

Convocation speaker asks churches to get involved with immigrants

Advocate

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Showing gratitude to God

*“Enter God’s gates with thanksgiving,
and into God’s courts with praise.
Give thanks and bless God’s name.”*

– Psalm 100:4



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

— Virginia Conference Vision Statement

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Have an 'ever joyful heart' every day



Neill Caldwell
Editor

Like most all of our favorite hymns, there's a story behind the November favorite, "Now Thank We All Our God."

It was written by a Lutheran minister, Martin Rinkart, who lived in the kingdom of Saxony (modern-day Germany), during the Thirty Years War between Catholics and Protestants (1618 to 1648). Thousands of people fled the fighting to the walled city of Eilenberg, where Rinkart served a church, for safety and protection. But once inside the city, disease and starvation killed most of the refugees and the citizens, too, including Rinkart's wife. Sometimes the pastor buried 50 people a day!

As the war wound down and the people began to experience first hopes of peace, Rinkart wrote the hymn — which we traditionally sing at Thanksgiving — for a worship service commemorating the end of fighting. The words of the song have a special meaning when seen amid the context of years of war, famine and despair:

*"Oh, may this bounteous God
through all our life be near us,
with ever joyful hearts
and blessed peace to cheer us;
and keep us still in grace,
and guide us when perplexed,
and free us from all ills
in this world and the next."*

That Rinkart could be so thankful after such a disaster is a blessing for all of us, one that endures in his wonderful lyrics.

That's the thing about gratitude... It's easy to be thankful when things are going well, when we have plenty of money, plenty of time, plenty to eat.

But when things turn difficult, challenging, stressful, we tend to do a lot more grumbling than we do rejoicing or offering thanks.

We're still a lot like the ancient Hebrews wandering in the Sinai, who seemed to alternate between praising God and bitching about their condition (mostly the latter).

Of course, I also have encountered those who seem happy and grateful to God no matter what state their lives are in. They say "thanks" when they rise each morning for the simple gift of a new day of life.

Offering up our own gratitude is something we need to do each day. We can do it in prayer, in praise, and in serving others, which is one of the best ways to show our thanks. (Matthew 25:40)

Take time to say "thank you" to God.

Neill Caldwell

Practicing gratitude provides spiritual, emotional benefits

For Steve and Tyra Damm, a devastating diagnosis of terminal cancer brought an unlikely gift: gratitude.

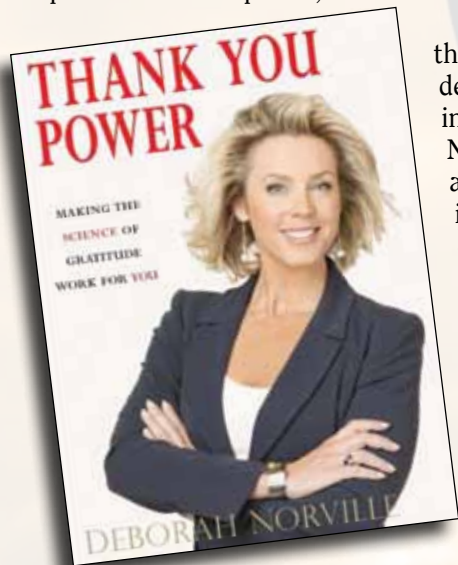
From the day he learned he had a brain tumor until his death, Steve Damm woke up every morning and gave thanks to God for another day.

"We learned that every day is truly a gift," said Tyra Damm, a member of Holy Covenant UMC in Carrollton, Texas. "We talked about that many times. I don't think Steve would have lived as long as he did if we hadn't recognized all the blessings we had." Her husband outlived medical predictions, living 20 months instead of the four to six months typical for someone with his type of brain tumor.

On Nov. 24, Americans will celebrate a day set aside for giving thanks. But many say they've received year-round blessings by heeding the biblical injunction to give thanks always, in everything (Ephesians 5:20), even in the face of life's most difficult challenges.

"Gratitude is a way to approach life," said the Rev. Brian Hardesty-Crouch, a United Methodist pastor and president of *HolyMoments.org*, an extension ministry focused on spirituality. "It's looking for the good and thanking God for that."

Deborah Norville, host of the television program "Inside Edition," suspected gratitude's hidden benefits from her experiences as a reporter, interviewing survivors of tragedy.



TV host Deborah Norville's book on the benefits of gratitude

"I've been astounded that so many people, despite terrific suffering, feel grateful," said Norville, who grew up attending First UMC in Dalton, Ga. "I wondered if the practice of gratitude was somehow linked to one's ability to find inner strength and happiness."

That hunch led Norville to dig into research journals and ultimately to write a book, *Thank You Power: Making the Science of Gratitude Work for You*

(Thomas Nelson, 2007). She discovered that an "attitude of gratitude" actually alters brain chemistry and reduces physical signs of stress.

Why is gratitude so powerful? It keeps a person focused on blessings rather than problems and puts minor annoy-

ances in perspective. Thanking God or another person can lift people out of their own unhappy, self-absorbed morass.

"It's not always easy to find the silver lining in a bad situation, but when you do, it completely changes the lens through which you view it," said Norville.

Elaine Morris, a Christian leadership coach in Dallas, learned that lesson in 2001, while undergoing a difficult divorce and struggling financially. Morris kept a journal and found ways to give thanks in her written prayers. Re-reading the journals recently, she realized that gratitude helped her survive that year.

"I always thought God asked us to be grateful because we 'should' thank Him," said Ms. Morris. "But God does it for us. By being thankful, we can keep going. It gives us strength and hope for the future, to know that whatever troubles you face are not going to go on forever."

Like Norville, Barbara Brown Taylor, author of *An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith* (HarperOne, 2009) says she's been amazed by friends who've responded to a series of losses or painful experiences with gratitude.

"Most of them tell me that it is one of the few choices they have left to them: to decide how they will respond to what has happened to them," she said. "The minute they find something to be grateful for, they cease being victims of their circumstances and become people able to give thanks."

"Gratitude is literally one of the few things that can measurably change people's lives," says Robert Emmons, author of *Thanks! How the New Science of Gratitude Can Make You Happier* (2007). His research showed that grateful people report higher levels of positive emotions, life satisfaction, vitality, optimism and lower levels of depression and stress.

That scientific evidence may help explain why virtually every world religion offers some teaching on the virtue of gratitude. But the Rev. Tom Albin, team leader for Upper Room Program Ministries, believes gratitude has a special place in the Methodist heart.

"Gratitude is the appropriate spiritual response to grace," he said. "If we lack gratitude and benevolence to our neighbors, John Wesley would say that we have not truly been converted and there is more that God needs to do in our hearts."

One way to cultivate gratitude, Albin said, is to serve others. Gratitude is often an unexpected side effect of mission work.

"It's a typical pattern," he said. "A youth group of middle-class kids goes to work in a place of significant need, and they come back more grateful for privileges that, before, they had taken for granted." □

— Mary Jacobs for the United Methodist Reporter

Grateful for home, ancestors who taught us how to be grateful

On my church office wall hangs a small, 4x5 photo of those West Virginia mountains I call home. The frame's clearness shows off the vivid blues, purples and greens of a crisp, probably cold, early spring day. In the foreground, contrasting with the brightness of the mountain ranges, brown windblown, trampled grass reveals where the photographer kept shifting from place-to-place searching for the perfect spot to snap the perfect photo.

The object of the photographer's interest, the Nelson Rocks, fits exactly in the photo's center; however, the farm to the left is what pulls me into the scene. Most people would pay no attention to these farm buildings which look like tiny, white dots glued to green construction paper. But I do, because one never forgets home. In the mountains, we call this the home place.

My German ancestors immigrated to this area of West Virginia in the

early 1700s. I wonder if these early settlers ever thought of themselves as one day being "ancestors." Could they have realized the roots they were putting down among the mountains and the valleys would grow deeply enough to sustain my family for generations to come?

In today's hurried, very mobile society, the idea of a home place seems somewhat foreign. To be able to return to where I learned to ride a bike, agonized over the loss of my first true love, packed for college, and later married, fills me with profound gratitude and joy.

Most important, on this up-the-hollow home place, my parents taught me about God. And on Sundays, down that dusty, rocky mountain road, we drove to the white frame Methodist church where my faith took root and grew.

I'm grateful to God, whom I serve with a good conscience as my ancestors did.
— 2 Timothy 1:3a (Common English Bible)



The author's home place is near this scenic mountain view of Nelson Rocks, West Va.

In November, we Christians set aside two days, Thanksgiving and All Saints Day, to thank God for the many, many blessings God has given us and to honor our ancestors who planted and nurtured the roots of our homes and our faith. For these blessings, I am deeply grateful. □

— The Rev. Debra Lucas is pastor of St. Peter's UMC in Montpelier, Richmond District.

A thankful heart

by Paulo Da Silva

I learned about the importance of being thankful early in my life. I got it from my father, and later from my father-in-law. When they were among us, they showed simplicity, love and thankfulness to every person and to everything they faced in life.

These two had a strong influence in my life. I say this based on what they went through as they were serving in the Methodist churches in Brazil. Both, one of African descent and the other of German descent, would always thank the Lord for what they had. In Brazil they both faced unemployment, inflation, and as a consequence of it, difficulties in paying their bills while maintaining the status quo of their families. Always, they would have a thankful heart. Both would say, be thankful to the Lord and to the persons who are surrounding you — it is a commandment!

On the other hand, when I was 14, watching Shake-

speare's *Romeo and Juliet*, I could learn seeing an unthankful heart. Shakespeare uses the word "unthankfulness" four consecutive times, including the Friar's cry in *Romeo and Juliet*: "O deadly sin, O rude unthankfulness."



The Gospel of Luke (15:15-16) also reminds us that among the healed 10 lepers, only one came back to say thanks to Jesus. As I read the Gospel, I see that this one ceased being sorry for himself and gained an attitude of thankfulness just for being thankful to Jesus, the one who healed him.

I see myself as a blessed person who could learn from the two best persons I have ever known. A grateful life starts with a thankful heart.

May we, through the Lord's Grace, share a thankful heart through our ministry in this thanksgiving month. □

— The Rev. Paulo Da Silva is pastor of Amelon UMC, Lynchburg District.

Hurricane Katrina-damaged churches express gratitude to volunteers who have continued to respond

Hurricane Katrina tore a gaping hole in the side of Mississippi City United Methodist Church in Gulfport, Miss. The organ was tossed upside down. On top was a worship book open to the "Hymn of Promise."

That was the hymn the congregation sang in a remembrance service during the summer on the Aug. 29 anniversary of the disaster, which occurred six years ago.

The service was one of several to give thanks to God and to the nearly 1 million, and counting, volunteers who have come and continue to come to rebuild homes on Mississippi's Gulf Coast.

The Mississippi Conference has hosted more than 160,000 volunteers, who have worked on 12,000 homes and built more than 100 new homes, saving struggling Gulf Coast homeowners some \$100 million in labor costs. Many teams have returned again and again, some making as many as 20 trips.

"Across the Mississippi Gulf Coast, there was a deep sense of gratitude that filled United Methodist churches," said the Rev. Bill McAlilly, Seashore District superintendent, of the many worship services. "We remember Hurricane Katrina and all those who have brought healing and hope."

United Methodists were not alone. Interfaith sunrise services were held in Pass Christian and Ocean Springs,



Mississippi City UMC in Gulfport was literally torn apart by Hurricane Katrina.
(A UMNS file photo by Mike DuBose)

and in Biloxi the rainy skies cleared just as nearly 100 gathered with local and national officials for a memorial service remembering those who died in the storm.

Students from local high schools read each of the 168 names of people who died as friends and family observed in silence. The names of those who lost their lives and those who are still missing are etched in the Katrina Monument located on Biloxi's Town Green.

The monument was built by the "Extreme Makeover Home Edition" television show. "This monument stands as a quiet reminder of the lost, the found and the moment that changed us forever," Biloxi Mayor A.J. Holloway said.

In Gulfport, Gov. Haley Barbour said, "Katrina didn't change the character and spirit of the people down here, but it let it be seen across the world."

Members of Mississippi City UMC

gathered with the community for a Katrina Memorial Celebration on the beach. The Rev. Denise Donnell said it was important for the congregation to host the event for the community to know the church is here for them.

"The church cannot be confined to four walls," Donnell said. "It must leave the building and proclaim to the world that God is good all of the time, and

all of the time, God is good!"

In D'Iberville, members of Heritage United Methodist Church held a service of remembrance, thanksgiving and celebration, moving from darkness into light. The congregation continues to host volunteers at their church.

Their service included a slide presentation of images before, during and after Katrina, followed by a time for personal witness.

Church member Ella Mae Weems closed her story by saying, "those who responded to help were the rod and staff of God."

The Rev. Wayne Napier added: "God had us lie down in green pastures, led us beside still waters, restored our souls and was leading us in paths of righteousness, for his name's sake. We truly are the rod and the staff of God. We just look like ordinary people." □

— Lisa Cumbe Michiels, director of communications of the Mississippi Conference

The Great Thanksgiving

A closer look at the United Methodist Eucharistic prayer

by Amy Pannell

Wide eyed, scanning sale papers for turkey deals? Seating charts dancing in your heads? How can Uncle Jacob be seated away from Uncle Esau? Glittered fingers glued together? Another pine cone centerpiece failing to look like Martha Stewart's? Good news! Let the world celebrate Thanksgiving. But we Christians celebrate "The Great Thanksgiving" all year long!

"The Great Thanksgiving" is the prayer offered every time the Risen Christ invites us to eat together. This prayer, found in *The United Methodist Hymnal*, pg. 9, has been crafted from generations of God's people communing with God. In the Easter posture of prayer: open eyes, hands up, Christians feast. Jesus tells us the stories that saves lives and the world, he feeds us, and prays for us and with us.

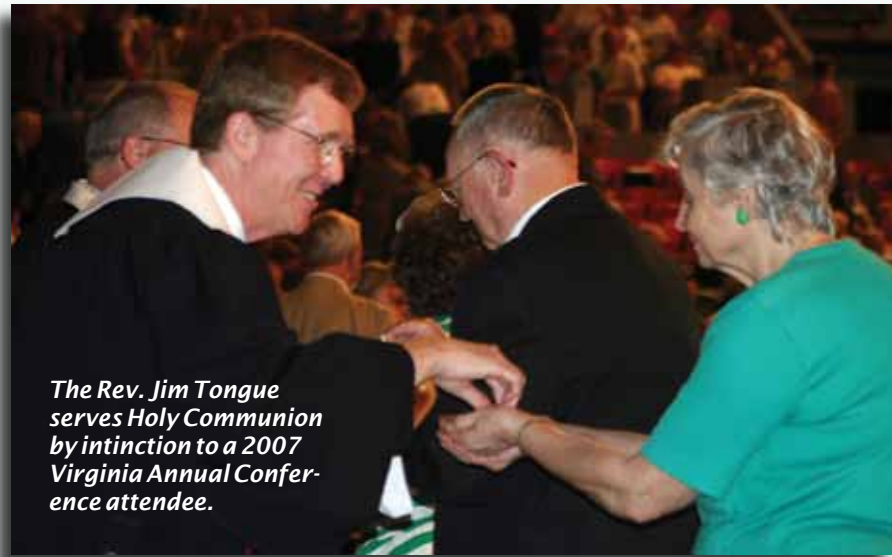
Communion has many names, one of them being "Eucharist," a word which means "thanksgiving." In this eucharistic experience, God helps me be and live in this world in a new way. I come away from the table "to thank God." This prayer's phrases and motions fill me with joy, re-turn me to God and renew God's life at work within.

My wandering heart hears "Lift up your hearts," holler-ing the Way. God reminds

me of my worth: "You formed us in your image and breathed into us the breath of life." In my unbelief, I am helped, "Your love remained steadfast." Lonely, I sing, loudly and off key, with "people on earth and all the company of heaven... joining in the unending hymn."

I look into the eyes of modern day disciples, Peters and Pauls, Marys and Marthas, and Jesus feeds us, "Take, eat..." "Drink this..." This Suffering Servant knows us and feeds us Life. Remembering all that God has done, is doing, and will do comes alive and real in this moment, leading into the unknown, uncertain, and uncontrollable, offering "ourselves in praise and thanksgiving." Angry and lamenting all the cheap religious explanations and phrases, God gives the mystery of faith: "Christ is died, Christ is Risen, Christ will come again." Despaired and down with just how broken the Body, the church, is, I overhear Jesus praying, "By your Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry

I eagerly approach with my open hands to be fed and sustained by a God who at this very minute is mingling with the heavenly banquet party!



The Rev. Jim Tongue serves Holy Communion by intinction to a 2007 Virginia Annual Conference attendee.

to all the world." I eagerly approach with my open hands to be fed and sustained by a God who at this very minute is mingling with the heavenly banquet party!

Having tasted and seen, with the bread in the gaps of my teeth and my tongue purple with life, the final prayer fills me with courage, "Grant that we may go into the world in the strength of your Spirit..."

With the "confidence of being children of God," now is the time to say no to the world telling the church who to be and what to do. I believe Christ gave us the practices and power to become who he birthed us to be: Thanksgiving People.

I recently heard Sara Miles (author of *Take This Bread: A Radical Conversion* and *Jesus Freak: Feeding - Healing - Raising the Dead*) witness to how the work of the people can flow from worship's ways. Every Friday, fresh fruits and vegetables are carried into the sanctuary of St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church and placed around the altar. More than 900 people come and fill their grocery bags every week. When the way of doing this practice (not a program, but a practice) no longer worked for the growing number of people coming, they instituted a three-week sabbath. The volunteers gathered for dinner over several nights. Rather than talking about "fixing the problem," they shared what they loved about what God had been doing. From this love, given and received, ideas poured forth. I am quick to dismiss these church folk meeting conflict like this because they have dancing saints painted on their walls! But maybe it is possible to have eucharistic experiences in times of tension and turmoil.

Come, the table is ready! The font and table of Christ is ready to serve us with the grace, energy, and thinking to be church in life-giving ways. Let us continue the feast! Let us be Great Thanksgiving People. "The Lord be with you."

"And also with you." □

— The Rev. Amy Elizabeth Pannell is associate pastor of Shady Grove UMC in Glen Allen, Richmond District.

A simple Thanksgiving prayer

by Garrison Keillor

At the risk of sounding like Pastor Bob of Pigeon Knob, I have to say the best thing about Thanksgiving is the thankfulness part. It certainly isn't your loud relatives and their embittered children, and it isn't the weather (overcast, with a 50 percent chance of snow.)

It is the sheer gratitude for the fact that you have somehow, once again, navigated the treacherous channels of life and avoided the greasy hand of death and have not thrown your savings down a rat hole or contracted an insect-borne disease so rare they plan to name it after you.

It's an unjust world; mortality has us all by the tail; we live in a culture of complaint; and yet, as we all know, there is much to be grateful for – though we're reluctant to say so, fearing it may sound smug or boastful.

In my childhood, Dad bowed his head and gave thanks to God – for the food, for redemption, and other stuff – a fine custom that I have discontinued.

My prayers sound pompous to me (“O Thou Who didst create the growth hormones that produced this enormous bird...”) and I feel odd saying them in front of Jews, agnostics, atheists, “spiritual” people, Uncertains, Rosicrucians, ophthalmologists and the tired old Anglicans at our table.

But I also feel odd if the food is hauled into the dining room and we simply dig in and feed like jackals at the carcass of a fallen gazelle. There should be a graceful pause, a meaningful look around the table, an appropriate word or two. To that end, I had a table grace painted on the dining-room wall above the mantel.

***“O Lord, we thank Thee for this food,
For every blessing, every good.
For earthly sustenance and love
Bestowed on us from heaven above.
Be present at our table, Lord.
Be here and everywhere adored.
Thy children bless and grant that we
May feast in paradise with Thee.”***

If I printed the prayer on cards and passed them around, it would feel like a school assignment. Instead, I just look up at the wall and start singing (to the tune of the doxology), and everyone else in the family chimes in.

If it sounds good, we might segue into “America the Beautiful” and “Take Me Out to the Ball Game.” And toss in the hymn “Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow,” sung to the tune of “Hernando’s Hideaway.” It isn’t a party unless you sing a few songs.

Group singing is one more thing for which I am grateful. It’s civility in its purest form. If you have a few hairy-legged baritones and basses, you can launch into “Old Man River” or “On the Road to Mandalay.”

Although you must all resume toting the barge and lifting the bale tomorrow, it’s inspiring to hear 15 people find harmony around the Thanksgiving table. And it sets a tone. No crying in the cranberries. Lighten up. It could, as we say, be worse. □

– Garrison Keillor, humorist, author and host of “A Prairie Home Companion” on American Public Radio, originally wrote this essay for <www.realsimple.com>.



People worldwide find varied

by Tim Ghianni

Words uttered by a person celebrating escaping the streets. A robust “thank you” directed toward heaven by a proud man looking toward the final acts of a life well spent. The silent symbolism offered by a woman who toasts God, family and friends by hoisting her bounty-filled plate.

These words, prayers, acts offer a common message on this holiday: “Thank you, God, for the life you have given me.”

That’s actually the translation of a note detailing the many reasons for giving thanks as written in Spanish by the Rev. Luis O. Diaz de Arce, 93, a native of Cuba and retired member of the Florida Conference.

Diaz, who uses this holiday to embrace many decades of blessings rather than dwell on hardship and loss, is one of several people – from various stations of life – who today share their thoughts, prayers and special traditions of this American holiday.

Giving thanks before a meal by lifting a plate

Those struggling for just the right words may want to borrow the tradition of Marcia McFee, a creative worship consultant from Truckee, Calif.

In her home, a simple toast – not with a beverage but with a plate – is silent testimony of gratitude for life’s abundance.

Actually, she borrowed her tradition from a friend, Nina Reeves, North Alabama Conference leader of youth ministry for decades.

“She told me once: ‘Marcia, when I go out to dinner with my interfaith friends, words sometimes get in the way. So when we pray before the meal, we just lift the plate.’”

“Then she grabbed her plate full of food, and I grabbed mine, and we lifted (them) silently into the air.

“‘Amen’ is the only word uttered as we replaced the plates on the table.”

McFee finds this particularly appropriate on Thanksgiving. When family and friends of different spiritual bents and traditions gather to celebrate a holiday, breaking bread together is more about the unity of hope than the difference in beliefs.

“Lifting the plate can include everyone in a common practice that offers a way to give thanks for the food, for the gathering, for life.” Amen.

Remembering the less fortunate

In a nation where the economy is struggling and homelessness is far too common, not all celebrants are in the bosom of their families on the holiday.

Even in that population, there are those who offer thanks for little victories and blessings as they bow over plates of food provided by churches and shelters across the nation.

The Rev. Neelley Hicks, a deacon at Sixty-First Avenue United Methodist Church in a hard-scrabble section of Nashville, Tenn., describes the thoughts of one of her friends, “Ed.”

“Ed” was forced to flee his “home” when May’s historic floods washed away Tent City, the city’s long-established homeless encampment on the banks of the Cumberland River. Hicks says Ed is thankful that he since has found permanent shelter in Nashville. And he wants to remember the less fortunate. He “wants to lift up those people from other countries who don’t have anything

to eat, and those in the U.S. who are struggling,” Hicks says.

“He wants everyone to pray for (the) homeless living on the streets.”

Humbled by others’ gratitude

Those, like Hicks, who aid the homeless, share those sentiments.

Take the “The Sandwich Girl,” for example. Meredith Medlin, a student at Boston University, calls Christ United Methodist Church in Franklin, Tenn., her home church. It’s an existence that could be far-removed from the streets.

Instead, last summer she earned her nickname by delivering sandwiches and sharing conversation with Nashville’s homeless.

The experience moved her so much that when she bows her head on Thanksgiving, she will count the people she met among her blessings: “It humbles me to see how few material possessions some of my brothers and sisters have, yet all they can do is praise you, God.



ways of saying grace

Thank you so much for those blessed children. I thank you not only for giving them your grace and peace, but also for putting them in my path, that I may experience you and be humbled by their gratitude..."

Filling life with colors and flavors

When she begins to count her own blessings this Thanksgiving, Maria Teresa Santiago, a diaconal minister from Puerto Rico, looks back at her humble upbringing and realizes that what she once thought was poverty was really a life of bounty, in spirit and grace, if not in material possessions.

"As children, we were taught to say please and then to give thanks," she recalls.

"...I would ask my father why we always had to give thanks. He would reply that we should not only say it but feel it, since we are not rich and everything we have is a blessing from God."

She remembers thinking that she didn't really know why to be thankful, since "we don't have a place to live and I don't have what other children have, and my father earns so little."

"I could not understand the wealth my father was talking about, nor the gratitude he felt."

Now she understands "the wealth which my father spoke of and the gratefulness he felt... When I see the injustices of the world, I no longer think God is unjust. I believe that God has called me, my father, my mother and you who are reading these lines to make a change."

Gratitude "does not derive from our possessions or our achievements, but from our attitude toward the circumstances. Today I can say that if I hadn't learned to be grateful, I could not understand God's plan in my life..."

"If I hadn't been able to develop this gift, I would have lost the opportunity to fill my life with so many colors and flavors."

Thankful for 93 years of blessings

Back in Florida, the Rev. de Arce approaches Thanksgiving by celebrating 93 years of blessings that began when he was born in the "bosom of the large family saturated with love."

He goes on to describe how much he has been blessed by teachers, preachers, schools, churches, doctors, medicines, all things, great and small, that helped him negotiate a life well-spent.

There are words of thanks for "a partner that sweetened my life" and the resulting children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren who "have lighted my earthly journey."

He also is grateful for being allowed to work as a pastor, "grazing sheep in your flock" and even rescuing some of those who were lost.

He is "at the end of my pilgrimage," he says, and he tells God, "thank you for the long life you have given me." □

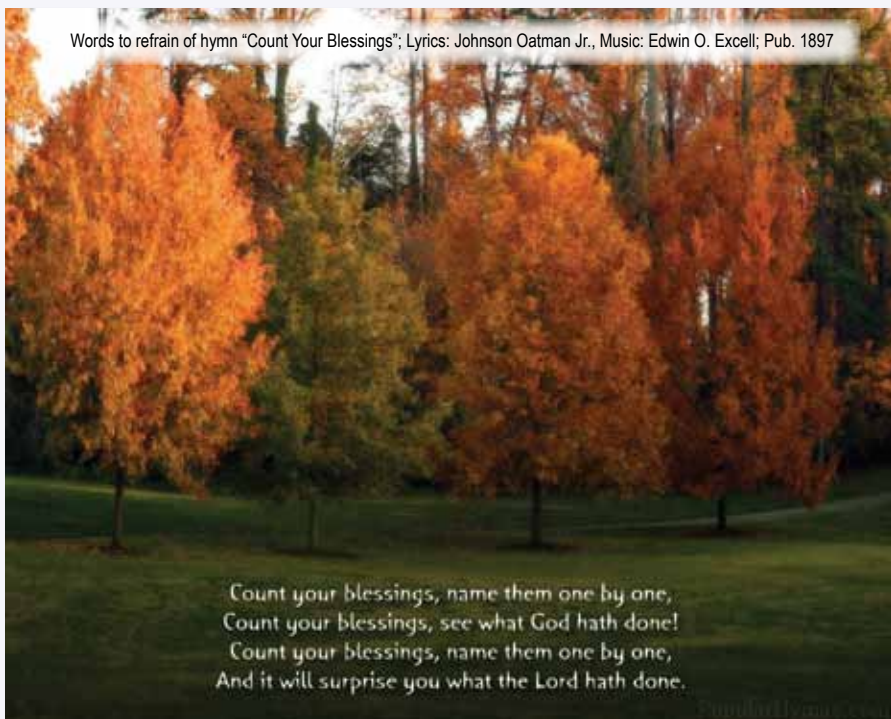
— Tim Ghianni is a Nashville, Tenn.,-based freelance writer.

Some words of thanks:

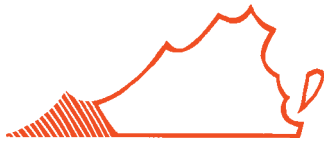
*L*oving God, in the midst of plenty or in the presence of scarcity, I am blessed. Whether it is a plate filled with food or facing what we now call a full plate of cares and worries, I am still blessed. At a table with family and friends, even with the absence of dear loved ones whose love and life once nurtured and supported me, I am blessed. On this day of counting blessings to give you thanks, let me give you thanks, because in your love, I count and I matter to you. For the food that nourishes me and for the nourishment of faith, I give you thanks. For life, and for the fullness of life, I give you thanks. For the warm embrace of your love, for the warm glow of hope and light, even in the pit of despair, I give you thanks. As an action of giving thanks, let my life be a never-ending prayer and sermon of gratitude. And for the love of a dear Savior, in whom all things guides and inspires, in Christ Jesus, I pray with thanksgiving. Amen. □

— The Rev. Eradio Valverde Jr., superintendent of the Corpus Christi District, Southwest Texas Conference

Words to refrain of hymn "Count Your Blessings"; Lyrics: Johnson Oatman Jr., Music: Edwin O. Excell; Pub. 1897



Count your blessings, name them one by one,
Count your blessings, see what God hath done!
Count your blessings, name them one by one,
And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.



Virginia

Attendees at convocation hear of need for church's involvement in immigration issues

It was no coincidence that the Bishop's Convocation on immigration was held at Grace United Methodist Church in Manassas, in Prince William County, home of one of the toughest anti-immigrant laws in the country.

After the crackdown, Prince William County lost about 20 percent of its Latino population, according to a report by the Migration Policy Institute. That figure has since rebounded. But the talk of the convocation, held Oct. 1, was comments made by Corey Stewart, chairman of the Prince William Board of County Supervisors, who "credited" the county's increase in median household income on the exodus of immigrants.

The day's keynote speaker, Jim Perdue Burke, a missionary working specifically with immigration-related issues for the Desert Southwest Conference in Arizona, told the crowd that migration patterns are affecting the entire globe, not just the United States, and may soon change the way we look at everything.

"Immigration in the U.S. has exploded over the past 20 years," Perdue Burke said, "so that one person in eight is an immigrant. By (the year) 2050, that figure is expected to be one person in five."

Perdue Burke said that when jobs are plentiful, immigrants are welcomed because they fill the low-wage jobs that Americans don't want. But when jobs are scarce, like they are now, migrants are blamed for taking those same jobs away from citizens. "They cease to be people and become 'labor,' a thing that we can plug in when we need it."

Perdue Burke also talked about the theological aspect of offering hospitality to foreign workers. "Our forbearers in the faith were immigrants who were treated like dogs so they said 'not on our watch!' The Jewish tradition was that God's call is extended to all people, all races, so the

stranger was welcomed. Paul wrote that the Christian church must be for all people. But we're taught to fear and suspect the stranger. So we're caught in the middle between fear and hospitality."

In her homily during opening worship, Bishop Charlene Kammerer outlined her past work with immigrants, including the fact that as a child in Florida, her home church adopted the Martinez family, refugees fleeing the Communist government in Cuba. "At the beginning they were in the country illegally, so to my surprise my church became known around town as the place that 'harbored those criminals.' I was simply aware that they had become removed from everything familiar in their lives.

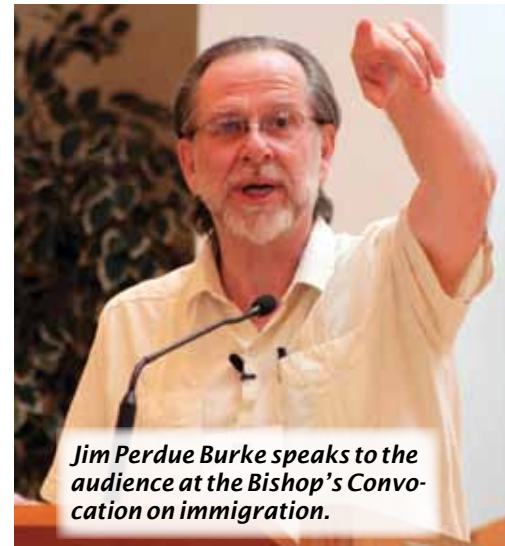
"Families like the Martinez family are coming to Virginia in waves," the bishop added, "so we have many new neighbors among us who are struggling to make it day by day."

Kammerer also spoke of the Sept. 28 judicial ruling in Alabama, where United Methodist Bishop Will Willimon joined religious leaders who sued the state to block a harsh new immigration law from taking effect. A judge upheld some parts of the law but did strike down a provision making it illegal for churches to help immigrants.

"Not since the days of the Civil Rights movement have so many communities of faith become energized to stand up for the right treatment of others," Kammerer said.

The Rev. Larry Jent, speaking for the conference Commission on Ethnic Minority Concerns and Advocacy that helped sponsor the event, said the intent was to make working with immigrants a missional focus of conference churches. "We want to avoid the political questions — not because they're not important, but because the church has more important issues to deal with."

Jent joked that as a Native American, his people had been aware of the immigration



Jim Perdue Burke speaks to the audience at the Bishop's Convocation on immigration.

problem for more than 400 years.

Perdue Burke said the idea of aiding someone who might be in the country illegally blocks many churches from doing anything to help.

"Taking an undocumented person to a job is not illegal," he said. "Nor is evangelizing to them, or helping them, or praying for them. And if they were, it should be the church's responsibility to do them anyway."

Allison Rutland-Soulen, an attorney with the Just Neighbors legal aid organization, told the audience that churches need to be proactive in creating opportunities for members to be in direct contact with their neighbors.

"The Virginia Conference has numerous ways for people to enter into those kinds of relationships," said Bill Mefford of the General Board of Church & Society in Washington, D.C., who attends Culmore UMC in the Virginia Conference. "But how do we go beyond providing services? The next step is developing intentional shared relationships. Ministry should be a shared experience, mutual and reciprocal." □

— Neill Caldwell

5 Talent Academy audience learns about best practices of evangelism from other churches

“Evangeliism” is no longer a word to be shunned and avoided, but simply “sharing the good news of Jesus Christ in word, sign and deed” according to the Rev. Randy Orndorff, one of the presenters at the 5 Talent Academy on Oct. 6.

A crowd of more than 400 people, representing 140 different churches in the conference, attended the teaching event at Oak Grove UMC in Chesapeake and learned how evangelism is the responsibility of all members of a congregation.

Attendees from 80 churches were “sampling” a 5 Talent Academy event for the first time. During 2012 Annual Conference, there will be another opportunity for congregations to sign up with the conference program for revitalizing existing churches, so organizers opened up this event for other congregations to try.

The format was somewhat different. Five Virginia Conference churches – Salem, Arlington Temple, Wilderness, Culpeper and the Hispanic ministry at Floris – made presentations of their best practices of evangelism.

Probably the best “take-away” moment came from the Rev. Rita Staul of Salem UMC, part of a two-point charge in the York River District, where worship attendance has more than tripled in the past eight years. Staul told of baking her husband’s favorite chocolate cake but leaving it out on the counter. A single ant looking for food discovered the cake, then went back to get all his friends so they could come and share in the feast.

“That’s ant evangelism!” said Staul.

The secret to Salem’s success, Staul said, lies in three simple steps: prayer, hospitality and service.

In addition to the attendance jump, the average age of the congregation has dropped by 20 years; participation of children has gone from 2 to 30, youth from 3 to 18; and the amount of tithes and offerings has nearly doubled. The church also has raised more than \$100,000 in an annual auction, with proceeds going to help people in the community.

“Meet people’s needs then lead them to Christ,” Staul encouraged. “Then send them out to lead others.”



Rev. Rita Staul describes the amazing growth experienced at Salem UMC in Gloucester.



In the afternoon session, attendees broke up into small groups to discuss what they had heard in the morning session and how to apply it to their own churches.



The Rev. Tom Berlin of Floris UMC responds to a question from the audience, as Jacqueline De Los Rios (left) and the Rev. Rita Staul listen.

At one point the Rev. Tom Berlin, senior pastor of one of the largest congregations in the conference, asked the audience for additional appreciation for the efforts at Salem.

Berlin spoke about the growing Floris ministry to the Latinos in the area around Dulles Airport, which was generated by lay people within the church. “A lay person asked me ‘when will we start to meet the spiritual needs of our Latino neighbors?’,” Berlin

said. “When the laity starts asking for programs, you can do anything.”

The Spanish language service at Floris currently has about 120 participants. But that was not started until the church had been involved with the Latino community for 15 years, through English as a Second Language classes and other ministries.

The Rev. Keith Boyette, pastor of Wilderness UMC, along with lay member Tina Page, spoke of how that church articulates its mission and

vision, its “core values,” in shaping its message to the community. “It’s like our DNA,” said Boyette, “which determines and directs our witness.” The church asks every member to sign a pledge making evangelism a responsibility, and provides training for sharing their faith to others.

Arlington Temple UMC representatives talked about how they first made their church more attractive, identifiable and accessible, then worked to appeal to the diverse community around their facility.

Orndorff spoke about Culpeper UMC’s confirmation classes, which have brought many new families into the church. “We expect the whole church to be involved in our confirmation process,” he said, “and to offer a program that the entire community wants to be a part of.”

The next 5 Talent Academy event will be Feb. 23, 2012, at Ebenezer UMC in Stafford. Bishop Ricardo Pereira from the Cuban Methodist Church will be the guest speaker. □

— Neill Caldwell

Campus ministries in Virginia Conference measure good things

by Jeff Harlow

Campus ministry is a rich and complicated expression of God's reign on campuses across the Virginia Conference. Recognizing this special gift from God, the conference Board of Higher Education and Campus Ministries has proactively prepared for a new generation of students on our campuses by engaging in an intentional process of deep change.

Accountability is the key ingredient to help us change. Two initiatives have helped us become more accountable to the conference. First, we aligned our organizational structure to provide a clear support system by encouraging a direct role for district superintendents. Second, we developed a comprehensive set of effectiveness measures that will be implemented by all campus ministries.

A new vision

We believe that what gets measured gets done. With the help of campus ministers and students, we developed a robust yet elegant set of effectiveness metrics. The new "metrics for success" are driven by our vibrant new vision: *Campus ministry invites and equips students to explore, engage and embody an active faith in God.*

The new vision statement is already energizing students and leaders on campuses. Deborah Lewis, campus minister for the Wesley Foundation at the University of Virginia (UVA) explains, "Explore, engage, and embody might be new words for us, but the concepts have been alive here for many years. Our students love the new vision statement and we are eager for others to hear how it's being lived out at UVA."

Metrics are a tool for campus ministers to demonstrate how they are inviting and equipping students to explore, engage, and embody their faith in God.

In August, we launched a trial period for campus ministers to practice using the new metrics. Attendance counts are being recorded for all events, programs and groups. In addition, narrative descriptions of events are being recorded. The narrative data for each event provides a rich context to help us interpret

the quantitative data.

The narrative information includes descriptions of events along with observations of impact for students in the form of examples, stories and photos. In this way, our campus ministries will be described and evaluated in terms of the quantity of students participating *plus* the quality of their participation.

Good things are happening

We are gathering real evidence about the good things happening on our campuses. In particular, we

hope to compile evidence that a variety of students at different stages in their faith journeys are enjoying opportunities provided by campus ministries. As expressed in our new vision statement, we expect to receive evidence about students who are exploring their faith in God, those seeking to engage more fully in their faith, or those stepping out boldly to embody their faith. Bret Gresham is the campus minister at Virginia Tech's Wesley Foundation. He sums it up this way: "We finally get to express the countless ways that we extend God's love to everyone on our campuses!"

Conference campus ministry comes in a variety of shapes and sizes. We are blessed to have traditional Wesley Foundations on seven campuses. A Wesley Foundation is led by a full-time United Methodist pastor and operates a ministry center adjacent to the campus. In addition, we share support for ecumenical campus ministries on six campuses. We also help support a chaplain's ministry at six United Methodist-related schools in Virginia. We also enjoy a partnership with campus ministries sponsored by two local congregations. These congregation-based ministries



(Above): Members of UVA's Wesley Foundation baked and decorated more than 9,600 cookies to fund their spring 2011 mission trip. (Left): Young adults of the new RISE faith community celebrate the James Madison University campus ministry's new identity. (File photos)



serve three campuses.

We embrace a rich diversity of campus ministry styles and cultures, recognizing that our campuses in Virginia are located in a variety of places and serve a variety of students. With this rich diversity in mind, the new metric system was designed to gather information about ministry effectiveness regardless of where or how the ministries happen.

Our new "metrics for success" system includes the requirement that campus ministers, local boards, board personnel and district superintendents meet on a regular basis to talk about their data. These holy conversations about data will provide a forum in which ministry colleagues share best practices and encourage improvements as needed.

Over time, we expect our campus ministers, local boards and district superintendents to embrace the measurement system as a valuable tool for demonstrating our successes, identifying where change might be needed, and making improvements in ministry effectiveness. □

— The Rev. Jeff Harlow is chair of the conference Board of Higher Education and Campus Ministries. He is the pastor of Enon UMC in Mechanicsville.

Camp Loud and Clear is Virginia's first-ever camp for young people with hearing disabilities

What do you get when you cross one persistent mother with the Virginia Conference Commission on Disabilities (COD)? Camp Loud and Clear; the very first camp ministering to deaf and hard of hearing (deaf/hh) young people in Virginia!

Since 2001, members of the COD have dreamed and envisioned a camp specifically established to bring the good news of Jesus Christ to a special population that is largely ignored by the church. Less than one percent of deaf/hh persons are church members. In 2005, the Gallaudet University Research Institute reported that across the United States, approximately 1 million people over age 5 are "functionally deaf," and about 8 million people over age 5 are hard of hearing (that is, have some difficulty hearing normal conversation even with the use of a hearing aid). The 2010 Census reported the number of adults with hearing trouble as 34.5 million. What a glorious mission field for The United Methodist Church!

The camp, held in July, was hosted by 4-H Camp Holiday in the Farmville District. The lake seemed to rise out of the trees brilliantly blue and surrounded by large pines. As I entered the main building, which housed the dining room, I held my breath. The building was filled with the sounds of children laughing and playing while the adults had a slightly "deer in the headlights" look. This was highly organized chaos! Campers were being checked in, receiving name tags and their cabin assignments with instructions to return promptly at noon for lunch.

From Friday afternoon until Sunday late afternoon, the campers experienced all of the joys of camp: swimming, fishing, crafts, devotions, drama, archery and the climbing wall. By nightfall they were more than ready to return to their cabins after vespers for a well-earned night's sleep.

College students who came from Radford and Longwood Universities' programs that focus on deaf/hh issues

by Tizzy von Trapp Walker

chaperoned the campers. The camp counselors represented a wide variety of denominations, but were all joined in the common goal of ensuring these young people from 8-14 a most enriching camp experience and a time to see ourselves as God sees us: perfectly and wonderfully made! (Psalm 139) For many of the campers, this was the first time they were introduced to the song "Jesus Loves Me, this I Know;" and the first time many learned about Jesus!

My initial fears and trepidation melted away, and by Sunday afternoon closing worship, we had become a true community of faith, encouraging each other, celebrating accomplishments and showing parents, sponsors, and the church the amazing work God can do wherever two or three are gathered in God's name.



A word from the camp's chairperson:

An evaluation with questions for both the campers and the parents was sent out, and the biggest comment from the campers was that they want the camp to be longer! The parents noted that their children enjoyed that every camper was (deaf/hh). None of the campers had ever been in a situation where they were surrounded by other children just like themselves. In fact, none of them even knew any other



(Above): Volunteer staffperson Kelly, a cued speech transliterator, "cues" to a camper who is hard of hearing. Cued speech is a form of communication that supplements lipreading. (Left): Becca, a "counselor in training," shows off her target practice accuracy. Any deaf/hh child age 13-18 qualified to be a counselor in training. (Below): A 4-H Prince Edward County volunteer teaches eager campers how to bait a fishing hook. All activities (except for crafts) were taught by 4-H instructors who are certified in their area of expertise.



deaf/hh children, and the friendships that developed were amazing.

What I noticed was the happiness of the campers; they were allowed to be kids – just everyday kids at camp doing camp activities without anybody focusing on the fact that they had a cochlear, a hearing aid, or used sign language.

Next summer's camp is set for July 13-15 at the same location. □

— The Rev. Elizabeth "Tizzy" von Trapp Walker is pastor of the Richmond Charge (Calvary, Hopewell and Oakland UMCs), Fredericksburg District. Jennifer Kingsley, chairperson of Camp Loud and Clear, is a member of Smyrna UMC, Farmville District.

Teens trade phones, air conditioning for hard work at 'LebCamp'

Most teens spend their summers doing good by battling the evil alien monsters on their TV screens from their couches, with the air conditioning cranking and the refrigerator within easy reach. The teens of Lebanon United Methodist Church (LUMC) in Hanover, however, choose to spend a week of their summer doing good in the community.

About 30 teenagers decided to spend a week in the 100-degree heat building houses, making connections, and just making their community a little bit better.

"LebCamp," was created by the Rev. Jason Stanley, youth pastor at Lebanon, as a way to get youth involved in the community. LebCamp has been going on for seven years and working together, the youths of LUMC have completed many projects. "Instilling a missional heart willing to serve others in young people is very important to me," Stanley said. "LebCamp is the perfect vehicle in which that happens."

This year the team completed an astounding 16 projects, ranging from building decks to painting to patching roofs, all for people who cannot afford to complete these repairs on their own. But the other important thing that the teenagers do is build relationships with their residents.

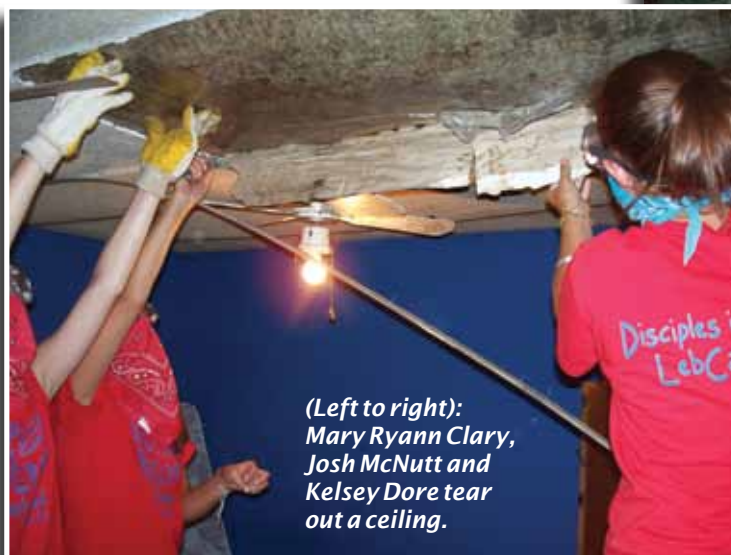
"My residents were so sweet. It's just not right that good people like that should live that way," fifth-year LebCamper Hannah Scarborough said.

"Mrs. Clark is certainly one of the top three favorite people I've ever met," said third-year LebCamper Jeremy Eye. "She seemed closer to God than many pastors. There really isn't enough I can say about her. I tried to cherish every moment she spoke. You just don't meet people like this every day."

Why do they do it? For one week teens must give up their phones, Facebook and video games to do hard work. For some teenagers the fact that they

could not have constant access to their cell phones would send them reeling, their fingers itching to text someone. This is not the case for the LebCampers.

"This was my second year back at LebCamp, and one thing that kept and is keeping me coming back is watching people take time out of their summer and help the less fortunate," Kelsey Dore



(Left to right):
Mary Ryann Clary,
Josh McNutt and
Kelsey Dore tear
out a ceiling.

said. "Seeing how I was transformed this last week was such a great opportunity not only for me, but for my peers. The relationships that are built with the residents, friends, staff and God are endless. I have to say, LebCamp is one of the most eye-opening experiences I have had. Nothing in this world can beat the feeling of touching a complete stranger, with the work through God,"

Many of the youths at Lebanon could say that LebCamp has changed them and the people around them in their lives.

"I'd have to say it's a great way to get out there and make a difference where it counts, our own community," second-year participant Christian Clark said.

Graham Roper also has been transformed by working at LebCamp. "I go to LebCamp because it's tradition. It's the only place where you can be totally surrounded by people who genuinely love you. LebCamp is about serving others and finding God through your service. Not many people would be so excited



Conner
Heermann
carefully
destroys old
boards of a
deck in need
of repair.

about waking up at 6 to work in heat for people they have never met."

Lindsey Payne attended LebCamp for the very first time this year, and felt affected on a personal level. "Well, one thing that hit me right away was the love and sense of community the church exuded," Payne said. "Every person I met impacted me because

they were so kind. I don't think I had ever really been surrounded by so much kindness before. I felt transformed by each person I formed a relationship with no matter if it was someone who I already knew or someone I had just met. "I really got a sense of being in a family with the people around me."

Several adults also help out with the projects throughout the week, whether they simply provide a lunch one day or they stay on site with the youths guiding them and ensuring their safety with power tools and other matters.

Campers every year put forth effort and time into making the world around them a better place for everyone. Whether they build someone a new deck or merely paint a floor, the effects are still felt in the hearts of their residents, and their own. □

— Ashley Ireland and Max Berry,
young people at Lebanon UMC,
Richmond District.

Summer school camp at Floris UMC feeds hearts and minds

About 100 elementary school children received a groundbreaking summer school experience in Herndon thanks to the unique partnership between Hutchison Elementary School and Floris United Methodist Church. "Camp Hutchison" was facilitated by more than 130 volunteers from the church and community.

Hutchison Elementary School was founded in 1975 and has a rich multicultural student population, which includes students from more than 28 countries. Floris UMC and Hutchison Elementary began a partnership in 1999. Over the years, the church and school have worked together to serve the students and staff of the school. The church-school partnership includes such programs as mentoring and tutoring Hutchison students, evening English as a Second Language classes for their parents, coat and book drives, seasonal giving opportunities that allow the congregation to bless the students and their families and, more recently, Help Hungry Kids, a weekend meal program that serves 90 students each week.

"In April, we sat down with Principal Judy Baldwin," explains the Rev. Tom Berlin, "and we asked, 'What's something that keeps you up late at night?' She said, 'summer enrichment.'"

Berlin and Jake McGlothlin, director of "Serve Ministries," went back to the congregation and surveyed

certified teachers by asking if they would be interested in volunteering this summer in a summer enrichment camp for students at Hutchison Elementary. "The response was amazing," said Berlin. "This was clearly something that resonated with the congregation."

As the vision unfolded, it became clear that keeping the students' academic skills strong over the summer was only part of what Floris could do at Hutchison. Equally as important was providing nutritional meals and a fun experience. The end result was a camp that combines education, enrichment and nutrition in a four-week, half-day program. In addition to being taught math and language arts by certified teacher volunteers, the children, grades 1-3, enjoy daily activities such as art, drama, music, science/nature and recreation. Campers also receive breakfast and lunch, prepared and served by volunteers, as well as a healthy snack to take home.

"No matter what the educational outcome is, these children will gain so much just by knowing that people care about them," Baldwin said. □

— Cynthia Lopynski,
Floris UMC director of Connections



(Above:) Summer campers enjoy a meal together along with one of the Floris students and an adult volunteer. The camp provided breakfast and lunch every day.

An adult volunteer leads a young science class as they explore nature outdoors. Science was one of the enrichment activities offered by the camp.



Advent devotional booklet benefits hunger relief

The Society of St. Andrew (SoSA), founded in 1978 by three Virginia Conference pastors and based in Big Island, salvages fresh produce that would be wasted and donates it to feed the hungry.

SoSA Advent devotions and giving program is designed to draw participants closer to God's loving gift to the world — Jesus.

Advent is a special period of mental and spiritual preparation for the coming of Christ, encompassing the four Sundays before Christmas Day. SoSA's devotional booklet provides a personal meditation for each day during Advent.

Those who participate in SoSA's Advent devotions program are invited to give, in the name of the Christ Child, a gift of food by making a small daily donation to SoSA during the season. These contributions will be used by SoSA to feed the nation's hungry — at a cost of about 2 cents per serving.

The Advent devotions starter kit includes a sample devotional booklet and instructions for church leaders to administer the church's participation in this program. To order one electronically, visit <<http://www.endhunger.org/advent.htm>>.

SoSA's Advent material is provided free of charge to individuals and congregations who covenant with them to donate to the hunger-relief organization's ministry during the Advent season. □

Advocate ad rates to increase first of year

The *Virginia Advocate's* advertising rates will increase from \$30 per column inch to \$36 per column inch effective Jan. 1, 2012, for ads reserved beginning with the March 2012 issue. For the first time, discount rates for 6-month or longer contract packages also will be offered. Contact Peggy Cribbs at (804) 521-1110 or <Advocate@vaumc.org> to reserve your space. □

Saint Matthias UMC uses Facebook social media to facilitate weekly book study group



The Internet, blogosphere and Twittersverse are filled with information about the importance of “social media” to the life of churches today. If you are not on Facebook, you know plenty of people who are (more than 750 million at last count). And you may know people who Tweet, even if you’re not sure what that means.

At any rate, the world is thoroughly committed to the social media (including Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and plenty of other sites) where people can find people they know, or used to know, or would like to know, and communicate with them 24/7. So, the argument goes, the church should have a presence in the social media.

We, United Methodists, have roots in exploring new ways to reach people. John Wesley overcame his initial distaste to field preaching in order to minister to the many, many working-class people who never went to church. He eventually preached outdoors to thousands of people at a time. There would have been no Methodist movement had he not decided to go where the people were.

So, here we are, a decade into the 21st century, and, still, most people are not in church. But, they are out there with their laptops, tablets and smart phones, texting and chatting up a storm. How do we reach them? At St. Matthias UMC, Fredericksburg District, we are exploring the ways we might be able to use social media to reach those people. We have a Twitter account, even though hardly anyone in the church admits to Tweeting. And, we have a page on Facebook. This is where it gets interesting.

In the spirit of experimentation, I

started two book groups. Both groups spent six weeks studying a book called *Unconditional? The Call of Jesus to Radical Forgiveness* by Brian Zahnd. The book is mind-altering and life-transforming, and everyone in both groups would heartily recommend it. But, that’s not the point here.

The point is that one of those book groups met on Facebook. On Monday evenings, several church members and the pastor gathered in the comfort of our own homes, in front of our own computers, and went to the St. Matthias page (a closed group, in which anyone can see the page, but only members can see the posts). We each clicked on “Chat With Group,” and the discussion began.

For an hour, we typed in our thoughts and feelings about that night’s chapters. We read each others’ comments and responded. In addition, there were other church members who never said anything, but just read the conversation as it rolled on. This sort of anonymous observation would have been impossible to do in a group around a table at church.

We are confident that enthusiasm for this new study medium will grow from here on. You can’t beat the convenience. Once, one of our Facebook regulars snuck out of a dinner party with her lap-

top in order to join in the conversation.


While everyone’s first choice would probably be to talk around a table at church, this is a very useful second choice. It will never replace the “old school” book group or Bible study, but it will allow/encourage more people to attend than might otherwise.

We recognize that this experiment included nobody from outside the church as part of the Facebook study group. But, the more comfortable we, as a congregation, become with Facebook and other social media, the more likely we are to find ways to use them to share the love of Christ with people who need to know that love.

What’s next? We’re considering *Who Stole My Church? What to Do When the Church You Love Tries to Enter the 21st Century* by Gordon McDonald. It seems particularly relevant to our church’s situation, and maybe to yours, as well.


Like it or not, the rate of change in our world is only accelerating. We can use the opportunities it brings to share the gospel in new ways, or we can refuse to change, putting us in that august lineage of people who refused to learn how to use books rather than scrolls. Let’s turn the page. □


— The Rev. Walt Westbrook is pastor of St. Matthias UMC in Fredericksburg.




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VOY choir forms relationships in Dominican Republic

In June, a mission group of 20 high school youths and six adults stepped out of an overcrowded bus and into the community of Cuesta Arena in the Dominican Republic. The area around them was empty, except for half of a cement house, a deep hole and a picnic pavilion. Then a couple of locals arrived on the site and started gesturing what needed to be done.

Those who had Spanish in school used their basic words to help the process along. Soon, children from the surrounding community arrived and drew many of the youths to the pavilion to play. Other members of the team started digging a hole for a water cistern and pounding dirt into a level foundation for the new missionary house.

Every year, the Virginia Conference's Voices of Youth (VOY) program sends out a group of youths to aid a community located either within or outside the United States. The group then tells about their mission experience through music, in the form of a traveling concert choir.

This year's tour included a week in the Dominican Republic and two weeks of singing across the conference.

It did not take long for relationships to build between VOY and the local people. Pictures drawn with chalk broke down the language barrier. Gestures served where language failed. Speech was simply not needed to make connections. Many of the children played games with VOY. Other children did their best to help the efforts of the cistern-diggers by pushing wheelbarrows of dirt to where they were needed.

Before lunch, mission team members would pause in their work to sing with and for the locals. Some songs were in English, some in Spanish, but all of the music brought people together through a common belief in being and living as Christians.

The work that was accomplished truly made a difference to the community, and it showed. More people came to watch the singing and working every day. VOY truly made a difference in Cuesta Arena.

When the time came to leave, there was a great deal of crying. Many members of the group would have loved to stay longer, but returning did not mark the end of the trip. There was still important work to be done to tell others about VOY's efforts. The choir moved across Virginia for the next two weeks giving concerts. During each concert the group sang, talked about the Dominican Republic, and gave testimonies about how the trip had affected them.

Hearing about the mission trip from youth made an impact on those who listened. It is uncommon for young people to have strong voices in the church, because many do not realize what youth are capable of.

Voices of Youth is named well, for not only do the youths on the trips sing, but they also find their voices. This trip and every mission trip that came before it shows that any one of us can make a difference in the world, no matter what their age. □

— Emily Bailey, a 2011 VOY participant



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- A child is abused or neglected every 60 minutes

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Boy Scout Troop journeys 8,000 miles cross-country

How do you teach a young man to be trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean and reverent? Most agree that direct experience is the best teacher.

This is definitely the philosophy of the leaders of Boy Scout, Troop 1, sponsored by Main Street United Methodist Church in Suffolk. As written in Genesis: 26, "God gave mankind dominion over the earth." To become a steward of God's perfect creation we must first understand and experience the complexities and intricate balance that coexists in various environments.

Under the direction of Troop 1's committee chair Bill Webb and Scoutmaster Robert Baker, a trip of a lifetime to the western states was planned this summer. The intent was to expose Scouts to as many environs as possible and to mature them in the Boy Scout oath.

After much prayer, fundraising and planning, 26 boys and 13 adults left Suffolk at 6 a.m. on July 1 in one RV and three vans pulling tightly packed trailers. The Rev. Myrtle Hatcher was present on her first day as pastor at the church to send the group off with a special prayer and lots of hugs.

The first nine days of travel included: seven national parks (from Shenandoah to Yellowstone), 10 historical sites (from the St. Louis Gateway Arch to Mammoth Hot Springs), 16 places of interest (from the New River Gorge to Artist's Point) and nine wonderful United Methodist churches in nine different states opening their hearts by opening their doors for the group to sleep.

The tradition at Main Street has been that many boys from Troop 1 become Eagle Scouts. For this to occur, young Scouts need to attend summer camp to complete merit badges. To that end, Scouts attended Camp Buffalo Bill located outside of Cody, Wyoming. The group enjoyed sleeping in their tents on brisk full-moon-lit nights, remembering items to be placed in the bear box (this is grizzly territory), the KYBOs (Scouting's new name for latrines), singing silly songs, making a shelter and a boat out of found objects, participating in



shooting, archery, canoeing, rafting, climbing and rappelling, fly fishing, crafts, backpacking and more. Wednesday was a free day and the troop decided to spend the day in the historical town of Cody. They spent hours in Buffalo Bill Historical Center (rated as one of the best museums in the world), walked up and down Old Town Cody streets, saw a shoot-out outside of Irma's Hotel (built by Buffalo Bill), and ate buffalo burgers. After this, the troop attended the Cody Rodeo, the oldest rodeo in the nation.

The last week took the group to five more national parks (from Grand Teton to the Great Smoky Mountains), seven more historical sites (from Arch of

Horns at Jackson Hole to the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis), six more places of interest (from rafting the Snake River to visiting the Cherokee Reservation), two KOA campgrounds, one Flagstaff Federated Church, and three more United Methodist churches where they slept.

Each Scout was assigned a national park or historical site that was researched before submitting a written report. Then before visiting that site, the report was given orally. One Eagle Scout, who may pursue a career in religion, gave his first sermon to the troop centering the message on using kind words and thoughts when under stress.

God has richly blessed this nation. Sadly, however, the Scouts learned how people have destroyed resources and cultures. It was told many times that it will be the future generation, including these Scouts, who will have the responsibility to make it better. We trust they will. □

— Barbara McPhail, Congregational Care coordinator at Main Street UMC in Suffolk

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DECEMBER

'Single Again' Retreat, Dec. 2-4.

Camp Overlook, Keezletown. Explore the trials, the hurts and the loneliness of being single again, and search for the road that leads to healing and wholeness. Participants will join with others who have found themselves single again through separation, divorce or death. Brief presentations, small group reflections and expressive worship will help restore body and soul. For more information, call (540) 2MY-CAMP or e-mail <campoverlook@gmail.com>. Cost: \$105, includes lodging, meals and program supplies.

Winter Camp, Dec. 9-11. Westview on the James, United Methodist camp in Goochland. This event is for 7- to 15-year-olds. With a variety of activities and a focus on Advent and what it means to wait for Christ's birth, this weekend is the perfect way to connect with the meaning of Christmas. Cost: \$109/person. For more information and to register, visit <westviewonthejames.org>.

'Walk to the Manger' & retreats for all ages, Dec. 16-17. Camp Overlook, Keezletown. Register for the census, become a shepherd, hear the angels proclaim the good news, visit a young couple and their special child and help point three kings toward the treasure they seek. Overlook Retreat and Camp Ministry in Keezletown presents an interactive Nativity from 6 to 8 p.m., Friday, Dec. 16. Tours start continuously. The perfect way to reflect on why we celebrate Christmas. Turn your manger visit into a retreat. Youth groups can visit the holy family and then enjoy an overnight experience in newly renovated cabins before a Saturday morning tubing trip at \$52/person. Individuals, couples and families can stay overnight at the bed and breakfast at Blessings Lodge after their trip through Bethlehem. \$99 per room (bedding for four or more on the floor). For more details and registration information for both overnight events, call the camp office

at (540) 2MY-CAMP or send an e-mail to <campoverlook@gmail.com>.

Winter Camp, Dec. 27-28. Camp Overlook, Keezletown. 6 p.m. Tuesday through 6 p.m. Wednesday. The stars are never brighter and the fireplace is never more delightful than winter on Overlook's side of the mountain. Open to 4th- through 10th-graders, bring a friend and delight in a number of camp activities with a winter twist and a Christmas flavor. The program is staffed by counselors and staff from summer camp. Highlights: "Walk to Manger Christmas Experience," "Jumbo Christmas Cranium," favorite camp games like "Gladiator Ball," sugar cookie decorating. Cost: \$48 registration fee includes snacks on Tuesday, breakfast, lunch and snacks on Wednesday, and program materials (\$5 discount per child for two or more from each family).

FEBRUARY 2012

United Methodist Day at General Assembly, Feb. 2. State Capitol, Richmond. This annual event is for all United Methodists concerned with issues before the Virginia General Assembly. Sponsored by the Virginia Conference Board of Church and Society, Conference Legislative Network and United Methodist Women, UM Day gives congregations a vehicle for reaching beyond themselves and introduces them to the Social Principles of The United Methodist Church in a meaningful way. More information will be available in the "Events" section of the Web at <www.vaumc.org> closer to the date.

'Celebrate Your Marriage' Retreat, Feb. 10-12. Camp Overlook, Keezletown. Grow in your love and commitment to God and one another. Join with other married couples to enrich your relationship in the context of Christian faith and action. Trained leaders will guide you through a series of exercises, activities, and worship experiences. For more

information, call the camp office at (540) 2MY-CAMP or send an e-mail to <campoverlook@gmail.com>.

APRIL 2012

'ReFirement: A Creative Spark' for Older Adults, April 20-21. Blackstone: The Virginia United Methodist Assembly Center. Sponsored by the conference Older Adult Council, this retreat will focus on fostering the spark of creativity in order to enrich the lives of older adults and enhance the ministries of the church. Workshops include watercolor and acrylic painting, music, liturgical movement, and knitting/crocheting for making prayer shawls. Fellowship opportunities also will be available. Why attend a retreat focused on the arts? A resolution to the 2005 White House Conference on Aging stated: "Research suggests that active participation in the arts and learning promotes physical health, enhances a sense of well-being among older Americans, improves quality of life for those who are ill, and reduces the risk factors that lead to the need for long-term care..." More information will be available after the start of the year from the conference office of Leadership and Inclusivity.

MAY 2012

Festival of Homiletics, May 14-18. Atlanta. The Virginia Conference Order of Elder encourages all pastors to consider attending this week of preaching and teaching. The festival is the premier training event in preaching in the country. A link will be provided on the Virginia Conference Web site to help connect clergy who want to carpool to Atlanta. Registration information will be available after Nov. 1. Scholarships may be requested through the Virginia Conference Clergy Development program. An application and instructions may be accessed from <www.vaumc.org>, click "Administrative Services >> Ministerial Services >> Clergy Development." The next deadline is Feb. 10, 2012.



Nation & World

Petition signers challenge bishops on same-sex union

Nearly 2,000 United Methodist clergy and more than 8,000 laity* have signed letters urging the Council of Bishops to take a public stand supporting the denomination's position on marriage and homosexuality.

The letters respond to the pledges to bless same-sex unions signed this summer by more than 900 active and retired clergy across the United States.

The clergy's pledges threaten the future of The United Methodist Church, contend both the clergy and laity letters.

"The church needs you to lead," the clergy letter tells the bishops. "We need you to act before the promised disobedience occurs. We need you to issue a public statement that you understand the proposed disobedience to be a grave threat to the unity and the life of the UM Church and that you stand together in your commitment to defend and enforce *The Book of Discipline*."

The Book of Discipline, the denomination's law book, identifies the practice of homosexuality as "incompatible with Christian teaching." The book prohibits United Methodist churches from hosting and clergy from officiating at "ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions."

"I understand that there are people with good hearts on both sides," said the Rev. Ed Robb III, senior pastor of the 9,200-member Woodlands UMC near Houston. "But the church has consistently come down with a position. . . . The way we deal with these matters is through holy conferencing. We don't do it by renegade activity."

Robb and four other pastors spearheaded the letter campaign after talking about the issue earlier this month at The Leading Edge meeting, a gathering for the senior pastors of the 100 largest United Methodist churches in the United States. The pastors hope to collect signatures from like-minded clergy and laity at



(Right): Julie Bruno (right) and Susan Laurie serve Holy Communion to guests following their marriage ceremony across the street from the site of the 2008 United Methodist General Conference in Fort Worth, Texas. The lesbian couple held the ceremony next to the assembly to protest denominational policies that do not recognize same-sex marriages. (UMNS photo by Paul Jeffrey)

<www.faithfulumc.com>.

Individual bishops, including Chicago Area Bishop Hee-Soo Jung and Minnesota Area Bishop Sally Dyck, have issued statements affirming their commitment to enforce church law. The Cabinet of the Minnesota Conference recently filed a formal complaint against a retired elder and is investigating whether he violated the denomination's ban against performing same-sex unions.

However, the petition-signers want the Council of Bishops to make a statement as a body.

Bishop Larry Goodpaster, president of the Council of Bishops, said that when the Council of Bishops' executive committee meets before the council's fall meeting, the group would review

AT ISSUE:

'Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches.'

Paragraph 341.6



the letters and "decide about any response that it might make or that might come from the full council."

Since 1972, the subject of homosexuality has sparked discussion every four years at General Conference, the denomination's top lawmaking body. Delegates consistently have voted to keep the *Discipline*'s stance against homosexuality.

The most recent movement started at the Minnesota Annual Conference session, where 70 clergy signed a statement saying they would "offer the grace of the Church's blessing to any prepared couple desiring Christian

(Continued on pg. 23, Petition signers)

Panel urges church to be more global

The time has come for The United Methodist Church to get serious about its global nature and be less U.S.-centric, says an international panel of United Methodist leaders.

"We are really hoping to shape the hearts and minds of the church," said Bishop Scott Jones, chair of the Committee to Study the Worldwide Nature of The United Methodist Church. "We want the leaders to understand our worldwide nature and the diversity that we think is a real blessing in the life of the church."

To that end, the 20-member committee has issued a report and proposed legislation to General Conference, the denomination's top lawmaking body.

The legislation would:

- Incorporate a new worldwide United Methodist Church covenant into *The Book of Discipline*, the denomination's law book. The covenant will be accompanied by a "Litany for the Covenant of The Worldwide United Methodist Church."
- Make clear in a new global *Book of Discipline* what decisions the General Conference makes, and which areas of ministry and organization are adaptable by central conferences outside the United States.
- Clarify how general agencies function in a worldwide rather than U.S.-centric church.
- Set in motion a process for annual (regional) conferences to study a proposed new model for a worldwide church. This study process may result in petitions for greater structural change at the 2016 General Conference.

Passing this legislation will require a majority vote of General Conference delegates. The next General Conference meets April 24-May 4, 2012, in Tampa, Fla.

The United Methodist Church has nearly 40,000 congregations in the United States, Africa, Europe and the Philippines. As of 2010, the denomination's membership topped 12 million members worldwide.

However, the denomination's U.S. membership has been declining for more than 40 years, even as the church in Africa and the Philippines has been growing. Today, about 7.8 million United

Methodists live in the United States.

The 2008 General Conference authorized the formation of a worldwide nature study committee to examine the denomination's changing demographics and take recommendations to General Conference.

Group members traveled around the globe for listening sessions with United Methodists in the Philippines, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Europe, as well as the United States.

In its report to General Conference, the panel listed some of what members heard in their travels to central conferences, including desires for more ministerial education, greater communication with general agencies and the ability to adapt *The Book of Discipline*.

Overwhelmingly, Jones said, he heard "a strong desire for the worldwide unity of the church at the same time as a desire for greater mutual understanding and respect.



The Africa University traveling choir performs during a United Methodist dinner hosted in 2008 in Fort Worth, Texas. A panel of United Methodist leaders has proposed legislation aimed at helping the church live more fully into its global nature. (UMNS file photo by Mike DuBose)

"The dynamic with which we were working was the desire to clarify what holds us together while allowing for greater freedom in other matters," he added.

The committee is particularly eager to get United Methodists on board with adding the new covenant to *The Book of Discipline*, said Jones. The covenant puts into words values most church members already embrace but may not be fully aware of, he said.

"United Methodists throughout the world are bound together in a connective covenant in which we support and hold each other accountable for faithful discipleship and mission," the covenant

says in part. "Integrally holding connective unity and local freedom, we seek to proclaim and embody the gospel in ways responsible to our specific cultural and social context while maintaining 'a vital web of interactive relationships.'"

The proposed legislation to clarify *The Book of Discipline* specifies that matters such as the denomination's doctrine, Constitution, "Social Principles" and structure would not be subject to adaptation. However, the legislation, if passed, would empower annual conferences outside the United States to set some different educational standards for ordination as elders and deacons.

At General Conference, the committee also wants to set in motion consideration of a new worldwide model that would have The United Methodist Church organized in the same central conferences structure, with the five U.S. jurisdictions constituting a new central conference.

Under the model, jurisdictions would

still elect bishops in the United States, and larger central conferences would have the right to form jurisdictions within their boundaries.

In 2009 and early 2010, voters at annual conferences rejected

constitutional amendments approved by the 2008 General Conference that would have formed similar regional bodies.

"The key lesson of the constitutional amendments passed by the 2008 General Conference is that the church must take time to think these issues through as carefully as possible," the committee said in its report. "The committee is proposing a model for conversation during the next (four years). This model, we hope, will stimulate proposals for action in the 2016 General Conference to change our worldwide structure." □

— Heather Hahn,
United Methodist News Service

Report: In church, as in school, seniors rule

There's long been talk of the "graying" of United Methodist congregations, but the same can now be said of its pastors.

The annual report on clergy age trends in The United Methodist Church reveals a widening age gap. The report was released in late September by the Lewis Center for Church Leadership of Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C.

Even though there are more young elders, deacons and local pastors than 10 years ago, their numbers are dwarfed by elders in the 55-72 age range – 951 compared with 8,790. Reflecting a trend that began in 1995, the number of elders in the 35-54 range continues to decrease.

From the 1970s to 2005, there was a continuous decline in the percentage of young adults as active elders. The past six years have seen gradual increase.

"After that long of a decline, for it to turn up in terms of numbers and percentage is fairly significant given the past trends," said the Rev. Lovett Weems, project director of the study. "But the numbers are very modest, and they're not enough to counterbalance the large numbers of middle-age clergy that are moving into the older group."

Since 1990, the denomination's Board of Higher Education and Ministry has held periodic *Exploration* events where young people, ages 18 to 26, can consider the possibility of entering professional ministry.

The Rev. DJ del Rosario, director of young adult ministry discernment and enlistment at the board, said one explanation for the age gap harkens back to a recurring theme he's heard from pastors.

"When young people come to them and tell them they're interested in pursuing ministry, many pastors tell them to go do something else first, then get ordained later. The abundance of older clergy we have might reflect that," said del Rosario, 34.

Among the 2011 study's findings:

- For the second year, the total percentage of elders ages 55-72 is the highest in history. In 2010, they rep-

resented half of all elders; this year it is 52 percent. As recently as 2000, this age group represented only 30 percent of active elders.

- The median age of elders remains 55 – the highest in history, first reached in 2010.
- The number of under-35 elders increased from 946 in 2010 to 951 in 2011, now 5.61 percent of the total number of elders. That's the highest number and percentage of elders under 35 in more than a decade.
- There are 455 young local pastors, more than any time in recent history. They comprise about 6.2 percent of all local pastors.
- There was a dramatic increase in the

The Rev. Brian Siegle (kneeling) is ordained elder by Bishop Tim Whitaker during 2011 Annual Conference in Roanoke. (Photo by the Rev. Jon Woodburn)



percentage of young clergy who are women. Ten years ago, men outnumbered women by a ratio of 2:1. Today, women comprise almost 40 percent of elders under age 35.

Though the increase in the number of young elders hit a 10-year high, some might be discouraged because that rise reflects only five more pastors. How-

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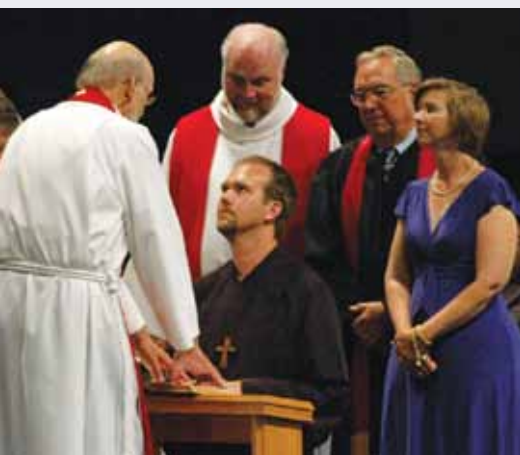
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Petition signers

(Continued from pg. 20)

marriage," including same-sex couples. Similar statements were subsequently signed by clergy in at least four other annual conference gatherings.

The Rev. Bruce Robbins, pastor of Hennepin Avenue UMC in Minneapolis, organized the signature collection in Minnesota. The clergy's letter to the bishops specifically takes him to task.

"It grieves me that there is not some sense of compassion or grace or some recognition of an understanding that we too are faithful United Methodists who are caught in a powerful dilemma between different covenants that we have," Robbins said. "*The Book of Discipline* calls us for inclusiveness and recognizing the sacred worth of all persons, and then places prohibitions that we deeply believe are prejudicial and unjust."

Robbins, whose church has an average weekly attendance of 600, is also the former top executive of the United Methodist Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns.

He noted that the clergy letter suggests clergy who wish to perform same-sex unions should leave the denomination.

"But I am United Methodist, and my Methodist roots go back many, many generations," Robbins said. "And there have been times in the Methodist tradition when people have been excluded before, such as women in ordination and the permissiveness of slavery."

Monica Swink, a member of Epworth UMC in Oklahoma City, criticized the clergy and laity letters to the bishops as "doom and gloom."

She is a leader in the "Love Your Neighbor" campaign launched by Common Witness, a coalition of three unofficial caucuses that advocate for greater inclusiveness of gay members. The campaign advocates changing *The Book of Discipline*.

"They are asking the church to punish and judge," she said. "And I just think the church needs to reflect God's love." □

— Heather Hahn,

United Methodist News Service

*Many of the lay people who signed the petition are apparently not United Methodist, as they did not list their annual conference, so an accurate number for laity is impossible.

ever, the study shows that young people are pursuing a number of different ministry options.

The Rev. Shalom Agtarap, 27, pastor at First UMC in Ellensburg, Wash., said, "It's encouraging to see there are many paths to ministry now. Some may feel called but don't want the burden of so many years of school."

The Rev. April Casperson, director of admissions at Methodist Theological School in Ohio, agrees.

"A seminary education can cost \$60,000. A pastor in their first appointment is going to make far less than that," Casperson, 30, said. "Many may decide against pursuing the elder track."

One area of decline for younger clergy is in the number of deacons. After years of increase, there was a slight decline, but Weems pointed out that those numbers could be deceptive. Most of the data was compiled through United Methodist Board of Pension and Health Benefits statistics, and deacons are often in employment settings where they have a pension plan not covered by the denomination.

Casperson is one of those deacons not counted in the study. Since her main job is at a seminary, she is not in the United Methodist pension system.

Virginia is among the 10 conferences with the highest percentage of young commissioned and ordained elders.

The conferences that have the highest proportion of young clergy tend to have plans to introduce young people to a life of ministry. That can include developing youth as camp leaders or through mission trips. It can be by offering summer internships. For another conference, it may be the campus ministry program. □

— Joey Butler,

United Methodist Communications

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Local Church



▲ In August, more than 40 members of **Main Street UMC** in Waynesboro helped package 45,000 meals for Stop Hunger Now. The event, organized by the LARCUM churches in Waynesboro, was held in the Waynesboro High School cafeteria. Each of the four participating congregations contributed a minimum of \$2,500 for the effort. More than 200 volunteers packaged the meals in less than two hours. LARCUM is a covenantal relationship between Lutheran, Anglican, Roman Catholic and United Methodist churches seeking ecumenical unity. The statewide LARCUM Conference will be held in Waynesboro Dec. 1-3.



▲ After **Farmville UMC's** October Midweek & Mission featured Habitat for Humanity, church members built and decorated birdhouses to use as housewarming gifts for future Habitat for Humanity home builds. Pictured: Regina Hux, Betty Sumner, Carol Schall, Rita Rountree, Cecelia Culler and Judy O'Steen.

Recently, members of **Haygood UMC**, Virginia Beach, spent a Sunday afternoon packing meals for Stop Hunger Now. Stop Hunger Now is an international hunger relief organization that coordinates the distribution of food and other life-saving aid around the world. In less than three hours, 30,000 meals were packed.

► **Rodes UMC** in Afton, Charlottesville District, enjoyed a day of apple butter-making in late September.



The congregation worked hard and produced 98 gallons of apple butter to sell at the church's "Lord's Acre Day" in October. Proceeds support the church and its mission work.



▲ On Aug. 7, many members from **Providence UMC**, York River District, enjoyed dropping a line at the Seagull Pier after church. The pier is located on the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel. They had a total of 26 turn out, and most everyone caught something. Greg Wrenn caught an impressive 21 fish. Although they didn't catch any record-breakers (barely keepers), they did catch a variety: sea robins (flying fish), croaker, spot, flounder, blue fish, sea bass and a crab. Youth Director Paul Greggs was in charge of the trip.



▲ On Sept. 17, several United Methodist churches from Dinwiddie County in the James River District got together to package meals for children and impoverished adults outside the United States. About 40 members from the **McKenney Charge** (Asbury, Mansons, and Rocky Run UMCs), **Dinwiddie Charge** (Lebanon and Mount Olivet UMCs) and **Trinity UMC** got together with representatives from Stop Hunger Now to help package 10,000 meals. To help in the funding of this operation, the churches also were able to raise \$2,500 to go towards purchasing the components of the meals as well as other costs associated with packaging and transporting the meals. Three stations were set up in the meeting hall of Mansons Church in McKenney, and volunteers orchestrated an assembly line to combine a packet of vitamins, dehydrated vegetables, powdered protein and rice in a heat-sealed baggie. Each meal packet, which was neatly boxed, will be combined with many other packets and shipped overseas.



▲ Sept. 18 was Christian Education Sunday at **Main Street UMC** in Suffolk. Excited third-graders received their first student study Bibles and all teachers from the church, the community and the Day Care were recognized.



▲ Each year on the first day of school, **Main Street UMC** in Suffolk hosts a back-to-school prayer vigil. The sanctuary is open for 12 hours of prayer and the community is invited to come to pray for our children, child care ministries, college students, teachers and administrators. Prayer stations are set up for all ages to participate in active prayer for a successful and safe school year.



▲ **Farmville UMC** has adopted the "Wear It Wednesday" Initiative, where people are encouraged to wear a Christian-themed shirt each Wednesday to show off their faith. Learn more at <www.wearitwednesday.com>. Pictured, the Rev. Sylvia Meadows (who moved from Farmville UMC in July) and director of Discipleship Lynedele Blakely in church T-shirts.

A team from **Grace UMC** in Manassas and **St. George's UMC** in Fairfax – including a high school student from each congregation – made visits on Capitol Hill as a part of the Imagine No Malaria campaign of The United Methodist Church. The team participated in a Senate briefing on malaria and met with a hospital administrator from Democratic Republic of the Congo and mission personnel from United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR), United Methodist Communications and the General Board of Church & Society before visiting the offices of Rep. Gerry Connolly, Rep. Frank Wolf and Sen. Jim Webb to urge continued United States funding of malaria eradication efforts. Under the House of Representative's proposed budget cuts to these efforts, an estimated 3.2 million children under the age of 5 would no longer be able to be treated for this preventable and treatable disease across sub-Saharan Africa, where Imagine No Malaria is most active. More information can be found at <www.imagenomalaria.org>. (Imagine No Malaria encompasses the Nothing But Nets ministry which many churches across the Virginia Conference supported.)



▲ **Clover UMC**, Farmville District, raised \$1,000 from a church-sponsored stew supper for the 7th Annual Walk for Hope, which benefits cancer patients in the county.



▲ This year, members at **Grace UMC** in Parksley, Eastern Shore District, spent time making hats for African babies. It has been proven that the mortality rate is much lower for babies who have hats on. The church sent 100 hats to West Africa by Gina Crockett and Jenny Lowell, who worked in the orphanage for two weeks this summer.



▲ Pictured is a display of kits recently dedicated at **Broad Street UMC** in Portsmouth, Elizabeth River District. It included 127 health kits, 106 school kits, 221 birthing kits, one cleaning bucket and one sweater. The kits will be sent to UMCOR for distribution worldwide to those in need.



▲ Located in the center of town on Main Street, **Stanley UMC**, Harrisonburg District, is able to bring a sense of peace and joy to whoever comes by. Although the church yard is small, shrubs and seasonal flowers are lovingly tended to express God's presence. Recently the congregation dedicated new items to the memorial garden (pictured).



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Living the Word



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:
C. Rives Priddy, a certified director of Christian Education, is a lifelong United Methodist. She has held a variety of positions in her local church, on the district and across the conference. Rives graduated from Hollins College with a B.A. in Psychology and from the Presbyterian School of Christian Education with an M.A. in Christian Education. She is currently the Lower School Religion Teacher and Chaplain at St. Catherine's School in Richmond. Rives is grateful to be a member of Centenary UMC, the first congregation in the Virginia Conference to affiliate with the Reconciling Ministries Network. She shares a home with another lifelong United Methodist, C. Nancy Cook, and two cats, Goldie and Georgie.

November 6, 2011

Come to The Table
Matthew 5:17-26

When I was young, it was not the practice of the Methodist Church to include children in Holy Communion. On one summer visit to my grandmother's home, I was allowed to help her set up for Communion the next day. I practiced being a part of the sacrament. I picked up the hymnal, found the service and quietly read the words. Then I moved to the rail, knelt, folded my hands and bowed my head. I reached for an imaginary wafer and then pretended to take a cup. Unbeknownst to me, the new pastor had come down the side aisle from the back. He placed his hand on my right shoulder. I froze! I was sure I was in trouble. But he smiled at me, turned to Granny and said, "Miss Timmie, when you come to The Table tomorrow, please bring your granddaughter with you." He could have been Jesus!

This week's lesson opens with Jesus reassuring his listeners that his intention is not to abolish God's Law but to broaden our human understanding of it. Jesus extends who is included in the Kingdom at the same time as he expands what it means to be a righteous follower. We are required to be good models and teachers of the Law, too.

Our responsibility, however, is more difficult than just being good role models or teachers. Anger or insults towards our sisters and brothers are as destructive to the offender and offended as murder. God wants us to take the first step in reconciliation no matter who might be at fault. Suppose someone won't accept our apology? How do we ask for or offer forgiveness when the other person refuses to speak, is blinded by an addiction, or is no longer alive? What do we do

when the one we may perceive as the offender doesn't even know s/he has hurt us? Can we forgive like Jesus who said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing"? (Luke 23:34, NRSV) There are no easy answers, but we must try. We must pray for guidance and courage to forgive and also to ask for forgiveness so that we can freely worship God side by side with all God's children.

The pastor who first invited me to The Table more than 50 years ago embodied the Scripture, "We love because he first loved us." (1 John 4:19, NRSV) He saw my spiritual need and met it. With that generosity, can we fail to do the same? □

November 13, 2011

Pray for your enemies
Matthew 5:43-48

As one of my fifth-graders so eloquently said when another child questioned her classmate about why she understood a story from Scripture differently, "That's because different Christians understand the Bible differently." That child, a member of an independent Christian congregation, could just as easily have been a United Methodist. John Wesley used the Quadrilateral to help us understand the primacy of Scripture, the significance of tradition, the role of reason, and the importance of our own experience as ways God has given us to comprehend God's Word.

Many of us participated in this past summer's School of Christian Mission's study "Coming Out on the Side of Grace: Forgiveness, and Reconciliation" so ably led by Steve Hundley. We particularly heard and shared stories of violent conflict and forgiveness such as those that have occurred in Ghana, Liberia and South Africa. Most of us have not experienced events quite

so divisive or redemptive. However, we have had disagreements with our Christian sisters and brothers.

Much debate exists about what is required of faithful Christians. Like the pastor who invited me as a child to Communion, some of our clergy and lay leaders have taken steps to include all members of their community in the full ministry of the church. Other equally committed disciples care deeply about their flock's souls, too, but they may see this reaching out as a loosening of standards of what it means to be a faithful disciple. Devout Christians disagree, and in the process may hurt each other and the Body of Christ.

The lesson of Matthew 5:44 is very clear: "But I say to you, 'Love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you.'" While I hope none of us would consider our fellow Christians enemies who persecute us, I know it is difficult to understand how we can believe so differently. As children of God who serve a risen Savior, we should love unconditionally and pray unceasingly for each other.

Thank God we are United Methodists who, as John Wesley taught, are "moving on to perfection." We don't have to get it right all the time to be a part of the Body of Christ. We just have to keep trying to do God's will. God will do the rest! □

November 20, 2011

Inside
Matthew 6:5-15

While many of my adolescent friends preferred the Beatles, I was a Peter, Paul and Mary fan. My passion for their music continues to this day. "Inside" is one of their delightful children's songs that speaks to the first part of the message of this Scripture. People can't actually tell what is on the inside just from looking on the outside whether it is a pie, a present, a book, or another human being. God knows that "Inside, Inside, that's where you'll find the heart of the matter." (Hill/Stookey © 1988 Songweaver Publishing Co.)

Once again Jesus reminds his followers that the visible display of religious

practice is not primary; rather, the state of the heart, which only God can see in full, really matters. We are reminded that though God already knows what we need, God expects us to pray. For those of us who may have a difficult time praying, God gives us a formula in what we now call the Lord's Prayer. First and foremost, we should honor God. We should pray for God's will to be done, ask for our basic needs, and practice forgiveness. We've already explored how difficult it is to come to the altar to worship God when we have not sought reconciliation with our sisters and brothers. "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." (Matthew 6:12, NRSV) We should forgive others if we expect to be forgiven. Neither is an easy task!

As I write this, my Jewish students are in the middle of their High Holy Days: Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. They will conclude these Days of Awe by reading the book of Jonah in their synagogues. This story of call, anger, forgiveness and acceptance is worthy of a yearly reading by Christians, too. Who are the people we consider unworthy of forgiveness? Are we answering God's call or trying to run away? Are we able to risk being thrown into the sea by admitting that we might be the cause of the storm? Do we trust that God will catch us? Can we accept that God sees God's children in ways we cannot imagine? Are we ready to let go of our own anger and forgive others, so that we may be open to the forgiving love of God through Jesus Christ? □

November 27, 2011

'You don't need to worry'
Matthew 6:25-34

I had done it again! I had called a first-grader by her older sister's name. I apologized and she forgave me. I promised to try to remember. Class continued. As the girls left behind their classroom teacher, I followed to watch for stragglers. The last one turned the corner and headed up the stairs. I started back to my classroom when a smiling face popped

around the door at the bottom of the steps. "Oh, Ms. Priddy, you don't need to worry! No matter how many times you call me 'Susie,' I will always forgive you!" The gospel manifested through a child!

Earlier lessons have dealt with forgiveness and God's generosity in bestowing forgiveness. Now we turn to examine how much God provides for us. As my student said, we don't need to worry! These are trying times: many are out of work or underemployed. The uncertain economy even hurts those of us with jobs. At the same time we may be learning that we need less than we thought. This week we celebrate Thanksgiving and begin the season of Advent, a time of preparation, anticipation and hope. As Christians, we don't need to worry because we know that Jesus comes again. God will provide!

My school hosted homeless families for a week through CARITAS. Our guests were housed in the large room across from my classroom where supplies were stored. At 3:15 one of my students noticed that we were almost out of juice boxes. Fortunately, I recalled that members of our faculty had offered to supply needs at the last minute, so I asked the girls to pack up while I sent an e-mail request. I pushed "send" and simultaneously heard a child say, "Ms. Priddy, there's someone at the door." Our school secretary held two grocery bags of juice boxes that a parent had just dropped off. My students' eyes were wide with wonder! God had provided even before being asked! Prayers of thanksgiving were offered, and my girls left with an experience to share about God's provision.

Is it time to remind ourselves of all the times that God has provided for our needs? Are there ways our hands can provide for others so that they, too, know the love of God through Jesus Christ? □





Letters & Commentary

Key competencies for a 'missional' congregation

The “missional DNA” of Floris United Methodist Church has been one of the keys to our growth and vitality. Fruitfulness in mission has had a dramatic impact on everything from worship attendance to stewardship. I am convinced that vigorous mission engagement is one of the key synergies that drives vitality in congregations of all sizes.

**Commentary by
Tom Berlin**

What steps can a congregation take to be a “missional church?”

- **Prepare spiritually.** A passion for mission is the fruit of spiritual conversion. Only transformed people can transform the world. So a congregation’s missional imagination must be holistically grounded in, and meaningfully connected to, its theological self-understanding and worship life. Pastors and key leaders must have their hearts broken for the needs of the poor so that they will engage in ministries of mercy and justice. Disciplines that assist in this preparation include searching Scripture, praying, maintaining silence, connecting with the missional history of your church or denomination, and driving through the community and asking, “What does God want us to notice?”

- **Assess needs.** Doing “just anything” does not always amount to “doing good.” To give credibility to their mission efforts, congregations must first identify strategic issues. Church leaders must discern where needs and missional opportunities lie, using census data, community profiles, formal studies by governmental agencies and nonprofits, and “the word on the street.” Floris formed a strategic partnership with Hutchison Elementary School after someone from the Department of Social Services showed us a map displaying statistics on income, crime levels, ethnicity and languages. She pointed to the school and said, “If you really want to do something that will bless children in your community, go here and see what they need.” The school had the highest free and reduced lunch population of any in our immediate region. But sadly, until she pointed out Hutchison on the map, I did not even know the school existed, although it is only about two miles from our church.

- **Plan strategically.** Mission takes a lot of planning, no matter the size of your church. Once the objective is defined, the church has to consider many factors in order to be fruitful: everything from volunteer enrollment, space and materials, funding, ongoing management, training of volunteers, recruitment and replacement of volunteers. For this planning to be strategic, the church must also define the indicators of success and consider what the life span of

the ministry will be.

- **Cast a compelling vision.** The mission horizon of many churches is defined by a collection of pet projects, each backed by a small constituency. A larger view is possible only when lay and clergy leaders can articulate a shared, scripturally informed understanding of what the church is called to do. There is no limit to what a group of people can do when they are captured by a vision of what the church, led by the Holy Spirit, can accomplish. Floris started a children’s home and hospital in Sierra Leone, Africa, after a pastor from that country in 1999 cast the first vision of blessing children impacted by the war. The energy that sustains these ministries is created when the vision is recast year after year.

- **Create partnerships.** Floris rarely creates its own programs in the community. We prefer to work with other organizations that have structures already in place to which we can add human and financial resources. Established denominational churches often have a unique opportunity because they are seen as trusted partners within the religious community. For example, Floris Church recently helped launch Connections for Hope, a center that houses six area nonprofits under a single roof. This was possible because each trusted us – in part because of our 100-year history of service to the community.

- **Communicate.** Once the vision is clear, it must be communicated in such a way that the majority of church members want to participate. It is not enough to write it. You must say it, over and over again, through multiple communication channels and as a part of worship services. When members travel to Sierra Leone, for example, the vision is cast through pictures, blogs and even by Skyping the children into a worship service. The more the ministry develops, the easier it is to tell the story. However, as time goes by, it is more necessary to refresh the vision regularly as yesterday’s exciting project becomes today’s same old thing. Frequent communication serves to remind the church of its missional DNA.

- **Secure funding.** Money is a key determinant of the scope and impact of mission. The simple truth is that when money is in place, you can do things. When it is not present, you can’t. So churches must address the issue of mission funding head on. We must invite people and businesses in our community to join us in supporting good work so that unsustainable burdens are not placed on the church budget. I have become more confident and forthright in addressing the relationship between money and

mission. And as a result, more church members participate in transformative ministry that blesses many, many others. They also are willing to invite their friends who may not attend any church to join them in supporting the good work our church is doing in the community and world. □

— Tom Berlin is lead pastor of Floris United Methodist Church in Herndon, and coauthor with Lovett H. Weems Jr., of *Bearing Fruit: Ministry with Real Results* (Abingdon Press, 2011).

Is youth ministry killing the church?

After having worked for several years as a youth pastor, I recently accepted a call to be an interim solo pastor. One weekend, Sara, a beloved saint of the church, died after a long battle with Alzheimer's. On Sunday morning I was standing in the choir room discussing plans for the funeral when Jonathan — a high school sophomore — walked in. "Deanne," he said to the music director, "I heard about Sara, and I thought you might need me to take Libba's spot in the bell choir this morning." She gratefully accepted his offer and excused herself from our conversation to review the music with him.

It was a pretty mundane exchange, but I was blown away. It's remarkable enough to see a 16-year-old boy drive himself to church early to join a bell choir comprised of adults in their 50s and 60s. But even more intriguing was Jonathan's perceptiveness. Not only did he know that Libba was Sara's daughter, but life in the church had taught him to anticipate congregational needs. He knew that Libba played with the bell choir, and he realized she probably couldn't play that morning. Unprompted — I checked with his parents — he offered to fill in.

This couldn't have happened at any of my previous churches — though it's not Jonathan's faith that's of a rare caliber. It's his connection to the congregation.

I've always met young Christians through youth programs. I've been hired by churches so committed to the discipleship of their young people that they've dedicated resources to creating specialized curriculae and activities. These churches expect regular events that are created exclusively to minister to young people.

But I wonder now if we're ministering them right out of the church. Unlike Jonathan, the kids I've previously pastored never sat around a table with adults at church-wide fellowship events — they had their own program options. They've never worked side by side with other members to put on a neighborhood Vacation Bible School — they were off on their own mission trips.

When the youths were asked to contribute to the larger church, it was usually through manual labor, the only thing we thought they were capable of doing. Yes, we may have let them plan and lead one worship service a year, but we never dreamed of asking any of them to sit on the worship committee or serve as a regular worship leader. The message was that the church existed to serve them, not the other way around.

Kenda Creasy Dean and others warn that when our chil-

**Commentary by
Kate Murphy**

dren and youth ministries "ghettoize" young people, we run the risk of losing them after high school graduation. I saw evidence of this in Jonathan. Over the years I've worked with young people as passionate and serious about their faith as Jonathan is. I think I've done youth ministry with integrity.

But I may have been unintentionally disconnecting kids from the larger body of Christ. The young people at my current congregation — a church that many families would never join because "it doesn't have anything for youth" — are far more likely to remain connected to the faith and become active church members as adults, because that's what they already are and always have been. □

— Kate Murphy is pastor of Hickory Grove Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, N.C. This article was written for *The Christian Century* magazine.

Reader comments on arrest of head of Board of Church & Society

I believe that other Virginia United Methodists would be interested in seeing that Jim Winkler, General Secretary of The United Methodist Church Board of Church & Society, was arrested by a U.S. Capitol police officer in July in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda for civil disobedience.

As a United Methodist and a former employee of the U.S. Congress, I am ashamed and embarrassed that a United Methodist has brought dishonor in our Capitol to The United Methodist Church in the promotion of his own personal political beliefs at our expense. I have not heard the results of his Sept. 7 court appearance. □

— Rachel J. Saunders,
Springfield

Editor's note: Winkler was one of 11 religious leaders who held a prayer session in the Capitol during the summer debt-ceiling and budget negotiations to protest cuts in programs to aid the poor. At his court appearance for a misdemeanor charge of "unlawful conduct" in October, he was ordered to stay away from the Capitol for six months, but received no fine. One protester did receive a fine of \$50 due to previous nonviolent civil disobedience convictions.



Jim Winkler is handcuffed by U.S. Capitol police following a prayer session in protest of budget cuts.

September Advocate is a keeper

The September edition of the *Advocate* is a keeper. You and your staff did a great job, as usual, and the treatment of the 9/11 topic was excellent. The editorial about unity and faith was a great commentary and my favorite piece in the magazine. From cover to cover, this is a superb piece of work. □

— Tim Tanton, executive director of content,
United Methodist Communications



Clergy & Diaconal

Deaths



Rozier

The **Rev. Rendell Ray Rozier**, 61, retired elder, died Oct. 9, 2011. He began his ministerial career in 1941 at Galloway. He served as a Navy chaplain from 1986 until he was placed on incapacity leave

in 2007. He retired in 2011.

Survivors include his wife, Annette.

The **Rev. William R. Livermon Jr.**, 73, retired elder, died Oct. 15, 2011. He began his ministerial career in 1961 at Hyco. He went on to serve as associate pastor at First UMC (Martinsville), then as pastor of Mount Olivet UMC (Danville) and as a chaplain (major) in the Army. He retired in 1987. Following retirement, he served in Teamwork Ministries (Martinsville) and Maritime Ministries (Richmond).

He was predeceased by his father, the Rev. William R. Livermon Sr., who also served in the Virginia Conference. Survivors include his wife, Miriam; children, Christy Rogers, Kathryn Zinn and Randy Livermon; nine grandchildren; mother, Thelma; and brothers, Robert and the Rev. John Garrett "Garry" Livermon. Garry is pastor of Susanna Wesley UMC (York River District).

Helen King, wife of the Rev. George E. King, died Aug. 10, 2011. George is a retired elder living in Goldsboro, N.C.

Hugh Crichlow, brother of the Rev. Winston L. Crichlow, died Oct. 4, 2011. Winston is a retired elder serving West Franklin Charge (Bethany and Maple Grove UMCs), Danville District.

Oscar Abarca, father of David Arbaca and father-in-law of the Rev. Ashley Abarca-Mitchell, died Oct. 5. Ashley is associate pastor of First UMC, Charlottesville.

Births

The Rev. Shin Woo Hong and his wife, Hailey, announce the birth of their first child, **Susie**, on Sept. 20. "Susie," a name in both Korean and English, means "outstanding wisdom." Shin is pastor of the Bethany-Sardis Charge, Charlottesville District.

CORRECTIONS

• On pgs. 6-15, in the **July 2011** issue of the *Virginia Advocate*, churches listed in red represent congregations that have paid 100 percent of all their conference and district apportionments for 2010. The conference treasurer's office reports that the following churches also have paid 100 percent of their 2010 apportionments: **Lebanon UMC** and **Mount Olivet UMC** on the Dinwiddie Charge, James River District (former Petersburg District).

James Bond 007's moral compass is subject of Bible study

Dr. Benjamin Pratt, a retired elder of the Virginia Conference, lives near Washington, D.C., and worked for many years as a pastoral counselor, specializing in helping men and women in public service. He also is a scholar who researched author Ian Fleming's life and literary career with James Bond. Pratt



has lectured on the moral wisdom of Fleming and Bond at the Smithsonian Institution, universities, churches and synagogues. His complete series of lessons of these ideas can be found in the book *Ian Fleming's Seven Deadlier Sins & 007's Moral Compass: A Bible Study with James Bond*. To read more about the book, which is available at Amazon.com, visit <<http://www.BondBibleStudy.info>>. □

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Give thanks to God in all circumstances



Charlene Payne Kammerer
Bishop of the
Virginia Conference

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” (NRSV)
— 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

The apostle Paul is admonishing the early church in Thessalonika in the final chapter of Thessalonians. This familiar verse is one I learned as a child in a Methodist Sunday school setting. My local church had “sword drills” on Sunday evening as part of our mid and senior high youth group ministries. I grew up reciting Scripture verses from both the Old and New Testament. This was one of my favorite biblical phrases.

I didn’t realize as a child that the challenge of this verse would only get harder every year of my adulthood. There are so many life circumstances where it is very, very difficult to learn to express gratitude to God. Sometimes, one can only arrive at that place of gratitude after moving through a time of great tragedy and being able to look back and see the hand of God at work. In the midst of great pain, disappointment, desolation and heartbreak it is hard to even contemplate “thanking God in all circumstances.”

Right now, I have four dear friends who are all struggling with cancer. They are the scary kinds of cancer: pancreatic cancer, lung cancer, brain cancer, spinal cancer. Each one is a person of deep faith. Each one is going through a hellish treatment regimen. Each one is surrounded by loving family, friends and a community of faith. I confess that it is very hard for me to constantly give thanks to God in their circumstances, even as I am praying unceasingly for their healing.

However, what has stunned me with every one of these dear friends, is they themselves are learning how to thank God for each day, for the gift of life. They are continuing to pray, to hope, and to trust God for their living. They are communicating to me and others in their close circles that they can rejoice in something every day. God has not left them and is holding them securely. Each friend is offering an incredible witness of faith. As they endure the pain and struggle, they pray for individual healing and also for their family members who struggle with them. It takes a lot of courage to be so bold. “How can this be,” I ask myself, “that they are handling cancer so well?”

Such a response can only be possible because of a God who loves us fiercely, especially if we are struggling with cancer. Such a response can only be possible when souls are laid bare, and faith is a living response to an unexpected diagnosis. With my friends, cancer is not controlling them nor defining them. They are loving Children of God – open, vulnerable, hurting, and hopeful. Give thanks to God for ALL things? How can I respond any less?

Grace and Peace,

Charlene Kammerer

Charlene Kammerer

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Rates for advertising and Tributes are available upon request.

Local Church News

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

Letters

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

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