

330 participate in 20th United Methodist Day at General Assembly



Virginia United Methodist

Advocate

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Will one issue tear us apart?

*The United Methodist Church has
debated homosexuality for 40 years
with no end in sight*

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

— Virginia Conference Vision Statement

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Let’s take a look at what Jesus said about homosexuality



Neill Caldwell
Editor

can hear it now... “Why do you want to stir up that pot again?” Or better yet: “Cancel my subscription!” You’re right. Homosexuality is an issue that stirs United Methodists up. So as we investigate this issue again, I did want to start with some biblical teaching. So here’s what Jesus said about the topic of homosexuality:



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Neill Caldwell

The (rainbow) line in the sand



Neill Caldwell
Editor

OK, I knew you wouldn't let me get away with writing that little on such an important topic ...

"What about in Matthew 19?" you say. "What about Mark 10?" Yes, Jesus does repeat the scripture (Genesis 2:24) about a man and a woman being united as one, but it's in response to a question, and a trick question at that, about *divorce*, not homosexuality. (And, by the way, Jesus has quite a lot to say about divorce, money and

giving away all you have to serve the poor, but where's the great hoo-ha about all that? Christ even talked about *eunuchs*, for Pete's sake! So where are all the pro-eunuch and anti-eunuch groups?)

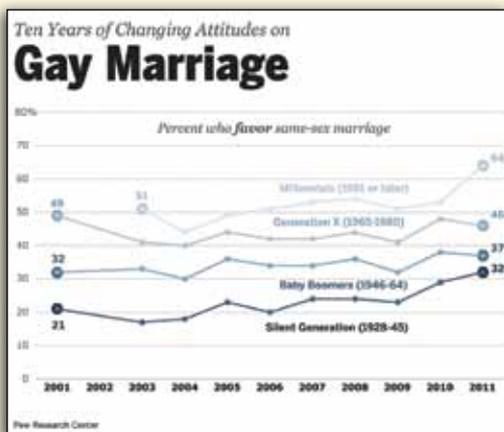
My feeling is that if sexual orientation were really as important as all that, Jesus would have spelled it out for us. Instead, we're left to argue and insult, throwing scripture verses back and forth like darts, taking up precious time that could be spent doing the work of the Lord.

The Episcopalians have split over it; the Presbyterians are now in the midst of schism over it as well. Are we next? It could happen. Liberals continue to see this as a human rights issue that they will not let go of. Conservatives have drawn a line in the sand: if there is any change in the status quo, they're gone.

As the Rev. Rhonda VanDyke Colby told a group of her Shenandoah University students a few days ago during a discussion on the key issues of General Conference, homosexuality "is so divisive that people don't even want to have a conversation about it, for fear that if you take a stand on it you'll immediately alienate half of the room."

It's clear that in America at least, the needle is moving slowly but steadily toward greater acceptance of lesbians, gays and transgendered persons. Recent Gallup and ABC/*Washington Post* polls have shown that more than a major-

ity are in favor of same-gender marriage. We now have gays serving their country openly in the military thanks to the lifting of "don't ask/don't tell." As I write this, Washington has become the seventh U.S. state to approve same-



The Federal Reserve office in Richmond drew criticism for flying the rainbow Gay Pride flag last June to celebrate LGBT Month and promote diversity in the workplace.

gender marriage, as have the New Jersey and Maryland legislatures, and an appeals court has struck down California's ban on same-gender marriage as unconstitutional.

But Rev. Keith Boyette, who has an essay on the following page, would say that the church should not mirror the popular culture, but rise above it. "The church stands over and against culture and society when culture and society are moving in a direction or persisting in practices that the church understands to be not biblical," he said following his participation in the 2011 trial of the Rev. Amy DeLong, a Wisconsin elder who admitted performing a same-gender wedding and was convicted at her church trial.

You can make a good argument for striving to be better than the culture, but if we choose to ignore the culture, we do so at our own peril. Young people, especially, have a much higher level of comfort with all kinds of gender identification. They see the church's opposition to same-sex marriage and homosexuality, in general, as a hypocrisy in the face of Christ's call to love everyone equally. And that turns them off of church (among other things we do).

Our church has a history of adapting. The biggest focus of the denomination right now is the "adaptive challenge" of how to make more vital congregations. Even back to the beginning, when John Wesley was asked not to come back to preach at churches, he went out to the streets and spoke at the factories and prisons to communicate the good news of Jesus Christ.

So at the risk of alienating half the room... For me it all comes down to the teaching of Christ about *all* people being children of God. We are charged to love one another, no matter a person's gender orientation, unusual personal hygiene habits, which football team they pull for, what kind of car they drive, etc., etc., etc. My gay friends – and there are a bunch – are no less holy than I am. In fact, most are probably more so.

My friend, the Rev. Mark Barden in the Western North Carolina Conference, says he would like to see his beloved United Methodist Church go back to pre-1968 *Disciplinary* language about homosexuality, which is to say *none*. Let's just take it all out and move on to other more important subjects like evangelism, mission, helping eliminate hunger, poverty, malaria ...

Hmm... You know, that's not such a crazy idea. ☐

UMC holds on to traditional Church teachings

by Keith Boyette

Although The United Methodist Church confronts challenges to its continued vitality and mission on many fronts, delegates to the 2012 General Conference in Tampa will yet again be asked to reverse the church's position on homosexuality.

Our *Book of Discipline* declares that the "practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching," forbids the ordination or appointment of self-avowed practicing homosexuals, and prohibits ceremonies which celebrate homosexual unions from being conducted by our ministers or occurring in our churches.

For ten General Conferences (1972-2008), and after numerous dialogues, two General Church study commissions, the development of official study resources, dozens of convocations, a plethora of books, demonstrations and disruptions of General Conference business, and extended impassioned debate, The United Methodist Church has continued to affirm a holistic position on human sexuality that is pastoral and biblical, compassionate and redemptive. Our denomination's current statements on homosexuality set forth a balanced position that affirms the "sacred worth" of all persons, while acknowledging that as Christians we cannot affirm every expression of human sexuality. There are sexual practices that contradict biblical standards, and as faithful disciples we must be willing to declare them to be incompatible with Christian teaching. Our position does this with mercy and grace, and is consistent with the pronouncements of scripture in both the Old and New Testaments and 2000 years of Christian history.

For millennia, biblical and Christian writers have declared that homosexual practice violates God's design for humanity and the pronouncements of Scripture. Explicit moral references to such behavior in the Christian tradition have been consistently negative. Every reference to same-sex intercourse in Scripture is negative (see Genesis 19:3-8; Judges 19:22-25; Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, 18-20; and 1 Timothy 1:8-11).

The Scriptures and Christian theology have limited sexual activity to within the boundary of marriage. Marriage has been defined by the Church in its orthodox expression as the covenantal relationship of supreme love between a man and a woman.

This definition has been based, in part, upon the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 19:4-6 which affirms that gender is a divine creation, heterosexual marriage is a divine institution, and heterosexual fidelity is the divine intention. Our *Discipline* rightly calls faithful followers of Jesus Christ to



celibacy in singleness and fidelity in marriage. Maintaining the current stance in our *Discipline* keeps faith with the supremacy of Scripture and is consistent with tradition, experience and reason.

Exposure to contemporary media demonstrates that we live in a hyper-sexualized culture. For more than 40 years, there have been those within The United Methodist Church who respond to events in our culture by arguing that we should accommodate to and adopt the ways of the culture in which we live. The existing position of our church, grounded in scripture and the historic teachings of the Church, is a statement of clarity in an age of murky morality.

In an era when far too many know the spiritual devastation which comes from sexual brokenness that occurs regardless of sexual orientation, our focus as a church should be on being prepared to minister to the needs presented while uncompromisingly standing for biblical truth and the transformative power of a relationship with Christ.

Our current *Discipline* makes clear that all persons, whatever their sexual orientation, are welcome in The United Methodist Church, but is also clear that sexual relationships outside the biblically and historically defined boundary of Christian marriage between one man and one woman must be confronted for what they are – sin – and persons who sin must be called to confession, repentance and transformation.

Every four years for 40 years now, as we have approached General Conference, clergy and laity, regardless of perspective, have approached the debate on sexual practice with apprehension. While the malaise which is present in The United Methodist Church is not solely related to this debate, the contentiousness of this debate has, in my opinion, distracted us from the central mission of the church – to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. And yet we still battle. We will do so yet again in Tampa. May God give us His grace and mercy. □

– The Rev. Keith Boyette is pastor at Wilderness Community UMC in Spotsylvania.

Tired of waiting

Progress will not be made as long as fear dominates the conversation

by Rob Vaughn

He was a good pastor, until he said he was gay.” That headline appeared in *The Washington Post* about a seminary colleague – a talented pastor who lost his pulpit only because of his honesty about his sexual orientation. Because of a typo in the article which added an extra zero, the newspaper said about 450 students at Wesley were gay. Suddenly the questions from the Board of Ordained Ministry representatives were about our sexual orientation as opposed to our preparation for ministry. I then began to get a glimmer of what my LGBT friends went through all the time.

I am very grateful for the progress we’ve made as a more accepting and humane society since then but saddened that progress is not reflected in our denomination’s policy. I am saddened because we have lost far too many talented persons who have been called by God to both lay and ordained ministry because of the infamous phrase in our *Social Principles* statement, “The UMC does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching.” I am saddened that our position on homosexuality has so seriously impacted young adults that our witness to God’s magnificent grace and love is impaired.

Like a people exiled in Babylon, waiting for a chance to return home, I am hopeful for that day when my United Methodist faith home is truly open and affirming of all my LGBT sisters and brothers in Christ. My hope for the future is a homecoming that welcomes all who have been injured; a homecoming that makes good and full use of the gifts of our LGBT siblings. I look forward to a day when I will not have to travel to Canada to witness a life-long friend’s marriage – she and her partner have been committed to each other for over decades. I look forward to when our conversations about sexuality will return to what we have a choice over, like other issues of Christian ethics, rather than what we cannot control.

Mary Kraus, a clergy colleague who pastored a reconciling congregation, told me about a woman and her partner who, when they found her congregation, both cried tears of joy for the whole next month because they had finally found a faith community where they could be affirmed like any other committed family. What I would like to see is a time of no more tears, when every Methodist congregation would be a place of welcome for all God’s children.

What I fear will occur are more tears of pain before there’ll be tears of joy – pain at another General Conference leaving our church’s policy as it is – pain at knowing the effect on the lives of persons who feel they have a secret that they cannot share, a part of their lives that



must remain hidden. And I think there will continue to be pain because the incredible witness and work for God in Christ within The United Methodist Church will not get heard by a generation who cannot get past our inhospitality toward LGBT persons.

Most folks I’ve encountered who hold a different perspective have also been concerned about the church’s witness in the world and how to encourage holiness in the lives of others. Yet good, honest, informed dialogue has been all too rare, and legislative settings like General Conference have not been settings for learning about this issue. Progress will not be made as long as fear, in all of its disguises, continues to dominate our conversation.

What I also believe will occur, and what brings me hope, is that a number of LGBT persons will actively remain in the church, offering their witness to God’s work in the UMC in spite of our less than gracious attitude. The role of Reconciling Ministries and their willingness to explore questions of hospitality will continue to inspire and offer hope for a changed future for the church. The witness of such groups is like 2nd Isaiah reminding us that all God’s children will get home again. But as much as I want an inclusive church today, it will be in God’s time and not mine.

That’s where I’m impatient. I’m tired of waiting. I’m not certain how many of my colleagues around the denomination who believe in an inclusive church will continue to choose to live with a policy that is contrary to the gospel. That just might be the flashpoint in the next few years of our denominational life. □

– The Rev. Dr. Rob Vaughn is pastor of Community of Faith UMC in Herndon. A Wesley Seminary graduate, his Ph.D. is in Sexuality Education from the University of Pennsylvania.

No unity when anyone is excluded

by Rives Priddy

Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world.” Taught this as a preschooler, I believed it, took it to heart, and have tried to live its truth. It got me into a lot of trouble! I have witnessed children welcomed at table, women ordained, black and white churches united, people with a variety of abilities fully engaged in the life of The United Methodist Church and divorced people allowed to be church leaders.

Sexual minorities have always been among the followers of Jesus Christ in the congregations I knew, and I don't remember God not being there! At a Women in Ministry workshop another attendee said she had known “a Priddy from Ashland.” I was surprised when she said my recently deceased mother's name and told me they had been church camp counselors when my mother was pregnant with her first child. My first church camp experience was in utero! I am a life-long United Methodist by choice – God's and mine!

I find it ironic that as physicians were eliminating homosexuality as a disorder, General Conference was adding “incompatible with Christian teaching” and other prohibitions to the *Book of Discipline*. Bishop Jack Tuell was among those who added prohibitions and has since admitted his error in his book, *How I Changed My Mind*.

My Methodist Youth Fellowship counselor has reminded me of my desire to be a missionary. Little did we know I wouldn't be heading to Africa, but would be witnessing instead to those already in the fold, encouraging them to stay, to answer God's call. Since adolescence I have worked in churches as a volunteer and paid professional. Early in my ministry a seldom seen 14-year-old attended our bowling party. Helping with the scorecard, she noticed another visitor and said, “Isn't she beautiful?” Realizing she may have revealed more than intended, she stiffened. “Not that I am gay!,” she said. Noting her fear, I placed my hand on her shoulder, asked God's guidance, and said, “It wouldn't bother me. I know God loves His gay children, too.” I felt the weight of the world leave her, and she started coming to UMYF. We cannot guide our youth in healthy life choices if they are not present.

I am aware of those who had begun the ordination process and had the rules change mid-course. Some left the Virginia Conference, our denomination, or church completely. Some were removed because of perceived homosexuality (how does one prove celibate heterosexuality?), others took their own lives. Few have remained, and that is The United Methodist Church's loss.

Every year I attend annual conference and learn of more who have left. I weep hearing about falling numbers knowing how many have been forced out. However, joys abound: the mother of three, two who met their spouses through church camps, asked me, with a smile, if I could help her

daughter find a church camp for her gay child; the couples who knew each other but just learned both had a gay child; and lay members who discovered their pastor was an ally.

I worry about the unity of the church, because it is already broken when anyone is excluded. Jesus' ministry was to all, particularly the marginalized. A split in our denomination will not resolve this. As long as we baptize babies and confirm adolescents, we will have young gay people among us.

Now 60, I have attended a number of same-sex weddings and can speak to the sacramental nature of those worship services. Afterwards I have been asked: “Can you tell me about this God you know?” “I haven't been to church in 20 years. Would you help me find a church near where I live?” “May I share pictures and bulletins with my niece and her partner? Maybe it would bring them back to church.”

I believe all are members of God's family, and agree that not all couples are ready for Christian marriage, and not all people are called to ordained ministry. We allow our pastors to decide who not to include, but do not allow them the same freedom to officially support those they believe are called to membership, marriage, and/or ordination.

My hope is that General Conference will finally eliminate the “incompatible with Christian teaching” clause and allow all pastors to care for their whole flock as well as permit the appropriate local, district, and conference committees to make their decisions based on a person's call and fitness for ministry. □

– C. Rives Priddy, a certified Director of Christian Education, is a member of Centenary UMC, Richmond, and an active participant in the Reconciling Ministries Network



Phyllis Siegel, 76, and Connie Kopelov, 84, celebrate as they leave Manhattan's City Clerk's office after becoming the first same-sex couple to get married in New York City last year. (Associated Press photo)

Parents put relationship with God's son above relationship with their homosexual son

by Larry and Betty Baker

Forty-one years ago we were proud parents of two blond curly-headed little girls. We had little money but a great love for children. We knew we wanted another child and felt strongly led to adopt. The Lord in His mercy led us through mountains of paperwork and the complexities of two governments, one on the other side of the world, to the beautiful dark-haired, dark-eyed baby who was to complete our family. Friends prayed with us through the long months of waiting and when all was finally approved, Larry flew to Seoul, South Korea, and brought our son home.

There was no question he was ours; he was a Baker brother, son, grandson, nephew and cousin and loved by all. The adoption process was completed before he turned 2.

Most of his growing up was in Madison County. He was baptized and confirmed in Mount Zion United Methodist Church and faithfully participated there, as we still do. He went through the broken bones, stitches, chicken pox and pranks most boys do and dealt with the prejudice of being labeled "different." We were continually amazed by his intelligence and love of learning and never felt concern about drug or alcohol problems. We felt blessed because he was such a great kid!

After college he went into computer programming and moved away from home. At first he was lonely, so all the family sent silly e-mails and cards and we often treated him to a meal. Gradually he began to make friends and seemed happier.

Our house has always been full of kids, so we invited him to bring his new friends home. He told us about their activities, but we began to realize he didn't want us to meet any of these friends. Having gone through family anguish when my nephew announced he was homosexual, the Holy Spirit helped us discern our son's fear of telling us he, too, was homosexual.



The Bakers pose for a family picture.



When we asked him, he said yes. We saw and felt his relief when we told him he was still our son, no matter what; and we encouraged him to seek help from many places. For two years we cried, were ashamed and kept it a secret. During that time, we read a lot and sought help ourselves. Finally we began to tell family and friends and bring it out in the open.

There have been painful times since, when the chasm has seemed too deep and broad to hold our family together; but our family relationships are now solid and close and God's love has brought us through.

We have repeatedly, painstakingly searched scripture and found nothing to refute the Apostle Paul's words: "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals,^[1] nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetousness, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Corinthians 6:9-11, *New King James Version*.)

Such were ALL of us until we have accepted Christ.

Our son is a person of sacred worth, as we all are, and it would be so easy to follow the path of acceptance as many other parents have done. But our relationship with Christ has to be far above our relationship with our son. Our greatest sorrow is that he and his partner have turned their backs on God and refuse to believe in Him. We pray for them to return to Christ, and we know that God can turn them into the men that He wants them to be.

Homosexuality is not sin with a capital "S," it is simply sin, and we as a church have not served the homosexual community well. But we do not bless alcoholism or any other sin. Why should we bless homosexuality?

We thank God almost every day for The United Methodist Church's stand on refusing to ordain homosexuals or marry them. We thank God for the Council of Bishops' letter that holds to *The Book of Discipline*. We thank God for the men and women in Mount Zion United Methodist Church pews and all across the country who are praying for our church to stand firm in this matter. We are among the countless numbers who will leave this church if The United Methodist Church caves in to the world's social pressure. □

— Betty and Larry Baker are members at Mount Zion UMC, part of the Rapidan Charge in the Charlottesville District.

[1.] Footnote in NKJV: That is, "catamites." (Merriam-Webster defines "Catamite" as "a boy kept by a pederast for sexual purposes.")

Issue remains a flashpoint

General Conference to again take up end to *Discipline* ban on gay clergy and officiating at same-sex unions

Since 1972, the topic of homosexuality has surfaced every four years at General Conference. Delegates consistently have voted to keep the *Book of Discipline's* stance on the issue.

The church's book of law says all people are of sacred worth but also states, "the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching."

The *Discipline* bans "self-avowed practicing homosexuals" from being ordained or appointed to serve in the denomination. It also says that marriage is to be between a man and a woman and forbids United Methodist clergy from officiating at same-sex unions.

But in early 2011, 36 of the denomination's 92 retired bishops called on the denomination to eliminate its ban on the ordination of gay clergy. The statement sparked varied reactions from active bishops as well as the denomination's unofficial evangelical and progressive caucuses.

Then, starting during annual conference season, more than 1,000 United Methodist clergy in the United States signed pledges to bless same-sex unions, marking a new turn in the long-time debate.

"This is not some insignificant violation of the terms of the *Book of Discipline*," said the Rev. Thomas Lambrecht, the church's counsel in the church trial of the Rev. Amy DeLong, who admitted performing a same-gender marriage service. "I think scripture is very clear that our expression of the good gift of sexuality is to be reserved only within heterosexual marriage," he added.

Lambrecht is pastor from Wisconsin who sits on the board of Good News, an unofficial evangelical caucus within the denomination.

"The church does a good job of saying everybody's welcome and God loves everybody," DeLong said. "(But the church) then spends a whole lot of time and energy creating rules to define who's in and who's out."

The summer of same-sex pledges, in turn, sparked a countermovement by other United Methodist clergy and lay people urging the bishops to make clear that they will enforce the *Book of Discipline* on this issue. As of Feb. 1, more than 2,600 clergy and 13,200 laity in the United States signed petitions to the bishops at <www.faithfulumc.com>.

The Council of Bishops responded in a Nov. 10 letter that urges churches and families not to "reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends," but also says the bishops will uphold church law. □

— Heather Hahn, *United Methodist News Service*



United Methodists Kathy and Dave England of Nebraska (top) came to the 2008 General Conference in Fort Worth in support of their gay son. At left, others hold a silent protest during the 2008 gathering.

There are deeper issues

by Tim Tennent

Last year more than 900 United Methodist clergy pledged to perform same-sex unions in open defiance of the Scriptures, of our ministerial tradition of holy conferencing, and of the Discipline of The United Methodist Church.

In response, a group of pastors of some of the largest churches in America prepared a petition asking the bishops of the United Methodist Church to issue a statement that the *Discipline* will be respected.

What is at stake is more than just a re-affirmation that biblical marriage is between a man and a woman. There are two deeper underlying issues which we need to always keep in mind. First, this is a struggle about biblical authority and the great stream of apostolic orthodoxy. We cannot even begin to reclaim our nearly lost heritage as Methodists if our clergy advocate positions which are at variance with historic faith. Second, this is a struggle about ecclesiology, especially the role of the episcopacy

Where does the UMC stand on homosexuality?

Since 1972, the *Book of Discipline* has declared “homosexual practice” to be “incompatible with Christian teaching.” Following the 1972 incompatibility clause, other restrictions have been added at subsequent General Conferences. Currently the *Book of Discipline* prohibits the ordination of “practicing, self-avowed homosexuals,” forbids clergy from blessing or presiding over same-sex unions, forbids the use of its facilities for same-sex ceremonies and prohibits the use of church funds for “gay caucuses” or other groups that “promote the acceptance of homosexuality.”

Despite this language, not all members of the Church are of one mind on this issue. Preceding the incompatibility clause the *Book of Discipline* clearly states that “homosexual persons, no less than heterosexual persons are individuals of sacred worth.”

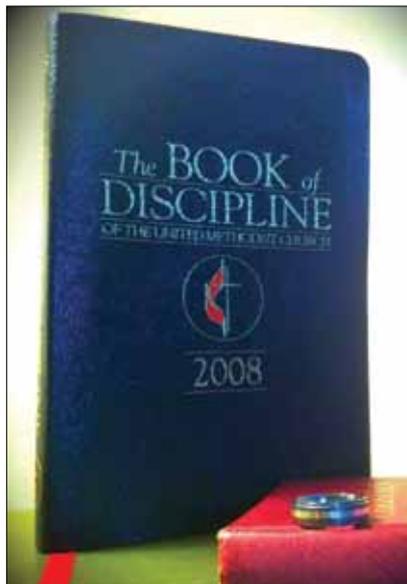
Some believe that this “sacred worth” clause stands in contradiction to the following statement regarding the incompatibility of homosexual practice with Christian teaching. *The Book of Discipline* affirms that all persons, both heterosexual and homosexual, are included in the ministry of the church and can receive the gift of

God’s grace.

While *The Book of Discipline* supports the civil rights of homosexual persons and rejects the abuse of homosexuals by families and churches, it also calls for laws defining marriage as a union between one man and one woman.

Failed efforts have been made to pass resolutions to “fully include gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons in the life of the Church” at General Conferences since the introduction of the incompatibility clause in 1972; delegates from conferences in the Northeast and on the West Coast typically vote to do so, but are outnumbered by those from Southeast and overseas.

Some of these issues have come before the Judicial Council. In October 2005, the Council undertook two controversial measures on this topic. First, the Council upheld the revocation



of Irene Elizabeth Stroud’s clergy status for disclosing she is openly lesbian. The council also rendered a decision allowing Virginia pastor the Rev. Ed Johnson the authority to deny church membership to an openly gay man. The latter decision was especially controversial since it appeared to contradict both the church’s Constitution and membership policies which stipulate that membership

shall be open to all persons “without regard to race, color, national origin, status or economic condition.” (The Judicial Council had previously found that the word “status” also applies to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons.)

Decision 1032 created vigorous debate on the level of autonomy individual pastors have in interpreting and applying church doctrine. □

– *United Methodist News Service*

behind the same-sex marriage discussion



in our church. For clergy to do something in open defiance of the *Book of Discipline* is a serious breach of our unity, regardless of the issue. There are many churches whose clergy are not under episcopal authority and are not bound to one another by a covenant. The United Methodist church is not among them.

Bishops must rise up and do what bishops have been elected to do. Bishops are called by God, and ordained by the church, to defend the Gospel, shepherd the church and

exercise church discipline. This shouldn’t require a petition. It should be the normal expression of episcopal authority.

A decade ago, Bill Hinson called for a special task force to create a process which would lead to an “amicable separation” between United Methodists. This would not be a defiant church split, but a solemn process whereby the church allows those who are committed to historic orthodoxy, the Wesleyan heritage and secure episcopal authority to live under such a covenant.

Many faithful Methodists (including me) are not yet ready to pull the “amicable separation” lever, but this is the inevitable trajectory if our bishops will not exercise their God-given, episcopal resolve to enforce our *Discipline*. We need an affirmation that our covenant is still in force and that the “people called Methodists” can focus our energies and resources on spreading scriptural holiness throughout the world. □

– *Dr. Timothy C. Tennent is president of Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Ky.*

Virginia

Q. What's black and white and red all over? A. 330 United Methodists at the State Capitol

The 20th United Methodist Day felt a bit Trinitarian, or as Bishop Charlene Kammerer phrased it, a "Methodist trifacta," with special honors for the bishop, for a United Methodist congregation, and a United Methodist prayer.

During the House of Delegates noon session on Feb. 2, Bishop Kammerer was honored by Henrico Rep. Peter Ferrell, 25 members of Rising Hope United Methodist Mission Church were introduced, and the Rev. Al Lynch of St. Andrews UMC in Richmond led the body's opening prayer (and prayed over the Senate the following day).

An overflow crowd of 330 United Methodists from across the conference gathered at Bon Air UMC for breakfast, boarded buses to the General Assembly building and State Capitol in downtown Richmond, and then returned to Bon Air for lunch and talks by the bishop and General Secretary of the General Board of Church & Society Jim Winkler, a lay member of the Virginia Conference.

Most everyone was dressed in red and black, representing the colors of the Cross and Flame of The United Methodist Church.

In celebrating the 20th year of United Methodist Day, Bishop Kammerer praised the "strong tradition of United Methodist presence and advocacy in the General Assembly ... where we lobby and advocate for positions we support for the good of the citizens of the Commonwealth of Virginia. Often times, the issues are education, affordable housing, health and dental insurance for the poor, the practice of payday lending and car loans, and the list goes on and on.

"We are always well prepared as a group to study the issues ahead of time, to know how to contact and speak with

our House member or Senator and to share the positions of The United Methodist Church on a host of issues. The United Methodist Church has been respected in this arena for a long time in Virginia."

Kammerer said she feels that it is her duty as a follower of Christ to speak out again injustice. She mentioned a visit to Candler Seminary in Georgia when she was asked by a student: "how do you know as a pastor when to be prophetic?"

"My response to the student," Kammerer said, "was this: 'The moment will come to you. You will know you are being called again by God. It will be like a divine nudge, a fire in your belly, a clarion call, and you will want to

resist it. Most often, in my own experience, you will be called to speak and act on behalf of those who are voiceless, powerless, marginalized. And you will be speaking for God. This is a very scary thing, and seems to scare us pastors more than the fact that we boldly speak for God every time we stand up to preach the Word of God.'"

In his remarks, Winkler said he had been asked to address how participants could take back home to their local church what they had experienced.

"What I really want you to do when you leave here is to shake the gates



United Methodist wore red and black to symbolize the colors of the Cross and Flame logo of the church during the 20th United Methodist Day at the General Assembly. At left, Bishop Kammerer welcomes 330 participants gathered at Bon Air UMC. Below, Wayne Rhodes of the General Board of Church & Society looks over materials with Rosa Lewis (center) and Patsy Gochenour.



(Photos by Linda Rhodes and Neill Caldwell)



Karen Booker (left) and Alneta McCall search for the location of a legislative committee hearing. Below left, General Secretary Jim Winkler of the General Board of Church & Society speaks during the afternoon session at Bon Air. Below, Natalie May pushes Bon Air Apple Butter.



of hell,” Winkler said. “Because if you don’t, things will only go from bad to worse. You know the statistics: millions of children go to bed hungry every night, the gap between the rich and the poor grows daily, climate change threatens God’s very Creation, war remains a commonplace occurrence, and preventable diseases go untreated. Frankly, we’re counting on you to be the ones that turn things around.



“Making United Methodist Day real in the local church means you will need to act strategically ... bring people along step by step,” Winkler continued. “You will need to carry out a program of education, witness and action. Education: teach the Bible and the United Methodist *Social Principles*. Not everyone will agree with you. If you yourself cannot accept or appreciate disagreement, you’ll find it hard to move forward. Witness: live out the Word. Feed the hungry and advocate for affordable housing and a living wage. Action: set up the card table in the corner of the narthex and ask people to write a let-

ter to Congress, march in a demonstration, reach out to young people, and build relationships and coalitions.”

Winkler also had words of praise for Bishop Kammerer: “At general board meetings I always try to sit next to her, but everyone else also wants to, so the seat is usually taken.”

Rising Hope pastor the Rev. Keary Kincannon said the congregation was there to make sure “our legislators pass bills that include and lift up the poor and marginalized and not exclude them from society. We were there to meet with our delegate, Scott Surovell, and our senator, Toddy Puller, to let them hear from the voices of some of the least among us. We brought 25 predominately low-income members ... who are homeless, disabled, unemployed and working poor or on fixed incomes. We were asking them not to forget about us.”

Patsy Gochenour, a member of Braddock Street UMC, Winchester District, has been participating in United Methodist Day since it first began. Gochenour said that being part of United Methodist Day, along with her connections to the conference Board of Church and Society, United Methodist Women and Caretakers of God’s Creation “gives me the strength to move forward and do something positive. And that’s all that God requires of us.” □

-Story and photos by Neill Caldwell and Linda Rhodes

Virginia Interfaith Center selects new president

At United Methodist Day at the General Assembly, The Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy introduced Marco Grimaldo as the new CEO and president.

Grimaldo most recently served as a Regional Organizer for Bread for the World and previously served as the Director of the Bread for the World Institute and as the National Organizer for the Alliance to End Hunger.

“The Center and its members have a reputation for being tenacious advocates for those on the mar-

gins of their communities,” he said.”

Grimaldo has more than 20 years of experience in politics and non-profit advocacy, including work on national campaigns related to international development assistance, HIV/AIDS, debt relief and a range of domestic hunger and poverty concerns.

The 30-year-old Interfaith Center for Public Policy is Virginia’s oldest faith-based advocacy group and works to unite faith communities to reduce poverty rates in Virginia. □



National PAUMCS meeting coming to Richmond

The Virginia Chapter of Professional Association of United Church Secretaries (PAUMCS) will host the National PAUMCS Conference April 12-15 at the Hilton Hotel and Spa at Short Pump in Richmond.

Bishop Charlene Kammerer will preach Thursday's opening worship. Saturday closing worship will take place at historic Trinity UMC, established in 1790, and the Rev. Myrtle Francis Hatcher will preach.

The Rev. Marc Brown, Kathy Merry and the Rev. John Briggs, will present "Does Your Church Have a Prayer: Are You in Maintenance or Mission?" and "How to Recruit and Keep Volunteers." The Rev. Al Horton of First UMC in Charlottesville will present "History of Methodism in Virginia," and the Rev. Dan Garrett will offer a preview of General Conference.

Participants will have Friday dinner at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts



The national meeting of the Professional Association of United Methodist Church Secretaries (PAUMCS) will be held at the Hilton Hotel in the Short Pump area of Richmond.



and be able to tour its world class collection, and an optional Monument Avenue/Church Hill/Methodist history tour of Richmond on Saturday. Attendees will also participate in a meal packaging event presented by Stop Hunger Now.

Registration brochures and cost

information are available at <<http://www.vaumc.org/page.aspx?pid=795>>. Some scholarships are available.

E-mail Susan Petrey at <Richmond-District@vaumc.org> for more information. □

New denomination-wide creation care ministry formed at Virginia meeting

In late January United Methodists from all over the country gathered at St. Matthew's UMC in Annandale to found a denomination-wide ministry of caring for God's creation. Caretakers of God's Creation, a ministry of the Virginia Conference, hosted more than 30 who attended physically, and many more who joined by Web-based video conferencing. United Methodist conferences represented were Florida, North Georgia, Virginia, Upper New York, Kansas East, Baltimore-Washington, Missouri, Susquehanna, West Michigan, Holston, Kentucky, Tennessee, Iowa and New Jersey.

Caretakers of God's Creation, under the leadership of the Rev. Pat Watkins, has been serving the Virginia Conference for the past three years. Watkins is the first Church and Community Worker in the nation assigned to a mission to raise awareness of the relationship between faith and responsibility to care for God's creation.

"Based on the amazing energy and enthusiasm from all over the country, the time seems to be right for The United Methodist Church to form a denominational organization of caring for God's creation," Watkins said. "Several annual conferences and individuals from around the connection are already hard at work expressing their Christian faith, their United Methodist theology, and their Wesleyan heritage by



Representatives from all across the nation gather at St. Matthew's UMC in Annandale to talk about God's creation.

engaging in a mission to God's creation." Caretakers of God's Creation carries out its mission by equipping and empowering congregations and individuals to live out their faith in relationship to God and God's

creation by protecting and healing God's earth.

The attendees at St. Matthew's UMC confirmed that United Methodism world-wide would benefit from a denomination-wide Caretakers of God's Creation organization to raise awareness and promote action on behalf of God's creation. The attendees discussed the possible goals, operational structure and resources required to make this effort a success, with a specific focus on the next three years.

The group authorized a steering committee to be formed with plans to meet in the immediate future to move forward toward the goals outlined in the meeting.

"God created an amazing place and called it 'very good!'" Watkins said. "The time has come for us to declare God's creation 'very good' as well." □

Big doings at Willis UMC

State, national leaders hold town hall meeting at Richmond church

State and federal officials including Gov. Bob McDonnell held a town hall meeting Feb. 1 at Willis UMC to promote tourism and the National Park System.

Willis UMC sits on the edge of two Civil War battlefields, Glendale and Malvern Hill, on Willis Church Road near state Route 5 east of Richmond. Church members and pastor Mark Rooks served as hosts for the event.

The town hall meeting celebrated an upcoming land transfer from the Civil War Conservation Trust. The group buys up historic battlefield lands for preservation purposes, then sells the land to the National Park Service. Much of the land around Willis UMC is now owned by the Park Service, and an additional 365 acres up the road from the church are to be transferred.

Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar announced plans for a \$4 million park expansion near the Willis church. Virginia is marketing itself as a destination during the 150th anniversary of the Civil War.

“Tourism is one of the top economic drivers in Virginia and in communities throughout the country,” Salazar said. “These acquisitions ... will enable us to preserve two key battlefields of the Civil War and help draw more visitors and jobs to the area. This is a win-win situation.”

“In 2010, tourism in Virginia generated \$18.9 billion in revenue, provided \$1.3 billion in state and local taxes and supported more than 204,000 jobs,” Gov. McDonnell told the audience. “In these difficult economic times, these investments in our history will also pay dividends to our future by putting more people back to work.”

The land to be preserved with the new funds lies primarily on the Glendale and Malvern Hill battlefields, which played key roles in the unsuccessful summer 1862 campaign by Union Gen. George B. McClellan to take Richmond. Until now, Glendale has been inaccessible to visitors. The Department of the Interior said that, with these preservation funds, the battlefield will be almost entirely preserved and the area will be made accessible to visitors for the first time.

McDonnell and Salazar were joined by Jon Jarvis, director of the National Park Service. Jarvis said the 23 million visitors to Virginia’s National Park Service sites contribute \$493 million to local economy. □



Gov. Bob McDonnell speaks in the Willis Church sanctuary (top). Middle, a historic marker outside the church. Bottom, Gov. McDonnell and his wife, First Lady Maureen McDonnell, share a laugh with U.S. Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar at the new Visitors’ Center across the road from the church. (Photos by Neill Caldwell)

Delegation hears from its nominee

Virginia's delegation to 2012 General and Jurisdictional Conference gathered at the United Methodist Center to hear from episcopal nominee the Rev. Young Jin Cho, plus reports on issues that will be important when General Conference begins April 24.

Cho had been traveling with a conference clergy group in Korea when he was selected by the delegation to be promoted as one of the candidates for the five bishop slots that will be elected in July. Cho said he fell to his knees when he heard the news. "It was too much," he said. "Your decision came as a surprise, as I was the 12th clergy delegate (selected to go to General Conference). I am a first-generation immigrant and my English is still in the process of sanctification!"

The United Methodist Church has elected only three Korean-American bishops in its history, and none in the Southeastern Jurisdiction (SEJ). In fact, Cho is the first Korean-American even nominated in the SEJ.



Cho

Before Bishop Kammerer appointed him to the Cabinet as Arlington District Superintendent seven years ago, he served as senior pastor at Korean UMC of Greater Washington for 23 years. In discussing his years of ministry, Cho said he has had one simple maxim: "Where the Lord wants me, I will follow."

Cho said that, if elected, he would be a "praying bishop."

"The United Methodist Church is at a crossroads," he said. "The one thing lacking ... is spiritual vitality. Without it, we're only adding plans and programs."

Virginia delegates also got a list of "talking points" to help convince other conference's delegates of Cho's worthiness. "I hope delegates grasp who he is as a person, a true humble servant leader," said the Rev. Steve Jones, the Richmond District Superintendent.

In other presentations to the group, The Rev. Beth Downs and the Rev. Jeff Mickle from the conference Board of Ordained Ministry discussed the Study of Ministry proposal to eliminate "security of appointment" for elders. Don Rogers, Betty Forbes and others from the Virginia Conference Board of Pensions presented two proposals coming from the General Board of Pensions.

Dr. Kendal Soulen of Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C., facilitated a small-groups discussion of homosexuality and same-gender marriage.

A group of students from Shenandoah University and the Calling 21 program also sat in on the meetings as observers. The group will also attend General Conference.

The delegation will next meet March 2 at 9:45 a.m. at River Road UMC in Richmond. □



Shirley Cauffman is nearing the end of her term as conference Lay Leader. (File photo)

Nominations open for conference Lay Leader

Shirley Cauffman will conclude service as Virginia Conference Lay Leader at Annual Conference in June, and the search process for the next conference Lay Leader is under way.

The Book of Discipline states that the conference Lay Leader is "the elected leader of the conference laity" who has "responsibility for fostering awareness of the role of the laity both within the congregation and through their ministries in the home, workplace, community, and world in achieving the mission of the church and enabling and supporting lay participation in the planning and decision-making processes of the annual conference, district, and local church in cooperation with the bishop, district superintendents, and pastors" (§607, *2008 Book of Discipline*).

Changes will be proposed at this year's Annual Conference session to increase the term of service of the conference Lay Leader from three years to four years, with a maximum of eight consecutive years of service.

Applications are available from the conference Web site at <www.vaumc.org/CLLsearch> Interested persons should contact Bob Forrest, Search Committee chair, at <proffitva@netzero.com>, or call (434) 974-6650. Nominations profiles must be submitted by **April 15**. □

Denman Award nominations being sought

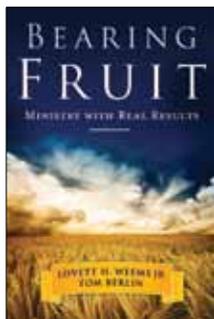
The Virginia Conference is accepting nominations for The Harry Denman Evangelism Award for clergy, laity and youth. Nominations must be received no later than May 15 to be considered for the 2012 awards. The Denman Award recognizes a person whose life and ministry exemplifies the teaching of Christ and the Great Commission. You can download a nominations packet from the conference Web site, <www.vaumc.org>. For more information, contact the conference Office of Congregational Excellence via e-mail at <pathickman@vaumc.org>, or call (804) 521-1155 or 1-800-768-6040, ext. 155. □

Study guide now available for Berlin and Weems book

The authors of *Bearing Fruit: Ministry with Real Results*, the Revs. Tom Berlin of Floris UMC and Lovett Weems of Wesley Theological Seminary, have now created a Study Guide to facilitate reflection, discussion and application of the book.

Bearing Fruit was published last spring by Abingdon. "We have been pleased to learn of the many ways that individual church leaders and congregational teams are using the book as a springboard for discussion and planning. We have prepared this study guide ... primarily as a resource for group study," the authors said in the introduction to the guide.

"This guide is intended only as a launching pad," Weems said. "We know that the richest learning will occur as each leader and each group brings their own questions and perspectives to *Bearing Fruit*."



The book and *Study Guide* are designed to provide church leaders with the tools they need to assess the fruit their ministry bears in the lives of their congregation, their community, and the world. The authors ask leaders to define their ministry in terms of "fruitfulness as well as faithfulness," and directs pastors and lay leaders to "ask about the outcomes of any given ministry or program, not just its process."

"This is the one book we've asked our leaders to read together before our strategic planning process this year," said the Rev. Adam Hamilton, senior pastor at United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kansas.

The study guide is available at Cokesbury and Amazon.com, and available for download at: <www.churchleadership.com/resources/bearingfruitdraft.html>. □

Farabaugh writes his first novel

The Rev. Tim Farabaugh's fourth book is his first of fiction: a historical novel set during the time between the French and Indian war and the American Revolution titled *In Search of Revenge and Respect*, about a young man named Gus whose parents are killed in an Indian raid.

Farabaugh, a conference elder, is currently the Chief Operating Officer at the Vinson Hall Corp. in McLean.

Farabaugh's previous books were professional: *Ministry to and with the Elderly*, *Lay Pastoral Care Giving* and *A Guide to Long-Term Care Administration*. □

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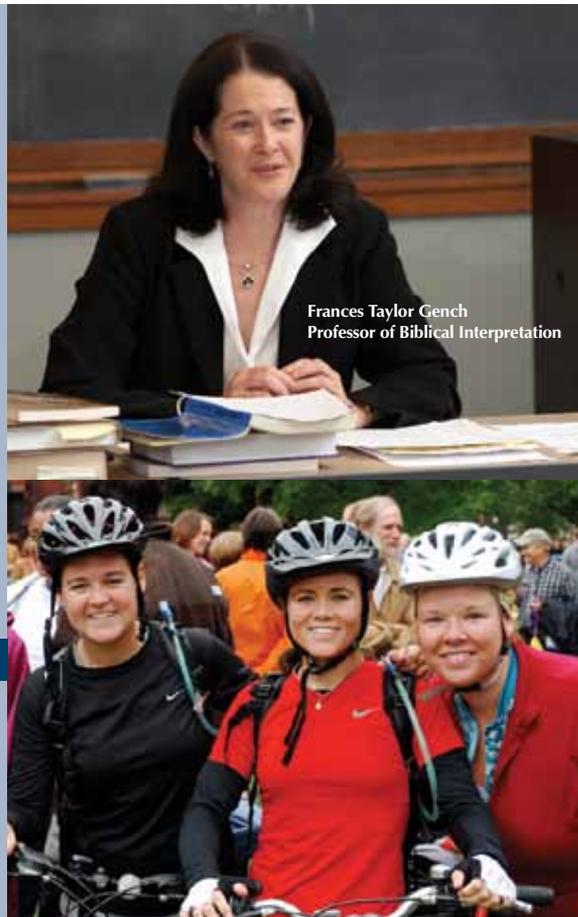
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Foster Kids Deserve A Chance At Higher Education Too.



Disaster Response getting second shower trailer

The Virginia Conference Disaster Response Team is getting a second "shower trailer" as a sort of gift when the national Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD) Conference is held in Norfolk May 7-11.

Each year a service project is completed by National VOAD members during their conference. This year the project will be building and outfitting two disaster trailers: a tool trailer that will go to Virginia Presbyterian Disaster Assistance and the shower trailer for Virginia United Methodists.

The cost of the shower trailer is about \$23,000, of which \$10,000 is a direct contribution from National VOAD; the remaining monies come



Pihlcrantz

from donations from sponsors and national level partners such as Lowe's, Home Depot, UPS and FedEx. The Virginia Conference Disaster Response coordinator, the Rev. Bob Pihlcrantz, is also currently the vice president of Virginia VOAD (soon to be president) and has been directly involved in the planning for the VOAD national conference as the co-chair of the Host Committee.

Virginia Disaster Response has had a tractor-trailer sized shower trailer that since its first deployment has been out on the road serving areas where volunteers are still working to repair damage from disasters like Hurricane Katrina or last year's string of tornadoes. It's currently in Tennessee, but due back to Virginia soon for some needed updates.

"This second trailer is going to be much more mobile than the tractor-trailer-sized version we have now," said Pihlcrantz. "This one will be able to be towed behind a pickup (truck) and will have five shower stalls, two sinks, and washer and dryer units.

"The trailer is a much needed piece of ministry equipment which we need here in Virginia," Pihlcrantz added. "In our conversations about this project it became very clear that we needed to engineer this trailer to our requirements and specifications if it was going to be useful to us. ... I am excited about this project and the opportunities it will give us to continue to be in disaster mission and ministry not only across the conference but the country."

Pihlcrantz also extended a word of thanks to his predecessor, the Rev. Frank Jennings, "who did an extraordinary job of engineering the specifications for the trailer and has done a significant amount of leg work."

"Bob has done a great job of coordinating this with VOAD and deserves a great pat on the back when this all comes together," said Jennings. "It truly is a high honor for us as Virginia United Methodist Disaster Response to be chosen by national VOAD to receive this shower trailer."

For more information about the national VOAD meeting being hosted at the Norfolk Marriott Waterside in May, go to <www.nvoad.org/avc>. □

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Nation & World

Proposed restructuring becomes hot topic of debate

Weeks before the 2012 General Conference, delegates to The United Methodist Church's top lawmaking body got a hint of the debate to come regarding restructuring the denomination.

More than 300 delegates, communicators and agency staff gathered Jan. 19-21 for the Pre-General Conference News Briefing at the Tampa Convention Center, where discussions of the proposed changes dominated conversation.

The main piece of legislation – the result of the multiyear “Call to Action” process – would consolidate nine of the church's 13 general agencies into a new United Methodist Center for Connectional Mission and Ministry under a 15-member board.

The board would be appointed by and accountable to a 45-member advisory board called the General Council for Strategy and Oversight, which would replace the Connectional Table that presently coordinates the denomination's mission, ministry and resources.

Essentially, the proposal would reduce agency boards now governed by more than 500 people to a group of 60. The legislation would also allow the board of the newly created center to redistribute up to \$60 million toward funding theological education, recruiting young clergy and fostering vital congregations – about 10 percent of the amount presently budgeted for general church operations.

Delegates heard both an overview of restructuring legislation and concerns that the plan would damage the denomination's connectionalism, give too much power to the bishops and eliminate the denomination's historic “separation of powers” between bishops and General Conference.



Mary Brooke Casad, chair of the Connectional Table, discusses proposed legislation regarding the church's structure during the pre-General Conference News Briefing at the Tampa Convention Center. At left are fellow panelists the Rev. Amy Valdez Barker of the Vital Congregations project and Tracy Merrick representing the Methodist Federation for Social Action. (UMNS/Mike DuBose photo)

An overarching question for many at the briefing: Will the reorganization achieve its goal of promoting more vital congregations or have the opposite effect?

The Council of Bishops and Connectional Table initiated the “Call to Action” to reorder the life of the church in the wake of the 2008 global economic crisis and after decades of declining U.S. membership. The “Call to Action” Interim Operations Team devised the recommended changes, and the Connectional Table drafted the legislation.

“We do not presume that what we are presenting is perfect by any means,” said Jay Brim, who chairs the Connectional Table's legislative committee. “It is a proposal to move us toward change, and these changes,

we hope, will be a significant step forward for the church.”

Brim, lay leader of the Southwest Texas Conference, said the denomination's 13 current general boards are “in a constant push to make sure that local churches and annual conferences know who they are, what they have to offer and how to get it from them.”

The Rev. Tim McClendon, a Connectional Table member and the Columbia (S.C.) District superintendent, explained his worry that the Connectional Table legislation would give too much power to the denomination's bishops. □

-Heather Hahn, United Methodist News Service

Supreme Court shields churches from bias laws

A landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision has established that The United Methodist Church and other religious groups are free to set their own rules for choosing and dismissing leaders without government interference.

The high court on Jan. 11 for the first time recognized a “ministerial exception” to U.S. employment anti-discrimination laws, a rare unanimous decision many legal analysts are calling the most significant in many years regarding religious liberty.

One likely result is that church leaders will face fewer lawsuits related to employment. However, the ruling also puts more responsibility on The United Methodist Church to prevent discrimination and do justice in its hiring practices, say denominational leaders.

The ruling “affirms the historic separation of church and state by allowing the church autonomy of its religious practices,” said Bishop Grant Hagiya of the Pacific Northwest Conference. “I believe it will help annual conferences avoid frivolous lawsuits out of greed or self-interest,” he said. “But, this means that the onus is on our UMC polity to be fair and allow for due process at all costs.”

At least one church leader says the court’s decision could have implications for the denomination’s 2012 General Conference, where delegates will weigh whether to eliminate job guarantees for elders in good standing.

The case before the Supreme Court – Hosanna-Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church and School vs. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission – dealt with a teacher at a Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod school who said she was fired in retaliation for her discrimination claim under the Americans with Disabilities Act. The teacher, Cheryl Perich,



The Rev. Eric Pridmore, who is visually impaired, uses a computer program that displays the pages of books as large, white type on a black background to help him read. Pridmore and his wife, Lisa, pastor a three-point charge in Rolling Fork and Cary, Miss. (UMNS/Mike DuBose photo)



The U.S. Supreme Court building in Washington. (File photo)

had developed narcolepsy.

“The interest of society in the enforcement of employment discrimination statutes is undoubtedly important,” Chief Justice John Roberts wrote in the ruling joined by all nine justices. “But so, too, is the interest of religious groups in choosing who will preach their beliefs, teach their faith, and carry out their mission.”

Roberts added that by imposing an unwanted minister, the state would infringe on the First Amendment’s right to free exercise of religion and violate its ban on Congress establishing religion.

Church leaders were quick to point out that the Supreme Court’s decision should not lessen The United Methodist Church’s commitment to preventing discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender or disability.

“If the EEOC guidelines don’t apply to the church, then we need to make sure we are advocating for those justice concerns within our own structure,” said the Rev. Darryl Stephens, who oversees advocacy and sexual ethics for the Commission on the Status and Role of Women.

The Rev. Eric Pridmore, a United Methodist pastor in Mississippi and co-chair of the United Methodist Association of Ministers with Disabilities, said clergy must be both physically and mentally healthy to be ordained. But, he added, *The Book of Discipline* is clear that disability by itself should not be a disqualifier from ministry.

“As a denomination, we recognize that those with disabilities have something to offer and they can and should be included in ordained ministry,” said Pridmore. “However, the way in which that gets practiced is sometimes problematic.”

He said clergy sometimes struggle with appointments that do not take into consideration their physical challenges or the disability of a family member. For example, a pastor who uses a wheelchair may be appointed to a church with a parsonage that is not handicap-accessible. Pridmore said bishops and cabinets occasionally do not take into account the importance of accessible public transportation. □

– Heather Hahn, United Methodist News Service

Ministry transforms the lives of African orphans

Don't talk to me about God," Angelique, a young Rwandan orphan, sobbed quietly. "If there is a God, he doesn't love me."

In 2008, when she was just a teenager, Angelique uttered those words to a member of the ZOE Ministry staff. Despite her youth, Angelique had suffered more than most people do in a lifetime.

At age 15, both of her parents died. Angelique and her two siblings – a 12-year-old brother and 10-year-old sister – moved in with their grandfather.



Angelique (center) gathers with two of ZOE Ministry's social workers.

Within six months, he also died.

Angelique's troubles grew even larger when the mud hut where her family lived collapsed in a rainstorm.

Grieving the loss of the closest adults in her life and struggling to provide for her two young siblings, Angelique was now homeless as well.

After much searching, Angelique found three separate homes that would each accept one child. This seemingly good news quickly turned ominous for Angelique when she realized she would be staying in a room already occupied by a 24-year-old man.

After months of rape and abuse, Angelique became pregnant, but with limited resources and nowhere else to go, she had to stay put.

Angelique's life changed dramatically, thanks to an encounter with ZOE Ministry.

With the help of ZOE Ministry's Orphan Empowerment Program, Angelique received a new home for herself and her siblings, and began her own business. This 17-year-old, who once had no hope and no desire to hear about God, now joy-

ously tells how God transformed her life, sharing her home and her faith with other needy orphans.

Greg Jenks, executive director of ZOE Ministry, said his staff developed the illustrations to show their work is mutually beneficial. "Too often, our mission work is one-sided," Jenks said. "We look at those to whom we minister as people who are only capable of receiving. Thus, the mission work tends to become paternalistic and one-sided." □

-Emily Snell for United Methodist Communications

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New report connects hunger, farmers

Darin Greear of Riner, near Christiansburg, loves farming so much that he uses income from his full-time job as a real estate agent to subsidize his passion.

Raised on a family farm, he leases out most of the 450 acres he still owns with his father but cultivates an alfalfa crop with a partner. A few years ago, he bought a one-pound pack of turnip seeds to plant along with the alfalfa, which led to plenty of turnips and a partnership with the United Methodist-related Society of St. Andrew.

The society uses a volunteer network to glean excess and unwanted produce from farmers. "We wound up picking around 60,000 pounds that year and distributing to the local food banks," Greear said.

Last year, he decided to devote six acres only to turnips – for the sole purpose of giving them away. Another 100,000 pounds of turnips were distributed.

Strengthening the connection between U.S. farmers and the need for more nutritious food is the focus of Bread for the World's 2012 Hunger Report, "Rebalancing Act: Updating U.S. Food and Farm Policies."

United Methodists have worked for years with Bread for the World, a Christian advocacy group dedicated to educating the public and urging U.S. decision-makers to end hunger at home and abroad. One of the most popular activities

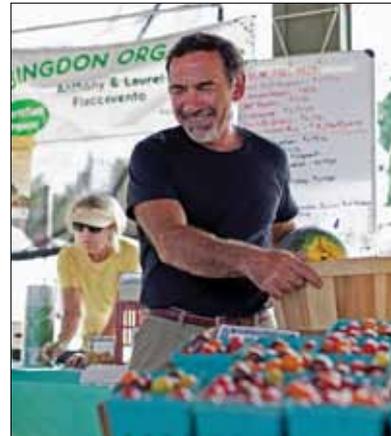
for congregations is the annual Offering of Letters to Congress.

This year's hunger report calls for improved policies that better meet the needs of farmers while providing a healthy food supply for all and making international food aid more effective by allowing for more local and regional purchase of food.

An accompanying Christian study guide allows people of faith to discuss how changes to U.S. food and farm policies can affect the poor and hungry while viewing the themes of the annual hunger report through a biblical lens.

The Rev. Jim Gulley, advisor for agriculture and community development, General Board of Global Ministries, said the report does a good job of touching on "some of the key issues that can help rebalance our (farm) policy." □

-Linda Bloom, United Methodist News Service



Anthony Flaccavento, founder of Appalachian Sustainable Development, sells his produce at the Abingdon Farmers Market. (Bread for the World photo)



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CONNECTING THE CHURCH IN MISSION





Local Church



▲ The **North Amelia Charge** (Salem, Epworth, and Jetersville UMCs) hosted a drive-through live Nativity Dec. 17-18, 2011. The children of the community also participated in an all-day Vacation Bible School focused on the Christmas story followed by participation in the live nativity. The town of Bethlehem was re-created around the circle drive of the Salem Church including a carpenter's shop, market and the inn. Members from the three churches played parts. The tax collected by Roman Centurions was a canned food or monetary donation to the local food bank. At least 100 cars viewed the scene over the two evenings.



▲ As Santa (Carl Burke) and Mrs. Claus (Anne Burke) narrated the story of the birth of Jesus, Tuesdee Miller (Mary), Cody Jones (Joseph), Gigi Swyers, Sadie Jones, Avery Myers, Doriann Hicks, Sarah Miller (angels) and other members of **Watson UMC**, Danville District, acted out the Christmas play in December.



▲ Heavenly music filled the room at the annual United Methodist Women's Advent Prayer Breakfast at **Leesburg UMC**, Winchester District, on Dec. 3, 2011. Professional musician Madeline MacNeil sang and played her hammered dulcimer. It was a reunion after almost 50 years for Madeline and the Rev. Dr. Bert Sikkelee, who gave the morning's message. At right is the church pastor, the Rev. Jim Wishmyer.



▲ On Epiphany Sunday, Jan. 8, the Magi made a stop at **Main Street UMC** in Suffolk. They brought gifts for the baby Jesus and, during the children's sermon, explained the significance of each one. Their robes and crowns were made by the church's Needlework Guild. That group is also responsible for the Prayer Shawl Ministry at Main Street UMC and the Chrismon tree that stands in the sanctuary during Advent and Christmas.



▲ The Senior Adult group at **Farmville UMC** recently hosted Chris Mason as their speaker. Mason presented a program called "My Dream, A World War II Museum," and brought with him many items he has acquired for the seniors to view. Pictured (from left): Katrena Young, Marge Fuller, Dick Fuller, Chris Mason, Lawrence Varner, Jimmy Gates and C.T. Crowder.



▲ **Laurel Hill UMC** youths attended the "Acquire the Fire" event in early February. They gave each group the responsibility of coming up with a group picture that was anything but normal, as their tag line this year was "Normal's Not Enough." This year the youth group has also sponsored the Valentine dinner and auction on Feb. 11, held a 30-hour fast, and hosted "Spud Sunday" in February in order to raise money for their upcoming adventures.



▲ **Fairfields UMC's** 16th annual festival raised \$7,500 to donate to various charities and organizations that contribute to the welfare of the community. Pictured (from left): festival co-chairman Jim Holland, Frances Hurst and Bob Lumsden, chair of the Covington-Hurst Educational Fund. The fund is named after Hurst and her sister, the late Betty Covington. The fund provides financial assistance to local residents to help them pursue their educational goals.



▲ Women of **Mount Olivet UMC**, Staunton District, began a sewing group to make 40 pillows for the residents of Bethel Ridge Nursing Home. They gave the pillows to the residents as Christmas gifts. They continue to meet weekly and have made a quilt that will be sold in order to continue funding for this ministry. Pictured (from left): Doris Hedrick, Joy Chambers, Norma Friend, Eva Ripley, Dawn Paul, Martha Gray and Barbara Powell. (Not pictured: Mary Sue Lester).

Widows and widowers at **Tabernacle UMC** in Virginia Beach were honored with a special luncheon in January. This annual event gives the congregation a chance to recognize and thank these special members for their many years of service.

► **Bethany UMC** in Gloucester Point participated in a Stop Hunger Now meal-packaging program on Jan. 29, where 125 people gathered to package 10,000 meals in one hour. Bethany also had a silent auction prior to the event to raise \$2,500 for this project.



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2012 Annual Conference Info – June 22-24, Roanoke Civic Center

For updates, visit <www.vaumc.org>

PACKET MATERIALS — In an effort to be good stewards of the environment and financial resources of the conference, the 2012 Annual Conference “promo packets” will again be virtual. Electronic copies of materials previously submitted in hard copy for the tote bag will be accepted – at no cost to the organizations submitting them – for inclusion in the Virtual Promo Packet, which will be posted on the conference Web site, <www.vaumc.org>, under Resources>2012 Annual Conference Information. The Virtual Packet will be available for viewing on the Web site on June 1.

Information for the Virtual Promo Packet needs to be submitted in pdf format to the office of Connectional Ministries via e-mail to <BevMyers@vaumc.org> for approval by May 4.

Those organizations still wishing to disseminate their information in a hard-copy format may arrange for a display table at the Roanoke Civic Center by contacting Tim Tate at (540) 977-4212 or <pastor@bonsackumc.org>. Display guidelines and a Display Request form are available on the Annual Conference Information page of the conference Web site.

CONFERENCE OFFERING — Each year, members are encouraged to help raise money for mission projects designated by the bishop. The pastor or lay representative of each church will take that money to Annual Conference, where it will be collected during a special time of the session.

This year’s offering goal is \$200,000 and will benefit the following projects:

Brazil: Studies show that the religious beliefs and values that a person develops by age 13 are pretty much those that they will maintain throughout life. For 20 years the Methodist Church of Brazil has provided safe centers of spiritual, physical and emotional nurture to at-risk children through the nationwide Shade and Fresh Water program with the goal of developing good citizens with strong Christian values. Funds from this year’s conference offering will go for training, materials and start-up costs to enable these seeds of hope to be sown in new locations in Brazil, Mozambique and other parts of Latin America

as the Shade and Fresh Water model is adapted and implemented for use in new settings. Through the Virginia Conference partnership with the Methodist Church of Brazil, good seeds will be planted on fertile soil, resulting in a bountiful harvest which transforms lives and makes disciples.

Mozambique: Offering seeds of growth and life to laity and clergy by providing opportunities for training and development as leaders continues to be a top priority for The United Methodist Church in Mozambique. A portion of this year’s annual conference offering will go to provide materials and training in theological and biblical education by extension across the two annual conferences in Mozambique.

A second focus of the Mozambican UMC’s request for funding this year focuses on the combined program with Brazil of Shade and Fresh Water. This program provides opportunities for seeds to be planted within the hearts and minds of at-risk children to know the love of God and to grow and be nurtured by the body of Christ in their communities and villages.

Cambodia: The Virginia Conference is being called to a unique opportunity to join the church in Cambodia as it is watering the seeds of church growth and work to become an autonomous Methodist Church in 2016. Our conference Initiatives of Hope mission focus has added Cambodia this past year. We have chosen to support them in their efforts to reach a population that is young and enthusiastic in their witness to the transforming power of Jesus Christ in many areas of the country.

Their request for offering support is in three areas. The first is in pastoral ministry, church growth and lay leadership development through ongoing training workshops as they learn to serve and witness to their faith.

The second area of need is for scholarships for youth attending university and continuing education of pastors. Education in general was destroyed during the reign of the Khmer rouge. Now all educational institutions are trying to build from scratch. Our gifts can support the effort to help pastors and youth improve their level of

studies.

The third area of support requested is for purchase of land in pioneer areas, building new churches and repairing old facilities. Cambodian churches are designed as multi-purpose centers for worship and as gathering places for all ages. From these centers the people move into the villages and begin new communities of believers and disciples of Christ.

Shalom Farms: Shalom Farms is literally and spiritually planting seeds and celebrating the harvest of feeding the least of these in Christ’s name.

Begun by United Methodist Urban Ministries of Richmond (UMUMR) in the fall of 2008 at Westwood on the James, Shalom Farms is a nonprofit community farm project with the overarching goal of increasing access to healthful food in the Richmond region, particularly in low-income urban neighborhoods. UMUMR’s Shalom Farms attains its goal by: 1) providing fresh and healthful produce to underserved communities; 2) providing educational training to children and adults on growing food, nutrition, and food-based entrepreneurship; and 3) linking community groups to a wide range of food security resources and partners.

In 2011, with the help of almost 2000 volunteers, Shalom Farms grew and distributed 35,000 pounds of fresh organic produce to the children and families in Richmond most in need. In the “food deserts” in which UMUMR operates, the nearest grocery store is often more than four miles away with more than 50 percent of residents lacking access to their own transportation. The produce, grown with the help of many partners including the recipients, is distributed at food pantries, served in meals at soup kitchens and after school programs, used in cooking classes and sold at youth-run farm stands.

More information about these projects and promotional materials can be found on the conference Web site at <www.vaumc.org> under “Resources >> Annual Conference 2012.” Or contact the conference office of Mission Excellence at 1-800-768-6040, ext. 144, or (804) 521-1144, or <Mission@vaumc.org>.

Upcoming Events

MARCH 2012

Disciple University: Peace With Justice Academy, March 19-21, Oak Grove UMC, Chesapeake Conference and Retreat Center.

The Virginia Conference Board of Church and Society announces the first Disciple University training, Peace with Justice Academy. Retreat leader will be the Rev. Dr. Wayne Lavender, who holds a Ph.D. in public policy from George Mason University and is currently a professor at the University of Human Development in Iraq. Registration fee is \$50 per person, which includes lunch and dinner and materials. This retreat will be repeated four times in different locations of the conference across this year, as well as new Disciple University opportunities in 2013 and 2014. This event is open to laity and clergy. Participants will earn 1.5 units of CEU. For details, contact John Fair at (804) 931-3773 or <john.fair@p2-planningforpeace.com>; Glenn Rowley at (804) 521-1100 or 1-800-768 6040 or <GlennRowley@vaumc.org>.

APRIL 2012

'ReFirement: A Creative Spark' for Older Adults, April 20-21, Blackstone Conference and Retreat Center.

Sponsored by the conference Older Adult Council, this retreat will focus on fostering the spark of creativity in order to enrich the lives of older adults and enhance the ministries of the church. Workshops include watercolor and acrylic painting, music, liturgical movement and knitting/crocheting for making prayer shawls. For more information, contact the Center for Lay Leadership Excellence, (804) 521-1153 or 1-800-768-6040, ext. 153, or <marthastokes@vaumc.org>.

School of Children's Ministries, April 20-21, Blackstone Conference and Retreat Center.

This event will offer workshops such as: "Worship Together," "Curriculum Conundrum," "Buzz Words," "Think Fast!" and "Five Cultural Threats to Your Kids' Faith." You will be able to select three of six workshops. The cost will be \$70 per person (double) or \$90 per person (single) and will cover lodging, meals

and resources. You can register online at <www.vaumc.org>, or e-mail Becky Tate at <beckytate@vaumc.org>.

MAY 2012

Mission trip to Mozambique, June 28-July 15.

Virginia Conference United Methodist Women are planning a mission trip to Mozambique. Organizers are inviting current UMW members and/or any women, lay or clergy, who are interested in meeting and working with the women of Mozambique at the orphanage or girls' school in Cambine and the widows at Massinga. The trip will include a visit to Krueger National Park in South Africa. The group will depart June 28 from Dulles Airport and return on July 15. The cost of the trip will be \$3,200 to \$3,500. For more information, contact Sue Boltz at (703) 768-7499 or <sboltzmno@gmail.com>, or Chris Cole at (540) 289-5128 or <criscole@intelos.net>.

JULY 2012

LEAD, July 27-Aug. 5, Salvation Army Roanoke.

LEAD is a leadership training event offered by the Virginia Conference Council for Youth Ministry. This experience will be a 10-day leadership immersion. District and local church youth councils are invited to select three to five youths who are willing to commit to this intensive experience and a covenant action plan to enact newly developed leadership skills in their districts and local communities. The first three days of the event will be spent working with participants to understand vocation: identifying their strongest gifts and deepest passions, discovering how their gifts and passions intersect with the needs of the world, and responding to God's call to act on and live out their discoveries. During the next five days, participants will pick a track based on their discoveries and be immersed in one of three areas: worship, spiritual formation or outreach. Finally, the event will end with a culminating experience of "design studio" where youths create action plans and covenants for making a difference in their districts and local communities. The cost is \$300. For more information, e-mail <alisonmalloy@gmail.com>.

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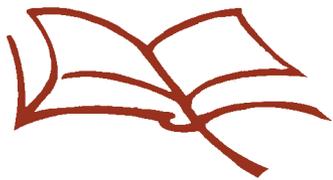
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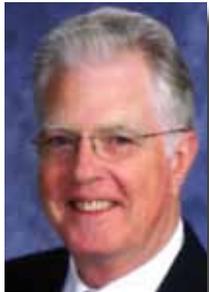
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Living the Word



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Gene Mims is the James River District Lay Leader and has held a number of positions in his local church, Gary's UMC. He is a former district president of United Methodist Men (UMMen) and has also been a part of the conference UMMen's board. His current focus is on prison ministry. He leads a weekly Bible study class at Greensville Correctional Center and is active as a Karios volunteer as well. In 2011 he was elected chair of the Board of Directors for the newly formed Disciple Bible Outreach Ministries of Virginia, Inc., which takes the Disciple Bible study series into prisons. He retired as postmaster after 33 years experience with the U.S. Postal Service. Gene and Kay, his wife of 50 years, have four children, eight grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

March 11, 2012

The Word Became Flesh

John 1:14

God was not satisfied to proclaim God's Message through the prophets or confine it to writing. No, God's message is found in Jesus. In God who came in human flesh to live as one of us. This made grace accessible, touchable, and available to all. God was revealed through Jesus. God took on human form and with it the frailties of humans. God's glory could not be hidden. Grace and truth are revealed in Jesus. God comes near. God becomes touchable. God's message becomes real.

For me, God was revealed to me in ways I never would have expected. On July 7, 1997, I had a heart attack and had to undergo a quadruple heart bypass operation. I was 54 years old. Up until that time, I was what I would call a "mediocre Christian." That was my wake-up call. God helped me to realize what was really important in my life.

I would like to tell you that everything changed after that, but I can't. God has made me a work in progress. One that I expect won't be completed until God calls me home. I had friends who sponsored me on a "Walk to Emmaus," and I will tell you it was a spiritual renewal time for me. However, it wasn't until I teamed on a walk that God was revealed to me in a way I had never experienced. During a communion service, I suddenly understood that Jesus had died for me. Oh, I knew He had died for us, but now it became so very personal. At that moment, I understood Grace like I never had before. Each time I take communion I remember that time, and I hope I never forget.

God is revealed to us all the time. One of the passions God has given me

is for prison ministry. I recall one of the inmates made the statement that he didn't understand why some people would pray for God to come into their midst, because God was already there. Hebrews 13: 5-6 gives us the promise that God will never leave us or forsake us.

I pray that each and every one of you will yourselves open to receive the grace that only God can give. May you experience that God came near. □

March 18, 2012

The Wedding at Cana

John 2: 1-10

I like to think that passages of scripture can teach us a multitude of things. I have found that many times it depends on where I am in my spiritual walk though life. In the scripture today, one of the things Jesus revealed was that he was an obedient son. He revealed his graciousness by not allowing the wedding host to be embarrassed. Very importantly, Jesus "revealed his glory and his disciples believed in him" (2:11). The passage today reflects some other things. There is an unusual aspect here that is seldom shown in art, movies or literature about Jesus. I am talking about the view of Jesus as an outgoing, party-going sort of guy. The gospels present Jesus as a man who loves a good feast or party, yet few ever talk about it. Frequently Jesus is portrayed as a solemn sort who seems aloof from the things going on around him. In an attempt to capture the divine and "other worldly" aspects of Jesus, the human and "this worldly" aspect of his life are neglected. I guess that is why one of my favorite artistic representations of Jesus is the one with him tilting his head back and laughing.

How many of Jesus' parables include dinner parties, banquets and feasts?

His parables are full of celebrations, and as in our text today, he is frequently in attendance at one. I'm sure that he was eating, drinking, laughing and having a good time. Why else would his detractors have referred to him as a "glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners." (Luke 7:34) You know, there is a distinct possibility he may have even danced!

Does that mean that Jesus got drunk or sinned? Not at all. It means that he loves people, he loves joyous celebrations and he loves life.

God loves us so much that he became human and came among us in order that we might be saved from our sins. God in Jesus Christ actually loves being with us and among us. Think about the many religious events in both the Old and New Testaments that center around food and banquets. God wants to commune with us so much that God is planning a huge wedding feast in the kingdom to come. I hope to see you at the party. ☐

March 25, 2012

God's Word Saves

John 3: 11-21

John 3:16 is one of the most popular and beloved New Testament scriptures. It is one verse nearly anyone who has ever attended Sunday school or church can quote to you right away. Equally important is the rest of today's scripture. This is the heart of the gospel story about Jesus and his mission. "God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him." This whole passage reflects how much God loves you and me. Can you completely grasp the implication that God loves you so much that God would send his son to die for you? I've said in previous devotions that the thought just totally overwhelms me.

The message of today's passage is all about God's love for you. You can't earn it and you don't deserve it, but God loves you anyway. As a friend of mine puts it, "I may not be perfect, but God loves me anyway." God loves you and there is absolutely nothing you can do about it!

God's does not *force* us into a loving relationship, but instead woos us and invites us. You can accept or reject this salvation. You can accept or reject this invitation to spend eternity with God. It never ceases to amaze and humble me to find that God truly is everywhere. Even in a place like prison, God's presence is so profoundly felt. Even though some of the men I know will probably be incarcerated for the rest of their earthly existence, their souls are at peace and they have a freedom that many of us outside the walls never experience. To quote Billy Graham, "I know who I am and I know *whose* I am." They know whose they are.

God seeks and finds us. God sent Jesus, into our world, taking on our flesh as a fully human friend, brother and Savior. And purely by grace, with no contribution on our part, Jesus paid the price for our sins.

May you be overwhelmed with how much God loves you. May we gratefully receive God's gift of salvation, forgiveness, and grace and may we pass it along to others. ☐

April 1, 2012

Jesus Testifies to the Truth

John 28: 28-37

As I read this account, I get the impression that Pilate is looking for a way to appease everyone. He is afraid of the crowd, but the more he learns the more he becomes afraid of the prisoner. It is important we understand that long before the Jewish leaders arrested Jesus in the garden, they had planned to kill him (John 11: 47-51; Matthew 26:59). However, these same Jewish leaders did not have the right to execute anyone, so it was necessary to get the approval of Rome. This is why Jesus is brought before Pilate, the Roman governor (v. 28).

Don't you think it is interesting to note that the Jewish leaders did not hesitate to condemn an innocent man, and yet they were careful not to defile themselves by walking into the governor's palace? They were far more interested in keeping ceremoni-

ously pure than in justice. Let's say you have to make a decision that has two clear probabilities. If you make one choice, it could boost your career, increase your salary and improve your social standing. The other choice would come at an extremely personal cost. Your conscience tells you that the second choice is the one you should take.

This is the situation Pontius Pilate was put in. He was given the unenviable job of deciding whether or not Jesus deserved death as a threat to Roman rule.

In John 18:38 Pilate asked "What is truth?" I believe he already knew that truth. This was probably the clearest case ever brought before Pilate. But too often self-interest will trump justice. Doing the right thing for Jesus meant doing the wrong thing for Pilate. Pilate didn't want anyone to think he was weak or indecisive (which he was). He also didn't want Rome to think he was soft on rebels in the area he governed. So he took the easy way out. He washed his hands of the matter and handed Jesus over to the execution squad.

It is easy to condemn Pilate. But our self-interest often overcomes the right choices in our lives, just like it did in Pilate's life. There is good news, however. That good news is that Jesus went to the cross to carry away that very guilt.

May you make the right decision. ☐

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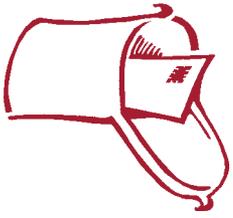


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Letters & Commentary

Attack on Occupy movement was lacking in Christian spirit

Debate is essential to the development of Christian thought and practice, but it should be rational, informed, and accurate. I find none of these attributes in Rev. Bert Duckwall's "Occupy Movement" commentary [January *Virginia Advocate*, pg. 28]. Too many sentences make no grammatical sense, beginning with the first, while the basic argument is simply a series of non sequiturs.

I do sympathize with Duckwall; the socio-economic issues facing the nation are indeed complex. Even the Republican presidential candidates cannot agree as to what Capitalism is or in what form it is good or bad. But to make the astonishing claim that the quest for social justice is a "nebulous holdover concept from the 1960s" and to misrepresent and to ridicule the Occupy Wall Street protest against the massive transfer of wealth from the many to the few does not clarify any issue or define what it means to follow Christ.

—Dr. Richard N. Soulen is professor of New Testament Studies at Virginia Union University, Richmond

Matthew would have no part of critique of Occupy movement

I am still weaning from smelling salts after Rev. Bert Duckwall's shocking dissing of the Occupy Movement [January *Virginia Advocate*, pg. 28], and citing the Apostle Matthew in doing so. Rev. Duckwall oddly couples references to Matthew scripture and Marx socialism to scold Occupiers for their non-mannerly camping. Just as baffling is his stumping for the stupefying 99 percenters who disavow the Occupy cause while also advocating their best interests.

The worshiping of gain is hardly a "nebulous 1960s social injustice holdover," but instead a centuries old paradox for the Church.

And defining today's poor as "only 1 car/LCD-TV/cell-phoners" maps for us all exactly where "misguided theology" dwells.

The God that I believe in is not a *laissez faire* God, but Duckwall's ode bewails his belief that his God is.

—Allen C. Story is a member of Courtland UMC, James River District

Arrest shows no real courage

Those who praise the arrests of United Methodists in our U.S. Capitol might want to view this through a larger lens. Any Christian who is arrested in an anti-government protest over deficit spending is part of the problem, not the solution. As the saying goes: "your tax dollars at work." Every arrest requires a tax expenditure.

For those who advocate more government entitlements, please consider how the effectiveness of the United Methodist Committee on Relief would be compromised if we had to filter all contributions through a multi-layer government bureaucracy.

There are some things that government should provide, such as food stamps for the *truly* needy, but not the professional students I knew long ago buying food with our stamps while saving their cash for beer and cigarettes. There are some things The United Methodist Church *must* provide, including a witness for Christ as we seek to lead others to the Lord with our charity.

We must prayerfully prepare for the future remembering that the end of government spending will come by (a) government shutdown, or (b) reductions in entitlement spending. When that happens there may not be any food stamps. What should be our role to help the needy when this occurs?

In Ephesians 3, Paul describes himself as "the prisoner of Christ Jesus." He was often arrested for preaching the Gospel, not for the politics of government spending.

If United Methodists want to show their courage while being arrested, I suggest that they go to Saudi Arabia, Iran or North Korea and experience prison with courageous Christians enduring persecutions for their unbending faith in Christ. An arrest over government spending in our Capitol is, as Shakespeare might say: "full of sound and fury, signifying nothing"... except political correctness.

—John H. Woolwine, Roanoke

A misplaced search for God?

Reading recent communications published in the *Advocate* on the subject of the arrest of Jim Winkler, General Secretary of the General Board of Church and Society, the following occurs to me: When Jesus wanted to communicate with His God in open prayer, He prayed in the Temple, God's house. What god was Mr. Winkler seeking when he went to pray openly at the U.S. Capitol?

—Clifford R. Buys, Charlottesville

Caregivers can benefit from new book by Rev. Pratt

In one out of three American households someone is a caregiver. Caregivers need daily, practical help in reviving their spirits and avoiding burnout.

The Rev. Benjamin Pratt, retired Virginia Conference pastor, pastoral counselor and a caregiver for six of the last seven years, has just written a 150-page *Spiritual Guide for Caregivers: Keeping Your Spirit Healthy When Your Caregiver Duties and Responsibilities Are Dragging You Down*. Take “Caregiver” out of the title if you wish, and the book speaks directly to almost all our lives.

Realizing that all caregivers are grieving, it’s a book about loss and fear that progresses to gratitude, hope, and joy. It underscores the necessity for each caregiver to maintain self – body and spirit – in order to care in optimal fashion for a loved one.

Knowing that caregivers have little time for reading, the book’s chapters are short, four to six pages each, with plenty of space to write your own responses to the insightful questions that Rev. Pratt asks. This book is designed to let readers jump in almost anywhere and explore at their own pace. It is filled with helpful quotes, paragraphs from other caregivers, touching poetry, wisdom from the author and from the community of helpers.

Although I am not a caregiver, I have already given this book to one friend; and I am grateful to have it for myself. You will be, too. Read more at <www.GuideForCaregivers.info>.

—The Rev. Dr. Bert Sikkelee is a retired United Methodist clergy living in Centreville

Churches need spirituality

The commentary offered by Bishop Joe Pennel [February *Virginia Advocate*, pg. 28] is most appreciated.

We are called by God into relationship with God and with others. Our churches are suffering from a lack of sharing deep spirituality in a real, non-dogmatic and rigid way. Jesus called all into a life of deep prayer, close relationship with God, and shows us how to bring a centeredness in God forward into daily life. Prayer-without-ceasing, cultivating an awareness of the presence of God with us in the midst of the sorrow, pain, joy, challenges, and even boredom of daily life, brings the fruits of the Spirit to every situation as a grace-filled healing balm in our hurting world; this is social witness and leads to sacred activism.

All are called to a deeper prayer life and to experience prayer as a listening-to-God, not just talking to God. We desperately need clergy to be courageous enough to share deep spirituality authentically and in a way that is theologically sound, open, and probing. We need clergy to recognize and help others see God at work in the world, not just in the church. John Wesley spoke of taking communion as often as possible. Why don’t all our churches offer that sacrament, that nourishing means of grace, weekly? Where is contemplative prayer in the life of our church? People are hungry for more. We need more spiritual sustenance within the church, or people will look elsewhere to find it. Seekers are hearing God’s call. Can our churches nourish that call in an authentic way, in a way that will challenge the status quo, even within the institutional church? “Be not afraid.”

—Dawn Peck is a member of Trinity UMC in Lexington

Divine amnesia: It was a minor miracle, but one we won’t forget

It was a beautiful, warm Sunday afternoon. Our youth from Pleasant Valley Church arrived in Washington, D.C., to serve the homeless people gathered on Lafayette Square, across from the White House.

We had so many clothes for the trip that Mike drove his car in addition to the minivan I rented. By the time we had parked and unloaded the clothes we had on the van, there was a line of at least 20-25 homeless men waiting for us. They dove into the bags, calling out orders for different types of clothes.

“Anybody see 32 waist jeans?”

“I need a big coat, man!”

“Got any underwear?”

The clothes and the bags they came in were gone with the exception of a few things nobody wanted. The men we had served now huddled in line for the food wagon which had just arrived.

As I was putting the last of the unclaimed clothes in the van, I heard several of our youth volunteers talking to someone. I glanced in their direction and saw a man who was barefoot.

The look of compassion and helplessness on the faces of the teens told me that there were no shoes or socks left. They looked at me with pleading eyes. My mind raced as I desperately tried to figure out a way to get this man some shoes on a Sunday.

Then one of the youths, in a shouted whisper, exclaimed, “Wait a minute! There’s still stuff in Mike’s car!” She didn’t want to alert the other homeless

people until we had done all we could to meet this man’s desperate need.

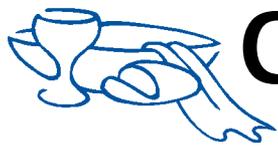
Several of the teens escorted the man to the trunk of Mike’s car. They opened it and found a couple of pairs of thermal socks and a pair of work boots in like-new condition that were exactly the man’s size. They were the only shoes in the trunk.

As he sat on the pavement to put on his socks and boots, the expression on the man’s face changed from dejection and hopelessness to unbridled joy.

Everyone was amazed at this little miracle. God provided the perfect pair of shoes in the perfect size and saved them for this man through our forgetfulness.

Behold the hand of God!

—Steve Jennings is executive director of *Teens Opposing Poverty*



Clergy & Diaconal

Deaths

Charles "Charlie" H. Johnson Jr. died Dec. 27, 2011. Charlie was a member of Community UMC in Virginia Beach and served at Iron Gate Charge, Staunton District, for four years as a full-time local pastor. A memorial service was held in Virginia Beach at Scott Memorial UMC. Among survivors is his wife, Theresa, step-children, Angie and Robbie; his sons, Chuck and Douglas Johnson.

The **Rev. Louis Alvin Timmons**, 71, retired clergy from the Eastern Shore District, died Feb. 10, 2012.



Timmons

A native of Delaware, Timmons was a U.S. Navy Vietnam War veteran and a graduate of Virginia Wesleyan College and Wesley Seminary. As pastor he served churches in Delaware, Maryland and Virginia. He also served as co-director of Casa Esperranza in Wachapreague. A celebration of life service was conducted Feb. 18 at Oak Grove UMC in Melfa, with the Rev. Sandra Benson officiating.

He is survived by his wife, Sylvia Faye Timmons, two sons, Eric Timmons of Winchester and Edward Timmons and his wife, Terri, of Winchester; one brother, John Robert Timmons of Brazil, and one grandson, Jakob Shoe of Winchester.

Dr. Bruce Chester Souders, 91, of Frederick County, died Feb. 12, 2012. He was born in 1920 in Pennsylvania. He was professor, director of Public Relations and minister at Lebanon Valley College. Souders came to Winchester in 1961 to head the Humanities, English and Philosophy departments at Shenandoah College. He

helped the college attain university status in 1975. He was a graduate of Lebanon Valley College, earning degrees in English and History. He received a Master of Theology Degree in 1947 at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio. Souders retired in 1989 from Shenandoah University. He received an Honorary Doctorate from Shenandoah in 1996. He attended Braddock Street UMC in Winchester. Surviving are his wife Patricia Bartles, his son, Gregory A. Souders of Winchester; a sister, Agnes Souders of Pennsylvania, and brother, Ralph Souders of Iowa.

Helen M. Simmons, widow of the Rev. Eugene Sowder, died Jan. 7, 2012.

Donald H. Rimer, the father of the Rev. Scott Rimer, died Jan. 24, 2012. Scott is the senior pastor at Larchmont UMC in Norfolk.

The Honorable Hal J. Bonney Jr., father of the Rev. David J. Bonney, died Jan. 22, 2012. Bonney was a fed-

eral judge and member of the Duke Divinity School's Board of Visitors. Scott is pastor of St. Mark's UMC, Richmond District.

Rhea Kidd, 83, wife of the Rev. Rudolph Kidd of Williamsburg, died on Jan. 27, 2012.

Gaynelle Williams Lovern died Jan. 20, 2012. She was the wife of the late Rev. Thomas Young Lovern Jr.

Grace Horsfall Pihlcrantz, 84, of Boca Raton, Fla., the mother of Rev. Bob Pihlcrantz, died Feb. 23, 2012. Bob is the pastor of Mount Pleasant UMC, Elizabeth River District, and the Virginia Conference Disaster Response Coordinator.

Correction

In the death notice for the Rev. Eugene S. Condrey (pg. 30, February *Advocate*), all churches Rev. Condrey served were in the Lynchburg District, including Shiloh and Wesleybury.

Staying cool at Convocation



The Rev. Rachel May from Peakland UMC and retired pastor Raymond Wrenn enjoy ice cream during a break at the 2012 Ministers' Convocation at Blackstone.

Church lives with our differences while striving for Christian unity



Charlene Payne Kammerer
Bishop of the
Virginia Conference

“... perfect love casts out fear.” – 1st John 4: 18

Ever since 1968, with the union of The Methodist Church and The Evangelical Brethren Church, resulting in The United Methodist Church, our *Book of Discipline* has addressed the reality of homosexuality within the context of Christian community. Some quadrennial General Conferences have added language to the original paragraphs in the *Book of Discipline*. For over 40 years, our denomination has struggled with homosexuality. We remain, like most Protestant denominations, deeply divided in our convictions. These differences are expressed in biblical interpretation, theological reflection and the practice of Christian community.

In 1992, I was a delegate to General Conference from the Florida Conference. I ended up chairing the legislative committee which dealt with only two topics – baptism and homosexuality. We were grappling as a global body with our theology of baptism and our response to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered members of our churches, our communities, our families. The General Conference approved both the *Study of Baptism* and the *Study of Homosexuality* at that General Conference. Our legislative committee dealt with well over 500 petitions, and modeled Christian conferencing. But both the theology of baptism and the Christian response to homosexuality continue to surface at our General Conferences.

The people of The United Methodist Church have lived with our differences of opinion for well over 40 years now, opting to strive for unity in the Body of Christ, and living together in the midst of our differences.

In “John Wesley’s Commentary on the Bible” (edited by Roger Schoenhals), I have found courage and comfort around the Biblical teaching that “perfect love casts out fear.”

Mr. Wesley instructs us “it is by the Spirit that the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts.” “Every one, whatever his opinions or mode of worship be, who loves God, loves his brother (and sister) purely because he (she) is a child of and bears the image of God.” “Bigotry is properly the lack of this pure and universal love. A bigot only loves those who embrace his opinions and receive his way of worship, and he loves them for that, and not for Christ’s sake.”

Wesley believed that whoever was in Christ and still knew fear was not yet perfected in love. We in The United Methodist Church are not yet perfected in love. This is a judgment on us all. God still has work to do in our community, to bring us to a place of love and not demonization of “the other side.”

“... perfect love casts out fear.” – 1st John 4: 18

Grace and Peace,

Charlene Kammerer

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Rates for advertising and Tributes are available upon request.

Local Church News

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

Letters

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

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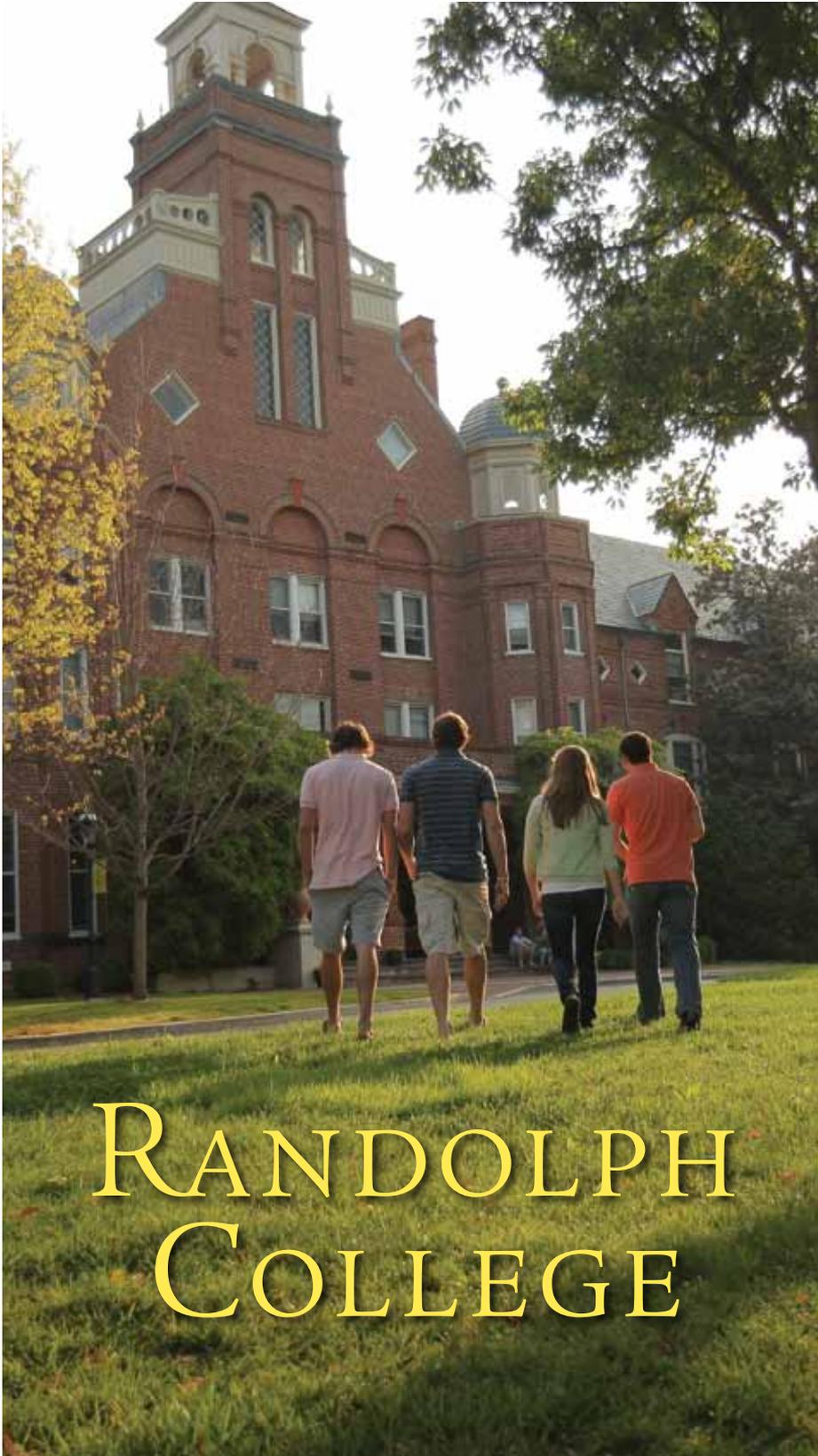
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