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We Are Not Alone! 'Connecting' Is at the Heart of the Gospel Story

By the Rev. Alvin J. Horton

It was exactly twenty-one years ago this month that my wife visited a local medical lab and quite unexpectedly met the wife of an older brother I had never met before. He was separated from our dad when he was an infant, and I grew up with only a photo of him as a child and very little information. He did not know I even existed.

I was born in Alabama and he in North Carolina. Yet, we met for the first time in Virginia. The story of our meeting was so extraordinary that it ended up on the front page of the *Richmond Times Dispatch* on Thanksgiving Day 2000.

His deceased mother had been an orphan and refused to talk with him about his father, so as far as Charlie knew he was all alone in the world...only his children to call family.

That all changed the day my wife met his. When we traveled to Alabama the



following year to visit our dad's grave, we were met unexpectedly by cousins from all over the region who joined us in prayer as we thanked God for connecting us with this long-lost member of the Horton family.

the importance of God's message to the world today: We are not alone!

No matter how separated we are from biological siblings, or how isolated we feel from others in our own community, God's message of 'connecting' is still at the heart of the Gospel Story...God connecting with us, and we with one another.

Sometimes we need a reminder. When children grow up, when friends die or move away, it is tempting to feel we are alone.

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As families across the nation gather around Thanksgiving tables in a few weeks, and as church families gather around the Lord's Table during Advent and Christmas, it seems only appropriate for us to consider

But God comes to us when we least expect a visit. And the message is clear: We are not alone! As John Wesley reminded us: "The best of all is, God is with us." Thanks be to God.

A Word to the Wise

The value of connecting elder pastors with their younger peers

by the Rev. Marg Kutz



◆ If the time is right, share your own story. Offer advise only when requested.

Some of the most tender words in Scripture are written to the young pastor Timothy by the elder pastor Paul. We are all familiar with these passages: “Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity....Do not neglect the gift you have... Guard what has been entrusted to you” (I Timothy 4:12,14; 6:20 nrsv).

Surely these words provided guidance, strength, and encouragement to Timothy who was beginning his calling as a pastor during a very contentious time in the Church. Paul, nearing the end of his calling, clearly knew and loved this young pastor.

Young pastors serving in our churches in the 21st Century are facing many of the same issues Timothy faced in the First Century Church. We who are retired can be a mentor and support for the many Timothys, and Tammys, among us.

- ◆ Also consider young pastors in other churches in the community where you live. Include them in your daily prayers.
- ◆ Once you have soaked them in prayer, contact them to see if you can take them out to lunch.

I believe this is one of the most difficult times in the past 100 years to be the pastor of a local church. So, offer them words of encouragement. The culture they are navigating is very different from what we navigated. So, don't be the expert. Just listen, and encourage. Be their Paul or their Priscilla.

If every retired clergy in our conference reached out to one young pastor, it could change the direction of our entire conference. We have the potential to be a mighty force so let's all be a force for good.

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How do we do that?

- ◆ First, you can begin by praying for the pastor of the church you are currently attending.
- ◆ Then listen, really listen. Ask good questions, ones that will help you get to know them, their story, and what makes them tick.



In Memoriam



Remembering those who have died since our last report in August 2021

Retired Clergy

Janis Karen Whitehurst (3/29/49) RL
 John W. Morrison (6/20/39) RE
 John S. Parker (4/14/37) RE
 Joseph E. Hammond Jr. (10/7/50) RA
 Angelito G. Samson (1/9/46) RE
 Paul Benj Davis Jr. (8/24/31) RE
 Alda V. Gunn (4/2/40) RE
 L Douglas Hill (4/9/40) RE
 Wilton B. Thomas (4/30/31) RE
 Virgil W. Soots (1/1/34) RA
 Robert T. Knox (7/29/35) RE
 Thomas L. Coffman (6/15/27) RE
 Kenneth S. James (9/8/27) RE

Aug. 11, 2021
 Aug. 20, 2021
 Aug. 20, 2021
 Aug. 25, 2021
 Sept. 8, 2021
 Sept. 12, 2021
 Sept. 19, 2021
 Sept. 26, 2021
 Sept. 30, 2021
 Oct. 1, 2021
 Oct. 10, 2021
 Oct. 19, 2021
 Oct. 25, 2021

Active Clergy

Terry K. Eum (4/11/84) FL
 Jeffry Roberts (11/29/59) FE
 William R. Payne (12/29/57) PL
 Janet F. Grissett (12/7/62) FE

Sept. 13, 2021
 Sept. 21, 2021
 Oct. 17, 2021
 Nov. 4, 2021

Spouses of Retired Clergy

Sharon F. Harris (Rev. Hugh Harris)

Sept. 4, 2021

Widows/Widowers of Deceased Clergy

Dorothy S. Donat (Rev. Ward Donat)
 Lois S. Turner (Rev. Trevor D. Turner)
 Gwendolyn Callis (Rev. Duane Ward)
 Patsy R. Hemphill (Rev. Eugene R. Hemphill)

Aug. 17, 2021
 Sept. 6, 2021
 Oct. 3, 2021
 Oct. 25, 2021

A 'Bedrock' Parable

A retired pastor reflects on the value of connecting with others

by the Rev. Hugh Harris

A year before my retirement my wife Sharon and I purchased her "dream house," a two-story frame Victorian Transitional home on a slanting lot. A dozen years later we discovered the garage floor had sunk two-and-a-half inches. This created expensive repairs drilling down to bedrock for structure stabilization.

her symptoms deepened, she had to give up her professional counseling career. Ultimately, frequent falls led to leaving the "dream house" for a single-story structure. Stress hit us emotionally, financially, physically, and spiritually. I became her 24/7 caregiver, a role that continued post-brain shunt.



with and for us, kept up with our needs, triumphs, and medical regressions. They visited during surgery, called to check on us, and undergirded us spiritually.

In September of 2020 Sharon fell, causing a brain bleed, followed by a blood clot and surgical wound that kept her in nursing facilities. The coronavirus pandemic caused severe isolation and deepening dementia. She even contracted COVID-19. Next came memory care and finally hospice care until she passed in September.

I am grateful to God and my fellow retirees for the support that has kept me going despite all setbacks. Emotionally and spiritually, it has been like a parable of building on rock instead of shifting sand.

During these years the retired clergy breakfast group I had met with every Wednesday morning provided stabilizing "bedrock" grounding for me.

"Bedrock" is the operative word here. When Al Horton asked me to write about our retired clergy breakfast group, "bedrock" came to mind.

In 2010 Sharon was diagnosed with mild cognitive impairment (MCI), often a precursor to Alzheimer's Disease. Dementia had begun. In 2013 she was diagnosed with normal pressure hydrocephalus (NPH) and received a shunt implant to drain brain fluid. As

During these years the retired clergy breakfast group I had met with every Wednesday morning provided stabilizing "bedrock" grounding for me. My breakfast buddies prayed

Want to join a group for retired clergy or spouses?

The ARMS Leadership Team would like to help facilitate the formation of groups across the conference for retired clergy and/or their spouses. Perhaps there are a number of people on your district who would like to get together periodically or on a regular basis for a meal, emotional support, or simply for fellowship.

If you would like to form a group, join one, or share information about a group that's already in existence, please contact Judy Mann at (804) 277-3973 or jafmann.mann9@gmail.com.

2021 ARMS Leadership Team Elected

At the October 11 meeting of the ARMS Board of Directors, the following people were elected to serve as the Leadership Team for the coming year. If you have questions, or would like to offer suggestions, please contact Steve Hassmer at (571) 224-8330 or stevehassmer@vaumc.org.

Co-Chairs:

Steve & Susan Hassmer

Co-Vice Chairs:

Keith & Linda Mottley

Secretary:

Judy & Larry Mann

Treasurer:

Susan Brack

Sunshine Correspondent:

Susan Hassmer

Newsletter Editor:

Al Horton

Co-Past Chairs:

John & Cathy Price

Retreat Coordinators:

Diane Galbreath & Alexis Fathbruckner

Retreat Registrars:

Harry & Gale Kennon

At-Large Members:

Larry & Nancy Tingle ('22)

Kathleen Mongue ('22)

Bill & Bobbie Wash ('22)

Ed & Marion Garrett ('23)

Alexis & Mark

Fathbruckner ('23)

Jim & Molly Sprouse ('23)

Hugh Harris ('23)



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Want to support ARMS?

Send suggested donation of \$10 per person to:

Rev. Susan Brack,
Treasurer
128 Glenwood Cir.
South Hill, VA
23970

Make check payable to "Virginia Conference UMC" with "ARMS donation" in memo line.

New Facebook group established for retired Virginia Conference clergy

Calling all retired United Methodist clergy: A new electronic discussion group for retired Virginia Conference clergy is now available on Facebook.

You don't have to be a member of Facebook to join in the conversation. The purpose of the group is to promote dialogue and discussion of all that's before us as a denomination, a conference, and as clergy.

Once you join you may invite any of your Virginia Conference retired clergy

friends or acquaintances. And don't forget to send your suggestions of topics for the group to discuss.

This new electronic group will provide loads of creative possibilities for enhancing communication among the community of retired clergy. You'll want to stay informed and engage other clergy in conversation about the things on your mind.

To sign up, visit www.facebook.com/groups/435815189426602.

For more information about this new venture, contact the group's host and moderator, the Rev. Jim Sprouse, at jimsprouse@vaumc.org.

