ralph and Ruth Shank Angle.

Preceding him in death are his par-



ents and his first wife, Dr. Kathleen Bailey Angle.

Surviving are his wife, Kate Harmon Angle; stepdaughter, Mary (Dennis)

Reaser; two-step grandsons, Alan (Susan) Powers and Philip Powers; two step-greatgrandsons, Remington and Jacob Powers; cousins, Betty Linkous of Christiansburg and Gerald Pendleton of North Yorkshire, England.

Angle was a graduate of Shawsville High School, and an honor graduate of the College of William and Mary. He received his Master's Degree in English from Middlebury College. He also completed post-graduate studies at Vanderbilt, Duke, Oxford and Cambridge universities. He was a professor emeritus of English and public speaking at Ferrum College where he taught for 34 years, and served as chair of the Humanities Department.

Angle was also an ordained minister in the Virginia Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church for 30 years. He served as pastor of St. James United Methodist Church for eight years and then served as pastor of Goodwin Memorial United Methodist Church for 44 years.

Dr. Thomas Harold Crowder Jr., died Mar. 27, 2017.

Dr. Crowder was the first pediatrician in Halifax County in 1960. Dr. Crowder received his medical degree from Duke University School of Medicine in 1955. He remained at Duke University Hospital to do his internship and then began a residency in pediatrics at Watts Hospital in Durham in 1957. It was during his time at Duke that he fell in love with his wife, Thelma, of 60 years.

He enjoyed actively participating in Main Street UMC where he served in many capacities over the years. He was an amateur scholar of John Wesley, and became a lifelong pursuit of collecting Wesley and Methodist memorabilia. He has written articles, given talks on John Wesley and donated many items of his private collection to the World Methodist Museum at Lake Junaluska, N.C., Duke University Divinity School and Ferrum College.

Dr. Crowder is survived by his wife Thelma; four children, Thomas Harold Crowder III (Linda) of Chicago, Ill.; Mary T. Crowder-Paden (Reed) of Cornelius, N.C.; Chancie Barclift Crowder (Marlene) of Raleigh, N.C.; and Catherine Louise Crowder of Greensboro, N.C.; and six grandchildren.



The Rev. Robert (Bob) H. Garner died Mar. 6, 2017, in Roanoke. A retired elder in the Virginia Conference, Garner was born Oct.

18, 1935. He married his high school sweetheart, Loretta Dillehay, and they had two children, Robert Dale Garner (Susan) of Altamonte Springs, Fla. and Pamela Garner Culbreth of Greensboro, N.C. (deceased 1994). He is survived by three grandchildren, Zachary Robert Culbreth of Roanoke, Rachel Elizabeth Garner and Robert Maxwell Garner of Altamonte Springs, Fla; and great granddaughter Lillyah Elise Garner.

Garner graduated from John Nicholls High School at Oxford Orphanage in Oxford, N.C. He was a Morehead Scholar at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. He continued his education at Greensboro College in

Philosophy and Religion. He graduated from Wesley Theological Seminary with a Master of Divinity.

Ordained into The Methodist Church in 1959, he served 10 assignments for the Virginia Annual Conference.

Hazel Wells Mayo McClung, 90, of Glen Allen, died Mar. 22, 2017. She was preceded in death by her first husband, Robert W. "Bob" Mayo Sr.; and her second husband, the Rev. Dr. Ardell "Mac" McClung. She is survived by two sons, Bob Mayo Jr. and Bill (Kathy) Mayo; stepdaughter, Ann McClung; stepson, Wally McClung; grandsons, Scott (Theresa) Mayo, Lee (Beth) Mayo and Billy (Amber) Mayo; great-grandchildren, Vaughn, Emma, Aidan, Oliver and Hudson.

She was a graduate of The Johnston-Willis School of Nursing Class of 1947. After retirement, she continued to be a nurse to her friends and family. Special thanks are extended to all of her McDonald's breakfast gang, with whom she shared many great moments and laughter. 🍷

**Need a book? A Bible?
A music CD?**

**Shop Online
At Your
Virginia
Conference
Online Bookstore!**

Save 20% on most items and
Gain 5% back for Virginia Conference

Go to the Virginia Conference Web site, <www.vaumc.org> and click, "Resources >> Cokesbury Virtual Bookstore."

* 5% return offer does not apply to curriculum, apparel, online downloads, or official denominational items.

Powered by
cokesbury.com

The Virginia United Methodist

Advocate

**EQUIPS
CONNECTS
INFORMS**

www.vaumc.org/Advocate

Lewis & Hitchcock, Inc.
Pipe Organ Builders Since 1915
11561 Edmonston Rd, Beltsville, MD 20705
Phone: 1-800-952-PIPE (7473)
Fax: (301) 931-2378

*Pew Upholstering & Refinishing
Reversible Pew Cushions
New Pews • Carpeting
Complete Renovations*
<www.churchinteriors.com>
1-800-289-7397
Church Interiors Inc.
*The Nation's Leading Church Renovation Specialists.
High Point, North Carolina*

For Your Printing Needs

 **Benj. Franklin
Printing Co.**

John R. Overbey, III (Jay)
Ellen A. Overbey

1528 High Street
Richmond, Va. 23220

(804) 648-6361
FAX (804) 643-7114

Get a bus and peace of mind.

Choose from our great selection of buses You'll enjoy peace of mind knowing service is available on site at your church.

Sonny Merryman INC.

VIRGINIA'S
BUS COMPANY

sonnymerryman.com
(800) 533-1006



Call for a free demonstration.

SALES AND SERVICE: CENTRAL VIRGINIA • HAMPTON ROADS • NOVA

FROM THE BISHOP

Bishop Sharma D. Lewis has been busy traveling especially in the last month. Check out some of her journeys below.



▲ The Council of Bishops formally welcomed newly elected bishops of the church during the opening of the Spring meeting in Dallas on May 1. The new bishops lined up in order of election.



▲ Bishop Lewis visited the Randolph-Macon College campus on April 17 to speak to pre-ministerial students.



▲ Bishop Lewis with Fredericksburg District Superintendent Ted Smith and the Rev. Ileana Rosario at the Bishop's Convocation on Prayer on April 1.

▼ Bishop Lewis held an Administrative Assistant Appreciation Luncheon on April 18 for conference center admins as well as admins from around the district offices.



Bishop's Bible Challenge readings for June

June 1	Job 1-4
June 2	Job 5-7
June 3	Job 8-10
June 4	Job 11-13
June 5	Job 14-16
June 6	Job 17-20
June 7	Job 21-23
June 8	Job 24-28
June 9	Job 29-31
June 10	Job 32-34
June 11	Job 35-37
June 12	Job 38-39
June 13	Job 40-42
June 14	Psalms 1-8
June 15	Psalms 9-16
June 16	Psalms 17-20
June 17	Psalms 21-25
June 18	Psalms 26-31
June 19	Psalms 32-35
June 20	Psalms 36-39
June 21	Psalms 40-45
June 22	Psalms 46-50
June 23	Psalms 51-57
June 24	Psalms 58-65
June 25	Psalms 66-69
June 26	Psalms 70-73
June 27	Psalms 74-77
June 28	Psalms 78-79
June 29	Psalms 80-85
June 30	Psalms 86-89



ONE LAST WORD



HOW THEN WILL THEY CALL ON HIM IN WHOM THEY HAVE NOT BELIEVED?

AND HOW ARE THEY TO BELIEVE IN HIM OF WHOM THEY HAVE NEVER
HEARD? AND HOW ARE THEY TO HEAR WITHOUT SOMEONE PREACHING?

AND HOW ARE THEY TO PREACH UNLESS THEY ARE SENT?

AS IT IS WRITTEN,

How Beautiful

ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO PREACH THE GOOD NEWS!”

ROMANS 10:14-15



SHENANDOAH™
UNIVERSITY



Your faith inspires you to

Open your heart

Stand with oppressed people

Work toward peace

Create communities of care

Seek justice

At Shenandoah University, you can explore faith's call in our **Christian Leadership Certificate Program**, where we focus on three key areas: leadership development, justice advocacy and spiritual formation.

As a United Methodist Church-affiliated university, Shenandoah boasts 90 areas of study, and a close-knit campus blessed with an active spiritual community. Scholarships are available to members of the Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church and to families of Virginia UMC clergy.

Learn more. www.su.edu | faithseekingjustice.org

WOODSON
CHapel
RECITAL
HALL