

## Being a local church communicator



Connecting with the

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

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

Phone: 1-800-768-6040 or

804-521-1100

Fax: 804-521-1174

E-mail: [advocate@vaumc.org](mailto:advocate@vaumc.org)Website: [www.vaumc.org](http://www.vaumc.org)Detailed guidelines for the following  
available upon request.**Subscriptions**

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

**Deadlines**

The Advocate is published once a month. The deadline to submit news and ad copy for the June 2017 issue is April 28. For more information on future deadlines, contact the Advocate office or visit the website.

**Advertising/Tributes**

Rates for advertising and tributes are available upon request.

**Local Church News**

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

**Letters**

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

**©2017 Virginia Advocate**

USPS 660-740 ISSN 0891-5598

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

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

# PILLOW TALK

**Madeline Pillow**  
Editor

## Taking pointers from opossums

### Opossums are the only North American marsupial, carrying their young in an external pouch after birth.

Opossums are the only North American marsupial, carrying their young in an external pouch after birth.

Opossums walked the earth with dinosaurs over 70 million years ago.

They are beneficial to eliminate rodents, snakes, insects and carrion; they are known as groundskeepers. Opossums have partial or total immunity to the venom found in snakes such as rattlesnakes and cottonmouths.

It is extremely rare for an opossum to contract rabies and it is uncertain what role, if any, they may have in carrying diseases of concern to humans.

When left alone, the opossum does not attack pets or wildlife, spread disease, chew through wires or dig through your garden.

The opossum has opposable "thumbs." Primates and opossums are the only mammals with opposable first toes.

Now you may be asking, "Madeline, while I find these opossum facts quite interesting, why are you sharing them with us?" The answer to that is opossums can teach us something about communication which is the feature for this month's magazine.

I think we can agree that it is through knowledge, whether learned ourselves or shared by others, that we make decisions. Now in thinking about opossums as a species, what are some of your inherent beliefs about them? What were you taught to believe or facts that you know?

I don't really remember learning about opossums specifically in school, but I heard people say they carried rabies and they hung out in trashcans.

In the last several years, I have seen concerted efforts by many groups to better communicate to the public true facts about these creatures. Some of them are listed above.

Now I don't know that there is a consensus yet about how this effort to educate the public is having an effect on the opossum species, but I am a firm believer that education can curb harmful behavior and behavior assumed because of fear.

Don't let anyone ever tell you that communication is not important. I tell participants in my training sessions often that if a church is doing great mission, but not communicating that to anyone, it's almost as if it's not happening. If a local church takes the time to share news and events with their congregations and outside communities: 1. the outside community gains a larger awareness of their church, and 2. there also may be a jump in participation from individuals and community partners to 3. an increase in aid and giving.

I also have another reason that communication is so valuable. As a united body in Christ, we are united in that Spirit, but we are unique individuals. This means different perspectives. No matter what we are doing whether in our church roles or in other professions and in our personal lives, if we are not clearly communicating to each other we cannot be sure that we have a shared understanding of meaning. To learn more about this, read the poem found on the One Last Word page.

As we continue our ministries in an age of changing technologies, the ways in which we communicate are important for us to analyze and constantly reevaluate to consider our effective in mission and ministry.

Until our next issue,

*Madeline C. Pillow*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS



## SECTIONS

- 4-6      **Commentary**
- 7-11     **Virginia News**
- 12-14   **A Day in the Life**
- 15       **Local Church News**
- 16       **Events**
- 28-29   **Equipping for Ministry**
- 30-31   **Living the Word**
- 32-33   **Clergy & Diaconal**
- 34       **From the Bishop**
- 35       **One Last Word**



Scan this code to go to the  
conference website:  
[www.vaumc.org](http://www.vaumc.org)

## FEATURE

- 18-27    Question and Answer session with communication experts

## STORIES

- 6            CEMCA shares statement on immigration raids
- 7            Aging conference is first of its kind
- 8            A 'praying life': focus of Convocation on Prayer
- 10          Richmond-area church holds discussion on race

**CORRECTION:** I neglected to give credit to Central UMC in Mathews, VA, for their photo of the sanctuary on the Table of Contents page in the Feb. 2017 issue. This photo is credited to Central UMC member Louise Witherspoon. The Knitting ministry at the church has been spearheaded for years by Anne South and has been around for a total of 50 years.

Thank you to all individuals and churches who shared their information and stories for the knitting ministries Feb. issue. We had enough content sent in for about three whole *Advocates*! As a result, my task of reading through this content and making editing choices was both a joy to read about the numerous stories of ministry and mission and very difficult in terms of what stories to share with *Advocate* readers.

### The Virginia Advocate Staff

**Madeline Pillow** | Editor, Director of Communications

**Cathryn Huff** | Graphic Designer

**Pam Culler** | Administrative Secretary

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

# COMMENTARY

## The Mirth and Mockery of Methodism

By Terry Lindvall and Greg West

### A Madness to their Methodism

Early 20th century Roman Catholic journalist and wit, G. K. Chesterton, once quipped that “it is a test of a good religion whether you can joke about it.” Methodism, it seems, fit his category of a good religion, even before some notable present descriptions:

Before Mel Brooks topped of Hedley Lamarr’s classic round up of every vicious criminal and gunslinger in the west in his *Blazing Saddles*: “I want rustlers, cut throats,

murderers, bounty hunters, desperados, mugs, pugs, thugs, nitwits, halfwits, dimwits, vipers, snipers, con men, Indian agents, Mexican bandits, muggers, buggerers, bushwhackers, hornswogglers, horse thieves, bull dykes, train robbers, bank robbers, ash-kickers, shiss-kickers, **and Methodists.**”

Before Will Willimon collected and wrote all those stories finding a comic incongruity between our high calling and our grubby actuality and introducing us to his Dog, the Methodist.

Before Jeff Foxworthy observed that “you might be United Methodist **if** you raise your hand and promise your pastor that you have read the 17th chapter of Mark as part of the introduction to a sermon on truth telling. (Note: Mark

only has 16 chapters. You might be United Methodist if you did not know that)” or if you sit while singing “Stand up, stand up for Jesus,” your pastor has a hyphenated last name, or your pastor moves every four or five years and you like it that way.

And way before the great prank of Greg and Susan Jones leaving Duke Divinity School to go to Baylor University, fooling both Methodists and Baptists.

Before movies portrayed the enthusiastic singing and worship of friendly Methodists—in contrast to the quiet Quakers—in William Wyler’s *Friendly Persuasion* (1956) or the throw-away line by Presbyterian minister Norman Maclean in Robert Redford’s *A River Runs Through It* (1992) that “Methodists are Baptists that have learned how to read” (soon to be appended with how Episcopalians are Methodists with Money and Wine).

Before Methodists were teased for their predilection for donuts, for a waning of their old enthusiasm, for overweight sinecure clergy, they were satirized for other unique characteristics.

### Father and Sons of Wits

In the 18th century one of the favorite and most frequent targets of sati-



# COMMENTARY

rists were the enthusiastic Methodists, quite unlike the solemn pot-luck Methodists of today (although their love feasts were most probably precursors to fruity Jello salads). Samuel Wesley, father of the brood of John, Charles, and others, possessed great wit and was ever ready to share a vivacious anecdote. He answered comic and provocative questions such as “Why [does] one hour’s sermon seem longer than two hours’ conversation?” and “how far is it consistent with wisdom to banter?” To the latter, he opined that “it may be necessary, by way of satyr, to shame some persons out of ill actions, when other methods fail; and it has often been found effectual.” Asked whether women have souls, he proposed that for the person who dared ask this question, “we only wish him the veriest virago in Christendom to his yoke-fellow, who would quickly satisfy him whether her sex had souls or no.”

Samuel tried to curry favor with the Queen by dedicating some (bad) satiric verse to her. In his own defense the author appealed to her:

*Because when the foul maggot bites  
He ne'er can rest in quiet:  
Which makes him make so sad a face*



William Hogarth etching The Laughing Audience (1733) depicts eighteenth-century theater scene.

*He'd beg your worship  
or your grace  
Unsiht, unseen, to buy  
it.*

Mirth and Methodism did not always make friendly bedfellows. While receiving much from the Moravians on piety and faith, John Wesley faulted them for a “tendency toward levity.” In 1758 John set about examining preachers at the annual conference and complained that many in the Methodist movement were “still wanting in seriousness!” In fact, he found a particular congregation in Newcastle quite lax in discipline. He intervened to censure 50 people, 17 for their drunkenness, two for cursing, three for quarrelling, and an astounding number of 29 for “lightness.”

Charles Wesley, on the other hand, showed more wit in handling clerical challenges. When one former tailor had been made into an “ineffective preacher,” Charles promised to make him a tailor

again, noting where his gifts for the kingdom lay. Opposing the ordination of John Nelson, he wrote, “Rather than see thee a dissenting minister, I wish to see thee smiling in thy coffin.”

**Read the rest of this article at the conference website.**

— Professor Terry Lindvall teaches Religious Studies Department in the areas of faith, film and humor at Virginia Wesleyan College. Greg West is chaplain at the college and co-teaches a course in Methodism and leads tours of the Wesleyan Revival in Great Britain.

*“God is always present; EMS has shaped me to pay attention.”*

—Sarah Payne '17, Pastor of Sherando UMC, Stuarts Draft, VA



Eastern Mennonite University

EASTERN MENNONITE SEMINARY



**APPLY NOW!**

[emu.edu/seminary](http://emu.edu/seminary)  
Harrisonburg, Virginia

# COMMENTARY

## CEMCA shares statement concerning immigration raids, call on church leadership

*Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:*

**W**e, the undersigned members of the Commission on Ethnic-Minority Concerns and Advocacy (CEMCA), of the Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church reaffirm our calling as disciples of Jesus Christ. As such, we are called to “loose the bonds of injustice, let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke” (Isaiah 58: 6). Right now, millions across the globe are afflicted, suffering the bonds of injustice, oppressed by the violence of war, and burdened with the necessity of fleeing for their lives. Others, who have come seeking economic opportunity, are now burdened with the threat of deportation. We confess that as a nation, we have slaughtered Native Americans, and acknowledge that we continue to live on the land that was once theirs. We confess our complicity in slavery: that we have held black women, men and children as property, and tortured and killed those who have resisted. And though having been set free from that bondage over 150 years ago, continue to suffer the

effects of entrenched racism that denies them the dignity of equality under the law. We confess and acknowledge the national sin of the internment of Japanese Americans during WWII. Lord, have mercy, and lead us to new life as children of the Living God, redeemed by Jesus Christ, whom you sent to free us from the bondage of our sins.

Forgiven and redeemed, we pledge ourselves anew to the ministry that has been bequeathed to us by our ancestors in the faith, having been promised that our God will go with us in this holy work. We stand with our brothers and sisters who continue to bear the burden of the oppression of the newly elected government, and pledge our support in a common bond of nonviolent resistance to these policies and practices.

We remember that our savior was once a refugee, and was himself poor, and said, “I was a stranger, and you welcomed me,” (Matthew 25:35). In accordance with the statement made by Bishop Bruce R. Ough, we promise “to see the face of Christ in the refugee.” We condemn policies and practices of a govern-

ment that would deny the US Constitution, and withhold sanctuary based upon religion. We affirm our common heritage with Jews and Muslims, as “people of the Book” and look forward to the kingdom of heaven in which all peoples will share in the great banquet of God.

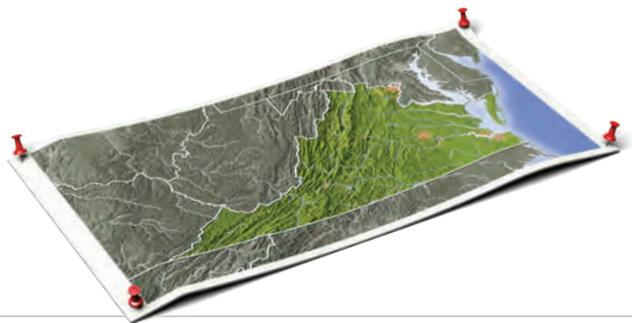
We condemn raids by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers, based on racial profiling, those in our own communities, and stand ready to advocate with our Latinx brothers and sisters in non-violent resistance to these oppressive practices.

Lastly we call upon the pastors of the United Methodist Church to provide guidance to their congregations, and to advocate with those who have been targeted. We call upon our leaders, both laity and clergy, to educate themselves and others about the call to Christian action in response to the current situation. We call for prayers that our government leaders would recognize that power without compassion creates and compounds fear and that they would open their hearts to God’s grace and love that casts out fear.

May the Peace of Christ be with us all.

**Gary Miller**  
**Lori Valentine de Segovia**  
**Lester Kurtz**  
**Patricia Schang**  
**Minoka Gunesequera**  
**Hyo Lee**  
**Karen Bragg**  
**Janice Webb**  
**Lyle Morton**  
**Larry Jent**  
**Gustavo Segovia Molley**  
**Clarence Brown**  
**Harold White Jr.**  
**Carol-Ann Redmon**  
**Shana Colwell** 

*This statement is being posted on behalf of the CEMCA (Ethnic-Minority Concerns & Advocacy) Commission of the Virginia Conference. Feedback or questions may be sent to Lori A. Valentine de Segovia at [segovia.five@gmail.com](mailto:segovia.five@gmail.com).*



# The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

## Aging conference is first of its kind as a statewide, faith-based event

By Allie Smith

Though the weather was unpredictable up until the day of the event, the passion for personal and congregational growth was strong as 175 Virginians from around the state braved the rain and snow to gather at Lynchburg College on Mar. 14, 2017, for the Faithful Aging Conference.

This unique educational opportunity was conceptualized by Denise Scruggs, director of the Beard Center on Aging at Lynchburg College, and Martha Stokes, director of church and community relations of Virginia United Methodist Homes, Inc. (VUMH). The Faithful Aging was the first statewide, faith-based conference of its type addressing opportunities related to an aging congregation and meeting the needs of older members, inside and outside the walls of faith communities.

The morning keynote was given by Verna Sellers, MD, MPH, geriatrician and medical director of geriatric services and programs at Centra PACE, on the topic of caregiving: past, present and future. Sellers' progressive and thoughtful view on caregiving was the per-

fect kick-off for the day.

Professionals from throughout the state of Virginia presented on a wide range of topics during two concurrent sessions. The first session included a best practices panel and topics on the following interests: building a dementia-friendly church, aging and loss, supporting our caregivers and taking the stress out of visitations. The second session offered topics on understanding and navigating senior services, the generational differences and the church, helping older members live a purposeful life and stay connected through church activities, and volunteer opportunities and tips for helping older church members stay legally and financially safe.

Presenters were able to connect with the attendees on an intimate level. Resources were provided and the attendees were given the opportunity to ask questions and share their stories.

Throughout the day, conference attendees were able to network with one another and the 48 exhibitors set up throughout the Drysdale Student Center. Exhibitors ranged from retirement communities

to hospitals and Leading Age Virginia to Senior News. The multitude of organizations and individuals involved speaks to the increasing need for educational opportunities such as this conference.

Wrapping up the afternoon was a keynote from Stokes and the Rev. Dr. Will Randolph, director of the office on aging and older adult ministries at Discipleship Ministries, titled "An Opportunity to Transform and Transcend."

With the help of a diverse planning committee, 11 gold sponsors including

the Older Adult Council of the Virginia Conference, nine silver sponsors and several months of planning, the first state-wide conference on aging was a success. 

— Allie Smith is  
Communications and Engagement  
Coordinator at Virginia United  
Methodist Homes, Inc.

Picture Credit: Allie Smith  
Pictured here are the closing keynote  
speakers: the Rev. Dr. Will Randolph  
and Martha Stokes. from VUMH.



# The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



## A focus on a 'praying' life versus a 'prayer' life at Bishop's Convocation on Prayer event

By Madeline Pillow

**I**'m a witness that prayer changes things, changes people," said the Rev. Juanita C. Rasmus, co-pastor of St. John's in Houston, TX, as the plenary speaker for the 2017 Bishop's Convocation on Prayer event held on Apr. 1.

Rasmus explained that prayer was a central spiritual discipline growing up. She remembered a laying of hands on her mother when she was gravely ill and even praying for now-husband Rudy when

they were just dating. Her husband Rudy co-pastors with her at their church in Texas.

An important distinction that Rasmus made in her talk was the difference between a "prayer life" and a "praying life." She described a prayer life as one that can make us feel guilty if it's something we simply see as an item to be marked off a list or if we forget to do it. Rather she called the assembled Virginia Conference group of over 200 at Trinity UMC in Richmond to invite God into a praying life, where

prayer is a part of everything an individual does and one's thinking is in tandem with God.

Focusing on the Scripture: Mark 1: 35-39, Rasmus pointed out that the disciples "hunted" for Jesus. She used this as an example that when an individual is deep in a praying life there will be all kinds of holy distractions that manifest themselves even into people who might keep you away from that life. She emphasized that it is important to ask God what is God's agenda in a given moment to be on the same page just as Jesus does in the corresponding passage.

There was a lot of laughter from the assembled group when Rasmus stated that she even brings her closet to God.

Rasmus also pointed out that clergy especially are in danger of burn out when they say "yes" to everything. This was a mindset that Rasmus also struggled with.

"I work for God now, aren't I supposed to always say "yes"?"

Rasmus ended by asking the body how they invite God into their lives.

"What was the last thing God asked you to do? Have you done it? What's your excuse?"

The Bishop's Convocation on Prayer was an event started by the previ-

Rev. Juanita Rasmus made a distinction between a "prayer life" and a "praying life" at the Apr. 1 event.



# The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



ous Virginia Conference bishop, Bishop Young Jin Cho and it was an annual tradition, Bishop Lewis said that she wants to continue.

"We know as United Methodists that prayer is one of our means of grace and I wanted to continue this annual tradition," said Bishop Lewis.

Following the plenary, participants attended two workshops out of 10 focused on prayer. Workshops offered were: "God, How Would You Have Us to Pray?" by the Rev. Juanita Rasmus; "Your Eucharist is Too Small! Grateful Living in Native American Traditions" by the Rev. Larry Jent; "The Lord's Prayer" by the Rev. David Canada; "Praying the Book of Nature" by Beth Norcross; "Prayer Walking" by the Marc Thompson; "Wesleyan Spirituality" by the Rev. Lindsey Baynham; "Praying with Scriptures" by the Rev. Judy Worthington; "Teach Them How to Pray: Intro-

ducing a New Generation to a Life of Prayer" by Paulo Lopes; "Devotional Prayer for Meetings" by the Rev. Don Jamison and "El Poder de la Oracion" by the Rev. Veronica Barrell and the Rev. Ileana Rosario.

View our website at [www.vaumc.org](http://www.vaumc.org) to see the livestreamed content from the event as well as a video wrap-up from the website. 📺

— Madeline Pillow is editor of the Advocate.

## Weekend Master of Divinity Degree

Union Presbyterian Seminary is committed to preparing pastors, educators, and scholars for ministry in today's world.

- **Approved by the University Senate of the UMC**
- **Generous financial aid for United Methodist students**
- **Full-time residential campus in Richmond, VA, and Weekend commuter campus in Charlotte, NC**
- **Application deadline July 1, 2017**



[www.upsem.edu](http://www.upsem.edu) • 980.636.1662

## PERSONAL & GROUP COACHING

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

SERMON  
COACHING  
w/ Jesus Focus

LEADERSHIP  
COACHING  
w/ Systems Focus



Coaching for Clergy Transitions

[larrybuxton@vaumc.org](mailto:larrybuxton@vaumc.org)

# The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



## Richmond- area church holds discussion on race

By Greg Carter

What happens when the topic of race intersects with the church? It's an area some would rather avoid. Yet, Belmont United Methodist Church in Richmond, Va., charged directly to the heart of the matter during its inaugural Church and Community Conversation on Race and Reconciliation.

Belmont UMC cast a wide net for invitees to the Feb. 25, 2017 event. In all, 84 people took part representing 29 churches and several organizations including the Virginia Department of Corrections, Embrace Richmond, Richmond Hill, Richmond Police

Department, Samuel Proctor School of Theology and Virginia State University.

"This conference offered an opportunity for people to dialogue in small groups on the topic of racial reconciliation," said Belmont UMC the Larry Cochran. "Our hope is that the conference will be the beginning of future conversations and serve as a springboard for action to address this important topic."

The small groups allowed individuals to examine their own attitudes, behaviors and beliefs linked to concerns about safety, crimes and punishments, which divide and unite individual communities and the city of Richmond. The groups later reported on practical ideas and actions that individuals, churches and community groups could take to address the issues.

In addition to the conversation, the group watched clips of the documentary "13th" which explores the historical elements of mass incarceration in the United States and its impact on African Americans.

Special guests included Joel Miller, a Reentry Specialist with the Virginia Department of Corrections. A former inmate, Miller now works to help prisoners prepare for life on the outside. He also works with outside groups to provide services to men and women returning home from prison.

The event concluded with a message from the Rev. Dr. Earl Bledsoe who explained that in order to achieve the goals set forth in this initiative, and to have more respect and concern for one another, it's vital that individuals seriously examine what it really means to, as stated in Matthew 22:37, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."

The Rev. Dr. Joseph Crockett with the National Council of Churches was instrumental in the development and launching of the conference. Belmont UMC lay leader Marie Coone served as facilitator for the conference. 

— Greg Carter is a friend of Belmont UMC and served as the photographer for this event. He works for the Virginia Department of Corrections as Community Relations Coordinator.



## Virginia Conference Communications office staff wins six UMAC awards

By Madeline Pillow

The Virginia Conference Communications office brought home six awards at the denomination-wide communications/media awards contest held during the annual meeting of United Methodist Association of Communicators (UMAC), Mar. 22-24 in New Orleans, La.

The *Virginia United Methodist Advocate* won first place in the magazine category of the Print Publications class which includes the teamwork of editor Madeline Pillow, graphic designer Cathryn Huff and Database Manager Brenda Capen as copyeditor.

*Advocate* Editor Madeline Pillow won third place in the portrait category of the Photography class for her shot of Bishop Sharma Lewis and Shirley Cauffman during the assignment of Bishop Lewis to Virginia at Southeastern Jurisdictional in July 2016.

Nick Ruxton and Madeline Pillow won third place for the video series “A Day in the Life.”

Nick Ruxton, conference videographer, won second place in the portrait category of the Photography

class for his shot of Bishop Cho at Annual Conference 2016. As well he won first place for “2016 Tornado Recovery: Waverly, Virginia,” a video that depicted the relief and recovery efforts of Virginia United Methodist Volunteers in Mission (UMVIM) following the Feb. 24, 2016 tornadoes in Virginia.

Ruxton also won third place for the blog “Through the Lens.” All the awards may be viewed on the conference website and were shared on the conference Facebook page the week of Mar. 27.

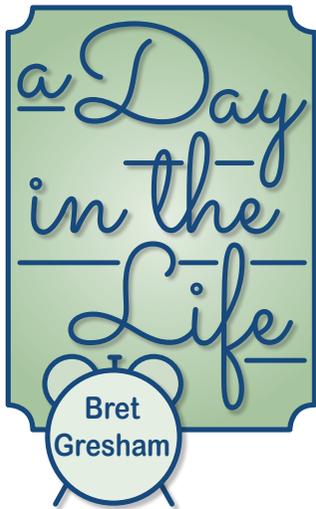
Over 100 communicators from across the United States participated in The United Methodist Association of Communicators 44<sup>th</sup> annual meeting in New Orleans. 📌

– Madeline Pillow is editor of the *Advocate*



Top: Nick Ruxton, Brenda Capen and Madeline Pillow brought six communications awards back to the conference. Middle: Award-winning portrait by Madeline Pillow. Bottom: Award-winning portrait by Nick Ruxton.

# A DAY IN THE LIFE



## Campus minister shares joy, hope in working with students

By Madeline Pillow

**B**ret Gresham, campus minister at Wesley Foundation at Virginia Tech called me two days before Nick Ruxton, conference videographer, and I travel to Blacksburg to interview him for this section, *A Day in the Life*.

He wanted to be sure that he knew what we needed from him. I tell him

that insofar as Nick and I can, we just want to follow him around. We really just want to share with people what a typical day in life and ministry looks like.

### No day is "typical"

Nick and I arrive in Blacksburg on a dreary and wet Wednesday. As the wind knocks our heads down further into our coats, Bret welcomes us to the Wesley building, going over several activities that he has planned, which includes worship with the students that night.

As Bret shows us around the facility where some students sit together on couches studying and chatting before their next class, the large fish pond has a problem. Kelly Wiseman, who serves as an administrative role at Wesley, realizes most of the water is seeping out of the pond leaving the fish stranded.

Bret quickly starts adjusting a hose to feed more water into the pond while Kelly runs to adjust the tap and water temperature.

Leaning over the pond, Bret look up to Nick and I and said, "I told you, there's no typical day in campus ministry."

"It varies so much. Each day we have some administrative tasks, but most of the day is a revolving door," said Bret.

This revolving door into his office includes students

who might want to share an idea with him, students in leadership positions that need to talk or students needing a safe space to discuss concerns from their personal lives to academic lives on campus.

### Campus ministry is a calling

For Bret, campus ministry is a fulfillment of what he feels is his call. But it didn't begin that way. Originally, Bret thought that youth ministry would be his calling. He was first appointed to Sudley UMC in Enon — a time of ministry, he says that he loves, but also felt like there was something missing.

He next served at Asbury UMC in Harrisonburg where he interacted with RISE church there, which was then Wesley Foundation at JMU. It was there that he realized what he was missing in his call — campus ministry.

Now in his appointed position at Virginia Tech, which is also his alma mater, Bret feels a fulfillment of call that feels like where he is supposed to be.

"I think my favorite part is my time with students. That's what gives me energy. I could be in five-hour meetings with students, and I come home and say, 'That was great'", Bret said.

His enthusiasm for this role is palpable as we see him interact with students



When asked how campus ministry fits into the life of the church, Bret Gresham, campus minister at Virginia Tech, sees it as a vital part.





# A DAY IN THE LIFE

throughout the day whether talking about what Hogwarts house he has been sorted into, what animal an online quiz says he is or working with students to prepare for the night's worship.

He describes ministry with students as one where the fruits of ministry can be seen much faster than in other forms of ministry.

"You're with them [students] for four years, and you are with them every day for four years," Bret said. You get to see them grow and see them come in as freshman with their Sunday school theology and see it grow into something they can articulate for themselves."

Bret emphasizes that it's this personal articulation of faith that the students carry with them into life, in their careers, whether it's as an engineer or whether they enter into ministry as a clergyperson.

## Changes in the ministry

Currently at Wesley, Bret said that the group is working on where the students see the ministry growing. Since Bret started his job at Wesley, there have been changes. The tenor of what campus ministry means has changed and he is making the ministry much more outreach-driven and less insular.

"Students have realized

that we are called to go out and share this safe space with our communities," said Bret.

When Bret started, he saw the ministry as very program-driven, but he wanted to push toward making it a more ministry-centered model by changing language. Bret asked the students: how does our language differentiate us from another organization on campus?

"I asked, would you be able to separate Wesley from a fraternity or sorority or, I don't know, the underwater basket-weaving club?" Bret said.

He then handed the task to his students who took an entire semester to vision who they wanted to be in ministry, what the organization could look like and what language they would use.

The time the students took, meant a lot to Bret.

"It meant a lot that these students had a passion for living out the Kingdom to take time out of their social and academic lives to figure this out."

## Five areas of ministry

From this visioning process, the structure of the campus ministry changed to five areas of ministry: outreach, discipleship, worship, missions and fellowship.

Instead of officers,

Wesley has student ministers who lead these five structures, and Bret acts as a facilitator. The process of choosing these student ministers is a process covered in prayer, Bret says, and rather than a voting process, they decide by consensus, something Bret thinks has set the tone for who they are.

Each spring, students meet in the discernment process to determine what positions need to be filled and what needs are necessary for the next year. The students then reflect back on the five areas of their ministry. Each student fills out a discernment sheet which lists among other things where they feel called and what their gifts are. These sheets are integral in deciding what gifts are needed for certain positions, and because of the process, Bret says, can lead to students recognizing gifts that others see in them that they might not see.

This change in structure has led the students, Bret thinks, to view the campus ministry as their own which he views as important to empowerment in their personal ministries.

"I think it has empowered them to realize that they will be ministers in their churches, whether clergy or lay, and to live into their call," Bret said. "They realize that they don't have to wait to be asked — they can already go out and do

ministry in the way that they see it."

## Student-driven action

At Wesley, there is a lot of action, and it's largely driven, Bret says, by student action and desire.

These students desire a mission-focused, "feet on the ground and hands in the dirt"-type of ministry, Bret said, which has led them to team up with local church Blacksburg UMC in a number of ways.

One of these is through a tutoring program that Blacksburg UMC holds for a local trailer park. Starting with elementary-aged students, the ministry has grown, leading the church to ask Wesley to also tutor middle-school and high-school-aged students in the trailer park. Every Monday and Thursday night, students from Wesley have a meal with these students, hang out with them and study.

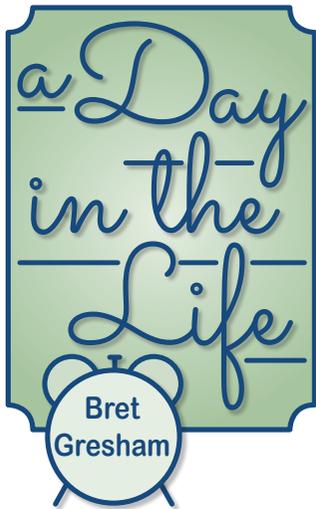
"It's really cool to see those relationships form between our students and theirs," said Bret.

Wesley also has a food pantry that Bret said started as a result of one student seeing a problem and wanting to do something about it.

After the student talked it over with Bret, the two took it to university leadership who only had two

(Con't. on next page)

# A DAY IN THE LIFE



(Continued from previous page.)

main thoughts: “Wish we had done this sooner” and “When is it going to open?”

The food pantry is integral in helping out students like graduate and international students who need help in between paying for books and paying for housing. Having access to the food pantry means it's one thing they can check off their list. Open three nights a week, the food pantry answers a need in the campus community all because of one student using her gifts, Bret said.

These outlets for outreach are ways that Bret hopes the campus ministry will continue to model as they grow and develop leaders.

“When we're serving God here and students continue that in their future careers, we know we've done our jobs here,” Bret said.

## Need for more staff

When Bret thinks about the future at Wesley, there are more ways he hopes they can grow in the next five to 10 years. One of those ways is through an increased staff.

Currently, there are just two people on staff at Wesley, and as Bret says, the challenge then leads to relying on students who already have a lot going on with academics, growing in

their faith and socializing on campus.

In his role, Bret says he wishes he could get out of the office more to be more of a presence on the campus, but it's important for him to be in the office in a space that is safe and confidential for students.

With many night events on campus, from Bible study to Wednesday worship, Bret makes it a point to go home and have dinner with his family before these events. His self-care comes in the form of playing basketball with the Virginia Tech Athletic Department. That connection, Bret notes, has led to other faculty and staff sending students his way who are in need in some way.

## Core beliefs front and center

At Wesley, United Methodism and the core beliefs of the Wesleyan faith are front and center with the campus ministry.

“One thing that separates us is that we tell people who we are. I think that's important,” said Bret. “We are distinctly Wesleyan; we are United Methodists. We can talk about grace, and students latch on. Our Wesleyan history is something we try to get out there and don't shy away from.”

When asked how campus ministry fits into the life of the church, Bret sees it as



a vital part.

“It is not just about the future of the church. Our students' passion for serving God and living out their faith is beyond anything I've seen,” Bret said. “They want to grow; they want to challenge themselves. And that's what we need right now. Campus ministry is the church right now. I think it is so important to remember when people are wondering where are our young people in church. And I don't say that because they are here — I see them every day, living out their faith in an authentic fashion.”

## Ministry is important to the conference

Bret said he is appreciative of the Virginia Conference because they understand the importance of campus ministry.

Before our interview time is up with Bret, he re-emphasizes the love he has for his job and the students who give him hope.

“I tell them I have hope because I see you every day. I have hope because you shine the light of Christ. They decide to come to worship on Wednesday. They decide to come to a family dinner. They decide to start a food pantry. They give me hope because that's what they put first.”

— Madeline Pillow is editor of the Advocate.

# DISCIPLES HELPING TO TRANSFORM THE WORLD



▲ Twenty-three members of **Fincastle United Methodist Church** packed Court Room No. 1 in the Poff Federal Building in Roanoke, March 17, 2017, to witness the Naturalization Ceremony for their minister, the Rev. Dr. Jae-Haeng Choi.

She was among 39 who became citizens of the United States that morning. Choi has served Fincastle UMC in Fincastle since Aug. 31, 2014. She is a native of the Republic of Korea, and came to the church from the California-Nevada Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church.

A reception honoring her was held in the Family Life Center after the worship service on the following Sunday.

**Rising Hope United Methodist Mission Church** was the charity of choice for the **Sydenstricker United Methodist Women's** auction fundraiser on Mar. 11, 2017, in Springfield. The church hall was transformed into an auction floor for the evening. More than 70 items were donated for auction. Local businesses provided dinner gift certificates, massages, manicures and pedicures and even oil changes.

Church members donated items or services such as pet sitting, child care, handyman services, a boat cruise on the Occoquan, a tour of Antietam



▲ National Battlefield, a beach house for a week and even a made-to-order decorated cake. Thirty-four themed baskets were created by members of SUMW (and others) to include: 19th Tee Party, Happy Easter, Let's Go to the Beach, St. Patrick's Day, Pray-

ing for You, Talk of the Town, Mom & Baby, Fitness (All Things Yoga), Movie Night, and Critter Lovers were themes.

SUMC's pastor, Don Jamison, donated his famous spaghetti sauce. His nine half-gallons of sauce raised more than \$450. Approximately \$5,000 was raised for Rising Hope Church that serves the needy community in nearby Alexandria.

The Rev. J. W. Park and **St. Andrew's UMC** in Portsmouth, Elizabeth River District, celebrated Girl Scout Sunday with Troop 5717 on Mar. 12, 2017. From the beginning of the service to the benediction, 27 girls participated. The troop presented 268 cans of food for Wesley Community Center in Portsmouth. Heather Newburn and Eddie Williams delivered the food to Wesley.

In November, they sold desserts at a meeting to raise money to buy gifts for 11 children of inmates, supporting a church Angel Tree Project. They shopped for and wrapped each gift.

The Girl Scout Troop has been meeting weekly at St. Andrew's since Sept. 2014. Leaders from the Girl Scouts and also Boy Scouts meet at the church monthly. ▼



# EVENTS



## May

### Shenandoah University Youth Theology Institute (SUYTI)

#### May 1

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

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

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

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

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

### Ministers' Convocation

#### May 8-10, Virginia Crossing Wyndham Hotel, Glen Allen

The Center for Clergy Excellence invites you for a time of Sabbath retreat, learning, and fellowship together as

ministry leaders at Ministers' Convocation from May 8-10, 2017. Come be engaged in theological and academic conversation while experiencing rejuvenation for ministry. The theme is "Making Space for Yourself and Others" with an emphasis on hospitality as a practice and spiritual discipline. For more information, contact [clergyexcellence@vaumc.org](mailto:clergyexcellence@vaumc.org) or visit the website for registration and event details including carpooling and room-mates at [www.vaumc.org/MinistersConvocation](http://www.vaumc.org/MinistersConvocation).

### A Day with Bishop Lewis for Associate Members and Local Pastors

#### May 15, Woodlake UMC, Chesterfield

The Fellowship of Local Pastors and Associate Members invites you to "A Day with Bishop Lewis" for associate members and local pastors at Woodlake UMC. From 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. on Mon. May 15, this will be a time to gather, worship, hear from Bishop Lewis, and engage in conversation. The day will conclude with a Q & A session. Registration for the day is \$15.00 and includes lunch. Register by May 9 at [www.eiseverywhere.com/ereg/index.php?eventid=220861&](http://www.eiseverywhere.com/ereg/index.php?eventid=220861&). Questions may be directed to [ClergyExcellence@vaumc.org](mailto:ClergyExcellence@vaumc.org).

## June

### Annual Conference

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

The 2017 session of the Virginia Annual Conference will be held June 16-18 at the Hampton Roads Convention Center. This Year's Theme will be "A New Thing" based off of Isaiah 43:19 -- "See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and

streams in the wasteland." For information about Annual Conference from housing to banquet information, visit [www.vaumc.org/AC2017](http://www.vaumc.org/AC2017).

## July

### Candidacy Summit

#### Jul. 7-8, Roslyn Retreat Center, Richmond

The Candidacy Summit is a 24-hour event for anyone (18 or older and out of high school) who is interested in

## Project Loans For Churches



Unsecured & Up To \$50,000

Rates As Low As 4.00% APR

No Fee To Apply  
Quick Application Process



[www.tumcu.org](http://www.tumcu.org)  
804-672-0200

Credit restrictions apply and rates are subject to change.



Federally insured by NCUA



# EVENTS

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

**Mission Encounter**  
**Jul. 28-29, Roslyn Retreat Center, Richmond**  
 Mission Encounter is THE BEST KEPT SECRET IN THE VIRGINIA CONFERENCE! Although its history began over 70 years ago by the then named Women's Society of Christian Service, and known as the School of Christian Mission for most of that history, the newly-named Mission Encounter is a cooperative event sponsored by the Virginia Conference Missional Ministries Board (formerly the Board of Global Ministry) and the Virginia Conference United Methodist Women. This event offers a wonderful opportunity for your whole congregation to come alive to mission, by participating in an exciting weekend mission education experience. There are classes for

adults where men, women, clergy and laity alike come to learn and be involved in mission groups by choosing one class out of three choices — a spiritual growth study, geographical study or social issue. This year from Jul. 28-29, the classes offered will be climate justice, living as a covenant community and the missionary conference of The UMC in the United States (Red Bird, Oklahoma and Alaska). Contact Gail Sutcliffe with questions at **703-490-3381**. Event will be held Bon Air UMC in Chesterfield.   
*"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."*



# Advocate

## SUBSCRIBE NOW!



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

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











# Question and Answer session



# With communications experts



By Madeline Pillow

**C**ommunications is at the heart of everything we do. You communicate with your family—you learn from those around you. You learn how to communicate and what is considered acceptable communication throughout school.

We, as United Methodists, whether clergy or laity, need to communicate our mission and ministry within our churches and to our outside communities.

Communication, no matter how you spin it, is integral to whatever you do. (And I would say this even if I wasn't an English major).

For this month's feature, I asked some communications experts from around our conference to talk about the importance of having an online presence and the making the best use of social media.





# Question and Answer session

**W**e gathered communication experts from around our conference to answer a few questions about communications and how it works within the church. Through their answers, consider how your church is handling your communications and what changes you might want to implement.

## OUR PANEL



Keri Marston serves as Communication Coordinator on the staff of Shady Grove UMC in Mechanicsville on the Richmond District. Prior to working for Shady Grove, she served as the Director of Communications at Trinity UMC in Richmond and Timberlake UMC in Lynchburg. She earned a B. A. in Communication Studies from James Madison University and currently serves as President of the Virginia Conference Board of Communications. Keri, her husband Chris, and two daughters are also members of Shady Grove UMC in Mechanicsville.



Betsey Davis is a retired educator and currently serves as Communications Coordinator at Journey UMC, a new church plant, in the Farmville District. She is also a member of the Conference Board of Communications, Technology Coordinator for Executive Committee of Virginia UMW and Director of Journey Community Center.



Jenn Kinne has been on staff at Farmville United Methodist Church for nine years. Jenn freelances as director of marketing for the Farmville Area Chamber of Commerce and social media manager for Letterpress Communications. She resides in Farmville with husband Jeff and two sweet boys, Mattison and Mason.



Sydney Morgan is the Communications Coordinator at Floris UMC in Herndon.



What's the best advice you could give a church looking to improve their communications whether internal (with church congregation) or external communications (media, outside community, potential members)?



**Keri Marston:**

"Know your audience. Make communication excellence a priority. Communicate clearly. and be strategic. Audit your current communication practices through a congregational survey and determine what is working and what is not. Use the resources available to you at [umcom.org](http://umcom.org). Obtain communication training for church leaders and volunteers who have a passion for

communication ministry. Pray for those leading your communication ministry and pray that your church's message will be met with openness."



**Betsey Davis:**

"Find spiritual persons who care about the ministries of your church, paid or volunteer, and give them the tools and training to do the important

# With communications experts



job of communicating. Their passion will come through in their words, photos and efforts.”



## Jenn Kinne:

“Create a communications team. Pull in ambassadors that will support you and help you. Experiment and don’t get discouraged if things don’t work.”



## Sydney Morgan:

“I would encourage any church looking to improve their communications to look to other churches for inspiration. There are so many churches in the world, and a lot of them are doing really cool things. Do some research online or by reaching out to other communications departments, attend conferences, watch webinars and read blog posts from church communication sites and social media scheduling tools to find out what works and what doesn’t.”

What are the top ways that communications works best internally in your church? Externally?



## Keri:

We produce a weekly electronic newsletter which is very popular. We know from feedback that we have received that all generations appreciate it and it helps churchgoers know what is going on in the life of the church. We connect our E-news to our website, so that more in-depth information can be provided if needed. We also find, in this day and age where the “regular attendee” has been redefined, our E-news allows us to have a connection point with our congregation whether or not they were able to be in worship on Sunday morning.

Externally, we communicate best through our outreach events and ministry opportunities. It is not enough for our church to be present on the street corner, we need to have a presence in our community.

About five years ago, we underwent a process to brand our church. This included creating a new logo and the tag line “growing together.” While creating a church brand was important in helping to establish our identity, we knew we had to go beyond that to make that identity impactful. Our church is really involved in mission outreach and has been for 30+ years. Over recent years, we have broadened that outreach to include local events such as participating in the Hanover Tomato Festival where we hand out free water, ice pops and sunscreen to our neighbors. We have established a very successful grief support ministry which traditionally attracts more people from the community than even from our congregation. We have also established a Dementia and Alzheimer’s Care Giver support group.

We let the community know about these things through traditional means – local newspaper, outdoor banners and our website, but it is what takes place through these ministries that is truly transformative to those within our community.

It is through our community partnerships, that we communicate to our external audience, our community, that we are here, and we care.



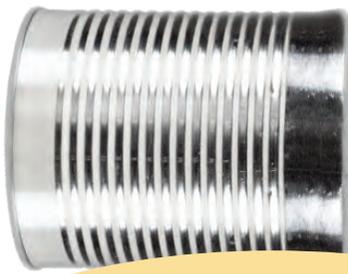
## Betsey:

Internally, we consider the various age groups and socioeconomic levels of persons we are trying to reach. Although Facebook works well for some, emails and texts from our pastor are more effective in reaching everyone. Our people do not tweet. Although we have a church bulletin, called our “Roadmap,” it serves more for guests than regular attenders as it highlights ongoing missions and weekly events.

Verbal announcements of special events are made weekly by a young, enthusiastic person with catchy slides to reach everyone. Externally we use Facebook and post events on one of our six pages and groups. We advertise in the small local paper and we pass out flyers at every event for our next event. Outdoors we use banners, yard signs and a temporary sign with changeable letters.

Our website is mostly a welcome mat for new seekers to the area. By posting photos of people engaged in worship, mission and fellowship, not the building, and telling the prospective guest what to expect in worship, we find that many of our guests have checked us out before showing up. After six years, we still have frequent guests.

(Continued on next page.)



# Question and Answer session

How can/does a church communicate differently than other organizations?



**Betsey:**

Churches seem to have a tendency to advertise internally and don't market ourselves enough externally. While it is true that most people come to church by "the elbow," someone inviting and bringing them, we still need to get the word out and be a clear beacon in the neighborhood. Avoid exclusive phrases like "join us" or "our church," and try inclusive phrases like "everyone is welcome," "you are invited," "everything is free," or "community event."

Consider being involved in community events to show presence in your community. Journey UMC rents a booth in our county fair, manned by a different church family each evening, to talk about missions. We also have a booth at Amelia Day in May annually, to engage people in prayer. We build a float annually for the Christmas Parade with youth and children riding on the float. I often submit photos with captions to our local paper of our hosted community events and donations to groups in our community.



**Jenn:**

I think we have the opportunity to share great things. So many businesses are on social media to sell. So many individuals are on social media to complain. We have the opportunity to share Scripture and spread the news of people serving people and being Christ to one another through our communications.



**Sydney:**

Churches aren't selling a product or asking for money in most of their communications. They are actually trying to sell you on a lifestyle and inform you about their services. In that aspect, churches are inherently communicating different than many organizations that work harder to fundraise or sell a product. Church communications needs to really focus on why it benefits the person outside of the church. They have to rely on constantly reaching new people to stay alive, which is especially difficult when a large portion of your audience has decided, for one reason or another, that your service is no longer a necessity in life.

How do you stay on top of new communication trends?



**Betsey:**

I am constantly reading the latest trends and experimenting with new technologies and software to stay ahead of the curve. The tutorials provided by Adobe Creative Suite make it possible for me to self-teach, and I get new ideas from free email subscriptions like MyCom, a United Methodist Communications service.



**Jenn:**

I think we can learn a ton from other organizations. I think it is two-fold – you can monitor what not to do as well as note best practices from others. Follow other churches as well as businesses on social media. Monitor their engagement and likes – see what's working and what's not and take note when creating your own content.



**Sydney:**

I read blog posts, follow technology companies on Twitter and other social media to see what's trending. Attend trainings and talk to other people in your industry. Plus, follow social media on your own so you can see what's big in the world outside of the church sector.

Can you share why churches need an online presence?



**Betsey:**

Studies show that people use the web to look at you before they come to your door. A current website shows vitality and that you care about embracing new people. The passion and reality that you share about your church will insure the person who is looking for what you have to offer will not be disappointed.

# With communications experts



Facebook messages are an awesome way to connect to some church members during the week. When they celebrate life milestones or grief, often they post to Facebook first. You can keep better connected. I remember passing on to my pastor that I read a post by a depressed teen. I also remember cheerful banter with a teen at church when I could talk with her about movies she and I both liked from reading her Facebook posts.



**Jenn:**

It's really where we are going. With attendance in worship on the decline, we need to reach people where they are. We need to stay up on the latest communication trends and our content needs to be good. Another big reason is our youth. Young people are the key to the survival of our churches so we need to show them that we respect where they are! Interacting with our youth and highlighting them on our social platforms lets them know that they are important to us!

How would you recommend churches try out new communications techniques best?



**Keri:**

I think churches need to be strategic in their communication. A great starting point on the road map to strategic success is to conduct a survey of your congregation and audit your current communication practices. Feedback from your congregation is valuable so that you know what is working and what may need tweaked or trashed all together.

You may find there are communication needs of which you were not aware. You may find that something you thought was outdated might actually be preferred by your congregation. If you decide to move in a different direction with your church's communication, as you implement new strategies, continue to gather feedback from your audience and respond to that feedback accordingly.



**Jenn:**

Start slow, and don't go nuts! You don't need to open a Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat and LinkedIn account tomorrow. You shouldn't put your bulletin on a Powerpoint and stop printing paper ones. You have to introduce these items slowly.

You need to give people time to get used new ways of communication AND you need to do it well. If you dive in too fast you will make too many mistakes. Try a couple of new things and perfect them.

Also, the same things that work for my church may not work for yours. After trying for about six months, you may find that one social media platform just never took off and that's okay! Give it up and try something different – you can always go back to it later when your congregation is ready. This happened to us with mass texting. When I first introduced it, two people signed up. I was so disappointed. Two years later, I tried it again and now we have hundreds signed up.

Why is it important that a church communicate well to its congregation?  
To its community?



**Keri:**

There is so much that competes for our attention these days. We find ourselves surrounded by noise and often drowning in it. The church can provide a clear connection line straight to the one who provides calm to our craziness, light to our darkness, joy to our sadness. I can't think of a more important mission or message than to share the love of Jesus Christ. By sharing that with those inside our walls, we can create an exponential affect to those outside. Effective internal communication ultimately educates and enables our congregations to communicate with those outside our walls. It is my experience that when internal communication supports the mission of your church, you will find that the Lord's work will be carried out beyond your walls in ways you could never have imagined. Your congregation and its ministry relationships will be truly blessed. *(Continued on next page.)*



# Question and Answer session



## Betsey:

I love this quote and wish I knew its original source, "'The church isn't the end user of the Gospel.'" If we are to build relationships, we need to know one another. Only through relationships can we spread the Good News and make disciples for the transformation of the world. I am excited that our last study group had two Baptists, a Presbyterian, an agnostic, two former Roman Catholics and a handful of United Methodists. We built relationships. I am excited that our congregation has worshipped together with dozens of others. I love that young families at our Community Trunk or Treat last fall confided much with our pastor and consider him their pastor. I love that shoppers from all faiths join our prayer circle when we open the thrift store daily.



## Sydney:

A congregation wants to know what's going on at their church. Church is central to their lives—they give money there, they find hope there, they serve others there—so they want to know what the church is doing. It's important to be open in communications with your congregation to maintain trust. Share what your staff does each day, show how you used the offering this week, etc. It's also important to keep a good relationship with the community and to continually be reaching out to them. In order for the church to continue to grow and thrive, you need to be able to reach new members outside the existing congregation.

Can you talk about social media and how to create a social media strategy?



## Keri:

The abundance of social media platforms can feel overwhelming. However, the number one rule of effective communication also pertains to the realm of social media. Know your audience!

If your target audience is not using Snapchat, than it is best to focus your resources where your audience is going to receive your message. At my church, the majority of our

social media participation takes place on Facebook. That is where the majority of adults are (if they are plugged into social media). Our youth use Twitter and Instagram, but I rely on our youth directors to create and manage the messages disseminated through these platforms.

An important concept to remember with social media is to not spread yourself too thin. Do what you do well. If you are interested in finding a social media strategy for your church, the Internet is booming with great strategy guidelines for both small and large churches. The platform you use really will determine your strategy, so I recommend doing some research on Google or your favorite search engine and see what will fit your congregation's size and needs.



## Sydney:

Social media is an important part of many people's lives. Using it to spread awareness of what the church can do for people is very valuable. It's a great resource for communications, especially because it's free most of the time. For social media, I would look at what you are trying to accomplish with each channel (Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, etc.) and make sure that every post goes toward achieving those goals. Create monthly or weekly content calendars so you can plan out what you are going to say ahead of time, while still leaving room for trending topics and shared stories. Get creative when you can. Videos and photos always do better than promotion posts. Use these channels to tell a story.

Can you share some of your greatest highs and lows working as a communicator?



## Keri:

The greatest high in communication ministry for me is when you see that the communication efforts you have put forth have been blessed by God and have been fruitful. When you see individuals moved to be in ministry, it makes the endless hours of effort you have given communicating the church's mission and the church's story, so worthwhile. On Sunday, May 1 2016, my church, Shady Grove UMC in Mechanicsville, held

# With communications experts



our first ever Be the Church Day. We came together as a congregation for one abbreviated worship service, received Communion, and then dispersed to participate in over 20 service projects. Most were outside of the church walls, others were held at the church. Then we returned at 1 p.m. for a churchwide lunch and informal time of sharing our experiences. The turnout for the morning was amazing with almost 500 in attendance. The weather was awful (rainy and cold for May), however not one person complained. Everyone was there to reach out and serve and they did so in a big way!

Projects included teams beautifying and landscaping local elementary schools, taking appreciation buckets of goodies to nurses and staff at our local hospital, giving away quarters at a local laundromat, making blessing bags to distribute to the homeless, packing care packages for soldiers overseas, delivering stuffed animals and other needed supplies to a local women's shelter, and the list goes on. When we first began to plan the mission event, there were lots of questions and uncertainty. Are you crazy for taking three worship services and combining them into one?!?!? How would we handle the parking? Where would we hold worship? What would people think about serving on a Sunday!!! There were so many hours poured into this event by a dedicated group of volunteers and the thing I learned most is to be faithful. Don't try and put God in a box. When you allow yourself to be filled with the Spirit and to offer yourself to be the hands and feet of Christ, when you commit to serve another in Christian love not wanting or expecting anything in return, when you are simply there to love and show grace, God will move in mighty ways.

I am thankful that there aren't too many lows in communication ministry. I would say the largest challenge is that there is always so much to do and never enough time. This is especially true when serving in a part-time capacity the way I do. It is challenging to prioritize the communication needs of a church. I often wish I could do more – create more graphics, promote more ministry opportunities in new and creative ways, make another engaging post on Facebook, I forever feel there is work left undone, because communication ministry can expand in so many directions.



## Betsey:

Highs are creating spirited-filled media for worship and changing the experience for worshippers. A high is using one of our own 7-year-old's artwork for our Community Egg Hunt flyer and hearing all of the ooh's and ah's from our leadership team. Lows are

spending many dollars on a mailing campaign to see it bear no fruit or creating flyers and posters and have no one willing to distribute them.



## Jenn:

LOW: when someone comes in to your office and says, "I had no idea we were having this event" and you know that it was in the monthly and weekly newsletter both on paper and online, it was on a flyer on the bulletin board, it was in the bulletin and the scrolling announcements on the wall on Sunday morning and on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram! It doesn't matter how connected you think you are...someone is always going to miss it!

High: when other churches call on me for help or ideas.

## Favorite social media platform?

## Keri:

Facebook

## Betsey:

Facebook. I am old school.

## Jenn:

Facebook, for sure. It is quickly becoming the one stop shop. You don't need Skype, you don't need Google. Facebook is doing everything that SnapChat and Instagram are doing now.

## Sydney:

It depends on the message I'm trying to share. Personally, I enjoy Instagram, but Facebook is very good for businesses and creating a community feel.

(Continued on next page.)



# Question and Answer session

What would be good first steps for congregations who are interested in becoming more media-focused on their worship services and in their church communications?



**Betsey:**

For recent generations, used to multi-tasking, listening with no visual stimuli is boredom. They are interested in the message; they just need musical and visual stimulation. When I first introduced a congregation to their first projected hymn, it was the eldest that loved it the most. They could finally see the words they had been missing for years. Captivate the audience with spirit-filled videos that are inexpensive if you cannot produce your own. Invite a young person to take photos at the next church event and show a slideshow at the next gathering. Encourage people to check in on their social media at church. During announcements, we often give the guest Wi-Fi password, inviting guest to use their Bible on their devices. Today there's an instructional video for nearly everything online. You can teach yourself on

How do you live out your ministry as a communicator?



**Keri:**

I love this question because I feel my work as a Christian communicator is just as much of a calling as that of pastoral ministry. My most favorite hymn is "Here I Am Lord." The words of the chorus are forever a reminder of what I was placed here to do.

"Here I am Lord. Is it I Lord? I have heard you calling in the night. I will go Lord, if you lead me. I will hold your people in my heart."

Several months ago, I awoke from a night's sleep with the clearest message I think I have ever "heard" from God. I often in life have felt that I hear God through other's words. This experience however was the first time I really heard God's message to me this clearly and in an audible non-human voice. "Extend your serve."

Wow! What a powerful message! "Extend your serve." So I find myself learning how to do just that and deciphering how I can help others do the same.



**Betsey:**

I take photos and videos everywhere I go, always thinking of how I might use them in worship or in communication. In our ministry setting I am privileged to have the opportunities to work with media in worship, design logos, signs, banners, flyers—not only for our church, but also for the expanding ministries we are growing. I go to sleep thinking about new ways of presenting information and I wake up enthused to try something new. Jesus was the best communicator ever. I work to help others know him better. I help every church who asks me, every group, for the Kingdom.



**Jenn:**

I look for God in everything that I do. I am constantly snapping pictures when I see God in landscape, in people, in actions. Also, I love to celebrate through story and pictures how others are serving God and neighbor! It really is the coolest job in the world!



**Sydney:**

I try to remember that each event we promote and each Scripture we send out might be doing more than just filling someone's newsfeed. There are people out there who are missing something in their lives or who need help, and a poster or tweet or door hanger at just the right time has the ability to change their lives. It's important to see the bigger picture and remember that you are doing God's work as you do the day-to-day tasks. ♡

# With communications experts



The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and redeemer.

PSALM 19:14 (ESV)

The effectiveness of communication is not defined by the communication, but by the response.

MILTON ERICKSON

I'm a great believer that any tool that enhances communication has profound effects in terms of how people can learn from each other and how they can achieve the kind of freedoms that they're interested in.

BILL GATES

If I am the message thrower, I must deliver the message in a way that it can be easily received.

**Memo**  
To effectively communicate, we must realize that we are all different in the way we perceive the world and use this understanding as a guide to our communications with others.

ANTHONY ROBBINS

The two words "information" and "communication" are often used interchangeably, but they signify quite different things.

Communication works for those who work at it.

JOHN POWELL

Information is giving out. Communication is getting through.

SYDNEY J. HARRIS

# EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY



## How to conduct a local church communications audit

Could your church communicate more effectively? Are you getting the most value for your communications dollars? No matter how well we think we're communicating, we may be able to do even better by asking questions, evaluating and making changes as needed. How do we find out? We evaluate and we ask questions, evaluate again and make changes as needed. That's the basis of a local **church communications audit**.

**A communications audit can help answer such questions as:**

- ❖ Are current communications efforts meeting the real wants and needs of our audiences?
- ❖ Are there communications gaps we need to bridge?
- ❖ Are our communications being received, understood and acted upon by the audiences we intend to reach in ways we intend for them to respond?
- ❖ What are our strengths?
- ❖ What are our challenges?

- ❖ What can we do differently?
- ❖ How do people say they would respond if we were going to try the idea you have?
- ❖ What would make an effective mission of our communications ministry?

Generally, a church communications audit looks at the overall communications practices to see how everything fits together to meet the needs of the congregation, visitors, and so forth as well as addresses specific communications vehicles, such as the newsletter, website and so forth.

**Key elements in a communications audit include:**

- ❖ Having a stated purpose and specific outcomes for the audit
- ❖ Good questions that get to the goals of the audit
- ❖ Holding listening sessions to get "qualitative" information
- ❖ Online and printed surveys to get "quantitative" information
- ❖ An individual or group that can evaluate the information and provide recommendations.

A survey of the effectiveness of communications within the community can be more difficult – but

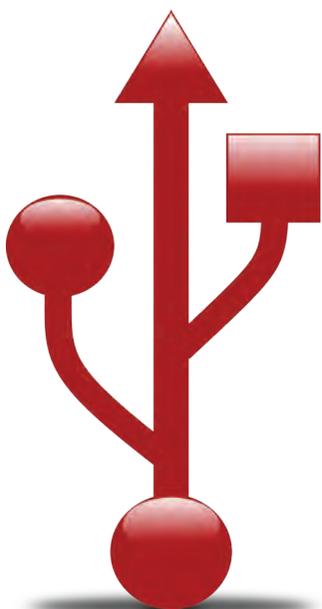
the basic approach can be the same if you can pull together focus groups within the community. You will probably be considering the image the church has in the community; how well the community responds to or engages in things going on with ministry and so forth.

**Key advice:**

Consider forming a taskforce for the audit. Keep the audit manageable so you can get information in a timely manner and respond to the needs as appropriate.

Possible steps for a communications audit could include (based on what works best in your setting and in your time):

- ❖ Create a taskforce for the purpose of doing a communications audit
- ❖ Contact the annual conference director of communication to see what help he/she may be able to provide
- ❖ Write down all the audiences served by the church (internally and externally) and add what information/communication they want and need
- ❖ Have fun brainstorming all the ways the church communicates
- ❖ Collect all the print pieces and think about the purpose, audience, message and distribution for



# EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY

some of the key pieces. Anything missing? Any gaps between the communications pieces and the audiences and needs identified earlier?

- ❖ Consider if there is evidence of a problem because communications aren't as effective as they could be.
- ❖ Decide what you would like to learn as a result of the audit. Write those things as purpose and outcome statements.
- ❖ Select 8-10 questions to ask during listening sessions
- ❖ Invite a broad range of individuals to one-hour focus group/listening sessions (no more than 10 people per session to allow adequate time for quality responses). Think about audio recording the sessions for accuracy.
- ❖ Consider spending an additional 10-20 minutes after the listening sessions for people to brainstorm communications ideas
- ❖ From the responses you receive in the listening sessions, develop questions for a survey.
- ❖ Arrange to provide the survey online as well as available as printed.
- ❖ Provide the surveys for 2-3 weeks online, inserted into bulletin,

classes, etc.

- ❖ Tabulate the responses and decide on recommendations

## Sample Audit Action Plan

Develop an action plan when beginning an audit.

### Setting the stage:

- I. Mission of the church:
  - II. Communications ministry mission statement or what we believe is the role of communications in supporting the church mission
  - III. Why do we want to do an audit?
  - IV. What do we hope to find out as a result of the audit?
  - V. What communications tools do we currently use?
  - VI. How effective do we believe each tool is?
  - VII. Who are our audiences (demographics)?
  - VIII. What do we want people to do as a result of our communications?
  - IX. What is evidence of a communications problem or challenge?
- Getting down to business:
- X. How will we conduct an audit:
    - a. Written survey
    - b. Online survey
    - c. Focus groups
  - XI. Who will coordinate

the surveys and focus groups, starting when, finishing by when

- XII. How/who will tally the results?
- XIII. Who will develop recommendations
- XIV. How will we inform the congregation and others of the audit results?

Write an action plan to enact recommendations.

## Sample Purpose and Outcome Statements for a Local Church Communications Audit

The overall purpose of an audit is to increase the sense of connection among the congregation and the church as a means of creating knowledgeable, supportive members involved in the work of your church in The United Methodist Church.

### Outcomes/Objectives:

1. Determine the effectiveness of current communication tools
2. Determine the need and receptiveness for [a communications tool/an approach the church is considering using]
3. Understand what the congregation says it wants and needs to know
4. With all of the good things going on in various committees or work

areas

5. Within the church, determine how informed members are across committee lines
6. Understand the different perspectives on communication efforts among particular audience segments:
  - a. Retirees
  - b. New Members
  - c. Young people
  - d. Define age segments as needed
  - e. Neighborhood
  - f. Visitors
7. Design effective delivery tools particular to each audience. 📌

– Resources provided by United Methodist Communications

# Devotions from International Lesson Series

## LIVING THE WORD



*The Rev. Megan J. Saucier is the pastor at Monumental UMC in historic Olde Towne Portsmouth, VA. She received her B.A. in Religious Studies from Centenary College of Louisiana and her M.Div. from Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University. Megan loves discovering beautiful spaces, drinking coffee, and reading. One day she hopes to own a tiny house. She shares in life and ministry with her husband, the Rev. Jason C. Stanley, their beautiful 2-year-old daughter and their greyhound, Roux. Megan is currently studying at Louisville Presbyterian Seminary in their Doctor of Ministry program.*

### May 7, 2017 The Blame Game Jonah 1:7-17

**M**y brother and I fought a lot when we were kids. We used to draw that imaginary line in the back seat and then cross it only to taunt the other person. We wrestled around the house and stole one another's Easter candy. We once put a hole in the wall and had to patch it up together as our punishment. In our small family, it was difficult to hide from responsibility, and finger pointing rarely worked, even though I tried mightily as a classic little sister.

As God sends a great storm to slow down Jonah's attempt to escape God's call, the passengers start looking for someone to blame. The common thought was that someone had angered the gods. They decide to use the method of casting lots to determine who is causing this distress. When that lot falls on Jonah, his affiliations are questioned. Jonah agrees to be thrown into the sea to appease the Lord, but the shipmates don't really want to throw someone overboard. After their efforts to row ashore fail, they prepare to hurl Jonah into the sea and ask that God not blame them for their actions. They hope and pray that God will work it out in the end. The storm ends, the fish swallows Jonah and they have their answer. The passengers respond by worshipping the living God.

When we face the storms of our lives, through disobedience, turmoil or just the effects of living in a broken world, we look for someone to blame. We typically look to outside forces first: God, family, other people, the government or the "powers that be." We rarely look to ourselves to find out our role in our own discomfort. Could we be to blame? How do we recognize our own responsibility?

Jonah didn't accept responsibility for his actions right away. His disobedience and hesitancy to recognize his part put others in danger. When he did accept responsibility that did not mean the hard times were over.

Most of the time, the effects of our difficult moments will not cease when we take responsibility for our actions. We may need to apologize,

seek forgiveness, or mend relationships. Other consequences or grief may accompany this revelation as well. Claiming our responsibility when we need to helps us to live into the gift of freedom God has given to us.

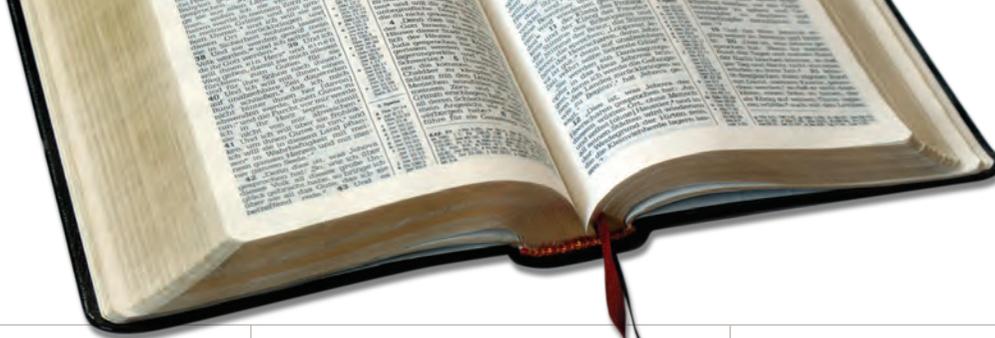
Think of a time when you took responsibility for your actions or decisions that caused difficulties for yourself or others. How did you experience freedom in the midst of your situation? What did you learn about God?

### May 14, 2017 Praying with Garbage Jonah 2

**I**n our new home we have the greatly coveted, ultra-convenient, modern invention, called... the garbage disposal. Since I was without one in my last home, I was oddly excited about this extra feature. No more positioning the drain catch just right so food won't slip through. No more wiping it out with a paper towel or hitting it on the side of the trash can to dislodge that sticky piece of rice. I could simply run the water, flip the switch and grind up those food particles to go to an unknown place. Out of sight, out of mind, I don't have to see it, and I don't have to touch it.

In the belly of the great fish, or the whale as we often like to describe it, Jonah comes face to face with the garbage of his own life. Surrounded by the depths of digestion and the truth of his thoughts, Jonah decides to pray. He prays a prayer of thanks to God for saving him from drowning in the midst of the sea. While this fish acts on God's behalf to save Jonah, we understand that if Jonah does not escape this place, he will surely die. He recognizes that he has run away from God and refused to follow God's instructions. As he accepts this truth, he worships God in the midst of the darkness, claiming the promise of God's deliverance.

It would be wonderful if none of us ever ran away from God, made mistakes or experienced tragedy, but we know that we will. Again and again, we will cry out, repent and ask God to deliver us from the garbage that surrounds us. As we become acquainted with our shortcom-



ings, our sin and our disobedience, we recognize how truly remarkable it is that God saves us. Praying in the midst of the deep, dark and dank places is an act of faith. To do so affirms our trust in the one who preserves us.

Imagine yourself at your “rock bottom,” or in the belly of the great fish. Write out your own prayer of surrender and trust. Who is God when you are surrounded by garbage? Who are you when you come to an understanding of your need and dependence on God?

## May 21, 2017

### A Different View

#### Jonah 3, Nahum 1-3

The other day, I was taking a walk through Olde Towne Portsmouth with my friend Laura Leigh. She is teaching her 3-year-old daughter how to cross the street and I hear her say, “What do we do when we get ready to cross the street?” “Look both ways,” her daughter says. Laura Leigh continues, “We also ask a grown-up if it’s safe to cross, because grown-ups are taller and can see over the cars.” “Mom, is it okay to cross?” “Yes, it is.”

A parent often gives us boundaries, because the parent knows that without them, we are bound to hurt ourselves. The image of God as divine parent is nothing new. God can see when we are about to hurt ourselves and hopes that we will ask for guidance before we hop out in front of an oncoming car.

If the Ninevites don’t change their ways, destruction is sure to come. The oracle of Nahum illustrates God’s anger at the city’s population and understands that they are headed for ruin. Like a frustrated parent, God can see the end of the road and sends Jonah as a last ditch effort to turn them around.

While the Ninevites deserved to suffer the consequences of their actions, God stepped in with a message of mercy. God decides not to bring calamity on the people as they repent and pray.

When we come face to face with the boundaries God sets for us, we might cross the street more than once without looking before we learn to listen to God. In the moment, we don’t always see the consequences of our actions: a critical word said to a child, an angry outburst at a church meeting, or a little white lie. God sees beyond our view of things and seeks to help us avoid hurting ourselves and others.

How have you experienced God’s protection from the consequences of your actions? In what ways does God help you to see a bigger picture?

## May 28, 2017

### Resentment

#### Jonah 4

In the Veggie Tales’ movie *Jonah*, the title song recounts the prophet’s story: “Jonah was a prophet, but he really never got it. He did not get the point... Compassion and mercy, from me to you and you to me, exactly what God wants to see, and yes, that is the point.” Jonah resented God for not destroying the Ninevites. He was so angry, he wanted to die. As that anger turned inward, the real person Jonah was hurting was himself.

God’s merciful deeds are not always appreciated. As far as we are concerned, people getting what they deserve is the way the world should work. When God offers radical, abundant and beautiful grace, we get uncomfortable. While we enjoy the benefits when mercy is extended to us, we sometimes have difficulty offering it to others. In Jonah’s case, he had quickly

forgotten his own salvation from the belly of the whale. His experience of God’s mercy did not fully translate into compassion for others.

God invites Jonah to see the importance of all creation saying, “Yet for my part, can’t I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than one hundred twenty thousand people who can’t tell their right hand from their left, and also many animals?” (CEB) God chose compassion and mercy rather than punishment.

Do you have trouble giving people the benefit of the doubt? Are your expectations of others getting in the way of accepting the overarching mercy and love of God? Are you carrying resentment with God or others that is clouding God’s love for you?

Try these ideas for turning from resentment to healing:

- ❖ **Recognize your emotions and express them if necessary.**

Telling both God and a trusted spiritual companion how you feel can begin the road to healing.

- ❖ **Remember God’s love for you and for all people.**

Seek to experience God’s love for you in worship and small group settings. Enact God’s love for others by serving someone in need.

- ❖ **Resolve to change.**

Be determined to offer forgiveness to others and let go of past hurts. With God’s help, forgiveness is possible.

- ❖ **Recreate the narrative.**

Give voice to your story of change so others can be inspired. Witness to what God is doing in your heart and life. 📖

# CLERGY & DIACONAL



## DEATHS

**The Rev. Donald (Don) Orlando Collins**, 91, of Emporia, died Mar. 18, 2017. He was preceded in death by his wife, Ann Smith Collins, and his son, Donald Stephen Collins. He is survived by his daughters, Beverly C. Flippo (Carter) of Doswell and Kim C. Johnson (Mike) of Jackson, N.C.; grandchildren, Brittany and Emily Flippo, Mason and Claire Collins, Lauren Ashley Collins, Lauren Hasty and Brad Johnson; two great-grandsons, Aubrey and Hunter Hasty; brother, Ben F. Collins of Greensboro, N.C.; and many nieces and nephews.

He served as Seaman 1st classman on the USS Gunston Hall in the Pacific area during WWII. After being honorably discharged from the military, he completed his education in broadcasting at Richmond Professional Institute (RPI) in Richmond, Va. in 1947. He spent the next 41 years as a broadcaster and the sales manager at WEVA in Emporia. During the early 1970s, he spent much time lay-ministering in the prisons or filling in at local pulpits. In 1987, he decided to retire from radio and pursue his real passion, the ministry. In 1988, he completed his coursework at Duke University to be ordained as a minister within The United Methodist Church. He became the minister of three small churches in Dinwiddie County on Jun. 16, 1988.

Oak Grove UMC, one of these churches, became his passion and he spent 19 years ministering there until his retirement in 2007.

**The Rev. Dr. Jimmy Carr**, deacon in full connection from Mississippi, died as a result of a heart attack on Mar. 18, 2017. He served as Executive Director of Lake Junaluska Assembly Center from 2000-2010.

**Walter A. Leyland Jr.**, the father of **Stephanie McClain**, wife of **the Rev. Bryan McClain** died Mar. 14, 2017. Walt, along with his wife Shirley, was a resident of Windsor Meade in Williamsburg and both were members of Williamsburg UMC.

Walt was a lifelong Methodist, having served in various lay leadership positions in churches from Pennsylvania to Maryland, as well as a youth in Virginia.

**Raymond Page**, father of **the Rev. Faith Weedling**, died Mar. 10, 2017, in Roanoke. The Rev. Weedling is pastor of Bethel UMC in Warrenton, Alexandria District. Her husband, the Rev. Steven Weedling is pastor of the Middleburg-Rectortown Cooperative Parish, Winchester District.

**Lindsey Christiensen**, sister of **the Rev. John Peters**, retired and part-time director of the Association of Educational Institutions, died on Ash Wednesday, Mar 1, 2017, after a brief battle with brain cancer. She was a former dean of voice and piano at Westminster Choir College and still a professor of voice who taught church musicians and opera singers.

Her service was at Nassau Presbyterian Church, Princeton, N.J. on Mar. 25, 2017. Lindsey sang with the Richmond Symphony and choral society and performed on many occasions in Virginia and New Jersey.

**Joseph Henry Hedrick**, 83, of Natural Bridge, died Feb. 8, 2017. He was the husband of **the Rev. Doris T. Hedrick**, pastor of Mount Olivet UMC, Staunton District.

He is survived by his wife, Doris T. Hedrick; sons Brian, Mark (Cynthia), Clay (Sue), Randy (Donna), and Scott (Lesley) and daughter Tracey

(Dinshaw); grandchildren, D.J., Jessica, Hilary, Brittany, Katherine, Sara, Stephanie, Matthew, Jenna, Jacob, Aiden and Pelaina; and several great grandchildren. Also surviving are his brother Herbert, and sisters, Lucille Harr and Sandra Patch.

He was a veteran of the U.S. Air Force. He was an alumni and avid supporter of West Virginia University. His career of 34 years as a forest ranger included 23 years on the Jefferson National Forest.

**Robert H. Blinn Jr.**, Lt. Col. USAF (Ret.), father of **the Rev. Robert C. Blinn**, died Feb. 21, 2017. A celebration of his life was held on Mar. 11 at St. Margaret's Episcopal Church.

**Mary Elizabeth Bacon Rodgers**, the mother of **the Rev. Milton Rodgers**, died Feb. 15, her 86<sup>th</sup> birthday. Mary was a fine Christian woman and her love of the church is what helped inspire Milton to devote his life to the church. Mary also gave Milton her famous laugh, her love of movies and of Broadway shows.

**John Reeves**, former president of Virginia Conference United Methodist Men, died Feb. 25. A service was held at Annandale UMC March 1 in Annandale.

**The Rev. Roger M. Baker**, an elder from the Rio Texas Conference who moved to Virginia and became an affiliate member of the Virginia Conference in 2012, died Feb. 20, 2017 after a long illness. He leaves behind his wife Sue and two teenage sons.

**Avis Bagley Bock**, 77, of Madison Heights, a retired local pastor in the Virginia Conference, died Feb. 19, 2017, at Guggenheimer Nursing Home

after a long illness. She was the wife of the late **Rev. James Ray Bock**. She was a retired local pastor with The United Methodist Church where she was a former pastor of Southview United Methodist Church.

Avis is survived by her daughter, Cynthia Woodroof (Jeff) of Lynchburg; her son, John Rosser (Susan) of Amherst; eight grandchildren, Joseph Campbell, Jonathan Mikles, Eric Campbell, Brian Campbell, Sarah Rosser Bostwick, Angel Mikles, Emily Jean Rosser and Willow Mikles; and seven great-grandchildren.

**Gene Edwin Honeycutt**, 82, father of the **Rev. Denise Honeycutt**, died Feb. 23, 2017. He was an Army veteran and had also been a school teacher and held a career in insurance. His wife and Denise's mother, Patsy, survives him. ☞

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

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

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

Go to the Virginia Conference Web site, <[www.vaumc.org](http://www.vaumc.org)> and click, "Resources >> Cokesbury Virtual Bookstore."

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

Powered by  [cokesbury.com](http://cokesbury.com)

The Virginia United Methodist

# Advocate

**EQUIPS  
CONNECTS  
INFORMS**

[www.vaumc.org/Advocate](http://www.vaumc.org/Advocate)

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

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

*For Your Printing Needs*



**Benj. Franklin  
Printing Co.**

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

1528 High Street  
Richmond, Va. 23220

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

## Get a bus and peace of mind.

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

**Sonny Merryman INC.**

VIRGINIA'S  
BUS COMPANY

[sonnymerryman.com](http://sonnymerryman.com)  
**(800) 533-1006**



Call for a free demonstration.

**SALES AND SERVICE: CENTRAL VIRGINIA • HAMPTON ROADS • NOVA**

# FROM THE BISHOP



## Crisis Communications

*Dear Pastors and Leadership of Virginia Conference churches,*

Communications is at the very heart of what we do; it is how we carry out ministry. Communication is also integral in maintaining the connectional aspect of our denomination that links local churches to our global church.

To this end, I am writing to convey the importance of sharing with the conference office when you or your churches are mentioned in the local press, have been contacted by the press or have a potential crisis. As well, please remember to contact your district superintendent first in

any crisis.

Afterwards, please contact our Virginia Conference Director of Communications Madeline Pillow ([MadelinePillow@vaumc.org](mailto:MadelinePillow@vaumc.org)). For any type of media contact, Madeline can provide guidance in talking to the press, sharing your news and handling any crisis. It is especially important in a crisis situation that the conference be informed and have as much time as possible to prepare.

A crisis is defined as any situation that threatens the integrity or reputation of an organization, usually brought on by adverse or negative media attention. These situations can be any kind of legal dispute, accident, employee action or other perilous action that could be attributed to an organization or impact your ability to operate. It can also be a situation when the public perceives an organization did not react in the appropriate manner.

As a conference, it is important that we are aware that because of ever-changing technology, news can be rapidly disseminated broadly on social media and the Internet. Our sensitivity to this will ensure that our ministry and our work at making disciples for Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world is the message that we broadcast.

I thank you for your attention to this matter and for helping maintain the strength of our connection. 🍀

*Peace and Blessings,*

Bishop Sharma D. Lewis

## Bishop's Bible Challenge readings for May

May 1	1 Chronicles 3-5
May 2	1 Chronicles 6
May 3	1 Chronicles 7-8
May 4	1 Chronicles 9-11
May 5	1 Chronicles 12-14
May 6	1 Chronicles 15-17
May 7	1 Chronicles 18-21
May 8	1 Chronicles 22-24
May 9	1 Chronicles 25-27
May 10	1 Chronicles 28-29 2 Chronicles 1
May 11	2 Chronicles 2-5
May 12	2 Chronicles 6-8
May 13	2 Chronicles 9-12
May 14	2 Chronicles 13-17
May 15	2 Chronicles 18-20
May 16	2 Chronicles 21-24
May 17	2 Chronicles 25-27
May 18	2 Chronicles 28-31
May 19	2 Chronicles 32-34
May 20	2 Chronicles 35-36
May 21	Ezra 1-3
May 22	Ezra 4-7
May 23	Ezra 8-10
May 24	Nehemiah 1-3
May 25	Nehemiah 4-6
May 26	Nehemiah 7
May 27	Nehemiah 8-9
May 28	Nehemiah 10-11
May 29	Nehemiah 12-13
May 30	Esther 1-5
May 31	Esther 6-10



# ONE LAST WORD

## “The Blind Man and the Elephant”

Poem by John Godfrey Saxe



It was six men of Indostan, to learning much inclined,  
who went to see the elephant (Though all of them were blind),  
that each by observation, might satisfy his mind.

The first approached the elephant, and, happening to fall,  
against his broad and sturdy side, at once began to bawl:  
'God bless me! but the elephant, is nothing but a wall!'

The second feeling of the tusk, cried: 'Ho! what have we here,  
so very round and smooth and sharp? To me tis mighty clear,  
this wonder of an elephant, is very like a spear!'

The third approached the animal, and, happening to take,  
the squirming trunk within his hands, 'I see,' quoth he,  
the elephant is very like a snake!'

The fourth reached out his eager hand, and felt about the knee:  
'What most this wondrous beast is like, is mighty plain,' quoth he;  
'Tis clear enough the elephant is very like a tree.'

While reading the poem below, consider the importance of communication. Also consider how individuals' different perspectives may affect their communication and how you create meaning based on their communication style and information they relate. Do all these men see the elephant the same? How well did they communicate their findings to create a whole image and understanding of the elephant?

The fifth, who chanced to touch the ear, Said; 'E'en the blindest  
man  
can tell what this resembles most; Deny the fact who can,  
This marvel of an elephant, is very like a fan!'

The sixth no sooner had begun, about the beast to grope,  
than, seizing on the swinging tail, that fell within his scope,  
'I see,' quoth he, 'the elephant is very like a rope!'

And so these men of Indostan, disputed loud and long,  
each in his own opinion, exceeding stiff and strong,  
Though each was partly in the right, and all were in the wrong!

So, oft in theologic wars, the disputants, I ween,  
tread on in utter ignorance, of what each other mean,  
and prate about the elephant, not one of them has seen!

– John Godfrey Saxe (1816-1887 / the United States)



# FERRUM COLLEGE



With a beginning forged on faith to a future strengthened by progress and aspiration, Ferrum College provides life-long learning and outstanding career and graduate school preparation in a setting of rich natural beauty. Our nationally recognized bachelor's degree programs range from business, agriculture, and environmental science to teacher education and recreation leadership. With small classes and a dedicated faculty and staff, we offer a hands-on, experiential approach to learning with real and relevant opportunities for students, including individualized attention and collaborative work with faculty members even in the first year. We are privileged to be a guiding force of higher education in Virginia and to have the opportunity to secure a bright and enduring future for our students.

 [WWW.FERRUM.EDU](http://WWW.FERRUM.EDU) 



**FERRUM**  
COLLEGE

*Celebrating Our United  
Methodist Heritage Since 1913*

