

VIRGINIA UNITED METHODIST

HERITAGE



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Virginia United Methodist *HERITAGE*
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of The United Methodist Church
Stephen S. Mansfield, president

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Virginia United Methodist HERITAGE

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from the editor's quill

In the fall of 1985, two unstoppable storms collided along the Virginia/West Virginia border, neither giving way to the other. After 14 days of rain, the ground could absorb no more. On Nov. 5, streams and rivers began hemorrhaging water as it fell from the sky. The Flood of '85 had arrived, bringing massive damage and havoc.

The Shenandoah River overran its banks, making it seem as if the entire Valley were now a river — mountain wall to mountain wall.

Deep water covered bridges that stretch 10 to 15 feet above normal water level.

Eating away their banks, some overflowing rivers and streams changed their courses. Some even ate chunks out of the roads and highways that parallel them.

Water-soaked mountainsides slid down into valleys and hollows, leaving scars and piles still visible today . . . 25 years later.

Torrents of mud and water slammed against doors and windows, breaking into homes and businesses and burying all basements and moving some homes and buildings in their entirety farther downstream.

Water and sewer lines broke; utility poles fell over; trees lost their balance; bridges exploded.

My wife, Debra, and I lived north of Harrisonburg in Timberville and suffered only a water-flooded basement. However, Debra's parents on the family farm, which is spread atop a mountain hollow in Pendleton County, West Virginia, suffered most everything listed above.

Debra rushed home to help her parents. When I arrived two weeks later, she told me an interesting story.

She and another person in the community had talked about outsiders coming to help. The other person wondered which outsiders would arrive first . . . the Mennonites or the Methodists.

Our reputation precedes us. It describes our attitude toward service and mission.

And "attitude" is *the* word one needs to consider when assessing a person's or a group's commitment to service and mission.

Betty Whitehurst could not have illustrated our United Methodist attitude toward service and mission any better. Whether we are involved with local, national, or international mission projects, whether we are involved with strenuous or not-so-strenuous mission projects, we get the jobs done. We find needs, and then we satisfy those needs. We do not hesitate during

times of emergency.

Yes, some projects can be difficult and tiring and their logistics can be frustrating and make one dizzy. And the surrendering of one's personal time for the sakes of others can be inconvenient at times.

Yet, as Betty points out, the satisfactions of helping people, meeting new people, making new friends, learning new cultures, traveling to new places, learning new skills, solving problems, and so forth are the personal rewards of our serving.

To be a true follower of Jesus, one must pattern one's life as Jesus said in Matthew 20:28 "...the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve,..." (NIV)

The Wesley brothers and their colleagues in Christ took God out of the cathedrals and to the people in the streets and the fields and the slums and the prisons where God needed to be. Their "method" was maddening to and made fun of by others of their time.

We, just like the Wesleys and their colleagues, have a reputation, too. Make no mistake. Non-Methodists know us. And they are not making fun of us. Betty's article illustrates our seriousness.

Betty shows us what it is to be "Methodist" and shows us that we are "United" in our service to others. Reading Betty's article makes one want to get out there and accomplish something.

As to the question who arrived first — the Mennonites or the Methodists — it was a tie.

Blessings to you all,

Boyd

L. Boyd Lucas

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Virginia Conference United Methodist Volunteers in Mission: History of a Grassroots Movement

by Betty Whitehurst

“In the last three decades, a major historical development taking place in Christian mission has hardly been noticed by American church members. The movement has developed from the traditional idea of the full-time missionary to the concept of short-term volunteer service emphasizing laity involvement. This ongoing process had its more recent beginnings about thirty years ago, and continues to gain strength today. It is a huge paradigm shift in the way our church approaches mission – a new way of thinking.”

— Thomas L. Curtis, Sr., in *From the Grassroots: A History of United Methodist Volunteers in Mission* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000, p. 23)

Introduction: History of the Volunteer Movement

The concept of mission volunteers began in Old Testament times. When Nehemiah decided the walls around Jerusalem should be rebuilt, he requested permission to travel to Jerusalem from Artaxerxes, ruler of the Persian Empire; secured building materials from Asaph, keeper of the royal forests; and invited his fellow Jews to help rebuild the wall. The account in Nehemiah 3, relating which groups rebuilt each portion of the wall, reads like a modern-day Volunteers in Mission rally where each team leader reports on a major project: “Our team laid the foundation; our team put up the walls; our team did the roofing...”

The New Testament also contains examples of mission volunteers. Finding Simon and Andrew beside the Sea of Galilee, Jesus said, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people” (Matthew 4:19, NRSV). Volunteers have heeded Jesus’ call to follow him from that day onward. Later, Jesus sent out 70 disciples two by two with instructions to “Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals... . Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide” (Luke 10: 1,4,7, NRSV). Unlike the early disciples, today’s volunteers are encouraged to take money, but they are told to carry as little personal baggage as possible, and to eat whatever is prepared for them.

The Rev. Tom Curtis, in his history of United Methodist Volunteers in Mission (UMVIM), wrote that “Saint Paul could well be considered the greatest volunteer in mission. He referred to the work of his hands as supplying his own needs and those of his companions as they traveled and preached through much of the known world.”¹

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, was one of the first volunteer missionaries in modern times. The “Wesley in America” exhibit at Perkins School of Theology, Dallas, Texas, in February 2003 included this statement: “In 1735, the Georgia Trustees asked John Wesley if he and some friends would go with James Oglethorpe to the new American colony of Georgia...as volunteer missionaries.”²

In the 19th century, some Methodists felt God's call to mission but could not secure the backing of an official mission agency, so they served as volunteers. A notable example is the Rev. William Taylor, an ordained elder of the Baltimore Conference born in Rockbridge County, Virginia, in 1821. He began his mission work by establishing the first Methodist church in San Francisco, California, in 1849. From 1856 to 1883 he traveled to several continents, beginning with South America's west coast, where he founded Methodist schools for teaching English and other subjects so the volunteer teachers could establish churches. With no official support, Taylor and other volunteers were responsible for spreading Methodism throughout Latin America. In 1897 the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church adopted the work he had established.³ After leaving South America, Taylor volunteered in other parts of the world, and in 1884 the Methodist Episcopal Church elected him Missionary Bishop of Africa.⁴

We in the United States tend to think we were the first 20th-century Volunteers in Mission. However, a Mexican bishop recounted that as a young adult, shortly after the Mexican church became autonomous in 1930, he participated in some of the mission teams that helped build new churches due to the rapid growth in church membership they were experiencing throughout the country.

Volunteer teams from the United States began going to Europe and elsewhere after the end of World War II. Throughout the Southeastern Jurisdiction, people from different annual conferences often say, "Volunteers in Mission began in my annual conference." In a sense this is true, since the movement began simultaneously in many places.

The *Training Manual for Mission Volunteers* of the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) describes the movement as follows (p. 7):

Today, tens of thousands of United Methodists each year serve as Volunteers in Mission. Most serve from one to two weeks, while others serve for a year or more. Ordinarily, volunteers serve at their own expense and with support from their local churches. Most teams contribute to the cost of materials for construction projects. UMVIM works closely with the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR), providing teams to assist in recovery from natural disasters and violent conflicts. The strength of this movement gains momentum day by day as the worldwide church prepares to send and receive those who want to make the love of God visible, meaningful, supportive, and redemptive.

The Virginia Conference has been a part of United Methodist Volunteers in Mission, Southeastern Jurisdiction (UMVIM,SEJ) since its inception in 1972. UMVIM,SEJ was recognized by the jurisdiction in 1976, and is associated with the General Board of Global Ministries by action of the 1980 General Conference. The Rev. Ray Chamberlain, Conference Secretary of

Global Ministries, reported to the 1980 Annual Conference that one goal of the Conference Board of Global Ministries was “Development of a Volunteers-in-Mission program involving laity and clergy in exposure and assistance to people in various mission centers both nationally and internationally.”⁵ That year a local church mission manual titled *More Than Bread* was published and sent to all United Methodist churches in Virginia (*Journal*, 1981, p. 286). It became an annual publication, updated each year and published under different names, and for many years has been included as an insert in the *Virginia Advocate*, the Virginia Conference’s official newsmagazine, as well as being widely distributed by the conference Office of Mission and Global Justice. The 2010-2011 edition is titled *Mission Opportunities: Being a Faithful Disciple*.

In 1988, the Rev. Jack Martin of the Virginia Conference became president of the UMVIM,SEJ board of directors, a position he held for the next eight years (1988-1994). From 1988 — the year UMVIM,SEJ became an official agency of the Southeastern Jurisdiction Administrative Council — until 1999, the Virginia Conference played a prominent role in the jurisdiction.

In 1989, retired Bishop Kern Eutsler of the Virginia Conference became the first part-time director of interpretation and promotion for UMVIM,SEJ. He originated the Fellowship of One Thousand, with the goal of securing at least 1,000 churches, groups or individuals who would contribute at least \$100 annually to UMVIM,SEJ through direct donations or Advance Specials. A membership pin was designed, and the idea proved to be a popular and productive method of fundraising. When Bishop Eutsler resigned from his position in 1996, retired Bishop Hasbrouck Hughes, also of Virginia, took on that responsibility and further developed the fundraising arm of UMVIM,SEJ.

In July 1995, the Rev. Walt and Dr. Betty Whitehurst were named Director and Associate Director of UMVIM,SEJ. They continued in those positions until their retirement in June 1999.

A Personal Experience of Mission and Transformation

In January 2002, this author participated in a Volunteers in Mission team that contained most of the elements found in the VIM experience:

- ...A group of committed Christians from one or more local churches
- ...People of different ages and varying skills working together
- ...Advance preparations made in cooperation with on-site leaders
- ...Orientation sessions for group building, organizing, and preparation
- ...Travel to another location, whether nearby, farther away, or overseas
- ...Serving the needs of others through disaster response, construction, medical attention, Christian education, and/or worship and evangelism
- ...An opportunity to do some sightseeing and shopping
- ...Forming close bonds with the community being served
- ...Deeply spiritual experiences, both as a team and in the wider community
- ...Transformation of the persons participating — both those who are sent and those who receive

Shortly after a major earthquake devastated El Salvador in 2001, my husband Walt Whitehurst and I decided to organize a disaster response team from our church, Charity UMC in the Norfolk District. Our church, known for its mission involvement, had sent teams to many places in the United States, but never to another country. We had hoped to recruit at least 10 other people from Charity, but because only six had volunteered, Walt spoke at a Norfolk District ministers' meeting, urging the pastors to invite people from their churches to join us. The Rev. Brad Dulaney, associate pastor of Great Bridge UMC in Chesapeake, took the invitation to his church and soon we had five members of Great Bridge UMC on the team. Word spread, and eventually we had 16 volunteers from seven churches. Most of the team members were from our district, but two persons were from Richmond and one from Idaho.

As we prepared for traveling to El Salvador in January 2002, we knew that taking donated medicines for use by our medical volunteers would be a challenge because of customs regulations. "The smaller the country, the redder the tape." We asked Bishop Joe Pennel to write a letter, on the bishop's letterhead and with the bishop's seal, stating that the medicines were a donation to the Methodist Church of El Salvador. All of our team members passed through customs except for George Williams, who was carrying a duffel bag of medicines. Seeing the customs agent examining George's luggage, Walt went to assist. He showed the customs official the bishop's letter and read it, translating into Spanish. The customs agent summoned his supervisor, and Walt showed her the bishop's letter. She said, "Let me take this and have it copied," and Walt said, "We have another copy. You may keep the original." Her reply was, "Oh, no, our rules are that it must be copied on our copier."

After receiving permission to take the medicines into the country, we entered the San Salvador airport where our hosts awaited us: the Rev. Juan Mayorga, president of the Methodist Church of El Salvador; the Rev. Jorge Cabrerias, pastor of "Nueva Jerusalem" (New Jerusalem) Methodist Church in Ahuachapán; and Gelmarie Moreno-Sánchez, UMCOR coordinator for earthquake relief teams in El Salvador. They accompanied us to Ahuachapán, a three-hour ride in a rented bus.

Our hosts had arranged for us to stay in a small hotel, where we ate breakfast every morning. Members of our group purchased and delivered lunch to our work sites each day, and church members prepared supper and served it at the parsonage next door to the church. We enjoyed meeting the church members as they served the meals, and the team became closely united as we gathered at the hotel each evening for devotions and sharing about the day's activities.

Once we began our work in Ahuachapán it was amazing to see how the talents of each team member added to the effectiveness of our team.

The Rev. Sam NeSmith took his laptop computer and sent an e-mail each night to the addresses we had given him of our families and friends back

home so we could keep in touch.

Ginger Griffith volunteered to lead Vacation Bible School for the children in Ahuachapán. She prepared all the materials and asked me to translate them into Spanish.

Dr. Roger Boe of Pocatello, Idaho, the medical consultant for the General Board of Global Ministries Mission Volunteers program, provided medical attention, along with Dr. Charles O’Dea, a chiropractor; Diana Palmer, a registered nurse; and Kim Dulaney, a medical student who acted as pharmacist. Roger had sent us a list of needed medicines, and team members’ churches donated enough medicines to fill two large duffel bags.

Our primary mission project was building a house for a family whose home had been destroyed by the earthquake. Team member Jim Beltz, a building contractor, worked under the supervision of the Salvadoran crew chief and then guided our volunteers in building the Salvadoran way. By the time we left, we had almost completed the house, and enough of our construction money remained to pay for finishing the job.

While the construction team worked on the house, the medical team worked in the church sanctuary, using the space between the pews and the altar as their clinic while people sat on pews waiting for medical attention. We cared for a large number of patients in a short time, and each patient received loving personal attention from the doctor, nurse, and/or chiropractor.

An amazing thing happened as the doctor and nurse cared for a very ill baby. The nurse said she wanted to say a prayer for the mother and baby. I began translating her prayer into Spanish but soon stopped because I heard two voices at the same time — the nurse, pleading with God to spare the child’s life, and the child’s mother, saying a virtually identical prayer in Spanish. I realized my translation was no longer needed because the Holy Spirit was present.

Vacation Bible School began the first day with 20 or so children sitting on pews that we had brought from inside the church and set on the front sidewalk. The number of children attending increased daily until more than a hundred children enthusiastically sang, made crafts, played games, and fidgeted through the telling of Bible stories. We wondered whether they were learning anything about God, until the day Miguel, age 13, stayed after the other children left. He picked up the colored chalk we had used for sidewalk drawings and drew scenes of the Creation on the sidewalk. Then he wrote, in Spanish: “God did all of this, and you do not believe?” We marveled at God’s way of showing us that our being there really did make a difference.

On our “day off” we went with pastor Cabrera and some New Jerusalem church members to visit Mayan ruins, a picturesque village, and a large shopping mall where we had lunch. In the village, one of our team members discovered a furniture-making shop and purchased a handmade wooden rocking chair, which the craftsmen took apart and packaged into a big, bulky package which later was checked with our luggage for the trip home. As we

boarded our plane, some members of the group teased the owner of the chair by saying they had just seen a luggage cart go by with that big unwieldy package, headed for another plane, and wondered where it would end up. (It arrived safely in Virginia, and has now been re-assembled.)

When a team comes home, team members share their stories with others, who often are inspired to “go and do likewise.” During our team’s report to Charity UMC, team member Ed Rountree said he had accompanied Pastor Cabrera one afternoon to take the hotel maid to her home. Learning that she had several children, he asked the pastor to stop at a bakery where he bought some rolls. When he gave the rolls to the children, they were very excited, shouting “Pan! Pan!” (“Bread! Bread!”). With tears rolling down his cheeks, he said, “Who would have thought that children would be so poor that bread would be a treat for them?”

Ed Sievers, a member of the congregation, said later, “I want to experience what he has experienced. I am going on the next mission trip.” He did, and later became an outstanding mission leader in the church, establishing a program in which members of our rural church go into inner city Norfolk about six times a year to serve a meal to people in the Park Place neighborhood, a project of Park Place UMC.

Our mission trip to El Salvador gave Great Bridge UMC an unexpected blessing. While we were in Ahuachapán, the pastor of New Jerusalem Methodist Church said they would like to have a sister church relationship with a church in the United States. The Great Bridge team members presented the idea to their congregation, which enthusiastically accepted New Jerusalem’s invitation.

George Williams, Norfolk District Volunteers in Mission Coordinator who was a member of our El Salvador team and is a member of Great Bridge UMC, stated that during the past eight years, 2002-2010, Great Bridge UMC has received repeated visits from Salvadoran pastors, including the Rev. Juan de Dios Peña, current president of the Methodist Church in El Salvador as well as UMVIM coordinator for that country, and has sent many construction and medical teams to Ahuachapán.

The first Great Bridge teams built a new, larger church building and parsonage for the New Jerusalem church. The work of the Great Bridge medical teams inspired the New Jerusalem congregation to establish a free clinic, using rented space, and later the Great Bridge volunteers remodeled the former New Jerusalem church building for use as a clinic that provides free medical attention to between 400 and 500 people each year.

Next, the Great Bridge congregation built three homes for needy families, followed by a building for “La Providencia” (Providence) Methodist Church, a newly organized church in Ahuachapán, and a parsonage for that church.

The Methodist Church of El Salvador is only 17 years old as of 2010 and is rapidly starting new churches. El Shaddai Church, a new congregation, needs a building which will be constructed with the help of Great Bridge

teams once the El Shaddai congregation secures a site. The most recent project, in June 2010, was adding Sunday school classrooms to the New Jerusalem church building.

Great Bridge UMC also finances, through contributions from individuals and small groups within the congregation, a scholarship program that currently assists 30 students in El Salvador.⁶

As we traveled home from El Salvador in 2002, we asked the team members to write evaluations of our mission. Their comments included the following:

“My faith has been strengthened, and my spiritual perspectives on life clarified.”

“Going into the homes and taking the time to sit and talk and listen to the people was such a blessing.”

“My life will be forever changed because of this truly wonderful opportunity to serve on a mission team. I saw the face of God in the people there.”

Reflecting on the experience, our team concluded, as most teams do, that we went with the goal of blessing the people there, but we were blessed far beyond our expectations. Our lives were transformed as we accepted the warm hospitality of the Salvadorans, feasted on delicious Salvadoran meals, rejoiced with the family whose new home was nearing completion, enjoyed a day of sightseeing and shopping, experienced close fellowship with other team members and with Salvadoran Christians, and grew spiritually as we worshipped together in two languages, guided by the same Holy Spirit within us all. That is the essence of the VIM experience.

Virginia Conference Volunteers in Mission

How did we arrive at this impressive way of being in mission with people around the corner or around the world? It would be impossible to name all the persons, or even all the outstanding Volunteers in Mission leaders, who have contributed to the work of Volunteers in Mission in the Virginia Conference. Those named represent the others whose names do not appear, but whose loving service is nonetheless valuable and appreciated.

Summer Mission Programs for Youth and Young Adults

The volunteer movement in Virginia has its origins in summer mission programs for youth and young adults. The Methodist Caravan program in the 1940s and 1950s provided an opportunity for college students to volunteer during the summer in small teams (usually four college students and an adult counselor) that provided activities for children and youth in local churches.

Summer work camps offered another volunteer opportunity for students. As early as 1955 the Conference Board of Missions sponsored an annual European Travel Seminar and Work Camp. The Rev. W.L. Asher and nine young people spent three weeks in Durnbreite, Germany, in the summer

of 1955; the Rev. Lee Varner and seven youth participated in a work camp in Linz, Austria, in the summer of 1956; and a group of young people, accompanied by Robert A. Davis, worked in Quebec, Canada, in the summer of 1957.⁷

In the summer of 1958, the Rev. Doug Newman, his wife Phyllis, and eight young people went to Reid, Austria (*Annual*, 1958, p. 170), and in 1959 the Rev. Ernest Emurian, his 10-year-old son, and other youth were part of a group of 34 persons from Virginia working at a refugee camp in Linz, Austria (*Annual*, 1959, p. 163).

As a result of Virginians' visits to Austria, Lee Varner became the first pastor of the English-speaking Methodist Church in Vienna, Austria. The Conference Board of Missions initiated the church project, with financial support provided by the Virginia Conference. Later, the General Board of Global Ministries agreed to send GBGM missionaries to pastor the English-speaking congregation.

In the 1960s the emphasis shifted to Latin America. The Board of Missions reported to the 1962 Annual Conference that the Rev. and Mrs. C.W. Gibson would lead a South American Seminar and Work Camp, June 28-August 5, 1962, with seven students visiting Bolivia, Peru, Argentina, and Chile (*Annual*, 1962, p. 177).

At the 1964 Virginia Annual Conference, the Board of Missions reported that five Virginia students had participated in Methodist Student Movement summer service activities in 1963 — two in Hawaii and three in Mexico (*Annual*, 1964, p. 195).

The Summer Service Projects Committee, chaired by the Rev. Carl Haley, was formed prior to the 1965 Annual Conference. The Board of Missions reported that eight students had been selected to receive scholarships. They were to serve in Panama, Alaska, Montana, and possibly New York City (*Annual*, 1965, p. 194).

Local churches were also sponsoring volunteer youth teams. In the summer of 1965, youth from Annandale UMC, under the leadership of the associate pastor, Walt Whitehurst, traveled to New York City to paint some rooms at Grace UMC in West Harlem, where two congregations — one African-American, the other Latino — worshipped. It was a significant experience for both the Annandale youth and the members of Grace Church.

By 1969, a Conference Committee on Youth and Student Ministries had been formed, with the Rev. John Tate as chair. It was described in the Board of Missions report as "a new and expanded committee of the old Committee on Summer Service Projects" (*Annual*, 1969, p. 220). Its primary purposes were to enlist youth and students for service projects; develop service projects within the Virginia Conference; and finance or partially finance these service projects and the youth and students involved in them. In 1974 the committee was assigned to the Division of Mission Education and Cultivation of the Conference Board of Global Ministries.

From 1971-1977, youth and student teams worked in Austria, Mexico, Kenya, and Oklahoma, and visited Mexico, Peru, Bolivia and Chile for a Seminar on Church and Government in Latin America.

In the summer of 1978, an ongoing relationship between youth and students from Virginia and Mexico began when a youth and student group led by Walt Whitehurst and Virginia Conference youth director Millie Cooper participated in the Youth in Mission program of the Methodist Church in Mexico. After two weeks of training at Camp Sierra Linda near Monterrey, the youth formed small groups, comprised of both Virginians and Mexicans, that worked for two weeks with indigenous people in the states of Jalisco, Hidalgo, Guerrero, and Puebla (*Virginia Advocate*, Aug. 31, 1978, pp. 4-5). The following summer, 1979, Mexican youth and young adults visited Virginia. They attended the Creative Arts Workshop in Blackstone, worked with Spanish-speaking migrants on the Eastern Shore, and visited churches and mission projects throughout Virginia. The experience was repeated in the summer of 1983, when Virginia youth again participated in the Youth in Mission program in Mexico, followed by a Mexican youth team that joined Virginia youth in their summer mission activities.

Adult Mission Teams

Two couples exemplify the early pioneers of Virginia's volunteer mission efforts.

Douglas and Doris True of Arlington were among the first Virginians to lead teams to Haiti under the sponsorship of the Northern Virginia Board of Missions. Doug chaired the Committee on Youth and Student Ministries of the Virginia Conference Board of Global Ministries beginning in 1983.

Jack and Marianne Martin went to Haiti with the Trues, leading to their lifelong commitment to Volunteers in Mission. Jack Martin has been one of the foremost leaders in Virginia and in the Southeastern Jurisdiction. In 1982 he became chairperson of the Virginia Conference UMVIM Steering Committee, established in 1981. He continues to lead teams, and as Petersburg District Superintendent he has involved every church in his district in participating in UMVIM.

In 1986, volunteers from Virginia worked on a number of projects within the United States, and 286 team members participated in 21 international teams in Mexico, Haiti, Puerto Rico, and Costa Rica (*Journal*, 1987, p. 248). In 1991, the Virginia Conference set a new record for the number of teams sent by any annual conference, with 116 teams — 98 national and 18 international — registered through United Methodist Volunteers in Mission, Southeastern Jurisdiction (UMVIM,SEJ).⁸

In 2000, there were more than 4,000 volunteers, and 35 international teams went to Bahamas, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica, Ghana, Honduras, Israel, Mexico, Nicaragua, Philippines, and Russia (*Journal*, 2001, p. 180).

In 2006, largely due to the response to Hurricane Katrina, the total number of volunteers had increased to 5,200. They worked in 13 states and 28 countries. The total amount raised for team and project expenses exceeded \$5 million (*Journal*, 2007, p. 188).

On a bus trip sponsored by the Division of Mission Education and Cultivation of the Conference Board of Global Ministries in the early 1990s, Olin Compton of Richmond visited Native American mission work in the Southeastern Jurisdiction. The poor condition of the homes in Edisto, South Carolina, so shocked him that he recruited a large number of teams for Edisto. They renovated dozens of homes which had serious plumbing defects, dangerous electrical wiring, rotting floors, leaking roofs, and other problems. In the process the team members came to know and appreciate the Edisto people and their culture, and the people of Edisto no longer felt abandoned and isolated.

Also in the 1990s, Patricia Koontz of the Ashland District organized teams from throughout the conference which joined with Native Americans in constructing the Rappahannock Community Center in Indian Neck, Virginia.

In cooperation with the Virginia Conference United Methodist Men's Heart Havens project, which provides group homes for persons with disabilities, Volunteers in Mission constructed the first VIM-built Heart Havens home in Waynesboro, Virginia, in 1999. Since then, volunteers have built other Heart Havens homes. Local churches provide assistance with upkeep of the homes through the United Methodist Men's Heart Havens Home Adoption Program.

Habitat for Humanity, although not an official United Methodist program, is another popular way for United Methodists to volunteer their services in their own localities and beyond.⁹

The Rev. Larry Thompson succeeded Jack Martin as chair of the Conference UMVIM Steering Committee in 1986, followed by the Rev. Steve Rhodes, 1987-1996, and the Rev. Roy Creech, 1996-1999. Kip Robinson became Conference UMVIM Coordinator in 1999, and was later named Associate Director of UMVIM, SEJ in Atlanta. The Rev. Keith Mottley was named UMVIM Coordinator in 2007, and is working toward re-organizing the Conference UMVIM Committee in order to plan an annual or semi-annual rally, mentor new team leaders, publicize UMVIM throughout the conference, and keep the UMVIM Web site updated.¹⁰

One function of the Conference UMVIM Committee is to provide training for potential team leaders. For many years the Virginia Conference held one team leader training event each year, but in 2009 the conference held five training events and scheduled six for 2010.

Special Relationships – Mexico, Russia, Cuba, Mozambique, Brazil

Mexico

The Rev. Jim Righter, editor of the *Virginia Advocate* (1982-1986), accompanied a group of conference leaders to Mexico in 1984. He then provided ongoing publicity for the two projects they selected. The *Advocate* articles helped recruit the many teams that responded to the need for volunteers. According to Walt Whitehurst, that experience was a turning point in Virginia Conference mission efforts:

At Annual Conference in June 1984, I was appointed to serve as Conference Secretary of Global Ministries. Soon afterwards, Jack Martin, Conference Coordinator of Volunteers in Mission, said that the Annual Conference had agreed to identify a single Volunteers in Mission project for funding and VIM teams, and suggested that we choose a major project in Mexico and try to recruit teams from each district to work on that project. With that goal in mind, a group of six representatives from Virginia went to Mexico to meet with Bishop Alejandro Ruiz and the president of the Methodist Women of the Central Conference of Mexico. . . . The priority according to Bishop Ruiz was to complete the construction of the “Nueva Vida” (New Life) Methodist Church in San Lucas Atoyatenco, in the state of Tlaxcala; and the project of the Methodist Women was to build a home for the aged in Mexico City. We decided to challenge each district of our conference to send at least one team, and we chose the church construction for 1985 and the home for the aged in 1986. From February to August 1985 we sent 11 teams to complete the church construction. After that we sent 19 teams to help build the home for the aged.¹¹

The completion of those projects did not end our relationship with Mexico. Many teams continue to go to various locations in that country.

Russia

In 1993, two Virginia teams were among the first Volunteers in Mission to visit Russia. One, led by the Rev. James M. (Jerry) John, pastor of Court Street UMC, Lynchburg District, went to Stavropol and Pyatigorsk in southeastern Russia. The other, led by Walt Whitehurst and Don Wenger of Community UMC, Norfolk District, went to Asha, in the Ural Mountains near the city of Chelyabinsk.

In 1994, a Virginia Conference United Methodist Women’s team went to Russia. It was divided into two groups; one, led by Betty Whitehurst, visited

Chelyabinsk, and the other, led by Darlene Amon, visited Pyatigorsk and Stavropol. The Chelyabinsk group included Bishop Thomas Stockton and his wife Jean. That year also marked the beginning of Volunteers in Mission teams to Ivanovo, in central Russia.

Soon afterward, Bishop Stockton convened the Russia Initiative Committee with Walt Whitehurst as chair. Sam NeSmith became chair in 1995, a position he held until 2006, during which time the Russia Initiative grew to be an important outreach of the Virginia Conference. Teams have worked primarily in Pyatigorsk and Stavropol, Chelyabinsk, and Ivanovo, but many teams have gone to other places in Russia, and to other former Soviet Union locations.

Though no longer committee chair, Sam NeSmith continues to lead teams to Russia, and has been a major contributor to the growth of the United Methodist Church there. People who followed Sam as chair of the Russia Initiative Committee are the Rev. Paul Phillips (2006), the Rev. David Hindman (2008), and Laura Whittle (2010). Laura Whittle spent two semesters in Russia while studying at the College of William and Mary and currently attends Wesley Seminary.¹²

The campus ministry at the College of William and Mary has been instrumental in sending student teams and individual students to Russia. Students and faculty from Shenandoah University have also participated in a variety of programs of exchange and support with the Pyatigorsk Linguistic State University and Stavropol State University. For high school age youth, the Russian Youth Camp Exchange provides for Russian youth to come to Virginia, and Virginia youth to travel to Russia, in alternating years.

Cuba

The Virginia Conference has also played a role in developing the work of UVMIM in Cuba. In the fall of 1993, Betty Whitehurst traveled to Cuba with a group of Southeastern Jurisdiction leaders who went to discuss re-establishing our relationship with the Methodist Church in Cuba in order to send volunteer teams there. The following spring, representing UVMIM, SEJ Director Tom Curtis, Betty met in Cuba with the four other jurisdictional UVMIM coordinators and some GBGM staff members and directors. At that meeting she was named coordinator for all UVMIM teams going to Cuba, a position she held until January 1999, when another Virginian, Aldo González of Fairfax, became Cuba UVMIM Coordinator. Aldo continues to coordinate all Cuba teams. Virginia teams have worked in Cuba almost every year since 1994. The most recent project has been constructing facilities for the newly established Methodist Seminary in Havana.

In addition to renovating churches and parsonages, volunteers from the United States and Cuba built Camp Canaan, which can serve 700 or more people. Its facilities include dormitories, dining hall, meeting rooms, and a beautiful chapel. More than 2,000 people from the United States and Cuba

attended the dedication ceremony on May 24-25, 2002. Afterwards the throng filed past tables covered with prepared take-out dinners and then sat on the ground in groups. Their sharing a meal together resembled the feeding of the 5,000.

Mozambique

Volunteers in Mission teams are an important component of the Virginia Conference Initiatives of Hope. Through the Mozambique Initiative, Virginia Conference Volunteers in Mission built a vocational school and a girls' dormitory at the Cambine Mission Station as well as the Janene Pennele Elementary School and a women's training center at Tinga Tinga in the Bungane District. Teams have helped train pastors, have related to Mozambique women, and have provided other services as requested by Mozambique United Methodist leaders. Virginia Conference United Methodist Women have given major support to two projects of the United Methodist Women's Society of Mozambique: the Living Water Society, whose goal is to provide a well in every village in the country, and the Hanhane Women's Shelter, a home for elderly women.

Brazil

The Initiatives of Hope report to the 2010 Annual Conference (*Book of Reports*, 2010, p. 58) describes VIM work in Brazil:

Brazil continues its long-standing focus on reaching out to "street children" in urban areas by working to build and strengthen Shade and Fresh Water centers. These centers are safe havens in impoverished areas of Brazil where children can come, have fun and learn about the love of Jesus Christ. In 2009 a new Shade and Fresh Water center was completed to serve indigenous children in a remote region of the Amazon. More than 3,000 children and teenagers are served through these centers, and UMVIM teams continue to be a vital link in developing and supporting them.

Other Mission Opportunities

Although most VIM teams are involved in construction or repairs of church buildings or church properties such as schools or clinics, specialized teams perform urgently needed services for their brothers and sisters in the places where they go. Medical and surgical VIM teams care for patients and help train local caregivers. Disaster response teams provide immediate and long-term disaster relief. Families with children find opportunities to experience hands-on mission in a variety of settings. Some teams combine several of these elements, while other teams concentrate on one type of mission activity.

Medical Teams

Through the Virginia Conference Initiatives of Hope, medical and dental services are offered in Brazil by volunteers on the John Wesley Medical Boat on the Amazon River (*Book of Reports*, 2010, p. 58).

In June 2009, Virginia Conference representatives were part of the first-ever medical symposium at Chicupe Rural Methodist Hospital in Mozambique. Medical staff from five of the province's hospitals and medical clinics attended the symposium (*Book of Reports*, 2010, p. 58).

Many Virginia teams work with the Friends of Barnabas Foundation, founded by the Rev. Linwood Cook, to send medical and surgical teams to the central mountains of Honduras, the second poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. Kip and Nancy Robinson are co-presidents of the foundation.

Although the project called for construction teams rather than medical personnel, a medical need was met when the Norfolk District, in connection with the June 1999 Annual Conference, invited volunteer teams to build a clinic in Chesapeake, Virginia. Beginning June 6, 1999, 12 one-week teams, each contributing \$2,000 toward construction costs, built the clinic. The clinic, a community-supported effort, had served the community since 1992, but after seven years had outgrown its original facilities.

The Virginia Legislature recognized our United Methodist contribution in Senate Joint Resolution No. 415, "Commending the Chesapeake Free Care Clinic," adopted by the Senate and House of Delegates in January 2003. One of the introductory phrases reads as follows: "WHEREAS, the clinic building was the priceless humanitarian gift of the Fall 1999 United Methodist Norfolk [sic] Conference, where church members from all over the State helped with construction over a 12-month period..."¹³ and concludes by commending all who helped with the project.

Disaster Response

Hurricane Camille in 1969 was a major impetus in our organizing the Virginia Conference Disaster Response Committee. Since then the committee has played a major role in recruiting and training volunteers to assist with disaster response, and in receiving volunteers from outside Virginia when there is a disaster in our area.

Virginia teams helped rebuild in South Carolina following Hurricane Hugo in the fall of 1989 and in Homestead, Florida, following Hurricane Andrew in 1992. Each mission required several years of rebuilding.

In September 1996, Hurricane Fran caused damages in seven Virginia Conference districts, with Harrisonburg District hit hardest. Many Virginia churches organized teams to help in the relief efforts. By the time Annual Conference met in June 1997, we had raised \$140,000 to assist persons affected by the hurricane (*Journal*, 1997, p. 271).

Hurricane Floyd in September 1999 caused major flooding in the city of Franklin, Virginia, along with Isle of Wight, Southampton and Suffolk

Counties. Churches throughout Virginia and from outside the state sent teams to help with cleaning out damaged homes and rebuilding. By February 1, 2000, the Virginia Conference Committee on Disaster Relief had provided assistance to nearly half of the 800 families registered with FEMA. Through a conference-wide Adopt a Family program, churches adopted more than 150 families affected by the hurricane and provided the families with Christmas gifts and decorations, furniture, clothing, and food (*Journal*, 2000, p. 170).

In November 1999, Bishop Joe Pennel appointed the Rev. Frank Jennings to oversee relief operations in Franklin. He became known as the conference “disaster pastor.” A series of dedicated pastors and laypersons have chaired the Conference Committee on Disaster Response. The Rev. Robert Pihlcrantz now holds that position, having replaced Frank Jennings in 2009.

In 1999 the conference had no disaster response trailers. Now the conference has five fully equipped trailers, available to districts as needed, as well as an additional trailer for conference teams. A special trailer is available for hauling debris, mission kits, and construction materials. A shower trailer with 10 showers and six sinks has been deployed since Hurricane Katrina in 2005. We are currently equipping an early response trailer for use by immediate response teams. Many local churches have their own disaster response trailers, and all 18 districts of the Virginia Conference have disaster response teams.¹⁴

Volunteering by Children and Families

Although many UMVIM projects do not accept children because of security or liability issues, some teams, both national and international, have included children, usually traveling with their parents or grandparents. Walt and Betty Whitehurst, Carl and Marcy Crimm, and Ed and Jean Williams, adult leaders for a youth and student group, took their children to Mexico in the summer of 1978. The Rev. Rhonda VanDyke Colby initiated family work camps in the United States for congregations she served before accepting her present position as Dean of Spiritual Life at Shenandoah University.

Teams that include children have found them to be enthusiastic and helpful, and children are often able to communicate well with other children, even when they speak a different language. Whether in a soup kitchen in Virginia, an orphanage in Russia, a village in Mexico, or a home for the elderly, the persons the children help serve usually accept and appreciate the children’s participation. The children can then be a bridge between team members and the people the team serves.

Virginia Conference camps sponsor mission activities for children and youth, not related directly to Volunteers in Mission but similar in nature. The camps are listed below, with a brief summary of their mission programs.

1. Camp Alta Mons, near Roanoke, “has recently begun to hold camps for mission groups/teams who are interested in working on the camp or doing home repair type work

in the community. The camps are typically for groups that include both youth and adults.”¹⁵

2. Camp Highroad, in Northern Virginia, sponsors City Camp, a mission opportunity for 7th- through 12th-graders whose mission is “to bring the camp experience to children in urban communities who would otherwise not have the opportunity.”¹⁶ City Camps are held at local United Methodist churches.
3. Camp Occohannock-on-the-Bay, on the Eastern Shore, offers a 12-day Middle School Mission Camp combining traditional camp life with five days of community service.¹⁷
4. Camp Overlook, near Harrisonburg, offers a Christian Service Initiative for Youth (CSI: Mission), a week of “service, sharing and exploring what it means to be on a mission for Christ.”¹⁸ In addition to worship and recreation, teams of youth do hands-on projects serving the needs of poor and elderly persons.
5. Camp Westview-on-the-James, near Richmond, included in its 2010 summer program a Kids’ Work Camp in September, and Middle School Mission Weekends in August and October. Westview also accommodates large or small groups, from one day to a week or longer, to do mission outreach such as home repair, working in a food bank or soup kitchen, Harvest of Hope, organic farming, or visiting elderly people.¹⁹

Some districts and local churches also offer mission opportunities for children. For example, “Helping Hands” is a two-day Virginia Conference children’s event hosted by local churches for 4th- through 8th-graders, parents, and adult leaders that includes learning about Christian mission and doing hands-on mission such as window washing, yard work, serving food to the homeless, helping elderly persons, cleaning, delivering needed supplies, painting, making care packages, visiting hospital patients, and organizing thrift store items.²⁰

The Society of St. Andrew, begun in 1979 in Big Island, Virginia, by the Rev. Ray Buchanan and the Rev. Ken Horne and their families, sponsors the Harvest of Hope, which welcomes families with children for hands-on mission:

Participants work in fields gleaning food for the hungry, study hunger issues, participate in Christian worship, and have fun! A variety of events take place throughout the year: weeklong retreats for senior high youth (completed

grades 9-12) and their adult sponsors; weekend retreats for junior high youth (completed grades 6-8) and their adult sponsors; a weekend retreat for college groups and young adults (ages 18-30); and weekend intergenerational retreats for ages 10 to 100.²¹

“Stop Hunger Now,” a related organization, sponsors events in which large numbers of people of all ages put together food packets which are sent to other countries to be used for school lunches and in emergency situations. Virginia churches, districts, colleges, and the 2010 Annual Conference have held “Stop Hunger Now” events.

Conclusion: The Value of Volunteering

The UMVIM motto, “Christian Love in Action,” is based on 1 John 3:16-18: “We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us — and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.”

Bob Walton, Assistant General Secretary for Mission Volunteers at GBGM until his retirement a few years ago, recently wrote:

We had a powerful movement marching across the church; our job was to resource it This meant both the sending of volunteers and the receiving of volunteers. It meant providing resources through both the Jurisdictional and Annual Conference structures, not to replace something that was working but making resources available to all No one owns the Volunteers in Mission movement. It does not need to be controlled, merely resourced and strengthened, so that it is able to deliver to the church of today the renewed spirit of community, the ability to embrace each other in understanding, love and compassion. I can hear the refrain raising its voice across the horizon — “I will go Lord, if you send me, I will hold your people in my heart.”²²

A report, prepared by Mission Volunteers staff member Michael DeBorja for the spring 2009 meeting of the GBGM Board of Directors, explains that the work of UMVIM emphasizes the four GBGM focus areas: Church Growth, Leadership Development, Global Health, and Ministry with the Poor.

Church growth is promoted primarily through partnerships between annual conferences in the United States and annual conferences or autonomous Methodist churches in other countries. Leadership development is two-fold: offering training for team leaders, who then train the volunteers, and sending teams of pastors or teachers who share ideas with their counterparts in other places. In a number of annual conferences, including Virginia, an UMVIM presentation is a part of the annual Licensing School for Lay Pastors. Global

health is an important factor for medical teams, or medical components of work teams, that offer not only immediate medical attention but also holistic health care and training. Ministry with the Poor means working with persons living in poverty rather than simply offering them handouts and assistance. All UMVIM teams work on poverty issues, including education, sanitation, housing, food, clothing, and medical care.²³

Kip Robinson, reporting for UMVIM to the 2007 Virginia Annual Conference (*Journal*, 2007, p. 188), explained the appeal of participating in Volunteers in Mission:

Honestly it's amazing. How could a ministry of The United Methodist Church known as "the best kept secret in Methodism" mushroom into near mega-ministry status? It happened to United Methodist Volunteers in Mission (UMVIM), and it especially happened in the Virginia Conference, a testament to the power of the Holy Spirit to affect change in all of us

Why is this happening? Two reasons come to mind. One is that as more and more people experience for themselves the spiritual transformation that comes from a short-term mission experience, they persuade others to venture out of their comfort zone. The other reason is the massive response to the devastation of Hurricane Katrina in the Gulf Coast.

Volunteers in Mission multiplies the effect of GBGM missionaries by providing a physical presence and a Christian witness in places where there are no missionaries, and by supplementing the work and witness of the missionaries who are at work in places where volunteers go.

Volunteers in Mission is one of the most flexible programs of The United Methodist Church. There is no age limit for team members; each team sets its own age requirements, in consultation with leaders of the project on which they will be working. The number of persons per team is also decided in consultation with the persons receiving the team. Team members do not have to be United Methodists; persons of other denominations and other faith traditions may participate as long as they are interested in helping build up God's kingdom on earth.

Persons who receive Volunteers in Mission teams are as important to the program as those who offer their services, since they provide the hospitality and the fellowship that make the team experience possible and meaningful. At the International Conference on Sending and Hosting Volunteers, sponsored by Mission Volunteers in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, in November 1998, a set of "Guidelines for Sending and Hosting Volunteers" was developed by Volunteers in Mission leaders from churches in many different countries. The introductory remarks conclude with the following statement (p. 2): "***We all are called, we all are sent, we all are to offer the gift of hospitality to others.***"

Volunteers in Mission work with and under the supervision of the people they go to serve. “The most popular type of UMVIM team is a construction team, where team members engage in building a school, clinic, church, parsonage or other structure, working alongside others from the local area. Other popular teams are medical teams, Vacation Bible School teams, evangelistic teams, and teaching teams. Even with all this activity constructing, teaching, providing medical services and Vacation Bible Schools, *it is never about the project... it’s about the people.*”²⁴

Notes

1. Thomas L. Curtis, Sr., *From the Grassroots: A History of United Methodist Volunteers in Mission*, p. 7.
2. Quoted in *Following God's Call: Individual Volunteers in Mission*, by Walter A. and Betty C. Whitehurst (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), p. 13.
3. Ignacio Vergara, *El protestantismo en Chile*, 3rd ed. (Santiago de Chile: Editorial del Pacífico, 1962), pp. 50-51.
4. Taylor University Archives (http://www.taylor.edu/academics/support_services/archives/pdf/taylor_checklist.pdf).
5. *Journal of the Virginia Annual Conference of The Methodist Church*, 198th Session, Richmond, VA, 1980, p. 276. (Future quotes from Conference Journals will be annotated in the text.)
6. George Williams, in a telephone conversation Sept. 12, 2010.
7. *The Annual of the Virginia Annual Conference of The Methodist Church*, 175th Session, Roanoke, VA, 1957, p. 164. (Future quotes from Conference Annuals will be annotated in the text.)
8. *UMVIM Update*, Vol. XIII, Issue 1, Spring 1991, p. 3.
9. For additional information, see Habitat for Humanity Web site (<http://www.habitat.org/>).
10. *Book of Reports*, 228th Session, Virginia Annual Conference, 2010, Norfolk, VA, p. 58. (Future quotes from the *Book of Reports* will be annotated in the text.)
11. Walter A. Whitehurst, *Memoirs* (unpublished, n.d.).
12. Rev. Samuel E. NeSmith, in a telephone conversation Aug. 26, 2010.
13. State of Virginia Web site (<http://leg1.state.va.us/cgi-bin/legp504.exe?031+ful+SJ415ER+pdf>).
14. Rev. Franklin T. Jennings, in a telephone conversation Aug. 27, 2010. [For further information, see the *Virginia Conference Disaster Response and Recovery Plan*, revised June 2009, on the Virginia Conference Web site (www.vaumc.org – Ministries/Mission and Global Ministries/Disaster Response/Documents).
15. Camp Alta Mons Web site (<http://www.altamons.com/camps.htm>).
16. Camp Highroad Web site (<http://www.camphighroad.org/camps/>).
17. Camp Occohannock-on-the-Bay Web site (http://www.ootbay.org/middle_school.htm).
18. Camp Overlook Web site (<http://www.gbgm-umc.org/campoverlook/summerprogram.html>).
19. Camp Westview on the James Web site (www.westviewonthejames.org).
20. For additional information, see the Virginia Conference Web site (www.vaumc.org – Ministries/Age-Related Ministries/Children's Ministries).
21. Society of St. Andrew Web site (<http://www.endhunger.org/harvest.htm>).
22. E-mail from Rev. Dr. Robert E. Walton, July 1, 2010.
23. Michael DeBorja, ed., *Presentation Book for the Spring 2009 Mission Volunteers (MV) Board of Directors Meeting*.
24. Kip Robinson, "Fast Facts about UMVIM,SEJ," an e-mail attachment from sejinfo@umvim.org, Dec. 9, 2008, p. 2.

History in the Making

General Commission on Archives and History Meets in Hungary

This past August I had the privilege of attending the annual meeting of the General Commission on Archives and History (GCAH) in Budapest, Hungary. Bishop John R. Schol, agency president, led the Commission, which was gathering for the first time outside of the continental United States.

The first night, Commission members presented the Distinguished Service Award to Dr. Helmut Nausner, a former pastor and conference superintendent from Austria, and leader in theological, historical, and ecumenical work in Europe. Other Commission business included reports from standing committees and the adoption of the 2011 budget.

Following the General Commission meeting, most members remained in Budapest to attend the 4th Conference of the European Historical Commission of the United Methodist Church. Participants from more than a dozen European United Methodist Conferences heard scholars speak on the theme of “Methodism in Europe after World War II (1945-1965).” In a poignant example of global Methodism, at the opening session individuals shared objects that represented for them the time after WWII, a time of repression and suffering, but also a time of rebuilding and reconciliation.

Worship was enhanced throughout the Conference by the use of the newly released hymnbook, *Singing Grace*, published by the European Methodist Historical Commission, with assistance from the General Commission and the General Board of Discipleship. Dr. Ulrike Schuler and Dr. S.T. Kimbrough, Jr., edited *Singing Grace*. The songbook contains hymns in many different European languages and hymnic traditions which communicate Methodist theology in words and music.

We listened to witnesses describe the heartaches and tragedies of those caught up in the nightmare of reconstruction following the war. One of my fellow members on the General Commission commented that “one phrase from John Wesley’s own experience kept coming back to me, i.e. ‘a brand plucked from the burning.’” The rebirth of Methodism came from the remnant left by the devastation of war in several European nations.

Dr. Graham Kent of Great Britain provided thought-provoking devotionals each day of the Conference. He reminded us that God’s presence has been in the worst as well as in the best of times and experiences of the faithful. Using selected art images, he suggested that as archivists and historians of the church’s memory, we must “allow the truth to be told of those times, good and bad, so that we can share one another’s suffering, forgiveness, reconciliation and the new life in Christ.”

On the last day, GCAH General Secretary Robert Williams summed up the feelings of many when he quoted St. Paul’s message to the Ephesians, “We are no longer strangers.” He added, “Methodist people are one people around the world.”

— Catherine D. Morgan

Notes from the Ethelbert Drake Society

Named for the eccentric first editor of the Methodist Christian Sentinel (forerunner of the Virginia United Methodist Advocate) the Ethelbert Drake Society is “dedicated to the preservation and dissemination of items of Virginia Methodist history which heretofore have been overlooked or suppressed.”

First African-American District Superintendent in the Virginia Conference

“Not in the foreseeable future” was Bishop Walter Gum’s reply when Bishop Scott Allen, in 1968 preparing for the merger of his mostly black North Carolina-Virginia Conference with the mostly white conferences, asked him if there would be a place in the new Virginia Conference for an African-American district superintendent.

Allen then found a more welcoming spot in North Carolina for Joseph Bethea, who had been superintendent of the black Virginia District, and would become a bishop in 1988.

Gum’s vision of the future ended with his death the next year. The “foreseeable future” expired in only four years, when Godfrey Tate became the first black superintendent of the Virginia Conference, appointed to the new Ashland District.

— *Rev. Raymond F. Wrenn,*
secretary of the Ethelbert Drake Society

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