

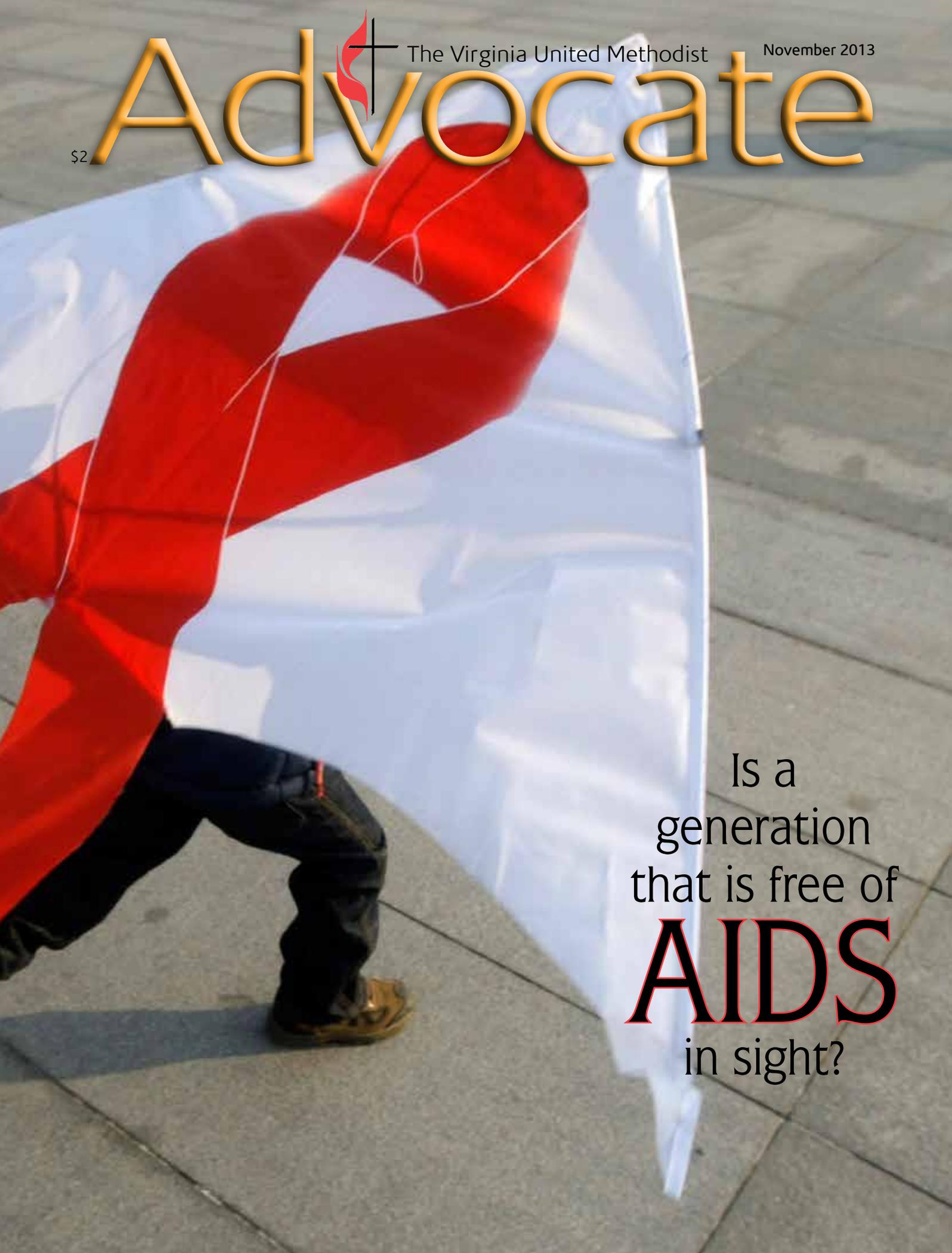


The Virginia United Methodist

November 2013

\$2

Advocate



Is a
generation
that is free of
AIDS
in sight?

FROM THE EDITOR



Neill Caldwell
Editor

**When HIV/
AIDS hits
home**



In the early- or even mid-1980s I was as clueless about the growing AIDS epidemic as most people. Then I learned my cousin was dying of the disease.

Mickey was a few years older than I was; we weren't particularly close because he had moved on from our small town by the time I'd reached my formative years. But he was a journalist, and that's what I wanted to be, so when I did see him – usually at Christmas at my aunt's house – I always wanted to talk to him, to pick his brain. He covered our state championship high school football team while he himself was a student at the high school and had gone on to become a reporter for a newspaper that covered Congress in Washington. To me, that was a big deal. Plus his mother, who shared my birthday, was my favorite relative.

At first she ran in the opposite direction when she learned of her son's diagnosis. Not only was it a death sentence at the time, it also suggested a kind of lifestyle that folks living in small Southern towns wanted to keep hidden. But after awhile she had a change of heart and returned to being the loving mother that she always was. Not only did the two reconcile, but she also joined the nurses taking care of him in the last weeks of his life as he wasted away in a hospice facility.

When AIDS hits your own family, it ceases to be an "issue" and becomes something very real, very tangible.

Of course 30 years later we know a lot more about AIDS. It's not limited to the gay community. In fact, today it's spreading most actively among women and children in Africa. We know it's not a death sentence anymore; a "cocktail" of medicines is extending the life of AIDS/HIV patients. Persons like basketball legend Magic Johnson are examples of how AIDS is a treatable disease today. There's even talk of a cure in the not-too-distant future. But those drugs are expensive. It can cost \$12,000 a year to treat one person.

Where does The United Methodist Church stand as we look back at 30 years of AIDS and HIV? Fortunately there are a lot of programs available to support, like the Global AIDS Fund (Advance #982345 or www.umglobalaidsfund.com), which was established by the 2004 General Conference. Since then, more than \$4 million has been raised to support AIDS-related projects around the world. Currently, the fund supports more than 200 projects in 37 countries. "20/20: Visioning an AIDS-free World" asks for a commitment of \$20 a month or more until the year 2020 to help put a stop to HIV/AIDS.

As we prepare for another World AIDS Day on Dec. 1, we should remember that resources are available from the General Board of Church and Society (www.umc-gbcs.org), and the General Board of Global Ministries (<http://gbgm-umc.org/health>). We must increase our awareness of HIV/AIDS, our care of its victims, and our support for world health-related programs of the church, one of our areas of particular focus. 📌

Neill Caldwell

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words, and of conference-wide interest. Com-
plete names of individuals, churches and districts
should be included. Because of space limitations,
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related to church members' birthdays (of
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receptions for moving and/or retiring pastors,
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trees/crosses, and any item over two months
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Corrections: New Hope UMC, Lynchburg District, should have been listed in the July issue as 100 percent paid apportionments for 2012, while Greenville UMC, Staunton, paid their World Service apportionment 101 percent.

On the cover: A child flies a kite with a red ribbon during a World AIDS Day event in Beijing in 2008. There are about 700,000 cases of HIV/AIDS in China. Reuters/Jason Lee

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Who employs United Methodist pastors?

An epigram by the famous 16th century English poet and writer John Heywood says, “wolde ye bothe eate your cake and have your cake?” The United Methodist Church is not quite that old, but ever since I can remember, she has been trying to do exactly that.

I say this in reference to the article in last month’s Advocate about Obamacare [“The impact of Obamacare,” pp. 6-7, October 2013] and our “distinctly Methodist dilemma” about who employs the clergy. When it comes to

taxes, Social Security and travel expenses, the conference says that I am self-employed. When it comes time for me to be paid they say that I am an employee of the local church. When it comes time for me to be moved, then I belong to the conference.

I think that it is a crying shame that the IRS will have to solve this dilemma, but our church agencies love to dabble in politics, so we will see how this plays out.

I wonder what else will come out of this “can of worms.” If I am employed by the conference or the local church, then I guess that they will have to pay half of my Social Security

withholding that I have been paying. If I am an employee of the local church or the conference, then I think it is only fair that they pay for my travel expenses that I have been paying. Maybe if I work for the conference they might consider giving me a company car!

At least I will know who to ask for a raise. I’ve been asking my wife, since I thought I was self-employed and she has the checkbook, but that hasn’t worked very well.

The Board of Church and Society loves to lobby for social justice, so maybe they will come to my aid.

*Allan Murphy, Local Pastor,
New Hope and
Southall Memorial UMC*

I have always thought that for the next millennium and beyond, the Roman Church in western Europe and the Orthodox churches to the east were the places for the desperately poor to turn to for food and financial help. I further thought that with the rise of nation states in Europe in the second millennium, the states under kings, queens and other royalty helped the poor because they were needed to fill the ranks of their armies and navies and to work on the royal farms to keep the granaries full. Slowly but surely, governments took over taking care of the poor so that they were healthy and strong enough for hard labor. However, my pastor informed me that my thinking was a bit late because Saint Augustine in the fourth century is quoted as saying:

“Our forefathers abounded in plenty because they gave God the tithe and to Caesar tribute. But now, because our devotion has receded, the imposition of taxes has advanced. We are unwilling to share with God, giving Him the tenth, and now, behold . . . a tax-gatherer takes from us that which God receives not.”

So this has been going on for a long time, and today, the federal government in the USA does the heavy lifting when it comes to helping the poor: Medicaid, food stamps, unemployment compensation, and a graduated federal income tax that excuses nearly half the population are ex-

amples. Of course, churches have programs to help the poor and the poorest of the poor, and the church I attend has multiple programs aimed at helping the local poor. But these are small programs compared to government programs.

The fact remains, Jesus told his church, not the Roman government and not the Hebrew priesthood, to take care of the poor. I can only wonder if the ancient church made a pact with the devil when its lack of devotion forced governments to take over caring for the poor.

There are arguments for defending the status quo such as: 1) letting taxes be the source of most funding for the poor means the unchurched who pay income tax help pay the bill, and 2) It’s a good thing that Christian thinking has influenced secular law.

But, does the government take care of the poor out of love or to win votes, or to reduce crime, or to prevent a violent revolution? Only the church does this out of love for our brothers and sisters.

Given the above, the question remains: On what grounds should United Methodists tithe? I asked the most Catholic person I know – a college classmate who teaches Latin to young seminarians in Louisiana – what the position of his denomination was with regards to tithing. His next letter contained this statement from the priest he consulted:

“You can tithe if you want to, but the government takes care of the poor.”

So there you have it. That is why so many Christians do not feel obligated to tithe, but it need not be that way. If the church wants to be relevant in today’s society, it must take back as much of this responsibility as possible from federal, state and local governments, and pastors must find the courage to speak strongly about the necessity of tithing to their flocks. Malachi 3:6-12 is all anyone needs for delivering a sobering, convicting sermon.

My senior pastor has never been bashful about talking about tithing, and we have become a relatively generous church. We offer Crown Ministry courses that teach biblically-based financial planning. In addition, retired pastor Rev. R.T. Kendall has preached several times at our church. He is the author of a booklet called *Tithing, Discover the Freedom of Biblical Giving*, and in this book, he emphasizes that the 10 percent should go to the local church.

So what is the local church to do? I say start with learning if any member is on food stamps or unemployment compensation and see if by tithing the congregation can help them get off these programs. Let’s at least look out for our own, like the early church.

-Tom Hassler is a charter member of New Town UMC in Williamsburg.

From the Bible: Breaking Covenant by Withholding Tithes

⁶ For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, have not perished. ⁷ Ever since the days of your ancestors you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts. But you say, “How shall we return?”

⁸ Will anyone rob God? Yet you are robbing me! But you say, “How are we robbing you?” In your tithes and offerings! ⁹ You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me—the whole nation of you! ¹⁰ Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and thus put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing.

¹¹ I will rebuke the locust for you, so that it will not destroy the produce of your soil; and your vine in the field shall not be barren, says the Lord of hosts. ¹² Then all nations will count you happy, for you will be a land of delight, says the Lord of hosts.

-Malachi 3:6-12 (NRSV)

To tithe or not to tithe ... is that a question?

By Tom Hassler

Two delegates to the 2012 Annual Conference spoke about tithing, and one quoted what percentage of income United Methodists are believed to give to charities and the church. I do not remember the stated figures, but they were close to what a professional fund raiser told our building team about 10 years ago: Methodists give about four percent of income to all charities, and the church gets about half of that.

This reminded me of two past events: I had a discussion 50 years ago with my father about the

role of government and the church in taking care of the poor. My dad, a federal employee, and with my mom, a member of Central UMC in Arlington for more than 50 years, said the government had to do it because the church could not. The second related event was at the 2011 Virginia Annual Conference. There was a spirited debate about reduced compensation for prison chaplains. I was building up courage to go to the microphone and talk about tithing, but the Holy Spirit whispered in a young preacher’s ear, and he rose and asked the presiding bishop if it was okay to put some money on the altar

for the chaplains. The answer was yes, and while the business of the conference proceeded, hundreds of delegates moved to the altar to place their gifts.

Resolution five in the 2012 Book of Reports was not addressed by the Annual Conference, but it contained a statement about the need for a discussion about the roles of government and the church in caring for the poor. I agree, and this discussion must include all Christian denominations if it is to have any lasting effect nationally.

When the church began on the day of Pentecost, it soon began taking care of its own (Acts 4:32-37), and



COMMENTARY

If Jesus was a 'Zealot', then Matthew was not a disciple

By Jason Micheli

This weekend we began a sermon series, "Zealot or Savior?" in which we'll spend four weeks reflecting on and responding to the claims author Reza Aslan makes in his bestselling (but hardly novel) book, *Zealot*.

If you wish to be spared the minutiae of regurgitated, outmoded, largely-discredited 19th century conjectures that Aslan makes in his book, then here's the basic gist.

The Jesus of faith that has been received by the Church through tradition and canon bears little resemblance to the actual, 'real' Jesus of history.

The historic Jesus, according to Aslan, was a Zealot.

The Zealot movement, in case you didn't know, was a 1st century political movement within the period of Second Temple Judaism that agitated for armed revolt against the Roman invaders. Whereas the Pharisees were the most extreme in wanting a return to moral and religious purity for their people, the Zealots were the most extreme in wanting to return to nationalistic purity. Simon, one of Jesus' disciples, was a Zealot, according to the Gospels – a curious revelation to make, one would

think, if the Gospels' intent were to hide that Jesus was also one. Some scholars also believe Judas was a Zealot and attribute Judas' betrayal of Jesus to Judas' growing impatience and disenchantment that Jesus, having ridden into Jerusalem as a mock general, nevertheless refused to take up the sword.

Aslan's assertion is based on the premise that crucifixion was reserved by Rome for the crime of sedition and threatening the state. Therefore, Aslan assumes, Jesus must have been a revolutionary.

One of the tests historians use for the reliability of ancient documents, like the Gospels, is the degree to which they narrate unflattering, shameful details that would be embarrassing to their community and for which there'd be no reason to document UNLESS THEY WERE TRUE.

That Aslan assumes such a revolution must necessarily manifest itself violently and that sedition and threat to the status quo can only come through a depressing lack of political imagination.

Aslan's logic is essentially the same as someone who would argue that Martin Luther King must have 'really' been like Malcom X

because non-violent resistance could never change the status quo or threaten the powers that be.

As Dennis Perry preached recently, Aslan essentially claims that the 'real' more interesting Jesus is the one Pontius Pilate knew and condemned. That some of us find this Jesus more compelling too shows that, like Pilate, we don't know the answer to the question: 'What is truth?'

There are several lines of attack when it comes to critiquing Aslan's book. For one, had Jesus been a Zealot, his Messiahship would have conformed much better to 1st century Jewish expectations, and it's likely he'd be remembered today not as the Christ but as Judas the Hammer was for leading his own Messianic revolt.

The other points of critique I'll save for another day save this one.

One of the tests historians use for the reliability of ancient documents, like the Gospels, is the degree to which they narrate unflattering, shameful details that would be embarrassing to their community and for which there'd be no reason to document UNLESS THEY WERE TRUE.

For example, divulging that all of your Messiah's disciples betrayed or abandoned him.

For example, making women the first and key witnesses to the resurrection at a time when they could not even be witnesses in a Roman court.



The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

Ferrum College throws large party to celebrate its 100th birthday

FERRUM – Ferrum College's Centennial Celebration in October included football, food and fireworks.

It was also Homecoming weekend, which meant that the annual parade and football game took on special significance. (The Panther football players did their part to extend the party, beating Greensboro College 31-21.)

Ferrum was founded in 1913 by Methodist women hoping to bring literacy to undereducated children in the Blue Ridge mountains. Ferrum President Dr. Jennifer Braaten said she sought out the school's top post because of its continuing mission of serving the underserved.

"Our mission today is as strong as ever," Braaten said. "We've evolved and we will continue to evolve."

The school, which has a current enrollment of about 1,500 students, has seen significant growth in recent years. When Braaten became president in 2002, about 900 students populated a much more sparsely developed campus. A recent building boom has resulted in four new residence halls and new or renovated class spaces. The school is adding the Ferrum Mercantile, which will house several dining options, a farmers market and a stage area.

Ferrum has shifted from a training school to a two-year college to an applied liberal arts school – and Braaten says graduate programs are on the drawing board.

But the 100th anniversary was mainly a time for looking back. Hundreds of alumni came back for the weekend, which included a busy schedule of events. On Saturday, a time capsule was buried on campus to leave a lasting remembrance of Ferrum at age 100.

-Neill Caldwell



(Top) "Hip-hop violinist" Josh Vietti from Los Angeles was part of the multi-act free concert at Ferrum's campus.

(Second from top) Ferrum football players beat Greensboro 31-21.

(Middle) Freshman Ashley Rusnak from Christiansburg marches in the parade with her women's soccer teammates.

(Bottom) Current president Jennifer Braaten and her husband are featured in the parade on Friday.

(Right) Ferrum's founding president, Benjamin Beckham, who was known for traveling the region in his Model T Ford recruiting students, is represented in the Homecoming parade.

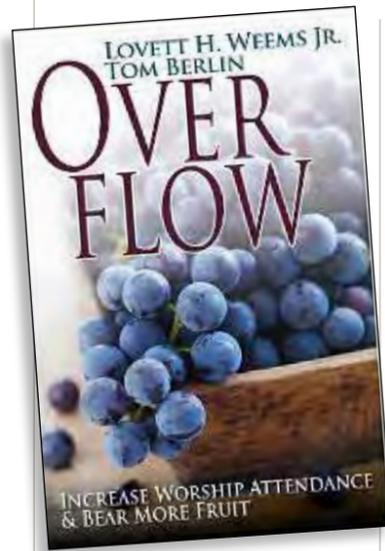
Photos by Neill Caldwell



The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



Berlin, Weems write second book together



The Revs. Tom Berlin and Lovett Weems, who teamed up to write the book *Bearing Fruit*, have a follow-up book out called *Overflow: Increase Worship Attendance & Bear More Fruit*, also published by Abingdon.

Berlin is senior pastor at Floris UMC in Herndon. Weems is director of the Lewis Center for Church Leadership at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C.

"Why focus on worship attendance?" the book asks in the introduction. "Without vital worship at-

tendance, it is unlikely that members are growing and new disciples are being brought to faith. ... Growing churches connect people with God, and compelling and inspiring worship is a primary means of connection."

"Worship is at the center of a congregation's life," the authors continue. "And improvements in worship tend to spur improvements in the church's other ministries."

In *Overflow*, Weems and Berlin share research, tactical ideas, and practices that can help lead to increased attendance. They instruct church leaders on the importance of paying attention to factors critical to worship growth,

and demonstrate new approaches to worship planning.

"Tom Berlin and Lovett Weems help us to tend the heart and soul of the church, that worshipful space where souls are embraced and awakened by God," said Bishop Hope Morgan Ward of the North Carolina Conference.

"*Overflow* is a thoughtful, and practical (even doable) assessment of why we worship, and how we might connect energetically with those who are already in worship, as well as with those who have not shown up just yet," said the Rev. Dr. James C. Howell, senior pastor at Myers Park UMC in Charlotte, N.C. ☞

New Church Leadership Institute to be held in Glen Allen Nov. 18-20

The Virginia Conference Office of Congregational Excellence will offer the New Church Leadership Institute Nov. 18-20 at the United Methodist Center in Glen Allen.

Noted national new church plant expert Jim Griffith will lead this training, which will help participants determine whether this area of ministry is something they might focus on. It will also offer all pastors ways to revitalize their current congregations.

The New Church Leadership Institute will help you discern your ministry style by offering greater clarity in ministry competencies, core behaviors and spiritual gifts, in your personal mission field or affinity group, and in leadership style and its implications.

"Some of the new graduates may eventually have the opportunity to start a new faith community," said the Rev. Mark Ogren, director of Congregational Excellence for the conference. "All will have the opportunity to support a new United Methodist faith community."

The event is free for all Virginia Conference clergy and laity. For others, the cost of the training is \$299 for registration before Nov. 1, \$399 after Nov. 1, \$195 for district superintendents or conference staff, and \$50 for spouses. You can register at the conference website, www.vaumc.org/NCLRegistration. ☞

Field organizers: A national leadership opportunity for college students

Over Labor Day weekend many college students went home to see their families or slept in and enjoyed one day off from classes. But Kayla Buechner, a sophomore *JustFaith* Christian Leadership minor at Shenandoah University, traveled to Chicago to help plan and implement grassroots movements during the first year of the Field Organizers program for the United Methodist Student Movement (UMSM).

Buechner, a member of Ebenezer UMC in Stafford, applied to be part of the newly-created program after hearing about it through the Office of Spiritual Life at Shenandoah University.

According to umsm.org, Buechner is one of 10 college students around the nation chosen as a Field Organizer and is the only one chosen as a first-year student. Desiring to practice what she has been learning about leadership in the classroom, Buechner committed herself to a few hours each week working toward spiritual renewal and vitalization on college campuses across the country. While the Field Organizers only get together twice, they gather monthly via phone conferences to interview experts in the field, discuss their plans, organize, and write blogs about their experiences, their hopes and their dreams.

New Field Organizers will gather with the outgoing field organizers in Nashville in January to pass the torch and fan the flame of faith as students continue to lead our denomination in the 21st century.

-The Rev. Dr. Justin Allen and Alex Woody, Shenandoah University



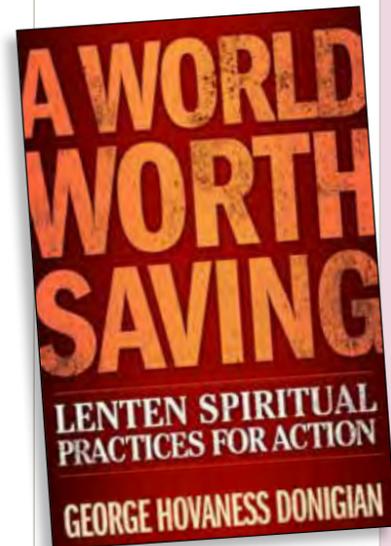
Virginia native writes book on Lent as a season of mercy and compassion

Another member of the Virginia Conference has a new book out. The Rev. George Hovaness Donigian is "on loan" to the South Carolina Conference, where he is pastor at Monaghan UMC in Greenville. His book, *A World Worth Saving: Lenten Spiritual Practices for Action*, is set up as a six-week study for the season of Lent. It is published by The Upper Room.

"My intention is to address the laity and to link more closely our inner spiritual practices with our external actions of ministry," Donigian said of his reasons for writing the book.

Donigian says that people and churches that focus on the self-denial of Lent, "giving up a practice that they enjoyed, like eating chocolate," are missing out on part of the beauty of that season. "I think we need to see Lent in a more positive light, and as a season of mission and ministry."

Donigian also writes about his hometown of Hopewell in the book. "We had a rare mix of ethnic groups, people who settled down there to work in the manufacturing plants in the early 20th century and found ways to hold on to their traditions while embracing new life in the United States. As a child, I didn't appreciate how special our community was. There weren't many towns of 18,000 back then in Tidewater Virginia where you could hear Armenian, Greek, Lebanese, Turkish, Chinese, Japanese and other languages in the same neighborhood." ☞



The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



Like trees planted by the water All God's Children camp helps inmates' children flourish

By Nancy Wright Beasley

For Michael Mills, *All God's Children Camp* is a very different world than the one he knew as a child growing up in a South Richmond neighborhood near Jefferson Davis Highway.

"When I got to the camp in Goochland, I thought it was the Bahamas," he recalls. "I didn't know nothing like that existed. There was nobody shooting up on the street corner, no violence." At home, "my mother would try to teach me how to cook crack [cocaine] on the kitchen stove. I was probably in elementary or middle school. My mother even shot my grandmother and she almost died."

Now 21, Mills returns each summer as a men-

tor, giving other children the opportunity that he believes changed his life during the six years he attended camp. The Virginia Conference of The United Methodist Church established All God's Children in 1999 as an initiative for children whose parents are incarcerated, as Mills' mother often was.

"My first-grade teacher gave me a paper saying the camp was free," he recalls. "My grandparents didn't know much about it, but they wanted to get me out of the house."

"My mother was in jail," he continues. "As soon as I was born, she gave custody to my grandparents. It ain't all been sunshine and crickets growing up. My grandmother called me 'Little Black Sambo,' but she idealized my older brother, Guy. I'm cool with my brother now, although I felt like a slave in that house."

After his grandfather died, Mills moved to Haven House, a group home for teens where he met Gina Jones, a residential counselor there. "Haven was due to close, and Michael was scheduled to stay in a shelter until another home was found," Jones says. "He had visited me previously, so he was allowed to temporarily live with me through an emergency foster care placement in March 2007. He's still here."

A 10th-grader when he left Haven House, Mills eventually transferred to Varina High School, where

Jones now works as an administrative intern. He graduated in 2010.

"My family embraced Michael immediately," Jones says. "Going to camp every summer reinforced the values I had. We leaned on God, and Michael put the bad things behind him." When Mills was in the group home, no one visited him, she says. "When he spent time with his birth family, it always ended in a dramatic episode." Jones credits her stepfather as her guiding light, saying he "gave me the strength to help Michael."

The Rev. John Peters, senior minister at Trinity UMC, became Mills' mentor at camp. Peters says that many of the children there are looking for a father figure.

"I was paired with Michael by chance and ended up mentoring him and Guy, who is two years older," Peters says. "They never had a father living in the home. Our family included them at Christmas and Easter and gatherings across the years. They are adults now, but we continue to help them with decision-making, encouraging their direction. Our two sons, who are grown, consider Michael and Guy as family, too." Peters describes Mills as having a sweet spirit, but adds that "there were times when he would go to a dark place and nobody could communicate with him. Rather than push the issue, we just tried to encourage him."

The Peters family learned about the children's home situation along the way. "We weren't surprised, since this is the type of child that the camp deals with. I held the grandfather's funeral, and the boys took a leadership part of the service in 2006," Peters says. "I wanted to honor him because he was well-loved by those boys. I just held the grandmother's service as well."

Mills now works alongside Peters as a mentor. "Nothing gives me greater joy than to be at camp with Michael and see who he has grown into, how he relates to these kids who are just like he used to be," Peters says. "Much older mentors turn to him because he knows where these kids live in their heads. He's so valuable to the camp."

The camp was valuable to Mills and his brother, as well, Peters says. "Guy spent some time in jail but is doing great now, working in construction and staying close to church. Michael has attended community college classes and is currently working two part-time jobs."

Mills knows he can count on Peters, unlike his birth family. "John understood when my grandmother kicked me out of the house, and when I look back, all the stuff that John went through with me and my family, he could have just shut his car door and never come back," Mills says. "John proved that he

was always going to be there for me."

This summer was the fifth year Mills had been a camp mentor, says Casey Torrence, director of the camps that are held at Westview on the James, Camp Highroad in Middleburg and in Occohannock on Virginia's Eastern Shore.

Staffed by volunteers, the camps are free for attendees, except for a \$10 registration fee. Each camp includes nature and Bible study, music and crafts, as well as a class in peer mediation, taught by paid counselors who also assist with children in need of a little extra help.

"If a parent is incarcerated, statistics show there's about a 60 percent chance of the child becoming incarcerated, which is particularly true if it's a mother," Torrence says. "Mentors like Michael are so important."

When interacting with campers, Mills says, "I get down on their level and try to make them feel good about who they are." He adds, "Right now, I'm not emotionally prepared to do what John did for me. My feet have got to be planted a little deeper before I can take on that much responsibility, but I'm going to get there."

Nancy Wright Beasley originally wrote this for Richmond magazine. She is the author of "Izzy's Fire: Finding Humanity in the Holocaust", a story of how a Catholic family saved 13 Jews during the Holocaust in Lithuania, and "Reflections of a Purple Zebra: Essays of a Different Stripe," a compilation of her columns.

'Oh, thank heaven for year number seven!'



By James Hemphill

"I am somebody!" We concluded each class with these three simple words. It is not only important for the children at *All God's Children Camp* to hear and repeat these words, but also for the mentors. We all have different backgrounds, and we have all had low points in our lives. Sometimes repeating "I am somebody" makes all the difference.

When Dawn Skinner asked me to mentor at All God's Children Camp seven summers ago, I was excited and nervous. I was a 16-year-old rising junior in high school and now I would be responsible for two children at an overnight camp. Seven years later, signing my name on the dotted line definitely became one of the best choices of my life.

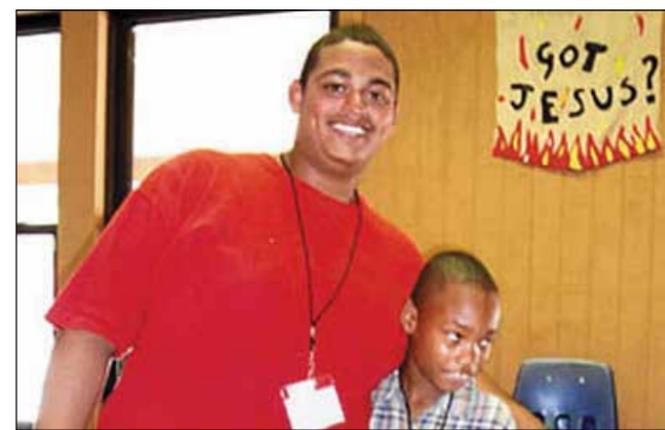
My eight weeks at AGC have been challenging, yet so rewarding. I have seen many faces turn into illuminating smiles throughout the duration of the week. There has definitely been conflict between mentees from name-calling to physical pushing and fighting. As mentors, we try to discourage these certain behaviors, but all children have buttons that can be pushed.

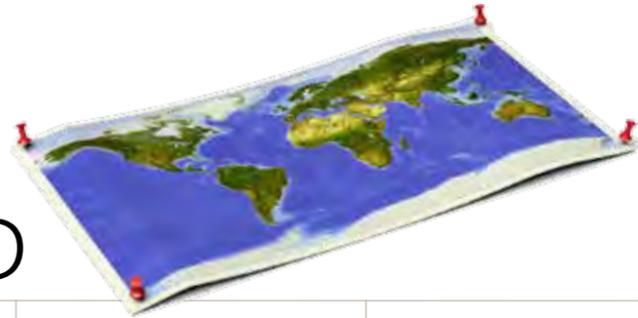
To solve these conflicts, experienced counselors sit the campers down and discuss the issues that arise. I think this is critical for the children because they are going into middle school and high school and will need to be able to settle disputes in a calm manner.

But on a much more positive note, most of camp is full of campers experiencing nature and carrying out tasks that

(Continued on page 25: "Number 7")

Former camper Michael Mills returns to All God's Children Camp as a mentor each summer. Photo by Mary Hetzel





How do you define church 'vitality'?

By Heather Hahn

To determine whether a congregation was doing well, church leaders used to count just two things – bottoms in the pews and dollars in the plate.

Now many United Methodist leaders believe those metrics are not good enough. People and money do not capture whether a church is truly doing the vital work of making Christian disciples, says the Rev. Amy Valdez Barker.

So, what qualifies as a vital congregation?

Valdez Barker spends a lot of time thinking about that question. She is the executive secretary of the Connectional Table, which coordinates the

denomination's mission, ministry and resources. She also previously served as the project manager for the Vital Congregations initiative established by the United Methodist Council of Bishops and Connectional Table.

She is not alone. Pastors, bishops and lay people across The United Methodist Church are wrestling with defining vitality – even as the term “vital” increasingly becomes a buzzword in the denomination's efforts to reverse decades of declining U.S. membership.

“It is something we've got to keep on exploring,” Valdez Barker said.

She has her own ideas. “For me, vital congregations really are helping people grow in their relationship with God and their relationship with neighbor,” she said. “Congregations that are vital are helping people live out their discipleship.”

Measuring disciple-making

The challenge comes in figuring out how to measure disciple-making. Denominational leaders have varied ideas of how to go about that.

One thing Valdez Barker and other denominational leaders do agree on: The United Methodist Church has plenty of stories of vital churches engaged in dynamic ministry, and those churches come in a variety of sizes and cultural contexts.

Take just these two examples of vital United Methodist congregations.

Grace Church – a multi-campus United Methodist congregation in Southwest Florida – routinely welcomes more than 2,500 worshippers each week. The church offers more than 100 small groups, operates its own Grace Community Center and has gained a national reputation for providing one of the largest recovery ministries in the United States.

It's no surprise that denominational leaders regard Grace Church as a vital congregation. Grace's lead pastor, the Rev. Jorge Acevedo, even wrote a book on the subject: *Vital: Churches Changing Communities and the World*.

But denominational leaders also point to the far smaller Evangelical UMC in Billings, Mont.

The congregation, like Grace Church, offers weekly Bible studies. Since December 2011, it also has operated the Yellowstone United Methodist Free Store “giveaway” ministry at least twice a month. As of the end of 2012, it had a weekly worship attendance of 98 people.

“You can have a big church that's wimpy, and a small church that's strong,” Acevedo said. “The key is whether the church is moving in the right direction.”

The Rev. Jeremy Scott, Evangelical's pastor, said the church has seen its worship attendance grow this year. Nearly all that

growth has been people under retirement age and families with young kids.

What both Grace and Evangelical share in common is that they offer opportunities for spiritual formation and social outreach to their communities. They also share a clear sense of vision, of what they can do to help build God's Kingdom.

“Vitality is an attitude in my book,” Scott said, “an attitude that is about building the future even if we won't necessarily be there to see the fruit.”

A Call to Action

The denomination-wide emphasis on vital congregations began in 2010 when the Call to Action Steering Team, a cross section of 16 United Methodist leaders, commissioned a study by the consulting firm Towers Watson. Valdez Barker and Acevedo were among the Call to Action Steering Team members.

The study used six “indicators of vitality” identified by the steering team to measure United Methodist congregations in the United States. They were:

- ❖ average worship attendance
- ❖ total membership
- ❖ number of children, youth and young adults
- ❖ professions of faith
- ❖ annual giving
- ❖ financial giving beyond the local church

Still with only a few additions, the study's vitality indicators were based largely on the old paradigm of pew and offering plate – the things the church now measures.

“While they tell us some things, in my opinion, (the indicators) aren't the whole picture of the health and vitality of a congregation,” said Kim Shockley, team leader of the recently completed Toward Vitality Research Project. Her study, sponsored by four United Methodist agencies, examined congregations that had undergone change recently and were reaping the benefits of that change.

“The vital congregations we interviewed were wanting to measure the impact they were making within the community – how many people were we feeding, clothing, etc.,” Shockley said.

Study and fellowship groups

The churches also wanted to measure how many people they engaged in study and fellowship groups.

“Growth in attendance and participation is important,” Shockley said. “But we have to look at things beyond Sunday morning worship – small groups, mission opportunities, places where we can intentionally build relationships and help people to find a connection back to a relationship with God.”

A broader idea of



The Rev. Amy Valdez Barker. UMNS photo by Mike DuBose.

vitality is reflected in the Vital Congregations initiative which, starting in 2011, asked United Methodist congregations and conferences around the globe to set goals in five areas:

- ❖ Average worship attendance
- ❖ Evangelism measured by professions of faith
- ❖ Spiritual formation measured by small groups
- ❖ Missions measured by number of people in the congregation engaged in local, national and international outreach
- ❖ Stewardship measured by the amount given by a congregation for support of charitable ministries

Valdez Barker of the Connectional Table expects that church leaders will look at additional indicators of vitality in the future. She noted that the Unit-

ed Methodist Commission on Religion and Race is encouraging congregations to look at how they reflect their neighborhoods.

“Where God has planted us, do the people worshipping reflect the community in which we live? Unfortunately, I don't think that's true,” Valdez Barker said. “If we really are for transformed lives, then what are we doing to transform the lives of the people in our own backyard?”

Mountain Sky Area Bishop Elaine Stanovsky says she knows whether a congregation is vital soon after walking through the door. “(You can tell) whether the systems are transparent to guests and newcomers or whether you have to be a lifelong member to know where to find a cup of coffee.”

When a church is vital, she said, “life spills out and every aspect of the church is affected.”

-Heather Hahn, United Methodist News Service

A worship service at First United Methodist Church of Palo Alto, Calif., includes hymns sung in both Spanish and English. UMNS photo by Deborah White.



EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY



How to rid your church of young people

By Ben Boruff

Young people are, by and large, missing from the church. This realization came one day when I opened my eyes and saw pews full of heads that were, with few exceptions, bald, gray or wrinkled.

(You may suggest, of course, that a percentage of those bald, wrinkled heads belonged to newborns, but you'd be mistaken. Very few babies attended church that day, and the yells and cries of those that did suggested that they were as surprised by the lack of young people as I was.)

As a Christian young person myself, this revelation baffled me, and I felt it was my duty to communicate this oversight to the rest of my denomination. After several sincere attempts, I was told that churches were already aware of the declining population of churchgoing young people. Church leaders had also observed the gray heads and had produced reports that detailed the phenomenon's evolution. Many expressed desires that young people attend church, and some even suggested that action should be taken. Thinking that perhaps these congregations simply did not know how to seek out and engage young people, I suggested that they do research and discover effective ways to fellowship with youth and young adults.

The lack of action

amongst these congregations, however, continued to confuse me. They comprehended the situation, and they understood how to fix the problem. It was as though their good ideas were overshadowed by some unspoken rule. It took quite some time for my naive mind to find the only logical conclusion: These churchgoers did not want young people in their churches.

I realized that perhaps these Christians were quietly trying to rid themselves of young people and simply did not know how to finish the job. Young people are, after all, opinionated and hormonal, and they tend to use copious amounts of technology. It is understandable why any person with an interest in routine and purity would want to exclude this obnoxious demographic. So, in a spirit of Christian solidarity, I decided to help these churches expel young people once and for all.

The following strategies should, if executed properly, help to permanently distance any young people from your church:

1) Bore young people with vague affection. Talk often about loving young people,

but never let that love result in anything tangible. Express the excitement you feel when you see them on Sunday. But when they express needs or have ideas, ignore them.

2) Do not, under any circumstance, ask young people what they want.

When asked what they want, young people often answer honestly. If young people are offered the worship and fellowship environments they want, they may flock to church. Better to restrict idea-giving to seniors.

3) Refit traditional services with guitars and muffins, but change nothing else.

"Contemporary" services can be created as halfhearted gestures to young people. Offering sugary food and upbeat music without asking young people what types of food and music they prefer is like giving a friend a ride without asking where he wants to go.

4) Fill the church with references to past generations. Old paintings. Cross stitch samplers. Dated jokes. Allusions to cancelled television programs. Sermon illustrations that involve outdated technology. A bar-

rage of generation-specific references will drive away even the most devout young person.

5) Refuse to acknowledge today's pop culture. Ignore Iron Man. Avoid Apatow. Nix Nicki Minaj. Overlook online gaming. Forget Family Guy.

6) Use the phrase "does not condone" as much as possible. These words are nails on a chalkboard to most young people, a youth repellent.

7) Whenever possible, remind young people that they are, indeed, young. Sometimes youth must be reminded that they are not high on the Christian hierarchy. Mention how happy you are that someone "their age" wants to be involved.

8) Be unapologetically nostalgic. Talk often about when things were better. Speak nostalgically often enough, and young people will see the church for what it is – a time capsule.

These guidelines will help any church rid itself of young people. Feel free to share them with mission teams, small groups and choirs.

-Ben Boruff, a senior at Indiana University, is a member of the United Methodist Church's Connectional Table and served on the Call to Action Steering Committee. This article first appeared in the United Methodist Reporter.



7

ways to support your pastor on Sundays

Sunday mornings are a stressful time for pastors. I also know most people who love their church...and their pastor...want to help any way they can to make the Sunday morning experience the best it can be. So here are seven ways you can help your pastor on Sunday:

Pray: Pray for your pastor. Ask God to open the ears of the people, to guide your pastor's heart and to bless the services with the Holy Spirit.

Don't complain: Sunday morning is not the best time to bring complaints. It is very distracting when the pastor is about to speak to hear criticism that will have to be dealt with later. Hold those until Monday, but even then, ask yourself if sharing it is genuinely helpful to the entire body.

Don't share something you want us to remember: Most likely we will forget what you told us by the time Sunday is done. Send an e-mail later or call Monday morning. If it must be shared on Sunday, write it down.

Be Kingdom minded: Think of others ahead of yourself. Keep in mind the temperature in the room may not be your ideal temperature, but it may be exactly right for someone else.

Volunteer: The work of the church can't function with only a few people. I've never met the church that had too many people volunteering in preschool ministry, too many greeters, or too many people willing to do whatever it takes. Introduce us to visitors: We need to meet and welcome visitors, especially those seeking a church home.

Pray more: It really does begin and end with prayer. More than anything, we want your prayer support. The Spirit of God seems to respond when you do.

-Ron Edmondson, from www.churchleaders.com



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Churches crucial to turn tide of HIV/AIDS

By Donald Messer

No speaker claimed the church has the power of Moses to turn back the Red Sea of HIV and AIDS in the world. But scientists, activists, and political leaders at the 19th International AIDS Conference repeatedly stressed the crucial role faith communities must play to reach the vision of an "AIDS-free generation." The conference took place this summer in Washington, D.C.

New scientific breakthroughs that reduce the possibilities of HIV being transmitted and lowering the death rate of AIDS has prompted unprecedented hope that the world can achieve the UNAIDS goal of "zero new HIV infections, zero new AIDS deaths and zero discrimination." The partnership of faith communities with public health officials and political leaders is essential for HIV education, prevention, care, treatment and stigma reduction.

Ambassador Eric Goosby, the U.S. Global AIDS coordinator, at an inter-faith conference before the gathering, said the "government needs the faith community to reach the people most affected by AIDS, such as the urban poor and people in rural areas."

UNAIDS Executive Director Michael Sidibé thanked "the American faith community, advocating for justice and bringing care and services to people in the neediest communities."

Unlike 24 years ago, when the conference was last held in the United States, faith groups this time were integral to the deliberations that at-

tracted some 24,000 participants from more than 195 countries.

Lifting up the conference theme of "Turning the Tide Together," the U.S. surgeon general, Dr. Regina Benjamin, shared the story of losing her brother to an AIDS-related illness and called on the faith community to help the government in "turning the tide against AIDS."

The path to an AIDS-free generation is paved with partnerships.

Recognizing the vital role of faith communities in combatting HIV/AIDS, President Obama invited leaders of various faiths to a special forum at the White House. Joshua Dubois of the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships noted that "the path to an AIDS-free generation is paved with partnerships."

Obama, in a video presentation to a religious summit sponsored by Rick and Kay Warren of Saddleback Church, World Vision, Catholic Relief Services and Food for the Hungry, stressed how crucial it was for faith leaders everywhere to demonstrate love and compassion.

Calling for partnership with faith leaders, Obama cited St. Paul that "we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another" (Romans 12:5).

Former President George W. Bush also spoke by video, declaring the AIDS emergency both a moral imperative and a matter of national security. He thanked the faith community for its work, and cited Jesus saying that "To whom much has been given, much will be required" (Luke 12:48).

Pastor Rick Warren of Saddleback Church noted that the church with its congregations and health clinics spread out in villages across the continent of

Africa has the potential of "turning the tide" in the battle to end AIDS.

"We may not agree on a lot as Christians," said Warren, "but we can agree to work together to stop AIDS."

Churches and other faith communities have a unique role to play in creating an AIDS-free world

Linda Bales Todd, of the United Methodist Global AIDS Fund Committee, observed that "United Methodists have expended over \$3 million for 270 AIDS projects in 38 countries." The 2012 United Methodist General Conference endorsed a \$5 million goal in a campaign called "20/20: Visioning an AIDS-Free World."

The Rev. Christo Greyling of World Vision emphasized the healing ministry of Jesus and that "the church has no exit strategy when it comes to the response to HIV and AIDS."

Speaker after speaker emphasized that, besides providing treatment and care, churches and other faith communities have a unique role to play in creating an AIDS-free world.

Commitment to overcome stigma

First, churches must demonstrate a commitment to overcome stigma. Because of blame and shame, people fail to get tested, counseled and treated until it is too late for medicine to work. If the UNAIDS goal of "getting to zero" is to be realized, church groups need to stop fueling discrimination and become anti-stigma agents.

Engage in dialogue

Second, churches need to engage in dialogue with people infected by HIV and AIDS, including key populations affected by the pandemic. A stigma survey in Kenya revealed 38 percent of HIV-positive people had been physically harassed, and 31 percent had been excluded from their houses of worship.

Religious leaders exercise positions of power in their communities and countries, but often have not exercised

their influence to be shepherds protecting their flocks nor helped to stem the spread of the disease.

The Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance earlier this summer in Malawi engaged religious leaders and people living with HIV in a day of dialogue. The Rev. Philip Kuruvilla of the Syrian Orthodox Church of India reports that Asian religious leaders are planning to meet with people from the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) communities. Representatives of the Center for the Church and Global AIDS met recently in Nairobi, Kenya, with pastors and LGBT activists. Rebecca Yount, director of the United Methodist 20/20 campaign, described that session as "a time of listening and learning as we heard courageous Kenyans tell of the violence and discriminatory health care they receive because of their sexual orientation."

Promote "safer sex" and behavioral change

Third, churches are called to promote "safer sex" and behavioral change. Neither cure nor vaccine are imminent, so "safer sex" and behavioral change remain key elements in "turning the tide." Condoms remain the least expensive and most effective prevention method available, yet often faith groups are hesitant about making them available. Robert Ngaiyaye of the Malwai Interfaith AIDS Association noted some progress after their dialogue in Lusaka. "Malawian religious leaders aren't handing out condoms from the pulpit," said Ngaiyaye, but "they are talking about them when they used to never even speak the word."

Churches can offer compassion and companionship

Fourth, churches can become Good Samaritans who offer companionship, care and cash. Often recitation of Jesus' parable of the helpful Samaritan notes his extraordinary courage and compassion but fails to underscore that he generously gave the innkeeper

"two denarii" – the equivalent of the usual day's wage for a laborer – and declared "Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend" (Luke 10:35).

If the church is to fulfill its mission and ministry in partnership with the global community seeking to "turn the tide" of the AIDS pandemic, every Christian and congregation will be expected to make a significant personal and financial contribution.

Stressing the importance of religious groups working together with

governments and non-governmental organizations, the Rev. Canon Gideon Byamugisha, an HIV-positive Anglican priest from Uganda, declared that, "When we do what we can, God will do what we can't. With great partnerships, we can do great things" – like helping to turn the tide, parting the Red Sea of HIV and AIDS, and leading people from the pharaohs of poverty and disease toward an AIDS-free generation.

-The Rev. Don Messer is chair of the United Methodist Global AIDS Fund Committee.

AIDS by the numbers

Here is the latest global and regional picture on HIV and AIDS from a report by the United Nations Programme on AIDS:

- An estimated 34.2 million people worldwide had the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) that causes AIDS in 2011, according to the UNAIDS data, up 18 percent from 2001, when 28.9 million were living with HIV.
- There were 2.5 million new HIV infections in 2011, including an estimated 330,000 among children.
- AIDS-related deaths fell for the fifth year running to 1.7 million, down from a peak of 2.3 million in 2005 and 2006.
- More than 8 million people had access to antiretroviral therapy, an increase of 20 percent from 2010. The U.N. wants the number to hit 15 million by 2015.
- A year's supply of antiretroviral drugs cost less than \$100 per person per year for the least expensive regimen recommended by the U.N. In 2000, it cost more than \$10,000.
- 46 countries, territories and areas restrict people living with HIV from entering or staying.
- Sub-Saharan Africa remains the region hardest hit by HIV, with 23.5 million HIV-positive people in 2011, about 69 percent of the global total.
- There were 1.4 million people living with HIV in North America in 2011, including 4500 children.

SOURCES: UNAIDS/Reuters



Thirty years later, AIDS stigma remains

By Barbara Dunlap-Berg

A 17-year-old African-American man recently told his mother he was gay. Her first reaction was judgment, shame and revulsion. Her next response was to lecture him about the evils of his ways and to say, "You'd better not get AIDS and die."

Sadly, the Rev. Gregory Gross was meeting with the teen because he had just tested HIV positive.

"It was now, not just having to face this new news, but also the shame and embarrassment of letting his own mother down," Gross said. "I can't help but wonder how things might have been different if she could have supported her gay son rather than condemn him."

Thirty years ago, on June 5, we heard of AIDS – acquired immune deficiency syndrome – for the first time. That was when the U.S. Centers for Disease Control first identified the disease that had beset five formerly healthy young men in Los Angeles.

Since then, nearly 30 million people have died from AIDS-related causes. Some, like young Ryan White, who acquired AIDS through a blood transfusion, became household names. Some – like actor Rock Hudson and singer Freddie Mercury – were already famous. Many more were faceless, nameless individuals too easily forgotten.

And while society has become much more aware of AIDS and HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, the stigma remains. Confusion and misconceptions are rampant, said Gross, a clergy member of the Northern Illinois Annual Conference. A licensed clinical social worker, he manages the HIV-testing and prevention program at the Center on Halsted in Chicago.

"People continue to have a gut reaction to this disease unlike any

other," Gross said. "Even though people may know intellectually that they cannot contract it through casual contact, there is still the gut reaction of fear and repulsion and 'what if?' when encountering someone living with HIV."

People living with HIV are the modern-day lepers of whom we read in biblical stories, he added.

"As disciples of Jesus Christ, United Methodists are called to continue his healing ministry to the most marginalized in the world."

Rev. Donald Messer

"A challenge of my work is to focus on HIV prevention while combating the stigma around those living with HIV," Gross said.

United Methodists have an obligation to meet that challenge, said the Rev. Donald Messer, chairperson of the denomination's Global AIDS Fund Committee.

"As disciples of Jesus Christ, United Methodists are called to continue his healing ministry to the most marginalized in the world," Messer said upon his election as chairperson.

Gross' ministry isn't confined to the United States.

Gross also is involved with Project Tariro, a United Methodist program helping HIV/AIDS patients and families to live positively in Zimbabwe. According to the World Health Organization, more than 15 percent of the adult

population in Zimbabwe has tested positive for HIV/AIDS. The average life expectancy has dropped to 34 years. Every week, 4,000 people die from AIDS-related causes. Only 12,000 of those infected receive antiretroviral drugs.

"I think it's easier for people to think of (HIV/AIDS) as something 'over there,'" Gross said. People want to help AIDS orphans in Africa. When he gives presentations on the situation in Zimbabwe, however, he always makes it a point to bring it back home.

"HIV rates continue to increase here, too," he added. "Just because we have good medications now doesn't mean it isn't a concern." And while HIV-positive people are now aging, the long-term effects of HIV treatment are unknown.

Although AIDS is not a "gay disease," homosexual and bisexual men continue to carry the biggest burden of HIV in the United States – especially young, gay African-American and Latino/Hispanic men, as well as transgender women. African-American women are seeing increasing numbers, Gross said, but for every African-American woman diagnosed with HIV, six gay men are diagnosed. The number of new infections continues to rise among young gay men.

Gross, who also is appointed to Chicago's Berry Memorial UMC, seems to have found his calling.

"HIV ministry can be challenging, exhausting work," he admitted. "But it can also be an incredible blessing to be engaged in such incarnational ministry of presence – of walking with someone from testing, to waiting for results, to sitting with him and his grief and fears, to connecting him to medical care and transitioning to support groups.

"It is incredibly humbling to walk this journey through the valley of the shadow of death to new hope." ☞

*-Barbara Dunlap-Berg,
United Methodist Communications*

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MEMBER FDIC



▲ **Asbury UMC on Main Street in Harrisonburg** celebrated its 225th anniversary on Sept. 15. Bishop Hasbrouck Hughes, Asbury's senior pastor from 1971-1977, was the guest speaker. The service was followed by a covered dish lunch. Meanwhile, Persons UMC in Drewryville also celebrated its 175th anniversary on Sept. 15 with a reunion.



▲ The Sojourners Sunday School Class of **Beulah UMC, Chesterfield County**, packed 190 school kits and 240 health kits. Each year, members of the class buy school supplies on sale and assemble the kits to "sell" to members of the congregation for \$5 each, \$6 less than UMCOR requests to provide a school kit. With the proceeds from «selling» the school kits, the class buys supplies to make health kits. This year, Beulah provided a total of 572 kits, including school and health kits from others within the church, birthing kits and layettes, and money donated for cleaning buckets.

Wallace Memorial UMC in Fox Hill, Hampton, recently received nine new members. In the past year attendance has steadily grown, youth

programs have been expanded, and at a recent Prayer Shawl Retreat, more than 40 women were busy making prayer shawls, which were dedicated during the retreat for those in need of prayer and comfort. ▼



▲ **Epworth UMC in Thaxton** hosted a Stop Hunger Now packing on Sept. 7, packing more than 10,000 meals.

For the second year, the Senior Youth Group at **Belview UMC in Radford** made the trip to serve the people of Henderson Settlement in Frakes, Ky. This year they helped build an outdoor storage shed for an elderly couple who lived in a trailer and needed additional space. In addition to the physical work, this mission team also built a bridge of friendship. Over the four days that they worked on the shed they became

friends with the elderly couple and their grandchildren. They learned that the man had worked in the Kentucky coal mines for many years and heard about his life of hard work. He had two small grandchildren who lived next door. The young boy, 8 years old, was raising ducks to supplement his family's income. There were 30 ducklings wandering all over the job site, and the youths named this trip "Duck Nation." The grandchildren, the boy and a girl about 10 years old, and their grandfather also helped on the shed by hammering nails, getting tools and holding items for the team. This made this youth group feel that they were in mission with and not mission to this family. Belview youths worked hard over seven months to raise the money for this trip. They hosted a special Valentines' Day dinner, yard sales and had several luncheons after church to raise the money. They want to thank their youth leader, Lindy Mann, and her husband, Dale Mann. They also thank dedicated youth parent Dee Linkous for being a part of this mission team. Youths on the trip were: Austin Grayson, Kaitlyn Linkous, Paul Linkous, Juliana Spencer and Jake Petzold. ▼



▲ **Farmville UMC's "Fusion" youth group** stuffed more than 80 fabric bears on Sept. 29 to pack in Operation Christmas Child boxes.

NOVEMBER

United Methodist Men's Spiritual Retreat

Nov. 1-3, Blackstone Conference and Retreat Center
The 36th annual men's spiritual retreat will feature the Rev. Tom Berlin of Floris UMC in Herndon as leader. Berlin will speak on "Profiles In Courage." For more information, contact David Bean at david_bean@vawp.uscourts.gov or (540) 718-2752.

UMVIM Team Leader Training

Nov. 2, St. Mark's UMC, Hampton
Nov. 9, Cave Spring UMC, Roanoke
Nov. 23, Annandale UMC
Each training session will be from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. with registration beginning at 8:45 a.m. Team Leader Training is required for all first-time team leaders, but all interested persons are welcome to attend whether leading a team or not. All participants must pre-register by noon Monday before the training event. There is a \$55 registration fee for each participant.

Middle School Retreat

Nov. 8, Eagle Eyrie, Lynchburg

High School Retreat

Dec. 6, Eagle Eyrie, Lynchburg

In these weekend retreats, youths are challenged to grow as disciples of Christ through powerful worship, Bible study and small groups while building friendships with youths from all over Virginia. You can e-mail the names, ages and gender of participants to Becky Tate at BeckyTate@vaumc.org.

Early Response Team Training

Nov. 9, Galilee UMC, Sterling
Early Response Teams respond during the first phase of disaster relief, providing Christian presence. Train to be ready to respond and know the first steps to help. Registration fee is \$55, which includes training manual, UMCOR ERT badge, T-shirt and background check fee (forms will be handed out at training). Galilee is located at 45425 Winding Road in Sterling.

New Church Leadership Institute

Nov. 18-20, United Methodist Center in Glen Allen
The Virginia Conference office of Congregational Excellence will offer the New Church Leadership Institute. New church plant expert Jim Griffith will be the leader of this training, which will help participants determine whether this area of ministry is something they might focus on. It will also help all pastors with ways to revitalize their congregations. Register at the conference website, www.vaumc.org/NCLLregistration.

JANUARY

Ministers' Convocation

Jan. 14-16, Blackstone Conference and Retreat Center
The theme of the 2014 training for clergy and church professionals will be "Breaking down the Walls: Transforming Conflict into Resolution." Keynote speakers will be Dr. Ellen Ott Marshall and Thomas W. Porter Jr. The preacher will be Bishop Greg Palmer; Bishop Young Jin Cho will preach at the opening service. Register through the conference website, www.vaumc.org under "Events." For details, contact Beth Downs at BethDowns@vaumc.org or call 1-800-768-6040, ext. 127 or (804) 521-1127.

FEBRUARY

Lay Servant Academy

Feb. 21-23, Blackstone Conference and Retreat Center
The Virginia Conference Lay Servant Academy will help laity as they encourage, equip and support others for deeper commitment to Christ and to faithful discipleship. For more information about the Academy or Lay Speaking/Servant Ministries, contact your district director or e-mail Johnnie Draughon, conference director of Lay Speaking Ministries, at johnnie.draughon@cox.net or David Bailey, Lay Servant Academy director, at dw.bailey@comcast.net.

("Number 7", continued from pg. 11)

seemed impossible. From passing the swim test to gliding off the zip line, witnessing the thrill on their faces is worth every second of sleeping on a mattress not much thicker than a toothpick. Being tired or dirty is never an excuse I use when venturing out of the cabin in the morning attempting to be a role model for these young men.

Most importantly, I think God is with these children every step of the way. A lot of them have difficult upbringings and God wanted them to assemble with loving mentors so they could see God's path for each and every individual. God wants to witness these children succeed in life and hopefully attend college and grow up to be the people they set out to be.

I know God put me on this earth so I could go to All God's Children Camp. From my first week of camp where I immediately had a camper birthday to this past camp where I finished with a camper birthday, it has been a celebration of songs, stories, reflections, joys, tears and bundles of love everywhere. ☺

-James Hemphill has been mentoring at camp since he was 16. He just graduated from James Madison University.

Devotions from International Lesson Series

LIVING THE WORD



The Rev. Dr. Lynne Blankenship Caldwell is pastor of Brookland UMC in the Richmond District, teaches at the Samuel D. Proctor School of Theology at Virginia Union University, and is director of the Johnson A. Edomson Institute for Evangelism, Mission and Global Christianity. She has a BA from Berea College in Kentucky, a Master of Divinity from Asbury Theological Seminary, two certificates in Church Leadership from Duke, and a Doctor of Ministry from Wesley Theological Seminary. Lynne is a trustee for Berea and at High Point University. She is on loan to Virginia from the Western North Carolina Conference, where she was a district superintendent. She and her husband, Neill, live in the Ginter Park section of Richmond.

Nov. 3, 2013 My burning bush Exodus 3:7-17

This call from God for Moses to become God's messenger to the Hebrews and Pharaoh is one of the greatest stories in salvation history. It helps us understand more about who God is, who we are, where God is to be found when we suffer, and God's promises to deliver us.

- ♥ God reveals God's self in unexpected ways, but in the midst of ordinary moments of our lives.
- ♥ God calls persons regardless of their pasts, regardless of their present circumstances.
- ♥ God sees the conditions of humankind; God hears cries of injustice; God knows their sufferings; God cares and responds, making a way for redemption and release. God is not far away, an omniscient observer, simply watching our plight and leaving us to our own devices. God is present, active, ready to bring us out from misery, up from bondage, and into new life.

In the late 1980s, when I was an associate pastor, a fairly ordinary request came from a church member, a nurse, for a pastoral visit to be made to a family who were not members and had no pastor. This time the request was for us to visit a family who'd just suffered the loss of their first child through Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. Before going into the home, the nurse wanted me to be aware this family was also dealing with economic poverty and HIV-positive diagnoses.

The bush began to blaze. I began to confront my own fears and inadequacies, my biases, my bigotry and ignorance. Like Moses, I wanted to ask God lots of questions, mostly that God might want to consider someone else for ministries with persons with HIV/AIDS. Surely God didn't mean for me to walk into frightening, uncharted, possibly dangerous, certainly demanding, relational ministry!

But, I began to understand across the next days and weeks that God was well aware of great cries of pain and suffering, of systemic injustices perpetrated against persons living with HIV/AIDS, of daily rejection and hateful, hurtful treatment endured by patients and fam-

ily members. Not only was God aware of their plight, God was aware of mine. Not only was God inviting me to be a part of announcing good news of deliverance to them, God was preparing to deliver me from cowardice and arrogance. "I have given heed to you... I will bring you up out of the misery..." (Exodus 3: 16-17).

Nov. 10, 2013 A day of remembrance Exodus 12:1-14

She was less than 2-years-old when I first met her. But she had known more adult-like pain and suffering than I could begin to imagine. In spite of pain, repeated cycles of medicines, procedures, and trips to the National Institutes of Health, she was our angel messenger, and the message – in her twinkling blue eyes, contagious giggle and amazing personality – was "Live! Love! Laugh! Death may be coming, but celebrate the joy today!"

Born HIV-positive, "Hope" was the darling of the community hospital in the small town where I was a pastor. Many days she walked the halls of the hospital, balancing her movements by pushing a toy pushcart which doubled as walker and as transport for a medical pump used to continually infuse antibiotics, anti-virals, steroids or antihistamines. Hope was not to be deterred by a neuropathy in her feet, or the necessary appendage of a medical pump. With little hospital gown flowing, always under the watchful eyes of her mother and the nursing staff, Hope would float across the threshold of another patient's room and announce: "Won't you come to my un-birffday party? It will be at 4 o'clock! We'll have cake! Please come!"

How treasured the day when I received the treasured invitation! "Are YOU coming to my un-birffday party? I hope so! It will be so much fun!"

"Hope, I would love to!" I said, "But, whatever is an un-birffday party?"

"Well, you have only one birffday. But you have 364 un-birffdays to celebrate!"

Our little messenger of love and life demonstrated joy and trust in the face of death for almost four years. When her tiny body finally succumbed to the ravages of HIV, more than 400 people crowded into the Lutheran church's sanctuary to give thanks to God, to celebrate Hope

and her message of Life.

The scripture lesson recounts a day not only to be remembered, but also a day which becomes one of the defining moments for Jewish identity. Sometimes it is hard to imagine joy, hope or peace can be found in a story with an angel of death, children dying in the night, families preparing to make a nighttime escape for freedom's sake. But then, again, maybe we can learn from Hope, and from the Exodus text. Even when the circumstances around us are bleak, terrifying, seemingly unalterable, even so there is still laughter, and singing, still the comfort and support of community, still the promises of God, still the assurance God has heard our cries; God remembers us; God is with us; we will be free!

Where there is an angel of death, there must be an angel of Life! Every day is a gift of life. It is a glorious day of remembrance!

Nov. 17, 2013 Freedom in impossible circumstances Exodus 14:21-30

A friend and I made our way to a little house on a run-down street in response to a request for volunteers to work with an AIDS patient. We were met at the door by a woman emaciated from years of substance abuse and now full-blown AIDS. She really had no family, only a few friends. She needed help with everything – buying groceries, transportation, house cleaning, personal care – the list went on and on. More than anything, Deborah needed friendship, real friendship. She longed to be set free from the guilt of her past life, from the pain and suffering of her present. She needed to receive the love and grace of God, but she felt too unworthy.

Across the next several months, volunteers drove her to appoint-

ments, prepared and delivered meals, helped make connections for other community resources. And, as only God could do it, a connection was made with a local United Methodist congregation.

This was a large church by numbers, dollars, prestige. Members were doctors, lawyers, community leaders, business owners. Deborah's background in drugs, alcohol, prostitution and family conflicts had left her fairly destitute. Folks at church were scared of HIV. Some were skeptical of Deborah's motivations. Most had never met or had any contact with a person living with AIDS. Two great opposites were being drawn into relationship.

Deborah, in all her neediness, and some ladies of the church came together in a miraculous way, and were knit together with cords of amazing grace and love. Someone led Deborah to trusting faith in Jesus Christ. She was baptized and became a member of the church.

When Deborah died, there was no family to identify the body for releasing it to the funeral home for cremation, so I signed the papers. State law required next of kin be notified before cremation or burial. Across months of waiting as authorities attempted to locate any relative, church members who owned a funeral home housed her body for free. Eventually they took care of all costs related to her burial.

The congregation became Deborah's family and friends. They helped her experience freedom Christ alone can give. But, Deborah was not the only one set free. At her memorial service, one after another, persons told of holy moments shared with this sister in Christ, forever changing their lives and setting them free from misconceptions, judgments, pride. Once again, where there seemed to be no way out, or through and on to freedom, God created one!

November 24, 2013 God's Presence in the Wilderness Exodus 40:16-30, 34,38

The invitation to come and celebrate Holy Communion in the living room of my friends' home was not unusual. We had shared bread and cup around their dining room table on many occasions. Breaking bread and taking the cup had become the highest expression of thanksgiving for the gift of life at our monthly birthday suppers. A group of 10 women came together to enjoy wonderful meals and fellowship frequently. It seemed like at least one of us had a birthday in any given month, and a tradition emerged for sharing a scrumptious meal and celebrating the Lord's Supper around the table on those special occasions.

So, this request was not extraordinary. Except this time Holy Communion wasn't to be with the circle of women. Rather, this time would be with a group of persons who'd been meeting for support, encouragement, and wisdom-sharing while learning to live with an HIV-positive diagnosis. "Jane" and "Julia," both highly trained nurses, had been opening their home for months, providing a safe place for comfort and caring conversation in the midst of a seemingly endless wilderness of medical appointments, financial chaos, societal rejection and fear.

Jane and Julia were deeply devoted followers of Christ with incomparable spiritual gifts for hospitality and compassion. Their rich prayer life would stand beside Mother Teresa's or that of St. Teresa of Avila. They'd invited me to celebrate Holy Communion with these weary, wandering pilgrims because Jane and Julia discerned their friends needed, more than a supportive conversation, a real time and place encounter with God. Most had not had an opportunity to

(Continued on page 28: "Living Word")

CLERGY & DIACONAL



Deaths



The Rev. Charles Beard, 52, pastor of Central UMC in Hampton, died Sept. 23, 2013. He was serving in his first appointment in the Virginia Conference.

Beard served active duty in the U.S. Air Force for 13 years, retiring as Staff Sergeant, and served in the Air Force Reserves for four years. He graduated from Morehouse College in Atlanta, Princeton Theological Seminary and Virginia Union University in Richmond. Funeral services were conducted by the Rev. Joe Carson, York River District Superintendent, at Gethsemane Baptist Church, Newport News. Beard is survived by his wife, Jacqueline, and two adult children, Steve and Lorielle.



Loreeda Ruth Jones Niemann, 89, died Sept. 23, 2013, in Kingsport Tenn., where she had made her home for the past several years. A graduate of Emory & Henry College,

she had a Master's Degree in Bible and Theology from Scarritt College and Vanderbilt University School of Religion. She was director of Christian Education from 1952-1960 at Asbury Memorial Methodist Church, Harrisonburg. In 1960, she accepted a similar position at Harris Memorial Methodist Church, Honolulu, Hawaii, where she remained until 1963. At that time, she became a diaconal minister of the Methodist Church. She then served as a campus minister at the Wesley Foundation at Mary Washington College. In 1970, under her leadership, the Wesley Foundation became ecumenical, changing its name to the Campus Christian Center and including participation by local United Methodist, Lutheran, Episcopal and Presbyterian churches, welcoming students from all denominations. She retired in 1987. She was an active member of the Fredericksburg UMC.

Imero Fiorentino, father of **the Rev. Linda Crabbs**, died Oct. 1 in New York City. Crabbs is pastor at Forest Grove UMC, Richmond District.

Vernelle Cullen Ports Long, 88, of Raleigh, N.C., died Sept. 17, 2013. She was preceded in death by her husband of 65 years, **the Rev. J.G. Long**.

Alice Louise "Alouise" Witbeck Ritter died Sept. 21, 2013. She was widow of **the Rev. James N. Ritter** and ministered beside her husband at 22 United Methodist churches across Virginia for 42 years. She was an active member of Lower UMC in retirement.

Jonathan Steel Willis, 66, of Roanoke, died Aug. 28, 2013. He was the son of **the Rev. David and Elinor Willis**; David is a retired clergy in the Staunton District.

Births

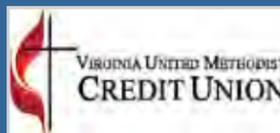
The Rev. Kameron Wilds and his wife, Samantha, welcomed a son, **Alexander Michael**, on Sept. 14. Wilds is the pastor at Grace Design UMC, Danville District.

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2016 World Methodist Conference logo designed by Virginia Conference designer

The logo chosen for the 2016 World Methodist Conference is the work of Virginia's own Cathryn Wooton, a graphic designer in the conference's communications office. Her design was selected from more than 50 entries and unveiled at the World Methodist Council's meeting at Wesley's Chapel in London on Sept. 11.

The logo and conference theme, "One," is used to both reflect the Council's goal of being a body that unites the 80 member churches from the Methodist, Wesleyan, Nazarene, United and Uniting Church traditions, as well as recalling John Wesley's quote that "Methodists are one people in all the world."

"The logo sums up the purpose of the World Methodist Conference, which is for people from all over the world who share in the faith traditions affiliated with the World Methodist Council to convene, celebrate and discern within

the common threads of their faith in Jesus Christ," read a news release by the Council.

The 2016 World Methodist Conference will take place from Aug. 31 – Sept. 4 in Houston, Texas.

The World Methodist Council is composed of delegates elected from its member churches. From 2001 onward, the Council has averaged 400 members. Representation is determined by Church membership and financial contribution to the work of the Council.



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("Living Word," continued from pg. 27)

receive the Sacrament or participate in worship in a long, long time. Whether fear of rejection, or fear of unwittingly causing someone else harm (we were still learning facts about the spread of HIV at that time), it didn't matter. What they needed that evening was the assurance there was a tabernacle in their wilderness, a visual and tangible reminder of God's presence – real and knowable.

What an amazing experience as bread and cup were blessed, broken and shared that night! Never had I witnessed this means of grace so powerfully extending God's transformational love and comfort for those so needing a sense of security and guidance. That living room became hallowed ground, a tabernacle in the wilderness, a place for experiencing the assurance of God's presence.



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FROM THE BISHOP



“Think” and “Thank”

May the grace, peace and joy of our Lord be with you. November is the month of Thanksgiving. It is the time to remember and reflect upon God’s grace poured out upon us. It is the time to thank God for blessings given to us throughout the year. It is the time to rejoice and celebrate the joyful season of Thanksgiving.

Someone said, “Christian ethics is an ethics of thanksgiving.” I fully agree with this statement. Our lives as disciples of Jesus Christ are built upon God’s amazing grace revealed in Jesus Christ. The holy life we are called to live is an expression of our thankfulness for God’s love. If we lose this gratitude – the reason and foundation of holy living – our lives as disciples of Jesus Christ will be a burden, not a joy. If we lose the heart of thanksgiving, our ministry will be just a duty, and there will be no joy. The Christian life without thanksgiving

will easily fall into legalism. This is not a life our Lord wants us to live. This is not a life living out the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

This past Oct. 4 was the 46th anniversary of my lung surgery which I underwent in 1967. Because of bleeding, I stayed in the operating room for about 28 hours and received massive transfusions of blood. I wandered between life and death and offered my last prayer to the Lord when I was conscious for a while. Whenever I remember what God did in that difficult situation, I cannot but give thanks to God.

Since then, I started counting my age in a new way. The 46 years of my life since then have been an additional gift from God. So now I am 46 years old! Thanks be to God!

On the week of the anniversary of my operation I made a phone call to the surgeon who performed my surgery that day. He has retired from practice and is living in Morganton, N.C. We shared memories together and had a good conversation.

Each day when I enter the United Methodist Center or drive to visit churches, I remember what Paul said: “By the grace of God I am what I am (I Cor. 15:10).” I am deeply humbled and grateful for the opportunity to serve this conference. I am fully aware of where I was, and where I am now. Because of this remembrance of God’s grace, I still do my ministry with joy and gratitude, although there are issues and difficult situations. If I lose this joy and gratitude, my ministry will face serious challenges.

There is a one letter difference between the words “Think” and “Thank.” I think “Think” and “Thank” are closely related. If we think deep, we will be able to thank. Thinking deep will help us to see the situation from a different perspective.

There was a pastor who always began his worship services with the prayer: “Gracious God, we thank you

for this beautiful day.” One Sunday the weather was terribly bad, and only a few people came to the worship service. They were curious whether the pastor would give thanks to God for the weather that day. The pastor prayed: “Gracious God, we thank you that we rarely have this kind of bad weather.”

If we think deep, we can give thanks to God in any circumstance. We can have a different perspective on our situation as the pastor prayed. Even in a very difficult situation, we can find God’s presence and give thanks to God. This is a real blessing. If our heart is filled with gratitude to God and to the people around us, we will have a happy life and joyful ministry. Where there is a thankful heart, there is joy and peace.

But unfortunately, our lives today are too busy to think deep. There is no time to think deep. There is no room to enjoy the gifts of God around us. As Richard Foster says, superficiality is the curse of our age. We look for instant satisfaction and expect an instant response. In this season of thanksgiving we need to slow down. We need to open our hearts and minds to God and to the people around us and to rediscover the thankful heart within us. Please think deep and thank God!

May this month be filled with deep gratitude to God and to one another.

In our Lord,

It takes a village to rev up Heart Havens’ benefit bike rally



Residents from the local Heart Havens Garber-Morris, Tate and Marybeth Graff homes joined the ‘Ride for Independence’ festivities. Photos by Kiki Nusbaumer

The second annual Heart Havens’ Ride for Independence motorcycle rally took place Sept. 28 at Steel Horse Harley-Davidson on the south side of Richmond. The two-hour ride, led once again by the Knights of Life, a motorcycle group consisting of medically trained riders, departed from Steel Horse and snaked along Route 360 into Powhatan County and back.

Heart Havens’ special guest rider this year was Bruce Heilman, Chancellor at the University of Richmond.

When the bikers returned, the Harley Owners Group served hot dogs. The Righteous Outlaws – whose members include Alan Nesaw and Hank Heerman of Lebanon UMC – ran

through a few sets of blues and rock music atop a big flat-bed trailer. The Rev. Ben Hadley-Goggin painted faces with paint donated by Trinity UMC. A fleet of vintage cars was on display at the back of the parking lot. Prizes were donated by the Richmond District United Methodist Men, Pam and DJ Thacker of Knights of Life, and Savage and McPherson Insurance. Biker Basics was on hand to make stickers and personalize biker gear with their mobile print shop. Ice cream churned by a Harley-Davidson was on hand, and Bunkie Trinite Trophies sponsored the Most Unique Bike Award, which was chosen by first grader and official judge Aaliyah Avent. 🍷

ONE LAST WORD



Tweets heard ‘round the conference

Lindsey Baynham @LMBaynham off to a district clergy gathering where the fellowship is good and the coffee flows #NOVAclergy #VAUMC#gosox

Sarah Payne @sarahe_payne Cody asked to meet the bishop. He did, with words of wisdom, “Be a faithful child and God will bless you.” #vaumc



Lindsey Baynham @LMBaynham writing my charge conference report... what a year @FairfaxUMC! #thankful

McKennon Shea @McKennon This is a little late for the discussion, but for those who are in favor of #onlinecommunion, you also are affirming online baptisms, right?

Randy McMillen @RandyMcMillen Alexander the Great’s map makers frustrated because they had to draw maps as they moved into new worlds. So it is with us. #Catalyst

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