



March 2019

# Advocate

## General Conference

↔ 2019 ↔

## Preview



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

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

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# PILLOW TALK

**Madeline Pillow**  
Editor**Fly like an eagle...  
cry like a red-tailed hawk**

## Did you know that the sound of the eagle we hear in movies is actually the call of a red-tailed hawk?

With the rise of movies and our interest in the visual, it can be hard to separate the truth from fiction especially when fallacies are presented as truth. Our understanding – or at least my understanding – of the eagle has been from movies. In movies, the eagle is a majestic creature only heightened in its size and fierceness by its loud cry. I guess the real cackle-like call of the eagle would be less than impressive as John Wayne rides across the scene of a western.

In my part of the world, I don't see that many eagles. It was only a few years ago that I traveled to Maine and saw a nesting pair in the wild and grasped the sheer size of the birds. I don't remember if I heard their call.

This popular fallacy in movies is a reminder that humans like to mess with God's creation or put their own understanding on God's plan. There are plenty of examples in the Bible where humans thought they knew best. We know how that turned out.

God calls Samuel to go and bless the new king of Israel, one of Jesse's sons. When faced with his choices, he passes David right by. You mean David didn't "look" like a king? Nope. Samuel saw a kingly stature in that of David's brother Eliab.

But God sets Samuel on the right path quickly:

*But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."* (1 Samuel 16:7)

I can see the fear, anxiety and anger as we head into the Special Session of General Conference. The fact is that we don't know what will happen. Nothing may happen.

As a communicator all I can do is report the facts back to our conference. As a United Methodist, I prayerfully wait. It may very well be that the plan God has is not anything that we have yet come up with. But we would be wise no matter what happens to not put our own spin on things or dub over the voice of God with that of a red-tailed hawk. 🦅

Until our next issue,

*Madeline C. Pillow*

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Above: Attendees at the United Methodist Council of Bishops meeting in Chicago join in the "Praying Our Way Forward" closing worship service. From left are: Jolynn Lowry, Bishop J. Michael Lowry, the Rev. Alex da Silva Souto and Bishops Cynthia Moore-Koikoi and Hee-Soo Jung. Photo by Mike DuBose, UMNS.



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## A 5-star rating

I enjoyed reading the article in the January *Advocate* about the ride sharing ministry of R.J. Jun and Robert Stutes.

I have a story to share from a different perspective. Last Christmas I was visiting my daughters in Chicago. My younger daughter and I contacted Lyft for a ride from my hotel to her in-laws' home. A nice young man named Gabe picked us up. Being new to using the

Lyft service, I was talking with my daughter about needing a ride to the airport very early the next morning. Gabe expressed an interest in driving me. We were able to set it up so he would be my driver.

Gabe showed up right on time. We had one stop to make and then headed for O'Hare Airport. I don't really remember how this conversation started but he began to tell me his story — how he didn't have a lot of direction in his life and then

enrolled at a Christian college and came to faith in Christ. He now has a girlfriend and they are involved in a church together. I sat in the backseat and listened and thought how it was no coincidence that I was riding with Gabe.

Before we arrived at the airport I told him I was a pastor. I enjoyed hearing how God was/is at work in his life. And, yes, I did give him a 5-star rating and a nice tip!

— Peggy Packard,  
Weyers Cave UMC

## Kindred Project reflection on General Conference: Peace

By Kimberly  
Barker-Brugman

The first thing that comes to mind is the children's song, "I've got peace like a river...in my soul." It's a happy and peppy kind of song, and it makes me smile to remember all the times and places I have sung it. That memory brings me God's peace. The song is all about water. The other verses are: love like an ocean, joy like a fountain. Water is an element of peace, love and joy.

Water is necessary for life as it makes up 90 percent of our body weight and is vital for

the functioning of our bodies. Biblically, water is prevalent from its creation in Genesis to the Book of Revelation. Jesus is the one who is and who offers living water to the Samaritan woman at the well. His discussion with her and his presence to those "others" brought them peace; a joyful, happy peace like in the children's song.

But then there is Jesus sleeping in the boat in the storm. The disciples are looking for the peace and understanding of who this Jesus is and their faith is small and unfinished as they fret in the boat

on the stormy seas and awake their Lord asking why he does not care for their lives and safety as they are to perish in this storm. Jesus says: "Peace be still" and it is so.

It also reminds me of another water song entitled "A Gaelic Blessing" (arrangement by John Rutter) that I have sung in several choirs: "Deep peace of the running wave to you." Running waves don't bring up images of peace but of stormy seas. And yet, its melody is so peaceful it always brings the deep peace of God to my spirit. Each verse of this song speaks of the



Letters to the Editor are printed on a space-available basis. Letters may be emailed to [MadelinePillow@vaumc.org](mailto:MadelinePillow@vaumc.org) by the first of the month.

# COMMENTARY

creation: deep peace of the flowing air to you, of the quiet earth to you, of the shining stars to you.

One of the places I feel and am reminded of the deep peace of God is in nature. To stand at the edge of the ocean and watch it is relaxing. It doesn't matter if it's a bright sunny day with gentle waves or a rainy, windy, stormy day with huge waves breaking white and foamy. As I gaze out over the ocean, I sense its depth and know that under those waves it is quiet and peaceful. The ocean is so vast - it reminds me of the breadth of the love of God that is deep and wide. So no matter what storminess my soul is experiencing, I find peace at the edge of the sea. And as I gaze at the ocean in all its vastness, I remember how small my sin is compared to the vastness of the love of God and I find peace.

These past two years as The United Methodist Church has awaited the 2019 General Conference have been a time of anxiety, hurt, fear and generally stormy seas. And yet we know the One who calms the seas. Is our faith, as young and unfinished as his disciples, that we,

too, have been begging for him to calm the storm? Have we been like Peter stepping out the boat and about to drown because we lack faith? All we have to do is ask Jesus and he will calm the storm inside us even as it continues around us.

What brings you into the deep peace of God? Music? Scripture? Prayer? Creation? This time of storm and disruption and angst is a time for us to practice ways that bring us peace and deepen our faith and allow us to walk together in peace, not storm.

Nature is one of those places I find the deep peace of God; water is nature and reminds me that all humanity struggles, even those in the boat with Jesus. So when I am troubled and I need to remember my center, I begin with water and baptism. That is the foundation the Body of Christ; we all have that in common.

In nature I am reminded that God is Creator and nature is beloved of God and is a way that I see God. To gaze at nature is my "visio divina", a practice of looking and seeing the Holy One. Nature is my "icon" (not idol

and every time I look at it, it centers me and brings me back to the Holy One. To encounter God in this way, I may go to one of my favorite parks; the ones with marshes or rivers or bays or ponds. As soon as I step out of my car, I breathe deeply - breathing in Jesus, the breath of life. Did you know that scientists have proven there are elements in the ocean and forest air that do affect our body chemistry and lift our spirits? God created nature to fill and heal us. God is so good.

(Con't. on pg. 34: "PEACE.")

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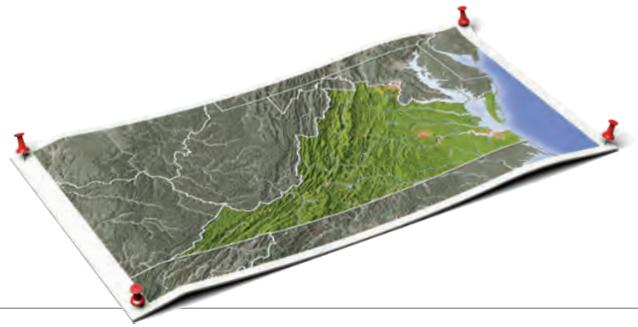


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# The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



## Church assists furloughed workers in local community

By Forrest White

The Rev. Michelle Matthews and members of The Kingstowne Communion in Alexandria weren't able to worship together because of the wintry weather on Sunday morning, Jan. 13, but it didn't stop them from doing what they always do — looking for ways to live out the church's mission statement:

*To gather people into communion with Jesus*

*Christ through courageous conversation, creative community, and collaborating for the common good.*

That snowy evening, their hearts were heavy because of the partial government shutdown and the effect it was having on countless people in their community. Two of the church's nursery workers have loved ones serving in the Coast Guard. Unlike other branches of the military, the Coast

Guard is part of the Department of Homeland Security, which operates on emergency orders because of the ongoing shutdown, so its members weren't getting paid.

The church wanted to help, so Matthews reached out to the local Ledo's Pizza looking to collaborate for the common good. If the church advertised that it would pay for dinner for furloughed workers and their family members as well as anyone not receiving regular government assistance, would Ledo's offer \$5 calzones? Yes! The deal was struck and "Calzones to say We Care" was set for Wednesday, Jan. 16.

The Kingstowne Communion advertised the event on its Facebook page and other social media platforms and spread the word at Fort Belvoir, which is less than five miles from Island Creek Elementary School where the church has its worship services.

"We had a crazy turnout," Matthews



# The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



said. "About 125 people came to eat calzones."

At least half of them had ties to the Coast Guard.

The massive turnout overwhelmed the Ledo's staff, so church folks jumped in to take orders and bus tables.

But that wasn't their most important work that evening.

"We walked around and talked to every table," Matthews said. "We said, 'We're so sorry life is like this right now.' Over and over and over again we heard, 'This is such a morale booster for us, to go out and have a meal together.' They were so, so grateful."

Members of the church felt compelled to help cover the cost of the meals at Ledo's. Some wrote checks. Some handed Matthews

cash. Around 9 that night, a church member texted to say they would cover the rest of the bill. In the end, the church had to pay nothing out of its missions' budget.

**The massive turnout overwhelmed the Ledo's staff, so church folks jumped in to take orders and bus tables.**

"We have a budget for missions, but that money is mostly spoken for," Matthews said. "It was kind of a step out in faith to say, 'This is what we're going to say

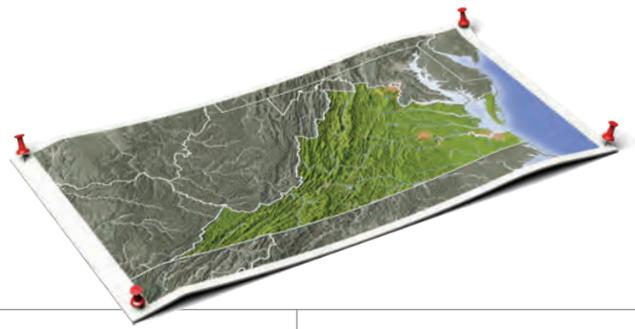
missions is right now.'"

The Kingstowne Communion is a small church plant, which grew out of Aldersgate UMC in Alexandria. It began in 2014, but shut down for a few months before returning in the fall of 2016 with its new name and a strong desire not simply to speak of its mission statement, but to live it out as well.

With the shutdown lingering, the church decided to offer another dining out event, this time reaching out to Fiona's Irish Pub, where its members gather for pub theology. Again, their plan was met with much enthusiasm. The restaurant's owners have struggled too, with fewer people eating out because of the shutdown.

*(Con't. on page 8: "FURLOUGH.")*

# The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



*("FURLOUGH," cont. from page 7.)*

Almost 200 people showed up Jan. 23 from 5:30-7:30 p.m. at Fiona's, which put together a special \$5 menu that included cheeseburgers, chicken pot pie, salads and items for the kids.

Kingstowne Communion created a Facebook fundraiser with a goal of raising \$1,000 to cover the tab at Fiona's.

Within six hours, they had \$1,100.

"The collaborating for the common good piece is really who we are," Matthews said. "We don't really do much of anything as a church unless we're inviting a community partner to do it with us."

This is true collaboration — co-hosting the event, equal branding, advertising across secular and Christian social media platforms, etc.

"This is how it's able

to happen so successfully," Matthews said.

She encourages churches everywhere to look for ways to partner with local businesses to make life better for those who may be struggling in the midst of the shutdown or with some other challenge.

"There are things you could be doing if you're just willing to make the ask, right?" she said. "Where is the place in your area? What's the family restaurant in your area that's probably already having the conversation, 'What can we do to help?' I think this should happen all over the place."

You may reach Matthews via email at [michelle@kingstowne-communion.net](mailto:michelle@kingstowne-communion.net).

To give via the Kingstowne Communion Facebook fundraiser visit: [www.facebook.com/donate/3429216ds09646626/?fundraiser\\_source=external\\_url](https://www.facebook.com/donate/3429216ds09646626/?fundraiser_source=external_url).

Or give to the Kingstowne Communion (indicate special offering): [kingstownecommunion.net/give](https://kingstownecommunion.net/give). 

*– Forrest White is a news associate with the conference Communications office.*

*Check our website for other ministries like this during the shutdown: [www.vaumc.org](http://www.vaumc.org).*



# New church seeks to be 24/7 faith community

By Forrest White

As a child, Shawna Fulk walked the aisles of Gray's IGA, the local grocery store in Verona, Va., with her mama, doing what most children do — eyeing all the tempting treats on the junk food aisles.

Now, more than three decades later, she still walks where those aisles once stood, offering Living Water and the Bread of Life.

Shawna Fulk is now the Rev. Shawna Hiner, pastor of Aisle 7 Fellowship, which worships on Sunday mornings at Verona Community Center, a space that was once home to Gray's IGA.

The *About Us* section of the Aisle 7 website says this:

*We've all had the experience of walking into a grocery store and asking "Can you tell me where to find the baking soda (or honey or taco shells)?" And the answer was something like "Oh, that's on Aisle 2 (or 5 or 8)."*

*Isn't that what people are asking about life? "Can you tell me*

*where to find meaning... real life ... forgiveness?"*

*Most of us spend a lot of time in the junk food aisles. But the good food, the healthy food, is what we really need.*

*Aisle 7 represents the place where Jesus provides food from heaven. He is the bread of life. He gives us water that eternally satisfies. And when we invite people to our fellowship, we are inviting them to come to Jesus to receive the bread and water that alone can satisfy. Why the number 7? Seven is the biblical number of completion.*

*In Jesus, our lives are made complete.*

Aisle 7 seeks to be a "24/7" faith community.

Hiner likes to offer that reminder at the end of worship services.

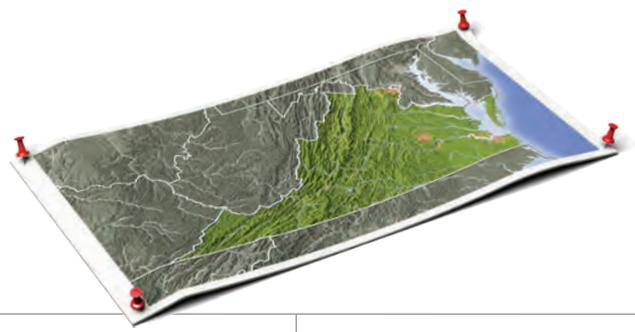
"It doesn't end here. You have work to do. You are going to reach more people, your stories are going to touch more lives, than I ever will here on a Sunday morning. What we're doing here is preparing you to go out. Go beyond. Go do.

"We're all ministers and we have this good news that people right

(Con't. on next page: "AISLE 7.")



# The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



*(“AISLE 7” cont. from page 9.)*

Aisle 7 represents the place where Jesus provides food from heaven. He is the bread of life. He gives us water that eternally satisfies. And when we invite people to our fellowship, we are inviting them to come to Jesus to receive the bread and water that alone can satisfy.

around the corner need to hear,” said Hiner, who was commissioned as a licensed local pastor at the 2018 Virginia Annual Conference. “When we’re all doing it, we’re going to reach far more than we ever could of hoping maybe they’ll come in and worship with us.”

## Looking beyond the walls

Aisle 7 Fellowship grew out of Verona UMC’s desire to find new ways of fulfilling its mission to reach the world for Jesus.

Back in 2015, with two traditional services in place, the church began looking for a way to offer contemporary worship. But the social hall didn’t seem like the right place. It turned to an empty space between the local Goodwill and Dollar General

Store, a space that had been used most recently by an arts organization.

More than 80 volunteers — many of them church members — overhauled the space into a community center, knowing it would offer many things to many people, but most importantly it would offer the love of Christ.

“We needed to look beyond the secure walls of our sanctuary and see the folks who matter to God but, for various reasons, were not being reached by our church,” said the Rev. Bob Weeks, senior pastor of Verona UMC. “We saw a new campus as a way to begin from scratch and to discard our traditional ideas about what church, and especially its worship, should look like.”

## Roots run deep

Aisle 7 Fellowship began in the spring of 2016, under the leadership of the Rev. Kevin McMullen. Though Hiner became its pastor in July 2018, her roots at Verona UMC run deep. She grew up in the church and was baptized there in 1988 by the Rev. C. Edward Pruitt. As an adult she taught Sunday school and led Bible studies.

She was on the church staff, as office administrator, for 14 years.

“Shawna brought so many gifts with her into the three-year-old church plant,” Weeks said. “She has preached the Word in a way that is accessible to all people, no matter what their prior church experience or life situation. She understands that church is a verb and pours herself into her ministry.”

The Verona Community Center — run by volunteers — offers the perfect space for Hiner to pour herself into ministry. It has a no-pay café with free Internet and comfortable seats, a place where anyone can come and use a computer, have a snack and get a cup of coffee. On any given day you’ll find people there working on a resume, reading a book or doing their laundry for free. They can even take a shower.

Aisle 7 puts together care bags for those who need them.

“It’s just been a great place to meet so many different people and have great conversations about where they are, to invite them to church, to show them where we worship and say, ‘We’re pretty casual here,’” Hiner said.

# The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

There is no competition between Verona UMC, with a weekly worship attendance of about 250, and Aisle 7 Fellowship, where about 60 worship each week. Hiner wants to grow that number to 100 by the end of the year, if not sooner, creating a need for a second worship experience.

“Together we can reach more for the kingdom by doing what each of us does well,” she said.

## Weeks agreed.

“We see ourselves as two expressions of the same church. We have the same mission — to reach others with the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to bring positive change into our community and beyond,” he said. “The older campus has primarily supported the newer campus through prayer, financial and administrative support. The newer campus has supported the older by bringing a fresh wind of God’s Spirit into not only our church family but the community surrounding us.”

Hiner can’t help but think that John Gray, the late grocer and long-time Verona UMC member, would love to

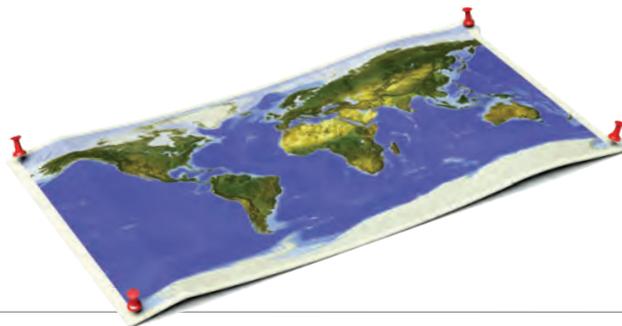
see what Aisle 7 has to offer.

“What a wonderful man he was. How he loved his church, his family and his community,” she said. “I know he’s (in heaven) saying, ‘Wow, what a wonderful way to keep that space alive.’ I’m sentimental. I think about all those things. That’s where my mom did her grocery shopping. I went there as a kid. Now I get to preach there.”

— Forrest White is a news associate for the conference Communications office.



# The United Methodist connection in THE WORLD



## Delegation chairs look toward General Conference

By Sam Hodges  
Published Dec. 17, 2018 by  
UMNS

The Rev. Judy Zabel has had her ears bent this fall, listening to fellow United Methodists talk about the upcoming special called session of General Conference.

As chair of the Minnesota Conference delegation, she's been all over the state attending open meetings where people could offer opinions or ask questions about legislative plans to address The United Methodist Church's long, schism-threatening conflict over homosexuality.

Zabel, senior pastor of Minneapolis' Hen-

nepin Avenue United Methodist Church, went to yet another session where individuals could make an appointment with the delegation and share views privately.

Lots of impressions linger from her many conversations. But one theme resounded.

"People want a decision to be made," said Zabel. "They'll be most disappointed, I think, if nothing happens."

If any group has a finger on the pulse of the United Methodist public, it's the delegation chairpersons for the special General Conference, set for Feb. 23-26 in St. Louis.

They are, for any General Conference,

team captains.

"The main role of the leader of the delegation is just keeping us organized and on track," said Tim Crouch, chair of the North Texas Conference delegation.

Preparations for the special General Conference have been particu-

"People want a decision to be made," said Zabel.

"They'll be most disappointed, I think, if nothing happens."

The Rev. Judy Zabel speaks during the 2016 General Conference in Portland, Oregon. She again chairs the Minnesota Conference delegation as it prepares for the special called session of General Conference, set for Feb. 23-26 in St. Louis. File photo by Maile Bradfield, UMNS.



larly intense, given the high stakes. More meetings. More questions and comments.

"The interest level is dramatically higher," Crouch said.

Most conferences, by tradition, have as chairs the first elected clergy or lay delegate. And most alternate, having a clergyperson as chair for one General Conference, and a layperson four

# The United Methodist connection in THE WORLD

years later.

Delegation chairs are not mentioned in the *Book of Discipline*, but the current General Conference rules assign them responsibility for reporting attendance for their delegation. The rules also have them involved in the seating of reserve delegates if the occasion warrants.

At this point, many chairs are leaning on their fellow delegates to read the *Advance Daily Christian Advocate* (<https://bit.ly/2WEPH7g>), which previews legislation.

"You really can't do your work as a delegate if you don't read the petitions," Zabel said. "We owe that to one another."

## Listening sessions

Most delegations have been part of listening sessions, and many of those have been crowded.

"Packed out" is how the Rev. Bill Allen, chair of the Upper New York Conference delegation, described the meetings in his region.

Mathew Pinson chairs the North Georgia Conference delegation, and it was his view, backed, he said, by Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson, that district superintendents

should hold meetings on the plans — not the delegates.

But Pinson has made himself available to speak at churches.

"I personally have been invited to be in a different congregation almost every Sunday since this summer," he said. "I hear what they have to say, and I tell them what's going on."

Some delegations have gone farther than traditional listening sessions.

Crouch, for example, asked some of his fellow North Texas delegates to organize three meetings where representatives of Reconciling Ministries Network, Uniting Methodists and evangelical groups could make their case for the denomination's future.

"What my committee told these advocacy groups is, 'This is your hour-and-a-half. You design it any way you want to have it go. We're here to listen and learn,'" Crouch said.

Some chairs are quick to say their delegation has already decided which legislative plan to back. For example, the Rocky Mountain Conference delegation is part of a Western Jurisdiction endorsement of the One Church Plan,



which would shift decisions about ordaining gay persons or holding same-sex unions to the conference and church levels.

"We're giving (One Church) full-throated support," said the Rev. Kent Ingram, chair of the Rocky Mountain delegation.

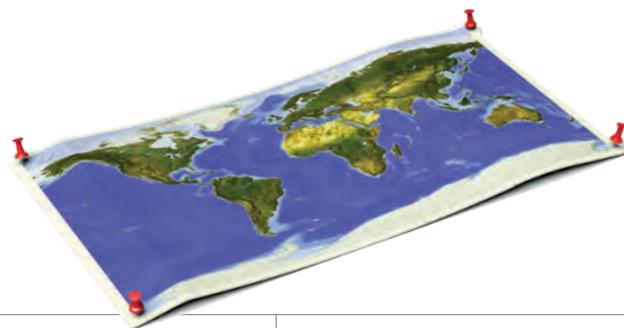
In the Zimbabwe East Conference delegation, support is strong for the Traditional Plan, which would retain church law restrictions against ordination of gay clergy and same-sex unions, and provide stricter enforcement.

"We want to maintain our position as a church and do not want to be swept away by

Mathew Pinson chairs the North Georgia Conference delegation to the special called session of General Conference, set for Feb. 23-26 in St. Louis. Pinson has been visiting conference churches nearly every Sunday for months, answering questions about the legislative plans to be considered by delegates. Photo courtesy North Georgia Conference.

(Con't. on next page: "ST. LOUIS.")

# The United Methodist connection in THE WORLD



("ST. LOUIS," cont. from page 13.)

other influences," said the Rev. Annie Grace Chingonzo, Zimbabwe East delegation chair.

Within the East Ohio Conference delegation, there will likely be votes for both the One Church and Traditional Plan, said chair Allen Laferty.

He added that a lack of unanimity hasn't kept delegates from getting along or getting their preparation done.

"I'm proud of my delegation," he said. "We're a great example of how the church could work together."

## Only three days

Delegation chairs are definitely aware of concerns about how the General Conference will play out. High on that list is that this meeting is only about half the length of a regular General Conference, with just three days allotted for legislative work.

"Time is something I hear a lot of folks express anxiety around. 'How can we possibly get through all these petitions?'" said Allen, the Upper New York Conference delegation chair.

The question of which bishops will be presiding has taken on heightened importance.

"Some of our bishops are very good at that, some are not. And some are very identified with one side or another," said the Rev. Chappell Temple, Texas Conference delegation co-chair.

There's concern too about the possibility of protests by those demanding full inclusion of LGBTQ persons in the denomination. Such a demonstration prompted the 2012 General Conference in Tampa to take an early lunch recess, with resumption of work delayed well into the afternoon by conference officials' negotiations with protesters.

"We really do not have that choice in St. Louis," Allen said, referring to the short time frame.

The special General Conference will see essentially the same delegates and delegation chairs as served in Portland at the 2016 General Conference.

That's an advantage, Crouch believes.

"These are all now very experienced delegates," he said.

For Emma Cantor, who chairs the two-person North Central Philippines Conference delegation, the experience factor combined with extensive prepara-

tions bodes well.

"I think we have enough orientation regarding the General Conference, helping us to seriously participate in an open, loving discussion," she said.

And just as the interest level has been high, so has the level of prayer.

"I don't think I've ever experienced as many people intentionally praying for a General Conference as I have this time," Allen said. "That is really encouraging."

Pinson has urged a combination of prayer and Bible reading for the North Georgia delegation. His specific reading assignments include the Gospel of John, chapter 17, which includes Jesus' Farewell Prayer, also called the High Priestly Prayer (John 17: 1-26).

The prayer is, in no small measure, about Christian unity.

"That's the best preparation you can have for going into this General Conference," Pinson said. 

*—Hodges is a Dallas-based writer for United Methodist News Service. Eveline Chikwanah and Gladys Mangiduyos contributed. Contact Hodges at 615-742-5470 or newsdesk@umnews.org. To read more United Methodist news, subscribe to the free Daily or Weekly Digests.*

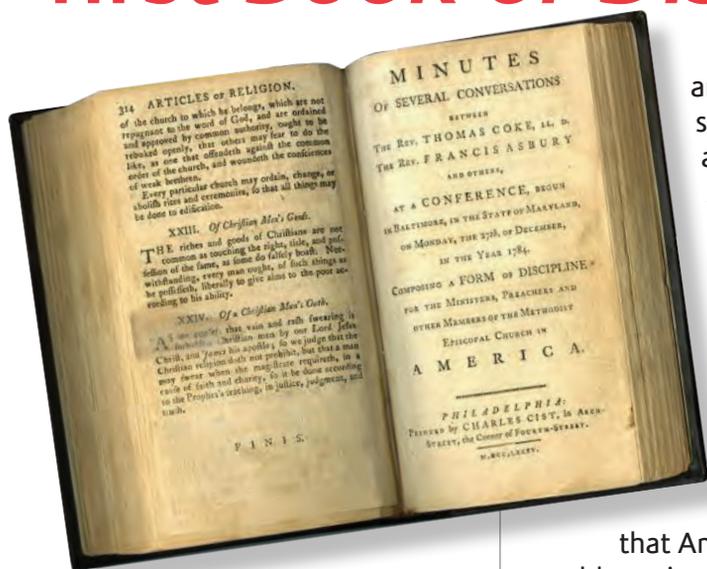
The Rev. Bill Allen chairs the Upper New York Conference delegation as it prepares for the special called session of General Conference, set for Feb. 23-26 in St. Louis. Photo courtesy Upper New York Conference.





# EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY

## Ask The UMC: When was the first *Book of Discipline* created?



First Published Jan. 15, 2019 by United Methodist Communications Facebook217TwitterPrintEmail

The first *Book of Discipline* was adopted in 1784 at the historic Christmas Conference, which established the Methodist Episcopal Church in America, to serve as the governing document for the new church.

It was originally titled “Minutes of Several Conversations Between The Rev. Thomas Coke, The Rev. Francis Asbury and Others ... Composing a Form of Discipline for the Ministers, Preachers and other Members of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America.”

The 1784 edition contained 81 questions and answers, following the format John Wesley modeled in the “Large Minutes” of the conferences in England.

Among other things, this first *Discipline* explained the roles, duties and expectations of clergy

and members, specified rules for administering the sacraments, set a common salary for pastors, and called for pastors to attend carefully to their diet as well as their spiritual practices.

The *Discipline* declared that American Methodists would continue Wesley’s mission to spread scriptural holiness across the land.

Question 4 asked, “What may we reasonably believe to be God’s Design in raising up the Preachers called Methodists?” Answer: “To reform the Continent and to spread scriptural Holiness over these Lands.”

The volume also included the Articles of Religion, The Sunday Service and the Collection of Psalms and Hymns sent by Wesley to the American Methodists. Today, we find these resources in three different volumes: the *Discipline*, *Book of Worship*, and *United Methodist Hymnal*.

In 1786, a revised edition was published, the last to include the Sunday Service. Each year through 1792, the *Discipline* was revised and published in a new edition because the General Conference met annually. Since 1792, General Conference began

to meet and revise the *Discipline* once every four years. These revisions addressed the specific circumstances and current realities the church experienced at that time.

The latter part of the 19th century saw a sea change in the format of the *Book of Discipline* in both The Methodist Episcopal Church and The Methodist Episcopal Church, South. It shifted from being a document of questions with answers, toward more of a legal manual with directives and mandated structures. This reflected the reality that the churches had become vast in size both geographically and numerically, and more complicated in structure. Their guiding document needed to be more specific and less open to interpretation so Methodists across the entire continent could function as one coordinated body.

Today, we continue the practice of amending, clarifying and perfecting the *Discipline* in light of the current missional settings around the world. The *Discipline* remains “the most current statement of how United Methodists agree to live their lives together and ‘maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.’” (2016 *Book of Discipline*, Episcopal Greetings) 📖

—This content was produced by Ask The UMC, a ministry of United Methodist Communications.

# Anticipating Gener



Members of the Council of Bishops listen as Bishop Bruce R. Ough reads a statement about sexuality and the church from the Council at the 2016 United Methodist General Conference in Portland, Ore. The Council of Bishops has called a special General Conference on Feb. 23-26, 2019 to take up bishops' proposals related to church unity and homosexuality. File photo by Paul Jeffrey, UMNS.

# al Conference 2019



**T**he Council of Bishops called a Special Session of General Conference to act on the Commission on a Way Forward's report. The 32-member commission was appointed by the Council of Bishops following General Conference 2016 to examine paragraphs concerning human sexuality in the *Book of Discipline* and to explore how the unity of the church could be strengthened. The Special Session will be held Feb. 23-26, 2019 in St. Louis, Missouri.

The delegates for General Conference 2016, who were elected in their annual conference, will be the delegates for 2019.

Learn more about the Commission on a Way Forward: [www.umc.org/who-we-are/commission-on-a-way-forward](http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/commission-on-a-way-forward).

Read the final report from the commission: [www.umc.org/topics/general-conference-2019-special-session](http://www.umc.org/topics/general-conference-2019-special-session).



From left, Ms. Martha Stokes, Bishop Lewis and the Rev. Tom Berlin at the Commission on a Way Forward Q&A event held in September at Reveille UMC in Richmond and livestreamed throughout the conference at 10 other sites and online.



# Virginia delegation prepares for Special Session

By Forrest White

**M**artha Stokes vividly remembers the moment at the 2015 session of the Virginia Annual Conference in Roanoke.

The time had come for the vote on delegates to the 2016 United Methodist General Conference in Portland, Oregon, where many expected resolution to the denomination’s long-standing debate over same-sex marriage rites, ordination of self-avowing LGBTQ clergy and whether homosexuality is “incompatible with Christian teaching” as stated in the *Book of Discipline*.

Stokes knew how it worked — the first elected lay person would be the chair of the delegation.

She sat next to Angie Williams, a friend and one-time colleague on the conference staff.

Her heartbeat was quick, her body tense.

The first name appeared on the screen and ...

It was hers.

She barely had time to turn to Williams before her cellphone buzzed.

“I was sitting there in a little bit of shock and I got a text from (Rev.) **Tom Berlin**,” Stokes said. “It said, ‘Congratulations, I’ve got a gift for you.’ In my naïve way of thinking, I thought, ‘Isn’t that nice!’”

After the vote to form the delegation was complete, she found Berlin.

His gift to her?

A thumb drive filled with information she would need for the journey that began right there in the Berglund Center in Roanoke and, because the gathering in Portland didn’t yield resolution, won’t end until the Special Session of the General Conference set for the America’s Center Convention Complex in St. Louis, Missouri, Feb. 23-26.

“Over the last few months I’ve told people this has been like the longest roller coaster ride you can

ever experience,” Stokes said. “You get up on this high peak, like being on a mountaintop experience, and you feel so close to God and then it just drops off and you’re trying to hold on to the seat and your emotions run the total opposite.”

## A diverse delegation

In many ways, the Virginia delegation — 11 laity, 11 clergy — reflects The United Methodist Church as a whole.

There is not consensus among the members over the plans presented by the Commission on a Way Forward, nor is there consensus for a desired outcome of the gathering in St. Louis.

“I can very honestly say that all of the Virginia delegation does not think the same,” Stokes said. “There is difference among us.”

During a September event held at Reveille UMC in Richmond and livestreamed at 10 sites around the conference as well as online, Berlin, also a delegate, shared his great hope for St. Louis as passage of the Commission’s One Church Plan because he said it provides a “generous unity.”

That plan, Berlin said, honors the fact that The United Methodist Church has progressive and traditional people, as well as “a whole bunch of us in the middle” with some leaning left and some leaning right and it tries to “create a space for everyone.”

In January, when *The Virginia Advocate* invited each of the 22 delegates to respond to a set of questions, the Rev. Rob Vaughn, lead pastor of Community UMC in Herndon said: “My greatest hope

is we will end the discrimination of persons who identify as gay or lesbian while maintaining our unity and mission of this beautiful, life-changing, hope-providing, large-tent, global body of Christ.”

**Delegation member Joyce Winston** turned to Scripture when describing her hope: “That we will know and vote according to God’s will. That we will remember Romans 12:2, ‘Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.’”

## A charge to keep

Delegates were elected in 2015 not to find consensus among them; they were charged with diving deep into the discernment process and ultimately voting their conscience, Berlin said at the Reveille event.

By the time they arrive in St. Louis, they will have been to-

gether for more than 44 months.

Stokes said it felt like it was a full-time job to prepare for 2016 General Conference.

“I was wrong,” she said. “Looking back over these last six months, that was a part-time job.”

Since July 1, 2018, Stokes has:

- ❖ Made nine presentations in local churches
- ❖ Conducted nine district sessions
- ❖ Participated in the Reveille UMC event with Berlin and Bishop Sharma D. Lewis
- ❖ Held three delegation meetings
- ❖ Attended two meetings with delegation chairs and other leaders from around the Southeastern Jurisdiction
- ❖ Attended three General Conference-related meetings at the Virginia Conference level



A behind-the-scenes look at the Sept. 2018 Q&A event.

## Change is inevitable



Martha Stokes

It has been hard work of the mind, body and soul for Stokes and each of the delegates.

Change for the denomination is inevitable, Stokes conceded, saying, "We realize that no matter what happens in St. Louis, there are going to be people on either end of

the theological spectrum who say, 'This is enough' or there are a lot of people who are really tired of this being the main focus of our conversation together."

A delegate at the April 1972 General Conference in Atlanta, Georgia, led to the first public debate on homosexuality in the denomination and ended with an addition to *The Book of Discipline* which read: "The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching."

That debate has continued and intensified over time in the UMC, as other denominations wrestled with issues related to human sexuality and inclusivity and at times splintered at least in part over the issue.

"I am hopeful because my faith does not depend upon the church remaining the same. I believe that God is doing a new thing, no matter what we do or what we vote or what we legislate or what we desire."

— The Rev. Tammy Estep

"I am hopeful because my faith does not depend upon the church remaining the same," said the Rev. **Tammy Estep**, delegate and senior pastor of Haygood UMC, Virginia Beach. "I believe that God is doing a new thing, no matter what we do or what we

vote or what we legislate or what we desire.

"As for me and my household, we will follow the love of Jesus the Christ wherever Christ leads us. And we will do so with great gratitude for The United Methodist Church that raised me in God's prevenient, justifying and sanctifying grace and taught me that God's love embraces all."

**Delegate Darlene Amon** has encountered lots of church folks who believe traveling to St. Louis is simply a waste of time, she said, that the outcome is a "done deal" based on historical leanings and speculation as to how delegates from around the world will vote.

"Not true. It is not a done deal!" Amon said. "Furthermore, it's imperative to keep an open mind (read, study, listen) then allow the working of the Holy Spirit in the decision process."

Stokes included an "outcome" slide in her presentation power point with four scenarios and her educated guess as to the likelihood of each coming to fruition. They are:

A Commission on a Way Forward plan adopted as presented <b>DOUBTFUL</b>	A Commission on a Way Forward plan adopted with amendments <b>HOPEFUL</b>
A different plan brought to the floor and adopted <b>MAYBE</b>	Nothing changes <b>POSSIBLE</b>

Delegates described their journey as ranging from deeply spiritual to frustrating and unpleasant at times, from humbling and an honor to one that sometimes wakes them in the night only to be calmed by prayer.

"My lasting thought is of Christ in the garden being extremely patient and loving with each of us called United Methodists," **delegate Warren Harper** said.

With the world watching, those involved hope the Christ-like patience and love undergirds the proceedings in St. Louis.

"My greatest fear is that the delegates will treat



each other with distrust and malice as they did in Portland when we reflected the world rather than Christ in the way we treated one another,” Estep said.

Vaughn expressed a similar fear.

“I fear that we will reflect the political chaos in the United States, remaining in our identity silos, rather than be open to the movement of the Holy Spirit crafting way to be the transforming body of Christ for all in our denomination,” he said.

This long rollercoaster ride?

The end is in sight.

When asked to describe her feelings with her time in St. Louis drawing near, **delegate Alison Malloy** said, “Aware. Anxious. Prepared. Unprepared. At peace. Like I know nothing. As if I’ve been training for this time my whole life.”

Stokes offered a final request for all United Methodists in the Virginia Conference.

“No matter what happens in St. Louis, love us,” she said. “Remember we’ve got to come back. We have to be back in our local church, to our jobs. Just remember to love us.”

– Forrest White is news associate with the conference Communications office.

## Virginia delegation takes time for prayer before General Conference 2019

By Madeline Pillow

The Virginia delegation to General Conference held a time of retreat on January 25, 2019 at the Roslyn Retreat Center in Richmond. The retreat was also open to other clergy and laity who wanted to participate in this time of prayer with the delegation. The retreat provided time for prayer, discernment and centering prior to the Special Session of General Conference which will be held in St. Louis from Feb. 23-26.

**Danielle Hettmann**, a young adult in the conference, offered her leadership in planning and organizing the retreat.

“The Virginia delegation first discussed the re-



“General Conference should be approached with such care and preparation which our delegates have faithfully done.”

– Danielle Hettmann

treat as a time of prayer, discernment and centering ahead of their last delegation meeting,” Hettmann said. “Since each of them is intently focused on their preparations, I’m helping bring that vision to reality by being the hands and feet to make the event possible. We currently have clergy and laity, delegates and non-delegates, scheduled to attend. I hope that attendees come away feeling centered and leave with a renewed focus on who God calls each of them to be.”

As the General Conference draws closer, Hettmann emphasized that the retreat did not focus specifically on the discussion of legislation but rather preparation in another way.

“General Conference should be approached with such care and preparation which our delegates have faithfully done. This retreat time will provide a space that will not focus specifically on discussion of legislation or preparation but instead provide a space for processing, reflection, and focus as we



Joy Crawford led the retreat participants in a time of guided meditation.

walk forward together.”

As part of the retreat time, **Joy Crawford**, director of youth and adult formation at Welborne UMC in Richmond and who holds a certificate in spiritual

guidance from Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation, led participants in a time of guided meditation.

As well the **Very Rev. Ian S. Markham**, dean of Virginia Theological Seminary, spoke about the similar journey the Episcopal Church took in the last couple of decades and where The United Methodist Church now finds itself.



The Very Rev. Ian S. Markham

He expressed admiration that the delegation was making sure to take out time for prayer during this process. He reflected back on the similar conversations the Episcopal Church has had in the last two decades related to human sexuality and how United Methodists are now entering

into territory where the Episcopal Church had once been.

“The Episcopalians and the United Methodists have the same danger,” said Markham. “We have to make sure that we remain church.”

He shared that it is important to appreciate conservatives who can be the voice of constantly asking, is this work of God?

“Because not everything is,” said Markham.

He also shared the importance of the hard work of prophetic discernment and staying in conversation with as many people as we can.

Throughout the process of arguing about human sexuality in the Episcopal Church, Markham said that in the denouement of that work and how it af-



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affected the church, it was important that they constantly reach out to each other and to build bridges with one another.

During his talk, Markham shared four principles for staying in conversation with one another which he considers a spiritual discipline.

- ❖ **I always recognize all the things that bind me to my sister and brother in Christ. We share so much.**
- ❖ **I always aspire to sit with, understand, those who disagree.**
- ❖ **I always seek to state the position I don't hold with as much fairness as can muster.**
- ❖ **I always seek to pray with, understand, and serve the other.**

Markham said of disagreement:

"I always tell students you are never allowed to disagree with somebody until you can state their position accurately and in such a way that illustrates that you get it and that if somebody else was listening they might be persuaded. When you tick that box, then you allowed to say this is where I have a problem."

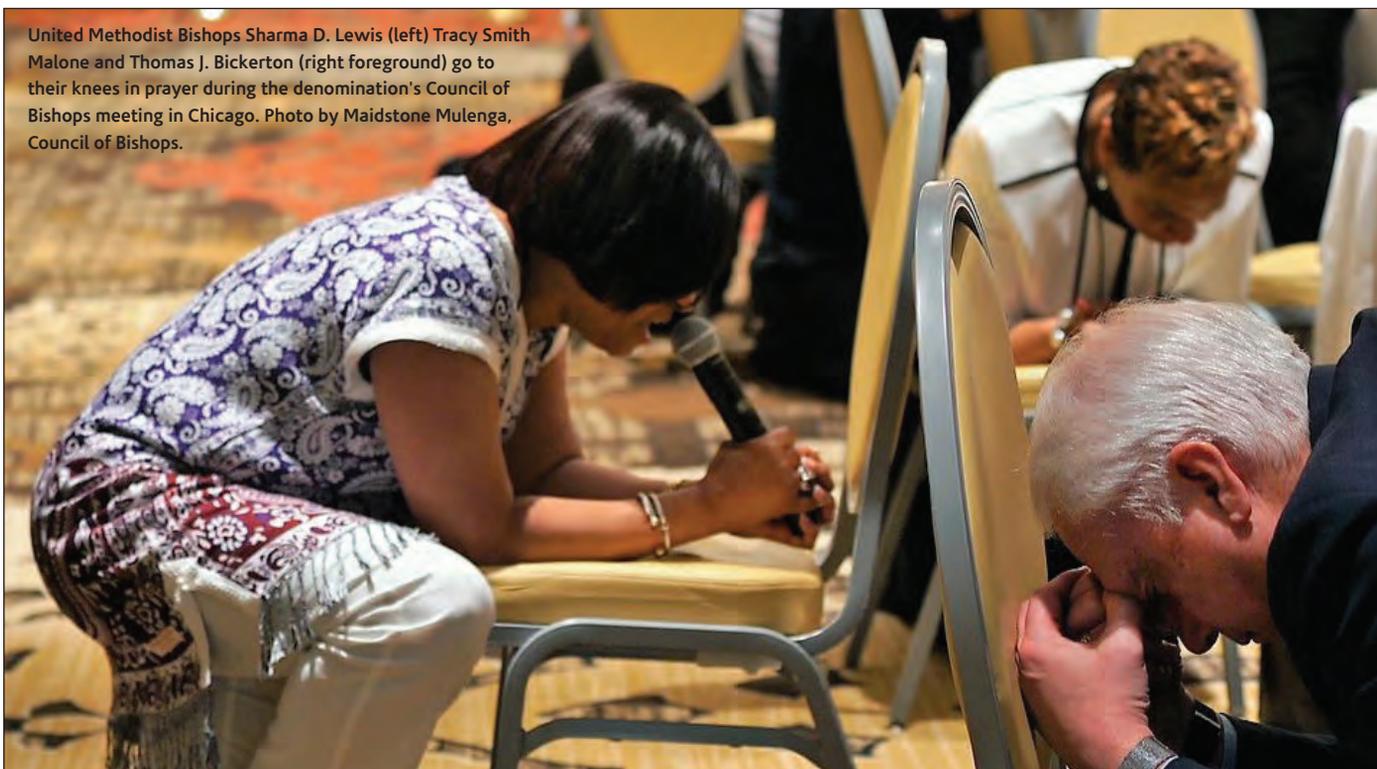
Markham concluded by sharing that the delegation and conference can help in the days following General Conference to emphasize seeing the humanity in each other and in those with which we disagree.

"Make it a human issue and prepare people to see that the ties that connect us are worth cherishing, feeding and supporting."

The following day, the delegation met for their final meeting to discuss the three plans coming before General Conference and the ruling from the Judicial Council in October. 🇺🇸

– Madeline Pillow is the editor of the Advocate magazine.

United Methodist Bishops Sharma D. Lewis (left) Tracy Smith Malone and Thomas J. Bickerton (right foreground) go to their knees in prayer during the denomination's Council of Bishops meeting in Chicago. Photo by Maidstone Mulenga, Council of Bishops.



# Work group formed by Bishop focuses on 'way forward'

By Madeline Pillow

A work group formed by Bishop Sharma D. Lewis has been meeting since July 2, 2018 to discuss the work of the Commission on a Way Forward and in anticipation of the results from the Special Session of General Conference (GC) in 2019.

Known as the Bishop's Way Forward Work Group, its members represent individuals involved with clergy and laity of the conference as well as those related to the financial considerations of the Virginia Conference.

Meeting once a month, the group has met to interpret the work of the commission and the possibilities of GC 2019 to seek clarity for clergy and laity and to provide answers to their questions.

Their meetings have led to several actions including:

- ❖ The live Sept. 26 Q&A event that featured Martha Stokes, the Rev. Tom Berlin and Bishop Lewis answering questions about the work of the Commission and GC 2019.
- ❖ *The Six Guiding Principles* shared by Bishop Lewis.
- ❖ A letter in December to both clergy and laity concerning Bishop Lewis' outlook on GC 2019 and resources for local churches

In her December letter to clergy and laity, Bishop Lewis said she hoped that all could be a non-anxious presence in spite of disagreement, anger or fear.

"As we prepare for this Special Session of General Conference, I call upon you, members of the Virginia Conference, to be a non-anxious presence. Lean away from fear and lean on God. Lean away from uncertainty and lean into the mission of your local churches. God is here and God is doing something immeasurably more than we know how to ask to imagine."

To find all the news and updates concerning the work of the Commission on a Way Forward and GC 2019, visit <https://vaumc.org/GC2019>.

– Madeline Pillow is the editor of the Advocate magazine.

## Bishop Lewis' Guiding Principles

1

Clergy and laity are to lead with a non-anxious presence.

2

Pray for our church's mission and Way Forward daily.

3

Pursuit of the UMC mission: "to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world."

4

Pursuit of the VAUMC vision: "to make disciples of Jesus Christ who are lifelong learners who influence others to serve."

5

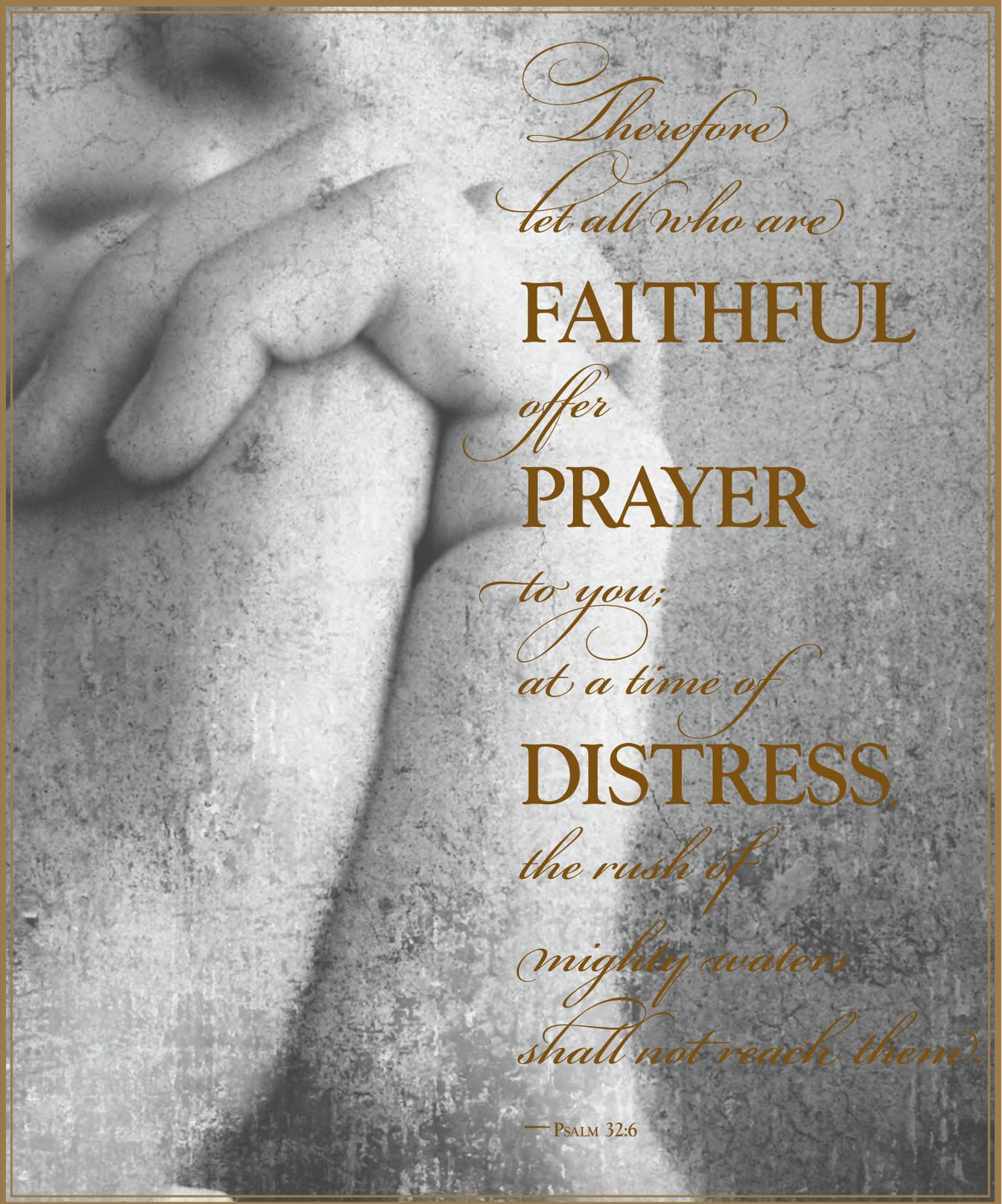
Strive for unity in the Virginia Annual Conference.

6

Keeping our promises as an Annual Conference. (i.e. related to pensions and healthcare for retired clergy and global commitment to mission)

View Bishop Lewis' Six Guiding Principles related to GC 2019: <https://vimeo.com/manage/293610770/general>

You can view Bishop Lewis' letter to the laity: [vaumc.org/ncfilerepository/BishopLewis/BishopslettertolaityDec2018.pdf](https://vaumc.org/ncfilerepository/BishopLewis/BishopslettertolaityDec2018.pdf).



*Therefore  
let all who are*

**FAITHFUL**

*offer*

**PRAYER**

*to you;*

*at a time of*

**DISTRESS,**

*the rush of*

*mighty waters*

*shall not reach them.*

— PSALM 32:6



Bishop W. Earl Bledsoe prays with a small group at General Conference 2016 in this file photo by Maile Bradfield, UMNS

*O, Lord,  
hear our  
prayers*

**R**ight now, Jesus, we need a miracle. Turn the water of our church's conferencing procedures into the wine of your Holy Spirit's powerful guidance. Give us the wisdom to understand your will for this church. And then, whatever you ask of us, give us the courageous faith to do it.

May our church become more truly yours, as we let go of our need to control it and we entrust our future to you. We ask this in the sacred name of the Holy Trinity. Amen.

– Virginia Greer



**G**racious and loving Jesus we in the United Methodist Church pray this day and for many days ahead for your Divine presence among us as a church. We especially pray for your tender touch and word on our Virginia Delegation. I pray I may be and all delegates may be touched by prayers from afar as I and we struggle with listening, praying and discerning legislation as it is very quickly placed before all 864 delegates. May we hear those prayers from our Conference as questions are asked and votes taken. May prayers strengthen our delegates spirits and bodies as they grow weary. Bring us to full attention by the power of your holy spirit dear Jesus. Allow me to listen with quiet assurance that your will be done. In the mighty name of our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ. Amen

– Warren R. Harper

**C**reating, Redeeming and Sustaining God: We give you thanks for the redeeming, transforming love you pour into our lives through the life, death and resurrection of your son, our savior Christ the Lord.

We give you thanks for your United Methodist Church that seeks to make disciples of Christ so that you may transform the world.

Now as we gather in St. Louis for our 2019 General Conference. . .

We ask that you grant traveling mercies to all who attend.

We ask that you would bless the delegates with an openness to your will with peace in our hearts.

We pray together that you would still our hearts and minds so that we may listen to you.

We pray together that you would still our hearts and minds so that we may listen to each other.

We pray that our next steps would be anointed by your Holy Spirit.

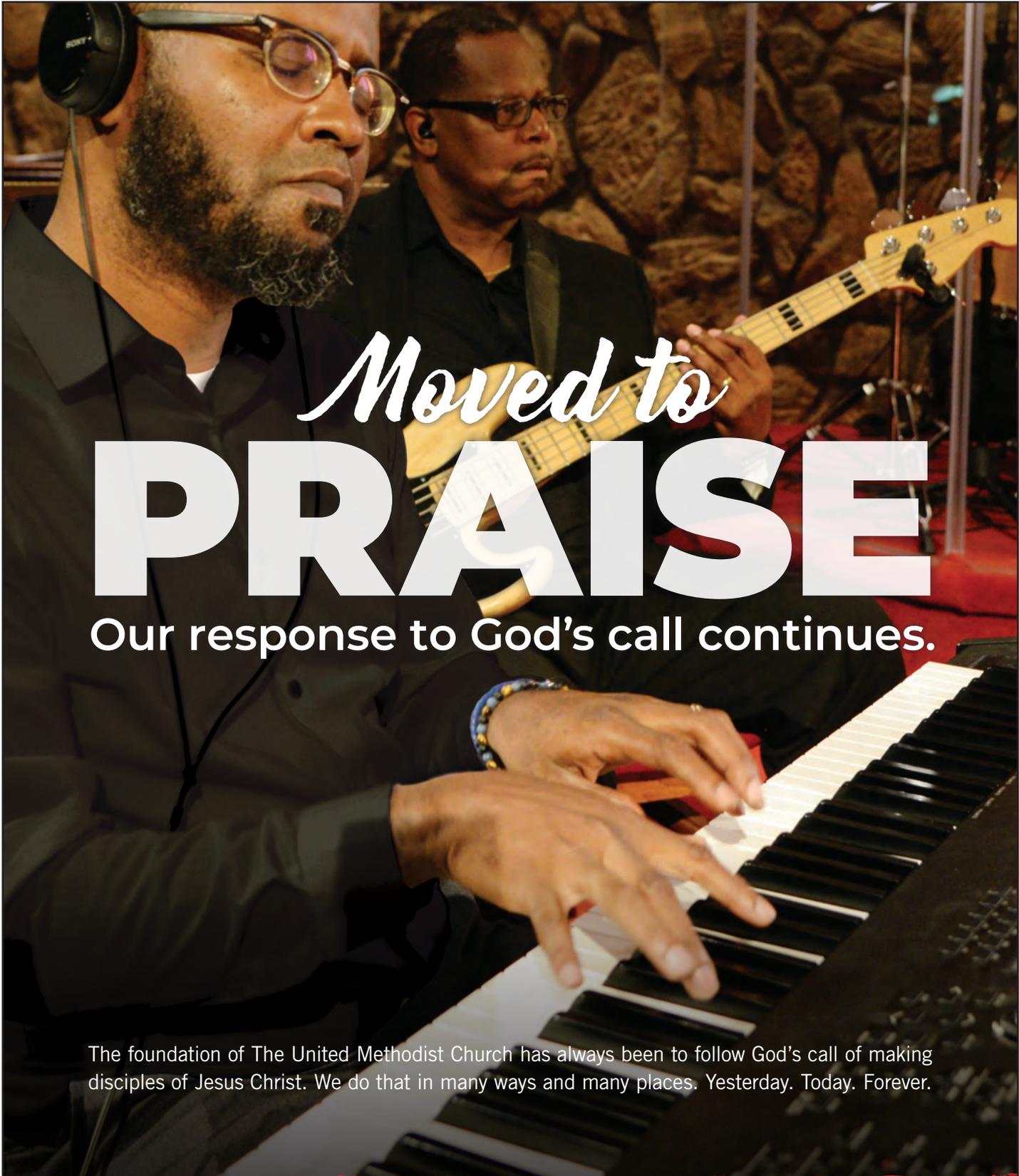
May our gathering and work together, in the midst of our world and especially in our country so divided by fear, be a global witness to the redeeming and reconciling power of the Cross.

We ask this in the name of Christ our Lord. May it be so. Amen and Amen.

– The Rev. Mark Ogren

**D**ear Lord, I pray for guidance, I pray for clarity, I pray of wisdom, and I pray for peace. Take away my anger and frustration so that I may recognize your voice rather than my own. When I speak with someone whom I don't like or agree with help me to remember that you love them. I pray we choose Your Will. Amen.

– Beth Christian



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# EVENTS

## MARCH

### Clergy Spouses Retreat March 8-9, 2019, Camp Overlook, Harrisonburg, Va.

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

Conference for 20 years. She co-founded Artos Retreats two years ago out of a calling to improve the well-being of clergy spouses through connection and learning. Before starting Artos, Anderman provided independent instructional design and communications consulting for over 20 years. She has facilitated small group learning in both corporate and church environments for 25 years. Cost is \$100 which includes accommodations and meals. The gathering time is 2 p.m. program beginning at 4 p.m. on Friday, March 8. For questions, contact Judy Hall at (804) 264-0524. Learn more at the conference website at [www.vaumc.org](http://www.vaumc.org) and click "Conference Calendar" at the top right corner.

### Bishop Lewis "Chat and Chews 3.0" March and April 2019, Various locations around the conference

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

- ❖ Saturday, March 23, 2019: Western Group (Charlottesville, Harrisonburg, Staunton, Winchester) Location: St. Paul's UMC in Staunton
- ❖ Saturday, April 6, 2019: Southwestern Group (Roanoke, Lynchburg, Farmville, Danville) Location: TBD
- ❖ Saturday, April 13, 2019: Eastern Group (Eastern Shore, Elizabeth River, James River York River) Location: TBD

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

Please contact your district superintendent with any questions.

### Goodson Academy of Preaching March 27-28, 2019, Trinity UMC, Richmond

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

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

# LIVING THE WORD



*The Rev. Drew VanDyke Colby is a product of God's grace and the Virginia Conference of The United Methodist Church. He's an elder currently serving as associate pastor for Youth, Young Adults and Outreach at St. Stephen's on the Alexandria District. He loves his family, his neighbors, his church, his musical instrument collection*

## March 3 Luke 14:7-14

Just before this Scripture, Jesus has healed a man with dropsy on the Sabbath. Today we would call it edema, an issue of chronic inflammation and fluid build-up. Jesus ministered to him by healing him. We might even say he was healed because Jesus deflated him.

Maybe the dinner guests were puffed up too, in a different way. It appears a few of them got into a bit of a scuffle, jockeying for the seat of honor. They must have felt deflated when Jesus spoke up and humbled their attempts at self-exaltation.

And then, imagine being a slave in the room when he mentioned that the true honored guests ought to be the lowly among us. I imagine the slaves not feeling puffed-up, per se, but certainly feeling noticed in a new way. Filled, perhaps?

The truth about the humility pointed to in this gospel story is that, for the most part, we don't willingly humble ourselves. In fact, at a profound level, in our sin-sickness we cannot humble ourselves. We are turned in on ourselves and puffed up in ways we cannot see.

The good news is that Christ humbled himself for us. In his life, and ultimately in his death, he humbled himself and gave himself up for us: the puffed up and the lowly alike. Therefore, he was exalted so that at his name we are all driven to bow in adoration and humility.

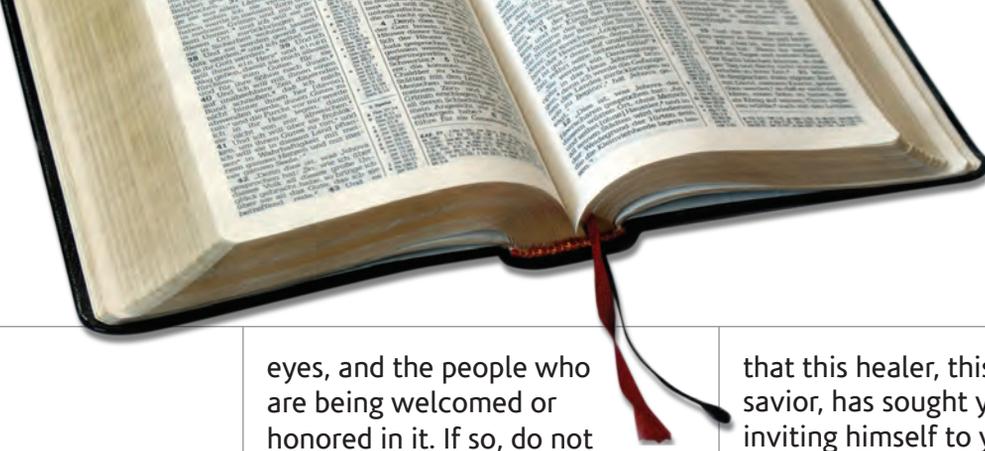
Today our healing comes through hearing the good news that the One who is exalted over us welcomes us all to his table. And it is at that table that we are healed. The puffed up are mercifully deflated, and the lowly are filled. Thanks be to God.

## March 10 Mark 1: 16-20 and Luke 14:25-33

*"For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it?"*

Is it worth it? Is saying no to some things so that you can say yes to Christ worth it? Is giving up a percentage of your income as a gift to God to fund the ministry of the church worth it? Is giving up a weekend to spend it on a youth retreat worth it? Is spending money on making our church more hospitable to folks with disabilities worth it? Is handing over our church building to a new congregation because they have new energy to reach this community worth it? Is listening to the folks that complain and proceeding anyway worth it? Is holding my tongue because I might be wrong worth it? Is sitting in the same pew with my political opposite worth it? Is having a conversation with them worth it? Is praying for them worth it? Is funding the ministry of growing churches in other parts of the world worth it? Is giving something up for Lent worth it? Is facing conflict honestly worth it? Is compromising on some principles worth it? Is sticking to some principles worth it? Is being a Christian, following Christ, enduring life in The United Methodist Church these days ... Is it worth it?

Jesus Christ knew we'd ask these questions. In fact, he suggests that we should. I don't know the answer to all of them. But I do know one thing. At some point, when God was looking out over creation, the Spirit raised the question "Is it worth it?" and that's when from the Father came the Word: "Yes."



## March 17

### Luke 15

The religious experts are complaining about the company the Teacher keeps; so he tells them some stories. We are familiar with the image of God revealed in these parables. It's true that God seeks out the lost recklessly like that shepherd. And that God is crazed with concern for the world like the widow looking for her coin. God is, at all times, peering from the porch for the wayward son to come home like that father and, for that, we rejoice.

It is also true, however, that God is in Christ the Son who chose to go wayward, entering the far off country to be with us. Christ is the prodigal son who resorts to vile dissolute living, squandering his wealth (elsewhere referred to as his "equality with God") by picking up the tab for drunken sinners like us, even to the point of death, paying the "tab" with his own life.

But... early in the morning, on the third day, he was raised, and he began his journey home. And when he arrived there, there was a celebration. Jesus, the prodigal son, returned and was given the name above all names. The robe and ring reserved for the Father alone were now his. And every day there is rejoicing for each sinner who follows him home.

You may be one of them. Or, you may be on the outside, like the scribes and Pharisees (the ones for whom the story was told). You may be uncomfortable with the feast before you

eyes, and the people who are being welcomed or honored in it. If so, do not be afraid. Instead, remember this word spoken from God to you too, "All that is mine, is yours. Rejoice."

## March 24

### Luke 19:1-10

I was in Mozambique on a UMC trip a few years back when I met a man named James. Among other things, he and I bonded over music. I recorded a bunch of the songs he and my new friends sang for us. One of my favorite songs he taught me while we were together was a Xitswa song (one of the Bantu languages spoken in Mozambique).

The verses told the story of Luke 19, Christ encountering Zacchaeus; but the chorus was my favorite. James sang "Manya Zacceo" which translates to "Run, Zacchaeus! Run! For I'm coming to your house today."

Of course it reminded me of similar songs I learned as a child. But, as James and his choir sang, the image that came was a break-neck-paced run. Remembering it now, I'm swept up in the thought of being Zacchaeus, hiding up in a tree, not just because I'm small but because I'm too ashamed to encounter Christ in the open. And Zacchaeus was right to feel ashamed. He's an extortionist, the villain in the story. Nonetheless, Christ sought him out and said "Manya Zacceo. I'm coming to your house."

Imagine the thrill of knowing

that this healer, this teacher, this savior, has sought you out and is inviting himself to your house regardless of your stature or shame. It is the thrill of the woman at the well running to tell her neighbors about this man. It is the speed of the women running from the empty tomb. It is the lack of shame of Peter leaping out of the boat to swim toward the risen Christ. So, to you, reader, I say, "Run. Run as fast as you can to meet Christ. Christ has died. Christ is Risen. And he's coming to your house today."

## March 31

### Matthew 4: 12-22

Have you heard the worship song written by Matt Crocker, Joel Houston, and Salomon Lighthelm called "Oceans"? I will be honest with you VAUMC family, I'm not that into contemporary Christian music. Even when you call it "modern" to try and trick me, I'm still usually not a fan. I'm not saying you shouldn't be a fan. I'm simply saying I'm not often a fan. I confess to being a church music snob. I hope you can forgive me.

And, if only for the fact that it gets used so much, "Oceans" is one of my least favorite. It's not for any good reason. The theology isn't that bad. The music isn't that bad. I just can't stand it. I'd explain it if I could, but I can't, so I won't.

*(Con't on page 32: "LIVING WORD")*

The 2019 Living the Word devotions are from the *Standard Lesson Commentary* from Cokesbury. Note: you can follow the February readings for the 2019 Bible Challenge from Bishop Lewis on pg. 34.

# CLERGY & DIACONAL



## DEATHS



**The Rev. Eugene O. Setchel**, 87, died Dec. 31, 2018, in Florida. He began his ministerial career in 1967

at Greenville. He went on to serve McKenney, Princess Anne Plaza, Memorial in the former Petersburg District, Bethany in Gloucester, Great Falls, and Otterbein in the Harrisonburg District.



**The Rev. Troy Michael "Mickey" White**, 81, of Vinton died Dec. 15, 2018. He was in his 15th year of serving Parrish Chapel United

Methodist Church in Bedford County at the time of his death.

**Marion Haverty Hamm**, 89, of Richmond died on Dec. 25, 2018. She was the widow of **the Rev. John Madison Hamm**.

**The Rev. Michael Johnathan Quist**, 50, died Dec. 22, 2018. His sister, **the Rev. Joanna Dietz**, is minister of Mission and Service at Braddock Street UMC in Winchester. Quist was the lead pastor at First United Methodist Church in Mercedes, Texas.

**The Rev. Henry E. Riley Jr.**, 86, died Dec. 18, 2018. He served as superintendent of the Farmville

District from 1988-1994 and then served as senior pastor of Fredericksburg UMC until his retirement in 1997. Before becoming superintendent he served as pastor at Laurel Park, Forest Road, Appomattox, Aldersgate (Chesapeake), Beulah (Richmond) and Granbery Memorial.

**Phyllis Clark**, 81, of Roanoke died Dec. 17. Her son-in-law, **the Rev. Tim Gearheart**, is pastor of Wesley Memorial UMC Martinsville.

**Patricia Sands Hepler** died Dec. 6, 2018. She was the wife of **William E. "Bill" Hepler**, a retired local pastor in the Virginia Conference.

**Peggy Joyce Cormany Jones**, 79, died Dec. 5, 2018. She was the wife of **the Rev. LeRoy V. Jones**, retired.

**Donald Lee (Donnie) Barbour**, 73, of Martinsville, Va., died Jan. 13, 2019. His daughter, **the Rev. Amanda B. Harris**, serves the Axton Charge in the Danville District.

**Marion Ruth MacMillan Moody**, 92, widow of **the Rev. Henry Moody**, died Jan. 14, 2019. She was a resident at The Hermitage in Roanoke. A memorial service was held at Central United Methodist Church in Salem on Jan. 26. ❧



("LIVING WORD" con't from previous page.)

I only bring it up because so much of this week's Scripture is in reference to water, the sea, and the shore. John the Baptist, the one who spent his ministry in the water, dunking people in it, has been arrested. Then Jesus crosses the Jordan into Galilee by the sea where, while walking on the shore, he calls first Simon and Andrew, then James and John. They were all working in the sea, but when called, they left immediately and followed.

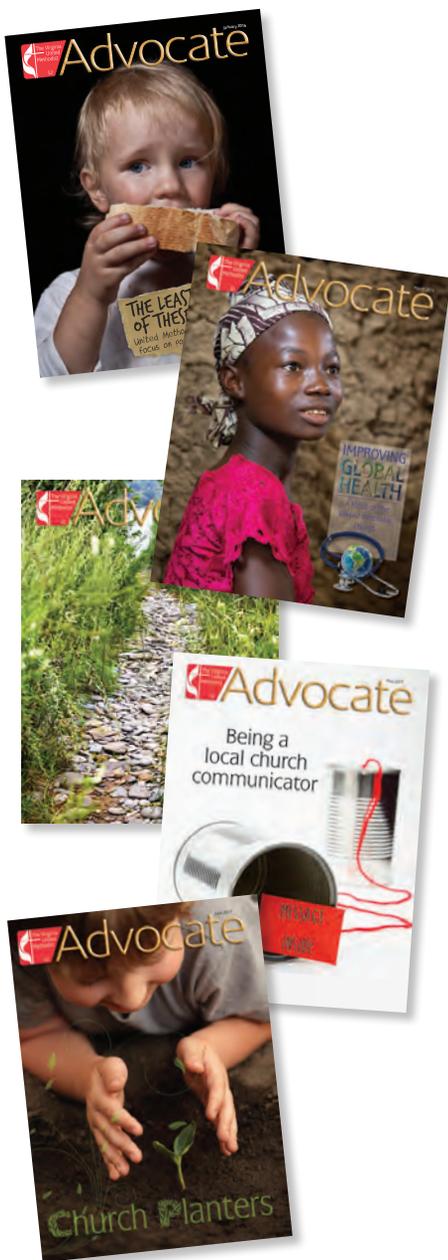
Some of what I don't like about much contemporary Christian songs is that they can make it sound like following Jesus is the way to fix all your problems and be happy. In my experience (and, more importantly, in the Bible) it's not that simple.

Here's where "Oceans" gets it right: "You call me out upon the waters. The great unknown where feet may fail." God calls us not into happiness, but into the unknown, even into failure. Jesus is, in fact, proof that "God loves you and has a plan for your life" but God's plan got one of these seaside apostles imprisoned and the other three killed — one by the sword, two hung on a cross.

The only reason to follow Jesus is to trust that in following him, no unhappiness, or storm, or wave, or flood, can separate you from his love and power. In the words of a song I love to hate, and hate to love, "When oceans rise," we can trust God that, no matter what, "my soul will rest in Your embrace. For I am Yours and You are mine." ❧

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

After that first deep breath, my eyes take in my surroundings and I am reminded to take in a few deep breaths as I choose my path. I walk and pray and along the way the cares of the world are brought into perspective by the awesomeness of God that I see in the creation. I gaze up at the trees and know that they too sing God's praises. I lay on the ground to gaze up at the stars and I am reminded how big the universe is and how small I am. And in those moments I reconnect with the deep peace of God.

What way do you reconnect with God's peace? How do you bring that peace into your world?

Surely, Christmas is not so far away from our thoughts that we have forgotten the message of the angels to Mary and later to the shepherds: Peace be with you. Do not be afraid.

We need not fear, God, the Creator, has got this...God has got us...nature is one of those reminders that God has got this and it's going to be okay.

Shalom, salaam and peace to you. ☞

—The Rev. Kimberly Barker-Brugman,  
Soul Story Ministries for the Kindred Project

## Bishop's Bible Challenge readings for MARCH

March 1	Exodus 29-30; James 1
March 2	Exodus 31-33; James 2
March 3	Exodus 34-35; James 3
March 4	Exodus 36-38; James 4
March 5	Exodus 39-40; James 5
March 6	Job 1-2; 1 Cor. 1
March 7	Job 3-4; 1 Cor. 2
March 8	Job 5-7; 1 Cor. 3
March 9	Job 8-10; 1 Cor. 4
March 10	Job 11-13; 1 Cor. 5
March 11	Job 14-16; 1 Cor. 6
March 12	Job 17-19; 1 Cor. 7:1-19
March 13	Job 20-21; 1 Cor. 7:20-40
March 14	Job 22-24; 1 Cor. 8
March 15	Job 25-27; 1 Cor. 9
March 16	Job 28-29; 1 Cor. 10:1-18
March 17	Job 30-31; 1 Cor. 10:19-33
March 18	Job 32-33; 1 Cor. 11:1-16
March 19	Job 34-35; 1 Cor. 11:17-34
March 20	Job 36-37; 1 Cor. 12
March 21	Job 38-40; 1 Cor. 13
March 22	Job 41-42; 1 Cor. 14:1-20
March 23	Prov. 1-2; 1 Cor. 14:21-40
March 24	Prov. 3-5; 1 Cor. 15:1-28
March 25	Prov. 6-7; 1 Cor. 15:29-58
March 26	Prov. 8-9; 1 Cor. 16
March 27	Prov. 10-12; Titus 1
March 28	Prov. 13-15; Titus 2
March 29	Prov. 16-18; Titus 3
March 30	Prov. 19-21; Hebrews 1
March 31	Prov. 22-24; Hebrews 2

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# ONE LAST WORD

## You have time to read the Bible

From [www.crossway.org](http://www.crossway.org)

If someone observed an average day in your life, how would they see you spend your time? How much of your time is given to TV, Facebook, YouTube, podcasts, hobbies, and housework? How much time do you devote to Bible reading?

In August 2018, crossway.org surveyed over 11,000 readers, asking questions about how much time they spend doing some of the things mentioned above. They then compared those responses with the average amount of time it takes to read various portions of Scripture.



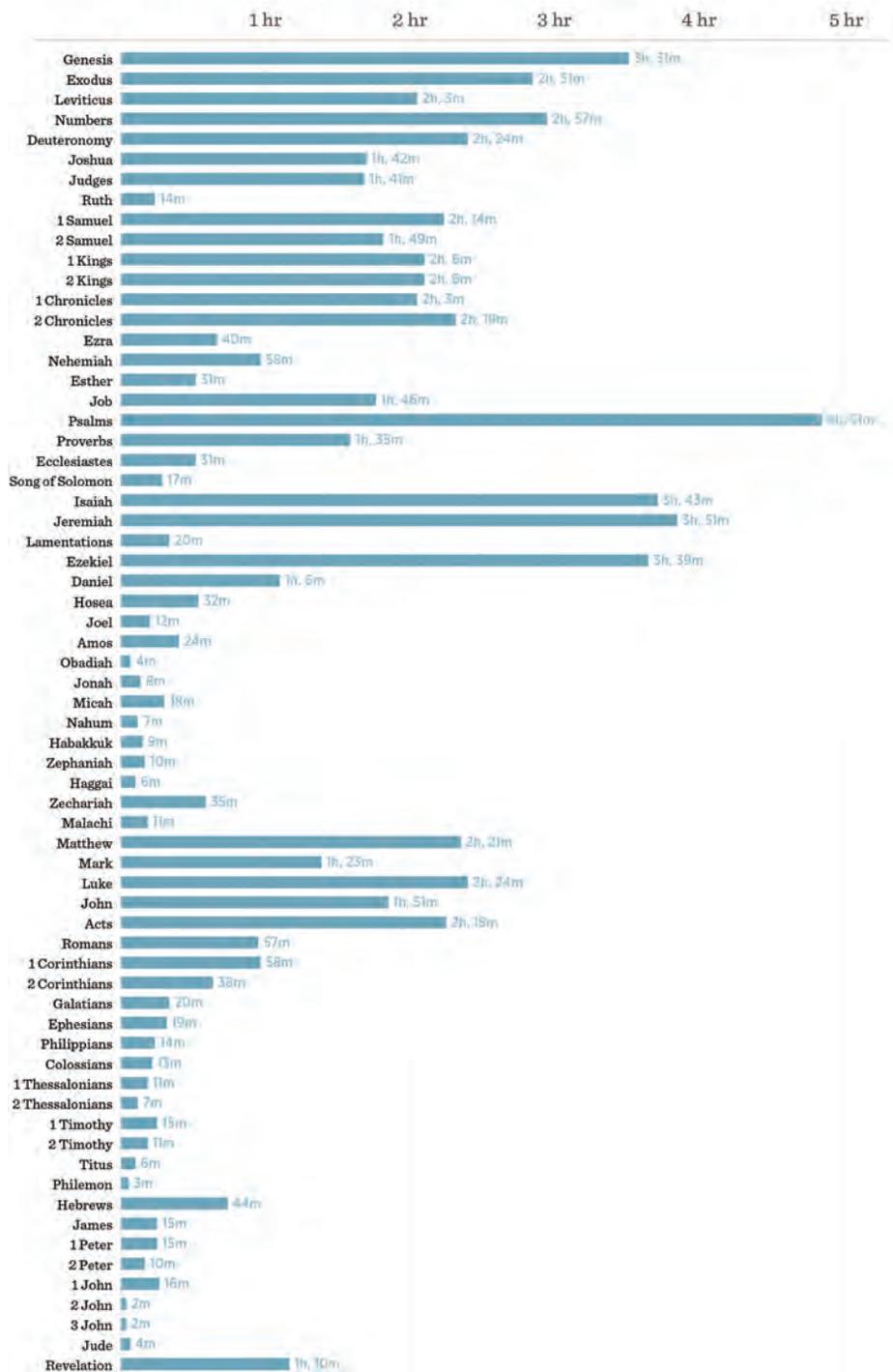
### Takeaway

Do you have a spare five minutes in your day? Take up and read the book of Jude or maybe even Obadiah. Do you have 15 minutes? Read Ruth or Philipians. Do you have an hour? Immerse yourself in Nehemiah or Romans.

### Time well spent!

## READING EVERY BOOK OF THE BIBLE

How long does it take to read each book of the Bible?





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