



# Advocate

May 2019



ASK the UMC:

*What  
happened  
at  
GC 2019?*



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**Virginia Advocate**

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

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The Advocate is published once a month. The deadline to submit news and ad copy for the June 2019 issue is April 26. For more information on future deadlines, contact the Advocate office or visit the website.

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

#### Letters

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

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USPS 660-740 ISSN 0891-5598  
Published monthly by Virginia United Methodist Communications, 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.

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

**Loving  
those who  
are gone**

**"Be the things you loved most about the people who are gone."** -Unknown

I've been thinking a lot about this quote. On Monday, March 25, my "Papa", the Rev. Doug Pillow, retired elder, passed into glory.

My office has not had much of a break between General Conference, working toward Annual Conference in June or in all of the events and action items in between.

I finally found some time the weekend following his passing to process and grieve his death.

His funeral was all we could have wished for. It was a celebration to honor a life well lived. Papa's favorite people were there, from members of his former congregations to clergy members to loved ones.

Papa loved that I worked at the conference center and was the Advocate editor. Loved it. Every month, whether by phone call or in his prolific letter writing, he would tell me about some aspect of the magazine that he liked. He wasn't alone in this. I am pretty convinced that my grandmother has been our highest-grossing subscription getter since I started (Hugs and kisses to you, Gaga!).

In reflecting on his life, I was never hazy about what Papa believed. He loved God and he loved his family. He also loved food; he was the quintessential United Methodist.

With Papa's death comes the knowledge and understanding that there has been a major loss in my life. I no longer live in a world where he is.

But I can choose to carry him with me. I can carry what I loved most about him with me in the world of which I am still a part. I can love God. I can love my family. And I can love all kinds of food. ☺

Until our next issue,

*Madeline C. Pillow*



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On Cover and above: Photos taken at the 2019 General Conference in St. Louis by Paul Jeffrey, Mike DuBose and Kathleen Barry.

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conference website:  
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## LETTERS & SNIPPETS

### Virginia Board of Laity shares letter following General Conference

*At the end of March, the Board of Laity shared a letter to the entire conference concerning General Conference and moving forward.*

**All God's people in all places, and in all times, are called to love and to serve.**

— Ministry of the Laity

<sup>4</sup>Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; <sup>5</sup>and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; <sup>6</sup> and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. <sup>7</sup>To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

<sup>14</sup>Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many.

<sup>20-21</sup>As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."

— 1 Corinthians 12:4-7, 14,  
20-21 NRSV



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

"Because lay ministry has been instrumental in the spread of the gospel from the earliest times and especially in the establishment of The United Methodist Church, and because God, through baptism and confirmation, continues to call each believer into ministry, the Virginia Conference Board of Laity lifts up the crucial importance of lay ministry and urges lay people to take this call seriously, committing themselves to grow in faith, mission, witness and ministry. We thank our pastors who commit themselves to leading lay people to discover and develop their ministries and who partner with them in this great adventure of faith and discipleship.

It is our continuing prayer at this time for our church and its people called United Methodists that our God will most assuredly lead us forward in His unfailing way. May we, the Virginia Conference laity, in partnership with all our clergy, district superintendents, and bishops be truly faithful to each other with the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ as we move forward together.

"This is a critical

time on our Christian walk together to stop and listen to our God and recognize, as Paul said, 'there are many members, yet one body.' If nothing else we the laity over the past six years in the Virginia Conference have been taught how to be in prayerful conversation, Christian conversation, transparent conversation. May we, the laity, all the laity now more than ever continue forward.

"May Christ be with us."

— The Virginia Board of Laity  
Warren R. Harper,  
Conference Lay Leader

### Task force formed for potential GC voting irregularities

A task force has been formed after revelations of potential voting irregularities surfaced following General Conference 2019. The Rev. Gary Graves, secretary of the Commission on the General Conference, has said the number of ineligible voters was too slim to affect the outcome of the vote on the Traditional Plan or the defeat of the One Church Plan. The One Church Plan would have left questions of mar-

# LETTERS & SNIPPETS



Executive committee of The United Methodist Church in Germany

riage up to individual clergy and churches, and ordination up to annual conferences.

However, a vote that would allow churches, within limitation, to leave the denomination while keeping church property was decided by a two-vote margin. Graves said since voting is by secret ballot, it is unknown if the possible ineligible voters supported a particular outcome.

## The German Church won't impose Traditional Plan bans

**S**tipulations in the Traditional Plan approved by General Conference 2019 are unacceptable, said the executive committee of The United Methodist

Church in Germany, and the church in Germany will not impose the stricter penalties laid out in the plan.

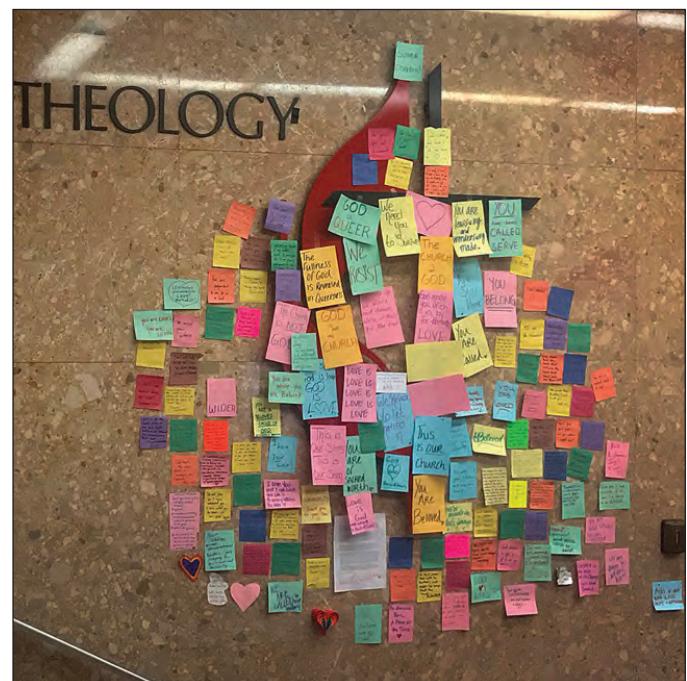
The committee is also forming a round-table to search for ways to preserve unity.

## Seminary leaders stress inclusiveness after GC2019

**L**eaders of most United Methodist seminaries in the U.S. that train clergy for the denomination are stressing their inclusive policies after the special General Conference affirmed the church's LGBTQ bans. While some African educators and at least one U.S. seminary that trains many United Methodists welcomed the action, leaders at

most of the 13 United Methodist theological schools did not. Most of the 13 United Methodist seminaries posted notes on their websites saying that their policies of inclusion — including LGBTQ individuals — will continue. ↗

Messages of support for LGBTQ students at Boston School of Theology. Photos courtesy of UMNS.



# DISCIPLES HELPING TO TRANSFORM THE WORLD



▲ At their January Epiphany party, the United Methodist Women (UMW) of Sterling UMC recognized three church members with a Special Mission Recognition Pin for their outstanding dedication to UMW.

Maryann Craig is present at almost every mission event of Sterling UMC, usually in the background performing a thankless task of one kind or another. She has for several years managed the clothing aspect of the annual rummage sale, which funds the church's mission programs for the year. During their semi-annual pancake breakfast, she can usually be found in the kitchen washing dishes. She also participates monthly in the Grace Ministries program, once again managing the clothing. She has been on multiple mission trips, particularly to Sager Brown

where she helps with UMCOR kits.

Don and Donna Meyer have volunteered as short-term missionaries to Red Bird Mission in Kentucky through United Methodist Volunteers in Mission (UMVIM). They are tireless volunteers for Sterling's annual rummage sale and monthly Grace Ministries. Both have been on countless mission trips through the church. Don is a chaplain for Loudoun Hospital and helps Sterling's pastor by visiting those in the church who are in the hospital or who need home visits. Pictured from left, Maryann Craig, Don Meyer, Donna Meyer.

**Bobby Boyd** became the new camp director for Westview on the James, Goochland, as of Feb. 4. He earned a B.S. in Business Management from Asbury Col-

lege and an M.A. in Christian Formation in Ministry from Wheaton College. His experience includes having served as the Director of Youth and Young Adult Ministries at Warwick Memorial UMC, as the Program Director at Riverside Lutheran Bible Camp, and most recently as the Director of Waukaway Springs Christian Retreat Center. Bobby is married and he and his wife, Jenny, have two daughters.

Boyd said he is excited to work with the staff to promote Westview's mission of "Creating a place apart to grow with God in every season." The Westview Board said it believes that in hiring Boyd, it has found an experienced camp director,



with a passion for outdoor ministry, to provide leadership and direction for the camp and assure that Westview achieves its vision of "Playing outdoors. Building community. Transforming lives."

**Westhampton UMC** in Richmond held a Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service for the first time in 2019. The director of

the Westhampton Day School, Danielle Todd, proposed inviting the community to join the church for a chapel service and then for service inside and outside the walls of the church. The Rev. Christy Haga Turner, Westhampton pastor, said the congregations was very supportive of the event. They had participation from other churches including Bon Air UMC and Welborne UMC as well as day school families. Offsite projects included serving as needed at the Evelyn D. Reinhart House and the Welborne UMC Food Pantry. Other projects included creating cards for the MCV Burn Center and collecting items for the Richmond Animal League.

"I believe MLK Day is gaining popularity as not a day off, but a day on for serving in our community," said Turner. "Service is essential to our life as Christians. We believe God's vision for us at Westhampton is to put our faith into action and this service of worship, followed by service projects only helped to underscore that vision."

Nineteen Virginia clergy attended the **2019 Convocation for United Methodist Black Pastors** sponsored by the Discipleship Ministries from Jan. 8-10, 2019 in Atlanta, Ga. They represented churches from all over the Virginia Conference.▼





# What happened



# at General Conference?



Mid growing concerns for the denomination's future, the 2016 General Conference authorized the formation of a commission to deal with church teachings on homosexuality and find ways to help the church stay together. The Commission on a Way Forward submitted proposals that were considered by the delegates at the 2019 special called General Conference.

Delegates to General Conference include equal numbers of lay and clergy members elected by annual conferences around the world. Bishops preside and facilitate the work of the delegates, but do not vote. The General Conference is the only body that approves church policy and speaks officially for the denomination.

## *What was decided by General Conference?*

The General Conference delegates passed by a 438-384 vote the Traditional Plan, which retains restrictions against "self-avowed practicing homosexual" clergy and officiating at or hosting same-sex marriage ceremonies and requires stricter enforcement for violations of church law.

The Traditional Plan was one of the plans that came out of the work of the special commission. The One Church Plan, which would have left questions of marriage up to individual churches and clergy, and ordination requirements up to conferences, was defeated.

## *The Traditional Plan as approved includes:*

- ❖ An expanded definition of "self-avowed practicing homosexual" to include people "living in a same-sex marriage, domestic partnership or

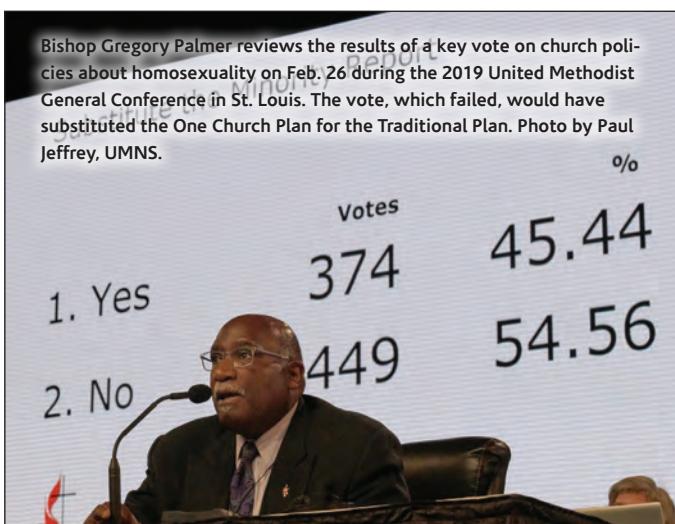
civil union or is a person who publicly states she or he is a practicing homosexual."

- ❖ The creation of the council relations committee, as part of the Council of Bishops, to hold bishops accountable to restrictions related to homosexuality.
- ❖ Minimum penalties for clergy convicted at trial of performing a same-sex wedding. Those penalties include one year's suspension without pay for the first offense and loss of credentials for the second.
- ❖ The requirement that Boards of Ordained Ministry examine and not recommend candidates who do not meet standards regarding sexuality. It also empowers bishops to rule a candidate out of order.
- ❖ The requirement that annual conferences certify only Board of Ordained Ministry nominees who will "uphold, enforce, and maintain the Book of Discipline related to ordination and marriage of practicing homosexuals." The General Council on Finance and Administration will withhold funds and use of the cross and flame logo for conferences that fail to do so.



United Methodist bishops hold hands in prayer during a day of prayer for the 2019 United Methodist General Conference in St. Louis.

Photo by Mike DuBose, UMNS.



- ❖ Multiple changes to the complaint process under church law. These changes include requiring that bishops not dismiss complaints without reasons given; involving those making complaints in the just resolution process; allowing the church to appeal “errors of church law or administration” of church trials.

The delegates also approved an exit plan for churches that want to leave the denomination with their property. Local churches that elect to leave must pay unpaid apportionments and pension liabilities.

Two petitions were approved to deal with the pension liabilities of departing churches and the accrued benefits of departing clergy. One requires that any local church that withdraws or is closed must pay, at a minimum, its fair share of unfunded pension liability for their annual conference. Delegates amended the legislation to say “nothing in the forgoing would prevent annual conferences collecting other obligations from local churches.”

The other petition spells out that any clergy members who end their relationship with a conference will be treated as “terminated vested” participants, meaning their accrued benefits would be safe and converted to an individual account balance.

In addition, delegates approved a timeline for 2019 legislation to take effect in church regions in Africa, Europe and the Philippines 12 months after the 2020 General Conference.

## *Where can I read the plan that passed?*

The approved legislation and amendments are available at <http://umc.org/calms>. Summaries, overviews and other resources about the Traditional Plan and each of the other proposals are available on the 2019 General Conference website: [www.umc.org/who-we-are/general-conference-2019-legislation](http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/general-conference-2019-legislation).

## *Was any of the Traditional Plan unconstitutional?*

Yes, the Judicial Council, the denomination’s top court, in Decision 1366 and Decision 1377 has ruled parts of the plan as violations of the denomination’s constitution.

The Judicial Council ruled that certain portions of the plan strayed from the constitution on matters of due process and by elevating adherence to requirements related to homosexuality above all other requirements. Those portions deal with bishop accountability and responsibilities, composition of boards of ordained ministry and the examination of candidates for ministry by the boards of ordained ministry.

(Con't. on next page: "GC 2019.")



In Decision 1377, the church court also identified constitutional problems in legislation dealing with the exit of churches from the denomination.

Delegates amended a Traditional Plan petition dealing with board of ordained ministry nominees as well as the exit plan petition. It's up to the Judicial Council to determine if the amendments resolve the constitutional problems.

## *Will the Judicial Council review the plan approved by General Conference?*

The General Conference delegates requested a ruling by the Judicial Council on the constitutionality of the Traditional Plan. The Council of Bishops also has requested a review of the approved exit plan for churches. The Judicial Council will address these requests at its next scheduled meeting April 23-25.

## *When will changes take effect?*

The Traditional Plan legislation takes effect Jan. 1, 2020 for churches in the U.S. and 12 months after the 2020 General Conference for churches outside the U.S. The pension legislation took effect immediately after the 2019 General Conference. The church exit

plan also was to take effect at the close of the 2019 General Conference, but is awaiting Judicial Council review. Any portions of the plan ruled unconstitutional will not take effect.

## *How did each delegate vote?*

Delegates vote by secret ballot. The voting system generates final results based on a tally of all valid votes. There is no record of how individuals vote. This is to protect all delegates so they can vote their own conscience.

## *How many delegates were from each country?*

The special General Conference session had the same delegates as General Conference 2016 unless annual conferences chose to elect new delegates.

The number of delegates was set at 864 – about 58 percent (504) from the United States and 30 percent (260) from Africa. The remaining delegates (90) are from the Philippines, Europe and Eurasia as well as 10 from “concordat” churches with which The United Methodist Church has formal relationships. Thirty-one delegates were absent during General Conference, mostly because they could not obtain visas.

## *Can the 2020 General Conference change the outcome?*

Each General Conference makes decisions on the submitted requests before it. It is possible the 2020 General Conference may receive similar legislation and delegates will make their own decisions. The actions of one General Conference do not bind the next General Conference. Every General Conference can alter or revise any previous actions or adopt new policies within the limits of the Constitution. ↗

– From United Methodist Communications

# Bishop offers statement following General Conference 2019

By Forrest White

**E**arly in her March 4 "State of the Church" address, Bishop Sharma D. Lewis urged those in attendance at the Virginia Conference Center and those watching via livestream to keep praying for The United Methodist Church's mission and for a way forward only days after General Conference 2019 deepened the denomination's divide.

"I know many of you are saying, 'I'm tired of praying Bishop. I want action. I want us to do something,'" Lewis said. "You can do both."

She then pointed to Scripture – James 5:16.

*Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.*



"Engage in action—action that is beneficial not for your own personal gain but action that will glorify our Lord and Savior," Lewis said, her preacher voice rising.

"In all of our churches we need to be actively involved in ministry to welcome all people, all people, all people in the life of the church. I think all of you will agree with me ... No matter what was decided at General Conference, no one is excluded in the Kingdom of God."

Thirty-three minutes into her address, Lewis invited the Rev. Tom Berlin and Mrs. Martha Stokes, chairs of the Conference Committee on Episcopacy, to join her at the podium where she announced that on the recommendation of her doctors she would take a six-month medical leave effective immediately.

In late December 2018, Lewis underwent hip surgery and then had an additional surgery in January, which prevented her from attending General Conference in St. Louis. Complications related to her original surgery would force her to undergo two additional surgeries, she said.

"To take six months off will be hard, but I have got to get well," she said.

If the denomination she serves is to heal, it will require finding common ground, without casting stones across what she called "two distinct lines being drawn again in the sand" in St. Louis.

Lewis urged United Methodists of the Virginia Conference not to leave the denomination, but instead to "realize we have more things in common than differences" and "we can do more together than separately."

She cited Virginia Annual Conference 2018, when nearly 1,700 United Methodists worked on service projects together around the Hampton community.

"We didn't ask each other what our theological convictions were (that day)," she said.

Lewis assured all those listening that she would "live my life consecrated as a bishop to lead the whole church."

"As your bishop, I want to affirm all people. I want to

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

say all people are valued. All people are called. All people are of sacred worth," Lewis said.

"... To the brothers and sisters of the LGBTQIA+ community I want you to know you're loved and you are accepted in our churches. I also want to say to you I can't imagine how you must feel, once again. I can't imagine. I can't imagine the deep pain, the hurt.

"As your bishop I also want to affirm the evangelical community ... that often times feels that their beliefs are misunderstood (as) animosity or homophobia instead of their deep, abiding faith in Jesus Christ."

In addition to her call for prayer and action, Lewis repeated other common refrains of her first 30 months as bishop, calling upon clergy and laity to:

- ❖ **Lead with a non-anxious presence**
- ❖ **Pursue the United Methodist mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world**
- ❖ **Encourage one another and allow the Holy Spirit to guide them**

During the question and answer portion of the address, Berlin and Stokes shared their thoughts, as Lewis sat nearby.

Berlin called this a time of "self-definition" for the local church.

"There's a moment of opportunity here, a leadership moment," he said. "Clergy and laity you need to be leaders. You need to not be sitting back, being passive ... No,

lean into it. Preach what you're for, state what you're for, not what you're against. That's what would help people."

Stokes called for continued conversation and relationship building, but on a deeper level.

"This is not a time to stop having conversation," she said. "This is a time to take the conversation even to a different level. There are folks who are hurting. There are folks who are fine with the decision. There are so many in the middle, so many of us who are centrists, living our lives as United Methodists that are not necessarily on either end of our spectrum of understanding here."

Before she began her address Lewis asked everyone to join her in singing *Blessed Assurance*, her favorite hymn.

She said she couldn't get the refrain of the hymn "out of my head, out of my spirit" as she prayerfully prepared her message.

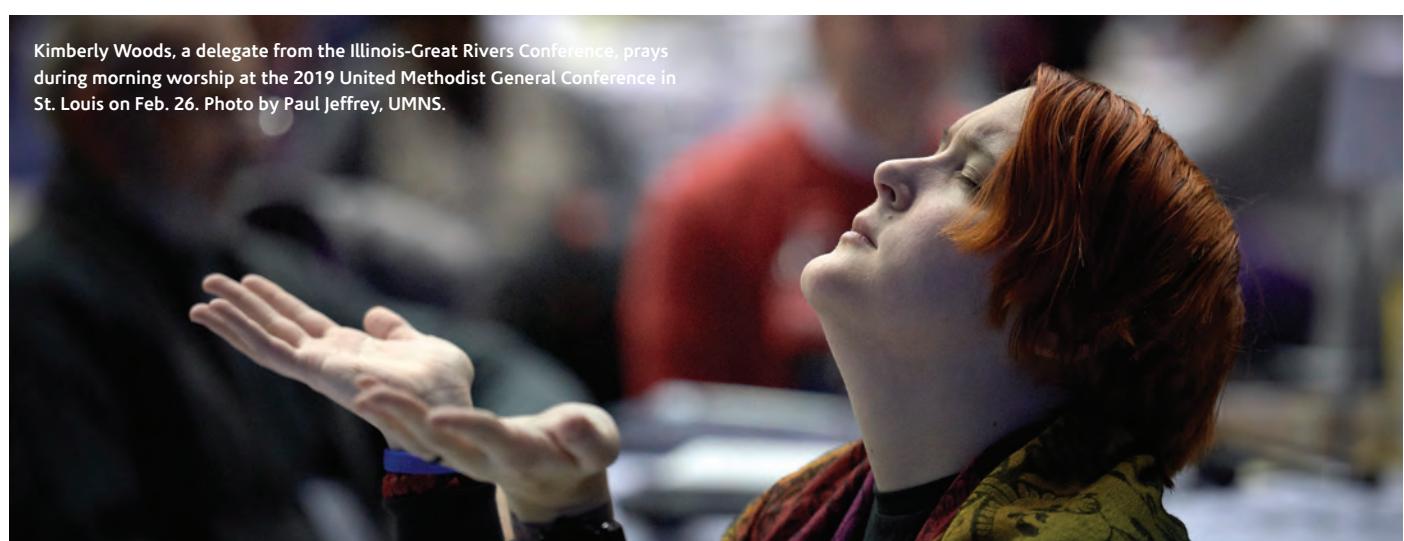
**This is my story, this is my song,  
Praising my Savior all the day long.**

"It is the last line of this hymn that really resonates in my spirit, the last line, praising my savior all the day long," Lewis said. "I'm here to remind all of us that it is our Lord and Savior that will get us through, as United Methodists, these unsettling and also restless times."

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

You can view the archived video at  
<https://livestream.com/vaumc/stateofthechurch>.

Kimberly Woods, a delegate from the Illinois-Great Rivers Conference, prays during morning worship at the 2019 United Methodist General Conference in St. Louis on Feb. 26. Photo by Paul Jeffrey, UMNS.



# *Individuals support ad in the Washington Post*

By Forrest White

**T**he Rev. Rob Vaughn described his flight back to Virginia from 2019 General Conference as nothing less than scary – not because of any turbulence in the skies but rather because of the turbulence swirling around The United Methodist Church.

The thoughts that had plagued him in the hours after passage of the Traditional Plan were his unwanted travel companion all the way home.

*We just added much greater injury to individuals, families and the community.*

*We destroyed our reputation as a church of open hearts, open minds, open doors.*

*We're not THAT UMC!*

He felt as if he should scream that last message to the community.

So, Vaughn – one of the Virginia Conference's 11 clergy delegates in St. Louis and lead pastor of Community of Faith UMC in Herndon – came up with the idea to place an advertisement in *The Washington Post*.

"A statement to say this action of General Conference is not representative of us or most of the United Methodist churches in the United States was necessary," Vaughn said.

He reached out to colleagues in the Arlington and Alexandria districts, as well as leaders of metro District of Columbia churches in the Baltimore-Washing-

ton Annual Conference, inviting them to join the list of churches listed in the ad and to help pay for it.

There was a sense of urgency for the participating churches to get this message out as quickly as possible:

No matter who you are or where you come from, you are welcome here. We welcome all and stand together for LGBTQIA inclusion.

There are 55 churches in the Alexandria District, 48 in the Arlington District.

Of those 103 churches, 49 opted to participate in placing the ad, as did Arise Campus Ministry of George Mason University.

The Advocate reached out to five pastors at Northern Virginia churches that did not participate.

Only the Rev. Jason Duley, senior pastor at Galilee UMC Sterling, agreed to share why his church chose not to be a part of the ad.

"While Galilee is clearly welcoming of all, we felt the ad was a bit too progressive for our posture," Duley said.

He likened Galilee's approach to that of Better Angels, a community organization working "to depolarize America" according to its website.

"We are intentionally working to bring together people who differ on a number of controversial issues, teaching all to value those who are different from them," Duley said.

"Doing the hard work of peacemaking is a way of showing the love of Christ to all."

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



The Washington Post



## No matter who you are or where you come from, you are welcome here.

We welcome all and stand together for LGBTQIA inclusion.

A week ago, our global United Methodist Church chose not to fully embrace the gifts and lives of our LGBTQIA members and friends. We grieve this decision and the pain it causes our siblings throughout the world. The majority of United Methodists in the United States believe differently and desire a church that is more diverse, more open and truly representative of the communities they serve. The local United Methodist faith communities listed below proclaim God's love and grace are for ALL and welcome everyone --- especially persons who feel the pain of this decision.

These United Methodist Churches of the D.C. area extend a special welcome to our LGBTQIA neighbors, allies, and families.

**Northern Virginia United Methodists** **Alexandria:** Aldersgate UMC, Beverley Hills UMC, Fairlington UMC, Kingstowne Communion UMC, Rising Hope UMC, Saint James UMC, Trinity UMC, Washington Street UMC **Annandale:** Annandale UMC (Main & Immanuel Campus), St. Matthews UMC **Arlington:** Arlington Commons UMC, Calloway UMC, Calvary UMC, Central UMC, Cherrydale UMC, Community UMC, Mount Olivet UMC, Walker Chapel UMC. **Falls Church:** Christ-Crossman UMC, Dulin UMC, Friendship UMC, Galloway UMC **Fairfax:** Bruen Chapel UMC, Burke UMC, Centreville UMC, The Hunger Church Charles Wesley UMC, Church of the Good Shepherd (Vienna), Epiphany UMC, Great Falls UMC, Oakton UMC, Silverbrook UMC, Trinity UMC (McLean), Vale UMC (Oakton), Washington Farms UMC **Herndon:** Community of Faith UMC, Floris UMC, Herndon UMC **Reston:** Restoration UMC **Fauquier:** Gainesville UMC, Warrenton UMC **Loudoun:** Crossroads UMC, Pleasant Valley UMC **Manassas:** Grace UMC **Prince William:** Cokesbury UMC, Dumfries UMC, Good Shepherd UMC **Springfield:** Messiah UMC, Springfield UMC, Sydenstricker UMC **Campus Ministry:** Arise Campus Ministry (at George Mason University)

**Washington D.C. & Maryland United Methodists** **Washington DC:** Asbury UMC, Capitol Hill UMC, Dumbarton UMC, Foundry UMC, Hughes Memorial UMC, Mount Vernon Place UMC, Mount Zion UMC, National UMC, The United Church **Beltsville:** Emmanuel UMC **Bethesda:** Bethesda UMC, North Bethesda UMC **Chevy Chase:** Chevy Chase UMC **College Park:** College Park UMC, University UMC **Greenbelt:** Mowatt Memorial UMC **Hyattsville:** First UMC **Kensington:** St. Paul's UMC **Laurel:** Emmanuel UMC **Rockville:** Faith UMC **Silver Spring:** Colesville UMC, Silver Spring UMC **Suitland:** Bells UMC **Temple Hills:** Church of the Redeemer UMC **Wheaton:** Hughes UMC - El Buen Samaritano **Seminary & Campus Ministries:** American University United Methodist Protestant Community, Wesley Foundation at University of Maryland at College Park, Wesley Foundation at Howard University, Wesley Theological Seminary

*There are many more United Methodist churches who extend welcome and stand in solidarity. The listed communities are from the immediate geographical area around Washington.*

("AD" cont. from page 15.)

The ad ran March 8 in the Post's A section, March 9 in its religion pages and again in the A section on Sunday March 10.

Total cost was \$34,000, Vaughn said, after "very serious multiple discounts and great assistance from the Post advertising department."

Three-day placement without the discount would have been more than \$100,000, Vaughn said.

Not every participating church paid the same amount, though every church that wanted to participate was able to be included because of individual donors.

One person gave \$1,500, Vaughn said.

"In a sense, the ad was the beginning of putting our money where our mouth is," said the Rev. Tim Ward, pastor of Restoration Church in Reston. "It's one thing to say that we are inclusive of all people. It's another to put your financial resources in a place of

commitment to that reality."

At Bruen Chapel UMC in Fairfax, the Rev. Ruth Burgess said she considers her congregation, with an average worship attendance of fewer than 20, "welcoming, although not always perfectly so." She shared the idea for the ad on Sunday morning, March 3, and had some members "contribute substantially" to make sure the church was included.

"After the advertisement appeared, our oldest, most conservative regular congregants were appalled," Burgess said. "Conversations with them since the ad appeared have not reflected outrage about the actual welcoming stance in the ad, as much as a feeling that we should have just gone on in our usual way of being quietly welcoming. On the other hand, there are some younger, very justice-oriented congregants who would have been appalled and upset if our church name had not been on that list."

The United Methodist Church has a significant public relations problem to address, said the Rev. Jason Micheli, head pastor of Annandale UMC, which participated in the Post ad.

"As important as it might have been to have our church listed in the advertisement, I think it was just as important the church was not seen as not being in the advertisement," Micheli said. "(That is) the effect of General Conference's decision in diverse communities like metro DC."

Micheli had an encounter with a barista at the local coffee who had seen the ad and said, "I'm sure your church is nice, but that doesn't change the fact that you all think my husband and I should get divorced if we were a part of your denomination."

Ward shared the ad via social media. He has been heartened by responses, from a new visitor attending Restoration to Jewish friends in his neighborhood expressing their gratitude for the church standing with LGBTQIA brothers and sisters.

"We had many people in our family's friend community reach out and say what a gift it was to know that we were on the right side of this conversation," Ward said. "People have been grateful that we took a stand." ↗

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

## Other ads have run in newspapers including the *News & Advance* in Lynchburg as well as in Charlottesville.

Clergy in the Charlottesville District gathered for lunch the week after General Conference to discuss how to respond with one voice, said the Rev. Deborah Lewis, campus minister for the Wesley Foundation at the University of Virginia.

"We wanted to own up to the painful position our church is in, who we really are at this moment, while also naming that it is not where we will always be, by the grace of God," Lewis said.

The Charlottesville clergy group drafted a letter, which read in part, "To our LGBTQ kin, you are beloved of God and by us. We affirm the power of God's baptismal covenant with you that calls Christians into ordained ministry. We take joy in your loving relationships and marriage commitments. We recognize God's holy image in you, present in your body and spirit, and expressed through your sexual and gender identity."

The letter ran in the March 10 edition of *The Daily Progress* newspaper and then again that week in the *C-VILLE Weekly*. It was also widely shared via social media.

"The very first person to 'like' my social media post was a student who told me earlier this semester, 'Before I came to Wesley, I didn't know you could be a Christian like this,'" Lewis said. "She comes from a small congregation in another part of our conference where she spent her teen years biting her tongue during church. This is an intelligent, thoughtful UVA student whose sense of the world and how to love her neighbors did not match what she heard in worship."

The Rev. Isaac Collins, lead pastor at Wesley Memorial Church in Charlottesville, said he felt as if the letter gave him the opportunity to "confess my complicity in the General Conference, and also, repent of its decisions."

"Something in me died while watching the General Conference," Collins said. "I lost my last hope that we would find our way out of this mess. I know now that only Jesus is going to do that." ↗

# Varied response to GC2019 continues in Virginia Conference

by Madeline Pillow

A little over a month ago, delegates from around the world met in St. Louis for the Special Session of General Conference to discuss the work of the Commission on a Way Forward and human sexuality.

At the conference, delegates passed the Traditional Plan, a plan that reinforces church bans on same-sex unions and "self-avowed practicing" gay clergy, by a 438-384 vote.

Following this decision, reactions from laity, clergy and congregations were mixed. While still at General Conference, the Western Jurisdiction declared that it would continue to work for inclusion together.

The Wesleyan Covenant Association (WCA), proponents of the Traditional Plan, shared a statement following the conference and said they were thankful that the church "reaffirmed its sexual ethics, teachings on marriage and its ordination standards for clergy." The association shared that they are committed to working with other United Methodists to address "factors that have contributed to dysfunction and ineffectiveness" including a gracious exit provision or the possibility of launching a new Methodist movement.

## Response to GC in Virginia

Virginia, much like other conferences around the nation and world, have shared varied reactions to the results of the conference in February.

Last week a grassroots movement created and shared a letter response in opposition to the actions taken at General Conference 2019, namely the pass-

ing of the Traditional Plan. The letter called for the end of LGBTQIA discrimination in The United Methodist Church. In a week, the letter has garnered over 2,000 signatures from laity and active and retired clergy in the conference. The letter shared, "We hear God calling all disciples to greater faithfulness in the midst of this time of pain and lament. At Christ's invitation, we continue gathering around the wide-open Communion table as one family."

The Evangelical Fellowship in the Virginia Conference, supporters of the action taken at General Conference 2019, drafted a letter in mid-March and sent it to Bishop Kenneth Carter, president of the Council of Bishops. The letter stated that "the whole church must reach out in healing mercy to LGBTQIA+ persons and others who feel aggrieved or alienated by the conference' decisions" but that after the over two years of preparation for the special session that the General Conference had decided a way forward.

"Grievous harm comes to the church's faith and witness to Christ from flirtation with the ideologies and ethics of a post-Christian culture. We greatly need mature, spiritual leadership that will help the whole church reclaim the radical and counter-cultural way of discipleship," the letter said.

The group also ask Bishop Carter to implement the mandate set forth from the General Conference as its executive officer to "rebuild the well-documented trust deficit of our church leadership."

Bishop Pete Weaver, interim bishop of the Virginia Conference, shared he is open to receiving responses from all perspectives related to the 2019 General Conference. He clarified that documents has received are responses from persons who have chosen to sign the supporting document and is not a statement indicating an official response of the Virginia Annual Conference to the action of the 2019 General Conference.

## Response from around the nation

In a recent United Methodist News Service article, it was shared that meetings are happening all over



The Rev. Tom Berlin, clergyhead of the Virginia delegation and member of The Commission on a Way Forward, gives the minority report at General Conference.

the United Methodist connection in the wake of General Conference.

A group of centrists and progressives are meeting to consider options for a “broad center.” So far there has been a meeting in Dallas and a meeting scheduled for Apr. 4 in Atlanta. In attendance were some U.S. bishops, the Rev. Adam Hamilton, founding pastor of the Leawood, Kansas-based United Methodist Church of the Resurrection, and the Rev. Tom Berlin, member of the Commission on a Way Forward and pastor of Floris UMC in Herndon, Va. These discussions are defined as preliminary as a third, much larger meeting has been scheduled for May 20-22 at the Church of the Resurrection. It is believed this meeting would involve representatives from every United States annual conference.

Both Berlin and Hamilton, shared that the meetings are interested parties talking about the future and united by their response to the outcome of the February General Conference.

“We’re a group of people that find the punitive measures of the Traditional Plan unacceptable,” Berlin said.

Berlin and Hamilton are also among a number of people who said they feel conversation, especially in disagreement is important for the denomination right now.

“I think it’s always wise for people of good will to have conversation with each other, especially in times of disagreement and conflict,” Berlin said.

The Rev. Keith Boyette, president of the WCA stated that he has been part of “difficult dialogue” with leaders from the other side to talk about the conflict in the denomination and avoiding the “kind of rancor” that characterized the recent Special Session of General Conference in St. Louis.

“That’s certainly the goal of this dialogue. Whether that would be achievable, it’s too early to know,” Boyette said.

Boyette shared that he has been in discussion with One Church Plan supporters and the conversations have led him to talk with regional WCA leaders and to survey them about their discussions.

“That survey will be discussed at our council when it meets on Wednesday (April 3) and will inform our participation in the ongoing conversations,” he said.

In the article, Boyette noted that resistance has been widespread to the General Conference’s vote to pass the Traditional Plan.

“It’s unsettling to see segments of the church reject the discernment of General Conference,” he said. “It does illustrate the deep divisions that we’ve been pointing out for quite a while.”

## *What's next: Judicial Council meeting*

As conversations continue following General Conference 2019, follow-up to the conference will be picked up during the April 23-25 meeting of the Judicial Council. One of the items on their docket will include determining the constitutionality of the Traditional Plan. You can find the entire docket for this meeting at <http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/judicial-council-april-2019-docket>.

The Rev. Gary Graves, secretary of General Conference has shared that any legislation that is found unconstitutional by the Judicial Council would not be included in the Book of Discipline.

— Madeline Pillow is the Advocate editor and the conference Director of Communications.

# Resistance to GC 2019 spreads

By Sam Hodges

First published by UMNS on Mar. 26

**B**efore last month's special called General Conference in St. Louis, the Rev. Mitchell Boone had participated in same-sex weddings, but he hadn't violated the United Methodist Book of Discipline by performing one.

He's willing now, despite the risk of getting charged under church law. The denomination's top lawmaking assembly's vote to continue bans on same-sex weddings and ordination of gay clergy— and strengthen enforcement— pushed Boone to a new place.

"My commitment to a fully inclusive church will not waver going forward," he wrote to the church he leads, Dallas' White Rock United Methodist Church.

By a vote of 438-384, General Conference delegates adopted the Traditional Plan, and resistance to that vote continues. It's taking different forms and drawing in people who haven't spoken out before.

Among those watching the drama unfold have been United Methodists with a history of defying official restrictions on LGBTQ participation.

"It's very heartening to see the outpouring of support," said the Rev. Austin L. Adkinson, part of the United Methodist Queer Clergy Caucus and pastor of Haller Lake United Methodist Church in Seattle.

Traditionalist-minded pastors, such as the Rev. Chris Ritter, are observing, too. Ritter's website tracking the fallout from General Conference received about 100,000 hits in March, he said.

"I believe we are watching the stages of grief play out before our eyes in the reaction of our brothers and sisters who wanted to see church teachings changed," Ritter said.

Resistance to the Book of Discipline has long been pronounced in the Western Jurisdiction— where

the Rev. Karen Oliveto, a lesbian married to another woman, was elected bishop in 2016. Now that resistance is spreading to other parts of the U.S. as well as to Europe.

In the Iowa Conference, more than 1,100 clergy and laity signed a statement lamenting the harm done to LGBTQ people by the General Conference action and promising they will no longer abide by the restrictions on ordination and same-sex weddings.

Clergy signees specifically said "we will take the authority to perform marriages, with respect to our consciences and not to the *Book of Discipline*."

The Rev. Katie Dawson, a General Conference delegate and one who has worked often with traditionalist clergy and laity on denominational committees and boards, added her name.

"As I have listened to a number of folks who are most harmed by our current legislative stance in the *Book of Discipline*, I keep hearing that silence is complicity," said Dawson, pastor of Immanuel United Methodist Church in Des Moines. "I feel I can't be silent anymore."

**"We want to build power, relational power, to create a movement that puts pressure on the leaders of our conference to publicly stand against this and refuse to implement its rules."**

—Rev. Jason Butler, pastor of Open Table United Methodist Church.

In Raleigh, North Carolina, the Rev. Jason Butler announced his willingness to do same-sex weddings. He's also organized a petition drive of North Carolina Conference clergy and laity asking Bishop Hope Morgan Ward and her Cabinet to stand with them in resisting implementation of the Traditional Plan.

"We want to build power, relational power, to create a movement that puts pressure on the leaders



of our conference to publicly stand against this and refuse to implement its rules," said Butler, pastor of Open Table United Methodist Church.

More than 300 clergy in the Michigan Conference signed a letter to their episcopal leader, Bishop David Bard, saying they will not abide by LGBTQ-related restrictions in church law. The letter also urged that the conference's Board of Ordained Ministry recommend qualified candidates for ministry regardless of sexual orientation.

Clergy and laity of the Wisconsin Conference drafted their own letter, titled "Sacred Resistance and Call of Action."

At Dallas' Northaven United Methodist Church – long a part of the Reconciling Ministries Network that has tried to change church restrictions on LGBTQ participation – the Rev. Marti Soper shared a nine-part response to General Conference.

Along with covering "United Methodist" on the church's sign, Northaven has chosen to place in escrow its apportionment funds. She said a church committee will review the decision in May.

King Avenue United Methodist Church in Columbus, Ohio, another Reconciling Ministries Network con-

gregation, also has put its apportionment payments into escrow. The Rev. John Keeny, pastor, said it was a protest of General Conference but also a response to frustration in the congregation.

"Every General Conference we lose members, we lose pledges with the exclusionary language of the Discipline," he said. "This year it was pretty clear that unless we did something we would lose more persons and more pledges."

In the Great Plains Conference, the Rev. John R. Collins drafted a resolution for the upcoming annual conference gathering, calling for no funds to be expended for background investigations, complaints, just resolutions or clergy trials related to LGBTQ ordination or marriage.

He started a petition in support of the resolution and collected about 350 signatures over a few hours.

"We've had people from other conferences ask to borrow the (resolution) form, so I'm encouraged by that," said Collins, who with his wife, the Rev. Jennifer Collins, leads First United Methodist Church in Abilene, Kansas.

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

A petition drive in Norway calls for creation of a committee to explore how LGBTQ United Methodists there can have full equality in marriage and ordination, even if that might mean, as a last resort, the Norway Conference leaves the denomination. The effort was inspired by similar action by United Methodists in Denmark, said Ole-Einar Andersen, a lay member in Trondheim, Norway.

The Rev. Ole Birch of Denmark estimated that 90 percent of the United Methodists in that country oppose the Traditional Plan.

"Some are sad, some are angry," he said. "The annual conference will look at a proposal to set up a 'Commission on a Better Way Forward' to investigate how we can become a nondiscriminatory church inside or outside the UMC."

Meanwhile, the executive committee of The United Methodist Church in Germany unanimously backed a statement saying that "the stipulations of the Traditional Plan are not acceptable for our church."

Some churches in the U.S. continue to display rainbow banners or drape the "United Methodist" in their signs with rainbow materials. Hyde Park Community United Methodist Church in Cincinnati is among the latest denominational groups to take out a newspaper advertisement expressing grief to the LGBTQ community for the results of General Conference 2019.

Along with protesting, at least a few clergy unhappy with how General Conference went are exploring new futures for their churches.

The Rev. Sid Hall, pastor of Trinity Church in Austin, Texas, said he's gotten 10 to 12 calls from United Methodist pastors eager to know about his church's experience in dual affiliation with The United Methodist Church and the more LGBTQ-inclusive United Church of Christ.

For the Rev. Rudy Rasmus, who leads St. John's United Methodist Church in Houston – a congregation about one-third LGBTQ – all options are on the table. He's waiting to see if the Judicial Council again rules unconstitutional a disaffiliation or "gracious exit" plan for churches that was approved at General Conference.

Rasmus' specific question relates to St. John's:

"Would gracious exit apply to a now predominantly black church that historically was a white church that happens to be located on some of the most valuable land in the downtown area of the third-largest city in America?"

The Reconciling Ministries Network reports gaining 18 new churches and communities and more than 3,000 individuals since the General Conference in St. Louis.

The traditionalist Wesleyan Covenant Association has seen an "uptick" in church membership and lots of inquiries, said its president, the Rev. Keith Boyette.

"The responses that have been on the traditional side have not been of the dramatic public expression – newspaper ads and those sorts of things," he said. "More, it's been the conversation that occurs among people, (asking) "How can we continue to be invested in a church that is this broken?"

David Reed, Memphis Conference lay leader and chair of its General Conference delegation, is another traditionalist who said he thinks the St. Louis gathering and its aftermath underscore the need for considering denominational restructuring or division.

"I think I hear leaders on both sides of the conversation saying we've got to find a way not to continue to work in conflict with each other," he said.

Retired Bishop Will Willimon said he is feeling for active bishops – most of whom supported the failed One Church Plan, which would have given U.S. churches and conferences leeway on same-sex unions and ordination of gay clergy – as they grapple with the divide.

"I hope this maybe can be seen as an opportunity and a blessing to learn what the law cannot do and only the gospels can do, and to learn that the bishop's real authority is not the power to enforce the rules of the Discipline," he said. "Our authority is like a pastor's authority. It's influential." ↗

– Sam Hodges is a Dallas-based writer for United Methodist News Service.



(Left) Conservative activists from Westboro Baptist Church demonstrate on February 23, 2019, outside the opening session of the Special Session of the General Conference of The United Methodist Church, held in St. Louis, Missouri. Photo by Paul Jeffrey for United Methodist News Service.

(Bottom left) Bishops confer over the issue of whether the legislative committee can refer items to the denomination's Judicial Council for review during the 2019 United Methodist General Conference in St. Louis. Clockwise from lower left are Bishops Thomas Bickerton, John Schol, David Bard, Julius C. Trimble and Cynthia Fierro Harvey. Photo by Mike DuBose, UMNS.

(Below) Bishop Mande Muyombo speaks to the February 23, 2019, opening session of the Special Session of the General Conference of The United Methodist Church. Muyombo is the resident bishop of the North Katanga Area, which includes North Katanga, Tanganyika and Tanzania conferences in the Congo Central Conference of The United Methodist Church. Photo by Paul Jeffrey for United Methodist News Service.





# EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY

## Helping your congregation heal after General Conference

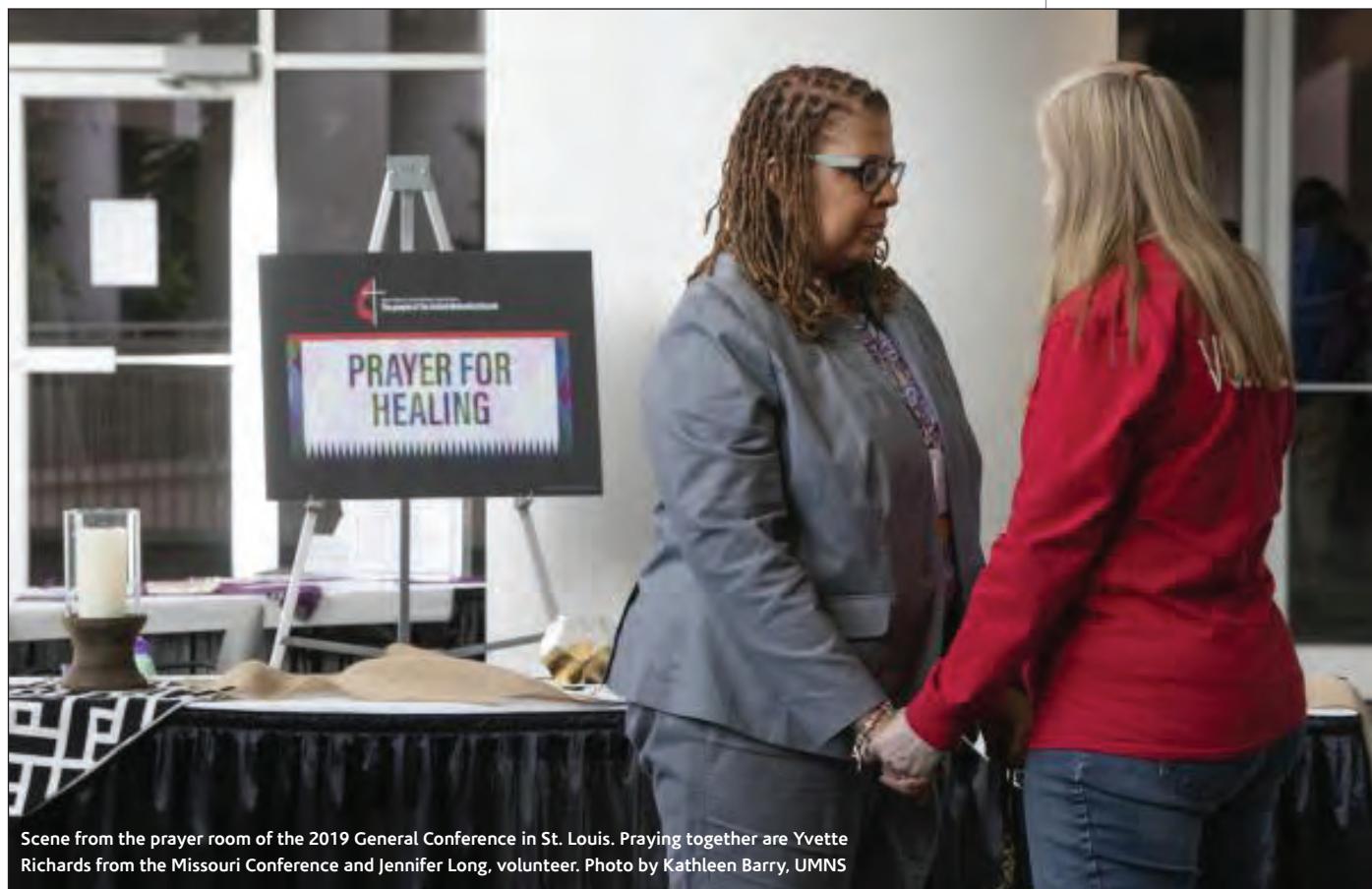
By Philip Brooks

**A**s news and questions around the outcome of the 2019 General Conference spread, United Methodists continue to experience a myriad of emotions — individually and as congregations.

The debate and voting at the special session demonstrated United Methodists' views on ministry by, with and to LGBTQ people and the role of church discipline cover a wide spectrum. Some feel

comfortable and safe discussing the subjects with other congregants, while others are afraid of bringing them up for fear of sowing discord. Even when members disagree strongly, no one wants to see their congregation become a battlefield. Most agree the local church should be a place of healing and reconciliation rather than a powder keg.

"When I go back to my local church the first thing I'll tell them is 'BREATHE. BREATHE. Slow down and let's



Scene from the prayer room of the 2019 General Conference in St. Louis. Praying together are Yvette Richards from the Missouri Conference and Jennifer Long, volunteer. Photo by Kathleen Barry, UMNS

find ways to prayerfully respond that serve the mission of the church and care for all our people," said the Rev. Kennetha Bigham-Tsai, chief connectional officer for the denomination's Connectional Table on Feb. 27.

"Let's be in relationship with people by understanding, listening and attending to how they are feeling," she continued.

So, how can congregants who disagree internally prepare to continue to serve in ministry together and offer Christian love to all?

## Name the disagreement

Louisiana Bishop Cynthia Fierro Harvey presided over the Feb. 26 session of General Conference. As the day came to a close, Harvey said, "A lot people will leave here hurt, harmed, disappointed. I think all of us have felt those emotions, sometimes all at the same time. Yet we still leave as the Body of Christ, broken people called to serve a broken people. Maybe that connects us in a different way to the people we serve."

It is vital for churches to initiate conversa-

tions and activities to work through members' disagreements around the decisions of General Conference as well as church teachings and law that have not changed. Ignoring pain, bitterness or anxiety will not make it go away. Acknowledge that some members are hurting and need reassurance that they will continue to be loved and respected within the congregation. Help those who are happy with the outcome of General Conference to practice humility. Urge all to extend kindness and compassion to each other.

## Find the center

The Rev. W. Craig Gilliam is a nationally recognized consultant specializing in mediation and conflict transformation in churches. He says congregational leaders need to develop a "container" for dialogue that is direct and honest about the intention of the conversation, finds a "center" set of values to agree on and defines clear rules for the discussion. Sharing stories of the life of the church or having members talk about what drew them to the congregation can help.

Gilliam also recommends using John Wesley's General Rules to frame how members engage each other.

Do no harm. Sometimes people say or do what they think is right without regard to how it affects others. Recognize the potential for unintended harm and approach the conversation with extra intentionality.

## Do good.

Ask the question, "Is what I'm about to say or do really coming from a good place and seeking the good of others?" If the answer is "no," what needs to change?

## Stay in love with God.

One way Christians stay in love with God is by sharing the love of God with others through the means of grace. This final rule directs Christians away from their individual concerns to a focus on their shared relationship as God's children.

## Remember who you are

"Remind the local church of its identity," said the Rev. Junius Dotson, general secretary of

Discipleship Ministries. "We are a welcoming place, we practice radical hospitality and we are a church that cares about people. We don't have to be of one mind and agree on every single issue in order to maintain our fundamental commitment to making disciples of Jesus Christ."

## Gather together

The Rev. Scott Hughes, director of adult discipleship at Discipleship Ministries, has adapted his Courageous Conversations materials into an outline for conversations specifically responding to General Conference. In Part One, churches engage in conversation that sets ground rules and allows everyone to express their feelings and anxieties in a non-judgmental environment. Part Two challenges participants to think critically about how God wants them to respond to the latest developments in the denomination and how they will continue to live out their mission as a church. As they ask these questions, churches might draw ideas from "The Movement Continues" resources online.

(Con't. on page 28: "HEALING.")

# LIVING THE WORD



*Beanie Kelly is a licensed local pastor who serves as associate pastor at Shady Grove UMC in Short Pump. She is the mother of two adult children, Caran and Paul. She enjoys playing with her grandson, 21-month old Chase, son of Paul and Keri. A graduate of UNC-Chapel Hill, Beanie loves ACC basketball and her Tar Heels. She enjoys working with children and using drama to explain the Bible.*

## May 5

Romans 3:21-31

*"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."* —Romans 3:22-23 NIV

You may have seen them—jars filled with behavior beads. They are colorful little beads or marbles earned by students when they exemplify good behavior. A good test grade. Proper self-control down the hall to the library. Helping a new student. Cleaning up a mess someone else made. You get the idea. You are rewarded for your behavior. Likewise, when you exemplify poor behavior, bye-bye behavior bead. The teacher removes one from your collection to illustrate your poor choice.

What do you do with them, these specially awarded beads? You can cash them in for a prize. Or they can earn you a privilege such as extra time on the playground. If enough of the students earn a certain goal number, then an ice cream party may be around the corner.

Throughout time, we have been tempted to think of our own faith journeys as opportunities to gain behavior beads. We have fed the homeless. We have visited the sick. We have taken a casserole or two to someone who has lost a loved one. Surely these deeds can get us one step closer to the Kingdom of God.

But Paul reminds us: no matter what we do, we cannot save ourselves. Because we sin. Plain and simple. We sin, and no amount of good deeds and behavior beads can do what Christ has already done for us on the cross. God's mercy is overwhelming and lifts us out of the pile of sin we create for ourselves.

Praise God that our eternity does not depend on earning behavior beads! Surely, as soon as we earn one, we would lose five. Or more! Thank you, Jesus, for your sacrifice that frees us from any accounting

system that would be impossible for us! Amen.

## May 12

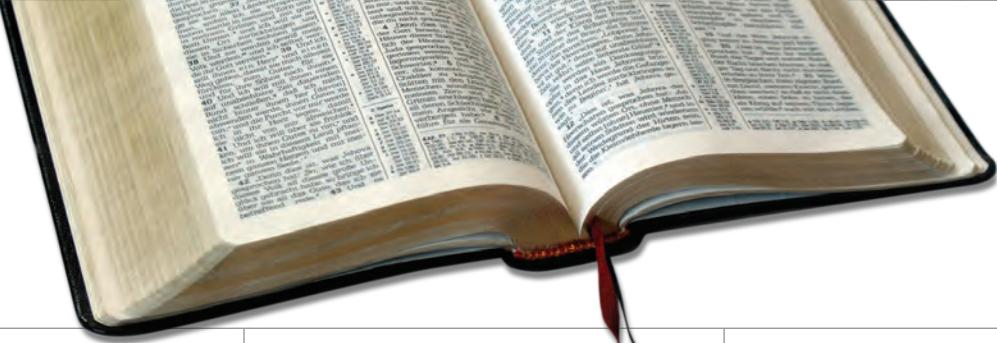
*"For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God."* —Romans 8:14

Graham attends preschool and is happy to be five. So he tells me at chapel time. Graham is typically seen with a great big smile and mud. And Graham likes to help others. He is giving and forgiving. He is one of those kids that helps you to see the joy in life. A couple of days after Valentine's Day, he was proudly displaying Valentine pencils, over each eye. What I mean is the lead part of the pencil was held loosely in his hands with the red heart erasers covering each eye.

What a sermon right there! Look at each other with the eyes of love. Isn't that what the Spirit calls us to do? If we see each other with the eyes of love, won't that help us to move toward peace? Jesus tells us, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God."

Graham got some hot pink sunglasses shaped like stars. He was seen sporting them while wearing a Peanuts T-shirt with the slogan, "It's good to have a friend." With hands on his hips, he said with a grin, "These glasses are so I can see the good in people." Then the follow-up: "But they don't actually show me that. You can't really see anything." His mom pointed out, "Well, maybe then every time you wear them, you can let them remind you to think about the good in the people you see." After a moment, Graham added, "I think about that already." His mom encouraged him, "I know, buddy. You really do. So keep on doing it and enjoy those glasses."

When we are able to see others with the eyes of love and see them the way God created them, we can find that image of God right there before us. When we look



for the good in others with the help of the Spirit, we are one step closer to being peacemakers. When we are peacemakers, we behave as children of God. Let's take some advice from how Graham seeks the world, with love, joy, and a tendency to find good always.

## May 19

Romans 11:11-24

*"Do not consider yourself to be superior to those other branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, the root supports you."* —Romans 11:18 NIV

Ever remember being the new kid, maybe in school or at church or on the swim team? You enter a world that seems already quite complete. Friends are already established, teams already solidified, groups already cohesive. And then...you show up.

What's the reaction from the ones already there? Did they reach out to greet you with open arms? Did they say, "Hey, come on over and eat with us?" If they did, you were lucky. If they didn't, you are not alone.

People are not usually drawn to change. They tend to repeat their patterns, keep the same friends, eat the same food. We get in a rut. Feels okay to us. But not so much to the new one in the group.

Think about your church. When someone new comes on the scene, how quick are we to open the circle? To make a horseshoe out of it so someone can slip right in? Do we invite them

to our conversations or just give them a bulletin? Do we ask them to pull up a chair and eat with us or do we just smile and nod?

Bringing people into God's circle, drawing it wide with a free spot or two in it, means we must be intentional in our outreach and hospitality. Let's remember that each new person has a view of God that can help us understand our Creator. Think what we can learn!

Come, Holy Spirit, come! Help us to see, to invite, to include, and to support. Amen

## May 26

Romans 12:1-8

*"I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship."*

Romans 12:1 NIV

When I was in youth group, my youth director told us one Sunday night during our lesson that our body was a temple. It was where Jesus lived. It blew my mind for a bit. Whatever I did affected Jesus. Whatever I ate, wherever I went, whatever I said...all of it was important because Jesus lived in me.

That Sunday night had a huge impact on the decisions I made as a youth. There were activities I avoided. And on the flip side, there were activities in which I engaged. I would ask myself, "Would Jesus want to be doing this with me?" My youth director's words really stuck with me. They were transformational.

Years later as a youth direc-

tor myself, I took a group to Mountain T.O.P. mission project. Each night we sang a song by Amy Grant called *Mountain Top*. The words of the song hit home with me as those did so many years before when I was a youth myself:

*But I'd love to live on a mountain top  
Fellowshipping with the Lord.  
I'd love to stand on a mountain top,  
Cause I love to feel my spirit soar.  
But I've got to come down from that mountain top  
To the people in the valley below,  
Or they'll never know that they can go  
To the mountain of the Lord.  
Now I am not saying that worship is wrong,  
But worship is more than just singin' a song.  
It's all that you say and everything that you do;  
It's letting his spirit live through you.*

Worshipping God includes mountaintop moments where we feel at one with God. We just want to stay in prayer and praise. Yet there is work to be done to bring about God's kingdom here on Earth. This means doing some "valley work," helping people and sharing the Good News.

The idea that worship is all

(Con't on page 29: "LIVING WORD".)

The 2019 Living the Word devotions are from the *Standard Lesson Commentary* from Cokesbury. Note: you can follow the May readings for the 2019 Bible Challenge from Bishop Lewis on pg. 31.

# CLERGY & DIACONAL

## DEATHS



**The Rev. C. Douglas (Doug) Pillow, 90, died March 25, 2019.** He served these churches on the Lynchburg District: Motley, Hickory Grove, Mt. Olivet, Wilson, Tyreeanna, Timberlake, Centenary, Amelon and Peakland UMC. He also served at Warwick Memorial in Newport News, Kenwood in Petersburg, Mt. Vernon in Danville and Madison Heights Christian Church (interim pastor). He had most recently served at Court Street UMC in downtown Lynchburg during retirement. He is the grandfather of the Rev. Patrick S. Pillow (associate pastor at Chester UMC) and Madeline C. Pillow (Virginia Conference director of communications).

**Dorcas Beighley, 77, died April 1, 2019.** She was the wife of the Rev. Dr. Paul Beighley, retired, who serves Bethany UMC in Brodnax.

**Johnnie Morris, 78, co-founder of Journey UMC and Journey Community Center in Amelia Court House, died March 18, 2019.**

**Marvin B. Reifsnyder, 104, died Feb. 20, 2019 in Front Royal.** He is the father of the Rev. Alan G. Reifsnyder, retired.



(“HEALING” cont. from page 25.)

## Know the purpose

The Rev. Stephanie Anna Hixon, executive director of JustPeace, says the purpose of difficult conversations is not to change one or more groups' minds or even to resolve the conflict. The goal should be for all participants to get to know and understand one another more deeply. It means addressing one's own perspective, assumptions and prejudices honestly while learning about those of others in a safe and loving environment.

“A community can be steeped in all the best conflict resolution practices and yet not engage well because of so many other factors including how persons perceive and engage with one another,” said Hixon.

## Use rituals

Among the other practices church leaders might use to ease difficult conversations are traditional church rituals. Worship designer Marcia McFee includes liturgies for holding difficult conversations in her Table Talks series.

“I developed resources for holding difficult conversations during Communion or love feasts, but these liturgies can be adapted for other occasions as well, such as a potluck or a small group setting. I focus on moments throughout Jesus’ ministry where he sits down to eat with people from different backgrounds and who were not often of the same mind, yet Jesus called them all to his table.



“How do we stay at the table together even as we continue to disagree?” asked McFee.

## Serve together

Engaging in a shared mission or outreach project can also help a church come together and sometimes make conversation easier. Gilliam recognizes volunteering together as a way of letting oneself go in order to do selfless acts for others. As church members work together in a common effort, they remember the things that hold them together.

## What's next?

Conversations are a good first step toward healing, but congregations also need activities that reinforce healthy relationships. Regular communal practices are vital. Leaders might encourage participants in the conversations to form new small groups that meet regularly to support and pray for one another. Leaders should use worship and fellowship activities to reinforce shared values and commitments. Churches that are inwardly caring and affirming will be in the best position to make new disciples by showing this same kind of love to those outside their walls. ☩

— Philip Brooks is a writer and content developer with the leader communications team at United Methodist Communications.

(“LIVING WORD” con’t from page 27.)

that we say and do had a profound impact on me. I had up to that point thought of worship as a time set aside to think about God and to sing or pray. But now this song...the words over and over in my head. Worship is all that I say and do. If Christ lives in me, and worship is all that I say and do, then I am called to show my gratitude for God’s mercy by offering myself as a living sacrifice.

This means giving up my will and laying myself before God, saying, “Here I am. Live in me. I no longer follow my own desires but rather I seek and follow your desires. I give you the best of me. I give you the worst of me, my messes and my failures. I ask that you take it all and fill me with your grace that my life may point to you and your glory.”

May I be a living sacrifice.  
May the way I live point others  
to you, Lord. 

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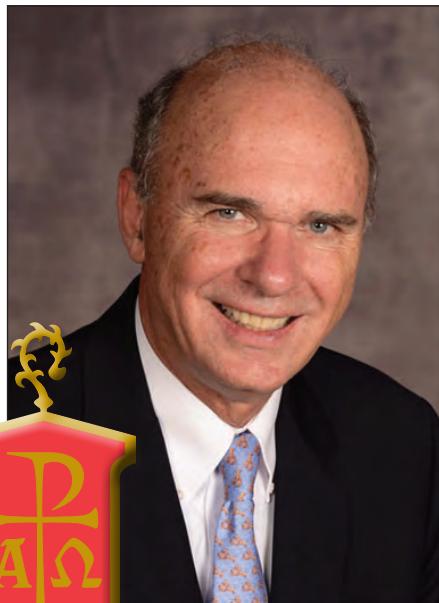
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# FROM THE BISHOP



## Partners in Ministry

Bishop Pete Weaver, interim bishop to the Virginia Conference, will start sharing a weekly reflection entitled "Partners in Ministry" each Tuesday on the conference website at [https://vaumc.org/pages/blogs/blog\\_bishopweaver](https://vaumc.org/pages/blogs/blog_bishopweaver). Below are some excerpts.

### April 2, 2019

"Partners in Ministry" is meant to be some periodic, random thoughts, prayers and experiences which God is stirring in me as I journey with you in following Jesus and serving Virginia while God brings healing to Bishop Lewis. It was only four days before I started serving you as your interim bishop that I had any notion that this might happen. God is full of surprises.

Bishop Lewis assured me that there are great people...partners in ministry... in Virginia. And she is right. So far in my short time serving, I have met wonderful children, scientists, retirees, farmers, artists, youth, teachers, military personnel, conference staff, and, yes, pastors (!) and, yes, one very friendly United Methodist dog in the parking lot of the church hosting the Danville District conference! God is full of gifts.

I will confess, that when I started, having never served in the Virginia Conference, I felt really challenged. And I knew, as you do, that we are living in a time when the church is experiencing many different challenges. But then I remembered the night that I was very unexpectedly elected a bishop and a teenager handed me a small card that said, "The task ahead of you is never as great as the power behind you." That card still sits on my desk...and still stirs my soul. God is full of faithful promises.

### April 9, 2019

Dear Partners in Ministry,

Thanks be to God for all the partners in ministry, laity and clergy who make up the Virginia Conference. Below I share a few ministries who are engaged in life-changing and world changing ministry.

**+THE "MCDONALD'S GOLDEN ARCHES"** became a sanctuary for sharing the "bread of life." This innovative ministry was started by members of the New Hope UMC in Stafford as they sought to reach and build relationship

with new people by going to McDonald's. Eating, fellowshiping, relating, connecting with people's needs, praying.... sounds like Jesus. Where better to do it than under the big "M" (for "mission")? Now, even the workers at the McDonald's help to look out for folks in need and direct them to the New Hope "Bread of Life" folks! Maybe the "M" means "miracles."

If you want to know more about this ministry for your church, call the Rev. Teresa Smith at 540-370-4875.

**+THREE LOCAL CHURCHES ARE A TRINITY OF PARTNERSHIP** in feeding, praying for, and being Gospel (Good News) for folks living around the Prince Edward Charge, Farmville District. People from the Beulah, Mt. Pleasant, and Mt. Harmony congregations meet twice a week, 51 weeks of the year to organize donated food, collect fresh grown food, pray and then each Saturday to share with over 200 families the caring and bounty.... "the gifts of God for the people of God!"

If you want to know more about this ministry for your church, call the Rev. Evelyn Penn at 434-223-8237.

**+THE LATINO CLERGY CAUCUS** welcomed me as a partner in ministry last Friday with joyous singing and fervent laying-on-of hands prayer. We are greatly blessed as a conference to be able to partner together in sharing Christ in different languages and cultural traditions. I shared how much my own spiritual journey had been enriched through Latino ministries in the areas



I have served and Nicaragua. The joy and challenge has been spreading here as Latino leaders from Trinity UMC, Ramsey Memorial UMC and Floris UMC have been trained as "Lay Servants." Creative new strategies are being developed with the help of Dean Wingeier-Ray of Wesley Seminary. The Spirit is moving!

If you want to know more about this ministry for your church, call the Rev. Ileana Rosario at 804-776-6250.

Grace and Peace to you all as we share the Lenten Journey! 

## Bishop's Bible Challenge readings for May

May 1	Num. 9-11; Rev. 18
May 2	Num. 12-14; Rev. 19
May 3	Num. 15-16; Rev. 20
May 4	Num. 17-19; Rev. 21
May 5	Num. 20-22; Rev. 22
May 6	Num. 23-25; Matt. 1
May 7	Num. 26-28; Matt. 2
May 8	Num. 29-31; Matt. 3
May 9	Num. 32-34; Matt. 4
May 10	Num. 35-36; Matt. 5:1-26
May 11	Jonah 1-4; Matt. 5:27-48
May 12	1 Kings 1-2; Matt. 6:1-18
May 13	1 Kings 3-5; Matt. 6:19-34
May 14	1 Kings 6-7; Matt. 7
May 15	1 Kings 8-9; Matt. 8:1-17
May 16	1 Kings 10-11; Matt. 8:18-34
May 17	1 Kings 12-13; Matt. 9:1-17
May 18	1 Kings 14-15; Matt. 9:18-38
May 19	1 Kings 16-18; Matt. 10:1-20
May 20	1 Kings 19-20; Matt. 10:21-42
May 21	1 Kings 21-22; Matt. 11
May 22	2 Kings 1-3; Matt. 12:1-23
May 23	2 Kings 4-6; Matt. 12:24-50
May 24	2 Kings 7-9; Matt. 13:1-30
May 25	2 Kings 10-12; Matt. 13:31-58
May 26	2 Kings 13-14; Matt. 14:1-21
May 27	2 Kings 15-16; Matt. 14:22-36
May 28	2 Kings 17-18; Matt. 15:1-20
May 29	2 Kings 19-21; Matt. 15:21-39
May 30	2 Kings 22-23; Matt. 16
May 31	2 Kings 24-25; Matt. 17

Be the things you loved most about the people who are gone.

—Unknown

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